I am so glad to be back with you and to learn again from Father Ryan and Dr. Hussain. My thanks to Father Ryan for inviting me to be with you. And to President McShane for the gracious hospitality of the University. It never fails to impress me. And to Sister Anne-Marie Kirmse for all she does to bring these talks to reality.

I feel kind of like Charlie Brown in the ongoing struggle with Lucy over the football. Once again Father Ryan has superbly articulated the issue at hand leaving me only to annotate his remarks. I am grateful to him for causing us to focus on a dimension of Jewish religious thought and practice which we do not customarily recognize or make explicit, specifically the role of the Divine Name. And he does us great service in reminding us that attention to the Name itself is a living part of all of our three faith traditions. Since Father Ryan has left me nothing to say, I will simply reiterate what he has taught us and venture to offer some of my own perspectives on the general issue at hand in the Jewish tradition.

I would start by noting that there is a multiplicity of ways in the Jewish tradition of relating to G-d. We find expressions of outright awe and a sense of the ineffability of G-d or the tremendous power of G-d. We encounter it in the biblical portrayal of the theophany at Sinai. It is expressed in so many Psalms and is the theme of the Book of Job. Elsewhere we see a tremendous intimacy: the many times in the Torah where G-d is addressed as Abba/Father; the audacity of Abraham in challenging G-d about G-d’s plan to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; Moses’ virtual bickering with G-d on numerous occasions and yet identifying G-
d as a “Friend” (Exodus 33:11). We see the intimacy of this relationship in the numerous times in Psalms where the author challenges, even berates G-d as in “wake up, why are you sleeping Lord” (Psalm 44:24) or the practice in more recent times of referring to G-d as Tatanyu/Beloved Father. Neither the Bible nor later Jewish tradition speak of or to G-d in a single idiom. And then there is the modality that is the subject of tonight’s reflections where we do not refer to G-d at all but to the Name.

I suggest that we are not confronted with a single phenomenon here, but two distinct phenomena. On one hand there is the issue of numinal power, and on the other there is the question of delicacy or circumspection. Of course ultimately these two modalities are two sides of the same coin: an appreciation of power; and an appropriate reticence about too casual an encounter with that power. Let us begin with the idea of name itself. Anthropologists tell us “…the name…for something comes to be viewed as tantamount to the thing itself, and power over your name comes to mean power over yourself.” I assume it worked the same in the Bible as it does in various basic societies.

Certainly this seems to be the meaning of Adam naming the animals in Genesis. He is being given dominion over them. When someone is to be extirpated–obliterated not merely from life, but from memory, indeed being itself—the Torah says that their “name” is blotted out. Similarly, when someone’s fundamental nature is changed, when their essence is changed, that change is signified–or effected–by a change in their name. Thus Abram becomes Abraham (literally father of a multitude) when he is destined to be the father of a multitude of people. And Sarai becomes Sarah (Princess) when she is to be the mother of many. Jacob becomes Israel, etc.

And, of course, G-d is depicted in Exodus 3 and 6 as getting named anew–or named differently–as Father Ryan has taught us. Names have power and your name is to be protected.
We can speculate about the history of the change of G-d’s Name. It has been suggested that Moses superimposed the worship of a new god onto the ancestral god of the Hebrew people. But we won’t follow that line of speculation. We will merely note that Exodus contains extensive discussion about how G-d is to be designated. In Exodus chapter 3 in the space of five verses, G-d answers Moses question about G-d’s name by saying Ehyeh asher Ehyeh and then instructs him to tell the Israelites that he was sent to them by “the Lord the G-d of your fathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac and the G-d of Jacob” and then tells him to tell Pharaoh, “The Lord, the G-d of the Israelites has met with us.” While in Exodus 6 G-d maintains that “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as El Shaddai but by My name Yud Hey Vav Hey, I made Me not known to them.” The attention to G-d’s Name seems not to be an incidental matter.

As Father Ryan suggests, this Tetragrammaton does initially seem to have the qualities of a personal name though it ultimately came to have the more generic quality of the English word G-d (with a capital G). And we can infer that by virtue of being an essence revealing name from the beginning, this word itself came to have a quality of potency. The rabbis later designated it as Shem Hamephorash/the distinctive Name, the Name set apart. In English, of course, we refer to it as the Ineffable Name.

