

## An Overview of The Natural Law

One of the most famous of the Buddha's teachings is him summarizing the Quality to a group of 1,250 worthy ones.

*The not doing of all evil,  
Engaging in the wholesome,  
The purification of the psyche,  
This is the teaching of the awakened ones.*

*Acceptance is the ultimate austerity for honing.  
"Extinguishing is the ultimate," the awakened ones say.  
One who has gone forth would not harm another.  
A tranquil one does not harass another.*

*Without confronting, without harming  
And restrained by the Restraint,  
And knowing the measure of the meal,  
Living in a secluded place,  
And commitment to the mastery of the psyche  
This is the teaching of the awakened ones.  
Dp 183-185*

### Qualities of the Buddha Dhamma Sangha

Followers of the Awakened One would often take refuge, seek protection and shelter in the Awakened One himself, the Quality he taught, and the Order of monks he established.

The quality of belief, faith, and inspiration around the Awakened One, the Quality, and the Order can be an important source of energy and motivation and a vehicle for a wholesome, balanced, contentment and joy. When one has a basis of that wholesome balanced contentment and joy, it can be very conducive towards convergence and unification and ultimately letting go completely.

However, to generate that belief, one needs to have a sense for what they are. The canonical description of the Awakened One, the Quality, and the Order are:

*He is auspicious, worthy, and fully and completely awakened, perfect in wisdom and conduct, virtuous, knower of the universe, unsurpassable trainer of men, teacher of deities and humans, awake and auspicious.*

*Well described by the auspicious one is the quality, visible, timeless, "come and see," progressive, to be individually experienced by the perceptive.*

*Well practiced is the order of disciples of the auspicious one. Rightly practiced is the order of disciples of the auspicious one. Correctly practiced is the order of disciples of the auspicious one. Properly practiced is the order of disciples of the auspicious one. That is the four pairs of men, the eight types of men. That is the order of disciples of the auspicious one who are to be made offerings, to be hosted as guests, to be given gifts, to be offered añjali, an unsurpassable field of rewards of the world.  
(e.g. AN 3.70)*

### Giving

The Awakened One was constantly pointing out the benefits of giving. The results he described are both in this life and after death.

*Monks, if beings would know the results of giving and having shared as I know them, they would not eat without having given, and the impurity of possessiveness would not stay in their psyche. Even the last bite, the last handful, from that they would not eat without sharing, if there were ones who could receive them. But monks, because beings do not know the results of giving and sharing like I know them, they eat without having given, and the impurity of possessiveness stays in their psyche.  
Iti 26*

*Monks, these are five benefits in giving. Which five?*

- *Many people love it and find it pleasing.*
- *Those who are true men share.*
- *A good reputation spreads.*

- *Worldly things don't disappear.*
- *With the breakup of the body, after death, one arises in a good destination, a heavenly world. These are the five benefits in giving.*

*Giving is loved.*

*Remembered, the quality follows*

*Those who exist in that always share*

*Restrained and celibate.*

*They teach the quality*

*Which drives out all pain.*

*That quality here having understood,*

*Completely extinguishes, without any impulses.*

*AN 5.35*

### **Morality & The Results of Deeds**

The Buddha often taught about the importance of morality both in leading to our long-term worldly well being and also being a crucial part of the path that leads to ultimate freedom.

There are ten core parts of morality the Buddha laid out (MN 41):

The three parts of bodily moral conduct are:

- Refraining from killing living beings
- Refraining from stealing
- Refraining from wrong sexual behavior, that is, with one who is under someone else's protection, is a monastic, is in another relationship, or with someone with whom sex is illegal.

The four parts of verbal moral conduct are:

- Refraining from lying
- Refraining from speaking divisively
- Refraining from speaking coarse speech
- Refraining from useless chatter

The three parts of mental moral conduct are:

- Not being covetous
- Not being hostile
- Believing in mundane right view:
  - 1) There are fruits which mature from good and bad actions. 2) The visible world exists, as well as a world beyond. One is born into this world through a mother and a father. One is born into a world beyond through falling into them spontaneously.
  - 3) There are well practiced renunciates who have experienced with direct knowledge this world and the world beyond and make it known.

