Nico Armin
Buddhism and Anarchism
Exploring the Unlikely Compatibility of Two Distinct Traditions
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would then live on to be one of the single-most convicting critiques of the caste system. The Buddha himself declared all people are created equal. And later Mahatma Gandhi, Indian independence activists, and anarchist theorists would look to Buddhism for answers regarding how to undo the caste's hierarchy. Suttas like the *Kesamutti Sutta* warned specifically against gullibility and acceptance of authority *prima facie*, which departs from all other belief systems deemed religious in some way and is in accordance with anarchist principles.

What's more, the Buddha's Sangha was a refuge from political life for all people, from Kshatriya kings to Brahmins, to Dalit untouchables. the Sangha is an equal-opportunity commune that subsists without the use of money or assets. This was a direct affront to the market system of the time, and even drew the ire of nearby merchants. And the entire basis for hierarchy in ancient Indian society was challenged by the Buddhist dhamma. Their creator gods were subjugated, allegorically dismissed, and so the concept of divine right of rule in the Indian rendition was challenged by the dhamma. I will be first to admit that Buddhism and anarchism part ways at a few very important junctures, but they remain compatible if we remain nondogmatic about either tradition. Both worldviews have indeed come to be synthesized in my own mind in the same way this essay was written, as I have taken the precept of avihiṃsā nonviolence.

In the summer of 2018 I was at a movie night event with newly acquainted classmates from grad school. We were all still getting to know each other and one of them asked me something about my personal beliefs. I don't remember the details but I remember admitting I was a Buddhist anarchist. I think the reason I put it in those terms had to do with the context of our discussion. Mind you, he is a Japanese classmate whom is fluent in English. But his response was something to the effect of, "How does that even make sense?" And his response filled me with the urge to lecture to him then and there about how Buddhism and anarchism are actually compatible if you really think about it. I was tempted to mention the Japanese Buddhist anarchist monk, Uchiyama Gudō (May 17, 1874 – January 24, 1911), and Emma Goldman's personal friend from India, Har Dayal (14 October 1884 – 4 March 1939), but I resisted the urge. Instead I promised myself that I would write an essay expounding on this compatibility. So this essay is the result of that urge.

To be sure, I'm not saying Buddhism is to be conflated with anarchism *prima facie*. Many so-called Buddhist traditions did indeed serve as legitimators of tyrannical rulers and often fomented violent conflicts (e.g. the Genpei war, the Nanboku-chou conflicts, Ikko Ikki rebellions, and so on). And to explain what I mean by Anarchism, let me just first explain the source of my own anarchist convictions. Pyotr Kropotkin is possibly the most influential as he argued for peace and prosperity among humans in his *Mutual Aid*. The next proponent I draw from is Rudolf Rocker and his outline of Anarcho-Syndicalism as a communal answer to many of the problems that come with an imperfect world driven to subsistence should we fail to cultivate favorable conditions, agriculturally and infrastructurally. And third in my list of influencers would be Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, as he was instrumental in outlining the tyranny of property. And I personally define anarchism in the way atheists define atheism. Just as the prefix 'a' means "not" and 'theist' means "believer in god"- I am stating the prefix 'an' also means

"not" and 'archist' is a catch-all for all things ending in "archy": hierarchy, monarchy, oligarchy, patriarchy, etc. The objective of anarchism is to instill a sense of dignity in all people and to charge all with the agency to realize and defend their human rights.

I believe Buddhism and anarchism overlap from the start because both traditions aim to critique the status quo. Additionally, there are several key factors about the Buddhist dhamma and its relationship to political convention that I think makes it more compatible with anarchism than any other political ideology. These factors are expressed in five major juxtapositions: 1. Prince Siddhartha's defiance against his father, Oligarch Śuddhodana; 2. The dhamma's dissolution of the Hindu caste system in Northern India; 3. Specific texts accredited to the Buddha that speak against dogmatism; 4. The Sangha's function as a commune living beyond the limits of monarchies and oligarchies (and often functioning as sanctuaries beyond political realms); 5. Tales of the Buddha and his discourses with the Hindu gods. There is a lot to explore here, so let's get right into it.

1. Prince Siddhartha Defied His Father, Oligarch Śuddhodana

The Buddha's life story is very essential to the Buddhist tradition because many of its main concepts are delivered in a parable fashion. As the story goes, the Buddha was born as Siddhartha Gautama, the prince of a regent Kshatriya family. The caste system was ubiquitous in the Buddha's life. So his father, the Oligarch Śuddhodana, had absolute power over his subjects as an oligarch of the Shakya tribe's Mahājanapada (oligarchic republic) before it was subjugated into the greater Kosala realm. And people below Śuddhodana were given various tasks suited to their caste. But from one perspective, no person's life was more under the thumb of Śuddhodana than Siddhartha himself.

found in Vedic texts and the Mahabharata, the role of the deva god is always subjugated below the man, the Buddha. At some point Indra as Sakka was declared by Buddhagosa to have transcended into becoming the Bodhisattva, Vajrapāṇi. This ascension within Buddhist thought is actually a means of dissolving hierarchy, as any person can achieve Buddhahood. What's more a Buddha is considered further on the path to enlightenment than a Bodhisattva.

Conclusion

In this essay, we first discussed Prince Siddhartha's defiance against his father, Oligarch Śuddhodana and how this defiance broke from hierarchical concepts such as patriarchy and filial piety; secondly we explored the *dhamma*'s stance on the Hindu caste system in Northern India, in the Buddha's time and in the 20th century; thirdly we examined specific texts and concepts accredited to the Buddha that oppose dogmatism; fourthly, we saw that the Sangha has functioned as a commune existing beyond the limits of monarchies and oligarchies, and how they often function as sanctuaries beyond political realms; finally we examined abridged tales of the Buddha and his discourses with the Hindu gods where the justifications for oppression, oligarchy, hierarch, patriarchy, and monarchy were deconstructed within the suttas. And the above is just a fraction of the literature available regarding the Buddha's dhamma.

