



ETHICALLY SPEAKING

53 Prospect Park West, Brooklyn NY 11215 (718) 768-2972

Volume 94, no. 1

Thoughts on Pledging

Now that summer is over, I am very glad to return to Ethical Culture, my chosen spiritual home. I am glad to see the faces of those I have come to love, and new faces, whom I look forward to meeting and getting to know. I am deeply grateful for this community, which has rejoiced with me in good times, supported me through times of trouble, and taken seriously its promise to participate in my son's ethical education.

What is it about Ethical Culture that you love? What is it that you are grateful for? Whatever it is, you keep these things alive and well when you renew and, I hope, increase your pledging. Please send in your pledge forms early, and consider becoming a *Pillar of the Society* with a pledge of 2% of your net income, and/or increasing your pledge by 15%. This year I will also be calling on some of you to assist in the pledge campaign. I hope you will find it in your hearts to say yes to this important effort.

*Celeste Liebowitz
Pledge Coordinator*

Leader Notes: More Than Community Building by Lisel Burns

I know Felix Alder, our founder, summured in the mountains, but as I packed my bags to leave for home I really wondered if his had been as small a house as the one I have shared for a week every summer with my siblings and their children. Four very different families we, with different lifestyles, and different ideas. The co.-ownership and shared time in the house gives this diverse group a chance to make something positive together as adults, while setting up tensions that threaten fragile courtesies.

Our four WASP families don't share many common assumptions about people, groups, or society. We represent extremely different lifestyles: one apolitical "Generation X" couple (academic and businessperson), one expatriate Caribbean family who thinks the United States is a "gun-crazy welfare state with too high taxes," a single mother who voted for Jerry Brown the last time around, and me.

We have fun. We quarrel, and we all have house jobs. I took the role of Process Coordinator, leaving Finance, Repair and

Rentals alone. But eliciting the best of us as a group is much harder work than I would have predicted. It takes most of each annual vacation to get us onto the same page. According to Scott Peck, we've passed through (stage one) the honeymoon, and (stage two) squabbling and are in (stage three) emptiness. I notice that in emptiness, we are quieter, wondering if it is worth going on as a group, or better to fall back onto some sort of time-share rotation.

Notwithstanding all our differences, I knew we could make it to some kind of positive community: (stage four) mutual acceptance and affirmation. But this wasn't necessarily comforting. People can become a community of sorts in an Aryan Nation summer camp or in a Brooklyn health club, learning to show respect for each other's styles and locker spaces. In modern times — where almost any sort of beliefs are being promoted by some group as positive living — is community building really enough of a goal?

Grandiose or not, I want more for our sibling family, and for any group to whom I'm giving a real chunk of my life energies. In these "anything goes" times, I think we need to identify a family mission statement and core principles, to claim an identity strong enough to prevail. This summer's happy ending was the tentative acceptance of temporary, draft guidelines — agreed-upon principles we would abide by until whenever we found ourselves better ones. It felt like reinventing civilization, finding a sandy beach after treading rough water too long. We are still at the beginning.

On the road back home and as I near Brooklyn Ethical I feel confident about the distance we have covered in BSEC community building. Compared to the microcosm of my family group we seem quite rooted, with a sense of place and our history. We know better who we are, though our particular gifts need clarification.

Continued on back page...

Brooklyn Jamboree September 24th & 25th

Brooklyn might seem an unlikely place for an old-time bluegrass music festival, but it will be like a homecoming party when the Good Coffeehouse celebrates its *Second Annual Jamboree* on Friday and Saturday, September 24th and 25th at the BSEC Meeting House. The Jamboree brings together musicians and fans of the traditional American music born in the mountains of Appalachia. James Reams, who conceived of the Jamboree and is himself an old-time and bluegrass musician of some renown, said, "We plan to keep things on a small scale. We want people to feel at home and have a good time. The only thing 'big' is the big time we hope everyone has! That's why the Jamboree's motto is: *Just a big old time.*"

