

## Chapter I-2: *The Dagbamba Way of Living in the Villages and in the Towns*

The talk we were holding yesterday, we will continue it, and I am going to talk about the sense<sup>1</sup> of us Dagbamba. How wisdom is, wisdom wants the person who asks for it, and wisdom wants the person who holds it and shows it. The chief of Tolon is Yakubu Alhassan Tali, and he is a very learned person. He called a name for himself, and he said, “Wisdom is too much; one person cannot hold it.” One person alone does not hold sense.

As we are sitting, I have some sense, and as Kissmal and Ben are sitting here, they have also got some sense, and you too have got some sense. And truly, if you follow it, you will come to see that our sense is more than yours, because you don’t know, and you ask and we show you. And if those who show you have more sense than you, you have also got sense because you have asked. What you have asked to know, you will see that you will also come to know it. And in my thinking, I think that the one who asks also has sense more than the one who shows. Why do I say that? If you didn’t ask us, we wouldn’t talk. And if you didn’t ask and we didn’t show you, it would mean that our sense is there and we have not shown it, and such sense is useless sense. That is why it looks as if your sense is more than ours.

If you have some sense and you show people, it’s better. If there is foolishness inside your sense, it will be less than the sense you have taken to show your sense. And if there is foolishness inside your showing, asking will ask. Inside the asking, you will know if you have talked foolishness, and it is inside asking that you will also know that it is sense you have talked. And so as you have taken patience and come and asked us, we will show you what we know.

If we refuse, it is not you who will ask us again; God will ask us. To those of us who pray, if there is a *maalam*<sup>2</sup> who knows and he refuses to show those who are following him, there is a talk on his part. It is God who has given sense to him, and it is God who has given sense to somebody before and that fellow also showed him. If he takes his sense and enters his room and doesn’t show anybody, whatever happens, God will ask him. I can say that even the sense that someone sells is better than the sense he puts down and holds, because even the sense that they sell is not bought with money: you buy it with patience. Whatever happens, somebody who doesn’t know and he wants to know, if he has money or he has no

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1. *yem*: sense, wisdom, experience, knowledge

2. *maalam*: Muslim cleric; someone learned in Islam. The word *maalam* is Hausa and is used within English throughout West Africa; the Dagbani word is *afa*, plural: *afanima*.

money, he will use patience before he gets the sense. And as I said something about this yesterday, I am adding this talk to you today, because it is you who have asked us about the way of living of us the Dagbamba and about the character we have.

You have said you want to learn the talks of Dagbon, and you want me to talk and you will write it. And I also told you that it is my wish that we do this work. Why is it so? As we are sitting in Dagbon here, I am a drummer, and it is because of this drumming that I have come to know what I know about the way of living of the Dagbamba. And I have seen that some of the old talks on the part of how we live, we are releasing them, just because we are not putting them down for the children we give birth to. And there is fault on the part of those here who are educated and those who are in charge of education here, because they are the people who are not encouraging the children to live in the traditional way. If you look at the people in the South, they seem to know their customs very well. You will see a person who is educated and in a high position, and he will know much about his tradition.<sup>3</sup> But in Dagbon here, you will see somebody in an office, and if you ask him something about the tradition of Dagbon, he will only know a little bit, and that will be his extent. His knowledge doesn't go far. If you ask him something, he will talk what he knows and add what he doesn't know, and it won't be the truth. There will be lies inside his talks on the part of what he doesn't know. And if you too don't know, you will think that what he is telling you is true. And such people are the ones teaching our children who have entered schools to learn English. And these modern children in the towns are following the ways of those people, too.

I don't know whether it is because no one has written down the tradition for the children who are coming up, but it is good if we put something down for the children. If they give birth to a Dagbana child and the child grows up, whether the child is a girl or a boy, there are things the child should have in mind to know within himself and to show that, truly, he is a Dagbana. If not that, if he doesn't know anything about the way of living or the traditions of Dagbon, then he shouldn't believe that he is a real Dagbana. I'm not talking on the part of Dagbamba alone. I'm talking about every tribe.<sup>4</sup> If you say you are fit to be a person, it's good you know something about your tradition. If you give birth to your child, at least your child must know that you have been doing work, and the child must know something about the work you have been doing. And a child should know what his grandfather and grandmother and great-grandparents were

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3. kali: tradition

4. zuliya: tribe, clan

doing and how they lived. It would be good for every child growing up to be asking the father, “My father, how was your time?” or “My father, during the time of my grandfathers, how was their life at that time?” And their fathers would be telling them.

