



# ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

VOLUME 29 NUMBER 5

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JANUARY 2010

## SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

**Jan 3 Risa Olinsky**, *“The Anti-New Year’s Resolution: Personal Accountability & Health”*



Chances are you have started each New Year with the best of intentions and somewhere down the line these intentions dwindled away with your motivation. If the process didn’t work last year, why would you repeat the same thing again? Try something new: Think about creating a lifestyle you can live with throughout the year, not just the first few weeks.

Take the pressure off yourself to be or do something incredible, to eat perfectly, to exercise daily, to lose twenty pounds, and to make contact with everyone that you lost touch with. These are all unnecessary stressors in life — the one thing that we really want to avoid. Instead, try something totally enjoyable: Think about a time in your life when you felt wonderful, and let’s use that as a starting point.

You wouldn’t go on a trip without an itinerary and a map. Mapping your life is no different: you need a plan and that plan may or may not require some help — of family or friends, and maybe a professional. It make take some time to hash out, but you won’t know that until you take inventory of your own resources, where you are starting from and what it will take to get where you want to end up. It takes patience and mostly the willingness to change — for the better.

Risa Olinsky, JCC Metrowest Director of Lifestyle & Wellness and nationally certified wellness coach

has over 25 years of experience in the health and wellness field. She has extensive experience in health coaching, exercise testing, personal training, and fitness programming for adults of all ages. Risa is the creator of Count on Yourself™ coaching and founder and executive director of HWPN, The Health & Wellness Professional Network — a professional organization with 200 members across NJ and NY.

**Jan 10 Dean Sluyter**, *“Bigger Than Pain, Bigger Than Joy”*

Sometimes we might feel that we’re carrying pain so intense that we’ll never get over it. Sometimes we might feel that we’ve had joy so intense that nothing else can ever match it. Either way, it’s a gloomy prospect. But the sages of *Advaita* point out that all joy and all pain are experienced within awareness; therefore awareness itself must be “bigger” than both. In this session, Dean will lead a guided meditation and directed self-inquiry facilitating direct experience of your own nature: pristine, sky-like awareness.

Dean Sluyter (rhymes with “lighter”) has taught natural meditation throughout the U.S. since 1970. He leads the New Jersey *Sangha* and is a prison chaplain for the New Jersey Department of Corrections.

Dean teaches at The Pingry School, Platforms begin at 11 a.m. All are welcome. Platforms are subject to change without notice. For information, contact the Society office, 973-763-1905.



where, as the developer of the Literature of Enlightenment program, he is a leading innovator in the use of meditative techniques in education.

He is a film critic and the author of three books, the most recent being *Cinema Nirvana: Enlightenment Lessons from the Movies*; he also blogs for *The Huffington Post*. Dean has given talks and workshops throughout the U.S.

Dean has trained and practiced with eminent teachers in various devotional and meditative traditions, with his main focus on the nondual contemplative practices of Buddhism and *Advaita*. He has completed numerous lengthy retreats in the US and abroad and has made pilgrimages to India, Tibet and Nepal. When not writing or teaching, Dean takes photographs, plays blues harp, sax and harmonium, and happily rides his Vespa through the streets of New Jersey.

**Jan 17** To be announced

**Jan 24 Maria Concilio**, *“A New Paradigm for Gardening with Pollinators in Mind”*

Local beekeeper Maria Concilio will discuss the potentially catastrophic threats facing bees and other pollinators — from environmental pollution and commercial production techniques to the pesticides used in gardens and on pets. She will outline some of the ways in which ordinary gardeners can help save these crucial creatures.



“I have been keeping bees in South Orange, (continued on next page)

# Ethical Culture Society of Essex County



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#### Editor's note

The newsletter invites you to submit articles, announcements, commentary, etc. for publication. ITEMS MUST BE RECEIVED BY THE EIGHTH OF THE MONTH FOR INCLUSION IN THE FOLLOWING MONTH'S EDITION. Items should be no more than 150 words, preferably submitted via email to the editor (gilman.howard@gmail.com). Items can also be delivered to: Editor, Ethical Society Newsletter, 516 Prospect St., Maplewood, NJ 07040. Please call the office, 973-763-1905, and leave word especially if your item is time-sensitive.

Editor reserves right to edit for length, clarity and content. Opinions offered in this publication are those of the authors.

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Our web site: [www.essexethical.org](http://www.essexethical.org)

**...act so  
as to elicit  
the best  
in others  
and in  
ourselves**

Attention members! Please submit your email addresses to [ethicalessex@netscape.com](mailto:ethicalessex@netscape.com) to receive newsletter and other special event notices.

