THE SOUL AND THE SCALE · A FREE OFFERING FROM BHĀLU

The Returning Voice

A reflection and a month of practice for anyone who hears the myth of Echo and Narcissus and recognises themselves in the one who fades.

"Is anyone here?"

"Here."

here

here

here

Offered by Bhālu · The Soul and the Scale · Built on Donna Christina Savery's *Echoism: The Silenced Response to Narcissism* (2018) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book III

Begin here

This is a place to practise hearing your own voice again. It is for people who adapt so well to others that they lose track of what they themselves think, want and feel.

It is built on the work of psychotherapist Donna Christina Savery, who gave this pattern a name: **echoism**. Narcissism has been written about endlessly. Savery turned to the figure psychology had forgotten, the nymph Echo, and to the people in her consulting room who lived like her. The exercises here are adaptations of her ideas for personal reflection. They are not her clinical method, and they are not therapy.

The evening reflection

One sitting · 30 to 45 minutes

Five movements that take you from hearing the myth to speaking one sentence of your own.

The month of return

Four weeks · 20 to 60 minutes, four times a week

A fuller practice: daily reps, deeper exercises, and a way to measure change.

How this is held

The workbook follows the six principles of a trauma-informed approach set out by SAMHSA, the US mental-health agency.

SAFETY

The pace is yours. A *Pause* button sits in the corner of every page, with grounding and support.

TRANSPARENCY

It says plainly what it is: reflection drawn from a published book, not therapy.

PEER SUPPORT

It is offered by someone walking the same road, not from above it.

COLLABORATION

Nothing here diagnoses you or anyone in your life. You decide what fits.

VOICE AND CHOICE

CONTEXT

Every prompt is optional. Skipping is a choice in your own voice.

The myth reads differently across gender, culture and history. Your reading is valid.

Who this is written for. Adults. Teenagers and younger readers are welcome to use it alongside a parent, a trusted adult or their therapist, because some sections touch on harmful relationships and are best explored with support. Therapists and counsellors: there's a section for you near the end, with chapter references to Savery's book.

The myth, told from Echo's side

Echo was a mountain nymph who loved to talk. When Zeus slipped away to chase the other nymphs, Echo would stop his wife Hera on the path and keep her talking, story after story, until the nymphs had scattered to safety. When Hera understood what was happening, her anger fell on the one she could reach. She did not punish the king of the gods. She punished Echo.

The curse was exact. Echo would never again speak first, and never say anything of her own. She could only repeat the last words someone else had spoken. Silenced, she withdrew into the forest, and the longer she went unheard, the fainter she became.

Then a young man came hunting through her woods: Narcissus, beautiful and sure of himself, who had refused every person who ever loved him. Separated from his friends, he called out, "Is anyone here?" And Echo, alive for the first time in a long time, answered, "Here." "Come out!" he called. "Come out!" she called back, and ran toward him with her arms open, filled with his words as if they were her own.

He recoiled. He told her he would rather die than let her have him. She could only give his own words back to him. Ashamed, she fled into caves and hollows. But her love grew with the rejection rather than shrinking, and it wore her away until her body was gone and her bones turned to stone. Only her voice remained, heard everywhere, belonging to no one.

Narcissus was cursed in turn to love only himself. He fell in love with his reflection in a still pool and wasted away beside it, unable to reach the face he loved. As he died, he sighed, and Echo, angry and still grieving, sighed back. When he cried "farewell," she said it too. Where his body had lain, a flower grew. Echo left nothing behind but her voice.

> *Lost Echo sits amid the voiceless mountains,*
> *And feeds her grief…*
>
> Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Adonais" (1821), the epigraph Savery chose for her first chapter

Notice three things about Echo's story, because the rest of this workbook rests on them. She was punished for protecting someone more powerful than herself. She came alive only when someone else spoke first. And at the very end, the one feeling she has that is not borrowed from Narcissus is her *resentment*.

Before reading on: what part of the story stopped you, and why?

Do you recognise this?

Savery chose not to open her book with a checklist. She wanted therapists to recognise echoism through experience in the room, and she offers her working definition only in the final chapter. The list below is a mirror drawn from the patterns she describes. It isn't a validated screening tool or a diagnosis, of you or of anyone in your life. Tick whatever feels familiar.