In the olden days in Dagbon here, the children used to come out in the night and sit with their fathers or mothers. That was the time they learned all the things that their grandparents and great-grandparents were doing before. In the villages, it is still there like that. You yourself, as you have sometimes been sitting with me on Tamale market days, you see villagers coming to sit with some of us the old men in the town, and they come to talk to us about any problem they may have in the town so that we will help them. But we the old people also gain from their talks, too, because as we have moved from the village to the town, they are still at the village and they are still adding ideas about the tradition and how it can continue moving. And so when they come, we also learn from them.

And so it is in the villages that the children learn more about Dagbani and about the traditions of Dagbon. When the villagers are sitting with their friends in the night, how I am sitting and talking to you, that is the same way they also sit. And what I am talking to you, that is the same thing they always talk. Anything on the part of tradition and history, they can talk about it. It isn't that the old people call the children to come and listen. It is the children who bring themselves. One old man will call his fellow old man to come and talk. And when they sit together, these old men will just take it as a conversation. Somebody can say, “Oh, during that time there was hunger in Dagbon; this is what happened.” Or another fellow can say, “During the war of the Dagbamba and the Gonjas, this was what was happening.” They will start to talk about all that happened during that time. And they know it. Maybe they don't know it up to how a drummer knows it, because they learn it from the drummers; but sometimes drummers will talk and they will also listen, so that they can also take it and talk. Whenever these old people are talking, if a child comes, he can sit and be listening. They won't drive the child away. This is how the village life is and how the village children sit with their elders. And if these elders find that their sitting and talking all the time is becoming very, very dull to them, they will try to organize some music so that the children will be making noise and jumping up and down outside the house before it is time for sleeping.

And so the village children, this is how they train them, and the living in the villages is different from that in the towns, and the village children too are different from the town children. Village children, whatever it is, if it is on the part of doing something bad, they fear it very, very much. And I can say that it is all because they always give respect to the old people. Any village child who is

from five to five-and-a-half years, when he finishes eating his night food, he will come out and sit by the side of his father, and the father will talk and he will hear. Maybe the father is someone who has medicine: it is there he will show the child the name of the medicine, because if he doesn't show him, he will come to die and the child will not know the name. And so the talk does not come from anything. It is there. A child who wants to gain, he will go near his father and he will be pressing his father's legs. Sometimes he will press his father's legs till his father sleeps. And sometimes, inside it, the child too can lie down and sleep on top of his father. And if the child is doing this, all the sense this old man has, he will take it and show the child. And so it is old people who show small children sense. And a village boy, wherever he goes, he will be thinking of his father, and he always sits with his father. If he sees anything, the first thing he will think is that he should get it for his father. Anything he gets that is good, he will just come and give it to his father. And his father too, that was how he was also trained by his father, and that is how he trains his child.

Truly, this is how the life in the villages is, and this is why I am showing you that the villagers know how to give respect to elder people. These villagers, when they come from the farm and they eat the night food, they have nothing to do. When it's night they have no place to go apart from just coming out to sit outside the house, and their children will gather round them, and they will be listening. We have a proverb in Dagbon that a child who sits near old people is also an old person. That's why I told you that it's not that the villagers call these children to come and sit and listen. About ten different people from ten different houses will come outside one house and sit and talk about what happened during the day. And the villagers too, if they want to talk about something, they won't speak secretly; they just talk loudly. And the old men will be talking louder. And when they get their old, old people to talk, these old, old men are the ones who speak loudest. And what these villagers will be talking about, any kind of talk about life or living that these elders want, they can bring it and talk about it with their fellow elders. And the children will listen, just because they want to get something better, and they know that these old men are talking about something important.

When these villagers come out in the night and the young children are sitting around them, they can be also telling the children stories about how they themselves were children and how their fathers were looking after them. Anything having to do with our customs, the fathers can bring a talk about it. Maybe the fathers will talk about dead bodies: if somebody dies and the fellow was at this age, this is how you bathe the dead body, and this is how you have to bury the fellow, and his face should be facing this side. These children will be

listening so that when they also grow up, they will know how to bury others. If it is on the part of the true way to make a funeral, or if you are going to attend such-and-such a funeral, they will talk about which way and which way you should pass before you go to the funeral. If the fathers or the elders are talking about this, the children will be listening. If it is going or sending messengers to find a wife for others, it is the village elders who talk about it and gather these children to listen to it, so that whenever they send any of the children to go and do that, the child will do it all right without any mistake. And so if such a child grows up and comes to stay in the town, he knows much more about the tradition of Dagbon than the one who has grown up in the town. That's why I myself, as I am sitting, even Alhaji Adam or my brother Shenii will sometimes come to me and ask me about such things, because as I was brought up in the village, it is sure that I know about all of it. Fusheni is my senior brother. And my senior brother Alhaji Adam, you know how he is: as for him, no one knows how old he is; his first-born son is even older than me. It is just because I am truly from the village, they know that I have some sense that they don't have.

