

11

Aṅgulimāla Sutta

The Discourse on Aṅgulimāla | M 86

Theme: The healing of a serial killer

Translated with notes by Piya Tan ©2003, 2021

1 The Aṅgulimāla story

1.0 TEXTUAL SOURCES

1.0.1 PALI SOURCES

Aṅgulimāla Sutta	M 86/2:97-105
Samyutta Nikāya	S *119-120¹ [§30+31]
Dhammapada	Dh 26+27 [§§30+31], 40 = 145 [§24], 80 [§24], 172 [§19], 173 [§19], 382 [§20]
Thera,gāthā	Aṅgulimāla Thera,gāthā 866-870 [§§6.1-6.5], 871-886 [§§17-879].² Tha 9 [§33³], 119 [§24⁴]
Vinaya	Cv 7.3.12 [§25⁵]
Aṅgulimālatthera- t,thera Vatthu	DhA 13.6 [E W Burlingame (tr), <i>Buddhist Legends</i>, 1921 3:6-14]
Asadisa,dāna Vatthu	DhA 13.10/3:183-189 (Dh 442; 177)⁶

1.0.2 Chinese translations

雜阿含 <i>zá āhán</i>	SĀ 1077/T2.99.280c18	Samyukta Āgama (T99)
別譯雜阿含 <i>biéyì zá āhán</i>	SĀ2 16/T2.100.378b17	Samyukta Āgama 2 (T100)
佛說耇掘摩經 <i>fó shuō yāngjuémó jīng</i>	T2.118.508b20	
耇掘髻經 <i>yāngjuéjì jīng</i>	T2.119.510b17	
耇掘魔羅經 <i>yāng jué mó luó jīng</i>	T2.120.512b08	
增壹阿含 <i>zēng yī āhán</i> (38.6)	T2.125.719b20	
賢愚經 卷第十一 <i>xián yú jīng juàn dì shíyī</i>	T4.202.423b06	The foolish and the wise sutra. Scroll 11
出曜經, 雜品第十七 <i>chū yào jīng zá pǐn dì shíqī</i>	T4.212.703a25	Beyond glorious sutra. Miscellaneous ch 17

¹ S *119-120 (S 1:25) are verses uttered by deities (*devatā*) of the Satullapa host [SD 42.6 (1)]. See Dh:N 68 nn27+28.

² On Tha 887-891, see (3.2.3.2).

³ §33 is the last of Pilindavaccha's verses (Tha 9). Parallels SĀ 1077/T2.281b6; SĀ2 16/T2.721b7; EĀ 38.6/T2,721-b8; T118/T2.510a15; T119/T2.512a9. §33+34, on Aṅgulimāla's asseveration that he has made a welcome choice, are not found in the Chin versions. A stanza similar to §33 is found in Saṅghabhedavastu (Gnoli 1977: 156.7): *svāga-taṃ te vyavusitaṃ, naitad duścintitaṃ tvāya, pravibhakteṣu dharmeṣu, yac chreṣṭhaṃ tad upāgama*, spoken by the Buddha.

⁴ §25 recurs as Dh 80, 145; Tha 19, 877; parallels in T210/T4.564a9, T212/T4.707c27, T213/T4785c22; Skt + Tib Uv 17.10 (Bernhard 1965:236, cf 214 in Nakatani 1987:50; Beckh 1911:57, Zongtse 1900:176).

⁵ At Cv 7.3.12 (V 2:196,3), the verse recurs in the context of the Buddha's taming of the drunken elephant Nālā-giri. This further reflects the theme of self-taming of this verse. The last line is different in the Vinaya verse: At V 2:196,2, this line reads: "a noble elephant tamed by the great seer" (*nago danto mahesinā'ti*). For Chin parallels, see SĀ 1077/T2.281b7; SĀ2 16/T2.379a9; EĀ 38.6/T2.721b13; T118/T2.510a22 (without refs to crafts); T119/2:512a18.

⁶ A rogue elephant is made to stand with a white parasol before the elder Aṅgulimāla, and it does so docilely, out of fear for the elder, nor does the elder fear the rogue elephant. (DhA3:186 f)

1.0.3 Sanskrit and Tibetan sources

Enomoto (Eno) 1077 ⁷	<i>A Comprehensive Study of the Chinese Saṃyuktāgama</i> , 1994
SHT 1:160	Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden, Wiesbaden, 1965
Uv 16.5-10, 17.10	Udāna,varga
MSV 4:56	MūlaSarvāstivāda Vinaya 4:56 (Nāther 48)
Eno 101	J-U Hartmann, “Sanskrit Fragments from the Āgamas (I), The Aṅgulimalasūtra,” <i>Indologica Taurinensia</i> 23/24 1998:351-362.
Derge 213	‘phags pa sor mo’l phreng ba la phan pa zhes by ba theg pa chen po’l mdo. Cf Derge Dulva 1:36b. Cf Peking 879

1.1 The story of Aṅgulimāla took place during the 20th year of the Buddha’s ministry.⁸ Aṅgulimāla’s life story is found in the Majjhima Commentary (MA 3:304-319), the Dhammapada Commentary (DhA 3:169 f) and the Thera,gāthā Commentary (ThaA 3:54-64). For an internal clue of the historical time of his story, see §9.2 of the Sutta. All these sources differ in some details, but they agree on the narrative drift of Aṅgulimāla’s story, which is summarized below.⁹

1.2 AṅGULI,MĀLA AND HIS YOUTH

1.2.1 The name “Aṅgulimāla”

Aṅgulimāla is not a proper name but an epithet meaning “finger (*aṅguli*) garland (*mālā*)”—it is said that at the height of his infamous career, the bandit Aṅgulimāla wore a bloody garland of human fingers around his neck as he went around on a killing rampage.

He was the son of the brahmin **Bhaggava**, chaplain to Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, and the brahminnee **Mantāṇī**. At his birth, based on their astrological beliefs, they were warned that the child, born under the constellation of thieves, would be a murderous robber. The concerned parents named their child, **Ahimsaka**, meaning “the non-violent one,”¹⁰ hoping to thus reverse his fate.

1.2.2 The student Ahimsaka

1.2.2.1 The adolescent Ahimsaka was sent to be schooled in an ashram in Takkaśilā,¹¹ where, through his diligence, he became his teacher’s favourite pupil. His colleagues, jealous of his position, gossiped to

⁷ Fumio Enomoto 榎本文雄. *A Comprehensive Study of the Chinese Saṃyuktāgama: Indic texts corresponding to the Chinese Saṃyuktāgama as found in the Sarvāstivāda-Mūlasarvāstivāda literature*. Kyoto: Kacho Junior College. 1994. Numbers refer to Skt fragments.

⁸ AA 2:125; Jina,kāla,mālī 29-35; cf BA 3.

⁹ For a discussion on the versions of and variations in Aṅgulimāla’s stories, see Analayo’s *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya*, 2011:485-502.

¹⁰ ThaA says that he was initially called Himsaka (“the violent one”), but later named Ahimsaka (“the non-violent one”) (ThaA 3:55). See Tha:RD 323 n3.

¹¹ Takka,śilā (lit “stones that think: or “logic stones”) but the Skt name is Takṣa,śilā. It was the ancient capital of the kingdom of Gandhara (see **Assalāyana S** (M 93) @ SD 40a.2 (3.3.2)). Historically, Taxila lay at the crossroads of three major trade routes: the royal highway from Pāṭaliputra; the north-western route through Bactria, Kāpiśa, and Puṣkalāvātī (Peshawar); and the route from Kashmir and Central Asia, via Śrinigar, Mansehra, and the Haripur valley across the Khunjerab pass to the Silk Road (see R Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, 1961:237). The ancient Takkaśilā University boasted over 60 distinct arts and sciences taught by great masters, assisted by abler pupils, from at least the 7th century BCE until about mid-3rd century CE. Today it is called Taxila, located about 14 km (22 mi) NW of Rawalpindi, Pakistan. According to **Tela,pattā Jātaka** (J 96) and **Susīma Jātaka** (J 163), Takkaśilā is “2000 leagues’ (about 22,500 km or 14,000 mi!) from Benares (near where the Buddha taught the first discourse). As the crow flies,

their teacher that he was having an affair with the teacher's wife [1.2.2.2]. The foolish gullible teacher, intent on ruining Ahimsaka, but fearing a public outcry against punishing such an exemplary student, plotted a devious plan to destroy him. He demanded of Ahimsaka *a thousand human right-hand fingers* as an honorarium (*dakkhiṇā*). [1.2.2.2]

Unwillingly and unhappily, Ahimsaka went on to fulfill his teacher's instruction. Thereupon, he way-laid travellers in the Jālinī forest¹² of Kosala and having killed them, took a right-hand finger from each of them. In order to keep a proper tag on the fingers, he strung them up into a garland and hung it around his neck. Hence, his name, Aṅgulimāla ("finger garland").

1.2.2.2 A Chinese individual translation (T118) gives an interesting account of Aṅgulimāla's fall from grace with his teacher. It is said that he was an extraordinary intelligent and handsome brahmin youth. His teacher's wife fell in love with him and tried to seduce him. Being a person of moral goodness, he rejected her advances.

The spurned woman lied to her husband that Aṅgulimāla had tried to force himself on her. Fearing Aṅgulimāla's strength, the teacher did not dare punish him directly. Instead, he hatched a devious but dastardly plot by demanding his teacher's fee (*dakkhiṇa*) of a hundred (100) fingers, one from each victim within a single day. The idea was that this would lead to Aṅgulimāla being reborn in hell.¹³

1.2.3 The bandit Aṅgulimāla

As a result of his serial killing, whole villages outside the forest were deserted, and travellers avoided it. In due course, king Pasenadi was setting out with a troop of soldiers to capture the bandit whose name nobody knew—that is, except for his mother. Guessing the truth, she set out to warn him. By then, Aṅgulimāla lacked but one finger to complete his dreadful garland. At this feverish juncture, he was ready to kill even his own mother to complete his bloody task.

That very same morning, the Buddha, seeing Aṅgulimāla's readiness (*upanissaya*) for conversion, and also to prevent him from the heinous misdeed of killing his own mother, went to meet him in the forest some 30 yojanas (about 338 km = 210 mi) away. So in the 20th year of the Buddha's ministry, Aṅgulimāla was converted and became a monk by the *ehi bhikkhu* ("Come, O monk!") ordination,¹⁴ while the populace was shouting for the bandit's end at the rajah's palace.¹⁵ [§8]

1.2.4 The monk Aṅgulimāla

1.2.4.1 Later, when the rajah met the Buddha in Jetavana, he presented the monk Aṅgulimāla to the rajah. Having overcome his initial shock, the rajah was filled with wonder and offered to provide Aṅguli-

the actual distance is about 1609 km or 1000 mi. See B C Law, *Geography of Early Buddhism* (2nd ed) 1932: 4, 50, 49 f, 52; DPPN: Takkasilā; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxila>.

¹² ThaA 3:55.

¹³ T118/T2.508c19+23.

¹⁴ §6 = Tha 870. Vinaya Comy gives the full list of ehi-bhikkhus: the 5 monks, Yasa, his 54 friends, the 30 youths, the 1,000 matted hair ascetics (*purāṇa jaṭila*), the 2 foremost monks (Sāriputta & Moggallāna), their 250 wanderer followers, and Aṅgulimāla (totaling 1343 monks, according to the Commentary). Other ehi bhikkhus, says Buddhaghosa (*evam ādāyo*), are Sela and his 300 attendants [M 2:112 = Sn p112], Mahā Kappina and his 1000 attendants [SA 2:245 f; AA 1:322; DhA 2:124; SnA 2:440; cf Vism 393], 10,000 Kapilavatthu youths [VA 1:241], and 16,000 *pārāyanika* brahmins (Bāvāri's 16 disciples and their followers) [Sn 976-1149; SnA 2:575] (VA 1:240 f).

¹⁵ Tha 868-870.

māla with all the monk's requisites. Aṅgulimāla, however, having taken up the austere practice (*dhutāṅga*),¹⁶ turned down his offer.