- [ ] My sentences trail off, or I judge my words before I've finished saying them.
- [ ] I feel most alive when someone else brings the energy, the plan or the need, and flat when I'm left to choose for myself.
- [ ] I find it hard to say what I want, even about small things like where to eat.
- [ ] When people ask about me, I end up talking about someone else.
- [ ] There's a harsh voice in my head that tells me I'm pathetic, stupid or not worth hearing. It often talks to me as "you" ("You're such an idiot"), as if someone else were speaking.
- [ ] I've been close to people who took up all the space, and it felt normal at the time.
- [ ] I carry a quiet resentment toward people I keep giving to.
- [ ] I undo things just when they start to go well.
- [ ] When I want to be seen or heard, I worry that wanting it makes me arrogant or self-obsessed, or even a narcissist.
- [ ] I'm good at helping, listening and holding space, but I'm often missing from it myself.

Ticking several doesn't mean something is wrong with you. Savery writes that aspects of echoism, like aspects of narcissism, are present in everyone (Chapter 9). What matters is whether they dominate your personality and relationships, to the point where you adapt so much to others that you lose track of who you are (Chapter 4).

The ideas

An echoist is someone whose own voice was silenced by living around dominant, self-centred people, who survives by echoing others, and whose recovery means growing a voice of their own while an inner critic tries to prevent it.

Savery's own summary, from her book's subtitle and final chapter, is that echoism is "the silenced response to narcissism": a state in which a person gives up being-for-herself in favour of the other, and is always found in relation to narcissistic figures, outside or inside the mind.

Savery combines two traditions: psychoanalysis (especially the work of Wilfred Bion, Herbert Rosenfeld and Ronald Britton) and existential philosophy (Sartre, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and the Swiss analyst Alice Holzhey-Kunz). Here is what you need from both, in plain language.

Own-voice	Savery's word for a voice that is truly yours: your thoughts, wants and words, said as yours. Growing it is the whole aim of the work.
The critical voice	An inner figure that attacks your growth while claiming to protect you. Savery's clients called it the "critical-voice"; in psychoanalytic language it is an *ego-destructive object* (Bion, Britton). Savery reports that every echoist she worked with had one. It tends to sound like the dominant people in your life, and often calls you "you" rather than "I".
Being-for-others	Becoming what other people want, so you never have to face choosing who to be. Savery calls the people who mostly live this way *defensive echoists*. They still reach toward life and connection, and their potential for growth is good.
Being-through-others	Borrowing another person's life force, opinions and words, and living on them. Savery calls this *self-destructive echoism*. Whatever good is taken in seems to be eaten before it can nourish. Most people move between both states.

The echoistic-narcissistic couple	Savery's term (ENC) for a sealed pair: one person projects and dominates, the other absorbs and adapts. It feels so natural from the inside that nobody remarks on it, until someone does.
Triangular space	A borrowing from Britton: a third position from which you can watch yourself and the critical voice together, instead of simply being inside it. Writing the voice down, or saying it aloud to a witness, creates this space.
Dethroning	Britton found that removing a cruel inner figure from its seat of authority helps, even if it never changes. It can keep talking. It just stops getting the final vote.
Life anxiety	Savery's name for the dread that comes with existing visibly: taking up space, being free, leaving a footprint. It is the reason things going well can feel dangerous.
Guilt for existing	What existential writers call *ontological guilt*: guilt not for doing something wrong, but for wanting, choosing, or having an impact at all.
Resentment	Often the one feeling an echoist clearly owns, as it was Echo's. It is valuable because it points straight at a want that was never voiced.
Faith, not hope	Hope is always hope for a particular outcome. Faith, in Savery's sense, is staying in a process with no guarantees, because some experiences are undeniable even when reason says they shouldn't be possible.
The helper as echo	Listening, mirroring and holding space are healing skills, and also echoistic behaviours. In a helper who knows themselves, they are gifts. In one who doesn't, they can be a place to hide.

Why it is so hard to change

- **Growth feels like becoming the thing that hurt you.** Recovering echoists often fear they are turning into a narcissist. Savery reads that fear as a sign of growth, not of danger.
- **The critic attacks hardest when life goes well.** Britton describes inner judges that become most menacing when a person shows independence or creativity.
- **Freedom brings grief.** Once the voice returns, so does grief for the years it was not heard.
- **Talking about the other person keeps the silence away.** Long stories about someone else can protect you from the frightening blank where your own story should be.

What helps

1. Leave space, and don't rush to fill it. Silence is where an own-voice appears.
2. Let the critic speak out loud, ideally with a witness, so you can observe it instead of becoming it.
3. Put it on trial, as Job put God on trial. You can't destroy it, but you can take away its throne.
4. Don't trade one authority for another. Even a kind teacher who tells you what to think becomes the next voice to echo.
5. Use sound, image and movement when words are stuck.
6. Keep faith without demanding a guaranteed outcome.