Last year's celebration attracted more than 250 musicians and fans. It was held both in the meeting house and out in the garden where passersby, attracted by the music, stopped in and stayed for the evening hoe-down and concerts. This year will include a kick-off concert with James Reams and the Barnstormers on Friday, September 24th at 8pm. Admission to the concert is \$8 at the door or \$7 in advance. On Saturday, starting at noon, admission is only \$1, and will include music workshops, jamming, song swaps, a hoe-down, a barbecue dinner, an evening of concerts, and the "Brown Jug Award" presented to a person who has made a significant contribution to old-time and/or bluegrass music in the Northeast. Children's activities make for a great time for the whole family.



**THE BROOKLYN SOCIETY
FOR ETHICAL CULTURE**

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Ethically Speaking is published six to ten times a year by BSEC. This issue was produced by Bob Strock, Lisel Burns, Celeste Liebowitz, Martha Hoffman, Glenn Newman, Bruce Liebowitz, and Anne Klaeysen.

Ethically Speaking is written by a number of BSEC members. Views expressed in this publication are always open to friendly discussion. Our newsletter staff, like the membership at large, may vary in their thinking on many issues, yet we are all committed to putting deed before creed, and to strive constantly toward living out, each in our own particular way, the Ethical Ideal of eliciting the best from ourselves and others.

Belly Dancing At BSEC

The *New York Times* ran an article this summer on *How to Build Abs of Undulating Steel*, extolling the benefits of belly dancing, believed to have originated in northern India and spread throughout eastern Europe and northern Africa, mixing with indigenous dance forms. Now you, too, can work your stomach muscles without doing sit-ups. Join Salome's class every Saturday morning at 10AM for a workout that is good for coordination, endurance, balance and toning. *Free to BSEC Members!*

The President's Column by Glenn Newman

Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.

— Barry Goldwater, 1964

I used to think there was truth in that statement. Now I'm not so sure. There's a lot to be said for moderation in all things. All issues — abortion, capital punishment, labor vs. management — have people of good will and reason on both sides. But problems arise when people believe they have a monopoly on the truth. Extremism, tolerated and accepted in any area, is then justified. Reasoned discussion becomes impossible. If I am right and the other so clearly wrong, then I can treat him as less than human. If we cannot understand that our opponent's beliefs are held in good faith, how can society hope to maintain civilized discourse and reach mutually acceptable solutions to difficult problems?

In sports it is okay to be a fanatic. After all, "fan" is at the root of fanaticism. But no one takes the call to "kill the umpire" or "crush the other team" literally. In sports it is clear that loyalty to one's side is unequivocal and absolute. But in all other aspects — politics, economics, personal relationships — I have come to believe that it is always more productive and less stressful to assume the good will of others, to look for the reasons for their opinions, and to attempt to understand why they hold their differing beliefs. Only when I listen can I hope to be able to find common ground and begin to bridge the gap.

Some might ask, "Why try to bridge the gap between some right-minded person and some poor wretch who can't see the truth staring him in the face?" That's the essence of the problem: everyone thinks, at some time or other, that someone else can't see the truth. While on vacation in Atlanta, I

found myself riveted to a performance by a television evangelist whose all-consuming belief in the Christian Bible as "absolute truth" precluded him from engaging in dialogues. In his world there were no matters of opinion to be discussed with others: no opinions, only absolute truth.

I recently saw *The Gathering*, a theatrical drama about a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps who hated all Germans and argued that all Germans are to be reviled by all decent people, especially Jews. He refused to accept that there could be any German who was not to be held personally responsible for the Holocaust. By the end of the play (and because it is fiction, it has an uplifting resolution representative of the author's hopeful view of the world) the survivor is ready to accept that there are some Germans of good faith and to move on towards some type of forgiveness.

