

# BESpeak



SUMMER 2019

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

## A Higher Life

by Hugh Taft-Morales, Ethical Leader

**F**elix Adler's booklet *Life and Destiny* is a collection of some philosophical wanderings from the founder of Ethical Culture. He writes from another age, full of idealistic philosophy and metaphors. My comments in this Leader column reflect on one of his essays entitled, "Higher Life."

Often people come to the Ethical Society in search of a better way to live. They yearn for an ethically uplifting life, but find it elusive. Perhaps they feel dragged down by the creeping immorality infecting politics. Maybe they struggle to live up to their own ethical ideals. If they become stuck in indignation or mired in self-criticism, their attitudes can harden and this can hamper moral growth. These days how can anyone searching for a better way to live remain hopeful? How can we keep nurture ethical evolution in dark times?

There are two qualities of a life well lived that I find useful in balancing realism and optimism. They help me manage two contradictory impulses – admitting our deep limitations while yearning for a higher life. They are not discussed much in the public square or in social media. Maybe they seem a bit old fashioned. They are **HUMILITY** and **DIGNITY**.

Humility, on the one hand, counsels that we move carefully through life, restraining our confidence so as to avoid error. Humility encourages us to listen, learn, and sometimes follow. Dignity, however, requires us to take our selves seriously. It encourages us to stand and be counted, to defend our principles despite opposition. Though humility and dignity point in different directions, they both are present in many people I admire – like Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., my grandfather Robert Taft. So maybe they, in fact, reinforce each other. Maybe we have to embrace both.

Felix Adler, the founder of Ethical Culture, embraces both. He counsels us to nurture humility while promoting the best in self and other. He rejects worshipping the false idol of "humanity," but promotes human virtues, such as honesty, goodness, and justice. Unsatisfied with the actual, he still has faith in our potential.

Though Adler died almost a century ago, I still find some of his wisdom useful. I'll turn to one essay he wrote entitled "Higher Life" that I found in the booklet *Life*



(continued on page 5)

## SUNDAY PLATFORMS

10:30 a.m.

Our weekly meetings begin with lively, informative talks given by a wide range of knowledgeable, notable speakers. A question/answer and discussion period follows, giving those attending a chance to question the speaker, discuss the issues, and present their own opinions. At the end of the discussion period, there is a coffee hour which gives members, newcomers, and visitors the opportunity to socialize.

Visit [bmorethical.org](http://bmorethical.org) for a listing of upcoming platform topics.

## ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

Individualized programs for preschool children and school aged students.

## TODDLER CARE

Separate supervision provided for children up to age two.

## 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	First Sundays
G to L	Second Sundays
M to R	Third Sundays
S to Z	Fourth Sundays

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Hugh Taft-Morales, *Leader*

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Kirk Mullen, Hugh Taft-Morales  
Coordinator: Kathryn Merrill

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

**On the web at** [bmoreethical.org](http://bmoreethical.org)

# Meet the Public Relations Committee

## MEL TILLERY, CHAIR

"I'm a naturalist, educator, artist, and queer advocate. I love working in parks and nature centers because it allows me to learn from other naturalists and to share the love I have for snakes, spiders, birds, and the outdoors. I've lived in Baltimore County since 2004, when I started attending Goucher College. Tevis and I currently live in Towson with our housemate and our parrots."

### Where Born:

Wichita, Kansas

### Member Since:

2014

### Why I Volunteer:

BES is a unique place whose community and goals I want to support. I think our presence adds to Baltimore's character and gives our members a sense of belonging.

### A Favorite Quote:

"When I say it's you I like, I'm talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can ever see or hear or touch. That



deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive. Love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over war, and justice that proves more powerful than greed."

– Mr. Rogers

### Other Interests:

Community theater, science fiction, and roleplaying games.

### Thanks to our Public Relations Committee Members:

Kathryn Merrill, Thomas Higdon, Omowale Elson, Emil Volcheck, Paul Furth, Jeanne Sears, Sophia Purekal, Mary Beth Sodus, and Nancy Nelson.

## NAVIGATORS USA CHAPTER 43

The Baltimore Ethical Society is proud to sponsor Navigators USA Chapter 43, an all-inclusive, co-ed, secular scouting group. We meet the first and third Sundays and may have optional "flex" meetings some months.

Our chapter is a family scouting group. Families are expected to participate in the activities – no drop offs. Email [baltimore Navigators@gmail.com](mailto:baltimore Navigators@gmail.com).





## IN THE NEWS:

# 2019 AEU Assembly

From June 21-23, the American Ethical Union (AEU) held its 104th Annual Assembly in Tampa, celebrating the theme of “Democracy for All.” Speakers included Carlos Guillermo Smith, the first openly gay Latin member of the Florida House of Representatives and Howard Simon, former executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union.



