

## Narcissus

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Often we fail to see things as they really are; we see things as we think we are.

A famous Greek myth tells us of Narcissus, the son of a river-god and a nymph. He was such a beautiful youth that even the gods fell in love with him. But Narcissus was vain and arrogant, and spurned them all, priding in his own body.

One day, as he went hunting, Nemesis (the god of retribution against hubris) followed him, and led him to a calm pool. As Narcissus bent to drink, he saw his own image, and at once fell in love with it.

He tried to kiss it, but it disappeared into ripples. He waited for the image, again and again. As he stayed there pining for his own image, he was watched by Echo, a wood nymph, who was cursed by Hera (Zeus' wife). Despite her beautiful voice, Echo could only repeat the last words of others, finishing the sentence but never saying her own.

When she finally appeared before Narcissus, he at once rejected her as being unworthy of him. Spurned and humiliated, she wasted away in the woods and turned into rock. Even to this day, it is said, when we call out to her, we can still hear her reply, an echo.

Narcissus, too, wasted away by the pool, lusting after his own image, his mind-made self. After his death, he turned into the white-flowered narcissus.

### A MORAL

Often we fail to see things as they really are; we see things as we think we are.

Such remarkable stories are helpful in our own reflection of what it means to be "narcissistic," or to simply "echo" others without any understanding or learning. We mistake the echo for our own voice.

It is a story of letting go of the self and of self-understanding. There are, of course, other meanings and reflections that can be useful in our understanding of human nature and existence.

Echo may be a tragic figure, but she seems to be kind, and suffers for her love. For example, when we echo the Dharma, even when we are spurned by the Narcissus of today, it is still worth it. The Dharma is within us, and we will always echo the Dharma, even after our time. Both our life and death are not in vain.

## DALI'S DEPICTION

The Spanish surrealist artist, Salvador Dali (1904-1989) painted perhaps the most remarkable depiction of "The Metamorphosis of Narcissus" (1937). This work is on display in the London Tate Gallery. It is a work of art that deserves our profound reflection.



<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dali-metamorphosis-of-narcissus-t02343>.

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