For this Jew to realize that continued hating precluded his ability to move forward with his life was a remarkable achievement (and accomplished in less than two hours). Others hold their hate more tightly and their opinions tighter still. It is something we must work against. If we as a society, and as an Ethical Culture Society, do not realize that dehumanizing someone with opposing views is wrong, if we do not acknowledge that reasonable minds may differ, then we can never hope to move toward the common ground that we as a Society have committed to and that we as a society desperately need to find. Of course, that's my opinion; I could be wrong.

Devolution of Meaning — by Bob Strock

The Theory of Evolution, the cornerstone of the biological and medical sciences, has been removed from the public school curriculum in Kansas. A supporter of the change states that life has no meaning "if we're just animals in a struggle for survival."

This issue is at the very core of Ethical Culture's purpose. Religion is a response to humanity's self-reflective capabilities — it fills the gaps in our understanding of ourselves and the world, and makes us whole in our hearts and minds (in heartless, mindless reality we are already whole). The problem is that most of the world's major religions attempt to fill gaps in our understanding that *no longer exist*.

Science can be used as a belief system, but that is not its purpose. Science is an extension of our eyes, ears, and hands. It gives us information that we couldn't possibly have imagined without its help. But just as science has shown us that which religion has always claimed — that there is more to life than we can see with our own eyes — I believe that there will always be more to life than can be explained by science.

The Creationists are not evil, but misguided, and more than anything they are very afraid. Afraid of the emptiness they perceive in a cold, godless world with faith in nothing but inconclusive scientific facts; a nihilistic world which drives people to the depths of anguish and despair. But their answer is to roll back the clock of knowledge to the time when their belief systems were established, thinking that science is the cause of all nihilism, when throughout history it has always been narrow-mindedness.

Ethical living and compassion toward all human beings is offered by Ethical Culture and many other progressive religions as a possible solution to the emptiness around us, but is it enough? Are we missing a crucial point that the Creationists see? Maybe metaphysical questions do matter. Maybe religion isn't possible unless we try to somehow fill those gaps in our understanding, unless we confront those questions that cannot be answered by science or our senses.

Of course, that leads us to the ultimate question of them all: "What are we all doing here?"

SEPTEMBER 1999 BSEC CALENDAR

9/1 – 9/11

Wednesday 9/1

6:30-10:30PM: *Pinewoods Folk Open Sing* with potluck supper & snacks. Bring your voice and instruments. Free Admission.

Saturday 9/4

10-11AM: *The Art of Belly Dancing* taught by Salome. Call 399-1732 for info.

Tuesday, 9/7

7:30-9PM: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus* directed by Bev Grant. We believe that every woman can sing! Call 768-2972 for info.

Wednesday 9/8

7-9PM: Board of Trustees Meeting.

Thursday 9/9

7-9PM: *T'ai Chi Chuan* with J.P. Harpignes. \$12/class; \$40 for 4; BSEC members free.

Friday 9/10

7PM: Potluck supper and training workshop for Membership Committee and Sunday Greeters. Call Anne at 965-3611 for info.

Saturday 9/11

10-11AM: *The Art of Belly Dancing.*

9/12 – 9/19

Sunday 9/12

11AM-12:30PM: *Super Sunday* for Sunday School Families. Call Sunday School Director Remi Gay at 941-5338 for details.

12-4PM: *BSEC Open House* with booths, program demonstrations, music, and tours of our Meeting House.

Tuesday 9/14

7:30-9PM: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus.*

Wednesday 9/15

6:30: *Colloquy:* a shared reflection circle.

7:30-9PM: *Couples Workshop:* for couples recently married within Ethical Culture, addressing a variety of relationship issues.

Thursday 9/16

7-9PM: *T'ai Chi Chuan.*

Saturday 9/18

10-11AM: *The Art of Belly Dancing*

Sunday 9/19

10AM-12:30PM:

Children's Sunday Assembly.

10-11AM: Parents' Discussion Group.