The Buddha taught that it is these 10 types of moral or immoral conduct which determine whether one is born in heavenly or human realms or goes down to lower realms.

There were also a number of suggestions that the Buddha made for lay people specifically. In addition to taking refuge in the Awakened One, the Quality, and the Order, he also explained that taking the five precepts are overflowing streams of rewards. These are not killing, not stealing, not having sexual misconduct, not lying, and not taking alcohol, liquor or other things which are the basis for distraction and intoxication. (AN 8.39)

Additionally, the Awakened One encouraged lay followers to observe observance days on the nights of the full moon, new moon, and 8th days of the lunar cycle. On these days, lay people would go to listen to a Dhamma talk from monastics when possible, and observe the eight precepts for that day. (AN 8.41)

## **Kamma**

Teaching on kamma, deeds, is a fundamental part of the Awakened One's teaching. He encouraged all people to frequently reflect:

*I am the owner of deeds, heir to deeds, born of deeds, sheltered by deeds, whatever deeds I do, good or bad, I will be their heir.*  
AN 5.57

In this vein, a major theme of the Awakened One's teaching is to be very careful with one's intentions and put in a lot of effort to become conscious of one's intentions and remember their consequences at every moment.

Just as importantly, an understanding that one experiences the results of one's own actions leads to a greater ability to let go of trying to control the world or the acts of others. The more one is able to experience the effects of doing good actions and the consequences of doing bad actions inside oneself, leads one towards putting more effort into purifying one's own intentions and actions as opposed to trying to change the actions of others.

## **The Drawback of Sense Pleasures**

The Buddha offered many teachings and exhortations to monks and lay people about the dangers of sense pleasures. He described sense pleasures as any pleasing, liked, wished for, desired, pleasurable sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch. (AN 6.63)

He used many similes on the dangers of sense pleasures to describe how fleeting, fraught with danger, disappointing, and unfulfilling they are:

He likened them to a hungry dog chewing on a bone unable to satiate his hunger.

He described them as similar to a vulture, hawk, or crow carrying around a piece of meat, and the likelihood that other birds of prey would attack the bird if it does not drop the piece of meat.

He likened them to carrying a torch against the wind.

He likened them to being dragged towards a pit of fire.

He likened them to borrowed goods, which one has to return.

He likened them to a dream, and the reality faced when one wakes up.

He likened them to someone who has climbed up a tree to gather fruit, but realizes the danger with the realization that another is planning to cut the tree down to gather the fruit for himself. (MN 54)

The Awakened One also encouraged lay people to look at how much work, struggle, and stress goes into trying to earn money to attain possessions and experiences, which don't last and are subject to theft and destruction by various means. He often spoke at length on how many arguments, conflict, violence, war, and destruction is caused by the pursuit of sensual pleasures. (MN 13)

The more clearly one becomes aware of these internal and external drawbacks of sensuality and remembers them, the more one has a motivation to abandon them.

## **Benefits of Renunciation**

In addition to avoiding all the potential conflict and frustration and disappointment bred by the pursuit of sensuality, renunciation also offers the time and space to be able to dedicate oneself completely to the development of wholesome qualities, the abandoning of unwholesome qualities, and the purification of one's psyche.

In his own search for the way to ultimate freedom, the Awakened One, before he was awakened and was still a being destined for awakening, asked himself "Why if I'm subject to birth, aging, and death, do I seek out things that are also subject to birth, aging, and death?"

Even before reaching his aspiration of ultimate freedom, it became clear to him that seeking out the things and experiences of the world would only distract him from his purpose and only by looking at the internal causes of attachment and birth could he find the way out. (MN 26)

One of the common reflection for people preparing to go forth is:

*"The household is cramped and dusty, going forth is open and spacious. It's not easy living in a household to live the holy life completely fulfilled, completely pure, polished like a conch shell. What if I were to cut off my hair and beard, wear cloth dyed with tannins, and go forth from the household into homelessness?" DN 2*

In addition, the abandoning of sensual pleasures yields another, even more important quality necessary to the ultimate freedom. In abandoning sensual experiences of the five senses, one leaves behind all the agitation that is bred in that movement and attachment. The more one succeeds in abandoning the craving for and movement towards sensuality, the more one has an inner sense of contentment, joy, pleasure, and relaxation. These qualities naturally tend towards convergence and unification of the psyche. DN 2

## **The Four Noble Truths**

The four noble truths are the centerpiece of the Buddha's teaching. They are the key to ultimate freedom. The whole path is included in the four noble truths.

