

Sukhomlinsky News

No. 52

December 2019



A new year

I would like to wish all the subscribers to Sukhomlinsky News a very happy and productive New Year.

In Australia the past few months have been marked by the early onset of a particularly bad fire season. Capital cities have been blanketed in smoke haze, lives have been lost, and many hundreds of homes have burnt to the ground. Earlier in the year there were very bad fires in California, and in Japan and other parts of the world there have been severe storms and flooding. It would appear the effects of climate change are really beginning to bite.

Whether as educators, or simply as global citizens, we need to reflect on how best to respond to the challenges of the environmental crisis that is unfolding before our eyes. Sukhomlinsky lived and worked in a rural environment, and was very aware of the dependence of society on the natural environment. His whole system of education was firmly grounded in nature.

I am currently collaborating with other scholars to produce a short monograph on Sukhomlinsky's relevance in an age of environmental crisis. It will contain articles and extracts from Sukhomlinsky's work. I hope to be able to give more information during the coming months.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

From work to conviction

In this issue we continue our translation of the fourth chapter of Pavlysh Secondary School, on moral education, as Sukhomlinsky provides examples of the type of work activities he organised to support the development of moral convictions.

To educate a strong personality means to ensure that in each person noble moral convictions are expressed in living human passions, in individual aspirations, interests and impulses. There is no person in whom, given skilled educational work, a unique talent will not unfold. There is no sphere of activity in which the individual will not flourish, if only we, the educators, are able to entice a person with that most noble of creative endeavours—the creation of joy for other people. To awaken in each person the aspiration to live for an ideal, for principles and convictions, is especially important. Without the inspiration of an ideal, without understanding and experiencing the meaning of life, a person will not find their vocation; and a vocation is not something that a person finds or encounters, it is developed in a person as a result of their activity and their convictions.

Several years ago, Vasily B. graduated from our school. He was one of those students you might have called indifferent. But then we noticed that he related with great love, warmth and kindness to little children. He liked to play with the little ones and made toys for them. He liked it when children turned to him for help. We helped him build a playground for little children in his parents' yard. The boy planted an orchard for them, and grape vines. The little children on his street gathered there. They listened with interest to Vasily's fairy tales and stories. Vasily began to teach the children how to look after the trees, and it turned out he had a real talent as a gardener.

[Continued on the following page]

From work to conviction (continued)

The children found a good word to name their group and their orchard: Joy. The little ones could not wait for him to come home from school and come out to see them in the orchard. Then, when he was in year nine, the young man created a fairy tale corner for his little friends in an old barn.

With the onset of autumn, days spent in the Orchard of Joy were a real celebration. Each evening the children took home presents for their mothers, or for little brothers or sisters who could not come to the orchard.

Vasily has been an adult for some time now. He has a family, with two children, and works as a tractor driver. But the Orchard of Joy still brings happiness to new generations of little children, just as it did when Vasily was at school. From early spring to late autumn happy children's voices ring out just as they used to. Vasily has set up a shower and sports area for the children. On his days off he takes the children to the forest, where the fairy tale corner is now located in a cave, which they have fitted out together through their own efforts.

People only express their natures fully when convictions are at the heart of their actions and behaviour.

As the blade of a plough is cleaned of rust and becomes mirror clean when it daily turns the soil, so a human soul shines when it labours and overcomes difficulties, courageously meeting failure and not being deluded by success. Difficulties, obstacles and hard times are a touchstone for our convictions. How a person relates to difficulties during adolescence and youth determines their strength of spirit and loyalty to their principles.

The socialist way of life has spared the younger generation many difficulties and hardships

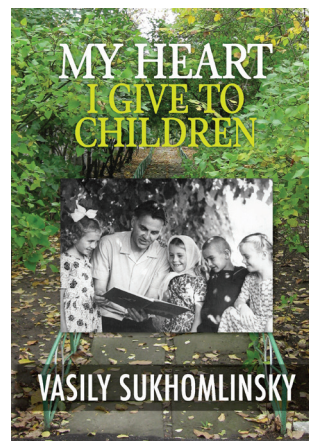
that were the fate of people living under an exploitative social order. But this does not mean that life under socialism or communism will be without difficulties, conflicts and privations. Difficulties, so essential for tempering the spirit, are inherent in creative work, in harnessing the forces of nature for the good of the nation. One who gives the warmth of his soul to warm others, who finds personal happiness in struggling for the happiness of society, is attracted by the prospect of doing something exceptional. In such work a person climbs to a higher level of moral development. To show young men and women the nobility of such spiritual growth is an important aspect of the formation of convictions.

