The Story of Aṅgulimāla (Retreat at Spirit Rock)

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:00:54

This evening I thought to tell a story from the time of the Buddha. It's a story that I think really speaks to just how the confusion of our minds can affect not only ourselves but others—the ripple effects—and yet the possibility of transformation even right in the midst of deep confusion.

In reflecting on this story, it feels to me that there are many parallels between things that happen in this story and things that happen today in the world. It's a reflection that the human mind—the greed, the aversion, the delusion that the Buddha spoke about—creates so much stress and suffering both internally and externally. That part of our minds hasn't changed much in the last 2,600 years. And so the teachings of the Buddha, as we all have found, have real value. I think there's a deep appreciation for the value and the transformative power of these teachings to help turn the mind away from greed, aversion, and delusion towards wholesomeness, towards wisdom, towards compassion, towards equanimity.

The story is the story of Aṅgulimāla. Many of you, or at least some of you, I'm sure have heard of this story. Aṅgulimāla was a mass murderer at the time of the Buddha. Certain parts of this story are pretty familiar to those who have studied the suttas. There's a whole sutta in the middle-length discourses, in the Majjhima Nikāya, titled the Aṅgulimāla Sutta that tells his story of the time he met the Buddha and the transformation that happened for him. There's also a whole backstory that the commentaries provide about how Aṅgulimāla became a mass murderer. That's the piece I really want to fill in because, to me, it has so much richness of teaching—this exploration of what the conditioning was that led someone in that direction. So it's very much a story of conditioning.

Some aspects of this story are magical or mythological, and I don't know how much of it has been shaped and sculpted over the years, how much of it is actual fact. And yet there does seem to have been a person who was a criminal. The Vinaya, the Buddha's teachings on the monastic rules, does speak about Aṅgulimāla and some rules that came out of the situation with him. So in all likelihood he was an actual person at the time of the Buddha.

I'm going to tell some of this story by reading from a compilation. Hellmuth Hecker created this version based on a combination of the backstory from the commentaries and the sutta. So I'll read some of it from Hellmuth Hecker's version and some of it I'll tell myself. But I'll start with Hellmuth Hecker's version:

At the time of the Buddha, at the court of King Pasenadi of Kosala, there was a learned Brahmin called Bhagavagaga who held the office of royal chaplain and was thus one of the kingdom's highest dignitaries.

One night his wife, Mantāni, gave birth to a son. Soon afterwards, the father cast the boy's horoscope and to his consternation found that his son was born under the robber constellation of the planets. This indicated that the boy would have within him a tendency to commit robbery.

On the day of the child's birth there was another disquieting event. All the weapons in the armory of the city of Sāvatthī had suddenly begun to sparkle. In the morning, the Brahmin went to the palace as usual and asked the king how he had slept.

"How could I have slept well?" replied the king. "I woke up in the night and saw that my auspicious weapons lying at the end of my bed were in a bright sparkle. So I was afraid and perturbed. Should this mean danger to the kingdom or to my life?"

The Brahmin said, "Do not have any fear, oh king. The same strange thing happened in the entire city, and it does not concern you. Last night my wife bore me a son, and unfortunately his horoscope had the robber constellation. This must have been the cause for the weapons sparkling."

The king asked, "Will he be a lone robber or the chief of a gang?"

"He will do it alone, your majesty."

And the man whose son was just born then says to the king, "What if we were to kill him now to prevent any future misdeeds?" He was willing to sacrifice his own son out of concern for the kingdom.

But the king says, "As he would be a loner, let him be raised and properly educated. Then perhaps he may lose these tendencies."

So the Brahmin and his wife named their son Ahiṃsaka, which in Pāli means "non-harming." They gave him a name that would support his movement away from harm. And they raised him to be intelligent and studious. He grew up well-behaved, studious, intelligent, and very strong in his body. The parents had good reason to feel that his tendencies—they didn't see any tendencies as a child toward becoming a bad person.

When Ahimsaka reached the age for formal education, his father sent him to study in Taxila, an ancient and renowned place of learning in India. There he was accepted as a student by the institution's main teacher.

Ahimsaka proved to be exceptionally studious and deeply engaged with his teacher. They developed a very good relationship. He surpassed all of his fellow students and became the teacher's favorite.

The other students grew jealous. "Since that young Ahimsaka came, we are almost forgotten," they said among themselves. "We must put a stop to this and cause a break between him and the teacher."

