

## ***A Drummer's Testament***

### *Introduction part 11*

#### **The Receptive**

The *I Ching* follows an ordered progression, and the second hexagram, the one I received when I started writing this book, is The Receptive. It is the appropriate guide for listener or a reader. When Eric Rucker and I first cast the coins, all six strong lines of The Creative changed to the six broken, yielding lines of The Receptive. In the *I Ching*, The Receptive does not oppose The Creative but complements and completes its impulse. As The Creative represents heaven and spirit, the attribute of The Receptive is devotion, and its image is the earth. It shares the positive aspects of The Creative, “sublime success” and “furthering through perseverance,” but The Receptive represents nature, the senses, the feminine, the expansion of space. It speaks of nourishment and benefit, of carrying and preserving all living things without exception, of opening outward to light and illuminating the things in its broad embrace, of an effort to assist and willingness to be led, of solitude and objectivity.

To receive the talks, therefore, think of the earth you stand on. If you were in Dagbon listening in the evenings, sitting on the earth and leaning against earthen walls, your eyes would be opened toward the starry heaven. You would hear the breezes in the trees, the trembling timbers of the entrance way to the temples in your hearing. With your head in heaven and feet on earth, you would yield to a universe of information, understanding it with patience and knowledge. Keep this image before you.

An elderly man, whom you yourself may call father, Father Drummer, sits down and talks, following a pattern repeated in Dagbamba villages in the night, when old people lean against the outside walls of their houses to sit and talk, and children gather around them. Father Drummer proceeds in a leisurely manner. He knows where he is going. Take a seat with the children, imagine a mild breeze, imagine a sky with stars and a crescent moon. You are on a journey to a vision of an alternative human potential that is both alien and universal. If the imagination is weak, you can read a passage aloud to find an appropriate pace.

When Alhaji Ibrahim calls the work “long talks,” he means just that. This book is a series of lectures, given over time, over months, over years. No one can know a person in one day, so how long will it take one to know a culture that goes back hundreds of years? You are with a person who is very old, older than his

years. Have you had a chance to sit with an old person? This book is for those who have the time and the wish to do so.

As easy as it is to lean against a wall, so too is this book easy to read. There are times when the information becomes thick with things you need to know, and you have to involve yourself in the details, but do not be discouraged. You will quickly become used to the rhetoric. The discourse of a drummer moves by simplicity and repetition, and the information will get to you either way. Father Drummer speaks simply and takes you all the way through the simple truths in living. He leads you on, and he moves on. Everything is simple and clear, and like the way a drummer beats, Father Drummer uses the simple to hook your head into the life of the people. He always makes you think about your perspective on this thing called life and how these people experience it. As you read, you might find yourself asking, “Hey, wait. I know it’s simple, but what is he saying?” The cloth of culture covers and hides simple meanings in secret discourse. The nature of Father Drummer’s thinking is never too far away from culture, and as a drummer who brings the higher forces into the world, he is never too far away from life. He fills in what you need to know to be able to understand what he is saying, and he repeats necessary information to help you absorb it painlessly. His discourse has precise detail to it specifically so that you can see and feel the reality of his examples. He uses repetition for emphasis, to give clarity to his presentation, just as the repetition of rhythms lends clarity to his drumming.

If something is confusing, relax and let the current talk’s meaning emerge through its flow. It is useful to revisit the Yoruba image of culture as a vast cloth too wide to tie its ends together. In that sense, you might be advised not to treat this work as a book that you can grasp and comprehend as a whole. If Father Drummer’s words speak to you, find your point of entry and branch outward, forward or backward. When you go to another place, you will be reminded again how things relate. You can read parts of it out of order and return to a place you left. Take a half-hour or an hour to read any chapter on its own. It is all right to read this book in bits over several years; after all, it took that long to talk it. When you have to stop reading it, you have to stop. If you like, leave it for some time. You can come back to it later.

This book, like culture, is an assemblage of texts indeed. Like culture, it is a mediator that evokes tension and requires engagement. It is about a particular place called Dagbon and the people who live there. Making the book was an exercise in objectification. Reading it is an exercise in influence and participation, in the anxiety of openness and the acceptance of alternatives. Like culture, it is something that needs to be shared. Take a small part of it to share with others,

from other perspectives on life, in the same way that Kissmal imagined. You are going on a journey, and you are going to meet a great man. Alhaji Ibrahim Father Drummer based his life and ethics in an institutionalized complex of art, family, politics, history, and community. In Dagbon there are people being trained to carry it on. For us in our time, it does not move the same way: the thing is internal and spiritual, yet its creative complement tends outward. It is accessible because the essence of our Father Drummer's traditional sensibility, the essence of his humanity, is a continuing moral focus that links character to culture. Thus did he align himself with the creative forces in life.