Maplewood and short Hills for two years & am a member of the New Jersey Beekeepers & Essex County Beekeepers Associations. I mainly became a beekeeper out of a deep commitment to restoring our environment and felt the bee crisis was connected in a vital way. Little did I know I would become completely enamoured of this amazing little bug that gives us flowers, apples and even honey.

"I am also raising three children, Raffaella, Ava & Carlo with my husband Jonathan Glasser, and they are the main reason for my cause to help our world be a better place. In my "spare" time I produce handmade soaps and lip balms under the name Honey Love Soaps, using beeswax and honey."



### Jan. 31 Dr. Patrick Swift, *"One Mountain, Many Paths: Celebrating Diversity Within Our Communities"*

Peace is not a destination, but a way of being for people of all traditions. Join psychologist and author Dr. Patrick Swift for a session of insightful and inspirational messages that make the path of peace a journey of love. An advocate for mutual respect based on his experience witnessing 9/11 from his NYC hospital and caring for some of the victims, Patrick shows us how celebrating diversity can make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. Hailed as a mix between Dr. Oliver Sachs and Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, Patrick brings a unique mix of multicultural values, respect for diversity and a passion for teamwork to all he does.

Patrick formerly studied to become a Jesuit priest and completed the Ignatian 30-day silent retreat. He currently serves as faculty at NYU Langone Medical Center with dual faculty appointments in Neurology and Rehabilitation Medicine. Patrick is also a past President of the New York Academy of Traumatic Brain Injury and consulted with the US Army how to best care for our service men and women who have sustained traumatic brain injuries and blast injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan. A man of many talents, Patrick is the author of the award-winning book *One Mountain, Many Paths* and previ-

ously hosted two television programs called "One Community, Many Faiths" and "The Diversity Doctor." Patrick has been seen on national TV on "The O'Reilly Factor" and heard on radio stations across the country including several NPR affiliates.

### Jan 8 Folk Friday at Ethical

Singalong with friends Lucky, Dusty, Rusty & Tio Pete, every second Friday of the month at the Society. No admission fee. Bring acoustic string and rhythm instruments, join in playing with us; bring some refreshments to share. Ethical Culture Society, 516 Prospect St., Maplewood; 7:30 p.m. (973) 763-1905 or 763-8293; [lnovemsky@comcast.net](mailto:lnovemsky@comcast.net) [Please note: For this and the coming winter months, call Lisa to check ahead.]

### A Message from Boe

#### *"A Festering Sore"*

Living in Ringwood, New Jersey, has been an unmitigated delight for me. I live beside a beautiful lake and have access to some of the state's most beautiful hiking trails. In the winter the local parks offer wonderful places to ski. The sunsets are exquisite. I could not ask for a more delightful place to live.

Nevertheless, this paradise is not complete and harbors a festering sore. An area called "Upper Ringwood" is inhabited primarily by a community of mostly African Americans who have lived there for generations since the early 1900s. Within the past 15 years or so, a very serious and hazardous condition has been discovered in this neighborhood. The Ford Motor Company had used various mine shafts as a dumping ground for toxic waste materials. The area was also plastered with numerous sink holes which were part of the coal mining operations of the company. Upper Ringwood residents were experiencing a variety of medical problems and skin disorders which were directly associated with the toxic materials underground.

Subsequently moneys appropriated by the State of New Jersey (continued on next page)

for remediation purposes were used by the township for fixing roads and other civic projects which did not involve helping the Upper Ringwood people.

It is difficult to say at this point when and if this egregious situation will be remedied. It is my fond (albeit optimistic) hope that the current publicity given to the issue by the Bergen Record newspaper will have a substantial impact.

I shall keep you informed of future developments. — *Boe*

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### **Our Successful Community — The Caring-Buddy Committee**

One measure of a successful community is supporting members in their endeavors to achieve their goals. Please help me. I want to see our Caring Committee work. Four members have reported with much pleasure that they have made their connections.

The deadline is upon us to select our buddy with whom to be connected in case of unfortunate circumstances.

In my first article about the Caring Committee, I mentioned that I hoped to be driving soon. It as happened — no one has to pick me up anymore to bring me to Ethical for our many engaging activities. Can you bring a measure of success also to selecting a buddy for our Caring Committee? If the arrangements seem confusing, please phone me for a simple explanation at 973-763-1033. But call you must. I expect your support in helping me be successful in launching the Caring Committee. Hopefully,

— *Betty Levin*

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### **Can virtue be taught?**

by *Howard B. Radest*

“Can virtue be taught?” The subject matter itself is problematic, which is why we move back and forth between the substance of ethics and the ways we acquire it. Argument about the nature and content of morality or the appropriate role of ethical thinking

continues. We are hardly nearer the agreement on ethics now than we were 2,500 years ago. Platonists, who embed values in the “heaven beyond the heavens,” still confront sceptics who deny the objectivity of human action. Kantians maintain that the moral law inheres in a special moral reality. The debate between partisans of the “good” and partisans of the “right” continues. The former look to purposes, the latter to processes. Some give priority to welfare, others to fairness. Intuitionists “know” the good directly; rationalists construct axiomatic systems; conventionalists describe moral “rules of the road.” Naturalists connect the “is” and the “ought,” seeking to build a bridge between ethics and moral psychology, between the desirable and the desired. Positivists condemn the connection as the “naturalistic fallacy.” Little wonder then that the academy is dismissed from the arena of life judgements as pointless.