And again, it is in the villages that we learn the real Dagbani. In the town they speak a town Dagbani, and it is a rough Dagbani. Sometimes we go to the government court to see a case, and the Dagbani even our Dagbamba lawyers talk, we don't know what type of Dagbani it is. The smallest children in the villages know Dagbani better. If you gather a horse, a cow, and a sheep and call a small boy from the town to come and call the names of these animals, he will call them wrong. All this is Dagbani, and somebody talking Dagbani should know it. If a village boy comes to call the names, he will call the names correctly. But you will ask a town child to call the name of a cow in our Dagbani language, and the child will tell you, "Moo-o." Can you imagine that a town child is going to call a cow, that is, *nahu* in Dagbani, and he will call it "Moo-o"? He will just take the crying of the animal to call it. So if the animal doesn't cry, will the child know its name? It is the way the animal cries that will allow the child to call it. If the villagers should hear this, they will laugh at the child until they are rolling on the ground. If it is anything in Dagbani, the town child will just be making mistakes all the time.

Sometimes when we are sitting down and the children are conversing nearby, we even used to wonder whether it is Dagbani they are speaking. They will talk and talk, and we cannot understand them. So we don't know whether they are also creating their own language or what. We don't know. For example, sometimes when they are going to call a group of horses, then they say "warinima." In Dagbani, there is nothing like *warinima*. A horse is *wɔho*, and more than one is *yuri*. That is Dagbani. But the children make their own word

*warinima* from *wɔho*. And so if old people are sitting down, and the children call “warinima,” we don’t know what they called, unless of course you ask them or you see the thing they are calling, and then you will know what it is they are calling. But a village child will never make that kind of mistake, and it’s just that the village child hears Dagbani from his fathers and elders when they are sitting around outside the house. As the village children always sit with old people, how an old villager is going to call the name of anything in Dagbani, that will be the same way a village three-year-old child will also call it. But these town boys, when their fathers are sitting in the night, these boys can just get up at anytime and walk away. They don’t mind about sitting near their fathers.

One time I asked one of the children in my house to go and count something, and this boy went and counted them and told me that the number was “eighty-seven”. And I asked him to call the number in Dagbani, and he couldn’t, and I said, “I don’t know ‘eighty-seven.’ I am a Dagbana, and I gave birth to you as a Dagbana, and you say you’re a Dagbana. And when I ask you something, you tell me the white man’s ‘eighty-seven.’ You can call the white man’s name of something, but you can’t call it in Dagbani. And you are not the son of a white man. And so what are you?” And the child could not answer me. Somebody who says he is a Dagbana should know this.

And here is another example. As Ben and Kissmal are here doing this work with us, they have shown that they want this work and they are serious to do it. But even as we are talking, there are some things I say in Dagbani, and they won’t know what I have said. Right now as we are sitting, I am sure that they don’t know what is called *tafirli* in Dagbani. If they travel to some place and a Dagbana asks them if they have *tafirli* in their pocket, they will just be standing there wondering what that fellow said. What is *tafirli*? If you put your hand in your pocket, there is some dust you will remove along with some thread or cotton. That is *tafirli*. And in our Dagbamba living, if someone asks you, “My friend, do you have a *pesewa* for me?”, and you have no *pesewa*, you say, “Oh! I don’t even have *tafirli*. There is no *tafirli* in my pocket.”

And so the village children know more about our Dagbani language and our Dagbamba living. Even when a village child is small, he has more sense than a town child who has grown. The children who were given birth in the town don’t know what the village children know. And truly, in the villages, what the elder people tell their children is this: they tell them to respect every old person, because a child can’t be respecting his father and leave other old people. And so the first thing they teach the children is to respect their elders. As for a village child, they train him to fear an old person, or to respect an old person. If you respect an old person, your life will go further, but if you have no respect for an

old person, your life won't go further. If a small village child is not respecting old people, he is not far from getting trouble. And so the villagers know how to give respect to their elders. If you are older than this man, then it is true that you are older than him, and he will be respecting you. And I can tell you that they even have something in the villages: if you are an old man and you tell a lie, they can't even say that you told a lie. We people in town, we don't know about that, and we don't mind anybody. The people in the towns find it easy to tell an old person that he is a liar. Even if your beard is white like the moon, if you the old man in the town tell a lie, a child about three years old will just stand in front of you and tell you that you are a liar and run away and leave you there. And it means that we don't know what is forbidden, and we have no sense about that. This is why I say that the villagers have sense more than us, and they fear more than us. And we the people in town say they have no sense.

