



# One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary Platform

May 17, 2026



New York Society for Ethical Culture  
2 W. 64th Street  
New York, 10023



## Upcoming events



## Donate to New York Society for Ethical Culture



The Society for Ethical Culture is a religious fellowship which seeks through education, service, and community action to increase [our] knowledge, practice, and love of right living and to deepen [our] sense of a consecrating influence in his life.

*The Ethical Platform*, October 4, 1964

[edited for inclusion]



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Programme

**Overture** **Joshua Elson**, Pianist

**Introductory Remarks** **Carolyn A. Parker, Ph.D.**  
Senior Research Fellow, Ethical Culture Institute

**Address of Welcome** **Elizabeth Singer**  
President, NYSEC Board of Trustees

Historic Reading I — **“First Anniversary Address”** by Felix Adler  
Reader: **Patricia Debrovner**

Anniversary Address I: **“150th Anniversary Address”** **Richard Koral, DMin**  
Ethical Culture Leader

Historic Reading III — **“On the Eve of the Centennial”** by Paul R. Migliore  
Reader: **Danny Hanson**

Anniversary Address II: **“Ethical Culture at the Crossroads: Looking Ahead  
and a Glance Within”** **Joseph Chuman, PhD**  
Leader Emeritus

Historic Reading IV — **“Religion of the Deed”** by Khoren Arisian  
Reader: **Bonnie Bean**

**Closing Remarks** **Carolyn A. Parker, Ph.D.**  
Senior Research Fellow, Ethical Culture Institute

## **“Ode to Joy”**

Music by Ludwig von Beethoven  
Lyrics by Pete Seeger and Bart Worden  
**Joshua Elson**, Pianist

## **Luncheon**

## **Before You Go**

Please take a moment to share your vision for NYSEC on the response form placed at your table. Your responses will be shared with NYSEC’s Board of Trustees and members. When you have completed your response, just leave it on the table. A volunteer will collect all of the responses at the end of today’s gathering.





**Excerpts from**  
**“First Anniversary Address” by Felix Adler**  
*Creed and Deed, 1877*

A year has now passed since we began our work, and for many months we have met in this hall week after week. We have reached the first resting place upon our journey, and it behooves us to look back once more upon the path we have travelled, and forward into the yet untried future that awaits us.

What was it that induced us to enter upon so perilous and for many reasons so uncertain an enterprise?

We felt a great need. Religion which ought to stand for the highest truth, had ceased to be true to us. We saw it at war with the highest intelligence of the day; religion and conscience also seemed no longer inseparably connected, as they should be. We saw that millions are annually lavished upon the mere luxuries of religion, gorgeous temples, churches and on the elaborate apparatus of salvation; we could not but reflect that if one tithe of the sums thus set apart were judiciously expended upon the wants of the many who are famishing, distress might often be relieved, sickness averted, and crime confined within more narrow boundaries. . . .

We were passing moreover through a period of momentous import in our country's history. The nation had just entered upon the second century of its existence, and the great recollections of what the fathers had done and designed for the republic, were fresh in our minds. We recalled the memorable words of Washington in his first inaugural address: "That the national policy would be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality." But we were startled to observe how greatly recent events had falsified these hopes and felt it our duty, within our own limited sphere, to restore something of that noble simplicity, something of that high fidelity to righteousness which it is said adorned the earlier days, and on which alone the fortunes of the state can rest securely hereafter. . . .

A few of us therefore took counsel how these objects might be attained, and we determined to take a step in a new direction. . . . What the exigencies of the modern age demand, more than aught else, is a new movement for the moral elevation of the race. . . . Taking the term creed therefore in its widest application, we started out with the watchword, Diversity in the Creed, Unanimity in the Deed. This feature, if any at all, lends character to our movement, and by it would we be judged. We claim to be thereby distinguished, as well from those religious

corporations that base their organization upon definite theological dogmas, as also from the great majority of Liberals who meet for purposes of contemplation and poetical aspiration, in that we put the moral element prominently forward and behold in it the bond of our union, the pledge of our vitality. . . .

