



ETHICALLY SPEAKING

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

Volume 95, no. 4

December Platforms

December 3: *Living Our Ideals: What Do Manners Have to do with Morals?*

With a look at expectations regarding manners and civility, and insights from Malcolm Gladwell's recent book *The Tipping Point*. Lisel Burns asks us to look at some consequences of differing attitudes toward people(s) beyond our own doorsteps.

December 10: *Memory and Social Change*

With Joyce King, Associate Provost at Medgar Evers College. A black educator reflects on the importance of cultural remembrance and identity, from her perspective as a leader working for social change over a period of some thirty years.

December 17: *Winter Festival*

Join the students of the Children's Sunday Assembly for an intergenerational annual BSEC tradition.

December 24 & 31: *No Platforms Scheduled*

January 7: *Living Our Ideals: Mensches, Mavens, and Moral Effectiveness*

BSEC Leader Lisel Burns looks at how we can become the center of a world community or network with relatively little work, if we take advantage of the technology that is already available to us, and use it to enhance the relationships that we already have.

Platforms are held every Sunday morning from 11am to 12:15pm in the main hall of the Meeting House followed by a convivial and delicious buffet lunch. Please stop by!

A Note from the President

I take this opportunity to write as the calendar year ends and we look both behind to the past year and ahead to the next. BSEC's past year has been remarkable in many ways: involvement in the Million Mom March; the success of the Sunday School, YES group, and Wednesday adult education programs; and, of course, a year of outstanding Sunday Platforms.

Looking ahead, the Board has passed a budget for the fiscal year 2000-01 in which, yet again, we forecast a serious deficit. This year, as in years past, we attempt to maximize BSEC's income from its various sources. The building we all love and which provides us with "The Place Where We Meet to Seek the Highest" provides us with a large portion of our income.

BSEC has what those in government would call a "structural deficit." The building throws off sufficient income to meet the expenses associated with its operations. The problems arise from the fact that costs for membership programs, leadership expenses, the newsletter, organization dues, and committee expenses far exceed the income from member pledges, Sunday collections, and other contributions. Even if the interest income from bonds purchased after we sold the school building were to be dedicated entirely to supporting programs, the deficit in those areas would still be very large.

So what does this mean for the future? BSEC can continue to spend more than we take in and deplete the endowment (which we have resolved to preserve for future generations) established from the sale of the school. If so, I estimate that BSEC could continue for at most ten years before we would have to sell the Meeting House, because we would no longer be able to maintain it. The alternative is a combination of greater fundraising and more aggressive budget-cutting.

There is group of dedicated members looking at long-range fundraising. Also, we should be mindful that the end of the calendar year is a good time to make donations that will be tax deductible for the year 2000. However, it is only by bringing expenses for programs in line with the contributions of the community of BSEC that we can survive in the long run. Please notice that I said *contributions* not funds; we can contribute by many different means. For example, rather than BSEC having to pay for clean-up after Lunch with the Bunch on Sunday, members could volunteer for clean-up duty. Even those who cannot perform physical labor can be helpful, possibly working in the office or covering the door at a fundraising event.

The point of this essay is simple: the membership can only expect the Society that they support themselves, with contributions of money, time, and effort. No one can rightfully expect a Caring Committee, for example, to function unless they commit to supporting the effort, either directly or by working elsewhere to permit others' efforts to be directed there. Similarly, the other programs we have come to find satisfying emotionally or intellectually do not just happen: they are the product of the intensive labors of (a painfully few) BSEC members.

It is your choice: do something to support BSEC and its activities or don't complain when many of the programs you desire disappear.

Glenn Newman

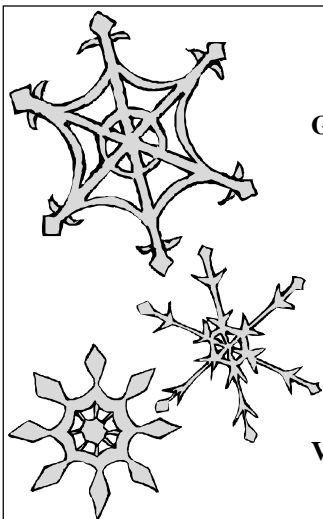
WINTER CRAFTS FAIR: Saturday, December 16, 11am - 4pm

GIFT SHOPPING?

BSEC celebrates Winter Crafts Fair 2000 on Saturday, December 16th, 11am-4pm. Our magnificent turn-of-the-century landmark mansion will be transformed into a gallery of original arts and crafts, including pottery, jewelry, clothing, toys, art prints, and much more. Find that something special for everyone on your holiday shopping list. Also: delicious refreshments and BSEC program booths, including YES, CSA, and local community development. Call the BSEC office at 768-2972 for information, or to volunteer.

VOLUNTEERS STILL NEEDED!

