CSSR News

Center for the Study of Science & Religion at Columbia University

CSSR: Director’s Report

“The most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe ... The question is not whether the theory of the cosmos affects matters, but whether, in the long run, anything else does.”

—William James, epigraph to “Pragmatism.”

William James’ view is central to the developing agenda of the CSSR: if the great intellectual endeavor that is the academic enterprise of Columbia University is to affect matters – not just understand them, quantify them, and publish discoveries about them; but also change them for the better – then the “views of the universe” of our faculty and our students are as important as their publications and discoveries.

This is not a notion consistent with the presumption that the purpose of an academic life is not at all to affect matters, but only to understand them, and that therefore, anyone’s view of the cosmos can be safely ignored, and everyone’s work can be left to speak for itself. This cool distance from matters of personal vision and obligation is compatible with great academic progress, but not with the purposes of the CSSR.

From its inception, the CSSR has been committed to “affecting matters” as well as understanding them; this is how we put it in the initial prospectus of 1999:

"CSSR will therefore have a particular reason to focus on the science and scientists involved in social planning, scientific research policy, and strategies for the protecting the future of the planet. CSSR will address the possible vocational aspects of those men and women who work as scientists but are also called upon to render judgment on social or policy issues, and on the place of religion in the models of human and social behavior used to formulate and vindicate such judgments."  

From then until now, the CSSR has been laying the intellectual, structural and fiscal foundations for this agenda, while at the same time expanding its purview at the university and beyond with the highly successful series of public events and curricular enhancements summarized below. That foundational work turns out to have been propitious, as the CSSR has just been brought into the new Earth Institute at Columbia University, a major university-wide initiative headed by Economics Professor Jeffrey Sachs, newly arrived from Harvard University.

The Earth Institute – a global University enterprise of twenty Centers, intends precisely to use the scientific, medical and technological expertise of our university to “affect matters” world-wide, beginning with the alleviation of the hunger and suffering of the Earth’s billion poorest people. The CSSR will have an important role to play in this agenda in the months and years to come.

Beyond all other considerations, the CSSR’s capacity to meet this challenge will depend on our colleagues, both those in the engineering, physical, biological, medical and social sciences who share a commitment to the Earth Institute’s new agenda, and those in the worlds of religious study and practice who similarly share the wish to be effective in their hopes and prayers for a better world. Just as affiliation with the Earth Institute has brought the CSSR to a host of problemsolving colleagues in the sciences, an invitation from President Joseph Hough to move our own offices from 401 Low Library to the fifth floor of the administration building of Union Theological Seminary, has brought the CSSR into daily contact with the Seminary’s students and faculty, as well with the faculty of the Columbia and Barnard Departments of Religion.

All in all, it looks like it will be a very busy year for the CSSR, as we become more deeply immersed in both Religion and Science, all at once, and as we find out how to use our academic strengths to affect matters for the better.

Robert Pollack is Professor of Biological Sciences, Adjunct Professor of Religion and Director of the Center for the Study of Science and Religion.
**Staff Update**

By Andrea Villanti

This past summer, the Center for the Study of Science and Religion underwent many changes. We moved from 401 Low Library to a larger office in Union Theological Seminary, became integrated in the Columbia Earth Institute, and reorganized our staff.

Our Research Director, Marco Gottardo, Ph.D., left the CSSR this fall to become a full-time graduate student in the Columbia University Department of Religion. This second degree will make Marco the only person we know with Ph.D.s in both science and religion.

In August, Elise Adibi joined our staff to help with the administrative work of the CSSR. You can reach Elise at the CSSR's new number (212) 851 1825 to get clear and helpful answers to questions about our events.

We have also expanded our staff to include more undergraduate research assistants. Anna Battis (CC '04) and Katie Gerbner (CC '06) are CSSR Seminar Coordinators and Mirian Pak (BC '04) is the Undergraduate Activities Coordinator. If you have questions about the CSSR Seminar Series, e-mail Katie at krg2006@columbia.edu.