The evening reflection

Five movements, 30 to 45 minutes. Find somewhere you won't be interrupted. A candle, a bowl or a drum helps, but isn't needed.

MOVEMENT ONE · 5 MINUTES

Arrive

Sit. Let the breath settle without forcing it. If you have a singing bowl, drum or rattle, sound it once and listen until the sound is completely gone. That fading tone is Echo. Notice how long you can stay with the silence after it before you want to fill it.

What did you notice in the silence?

MOVEMENT TWO · 8 MINUTES

Listen for Echo

Reread the myth slowly. Then answer without editing yourself.

Where in my life have I taken the punishment for someone more powerful?

Whose voice do I come alive in response to?

What do I resent, quietly?

MOVEMENT THREE · 10 MINUTES

The voice behind you

Savery's groups imagined the critic standing just behind them, then turned to face it. This gentler version is for one person on their own. If it brings up specific memories of harm, stop, put your feet on the floor, breathe, and save this for a time when you have support.

What "the critical voice" means here. The harsh running commentary in your head that judges you, often before you've finished a thought. It's different from conscience. Conscience looks at something you *did* and points toward making it right. The critical voice attacks who you *are* and wants you smaller and quieter. Britton describes this as the language of self-reproach replacing honest self-appraisal.

Write down three things your critical voice says to you, in its exact words, however harsh. For example: "Don't bother, nobody cares," or "You always ruin everything."

It says:

Now read back what you wrote, as a detective would. In each line below, "it" means the critical voice, not you. Tick each one that describes the voice you wrote down.

- [ ] It talks to me as "you" ("You always mess this up"), as if someone were standing over me. My own thoughts usually say "I".
- [ ] It claims to know what other people think of me ("Everyone thinks you're a joke"), though it has no way of knowing.
- [ ] It acts as if it's protecting me ("Don't say anything, you'll only embarrass yourself"), but its protection keeps me quiet, hidden or alone.
- [ ] Nothing would ever satisfy it. If I did what it demanded, it would find something new to attack.
- [ ] It seems pleased, even eager, when I fail ("Told you so"), instead of sorry for me.

These are features Savery describes in her clients' inner critics (Chapters 6 and 7). Each tick is evidence that the voice is behaving like an inner figure with its own agenda, not like the truth about you.

Whose voice, tone or phrases does it remind me of?

MOVEMENT FOUR · 10 MINUTES

Put it on trial

In the Book of Job, a man crushed by divine judgement does something remarkable: he judges the judge. Ronald Britton, whom Savery follows, reads this as the turning point in freeing oneself from a cruel inner authority. Job can't change God. He changes his relationship to Him. Answer in writing.

You claim to protect me. When did your attack actually make my life better?

You claim to know what everyone thinks. What is your evidence?

If I stopped obeying you, what exactly would happen?

The verdict, in my own words, starting with "I". It doesn't need to be kind or triumphant, only true.

MOVEMENT FIVE · 7 MINUTES

One word of your own

Echo could never speak first. You can. Finish each sentence, then say it out loud, even quietly, even alone.

I want…

I don't want…

I believe…

One small thing I'll do this week in my own voice:

Close with a sound: the harmonium, the bowl or the drum, or your own instrument. This time, play it when *you* choose, not in answer to anything.

If this evening opened something. The month of return, just below, is the next step, and it is free. If you'd like company along the way, subscribe to The Soul and the Scale. You'll hear first as new guided audio, circles and offerings take shape. Subscribe on Substack (https://open.substack.com/pub/thesoulandthescale)

The month of return

Four weeks, four sessions a week of 20 to 60 minutes, plus a few minutes of daily practice. Missing days is expected. Pick up where you are.

YOUR MONTH

Choose a start date, and this card will show the practice for each day.

Weeks one to four follow below. Daily reps take five to ten minutes. Session days take 20 to 60.

☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5	☐ 6	☐ 7	☐ 8	☐ 9	☐ 10
☐ 11	☐ 12	☐ 13	☐ 14	☐ 15	☐ 16	☐ 17	☐ 18	☐ 19	☐ 20
☐ 21	☐ 22	☐ 23	☐ 24	☐ 25	☐ 26	☐ 27	☐ 28	☐ 29	☐ 30

Tick a box for each day you practise. Gaps are part of it.

Every day, 5 to 10 minutes

- **The voice log.** When you catch the critic, write down exactly what it said, without arguing. Logging it is triangular space in miniature.
- **The finished-sentence memo.** Record a short voice memo that finishes four stems out loud: *Today I noticed…* *I want…* *I don't want…* *I think…* Savery's clients often trailed off before the end of a sentence. Finishing the sentence is the practice.
- **One preference, said aloud.** A small one: "I'd rather…"
- **The "I did that" list.** Before bed, write three things you did, each starting with "I". Echoists rarely claim credit for anything good.

