

The Theatre of Reflection

A Tibetan lama invites us to the theatre of emptiness.

By *[Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche](#)*



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When we're watching a movie in the theatre, we can relax and enjoy the show because we know it's an illusion. This magical display that we're watching is the result of a projector, film, light, screen, and our own perceptions coming together. In separate momentary flashes of colour, shapes, and sound, they create an illusion of continuity, which we perceive as characters, scenery, movement, and language. What we call "reality" works much the same way. Our ability to know, our sense perceptions, the seeds of our past karma, and the phenomenal world all come together to create life's "show." All of these elements share a dynamic relationship, which keeps things moving and interesting. This is known as interdependence.

When we look around us, we can see that nothing exists in isolation, which is another way of saying that [everything is interdependent](#). Everything depends upon an infinite number of causes and conditions to come into being, arise, and fall away moment by moment. Because they are interdependent, things don't possess a true existence of their own. For instance, how could we separate a flower from the many causes and conditions that produce it—water, soil, sun, air, seed, and so forth? Can we find a flower that exists independently from these causes and conditions? Everything is so intricately connected, it is hard to point to where one thing starts and another ends. This is what is meant by [the illusory or empty nature of phenomena](#).

The outer world in all its variety and our inner world of thoughts and emotions are not as they seem. All phenomena appear to exist objectively, but their true mode of existence is like a dream: apparent yet insubstantial. The experience of emptiness is not found outside of the world of ordinary appearance, as many people mistakenly assume. In truth, we experience emptiness when the mind is free of grasping at appearance.

Seeing the emptiness of the phenomenal world relieves us of the heavy notion of things being solid or intrinsic. When we understand that nothing exists independently, everything that does arise seems more dreamlike and less threatening. This brings a deep sense of relaxation, and we feel less need to control our mind and circumstances. Because the nature of everything is emptiness, it is possible to view our life the way we would view a movie. We can relax and enjoy the show.



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