

# BESpeak

FEBRUARY 2014

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

## Preparing for Lay Leadership Summer School

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

Sitting in the West Side YMCA watching the snow fall, I thought of the lush green North Carolina beauty of The Mountain. While it seemed a far way off, the image of the rolling Appalachians were in my mind as I walked around the corner to the New York Society for Ethical Culture to prepare for the 2014 Lay Leadership Summer School (LLSS). For a second time I am on the staff of this American Ethical Union project. Designed to offer Ethical Culturists a chance to hone their leadership skills while deepening their understanding of themselves and our movement, LLSS seems more important than ever.

I believe Ethical Culture is poised to grow and offer the world a new way of living. Perhaps this is a Quixotic belief, given our relatively small size. But as people drift away from traditional faiths and secularists seek new forms of meaning and community, our unique approach holds great promise. This is why I left a 25-year teaching career. And this is why I attended LLSS back in 2006 as a student.

It was there that I got to know Stephen Meskin, BES Treasurer and long-time board member. We were part of the same "Organizational Development" group. Our small cluster of seven wrestled with challenging interpersonal dynamics that taught me some valuable lessons about communication that I remember today as an Ethical Culture Leader. Steve can speak for himself, but I thought LLSS offered a lot: a beautiful natural setting, a week away from routine, insight into human behavior (especially my own), skills to nurture Ethical Societies, and connection to Ethical Societies around the country. This last element is fundamental to our movement in 2014. Executive Director Bart Worden is focusing on strengthening our network nationwide, which is one reason he too is serving as a staff member for his fourth LLSS.

Joining Bart and me are four other fantastic staff members: Jan Broughton from North Carolina, Diane Kirschner from Brooklyn, Paulo Ribeiro a leader is training and member of the Bergen Society, and Mary Herman, Leader for Congregational Life at the Washington Ethical Society. An important part of my decision to become



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### SUNDAY PLATFORMS 10:30 a.m.

(details on pages 4-5)

#### FEBRUARY 2

### "Seize the Days: How Cancer Patients Add Life to Their Days"

Dr. Evan Lipson

Founder and President of  
Seize the Days, Inc.

#### FEBRUARY 9

### "Diversity Matters"

Ayanna Watson

Founder, Black Atheists of America

#### FEBRUARY 16

### "Choosing Concrete Solutions – Over Concrete Plans"

Tyrone Barnwell

Founder and Director,  
3 C's Youth Initiative

#### FEBRUARY 23

### "Why Animals Matter"

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

### ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

WITH LINDA JOY BURKE

Every Sunday

10:30 a.m. – Noon

### TODDLER CARE

Supervision is provided for preschoolers between the ages of one and four in our toddler room.

# BESpeak

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## Issue 436

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**Hugh Taft-Morales** *Leader*  
**Fritz Williams** *Leader Emeritus*

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by @bmorethical.org. For general  
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On the web at [bmorethical.org](http://bmorethical.org)

# Humanism and Kwanzaa

by *Emil Volcheck, BES President*



**K**wanzaa is a week-long celebration of African culture created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga. The celebration runs from December 26th to January 1st. Each day focuses on one of seven principles: Unity, Self-determination, Collective Work & Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Creativity, Purpose, and Faith. The name Kwanzaa is derived from a Swahili phrase meaning first fruits of the harvest. I've been interested in Kwanzaa since a few years ago when Kirk Mullen told me it was secular. I had previously read about Kwanzaa and dismissed it because of that last principle - Faith - which I assumed was theistic. However, Karenga defines Faith as "To believe with all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle." All seven principles are nontheistic. It appeared that Kwanzaa might be compatible with Humanism and Ethical Culture. I wondered if BES should consider celebrating Kwanzaa.

I had never been to a Kwanzaa celebration and was curious to attend one. When the Lewis Museum announced that Dr. Karenga himself would come to Baltimore to speak at their Kwanzaa celebration, I leaped at the chance. On December 28th, Ronit Klemens, my wife Kathleen Wilsbach, and I heard Dr. Karenga deliver a speech titled "Celebrating and Living Kwanzaa: Sowing and Harvesting Seeds of Good." There was standing room only in the auditorium. A thousand people came to the museum that day. I could see why. Karenga is a great speaker. He projected energy, righteousness, humor, and awareness that I found uplifting.

