Chapter I–3: *The Sense of Dagbamba and Their Living in the Olden Days*

The talk we were holding yesterday, we will continue it. Yesterday I told you how our fathers trained us at the village, and from the time when I was a child and I got up to meet our living, as we are sitting, if I am not very old, at least I must be sixty years or more, or about that age. And what I have seen up to now, those who followed me haven't seen it. I can even tell you that these talks I am talking, in Dagbon there are many people who are grown up to my size, and if you talk my talks to their hearing, it will surprise them. Some of what I'm telling you, they have never heard it before.

From the time we ourselves were young children up to now, many, many, many things have changed. Why have I said that many things have changed? I want to start and give you an example. The time I was coming into my sense, we were spending the white money, *cowrie* shells. And we were spending it one by one. There are some boys, if you ask them what was the first money the Dagbamba were spending, they won't be able to answer the question. But we were able to ask our fathers, and they told us. They said it was cowries and nothing else. And I even think: I don't know, but I think in my heart that in all of Ghana and from the Hausa land and in Nigeria, we were all spending cowries. This is what I think. One time I was sitting with my father, and I asked him whether they were spending cowries everywhere, and he said that they had been traveling to Ouagadougou in the Mossi land to buy cows, and they were spending cowries. And my knowing this is from asking. When I asked my father, he told me. And it comes again from sitting near the old people, and they were talking and I was listening.

The talk I have given to you, what brings it? It is just that a child who grows up and meets the father, and gives respect to the father, and also accepts the instructions of the father: such a child will be able to talk like this. This talk, if you take it to any elderly person who knows about the Dagbon tradition, he will tell you that the person who talked this thing actually stayed closer to his father. And the talk I have given to you, if he opens his mouth, that is the same way he is also going to talk. At this time in our modern Dagbon, if you want to find somebody to talk things like that, and the talk will be falling nicely, it will be hard for you. And so, in the olden days in our Dagbamba way, how we were doing this, we were doing that, we were doing this, and we were doing that, up to this modern time: that is the talk I'm talking today. And those who don't know it, if they hear it and they are Dagbamba, they will tell you that since they were born, they have never heard it before. But when our Dagbon was there and we were

inside it, our fathers were telling us and we were listening. And after our fathers died, our fathers' friends who were older, they also talked to us. And we also took sense and asked again, and they told us much about Dagbon. And so we went deeply and searched for these talks.

It was asking I asked, and my father told me that he was there when hunger fell in Dagbon. If I didn't ask my father or anybody, no one would have told me, because it wasn't that the hunger came and lasted for a long time. The hunger my father said he saw, it only lasted for about a month or two months in Dagbon here. At that time, there was no food for Dagbamba to eat, and they tried to eat something we call *taaŋkoro*. This taaŋkoro is like a yam, and it was growing in many places. When the hunger came, people were eating it, and many of them were dying. The people who had sense, they would dig this taaŋkoro and get a large one, and they would come and peel it and pound it and mix it with water. They would put it in a basket that had close holes, so that when they put the water and mixed it, the water would be dripping and leaving the taaŋkoro. They would be sieving the water away because the water was poison. They would mix it with the water and sieve it about three times. If they sieved the water like that, they would spread the taaŋkoro in the sun to dry, and they would put it on a grinding stone and grind it, and they would use it to make food and eat. And by then they would be able to eat it and not die. And those who didn't do it well, when they ate it, that very night their stomachs would start running out, and they would be dying like that. That was how it was. And what I am telling you is from my asking. I was asking.

This talk I have just talked, I heard it from my father. As for that hunger, it is only our father who told us. They hadn't given birth to us the time that hunger came. It is our father who talked and we heard. When we were born, there was another hunger again, but it was not taaŋkoro-eating. As for that one, we didn't see it. It was asking I asked, and today I am talking it. But how the present children are, they are not interested in asking. But I was asking very well of these things, and I got to know them. I think that maybe when you go to Reverend Wumbee to work on the writing of our Dagbani, if you ask him some of the things I am talking about, he will have heard some of them from his father, because I think that he is also somebody who has asked and who knows more about all these things. If he says he doesn't know, then it shows that maybe he was not able to ask about that thing. And so it wasn't all Dagbamba who were able to ask and know. But I can tell you that sometimes if you tell some Dagbamba that there was hunger in Dagbon and people were eating taaŋkoro, some of them will say it's a lie. It's just that they have never heard of it before.

