

### **Lesson 23 – CONFIDENCE – The Story of Angulimala**

There was once a boy called Ahimsaka, which means “one who does no harm.” But when he grew older, he became violent and did not seem to care about any living beings. He became a well-known robber and murderer in the kingdom of Kosala. When he murdered someone, he cut off one of their fingers and wore it on a necklace of many fingers around his neck, so he was then called Angulimala, which means finger-necklace. The people of the villages and towns in the kingdom heard about him and were frightened. They traveled only in large groups to avoid being murdered.

One morning, the Buddha took his bowl and went to the town of Savatthi to receive food from the villagers. After his meal, he started walking down a road where Angulimala was hiding. As he walked, he passed by several people – shepherds, cowherds, farmers and travelers. Each of them warned him,

“Do not take this road, monk! On this road there is the bandit Angulimala! Men in groups of ten, twenty, thirty and even forty have traveled on this road, and all of them have been killed by Angulimala!”

But the Buddha just continued walking down the road in silence. With his enlightened mind, he could see when someone had a mind that was ready to listen to him and understand his teaching. He knew he could teach Angulimala, and had no fear.

Angulimala saw the Buddha coming in the distance, and he was surprised that a monk would come alone. He thought,

“How wonderful, how marvelous! Men have come along this road in groups of forty, and now this monk comes alone! Seems like this is his destiny. Why not kill this monk, too?”

He buckled his bow and arrows onto his shoulders, grabbed his sword and shield, and started running up to the Buddha. When he got close, Angulimala charged up to him for the attack.

But somehow, Angulimala couldn't get close enough! Buddha was just walking along at a normal pace, and although Angulimala ran as fast as he could, he couldn't run fast enough to reach the Buddha.

Angulimala thought, “I can run and catch up with a galloping elephant and grab it, or a galloping horse or deer. But even though I am going as fast as I can, I can't catch up to this monk who is just walking at a normal pace!”

This was because of the Buddha's supernatural powers. Finally, after running as fast as he could possibly go, panting, sweating and gasping for breath, he called out, “Stop, monk! Stop!”

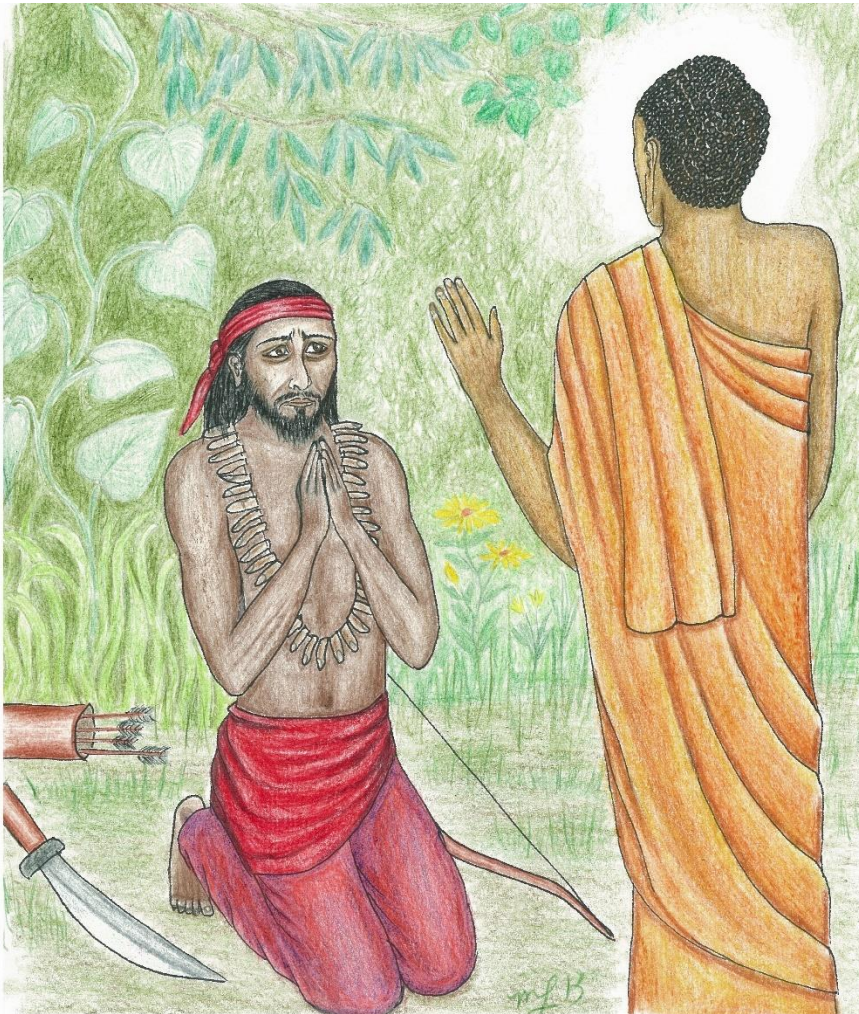
The Buddha said, “I have stopped, Angulimala. You stop also.”

