

AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY

REVISED EDITION

On Becoming Ancestors



ANTHONY EPHIRIM-DONKOR

AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY

On Becoming Ancestors

REVISED EDITION

Anthony Ephirim-Donkor



University Press of America,[®] Inc.
Lanham · Boulder · New York · Toronto · Plymouth, UK


**Copyright © 2011 by
University Press of America,[®] Inc.**
4501 Forbes Boulevard
Suite 200
Lanham, Maryland 20706
UPA Acquisitions Department (301) 459-3366

Estover Road
Plymouth PL6 7PY
United Kingdom

All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
British Library Cataloging in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011920614
ISBN: 978-0-7618-5467-8 (paperback : alk. paper)
eISBN: 978-0-7618-5468-5

Cover photo: Nana Obrafo Owom X

 The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992

Preface

This edition is the result of the favorable response generated by the first edition, as readers attempted to relate and identify with the innate human desire to know about the mysteries of existence and quest for immortality or spirituality. My interest rejuvenated, I researched the subject again from 2000 to 2008. Of course, I still do not claim to have all the answers to existence the second time around, but I now have a deeper meaning and understanding of the claims that I made in the first edition.

Through more discussions with elders, careful examination of ritual processes, and from my own experiences as an Akan traditional ruler, I bring new and exciting ideas to this subject in ways that are more insightful and thought provoking. As a result, the chapters have been revised to reflect new research and appreciation for the subject in this edition.

As an educator, I sometimes begin my discussion or teaching about African religious thought by saying or writing “Africa” on the board and sometimes ask my students to say or write anything that comes to mind upon hearing or seeing the word Africa. Words like superstition, voodoo, tribe, jungle, village, animals, ancestral worship, pagan, hunger, poverty, huts, rites, witchcraft, and many more would always come up. However, by the end of a session, students would have come to some understanding of the universality of such terms or ideas. In fact, most of what is taught about others is, in one way or another, informed by our contextual prejudices. People make judgment about others without the slightest inkling that, perhaps, they too may be partakers of the same or similar realities and beliefs.

A recurring point about black spirituality is the so-called “worship of the dead” among Africans, but do not all peoples “worship,” i.e., venerate or show reverence for the dead? I know of soldiers on every continent who visit war memorials and wail, and whole countries that set aside national (memorial) days to remember their dead. I have seen many people visit cemeteries or crematories and leave flowers on the graves of their loved ones, and have observed many presidents and heads of state lay wreaths at the tombs of unknown (dead) soldiers or national heroes.

The fact is that in Africa deliberate efforts are made to worship the dead regularly although the way cemeteries are kept in the Western world makes me wonder if the dead are not also worshipped in Western societies. The point is that the dead, for the Akan, do not die but continue to live on forever as ancestors (Nananom Nsamanfo) or as ordinary posthumous abstract personalities Nsamanfo.

This then is what the book is about—how an Akan becomes an elder and upon one’s death worshipped as an ancestor. That is, to attain the apogee of existence as an ancestor, an adult must first have been an elder; meaning, one has attained existential perfection, so that upon death an elder is guaranteed perpetual place in the Samanadzie, the world of the dead. In this way, an ancestor is remembered on earth when succeeding generations invoke his or her name socio-politically and spiritually during family and state affairs. As divine judges, the Akan dead appear before the ancestors and account of themselves, because the ancestors are all-knowing and all-present, watching over the affairs of the world that they en-

trusted to the elders. Therefore, whenever the earthly *Ābusua* (descendants of a single woman) convenes, it must first invoke its heavenly counterparts to be in their midst, because before the ancestors the elders must show obeisance.

In general, the book is aimed at three audiences. First, Africanists, cultural anthropologists, and sociologists will find this book indispensable, because it deals with every facet of Akan culture from the perspective of an insider who now stands outside looking in critically. From metaphysics, existential issues, and socio-political organizations, to rites delineating the stages of the life cycle, the book brings the Akan and African ritual life in its totality into focus.

Secondly, the book is addressed to psychologists and students of developmental and psychosocial psychology. Further, it may be used as a resource for African developmental studies by looking at models extant among the Akan people, and in dialogue with Western psychological scholarship in the search for a cross-cultural interpretive framework. Structurally, my interpretive framework is influenced by Erik Erikson and James Fowler, known for their work on the ego and psychosocial stages of the life cycle, and constructive developmental research in faith and moral development, respectively. These theories enabled me to contextualize a unique African developmental model within the framework and customs of the Akan.