As I have talked about the hunger that came and they were eating taaŋkoro, as I am sitting down now, it was my father who told me that when the hunger came, it did not only fall in Dagbon. Do you see the people in the Upper Region? We call them Gurunsis. It was only hunger that was killing them. Dagbamba have a type of basket, and when hunger fell in the Gurunsi land, Dagbamba were taking guinea corn and putting it in this basket, and they would take it to the Gurunsi land. At that time, when the hunger came to the Gurunsi land, the Gurunsis had no food. If a Dagbana man took the guinea corn to that place, the Gurunsis didn't have money to buy. They would go and bring their children to come and stand. They would come and put them in front of the Dagbana man who brought the guinea corn, and they would say, "One of these my children, I'm taking him for you. You too, you should collect some of your guinea corn and give it to me." When they were going to exchange the child and the food, the Dagbana man would look at the child very well to be sure that the child was not sick. If the child was looking very dull, the father of the child would tell the Dagbana man that it was only hunger that made the child so. And the Dagbana man would take the child. A child cannot walk from the Gurunsi land to Dagbon. And the Dagbana man would put the child in the basket, and pick it and carry, and he would bring the child to Dagbon. And when the Dagbana man arrived home, they would say that he has taken guinea corn to go and exchange it for a child. It is the guinea corn he took there and used to exchange it for the child. He would look after the child up to the time the child would grow. If he happened to bring a female child and a male child, the female one would marry the male. If he brought only a female, then he could take the girl to be his wife. All this was because of hunger. A Dagbana could take food and go and exchange it for a human being, and Dagbamba were selling Gurunsis. This was what was going on, and we heard it from our father.

And again, the living I have seen from the time I was a child growing up, it is adding to the talks that I asked and heard. Truly, since I was a child and growing up, many things have changed. In the olden days, there were fears. There were hyenas, and there were lions. Where there was a forest, you would see lions, and they were catching human beings. And there were elephants catching human beings. And what I'm telling you now, in Dagbon at this time, if you go through Dagbon, you can travel more than two hundred miles, and you won't see any of these animals. You won't see even one of them again. They are now far away. We have given birth to children, and they don't know the way a hyena looks. But the time they gave birth to us, and we were small – maybe at that time we could not stand and reach your waist – our fathers used to lie outside the house. From six o'clock to six-thirty, the best place for us the children to sleep

was on the laps of our fathers. Then they would tell us that everybody should go into the house. If you were going to go into the house, you had to run fast. Sometimes you would run into the house, and maybe you didn't even sit down, and you would hear screaming. They would say, "A hyena has caught somebody." It is your fellow human being he has caught. They would call a drummer to come out, and there was some beating he would beat that showed that an animal has caught somebody. Everybody would be coming out from their houses carrying cutlasses and cudgels. A hyena has caught a human being and is going with it. That was the time our fears were there. Today's children, if you ask one to describe how a hyena looks, he can't say. Now the hyenas are far away. Their time has passed, and we human beings are still here. But we still have fears. The time animals were catching human beings, that was the time our fathers gave birth to us. We were afraid, that if we came out from the house in the night, an animal would catch us and take us and go.

Truly, it would be good if today's young people asked their fathers how their lives were in the olden days. A child must know about how his fathers and forefathers were living, and the sense they were using to live. I told you that in the olden days, we were using cowries as money. Even going back to the time when the white people were holding us, we were spending the cowries. Our grandfathers said that when there weren't any white men in Dagbon, they were only spending cowries, but as for me, I grew up and met the time the white man was coming to mix coins with the cowries. There was one that was like silver metal, and there was a red one. These coins and the cowries were mixed for the spending, and we were spending them together, the two types of money at the same time. That was the time I got to know the white men. Getting to the time when I think I was about fifteen or twenty years, that was when the white men canceled the cowries. Now cowries are just on the street. And now there are people the age of Kissmal or Ben sitting down, and if I want to tell them that some time ago we Dagbamba were spending cowries, maybe they will say that I'm telling lies. And so if an old person says he was at one time spending cowries, he will bring an argument between himself and a small child. The small child will not agree, and it is because no one has ever told him. Do you know *kaafa?* It is a light food, and it is white, and they wrap it in leaves. When I was a child and coming into my sense, they were cooking kaafa, and they cooked this kaafa and put it into bowls to sell. If you spent one cowrie to buy kaafa, they would give you one. If you took five cowries to buy it, the woman would add you one more and give you six.