Dr. Karenga began by explaining that Kwanzaa celebrates traditions and principles that are Africa's gift to the world. Kwanzaa offers an occasion for everyone, white or black, to celebrate African culture. He expanded on the metaphor of goodness as a seed that you plant through performing good deeds, which then later grows and returns a bounty when harvested.

Dr. Karenga explained each of the seven principles of Kwanzaa and illustrated them with stories. To illustrate the principles of Unity and Self-Determination, he invoked Harriet Tubman. He described her awakening to freedom by paraphrasing her words: "This feeling of freedom I had, it's so beautiful, I need to share it. In that moment, I declared to myself, I would spend the rest of my life sharing this freedom with others." He interpreted her realization in this way:

*In that moment, she did two things. First, she redefined freedom as a shared good, not an individualistic practice separated from what others need. Second, she redefined freedom from individual escape to the collective practice of self-determination, in and for community. So when you see people trying to escape the black community to find a comfortable place in oppression, you remind them of Harriet Tubman, who ... taught us that freedom is indivisible. All real good is shared good.*

*(continued on page 6)*

# Darwin Day Events

## *February 6, 7:00 p.m.*

Join the Towson University Secular Student Alliance to celebrate Darwin's birthday with pizza and a lecture by Dr. Erik P. Scully, Professor of Biological Sciences (Towson). Parking is available in the Union Garage and the lecture will take place in Chesapeake 302 in University Union. Join the Meetup at <http://meetu.ps/28dYR6>.

## *February 12, 6:30 p.m.*

Celebrate Darwin Day with the Baltimore Coalition of Reason! Join us at BES for a lecture on evolutionary theory by Prof. Kevin Omland (UMBC) titled "Sharing the Tree of Life With Our Cousins: The Fall of the Ladder of Progress" followed by a potluck dinner at 7:30 p.m. Join the Meetup at <http://meetu.ps/27ZTGg> and if you're joining us for dinner, please tell us you're coming and what dish you'd like to bring here: <http://ur1.ca/ge890>.

Prof. Omland's lecture will explore how one criticism of evolution by natural selection is that it cannot explain the evolution of complex organisms from simple organisms. Biologists are increasingly realizing that it is impossible to categorize some organisms as simple and others as complex. Old views of the *Tree of Life* typically depicted life in an ordered "ladder of progress" with "simple" species at the bottom and "complex" species at the top. Current views recognize that present day species are adapted to their particular niches, with no one species representing some pinnacle of evolution. DNA sequences from an increasingly large number of species are now providing information on how all species on the planet are related to one

another. Unlike misconceptions from the 1900s, evolutionary biology now recognizes that present day species are not descended from other present day species, rather we are all cousins.

## *February 22, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.*

Join the Washington Area Secular Humanists (WASH) at Phillips Seafood, 900 Water Street SW, Washington, DC, for their annual banquet and drink a toast to Charles Darwin! Enjoy the buffet and hear a lecture on early humans by archaeologist Dr. Briana Pobiner. Tickets are available at <http://banquet.wash.org>. Join the meetup at <http://meetu.ps/28f1GP>.

Dr. Briana Pobiner is a prehistoric archaeologist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History Human Origins Program and an Associate Research Professor in the Center for the Advanced Study of Hominid Paleobiology at the George Washington University. Her research centers on the evolution of human diet, but has included topics as diverse as cannibalism in the Cook Islands and chimpanzee carnivory. She has conducted fieldwork in Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, and Indonesia. Briana was featured as one of Fox 5 DC's "offbeat experts" and recently interviewed on NPR's "The Splendid Table" about prehistoric human diet.

The "paleo diet" is currently in fashion - but what do we really know about what our ancestors ate? Dr. Pobiner will explore the evidence for different types of foods in ancient diets, starting from millions of years ago up to the wide variety of diets seen in people around the world today.

## **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

### **Poetry Group**

Sunday, February 2, 9:30 a.m.

### **Mindfulness Meditation**

Sunday, February 9, 9:30 a.m.

### **Board Meeting**

Sunday, February 9, 12:30 p.m.

### **The Politicization of Bioethics**

Sunday, February 9, 4:00 p.m.

### **Baking Night at Moveable Feast**

Thursday, February 13, 5:45 p.m.

