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**Janusz Korczak and Yitzhak Katzenelson**

**Two Educators in the Abysses of History**

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

The twentieth century left humanity in despair. Perhaps the heritage of Janusz Korczak and Yitzhak Katzenelson can serve as a promise of hope, a beacon that may guide us into a better world.

Two global wars and genocides with their unprecedented human slaughter, the shattering memory 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 could 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.[[1]](#footnote-1) The world went out of its mind.

The twentieth century wrecked the bridges that can lead us back into our heritage, our past worlds in which were stored the building blocks of the present. These cultural storage spaces have been lost behind the images of World War II. Human society and Jewish society, in particular, have been orphaned. When people reach a new reality, they rely on their reality-judgement and the lessons they have drawn from their past. 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 also whether recent historical experiences can serve as contemporary Jews’ twenty-first-century road map. 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 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 the Nazis envisioned as a post-Christian world. Anti-Jewish hatred, even in its modern forms, developed on the fertilized cultural grounds of the old anti-Semitism. In modern twentieth-century Europe, Christian teachings fueled anti-Jewish sentiments and quite often were used to justify the Jews' fate.

The majority of the Muslim world lay beyond the lands in which the Holocaust occurred, though the Jerusalem-based religious leader, the Mufti Haj Amin al-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 modern man. Modernized Jews and non-Jews alike believed that the new era of Enlightenment – with its liberal values of rationality, science, humanism, individuality, human freedom, civil rights and modern education – would lead humankind into a better future for all. Jews embraced modernity, celebrating its promise of emancipation and integration into their host societies. Only a minority believed that Zionism, a movement working to realize a particularistic Jewish national revival and 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 services 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, in every rank, had to obey the German authorities. The Nazis mobilized education at every level to recruit new supporters and delegitimize ideas of equality, human rights and democracy. In fact, science and higher education – both of which were highly developed in German urban areas – did not stop the Nazi ‘tsunami’; in fact, their product, technology, served Hitler's war machine very well. Only external forces, the armies of the Allies, 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 of people's ability to lead society in a constructive way and the growing scepticism of human moral discourse, we are desperately searching for a moral orientation. From where can people derive that moral perspective?

Can education be our ethical Archimedean point? 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 than amoral individuals. In his reflections on the reality of Auschwitz, Primo Levi told us that it was those who collaborated in some way with the agents of death who survived.[[2]](#footnote-2) 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 a moral 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 Socrates, the classical Greek philosopher and teacher. Society sentenced him to death because he questioned its conventions, thereby endangering the status quo of the Athenian polis. Socrates’s 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? Educators may be important, but only if they are autonomous people with an authentic voice.The answers to these questions are essential to the future of society and the professional image of educators.

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 – **Janusz Korczak** (born Henryk Goldzmit; 1878–Treblinka, 1943) and **Yitzhak Katzenelson** (1886–Auschwitz, 1944) – who in times of radical crisis showed leadership and resisted the reality of evil, 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 with the fate of the Jews in the middle of the twentieth century.

Why Korczak and Katzenelson? The initial reason to study their legacy is a personal one. Korczak's image was present in my childhood world. The elementary school I attended was named the ‘Janusz Korczak School’. Beautifully illustrated Polish stamps carried Korczak's image: I had a few of those stamps in my own album, which I later lost. The image of Korczak’s literary hero, King Matt (Mathew), the First, was on display in the school's library. We were 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 with the Nazi reality. 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 Holocaust Museum (GFH), located on the grounds of the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz in Israel, introduced me to deeper layers of Korczak's legacy. I have pondered Korczak's work for nearly four decades, and it continues to enrich my own pedagogical thought.

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 place in the academic landscape. The historical discourse about Korczak has overshadowed his pedagogical contributions and relegated him to the realm of Holocaust and Genocide Studies. For the public, Korczak is only 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 accept his pedagogical legacy as a respectable part of 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 than as 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 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, despite his being appreciated as a world-reknowned educator, Korczak’s thought is categorized 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 thought: it is rarely studied in teachers' education programs and philosophy of education courses. The aim of this study is to emancipate Korczak's legacy and find it a proper, respected place in the academic fields of Jewish Studies and education.

While Korczak promulgated a universal vision of solidarity, the mission of Yitzhak Katzenelson, the second subject of this study, was his people's national revival. In contrast to Korczak, who was a cosmopolitan, identifying both as a Pole and a Jew and sometimes as neither, Katzenelson was a Zionist. His works were also present in the library of my parents, bearers of the legacy of the murdered Jewish people in World War II. The formal name of the Ghetto Fighters House, which my parents, together with the members of the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz, founded on April 1949, is the Yitzhak Katzenelson Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Heritage Museum. Katzenelson – the Bible and drama teacher, the Hebrew poet – is 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 pre-war 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 song ‘Five Years of Michael’, which most Israeli children learn to sing when they enter elementary school; the poems ‘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 pre-war poetry and children's writings draw a bright picture of future Jewish life in the Land of Israel.

However, during World War II, when he was suffering under the Germans' terror and policies of destruction, 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 from the Vittel internment camp in France, the *Vittel Diary* (1943) and ‘The Song of the Murdered Jewish People’ (1943), which has become part of the liturgy of Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Commemoration Day, 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 victims of the Holocaust: their 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.

In addition, 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 could respond either from a nationalistic or universalistic perspective. It was a widely shared Jewish dream to become a citizen of the world, respectfully accepted into the family of humanity. It was also a legitimate Jewish dream, although held most of the time by only a minority of Jews, to return to the Jewish ancient homeland and to revive Jewish life there. Both the vision of renewed life and the memory of total destruction and death inform Jewish life. 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 took on a drastic meaning.

A comparative discussion of Korczak and Katzenelson's stories may lead us to a better understanding of the realities of the Holocaust and the meaningful place educators could have in it. It also opens a door to a crucial discussion of our future. We do not have to decide who reacted in a more appropriate way to the impossible situation of terror, ghettoization and destruction. We were not there, and we are in no place to make any judgement. 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 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 up a universal discussion about the role of educators in any society in times of crisis and destruction. How can and should educators respond to a genocide, wherever it may occur? 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 of human future? 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.

1. **The Holocaust as a Universal Lesson**

The Holocaust was not the only genocide to occur in the twentieth century: crimes against humanity happened in all parts of the world and at different times. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the Holocaust, the ideology behind it and its aim of wiping away a whole people, the modernized methodologies of its implementation – all added up to make it a unique event that went far beyond what human history had ever showed us. We continue to wrestle with the meaning of the Holocaust, and the passage of time does not diminish this struggle. The Holocaust continues to capture our imagination and to challenge our understanding of humanity, our metaphysics, our language and our self-image as modernized human beings. It threatens to swallow all our spiritual energies and erase our horizons, resulting in a sad and hopeless, cynical and nihilistic, human reality.

We wish to leave the nightmare of the Holocaust behind, hoping to get a new start on life, but is that really possible? Can we leave Auschwitz behind in the name of a liberating forgetfulness?[[3]](#footnote-3) Can we leave our nightmares behind because we want to live as Elie Wiesel put in the mouse of Michael, the hero of his 1995 novel *The Town beyond the Wall*? We wish for a renewed world, but we cannot achieve it without first entering the abysses of the Holocaust or, as Wiesel wrote, returning to the place of suffering. Even if we try to shut the memory of the Holocaust behind our mental doors, it will still have its destructive power.

The dark realities are here, they are not going to disappear, and as claimed the French Jewish philosopher, Andre Neher, we have to wrestle with them: ‘*The Holocaust is a return to chaos, which we must first have the courage to enter if we wish to find our way out of it; otherwise there can be only false exits and spurious thought without any grasp of reality.’*[[4]](#footnote-4) Chaos means the destruction of our cosmos, of our created ordered world and of our civilization. After the Holocaust, claims Neher, we need the courage to re-create our world because what happened during World War II destroyed not only the lives of millions of victims but also our cosmos, our sense of being at home in this world. However, the path to this desired resurrection cannot bypass the realities of destruction.

The two world wars of the twentieth century and the events that come under the collective title ‘the Holocaust of the Jewish people’ engage us in urgent discussions of human identity. The drama of this extreme manifestation of evil rivets our attention; stories of extreme evil attract us. Numerous books and movies make the Holocaust and the historical phenomena of Nazism part of our collective memory, our culture and our language. The images of Nazism and its ‘Final Solution’ death policies became part of a shared imagination. They have become, even if we do not like it, part of our modern identity.

The Holocaust has also become an essential part of our educational discourse. Many advocate that the drama of extreme evil and human suffering in the twentieth century be a central part of our educational agenda. We tell our students the history of anti-Semitism, the longest-lasting hatred in human history; we teach them about the modern manifestations of racism, fascism and totalitarianism and the collapse of liberal democracy; and we sum up this story with the rise of Nazism and all that it entails. Then we take them to the ‘valleys of death’ in Europe and show them the monuments of death that the Germans erected throughout Europe. They learn, in principle and in detail, how a modernized society built a machine of war, terror and destruction that dominated the entire continent and threatened the rest of the world.

In addition to giving us a surge of adrenaline, this educational discourse of the Holocaust is supposed to give us – and our students as well, so we hope – a simple ethical explanation of the world: it describes human reality in clear 'good' and 'bad' terms, in black and white without nuance. The events of World War II, including the Holocaust of the Jewish people, are put in front of our students in sharply contrasting moral definitions of good and evil. The Holocaust discourse gives its participants a clear moral roadmap of human history: the bad is there and the good is here. Those places we visit in Europe were, in the past, fields of war and places of terror, destruction and mass murder, where evil prevailed. Here today, we experience the opposite: the good. It is a clear, comforting lesson and, we hope, an effective one.

Holocaust and Genocide Studies provide us, according to this popular educational paradigm, with the moral lessons that will keep and nurture the goodness of our society. We tell our younger generations the story of evil and its radical manifestation in the twentieth century and try to foster the opposite in their minds and hearts. From the story of anti-Semitism, we derive the rejection of the demonic mythological hatred of Jews or any other group of people. From expressions of xenophobia, we learn to rejext all religious, ethnic and racist stereotypes. We teach that the ‘other’ is not our enemy by default. From the history of fascism, we learn its opposite: the values of human dignity and the ultimate equality of all people, freedom and individual autonomy. The story of totalitarianism and of the terror-state teaches us the ultimate importance of democratic political constructions. From the story of a modern Western society, which built the machine of terror and destruction, we hope to derive a lesson about the limitations of political power. We hope to teach our soldiers, police officers and other civil servants the danger of excessive power. We look back to the twentieth century and define – and mark with warning signs – the slippery slope that can lead us to the radical abuse of human rights.

The Holocaust changed our language. The stories of terror, destruction and mass murder give us new ultimate definitions of good and evil. Auschwitz has become the reference point of our ethics. When we want to define something in our lives today as radically bad, we refer to the horrors of the Holocaust. Our current discussions of the phenomena of radical abuse of human rights frequently invoke the words ‘Nazi’ and ‘Nazism’. Quite often, popular discourse manipulates this vocabulary– from different ideological perspectives – to equate someone we deeply disagree with as a ‘racist’ or even a ‘Nazi’. Today, the very, very bad person is a ‘Nazi’.

However, if we reject such use of extreme words in everyday experiences, we recognize that the moral lesson we can draw from images of terror and mass murder, as well as the analogies we can draw between past genocides and present realities, become problematic. What can we learn from the life stories of arch-murderers, who became the celebrities of the twentieth century, or from the descriptions of the industrialized mass murder of millions of people? Radical evil has always attracted our imagination, and great villains have always been celebrities and heroes of popular legends, literature and film, and yet the moral lesson we derive from them is not convincing.

It is commonly asserted that the Nazis were ordinary people and that in each one of us there is a hidden tiny Nazi who waits for its opportunity to grow and take over. Yet we all know that in reality most people are not in the process of becoming arch- murderers, even if they do not receive the antidote of exposure to Auschwitz images.

These well-intentioned educational analogies, which are commonly found in Holocaust and Genocide Studies programs, are based on the optimistic assumption that people who are exposed to pictures or stories of radical evil internalize a moral lesson and become better people. In such an educational perspective, the history of evil becomes a major educational text and a very powerful one. However, the hypothesis that exposure to evil makes people better people has no theoretical basis or empirical proof; on the contrary, there is ample evidence that human psychology works differently and that people who suffer violence tend to repeat it to others.

Thus the educational discourse about the Holocaust should go beyond the naïve expectations that have made the history of evil a major educational tool. If the hypothesis that exposure to evil fosters the good in people was verified by human reality, then the absurd pedagogical conclusion would be that the best place for our schools would be next to the prison yard; there the children could see criminals and thereby develop the proper moral antidote. We all know, however, that students need exposure to images of morality and stories of compassion and moral courage in order to develop their own moral compass.

Furthermore, if it were true that exposure to stories of evil makes people better, then the phenomena of evil would be self-destructive or, better formulated, self-amending. People would see acts of evil and would become better people – and evil itself would die out. We know that human history does not develop in that way: we need a more complex picture and a more critical discussion of the educational rewards that we hope to gain from Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Exposure to evil is not sufficient; we also need to hear the stories of the victims. Can we learn something valuable from the history, quite often untold, of the victims of radical evil and the degradation of humanity?

Among the millions of victims of Nazi Germany, the Jewish people hold a unique and terrible place: Jews were the par-excellence victim group of Nazi ideology and policies of terror and annihilation, the end result of which was to be the disappearance of the Jewish people as a whole. To an extent, the Nazis achieved that mission. Today, Jews tell their children that ‘once upon a time there was’ a rich Jewish world in Europe and the Islamic countries. That world is no more, just a fading memory. Communities that had existed for thousands of years, rןch with life and culture, are no longer. Yiddish, Ladino and Jewish Arabic are no longer spoken. A Jewish ‘Atlantis’ remains only as a legend. We can assume that Jewish life for many years to come will remain marked by that destruction.

A catastrophe of such magnitude has far-reaching effects on those who experienced it, yet delving into the world of the victims yields neither clear ethical messages nor a sense of strength. There are no easy answers to the questions raised by the experiences of the victims. In general, being a victim of the Holocaust, or any other genocide, is not perceived as a source of pride and strength. Instead, that suffering shatters the victim’s world and is seen only as a source of helplessness and misery, fear, hunger, humiliation, the loss of humanity and finally the loss of life.

Contrary to common expectations, such an experience does not necessarily make its victims better human beings. In radical situations, people show moral weakness, break family ties, exploit others and even collaborate with the oppressors. Only a few can look back at their behavior in such times of chaos with pride and a sense of strength. Korczak suggested in his ghetto diary, which is discussed later in length, that one day people would reflect on their role in the history of the war with shame: ‘*Long after the war, men will not be able to look each other in the eyes without reading the question: How did it happen that you survived? How did you do it*?’[[5]](#footnote-6)

Primo Levi, the renowned Italian Jewish writer who earned global fame for his reflections on his experience as an Auschwitz prisoner, wrote about the survivors’ experience. As they looked back and remembered their humiliation they suffered and the weakness they displayed during the situation of terror and imprisonment, they felt not blame or guilt, but shame.[[6]](#footnote-7) His 1947 memoir *If this is a Man* takes its title from one of his poems, which opens the book. Levi begins his interpretation of the Holocaust experience with this poem, which became the theme of his entire writings; in it he wonders about the humanity of the victims:

***If This Is a Man***

You who live safe

In your warm houses,

You who find, returning in the evening,

Hot food and friendly faces:

Consider if this is a man

Who works in the mud,

Who does not know peace,

Who fights for a scrap of bread,

Who dies because of a yes or a no.

Consider if this is a woman

Without hair and without name,

With no more strength to remember,

Her eyes empty and her womb cold

Like a frog in winter.

Meditate that this came about:

I commend these words to you.

Carve them in your hearts

At home, in the street,

Going to bed, rising;

Repeat them to your children.

Or may your house fall apart,

May illness impede you,

May your children turn their faces from you

The powerful text starts with the degraded image of a man and ends with the words taken from the traditional proclamation of faith, Shema Yisrael (Hear, Israel!). Yet Levi's poem is universal, addressing the humanity of all who suffered: not only the Jews but all camp prisoners. He is distressed not by the inhuman actions of the oppressors but by the behavior of the victims, the camp's prisoners who lost their humanity. Levi's book is not another piece of Holocaust historiography, nor just a personal testimony, but a philosophical invitation to understand the human reality.

It is not easy to shift focus from the perpetrators to the victims. The Holocaust discourse often asserts that those who created the death machine had lost their humanity: they were ‘human monsters’. Levi's meditation argues instead that the victims, and thus all people, lost their humanity as well. This is not a comfortable claim to make, and yet it is the authentic reality of Holocaust victims and survivors. The aim of the Nazi system of destruction and terror was to degrade the humanity of certain populations, uproot people from their homes through deportations and ghettoization, and finally annihilate them systematically in the concentration camps. In such circumstances, very few, says Levi, went to their death with pride; very few of were proud of their conduct; very few could say that they went through hell and passed the test of humanity.[[7]](#footnote-8) Even fewer could say that they actively resisted the Germans. Their obvious helplessness became their shame.

The Holocaust is a looking glass through which all secrets and qualities of humanity can be revealed. The victims engaged in a wide range of behaviors, from weakness and immoral conduct to heroism; in between there was a spectrum of grey shades that one cannot judge but can try to understand: the ‘grey zone’, in Levi's words.[[8]](#footnote-9)

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify in the darkness of the Holocaust fragile sparks of light and instances of human courage and dignity. As the Holocaust philosopher Emil Fackenheim suggested, these instances give us back some of our lost human dignity.[[9]](#footnote-10) We praise these precious moments, as they save us from total despair. If we want to encourage the good in ourselves and find moral anchors for life in the future, we must find these sparks of human dignity in our past. The rare stories of people who resisted evil, even when it was irresistible, give legitimacy to our faith in the future of human dignity. If in the darkest time in human history, we find expressions of human dignity, then we can hope that human dignity will prevail.

This is the background to our study of the legacies of two Jewish educators: Janusz Korczak (Henrik Goldzmit) and Yitzhak Katzenelson. Both Korczak and Katzenelson were well known public figures before the Holocaust, both were trapped in the very same historical situation, and both, each in his own way, resisted it. They were both living the same harsh reality in the Warsaw ghetto, and they knew each other. Katzenelson wrote about Korczak in his *Vittel Diary* (1943) where h described the orphanage children’s performance of the Rabindranath Tagore's play *The Postman*.[[10]](#footnote-11)

Both Korczak and Katzenelson played an active role in the broad phenomenon of Jewish resistance to the German death policies, but they reacted to the ghetto reality and the German terror in opposite ways. As such, both can be a source of inspiration in our efforts to rebuild the human cosmos in a post-Holocaust reality. Their role in Holocaust education programa can be a positive one; they can serve as models of human bravery and solidarity in the face of radical evil for young people of today, in general, and of young educators, in particular.

This study of Korczak and Katzenelson is not limited to the war years of 1939–1945. Their response to the dramatic days of the Holocaust was shaped by their early lives, their writings and their pre-war work. The entirety of their life experiences influenced their conduct in days of radical crisis, war, persecutions and impending death.

1. **Two Educators**
   1. **Janusz Korczak – Henrik Goldzmit**

Janusz Korczak was a Jewish Polish intellectual, pediatrician, writer, and a father figure to children in two orphanages in Warsaw. For almost four years under German occupation and nearly two years in the dying Warsaw Jewish ghetto, he ran the Dom Sierot orphanage on Krochmalna Street 92 as an oasis of love and care. It was a Sisyphean task to keep the children's community alive and provide the children with shelter, food, clothing and even provisional schooling. Korczak could not save his children from their Jewish fate, and on 5 August 1942, he and the orphanage’s children and entire staff were sent to Treblinka.

The ghetto chapter of Korczak's life brought to an end his pedagogical work and prolific writings. However, his legacy lives on: his ideas continue to inspire generations of educational thought. The ordering principle of his pedagogy was that a better world would come about through better education and that better education depends on a radically different understanding of children. He saw the child as a complete person, not one in the making, but a person here and now. Childhood is an end of itself, and children have rights to a fulfiling life.[[11]](#footnote-12) His ideas influenced the first international declaration relating to the welfare of children – The Rights of the Child – which was adopted in Geneva in 1924.[[12]](#footnote-13) Yet Korczak was not only a theoretician but also an educator in practice, a ‘total’ educator who combined rich writings about education with pioneering practice.



