

When Will the Monk Return?

(from *Burmese Monk's Tales*,
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Prologue: The good lady who offered alms food to the Thingazar Sayadaw was excited and fussy, and she asked, "My lord, was the vegetable soup to your lordship's liking? Was the pork curry a little too salty? And the chicken curry, was there too much chili in it?" The Sayadaw did not answer, but the lady was too dense, and went on asking questions, Finally, the Sayadaw replied, "It is not proper for a monk to pass remarks on the alms food that is offered to him, and if he does, he not only breaks a vow, but brings trouble on his head, as in the case of the Monk and the Cabbage Soup."

A Farmer and his Wife had been able to save some money, and with their savings they built a monastery and installed a Monk in it, The Farmer was good-natured, the Wife was fussy, and the Monk was young. One morning the Wife brought some cabbage soup, rice, and curry and when the Monk had eaten the meal, she asked, "My lord, was the cabbage soup nice?" The Monk did not answer, but the Wife persisted in her questioning. At last the Monk, who wanted to please his patroness, replied, "*Laywoman, the cabbage soup was very nice indeed, and, in fact, it is my favorite dish.*" The Wife went home and said to her husband, "Husband, our Monk's favorite dish is cabbage soup and so you must irrigate your cabbage patch so that there is an adequate supply of the vegetable throughout the whole year." The Farmer did as he was told, and the Wife offered cabbage soup to the Monk every morning until the latter became sick and tired of it. But he consoled himself with the thought that the rainy season was nearly over, and when the rains stopped the cabbage plants would die.

At last the long rainy season was actually over, but, to the consternation of the poor Monk, the cabbage soup continued to come every morning. Unable to contain himself any longer, he asked the Wife, "Laywoman, surely cabbage is now out of season, and yet you seem to have a large supply of it." "There is no need for my lord to worry," replied the Wife with great satisfaction. "My lord will never lack cabbage soup, for our cabbage' patch is well irrigated even in the driest months."

The Monk brooded over his misfortune and early next day he left the monastery quietly and went to reside at another village. The Farmer and his Wife were heartbroken over the sudden departure of their Monk and wondered where he had gone.

After some months the Farmer and his Wife learned from an itinerant trader that their Monk was now residing in a village some distance away. They were overjoyed at the news, and the Wife sent with the trader the following message to the Monk:

**"I watch the road,
I shed a tear.
When will he return,
Our Monk so dear,
Our Golden Monk?"**

On his next round, the trader brought from the Monk the following message in reply:

**"Watch not the road,
Waste not your tear.
There is no return
Till your patch is clear
Of Golden Cabbage."**