

## Are the gods real?

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Once when a Buddhist song-writer was told that music has its limits in helping us progress on the path, he retorted that he once dreamed that the gods themselves appeared to him and delighted in his music! Amongst the works of this same person are such lines as “O Buddha! ... I seek Your Blessings, Guidance, and Protection! ... With my Lord helping me!”

It’s interesting how those of us who believe in Deity (with the big D) also tend to respect power and authority, and see karma as blessing what we see as high class (to collect) or low status (to reject). This is like in Renaissance Europe, where the Catholics believe that their belief in God not only made them human but also superior to the “Godless” who were not human or less so, and had to be conquered and converted for their (our) own good. And so began the colonial conquests.

The early Buddhist mythology of the gods and non-humans are a narrative, not of power, but of **potential** of our rising above our current state to celebrate **humanity**, divinity and beyond. The stories of the devas and other celestial and non-human beings, with their wiles and ways, their progressively refined levels of existence, simply reflect how our mind can and must be known, tamed and freed.

What we find difficult, even impossible, to speak of in daily words, we tell in tales and share in stories. We love to imagine being a better person and to hope for a better world. These are the distant stars we aspire to reach. Even if we are unable to reach those stars, we can at least chart our life’s course by them.

The myths of the gods and non-humans are those starry heavens that we imagine, that we try to reach. For these myths are real stories about us, our pains, fears, dreams and visions. As soon we are able to speak as children, we are told such stories that hasten our ability to express ourself and to communicate, and enrich that ability.

The gods and non-humans may not be as real as we are **now**, but they are as real as our minds and heart imagine them to be. They represent our lust, hate, delusion and fears, they embody our love, kindness, wisdom and courage to face our demons, cross the sea of troubles and climb to the peaks of our dreams.

The fact that we, even today, enjoy watching a good movie, or religiously follow some TV series, suggests that we are drawn to some reality that we are so familiar with, something bigger, even more real than we are. Our daily lives limit us to what we can or must do **now**.

The ancient myths warn us of the dangers to come, that can and may challenge us. They play out the mistakes and doubts that weaken and limit us, so that we do not have to meet them unprepared or to blindly repeat them. They also **inspire** us in the directions we can and must take, and what we can become to tap the genius and goodness that lie deep within us.

We all love a good story, and some of the best stories are those told and retold by our forefathers and teachers, and will continue to be told to future generations. This is one of the greatest legacies we can leave behind for the benefit of posterity so that they will know about our adventures, failures and success, losses and gains, sorrows and joys— that we have taken the hero's journey. These are the stories that have kept us going and growing so that we are what we are today.

The gods may not be as real as history. But **who** writes history; who tells us history? History may **teach** us what those in power want us to believe; myths can **reach** us, in our deepest being, shedding light on it. History is often about **other** people, his story, about past events; but myths are eternal, on-going stories, happening **right now**: it's about **us**.

Myths are unfinished stories: we have yet to tell ours. When the story of our life is worth retelling, they are then called “myths.” They may not be as real as all the wealth or power that we have or dream of having, but they are more real than that. The “gods” is another name for these myths, at least in early Buddhism.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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