Already in the Biblical period The Name becomes a symbol and not a sign; i.e., it comes to participate in the reality of that to which it attests. The Name itself has clear importance. Thus in the Ten Commandments in addition to abjuring idol worship we are instructed not to take the Name of the Lord in vain (Exodus 20:7 and Deuteronomy 5:11). Looking back to the very beginning of its faith, the Bible asserts that Abram, even before his name is changed, built an altar and, “Called on the Name of the Lord” (Genesis 13:4). In the remarkable theophany of Exodus 34 G-d in G-d’s own self is represented as pronouncing The Name:
And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with …[Moses] there and proclaimed the Name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed Adonai, Adonai… (Exodus 34: 5-6).

In one of the poems that constitute Moses’ farewell addresses he invokes:

“I will proclaim the Name of the Lord,

Ascribe greatness to our G-d” (Deuteronomy 32:3).

Long after Moses, the Book of Samuel depicts one of the great moments in the life of King David:

And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baalei Yehuddah, to bring up from there the Ark of G-d –upon which is pronounced the Name, the Name of Adonai…(II Samuel 6:2).

Clearly the Name itself is of consequence. And as a result the Name came to be seen as having a kind of power. Especially in the Bible it appears that the very Name of G-d possessed its own independent power, very much like the Ark of the Covenant which seems to have had the power to liberate itself from Philistine capture and could inflict mortal injury if inappropriately touched. So there are places in the Bible where G-d’s Name itself was hypostasized and seems to have an autonomous agency:

All the peoples of the earth shall see

that the Name of the Lord is called upon you;

and they shall be afraid of you” (Deut 28:10).

The Lord answer you in the day of trouble

The Name of Jacob’s G-d keep you safe (Psalm 20:1).

Our help is in the Name of the Lord
The maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 124:8).

What are we to make of the words in Psalm 118:

- **Blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord**
- **We bless you out of the House of the Lord**

Does it mean that we bless you on behalf of the Lord? Or does it suggest that the Name itself has the power to confer blessing? We will return to the power dimension of the Divine Name when we encounter it more graphically in post-Biblical Judaism.

Let us now turn to that other dimension of the use of the Name in the Bible and later tradition, a stream that reflects a certain delicacy or circumspection in speaking about G-d. I believe we see that same kind of circumspection with relation to the appearance of angels in the Bible. More often than not the appearance of an angel serves as a way of introducing G-d decorously into a scene. Almost always the angel will disappear and be revealed to be nothing other than the appearance of G-d. So too with the issue of the Divine Name. There are places where reference to the name of G-d stands in for the presence of G-d. We see this with some frequency in Isaiah and others of the prophets, for instance:

- **Behold the Name of the Lord comes from far off**
- **With His anger blazing and thick in smoke**
- **His lips are full of indignation’and his tongue as a devouring flame (Isaiah 30:27).**

And in Psalms:

- **May His Name endure forever**
- **May His Name be continued as long as the sun (Psalm 72:17).**

In each of these cases, I believe, reference to the Name is a delicate way of representing the very presence of G-d.
In various places the Bible talks about bad human behavior of various kinds as having the power to “profane the Name of your G-d.” Here, too, I suggest reference to the Name is a circumspect way of making the remarkable assertion that G-d in G-d’s own self can be degraded by the actions of those who are supposed to attest to G-d. The Name is a circumspect invocation of the One to whom it attests.

It is against this background that we can appreciate the way the Divine Name was employed in the post-Biblical period during the second Temple period. One Talmudic citation (Sota 7:6) implies that the Name may perhaps have been pronounced by the priests when they invoked the Priestly benediction (Numbers 6:22-27). We are more certain that the high point of the observance of Yom Kippur was the single moment when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies and in the midst of his prayer would pronounce the Ineffable Name. There is a description of this in the Mishna:

And when the priests and the people who stood in the Temple court
Heard him pronounce the divine Name they would kneel and bow down and fall on their faces and recite the words of Psalm 72:19 (Yoma 6:2).

Given the peculiar nature of Hebrew, that verse from Psalms can have various meanings. It can mean “Praised be His Name whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever.” Or it can mean “Praised be the glorious Name of the One whose kingdom is forever and ever.” And I dare to venture that in this context it had the latter meaning: the Name itself was glorious and worthy of praise.

But even in the Temple there seems to have been some circumspection about pronouncing the Name. Rabbi Tarphon who came from a priestly family remembers:
Once I followed my uncles on to the dais and I inclined my ear to catch what the High
Priest said. But he caused the Name to be drowned out by the singing of his fellow-
priests (B. Kiddushin 71a).

