

**THE THREE GODS; FOUNDERS OF JAGAD
BASEMAH**
Kisah Tiga Dewa Pendiri Jagat Basemah

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THE THREE GODS; FOUNDERS OF JAGAD BASEMAH

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Cerita Rakyat Sumatera Selatan

KISAH TIGA DEWA
PENDIRI JAGAT BESEMAH

Ditulis oleh
Dian Susilastri



KISAH TIGA DEWA PENDIRI JAGAT BESEMAH

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Foreword

Literature work is not only series of word but it also talks about life, both realistically and idealistically of human. If it is realistic, the literature work usually contains life experiences, good model, and wisdom which have been added various style and imagination along with it. Meanwhile, if it idealistic, the literature work contains moral lecture, good character, advices, philosophical symbols, culture and other things related to human life. The life itself is very diverse, varies, and full of various problems and conflicts faced by humans. The diversity in humans life also affects to the diversity of literature work because the contents are inseparable from civilized and dignified humans life.

The literature works that dealing with life utilizes language as medium of deliverance and imaginative art as its *cultural land*. On the basis of the language medium and imaginative art, literature is multidimensional and multi-interpretative. Using language medium, imaginative art and cultural dimension, literature deliver messages to be reviewed or analyzed from various perspectives. The outcome of that perspective depends greatly on who is reviewing and analyzing with various socio-cultural and knowledge background. There is a time when a literary reviewer reviews from the point of view of metaphor, myth, symbol, power, ideology, economy, politics, and culture can be refuted by other reviewers who see from perspective of sound, referent, or irony. Even so, Heraclitus said, "However opposite they work together and from different directions, the most beautiful harmony emerges".

There are many lessons that we can get from reading literature, one of which is reading folktales that are adapted or reprocessed into children's stories. The results of reading literature always inspire and motivate readers to be creative in

finding something new. Reading literature can trigger further imagination, open enlightenment, and add insights. For this reason, we express our gratitude for the processors for the story. We also express our appreciation and gratitude to the Head of the Coaching Center, Head of the Learning Division, and Head of the Subdivision of Modules and Teaching Materials and staffs for all the efforts and hard works carried out until the realization of this book.

Hopefully this storybook is not only useful as a reading material for students and the community to foster a culture of literacy through the National Literacy Movement program, but also useful as an enrichment of our knowledge of past life that can be utilized in addressing current and future life developments.

Jakarta, June 2016

Regards,
Prof. Dr. Dadang Sunendar, M. Hum.

Preface

Besemah is the name of a tribe that inhabits the valley of Dempo Mountain in Pagaralam, South Sumatra and its surroundings. According to the story of the elders, there were three deities who became the *puyang* (ancestors) of the Basemah people, namely Dewa Gumay, Dewa Semidang, and Dewa Atung Bungsu. They were the ones who opened the land, made civilization, and spread the *jurai* (descendants) of the Besemah tribe to almost control the territory of South Sumatra, parts of Jambi, and Bengkulu.

The Three Gods: Founders of the Universe of Besemah is adapted from some narratives from the *jeme* (people) of Besemah about the legend of Besemah. The story told by the interviewee is one version of various stories of the legend of the universe of Besemah. In this version of the book, the legend of Besemah is referred to as a story with imagination mixed from the main source plus other sources. Thus, it is only natural for the reader to find a somewhat different story about this legend of Besemah.

The three gods who are the characters in this book, Dewa Gumay, Dewa Semidang, and Dewa Atung Bungsu, have their respective roles in establishing the Universe of Besemah. They also have stories and experiences in carrying out the mission of establishing the universe of Besemah. Hopefully the readers can take some lessons from this tale.

Palembang, April 2016

Dian Susilastrri

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THE THREE GODS; FOUNDERS OF JAGAD BASEMAH

1. Besemah Tribe in Dempo Valley

Besemah was a tribe that lived in the valley of Dempo Mountain, now Pagaralam City, South Sumatera. This area was part of the vast Suwarnabumi Island (now is called Sumatera). The area where Besemah tribe resided was called Besemah Land. The tribe referred to themselves as *jeme* (the people of) Besemah.

The Valley of Dempo Mountain was a highland with cool air, fertile land, and clear rivers. Its fertile land allowed trees and vegetables to thrive. Colorful flowers were lush on the fields, filling the air with their sweet smell. Tall trees provided shades and clean air for animals. The clear water gave home to many kinds of fish. Dempo Valley was like a heaven for its inhabitants.

Legend had it, there were three gods who became *puyang* (ancestors) of *jeme* Besemah. They were Dewa Gumay, Dewa Semidang, and Dewa Atung Bungsu. These three gods cleared lands, built villages, and created civilization with its military and government systems. The *jurai* (descendants) of these three gods became Besemah tribe that inhabited the regions of South Sumatera, part of Jambi, and Bengkulu. There, Dewa Atung Bungsu built a kingdom called Keratuan Besemah.

In ancient time, long before Keratuan Besemah was founded,

there had been a society in the valleys of Dempo Mountain. These people were called *jeme* Dempu. However, they could not grow because there were many spirits from the other world that roamed the land. These spirits wanted to get rid of human beings who lived near the foot of Dempo Mountain.

Due to the powers of the three gods, Dempo Valley became a safe, peaceful, and harmonious place. Nobody dared to disturb the peace in Besemah, until the glory of Keratuan Besemah faded away with time.

2. *Jeme Dempu* and The Foreigners

At the foot of Dempo Mountain, a highland in Suwarnabumi Island, there was an area with fertile soil and clean air. Its rivers were long and deep.

The water was clear and flowed swiftly. Vegetation around the rivers thrived in the fertile land. Animals lived peacefully in the wild. Fish swam in the rivers. That place was called Dempo Valley. It was a wild jungle. Its fertile land and clear water attracted people from all over the land to stay there. Living in Dempo Village was easy because there was abundant food in the area. However, the people only led simple life, being nomads. They always moved from one place to another. They used tools made from rocks to cut, to cook, and to hunt.

Jeme Dempo (the people of Dempo) was the name of a group of people living in Dempo Valley at the time. The ancestors of *jeme Dempo* was called Senambun Tue. Senambun Tue originated from the heaven. He came to Suwarnabumi and his descendants lived in Dempo Valley.

