



# HOW TO RECOVER

Getting Out of Hot Water



This is a short story. You may know it.

Repeating, revising, reviewing and revisiting is part of practice. Over and over again we study the teachings which point to the Way of our true, original nature.

This short story is for you.



Before reading the story, consider how you may see yourself as *good* – a good, decent person. Being a good, decent person is not enough in spiritual life.

- Good, decent people are often ignorant of their divine nature.
- To know who you are requires a change of identity.



This story is about a good, decent person  
gone bad, who when he meets up with the  
Truth, awakens.



## The Story

The main character is *Angulimala*; infamously known as *The Finger Necklace Monk*. A moniker he earned because he wore the fingers of his victims as a garland. Something we all have a tendency to do; we all tend to take pride in slaying and beating another. We call it winning.

*Angulimala* was born into a royal family; his father was a king. The joy of his birth soon changes to worry when his parents are told



by a trusted soothsayer that the boy was born with criminal tendencies. (We are all born with tendencies)

This news disturbs his parents enough that they take measures to prevent the child's criminal tendencies from taking hold. They name him *Ahimsaka*, meaning harmless and stress the importance of *obedience*. As a result, *Ahimsaka* grows up to be a fine, obedient young man.



When old enough, *Ahimsaka* leaves home to enter the household of an educated Brahmin who ran an apprentice program for those interested in spiritual life.

*Ahimsaka*, an obedient, honorable student soon became the teacher's favorite. This favoritism led to all the other students to feel jealous. The jealousy grew until *Ahimsaka's* fellow students began a whisper campaign against him. Soon doubt in the mind of the teacher took root turning him against





*Ahimsaka*. The teacher, now fearful and mistrustful of *Ahimsaka*, decides to end *Ahimsaka*'s studies. He calls for *Ahimsaka* and demands he pay his fees. *Ahimsaka*, unaware of the turn in his teacher, is quite agreeable to pay his teacher and asks what must he pay.



Here is what follows.

"You must bring me a thousand first fingers from the human hand."

"Surely you don't require this of me?" responded the horrified *Ahimsaka*.

"You have taken from me and in return you must now do my bidding. Go now and bring a thousand fingers."

The teacher's secret wish was...that in the process of carrying out this task, *Ahimsaka*



would be killed and he would never have to see him again.



Here is what happens next.

The unhappy student...went to live in...the forest...reluctantly at first, but later without compunction, he began waylaying lone travelers, killing them, cutting off one of their fingers and living off the possessions he stole.

At first, he hung the fingers on a tree where the birds would pick at the flesh, after which the bones would drop to the ground and be scattered.



After a while, *Ahimsaka*...threaded the fingers on a cord and hung them around his neck. With this terrible appearance, the now notorious and feared murderer came to be known as *Angulimala* (Finger Necklace).

Eventually, through murder, and perhaps by cutting fingers from corpses...in charnel grounds, *Angulimala* accumulated 999 fingers leaving him needing one more finger.



Let's flash forward.

*Angulimala*, hiding in the forest, ready to commit matricide is suddenly warned to STOP!

Buddha, knowing the taint of matricide would taint *Angulimala* for life.



The first encounter with Buddha.

When Buddha appears, seemingly out-of-nowhere, he tells *Angulimala* to STOP!

When we encounter the Truth, we often are brought up short and STOP! STOP what you might ask? STOP running after the material world.

What do you need to STOP!



*Angulimala's* first response.

He stopped. The teaching, in one word:  
STOP! How often do you STOP! harmful  
actions of body, speech and mind?

*Angulimala* stopped. Can you?

What human tendencies do you identify with  
in yourself? Who do you think you are?

When *Angulimala* stops killing, he asks to  
be Buddha's student.





*Angulimala*, the Monk continued to suffer. Making a commitment to a path is a beginning. It comes after a glimpse of the Divine. A change occurs. A commitment follows. Suffering continues.

He stopped the killing, made a commitment and hung out in the company of spiritual seekers with Buddha as the main teacher. Although he followed the monastic order, he still suffered.



