Over the past three decades issues of the environment have been at the forefront of scientific, social, and political concern and have influenced Jews and Judaism in provocative ways. Some have claimed that Judaism promotes human entitlement to exploit nature based on a command to fill, increase, and dominate the world (Genesis 1:28) and have even argued that Jews have been historically alienated from nature. Others have countered by citing Genesis 2:15, Deuteronomy 20:19-20, and a number of rabbinic texts that advocate preserving and protecting nature. Jewish scholars and activists increasingly search for answers to pressing environmental issues in the Jewish tradition through such organizations as The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) and Hazon. These groups work to create a healthier world and stronger Jewish community by marrying traditional sources with sustainable living, organic farming, energy conservation, and community-building.

These Jewish approaches to the environment have transformed into environmental approaches to vital Jewish issues ranging from peace-making in the Middle East to engaging disaffected Jewish GenXers. The 2015-2016 Lichter Lecture Series considers contemporary Jewish environmentalism through innovative readings of Jewish texts, analysis of cutting-edge Jewish nature programs, and the examination of attempts to solve contemporary Jewish challenges through environmentalism.

All lectures are free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served after the lecture. Dietary laws observed. Reservations are encouraged: Contact Wendy Lane, Department of Judaic Studies at (513) 556-2297 or wendy.lane@uc.edu

Parking: The Department of Judaic Studies will offer a limited number of prepaid parking tickets for senior citizens for the on-campus lectures. In order to secure a ticket, those interested should contact Wendy Lane at (513) 556-2297 or wendy.lane@uc.edu

ECO-JUDAISM: New Jewish Approaches to the Environment

Parking: Paid parking at Corry Garage.

About the Speaker: Professor Julia Watts Belser is Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies in the Theology Department at Georgetown University. She studies rabbinic Jewish culture in late antiquity, with expertise in disability studies, gender and sexuality studies, queer theory, and ecological criticism. She is the author of Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity: Rabbinic Responses to Drought and Disaster (Cambridge University Press, 2015). Active in the field of religion and ecology, she recently co-edited a special issue of Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology on Religion, Disability, and the Environment. An ordained rabbi and a Jewish feminist ethicist, Belser is a passionate teacher committed to helping communities grapple with climate change and environmental violence—and forge more resilient and creative responses to environmental crisis.

Parking: Paid parking at Corry Garage.

About the Speaker: Jeremy Benstein is Deputy Director, The Heschel Center for Sustainability, Tel Aviv. He is the co-founder and Deputy Director of the Heschel Sustainability Center in Tel Aviv, and director of the Center’s Environmental Fellows leadership program. He holds an AB degree from Harvard, a master’s degree in Judaic Studies from the Schechter Institute, and a doctorate in environmental anthropology from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He works extensively in leadership development and capacity-building with environmental activists and educators in Israel, and has lectured widely (U.S., Canada, England, Italy, Spain, Turkey) on Judaism, Israel, and the environment, including the environment as a focus of shared citizenship between Jews and Arabs in Israel. Jeremy’s interests focus on the interplay of religion, culture, and values with the environment, topics he has explored in his book The Way Into Judaism and the Environment (Jewish Lights, 2006).

Parking: Free parking is available at the Mayerson JCC.

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