

# The chicken and the eagle



**Primary source: Fr. Anthony de Mello SJ, quoted in Awareness, Fount.**

There was a chicken farmer who was a very keen rock climber. One day, climbing a particularly challenging rock face, he came upon a large ledge. On the ledge was a large nest and in the nest, three large eagle eggs.

He knew it was distinctly unecological, and undoubtedly illegal, but temptation got the better of him and he discreetly put one of the eagle eggs in his rucksack, checking first to make sure the mother eagle wasn't around. Then he continued his climb, drove back to his ranch, and put the eagle egg in the hen house.

That night the mother hen sat on the huge egg, the proudest chicken you ever saw. And the cockerel seemed pretty pleased with himself too.

In the fullness of time the egg hatched and the baby eagling emerged. It looked around and saw the mother hen. "Mama!" it squawked.

And so it was that the eagle grew up with its brother and sister chicks. It learned to do all the things that chickens do: clucking and cackling, scratching in the dirt for grits and worms, flapping its wings furiously, and flying a few feet into the air before crashing to earth in a pile of dust and feathers. And believing above all things that it was totally and absolutely, a chicken.



One day (later on in life) the eagle-who -thought-he-was-a-chicken happened to look up at the sky. High overhead, soaring majestically on the thermal currents, flying effortlessly with scarcely a beat of its powerful golden wings, was an eagle.

"What's that?" said the old eagle in awe to his farmyard neighbours. "It's magnificent. So much power and grace. Poetry in motion."

"That's an eagle," said the chicken. "That's the King of the Birds. It's a bird of the air. But we, we're only chickens, we're birds of the earth."

And so it was that the eagle lived and died a chicken; because that's all it thought it was.



Trainers: This is a great story to illustrate self-limiting beliefs.

More metaphors and similar-style stories can be found in Nick Owen's books "The Magic of Metaphor" and "More Magic of Metaphor".