1.2.4.2 Once, when Aṅgulimāla was in Sāvattihī seeking alms, a group of people recognized and attacked him, physically wounding him. On the Buddha's advice, he endured their wrath to let his karma run its course. According to the Dhammapada Commentary, Aṅgulimāla died soon after (DhA 3:169). By then, he was already an arhat.

2 Aṅgulimāla's significance

2.1 AṅGULIMĀLA'S POPULARITY

There is a popular story about Aṅgulimāla's meeting with a woman in difficult labour. Out of his compassion, he consults the Buddha on how to help her. Following the Buddha's instructions, Aṅgulimāla performs an "act of truth" (*sacca, kiriyā*) and the woman then undergoes an easy delivery. His verse is even today a popular mantra used for expectant women and women in labour [§15]. It should be noted however that his compassionate act is done before he is an arhat. He is probably still a streamwinner. He attains arhathood following this event [§16].

The Aṅgulimāla story (as found in the Aṅgulimāla Sutta) appears to be popular and is also preserved in the **Avadāna Śataka** (no 27) and other Sanskrit sources.¹⁷ Aṅgulimāla's conversion is often regarded as a most compassionate and miraculous act of the Buddha, for example, in the Suta, soma Jātaka (J 537), which was told in this connection.¹⁸ His story is an example of how good karma can overcome former bad karma (AA 2:218).

It was on Aṅgulimāla's account that the Vinaya rule prohibiting the ordination of captured robbers was made.¹⁹ His Elder's Verses are found at **Theragāthā** verses 866-891.

2.2 AṅGULIMĀLA'S CONVERSION

2.2.1 Once inside the forest to meet Aṅgulimāla, the Buddha could well have stood and waited for him; for, Aṅgulimāla is well acquainted with every part of it. Once he sees the Buddha, he decides to attack him. But no matter how hard he tries, the Buddha is always some distance ahead. Legend has it that the Buddha makes the earth turn around²⁰ so that Aṅgulimāla is always behind the Buddha no matter how fast he runs (MA 3:332).

¹⁶ "Austere practices," *dhutāṅga*. There 13 such austere observances: 1. wearing patched-up robes of discarded pieces of cloth or rags (*paṃsukūlik'āṅga*); 2. keeping only the three robes (*te, cīvarik'āṅga*); 3. going for alms (*piṇḍa-pātik'āṅga*); 4. not omitting any house when going on an alms-round (*sapadānik'āṅga*); 5. eating at one sitting (*ek'āsānik'āṅga*); 6. eating only from the bowl (*patta, piṇḍik'āṅga*); 7. refusing all further food (*khalu, pacchā, bhattik'āṅga*); 8. living in the forest (*araññik'āṅga*); 9. living under a tree (*rukkha, mūlik'āṅga*); 10. living in the open air (*abbhokāsik'āṅga*); 11. living in a cemetery (*susānik'āṅga*); 12. being satisfied with whatever dwelling (*yathā, santhatik'āṅga*); 13. sleeping in a sitting position, ie, never lying down (*nesajjik'āṅga*) (M 5,9/1:30, 113.9-20/3:39-42; A 5.181-190/3:219 f). These 13 items are all found in the Suttas but not all together in one place. See Vism ch 2 & also **Bakkula S** (M 124), SD 3.15 Intro.

¹⁷ For refs to Skt sources of Aṅgulimāla, see Hartmann 1997-98.

¹⁸ J 5:456 f; also J 4:180; SnA 2:240; DhA 1:124.

¹⁹ V 1:74, cf V:H 4:93 n1 ad loc.

²⁰ Another occasion when the Buddha made the earth "turn" thus is when **Ānanda** stands right in front of the Buddha to prevent the intoxicated elephant Nālāgiri from trampling the Buddha. Ānanda remains where he is despite the Buddha forbidding him thrice. The Buddha "makes the earth turn around" to get Ānanda out of the way (J 533/5:335 f; DhA 1.12/1:140 f).

Finally, like Kisā Gotamī at the end of her *Sisyphian walk*,²¹ Aṅgulimāla, after failing to catch up with the Buddha, at the end of his **Sisyphian run**, tires and stops [§5]. His will is broken; the old self weakened. Almost in desperation, he calls out to the Buddha to stop. The Buddha replies with the ego-shattering words, “I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla! You stop, too!”

Fascinated by the vaguely familiar words, Aṅgulimāla asks the Buddha to explain them, the Buddha does so. Before this, Aṅgulimāla is still under the spell of his foolish guru in the dark depths of his mind. The Buddha’s instruction effectively frees him from the guru’s ghost. He is now free to be his true self, a true individual, a liberated being. [§6]

2.2.2 The spiritual significance of Aṅgulimāla’s conversion is in no way diminished—indeed even enhanced—without the miraculous aspects, as noted by the German scholar monk, **Analayo**:

In fact, one might even imagine the whole scene without any magical feat, since the Buddha’s refusal to obey the brigand’s obey to stand still, and his fearless rebuttal, “I have stopped, you stop too!”, would fit in well at such a juncture and be sufficient to account for the subsequent denouement of events. (Analayo, 2008: 143)

Analayo admits that “[t]hough the miracle might have been introduced into the account of Aṅgulimāla’s conversion at a time early enough to be present in all versions, this remains evidently hypothetical, given all versions state that a miracle took place.” (id). However, he adds an interesting and important note: All the versions agree that what really change Aṅgulimāla are the words spoken by the Buddha:

since after the miracle he just commands the Buddha to stop, whereas after the words spoken by the Buddha he throws away his weapons and asks to be accepted as a monk. Moreover, after the magical feat, Aṅgulimāla still addresses the Buddha as “recluse,”²² a mode of address used in the early discourses by outsiders that have no particular relation to or confidence in the Buddha. After the words spoken by the Buddha, however, a change of attitude takes place, as he refers to the Buddha as “Sage,” “Blessed One” or “Venerable One.”²³ These epithets express Aṅgulimāla’s appreciation of the wisdom underlying the Buddha’s explanation and probably also his respect for the Buddha’s fearless response when commanded to stand still by an armed brigand.²⁴ (Analayo 2008: 143 f)

2.2.3 A vital theme that runs through all versions of the Kisā Gotamī story is her *walk* in search of a handful of mustard seeds that would revive her dead son. This action represents a spiritual movement away from her old suffering self towards a new liberated self. We see a similar movement in the Buddha’s conversion of Aṅgulimāla, where he *runs* after the Buddha to kill him, but he could not catch up with the Buddha until he *calls* out to the Buddha. The ensuing dialogue marks the spiritual turning-point in Aṅgulimāla’s life.²⁵

²¹ See **Kisā Gotamī**, SD 43.2.

²² W Stede, “Aṅgulimāla and liberation,” BSOAS 20, 1957: 34, however, feels that “there can be little doubt that the account is true and that the miracle actually happened.”

²³ 沙門 *shā mén* throughout: SĀ 1077/T2.280c29; SĀ2 16/T2.378b27; M 86/2:99,17 and Tha 866: *samaṇa*; T118/T2.-509b2; T119/T2.510c26; EĀ 38.6/T2.720a18; T212/T4.703c15. N Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha*, Bombay, 1966:56 explains that the use of the address *samaṇa* here “denotes a certain indifference.” (Analayo’s n, normalized)

²⁴ SĀ 1077/T2.281a16: “sage,” 牟尼 *móu ní*; SĀ2 16/T2. 378c15: “such a man,” 如此人 *rǔ cǐ rén* and “blessed one,” 婆伽婆 *pó jiā pó*; M 86/2:100,1 and Tha 868: “great sage,” *mahēsi*; T118/T2.509b13: “great sage,” 大聖 *dà shèng*; EĀ 38.6/T2.720b16: “venerable one,” 尊 *zūn*; T212/T4.704a6: “great sage,” 大聖 *dà shèng*. (Analayo’s fn, normalized).

²⁵ **Aṅgulimāla S** (M 86,5/2:98 f), SD 5.11.

Elizabeth Harris aptly describes Aṅgulimāla's transformation upon hearing the Buddha's words, thus: "Aṅgulimāla is forced into the realization that his life has been a futile chase, a fretful searching, without peace and fulfilment. The tranquillity of the Buddha contrasts sharply with his own turbulence and the destructive state of his mind. The contrasts make him see the nature of his mind. A revolution—in its true sense of a complete turning around—takes place." (1990:36)

3 Difficult passages

3.1 Pasenadi's attempts to subdue Aṅgulimāla

3.1.1 Pasenadi consults the Buddha

3.1.1.1 The Sutta tells us that Pasenadi has some 500 horsemen with him [§9], surely more than enough men to capture a single bandit. Even then, the Commentary, dramatically impresses on us that the rajah is still uncertain of his ability to capture Aṅgulimāla. It explains that the rajah, fearful of confronting Aṅgulimāla, visits the Buddha first to find out if he would succeed in capturing him. Should the Buddha warn him against it, he would take it that Aṅgulimāla will defeat him; then, he has good reason for aborting his mission. (MA 3:335,1-16)

3.1.1.2 The Chinese Udāna, *varga*, however, gives its version of this episode: king Pasenadi has heard that Aṅgulimāla has already become a monk. The rajah thus visits the Buddha to ascertain this.²⁶ However, according to the Sutta, Ekottarika Āgama versions, and an individual Chinese translation,²⁷ it is the Buddha who tells the rajah that Aṅgulimāla has become a monk and is sitting close by [§13]. All the versions we have tell us that the rajah is terrified on seeing Aṅgulimāla sitting close nearby.

The rajah's fear is natural and understandable. He is all alone with the Buddha, and if his soldiers were present, too, they would be without their arms. He is confronted by the very bandit that he wants to hunt down. Moreover, as is customary, even kings, when approaching the Buddha, would put aside their royal emblems (sword, parasol, diadem, sandals and whisk).²⁸ In fact, this respectful gesture, even protocol, is actually mentioned in **the Dhamma, cetiya Sutta** (M 89) and various other non-Pali textual sources.²⁹

3.1.2 What Pasenadi says about his mission

3.1.2.1 The Pali readings of the Aṅgulimāla Sutta (M 86) gives us 2 versions of the rajah Pasenadi's effort to capture the bandit. After the populace complained to the king about the bandit Aṅgulimāla, the rajah Pasenadi set out with some 500 horsemen (*assa*, §9). The Pali manuscripts give us 2 accounts of the king's sentiment when he meets the Buddha [§10.2]:

Ee	<i>nāhaṃ bhante paṭisedhissāmīti.</i>	"Bhante, I am unable to stop him!"	[3.1.2.2]
Be Ce Se	<i>tāhaṃ bhante paṭisedhissāmīti</i>	"Bhante, I will stop him!"	[3.1.2.3]

²⁶ T212/T4.704b7.

²⁷ EĀ 38.6/T2.720c14 and T119/T2.511b9 add that Aṅgulimāla is seated.

²⁸ On the rajah's insignia (*[añca.kakudha]*): SD 16.15 (2.2).

²⁹ The Chin version of M 89: MĀ 213/T1.795c12; T119/T2.511a27; T1451/24.237a27; D (6) 'dul va, tha 82b7 or Q (1035) de 79b5.

3.1.2.2 The future tense verb, *paṭisedhissāmi*, can apply in either case. The Burmese, Sinhala and Siamese readings has *tāham* = *ta* (“him”) + *aham* (“I,” ie, the king) “will stop him,” while the European (PTS) edition reads *nāham* = *na* (“not”) + *aham*, thus reading, literally, “I will not be able to stop him.”

This is a special usage of the future tense, which is found in a number of other interesting situation where we cannot simply render it in the future tense. In other words, it has an idiomatic usage that is polite or reflects uncertainty (often both), as in the case of the brahmin Doṇa when he sees the Buddha’s footprint, as recorded in **the (Catukka) Doṇa Sutta** (A 4.36).³⁰

Here, in **the Aṅgulimāla Sutta** (M 86), rajah Pasenadi fears Aṅgulimāla and is uncertain whether he will be able to capture or kill the bandit. Pasenadi’s fear is reflected both in his visiting and consulting the Buddha before setting out on his mission, and how reaction of terror when he realizes that he is in the presence of Aṅgulimāla. Hence, clearly, he would have honestly confided in the Buddha’s of his fears.³¹ Under such circumstances, Pasenadi would have told the Buddha: “I’m unable to stop him!” or “I will not be able to stop him!”