Marjory Stoneman Douglas student Lea Serrano accepted the 2019 Elliott-Black award on behalf of her school and teachers. Dr. Jacob Abraham & Kimberly Krawczyk also spoke. The Elliott-Black Award is the highest honor that the AEU bestows to organizations or individuals in recognition of their significant and positive impact on society through profound courage and commitment and in the fulfillment of ethical ideals.



Thomas Higdon presenting Karen Elliott with the Anna Garlin Spencer Volunteer Award from the AEU for her service to BES. The award honors dedicated members for their commitment to help their ethical congregation and the American Ethical Union thrive.

BES members in attendance included Joanna Brandt, Karen Elliott, Thomas Higdon, Emil Volcheck, and Kathleen Wilsbach. Throughout the Assembly, they and other attendees participated in workshops and talks to learn about how they can get more involved in advocating for the rights of the most disenfranchised in our country.

In addition to the award presentations show above and at left, the AEU also awarded the Felix Adler Lifetime Achievement Award to Edward L. Ericson. Ericson is the author of several books including *The Humanist Way* (1988). This award officially recognizes our members who have stimulated the growth of the Ethical Culture Movement during their many years of active participation in the AEU and its member Societies.

## Roy Zimmerman

On Thursday, May 23rd, Roy Zimmerman brought his wit and musical talent to the Enoch Pratt Hall at First Unitarian Church. The evening was sponsored by the Baltimore Coalition of Reason. Three coalition groups were represented: BES's own Hugh Taft-Morales; First Unitarian's David Olson, and Bill Creasy, Coordinator of their Baltimore Secular Humanists chapter. A small but enthusiastic audience were treated to songs such as Creation Science 101, Defenders of Marriage, and To Be a Liberal. Roy's satire helps the daily news go down a bit more easily. Things are so crazy in the world today that Roy said his songs “practically write themselves!” Check out his website at <http://www.royzimmerman.com/>.



Roy with Hugh and his new “Psychedelic Relic” t-shirt, playing off of a song by the same name. PHOTO BY: Maureen Taft-Morales

# poetry SALON

**First Sundays, 9:30 a.m.**

The Baltimore Ethical Society's Poetry Salon is dedicated to the appreciation of all types of poetry. You may read your own poems or you may read the poems of others. We meet on the first Sunday of each month. We begin at 9:30 a.m. and end at 10:25 a.m.

## MEMBER PROFILES

**Let's get to know each other a little better.** We post short biographies of our members in our website's Members Only section. Profiles of our newer members have been posted based on the text used in their welcoming ceremonies, but we need to hear from our longer-time members. Go to the Directory or Member Profiles page and you will see a "Tell Us About Yourself" link in the sidebar that will take you to a form submission page. Type some details and attach a portrait-type photo. If you don't have a picture of yourself, our photographer can take one after a Sunday meeting. Use the published profiles as a guide. If you have any questions, contact Wayne Laufert (wlaufert@aol.com) or Janey Solwold (jlsolwold@gmail.com).

## SECOND SUNDAY FAMILY MEET-UPS!

Join other families with young children immediately following platform on the second Sunday of each month to have fun, build community, and let off steam. The activities will be selected with 2-6 year olds in mind, but all are welcome! If you have questions, email Maya at may-agk@gmail.com or Beth at emluginbill@gmail.com.



## SMART RECOVERY MEETING

**Every Saturday, 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., downstairs**

SMART Recovery (Self-Management And Recovery Training) is a free peer-support group for individuals who have chosen to abstain, or are considering abstinence from any type of addictive behaviors (substances or activities), by teaching how to change self-defeating thinking, emotions, and actions; and to work towards long-term satisfactions and quality of life. SMART is not a 12-step group like Alcoholics Anonymous. For more information about SMART, visit [www.smartrecovery.org](http://www.smartrecovery.org).

## TABLETOP GAME NIGHT

**First Fridays, 7:00 p.m.**

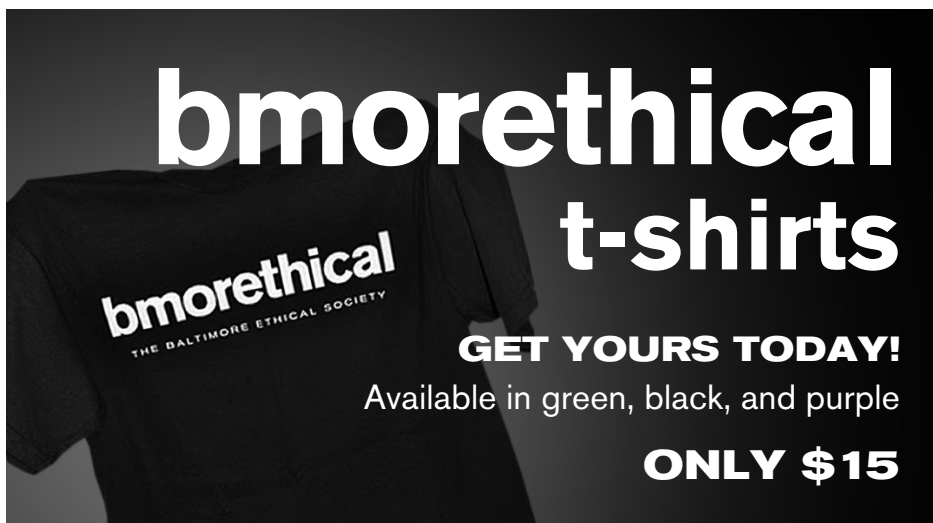
Join us in the library as we play a variety of unusual pen and paper roleplaying games. We meet from 7:00–10:00 p.m. on the first Friday of each month. No gaming experience necessary

