



Topic overview

## Names and Naming

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### NAMES AND NAMING

**NAMES AND NAMING** activities are central to human symbolic and communicative processes. To be human is to name, and be named, and thereby to possess full being and the ability to relate to the world in meaningful ways. In the Bible, God is said to have brought all the newly created animals to the first human, "to see what he would call them" (*Gn.* 2:19). In all human communities there is thought to be a close relationship between the name of a person or other phenomenon and its character, status, and very being.

Names often have a mysterious quality, whether they refer to sacred beings of a transcendent nature or to humans and other concrete entities. There is power in names, because they both participate in the reality named and give definition and identity to that reality. That is, name and named exist in a mutual relationship in which the power of the former is shared with the being of the latter. Being without name has a very marginal status in the world of phenomena. For example, traditional Christian teaching holds that unbaptized children who die go to limbo. They have no clearly defined status because they have been given no name by the proper ceremonial means. The act of christening during baptism renders a new life human in the religio-cultural sense, which is more significant than mere biological humanness. Similarly, among the Netsilik, in a traditional Inuit (Eskimo) context, once a female infant had received a name it was absolutely forbidden to kill her, though female children were often considered superfluous.

Persons have often been thought to persist after death through the remembrance of their names. In ancient Egypt, children had the solemn duty to preserve the names of their parents through ritual means. The Old Kingdom Pyramid Text of Pharaoh Pepi I refers to his continued existence by means of the repetition of his name: "Thy name which is on earth lives; thy name which is on earth lasts; thou wilt not disappear; thou wilt not be destroyed in all eternity" (cited by Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, Chicago, 1948, p. 113).

Not only humans, whether of high or low degree, but also gods exist and express their power, presence, and will by means of their names. In ancient Israel, God was believed to dwell in his Temple through his name (*shem*), while he himself dwelt in heaven. That is, by his name, *YHVH* (probably then pronounced as *Yahveh*), God resided in revealed form among his creatures. In this case, Yahveh's inner being was not coterminous with his name; but his power, will, and presence were made manifest in his sanctuary through it. Islamic belief holds that Allāh likes to be called upon by his names, which provide vehicles for communication and even union between Allāh and his human servants. In Hinduism, the mention of a god's name has soteriological value. One view even holds that the name of God is greater than its referent, because sound (*śphoṭa*) is absolute. But not all traditions have a name for God, nor is it always considered proper, because of their holiness, to utter those names that are associated with divinity.

### NAMES OF GODS AND OTHER SACRED ENTITIES

It is common to nearly all religious practices that in order to communicate with a deity one must know its name. Knowledge

of a divine name gives the knower both power and an avenue of communication with its source. This intimate relationship between knowing a name and participating in its power has both religious and magical aspects.

## Ancient Israel and Judaism

Moses asked the voice from the burning bush, identified as "the god of your fathers," what his name was, and was answered "I am" (*ehyeh*), which, in a different Hebrew grammatical form, is rendered *Yahveh* (approximately, "He causes to be"; *Ex.* 3:13–14). In keeping with this most mysterious and potent of God's names in the Hebrew tradition is the

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conviction that God's names are, generally speaking, according to his acts. Causing to be is the greatest of acts and thus the name *Yahveh* is the most sublime name. *Yahveh*, as name and as theological concept, affirms both God's eternal reality and his reliable presence with his covenant people, Israel.

There are many names for God in the Hebrew scriptures; some of them appear to be very archaic, and some were shared by other Semitic peoples in antiquity. Other names came into being during the long covenant history of Israel, both through contact with neighboring peoples and through the deepening insights of Hebrew prophets and poets. *Baal* ("lord"), a term common to Canaanite religion and Hebrew faith, came to be associated with *Yahveh* for a time, only to be repudiated later. *Adon*, which also means "lord," did not earn the opprobrium of *Baal* and continues to the present to be an honorific substitution for *Yahveh*, the name that postexilic Jews considered too holy to utter. *Adonai* ("my lord") came to be a potent religious term because of its referent, whose real name was different. Here sacred names can be seen operating on different levels, with one gracious name serving as a protective shield for another, more sacred name. Certain other divine titles and names emerged from Israel's cumulative experiences and convictions: political ones meaning "king," "judge," "shepherd"; kinship terms meaning "father," "brother," "kinsman"; and metaphors from nature with such meanings as "rock."