Angulimala was confused. He didn't know what the Buddha meant. He thought, “These Sakya monks are supposed to speak the truth. But this monk is walking, and yet he says he has stopped. What does he mean? Is it truth or a lie? I am going to question him.”

He said, “While you are walking, monk, you tell me you have stopped. But now that I have stopped, you say I have not stopped. Monk, what do you mean by that? How is it that you have stopped and I haven't?”

The Buddha replied, “I have stopped harming any living being. But you have no self-control towards anything. So that is why I have stopped and you have not.”

These few words from the Buddha sunk deep into Angulimala's mind, which suddenly and completely changed him. He said, “Oh finally, a wise man I can respect; this monk has now appeared in this forest. Surely I will give up all evil, hearing your words speaking the Dharma.”



Angulimala threw his weapons on the ground and bowed to the Buddha's feet in devotion. He asked the Buddha to ordain him as a monk.

The Buddha only said, “Come, monk.” And that is how Angulimala became a monk.

The Buddha walked back toward Savatthi with Angulimala walking along with him as his helper, his attendant monk.

When they arrived in Savatthi, they went to a park to stay. At that time, there were big crowds of people gathered at the gate of the palace of the king of Kosala, King Pasenadi. Terribly upset, they were shouting and loudly demanding that the terrible robber and murderer Angulimala be destroyed.

King Pasenadi in his carriage and 500 of his men on horseback left the palace and went to the park where the Buddha was staying. The king got out of the carriage, walked up to the Buddha, bowed and sat near him.

The Buddha asked, "What is wrong, great king? Is the king of Magadha attacking you? Or is it the Licchavis, or some other hostile ruler?"

The king said, "It's not that, lord. A bandit has appeared in my kingdom. He continues to murder people and he wears their fingers as a necklace. I'm never going to succeed in putting him down, my lord."

The Buddha said, "But, great king, if you saw that Angulimala had shaved off his hair and beard, put on a monk's robe, gotten ordained, and followed all of the monks' rules, never killing or stealing, living the holy life, only doing good, would you still do that to him?"

Having great respect for the Buddha's monks, the king said, "We should bow to him, invite him, or ask him to accept offerings of robes, food, lodging and medicine, or we should arrange for his protection, shelter and defense. But lord, he is a criminal who does such evil acts, so how could he have such virtue and self-control?"

Angulimala was sitting not far away. The Buddha reached out his arm, pointed to Angulimala, and said, "There is Angulimala."

The king was so shocked that his hair stood on end. The Buddha noticed his expression of fear and said, "Don't be afraid, great king, don't be afraid. There is nothing to fear."

The king's horror and fear disappeared with the Buddha's calm words. The king walked over to Angulimala and said to him, "Lord, Angulimala was once a noble person, wasn't he?" The king guessed that he must have been a good person earlier in his life, to be able to live as a monk now.

"Yes, great king," Angulimala replied.

The king asked, "What was the name of your father's family? And your mother's family?"

