SN 42.2 — SN 42:2 To Tālapuṭa the Actor | Tālapuṭa Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

To Tālapuṭa the Actor

Tālapuṭa Sutta (SN 42:2)

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrel Sanctuary. Then Tālapuṭa, the head of an acting troupe, went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, I have heard that it has been passed down by the ancient teaching lineage of actors that ‘When an actor on the stage, in the midst of a festival, makes people laugh & gives them delight with his imitation of reality, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas.’ What does the Blessed One have to say about that?”

“Enough, headman, put that aside. Don’t ask me that.”

A second time… A third time Tālapuṭa, the head of an acting troupe, said: “Venerable sir, I have heard that it has been passed down by the ancient teaching lineage of actors that ‘When an actor on the stage, in the midst of a festival, makes people laugh & gives them delight with his imitation of reality, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas.’ What does the Blessed One have to say about that?”

“Apparently, headman, I haven’t been able to get past you by saying, ‘Enough, headman, put that aside. Don’t ask me that.’ So I will simply answer you. Any beings who are not devoid of passion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of passion, focus with even more passion on things inspiring passion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Any beings who are not devoid of aversion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of aversion, focus with even more aversion on things inspiring aversion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Any beings who are not devoid of delusion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of delusion, focus with even more delusion on things inspiring delusion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Thus the actor—himself intoxicated & heedless, having made others intoxicated & heedless—with the breakup of the body, after death, is reborn in what is called the hell of laughter. But if he holds such a view as this: ‘When an actor on the stage, in the midst of a festival, makes people laugh & gives them delight with his imitation of reality, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas,’ that is his wrong view. Now, there are two destinations for a person with wrong view, I tell you: either hell or the animal womb.”

When this was said, Tālapuṭa, the head of an acting troupe, sobbed & burst into tears. (The Blessed One said:) “That is what I couldn’t get past you by saying, ‘Enough, headman, put that aside. Don’t ask me that.’”

“I’m not crying, venerable sir, because of what the Blessed One said to me, but simply because I have been deceived, cheated, & fooled for a long time by that ancient teaching lineage of actors who said: ‘When an actor on the stage, in the midst of a festival, makes people laugh & gives them delight with his imitation of reality, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas.’

“Magnificent, venerable sir! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has the Blessed One—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha of monks. May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life.”

Then Tālapuṭa, the head of an acting troupe, received the Going-forth in the Blessed One’s presence, he gained the Acceptance. And not long after his Acceptance—dwelling alone,

secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute—he in no long time entered & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life, for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, directly knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now. He knew: "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world." And so Ven. Tālapuṭa became another one of the arahants.