3.1.2.3 However, considering that Pasenadi has some 500 horsemen with him, all presumably well armed, he should be well and ready to set out on his mission. It is his habit of seeing the Buddha first before going on such a dangerous mission. After all, as a rajah, it is his task—especially with the populace terrified and seeking his intervention—to keep the public peace. Otherwise, we may lose his mandate or charisma of power. Indeed, after he has captured the bandit, his popularity would increase all the more. Hence, he would confidently tell the Buddha, “I will stop him!”

However, considering the big picture, which is ridden with life-and-death uncertainties, Pasenadi would certain be of two minds. The amplified translation simply reflects his two minds.

3.2 AṅGULIMĀLA’S ATTAINMENT OF THE PATH

3.2.1 Aṅgulimāla’s streamwinning

3.2.1.1 The climax of the Aṅgulimāla story in his 1st encounter with the Buddha is, of course, his breakthrough into **streamwinning** after listening and understanding the Buddha’s remarkable riposte of the reality of the moment. Aṅgulimāla has reached a point in his killing career when he only needs 1 one finger to complete his macabre garland of 1,000 shrivelled fingers.

Although he is ready to easily kill his own defenceless mother who is now approaching him in the forest, it is even easier to kill a harmless monk, that is, the Buddha, who is unrelated to him. Anyway, the Buddha intercedes so that Aṅgulimāla will not intentionally commit matricide which will prevent him from reaching the path in this life itself.

3.2.1.2 §5 highlights Aṅgulimāla’s **running after the Buddha**. Despite the best of his physical efforts and stamina—he was able to catch up with any swift running beast and seize it (presumably, to kill it for food) [§5.2]—yet, he is simply unable to reach the Buddha who seems to be walking in a mindful monkly gait.

Aṅgulimāla’s inability to reach up to the Buddha is similar to **Yasa’s father’s** inability to see his own son, Yasa, who has by then attained streamwinning and is sitting near the Buddha. Only after listening to the Dharma and gaining the Dharma-eye himself, is the father then able to see his own son, a fellow

³⁰ A 4.36/2:37 f (SD 36.13 (6)).

³¹ Pasenadi, as a young rajah, has been close to the Buddha (also young then) since first meeting him during the 1st year of the ministry: **Dahara S** (S 3.1), SD 42.11; on their lifelong friendship, see (1).

streamwinner. Clearly, Yasa’s father’s spiritual blindness or darkness has been lifted through gaining the path to be able to see Yasa’s as a saint of the path like himself.³²

3.2.1.3 When Aṅgulimāla finally stops running, either tired out by his vain efforts or realizing the vanity of his efforts (for 1st time), it is as if he has been raised into a new level of awareness, that is, through the bloody darkness into the light of his past good karma, his natural goodness, on account of meeting the Buddha.

Aṅgulimāla’s movement through the world—like **Kisa Gotamī**, carrying her dead infant, her only child, walking around the whole village, vainly seeking some mustard seeds from a house where no one has died—brings each of them a vision of true reality that liberates them from their predicament: Gotamī from her blindness to impermanence, and Aṅgulimāla from his blindness of delusion. Both of them finally break out of the rut of running after a false and painful reality.³³

The Buddha, dramatically, by his own example, as it were, in merely a verse, teaches Aṅgulimāla to **stop** “running,” that is, end his killing:

I stand still [§6.2n], Aṅgulimāla, all the time. but you’re unrestrained towards living beings.	To all beings, I’ve laid down the rod; Therefore, <i>I stand still</i> but you stand <i>not</i> still.
--	---

Long have I revered the recluse, the mighty sage, therefore, having heard your Dharma-woven stanza,	the truth speaker, who has entered the great forest; I will live, having renounced evil, a thousand evils.”
	[§6.2]

It should be noted that at this point, Aṅgulimāla attains **streamwinning**, represented by the word **thito**, “standing” [§6.2] applied to Aṅgulimāla. This is further confirmed by the Buddha’s accepting him as a monk of the noble sangha. Here I follow the PTS edition of the Thera,gāthā reading: *so’haṃ cājissāmi sahassa,pāpaṃ*. The Commentary tells us that, at this point, Aṅgulimāla realizes that he is actually before the Buddha himself, who has come to the forest for the express purpose of helping him.³⁴

3.2.2 Aṅgulimāla’s awakening

3.2.2.1 There is no mention of Aṅgulimāla’s **arhathood** until, appropriately, at the very close of the Sutta, that is, the last 2 verses, especially the last one, which quotes Aṅgulimāla as saying:

Welcome, not unwelcome, the 3 knowledges are won,	no bad counsel, is this for me: done is the Buddha’s teaching! ³⁵	[§34 = Tha 886]
---	---	-----------------

³² Mv 1.7.7-10 (V 1:17), SD 11.2.

³³ On the story of Kisā Gotamī and her dead infant, see SD 43.2d.

³⁴ MA 3:333; ThaA 3:37 f. The Chin version gives a curious twist to the story: after granting Aṅgulimāla ordination, the Buddha uttered a verse of praise, hearing which he gained streamwinning: “Now that you have a shaven head, it is proper that you abandon the fetters. Destroying which brings great fruit, there will be no more anxiety and suffering” 汝今以剃頭 除結亦當爾 結滅成大果 無復愁苦惱 *rǔ jīn yǐ tītóu, chú jié yì dāng ěr, jié miè chéng dài guǒ, wú fū chóu kǔnǎo* (EĀ 38.6/T2.720b23). T202/T4.424a29 and its Tib version (Schmidt 1843:243,17), too, mention his streamwinning here, adding that soon after he became an arhat; cf T202/T424b3 (Schmidt 1843:244,1).

³⁵ This line, *katam buddhassa sāsanam* [§34d], the Sutta’s very last line, is the essence of the arhat’s review knowledge: “I directly knew: Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done. There is (for me) no more of arising in any state of being”; and also of the arhathood pericope: see eg **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,100.2-4), SD 8.10.

By “**welcome**” (*sāgatam*; Tha *svāgatam*) joyfully refers both to welcoming the Buddha into our life. “**Not unwelcome**” (*nāpagatam*), a double negative, common in Pali and Indian idiom, where we are reminded how the moral life world: we restrain the senses. Instead of enslaving us through our unconscious tendencies, we clearly see true reality with—truly this is *not unwelcome* at all.

3.2.2.2 In the 2nd line, “**no bad counsel is this for me,**” Aṅgulimāla rejoices gratefully in the Buddha’s courageous, wise and effective that stops his running amok on a killing spree. From the time that Aṅgulimāla sees the Buddha in the forest up to the verse at **§6.2** (Tha 867), the Buddha was inspiring the conditions for streamwinning in Aṅgulimāla. Listening to this verse, he finally breaks free of unhappy life and breaks through into the Dharma, becoming a **streamwinner** [§6.2].

3.2.2.3 In the **Te,vijja Sutta** (D 13), the Buddha plays on the familiar brahminical term of his time—the Sanskrit *tri,vidya*, one with the 3 knowledges (master of the Vedas)³⁶—to refer to “one with the true knowledges.”³⁷ The true knowledges refer to knowing about oneself, about how karma works on us, and being free from them. Technically, these **3 knowledges** (*te,vijjā*) are:

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) the knowledge of one’s own past lives | <i>pubbe.nivāsānussati,ñāṇa</i> |
| (2) the knowledge of the karmic past of others (the divine eye) | <i>cutūpapāta,ñāṇa (dibba,cakkhu)</i> |
| (3) the direct knowledge of one’s destruction of the influxes | <i>āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa</i> ³⁸ |

In the older suttas,³⁹ the “**influxes**” (*āsava*) are a triad, those of sensual lust (*kām’āsava*), of existence (*bhav’āsava*) and of ignorance (*avijj’āsava*). The arhat has destroyed all of them, meaning that he has mastered all his sense-faculties (no more sensual pleasures trouble him at all); he understands his mind and how birth arises in samsara; and understands the nature of existence in terms of the 4 noble truths in all their practical aspects. The later suttas lists a tetrad of influxes, with that of views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), as the 3rd influx.⁴⁰

3.2.2.4 Aṅgulimāla, not yet an arhat, only a streamwinner then, is troubled by the sight of a woman struggling with birth-pangs [§1.4]. He relates the matter to the Buddha, who then advises him to perform an act of truth (*sacca,kiriya*),⁴¹ as a streamwinner, thus:⁴²

“Sister, since I was born, I do not recall ever having intentionally deprived a living being of life. By this truth, may you be well, may your womb [your child] be well!”
Yato ahaṃ bhagini jāto, nābhijānāmi sañcicca pānaṃ jīvitaṃ voropetā.
Tena saccena sotthi te hotu, sotthi gabbhassatī

With a streamwinner’s faith but lacking an arhat’s wisdom, Aṅgulimāla is still aware that he has not fully awakened, not yet an arhat. He stills and troubled by his past killings and violence. With the earnest moral virtue of a streamwinner, he wants to be sure that he is not speaking any falsehood. To see Aṅguli-

³⁶ For details on the 3 Vedas, see SD 1.8 (2.1).

³⁷ D 13/1:235-252 (SD 1.13).

³⁸ On the arhat’s 3 knowledge, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8 (2.2); also SD 1.4 (1.1.3.3).

³⁹ See eg **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,1.10(20)/3:216); **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2,99.3), SD 8.10; **Sammā Diṭṭhi S** (M 9,70/1:55), SD 11.-14; **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121,12/3:108), SD 11.3; **Ti,kaṇṇa S** (A 3.58,5/1:165), SD 94.5, (**Te,vijja**) **Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 3.59,-4/1:167), SD 80.16; **Nibbedhika (Pariāya) S** (A 6.63,9/3:414), SD 6.11.

⁴⁰ On *āsava*, see **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2), SD 30.3 (1.3); SD 4.25 (5); SD 50.12 (2.5.2); SD 55.9 (1.3.2.5).

⁴¹ On *sacca,kiriya*, see SD 39.2 (2).

⁴² Cf the young layman Cakkaṇa’s utterance of truth (DhsA 103,9-21) + SD 59.6 (5.1.2.1).

māla's mind at peace (so that the act of truth will work), the Buddha adds the word "in the noble birth" (*ariyāya jātiyā*), referring to his state as a **streamwinner**. The verse of truth now sounds:

<p>"Sister, since I was born in the noble birth, I do not recall ever having intentionally deprived a living being of life. By this truth, may you be well! May your child be well!"</p>	<p><i>yato'ham bhagini ariyāya jātiyā jāto</i> <i>nābhijānāmi sañcicca paṇaṃ jīvita voropetā</i></p> <p><i>tena saccena sotthi te</i> <i>hotu sotthi gabbhassa</i> [§15.2]</p>
---	--

3.2.2.5 Two Chinese Saṃyukta versions (SĀ 1077 and SĀ2 16)⁴³ report that Aṅgulimāla became an arhat and conclude with a set of verses spoken by him. The two individual Chinese translations (T118 and T119)⁴⁴ similarly record his gaining of full awakening at this point, while the Sutta and Ekottarika Āgama versions only mention this towards the end of his narrative.⁴⁵

In the case of T119 placing of his arhathood becomes inconsistent since later on in T119 (T2.511c27), the Buddha instructs Aṅgulimāla "to bear it, not to show any evil thoughts," 忍勿發惡意 *rěn wù fā èyì*, after he had been attacked by some people while on his almsround. If he was already an arhat, the Buddha would not have needed to give him any such instruction.