We were there at that time, spending the white money, the cowries, and it came to a time when they brought out a coin that was ten cowries, and we called it

laɣ'pia, or ten cowries. And it came again and they brought out a red penny, and it was like one *pesewa.* Inside this penny, there was a design like a sheep and a walking stick. One of these pennies was equal to a hundred cowries. If you wanted to change the red penny, it was one hundred cowries. That is why we called it *kobo,* or *kɔbga,* that is, one hundred. And fifty cowries was a half-penny, *pihinu*, or fifty. I can tell you that there are many Dagbamba who have wives and children, and they do not know what this kɔbga is. If you took this penny and bought food, you would have to struggle to finish all the food. The time I was coming into my sense, we knew the cowries and this red penny, and it came to a time when they brought out the ten pesewas coin, or one shilling, and it was *laɣ'tuhili:* one thousand cowries. If the kobos were twenty, we called it *tuusahi*, or two thousand. It was the white men who came with these coins and things. As for us the Dagbamba, or blacks, we didn't know anything about it. We only knew about the cowrie. And when they were changing these coins, and one type of them was coming to an end, some Dagbamba people would gather it plenty, and go and give it blacksmiths. And the blacksmith would melt it and use it to make either a ring or a bangle. The time you have been coming to Dagbon, if you have been seeing some Dagbamba chiefs who wear smocks, then you sometimes you will see some silver they put on their hats and the smocks. That is some of those coins.

The time I was growing up, if you took one pesewa and gave it to a child of about twelve years, he would spend it for some days. However useless a child was, it would take him about four days to spend one pesewa. At that time, if they pounded *fufu* to sell, they were putting it into balls for half a cowrie, and a child could use that to buy fufu and eat and be satisfied. And so if a child had a penny, how much was left? He could buy ten cowries of meat, and money would still be remaining. If he was going to spend it in this way, it would take him about four days to spend it. And so in those days, a kobo was standing that if a child of about twelve years would spend it and be eating fufu and meat, we would say that he is a useless boy, "Look at a small boy like that, and he is buying fufu and adding meat!" In the olden days, any food seller would even not agree to sell meat to children. He would not agree to sell meat to children like that.

Now as we are sitting, nobody, not even a child, can spend threepence and be satisfied. But I can tell you that when I was twenty years old and up to thirty years, I was spending threepence a day and was satisfied. I was around thirty-five years old when I left for the South, and from Tamale here to Kumasi, the lorry fare was twenty pesewas. I would sleep on the road with the lorry for two days. If it was daybreak and I took threepence, I would buy food and add meat, and I was eating all right. At the age of forty years, I was spending ten pesewas in a day,

and it was all right for me. If I had ten pesewas and was spending it, I would not have to spend anything else again. And my eyes were open, and I was able to know of everything. When I first came back to Tamale, I went to buy fufu, and the only money I spent was ten pesewas: five pesewas fufu and five pesewas meat. And I wasn't able to finish it. And so even from that time, it is a big change up to now. Getting to the time I was forty years and up, the most money you could spend to buy a cow was ten pounds, and the largest sheep was five pounds. And so at that time too there were changes, but the changes weren't hard. When I reached the age of forty-five and fifty years, the prices also rose, and you could spend forty pounds for a cow.

Truly, the time we were spending five or ten pesewas a day, that was during the time the white people were holding us in Dagbon here. In the olden days, you would see people on the roadside pounding fufu. The places where they were doing that were only Tamale, Savelugu, Kumbungu, and also at Ziong, which is about two or three miles from Nanton. These were the only places where you could go to buy fufu to eat. As they were pounding fufu by the roadside, if you were traveling, you would meet them. If you saw Mossi people coming from their Mossi land and passing on the road, this was where they would sit down and have their food and eat very well before they continued their journey. There is another place called Kpatinga, and they were also pounding fufu there, because that place was a road for people driving cattle from Ouagadougou in the Mossi land. The cows from that place are very much bigger than the cows here. They would not drive the cattle all the way to the South: they would start and pass Kpatinga, pass Sang, pass Kpabiya, and come to reach Salaga. That was where they would meet the Southerners and sell the cattle to them. That is still where they sell the cows today. At that time, the only money you needed to buy one of those Mossi cows was five cedis. And as for this town's cow, for you to buy the biggest and nicest cow in Dagbon was either two cedis and fifty pesewas, or maybe three cedis. At that time, if an old person died and they were going to perform his funeral, and he had no money, if the family was going to contribute and buy a cow, if they gave up to one cedi fifty pesewas, it was all right: they could go and buy a medium-sized cow. I have seen it myself. It isn't that somebody told me.

And it came to a time when we were in town here, and the Gurunsi people were coming from their towns into this town with chickens. They have some very big chicken coops made with corn stalks, and we call them *gampilsi.* They would put chickens into these coops and carry them from their land to this town. Sometimes a Gurunsi could carry thirty chickens from the Gurunsi land to here. If a Gurunsi arrived here, he would sell the medium-sized chicken for about two

hundred cowries. The chicken that was well matured, and it was very heavy, it would be about four hundred cowries, or four kobo.