Finally, it is addressed to African Americans. The African American community has undergone a series of identity shifts in its quest for a cross-cultural heritage and renaissance in recent decades. I base this claim on my own experience as a pastor who has taught black spirituality and cultural reclamation to my African American congregations in Georgia.

As a former pastor of three African American congregations at Suwanee, Georgia, that later merged under my leadership into Suwanee Parish United Methodist Church, and later Thurman-Harman-Ellington Unitarian Universalist Church in Decatur, Georgia, I know the yearning of the laity in attempting to reclaim some aspects of the lost heritage. I was attempting to educate them, but in the process, I too came to be educated. As an African, I came to understand the anguish and experiences of my African American brothers and sisters across the Atlantic. Now that I am no longer a practicing clergyman but a representative of the Akan-African cultural heritage, I continue the discussions I began at Suwanee with some members of the church.

Indeed, I was quite anxious. Yes, I was, and am, black, but I was also an African. However, I took the pastorate as a challenge, for after all, one of my strengths was in cross-cultural faith development. In the process, I discovered something unique, or should I say, together we discovered a shared propinquity. This was manifested in resounding “yes” responses. I do not mean the call-and-response uniqueness of black worship, though even that too had a meaningful resolve to it, perhaps for the first time. By “yes,” I mean knowing about the contextual origins of the call-and-response between a king, on the one hand, and his or her orators and citizens, on the other. In the absence of the king or the elder in the Black Diaspora, the pastor or minister assumed the roles of king, elder, and priest by continuing the call-and-response carry over from Africa in the context of black church worship experiences.

What I am referring to in relation to the yes responses, like the call-and-response trademark of the black church, is my ability to offer an African hermeneutical approach to the lost African Diaspora heritage. When one understands why a person does the things one does, it is quite exhilarating and often emits responses like uh-huh. That is, finding an anchor for some of the innate depositions a people have. Therefore, while this book by no means addresses all aspects of the African cultural heritage wholly, it is a start.

Furthermore, this book stems from my own attempt to come to an understanding of myself cross-culturally in the United States of America. After taking a number of psychology courses in graduate theological seminary, during which I constructed my life's tapestry, I realized that I was a communal being, defined and shaped in the ethos and polity of the Akan. This led me to appreciate my own culture for the first time. Standing outside of my own culture, I realized how different I was racially and culturally. These differences forced me to reflect upon my life, but rather than conceive of these differences as weaknesses, they became my strength and uniqueness, thus leading to my cultural reclamation.

However, my cultural reclamation would never have been possible without the support and love shown toward me and my wife, Comfort, and later our children by so many good people, when my wife and I first arrived in the state of West Virginia where I began my undergraduate studies at Bluefield State College. Then, I transferred to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and finally, to Emory University in Georgia. Thus, in this final edition, I take the opportunity to express my sincere thanks to Rev. Dr. Frank L. Horton, Mrs. Julia Bundy and her husband, Joseph, Dr. Thor Hall, Sarah and Professor Arlie Herron, Dr. Romney Moseley, Dr. James W. Fowler, and Ms. Beryl Bergquist (Beryl Farris).

Upon graduation from graduate school, certain individuals also played, and continue to play, significant part in our lives in the United States, as well as in Ghana. Therefore, I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to Dr. Susan Wooley and her husband Mac Geokler, and Sharon and Harvey Nerhood for their commitment to the people of Mprumem and Ghana.

For assisting in the completion of this book, I express my appreciation and thanks to my research assistants in Ghana, Isaac Kwesi Ghanney and Alfred Neanyi Wallace, for their persistence in obtaining relevant data for this project. For his technical assistance, I am grateful to Juan S Restrepo, a work-study student for the Department of Africana Studies.

CONTENTS

Preface

vii

PART I: PERSONALITY FORMATION

Chapter 1: The First People	1
Chapter 2: Personality Perspectives	25
Chapter 3: Gods In The Flesh	39
Chapter 4: God Is Life	61

PART II: STAGES OF AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY

Chapter 5: Transient Being	79
Chapter 6: Spiritual Personality	89
Chapter 7: Education	103
Chapter 8: Ethical Existence	115
Chapter 9: Eldership	129
Chapter 10: The Ancestors	143
Endnotes	165
Glossary	171
Bibliography	173
Index	183
About the Author	187

Chapter 1

The First People

The Akan, whom this study is about, live in the modern countries of Ghana and the Ivory Coast. However, the study focuses on those in Ghana, approximately half of Ghana's population and uses them as a resource for examining the overall conception of human and spiritual development for Africa. Thus, it is the first study of its kind to concentrate on specific developmental and psychosocial stages of an African people from the world of the ancestors, the Samanadzie, to the corporeal world, the Wiadzie, and back to the Samanadzie. As the book looks at the life cycle, it uses rites of initiation in the context of transformation during the maturational processes, i.e., how these rites influence an individual socio-culturally, politically, psychologically, economically, and above all, spiritually.

