

Chapter II–28: *Madness*

Yesterday I told you that sicknesses are many in Dagbon here, and in this present day, there are some sicknesses that have just come to enter here. And the sicknesses we have, the white men and the doctors have been able to treat some of the sicknesses. But there is one sickness that I haven't seen that the white people are able to treat it: madness. As for madness, we knew it before the white men came, and it is there today and tomorrow. And today we are going to talk about how there are mad people in Dagbon, and how we look after them.

And in Dagbon, there is no sickness that is stronger than madness. As for madness, no matter how they treat it, if they treat you and you come to get health, you will still be a mad person. That is because it is God who brings madness. All of us, all black people here, we know that it is God who brings madness. We all know that, and we don't ask. But we just take it and call it that a mad person is someone who has dwarfs, or someone who has *alizinis*, evil spirits. That is all. In Dagbon, there are some people who have medicines to treat a mad person. They have been treating mad people, and those mad people they have been able to treat are more than those they have not been able to treat. If the people with medicine were not able to treat madness, then the mad people would be many here. There are some towns, if you go there, you will not see a mad person. Sometimes you will see that in that town there were some people who were mad, but those with medicine have been able to treat them, and they now have health.

In Dagbon, if madness should enter a person, that person's housepeople will take all their medicines to treat the person, and if they are not able to treat him, then they will have to go to someone who treats madness. It is not all Dagbamba who can treat madness, and those who treat it, there are many types of them because there are many types of madness. And so the mad person's housepeople will go to a soothsayer to find the person who can treat their mother's child. If the soothsayer looks and sees, they will have to send a messenger to the place or the house where they will treat the madness. The mad person's housepeople have seen that they cannot treat the madness, and so they will go and buy cola, and take it and give to the person who treats madness. When they give the cola, the one who sends the cola will tell the medicine man that a big sickness has caught either his father, his mother, his brother, or his sister, and this messenger will say that it is a sickness that has caught him at once.

As for the treating of madness, when they send to tell the person who treats, that person will also call his child that the child should go and look at the sickness.

This child is helping the father. In Dagbon here, if someone has medicine, his child will know it; or if his child does not know it, then his nephew will know it. The child the medicine man sends will come and look at the mad person. When he finishes and he knows the sickness, he will go home and tell his father. As madness has many types, we have the dwarf's madness and also the alizini madness. As for the dwarf's madness, you can treat it and the person will get health, because a dwarf dies. The dying of an alizini is hard, but an alizini also dies; it can die. But the alizini madness, you cannot treat someone so that he will be completely all right again. And so, if the child comes and sees the mad person, he will go and tell the father whether it is an alizini that has climbed him or a dwarf that has knocked him.

And at that time, the medicine man will go to soothsayers, and the soothsayers will look, and if they see the medicine he will take and use to treat the mad person, the medicine man will tell the mad person's housepeople to bring him. And so here is the case: the mad person's housepeople have already seen a soothsayer, and the soothsayer has already told them that it is this very medicine man who can treat their person. But the medicine man will say, "One person does not see witch-fire." As he has said this proverb, it shows that one person does not treat sickness. If witches are on top of a tree in the night, when they open their hands, there is a red fire there. If you wake up in the night and come out from your room and see it, you will go and wake somebody up and tell him that he should also come out and see. If not that, maybe the next morning if you want to talk about what you saw, people will say it's a lie. At that time the one you woke up and called will also say, "I saw it, too." That is the meaning of "One person does not see witch-fire." If I take my sense to do some work, I will call you to bring your sense and add it so that we will do the work. And so when the medicine man goes to the soothsayer, and the soothsayer looks and also sees that he will be able to treat the mad person, then the medicine man will send a message to the mad person's housepeople, and they will bring the mad person.

