Klutznick-Harris Symposium offers 15 sessions on “Jews and the Environment”

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Their passions range from hiking to biking -- and all sorts of other activities. Their homes are found from the Middle East to the Midwest -- and many points in between. The topics of their presentations cover everything from agriculture to zoology -- looked at from a variety of perspectives and methodologies. They are the 15 presenters at this year’s Klutznick-Harris Symposium -- on Jews and the Environment -- being held on Sunday, Oct. 28, and Monday, Oct. 29.

The Symposium will have its formal beginning Sunday, Oct. 28, 10:30 a.m., when Daniel Hillel talks about the role of the environment in shaping the Hebrew Bible. Hillel, currently residing both in Israel and in New York, is one of the world’s leading ecology experts, having authored or edited nearly two dozen highly respected books on soils and hydrology.

Born in California, he went to Palestine (later, Israel) at an early age. In the early 1950s, he was a founding member of a Negev settlement named Sde Boker. There he became friends with David Ben Gurion, with whom he exchanged a number of letters that he cherishes to this very day.

He will be followed by Ellen Bernstein, well known as a lecturer, writer, and organizer within the Jewish environmental movement. With mountain climbing, canoeing, and biking among her favorite childhood activities, she did her undergraduate work at UC-Berkeley in one of the first environmental programs in America.

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Founder of Shomrei Adamah, the first national Jewish environmental organization, Bernstein is at present preparing a unique ecological studies program at Hebrew College. She will be speaking about the "natural intelligence" of the Song of Songs.

Between the first and second sessions is a luncheon, at noon, to which all are invited. The second of Sunday's workshops features three speakers: Jonah Steinberg, Dean Bell, and Barbara Lerman-Golomb.

Steinberg is Director of Talmudic Studies at the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College. This experience ties in well with the topic of his presentation, "Classical Rabbinic Steps Toward a Theology of Cosmic and Environmental Torah."

Through his leading role in Hebrew College's Open Bet Midrash, Steinberg has frequently taught about Judaism and the environment throughout the United States and England.

In his presentation, Dean Bell, of the Spirens Institute of Jewish Studies -- where he serves as Dean and Chief Academic Officer -- will summarize and analyze the results of his research on Jewish descriptions of earthquakes in the early modern world. As Bell notes, earthquakes "haunted" his graduate study. On his first night in California at Berkeley, he experienced one of the area's most severe earthquakes!

Barbara Lerman-Golomb recently stepped down as executive director of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) and now serves as a consultant for another leading Jewish environmental organization, Hazon. In addition to her continuing work as an environmental educator, Lerman-Golomb was a coordinator for the Million Moms March and serves on the Commission on Social Action of the Union for Reform Judaism. From these perspectives, she will address her audience on "Reconnecting to Nature for Our Very Survival."

Philip Hollander, who teaches Hebrew literature and culture at Tulane University, will lead off Sunday's third session. He will look at -- and invite you to view -- changing attitudes toward the environment in two Israeli films: the now classic Sallah Shabati and the recent James' Journey to Jerusalem. Outside of the classroom, Hollander takes an active role through cycling to work by bike and supporting efforts to restore wetlands along the Louisiana coast.

There are few people in Omaha who are unfamiliar with Marty Shukert or untouched by his numerous efforts in both the public and the private sector: city planning, redevelopment, building design, and promotion of trails and open space. Bicycling, photography, drawing, music, and baseball are among the multi-faceted Shukert's many hobbies. As the title of his presentation -- "Green Judaism and the Design of Communities: A Practitioner's View" -- makes clear, he will draw from his decades of experience for the Symposium.

These seven presentations, concluding at 5 p.m., are open and free to the public, as are other events associated with the Symposium -- which resumes, Sunday, 7:30 p.m., in the JCC Theater, with the keynote address of Ailon Tal, from Ben-Gurion University. Tal will talk about "What Makes Jewish Environmentalism Jewish?"

Just before Tal speaks, Lindsey Paige Savoie will introduce the Symposium audience to the concept of a Jewish CSA (community supported agriculture) as a possibility for Omaha. A native of Omaha, she presently lives in Silver Spring, MD, where she is an avid bike rider and Jewish environmental educator.