Janusz Korczak  
GFH archive # 13166

Korczak's pedagogy was translated into practice when he implemented a 'children’s democracy' in both of the orphanages he ran. The children were part of a rational community that engaged in a rational discourse through its children parliament, children's court and the orphanages’ newsletter. In addition to his work with his children, Korczak edited a children's newspaper, *Mały Przegląd* (Little Review) and wrote the scripts for a popular radio program, *The Corner of the Old Doctor*, which was on the air from 1930–1936. His also wrote several very popular children's books, including *King Matt (Mathew) the First* (Król Maciuś Pierwszy; 1923) and *Katiush the Magician* (Kajtuś czarodziej; 1933).

Korczak, whose name at birth was Henryk Goldzmit, was born in 1878 (or 1879) to a well-to-do assimilated Jewish family . Like many Jews in modern times, he was nourished by the universal dream that one day all people would be part of a unified humanity, with no discrimination along religious, ethnic or racial lines. Over several generations, the Goldzmit family had integrated into Polish society, so that by the time Korczak was born, it had left its unique Jewish characteristics behind. It was only when little Henryk was five years old – so he recalls years later in his ghetto diary – that he first learned that he was Jewish.[[13]](#footnote-14) His entire life was characterized by he tension between his Jewish and Polish identities, as he moved from a feeling of belonging to Polish society and culture to one of un-belonging, and then oscillated between feeling that he belonged to or was alienated from Jewish society and culture.

In 1898, Korczak both began his medical studies and started his writing career, winning a prize in a literary competition. For that competition, he adopted the pseudonym Janusz Korczak, an echo of the name of a Polish national hero, Janasz Karczak, in one of Józef Kraszewski's novels, *The Story of Janasz Korczak and the Sword Bearer's Daughter* (Historia o Janaszu Korczaku i o pięknej miecznikównie: powieść z czasów Jana Sobieskiego; 1874). That young Henryk Goldzmit adopted the name of a Polish national character indicates the depth of his search for a recognized identity. As Goldzmit young Henryk was a Jew, an outsider, while as Janusz Korczak he was part of the Polish national narrative, an insider. What was at the beginning just a pseudonym adopted for a literary competition turned out to be a lifelong identity statement.

In 1901, he published his first book, *The Children of the Street* (Dzieci ulicy), which describes the life of the poverty-stricken children in Warsaw. His second book, *The Salon Children* (Dziecko salonu), which was first published in a periodical, appeared in 1906. This book made Korczak popular in Polish society.

In 1904, Korczak started his medical career as a doctor in a Jewish hospital in Warsaw. There he became acquainted with the poor sectors of the Jewish community. Later that year and during 1905, Korczak served as a medical army officer in the Russo-Japanese War. From 1906–1908, Korczak pursued advanced pediatric studies in Berlin, Paris and London. After returning to Warsaw in 1909, he guided Jewish and Christian children in summer camps and came to realize the importance of camping as a means to enable inner-city children to spend healthy time in the country. His experience running the summer camps, which continued to be operational until World War II, was decisive in shaping Korczak’s educational practice and pedagogy. It was during that time that he decided to dedicate his life to educational work and leave behind his medical career, a painful decision that preoccupied him throughout the rest of his life.

In 1912, Korczak, with the cooperation of the Jewish Orphans' Aid Society (Ezrat Yetomim) of Warsaw, established the Dom Sierot orphanage at Krochmalna Street 92, which he directed until his deportation to Treblinka.

During World War I, Korczak served again as a medical officer; towards the end of the war, he joined Maryna Falska, a strong-minded social activist, in developing plans for another orphanage, this one for Polish refugee children in Kiev. On their return to Warsaw in 1919, they founded the Our Home (Nash Dom) orphanage for Christian children, which they led together until 1936, when he had to leave the institution.[[14]](#footnote-15) All these years Korczak divided his time between the two children's communities in the Jewish orphanage and in the Christian orphanage. He was never able to bring these Jewish and Christian children together, despite believing that doing so would be the optimal situation.

As his involvement with the children grew, he developed more fullly his humanistic philosophy and educational worldview, which he expressed in numerous books, articles and lectures. In 1908, he published his famous article ‘School of Life’. His book *How to Love Children*, which he had formulated and drafted during World War I, was published in 1919: in its four parts – ‘the child in the family’, ‘in the boarding school’, ‘in the summer camp’ and ‘in the orphanage’ – can be found his core ideas about education. He continued to expound his pedagogical ideas in various articles and lectures, culminating in his seminal work, *The Child's Right to Respect* (1929).

As a humanist, Korczak wrote about more than just pedagogy. In 1922, Korczak published a book of prayers, *Alone with God* (Sam na sam z Bogiem), containing eighteen prayers from different religions. The book expresses in a literary way his understanding of the value of religious sentiments. Korczak's religious ideas did not fit within any established religion, but he considered religiosity to be part of the human identity. The book is neither a Jewish nor a Christian prayer book, but rather a humanistic book that opens a window into the souls of ordinary people.

Korczak had a rich literary career and became most well known as a children's writer, though the dividing line between his belletristic and educational philosophy is sometimes unclear. Consider *King Matt the First* (*Król Maciuś Pierwszy*), which secured his position as a leading children's writer. The story of King Matt – a ten-year-old prince who becomes king after his father dies and then tries to establish a children's kingdom and implement several social reforms – describes in a literary way the educational utopia of Korczak that he later tried to implement in the orphanages. It also places the blame for the failure of the children’s kingdom on adults, not on Matt, who as a child is too naïve to be aware of the plotting of people around him. One must respect children’s qualities and their limitations. The message of the novel, a central idea in Korczak's worldview, is that children need honest guidance from adults to lead full, rich lives.

The story of Matt continued in less well-known novel *The Little King Matt on the Deserted Island* (Król Maciuś na wyspie bezludne; 1923). Its plot is also a vehicle for Korczak’s humanistic worldview. Like Napoleon, Matt is sent to an exile on a deserted island, escapes and regain his kingdom, only to give it up again when he becomes disillusioned about the realities of life.

Korczak's literary career continued with three other children’s books – *Little Jack* (1924), *When I Am Little Again* (1926), *Madmen's Senate* (Senat Szaleńców; humoreska ponura; 1931) and *Kaytek the Wizard* (or *Kaytus the Wizard*) (1933) – and the play *Madmen's Senate* (1931). This play is a troubling prophetic vision of the rise of the Nazis to power two years later.

Korczak was also an active journalist, and journalism came to hold a major place in his educational toolbox. As mentioned, in 1926, Korczak founded his weekly children's newspaper, *Mały Przegląd* (Little Review), as a weekly supplement to the daily Polish Jewish newspaper *Nasz Przegląd* (Our Review). His secretary was the novelist Igor Newerly who worked to preserve Korczak's legacy after the war. Korczak saw a central place for children’s journalism in any serious educational endeavour. An educational institute without a newspaper suffers from educational shuffle and has no spinal cord for his activity.[[15]](#footnote-16) This children's newspaper also connected Polish Jewish children to Jewish children in Palestine, who were invited to contribute articles to this children's written ‘meeting place’.

Korczak visited Palestine, the Land of Israel, twice during the 1930s. He spent most of his first visit in 1934 at Kibbutz Ein Harod, where he observed the newly formed utopian socialist community of young pioneers that developed there.[[16]](#footnote-17) It was not the ideology of the kibbutz movement that interested him, but the effort to build a new society in an old-new homeland. In 1936, he visited Palestine for the second time, traveling to other towns and villages to broaden his understanding of the land and its people’s experimentation with new forms of societal organization and new types of human relationships.

As the political atmosphere in Poland grew darker in step with changes in neighboring Germany, the lives of Polish Jews became increasingly restricted. In 1936, the authorities closed down Korczak's radio program, *The Corner of the Old Doctor*. Public hostilities forced Korczak to leave the Christian Polish orphanage Nash Dom as well. As Poland became less hospitable to Korczak, he became more involved in the Zionist movement; he also began to write more about Jewish children in the Land of Israel.[[17]](#footnote-18)

At the outbreak of World War II, Korczak acted as he had done in earlier wars – as a Polish patriot. He walked proudly in the streets of Warsaw dressed in his Polish medical officer's uniform. He felt needed again. His radio program returned for a short time, and he was busy giving medical help to the people of bombarded Warsaw. For a short time, Korczak felt that he again belonged to Polish society.

In 1940, Korczak ran what was to be the last summer camp for children living in the orphanage at Krochmalna 92. Even though the Germans had already occupied Poland, Korczak made it possible for his children to feel a sense of freedom in the countryside. In November 1940, by German decree, the orphanage moved to a new location inside the ghetto, along with all the Jews of the city. For the next twenty-two months, Korczak worked hard every day to feed and protect his children. In those months, he struggled stubbornly to keep despair at bay and preserve the orphanage as an island of love and humanity in a dying ghetto.

From 15 May 1942 until 3 August 1942, Korczak wrote a diary, a kind of meditation book, which is a rare window into his spirit, thoughts, feelings and moral struggle as a father figure to hundreds of children. The diary survived the war, and it gives us a rare portrait of the role of an educator in days of a radical crisis.

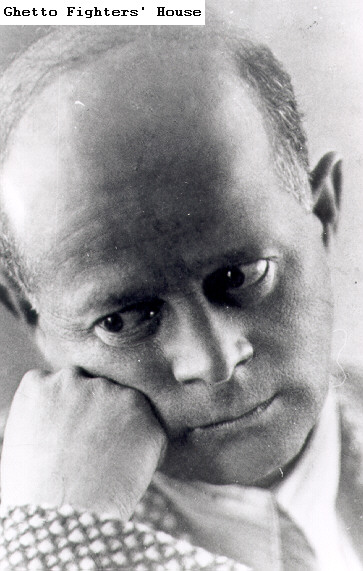
On August 5, as part of the liquidation of the ghetto population, the ghetto children's houses were shut down. Korczak was sent to the death camp of Treblinka along with the entire orphanage, 192 children, and about seven to ten staff members. Korczak was sixty-four years old at his death, and Stefania (Stefa) Wilczyńska, his partner in the leadership of the orphanage, was fifty-six.[[18]](#footnote-19)

* 1. **Yitzhak Katzenelson**

Yitzhak Katzenelson, who became known as ‘the mourner of the Holocaust’, was born in 1886 in Lithuania. His father Yaakov Binyamin Katzenelson was an ordained rabbi, but did not have a pulpit; instead he earned his living as a ‘maskil’ (modern Jewish scholar) and Hebrew writer. From him, Yitzhak got his broad Hebrew education and deep love for his people.[[19]](#footnote-20) His mother came from the Davidson family in Karlitz, Lithuania, a family of rabbis who had connections to the Hasidic movement in general and to the Chabad movement in particular.

In 1896, the family moved to Lodz in Poland, and in 1906 Yitzhak started to work as an educator in the family’s Hebrew school, part of the network of Hebrew educational institutes created by his family. Lodz, an industrial city, with no religious status or national importance, became the center of the revival of Polish Jewish life because of its educational institutions and Zionist activity.

Katzenelson was a gifted teacher, a prolific writer, poet and dramatist – and an active member of the Zionist movement: he wrote both in Hebrew and Yiddish. Many of Katzenelson’s poems were set to music by various composers, disseminated and sung all over the Jewish Diaspora and in the Land of Israel: they attained the status of folk songs, with very few people knowing who had written them.



Yitzhak Katzenelson  
GFH archive # 19002

His early writings earned Katzenelson the nickname of the ‘playboy’ of Hebrew poetry because of the childish charm and playfulness that characterized his verse.[[20]](#footnote-21) In 1910 his first book of poetry, *Dimdumim* (Twilight), was published in Warsaw. In 1912, he established the Hebrew Stage theatre where he would later stage his plays. In 1938, he published a three-volume collection of poetry. In the introduction to this edition, Katzenelson apologized that he turned to poetry in a time of great stress for his people. Today, one can read in those words Katzenelson's piercing intuition about the impending catastrophe.

and life were bound up – Berl Katzenelson and Yitzhak Tabenkin – prominentLaborhad , and he had close ties both with the Jewish settlers in Palestine and with the Zionist movements in Poland. In 1925, Katzenelson visited Palestine for the first time, and in 1933, he made his second visit.[[21]](#footnote-22) He used these visits to the Land of Israel to prepare for his making aliyah. He even bought a plot of land in Tel Aviv for his future home. However, for a variety of reasons – health problems, questions about his future in the theatre community in Israel and his obligations in Lodz – he delayed immigrating to Palestine until it was too late.

From 1935–1939, Katzenelson devoted his energies to invigorating Jewish culture work in Lodz: teaching poetry, hosting holiday parties, and having Shabbat evening celebrations (Kabbalat Shabbat) in the Borochove ‘kibbutz hakhshara’ (preparation kibbutz) in Lodz.[[22]](#footnote-23)

The Germans occupied Lodz on September 8, 1939. The building in which Katzenelson’s Hebrew school met was taken over by the Germans, and the poet had to go into hiding. As soon as he could, he escaped alone to Krakow, where he stayed for several months, leaving his family behind. Then, with the help of friends, he continued on to Warsaw, reaching that city between November 17 and 19, 1939. His wife Hannah and his three sons, Zvi, Benzion and Benyamin, were arrested and deported to Krakow from Lodz. They later were able to escape Krakow and joined him in Warsaw in January 1940.[[23]](#footnote-24)

In Warsaw, the Katzenelsons found themselves among hundreds of thousands of refugees who made up the nameless Jewish masses of the city. In his first months in Warsaw, Katzenelson felt adrift. He mourned the loss of his dream to immigrate to Palestine, which he had planned to do in late 1939. He had no prospects of work and had no idea what he should do. Yitzhak Zuckerman, who had just smuggled his way back to Warsaw from the Soviet-occupied parts of Poland and was attempting to reorganize the Dror (Freedom) movement, heard about the poet and his troubled situation and invited him to join the circles of the pioneering movement.[[24]](#footnote-25)

Katzenelson was accepted by the HaHalutz (The Pioneer) movement, becoming a teacher in the first underground seminar held after Warsaw was occupied. That seminar restructured the Zionist movement around the concept of a shared responsibility for the Jewish people. In his memoirs, Zuckerman describes Katzenelson's role in this founding seminar and in the subsequent formation of the underground movement:

*He lectured on the Bible and Hebrew literature and played an important role in our Seminar. The Seminar brought him close to us. People who bear responsibility together created a special relationship. I am sure that that seminar had a great influence on the party members.… An aura of underground people was created around us*.[[25]](#footnote-26)

This seminar gave birth to an underground movement whose members had a deep sense of comradeship and commitment to the well-being of the Jewish community, and Katzenelson became an important part of it. He became a teacher in the Dror's underground gymnasia and helped plan Dror's other cultural activities. Zuckerman, like other survivors of this group of social leaders, recalled Katzenelson’s unique role in the underground circles and the close relations he developed with the young members of the pioneering movement:

*In days of no hope, and he is tired and broken. We handed him a brother's hand, and he accepted it… He became old. We remembered his poetry, sunny, full of the joy of life … and now in the ghetto, there are dying children, …the ground was caved away under his feet.…*

*Day-by-day he was coming to us, day-by-day he was sitting with us. There was no sadness, which was not his sadness. There was no trouble, on which he did not cry. His heart was full of love to his people, to our pioneers, to his wife and children.… His poetry in those days was in Yiddish, the language of his people in the Warsaw ghetto. He was above all.… He was with us and he was one of us. I still can see him in my mind: short, white hair and serious, and his words simple.*

*When he was speaking to us before the battle* [January 1943] *I imagined one who before a definitive war he spoke on top of one of the mountains of that land.*[[26]](#footnote-27)

Katzenelson gave voice to the comrades' spirit, both in days of joy and in days of grief, giving words to the most intimate feelings of his young friends. As his comrades described him, he was their older brother and a mentor, expressing every whisper of their hearts. His utmost resistance to the reality of persecution came in the form of his writing, teaching, reading poetry and playing drama.

Katzenelson drew inspiration from biblical stories and wrote in a biblical style and with pathos. In fact, das bdIn days of sorrow, he saw his entire people as ‘a collective Job’, and so he wrote the play *Job*. The ghettoized Jews stood in for the ancient exiles to Babylonia accompanied by the prophet Ezekiel, and so he wrote the play, *On the Rivers of Babylon*. People suffered from the cold and hunger, and so he wrote his ‘Songs of Cold’ and ‘Songs of Hunger’. Katzenelson showed that even when the body is chained, the spirit could remain free, and a free spirit could resist radical oppression.

In the ghetto, Katzenelson ran Bible study groups,[[27]](#footnote-28) taught Jewish history and literature, led a drama group, wrote Yiddish poetry and read his poetry to his young comrades, giving words to their unspoken pains, their rage and their desire for revenge. He started to publish in the ghetto underground periodicals – forty-five poems in all – that served as a spiritual beacon for the young members of the Jewish underground. His writings during the ghetto years became a source of inspiration and courage to the resistance movement. Most of Katzenelson's writings of that time were rescued from destruction; the original manuscripts are preserved in the archives of the Ghetto Fighters House in Israel, which bears the poet’s name.

On July 1942, the Nazi death machine reached Warsaw. The Germans rounded up his wife Hannah and their two younger sons, Ben-Zion (then age fourteen) and Binyamin (age eleven), among the masses of ghetto Jews and deported them to Treblinka. He wrote the poem ‘The Day of My Great Agony’ (Yom Assoni HaGadol) in Hebrew, expressing the catastrophic reality of that bitter day when his entire world was ruptured.

With the ghetto walls closing in Katzenelson and his older son Zvi became part of the Jewish Fighting Organization (JOB), which was under the auspides of the Dror movement. On January 18, 1943, joined a JOB squad that was preparing to wage an act of armed resistance, later to be known as the ‘January Uprising’. From the testimony of Zivia Lubetkin, we learn of the words of encouragement that Katzenelson offered to his comrades just before the first battle on Zamenhof Street. The poet became the spiritual spokeman of the resistance movement as it prepared for the last battles in the ghetto.

By that time Katzenelson was fifty-seven years old, and Zuckerman felt the poet was too old to participate in armed resistance. He then arranged for the poet, his son Zvi and one of the movement’s older activists, Tuvia Borzykowski, to be taken to a hiding place outside the ghetto. Zuckerman writes of this decision,

*We organized to go, but I could not take Yitzchak Katzenelson with us anymore; it was too much of an effort for him at his age, and it was a great responsibility. Someone said he knew a hiding place… and Katzenelson and his son were taken there.*[[28]](#footnote-29)

He added, *‘They weren't needed for the struggle, the uprising.*’[[29]](#footnote-30)

And so when the April 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising began on the eve of Passover, Katzenelson and his son were already in a hiding place outside the ghetto on the Aryan side of Warsaw. Unfortunately, they did not remain in that secret apartment for long. Yitzhak and Zvi Katzenelson, who had obtained forged Honduran citizenship documents, ventured out of their hiding place to rhe Hotel Polski, which was claimed to be a safe gathering place for foreign citizens. Zuckerman had suspected that the Hotel Polski was a trap set up by the Gestapo to catch Jews in hiding, but he was unable to prevent the poet from going there; Indeed it proved to a Gestapo outpost.[[30]](#footnote-31) Zuckerman recalls, ‘*Subsequently, we learned that Katzenelson and a few other good Jews had made their way to Hotel Polski and were shipped to Vittel.*’

On May 22, 1943, the poet and his son were sent with 200 Jews from Warsaw to the detention camp in Vittel, France, which had been set up for Jews with allegedly foreign citizenship. The camp inmates were supposed to be exchanged for German citizens, a promise that turned out to be an illusion. During his stay in Vittel, Katzenelson was able to maintain some ties with the outside Jewish world. However, even though his stay in this camp became known to his family in the Land of Israel, his cousin Berl Katzenelson, then the leader of the Labor Zionist movement, was unable to rescue him.

Vittel was organized as a detention camp, and its conditions were much better than those in other concentration camps.[[31]](#footnote-32) Katzenelson and his son were detained in the Hotel Providence, which was part of the camp; there they had some privacy, a desk and a chair, so the poet could write. During his stay in the camp, he wrote two of his most important works, both of which deal with the Holocaust: the *Vittel Diary* (Pinkas Vittel), written in Hebrew, and the fifteen-canto poem ‘The Song of the Murdered Jewish People’, written in Yiddish. It took him three and a half months to write them. The poet, with the help of Miriam Novitz, buried two copies of this poem in the camp,[[32]](#footnote-33) and another copy was smuggled outside the ghetto in the handle of an umbrella and brought to Israel by Ruth Adler. The umbrella handle and the text are preserved in the archives of the Ghetto Fighters House.

In April 1944, the poet and his son were sent to the Drancy concentration camp in France. From there they were sent a few days later, probably on April 29, to their death in Auschwitz. After the liberation of the camp, Miriam Novitz took his writings from their hiding place, and they are preserved in the GFH archives.

