

Sukhomlinsky News

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From moral precept to moral practice

In this issue we are continuing our translation of the fourth chapter of Pavlysh Secondary School, on moral education.

In the process of forming moral habits that reflect an attitude towards material objects and, via those objects, towards people, children acquire their first notions of good and evil, honour and dishonour, justice and injustice, duty, happiness and dignity. But this is just the beginning of moral development. A higher level in this process is attained when children are motivated to perform actions that represent a direct relationship to people, to themselves and to the interests of society. The goal of such actions is to awaken the thought that my actions must be harmonised in the interests of the people that surround me, that my happiness must not bring them disappointment or unhappiness. Actions that teach us how to live among other people: these provide a foundation for moral culture upon which all future development depends. In order that the moral concepts, truths, norms or principles that underly these actions may be appreciated at an emotional level, the school community must live a rich spiritual life. Let me illustrate how, as a result of engaging in certain actions, moral convictions may be formed that demand respect for the interests of others. We teach our children:

When you speak about a person, an action, or something that has happened, say what you think. Never try to guess what people are expecting you to say. Trying to say what you think others want to hear can make you a hypocrite, a toady, and ultimately a worthless person.

[Continued on the following page]



Precepts and practice

This month I am again translating an extract from the fourth chapter of Pavlysh secondary school, a chapter on moral education.

In this month's extract Sukhomlinsky lists several precepts or moral expectations. These include the expectations that students will have an independent point of view, and will speak their minds honestly, that they will challenge behaviour that they consider dishonourable, support friends and family, and always put in their best effort.

Then Sukhomlinsky looks at the emotional underpinnings of moral behaviour, the importance of positive role models, and the need to listen to little children's grievances and help them address them practically.

This month's newsletter includes translations of three stories. 'Perhaps he doesn't have a clue' shows us Sukhomlinsky's sense of humour, and perhaps also suggests the shortcomings of not voicing an opinion.

'Two brothers' evokes the village setting in which Sukhomlinsky worked, and provides an example of what Sukhomlinsky is referring to when he speaks of 'unrefined feelings'. It illustrates the way in which Ukrainian folk values underpin much of Sukhomlinsky's work.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Moral practice (continued)

You have witnessed an act of injustice, deceit, the humiliation of someone or some other wrong action. Your heart burns with indignation and you want to intervene, to stand up for the truth... But the calculating part of you says you should not intervene, that it is none of your business. You must realise that this is the voice of cowardice. Follow your first impulse, your feeling, the voice of conscience. Your first impulse is usually your noblest. A cold, calculating attitude towards evil, injustice and dishonour can turn you into an indifferent, heartless person.

Do not criticise your friend's failings in public, if you have not first spoken to him in private, if you have not tried to convince him of his error. If you have succeeded in convincing him, criticism is unnecessary; it will be no more than empty chatter.

If you have heard something said about a person, action or happening, do not repeat the words like a parrot, but think about what you have heard. Have your own opinion, your own view about everything. But if you are convinced that what others are saying is true, support them and defend their point of view.

Do not forget what you need to do today (a lesson, work in the workshop or the horticultural plot, participation in a club and the like). When you wake up, your first thought should be about the work that you need to complete today. Putting things off till tomorrow leads to laziness and disorganisation. So that you can have a calm conscience, do today at least a small part of what you need to do tomorrow. Let this be a rule that governs your life.

Acquire knowledge through your own efforts. It is dishonourable to rely on your friends' work. Failing to do your homework independently is the first step towards becoming a parasite.

At the end of the day think about what you have done to bring joy and

happiness to others, and to become more intelligent yourself—that also brings joy to others. If you cannot think of anything you have done, you have lived a day in vain, and tomorrow you need to redouble your efforts to make up for lost time.

In a workshop or classroom, you see a sample of what you have to produce: a part, a model, an instrument etc. However perfect or beautiful the sample is, try to make something better. Know that there is no limit to the skill and mastery that can be attained in work.

If your friend is falling behind in studies or in their work, show them how to overcome their obstacles. If you are not concerned about your friend's difficulties, you are an indifferent person. The more you bestow heartfelt warmth, kindness, care and concern on your friend, the more joy will come into your life.

Do not expect your mother and father to do your work for you. Respect their work and need for rest through your actions. Through studying well and working hard you will bring your parents joy. Do not disappoint them. Do not let them always leave the best for you.