Angulimala responded, "My father's family, great king, was called Gagga. My mother's family was called Mantāni."

The king, respectfully creating a new name for Angulimala as the son of Gagga and Mantāni, said, “Let the noble monk Gagga Mantāniputta allow me to take care of getting your robes, food, lodging and medicine.”

Venerable Angulimala thought that just living in the forest, begging for food, and wearing robes made from rags, as he was doing then, was good enough for him. So, he responded, “There is no need, great king.”

King Pasenadi walked back to the Buddha and said, “It’s is wonderful, lord, it is marvelous how the Buddha trains the untrained, quiets the unquiet, calms the uncalm. One whom we couldn’t control without punishment or weapons the Buddha has controlled without punishment or weapons. And now, lord, we must depart. We are busy and have much to do.” And he bowed respectfully and left.

One morning, Ven. Angulimala went with his bowl to receive food from the people of Savatthi. He went from house to house and stood at the door, waiting for an offering of a bit of food from each. Then he saw that there was a young woman having a baby who was in terrible distress and pain. Feeling deep compassion, he didn’t know what he could do to help. He thought, “What horrible things people must suffer, what pain they suffer!” Afterward, he went to the Buddha and told him what he saw.

The Buddha advised him to go and bless the woman by saying, “Sister, since I was born, I have never purposely taken the life of a living being. By that truth, may you and the child have peace.”

Ven. Angulimala said, “Wouldn’t I be lying? I have purposely taken the lives of so many living beings.”

The Buddha responded, “Then, Angulimala, say to her, “Sister, since I was born with the noble birth I have never purposely taken the life of a living being. By that truth may you and the child have peace.”

The Buddha meant that since Angulimala became a monk, it was as if he was reborn as a monk; he left behind his old life and since that time he never killed any living being.

So, Ven. Angulimala went to the woman and spoke the words the Buddha had advised him to say, blessing her. And the woman and her child were healed, were free of pain and felt very peaceful.

Afterward, Ven Angulimala sat alone, meditating, completely controlling his mind, keeping it free of distraction. His meditation became very deep, he suddenly and directly knew that he would have no more births, that this was his last life, because at that moment he had accomplished the final goal of the holy spiritual life. He had reached enlightenment. He had become an Arahant.

One morning some days later, he went out to receive food from people in the town of Savatthi, and someone threw a big hard clod of dirt and rocks at him. Then another person hit his body with a large stick, and someone else threw a big sharp piece of pottery at his head. They made his head bleed, broke his bowl, and tore his robe. They knew he was a murderer before he became a monk and they were still angry at him. When he returned to where the monks were staying, the Buddha said,

“Take this pain, holy man, take the pain. You are experiencing here and now in this life the results of the acts you did before. Otherwise, you would have experienced the results of your karma for many, many years in hell.”

Later, when Ven. Angulimala was alone, blissfully meditating, he thought,

“One who lived recklessly, but is never again reckless,  
one who did bad deeds but now buries them with good deeds,  
one who as a young monk has devotion to the Buddha’s Dharma,  
he lights up the world like a full moon when the clouds disappear.

Let my enemies hear the Dharma, let them come to the Buddha’s teaching.  
Let them serve the people who practice the Dharma because they are at peace.  
Let my enemies hear the Dharma, and learn about tolerance and kindness.  
Then they would not wish to harm me; they would not try to hurt other beings.  
Let my enemy who guards and protects all beings, attain the ultimate peace.

I was obnoxious in the past, but I am innocent now.  
My name Ahimsaka is now true; I don’t hurt anyone.  
Although I once lived as the robber with the name ‘finger necklace,’  
And was swept along by the big flood of ignorance,  
I went for refuge to the Buddha.  
I have found the refuge that leads to the end of suffering.  
I did so many acts that would have led to births in horrible places,  
Yet the result of those acts I experience now,  
So I need not suffer in the future, because I will have no future births.

Oh people are fools if they are reckless and run after desires;  
But those who diligently meditate to reach the highest bliss.”

