

Anarchist-Buddhist Praxis

A short essay for a hopeful future

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Anarchism, an ideology which asserts autonomy for all people with common facets of free association (federation as a process of forming egalitarian associations without coercion of government), mutual aid, and direct action meshes itself well with common ideas present in Buddhism. Buddhism asserts within the suttas (scriptural accounts of the Buddha's teachings) that in order to practice the Dhamma (the teachings) we must have the four requisites for practice: food, shelter, medicine and clothing. If someone lacks one or more of these requisites they will struggle to implement the Dhamma and engage with the Sangha (community of Buddhists). In the Vinaya (rules for monastics) there is a lack of strong hierarchy, individual monastics are not granted more institutional power than other monastics. Individual responsibilities are doled out (such as someone who accounts for food storage) and are both elected by and immediately re-callable by the Sangha. There is acknowledged social expectations that more experienced monastics ought to be respected (we respect the shoe-maker in shoe making and the monastic in the Dhamma) yet those experienced monastics do not (or rather, did not originally) have coercive power to compel other monastics into service or specific action: if one monastic feels that to do something is to break with the Dhamma, they should not do it even if a senior monastic asks it.

Synthesizing Buddhism with Anarchism we produce an Anarchist Buddhism, which pays special attention to ensuring the four requisites for all via Sangha (an emphasis on communalism) and in doing so empower a higher and more desirable form of autonomy (the autonomy to practice the Dhamma and or live freely, not the autonomy to struggle and survive in isolation). An Anarcho-Buddhist praxis seeks to provide the four requisites to all people in the knowledge that without those requisites they cannot seriously approach or practice with the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. While providing those requisites it is understood that coercion (force) cannot compel someone to Dhamma, that no one else can do the practice for you (you must be at the forefront of your own liberation) and you must be empowered with autonomy in order to the practice Dhamma genuinely. As Anarcho-Buddhists we assert the most effective, compassionate and virtuous way to lead people to the triple gem of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha is to provide the material requisites without coercion or hierarchy, to allow people to exist with a high degree of autonomy that they might realize the Dukkha (suffering, stress, unsatisfactoriness) of the world and seek an end to it through the practice of Sila, Samadhi and Paññā (virtue, concentration, wisdom).

What does this look like, practically? How do we practice Anarchist Buddhism today? In this we can split actions into two major types:

1. Immediate provision of the four requisites to all people without requirement or coercion
2. The building of the Sangha in such a way as to ensure requisites and autonomy now and tomorrow

The first point of immediate provision is experienced when we give a hungry person food, provide medical care, hand out jackets for the cold and give houses to those without. It is a present albeit temporary fix to a long standing issue, a sandwich lasts only until it is eaten. This kind of praxis is immediately beneficial, it is a crucial practice of Sila, to provide for others the opportunity to see the Dhamma. Yet this giving alone is not enough to ensure a long term and consistent access to the requisites, it is a temporary stop-gap under an imperialist capitalist system that demands some go without food so that others may eaten from golden tables heaped with caviar. In order to eliminate those who live without the requisites for practice, we must revolutionize society to provide food, medicine, shelter and clothing for all people regardless of who they are, what they have done, will do or are doing.

We can begin to create the kind of Sangha that provides for all by creating communities which are horizontal (non-hierarchical), independent, self-sustaining and have a culture of material mutual aid. We can cultivate the basic well-being needed to see the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. By creating communities independent of the state and capitalism, we empower ourselves to effectively provide for ourselves and those around us. Practically this involves land acquisition, self-sustaining material good creation (i.e recycling, sustainable farming and manufacturing) and a cultural attitude of compassionate giving to all who are without. By creating communal structures outside the arm of the state we can create the shell of the new world within the old. Resisting hyper-individualist, consumerist and hierarchical cultural and state institutions by willfully living with autonomy and compassion.

What does this look like in reality? Material steps involve first gathering a community of people with similar values and beliefs. Such as through networking in existing Anarchist and Buddhist spaces. Then to find a location for the commune and acquire it. The community can then begin to build up structures for shelter, religious practice, pleasure, food and so on. In the long term the community can begin practices of mutual aid and direct action in the surrounding area, yet even by existence as a free people alone do we demonstrate the possible joy and peace of living beyond the state. The actual realistic implementation of this runs along two spectrums:

1. Illegalist vs. Within the system
2. Self-sustaining vs. Existing system integration

For the first, it is a question by which rules a community will or won't play by. Land is considered private property and within the purview of the state demands titles and money for its use, a given community may squat or otherwise seize such land for their own use (being illegalist) or seek to pool resources and legally acquire such land (within the system). This is not a binary, a community may seek to legally acquire land only to covertly construct buildings outside of existing building codes and under cover so as to avoid taxation, a community may skirt the law by making multiple technically mobile trailers not considered under building codes. Taking patented plants owned by corporations and using their engineered genetics to covertly grow food without paying to the corporations. Dumpster diving for resources or repossession of goods from Walmart, there's a broad spectrum between bowing to the state when it's most effective and disobeying it's dictates when it suites the particular community.

For the second, it can often be a question of the circumstances of the community. Is there arable land where the community is? Are there enough able bodied lay people to till the soil? Can a well be drilled and textiles grown? These circumstances are both highly specific and subject to change. A given community may start by carrying in water from an outside source only to setup a well within a few years, likewise with food, textiles and electricity. Thankfully there is an ever growing resource of accessible information about sustainable agriculture, off-grid electrical systems, and independent ways of creating all we need from sex toys and instruments to farming equipment and medicine. In an ideal situation a given community can start or become totally independent of the existing system, which is to say become independent of capitalism and the state. While this is often inaccessible at the start or not possible without much broader inter-community support, it ought to be a sought after goal.

So what if we do it? What happens if we disregard the claims of the state to every tree and every tract of land, every naturally growing food and every human body, to assert that all beings have a right to autonomy and that through enshrining autonomy and providing for the body we empower all beings to reach towards Nibbana (enlightenment, the end of Dukkha). The state, eventually seeing a threat to its power will attempt to police or outright destroy such challenges. Through taxation of the Sangha to support its imperial military and police efforts, through demanding that any community follow the dictates of the state (law) independent of what the Dhamma says as in compulsive military service, immoral laws, private property, deprivation of material needs from the poor and the demand that any land used by the community be acquired through state regulated private property regardless of whether it's being used as a financial holding or third home of the rich. There are many tactics we might employ to avoid or subvert the ire of the state, obfuscating building projects, refusing its dictates and even defending our communities with force when the state seeks to eradicate us. We can look to practices of squatting (occupying unused buildings and land without state permission), non-violent resistance, armed self-defense, sustainable manufacturing and agricultural practices, egalitarian decision making and free association to create a Sangha and ultimately world free of coercion and material deprivation. We can create a world with genuine freedom and autonomy, a world where no one goes hungry, cold, or without care. We can create the kind of Pure Land that conduces directly to awakening, if we work together with intention and will.

The path to a beautiful world and thriving Sangha is not without hardship. The practice is at times difficult and asks much of us. We are asked to change how we think and what we have been conditioned to do and believe. Yet, if we follow the Dhamma and see others as they truly are then tomorrow can be better, if we work together.

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