Hundreds of years later, his descendants became *jeme Dempo*. Soon, many people came to Suwarnabumi, even though nobody knew whence they came. These foreign people lived together with the descendants of Senambun Tue. They lived as nomads, moving from places to places, always searching for an area with abundant

source of food.

These foreigners did not come all at once. The first foreigner to arrive in Dempo Valley was Kam-Kam people. They were tall and yellow skinned. They had slanted eyes and straight hair. They lived by catching fish in the river. Then, came Nik-Nuk people who were tall and broad. They had long nose, black eyes, and dark hair. Their skin was pale. They lived by hunting games and fish, which they roasted on bonfire.

Several full moons passed before Ducung people came to the area. These people were short and squat. Their body was humped and small but they could move with agility. Their appearance was not too pleasant to see. Their skin was scarred. Ducung people lived by catching fish in the river. They also ate edible leaves.

Then the people of Sebakas, Berige, Rebakau, and Rejang came almost at the same time. Their appearance was similar to the descendants of Senambun Tue, with muscular body, brown skin, and dark hair. They moved a little awkwardly. They also caught fish in the river and ate the fruits and vegetables available around them.

These foreign people brought their own habits and traditions. The descendants of Senambun Tue gradually acclimated to their ways of living.

Senambun Tue only taught his descendants to eat fish and

vegetables. Since these foreigners came, *jeme* Dempu began to eat meat and fruits they got from the forest.

The foreigners and the descendants of Senambun Tue lived in caves on the valley. There was no government or social structure among them. They roamed the jungle, moving from cave to cave.

They lived in Dempo Valley for several generations. They lived peacefully. They never fought for land or food. Their only enemy was *masumai*, the spirits from Dempo Mountain.

3. *Masumai*: The Dempo Spirits

Dempo Mountain stood tall in Suwarnabumi. Its valley was vast and fertile. *Jeme* Dempu and the foreigners lived there. They roamed the land freely and lived peacefully in the valley. However, they were not the only resident of Dempo Mountain.

Way up at the top of Dempo Mountain, a group of spirits ruled the area. They had been living in Dempo Mountain for thousands of years. They considered themselves the master of Dempo Mountain and its valley. These spirits were called *Masumai* and mostly lived in the unreachable areas at the top of the mountain.

Their appearance was terrifying. Their body was tall and broad. They had dark skin and sprouted a horn from their forehead. Their eyes were big and red. Their nose was round and big. Their arms hung on the sides of their bodies, almost reaching the ground. They walked without touching the ground. They moved swiftly, floating in the air. Their dark cloaks fluttered whenever they moved. *Masumai* could change their appearance to look like human. They usually did this to trick human that they met.

The people who lived in Dempo Valley regarded *Masumai* as evil spirits. It was because *Masumai* often kidnapped human, who would never be seen again. The inhabitants of Dempo Valley were always afraid whenever *Masumai* went down the mountain and looked for preys. *Masumai* often came to the valleys during

the quiet hours of the night, a few hours before dawn. They also often came in the short period of dusk, after the sun set and before the evening fully came.

It was believed that adults whom they kidnapped were turned into Masumai slaves. These slaves were not fully human. They were half human half spirit. Children that Masumai took were sacrificed to *puyang* (ancestors) of Dempo Mountain. That was why the people of Dempo Village always stayed quiet inside their caves when the sun set. They only came out again after the sun had fully risen. They were afraid that Masumai might kidnap them.

The group of Masumai were led by Ratu Masumai (the king of spirits). He stayed and meditated at the Peak of Dempo Mountain since thousands of years ago. Masumai could live for hundreds, even thousands of years. Ratu Masumai always regarded Dempo Mountain and its surroundings under his command. When human first appeared around Dempo Valley, Masumai were furious. They were angry because fire that men used to roast fish and meat, and the smoke coming from it, polluted the air. For thousands of years, the air in the area was clean and fresh. Masumai loved the smell of dew, soil, and flowers in Dempo Valley. They felt that human and their technology destroyed the natural order of things.

Masumai were actually a group of spirits who were pious. They

always performed prayers and worships according to their belief. Every once in seven full moon, they performed a ritual of meditation. They would meditate for a month. The ritual began when the full moon of the seventh month rose and ended on the next full moon.

Masumai spirits meditated to calm Dempo Mountain. In their meditation, they prayed that Dempo Mountain would always be calm and would not erupt. In the ancient past, Dempo Mountain had erupted and almost destroyed the Masumai. Since then, Masumai routinely performed the ritual to ask the master of Dempo, i.e. *Puyang* of Dempo Mountain, to not let the mountain erupt.

They sent offerings to *Puyang* of Dempo Mountain. The offerings were initially consisted of flowers and cattle, such as goats, cows, buffaloes, or sometimes deer. However, since human polluted the air with their smoke, Masumai were disturbed. They could not focus on their meditation because they found that the smell of burning meat was awful. Therefore, they were furious with human and kidnapped human children to be presented as offerings.

One day, Ratu Masumai called his guard.

“Guard, what is this awful smell?” Ratu Masumai asked. “I cannot concentrate and I failed my meditation because of this

smell.”

“I don’t know, Ratu,” the guard replied.

“Go and find the source!” Ratu Masumai commanded, trying to contain his rage.

“I obey!” the guard said before leaving.

The guard called his fellow guards and went down the mountain. When the sun set, they began searching. Those Masumai floated around the valleys and along the rivers at the foot of the mountain. As soon as the light dimmed in the sky, they spread out. They focused their senses to smell the source of the awful smell that polluted the air. However, when the dawn came, they still had not found what they were looking for.

The sun began to shine. Masumai guards returned empty handed to the Peak of Dempo Mountain. Ratu Masumai was furious when they made the report. “What do you mean there is no source?” Ratu exploded. “That awful smell came from down there,” he pointed towards a general area at the foot of the mountain. The guards fell silent. They felt guilty and a little afraid.

Suddenly, the awful smell filled the air again. It was even sharper than before. They looked at each other. Ratu exclaimed, “Hey... do you smell it?”

“Yes, Ratu,” all Masumai replied.

“So they created this smell when we are unable to go down the mountain,” Ratu grumbled.

Ratu Masumai was entitled to be angry. Masumai were nocturnal beings. These spirits could not walk under the sun. They would feel weak if the sun rays touched their skin.

