

Sukhomlinsky News

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Moral refinement

The ABC of morality

In this issue we translate an extract on moral education from the fourth chapter of *Pavlysh Secondary School*.

What universal human norms do we teach to children as the ABC of moral culture, as a first school in civic mindedness?

1. You live amongst other people. Do not forget that your every action, your every desire, has a consequence for the people around you. Remember that there is a difference between what you want and what is acceptable. Check your actions by asking yourself: am I doing any harm, or causing any inconvenience to others? Act in such a way that the people around you benefit.

In explaining this moral principle, we provide examples that show how we should behave among others. You may want something, but first think whether you are causing others unpleasantness in doing what you want. For example, there are roses growing in this alley, and you want to pick a flower. Think what would happen if every child in the school were to satisfy such a desire. Nothing would be left of the flowering bushes but a few bare stalks.

Children's hearts are very receptive to such thoughts; a child's soul experiences deep joy in doing good for others. If such moral homilies are accompanied by judicious exhortations, prompting children to do good deeds for others, an inner spiritual strength is established in children's hearts from a young age, and they learn to limit their desires and whims. This is very important for the formation of civic mindedness. If during childhood a person considers only their own interests and not those of others, being governed only by their own desires, and not recognising the interests of the community, they will grow up as self-centred egoists. To be able to control one's desires is an elementary rule, the first stroke of the first letter in the ABC of moral behaviour. Loud, sententious statements about morality are not understood by children. We need less of such flowery language and more careful refinement of human conduct, refinement of developing habits.

I apologise for not sending out a newsletter last month, and hope you enjoy this month's offering.

This month's extract from Pavlysh secondary school focuses on the central concern of Sukhomlinsky's educational system: moral education, or the education of 'genuine human beings'.

Sukhomlinsky wrote a whole book entitled 'How to educate a genuine human being', and it covers many moral principles in great detail. In Pavlysh Secondary School he distills these down to five principles, and these are described in this month's translation. Perhaps the most central of these five principles is the fourth. He writes: 'To instil in each person kindness, heartfelt sincerity, empathy, a willingness to come to the aid of others, sensitivity to all things living and beautiful, this is an elementary principle of school education. Indeed, this principle is the foundation of school life.'

I hope this month's translations will provoke thought about the ultimate aims of education.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

[Continued on the following page]

The ABC of morality (continued)

2. *You enjoy good things created by other people. People give you the happiness of childhood. Repay them with kindness.*

Before children comprehend that they are citizens of a society, and that this entails major responsibilities, they must learn to repay kindness with kindness. Their consciences should not allow them to be mere consumers of gifts and pleasures. We tell our children: 'During the quiet pre-dawn hours when you are still asleep, milkmaids are working at the dairy farm. They are preparing fresh, nourishing milk for you. The cook is heating the oven in the school kitchen, so that you can have a tasty breakfast. Miners are descending mineshafts to work at the coalface and mine coal, so that it will be warm in your classrooms. During severe frosts tractor drivers go into the fields to get feed for the cows whose milk you drink. Your mothers and fathers leave early for work so you can have clothes and shoes, so you can play under the sun and the blue sky. You are generously given many blessings, but people also expect good things from you.'

We teach our children how to do good to others. We say: 'Here is a place where the workers on our dairy farm rest. Children, let us plant some rose bushes and lilac here, so it can be a place of beauty and joy for our mothers and sisters.' And when our children begin work planting, and then take on the care of the plants, this work brings them great joy, because it is motivated by noble feelings.

The children progress from one good deed to a second and a third, as we lead them step by step up the ladder of moral refinement. And the children experience sincere feelings of joy at the opportunity to do good things for others. I repeat, such feelings are only established in a person's heart when

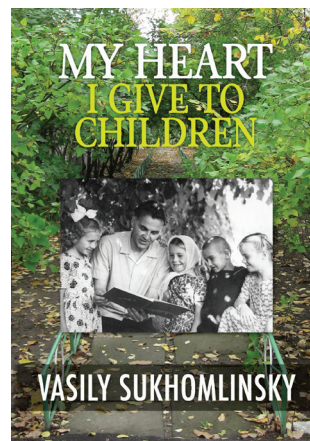
they are experienced many times during childhood.