DATE	SITUATION	ITS EXACT WORDS	WHOSE TONE IS IT BORROWING?	WHAT IT WANTED ME TO DO OR NOT DO

WEEK ONE

Seeing clearly

SESSION 1 · THE RELATIONSHIP MAP

Savery found, almost without exception, a narcissistic parent or partner at the centre of her clients' lives, often a pattern of seeking out dominant partners, and an inner voice that echoed them. Map your own. You don't need to label anyone. The question is not "is this person a narcissist?" but "what happens to *my* voice around them?"

PERSON OR ROLE	WHAT I GAVE	WHAT I SILENCED	WHAT I RESENTED	WHAT I WANTED TO SAY
The inner voice				

Reading across the rows, what repeats?

A line on responsibility. Savery asks echoists to notice the footprint they leave even when they believe they leave none: the adapting, the silence, the over-

giving. That lens is useful for patterns. It does not apply to violence or abuse. Responsibility for harm belongs to the person who caused it.

SESSION 2 · TURN AROUND AND FACE IT

Imagine the critical voice standing just behind you, then turn around in your mind and look at it. Draw it if you like, with speech bubbles. Some of Savery's participants did exactly that.

What does it look like? How old is it, and how does it stand?

How does it sound? Whose cadence and phrases does it use?

When did it first appear?

What is it afraid would happen if it went quiet?

SESSIONS 3 AND 4 · THREE BELIEFS

Three beliefs to test. They aren't quoted from Savery; they are common shapes the critic's "protection" takes. For each one, write whether it's yours, whose voice it sounds like, and when you first remember believing it.

“I don’t deserve it.”

“I won’t be able to keep it.”

“Wanting it will hurt me.”

WEEK TWO

Dethroning the voice

SESSION 1 · THE FULL TRIAL

Return to the trial from the evening reflection, at full length this time.

The charges: what has the voice cost me? Posts never made, chances undone, help never asked for, joy never felt.

Cross-examination: “You say do better. Define better. Would you ever accept it?”

“Why are you pleased when I fail?”

“Whose words were you, before you were mine?”

My verdict:

SESSION 2 · THE TWO-VOICE DIALOGUE

Write a conversation. Begin the critic's lines with **V:** and your own with **Me:**. The one rule: the critic may speak, but your own voice must finish every sentence it starts. Your voice doesn't need to win, only to finish. Then do it aloud with a drum or rattle, playing only when you hear yourself.

An example of the shape:

V: You're going to sound stupid.

Me: I might sound unsure, and I'm going to say it anyway.

V: Nobody asked you.

Me: I'm asking myself.

The dialogue:

SESSION 3 · WHY IT GOES WRONG WHEN IT'S GOING RIGHT

Bion, whom Savery quotes, believed that psychological growth is the event people fear most, because becoming yourself can feel almost indistinguishable from grandiosity. Following Britton, Savery describes the inner critic becoming most hostile when a person shows independence, creativity or growth (Chapter 2), so the voice often gets loudest just as you start to exist more visibly. Study three times you undid something good. Do this in daylight, as research, not as a night of self-punishment.

WHAT WAS GOING WELL	WHAT I FELT JUST BEFORE	WHAT I DID	WHAT THE VOICE SAID AFTER	WHAT UNDOING IT PROTECTED ME FROM

WHAT WAS GOING WELL	WHAT I FELT JUST BEFORE	WHAT I DID	WHAT THE VOICE SAID AFTER	WHAT UNDOING IT PROTECTED ME FROM

SESSION 4 · THE EARLY-WARNING PLAN

The good moments I need to watch: praise, closeness, a milestone, a success.

My early signs: restlessness, numbness, picking a fight, disappearing.

My agreed move. For example: wait 24 hours before quitting anything; tell one person "it's going well and I want to wreck it"; do the next step at 10% rather than dropping it.

One more rule. One of Savery's clients lay awake after every social event while her inner judge tried each sentence. Savery called it a post-mortem, an examination only a corpse could bear. If your nights look like this, adjourn the court until morning. Then give it ten minutes and three questions: *What happened*? *What did I want*? *What will I try next time*?

WEEK THREE

Relationships and wants

SESSION 1 · TURNING RESENTMENT INTO WANTS

In the myth, Echo's resentment is the one feeling that is truly her own. Treat yours as a signpost.