They began by slandering Ahimsaka, but this approach gained no traction because his behavior was utterly impeccable. So these jealous students decided on another route—they would plant seeds of doubt

in the teacher's mind.

In three separate groups, seemingly unrelated, they approached the teacher. The first group said, "We have the sense, we believe there is talk being heard, and we think Ahimsaka is plotting against you." The teacher dismissed them: "Don't tell me this nonsense."

The second group, appearing unconnected to the first, came with the same message: "We've heard this; we think Ahimsaka is plotting against you." Again the teacher rejected their claims: "This is ridiculous. He is like my son. I know him so well."

Then a third group came, repeating the same accusation, but adding: "Well, if our teacher does not trust us, then examine it for yourself. See for yourself. Find out for yourself if Ahimsaka is plotting against you."

The story tells us: "Once suspicion is roused, finally the poisonous seed of suspicion took root in the teacher's heart, and he came to believe the possibility that Ahimsaka wanted to push him out. Once suspicion is roused, one can always find something that seems to confirm it."

The teacher's suspicion grew into conviction. "I must kill him or get him killed," he thought. But then he continued reasoning: "It will not be easy to kill such a strong man. Besides, if he is slain while living here as my pupil, it will harm my reputation, and students may no longer come to me. I must think of some other device to get rid of him as well as to punish him."

Let me pause here and reflect on what has just transpired in this story.

We have the jealousy of students. Ahimsaka, simply being who he is, is a delight to be around. The teacher genuinely loves him. He is doing nothing wrong. The story makes clear that the seeds of doubt the students are planting are complete falsehoods—they are fake news.

Jealousy contains probably an equal mixture of greed, aversion, and delusion. There is the greed of wanting something someone else possesses—in this case, the close relationship with the teacher. There is the aversion arising from not having it, and aversion toward the person who seems to be supplanting you. And there is the delusion that acting on these impulses would bring actual happiness—the deluded belief that getting rid of Ahimsaka, creating a split between teacher and student, would create lasting happiness for them.

So jealousy, this unwholesome motivation, prompted the students to lie, prompted them to act unskillfully, prompted them to be unethical in order to get what they wanted. We see the condition of unwholesome mind states creating unskillful, unethical behaviors.

And then we have this propaganda dynamic at work in the story—the repeated hearing of something. Over time, we begin to take in as truth what we hear repeatedly. We become more likely to believe something we've encountered again and again. Then we might see the world from that perspective, or if we're investigating whether something is true, we might look for evidence that supports it while ignoring

evidence that disconfirms it.

This is the well-known tendency of confirmation bias that we discussed a week or two ago. This is a teaching about how our minds work, captured in that sentence: "Once suspicion is roused, one can always find something that seems to confirm it."

This is such a tendency of our minds. It's a frightening aspect of our minds in some ways. We talked about this the other day—how our minds will tend to not see something when we have a particular perspective. Actually not see it.

And yet, recognizing that this is how our minds work, knowing this information is so useful, because it does begin to help us to potentially question what we take as our views, what we take as true, what we take as what we believe.

There have been some studies done on how quickly views form. There's an article called "Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds," and in it they discuss a study about how quickly a view was formed. In this study, students were handed packets of information about a pair of firefighters, Frank K. and George H. Frank's bio noted that, among other things, he had a baby daughter and liked to scuba dive. George had a small son and played golf. The packets also included the men's responses on what the researchers called the Risky-Conservative Choice Test.

According to one version of the packet, Frank was a successful firefighter who, on the test, almost always went with the safest option. In the other version, Frank also chose the safest option, but he was a lousy firefighter who'd been put on report by his supervisors several times.

Midway through the study, the students were informed that they'd been misled and that the information they'd received was entirely fictitious. The students were then asked to describe their own beliefs. What sort of attitude toward risk did they think a successful firefighter would have? The students who'd received the first packet said they thought he would avoid it. The students in the second group thought he'd embrace it.

The researchers noted, "Even after the evidence for their beliefs has been totally refuted, people fail to make appropriate revisions in their beliefs." They observed that in this case, the failure was particularly impressive since two data points—Frank and George—would never have been enough information to generalize from. So one exposure to information, told almost immediately it was fake news, and still that first impression shaped their views. The researchers noted, "Once formed, impressions are remarkably perseverant."

This is humbling. This is humbling, to see this, to recognize just how quickly views can form. And often we don't even know they're views. So knowing something about this can help us.

