

**DATUK TEMIANG BELAH**  
*Datuk Temiang Belah*

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## **DATUK TEMIANG BELAH**

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Language Development and Cultivation Agency  
Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia  
Jalan Daksinapati Barat IV, Ramangun, Jakarta  
Telepon (021) 4706287, 4706288, 4896558, 4894546  
Pos-el: badan.bahasa@kemdikbud.go.id  
[www.badanbahasa.kemdikbud.go.id](http://www.badanbahasa.kemdikbud.go.id)

## DATUK TEMIANG BELAH<sup>1</sup>

The sun has never left the earth despite the perfect raincloud that covers the sky<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, God will never leave humans even though we see that our lives are always miserable, underprivileged, or full of trials. Behind it all, there must be a mighty power that strengthens human beings. It is God Almighty who always gives countless blessings to human beings. Human beings will never finish writing all of His blessings. In fact, if the entire sea water turns into ink, it won't be enough for them to write down all the blessings given by God to us. There are too many blessings of God that we sometimes do not realize.

That was the principle of life held by a married couple who lived in the Burung Mandi Hamlet. The village was located in Manggar, Belitung Island. They had never complained about their fate for living an underprivileged life. They believed that God was always on the side of His creatures. God would never leave them even just for a second. God would always give blessings and favors to His people, especially to those who were always grateful.

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<sup>1</sup>It is the folklore developed in Manggar community, East Belitung Regency. This manuscript is based on the story of the Family Lineage of Datuk Temiang Belah's descendants.

<sup>2</sup>This sentence is inspired by the poem "There Is Still the Sun" popularized by the musicalization of the poem Sasina, IKSIUI

Although they were not rich, they had never felt life in difficulties. They could get all they needed through the unthinkable way. There was always an unexpected path for the husband and wife to get their daily needs. The community knew the husband by the name Datuk Letang.

Every day, they worked on the field. They grew rice and several types of vegetables. Therefore, they had never lacked of rice. The rice from the harvest was enough for their daily food. They also sold some of their crops to the market to buy other necessities that they could get from their own fields.

To get vegetables, Datuk Letang's wife rarely bought them in the market. Their field was also enough to meet the needs of vegetables. Datuk Letang was not stingy as well. If a neighbor asked for vegetables, they would willingly give the vegetables. They thought, rather than having their vegetables rotten on the stems of plants and eventually could not be consumed; the vegetables would be better cooked by the neighbors.

Besides not being wasteful, they felt happy to help the neighbors who needed vegetables. On other occasions, when the natural condition was unfavorable to go to district market to sell vegetables crops, they did not feel the objection to share vegetables to neighbors. The neighbors would be pleased to accept it. The kitchen necessities of the neighbors that day were being facilitated once again.

If we often facilitate other people's business, our business will also be facilitated by God the Ruler of the entire universe. That was Datuk Letang's principle that he always told to his wife. Perhaps, that was why their lives were always fulfilled. Wealth of property for them was not too important. Eating enough with healthy body condition had made them happy. The wealth of constantly grateful hearts was more important than property wealth.

They farmed every day. In the morning, they went to the field and in the evening, they went home. Their field was located quite far from their home. So, they rarely went home if their work was not finished. For that, they brought packaged food for lunch so they did not have to come home at lunchtime.

Some farmers in this hamlet chose to live in the hut they built on the fields. In addition to serving as a resting place, this hut was also like their second home. Days before the harvest, some farmers lived there. They moved all the usual activities at home and village, such as cooking, bathing, and worshipping, to the hut. So, when the harvest time nearly came, the fields become crowded and the village tended to be deserted because the villagers left for the fields.

However, this was not done by Datuk Letang and his wife. They chose to stay at home. Besides their hut was not really enclosed as a bed in the nights, their field was also not too large. Their hut

was not as enclosed and as solid as the huts of other villagers. So, it was enough for them to leave early in the morning to the field and return home in the afternoon.

Like the tradition of the community in some places of Belitung Island, the community in Burung Mandi Hamlet also celebrated rice harvest. This celebration was known as *maras taun*.

At that time, the paddy plants should be nine months old before they could be harvested. This is different from the rice plants of the present time that can be harvested at the age of three months. It is inseparable from the development of agricultural science and technology that is so advanced and rapid.

The scientists and researchers worked hard until they could find short-lived rice plant species. How useful the science and technology is that they can cut time and multiply the harvest. If farmers in the past could only harvest once a year, now they can enjoy the harvest three times a year; a truly meaningful benefit. God is great. He has created people with such sophisticated thinking. It is up to humans on how to use God's gift and wish their gratitude.

At this time of harvest, the people of Burung Mandi Hamlet were so busy. In addition to harvesting, they also worked together to prepare Maras Taun ceremony as an expression of gratitude to

God for giving them abundant harvests. This goal was suitable with the name of Maras Taun celebration.

The name "Maras Taun" comes from the word *maras* which means 'cut' and *taun* which means 'year'. The meaning of the name is to leave the past year with gratitude and wishes for all the good things in the next year.

