



Name: _____

Date: _____

Grade: _____

THE YOGA OF WISDOM

ANSWER KEY FOR CLASS THREE

1. Arjuna says that it feels like we are sometimes compelled, seemingly against our will, to do things we know are wrong. Discuss which of the ways karma ripens helps us to explain this feeling of compulsion to do negative acts.

According to Je Tsongkapa's *Lam Rim Chenmo*, karma can ripen as 1) the "ripened result," which means the kind of birth you will take in the next life; 2) even if born a human, the karma will cause you to have a similar experience happen to you (e.g., if you kill, you will have a short life), which is called the "corresponding result"; 3) there is an "environmental result" of karma, which determines the kind of place and circumstances you will live in; and 4) you will have a "corresponding habit" or propensity to engage in that kind of action again. It is the fourth one that explains why we are seemingly forced to do negative actions – we are habituated from past negative action to repeat it.

2. Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that desire and anger are "the real enemy." According to other texts, what is the root of both of these? Quote the relevant verse from the *Yoga Sutra*.

The source of both ignorant liking and ignorant disliking is ignorance itself, *avidya* in Sanskrit. The *Yoga Sutra* 2.3-4 enumerates five root mental afflictions – ignorance, selfness, ignorant liking, ignorant disliking, and grasping – and then says "Ignorance is the field for the ones that come after it.

3. Explain the "chain of pain" that cause us to repeatedly experience suffering in our lives. Where is the "weak link" in this chain?

We are born with ignorance. This ignorance forces us to see things the wrong way, as if they had self-existence. Because we see things wrong, we react to them with ignorant liking and disliking (*raga* and *dvesha*) and then grasp to these things as if they had inherent likeability or dislikeability. Finally, we commit acts of body, speech, or mind in relation to these objects which plants new karmic seeds that reinvigorate the whole cycle. The "weak link" in the cycle is where we see things wrong. We can overcome the inborn ignorance by truly understanding that things have no self-existence – that they are all coming from



me and not at me – and thereby no longer react to them with ignorant liking and disliking.

4. In verse 3.38, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that wisdom is “covered” by our mental afflictions just as “fire is concealed by smoke, a mirror by dirt, and an embryo by the amnion.” Discuss what this might mean in terms of the two types of “Buddha nature” and the difference between “natural nirvana” and nirvana which results from the permanent cessations of all mental afflictions.

“Buddha nature” is divided into “innate” and “developable,” the former referring to the emptiness of our nature which makes it possible for us to be a Buddha someday, while the latter is the realization of that potential due to our practice. Similarly, “natural nirvana” is just another term for the emptiness which is a part of every existing object. It is not actually nirvana, since it is not the permanent end of one's mental afflictions due to perceiving emptiness directly. Krishna's reference to a sort of innate wisdom which is just “covered by” our mental afflictions must refer to the emptiness of our true nature which is then “obscured” by ignorance and mental afflictions which are “adventitious” and not part of our true nature. But wisdom must also, of course, be developed and cultivated through study, contemplation, and meditation.

5. In the Gita we read that desire is “insatiable as fire.” Quote the verse from the famous text by Je Tsongkhapa, *The Source of All My Good*, on why this is so.

**Bless me to perceive
All that's wrong
With the seemingly good things
Of this life.
I can never get enough of them.
They cannot be trusted.
They are the door
To every pain I have.
Grant me then
To strive instead
For the happiness of freedom.**

6. The Gita says that there is something “superior to the intellect” when it comes to understanding ultimate reality. What is it? And what, in general, are the three ways one can have a “valid perception” or *pramana*?

The “direct” perception of ultimate reality is superior to any intellectual understanding of it in that only it can result in the cessations and realizations that make it inevitable that the person who has had this



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experience will definitely reach the permanent end of suffering in a finite period of time. The three forms of perception are 1) *pratyaksha* or direct perception, 2) *anumana* or inferential reasoning, and 3) *agama* or “authority” (meaning primarily the authority of scripture or of the guru’s word).

7. What is “deceptive” about the “deceptive appearance of duality?”

The deceptiveness of the appearance of duality is not that things are really somehow all the same or that the subject and the object are one. It is the fact that things appear to have self-existence. The appearance of objects and the subject mind that perceives them as if they had some kind of true or real existence apart from the mind that projects them is what is “deceptive” about duality.

8. In the Gita, as in the *Heart Sutra*, we read that it is possible to overcome old age and death. Explain why this is so.

The physical body itself, and the processes of change it undergoes, does not have any self existence. The perception of having a gross physical body that gets old and dies is a projection forced upon us by negative karma (especially the karma of harming others). If we cleaned up the karma that forces us to see ourselves getting older and eventually dying, we would not experience the result of that karma.

9. The Gita claims that there is an “arrogance and pride that comes from wealth.” Is there something inherently problematic about wealth, and if not, where does the arrogance and pride often associated with wealth come from?

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with having material possessions and money. What is problematic is not understanding the real causes of such wealth – which are generosity towards others and not stealing – which leads an ignorant person to believe that it is somehow “natural” or “God-given” that they should have wealth while others do not. This, of course, leads to the arrogance and pride the text is associating with wealth.

10. We read in the Bhagavad Gita that instead of just following our own inclinations we should be guided by the authority of scripture. In Buddhism, scripture consists of the supposed unerring word of the Buddha. According to the texts of Buddhist logic, what evidence do we have that the Buddha is, in fact, “unerring”?

Of all the people we have ever met or heard of, it is only Lord Buddha who has described our daily suffering perfectly, in a way we can confirm ourselves. This by itself allows us to believe that he is very possibly unerring, which cannot be said of those who do not describe our suffering in this way.