Thag 19.1 — Tālapuṭa

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Text

Verses of the Senior Monks 19.1

The Book of the Fifties

Chapter One

Tālapuṭa

Oh, when will I stay in a mountain cave,

alone, with no companion,

discerning all states of existence as impermanent?

This hope of mine, when will it be?

Oh, when will I stay happily in the forest,

a sage wearing a torn robe, dressed in ocher,

unselfish, with no need for hope,

with greed, hate, and delusion destroyed?

Oh, when will I stay alone in the wood,

fearless, discerning this body as impermanent,

a nest of death and disease,

harried by death and old age; when will it be?

Oh, when will I live, having grasped the sharp sword of wisdom

and cut the creeper of craving that tangles around everything,

the mother of fear, the bringer of suffering?

When will it be?

Oh, when will I, seated on the lion’s throne,

swiftly grasp the sword of the seers,

forged by wisdom, of awesome might,

and swiftly break Māra and his army? When will it be?

Oh, when will I be seen in the assemblies

with those who are virtuous, unaffected, respecting the Dhamma,

seeing things as they are, with faculties subdued?

When will it be?

Oh, when will I focus on my heart's goal in the Mountainfold,

free of oppression by laziness, hunger, thirst,

wind, heat, bugs, and reptiles?

When will it be?

Oh, when will I, serene and mindful,

understand the four truths,

that were realized by the great seer,

and are so very hard to see? When will it be?

Oh, when will I, devoted to serenity,

see with understanding the infinite sights,

sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas

as burning? When will it be?

Oh, when will I not be distraught

because of criticism,

nor elated because of praise?

When will it be?

Oh, when will I discern the aggregates

and the infinite varieties of phenomena,

those interior and exterior, as no more than

wood, grass, and creepers? When will it be?

Oh, when will the monsoon clouds in season

freshly wet me in my robe in the forest,

walking the path trodden by the seers?

When will it be?

Oh, when will I rise up, intent on attaining freedom from death,
hearing, in the mountain cave,
the cry of the crested peacock in the forest?
When will it be?
Oh, when will I cross by psychic power unobstructed
the Ganges, Yamunā, and Sarasvatī;
and that place where one is thrown in the abyss,
the horrifying Mare's Mouth? When will it be?
Oh, when will I be devoted to absorption,
shunning all the signs of beauty,
splitting apart desire for sensual stimulation,
like an elephant that wanders free of ties? When will it be?
Oh, when will I realize the teaching of the great seer
and be content, like a pauper in debt
harassed by creditors, who finds a hidden treasure?
When will it be?
For many years you begged me,
"Enough of living in a house for you!"
Why do you not urge me on, mind,
now that I've gone forth as an ascetic?
Didn't you entice me, mind:
"In the Mountainfold, the birds with colorful wings,
greeting the thunder, Mahinda's voice,
will delight you as you meditate in the forest?"
In my family circle, friends, loved ones, and relatives;
and in the world, sports and play, and sensual pleasures;
all these I gave up when I entered this life:
and even then you're not content with me, mind!
This is mine alone, it doesn't belong to others;

when it is time to don your armor, why lament?
Observing that all this is unstable,
I went forth, seeking the state free of death.
He whose words are well-composed, supreme among people,
great physician, guide for those fit to train, said:
“The mind fidgets like a monkey,
so it’s very hard to control if you are not free of lust.”
Sensual pleasures are diverse, sweet, delightful;
an ignorant ordinary person is bound to them.
Seeking to be reborn again, they wish for suffering;
led on by their mind, they’re banished to hell.
“Staying in the grove resounding with cries
of peacocks and herons, and adorned by leopards and tigers,
abandon concern for the body, without fail!”
So you used to urge me, mind.
“Develop the absorptions and spiritual faculties,
the powers, awakening factors, and immersion;
realize the three knowledges in the teaching of the Buddha!”
So you used to urge me, mind.
“Develop the eightfold path to realize freedom from death
emancipating, its objective being the end of all suffering,
and cleansing all defilements!”
So you used to urge me, mind.
“Reflect rationally on the aggregates as suffering,
and abandon that from which suffering arises;
make an end of suffering in this very life!”
So you used to urge me, mind.
“Rationally discern that impermanence is suffering,
that emptiness is non-self, and that gloom is death.