The ceremony was held for three days. In that activity, the people were treated to various performances and traditional art of Belitung from *Stambul Fajar* to *Dulmuluk Theater*. The peak of *maras taun* celebration was featured with *maras taun* dance performed by two girls who wore lace dress which was typical with that of female farmers' complete with bamboo hats. The dance movement symbolized the farmers who worked to harvest rice. In addition, the ceremony was also featured with a song that contained an expression of gratitude for the crops they earned.

What not less important in this ceremony was *kesalan* procession, which was a prayer of gratitude for the harvest and blessing plea for the future, led by two elders. After praying, both of them sprinkled the water mixed with the *nerouse* and *ati-ati* leaves. This sprinkling became a symbol for washing misfortune for the people.

The peak of the Maras Taun ceremony was the distribution of *lepat*<sup>3</sup> to all the people present. *Lepat* was divided into two types, namely large *lepat* with a weight of about 25 kilograms, and five thousand small *lepat*. Big *lepat* was cut by local leaders and then was distributed to the villagers.

This procession was performed as a symbol of a leader who must serve his people. After that, the villagers would scramble to take small *lepat*. The scramble procession was a symbol of the joy of the villagers for the good harvest.

After the villager having fun in Maras Taun ceremony, they got back to their daily activities as usual. They went back to the field and cultivated or managed the delayed crops due to *maras taun* ceremony.

In the time after the rice harvest, Datuk Letang's wife usually did not go to the field. She stayed at home to dry up the crops. Paddy that had just been harvested could not be directly processed into rice. If it was directly pounded into rice, then surely the resultant rice would not be intact, and even broken. In fact, the paddy did not infrequently become broken until it looked destroyed because it was not fully dried until tender and fragile. Thereby, before pounded into rice, freshly harvested paddy should be dried for

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<sup>3</sup>*Lepat* is a typical Belitung food made of red rice stuffed with fish or meat pieces and is wrapped in yellow leaf.



about two to three days for the rice grains to become dry and unbroken when pounded.

Drying the paddy became the duty of Datuk Letang's wife. Usually, she dried the paddy in front of the house. She would wait for the paddy that was being dried, in case there were chickens that were trying to eat or scramble the paddy. If any chicken tried to eat it, she would banish them using a twig. When she was reluctant to get up to repel them using a twig, she would simply throw rocks at the menaces until they ran away.

In addition to planting rice and vegetables on the fields, Datuk Letang sometimes also caught fish in the river. Datuk Letang house was located nearby Letang River's flow. So, the people in the market used to call him Datuk Letang. In those days, a person's real name would be forgotten; whereas their nickname would be better known, thus drowning their real name.

As commonly used by villagers in Burung Mandi Hamlet, Datuk Letang also used *bubu*<sup>4</sup> to catch fish or shrimps.

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<sup>4</sup> A tool to trap fish, crabs, and shrimps made of woven bamboo, has tubular shape like jars. An unraveling woven bamboo lid is installed in the inside so that the incoming fish cannot get out. It is placed in the streams or swamps and is left for a while so that fish, crabs, or shrimps are trapped inside.

Besides *bubu*, the people also used fishing pole to get fish. However, this was considered a waste of time. Their time was spent on the fields.

So, they did not have time to sit for a long time and wait for the fishing line by the river. The time was better used to work on the fields.

The nets were also used by the people to catch fish. However, this tool was not commonly used by the villagers of Burung Mandi Hamlet in the river. The net was only used by the villagers to catch fish in the sea. Besides, Burung Mandi Hamlet was located quite far from the sea so they had no nets.

The catch was rarely sold to the market. Datuk Letang's wife preferred to cook it. It was done because they could not afford to buy meat. Besides, Datuk Letang preferred to eat fish than meat. He always finished the fish cooked by his wife. His wife was happy if her husband liked her cooking.

One morning, Datuk Letang intended to see the fish he caught in the river. Datuk Letang immediately went down to the river to check the *bubu* he had set up since the previous afternoon. Usually, once the fish take in the *bubu*, the result was enough to be the side dish for both of them in two days. Sometimes, they also shared the catch to their neighbors.

Therefore, Datuk Letang only put that *bubu* once or twice a week in the river so that their food side dish had alternatives every day. If he was bored of eating fish, he did not go to the river. He would bring home his *bubu* and hang it on the kitchen wall. Before saving it, Datuk Letang never forget to clean his favorite *bubu*. *Bubu* made of bamboo actually will be more elastic and durable when used often. The characteristics of bamboo that gets stronger when soaked in water makes *bubu* become less vulnerable when used. However, the dirt on *bubu* will accelerate the damage on the *bubu* if not cleaned. The mud that usually sticks on *bubu* will make the bamboo blades quickly brittle. In addition, what no less important is the cleanliness of *bubu* that will always be maintained if frequently cleaned.

Datuk Letang's house and the river were located on the outskirts of the settlement of Burung Mandi Hamlet. The distance was one of the reasons why the community did not use the river for the purpose of bathing, washing, and serving as lavatory. They chose to use well water built through mutual assistance in several places of the settlement. Only during long drought with dry water wells, they would head for the river to do these daily activities.