## Christianity

The New Testament community inherited most of the Israelite names and convictions associated with God but never developed the strong sense of taboo connected with the holiest name, *Yahveh*. Jesus took the Hebrew name of God as "father" but rendered it in the familiar form *Abba* ("daddy"), which astonished people because it is ordinarily used only between an actual begotten child and its father. *Father* has remained the most characteristic Christian appellation for God, used especially when the speaker draws near to him in prayer, worship, and praise. All other names for God, whether inherited from the biblical tradition of the Jews or generated within the Christian movement, have been tempered by the intimate personal dimension that Jesus emphasized.

The Christians accepted the older Hebraic custom of speaking or acting "in the name of" someone, whether God or a human, as a representative or witness. The New Testament sometimes uses the names of God and Jesus almost interchangeably as the ultimate divine authority, while never suggesting directly that Jesus is other than the mediator between God and humankind, and not to be worshiped himself. The identification between Father and Son, however, becomes almost total in later christological developments, when Christians came increasingly to conceive of God in terms of Jesus' incarnation. "At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow" (*Phil.* 2:10) is one way in which the New Testament expresses the exalted nature of Christ, whose name is holy.

## Islam

In characteristic Abrahamic fashion, the religion of Muḥammad and the Qur'ān places heavy emphasis on the name of God. All utterances, written or spoken, should be prefaced by the phrase "In the name of Allāh, the merciful, the compassionate" (Arab., "Bismillāh al-rahmān al-rahīm"). The word *Allāh* is probably an archaic contraction of the Arabic definite article *al-* and *ilāh*, "deity" (cf. Heb. *el*, *eloh*, "god"). Allāh, "the god," or God, was central in the pre-Islamic pantheon but as the highest and not the sole divinity. The ancient Arabs believed that Allāh had three daughters, but this as well as other views of Allāh's relatedness and contingency were swept away by the prophetic activity of Muḥammad and the message of the Qur'ān. The Islamic scripture emphasizes Allāh's incomparable uniqueness. It also provides many names and titles of Allāh, sometimes outright but often in the sense of derivations of divine attributes and activities (e.g., *Knower*, *Provider*, *Relenting*). Later Islam developed out of the Qur'ān a list of the "most beautiful names of Allāh" (*al-asma*, *al-ḥusnā*), which are traditionally believed to number ninety-nine. The names are recited by Muslims, often with the aid of a string of beads called a *subḥa*. Each name has a particular power and should be recited according to the spiritual station of the seeker.

In addition to *Allāh*, two other names figure prominently in the Qur'ān. The first is *Rabb* ("lord"), a term that occurs most frequently in passages containing material about Jews and Christians. The message of Allāh's uniqueness and sovereignty is often declared with the use of *Rabb*, beginning with what is commonly considered to be the first passage to have been revealed: "Recite: In the name of thy Lord [*rabbika*], who created man of a blood clot" (surah 96:1–2). The second frequent Qur'anic name besides *Allāh* is *al-Rahmān* ("the merciful"), which is the same as the old South Arabian

Jewish name for God. The Qur'ān commands the believers to "call upon Allāh, or call upon al-Raḥmān; whichever you call upon, to him belong the names most beautiful" (17:110).

Muslims have never observed a taboo respecting the name of God. Instead, they have preferred to utter their praises with as many divine names and attributes as possible, following the Qur'anic command: "O believers, remember God oft [by means of *dhikr*, "mentioning" his names], and give him glory at the dawn and in the evening" (33:41).