Volunteers will meet Sunday, December 10th at 1pm to assign tasks and finalize plans. Everyone's welcome to come help!



**THE BROOKLYN SOCIETY
FOR ETHICAL CULTURE**

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Youth Group: Rita Wilson & Tony Severo

Ethically Speaking is published 6-10 times a year by BSEC. This issue was produced by Bob Strock, Lisel Burns, Anne Klaeysen, Remi Gay, Marshall Dubin, Rita Wilson, and Martha Hoffman.

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.

<http://www.bsec.org>

National Service Conference:

The American Ethical Union at the United Nations

The National Service Conference affiliated with the American Ethical Union is the group representing the International Humanist and Ethical Union (which includes the AEU) at the United Nations, with official "NGO" status.

Martha Gallahue, national coordinator of the National Service Conference, spoke at a BSEC platform in October, and will be coordinating a new project in the Global Development area at BSEC. Monthly volunteers will meet with Martha to raise awareness of the positive work being done at the United Nations, especially the work that pertains to social issues we as a community have committed ourselves to address: child and family well-being, universal healthcare, and local to global development.

Kurt Johnson, Lisel Burns, Joan Donnen Klips, and Dorothy Klein have committed themselves to taking some part of the work. Others interested in being a volunteer for this very worthwhile effort are invited to contact Martha G. or Lisel B.

VIEWPOINT

Dangling Chads and Democracy by Bob Strock

I guess it had to happen sometime. And the odds are that this will never happen again. The fact that the count boils down to one state makes the chaos surprisingly controlled. The electoral college is a strange thing, but imagine if the presidential election were decided by popular vote, and by some freak of probability, the margin of that vote came down to a few hundred, or less. We'd have every ballot box in every precinct in every state in the Union turned over, and we wouldn't be finished counting until well into the spring, by which time Congress, acting at the behest of the Tenth Amendment, would have outlawed the office of the President, if not the entire executive branch.

I had kind of hoped for the people of Palm Beach County to take a chapter from the Serbians and storm the Courthouse with their tractors, demanding their votes be counted. But the only people who showed up (at least the ones who made the news) were the campaign poster-wielding partisan types who basically get into a less-than-jovial version of "Tastes Great! Less Filling!" whenever they happen to show up at the same place in relatively equal numbers.

During this process, the patience of the general electorate has been admirable, and the self-serving classlessness of the candidates has been as should be expected. After all, they're fighting for their political lives here. And both parties in Congress are gearing up for a four-year-long pitched battle that will make us long for the good-natured, mature collegiality of the Gingrich/Clinton years.

The easiest way to make a selection is to boil it down to a choice between two: between yes and no, between black and white, between right and left, between up and down, between good and bad, between good and evil. They say that's how our brains work. You might say that all choices can be boiled down to a series of decisions between yes and no, yes and no, yes and no.

Things can be analyzed that way, but I don't know if that's really how choices present themselves in real life, and even so, for our electoral system to do the analyzing

for us, to boil the choice down to two before we get a chance to even speak, seems a disservice to the voters, maybe even to the parties and candidates themselves.

And as the game goes on into extra innings, as we go into the next round of sudden death and the line between entertainment and politics vanishes completely, it occurs to me how much more important Free Speech is than our right to vote. Actually, Free Speech needs the right to vote to give it teeth, but voting is not an end in itself. Our right to vote is the foundation of our power to work within the political process. The most dangerous threat to democracy is not the electoral college, or butterfly ballots, or dangling chads, or corrupt or otherwise inadequate electoral systems. The most dangerous threat to democracy, now and always, is a stifling of the people's voice, the stifling of each of our voices. And that's going to continue whoever has his hand on that Bible come January 20.

Membership News

Joan Klips' mother, Maxine Donnen, died of leukemia on Sunday, November 5th. Maxine Donnen was a member of BSEC in the early to mid 1950's. A memorial service will be held at the Brooklyn Bar Association, on Wednesday, December 16th, at 6pm. Donations can be sent in her memory to the Leukemia Society of America. Our deepest sympathy goes out to Joan and her family.

Kurt Johnson, chairman of BSEC Environmental Affairs, was invited by New York City Parks Commissioner Henry Stern to an advisory luncheon on November 15 to discuss the future of the plans of the New York City Parks Department to further enhance park habitats for more flowers, birds, insects, etc. Attending the three-hour luncheon were major officials of the Parks Department who desired to huddle with advisors about the long-term planning for New York City's parks. As part of the luncheon, Mr. Stern gave Kurt an official Parks Department name. He will be known, internally, as "Samuelis" (Nabokov's endangered species) and receive a badge with that name for future meetings.

