

## **Lesson 23 - CONFIDENCE**

*Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.*

*Question to think about before the story:* Did you ever think, “I’m just a regular person, I don’t think I could ever be a great holy person?”

### ***Story: Angulimala***

A boy called Ahimsaka, which means “one who does no harm,” grew up to be a robber and murderer in the kingdom of Kosala. He was violent and did not seem to care about any living beings. When he murdered someone, he cut off a finger 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 all villages and towns in the area heard about him and were frightened. They traveled only in large groups to avoid being murdered, and avoided going on one certain road where Angulimala was often hiding.

One morning, the Buddha went to the town of Savatthi to receive food, and after his meal, he started walking down that certain road where Angulimala often killed people. Several people saw the Buddha walking on that road, and each one told him not to go on that road because the robber Angulimala is there, and even groups of 40 men have been killed on that road by him. But the Buddha just continued walking on the road in silence.

Angulimala saw the Buddha coming, and he was surprised that a monk would come alone. He thought, “Why not kill this monk, too.” With his sword and bows and arrows, he started running up to the Buddha. Angulimala ran as fast as he could, but he could not run fast enough to reach the Buddha. But the Buddha was walking slowly! Angulimala thought, “I can run and catch an elephant, a horse or a deer, but I cannot catch up to this monk who is just walking!” This was because of the Buddha’s powers.

Finally, after running as fast as he could possibly go, panting, sweating and gasping for breath, while the Buddha only walked, he called out, “Stop, monk! Stop!” The Buddha said, “I have stopped, Angulimala. You stop also.” Angulimala was confused; he did not know what the Buddha meant. He said, “While you are walking, you tell me you have stopped, but when I stop, you say I have not stopped. Monk, what do you mean by that? How can you have stopped and I haven’t?” The Buddha answered, “I have stopped forever doing violence to any living being. But you have no self control toward anything. That is why you have not stopped.”

Angulimala had a sudden change of mind. He said, “Finally, a wise man I can revere, this monk has appeared here in this forest. I will surely give up all evil, hearing him speak the Dharma.” Angulimala threw away his weapons and bowed to the Buddha’s feet, and asked the Buddha to ordain him as a monk.

The Buddha only said, “Come bhikkshu.” And that was how he was ordained. Angulimala became the Buddha’s attendant monk. The people in the towns and villages did not know this, however. They went to King Pasenadi to demand that the terrible robber Angulimala be destroyed. So, King Pasenadi with 500 other men went out on horseback, to try to find and destroy Angulimala. They saw the Buddha, who asked the king what was wrong. The king told the Buddha about the murderer Angulimala with his finger-necklace, and the king’s plan to put an end to him. The Buddha said, “Dear king, if you saw that Angulimala had shaved his head, put on a monk’s robe, gotten ordained, and followed all of the monks’ rules, living the holy life, would you still do that to him?” The king said, “I would bow and treat him properly as a monk, but he is evil, so how could he have such virtue and self-control?” Just then, the Buddha pointed to Angulimala and said, “There is Angulimala.”

The king was shocked. The Buddha said, “Don’t be afraid, there is nothing to fear.” The king said, “Let the noble monk allow me to look after all of his needs.” Ven. Angulimala said he didn’t need anything. King Pasenadi said how wonderful it is that the Buddha could calm and quiet such a person who was so out of control, without any weapons or punishment.

One morning, Ven. Angulimala went with his bowl to receive food, and he saw a woman who was in terrible distress with a deformed child. He thought, “what horrible things people must suffer,” and went to the Buddha and told him what he saw. The Buddha told him to go and say to that woman, “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, “Bhante, wouldn’t I be lying? I purposely took the lives of many living beings.” The Buddha said, “Tell her that since you were born with the noble birth you have never purposely taken the life of a living being.” So, Ven. Angulimala went to the woman and said, “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 your child have peace.” And the woman and her child felt very peaceful from that time onward. Ven Angulimala sat alone, meditating, completely controlling his mind, and then realized Truth. He knew that he would have no more births and he became an Arahant.