## Sikhism

The Indian combination of devotional Hindu and Ṣūfī Islamic doctrines founded by Gurū Nānak (d. 1539) emphasizes the magnification of God by his name in a special form of devotion known as *nām mārga* ("the path of the name"). A variety of names for God are recognized and uttered by Sikhs, including both Muslim and Hindu ones, but the most common is *Sat Nām* ("the true name"). Although Sikhs believe that it is beyond humankind's capacity to describe and define God, people can become purified and free of their egos by means of the veneration of his names, with intelligent awareness and detachment from the world.

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## Hinduism

There is a persistent conviction within the rich and complex Hindu worldview that the mysterious, unknowable ultimate reality, *brahman* (which literally means "expansion, swelling, growth"), transcends and undergirds all. *Brahman* is the holiest of beings, the most real being, and the source and goal of all being. Hindus have developed highly abstract pantheistic and theistic philosophical doctrines of *brahman*. At bottom, the name *brahman* means "prayer," in the sense of sacred utterance, so that by speaking the word one participates in its reality as power and speech. The believer is able to meditate on divine themes by means of *mantras*, special patterns and techniques of oral utterance that center on the name of a deity, or on a sacred syllable or sound. A *mantra* is not limited to divine names as words only but may be rooted in the whole realm of sound and breath. *Mantras* are recited under the guidance of a guru, or preceptor, who knows the correct pronunciation of the formulas and other aspects of ritual performance, such as posture and breath control.

It is of the utmost importance in Hinduism that the correct name for a deity be used, depending on the purpose and status of the worshiper. The many named divinities of Hinduism, although never universally regarded as belonging to a single system, nevertheless can be identified as components of a comprehensive and balanced worldview, with prominent social and cultural dimensions.

The invocation of names of gods is especially prominent in devotional (*bhakti*) Hinduism. Singing and recitation of the divine names, especially that of Kṛṣṇa, is believed to bring release (*mokṣa*) from the round of rebirth (*samsāra*). Some Hindus meet regularly to perform *nāma vali*, a "necklace of names" in which an emotionally charged congregation and its leader sing the name of a deity, beginning slowly, and building up to a spirited climax. The Purāṇas contain much on name praise, such as the following passage: "Hari's Name, Hari's Name, and Hari's Name alone is my vocation. In the Kali age there is no other, no other, indeed no other course [for *mokṣa*]" (cited in Singer, 1966, pp. 143–144).

## Mahāyāna Buddhism

Mahāyāna Buddhism places considerable emphasis upon the soteriological efficacy of invoking the Buddha's name. The Pure Land schools of East Asia stress faith in Amitābha (called Amida in Japan), focusing on the simple ritual of reciting the name of the Buddha in order to be saved and enter paradise.

### Nembutsu

The devout repetition of the phrase "Namu Amida Butsu" ("Homage to Amida Buddha") is believed to deliver one from sins and, if uttered on the threshold of death, will effect one's rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida. There are different schools of the ritual remembrance of the Buddha's name, called *nembutsu* in Japanese and *nien-fo* in Chinese. The Japanese monk Hōnen (1133–1212) taught that one should repeat the name of Amida with faith, a practice open to practically anyone, not requiring long apprenticeship in meditation. Hōnen and some of his disciples insisted that the *nembutsu* formula should be repeated continuously, as many as seventy thousand times in one day. Shinran (1173–1262), who followed his master Hōnen in *nembutsu*, considered a single recitation of the ritual invocation, "with faith," as sufficient for salvation. In Japan, the name is a key dimension, whereas in China and India, invoking the name of Amitābha Buddha has been associated with the less central contemplation of the gigantic features of the Buddha's cosmic body.

### The Lotus Sūtra

Another ritual naming practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism is the invocation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, a major book in the Buddhist

canon that became a central scripture of Tendai Buddhism in China and Japan. Nichiren (1232–1282), a Japanese seeker who studied Tendai, Zen, and Pure Land Buddhism, concluded his spiritual training with the discovery that enlightenment could be achieved by anyone who has sincere faith in the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*. This faith was then to be expressed in the formula "Namu Myōhōrengekyō" ("Homage to the *Sūtra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law*"). Implicit in this Japanese statement of affirmation is the sense of humble submission to the power of what is named, which is also somehow the name itself. Nichiren chanted the name of the *Lotus Sūtra* to the accompaniment of a drum.