I RESENT…	WHICH MEANS I WANTED…	DID I EVER SAY IT?	COULD I ASK FOR IT, OR GIVE IT TO MYSELF?

SESSION 2 · THE "I" PAGE

Choose the relationship you think about most. Write one page about yourself in it using only sentences that begin with "I". No "they" or "she" or "he". Notice how hard it is. Savery found that talking about the other person can be a way of avoiding the empty place where your own story should go.

The "I" page:

SESSION 3 · THREE EXPERIMENTS, SMALLEST FIRST

Pick a relationship that has become one-sided. Try each experiment once, and note what happened and how you felt. If the relationship can hold your voice, it will start to feel more mutual. If it can't, that is information, not failure.

- [ ] State one small preference.
- [ ] Share one true thing about how you are, without fixing it or making it lighter.
- [ ] Ask for one thing.

What happened, and what I felt:

SESSION 4 · FEARS YOU CAN ACT ON, ANXIETY YOU HAVE TO CARRY

The existential writers Savery draws on separate concrete fears, which you can do something about, from deep anxiety about existing, which can only be lived with. Echoists often swap one for the other: they turn the deep dread into a crisis to manage, or let it stop them from handling the practical problem in front of them.

CONCRETE PROBLEM (ACT ON IT)	ONE NEXT STEP	THE DEEP FEAR ATTACHED (CARRY IT)

WEEK FOUR

Voice in the world

SESSION 1 · THE VISIBILITY LADDER

Climb one rung at a time. Stay on each until it feels uncomfortable rather than impossible. The aim isn't applause. It is learning that you still exist after being seen.

RUNG	MY VERSION	WHAT THE VOICE SAID BEFORE	WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED
Share something you made, with no comment			
Add one honest line in your own words			
Speak first in a group			
Say what you believe, out loud, to someone			

SESSION 2 · ENVY, READ CREATIVELY

One of Savery's clients was sure her envy proved she was a narcissist. Savery heard it differently: the client had first felt erased, invisible at the table, and the envy came afterwards, keeping a little self alive. Holzhey-Kunz argues that for very sensitive people, envy can be creative: a wish to give yourself permission to take up space.

Who do I envy, and what are they allowed that I don't allow myself?

What would a small, legitimate version of that look like for me?

SESSION 3 · THE EVIDENCE BOX

Near the end of the book, a client called Michaela heard from a family friend that there had been no toys anywhere in her childhood home, no sign that a child lived there at all. A candle matching the one in her therapist's room became her concrete proof that a relationship in which she existed was real. Gather your own evidence: things you made, kind messages, milestones, keepsakes from people who saw you. Open it when the voice says you have done nothing real.

What goes in my box:

SESSION 4 · UNDENIABLE EXPERIENCES, AND A NEW VERDICT

Moments that were real, even if the voice says they meant nothing:

Reread your Week two verdict. Write a new one, and notice the difference.

Savery says the clearest measure of progress is the voice itself: its tone, its depth, and the confidence with which it is used. Record a two-minute memo on day one and on day thirty, saying what you believe, and listen to both.

Weekly check-in

The loudest thing the voice said this week:

A moment I heard my own voice:

Something I wanted, and said:

What I'll try next week:

The spiritual lens

Savery was surprised to find her clinical work leading into theology. Her seventh chapter reads the inner critic as a "god-like object", an inner authority that demands silence and loyalty, and reads recovery as a matter of faith. For anyone with a spiritual or magical practice, these ideas open further doors. Take what serves you.

The curse is not your nature

Echo wasn't cursed for her own wrongdoing. She covered for Zeus, and Hera's anger landed on the one she could reach. A curse is something placed upon a being, not the being itself. Savery is also clear that a curse can't be undone by a wish or by another spell. It loosens through slow, witnessed work. Ritual can hold that work, the way myth and theatre hold what is too painful to face directly. It can't be a shortcut around it.

Discernment: guidance, or the critic in robes?

Savery's clients often experienced the critic as all-knowing and protective. One client's inner voice demanded that she stay alone, and claimed to be the only companion she could rely on. In spiritual life it can be hard to tell a genuine inner authority from the old voice dressed in sacred clothes. Test any voice that claims authority over you.

QUESTION	THE CRITIC IN ROBES	SOMETHING WORTH TRUSTING
How does it speak to me?	As "you", with contempt	With respect, even when the truth is hard
What does it ask of me?	Silence, isolation, smallness	Voice, relationship, growth
How does it meet my failure?	With satisfaction	With honesty and no pleasure
Does it claim to know every mind?	Yes	No
Can it be questioned?	No; doubt is betrayal	Yes, and it holds up

Abraham, Agamemnon and Job

Savery works with Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, which he published under the name Johannes de Silentio, "John of Silence". Abraham obeys in silence. Agamemnon makes his terrible choice and speaks it aloud. Job puts the divine on trial. Savery's stance is Johannes's: keep faith, and keep questioning any authority that demands your silence. In many contemplative and magical traditions, testing the spirits is a duty, not a blasphemy. Bring the same rigour to the judge inside you.