We have made a beginning only. If we look ahead, dangers and difficulties still lie thickly on our path. The larger work is still before us. But we will confide in the goodness of our cause, and believe that if it be good indeed, in the end it must succeed.



**Excerpts from**  
**“On the Eve of the Centennial: A New Year’s Address”**

**by Paul R. Migliore**

*The Ethical Platform, December 29, 1974*

Our distinctiveness as an Ethical Movement will always lie in our faith in people, in our willingness to be innovative, to take chances and put ourselves on the line for those things in which we truly believe. Our strength as a movement lies in our collective will, for we are not isolated individuals, alone and vulnerable against the inhumanity of the world. We are a collective conscience, helping people to probe themselves, to reach beyond themselves and enlarge their vision. To be in tune with the richness of life is to be vibrant and alive, animated by the spirit of the human conscience. To be alive and in touch with the forces of life is to understand its passion and its pathos, and to be able to fill oneself by being in touch with the lives of others. . . .

We all have an individual mission, for we must all look within ourselves and realize that it lies within us. And we all have a collective mission, for we must also look at each other and say to each other, “It lies with us.” We’re all part of a human community so very interdependent. A little of each of us is destroyed each time life is wantonly destroyed. A little of each of us is defamed each time human life is debased. We cannot surrender our humanity because of the inhumanity of others. Each of us has this ethical responsibility. Individually and collectively we can and must meet the crisis of conscience that faces us today. It is our sense of community, shared values, and commitments which gives us our sense of connectedness that we draw the strength to act on the dictates of our conscience despite a seemingly indifferent universe.

John Elliott wrote that the spirit of religion is “a fire passed from life to life, not by instruction, but by kindling.” That is the challenge for us today, to rekindle the fire and the passion that must be the basis of an Ethical Movement and to ever enlarge that circle of humanity which shares a basic faith in the human potential and a basic reverence and respect for the passionate strivings of human consciousness. That is the challenge for us on the eve of this new year and on the eve of the Centennial of the Ethical Culture movement. So let us arise together to meet this challenge, for we are the charioteers of our own destiny.



Excerpts from  
**“Founder’s Day—Religion of the Deed: Ethical Culture as a Reform  
Movement” by Khoren Arisien**

*The Ethical Platform, May 12, 2002*

. . . [R]eform will always be necessary. We're hardly perfect or perfectable; reform therefore calls for continued self-reference. We must be modest here, neither proud nor humble. Reform is the human race's engine of progress; while the idea of progress testifies to humanity's ineffable worth, reform as an active undertaking is the embodiment of progressive possibility.

Reformers, let's remember, are not revolutionaries but meliorists. You don't have to overthrow society, which requires violence, in order to make it better; revolutionaries, of course, aim to supplant entirely what they overthrow, the baby and the bathwater. However, incremental improvement, which assumes a given state of affairs has much that is commendable about it—yet we are not justified in sitting on our laurels—does not have to be feeble or superficial, it can be thoroughgoing and creative. The humanist doctrine of the universal divinity of human nature—our core legacy from Emerson and Adler—suggests history convincingly reveals that, despite our capacity for turpitude and tragedy, we humans also have an innate inclination to want to contribute somehow to the world's well-being. Meliorism means that conscious and persistent human effort, depending on the agenda at hand, can make things better—or worse. It's up to us which direction we shall take.

In a sense we must all strive to be reformers,—in that we are all responsible for democracy's well-being—moral agents of humanizing social and political change. That our reach will always exceed our grasp is cause more for rejoicing than despair, else what's an Ethical Movement for?



## Ode to Joy

*Lyrics by Pete Seeger and Bart Worden*

*Music by Ludwig von Beethoven*

Build the road of **peace** before us,  
Build it wide and deep and long.  
Speed the slow, remind the eager,  
Help the weak, and guide the strong.

(CHORUS)

None shall push aside another,  
None shall let another fall.  
Work beside me, sisters and brothers!  
All for one and one for all.

Build the road of **justice** before us,  
Build it wide and deep and long.  
Seek to make the world a fair place.  
Equal all before the law.

(CHORUS)

Build the road of **care** between us,  
Build it wide and deep and long.  
Joining hands to work together;  
In the world we all belong.

(CHORUS)