Siddhatha Gautama, the Buddha of the Shakya tribe, Shakyamuni, was declared by the hermit yogi Asita that he would either be a conqueror or a sage. And despite oligarch Śuddhodana's wishes, Shakyamuni Buddha determined to become a sage. From the very beginning he rejected the premise of political life in Mahājanapada period India. His early life story warns against information being concealed in order to manipulate others. The Buddha's dhamma

whether one makes an effort or does not. Knowing the emotion of joy without making an effort is but a way to feel suffering. The pursuit of joy through effort will decrease suffering and lead to true joy. Similarly, grief without effort will linger and compound suffering, but grief with the effort promoted by the dhamma brings peace. The pursuit of equanimity without skillful effort will lead to suffering. But seeking equanimity with effort by way of the dhamma leads to equanimity indeed."

The Buddha instructed Indra further about how the senses deceive us into unskillful mental states. Indra humbly thanked Shakyamuni Buddha and admitted, "*Taṇhā* is a disease and a yearning arrow! It seduces even devas like me. Surely, we devas were brought to war with the asuras, and when we won I though all the spoils of both realms would fall to the devas. But upon hearing the dhamma and the teachings of *avihiṃsā* (nonviolence) I became disillusioned with our kamma. And when I questioned the Brahmins for council, they could never answer my burning questions regarding these unskillful states. Yet you have! The Brahmins could only return my question with further questions. They doubted my identity, but when I admitted I am Indra, the deva king come as Sakka, and spoke to them of your dhamma as much as I knew, they delighted in me and praised me as their patron. But lord, Buddha, *you* are *my* Tathagata: the keeper of the true and whole dhamma." Indra was satisfied with the Buddha's teachings and praised him three times declaring him the worthy, the blessed, and the self-awakened one (the meaning of the word 'Buddha').

This parable of Indra's visit to the Buddha highlights again the subjugation of Hindu gods. Indra states above that the Brahmins praised him for only imparting a fragment of the Buddha's dhamma. This sutta fully illustrates the deconstruction of the Hindu pantheon, caste and subsequent political structures. The parables within the dhammas also serve the function of teaching the dhamma by way of dialogue. This rhetorical device, though

Before he was born, the Buddha's coming is said to have been foretold by a yogi named Asita. He told Śuddhodana that his precious son will either become a warrior king, conquering all rival territories by conquest, or a sagely spiritual leader who will influence the world with his wisdom. Being the patriarch that he was, Śuddhodana wished for his son to become a warlord. He cringed at the notion of his son becoming a religious sage. So he did everything in his power to make sure Siddhartha would become a king by conquest. Śuddhodana ordered all of his subjects to create an alternate reality for Siddhartha within the palace so that he would be unwise to the experiences of the outside world and thus unable to become a sage.

This parable is so valuable because we can clearly see a crucial trait of authoritarianism laid bare: the need to control and distort knowledge from others. If you find yourself among people who attempt to hide knowledge from you, and whom prevent you from learning, they are either acting out of self-interest, or almost certainly trying to subjugate and oppress you.

Śuddhodana forbade Siddhartha from leaving the palace and made it so that his subjects would only teach him things that lead to his success as a conquering king. But eventually Siddhartha disobeyed his father's commands and left the palace to experience the Four Sights: first, an old man; second, a sick man; third, a corpse; and fourth, an ascetic hermit (yogi). There is an extensive narrative regarding these four sights that I recommend you read, but in summary they symbolize Siddharta's insights into certain truths: aging is inescapable, we will all succumb to illness, we all die, and these realizations have led many people to seek transcendence from these unfortunate truths. But the main moral of the Four Sights is that we cannot delude ourselves they are not our shared reality no matter how hard we try. This is called impermanence or *anicca* in Pali.

The Four Sights troubled Siddhartha so much that he could not find peace living a life of luxury in the palace, doing as his father

commanded. It is said he felt a personal conviction and call to action that he needed to do something to help people as well as himself. Meanwhile, his father heard of his desertion and resolved even more to ensure Siddhartha remains in the palace. In the end, the Buddha would not be kept from deserting the palace for good. When he reached the outskirts of town, Siddhartha cut his hair and shed his regal garments and jewels and gave them to his charioteer, Channa. In this tale, we can see a clear rejection of several hierarchical and political preconceptions. Despite being the son of the oligarch Śuddhodana, Siddhartha disobeyed his commands. Despite being the autocrat of the Shakya tribe's domain, regent in Kapilavastu, his decree was not obeyed with unquestioning loyalty. And the fact this story was carried down through oral tradition in the region for hundreds of years before it was written into the Pali canon is indicative of an anti-establishment narrative.

The Buddha's defiance against his oligarch father, Śuddhodana, is in direct contrast with the patriarchal values of hierarchical societies so ubiquitous in the ancient Shakya and Kosala realms of India. Not only was his refusal to obey his father's commands an affront to oligarchic rule, but it was also a rejection of its governing principles. This included the Vedic concept of caste, which Shakyamuni Buddha and his Sangha would go on later to deconstruct through various suttas. The Buddhist movement would dissolve the hierarchical caste system wherever it went, for the majority of its spread throughout Asia.

2. The Dhamma vs. Caste

The caste system during the Vedic period leading up to the time of the Buddha's life, the Mahājanapada period (600–345 BCE), decreed that people ought to live their lives serving the function of their status. This meant that everyone was born into their status and were not permitted to engage in any activity of the upper or

a narrative conduit through which the dhamma was transmitted. In Thanisarro Bikkhu's translation of the *Sakka-pañha Sutta* the Buddha delivers an entire sutta to Indra (called Sakka in the Pali) as council on the problem of evil: that is, despite the dhamma's teaching that everyone should abstain from doing evil (including hypothetical beings existing elsewhere), wrongdoing is a common occurrence (the hypothetical beings are said to do immoral things in scriptures as well). Below is my abridged version:

Shakyamuni Buddha answered Indra, "As you know, the devas, asuras, and nagas, and all the other hypothetical beings are said to be fettered by envy and greed. They preach they are above violence and rivalry, but we find they are constantly thrown into jealous conflict." Indra was delighted by the Buddha's words and praised him. "You speak of the truth, venerated sage. Your words have allayed my doubts." he said.

