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This has been an amazing class. There was so much information that is not normally available in the texts that I normally read. Dr. Lancaster's eight lectures were extremely interesting to me. As a whole, I thoroughly enjoyed the class.

Dr. Lancaster's lecture regarding perception was an eye-opener to say the least. I never really gave the senses much thought. We are told, from the texts, to see things as they really are. Yet, I never really paid much attention. I always took it for granted that what I see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think are the real tangible objects. When Dr. Lancaster pointed out, very clearly I might add, that all of the senses are either chemical and/or electrical impulses, it was like a light bulb going off in my head. I began to understand that the mind recreates the world we perceive, and that it is through that recreation that differences in each person's perception comes to the forefront. We attach our likes and dislikes to this recreation. Thus, I perceive things differently from the next person.

This was reinforced by the opening story in Damien Keown's *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. As each blind person felt a different part of the elephant, each person formed their own perception of what an elephant is like. Because they all felt only a part, they were not really seeing the elephant for what it really is. These perceptions carry over into our belief system as to the different schools of Buddhism to which we adhere. Rather than focus on what is important, that of attaining Enlightenment, we become attached to the dogma.

I didn't know just how important the art and relics were to Buddhism. The fact that people built stupas to house the relics of Buddha as well as those of arhats, and venerated them as holy icons.

One of the things that really surprised me was the fact that at one time, it was believed that there were some people in the world that could not, under any circumstances, attain Enlightenment. These people were referred to as "A-goetra". It made me wonder if people could have amassed so much negative karma that they were forever relegated to the never-ending cycle of samsara. I pondered that for quite a while. For those that were deemed thus, it seemed to me that they would stop any practice they may have been doing, and lived for the day...carpe diem. It was this precise outlook that helped to reinforce my practice. I began to practice with renewed vigor.

I really enjoyed the discussion and readings on Buddhist art. I was totally unaware that the cave art in China existed. There are a few things that stand out in my mind with regard to Buddhist art. The first was the destruction of the Great Buddha of Bāmiān in Afghanistan. It is amazing to me that it was destroyed for no other reason than ignorance. The Taliban decided it was idolatrous and had it destroyed. The second thing that stands out is, before I was arrested, I had the great fortune to see four monks creating a sand mandala in a shopping mall. I stood transfixed for hours as they lovingly applied the sand. I returned a few days later to take pictures of it. I was dismayed to find that the mandala had been swept up and discarded. I now understand that it was to stress impermanence.

The fact that Buddhas appear in the world when the Dharma is lost made sense to me. However, in this day and age, when the entire Canon is stored either electronically or in volumes, makes me believe it will be quite some time before Maitreya arrives. In order for him

to appear, does it mean that the Dharma is totally lost? Was it the same for the present Buddha? I believe that it does because the present Buddha set the Wheel of Law turning when he gave his first sermon to the Five Ascetics.

There was nothing in the course that I did not like. I found all of the topics in the Reader and the lectures by Dr. Lancaster fascinating. I would like to be able to see some of the Buddhist art in color photographs. Additionally, I would like, at sometime in the future, to be able to study Pali or Sanskrit so that I may read the original texts.

Thank you for the opportunity to take this course. It was very insightful, well put together, and the lectures by Dr. Lancaster as well as the discussions with Venerable De Hong, John Freese were well thought out. I look forward to taking more courses in the near future.