Datuk Letang examined his *bubu* upon arriving at the front of his hut. Instead of fish or shrimp, a piece of bamboo stuck in the *bubu*. Bamboo was even preventing the fish from getting into it. Not a single fish was trapped in the *bubu*. Not much luck today,

he thought. Datuk threw the bamboo and put his *bubu* back on so that in the afternoon he could take it and expected to get fish catch.

After finished putting the *bubu* back in again, Datuk Letang did not come home because he did not bring fish catch for his wife to cook. He went straight to the fields to cultivate. If fish got trapped in his *bubu*, he would go home first to the field. However, his dream to bring home fish or shrimp to be cooked by his wife as side dish did not come to reality that day.

On the way home, he was somewhat annoyed because he had not eaten fish for three days. He hoped this morning's catch could relieve his desire to eat fish. But instead of getting fish, useless piece of bamboo went into the trap.

Not long after, he arrived at his field. Apparently, the wife had already been in the field. She was diligently plucking the little grass that grew on the sidelines of the chili plants row. The grass that began to grow must be immediately revoked before taking away the nutrients in the soil that would have been intended as the food of chili plants.

“I’m in bad luck. Today I cannot get fish at all. There was a bamboo piece that went into my *bubu*,” said Datuk Letang to his wife.

“Well, it’s not our luck, replied his wife.” We should not blame the day by mentioning the unlucky day. It is the same as blaming God’s destiny. We should have breakfast first. I’m ready.”

Apparently, his wife had cooked rice and tomato sauce and freshly picked vegetables from their field. Warm rice and spicy sauce increased the appetite of Datuk Letang and his wife. They ate with gusto. The freshly picked vegetables also tasted sweet, thus improving their appetite.

The sun began to show its power. The warm rays turned into blistering. The sound of the night animals had completely disappeared and was replaced with the sounds of birds scrambling for food. The little birds that had not been able to fly for finding food were left in the nest in a safe condition from predators.

Sweats were swiftly pouring down from the skin pores of that couple in the middle of the field. Datuk Letang was hoeing enthusiastically. He was preparing the land to grow corn. He was seen sweeping the back of his hand several times to the forehead to banish the sweat rolling down his face.

“Let’s go home first. It’s very hot now,” said Datuk Letang to his wife.

They then packed up their tools and immediately walked towards the house. On the way, they met some of their neighbors who were still on the fields. Some bare-chested men swayed their caps

to bring a little gust as they sat under a tree. The heat of the day was unbearable to stay under the heat.



Their house was quite simple. There was only one bedroom, parlor, living room, kitchen, and a well behind the house. They also ate on a divan that was covered with pandanus mat. They were sitting cross-legged on the divan. Without tables and chairs, they sat comfortably and enjoyed the food with gusto. For them, the deliciousness of food did not depend on the menu, rather depended on the tongue and the mood of the person eating. If a person is healthy with happy mood and hungry stomach, the simplest food would taste good on the tongue. On the contrary, any food would not taste good on the tongue if the person eating was ill.

After breakfast, they immediately went to the field to manage rice and other plants. Datuk Letang weeded the grass that grew around the plants, while his wife watered down the vegetables. Apparently, the cayenne papers they planted had been ready to be harvested and they were mostly red. Datuk Letang's wife immediately picked them. She stored some of them for spices supply in the kitchen and the rest was sold to the market.

Little by little, they collected the result of vegetables and rice sales as savings. These savings could be used as backup when

they bought seeds, repaired their house, or other unexpected needs.

They did not have plenty of necessities. They used the money for the necessities of life in that quite simple manner. The most important thing it was enough for clothing, food, and housing. One more thing not less important for them was to set aside what they had to help the neighbors in need.

The sun began to shine with dignity when Datuk Letang once again checked his *bubu*. Hopefully I'm lucky this time, he thought. He already wanted to eat fish. Once he arrived on the river, he became so surprised. He carefully watched the bamboo that went into his *bubu*. Apparently, the bamboo he had thrown away returned to that *bubu*, although as he recalled this morning, he had thrown the bamboo away from the *bubu* so that the bamboo could not pass the *bubu* again, let alone got back into it.

He thought and had prejudgment that there must be someone playing prank on him. He then put his *bubu* back in and carried the bamboo. He was eager to teach a lesson to the person who dared to play prank on him. However, he still thought wisely, perhaps it was just coincidence. Even if there really was someone playing prank on him, he did not need to hold grudge either, he thought.

He brought the bamboo up so as not to be in the stream again. He took it on the way home. However, Datuk Letang did not go directly to his house. He made a turn on his way and threw the bamboo that he carried into the forest. If his prediction about someone who was trying to play prank on him was indeed true, he hoped that the prankster could not find the bamboo anymore.

The next day, Datuk Letang checked his *bubu* again. The thing that happened before happened once again. Again and again, that piece of bamboo went into the *bubu*. The bamboo was also the same bamboo that had been thrown into the forest. It reinforced his assumption: it was certainly done by a prankster. Datuk Letang became furious from it. He put the *bubu* back and threw away the bamboo farther away into the forest. He walked into the forest for almost an hour and threw away the bamboo there.

