



Name: _____

Date: _____

Grade: _____

MEDITATIONS ON EMPTINESS

ANSWER KEY FOR CLASS TWO

1. Describe the objections made by the critic in the first and sixth verses of Arya Nagarjuna's chapter on "What If Things *Weren't* Empty," and then identify the fundamental assumption that lies behind these objections.

The critic claims that if things were empty, as Nagarjuna asserts, then "nothing would arise and pass away," "the four Arya truths would not exist," there would be "no real results of righteous and unrighteous behavior," and "all worldly conventions would be maligned." The fundamental assumption the critic is making is that to claim things are empty is to say they don't exist at all.

2. What does Arya Nagarjuna mean when he tells his opponent, "You don't understand the purpose of emptiness, emptiness itself, or the meaning of emptiness."

The purpose of emptiness is to bring wisdom and eventually perfect peace of mind through the realization that all things are projections and do not exist self-existently. Emptiness does not mean that things don't exist at all, as the opponent has assumed, but rather that they exist only as projections. And the meaning of emptiness is the fact that things exist dependently, and not independently.

3. What is the "deep reality" of the Buddha's teaching?

That there is a distinction between "deceptive" and "ultimate" truth or reality.

4. What does Arya Nagarjuna point out as the consequence of seeing things as having some kind of self-nature in verses sixteen and seventeen?

He notes that if we say things have a self-nature we cannot also say that they come from causes and conditions. There would be no causality, agents and actions, arising and ceasing, or results if things existed self-existently.

5. Identify the positive way that Arya Nagarjuna describes emptiness. What conclusion does he draw from this regarding the universal application of emptiness?

In verse eighteen, he identifies emptiness with dependent origination: "whatever



arises dependently is what is called emptiness.” And in the next verse he notes that “there is nothing whatsoever that does not arise dependently, and thus there is nothing whatsoever that is not empty.”

6. What implications would there be if we said that Buddhas existed independently?

First, it would mean that Buddhas would somehow exist independent of enlightenment, and vice versa. Second, it would mean that someone who was not already a Buddha could never become one by following the bodhisattva path.

7. What implications for morality and functionality would there be if things *weren't* empty?

There would be no point in virtuous or non-virtuous actions, for a virtuous person would exist as such independently of his or her actions, and the same would go for a non-virtuous person. And a self-existent thing would not function at all: “Something with a self nature doesn't do anything!” There would be no point in trying to change ourselves or anything else if things had a fixed essence and thus were not empty.