



Name: _____

Date: _____

Grade: _____

MEDITATIONS ON EMPTINESS

ANSWER KEY FOR CLASS FIVE

1. What are the “three spheres” of emptiness?

There is 1) the emptiness of the subject, of “me” or of the “person”; 2) the emptiness of objects, of “mine” or of “phenomena”; and 3) the emptiness of the relationships between things or processes (like, for example, causality itself).

2. Name and define the two forms of the tendency to grasp things as existing in truth.

a) The "learned" form of the tendency to grasp things as existing in truth; a tendency to believe that things have their own nature which depends primarily upon the mind being affected by specific philosophical beliefs.

b) The "innate" form of the tendency to believe that things have their own nature which has existed in our minds for beginningless time, and which is possessed by all normal living beings, both those whose minds have been or have not been affected by specific philosophical beliefs.

3. Name three wrong ideas that we might have about ourselves that are classified as "learned" tendencies to see things as truly existing.

a) The tendency to see the person and his parts as being like a master and his servants; this would correspond to the idea of a "soul" or a "me" which is totally distinct from the parts of the person.

b) The tendency to hold that our ultimate reality lies in objectively real, partless atoms; this would correspond to the materialist view of modern science, or explaining the fine points of perception as being chemically based.

c) The tendency to hold that our ultimate reality lies in moments of consciousness which are objectively real and partless; this would correspond to our sense of a self beyond our parts.

4. What does Master Shantideva say is one of the implications of realizing that there is no “I” in the way we ordinarily think there is?

He says that if we realize there is no such self we will no longer be afraid.



5. Master Shantideva states says that we are not any single one of our parts, and the Buddhist thinkers on emptiness additionally assert that we are also not the whole of the parts. It's easy to see that we are not any one of our parts, such as an arm or a leg, but why is it the case that we are not the sum of all of our various parts?

In that case, if we took away any one part, we could no longer exist. Just as there cannot be a flock of sheep no member of which is a sheep, so too there cannot be a self which is made up of parts none of which is the self. The total sum of all the parts of a person is not the person until the image of the whole has been imposed upon these parts by the projections forced upon us by our past karma.

6. If the self is not the body, perhaps it is the mind. But the mind seems to be shifting moment to moment, playing different “roles” – one moment a “seer,” the next a “hearer,” then a “thinker.” What does our author say would be the consequence of thinking that what we call the “self” is like an actor that plays one role and then another?

He indicate that such a conceptualization of the self would undercut the contention that the self is somehow unitary, saying that the “so-called ‘oneness’ of that (self which takes on one guise and then another) is really quite extraordinary.”

7. Why can't the consciousness be the independent “self” we think exists?

Consciousness does not exist apart from an object it is conscious of. If the self were the consciousness, it would cease to be every time the consciousness unlinked itself from an object of consciousness and become a different self every time the consciousness were conscious of another object.

8. Why is it impossible for the consciousness to be unchanging?

If the consciousness were unchanging, it would not do anything – including being conscious of something. For every time the consciousness is conscious of something it changes.

9. Why can't the self be the mind of either the past, future, or present?

If the self is the mind of the past or future, it no longer exists. If the self is the mind of the present moment, it no longer exists as soon as the mind of the present moment becomes the mind of the past.

10. What is the example used by Master Shantideva to show that, if we try to find any other real nature of the “me,” we come up with nothing?

When we go through any of the other ways of existing, and also try to look beyond this nominal nature, we come up with simple emptiness, as if we had stripped away



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all the parts of the trunk of a banana tree or the stem of an empty reed.

11. What then is the real nature of the "me"?

It is an image or a concept imposed upon a collection of constantly changing parts.