

Sukhomlinsky News

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Parents and children

Once again I am indebted to Berta Karaim for the translations in this month's newsletter. Berta is currently working on translations of extracts from Sukhomlinsky's book *Tell me a story...Philosophy for children*, as part of her degree studies at Monash University.

The theme of her translations this month is relations between parents and children, and the value of children seeing themselves as 'a living link in the eternal chain of generations!'

Sukhomlinsky was interested in both sides of the parent-child relationship. He wanted to strengthen the bonds between children and parents, to assist parents to educate their children wisely, and to foster gratitude in children for their parents' love.

Those who enjoy Sukhomlinsky's stories for children should be pleased with this issue, as it contains more stories than usual.

I would like to thank the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science for recognising my efforts to make Sukhomlinsky's legacy available to English speaking readers. As part of the 100th anniversary celebrations they have awarded Sukhomlinsky badges to a number of Ukrainian and international scholars and educators, including myself.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

The Heart's Memory

The following extracts from *Tell Me a Story... Philosophy for Children* have been translated by Berta Karaim.

On the heart's memory

To every generation of my students, when they are able to appreciate human values, I narrate the following tale:

For that you need to be a Person

A Person went to the grave of their Father. They pulled out some weeds, then dug a little hole and planted a rose bush.

A Dragonfly was sitting on stalk of grass. She carefully watched the Person's work and wondered: 'Why are they doing this? First, they pull out the grass, then they plant a rose bush? This is neither the city nor a flower garden.'

Several days passed. The Person returned to the cemetery, pulled out some weeds and watered the rose bush. They smiled when they saw the first blossoms on the rose bush.

'Person,' asked the Dragonfly, 'What are you doing? Why do you plant flowers on this little mound, and water the grass? Why do you pull out the weeds? What do you have beneath this mound?'

'My Father is here,' answered the Person. 'This is his grave.'

'What is a Father?,' asked the Dragonfly again. 'What is a grave?'

The Person began to explain, but the Dragonfly could not understand.

She begged the Person:

'Person, please tell me, what must I do in order to understand everything that you are saying?'

'For that you have to be a Person,' answered the Person.

[Continued on the following page]

The heart's memory (continued)

With each retelling of this story, I hope that the children can understand a great moral truth: that a person affirms themselves in this world not only as a being who thinks and feels, but also as a living link in the eternal chain of generations. This chain connects past generations with future generations. The more people treasure memories of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, the more they feel the weight of their responsibility for the future. It is only because a person sees in their father, grandfather and great-grandfather the root of their being, their honour, their dignity, that we have a Homeland.

We often speak with mothers and fathers about honour and esteem for previous generations. During the lessons in our school for parents, we talk about the instructive fates of mothers and fathers who, not having attained the wisdom of nurturing respect for elders, harvest the bitter fruits of their moral ignorance. One mother's fate is lucidly illustrated in the following tale:

Little Peter and Little Paul

A mother and father are sitting at a table. The mother is sewing; the father is reading a newspaper. Five-year-old Peter is playing by himself on the couch: saddling his horse, preparing for a long journey, dreaming of voyages beyond the blue sea...

The mother looks out the window and says to the father:

'The devil is bringing Grandma Martha.'

Little Peter quickly unsaddles the horse and gets up to look out of the window, but is too late. Grandma Martha is already knocking at the door.

The mother replies:

'Come in, please.'

When Grandma Martha enters,

the mother greets her in a pleasant voice and asks her to sit down. The Grandmother sits down, sighs and says:

'I barely got here. My legs hurt so much, so much...'

Little Peter looks at his grandma in confusion. He asks her:

'Grandma Martha, did you walk here by yourself?'

'Yes, of course. I didn't ride here,' replies the Grandmother with a smile and offers Little Peter some cake.

'But, Mum, you said that the devil brought Grandma Martha,' adds Little Peter.

The Mother's face at first reddens and then loses all colour. She lowers her head and stares at her sewing. The father hides behind his newspaper. Grandma Martha quietly gets up and leaves. A tense silence fills the house.

Many years pass. Peter becomes a grown man: he now has a wife and a five-year-old son, Little Paul. His father has passed away; his mother lives on her own.