## China

The Chinese have traditionally stressed the importance of names, whether in the Confucian doctrine of the "rectification of names," a philosophy of balance, propriety, and equity in the universe, or at the practical level of naming gods, humans, and other beings. Confucianism has always emphasized the veneration of ancestors, but the Way of Heaven (*t'ien-dao*) has traditionally been ultimate. *T'ien* ("heaven") is sometimes a name for the impersonal sky that overarches all things; at other times *t'ien* has taken on a somewhat more personal meaning, as the divine ruler of events on earth. A variant is *shang-ti* ("supreme ruler," or God). But *t'ien*, even when it means "deity," is subordinate to *dao*, the universally acknowledged ultimate reality in Chinese religious thought. *Dao* cannot be named, nor can it be translated. To characterize the term as the impersonal, creative, and regulating power of the universe is to approach its essence, which in any case is mysterious and transcendent. But, paradoxically, *dao* is also immanent and natural. Lao-tzu's classic treatise, *Dao-te ching*, opens: "The way [*dao*] that can be spoken of is not the constant way; the name that can be named is not the constant name. The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth; the named was the mother of the myriad creatures" (trans. D. C. Lau, Baltimore, 1963).

## Nonliterate and archaic traditions

The appellations for divinity and humankind alike among nonliterate peoples are often extremely varied and complex. Names and naming are frequently surrounded by taboos and employed only with specified ritual procedures, including considerations of status, relationship, season, age, place, and power.

## Australia

Among the Aborigines of southeastern Australia, before Europeans arrived, there was a fully developed belief in a "high god," as scholars have named the category of supreme being in archaic religion. In Australia, the high god's names,

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myths, activities, and associated rituals were closely guarded secrets, known only to the initiated males of high status. *Baiame* is one of the names for the Australian high god, who is believed to have created the world, given moral laws, and established the initiation rites by means of which humans attain their full being and come into contact with ultimate reality. The Australian high god is a sky divinity who performed his greatest labors at the beginning of things, but who nevertheless continues to live and have influence. *Baiame*, *Daramulun*, *Nurunderi*, *Bunjil*, and *Biral* are some of the names for the "sky-hero," as A. P. Elkin (1954) calls the Australian high god. The secret name of this deity was divulged during initiation rites, when his voice was heard in the sound of the bull-roarer.

## Africa

Celestial supreme beings are also known in traditional African religions. Some are distant and uninvolved in human affairs, as in Australia. But others are active and engaged in the world, especially on the moral plane. The Yoruba believe in a high god called Ọlọrun ("lord of the sky"). Ọlọrun is not directly involved in historical existence, but rules through intermediaries. Among the Dinka, on the other hand, Nhialac, whose name means "above," is honored as both creator and sustainer of the world. The Dinka tend to identify all other gods and sacred forces with Nhialac, who thus becomes a sort of only god, in the monotheistic sense, as well as supreme being. The Nuer have no special name for God, but simply use the term *kwoth* ("spirit"), together with appropriate qualifying words or clauses.

## Ancient Egypt

The celestial type of deity is clearly discernible in ancient Egyptian religion, where the pharaoh was believed to be the divine embodiment of Horus, the falcon god, and Re, the sun god. Celestial names and attributes are always reserved for royalty in such traditions as that of Egypt, in which the close relationship, even identification, of the divine and human realms is bound up with rule and cosmic order. Ancient Egyptian sources indicate a great concern for names and their power. The most powerful name for a god was his or her unknown name, as is evident in the famous story of how Isis tricked the supreme god Re into revealing his secret name, which resulted in the goddess's appropriation of his power. Name magic became highly developed in ancient Egypt, especially with respect to deities, who exercised direct power over humans for good or ill.

