



Name: _____

Date: _____

Grade: _____

THE YOGA OF WISDOM

ANSWER KEY FOR CLASS ONE

1. What does Arjuna say to Krishna as he begs him for teachings?

He says, “I am afflicted to my core by the flaw of deep depression; my mind is totally confused about what is the right thing to do. I beg you to tell me clearly what is best. I am your student; please teach me. I surrender myself to you.”

2. What are the three possible coherent worldviews for explaining why things happen?

1) Everything is just random or serendipitous; there is no real reason at all why things happen; 2) God is micro-managing every single event in the universe, and therefore we have no free will over or responsibility for our actions; or 3) everything is in the nexus of causality or karma, and therefore we are responsible for everything that happens to us and in absolute control over our future.

3. What are the four laws of karma?

Karma is definite – a good cause will definitely result in a good effect, and vice versa; 2) left untreated, karma grows or increases in potency over time; 3) if you don’t create the karmic cause, there can be no karmic result; and 4) if you do create the karmic cause, the karmic result will follow.

4. The Gita says that one does not achieve perfection through “mere renunciation.” But most, if not all, religious traditions insist that some form of renunciation is the prerequisite for attaining high spiritual goals. What do you think is the difference between “mere renunciation” and the renunciation that actually is required to achieve perfection?

“Mere renunciation” is to give up external things like money, your profession, your relationships, family, etc. Real renunciation is a shift in one’s attitude; it is a state of mind that prioritizes the spiritual over the worldly.



5. Describe why it is impossible to escape karma by just not doing anything.

The Gita points out that it is actually not possible to not do anything. At the very least, the mind is always active, and always will be.

6. The Gita tells us that we should “follow our own nature” and “do our own duty” (and not try to be someone we’re not). This cannot mean that we need not cultivate ourselves and that we should just do whatever we feel like doing. So explain what “following our own nature” and “doing our own duty” really means.

It means facing up to and embracing your present and create the causes in the present for a better future, instead of just wishing that things were different and being unhappy and unsatisfied about how they are.

7. What might Lord Krishna mean when he tells Arjuna, “Your prerogative is over your actions, not over any of the results”?

We have a “prerogative” (*adhikara*, meaning “authority, privilege” and also “propensity, predilection, or predisposition”) regarding our actions in the sense of a responsibility for what happens to us in the present, since it has only come from our own past karma. As spiritual practitioners we need to take responsibility for and ownership of everything that happens to us in the present. We must not, however, make the mistake of thinking that actions in the present have immediate results; we cannot change the present in the present. We have not “prerogative” or control over the *immediate* (and only apparent) results of our actions.

8. Lord Krishna also says we should “not be attached to inaction either.” Discuss two ways one might get attached to inaction.

We might, for example, get discouraged about the suffering in our world and feel that there’s just nothing to do about it. Or we might feel that someone like ourselves could never get enlightened in this lifetime and just quit our spiritual practice.

9. Does equanimity mean just not caring about anything? If not, what does it mean? And what does it mean “to be the same whether you are successful or unsuccessful” in one’s actions?

Equanimity obviously does not mean that we just don’t care about anything or anyone. It means that one treats every being as being equally deserving of one’s compassion and love. To “be the same whether you are successful or unsuccessful” in one’s actions means to not be swayed by the merely apparent short term results of actions (which are not really the results of those actions at all, but are coming from previous causes) and to realize that the karmic results of action take time to ripen.



10. The Gita says that a person “whose sense of self is identified with all beings acts without being stained by action.” Explain, and give the traditional Buddhist method for expanding one’s sense of self and identifying with other beings.

Karma is created and collected (and thus is the cause of our continued suffering in samsara) due to the belief that the subject (the “me”) is fundamentally different from the object (the “you”). Overcoming or transcending the artificial boundary between “self” and “other” is to identify oneself with all others, thereby eliminating in a way the opposition between subject and object, self and other necessary for producing karma. The method for doing this in the Buddhist texts is called “equalizing and exchanging self for others.”

11. What is meant by the phrase “karmic suicide” or “pushing one’s karmic envelop” and how do these phrases relate to the concept of sacrificial action?

“Karmic suicide” refers to the practice of sacrificing one’s own immediate advantage in order to re-invest that karma in order to obtain a greater result in the future. When, for example, we have the karma to obtain something we like, but to enjoy it now would mean that someone else who wanted that item would be deprived of it, we choose not to “push our karmic envelop” but rather “sacrifice” the desirable item (i.e., give to the other) in order to create the karma to have abundance in the future.

12. List several ways we could be engaged in sacrificial action all day long.

Every action could potentially be an opportunity for sacrifice. We could offer our food before we eat it, the beauty of a sunset, the time we spend engaged in virtuous activity, the pleasure we feel when we are with loved ones, etc.