Jason Dubin is joining the office staff as Membership Coordinator. For the past couple months he has been assisting Lisel with Leader's Office operations, and now plans to help out in the coordination of membership activities and records, and to assist the Communications Task Force in the creation of a new membership database, just in time for the twenty-first century. Welcome aboard, Jason!

DECEMBER 2000 BSEC CALENDAR

12/1 – 12/9

Friday, 12/1

8pm: Good Coffeehouse concert series presents singer-songwriter Ilene Weiss performing her poignant, intelligent, and irreverent holiday songs; and *Squeezology* featuring Jody Kruskal on concertina, Paul Friedman on fiddle, Bob Jones on bass and guitar, and Marnen Laibo-Koser on piano, viola and flute. Donation \$8.

Saturday, 12/2

10–11am: *The Art of Belly Dancing* taught by Salome. Free to BSEC members. Call 399-1732 for information.

Sunday, 12/3

Monthly Membership Sunday

10am–12:15pm: Children's Assembly

11am: Platform with Leader Lisel Burns: *What Do Manners Have to Do with Morals?*

12:30pm: Lunch with the Bunch, celebration of December birthdays, Newcomers Circle.

Tuesday, 12/5

7:30–9pm: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus* directed by Bev Grant. Come sing with us! Call 965-3611 for information.

Wednesday, 12/6

6:30–10pm: *Folk Open Sing* with potluck supper and snacks, co-sponsored by the Pinewoods Music Society. Bring your voice, instruments, friends, neighbors and family. Free admission.

6:30–7:30pm: quiet workshop and reflection
7:30–9pm: *Colloquy*, a traditional Ethical Culture ceremony of shared reflection and music.

Thursday, 12/7

7–9pm: *T'ai Chi Chuan* class taught by J.P. Harpignes; \$12 per class or \$40 for 4 classes. Free to BSEC members.

Friday, 12/8

7–9pm: The Good Coffeehouse Concert Series presents musicians from metropolitan Ethical Culture Societies in a benefit for the Sunday School. Artists include: Bart Worden, Leader of the Westchester Society; David Fersh from Long Island; Kim Jones of the jazz ensemble *Riverside Drive* from the New York Society; and guitarists Joel Cohen, Jon Kolleeny, Alex Mogieleff and Justin Stallard from right here in Brooklyn. Donation \$8.

Saturday, 12/9

9–11am: *The Art of Belly Dancing*.

12/10 – 12/27

Sunday, 12/10

10am–12:30pm:

Children's Sunday Assembly

11am: Platform with Joyce King, associate provost of CUNY Medgar Evers College, speaking on *Memory and Social Change*.

12:30pm: Lunch with the Bunch

Tuesday, 12/12

7:30–9pm: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus*

Wednesday, 12/13

6:30–7:30pm: quiet workshop and reflection

7:30–9:00pm: *Members & Friends Dinner*, followed by holiday songfest. Bring instruments if you like, and suggestions for songs.

Thursday, 12/14

7–9pm: *T'ai Chi Chuan*.

Friday, 12/15

8pm: The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents Third Friday with the Park Slope Food Coop: Matt Mitler and the theater group DZIECI perform *A Fool's Mass*, an evening of buffoonery, choral hymn singing and chants from the 8th through the 16th centuries. Donation \$8.

Saturday, 12/16

9–11am: The Art of Belly Dancing

11am–4pm: **Winter Crafts Fair.** Come do your holiday shopping!

Sunday, 12/17

10am–12:30pm:

Children's Sunday Assembly

11am: Sunday Platform: *Winter Festival*.

12:30pm: Lunch with the Bunch

Tuesday, 12/19

7:30–9pm: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus*

Wednesday, 12/20

6:30–7:30pm: quiet workshop and reflection

7:30–9pm: *Faith Conversations*, an on-going discussion series centering on the place of traditional religious beliefs and practices within a humanist religion.

Thursday, 12/21

7–9pm: *T'ai Chi Chuan*.

Saturday, 12/23

9–11am: *The Art of Belly Dancing*.

Sunday, 12/24 and 12/31

No platforms scheduled

Tuesday, 12/26

7:30–9pm: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus*

Wednesday, 12/27

6:30–7:30pm: quiet workshop and reflection

7:30–9pm: *Ethical Culture Readings*.

12/28 – 1/7

Thursday, 12/28

7–9pm: *T'ai Chi Chuan*

Saturday, 12/30

9–11am: *The Art of Belly Dancing*

Sunday, 12/31

New Year's Eve Celebration!

Call 768-2972 for details.

Tuesday, 1/2

7:30–9pm: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus*

Wednesday, 1/3

6:30–10pm: *Folk Open Sing*

6:30–7:30pm: quiet workshop and reflection

7:30–9pm: *Colloquy*

Friday, 1/5

8pm: Good Coffeehouse concert series presents Juan Avila and Rhythms of Aqua. Donation \$8.