Day-to-day moral decisions, however, are no less conflicted. Were we really secure in our ordinary values, we might with relief leave the philosophers to their arguments, but in moral experience too, as we well know, there is less and less agreement as our world grows larger. Advocates are to be found on the many sides of any morally interesting question. In the press, from the pulpit, in the legislatures, we debate a familiar agenda without expecting resolution — abortion, surrogate motherhood, euthanasia, capital punishment, and so on, and the situation promises to become more and not less difficult as matters of life and death become questions of choice, not fate. Decisions about war and peace or in biomedical ethics produce new complexities for which we are unprepared. The massive and poorly understood drive to

organize everything and everywhere of modern corporate societies leaves us puzzled about moral obligation. Despite a growing literature, there is scant wisdom on the “moral responsibility of business” or the moral obligations of government, yet life and death, war and peace, power and influence are unavoidably presented in our daily lives. Little wonder then that the moral anxiety is a feature of contemporary biography. Little wonder, too, that the pressure for moral education increases almost in direct relationship to the increase of our moral confusion.

**“No completed moral code is available or is likely to be in the future.”**

At the same time, ethical analysis and moral history do help us find usable notions, for example, that moral judgement requires a certain “distance” from self-interest; that moral imperatives require an assessment of the possible and the impossible or, as the philosopher puts it, “ought implies can”; that

moral variety recommends a certain toleration; that moral novelty advises the need for dependable methods of moral inquiry. To be sure, none of these ideas is ever secured. For example, the egoist may take “self-interest” to be the criterion of moral judgement and think thereby to deny the possibility of moral objectivity, but the ethical egoist must still deal with the moral equality of all egos and the problem of the “free rider,” that is, the distinctions between self-interest, selfishness, and opportunism; these distinctions are never only a “matter of taste.”

It is clear enough to all but the extremist among us that no single method of moral inquiry and no completed moral code is available or is likely to be in the future. Given the essential “fuzziness” of moral biography, no single moral pedagogy will serve either. Like it or not, moral conflict (*continued*)

# ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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## ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY NEWSLETTER · JANUARY 2010

### **Can virtue be taught?** *(continued)*

will not be settled in our time any more than it was in the past, and even the extremists know they cannot have their way without oppressing the “enemy” and inviting perpetual warfare.

We cannot establish moral education by exclusive attention to common-sense morality either, because common sense fails us just where we are most in need. We are creatures too of our passions as much as of our reasons. Interesting moral questions are felt as well as argued. A strain of the arbitrary persists in all serious moral discourse. The struggles between secular and religiously based morality, between left and right, between individualist and communalist, take place inside and outside of the walls of school and academy, and are inevitably shaped by our deepest feelings.

The outcome, too often, is to con-

vert pluralism into separatism, and toleration into a treaty relationship between alien parties. On this dubious ground, we succeeded for a long time in developing common schooling that satisfied the expectations of most people most of the time. Political peace, however, was achieved at the cost of moral imperialism and, more recently, of moral superficiality. Furthermore, the unspoken assumptions that grounded that peace have vanished. New players with newly found powers have entered the game. Schools have again become a battleground, and even a pretended moral neutrality does not defend them from attack. Church-state issues, which are a measure of social conflict and not simply of religious differences, arise more and more frequently. Evolution, creationism, Bible reading, sexuality, prayer, censorship, and patriotism be-

come points of controversy.

In this complicated situation, some of us will continue to insist that our own answers and only our own answers are acceptable whether in school, home or society. If this sense of things prevails, then warfare or an uneasy peace are the only alternatives; but then, society itself is at risk. What shall we do and where shall we turn if that risk is unacceptable and moral neutrality an illusion? We began with the Socratic question, “Can virtue be taught?” We answered with Socratic ignorance. However, that is an invitation to moral education and not a denial of its possibility. Ignorance is the stimulus and school the response, but what kind of schooling?

*[Excerpted from Howard B. Radest's book, Can We Teach Ethics? Dr. Radest, dean emeritus of the Humanist Institute and a member of the National Council of Ethical Culture Leaders, spoke at our Society on Sep 20, 2009.]*