There are other places in this article that talk about ways we can begin to correct for this confirmation

bias. There was a study where they asked people their views, and then asked them to explain in detail what they thought about particular political policies. People had very strong views about these policies, but when asked to describe in detail how those policies would actually work, they realized that they didn't really know how they would work, and they backed off a little bit on the intensity of their beliefs.

So this is a bit of a clue. Can we reflect a little more carefully on the ramifications of what we think?

The story continues. The teacher has decided, based on fake news, based on information that was not true—he did not know that he was being lied to. So he didn't get that extra bit of information. You know, "by the way, this was false." Still might have gotten in there, because just as this example shows, how quickly views can form. But the teacher had been told things that weren't true, yet he believes they were true. And in his own exploration, he confirmed they were true. So the teacher is acting out of what he thinks of as true.

Here's where I feel like there's a thread of how sīla, ethical conduct, really plays out in our lives in the world. The students, out of jealousy, told lies. Just think about the ripple effects here that are happening based on these actions, and how potent our actions can be, especially when they're rooted in unethical conduct. I mean, this is a piece of this story—how potent unethical conduct is.

So the students told these lies out of jealousy. The teacher, believing them—so the teacher is now acting out of what he thinks of as true. His response is: I need to have him killed, or somehow get rid of him. That's coming out of what he thinks of as true. And yet again, the action that his mind is pointing him toward, out of anger, out of fear, out of aversion, out of fear that he's going to somehow be supplanted—he's contemplating taking life.

the movement towards unethical conduct in this story.

I think another piece of this that's useful to reflect on is the teacher taking action, believing that the beliefs he's basing his actions on are true. It's delusional, it's not true, and yet we see the power of belief to shape action—especially someone who holds power. In this case the teacher holds some power, and that will come out in just a moment in terms of what unfolds between the teacher and Angulimala to come.

So the story continues. It happened that soon afterwards, Ahimsaka's course of studies had come to an end and he was preparing to go home. The teacher called him and said, "My dear Ahimsaka, for one who has completed his studies, it is a duty to give a gift of honor to his teacher. So give it to me."

Ahimsaka replies, "Certainly master, what shall I give?"

The teacher replies, "You must bring me a thousand human little fingers of the right hand. This will be your concluding ceremonial homage to the science you have learned."

Ahimsaka's immediate response is, "I can't do that. How can I do that? My family has never engaged in violence. They're harmless people."

The teacher says, "Well, if the science does not receive its due ceremonial homage, it will yield no fruit for you."

Then Ahimsaka consented, and after worshipping his teacher, he left.

The commentaries kind of question this—there's a wondering why Ahimsaka went ahead with this. They speculate that some of it might have to do with the predisposition that was foretold in his horoscope when he was born, that he was born with these propensities for violence. But the other piece that is considered is the unquestioning devotion to a teacher. The teacher seemed to understand this. He understood that Ahimsaka, being a dutiful student—even the language here is, "Well, if the science does not receive its due ceremonial homage, it will yield no fruit for you"—so there's this devotional movement to do what the teacher asks.

This is a power differential here. Ahimsaka trusted the teacher and took up his suggestion.

Again, there are some studies that point to this being not just a dynamic that played out in ancient India in this story. The dynamic around power and people who will do things that they know are unethical when asked to do so by someone in power and control—this has played out over history.

After World War II there was a lot of questioning. Researchers took up the question of how this could have happened, that ordinary human beings would do this kind of thing to the Jewish community. And so there were studies about whether power was a significant factor. One of the researchers at Stanford—some of you may have heard about the Milgram studies—Milgram speculated that power was a big piece of this. Someone in authority telling you to do something. He wondered how willing people would be to go against what they know is ethically wrong, given someone in authority telling them they should do it.

So he created a study where two people came in: one was a confederate, a participant in the whole experiment, while the other was the person being experimented on. These two people arrived at the lab and were both told this was an experiment about learning, looking at how much negative reinforcement would support or diminish learning. One person drew a straw indicating they would be the learner, the other would be the person who administered the punishment—the negative reinforcement.

The person who was unknowing about this experiment was always the one who ended up delivering the punishment. The setting was that somebody was in a room, hooked up to a machine that would deliver shocks. Questions were asked, and if they got them wrong, they were given shocks. The participant who didn't know about the experiment was the one giving the shocks.

This machine had a dial that went from 15 volts to 450 volts. At 15 volts, it said "mild shock." At 450 volts, it said "danger." As the experiment progressed, the learner was answering many questions wrong, and so the experimenter would tell the person giving the shocks, "Okay, you need to turn up the dial, make the shock more painful."