## Ancient Rome

The naming of deities in Roman times was a highly complex and carefully regulated affair. The Romans kept long lists of divinities, both known and unknown; and they also preserved secret lists of divine names. Hermann Usener wrote a celebrated book called *Götternamen* (Names of Gods; 1896) in which he argued that the Romans distinguished both "momentary" and "functional" deities, who received names according to their times and kinds of activities. Every time, place, thing, and event had its own deity, according to this theory, and the myriad deities that inevitably resulted from such a view were arranged hierarchically. Usener's thesis that momentary and functional gods gave rise to more pervasive, overarching gods, and finally to God, has not fared well in recent times, although his researches still provide a detailed review of the naming systems employed by the ancient Romans.

## HUMAN NAMES AND NAMING PROCESSES

Human names and naming practices are often as important ritually and symbolically as those connected with deities. For example, in ancient Egypt, the name of a god, person, or object was equivalent to its inner being; without *ren*, "name," there was no existence. In the case of humans, *ren* came to be equal in importance to the *ka*, the individual's "spirit" or "vital force." Likewise, in traditional China the name and its owner were identical. In Confucian ancestral rites, the deceased had a "spirit tablet" or a gravestone engraved with his or her name. If the name were omitted or effaced, then there was thought to be no spirit in the grave, and the person utterly ceased to exist. Similar ideas, with different specific rites and behavior patterns, can be found in other traditions (e.g., in Africa, Oceania, and the Americas).

## Judaism

Jews have traditionally employed biblical names, which in turn were derived from many sources: kinship (e.g., *Yehoshu'a ben Nun*, "Joshua the son of Nun"), animals (e.g., *Rahel* or *Rachel*, "ewe"), plants (e.g., *Tamar*, "palm"), personal characteristics (e.g., *Esav* or *Esau*, "hairy"), circumstances of birth (e.g., *Ya'aqov* or *Jacob*, "he who takes by the heel"), and relationship to God (e.g., *Ovadyah* or *Obadiah*, "servant of Yahveh"). In biblical times, the Hebrews practiced name changing because of status changes or special circumstances and experiences. *Ya'aqov's* (Jacob's) name was changed to *Yisra'el* (*Israel*, "let God contend" or "he who strives with God") after his struggle with the angel (*Gn.* 32:29). *Avram's* (Abram's) name was changed to *Avraham* (*Abraham*) and *Sarai's* to *Sarah* when they were commissioned with their auspicious roles as parents of multitudes (*Gn.* 17:5, 17:15). Jews have also adopted foreign names in certain periods. In medieval Europe, they adopted both sacred and secular names, a practice that endures.

## Christianity

Christians have sometimes insisted on specifically Christian names for their children, but they have often also adopted names current in the countries where they have lived. Where Christians have constituted a minority, for example in Islamic regions, "Christian" names (like *Peter*, *George*, *Paul*, *Mark*, and *Thomas*) have been important factors in preserving religious and social identity. Although it has rarely been required that children take biblical names, it has often been done. More common has been the practice of giving a child the name of a saint. Persons entering holy orders or elevated to high ecclesiastical office have also taken saints' names. During the Reformation, Protestants began using Old Testament names for their children, to distinguish themselves from Roman Catholics. The Council of Trent decreed that all baptized infants must be given a saint's name.

## Islam

The conversion to Islam is accompanied by a change of name. Muslim names are partly based on ancient Arabic or other

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(Persian, Turkish, or Indian) usages, partly upon the sayings of Muḥammad reported in the body of traditions known as *ḥadīth*. Muḥammad taught that the best names are *ʿAbd Allāh* ("God's servant") and *ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān* ("servant of the merciful"). From this basis, the use of *ʿabd* with any of the ninety-nine "most beautiful names" of God became very common. The name *Muḥammad* and its parallels are widely used for males, for according to tradition every man with the name of Muḥammad will go to paradise. The Muslims developed a list of ninety-nine names of the Prophet (*asmā' sharīfah*) to parallel the ninety-nine names of God. Among them are *Aḥmad* ("most praised"), *Tāhā* (the first word of surah 20), *Mudaththir* ("wrapped," the opening word of surah 74), *Munīr* ("radiant," surah 33:45), and so forth. Also popular are the names of the Prophet's family and his companions, although in Shīʿī circles one will never find the names of the first three caliphs or of ʿĀʾishah but will very frequently find those of Fāṭimah and the imams, from ʿAlī to Taqī or Riḍā. Names of the Qurʾanic prophets are widely used, including those of Mūsā (Moses) and ʿĪsā (Jesus).

