

Sukhomlinsky News

No. 37

July 2018



An International Sukhomlinsky Association?

Visit from Japanese professor

On Thursday 12 July Professor Katsuhiro Yamazumi, who was already in Australia to attend a conference in Melbourne, visited Brisbane to meet Alan Cockerill. They discussed the significance of Sukhomlinsky's work and how its study could be furthered in the future.

Professor Yamazumi has had an interest in Sukhomlinsky since his undergraduate years, his interest predating Alan Cockerill's, who only learnt of Sukhomlinsky in 1987. However, he feels that Alan's English language translation of the 2012 edition of *My heart I give to children* shows Sukhomlinsky in a new light, and places him amongst other leading exponents of holistic education, such as Rudolph Steiner.

Japanese translations of eight of Sukhomlinsky's works appeared between 1968 and 1982, including *My heart I give to children* (1971), *Pavlysh Secondary School* (1974), *The birth of a citizen* (1981) and *Letters to my son* (1982). However, Professor Yamazumi feels that these translations were made by scholars interested in promoting Soviet ideology, and that fresh translations and fresh scholarship may possibly reveal Sukhomlinsky in a new light.

Professor Yamazumi is interested in publishing a Japanese translation of Alan's book *Each one must shine*, and in encouraging new translations of some of Sukhomlinsky's classic works. He also plans to put forward a proposal to examine Sukhomlinsky's legacy at the World Education Research Association Focal Meeting in Tokyo in August 2019. One of his most interesting ideas was that we might recreate an International Sukhomlinsky Association, such as was formed in Germany during the 1990s. I plan to discuss this idea more in future newsletters.

During the 1990s there was an international Sukhomlinsky association based in Marburg, Germany, which attracted participants from as far afield as Greece and Japan. On a recent visit to Brisbane, Professor Katsuhiro Yamazumi raised the possibility of reforming an international association for those interested in Sukhomlinsky's legacy, so as to promote the study and awareness of his work.

This is an idea that is close to my heart, and I thought I should share it with the readers of this newsletter. As a first step, I invite subscribers to this newsletter to email me with their thoughts on what such an association might look like, and with any suggestions about online platforms that we might use to communicate with each other. Please send any ideas to ejr.cockerill@gmail.com.

Once again I am delighted to acknowledge the contribution of Monash University student Berta Karaim, who has translated much of the material in this month's newsletter.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



Beauty: the joy of our life

This week's translation is taken from the 2016 publication *Let me tell you a story: Philosophy for children*, which was compiled by Sukhomlinsky's daughter on the basis of *How to educate a genuine human being, An ethics anthology, and other works*.

Developing a sense of beauty

Beauty is the joy of our life. People became human because they saw the depth of the blue sky, the twinkling of the stars, the rosy glow of sunset, the transparent haze of the vast steppe, the crimson sunrise before a windy day, the shimmering of a mirage on the horizon, the blue shadows on March snowdrifts, a flock of cranes in the blue sky, the reflection of the sun's rays in myriad drops of morning dew, the grey threads of rain on an overcast day, the purple cloud on a lilac bush, the tender stalk and the blue bell of a *prolisok* [a flower similar to a snowdrop]. They saw all this and, in awe, went forth into the world, creating new beauty. The joy of life revealed itself to humanity because people heard the whisper of leaves and the song of a grasshopper, the babbling of a spring stream, the modulating silver bells of a lark's song in the scorching summer sky, the whispering fall of snowflakes and the moaning of a blizzard, the gentle lapping of a wave and the majestic silence of night. Humanity heard all these things and, with bated breath, has been listening to the wonderful music of life for hundreds and thousands of years.

We repeat these words in those happy moments when new depths of beauty of the surrounding world are revealed to the children's eyes, awaking in them emotions of joy, excitement and awe. We speak of the silver bells of a lark's song on a hot summer day, when, after a day of work or a hike, children rest in the shade of an oak grove and gaze upon that quivering little ball of life... Words

about the beautiful only reach the ears of children when they themselves can feel beauty. Seeing and hearing, feeling with the heart what has been perceived – these are the first windows into the world of beauty.

I see a very subtle and complex educational and moral significance in a person being guided, in their childhood years, to treasure beauty in all of its forms, to be inspired by the beautiful, to dream of creating, protecting, and affirming beauty around and within themselves.