3.2.3 The Aṅgulimāla Thera,gāthā

3.2.3.1 The Aṅgulimāla Sutta (M 86) is remarkable in presenting and preserving 21 of the elder's 24 verses (**Tha 866-886**), that is, excluding the last 5 verses, **Tha 887-891** [3.2.3.2]. These verses quoted in the Sutta highlight the following developments as related in the Sutta:

<p>Tha 866 Aṅgulimāla questions the Buddha's "standing still" (<i>thita</i>). Tha 867 The Buddha's <i>thitāthita</i> verse highlighting Aṅgulimāla's attaining <u>streamwinning</u>. Tha 868 The elder as a streamwinner, free from his old dark life of serial violence. Tha 869-870 The narrator's verses on the elder being accepted by the Buddha into the order.</p>	<p>[§6.1] [§6.2] [§6.3] [§§6.4 f]</p>
--	---

Aṅgulimāla's verses of uplift (*udāna*) [§18n]

<p>Tha 871-873 The elder rejoicing in his state: the "cloud-free moon" (<i>abbha mutto'va candimā</i>). Tha 874-876 Aṅgulimāla's verses of lovingkindness to his enemies. Tha 877-878 Joyful reflections on his Dharma training by the Buddha. Tha 879-881 Reflections on his past as a serial killer, contrasted to his present liberated state. Tha 882 On his "debt-free" state as an awakened renunciant, an arhat. Tha 883-884 Admonition to us, especially the renunciant, not to be negligent. Tha 885-886 The <i>sāgata</i> (welcome) verses of deep gratitude to the Buddha; his arhathood.</p>	<p>[§19-21] [§§22-24] [§§25-26] [§§27-29] [§30] [§§31-32] [§§33-34]</p>
--	---

3.2.3.2 The Thera,gāthā contains a further set of 5 verses, **Tha 887-891**, which conclude Aṅgulimāla's elder verses as a full set in its **Viṣati Nipāta** (the book of twenties). It is not known why these verses are not included in the Sutta.

⁴³ SĀ 1077/T2/281a24-b29; SĀ2 16/T2.378c28-379a22.

⁴⁴ T118/T2.509b23-24 得六通證生死已斷 *dé liùtōng zhèng shēngsǐ yǐ duàn*, he obtains the 6 superpowers showing that he has broken the samsaric cycle; T119/T2.511a19 時鸞崛髻成阿羅漢 *shí yāngjuéjì chéng āluóhàn*, then Angulimāla becomes an arhat.

⁴⁵ EĀ 38.6/T2.721a7; T118/T2.509b23; T212/T4.704b4 record Aṅgulimāla as attaining the 6 superknowledges.

Tha 887	<i>araññe rukkha, mūle vā pabbatesu guhāsu vā tattha tatth'eva aṭṭhāsīm ubbigga, manaso tadā</i>	In the forest or at the foot of a tree, in the mountains or in caves; here and there I just stood like that, with agitated mind.
Tha 888	<i>sukhaṃ sayāmi ṭhāyāmi sukhaṃ kappemi jīvitam ahatthapāso mārassa aho satthā'nukampito</i>	I lie down, I stand happily; happily, I live my life beyond the reach of Māra's snare: O how compassionate is the teacher!
Tha 889	<i>brahma, jacco pure āsīm udicco ubhato ahu so'jja putto sugatassa dhamma, rājassa satthuno</i>	I was of brahmin birth before, high-born on both sides was I. Now, I am the well-farer's son, of the teacher, king of Dharma,
Tha 890	<i>vītaṇho anādāno gutta, dvāro susaṃvuto agha, mūlaṃ vadhitvāna⁴⁶ patto me āsava-k, khayō</i>	Craving-free, grasping-free, with sense-doors guarded, well restrained, having rejected the roots of evil, I have gained destruction of th'influxes.
Tha 891	<i>pariciṇṇo mayā satthā kataṃ buddhassa sāsanam ohito garuko bhāro bhava, netti samūhatā'ti</i>	The teacher has been well served by me. The Buddha's teaching has been done. The heavy burden has been put down. The leader to birth has been rooted out.

It is possible that these verses may have been added later to **the Thera, gāthā**, or, more probably, they arose to the elder while he is in retreat, as described in §16.

3.2.4 Aṅgulimala's foremost position

3.2.4.1 The Aṅgulimāla Sutta (M 86) closes by stating, in verse, that Aṅgulimāla has attained "the 3 knowledges" (*ti, vijjā*), that is, arhathood [§34]. The Sutta is a unique canonical account recounting the life of a great early saint from the time of his meeting the Buddha, through his attaining arhathood, and the key events thereafter. Although his biography, as a serial killer, and his conversion by the Buddha himself, are dramatic, he is not recorded in the Pali texts as being accorded by the Buddha any foremost state.

3.2.4.2 The Chinese versions of the Sutta, however, mention the Buddha as declaring him to be the foremost (*agga*) of those disciples **with intelligence and quick understanding**:

我弟子中第一聰明捷疾智者。所謂騫掘魔比丘是也。

wǒ dìzǐ zhōng, dìyī cōngmíng jiéjí zhìzhě. suǒwèi yāng jué mó bǐqiū shì yě (EĀ 38.6)⁴⁷

我聲聞中第一比丘有捷 疾智。所謂指髻比丘是。

wǒ shēngwén zhōng, dìyī bǐqiū yǒu jiéjí zhì. suǒwèi zhǐ jì bǐqiū shì (T119)⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Be *vadhitvāna*; Ee *vamitvāna*. However at Tha 116 + 576, all MSS read *vamitvāna*.

⁴⁷ T125/T2.722c20-21.

⁴⁸ T119/T2.512a27.

3.2.4.2 This foremost position mentioned in the Chinese texts is not that of attaining arhathood, which is declared of **Bāhiya Dāru, cīriya** (A 1.216/1:25), the foremost of monk disciples who have quickly attained direct knowledge (*khippābhiññānam*), that is, became an arhat. His story is told in **the Udāna** (U 1.10).⁴⁹

Perhaps, in the case of Aṅgulimāla, the Chinese translations are referring to how quickly Aṅgulimāla understands the Buddha's first instructions to him at the time of his conversion [§6.3]. We can thus speak of him as being, unofficially, the foremost of those who are **quick in learning** (*ugghaṭitaññū*), that is, grasping it at the first hearing of the teaching.⁵⁰ More significantly, with this understanding, he attains stream-winning. In fact, the speed at which Aṅgulimāla attains streamwinning is quite remarkable, even unique.

3.2.5 Aṅgulimāla in the time of Kassapa Buddha

According to the Ekottarika Āgama, the Buddha relates Aṅgulimāla's last life during the time of Kassapa Buddha, when those people killed him. By karmic repercussion, in this life, Aṅgulimāla goes on to kill them in turn.⁵¹ It matters not that he does not know this (as a rule, we do not really know the real reasons for any of our unwholesome actions): karma is often a painful cyclic habit that we are caught with others in mutual harming and destruction.

This account at **EĀ 38.6** goes on to say that the number of his victims is 80,000, 八萬 *bā wàn*. **T119**, too, says that he has harmed and killed many hundreds of thousands of living beings 殺害無數百萬眾生 *shā-hài wúshù bǎiwàn zhòngshēng*.⁵² The Chinese **Udāna, varga** (T212) similarly notes that he has killed countless thousands of humans, 數千人 *shù qiān rén*.⁵³

3.3 THE RULE AGAINST ORDAINING BRANDED THIEVES

3.3.1 Difficulty in obtaining almsfood

The Commentary says that Aṅgulimāla found it difficult to obtain food during his almsround, since people are too afraid to approach him (MA 3:338,8). The elder Aṅgulimāla then cultivates lovingkindness towards those people. Further, to remove the public fear, the Buddha instructs Aṅgulimāla to publicly proclaim in an asseveration (act of truth) that he has completely give up his former murderous ways and no longer harms any living beings. (MA 3:338,10-25)

3.3.2 The Vinaya rule

3.3.2.1 The Vinaya reports Aṅgulimāla's acceptance into the order resulted in an uproar among the people. This led to the Buddha introducing a rule against ordaining such bandits or thieves in the future. The Vinaya rule actually forbids admitting "a thief who wears an emblem: (*dhaja, baddho coro*, V 1:74,34). In a note to her Vinaya translation here, I B Horner notes that "it is difficult to reconcile the above Vinaya ruling with the story of Aṅgulimāla's going forth," as recorded in M 86 (V:H 4:93 n1).

3.3.2.2 Yet, the introductory story to this rule speaks of Aṅgulimāla as a **cora** (bandit, robber, thief) (V 1:74,26), as in M 86. There is little doubt that the same person is meant. "Perhaps," reasons Analayo,

⁴⁹ U 1.10/15-17 (SD 33.7 (1)). On his practice, see (**Satipaṭṭhāna**) **Bāhiya S** (S 47.15), SD 47.10.

⁵⁰ On the 4 kinds of learners, see **Ugghaṭitaññū S** (A 4.143) SD 3.13(3.3).

⁵¹ EĀ 38.6/T2.722c5+14.

⁵² T119/T2.511c8.

⁵³ T212/T4.704b27.

“the rationale behind this rule is that, while behind the Buddha’s decision to ordain Aṅgulimāla was based on an assessment of the latter’s potential, other monks might not have such knowledge. In view of the repercussion that such an ordination can cause among the laity, this rule could have been intended to prevent other monks from imitating the Buddha’s action by indiscriminately ordaining criminals.” (2011:497)

4 Was Aṅgulimāla a cult worshipper?

4.1 R F Gombrich, in chapter 5 of his book, *How Buddhism Began*, titled “Who was Aṅgulimāla?” (1996: 135-164), recounts and discusses in some detail the Aṅgulimāla story using materials from both the Majjhima and the Theragāthā Commentaries. By a reconstruction of a stanza from the Aṅgulimāla verses, Gombrich proposes that Aṅgulimāla was really a Tantric practitioner in the Śaivite/Śākta tradition. He explains that “his practice of collecting fingers for a necklace is thus sure to be the result of a vow, in which the worshipper tries to attain the iconic form of this god” (1996:152).

4.2 The original Pali of Aṅgulimāla’s conversion verse runs as follows:

<i>cirassaṃ vata mahito mahesi</i>	<i>mahā, vanam samano paccupādi</i>
<i>so ‘ham cajissāmi sahassa, pāpaṃ</i>	<i>sutvāna gātham tava dhamma, yuttam</i> [\$6.2]

Long have I revered the recluse, the mighty sage, who has entered the great forest,
Therefore, having heard your stanza on the Dharma, I will renounce a thousand evils.

(Tha 868 PTS ed)

Gombrich reconstructs it by selecting certain variant readings, thus:

<i>ciram vata mahito maheso</i>	<i>mahā, vanam pāpuṇi sacca, vādī</i>
<i>so ‘ham cajissāmi sahassa, pāpaṃ</i>	<i>sutvāna gātham tava dhamma, yuttam</i>

For a long time to fulfil a vow I have been honouring Śiva. You have arrived in the forest,
speaking truth. So I shall give up my thousand crimes, for I have heard your voice, which
teaches what is right. (Gombrich 1996:154)

4.3 Gombrich’s proposal is, of course, only hypothetical since he has neither presented conclusive evidence to convince specialists in Śaivism such as Alexis Sanderson,⁵⁴ nor satisfactorily answered an extensive rebuttal in a book review by Maithrimurthi Mudagamuwa and Alexander von Rospatt.⁵⁵ Anyway,

⁵⁴ See Gombrich 1996:152 n7.

⁵⁵ Mudagamuwa & von Rospatt, 1998:169-173. **Anālayo** further notes: “In regard to the address used by Aṅgulimāla in the different versions at this point [2.2 n at end of Analayo quote], it may be worthwhile to note that none of them supports the emendation of *mahesi* to *maheso* suggested by Gombrich (1996:151), based on which he then concludes that Aṅgulimāla could have been a ‘proto-Śaiva/Śākta.’ A similar suggestion was already made by Eitel [1888] (2004:13), who in his gloss on ‘Aṅgulimāliya’ speaks of a ‘Śivaitic sect of fanatics who practiced assassination as a religious act. One of them was converted by Śākyamuni’; by Legge [1886] (1988:56 n2), who suggests that ‘the Aṅgulimāliya were a sect of Śivaitic fanatics, who made assassination a religious act’; and by Soothill & Hodous [1937] (2000:454), who under the entry 鸞嶇摩羅 *yāngjuémólúó* speaks of a ‘Śivaitic sect that wore ... chaplets’ of finger-bones. Yet, as pointed out by Maitrimurthi & von Rospatt (1998:170, 173), ‘there seems to be no testimony at all in the history of Indian religions to the practice of killing for decorating oneself with parts of the victim’s body’ and such a proto-Śaiva/Śākta would antedate ‘other known practitioners of Śaivic tantrism by a millennium.’” On Chin versions not supporting such an idea, too: Analayo 201: 493 n258.

these are the kind of academic exercises that keeps Buddhist scholarship robust and relevant, and it's beneficial for Pali and sutta students to study how professional scholars work.