The way I am talking about the villagers, truly, I am talking to you about my own starting, because I was born in the village. It was at Voggo that they gave birth to us, and from Voggo I went to Nanton. And since the time I came to Tamale, I have been living here with the way I was trained at the village, and I have been holding closely to what our fathers were showing us. If you grow up in a village, the only thing your father will do to you is to let fear enter you. And he will be talking about what he grew up and met and what your grandfather also taught him, and so that is what he is also going to take and talk to you. If you are coming to do something bad, your father will tell you, "Hey! My friend, have fears!" And then you too, you will think twice about what you were going to enter. As for us, at that time, if someone was going to do something and our father told us something like that, we always thought that the way he talked to us, if we went and did it, we would die. And we too, we didn't want to die. So what our father said, we would have to take our time and stand quietly. And he would tell us, "The way I shouted on you, my father also talked to me like that." Then he would begin to tell us the way his father too was looking after his children. And so this is our father's talk I'm talking to you now. What I have just talked, that is what our fathers took and looked after us. If you ask anyone who was trained in the villages, if that person were to be the one talking here and he opened his mouth, it is the same thing he will say. It is because of our respect and the fears our father put into us. That was why we were able to know much about the Dagbamba tradition.

My senior brother Mumuni is staying at Savelugu, and the way our father trained us, that is what he is also taking to train his children right now in his house. He tells them, "This is what my father told me. And I want all of you to be doing that. What I am talking to you, if you refuse it, if you go to some place and

do a wrong thing there, they will mention your name there and mention my name there. And I don't want one day somebody will go to some place, and somebody will ask, 'How did Mumuni train his children?' And so I want when I talk something, and then you will take the talk, just as I also took my father's talk." This is what my brother Mumuni has been telling his children. The child God made well will collect his talk, and the one God didn't make well will collect this modern times' talk. And so if you are a village child, this is what your father will be telling you. A villager doesn't leave freedom to his children.

As for the town children, the reason why we can't train them the way our fathers trained us is because this time they are seeing many different things in the towns. In the town, there are cinemas and videos. Will you sit outside and they will come and sit by you? They will go to the cinema. A child won't take time to sit down and listen to your old talks. Do you see this hour we are sitting now? If you are in the town and you have your child, by now he's at the football field. And you the father, if you want him to send to buy something, you won't see him. In the evening, he will send himself to cinema hall or the video place. If not that, he will be at the *Simpa* playing. Before he will come back to the house, you will be sleeping. And if he is going around like this, and he doesn't sit with you the father, how can he listen to you? We have been talking. The child doesn't want to listen. And so what have you got to do with him again? You don't have anything to do with him again. If you want to stop the child from going to all these places, he won't agree because the other children are also going. If you want to put these modern children down and tell them that this is what our fathers did to us, they will tell you, "As for you people, you were fools. That was why your fathers were able to train you like that." And so if God doesn't make a child well, you will talk and talk and become tired. Do these modern children say, "As for us, we suffered"? You won't hear it. So we were fools; that was why we suffered. But we too, we are seeing that the way we suffered, it is better than: they are not suffering now, and they are facing their problems. You will try and try and try, and you can't control them, and so you have to leave it. That is how it is.

But as for the village, if you send your child, "Go to this place," he will go. Maybe you will send him to the farm, "Go and dig yams and bring them home." When he goes to the farm, he will dig the yams, tie them in a bundle and carry it to the house. If you are going to give it to somebody as a gift, then you will direct him, "Take it and go and give such-and-such a person." He will take it and carry and send it there and give it to that person. And if it is *guinea corn*,<sup>5</sup> you cut it

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5. guinea corn: sorghum



and put it down at the farm. This is villagers' talk! You will tell the child that he should take a basket to the farm and carry the guinea corn and come home. And he will go with the basket and load it with the guinea corn and bring it home. Then you will direct him, "Go and give it to such-and-such a person." He will carry it straight to the place, and the person will say, "We thank God." And the child will come back home, and tell you, "My father, I have gone to the person you showed me. And he said if I come I should tell you that 'May God bless you and give you what you want.'" At that time, you the father will know that where you sent him, truly, the child has gone there. The one you have sent the child to has collected the gift, and he is happy. And when the child comes back and tells you, then you will also be happy. As for village children, that is their benefit. But as for a town child, sometimes you will send him, "Go and do this thing for me." The place you send him, if he goes there and sees something that interests him, he won't come directly. Sometimes he will be there for a long time. When he comes back and he's entering the house, he will forget that you sent him before he went out and saw that thing that interested him. If you don't see him, then it's finished.

