

## ANGULIMALA REAL-LIFE STORY

The real life-story of Angulimala's dual transformation from being a diligent, virtuous student to a notorious serial killer, and subsequently, to a Saint has been retold for over two thousand six hundred years. It has never failed to evoke powerful emotions in the reader or listener. This presentation is crafted to cater to a wide readership, ranging from young children to teenagers and adults.

Parents can introduce the moral lessons of the historic Angulimala episode to their children as young as three years old, by reading in sequence the captions of the illustrations. A picture is worth a thousand words. A child can grasp the essence of the story through these graphic illustrations. Parents can use them to narrate to their young ones in simple language the sequence of events and happenings of the legendary story and the moral lessons to be drawn from it. Teenagers and youths would find the story a classic that makes for enjoyable reading. Simultaneously, they can benefit from understanding the underlying life-principles such as the Universal Law of Karma. Further, the story would inspire them to actualize their individual goals in life.

Parents are encouraged to bring up their child with *metta* (unconditional friendliness or benevolence or goodwill) and *karuna* (compassion). Expectant mothers and their immediate families can draw deep *shraddha* (confidence) so essential for motherhood from Arahant Angulimala – the Patron Saint of Mothers. They would better appreciate the inherent power of the protective blessings evoked from reciting or listening to the *Angulimala Paritta* regularly. In addition, they would benefit profoundly from observing *gabbha parihara* (protection and the psychological, emotional and spiritual development of the foetus), based on ancient wisdom for ensuring a holistic development and growth of their unborn baby and for a successful birth. The book can be also used as a text for English comprehension and for staging a drama in school.

# ANGULIMALA: Transforming Life



By

**G.K. Ananda Kumarasiri**



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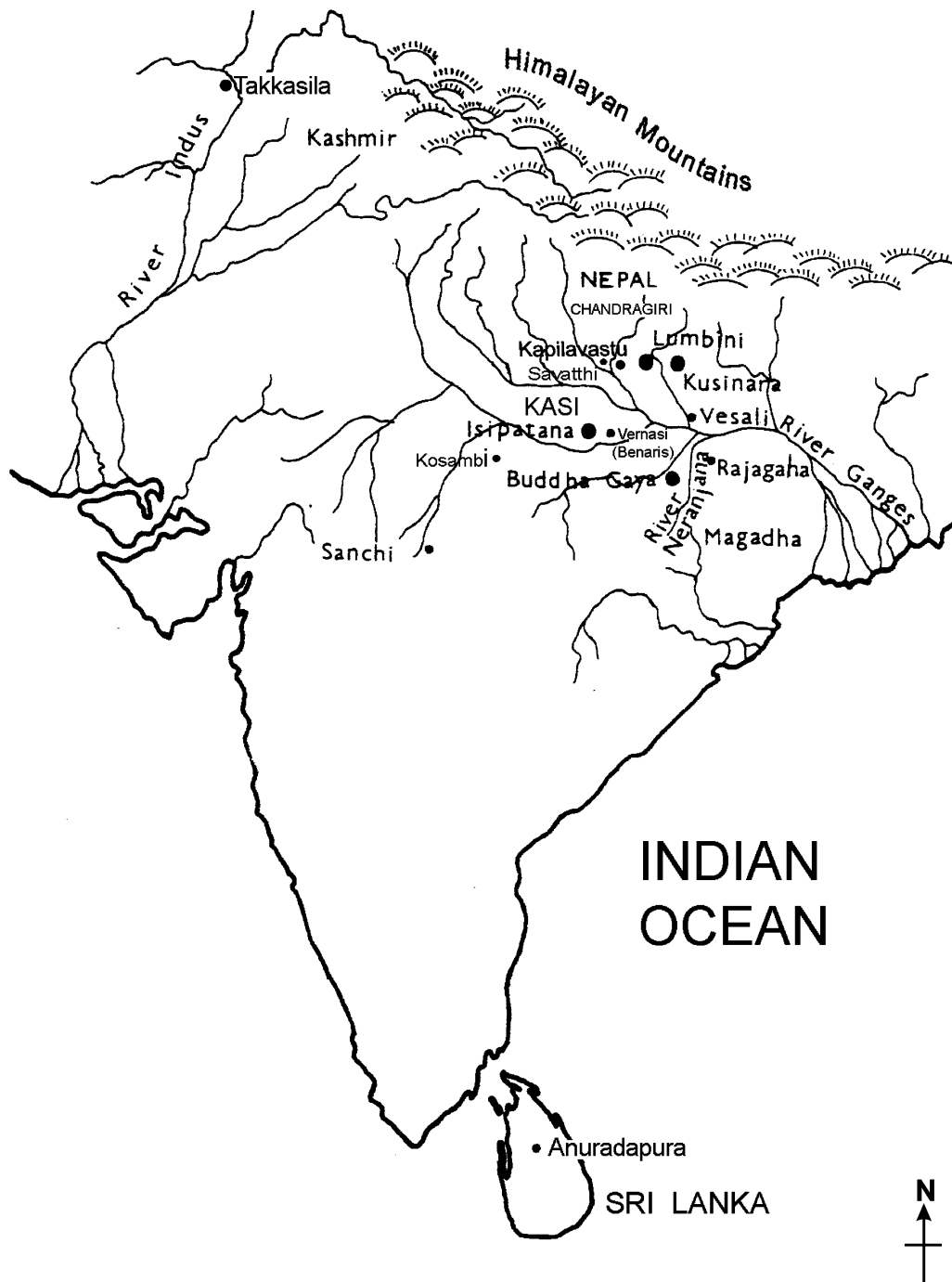
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## About the Author



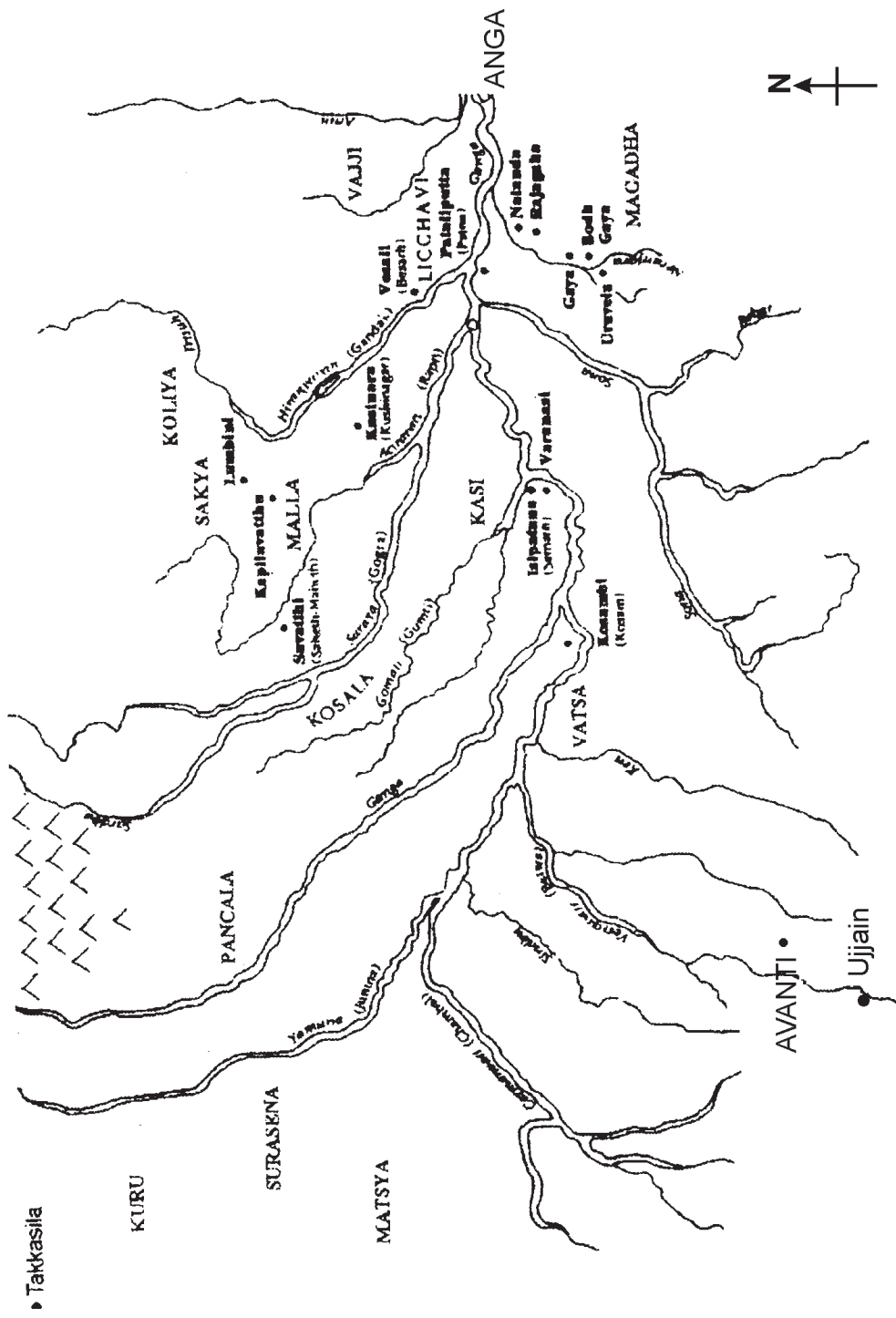
Ambassador Dato' Dr. G.K. Ananda Kumarasiri has had a distinguished diplomatic career (1966-1995), with the rare distinction of setting up and heading the Centre for International Relations and Strategic Studies. The assignment stimulated his interest in education, human resource development and professional training. In 1984, he was appointed High Commissioner to Nigeria. He retired in 1995 as Director-General ASEAN. Apart from being an Adjunct Professor at University Utara Malaysia, he is an active Dhamma speaker in Malaysia and abroad and has authored several landmark books:

- Professional Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs Management: An Ambassador's Insight
- My First Word Book: Holistic Education
- A Compendium of Buddhist Personal Names: Heritage and Significance of Adoption
- The Way Forward
- Advancing from **Knowing** to **Being**
- My Alphabet Book: Holistic Education
- The Terrifying Drug Menace
- Welcoming the Birth of a Child
- Angulimala: Transforming Life
- Mothercare and Parenting: Key to Social Structuring
- SIDDHARTHA: Prince of Peace
- Way of Siddhartha: Victorious Noble Prince
- SIDDHARTHA: My First Story Book
- My First Colouring Book
- King Bimbisara: A Father's Unrmitting Love



ANCIENT CITIES OF INDIA (circa 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.)

# GANDHARA



Kosala and Neighbouring Kingdoms (circa 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.)





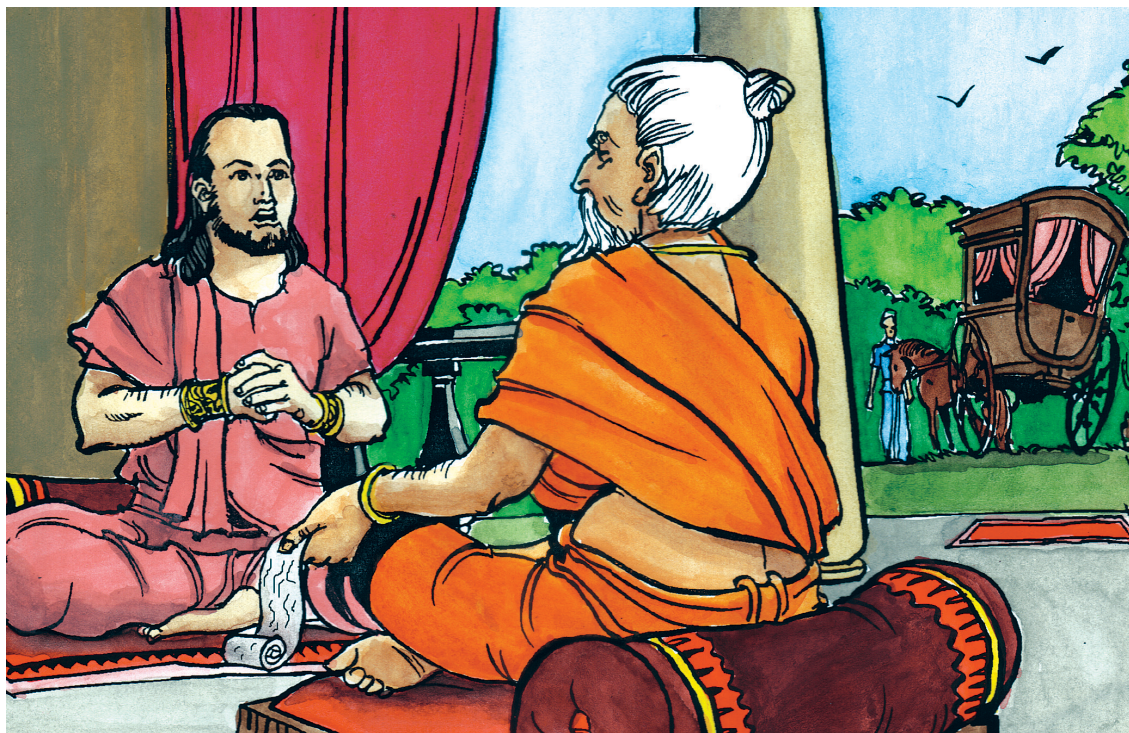
### **Bhaggava and Mantani Overjoyed at the Birth of a Son**

Around the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Bhaggava Gagga was the Purohita Brahmana (Grand Chaplain) in the court of King Pasenadi of the Kingdom of Kosala in North-east India. He was married to a beautiful Brahmin girl named Mantani. After several years of enjoying a happy married life, they were at long last blessed with a baby boy. He was a delightful, healthy, cute little bundle of joy. The loving couple were thoroughly overjoyed at the arrival of their newborn son. But strangely, at the time of his birth in the middle of the night, Bhaggava had noted a brilliant light glittering from the weapons of the night guards protecting their home.

This unusual happening troubled him somewhat. He could not help feeling that the strange glitter of the weapons was somehow connected with his son's birth. He wondered whether it was an auspicious or inauspicious sign that he had witnessed. He could not tell for sure for he had not come across such a mysterious happening before. He was naturally anxious to find out whether the strange phenomenon was a good or bad omen. It was a common practice in India as in other civilizations, particularly among the royal families, aristocrats and the nobility to consult astrologers to interpret an unusual event or incident. Since it was midnight, he had to wait till the next morning to visit the Royal Astrologer, Kanthipala, to seek his expert knowledge on the matter.

So early next morning, Bhaggava hurried to Kanthipala's home to chart his





### **Bhaggava Consults the Royal Astrologer on his Son's Horoscope**

newborn son's horoscope and obtain the respected astrologer's expert opinion about the strange happening that had taken place at the time of his birth. He first broke to him the happy news of being blessed with a son and then proceeded to explain about the glitter from his night guards' weapons. He requested him to kindly cast his son's horoscope as a matter of urgency as he was anxious to find out what the future held in store for him.

Kanthipala carefully referred to his books and charts a few times over to make sure that he had read the astrological signs and computed the planetary calculations correctly. Bhaggava noticed that after each reading, he shook his head as if in disbelief. Further, Kanthipala muttered to himself after each round he flipped through his astrological tables and charts, *"This cannot be true. Possibly there might be something not quite correct in the configuration of the times and the reading on the constellation of the planets."* He paused for a while and again mumbled, *"I must check this out again."* Bhaggava's anxiety heightened as Kanthipala reviewed his calculations a few times. Not able to hold his patience any longer, he pressed him for the verdict of his astrological findings. Thereupon, Kanthipala looked up slowly at Bhaggava and in a measured voice declared:

*I regret to be the bearer of distressing news, Purohita Brahmana. According to my calculations, your son was born at an inauspicious time.*

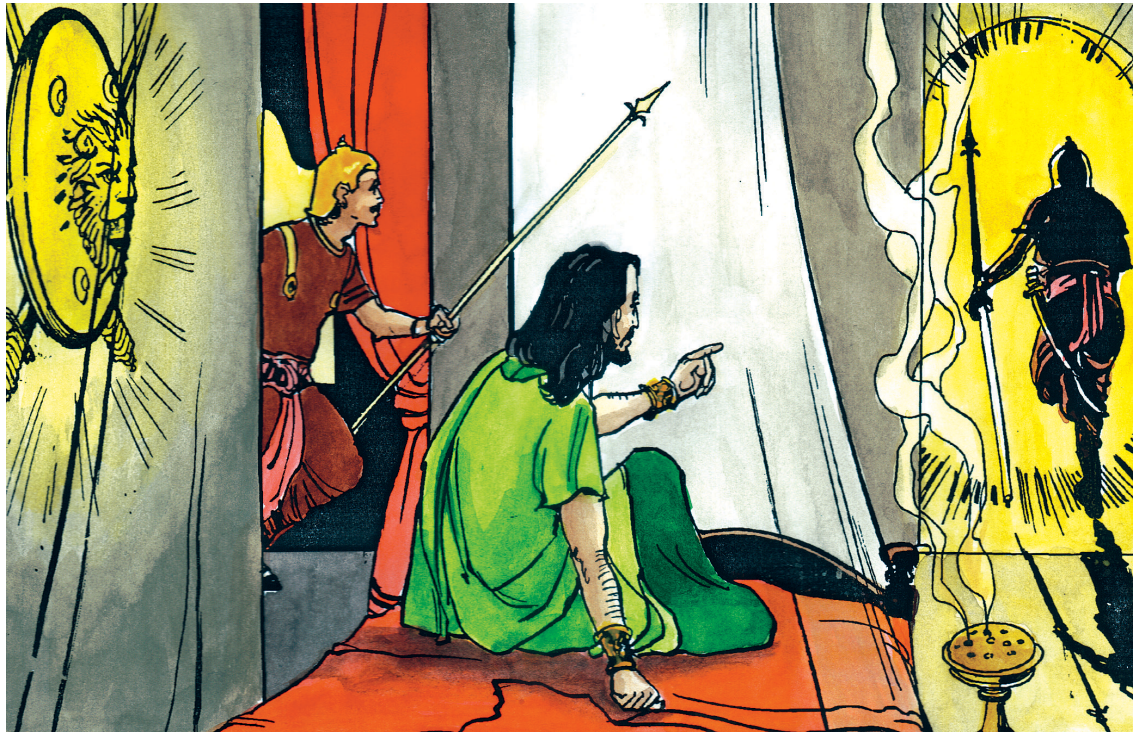


### **Bhaggava Overhearing People Discuss about the Strange Omen**

*To be precise, he was born under what is known as the 'bandit constellation'. This means your son bears a predisposition to a life of violence and crime. Furthermore, the strange sparkle of the weapons you had witnessed does not augur well for his future. As a matter of fact, the omen is extremely bad. It portends that your son is destined to become a notorious bandit when he grows up.*

Bhaggava was totally devastated. He gaped with open mouth as Kanthipala delivered his heart-shattering opinion. One could well imagine Bhaggava's great shock when told the most disturbing forecast of his son's future. Heart-broken and burdened with great sadness, he slowly made his way home. As he passed through the capital city of Savatthi, he noticed several of the cityfolk discuss about strange flashes of light that had set forth from their weapons the night before. He stopped his horse carriage to find out what exactly they were saying. Most of them expressed fear that the strange happening was a bad omen. He overheard a person remark, "Ah! *this is not a good sign at all.*" Another declared, "Some evil is going to strike Kosala." They concluded, "This dreadful omen is a clear message that the Gods are terribly angry and would soon show their wrath."

Bhaggava became more burdened with sadness over his son's predicted disastrous future. He told himself, "If the city folks too had experienced the strange



### King Pasenadi Suddenly Awakened by Blinding Flashes

*flashes of light, then the Royal Astrologer, Kantipala's, prediction could well be correct.*" As he journeyed homeward brooding over what had transpired, his heart grew heavier and heavier about his son's cruel future. However, he did not wish to inform his wife of their son's shocking horoscope. He simply did not have the heart to break the unhappy news to her. He knew that this would surely cause her much heartache and anguish which invariably would affect her health. He resolved to bear the pain of the heart-breaking prediction of the Royal Astrologer all by himself.