5 Significance of Aṅgulimāla today

5.1 In our own times, Aṅgulimāla is an inspiring figure in Buddhist social work and “engaged” Buddhism. It is the name for a Buddhist-initiated prison ministry in the UK (run by a Theravada monk of the Cittaviveka community) and has also inspired scholars like David Loy to write of a broader view of social justice.⁵⁶

The point of this *sutta* is not difficult to see: we need only contrast the fate of Aṅgulimāla with what our retributive justice system would do to him. The importance of this story within the Buddhist tradition highlights the only reason that Buddhism accept for punishing an offender: to help reform his or her character. There is absolutely no reason to punish someone who has already reformed himself. (Loy, “How to reform a serial killer”, 2000:150)

In the same paper, Loy points out how karma “is essential to the Buddhist understanding of justice”:

One modern approach to *karma* is to understand it in terms of what Buddhism calls *saṅkhāras*, our habitual tendencies. These are best understood not as tendencies we have, but as tendencies we *are*: instead of being “my” habits, their interaction is what constitutes my sense of “me”.

The point of this interpretation is that we are punished not for our sins, but by them. People suffer or benefit not for what they have done, but for what they have become, and what we intentionally do is what makes us what we are. This conflation makes little sense if *karma* is understood dualistically as a kind of moral “dirt” attached to me, but it makes a great deal of sense if I am my habitual intentions, for then the important spiritual issue is the development of those intentions ... If *karma* is the psychological truth about how we construct ourselves—about how my sense-of-self is constructed by “my” greed, ill will, and delusion—then we can no longer accept the juridical presupposition of a completely self-determined subject wholly responsible for its own actions. Again we can no longer justify punishment as retributive, but must shift the focus of criminal justice to education and reformation. (Loy, op cit, 2000:156 f)

5.2 In the same spirit, too, we find that Buddhism does not see conversion as a wholesale acceptance of an external agency by way of religious “conversion” but through *an inner spiritual realization*. The surrender of one’s will to an external authority, whatever one calls it, can easily lead to abuse by those who define what that authority is. The figure of the “finger bandit” has also been used to describe the minions of religious cult leaders who are:

still wandering around today, obeying, zombie-like, the commands of their masters to seek thousands of fingers of converts. For every finger, a human individual must mentally die: those who surrender to fanaticism and bigotry of the cult lose that finger—and their minds—to the cult leader.

(Piyasilo, *Buddhist Culture*. Petaling Jaya (Malaysia): The Dharmafarers, 1988g:157; rev 2006)

— — —

⁵⁶ See David Loy, “How to reform a serial killer: The Buddhist approach to restorative justice.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7 2000:145-168.

Aṅgulimāla Sutta

The Discourse on Aṅgulimāla

M 86

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anāthapiṇḍika's Park in Jeta's grove near Sāvattḥī.

THE CONVERSION OF AṄGULIMĀLA

The bandit of Jālinī forest

2 Now at that time, there was a **bandit**,⁵⁷ in the realm of the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala, named **Aṅguli,māla**, who was murderous, bloody-handed, given to blows and violence, merciless to living beings.

On his account, villages were no more villages, market-towns were no more market-towns, [98] countryside were no more countryside.

Having again and again murdered people, he wore their fingers as a garland (*aṅguli,māla*). [98]

3 Then, when it was morning, the Blessed One, having dressed himself and taking robe and bowl, entered Sāvattḥī for alms.

Then, the Blessed One, having walked for alms in Sāvattḥī and returned from the alms-round, after his meal, and finished his meal, folded up his bedding,⁵⁸

and then taking his bowl and outer robe, set out on the road leading towards the bandit Aṅguli,māla.

3.2 Cowherds, shepherds, ploughmen and travellers saw the Blessed One walking along the road leading towards the bandit Aṅguli,māla. Seeing the Blessed One, they said:

“Do not take this road, recluse!

On this road, recluse, is the bandit Aṅgulimāla,
murderous, bloody-handed, violent and deadly,⁵⁹ merciless to living beings.

Villages are no more villages, market-towns are no more market-towns,
the countryside is no more the countryside.

He is always murdering people and wears their fingers as a garland.

Recluse, men have come along this road in groups⁶⁰ of 10, 20, 30, 40, 50,
but still they have fallen into the bandit Aṅgulimāla's hands!”

When this was said, the Blessed One went on in silence.⁶¹

3.3 For the 2nd time, the cowherds, shepherd, ploughmen and travellers saw the Blessed One ...
Seeing the Blessed One, they said:

“Do not take this road, recluse! ... The Blessed One went on in silence.

⁵⁷ “Bandit,” *cora*, broadly, “a thief, a robber; a bandit.”

⁵⁸ “Folded up his bedding,” *sen'āsanaṃ saṃsāmetvā*, here probably refers to tidying up his resting-place (*saya-na*), or perhaps the “residence” or “lodging,” which would be a cell-like hut or space of a forest monk.

⁵⁹ “Violent and deadly,” *hata,pahate*, lit, “killing and striking.”

⁶⁰ Be *saṅkaritvā saṅkaritvā*; Ce Ee+Comy *saṃharitvā saṃharitvā*; Se Ke *saṅgaritvā saṅgaritvā*. Comy: “having banded together, forming groups” (*saṅghāṭaṃ katvā vagga,vaggā hutva*, MA 3:331,20).

⁶¹ On the various kinds of silence, see **Silence and the Buddha**, SD 44.1.

3.4 For the 3rd time, the cowherds, shepherd, ploughmen and travellers saw the Blessed One ...
Seeing the Blessed One, they said:

“Do not take this road, recluse! ... The Blessed One went on in silence.

The Buddha meets Aṅgulimāla

4 The bandit **Aṅgulimāla** saw the Blessed One coming from afar. When he saw him, he thought:
“How strange! This cannot be!”⁶²

Men have come along in groups of 10, 20, [99] 30, 40, 50, but still they have fallen into my hands. But now this recluse comes alone, unaccompanied, as if compelled.

Why shouldn’t I take this recluse’s life?”

Then, the bandit Aṅgulimāla took up his sword and shield, strapped on his bow and quiver, and followed close behind the Blessed One.

5 Then, the Blessed One performed a **feat of psychic power** such that the bandit Aṅgulimāla, though going as fast as he could, could not catch up with the Blessed One who was walking at his normal pace.⁶³

5.2 Then, the bandit Aṅgulimāla thought:

“How strange! This cannot be! Formerly I could catch up even with a swift elephant and seize it.

I could catch up even with a swift horse and seize it.

I could catch up with a swift chariot and seize it.

I could catch up with a swift deer and seize it.

But now, though I am going as fast as I can,

I cannot catch up with this recluse, who is walking *at his normal pace!*”⁶⁴

5.3 He **stopped** and called out to the Blessed One:

“Stop, recluse! Stop, recluse!”⁶⁵

“I’ve stopped, Aṅgulimāla! You stop, too!” (*ṭhito ahaṃ Aṅgulimāla, tvaṃ tiṭṭhā ti*)⁶⁶

5.4 Then, the bandit Aṅgulimāla thought:

“These recluses, sons of the Sakyas, are those who speak the truth, who assert truth; but though this recluse is still walking, he says: **‘I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla! You stop, too!’**

Let me question this recluse.”⁶⁷

⁶² “How strange! This cannot be!” *acchariyaṃ vata bho, abbhutaṃ vata bho*, usually rendered as “How wonderful! How marvellous!” which fails to fit the context here.

⁶³ *Atha kho bhagavā tathā, rūpaṃ iddhābhisaṅkhataṃ abhisaṅkhāsi yathā coro aṅguli, mālo bhagavantaṃ pakatiyā gacchantāṃ sabbatthāmena gacchanta na sakkoti sampāpuṇiṃ.*

⁶⁴ Comy says that when Aṅgulimāla approaches him, the Buddha “makes the earth turn around” so that Aṅgulimāla is always behind him. Comy basically says that the Buddha makes the earth turn around so that he keeps appearing behind Aṅgulimāla whenever the latter reaches near him. Comy is cryptic (I’m unable to fully comprehend this sentence): *Mahā, paṭhavirū ṃmiyo uṭṭhapento viya saṅgharivā para, bhāge akkamati ora, bhāge valiyo nikkhamanti*, lit, “Having crunched together the far side and the near side, as if turning the great earth into waves, leaving only folds” (MA 3:332,10-12). Cf when the Bodhisattva, upon leaving Kapilavatthu, turns around to gaze at it: SD 52.1 (9.2.1). See (2.2).

⁶⁵ We have here a theme on spiritual movement: Aṅgulimāla *runs* after the Buddha to kill him, but he could not catch up with the Buddha until he *calls* out to the Buddha. The ensuing dialogue marks the spiritual turning-point in Aṅgulimāla’s life. A similar movement theme runs through the Kisā Gotamī story: she *walks* in search of a handful of mustard seeds that would revive her dead son. Such actions represent a spiritual movement away from the old suffering self towards the new liberated self. See **Kisā Gotamī**, SD 43.2.

⁶⁶ On the use of worldly language and Dharma language, see SD 26.11 (6.5); **Dh 97**, SD 10.6 esp (5).

Āṅgulimāla's verses

6 Then, the bandit Āṅgulimāla addressed the Blessed One in verse thus:⁶⁸

6.1 “You are walking, O recluse, yet you say, ‘I stand *still*.’
And to me who stands still you say, ‘You stand *not* still.’
Therefore, recluse, I ask you this question:
‘How is it that *you* stand still, but *I* stand not still?’”⁶⁹

*gaccham vadesi samaṇa t̥hito'mhi
mamañ ca brūsi t̥hitam aṭṭhito'ti
pucchāmi taṃ samaṇa etam atthaṃ
katham t̥hito tvam aham aṭṭhito'mhi*

[Tha 866]

[The Blessed One:]

6.2 “**I stand still,**⁷⁰ **Āṅgulimāla, all the time.**
To all beings, I've laid down the rod;
but you're unrestrained towards living beings.
Therefore, I stand still but you stand not still.” [100]

*t̥hito aham āṅguli,māla sabbadā
sabbesu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍam
tuvam ca pāṇesu asaññato'si
tasmā t̥hito'ham tuvam aṭṭhito'sīti*

[Tha 867]

[Āṅgulimāla:]

6.3 “Long have I revered the recluse,⁷¹ the mighty sage,⁷²
the truth speaker, who has entered the great forest;
therefore, having heard your Dharma-woven stanza,
I will live, having renounced evil, a thousand evils.”⁷⁵

*cirassam vata me mahito mahēsi
mahā,vanam pāpuṇi sacca,vādī⁷³
so'ham cajjissāmi pahāya pāpaṃ⁷⁴ d
sutvāna gātham tava dhamma,yuttam c*

[Tha 868]

[Narrator:]⁷⁶

6.4 So saying, the bandit flung sword and weapon over the chasm,
down the precipice, into the abyss.⁷⁷
The bandit bowed at the feet of the Sugata [the well-farer],
and there and then requested for the going-forth.⁷⁸

*itv-eva coro asim-āvudhañ ca
sobbhe papāte narake akiri
avandi coro sugatassa pāde
tatth'eva nam pabbajjam ayāci*

[Tha 869]

⁶⁷ See **Skillful Means**, SD 30.8 (3.4.1).