Yet, Indra had more to ask of the Buddha, "But sage, what is the cause of their envy and greed?" The Buddha answered, "The source of their envy and greed is caused by the bias of what they hold dear and what they do not. This bias is caused by *taṇhā* (desire) which indicates the fallibility of these souls. And instead of viewing all with the same impartial gaze, with equanimity, they live per their biased preference." Indra understood but then asked, "But what is the source of *taṇhā,* dear sage?"

Shakyamuni Buddha replied, "The source of *taṇhā* is the mind. The mind has a habit of *papañca* (objectification) which stems from the mistaken belief in *attā* (permanent self). This is a mistake because all things are impermanent including the self. When the mind develops, this habit of objectification is increased over time, and so too does *taṇhā* since there was no skillful intervention. Thus this is the unskillful mental state." Hearing this, Indra then asked, "Venerated sage, how does one treat this unskillful mental state?"

Shakyamuni Buddha spoke, "Everyone understands the concepts of joy, grief, and equanimity at some point in their lives. Joy, grief and equanimity each have two outcomes that separate by

Shakyamuni Buddha exposed Mara again for what he is, "I know it is you, Mara. Evil One. You are ever on your mission to prevent the dhamma from being taught. For you lack sympathy for those who suffer. You would rather the laity to remain ignorant of the dhamma so they may go on suffering as they do. I *am* the Tathagata, and my duty is to teach the dhamma. Your Brahmins have carried on telling the world they are self-awakened and delude themselves and others into thinking they were self-awakened. But *I* am truly self-awakened. Just as a palmyra tree that grows to have its canopy cut off is incapable of growing again; so, too, the fermentations that defile, that lead to further becoming, that that cause stress, suffering, aging, and death: Those I the Buddha have renounced, their root destroyed, like an uprooted palmyra tree, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising."

Mara could no longer deny Shakyamuni Buddha was indeed self-awakened and enlightened, so he vanished as he always had from the Buddha.

The *Brahma-nimantanika Sutta* puts the Buddha above the gods by proxy of the Brahmin Baka, and Mara. Not only that, but this sutta renders all means of control for the Brahmin caste ineffectual. The political and metaphysical assertions of the Brahmin are no longer legitimate so long as the Buddha is around to teach the dhamma. And here Mara is shown to be the proponent of obedience to hierarchy and theocracy by way of allegory. Since Mara is the embodiment of corruption and delusion in humans, and he possesses the Brahmin congregation in this parable, it is very clear that the Buddha dhamma is opposed to oppression by show of authority of any kind.

Other gods in the Hindu pantheon, such as Indra, function as supplicants in Buddhist suttas. These tales put them below the Buddha in reverence, and this also shows a notion of irreverence to the Hindu pantheon as a whole. The Hindu pantheon fell into irreligion in the minds of early Buddhists, and functioned merely as

lower castes in the hierarchy. It is usually stated that the Brahmin (priest) caste is the most revered, but this was not always the reality and was subject to change by region, regime, or period. In the Mahājanapada period, the Kshatriya (warrior) caste enjoyed the higher status and authority within the Shakya tribe. The Vaishyas (propertied land owners and merchants) answered directly to the Kshatriya, and managed the Sudras (peasant farmers or laborers). The final caste was the Dalits or Panchamas (untouchables) who were responsible for unwanted labor, such as cleaning and handling animal waste or corpses. We know from the *Esukari Sutta* that this lifestyle was still in practice through the Buddha's life, but was challenged thereafter.

In the *Madhura Sutta*, the arahant (enlightened monk) Kaccāna was visited by King Avantiputta in Gunda Grove where he would spend most of his time as a hermit monk. King Avantiputta sat upon his chariot to ask Kaccāna what he thought of the caste hierarchy. The abridge version goes something like this:

"Venerable Kaccāna, the Brahmins say they are to be honored more than any of the other castes. What do you think about this?" inquired King Avantiputta.

"It is just a saying in the world, great king, that 'Brahmins are the highest caste…heirs of Brahma.' But what do you think, King Avantiputta— Do not other Brahmins (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), and Sudras (laborers) precede and succeed members of their own caste? And if they were to achieve a following of servants eager to please them, and wealth and an abundance of food, will there still not yet be others who have achieved and will achieve the same success?" said Kaccāna, Buddha's arahant disciple.

"There will be, Venerable Kaccāna" admitted King Avantiputta.

"Then what would you think, King Avantiputta, if I said Brahmins (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), and Sudras (laborers) are still yet capable of shameful deeds, such as murder, ill treatment of corpses, robbery, rape, and debauchery?

Would you not admit that they were all capable of the same measure of shame regardless of their caste, or are they not?" asked Kaccāna.

"I would say they are all capable of the same misdeeds. I see your point, Venerable Kaccāna." admitted King Avantiputta.

Kaccāna continued, "Then you see it is just a saying in the world that 'Brahmins are the highest caste…heirs of Brahma.' …And suppose a Kshatriya or a Brahmin or a Vaishya or a Sudra were to shave their heads and don the monk's robes, renouncing the world and giving up unwholesome habits, such as killing, debauchery, and poor diet. Would you be able to determine their caste? Would they not appear the same to you?"

King Avantiputta responded eagerly, "They would all appear the same to me, Venerable Kaccāna."

"And how would you treat them, King Avantiputta?" asked Kaccāna.

"I would pay them homage, and treat them as a guest in my presence. Myself and my entourage would offer medicinal attention and accommodation if needed." And suddenly the realization of the dhamma came over King Avantiputta. He praised Kaccāna for his teachings, and the realization that all people are equal when we understand superficial privileges for what they really are.