This was how we were living. At that time if a person was looking for a goat or a sheep, forty pesewas was the highest price for a very big or well-matured goat, and a goat that was not yet matured was about twenty pesewas. Sheep too were also like that. As for guinea fowls, unless the Guinea Fowl Festival came before they would start buying guinea fowls. Our father was raising guinea fowls, but at that time a guinea fowl had no market. We don't take a guinea fowl to make sacrifices to our gods. We don't take a guinea fowl and give it to somebody as alms; we give chickens. The only work for the guinea fowl was that on festival days, you would catch a guinea fowl and put it in a coop, and you would carry a bundle of yams to your in-laws and give it to them. If your wife was a young girl still staying with her parents, you could give respect to your in-laws like that, just because you wanted them to give you a wife. Apart from that, the only medicine for the guinea fowl was just eating. If you saw a stranger, you would catch the guinea fowl and kill it for the stranger and make soup for him to eat. If your heart was white one day, you would say you will kill a guinea fowl and eat. This was how the guinea fowl was standing during that time. By then, even if you were looking with red eyes to find a guinea fowl, nobody would sell it to you: if you were looking for a guinea fowl to buy, and you just went to the one who raises them, he would just give you any number of guinea fowls you wanted. He would prefer to give you the guinea fowl as a gift rather than to sell it.

Sometimes you might want a goat to do something. You could use twenty pesewas to buy the goat. During that time, it wasn't everybody who was looking after animals. It was coming from how old you were, and you wouldn't just get up and say that you were going to be looking after animals. It was only old men and old women who had animals, and those who raised goats were different from those who raised sheep. From the olden days, on the part of the typical Dagbamba, it was goats and chickens that had value because it was goats they used to sacrifice to their house gods like *Jɛbuni* or *Wumbee,* and it was chickens they used to repair their medicines. And again, they used goats to make sacrifices if a woman gave birth to twins, and they used goats to perform their funerals. If it is on the part of the typical Dagbamba, those who are not Muslims, they still use goats for these things. It was only the Dagbamba who were Muslims who regarded the sheep as important for their sacrifices. And so during the olden days, goats had more use than sheep, and it was old people who were looking after them.

As for a sheep, its use was for sacrifices to God Himself, or if a chief wanted maalams to read the Holy Qur'an for him, or if the chief wanted drummers

to beat drums at the chief's house and show our old talks or count his forefathers who were dead, those he knew and those he didn't know. If a chief had the means, he would kill a cow and a sheep. If he had no means, he would only kill a sheep. If you were following the Muslim religion, if your in-law died, you would use a sheep to perform your in-law's funeral. If a Muslim died, they would kill a sheep and use the meat to prepare food for those strangers who traveled and came to the funeral, and we called it *soli saɣim,* "road-traveling food." The time they bathed the dead body, the one who bathed the dead body was given a sheep. This was how the sheep was standing in Dagbon here, and this is what we grew up and met in the olden days.

And at that time, as for yams, no one would go anywhere to buy yams. How were you going to buy it? Everybody had yams. And there was no selfishness. If you had no yams, whenever you saw someone going to the farm, you would say, "Oh, as for these yams, let me follow you to your farm, and you will give me some." And he would say, "Oh, what use do I have for these useless yams? If you want, you can bring all the people from your house to come and dig yams from my farm." He wanted people to dig the yams out and take them, and he would be keeping the yam seeds for the next time. Or sometimes the fellow will tell you, "Oh, don't waste your time. You sit down. I myself will go to the farm and carry the yams for you." You will be sitting in the house, and he will bring you the yams and go his way. Today, none of that is there again. But in those days, you would follow somebody to his farm and dig plenty of yams and bring them to your house, and in your house, nobody would like you: they would be eating yams and become fed up with them.

When I was growing up, if a butcher got a cow to kill, you would see many children gathering around him. These children were not his children. They were children from the village or town. What I am telling you now is something that I have seen myself. When the butcher skinned the cow, he would bring out the liver, take a knife and cut it into pieces, and share the meat among the children. Whether he knew the children or he didn't know the children, he would share the meat to them. It was not that he was giving them and losing his profit. When he cut the meat for the children, you would see all of them going to their houses. You know, as for a child, when it's daybreak, a child will walk more than the father. The child would be roaming, but when he got this meat, he could not just go and make anything with it or throw it away. During those days, if a child got anything outside, he had to carry it to the house and show his parents what he had got and where he got it. The child's only sense was: if you get something, take it home and show it. During those days, no child could be walking outside the house, and somebody would see the child and give him something, and the child

would just use it. The child would have to bring the thing and sit in front of his father and tell him who gave it. And so the time these children brought the meat to the house, their fathers would know that the butcher had killed a cow, and they would get ready to go out and buy meat. This was why the butchers were cutting meat for the children, so that the children would take the meat home and let the whole town know. Everyone would say, "Oh! Look at this child. The butcher has killed a cow: let's go and buy meat." That was how it was.

