

Sukhomlinsky News

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Parents and children

*This month I am continuing to publish Berta Karaim's translations of extracts from Sukhomlinsky's book **Tell me a story...Philosophy for children**, still on the theme of parents and children.*

The stories in this newsletter are interspersed through the text rather than collected on the final page.

As teachers in the southern hemisphere return from summer holidays, I wish them good health, strength and inspiration to meet the challenges of a new school year.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Parents and children

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

On love for parents

The problem of parents and children is one of the most complicated problems in education. There are as many sides to this problem as there are living, unique children in front of you. At the very beginning it is necessary to be aware that any attempt to influence a child will be in vain if the father and mother are not the ones children turn to for moral guidance and to help them experience life fully. Only if the father and mother have a moral right to dictate their will (and parental upbringing is, in its essence, a father's and mother's will multiplied by their love for their children and the children's love for them) will their moral guidance reach their children's hearts, generate appropriate feelings in response, and awaken the urge to be good. The right to give direction and love provide safety and security for the child. He or she understands the demands and strictness of their father and mother and knows they will not allow irresponsibility in their behaviour. Demands without love turn a child's life into torture. There is another correlation: the gentler and more generous parents' love, the wiser and more experienced their will has to be. Love without the ability to direct, to manage their desires, and especially to place limits on their desires, turns a child into a capricious, wilful being, who, as the parents will soon learn, will be out of control. Disobedience, in most cases, is the result of an imbalance between love and the ability to assert the parent's will.

That is why we teach parents and future parents to both love and give direction, and to observe carefully to ensure that the harmony of these two is not disturbed.

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Parents and children (continued)

Side by side with educating parents we conduct the ethical education of children, adolescents, and our senior boys and girls. How in practical terms do we teach young people to relate to their parents?

We consider a school culture of respect for mothers to be extremely important. Teacher, your mission is to develop in each child the sense of caring for their mother as the most precious person in the world.

In my talks with students, especially ones at the age between childhood and adolescence, I consider it very important to make sure a child clearly understands that their mother's peace, happiness and well-being depend on the child. A mother's happiness is created by her child, adolescent, or young man or woman.

Ideological upbringing starts when a child says 'mum'. What will become of a being who is born from a human being and in the image of a human being depends to a huge extent on how they relate to their mother and father, and what feelings they have when they say the words 'mother, father'. The old Ukrainian tale "The Legend of a Mother's Love" discusses this.

Children like to listen when I read tales and stories about mothers from my ethics anthology. Every generation of my students at the most sensitive, gentle and fragile age memorises "A Tale about a Goose".

There are several stories and tales about a mother's heart in my ethics anthology ("Beloved Son", "A Grey Hair", "Why the Mother Ran from the Field").

One story in my anthology is a legend about seven daughters. When I tell this story I try to awaken grown up thoughts in the minds of little sons and daughters. Why do I need a mother?

Why is she dear to me? A poppy flower needs the sun's rays; dry soil needs a drop of water; a helpless nestling needs a caring mother bird; a bee needs a flower; a rose needs the morning dew; a cherry orchard needs a nightingale's song. All of these are needed to make my life more beautiful, lighter, nicer, better. It is very important to develop in a child's soul a sense that a mother is precious not as a source of personal joy and comforts, but as a living, loving human being with a world of feelings and thoughts!

The Seventh Daughter

A mother had seven daughters. Once, the Mother went to visit her son, who lived far, far away. The Mother returned after a month. When she walked into the house, the daughters, one after the other, began to tell how much they had missed their mother.

'I longed for you the way a poppy longs for a ray of a sun,' said the first daughter.

'I waited for you the way dry soil awaits a drop of water,' murmured the second daughter.

'I cried for you the way a baby bird cries for its mother,' lamented the third daughter.

'It was as difficult for me to be without you as it is difficult for a bee to be without a flower,' twittered the fourth daughter, cuddling the mother and staring into her eyes.

'I dreamt of you the way a rose dreams of a drop of dew,' twittered the fifth daughter.

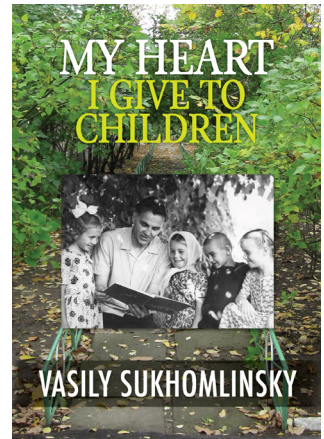
'I looked out for you the way a cherry orchard looks out for a nightingale,' whispered the sixth daughter. The seventh daughter did not say anything, although she had much to say. She simply took off her Mother's shoes and brought a tub of water to wash her feet.

