

Illusion and Reality – An Overview

Illusion and Reality

- *King of Concentration Sutra*: Takes a *magician's illusion*, a *dream*, and an *echo* as examples of the confusion between appearance and reality. All of these exist conventionally.
- Everyday objects: They deceive us because the conditions are there for things to appear to have an intrinsic nature they don't actually have.
- A fundamental fact of phenomenal existence: The verses in *King of Concentration Sutra* draw our attention to the fundamental fact of phenomenal existence – how our confused mind grasps at a substantial reality of things, although in actual fact things are empty of inherent being.
- Fictionalizing: There is a discernible degree of fictionalizing in our everyday reality – the object is *there*, and our understanding is *here*; we never quite see things as they actually are (even whether we get close to the truth, or are miles from it).
- Illusion-like existence: The Tibetan masters urge us to see all things as *illusion-like*. They do *not* suggest we see life as an illusion – life is *not* a dream with no reality at all. Yet, it is *like* a dream, in that we create the fiction. Nevertheless, life is not as black and white as it appears. Reality is not as real as it seems, nor is illusion quite as unreal. We need to let go of that sense of concrete reality and see all things as *illusion-like*.
- Example of a book: A book appears as a book to our mind when somebody has bound the pages together and we conventionally agree that this is a book, nothing more – there is nothing from the book's side that defines it as a book.
- Karmic imprints: That things appear in a certain way because of karmic imprints is illustrated by the example of a dream. Dreams are not real, but most of the time, they have a strong connection with our life. In the same way, we misconceive reality because we have had these karmic seeds from many lifetimes. We are so familiar with seeing everything as *inherently existent* that we keep seeing things in the same way; it is our deepest habit.
- Dream analogy: The man desiring his dream-lover illustrates that we are deceived by our emotions – although lacking any real existence, the dream-woman takes on significance only because of his desire. The joy and grief that a woman feels for her dream-son, shows us the insubstantiality of the objects of our attachment, aversion, and ignorance.
- Reification of "I": The fundamental need to reify the "I" ("reify" – to treat a concept as an object; to think of or treat something abstract as if it existed as a real and tangible object) causes us to see everything as inherently existent.
- A sense of permanence: We develop attachment, aversion, hatred, grief, and so on all the time – based on a sense of permanence that is actually divorced from reality. We want things to be permanent – so we see them that way.

- Echo analogy: The echo symbolizes our own habitual tendency to see things as existing independently.
- Appearance versus reality: The world we live in – our body, our possessions, the buildings and streets of our town – seem to be very real. It is difficult for us to understand that they do *not* exist as they appear to us.
- Water reflection analogy: From the ultimate perspective, there is no difference between the reflection of our face and our real face, between what from our worldly perspective we would call "illusion" and "reality" – both are equally conventionally existent: one as a reflection, one as a face. There is no difference between them in the way they exist.
- Understanding emptiness: To understand this discordance between appearance and reality, on the level we are talking about here, requires an understanding of *emptiness* – only with such understanding will we be able to see that appearance is the sense of intrinsic existence, whereas reality is the lack of intrinsic existence.
- Levels of understanding: There are different levels of understanding we must all pass through to get a deeper understanding of emptiness – our study of the four schools of Indian Buddhism helps achieve this.
- Final mode of existence of an object: This is *the lack of inherent existence from its own side*. This truth has to penetrate to a deeper level.
- Traditional example of the coiled rope and the snake: Attachment, aversion, and ignorance all stem from the same kind of misunderstanding.
- Value of understanding: Knowing how people, actions, and events exist conventionally, makes it possible to understand the four noble truths on a very profound level – and this understanding helps us to generate compassion and so on.
- Misapprehension and suffering: We all share this illness of fictionalizing the world we live in. All suffering arises from this misapprehension, and if we can see this, we will stop ascribing good and bad, and meting out our compassion only to those we feel deserve it.
- Understanding the process of life: Differentiating between the fiction our conceptual mind creates and the reality of our life will help us understand the process of all things and events, how they go together, how they work together.
- Final wisdom: Why is the only true mind one that recognizes the *absence* of independent existence of the object? Because that mind is the only one that is *free from fault*. That is why we use the word *emptiness*. The final wisdom realizes the lack of intrinsic existence of whatever object it is meditating on – the body, the "I", an external object, even emptiness itself. There is no fault at all in that wisdom.