# bmorethical t-shirts

**GET YOURS TODAY!**

Available in green, black, and purple

**ONLY \$15**





# HUMANIST improv group

First and Third Tuesdays, 6:15 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Did you know that a central tenet of humanism and good improv is Bringing out the best in others brings out the best in ourselves? One goal is to see if improv can be used to explore social justice issues. Another is to have fun and be silly for a little while. We meet once a week to do improv exercises and work on improv skills and maybe even to perform.

## PROGRAM COMMITTEE MEETING

Fourth Sundays, 12:30 p.m.

Join the Program Committee and help choose speakers for our Sunday morning meetings! Visitors are also welcome to provide thoughts and speaker suggestions, or just to listen.

## SOMEONE GETTING MARRIED?

The Baltimore Ethical Society has a Leader and a team of officiants who are trained and licensed to conduct weddings, memorials, and other life passage ceremonies. For more information about our ceremonies or to make arrangements, please contact our Officiant Team Coordinator, Kathryn Merrill, at [weddings@bmoreethical.org](mailto:weddings@bmoreethical.org).

## A Higher Life

(continued from page 1)

*and Destiny*. In it Adler praises these two ideals and explains how they are bound up together. Just as valleys frame mountaintops, our limitations glorify our ideals. He writes, "...the crowning grace of all is Humility, in the sense in which it implies and presupposes dignity. Dignity is based upon the consciousness of a divine element in human nature, or an infinite aim, a boundless destiny. Humbleness is due to a sense of the incalculable distance which still separates us from the goal." (p. 51)

While I don't often use words such as "divine," "infinite," or "boundless," I appreciate how entranced Adler was by ethical ideals. At times he treats them as if they exist in some higher world, such as the ideal world Plato constructed filled with his eternal, perfect "Forms" of truth, beauty, and justice. I don't put much stock in such

metaphysics. The time for philosophical idealism has passed.

But I do appreciate how such high-sounding superlatives fuel my imagination and stir my emotions. I value how faith in "unalienable rights" inspires many to strive for a democracy to be proud of, though it might fall well short of our dreams. We still should reach for the stars, while keeping our feet on the ground.

Much of my work as an Ethical Humanist Leader involves encouraging us all to have high ethical ideals while at the same time remembering how the world really works. Adler insisted on testing his ideals by applying them to the world. While he didn't embrace *philosophical* pragmatism, he lived a *realistic* pragmatism. The dignity he insisted upon was bound up in the humility that arises when you work with real people on real problems.

Working with real people, and working on your self, can be frustrating. It can tempt us to abandon our

ideals, to end the yearning for a better world that may feel always out of reach. But to surrender – to give up our ideals and sink back into acceptance for how things are – is not humble. It is cheap. True humility arises only when we compare our progress with our grand desires, when we take a single step towards the distant mountaintop.

I prefer to live in a world where the potential for peace remains despite the reality of war. I don't like cynically dismissing our political leaders as self-interested liars – I want to believe that heroes are real. More than anything, however, I want to hold on to a vision of my better self – a self that is more consistent and effective at building an ethical world. Holding on simultaneously to my idealism and realism is what I demand of myself. The dignity and humility I seek arise together. I want to help them both grow. It's why I came to the Ethical Society. I hope it's why you came too.



**BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY**  
2521 Saint Paul St., Baltimore, MD 21218

**NEWSLETTER**

Please do not delay!  
**TIME VALUE**

**ETHICAL ACTION MEETING**

**Third Sundays, 12:30 p.m.**

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

**NEWCOMERS MEETING**

**See Website for Dates, 12:30 p.m.**

New to the Society and interested in learning more?  
Come to the Newcomers Meeting, held following the  
Platform once each month, and find out more about  
Ethical Culture and our Society - its history, its philoso-  
phy, and its organization. Meetings last about one hour  
and are recommended for anyone who's curious about  
membership. Please attend at least one Platform before  
going to a Newcomers Meeting. Contact Wayne Laufert  
or Janey Solwold for more information.

**MINDFULNESS**

**meditation**

**Second Sundays, 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 medita-  
tion 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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