Later that morning, Bhaggava as usual reported to King Pasenadi's court. As a routine, he inquired from the monarch whether he had a sound sleep. "How could I have slept well?" retorted the King curtly. He disclosed to him:

*A very strange thing happened last night, Brahmin. I was awakened suddenly in the middle of my sleep by blinding flashes of light which gleamed from the royal coat of arms hanging over my bed. As I woke up, I saw the royal armoury blazing like a wild fire. The whole night through my mind was preoccupied over the strange flashes of light that had occurred. I was too perturbed to return to sleep from that moment onwards. Initially, I thought that perhaps what had happened was a nightmare or that it was just my imagination playing tricks on my mind. Upon investigating the strange incident, I realised that this was not so. I*



### **Bhaggava Confides about the Royal Astrologer's Prediction**

*could not help but feel distressed by the unusual happening. I wondered, Brahmin, 'could this be an omen signalling a danger to the kingdom?'*

Being one of the most trusted and loyal high officials of the Royal Court, Bhaggava addressed the King with utmost honesty:

*Your Majesty, have no fear. The same strange phenomenon had taken place throughout Savatthi. The mysterious happenings do not concern Your Majesty. This strange happening is connected with my family. Last night, Mantani was blessed with a son. At the time of his birth, all the weapons in the city had glowed as if they were on fire.*

Bhaggava paused for a moment to take a deep breath. With a heavy heart, he proceeded to disclose to the King the painful prediction about his son's future:

*Your Majesty, I requested the Royal Astrologer, Kantipala, to cast my son's horoscope and also consulted him about the mysterious happening that had occurred at the time of his birth. According to him, my son was born under a 'bandit constellation'. This was what caused the weapons to dazzle brightly. He predicted that the strange phenomenon portends a danger to the people of Kosala when he grows up.*



### **Bhaggava expresses Gratitude for the King's Compassion**

Out of unwavering loyalty to his monarch, Bhaggava submitted that he could not bring up a son who was destined to be a threat to the kingdom. He cited as justification the Vedic scriptures which stated that one evil life may be sacrificed to save other innocent ones. With a heavy heart, he requested, *"Your Majesty, permit me to end my newborn son's life before he grows up to be a notorious bandit."* King Pasenadi was somewhat taken aback. He thought hard for a moment and inquired, *"Brahmin, did the Royal Astrologer predict whether your son would become a leader of a gang of bandits or just a lone criminal?"*

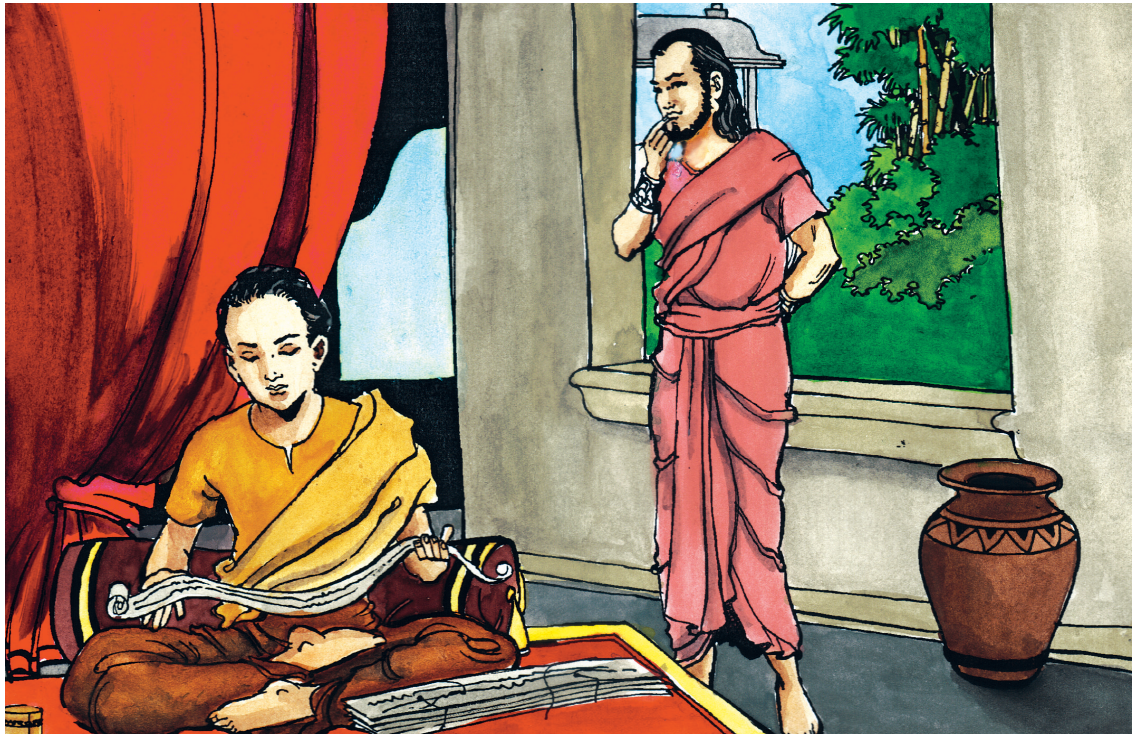
Bhaggava answered truthfully, *"Your Majesty, a lone bandit is his fate."* His reply set at ease the King's mind. He reasoned that as a lone bandit, Bhaggava's son could not pose an insurmountable threat to the kingdom. Being a devout patron of the Buddha, he recalled the Enlightened One's Teaching about the innate goodness of human beings and that every child is born virtuous and pure in mind. The King was confident that in accordance to the Buddha's Teachings, Bhaggava would be able to successfully forestall evil traits from taking root in his son. He advised him, *"Instead of ending your son's life, Brahmin, it would be better to raise him with proper education and guidance to live a virtuous life. He would then grow up to be a responsible and loyal subject. You should endeavour to forestall whatever unwholesome predilection he may possess because of his past karma (consequence of evil thoughts and actions from past lives)."*



**Bhaggava and Mantani spent quality time with baby Ahimsaka**

Bhaggava heaved a sigh of relief. His son would live after all! He thanked the King profusely for his compassion and wisdom. He promised to raise his son in accordance with Brahminic traditions and customs and guide him to live a virtuous life. Bearing in mind the King's advice, one of the very first things Bhaggava did was to give his son a meaningful name. After much deliberation with Mantani the name "*Ahimsaka*" (Harmless One) was chosen. Bhaggava hoped that this name would plant in his son's mind, the life-ideal to strive for a blameless way of life. He thought to himself, "*Hopefully, my son would strive to achieve the ideal of ahimsa (non-killing or hurting of any living being, including animals) and neutralize his evil karma. He would then not become a bandit as predicted in his horoscope.*"

Bhaggava and Mantani spent many delightful days of quality time with their newborn son daily. Ahimsaka was such a joy to his parents. Playing with him gave them tremendous happiness. They brought him up with great care and affection. Bhaggava paid meticulous attention to his grooming. He spared no effort to bring him up as a person of sound character and mind. As instructed by his monarch, he provided close supervision and parental guidance to ensure that his son grew up to be a virtuous person. He was provided the best education possible and was well tutored in the customs and religious practices of the Brahminic tradition right from a young age.

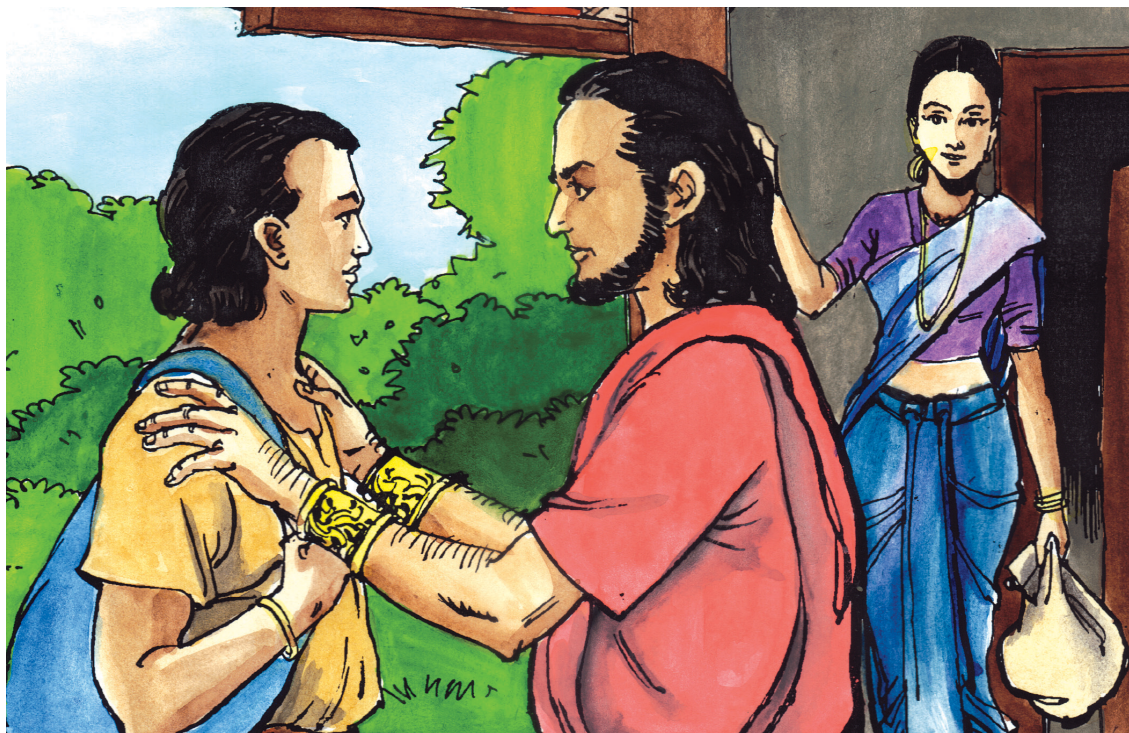


### **Ahimsaka Proves a Diligent and Virtuous Student**

Ahimsaka grew up to be physically strong and athletic. True to his name, he was a gentle and loving child. In particular, he was deeply affectionate and highly respectful of his parents. Also, he was totally committed to maintaining the honour and reputation of the family. Furthermore, he displayed deep compassion for others and was kind and caring towards animals and insects. He proved to be an intelligent and well-mannered student as well. Bhaggava's confidence and pride in his son soared as he made remarkable progress in his education. He was particularly pleased that his son's character and conduct were impeccable. He was confident that a youngster as dedicated to his studies as his son had proven and who was so strongly committed to preserving the family's prestige and honour would certainly not become a notorious criminal. Moreover, Ahimsaka took such a keen interest to study the sacred Brahminic traditions and customs and the Vedic Scriptures.

As a teenager too, Ahimsaka distinguished himself in scholastic achievements. He persisted in his burning passion for learning. His *adhithana* (strong aspiration or resolve) was to achieve the pinnacle of higher learning by being selected to study in a reputed institution of higher learning.

When Ahimsaka came of age, in recognition of his excellent academic performance and his respectable Brahmin family background, he was selected into the famous



### **Bhaggava and Mantani Bid Ahimsaka Farewell**

University of Takkasila (Taxila, located in present-day Pakistan) – the renowned centre of learning in ancient India. Not only did Ahimsaka achieve a very high level of scholastic excellence, he was privileged enough to study under the tutelage of the foremost teacher namely, the widely renowned Guru Disapamukh.

Bhaggava and Mantani beamed with pride over Ahimsaka's outstanding scholastic achievement. They were delighted that he would be instructed by the best *guru* (preceptor or master). They were confident that he would soon follow in the tradition of his distinguished family and hold a high position in the Royal Court upon completing his tutelage. Higher learning and scholastic achievement were regarded as particularly noble undertakings in ancient Indian society. A learned person was highly honoured by society and accorded great respect. At the same time, Bhaggava and Mantani's hearts were heavy. They felt a tinge of sadness. Ahimsaka's departure for Takkasila was both a happy and sad event for them for this also meant that their son would be away from home for several years until he completed his scholarship. It was the established tradition then for a student to study under a single *guru* for around eight to ten years. Such a long period of tutelage was necessary for a *guru* to impart the knowledge he had accumulated through his life-long study and self-experience.

As for Bhaggava, he had an additional albeit secret reason to be happy over





### **Ahimsaka Arrives at Takkasila University**

Ahimsaka's scholastic brilliance. He was greatly relieved that his son had grown up to be an outstanding student. He was confident that Ahimsaka had a very promising future ahead of him. A bright future was all the more assured, given his own high position and influence as Purohita Brahmana. Bhaggava felt sure that since his son possessed a distinctly ardent thirst for learning, he could hardly be expected to become a murderous bandit. He told himself convincingly, "*There must have been some mistake in the prediction about Ahimsaka's evil ways as an adult. Kanthipala must have made some error in the reading of his horoscope.*" Thinking thus, Bhaggava ceased to worry about his son's future.

When Ahimsaka arrived at Takkasila, he was overawed by the ambience of the university. The structures were massive with towering arches every twenty or so steps apart. Wide corridors on both sides of the buildings linked large lecture halls and students' dormitories. The library was a treasure vault of books and other educational materials one only dreamt about. He was eager to read the rare collection of treatises and other learned works housed in it. The university campus itself stretched for several leagues in all four directions, with wide open parks and beautiful gardens. The sprawling campus grounds were interspersed with residential buildings and teaching faculties. Close by the huge structures housing the lecture halls and amphitheatres were shaded lawns where groups of students were seen engaged in discussion, debate, quiet self-study or



### **Ahimsaka Pays Respects to Guru Disapamukh**

contemplation. Ahimsaka could not help but feel the University such an invigorating place for scholarship. He took an immediate liking to the place and felt lucky to be there. From the very moment he stepped into the campus, he was inspired to take every opportunity to excel in his higher learning. *“This is such a refreshing environment for learning. I am sure I will love this famous university,”* thought Ahimsaka to himself.

Takkasila also had the rare distinction of hosting students from all over the Indian sub-continent and from even lands beyond. There was hence the added attraction of interacting with students from different cultural backgrounds. It was a unique sight to see students garbed in various ethnic attire interacting with each other in the interest of scholastic pursuit and in the process cultivating intimate relationships. After being guided around the University, Ahimsaka was finally introduced to the famous Guru Disapamukh. When they met, he bowed respectfully before his *guru* and presented him with the gifts his parents had sent. Guru Disapamukh warmly welcomed Ahimsaka and introduced him to the rest of his aspiring students. At Takkasila too, Ahimsaka proved a conscientious and excellent student. He performed exceedingly well in his studies and soon demonstrated that he was head and shoulders above the rest of his class. Within a short period, he mastered what his peers had struggled to cope with for several months. Guru Disapamukh was highly impressed and very proud of Ahimsaka’s



### Guru Disapamukh Praises Ahimsaka's Scholarship

scholastic capabilities. He predicted confidently that Ahimsaka had a great future ahead of him.

Ahimsaka served his *guru* humbly and faithfully. Within only a couple of years, he was regarded the most illustrious and obedient student of the renowned Master. He was also known throughout the campus for his kindness and virtuous ways. It was, therefore, hardly surprising that he became the favourite of his *guru*. So impressed was Guru Disapmukh with Ahimsaka that he extended the hospitality of his home as if he were his own son. Ahimsaka's gentle, humane nature also impressed his *guru's* wife, Shanti. She had no children of her own. She took a natural liking for Ahimsaka and treated him as one of the family. It was indeed a rare honour for a student to be accorded such a high privilege and trust by a preceptor as renowned as Guru Disapamukh.

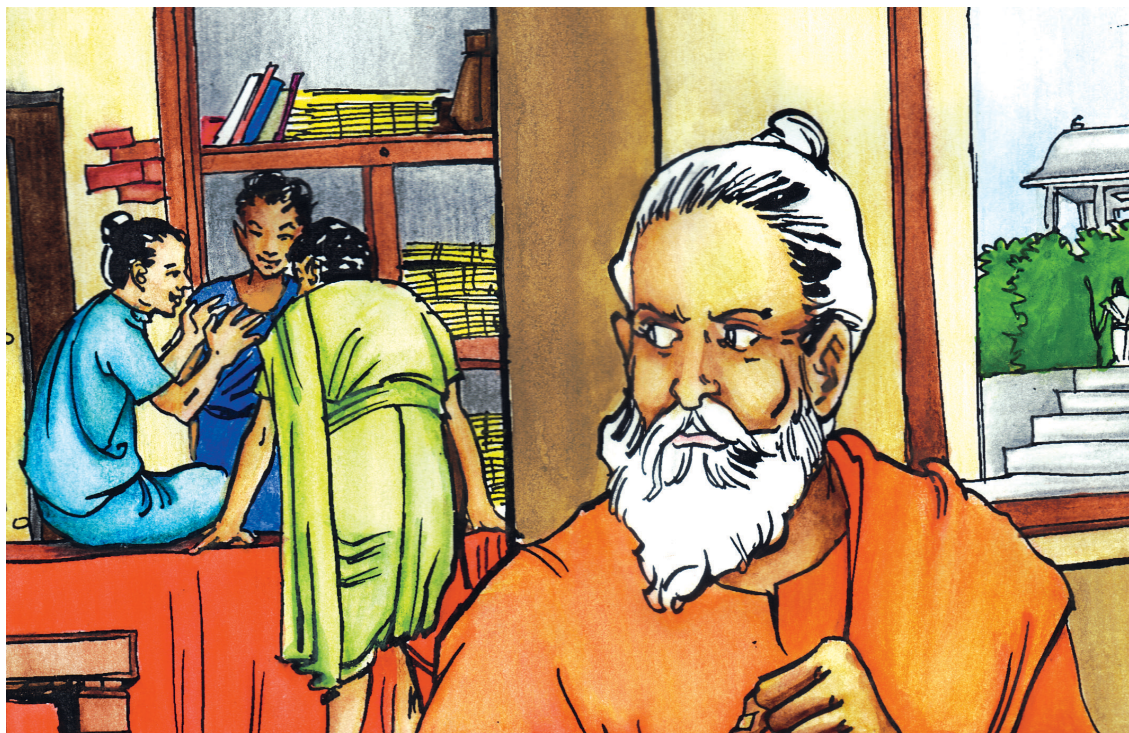
In his initial years in Takkasila, Ahimsaka had many close friends. With the growing prominence of his scholastic achievements, his peers began to distance themselves from him. They were envious of his remarkable success and the special treatment he was accorded by their *guru*. They grew increasingly unhappy with the special attention and privileges extended to him by their famous preceptor. His peers were resentful of the praises Guru Disapamukh continuously showered on him. They began to frequently express their



### **Ahimsaka's Peers Resentful of his Achievements**

disenchantment about Ahimsaka among themselves. The usual grumbling was that because of Ahimsaka's scholarly prominence, their *guru* had virtually forgotten them. "*We must soon end this ridiculous situation by causing a rift between Ahimsaka and our Guru,*" they secretly harboured in their hearts. Over time, their envy festered and slowly but surely this degenerated into a deep-seated hatred against his very presence. It came to a point that they could not bear Ahimsaka's popularity any longer and decided that it was time to get rid of him. They plotted to discredit him in the eyes of their *guru*. But try as they might, they could not find a single fault since he was such an ideal student and so very correct in his behaviour. There was really nothing damaging that they could exploit to disgrace or discredit him.

Ahimsaka's peers knew that they could not blemish his academic record. So, they schemed to tarnish his character. They connived to make false allegations against him in order to poison their *Master's* mind about his favourite student. They schemed to report to Guru Disapamukh that Ahimsaka had become swollen headed and regarded himself intellectually superior to him and that he aimed to overshadow the Master. To ensure that the scheme hatched would succeed, they planned to plant in addition a seed of suspicion in their *guru's* mind that Ahimsaka had taken advantage of his kindness and hospitality to start an illicit relationship with his wife, Shanti. In order to effectively execute their sinister plot, the jealous



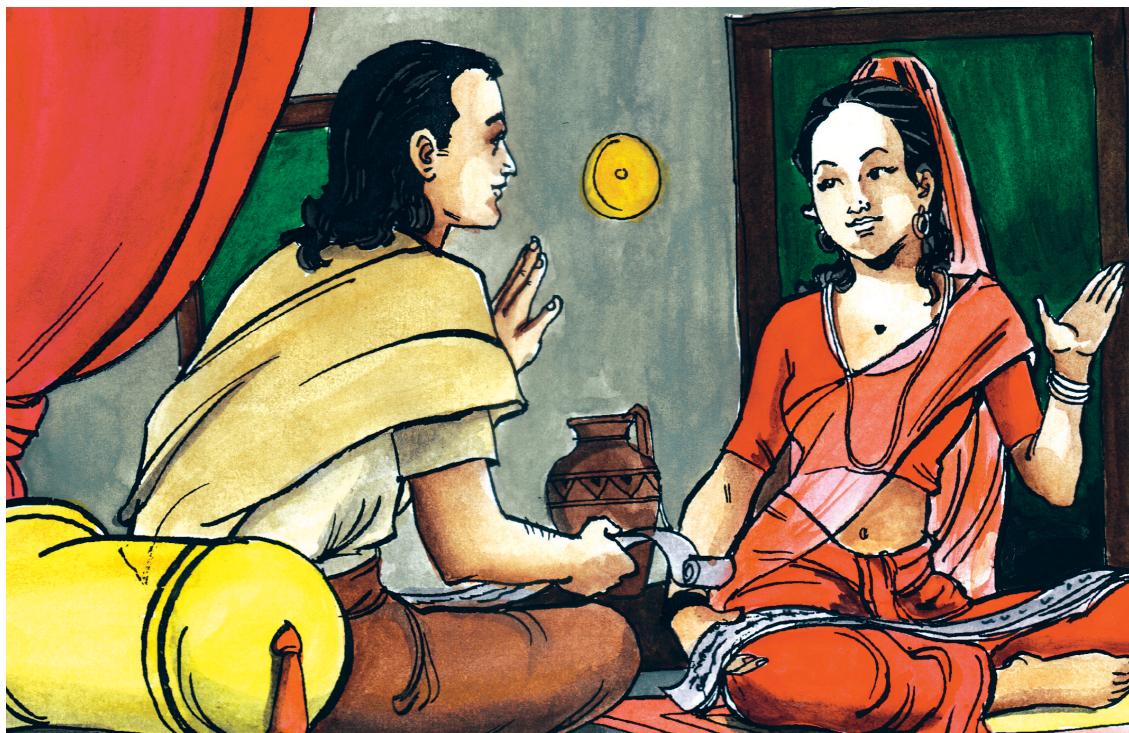
### Ahimsaka's Peers Plot Against him

peers divided themselves into three cliques. The first group would inform their *guru* of Ahimsaka's improper character and conduct. The second and third clique would then confirm, at intervals to their *guru*, the veracity of the first clique's accusations leveled against Ahimsaka.

