

Chapter III–13: *Special Problems of Children*

Today we are going to continue the talk of children. Yesterday I told you that the bringing forth of children, to us Dagbamba, it is good, and at the same time, it has got many types. I have told you already that someone can bring forth a child, and he has no money, but before the naming, he cannot count his money. And this man who was never able to get enough money, he will know the covering of his anus. As for the richness of such a child, in Dagbon here, it is in the open. When the child is in the stomach of the mother, the money too will be in the stomach of the mother. And you the man will be suffering. When the woman brings forth, then you the man will start becoming rich. And as you have started becoming rich, you are still becoming rich. And there are some children, when your wife is pregnant, you are poor, and when your wife brings forth, poverty will be holding you more, and your wife will still be bringing forth. And I think that for all tribes, such different types of children are there, because bringing forth is bringing forth, and a child too is a child. And so the talk of children is very difficult to take and talk.

And the bringing forth of children is hard, because if you are bringing forth fine children, you can come to bring forth a bad child. Someone can bring forth a bad child and the child will be an *alizini*. This alizini is a bad spirit. It can come that when the woman is going to give birth, she will give birth to an alizini, and you the family will not know that it is an alizini. You have seen it as a human being. Sometimes it will reach two months or three months or five months before you will be watching the way the child is and know that it is an alizini. And it can happen that the time the child was born, the alizini was not there; unless the child grows before the alizini will come to the child. And so there are many ways of this alizini.

This alizini, you will be sleeping with it in the room, and it will not be there. The child will be lying in front of the mother, and when it's night, the mother will use her hand and will touch around and not see the child. Such children, they have been brought forth in Dagbon here. Some go out in the night. Some turn to be snakes. And there are some, their eyes, you yourself, you will see the eyes and fear will catch you. There are some, you will see the head and will not know what kind of head it is. It will not look as if it had come from the vagina of a woman. If somebody brings forth an alizini, this alizini can swear that the parents will not be human beings again. Or this child can swear that it will eat the mother and father before it will die. And inside this Dagbon, unless the parents get up and eat the life of the child, they will die and leave the child.

And so you can give birth to a child, and inside your seeing, you will see that the child is very, very strong. You have been seeing small children, but you haven't seen a child like that before. It will put fear into you, and you will call some big men who have got medicine to come and see your child for you. If you are somebody who goes to soothsayers, you can go to a soothsayer. If the soothsayer should tell you that if you don't remove the child from your bone, it will eat your life, then you will know how you will go and get people with medicine to take the child away. And if it happens that you give birth to an alizini and not know that it is an alizini, the child will eat your life. If God likes you, those who have medicine will come and see a child like that. Sometimes you will take the child outside and be sitting down. Somebody who has medicine will be passing and see the child. And he will stand and be looking at the child quietly. That person might walk to a tree standing there and call somebody and say, "That fellow's child is an alizini, and if he doesn't look upon the child, the child will eat his life." A person who gives birth to an alizini and doesn't know, if God likes him, this is how somebody will see the child and talk to him.

Such bad children are there, and it is not from anywhere: it is God Who brings them. Apart from that, if a woman is pregnant and is always abusing her husband, it can happen that the woman will bring forth and the child will be an alizini. And bringing forth these bad children again, if a woman is pregnant and always sleeps in the compound, that can let her bring forth an alizini. And when they bring forth a child and they have not yet named the child and the navel too has not yet fallen, they don't go out of the room and leave the child. I don't know about the hospital, but in Dagbon here we don't do that, because it can make a child a bad child, or it can let an alizini come and change the child.

