**1. Why Janusz Korczak and Yitzhak Katzenelson**

The twentieth century left humanity with despairing memories. Perhaps the heritage of people like Janusz Korczak and Yitzhak Katzenelson can serve as a promise of hope, a beacon that guides us into a better world.

Two global wars and genocides with their unprecedented human slaughter, the dark shadow of the Holocaust of the Jewish people, the presence of the atomic bomb and the constant threat of apocalyptic nuclear war, religious fanaticism and world terror fueled by religious radicalism, global waves of refugees pushed out of their homes by political violence and economic crises – all threaten not only the continuing flourishing but even the survival of our civilization. They paint dark shadows above human horizons; their presence in our consciousness threatens our belief in the basic goodness of human beings and our ability to work for a better world.

Auschwitz, the epitome of human demonic creativity in the twentieth century, marks the loss of our moral orientation. Its scandalous reality – an industrial complex of death – shatters our basic trust in human morality. Civilized, educated people committed the worst crimes one can imagine there, even as they used words like "good" and "evil," framed their actions in terms of human decency, and led family lives in the proximity of the camp. Unavoidably, their actions lead us to question the very legitimacy and effectiveness of any moral discourse. In the concentration camps, language was no longer a reliable representation of reality (Steiner 1986). The world went out of its mind.

The destruction occurring in the twentieth century destroyed the bridges that can lead us back into our heritage, our past worlds in which were stored the building blocks of the present. have been Human society and the Jewish community, in particular, have been orphaned.

When people reach a new reality, they rely on their judgment and the lessons they have drawn from their past to understand and cope with it. In the twentieth century, Jews failed to "read the map." Nothing in their past prepared them for the horrors of the Holocaust. It is doubtful whether their recent historical experiences can serve as their twenty-first-century road map. These dramatic historical experiences have shaken our trust in the future. Can we trust our culture to guide us along a path of decency into the unknown of the twenty-first century?

The moral roots of modern society are found in the textual and ritualistic worlds of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Even for secular people, monotheistic scriptures provide the vocabulary and lexicon of their moral language. However, the religious ideas of moral justice and divine providence lost their credibility in the face of such unprecedented destruction. Can any theodicy explain the horrors of those years and the principal enigma of the coexistence of factories of death and God's just providence? Christians and Muslims barely mobilized their religious traditions to resist Nazism and defy its genocidal policies toward the Jews, the Roma, and other groups of victims. The Catholic Church stood by when the Germans implemented the "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem" in what they saw as a post-Christian world. The majority of the Muslim world lay beyond the lands in which the Holocaust occurred, though the Jerusalem religious leader, the Mufti Hag Amin El-Husseini, embraced the genocide against the Jews for his own nationalistic interests, even giving it a religious justification. The reality of Auschwitz seems to refute the validity of all monotheistic traditions.

Enlightenment and education were messianic beliefs of the modern individual. Modernized Jews and non-Jews alike believed that the new era of Enlightenment – with its values of rationality, science, humanism, individuality, human freedom and civil rights, and modern education – would lead humanity into a better future for all. Jews embraced modernity, celebrating its promise of emancipation and of integration into their host societies. Only a minority believed that Zionism, a particularistic Jewish national revival—a form of auto-emancipation—was the best answer to "the Jewish problem."

This Enlightenment "messiah" soon turned out to be a false one. German university professors, schoolteachers, businesspersons, white-collar professionals, artists, and members of the clergy joined the Nazi movement and offered their good service to the devils of nationalism and racism. Following the July 1933 concordat between the Vatican and Nazi Germany, the German Catholic Church succumbed to the demands of the regime, and the clergy had to obey the German authorities. The Nazis mobilized education provided at all levels to recruit new supporters and delegitimize ideas of equality, human rights, and democracy. In fact, the products of science and higher education—both of which were highly developed in German urban areas—did not stop the Nazi "Tsunami," but instead served Hitler's war machine very well. Only external forces—the armies of the Allies in World War II—put an end to the German Third Reich and freed the world from the Nazi nightmare.

In the face of mass murder on an unprecedented scale, recurring genocides, the threat of nuclear war, the mistrust in government’s ability to lead society in a constructive way, and the growing skepticism of human moral discourse, we are desperately searching for a moral orientation. From where can we derive that moral perspective?

Can education be our ethical Archimedean stand? Students may rightly point to the historical fact that educated people whose moral consciousness remains steadfast and unshaken do not have better chances of survival in times of total war and terror. In his reflections on the reality of Auschwitz, Primo Levi told us that it was those who had collaborated in some way with the agents of death who survived (Levi 2013, 31–71). Students may rightly question the relevancy of education in a post-Holocaust era. Why should they get an education if it will not help them survive or stand up against the currents of evil?

