



The Devil Debates an Angel

Course Eight
*If Einstein's Wrong,
Problems Disappear*

Name _____

Date _____

Place _____

Homework Master, Class One: A Flat Earth and An Irritating Person (Verses 113-119)

1) Please check the appropriate box below to indicate *whether or not the object mentioned even exists*.

(1) The Earth ☒ Yes ☐ No

(2) An Earth which is a flat disk, as described by early Buddhist
and Western cultures ☐ Yes ☒ No

(3) A round Earth which is the fixed center of the universe, as
Aristotle described ☐ Yes ☒ No

(4) An Earth which rotates around a fixed Sun, as
Galileo described ☐ Yes ☒ No

(5) An Earth which rotates around the Sun in a universe full
of fixed stars, as Newton described ☐ Yes ☒ No

(6) An Earth which rotates around the Sun, both in constant
motion away from an original explosion point,
in a universe whose shape is twisted by the presence
of the stars, which are also moving—as described
by Hubble and Einstein ☐ Yes ☒ No

(7) An Earth and Sun and stars whose velocity and position
are altered by the act of observation,

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as Heisenberg described ☐ Yes ☒ No

(8) An Earth and Sun and stars whose every observable quality, and very existence, is flowing from seeds created by how the observer has treated others in the past—as described by Je Tsongkapa ☒ Yes ☐ No

2) Briefly describe each of the kinds of “space” listed below, and state how it compares to the idea of emptiness.

(1) An expansive, open, and peaceful feeling during meditation:

[In Buddhist philosophy, when a meditation is described as being “like space,” this *does not* refer to a peaceful, expansive feeling that we experience during the meditation. In general, such a feeling can be helpful in calming the mind to prepare it for a meditation with more meaningful content—content which can free us from the cycle of pain; but by itself simply thinking expansive thoughts cannot help us in a lasting way, and that kind of peace will come and go.]

(2) Space as outer space, where the stars and planets hang suspended:

[The blackness of outer space, and space in the sense of sky, are actually simply visual, colored objects that to our eyes lay between objects such as airplanes or stars. As such, they are positive objects—*presences* of something—and are not ultimately useful in our journey to escape pain.]

(3) The space in which a cup of coffee sits:

[Here we are talking about “real” space, which in Buddhism is defined as the simple absence of material objects which allows these objects a place in which to “sit.” Even when a coffee cup sits in such a space, the space itself remains there, open and not pushing the cup out of

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that area. Thus this space is said to be unchanging. In being thus, and in being the simple absence of something, space in this sense is a good metaphor for emptiness.]

(4) Space as the object of the direct perception of emptiness:

[This shares two qualities of the space in which a coffee cup sits. First of all, it is a simple absence: not of physical matter, but rather of any object which did *not* come from our own karmic seeds. Secondly, it is unchanging: like the space which remains the same whether you put a coffee cup into it or slide the coffee cup out of it, the fact that a thing is never *not* coming from our own karmic seeds remains forever 100% the same with every object, until such time as that object itself is destroyed. And so here “space” is simply a metaphor for emptiness itself; whereas if we perceive what space is we simply understand our world better, our life becomes perfect happiness if we understand space in the sense of emptiness.]

3) How does the image of a fountain relate to the thoughts which pass through our mind, and emptiness itself? In your answer, refer also to the Diamond Cutter Sutra.

[When we watch a the rising jet of water coming out of a fountain, we see a certain outline of the jet—but at the same time we realize this is not a static object, but rather composed of ever-changing streams of water, as the fountain pipes below shoot up new water moment to moment.

The mind is the same: We think of ourselves as possessing a static brain or mind, but in fact our mind is like the water jet, composed of fleeting, ever-changing thoughts. These thoughts are “pushed up” into our consciousness the way that the water is spurted up by the water pipes. The pipes represent the karmic seeds in our mind which split open moment to moment and shoot up thoughts into our conscious mind.

And so there is no static or solid mind: rather, it is simply a stream of instantaneous impressions breaking out of seeds, and each of these seeds was planted by how we have behaved towards other people.

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Becoming aware of the moment-by-moment impermanence of our mind itself is not to become aware of emptiness, but we can see how thinking carefully about where this impermanence is coming from (the karmic seeds) can lead us to the realization of emptiness: the understanding that there is nothing about our outer world or inner thoughts which is *not* coming from how I have treated others in the past.

The idea that considering subtle impermanence carefully can lead us to a realization of emptiness is reflected in the final lines of the Diamond Cutter Sutra, where Lord Buddha gives 9 different metaphors. Six of these relate directly to impermanence, and three to emptiness, or the idea of an illusion (things seem to be coming from their own side, but in truth are coming from us). Here are the nine:

Metaphors for impermanence from the final lines of The Diamond Cutter:

- (1) A star (which fades as daylight approaches)
- (2) A butter lamp, or candle
- (3) The morning dew (which disappears as the sun rises)
- (4) A bubble
- (5) A stroke of lightning
- (6) Clouds (which form and dissolve in the sky)

Metaphors for illusion, or emptiness, from The Diamond Cutter:

- (1) A cataract on the eyes
- (2) A mirage on the road
- (3) A dream]

4) How does emptiness, in the sense of an absence of something, help us make our relationships with friends and partners perfect?

[Remember that emptiness refers to the absence of a thing or person which is *not* coming from karmic seeds planted in our mind when we were good or bad to other people. In general, when we are in a highly emotional situation with another person, we tend to feel strongly that they are coming from

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themselves: we blame them, we feel that if they wanted they could be nicer to us.

If we calm down a bit we can recall that in actuality they are coming from us, from how we have treated other people in the past. When we do remember this fact, then the image we have of this other person as coming from themselves suddenly disappears: it goes “poof”!

When these things that were never there go “poof,” we have arrived at an understanding of emptiness! Now there is no longer anyone in front of us to be upset at: there is only ourselves, and we can take charge and stop planting the bad seeds that created this problem person. This is how emptiness helps us make our friends and partners perfect.]

Coffee shop assignment: Please meet with at least one other person—or better, a group of people—whom you didn’t know well before this teaching; do your homework together and discuss together any questions you have. Please write here where, when, and with whom you did your homework:

Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, bring to mind a person whom you find challenging. Consider which version of them doesn’t exist at all—like an Earth which is shaped like a flat disk—and which version of them does very much exist. Then consider which of these two can make you upset.

Please write here the two times that you started these meditations (homeworks without these times will not be accepted):