In Dagbon here, when you bring forth an alizini and you know, you will search for someone who has medicine, and he will come and put medicine on the child. When it's night, you won't see the child again. Some will go away; some will turn into a snake and go; some will turn into air. There are many people with different medicines like that. And someone will just come and take the alizini away. We have people who do that. And I have seen that in my house. My brother Sumaani gave birth to a certain child, and the child was called Sulemana. That child was very, very handsome. When the child was born, going to six months, we saw that the child's waist was becoming very big. And we saw that the child's legs were very large. And they were not swollen. When the child sat in the room and opened the eyes to look at you, fear would catch you. Sometimes you would look at the eyes of the child, and they would look like a human being's eyes, but sometimes you would look at the eyes and they would be changing. And

at that time, the mother was not well. Her breast was swollen, and it was swollen for about three months. And they looked, and the soothsayers said that the child has said it will not suck the mother's milk, and it will eat the life of the mother before it will die.

And they went to a village called Jimbayayili and brought a certain man. The day they brought the man, this man and the child slept in the room in our house. And truly, the man knew the talk that was in it. He said he slept with the child, and the child went out and left him, and he didn't see the child. It was in the morning that the child came back. And the man went back home, and he went and searched for medicine and came back. He burnt some medicine like incense, and he made the mother put the child at his back, and the mother gave the child to him. And he took the child to Jimbayayili. It is only he and God who know whether he used a stick to beat and kill the child. No one else knows, and it's about twenty years today. And such a child, when the child is not there, no one performs its funeral in this Dagbon. And no one cries. The mother has never sat down to remember and to think about the child. As for this, I have seen it in my own house.

And I've heard people talk. An alizini can turn into a snake. This snake, it is not that the child will turn into an actual snake. It is the head and tongue that will show, because they do the work that a snake does. The head the child was born with, you will see that the head will become very small. When the head shakes a little, the child will bring out the tongue and be licking it. That is the snake. And Dagbamba have a medicine; they will take the medicine and put it on the child, and the child will go away and leave the mother and the father. And we don't know where the child goes. And we don't care. When they put the medicine on it, it will go. No one will see it again. As for this, it's there; it's not something you should refuse. As I am not the only Dagbana, if you see any Dagbana you can ask whether somebody has ever given birth to a child and the child becomes a snake. As for this, it's not a lie. And even some maalams, when they see a snake inside a town, they will say "Asalaam Aleikum" three times before they kill it. If it's an actual snake, it will be lying there and you will kill it. But if it's an alizini, you won't see it again, and you won't know where it has passed. And so an alizini becomes everything. And that is how it is.

And again, giving birth to twins is very difficult in Dagbon here. Twins have got curved talks, and some people fear them, and some people don't fear them. Sometimes a typical Dagbana will be poor and give birth to twins, and he will be getting money, and sometimes someone will give birth to twins and will become poor. Someone will give birth to twins and become useless, and someone

will give birth to twins and become a chief. And so some Dagbamba like twins, and some Dagbamba fear them. As for the Mossis, I have heard somebody say that the Mossis fear twins, and if a Mossi person gives birth to twins and nobody knows about it, he will just kill them or he will bury them alive, just because of their bad talks. I have heard it, but I haven't seen it. But a typical Dagbana can go to soothsayers, and they will tell him that if he gives birth to twins, his body will become cool. If he was a person who didn't have anything in his hands, he will get something. And so some people go to soothsayers and the soothsayers tell them that, and twins are not something they fear.

And at the same time, twins are not something people always want. When a typical Dagbana gives birth to twins, he has to be going around to soothsayers all the time, just to find out what the twins want so that he will do it for them. As for a typical Dagbana, he takes it that the twins are people of the gods, and when he brings forth twins, a typical Dagbana will slaughter goats on their birth. This is how the typical Dagbamba are. It's only Muslims who find it easy to hold twins. When a Muslim gives birth to twins, he doesn't mind whatever the twins say, and there is no Muslim who will go around to ask what the twins want. He will just have them: if they want to live, they should live; if they want to die, they should die. Muslims don't do soothsaying, and if you give birth to twins in Dagbon, it means that you have to be doing some soothsaying. And so Muslims don't take it to be anything important when they give birth to twins. And so everything has got separation and exceptions, and if you separate the talks, and you put it like that, somebody will see it and will know that it's true. When the world was made and the way of living started, what somebody wanted, somebody else didn't want it. This is how it is, and everything has got separation. And that is why I have showed you that somebody will give birth to twins and get money, and somebody who is a prince will give birth to twins and get chieftaincy, and somebody will give birth to twins and will not be better again. And they are all just examples, because it's the luck of the child. And again, I have shown you the talk of children for the typical Dagbamba and then for the maalams and then for those who are not maalams but they pray. And all this is inside our talks, and it is the way of the true and typical Dagbamba that I'm talking of here.

