

Chan Talks

by Venerable Master Hua

Dreams, Illusions, Bubbles and Shadows

All conditioned things are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, like dewdrops or a lightning flash: You should contemplate them thus.

Vajra Sutra

"*All conditioned things*". "Conditioned" means that which has shape and appearance, that which is not ultimate. This appearance is not real, but most people are deluded by this false appearance, and cannot tell the true apart from the false. They turn their backs on enlightenment, mix with the dust, and take a thief as their son. For this reason, our originally pure nature gets covered up by defilement, like a mirror which is coated with a thick layer of filth and dust, unable to reflect the marks of all external things. Since we can no longer discriminate between the true and the false, we go about in a daze, wasting our time.

"*All conditioned things*" refers to all things that have marks, shape, and external form. They are false and untrue, like "*dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows*." A dream is not real. An illusion is conjured from transformation, like a mirage, and it has no actual substance. Bubbles in the water, though they may seem as if they truly exist, are in fact devoid of a true nature. The same goes for shadows. Reflected images do not have an identity of their own—their very nature is false and unreal. Dewdrops appear in the early morning, but once the sun comes out they disappear. A lightning flash just appears for a split second, then it's gone. All conditioned things are like that, too. But people are deluded by external marks, and exhaust themselves in running after what is false.

Some people are deluded by wealth. They try their best to make as much money as they can, without having any scruples. Other people are confused by beautiful forms, so that in thought after thought, day and night they try to gratify their senses with beautiful forms. Others are greedy for a fine reputation. Driven by their ambition for a good name, they do upside down things. Then there are people who can't put down good food. All day long they think about ways to get delicious food or nice clothes to wear. The desire for food also includes the desire for beautiful clothes. Then there are people who are not attached to any of those four things—money, beautiful forms, food, or fame—however, they aren't able to put down sleep. They feel that if they sleep a little less they have taken a great loss and that they have to get in at least eight hours of sleep each night.

Money, beautiful forms, fame, food, and sleep are the five roots of the hells. They are all conditioned dharmas. Well, how do we solve the problem? You must first recognize them for what they are. Look upon them as dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, as dewdrops, and as a lightning flash. You should engage in such a contemplation.

Take a look at history. From the ancient past to the present, where can you find people who managed to possess wealth forever, beautiful forms forever, fame forever, or always eat good food, or forever sleep without waking up? None of those situations were possible, and if it was that way in the past, what makes you think you can change it in the present? Why do you keep on being so upside down about the five desires? If you don't want to be upside down, you have to study wisdom. Wisdom arises from holding the precepts. From precepts you give rise to samadhi, and from samadhi you give rise to wisdom. That's the formula, it's very simple. Once you have figured out the accounts, you will discover that the five desires in reality aren't worth a cent, so why do you want to be turned upside down by them?

Special Events

at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas

Aug.5: Sunday celebration of Gwan Shr Yin Bodhisattva's Accomplishing the Way

Aug.5 eve.-Aug.8 eve.: Three days of recitation of Gwan Shr Yin Bodhisattva's name

Sep.2: Sunday celebration of Ullambana

Sep.14 eve.-Sep.17 eve.: Three days of recitation of Earth Store Bodhisattva's name

Sep.16: Sunday celebration of Earth Store Bodhisattva's Anniversary

Oct.28 eve.-Nov.4 eve.: One week of recitation of Gwan Shr Yin Bodhisattva's name

Nov.4: Sunday celebration of Gwan Shr Yin Bodhisattva's Leaving Home

Nov.5: Monday (actual day)celebration of Gwan Shr Yin Bodhisattva's Leaving Home