

Ego, Echo, Doubt

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A **myth** is a real story told in a beautiful way that profoundly reflects our innermost qualities that seems to trouble us now, but with wisdom, will free us into a boundless space of life. Early Buddhism is full of such myths. It should also be noted that how a myth benefits us depends on how well we feel its beauty and how honestly we accept its truth.

Narcissus

Narcissus is that real, deep, often blindingly dark abyss in our unconscious self: **The self** we imagine to be a permanent reality. This self-view grew with us since we were very young, when we were conditioned by others to seek every wile and way to feed this Self. We are so caught up with self-love that we are unable or unwilling to see or accept others as they are.

In Greek mythology, **Narcissus**¹ was such a beautiful youth that even the gods fell in love with him. But he spurned them all out of pure personal pride of his beauty. One day, he saw his own image in a calm pool. He fell so deeply in love with it that he kept bending down and trying to embrace it. Each time, he touched the watery image, it rippled away. He could not let go of this self-love and stayed there by the pool-side the whole time, pining away. He died and turned in a narcissus (also known as a daffodil).

Echo

Watching him at that time was Echo², a shy mountain nymph who could only repeat the last few words of others. She fell in love with Narcissus but dared not appear before him for fear of rejection. Hearing only echoes, Narcissus simply ignored her. In due course, she, too, unrequited, pined to death for his love. Her voice can still be heard in the mountains which was her domain.

Burdened by self-love, we too, like **Echo**, often see something desirable—something comforting, powerful, sacred or simply beautiful. We want it for ourself: we see it like food that nourishes us, and cannot live without it, as it were. We imitate its ways and echo its whims.

Our self is but a mere reflection of what we desire in others—like Narcissus' image in the water. We desire so much to be just like that image. We keep repeating our actions, vowing to get what we desire. We imagine that by echoing this act again and again, we make it real: it becomes ours, becomes us.

Pandora

Then, there is **Pandora**, who, in this reflection, represents all our **Doubts** and curiosity. Her story is related to that of Prometheus, a kind demi-god, who, out of compassion, stole fire

¹ See fb170828 Narcissus piya.

² See fb170829b Echo piya.

from heaven and gave it to humans so that we lived well and civilized. This angered the high gods who reacted by cunningly reciprocating Prometheus' gift with another.

Prometheus sensed the wiles of the high gods, and warned his brother Epimetheus never to accept any gifts from them. Epimetheus, sadly, could not turn down the gods' gift of Pandora. Now, the gods also gave her a special sealed pot with all kinds of things in it. She was told never to open it.

Doubt

One day, in an idle moment, Pandora, wondered what could be in that wonderful pot. A thousand questions crossed her mind. She doubted that she would be a good wife, and perhaps there were gifts in that pot, she could give Epimetheus and his brother Prometheus.

In the end, her doubts and curiosity got the better of her. She opened the jar. Out of it flew all the ills that we now know: lust, hate, fear, jealous, pride, laziness, delusion, and so on. When she realized her folly, she at once closed back the pot. Then, she heard a tiny voice from inside the pot: "Let me out! I'm not like the others! I am Hope!"

We are not sure what she did next. The story tellers must have felt that it is up to us to finish the story. We should let out the good, the better and the best our in us. It is called **Education**, letting the truth and beauty within us shine without.

Women

The Pandora story has a couple of interesting problems. First, a translation issue. When the 16th-century scholar, Erasmus, translated the Greek original of the Pandora story, he wrote "pyxis" instead of the original Greek "pithos" (a large jar). "Pyxis" refers to any kind of jar-shaped vessel, even a box. In English, it famously became "Pandora's box" when it was originally "Pandora's jar."

Secondly, a darker error, was that this story influenced the early European Christian theologians who tried to use Greek philosophy and culture to enrich their religion. They saw in the story of Pandora, a woman, in her curiosity and lack of self-restraint, opened the jar of folly and brought into the world all of man's sorrows.

In Buddhist mythology, we see Pandora as that doubting part of us, not a female person, but a personality trait, a kind of animus in men and anima in women that needs to be developed and harmonized to give us both wisdom and compassion in good balance. In other words, a myth is telling us that we must see and accept ourself for what we are, and we have the power and need to cultivate ourself—no one else can do that for us.

Buddhisms to be avoided

Most of us do not really follow the Buddha but create our own Buddhism or cult, often disregarding, even spiting the Buddha. It's like biting the hand that feeds us—and this food is more precious; it's wisdom. Hence, it is beneficial for us to fully avoid Narcissus Buddhism,

Echo Buddhism and Pandora Buddhism. They are nothing more than the glorification of self-identity view, attachment to ritual and vows, and doubt—the first 3 fetters preventing us from reaching the path of awakening.

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