Buddhism itself exists as an alternative to the Vedic tradition and other practices of society because the Buddha dhamma rejects previous assertions about reality. Buddhism's very existence in Northern India was a direct critique of early Vedic Hinduism, Jainism (Nigathas in Pali suttas), and strictly Upanishadic Hinduism of the time. As with Kaccāna's instruction, the Brahmins naturally preach their high status because it is in their own self-interest to do so. And anyone else in that position of privilege would be tempted to do the same. It takes a strong-willed doctrine, such as the Buddha dhamma to transcend from this oppressive mentality. Not only did the Buddha dhamma teach a strict doctrine of egalitarianism, but it also taught that any person could take refuge in the

contains celestial bodies that revolve around the Earth- that come and go. They illuminate the world and cast shadows from either direction. You have influence over beings who come and go. There are epochs here. This is not eternal. But there are other realms known as the *Ābhassara* that you have not seen, and do not know exist- at least not any longer. You have been here for so long that your memory of the impermanent is faded. You have mistaken me to be of ordinary birth and insight, but I am the Tathagata (teacher of the dhamma) and I have seen beyond your delusion. Having come to known the rudimentary elements for what they are, I have insight into your realm as well as all the others"

Baka Brahmin was displeased at the Buddha's dhamma and protested, "If this is what you think of my realm, I will disappear from you this instant."

"Disappear from me if you can." Shakyamuni Buddha responded. Then Baka strained pensively thinking "Disappear, I will disappear." But he could not. So then the Buddha retorted, "Well if you will not disappear, I will in your stead." Baka looked up from his concentration, "Yes, disappear from me, monk- if *you* can." The Buddha said he fabricated a psychic trick that made it seem as though his body was gone, but his voice remained. He recited to the congregation of Brahmins, "Having seen danger right in becoming, and becoming searching for non-becoming, I didn't affirm any kind of becoming, or cling to any delight." The whole congregation was astounded by this trick and praised the Buddha saying, "How awesome that he could do this!" and "This is the power of Shakyamuni, sage of the Shakya tribe, the Buddha. No Brahmin has done this before." Then Mara spoke from the congregation again, "O Buddha, if this is your dhamma, it should not be taught to the laity. As many enlightened ones before you did not lower themselves to teach the laity, so you should also abstain from this practice. You have more to gain from remaining at peace with yourself, in seclusion away from others."

Shakyamuni Buddha rebuked Baka, "How immersed in your delusion you are, Brahmin Baka! This is your ignorance: what is inconstant you declare constant! What is impermanent you declare permanent! What is partial you declare total! Where all is subject to falling away- you declare it will not fall away! What is born, ages and dies, you declare does not!" At the Buddha's words, Mara possessed one of Baka's subordinates in protest, "Monk, monk, do not rebuke this Brahmin. He is the most revered among us, for he has achieved a state of enlightenment in the company of our Lord Brahma. The creator of all, and father to us all." Mara went on to state the division of Brahmins who disobeyed Brahma's law, and those who obeyed. Of course, he stated that the disobedient were incarnated into a "coarse body" and those who obeyed were given "refined bodies". He then implored the Buddha, "So please obey Lord Brahma, don't you see his assembly is gathered here?"

The Buddha's attention was turned towards the gathering of Brahmins. The Buddha leveled his rebuke towards Mara directly as he was in possession of the gathering, "I know you, Evil One. Don't assume, 'He doesn't know me.' You are Mara, Evil One. And Brahma, and Brahma's assembly, and the attendants of Brahma's assembly have all fallen into your hands. They have all fallen into your power. And you think, 'This one, too, has come into my hands, has come under my control.' But, Evil One, I have neither come into your hands nor have I come under your control." At this the Brahmin Baka addressed the Buddha once again, "But surely you understand that what is constant is constant… …what is permanent is permanent, and what is not born, ages, and dies, is eternal. That from this realm, there is nothing beyond. Surely you know that Brahmins before me have attained this insight and their attainment was passed on for generations to come."

Shakyamuni Buddha heard Baka and went on to explain that his appeal to tradition and delusion was a self-imagined realm created in his own mind. The Buddha explained, "The realm you describe

Sangha and seek enlightenment if they were up to the task. Though this did not completely dissolve strife experienced outside of the Sangha, surrounding *upāsaka* (lay communities) did become less oppressive, especially among lay practitioners whose family members joined the Sangha. Furthermore the idea of the Dalit (outcast) was challenged by the Buddha on many accounts. The most pertinent being the *Vasalla Sutta* where the Buddha rebukes an arrogant Brahmin at length, and here is my abridged version:

One day Shakyamuni Buddha left Anathapindika monastery for receiving dāna (alms) at Savatthi city. He donned his robes and begging bowl and set out to the city as usual. Now, Shakyamuni Buddha was passing by Brahmin Aggika Bharadvaja's house as he was cooking an offering for the Buddha. The Brahmin was not yet done cooking and lost his temper, so he yelled obscenities at Shakyamuni Buddha, "Stay there, baldy! Wretched monk! You Vasala!" (Vasala is a synonym for Dalit/outcast, which literally means "little man". A similar term is used in Chinese- "xiǎo rén").

The Buddha stopped and spoke to the Brahmin, "Tell me Brahmin, do you know the conditions that qualify someone as being a Vasala (outcast)?"

"No I do not, Venerable Gautama Buddha. Please teach me the dhamma's conditions for who qualifies as being a Vasala." admitted the Brahmin.

"Listen then, Brahmin, and pay attention, I will speak." said the Buddha.

"Yes, Venerable Sir," replied the Brahmin.

"1. Whosoever is hateful and slanderous. 2. Whosoever murders and lacks sympathy for living beings. 3. Whosoever besieges towns as an oppressor. 4. Whosoever burgles.

5. Whosoever avoids paying their debts. 6. Whosoever assaults pedestrians on the road to steal from them. 7. Whosoever lies at the expense of others. 8. Whosever causes a married woman to be unfaithful.

