



The Music of Cairo

I'm not one for big cities. Having been raised in rural Minnesota, I have a natural preference for the quiet of the countryside. The sort of quiet where you can hear muffled conversations from neighboring farms a quarter mile away.

FAR FROM KANSAS

You could say that things are different in Cairo, Egypt. There are 18 million people in Cairo, and those who own cars seem to be driving them at the same time, which leads to constant congestion. The term freeway is understood literally and driving is subject to individual interpretation. In reality, traffic is managed by a complex system of hand gestures and horns. Lots of horns. If I had rented a car, I am certain that my driving adventure would have been over in less than 15 minutes.

Also, since Egypt is predominately Muslim, there are public calls to prayer five times per day, starting at dawn and ending after dark. These prayers are sung in Arabic over loudspeaker systems that are mounted on Mosques and other high vantage points throughout the city. The result is a booming chorus of unorganized voices. This, coupled with the constant horns, makes Cairo a loud, busy place. Cairo is rarely silent.

None of this is conducive to a peaceful night of sleep. After my first noisy night, I realized I needed to change something about my situation. Since I could not change the car horns or the loudspeakers, and I had no intention of cutting my visit short, my choices were limited, or so it seemed. I began to consider my perspective.

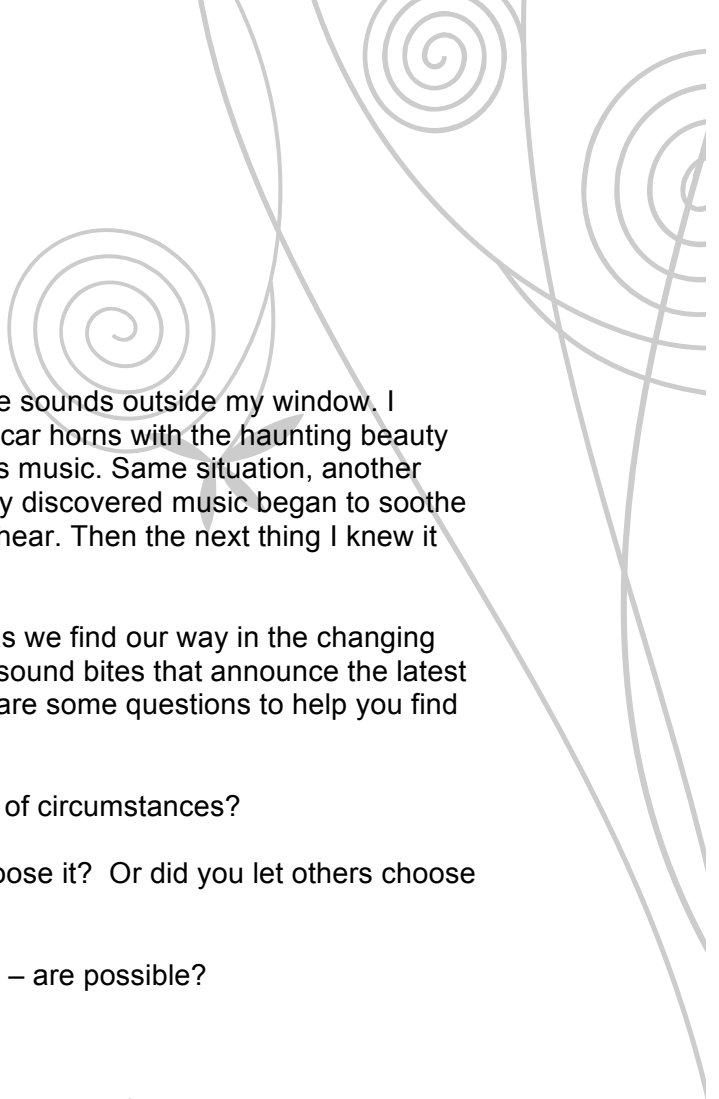
THE FACT TRAP

A perspective is a point of view based on a subjective evaluation. It is subjective because it is based on individual interpretation. Have you ever had the experience of attending a meeting and later finding out that your perspective of what happened during the meeting was different from everybody else? This is an example of different subjective evaluations of the same event. In other words, different perspectives.

Due to our strong urge to make sense out of our environment, we often forget that perspectives are not necessarily facts. Rather, perspectives are personal interpretations of what we experience. If we allow our perspectives to form and solidify unchallenged, it limits our ability to be open to the possibility of other interpretations. It's sort of like squinting through a keyhole instead of taking in the wide view through a panoramic lens. Subconsciously turning perspectives into facts limits our ability to make other choices and see the range of possibilities.

PERSPECTIVE IS A CHOICE

During my second night of frustration with never-ending noise I began to challenge my perspective of the situation. As I began to search for other ways to interpret my



experience, I started to notice a certain rhythm to the sounds outside my window. I slowly started to connect the rhythms to the chaotic car horns with the haunting beauty of the prayerful voices. Then I started to hear it all as music. Same situation, another interpretation, another perspective. In fact, this newly discovered music began to soothe me as I started to look forward to what else I would hear. Then the next thing I knew it was morning, lulled to sleep by the music of Cairo.

These days many of us are facing new challenges as we find our way in the changing world. It doesn't help that we are buried by multiple sound bites that announce the latest layoff, financial decline, or economic setback. Here are some questions to help you find the music in your own situation:

1. What is your perspective on your current set of circumstances?
2. How did your perspective form? Did you choose it? Or did you let others choose it for you?
3. What other interpretations – or perspectives – are possible?
4. Which perspective will you choose?
5. What actions will you take to make it more than words?