⁶⁸ From here begins the narrator's quoting of Āṅgulimāla's **Thera,gāthā**, ie, Tha 866-870. The elder's Tha verses then resumes at §18.

⁶⁹ On the significance of this verse, see [3.2.1].

⁷⁰ While Āṅguli,māla's question [prec verse] speaks on a worldly level, the Buddha's answer here brings him up to the Dharma level, where “still” (*t̥hito*, lit “standing”) means his mind has been stilled and no more creates new karma. But since Āṅguli,māla has been killing, he is not still in the Dharma sense. For a study on religious language, see Intro (2.3) & **Dh 97: Religious language**, SD 10.6.

⁷¹ Āṅguli,māla recalls his past good karma, a case of *pubbe ca kata,puññatā*, as stated in **Maṅgala S** (Khp 5.9 = Sn 260), SD 101.5.

⁷² This verse marks Āṅgulimāla's attaining streamwinning: [3.2.1.3].

⁷³ Be so; Ce *mahā,vanam samaṇo'yaṃ paccupādi*; Ke Se *mahā,vanam samaṇa paccupādi*.

⁷⁴ Tha:PTS: *so'ham cājissāmi sahassa,pāpaṃ* (pref: see foll). Be so; Ce *so'ham cirassāpi pahāssam pāpaṃ*; Ke Se *so'ham carissāmi pajāhissam pāpaṃ*.

⁷⁵ For Gombrich's speculative reconstruction, see (4).

⁷⁶ Note that these 2 verses [§§6.4 f] are by the narrator: M 86,63+64/100,9 and Chin sources (SĀ 1077/T2.281a21; SĀ 2 16/T2.378c23; T19/T2.511a8) all recount Āṅgulimāla's reaction in verse here, but report the Buddha's ordaining him in prose; T118/T2.509b15 give the whole section in prose.

⁷⁷ “The abyss,” *narake*. A play on the word *naraka*, also meaning “hell,” is obvious here.

⁷⁸ “Requested for the going-forth,” *pabbajjam ayāci*, that is, requested to be admitted into the order.

6.5 Compassionate is the awakened great sage,
the teacher of the world with its gods.
He said this to him: “**Come, O monk!**”⁷⁹
Just this indeed made him a monk.⁸⁰

*buddho ca kho kāruṇiko mahēsi
yo satthā lokassa sadevakassa
tam ehi bhikkhūti tadā avoca
es’eva⁸¹ tassa ahu bhikkhu, bhāvo’ti*
[Tha 870]

7 Then, the Blessed One set out on a journey back to Sāvattthī with the venerable Aṅgulimāla as attendant monk, and after journeying from place to place, the Blessed One arrived in due course at Sāvattthī. And there the Blessed One stayed in Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park in Jeta’s grove near Sāvattthī.

THE NON-VIOLENT TRANSFORMATION

Pasenadi seeks Aṅgulimāla

8 Now at that time, a great crowd had assembled at king Pasenadi’s palace gate and raised a hue and cry:

“Your majesty, there is in your realm [§2] a bandit named Aṅgulimāla.
He is *murderous, bloody-handed, violent and deadly, merciless to living beings.*
*On his account, villages are no more villages, market-towns are no more market-towns,
countryside is no more countryside.*
Having again and again murdered people, he wears their fingers as a garland.
Let your majesty stop him!”⁸²

9 Then, early in the day,⁸³ Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, set out of Sāvattthī with 500 horsemen,⁸⁴ heading for the park [monastery]. Going in his carriage as far as the road was passable for a carriage, he alighted from it, proceeding on foot, went up to where the Blessed One was. And having gone up to the Blessed One, [101] he saluted him and sat down at one side.

9.2 As king Pasenadi sat there at one side, the Blessed One said to him:⁸⁵

“What is it, maharajah? Is Seniya Bimbisāra, the rajah of Magadha, angry with you?⁸⁶ Or the Licchavīs of Vesālī? Or some other hostile kings?”

10 “Bhante, Seniya Bimbisāra, the rajah of Magadha, is not angry with me; nor the Licchavīs of Vesālī; nor any other hostile kings.

But, bhante, there is in my realm [§8] a bandit named Aṅgulimāla—
he is murderous, bloody-handed, violent and deadly, merciless to living beings.
Villages are no more villages, market-towns are no more market-towns,

⁷⁹ On *ehi, bhikkhu*, see Intro (1) n.

⁸⁰ Lit, “Just this indeed was his monk-state.”

⁸¹ Be Ee Se so; Ce *eso’va*.

⁸² *Tam devo paṭisedhetu* [§10.2 n].

⁸³ “Early in the day,” *divā, divassa*.

⁸⁴ *Pañc, mattehi assa, satehi*, lit “with some 500 horses”: I take this as a synecdoche: “horses” here means “horsemen.” On synecdoche, see SD 52.1 (2.4.1.5).

⁸⁵ On Pasenadi’s meeting the Buddha, see (3.1).

⁸⁶ From this mention of Bimbisāra (544-492 BCE) [SD 8.10 (1)], we can deduce the relative date of Aṅgulimāla’s story. Comys tell us that his conversion was in the 20th year of the ministry [1.1].

the countryside is no more the countryside.

He is again and again murdering people and he wears their fingers as a garland.

10.2 Bhante, I will stop him [(but) I'm unable to stop him.]”⁸⁷

11 “Now,⁸⁸ maharajah, suppose you were to see Aṅgulimāla with his hair and beard shaven, clad in saffron robe, and gone forth from the household life into homelessness; that he is abstaining from destroying life, abstaining from taking the not-given and abstaining from false speech; that he is eating only one meal a day, and is celibate, virtuous, of good character.

If you were to see him thus, how would you treat him?”

12 “Bhante, we would salute him, or rise up to greet him, or invite him to be seated, or invite him to accept robes, almsfood, lodging or medicine, support and necessities for the sick; or we would provide him with guard, defence and protection in accordance with the law.”⁸⁹

But, bhante, how could one of such an immoral and bad character ever have such virtue and restraint?”

Pasenadi meets Aṅgulimāla

13 Now,

at that time, the venerable Aṅgulimāla was sitting not far from the Blessed One. Then, the Blessed One stretched forth his right arm and said to Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala:

“Maharajah, this is Aṅgulimāla!”

Then, king Pasenadi was stricken with terror, his body-hair bristled.

The Blessed One, understanding *the hair-bristling terror* of Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, said this to him:⁹⁰

“Fear not, maharajah, fear not! There is nothing for you to fear from him.”

Thereupon the fear [102] and hair-bristling of Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, subsided.

13.2 Then, Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, approached the venerable Aṅgulimāla and, having gone up to him, said:

“Bhante, is our noble master (really) Aṅgulimāla?”⁹¹

“Yes, maharajah.”

“Bhante, of what family is the noble master’s father? Of what family is his mother?”

“My father, maharajah, is a **Gagga**; my mother is a **Mantāṇī**.”

⁸⁷ Be Ce Se *tāhaṃ bhante paṭisedhissāmīti*; Ee *nāhaṃ bhante paṭisedhissāmīti*. *Paṭisedhissāmī* is 1 sg fut of *paṭiseddheti* or *paṭisedhayati*, “wards off; prevents; prohibits; contradicts,” but the context here means “to stop.” See (3.1.2). On the use of the future tense in *paṭisedhissāmī*, see [3.1.2.2].

⁸⁸ On this paragraph of respecting such a one, cf **Madhura S** (M 84.9/2:89), SD 69.8.

⁸⁹ The Buddha’s good-natured remark is a skillful means to elicit a positive and public reply that he would treat Aṅgulimāla well, now that he is a monk. Having *publicly* declared his good intentions, the rajah is bound by his noble obligation to keep to them! For a similar remark by the Buddha, where the Buddha elicits public support for renunciants from rajah Ajāta, sattu, see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,35-38/1:60-62), SD 8.10.

⁹⁰ *Atha kho bhagavā rājānaṃ pasenadiṃ kosalaṃ bhītaṃ samvigga, loma. haṭṭha, jātaṃ veditvā rājānaṃ pasenadiṃ kosalaṃ etad avoca.*

⁹¹ *Ayyo no bhante aṅguli, mālo’ti*. “Noble master,” *ayya* = *ariya* (Skt *arya*, *ārya*), “noble.”

“Bhante, if it pleases the noble master Gagga,mantāṇī,putta [son of Gagga and Mantāṇī], I shall provide the noble master Gagga,mantāṇī,putta with robes, almsfood, lodging and medicine and support in sickness.”⁹²

14 Now, at that time, the venerable Aṅgulimāla was a forest dweller, an almsfood eater, a refuse-rag wearer and restricted himself to 3 robes.⁹³

Then, the venerable Aṅgulimāla said this to Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala:

“I’ve enough, maharajah, my triple robes are complete.”⁹⁴

Pasenadi rejoices in the Buddha

14.2 Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, then, returned to the Blessed One, and after saluting the Blessed One, sat down at one side. Seated at one side, Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, said to the Blessed One:

“How wonderful, bhante! How marvellous, bhante!

How the Blessed One tames the untamed,
brings peace to the unpeaceful,
extinguish the unextinguished.

adantānaṃ dametā

asantaṃ sametā

*aparinibbutānaṃ aparinibbuāpetā*⁹⁵

Bhante, we ourself could not tame him

with the rod and the sword [by fear and force],⁹⁶

yet the Blessed One has tamed him with neither rod nor sword.⁹⁷

And now, bhante, we must depart. We are busy and have much to do.”

“As you please, maharajah.”

Then, Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, rose from his seat, and after paying homage to the Blessed One, keeping his right (to the Blessed One),⁹⁸ departed.

ĀṄGULIMĀLA’S COMPASSION

Aṅgulimāla and the woman in labour

14.3 Then, when it was morning, the venerable Aṅgulimāla dressed himself and, taking his bowl and outer robe, went into Sāvattihī for alms.

⁹² Here, Pasenadi volunteers to offer the monk’s 4 supports. See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,34-38/1:60 f), SD 8.10.

⁹³ These are 4 of the voluntary ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*). See Intro (1) above. For details, see **Bakkula S** (M 124), SD 3.15 (2).

⁹⁴ *Alaṃ mahā,raja paripuṇṇaṃ me ti,cīvaraṃ ti.*

⁹⁵ There is a wordplay on *nibbuta*, “attained nirvana,” here, but, in this context, it should be taken in the normal worldly sense since Pasenadi has no real knowledge of Aṅgulimāla’s true attainment.

⁹⁶ Technically, by corporal punishment or by capital punishment.

⁹⁷ *Yañ hi mayaṃ bhante nāsakkhīhā daṇḍena’pi satthena’pi dametuṃ so bhagavatā adaṇḍena asatthen’eva danto. Daṇḍena ... satthena* means using the fear of punishment and force of weapon, or simply; *adaṇḍena ... asatthena* simply means “non-violent.” This is the best example of the Buddha’s “greatest miracle,” as taught in such discourses as (**Pāṭihāriya**) **Saṅgārava S** (A 3.60,6.3/1:172), SD 16.10; see also **Miracles**, SD 27.5a (3.3). Cf Dh 129: “All tremble at the rod” (*sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa*). In **Dhamma,cetiya S** (M 89), the rajah Pasenadi similarly praises how the Sangha members are so well disciplined “with neither rod nor sword” (M 89,13/2:122). This is an example of the difference between the “wheel of power” (*āṇā,cakka*), ie, the sphere of political power, and the “wheel of truth” (*dhamma,cakka*), the realm of the Dharma (VA 10 = KhA 1:95; MA 2:278; ThaA 3:48).

⁹⁸ “Keeping his right (to the Blessed One),” *padakkhiṇaṃ*, that is, going in a clockwise or sunwise manner around a sacred person or object.

As the venerable Aṅgulimāla was going for alms on an unbroken round of the houses⁹⁹ in Sāvattḥī, he saw a certain woman in difficult and painful labour.¹⁰⁰ [103]

When he saw this, he thought:

“How defiled with affliction are beings! Alas, how defiled with affliction are beings!”¹⁰¹

14.4 When the venerable Aṅgulimāla had gone *for alms on an unbroken round of the houses in Sāvattḥī*, and had returned from his alms-round, after his meal, he went to the Blessed One.

