

Angulimala meets the Buddha



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One hot day, the Buddha set off as usual to collect gifts of food from a nearby village. But as he approached the village, he realised that something was wrong. There was silence and the streets were deserted.

“What is going on?” he wondered.
“Where is everyone?”

The Buddha carried on towards the nearby city to see if he could find out what had happened. The road to the city was full of people hurrying past him.

“Why is everyone in such a rush?” asked the Buddha.

“It’s that terrible robber, Angulimala,” said a woman. “He’s roaming the countryside around here. Even the King and his soldiers are afraid to try and catch him! We’re going to the city for safety.”

“Who is this robber, Angulimala, who makes everyone so afraid and unhappy?” wondered the Buddha. “I must go and meet him.”

Meanwhile, Angulimala was sitting outside his den, planning the day’s work. He was a fierce-looking character. He had huge, wild, staring eyes, and his face was

covered in scars. Around his neck was the terrible necklace of fingers which had given him his name. So far there were ninety-nine fingers, chopped off the hands of the people he had robbed.

“One more finger and my necklace will be complete!” he gloated. “I wonder who will be my next victim.”

At that moment, the Buddha appeared, walking slowly and calmly.

“How dare he walk past my den?” thought Angulimala. “I’ll have one of his fingers to finish my necklace! That will teach him a lesson.”

Down he jumped and began to run after the Buddha. But, run as he might, he couldn’t catch up with him.

“Stop!” shouted Angulimala. “Stand still!”

The Buddha turned and looked Angulimala in the eye.

“I have stopped; I am still, Angulimala. It’s you who needs to stop.”

“Don’t try to fool me!” shouted Angulimala, waving his sword. “I could see you were moving.”

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“Ah,” said the Buddha. “But I meant something else.”

“Something else?” roared Angulimala, getting angry.

“I have stopped,” repeated the Buddha. “I am still, because I never harm, I never kill. You can’t stop; you’ll never be still, as long as you harm, as long as you kill.”

No one had ever spoken to Angulimala like this before. He began to get a bit worried. This man clearly wasn’t afraid of him. He became even more furious.

“Don’t you know who I am?” he screamed. “I am Angulimala, the robber with the necklace of fingers. I am the terrible adventurer.”

“What you need, my friend, is a real adventure,” replied the Buddha.

“‘Friend?’” asked Angulimala. “Did you say ‘friend?’”

Angulimala was very surprised. No one had called him “friend” for a very long time. In fact, he didn’t have any friends. Everyone was afraid of him. He remembered how, when he was little, he used to have friends. Then he had started to bully the smaller boys and girls until, in the end, no one wanted to be his friend. Then things had got worse and he had begun to steal from people’s houses. Now he was the terrible robber from whom everyone ran away.

“What have I been doing?” he exclaimed. “No wonder no one wants to be my friend.”

“Angulimala,” asked the Buddha kindly, “why don’t you come and live with me and my friends? If you were very brave you could make a fresh start. Now that would be a real adventure!”

Angulimala walked to the edge of the cliff and threw his sword and shield over.

“Are you sure this will be an adventure?” he asked.

“Oh yes,” replied the Buddha. “The greatest adventure of your life!”

That night, Angulimala stayed with the Buddha and his friends under the stars. These people were kind. They shared their food and talked to him. No one was afraid. Perhaps he could be different, he thought. Deep down, he was tired of his old life; all that robbing and hurting other people had never really made him feel happy. Although he knew it might be difficult to change, he decided to stay with the Buddha and his new-found friends.

In the morning, he threw away his terrible necklace of fingers. Then he cut off his long hair and beard and put on the same simple robes that the others wore. He was already feeling better.

One morning a week or two later, as Angulimala sat talking with the Buddha, the king suddenly appeared in the clearing.

“Good morning, your majesty,” said the Buddha, smiling. “Where are your guards and attendants? Have you come alone?”

“I didn’t want to bring them with me,” answered the king. “It might have attracted the attention of that robber, Angulimala. My people are terrified of him; even my soldiers refuse to go and search for him. What am I to do? It can’t go on like this!”

“What would you say if I told you that Angulimala was no longer a robber?” asked the Buddha.

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The king smiled. "I wouldn't believe it," he said. "That cut-throat!"

"That cut-throat", said the Buddha, "is now as kind and gentle as any of my followers..."

"Impossible!" interrupted the king.

"...and he's sitting next to you!" continued the Buddha.

The king turned to look at Angulimala, who sat looking at him, smiling.

"You? Angulimala?" exclaimed the king, jumping up.

"Have no fear," said the Buddha.

"Angulimala is now a changed man."

The king smiled nervously. "I'm very pleased. What a relief! You're going to stay with the Buddha? Good, good ... I must go now - such a busy day ahead."

The king hastily said goodbye and hurried away as quickly as possible.

The Buddha smiled at Angulimala, who smiled back. Then he got up and went off to help his new friends collect their food for the day.