

Sukhomlinsky News



Leaving a legacy

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

This month's stories from Sukhomlinsky's Ethics Anthology are from two sections. Some are from the latter part of a section entitled 'People leave part of themselves in others,' and some are from the early part of a section entitled 'Harmony in work, happiness and duty.'

Several of the stories touch on the theme of leaving a lasting legacy through one's work, or through one's children. The longest story attempts to answer the question 'What is love?'

I hope you find the stories meaningful.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



Stories from An Ethics Anthology

The most skilful craftswoman

This happened a long time ago. In a village in Ukraine the girls and women decided to show off their skills. They agreed that on Sunday they would all come to the village square, and that each would bring the finest thing they had made with their own hands: an embroidered cloth, lace, linen, a tablecloth or an item of clothing.

When Sunday arrived, all the girls and women came to the square. They brought many amazing things. The elders who had been entrusted with the task of naming the most skilful craftswomen could not believe their eyes—there were so many talented girls and women. The wives and daughters of rich men brought bed covers embroidered in gold and silver and fine lace curtains woven with wonderful birds.

But to everyone's surprise the victor was Marina, the wife of a poor peasant. She did not bring embroidery or lace, though she was skilled in those crafts as well. She brought her five-year-old son Petrus, and he brought a lark that he had carved from wood. When Petrus lifted the lark to his lips and blew on it, the little bird chirped and sang just like a living bird. Everyone on the square listened with bated breath, while above the square, in the blue sky, a real lark sang, attracted by the song from below...

Someone who creates an intelligent and kind human being is the most skilful craftswoman. That was the decision of the elders.

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology* (cont.)

What trace should a person leave on the Earth?

An old master-builder constructed a stone house. He stood to one side and admired the building. 'Tomorrow, people will move in,' thought the master with pride.

At that time, a seven-year-old boy was playing 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. The boy looked at his footprint, laughed, and ran away.

Many years passed. The little boy grew up. His life unfolded in such a way that he kept moving on, never settling in one place, and never really applying himself to anything, physically or mentally.

Old age came upon him. The old man remembered the village on the banks of the Dnipro where he had grown up. He felt an urge to visit the place, and he travelled back to his home. He met people and introduced himself, but they simply shrugged their shoulders. No one remembered any such person.

'What trace did you leave here of yourself?' an elderly local asked him. 'Do you have a son or a daughter?'

'I don't have any son or a daughter,' replied the old man.

'Perhaps you planted an oak tree?'

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

'Perhaps you cared for a field?'

'I did not care for a field...'

'You have probably written a song?'

'No, I did not write any songs.'

'So, who are you? What did you do with your life?' asked the puzzled local.

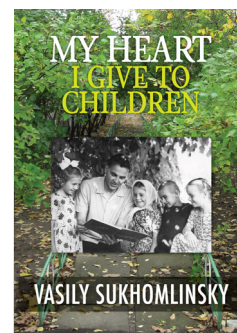
The old man could not answer. He remembered the moment when he left a footprint on one of the steps of a stone house. He walked to the place. The house was still there as if built only yesterday, and on the lowest step was his tiny little footprint.

'And that is all that will be left of me on this earth,' thought the old man bitterly. 'But it is not enough, not nearly enough. I should have lived differently...'

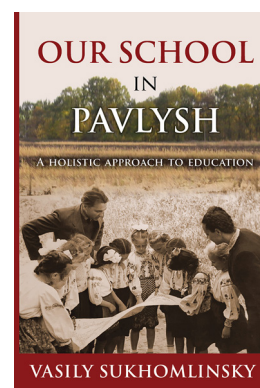
A legend about love

What is love? A person is born, lives and dies, but love is eternal. If it were not for love, a person could not contemplate the future. Love is the wise eyes of beauty. When God created the world, he taught all living creatures to continue the life of their species. God settled man and woman in a field, taught them how to construct a shelter, and gave the man a spade and the woman a handful of grain. 'Live, and continue the human race,' said God, 'And I will go about my work. I will return in a year to see how you are going.'

