The best path to liberation

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*Laurence Freeman, **Christian Meditation Newsletter,** Setpember 2006*

There is a way to go. The distance between where we are and where we are headed generates the symbols and rituals to express our longing for God. If we don't even feel or acknowledge that longing for wholeness, love and truth, we are seriously self-alienated. If we pray and worship with sincerity, opening the heart and suspending our doubts and disbelief, we will know that we are on the way and this will give us peace. The sense of distance is the challenge and it is the stimulus for every pilgrimage – whether to a sacred place or our own heart. But actually the way ist he life and this realisation reveals that, as Meister Eckhart put it, 'there is no distance between us and God'. Our feeling of separation is, paradoxically, caused by the fact, as St Augustine puts it, that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves

Most of the time, we have to put up with the feeling of distance.We have to 'mind the gap' as the voice on the London Underground reminds passengers, the gap between seed and fruit even though the fruit is in the seed. If we don't remain mindful of this we miss our footing. In a sense, we have to pretend to be more real than we are in order to lose the delusory sense that we are not real.'Fake it to make it', says the Twelve Step program.

To illustrate this I like the story of the man and his parrot. The man was very fond of the parrot that he kept in a cage and spoke with every day.One day he told the parrot he was going to see his meditation teacher and the parrot asked him to ask the teacher what was the best path to liberation. The man returned and told the parrot what the teacher told him: die to self, let go of everything, die. He then put the night cover over the cage and went to bed. In the morning when he lifted off the cover to say good morning to the parrot he found it lying on its back on the floor of the cage with its eyes closed and its legs sticking up. The man was heartbroken, opened the cage and tearfully lifted the parrot out. As soon as he did, the parrot seized its opportunity and flew off escaping through the open window. It had wisely interpreted the teacher's advice.

St John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book III, Chapter XX, §2.

"Attachment is an anxiety that, like a bond, ties the spirit down to the earth and allows it no enlargement of heart."