3. *All the good things and joys of life are created by work. Without work it is not possible to live honourably. There is a folk saying that those who do not work do not eat. Remember this precept till the day you die. A lazy person, a sponger, is like a drone bee eating the honey made by the worker bees. The first work you must do is to study. When you go to school you are going to work.*

In order to accustom children to work, to teach them a genuine love of work, as their first civic duty, we have created an atmosphere of work at school, and an intolerance of laziness, negligence, idleness and sloppiness. A little idler is the living root of parasitism. We should not accept little idlers in our society. A child can only understand that life is impossible without work when they experience the joy of work in their community, and such joy is incomparable. Applying all their strength, young people do not what they feel like, but what is necessary, and in the end, experiencing joy at what they have accomplished for others, they want to do whatever is necessary for the common good. At the age of seven or eight our children plant small orchards and vineyards and turn barren land into flourishing gardens. Our aim is that by the age of twelve or thirteen children will be able to see mature orchards created by their own hands. This is how they will find true joy in work. In this way they see themselves as hard working people even in childhood. Each of them during adolescence and early youth sees themselves in their work, as in a mirror: their skill, their strength of will, their thoughtfulness and persistence. And in each one's heart is established a conviction that they cannot live without working. The giving of oneself to others, the establishment of a love of work in

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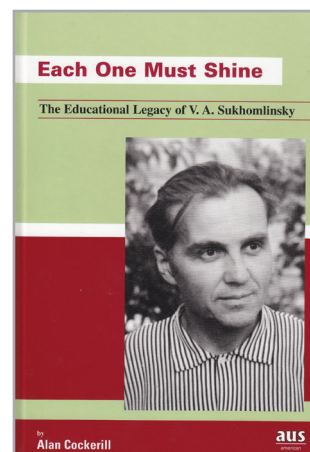
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one's consciousness, is a deeply individual process. That is why we ensure that each student in childhood invests their strength of soul in work and takes pride in what they have achieved, be it planting a tree or constructing a working model of a car for our workshop. If this is not achieved in childhood, to begin such education in adolescence or early youth is a thousand times more difficult. The ABC of morality is absorbed in childhood.

4. Be kind and sensitive to others. Help the weak and defenceless. Help a friend in trouble. Do not cause people harm. Respect and honour your mother and father—they have given you life, they are educating you to become an honest citizen, a person with a kind heart and a pure soul.

To instil in each person kindness, heartfelt sincerity, empathy, a willingness to come to the aid of others, sensitivity to all things living and beautiful, this is an elementary principle of school education. Indeed, this principle is the foundation of school life. Heartlessness gives rise to indifference, indifference gives rise to self-centredness, and self-centeredness is the source of cruelty. In order to prevent heartlessness we educate children in the spirit of heartfelt care and concern for all that is living and beautiful, for plants, flowers, birds and animals. A child who takes to heart the plight of a blue tit that is defenceless in a winter frost and saves it from perishing in the cold, or who takes care of a young tree, will never become heartless and cruel towards people. On the other hand, if a little person breaks or heartlessly destroys something that is living and beautiful, he may become a little tyrant, mocking those who are close to him. And how many such tyrants we come across in life... Consider a little seven-year-old getting ready for school: he cannot lace up his boots and angrily breaks the lace and throws his shoes across the room. He wants his mother to get upset

and even to make her cry, and when he does drive his mother to tears, he feels some relief. This is the sort of 'harmless' tyranny against which we must tactfully, sensitively, but relentlessly fight. The child must feel that every person has a heart that should be spared pain, and that to cause it pain is a great evil. May each child's heart feel concern for the fate of all things living and beautiful. Then it will never know the spiteful feeling of sweet pleasure at the thought that someone's heart is suffering because of him.

We ensure that each child is responsible for the care of flowers and plants, of birds and animals, of fish in an aquarium. This work refines heartfelt sensitivity and awakens a desire to do good. We encourage children to care for other people, primarily for mothers and grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers. On their very first day at school we explain to the grade one students how hard it is for their parents, and what a hard life's journey their grandfathers and grandmothers have had to traverse. That very day, in their gardens at home, the children plant an apple tree for their mother, an apple tree for their grandmother, and apple tree for their father and an apple tree for their grandfather. They take on responsibility for the care of these trees (of course they have to be reminded and literally led by the hand). Eventually the day arrives when fruit ripens on these trees and the children offer the fruit to their parents and grandparents. (This too has to be taught, and the child reminded a thousand times.) If you manage to make these the most joyful moments in a child's life you have entrenched moral values in the child's heart. We do not believe that moral vices are due exclusively to the remnants of capitalism in people's consciousness. Moral vices can arise wherever there is a lack of genuine education, where a young person is treated like a little god,

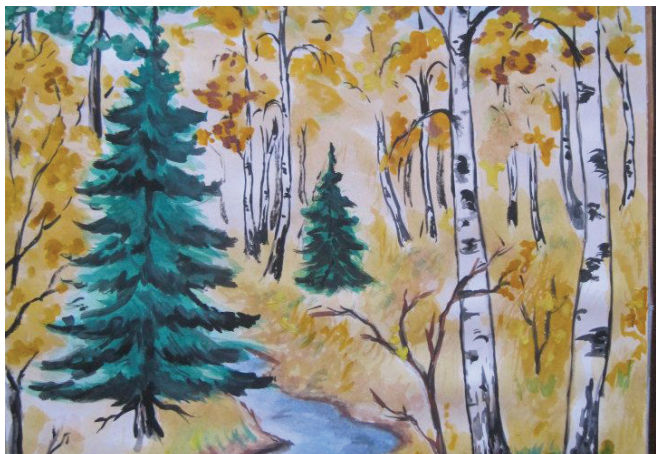
for whom anything is permitted, or, on the contrary, like a neglected weed that is taught nothing good or evil. In order that there be no evil we must teach only goodness.