The nature of those truths is they are the keys to coming out of the cycle of pain. They are the truths that delusion is constantly trying to avoid. All the previous sections are the required prerequisites to forming a wholesome basis from which one can come to a place of acceptance with that which is hardest to accept.

When the Awakened One was still on the path to awakening, his goal wasn't only to lessen the emotional and physical pain inherent in life. His goal was to get out of the cycle of birth, aging, and death completely. (MN 26)

The first noble truth is the truth of pain. It was to be understood completely, from all sides:

*"Birth is painful. Aging is painful. Death is painful. Being stuck with those who are not loved is painful. Being separated from those who are loved is painful. Not getting what one wants is painful. In brief, the five masses which are taken on are painful."*

The second noble truth was the origin of that pain which was to be abandoned:

*"That craving which comes into existence over and over again, which goes along with delight and infatuation, going about delighting here and there. That is: craving for sensuality, craving for existence, or craving for non-existence."*

The third noble truth was the dissolution of pain was to be realized.

*With the fading away, and dissolving without a trace of that very craving, giving it up, relinquishing it completely, release, without any clinging.*

The fourth noble truth is the way leading to the dissolution of pain, the whole set of preparations necessary to develop the subtlety of mind and psyche necessary to abandon craving at a moment-to-moment level. It is to be developed.

*"This very noble eight-part path. That is: right view, right resolution, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right remembrance, and right convergence."*

(\*SN 56.11)

It is the understanding of these realities and the experience of them that lays out the path to ultimate freedom. When they are understood, applied, and developed, they lead to the realization of ultimate freedom.

## **The Noble Eight-Part Path**

The most complex part of the four noble truths is the fourth, the noble eight part path. The process involves creating a clean basis of moral purity, abandoning the pursuit of sensual experiences and unwholesome qualities, developing awareness, and unification of the psyche.

The noble truth of the way that leads to the dissolution of pain is the noble eight-part path:

Right view, right resolution, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right remembrance, right convergence.

Right view is the knowledge of pain, knowledge of the origin of pain, knowledge of the dissolution of pain, knowledge of the way leading to the dissolution of pain.

Right resolution is a resolution of renunciation, non-hostility, and non-cruelty.

Right speech is refraining from lying, divisive speech, coarse speech, and useless chatter.

Right action is refraining from killing living beings, taking what is not given, and wrong sexual behavior.

Right livelihood is abandoning wrong livelihood and supporting his life by right livelihood (MN 141). The full description of the types of livelihood a monastic should avoid includes a long list of activities which involve fortune telling, "animal arts" of reading omens and characteristics of people and nature, predictions about astrology, politics, weather, and mundane things, worldly livelihoods and doing errands for people, black and white magic, blessings, curses, and various forms of healing. (DN 2)

## **Right Effort: Developing the Wholesome and Abandoning the Unwholesome**

Right effort is a monk generating desire, effort, arouses energy, digs deep for will power and strives to keep unarisen unwholesome, bad qualities from arising, to abandon arisen bad and unwholesome qualities, to make unarisen wholesome qualities arise, and to sustain, develop, extend, and fulfill arisen wholesome qualities.

To do this one needs to have a clear understanding of what wholesome and unwholesome qualities are.

The five coarsest forms of unwholesome qualities the Buddha described as obstructions or blockages. He would also often describe specific tools to overcome each of them. (DN 2)

To overcome the obstruction of covetousness, greed, envy, and sensual desire for the world, one is encouraged looking at the unattractive aspects of that which one is infatuated with. There are a number of different tools to either break the object down into its constituent parts, or think about what it will turn into as it dissolves.

Some of the most common reflections are corpse, a skeleton, or breaking things down into the characteristics of earth, liquid, heat, wind, or breaking the body down into its component parts: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pancreas, spleen, lungs, large intestine, small intestine, other inner organs, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, snot, wound seepage, urine. (DN 22)

To overcome the obstruction of hostility, he encouraged developing kindness and sympathy for the well being of all living beings.