* 1. **Different Responses to Reality**

Korczak and Katzenelson responded to the same reality of the ghetto in opposite ways, each of which illuminates the other. Korczak did not give into despaire and worked to ensure the welfare of his children until the very end when he silently accepted their fate. Katzenelson waged a spiritual struggle with reality, mounting an outcry and a call for resistance. This study suggests that their very different responses to a similar reality can be explained by their very different personalities and world views. Their cultural backgrounds, their life stories and their different existential situations explain – without judgment – their different responses.

Korczak was part of a generation of Jews with weak Jewish identities who sought, with only partial success, to gain a respected place within European society. Korczak-Goldzmit was a typical example of the ‘cosmopolitan Jew’ who hoped to achieve salvation in a universal culture, by being part of humanity in its broader sense.

Korczak knew that he came from a Jewish family, but this fact had marginal meaning for most of his lifetime. As he recounts in an article in his children's newspaper[[33]](#footnote-34) and in his diary,[[34]](#footnote-35) his great-grandfather was an observant Jew, following Jewish rabbinic law and hurrying to return home from work for the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. His grandfather was a person steeped in modern Hebrew culture and versed in the secularized world. His father, Joseph Goldzmit, like his aunts and uncles, was already part of the Polish bourgeois with a Polish name; he was a well-to-do lawyer who served Polish clients. Henryk Goldzmit, as Goldzmit-Korczak admitted about himself, was not familiar with Jewish culture and did not know Yiddish or Hebrew; his social milieu was Polish non-Jewish society.

Korczak, like most other assimilated Jews of the time, was not a member of the Zionist movement; its ventures did not concern him. He spoke of Jews as a collective in the third person, as ‘they, the Jews’. Only during the 1930s did Korczak gradually became closer to Jewish life, especially when he realized he would share the same fate as his fellow Jews.

Katzenelson, on the contrary, had a deep, authentic Jewish identity. In Lodz, the family was occupied in nurturing Jewish culture and Hebrew and Zionist education; his parents developed a continuum of educational institutions from kindergarten to gymnasia. Katzenelson was connected with all his soul to every layer of Jewish culture and to the life of his people. He spoke and wrote in Yiddish and Hebrew. His stories are taken from the world of the Bible and rabbinic literature. His book of poems *Yesh Li Shir* (Songs for the Children of Israel; 1954) and his book of children’s stories, *Behalom Ubehakitz* (1955), expressed the intimate link between Hebrew and Jewish culture and his educational work.

Katzenelson's poetry was known and put to music in Palestine and in Jewish communities worldwide. His poems ‘Ma Yafim HaLeylot BeCenaan’ (How Beautiful Are the Nights in Canaan; 1906), ‘Shirat HaKotzrim’ (The Poetry of the Harvesters; 1910) and ‘Shir HaGalil (The Song of the Galilee; 1919) express his deep personal connection to the Zionist enterprise and to the return of the Jews to their homeland. He helped his younger brother Avraham immigrate to Palestine, he visited the Land of Israel twice, and he was preparing to emigrate there with his family. His strong bond to the Jewish masses in Poland and his sense of obligation to continue his educational work in Lodz delayed him until immigration was no longer possible.

Thus before World War II, both Korczak and Katzenelson's life stories had some similarities: both had visited the Land of Israel twice, were on the verge of immigration, but did not make their decision in time and were trapped in the events of the war. However, while Korczak was a person of the world with no intimate connection to the fate of the Jewish people, Katzenelson deeply identified himself with the historical story of his people and its dream to return to its ancient homeland. In the introduction to his three volumes of poetry, published in 1938, Katzenelson looks with bitterness on the role of Jews in World War I: ‘*we have danced in this foreign wedding*.’[[35]](#footnote-36) In the years preceding World War II, he sensed the approaching catastrophe and felt uncomfortable that in such time of national trouble he was busy writing and publishing poetry: ‘*As for myself, I feel uncomfortable, very uncomfortable, and nevertheless… he do[es] not control himself and he sings*’.[[36]](#footnote-38) Before the war, Katzenelson wrote mainly in Hebrew; in the ghetto, however, he wrote only in Yiddish, expressing in an unmediated way the agony of the ghetto Jews, their pain, grief, despair and desire for revenge. Then he joined the call for armed resistance.

Korczak and Katzenelson not only differed in their connection to Jewish life; what also distinguished them was for whom were they responsible. It is is a truism that it is easier for the young to join the underground and engage in active armed rebellion because most do not have families of their own to take care of. Korczak did not have a family of his own – his mother and his sister were no more with him and he had no children of his own – but he was carrying the very weighty responsibility for the welfare of hundreds of children and staff. During the last months of the ghetto’s existence, this burden even increased when he asked the personnel department of the Jewish Council to give him responsibility for running another children's house on Dzielna Street 39.[[37]](#footnote-39)

The personal reality for Katzenelson was different. He lived with his wife Hannah and their three boys, and he had responsibility for their welfare only. When he joined the underground, he was a powerful spiritual presence for his young comrades, but he did not have responsibility for their lives. In fact, the Dror movement comrades sheltered and protected the poet and his family, not the other way around. After the main deportation of the ghetto population, when his wife and their two younger sons were taken to Treblinka, he was in a state of shock and despair. He then was responsible only for his son Zvi.

To summarize, Korczak and Katzenelson, who shared the same historical reality, radically differed in their world views. Korczak was a universalist who sought solidarity with all people and saw nature as the common basis of all people. The idea of humanity guided his thought and actions. He drew on insights from Stoic philosophy, which sees human beings as an integral part of infinite nature. This concept directs each individual’s life and enables him or her to accept the hardships of life with acceptance, or Apathea. In contrast, Katzenelson was a man of biblical and rabbinic culture. He was nourished by the concepts of free will and moral responsibility, but within the context of a national existence and Jewish tradition. The image of the Hebrew prophet stood before his eyes. Where Korczak drew ideas from Greek philosophers, Katzenelson engaged in an intimate conversation with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. While Korczak accepted reality, Katzenelson struggled with it.

When we compare the two – on the one side the universal educator, the assimilated Jew and the person of the world, and on the other side the nationally minded educator – we can ask if these two polar identities can explain their very different responses to the reality of the Holocaust. Korczak was totally committed to the welfare of his children, but accepted their fate with silence, and he never lost his faith in humanity. Like Socrates who drank the cup of poison, he accepted his end with silent pride. Katzenelson was spiritually active up to his last days. He wrote poetry and staged theatrical plays, spoke up, mourned, cursed and called for revenge and rebellion. In the beginning he was a messenger of hope and consolation; in the end, he was the prophet of total despair.

1. **Janusz Korczak: A Stoic Struggle with Ghetto Reality**
   1. **The Last Chapter**

Most of those who have heard of Korczak know only about the last chapter of his life: his nearly two years of struggle within the ghetto walls and then the last march on Wednesday, 5 August 1942 with close to 200 children and about 7–10 staff members to the deportation square and then to the train that took them to the death camp Treblinka.[[38]](#footnote-40) This dramatic and tragic last chapter of his life has fixed Korczak in the public’s mind as a martyr of the Holocaust and placed him in the gallery of heroic personas, like Anne Frank, who are known only as part of the Holocaust discourse.

Indeed, his three years under German occupation, including nearly two years within the sealed Warsaw ghetto, tell a unique story of leadership and the ultimate commitment of an educator to his children. It addresses our principal question about the role of educators in time of radical social crisis. Yet this study goes beyond the dark cover of the Holocaust to explore nearly forty years of Korczak’s rich and inspiring literary career, social activity and educational work. Later chapters examine the ways in which he dealt with the challenges of life; they analyse his writings on childhood, children's civic rights, street children and the neglect of children, children in wartime, and children’s communities in orphanages; they also examine his children’s literature, educational journalism and work as a pediatrician.

It is true that Korczak had an intimate dialogue with death all his life, and yet his educational work is dominated by the struggle for life. To live in dignity, day after day, to dedicate one’s life to the welfare of others, is more heroic than to die dramatically in battle, said Korczak in his ongoing discourse with his readers.[[39]](#footnote-41)

Treblinka was the last waystation. Korczak and his children, like about half a million Jews of the Warsaw ghetto, were sent there to their deaths. Korczak could have saved himself and fled before being deported to a hiding place in another part of the city, but he refused to leave his children. This tragic story serves as the starting point of our exploration of a rich and complex legacy that encompasses more than the Holocaust alone.

On 5 August 1942, the Germans ordered the deportation of the children’s houses in the ghetto, including Korczak's orphanage. Several testimonies describe the last march of Korczak and his orphans: it was about a two-kilometer walk from the orphanage to the Umschlagplatz (the deportation square), on a very hot August day. Korczak was leading the procession, perhaps holding the hands of children on either side of him; several eyewitnesses claimed that Korczak was already too ill to carry a child in his arms.[[40]](#footnote-42) The children marched in rows, either four or five abreast, dressed in their best clothes and shouldering their backpacks. The green flag of the orphanage was carried with them. In his diary, Ringelblum, the noted ghetto historian, mentioned a singing line of children.[[41]](#footnote-43) No one was crying; no one was trying to escape or hide. The older children probably knew what they were marching towards, and yet no one left the lines. It was a silent march to death. According to an unverified account, a German officer who recognized Korczak at the deportation square as the writer of his beloved childhood book, *Little Jack*, offered him safe passage from the Umschlagplatz. Korczak refused and went with his children to Treblinka.[[42]](#footnote-44)

Joshua Perle, who was at the Umschlagplatz that day and survived the war, recalled the eerie calm of the children:

*A miracle occurred. Two hundred children did not cry out. Two hundred pure souls, condemned to death, did not weep. Not one of them ran away. No one tried to hide. Like stricken swallows, they clung to their teacher and mentor, to their father and brother, Janusz Korczak that he might protect and preserve them…. Janusz Korczak was marching, his body bent forward, holding the hand of a child, without a hat, a leather belt around his waist and wearing high boots. A few nurses followed by 200 children dressed in clean and meticulously cared for clothes, who were being carried to the altar… on all sides children were surrounded by Germans, Ukrainians and this time Jewish policemen. They whipped and fired shots at them.… The very stones of the street wept at the sight of this procession.*[[43]](#footnote-45)

Ringelblum's account of the ghetto years includes another testimony about the events of that day by Nahum Remba, who for many years directed the education agency of the Warsaw Jewish community and was then a member of the German-appointed Jewish Council, the Judenraete. During the mass deportations, Remba set up a fake first aid station at the edge of the square, and wearing a doctor's coat, he would declare that people were contagious and would send them back into the ghetto. In his testimony, he wrote that he tried to delay the deportation of the children and asked Korczak to accompany him to the Judenraete offices to solicit their intervention. Korczak refused to depart from his children, even for a moment. Remba described the procession of Korczak and his children to the deportation place as a proud, ordered and quiet march to death:

*Heading the procession was Korczak. No, I shall never forget this scene as long as I live. Indeed, this was no march to the carriages, but rather a mute protest organized against this murderous regime…. Begun a procession the like of which no human eyes have ever witnessed. The children were arranged in fours; Korczak marched at the head with raised eyes, holding the hands of two children. The second group was led by Stefa Wilczynska, the third by Broniatovska, whose children held blue colored knapsacks on their backs. Heading the fourth group was Szternfeld from the dormitory of Twarda Street.… They were going to their death with eyes full of contempt for the barbarian murderers.*[[44]](#footnote-46)

, and ewas Remba himself could not hold back his tears at the sight of this ‘cold-blooded murder’.

Korczak, in going to his death with his children, was not unique: other educators similarly accompanied their children to the deportation square and then the camps when the order came. Yet Ringelblum in his diary writes that Korczak set the standard of commitment:

*It was Korczak, who instilled the general conviction that it was necessary to go altogether [with the children] to the Umschlagplatz. Among the directors of boarding schools there were several who knew only too well what is awaiting them, yet, they decided that it was impossible to leave these children to their own fate at such a critical hour. It was their duty to march together with them to their death.*[[45]](#footnote-47)

How can we understand Korczak's behavior and give it meaning? Several Korczak scholars have defined it as an act of Jewish martyrdom, *Kiddush Hashem* (the sanctification of God's name), giving his actions a Jewish label. Yet writings Ringelblum in his diary dares to ask the difficult question of whether Korczak's martyrdom, which gained nothing, was justified.[[46]](#footnote-48)

Korczak’s admirers tend to see his staying with the children, forsaking any opportunity to escape, as an act of heroism. However, Korczak was the father of his children, and it was obvious that he would refuse to leave them in that dark moment. No one who knew Korczak could imagine the possibility that he would save himself and leave his children alone.

Korczak was a humanist and critical of the idea of a sacred death: he saw life as the heroic challenge, not death. He felt it was easier to die a heroic death and be honored by others than to suffer the everyday hardships of life: ‘*the heroism of a life of labor*’.[[47]](#footnote-49)

However, several weighty questions remain. How can a father to hundreds of children prepare himself – and them – for their inevitable deaths? What did he say to the children beforehand? Why was it important for Korczak that the children walked to their deaths silently, proudly and with dignity? Did he think that marching this way would make it easier for the children, or was it a show of spiritual resistance?

One may also ask why he did not try to save at least a few of the children. And why did no children try to hide or to escape? Even in his private diary, Korczak made no mention of hiding places or attempts to escape. He accepted his coming death and prepared for it. What spiritual stand did he express in the last part of his life? Why accept this fate in such a calm way?

By August 1942 Korczak had spent twenty-two months in the sealed ghetto, waiting and waiting as it slowly decayed to extinction. Death was part of daily life; corpses lay in the street, and children played next to them: as he wrote, *‘The children are no longer afraid of death. In one courtyard, the children played a game tickling a corpse.*’[[48]](#footnote-50)Death penetrated the houses. Korczak, as a physician and as one who took care of many children, encountered death even more than others did.[[49]](#footnote-51) Death was an intimate experience for Korczak, and he dealt with it in his discourse and writings. However, as much as death occupied his thoughts, still the question arises about the meaning of this quiet march towards death.

Yitzhak Perlis, a noted Korczak scholar, claims that Korczak's ghetto diary may hint at a possible answer. Four days before the deportation to Treblinka, on August 1, Korczak wrote a short but important passage in his diary: ‘*Did Marcus Aurelius read the Wisdom of Solomon? How soothing is the effect of his memories*.’[[50]](#footnote-53) What can we learn from this passage in the diary? It is not clear to which book ‘The Wisdom of Solomon” refers; perhaps it was the biblical book of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. Nonetheless, a close reading of this sentence shows that it is not the specific book read by Aurelius that was important to Korczak: it was Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* itself.

In fact, Aurelius's *Meditations* is the only book that Korczak mentions towards the end of the diary. One may infer therefore that it was a source of spiritual support, that it had a soothing effect on him, that it helped him accept his death. Thus *Meditations* can open a window onto the spiritual world of Korczak. Who was Marcus Aurelius? What did he advocate in *Meditations* that helped Korczak cope with the doomed reality of the ghetto? Looking at the life and thought of Marcus Aurelius, the emperor of Rome and a Stoic philosopher, will give us a key to the atructure of Korczak's world.

* 1. **In Search of an Ordering Principle in Korczak's Legacy**

Korczak's ideas and educational work are well known, powerful and inspiring, and yet they have been marginalized in the field of educational philosophy and the history of education. Graduate-level education courses barely deal with Korczak. Why? Korczak's writings themselves are partially to blame for this neglect. He expressed several times his opposition to elaborate educational theories, and as a result his written work is fragmented. The result is that many of those who have written about Korczak only provide a face-value, superficial presentation of his ideas. Inspired as they may have been by those ideas, these scholars could not find any ordering principles underlying them and therefore could not construct a coherent philosophy of education from Korczak's texts.

However, a few Korczak scholars have tried to define a Korczakian education theory, placing him in the context of modern humanistic education.[[51]](#footnote-54) Korczak has been associated with figures like Dewey or Buber, but with limited success. Although we have an evidence that in later years Korczak had several books by Dewey on his library shelves, he never mentioned him in his writings. We do not know whether Korczak was familiar with Dewey's thought when he formulated his own educational ideas, but we do know that Korczak prepared a draft of *How to Love a Child* during World War I and Dewey’s first major book on education, *Democracy and Education*, was not published until 1916. Iit is even questionable whether Korczak could read Dewey well, because he did not speak English fluently.

Buber as well is never mentioned in Korczak's writings. The philosopher’s most seminal book*, I-Thou*, was published in 1923, four years after *How to Love a Child*. More important, even though Korczak and Buber were both humanists who sought the well-being of people in a modern industrial world, each one’s philosophy was based on opposing ideas of humanity: Korczak was an essentialist, Buber an existentialist. Korczak was a philosopher of the immanence, while Buber was a philosopher of transcendence. Korczak’s philosophy, which embodied a real-life approach to education, was quite different from the dialogical spirituality of Buber. While Korczak sought educational guidance in nature and in the actual reality of children – he felt that their bodies, character, biography and family roots, when combined, determine their fate – Buber looked beyond the actual reality of the person into the realm of the free spirituality of the persona. In Buber’s view, a person was present to the other through his or her words, in their mutual dialogue. Buber’s and Korczak’s understanding of humanity and therefore their education ideas pointed in opposite directions.

We need to look elsewhere for the source and inspiration for Korczak’s pedagogical writings and practice. His mention of Marcus Aurelius in the ghetto diary raises the hypothesis that Korczak was expressing Stoic ideas through his leadership in the ghetto.[[52]](#footnote-55) His understanding of death, expressed in his ghetto diary, as well as in earlier texts, and the way he chose to approach the coming death of his children can be understood as a Stoic approach to the realities of life and death.

The Stoicism hypothesis takes our exploration beyond the tragic end of the ghetto, the ‘waiting room of death’.[[53]](#footnote-57) I argue that underyling Korczak's understanding of childhood and education, as well as the practices he implemented in his children's houses, are Greco-Roman philosophical ideas.

* 1. **S****toicism**

Stoicism, originated in the third century BCE, at the dawn of classical Greece, in the columned city square of Athens, the agora. It developed into a dominant philosophical school in the Greco-Roman world and later influenced the modernization and secularization of Europe.

Stoicism does not have one paved pathway; it is rather a direction of thought and a state of mind. It gained importance by offering a new interpretation of the radical changes that the Greek world were going through after the conquests of Alexander the Great and the collapse of its local city-state structure. Stoicism helped give a new orientation and meaning to the life of the individual in a globalized world. From Greece, Stoicism found its way to other parts of the Greco-Roman world, and as a spiritual and political movement, it existed on the world stage for five hundred years and influenced the development of Western culture and European thought.[[54]](#footnote-58)

Stoicism offers a holistic world view, which in contrast to monotheistic theology, understands God as identical with nature or as its immanent spirit. It is based on an ontological idea, a certain claim about reality, but its assertion that human beings are also part of this worldly infinity gives Stoicism an ethical dimension. It thus has an internal paradox at its core: advocating the acceptance of reality while being actively engaged morally and ethically in society. Stoic philosophy advocates an active moral life. Its ethics is humanistic in its essence, advocating the equality of all human beings and the value of leading a worldly rational life according to the postulates of nature.

Scholars of the Stoic school identify three stages in the development of Stoicism as a philosophical school that later had a very important influence on the modern European mind[[55]](#footnote-59):

1. Early Stoa (early 3rd –2nd century BCE): Zeno of Citium, Cleanthes, Chrysippus
2. Middle Stoa (2nd–1st century BCE): Panaetius and Posidonius
3. Late Stoa, Roman period (1st– 2nd century CE): Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius

Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE, Roman emperor from 161–180 CE) was the last identified Greco-Roman Stoic thinker. As the emperor of Rome, he served most of his ruling years outside of Rome with his armies, defending the northern borders of the empire. He wrote his most well-known work *Meditations* at the margins of the civilized world while engaged in constant fighting. Expressing his own understanding of Stoic teaching, it provides guidance for his own self-improvement and inner strength.[[56]](#footnote-60)

Stoic ideas later influenced the thought of the Fathers of the Church. In Christian medieval times, Stoicism was present mostly in the undercurrents of European culture, resurfacing in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, contributing to the secularization and modernization of European culture.[[57]](#footnote-61) The Stoic emphasis on nature as the guiding principle of rational life suited the spirit of the New Age of natural sciences: the Stoic immanent logos became in modernity the immanent laws of nature. Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* was a favorite book of several powerful leaders, writers and philosophers of modern times, including Frederick the Great, John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold and Goethe.[[58]](#footnote-62) As such, it would also have been available to a modern European intellectual like Korczak.