When Ahimsaka's jealous colleagues unfolded their sinister plot, Guru Disapamukh reprimanded them and dismissed outright the allegations they had levelled against his favourite student. He considered their charges preposterous and reproached them for accusing Ahimsaka of such inconceivable wrongdoings. He rebuked all of them, saying:

*Get away, you miserable lot! Don't you have anything better to do than find fault with Ahimsaka? Do not waste your time to cause dissension between me and Ahimsaka! Leave him in peace to pursue his studies. It will do you all a great deal of good to instead follow the example of his diligence and rare scholistic progress.*

The three groups of peers respectfully submitted to their *guru* that as far as they were concerned they had done their duty by informing him about Ahimsaka's rotten character and his gross misconduct. They politely suggested that it was now left entirely to the Master to take heed of their warning and institute



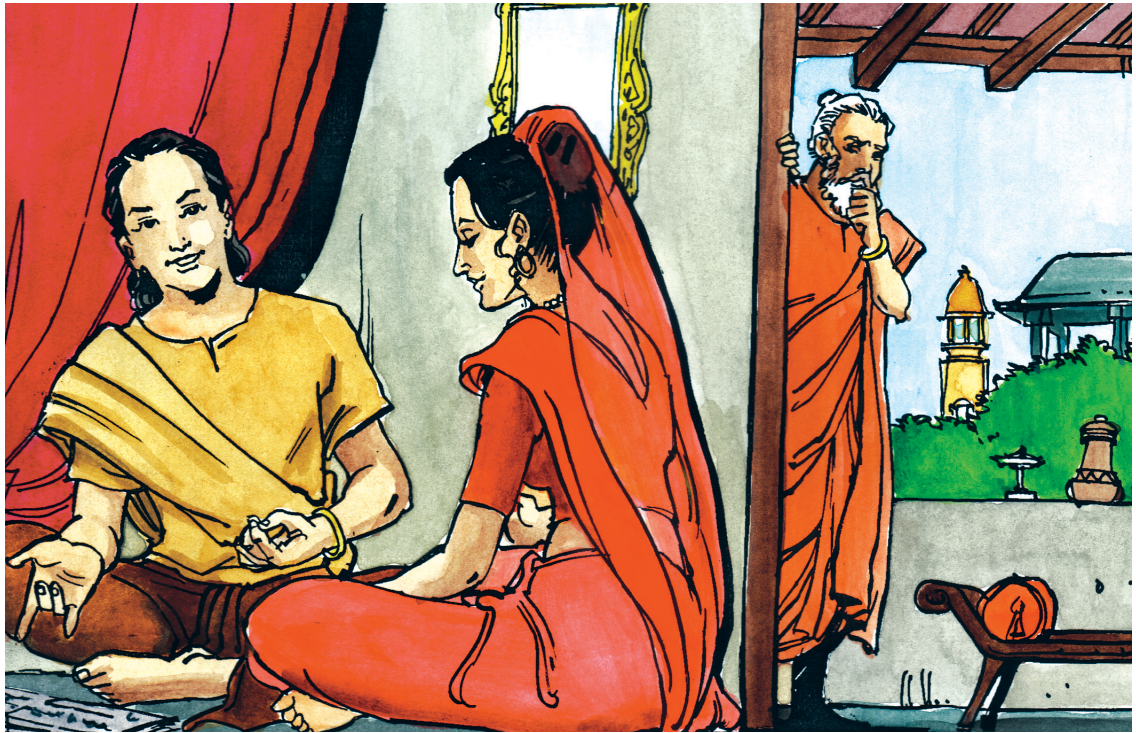
**Ahimsaka and Shanti in Animated Conversation**

appropriate measures to protect his interests and family honour. They collectively implored, *“If our respected Master does not trust us, it may do well Sir, for you to find out the true character of Ahimsaka yourself.”*

Although Guru Disapamukh had at first rejected outright the allegations leveled against Ahimsaka, slowly but surely, doubt about his favourite student began to grow in his mind. As time passed, the poisonous seed of suspicion against Ahimsaka began to germinate. He began to be apprehensive about Ahimsaka’s close relationship with his wife. This matter was unnerving to Guru Disapamukh since he was old, while on the other hand, Shanti was relatively young and attractive. Moreover, it was evident that she was very fond of Ahimsaka.

Eventually, the *guru* fell for the treacherous scheme hatched by Ahimsaka’s jealous peers. His mind became preoccupied with the possibility that Ahimsaka had taken advantage of his hospitality and was carrying on an affair with Shanti. He was upset that Ahimsaka spent much time with her. To his growing distrust, he often found them seated together in animated conversation. He could not help feeling jealous of Shanti’s affection towards Ahimsaka. He silently resented her treating him with kindness and looking after his needs so caringly.

Suspicion about Ahimsaka’s character and behaviour now loomed large in Guru

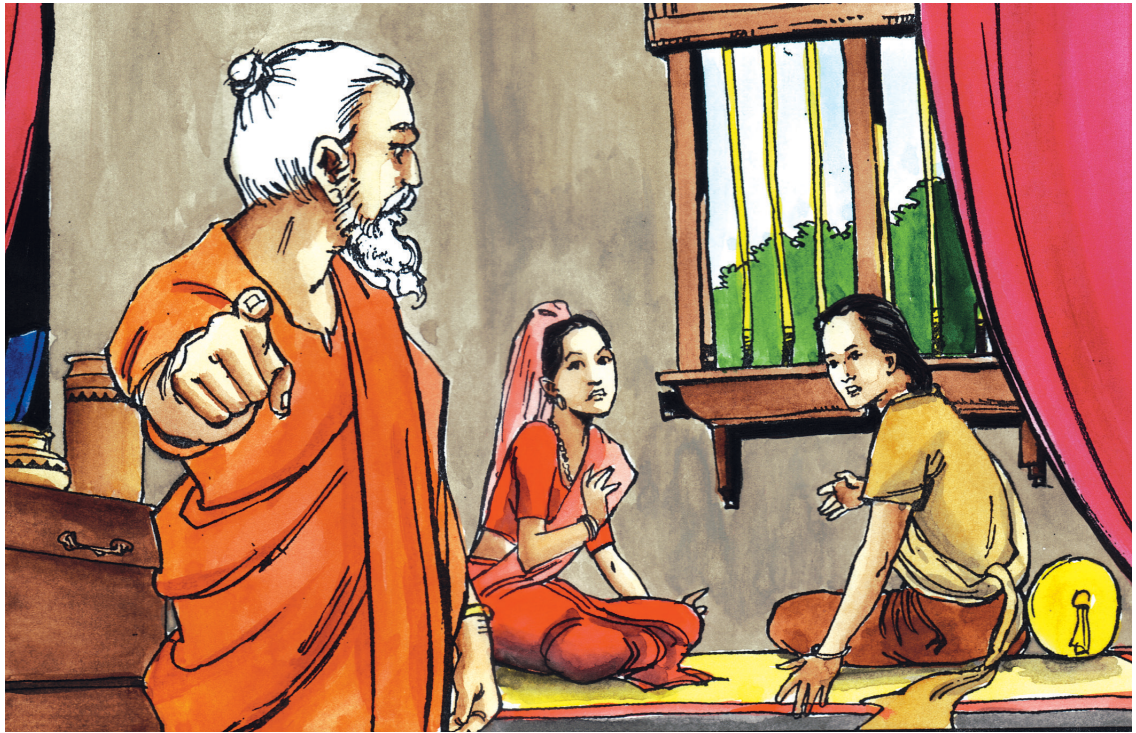


### Suspicion Takes Root in Guru Disapamukh's Mind

Disapamukh's mind. Day by day, and hour by hour, he thought of nothing else but the affectionate relationship between Ahimsaka and his youthful Shanti. This was all the more so because he knew that they thoroughly enjoyed each other's company. He, however, felt it unwise to openly confront either of them regarding their intimate relationship without solid proof. He would often ask himself:

*Could it be that my students were after all absolutely right about Ahimsaka's improper behaviour and dubious intentions. I have been so trusting of him to a point that I was blinded about his true character. I treated him like my very own flesh and blood. How could he do this to me? Is this the kind of gratitude that he repays me with. As the saying goes, 'there is no smoke without fire.' From now onwards, I must keep a close scrutiny on his every move. It would be simply foolish of me to take my eyes off him even for a moment.*

It is said that once suspicion is aroused in one's mind, one can always find something to confirm it. As it turned out, this was exactly what happened in the case of Guru Disapamukh. Despite being a very wise and learned person, he could not help being a victim of the age old practice of calumny. His suspicion and fear of Ahimsaka increased by the day until he could not bear them any longer. He waited for an opportune moment to nail down Ahimsaka. One day, when both



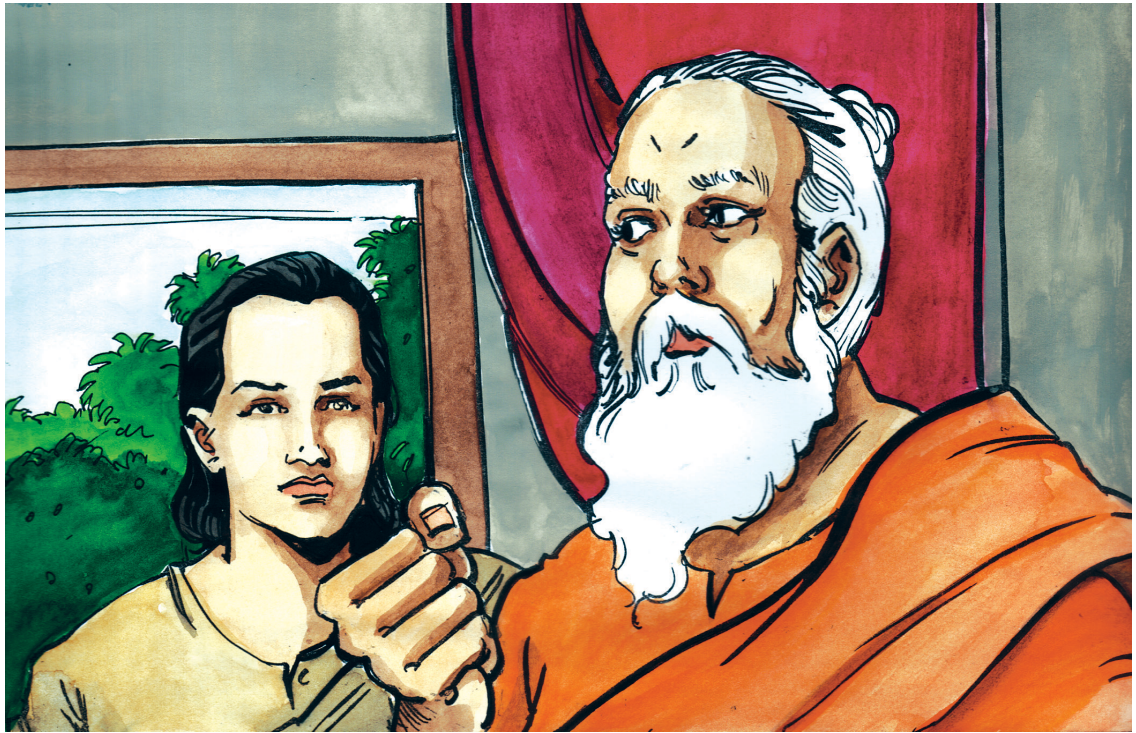
### **Guru Disapamukh Reprimands Ahimsaka for being Disrespectful**

Shanti and Ahimsaka were engrossed in conversation, he sneaked quietly behind the door and entered stealthily into the house. Neither Ahimsaka nor Shanti noticed or heard him enter the hall. Unaware of his presence, they naturally failed to get up as customarily observed to show respect to the Master. Guru Disapamukh was furious that Ahimsaka had failed to pay due obeisance when he made his entrance. He was livid that his student had behaved with such insolence. He shouted out angrily at him for being ill-mannered and disrespectful.

Ahimsaka had never ever been reprimanded in his life, not to speak of suffering the ignominy of such a severe scolding from his respected preceptor. Guru Disapamukh's outburst of rage shook him to the core of his being. Deeply shocked and shaken, he stood silently in a daze with his head hanging down and his eyes gazing towards the floor. After letting loose his wrath, Guru Disapamukh angrily ordered Ahimsaka to leave his house at once. Ahimsaka pleaded repeatedly, *"Master, please forgive me, I did not mean to be disrespectful. I did not hear you coming. Please forgive me, for it was never my intention to disregard your eminence."* His impassioned pleas for pardon over the inadvertent oversight were of no avail. The *guru* was absolutely adamant. He ruled that Ahimsaka should never set foot in his house ever.

Ahimsaka was completely shattered. He realised that he had no choice but to





### **Guru Disapamukh Schemes to Destroy Ahimsaka**

leave. He went to his room and quietly packed his belongings. Before taking his leave, he paid reverence to his *guru*. Once again, he prayed at his feet and begged for forgiveness. But Guru Disapamukh remained totally unmoved. Instead, he looked the other way to demonstrate his impatience and still-burning anger. Under a heavy cloud of despondency, Ahimsaka left to seek accommodation in the students' dormitory in the campus.

By now Guru Disapamukh concluded as true, what Ahimsaka's peers had reported about him. He believed that Ahimsaka had become egoistic, arrogant and disrespectful. Deep down, he also feared that Shanti might one day elope with his youthful and handsome student if he failed to take immediate measures to scuttle their relationship. He could not bear the thought of being left all alone and to have been betrayed by this ungrateful student whom he had treated as his own son. He wickedly contemplated that evicting Ahimsaka from his house was not sufficient security for his liking. Consumed by deep fear and anger, he decided that it was best to get rid of the handsome and highly intelligent young man completely. Thereupon, he hatched a vile scheme to destroy Ahimsaka.

With this sinister objective in mind, Guru Disapamukh decided to devise a way to get Ahimsaka killed. At the same time, he was concerned that if Ahimsaka were to be killed while remaining under his wardship, this would taint his reputation and

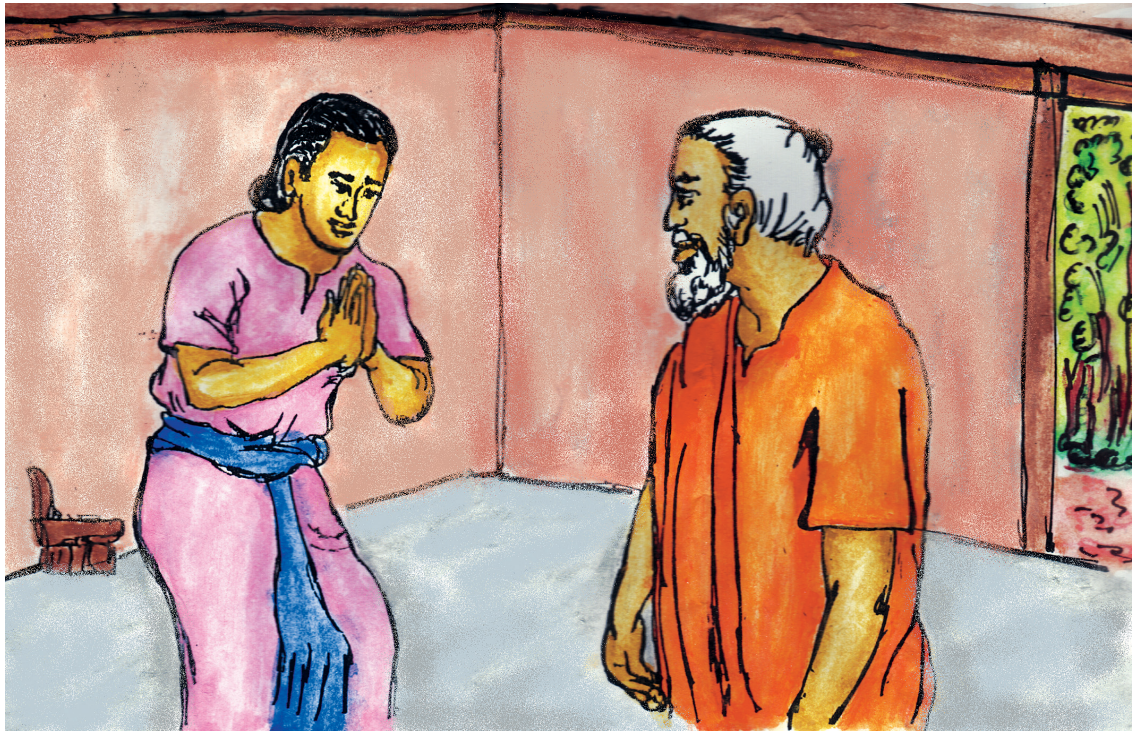


### Ahimsaka Thrown into Deep Consternation

students would no longer seek him out for tutelage. Worse still, he could be accused of a criminal act and even sentenced to death. This was especially so because of the allegations his other students had made about Ahimsaka's illicit affair with his young wife. Therefore, he thought it best to demand his *Guru Dakshina* (traditional offering to one's teacher for guidance, usually fulfilled at the conclusion of one's studies which is a hallowed custom strictly observed in India even to this day). According to this entrenched ancient Indian tradition, it was a *guru's* sole prerogative to request any form of *Guru Dakshina* he chose. Sacrificial offerings, including human sacrifice as fulfillment of a vow or penance or offering to the Gods was not unheard of under the Brahminic tradition. He knew that Ahimsaka would have no choice but to fulfil the *Guru Dakshina* he demanded.

The first thing Guru Disapamukh did the next morning was to summon Ahimsaka. He pronounced that he would not be able to teach him any further and demanded his *Guru Dakshina* of an offering of a hundred human *angulis* (fingers). He ruled that the little fingers must only be from the right hand of his victims. He was certain that Ahimsaka would be killed well before fulfilling his *Guru Dakshina*. Equally important, he could deny responsibility for the murder of Ahimsaka's victims.

Ahimsaka was thrown into deep consternation over the pronouncement of the shocking *Guru Dakshina*. He was torn between his duty and gratitude to his *guru*

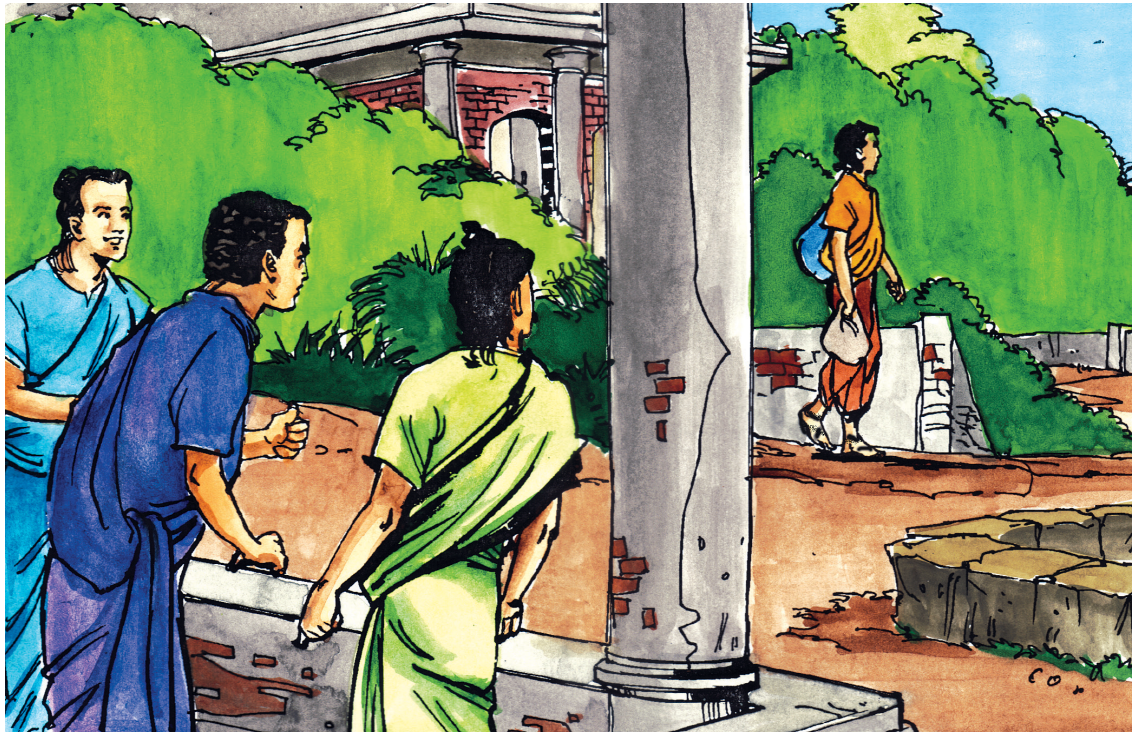


### **Ahimsaka Pleads to Guru Disapamukh to Alter his Guru Dakshina**

for all he had imparted to him and his personal desire to learn everything possible from his renowned Master, and on the other hand, his aversion to hurt a living creature let alone kill a human being. He wanted very much to honour his *Guru Dakshina* but abhorred having to carry out such a murderous task, even though it came from no lesser a person than his highly respected *guru*. Very early in life, he was taught by his parents the virtues of kindness and gentleness, and above all, the sacredness of human life. Indeed, he had scrupulously honoured the noble life-ideal of not hurting or taking the life of another living being. This was a moral principle which was embodied in the very meaning of his name, Ahimsaka. Shocked by the outrageous demand of Guru Disapamukh, he exclaimed:

*O' Master! How can I do such a cruel thing of killing innocent people? My family has never engaged in violence much less killed people. We are peace-loving, harmless people. I beg you, Respected Master, please change the Guru Dakshina. I will do anything you command me, but please spare asking me to hurt or kill any living being.*

But Ahimsaka's fervent pleas were of no avail. Since Guru Disapamukh's intention was to get rid of him completely, he insisted vehemently that the *Guru Dakshina* could not be altered. Instead, the Master warned Ahimsaka tersely that should he refuse or fail to fulfil his *Guru Dakshina*, he would as a consequence



### Ahimsaka's Peers Jubilant over Getting Rid of him

not only cause to bring upon himself considerable disrepute, but also a terrible curse will befall upon him that will ruin his life forever. Ahimsaka faced a great dilemma. He had to choose between avoiding evil and obeying his *guru*.