Traditionally, a Muslim name has several different parts, among them the *ism*, the *nisbah*, and the *kun-yah*. The *ism* is the religious name, like those mentioned above. The *nisbah* shows the relation to one's birthplace, tribe, or line of thought; in Arabic, it ends in *ī*, as in *Makkī* ("from Mecca"), *Thaqafī* ("from the Thaqīf tribe"), and *Ḥanafī* ("belonging to the Ḥanafī

school of law"). The *kunyah* indicates the relation of a parent to a child; either *Abū* ("father of") or *Umm* ("mother of") is given to a firstborn child, as in *Abū 'Alī*, or is used in a more general sense, as in *Abū al-Fawāris* ("father of the riders"). The *kunyah* is the name of honor by which one ought to be addressed.

A Muslim name is often complemented by a *laqab*, a nickname pointing to some special quality, as in *al-A'raj* ("the lame one"). Often, composites with *al-dīn* ("of the religion") are added to the *ism*, as in *Jalāl al-Dīn* ("majesty of religion"). To people in political positions compounds with *al-dawlah* ("of the state") may be given as honorific titles, as in *Sayf al-Dawlah* ("sword of the state"). Rulers surrounded themselves with long chains of honorific names, the central one pointing to their relation with God, as in *al-Mutawakkil 'alā Allāh* ("who trusts in God"). Male children were sometimes given repellent names to avert the evil eye, but slaves were often given such delightful names as *Marjān* ("coral") and *Kāfūr* ("camphor").

Non-Arab Muslims traditionally continued using their inherited names, complemented by Muslim names; in countries under Persian cultural influence, such as Turkey and India, Persian names were often used among the upper classes. Indo-Pakistan has produced unusually colorful names, which are often incompatible with Arabic grammar.

Names are often given by an elder member of the family or a venerated master. If a child is born on an auspicious day or in a sacred month, he or she may be named accordingly: by *Ramaḍān*, for instance, or *Mawlidīyah* (for a girl born on the birthday, *mawlid*, of the Prophet). If the child is the result of a special prayer he may be given the name *Nabi-Bakhsh* ("gift of the Prophet"), *Dād- 'Alī* ("Ali's gift"), or *Ghauth-Bakhsh* ("given by Ghauth," i.e., 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānā). Often, especially in India, the Qur'ān is opened and the first meaningful word found is taken for a name. Family names were long unknown in some parts of the Muslim world, or have only recently been introduced, as in Turkey; in such cases the *nisbah* or the *laqab* may develop into a family name.

## Hinduism

Hindu names are extremely varied and numerous. They often include the names of deities, as in *Devadatta* ("given by God"). A Hindu name should reflect the bearer's place within the caste hierarchy. Sometimes a secret name is given to a boy and will remain as part of what survives of him after his death. A close relationship exists between name and personality, and so one's name must be guarded and respected. A traditional Hindu wife never calls out the name of her husband or utters it to others, nor will her husband use her name aloud. The more names a person has, the more secure he or she is from evil and harm. A change of name occurs when status is altered, as when a person becomes a ruler or is recognized as a great spiritual leader.

The ritual of name giving is an important family event, requiring new clothes, an auspicious spatial orientation for the ceremony, the bestowing of a consecrated gold object on the child, and anointing. The name is selected by a family priest or astrologer. Careful attention is given to the number of syllables in the selected name (an even number for boys, odd for girls), its source, and other similar matters.

