

## No Greater Contentment

### The Poem of Bhūta

*Theragāthā 522-526*

*yadā nabhe gajjati meghadundubhi  
dhārākulā vihaṅgapathe samantato  
bhikkhu ca pabbhāragato 'va jhāyati  
tato ratim paramataram na vindati*

When the thundering storm cloud roars out in the mist,  
And torrents of rain fill the paths of the birds,  
Nestled in a mountain cave, the monk meditates.  
—No greater contentment than this can be found.

*yadā nadīnam kusumākulānam  
vicittavāneyyavatamsakānam  
tīre nisīmo sumano 'va jhāyati  
tato ratim paramataram na vindati*

When along the rivers the tumbling flowers bloom  
In winding wreaths adorned with verdant color,  
Seated on the bank, glad-minded, he meditates.  
—No greater contentment than this can be found.

*yadā nisīthe rahitamhi kānane  
deve galantamhi nadanti dāthino  
bhikkhu ca pabbhāragato 'va jhāyati  
tato ratim paramataram na vindati*

When in the depths of night, in a lonely forest,  
The rain-deva drizzles and the fanged beasts cry,  
Nestled in a mountain cave, the monk meditates.  
—No greater contentment than this can be found.

*yadā vitakke uparundhiy' attano  
nagantare nagavivaram samassito  
vitaddaro vigatakhilo 'va jhāyati  
tato ratim paramataram na vindati*

When restraining himself and his discursive thoughts,  
(Dwelling in a hollow in the mountains' midst),  
Devoid of fear and barrenness, he meditates.  
—No greater contentment than this can be found.

*yadā sukhī malakhilasokanāsano  
niraggalo nibbanatho visallo  
sabbāsava byantikato 'va jhāyati  
tato ratim paramataram na vindati*

When he is happy—expunged of stain, waste and grief,  
Unobstructed, unencumbered, unassailed—  
Having ended all defilements, he meditates.  
—No greater contentment than this can be found.

Three entirely different moods are portrayed so sensitively in the first three stanzas of this poem by the monk Bhūta—the first wild and clamorous, the second bright and benevolent, the third dark and mysterious. Constant among these dramatic changes of nature is the meditating monk, content in any setting.

Mindful awareness allows all things to be just what they are, undisturbed by the reconstructions of the petty ego. Like the tiny figure in a Chinese landscape painting, the monk blends into phenomena because of his transparency of self.

The original tristubh meter is an alteration of 12 and 13 syllables per line, reproduced here in a 12 and 11 syllable translation that seems to work better in English. The Pali images are so richly textured in this poem, one could easily use twice as many English words and still not capture the nuances.

The second line alone, for example, evokes the image of twisted streams of water cascading down the steep streambeds of a mountain gorge, and then transfers the image to the heavens, where the plunging rivulets now course down the invisible tracks left everywhere in the sky by the passage of birds. That's a lot to fit into eleven syllables!

—A. Olendzki