

# Sukhomlinsky News

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## Sukhomlinsky in Japan

In 2016 the popular Japanese novelist Eto Mori published *Mikazuki* (Crescent Moon), a novel that refers to Sukhomlinsky. The following short account of the novel has been written by Hiroko Cockerill.

The protagonist of the novel is Oshima Goro, a primary school caretaker with a natural talent for teaching children. He opens a cram school together with his wife Chiaki, who is a harsh critic of the policies of the Ministry of Education. Whereas the Ministry of Education has a narrow focus on intellectual development and allows teachers little discretion in their choice of teaching methods and materials, Goro's cram school aims at fostering a love of learning in every child, especially those with learning difficulties.

Sukhomlinsky is referred to in the book as an ideal educator who believes in the power of education and genuinely loves his pupils. The book includes quotations from Sukhomlinsky's work, including the following: 'Children by their very nature are inquisitive researchers, explorers of the world', 'It is my deep belief that a real education comes from the urge to educate oneself', and 'If you are able to foster a resolute conscience and an indomitable spirit in your pupils, they will become your comrades in battle and comrades in life, and then they will even be able to become your teacher'. Goro writes a book about Sukhomlinsky's life, to spread his educational ideas. The book is very well received and Goro himself becomes well known for his educational work.

Half way through the novel the focus moves from Goro's success story to his wife Chiaki, who takes over management of his cram school, and then to his grandson Ichiro, who organizes support groups for children who are behind with their school work. Goro's educational ideals are revived in Ichiro's independent support groups.



## WWF Living Planet Report 2018

The World Wildlife Fund has just released their Living Planet Report for 2018. It is a damning indictment of human impact on the biosphere. Since 1970 animal populations have been reduced on average by around 60%. For more detail, download the report from: <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/living-planet-report-2018>.

One of the features of Sukhomlinsky's holistic system of education is that it is grounded in the natural environment. Sukhomlinsky draws inspiration from nature for every aspect of his educational system, from strengthening the health of his students to their intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and vocational development. He taught his students to understand, appreciate, protect and nurture the natural environment. This is one of the reasons his legacy is still relevant in the 21st century.

I would like to thank Berta Karaim for selecting and translating most of the material for this month's newsletter, and my wife Hiroko for reading and giving us an account of Eto Mori's Japanese novel *Crescent Moon*, which makes reference to Sukhomlinsky's educational philosophy. It is interesting to see that Sukhomlinsky has entered Japanese popular culture in this way.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

# Attitudes to elders and a capacity for love

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

## On attitudes towards elders

Many years of educational experience have convinced me that respect for elders is in proportion to how deeply students have come to think and feel that certain behaviours, with their roots in a lack of refinement and uneducated feelings, are unacceptable. In our system of ethical education, ten 'Don'ts' have been formulated. Adherence to these prohibitions is perceived in our community as a matter of honour and dignity, while breaking them is an indication of moral ignorance and shameful. These are the 'Ten Don'ts':

**Do not** be idle while everyone around you works;

**Do not** laugh at old age or elderly people;

**Do not** enter into arguments with respected adults, especially the elderly;

**Do not** express discontent that you lack some thing or other;

**Do not** permit your mother to give you something that she denies herself;

**Do not** do what elders condemn – neither in their sight nor behind their back;

**Do not** leave an elderly relative to live alone; in the life of every person comes a time when they are unable to experience any joy other than the joy of human communication;

**Do not** leave on a journey without requesting your elder's permission and advice;

**Do not** eat a meal without having invited your elders;

**Do not** sit while an elderly person stands, especially a woman; either should you wait for an elderly person to greet you; you should be the first to extend

greetings, and to wish good health upon parting.

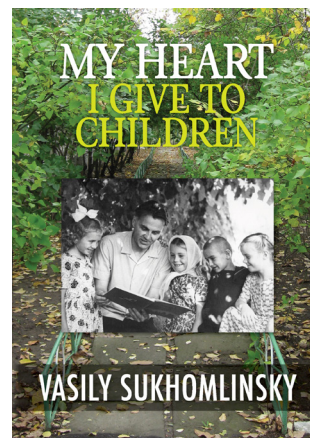
The implementation of these 'Ten Don'ts' requires a very high degree of attention to the harmony of the whole educational process. Our own behaviour, our way of thinking, our attitudes to one another and to the moral values of the community – these are, figuratively speaking, a tuning fork that sets the tone for our children's convictions. Every single one of our words carries genuine meaning for our children depending on the actions that they observe behind our words. If our actions contradict our words, we are raising hypocrites and presenting the whole older generation in a bad light.

Our teaching collective is very concerned that the relationships between children and the older generations should be heartfelt, and encompass the individual, and that they should not in any circumstances take on the character of a routine campaign or activity. Under no circumstances allow a schoolchildren's meeting with a respected elder to become an exhibition, or the care of the elderly to become a chore. Interactions with the elderly should always be heartfelt. A child's behaviour towards the older generations is a sure indicator of what kind of a citizen the child will grow up to be.