9. Whosoever being wealthy refuses to support their aging parents. 10. Whosoever assaults and batters their relatives. 11. Whosoever is asked for good advice but answers with ill-advice. 12. Whosoever attempts to conceal their misdeeds.

13. Whosoever is treated as a guest and is served food in other's homes, but does not do the same for others. 14. Whosoever lies to mendicant monks or Brahmins (about having food). 15. Whosoever is present at mealtime and insults monks or Brahmins [for seeking dāna (alms)].

16. Whosoever self-deluded, speaks asatam (harsh words of intimidation) or falsehood expecting to gain something. 17. Whosoever is boastful and belittles others. 18. Whosoever is capricious and unaware of the harm they cause by their actions. 19. Whosoever reviles the Buddha, the Abbot, or the Sangha.

20. Whosoever not being an arahant pretends to be so is the lowest of outcasts, for they are thieves of all the cosmos. 21. Not by birth is one an outcast; not by birth is one a Brahmin. By deed one becomes an outcast, by deed one becomes a Brahmin.

22. This I recite from experience: There was a Dalit's son, Sopaka, who became known as Matanga. 23. Matanga attained the highest of fame despite the odds. He was so revered by the Kshatriyas and Brahmins that they attended to him. 24. He achieved this feat by living as Matanga, the ordained monk and following the Noble Eightfold Path. By doing this, he attained enlightenment. 25. His birth as a Dalit did not prevent him from being revered and a witness to the Brahmin's point of view.

26. High birth does not prevent one from falling into inner-turmoil, or from shame. 27. Not by birth is one an outcast; not by birth is one a Brahmin. By deed one becomes an outcast, by deed one becomes a Brahmin."

Upon hearing this dhamma, Brahmin Aggika Bharadvaja knelt in praṇāma before Shakyamuni Buddha saying, "O Venerable Gautama Buddha, I promise to participate as one in the *upāsaka* (laity)

pati's arrival. All visual depictions of this moment show the Buddha in *padmasana* (the lotus position) above Brahma Sahampati, and the latter kneeling in *praṇāma*. The prevalence of this fact shows the dhamma is superior over any belief in gods and their supposed authority on Earth. This deity is meant to be chief and progenitor of the Brahmin caste, and Buddhists dared to place their patriarchal creator god below the god they appealed to legitimize their own status over other castes.

Thanissaro Bikkhu's translation of the *Brahma-nimantanika Sutta* is prefaced by an interesting observation regarding the habit of Brahmins and other monotheistic proponents. He states that Mara (the god of craving, delusion, and death) is the source for those who demand obedience to a creator god. This observation also concludes for us that Buddhist thought is opposed to dogmatism, and hierarchy for a number of reasons. Brahmanism is a hierarchical belief-system that justifies all its practice by appealing to a creator god as the source of goodness. Here, Mara is understood as imitating the figure of Brahma and also possessing the minds of Brahmins subordinate to their chief, named Baka. Baka is shown to be self-deluded in thinking he has achieved a Brahmanic form of enlightenment, but Shakyamuni Buddha shows him that this is Mara taking over and deceiving him.

Shakyamuni Buddha's initial critique of Baka was that he claimed his revelation was unchanging and eternal. This is a denial of the dhamma's tenet of *anicca* (impermanence) and in reverse to how Brahma Shampati appeared to the Buddha— the Buddha appeared to Baka to glimpse his delusional realm at the royal sal tree in the Subhaga forest in Ukkattha. And in a similar fashion the Buddha was greeted by Baka as an honored guest saying, "Welcome good sir. It has been long since you arranged to come here — for this place is constant. This is permanent. This is eternal. This is total. This is not subject to falling away — for here one does not take birth, does not age, does not die. And there is nothing beyond this."

the heavens, "All is lost, Tathagatha (great teacher). You prefer to remain in your equanimous state rather than teach the dhamma. If you dare not teach the dhamma you just attained, the world will not know the just from the unjust!" Brahma Sahampati left his heavenly realm to appear in front of the Buddha. He knelt in praṇāma, placing his right hand over his heart.

"Lord Buddha, I implore you to teach your dhamma. In the past there appeared among the Magadhansan impure dhamma devised by the stained. Your dhamma is unstained and whole. Please emancipate this world's people from their pitiful state of suffering. Free them from the oppression caused by craving and suffering."

The Buddha envisioned the world and its people in many different walks of life. He glimpsed people of keen awareness and presence of mind, and individuals worn and dulled by nature and the experiences of life. It was just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses — born and growing in the water — might flourish while immersed in the water, without rising up from the water; some might stand at an even level with the water; while some might rise up from the water and stand without being smeared by the water. He could see the potential for those who might learn the dhamma, and those who are not yet capable due to their karma.

Upon this revelation, the Buddha spoke, "I shall open my doors to those who are willing to enter. Let them show their conviction. I realized that I was not willing to teach the dhamma for I thought trouble would arise. O Brahma, I did not tell people the sublime dhamma." Upon hearing this, Brahma Sahampati understood the Buddha resolved to teach the dhamma and disappeared.

This parable places the Buddha above the god Brahma Sahampati from the moment he appeared to the Buddha. He knelt in *praṇāma*, and placed his hand on his heart. This gesture is a reverential salutation, and his hand on his heart signifies his reverence deeper still. The dialogue also suggests the Buddha is placed above the god, as he does not change his position or demeanor upon Brahma Saham-

with you from now on. I will take refuge in you, the Buddha, your dhamma, and the Sangha. That I promise until the day I die!"