The Akan are bound together by a common cultural heritage and belief in a monotheistic God (Nana Nyame) and language.¹ Under the umbrella name Akan are the Asante, the Fante, the Akuapim, the Akyem, the Akwamu, the Khwahu, the Nzema, the Ahanta, the Wassa, the Bono, and the Safwi, as the major groups. Their ancestors, according to the historian Adu Boahen, "first lived in the open country of modern north-western Ghana and north-eastern Ivory Coast" but moved into the forest region before the beginning of the Common Era.² What this means is that, the Akan have always been a Western African people, with no evidence suggesting that they might have originated anywhere else other than Africa. This historical fact is consistent with ancient Greek claims that Africans, or black peoples, are natives to the African continent, not known to have entered Africa from outside the African continent.³ This point is important because occasionally some ethnic leaders in

Ghana would make fantastic claims identifying their ethnic groups with European or foreign origin, thinking that such identifications made them superior to other so-called "native" groups. Yet, all the evidence to foreign origins point to the advent of Arabs and Europeans to Africa at a time when Africa was already inhabited by blacks. Indeed, it was non-Africans who introduced Islam, Christianity, slavery, and colonization to Africa and inculcated inferiority complex in Africans, to the extent that it is now etched in the psychic of black peoples. The consequence now is that everything white, foreign, and European or Arab is superior to everything black.

For the Akan, this complex was not always the case, because their name, *Akan*, itself is illustratively African, for it has to do with beginnings. However, to what extent has a name to do with beginnings? The etymology of *Akan*, I discovered, has several renditions. *Kan* is interpreted as first, to lead, foremost, genuine, pure, light, bright, intentionality, to count or reckon, to read, and to cry or wail, as singing of dirges at funerals. Indeed, the *Akan* are the first to walk the earth and hence the *Akanfo* from *Akan* (First) and *fo* (People). Furthermore, they are the first to be endowed with the art of oratory, the speech-makers of public forums. This would be consistent with the view that the *Akan*, as the first people, were the first to have seen light and would as leaders have a message to impart to others. One thing on which they concur is that the *Akan* are the first or leaders in whatever they do in the context of *Kan*—light, lead, first, read, pure, cry, count, etc. All of these meanings of *Kan*, as would be shown in this study, are related to the central understanding of existence, which encompasses several phases.

Since the *Akan* are the first humans to work the earth, it also means that they have something to say about life's formative processes existentially and metaphysically. For them, there are no qualms about where the human being originates, as a person originates in the ancestral world called the *Samanadzie*. Then the "person" journeys to the tangible world called the *Wiadzie* (literally, under the sun) pre-imbued ethically (*ɔbra*). And finally, the human being returns to the *Samanadzie* upon death. As I will expatiate in succeeding chapters, an individual is ethically imbued with a *Su* (an essential nature), which developmentally manifests itself as the *Suban* (disposition or character attributes). The *Suban* ripples into either a *Suban pa* (good or ideal disposition or character attributes) or *Suban bɛn* (bad or evil disposition or character attributes) and ultimately leads to *ɔbra bɔ* (ethical existence and generativity) during adulthood as either *ɔbra bɛn* (unethical life) or *ɔbra pa* (good or ideal ethic). Finally, *ɔbra bɔ* finds expression in the attainment of the highest socio-political and spiritual estate as an elder (*Nana*), a stage marked by wisdom (and intelligence), the hallmark of an ideal ethic and generativity, *ɔbra bɔ*.

Ontologically, the *Su* is transmitted by a deity through a father's semen (*Huaba*), because the nature of the spirit or what the *Akan* refer to as the *Sunsum* (pronounced *Soon-Soom*), is inherently masculine or male. The exact moment when the *Su* is revealed is when conception occurs; that is, when the spirit (*Sunsum* or *Ntoro*) inherent in the semen fuses with the egg or blood (*Mogya*) of a woman, but without a soul (*ɔkra*), Rattray asserts.⁴ Rattray's rendition of the *Akan* position is enlightening, because for him the potential human begins when a male sperm fertilizes a female blood (egg). Since the male spirit or *Sunsum/ntoro* is active, it carries,

via the sperm (*Huaba*), the *Sunsum*, which initiates certain dynamic events in the egg or the woman's blood (*Mogya*). Only then does the *Ɔkra* (soul), which Rattray describes as "the stranger" find an already active cell, a neonate or "infant."