As the voltage increased, the confederate would start screaming. They weren't actually being shocked—they were acting—but they would scream, and the person giving the shocks would look at the experimenter. Often there was this sense of, "Should we keep going with this?" And the experimenter would say things like, "The experiment requires that you continue. Please continue. Keep going." In a neutral way, but with that prompting.

The experiment requires that you continue. Two-thirds of the participants—two-thirds—delivered the highest level of shock, which would have been very dangerous. I don't know, it could have even caused death. Two-thirds of the people. And everyone in the study went to a significant level. Everyone went to a very significant level of delivering shocks.

Milgram wrote: "I set up a simple experiment at Yale University to test how much pain an ordinary citizen would inflict on another person, simply because he was ordered to do so by an experimental scientist. Stark authority was pitted against the participant's strongest moral imperatives against hurting others, and with the participant's ears ringing with the screams of the victims, authority won more often than not. The extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact that most urgently demands explanation."

There were some additional studies they did to moderate or check what aspects might change whether somebody would be willing to do this. Something as simple as taking the lab coat off the scientist reduced participation. But the thing that almost completely eliminated it was when the people were reminded that they carry the responsibility for their actions in the experiment. They were reminded that if harm comes to that person, it's your responsibility. Almost no one was prepared to obey in that case.

This is really the teaching on karma. The Buddha says—and we talked about this in the equanimity phrases—you are the owner of your actions. The responsibility for your actions lies with you. So again, this is pointing to a teaching on ethics: that we are the owner of our actions, that whether we act ethically or unethically has an effect not only on others but on us.

I think there's a humbleness in seeing how little power it takes for people to forego their own sense of ethics when they're not reminded of it. Maybe we should remind ourselves daily of this. The Buddha encouraged us to remind ourselves daily: I am the owner of my karma, the owner of my actions. My happiness and unhappiness depend upon those actions.

So ethics supports us. Commitment to ethics can help us counter some of the powerful forces of ignorance and craving in our minds. If the students had thought about not lying because that action would be a breach of sila, a breach of ethics, they might have looked at their minds and seen the aversion and the greed in there and chosen not to act on it. Sometimes just the not acting—the ethics—can be a kind of warning bell for us. Are we getting ready to act unethically? There's some ignorance and delusion there. So it's a really useful guideline for us.

So Ahimsaka goes off to get the thousand fingers, and he chooses to do so not by going to a charnel ground and chopping off fingers of corpses, but by killing victims and cutting off their fingers. He basically terrorized the neighborhood. People in that area went to the king and said, "You've got to do something. This guy is killing everybody. This is a problem."

And at this point, the Buddha enters the story.

At this point, Ahimsaka has killed 999 people, so he has one more person to kill to fulfill his obligation to the teacher. The news is getting out, the whole neighborhood is talking to the king, and Angulimala's mother—oh, and I forgot to tell you how he got the name Angulimala. The name literally means "garland of fingers." Mala of fingers. Angulimala. That's how he got the name, because he strung the fingers that he cut off into a garland and wore them around his neck.

His mother was in the neighborhood, and she had an intuition. Nobody knew who Angulimala was, but his mother had the intuition that it was him, because he had never come home from school. She just had that sense that it might be him, and so she decided to go find out—to put herself in the way of this person who was killing all these people.

At the same time, the Buddha, with his kind of magical power, surveys the world and understands that Angulimala is getting ready to kill his mother. There's a connection discussed in the suttas, a deep connection between Angulimala and the Buddha over many lifetimes. The Buddha saw that in killing your mother, according to Buddhist cosmology, you are taking an action that would prevent you from being awakened in this lifetime. But the Buddha also saw that Angulimala had actually developed so many wholesome qualities that he had the capacity to become fully awakened in this very lifetime. If he killed his mother, however, that would nullify the possibility.

And so the Buddha decides to put himself in the way of Angulimala, to go search out Angulimala.

At this point, the story becomes a little bit mystical. The Buddha finds Angulimala, and Angulimala sees both his mother coming and the Buddha coming at the same time. He sees his mother, recognizes her, and thinks, "Well, it's my mother, but I need this thousandth finger." The compassion in his heart is so dead at that moment that he is even contemplating killing his mother.

The Buddha comes into the picture, and Angulimala sees him. He doesn't know this is the Buddha—he thinks he's just some random ascetic wandering through the forest. And so he says, "I'll kill him instead. Why kill my mother?" He didn't understand that the consequences would be equally severe for killing a Buddha.

