

BESpeak

DECEMBER 2013

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Of Gifts and Gratitude

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

One of the best *gifts* to yourself is a healthy dose of *gratitude*. I am not talking about gratitude that **others show you**, although that is a very nice present to receive! I am speaking of the gratitude you **express to others**,...or to the planet, or to your pet, or just about anything. Studies have shown that feeling and expressing gratitude contributes to your mental and physical health.

For example, two doctors at the University of Texas Health Science Center report that, “a growing body of research shows that gratitude is truly amazing in its physical and psychosocial benefits.” One study on gratitude had participants keep a journal. Some were told to write about five things they were grateful for during the past week. Others were instructed to write down the “daily hassles” that confronted them that week. After 10 weeks, the group writing on gratitude “felt better about their lives as a whole and were a full 25 percent happier than the hassled group.” They reported better health, more emotional support, and, not surprisingly, a greater sense of gratitude when compared to group recording “hassles.”

[For more information, see <http://www.dailygood.org/story/578/the-neuroscience-of-why-gratitude-makes-us-healthier-ocean-robbins/>. Another simple article worth reading is from the Harvard Mental Health Letter found at http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Mental_Health_Letter/2011/November/in-praise-of-gratitude]

Years ago I heard about such theories through something called Positive Psychology, practiced by some members of the Washington Ethical Society (WES). It served families well as a part of the Coming-of-Age program at WES. Prior to some tricky conversations between teen and parent about freedoms and responsibilities, we offered each other statements of appreciation. The sessions were markedly more fruitful and pleasant than most attempts to navigate the often-stressful relationship between cautious parent and independent-seeking teen. The gratitude we expressed through this program has become a permanent part of our family bonds.



(continued on page 7)

SUNDAY PLATFORMS 10:30 a.m.

(details on pages 4-5)

DECEMBER 1

“The Tree of Knowledge: Celebrating the Roots of Humanism”

Hugh Taft-Morales
Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

DECEMBER 8

“The Vicious Circle Principle of the Evolution of Humankind”

Craig Dilworth
Reader in Theoretical Philosophy,
Uppsala University

DECEMBER 15

“Church, State, and Blasphemy Rights: a Year-End Summary”

Tom Flynn
Executive Director,
Council on Secular Humanism

DECEMBER 22

“Get Money Out of Maryland Politics!”

Charlie Cooper
President, Get Money Out – Maryland

DECEMBER 29

Pancake Breakfast

ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

Every Sunday, 10:30 a.m. – Noon
Children of all ages are welcomed.
For those aged of 1-3, separate
supervised activities are offered.

BESpeak

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Fritz Williams *Leader Emeritus*

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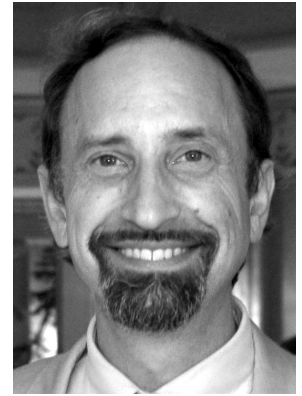
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Contacts by e-mail: use President,
VicePresident (one word), Treasurer,
Secretary, Poet, or Admin followed
by @bmorethical.org. For general
questions: ask@bmorethical.org.

On the web at bmorethical.org

Honoring Our Commitment and Paying It Forward

by Emil Volcheck, *BES President*



Our next pledge drive will set a new and ambitious goal by asking members what they can pledge over the course of two years, instead of just one. Each year, at the annual membership meeting in May, members are asked to approve a budget for the next fiscal year that begins in July. In years past, our pledge drives were synchronized with our budget planning process. The pledge campaign used to start early enough so that by April, members had already made pledges for the next fiscal year. This enabled the Board to propose a budget whose income was based on the sum total of pledges made by members for the coming fiscal year.

