Long ago, there lived two men, Sama Changja and Uma Changja. Uma Changja was so poor that what he gathered in the morning, he ate the same morning, and what he gathered at night, he ate the same night. Nonetheless, he begged in the morning to give offerings to his ancestors. He was a dutiful son, kept on good terms with his siblings and lived harmoniously with his relatives. He was considerate of his neighbours, and everyone praised him.

Sama Changja, on the other hand, was wealthy but failed in his filial duties, lived inharmoniously with his siblings and failed to earn the respect of his neighbours. Furthermore, he was a mean-spirited man with a vulgar mouth. Sama Changja also committed many sins: he let rice plants rot; he left rice grains to crumble to dust; he left coins to rust and clothes to become covered in mildew. When he loaned grain, he gave in small measures and received payment in large measures. He even charged interest when lending money to his in-laws. He once let his horse loose inside a pottery store. In a silk shop, he sprayed a water gun. He pinched crying babies. He pushed a child squatting to relieve himself. He kicked a pregnant dog. He neglected to feed his horse and then lied about it. When a beggar came, he scattered cold rice clumps here and there. When a Buddhist master came to receive alms, he tossed awns to him during the barley season and empty rice heads during the rice harvest. He drove stakes into pumpkins. He violated married women. He kissed and fondled the breasts of women carrying water jugs at dawn.

Sama Changja’s ancestors were starving, so one day they went to the King of the Underworld to plead their case, and said, ‘We’ve come to appeal to you because although Sama Changja’s house is rich, he gives no devotion to his ancestors. We are left hungry, thirsty and naked.’

‘What is it that you want?’ the King of the Underworld asked.

‘Since we are hungry, give us food; since we are naked, give us clothes; since we are poor, give us money’, implored the ancestors.

The King of the Underworld sent a Buddhist monk to call in the messengers; Haewnmaeki, Kangim of the Underworld and Lee T’aekch’un of this world. The King of the Underworld said to the three messengers, ‘What one hears while seated is not always what one sees while standing. Go and see for yourselves.’

First, the king sent a Buddhist monk. Wearing his monk’s robes and peaked hat, with a long string of prayer beads around his neck and a short one on his
wrist, and holding a wooden cane and knocking his wooden bell with a clapper, the monk stepped into Sama Changja’s house on the third day of the New Year.

‘I have heard that a rich man named Sama Changja lives here and I have come to collect alms for the restoration of a run-down temple’, said the monk.

At the word alms, Sama Changja abruptly threw open his window and demanded, ‘What sort of wretch begs for alms on the third day of the new year? Even seeing a monk in a dream brings bad luck. What kind of creature dares to come to my front gate?’

‘I am a monk. My temple is falling down, so I have come to ask for alms for its restoration’, said the monk.

Sama Changja called his servant and ordered, ‘Grab that monk, flog his behind and slap his cheeks. Then, even though fertilizer is precious, put some manure in his bowl.’

‘If manure is too precious to give away, then by all means keep it for yourself’, the monk replied, and he overturned the contents of his bowl.

Seeing this, Sama Changja’s daughter-in-law rushed out and pleaded, ‘Father, we may not be able to give generously to the monk, but is this any way to treat him? If we give liberally, it will still only be one mal. If we give meagrely, it will be merely five toe. Why must you act this way?’

She went into the next room and brought out a roll of silk and three mal and three toe of rice.

‘Great Master, please understand that my father-in-law was not always like this. Only recently has he had a change of heart. This donation may be humble, but please use the three mal of rice to make ceremonial vessels to give alms to the Buddha. Use the three toe of rice to buy candles and paper and pray to the Buddha for my father-in-law’s good fortune and health. Please use this roll of silk to make robes for yourself’, she said to the monk.

‘I had thought there were no kind people in Sama Changja’s home, but I see otherwise. Considering Sama Changja’s many sins, I would turn this entire house into a swamp and take Sama Changja with me, but his good and virtuous daughter-in-law is here. Perhaps you would leave with me?’ asked the monk.

‘If you are a monk, you should be content with paying your respects to the Buddha and be satisfied with what you receive in alms. What is the meaning of trying to take me? How can I serve two husbands? Don’t even utter such nonsense. Go back and pray for my father-in-law’s good fortune’, replied Sama Changja’s daughter-in-law.

The monk returned to the King of the Underworld and reported, ‘What one hears while seated and what one sees while standing are one and the same.’

‘If that is so, then on the first full moon of the first month of the New Year, give Sama Changja a premonitory dream’, the King of the Underworld ordered.