The concluding details from this sutta imply that even the proud Brahmin spent the rest of his life supporting the Buddha's community. And this is surely different from how Brahmins thought society ought to function. The caste was challenged by the Buddha in every way. It may seem the *Vasala Sutta* states certain aspects of caste society as facts of life, but we can see that anyone could be revered or outcast by their deeds and not by pure accident of birth: "21. Not by birth is one an outcast; not by birth is one a Brahmin. By deed one becomes an outcast, by deed one becomes a Brahmin." We can see that the weight of the caste system was lessening, and was more regarded as a means of compliment or showing reverence. And in the following centuries the Jatakas suggest that intermarriage between castes began during or just after the Buddha's life. This was a considerable sign of progress from the Vedic caste system. Such confrontation with the Vedic caste is very much compatible with the emancipatory agenda of anarchists.

We can see that the real lesson in the Buddha dharma is one I call the 'three potentials' that are found in Buddhist thought and a plethora of other doctrine: potential 1) all people have the potential to do great moral deeds, 2) all people have the potential to do shameful deeds, and 3) all people have the potential to be mediocre in their deeds. Of course, I grant other variables are possible; this is not a false trichotomy. Rather, this triadic moral principle is meant to highlight the universality of moral potentials. The third potential is one I think not enough people fully understand: being a bystander and enabler to bad deeds/karma, though not a malicious deed renders a person morally dubious. But on the other hand, it is inappropriate to expect direct action from others; this is an imposition that could lead to undue harm.

In any case, this principle of 'three potentials' is a moral device aimed at showing there is no innate difference between people. There is no way to impose a hierarchy such as the caste on people

declaring one is more virtuous or deserving of differential treatment based on the accident of birth. Buddhism declares that it is a person's deeds that show whether they are honorable. But honorable or not, the Buddha instructed that all living beings are to be treated with the same respect and shall go unharmed by our deeds. This is possible by practicing mettā (benevolence), and avihiṃsā (nonviolence). The Buddha's dismissal of caste beliefs as roles determined by birth have been present throughout South, East, and Southeast Asia ever since his Sangha was around to spread the dhamma. This is a legacy that anarchists can appreciate.

For India herself, many Indians in the independence movement (1857–1947) did look to Buddhism as a model for liberation from both the oppression of the British Empire and the caste system itself. In regards to whether the caste system would go on to exist, if but as an underlying tradition rather than a visible apparatus for governance, Har Dayal stated, "I do not acknowledge any caste-system, good, bad, or indifferent." What's more he would later praise Venerable Mahatma Gandhi's efforts to uplift the downtrodden untouchables. Dayal voiced his own protest against caste in his essay "Modern India and European Culture" by highlighting India's subaltern position on the world stage, "All Hindus are pariahs in the society of civilized men and women, whether they are rajas or valets, priests or sweepers…" and concluded, "[the caste system] is the climax of all social inequality." Like the *Madhura Sutta* and the *Vasala Sutta*, Dayal's statements highlight the sameness in potential regarding all people, and in the latter quote he implied the mundanity of attempts in Indian society to prop up higher castes while the whole of India was deemed subaltern by the world powers of the time. And he would later add that "love transcends all castes" which further points to the sameness of all people regardless of birth.

In his paper, "Three Ideas on Education" published in the December issue of *Modern View* (1925) Dayal called to action the passionate removal of caste:

So far we have seen Buddhist thought challenge filial piety through the tale of young Siddhartha Gautama's escape from this oligarchic father's rule, notions of hierarchy existing as the caste system, and political life by way of the Sangha. Finally this essay will conclude with a discussion about how the Buddha was viewed vis-à-vis the Hindu pantheon, and the parables that narrate discourses he has with the gods of Hinduism.

5. The Buddha vis-à-vis Hindu Gods

The *Ayacana Sutta* contains a discourse between the Buddha and a syncretic deity called Brahma Sahampati. This is most likely the chief creator god of the Hindu pantheon: Brahma, of which the Brahmin caste is said to descend from. Yet, this notion is somewhat ambiguous because certain tales regarding Brahma, as opposed to the Brahman, in Buddhist literature is inconsistent at times. In any case, the *Ayacana Sutta* provides a narrative discourse that I like to think of as a parable, but I will provide an abridged version first before explaining what I mean:

In a time when Shakyamuni Buddha had attained Buddhahood, he meditated at Uruvela on the bank of the Nerañjara River, at the foot of a goatherd's Banyan Tree. In deep reflection the Buddha thought,

"This dhamma I have attained is so deep, and so refined, that it will be hard to transmit to others. It seems the whole world is living in delusion, and it will be next to impossible for them to comprehend this dhamma. And if I set out to teach the dhamma to them without proper preparation, it will only result in dissatisfaction."

After some time meditating on these thoughts, the Buddha slowly shifted into an equanimous trance, preferring to be at peace with himself over ruminating over failure in transmitting the dhamma. In this state the god Brahma Sahampati perceived what Shakyamuni Buddha was thinking and spoke to him from

life, let him be cordial and refined in conduct. Thus, full of joy, he will make an end of suffering." This passage provides an impetus for would-be members of the Sangha to retreat from oppression. Similarly the Buddha warned against oppression by means of violence in the *Danda Vagga* (discourse on violence). 131. "One who, while himself seeking happiness, oppresses with violence other beings who also desire happiness, will not attain happiness hereafter." And it has been the anarchist critique that oppressive violence has always been the basis for anarchist thought, or as Proudhon described it, "oppression, misery, and crime".

Like many anarchist communes today, the Sangha is meant to survive on charity (*dāna*) and barter alone. This communal subsistence is often called "the economy of gifts" and would ideally allow monastics to sever ties from whatever political regime that existed around them at the time. These days a Sangha exists within a nation-state regardless of their means of subsistence, and this typically renders the upkeep of a Sangha nearly impossible where the tradition is not the norm. And this is just another sign of oppression and systemic violence. But this doesn't change the fact that wherever a Sangha exists, there is a potential for people within a political realm to seek refuge in the Buddhist community and attain a new life, and oftentimes a new name upon ordination. Many ordained monks went on to be given the title of arahant (an enlightened monk) and they continued Shakamuni's teachings, assembling in the First Council in Rajagada (5th c. BCE) and Second Council in Vesali (4th c. BCE) whereby much of the Buddhist tradition was chronicled and passed down verbally until written tradition took over during the reign of King Vaṭṭagāmiṇi in the 1st century BCE, and this was when the Pali Canon was formed.