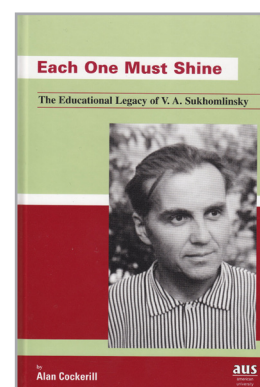
Exactly one year later God returned with the archangel Gabriel. He came early in the morning, at sunrise. He saw the man and the woman sitting by their shelter. Their grain was ripening in the field, and next to them a baby was sleeping in a cradle. The man and the woman were gazing now at the red sky, now into each other's eyes. When their eyes met, God saw in them some power he did not recognise, some beauty he could not comprehend. The beauty he saw in their eyes exceeded that of the sun and the sky, the earth and the field of wheat. It was



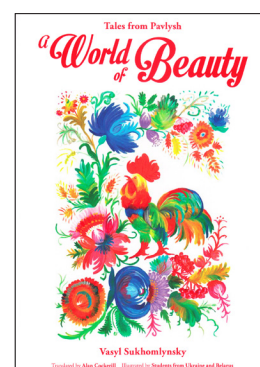
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more beautiful than anything God had created, and more beautiful than God himself.

This beauty so shocked, amazed and stunned God, that his divine soul shook with envy and fear. 'How could it be,' he cried, 'That I created an earthly creature, made people from clay and breathed life into them, but I could not create that beauty, did not even imagine it could exist. Where did it appear from, and what is that beauty?'

'It is love!' said the Archangel Gabriel.

'What is love?' asked God.

The archangel shrugged his shoulders.

God approached the man, touched his shoulder with his aged hand, and begged him, 'O human, teach me to love.'

At first the man did not notice the touch of God's hand. He thought a fly had landed on his shoulder. God repeated his request, imploring the man. Finally, the man heard God's words and replied, 'Love is not for God. You can burn up heaven and earth as if they were toys, you can cast the earth into an inferno, and your soul will not flinch... Only someone with a heart, who holds dear every blade of grass, every ray of sunshine, every drop of dew, only such a person can experience love. You are pitiless and cruel, but love is gentle, kind and warm. You could learn to love, but then you will cease to be God.'

God was a feeble, but angry and vengeful old man. He flew into a rage and shouted, 'So you do not want to teach me how to love, human? Then I will make sure you remember me! From this moment you will age. Each day of life will take away a tiny portion of your youth and strength. You will gradually fall into ruin. And I will come back in fifty years and see what remains in your eyes, human. You will see who is stronger, love or God.'

God returned with the archangel Gabriel fifty years later. He saw that in place of the primitive shelter there was now a peasant hut made of logs, that an orchard now flourished where before there had been wasteland, grain was ripening in the field, the man's sons were ploughing the soil, his daughters were harvesting wheat and his grandchildren were playing in the meadow. By the hut an old man and an old woman were gazing now at the morning dawn, now into each other's eyes. And God felt fear when he saw that the human eyes had not aged at all. In the eyes of the man and the woman he saw a beauty even more majestic and eternal than before. Now he saw not just love, but faithfulness. He understood that in the face of human faithfulness all his divine power was to no avail. God flew into a rage from impotence and malice. When cruelty is powerless, it grows fierce and vengeful. It is prepared to destroy the world. Cruelty is the mortal enemy of love.

'So aging is not enough for you, human? Die

then, die in pain and fear, depart into the earth, to dust and decay. Die weak, feeble, powerless, die from exhaustion and illness. And I will return and see what has become of your love.'

God returned with the archangel Gabriel three years later. He saw the man sitting by a burial mound. His eyes were sad, but in them shone an even greater, incomprehensible human beauty that God found terrifying. Now God saw in the man's eyes not just love, and not just faithfulness, but heartfelt memory. God's hands shook from fear and powerlessness, and he fell on his knees before the man and begged, 'O human, give me that beauty. I will give you whatever you want in exchange, but I must have it.'

'I cannot,' answered the man. 'It comes at too high a price. Its price is death, and you are immortal.'

'You can have immortality, you can have eternal youth, just give me love,' wailed God.

'I do not need those. Neither eternal youth nor immortality can compare with love,' answered the man, and his eyes expressed such powerful belief and hope that God was full of fear. He rose, clenched his beard in his hand, and walked away from the old man sitting by the little grave. He turned towards the wheat field and the scarlet dawn, and saw a young man and woman standing by the golden ears of wheat. They gazed now at the red sky, now into each other's eyes... God held his head in his hands, groaned at his powerlessness, and departed the Earth to live in heaven. Since that time humans have become the gods of the Earth.