Apparently, the incident recurred, not just two or three times. The bamboo got into the *bubu*, then bamboo was thrown away but the bamboo turned up in his *bubu* again on the next day. Repeated events playing like a recording made Datuk Letang upset. Weirdly, the bamboo that went into the *bubu* was the same bamboo in each event. So, Datuk Letang thought that it was the same bamboo, though in fact, he had thrown it away and he thought nobody saw what he was doing. Datuk Letang was also sure that no one followed him during his entrance and exit to the forest.



Finally, because of annoyance, Datuk Letang brought the bamboo home. He thought that if the bamboo was inside his house, he would find out who was playing prank on him. Or at least, that bamboo could be used for additional firewood.

Upon hearing the story from Datuk Letang, his wife thought that that bamboo was not an ordinary bamboo. However, her husband insisted that it was only done by a prankster. His wife did not use the bamboo for firewood; rather as a presser for the paddy sunning mat.

The villagers usually used stone or other heavy objects to press the paddy's sunning mat. The point was that if blown, the mat would not fly and dried rice would not be scattered. If such event happened, it would certainly add more work to the people sunning the paddy. In addition, the paddy would be wasted away because it was not possible to dry the paddy with no remains left in the ground, there must be some left scattered.

This time, it was the harvest season. Like other Burung Mandi villagers who celebrated *maras taun*, Datuk Letang and his wife had just finished harvested the yellowing paddy in his rice field patch. However, only that day, Datuk Letang's wife had the time to dry the paddy. Yesterday, she was still preoccupied with work on the field with her husband. Today, the work in the field was not too much. So, the work on the field was pretty much done by Datuk Letang himself.

After all, the grains of paddy they harvested were not too wet. It was still quite safe to keep them in a sack, for a week or two. It was different from the wet ones; they should be immediately dried to avoid them from growing buds. Wet rice but not immediately dried in the sun would produce broken rice. Even if they were not broken, the resultant rice color will be dull, not as white as that coming from dry paddy grains.

That day, after her husband went to the field, Datuk Letang's wife dried the paddy. She pressed the sunning mat using the bamboo her husband brought. Holding a small wood to ward off the chickens or birds eating their dried paddy, Datuk Letang's wife sat under a tree waiting for her dried paddy. Moments later, a chicken came and tried to eat the paddy. She then moved from her seat and ran to repel the chicken. She accidentally hit the bamboo that she used as the presser of the sunning mat.

Initially, nothing happened. The chickens had gone, running away for seeing the twig brought by the paddy owner. Datuk Letang's wife returned to sit under a tree while enjoying the breeze.

Suddenly, there was the sound of a baby crying. Datuk Letang's wife was confused and searched for the source of the sound. She thought that her neighbor who had a baby came to her house yard to have conversation, just to kill the time. However, she found no one on her house yard. After taking a look here and there, she was shocked to see the bamboo which became the presser of the

sunning mat. Apparently, the battered bamboo had been split into two parts, and there was a baby boy in one part of the bamboo.

Datuk Letang's wife was really surprised to see the bamboo. She paused for a moment, convincing herself whether what she saw was real or just hallucination. Slowly, she approached the source of the sound that left her wondering. Apparently, what she saw was real.

The baby was wrapped in two layers of cloth, namely *cindai* clothes on the outside and a *cukin* clothes in the inside. The motherly instinct immediately came out of Datuk Letang's wife. Datuk Letang's wife instantly held the baby boy. She carefully walked towards the field to immediately tell the event to Datuk Letang.

Arriving on the field, Datuk Letang was surprised to see his wife carrying a baby. He wondered where his wife found the baby boy. To his knowledge, his wife was not pregnant. Even if she was pregnant and had just given birth, no way she could hold her baby and took him from the house to this pretty distant field. So, he thought the baby carried by his wife was other person's baby.

Datuk Letang almost scolded his wife because he thought his wife had just taken a baby from the mother. Datuk Letang's wife immediately told the incident that just happened to her. The explanation of his wife was rather unreasonable indeed. However,

after hearing her explanation, then Datuk Letang felt relieved and undo his intention to berate his wife. That married couple was so happy with the grace of God for the presence of the baby boy.

While enjoying their happiness, Datuk Letang's wife remembered the sunned paddy that she left behind. They hurried back to the house. Arriving home, they witnessed how a dozen chickens ravenously ate their sunned rice. In some parts, the paddy was scattered around on the ground. Datuk Letang ran to repel the naughty chickens. He immediately cleaned up the mess made by the chickens.

Such incident usually irritated them, but not this time. Apparently, the happiness has overcome their annoyance; the happiness of just having a baby that they had been yearning for so long.

“Be thankful. It's been so long that we want a child but we have not gotten a child until this time. I never really imagined that I would have a child in our mature age because it is impossible for me to get pregnant. But, God seems to have another will. We get the child through another path; a road we never expected,” said Datuk Letang's wife happily.