Rattray, however, does not say exactly when the soul enters the mix, but we will find out in the succeeding chapters that the *Ɔkra* actually enters a neonate the moment it inhales its first breath when a neonate is able to breathe on its own or with assistance outside the womb. This is important because two souls or *Akra* (plural of *Ɔkra*) are incapable of dwelling in a single body, as that of an expectant mother and her fetus. The fact that a fetus is able to survive in a womb via its host means that a person could, for example, also be kept alive artificially for as long as necessary. Of course, this does not mean that an *Ɔkra* has left a body entirely; rather, it means that one is only surviving by a thread of an *Ɔkra*.

Also, the deities (Abosom), the originators of all spiritual properties via fathers, may remove their spirit from a person, render a person spiritually (and sometimes physically) inactive, and yet remain alive because an *Ɔkra* keeps an individual alive. Expressed paternally, an angry father may withdraw his protective spirit from his offspring and a child may end up a vagabond, because one's spiritual cover has been removed making a child weak and vulnerable to the whims of nature and spiritual forces. Such spiritual paralysis ultimately leads to physical death caused by the least provocation and, unfortunately, someone else is blamed for causing such a death. The point is that the spirit (*Sunsum*) is uniquely different from the *Ɔkra* by virtue of their provenances.

The *Sunsum* (spirit) is transmitted through a male's semen (*Huaba*) as a unique masculine agency called by the Akan as *Su* (although it might as well be called a *chromosome*). Whatever name is given it, the Akan know that from the *Su* is derived the basis of all personality or character traits. However, a girl does not have a *Sunsum* although Rattray believes that a girl has a "small" *Sunsum* "which her father gave to her." But the fact is that girls or women do not transmit the *Sunsum* or spirit in the same ways as they do not transmit *Y* chromosome. Even though it takes a male to produce a male, the very nature of the *Sunsum* is such that it is capable of producing a female gender, because in addition to the *Sunsum* a male has *Mogya* or blood too, although *Mogya* is thought to be a female agency as a male is incapable of gestation and parturition.

To illustrate further, genetically we know that a male has both the *X* and *Y*-chromosomes, while a female only has the *X* and in consequence a male produces both a male and female offspring, bolstering the Akan position that a female does not have a *Sunsum* (or a *Y* chromosome). Males have *X* chromosome or the *Mogya*, because males are formed in the wombs of females making it possible for them to inherit the female chromosome (blood), in addition to their unique *Y* chromosome or full-fledged *Sunsum*. Ontologically, then, the *Sunsum* or *Y* chromosome is foreign to women, having been introduced into the original woman or women by an utterly different, nonphysical male agent, because the *Sunsum*, as we will see in subsequent chapters, is an intangible entity. What this suggests is that males and females originally had different proveniences. Males inherit the female *X* chromosome or the *Mogya* (blood) of their mother because they are formed in the wombs

of mothers. Consequently, males are unable to transmit *Mogya* (egg/s) or *X* chromosome because the *Mogya* is not original to men, although it does not mean that males do not have blood running through their veins. Similarly, females are incapable of inheriting or transmitting the male chromosome, the *Sunsum*, because women lacked the *Sunsum* originally. Furthermore, men are incapable of gestation, which would have caused women to also inherit and transmit the *Sunsum* in addition to *Mogya*. This suggests that men do not transmit *Mogya*. So, then, how does a male produce a female offspring since a male only transmit the *Sunsum*, which is male?

In the Akan scheme of things, what women have in order to make life possible and men do not is blood (*Mogya*). In other words, the *Sunsum* that women do not have, they compensate for it with the *Mogya* (blood), and so while women lack the *Sunsum*, any partial transmission of the *Sunsum* is enough to produce a female offspring and probably why Rattray posits that females have a small *Sunsum*. Symbolically, then, a male has *Sm*, while a girl has *Ms*. Ultimately what we have is a pair of opposite sexual entities that complement and fulfill each other, because psychosexually each gender desires an intrinsic self that is fully expressed in the other.

From their beliefs in reincarnation, conception, birth, education, ethical existence and generativity, eldership, death, to ancestorhood, the Akan have culturally defined rites marking individual phases of development delineating *ɔbra bɔ*⁵ (ethical existence and generativity). However, an individual must lead an ideal ethic (*ɔbra pa*) in the corporeal world leading to the conferral of the title elder (Nana). In the world of the *dead-alive* (*Nsamanfo*) called Samanadzie, those who were elders on earth automatically attain ancestorhood, joining the immortal community of ancestors called Nananom Nsamanfo.