Faith, not hope

Savery leans on T. S. Eliot's "East Coker", where the soul is told to wait without hope, because hope would be hope for the wrong thing, and that faith lives in the waiting itself. Hope always has an object, an outcome you need. Faith, as she means it, has no object: it is the willingness to stay in a process nobody can guarantee. If you can't picture a future right now, you don't need to. You need enough faith for one more week.

Practices

- **A pathworking to meet Echo.** In meditation, walk into her forest and find her among the stones. Ask what the first word in her own voice would be. Write it down when you return.
- **A counter-liturgy.** Write a few lines in your own words, never borrowed ones, to speak at the start of your practice. For example: "I speak in my own voice. I am allowed to leave a mark."
- **Meeting or escaping?** Before sitting, ask honestly whether you are going in to meet yourself or to get away. One of Savery's clients drifted into a "white space" that felt peaceful, then realised it was peaceful only because the critic left her alone there. On escape days, choose practices that use your voice: chanting, toning, drumming.
- **Prometheus.** Savery's last chapter is named for the Titan who stole fire for humanity and suffered for it. She quotes Brecht on the need not only to understand Prometheus's chains but to be trained in the *desire* to free him. Ask yourself: what would I want, if wanting were safe?

My counter-liturgy:

Echo’s first word:

For leaders and healers

Savery's ninth chapter is about helpers who are echoists themselves, and anyone who holds space for others should read it.

Listening, mirroring, reflecting back, absorbing other people's feelings: these are the core skills of helping, and also echoistic behaviours. In a helper who knows this about themselves, they are gifts. In one who doesn't, they can become a hiding place. Savery describes a counsellor who realised her warm, mirroring style came so easily because it was her own old defence. In one hard moment she simply repeated her supervisor's words to a client, and the therapy ended. Savery also admits to doing it herself: running over time, talking too much, offering solutions, and leaving exhausted, before realising she was handing a client a strong voice to copy and so repeating the pattern that kept the client silent.

A self-check for helpers

- [ ] I feel drained or empty after holding space.
- [ ] I find it hard to end on time.
- [ ] I feel responsible for whether people feel better.
- [ ] I fill silences, or answer when someone asks "what should I do?"
- [ ] I rarely include anything in my offerings simply because I love it.
- [ ] I'm drawn to, or flattened by, the most dominant person in the room.
- [ ] I feel quiet resentment toward the people I help, then guilt about it.

Watch for the reverse risk too. Admired healers can drift into the Narcissus seat, the teacher whose words are repeated. The safeguard is the same: protect other people's voices as carefully as you protect your own.

Ground rules for circles, adapted from Savery

1. **Their own voice is the point.** Your voice can model a different tone, but it isn't what people should leave carrying.

2. **Hold back, inside a clear frame.** Don't fill every silence. Savery's participants found open silence very hard, though, so give a structure and leave space within it.
3. **Let inner voices be named, not excavated.** Speaking or writing a critic's phrases is enough in a circle. Deep trauma work belongs with trained clinicians.
4. **Don't reassure or label.** Don't tell anyone who they are, including "you're not a narcissist" or "you're an echoist". Ask what they notice.
5. **Watch your own energy.** Savery tells helpers to track it. Feeling drained, or that you can never give enough, is information about the room.
6. **Take fear seriously.** If someone describes feeling unsafe, or fears being hunted down, treat it as real and refer them on.

At every gathering: say plainly that it isn't therapy, that anyone can sit out any part, and have support information available. For deeper work, have a second facilitator and a quiet space someone can step into, as Savery did in her residential groups.

Four exercises from Savery's groups, adapted

STONES ON A TRAY

Each person chooses a stone, shell or seed to stand for themselves and places it on a cloth in the centre. At points during the gathering, people move their own piece to show where they feel in relation to the group. Speaking about it is optional. One rule matters: never move anyone else's piece. In Savery's group, a participant had to step away when a facilitator's piece moved away from hers.

THE VOICE UNDER THE NOISE

Everyone holds a small percussion instrument, eyes closed. Guide them to let all their inner voices be present, then to listen underneath for their own. When they hear it, even for a moment, they play. In Savery's group the sound grew from scattered taps to a full swell, and one woman described it as hearing her own voice for the first time. Afterwards, offer two colours of pen: one for the critic's words, one for their own voice.