Whatever work our students are doing, we suggest to them that in that or any other work, there is room for the brilliant flowering of their creative abilities. No person can ever say I have reached a ceiling. We may have cultivated, for example, ears of wheat with 55-60 grains, but it is possible to cultivate an ear with 100 grains. In practice, we never grow pears and apples from cuttings, but if you apply thought and skill, it is possible to plant a cutting directly in the ground and grow a tree from it, and it will be distinguished by some interesting features. Usually arable land, with the best fertilisation and crop management, gives no more than four tonnes of wheat per hectare, but if you fully develop the plant's potential, it is possible to attain yields equivalent to nine, ten or even fifteen tonnes per hectare. (So far, we have only conducted trials on a small area of land.) In our locality we usually only harvest one crop of grain per year, but it is possible to harvest two crops, and so on.

Everything that is difficult, but

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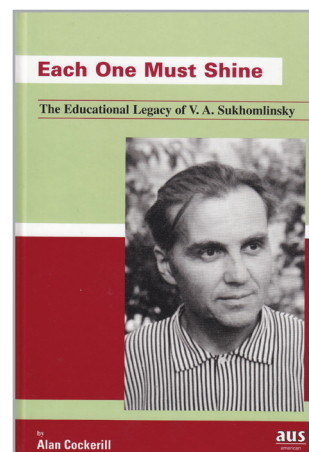
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possible, attracts young people with its unusualness and the romanticism of discovery and creativity. Our students try to follow a work path that has never been trodden before. In our system of education there are work tasks whose aim is the formation and development of convictions. These tasks require consistent application over a significant period. The firmness of convictions is tested by time. We choose work tasks that are calculated to begin in early adolescence and be completed in early adulthood.

In 1960 we inspired a group of students with the prospect of growing a wheat crop yielding the equivalent of nine or ten tonnes per hectare. To make the task more challenging for the children, we chose an area of infertile, clay soil, which had first to be made highly fertile. In the difficult work that lay before us there was an attractive challenge to the forces of nature. The elements had destroyed the soil, but we were going to restore it. That was just as wonderful as building a hydroelectric power station in the taiga or inventing a new machine.

We set to work, digging deposits of fertile silt from a gully and transporting it to the plot of clay soil. To encourage life to develop more quickly in the clay soil we also introduced organic matter, providing a medium for the activity of beneficial microorganisms. All of this was difficult, but you cannot achieve anything significant without effort! We received spiritual support from the thought that we were creating something new. It was as if we were creating a window into the future: if it is possible to create 1000 square metres of fertile soil, it is possible to create many thousands of hectares.

Half a year later we sowed our plot with plants that add nitrogen to the soil. Then we ploughed the

earth again and brought more silt. We repeated this process for three years, analysing the composition of the soil each autumn to see if it was ready for sowing winter wheat. However, each time we tested the soil we found it to be deficient in some nutrient, so we determinedly sought some fertiliser that would eliminate the deficiency. The more we achieved, the more determination we felt to overcome each new difficulty, because experience taught us: if today is difficult, tomorrow will be joyful. The joy that each of us experienced in this purposeful work grew drop by drop into a wellspring that fed the conviction that we would achieve our goal. If you want to see difficulties lead to strength of spirit, and to reinforce convictions, connect these difficulties with invisible threads to some significant work that demands great effort, time, and collective unity in spirit and ideals.

When our next analysis showed that the soil was ready, we spent several days going into field. From millions of ears of wheat, we chose only the biggest, those that showed the greatest resilience to drought (it was a dry year), and then we sorted the grains from those ears, discarding any that were small or poorly developed.

Before sowing we again incorporated organic matter into the soil, activating beneficial microorganisms. We sowed the seed not in narrow rows, but in nests, with greater distance between the rows, giving each plant maximum room to grow and to absorb nutrients. In winter we mounded snow on our plot.