This belief is based on a theory of personality and religion that has its ontological basis with God and the archetypal Old woman (the Abrewah) and her children who constitute the ideal *Ābusua* or matrikin. The belief in the ancestors is intertwined with the *Ābusua*, existentially, and, consciously or unconsciously, no one can gainsay the belief in and worship of the ancestors, as that would negate the reality of the *Ābusua*, which is the mother. The *Ābusua* gives life, nurtures, and construes symbols and rites psychosocially in order to give meaning to individuals socially. Without an *Ābusua* one is lost relationally, culturally, and ethically.

Structurally, the NaSaman (Spirit Mother) is the head of the Samanadzie, the world of the dead, including the ancestors. This makes all posthumous abstract personalities (the dead-alive) her children because they are composed of her blood (*mogya*) and therefore constitute her *Ābusua*. These "children" replenish the corporeal world after the NaSaman sends those who have never been born as well as those wishing to reincarnate into the corporeal Wiadzie. Thus, the NaSaman ensures survival, continuity, and faith in the earthly *Ābusua* when she wills her "children" to her earthly female representatives, mothers. For this reason, a child looks physically the same as the NaSaman, represented on earth by a mother who is the exact replica of the NaSaman, because she carries the same blood as the original mother, the Old woman (Abrewah).

Akan society thus is organized along matrilineal descent lines called the *Ābusua* (blood). In fact, every Akan must be born into one of seven (or eight)

Ābusua descent groups, namely, *Asona*, *Tweedan*, *Kona*, *Anana*, *Abradzie*, *Asakyir*, and *Asenee*. These original *Ābusua* groups confer on the Akan three fundamental rights: citizenship, because one has an Akan mother; political rights, because children accede to their mother's throne or stool; inheritance, because children protect their mother's right to own everything acquired and owned by her children since they are composed of her blood and therefore constitute a single matrix. For this reason, siblings would inherit one another's property, while nephews inherit their uncle's and nieces their aunt's, because they share the same kinship lines as their uncles and aunts and therefore constitute an *Ābusua* or a kinship group.

Conceptually, the ideal life is predicated upon a God-given existential entity called *Nkrabea* (a unique existential career blueprint). Although a unique personalized existential career blueprint, the *Nkrabea* is elusive even to its owner nonetheless, making life anxiously capricious. Actuation of ethical existence and generativity (*ɔbra bɔ*) therefore has to do with knowing the precise nature of an individual's existential career opportunities, the discovery of which may lead to an ideal existence (*ɔbra pa*). The inevitability of death also means that an ethical existence and generativity (*ɔbra bɔ*), the attainment of eldership (Nana), and ancestorhood may not be achieved in a lifetime. When an individual dies without fulfilling an *Nkrabea*, then the deceased is reincarnated in order that one may fulfill its *Nkrabea*, if the dead person lived a good life but died before old age. Yet a fulfillment of an *Nkrabea* does not necessarily lead to eldership, because ethical existence and generativity must be construed socially as ideal. In other words, only an *Ābusua*, the matrix and custodian of ethical existence and generativity, confers eldership after it validates a stage.

In this vein, my research method is participatory observation of ritual processes. By that, I mean the process by which an individual's (participant's) subjective experiences are critically assessed by the community (observers) of faith in order to ensure the veracity of those experiences. Thereupon an appropriate maturational stage title is conferred on an individual. For the Akan, this method of objectifying ritual stages to ensure orthodoxy is a normative process handed down from antiquity to contemporary generations. Sadly, the ritual stages are being ignored or forgotten entirely in the urban areas.

The lingering nature of ethical existence and generativity (*ɔbra bɔ*) means that living must be acted out harmoniously and altruistically in order to ensure an ideal life, because the ideal is measured in terms of altruism, invariably construed as having discovered one's own *Nkrabea*. Even though ethical existence and generativity (*ɔbra bɔ*) is viewed as an individual quest, it is still incumbent upon a community to safeguard its content, because disorder, engendered by unethical life, has broader existential and metaphysical implications, threatening the homeostatic relationship between the corporeal and the spiritual worlds. To maintain cosmic balance, annual, seasonal, forty-day cyclical ceremonies, and situational rites are performed periodically. These rites called for communal participation so that even absentee citizens are represented by other family members or lineage heads. Led by traditional kings and their elders, society is brought to existential-divine harmony through propitiatory worship.