Angulimala sees the Buddha and starts to chase him, to follow him. But the Buddha used some of his supernormal powers to make it impossible for Angulimala to catch him. The Buddha was walking at a normal walking meditation pace, and Angulimala was running as fast as he could, yet he couldn't catch up.

Angulimala thought, "This is amazing. Formerly I caught up even with a galloping elephant and seized it. And I can't catch up with this monk who's walking at his normal pace. What's going on?" He stopped running and yelled out to the Buddha, "Stop! Stop, monk! Stop!"

The Buddha kept walking and said, "I have stopped, Angulimala. It is time for you to stop."

This jarred his mind, because in that moment Angulimala was standing still and the Buddha was walking. Angulimala said to himself, "These monks tell the truth, but here I am standing still, and this monk is walking, yet he tells me he's stopped and I haven't. What does he mean?"

The Buddha knew this would jar his mind a little. And so Angulimala asked him, "What do you mean? While you're walking, you tell me you've stopped. But now when I've stopped, you say I've not stopped. What is the meaning of this?"

The Buddha replies, "Angulimala, I have stopped forever, forswearing violence to every living being. But you have no restraint towards things that breathe. That is why I have stopped and you have not."

So again, he's pointing to ethics here. He's pointing to stopping the violence—that the Buddha has forsworn violence. And yet I think there's also a pointing, in a way, to something deeper. The freedom of the Buddha, the mind of the Buddha, the freedom the Buddha points to, is the stopping of greed, aversion, and delusion, the stopping of ignorance. That's another way the Buddha has stopped: ignorance, greed, aversion, delusion no longer arising, no longer functioning in the mind. And when ignorance arises in the mind, when delusion arises in the mind, this is where unethical behavior springs from.

So I think this is another pointing—not only the ethical teaching but a pointing to the deep stopping that's possible. Although perhaps the Buddha knew in that moment Angulimala wasn't quite ready for that part of the teaching. But maybe he was ready for the teaching on ethics.

Angulimala had a very radical change of heart in that moment, a really strong sense of having met a teacher who could help him. And so he asked the Buddha for ordination, and the Buddha ordained him.

Meanwhile, the king is still looking for Angulimala. The villagers do not know of this transformation. The king is out looking for Angulimala to kill him. On his way, he's in the neighborhood of where the Buddha resides, and so the king, passing by, stops where the Buddha is and pays respects to him.

The Buddha sees the king with his army and says, "Where are you going with this army? Is there a war?"

The king says, "No, there's not a war, but there is this single man, Angulimala. We need to put him down. But I don't have much hope in that."

The Buddha, with Angulimala sitting next to him—now with his shaved head and robes, unrecognizable to the king—says, "But great king, if you were to see Angulimala with shaven head and beard, clad in the yellow robe, gone forth from the home life into homelessness, and that he was abstaining from killing

living beings, from taking that which was not given, and from false speech, eating only at one time a day, living the life of purity and virtue and noble conduct—if you saw him thus, how would you treat him?"

"Venerable sir, we would pay homage to him, invite him to accept the four requisites of a monk, and arrange for his protection. But how could such an unvirtuous person of evil character have such virtue and restraint?"

Then the Buddha gestured: "This, great king, is Angulimala."

The text says the king's hair stood on end. He lost his composure. But the Buddha said, "Do not fear. There's nothing to fear."

This is interesting to me because at this point in the story, the Buddha is telling the king not to fear. He's saying, essentially, trust me. And the king does trust him. With that phrase from the Buddha, the king kind of relaxes and offers the requisites to Angulimala, offers him protection.

It's a counterpoint in the story to the teacher telling Angulimala, "Trust me, you have to do this thing." In this case, the Buddha is saying, "Trust me, there's nothing to fear." So what's the difference here?

And again, I think it comes to ethics. Because what the teacher was asking Angulimala to do was something unethical. He was asking him to kill beings, to take life. And so that perhaps should be something to examine, even in a position of trust and power—when somebody is asking you to do something unethical, there's a pause there.

In the case of the Buddha, the Buddha is pointing to the ethical action. He's pointing to not harming, not killing Angulimala. So ethics may be a support for us in terms of deciding how to act. Maybe something about who to trust.

At this point, Angulimala is a monk, and we've been talking a lot about the external dimension of the story—the interactions between people and how ethics plays out. Now the story turns to the inward dimension of Angulimala as a monk, practicing, trying to meditate.