As for that time, too, the butchers would give the chief some part of the leg of the cow, and we call it *boligo;* and the butchers would add part of the stomach and a piece remaining from the liver, and intestines. The butchers would put all this meat into a calabash and give it to somebody to carry to the chief's house. That was the share for the chief himself. And there was part again that would go to the *Nakɔhi-Naa,* the chief of the butchers, and that was the profit of his chieftaincy. In the olden days, too, when the butchers slaughtered a cow, drummers used to go to them and beat drums for them praising their grandfathers. After the butchers skinned the cow, they would give the head of the cow to the drummers, and they would add money on top. It's only now that money is hard that they don't do that again. These days, if a butcher slaughters a cow, he is thinking about what he will do and he will not be in debt. And so in the olden days, when they slaughtered, they were giving. When it was changing, they were still giving to the Nakɔhi-Naa, but now they will just sit down and calculate and give the Nakɔhi-Naa money. If it is a sheep or a goat, sometimes they will send meat, but these days, any meat of a cow, the butcher won't give it to anybody. How the prices of the animals are high, the butchers will only give money. Today, as there is money inside, we have seen some people entering butcher's work, and they are not from the family of the butchers. In the olden days, if you were not from the butchers' family, you would not be doing that work. All that has changed. Truly, there are still many places in Dagbon where the butchers will give the chief his share of the meat, but today in this Tamale, none of it there again. If the butcher gives meat to the chief, it is only a gift, and he will not give the way the butchers used to give. In this town, the Nakɔhi-Naa will not even get an ear of the cow. He is just eating chieftaincy for nothing.

And so many, many things have changed in Dagbon here, and today's children don't know anything about that. This is why I have told you that it would be good if today's young people knew how their fathers were living in the olden days. I have heard our old people talk. The old people said that all the ways of Dagbon that we leave and throw away, a day will come when we will want to pick those things up again. And we have been seeing it. When the white men came, those who followed the white men on the part of farming, they were following the

white man's way of farming, and they were buying fertilizer and throwing on their farms. And now, in this modern Ghana, where is the white man's fertilizer again? You will struggle to get it, and you won't get it. If you get it, the price will be high, and you won't see the profit of the food you will grow. As it was helping us, it is now defeating us. But in the olden days we had our fertilizer. You would spread cow feces in the farm. If there were goats or sheep, you would collect their feces and spread in the farm. Rain would beat it, and it would become rotten, and the food would get up. But this time, they have thrown all that away, and we cannot buy fertilizer, too. It has brought hunger to us. We Dagbamba are known to be farmers, but now it is just common for us to be buying corn from the South, from Ejura and Techiman. We have thrown away our traditional way of farming, and now we are farming and also buying food. If it is the grinding machines, in the olden days, we had a stone called *nɛli,* and we were using it to grind our guinea corn and millet and corn. This grinding stone is still in some villages, but today in this Tamale, you will not see any woman or child who will use it. And the grinding machines they have brought here are spoiled. There are no spare parts, or if not that, there is no diesel oil. And so our old people talked, and they said that what you are holding in your hands, you should not let it fall on the ground.

Truly, when this modern living came, it came to the time when we said that our eyes were open and we were going to be holding ourselves. But how can you hold yourselves if you don't know anything about how your forefathers were living? You can't. And so those who said we were going to hold ourselves, their sense is different. Truly, as for us and how we know it: those who were born in Dagbon before the white men came, their lives were different from those who were born when the white men were in Dagbon. Even as I am sitting, at the time I was a child, our fathers used to call us white-man's-time children. But we whom they gave birth to at that time, we were in between. Our fathers were afraid, and they were holding truth. And we were also afraid, and we were holding the truth. It is within the time of the white men that they gave birth to me, the time the white men were just coming. We the children our fathers gave birth to at that time, we knew what was respect. And how it came up to these modern times and Ghana came out, then they gave birth to another type of children again. All those who were given birth after Independence, it is Dagbamba women we married and gave birth to them. You the one who gave birth to that child, you are a Dagbana. And you gave birth to the child inside your house. The child is going to eat the same food you are eating up to the time he grows. We have given birth to them, but they don't know the tradition. If we sit down and think about them or we look at what they are always doing, it doesn't even look as if we've given birth to them.

We will just be looking at them and wondering what sort of people they are. To us, they are like blind people. That is why our old people say that too much eye-opening is foolishness. And it isn't anything that causes it. It is just eye-opening, and freedom: that has spoiled our living.