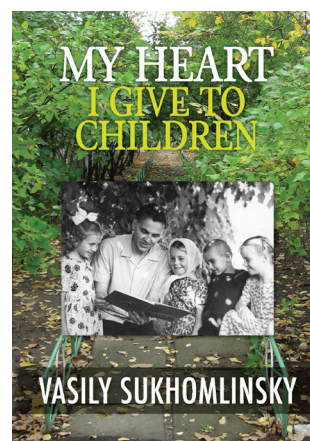
Respect women. Your attitude towards women is a mirror reflecting your moral development. To love a girl means first and foremost to bring her joy, to create joy. If you witness someone insulting a woman, stop them and rebuke them.

How do we practically encourage students to follow these precepts? Where do they find an experience of justice, of moral concepts? How are their convictions formed and strengthened?

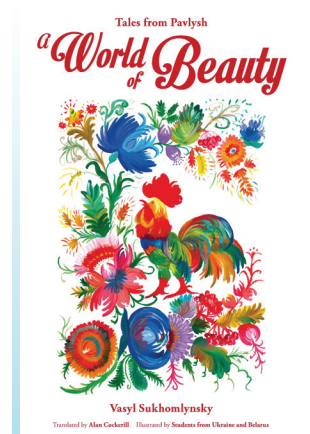
We show the students those pages from the anthology of humanity's moral values that are devoted to noble, courageous fighters for truth, for the freedom of their people. Images of these people kindle a burning ambition in the hearts of our students to be just as cou-

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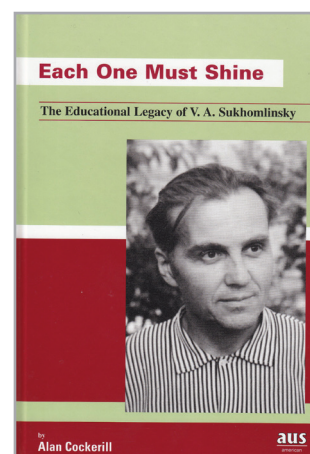
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rageous. This experience, this feeling, is the embryo of a conviction. But an idea really takes hold of a person's soul when they feel their own greatness and beauty. A child is standing at the crossroads of ideological influences. Circumstances arise in their life where they see and hear evil. The greatness inherent in the moral conduct of those from whom it is worth learning how to live provides a bright light that illuminates what a child sees around them. The young person standing on the threshold of life takes up the battle against evil. In many cases this results in conflict, but this is as it should be, since conviction is born in a battle of ideas. It is very important that the young person sees and feels evil, takes up the battle with it, and emerges the victor, gaining a conviction that in our society goodness and justice triumph.

Our young Pioneers were helping some adults load some corn cobs collected for seed into the tray of a truck. They were choosing the biggest cobs. Suddenly the team leader suggested, 'Children, throw any old cobs into the bottom of the tray, and put the best cobs on top. We need to complete our quota as quickly as possible.' The children had just been listening with bated breath to an account of Alexander Ulyanov's courage. 'How can we follow such advice? Why should we deceive someone?' they thought. And with indignation they told their teacher all about it. This was their first battle for justice, and it left a deep impression on their young hearts.

Members of our children's committee for the defence of nature go out in groups to patrol our fields, forests and meadows, and the banks of our reservoir, to see if anyone is raising a hand against our green friends, if anyone is attacking our forests and fields, if any poacher is stealthily approaching our waters to catch fish during the spawning season. Sometimes

these patrols are crowned with success and the Pioneers succeed in preventing something bad from happening, or at least in establishing the truth...

We do not allow children to just see evil and evaluate it from the point of view of moral norms. If a child understands very well that evil is being committed in front of them, and just takes note of who is guilty and tells their elders, leaving them to sort it out, they will grow up indifferent to everyone and everything. Everything will be subordinated to a dispassionate rationalism, and then to cold calculation. When they witness evil, they will consider whether to protest or not to protest and will become hypocrites.

Such people are frightening. During their lives they commit thousands of betrayals, and these betrayals are terrible because at first glance they seem insignificant... If they see a hooligan insulting a young woman, they will not always ignore it. They may stop and look and complain about the lack of a response from the police or volunteers, but they will not step in themselves. And this is in fact a foul betrayal, that has its roots in an inoffensive, indifferent childhood.

The spiritual life of a child is distinguished by great sensitivity to those phenomena that affect our feelings. Foremost among these is the grief and suffering that one person causes another. Every teacher is often obliged to listen to the complaints of little children about the misdeeds of their friends or of older students. Usually this involves someone hurting someone else's feelings. The child is expressing their indignation to the teacher, as for now that is all they are capable of. How important it is to listen attentively to these little children's complaints! The child is not asking the teacher to punish the guilty party, even if they themselves have been hurt. They want

the teacher to share their grief and indignation. The offence is usually very small from an adult point of view, but children have their own point of view, their own perception of good and evil. We need not only to bring ourselves down to the level of a child's interests, but to deeply penetrate a child's thoughts, to experience their feelings, to be agitated by their concerns. We should not encourage children to complain, but when a child brings their grief to you, they are hardly aware that they are complaining. They want their feelings to find a response in the heart of another human being.