## China

There is an intimate relationship in Chinese tradition between a person's name and his essential being. After a person's death, if no spirit tablet is attached to the grave, there is no continuing inhabitant of the grave in the sense of a distinct personality. The spirit tablet, or "soul silk," is inscribed with the taboo name of the deceased and receives the prayers and veneration of his family. Although names are maintained for generations, the real name of the deceased is never uttered aloud; rather, another name or title is used. This applies also to living persons, who are commonly referred to by inferior names, which are often apotropaic, considered capable of warding off evil because of their unattractive associations. A demon is unlikely to take an interest in a child with a name meaning "stupid dog" or "sweet potato." Inferior names are known in other cultures, too, such as those of Africa and of ancient Greece. Paired with the inferior name is a "fate name" (*ta ming*), which bears an auspicious meaning (prosperity, happiness, success). The fate name is also never uttered. In traditional China, each name was thought to require an adequate portion of each of the five elements of the universe, which were symbolized by certain Chinese characters. The precise determination of a new name was made by consulting the horoscope.

The naming of persons, especially males, has been a complex matter in China. The "milk name," given a month after birth,

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remains with the person for life. It is used by relatives and others close to the person. Additional names include a "book name," bestowed upon starting school; a "great name," received at marriage; a name to be used by friends outside the family circle; a "studio name," for scholars; and a posthumous, or taboo, name, inscribed on the spirit tablet. Females receive fewer names than males, but they, too, have a milk name, a surname, a marriage name, and nicknames.

Chinese emperors had many names, some connected with their years of rule and any favorable factors connected with them. A ruler's personal name was taboo during his lifetime. At the domestic level, a child was forbidden to utter the name of his father, and wives avoided using their husbands' names, as in India.

## Nonliterate traditions

The use of secret names has been widespread among otherwise very distinct and dispersed cultures. In Aboriginal Australia, name taboos were associated with secret rituals featuring the names of sacred and totemic beings. A person's secret name was never uttered beyond the ritual setting, when the *tjurunga* was being examined, and it was not known beyond the circle of initiated males of his local totem group. Even when the secret name was spoken, it was whispered, lest an enemy learn it and work evil magic by it. The secret name among Aboriginals represented the real self, linked with the past, present, and future in the timeless Dreaming.

Among the Inuit (Eskimo) of North America, the Netsilik distinguished between a personal soul and a name soul. The former was the source of health and energy but was vulnerable to attacks by evil spirits and wicked shamans. A name soul was an actual name, with life and power of its own, and it could protect the person who bore it. Therefore, people acquired as many names as possible, because they served as guardians. Males and females bore names without regard to sex, and the names often came from nonhuman categories such as animals, natural objects, and activities. Hunters liked to have additional names for greater strength, and women obtained them in order to have healthier children. When giving birth, a mother would often call out various names; if the birth was made easier after the mention of a particular name, then it was believed that a name soul had already entered the baby's body, and that would be its name.

In Native American cultures, names were thought to shape and influence the personalities and characters of individuals. Names might serve as an ideal or goal if they were auspicious or represented some virtue. Or names were given that reflected failings and character flaws. It was common for a person to earn a series of names during his lifetime. Among the Blackfeet, a man normally had at least three names: he received the first at birth and used it until he went to war for the first time. The second was a nickname given to him in boyhood by his playmates. It was often unflattering and would sometimes remain attached to its bearer for life. The third was the tribal name, bestowed after the young man had fought his first enemy. The tribal name was based on the outcome of that fateful experience and he bore it for life, whether it reflected honor or dishonor. If a person earned an unflattering name because of his first battle, he could possibly redeem himself through later exploits and then be awarded a meritorious name by the tribe. An individual might earn as many as a dozen names during his lifetime, all of which were his exclusive possessions, forbidden to others. It has also been traditional among Native Americans not to divulge their own names when asked. Someone else must utter the name, because it would be boastful as well as inauspicious to speak one's own name aloud. In many Native American cultures, names were drawn from the totemic and animal worlds, as well as from incidents in life. Names of deities were rarely used in connection with human names.

## SEE ALSO

Attributes of God ; Dhikr ; God ; Nianfo ; Supreme Beings .

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