Truly, I'm just comparing the town life to the village life, and the village life is different from the town. And what I am telling you is this: this is how our fathers trained us when they gave birth to us. The way of living of the villager is such that if a villager gives birth to a child, before the child gets from four or five years to six years, he will have some sense which someone from the town will not have. Sense like what? The villager knows how to be afraid, and a villager has the sense he will use to respect the other, and he has the sense which he will give to small children to hold so that they will also teach their children. The village child who is small, they will also let him see suffering so that he will be used to it, and that one too will make him different from the town child. It's only now that things have changed, but formerly they were not allowing a village child to eat much. The child's father and grandfather were not taking food to train children. If a child was eating plenty, they wouldn't agree. They were taking it to compare to when they were children, and war came. Sometimes a war would come and some of them would walk for four days, and they would not know where food was. And the old people were holding that way of living. When they cut and shared food in the house, they would only cut a very small portion for the children. Sometimes an old person would cut the food and put it in his hand and then put soup there and give it to the small child to eat, and he would be cutting the food little by little and putting it in his hand with the soup to feed the child. And he would say that if the child is used to suffering, if war comes, the child will be used to the suffering. And so the village children are used to suffering, and this is how they live when they are young.

When these village children grow up, they cannot spend money as a town person can spend. It is during their childhood that their fathers will gather them round and tell them how to be spending. When they are children, their fathers will not allow them to have money in their pockets so that they will learn how to spend. If a villager should come to the town and see you spending more than two cedis in eating, he will say that you are a fool. And a villager won't be spending on good clothes. Even sometimes some of them may have fine clothes, but they cannot put them on all the time as we do in town. If you are a villager and everyday you put on a nice shirt, when your friends see you, they will say, "Eh! As for our friend, he is trying to become a useless person. He doesn't want to go to the farm again. Every day he is putting on fine clothes." A young boy in the village will not be wearing shirts like the town boys. If not that this time everything is changed, you couldn't see a village child putting on a shirt. He will just be sitting at the farm and at home like that without any shirt, and mosquitoes and other kinds of insects will be biting him. That alone will show someone sense, and the sense is different. We the people in town call them fools, and the villagers take it that living in that way, they get sense, because it shows them how to eat suffering. And all this makes the village living different from the town living.

And we in the town, the sense we have: we have the sense to cheat one another, and the sense which will let us get and eat, and the sense which will let us get money and be spending. The sense in the town is just, "What will I do to cheat people and eat?" But these villagers, they don't know what cheating is. Even if they see somebody cheating, they fear him. And it's not from anywhere. If you sow a seed, it is the same seed which will grow from the ground; it will not grow a different seed. The villagers, their forefathers gave birth to their fathers and they also feared cheating. And so if a villager gives birth to his child, the child too will be afraid of cheating.

And the reason why villagers are afraid of cheating one another is that they fear going to the chief's house. If the villager cheats his friend, when they go to the chief's house, the small thing that he has cheated from his friend, more than that is going to come out of him. And so these villagers, if they give birth to a child, they will teach the child to be afraid of cheating the friend. It is because a villager doesn't want the child to be put before the chief someday at the chief's house. If a village child does a bad thing, it won't come and eat just the child alone. Even if the child grows up to be a man and they are going to judge the case in the village, if the child's father is there, they won't take everything to point at the child; they will rather point at the father, and they will carry the case on to the father. If you are a villager and you give birth to a child, and what you speak to

the child, the child doesn't listen, you the father, your heart will not lie down. Any time an old lady is going to say something, she will say, "So-and-so's child," and any time an old man is going to say something, he will say, "So-and-so's child." That alone will let you the father be thinking about the kind of child you have given birth to. The best thing is that what you taught the child, that is what you will be hearing about him. And so the villagers, when they give birth to their children, they only teach them how to be afraid. And this is how their life is.

And so how a villager is, from the time he is given birth up to the time he will be very, very old, he will still be holding what his parents trained him to be. Truly, to me, I can say that the town living is better than the village living. And even the villagers, many of them would prefer the town, but they can't stay in town. They believe that they the villagers cannot do what we the people in town are doing. Truly, some of the villagers, their way of living is just like ours in the town, but they themselves fear the town, and they believe that even if they come and stay here for three years, they will still be villagers like the first time. And even if I don't say it, the maalams say that the heavens of the world are the towns, and the hells of this world are the villages. They say that because there is a lot of suffering in the villages. There are bad things and there are difficult things. Truly, we are all the same. But the sense of the village is not in the town. If you are living in the village, you know what is forbidden more than the one living in town. And truly, if somebody knows what is forbidden, he has got sense. We the people in town, we are free more than the people in the village. Our roaming is free. And we take the sense of the villagers to be foolishness. But truly, on the part of foolishness, it is the foolishness of us people in the town that we take to be sense. And this is how it is.