“Yes. Apparently the bamboo that made me tremendously annoyed some time ago brings happiness for us this time. Maybe that's why we should not judge something or someone when we

just got to know them, because we haven't known the truth," said Datuk Letang wisely.

The baby boy was then treated and raised by the husband and wife with great affection. They never left the baby alone. If they had to go to the fields, they would take him along. They would take turns guarding him in the shack, or if they were working together, Datuk Letang's wife would put her baby in a safe place but still within their vision range.

Day after day, months after months, the baby miraculously grew very fast. It seemed like his body grew bigger by day. At the age of one year, his body was like a six-year-old child. The child also spoke fluently. In addition, he was also good at performing *salat* and reciting Quran. In fact, in Burung Mandi Hamlet where they lived, no one was able to recite Quran or perform prayers. Of course, no one could teach him to pray and recite Quran. At that time, the teachings of Islam was yet to enter and spread in Burung Mandi Hamlet.

The presence of this baby was not only a blessing for Datuk Letang and his wife, but also for the neighbors. The people of Burung Mandi Hamlet were inevitably happy to see the child growing up. Besides funny and adorable, the child was also considered more mature than his age. He could be a mediator to his peers who often fought, behave fairly, and set a good example for his friends.

Datuk Letang and his wife were very happy because they finally had a child. Plus, their child had strengths that other children did not. Because of these strengths, especially the knowledge of Islam, the child also taught his friends to pray and recite Quran.

Not long afterwards, in Burung Mandi Hamlet, the child had turned into some kind of little *ustaz* (Islamic cleric).

These strengths were generally welcomed by the people of Burung Mandi Hamlet, who occasionally were heard to recite Quran once in a while. They could only learn to recite Quran if preachers from other areas happened to stop by at their hamlet. As the preacher continued his journey, Quran recitation lesson then faded away and became long forgotten.

Now, they felt lucky because there was a child who was considered to have a miracle because he could recite Quran. However, there were also some villagers who thought it was just a babble of a child who happened to resemble a man who was reciting Quran. “After all, they also did not know the correct form of Quran recitation,” thought some villagers who did not believe in the miracle of that child.

There were also some villagers who did not like the presence of the child because such religious teachings would shift the existence of the ancestral beliefs that they had embraced for all this time. They were worrying if later the villagers no longer

believed in the magical powers that made them respected by the villagers.

It was also worried by Datuk Letang himself. He always felt confused and restless when he heard the complaints made by some of his friends. He wanted the villagers to embrace the beliefs of the ancestors, but on the other hand, he was also so affectionate and proud of his son who was so bright.

Datuk Letang was a person who had supernatural power and was highly respected by the community in his hamlet. He was able to cure severe diseases suffered by the local people. Many healers could not cure the diseases of the villagers. They confessed that they had given up. However, in the hands of Datuk Letang, the diseases gradually disappeared, fading away along with the stool of the sufferer. The sufferer was healthy again; even some became healthier than before.

It was said that Datuk Letang was also able to cross to Java Island just by sitting on a floating log and rowing twice. This incident had never been witnessed by the person who told the story, but the villagers would easily believe in the supernatural story of Datuk Letang. The story was already embedded in the mind of every villager of Burung Mandi Hamlet. They had already known Datuk Letang as a supernaturally powerful man.

One day, there were pirates who came to Belitung waters territory. The pirates apparently had disturbed the fishermen. Datuk Letang was summoned by the fishermen to help them drive away the pirates. Without any weapon, Datuk Letang was able to defeat the pirates and drove them away. Datuk Letang then increasingly became more famous for his supernatural powers.

However, precisely because of this miracle, Datuk Letang became sad. He would not be able to follow and implement the teachings of Islam as done by his son. He feared that his supernatural power would be lost if he practiced the teachings of Islam.

For being embarrassed to his son and also to himself, he intended to go into seclusion from his children and wife. He could not sleep soundly for many days as he remembered the burden of his mind. He wanted to leave his wife and child, but on the other hand, he loved them very much.

Datuk Letang also hesitated because he remembered the verses frequently said by his son when he taught his friends. Datuk Letang was afraid of torture after he died, but he was not willing to give up his supernatural power. Once upon a time, Datuk Letang was sitting on the porch. His son and his friends were gathering on the yard. His son read a poem. Datuk Letang also listened and contemplated the poem.

*It's not necessarily that thing in particular*



*About prayer is another matter*

*We shall never know the secret*

*About the angel's question in burial chamber*

*That's where one feels God's torture*

*When one's lifetime knows religious knowledge*

*The afterlife is filled with turbulence*

*As the illumination is nothing of coincidence*

*The pain is terribly unbearable*

*From the skin through the bone*

*Screaming, crying without pause*

*As non-existence will bring home*

*The pain is without mercy*

*As if sitting on a spine*

*Being beaten and stabbed daily*

*At such time one is being in remorse*<sup>5</sup>

After thinking about carefully for days and counting the profit and loss, Datuk Letang's determination to leave his child and wife was finally emboldened. For him, it was better to leave his own happiness in the good name of his wife and child. However, Datuk Letang forgot that the happiness of his wife and son would not be complete without Datuk Letang on their side.