So that is what love is. Love is higher than God. It is eternal human beauty and immortality. We become dust, but love remains. We live in the memory of our grandchildren and great-grandchildren because of love.

The laziest cat in the world

A cat was lying on the table. A little girl put two saucers on the table, one with milk and one with sour cream. The cat thought, 'The little girl has brought me a treat, but which is better, sour cream or milk?' The cat was about to consider which was better, but he could not be bothered to think about it, he was so lazy.

Suddenly a sparrow flew in at the open window. It landed on the table and began to peck at some crumbs. Now the cat had three tasty things to choose from: milk, sour cream, and the sparrow. But it was not easy to decide which of the three was the tastiest. The cat was about to consider which was the tastiest, but it seemed too much like hard work, so he closed his eyes and went to sleep.

He was the laziest cat in the world.

Stories

The final judgement

In a certain human society, there was a custom. When a person had lived their life, and it was time for them to die, they appeared before the Final Judge, and the Judge decided what would remain in the world of the person who was departing: the love and respect of their fellow citizens, honour and eternal glory, or merely some minor remembrance.

Once the time came for a hard-working man to die. He came to the Final Judge, and the Final Judge asked him, 'How many years have you lived on this earth?'

'Ninety-nine,' answered the hard-working man. 'Show me your years.'

Now this hard-working man had planted a tree every day. For every day he had lived, a tree had flourished. The hard-working man took the Final Judge and showed him all the trees he had planted, one after another. It took many days for the Final Judge to inspect the forest planted by the hard-working man. When he finished inspecting it, he said, 'You have lived a good life. May eternal glory be your legacy in the world.'

The hard-working man died peacefully.

Then the time came for an idle man to die.

'How many years have you lived on this earth?' the Final Judge asked him.

'Ninety-nine,' answered the idle man.

'Show me your years.'

But the idle man had nothing to show. The Final Judge saw only an empty space.

'Well, then, may you be forgotten,' decided the Final Judge.

The idle man died, and in an instant people forgot all about him.

A ray of sunshine

Little Timka wakes up very early in summer. He has so much work to do: feeding the pigeons, watering the flowers, reading his book, and drawing a picture to illustrate a fairy tale. When he wakes up, he watches a pink ray of sunshine creep towards his bed. As soon as it touches his pillow, Timka quickly gets up and does his exercises.

But today Timka does not feel like getting up. He could not say why he feels that way. The ray of sunshine has already reached his pillow and before he knows it, it has crept right up on to his pillow. 'What will happen next?' wonders Timka, and he just keeps lying there in bed.

But then the ray of sunshine creeps right across the pillow and touches Timka's face. It burns him, like a hot coal. Timka feels ashamed that the ray of sunshine has caught him napping. He jumps out of bed and does his exercises.

Many years pass, and Timka becomes an adult. He has children of his own. But he never forgets the shame he felt when that burning ray of sunshine caught him napping.

Why Andrei was sad

One hot summer's day, some black clouds suddenly appeared, and thunder rumbled across the sky. Near the tractor brigade buildings grew a tall and slender poplar. Lightning struck it and split the poplar from its crown right down to its roots.

Two young tractor drivers, Stepan and Andrei, came out of the tractor depot and went over to inspect the damaged poplar. Stepan laughed. He thought the poplar looked funny split in two. But Andrei looked sad. 'Why are you so sad?' asked Stepan. 'There are lots more poplars.'

'I planted that poplar,' said Andrei. 'It was tiny then, as small as this twig.'

It was not difficult

Pilipka is a little boy in grade two. His father fought against the fascists during the war and has a military service medal. On a cold winter's evening, when a blizzard is raging outside, Pilipka will ask his father, 'Dad, tell me about the battles with the fascists.' And, for the umpteenth time, his father will tell him about the difficult marches, the bitter frosts, the deep snow and the bloody wounds...

'What a difficult medal that was to earn,' said Pilipka one night, as he went to bed...

The school year came to an end. Pilipka came home from school with a big book illustrated with beautiful drawings. In the book was an inscription that said, 'Awarded to Pilipka for high achievement in studies.' Pilipka's mother was delighted with the book and looked through it, but Pilipka was silent and frowning...

'Why aren't you pleased with your award?' asked his mother in surprise.

'Because it wasn't difficult to earn,' said the boy quietly.