On desires

To teach a developing person to express their true human nature is no easy task. The complexity of

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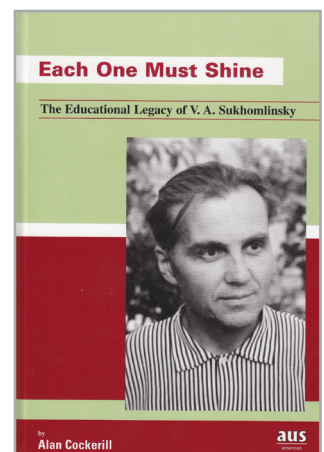
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this task can be explained by fact that we are dealing with children's desires, which must be respected, treated with understanding and sensitivity, and even developed. The nurturing of moral freedom is inextricably linked with the refinement of desires, providing a foundation for the development of higher moral needs or imperatives. Not everything that a child desires is necessary - that much is clear. The wisdom, skillfulness and art of the teacher's rule over the will of the student lies in morally justified, community approved needs becoming the innermost desires of the developing person.

It is necessary for the teacher to be deeply familiar with the logic of children's wishes and desires, as well as the relationship of such desires to rightful needs and the overall interests of holistic child development. We need to take into account that a child desires to do precisely that which is forbidden. The short story *The Grandson's Request* can clarify many matters in this regard.

The Grandson's Request

Three grandsons came to visit Grandfather Taras' field: Little Peter, Little Ivan and Little Taras. They spent quite some time at their grandpa's hut. The Grandfather offered them watermelon, rockmelon, honey, apples and sour cherry juice.

As they parted, the Grandfather gave each grandson a large watermelon. He led the grandsons beyond the hut to the edge of the forest that grew beyond the field. The grandfather had already returned to his hut when he heard his seven-year-old grandson Little Taras running back from the forest and yelling: 'Grandpa Taras!...'

The grandfather asked, 'What is it my dear grandson? Why have you come back?'

'Dear Grandpa, please let us steal a watermelon...'

The Grandfather was very surprised and confused. He almost wanted to

yell: 'Why do you want to be hooligans and criminals...'; but then he saw the pleading eyes of Little Taras and his peeling sunburnt nose. The grandfather suddenly understood and had to suppress a laugh. He said severely:

'Just you watch that you take no more than one watermelon... and take it... no, steal it, from that corner over there...'

Grandfather Taras turned around and walked back to the hut, smiling all the while, remembering his childhood. Little Taras, meanwhile, ran back to the forest, bouncing, with the joyful news: Grandpa said it was all right to steal one watermelon.

Why is it so? Why is a child, and in particular an adolescent, drawn towards that which is forbidden?

It appears that the matter lies in the child's desire to express their human nature, to test, prove and assert their independence, exploring and affirming the strength of their personality. That which is permitted appears uninteresting; that which is forbidden appears far more attractive.

How should we resolve this sensitive matter? How can we nurture a child's ability to express their human nature and at the same time express their independence, to explore and affirm the strength of their character? What must one do to ensure that a spirit of self-control prevails within our school? For that it is necessary to replace the forbidden with the difficult; even to make the forbidden permissible, but to reveal the difficult within it. The more difficulties are overcome, the fewer prohibitions there will be.

On goodwill

Goodwill is a feeling that is nurtured when the abilities of all students, without exception, are developed harmoniously. There is not and there should not be anyone who is 'good for nothing'. Success in studies should not

be, metaphorically speaking, the only soil in which the human seed can grow. Where there is no other soil, some individual students will always feel weak, and left behind. When there are people in the class who are at best the objects of constant pity, we cannot hope for the overall harmonious development of abilities, or of the harmonious development of morality.

For the nurturing of moral refinement, I believe it is paramount that each person, both in their individual and in their collective relationships, is connected to others by bonds of goodwill. At the same time as they take their first steps on the path to knowledge, may each the little person also experience excitement and concern over another person's good fortune or sorrows.. May their own experience convince them that their inner peace depends on how they view other people and how they relate to them. In the childhood years, it is impossible to imagine a complete, or even a minimally adequate education, unless each child, when they meet someone connected to them by the bonds of goodwill, is moved to enquire about their health and how they are feeling. This is one of the most subtle areas in the education of attitudes, convictions and ideals in life.