Having gone up to the Blessed One, after saluting the Blessed One, the venerable Aṅgulimāla sat down at one side and said this to the Blessed One:

14.5 “Bhante, in the morning I dressed myself and, taking my bowl and outer robe, went into Sāvattḥī for alms. As I was going for alms on an unbroken round of the houses in Sāvattḥī, I saw a certain woman in difficult and painful labour.

When I saw this, I thought:

‘How defiled with affliction are beings! Alas, how defiled with affliction are beings!’”

15 “In that case, Aṅgulimāla, having gone into Sāvattḥī, say to the woman:

‘Sister, since I was born,¹⁰² I do not recall ever having intentionally deprived a living being of life. By this truth, may you be well, may your womb [your child] be well!’”¹⁰³

“Bhante, wouldn’t I be telling a deliberate lie, for I had intentionally deprived many living beings of life?”¹⁰⁴

Aṅgulimāla’s act of truth

15.2 “In that case, Aṅgulimāla, having gone into Sāvattḥī, say to the woman:

‘Sister, since I was born in the noble birth,¹⁰⁵
I do not recall ever having intentionally deprived
a living being of life.
By this truth, may you be well!
May your child be well!’”

*yato’haṃ bhagini ariyāya jātiyā jāto
nābhijānāmi sañcicca pāṇaṃ jīvitā voropetā

tena saccena sotthi te
hotu sotthi gabbhassa*

⁹⁹ “Going for alms on an unbroken round of the houses,” *sapadānaṃ piṇḍāya caramāno*. This is the 4th of the 13 austere observances (*dhutāṅga*): [SD 3.15 (2), see esp (2.1)(4)].

¹⁰⁰ “Difficult and painful labour,” *mūlha, gabbhaṃ visāta, gabbhaṃ*. The Majjhima Tīkā says that *mūlha, gabbha* means that the foetus had only partly turned around in the womb, keeping a horizontal position, so that it is unable to pass through the birth-canal (*Gabbho hi paripakko sampajjamāno vijāyana, kāle kamma, javātehi sañcāletvā parivattito uddhaṃ, pādo adho, sīso hutvā yoni, mukhābhimukho hoti, evaṃ so kassaci alaggo sotthinā bahi nikkhamati, vipajjamāno pana vipari, vattana, vasena yoni, maggaṃ pidahitvā tiriyaṃ nīpajjati, tathā yassā yoni, maggo pidahati, sā tattha kamma, javātehi aparāparaṃ parivattamānā vyākulā mūlha, gabbhā’ti vuccati, taṃ sandhāya vuttamā gabbha, mūlhan’ti*). (MAṬ:VRI 2:155)

¹⁰¹ *Kilissanti vat abo sattā. Kilissanti vata bho sattā*.

¹⁰² “Sister, since I was born,” *yato’haṃ bhagini jāto*. Here the Buddha is actually referring to Aṅgulimāla’s spiritual rebirth, breakthrough into Dharma (streamwinning), but Aṅgulimāla, not yet an arhat, still recalling his past violence, misunderstood. In reply, the Buddha then refers to “birth amongst the noble ones” (*ariyāya jātiyā*). See foll n.

¹⁰³ Cp this with Cakkaṇa act of truth (MA 1:204,6; SA 2:150,15; DhsA 103,19): SD 59.6 (5.1.2.1).

¹⁰⁴ For an explanation, see (3.2.2.4).

¹⁰⁵ Note here that this refers not to his being an arhat, but a *learner* (*sekha*), at least a streamwinner. His attaining arhatness follows later.

15.3 “Yes, bhante,” the venerable Aṅgulimāla replied in assent to the Blessed One, and having gone into Sāvattī, approached the woman and said:

**“Sister, since I was born in the noble birth,
I do not recall ever having intentionally deprived a living being of life.
By this truth, may you be well! May your child be well!”**

Then, the woman and the child in her womb became well.¹⁰⁶

AṅGULIMĀLA’S AWAKENING

Aṅgulimāla’s arhathood

16 THE FULL ARHATHOOD PERICOPE¹⁰⁷

Then, the venerable Aṅgulimāla, dwelling alone,¹⁰⁸ aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute, in no long time at all, right here and now, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge,¹⁰⁹ attained and dwelled in the supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

16.2 THE ARHAT’S REVIEW KNOWLEDGE

He directly knew:

“Birth is destroyed,
the holy life has been lived,
done what is to be done,
there is no more of this state of being.”¹¹⁰ [104]
And the venerable Aṅgulimāla became one of the arhats.

Aṅgulimāla’s past karma ripens

17 Then, when it was morning, the venerable Aṅgulimāla dressed himself and, taking his bowl and outer robe, went into Sāvattī for alms.

Now on that occasion, someone threw a clod and hit the venerable Aṅgulimāla’s body; someone else threw a stick and hit the venerable Aṅgulimāla’s body; someone else threw a potsherd and hit the venerable Aṅgulimāla’s body.¹¹¹

Then, with blood streaming from his cut head, with his bowl broken, and with his outer robe torn, the venerable Aṅgulimāla went to the Blessed One.

17.2 The Blessed One saw the venerable Aṅgulimāla coming in the distance. Seeing him, the Blessed One said to him:

“Bear it, brahmin! Bear it, brahmin!
You are experiencing here and now the fruit of karma
because of which you might have been tormented in hell

¹⁰⁶ Cf the story of Suppavāsā: DhA 31.3/4:192-194; J 100/1:407 f; U 2.8.15-18. See DhA:B 3:12 n1.

¹⁰⁷ For details, see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2+56.3), SD 7.14.

¹⁰⁸ “Alone,” Ee *eke* (preferred); Ce *eko*; Be Se omit.

¹⁰⁹ On the elder’s verses (not included in this Sutta), ie, **Tha 887-891**, see (3.2.3.2).

¹¹⁰ On this para and the next (the attainment of arhathood), see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2/1:203) n, SD 7.14.

¹¹¹ Comy explains that these objects were thrown at marauding crows, dogs and pigs but hit the elder (MA 3:338).

for many years, for many hundreds of years, for many thousands of years.”¹¹²

18 Then, while the venerable Aṅgulimāla was alone in retreat enjoying the bliss of liberation, he uttered these **verses of uplift**.¹¹³

- | | | | | |
|-----------|---|-------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 19 | Whose past bad deeds
are blocked off by good deeds
brightens this world
like a cloud-free moon. | (Dh 173) ¹¹⁵ | <i>yassa pāpaṃ kataṃ kammaṃ
kusalena pithiyati¹¹⁴
so’maṃ lokam pabhāseti
abbhā mutto’va candimā</i> | [Tha 872] |
| 20 | The young monk who
devotes himself to the Buddha’s teaching
brightens this world
like a cloud-free moon. | (Dh 382) ¹¹⁶ | <i>yo have daharo bhikkhu
yuñjate buddha,sāsane
abbhā mutto’va candimā
abbhā mutto’va candimā</i> | [Tha 873] |
| 21 | Let even my enemies hear talk on Dharma. ¹¹⁷
Let them be devoted to the Buddha’s teaching.
Let even my enemies associate with those people:
the good lead others to embrace the Dharma. | [105] | <i>disā hi me dhamma,katham suṇantu
disā hi me yuñjantu buddha,sāsane
disā hi me te manuje bhajantu
ye dhammam ev’ādapayanti santo</i> | [Tha 874] |
| 22 | Let my enemies in due time hear
the Dharma from speakers of patience
who praise harmony, and
may they act accordingly. | | <i>disā hi me khanti,vādi,vādānam¹¹⁸
avirodha-p,pasaṃsanaṃ¹¹⁹
sunantu dhammaṃ kālena
tañ ca anuvidhīyantu</i> | c
a
b
[Tha 875] |
| 23 | For, surely then he would not wish me harm
nor harm other beings, too—
He would gain supreme peace:
he would protect all, the moving and the still. ¹²¹ | | <i>na hi jātu so mamaṃ hiṃse
aññaṃ vā pana kañcanaṃ¹²⁰
pappuyya paramaṃ santim
rakkheyya tasa,thāvare</i> | [Tha 876] |

¹¹² Comy explains that any karma is capable of bringing three kinds of result: a result to be experienced here and now, ie, in the same life as it was committed; a result to be experienced in the next existence; and a result to be experienced in any subsequent to the next one, as long as one continues in this cyclic life. As an arhat, Aṅgulimāla freed himself from the latter two types of karmic result but the first remains, since even arhats may experience the present results of deeds done before attaining arhathood. (MA 3:339 f). See **Sañcetanika S** (A 10.206/5:292-297), SD 3.9.

¹¹³ Aṅgulimāla’s verses (Tha 871-886) here concludes the Sutta itself. For a comp study of foll vv in Pali, Prāk, Chin, Tib, etc, see Analayo 2011:499-501.

¹¹⁴ Ce Ee Ke Se so; Be *pidhīyati*.

¹¹⁵ §20 recurs as Dh 173, Tha 872; parallels in Pravrajyāvastu (Mūla-Saravāstivāda V) cf Dutt 1984d:56.6 + Nather 1975:48.12; cf also Levi 1942b:18.35; T210/T4.562c25; T211/T4.584b5; T212/T4.704b25; Skt + Tib Uv 16.9 (Bernhard 1965:226; Beckh 1911:54; Zongtse 1990:166).

¹¹⁶ §21 recurs as Dh 382; Tha 873; parallels in T210/T4.562c23; T211/T4.584b3; T212/T4.704c14; T213/T4.785b2; Skt + Tib Uv 16.7 (Bernhard 1965:226; cf 191 in Nakatani 1987:46, Beckh 1911:54, Zongtse 1990:165).

¹¹⁷ Comy says that vv 874-876 were Aṅgulimāla’s verses of uplift (*udāna,gātha*) after he had been injured during his alms-round (MA 3:340,15-20). For Chin accounts in SĀ 1077/T2.281b,18+25+27 (in this sequence) & SĀ2 16/T2.-379a21: Analayo 2011: 300 n295.

¹¹⁸ Be so; Se *khanti,vodāniṃ*

¹¹⁹ Be so; Ce Ee Se *avirodha-p.pasaṃsanaṃ*.

¹²⁰ Ce so; Be Ce:Ka *kañci naṃ*

- 24 Ditch-diggers guide water;
fletchers bend the bow;
carpenters bend wood—
the wise tame themselves. (Dh 80, 145; Tha 119)¹²²
- 25¹²³ Some tame with the rod,
some with hooks, others with whips;
but I was tamed by that one
who has neither rod nor sword.
- 26 ‘Non-violent’ [Ahimsaka]¹²⁵ is my name;
in the past I was violent [*himsaka*].
Today I am truly named:
for, I violate no living being at all.
- 27 In the past a bandit was I,
known as “Finger-garland [Aṅguli,māla],”
being carried away by a mighty flood,
I found refuge in the Buddha.
- udakarṃ hi nayanti nettikā
usukārā namayanti tejanam
dāruṃ namayanti tacchakā
attānam damayanti paṇḍitā* [Tha 877]
- daṇḍen’eke damayanti
aṅkusehi kasāhi ca
adaṇḍena asaṭṭhena d
aharṃ danto’mhi tadinā¹²⁴ c* [Tha 878]
- ahimsako.ti me nāmam
himsakassa pure sato
ajjāharṃ sacca,nāmo’mhi
na nam himsāmi kañcanam¹²⁶* [Tha 879]
- coro aharṃ pure āsim
aṅgulimālo’ti vissuto
vuyhamāno mah’ogghena
buddham saraṇam āgamaṃ* [Tha 880]