Saturday, 1/6

10–11am: The Art of Belly Dancing

Sunday, 1/7

Monthly Membership Sunday

10am–12:15pm:

Children's Sunday Assembly

11am: Platform with Leader Lisel Burns and community singing

12:30pm: Lunch with the Bunch, celebration of October birthdays, and Newcomer Circle.

1pm: *But Is It Right?* An open discussion focusing on basic ethical notions and everyday moral dilemmas.



BSEC New Year's Eve Party Ringling In the 21st Century

Joel Cohen and Tony Severo are making plans for the BSEC New Year's Eve Party, to bid a final and ethical farewell to the 20th century.

Plans so far include a buffet dinner, entertainment, candlelight, and free fireworks at midnight. If you're going to be in New York for New Year's, this will be the best place to be!

Reservations are requested, so please contact the BSEC Office if you plan to come. The party will begin around 8pm, and last until it ends. All ages are welcome! Childcare will be available, but by reservation only. Call the office for reservations and price information.



Children's Sunday Assembly News

In November, the theme of the month was *Unsung Heroes*. We started the month with a service project by walking down to 4th Avenue to watch the first runners from the NYC marathon go by and pick up cups and other garbage there and on the way. We also talked about the reason thousands of people run in the a race that only two people can win, to introduce the idea of intrinsic rewards.

Our annual *Wampanoag Festival*, held with the adults in the meeting house consisted of a songs and dances, and a time for story telling, forgiveness, and expressing gratitude for the abundance in our lives. Afterwards we held our 2-3-4 OXFAM fundraising luncheon. We look forward to a grand Winter Festival on December 17th, so please join us!

Speaking of *Unsung Heroes*, at the Religious Education conference, Arthur Dobrin, leader of the Long Island Society discussed the research that has been done on the common characteristics of people who were rescuers during World War II in Europe. Most

attendees, adults and children seemed to enjoy both the social and intellectual stimulation provided, although the beds in the cabins could have been a little more comfortable for some...

CSA Calendar:

12/17: Parents and other adults are invited to join us in the Meeting House at 11am when we host the annual intergenerational *Winter Festival*.

12/24 & 12/31: NO regular classes. Call 768-2972 to see if there will be any family activities 12/31 before the New Year's party.

December Theme: *Holiday Traditions*.

Ethical Action Project:

Collecting for CHIPS Food Bank.

Our Children's Sunday Assembly program meets every Sunday from 10:00am to 12:15pm. We offer an ethics-centered curriculum and community for children aged 4-13 years. Registration is open throughout the school year.

Remi Gay, Director

Readings in Ethical Culture

We are reading the classics— Ethical Culture classics, that is. In November we officially started the Fourth Wednesday Ethical Readings program with Felix Adler's *Reconstruction of the Spiritual Ideal*. This month we will discuss several articles written by the early leaders of the movement, including our own Dr. Henry Neumann, originally printed in *The Standard*. Here are selections for the coming months:

January: John Dewey, *A Common Faith*

February: William James, selected chapters from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

March: David Muzzey, *Ethics as a Religion*

April: Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine*

May: Arthur Dobrin, *Ethical People and How They Got to Be That Way*

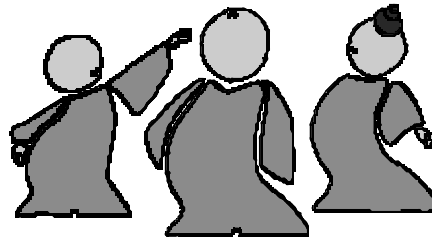
June: Henry Neumann, *Spokesmen for Ethical Religion*

The Ethical Culture books are available for purchase at BSEC. The Dewey and the James and the Noddings are available at bookstores everywhere. Please join us for a lively discussion on ethical matters!

And here one profoundly important practical consideration will come to our aid, namely, the sense of our own imperfection, coupled with the consciousness of the inextinguishable power of moral renewal. Instead of attributing a lack of response to the hopeless dullness of the person upon whom we labor, a sense of humility, based on the knowledge of our own exceeding spiritual variability, will lead us to turn upon ourselves, and far from permitting us to despair of others, will impel us rather to make ourselves more fitting instruments of spiritual influence than obviously as yet we are. - *Felix Adler*

DZIECI:

A Fool's Mass
December 15, 8pm



A Fool's Mass will be performed at the Good Coffeehouse on Friday, December 15 at 8pm.

A Fool's Mass is a blend of buffoonery and hymn-singing, and follows the efforts of a band of innocents at a church somewhere in medieval Europe as they try to make the best of things after their beloved priest has died of the plague.

Dzieci is a group devoted to performing works of service in a variety of settings, from stage presentations to interaction in hospitals. *Ethically Speaking* editor Bob Strock joined the group after seeing last year's version of *Fool's Mass*.

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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