To overcome the obstruction of sluggishness and sleepiness, he recommended recognizing light, remembering, and fully aware. He encouraged by uncovering, unwrapping the will, developing radiance in the psyche, as well as remembering and being fully conscious. (AN 7.61)

To overcome the obstruction of agitation and worry, he encouraged a focus on calming one's psyche.

To overcome the obstruction of indecision, he encouraged clarity on what are wholesome and unwholesome qualities.

In addition to these major obstructions, he also listed a longer list of unwholesome qualities such as anger and vindictiveness, being controlling or possessive, being deceitful and deceptive, arrogance and conceitedness, as well as grasping tightly to views and being unable to relinquish them. To deal with these more deeply seated impurities which are more tied to a sense of self and ego, he encouraged the recognition of impermanence (AN 9.3).

The benefit of overcoming these five obstructions and the weakening of the other unwholesome states, is that one is able to develop a state of calm, awareness and remembrance of the path. Because of this calm basis for awareness, it eventually develops into a deep contentment. One deeply content is overcome with joy. For one with a joyful mind, the body relaxes. A relaxed body feels pleasure. For one who feels pleasure, the psyche concentrates. (DN2, AN 11.1)

### **Right Concentration & Calm (Samatha)**

The Buddha described many different tools for creating a wholesome basis for calm: morality (AN 11.1) The four supreme dwellings (SN 46.54), the six recollections of the Awakened One, the Quality, the Order, giving things up, morality, and deities (AN 11.11).

Additionally, one of the most frequent wholesome bases comes from abandoning the five obstructions and reflects on the benefit of being free of them. When someone has abandoned the desire for sensuality and other unwholesome states, one naturally has a sense of deep contentment, From there, the Awakened One describes:

*For one who is deeply content, joy arises.*

*For one with a joyful mind, the body relaxes*

*For one with a relaxed body, one feels pleasure.*

*For one feeling pleasure, the psyche concentrates. (e.g. DN 2)*

These transition naturally into the four focuses (jhānā):

*"A monk separated from sensuality, separated from unwholesome qualities, he lives having entered into the first focus with thought and mental movement, with joy and pleasure born of solitude..."*

*Joy and pleasure born of separation flow through, flow around, fill up, and pervade this very body, with no part of the body left unpervaded with joy and pleasure born of separation...*

*With the calming of thought and mental movement, internally settling down, the will having been set down and unified, he enters into the second focus without thought or mental movement, with joy and pleasure born of convergence...*

*Joy and pleasure born of convergence flow through, flow around, fill up, and pervade this very body, with no part of the body left unpervaded with joy and pleasure born of convergence...*

*With the fading of joy, dwelling in observation, remembering and fully aware, experiencing pleasure throughout the body, that which the noble ones make known "This one is observing, remembering, and dwelling in pleasure." he enters into the third focus.*

*Pleasure without joy flows through, flows around, fills up, and pervades this very body, with no part of the body left unpervaded with pleasure and without joy...*

*With the abandoning of pleasure, and the abandoning of pain, with joy and suffering having previously come to an end, purified through observation and remembering, he enters into the fourth focus without pain or pleasure...*

*He sits having pervaded this very body with a pure and clean psyche, with no part of the body left unpervaded by a pure and clean psyche...“ (DN 2)*

### **Right Remembrance & Discerning (Vipassanā)**

Right remembrance is the piece of the path when one establishes remembrance in the context of four aspects of one's experience.

Right remembrance is described as:

*“A monk lives examining the body within the body, passionate, fully conscious, and remembering having removed covetousness and suffering for the world,*

*Lives examining sensations within sensations, passionate, fully conscious, and remembering having removed covetousness and suffering for the world,*

*Lives examining the psyche within the psyche, passionate, fully conscious, and remembering having removed covetousness and suffering for the world,*

*Lives examining qualities within qualities, passionate, fully conscious, and remembering, having removed covetousness and suffering for the world.” (MN 141)*

The Awakened One on several occasions goes much more in depth about what should be remembered in the context of each of these four experiences. (DN 22)

In the context of the body, he gave many objects for remembering the body in the context of its constituent parts and remembering the impermanence of it and a long list of impressions of a corpse and skeleton in various states of decay after death. Additionally, he included several objects which directed remembering more directly at the postures of the body, the breath, feeling the whole body, and relaxing the merging of the body.