Uproot the wandering mind!”
So you used to urge me, mind.
“Bald, unsightly, accursed,
seek alms amongst families, bowl in hand.
Devote yourself to the word of the Teacher, the great seer!”
So you used to urge me, mind.
“Wander among the street markets well-restrained,
mentally unchained to families and sensual pleasures,
like the full moon on a bright night!”
So you used to urge me, mind.
“Be a wilderness-dweller and an alms-eater,
one who lives in charnel grounds, a rag-robe wearer,
one who never lies down, always delighting in ascetic practices.”
So you used to urge me, mind.
Mind, when you urge me to the impermanent and unstable,
you’re acting like someone who plants trees,
then, when they’re about to fruit,
wishes to cut down the very same trees.
Incorporeal mind, far-traveler, lone-wanderer:
I won’t do your bidding any more.
Sensual pleasures are suffering, painful, and very dangerous;
I’ll wander with my mind focused only on extinguishment.
I didn’t go forth due to bad luck or shamelessness,
or due to a whim or banishment,
nor for the sake of a livelihood;
it was because I agreed to the promise you made, mind.
“Having few wishes, abandoning disparagement,
the settling of suffering: these are praised by true persons.”
So you used to urge me, mind,

but now you keep on with your old habits!
Craving, ignorance, the loved and unloved,
pretty sights, pleasant feelings,
and the delightful kinds of sensual stimulation:
I've vomited them up, I can't swallow them back.
I've done your bidding everywhere, mind!
For many births, I've done nothing to upset you.
Yet the creation in myself is because of your ingratitude—
for a long time I've transmigrated in the suffering you've made.
Only you, mind, make a brahmin;
you make an aristocrat or a royal seer.
Sometimes we become peasants or menials;
and life as a god is also on account of you.
You alone make us titans;
because of you we're born in hell.
Then sometimes we become animals,
and life as a ghost is also on account of you.
Come what may, you won't betray me again,
dazzling me with your ever-changing display!
You play with me like I'm mad—
but how have I ever failed you, mind?
In the past my mind wandered
how it wished, where it liked, as it pleased.
Now I'll carefully guide it,
as a trainer with a hook guides a rutting elephant.
The teacher willed that this world appear to me
as impermanent, unstable, insubstantial.
Mind, let me leap into the victor's teaching,
carry me over the great flood, so hard to pass.

Things have changed, mind!
Nothing could make me return to your control!
I've gone forth in the teaching of the great seer,
those like me don't come to ruin.
Mountains, oceans, rivers, the earth;
the four quarters, the intermediate directions, below and in the sky;
the three realms of existence are all impermanent and harried—
where can you go to find happiness, mind?
Mind, what will you do to someone who has made the ultimate commitment?
Nothing could make me a follower under your control, mind;
I'd never touch a bellows with a mouth open at each end;
curse this mortal frame flowing with nine streams!
You've ascended the mountain peak, full of nature's beauty,
frequented by boars and antelopes,
a grove sprinkled with fresh water in the monsoon;
and there you'll be happy in your cave-home.
Peacocks with beautiful necks and crests,
colorful tail-feathers and wings,
crying out at the resounding thunder:
they'll delight you as you meditate in the forest.
When the heavens have rained, and the grass is four inches high,
and the grove is full of flowers like a cloud,
between the mountains, like the fork of a tree, I'll lie;
it will be as soft as cotton-buds.
I'll act rather as a master does:
let whatever I get be enough for me.
And that's why I'll make you as supple
as a tireless worker makes a cat-skin bag.
I'll act rather as a master does:

let whatever I get be enough for me.
I'll control you with my energy,
as a skilled trainer controls an elephant with a hook.
Now that you're well-tamed and reliable,
I can use you, like a trainer uses a straight-running horse,
to practice the path of grace,
cultivated by those who take care of their minds.
I shall strongly fasten you to a meditation subject,
as an elephant is tied to a post with firm rope.
You'll be well-guarded by me, well-developed by mindfulness,
and unattached to rebirth in all states of existence.
With wisdom you'll cut short the one following the wrong path,
curb them by meditation, and settle them on the right path.
Having seen arising and passing away with respect to the cause of suffering,
you'll be an heir to the greatest teacher.
Under the sway of the four distortions, mind,
you dragged me around like a bull in a pit;
but now you won't associate with the great sage of compassion,
the cutter of fetters and bonds?
Like a deer roaming free in the colorful forest,
I'll ascend the lovely mountain wreathed in monsoon clouds,
and rejoice to be on that hill, free of folk—
there is no doubt you'll perish, mind.
The men and women who live under your will and command,
whatever pleasure they experience,
they are ignorant and fall under Māra's control;
loving life, they're your disciples, mind.