His determination to leave the child and his wife had been emboldened. Datuk Letang thought about where he would go and how to do it. For days, he was restless for thinking about how he was leaving. He wanted to use his supernatural power, but he did not want to do it again. The shame he felt towards his son overcame his ego. Finally, he decided to leave Belitung Island by boat that would be made using his own hands.

Datuk Letang then looked for a place that would not be known by his child and wife. For days, between the busyness of his work on the field, Datuk Letang wandered around his hamlet to find a safe hiding to prepare for his departure. He walked through the woods, hills, and to the beach for the place he wanted.

A few days later, he found a small island nearby Burung Mandi Beach. The place was quite hidden and had never been visited by

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<sup>5</sup> These four poetic verses are quoted from the old script entitled "Sunlight Poem" written by Haji Muhtar in 1925. The text belongs to Salim Yan Albert Hoogstad, a humanist in Tanjungpandan, Belitung.

villagers. The people already thought that the island was so haunted that no one ever dared to moor a boat on the beach.

The villagers of Burung Mandi Hamlet had been accustomed to hear that the island and its surroundings was the kingdom of jinn and the devils. Various types of spirits nested in that place. The villagers believed, anyone who entered the island would get lost and would not return.

They would become slaves in the kingdom of the devil. Once, a story was heard from the village's elderlies about someone who was lost for years but finally returned to Burung Mandi Hamlet. Upon his return from vanishing, the man reckoned that during his disappearance, he became a slave in the demonic kingdom of that island. Since then, the villagers were increasingly afraid to approach the island.

It was in contrast to Datuk Letang, he was never afraid to visit the island, even if he had to stay there. If what villagers said was indeed true, he was convinced that he was able to overcome all the dangers of the jinn there. With determination, Datuk Letang left for the island.

The materials needed to make boats could also be obtained on the island. The small forest there provided wood as the main material for constructing boat. The forest that had never been touched by

humans made the trees there growing big and old enough. The wood was big and strong to be used as raw material of the boat.

After finding a comfortable place, Datuk Letang immediately *constructed* a boat that would take him away from his hometown. One morning, he said goodbye to his wife and son, telling that he would go fishing in other areas of the river to get bigger and many more fish. Another time, he said he would go to the next village as he was asked to treat an ill person. Datuk Letang once also said he would join his friends on a sea journey.

Datuk Letang used various reasons so that his wife would not grow suspicious about where he actually went all day, and even when he only returned on the next day; though as a matter of fact, Datuk Letang went to finish constructing his boat.

One month later, the desired boat had been completed. A small boat was ready to sail with Datuk Letang for leaving Belitung Island. The boat was no more than three meters long. There was a main sail being put up on the boat. He had also provided a paddle.

Datuk Letang had prepared his departure so as to not being known to his wife and son. One night, after his child and his wife went to sleep, he sneaked out of the house. He had prepared several clothes and little food supplies at the back of his house. He picked up the stock and left for the isle to get the boat. By utilizing the onshore wind that blew strong enough, Datuk Letang

sailed from that place, leaving his child, his wife and his hometown.

The next day, his wife woke up and found that Datuk Letang was not in his home. She went looking to the river or field but could not find her husband yet. At first, she thought maybe her husband was away, helping someone in the next village, but did not have time to say goodbye last night.

A day, two days, three days, Datuk Letang did not come back. No news either. Datuk Letang's wife began to get nervous and worried. She was worried that something unwanted happened to her husband. Datuk Letang's wife could not imagine how the happiness of her newly completed family with the presence of a child now must be taken away because of her husband disappearance.

That day, Datuk Letang's wife went to the market to sell vegetables from her field. At the market or on the street, she met her husband's friends. She never forgot to ask the whereabouts of Datuk Letang to the persons she knew. No one knew where Datuk Letang's whereabouts.

Since that day, the news on Datuk Letang's disappearance speeded. Some villagers suspected that Datuk Letang was exploring knowledge in a sacred place, but because he was unable to survive, he was eventually brought into another world by

supernatural beings. Some also suspected that he fought against supernatural beings who wanted his talented children. There was also a rumor that Datuk Letang was drowned in the sea. In the long time, the hearsay increasingly became more unreasonable.

Initially, Datuk Letang's wife took the issue seriously, to the extent of asking it further to the villagers who brought the news. But, as time went by, she became annoyed with the made-up stories. The stories were only made by villagers who were curious about the Datuk Letang's disappearance who was famous for his power and being helpful.

For some time, Datuk Letang's wife and son were very sad and felt lost. Moreover, the child repeatedly asked about his father whom he never saw again. Sometimes he cried because he wanted to see his father. This apparently worsened the sadness felt by Datuk Letang's wife.

She could not understand why her husband could disappear without a trace. Perhaps he was really brought by a supernatural being. Did her husband purposely leave her with her child, but for what reason? Besides, their family condition was fine for all this time.