Since much of the early Canon survived while containing suttas that encouraged critical thought, it is only logical to conclude that the Sangha upheld emancipatory doctrine at least until Vaṭṭagāmiṇi's reign.

Caste is the curse of India. Caste, in all its forms, has made us a nation of slaves… The priest is our master, but he himself (and all of us) are the slaves of foreigners. This is the fruit of caste… It is not Islam, and it is not England, that has destroyed India. No, our enemy is within us. Priestcraft [Barahminism] and caste have slain us. This is the truth of history. Hindu Society twice committed suicide… Caste must go, and it must not go slowly and gradually, but immediately and completely and irrevocably. This should be our vow: No compromise with caste in any shape or form, and Hindu unity as our practical social ideal.

Har Dayal would later advocate the translation of Pali texts in Western academia, and could be credited as a major influence in this endeavor [to which I am grateful]. He similarly spoke against dogmatism, as in the unquestioned obedience to the Hindu and religious practices within India (to include Islam and Christianity). His strongest case against Hinduism's dogmatism was written in the September 1926 issue of *Modern View* where he stated the inevitable result of unquestioned obedience manifested as "child-marriage, purdah (seclusion of women), caste, polygamy, hideous idols, illiteracy and the condition of slavery " which he then declared, "the Shame of India". But many religious people might think this is a mere skew of Buddhist doctrine, and that Buddhism merely promotes an alternative dogma in place of other belief systems. But this is not the case, and the next subsection will explain why.

3. The Dhamma and Nondogmatism

The term dogma has a few definitions. Its origin in English derives from Catholic Christianity, and is etymologically linked to the Greek word, δόγμα (dogma) which literally means "that which one thinks is true". The Roman Catholics repurposed the word into Latin to mean, "an inconvertible truth made known through divine

revelation". And since roughly the second century CE, dogma was used as a means to control discourse and enforce a clerical and feudal hierarchy among residents of Christendom. Dogma has come to mean a set of beliefs that are not only "incontrovertible truth", but enforceable under arbitrary rule. Any challenge against such dogmas in Christendom, and the other Abrahamic religions (Islam and Judaism) has been at one time or another suppressed and condemned. This notion was exacerbated by the concept of divine right that meant the kings or other feudal regents would have unquestioned authority over their people. At certain periods and in some societies, denial of dogma was punishable by death. As a contrast, Buddhism does not have any such requirements. Of course there are social pressures is many communities for people to be Buddhist, but there has been no literature or governing body that mandated subscription to a specific set of beliefs. Of course we can assert instances of violence or suppression in Myanmar, China, Southeast Asia, and Japan. But these instances are not *caused* by disbelief in specific doctrine.

If you search for "Buddhist dogma" on Wikipedia you will come across diṭṭhi (right view). The tenet of *diṭṭhi* has been offered as an example of Buddhist dogma. But this is a flimsy analogous term, because right view is just one tenet of eight within the Noble Eightfold path. Diṭṭhi cannot be equated with Christian dogma because it is not broad enough to be the framework for most of the Buddhist doctrine in the same way dogma does for Christians. If I were to put on my Christian hat for a moment and try to make an analogy here: it would be like trying to say the keystone tenet of Christianity is the first Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount, "blessed are the poor [in spirit if Matthew]". As you may know, there are a few more Beatitudes in that sermon (ten in Matthew and four in Luke). So too is the same for the Noble Eightfold Path, there are eight tenets, and they all comprise just one component of the Buddha's dhamma (teaching). So I hope that illustrates the incompatibility of diṭṭhi serving as a substitute to dogma.

though many monks were indeed venerated, they were not so until they proved themselves to be sagacious in deed and speech. Authority in early Buddhist society had no linkage to possessions, status, or wealth. Their critique of property ownership is even compatible with the works of Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Rocker. The Dhammapada, possibly chief among all Pali Canon texts, states in the subsection *Dhammattha Vagga*: (discourse on the just), that one is not deserving of respect merely because of their perceived status from birth, age, or charisma, but rather the sum of all their deeds:

260. A monk is not an elder because his head is gray. He is but ripe in age, and he is called one grown old in vain. 261. One in whom there is truthfulness, virtue, inoffensiveness, restraint and self-mastery, who is free from defilements and is wise — he is truly called an Elder. 262. Not by mere eloquence nor by beauty of form does a man become accomplished, if he is jealous, selfish and deceitful. 263. But he in whom these are wholly destroyed, uprooted and extinct, and who has cast out hatred — that wise man is truly accomplished.

Shakyamuni Buddha also warned against false confidence in obedience to rules, rituals, and pedantry. These habits so often manifest as means of authoritarianism, and this principle would ideally promise that Sangha would remain an egalitarian commune that guaranteed equal opportunity to its residents. And if an anarchist commune would be modeled with a similar ethic to these principles, it could safeguard against the rise would-be despots:

271–272. Not by rules and observances, not even by much learning, nor by gain of absorption, nor by a life of seclusion, nor by thinking, "I enjoy the bliss of renunciation, which is not experienced by the worldling" should you, O monks, rest content, until the utter destruction of cankers (Arahantship) is reached.

In the Dhammapada's *Bhikkhu Vagga* (discourse on monks), Shakyamuni Buddha gives an emancipatory instruction, 376. "Let him associate with friends who are noble, energetic, and pure in

tify why their viewpoint merits consideration, and they come under greater scrutiny if they are claiming to state the truth about a subject.