THE VOICE ON CARDS

This replaces Savery's more intense "Monster" visualisation, which brought up memories of abuse for some participants and isn't suited to open groups. Each person writes one sentence their critic says, anonymously, on a card. Shuffle the cards and read each aloud in a calm, neutral voice. Then ask what people noticed hearing these words spoken by someone else, as a sentence on a card. People discover the voice is not unique to them, and that it can be observed.

THE MYTH AS STORY

Tell the myth over a drone or bowl, then invite reflection: which character do you recognise in your own life? Savery's closed groups went further, performing the myth and building living tableaux of each figure. Keep that for groups who already trust each other.

A 90-minute "Returning Voice" circle

TIME	SEGMENT	NOTES
0–10 min	Welcome and frame	Not therapy; opting out welcome; support info
10–20 min	Stones on a tray	Choose and place
20–35 min	The myth as story	Told over sound
35–50 min	Sound or silent meditation	Include one thing you love
50–62 min	The voice on cards	Read aloud neutrally
62–77 min	The voice under the noise	Percussion, then two-colour writing
77–90 min	Move stones; closing	Each person says one sentence starting with "I", or passes

Words for opening and closing

Read them as written, or put them in your own words. Being transparent about the frame is itself part of keeping people safe.

> *Opening: "This circle is reflection, not therapy. Everything tonight is an invitation. You can sit out any part, keep your eyes open, leave the room and come back. Passing is a full answer. Nothing you share is required, and nothing leaves this room."*

> *Closing: "Some of what came up tonight may keep moving through you for a day or two. That's normal. Drink water, be gentle with yourself, and reach out to someone you trust if it gets heavy. Support information is on the card by the door."*

A six-circle series

For leaders who want to hold the month as a group: groups that meet on a schedule tend to finish together more often than people working alone. One circle a week, about 90 minutes each, following the workbook.

CIRCLE	THEME	CORE EXERCISE	BETWEEN CIRCLES
1	The myth and the frame	The myth as story; stones on a tray	The evening reflection
2	Meeting the voice	The voice on cards	Voice log; Week one
3	The trial	Two-voice dialogue, written then drummed	Week two
4	Resentment and wants	Translating resentment, in pairs	Week three experiments
5	The voice under the noise	Percussion	Visibility ladder
6	A voice in the world	Each person reads their new verdict aloud; stones on the tray one last time	Keep the daily reps

Free to use in your own circles with attribution to Bhālu and The Soul and the Scale, and to Donna Christina Savery's *Echoism* (2018).

Care and limits

- **Echoism isn't a formal diagnosis.** It is a framework from one psychotherapist's years of clinical work, which she calls "the first word", not the last. The psychologist Craig Malkin has also used the term, in a related but different sense, in *Rethinking Narcissism* (2015).
- **The theory is a lens, not your history.** Savery's accounts of infancy are speculative, in the psychoanalytic tradition. Use them as metaphor, not as fact about your childhood.
- **She writes the echoist as "she"**, because Echo is female, and states that echoism applies equally to men and to anyone.
- **The method relies on a witness.** The voice weakens when it is spoken in front of someone. A workbook can begin that, but it can't replace a trusted person, a support group, or a therapist.
- **Stop if you need to.** If an exercise brings up flashbacks, panic or memories of abuse, pause, ground yourself, and bring it to someone qualified to help.
- **Insight is not treatment.** If you feel persistently flat, hopeless or unable to imagine a future, that may be depression, and it deserves care in its own right.

Support is available if you need to talk with someone. All of these are free and confidential.

IF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH IS A STRUGGLE RIGHT NOW

If you're overwhelmed, in emotional distress, or simply need to talk with someone, the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** (US) is open 24/7. Call or text **988**, or chat online at 988lifeline.org. You don't need to be in crisis to reach out.

IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING WITH DRINKING, DRUGS OR ANOTHER ADDICTION

The **SAMHSA National Helpline** (US), **1-800-662-4357**, is open 24/7 in English and Spanish, and can point you to treatment and support groups near you. You can also search for treatment at FindTreatment.gov.
Find a recovery meeting near you, in person or online: Alcoholics Anonymous (or AA's free Meeting Guide app), Narcotics Anonymous, and SMART Recovery.

OUTSIDE THE US

findahelpline.com lists free helplines by country.

In an emergency, call your local emergency number (911 in the US).