The relationship between him and his son was also fine. The wife was baffled for thinking about the disappearance of Datuk Letang.

Years went on, leaving the memories with Datuk Letang. She and her son had let go of Datuk Letang. Now, her son had grown into a handsome and gallant young man. His facial line firmly implied masculine impression. His eyes were sharp and shady at the same time. His eyebrows were perfectly curved, as if they were deliberately drawn by a painter. He had light brown complexion. He was sturdy-built, and his muscles were strong. Datuk Letang's son seemed like a prince who disguised as a commoner.

His religious knowledge became more advanced by day. He had never abandoned the teachings of Islam. He taught Islam to the villagers of Mandi Burung Hamlet. To improve his religious knowledge, the young man intended to wander around to various countries that were famous with Islamic religious leaders.

At first, the mother refused for fear of losing her only child. However, the mother eventually gave her blessing. With his mother's blessing, he embarked on his journey across the country.

On the way there, he also did not forget to spread the teachings of Islam to the people of the village he visited. As he visited more and more areas, the young man earned the title Datuk Temiang Belah. He obtained the title because he was born from a split bamboo. The story of his birth had never been covered up. Almost everyone who knew him already found out how he came into this world. The people increasingly believed that Datuk

Temiang Belah was not an ordinary person. Maybe he was an incarnation of God.

Datuk Temiang Belah was increasingly famous throughout the country. He was known as a spreader of Islamic teachings. Like Datuk Letang, Datuk Temiang Belah also had a miracle and greatness that made the people become amazed and respected him more.

Once upon a time, there was a dispute between the adherents of Islam, Christianity, and Confucianism in Manggar, Belitung Island. There, precisely on Samak Beach, there was a mountain rock that was deemed sacred by the adherents of the three religions. The rock was very large in size. Each of them claimed to be the owner of the rock.

The fight over the stone had been going on for so long. The fight eventually led to a dispute between the three groups, and not any party was able to conduct arbitration. If allowed to continue, perhaps the harmony among religious believers in Manggar would be threatened.

Seeing this, Datuk Temiang Belah was concerned and felt obliged to help end the conflict. He then tried to reconcile them.

“Why are you all fighting like this just because of a rock? You are brothers and sisters, sharing the same land of birth, eating and drinking from the same homeland. You are of one fate. You



should not be like this. What our grandchildren will say when they see their progenitors quarrel over a stone? Are you not ashamed?” said Datuk Temiang Belah.

The emotional people ignored the advice of Datuk Temiang Belah.

“This rock has always been a place of reverence for our gods and you should not be here too, let alone to worship!” said one resident who was Confucian.

“We, the Christians, have already made this place sacred. We are unwilling to let this place be touched by your worship,” said another party.

“You people are all wrong! Muslims are the first to have this rock because here lays the body of a *Wali* and you should not worship your God here,” defended a Muslim.

Datuk Temiang Belah once again gave such deep advice about religious harmony. He deeply regretted the attitude of the people who had no tolerance and respect for the followers of other religions.

Initially, all three religions did not want to relent. They still firmly claimed that the rock was only theirs, rather than one shared rock, let alone belonging to particular religious adherents. Datuk Temiang Belah was famous for being wise and fair then looked

for the middle way. He offered the option of cutting the rock into three pieces so that adherents of each religion would still get it.

After fierce discussion and debate, Datuk Temiang Belah's suggestion was finally accepted by the three parties. They finally agreed with Datuk Temiang Belah's suggestion. However, they disbelieved with the solution offered by Datuk Temiang Belah. How could a mountain rock as big as a house cut into three equal parts?

The long-awaited time finally arrived. The adherents of the three religions gathered to watch the cutting process. They were surprised that Datuk Temiang Belah did not bring an axe or other sharp weapons to split the huge rock.

Unexpectedly, Datuk Temiang Belah easily cut the mountain rock into three pieces, without any difficulties. Through his supernatural powers, without any sharp weapons, the rock was split into three. The three pieces of rock were also of the same size. Those who witnessed it were very amazed and impressed by the greatness of Datuk Temiang Belah.

Those three pieces of rock were then lined up in a place not far from the original place. The community worked together day-to-day to shift the pieces of rock until they reached the position desired by the adherents of each religion. Although was done by

many people with various tools, it was not easy to move the pieces of rock.

Actually, with his supernatural power, Datuk Temiang Belah could easily move it. However, he wanted the people to work together, work in mutual assistance, and work hand in hand to move the rock.

On the next day, the people divided tasks. Some were looking for bamboo and tree trunks as levers. Some were lifting, pushing, pulling, and making rope knots. The women cooked together to prepare food for villagers who worked to move rocks.

Old and young, men and women, without any religion discrimination worked to help as much as they could. The ones who still had strong power helped with their energy. The ones with the skills helped with the simple method to facilitate the translocation of the rock. Those who had treasures help by providing food. Children, who had not been allowed to join in, were shouting to give them encouragement.