The same circumspection is reflected in the writings of another scion of a priestly family.
Josephus in his *Antiquities* writes:

> Whereupon G-d declared to…[Moses] His Name, which had not been revealed to men
> before, which it is not lawful for me to utter ( ii.xii.4).

We don’t know what the practice was in biblical times itself about pronouncing the
Name, but a certain circumspection about uttering that Name characterizes the post-Biblical
Jewish tradition. The rabbis state:

> In the Sanctuary the Name was pronounced as written. But beyond its confines a
> substitute Name was employed (Sota 7:6).

In sacred texts that Tetragrammaton continued to be written, though often rather than
writing it out even in sacred texts it would be replaced with designated abbreviations. This is
consistently the case even in prayer books where the Tetragrammaton never appears.

And more. However it was written out that Name would never be pronounced. In the
Jewish liturgy whenever the Tetragrammaton appears one says Adonai, (which is
conventionally—at least before gender sensitivity prompted change—translated as Lord) a kind of
euphemism. This practice is made explicit in the Talmud. In Kiddushin 71a we read:

> Not as I am written am I pronounced

> I am written *Yud hay vav hay* [the Tetragrammaton]

> I am pronounced *aleph dalet* [nun yud–Adonai].
Elsewhere in the Talmud (Pesachim 50a) the rabbis express the belief that in the world to come the Name will be pronounced as it is written.

And this is not the end of how post-biblical Judaism deals with the Divine Name. The Name came to play a significant, if not overtly acknowledged role, in the liturgy. The closest that Judaism comes to possessing a creed are the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. They are included in every worship service, often referred to as the “watchword of our faith”: “Hear O Israel the Lord our G-d the Lord is one.” When those verses are included in the worship service the flow of the Deuteronomic text is interrupted by interposing between verses 4 and 5 the words of Psalm 72:19, “Praised be His Name Whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever” or “Praised be the glorious Name of the One whose kingdom is forever and ever,” a direct re-enactment of the practice of the congregation at the Temple when the High Priest pronounced the Name. Which has the effect of causing contemporary worshippers, whether they know it or not, to express praise for the divine Name itself before returning to the rest of the verses from Deuteronomy (“And You shall Love the Lord your G-d with all your heart...”).

And this is echoed in the traditional practice of another interjection in the liturgy. Whenever one reads the words Baruch Attah Adonai/Blessed are You O Lord, which is the standard opening phrase of blessings, the congregation interjects, Baruch Hu u’varuch Shmoh/Blessed be He and blessed be His Name.” The Kedusha, an essential element in the liturgy of every worship service, has separate variants for morning and evening services. In its evening iteration it asserts, “You are Holy, Your Name is holy and the Holy ones praise You every day.” And in the morning it adverts to the Book of Isaiah and states, “We sanctify Your Name on earth just as You are sanctified on high.” And then there is the prayer that concludes every service, the
Kaddish. It functions as a memorial prayer for the dead, but is in fact a doxology the opening words of which state:

Glorified and magnified be His great Name
In the world which He has created.

In each of these instances the very Name of G-d itself is treated with veneration. G-d in G-d’s own self is not mentioned but represented by the hypostasized Name.

Another standard rubric of the liturgy for every worship service is the Aleinu, which quoting the prophet, Zechariah (14:9) concludes with the messianic hope, “On that day the Lord shall be one, and His Name shall be one.” Whatever this formula may have meant in Zechariah’s time, to the modern ear it is a complex concept to decipher. Perhaps it alludes to the hope that at the end of time all humanity will join in affirming the one G-d. As we shall see below, the notion of unifying the Divine Name came to have a very specific meaning for Jewish mystics.5

Reverence for the very Name of G-d carries over to Halachah/Jewish “law” which instructs us that one cannot destroy any text that has The Name on it, or dispose of it in an undignified way. Rather, it must be buried as you would bury a human being who is similarly understood to be a representation of the divine: created in the image of G-d.

Additionally, the rabbis elaborated on the biblical concept we have already encountered in the Bible: profanation of G-d’s Name/Chillul ha’Shem. They advert with some frequency to the fact that if you act in such a way that your actions bring disgrace to the G-d to whom you attest, it is a chillul ha Shem/profanation of G-d’s Name—perhaps the most serious of sins. It is written in the Talmud
He who is guilty of profaning the Name cannot rely on repentance, or upon the power of the Day of Atonement to gain him expiation, nor upon sufferings to expunge it. Only death alone can expunge it (B. Yoma 86a).

A later text asserts that the person guilty of

*Chillul haShem* is among the five types of sinners for whom no forgiveness is possible (Avot de Rabbi Natan 39).