The awful smell filled the air every day for the whole duration of their meditation. Finally, a Masumai guard forced himself to float down the mountain when the sun shone bright. He had to find the source of that smell for the sake of their peace. He was in luck because he finally succeeded to find what he had been looking for. Dragging his weak body, the guard returned to Ratu Masumai and reported his finding.

Since then, when the time to meditate was near, Ratu Masumai ordered his guards to kidnap children.

They would present these children as offerings. The children were replacement for animals because human had captured and roasted the animal Masumai usually used for offerings. Adult human who dared to venture outside their caves after sunset would also be taken. They would be turned into Masumai slave. Their memory and conscience were erased and they would do whatever Masumai ordered them to do.

Dempo Valley became a terrifying place at night. From dusk to dawn, Dempo Valley was a dangerous place for human. News of

kidnapping were often heard around the valley. Even though everyone was wary and kept close watch on their family members, there were always children being kidnapped, particularly around the full moon.

At first, they blamed each other for the missing people. They thought that their family members were kidnapped by other groups. Each group of people searched other group's caves. However, their suspicions were not proven. They then suspected those missing people had been eaten by wild animals. They attacked and killed any wild animal they found in the forest. If they had no courage to do so, they would just avoid the animals and hid in their caves.

However, after some time, they realized that the missing people were taken by something else entirely. They found that out one evening. That night, after the sun had set, a group of *jeme* Dempu gathered around the campfire in front of their cave. They were having a dinner party, roasting a deer that they had hunted that day. The air was thick with delicious smell of roasted meat. The smoke rose high and reached the Peak of Dempo Mountain.

Out of the blue, a Masumai appeared among them. He was tall, broad, dark, and hairy. His eyes were red. There was a horn on his forehead. In a blink of the eye, Masumai snatched one of their small children and took him away. Everyone around the fire was shocked. They could not move nor speak. By the time they

realized what happened, the Masumai had vanished into thin air. They tried to pursue him, but he had disappeared.

Masumai moved swiftly like a gust of wind. They could not find him, not even his shadow. There was no footprint on the ground. Only a sweet smell of flowers was left in the air. The people were distracted for a moment by the smell. Soon, they realized that the creature they were pursuing had gone.

Incident like this happened again and again. All people living in Dempo Valley, both the descendants of Senambun Tue and the foreigners, agreed that Masumai were the kidnappers. They were unable to fight Masumai because Masumai were far more superior to them. Masumai were terrifying. They could move very swiftly. They could disappear. In short, no human being had the power to challenge them.

The inhabitants of Dempo Valley had known the signs of Masumai's presence. During the full moon, when the sun had set and the sweet smell of flowers was thick in the air, everyone was on guard. They stayed in the caves and kept good watch on their family members. They knew that was the time Masumai kidnapped their victims.

Every full moon, the foot of Dempo Mountain was quiet as cemetery. Even though the evening was bright with the moonrays, nobody came out to enjoy the beauty. Everyone was terrified,

staying awake in their caves until sunrise. If noone was kidnapped, it meant that Masumai did not made offerings that month.

However, they could not drop their guard. Even if it was not meditation period for Masumai, they still kidnapped anyone who was foolish enough to stay outside during the fullmoon.

This happened for hundreds of years. Masumai became the enemy of human beings. They terrorized the people in Dempo Valley. It was this situation that forced the three gods from the heaven to come to the earth. They would change the situation in Dempo Valley.

4. The Three Gods and Heavenly Duty

Dewa Gumay, Dewa Semidang, and Dewa Atung Bungsu, who later became *puyang* (ancestors) of Besemah tribe, were gods who lived in heaven. They were sent by the Ruler of All Gods, Mahadewa, to go to the earth and build a new civilization. Mahadewa and other gods wished to see a peaceful and civilized world on earth.

From heaven, Mahadewa saw the chaos in Dempo Valley. The spirits had terrorized the humans. Human was one of the earth creatures, tasked with taking care of the earth. If the spirits kept terrorizing them, human would always stay in caves and there would be no one to take care of the earth.

Mahadewa saw that Dempo Valley was a perfect place for human to build a civilization. That was why he sent three gods to return peace in Dempo Valley. The three gods were Dewa Gumay, Dewa Semidang, and Dewa Atung Bungsu.

Before the three gods were sent down, Mahadewa told them about Dempo Valley. He told them that there were people living in the Valley. They were *jeme* Dempu, the people of Dempo. They lived harmoniously with foreigners who came there. Mahadewa also told them about the spirits that kidnapped and terrorized the people.

“Before you go to the earth, I will give you three tasks. First, you

have to know about the *jeme* Dempu,” Mahadewa said. “You also have to know that other beings were terrorizing them, becoming the enemy of *jeme* Dempu. Defeat them peacefully,” he added. The three gods nodded.

“Your next task is building a new civilization,” Mahadewa said. “Find a good place to be is capital,” he added. “This new place should be opened to accept *jeme* Dempu and other people who want to reside there.”

Mahadewa then described the characteristics of the new place. It should be located near a river estuary with heavy water. Heavy water meant that it was clear and provided many benefits for human. The area near the estuary would be fertile and promise a good living.

The land to build the new civilization was marked with black soil and thorny bushes. There would be many buffaloes wandering on the grassland, but there was no man living there. Behind the area was a huge mountain. These were the characteristics of the place where they should build a new civilization.

The three gods listened intently to the instructions. Their first task was to get to know *jeme* Dempu. Secondly, they had to understand why the spirits terrorized the people. Thirdly, they had to build a new civilization to keep the peace and harmony among human, particularly at Dempo Valley.

5. The Three Gods Came to Earth

The peaceful and calm Siguntang Hill was disturbed by a fruit falling from the sky. The fruit shaped like an egg, only bigger. It rolled on a field of grass, under tall trees. However, no one saw it. Crickets and grasshoppers were the only things that knew the fruit was there. The fruit laid on the grass for a long time.

Siguntang Hill was quite far from Dempo Mountain. Siguntang Hill was a vast highland. Even though it was tall, it was not tall enough to be called a mountain. Various trees grew there, throwing shades on the green carpet of grass. There was no river on the hill.

Seven full moons passed since the fruit fell from the sky. Strangely, the fruit did not dry up or decay. Its shape and color were still the same. Every day, the fruit only rolled a little under the wind and then stayed still again.