If this mad person is a man and he has a wife, when they bring him, they will add his wife and also a young person. If it is a woman who is mad, they will send, say, a young girl, and they will add a young man to go with them. The two people will take the mad person and go to the medicine man's house. The day they reach there, if the medicine man has some medicine with him, he can prepare some of the medicine: he will give some to the mad person to eat, and he will put some in water and give it to the mad person to bathe with it. There is some madness, when it enters a person, he will be doing things by heart, just doing things and saying things in whatever way. If they give him the medicine to eat and

to bathe, and if it is true that the medicine can treat him, you will see that the mad person will become cool. And there is some madness, too, the mad person will be sitting down very quietly, and if they give him the medicine to eat and to bathe, you will see that he will start waking up and be doing some things by heart. As for the quiet mad people, truly, to treat them is difficult. But those who are by heart, to treat them is not so difficult.

And so, if they see the medicine that will be able to treat the mad person, then the medicine man will let them go and get some of that medicine from the bush. The medicine is not from anywhere: it comes from trees and bushes that are standing. The young person who followed the mad person from his house and came, he is the one the medicine man will show the medicine to, and that young person will go to the bush and bring it back to the house. The medicine man will show this young person the names or the types of the trees and grasses so that he will go and search for them. When he goes and finds them, he will get the leaves and he will dig under and get the roots, and bring all to the house. And so you should know that there are different kinds of medicine. Medicine is never one. Somebody's medicine shows that they should shave the head of the mad person before they put the medicine. And somebody will leave the mad person like that, without shaving. And somebody's medicine: they have to whip him with the *barazim*, our local whip. And somebody's medicine: they have to put our local handcuffs on him. These handcuffs are made by our local blacksmiths, and medicine is inside the handcuffs. When they handcuff him like that, if his eyes were hard, he will become cool. That is how some people's medicines are. And so medicines are different kinds.

And again, when they see the medicine they are going to use to treat the mad person, the medicine will eat money and hens. Someone's medicine will eat four hens; someone's, five hens; someone's, even seven hens; and others will eat two hens or one hen. And so when the young person brings the medicine, the medicine man will show him the number of hens and the amount of money the medicine will eat, and the young person will go back to his mad person's house and tell his housepeople, "They say we should bring such-and-such a number of hens and such-and-such an amount of money." If the money is three cedis, they will get it and give it to the young person, along with the hens. And he will take it to the medicine man.

At that time, the medicine man will go and kill the hens, remove the feathers, and put the hens on fire to remove the hairs. And the medicines the boy brought from the bush, he will scrub them and remove the dirt. After that, he will prepare the medicine. There are some medicines they will pound in a mortar, and

some they will grind, and some too they will cut into small pieces and put in the sun to dry before they pound it. And there are some they will cut into long pieces and put into a pot. If it is leaves they got from the bush, they will take all and put inside the pot. The girl who was added to the others when they came, her work is to be putting the pot and water on fire. When they prepare the medicine, they will cut part of it, and the medicine man will take it to smear on the head and the body of the mad person. And the part that is left, the girl who was putting the water in the pot will make very small balls of the medicine. She will be doing that, cooking the hens and putting the medicine in food. That is her work. And so that is new medicine, and on that day the mad person will eat some of the medicine, and he will bathe with some of the medicine in his bathing water. If the medicine will receive him and he will be treated, it is there that they will see. When they brought the mad person, he was doing bad things, and when he eats the medicine and bathes with it, by the next day he will change. If he changes, they know that the medicine will receive him, that is, he will be treated. They will give him that medicine for one week — seven days. If it is that he has not changed, he will still be eating and bathing that medicine for one week.

After the seven days, if the medicine does not receive the mad person, the medicine man will go out again and see a soothsayer. He will tell the soothsayer that people have brought a sick man to him and that the soothsayer should show him somebody he can go and meet so that he will not eat disgrace. And the soothsayer will tell him, “Go to this place,” or “You will be sitting down, and such-and-such a fellow will meet you. And if you meet the fellow, your medicine-bowl is with him.” And so the medicine to treat the mad person is with him. If it is that the soothsayer shows him a certain town, the medicine man himself will get a cola and go to that town and meet the other medicine man. And he will tell him, “They have brought me a sick person, and I have used all my sense, and I have not been able to treat him. That is why I have come to you, for you to help me.” And the other man will say, “All right, it doesn’t matter. One person does not see witch-fire. So let the two of us go together and see.” Have you seen? He is coming to help the medicine man, and so the medicine man is not the only one who will treat the mad person. And he will follow him and they will go.