Stoicism as a school of thought had many variations, but a summary of the Stoic teachings of several hundred years yields the following principal ideas:

* Nature is infinite and there is nothing beyond it.
* The divine logos penetrates nature and makes it rational.
* Therefore, the world is logical and explainable by human rationality.
* All human beings are part of nature.
* Therefore, the divine logos (i.e. God’s spirit, rationality) is present in any human being.
* From the perspective of infinity, all human beings, actually all creatures, are equal.
* The law of nature (i.e. the logos, rationality) should guide human beings to their happiness.
* Stoic Apathea: humans have to accept the ruling of nature, including death, in indifference.

The actual expression of these ideas varied from one Stoic figure to the other, but in total, these principles comprise the Stoic attitude towards life and death.

As mentioned, the emergence of Stoicism in the Hellenistic world and its wide acceptance were a response to the need for an new ordering principle to reality after Alexander the Great destroyed the traditional structure of the Greek world. It was a universal world view that gave meaning to a new universal political reality and a new social order. Before Alexander wiped away the political horizons of the Hellenic world, one understood himself as a citizen of a certain city-state: one was an Athenian or Corinthian, for example, and all that it entailed. The polis gave its citizens an identity, but this local structure became irrelevant when the horizons of the ‘civilized’ world were broadened beyond the previously known world. People needed a new orientation and Stoicism found it in nature: the universal guiding principle that, on the one hand, can bring all human beings together and, on the other hand, guides the individual’s daily life in an age of globalization.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE), a leading politician of his time – a Roman senator and an adviser to emperor Nero – was also a Stoic philosopher who expressed clearly the ideal of integrating oneself into the eternal and the determinate flow of reality.[[59]](#footnote-63) As he writes in his *Moral Letters*, we are governed by predestination, and we have to endure all the hardships of life with a brave spirit and indifference:

*What am I to do? Death is on my trail, and life is fleeting away; teach me something with which to face these troubles.Bring it to pass that I shall cease trying to escape from death, and that life may cease to escape from me. Give me the courage to meet hardships; make me calm in the face of the unavoidable*.[[60]](#footnote-64)

The ethical imperative is to live according to the postulates of nature. Apathea, Stoic indifference, is the result of the understanding that no one can exclude oneself from the order of the world and especially from death. A rational person has to accept this order and live accordingly.

Nonetheless, following the internal Stoic paradox, Seneca was not a passive and apathetic personality; rather he was an active public figure in Rome. The understanding of human mortality poses a moral duty. A similar call for moral activism appears in *Meditations*: the verdict of death should not promote a feeling of passivity and indifference, but rather the idea that in every day of their short lives people have a moral responsibility for the world: ‘*Not as though thou hadst thousands of years to live. Death hangs over thee: whilst yet thou livest, whilst thou mayest, be good*.’[[61]](#footnote-65) Stoicism has at its basis a moral pathos, calling people to their moral commitment (*Pietas*) to improving reality.[[62]](#footnote-66) Stoic philosophy, like other pantheistic philosophies, attemps, with limited success, to hold together both Apathea and Pietas: the acceptance of the world as it is and the call for moral action to improve it.

Seeking a a new orientation that would meet his own spiritual needs and would help him reconcile his two identities, being neither totally Polish nor totally Jewish,[[63]](#footnote-67) Korczak found acceptance and felt recognized in a universal Stoic world view: one based on a rational education and the ideal of one language and one unified humanity.[[64]](#footnote-68) Therefore, if we consider Stoicism as the ordering principle to his educational thought and practices, we will gain a new understanding of Korczak's approach to death and his pedagogy.

* 1. **P****reparing to Die**

Life and death are primary elements of Stoic thought and for Korczak as well. For three years he struggled under German terror to keep the Krochmalna orphanage running smoothly and his charges safe.[[65]](#footnote-69) On December 1940, the orphanage had to leave the spacious building it had occupied for twenty-eight years and join the rest of the Warsaw Jews behind the ghetto walls. For the next twenty-two months he strove to maintain the orphanage as a safe haven and an island of love for more than hundred children in the dying ghetto. How was he able to shelter, educate, feed, clothe and give them spiritual and moral guidance in those days of terror,? How could he maintain the children's faith in the goodness of human beings in such a situation of despair? How was he able to keep his own sanity in the face of his children's doom?

Korczak was not the only educator facing these challenges. Studies estimate that there were 100,000 children in the Warsaw ghetto, about 75 percent of whom were in need of social services. Meeting the needs of these children posed a major challenge to the Jewish leaders of ghetto. Just before the massive liquidation of the ghetto population, Centos, the Jewish Central Organization for the Aid of Orphans (Centrala Towarzystwa Opieki nad Sierotami),[[66]](#footnote-70) was running more than one hundred children's aid institutions, including thirty boarding schools and orphanages.[[67]](#footnote-71) Korczak has received so much attention because he was already well known before the war and because he left us his diary, which opens a rare window into his soul. Yet, many educators took upon themselves the impossible task of taking care of children in the ghetto: they waged a heroic struggle to maintain life and human dignity. They and their efforts remain unknown, covered by the ashes of destruction and the absence of historical records. Korczak's struggle represents that of a much wider circle of anonymous dedicated educators who adopted a sacred mission in an impossible reality. Their efforts raise the same question I posed earlier: How can educators do their work of nurturing the next generation in a dying ghetto?

The diary that Korczak started to write in the last weeks of his life gives us insight into his mind, soul and childhood memories: it is an honest, detailed account of the ghetto years and his stubborn efforts to keep the orphanage alive.[[68]](#footnote-72) Korczak describes endless days and evenings of walking from one door to another, begging for contributions of money and for food and clothing: ‘*I returned utterly shattered from the "rounds". Seven calls, conversations, staircases, questions. The result: fifty zlotys and a promise of five zlotys a month. To provide for two hundred people!*’[[69]](#footnote-73)

Korczak's health deteriorated, but he had to persevere and take care of his children; as mentioned he even assumed responsibility for running another children's house. His diary and letters reveal a horrible situation of young children dying in this ‘*slaughterhouse of children*’, *the* *children's slaughterhouse* *(and morgue) at 39 Dzielna Street*’, as he bitterly and sarcastically called his orphanage in a letter to the head of the Judenraete.[[70]](#footnote-74) At nights, when everyone was in bed, he wrote in his diary while downing a bottle of vodka. Drinking alcohol, although it ruined his health, helped him survive Hell and continue to support his children: ‘*Five glasses of raw alcohol mixed half and half with hot water gives me inspiration.*’[[71]](#footnote-75)

In spite of his tireless efforts, Korczak's orphans could not be protected, and the ghetto reality penetrated the walls of the orphanage. In his diary entry on 15 July 1942, he writes ironically about the children being the *‘old’*dwellers of his orphanage who think and talk only about their weakness and sicknesses.[[72]](#footnote-76)

Death was everywhere in the dying ghetto and Korczak's diary reveals his struggle with this reality. He writes, ‘*A body of a dead boy lies on the sidewalk. Nearby, three boys are playing horses and drivers. At one point they notice the body, move a few steps to the side, go on playing.*’[[73]](#footnote-77) In another entry he describes the ‘following scene in the street’:

*A young boy, still alive or perhaps dead already lying across the sidewalk. Right there three boys are playing horses and drivers; their reins have gotten entangled. They try every which way to distangle them, they grow impatient, stumble over the body lying on the ground. Finally one of them says:* ‘*Let's move on, he gets in the way*’*.*[[74]](#footnote-78)

Korczak as a doctor had to face this reality quite often, and he was preoccupied by his search for the meaning of death – both during the day and in his nightmare-plagued sleep:

*What ghastly dreams! Last night: the Germans, I without an armband during a curfew at Paraga. I woke up and again a dream. On a train, I am moved, a meter at a time, into a compartment where there are already several Jews. Again, some had died tonight. Bodies of dead children. One dead child in a bucket. Another skinned, lying on the boards in the mortuary, clearly still breathing. Another dream: I am standing high up on a wobbly ladder, and my father keeps on pushing a piece of cake into my mouth, a big lump with sugar frosting and raisins, and anything that falls from my mouth he puts crumbs into his pocket.*

*I woke up in sweat at the most crucial point. Is not death such an awakening at a point when there is no apparent way out?*[[75]](#footnote-79)

However, Korzcak was preoccupied by death even before the war. In his diary, he writes that suicide may be the only escape from the fear of death and notes that the idea of a liberating death, of suicide, first occurred to him when he was a teenager: ‘*When I was seventeen, I even started writing a novel entitled suicide. The main character hated life out of fear of insanity.*’[[76]](#footnote-80) He even suggested to his sister that they commit suicide together as he had lost all sense of purpose: ‘*I could find no place for myself in the world or in life.*’[[77]](#footnote-81) In fact, thoughts of suicide and death never left him. Korczak feared that he was carrying in his genes the insanity of his father.

Confronting his fear of death and the reality of death all around him, Korczak developed the idea that death is not an ultimate end. He came to believe that if one deals with death in a rational way, one can overcome the fear of it. Korczak's reference to Marcus Aurelius indicates that he was aware of Stoic philosophy and its view that the fear of death is senseless, that death is a part of life and should be accepted as such. In his *Meditations,* Marcus Aurelius articulates this perspective:

*Whatsoever thou dost affect, whatsoever thou dost project, so do, and so project all, as one who, for aught thou knowest, may at this very present depart out of this life. And as for death, if there are any gods, it is no grievous thing to leave the society of men*.[[78]](#footnote-82)

Death is inevitable, and every reflective being is aware of his or her impending death; therefore, everyone should accept death in a spiritual attitude of fearlessness. The fear of death is irrational because rational people understand that death is part of nature. ‘*As generation is, so also death, a secret of nature's wisdom*’[[79]](#footnote-83): death always hangs over life and humans should accept it in the Stoic mood of Apathea*.*

In certain circumstances, death is even better than life because it frees people from the slavery of their bodily existence: ‘*Death is a cessation from the impression of the senses, the tyranny of the passions, the errors of the mind, and the servitude of the body.*’[[80]](#footnote-84) The ‘soul in the cage’ metaphor – which Korczak later used – is first cited by Socrates in Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*, after he drinks the cup of hemlock. In response to the tears of his friends, Socrates tells them they should not be sad because death frees the soul from its cage:

*That soul, I say, herself invisible, departs to the invisible world – to the divine and immortal and rational: thither arriving, she is secure of bliss and is released from the error and folly of men, their fears and wild passions and all other human ills, and forever dwells, as they say of the initiated, in company with the Gods*.[[81]](#footnote-85)

In that same dialogue, just before Socrates drinks the cup of poison, the text mentions a nucleus of a later Stoic idea: the court messenger tells him to ‘*try to bear lightly what must needs be*’*,* and Socrates replies that he will do as he says. When one identifies the inevitable, one has to accept it calmly, in Apathea.

Because death was seen as liberation from the slavery of one’s physical existence, suicide was an acceptable behavior among Stoics in Roman times. For example, Seneca committed suicide after Nero ordered him to kill himself (65 CE). The historian Josephus Flavius (37–100 CE) writes that Elazar Ben Yair, the leader of the Jewish zealots in Masada who convinces his fellow men to choose death instead of Roman slavery, was motivated by the idea of the liberating suicide.[[82]](#footnote-86)

This idea is an important element of Korczak’s world view: he used nearly the same words as Socrates to express his belief that death is not the ultimate end, but rather a freedom from the cage of the body:

*The spirit feels a longing inside the narrow cage of the body. Man feels and ponders death as though it were the end, when in fact death is merely the continuation of life, it is another life.*

*You may not believe in the existence of the soul, yet you must acknowledge that your body will live on as green grass, as a cloud. For you are, after all, water and dust.*[[83]](#footnote-87)

Like the Stoics, Korczak believed that people are part of nature – in contrast to monotheistic theologies that elevate humans above nature – and that after they die their body continues its existence, but in a different form as part of nature. This diary entry echoes the words of Socrates about the metamorphosis of the living into the dead and backward: death is not the end. The body of the dead will continue its existence as the green grass. Later Stoic texts developed platonic ideas of life and death into the paradigm of eternal change in nature, of which life and death are both integral parts. Korczak expressed the very same concept: ‘*Naïvely we are afraid of death, forgetful that life is a procession of dying and reborn moments*.’[[84]](#footnote-88) And like Socrates, who did not try to escape his death sentence, so Korczak, in different historical circumstances but with a similar spirit, accepted the verdict of life.

Yet this understanding of human mortality carries with it a moral duty. The verdict of death should not promote a feeling of passivity and indifference but rather the idea that in every day of one’s short life onehas a moral responsibility to improve the world: ‘*Not as though thou hadst thousands of years to live. Death hangs over thee: whilst yet thou livest, whilst thou mayest, be good.*’[[85]](#footnote-89)

In his article, ‘School of Life’,[[86]](#footnote-90) Korczak presents a monologue of an elderly schoolmaster who is approaching retirement. The principal, who may represent Korczak, does not allow his doctors to extend his life, because he is not afraid of death.[[87]](#footnote-91) He refuses to be judged by a theistic God and praises nature that gave him life.[[88]](#footnote-92) The meaning of life is be found in the understanding that life is an inseparable part of ever-flowing nature, expressed in the Heraclitean ‘Panta Rhei’: everything is flowing all the time.[[89]](#footnote-93)

The idea of the liberating death appears in Korczak's diary in his discussion of euthanasia for terminally ill people and criminals. As a doctor and a social activist, he had thought about euthanasia as an option for the very ill.[[90]](#footnote-94) As to who has the right to perform the act of euthanasia, Korczak suggests, ‘*The right to kill as an act of mercy belongs to him who loves, and suffers – if he himself also does not want to remain alive. It will be this way in a few years*.’[[91]](#footnote-95)

In this context, he also seemed to be ‘toying’ with the horrible thought of euthanasia for the children and the old people in the ghetto, as a means of sparing them the terrible reality of their impending deaths. Korczak had no illusions about what wasawaiting his children, and he wished to save them from the fear of death and suffering. However, he very quickly reached the conclusion that the act of euthanasia is murder:

*When during the dark hours I pondered over the killing (putting to sleep) of infants and old people of the Jewish ghetto, I saw it as a murder of the sick and the feeble, as an assassination of the innocents*.[[92]](#footnote-96)

Korczak never expressed publicly the option of euthanasia for the children whom he knew would soon die.

By the summer of 1942, he had to choice but to face the inevitable reality of death. Korczak knew he had to prepare the children for their coming end by giving them some form of spiritual aid. And so he decided to advocate the serenity of death. On July 18, several days before the mass deportation of the Warsaw Jews to Treblinka, the children of the orphanage performed the play *The Postman* by the Indian dramatist Rabindranath Tagore. When asked why he chose this play, Korczak said he wanted to prepare his children to face their death in a calm way and its message would be helpful in that effort.[[93]](#footnote-97)

Testimonies describe the hall as crowded with Jews attending from all parts of the ghetto. They watched the play in a somber mood: they were no more naïve about the fate of the ghetto population than was Korczak.[[94]](#footnote-98) Yitzchak Zuckerman and Zivia Lubetkin were among the people who were invited to that evening. Zuckerman recalled,

*On the last Saturday before July 22 (the 22nd was Tisha B’Av), Zivia and I were invited by Stefa Wilczynska and Janusz Korczak to attend a children's performance. All the ‘Big Shots’ were there…. The rumors and the Whispers were at their height by then*.[[95]](#footnote-99)

The Stoic perspective of life and death thus could help Korczak, as did the alcohol, continue his hopeless work. It can explain why it was important for him that, on the morning of August 5, his children would approach their fate in a calm and dignified way. It might also shed some light on the troubling question why Korczak did not make a desperate attempt to save at least a few of the children.

The idea that Stoicism informed Korczak's struggle with death leads to another hypothesis – that it also shaped his lifelong educational work, his understanding of the human being and his ideas about education. Let us explore the possibility that Korczak, the educator, was a Stoic philosopher not only in moments of death but also in life. In Korczak's diary of his early years, *The Confession of a Butterfly* (1914) he mentioned repeatedly his teacher of Greek culture.[[96]](#footnote-100) I propose that, underlying Korczak's understanding of childhood and education, as well as the practices he implemented in his children's houses, are ideas taken from ancient Greco-Roman philosophies, including Stoicism.

1. **K****orczak's Pedagogy**
   1. **Childhood from the Perspective of Infinity**

Stoicism is based on the idea of the infinity and eternity of reality.[[97]](#footnote-101) Infinity plays a regulatory role in human life: it gives human beings their orientation for life, their ethics and their path to fulfilment and happiness. To understand oneself and to know one's destiny – to know thyself in the classic teaching of Socrates and Stoicism – is to explore one’s place in this infinity, in nature. Understanding the human being as part of nature has both an ontological meaning and an ethical implication. Human life is regulated not by a transcendental source as in monotheistic traditions, but by the immanent logic of the infinite reality, \*nature. The Stoic logos, which permeates nature, or its later equivalent in the seventeenth-century Spinoza's ‘laws of Nature’ dictates the the rational way of life that leads to ultimate happiness or redemption.[[98]](#footnote-102)

The idea of infinity explains why education is so critically important for Korczak. Pedagogy means touching the other, and touching the other means, in accordance with the divine infinity of this world, touching the glory of God – in its immanent sense – or the endlessness of nature. Every human being is part of this infinity and eternity.

Korczak was a well-known pediatrician and educator, who in his everyday work addressed questions of all sorts about education and parenting. From his responses to young parents’ questions about early child development, the child’s life in the family or how to parent – life experiences that he had only through his work as a pediatrician – can be gleaned insights into his philosophy.

When young mothers came to Korczak with their questions about motherhood and the health of their child, Korczak did not provide practical prescriptions, but rather broad, philosophical answers. He would describe the perspective one must adopt to understand the existence of every child:

*‘My baby.’*

*No, it is not yours, not even during the months of pregnancy or in the hour of childbirth.*

*The child you have delivered weighs ten pounds. There is eight pounds of water and a handful of carbon, calcium, nitrogen, sulfur, phosphorus, and iron. You have given birth to eight pounds of water and two pounds of ash. And drop-by-drop what goes to make your child has been cloud vapor, snow crystal, mist, dew, the mountain spring and the scum of a city gutter. Every atom of carbon or nitrogen has been bound into millions of different combinations. You yourself have taken only that which has to be gotten.*

*Earth [is] suspended in infinity. Its close companion – the sun – fifty million miles away. The diameter of this minute globe of ours is just three thousand miles of fire with a thin, ten-mile deep, cool crust. Spattered upon that thin crust stuffed with fire amidst the oceans, is land. Upon land, amidst trees and bushes, insects, birds and animals, men swarms like ants.*

*Among these millions of men, you have brought forth one more – is it not so? – something infinitely minute, a speck of dust – a nothing. It is so fragile that it may be destroyed by any bacteria which, even when magnified a thousand times is but a dot in the field of the view.*

*But that ‘nothing’ is the brother, the flesh, and blood, of every sea wave, of the wind and the thunderbolt, of the sun and the Milky Way. That speck of grass, of every oak and palm – of every chick, lion cub, colt, and pu*

*There is something within it that feels and scrutinizes – suffers, desires and rejoices, loves, trusts and hates – believes, doubts, draws close and turns away. That speck embraces in thought everything: the stars and oceans, mountains and abysses. And what is the substance of its soul if not the universe, though dimensionless? Here is the contradiction in the human being, rose from the dust, which God has made his dwelling*.[[99]](#footnote-103)

The child is not an isolated monad, but rather an integral part of infinite space, of which God is the soul. The realization that one is part of infinity reinforces the smallness of each individual human being. Who is the person in the context of the infinite cosmos? On the other hand, this realization also establishes the human being's greatness, because he is part of such a grandiose reality. Each person is smaller than a bacteria and yet embraces in her mind the entire cosmos.

Infinity is not only spatial but also temporal. The story of the human being does not start with birth, nor does it end with death: the individual is part of the eternity of reality. In the same virtual discussion, Korczak places the newborn baby within the context of the flow of time. ‘*You say, “My baby”. It is not. The child is a common property; he belongs to the mother and father, the grandfathers and grandmothers… Child and infinity. Child and eternity. Child – an instant in time*’*.*[[100]](#footnote-104) The human being does not come to this world out of nothing, ex nihilo, but as a continuation of infinite reality: both spatial infinity and time infinity.