Over time, our pledge schedule has slipped to the point that now we've fallen about a year behind. When the pledge drive did not finish in time to prepare a budget for the annual membership meeting the Board estimated pledges based on the previous year. The Board asked the members voting on the budget to commit the society to achieving income that matched the budgeted amount. This worked tolerably well. During the last pledge cycle we met our \$40,000 budgeted income goal from contributions made to fulfill pledges. To be specific, the contributions received through August 2013 made good on the \$40,000 of pledge income estimated in the May 2012 budget.

A society growing as quickly as ours needs sound financial planning. We do not want to continue to base our budget on an estimate of promised payments. We intend to get our pledge drive back on schedule by asking members for two pledges simultaneously, with a separate pledge card for each. The first pledge will be for the amount the member expects to contribute by June 30, 2014. These pledges will make good on the budget approved at our last annual membership meeting in April 2013. The second pledge will be for the amount the member expects to contribute by June 30, 2015. The sum total of these second pledges will provide the basis for the 2014-2015 fiscal year budget that the membership will approve at its next meeting in May 2014.

To be clear, we are **not** asking members to pay two years worth of pledges in one year. We **are** asking members to think and plan ahead so that they can tell us what they believe they can contribute next year, in addition to telling us what they will give this year.

Our upcoming pledge drive will honor our commitment for last year and "pay it forward" for next year. The first pledge honors the commitment we made for the 2013-2014 fiscal year budget. The second pledge will help us make a sound decision when we approve our budget for the 2014-2015 fiscal year. This means asking all of us to plan further ahead than usual, but I'm confident we will succeed.

The Gift of Time and Talent

The time and talent of our volunteers is an inspiring gift. Hugh expresses the appreciation of the whole society well in his column. We value the work of all our members, but let us focus our thanks here on committees where members new to the society (or new to the committee) are making contributions. **Building:** Ray Noemer, Alan Shapiro. **Caring:** Fred Compton. **Ethical Action:** Laura Griffin as Assistant Secretary, Chris Yonushonis as Secretary, Janey Solwold and Paul Furth calling members on policy issues. **Ethical Education:** Argentine Craig as co-chair, Susan Henley scheduling classroom help for Linda Joy, Ben Busby representing the society at the AEU Religious Education weekend. **Financial Committee:** Paul Furth as chair, Angad Singh as Assistant Treasurer, Chris Nare, Chris Yonushonis helping with inventory. **Membership:** Wayne Laufert helping create new member packets, Janey Solwold welcoming new friends, designing and printing badges for new members. **Pledge:** Karen Helm. **Presiders:** Adam Garst, Angad Singh, Amy Trauth-Nare. **Program:** Dan Blank, Ronit Klemens, Angad Singh, Mary Beth Sodus as Hu-

manLight co-chair. **Public Relations:** Fred Compton, Paul Furth as chair, Nancy Poznak. **Video:** Ray Noemer. Thanks to everyone!

Some Committees Still Seeking Volunteers

The Caring Committee helps members who experience illness or other health problems. If you're sick or in the hospital, the committee will send a card or flowers, and make sure other members know you might need help. If you need a lift, the committee will try to help. If you'd like to help with the caring work of this committee, please speak to Kirk, Judy, or Emil.

Would you like to welcome and provide support to new members of the society? Then please ask Judy or Emil about joining the Membership Committee.

Have an idea for a Sunday speaker? Tell the Program Committee! Members include Ronit, Mary B., Angad, Dan, Hugh, or Emil. The Program Committee organizes our Sunday programs. Activities include inviting speakers, scheduling presiders, and finding volunteers to clean up after snacks. Want to help? Please ask any member of the committee about joining!

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Poetry Group

Sunday, December 1, 9:30 a.m.

Finance Committee and Pledge Team Meeting
Sunday, December 1, 12:30 p.m.

Mindfulness Meditation
Sunday, December 8, 9:30 a.m.

BES Eatery Social (B.E.S.)
Sunday, December 8, 1:00 p.m.