The collapse of civilization in the twentieth century was caused not only by the demise of cultural and moral ideals but also by the individuals— among them intellectuals and teachers—who led civilization into its mass graveyard, betraying their principles and their fellow humans. What was the role of these educators and thought leaders during World War II, and what can we expect their role to be in future historical crossroads? Will they be leaders and agents of change who inspire their students with the appropriate words, moral compass, and social orientation? Or will they only be obedient civil servants who follow the dictates of government authority? Will they have an original message to convey to their students, or will they just parrot the words society wants them to say?

Informing this question about the role of educators is the image of the classical philosopher and teacher, Socrates. Society had sentenced him to death because he questioned the conventions of society, thereby endangering the status quo of the Athenian polis. Socrates' legacy touches the very essence of education and of educators' identity—of what educators are supposed to be. Should they challenge the prevailing morality of their society? Should they stand up and resist evil in their community? Can society rely on its educators in times of radical crisis?

The historiography of education provides some answers to these questions in the stories of educators who became leaders of their society in the most difficult times. This exploration is a comparative study of two noted Jewish educators—born ––— who in times of radical crisis showed leadership and resisted an evil government, maintaining their autonomy and authentic voice. The stories of Korczak and Katzenelson open a window into the struggle of Jewish intellectuals, educators, and social leaders to exercise just leadership and to maintain their moral compass in the middle of the twentieth century.

Why Korczak and Katzenelson? The initial reason I chose to study their legacy is a personal one. Korczak, in particular, was a strong presence in my childhood world. I attended elementary school at the Janusz Korczak School, I had beautiful Polish stamps carrying his image in my stamp album, and the portrait of the hero of his popular children’s novel, King Matt (Matthew) the First, was on display in my school library. We students were very familiar with the story of the child king who tried, but failed, to establish a children’s kingdom. We all saw the 1958 full-color feature movie based on Korczak's book. And Korczak's pedagogical writings were present in the rich home library of my parents.

However, Korczak’s story was still just one of many that I heard at home and at school of people who struggled heroically against the Nazis. It was only when I became an educator myself and read Korczak's pedagogical writings that he became a meaningful element of my spiritual landscape. Yitzhak Perlis's rich introductions (1974–1976) to the four volumes of Korczak's writings guided my exploration of Korczak's thinking. Discussions with my father, Zvi Shner, a Holocaust historian and one of the founders of the Ghetto Fighters House (GFH), a Holocaust museum located on the grounds of the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz in Israel, introduced me to deeper layers of Korczak's legacy. For nearly four decades, I have pondered Korczak's work, and it continues to enrich my own pedagogical thought and practice.

Nonetheless, as inspiring as his writings have been for me, I learned once I became a professor that Korczak's writings on education have had difficulties finding their deserved place in the academic landscape. The historical discourse about Korczak’s actions in resisting the Nazis has overshadowed his pedagogical contributions and relegated him to the realm of Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Outside of academia, the broader public sees Korczak only as a Holocaust martyr: his inspiring actions have had the unintended effect of narrowing his legacy to a story of martyrdom. They veil forty years of inspiring educational work and do not do justice to its true meaning and place in the history of humanistic pedagogy.

The nature of Korczak's own writings further obscures their true value: their fragmented character makes it difficult to appreciate his pedagogical legacy in the field of educational philosophy. Korczak was suspicious of elaborate educational theories, for reasons I later discuss, and a surface reading of his texts hardly reveals clear, structured philosophical thinking. They appear more as a flow of thoughts and an arbitrary cluster of beautiful ideas, rather than a rational integrated and disciplined discourse.

Does Korczak belong to the field of Judaic Studies? Korczak's unclear national identity adds to the difficulty of granting Korczak "shelf space" in academic libraries alongside other Jewish philosophers. His stance in between different cultural and national worlds, his not belonging to one social circle or one defined cultural identity, complicates and moves his Korczak's legacy away from the field of modern Jewish thought, as demarcated today. It seems that his thought is not "Jewish" enough, according to the traditional categorization of Jewish identity.

As a result of all these issues, in academic circles Korczak’s thought is seen neither as a philosophy of education nor as Jewish philosophy and so is often missing from twentieth-century humanistic discourse. Teachers' colleges and university schools of education tend to ignore his writings, and they are rarely studied in teachers' education programs and philosophy of education courses. The aim of this study is to emancipate Korczak's legacy so it can find its deservedly respected place in the academy—not only in Holocaust and Genocide Studies but also in Jewish Studies and the field of education.