Robert Pollack remains the Director of the Center for the Study of Science and Religion, on leave with a Director’s Grant from the John Templeton Foundation to fundraise and stabilize the CSSR. You can reach Bob at (212) 851 1825. Andrea Villanti continues to be the Program Coordinator, responsible for organizing programs and events in conjunction with CSSR grants. You can reach Andrea at (212) 851 1827.

We have been welcomed into Union Theological Seminary as a division of Columbia University by President Joseph Hough and his faculty and staff. Our new offices include a small library and beautiful wooden bookcases and cabinets. We are located on the fifth floor of the Dickinson building, at 120th and Claremont. If you would like to visit us, please call ahead (212 851 1825), and come to the main entrance at 121st and Broadway.

**Andrea Villanti is the Program Coordinator for the CSSR.**

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**Board of Directors 2002-2003**

For a complete list of the Advisory Board; please visit our website at: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cssr/

Ruth Fischbach, Ph.D., is a Professor in the Department of Psychiatry; College of Physicians & Surgeons. She is also a director of the Columbia Center for Bioethics. E-mail Dr. Fischbach at rf416@columbia.edu.

Robert Pollack, Ph.D., is a Professor of Biological Sciences, Lecturer in Psychiatry and Adjunct Professor of Religion at Columbia University and an Adjunct Professor at Union Theological Seminary. E-mail Dr. Pollack at pollack@columbia.edu.

Allan Rosenfield, M.D., is Dean of the Mailman School of Public Health, DeLamar Professor of Public Health and Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology. E-mail Dr. Rosenfield at ar32@columbia.edu.

Robert Thurman, Ph.D., is Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Indo-Tibetan Studies in the Department of Religion. E-mail Dr. Thurman at tbt7@columbia.edu.

Kate Wittenberg is the Director of the Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia. E-mail Ms. Wittenberg at kw49@columbia.edu.
Narrative Medicine Conference Spring 2003

By Rita Charon

Narrative Medicine is a new way of conceptualizing the practice of medicine—as medicine practiced with the narrative competence to recognize, absorb, interpret, and be moved by the stories of others. So much of what medicine lacks today can be found in the narrative skills to listen to patients as they tell of themselves so as to diagnose and treat disease effectively, to honor and bear witness to patients’ and families’ reports of suffering, to reflect candidly on one’s own experiences in living life around sick and dying people, to support students and colleagues in upholding their professional ideals, and to open serious and consequential discourse with the society medicine is meant to serve. All these goals—empathic and effective care of the individual patient, reflective practice, professional idealism, and societal discourse about health policy—can be reached by systematically and rigorously increasing the narrative skills of health professionals. Accomplishments in the fields of literature and medicine and the medical humanities provide methods and direction to this new approach to medical practice.

With support from the John Templeton Foundation and the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, the Center for the Study of Science and Religion and the Program in Narrative Medicine are co-sponsoring a Narrative Medicine conference on the Morningside Campus on May 2-3, 2003. The goal of the conference is to bring together scholars of narrative theory and autobiographical theory with clinicians who have been developing their and their students’ narrative skills so as to build empathy, reflection, and trustworthiness. This ground-breaking effort will begin to provide the theoretical foundations to what have already become commonplace activities in medical schools and hospitals—writing about patients in ordinary narrative prose, permitting patients to write about their illnesses in the medical record, and reading and writing with patients as therapeutic gestures.

The conference planning group includes Columbia faculty from the departments of medicine, English, comparative literature, socio-medical sciences (School of Public Health), anthropology, and psychology. Confirmed speakers include James Olney (English Department, Louisiana State University), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), David Morris (University Professor, University of Virginia), and Abraham Verghese (Department of Medicine, University of Texas, San Antonio).

As are all Templeton Foundation-supported events, the conference will be open to the Columbia community and the public, free of charge.

Please contact Rita Charon, Department of Medicine, for more information or to become engaged in the planning process for the conference (rac5@columbia.edu).

Rita Charon is an Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University.

