



The story of Angulimala —teacher's notes

There are several messages to this story.

1. One message is that love and respect are the main factors that brought about Angulimala's transformation. When the Buddha looked him in the eye with love, and engaged in conversation with him in a respectful and honest way, Angulimala could not help but listen and respect him back. That made him open to a new way of seeing things, and he dropped his cynicism.

In the *Dhammapada* (1.5) the Buddha says, *Hate is not conquered by hate, hate is conquered by love.*

2. A second message relates to karma. Negative karma, even in extreme cases such as that of a mass-murderer, can be purified and can become exhausted. That means that people can change. The fact you stole once does not make you a thief for ever. People cannot be judged on their actions alone because each person has the potential for changing. It is therefore a mistake to demonise anyone, however terrible their actions may be.
3. This story also raises questions about how karma works. Surely a mass murderer should suffer for his crimes? As the Buddha says in the *Dhammapada*, (9:127) "Neither in the sky, nor deep in the ocean, nor in a mountain cave, nor anywhere, can a person be free from the evil they have done."

How can we understand the situation? It might be that Angulimala's harmful tendency to kill had exhausted itself and come to a natural end, and that is why he was able to give it up and move on. Another factor is the regret he is said to have experienced, as well as his open confession to the Buddha; both of these are considered to be powerful in purifying karmic consequences. And the meditation practices he subsequently engaged in under the Buddha would also have had a role in purification.