

December 8th, 2020

On the 1st of December, 2020, I visited a class taught by Gregory Seferian, Comparative Literature 210, section 3, on Literature and Psychology. The class began at 11:40 and went on for an hour and a half.

It was a most rewarding experience. The focus was on two sections of the Buddhist classic The Dhammapada, titled "Elephant" and "Craving." Twice the class went into "breakout rooms," and both times I was included in one of these, with about four students participating while doing their best in acquiring an understanding of the texts. In the opinion of many, including me, Buddhism is most psychologically oriented of world religions, and the insights that these chapters offer the reader to acquire, penetrate, and examine are of immense value. At the same time, a Western reader, who typically values action and solution of problems more than contemplation, at first usually finds it difficult, indeed challenging, to come to terms with the complexity and profundity of works such as The Dhammapada. Prominent in class discussion on this occasion were matters such as the distinction between the self and the workings of the mind; possible definitions of the self; the nature of intelligence, with a consideration of the role of education in forming and assisting our intelligence; the issue of "letting go"; the nature of attachment, craving, and wanting. Mr Seferian ably led the students in dealing with the these psychological but also profoundly philosophic matters. He showed himself to be approachable yet authoritative as well, and remarkably capable of guiding relatively uninformed students toward opening up and broadening their intellectual horizons.

During this class I often felt an urge to participate but that would have been inappropriate for an observer, so I remained silent. It is regrettable that I had no opportunity to attend such a course in my own student days, but even so I was inspired to re-read The Dhammapada and think about its teachings again, to the best of my ability. I should certainly be willing to write a very good recommendation for Mr Seferian once he begins to apply for academic positions.

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