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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 (Sanghamittā) were the ones to formally bring the Dhamma to the island of Lanka, where Theravāda 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.

If nobody is to be found,
In front of one or behind one,
That is exceedingly pleasant
For the lonely forest dweller.

handa eko gamissāmi
araññaṃ buddhavaññitaṃ
phāsuṃ ekavihārissa
pahitattassa bhikkhuno.

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

yogipitikaṃ rammaṃ
mattakuñjarasevitaṃ
eko atthavasī khippaṃ
pavisissāmi kānaṃ.

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

supupphite Sitavane
sītale girikandare
gattāni parisuñcitvā
caṅkamissāmi ekako.

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

ekākiyo adutiyo
ramaṇiye mahāvane
kadāhaṃ viharissāmi
katakicco anāsavo.

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

mālute upavāyante
sīte surabhigandhake
avijjaṃ dālayissāmi
nisinno nagamuddhani.

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

vane kusumasañchane
pabbhāre nūna sītale
vimuttisukhena sukhito
ramissāmi Giribbaje.

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.