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The Afterlife Is Where We Come From

Alma Gottlieb

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The Afterlife Is Where We Come From Alma Gottlieb
When a new baby arrives among the Beng people of West Africa, they see it not as being born, but as being reincarnated after a rich life in a previous world. Far from being a tabula rasa, a Beng infant is thought to begin its life filled with spiritual knowledge. How do these beliefs affect the way the Beng rear their children?

In this unique and engaging ethnography of babies, Alma Gottlieb explores how religious ideology affects every aspect of Beng childrearing practices—from bathing infants to protecting them from disease to teaching them how to crawl and walk—and how widespread poverty limits these practices. A mother of two, Gottlieb includes moving discussions of how her experiences among the Beng changed the way she saw her own parenting. Throughout the book she also draws telling comparisons between Beng and Euro-American parenting, bringing home just how deeply culture matters to the way we all rear our children.

All parents and anyone interested in the place of culture in the lives of infants, and vice versa, will enjoy *The Afterlife Is Where We Come From.*

"This wonderfully reflective text should provide the impetus for formulating research possibilities about infancy and toddlerhood for this century." — Caren J. Frost, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*

“Alma Gottlieb’s careful and thought-provoking account of infancy sheds spectacular light upon a much neglected topic. . . . [It] makes a strong case for the central place of babies in anthropological accounts of religion. Gottlieb’s remarkably rich account, delivered after a long and reflective period of gestation, deserves a wide audience across a range of disciplines.”—Anthony Simpson, *Critique of Anthropology*

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