

A Buddhist story: The enlightened chicken

Once there was a clever little chicken, growing up nicely inside an eggshell. She could feel her wings growing, and her whole body getting bigger as time went by. She knew she was changing as she grew older. She lived in the dark, in a tiny universe. Food supplies seemed to be running out, and she was worried: would she die if there was no more to eat?

Then one day she felt an urge, strong and lively, in her heart to break free. It was frightening in one way, but exciting too. Where could the urge lead her? She might die!

But she was a courageous chick, so she began to peck at the edge of her universe with her little beak. Suddenly, the whole thing cracked up completely, the universe she had known literally split in two and she was in a new world, the outside world.

Everywhere there was warmth, bright lights, sights to see. She looked around, felt her wings flap, breathed the warm air of spring. Everything about her old life suddenly made sense.

She noticed that there were other eggs in the nest she had come from, she had been the first to hatch. She wondered straight away about her brothers and sisters: they were still living in the dark, maybe they were as scared as she had been five minutes earlier. How could she tell them?

She realised each chicken must find out for themselves, at the right time ~ but she felt compassion for them, so while Mother Hen went to peck some grain, the chicken sat on the eggs for her, warming them and speeding the moment when they would see reality for themselves.

1. What makes the chicken in the story suffer?
2. The chicken has an 'urge to break free'. Have you ever broken free?
3. Have you ever had a moment when you suddenly 'saw the light' and understood something valuable?
4. Buddhists teach that lots of what seems real to us is actually fake, and it is hard to see what is truly real. Do you think this makes sense? Explain your answer.
5. In Buddhism, questions about God are not important. Instead, Buddhists think carefully about what is real. Buddhism teaches that you can see the truth without talking about God. Do you agree? Why?
6. What could this story say to:
 - a. A person starting at a new school;
 - b. A person who has just got out of prison;
 - c. A person trying to learn to ride a bike, or to swim;
7. What is this story really about? Do you think it is a wise story?
8. What did you learn from this story?