To nurture humane qualities is a most complex and difficult task. It means to establish in a young child the need for a friend, who is dearer than anyone else in the world. One of the greatest joys of childhood should be the simple joy of communicating with others: I came to you because I

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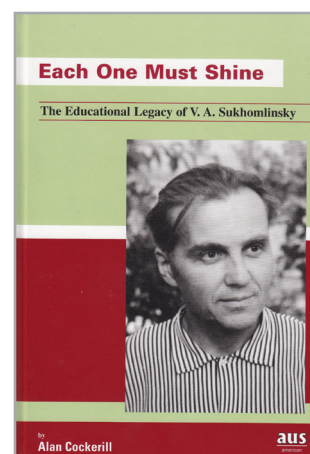
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cannot live without you.

We teach and advise children: share your joys with your grandmother and grandfather, spend time with them during the holidays. Many years of experience demonstrate that a child's ability to get along with the elderly gives rise to and nurtures noble qualities of soul. The kindness of a child who respects old age, with all of its wisdom and weaknesses, gives rise to a great strength of soul. It is of utmost importance that kindness is strong, determined, steadfast and persistent.

Without a doubt the most reliable remedy for many weaknesses which are born of that inevitable misfortune – old age – is devotion, sincerity and trust. Elderly people are especially sensitive to that which another person's heart gives them. They reward goodness with the greatest internal striving to overcome their own weaknesses. It is necessary to treat a child's impatience with the weaknesses of the elderly, especially those who are weak, lonely and unwell, as the greatest evil. This impatience is the toxic fruit born of the flowers of egoism and narcissism. The inability to accept that an elderly person has some small weaknesses is most often born out the desire of caring adults to create a sterile, 'improved' environment, shielding the child from anything that the caring adult may consider too much for a child's soul to bear. It is outrageous that some parents desire to protect children from the elderly and the elderly from children. The effort to protect a child from human weaknesses cripples the soul.

### **On the Ability to Love**

A child cannot live, cannot develop morally, cannot subsequently enter the wide world of civic life as a responsible citizen, if the child does not know how to love. I compiled the story 'The Lit-

tle Hunchback and the Shimmering Star' so that children, listening and entering into the spirit of the story, with a sense of wonder discover a great truth of human life: that a person only becomes a genuine human being when they love.

Here, vivid fantasy images have an earthly, human character. Even in the minds of the youngest children the following thought arises: real beauty is found in devotion, in the desire to bring joy to another person. My story teaches children to value human devotion and love. To be able to feel and understand that others value you – that is a great human value.

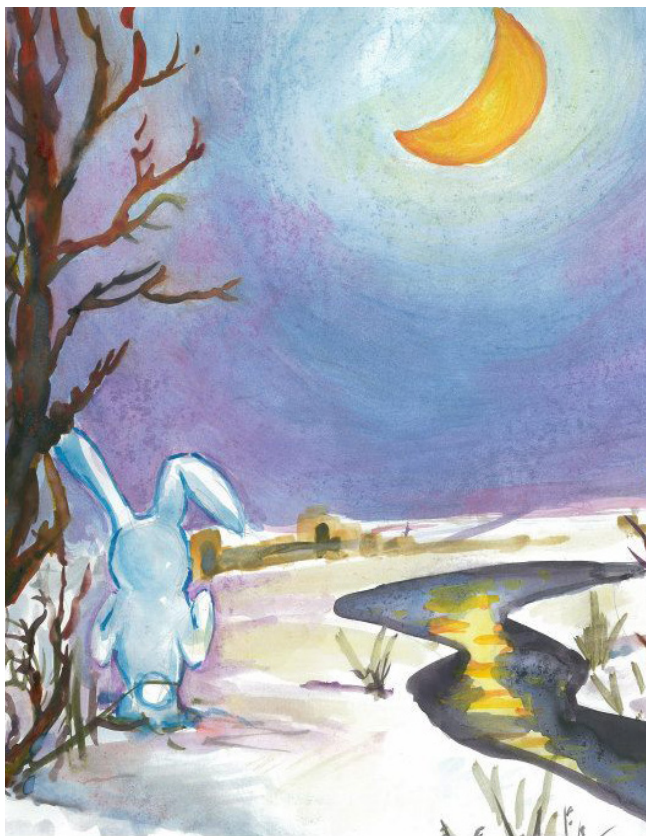
The following touching event transpired recently near the school in our village.