On one hot day, the tall and broad Dewa Semindang walked past the hill. He looked fresh even though his clothes were wet and worn. Dewa Semindang walked slowly around Siguntang Hill. He wanted to take a rest for a while under the trees. He had been walking for so long. Just as he sat down, he heard a voice calling. It sounded so soft, as if it came from afar.

“Oiii.... I am here....,” the voice said.

Dewa Semidang looked right and left, trying to find who had talked. He saw nobody and decided to ignore it. Then, he heard it again.

“Oiii . . . I am here....”

Dewa Semidang decided to get up and find the source of the voice. He heard it several more times and walked towards it. He finally heard the voice mentioning his name.

“I am in here. Please help me, Dewa Semidang,” it said.

Dewa Semidang was startled hearing his name. He concentrated to hear where exactly the voice came from. He looked around and finally spotted the egg-shaped fruit on the grass. The fruit shook.

“I am in here. Please help me, Dewa Semidang.” The voice seemed to come from inside the fruit. Dewa Semidang put his ear near the fruit and listened. The voice did come from inside it.

“Dewa Semidang, come on. Please help me,” the voice said. “Get me out of here,” it asked.

Dewa Semidang quickly picked the fruit up. He tried to remember why the voice sounded familiar. Then it clicked. It was the voice of Dewa Gumay. “How could Dewa Gumay get in this fruit?” Dewa Semidang thought. Then, the voice was heard again.

“Dewa Semidang, get me out of this fruit.”

“Who are you? Are you Dewa Gumay?” Dewa Semidang asked cautiously.

“Yes, it is I, Dewa Gumay,” the voice answered. “I have been stuck in this fruit for quite a while. Please get me out of it.”

“You are really Dewa Gumay,” Dewa Semidang said happily, “How come you ended up inside the fruit? Mahadewa was waiting for your report.”

“It’s a long story. Just get me out first, we’ll talk later,” Dewa Gumay said.

“Alright. How do I do it?” Dewa Semidang asked.

“Put your index finger on its surface. I will do the same from the inside. Once our fingers touched, slashed the surface with your nail,” Dewa Gumay explained.

“Alright, let’s begin,” Dewa Semidang said.

Together, they slashed the fruit’s hard and thick shell. Dewa Semidang did it from the outside and Dewa Gumay did it from the inside. Since the shell was thick and hard, their index fingers were bent and broken. Finally, they cracked the shell. The slim and small Dewa Gumay jumped out of the fruit and grew to a normal size. They embraced each other warmly.

“Adik Semidang, I am sorry,” Dewa Gumay said. He called Dewa

Semidang *adik*, which meant little brother. “I have not sent news to the heaven because I was trapped inside that fruit,” he added.

“Hold on, why did you call me *adik*?” Dewa Semidang asked. “I am here first,” he added, “I have crossed nine rivers. It means I am the older of us two.”

“But I am the first to be sent here, aren’t I?” Dewa Gumay reminded his companion. “It means I am the eldest and you should call me *kakak* (big brother).”

“Even so, you just set your foot on the earth’s ground. You have been breathing its air only for a few minutes. I, on the other hand, have walked the earth for several months,” Dewa Semidang insisted.

Dewa Gumay did not reply. He did not want to make a scene. It was his nature to avoid conflicts. For him, it did not matter who was called what. The heavenly duty they were entrusted with was more important.

“Very well,” Dewa Gumay said, “then, you are the older, Dik.” Dewa Gumay smiled and patted Dewa Semidang on his arms.

Dewa Semidang was glad. “Dewa Gumay has acknowledged that I am the eldest,” he thought. He did not even realize that Dewa Gumay still called him *adik*.

They then shared their experiences since coming down from

heaven. Mahadewa had tasked both of them to open a new place in Dempo Valley, on the southern part of Suwarnabumi. That new place would become the center of civilization for *jeme* Dempu and the foreigners who were currently living on Dempo Valley.

Dewa Gumay recounted what happened to him. He had ridden the sun rays to get to earth. However, the rays had been absorbed by a plant, along with him. It had bore a fruit and Dewa Gumay had been trapped in it. The fruit had fallen and reached Siguntang Hill. Dewa Gumay had not been able to do anything while trapped in it, including sending news to heaven. Dewa Gumay had been trapped in the fruit for several months. The gods in heaven had been waiting for his report.

Dewa Gumay had been the first that Mahadewa tasked with building the new civilization in Dempo Mountain. However, since there had been no news from Dewa Gumay, Mahadewa sent Dewa Semidang with the same task.

“So,” Dewa Semidang said, “for several full moons after you were sent, you haven’t done anything about our task?”

“That’s what happened,” Dewa Gumay said with regret. He looked down with embarrassment. He could not even look directly at Dewa Semidang’s eyes.

“Oh, Dewa Gumay!” Dewa Semidang said. “Don’t feel too bad. It’s not entirely your fault.” He tried to console his companion.

“It is fate,” he concluded wisely.

“It is indeed, Dewa Semidang,” Dewa Gumay replied softly. “It’s not that I can defy fate,” he continued, “but I still feel sorry for not having done my job.”

“Then, let’s get to work. What should we do?” Dewa Gumay asked.

“Let’s,” Dewa Semidang said. “There’s a lot to do and not much time. We’d better start soon.”



Dewa Semidang then recounted his experience until he met Dewa Gumay. When Mahadewa had not received any report from Dewa Gumay, he had decided to send Dewa Semidang with the same task.

“Go down there, Semidang,” he had said.

Dewa Semidang had been wandering ever since. He had crossed nine rivers, climbed mountains, and walked on valleys. He had explored Dempo Mountain and Seminung Mountain in the past few months.

During his journey, Dewa Semidang had watched the situation in Dempo Mountain. He had watched *jeme* Dempu from afar. He had noticed that they had never gotten out of their caves once it was dark. Everyone had been afraid of Masumai. Unfortunately, Dewa Semidang had never met Masumai. It was because he had been sleeping in caves during the night.

“That’s my story, Dewa Gumay,” Dewa Semidang said, “until I met you here.” Dewa Gumay regretted how Dewa Semidang had handled the situation. “Of course you won’t find Masumay, Dik. You were asleep when it was dark, and they only come out once it’s dark. You have the strength, but not the mind,” Dewa Gumay thought.