When this man comes and sees the mad person, he will know the medicine they will use to treat him, and he will tell the medicine man, “Don’t come again. I will send a child, and I will show him all the talk that is in it.” If the medicine that they will use is already with that man, he will go and remove one round ball of the medicine and give it to a child to take to the first medicine man. And he will say, “Get this medicine and go and give to your grandfather so-and-so or your father

so-and-so and tell him that he should collect the medicine and put it in food for the sick person to eat, and it will be daybreak and we will see what we will do.” And if God says that the medicine should be with that man, when the mad person eats it, the next day it will be the mad person himself who will talk the thing that is inside him. He will talk good. He was talking bad things: that was why we were calling him a mad person. He has not talked good sense, and now he has come to talk good sense. Will you call him a mad person again? No. At that time, you yourself will see him and know that the medicine will receive him and he will be treated. And you will see that the medicine man’s heart will be white. He will get a child and send to the one who gave him the medicine, and say, “It seems that your medicine will change the sickness.” And then that man will get a lot of the medicine and give to the child to take it back and give to the medicine man so that he will see what will happen. And by then, he will do all the work of the medicine. He will take some to cook food for the sick person to eat, and he will take some and make the sick person bathe with it. He will be doing all this for seven days. And if God wants the mad person, you will see that the two medicines, the eating and the bathing, will treat him.

If the sickness should change, and if it is that they have brought the mad person for two weeks, you will hear the medicine man say that the mad person should remain with him for two months. And the mad person will be there, and the medicine man will be giving him the medicine to be eating. The time the medicine man will know that the mad person is getting health will be when the mad person tells him, “My friend, the sitting I am sitting, I am not sitting in my house.” If the mad person is a man, he will say, “I was a householder sitting in my house. And the sitting I am sitting, I know that it is not my house. And I think it is something that has brought me here.” A mad person who is getting health may talk like this, and the medicine man will know he is getting health. The next day, you will see that when the medicine man is going to the farm, you will hear the mad person say, “My friend, let me accompany you to the farm.” And the medicine man will say, “Let’s go.” And when they are going, all the talks the mad person will be talking, the medicine man will be catching all. If it is good talks, he knows. If it is dead talks, if it’s the talk of madness, he will also know.

Going to two months, if it is good talks, and no bad talk comes inside it, you will see that the medicine man will send to the mad person’s housepeople and say that they should get such-and-such a number of hens and bring, and that he will shave the head of the mad person and shave his bad hair away. They will search for hens quickly. And the money the medicine man is going to get from them, they will get the money and send and give it to the medicine man. When he gets

all this, he will do all his medicines and shave the hair of the mad person. Then the medicine man will gather medicines and give to the mad person. There is some medicine in the form of powder: if the madness should get up again, they can put the medicine in fire, and when the smoke enters him, it can drive away the alizini. If the medicine is in the form of balls that the mad person can cut and put in food or water, the medicine man will give him. The medicine man will get all this and give to the mad person, and the mad person will go home.

The day he gets to his house, there is white heart in his whole house. It is because some bad talk can happen to somebody, and he will not go back to his house. Sickness will catch somebody, and they will take him to go to someone to treat him, and he will not come back to his house. And so madness has entered him, and they have taken him to another town, and he has come back. It is white heart. You will know that it is good, because you know that someone can go and not come back. And all his housepeople will be happy. People will be coming from other towns and will greet them, "How is our white heart?" And so, some madness is like that, and they are able to treat it.