5. Do not be indifferent to evil. Fight against evil, deceit and injustice. Do not accept the ways of those who would live at others' expense, cause harm to others or steal from society.

We consider it important to educate high civic expectations and an active approach to fighting evil and untruth. It is unacceptable for children to silently witness the squandering of resources, laziness, carelessness or inhumanity. But since those who do evil are often adults, educational work in this area demands great thoughtfulness and tact.

In our school we have a Pioneer post for the preservation of green plantings. This is one of our cradles of civic education. If the children see that an adult has destroyed or harmed trees, then the fight against this evil must not be limited to words alone. A child's heart experiences pain if evil goes unpunished. For this reason, we are at pains to ensure that the community makes the person who has committed the crime carry out work to repair the damage done. When they see that good triumphs over evil, children are more enthusiastic about participating in work that benefits society. If children are outraged at evil that they witness in life, and express their indignation, that is good. But they must also know how to do good, to entrench goodness in life through their own actions. Otherwise they may become empty windbags, demagogues, 'protesters' who do nothing to ensure that goodness and truth triumph.

Such is the ABC of moral culture, mastering which our children grasp the essence of good and evil, honour and dishonour, justice and injustice.



Stories

A hut in the forest

A grandfather and his ten-year-old grandson were walking through a vast forest. A barely discernible path wound between tall trees.

It was evening and the travellers were tired. The grandfather was already preparing to set up camp under the open sky, when suddenly the boy caught sight of a little hut in a thicket by the side of the forest path.

'Grandpa, look, there's a hut!' shouted the grandson joyfully. 'Maybe we can spend the night there.'

'Yes, it's a hut for travellers like us,' explained the grandfather.

They entered the hut. It was clean inside, with a fir branch hanging on the wooden wall. According to folk tradition, this signified hospitality: please make yourselves at home, respected guests.

The grandfather and his grandson stepped over to a table and saw a fresh loaf of bread and a little jug of honey.

On the windowsill was a bucket full of water.

The grandfather and his grandson washed and sat down to supper.

'Who put food on the table like this?' asked the grandson.

'A kind person,' explained his grandfather.

'How can that be?' asked the grandson in amazement. 'A kind person left food for us, and we don't even know who they are. Why did they make such an effort?'

'So that you would become a better person,' answered the grandfather.

A soap bubble

A boy was sitting by an open window and blowing bubbles. They were light and beautiful. The rays of the sun played on the bubbles with all the colours of the rainbow: yellow, blue, green, orange and violet. A light breeze lifted the bubbles and they flew over the flower bed and above

lilac bushes. They wanted to rise higher than the trees, but as they brushed against their leaves they burst.

However, one large soap bubble, lifted by the wind, flew up into the blue sky. A swallow saw the soap bubble, fluttered over to it and flew alongside in amazement:

'How beautifully dressed you are! What a beautiful bird you are! You are wonderful!'

'Yes, I am a wonderful bird,' said the bubble, swelling with pride. 'Look at how all the colours of the rainbow play on my dress.'

The swallow reached over to touch its dress and the bubble burst.

'Where did that wonderful bird go?' wondered the swallow. 'All I felt was a few drops of water.'

It's hard to be a human being

The children were returning from the forest, where they had spent the whole day. The path home led through a small cluster of homes in a valley a few kilometres from their village. The tired children just managed to reach these huts. They called into the first hut to ask for water. A woman came out of the hut, followed by a little boy. The woman drew water from her well, placed the bucket on a table in the middle of the yard, and went back inside. Having drunk their fill, the children rested on the grass and got their strength back.

When they had walked on a further kilometre from the huts, Mariika suddenly remembered:

'We forgot to thank the woman for that water.' Her eyes expressed concern.

The children stopped. They had indeed forgotten to thank her.

'Well so what,' said Roman. 'It's not a big deal. The woman has probably already forgotten all about it. Is it really worth going back over such a small thing?'

'Yes, it is,' said Mariika. 'Don't you feel ashamed to say that, Roman?'

Roman sniggered. He was clearly not ashamed.

'Well, you do what you like,' said Mariika, 'But I am going back to thank the woman.'

'Why? Tell me, why do we have to do that?' asked Roman. 'We are all so tired.'

'Because we are human beings.'

She turned and set off back towards the huts. Everyone else followed her.

Roman stood for a moment on the path, sighed, and then followed the others.

'It's hard to be a human being,' he thought.