### *Questions:*

1. Why couldn’t Angulimala catch up to the Buddha and kill him? (the Buddha used his supernatural power)
2. What was it that the Buddha had stopped but that Angulimala had not stopped? (harming living beings)

3. How did Ven. Angulimala feel in his heart when he saw the woman having a baby? (compassion)
4. Why did people throw things at Ven. Angulimala? (they knew he was a murderer before)
5. Why did Ven. Angulimala have to suffer with people throwing things at him even though he was an Arahant? (it was the result of his bad karma)
6. At the end of the story, what did Ven. Angulimala wish for his enemies? (that they hear the Dharma, serve those who practice Dharma, and attain ultimate peace)

*What the Buddha said:*

**“Yassa pāpam kataṃ kammaṃ, kusalena pithīyathi, so imaṃ lokaṃ pabhāseti, abbhā mutto va candimā.”**

**“He who by good deeds covers the evil he has done, illuminates this world like the moon freed from clouds.”**

Dhammapada 173 (13:7)

*Discussion - Confidence:*

Angulimala made an extremely dramatic change, from a murderer to a monk.

Let's think about why he made that change.

At first, Angulimala thought he was extremely powerful, in that he could take people's lives and terrorize the whole area, having control over so many people.

But then he saw someone with much greater power - the Buddha.

Was Angulimala's mind powerful? No, his mind was weak.

The Buddha pointed out that Angulimala had no self-control.

He had no power over himself.

The Buddha's mind was extremely powerful. He had great wisdom and self-control, and he had no fear.

Angulimala admired that, and had confidence that the Buddha could help him.

He had confidence in the Buddha and his teachings.

But he didn't have much confidence in himself.

When he first saw the woman suffering having her baby, did he try to help her?

No. Although he had compassion for her, he didn't even try to help.

He didn't have any confidence that he could do anything to help her.

He went to the Buddha, who advised him to say something that would heal her.

But he didn't feel confident when he thought about the horrible things he did before.

He only became confident when he thought of himself as a new person, a good person who now follows the Dharma.  
And then without any worries, with complete confidence, he could help and heal the woman and her baby.  
Not only that, what happened when he meditated? He was able to meditate very deeply. So, his confidence helped him to meditate better.

When people attacked Ven. Angulimala, throwing things at him, he seemed to lose his confidence again.  
The Buddha pointed out that it was the result of his past karma,  
But, Ven. Angulimala had already become an Arahant!  
So we see that when a person is kind, compassionate, and pure-minded, what happens to their past negative karma? It doesn't disappear; one still must suffer the results of one's past negative karma.  
So, Angulimala had to suffer pain and humiliation of people hating him and throwing things at him.  
What if he had not become a kind and virtuous person, what would be the results of his negative karmas?  
He would have suffered terribly for a very long time.  
But after he became a virtuous person, what happened to the pain he had to endure? It was much less.

What quality or character trait did Angulimala gain when he met the Buddha, when he followed the Dharma, and when he blessed the woman?  
He gained confidence.  
We learn from this story that even if we have misbehaved, made bad choices, made bad mistakes - even if we have done terrible things - we can have full confidence that following the Dharma can help us be peaceful and happy.

When we make a bad mistake, sometimes guilt can overwhelm us or make us feel depressed, with thoughts of being not good enough, unworthy or a failure.  
Instead, no matter what you did or failed to do, consider it as an opportunity for you to learn.  
Think about how you can do better next time, how you can avoid making the mistake again. And be determined not to do it again.  
Maybe you can help or be especially kind to someone you hurt.  
And you can pray for them.  
Remember that you are a good person, especially because you are aware of your mistakes, and you are learning the Dharma.  
And then let all the bad feelings go.  
Remember Angulimala: if he can rise above his past mistakes, so can we!

*Activity:*

Each student writes the quotation of Buddha on paper. On one half of the paper, each student draws a picture of Angulimala before he met the Buddha, and on the other half, Angulimala after he met the Buddha.