To reinforce his boon, Guru Disapamukh whom Ahimsaka revered as he would his own father deceived him by promising that once his *Guru Dakshina* was fulfilled, he would be instructed in special knowledge and a well-guarded secret science passed on through generations that would bestow upon him supernatural powers. He would then be able to absolve himself from all sins and enjoy a blissful life here and now in this life-cycle as well as in future lives. Guru Disapamukh cunningly reiterated that in any case, in keeping with entrenched tradition, Ahimsaka had no choice but to dutifully fulfil his *Guru Dakshina*.

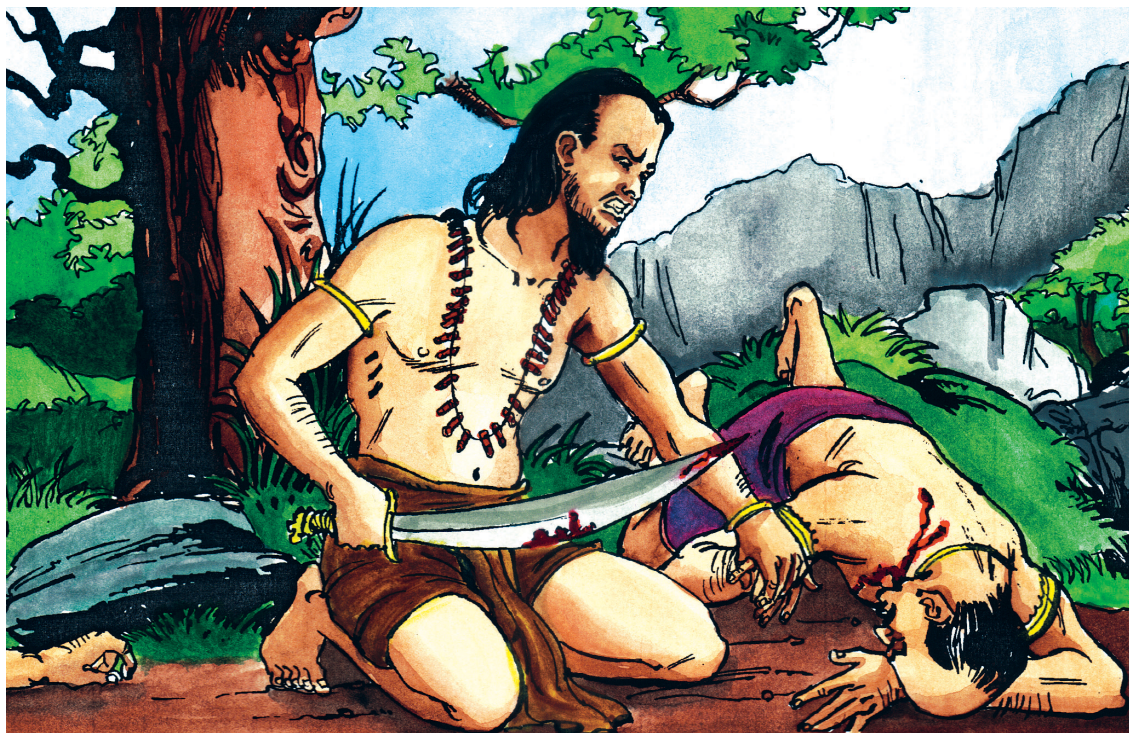
Young Ahimsaka's passion for learning and desire to acquire special knowledge which would bestow supernatural powers influenced his ultimate decision to accomplish his *guru's* command. After paying respects to his *guru*, he left the campus with a heavy heart. In contrast, his jealous peers were jubilant that their evil scheme had at last reaped the desired results. They were truly happy that Ahimsaka would be gone forever. So certain were they all that he would be killed in the course of collecting a hundred *angulis* that they cheered and celebrated the success of their evil plot.



### **Ahimsaka Surveys for Victims from his Forest Hideout**

Ahimsaka's *akusala kamma vipaka* (consequences of past unwholesome actions) in previous lives was now ripening. He was completely blinded by a misdirected sense of gratitude as well as a burning desire to wield supernatural powers after fulfilling his *Guru Dakshina*. He was determined to achieve the ultimate goal of possessing special powers even if it meant he had to embark on a murderous career. He made up his mind to give his Master what he had demanded and vowed to fulfil at any cost the gruesome *Guru Dakshina*. Arming himself with swords and spears, he made his way to the Jalini Forest, located along the western borders of Kosala. After surveying the area, he chose a strategic location atop a cliff that overlooked the terrain where the major trading routes traversing the kingdom converged. One of them was the famous caravan route which merchants used to carry goods, particularly rice, wheat and other agricultural products of Kosala to the trading cities of Kosambi and Ujjain. Another route linked Savatthi and the famous cotton and silk handlooms of Kasi which produced the finest textiles for export to places as far as Rome and Greece. Then there were the cart tracks used to transport goods to and from neighbouring kingdoms such as Vasta and Magadha.

Ahimsaka calculated that he stood a good chance of collecting his hundred little fingers by attacking unsuspecting caravans which frequented these major routes. Additionally, his hideout in the Jalini Forest was isolated and reasonably secure for him to prey on his victims without being captured. From his secure hiding



**Ahimsaka Severs a Little Finger from his Innocent Victim**

place, he began to pounce on innocent traders and their families who passed through the area. He spared no one and mercilessly murdered them for their little fingers. Amidst desperate cries to spare their lives, he ruthlessly butchered them all. As he began to kill more and more people, he had less and less qualms about attacking innocent men and women. Even children and little babies were not spared his bloody sword! One by one, Ahimsaka's unsuspecting victims came to the Jalini Forest from different directions. As if from nowhere, the young ex-student would leap out from the thick undergrowth and with one mighty blow, render them lifeless. From each of his victims he cut off the little finger from their right hand. He did not hate them. Neither did he wish to take their gold or other possessions. All that he wanted was their little right *anguli*.

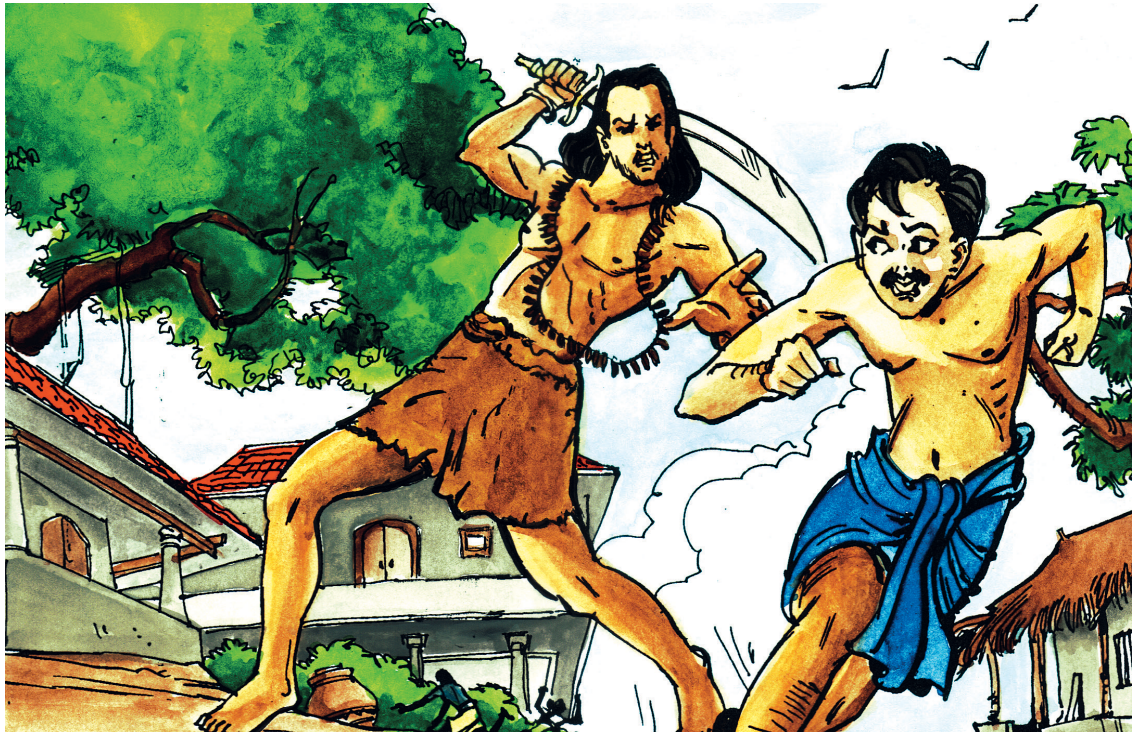
At first Ahimsaka tied the *angulis* he severed from his victims and hung them on a tree. However, they were eaten by crows and vultures whenever he left to look for more victims. He reckoned that if this were to continue he would have to kill well over a hundred people to complete his *Guru Dakshina*. He decided to string the *angulis* with twine and wear them as a necklace. This enabled him not only to guard them against birds but also to keep a count of the total number of *angulis* he had collected. It was because of the necklace of *angulis* he wore that Ahimsaka now became infamous and feared as the dreaded "*Angulimala*" – the one who wears a necklace of *angulis*.



### **Angulimala Attacks Traders Passing through the Jalini Forest**

By this time, Ahimsaka was well past the point of caring. He was driven by a burning obsession to complete his vow as quickly as possible. The kind-hearted, diligent student was long gone. He was now the ruthless highway bandit who terrorised people, so much so that the very mention of his nickname, Angulimala, sent shudders down peoples' spines. Thus Ahimsaka was no more, as he came to be known by his dreaded name, Angulimala, which stuck with him ever since.

With single minded devotion, Angulimala went about his blood-curdling mission of adding to his necklace of *angulis*. His murderous exploits soon spread throughout the countryside. He displayed great daring and ferocity. It was as though the devil himself had possessed him as he went about his obsession to complete his *Guru Dakshina*. Traders, merchants and ordinary travellers who used the cart tracks and passed through his forest haunt feared for their lives. Once he even managed to kill a group numbering ten traders and their families. As he gathered scores of human little fingers, fear spread about his daring attacks. Very soon, people began to avoid travelling anywhere near the Jalini Forest for fear that Angulimala would slay them all. Merchants discarded the popular trade route to transport their rice and other agricultural harvest. They used instead the longer route through neighbouring Magadha to reach the trading centre of Kosambi. Even hunters and woodsmen, familiar with the forest terrain, relocated their livelihood far away from Angulimala's forest haunt.



### Angulimala Attacks Villagers on the fringe of the Jalini Forest

As news of the killings spread, hardly anyone used the roads passing through the Jalini Forest. The main cart track between Kosala and Magadha became deserted. This meant fewer victims for Angulimala to attack. The situation drove him to think of alternative ways to secure his *angulis*. Out of desperation, he decided to attack people living along the fringes of the Jalini Forest. He entered villages bordering the forest at night under cover of darkness, killing people unlucky enough to be outside at that time. Village folks were soon alerted to Angulimala's attacks. They avoided leaving their homes after dusk and remained indoors with their doors and windows heavily bolted. Finding new victims became tougher for Angulimala. He became more desperate for *angulis* and began to forcibly enter homes and kill entire families for their little fingers. At this point, Angulimala had become crazed. He killed without thinking. He was obsessed with one and only one aim and that was to collect a hundred *angulis* as fast as he could to fulfil his *Guru Dakshina*.

Fearing for their lives, villagers living on the edge of the Jalini Forest abandoned their homes. No one was brave enough to stand up against the might and savagery that was Angulimala. The displaced villagers trekked to Savatthi to plead with King Pasenadi to deliver them from the murderous Angulimala. They camped on the outskirts of the city and waited for an audience with the King to implore him to protect their lives and homes against the terrifying serial killer.



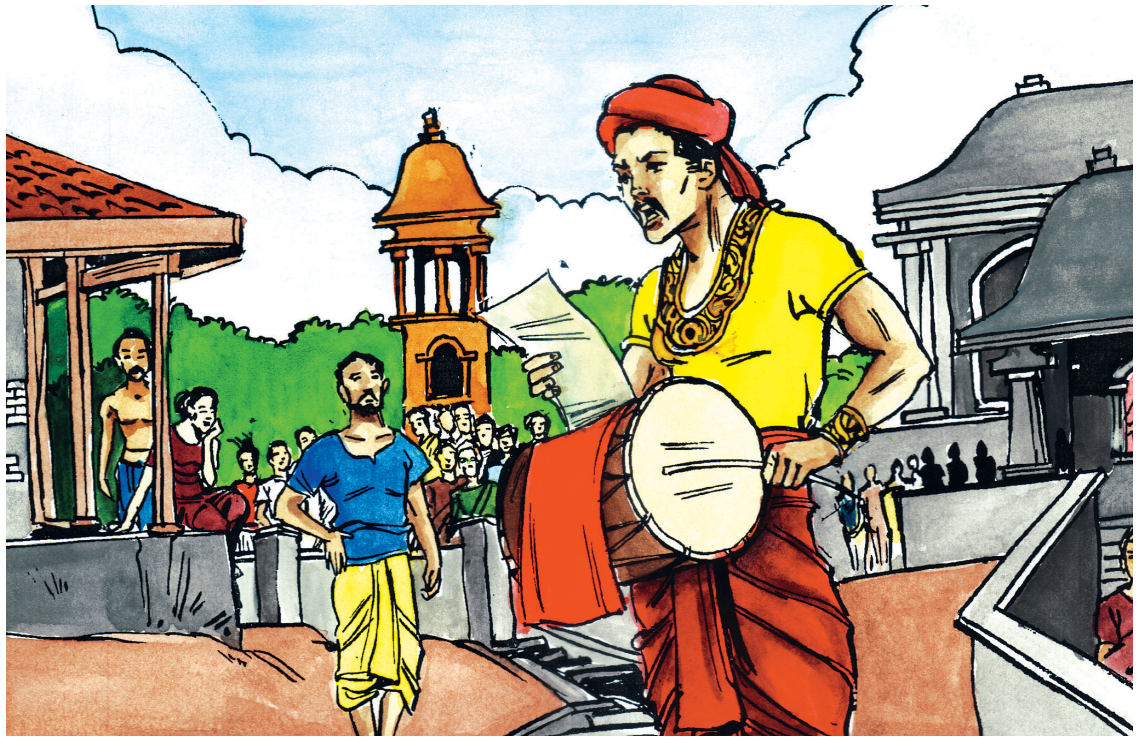


### **Village Elders Plead with King Pasenadi to Capture Angulimala**

The elders were finally permitted to present themselves at the Royal Court. When the King granted them an audience, they wept and lamented about their plight. They submitted to the King their fears and sufferings. They entreated their sovereign to despatch his army to capture Angulimala and put an end to his murderous exploits.

King Pasenadi at once realised the gravity of insecurity faced by the displaced village folk. He was also very concerned over the loss of revenue to his coffers due to the serious disruption of Kosala's trading activities with neighbouring kingdoms. He decided that quick and firm action had to be taken against Angulimala before the situation worsened and posed a serious threat to the kingdom itself. He resolved to free the villagers from the terror and agony of Angulimala by capturing him immediately. Having decided on the course of action to apprehend Angulimala, King Pasenadi commanded a public announcement of the royal decree among the city folks. That evening, the Royal Drummer read out the King's proclamation around the city center. At the top of his voice, he bellowed out loudly to the city folks who had gathered around him:

*Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Hear Ye! People of Kosala. His Majesty has declared that the murderous highway serial killer, Angulimala, is to be captured without any further procrastination. A detachment of the best soldiers in the kingdom is to be assembled forthwith to execute this royal*



### **The Royal Drummer Announces the King's Proclamation**

*command! His Majesty himself will lead the brave soldiers. These courageous men will capture Angulimala without fail! He will be hunted down and put to death by the sword!*

The Royal Proclamation spread throughout Savatthi and the city folks discussed among themselves the imminent capture of Angulimala by the kingdom's finest soldiers. Bhaggava who attended the Royal Court daily was among the very first persons to know about the King's command to capture Angulimala. For sometime now, he had contemplated deeply about the news of the killings that had taken place around the Jalini Forest. With great unease, he could not help but feel that the dreaded serial killer was his son, Ahimsaka, who had not returned home since he left for Takkasila University. He recalled vividly the prediction the Royal Astrologer, Kantipala, had made at the time of Ahimsaka's birth that his newborn son would become a dangerous highway bandit when he grows up. The more he reflected about the gruesome killings around the Jalini Forest, the more convinced he was that Angulimala was none other than Ahimsaka. He felt compelled to disclose to Mantani the prediction Kantipala had made regarding their son's future. That evening, he confided in her his worst fears that the notorious serial killer was their Ahimsaka. He informed her in a very sad voice the heart-breaking news that the king had ordered a detachment of the kingdom's finest soldiers to capture and execute their beloved son.



### **Mantani and Bhaggava Enveloped in Deep Anguish**

When Mantani heard the terrible news, she suffered a penetrating pain. She felt as if a sharp dagger had pierced right through her heart. She could hardly breathe. She could not accept that her son, her only beloved child, was a murderer! She cried out, *“O Brahma! What have I done to deserve this curse! She wept uncontrollably. Could this really be my beloved Ahimsaka. What has become of my loving and caring son?”* This cannot be true, she murmured in between sobs. She moaned with deep anguish to herself, *“I must save him from being killed by the King’s soldiers.”*

Bhaggava begged for Mantani’s understanding that much as he wanted to try and forewarn their son about the imminent danger to his life, he could not betray his monarch. As the King’s Royal Chaplain, he was bound to remain loyal and truthful at all times at whatever the price. He had no choice but to grieve in silence over the anticipated tragic fate of their only child.

Mantani was devastated that the son she had borne and brought up so lovingly could be the cause of so much pain and horrifying suffering in the land. The thought of him being captured and killed by the King’s soldiers was simply unbearable. *“He is my son; my own flesh and blood. I will not let him be hounded by the King’s soldiers and be killed like a hunted animal,”* she agonised. Instantly, she thought of venturing to the Jalini Forest to warn her dear son about the



### Mantani Reminisces about Ahimsaka

impending danger to his life. She was convinced that she would be able to urge him to give up killing innocent people, *“After all, I am his mother. Who else is better suited to make him see the error of his ways and return to the righteous path?”* As it was night and impossible for her to travel to the forest where wild animals roamed, Mantani decided to wait till early the next morning to begin her journey. She planned to leave home before Bhaggava woke up, knowing that he would definitely stop her from undermining the Royal Proclamation to capture and sentence Ahimsaka to death. Consumed by these burning motherly instincts in her heart, she retired to her bedroom.

Much as she tried, Mantani could not sleep a wink that night. Her mind was filled with anxiety for her son’s safety and the desire to do anything to save him from certain death. She tossed and turned restlessly in bed. All her thoughts were on her dear Ahimsaka – the son she had carried in her womb for ten lunar months and nursed and looked after so caringly and lovingly. Now the King’s soldiers were going to hunt him down like some wild animal. The last she saw him was when he bid her farewell before departing for Takkasila. She wondered how her poor Ahimsaka was surviving in the forest all alone. She could not help thinking, *“What a miserable life he must be suffering with no proper shelter and food to eat. Food, food, food,”* she repeated to herself. Her motherly instinct to feed her son automatically arose in her. She resolved, *“I must take some food for my starving*



### **Mantani Leaves for the Jalini Forest before Dawn**

*Ahimsaka. I will cook his favourite dishes. My dear Ahimsaka must be missing home-cooked food.”*

At that very instance, Mantani got out of bed and went straight to the kitchen to cook the dishes Ahimsaka fancied. His favourites were spinach, pulses, cottage cheese, lentils and green peas. She then wrapped the food neatly into a bundle with a cloth and returned to her room. Time passed so slowly for Mantani that night. It seemed like the longest night she had experienced in her entire life. At long last, she noted that dawn was about to break. She hurriedly got ready to set out to the Jalini Forest. Equipped with a staff, the parcel of Ahimsaka’s favourite food and her resolute determination to save her son from imminent death, Mantani quietly stepped into the deserted street.

It was the middle of spring. There was a light mist and the air had a slight chill. It was still hazy. Everything was shrouded in the morning mist. The city was so quiet that she could hear her own footsteps. Not a movement or a sound appeared in the otherwise normally busy city streets. They were all empty as the city folks were still fast asleep. Even the birds had not awakened to chirp and crow. Just as she had expected, Mantani did not come across anyone as she walked through the city. This way she did not have to explain to anybody about her secret journey. Before the sun could peek over the the horizon, she had already reached the outskirts of



### **The Buddha's Daily *Maha Karuna Samapatti***

Savatthi. By the time the sun was up, she had travelled several leagues away from the city. Soon, Savatthi was completely out of sight and she was well on her way to Angulimala's forest hideout.

This was the twentieth year of the Buddha's Ministry. At that time of the year, he was residing at the Jetavana Monastery. On that very morning when the Buddha routinely surveyed the world with His *Maha Karuna Samapatti* (Supreme Compassion), through His psychic power, He foresaw the unfortunate plight of Angulimala. The Buddha recognised that Angulimala was innately virtuous. He saw the grave *akusala kamma* (unwholesome volitional action) that Angulimala was about to commit that very morning.

The Buddha envisioned Mantani eagerly walking towards Angulimala's forest abode to save her son. Mantani was completely unaware of the grave danger to her life, she was about to face. With His divine eye, He could see Angulimala's obsession to fulfil the *Guru Dakshina* come what may. He saw that the misguided Angulimala had already secured ninety-nine *angulis* and was all set to secure his hundredth little finger to complete the *Guru Dakshina* and eventually acquire the all powerful supernatural powers his *guru* had duped him to believe. So compelling was Angulimala's desire to wield supernatural powers that he would kill anybody, even his own mother, for the last *anguli*.