This idea appears in Korczak’s literary study, ‘Bobo’ (1911). Bobo is a baby in Polish. In this work he states that the baby is not a new creature but the outcome of an endless chain of generations – of their lives, health, society and what they ate. When he was born, ‘*Bobo was already old.*’[[101]](#footnote-105)

By adopting the idea of infinity, parents and educators will gain a proper understanding of their relationship to the child. Every newborn bears not only the genes of his or her parents but, in a hidden text, also carries the footprints of a long history of ancestors. Korczak, in his pointed reply to the mother who speaks about her infant as her ‘own’, did not deny the intimate mother-child relationship, but offered her a broader perspective that acknowledges that an endless chain of generations echoes in the newborn’s life.

In this dialogue with the mother, Korczak was referring both to nature and nurture: the genetics of the child that contains within it the footprints of many generations and the child's family life. Both determine the child's character and potential in life. Each individual, who seems so unique, is part of nature and of a family, a community and the larger society, which all have an impact on his physical and cultural identity. As a natural scientist, Korczak came close to adopting a deterministic approach to the life of the individual. Children are infinite, but at the same time have a context that defines much of their identity.

Understanding the human being requires that one learns the context of his or her being. An educator who wants to understand a child has to learn about her life in the broadest sense: her environment, health, genetics, family history, community's history, and so on. The idea that one can only understand a person in the context of his or her reality carries crucial pedagogical implications: education is neither limited nor isolated to work in the classroom or the orphanage hall, but is rather an infinite adventure of reaching out to the infinity of reality. To meet a child then is to grasp the infinity of nature, sociology and history embodied in his existence, to touch the hidden soul of the world and the chain of generations that echoes in him. Nonetheless, the individual is not just a free agent, always evolving, or just an open possibility as envisioned in monotheistic traditions or in modern existentialism: the child can be studied and explored in a rational way. Education is science, and the rational educator is a scientist who takes upon him- or herself an endless inquiry.

Indeed Korczak undertook this infinite mission. In that sense, he was a monk, who gave up family life and the opportunity to have his own children to become the servant of the cause of the child.[[102]](#footnote-106) In various places, Korczak advocated the all-encompassing character of the educational mission. Teaching was not a job that occupied a few hours a day: an educator who really wanted to get to know children and have an impact on their lives had to work tirelessly, but by doing so would reap the greatest fulfilment.

Korczak’s conception of education as having an infinite essence has led to a major misinterpretation of his religiosity. The fact that Korczak referred to God and wrote a book of prayers, *Man and His God*,[[103]](#footnote-107) led several scholars to characterize Korczak as understanding God in a monotheistic sense.[[104]](#footnote-108) Others even saw these references to God and the prayers as proof of Korczak's Jewishness. However, Korczak was a pantheist, not a monotheist: he saw God as a metaphor for the spirit of infinity. As in Stoicism, God for him does not transcend nature, but is identical with it or is its immanent soul. Understanding the human being as part of infinity makes life infinite and the educational encounter infinite as well.

Life raises infinite questions – that is, religious questions about the meaning of human existence – whose answers are derived from the immanence of life: '*It is possible to educate children without religion, but not without God. How to explain birth, death, the march of generations.*’[[105]](#footnote-109) Questions of life and death are open questions, which demand an openness of mind towards the infinity of reality; they also demand modesty from the educator, who must recognize that he or she will never be able to answer them completely.

Thus Korczak’s conception of the human being differed sharply from that of the main currents of the three monotheistic traditions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam draw a sharp contradiction between the greatness and glory of God and the smallness and limitation of humans. Korczak, as other pantheists, eliminated this distinction. He conceived of the human being as the endless, most challenging text within the context of the infinity of nature.

Furthermore, a central idea in monotheism is that humans differ from the world's other creatures because they are created in ‘the image of God’. Although the biblical text is not clear about whether this phrase is to be meant literally, post-biblical traditions developed the idea that the ‘image of God’ has no corporeal meaning, but rather symbolizes God's free spirit that is bestowed on humankind. God has free will and freedom of choice, and so people have these qualities, which no other creature has. Human beings have the freedom of choice and, therefore, moral responsibility. They are free agents like God. Modern existentialism developed this concept into the idea that a human being is always an open possibility. Korczak was not an existentialist, but an essentialist: he held that every individual has her own reality, past, family roots and genetics, and these elements determine her behavior to a great extent. However, the nature of each individual is never fully known to us. It is a text we may read again and again, but we will never attain a full understanding of it.

Religiosity in Korczak's philosophy is identical with the wonder of infinity. Life questions are religious in their essence because they refer to the infinity of life. People obtain the answers to this kind of question not through theistic revelations or the reading of scriptures, but by rational study, the close observation of reality and the contextualization of human life within the infinity of nature.

The grand questions of education are located within this category of thought. We can never reach final and definite answers about education because it touches the infinity of life. We gain our knowledge about children and education from our life experience, observation of children, metacognition and reflection. Just as life is infinite, so the learning of the children is an infinite task. Understanding the child is like reading a book that reveals new pages and changes its text every day. Although teaching itself is a profession, education, in Korczak's view, is not: rather, it is an art or the expression of a religious worship of life.

As in the world of Greek philosophy, the main methodology through which to attain an understanding of reality is observation. Korczak advocated the rational and meticulous scrutiny of the child and the children's social life. He measured the heights and weights of his children weekly, keeping a close account of each one’s physical and mental condition.

This basic stance towards children – seeing them as part of infinity – framed and shaped every aspect of Korczak's pedagogy: his respect for the present of their childhood years, his approach to practical issues in their lives, his guidance to young educators who sought his advice, and the way he structured the children's houses as rational communities.

* 1. **All Stages of Life Have Ultimate Worth**

Korczak's conception of human life as part of infinity provided the philosophical context for his claim that the child is not a person in the process of being made, someone who will be an adult in the future, but rather is a human being now, who is just in the childhood stage of her life. Adopting the perspective of infinity mandates the understanding that the years of childhood are worthy and deserve respect equal to those of any other life stage; it requires a different understanding of childhood. Time is infinite, and the life of the child is part of this infinite time: any measure of time or evaluation of a specific time loses its meaning.[[106]](#footnote-111) From the perspective of the infinity and eternity, there are no boundaries between stages of life. Like national boundaries – wrote Korczak, inspired by his cosmopolitan yearnings – these are artificial boundaries that harm people:

*There are no frontier posts between the ages of man; we erect them, just as we have painted the map of the world in different colors, having set up artificial national boundaries only to change them every few years*.[[107]](#footnote-112)

Infinity does not have stages, chapters, beginnings or ends. Distinctions of ‘early’ versus ‘late’, ‘young’ versus ‘old’, and ‘fast’ versus ‘slow’ are culturally constructed. From human beings’ limited perspective, one stage of life may look more important than another; however, from the perspective of infinity, one understands that all stages of life are equally important and deserving of respect: indeed, childhood and adulthood, immaturity and maturity, have equal worth:

*The market value of the very young is small. Only in the sight of God and the Law is the apple blossom worth as much as the apple, green shoots as much as a field of ripe corn*.[[108]](#footnote-113)

Childhood is not an introduction to real life that will only happen later: it has its own unconditional meaning.

This insight grounds a fundamental feature of Korczak's worldview: childhood is not a preparatory stage for the future, but a chapter of life with as much worth as any other stage. Children are not human beings of the future: they are human being now and, as such, deserve our full attention:

*Respect for the present moment, for today. How will he manage tomorrow, if we do not allow him a conscious, responsible, life today....*

*Unintelligently we divide years into less or more mature ones. There is no such thing as present immaturity, no hierarchy of age, no higher and lower grades of pain and joy, hopes and disappointments.[[109]](#footnote-114)*

This understanding of childhood has important pedagogical implications. Childhood is not an investment program for real life in the future: it is life as it is. Children are not human beings in the making, who dedicate their childhood to preparing for a distant, unreal future; they are complete human beings who deserve respect as they are and whom we should help in their present life struggles:

*One of the worst blunders is to think that pedagogy is the science of the child; no!  It is the science of man.… There are no children, just people, but with a different conceptual scale, different range of experience, different urges, different emotional reactions. Remember that we do not know them.*[[110]](#footnote-115)

For Korczak, education is the science of the human being: it is not based on faith, nor does it deal only with children. Education is concerned about the relationship between different human beings, who have different experiences of life, but have the equal right for happiness and respect.

Equality does not mean similarity. People in different stages of life are different from each other, and every individual in every peer group is unique. We should respect human beings’ differences, as well as those between cultures, religions, classes, families and life stories. Respect can be seen as the recognition of these differences. Korczak recognized that, even though the residents of the children's houses all wore the same uniforms, under their clothes beat hearts that each differed one from the other:

*A hundred different hearts beat beneath exactly the same uniform and in each case a different difficulty, different work, different cares, and concerns.*

*A hundred children – a hundred individuals who are people – not people to be, not people of the future, not the people of tomorrow, but people now... right now... today. Not a miniature world, but a real world of values, virtues, shortcomings, aspirations, and desires not trifling, but significant, not innocent but human.*[[111]](#footnote-116)

It was God's will, writes Korczak in ‘The Rules for Living’, that

*the flowers and the eyes of people have different colors.*… *Only those who dislike thinking will be disturbed by the differences, and will be angry for the diversity that force man to think, to see and to understand*….. *Only fools ask that all men will be equal* *to one each other*. [[112]](#footnote-117)

Reality is colorful, people are different, and the challenge of the humanist is to see that variety and to respect it.

While acknowledging Korczak's appreciation of the diversity of humanity, we should refrain from reading him as a postmodern relativist. Korczak was realistic about the human condition, recognizing that some adults behaved better than others. Similarly, among children, there are pleasant children with a pleasing character and others who are unpleasant, dishonest or violent.

Korczak’s respect for childhood led directly to his assertion that children have inalienable rights: in fact, respect is the foundation of those rights, the realization of which results in the emancipation of children in society. Respect and rights go together: disrespect of childhood leads to disrespect of children and the abuse of their basic rights. These rights are not a gift or act of grace granted by others: they are an essential aspect of every human being, of every age. Those rights cannot arbitrarily be eliminated when it is convenient for the adult, the parent, the educator. They are not a benefit that adults give children out of their graciousness; children have rights because they are human beings now, not in years to come, and as human beings, their rights are an essential part of their human dignity.

A pivotal aspect of Korczak's life mission was to create the opportunity for children to exercise those rights that are unconditionally theirs. Korczak was one of the authors of the Declaration of the League of Nations (1924), which recognized the unconditionality of these rights: ‘*I call for the Magna Carta of children's rights*.’[[113]](#footnote-118) Korczak's ideas echo also in the UN Declarations of the Rights of Children of November 1959 and that of November 1989 (General Assembly Resolution 44/25), which entered into force on September 1990.

According to Korczak, the ‘Magna Carta’ of children’s rights should spell out three basic rights:

*I have found three basic ones, though there may be more:*

*1. The right of the child to die*

*2. The right of the child to the present day*

*3. The right of the child to be what he is*

*One should learn to know the child well so that in granting these rights as few mistakes as possible will be made. Mistakes are unavoidable. We should not let fear stop us: errors will be certified by the child himself with an astounding vigilance as long as we do not weaken one of his precious abilities – the mighty defensive power of the system*.[[114]](#footnote-119)

The second and the third rights clearly derive from his appreciation of childhood as discussed earlier: children have the right to live out their childhood years in full and to fulfil their own identity. It is the moral duty of the educator to help the child attain these rights. This task can never be completed because self-fulfilment is an infinite process, but educators have to make it the mission of their educational work.

It is more difficult to understand the first basic right, the right to die, which Korczak mentions in several places in his writings. The child certainly has the right to live out her life as she wants, but why does she have the right to die?

Here again we can discern Stoic thinking between the lines of Korczak's writings. In accordance with Stoic teaching, Korczak saw the fear of death as one of the major obstacles to experiencing a full life in the present. As the sarcastic joke goes, ‘Life is dangerous – people die’. If we want to live our life in full and if we want children to live their lives in full, then we have to overcome our fear of death. Because of our fear of the death that awaits our children, we try to keep them as safe as possible, in the process preventing them from living their lives fully: ‘*Fearful that the child may be snatched from us by death, we snatch from him – life; not wanting him to die, we won't let him live*.’[[115]](#footnote-120) Fear of death is an obstacle to human freedom: when one is free from the fear of death then one is free to live one’s life.

Another element of Stoic philosophy may explain this assertion. This idea, which be more problematic for the modern mind, is that the lifespan of every individual living creature, including that of every human being, differs. Everyone’s genetic makeup at birth helps determine how long each person will live; one has to accept that as part of the dictate of nature. As a pediatrician, Korczak was all too aware that some children died young. In response to childhood illness, Stoic philosophy offers both the values of Apathea and of Pietas. To fulfil the value of Pietas, one has to try with all one’s might to heal sick people, but if one cannot accept the natural fact of death – through Apathea – one cannot be an effective practitioner of medicine or an educator or even a parent. The decision to have children entails the fear, which all parents have somewhere in the back of their minds, of unexpected death. If one cannot overcome this fear, one will not be able to take the risk of having children. Moreover, parents who cannot rid themselves of their fear will not allow their children to live full lives.

Korczak's article, ‘The Child's Right to Respect’, was published in 1929, years before World War II and the reality of the Final Solution. However, the idea that one has to overcome the fear of death later proved quite relevant to the ghetto reality. Death should not be avoided in all circumstances; there are times when death is inevitable or even welcome. The terminally ill child has the right to die, and perhaps the ghetto children had the right to die with respect. The doctor in the hospital and the doctor in the ghetto orphanage have to struggle for life, and yet they have to accept the reality that people die and accept it and deal with it with dignity.

* 1. **R****esponsibility for the Present**

Having equal respect for all stages in life infers a total commitment to every single moment of human life. If every moment has ultimate value, then it should be nourished as an end of itself and not as a means for preparing for a tomorrow that in its turn will serve another tomorrow. Childhood has its own worth, and its unconditional value carries with it a significant educational responsibility for the present life of the child. The educator has do more than just passively show respect for childhood: his or her mission is to make this chapter in the life of the child fulfiling:

*The teacher does not have to take responsibility for a distant future, but he is fully responsible for the present.… It is far more comfortable to suspend responsibility, to hold it over to hazy tomorrow, than to account for every hour – right now, today. The teacher is indirectly responsible to society for the future, but for the present, he is directly and pre-eminently responsible to the child under his care.*

*It is convenient to sacrifice the child's immediate present to tomorrow's lofty ideals. To teach morality is simultaneously to nurture the good, to obtain a good, which exists in spite of faults, vices and innate vicious instincts. And confidence, faith in man, is this not in itself a good that can be perpetuated, developed as a counterweight to the evil which occasionally cannot be eradicated, and which can be controlled only with difficulty?[[116]](#footnote-121)*

Escaping into the future is an escape from responsibility. moment; parents and educatorsevadebyingyet-to-be Because the tomorrow is not present, they are not accountable for it, and if the present seems unworthy, they may not strive to make it as fulfiling as possible. The passing moment of the child does not get its proper attention.

Responsibility for the present is heavy on the educator's shoulders: the important decisions are those that deal with the present reality. The educator has to nurture the good here and now and fight evil here and now. In his most important pedagogical text, *How to Love a Child?* (1919), Korczak suggests that the irrational, and therefore immoral, fear of death causes us to sacrifice the free authenticity and the vitality of the presence:

*Fearful that the child may be snatched from us by death, we snatch him – life; not wanting him to die, we won't let him to live. Reared ourselves in an inert and corrupting expectation, we are in a constant rush toward an enchanting future. Being lazy, we refuse to seek the beauty of today so that we may be ready for an appropriate reception of what lies ahead: tomorrow will bring its own inspiration. What prompts the words: ‘I wish he were already walking and talking’ — but a hysterical expectation?...*

*In what way is the child's today inferior to his tomorrow? As regards effort concerned, it will certainly be tougher. When tomorrow finally comes, we start waiting for the next one. For essentially the view that the child is not yet but will be somebody, knows nothing but will know, is not able but will be able — enforces constant expectation.*

*One-half of mankind does not exist at all; the life of that half is just a joke, naïve strivings, passing emotions, amusing opinions. Children differ from adults, their lives lack something, but at the same time there is something more in them than in ours; that life different from ours is a reality and not a virtual image. What have we done to learn to know the child and to create conditions under which he may thrive and mature*?[[117]](#footnote-122)

One who isable to face the reality of death can also face the demands of life. To live is to take seriously the responsibility for the present and to accept the reality of death. Life is an open adventure that always carries the possibility of the end of life. When we deny this possibility and evade its risks, we deny life itself.

Parents and educators are afraid of the present: the future and the past are safer. The present is challenging and sometimes frightening, entailing risk. It demands accountability. It is safer to deal with the un-present future and evade real life here and now. We use the future as an excuse not to be in the present and not to allow the child to live life in full in the present. But life today is the only life that really exists, and it deserves full respect, despite its riskiness.

Korczak’s perspective on the childhood years challenges us to take them much more seriously than we are used to doing. We have to be brave enough to allow children to live fully in the present. We have to learn as much as possible about each individual child and his needs, respect who he is and support his development.

The overarching idea of infinity not only negates the traditional way in which people value children but also emphasizes that every moment is unique and that, once it passes, it will never return. Therefore, each moment deserves the educator's full attention and respect. In describing the educator’s task, Korczak paraphrases the famous statement of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus about the ever-changing quality of nature: ‘*You cannot enter twice the same river.*’[[118]](#footnote-123) Korczak writes instead,‘*Every time it is a different woman who bids farewell to a different person and welcomes a different one upon his return.*’[[119]](#footnote-124) The child, as any living human being, is an ever-changing being. Every day when a mother sees her child, it is as if she is meeting a new human being.

Korczak’s description in ‘The Rules of Life’ of the river of life, which is flowing and changing at all times, reflects Heraclitan ideas:

*Or I stand near a river and I know that it is a river, but at any time different water flow in this river. And you do not have even one moment when the water will be the same water. Always, always, the drops change, all the drops of the same river.*[[120]](#footnote-125)

Stoic teachings rely a great deal on Heraclitus’s concepts, which, as reframed by Korczak, express the idea that human reality is never static. Education does not deal with a fixed, known reality, but rather an ever-changing situation that demands endless learning and careful attention. Every moment of life is precious, and every moment of life demands our respect and support.

From monotheistic traditions developed the idea that life is a mere corridor to the more important stages of the afterlife. The present is unimportant or, worse, a temptation that derails people from the right pathway to salvation. Puritanical traditions saw the enjoyment of life as a sin or a waste of time, holding that human beings were created to a life of labor and suffering. Happiness in everyday life was seen as a luxury. Modern industrialized cultures took this idea further and developed the ideas of ‘saving’ and ‘investment’: capitalistic societies save present assets for vaguely described future days. The childhood years are an investment made in the hope of achieving future success; current happiness is sacrificed in that effort. Korczak challenged this puritanical paradigm of modern civilization by asserting that we have to live our lives each day to the fullest, rather than seeing the present as an investment in the future.

* 1. **W****e Do Not Know**

Korczak’s attitude toward knowledge was derived from the Stoic world view, as was his role as an alleged professional giver of guidance to troubled or confused parents or a counselor to young educators.

The idea of knowledge and the limits of knowledge are elemental parts of the Greek intellectual world. The logos, as conceptualized by Heraclitus, is the ordering principle of knowledge: it permeates the world and therefore can be known, studied and explored. The rational person seeks knowledge both of the world and his own being. ‘Know yourself’, the visitor to the Delphi Temple is advised. But this knowing always involves realizing the limits of one’s knowledge. Socrates taught us that he knew that he did not know, and he continually pushed those who listened to him in fifth-century BCE Athens to accept the limits of their knowledge. The Socratian insight principally dictates an infinite process of learning, which always comes up against the recognition of the unknown and yet ceaselessly demands a continuation of the learning effort. thosejust as ed

To learn is to explore territories beyond the borders of one's former knowledge. Learning is a transcendent mission of the person who re-creates himself in this process of going beyond those limits. This acknowledgement of the unknown – the limitation of absolute knowledge – was a major element of Korczak's epistemology and of education itself.

Infinite reality always transcends our knowledge, including our knowledge of the other The idea of infinity limits educators' pretensions and hubris: educators can never know their students or children in full, nor can they attain a complete theoretical explanation of their work. Elaborate education theories always fall short. If the child is part of infinity, then the educational encounter is always incomplete, and educational theories never gain the clarity needed to fully provide guidance to the educator in pursuit of her mission. Recognizing the limits of knowledge is the beginning of the human struggle to find the proper pathway through life.

Like a good educator, a good doctor always remembers that his knowledge is insufficient. As a pediatrician, Korczak understood that he could never know the precise physical situation of his patients and that often he could not heal them. An honest educator and an honest doctor sometimes have to admit that they were too short-sighted or short-handed to be of help.