If you give birth to a child, you will raise the child and be showing the child sense. Whatever happens, a child must know about the work you are doing. And truly, for any person, it is better, in every tribe, to know something about your tradition and your custom. Today's children say their eyes are open, but today, many of the children don't even want to open their eyes to have a look at what we are doing. And if you want to talk to somebody, and the fellow turns his face away from you, do you think he is listening to what you are saying? He doesn't want to listen. If you are talking to somebody, do you speak to his face or the back of his head? You have to talk to the face. And if you are talking to him and he is interested in what you are saying, he will also look at your face. But if he is not interested, he will turn his head away from you. He is not minding you. And what you too have for him to hear, then if you are sensible, you have to leave it. That is the end of it. And so today's children say their eyes are open, but we who have come first, we look at the young ones who are behind us and take them to be blind people. In Dagbon here, this is how it stands for us: everyone's eyes are open; everyone has got his sense; and everyone is free.

Why am I saying that? During our time, we knew that our parents were holding us, and we didn't do things by ourselves. Everything that was behind us and in front of us and at our right side and at our left side, everything was going on well. But today's children have not caught the talks of their forefathers. They are free. In any of their mouths, there is no saying that something is forbidden. The only thing in their mouths is "Nothing is forbidden." "What will be good" is not in their mouths. "Let's make it well" is not there. "Let's repair it" is not there. What is there? "Let's spoil it": that is there. "Pour it down and let's fight to get it": that is there. "Let's struggle for it, and if you don't get it, it's your luck." That is what is there now, and these are the people our children are following. There is nothing at their front, nothing at their back, nothing at their sides: they are just alone. This is how it stands. Can it be good? Can someone who is alone say he is a person? It won't do.

And so I will talk about what those who are coming behind us should know, and all that they should consider if they want to say they are Dagbamba. And you will write it, and we will put it down for them. If they leave it, how they will end is how they are going to end. If they spoil our custom, it will come from them, because they are not asking or listening. And it will not be the fault of us their fathers or anyone else. It will be their fault. We would like to tell them, but they

are refusing to listen. If you want to tell a child something, and the child doesn't want to listen, you cannot do anything. The time I was coming into my sense, and I was following my senior brother Sheni to learn drumming, he told me that you can't catch a live bee and put it into a hole. If you put it in a hole, it will come out again. It's still alive. It will only stay if it wants to stay. And so the talk we will talk, it is for somebody who wants the talk. That is the meaning of: you can't catch a live bee and put it in a hole. We will talk and you will write it and put it down. And the one who wants, if he never had a chance to hear the talks of an old person, that fellow can still get it.

And as I will talk, I will be talking about all the sense of Dagbamba. And I will come to add and talk about the sense that Dagbamba have taken to do things, because we Dagbamba hear the voice of an old person. We Dagbamba, as for our sense we have and the sense that our grandfathers were holding, it is too much. I think in my heart that on the part of sense, there is no tribe is Ghana you can compare to the Dagbamba. We have sense on the part of living with people, and we have sense on the part of learning work. And truly, the work of Dagbamba, in everything, there is sense inside it, and we drummers too, it is sense we take to do work. Inside the beating of drums, if there is no sense, you cannot do it. You can beat some of it, but you will not be able to beat some parts of it. As drummers beat, it is sense that beats. The names we call for people, it is sense we take to call the names. Somebody will be there, and he cannot call a name for himself. It is a drummer who will call a name, and it is sense. If a drummer has no sense, he couldn't do that. A drummer will even call a name, and the name will do as if it has brought people together. And a drummer will call a name, and the name will let somebody gain from somebody or let somebody go against somebody.

In Dagbon here, if you want to see sense, if not drumming, then you will look at the blacksmiths or the barbers or the weavers. In Dagbon here, those of us who are doing sense-work, we are in different lines. As I am sitting, I was born a drummer, and I am from a family of drummers. The drummers, butchers, the blacksmiths, and the barbers: they all have their family lines on the part of their work. Truly, most Dagbamba are farmers; it is only those I have called whose work is in the bone.[1] As for butchering work, there is not much sense inside, but the blacksmiths and the barbers and the weavers, they take sense to do work. As for leather working, there is sense inside it. If a leather worker does work, and it is the dressing of horses, he will sew a cover for the horse's eyes and you will not think that it is leather he has used to sew it.

---

1. in the family.

How the blacksmiths are, they follow their families to do their work, and it is family work like the work of us drummers or the butchers or barbers. They have got their way, and we have got our way, and we don't mix with them. And so they are different. The real blacksmiths have all got their families. Their work also follows the families, but I think in my heart that it is not as strong as the way drumming or soothsaying work follows a family, because I have seen people who have not been born blacksmiths go to enter the blacksmith's work. Those who are not blacksmiths and go to join them are there, and it is money they want. As for the blacksmiths, others come and enter them. And the real blacksmiths are there, and they are the ones who are inside this blacksmith talk from their starting, and they are the ones who eat the blacksmith's chieftaincy.