I have a number of stories intended to teach one how to become inspired. I give particular educational and moral significance to the story 'Beauty, Inspiration, Joy and the Secret'. [Note: this story appeared in Issue 11 of this newsletter, which can be downloaded here:

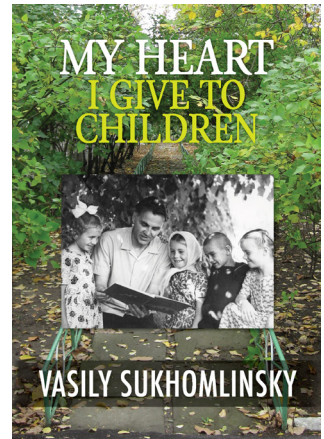
<http://theholisticeducator.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Sukhomlinsky-News-11.pdf>]

I dream that each and every single one of the children in my care will, by the time they reach the cusp between childhood and adolescence, be enthralled by the thought of the eternal nature of beauty and the beauty of a life filled with work, creating and caring for the beautiful.

I guide the children in my care to the sources of beauty a thousand times during the years they are studying in primary school. These are lessons in experiencing a vision of the beautiful. The children learn to see, to admire, and to listen to the music of the world around them, and thus to understand it.

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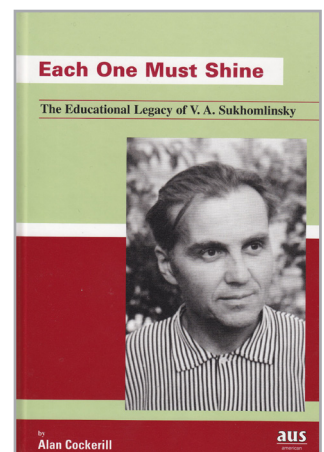
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Beauty refines us

Beauty is one of the streams that feeds kindness, warmth and love. The wonder we feel when we see a dog-rose bush, blazing with red berries and orange leaves, a little maple tree or a shapely apple tree, on which only a few yellow leaves linger, a tomato bush, burnt by the breath of the first night frost: all these things awaken in children's hearts a tender, benevolent and caring attitude towards the living and the beautiful. A child feels sympathy for plants that are preparing for the winter. For children plants are living creatures who will feel the cold of the penetrating winds. Children want to protect plants from the cold. When we cover roses and grape vines for the winter, the children carefully, tenderly bend each little branch to the earth, trying not to break or damage them. In winter the children talk anxiously about young trees, wondering if they feel the cold. And when we collect snow to supply more moisture to the trees, this work is for the children an expression of their heartfelt concern for beauty, and not just a fulfilment of an obligation.

I see great educational significance in a child witnessing, understanding, feeling, experiencing, and ultimately realising the great mystery that is the *awakening of life* in nature. The first spring blooms and opening buds, the first tender blades of grass, the first butterfly, the first croak of a frog, the first swallow, the first thunder, the first trill of a sparrow: all these things I show to children as expressions of the beauty of eternal life. And the more deeply they are inspired by this beauty, the more strenuously they strive to create beauty. For the children a blossoming orchard is a real occasion for celebration. Early in the morning the children come to the orchard and admire the waves of white, pink, violet and orange

blossoms, which appear to float over the orchard, and listen to the chorus of the bees. You must not sleep in on these days, I teach the children, you must get up at dawn, or you will sleep through the beauty! And the children get up before sunrise, so as not to miss those magic moments when the first rays of the sun light up the flowers, laden with dew. They witness an amazing display of many shades of colour, and if children hold their breath, overcome with admiration for this beauty, they will never become insensitive, indifferent, heartless people. The spiritual wealth that is acquired through the contemplation of beauty is developed and further enriched in work aimed at creating joy for others.

People pass through a lengthy school of refining their feelings, before ascending to such a high and selfless perception of beauty. This school begins with contemplation of the beauty in nature, with the ability to see and hear beauty. It includes wise lessons in understanding human loyalty, devotion, affection, duty and responsibility. It is not possible to be selflessly in love with beauty without suffering, and without comprehending the beauty of a mother's soul, as she silently bends over her son's grave.

Teach how to perceive beauty

I consider it very important to teach little children to see beauty and at the same time to think of the beauty of human nobility. Thought, understanding and reflection play an exceptionally important role in refining feelings. The children and I walk to greet the dawn on the bank of a lake, and there I tell them the story of 'The ox and the tit'.

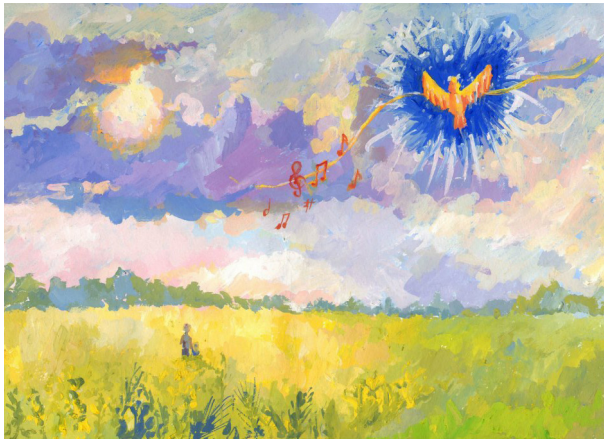
I have a whole collection of stories about beauty for little children. The most important thing in these stories is to stimulate

reflection on beauty, and to establish attitudes and convictions about the beauty of nature, and of human beings and their actions. The story 'The ox and the tit' makes children reflect on the fact that beauty is only revealed to the wise and those who think.