### The Buddha Envisions the Danger Mantani Faced

To prevent Angulimala from committing the unpardonable *akusala kamma* of matricide, the Buddha decided to intervene and save him from falling into the deep *karmic* abyss because of his evil action. This was all the more alarming for matricide constituted one of the five most heinous unwholesome acts that produces an irreversible and immediate rebirth in *apaya* (woeful state of existence). The Enlightened One knew that Angulimala was born a virtuous, noble child and had the potential, due to his past wholesome *kamma*, to attain Nirvana (state of supreme bliss or emancipation) in this life. He saw that Angulimala had sufficient potential to enter the *Bhikkhu Sangha* (Order of Monks) and attain Arahant hood or Sainthood. The Buddha was certain that this spiritual goal was attainable provided he was transformed and given the right instruction and skilful training to purify his mind through diligent practice of *bhavana* (mental cultivation through meditation).

Through His divine eye, the Buddha knew that Angulimala had been misguided by his *guru* to become a ruthless murderer. Due to blind faith in the Master coupled with his single-minded obsession to attain the pinnacle of knowledge and supernatural powers, he had gone about fulfilling his *Guru Dakshina* with an unwavering commitment. The Buddha was confident that Angulimala could be transformed to the noble, righteous person he was originally, by His supreme *metta* (unconditional friendship or boundless goodwill or benevolence) and *Maha*



### Villagers Warn the 'Ascetic' about the Murderous Angulimala

*Karuna* (Great Compassion). Recognising thus, the Buddha decided to seek out Angulimala before his mother could reach him. The Enlightened One was confident that He could prevent Angulimala from committing a most heinous *akusala kamma* and lead him to tread the Path of the *Dhamma* (the Buddha's Teachings). Bearing these compassionate sentiments for the unfortunate Angulimala, He set out to the Jalini Forest located about thirty leagues away as an ordinary ascetic.

Cowherds, shepherds, ploughmen and villagers who saw him passing along the road, advised not to proceed further as the cart track led to the hideout of the murderous Angulimala. They warned him, "*Venerable ascetic, Angulimala is no respecter of holy ones. He will surely kill you. Do not proceed any further along this track.*" The concerned village folks of course could not recognise the Buddha because of his ascetic garb. The 'ascetic' smiled and assured the concerned folk not to worry about his safety and proceeded along the cart track.

As the 'ascetic' approached the Jalini Forest, another group of villagers ran up to him and pleaded repeatedly with deep concern for his safety. They cautioned him:

*Do not take this dangerous road, Venerable Sir. It leads to the bandit, Angulimala, who is bloody-handed and merciless. He is so daring and*





### Village Folks Deeply Concerned for the 'Ascetic's' Safety

*even enters remote villages to kill people. Whole villages have been laid to waste by him. He is constantly murdering people and he wears their fingers like a necklace around his neck. Men have come along this road in groups of ten and twenty, but still, they have all fallen victims to the ferocious Angulimala!*

The 'ascetic' thanked the village folks for their compassion and deep concern for his safety. He remained calm despite their anxiety and continued his journey along the road unperturbed. He exuded a bearing of great confidence and courage. For a third and fourth time, the 'ascetic' met villagers who ran up to him to warn not to proceed along the cart track because it led to the dreaded Angulimala's haunt. On all of these occasions, the 'ascetic' remained calm and continued to walk silently towards the Jalini Forest.

That morning, Angulimala woke up very early. His heart was filled with great anticipation for at long last, he just needed one more *anguli* to complete his *Guru Dakshina* and return to his scholastic pursuit under the tutelage of the famous *guru*. He solemnly swore that he would kill whosoever he came across that day, no matter what. Around mid-day, from his look-out post, he spied a lone figure in the distance walking in the direction of the Jalini Forest. He felt his moment of good fortune had finally come to free himself from the *Guru Dakshina*.



### **Angulimala Readies to Pounce on his Unsuspecting Mother**

Angulimala's heart leapt with excitement to see a ready victim to kill for the last *anguli*, he so desperately wanted. Charged with great excitement, he gathered his sword and began to walk downhill through the thick forest undergrowth. He quietly positioned himself close to the cart track to attack his last victim. Crouched among the thick cluster of bushes, he waited anxiously for the lone person to arrive. As the figure appeared closer, he saw that it was a woman walking slowly with the help of a staff in one hand and a bundle in the other. When the figure appeared nearer, he thought she looked vaguely familiar. As she came close, he realised, indeed, she was his mother!

At that moment, Angulimala's body quivered. His eyes began to well with tears. His heart softened as he noticed that she had grown much older, tired and distinctly hunched. "*Oh, mother dear,*" the ferocious murderer wept silently without realising it. He missed his mother dearly. He had not seen her for years, since he left home for Takkasila. His love and affection for her surfaced in his heart. His first reaction was to lay down his weapons and run up to his mother and hug her. But he could not let her see him in such a horrible savage-like state.

At that point, Angulimala's mind turned towards the dark side. He reminded himself that he had a bigger mission in life to fulfil. He had vowed to complete his *Guru Dakshina* at any cost that day. He was torn between his love for his mother



### **The Buddha Appears before Angulimala as an Ordinary Ascetic**

and his desire to collect his last *anguli*. So intense was his obsession to complete his *Guru Dakshina* that he was prepared to kill his mother for the last little finger he required. With tears flowing from his eyes and hands trembling, he raised his sword and rose from the bushes to pounce upon his unsuspecting mother.

Just at that critical moment, the Buddha appeared before Angulimala as an ordinary ascetic. On seeing the ‘ascetic’, Angulimala’s mind instantly switched from attacking his mother to killing the lone ‘ascetic’. He thought to himself, *“How marvellous and fortunate it is to see an ascetic appear right before me at this very moment. I don’t have to kill my mother when there is this lone recluse I can kill without much effort? Let my dear mother live. I will instead kill the ‘ascetic’ and cut off his little finger to complete my Guru Dakshina.”*

Raising his sword, Angulimala stalked the ‘ascetic’. When he was close enough, the Enlightened One performed a supernatural feat. Through His psychic powers, He created an illusion of Himself still in the form of an ascetic walking just a few steps in front of Angulimala. Though Angulimala walked briskly, he could not catch up with the ‘ascetic’. He could not come close enough to strike him with his sword even though the ‘ascetic’ merely walked in a saintly gait at a normal pace just a few of steps in front of him. As much as Angulimala tried to bridge the gap between himself and the ‘ascetic’, he could not. He then decided to give chase



### Angulimala Sprints after the 'Ascetic'

after the 'ascetic', but still, he could not get close enough to strike him down with his sword. So he decided to sprint as fast as he could. Even so, he was unable to narrow the gap between him and the 'ascetic'. Yet surprisingly, the 'ascetic' merely walked in his normal graceful measured steps.

Angulimala increased his speed and gave full chase. He ran with all the strength he could muster, until he ran completely out of breath. To his astonishment, the 'ascetic' just kept walking at a leisurely pace a few of steps ahead. But still, he could not get any closer to him. He panted heavily. His legs were tired and his feet were sore. His whole body was burning hot and poured profusely with perspiration. Before long, he was totally exhausted and compelled to stop his chase. As he stopped to catch his breath, he reflected on his futile chase:

*It is simply amazing. In the past, I could outrun an elephant and seize it. I could chase a swift horse and capture it. I could overtake a chariot and arrest it. I could catch up with a swift deer and kill it. But though I ran with all my might as fast as possible, I could not catch up with this ascetic who remains unperturbed and walks at his normal graceful pace.*

The exasperated Angulimala yelled out, "Stop, ascetic! Stop at once, ascetic!"



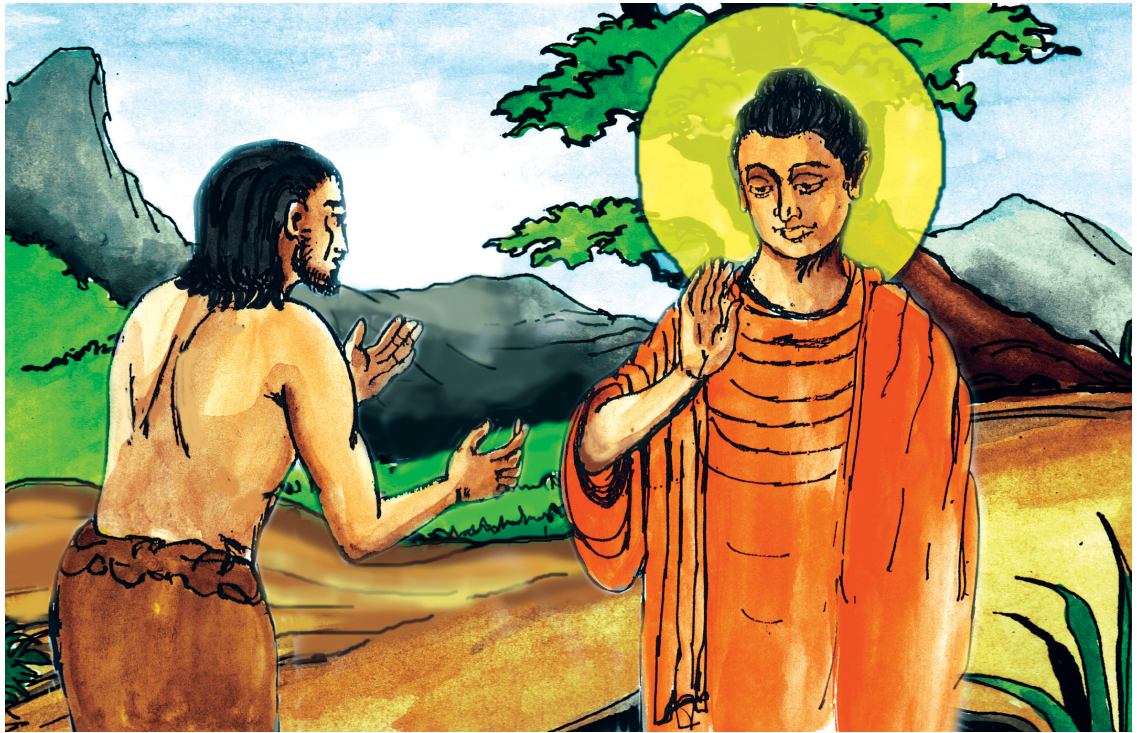
**The ‘Ascetic’ Responded, “Angulimala, You Too Stop.”**

The ‘ascetic’ calmly responded, *“I have stopped, Angulimala, you too stop.”*

When Angulimala heard these words, a dramatic transformation came over him. The suppressed current of his *kusala kamma* (wholesome deeds) surfaced, allowing his nobler and virtuous inner goodness to break through the wall of hardened cruelty into which he had been entrapped by his *guru*. Upon reflecting on the ‘ascetic’s’ response, Angulimala thought to himself, *“The ascetic calls me by my bloodstained name. This is strange. I do not know him at all. As an ascetic, he is expected to always assert the truth. Yet, although he walked, he claimed that he has stopped and requested me to also stop.”* Angulimala was totally puzzled. *“Suppose I question the ascetic further,”* he told himself. The bewildered Angulimala posed a barrage of questions:

*What do you mean ascetic by asking me to stop? While you walked, you told me you have stopped. Again, when I stopped running, you said I have not. I ask you ascetic, what is the meaning of your assertion? How is it that you have stopped and I have not, when in fact, I have already stopped and you have not?*

Even as He transformed himself from appearing as an ascetic into His Enlightened Being and slowly turned around to address Angulimala, it straight away dawned



### **Angulimala Awed by the Buddha's Serenity and Saintly Bearing**

on the latter that the majestic looking 'asetic' was none other than the Buddha Himself. As he gazed with amazement at the serenity and aura of the Enlightened One, his face lit up and his weapons simply slipped away from his hands. For the first time since he became a highway bandit a radiant smile broke upon Angulimala's weary face. He realised that the Enlightened One had come to the Jalini Forest entirely out of compassion to save him from his miserable state. The radiance emanating from the Buddha's all embracing compassion enabled him to see in a flash, the misery and suffering in which his life had been engulfed as a result of his blind obedience to carry out the *Guru Dakshina*.

Looking straight into Angulimala's eyes, the Buddha spoke in a compassionate soft voice. The Buddha's immortal explanation of the deeper meaning underlying His assertion struck the core of Angulimala's inner spiritual self:

*Angulima, unlike you who remain misguided and distressed, I have stopped committing unwholesome thoughts and deeds forever. I abide steadfast evermore, for I am merciful to all living beings as I abstain from causing any harm to them. On the other hand, you are merciless to living beings. You have no restraint towards things that live. That is why I say, I have stopped and you have not, Angulimala.*

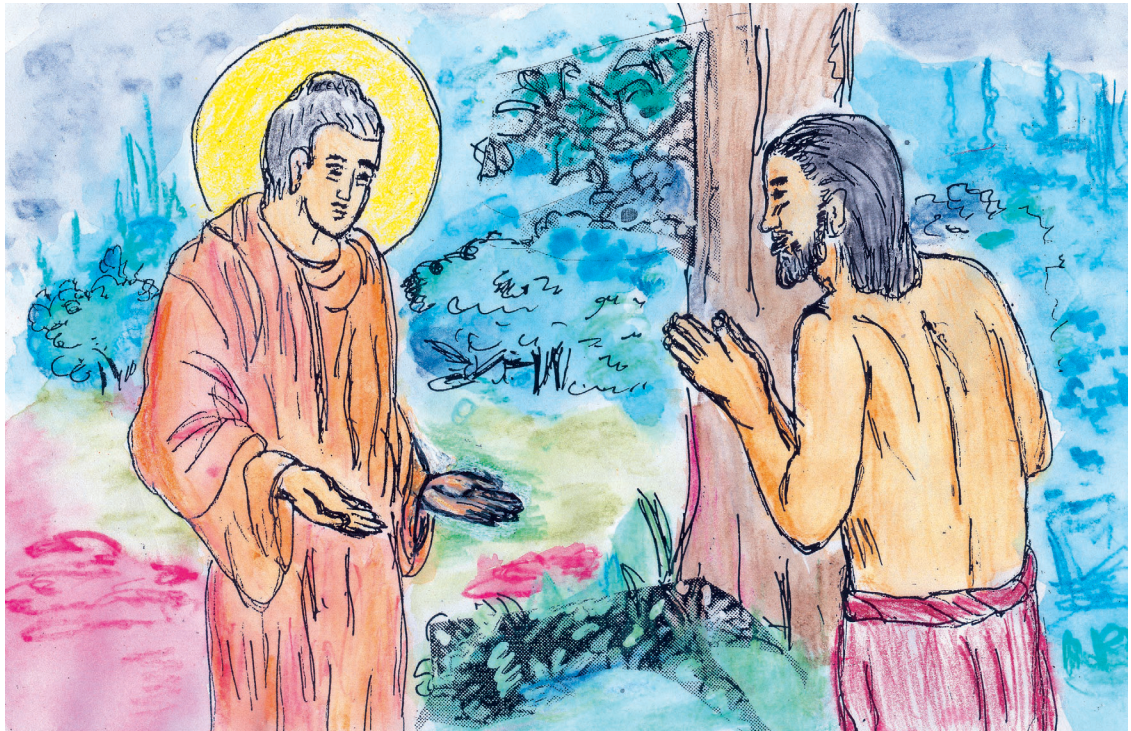


### **Angulimala Express Gratitude to the Buddha**

Upon reflecting deeply on the Buddha's profound observation, the now spiritually inspired Angulimala awakened from his deep slumber of *avijja* (ignorance). Moved to the very core of his being by the Buddha's compassion and radiant noble bearing, he went down on his knees and covered his face in his blood-stained hands. For the first time since he became a highway serial killer, someone had expressed love and compassion to him. His heart opened up and his mind was awakened from delusion by the insightful wisdom of the Buddha. His suppressed *metta* blossomed. He wished for nothing else but to follow in the Enlightened One's footsteps. He had heard about the Buddha and His Teachings while studying in Takkasila. But seeing the Blessed One in all His wondrous aura was an inexpressible uplifting spiritual experience.

No longer did Angulimala have an urge to return to his *guru* for he had indeed met a far more Enlightened and Noble Teacher. He now entrusted himself to seek liberation from self-delusion. This realisation impelled him to take the noble step of entering the Order of the *Bhikkhu Sangha* (Order of Monks) and become a spiritual son of the Buddha. He spontaneously declared:

*Oh, Bagavat (Blessed One), You have come to this forest risking your life to save me from the miserable life I have led as a misguided bandit. I beg you to please accept me as a disciple and help redeem myself from*



### **Angulimala Requests Permission to Enter the Bhikkhu Order**

*the grave misdeeds I had committed. My only aspiration is to show my gratitude by transforming my life. I wish for nothing else but to dedicate my life to perfecting myself spiritually under your guidance as a disciple and help to transform the lives of others. Having realised your profound wisdom, I renounce evil forever. I wish for nothing more, Most Enlightened One, than to serve humankind, by my own example, in earnestly walking the Aryan Path (Noble Life) and diligently practising the Dhamma (The Buddha's Teachings or the Ultimate Truth).*

So saying, the now completely transformed Angulimala removed his *mala* (necklace) of *angulis* and flung it away. Joining his palms together in reverence, he knelt at the Enlightened One's feet and paid homage for saving him from the deep abyss of *apaya* which he was about to fall into. Gently touching Angulimala's shoulder, The Enlightened One, responded softly with deep compassion, "*Ehi bhikkhu*" (come, *bhikkhu*). Thus Angulimala was invited by the Buddha Himself to enter the *Bhikkhu Sangha*.

The moment the Buddha accepted him as a disciple, Angulimala experienced a tremendous spiritual stirring. From that fateful episode onwards, he revered the Buddha as his Redeemer and Refuge. With this lofty spiritual aspiration, a second and even greater transformation came about in Angulimala. His misguided,





### **Mantani Blesses Angulimala While he Pays Respect**

murderous obsession vanished completely and in its place the innate goodness and true potential of his inner *metta* and *karuna* (compassion) broke loose. He now aspired to be the very simile of the lotus the Buddha referred to in His Teachings for all of humankind to emulate: Just as the lotus sprouts through the murky water and blossoms for all to enjoy its beauty, radiance and sweet fragrance, so too should all human beings raise above unwholesome thoughts, speech and actions and live noble lives.

Mantani who stood a short distance away, witnessed the dramatic transformation of her beloved son. She was overwhelmed and so greatly relieved when she heard Ahimsaka vow that henceforth he would shun unwholesome deeds and instead, tread the Path of the Dhamma. With great joy in her heart, she walked up to her son whom she had so dearly missed. On seeing his mother, Angulimala spontaneously knelt down on his knees and worshipped her at the feet. While placing her hand on his head and stroking it gently with motherly love, Mantani blessed him, "*Sukhi hotu*" (May you be happy and well always) *my dear son.*" As he rose up, she hugged him tightly. Angulimala too embraced his mother with intense love. He shed tears of joy while hugging his mother whom he had missed so very dearly. Mantani was simply overjoyed and wept uncontrollably. It was indeed a moving scene to witness the love of a mother for her dear son and a son's love for his ever loving and caring mother.



### **Mantani and Angulimala Embrace Each Other Tightly**

Both mother and son held each other in a tight and loving embrace. For a moment, they were both absorbed with each other and in a world of their own. Mantani then began to run her fingers over the features of Angulimala's weary face. Her heart crumbled to see that his once gentle and pleasant looks had given way to something unkempt and haggard. He looked so run down as though he had not eaten for days. At that thoughtful moment, Mantani remembered the favourite dishes she had cooked for her son and released her warm embrace to collect the parcel of food she had brought and placed at the base of a tree nearby. She quickly returned with the parcel to Angulimala and expressed with deep motherly affection, *"My dear son, you must be hungry, I have brought your favourite dishes knowing that you must have missed them very much."* Angulimala felt deeply moved by his mother's boundless love. He could not help shedding tears of gratitude for her thoughtfulness and selfless caring. Tears began to roll down his cheeks as he sobbed like a little child while holding his mother close to him. Mantani comforted Angulimala by smothering him with motherly affection. She then placed into his hands his favourite food she had so thoughtfully cooked for him.

Gradually, upon regaining his composure, Angulimala realised the presence of the Buddha in their midst. He turned around and walked towards the Enlightened One and offered the parcel of his favourite food. As a dutiful disciple to his new-found Master, it came to him naturally to serve the Buddha first. The Enlightened



### **Angulimala Offers his Favorite Food to the Buddha**

One accepted the alms-food and divided it into two portions. Taking one portion for Himself, the Buddha handed back to Angulimala the other, explaining, *“This food was prepared by your dear mother out of great love for you, Angulimala. It is only proper that you partake a portion of it, my son.”*

Angulimala accepted the other portion of food and placed it into his mother’s hands requesting her to eat as she must be hungry after her long and tiring journey from Savatthi. Mantani realised that her son would not eat until she agreed to partake the food as well. So she held Angulimala by the hand and led him to a shaded spot under a giant Banyan tree. They sat down together and waited until the Buddha had completed His meal. Only then did they begin to have theirs. It was such a delightful sight to see both mother and son seated together sharing the food. Mantani happily fed Angulimala morsels of rice and his favourite vegetarian dishes. He had no doubt grown up and become a young adult, but deep in her heart, he was still very much a child to her.

When the Buddha noticed that Mantani and Angulimala had completed their meal, He signalled to them that it was time to leave for the Jetavana Monastery. Angulimala turned to his mother and once again worshipped her at the feet, before departing with the Buddha. Mantani blessed Angulimala *“Sukhi hotu, my son,”* before he rose to his feet. She pulled Angulimala into a tender embrace and



### **Angulimala Worships his Mother before Departing**

smothered him with motherly love and affection. She did not want to let go of him even for a moment. But she had no choice for Angulimala had made up his mind *'to go forth'* (enter into a monastic life).