And truly, I think that in Dagbon here, giving birth to twins is from family to family. If among your family or line, in the olden days, some of them were giving birth to twins, then among your family today, some of you will also be giving birth to twins. If your father or mother gave birth to twins and you don't give birth to twins, then at least your child or your grandchild will give birth to twins. Sometimes people here in Dagbon used to wonder, and somebody will give

birth to twins and will sit down and say, “I have no twins in all of my family, and so how is it that I’m giving birth to twins?” If he should sit down and think deeply, if there are no twins in his family, then there must be twins in his wife’s family. You don’t give birth to twins for nothing, because giving birth to twins doesn’t come at once or by heart. It isn’t everybody who gives birth to twins. We give birth to twins family by family.

When a typical Dagbana gives birth to twins, he will go to make soothsaying to get their names. And in Dagbon here, as the typical Dagbamba have put it that twins are people of the gods, usually the names of the twins will be Danaa and Dawuni if the twins are boys, and Payanaa and Payawuni if they are girls. And he will go to a second soothsayer again to see whether the names he has got will fit the twins or not. When the second soothsayer tells him that the names are fit, then he will call the twins by those names, and he will come back and call the names to them. When he does that, getting to four days, the navels will fall, and he will go to the soothsayer for a third time. In Dagbon here, the special thing for twins is that if the woman wants to take the twins to her house, they have to go to another soothsayer to see whether the twins want to be separated from their father or not. Sometimes the soothsayer will tell the father that if he should allow the woman to take the twins away, they will be crying all the time, and so he should have the twins in his house, and they won’t go. And sometimes he will go to a soothsayer and he will let the woman take the twins to her house.

If the mother is staying with the twins in the father’s house or if she has gone to her parents’ house, within a little time, you may see that the twins will be suffering from many different sicknesses. And when sickness falls on them like that, the father will always be going to soothsayers to find out what is wrong with them. Sometimes the soothsayer will tell the father that the twins want *nintugari*, the mixed rings: they make the rings to give the twins and hang on their necks. When they give these rings, then sickness won’t disturb the twins, and the twins too will stop crying and disturbing the parents. And the father will know that truly it was because of the *nintugari* that the twins were crying or falling sick. Apart from that, sometimes the soothsayer will say that the twins want the mother to carry them in the market and be begging, and whether the father or the mother is rich or not, the mother will be carrying the twins and begging. And I think you’ve been seeing it, and anyone who stays in Dagbon here will be seeing it.

And again coming to some time, sometimes you will see that the twins will not want to walk or will not want to become fat. And the father will have to go to a soothsayer again and find out. Sometimes the soothsayer will tell the father that

the twins want a goat, and the father will have to buy a goat for them. He will buy a red-brown goat, and he will say to the goat, “This goat, I am giving you to my twins, and you should be free and healthy and give birth to children as these twins’ mother gave birth to them.” And he will leave the goat so that it will be giving birth. And he will be selling some of the goat’s children to buy clothes for the twins and slaughtering some of them as sacrifice. And if this goat gives birth and he doesn’t sell the goat’s children to get clothes for the twins, but he just sells and spends the money and leaves the twins, it will become another talk for the father or the mother. Sometimes selling the goats and not spending the money on the twins will let the father or the mother die. If such a thing should happen, they will go and see a soothsayer, and the soothsayer will tell them that it is because the father was selling the goats and eating the money that the twins made one mouth and killed the father or the mother.