Sunday at the JCC concludes with a dessert reception, which follows Tal's keynote address.

Throughout the day, Symposium guests are invited to enjoy a special art show in the gallery (the show runs from Oct. 27-30). With Jenni Schlossman as curator, the exhibit is titled "Tikkun Olam: Repairing the World, One Artist at a Time." It includes work from local and national artists, all highlighting the importance of environmental concerns.

Guests are also encouraged to browse the Symposium-themed books for sale, courtesy of Soul Desires Bookstore; there will be an additional display of books in the Kripke Library. Moreover, local and national environmental groups have been invited to provide materials for the benefit of those in attendance.

Six more presentations are scheduled for Monday, Oct. 29, all taking place in the Skutt Student Center on the campus of Creighton University. The first session of the day begins at 8:45 a.m., with a presentation by Lawrence Troster, of GreenFaith (an interfaith environmental...
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coalition) and Bard College. He will lay out his understanding of a Jewish environmental theology of redemption. In addition to his writing and speaking engagements, Troster is a stage magician and enjoys theatre, hiking, and collecting Native American art.

Well-known biblical scholar Gary Rendsburg, of Rutgers University, will follow, with a presentation titled "From Desert to Sown: Israel's Encounter With the Land of Canaan." His involvement with ecology is active -- he has participated in five Hazon-sponsored bike rides (two in Israel, three in New York) -- and personal: at home he keeps a composting bin in his kitchen, with a sign above it that quotes Pirke Avot, hafokh bah, hafokh bah!

Three "speakers" are included in Monday's second session: Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, Sandra B. Lubarsky, and Natan Margalit. Brumberg-Kraus teaches at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, where (among other courses) he teaches a first-year undergraduate seminar on "The Rituals of Dinner"; the students, together with their professors, help raise the food and design the rituals for the class's final sustainable banquet. Brumberg-Kraus will be speaking on connections between Kabbalah, food, and sustainability.

The next presenter, Sandra Lubarsky, is the founding director of the graduate program on sustainable communities at Northern Arizona State, where she is also Professor of Religious Studies. Since 2002, she has logged more than a thousand miles walking across Europe and Turkey. For the Symposium, she will make a presentation titled "Rituals as a Theological Imperative."

Natan Margalit -- whose presentation has the title "A Tree of Life: Text and Nature Working Together" -- was raised in Honolulu and spent half his adult life in Israel. On the faculty of Hebrew College, he finds himself drawn to the beauty and power of both Jewish texts and the natural world. In much of his work, as is the case with this Symposium, he focuses on the meeting place between nature and text.

Following the second session, there is a lunch and keynote presentation, beginning at 12:30 p.m. The keynote speaker, Nigel Savage, is founder and executive director of Hazon, an organization that works to create a healthier and more sustainable Jewish community. He has spearheaded two major Hazon activities: bike rides and the launching of CSA's.

A native of Manchester, England, Savage has traveled throughout the world in pursuit of his goals. He is thought to be the first (and only?) English Jew to have cycled across the state of South Dakota on a recumbent bike. His keynote address is titled "Food for Thought: How the New Jewish Food Movement Provides a Fresh Route Into Judaism and the Environment." The conclusion of his presentation marks the formal end of this, the 20th Annual Klutznick-Harris Symposium.

The Klutznick-Harris Symposium is co-hosted by the Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization at Creighton University and the Harris Center for Judaic Studies at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, with the Kriple Center for the Study of Religion and Society at Creighton University and the Jewish Federation of Omaha.

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For more information on the Symposium or any of the presentations, or to follow Fran Minear in the Klutznick Office at 280-2303 or frminear@creighton.edu. A full program, plus additional features, can be found at the Klutznick website: www.creighton.edu/ceas/klutznick.

Creighton's Kriple Center for the Study of Religion and Society is sponsoring a related event -- a Symposium on Religion and the Environment -- on Thursday and Friday, Oct. 25 and 26. Information on that event is available at the Center's website: moses.creighton.edu/CSRS/.