



Name: _____

Date: _____

Grade: _____

MEDITATIONS ON EMPTINESS

ANSWER KEY FOR CLASS THREE

1. How does the commentator on the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Gyaltsab Je, answer the question of how beings who are like an illusion can still take rebirth?

He says it's a silly question: the person after rebirth is just as much an illusion as he was before he died, and asking the question is like asking why a stick that a magician has made appear as a horse can't be made to appear as a cow.

2. Explain why good and bad deeds are like an illusion, and yet still function perfectly well.

They work just as well as we thought they did before we found out they were illusory. They are like an illusion because the person doing them, the deed itself, and the object of the deed, all exist only in our projections. They function perfectly well though to produce the bodies of a Buddha.

3. What does Master Shantideva say about whether or not he is refuting the existence of things as they are known to us by our senses?

He says he is *not* refuting the existence of "things that are seen, heard, and known." But he does say that believing that these things have some kind of true, independent existence is the cause of our suffering.

4. What is the cause of the mental afflictions arising around objects which are, ultimately, illusory?

Master Shantideva says it just the habit of seeing things the wrong way, and the weakness of our wisdom: "Because the creator's habitual arising of mental afflictions towards objects of knowledge have not been eradicated, when he sees her the habit of thinking about the emptiness of things is weak."

5. How do we overcome our habit of seeing things as if they existed self-existently, and then what next step do we need to take to reach the "middle way."

We overcome our tendency to see things as if they had some reality from their own side by thinking about their emptiness and saying to ourselves, "Nothing exists." But then Master Shantideva also says that "one later abandons even this idea" and



realizes that things do exist, but not as they seem.

6. Is it true that a person can remove their mental afflictions, and thereby reach nirvana, solely through a good understanding of the four truths of a realized being?

Although it is true that a good understanding of these aspects can temporarily stop the manifest appearance of the mental afflictions, one cannot remove their potential from the mind permanently (and therefore attain nirvana) without seeing emptiness directly.

7. Name the two forms in which a person can possess a mental affliction.

They can be manifest, or else they can exist as a potential, waiting to happen.

8. Relate the six-step process described by Lord Maitreya which links the failure to perceive emptiness to the suffering we must go through.

- a) **One possesses the mental potential for the two forms of grasping to self-existence, from one's former life.**
- b) **These ripen and cause you to have the two kinds of grasping to selfexistence.**
- c) **These cause you to focus on nice things and ugly things as if they existed from their own side.**
- d) **This causes ignorant liking and ignorant disliking to start.**
- e) **These cause you to do bad deeds and collect karma.**
- f) **Karma forces you to wander around in the circle of suffering.**

9. Why does Master Shantideva say that “there is no possible refutation when it comes to emptiness”?

He is pointing out that the burden of proof falls on those who wish to contend that there is something that *does* have self-existence. There is nothing that has self-existence, so there is no possible refutation of the fact that things have no intrinsic, inherent existence.

10. How does Master Shantideva answer the concern that meditating upon emptiness might feel a little scary?

He points out that the tendency to see things as self-existent is the cause of all the suffering in the world, and so if we are going to be frightened, we should be frightened at it. The wisdom which realizes emptiness, on the other hand, is the cause of ending all the pain in the world, and thus all the fear in the world—and so we *must* meditate upon it.