Somebody can enter madness, and inside it he will be sitting down very, very quietly. They are talking to him, *ah-ah*. They are not talking to him, *ah-ah*. He is just sitting quietly. They will go to soothsayers, and they can take such a person and go to a medicine man's house. The medicine for someone can be the barazim, our local whip. When they get to the medicine man's house, if the medicine man has the whip, when it's daybreak, early in the morning, the he will take the whip and whip the mad person six or seven times. As the mad person has been sitting down quietly, it is inside the whipping that the medicine man will know whether or not he will be able to treat the mad person. He can be whipping him, and the mad person may ask him, "As you are whipping me like that, have you bought me?" Or, "As you are whipping me like that, am I a fool?" Or, "As you are whipping me like that, am I a mad person?" If the mad person should talk one of these things, then he is somebody they can treat to get health. But when they are whipping him, if he is only putting his hands about and going, "*Um-um, um-um, um-m-m,*" then he will not get health. Some of the mad people you see walking about, such a mad person is one of them. When such mad people are going, they will be putting their hands on their bodies as if they have some things on their bodies. As for them, they will not get health again. But the one who asks the medicine man a question, by the wish of God, they can treat him and he will get health.

There can be another madness, and the mad person will be doing bad things. Somebody can be mad inside his house, and if he is a man, or even a family head,

he can take a knife. As he is holding the knife, if he sees anybody he knows, he will say that he will kill him. It is there that they will know that it is madness. Such madness, if it should attack a person, Dagbamba have something. We have irons, and it is blacksmiths who make it. The mad person's people will take the irons and catch him. He will be struggling, and they will take him and tie him to the post that stands in the middle of the room. We call it *daantalga*, and it supports the roof. The sitting hall has also got this type of post, and if they want, they will bring him into the hall. There is a chain like a handcuff, and it is also blacksmiths who make it. And they will take the mad person and put the chain on his legs and sit him there. They are doing this because of his struggles. When they bring food, sometimes such a mad person will not eat it. And he will be urinating there. They will go to soothsayers and see the one who can treat him, and they can take such a mad person and go to the medicine man's house. If God likes the mad person, the way they treated the first person I spoke of, they can treat him. And if God likes him, although he was doing bad things, he will become well.

These chains I have talked about, we have something else again. There can be somebody, he will enter madness and his eyes will be strong. He will set his face and be stubborn, and he will be struggling. They will take something like a wooden box, and they will make some holes in it. They will remove the top and put his legs inside the holes, and then they will take the top part and put it back so that he cannot remove his legs. He will be sitting down free, except for his legs. And he cannot struggle again, because even his legs are strong, he cannot move them. Some people do that to a mad person. As for a mad person who is bad and they put his legs inside the box, sometimes such a person will take his legs and be knocking them and be struggling. Somebody can get up and run and fall back. And there will be sores on his legs.

They can hold someone like that for three months, or six months, or even sometimes up to a year, and there will be no change. They will be going to soothsayers, and they will not find any medicine man who is able to treat him. You will come to hear them say that they should make him foolish. You will hear the medicine man himself say, "As his eyes are strong, and he is struggling, if we remove the box from his legs, he will give people trouble. We should make him a fool." At that time the medicine man will get a medicine we call *jergili* — foolishness. And he will put it inside food. When the mad person eats it, he will become foolish. The struggling he was struggling, and the bad-doing he was doing, when he eats this medicine, he cannot do bad again. And by then you will see that they will remove the box or remove the chain from his legs, and he will come out. He does not have health, but he cannot do anything bad again.

And so, when they make someone foolish, it is that they have not been able to treat him. And they know that they cannot treat him so that he will become well. As they have chained him for a long time, they don't want to leave him like that. And as they know that he won't be well again, if they make him foolish, he cannot worry people. If not that, if this mad person does any bad thing, his housepeople will take the blame. Even sometimes the mad person will do bad to his housepeople. A person can be mad and kill his wife, or his mother, or his father, or his son, or his daughter, or his brother, or his sister. It can happen like that, and it has been happening. We have seen it here. And so when they make him foolish, he cannot kill anybody again. But he is not well either. There are some mad people like that in Dagbon here, and they have made them foolish. Don't you see mad people walking about? Have you ever seen someone killing someone? Such a mad person, if they make him foolish, his housepeople will not hold him again. They will not tie his legs and put him in the house again. We put the chains or the box on a mad person's legs to hold him, and we will see whether he will change or not. And you yourself, if you put the chains and you use all the medicines you have, and you see that he does not change, what will you do again? He won't change, and so you will make him cool down. He will go and be walking about, and at that time you will breathe a little, and you will be at rest. If he is your relative and you see him walking somewhere, your heart will be lying down a bit. But if he is going and killing people, as for that, you don't want it. And that is why we make some of our mad people foolish, and they will be walking.