### **Ethical Action Meeting**

Sunday, February 16, 9:15 a.m.

### **BES Eatery Social (B.E.S.)**

Sunday, February 16, 1:00 p.m.

### **Newcomers Meeting**

Sunday, February 23, 12:30 p.m.

### **Vegan Food Demonstration**

Sunday, February 23, 12:45 p.m.

### **BES Ironweed Film Club**

Wednesday, February 26, 7:30 p.m.

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## **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	February 2
G to L	February 9
M to R	February 16
S to Z	February 23

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## **GRATITUDE!**

We thank the following donors for their generous contributions to the society: Lane Berk, Joan Bromberg, James and Nancy Cox, Michael Franch, Stefan Goodwin, Carolyn Ladeji, Joan and Arthur Milholland, and Roy Speckhardt.

**FEBRUARY 2**

**“Seize the Days: How Cancer Patients Add Life to Their Days”**

**Dr. Evan Lipson**

*Founder and President of Seize the Days, Inc.*

Dr. Evan Lipson, oncologist and founder of Seize the Days, Inc., will explore the ways that people touched by cancer bring fulfillment and meaning into their lives. Seize the Days aims to celebrate and share the unique and meaningful ways that cancer patients add life to their days by documenting, presenting and preserving stories from patients, family members, friends, and caretakers. View Dr. Lipson's Ignite Baltimore talk here <http://youtu.be/zGYNwpeMnA8> and learn more at <http://seizethedays.org>.

**Dr. Lipson** is an oncologist in Baltimore. His primary interest is in clinical research with a focus on melanoma. Dr. Lipson received his Bachelor of Arts in economics from the University of Maryland in 1996. After working as a producer at CNN's "Larry King Live" for a few years, he completed a post-baccalaureate program at Georgetown University in preparation for medical school. Before matriculating, he worked at the General Clinical Research Center at Georgetown Hospital, where he developed an interest in cancer research. He received his medical degree in 2005 from the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City, where he graduated with distinction in research. He completed his medical training at The Johns Hopkins Hospital.

**FEBRUARY 9**

**“Diversity Matters”**

**Ayanna Watson**

*Founder, Black Atheists of America*

The discussion will cover the importance of embracing one's own diversity and the benefits of encouraging others to embrace their differences. Often times, in an attempt to live a more ethical life, people focus on the similarities and are afraid to focus on diversity. The idea stems from the ideology that finding a common ground is the best way to relate to each other. I will discuss how focusing on diversity also leads to a more ethical society.

**Ayanna Watson** is the founder of Black Atheists of America (BAAm). The organization's mission is to bridge the

gap between atheism and the black community. It seeks to achieve its mission by improving education among the youth in disenfranchised communities. The organization also serves to increase diversity among the atheist community at large, and to bring together atheists of color. BAAm envisions a world where atheists, particularly atheists of color, may embrace their lack of religion without the threat of being ostracized by their friends, family and the community. Learn more at <http://www.blackatheistsofamerica.org>.

**FEBRUARY 16**

**“Choosing Concrete Solutions – Over Concrete Plans”**

**Tyrone Barnwell**

*Founder and Director, 3 C's Youth Initiative*

Barnwell will report on the efforts of the 3 C's Youth Initiative to block the proposed juvenile detention facility in Baltimore City ("Youth Jail"). 3 C's is winning support from lawmakers at both the City and State levels. The State of Maryland commissioned the prestigious National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) to study the need for a Youth Jail. NCCD produced a report that identified specific scenarios with recommendations that if implemented would avoid needless costs to build any Youth Jail. The State is intentionally ignoring its own report and opting to push for more incarceration for more generations of African-American youth. None of the five NCCD Report scenarios requires any capital or construction costs. The recommendations would cost only a fraction of prison guards and other operational costs. Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services Secretary Maynard admitted his agency had not even considered the NCCD Report. He said he'd welcome the opportunity, but wasn't given authority to do so. NCCD showed proven approaches to beat back racist policies, but Governor O'Malley keeps pushing to incarcerate African-American youth.