Once the mother comes to visit her son. She spends some time in his house. Evening is falling. The mother says, as if thinking out loud:

'I wonder what should I do? Should I go home or stay the night here? It is getting darker and the journey is long.'

'You should go home, mother,' answers her son, Peter.

Little Paul is playing by himself on the couch: saddling his horse, preparing for a long journey, dreaming of voyages beyond the blue sea...

When he notices how his father is rejecting his grandmother, Little Paul says:

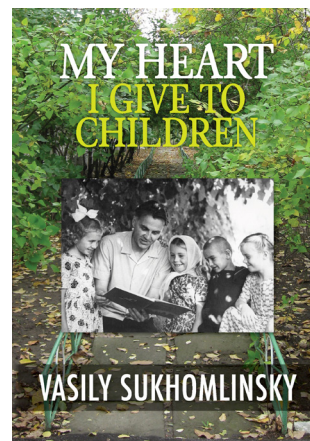
'Here you are, dear Grandma. I will give you my horse. Saddle up and you can be on your way.'

The Grandmother puts on her coat, her eyes filled with tears.

It is only through an appreciation of the value of selflessness that

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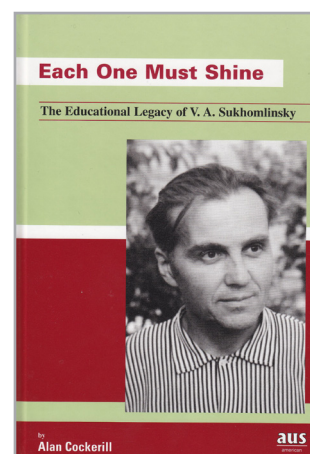
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we can discover the folk soul, the people's views of morality, of pure relationships between people. When faced with a child's open heart, be selfless, and let this selflessness express your attitude toward the holy Fatherland, the people, your family. These ideas occupy a very significant place in our system of education for parents and future parents.

The care that teachers, mothers and fathers take to develop a child's moral sensitivity, their receptiveness to every word of guidance from their elders, requires particular wisdom when we talk of that which is known as the memory of the heart. It is necessary to nurture and deepen this fine and subtle human trait in children.

I strive to ensure that throughout the years of schooling a person refines the fine, subtle and complex art of being aware of oneself, so that everyone, while still an adolescent, reflects on what they are capable of leaving behind in other people, in their work, in all things that live and flourish. Every student should ask themselves: 'Will I at least contribute some little drop to the eternal ocean of human existence?'

What is necessary for this? How can we conduct our educational work in such a fashion?

For this we have the folk tale about the fruitless man (in Ukrainian *Chlovik-Pustokvit*):

The fruitless man

There is a folk tale about a fruitless man. This man loved to sing and to have a good time, but he could not stay for any length of time in one place. He kept travelling from green field to flowering meadow, from flowering meadow to shady grove.

And then a son was born to him. The fruitless man hung his son's cradle on the branch of an oak tree and sat and sang to him. And his son grew not by days but by the hour. He jumped out of his cradle,

walked up to his father, and spoke: 'Father, show me something you have made with your own hands.'

The father was amazed that his son should speak such wise words, and smiled. He thought about what he could show his son. His son waited, but his father stopped singing and stood silently. The son looked at the tall oak tree and asked, 'Perhaps you planted this oak tree?'

The father bent his head in silence.

The son took his father to a field and looked at the heavy ears of wheat. 'Perhaps you grew this fine crop of wheat?'

His father's head hung even lower, and he remained silent.

The father and son came to a deep pond. The son looked at the reflection of the blue sky in the water and said, 'Father, give me some wise words of advice.'

*But the father was not only incapable of doing anything with his hands, he was unable to utter a single word of wisdom. His head hung even lower in silence... and he turned into a blade of barren grass (**pustokvit** in Ukrainian). This type of grass flowers from spring to autumn, but never produces any fruit or seeds.*

There is another similar tale:

What footprint should a person leave upon the Earth?

An Old Master built a stone house. He stood beside the house and admired the building. 'Tomorrow, people will move in,' thought the master with pride.

At that time, a seven-year-old boy was running nearby. He hopped onto one of the steps and left a footprint on a part of the cement that had not yet hardened.

'Why are you spoiling my work?' lamented the Master.

Many years passed. The little boy grew up. His life turned out in such a way that he moved around often, never settling in one place.