For therapists and other professionals

This is a psychoeducational, self-reflective workbook adapted from Donna Christina Savery's *Echoism: The Silenced Response to Narcissism* (2018). It is not a clinical protocol, and it hasn't been tested in research.

Savery's own approach (Chapter 10) is relational and depends on things a workbook can't do: a therapist who holds silence instead of filling it, who doesn't reassure, and who helps create "triangular space" in which the client and therapist can observe the critical voice together. The workbook works best as an adjunct to that kind of relationship, not a substitute for it.

Suggested uses

- **Between sessions.** The voice log, the trial verdict and the two-voice dialogue are designed to be brought into the room and spoken aloud with a witness.
- **As a shared language.** Clients who recognise themselves in Echo often find the myth gives them words for something they couldn't name.
- **In groups.** The six-circle series and adapted exercises in "For leaders and healers" draw on Savery's homogeneous groups (Chapter 8).

Exercises to approach with care

- **"The voice behind you" and "Turn around and face it."** These adapt Savery's "Monster" guided imagery (Chapter 8), which surfaced memories of assault and betrayal for some participants. The workbook versions are gentler and written, but may still activate trauma.
- **The relationship map.** It can surface abusive relationships. The workbook states that responsibility for harm belongs to the person who caused it.
- **The trial.** In clients with a severe inner critic, the critic can take over the exercise itself. Savery notes the critic also tends to attack the therapy after progress, and around breaks.

- **The "Do you recognise this?" list.** It is a reflective mirror, not a screening instrument. Savery warns that echoistic clients are easily mistaken for narcissistic, borderline or "as-if" presentations, and may misdiagnose themselves the same way (Chapter 6).

Younger clients

The workbook is written for adults. With adolescents, guidance from a clinician is recommended. Point the relationship map toward family, school and friendships, and do the "voice behind you" exercise together in session rather than alone. Make sure a safety plan is in place.

Where each idea comes from in Savery's book

WORKBOOK SECTION OR IDEA	SAVERY (2018)
The myth, read from Echo's side	Ch. 1, pp. 11–22
The critical voice (ego-destructive object), introjection	Ch. 2, pp. 23–40; Ch. 6, pp. 93–108
Being-for-others, The Look, shame, bad faith	Ch. 3, pp. 41–57
The defensive echoist (Jayne, Dr L, Mary)	Ch. 4, pp. 61–74
The self-destructive echoist, being-through-others (Mrs P, Anna, Jaz)	Ch. 5, pp. 75–90
Triangular space, dethroning, Job (Lisa, Peter)	Ch. 6, pp. 93–108
Hera's curse, god-like objects, faith not hope (Lucy)	Ch. 7, pp. 109–121
Echoistic-narcissistic couples, groups, key treatment principles, residential exercises	Ch. 8, pp. 125–141
The helper as echoist (Serena, Catherine)	Ch. 9, pp. 142–148
Definition of echoism, life anxiety, ontological guilt, recovery, space (Michaela)	Ch. 10, pp. 151–168

Page numbers follow the Routledge edition's table of contents. Clinician feedback is welcome by email at nickonlocation@proton.me or through The Soul and the Scale. Subscribe on Substack (https://open.substack.com/pub/thesoulandthescale)

Sources

All of the ideas and clinical observations here come from Savery's book. The myth is retold in my own words from Ovid. The exercises are adaptations for personal and group reflection, and quotations are kept brief.

The primary sources

- Savery, D. C. (2018). *Echoism: The Silenced Response to Narcissism*. London: Karnac / Routledge.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, Book III, the story of Echo and Narcissus.

Thinkers Savery draws on, named in this workbook

- Bion, W. R. (1962). *Learning from Experience*. London: Karnac.
- Britton, R. (1998). *Belief and Imagination*. London: Routledge.
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- Sartre, J.-P. (1943). *Being and Nothingness*.
- Eliot, T. S. (1940). "East Coker," in *Four Quartets*.
- Shelley, P. B. (1821). "Adonais."
- Malkin, C. (2015). *Rethinking Narcissism: The Bad – and Surprising Good – About Feeling Special*. New York: HarperCollins.

Continue the work

This workbook is free and complete as it is. It is also the first door into a longer body of work on the returning voice, weaving these ideas together with sound, ritual and contemplative practice.

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This workbook

- The evening reflection and the month of return
- The printable edition
- Essays and meditations on The Soul and the Scale

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- New chapters as the work grows

COMING

- A guided cohort moving through the month together
- Circles in person and online
- Deeper practice in sound, voice and ritual

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If someone came to mind as you read this, they may be waiting for someone else to speak first. With care, Bhālu

To get in touch directly: nickonlocation@proton.me

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