When I was growing up, I participated in some of these communal as well as private rites of initiation, such as twins, purification, and divination. As an adult, I have revisited, observed, and when possible, participated in some rites, again. Some rites, like funerals and festivals, may not be performed summarily, so I made several trips to Ghana in order to participate in or observe some rites in progress. The reason is that rites have their own seasons and parameters: those meant exclusively for girls and women, boys and men, and others inclusive of all ages and sexes. To gather information on these differences, I consulted teachers, nurses and midwives (both traditional and Western-trained), farmers, fishermen and fisher mongers, children, elders, diviners, and kings. I was also able to convene discussion groups on various aspects of the Akan culture. These, for the most parts, were recorded and analyzed with the help of assistants. In addition, we randomly discussed specific issues with many more people aimed at obtaining conventional viewpoints as opposed to traditional dogma.

From 1986 to 1993, I made several visits to Ghana (and Liberia). From 1979 to 1982, for example, I lived in the town of Gbarnga, Liberia, which made researching there somehow easier. In Ghana I was based in Winneba a town of over 70,000 people and Gomoa Mprumem, a farming town of 3,000 citizens although most of its citizens live in other communities and only return home annually during festivities honoring their ancestors. Most of the research was carried out in the Gomoa and the Awutu-Effutu-Senya Districts. In the latter district, I interviewed with representatives of the major branches of the Akan who reside there. In general, the research is reflective of the Akan culture.

My structural model utilizes myths and concepts, rites, dreams, and symbolic elements that form the basis for human development among the Akan. My developmental and interpretive framework for this study is based on the works of Erik Erikson⁶ and James Fowler.⁷ They are known for their works on the ego and psychosocial stages of the life cycle, and constructive developmental research in faith and moral development. Fowler has also studied the cognitive patterns of knowing, valuing, interpreting, and reasoning that constitute the basis for moral and ethical understanding. These theories are used within the socio-cultural, polity, and religio-spiritual framework of the Akan.

We should not assume that chronological age is always the determining factor about rituals marking maturation or passage to a new status. I discovered that there are sociological designations based solely on exceptional abilities. Individuals who fall under this classification must nonetheless conform to certain rules and norms of behavior associated with their stages. If, for example, a person fails to exhibit appropriate norms of behavior and cognition commensurate with a stage age, then society referred to such an individual as an *Onyimpa gyangyan* (useless person) or *Kwasiampanyin* (a fool).

Areas of our research include conceptual theory of personality; reincarnation, conception, birth, pre-and post-partum cares, and early childhood; the basis of orality and cognitive operational patterns of knowing and reasoning; meaning-making, and patterns of interpreting existence and generativity; eldership; death and ancestorhood, and ancestor worship.

First, I studied the patterns of ritual development by examining rites commensurate with maturational stages and the role the matrikin plays in performing these rites. Beginning with reincarnation and belief in ancestors as spiritual agents journeying into the corporeal world as children, I studied taboos and prohibitions associated with conception, pre-natal care, parturition, post-partum, and neonatal cares.

Second, I examined the pedagogical apparatus of cognitive development and epigenesis of orality as the basis for oratory during eldership. Since Africans are normally associated with oral tradition as the basis for social, economic, political, and spiritual discourses, my aim was to discover the operational patterns of oral tradition. Studying children between the ages of six through fourteen, I had them perform various tasks and questioned children who sold various food ingredients. They purchased different combination of food items at varying prices and then offered them money in large bills to determine how they went about computing the transactions and determining the right amount of change. Furthermore, I wanted to ascertain how much children committed to memory and their ability to add and subtract.⁸ Furthermore, I wanted to know the effect of Western influence on children in shaping their worldview; that is, whether or not the Western emphasis on writing affected oral tradition and public speaking. This was achieved artistically by asking school children to draw or paint anything of interest to them.

Finally, attention was giving to adulthood or what the Akan refer to as *ɔbra bɔ* (ethical existence and generativity). Adulthood begins when an individual becomes morally and ethically concerned with existential and metaphysical issues and their repercussions. In general, marriage and employment mark the beginning of adulthood, when an individual is able to distance oneself from significant others, engage in critical reflection, and made moral and ethical decisions in relation to others.

To make ethical choices is to engage in critical thinking during adulthood, because reflections about the path to an ideal life eventually ushers an individual into eldership. The attainment of eldership means that an elder is in a state of perfection in concert with the collective infallibility of the elders, concerned with maintaining existential and metaphysical order sometimes in the face of hostility by the young. As intellectuals, the elders are always thought of as seated-in-state during deliberations and adjudications. When a meeting is brought to order, deliberation and adjudication commence after the transcendent ancestors have been implored to assume their honored place among the elders.