How a villager is, and how a village old person is, truly, a villager has his way of living. The village way of living shows that if an old villager has many people in his house, his eyes will not be satisfied with the chief who is holding them in his village. If the villager does a wrong thing, and they will send him to the chief's house and charge him. And he will say to the chief that he has many more people than the chief, and so the chief is not more than he is. The villager who has many people will be doing this all the time, doing the wrong thing and not minding anybody. And so when we the town people look at what they do at the village, we say that they are fools.

And where a villager goes, the distance is not farther than the distance he will go to visit his other friends in the same village and greet them in the mornings. And these villagers, even in the Praying Festival, they won't bother coming to the town. But as for the market, they will come; on the market day, whatever happens, they will come to the market. And again, as for the *Damba*

Festival time, every old villager will come to the town. That will be the time they show themselves and people will see them. Apart from that, a villager will not be coming to the town. An old person at the village has no place to go apart from where I have said. He is not going to the farm unless to look at what his children are doing there. He will not be doing the farming work again. He will just go and sit under a shaded tree and be looking at them. If he likes, he will be holding an axe. If he sees a small tree that is standing in a wrong way, he will cut it down. When they finish farming that day, he will let the children carry it to the house, break it into pieces and put down. In the rainy season when the weather is cold, he will take the wood inside and make fire to keep himself warm in the room. This is what the old village people do. They have nothing to do in the town, and so they don't even like coming to town.

And as the villagers don't like coming to the town, the village children also hold that way of living. In the village, if your father is a farmer, he will show you farming. If it is daybreak, and if your father is strong and he's farming, and he's going, you will take a hen coop and hang it on the shoulder to carry the chickens to the farm. If you the child were sitting down, and your father takes a hen coop and hangs it on his shoulder, then at that time you will stand up, and you will go to your father and collect the coop: you are going to the farm. The village boys, by the time they are up to eight years, they have nothing to do except going to the farm, and they have nothing again to do except looking after cattle and other animals. These two things are with the villagers, and a human being will not gather these two things and go to some place again. When the village children come to town, their walking is different, and you will see them and know them. They fear the town children, and they don't come near them. As for the sense the village children have got when they are small, we say, "Their eyes don't satisfy on us"; it means that they don't regard us or they don't have trust in us.

If you are a villager and you always like going to the town, your friends will tell you that it is certain that one day you will involve yourself in big trouble, because the town is all the time full of troubles. I can even tell you that there is a village about thirty miles away from Tamale, and there are some old men at that village, and since they were born they've never seen Tamale. It's not that such an old man is not strong to come to Tamale, and it's not that he has no lorry fare to come. He just wants people to call him that he is truly a real Dagbana. He doesn't want to involve himself in any talk. So the villagers are not used to coming to town, because when they were young, their fathers trained them not to be coming to town and involving themselves with people. Their fathers told them to be afraid of putting their hands into other people's troubles, and if somebody doesn't bring his case to them, they shouldn't go and interfere in that person's case. Even

if a villager comes to town, when the town people group and sit at one place, when he comes to sit with them, he sits some yards away from them. He will not sit among them. And if you the town person are sitting with a villager and they bring food for you to eat, if you don't call him to come and eat, he will not come. You know, we the town people eat better food. If you see a villager whose living is difficult for him, it's from his eating. He may have the means, but he won't get sweet or better food to eat. And so the villager would like to come and eat, but he does not want to hear talks, and that is why he won't come.

Apart from that, I can even say that if something happens to a villager, and it is worrying him a lot, he can't just bring it out to the notice of many people. It's not that Dagbamba are difficult to know. We are different. You can be staying with somebody, and it will keep long and you will not know the talk that is in his stomach. And there can be somebody, when you stay with him, going to three days, you will know his secret. Such a person, his way of living is not all that good: it is better that you will be staying with somebody and you will say, "This person, I have kept long with him, and up till now, I don't know his secrets." And so in Dagbon here, it is not all people who know the secrets of one another. This is how it is. And so these villagers, they don't like talking by heart,<sup>6</sup> and they don't like to interrupt into<sup>7</sup> talks. They are not used to it because their fathers were not used to it. The villagers don't want their fellow friends to hear anything about their secrets. And what of their elders? A villager doesn't want to involve himself in any talk and he will happen to do something which is wrong, and it will come to be put on all of his people.