This activity seemed to have a positive impact for the people. Those who had previously argued because the rock, now became familiar and playful. Apparently, behind the dispute there was a huge benefit. Since then, the people had never been involved in dispute anymore. They respected one another and lived side by side in peace.



On another occasion, there was a big fire in Mataram Kingdom. For days, the people and royal soldiers worked together to put out the fire. Various ways had also been taken to extinguish the fire. However, they were all unsuccessful.

Fires became even more widespread and caused a lot of harm, and took casualties who were mostly the elders, women, and children.

The news reached Datuk Temiang Belah. Incidentally, he was also in the area close to the kingdom. Datuk Temiang Belah then went to the kingdom and tried to help put out the fire. Bringing a jug of water, he circled the kingdom while pouring the water he brought to the blazing fire.

“Where does that insane person come from? He boasted that he can extinguish the fire only using a jug of water? He must be crazy?” said a resident who saw what Datuk Temiang Belah did.

“Yeah, I don’t believe him, too. But it seems like everyone here is crazy because of this fire, so let it be. Let’s just see what he is doing,” said another.

In the beginning, Datuk Temiang Belah was frowned upon. People even laughed at what he was doing. They thought he was a madman. They had used thousands liters of water but they could not extinguish the fire. And now he used only a jug of water.

Datuk Temiang Belah was not unaware that the people talked about him and laughed at him. He did not care about it. He continued to circle the kingdom while pouring water from the jar he was carrying. He was determined and convinced that if he had finished surrounding this kingdom with the water splashed from the water jug and God's permission, the fire would soon be extinguished.

Then, they immediately stopped laughing when they saw the fire was instantly extinguished after it was splashed with water from the jug brought by Datuk Temiang Belah. Everyone looked at him in amazement and awe. Once again, Datuk Temiang Belah showed his power.

The news was immediately heard by the king. The king also did not expect that the fire in his area could be extinguished by one person. In fact, the royal firefighters have been summoned to find the way to extinguish the fire.

The king ordered the guards to call Datuk Temiang Belah. The king would like to thank the person who had helped his kingdom.

Escorted by several guards, Datuk Temiang Belah came before the king. In the luxurious hall of the kingdom, the king sat down with some royal officials. Royal delicacies had been prepared to welcome Datuk Temiang Belah. The king was eager to thank and glorify the hero who had saved his kingdom.

Datuk Temiang Belah bowed to him.

“So this is the powerful man who has saved my kingdom?” asked the king when Datuk Temiang Belah came before him.

“Your Majesty. I am just an ordinary human being, not a powerful person like you said I am,” replied Datuk Temiang Belah.

After they talked, the king admired Datuk Temiang Belah more. The king finally presented him a gift of an invincible weapon. The weapon was known to bring a good luck and never failed to defeat the enemy. It was called Parang Kuting. Datuk Temiang Belah humbly received the gift from the king. Once again, the king thanked him for his kingdom had been saved from a catastrophe that nearly paralyzed the kingdom.

Datuk Temiang Belah immediately turned Parang Kuting given by the king into a handled dagger, gloved with gold which weighted two kilograms. The dagger was named Berlok Tujuh Dagger. The dagger was also considered sacred and had miraculous power.

The people in Sumatra and Java soon talked about the power of Berlok Tujuh Dagger. During his journey, Datuk Temiang Belah encountered many kinds of evil people. There were countless people in various villages who received help from him. Datuk Temiang Belah rose to prominence as cleric. In addition, because

of his strength, he was also considered a hero. He never calculated and played favors in helping the villagers who were miserable or oppressed.

In addition to turning Parang Kuting into Berlok Tujuh Dagger, Datuk Temiang Belah was also able to creating other heirloom objects, such as swords which consisted of forty-one types. The swords were of various sizes. Some were one and a half meter long; and some were just as big as rod stick.

Datuk Temiang Belah also made musical instruments, such as a set of twelve gongs named deaf gongs, and other musical instruments named *kelintang*. There was also a tassel spear and *petunang*stone. The objects were considered sacred and made into heirlooms.

During his journey across the country, Datuk Temiang Belah met a woman who eventually became his wife. Datuk Temiang Belah's wife gave him descendants who continued to reproduce to the next generations.

Until the death of his mother, his father, Datuk Letang, never returned to Burung Mandi Hamlet. It seemed like Datuk Letang had disappeared off the face of the earth. There was neither trace nor clue on Datuk Letang's whereabouts. Datuk Temiang Belah, in his journey for knowledge, endlessly looked for the clues about

his father's whereabouts. However, his efforts were unsuccessful. Nobody knew where his father was.



Datuk Temiang Belah has left valuable services for the people of Belitung Island. His figure is very close to the minds of the villagers. He is regarded as one of the spreaders of Islam there.

No matter how powerful a person is, he or she is still a God's creature with soul. Everything with soul will eventually die. And that also happened to Datuk Temiang Belah. Datuk Temiang Belah finally died and was buried at the peak of Tajam Mount, Belitung. His tomb is considered sacred by the people and is famous by the name *Keramat Gunung Tajam*. His descendants are still living together with the community of Belitung Island up to this day.