We also have a story about the First Dandelion. It tells about how, amid some green grass there burst forth a dandelion, as bright as the sun. All the green blades of grass turned towards it. What was it? Where did such amazing beauty come from? The dandelion became vain and thought, 'I am the most beautiful. I am the only one like me in the world.' But then tens and hundreds of other bright little suns burst forth, and everyone forgot about the First Dandelion. The blades of grass now admired the flowers that were closest to them. Listening to this story and inwardly experiencing it, the children reflect that true beauty is inseparable from modesty and dignity.

When dealing with children's concepts of beauty one must be very thoughtful and careful. There is possibly no other occasion when superficiality can do as much harm as when discussing beauty. A careless word can do great harm.

Beauty opens our eyes to the world. The evil, the ugly, the non-descript, over a lengthy passage of time, eventually become intolerable in the light of beauty. One of the laws of education is that evil and ugliness should gradually be displaced by beauty. If you place a beautiful sprig of flowering willow on a table in the middle of the classroom, children will notice the spider's web in the corner. If you plant an evergreen fir tree at the entrance to the school, each of your pupils, as they pass by it, will feel in the depths of their soul a vague desire to do something good. Help each one to realise this desire.



Stories for Children

A horse and a rider

In a little house lived a Sculptor. From wood he could carve people, animals, fairy-tale birds and even flowers with transparent petals.

Next to the Sculptor lived a Little Boy and his mother. His mother burnt wood to produce charcoal, which she sold at the market. This was their livelihood.

The Little Boy would come into the Sculptor's workshop, sit on the bench and watch how life and beauty are born out of wood.

One day, a large log was brought to the Sculptor from the forest. It was cut into two parts. One half was brought into the Sculptor's workshop, while the other half was thrown onto a pile of rubbish in the yard, near the house where the Little Boy lived with his mother.

The Sculptor worked for many days. The Little Boy watched how a horse was born out of wood. It was as if the horse were real. The horse wanted to charge forward, but an invisible rider was holding him back. 'But where is the rider?' asked the Little Boy. 'The rider was left in the other half of the log,' answered the Sculptor.

The Sculptor's hands began to shake. The Sculptor was elderly and his body was weak; the daily work exhausted him.

The Little Boy ran to his mother. He wanted to tell her, 'Mum, please bring the other half of the log into the Sculptor's workshop – the rider is in it.'

However, there was no other half of the log. The Little Boy's mother had chopped it up and burnt it to produce charcoal. 'Mum, why did you burn the rider?' asked the Little Boy in a disappointed tone.

The Mum stared at her son without understanding.

A campfire in the field

A quiet autumn day. The sun shines, but is no longer warm. Silver spider webs fly in the air. Near the farm, in the field, cows are grazing. Mum and I are in the field. Mum is working and I am near her. In the evening, we sit near a big heap of potatoes. A small fire burns. The potatoes are being baked. How nice it is to sit near a fire, to mix the ashes with a stick and wait for baked potatoes.

And now the potatoes are baked. As we are enjoying the delicious potatoes, a flock of cranes flies through the sky. The sun sets behind the forest, the field darkens, and a wave of cold can be felt coming from the valley. Whenever I remember this day, my heart becomes so light...

The ox and the tit

During the night the pond was covered in a fine, delicate layer of ice, just like you can see here now. At dawn the ice lit up with all the colours of the rainbow. Can you see, children, how the dawn colours are flowing into each other? First the ice turns scarlet, then pink, then red, then violet. Now it is flaming like a sea of fire. The sun has shown its face over the horizon, and now the ice has turned crimson. At that time a tit was sitting on the willow here. She was admiring the play of colours on the ice at dawn. The tit sang her simple song about this delicate, tender, subtle beauty. Her song was joyful and a little sad at the same time. Soon the sun would rise a little more, the ice would melt, and all this magic would disappear.

'I am small, and my claws are soft as fluff, but I cannot land on this magic mirror,' sang the bird to the world. 'Yes, this is a mirror in which the whole world is reflected. Look at this beauty! How can anyone sleep at a time like this?'

At that time there was an ox standing on the bank of the pond. He listened in wonder to the tit's song. If he was not an ox, he would have shed tears of joy. But he was an ox. He wanted to get closer to the beauty of which the bird sang. He walked onto the ice, breaking it, and the magic mirror was shattered. Clouds of sediment rose to the surface of the pond.

'Where is the beauty?' mused the ox, and after having a drink, he waded to the other side of the pond.