While Korczak’s work was informed by the universal vision of all people in solidarity, the mission of Yitzhak Katzenelson, the second subject of this study, was to bring about his people's national revival. In contrast to Korczak, who was a cosmopolitan, identifying both as a Pole and a Jew—though at times he seemed to identity as neither—Katzenelson was a Zionist. His works, as were those of Korczak, were well represented in the library of my parents, bearers of the legacy of the murdered Jewish people in World War II. As mentioned, my parents were among the founders of the Ghetto Fighters House in April 1949, which is formally known as the Itzhak Katzenelson Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Heritage Museum. Katzenelson, the Bible and drama teacher, the Hebrew poet, was part of the DNA of this institution. While Korczak represented the founders' broad humanistic worldview, Katzenelson represented their commitment to the story of their people.

Katzenelson’s poetry is characterized by a sharp polarity between the joy encountered in his prewar writings and the pain, rage and despair that dominate his work during the Holocaust years. His prewar poetry was light, joyful, and even childish in character. His popular children's songs—"Five Years of Michael," which most Israeli children now learn to sing when they enter elementary school; "The Beautiful Nights of Canaan," and "Gilu HaGelilim" (Cheer up the Galileans)—are cheerful folk songs that express optimism, a love of life, and his hope for the return of his people to their homeland. His poetry and children's writings written before the war draw a bright picture of future Jewish life in the Land of Israel.

However, during World War II, while suffering under the Germans' terroristic and destructive policies, Katzenelson gradually lost his joy of life. His writings in the Warsaw Jewish ghetto express the tragic reality of his people. His most bitter texts were written during the year he spent with his son at the Vittel internment camp in France. "The Vittel Diary" and "The Song of the Murdered Jewish People" are now part of the liturgy of Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Commemoration Day: they express ultimate pain, rage, and despair. While Korczak never ceased to dream his humanistic vision, Katzenelson takes his audience into the depth of the abysses of history: he forces them to confront the real meaning of the Holocaust, which is despair.

Katzenelson’s poetry is bitter, poison to the soul, and schoolteachers, as well as the Ghetto Fighters House's educational staff, have found it nearly impossible to deal with his searing testimony and despairing outcry. Katzenelson's writings penned during the Holocaust paralyze the mind and freeze the blood. They leave us with no words to contain and express the depth of their agony, yet they give us a new understanding of the realities of the Holocaust: its loneliness, helplessness, and hopelessness. The Holocaust is not a source of pride, strength or even of educational revenue as many Genocide Studies or Holocaust Education programs characterize it. It is a "black hole" without consolation: this is the truth of the Holocaust. How can today’s educators deal with this most bitter historical heritage? I hope that this discussion will make Katznelson’s texts more accessible to educators and teachers who try to help their students understand the realities of the Holocaust from the victims' perspective.

Korczak and Katzenelson, two leading Jewish educators and well-known European public figures before World War II, responded in opposing ways to the same historical reality of oppression and offered different avenues of resistance. Their legacies are not easy to comprehend, and yet both are authentic responses to the crisis of the Holocaust years.

Korczak and Katzenelson in their responses to the Holocaust do not represent themselves alone. Like the founders of the Ghetto Fighters House, all twentieth-century Jews had to choose between two opposing options: to become a citizen of the world, respectfully accepted into the family of humanity, or to return to the Jewish ancient homeland and to revive Jewish life there. The vision of renewed life and the memory of total destruction and death underlie both responses. In the minds of many Jews, Korczak's vision and Katzenelson's dream and nightmare live side by side in a tense coexistence. In days of radical crisis, this ideological schizophrenia seems commonplace.

We do not have to decide who reacted in a better way to the impossible situation of terror, ghettoization, and destruction. We were not there, and we are in no place to make any judgment. However, we can try to understand their actions; we can raise questions about the role of leading figures, community leaders, social activists and teachers in radical times. We can ask and try to understand what happened, how they responded, and why.

The meaning of these two stories of educators' resistance to brutal power goes beyond the particularity of Jewish history. The Holocaust was a tragic laboratory of the human spirit and a prism through which hidden aspects of humanity were revealed. It opens a universal discussion about the role of educators in any society in times of crisis and destruction, particularly their responses to injustice and oppression. For example, how can and should educators respond to a genocide? What is their personal and professional responsibility in such circumstances? To whom are they accountable and about what? Should they be active members in resistance movements because they are educators and share the responsibility for preparing future generations? I extend an open invitation to educators who are aware of history and its meaning to join this discussion: it is not only about the past but also about their own responsibility to the future of their own society.

It is my hope that a comparative discussion of Korczak’s and Katzenelson's stories will open the door to a better understanding of the realities of the Holocaust and the meaningful role educators can have in teaching it; I hope it will also foster a crucial discussion of our future.