In addition to being judges, the elders mediate between members of their lineage and mend broken relationships, often putting their honor and prestige on line for those who seek their assistance. Not only are the intercessory roles of elders sought to mend damaged relationships, they are also sought when individuals entreat favor from other elders and ancestors.

As sages, the elders counsel members of their lineage and anyone seeking their services. They instill in their posterity proper moral and ethical teachings imperative to maintaining the delicate balance between the tangible and the spiritual worlds. As counselors, the elders embody collective truth and then assiduously defend them in the face of contempt by the young. Thus, like the *ɔsran* (Moon), elders, although good, are sometimes perceived as embodying evil and blamed for all

the ills of society by delinquent youths and adults. As infallible individuals who have mastered the act of existence, elders await their finitude on earth, as to when they would be transformed into ancestors upon death. While the corporeal world is fleeting, the attainment of immortality is rewarding. As elders, they are assured in their posterity, knowing that they have succeeded in bequeathing to future generations names that would be recalled eternally.

African spirituality then is a developmental model based on the Akan, one that serves as the basis for a better view of the African life. This way of conceptualizing the Akan or other African peoples is not new; however, it is the first study of its kind that examines the Akan from a developmental-spiritual perspective relative to Western psychosocial and ego and constructive developmental theories.

This endeavor stems from my own attempts to come to a cross-cultural understanding of myself in graduate seminary. After taking a number of developmental and psychological courses in graduate seminary, I began to take a critical look at myself relationally and culturally, especially when I was confronted with some racial incidences in graduate school. In the process, I discovered and came to an appreciation that I was a communal being, nurtured and shaped by the ethos and polity of the Akan. This study, therefore, discloses the way I perceive myself relationally, developmentally, and spiritually; it defines and forms my moral, ethical, and religious-political and spiritual responsibility as an Akan ruler (Ɔdzikro).

I have divided this study into two parts. Part I must be seen as a metaphysical and corporeal drama in the Samanadzie, the Akan world of the ancestors. Akan cosmology then is my way of offering a comprehensive ontology for a holistic personality. The concept of community is discussed in relation to the mother's blood as the basis for the physicality of an individual, because an individual is not only a physical being, but a spiritual and a divine individual as well. Following this, I offer the basis for spiritual and divine attributes of personhood, exploring over a dozen agencies and their manifestations. These entities are discussed in relation to the mother's blood, as the basis of a holistic personality.

Furthermore, I review the works of both foreign and Akan ethnographers about the Akan perspectives on the personality. In general, the reviewed literature deals only with few elements within the confines of previous studies on the Akan but they add to the longstanding and ongoing debate on the Akan personality conception. Even where new concepts are examined, except Rattray perhaps, they are not discussed in relation to the overall conception of the Akan anthropology. This is exactly why I thought a comprehensive study of the personality was needed, and so I began with the Akan cosmology.

Part II focuses on the stages of spirituality; that is, the process of becoming a human being in the Samanadzie, then journeying into the corporeal Wiadzie or world, and then finally back to the Samanadzie world. Until the beginning of consciousness, children are thought to have paranormal capabilities enabling them to maintain close rapport with their spiritual siblings and mother (NaSaman). However, with awareness also comes the task of educating children into full adults, and so beginning with simple to sophisticated ritual tasks designed to inculcate both cognitive development and moral and ethical responsibility, adults equip children

into becoming model citizens during the education stage of development.

Following that, attention turns to adulthood—the period of ethical existence and generativity—a time when an individual becomes existentially responsible for one's own actions. Paradoxically, adulthood is a period of independence from significant others as one enters into new relationships, but which, at the same time, is dependent state because an adult still relies on the matrikin for meaning and affirmation. The generative individual is therefore a young adult who marries, has children, and leads an altruistic life as a mature adult, the prerequisite for eldership. In recognition, one's matrikin confers on him or her, the highest existential title, Elder or Nana. In other words, after having mastered and meaningfully integrated the stages of living, an elder is now in the position to bequeath to contemporary generations acts of ideal living. As repositories of sacred traditions, elders are bound by a higher moral imperative: accountability before their eternal predecessors, the ancestors. Standing on the threshold of ancestorhood, elders have already transcended death and consequently look forward to living face-to-face with their eternal counterparts.