11AM: Opening Platform with Leader Lisel Burns. Theme: *Finding a Rooted, Responsible, and Reflective Ways of Life Amid the Challenges of the Year 2000.*

12:30PM: Lunch with the Bunch.

9/21 – 9/26

Tuesday 9/21

7:30-9PM: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus.*

Wednesday 9/22

7-9PM: *The Healing Music of the Gwana.* A healing music workshop with Randy Weston and the Gwana musicians. Presented by 651 ARTS. Free to BSEC Members! Call 636-4181 for more info.

Thursday 9/23

7-9PM: *T'ai Chi Chuan.*

7PM: Richard Price Book Discussion Group: *Ellen Foster* by Kaye Gibbons.

Friday 9/24

8PM: Good Coffeehouse Concert Series presents *James Reams and the Barnstormers* in an evening of traditional American string music featuring bluegrass and old-time. Admission \$8.

Saturday 9/25

10-11AM: *The Art of Belly Dancing.*

12:30-10PM: *The 2nd Annual Park Slope Bluegrass and Old-Time Jamboree.*

A whole day of traditional American music. Admission One Dollar!

Sunday 9/26

10AM-12:30PM: Children's Assembly.

10-11AM: Parents' Discussion Group.

11AM: Sunday Platform with Leader Lisel Burns: *Rooted Lives: Communities and Community Building.*

12:30PM: Lunch with the Bunch.

9/26 – 10/3

Tuesday 9/28

7:30-9PM: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus.*

Wednesday 9/29

7:30-9PM: *Faith Conversations.*

Thursday 9/30

7-9PM: *T'ai Chi Chuan.*

Friday 10/1

8PM: Good Coffeehouse Concert Series presents *Lily White Quintet* in an evening of cool jazz. Admission \$8 at the door.

Saturday 10/2

10-11AM: *The Art of Belly Dancing.*

7PM: Commemoration of the *Twentieth Anniversary of the Greensboro (NC) Massacre.* Three survivors will tell their story and the legacy of the Greensboro Justice Fund. Music by Bev Grant and the Brooklyn Women's Chorus.

Sunday 10/3

10AM-12:30PM: Children's Assembly.

10-11AM: Parents' Discussion Group.

11AM: Sunday Platform: *Responsibility and Reflection* with Leader Lisel Burns and Sally Bermanzohn of the Greensboro Justice Fund.

12:30PM: Lunch with the Bunch.

1-3PM: Teach-In by the Greensboro Justice Fund.

4-7PM: Wedding Couples Autumn

Gathering with Leader Lisel Burns. Call 783-2298 for information.

The School for Values and Culture: Life Explorations

The self-styled Committee for Values and Culture has been meeting over the summer to discuss how to expand the opportunities the Society offers for reflection on and exploration into issues of values and culture. The committee would eventually like to provide a number of classes, discussion groups, lectures, and workshops, with diverse subjects that address a variety of philosophical, ethical, creative, and practical issues.

For the present, we are pleased to announce two new discussion groups starting this fall, open to both members and the general community. The first, titled *Faith Conversations*, will explore questions related to the meanings and practice of faith, belief, and spirituality within a humanistic religion. It will be facilitated by Chris Jacques and meet for the first time on September 29 at 7:30. The following week, October 6, at 6:30, will be the first meeting of *But Is It Right?* — a discussion of basic concepts of ethical living such as tolerance, justice, trust, and honesty, with Vanda Bozicevic facilitating. We anticipate wide-ranging discussion in both groups and welcome all points of view.

These groups will meet Wednesday nights and will alternate with Core Value Workshops and Lisel's new wedding couples workshop. The committee also reminds members and others of the ongoing *Richard Price Book Discussion Group*, which usually meets the fourth Thursday of the month (unless otherwise noted in the calendar). Check upcoming newsletters for exact dates of all sessions.

If you are interested in being a part of the Values and Culture Committee, please contact Martha Hoffman at the BSEC Office.