Korczak's pedagogical modesty placed limits on the authority of any scholarly, educational theory or any established educational practice. Academic education programs can never encompass the whole reality of the child and the educational encounter. It was more important for young educators to open their mind and develop a new attitude towards the childhood years, the child, the educator and the relations between them. In a conversation he had with young educators about which pedagogical tradition would guide them in their educational work, Korczak suggested that intuition, common sense, love, honesty and modesty, good faith, caring and patience should be their most important pedagogical tools, rather than scholarly books and serious, elaborate education theories promulgated at academic schools of education:

*Whenever there will be schools, I wish the children all over the world that their teachers will confess that they do not know and that they are still young and therefore they don't know. They [the teachers], when they will become old, will utter comfortably a saying of despair: we will never reach the depth of the depth of the well of wisdom*.[[121]](#footnote-126)

When educators reach this stage of intellectual modesty there will be fewer scientific theories that claim complete knowledge and fewer educational practices that claim to be perfectly effective. Such educators are aware of infinity and of their limitations.

Korczak used Socratian language to explain why he could not answer others' questions. He thus expressed the epitome of self-knowledge: that most of reality was beyond his knowledge because it is infinite. A rational pedagogy has to follow these assumptions. If children are part of infinity and are infinite themselves, then rational educators must accept the limits of their knowledge of the child. Pedagogy is an endless chain of questions and honest, but modest, attempts to find limited answers. As did Socrates, the educator with proper self-awareness and self-criticism must refuse to give absolute answers. It is only when educators know that they do not know that they can start to walk the road of pedagogy.

In the beginning of *How to Love a Child* Korczak refers in a typical ironical way to his book and to Socrates' idea that ‘I know that I don’t know’ echoes in every word:

*How, when, how much – why? I am presentment of many questions awaiting answers, of doubts seeking an explanation. And my answer is: ‘I don’t know.’*

*Each time you put aside a book to spin the thread of your own thoughts, it means that the book has served its purpose. Whenever you skim over the pages, seeking rules and ready prescriptions, frowning at their paucity – you should know that if you do find counsels and indications, that this has happened not only despite but even against the writer’s will.*

*I don’t know. And cannot possibly tell, how parents unknown to me can rear a child likewise unknown to me, under conditions unknown to me; I repeat – can rear, not wish to or should rear.*

‘*I do not know*’ *– is the realm of science like an emerging nebula, a nebula of looming new ideas, ever nearer the truth.* ‘*I do not know*’ *is to a mind untrained to a scientific thinking a tormenting nothingness. I should like to teach others how to understand and love that wonderful effervescent creative* ‘*I don’t know*’ *as regards the contemporary knowledge of the child replete with dazzling surprise.*

*Let me emphasize that no book, no physician, can replace one’s own keen thought, own attentive perception.… The demand that anyone should provide processed thoughts is like asking a strange woman to give birth to your own child. There are thoughts that can be born only of your own pain, and those are precisely the most precious ones.*[[122]](#footnote-127)

Instead of asserting that one has absolute knowledge, one must become aware of the infinity of life, which brings with it the understanding that absolute knowledge is unattainable. This mature understanding is both an assertion of modesty before the infinity of reality and a demand for ceaseless exploration, with the awareness that any acquired knowledge will also be limited and that new, uncharted territories will always remain. Instead of elaborate knowledge Korczak spoke of observation and intuition.

Korczak explicitly connected his claims to the Greek philosophical ideas of ‘know yourself’ and ‘I know that I do not know’. In his "The Rules of Life" (1930), Korczak writes that he learned the concept, ‘Gnothi seauton’ (Know yourself), from an ancient Greek wise man:

*It seems weird that, that man does not know who he is and what he truly is, that he even does not know himself. One wise person said, in Greek 'Gnothi seauton'. It means 'Know yourself'.*

*It comes that even grownups have difficulties knowing themselves, and it is even difficult for the wise ones. Children imagine that adults know everything and can answer any question. As we see, we do not know, truly we do not know.*[[123]](#footnote-128)

The phrase ‘*I know that I don't know*’ is repeated several places in Korczak writings, the last time in his ghetto diary when he reflected on his entire life.[[124]](#footnote-129) In Korczak’s world view, there is no place for established pedagogical theories that claim to give the parent or the educator complete answers to future problems of life. Life demands that the educator confront both the infinity of life and the unavoidable unknowns that are essential to it.

Years later, following his two visits to the Land of Israel in 1934 and 1936, in an article "an Education Seminar’" Korczak writes,

*The teacher must know that his knowledge is thin, temporal, only an opening. It is not a shame not to know, disgrace is to cover the ignorance, to evade it, to fake. The child is a consumer who knows to demand and a rigorous critique.… I hear, I see, I remember – it is not much; also, I know, I understand – is little; I know that I do not know – but I feel. That is how a teacher should be.*[[125]](#footnote-130)

The principle of ‘not knowing’ was thus a basic stance for Korczak.

During those two tours to the Land of Israel, when he was asked, both as a pediatrician and an educator, to respond to the inquiries of parents and young educators about proper educational practice, he avoided giving them specific answers, based on the principal idea of the unknown. Instead he offered them Socratian rationality as a tool to deal with questions, which never have one clear-cut and reasonable answer. He told them repeatedly to have an open mind and to trust their common sense. Instead of providing pretentious, seemingly definitive answers to educational dilemmas, Korczak would assert the importance of contemplation, common sense and intuition. Because one could never attain an absolute knowledge of infinite reality, theoretical books have a very limited value. Educators will begin to learn only from the point they realize that they do not know the absolute reality of the child; they must understand that they face an infinite mission that no theory of knowledge can totally encompass. True educational encounters always transcend our knowledge. Teaching is an unlimited adventure.

Knowing that one does not know is a place of decency and intellectual integrity and the starting point of any genuine learning. This idea reappears in his ghetto diary:‘*Now that I know that I don't know and why I don't know, now that I can act in accordance with the supreme rule "don't harm the sick". I set out for unknown waters*.’[[126]](#footnote-131) The acknowledgement of unknowing is a necessary condition for embarking on a new voyage of learning. If one does not engage in this adventure of ever learning, life becomes boring and an intellectual laziness overcomes the intellect.

The knowledge of one’s unknowing and the infinite commitment to the sake of the child lead also to the modesty of the educator who understands his profession as a lifelong mission:

*When I perceive in a child the immortal spark of the fire stolen from the gods, a flash of unruly thought, the dignity of anger, a gust of enthusiasm, autumnal melancholy, self-effacing sweetness, alarming dignity, the courageous, joyous, confident, forceful search for causes and objectives, tedious endeavors, alarming qualms of conscience – then I bow humbly for I am falling short. I am a weakling, a coward.*

*What am I to you if not a deadweight upon your free flight, a cobweb binding your colorful wings, the shears whose murderous purpose is to cut exuberant shoots? I stand in your way or move about bewildered, grumbling, annoying, concealing or insincerely persuasive, colorless and ludicrous. [36].*

*Good teachers are distinguished from bad ones only by the number of errors made, and injustices done.*[[127]](#footnote-132)

Korczak thus acknowledged that good educators make mistakes; no one can claim, despite having professional knowledge, to be a perfect teacher. An individual who desires to be successful all the time cannot be an educator. In this claim, Korczak translated Stoic metaphysics into an educational practice. Given that the human being is an infinite entity, singular and ever changing, the educational encounter cannot be grasped by any formulas or absolute theories. The educator faces a limitless mission, which in principle cannot allow for complete success or the absence of errors or mistakes.

From this stance of modesty, however, the educator embarks on a long and winding adventure.

* 1. **Reality-Guided Pedagogy**

The concept of ‘the knowing of the unknown’ sets the parameters for the proper state of mind and actions that enable the educator to deal with any specific educational situation. First and foremost, an educator needs to heed the classic teaching of the Temple of Delphi, ‘know yourself’. Educators have to understand their own identity, feelings, thoughts, abilities and limitations before they can teach or demand something from the child:

*Be true to yourself, seek your own road. Learn to know yourself before you attempt to learn to know the children.… You yourself are the child whom you must learn to know, rear, and above all, enlighten.[[128]](#footnote-133)*

The importance of gaining self-awareness is not a piece of casual advice, but rather an essential element of Korczak's immanent world view, inspired by Stoicism and its roots in classic Greek thinking. When one knows oneself and one’s reality, one can act according to one’s own authentic nature and be more effective.

When advising a young, frustrated educator in the boarding school, who was struggling with the difficulties of educational work, Korczak suggested that he follow the 'reality principle':

*Teacher, take heart! You are already well on the way to abandoning the prejudiced, sentimental view of the child. You already know that you do not know. Things are not what you have thought,… Remember, it is no shame to be lost in the great jungle of life.… Are you suffering?  In pain, truth is born.*[[129]](#footnote-134)

In Korczak's pedagogical philosophy, not everything is attainable. Korczak as a pediatrician and a social activist, witnessed the socio-economic reality of inner-city children, and he had no romantic view of education. Modesty is not only about knowledge but also about what educators can achieve in their work. The sky is not the limit as the realities of life are the determining factors in the life of the child.

According to Stoic teaching, the proper way of conduct is derived from the understanding of one's place in reality. Nature gives people the best guidance to real happiness in life. One has to know one’s authentic self in order to find the proper way, one’s ‘own road’ in the world. The authentic self has an essence or positive nature that one needs to explore. That self is not a possibility open to change, as modern existential philosophies suggest, but an inner reality one has to understand and cultivate.

And so proper pedagogy has to understand and cultivate the child’s essential nature. Educators who want to find the best way for the child to develop under their supervision have to understand the child and get to know his or her nature. The nature of the child will be the best guide to pedagogical practice and will also instruct educators to temper their expectations:

*There are no children, just people, but with a different conceptual scale, different ranges of experience, different urges, different emotional reactions. Remember that we do not know them….*

*Be yourself and watch children carefully whenever they can be what they really are.  Look, and make no demands. For you will not force a lively, impulsive child to become cool, calm and collected. The distrustful and taciturn, will not turn frank and talkative.…*

*And what about yourself?… You have a kind smile and a patient look, just say nothing. Perhaps they will quiet down anyway? They are seeking their own way. Do not demand of yourself that you become right away an earnest, full-fledged educator with psychological bookkeeping in your heart and an educational code in your head. You have a wonderful ally, a magician – youth…. Not – what ought to be, but – what is possible.[[130]](#footnote-135)*

Based on the principle that education should start with the diagnosis of the reality of the child before moving to the prognosis, Korczak dedicated a large part of his time and effort to carefully observing his children and collecting data about their physical and behavioral reality. Observation of nature was the starting point of Greece philosophy in the pre-Socratic era and the prime methodology of science. Korczak adopted the same method, believing that observation, supplemented by contemplation, is the key to a proper education.

Korczak’s world view was shaped by his medical training. The physician is not satisfied with the healing of the ill person, but must diagnose the medical problem and from this diagnosis infer the proper medical response. Educators as well must craft their actions based on a proper diagnosis. Korczak was dealing with poverty-stricken children, children from broken families and orphaned children. Life left its bitter imprint on the identity of these children, influencing their behavior. Korczak had to learn these children’s history, background and physical condition. He meticulously observed the physical condition of the children, measuring their physical development on a weekly basis and documenting all aspects of their life. The physical data were very important for his work: ‘*Why waste the material of five hundred of the children's weight and height charts and not describe the wonderful, true, joyous work of the growth of man?*’[[131]](#footnote-136) His understanding of children and his pedagogical philosophy came out of this careful scrutiny of their life as a whole and an understanding of their reality. From the whole picture he developed his educational response.

The demand that one has knowledge of both the self and the other is a fundamental principle in Korczak’s pedagogical world. Attempting to know the unknown requires study, exploration, and motivation. Yet it calls for more than intellectual activity: it is also an expression of the seriousn commitment to the ethics derived from the philosophy of the immanence. According to Stoic teaching, reality provides guidance for what is good and what is bad, the wanted and the unwanted. Here, underlying all the immanent philosophies — from the Stoics, through Spinza's metaphysics and ethics, and finally to modern science and Korczak's immanent pedagogy – is the paradox of human free will. There is no coherent philosophical way to reconcile the Stoic Apathea, the acceptance of the dictates of nature, and the Stoic Pietas, the imperative for moral activity in society.

Philosophers of immanence have struggled hard, but unsuccessfully, to secure the place of the individual within an infinite and eternal reality.[[132]](#footnote-137) Nor was Korczak able to escape the same predicament posed by free will. His emphasis on knowing the child, who she is and what she can be, is appealing and yet carries an inevitable problem, which all educators have to address when they discuss the nature and character of their children and students: how to deal with the role of change in the future development of the individual as a free agent. If a child has an essential nature – derived from his biography, family history, and genetics – that the educator has to study in order to properly educate the child, then the danger of predestination and determinism arises. The educational encounter between them would be predestined by this known ‘nature’. It is true that Korczak echoed Heraclitean’s concept that the child is always changing,[[133]](#footnote-138) and yet the freedom of the individual to become something that she is not yet, as found in modern existentialism, was not part of Korczak’s world view. The individual has a nature, or an essence, that determines his or her behavior, and the task of the educator is to learn and know this nature.

In this respect, Korczak's understanding of humanity differed than that underlying modern philosophy; for example, Schelling's human’s ultimate freedom of action (*On Human Freedom*; 1989), or the post-modern existential philosophies of Heidegger's *Dasein* (Being and Time; 1962 [1926]), Sartre's concept of existence (*Existentialism and Humanism*; 2007 [1946]), or Buber's dialogical thinking (*I–Thou*; 1924). These modern philosophers stressed that human beings have no essence, but are free agents with pure ‘being’ or ‘presence’ and are open to all possibilities. In contrast, Korczak acknowledged that people change all the time, but they are neither free from their nature nor from their place in the infinity of nature and always have to struggle with their heritage.

In addition to rationality, Korczak's pedagogy was shaped by wholistic observation, both of physical bodily existence and the subjectivity of the person. That mind–body integration also exists in Stoicism, where the logos penetrates the natural reality. As an educator who was also a physician, Korczak naturally observed both children’s physical development, the changes in their bodies and health, and subjective development, through weekly conversations. He perceived the educational act itself as integrative, dealing with the physical existence and the spiritual life of the human being.

The truth is concealed in reality, and the philosopher and the pedagogue extract it with their keen vision. No dream about a future reality, a sort of new ‘tomorrow’, dictates the educational path; rather it is shaped by present reality, what educators can see for themselves. This was the guiding principle of all of Korczak's work. His was a naturalistic pedagogy, derived from the modesty of realizing the impossibility of knowing the unknown.

The educator, who knows that the child is part of a rational reality, does not strive for utopian achievements, but rather for what is achievable in an imperfect human reality. The observation of reality emerges from a spiritual stance of disillusionment. Reality has both good and bad in it; it offers both abilities and disabilities, possibilities and limitations. The educator has to learn about children’s lives from observing their reality and then plan educational interventions accordingly. Otherwise, the educator will be bitterly disappointed again and again.

In one of his articles about the special education school (January–March, 1925), Korczak gave his readers typical Stoic advice: ‘*The educator, who frowns, frets, feels resentment toward the child for being what he is, how he was born, where he learned from his life experiences, is not an educator.*’[[134]](#footnote-139) An immanent pedagogy, one based on the observation of reality and not on a revelatory message or a sacred text, is key. Again and again, Korczak advised young educators to observe their students closely and learn about their essential nature. The knowledge gained from that observation is not abstract, but rather obliges the educator to implement an educational act that is relevant to reality and embodies a clear moral stand about reality. Reality has a regulative role.

In his seminal text, *How to Love Children*, Korczak offers an example of the watchful observation of the lives of children at home, in school, at camp and the orphanage that is required and that must embody attentiveness and respect as well. He speaks on the French entomologist Jean Henri Fabre who was proud that in all his studies he never killed or harmed even one insect: he merely watched the insects' activities and behavior. Korczak suggests that educators relate to children just as Fabre related to the insects: as scientific explorers:

*The great French entomologist Fabre boasts of his historic observations of insects without having had to kill a single one. He studied their flight, habits, joys and sorrows. He watched them keenly while they played in the sunbeams, fought and .fell in battle, hunted food, built shelters, gathered stores. He was never indignant. With prudent eye he followed the mighty laws of nature in their barely perceptible vibrations. He was a people's teacher. He probed with the naked eye. Teacher be a Fabre of the children's kingdom!*[[135]](#footnote-140)

Korczak’s later text, *The Rules of Life* (1930–1933), also explores the importance of observation of the children's reality in guiding educational interventions: ‘*There are different people in the world: also adults, also young. Different are also the aunts and uncles, and different are the adult guests*’[[136]](#footnote-141) – and the differences continue in many aspects of life. For example, some people are more kind or friendly than others. Each individual deserves our diagnosis and a response attuned to his or her individuality.

This immanent pedagogy dictates the horizons of educators’ actions and their educational inspirations. Children are the educator’s raw material and work file. The overall aim of education is to help children flourish, develop their capacities and realize all their potentialities in full; in other words, to attain their maximum selves. To fulfil this aim, educators must learn everything they can about the reality of children and how they can achieve the best for them:

*Children should be assured the freedom necessary for harmonious development of all their mental powers, allowed fully to expand their latent powers, be brought up with respect for virtue, goodness, beauty and freedom.*[[137]](#footnote-142)

The respect for the child and pedagogical modesty come both from educators’ understanding of the infinite essence of the educational encounter and their awareness of its limitations. Educators thus have a very weighty responsibility: to cultivate what is there. This work is not a short-term task, but rather a continuing mission that always entails new discoveries and an endless struggle with the fullness of life. Its fulfilment relies on educators’ patience and their understanding of both the limitations of their knowledge and their limited ability to change reality.

A moral pathos guided Korczak's life, who dedicated himself totally to the well-being of his children. It stemmed from the Stoic pathos: ‘*What then remaineth but to enjoy thy life in a course and coherence of good actions, one upon another immediately succeeding, and never interrupted, though for never so little a while?*’[[138]](#footnote-143) Korczak struggled to imbue every moment of his life with acts of grace and help to others: those actions are the ones that give meaning to life and are true and pure, even as one navigates the most difficult challenges.

* 1. **T****he Rational Community**

Korczak’s optimistic, perhaps naïve, saying – to mend the world is to mend education – echoed the ancient Greek concept that the world is rational in its essence. Following from that principle is the idea that a rational world is mendable by a rational discourse, that a deeper understanding of reality and its logic will make people more ethical and healthier.

Socrates walked the street of Athens, trying to help his interlocutors attain a better understanding of ethical ideas applicable to their daily lives. As transmitted by his disciple Plato who wrote about the idea of the Good, Socrates believed that greater understanding would lead to more ethical conduct. If people would leave the darkness of the ‘cave’ in which they were intellectually dwelling and would examine the Good, they would follow the dictates of the Good. Clearly, the Athenians did not want to examine ethical thinking and sentenced Socrates to death. Plato's legacy has been to bring people to an understanding of rational ethics so that they will no longer wish the death of the philosopher.[[139]](#footnote-144)

The idea that knowledge and rationality are the tools to deal with prejudice and superstition was also at the core of the Enlightenment era, which brought about a revival of the classical word, the Stoa included. The French philosopher Voltaire said that superstition is the result of ignorance. He believed strongly in the power of rationality as a redeeming force, expressing his confidence that very soon, when people would become more rational, torture would disappear.[[140]](#footnote-145) People’s wrong actionsstemmed fromtrue Korczak’s world view was shaped by the Enlightenment heritage, which celebrated the idea that human errors can be eliminated by human rationality. From this concept Korczak drew his optimistic trust in the power of reason and therefore of education to mend the consciousness of people. Assuming that rational people base their lives on rational discourse, Korczak believed that one could reform the world through reforming education.[[141]](#footnote-146) Because an understanding of reality can be attainable by rationality, then rational discourse is the most effective avenue to achieve conflict resolution.

Korczak based his educational philosophy and his efforts to build a children's democracy in his children's houses on this optimistic assumption that if we want to reform education and attain a better world, we should create the social conditions that will enable and nourish rational discourse. This trust in the remedial quality of rationality was a guiding force for him. Yet Korczak was not the first to advocate children's self-guided communities; such proposals had developed earlier in progressive pedagogy circles. Educational scholars began to write about changing the power ‘game’ that characterized the traditional education system into a more cooperative one, based on a kind of an agreement between the children and the adults. In this new paradigm, children are not the subjects of the system but its citizens.

