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Introduction

*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.*

The Gospel According to John

This is a book about the power and significance of naming. In a world where expediency, fashion and commercialism widely govern the use of language, respect for the living power of the Word is being eroded. When language is corrupted, communication degenerates, and this has a disastrous effect on self-respect and on relationships, from the intimate to the international. As individuals we can put the life back into the language we use and nurture clarity of communication. A small step towards reclaiming our natural authority and responsibility for the quality of communication on this planet is to make it our business to find out what words really mean and to call things by their *true* names. Selecting authentic and supportive names for newborn children – names with which they can walk tall for life – is a worthwhile and important part of that step.

This book was inspired by the birth of my godson, Peter Francis Gilpin Spode. It was the first I had witnessed and filled me with deep gratitude and wonder. He arrived shortly after the glimmerings of dawn three days before the year's end – into a candlelit, lavender-fragranced bedroom (moist from the waterbath in one corner), surrounded by a gentle, silent team of six people. Each person had a specific commitment to the mother and baby and a function in the birthing room. Over the next few days, while Peter's parents were setting about choosing a suitable name for him, we discovered that, although there were several books listing a wide choice of names, there were none I knew of which were indexed the other way round – by meaning, quality or attribute. The challenge and implications of writing such a book appealed to me instantly.

This book is in three parts: the first talks about the power of language in our world and explains why naming is important and how it affects us, giving many examples of how ancient peoples respected the power of naming and used it not only to identify things but also to alter reality, change circumstances and heal themselves.

The second lists names under meanings, making it easy to choose a meaningful name. For instance, if you want to endow your child with the quality of a particular animal or flower, then all you have to do is look it up in the index – and you will find several names which bear that meaning. Names whose meanings are disputed or uncertain are discussed in a separate section; and I explain why I have chosen to include the names I have and to omit others.

NAMING

Then follows a more conventional index of first names and their meanings. Although I do not take a scholarly or academic approach, I have tried to be as accurate as possible according to available, often conflicting information. Without the vast amounts of research of those on whose work I have drawn, this book would not have been possible.

Part Three explores naming ceremonies and the relevance of ceremony in our lives today, and gives examples of naming ceremonies from various traditions and cultures. There is also a step-by-step guide to creating your own naming ceremony if you do not want to stick to tradition.

Whenever we become aware of the origin, source and meaning of a word, we become more aware of ourselves. In truly naming a person or thing we connect with the reality of what we name, and with its origin. I hope that this book may help you, the reader, to touch into the power of names.

Caroline Sherwood



The author in christening dress, with her father