"Today" means endless and inexhaustible eternity. Periods of months and years and of time in general are ideas of people, who calculate by number; but the true name of eternity is Today.

Philo (c. 50 C.E.)

AEU Workshop on Society Growth & Development

October 22 & 23 at Westchester Ethical

The Westchester Ethical Society will be hosting the tenth Annual Society Growth and Development Workshop October 22nd & 23rd. All are encouraged to participate. This would benefit anyone involved in membership activities, officers, board members, committee members, AEU Summer School graduates, and other committed volunteers.

Workshops will be offered on a variety of topics designed to help strengthen and grow existing ethical communities, and to create new ones. There will be opportunities to network with people in various Societies dealing with concerns similar to your own. Past workshops have included sessions on creating attractive and welcoming societies, planning for the future, effective fund raising, dealing with conflicts, and much more. For more information, contact the AEU office at 212-

Leader Notes, continued from page one.

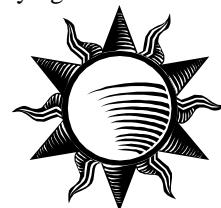
We like diversity, and insist upon it. By rejecting commandment ethics or one-way creedal doctrines for ourselves, we insist that each person shape their own (or reinvent ageless) ethical living principles, while abiding by our general guidelines and the attitudes suggested in our eight commitments.

In Brooklyn, we have come a good way toward a deliberate, values-based culture, with purposes, core principles and agreements becoming more explicit each Season.

Ethical living concerns itself among other things with the alpha and the omega. In *Religion of Duty*, one of his lesser known works, the founder of this Ethical movement Felix Adler says, "Hitherto, religion has concerned itself largely, if not chiefly, with the beginnings; in the future, religion must concern itself with the end. Religion must turn to the question: 'What is to become of it all?'"

I wonder how things will turn out in these two life communities I move between each summer. Adler put his emphasis largely, and repetitively, on our human capacities and our consequent responsibility to influence how things turn out. The truth is, as the theater owner in *Shakespeare in Love* (faced with a wild set of reverses) kept saying: "I don't know what will happen. It's a mystery!"

I am, however, quite sanguine.



Announcing: Game Nights! BSEC will be hosting monthly game night fundraisers at the meeting house. Evenings of backgammon, chess, and cards for game lovers, alternating with evenings of Scrabble® for all you word enthusiasts. Good conversation to be had every evening. Refreshments will be served. Admission \$10 for Scrabble, \$8 for open games. Discounts for five or more tickets. Please buy your tickets in advance at any Sunday Platform. For more information, call Bruce Liebowitz, Fundraising Chair, 336-3683, after 7PM.



The Greensboro Justice Fund: Fighting for Racial Unity

Twenty years ago, on November 3, 1979, five anti-Klan demonstrators were shot to death in the streets of Greensboro, North Carolina by the Klan and Nazis with the complicity of public officials. Ten others were wounded. The Greensboro Justice Fund, a non-profit organization, was set up in 1980 to educate the public and fund a civil rights suit. Five years later, a North Carolina jury found five Klansmen and Nazis, a paid police informant, and two Greensboro police officers liable for the death of a demonstrator, and Klansmen and Nazis liable for injury of two others. The liability award paid by the City of Greensboro was used to form a new Greensboro Justice Fund devoted to supporting grassroots organizations fighting for racial unity and empowerment across the South. Join us for a weekend of commemoration and commitment, a time to remember the fallen and to support the work of the survivors. On *Saturday, October 2nd*, BSEC will host a fundraising event for the Greensboro Justice Fund starting at 7 PM with an exhibit and refreshments, followed by an educational program at 8 PM. On *Sunday, October 3rd*, BSEC Leader Lisel Burns will officiate at an 11 AM Platform reflecting upon the grassroots experience of the Greensboro Justice Fund, followed by a luncheon and discussion.

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