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KSI Honors Eshel Ben-Jacob

Israeli professor a pioneer in bacterial intelligence

Professor Eshel Ben-Jacob, an award-winning Israeli scientist who pioneered the study of the intelligence of microbes and who created the hybrid neuro-memory chip, has received an honorary Ph.D. from Kepler Space Institute – only the second time KSI has bestowed such an honor.

Dr. Ben-Jacob, a professor of physics and the Maguy-Glass professor in physics of complex systems at Tel Aviv University, has advanced the scientific understanding of the foundations of cognition and intelligence through research on the collective behavior of bacteria.

His work is recognized for innovative ideas for fighting disease-causing organisms and adapting friendly bacteria to human benefit in space voyages.

“If we seek a future for the human race in space, we must take bacteria along for the ride, as none other can prepare the setting for us,” Dr. Ben-Jacob wrote in a chapter in *Beyond Earth: The Future of Humans in Space* (2006), a compendium of scientific, philosophical and sociological thought.

He wrote that bacteria “invented the foundation of intelligence and sociality” that enables organisms “to conduct a dialogue for collective decision-making and to generate communal memory to learn from past experience.”

Dr. Ben-Jacob’s investigations of neural networks outside the brain led to the NeuroMemory Chip, recognized by “Scientific American” in 2007 as one of the 50 most important achievements in science and technology that year.

The honorary degree was conferred in a special ceremony at the University of California, San Diego, on Friday (September 23.) In addition to KSI officials, also in attendance was Mark Hopkins, chairman of the National Space Society executive committee.

“Eshel’s pioneering research has put him in the arena of world class scientists,” said Dr. Bob Krone, provost of Kepler Space Institute, a global research think-tank and online academy dedicated to the advancement of human civilization through exploration and development of extraterrestrial space.

The only other honorary degree awarded by KSI – in October 2010 – was to filmmaker Irvin Kershner, director of *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* and numerous other motion pictures. The Doctor of Visual Arts degree was presented at Kershner’s Los Angeles home weeks before his November 27 death at the age of 87.

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