**Tyrone Barnwell** is the Founder and Director of the 3 C's Youth Initiative, a new African-American youth-led organization. The three C's stand for Choose, Change, and Control. The 3C's are committed to mobilizing other youth to be involved in the Choice, the Change, and the Control to speak on what will affect their education, empowerment and outcomes of their lives in Baltimore City. He believes that



ending the cradle to prison pipeline that fuels mass incarceration of people of color means not just stopping bad policies and practices, but starting new ones that invest in ourselves and our communities. Learn more at <http://www.3csyouthinitiative.org>. Mr. Barnwell is a proud father of two beautiful daughters and a son. Mr. Barnwell has received a Mayor's citation and a Senator's citation for community leadership. He started his community work in the year of 2000 as the youngest member of the Rosemont Neighborhood Community Association. In 2004 he became President of the Leaders of Tomorrow, a youth entrepreneurship program with the 4H of America. Barnwell became the Community Organizer for the Safe and Sound Campaign in Baltimore City in 2010, leading the successful Youth Ambassador program. In 2012 Barnwell became the President of the Belmont Elementary School PTA, where his daughters attend. He also serves as a member of The Sustained Solution (TSS), which offers workforce development services for the Brooklyn Park, Westport, and Cherry Hill areas.

## FEBRUARY 23

### "Why Animals Matter"

Hugh Taft-Morales

*Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society*

In honor of the birthday of Charles Darwin, Hugh Taft-Morales will explore the use and abuse of animals by homo sapiens. Non-human creatures serve as pets, are served on plates, and are strapped down for product testing. As guinea pigs and companions they are fundamental to our lives, but we rarely consider them independent of their value relative to human projects. Have they inherent worth? Hugh will discuss some recent studies in animal cognition that may surprise us and affect how we see our fellow inhabitants of planet earth.

**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.

## VEGAN FOOD DEMONSTRATION

February 23, 2014, 12:45 p.m.

A vegan advocate, Megan Graney will demonstrate vegan dishes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as well as a couple of deserts. You will get to sample everything she makes. The food is amazing, and it will open your awareness to great creativity in your own kitchen. Megan became vegan three years ago, after learning about the extreme cruelty involved in raising animals for food. Her interest in vegan food coincides with her great love of the Earth, and with her growing awareness of the devastating environmental impact of animal agriculture. Megan will be answering questions and sharing resources.

Please, stay after Hugh's platform address on "Why Animals Matter" for a potluck lunch before, during, and after the vegan food demonstration. It is encouraged but not necessary to bring a vegan dish for the potluck lunch free of flesh, eggs, animal dairy, honey, and gelatin.

## COMMITTEES 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 find you a ride. 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.

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

## IRONWEED

# film

## CLUB

Wednesday, February 26,  
7:30 p.m.

Join us for a screening of the documentary "Blackfish."

"Blackfish" tells the story of Tilikum, a performing killer whale that killed several people while in captivity. Along the way, director-producer Gabriela Cowperthwaite compiles shocking footage and emotional interviews to explore the creature's extraordinary nature, the species' cruel treatment in captivity, the lives and losses of the trainers and the pressures brought to bear by the multi-billion dollar sea-park industry. This emotionally wrenching, tautly structured story challenges us to consider our relationship to nature and reveals how little we humans have learned from these highly intelligent and enormously sentient fellow mammals. Watch the trailer at <http://blackfishmovie.com/trailer>.

Ask Emil about free membership in the film club (email [volcheck@acm.org](mailto:volcheck@acm.org), or call 410/929-3399). Would you like to help select films? Please ask Emil.

## FAMILY BOARD & CARD GAMES PARTY

Sunday, February 16, 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. Address and directions provided when you RSVP. For questions, please call 301-642-1065.

## LGBTQ HUMANIST COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE FREE MOVIE NIGHT

Tuesday, February 4, 6:15 p.m.

Doors open at 6:15 p.m. and the movie starts at 6:30 p.m. There will be FREE POPCORN! This month's movie is "Victor/Victoria" This film is about a struggling female soprano who finds work playing a male female impersonator which complicates her personal life. Email questions to our organizer Lucas McCahill at [lmccahill45@gmail.com](mailto:lmccahill45@gmail.com) and please RSVP on the Meetup.

## Humanism and Kwanzaa

*(continued from page 2)*

Dr. Karenga twice referred to the Creator: once when referring to the West African religion Ifa and once when referring to ancient Egypt. In his book *Kwanzaa*, he states "a profound reverence for Creator and Creation is a central focus for the ingathering of people in African first-fruits celebrations ...It is an expression of African spirituality, which here means intense emotional and rational appreciation for the highest ideals and values of humankind." Karenga places theistic references in a historical or cultural context but defines such reverence in a nontheistic way.