And so to have twins is difficult in Dagbon here. And it is because of these many talks that some people don’t like giving birth to twins. And so, giving birth to twins in Dagbon here is very hard, and there are some people here who even pray to God that God shouldn’t let them give birth to twins. It’s something on the part of the typical Dagbamba, and that is why I have separated it and told you that maalam don’t mind twins, because a maalam has no time for all this. And even there are some typical Dagbamba who give birth to twins and don’t go to soothsayers. And this is how it is.

And there are two types of twins who worry their parents a lot in Dagbon. Who are they? If you give birth to twins and one of them dies and leaves the other, this single twin will worry the father and the mother too much. And so if you give birth to twins and one of them dies, you don’t say that he died. No one can say that in Dagbon here. They have said it is forbidden, and we also came and met it. And they said that if you say the twin has died, then it means you have killed both of them. If you say that your one twin has died and left the other, then the remaining twin will not prosper; he will be worrying you the father and the mother all the time.

And the other twins who worry the father and the mother are the female and the male twins. You know that in this Dagbon male and female are not the same. Sometimes the female twin will stand up and say that she will kill the mother, and the father and the mother will also have to stand up. Or sometimes the male twin will stand up that he is going to kill the father. If the eyes of the mother and the father are red, the mother and father can save themselves. They will stand up on the twins by going to soothsayers, and the soothsayers will be telling them the mind of the twins. If the soothsayers tell them that their twins are going to give

them trouble, then they will run to some people to get medicine to protect themselves. Sometimes the mother and the father will be struggling to defend themselves against the twins, and it will come to a point that there is no way, and they will kill the twins.

When the parents see that the twins are coming to defeat them, they will go to a medicine man and let him make some medicine that will kill the twins. It isn't that they beat and kill them; they will make the medicine and put it on the twins so that the twins will die. And you know the typical Dagbamba have many ways of killing people. There are many, many different medicines which are strong for that. And the maalamas too have theirs, and they can just sit down and make it against someone and tell you to go, and the person will die. They can be pulling their beads and saying some prayers and within some time you will see the fellow dying. And so, if it happens that the parents should stand up like that to kill the twins, and such twins die, then we go to greet the parents, "*Ni ti zuɣusuŋ?*" that is, "How is our good luck?"

And we tell them that a pot of water was standing and has fallen down, leaving the pot. Because if a pot of water falls down and the water pours out and the pot does not break, then tomorrow you can still fill it with water. And so we say, "The water has poured out and left the pot, and tomorrow you will take the pot to the river and fill it again." And that is the way of twins. And it is not only twins. Every child, if a child is given birth and is not yet grown and dies, we say that water has poured from the pot, and you will take the pot and fetch water again. And its meaning is that the child has died and left the woman, and the man will take the woman and give her pregnancy again. This is what we say if any child dies, and if one twin dies and leaves the other, if God likes someone, giving birth will come again. And it doesn't stand only on the part of giving birth to twins.

Yesterday I told you how we give birth to children in Dagbon here, and how in giving birth to children, all the suffering inside it will fall on the parents. If the child is sick, they will be suffering for the child until the child becomes well. And they will be feeding the child until the child becomes big. But we love children, and we love giving birth to many children. And so we Dagbamba, when we bring forth a child, we will be taking care of the child until it grows. When woman brings her child from her parents' house, by then the child will be a bit grown, and it will not be the mother alone who is suffering on the child. The father will also be suffering. The time the child comes and it is going to start calling, it will call the mother because it is used to the mother, before the child will take the father and add. And by that time the father and the mother will both be suffering for the child.