Korczak was aware of these pioneering initiatives, but he implemented these ideas in his children communities in his own way.[[142]](#footnote-147) He founded the children’s democratic communities in the hope that they would be guided by mutual respect among its citizens and in the belief that in that children's world, there would be no more segregation and discrimination between Jewish and Christian children and between rich and poor children and that the rights of all children would be respected.

Korczak and his education partners, Stefania Wilczynska at Dom Sierot Orphanage and Maryna Falska at Nash Dom Orphanage, crafted the two children's houses as rational communities, using a system of rational discussion tools to create a community of rational discourse. This goal of attaining a rational discourse was the thread connecting all of Korczak's children communities' institutions: the children’s parliament, children's court, newspaper and bulletin board, as well as weekend discussions and joint literature reading that included all children and staff alike. All of these initiatives, which continue to fascinate educators, offered the children and staff an opportunity to think and reflect both on their personal lives and on their place in the community. Even mundane spaces such as the kitchen and the laundry offered an opportunity for the exchange of ideas.[[143]](#footnote-148) Korczak believed that through these rational initiatives the children and staff could solve their dilemmas and problems in a rational and positive way.

As noted by Igor Newerly, Korczak's aide for several years, the children’s democracy reflected the changes then taking place in the broader Polish context.[[144]](#footnote-149) Poland was ‘walking’ its first steps towards an independent Poland after nearly two centuries of foreign occupation. Democracy was something to be learned by Polish adults and children alike. However, the children's communities were not envisaged as experimental learning spaces for future life: Korczak believed that the rational life is the proper way of being for all ages in the here and now.

The fundamental institution in the orphanages’ children democracy was the children's parliament. First and foremost, it was an educational tool. Korczak envisioned it is an experiment in a democratic community life; children had to learn to live up to community social standards in order to take an active part in its political life. It was in the parliament that the social code, rules and regulations of the children’s homes were devised, with the aid of the staff. The children in each home elected twenty members to the parliament, who, with with the sensitive guidance of adults, regulated the life of the orphanage community:

*We have matured to the point of attempting self-government. This is the way our parliament was created though nothing definite can as yet be said about its prospects. The parliament is composed of twenty deputies. Five children constitute a constituency. Any candidate receiving four votes is elected. All are entitled to vote but candidacy is restricted to those who have never been brought to the Court on charges of dishonesty. The dishonest (pilfering, fraud) are granted the right to rehabilitation. The Parliament endorses or rejects laws drafted by the Judicial Board. It declares special holidays and grants the right to issue memorial cards.*[[145]](#footnote-150)

As much as Korczak appreciated the value of democracy, he was realistic, always critiquing his own ideas – and he did not overestimate the ability of children for self-governance. He recognized that children could not manage their social life alone, but needed adult guidance. mNor was he naïve about the goodwill of the adults in guiding children in their new independence. Korczak's children’s book, *King Matt the First* (1923), tells a story about the failure of children's government, primarily because the adults do not give the young king the proper guidance and, in fact, betray him. He thus recognized that both children and the adults can abuse power. Governance institutions should be run cautiously and not be subject to adults' manipulation:

*Caution is advisable, the limits of the Parliament's prerogatives should be extended slowly, the limitations and checks on its operations may be ample as long as they are unambiguous and forthright. Otherwise, there is no point in holding elections, in playing at self-government. We must not mislead either the children or ourselves. To play that game would be distasteful and harmful.*[[146]](#footnote-151)

An analysis of the code of laws developed by this parliament shows how carefully they were crafted. They were ‘soft’ laws, oriented to motivating children towards good citizenship. Punishment for infractions was not harsh and was limited mostly to educational actions. more arena in which than to impose punishment;being put on trial was more important than the punishment laid down by the court.

The peers' court, the second major institution of self-government, attracted worldwide attention to Korczak's children's houses. It was guided by adults and was aimed to protect the members of the community from the violence present in the day-to-day life of society outside its walls:

*All sorts of people live together. One is small, one is big; one is strong, one is weak; one is clever, another not so clever; one is happy, another is sad; one is healthy and another is sick. The Court sees that the big do not bully and that the small do not make themselves a nuisance to the big. That the clever do not take advantage or make fun of the less clever. That the bad-tempered does not annoy,… that the happy should not joke at the sad.*[[147]](#footnote-152)

Nonetheless, the children's court was not only a governance institution – as such its power was naturally limited – but it was also an educational institute that aimed to teach that conflicts could be solved in a rational way.

The parliament and the court were not sufficient to maintain a rational community. Any rational community from ancient Greece onwards needs an agora, a common space for common discourse. In addition to the children's parliament and court, the children's newspaper served as such a common space, enabling ongoing community dialogue in which all members of the community could participate:

*I firmly believe in the need for newspapers for children and youth, meaning papers in which they themselves are the contributors, and which tackle subjects salient and interesting to them – not just weeklies printing fables and pretty verses. And the children and youth must themselves say in their school newspapers what they find important.[[148]](#footnote-153)*

The newspaper was the place for the children to express their ideas and needs in a respectful way. Korczak saw the spirit of the institution in the pages of the newspaper. Everything that needed to be said by the members of the community was in it:

*What is the benefit of a school newspaper? Immense! It teaches a conscientious discharge of voluntary commitments, a work in a planned manner, based on the combined effort of various people. It teaches courage in voicing one’s opinion and how to conduct a decorous controversy on the basis of argumentation rather than bickering. It gives honest publicity in place of rumor and gossip. It emboldens the meek, pricks the bubble of excessive cockiness, calms and guides public opinion. It is the conscience of the community. You have a grievance – write to the paper. You are upset – write. You charge me with deceit or ignorance – all right, let’s discuss it openly, in the presence of witnesses, in writing, and create a document that we can repudiate.*

*The newspaper is a link, which binds the class or school. Through it, complete strangers come to know each other. It puts a spotlight on those quiet and thoughtful ones who in solitary silence can express themselves on paper but whose voice is lost in a vocal dispute*.[[149]](#footnote-154)

Sharing thoughts and opinions is at the heart of a rational community. But these thoughts, rather than being shouted out, need to be written down in a clear and respectful way and shared with others who can respond to them. A written opinion is an invitation for a rational dialogue, the key to conflict resolution and decent human relations.

The newspaper is also a space for learning the basic tenets of democracy. Writing down an idea or opinion is a basic democratic skill that people have to learn; other fundamental skills are reading others' opinions and listening to others. Democracy is based on taking part in community dialogue. The newspaper is by no means just a children's ‘game’: it is a shared space that facilitates the creation of a community with a shared identity and common ethics and rules of conduct:

*In an educational institution without a newspaper, the staff seem to me uncoordinated and desperate, pottering and grumbling, going around in circles, leaving the children without orientation and control, proceeding ad hoc and at random, without tradition, without memories, without a developmental path to the future.*

*A newspaper links firmly one week to another. It binds the children, the professional staff, and the service staff into an integral whole.*

*The paper is read to all the children. Every change, improvement, reform, every shortcoming and complaint find their reflection in it….*

*For a teacher who is anxious to understand the child and himself, the newspaper is an excellent regulator of words and actions. It is a vivid chronicle of his work, efforts, bunders, the difficulties, which have to be coped with.… It is a priceless research material.*

*Perhaps in the not too distant future, teachers' colleges will introduce lectures on educational journalism.*[[150]](#footnote-155)

Thus, the newspaper is the community agora where ideas are exchanged, the narrative of the institution is recorded and its collective wisdom is collected and developed. It is the milieu in which the community spirit develops.

For Korczak, the community's identity was a spoken, written and read identity. His vision of identity fused ideas derived from Greek classical thought with concepts from the Jewish world. Even though Korczak's Jewish roots were weak, the importance he gave to the newspaper as the center of the community corresponded with cultural developments among intellectual Jewish circles in twentieth-century Europe, when the newspaper replaced the yard of the synagogue as a common space. In the first half of the twentieth century, there was an unprecedenteded flourishing of Jewish journalism, which became for modern Jews, who came less and less to the synagogue on a regular basis, a surrogate virtual meeting place.

Korczak invested a lot of his time and energy in running a weekly children's newspaper that was a supplement to the Polish newspaper, *Nasz* *Przegląd.* Hecreated a community of readers and writers around his Polish Jewish children’s newspaper, *Mały Przegląd* (1926–1939), which extended beyond the borders of Poland; it even gained readers and correspondents in the Land of Israel, until it ceased to exist in September 1939 with the German occupation. Korczak strongly advocated that every school should have its own newspaper that would weave together the life experiences of the institution into a unified life story with identity and meaning. He envisioned that student teachers would one day learn educational journalism as part of their professional studies.

* 1. **An Educator of Life and Death**

This study of Korczak's story, beginning with the last tragic chapter of his life and extending backwards, reveals that for his entire life he saw life as a struggle. When death became an unavoidable reality, Marcus Aurelius and his Stoic ideas in the *Meditations* were a source of strength, a spiritual aid. The Roman Stoic helped him to find his own response to the reality of a dying ghetto; the Stoic idea of death took from it its horror. Throughout life one has to struggle with death in a rational way, and in the end, when one cannot win that battle, one has to accept one’s dying. Death is a part of life.

Stoicism, which helped him in the last chapter of his life, was also a guiding force in his philosophical worldview and pedagogy. When his Polishness did not provide Korczak a full identity and a complete sense of belonging, and when his Jewishness was already a fading-away reality, it was Stoicism that offered him an infinite rational cosmos in which he could find his place.

Korczak's legacy is important not only because of his educational insights but also because of his responses to his historical context. The history of the twentieth century can lead one to despair, but Korczak gives us the possibility of a more moral humanity. Instead of a world of poverty, danger and humiliation, people can weave a world of mutual respect, justice and faith. Korczak offers us a humane vision, messianic in its essence, of a kingdom of respect and dignity for all, children and adults, Jews and non-Jews alike. In a world divided by age, social status, faiths, ethnicities and local patriotism, Korczak offers a monistic utopian worldview of human solidarity. His universal vision of nature and humanity leads to a universal vision of education.

Korczak's pedagogy is not just a beautiful collection of inspiring ideas on behalf of the child and his or her rights. It has a philosophical ordering principle, inspired both by Hellenistic philosophies and concepts from modern pedagogy. In a Judeo-Christian context, based on a theistic model of reality in which God transcends the world, Korczak adopted a pantheistic immanent world view derived from Stoic philosophy. Nature is everything and there is nothing beyond it. God is nature or nature's soul.

And education has to follow the dictates of nature. Every child is part of the infinity; in every child, one can grasp the infinity of nature or ‘God’. Education is an effort to touch this infinity through the child and change it a little bit. As such, education has a very serious, though very difficult, mission.

Educators have to understand the context of their work and admit their limited knowledge: ‘*I know that I do not know.*’ With this genuine admission, ‘I don't know’, starts real education. It acknowledges both educators’ intellectual modesty and the great challenge of engaging in continuing learning.

Education is about the present; the educator is responsible for the present life of the child. Childhood itself deserves our respect; it is not a tool or a corridor to the real life of adulthood, but is life for its own sake. Children deserve their rights because their present life is not a phantom but real reality. The educator's mission is to help them lead fulfilling lives.

What can be achieved in education? Its possibilities are derived from the present reality that Korczak's immanent pedagogy makes the source and the guide of educational practice – which should achieve not what it ought to be but what is possible.

Education should be rational, and therefore it requires, as in ancient Greece, an 'educational agora' where all members of the community will participate in a rational discourse.

In all these aspects Korczak appears not only as one who adopts ideas from social pedagogy educational scholars like Froebel or Pestalozzi but also as a modern Stoic. A thread of logic connects all his inspiring ideas.

1. **Children's Rights**
   1. **A Journey into the World of Children Rights Advocacy**

That children have rights is a major element of Korczak's legacy, yet what is the philosophical basis for such a claim? Why indeed should children have rights? Of course, parents love their children and usually dedicate their time and resources to their welfare, and yet the challenge is not to define what we owe them but to determine whether children's rights exist independently of parental feelings. Where can we substantiate this claim and our obligation to meet the rights of children in our philosophy, social discourse and civic education programs?[[151]](#footnote-156)

Simply put, we are obligated to enable children to exercise their rights because children have no political power or property, and they depend on adults in all aspects of their lives. This has been the case throughout human history: children have always suffered injustice, with their lives being deemed unimportant and their voices unheard. In many parts of the world children are still victims of violence, war crimes and sexual abuse and are still forced to engage in hard labor; they lack health care, a good education and a basic quality of life. The emancipation of children remains a challenge.

Where can we find the words to inspire humanity to meet children rights? Perhaps Janusz Korczak's legacy can be the ‘Archimedean point’ to move the world to foster children's rights and to promote a global children's rights discourse.[[152]](#footnote-157)

* 1. **An Unfulfilled Promise**

The idea that children have rights – unconditional ones that are inherent in their very being – is a modern phenomenon. In traditional societies, children have no legal status; they remain dependent on their parents, the extended family and the community. Childhood has no value of its own; it is just a prefatory stage of life toward the ‘real thing’: adulthood. It prepares the person of the future to enter the community as a functional and obedient part of adult society. If the child accepts the duties and practices of the community, then her parents have given her a proper education and fulfilled their traditional duties.

During these preparatory years, children are weak, dependent and unprotected and therefore quite often been abused by adults. Charles Dickens's nineteenth-century novel *Oliver Twist* is the classic literary account of this reality. When it was published, this novel brought a new awareness of children’s unprotected status and started a movement towards the emancipation of children.

By the twentieth century, it was widely recognized that children deserve rights. In 1924, the League of Nations adoptedthe Declaration of the Right of the Child, the first international declaration of its kind. Yet it had no real enforcement power.[[153]](#footnote-158) Korczak, whose work inspired the writing of this declaration, recognized its advisory nature: ‘*The Geneva lawgivers have confused duties with rights. The tone of the declaration is not insistence, but persuasion: an appeal to goodwill, a plea for kindness.*’[[154]](#footnote-159)

Weak as this charter was, it was the first step in the long struggle for children's rights. In 1948, the newborn United Nations passed its own declaration of Universal Human Rights, which referred to all human beings, but not to children specifically. In 1959, it approved an extended version of the League of Nations Declaration of Children's Rights. Finally in 1989, the General Assembly passed its own robust declaration, the Convention of the Right of the Child; it came into force in September 1990.[[155]](#footnote-160)

Unfortunately, in spite of these international declarations, children are still abused and their basic human rights are still being violated[[156]](#footnote-161):

* *War crimes*: Children in areas of violent conflicts too often are the victims of those wars, along with other members of the civilian population. In many places, they are even forced to take part in military operations as child soldiers.[[157]](#footnote-162)Recently, the world has witnessed the unrelenting killing of thousands of children in Syria.
* *Poverty:* Poverty is one of the major reasons why children do not attain their basic human rights to food, clothing, a proper home and education. In many parts of the Third World and in poor sections of the developed world, children still suffer from malnutrition and a lack of clean water and proper medical care.
* *Hard labor*: The developed world enjoys the cheap products of the hard labor of children in undeveloped countries in the fields, sweat shops and factories.[[158]](#footnote-163)
* *No education*: Children do not have access to proper schooling either because of poverty or because traditions limit their access to education, particularly for girls. The inspiring story of Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani girl who risked her life for the sake of equal education to all children, illustrates well this twenty-first-century reality.[[159]](#footnote-164)
* *Sexual abuse*: Children are victims of sexual abuse and sometimes serve as sexual slaves. Even in the developed world, many children, primarily girls, suffer from sexual abuse in their family and community.[[160]](#footnote-165) Millions of girls in traditional societies continue to suffer female genital mutilation.
* *Improper welfare conditions*: Many children do not have access to proper medical treatment, vaccinations and public health measures; even parts of the developed world lack access to clean water.
* *Violence in the family and the community*: Children in every part of the world fall victim to violence, beatings, bullying and neglect within their immediate social circles. Children from broken families end up in hospitals or on the street, and the ‘street culture’ becomes their world.[[161]](#footnote-166) Bullying at schools as well as on social media are all too common forms of ‘soft’ violence, which is painful and harmful and sometimes lead to tragic consequences.[[162]](#footnote-167)
* *Refugee children*: The world is currently experiencing widescale migration, the results of interreligious conflicts and civil wars. Populations in undeveloped countries suffer also from natural disasters, epidemics and droughts, which claim children as their first victims. In Western countries, including Israel (the author's home country), the population of illegal immigrants and political refugees is also growing. Children of those immigrants and refugees are often denied the basic rights of all children to shelter, food, health care, education and political security.[[163]](#footnote-168)

Despite the work of the UN, state governments and civic organizations to tackle these abuses of children's rights, there remains a troubling gap between the promises of international declarations and the reality of children all over the world. Why is there such a gap and how can we face this challenge?[[164]](#footnote-169)

* 1. **Respect for the Child**

Korczak entered our collective knowledge as a Holocaust martyr. However, when we lift the dark curtain of the Holocaust, we encounter a world-knowned campaigner for the emancipation of children.

In the core of Korczak's pedagogy is the idea that the child is a complete person, not a person in the making. In accordance with the Kantian categorical imperative, one should treat every human being as an end unto him- or herself. Childhood is also an end of itself, and children, just as every human being, have rights to fulfiling life.[[165]](#footnote-170)

Korczak’s thought was in a long philosophical tradition of immanence beginning with Hellenistic and Roman Stoicism. There is no transcendent anchor to our reality: everything is immanent to the only one reality – nature. The human being is part of infinite nature, and nature, not a transcendent God, is the source and context of human existence. Nature, and not divine revelation, is therefore the source of human ethics**.** Korczak worshiped nature: ‘*Haven't I the right to be a disinterested worshiper of nature, to watch the shrub become green*.’[[166]](#footnote-171)

Such an axiom has far-reaching implications for education and the status of children. From the perspective of spatial infinity, there is no ‘small’ or ‘big’. Every part of nature has ultimate value; every creature has its place in reality. From the perspective of the infinity of time – eternity – there is no ‘old’ or ‘young’: each age has the same worth. Therefore, the small, young child deserves as much respect as a prominent adult. Respect for the child, for his or her world and for childhood itself was a pillar of Korczak's world view and grounded his claim for children's rights.

In numerous places in his writings, Korczak argues against the common attitude that childhood is just a preparatory stage for maturity and real life:

*There are, as it were two lives, one serious, respectable, the other indulgently tolerated, of less value. We say a man of the future, a worker of the future, a citizen of the future. Such they will be, there will be a beginning, seriously, but in the future.... No. Childhood means long and important years of a man’s life….*

*Unintelligently we divide years into less or more mature ones. There is no such thing as present immaturity, no hierarchy of age, no higher and lower grades of pain and joy, hopes and disappointments.*[[167]](#footnote-172)

Yet, that childhood is as worthy of respect as adulthood does not mean that children and adults are equal in their abilities. A common misconception of Korzcak’s thought is that he believed that children were equal to adults. In fact, he recognized that children, because they are new to this world, have less knowledge, experience and power than adults. Too often, adults abuse their weakness and lack of power and violate children's basic rights as human beings. We have to respect who children are and not what, in our limitless expectations, we want them to be. Their essential weakness deserves our respect and compassion:

*The child is a foreigner who does not understand the language or street plan, who is ignorant of the laws and customs.... Respect the ignorance of the child!... Respect the labour of developing knowledge! Respect for failure and tears!... Respect the child’s belongings and budget…. Respect for the mysteries and fluctuations of the toil of growth! Respect for the present moment, for today….*

*Respect for every single instant, for it passes never to return, and always take it seriously; hurt, it will bleed, slain, it will haunt with harsh memories*.[[168]](#footnote-173)

Respect for the world of the child means respect for youth and the passing moments of life. Traditional societies often respect the sternness of old people. Korczak called instead for respect for the young moments of a child's life with all their naïvete: ‘*Let us demand respect for the clear eyes, smooth foreheads, youthful effort and confidence.*’*[[169]](#footnote-174)*

Respect for the childhood years means respect for the present moment. We live in the present: the past is over and the future has still not com into existence. If we respect life, we respect every year, day and moment of it. Korczak urged ‘*respect for the present moment, for today*’.[[170]](#footnote-176)

Korczak's understanding that every spark of life, young or old, is part of eternity changes our understanding of the role of childhood in human life. Childhood is important not as preparation for the future but because it is life and any life deserves dignity. A few of Korczak's most poetic texts express this idea, which runs counter to the ethos of modern industrial society, which sees childhood as an investment program for future years:

*The flower is the forerunner of the fruit; the chick will become an egg-laying hen, the calf will in due time yield milk. In the meantime — care, expense, and worry.... The market value of the very young is small. Only in the sight of God and the Law [of nature] is the apple blossom worth as much as the apple, green shoots as much as a field of ripe corn.*[[171]](#footnote-177)

This industrial, capitalist ethos of investment in the future is not only immoral but also irrational, because we can never know the future. Nor can we program life like an industrial process. Quoting Louis Pasteur, the famous French scientist, Korczak writes, ‘*When I approach a child, I have two feelings. Affection for what he is today and respect for what he can become*.’[[172]](#footnote-178) We have to respect life as we see it for we can only wonder what it will be like in the future.