In this Dagbon, the blacksmiths have got a lot of work. If the blacksmiths don't make a knife, we cannot peel yams. If they don't make a hoe, we cannot go to the farm. They make some cudgels which we also take to the farm. What we use in cutting rice, it is blacksmiths who make it. What the butchers use in cutting meat, it is blacksmiths who make it. Truly, the blacksmiths are wonderful. A blacksmith will come and see something, and he will look at it, and he will go and also make it. They make what the barbers use for shaving us, and they make our Dagbamba scissors, too. Someone will go and buy the steering column from a car or truck, and a blacksmith will do work, and it will become a gun. The blacksmiths do work, and they make bracelets and bangles, and I can tell you that it is sense they use to make a bracelet we call *baŋa.* There is some silver money[1] which I said we were using when we were with the white men but we don't use it again, and the blacksmiths use it to make bracelets. And again, they can take telephone wire or red wire,[2] and they will make baŋa. If they take the red one and twist it together with black iron, or they take red wire and mix it, they make a type of bracelet we call *baŋgari*, or a mixed bracelet; it is this type of bracelet that you often see Bolgatanga people wearing. Truly, there is no counting what the blacksmiths make, because their work is too great. Even the blacksmiths themselves, no one knows all their work. Everyone will just know how to do the part he knows, and the rest will be remaining. If you say you will learn all the blacksmiths' work, you will not finish learning it. And so I can say that the work of the blacksmiths is more than any other work you can see in the land of us black people.

Even the work we drummers do, if the blacksmiths were not in Dagbon, our work would not have been good. Before you will do anything, it is the work of the blacksmiths you will use to do it. If you want to make a drum, you will take

---

1. *anzinfa,* lit., silver
2. *daanya,* copper

something to cut the tree: it is a blacksmith who made it. If you take an adze to carve the drum, it is a blacksmith who made it. There is another type of curved knife we use to scrape the inside of the drum, and it is blacksmiths who make it. If you are going to dance *Baamaaya* or *Jɛra,* there are some shakers you tie on your legs; we call them *chaɣla:* it is the blacksmiths who make these chaɣla. It is blacksmiths who make *feeŋa,* the castanets the dancers put on their hands when dancing. It is blacksmiths who make the *luŋ-bansi,* the shaker you can put on your hand when you drum.

And so in Dagbon here, the blacksmith is a big man, and he has no equal. Even the chief respects the blacksmith. In the olden days, if the chief did not respect the blacksmith, war would come and the chief would not get war things. If it was a spear, if it was a cudgel, if it was a knife, if it was arrows, it was the blacksmith who made all these things: if the blacksmith was annoyed at the chief, would the chief get what he wanted? He wouldn't get. In the olden days, the chiefs were giving a lot of respect to the blacksmiths. In this modern time, the white man's things have come for war. Someone will prefer the white man's gun, because the white man's one can kill more. As for our own, if it shoots, then that is all: unless you fix more powder and another bullet. That is why people don't regard the blacksmith's gun at this time, and they take it that the blacksmith's gun cannot protect someone again. The white man had sense to pack many bullets inside his gun, and the bullets can go far. If somebody wants something like that, he can buy it without seeing the blacksmiths. But in the olden days, at that time all these guns, bullets, bows and arrows, spears, cutlasses, a chief would get all of them from the blacksmiths and give to his soldiers. If he did that, then tomorrow if another chief would tie war and be coming to fight him, the chief would fight and drive him away. And so the blacksmith had a lot of respect in Dagbon here. And there are some people still using the blacksmiths' guns.

Even today, everybody gives respect to the blacksmiths. As for the war things, that one is finished, but metal work has not finished. And it is the butcher and the barber who give respect plenty. When the blacksmith is annoyed, the barber will not shave, and the butcher will not cut meat. If the blacksmith doesn't help, then the barber and the butcher won't do work. And so the blacksmiths are very strong with those people. As I am sitting, maybe I won't take a knife to cut something for some days or even months, but a barber or a butcher cannot say that. The barbers and the butchers don't do anything against the blacksmiths in Dagbon here. And the farming too, without the blacksmiths, we can't farm. The different hoes and all the things we use to farm, it is blacksmiths who make it. The axe we use to cut trees down, blacksmiths make it. There is something we use to uproot small trees in the farm, blacksmiths makes it. As for the blacksmiths,

truly, their strength is strength, and that is their way in Dagbon. The sense inside their work is very great, because it is sense they take to make all these things.