“Let’s just wait for Dewa Atung Bungsu first. Then, we go and search for those Masumai. I’ll teach them some lessons for

terrorizing human,” Dewa Gumay said.

“Mahadewa will send Dewa Atung Bungsu in the seventh full moon after I arrived in Suwarnabumi,” Dewa Semidang said. “And I think the seventh full moon comes tonight,” he concluded.

At the top of Siguntang Hill, the wind blew fiercely.

A single bolt of lightning struck the ground, even though the sky was clear. When the dust settled, Dewa Agung Bungsu was standing at the top of Siguntang Hill.

Down on Siguntang Valley, Dewa Semidang and Dewa Gumay watched the whole thing in amazement. They were startled and glad at the same time. They saw Dewa Atung Bungsu at the top of the hill and quickly ran to meet him. Dewa Atung Bungsu was waiting for them. Later, the place where they found each other would be called *Bukit Tiga Dewa*, the Hill of the Three Gods.

Soon, the three gods were reunited. They greeted each other. Each of them shared their experiences. Dewa Semidang and Dewa Gumay told Dewa Atung Bungsu what had happened. Dewa Atung Bungsu gave them the instruction from Mahadewa. They had to build the new center of civilization for *jeme* Dempu as soon as possible. Those people had to be relocated to a safer and better place.

Dewa Atung Bungsu also reminded them about Masumai.

Mahadewa instructed them to treat Masumai wisely. No matter what, Masumai were also God's creation. When he heard Dewa Atung Bungsu, Dewa Gumay felt ashamed for being agitated. He had been ready to annihilate Masumai a few minutes ago.

The three of them agreed to walk their separate ways to Dempo Valley. Their destination was the same. Their goal was to carry on the instruction to create a peaceful and civilized earth. They promised to regroup at the hill on the twenty fourth full moon.

6. Dewa Gumay Opened a New Land

After their meeting at the top of Siguntang Hill, Dewa Gumay continued his journey to the southwest. Not far from Dempo Mountain, he arrived on an empty land near a swift river. There, he met *jeme* Dempo and Ducung people. Ducung people were humped, small, short, scar-faced, but agile. Dewa Gumay felt a connection with them because he was short and stocky himself. He also met the tall, slanted-eyed Kam-Kam people.

These three groups of people lived in nearby caves. They shared similar food. They caught fish in the river and gathered fresh leaves in the forest. They were healthy, but they still moved from place to place.

Dewa Gumay taught them to settle. He taught them to build houses on stilts. Living in such houses, they would be safe from flood and wild animals.

He also taught them how to craft wooden tools for cooking and working. For their survival, Dewa Gumay taught them to cultivate the land. They planted vegetables and fruits as sources of food.

The people followed his direction. Dewa Gumay taught them patiently. They finally resided in the area. Dewa Gumay even married a Ducung girl. They lived happily and had many children.

From these people, Dewa Gumay knew that they were afraid of Masumai that often kidnapped their people. Not only children, Masumai also targeted lonely adults.

One day, when the sun set and full moon began to shine, Dewa Gumay felt something different in the air. He sensed something bad was coming. First, he noticed the smell of flowers in the air, wafting around his house. A moment later, he heard his neighbor screaming.

Dewa Gumay immediately went to investigate. However, he was too late. The neighbor's child, who was sleeping in the house, had been kidnapped. The people could not do anything but cry over their bad luck. It was too bad that Dewa Gumay did not have a chance to do something.

The kidnapping happened again and again. Dewa Gumay was furious. He could not catch Masumai who were so quick and left no trace but the smell of flowers. Dewa Gumay kept trying to find a way to safe his people.

7. Dewa Semidang: Serunting Sakti the Wanderer

Semidang meant ‘love to travel or wander.’ The name suited Dewa Semidang very well. As soon as he arrived on earth, he had not stopped exploring. He wandered around the southern side of Suwarnabumi. After his meeting with Dewa Gumay and Dewa Atung Bungsu, he walked south, towards Gunung Seminung, and then to the west, towards Dempo Mountain. There was where he met *jeme* Dempo and Nik-Nuk people.

Dewa Semidang assumed more than one name. He often introduced himself as Serunting. He had to face many challenges during his journey. He overcame them all with his power. The people came to call him Serunting Sakti on account of his amazing abilities.

At the foot of Seminung Mountain, Serunting Sakti built a hut, grew a garden, and created a bathing place. He kept it a secret so that he was the only one who used the bathing place.

One day, after a full moon, Serunting Sakti was going to his bathing place. He was going to relax there for a while. However, when he arrived there, he found something strange. He found traces of someone using the place. In fact, he was sure that it had been several girls. He smelled a faint trace of perfume and there were flower petals on the bath. “Only girls took a bath with flowers. But who were they?” Serunting Sakti thought.



He then decided to keep watch on the place. Every night he hid himself and watch the bathing place. One night, he saw seven angels floating down from heaven to his bathing place. They seemed to be sisters. They took a bath and danced beautifully all night. Serunting Sakti stole one of their clothes. It was called Anti Kesuma cloth and belonged to the youngest angel. “They need to know that his bathing place belongs to someone,” Serunting Sakti thought.

Once the angels finished bathing and prepared to go home, the youngest one could not find her clothes. Since she could not find Anti Kesuma cloth, she could not come home with her sisters. The cloth allowed them to fly. Her six sisters could not wait any longer. They returned to heaven, while the youngest angel stayed on earth.

As the youngest angel cried over her missing Anti Kesuma cloth, Serunting Sakti came out of hiding. She was startled.

She told Serunting Sakti her story. She and her sisters had to perform the ritual of flower bathing every full moon so that they could stay as angels on heaven. They had been flying down to earth using their clothes, and always returned to heaven in the morning. Until today. She could not come with her sisters without her Anti Kesuma cloth.

Seeing how sad she was, Serunting persuaded her to accept her

fate and came with him. The youngest angel felt that she had no other choice. She was grateful that this man was willing to help her. She came with Serunting Sakti to his hut. Long story short, they soon got married. Serunting Sakti then took his wife to travel west, towards Dempo Mountain.

Serunting Sakti built another hut near Dempo Mountain. His beautiful wife was very diligent and skillful. She helped providing their daily needs, including food. They met *jeme* Dempu and Nik-Nuk people there. Nik-Nuk people ate meat and fish, while *jeme* Dempu ate fish and nuts. Serunting's wife taught them how to cook delicious meal using the available resources around them.