Mantani's heart was filled with mixed feelings. On the one hand, she was happy for her son that he had abandoned his evil deeds and decided *'to go forth'* and become a disciple of the Buddha. Her son's decision beyond question was a highly noble one. Although her husband held the high position of Purohita Brahmana, her family had the highest respect for the Blessed One. In fact, many sons of distinguished Brahmin families such as Sariputta, Moggallana and Maha Kassapa had entered the *Bhikkhu Order* (Order of Monks) and attained Arahantahood (Sainthood). On the other hand, in the midst of her great joy in witnessing the dramatic transformation of her son, Mantani sensed that she was going to *'lose'* him once again. She was saddened by the thought that he would not be returning home, having embraced the homeless, wandering life of a *bhikkhu*. Tears began to swell up in her eyes until her eyelids could hold them no more. Slivery tears of motherly love streamed down her cheeks. Angulimala pleaded with his mother not to cry. He took the end of Mantani's *sari* (dress) which was drapped over her shoulder and gently wiped off her tears. He comforted her saying:

*Dearest Mother, I will visit you whenever I get the opportunity. Please be*



### **Angulimala Wipes the Tears off his Mother's Face**

*strong and have faith in me and the noble life of a bhikkhu I am about to enter. I must succeed in 'going forth'. Pray, dry your tears, dearest mother and give me your ashirvada (invocation of blessings and protection). I will never be away from you, but forever keep you close to my heart.*

Mantani hugged Angulima tightly as though it was for the last time she was going to see him. After a while, she slowly let go of her motherly embrace and said to him tenderly, “My dear son, may the blessings of the devas (protective celestial beings) be always upon you. Here, take this piece of cloth to wrap around your bare body. This and my motherly prayers, blessings and love are all I have to give you, my dear son.” Angulimala gladly accepted the piece of cloth his mother offered just like a valuable piece of treasure. He then turned towards the Buddha and both began their journey to the Jetavana Monastery. Mantani stood there gazing at her son until he was completely out of sight. With a heavy heart, she picked up her staff and began her long homeward journey.

Bhaggava was greatly relieved to see Mantani return home just as night was about to envelope Savatthi. He had been so anxious and worried about her disappearance. As soon as Mantani faced him, she placed her palms together and asked for forgiveness for leaving home without his permission. Bhaggava moved forward to Mantani. He hugged her tenderly and said in a soft gentle voice,



### **Anxious Bhaggava Rushes to Meet Mantani on her Return Home**

*“My dearest, it is I who should be asking for forgiveness for not venturing myself to save our son. You have done no wrong to warrant an apology, dearest. I know you had left home out of a mother’s love to protect our son. I honour your great love and devotion. I salute you my love for your courage.”*

Mantani felt relieved with Bhaggava’s understanding and smiled. As soon as she sat down to rest, she related to him what had transpired at the Jalini Forest. Bhaggava gave a huge sigh of relief. He hugged Mantani and once again asked for her understanding for not setting out to save their son. Mantani reassured him that she fully understood his predicament of not betraying his loyalty towards the King being one of his principal trusted officials. Both reconciled themselves to the reality that their son had *‘gone forth’*. They whispered a silent prayer that he would attain final emancipation through the spiritual path he had entered as a disciple of the Enlightened One.

Angulimala was ordained as a *bhikkhu* and received guidance in the monastic discipline in the Jetavana Monestry under the personal guidance of the Buddha. From the very outset, Angulimala Thera (Venerable Monk) practised the *Dhamma* with great *shraddha* (confidence) and utmost diligence. Thus, through His supreme *metta* and *karuna*, the Buddha was able to completely transform Angulimala from being a serial killer to a righteous and noble disciple.



### King Pasenadi Pays Homage to the Buddha

In the meantime, in the capital city of Savatthi, King Pasenadi who had been implored by his subjects to capture Angulimala had assembled a contingent of his finest soldiers to set out to the Jalini Forest. Being a staunch patron of the Buddha and the *Sangha Order* (Order of Monks and Nuns), it was customary for him to visit the Enlightened One regularly and especially before embarking on a special mission. On his arrival at the Jetavana Monastery, the King alighted from his royal elephant to pay homage to the Buddha. After paying his salutations, he sat down at a respectable distance on the right hand side of the Enlightened One.

The Buddha noticed that King Pasenadi and his detachment of soldiers were in full battle gear. He was well aware of the King's intentions. However, in order to put the monarch at ease, the Enlightened One tactfully inquired the reason for his military preparedness. Smilingly, He asked: *What is it that troubles you King Pasenadi that you are in full readiness for war? Has Kosala been attacked by a neighbouring kingdom? Is it that King Seniya Bimbisara of Magadha has provoked you, or is it because the Licchavi Princes of Vesali are troubling you, or is it that some adversary has posed a threat to your kingship?*

King Pasenadi assured the Buddha that he had not geared himself to wage war on any of the neighbouring kingdoms. He disclosed that he had mobilised a special military expedition to capture a dangerous highway bandit. The Buddha enquired



### **The Buddha Enquires about King Pasenadi's Military Expedition**

nonchalantly as to the identity of this lone bandit. The King replied, "*Enlightened One, he is the fearsome serial killer, named Angulimala, who has caused my subjects around the Jalini Forest to abandon their homes and flee for their lives.*" The Buddha was conscious of the possibility that Angulimala Thera's entry into the *Bhikkhu Order* may be misconstrued by people and probably even King Pasenadi himself. Mindful about the gravity of the implications on the law of the land that this move could have, He considered it prudent to secure from the King a royal pardon for Angulimala Thera for his past crimes. A royal reprieve was all the more necessary, since he now resided in the Jetavana Monastery and not the Jalini Forest. The Buddha hence ventured to get the King to view positively Angulimala Thera's entry into the *Bhikkhu Order*. With this objective in mind, He posed the following proposition to the monarch:

*Noble King, suppose you were to see that same notorious Angulimala who has shaved his hair and beard, put on a saffron robe and 'gone forth' along the Aryan Path from home life into homelessness. Further, he abstains from killing living beings; does not take that which is not given, refrains from false speech, does not abuse his senses, partakes only one meal a day and is celibate, virtuous and of excellent character. If you see him thus as a noble bhikkhu, how would you treat him?*





### **The Buddha Points Out Angulimala Thera to King Pasenadi**

Being one of the most devout benefactors of the Buddha and the Sangha Order, King Pasenadi responded without any hesitation:

*Most Blessed One, we will treat him with respect that is rightly due to a bhikkhu. We would pay homage to him. We would rise up for him and invite him to be seated. We would offer him the four requisites of a monk. Over and above these acts of patronage, we will arrange for his lawful guarding, defence and protection. However, Blessed One, from all reports from the villagers around the Jalini Forest, Angulimala is a most evil person. It is simply unimaginable for such a ruthless, murderous bandit to possess high virtue and restraint. It is inconceivable that he would ever enter the Bhikkhu Order and follow a restrained and peaceful monastic life.*

The Buddha signalled to King Pasenadi to take a look at what was going on in the precincts of the *vihara* (monastery or temple). While the King looked out through the window, the Buddha extended His right arm and pointed in the direction of Angulimala Thera who was helping in sweeping the grounds of the monastery. The Buddha then turned to the King and told him gently, *“There, Noble King, is Angulimala Thera, the hitherto ruthless serial killer who was so terribly feared by your subjects.”*

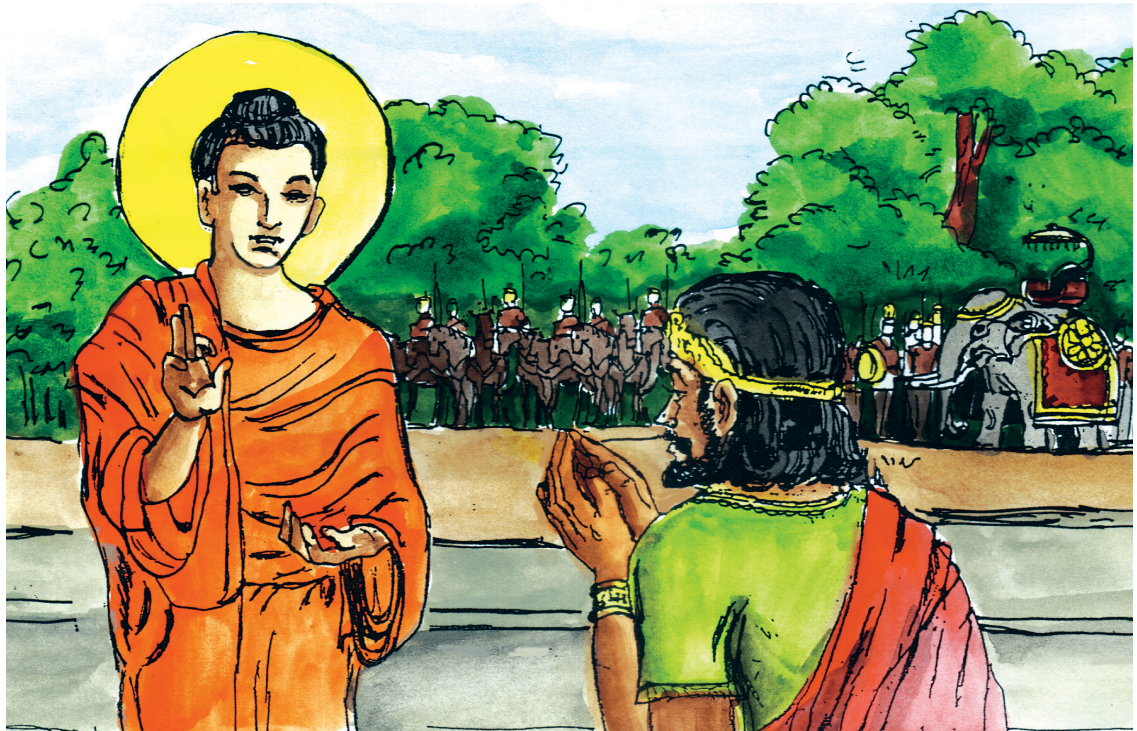


**King Pasenadi Pays Respect to Angulimala Thera**

King Pasenadi was taken aback by the Buddha's disclosure of the presence of Angulimala in the Jetavana Monastery. So terrifying was Angulimala's reputation that even the King lost his regal composure for a brief moment. His body trembled with alarm. His hair stood on end for fear that Angulimala could attack him at any moment as he was completely unarmed. The Buddha calmed the King and assured him that henceforth there was nothing for him and the people of Kosala to fear from Angulimala.

Upon receiving the assurance of the Buddha about the dramatic transformation of Angulimala, the King regained his composure. He was greatly relieved by the thought that Angulimala was now a *bhikkhu*. His subjects would be able to return to their homes and live without any more fear from the terror he had unleashed in the villages around the forest fringe.

The Buddha then introduced Angulimala Thera to King Pasenadi. After paying his respects, the King inquired from Angulimala Thera about his clan name. In response, Angulimala Thera disclosed that his parents were Bhaggava Gagga and Mantani. The King was initially surprised to learn that Angulimala Thera was the son of his Royal Chaplain, Bhaggava. As he reflected, he recalled the strange circumstances of Angulimala Thera's birth and the prediction Bhaggava had confided in him about his son growing up to become a dangerous bandit. He was



### King Pasenadi Full of Adoration for the Buddha's Fest

so relieved that all this was now history and that Angulimala had transformed and become a devout disciple of the Buddha.

As King Pasedani was accustomed to do *dana* (charity or alms offering) for the Order of Monks and Nuns, he offered Angulimala Thera the traditional monk's requisites, comprising three robes, food, shelter and medicine. Angulimala Thera, however, politely declined the King's generosity. He explained that he had taken upon himself four of the strict monastic observances of *dutanga* (strict ascetic practice) and that he had decided to be a forest meditation monk practising *pindapata* (going on alms round for daily meals). As it was time to go on his alms round in the nearby village, he politely excused himself from the presence of the Buddha and the King.

King Pasenadi and the Buddha discussed for a while the needs of the Sangha Order (Order of Monks and Nuns) in the Jetavana Monastery and on a few other temporal matters of interest to the King. Before taking leave of the Buddha, the King paid his respects to the Enlightened One. It moved him deeply that the Buddha was able to transform a ferocious serial killer into a noble, gentle *bhikkhu* without any force or even the threat of force. He expressed great relief over the ending of the security threat that the serial killer Angulimala had for so long posed to his subjects travelling through or living around the Jalini Forest fringe. The King



### Village Folk Reluctant to Offer Alms-Food to Angulimala Thera

exclaimed with great joy:

*It is simply wonderful! It is just marvellous how the Blessed One subdues the unsubdued, pacifies the ferocious and calms the restless. It is truly amazing that the notorious Angulimala whom we could have only apprehend with armed weapons, the Fully Awakened One has subdued so completely with just His metta and Maha Karuna. This is truly an amazing transformation of the fearless serial killer!*

Although he had embraced a monastic life, Angulimala Thera encountered difficulties in practising *pindapata*. Only a few people, trusting the Buddha's judgement, changed their attitude towards him and offered alms food when he stood before their doorsteps. Most villages still feared him. Many were outrightly hostile towards him. They could not forgive him for having caused the death of innocent people. Many still feared the reputation of his murderous past.

Often, when Angulimala Thera went on *pindapata*, people fearfully ran away from him and kept their distance. In accordance with the Buddha's Teachings, he bore these unfriendly acts and prejudicial treatments with equanimity. He understood why people behaved harshly towards him. He bore them no anger, ill will or hatred. He just felt sorry for these people instead of despising them.



### **Angulimala Thera Saddened by the Expectant Mother's Suffering**

There were days when Angulimala Thera could not even get a mouthful of food when he went on his alms round. He then decided to go on *pindapatha* in the city, hoping that he would not be feared by the city folks as he was not so conspicuous to them. Sadly, he experienced negative responses from the majority of the city folks as well. His past murderous reputation had indeed preceded him. The city folks too had come to know of the horrible misdeeds he had committed earlier in the Jalini Forest. Although he realised it was arduous for him to go on alms round, Angulimala continued to diligently observe the monastic discipline. Despite the many obstacles he encountered, he was satisfied and thankful for whatever little that was offered to him. Also, he was bent on perfecting his spiritual fibre. Matters of body meant little to him in comparison to his aspiration to attain the spiritual goal of emancipation.

One fateful day while on his daily rounds for alms in the village, Angulimala Thera came upon a house where an expectant mother was screaming in excruciating pain. She was suffering from prolonged throes of labour. Everyone in the family feared that she would not be able to bear her labour pains much longer and that she and her unborn baby were in grave danger. On seeing Angulimala Thera, the family elders rushed to him in desperation for help to deliver the baby. They pleaded to help relieve the expectant mother from her woeful state by invoking his spiritual powers and save her and the unborn baby from imminent death.



### **Angulimala Thera Depressed over the Expectant Mother's Plight**

Angulimala Thera could only confess his inadequacy in handling temporal matters such as childbirth. He regretted that he could do nothing to help the sorrowful plight of the expectant mother as he had no training nor skill in delivering babies. The deep anguish among the family members caused him great disappointment and a feeling of utter helplessness. A well spring of compassion arose in him regarding the dire state of the expectant mother and her unborn baby. He felt miserable over his inability to relieve her suffering and indeed the real danger of death she and her unborn baby faced.

As he walked back towards the Jetavana Monastery, his mind was enveloped with sadness over the expectant mother's grave condition. His heart was heavily weighed down by the sad reality of human suffering. His mind swirled with disturbing thoughts about *dukkha* (suffering) in life which human beings encounter:

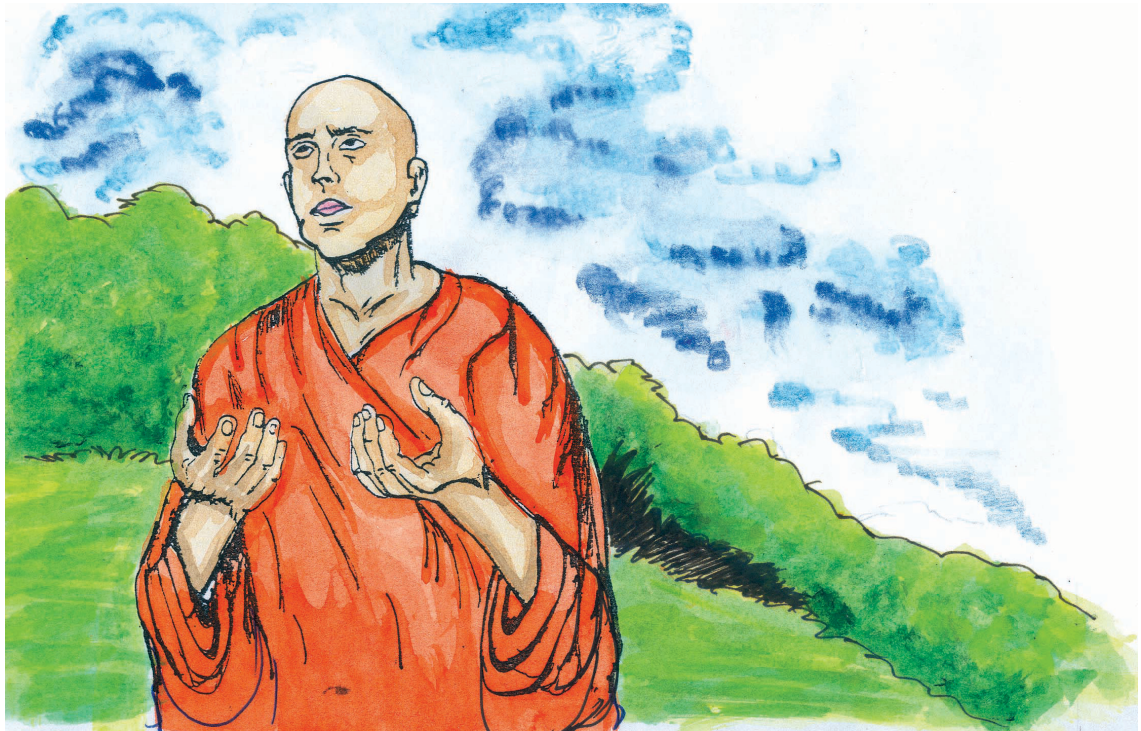
*Why do human beings suffer? How much do they have to suffer in life? How can I help this suffering mother from death? How can I help the unborn baby who is about to die? It could not have done any harm or wrong to anyone. Why should an innocent yet-to-be-born baby suffer such a cruel fate? In the past, I had killed so many innocent people. How I wish I have the power to save lives and be a worthy disciple of the Buddha by serving suffering humanity.*



### The Buddha Instructs Angulimala Thera to Recite a *Sacca-Kiriya Sutta*

Greatly depressed, Angulimala Thera reported to the Buddha about his disturbing experience in the village. The Enlightened One understood Angulimala Thera's troubled state of mind. He felt the deep compassion his disciple bore for the expectant mother's unbearable suffering. He could easily empathize with Angulimala Thera's sadness in not being able to do anything to alleviate the expectant mother's labour pains and save her and the unborn baby from imminent death. With His psychic powers, the Buddha envisioned that the precarious plight of the expectant mother, at the same time, had presented a wonderful opportunity for Angulimala Thera to redeem his reputation among the village folks. He knew that once they changed their negative attitude towards him, they would begin to accept Angulimala Thera and offer *dana* when he went on his daily rounds of *pindapata* in the village in future.

After discussing with Angulimala Thera about the plight of the pregnant mother, the Enlightened One taught Angulimala Thera a short *paritta* (stanzas recited for protection). The Buddha requested him to return to the village and recite it for the protection of the expectant mother and her unborn baby. The Enlightened One instructed Angulimala Thera to concentrate with one-pointedness of mind on the well-being of the expectant mother and her unborn baby. Simultaneously, he was to invoke his *sacca-kiriya* (assertion of the Truth of his personal purity), that is, the power of the asseveration of his personal purity based on his virtuous conduct. He



**“These Hands have Killed over a Hundred Innocent People!”**

was to assert this Truth by reciting with complete concentration of mind and utmost *shraddha* (confidence or faith based on clear understanding) the *paritta*, the Enlightened One had just taught him.

Angulimala Thera initially doubted whether he could undertake the assertion of his *sacca-kiriya*. He confessed to the Enlightened One his sense of guilt over the many murders of innocent people he had committed before his ordination into the *Bhikkhu Order*. He told the Buddha that by asserting that he had never deprived a living being of life, he would be committing falsehood. He respectfully submitted:

*Enlightened Master, I have in the past intentionally deprived many innocent people of life. These hands have been bloodied by murders. They have killed over a hundred innocent people. This fact can not be ignored. How can I truthfully make such a noble sacca-kiriya that I have not killed, Most Enlightened Master?*

The Buddha then advised Angulimala Thera to amend the assertion of his personal purity and piety to commence from, “*ariyāya jātiyā jāto,*” (from the time of his ‘*noble birth*’), that is, upon entering the Aryan Path (the Noble Path). This meant for the assertion to commence from the time of his ordination into the *Sangha Order*.





### **Charged with Confidence, Angulimala Thera Leaves for the Village**

Angulimala Thera now felt fully confident of asserting the amended *sacca-kiriya* for it was absolutely true that since becoming a *bhikkhu*, he had never ever knowingly injured or caused the death of any living being. The Buddha further instructed him that upon completing the *paritta* recitation, he was to sprinkle some of the *Pirith Pen* (water blessed through chanting which is used as spiritual protection) on the expectant mother. He was also told to offer some of the Blessed Water for her to drink as part of her spiritual abluion.

Fully charged with confidence, Angulimala Thera paid his respects to the Buddha and headed immediately to the village. His compassion for the suffering mother was so deep that he left the *vihara* without even partaking the alms food he had collected in the village. Unlike his earlier encounter with the troubled expectant mother's family, this time around, he was equipped with great *shraddha* of his personal purity as a devout disciple of the Buddha. He confidently presented himself at the expectant mother's home to carry out his spiritual assertion. Since males were customarily not permitted into the room, the expectant mother was accommodated behind a curtain that was hastily erected in the courtyard. The men folk hurriedly prepared a seat made out from a flat boulder and placed it in the courtyard for Angulimala Thera to be seated on the opposite side to recite the *paritta* the Buddha had taught him, based on his *sacca-kiriya*.