To my thinking, this is Humanism, or possibly Deism. I'm not alone in that. Carlotta Morrow, a self-described Christian Activist and writer, has criticized Dr. Karenga and Kwanzaa writ-

ing "Dr. Karenga must be looked upon as a false teacher. He [sic] words are attractive, especially to the intellectual crowd, but he's teaching a deadly doctrine of humanism, the teachings that MAN is the center of his own universe, and can save himself without the help of God." Dr. Karenga belonged to a chapter of the American Humanist Association in the 1960s, and he received a grant from the Unitarian Universalist Association to support the development of Kwanzaa in 1968.

I'm impressed by the history of Kwanzaa and the thinking and Humanist principles that Dr. Maulana Karenga has put into Kwanzaa. Next year I'd like to encourage more BES members to attend a Kwanzaa celebration. Perhaps the year after that we'll hold one ourselves.

# Preparing for Lay Leadership Summer School

(continued from page 1)

a Leader was due to my experience in LLSS in 2006. I wanted to offer others a similarly rewarding Ethical Culture experience.

I wrote in the Sept. 2012 *BESpeak* that an important part of LLSS was emphasizing the crucial balance between task and process. In the world so focused on the bottom line, we can become myopically obsessed with *what* we produce. Often, *how* we get there is forgotten, which is too bad because the process is really all about people, and people matter most.

Ethical Culture should be as much about people as product. So at LLSS we emphasize that process is as important as task. Even during this planning meeting in the first weeks of January, I try to remember process when dealing with my colleagues. Putting together a packed curriculum, while at the same time respecting and involving all six LLSS faculty, is not always easy. There is much to do and each of us is bubbling over with ideas and enthusiasm. Yours truly, in particular, had to remind himself to leave room for others, to welcome their contributions, and to respectfully challenge them when I disagreed.

This planning meeting was particularly interesting because it offered

us a chance to ask the big questions that confront our movement: What is Ethical Culture's mission in the world? How do we build Ethical Culture communities that reflect our mission? How can we *live the mission* in our personal lives so our selves and our relationships flourish? The downside of "blue sky thinking," of course, is that it leads to a lot of work to reflect our new ideas in the details of curriculum.

Responding to that challenge, Bart Worden unfurled his "blue sticky wall." We all brainstormed parts of the curriculum and sprinkled them on the fabric like the snow was collecting on the sidewalks outside. The rest of the afternoon we spent shuffling them into the most organic curricular flow we could. The result, if I do say so myself is impressive, and, a good days work.

As I walked back in the cold to the YMCA, I again remembered my first time at The Mountain, climbing to the sun drenched top of "the tower." Scanning the 360-degree view I felt an invigorating sense of purpose. If you think your life could be enlivened by such an experience, please look for the LLSS brochure in February. Come to The Mountain so you can support a renaissance of Ethical Humanism in a world that desperately needs it.

## Explorations in Bioethics and Medicine

### "THE POLITICIZATION OF BIOETHICS"

Sunday, February 9,  
4:00-5:30 p.m.

Come for ethical discussions with Hugh Taft-Morales about some of the moral quandaries posed by changes in science, technology and medicine. Other explorations will occur on March 9, April 13, and May 11 at locations to be determined and will include topics such as: human, animal, therapeutic cloning; informed consent of human subjects in research; gene mapping and genetic therapy; gender and feminist conceptions of autonomy; and "reproductive justice."

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

Sunday, February 16,  
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. If you have any questions, please contact Adam at [synxr0nic@yahoo.com](mailto:synxr0nic@yahoo.com).

### BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST

Thursday, February 13, 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](http://www.mfeast.org). Let Lisa Alderson know you are coming ([lialderson@gmail.com](mailto: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 car-pool, and she'll try to match you up with another BES participant.



**BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY**

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

**NEWSLETTER**

Please do not delay!

**TIME VALUE**

**ETHICAL ACTION MEETING**

**Sunday, February 16, 9:15–10:15 a.m.**

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

**NEWCOMERS MEETING**

**Sunday, February 23, 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, February 9, 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.

**bmorethical**

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