Seven children from the whole street gathered on the green lawn – three boys and four girls. Tomorrow would be a joyful holiday. And it has long been a tradition on the eve of the holiday for adults to give gifts to children. The children began to boast who was given what by their mother, their father, their grandparents. For the eldest, Nicholas, a bicycle was bought three days ago. His mother and father are certain that he does not know anything about the bike. They have hidden the bike in an unused room, but it is not possible to hide anything from that boy. He has already tried riding the bike, removed some bolts and exchanged the small light for a flashlight. A small toy gun as been bought for little Michael, dolls for Tatyana and Lida, a teddy bear for Olga, and coloured pencils for Zina.

'And my grandmother picked me up and gave me a kiss,' said eight-year-old Sergei, a first-grader, and in his eyes shone such happiness that all the other children were jealous. The bicycle, the gun, the dolls, the teddy bear, the coloured pencils – all that appeared to be pale and in-

significant in comparison to what Sergei felt... The presents had only just been bought, had not yet been given, but already the children had begun exchanging them – the doll for a gun, the teddy bear for a doll, the pencils for bike ride... Only Sergei sat proud and independent: his treasure could not be bought, could not be exchanged for something else. It was love, which is worth more than any other treasure.

If only all adults understood how much children treasure the love of mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers! Not a blind and unconscious love that is willing to be blind to all that is unseemly and see only the good, even if there is no good to be seen, but a wise, demanding, humanly miserly and humanly generous love. What can you do so that a child treasures your love, mothers and fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers? Here one elusive thing is supremely important – a child must always feel that they have not yet become the person that their loved ones would like to see and that they love. To be loved in this way is a pure, noble human desire. Sergei values his grandmother's affection because she does not kiss him every day; with an aching heart she explains to him the kind of person he should be, but, unfortunately, has not yet become, it is necessary to exert yourself, then you will become as a genuine human being should be. The son of wise parents always feels that there are more beautiful, morally better, more worthy people than him. To become one of those people it is necessary to strive towards that ideal; I love you not so much because of who you are, but more because of the person you will – I believe – become. This, essentially, is the foundation of parental love and filial devotion.



## Stories for Children

### Little hunchback and the shimmering star

In a large building in a city lived many boys and girls. One of them was a young girl called Little Hunchback. She truly was little and she truly had a hunched back. Just like the other boys and girls, she often went outside to play. Three other beautiful girls used to go outside to play: Blue-eyed Beauty, Azure-eyed Beauty and Black-eyed Beauty. Each one of these girls was convinced that she was the most beautiful of all and that everyone should admire only her beauty.

Little Hunchback could not take her eyes off these beautiful girls. Oh, how she wanted to give her love to one of them! She approached them in turn, and tried to play with them, but none of them paid the slightest attention to her. But Little Hunchback was used to this.

And so Little Hunchback began to love a far away Shimmering Star. Little Hunchback saw the Shimmering Star one starry night and whispered the warm words of her love:

'I want to be yours, Shimmering Star! I love you and I want to be loved too!'

The Shimmering Star was incomprehensibly far away, she could not have appeared as more than a tiny spark, but the strength of the Little Hunchback's love was so great that, imagine! the Shimmering Star replied:

'So be it, Little Hunchback, you will now be mine.'

In the eyes of the little girl appeared great happiness. She looked into the eyes of Blue-eyed Beauty, Azure-eyed Beauty and Black-eyed Beauty and was overwhelmed with how sorry she felt for them. Little Hunchback whispered:

'Oh, how unfortunate these girls are.'

### Ivan the elder and Ivan the younger

This happened in Belarus in the harsh days of war. The fascists burned down the village of Ivanivka, murdered many innocent elderly people, women and children, for no reason other than that they helped the partisans.

Miraculously, two nine-year-old boys escaped death – two Ivans. Both were very small and both were very similar. The only way to tell them apart was by their eyes – one Ivan had blue eyes, the other black.

The boys sat near the smoking ruins for a long time, crying, and then decided: 'We will cross the frontline to our side and we will fight alongside them against the fascists to avenge the blood of our mothers.'

But the frontline was two hundred kilometres away. The boys began to think: 'Who will be the elder on this difficult journey?' The journey was not possible without an elder.

The black-eyed Ivan said:

'I will be the Elder.'

And the blue-eyed Ivan replied:

'And I will be the Younger one.'

And so they set off on their difficult journey. They walked hand-in-hand. The moment anything dangerous appeared on the horizon, Ivan the Elder went in front and Ivan the younger walked behind him. Their injured feet bled, their eyes burned from the wind, but the boys kept walking ahead and endured all the difficulties of their journey. At every step, death threatened them, but they did not pay attention to it and so it could not trap them with its iron claws.

They became courageous and daring.

Ivan the Elder became courageous and daring because he felt that he was responsible for the life of the Ivan the Younger, while Ivan the Younger became courageous and daring because he felt: Ivan the Elder is responsible for me. A person becomes invincible when they feel that they are responsible for someone else's life. A person also becomes invincible when they feel that someone else is responsible for their life. Do not fight to become the Elder; do not fear being the Younger one. All that matters is that you are human.