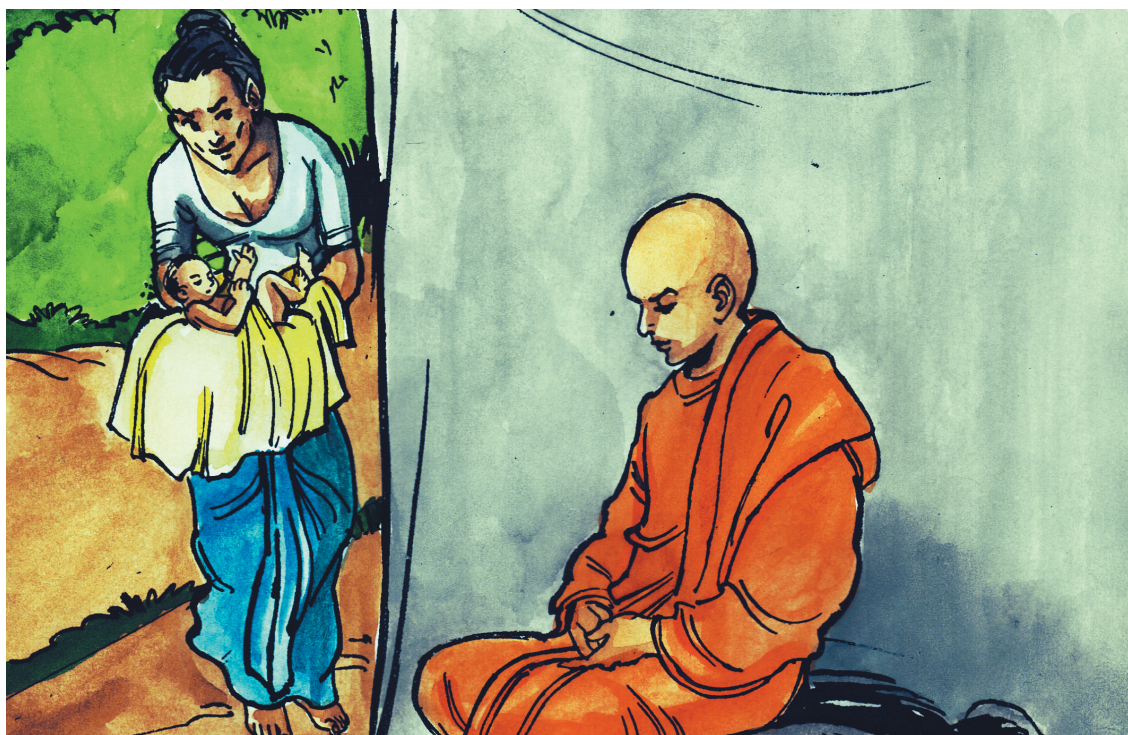


### Angulimāla Thera Asserts his *Sacca-Kiriya*

Seated cross-legged on the slab of stone that had been placed nearby to the expectant mother, Angulimāla Thera focused deeply on the Truth underlying the *sacca-kiriya* of his 'noble spiritual rebirth'. Concentrating with one-pointedness of mind, he invoked the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem, that is, the Trinity comprising of the Buddha, *Dhamma* (the Buddha's Teachings or the Doctrine) and the *Maha Sangha*. He then recited his asseveration with deep *shraddha* and intense concentration of mind. In accordance with the Buddha's instructions, he invoked repeatedly for seven times, the power of the Truth vested in the *sacca-kiriya* of his, "noble spiritual rebirth" for the protection and well-being of the expectant mother and her unborn child with an untroubled childbirth :

*Yato ham bhagini ariyāya jātiyā jāto  
nābhijānāmi sañcicca pānam jīvita voropetā,  
Tena saccena soth te hotu  
sothhi gabbhass ti*

Sister, from the moment I entered this noble life of a bhikkhu,  
I have not deprived any living being of life.  
By the Truth of this asseveration,  
May you and your unborn baby be happy and well.



### Happy Grandmother Presents the Newborn Baby to Angulimala Thera

Even before Angulimala Thera could complete reciting his *sacca-kiriya*, the mother's labour pains dramatically subsided. On completing his *paritta* chanting, he requested the husband to sprinkle some of the Blessed Water on his wife and to give the remaining portion for her to drink. The expectant mother's labour pains eased to a point where it became bearable. Some moments later, she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, without any complication or discomfort. The happy grandmother proudly presented the newborn baby girl to Angulimala Thera to be blessed. He was so relieved that both the mother and baby were safe. He was delighted to see the healthy and well formed baby girl. He happily anointed her with Blessed Water and invoked the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem for her good health and protection. Before taking leave, he blessed the newborn baby and mother as well as the rest of the family by reciting the *Tun Sutta* (The Three Principal Protective Suttas generally recited for spiritual guidance and protection).

The whole family was simply elated. They all knew that without a doubt, it was the spiritual powers evoked through Angulimala Thera's assertion of the *sacca-kiriya* of his noble spiritual rebirth that saved the mother and the unborn baby who were virtually on the brink of death. The family members who had gathered at the house paid reverence to Angulimala Thera in the traditional Buddhist way by kneeling at his feet with their palms placed together for what they considered was truly a miracle he had just performed. They praised and thanked



### The Family Expresses Deep Gratitude to Angulimala Thera

him profusely. One by one, their neighbours came up to Angulimala Thera, knelt at his feet and expressed their profound reverence for his spiritual purity and noble bearing. Ever so grateful were they for his compassion for the mother and her unborn baby that they gladly showered flowers on the one-time serial killer.

Throughout the outpouring of deep gratitude and reverence, Angulimala Thera remained calm and equanimous. He did not allow himself to be carried away by the sudden burst of extraordinary attention, praises and great adulation showered upon him. As a result of his skilful practice of equanimity, Angulimala Thera understood that he had merely carried out the Buddha's instruction. It was his deep faith in the Enlightened One that had brought about the happy turn of events. As the Buddha had envisioned, Angulimala Thera's *shraddha* in the *Buddha Dhamma* (The Buddha's Teachings) soared to a new high as a result of his success in saving the life of the expectant mother and her baby. In the midst of the family rejoicing, he made a silent resolution to himself, "*Henceforth, I will devote my life to bringing happiness to all beings. I firmly pledge to relieve them of their sorrows and miseries.*"

In no time, word spread around the city about the power that was invoked through the recitation of Angulimala Thera's *sacca-kiriya*. Thence onwards, the assertion of the Truth of his '*noble spiritual rebirth*' came to be referred to as the *Angulimala Paritta*. Soon



**Angulimala Thera's Seat being Consecrated**

news of the power of the *paritta* recited by Angulima Thera reached Savatthi. From there, it spread far and wide throughout Kosala and into neighbouring kingdoms. Over the years, the recitation of the *Angulimala Sutta* travelled even further beyond the shores of India to the rest of Asia.

Deeply convinced of the great efficacy of the *Angulimala Paritta*, expectant mothers travelled from distant towns and villages in Kosala and the surrounding kingdoms to the seat where Angulimala Thera had invoked the assertion of his, "*noble spiritual rebirth*". They were eager to experience for themselves the power of the *Angulimala Paritta* to ensure a safe and untroubled childbirth. Soon the seat from which Angulimala recited his asseveration acquired fame for its spiritual power in providing protection to expectant mothers. It was accorded great reverence and became venerated by the village folks. In time, the seat was consecrated as a sacred altar for expectant mothers. For those expectant mothers who were too weak to undertake the journey, the water with which the seat was washed was applied on the head to enhance their confidence and to provide the necessary spiritual fortification for their sacred mission of motherhood. Interestingly, not only expectant mothers but also livestock, especially cows, goats and mares were availed of the protective power of the *Angulimala Paritta*. Animals encountering difficulty in pregnancy were made to drink the water used to wash Angulimala Thera's seat, after being blessed by the recitation of the *Angulimala Paritta*.



### Reciting the Angulimala Paritta for Expectant Mothers

Thus, the recitation of the *Angulimala Paritta* became an entrenched Buddhist practice in respect to holistic motherhood. In tandem with this belief, the regular chanting of the *parittas* in general became an important religious practice that provided the necessary spiritual benediction as well as invoked confidence and protection for expectant mothers and their unborn babies. To this day, in traditional Buddhist countries, the chanting of *parittas* remains an integral part of the culture of providing spiritual fortification for a holistic motherhood. This explains why Buddhists strongly believe that when the *Angulimala Paritta* is recited to bless and provide protection for an expectant mother, she and her unborn baby would be in a calm and happy state of mind and in good health. In addition, they firmly believe that by observing this religious practice, the expectant mother will have a smooth and untroubled delivery of her baby.

The tremendous *shraddha* generated by the recitation of the *Angulimala Paritta* further reinforced the Buddha's Teaching to attach great importance to prenatal care for both the mother and the foetus. This religious observance, in turn, reinforced the Buddhist culture of "*gabbha parihara*" (the protection and physical growth as well as the emotional, psychological, moral, ethical and spiritual development of the unborn baby). In the years that followed, monks and nuns chanted in congregation, the record of Angulimala Thera's assertion of his purity, piety and spiritual prowess. A suitable preface was added to the original *paritta*



### Recitation of the *Angulimāla Paritta* Becomes Entrenched

*sutra* recalling Angulimāla Thera's success in invoking protection to the expectant mother and her unborn baby to make it possible for other monks as well as lay followers to recite the *paritta* in any locality. For this purpose, two stanzas were added as a preamble to the assertion of Angulimāla's *sacca-kiriya*, thus:

*parittam yam bhañantassa  
 nisinnaṭṭhāna-dhovanam  
 udakam pi vināsesi  
 sabbameva parissayam  
 sotthinā gabbha vutthānam  
 yamca sādheti tam khane  
 therassanggulimālssa  
 lokanāthena bhāsitam  
 kappāttāhiyi-mahātejam  
 parittam tam bhanāmahe.*

Whosoever shall recite the *paritta*,  
 The seat on which Angulimāla sat,  
 The water with which his seat was washed,  
 Will eliminate all labour pains.  
 There shall be an untroubled birth the moment this occurs.



### **Angulimala Thera Experiences Difficulties in Meditation Practice**

This *paritta* the Blessed One gave unto Angulimala is one of great majesty.

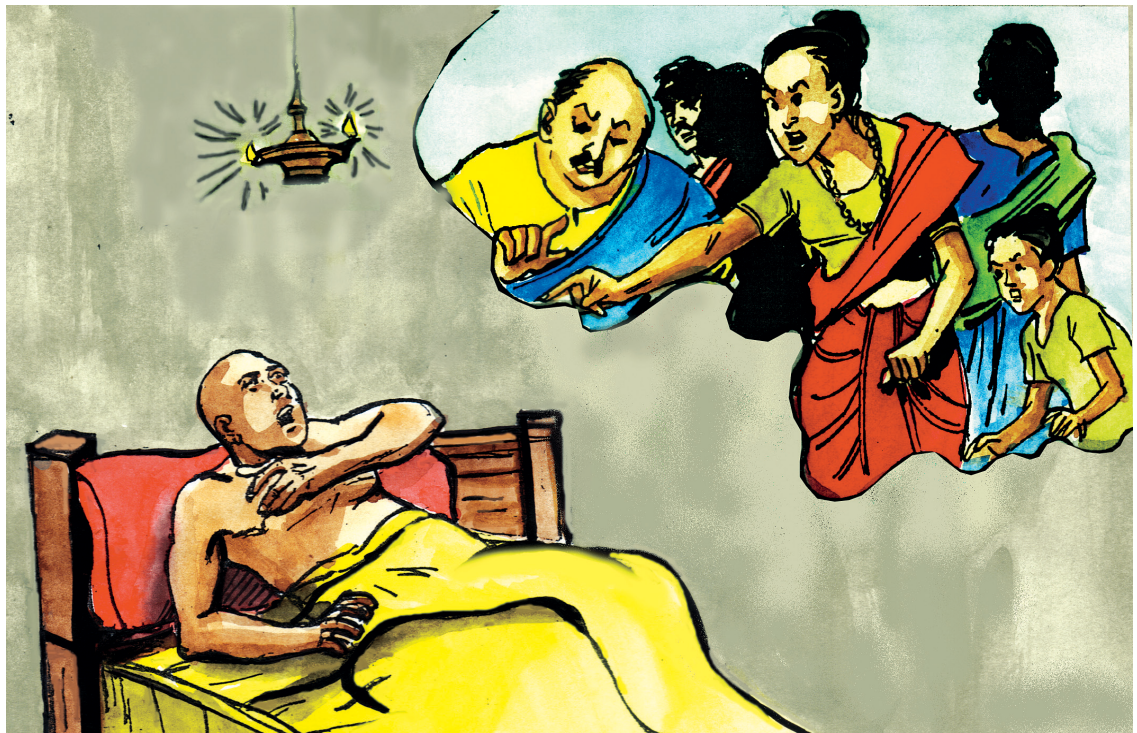
Its efficacy will hold good for aeons.

We chant them with deep *shraddha* and concentration.

Reverting to the episode of Angulimala's transformation, the success of Angulimala Thera's assertion of the Truth underlining his virtuous conduct also had a positive effect on his efforts to perfect meditation. For long, he had not been able to fully focus his mind in meditation practice. This was due not to lack of trying or serious effort on his part. Though he practised meditation with great commitment day and night, there would always appear before his mind's eye, his past evil deeds. His mind would invariably revert to his forest haunt where he had brutally killed so many innocent men, women and children. He could still hear their desperate pleas to spare their lives. Their plaintive voices crying out in desperation, "*please let me live merciful lord; please don't kill me, I have a wife and children to take care; spare my life for my helpless aged parents will be destitute ....*" constantly rang in his ears. The fear-stricken cries of his victims simply refused to go away.

If it was not the shrill cries of his victims, it was the vivid memories of their faces which haunted him. Their frantic last moments before he killed them often flashed across his mind's eye. He would visualize the gruesome scenes of the movements





**Angulimala Thera Haunted by Visions of his Past Killings**

of their limbs and their pale bloodless faces, when he was about to strike them with his sword. The dreadful visions of the bodies of his murdered victims scattered by the cart tracks and along the forest fringe would return to torment him. The sight of vultures, crows and hyenas scavenging on the rotting bodies would nauseate him and cause him to lose his appetite.

Whenever gruesome visions of his past misdeeds entered Angulimala Thera's mind, his heart would be consumed with deep remorse. Given this situation, he experienced difficulty in concentrating and bring his mind to one-pointedness. These mental and emotional disturbances simply refused to go away. Much as he tried to forget his cruel past, he could not escape from this mental agony. As a result, most of the days, his mind would be marooned in a sea of regrets over his past killings of innocent people.

Happily, things began to change as a result of his successful *sacca-kiriya*. Thera Angulimala underwent a glorious spiritual rebirth. This gave him an inner power to alleviate the pitiful suffering faced by ordinary folk. His inner power to heal and remove the suffering of others far exceeded the ruthless strength he had wielded in the past to drive fear and to kill and destroy innocent human lives. The very thought of his noble spiritual rebirth inspired him greatly and further reinforced his *shraddha* in the *Buddha Dhamma*.



### **Angulimala Thera Inspired to Perfect his Meditation Practice**

Strengthened by the belief in his noble spiritual rebirth, he was also encouraged to perfect his meditation. The episode of Angulimala Thera's assertion of his *sacca-kiriya*, beyond question, proved a tremendous morale booster to achieve spiritual uplift. He resolved to show his gratitude to the Buddha, by following His injunction to devoutly practise the *Dhamma*, especially the purification of the mind through diligent practice of *bhavana* (mental cultivation through mediation practice).

Arming himself with unwavering resolve, Angulimala Thera strove to perfect his meditation practice with great *viriya* (positive energy or resolute effort). He reinforced his monastic discipline as an *aranna bhikkhu* (forest meditation monk) and retired into the forest. The Buddha guided him in the practice of "letting go" his deep remorse over the past murderous deeds by concentrating on the "present moment" of his spiritual uplift.

The Enlightened One then taught him to practice regularly Vipassana Meditation (meditation practice based on the concentration of one's in and out-breath). Before long, dwelling alone in the solitude of the forest and having committed himself totally to the ardent practice of Vipassana Meditation as instructed by the Buddha, Angulimala Thera attained the spiritual goal of Arahant hood.

It would be recalled that earlier on when he first entered the Ariya Magga,



### More Village Folk Offer Alms-Food to Angulimala Thera

Angulimala Thera had found difficulty in obtaining alms food from the village folk when he went on *pindapatha*. Although he had become a *bhikkhu*, people were still very much fearful of him. Many still ran for their lives when they saw him from a distance. Many people would still shut their doors and windows when he arrived at their doorsteps to receive alms offering on his daily *pindapatha* through the nearby villages each morning.

In the wake of Angulimala Thera's attainment of Arahant hood, the village folk began to have greater confidence in his spiritual transformation. Many changed appreciably their perception of him. They discarded their fears and skepticism about the transformation from his murderous past. Increasing numbers of people began to accept Angulimala Thera without reservation and were kindly disposed towards him. Unlike in the past, they were now willing to offer him alms food when he visited their homes on his daily *pindapata* rounds.

However, not all village folks respected Angulimala Thera as a noble and righteous *bhikkhu*. There were a resentful few who could not remove the anger and hatred towards him from their hearts. Their animosity was simply not erasable for he had ruthlessly murdered their loved ones. They could not forgive him for having caused them irreparable loss and untold sufferings they had to bear. So, they continued to abhor deep hatred against him despite his entry into the *Bhikkhu Sangha*. Although



### **Group of Vengeful Villagers Brutally Attack Arahanth Angulimala**

he had donned a saffron robe, they did not trust his motives. They regarded him a monstrous person in the disguise of a monk who was a grave danger to society. Unable to seek retribution against him through the normal lawful process, since the King had already pardoned him, they decided to take matters into their own hands and seek vengeance against Angulimala Thera. None of them of course was aware that he had now attained the high spiritual stage of Arahanthood.

One day, when Arahanth Angulimala went on *pindapata* in the village, these angry villagers attacked him. They began to throw stones at him. A large piece of rock landed like a missile right on his forehead. It caused a deep cut. Blood gushed from the gaping wound. More rocks were hurled at him as he felt dizzy and fell to the ground. The angry mob of villagers ran up to him and let loose their pent up hatred. They assaulted him with brutal vengeance using iron rods and wooden poles. He was beaten up mercilessly. His saffron robe was severely tattered and his begging bowl broken into two. Blood streamed from the terrible injuries inflicted all over his body. He bled so profusely that in no time his inner robes were soaked with blood.

In spite of the severe injuries and great pain he suffered, Arahanth Angulimala did not raise so much as a finger to ward off the vengeful mob. Instead, he drew strength and resolve from his skilful training of *upekkha* (equanimity) and received



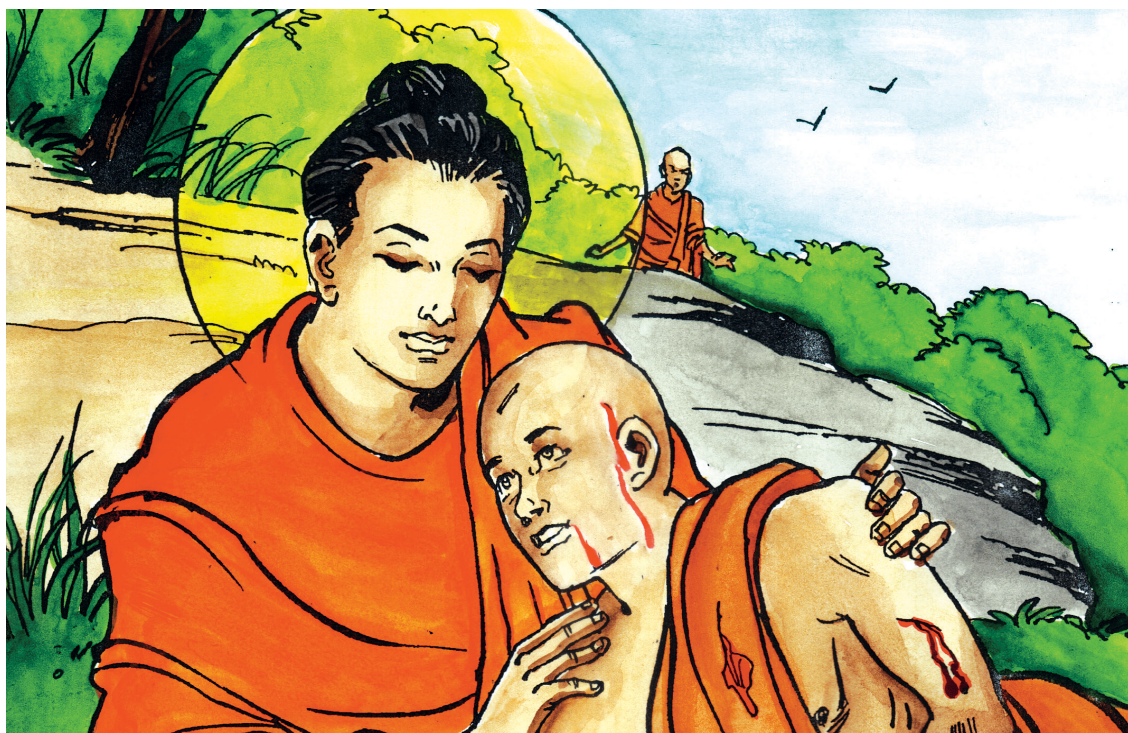
### **Injured Arahanth Angulimala Crawls to the Jetavana Monastery**

all their brutal blows without the slightest protest. When his body showed no sign of movement, the furious mob thought that he was dead. So they left him and disappeared into the village. Severely injured, Arahanth Angulimala gathered whatever strength his broken body could muster. Notwithstanding the great pain he suffered, he managed to crawl back to the Jetavana Monastery. With unwavering determination, he managed to reach the outer gates of the monastery.