Can you imagine trying to meditate after killing 999 people? What would be coming up in your mind? The story gives us a hint:

"Angulimala had not been able to focus his mind on the basic meditation subject which he'd received, though he'd tried day and night. Before his mind's eye had appeared the place in the jungle where he had slain so many people. He heard their plaintive voices imploring him, 'Let me live, my lord. I'm a poor man and have many children.' He saw the frantic movements of their arms and legs when in fear of death. When faced with such memories, deep remorse gripped him and made him get up from his seat and leave."

This is what happens. This is the inner consequence of unethical conduct. And likely, he hadn't really felt

the impact of it until he sat down and looked at his mind.

So he struggled. He struggled meditating. But he stayed. He committed to staying in the community. He didn't get much support from the community—they knew who he was at that point. They didn't give him much in the way of alms. In fact, they'd throw things at him. But he kept going. He kept going. Committed to the sīla. Really committed to the sīla at that point.

At one point on one of his alms rounds, he heard the wails of a woman having difficulty giving birth, and his heart broke open in compassion for her. To me this is another beautiful piece of the story—contrasted with his lack of compassion for the people he was killing, now his heart breaks open in compassion for someone giving birth. His heart broke with that suffering.

Then he went and talked to the Buddha about it. And the Buddha suggested that Angulimala go to that woman and say, "Since I was born, I have never purposely deprived a living being of life. By that truth, may you and the infant be safe."

And Angulimala says, "I can't say that."

I wonder about this one—why did the Buddha do that? Why did the Buddha tell him to say that? I'll tell you what he said next.

He said, "Then Angulimala, say to that woman: Sister, since I was born with the noble birth, I have never purposely deprived a being of life. By this truth, may you and the infant be safe."

That, Angulimala said, that I can say. Since I became a monk, I have never purposely deprived another being of life.

The kind of magical piece here is that this truth statement apparently created an easeful birth for the woman, and Angulimala has actually become a kind of patron saint for women in childbirth through that kind of statement, that acknowledgement: since I became a monk, since I was born with the noble birth, I've never purposely deprived a living being of life.

I thought about this a little bit. There's not a lot of explanation for why the Buddha told him to do this. It seems uncharacteristic of the Buddha to ask somebody to say something that's not true. I wonder a little bit if it's a test for Angulimala. Again, the Buddha's saying, go to this woman and say I've never purposely deprived a being of life since I was born. He's asking him to say something that's not true. Again, the power dynamic—a teacher asking him to say something that's unethical, that's not true. Is he willing to do it just because of that power dynamic? And he wasn't. He wasn't willing to do that.

The other piece of this that the commentaries point to is that it was really encouraging Angulimala to reflect on his sīla since he became a monk. He had had a kind of rebirth there into a life of non-harming. He had fulfilled his name, Ahimsaka.

It is said that this shift, when he went to the woman and said this statement—this true statement: since I became a monk, I've never killed another being, I've never purposefully deprived another being of life—after that point, his mind could settle in meditation. And the story ends as happy-ending Buddhist stories do: Angulimala became fully awakened. The transformative power of the practice. And it didn't stop people from throwing things at him when he went on alms round. And yet his mind could be at ease with that.

For myself, this story really points to how sīla supports us. And for ourselves too, this way of reflecting on our sīla. Several of us have mentioned this—that we can reflect on our ethical conduct as a support to help settle the mind. Our lives here on retreat: we are living the Eightfold Path. Anushka spoke about this last night. We're living the Eightfold Path. Bhante pointing to this in his own story. Following the Eightfold Path. Right action—yes, I'm doing that here and now. Right speech—yes, doing that. Taking some kind of support from that.

And also, for myself, I have this feeling, a kind of inspiration, in the depths of some of my retreats when I was really struggling, having such a hard time. Sometimes I would remember this story and think: if Angulimala could do it, maybe I can too.

Let's just sit for a moment.

A verse from Angulimala's enlightenment poem:

Non-harmer is the name I bear who was a harmer in the past.
The name I bear is true today. I hurt not anyone at all.
I stayed in forests, at the roots of a tree, in mountain caves, but with an agitated heart.
But now I rest and rise in happiness. And happily I spend my life.
For now I am free of Māra's snares.
Oh, for the compassion shown me by the Buddha.

May we all live with ethical conduct, following the Eightfold Path to freedom from craving and clinging. May all beings know ease and peace.

Thank you for your practice.

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