

# **Eight Commitments of Ethical Culture**

## **1. Ethics is central.**

*The most central human issue in our lives involves creating a more humane environment.*

Ethical Culture is an aspirational movement dedicated to cultivating the ethical life through the building of caring communities. Ethical Societies focus on humanity and are radically ethics-centered. They are intergenerational, and committed to life-span ethical learning. The choice to enter an Ethical Society in many cases is a choice to "swim against the current" of modern social trends. Members of Ethical Societies believe that the most important thing for members to do is to create more caring communities.

## **2. Ethics begins with choice.**

*Creating a more humane environment begins by affirming the need to make significant choices in our lives.*

One may live within the acceptable moral codes of one's world, and be considered a good person. But until we begin to choose our commitments and be truthful we cannot be said to be fully living an ethical life. The choice to join an Ethical Society comes at a point when reasonable maturity has been achieved. The decision to join should be fully volitional. It affirms the intention to continue how to choose helpful attitudes and behaviors instead of hurtful ones at every level of interaction.

## **3. We choose to treat each other as ends, not merely means.**

*To enable us to be whole in a fragmented world, we choose to treat each other as unique individuals having intrinsic worth.*

The essence of Ethical Culture is the belief that every person is uniquely precious and irreplaceable. The first decision we make is how to relate in general to one another. The most helpful attitude needed to create a caring community is an attitude of respect for everyone. This includes listening with trust and acceptance, and behaving in constructive non-inflammatory ways. It means not treating one another as objects of one's ambition, and supporting oneself and others in being ends in themselves.

## **4. We seek to act with integrity.**

*Treating one another as ends requires that we learn to act with integrity. This includes keeping commitments, and being more open, honest, caring, and responsive.*

When a person chooses to belong to an Ethical Society, that person is making some very specific commitments that relate to the way he or she acts. While all of us realize we are

"not there yet" in any full ethical sense, still, when we are voted in as members of an Ethical Society we have willingly relinquished some of our impulses in order to honor the integrity of community life. This includes our right to say whatever we want to say whenever we want to say it. This is done not in the spirit of repression or mindless conformity, but rather to assure that the baseline conditions for productive ethical group interactions are met. These conditions includes: evolving a culture of trust rather than paranoia so that we can safely explore what it means to be ethical, and, modeling the ethical principles we have developed by the way we interact.

We commit to treating one another with fairness and kindness and to keep our promises to one another and be truthful with each other. We agree to not harshly judge each other, and to listen, and give each other space for response. We agree not to let the unethical aspects of the world all around us creep into our midst. This of course includes refraining from the acts of urban chaos that haunt us, including assault, theft, vandalism, tampering with or altering records, possessing or using weapons, possessing, using, selling, or distributing illegal drugs, and engaging in such hurtful activities as intimidation or coercion. In the rare event any of these things might occur among us, we support a policy of suspension with interventions aimed at setting firm boundaries for the future.

We will also personally refrain from lying, harassing, libeling, profaning, and engaging in continuous verbal abuse such as constant blaming, cruel criticizing, attacking, threatening, labeling, and ridiculing. We will refrain from disrupting groups, since we are a voluntary community committed to developing a deeply ethical ethos.

In group meetings we are committed to supporting one another even when we disagree. We will attend to the process as well as the content of our meeting. Toward this end, we agree to speak from our own experience, to refrain from putdowns and constant advice, to honor personal confidentiality and cultural differences, to accept our responsibility to help get our own needs met, and to help the group stay on the agreed upon tasks. We will honor the designated leadership of any group, and keep our commitments to begin all meetings and end all meetings on time.

#### **5. We are committed to educate ourselves.**

*Personal progress is possible, both in wisdom and social life. Learning how to build ethical relationships and cultivate a humane community is a life-long endeavor.*

The Ethical Society enters into a life-span partnership with its members, helping develop resources for continued ethical growth in the context of a caring community. Members commit to mastering the basic tenets of the Ethical Movement in order to create a common ground for discourse. Members are constantly exploring how their ethical commitments can be actualized in their daily lives. The epistemology favors the value of complexity, and emphasizes a learning style of mutuality.

## **6. Self-reflection and our social nature require us to shape a more humane world.**

*Growth of the human spirit is rooted in self-reflection, but can only come to full flower in community. This is because people are social, needing both primary relationships and larger supportive groups to become fully human. Our social nature requires that we reach beyond ourselves to decrease the suffering and increase creativity in the world.*

Both active contemplation and contemplative action enrich the storehouse of response to the human condition. This assures a broad base of continuous perspective-taking, and numerous structures for actualizing commitments.

## **7. Democratic process is essential to our task.**

*The democratic process is essential to a humane social order because respect for the worth of persons requires a process which elicits and allows a greater expression of human capacities.*

The best way to create a caring community is to behave in groups in a way that encourages everyone to participate. Then the agreements we make will be more binding.

## **8. Life itself inspires "religious" response.**

*Although awareness of impending death intensifies the human quest for meaning, the mysteries of life itself, and the need to belong, are the primary factors motivating human "religious" response.*

Creating a more caring community helps us to experience life as deeply meaningful. Then we can celebrate the fact that we belong to a group that cares, and face life's joys and sorrows together. We can appreciate one another, and affirm that we are walking the same path.