Family Board and Card Games Party
Sunday, December 8, 3:00 p.m.

Baking Night at Moveable Feast
Thursday, December 12, 5:45 p.m.

Ethical Action Meeting
Sunday, December 15, 9:15 a.m.

Board Meeting
Sunday, December 15, 12:30 p.m.

HumanLight Eve Party and Potluck Dinner
Sunday, December 22, 7:00 p.m.

Newcomers Meeting
Sunday, December 29, 12:30 p.m.

SUNDAY SNACK SCHEDULE

All are invited to bring snacks for our coffee hour following platform. Snacks are especially welcome from those whose last names start with:

A to F	Dec. 1
G to L	Dec. 8
M to R	Dec. 15
S to Z	Dec. 22
Everyone!	Dec. 29

All snacks are welcomed but especially the inventive and healthy.

BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST

Thursday, December 12, 5:45–8:00 p.m.

Join BES members and others for this enjoyable outing at a great organization – check out their website at www.mfeast.org. Let Lisa Alderson know you are coming (lialderson@gmail.com) and show up at Moveable Feast, 901 N. Milton Ave., Baltimore, MD, at 5:45 p.m. Park in front of building and enter through the door closest to Ashland Street. Let Lisa know if you'd like to carpool, and she'll try to match you up with another BES participant.

DECEMBER 1

“The Tree of Knowledge: Celebrating the Roots of Humanism”

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

The roots of humanism run deep in many written traditions – from ancient religions to ancient Greece, from the middle ages to the renaissance to the enlightenment to today. Humanists revere many books – books of faith and skepticism, knowledge and opinion. Libraries serve as sacred humanist sites. Fearful of reason and reading, intolerant mobs have burned books and destroyed libraries in the vain hope of cutting the roots of the tree of knowledge. Thankfully, freethinkers and scholars have kept this tree alive. Join Hugh Taft-Morales as he explores this hostility towards knowledge and celebrates the liberating power of books.

Hugh Taft-Morales joined the Baltimore Ethical Society as its professional leader in 2010, the same year he was certified by the American Ethical Union as an Ethical Culture Leader. He also serves as Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia. His presence in Ethical Culture has been termed “invigorating.” Taft-Morales lives in Takoma Park, Maryland, with his wife Maureen, a Latin American Analyst with the Congressional Research Service, with whom he has three beloved children, Sean, Maya, and Justin.

DECEMBER 8

“The Vicious Circle Principle of the Evolution of Humankind”

Craig Dilworth

Reader in Theoretical Philosophy, Uppsala University

In this talk I'd like to bring to the listeners' attention that the nature of the development of our species is not as it is normally thought to be. It is not as though we progressed beyond other life forms through developing technology, which then allowed our population to grow. The development of humankind is not linear, but rather circular, in accordance with what I have called the vicious circle principle. According to the principle, “Humankind's development consists in an accelerating movement from situations of scarcity, to technological innovation, to increased resource availability, to increased consumption, to population growth, to resource depletion, to scarcity once again, and so on.” (*Too Smart for Our Own Good*, p. 110).

This view of our past allows us to better understand how important the human community has been to our survival, and how it is in the community that our morals have their origin.

Craig Dilworth was born in Canada and received his PhD at Uppsala University, Sweden, where he is presently Reader in Theoretical Philosophy. His work has included creating and running various environmental projects, as well as purely academic studies in metaphysics, philosophy of science, human ecology, theoretical physics, theoretical biology and the social sciences. He is the author of two major works in the philosophy of science, *Scientific Progress* (4th ed. 2008) and *The Metaphysics of Science* (2nd ed. 2007), as well as a book in human ecology entitled *Too Smart for Our Own Good* (2009). His latest work is *Simplicity* (2012), which is in meta-metaphysics, and constitutes a lifelong effort.