In the context of sensations, he taught monks to remember whether the sensations being experienced were pleasurable, painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful, and whether they were arising because of worldly stimuli or whether they were arising due to spiritual qualities away from the world.

In the context of the psyche, he taught monks to remember whether the psyche was with or without infatuation, with or without hatred, with or without delusion, collapsed or scattered, expanded or not, limited or limitless, converged or not, and freed or not.

The remembrance in the context of qualities which arise is the most complex and profound of the four and have embedded in them the types of remembering and recognition that eventually lead to letting go and liberation.

In addition to understanding the qualities of the obstructions, many times, he went more in depth in describing the nature of one's picking up, taking on, and identifying with different phenomena.

In breaking down each of the aspects of one's experience, understanding their impermanent, changing, painful, and not-self nature, one becomes disenchanted with them. As one becomes disenchanted with them, infatuation fades away, and they dissolve, culminating in ultimate freedom, and in that freedom the knowledge that one won't be born again.

This discerning has two main frameworks. These are repeated many times in the chapters of the Samyutta Nikaya 22 and 35. The most well known of these discourses are the first time the Buddha taught them and are known as the Anattālakkaṇa Sutta (SN 22.59) and the Āditta Pariyāya Sutta (SN 35.28).

The former framework involves looking at the impermanent, painful, not-self nature of each of the five masses or aggregates which are taken on and identified with: the mass of form which is taken on, the mass of sensation which is taken on, the mass of recognition which is taken on, the mass of mergings which are taken on, and the mass of perception which is taken on.

The latter framework involves looking at the impermanent, burning nature of the six internal and external aspects of the six sense fields as well as the perception of those fields, the contact between the three, as well as the sensation which arises due to this contact. The six sense fields are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, mind, the objects of each sense doors, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and qualities, and the perception of each of these sense doors.

Once one establishes the awareness of the impermanent, burning nature of these experiences and the understanding that infatuation, hatred, and delusion are fueling the fire, one becomes disenchanted with them. When one becomes disenchanted, infatuation fades away. With the fading of infatuation one is freed. With the experience of freedom, one knows that one is freed and that this is one's last birth.

### **Right Knowledge**

Often, when the noble eight-part path is presented without the explicit context of the first three noble truths, it is extended to the noble ten-part path, which includes right knowledge and right freedom. When the first eight parts of the path have been developed. Right knowledge is where the first two noble truths are applied and right freedom is when the third noble truth of dissolution is realized. (e.g. MN 117)

One of the most common descriptions of the culmination of the path is described by the penetration of the four noble truths.

*Like this, with a concentrated psyche, fully pure, fully clean, flawless, without any impurities, flexible, malleable, still, motionless, he bends and inclines the psyche toward the knowledge which leads to the wearing away of impulses.*

*He is aware "this is painful," as it actually is,  
is aware "this is the origin of pain" as it actually is,  
is aware "this is the dissolution of pain" as it actually is,  
is aware "this is the way leading to the dissolution of pain" as it actually is,  
is aware "these are impulses" as they actually are,  
is aware "this is the origin of the impulse" as it actually is,  
is aware "this is the dissolution of the impulse" as it actually is,  
is aware this is the way leading to the dissolution of impulses" as it actually is.*

*Knowing that in that way, seeing in that way, the psyche is freed from the impulse to sensuality, is freed from the impulse to exist, is freed from the impulse to ignorance, and in that freedom there is knowledge of freedom,*

*One is aware "Births have run out. The holy life has come to completion. What was to be done has been done. There is no more coming into this world."*

*DN 2*

### **Right Freedom & Extinguishing**

The ultimate purpose of the path is what the Awakened One described as nibbāna, extinguishing, or going out.

*This is peaceful, this is sublime: all mergings have stilled, everything acquired has been completely relinquished, craving has run out, fading away, dissolution, extinguishing.*

*E.g. MN 64 AN 9.36*