Dewa Semindang taught them how to build huts and craft simple wooden tools for cooking and cultivating lands. Those people, who had been living in caves, finally settled in their huts, around Dewa Semindang's place. They were getting better at cooking fish, meat, and vegetables every day. It was all because Dewa Semindang's wife had taught them very well.

Dewa Semindang and his wife had a child. One night, when Dewa Semindang was sound asleep and his wife was busy in the kitchen, the air in their huts suddenly smelled like flowers. Then, a black shadow flashed near Dewa Semindang's baby. The baby disappeared in a blink of an eye. The shadow had taken him.

Dewa Semidang's wife was shocked when she found that her baby's bed was empty. She woke her husband up in panic. She asked him where their son was. Dewa Semidang quickly went out the hut and looked around. There was no trace of anyone or anything. There was only the fading smell of flowers in the air. He then remembered Mahadewa's words about Masumai. He looked up and saw a full moon on the sky.

The next morning, he asked his neighbors about kidnapping in the area. They confirmed his suspicion that it had been Masumai who had taken his child. He was furious. "Mahadewa was right. I have to get my baby back," Dewa Semidang thought.

Dewa Semidang's wife said that she could ask the gods in heaven to help them get their baby back. However, she needed her Anti Kesuma cloth to fly there. Without thinking, Dewa Semidang gave her the clothes. The angel flew to heaven. Dewa Semidang could only see her vanishing in the sky. He was devastated because two people he loved were gone from his life.

Dewa Semidang waited for his wife to return for several months. However, she never returned with their child. Dewa Semidang was irritated and sad at the same time. He then left the place and wandered around.

He went wherever his feet took him. He hoped to meet a Masumai so that he could teach them a lesson. However, Dewa

Semidang always fell asleep when the sun went down and only woke up in the morning.

8. Dewa Atung Bungsu, Semah Fish, and Keratuan Besemah

Among the three gods sent to Suwarnabumi, Dewa Atung Bungsu played the most important role in building the new center of civilization. He was tasked by Mahadewa to find the perfect center of civilization in the area that his two friends had prepared.

Dewa Atung Bungsu always remembered Mahadewa's direction to open the new land.

“Get in every river and follow it,” Mahadewa had instructed. “On the meeting point of two rivers, you have to stop. Weigh and compare the water in the two rivers. Once you find the one with heavier water, follow it. Keep repeating it until you find the heaviest river.

Dewa Atung Bungsu began his quest on Suwarnabumi. He took some *jeme* Dempu as his guards. At first, Dewa Atung Bungsu got in Musi River and followed its stream on boat. It was a very long river. Dewa Atung Bungsu followed it until they arrived at Muara Sungsang and crossed it to the neighboring island. There, he met Princess Kenantan Buih from Keling Continent and married her. He took his wife and his guards on his quest, following the rivers to find the perfect land.



Dewa Atung Bungsu followed Musi River until he arrived at the place where Musi River met Komering River. He stopped and weighed water from the two rivers. He found that Musi River was heavier, thus he continued following Musi River.

The next estuary he found was where Musi River met Belida River. When he weighed them, water from Musi River was heavier. He carried on following the river. Comparing Musi River and Enim River at the next estuary proved that Musi River was also heavier. However, when he met Lematang River, he found that water from Musi River was lighter. Therefore, he and his group left Musi River and followed Lematang River. Along the stream, they found many small rivers; all with lighter water. They followed Lematang River for a long time.

Finally, Dewa Atung Bungsu arrived at a huge mountain. His guards told him that it was called Dempo Mountain.

The air was clear and clean, the grass was lush, and the soil seemed fertile. Dewa Atung Bungsu meditated and asked for guidance from the gods.

Dewa Atung Bungsu meditated for seven days and seven nights. He meditated alone in a cave at the top of Dempo Mountain. His last night of meditating was a full moon night. Dewa Atung Bungsu sensed something unusual. He smelled sweet smell of flowers in the air. He sensed a lot of terrifying eyes were

watching him. However, he tried to ignore all that and focused on finishing his meditation.

The next morning, Dewa Atung Bungsu opened his eyes and looked around. Now that he had finished meditating, he could investigate the strange smell the night before. However, there was no trace of anyone in the cave. There were no footsteps or anything but the fading smell of flowers.

Dewa Atung Bungsu walked out of the cave and rejoined his group. Dewa Atung Bungsu noticed something, he had met Masumai. It was too bad that they had gone when he finally finished with his meditation. Dewa Atung Bungsu then carried on with his quest, finding a new place to build a civilization.



They finally found an unnamed river. When Dewa Atung Bungsu weighed it, the water was heavier than Lematang River. He followed the new stream until he found a waterfall. “There’s no way I go through this waterfall,” Dewa Atung Bungsu thought. “I have to turn around.”

The waterfall had blocked his way so that Dewa Atung Bungsu had to turn around and followed the unnamed stream again. He found that the river ended in a deep stream.

Near that stream he found the land with the characteristics that Mahadewa had described. The water of the stream was heaviest, the soil was black, there was thorny bushes and wild buffaloes on the field, and there was no human being there.

“Eureka!” Dewa Atung Bungsu cried, “I have finally found it.”

Dewa Atung Bungsu and his group built huts and settled in the area. They cleared the surrounding area to make room for fields and houses. It took them a long time to finally finished building the area. they kept expanding their small village by opening new land for fields.

People who heard about this new place gladly joined them. *Jeme Dempu*, *Sebakas*, *Beride*, *Rebakas*, and *Rejang* people, who were living in caves, worked together to build Dewa Atung Bungsu’s village. Dewa Atung Bungsu and his wife taught them a more civilized way of living.

Dewa Atung Bungsu picked the right place. The land was fertile, the water in the river was clear and clean, and the air was cool. One day, Princess Kenantan Buih went to the river to clean some rice. Suddenly, a fish jumped into her rice basket. It had round long body and big scales.

She called her husband and showed Dewa Atung Bungsu the fish in the basket.

“Look, while I was cleaning the rice, this fish jumped into the basket,” she said. “What fish is this, Husband?” she asked.