University Seminars

By Anna Battis

The Center for the Study of Science and Religion has become a part of the University Seminar Program run through Columbia University. This provides the CSSR with a format in which faculty from all fields can come together in order to participate in CSSR sponsored discussions. The stated goal of the University Seminars is “the integration of otherwise fragmented knowledge, a pulling together of the many threads of knowledge and experience through the stimulus of continuing discussion.” With this in mind the CSSR has organized two topics for which interdisciplinary discussion is critical and has divided its seminar allocation into a fall series and a spring series.

The fall discussion has focused on the new Science and Religion track in the Religion Department and the curricular development that surrounds the creation of the new course being offered in the spring entitled, “Science and Religion, East and West.” So far this year, presentations have been made by Robert Pollock, Robert Thurman, and Neguin Yavari, each followed by an involved debate about the exact intent and structure of this new development in the Religion Department.

In the spring series the CSSR will shift its focus to the topic of “love”—by which we mean the various manifestations of loving relationships between two people, but also the broader notions of love as they emerge in religious, historical, journalistic, political, scientific and medical contexts. The first half of the spring series will feature speakers from psychiatry and neuroscience: Susan Coates, Robert Glick, Otto Kernberg, and Ethel Person. Our goal is to assess what the University is doing today, and what might emerge here if the topic of love were taken as seriously here in all these contexts as the topic of power.

If you want to be involved in the University Seminars Program or have further questions regarding it, contact Anna Battis at arb124@columbia.edu.

Anna Battis is a junior at Columbia College and a Seminar Coordinator for the CSSR.
New Track in Religion Department

By Neguin Yavari

The Department of Religion at Columbia has revised its undergraduate curriculum, to better incorporate recent methodological developments in the study of religion in a global era. The contemporary approach to study of religion is both multidisciplinary and multicultural. Religious traditions that were formerly associated with particular social, historical, and cultural contexts, and could be neatly parcelled out in area studies, are now in daily interaction with other traditions that might differ in their approaches to belief, ritual, scripture, or sacrifice.

An integral component of this new curriculum is the development of four tracks, to replace previous, more traditional categorizations of the field. In addition to the tracks in traditions and law, philosophy and ethics, and religion in contemporary society, the department has initiated a new area of study: science and religion. The track in religion and science is offered in conjunction with the Center for the Study of Science & Religion. The emerging field of religion and science examines issues in the relation between the natural sciences, social sciences, health sciences, and religions. The goal of this track is to teach students ways of thinking creatively and critically about complex relationships between these seemingly disparate domains. Students in this track might address questions regarding scientific worldviews in different religious traditions, the interface of cognitive science with religious belief, or the ethical, cultural and religious ramifications of genetic testing. The Department will inaugurate the new track in Spring 2003, when Professors Robert Pollack and Robert Thurman will co-teach an undergraduate lecture course on “Religion and Science: East and West.”

Neguin Yavari is an Assistant Professor in the Religion Department at Columbia University. She can be reached at ny71@columbia.edu.

To find out more about the new track, please visit the following websites:
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/religion/require.html

CFSSR Activities

By Mirian Pak and Katie Gerbner

The Columbia Forum for Society, Science and Religion is the undergraduate division of the Center for the Study of Science and Religion. The purpose of the CFSSR is to provide Columbia Students with a forum to discuss topics at the intersection of science, religion and society.

CFSSR undergraduates are interested in sponsoring conferences, hosting lectures and discussions, and publishing a journal that would focus on contemporary issues of science, religion, and ethics. We hope to encourage students in a dialogue between objective knowledge and subjective experience—academic interest and personal ideology.

CFSSR sponsored a trip to the American Museum of Natural History on Friday, November 1st. Joel Cracraft, the curator of Ornithology at the museum, gave CFSSR a guided tour of his private research facilities.

CFSSR will also be sponsoring a series of luncheons, beginning on November 15th with Professor Issac Levi of the Philosophy Department. There will be another luncheon held on the 22nd of November with Professor Wayne Proudfoot.

Mirian Pak, is a junior at Barnard College and President of the CFSSR.

Katie Gerbner, is a freshman at Columbia College and Public Relations Coordinator for the CFSSR.