You know, if strength should sit on a bone, whatever you do, the bone will break. And so, the mad person we are not able to treat, we cannot catch him and tie him: we will leave him and he will be walking. If he is somebody we have made foolish, and we bring him to the house and he refuses and goes out, we will leave him. We will not catch him. If he wants, he can be a very handsome person. Someone can walk like that and go to another place. Someone can go, and he will go and die. The time animals were there, a mad person could enter the bush, and a lion or a hyena would catch him and eat him. And no one would ask of him again. Someone could get up from here and walk to the South, and people would come and say, "We saw your house's mad person in such-and-such a town." Someone can go to the Mossi land, to Ouagadougou, and people will come from that place and say, "We saw your mad person at Ouagadougou." Someone will leave his town and go to a place like Tolon, Kumbungu, or Savelugu, and he will stay there. Some of the mad people, as they are walking, if they go to some place, if they know any of their relatives' houses, they will go there. When they go, they will

just be standing, because they cannot greet the way a normal person with good health can greet. And the people too will know, and they will say, “This is our mad relative.” And they will give him food to eat. When they give him the food and he finishes eating, then he will start going again.

And so these are some of the mad people you see walking about. There are some mad people, their madness wants them to be wearing clothes. And there is someone, his madness only wants shorts. And someone’s madness too will let him put just a small thing in front of him and be walking. And someone too, his madness does not want any clothes, and you will see him walking naked. But you will not catch him and bring him and make him sit down. You have tried all your medicines, and you have not been able to treat the madness. No one likes to see his person come out walking, and others will be seeing his weakness. But when it happens like that, you must know that it is more than your strength. And so, when a talk is stronger than you, you will have to be patient. These mad people walking about, sometimes someone can walk like that and come and know his house, and he will come home. He will not go to any place again. He is still mad, and he has no use for you. You don’t consult him in any talk. And he too will not enter into your talks. But as for food, you will give him. Someone can come home, and when it’s daybreak he will come out and sit down, and when it’s night, when he finishes eating, he will enter his room. And in Dagbon, this was how we were treating our mad people before the white man came here. And this is how it is.

And in Dagbon here, the maalams also treat madness. The way our local Dagbamba treat madness, there are medicines that a medicine man can give to a mad person, and it is the medicine which will show whether the madness will stop or not. When the mad person eats the medicine, he will open his mouth and talk, and when he talks, you will know whether he is talking good or he is not talking good. This is how their way is. But as for the maalams, they also treat madness, and they will talk to the mad person. They have a type of medicine, and they can even spit into their hands, and talk inside it, and take it and rub the mad person’s face. As a maalam is, if madness should climb on a person, and it is that God says the maalam should treat the fellow, the maalam will just catch the head and be talking and holding the head, and will come to spit on the head. And sometimes, by the power of God, the madness will finish. They will sometimes do that and ask the mad person, “What happened to you?” Sometimes the mad person will say, “Truly, it’s not anything.” And the maalam will say, “If it is not anything, then get up.” And if God likes somebody, he can get up. The maalams have that type of medicine, and as for them, they can also be calling the names of the alizinis they know, and they will be spitting and driving away the alizinis. And this is how it is.

And truly, I have told you that it is God who brings madness, but there can be some talk inside the family, and if a person does not do it, he can enter madness. And inside the family, there is something like that. It can be the house god, like *Tilo* or *Jebuni*, and if someone enters the madness and they go to a soothsayer, the soothsayer can look and then say, "Inside your family, if you don't go and make sacrifice to your house god, the mad person will not be well." Sometimes when they go and make the sacrifice, he will be well. And this talk is also with all of us here who are holding something old. If you are holding an old thing and you die, if no one in your family takes your old thing and holds it, madness will be following them.