¹²¹ “The moving and the still,” *tasa, thāvara*. This is one of the most problematic of Pali expressions. PED: The term *tasa* is metaphorically used of people who are in fear and trembling, as distinguished from *thāvara*, a self-possessed and firm being (= arhat, KhA 245) [n4:23c.1]. In this sense, *tasa* is derived from *tasati* both in the sense of: (1) Skt *tṛṣṭi* *yati*, to be thirsty; fig: to crave (S 2:13, Miln 254), and (2) Ved *trasati*, to tremble, shake, to fear, to be frightened (Sn 394, Nc 479, KhA 245). Andersen equates *tasa* with Skt *trasa*, and explains it as “moving, trembling, feeble” (*Pali Glossary* 111). PED also says that *thāvara* is always used in connection with *tasa*, contrasting or comprising the movable beings (animal world) and the immovable (vegetable world), and quotes as examples Sn 394 [Sn:P n26:24d], It 31 f. (Cf M 2:105 & M:H 2:290.4, SnA 2:468 493 & esp Kh:N 285.40.) Most traditional translators render *tasā vā thāvarā vā* (Sn 146b) as “the frail or the firm” or such like, and interpret it as referring to those who still have craving (*tasā*) and the arhats (*thāvarā*) respectively, in keeping with Comy (KhA 245). These beings are to be included in our loving-kindness. Unawakened beings may need our lovingkindness; but do arhats need our thoughts that they may “be happy-minded” (Sn 147d)? Arhats are beyond good and bad, and have transcended happiness and sorrow. However, we certainly should not regard them with ill will, as lovingkindness is an all-inclusive positive emotion. On the other hand, arhats (like the Buddha) are not “beings” (*sattā*), as they have gone beyond classification (Sn 209d). Scholars like K R Norman and L Schmithausen take the expression in the sense of “(all beings) moving and unmoving”; Schmithausen however believes that, from a historical viewpoint, the expression refers to “animals and plants” (“Status of Plants in Earliest Buddhism,” 1990). [Cf Mvst 1:207 *jaṅgama-sthāvara* (Mvst:J 1:164 “animal or plant”), 2:10 *calam sthāvara* (Mvst:J 2:10 “animal or plant”). Norman’s etym: *tasa* < Skt *trasa*, “moving,” ie, “the collective body of moving or living beings” [syn: *jaṅgama, cala*] as opposed to *sthāvara*, “standing still, stationary, not moving, fixed, stable, immovable” (SED svv) [cf Skt *sthāvara* → P *thera*, “elder monk”]. See Sn:P n8:4b for further details.

¹²² §25 recurs as Dh 80, 145; Tha 19, 877; parallels in T210/T4.564a9, T212/T4.707c27, T213/T4785c22; Skt + Tib Uv 17.10 (Bernhard 1965:236, cf 214 in Nakatani 1987:50; Beckh 1911:57, Zongtse 1900:176.

¹²³ At Cv 7.3.12 (V 2:196,3), the verse recurs in the context of the Buddha’s taming of the drunken elephant Nālagiri. This further reflects the theme of self-taming of this verse. The last line is different in the Vinaya verse [foll]. For Chin parallels, see SĀ 1077/T2.281b7; SĀ2 16/T2.379a9; EĀ 38.6/T2.721b13; T118/T2.510a22 (without refs to crafts); T119/2:512a18.

¹²⁴ At V 2:196,2, this line reads: “a noble elephant tamed by the great seer” (*nago danto mahesinā’ti*).

¹²⁵ MA 3:329 says that as a student his name was *Ahimsaka*. ThaA 3:55 on the other hand says that *Himsaka* (“the violent one”) was his original name. See Tha:RD 323 n3.

¹²⁶ Be Ce so; Ee *kañci nam*; Se *kiñci nam*.

- 28 In the past bloody-handed was I,
known as “Finger-garland [Aṅguli,māla],”
see the refuge I have found! That which
leads to new existence¹²⁷ has been removed.
- lohita,pāni pure asim̃
aṅgulimālo’ti vissuto
saraṇ’āgamaṃ passa
bhava,netti samūhata*
- [Tha 881]
- 29 Having done many such bad deeds
that lead to bad realms,
touched by karmic ripening,
debt-free I eat my food!¹²⁹
- tādisaṃ kammaṃ katvāna
bahuṃ¹²⁸ duggati,gāminam̃
phuṭṭho kamma,vipākena
anaṇo bhuñjāmi bhojanam̃*
- [Tha 882]
- 30 The foolish, the unwise,
give themselves up to negligence
but the wise one guards diligence
as his¹³⁰ greatest treasure. (S *119/1:25;¹³¹ Dh 26)
- pamādam anuyuñjanti
bālā dummedhino janā
appamādañ ca medhavī
dhanam̃ seṭṭham̃ va rakkhati*
- [Tha 883]
- 31 Give not yourselves up to negligence
nor delight in sensual pleasures,
the wise who meditate
gain happiness in abundance. (S *120/1:25; Dh 27)
- mā pamādam anuyuñjetha
mā kāma,rati,santhavam̃
appamatto hi jhāyanto
pappoti vipulam̃ sukham̃*
- [Tha 884]
- 32¹³² Welcome,¹³³ not unwelcome,
no bad counsel, is this for me:
In dharmas that are shared out,¹³⁵
I’ve found the best. (Tha 9)
- sāgataṃ¹³⁴ nāpagataṃ
na-y-idaṃ dummantitam mama
samvibhattesu¹³⁶ dhammesu
yam̃ seṭṭham̃ tad upāgamaṃ¹³⁷*
- [Tha 885]

¹²⁷ “That which leads to a new existence,” *bhava.netti*. MA 3:342 glosses this as *bhava,raju*, the rope called “craving” (*taṇhā*): “The mind of beings are bound like cattle with a rope tied to their necks and are led on (*niyantī*) to various existence.”

¹²⁸ Be Ce Se so; Ee *bahu*.

¹²⁹ Cf Tha 789. Comys say that there are **4 ways of using the monk’s requisites**: (1) by theft (*theyya,paribhoga*), the use made by a morally depraved monk (It 3.5.2(10*)/90); (2) as a debt (*iṇa,paribhoga*), the unreflective use made by a virtuous monk (cf S 16.11/2:211, where it simply refers to Maha Kassapa’s pre-arhat state); (3) as a heritage (*dāy-ajja,paribhoga*), the use made by the 7 learners (*sekha*) (excluding the one with the fruit of arhathood); (4) as an owner (*sāmi,paribhoga*) or “debt-free” (M 86,18/2:105* = Tha 882), the use made by an arhat. (MA 3:343, 5:32; SA 2:199; J 5:253; Vism 1.125-127/43).

¹³⁰ Notice here that the “foolish” (*bālā*) is pl, but the wise (*medhāvī...rakkhati*) is sg.

¹³¹ S *119-120 are verses uttered by deities (*devatā*) of the Satullapa host [SD 42.6 (1)]. See Dh:N 68 nn27+28.

¹³² §33 is the last of Pilinda,vaccha’s verses (Tha 9). Parallels are at SĀ 1077/T2.281b6; SĀ2 16/T2.721b7; EĀ 38.6-/T2,721b8; T118/T2.510a15; T119/T2.512a9. Aṅgulimāla’s asseveration that he has made a “welcome” choice [§33+34] are not found in the Chin versions. A similar “welcome” stanza (§33) is found in Saṅghabhedavastu (Gnoli 1977: 156.7): *svāgataṃ te vyavusitam̃, naitad duścintitaṃ tvāya, pravibhakteṣu dharmeṣu, yac chreṣṭham̃ tad upāgama*, but spoken by the Buddha.

¹³³ “Welcome,” *svāgataṃ* means either (a) “my coming to the Buddha” or (b) the Buddha’s coming to the forest to meet Aṅgulimāla. (ThaA 1:55)

¹³⁴ Ce Ee so; Be Se Tha *svāgataṃ*

¹³⁵ On the key words here, see Tha:N 120 n9.

¹³⁶ Be Ce so; Ee *paṭibhattesu*; Se *suviḥhattesu*. A wordplay here on *dhamma*, which can refer to alms given and received, or teachings given and received. On the best gift, see Dh 354.

¹³⁷ Be Ce Ee Se so; Tha *upagamim̃*.

33¹³⁸ Welcome, not unwelcome,
no bad counsel is this for me:
the 3 knowledges¹³⁹ are won,
done is the Buddha's teaching!

sāgataṃ nāpagataṃ
na yidaṃ dummantitam mama
tisso vijjā anuppattā
kataṃ buddhassa sāsanā'ti [106]
[Tha 886]

— evaṃ —

Bibliography

[For other references, see the latest *Sutta Guide*, SD 01]

Analayo [Anālayo Bhikkhu]

2008 "The conversion of Aṅgulimāla in the Saṃyukta-āgama." *Buddhist Studies Review* 25,2 2008:135-148.
Tr of ZA version.

Bieyi Za Ahan Jing 別譯雜阿含經

[A digital comparative ed & tr of the Shorter Chinese Saṃyukta Āgama, T100]

2006 "The conversion of Aṅgulimāla." First version published in *Buddhist Studies Review* 23,1 2006. Incl Pali texts and Comys; and Skt, Chin, Tib versions.

Bingenheimer, Marcus

2011 "BZA 16—The conversion of Aṅgulimāla," in *Studies in Āgama Literature*, 3.3.16, Taipei, 2011:87-92. https://mbingenheimer.net/publications/bingenheimer_StudiesInAgamaLit_2011.pdf.

Dhammapada Commentary

1921 *Buddhist Legends* (tr) E W Burlingame. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1921. 3 vols. See story 13.6 (DhA:B 3:6-14).

Furda, Danya

2005 "Karma and grace in the legend of Angulimala." PhD thesis, McMaster Univ, 2005.

Gombrich, R F

1996 *How Buddhism Began: The conditioned genesis of the early teachings*. Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion XVII. London & NJ: Atlantic Heights, Athlone, 1996. Ch 5. (pp135-164), "Who was Aṅgulimāla?" See response by M Mudagamuwa & A von Rospatt, 1998.

Harris, Elizabeth J

1990 *Violence and Disruption in Society: A study of the early Buddhist texts*. Wheel ser 392/393. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Soc, 1990.

Hartmann, Jens-Uwe

1997-98 "Sanskrit fragments from the Āgamas (I): The Aṅgulimālasūtra." *Indologica Taurinensia* 23-14 1997-98:351-361. http://www.indologie.uni-muenchen.de/dokumente/publ_hartmann/juh_angulimalasutra.pdf.

Hecker, Hellmuth

2007 "Angulimala: A murderer's road to sainthood." *Access to Insight (Legacy ed)*, 30 Nov 2013. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/hecker/wheel312.html>.

Loy, David

2000 "How to reform a serial killer: The Buddhist approach to restorative justice." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7 2000:145-168. (Based on a study of the Aṅgulimāla Sutta and the Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta.) Accessible at <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-MISC/101786.htm> (unpaged).

¹³⁸ This last verse states that Aṅgulimala has attained arhathood ("the 3 knowledges") [fol]. On Aṅgulimāla's foremost position as a disciple, see (3.2.3).

¹³⁹ On this verse and the 3 knowledges, see [3.2.2].

Lu Kai-wen [Kevin Lu]

2006 從兩類《鶡掘摩維經》探討聲經大乘化的詮釋學策略 (How did Mahayana Buddhism reform savaka sutta? -- On Mahayana's hermeneutical strategies by two kinds of Buddhist paradigms of Angulimala Sutta). *Journal of the Center for Buddhist Studies* 11, July 2007:31-84.

Mudagamuwa, Maithrimurthi & Alexander von Rospatt

1998 Bk rev of R F Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began* (1996). In *Indo-Iranian Journal* 41,2 1998:164-179. See esp pp169-173 & nn.

Nyanaponika Thera & Hellmuth Hecker

1997 *Great Disciples of the Buddha: Their lives, their works, their legacy*. Ed with intro Bhikkhu Bodhi. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society & Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997:319-333 (ch 8).

Stede, William

1957 "Aṅgulimāla and liberation," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 20, 1957:533-555.

Theragātha

1969 *The Elders' Verses I Theragāthā*, (tr) K R Norman, London: Pali Text Society, 1969:82-84, 246 f.

Wagle, Narendra

1966 *Society at the Time of the Buddha*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966.

050228 rev060418 081128 091118 100801 101115 111130 120916 130302 141027 150525 160106
180915 210901