Destructive Emotions:
A Dialogue between Western Science and Buddhist Inner Science

By Robert Thurman

In the evening colloquium, “Destructive Emotions: A Dialogue between Western Science and Buddhist Inner Science,” Daniel Goleman, Co-Chairman of the Consortium for Social Work and Emotional Learning in the Workplace at Rutgers University, will summarize new insights emerging on destructive emotions, in a preview of his just published book on the topic. Dr. Richard Davidson, professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at University of Wisconsin-Madison, will describe his neuroscience and psychopharmacological research on Tibetan Buddhist practitioners who have personally mastered their own destructive emotions. Robert Thurman will comment on this exciting ongoing research from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhist inner science.

Robert Thurman is Professor is Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies at Columbia University and President, Tibet House, New York. He can be reached at tbt7@columbia.edu.
William James and Varieties of Religious Experience
Colloquium Spring 2002

By Wayne Proudfoot

On March 24-25, 2002 the CSSR sponsored a colloquium on William James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. This was one of several colloquia held in this country and abroad on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of *Varieties*. Speakers were invited from a variety of disciplines: David Hollinger, an American intellectual historian from Berkeley; Ann Taves, an historian of American religion from Claremont; Jerome Bruner, a cognitive psychologist from New York University; Richard Rorty, a philosopher from Stanford; and Wayne Proudfoot, a philosopher of religion from Columbia.

Hollinger argued that James’s study of religious experience was an extension of his scientific approach to other topics in psychology, while Proudfoot said that *Varieties* is directed against a naturalism James took to be a threat posed by science and those who modeled their conceptions of the universe on science. Rorty identified these positions with two inconsistent strands that run through the book. Taves called attention to the ways in which *Varieties* might be seen as a model for a theory of religion that is informed by the best recent work in the sciences, as James’s was by the psychology of his day, but does not reduce religion to something it is not. Bruner said that when he began graduate work in psychology at Harvard sixty years ago *Varieties* circulated among the students as a kind of samizdat. The book anticipates, he said, some themes of the cognitive revolution in psychology that came about a couple of decades later and in which Bruner himself played a major role.

Each of these presentations provided plenty of opportunity for discussion of the relations between religion and science. Questions and debate were lively, among the speakers, and between the speakers and the substantial and varied audience that turned out for each session. The CSSR is indebted to the Templeton Foundation for sponsoring this event. A volume is planned that will include a paper by Philip Kitcher, a philosopher of science at Columbia, as well as revised versions of the colloquium papers.

Wayne Proudfoot is Professor of Religion at Columbia University. He can be reached at wlp2@columbia.edu.

CSSR and the 92nd Street Y

By Rabbi Phil Miller

The Bronfman Center for Jewish Life at the 92nd Street Y is proud to enter into a special partnership with the Center for the Study of Science and Religion at Columbia University under the direction of Professor Robert Pollack. The mission of the Bronfman Center is to offer to the New York community lectures, panel discussions, classes and workshops which explore and celebrate not only Jewish life, but the religious and moral issues confronting American society. Some of the most difficult issues confronting society today involve our ever-expanding abilities in science and technology and our limited ability to control those forces. The decisions we make on how to use technology in the years ahead will impact our very existence.

The Bronfman Center is eager to explore the implications of these issues and make them available to a sophisticated but popular audience, both here in New York City and throughout North America by satellite broadcast and web casting.

The first Bronfman Center event in cooperation with the Center for the Study of Science and Religion will be *Faith, Fact and the Future of Science* on the evening of February 5th, 2003.

Rabbi Phil Miller is Director of the Bronfman Center for Jewish Life at the 92nd Street Y. He can be reached at pmiller@92ndsty.org.

Faith, Fact & the Future of Science
Prof. Ursula Goodenough, John Horgan and Sharon Olds/ Dr. Robert Pollack, moderator
Wed., Feb., 5, 8pm, $18 at the 92nd Street Y (www.92ndsty.org)

Can science and Religion peacefully coexist or are the two ways of approaching the world mutually exclusive? How do we incorporate the apparently contradictory conclusions regarding facts, values and beliefs to better understand our own lives? Join two distinguished scientists, a poet and a philosopher as we explore these essential questions.