But you should know something. If a man says he loves his children, it's true that he loves the children, but he doesn't love his children as a woman does. When the mother is in her parents' house, all the suffering is for the mother. When the child is small and the child is vomiting or easing on the mother, the father has no hand in it, and he has no time for it. If the father has the means, he can buy small dresses for the child until the child grows. And if the man has not got, the mother will buy for the child. When the mother is in her parents' house and she is sleeping, the child will be lying in front of the mother, and when they come to the house and the woman enters her husband's room, the child will be sleeping in front of the man and the woman until the woman becomes pregnant again. And upon all this suffering, a woman loves a child more than anything. A man will sometimes know that he has given birth to a useless child, but a woman will never know that a child is useless. And you the man, if you give birth to ten children, among all these ten children you will get one or two whom you love more than the rest. But if a woman should give birth to a thousand children, the same love will fall on each of the thousand children. And this is how a woman's way is. In this world, everything is changing. Everything on this earth is changing, but we have never seen a child change a mother. Fathers change, but a mother is not changing. Whatever happens, a child will stand and know that this is the mother.

And so in Dagbon here, the mother's side is important. Even I've seen it plainly here. And I've seen it from the Konkombas and from the Nanumbas and from the Gurunsis too. And the Walas and the Dagartis and the other tribes in this north, I didn't ask to know what is happening with them, but I think it will be the same. We don't joke with the mother's side. However a Dagbana should be, if he should fall sick now and his mother died some time ago, if he says that his mother should come back and take him and he will rest, whatever happens, the fellow will not last up to daybreak. But if you say this to your father, he wouldn't take you. Even I have heard maalams say that in the next world, when they are going to wake everybody from his grave, they will first call your mother's name, and that will wake you from the grave.

So every person respects the mother. Why is it so? It is because all the suffering of bringing you forth is only on your mother and not your father. Your mother suffers a lot for you. We know that the child is for the father, but the woman has more say on the child than the man. That is why our Dagbamba mothers don't curse their children. If your mother says that you should walk on the street and a car should knock you down, then it will happen plainly. But as for the father, you know that it doesn't matter. You know that a man has got patience,

and where there is patience, there is no heartbreaking. And so if you are a man, you will just look at a woman carrying the stomach for nine months. Whether it is heavy or not heavy, no one will know, unless the woman and God. Maybe a night will come and this woman cannot sleep because of her stomach. And she cannot sit down. She will come to give birth to this child, and if this child is going to do bad to her and if she says something against the child, do you think it will happen or not? If someone suffers a lot, what that person says will always stand. And so that is why we fear our mothers and they also pity us. That is how it is.

And so in Dagbon here, there are some talks which you will not talk about your mother's house. I can tell you that in Dagbon here, if you ask someone about the mother's side of his family, it's not sweet. We Dagbamba fear to talk about that, and a Dagbana will not agree to open his anus from his mother's house and show somebody who is not supposed to know it. It's a big talk in Dagbon here, and it's not good to ask somebody about that. It shows that you are trying to put that person into trouble. Trouble like what? If your mother is not there and you want to say something about your mother, you fear it, because the mother's side does not want you to tell lies on it. Lies like what? Maybe you haven't heard something from your mother or you haven't seen something from your mother, and you want to say that you heard it from your mother. It will come to lies. What will it bring? It will bring trouble. So if you are a good person, you will only say what you know or what your mother actually said to you. And how you fear your mother, it is the same thing with your uncle, your mother's brother, because your uncle knows much about your mother's side. If it happens that your uncle didn't tell you something about your mother, and you want to talk about your mother, maybe you will tell lies. And lies about your mother's side are dangerous. The lie you will tell and it will someday eat you, it's not good to tell such a lie. And so in Dagbon here, we have that too. You will ask somebody certain questions about his mother, and he won't want to talk about it. And so, even, you shouldn't ask. There is no protection against it, and it's just like that. In Dagbon here, we take the mother to be very, very important, because from the time a woman is pregnant and comes to give birth to a child and the child is still young, all the suffering of the child is on the mother.