We have this in our drumming, and I have already told you about that. If you are a drummer and you bring forth your daughter, you will take her and give her to a man. When you give her like that, if she gives birth to boys and she doesn't want any of the children to beat the drum, then by the work of God, the drumming will be killing all of the children. But if God wants somebody, he will let one of the children enter madness. By that time, the man who married your daughter will go and see soothsayers. And the soothsayers will tell him to run quickly and let his child run to the mother's house and collect their old thing, that is, the drum. And the soothsayers will say the child will not be well unless he does that. And you will see that they will bring the child to the drumming. When they let the child take the drum, if that is the thing which is causing the madness, then the madness will not worry him again even for one day.

And all the people that I have told you their work is following the family, they have this thing within themselves. If a soothsayer comes to die, it is good they take his sister's children and let one of them take up the soothsaying bag. If not that, all of them may die. But if God likes them, some of them won't die: one of them will enter madness, and they will go and see a soothsayer, and he will say, "It is the soothsaying bag which is following him." And the *tindanas* too have it, because the way of the *tindana* can catch a person, and the fellow will refuse it and enter madness. If he becomes a *tindana*, the madness will stop. And as our drumming follows our grandsons or our nephews, the butchers too have it like that. In this Dagbon here, the killing they kill, some of them are butchers who started in the old, old days. As for them, their old thing is the knife. It's a knife a butcher takes to kill animals and sell meat. If the butcher's knife should catch a person and he refuses, he can enter madness. And if they bring him and he gets the knife, the madness can leave him. And the local barbers, their old thing is also a knife they use to shave people, and if madness catches a person and they bring him, when they show him how to shave, the madness can leave him. And the

blacksmiths also have it. Their old thing is goatskin bellows. I'm not talking of those blacksmiths who have now seen that there is money inside it and they are learning it. I'm talking of those who were in it long, long ago. The time Naa Luro went to war, he called them, and he let nine goats be slaughtered, and he gave them the meat to eat, and they took the skins to make the bellows to pump the air. And Naa Luro gave them stones to make iron, and wood to make charcoal. All this, I have told you about it. That is the way of the blacksmiths, and long ago, no one was entering the work of the blacksmith unless from the family. And so, if the blacksmith's work is inside the family and follows somebody, if he refuses, he can enter madness. But when he starts to learn how to make things, the madness will leave him.

And so it is custom. A drummer is somebody with old talks. A soothsayer is somebody with old talks. A blacksmith is somebody with old talks. A barber is somebody with old talks. And all of them, their talks are more than one another. But I can say that the blacksmiths, it is now that some people are entering into them. And the butchers too, we have seen people killing animals and they are not in their family. And those who are now entering barbering, no one can count them. But I have never seen someone enter soothsaying unless it catches him. And I can say that no one enters into drumming in Dagbon here. In our family, it's not there. As for drummers and soothsayers, they are still standing at their place. I have never heard them saying, "This person has entered soothsaying," or "This person has come to be a drummer." Even you, if it is according to the custom, we cannot say you are a drum-enterer. As we have elders, when they see you, they call you Lunzɛɣu, and our grandfather was called Lunzɛɣu. It is inheritance, like the way a child can inherit the heart of his grandfather. The old people see you and see your work, and as they say that you are the Lunzɛɣu, no one can call you a drum-enterer. It can happen like that, that one tribe can come and inherit another tribe. Have you seen? That is the way of custom. And those people who are inside custom, if they refuse it, sometimes they will enter madness. And we have this talk inside our families.

And so we have seen all of this on the part of madness in Dagbon here. And this is what I know about it. And I think I have finished with the talk of medicines. Truly, this talk I have been talking, it has no end, but I think that what we have talked will do. And so it is finished, and tomorrow, if God agrees, we will start another talk again on the part of our living in Dagbon here.