Ursula Goodenough, Professor of Biology Washington University and author of *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, which offers religious perspectives on our scientific understandings of nature; John Horgan, author of the best-selling *The End of Science, The Undiscovered Rational Mind and Rational Mysticism: Dispatches from the Border Between Science and Rationality*. Sharon Olds, former New York State Poet Laureate, teaches in the Graduate Creative Writing Program at NYU, author of *Blood, Tin, Straw, The Gold Cell* and, most recently, *Unswept Room*; Robert Pollack, author of *The Faith of Biology & The Biology of Faith*, directs the Center for the Study of Science and Religion at Columbia University where he is also Professor of Biological Sciences.
Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists

Why is this Gene Different from All Other Genes?

By Ed Reichman, M.D.

We are in the midst of an exciting time in the worlds of science and medicine. Almost daily, there are new discoveries being made about the workings of the human body, the nature of disease, and the relationship between the two. In order to begin a comprehensive dialogue on these issues from both the medical and halachic (Jewish legal) perspective of Jewish genetic diseases, the Center for the Study and Religion at Columbia University, in partnership with the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists, will conduct an educational and informational platform to discuss issues pertaining to Jewish genetic diseases. Doctors, medical students and other health professionals as well as scientists, genetic counselors, public officials, private sector leaders, rabbis and rabbinical students will participate in the day-long symposium. The symposium will be held on Sunday February 16, 2003 and will address the primary issues of Jewish genetic diseases. It will consider these issues in an interdisciplinary fashion, marshaling experts from medical, ethical, legal, corporate and rabbinic fields. The participants will collectively review the current state of scientific knowledge, including the limitations and controversies related to genetic testing. Participants will address the halachic issues that stem from genetic testing, in general, and for Jewish genetic disease, in particular. They will reevaluate the extant policies regarding Jewish genetic testing; and develop provisional guidelines for future testing policies. This symposium will examine how the disciplines of religion and science deal with the issue of Jewish genetic diseases.

The United Nations Millennium Project: Linkages between Columbia University and the United Nations will be increased, offering the intellectual resources of the University to the UN to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals on poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability.

"Science and technology must be integrated routinely into every country’s development strategy," says Earth Institute Director, Jeffrey Sachs. "No country can achieve sustained economic stability without focusing on energy and its distribution, as well as climate change, hazard risks, AIDS and other public health challenges, and the rapidly evolving nature of globalized markets and technology."

Sachs joined Columbia’s faculty in 2002, following 30 years at Harvard University where most recently he directed the Center for International Development.

The debate between religion and science plays a seminal role in the area of genetic diseases. Ultimately, the purpose of this symposium is to provide a comprehensive educational framework for an understanding of ethnically-specific genetic diseases and open the door for continued discourse in order to effectively bridge the gap between the theory and clinical practice of testing for Jewish genetic diseases.

The symposium is sponsored by the David Berg Foundation, the Shaykin Family Foundation and the Foundation for Jewish Genetic Diseases.

Ed Reichman is Professor of Emergency Medicine, Montefiore Hospital and he is a Rabbi ordained by Yeshiva University. He can be reached at saraneddie@aol.com.
**Union Theological Seminary**

The AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) Program of Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion featured an address on April 11, 2002, at AAAS headquarters in Washington, D.C. by the incoming president, Peter Raven, with a response by Larry Rasmussen, Union Theological Seminary. The subject was “The Sixth Great Extinction: Why It Matters.”

In January, 2003, Dr. Rasmussen will give a plenary address and be a respondent at a conference of Muslim and Christian scholars in Indonesia on “Science and Religion in the Post-colonial World.” This international conference will be held at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta.

Discussions continue at Union Theological Seminary about an Interfaith Institute: Spirituality, Peacemaking, Ecojustice, to be launched in the course of the coming year and hosted by Union. Some of its prospective work would be done in collaboration with the CSSR and, through the CSSR, with the Earth Institute of Columbia University.