Death is not a welcoming event and yet it is through death that an elder ultimately becomes an ancestor. Still, when death finally arrives the corpse is ritually prepared and given a fitting burial. After forty days, the posthumous abstract personality (the *ɔsaman*) of the deceased departs the physical world and returns to the world of the ancestors. There, the posthumous abstract personality, the *ɔsaman*, is put on trial and if found worthy admitted into the company of the ancestors. However, if the posthumous abstract personality is found to have led less than an ideal life on earth, then it is pronounced guilty and excluded from ancestorhood. Most importantly, the guilty *ɔsaman* may not be allowed to reincarnate to undo its evils.

The ancestors watch over the affairs of the world from their vantage abode of the sky or heaven (the *Samanadzie*). The *Samanadzie*, unlike the ancient Egyptian world of the dead governed by a male deity called Osiris, is actually governed by a female deity called the *NaSaman* (Mother *Saman*). Her name itself suggests that she was once a human because an *ɔsaman* can only be a dead person's posthumous abstract personality. For this reason, the *NaSaman* is the progenitor of all posthumous abstract persons (*Nsamanfo*) to the corporeal *Wiadzie* as neonates, who are destined to return to the *Samanadzie* upon death. Even so, human beings are children of God, because life is divine in origin despite the human being's physicality.

Flesh Is Blood

As I sat anxiously for Archbishop Tutu, the commencement speaker of my graduating class to speak, I heard the president of Emory University say in reference to Mary Leaky, the famous paleontologist who was being honored together with Archbishop Tutu by Emory University, that because of her work we now know that humanity originated with a single woman in Africa. That statement left an indelible impression on me, because I thought it was courageous on the part of President Laney to make such a public pronouncement to the mostly white crowd of several thousand. Actually, what took scientists a long time to affirm publicly, the Akan and

other African peoples, as well as ancient Greek historians, always believed and knew that humanity originated in Africa, with a single woman.

What exactly do the Akan believe about the beginning? To talk about a beginning, it is imperative to begin with a point of reference because it is within this context that one discovers and make sense of all that there was, is, and will be. Most importantly, a beginning deals with a people and their heritage, including history, religion, philosophy, polity, and, above all, their spiritual concerns. By spiritual concerns, I mean the quest by a people to aspire to the original, ideal epoch characterized by immortality but now superseded by impermanence in the corporeal Wiadzie. This definition makes spirituality a universal quest; that is, all living things would wish to live forever whether in the corporeal or in a world beyond, because of a certain innate longing for that which is lost or missed. Longevity then becomes an obsession and a goal; a desired intrinsic ideal, because life should not end but lived indefinitely, as it must once have been.

In order for me to deal with these issues, I have chosen the Akan cosmogony as a point of reference, because it offers me an inclusive, paradigmatic platform from which to speak to the quest for meaning and spirituality. The Akan creation story is brief and yet what has been handed down by word of mouth contains enough information to constitute a people, the Akan. The key to the story, as to every sacred tradition in Akan or any other African society, is the ability to decipher and interpret what has been handed down to succeeding generations.

We know from the Akan creation myth that the first qualitative act of Nana Nyame, the Akan monotheistic God, is God's creativity (*Ɔboadzie*). In the beginning Nana Nyame alone created heaven or the sky (*Ɔsor*), the earth (*Asasi*), and order (*Adze nyinaa Nyame ahyihye no peperper*) instantaneously. By order, I mean the perpetual cosmic and seasonal cycles of living things. It entails the never-ending reproductive cycles and their precise and orderly times of ascendancy.

For the Akan to the south, the earth came into existence on a Friday, while for those to the north, Thursday. Hence, the earth is *Asasi Āfua*, and *Asasi Yaa*, respectively and therefore people may not till the earth, because those two days are sacred to the earth depending on where one resides. Furthermore, acts that desecrate the earth must be avoided, including spilling blood (homicide) on her, sexual indiscretion on the open field, toxic waste, and indiscriminate use of land.

Notably, there are two things about the creative acts of God. First is the unilateral creativity of the Akan God, Nana Nyame. Secondly, to say that God arranged everything orderly or accordingly does not mean preordination; rather, it suggests that God has foreknowledge of everything. The foreknowledge of God means that God has advance knowledge of how things would ultimately turn out for everyone, because God is privy to everyone's *Nkrabea* prior to the birth of an individual. Once born, a person is, however, free to create, shape or lead the kind of ethic that is ideal or delinquent. Conceptually what determined *how* life is lived during adulthood is what the Akan called the *Nkrabea* (divinely decreed existential career blueprint or plan) actuated during adulthood.

When I was growing up, I heard many versions of the Akan creation account. However, no matter how many versions I heard, the essential nature of the story