The Buddha sighted him from a distance and hastened to his aid. The Enlightened One lifted him tenderly with both hands and rested him gently against His compassionate bosom. He comforted him while wiping gently the blood that oozed from the brutal wounds inflicted all over his severely battered frame. In a soft and soothing voice, the Blessed One consoled Arahanth Angulimala:

*What cruel deed has been inflicted on you, my son? Do not despair; this is the reality of kamma. You must bear all the pain without any malice or hatred against those misguided ones who had assaulted you. You are indeed a noble disciple, my son, to be able to take all the bodily pain with perfect upekkha.*

The Buddha knew that Arahanth Angulimala's last moments had come. There was absolutely no chance of him surviving the brutal beating and the great loss of



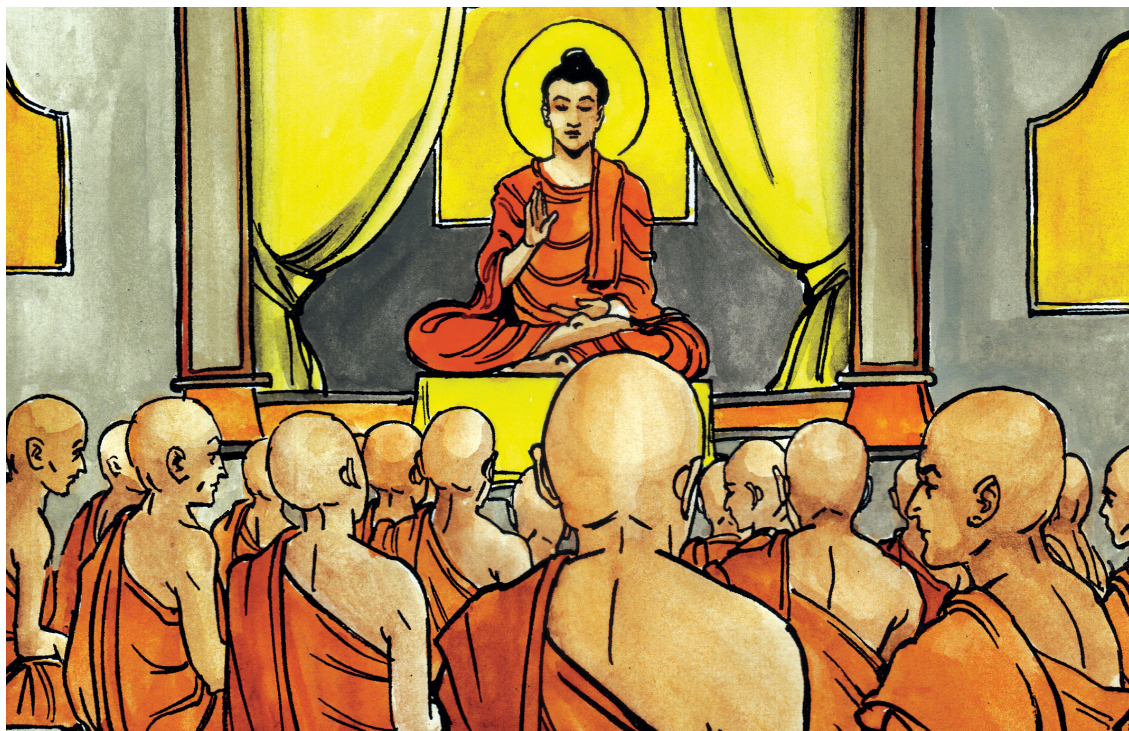
### **The Buddha Comforts Arahant Angulimala in his Last Moments**

blood he had suffered. The Enlightened One wanted his last thoughts to be tranquil and pure as this was bound to condition his rebirth. With tenderness of voice, He reassured the Arahant Angulimala with deep compassion:

*My son, you are experiencing now the results of unwholesome deeds committed in the past on account of which you might have been tortured in apaya for many life-cycles. Since realising your misdeeds you had transformed and tread the Aryan Path and devoutly practised the Dhamma. Even at this last painful moment, you must remain resolute in your shraddha in the Dhamma, my son.*

Having attained *Arahanthood*, Angulimala remained steadfast as ever in his absolute faith in the *Buddha Dhamma*. Likewise, his *metta* and *karuna* remained boundless despite the brutal assaults he had suffered. His mind and heart were immune to *dosa* (hatred), notwithstanding the physical pain from the severe injuries sustained at the hands of the angry village mob. He had only deep compassion for them, for he understood that their violent attacks against him were because the evil of anger and hatred had taken the better of them.

Resting against the Buddha's comforting body, Arahant Angulimala managed a deep breath and spoke feebly, "*Enlightened Master, my shraddha will never*



### The Buddha Explains Arahanth Angulimala's Attainment of Nirvana

*diminish. Despite the pain and injuries caused to my body, my mind remains equanimous evermore.*" Then he slowly rolled his eyes up to take one long last look last at Buddha, his Compassionate Teacher and Redeemer. With profound gratitude, just as his breath left him, he gasped his last words, "*Buddham Saranam Gacchami; Dhammam Saranam Gacchami.*" (I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dhamma). With these dying words escaping his feeble lips, as he rested in the comforting arms of the Buddha, Arahanth Angulimala passed into the blissful state of Nirvana.

It is noteworthy to recall that on one occasion, in the course of His sermon, a group of *bhikkhus* inquired of the Buddha about Arahanth Angulimala's rebirth. They were curious to know the state of his next life in view of his past *akusala kamma*. The Buddha stated unequivocally that Arahanth Angulimala had attained Nirvana. The *bhikkhus* expressed surprise that one who had been evil and killed so many innocent people, could pass into *Nirvana*.

The Enlightened One elaborated on Arahanth Angulimala's dramatic life-episode to help the *bhikkhus* better understand the Eternal Universal Law of Kamma thus:

*Angulimala was vested with innate wholesome qualities. Unfortunately, he was misdirected by his guru, Disapamukh. As a result of his blind*

*obedience to his guru, he heedlessly committed evil deeds. However, ever since his transformation and 'going forth', Angulima Thera perfected himself through devout practice of sila (morality), samadhi (mental discipline or concentration achieved through meditation) and panna (insight wisdom). Bhikkhus, kamma is never static but is at all times in a constant state of flux. Kamma therefore is changeable and is always changing as a result of one's thoughts, deeds and speech, at every moment of life.*

Thus, through his dramatic transformation from being a serial killer to becoming a devout practitioner of the *Dhamma*, Angulimala Thera was able to counter his past *akusala kamma* by accumulating greater *kusala kamma*. In elucidating on this important doctrine of the Eternal Law of Kamma, the Buddha pronounced the following insightful Teaching to the congregation of monks, *"He whose past misdeeds are covered by good deeds; illuminates this world as does the moon freed from a cloud."*



## EPILOGUE

There is no detailed record in the Buddhist scriptures and literature about the last years of Arahanth Angulimala. However, it is clear from the dramatic episodes in his life that despite his notorious past misdeeds, he became one of the most renowned Arahanth disciples of the Buddha. Apart from this, in traditional Buddhist countries, to this day, Arahanth Angulimala is revered as the Patron Saint of expectant mothers.

One of the best accounts of Arahanth Angulimala's holy life is his own description of diligent practice in forest meditation as recorded in the *Theragatha* (a collection of paeans of joy of monks upon attaining Arahanthood). These inspiring verses provide a lucid insight into his saintly life since '*going forth*'. Briefly, they reveal that as a monk practising *dhutanga*, Angulima Thera lived in solitary places such as forests, caves and mountains, perfecting his meditation practice. Equally significant, they also disclose that he spent his last years as an Arahanth in blissfulness, while he diligently practised the *Dhamma*, thus:

*Who once did live in negligence,  
And then is negligent no more.  
He illuminated the world,  
Like the moon freed from a cloud.*

*Who overcame the evil deeds he did,  
By doing wholesome deeds instead.  
He illuminated the world,  
Like the moon freed from a cloud.*

*The youthful bhikkhu who devoted himself,  
To diligent practice of the Buddha's Teaching.  
He illuminated the world,  
Like the moon freed from a cloud.*

*Let my enemies hear the discourse on the Dhamma,  
Let them be devoted to the Buddha's Teaching.  
Let my enemies wait on those good people,  
Who lead others to accept the Dhamma.*

*Let my enemies give ear from time to time,  
And hear the Doctrine as told by men who preach forbearance.  
Of those who speak in praise of kindness,  
May they follow the Dhamma with kind deeds.*

*For surely then they would not wish to harm me,  
Nor would they think of harming other beings.  
So those who would protect all beings, frail or strong,  
Let them attain the all-surpassing tranquility and inner peace.*

*Conduit-makers guide the water,  
Fletchers straighten out their arrows.  
Carpenters straighten out the timber,  
But wise men seek to tame their minds.*

*There are some who tame with beatings,  
Some with goads and some with whips.  
But I was tamed by such alone,  
Who has no rod nor any weapon.*

*“Harmless” is the name I had borne,  
But who was feared in the past.  
The name I bear today is pure,  
I hurt no living being at all.*

*And though I once lived as a bandit,  
Bearing the name ‘Angulimala’.  
One whom the great flood swept along,  
I went for refuge to the Buddha.*

*And though I once was bloody-handed,  
Bearing the name ‘Angulimala’.  
See the refuge I have found,  
The bond of being has been cut.*

*While I did many deeds that lead,  
To rebirth in the woeful realms.  
Alas, the fruits of Arahant hood has reached me now,  
And so I eat free from karmic indebtedness.*

*They are ignorant beings who have no sense,  
Who give themselves to negligence.  
But those of wisdom guard virtue,  
And treat it as their greatest good.*

*Do not give way to negligence,  
Nor seek delight in sensual pleasures.  
But meditate with diligence,  
So as to reach the perfect state of Nibbanic bliss.*

*So welcome to that choice of mine,  
And let it stand, it was not ill made.  
Of all the Dhammas known to humankind,  
I have come to the very best.*

*So welcome to that choice of mine,  
And let it stand, it was not ill made.  
I have attained the Triple Knowledge,  
And done all that the Buddha had Taught.*

*I stayed in forests, at the foot of trees,  
I dwelt in the mountain caves.  
But no matter where I went,  
I always had an agitated mind.*

*But now I rest and rise in happiness,  
And happily I spend my life.  
For now I am free of Mara's snares,  
Oh! For the pity shown me by the Master!*

*A Brahmin was I by descent,  
On both sides high and purely born.  
Today I am the Master's son,  
My Enlightened Teacher in the Dhamma.*

*Free of craving, without grasping,  
With guarded senses, well restrained.  
Spewn forth have I the root of misery,  
The end of all taints have I attained.*

*The Master has been served by me full well,  
All the Buddha's bidding has been done.  
The heavy load was finally laid down,  
What leads to new becoming is completely ended.*

## SIGNIFICANCE OF ANGULIMALA'S LIFE-STORY

Angulimala is among the best known Arahants in Buddhist scriptures and literature. Since the time of the Buddha, the real-life story of the dramatic dual transformation of Angulimala from being an intelligent and diligent student to a notorious serial killer, and subsequently, to a noble and compassionate *bhikkhu* who attained Arahantship through earnest practice of the *Dhamma*, has been retold to millions. Indeed, for over twenty-six centuries, Angulimala's life-story has been used to teach important principles of the *Dhamma*. It has thus remained a popular life-story throughout the ages. Each time, the story was retold or read, it never failed to move the hearts of the reader or listener and inspire him or her to practise the Buddha's Noble Teachings. Little wonder that the Angulimala episode has remained an integral part of Buddhist Education.

The legendary dual transformation of Angulimala carries important lessons on personal self-development as it provides invaluable insight into the nature of the human mind and how this affects the development of a person in terms of his or her thoughts, speech and actions. The real-life episode illustrates how even a decent person with strong *shraddha* in living a virtuous life can be dramatically brutal when misguided. The story demonstrates that *shraddha*, *adhitthana* and *viriyā* are important personal traits for one's development and success, provided they are well-directed. When a person's mind is directed towards a noble goal he or she will endeavour to achieve it with utmost enthusiasm and missionary zeal. But when the mind is misdirected along an evil path, this can make a person as passionate as ever in achieving his or her evil goal. Just like Ahimsaka, the individual would go to extremes to achieve the evil objective, notwithstanding the fact that he or she knows that this is morally wrong, even evil.

We know of terrifying killers, but even the most notorious would not be prepared to go as far as Angulimala. Since childhood, Ahimsaka was a highly virtuous, diligent lad who possessed very strong positive qualities for scholarship such as *adhitthana*, *shraddha* and *viriyā*. Similarly, when he embarked upon fulfilling his *Guru Dakshina* of a hundred human little fingers, he did so with blind obedience and commitment to his *guru*. With unrelenting zeal, he strove to meet his obligation as a dutiful student. He went about his gory mission with such great ferocity that he was able to slay groups of traders, travellers and villagers single-handed. Ahikmsaka was so obsessed with fulfilling his *Guru Dakshina* that he was even ready to kill his mother who had set out to save him from being apprehended by King Pasenadi's soldiers and punished with death.

Equally significant, the historic episode illustrates how one could transform an evil person, even as notorious as the dreaded Angulimala, to lead a virtuous life

by reaching out to him or her through *metta* and *karuna*. Parents are advised to likewise bring up their children with love, positive reinforcement and personal example instead of resorting to the conventional method of punishment as the way to guide or discipline them.

Another important concept highlighted in the moral story is the fact that a child is born with an unblemished mind. At birth, a child's mind can be likened to an unsoiled white sheet. Social scientists and renowned thinkers, such as the famous French philosopher, Rousseau referred to this state of an infant's mind as a *tabula rasa*, that is, a blank tablet on which anything can be inscribed. Regretably, it is a reality of modern-day life that a child's mind is constantly bombarded with negative influences which invariably lead him or her to unwholesome ways of thinking and behaviour. Parents should be ever mindful of this and other important realities in childcare and development and consciously cultivate their child's mind in a positive and wholesome direction.

Two other fundamental realities of the human condition and nature which underline the Angulimala episode also merit emphasis namely, the Eternal Law of Kamma and the pivotal role of the mind which dictates human thinking and behaviour. We are reminded that our lives are influenced by *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*) accrued through deeds committed earlier in life or arising from those done in previous lives. That is why some times, for a seemingly inexplicable reason, misfortune strikes us suddenly. Often we are faced with some unexpected and unthinkable problems or difficulties in life. This happens because of the ripening of some unskilful or unwholesome act we had committed in our past lives. The point to note here is that *kamma* is never finite or static. We are always interfering with our *kamma*. We are changing our *kamma* at every moment of our lives. So our *kamma* is in a constant state of flux. It is forever changing and changeable through our actions in this very life-cycle. This means that we can change the course of our life through the cultivation of wholesome *kamma* by living skilfully and in so doing, enjoy the benefits accrued therefrom, here and now in this very life.

No one is predestined or pre-programmed towards evil or failure or doom. On the contrary, one is in control of one's life. We are the ones who determine our success, well-being and happiness. We are responsible for all our thoughts, speech and action and the wholesome or unwholesome consequences or results they spawn. This means that we can change the course of our life as Angulimala did. Thus, the underlying principle of *kamma*, that one can always turn the direction in which one is living one's life. Further, it is entirely in one's power to decide the path one wishes to tread. The Noble Path of the *Dhamma* is open to all who wish to benefit from practising the Buddha's Sublime Teachings.

The other fundamental reality of human existence is that we can all benefit from the cultivation of the mind and diligent training in skillful living and attain Arahant hood. The cultivation of the mind which is central in the Teachings of the Buddha is premised on the reality that the mind is the forerunner of all our thoughts, speech and actions. In short, our mind is the maker and the master of all our thinking, speech and behaviour. Deviant behaviour is triggered by one's own unwholesome mind. Conversely, skilful living is born out of a wholesome mind. Furthermore, the mind is an inextricable part of every human being. Our mind follows us wherever we go. We may be able to run away from many things, but we can never rid ourselves of our mind. It remains with us all the time wherever we go. It sees what we do, hears what we say and even knows what we think. Nobody may be around us to watch over what we do or fail to do. But our mind remains ever present and automatically records every little detail of our thoughts, speech and actions, and thereby, conditions our future *kamma*. In essence, what this means is that all our thoughts, speech and actions are dictated by our mind. We are the very ones who are in control of our future happiness or the lack of it. We are in full charge of our success and happiness. Conversely, it means that we are the very ones responsible for our failures and misery. None of us are fated or predestined according to the dictates of some External Being or Power. We ourselves are the ones who dictate our future. It is our mind that determines whether we are contented and happy or miserable and angry; whether we are healthy or in poor health; whether we succeed or fail and so on.

We need, therefore, to purify our mind by cleansing it of unwholesome thoughts and actions. We can and should do this by observing the Teachings of the Buddha and develop a wholesome mental self-culture through *bhavana*, that is, the skilful cultivation of the mind. In this way, we will ensure that wholesome thoughts occupy our mind. This is the essence underlying the scientifically verifiable practice of *bhavana* which the Buddha stressed. It was Ahimsaka's misdirected mind, driven by his obsession to wield supernatural powers, that led him to be the dreaded serial killer. However, by diligently practicing the *Dhamma* and purifying his mind that was from the time he became a *bhikkhu*, Angulimala Thera was able to attain the spiritual goal of Arahant hood.

The life-story of Angulimala in addition underlines the Buddha's advice to us not to judge people on the basis of their outward appearance. Instead, we should try and understand with *metta* and *karuna* the underlying factors influencing their thinking, speech and behaviour. Only in this way can we effectively redirect them along the right path. It is far more important for us to first of all understand the mind or inner thinking of a wrongdoer instead of passing judgement or straight away condemning him or her.

Finally, it should be appreciated that the Angulimala episode carries special significance for expectant mothers. It highlights the Buddhist practice of *gabbha parihara*. The *Angulimala Paritta* brings to focus the entrenched Buddhist culture of regarding motherhood as sacred and the importance of ensuring the healthy growth as well as the mental, emotional, moral, ethical and spiritual development of an unborn baby. To this day, the *Angulimala Paritta* enjoys a special spiritual significance in traditional Buddhist communities with regard to mothercare and childbirth. Modern scientific research has validated the importance of ensuring what is termed as a, “*favourable foetal environment*” for the unborn child, as practised in Buddhism. Thus, the *Angulimala Paritta* stands out as an excellent illustration in Buddhism of the critical importance of providing spiritual fortification for expectant mothers, dating as far back as the time of the Enlightened One, over 2600 years ago.

Ever since, the recitation of the *Angulimala Paritta* became rooted as an important practice of spiritual reinforcement for a successful childbirth, expectant mothers have looked up to Arahant Angulimala as their ‘*Patron Saint*’ – a concept similar to the Christian tradition that emerged several centuries later, especially in Europe. The *Angulimala Paritta* continues to this day to evoke powerful *shraddha* in the hearts of millions of expectant mothers. Aside from observing the religious practice of chanting *parittas* for the protection and well-being of an expectant mother and her unborn child, it is common practice in many traditional Buddhist communities for the family to arrange for the recitation of the *Angulimala Paritta* specifically. This is observed because of the strong belief in the power inherent in this *paritta* for invoking protection and blessings for expectant mothers and their unborn child.

The chanting of the protective verses of blessing contained in the *Angulimala Paritta* helps to strengthen the confidence of an expectant mother to experience a trouble-free and successful childbirth. It is particularly important to appreciate the tremendous therapeutic benefits that an expectant mother and her unborn baby receive through the recitation of the *Angulimala Paritta* and other *parittas*. Indeed, among other spiritual and psychological benefits, the chanting of the *paritta* helps to promote a calm, relaxed and positive mental state in her. This in turn impacts vibrantly on the growth and development of her unborn baby. It is for these cogent reasons that *viharas* (temples) organise the recitation of the *Angulimala Paritta* and other protective *parittas* for expectant mothers and would-be-mothers regularly. Over the centuries, this important religious practice has become integral to the Buddhist culture of *gabbha parihara*. Our understanding of the historical antecedents of the *Angulimala Paritta* thus enhances the efficacy of its recitation for expectant mothers and their unborn babies and the benefit of *paritta* chanting for all in general.

## COMPREHENSION EXERCISE

1. What aspect of the life story of Angulimala impresses you most?
2. Why did Bhaggava name his son, Ahimsaka and how did he live up to this?
3. Evaluate Ahimsaka's personality and character.
4. Do you believe in the Law of Kamma? Give your reasons based on the Angulimala story.
5. Why and how did Guru Disapamukh's attitude towards Ahimsaka change?
6. Explain how Ahimsaka became the terrible serial killer?
7. Why and how did the Buddha intervene to save Angulimala?
8. How did the Angulimala Paritta come about? Explain its significance.
9. Angulimala attained Arahanthood despite his past evil deeds. Discuss.
10. What moral lessons are to be drawn from Angulimala's life-story?
11. What does the Angulimala episode tell you about the nature of the human mind?
12. Discuss a mother's love for her child. How should you show your appreciation towards your mother?
13. Describe the personality of the Buddha based on the Angulimala real life-story.
14. Explain the significance of parittas in general and the Angulimala Paritta specifically.
15. Discuss Buddhist meditation practice and its benefits.
16. Arahanth Angulimala is the "Patron Saint" of expectant mothers. Discuss.