Old age came upon him. The Old Man remembered the village on the

banks of the Dnieper where he grew up. He longed to go there again. He travelled back to his home. He met people and introduced himself, but they simply shrugged their shoulders. No one remembered such a man.

'What trace did you leave here of yourself?' a grandfather asked the Old Man. 'Do you have a son or a daughter?'

'I don't have either a son or a daughter,' replied the Old Man.

'Perhaps you planted an oak?'

'No, I did not plant an oak...'

'Perhaps you dug a field?'

'I did not dig a field...'

'So you must have written a song?'

'No, I did not write any songs.'

'So who are you? What did you do with your life?' wondered the grandfather.

The Old Man could not answer. He remembered the moment when he left a footprint on one of the steps of the stone house. He walked to the house. The house was still there as if it had been built yesterday, and on the lowest step was his tiny little footprint.

'And that is all that will be left after me,' thought the Old Man bitterly. 'But it is not enough, it is not enough. I should have lived differently...'





Stories for Children

The tale of a mother goose

One hot summer day a Mother Goose led her flock of little yellow goslings for a walk. She showed the big, wide world to her children. The world was green and joyful: a great field spread out before the little geese. The Mother Goose taught her children how to pluck the young grass stalks. The stalks were sweet, the sun warm and friendly and the grass soft. The world was green and sung with the many voices of beetles, butterflies and other insects. The little geese were happy.

Suddenly, dark clouds appeared and the first drops of rain fell onto the ground. And then pieces of hail as large and heavy as bird eggs began to fall. The little geese ran to their mother. She raised her wings and spread them over her children. It was warm and cosy underneath her wings. The little geese felt that the thunder, wind and hail were somewhere far, far away. They even felt happy: beyond their mother's wings something scary was happening, but they were safe and sound.

Then everything became still and quiet. The little geese wanted to run back into the field as soon as possible, but the mother did not raise her wings. The little geese began to squeak resolutely: 'Let us go, Mum!' The mother raised her wings quietly. The little geese ran out onto the grass. They saw their mother's wings were injured. Many feathers had been plucked out. The mother was breathing heavily. But the world around them was so joyful, the sun shone so brightly and happily, bugs and bumblebees hummed so beautifully, that it did not even cross the minds of the little goslings to ask their mother if she was alright. Only one gosling, the youngest and the weakest, approached his

mother and asked: 'Why are your wings injured?' The mother answered quietly: 'All is well, my dear son.'

The little yellow geese scattered across the grass and their mother was happy.

A beloved son

A mother had an only son.

He was the apple of her eye, her beloved son. She let him sit at the table while she sat by the door and ate the leftovers of her son's meal.

One day, the mother cooked some fish in cream sauce. The son loved the meal so much, that he demanded it every day: 'I want some fish. If there is no fish, I won't eat anything.'

How could the mother go against the will of her beloved son? Every day she went to a pond, cast a fishing net and caught some fish, until one day in late autumn, when the mother entered the icy water, caught cold and fell ill.

The mother lay in bed. She could not get up even to have a drink of water, but her son just sat at the table, sulky and silent. There was neither fish on the table, nor boiled potatoes.

The mother moaned, not because of her illness, but because of her motherly grief: she had raised a son, strong and tall, but unkind.

The mother asked: 'My son, what is the most precious thing in your life?'

The son was silent. He was silent, because he had nothing to say: there was nothing precious in his life.

The mother's heart could not bear it anymore, and it broke from grief.

A grey hair

Little Michael saw three grey hairs in his mother's plait.

'Mum, you have three grey hairs in your plait', the boy said.

The mother smiled and did not say anything.

In a couple of days Michael saw four grey hairs in his mother's plait.

Michael was surprised. 'Mum, you already have four grey hairs in your plait. Why did you get another grey hair?'

'Because of my pain', the mother answered.

'When my heart aches, a hair turns grey.'

'Why did your heart ache?'

'Remember you climbed a tall tree? I looked out of the window and saw you sitting on a thin branch. My heart ached, and a hair went grey.' Michael stayed thoughtful and silent for a long while. Then he came up to his mother, hugged her and quietly asked, 'Mum, if I sit on a thick branch, will that mean a hair won't go grey?'