Apart from that, if it is the weaving of baskets, it is sense that weaves it. Truly, you can't count those who weave baskets in Dagbon here. There is something we call *gamli:* they weave it and use it to close the entrance of a house. It is not in Tamale again; it is in the villages. It they didn't have sense, they couldn't do it. We have something we call *pɔŋ:* it's like a flat plate, and they use reeds to weave it, and we use it for many things. We have something we call *kpanjɔɣu:* formerly that was the Dagbamba box, and up to now it is still there. We didn't use wood to make a box to keep our things; we used dried grasses to make this box. It was those who weave things who used their sense to make it. They sat down and thought thoughts to weave something like that. Kpanjɔɣu was the box for women, and there was one for men called *pibirgu,* and chiefs and those who had this pibirgu would keep their smocks and gowns inside it. There is something called *puɣnai,* and women hang it near the place they cook. They put things like salt, pepper, *kpalgu,*[1] dried okra and all the things they use to make soup inside this puɣnai; if food is cooking, the smoke will rise and enter this basket, and it will take a long time for anything inside to spoil. The fans, the *zana* mats, and all the things they weave, Dagbamba used sense to make all of them. If Dagbamba had no sense, they wouldn't have been able to weave all these things.

Truly, the sense Dagbamba have to make things is very great. Dagbamba use clay and sand to make pots to keep water. This one you have in your room here, *luŋli,* with a wide mouth, there is another smaller one that resembles it and we call it *kɔbaŋa*. Sometimes when you see a chief riding a horse, you will see a woman carrying it and following with water. There is another one called *duɣu*. Truly, there are many types of pots. There is another one called *yuli,* and if you want you can call it *kɔduɣu;* farmers leave it in their farms, and it is the thing our farmers use to fetch water and drink. And all this is from the sense of Dagbamba.

Dagbamba take sand and dirt, and they use their hands to make something we call *tandi,* and we use it to build things. It's different from what the white men used to build things when they came. Dagbamba mix some things to make this tandi, and if they didn't have sense to do that, there would have been no building in Dagbon. And inside building again, when they roof a room, they take sticks to put on top of a room, and it is sense that puts the sticks. They will be putting sticks on top, and there will be no stick on the ground to hold it. Nothing is wonderful apart from when they roof a room, and there is no stick in the middle to hold it. If you go and look at it, will make you wonder, and you will know that it

---

1. a seasoning

is sense they have taken to do the work. Even those of us who are Dagbamba, we look at it and we wonder, because it is the work of sense. It is just sticks they have put on top, and there is nothing on top of the sticks. There is no nail they use to nail it. There is no rope they use to tie it. The sticks just join and catch one another, about thirty of them, on top of a room, and it will be standing like that. They will do that, and put grass on top, and they will use sense to weave the grass together. They will put all on top, and when the rain is raining, no rain will enter the room. This one alone, it is sense. And so the sense we Dagbamba have taken to do work, I will talk about it, and those who have sense will know that our tradition is not something we should let fall on the ground. And all that I will talk about on the part of tradition is the work of sense.

Here is a proverb for you: after morning, you get evening. When the sun rises in the morning, it comes to sunset. Do you know the meaning of what I have said? When we were going to start these talks, didn't you tell me? You told me. And I came. And was it not yesterday that I came again? I came. And didn't I tell you that I would come today? I told you. That is the meaning of the proverb. If you want to do something tomorrow, it is good you start it today. And so I think that what we are talking is good, and tomorrow we will continue. If we are talking these talks one by one, every day I will be having more ideas to talk about how we were living in the olden days and how we have changed now, and about our drumming and about me myself. And if you come to me and we sit together and talk about what talks I will bring, it will be good; and if you don't come, it doesn't matter. Any time I come to give a talk, when I go back to my house and lie on my sleeping bed or anywhere else where I am alone and everything is quiet, I think deeply over many things, and I try to get the ones I would like to talk about. Even it is surprising to me that I am talking talks today. I got up, and sleep was worrying me, and I had headache. And I thought that if I came, I couldn't talk any talk. But as I am talking, it looks as if the talks I am talking are very nice. As for experience, it is always increasing every day. And any time I think over something, I will remember it in my mind, and if it will be good to talk about it, I will come and talk. And so "We will eat and finish the food": it will come from those who are eating.

And so we are going to talk on how Dagbamba live, and it is sweet and it is bitter. Our Dagbon has got a lot of talks, but there is one talk that is strong on the part of all our talks. We Dagbamba know how to give respect to people. When we know a person, we will give respect to that person; when we don't know a person, we will give respect to that person. This respect, everyone grew up and met it. When we got up, our fathers and grandfathers were giving respect to themselves, and we also got up and met it. And our Dagbamba say that when you

get up and see what your fathers do, you should also do it. And so respect, that is our big talk. And tomorrow, if God agrees, I will come and we will continue our talks on the part of how Dagbamba live with one another and give respect.