

Parenting Lessons from Tribes Around the World

Feature – Interview with photographer Jimmy Nelson by Michelle Henning
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Talking Points

Photographer Jimmy Nelson found himself suddenly bald at 16 years old. He decided to go to Tibet where everyone else was bald. He took some photographs and those photos were published; his career had begun. Nelson's project *Before They Pass Away* contains stunning photos of people who are the last of their tribes. Traveling and spending time amongst some of the world's last traditional cultures has given him the opportunity to see how they parent.

- It seems people here in the modern world are obsessed with getting their infant on a schedule, sleep training and feeding them solid foods. In these indigenous cultures infants are always on their mother's boob. They breastfeed until they are 4 or 5 years old. Breastmilk builds their immune system and meets their nutritional needs. There is no structure to it – they eat when they're hungry. How can we learn by their example?
- The babies are always with someone, day and night: mother, brothers, and sisters. They are always attached to someone. They hardly fuss and whine because their needs are always being met. At night you would never know they're awake because they're with their mother. What is different in our culture that prevents this from happening in most households?
- This is all possible in our culture as well, it just depends on how committed we are as parents. Our world is full of opportunities and distractions. We can be very hard on ourselves and our culture places a lot of pressure on us to do everything "right" while maintaining a household and career. Are our cultural norms preventing people from raising their children this way? Why do you think we, as people, have gone from the parenting model of the indigenous cultures to where we are now? Is one more appropriate than the other? Why?
- Nelson observed that in the tribes they all have their children young. It is when we are at our strongest, most resilient, fearless, and flexible (physically and mentally). They are happy just taking care of their children. When their kids are older and leave home they're still young enough to keep on living and doing things they want to do. Do we have a cultural tendency to have our children when we're older? Why? How would our lives be different if we had our children while we were younger?

Resources

Full references for each article are available at <http://pathwaystofamilywellness.org/references.html>

Jimmy Nelson's website: <http://www.beforethey.com/>

Jimmy Nelson at TEDx Amsterdam: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPPxBpTP5hE>