And so these villagers have their way of living, too. These villagers, they don't know how to cheat one another, but to borrow money from somebody and pay it back is very difficult for them. It's not that we don't lend money to one another in Dagbon. Truly, if somebody comes to you and wants money, and you lend it to him, it is even more than giving a gift. What you give someone as a gift, maybe it will only be adding to what he already has, but the one who comes to you to borrow hasn't got what he needs, and he is sitting down useless. When you give him, he will say that you have no equal. Lending money to someone is like giving alms, because he hasn't got what he needs, and so talking on the part of our Islamic religion, we say that a person who lends money to people has more blessing than someone who gives gifts. But what God doesn't want is profit: if you lend somebody two cedis and he comes to pay you three cedis, it's not good. But on the part of the villagers, lending money and giving money look like the

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6. by heart: for no reason, without purpose or thought or plan, haphazardly, randomly, casually

7. interrupt into: get involved in

same thing. It's not that a villager doesn't want to pay back the debt. But sometimes somebody will borrow money from someone in the village, and the lender will come to ask for the money, and it will be trouble. What a villager prefers is that he borrows something from you and he doesn't pay you back, but any time you also see him holding something, you come to get it from him so that it will replace what he had from you. A villager likes that better than to hear somebody say, "Bring my money." Villagers don't want that at all. If you lend money to a villager and you continue asking him for it, he won't come to you for anything again, and he will be going around to tell others that if someone borrows something from you, you will always be asking him at any time that he is holding this thing or that thing of yours. And all this, the villagers don't like it. That is why I am telling you the villagers don't like worrying talks.

I can say that the town living is somehow free, and I can say that the villagers know what is forbidden, but truly, the villagers do what their hearts want, and I think that what is forbidden in the villages is not all that much. Truly, they are very free. They are free, but the way they are free is different from the way the town people are free. As for the villagers, they have freedom, but the freedom they have is that they won't go and get trouble. If it is daybreak, a villager will go to the farm, and he will farm until he becomes tired. If he comes home, maybe he will not even take time to bathe: he will only go and lie down. He won't walk by heart, and he won't go to some place and put himself into trouble. He's tired and he's lying down. You will go and visit him and be talking to him, and he won't be listening; sometimes he will sleep. He won't have free legs to walk and go and enter into trouble. But the person living in the town, he will go and walk by heart and go and enter into some trouble, and this trouble comes from the way he walks.

And so the people in the villages, they are very, very happy with the village life. All the disturbance or the troubles that are with the town people, none of it worries the villagers. As for them, they always have peace of mind when they go to sleep. When a villager sleeps and day breaks, if there are yams in the house, he will roast a yam and eat, and he will go to farm. He won't take his money from his pocket to buy food and eat. The yam he ate, it comes from his farm. He hasn't bought it. If he has money in his pocket, it will always be lying down. The yam he ate without using that money to buy it, it has kept the money down for him. The day the spending of the money will come, he will take the money and go and spend it at the place where it will help him. But as for the town, you will buy food. When day breaks, you will wake up and you will spend some money you were not thinking to spend. If there is a wedding, or a funeral, or the naming of a newborn baby, you will go and give money. If you don't have money, you will go

and borrow. But in the village, that spending is not there. As for a villager, he doesn't fear poverty. This is why they have peace of mind in the village.

And so where the villagers are is very good for them. It has given them a peaceful mind. Every day they have peace. We the people in the towns, we always go to them, and we too, we always have peace with them. As for the town, there is no farming, and if you a town man wants to farm, you have to go and beg a villager for land, and he will give you an area of land to farm and get food. If you farm and get food, it is because of the villager you got it. Truly, we in the town are benefiting from the villagers. But the villagers farm up to the way they want. And they don't spend money by force: unless it is very necessary that a villager should spend money before he will spend it. That is why villagers, they have peace of mind. Do you see how the villagers are? It's very good for them. The worries and disturbances and confusion of the town are not there in the villages. And so their minds are clear, and they have peace of mind. That is the reason why I say that the villagers are free.

And I can say again that at the moment, the villagers and the town people, they are one. As I'm talking to you about the villages, I am following the way of talk, because if you are going to talk about something, you start from the beginning. And so what I have talked about is the olden days part of the village life. In these modern times, everything has changed. You see Savelugu? It doesn't look like a village again. You see Sagnerigu? You see Lamashegu? You see Banvim? You see Vitin? Some of these villages around here are now just part of Tamale. And so now there are some villages where this modern living is there. In the olden days, the eye-opening was just in the town. This time it is not only in the town that you can get eye-opening. There are some villages, if you go to such a village now, there is a schoolroom there. A football park is there, too. And there is a mosque too. In the olden days, there were some villages, you would go there and you wouldn't see a Muslim there who prays. But this time, there are many Arabic schools in the villages. If it is Friday in a place like Savelugu, all the villagers around Savelugu will all come to Savelugu and say the Friday prayers. How can you stand in a line with somebody in a mosque to pray, and he will fear you? There are no fears again.