In contradistinction to *chillul haShem*, the Rabbis introduce the category of *Kiddush ha'Shem/*the sanctification of G-d’s Name. This term is usually reserved for those who died as what Christians would call martyrs, whose death was a testimony to their faith. In the Middle Ages, for instance, the Jews of the communities of the Rhine who suffered murder at the hands of Crusaders or who chose suicide over victimhood or forced conversion were said to have died *Al Kiddush haShem*/for the sanctification of G-d’s Name. And in our day Jews often apply this term to all the six million who perished in the Holocaust. They died *Al Kiddush haShem*.

To these categories one other was added, with largely mystical overtones: *L’Yached shmo*, quite a presumptuous idea, literally the unification of the Name. It expresses the belief that our actions can have the effect of making G-d one. It suggests that our fulfilling a religious imperative has the capacity to unify G-d, but is expressed in the circumspect terms of G-d’s Name.

It is in the more overtly mystical streams of Judaism that we re-encounter the notion that the Name possesses a potency. We see this in the earliest expressions of Jewish mysticism, the use of various combinations of the divine name to work miracles, including cures. It is expressed, as well, in the creation of mystical amulets making use of the Divine Name. Clearly for mystics the very Name itself was thought to have a power accessible to certain people.
Perhaps the most famous of Jewish Mystics was the Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name), the founder of the Chasidic movement. People may assume that his name derives from the fact that he acquired a good reputation. But what it really signifies is that he had access to the Shem Tov, the (Good) Name. And he used that Name as a wonder worker. There are many legends and folk tales about how the Baal Shem Tov came into possession of the Name.

And the power of the Name is reflected unconsciously in practices current among Jews today. We have seen how the Tetragrammaton evolved a euphemism: Adonai. But even that is not regarded as circumspect enough among many pious Jews. In more recent times the euphemism itself was euphemized. Other than in prayer or formal reading of sacred texts even that euphemism is not employed. Rather one replaces it with the neologism: Adoshem, a euphemism for a euphemism which seems to be built on the word Adonai and the word shem/Name. Or, more overtly some merely replace the now-unpronounceable euphemism with “HaShem” – the Name.6 Similarly, there are many who, when writing in English avoid writing out the word G-d, replacing it with the characters G dash D. Recently I saw it written in more dramatic form: G exclamation point D (G!d).

So though we never actually make it explicit, when we look at it as Father Ryan has caused us to, it becomes clear that the Name has great valence in Jewish life. It runs through every stratum of Jewish history and is manifest in every aspect of religious life. It is dealt with both reverence and circumspection. We might assume that attention to the Name would thus be the province of the pious or theologically sophisticated. But in truth it is even an element of everyday conversation. I learned it from my grandmothers. And I heard it in a conversation just this afternoon. It is a convention that you never say anything positive about yourself. “How are you?” You wouldn’t say “I’m fine,” not even “thank G-d I’m fine.”. And similarly you don’t
express gratification, gratitude, or relief. In all these cases what you say is “**Baruch HaShem**/Blessed be The Name.”

“How are you?” “**Baruch haShem.**”

“I got to the train just in time, **Baruch haShem.**”

“The boss really liked the report I turned in, **Baruch haShem.**”

“I talked to the Doctor and everything is negative **Baruch haShem.**”

So we have travelled together a great distance: from Abraham our Father to a conversation I had this very afternoon. And now we have reached the end. For those who have found the journey arduous or tedious this is a time to say

**Baruch haShem.**
NOTES


3 And elsewhere: 48:11; 103:1.

4 This same theme is found with some frequency in both the Torah and prophets: Leviticus 18:21; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2 and 32; Ezekiel 36:20-21; 39:7; 43:7-8 and Amos 2:7.

5 This verse offers the Talmud another opportunity to reflect on the difference between the way the Name is written and the way it is given verbal expression:

   Not like this world is the world to come. In this world the Name is written one way, but pronounced another. In the world to come … it will be pronounced the same way it is written (Pesachim 50a).

6 I once witnessed a most subtle religious dispute over the issue of “name.” At an interfaith Thanksgiving service the Catholic priest violated ecumenical etiquette by insistently and repeatedly concluding the prayers he read with the words “in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” – in a synagogue no less. The Jewish Cantor, offended, “retaliated” for the rest of the service by pointedly inserting the word “haShem” in places where, during a worship service, one would customarily say *Adonai*, as if to say “whatever this is I am participating in, I no longer consider it a worship service.”