One day, he went out to receive food, and people threw rocks and sticks at him, making his head bleed, his bowl broken, and his robes torn. When he got back, the Buddha said, “You must take this pain. You are experiencing the results of the acts you did before. You could have experienced the results of your karma for many, many years in hell.”

When Ven. Angulimala was alone, 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. Let my enemies hear the Dharma, let them serve the people who serve the Dharma because they are at peace. Let my enemies hear about forbearance and kindness. Then they would not wish to harm me, they

would not want to hurt other beings but would guard and protect them. So let my enemies attain 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 was the robber Angulimala, I went for refuge to the Buddha. I did so many acts that would have led to births in horrible places, but I now will have no more births. Don't be reckless and run after desires; that is foolish. But diligently meditate to reach the highest bliss."

*Questions after the story:*

1. Why was the Buddha not afraid of Angulimala?
2. Why couldn't Angulimala run up to the Buddha and kill him?
3. What did the Buddha mean when he said that he has stopped and told Angulimala to stop, but the Buddha was walking and Angulimala had already stopped running?
4. Why did Angulimala throw his weapons away and want to be ordained?
5. What happened when King Pasenadi saw Angulimala as a monk?
6. What did the Buddha tell Ven. Angulimala to say to the woman with her child?
7. Why did people throw rocks and sticks at Ven Angulimala?
8. How did the Buddha explain the pain Ven. Angulimala had to suffer?
9. What did Ven. Angulimala wish for his enemies?

*Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:*

**"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)

*Application of the moral(s) in the story to our daily lives:*

What do you think made Angulimala change from a robber and murderer to a monk? He had confidence in the Buddha. He saw that the Buddha's power from not harming any living beings was much greater and stronger than Angulimala's own physical strength and evil power over others. He realized that he was out of control - he did not have self-control, so his mind was weak. The Buddha had no fear, he did not hate Angulimala, and the Buddha had great wisdom and self-control. Angulimala admired that, and had confidence that the Buddha could help him.

Why did the Buddha advise Angulimala to tell the woman that he has never taken the life of any being since he was born with the noble birth, and that by the truth of those words, may she have peace? Maybe Angulimala would be worried and guilty about his terrible past and therefore wouldn't be brave enough to say those words. He had to admit that since his *birth*, he had taken many lives. But since his *noble birth* - his birth from a man to a monk - he has never taken a life. He has done only good deeds since then. So, by saying those words, he would realize that he is a new person, a good person, not the person he was in the past. So

without any worry, with complete confidence, he could bless the woman and bring peace to her.

But, Ven. Angulimala also had to realize that past karma does not disappear when a person becomes good. He must suffer the results of it. So, he had to suffer the pain and embarrassment of people throwing things at him in disgust. If he had not done good deeds (punyakarma) and become a pure person, he would have gone to hell for a very long time for his misbehavior. But because he became very pure, he had to endure much less pain resulting from his past karma.

So, what did Angulimala gain when he met the Buddha, and again when he blessed the woman? He gained confidence: confidence that the Buddha's teaching could help him, and confidence that he had a new life as a good person following Dharma. So, he had great confidence in the Dharma. We can see from this story that even if we have misbehaved, we can have confidence that following the Dharma can turn us around to be absolutely good, peaceful and happy. We should never give up on ourselves; we should not feel that we can never live a holy life. If Angulimala can do it, so can we!

But that means we must be diligent - keep trying - to avoid all evil, do good deeds, and cleanse our mind, as the Buddha has said. How do we avoid all evil? We *notice* when we do wrong acts, say angry words, and have bad thoughts, and stop them. We stay away from bad influences - misbehaved people, violent TV, and places where people are likely to misbehave. How do we do good deeds and cleanse our mind? We have virtuous friends, we keep busy with good actions, we read wholesome books, we learn and practice Dharma. If we do these things, we can have confidence, like Angulimala, that we will be happy and peaceful with a good "bright" future, like the moon coming out from the clouds.

*Activity to reinforce the lesson:*

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.

*Closing chant:* Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā  
May all beings have happy minds!

Like Ven. Angulimala, we can wish that those people who have hurt us will hear the Dharma and become peaceful, and not want to harm us or anyone anymore. May they have happy minds also!