

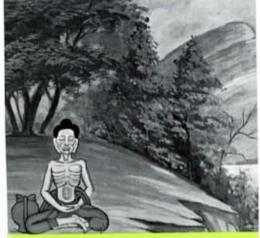
Barre Center for Buddhist Studies

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These lovely verses are attributed to Tissa Kumāra, the youngest brother of King Ashoka, and if this is true it demonstrates how some of the poetry of the *Theragāthā* entered into the Pali Canon relatively late—at the time of the Third Council (c. 250 B.C.E.).

Prince Tissa was made Vice Regent when Ashoka was first consecrated King. But within only a few years, inspired by the example of a forest-dwelling monk he encountered while hunting, he renounced worldly life to live as a simple Buddhist monk in the wilderness.

His monastic name translates as The Elder Who Lives Alone. The poem exudes the romantic yearning for the solitude of nature felt by someone who grew up, no doubt, in the court of the Maurya empire. The first five stanzas are said to have been uttered to Ashoka while expressing his wish to become a monk, and the last two verses were composed upon ordination. A final verse, not translated here, attests to his eventual awakening.

It was quite a family. Ashoka's son (Mahinda) and daughter (Sanghamittä) were the ones to formally bring the Dhamma to the island of Lanka, where Theraväda Buddhism flourished for two and a half millennia.

The mountains named in the last stanza actually refer to the ring of hills surrounding Vulture's Peak, but since the previous stanza specifies the peak of a mountain, I think it is appropriate to name the more well-known site.

-A.Olendzki

The Lonely Forest Dweller

Ekavihāriya Thera

Theragāthā 537-41; 544-5

purato pacchato vāpi aparo ce na vijjati, atīva phāsu bhavati ekassa vasato vane.

handa eko gamissāmi araññaṃ buddhavaṇṇitaṃ phāsuṃ ekavihārissa pahitattassa bhikkhuno.

yogipītikaram rammam mattakuñjarasevitam eko atthavasī khippam pavisissāmi kānanam.

supupphite Sītavane sītale girikandare gattāni parisuñcitvā caṅkamissāmi ekako.

ekākiyo adutiyo ramaņīye mahāvane kadāham viharissāmi katakicco anāsavo.

mālute upavāyante sīte surabhigandhake avijjam dālayissāmi nisinno nagamuddhani.

vane kusumasañchanne pabbhäre nūna sītale vimuttisukhena sukhito ramissāmi Giribbaje. If nobody is to be found, In front of one or behind one, That is exceedingly pleasant For the lonely forest dweller.

So be it! I will go alone To the forest, praised by Buddha; For the self-resolute bhikkhu, Dwelling alone, it is pleasant.

Pleasing, and joyful to sages, Haunted by rutting elephants, Seeking my goal alone, quickly Will I go to the wild forest.

In the well-flowered Cool Garden, In a soothing mountain grotto, Having annointed all my limbs, I will walk back and forth, alone.

When indeed shall I come to dwell
All alone, without companion
In the great forest, so pleasing!
My task accomplished, without taint?

While the gentle breezes flutter, Soothing and laden with fragrance, I'll burst asunder ignorance While seated on the mountain top.

In a grove covered with flowers, Or maybe on a cool hillside, Gladdened by the joy of release, I'll be content on Vultures Peak.