If Buddhists really apply the *Kesamutti Sutta* as a logical device, then they absolutely cannot be dogmatic in any sense. And if this is the case, the nondogmatic disposition of Buddhism allows adherents to question and analyze any propositions that come their way, including the basis of authority of others. The *Kesamutti Sutta* is a powerful instrument that warns against indoctrination and unquestioned loyalty to so-called leaders, secular or religious. And in a time when Brahmins were believed to have privileged authority over other castes, the Buddha's Sangha (community of *bikkhu* monks and *bikkhuni* nuns) functioned as a rapidly spreading commune that would provide an alternative to established society.

4. The Sangha: A Commune Separate From Political Authority

The Buddhist Sangha is often compared to the Benedictine and Augustinian orders of European Christian monks. And this parallel has some uses. But the deference and reverence of the Christian monk vis-à-vis the Buddhist monk is quite different. The Buddhist monk or nun is a renunciant, not to get closer to God and receive rewards in heaven, but to achieve enlightenment, or in the very least, renounce the world as it is polluted with undue suffering. The Sangha was essentially a movement that would attract thousands of followers within Shakyamuni Buddha's lifetime, and it was founded by people who lived off of the charity (*dāna*) of their surrounding communities.

Any veneration for monks or nuns received from people in those communities was out of sincere respect alone, and clearly not from a tradition of obedience. There was a sense of shared dignity that emanated from the Sangha, as it was attested in the suttas. And

Then there is the collective dhamma being presented as another stand-in for dogma in Buddhist thought. But this cannot be the case either, because the dhamma is the summation of all of Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings. And if this is the case, then the dhamma would be self-contradictory as a dogma due to various suttas that speak against compulsory belief. The most prevalent sutta is the *Kesamutti Sutta*, as it specifically addresses the problem with unquestioned beliefs in this excerpt [numbers are my own]:

1. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing (anussava),
2. nor upon tradition (paramparā),
3. nor upon rumor (itikirā),
4. nor upon what is in a scripture (piṭaka-sampadāna)
5. nor upon conjecture (takka-hetu),
6. nor upon an axiom (naya-hetu),
7. nor upon fallacious reasoning (ākāra-parivitakka),
8. nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over (diṭṭhi-nijjhān-akkh-antiyā),
9. nor upon another's seeming ability (bhabba-rūpatāya),
10. nor upon the consideration, The monk is our teacher (samaṇo no garū)

Kalamas, when you yourselves know: "These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness", enter on and abide in them.

It just so happens that the above passages hit on every aspect of political indoctrination. This is quite astounding for how advanced

they are in terms of discussions regarding belief. The first instruction, *anussava*, relates to belief by rote memorization. This is often forced upon pupils or citizens through educational institutions and quite often the news media today. Less resolute or acquiescent people will exhibit strong beliefs in things simply because they hear about them so often. The second instruction, *paramparā*, is just as astounding as the first because it warns against the appeal to tradition. This is often known as the informal fallacy, *argumentum ad antiquitatem* (appeal to tradition), that states that a claim is not true simply because people hold it as a tradition or have believed it was true for some amount of time. Similarly, rumors or hearsay, the third instruction, *itikirā*, are not reliable sources of truth because, even if a person is convinced of the truth of something, it does not mean they remember it completely and clearly. This is why hearsay is not admissible as evidence in any scientific setting. Yet, corrupt governing officials and business owners appeal to hearsay as a source for decision-making processes all the time.

It is interesting the fourth instruction, *piṭaka-sampadāna,* uses the term piṭaka which is self-referential to the Buddhist doctrine, the Pali Canon. So, in English it is translated as scripture, but the scripture in question is the sutta itself as it exists within the *Sutta Piṭaka* which is a pivotal source of the Pali Canon as a whole. The fifth teaching, *takka-hetu*, warns against conjecture, or assumptions based on preconceived notions. The sixth, *naya-hetu*, warns against axioms and again I think this is self-referential, because the axioms in question here would be popular phrases the Buddha or similar instructors would be preaching at the time. Axioms, maxims, truisms, or aphorisms, have strength in being memorable and seem true enough that many people simply repeat them and use them heuristically in society- which is often fast-paced and unaccommodating to lengthy discussion. But when we go through our whole lives assuming the truth of an axiom without investigation, it could lead to the acceptance of a fallacious rationale or bald assertions. The other weakness of axioms is that people can remember their content, but not the context nor the deeper meaning to them.

By extension of the sixth instruction, the seventh, *ākāra-parivitakka*, warns against fallacious reasoning at all. The term *ākāra* is literally defined as shape or form, but it has another definition meaning appearance, aspect, or image. And *parivitakka* means a reflection or consideration. And I think this is founded in the Buddha's description of reality— the Three Marks of Existnece: *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (dissatisfaction), and *anattā* (non-self) — and our delusions about reality, known as the Five Aggregates or *Khandha*. These are delusions we have that prevent us from seeing reality for what it is. The Five Aggregates are: *rūpa* (form), *vedanā* (sensation), *saññā* (perception), *saṅkhāra* (mental formations), and *viññāṇa* (consciousness). In summary, these five concepts we have about the world are fallacious because they fail to recognize *anicca* (impermanence), our inability to sense certain aspects of reality, our biases, our unskillful thoughts, and they delude us into clinging to the delusions of the self that have no basis in the aforementioned aspects.

The eighth instruction, *diṭṭhi-nijjhān-akkh-antiyā*, is also self-referential and is really about not misinterpreting the origins of one's insight as it could be skewed by bias. As stated above, the term *diṭṭhi* means right view. *Nijjhān* means insight, *akkh* refers to what the eye sees, and *antiyā* are the ideas we have pondered before. The ninth instruction, *bhabba-rūpatāya*, should be of interest to anarchists in that it speaks against following charismatic leaders or those we think are particularly skillful on those qualities alone. That disposition only leads to unquestioned servitude via admiration. The tenth instruction, *samaṇo no garū*, also leans towards anarchism because it is the antithesis to the appeal to authority fallacy. A proposition is not true merely based on the assertion that a person in authority said it was true. And a person's perceived rank is not sufficient to substantiate their claims just as it is not enough for any other person. Every person needs to demonstrate and jus-