“That’s Semah fish,” Dewa Atung Bungsu muttered after examining the fish. “I hope I do pick the right place to build a civilization. This river is lucky because there’s Semah fish in it,” Dewa Atung Bungsu thought.

“There is Semah fish in the river. It means the river has Semah fish... this river is *besemah!*” he cried. *Besemah* meant it has Semah.

Princess Kenantan Buih nodded. She then continued to do her chores.

Dewa Atung Bungsu’s cry was heard by his guards. One day, when they were going to the river, one of them said, “Come on, let’s swim in *Besemah* River!”

“Besemah River?” his companion was confused. “Which river is it?”

“This one!” the first guard said, jumping in the water. The unnamed river was then called Besemah River. The name caught on and the people living near the river was known as *jeme Besemah*. Dewa Atung Bungsu was their leader.

The place where they stayed for the first time was called Padurakse, which meant an area that had been checked. Then Dewa Atung Bungsu asked his people to move to a new area called Benue Keling, in honor of his wife’s origin. There, Dewa

Atung Bungsu created the government of Keratuan Besemah. He was the leader of that kingdom, with Putri Kenantan Buih as his queen.

Dewa Atung Bungsu made Benue Keling the center of Besemah and built his kingdom there. Keratuan Besemah soon became famous. On one point, two men came to Dewa Atung Bungsu. They were called Ratu Lubuk Umbai and Ratu Rambut Selake. They claimed to be the direct descendant of Senambun Tue, the ancestor of *jeme* Dempu. They wanted to take the kingdom because they believed that they were entitled to Besemah land.

“Dewa Atung Bungsu!” Ratu Lubuk Umbai called. “Why do you build a kingdom on my land?”

“This is my land,” Dewa Atung Bungsu replied. “If you need proof, look at those coconuts and cassava. I planted them all.”

Ratu Lubuk Umbai and Ratu Rambut Selake debated with Dewa Atung Bungsu for a while. All their arguments were defeated by Dewa Atung Bungsu. They finally gave in and moved to Jarai, leaving Keratuan Basemah alone.

In Gumai Ulu, which was part of Keratuan Besemah, the soldiers of Kubilai Khan arrived. They had failed to attack Singosari in Java Island and escaped to Suwarnabumi. Their leader was called General Lim. Since General Lim and his people would not follow the local culture, Dewa Atung Bungsu finally kicked them out.

General Lim could not take it. He would not be kicked out without a fight. Therefore, he challenged Dewa Atung Bungsu.

“I am willing to leave Keratuan Besemah if Dewa Atung Bungsu defeats me in a duel,” he said.

“Very well,” Dewa Atung Besemah said, “I accept your challenge.”

They fought hard in a river, using various martial arts techniques. Dewa Atung Bungsu won the fight and Panglima Lim accepted defeat. He and his people then moved to Lintang area.

9. Reunion of the Three Gods

Twenty-four full moons since the first meeting of the three gods in Siguntang Hill, Dewa Gumay, Dewa Semidang, and Dewa Atung Bungsu reunited at the same spot.

On the agreed day, the three gods arrived at the top of Siguntang Hill, on the northeast of Dempo Mountain. They each travelled for about half a month from their own places.

The three gods had changed after living as human for so long. Dewa Gumay became wiser, Dewa Semidang did not lose his spirit even though he had lost his son and wife, and Dewa Atung Bungsu oozed more charisma.

They greeted each other and made small talk. Then, they shared their experiences. They were glad that the people were willing to move forward. They never found it difficult to invite the people to join them and settle, building houses and using wooden tools. Most of the people in the area had left their caves and settled with one of the three gods. The new civilization had been passed down to *jeme* Dempo and other people.

Dewa Atung Bungsu had succeeded building a kingdom with its own government. It meant that one task was done. Dewa Gumay and Dewa Semidang were willing to support Dewa Atung Bungsu as the ruler of Keratuan Besemah. They announced that their own settlements were now part of Keratuan Besemah, making the

kingdom expand so vast to Lahat region.

Then, they talked about the most serious problem, the Masumai. When they were talking about Masumai, Dewa Semidang was the most affected. He was sad because he lost his son and wife because of Masumai.

Dewa Atung Bungsu had met Masumai when he meditated. He had also heard stories from his people about Masumai. To make sure, Dewa Atung Bungsu asked his two companions a question about Masumai.

“Aren’t they tall and hairy, has dark skin and red eyes, and sported a horn on their forehead?”

Dewa Gumay and Dewa Semidang could not confirm anything because they had never seen Masumai. They only felt the terror that Masumai left along with the smell of flowers. They knew Masumai’s ability, but they did not know what they looked like.

Even though he was the youngest among the three, Dewa Atung Bungsu was considered the most charismatic. They hoped that Dewa Atung Bungsu could subdue Masumai so that they would not bother human anymore.

Dewa Gumay and Dewa Semidang left the matter of subduing Masumai to Dewa Atung Bungsu.

10.Dewa Atung Bungsu Subdued Masumai

The three gods agreed to let Dewa Atung Bungsu handle Masumai. Dewa Atung Bungsu possessed the skill to communicate with spirits. Thus, Dewa Atung Bungsu climbed Dempo Mountain to meet Masumai.

When he was meditating in a cave at the top of Dempo Mountain months ago, Dewa Atung Bungsu had sensed, and even had a glimpse of, Masumai. They had tried to disturb his meditation, but they had failed.

Under the full moon, Dewa Atung Bungsu returned to the cave where he had meditated before. He concentrated and focused his will. He meditated again in the same cave, during full moon. It was deliberate. He suspected that Masumai would appear again.

He was right. By midnight, a sweet smell filled the cave. Masumai came in groups and tried to disturb Dewa Atung Bungsu's meditation. They emitted terrifying sounds, moving here and there. However, they could not get close to Dewa Atung Bungsu.

Dewa Atung Bungsu opened his eyes and finished his meditation. As soon as his eyes were open, all Masumai disappeared into thin air.

Dewa Atung Bungsu then called, "Masumai, don't go!"

“I want to ask you something,” Dewa Atung Bungsu said calmly.

For a moment, there was only silence. Dewa Atung Bungsu repeated his request. Suddenly, the smell intensified. A Masumai appeared in front of Dewa Atung Bungsu. He wore a crown on his head and held a staff in his hand. His feet did not touch the ground. His appearance was terrifying, but he seemed friendly.