DECEMBER 15

“Church, State, and Blasphemy Rights: a Year-End Summary”

Tom Flynn

Executive Director, Council on Secular Humanism

On this day in 1791, the Bill of Rights was ratified. Tom Flynn will provide a secular humanist perspective on the state of civil rights 222 years later. He will present a year-end survey on church-state separation and blasphemy-rights issues, summarizing where things stand on the most significant ongoing lawsuits around the country and examining challenges to the freedom to criticize religion/blasphemy rights domestically and worldwide. This talk is jointly sponsored with the Baltimore Secular Humanists (<http://wash.org/bsh>) and the Maryland chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (<http://au-md.org>).

Tom Flynn is executive director of the Council for Secular Humanism and editor of its magazine, *Free Inquiry*, the nation's largest-circulation secular humanist journal. He is an outspoken secular humanist activist. He cofounded the newsletter *Secular Humanist Bulletin* and designed the museum at the birthplace of 19th century agnostic orator Robert Green Ingersoll in Dresden, New York. He has written or edited four published books: a 1993 polemic, *The Trouble With Christmas*, two irreverent science fiction novels, and (as editor) *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*.

DECEMBER 22

“Get Money Out of Maryland Politics!”

Charlie Cooper

President, Get Money Out - Maryland

GMOM (Get Money Out – Maryland) was founded in 2012 to promote reforms that minimize the influence of money, and strengthen the power of citizens, in the political process, in the U.S. and in Maryland. *Citizens United v. FEC* is the 2010 Supreme Court decision which ruled that corporations cannot be limited in the amount they spend on elections because they enjoy the same First Amendment rights as living people. GMOM seeks an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to establish that constitutional rights apply only to natural persons. Charlie Cooper will report on GMOM's campaign to get the Maryland Legislature to pass a joint resolution formally calling for a Constitutional Convention. If you were inspired by Jennifer Bevan-Dangel's platform address in September on restoring ethics to our democracy (vimeo.com/76355499), then please come to this talk.

Charlie Cooper is a social justice activist in Baltimore. He is active in organizations that work on public education, child protection, climate change, and the economy. He served as Chairperson of the Maryland Education Coalition. Currently he devotes most of his time to GMOM, where he serves as President of the Board of Directors and chairs the Policy Committee. Read more at www.getmoneyoutmd.org.

DECEMBER 29

Pancake Breakfast

As 2013 flies out the door, we celebrate with a hearty breakfast and time to connect. Pancakes are on flap, with a variety of expert chefs (among them Ben Busby, Mary Beth Sodus, Karen Elliott, and Richard Lewis) turning out to turn things over. If you would like to bring a side dish or volunteer to help, please sign up at <http://ur1.ca/g1quf> (or contact Mary B. or Karen). Everyone is invited to bring a warm article of clothing such as gloves, scarves, hats, or socks to adorn our mitten tree. Coffee, tea, and juice will be provided and the breakfast is free and open to all. This year our mitten tree decorations will be donated to TurnAround, which provides support services to victims of domestic violence.

FAMILY BOARD & CARD GAMES PARTY WITH BALTIMORE PARENTING BEYOND BELIEF

Sunday, December 8, 3:00–6:45 p.m.
at the home of Marjeta Cedilnic

Join members of the Baltimore Parenting Beyond Belief Meetup for a board and card games party at the home of Marjeta Cedilnic in Howard County. Feel free to bring a game or play one of the many there. Please bring a snack or drink to share (or a small monetary contribution for the host instead). Come when you can, while the party lasts. Ms. Cedilnic is the lead organizer of the Maryland Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Address and directions provided when you RSVP. For questions, please call her at 301-642-1065. Join the Meetup at <http://meetu.ps/rSkQz>.

FINANCE COMMITTEE AND PLEDGE TEAM MEETING

Sunday, December 1, 12:30 p.m.

The Finance Committee and Pledge Team will hold their final meetings of the year together, after the platform, on Sunday, December 1, at 12:30 p.m. Please join us if you're interested in learning more, and especially if you wish to join either group. The Pledge Team, in particular, needs more members and help to find a chair. E-mail questions to pdqblues@aol.com.