A small village school. Thirty-two students study there. In the schoolyard there is a well. The villagers often come to the well. Every day, at exactly the same time, Grandfather Alexander comes to the well with his bucket. The children know him well. He is a war invalid: instead of his left leg, he has a prosthetic leg, but he still works hard, looking after bees and growing seedlings. Every time Grandfather Alexander comes for water, the children run to the well.

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They help Grandfather Alexander pull the bucket out of the well; he has lost three fingers on his right hand.

'How is your health, grandpa?' ask the children as soon as the old man enters the schoolyard.

'Thank you, children,' answers the grandfather, 'My health is good. The bees are buzzing, come visit me and I will give you some honey... The seedlings are growing... And how are your studies going? Are you all reading well now?'

'No, dear Grandfather, not all of us. We are learning, but we still get some words wrong.'

The Grandfather shakes his head with concern and promises the children that he will read them an interesting book next time they come to the apiary. The children are curious: 'What kind of an interesting book have you got, grandpa?'. Both the Grandfather and the children are glad that they have met, talked, and felt the need for one another. They are connected by the bonds of goodwill. It is a great moral wealth.

The greetings 'hello' and 'good day' express a subtle aspect of human relationships, as expressed in this story. I organise special discussions with small children and teenagers, dedicated to the words and emotions that the human race has instilled in these words, bit by bit, over many centuries. To my mind, it is crucial that when a child speaks these words, they carry, metaphorically speaking, the subtle music of human emotions, urges, desires and aspirations.

One quiet spring morning, when the school is drowning in the white blossoms of apple, pear, apricot and peach trees, my students and I walk to the most beautiful part of the orchard. One of my most cherished hopes is that the children, overwhelmed by the beauty that surrounds them, will feel the subtlest shades of meaning of that beautiful and wise word 'hello'.

During our first meeting beneath the blossoming trees I tell the children the story 'Say "hello" to people'. The word 'hello' has the miraculous ability to awaken feelings of mutual trust, to bring people closer together, to open souls to one another. To greet is to not simply to live, but to observe the world around you and to approach it in a certain way - that is what we teach the children.

Say 'Hello' to people

A father and his little son were walking along a forest track. All around was still. All you could hear in the distance was the knocking of a woodpecker and the babbling of a little stream in the depths of the forest.

Suddenly the son saw an old lady approaching with a stick.

"Dad, where's that grandma going?" asked the son. "To see someone, to meet someone or to see them off," said the father. "When we meet her, we'll say 'hello' to her."

"Why should we say that word to her?" asked the surprised son. "We don't even know her."

"When we meet her we'll say 'hello', and then you'll see why."

The old lady drew level with them.

"Hello," said the son.

"Hello," said the father.

"Hello," said the old lady, and smiled.

And the son saw with amazement that everything around them changed. The sun shone more brightly. A light breeze skipped through the tops of the trees, rustling the leaves. The birds started singing in the bushes. Before that, you couldn't hear them. The boy's soul felt joyful.

"Why was it like that?" asked the son.

"Because we said 'hello' to someone and they smiled.

The bonds of goodwill are invisible, but they are the most powerful urges. In order to bond a small child with another person, it is necessary to nurture the orientation of a child's entire spiritual life - an orientation towards other people. All other values must be seen by the child in the light of what benefits other people.

Among the aspects of ethical culture that must be revealed to a developing soul, we highlight those relationships connected with the concept 'please'. We take great care is to fill these relationships with the bonds of goodwill, heartfelt warmth and mutual trust.

On generosity

I strive to ensure that children want to be generous and selfless. For a child to feel happy when they give something away it is necessary to make generosity appealing. For the smallest schoolchildren I have legends and fairy tales in which not only is generosity surrounded by a romantic halo, but it is also presented in a simple, accessible form. The educator shows children how to become generous and the children begin to understand that the opportunity to be generous awaits them at every step. These stories leave a great impression on the children. They long to express generosity - but how? Here is necessary to act in line with the proverb: 'Strike while the iron is hot.' We must not allow a child's inspiration to be extinguished without having burnt brighter, or to be transformed into a blank shot. I emphasise the importance of small children, who aspire to be generous, finding the opportunity to do so.