“What do you want from us, O god who pretends to be human?” the Masumai asked.

“Who are you?” Dewa Atung Bungsu asked him.

“I am Ratu Masumai,” Ratu Masumai replied loudly. There was a hint of doubt in his voice.

“Who are you?” he asked.

He knew that the man in front of him was a god with great power and charisma.

“I am Dewa Atung Bungsu, the leader of people in Keratuan Besemah,” Dewa Atung Bungsu replied.

“Masumai, why do you kidnap human, especially their children?” Dewa Atung Bungsu asked calmly.

“How do you like it if your settlement is intruded?” Ratu Masumai replied with a question.



“Who had disturbed your settlement?” Dewa Atung Bungsu asked.

“We have lived here for thousands of years. We loved Dempo Mountain with its fresh air,” Ratu Masumai explained. “We also provide offerings to *Puyang* of Dempo Mountain once in every seven full moons to prevent the mountain from erupting.”

“That’s a noble deed,” Dewa Atung Bungsu said, “but why do you kidnap human children?”

“Humans have spread the awful smell of burning meat and fish into the air, polluting the fresh air that we enjoy so much,” Ratu Masumai said. “The smell also disturbs our focus when performing the important ritual. We will not have it. We’re afraid that Dempo Mountain will erupt again if we do not give offerings and perform the ritual well.”

“I understand, but why human children?” Dewa Atung Bungsu pressed on.

“They have captured and burned the animals we are using for sacrifice offerings. So, we take their children instead,” Ratu Masumai replied.

Dewa Atung Bungsu sensed Ratu Masumai’s worry. He patiently made a suggestion.

“Ratu Masumai, listen to what I am going to say,” he said. “You

can live for thousands of years, can't you? Human also want to live a long life, even though they may not live as long as you. They continue their legacy by having children. Their descendants are their future. They will be devastated if their children or their family members gone missing.”

Ratu Masumai was not an evil spirit. He was just angry and wanted to get revenge. He listened closely to Dewa Atung Bungsu.

Dewa Atung Bungsu then continued, “Vengeance is not a good thing to hold on to. I am sure that Masumai are not evil. You are pious spirits. You worship and perform rituals according to your own belief. Surely it is for the good in your life. There is a clear solution here. We just need to talk it out.”

“What is the solution, O god?” Ratu Masumai asked.

“Regarding your complaint about the smoke, I will tell Princess Kenantan Buih to teach the people to cook their food without polluting the air. They can cook in other ways. They don't have to roast the food and create smoke,” Dewa Atung Bungsu said. Ratu Masumai listened intently. Dewa Atung Bungsu then continued to talk.

“Regarding the animals, you have to share. Both Masumai and human cannot be greedy. All animals and plants on earth are God's creation. And every creature could use everything on earth

for the common good. You can keep and use the animals together with human. You have to share. Do you agree, Ratu Masumai?"

"I understand what you are saying," Ratu Masumai said.

"So, are you willing to promise not to kidnap and harm human in Dempo Village?" Dewa Atung Bungsu asked.

"Very well," Ratu Masumai replied, "we will not kidnap human anymore. We will return the children that we keep in our cave. We will release them from our spell and return them to their family."

"Thank you. I hold your words," Dewa Atung Bungsu said. He grew to respect Ratu Masumai's greatness and kindness.

Dewa Atung Bungsu and Ratu Masumai returned to their own places. Dewa Atung Bungsu met his wife and asked her to teach all *jeme* Besemah to change the way they cook meat and fish. They have to reduce the amount of smoke they released into the air. Varying their ways of cooking means they had more varied food. Fish and meat broth became favorite dishes of *jeme* Besemah.

Ratu Masumai kept his words. He released the children and adults they kept in their caves. These people returned in healthy condition. Their memories of being kidnapped had been erased.

Everyone was happy. They thanked Dewa Atung Bungsu. Dewa

Semidang thanked God because his son had returned. It was too bad that his wife would not return to earth.

Dewa Gumay also felt relieved. He was proud of Dewa Atung Bungsu. He concluded that every problem had solutions. Conflicts or misunderstanding between two parties could be solved with talking and discussion. All it needed was tolerance. Discussion was the best way to resolve a conflict. Every party stated their problem and worked together to find a solution in peaceful manner. *Jagat* (land of) Besemah belonged to human and spirits alike. *Jeme* Besemah and Masumai could live in harmony because they learned to respect each other.

11. The Fall of Keratuan Besemah

Jagat Besemah, under the leadership of Dewa Atung Bungsu, grew to be prosperous and peaceful. More and more people came there to stay. They cultivated their fields and catch fish for living. They made delicious dishes because Princess Kenantan Buih always taught them to. They also did not have to worry about Masumai anymore.

In another world, way up on Dempo Mountain, Masumai lived in peace. They routinely performed the ritual to *Puyang* of Dempo Mountain and presented cattle as offerings. They never came down the mountain. Dewa Atung Bungsu became their friend.

The smoke and smell of roasted meat that Masumai could not bear had been reduced to a minimum. Masumai would understand if every once in a while there was smoke wafting to their place.

One day, decades later, a disaster happened. Aking people, who were blue-eyed, tall, pale-skinned, and greedy, came to Besemah. They wanted to take *jagat* Besemah for their leader.

Dewa Atung Bungsu fought bravely against the greedy foreigners. He even asked for Masumai's help to get rid of Aking people. Dewa Semidang and Dewa Gumay also helped in the battles.

Aking people came to Besemah many times. Every time, Dewa

Atung Bungsu and Masumai were able to drive them back. They could not penetrate the defense that Dewa Atung Bungsu and Masumai put up.

However, Aking people were smart, smarter than *jeme* Besemah. They returned with strange weapons that spit fire and smoke. No Masumai could fight that kind of weapon. Dewa Atung Bungsu was wounded in that final battle. The whole kingdom was torn apart by these weapons. Dewa Atung Bungsu's soul finally left his body. His soul returned to the heaven while his body was buried in Benue Keling, the center of Keratuan Besemah. Dewa Gumay and Dewa Semidang also fell in the battle.

Keratuan Besemah fell. Aking people had succeeded to sit on Besemah land. However, *jeme* Besemah kept alive the tradition and wisdom that the three gods had left them. *Jagat* Besemah might fall, but Besemah people and their civilization survived.



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