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**BES EATERY
SOCIAL (B.E.S.)**

Sunday, December 8,
1:00 p.m.

Members and friends are invited to go out together for lunch. We'll gather in the lobby at about 12:45 p.m. following post-platform snacks to decide what restaurant to visit. Everyone is encouraged to wear their BES shirts or other items to help promote the society. Please note that the BES Eatery Social is now being held on a different Sunday each month to better provide members with the opportunity to attend this fun event. If you have any questions, please contact Adam Garst at synxr0nic@yahoo.com.

IRONWEED

film

**CLUB TAKES
A HOLIDAY**

Due to the Christmas holiday, the BES Ironweed Film Club **will not meet** in December. It will resume its meetings on 4th Wednesdays starting January 22, 2014. Ask Emil about free membership in the film club, or if you would like to help select films (volcheck@acm.org or 410-929-3399).

HumanLight Eve Party and Potluck Dinner

*Sunday, December 22, 7:00-10:00 p.m., at First Unitarian Church of Baltimore
(Corner of Charles and Franklin, enter hall on Charles St.)*

Please join us to celebrate HumanLight Eve with the Baltimore Coalition of Reason on Sunday, December 22, at 7:00 p.m.

HumanLight is a celebration of the winter season conceived by the New Jersey Humanist Network as a humanist or secular alternative to traditional religious celebrations. HumanLight features music and the lighting of three candles celebrating Reason,

Compassion, and Hope. HumanLight was first celebrated in 2001 in New Jersey and has since spread throughout the country. This year is the fourth celebration of HumanLight by the Baltimore Coalition of Reason. To learn more, visit the HumanLight website at <http://www.HumanLight.org>.



This year we are celebrating HumanLight at First Unitarian Church of Baltimore which is located on the corner of Charles and Franklin Streets. We will have a potluck dinner and desserts, music, and the candle lighting. This is a family-friendly event, and children are welcome. The Organic Family Band is back by popular demand! They will entertain us again with Irish jigs, Klezmer tunes, and Bundeslieder songs.

Please let us know you're coming and tell us what food you'd like to bring. Sign up for the potluck dinner at <http://ur1.ca/g0oty>, email Bmore-CoR@gmail.com, join the MeetUp at <http://meetu.ps/24qYMI> or sign up on Facebook at <http://ur1.ca/g1ujn>.

NEWS FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Every year, we ask our members to pledge support to BES. This income enables BES to serve our community. BES treats financial information related to your pledges as personal and confidential information. There is a need for certain society officers to have access to this information in order to run our pledge campaign and maintain our financial accounting. Your Board has adopted guidelines to authorize the minimal number of officials access to this pledge information. The Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer will have full access while the Leader, President and Vice President will have limited, "need to know" access. If you would like more details, these guidelines are available upon request.

During the November Board Meeting, Angad Singh was unanimously approved as the Assistant Treasurer. He will be working closely with our Treasurer, Stephen Meskin.

Of Gifts and Gratitude

(continued from page 1)

Having heard about the efficacy of gratitude, having spoken about it myself, and having experienced it close to home, why is it that I need reminders? Why does it seem that often I orchestrate moments of gratitude only during this season of Thanksgiving, whether in columns like this or around my dining room table at home?

At the Taft-Morales house, a family tradition has developed as a part of our late November feast where people around the table share some words of gratitude. Sometimes the comments are tongue in cheek, but usually they are sincere expressions of thanks. This fall - the first fall of my "empty nest" phase - I am particularly grateful welcoming all three of my children return from jobs and college. At the time of this writing I am anticipating once again being grateful for our expressions of gratitude.