The wheat plants grew big and strong. We fed them, and after each rain we raked between the rows. Each plant yielded five or six times more ears than usual, each ear had twice as many grains as usual, and each grain was twice

the normal weight. Our hearts were filled with joy. The harvest was a real celebration: one thousand square metres yielded 1.05 tonnes (equivalent to 10.5 tonnes per hectare). No-one had ever seen a harvest like that.

In 1965 we grew the equivalent of 13.7 tonnes per hectare. But our students are not satisfied even with that and have set themselves the goal of growing 15 tonnes. All of us, adults and children alike, speak with enthusiasm of the day, quite soon, when the boundless fields of all our collective and state farms will harvest crops just as bountiful as we harvest on our little plot. The grains of wheat will be as large and heavy as rice.

The education of convictions is impossible without work, without the application of morality and will power in which a person expresses themselves. Work is a powerful means of developing ideological convictions, but only if a person is using their work to prove something, to affirm an idea that has become an inseparable part of their soul. People must see in the results of their work a living incarnation of truths and values that they hold dear.





Stories

Filipp Ivanovich is not chairman any more

Vasilek's father travelled somewhere far away and brought back five apple trees for planting. These were special apple trees. People said their apples were as transparent as glass. They were so tasty there was nothing tastier in the whole world. You could put one of these apples on the windowsill in autumn and it would be as fresh in the spring as if it had just been picked.

People even said these wonderful apples could treat heart problems. If you ate one, your heart would stop aching.

And these were the sort of apple trees that father had brought.

Vasilek, who was in grade one, looked at the delicate rooted cuttings. They did not look like anything special, but they were such magical trees.

Vasilek asked: 'Where will we plant the trees?'

'We will only plant three of them...'

'Why?' asked Vasilek in surprise.

'You can take two of them now to our neighbour, to dear Filipp Ivanovich. I promised to bring two of these wonderful trees for him.'

Vasilek's father separated two of the cuttings and wrapped their roots carefully in a wet sack.

'You take these next door, Vasilek. Give my best wishes to Filipp Ivanovich.'

'Dad,' said Vasilek, holding the cuttings in his hands, 'Did you know Filipp Ivanovich isn't chairman of the collective farm anymore?'

'What do you mean, he's not the chairman?' shouted the father in amazement.

Vasilek's mother came over. She said, 'While you were away there was a meeting. He was removed from his position. He wasn't coping with the work...'

'Well that's certainly news,' said the father, shaking his head.

Suddenly he remembered something and called his son, who was heading to the gate with the trees.

'Vasilek, come back. You don't need to take the trees to Filipp Ivanovich.'

Vasilek came back.

'Why don't I need to?' he asked.

His father was silent.

The greedy boy

Once upon a time there was a very greedy boy. He was walking along the street, when he saw ice-cream being sold. The boy stopped and thought, 'If someone gave me a hundred portions of ice-cream that would be great.'

He approached his school. Suddenly, at a quiet, deserted intersection, an old, grey-haired man came running up behind him and asked, 'Are you the one who wanted a hundred portions of ice-cream?'

The boy was amazed. Hiding his embarrassment, he said, 'Yes... If someone gave me the money...'

'You don't need money,' said the old man. 'Over there, behind that willow tree, are a hundred portions of ice-cream.'

The old man disappeared, as if he had never been there. The boy looked behind the willow tree and was so amazed he dropped his school bag full of books. Under the tree was a box full of ice-cream. The boy quickly counted a hundred packs, wrapped up in silver paper.

The boy's hands shook with greed. He ate one, two, three portions. Then he could not eat any more as his stomach ached.

'What should I do?' wondered the boy.

He took his books out of his bag and threw them under the willow tree. He filled his bag with the shiny packets of ice-cream, but they did not all fit in his bag. He was so sorry to leave them that he burst into tears. He sat by the willow tree and cried.

He ate two more portions and slowly dragged his feet to school.

He went into his classroom and put his bag down, but the ice-cream was beginning to melt. Milk was running out of his bag.

The thought flashed through his mind that perhaps he should give the ice-cream to his classmates, but greed drove that thought away. How could he give away something so nice?

The boy sat looking at his bag, with the milk running out. Could it really be that he would lose such a treasure?

This story is for those in whose souls the worm of greed has settled. It is a terrible worm.