**Columbia University Center for Bioethics**

By Terra Chinn

The mission of the CFB is to provide an inter-disciplinary, inter-professional forum to advance scholarly work and public understanding on contemporary bioethical issues by promoting research, offering education, and providing service to diverse communities. The directors of the CFB, Dr. Ruth Fischbach, and Dr. Robert Klitzman, plan to offer a wide range of educational events on a broad array of topics. Through seminars, colloquia, and national conferences the Center will focus attention on issues such as the commercialization of science, conflicts of interest, issues in privacy and confidentiality, and the teaching of ethics across the professions. The CFB Web site provides a comprehensive calendar of events and links to resources of interest to colleagues.

Please visit the CFB website at: http://www.bioethicscolumbia.org.

**Mailman School of Public Health**

By Barbara Aaron

Mailman School of Public Health’s department of Epidemiology has spearheaded a number of service and research initiatives addressing the mental health consequences of the events of September 11, 2001.

Ezra Susser, Dan Herman and Barbara Aaron are leading a unprecedented mental health services initiative called A Common Ground, to provide outreach, social services, counseling, psychoeducation and in-depth mental health treatment to union workers and others exposed to the events of 9/11 and the subsequent rescue and recovery effort at ground zero. A Common Ground is a collaboration of Mailman, the New York State Psychiatric Institute, the Columbia School of Social Work, state and city government, and labor unions.

Susser, Herman and Aaron also co-wrote “Combating the Terror of Terrorism,” which appeared in Scientific American in August, 2002, to illuminate the primacy of public mental health in terrorism preparedness, response and defense. The article was circulated among the US Congress by Congressman Patrick Kennedy of Rhode Island, who introduced the Extended Mental Health Services Act last year.

Barbara Aaron is Director of 9/11 Projects, Department of Epidemiology at the Mailman School of Public Health. She can be reached at bpa2001@columbia.edu.

Please visit the Mailman School at: http://www.mailman.hs.columbia.edu
CSSR Seminar Schedule and Upcoming Events

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<tr>
<td>5:00-6:30pm</td>
<td>Nov. 20, 2002</td>
<td>Toward a New Environmental Ethic: Science and Religion in Conversation</td>
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<td>Davis Auditorium,</td>
<td>Larry Rasmussen, Ph.D.</td>
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<td>CEPSR</td>
<td>Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics, Union Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>5:00-6:30pm</td>
<td>Dec. 11, 2002</td>
<td>The Position of the Sacred in Contemporary Alternative Medicine</td>
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<td>Davis Auditorium,</td>
<td>Courtney Bender, Ph.D.</td>
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<td>CEPSR</td>
<td>Associate Professor of Religion and Sociology, Columbia University</td>
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<td>5:00-6:30pm</td>
<td>Jan. 29, 2003</td>
<td>Destructive Emotions: A Dialogue between Western Science and Buddhist Inner Science</td>
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<td>Davis Auditorium,</td>
<td>Daniel Goleman, Ph.D.</td>
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<td>Richard Davidson, Ph.D.</td>
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<td>Robert A.F. Thurman, Ph.D.</td>
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<td>5:00-6:30pm</td>
<td>Feb. 5, 2003</td>
<td>Facts, Faith and the Future of Science</td>
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<td>92nd Street Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun., Feb. 16, 2003</td>
<td>Kraft Center</td>
<td>Why is this gene different from all other genes? A Symposium on the Religious, Ethical, and Legal Ramifications on the Testing of Jewish Genetic Diseases</td>
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<td>Sponsored by the David Berg Foundation and the Shaykin Family Foundation and the Foundation for Jewish Genetic Diseases</td>
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<td>Fri., May 2, 2003-</td>
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<td>Templeton Research Lectures on “Narrative Medicine” at Columbia University</td>
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<td>Sat., May 3, 2003</td>
<td>Kellogg Center, SIPA</td>
<td>Sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation</td>
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