I hope that many BES members enjoyed our communal celebration of gratitude at our November Stone Salad program. The moral of the story is obvious - when everyone contributes, our feast is more abundant. This is true regarding our meal together, and our flourishing community. When newcomers come to BES and inquire about the "responsibilities of membership," I often say that we hope that all members contribute what they can in the form of "time, treasure and talent."

In varying degrees depending on individual circumstances, members offer volunteer hours, financial contributions through the pledge process, and expertise in various aspects of running a non-profit.

I have always been amazed at the generosity of the members of Ethical Culture. From the day I became a member of WES, through my experience of Leadership training, to my current role as Leader of Ethical Societies in Baltimore and Philadelphia, I am blown away at the contributions offered by all of you. The result, for which I am deeply grateful, is a deeply supportive environment, friendship, and love.

Of all the gifts that have been offered the BES community of late, the one that is most inspiring are the *many volunteers* that have responded to the call for help. The BES Board, led by Emil Volcheck's energy and enthusiasm for Ethical Humanism, has worked hard to grow our membership so as to increase the resources we have available to carry out our mission. The incredible growth in our membership and Sunday School offers a better chance to honor the BES constitution and "develop the highest values in human relations both in our individual lives and in community living" and to engage in "educational activities, public service, and social action." As new members join our committee structure, we all benefit. (See Emil's note on volunteers in this newsletter!)

Crucial to a successful integration of new volunteer time and expertise is that we pay attention to process. Being a part of a committee often involves less-than-inspiring elements such as committee meetings, email chains, and grunt work. (Ever tried cleaning our coffee makers after plating? Ugh!) In order for these tasks to be both effective and sustainable, it is important to remember gratitude. Volunteers need not experience their contribution as being one devoid of inspiration and growth.

In receiving the many gifts volunteers offer BES, and by extension the Baltimore region, I remind us all to pay attention to the process. For example, try starting committee meetings out with a brief statement of thanks to all who attend, a deep breath, and a good-faith promise to try to keep to the agenda and schedule. When working with each other - whether fixing the lights in our meeting hall, setting up the projector for the Ironwood Film Club, or manning our literature table at street fairs - let's remember to thank each other, and to thank ourselves. The nice thing about gratitude is that it is not a fixed sum - like love, it grows when you spread it around.

This holiday season, I thank each and every member of the Baltimore Ethical Society for their contribution to our community. It certainly helps the physical and mental health of our over-worked volunteer corps. My hope is that as many hands make light work, our new volunteers will not find themselves over-worked, and will never feel under-appreciated. My hope is that all volunteers - long-term and new - will feel renewed and refueled from involvement in the Baltimore Ethical Society. I know that it has been a gift in my life.

SOMEONE GETTING MARRIED?

The Baltimore Ethical Society has a team of officiants who are trained and licensed to conduct weddings, memorials, and other life passage ceremonies. For more info. or to make arrangements, email weddings@bmorethical.org.



BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

306 W. Franklin Street, Suite 102, Baltimore, MD 21201-4661

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

ETHICAL ACTION MEETING

Sunday, December 15, 9:15–10:15 a.m.

Come help plan the Ethical Action strategy for the Baltimore Ethical Society!

NEWCOMERS MEETING

Sunday, December 29, 12:30 p.m.

New to the Society and interested in learning more? Attended a meeting or two? Thinking about joining? Come to the Newcomers Meeting, held following the last platform of every month, and learn more about Ethical Culture and about our Society - its history, its philosophy, and its organization. Meetings last about one hour and attendance is recommended before becoming a member. See Judy Katz or Emil Volcheck for more information.

MINDFULNESS

meditation

Sunday, December 8, 9:30 a.m.

Mindfulness is a tool we can use in our daily lives to act in a more ethical way. We practice mindfulness meditation so that it comes naturally in stressful times. Join us as we sit (on chairs) and breathe (just the way it comes naturally) and listen to the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the world's best-known teachers of mindfulness.

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Visit bmorethical.org and look for us on Facebook, Twitter, and MeetUp.com @bmorethical

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