Let me add some salt. This *ɲahiba*, you uncle: they are two. The man who gave birth to your mother, if he also gave birth to boys with different women, or if the woman who gave birth to your mother also gave birth to boys with a different man, as these boys are all your mother's brothers, they are all your uncles. Apart from that, if the man and the woman who gave birth to your mother have also given birth to your uncle, and that one is very strong: that type of uncle and your

mother are just one, because they have the same mother and same father. And so if your mother's father gave birth to another boy with a different woman, that man and your mother are not the same. They are all your uncles, and you will call any of them, "ŋahiba," but the uncle who is inside the family, and it's that "My mother and my uncle have got the same father and same mother," that uncle has strength more than the other uncles who have the same father but not the same mother. That is the uncle we say is truly inside your mother's house. How your mother will talk and it will eat you, that is how he will also talk and it will eat you. But those uncles who are not one mother and one father with your mother, they cannot curse you like that. As I have separated it, have you seen the difference? That is how a child and the mother's brother are, and we have this in our families on the part of the children we give birth to.

And again, in Dagbon here, if it happens that a woman gives birth to a small child and she dies, if the child is not grown and is still sucking breast, we go to perform soothsaying. It is from this soothsaying that we get to know where to send the child so that the child will be saved from dying. If the child's mother has died and left this small child, the soothsayer will know whether the child will live if it sucks the breast of the father's sister. If that is the case, they will send the child to the father's sister. If it is that the child will suck the breast of the mother's sister, they will send the child to her. In Dagbon here, that is how it goes. And small children, if the mother dies or the father dies, or if both parents die, such children, we like them. They are orphans, and orphans are something we respect in Dagbon here.

In Dagbon here, if somebody dies and leaves children, the one who comes to perform the funeral is going to take charge of the children. The other time I told you that if somebody dies, it is the senior brother or the junior brother who will come and be the elder of the funeral. When he finishes the whole funeral, he will just look at the children the dead person gave birth to. If there are grown-ups among them, he will assemble them and talk to them on how to hold each other, and he will go back to stay at his house. But if there is nobody grown-up among them, then he can collect the boys to his house, and he will send the girls to their father's sisters. Whether the girls like it or not, they will leave their mothers and go. And sometimes, the one who performed the funeral can even remain in his brother's house. He will go and call his wives and his children to come and stay in that house, just to look after these children. When the children grow up, he will show them how to hold each other, and then if he wants, he will move back to his place.

If it happens that there are small, small children who are still sitting down and are not yet walking, as for such children, their mothers will take them to their parents' houses. And these widows, if they go away from the dead person's house with these small children, you know, sometimes others will come to marry them, and they along with the children of the one who has died will go to stay with the second husband. How the second husband will feed the children he and the woman will be giving birth to, that is the same way he will be feeding the children of the one who has died. And that is why we like such children, because as he is feeding the children, he is reserving a debt. Sometimes it can happen that somebody will also look after his children like that. Maybe it won't be daybreak, and the widow will give birth to his child and he will also die; she will go and marry another man again, and this man will take care of his child. And even, there are some Dagbamba men, if one of them sees these young children who are just hanging about in the towns or at the lorry stations, he doesn't mind to collect all these children to his house, just to be looking after them.

And if the widows have taken these small children to their mother's house or their father's house, the time these children's bones are strong a little bit and they are somehow grown, if they are boys, say by the time they are eight to ten years old, then the one who performed the father's funeral will collect these children from the mother. If the child is a girl, then when the girl is ready for marriage, that is the time he will collect the girl. That is how we do it. Sometimes he will collect all these children and leave the mother like that. If the mother wants, she can go and meet the senior brother of the dead husband and explain to him that she wants one of the daughters to stay with her so that the daughter can be helping her in doing her work, and he can give her one daughter, but not more than one. And so that is how it is. As for the children, they will follow their father's line. Dagbamba children will never run to their mother's line. You already know that Dagbamba children follow their father's lines and count themselves into the family of their father.

And so children have got a lot of talk in Dagbon here, and I think that what I have talked today will do. And I think that tomorrow I will continue and talk about how a child stays with the parents while it is growing, and how the parents will train the child, and how children live with each other and how they play.