In the olden days, too, a villager didn't want to hear that a chief wanted him at the chief's house. Now the villagers and the chief are friends. Whatever the chief wants, he has to consult the villagers. The villager does not fear the chief again. And so the villagers and the chiefs are one. And the village chiefs, too, this time they have the way to come to the town and meet the town chiefs. The village chiefs will just come and see the chief, and they will not go to see any elder to lead them. The town chiefs have given them that kind of way. Why is it

so? As for the town people, they don't care about who is the chief. And so what the chief will do and it will be good for him, it is within the village chiefs. Nowadays if a chief eats chieftaincy in a town, if he doesn't take the village chiefs and add them into himself, then nothing of his can be done well. So why is it that the village chief will fear the chief again? A village chief does not fear any chief. It is not there again.

And again, if a town person wants something to be done well, he has to go and catch a villager into his hand before his something will be done and it will be well. If you have your friend in the village, if he has some talk on the part of the town, you will help him. And if you need something on the part of the village, say, if you need an animal, you can send to call your friend. If he comes, you will tell him, "I have just called you to tell you that this is what is worrying me, so maybe you can help me." The villager will say, "Yes." And the problem that has come to him now, he will go back home and find it and bring it to you his friend. And at this time, there are no fears between the town people and the village people again. The villager does not fear the townsperson again. The village young men don't fear the town young men again. In the olden days, the reason why the villagers were afraid of the town was because what the town people were doing was different. Now they have all become one.

And so nowadays the village children don't fear the town children. In the olden days, there were the things which were not in the villages, and the town children used to take it and bluff the village children. But what is in the town today, if you the one in the town want to say that you have been going to school, at this time the village boys also go to school. And if you want to bluff with your Arabic schooling, the village children too have Arabic school in their villages. So what are you going to take to be more than them? If you want to bluff that you can play football, in the village they have football to play. If it is cinema that you always go to see, you can see cinema in Savelugu, and the villages near to Savelugu, if they are going to show a cinema, then all the children in these small villages will come and see how the film is. And so there is no day you the town boy can bluff to the village boy that you have always been looking at films, because the village boy also sees films. What will you take to bluff him? And so this time, too, the village boys and the town boys are friends. In the town, those children who have the means make friends with the village children. If the village boy comes from his village, he will just come and enter the house of the friend in the town. How will it be that the village boy will fear the town boy again?

And so on the part of our Dagbamba villagers, what I have talked, that was how they started. But this time, there are some villages where it is not there like that again. This time it has changed, and so you the townsperson and the person



from such villages, you are both the same. You can't show him eye-opening. You go to school; he also goes to school. You go to Arabic school; he also goes to Arabic school. You pray; he also prays. This is what is happening in some of the villages in Dagbon here. This modern living has gone to reach some of these villages, and some of the village children are just like these modern children in the towns.

And again, I can say that what I have talked to you about villagers, there are many villages where they are still holding closely to that way of living. And as I myself am sitting in Tamale, that is how my fathers trained me in the villages. And so on the part of our Dagbamba tradition, that is our starting. If you are going to talk about something, you should start it from the beginning, and we Dagbamba, this is where we started. And truly, even in this modern time, the children in the villages know more about the customs of Dagbon, about how Dagbamba live and about how their fathers were living in the olden days. It is because in the villages, they are still holding the customs, and the children in the villages are still interested to sit with their fathers and learn more about the talks of Dagbon. As everything has changed, that has not changed.

But now, as we are sitting in Tamale here, there are many children in my house, and they don't come and sit with me in the night. The children I have given birth to at Tamale, they don't know anything about our Dagbamba customs, and they don't know anything about the work I'm doing. If a child doesn't sit with an old person, how can he know something about the tradition by the time he is grown up? He can't. Dagbamba say that when a fish is wet, you can bend it; but when it dries, you cannot try to bend it or it will break. These modern children are growing up and running in the town, and they want eye-opening. They say they are following those whose eyes are open, and they don't know anything about Dagbon. They know how to eat the house food and grow. Everyday they eat food in the house, but they don't know the talks inside the house. They don't take instructions, and whatever they want is what they do. Can they know any talk? If you don't stay close to an elderly person, how can you be sensible? And so they know how to eat and use the food to grow, and that is all.

And what I am saying is that these children should have been coming to sit with us whenever these villagers come to sit with us to hear our talks and learn more about us, but the children don't do that. If they know that what they are learning in the schools is good for them, then they should also know that it is good they learn the talks of their fathers. Those who are at my age, when we were children, any time we were free, we used to go and sit with our fathers, and when strangers from different villages were coming to sit with our fathers, we would also go and sit and listen to what they were going to talk. But as this modern

living has come, it's not standing again. And I think I will stop here, and tomorrow I will continue, and we will talk more about how the Dagbamba were living in the olden days, and the sense we had.