It is important not to cool the passions in a child's soul, not to wound their sensitivities, not to make them indifferent. In sharing a child's indignation and experiencing their grief we are developing their moral sensitivity. We are teaching them to find an effective outlet for their feelings: not only to feel indignation at evil, but to fight against it; not only to go to someone to seek justice, but to affirm justice themselves. It is important to give the child concrete advice, indicating how to deal with the concrete situation.

The source of children's egotism is in unrefined feelings. A child feels themselves helpless in the face of evil, which seems insurmountable. And when they feel helpless, a sense of loneliness arises. If a young child bares their soul to other people, they no longer feel that that they must battle evil alone.

We try to gradually bring a child to the conviction that to do something good, useful or necessary for society displays moral valour, while to think only of oneself is dishonourable. It is very important that the actions that illustrate the essence of these ideas were accompanied by moral feelings, that the child should feel a personal aversion for dishonour.



Stories

Maybe he doesn't have a clue

Spring came. The snow melted in the fields, mist rose from the earth and a lark trembled with joy in the sky.

The collective farm chairman sent four old men into the field to see if the earth was warm enough to sow the spring wheat.

The four old men went to the field, and little six-year-old Vasilek ran with them, curious to find out if it was time to sow or not.

They came to the field. The farmers looked at the sky and the earth. They took a handful of earth, squeezed it and smelt it. Each one placed his palm on the earth for a minute to see if the earth was still cold.

One old man said, 'The earth has warmed through well. We could have sown yesterday.'

The second one said, 'No, yesterday would have been too early. Today is just right.'

The third one said, 'Let the earth warm a little more. Today is a little early. If we begin tomorrow it will be the perfect time.'

But the fourth man bowed his head and remained silent. He kept looking at the earth and the sky, squeezing a handful of earth and placing his palm to the ground, but he remained silent.

The three old men who had already voiced their opinions stepped aside and began to whisper among themselves: 'He is the most intelligent. That is why he is silent.'

But little Vasilek said, 'Or maybe he doesn't have a clue.'

Two brothers

In a big stone house lived two brothers: Maksim and Efim. Both worked on the collective farm. Their elderly mother lived with Maksim's family, and their elderly father lived with Efim's family. Maksim had a son, a tractor driver, and Efim had a beautiful daughter who was to be married. She worked as a milk maid.

For a week Efim had been preparing for a great family celebration—his daughter's wedding. It was to be the following Sunday.

In Efim's hut from morning to night they had been baking and boiling, frying and salting. There would be many guests at the wedding, and everyone had to be well fed.

On the Saturday morning the grandmother and grandfather came to congratulate their granddaughter on her marriage.

That same day in the evening the grandmother went to bed early complaining of a headache. She groaned, gave a quiet sigh, and died. All the relatives gathered round the dead woman's bed: the sons Maksim and Efim, the grandson, the granddaughter with her fiancé, and the dead woman's husband—Maksim's and Efim's father.

It became very quiet in that big stone house where two families lived.

'You need to postpone the wedding, brother, and you, my niece,' said Maksim.

'What am I to do now?' lamented Efim. 'Do you really think we can postpone it? We have done so much preparation!'

'What are you saying, Efim. Come to your senses!' said his father. 'And why don't you say something?' said the grandfather to his granddaughter.

'No, we won't put off the wedding!' said Efim.

The old father wept. A terrible silence fell over the house. The old father said, 'No-one will come to your wedding. Has that entered your head?'

The next day no-one came to Efim's house. Everyone went to Maksim's house for the mother's funeral. Maksim stood by his mother's body; his head bowed in grief.

Efim stood by the door. People walked around him as if he were a leper. 'That's the one who wanted to celebrate a wedding by his mother's coffin,' they whispered.

His son's portrait

The old worker Ivan Dorofeevich has been on duty at the factory entrance for many years. He checks everyone's passes.

Next to the entrance is the board of honour. The portraits of the best workers hang there. For two years a portrait of Ivan's son, a young lathe operator, has hung there. The old man's heart glows when he looks at his son's portrait.

But for several days now Ivan has not smiled when he sees his son's portrait but has frowned. It is difficult for him to look at it. His son has left his wife and young child for another woman.

His son's wife comes through the entrance. She sees Ivan Dorofeevich, bows her head, and shows her pass without greeting him. Ivan sees the suffering in her eyes.

He takes a stepladder, removes his son's portrait from the Board of Honour, takes the picture out of its frame and tears it to pieces.