The local community remembered his former life as a vicious killer and did not recognize his change. They beat him up, smashed his bowl, tore his robe and left him barefoot. A bit of a setback.

Buddha explained to him that the acts against him were karmic in nature and that gratitude was the antidote. To be grateful that the consequences of his intentional acts



(killing, stealing) were being dissolved in this lifetime.

Do you see the consequences of your life as the effects of your actions without identifying yourself as a bad person?



*Angulimala, A Compassionate Monk*  
*Angulimala* accepts the consequences of his past and continues on as a monk – with robe, bowl and begging for food.

The community, however, continues to shun him. The consequences of his killings were still active. Maybe you have had this experience? Where the locals in your life (family, friends, colleagues and so forth) continue to treat you as the ignorant *old* self.



During one of his begging rounds,  
*Angulimala* hears the wail of a pregnant  
woman in the pangs of labor. Compassion  
for the suffering of this woman arises but he  
realizes both the townspeople and the  
pregnant woman will shun him should he  
make an effort to offer traditional prayers.  
The locals hold onto disrepute. (Not so good  
on their part).



Nevertheless, *Angulimala* returns to  
Buddha; now discouraged and worn down  
by the continued shame.



## Endorsement of Buddha

*Angulimala*'s response is to correct Buddha. (Novices often debate/correct teachers). He reminds Buddha that he has killed and harmed others. (*Angulimala* did not know the cloud of forgetting).

But Buddha recognizes his weariness and tells him to return to the woman and tell her "I have never harmed anyone." Had *Angulimala* been enlightened, he would have understood the Buddha's instruction. But, *Angulimala* was not yet enlightened.



In other words, at this point *Angulimala's* self-ego is still running the show. He can't say what Buddha tells him because he still sees himself as a criminal.

Buddha does not argue with *Angulimala* but agrees to his correction by changing what he should say to the pregnant woman.

Tell her "...after my NOBLE birth, I have not harmed anyone." This clarification, is a realization. He accepts his...NOBLE birth. This changes everything for him...for the locals...and for the suffering woman.





Now he knows who he is, he no longer is plagued by the onslaught of discrimination from himself and others.

How about you?



## Noble Birth.

The noble birth requires you to stop identifying with the material realm. To *forget* your intentional, harmful acts, and find someone (teacher etc.,) who knows you and who will clarify and verify your NOBLE birth. The verification is realized when: *Angulimala* and Buddha both realize *Angulimala* is reborn.

*Angulimala* knew he killed many others in cold blood but was willing to STOP. As



well, he was willing to surrender to Buddha's teachings and to take up the vows and commit to them. And he stopped dragging the past around with him.



## Final Note

Often there is confusion about what this means – but hopefully this story will clarify what it means to work with a spiritual teacher and what it does not mean.

Nothing is transmitted. There is “no fee” demanded as his first teacher demanded. Transmission is an intuitive understanding of a master with a student and a student with a master. Both come to see the clear circle of brightness that is shared. It is an imperceptible, mutual assistance.



## SUMMARY – TAKE AWAY

*Angulimala* became discouraged but continued on despite the negative responses to him. He was not recognized in the way other monks were recognized. His past remained in the forefront of the locals. But it no longer haunted him.

*Angulimala's* journey included a good start, a serious fall and a full awakening. His practice matured to the point he experienced compassion which led to his acceptance and realization of being one who does no harm.



## STEP BY STEP

1. *Angulimala* had gone from bad-to-good-to-bad-to-awakening.
2. He felt discouraged by the reactions of others to him as still being “bad.”
3. His attempts to follow his vows were made more difficult because he, himself and others did not yet see him as a changed person.
4. It is not until he is told in an exchange with the Buddha that he is a true monk.
5. Two verifications: one from Buddha, the other within himself.



The Buddha perceived the heart of  
*Angulimala* as sincere and reminds him of  
the Truth of who he is.

*Angulimala* discovers for himself the Truth  
of his divine nature. His ego-self is slain and  
he awakens.

Who Are You?