As much as we may try to govern the endless flow of life, moments of life are not objects that yield to our control. Paraphrasing the insight of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus about the ever-flowing river, Korczak believed that life is an ever-flowing chain of singular moments: each one is different, and each one has ultimate value:

*A year is no more than an attempt to understand eternity for everyday use. An instant is but the duration of a smile or a sigh. A mother is anxious to hear her child. She will not succeed. Every time it is a different woman who bids farewell to a different person and welcomes a different one upon his return.[[173]](#footnote-179)*

Any spark of life – any being, any moment and any tiny life experience of the child – deserves our respect, To understand children and give them what they deserve, Korczak turned for guidance to these two perspectives of infinity and eternity. One may say that life is holy because it is infinite in its manifestations.

* 1. **What Are Children's Rights?**

led

Respect and rights go together. Disrespect of childhood leads to disrespect of children and the abuse of their basic rights. If childhood is seen not as a mere pathway to life, but as a stage of human life equal to any other and one that deserves our respect, then children have rights. Rights are not a gratuity that adults give children out of a sense of graciousness: instead they derive from the recognition that childhood has immanent worth.

Korczak was a link in the chain of education scholars, social philosophers and political leaders who fought for the emancipation of children in modern times; like them he called for ‘*the Magna Carta of children's rights*’,[[174]](#footnote-180) serving as one of the authors of the League of Nations Declaration of the Right of the Child, issued in Geneva in 1924.

How one turn a philosophical principle into a reality? What are these rights? Korczak's call on behalf of children's rights is clear in its pathos, but not in its content. His claim that children have rights deserves further explanation, which we find scattered in several of Korczak's writings. In 1919, Korczak published his book "How to Love the Children", which already contains the core of his ideas about children and education. There he writes:

*(...) I call for the Magna Carta of children's rights. I have found three basic ones, though there may be more:*

*1. The right of the child to die.*

*2. The right of the child to the present day.*

*3. The right of the child to be what he is*

*One should learn to know the child well so that in granting these rights as few mistakes as possible would be made.[[175]](#footnote-181)*

This is a founding statement, which contains a few difficulties. The second and the third rights, the right of the child to the present day, and the right of the child to be himself or herself are obvious. They clearly follow his demand of respect of childhood as discussed above. The child has the right to live his childhood years in full and to fulfil his own identity. It is the moral duty of the educator to try to help the child attain these rights.

However, the first of the above three basic rights, the right to die, which Korczak mentions in several places in his writings, is more difficult. Why the child has the right to die? Children certainly have the right to live, but why they have the right to die?

Here again one can discern between the lines Stoic ideas. Korczak sees the fear of death – in accordance with Stoic teaching – as one of the major obstacles of a full life in the present. In sarcasm, we say, "life is dangerous – people die". If we want to live our life in full and if we want the children to live their life in full, then we have to overcome our fear of death. Because of the fear of death that might await our children, we do not let them live their lives, "*Fearful that the child may be snatched from us by death, we snatch from him – life; not wanting him to die, we won't let him live*."[[176]](#footnote-182) Fear of death is an obstacle to human freedom. When one is free from the fear of death, then he is free to live his life.

If death is part of life – in a Stoic perspective – then we have to accept it and do not live our life in constant fear of death. ‘*Naïvely, we are afraid of death; forgetful that life is a procession of dying and reborn moments.*’[[177]](#footnote-183)When death approaches us, naturally, by illness or war, we have to accept it with Stoic "Apathea".

There is another Stoic element in his thought, which may be more problematic for the modern mind. This is the idea that all living beings, including human beings, have different life-spans, according to what nature allotted them. One has to accept death as part of the dictate of nature:

*The mother's love for her child, ardent, sensible and balanced, must give him the right to premature death, to ending his life cycle, not in sixty revolutions of the globe around the sun, but to see only one or three springs. This is a cruel demand for those who do not want to bear the hardships and pay the price of childbirth more than once or twice.*[[178]](#footnote-184)

The pediatrician part of Korczak's identity comes to the foreground here; as a doctor, he knew that sometimes life ends sooner than we hope and sometimes children die. This text brings together the Stoic idea of Apathea with that of Pietas. To fulfil the latter value, one has to try with all one’s might to heal sick people, but it is only by accepting the natural fact of death that one will be able to practice medicine or to be an educator and even a parent. The decision to have children entails the fear, which all parents have somewhere in their mind, of their child’s unexpected death. Those who cannot overcome this fear will not be able to take the risk of having children. Moreover, if they do have children, they may shelter them so much as to prevent them from living fully.

Korczak's article ‘The Child's Right to Respect was published in 1929, years before World War II and the reality of the Final Solution.[[179]](#footnote-186) However, the idea that one has to overcome the fear of death surfaced in Korczak's writings during his years in the ghetto. Death should not be avoided in all circumstances: there are times when death is inevitable or even welcomed. The terminally ill child has the right to die, and perhaps the ghetto children have the right to die with respect. Both the doctor in the hospital and the doctor in the ghetto orphanage have to struggle to keep people alive, yet they have to accept the reality that people will die and to deal with that reality with dignity.

In Korczak’s discourse, the right of the child to live his or her own life entails a broad spectrum of human rights. A good education is one of the most important ones: it can change a person's life. While the physician fights illness and death and helps grant the child the right to live, the educator opens in front of him the ways of life: ‘The doctor has saved the child from the grips of death; the teacher's assignment is to let him live, win for him the right to be a child.’[[180]](#footnote-187) In the background, one may hear the words of Socrates who said that, while his mother, a midwife, gave birth to bodies he, the teacher, gave birth to souls.

Korczak wrotes that the right to education is itself based on other inherent rights:

*The child has the right to desire, to claim, to ask. He has the right to grow and ripen and having matured, to bear fruit. And the purpose of education: that the child may learn not to make noise, not to wear out shoes, to listen and do as he is told, not to criticize but to trust that everything is done solely for his own good*.[[181]](#footnote-188)

The emancipation of children in Korczak’s world view was related to democracy and democratic discourse in society. They should have the right to exercise their will and have a say in decisions regarding matters of their life. The child is not an object, but a dignified member of society:

*It has not yet crystallized within me, nor has it been confirmed by reasoning that the child's primary and irrefutable right is the right to voice his thoughts, to active participation in our considerations and verdicts concerning him. When we will have gained his respect and trust, once he confides in us of his own free will and tells us what he has the right to do – there will be less puzzling moments, fewer mistakes.[[182]](#footnote-189)*

This idea – that children cannot be totally independent, but should have a say in running their lives – was the basis of the children’s democracy that Korczak implemented in his orphanages.

* 1. **Korczak's Children Democracy: The Social Realization of Children's Rights**

The children’s democracy established in Korczak’s orphanages were not pedagogical experiments nor a preparation for future citizens of the state. It had inherent value as the essential milieu for the realization of children's rights.

Korczak was not the first educational researcher to implement children's self-government. At the beginning of the twentieth century, numerous pedagogical experiments in the West were emphasizing youthful initiative, self-reliance and the responsible participation of young people in directing their own lives. Korczak adapted the progressive pedagogical concepts of his age to guide the creation and organization of a structured, democratic children’s society in both his orphanages.

The entire complex structure of the orphanage – the parliament, court, newspaper, board and weekend community-wide meetings – aimed to enable and foster a democratic, rational way of communal life. The rationality and the dialogical nature of these communities were essential as Korczak strongly believed that through a rational discourse people could reach agreement and resolve disputes.

Korczak believed that law and order, if not arbitrarily imposed, would foster the realization of human rights. Respect for the child's world does not imply the freedom to engage in violence or abuse others' rights.[[183]](#footnote-190) Children have the right to be protected from the aggressiveness of others. Korczak's children's houses were very well organized and were run according to strict regulations, but ones crafted to treat everyone fairly. The atmosphere was quite different from that found in today's progressive schools. Korczak and his partners, Stefa Wilczynska and Maryna Falska, understood that if they wanted to foster dignity and children's rights, they should structure the orphanage in as rational and democratic way as possible.

The children's community institutions aimed to protect children's rights, even their right to whatever personal possessions they had: ‘*First, everyone has the right to his property, no matter how insignificant and valueless. The fact that the loss can easily be made good is not the point.*’[[184]](#footnote-191) It is easy to dismiss the loss of a few, tiny objects, but one had to respect what were for the child valuable belongings. A theft is a crime at any age.

Korczak was not naïve about the character of children. He advocated for the child’s right to be a child and not a perfect, righteous person. Therefore, there was law and order in the daily life of the orphanage and also forgiveness for the weaknesses of every human being.[[185]](#footnote-192)

The orphanage children enjoyed different privileges of citizenship, depending on their colleagues’ assessment of their behavior, the degree to which they helped one another, and finally their contribution to the maintenance of general order and cleanliness. The rights of the orphanage citizenship went hand in hand with the fulfilment of community obligations.

The fundamental institution in the orphanage's democracy was the children's parliament. Each orphanage had its own parliament, to which the children elected twenty deputies to serve. These child deputies, with the sensitive guidance of adults, regulated the communal life of each orphanage:

*The Parliament endorses or rejects laws drafted by the Judicial Board. It declares special holidays and grants the right to issue memorial cards. (...) Caution is advisable, the limits of the Parliament's prerogatives should be extended slowly.... Otherwise, there is no point in holding elections, in playing at self-government. We must not mislead either ourselves or the children. To play that game would be distasteful and harmful.*[[186]](#footnote-193)

As Korczak showed in his novel *King Matt the First*, both children and adults can abuse power, and so governance institutions had to be run carefully. The code of laws developed by this parliament reflected this caution. Punishment was soft and limited mostly to educational actions.

The children's community tried to enforce law and order by its court to which all members of the community, including the faculty, were accountable. Korczak wrote, ‘*If am devoting a disproportionate amount of space to the court, it is because I believe that it may become the nucleus of emancipation,…, and make unavoidable the promulgation of the Declaration of Children’s Rights.*’[[187]](#footnote-194)

The orphanage's rules applied not only to the children but also to the adults in the community, including Korczak himself. They, like the children, were subject to the ruling of the court. If they abused the parliament's laws or offended someone, then ‘the children have the right to sue the adult staff’.[[188]](#footnote-196) Korczak proudly said that he was sued twice by the children because they thought he had violated their rights.

The submission of the staff to the court’s jurisdiction derived directly from the idea that children have rights that are unconditioned by the goodwill of the adults. The laws aimed to protect the individual from the aggression of others, to secure his or her basic rights and to put limits on the possible abuse of power by the adults over children.

The court met about once a week. Children who during the past week had no behavior infractions were eligible to serve as judges; five judges were selected by drawing lots among those children. One of them was a teacher who guided the proceedings of the court. After every fifty cases, a new set of judges was selected.[[189]](#footnote-197)

Influenced by Greek philosophy, Korczak believed that disputes were the result of misunderstandings. As a result, both the parliament and the court were more spaces of open discussions and learning through those debates than institutions of legislation and ruling. They served as the community ‘agora’, enabling a broad participation of children in the community’s political life.

Another common space was the orphanage's newspaper, which was a platform for an exchange of ideas and for regular, virtual ‘meetings’ of the entire orphanage. Korczak was a strong believer in the importance of a community newspaper:

*In an educational institution without a newspaper, the staff seems to me uncoordinated and desperate, pottering and grumbling, going around in circles, leaving the children without orientation and control, proceeding ad.-hoc and at random, without tradition, without memories, without a development path to the future.*[[190]](#footnote-198)

Korczak saw the community newspaper as also serving as the communal memory and a navigation tool, mapping the everyday life of the community and making that life into the community's history and identity. In a community with a recognized identity and a common path, life is not arbitrary and human rights are preserved.

Underlying the various inspiring policies that Korczak implemented in his children's communities was not an arbitrary amalgam of ideas, but rather a meaningful philosophical paradigm. The Stoic concept of infinity was the ordering principle of Korczak's education philosophy. In his world view, the small and the young deserve as much respect as any other human being. Children have as much right to live in dignity as any other human being. They deserve our respect for their world, their limitations and their dreams for the future.

In his two orphanages, Korczak created democratic communities that made respect for children and the protection of their rights a reality. Indeed, those communities were utopian. Although Korczak and the entire staff and children of his Jewish orphanage were murdered, his advocacy for children's rights remains written in gold letters on our walls.

Today children's rights continue to be violated all over the world. In war zones, in poverty-stricken sections of society and even in the close circle of the family, children suffer from violence, neglect and poor living conditions. Korczak's legacy calls us to pay attention to their plight and to ameliorate it. His writings provide children's rights defenders with the proper lexicon for their mission.

1. **Between Two Worlds**
   1. **Who Is Korczak: A Jew, a Pole, Both or None?**

The question of Korczak's identity has occupied scholars who wish to understand the context of his work and to define his place in the history of education. Those who see themselves as disciples of his legacy have claimed him as their own, as either being Polish or Jewish.[[191]](#footnote-199) Some see Korczak as a representative of the best of Polish society and Polish educational thought and practice, a source of pride and inspiration for Polish educators today. Others place him alongside the many outstanding Jewish personalities of the modern era, such as Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein, who hailed from Europe.

This study does not present new information about Korczak's identity. There are no hitherto undiscovered documents proving that Friday night candles were lit in his parents' home or that he observed other Jewish rituals or holidays. However, based on the data collected thus far, I offer here a new interpretation of his identity and the place education served in his life, one that applies as well to many other modern Jewish intellectuals: he failed to be at home in both the Polish and Jewish worlds.

Those who claim that his Jewish identity primarily shaped his life and work point to his dedication to ‘his’ children. They see it as the realization of the Jewish value of responsibility for the welfare of fellow human beings; they argue that this value motivated Korczak's actions even without him being aware of it. Further proof of Korczak's Jewishness is his joining the long tradition of Jewish martyrdom, of *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of God's name). Thus, they see the last chapter of his life as defining and giving meaning to his entire life’s work. Yet Korczak’s writings and practices sanctified life, not death, nor did Jewish terminology inform his work. In his diary, his most reflective text, he did not explain his educational mission in Jewish terms.

A more apt reading of Korczak is given by those who emphasize Korczak's double identity. For example, Miriam Sharshavsky, in her comprehensive work *Two Homelands* (1990), describes Korczak as torn between his connection to his Polishness and his undeniable link to the Jewish people.

Building on Sharshavsky’s approach, I claim that Korczak's identity was fundamentally shaped not by his belonging to a certain social circle or even to two cultures, but rather by his not belonging to any nationality and to his tragic failure to feel at home in any national milieu. This sense of homelessness is the thread that runs through the different stages of Janusz Korczak–Henryk Goldzmit's life. It defined his Jewish identity and motivated his educational pathos. Korczak was a tragic hero not only because of how he died but also because of the sense of homelessness and the absence of belonging that characterized his entire life. He resembled more closely a Greek hero of tragedy rather than a biblical figure. His inspiring dream remained unfulfilled, and what most of us remember about him is his final journey to Treblinka.

George Steiner, a contemporary thinker and literary scholar, describes modern Jewish identity as based on detachment and homelessness.[[192]](#footnote-200) It is the fate of the modern Jew to be the lonely stranger: this is what defines her identity. The destiny of the Jew, as difficult as it is, is to be the eternal guest. Only trees, not people, grow roots into the ground, claims Steiner. He turns Jewish homelessness into a moral challenge and even a moral mission: ‘*If trees have roots, then people better have legs and just be guests at each others’ homes.*’[[193]](#footnote-201) The Jew should be completely devoted to human dignity, the ‘image of God’ in humankind, and the struggle against nationalism and fascism in all their forms and facets. Worship of land or state is idolatry; only human dignity deserves our full attention. Korczak was a good example of the homeless Jew.

In the pre-emancipation period, the world of rabbinic tradition was a kind of portable home for the Jewish person. This ‘being at home’ collapsed in modernity. Jewish emancipation in modern Europe was built on the dream of becoming integrated into the surrounding non-Jewish society. Among liberal Jewish circles, there was an ideology of assimilation into a universal family of humankind, which rationalized in different ways the abandonment of what remained of the traditional Jewish world. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this struggle for equality and integration reached an impasse: the modernized Jew was left displaced and alienated both from his previous being and from the Gentile-like image that he tried to wear.

After decades of secularization and efforts to become emancipated in European society, Jewish identity in the middle of the twentieth century was fractured and lacked self-confidence. It was often shaped not by specific cultural content, but rather by the lack of that content – through detachment, confusion and a desperate search for spiritual meaning in life.

Korczak's life epitomized this tragic reality of a generation of Jewish intellectuals who were caught between sky and earth, with the nucleus of their being torn and bereft of any illusion of emancipation and yet feeling distanced and alienated from the Jewish world. Jean Amery, another twentieth-century Jewish intellectual who deeply felt this loneliness, worded the paradox of modern Jewish identity as follows: ‘*I cannot be a Jew but have no choice.*’[[194]](#footnote-202) Jewish identity became an exterritorial border zone that Jews could not leave if they wanted to remain loyal to their selves. Amery argued that this was the experience of an entire generation of Jews, probably ‘*numbering into the millions*’.[[195]](#footnote-204) Korczak was one of those Jews.

Korczak, torn between two worlds, hoped all his life that his work on behalf of children would be the longed-for bridge between Jews and non-Jews. Since the Enlightenment and the days of Moses Mendelsohn in eighteenth-century Berlin, modern Jews had deluded themselves into thinking that attaining a dual identity was possible. The tragic and heroic story of Korczak reflected the crumbling of this naïve vision in the middle of the twentieth century. The Polish society that embraces Korczak in the twenty-first century pushed him away in the early decades of the previous century. Even though Korczak spoke about education and children's rights in universal terms and hoped that the cause of helping children would bring all humanity together, his two children's houses, one for Jewish Polish children and one for Christian Polish children, remained separate until the end, as the Polish society of those days refused to embrace his universal paradigm. Korczak admitted as much, decrying the failure of his life's work and the impasse at which he had arrived. In Poland, in those last years of Polish independence, he bitterly described himself as an object devoid of value; in Palestine he saw himself as impotent and lacking any importance.

Dov Sadan, a Korczak scholar, empathetically describes Korczak’s wounds:

*The importance of a man, whose dream showed him one mold, the mold of a man, but whose reality showed him two molds, the first of the Polish people, to which he was clearly connected, and the other of the Jewish people to which he was connected in a dim way, and the core of his life was the winding and twisting between these two peoples.… But in the center of his way of life, the man was divided into two: his culture one and his life another…. Here we have a soul wounded on both sides …and he must defend himself from both sides.[[196]](#footnote-205)*

Korczak stood in between two cultures, his identity shaped by intense feelings of not belonging to either: he felt his homelessness as an insult.

Korczak’s efforts to create an ideal home for children can be seen as an attempt, a somewhat pathetic one, to bridge this divide: his radical vision of a children’s democracy would overcome the traditional boundaries of European society. His life's work, completely dedicated to children, was a creative attempt to build for himself and his generation a world in which he could be a fully accepted, complete citizen. Like Esperanto for Ludwig Zamenhof, psychoanalysis for Sigmund Freud, the economy for Karl Marx, spiritual life for Franz Rosenzweig, humanism for George Steiner, and art and music for many modern Jewish artists, education was for Korczak the milieu that would end the long history of Jewish loneliness and humiliation. However, it was his legacy that ended in Treblinka, and its fate places a dark shadow on any post-Holocaust discussion of universal ideals and global understanding.

* 1. **Korczak the Pole: Deep Rootedness and Illusion**

Korczak was well versed in Polish culture, and Polishness was the milieu in which he grew up and worked. Even under German occupation, when he was ghettoized because he was Jewish, Korczak held staunchly to his Polish identity. For example, in his application to the Jewish Council in the Warsaw ghetto for the position of director of a second orphanage, Korczak drew a portrait of himself as a Polish intellectual and public figure, deeply steeped in Polish culture and society.[[197]](#footnote-206)

Years earlier, when entering a literary contest, he decided to submit his writing under a pseudonym: the name, which later became his identity, was that of a figure from Polish history.[[198]](#footnote-207) It is not a minor detail that the literary Polish mask became his permanent name. It was only when living in the ghetto that Korczak again signed papers and documents as ‘Korczak-Goldzmit’. Did Korczak-Goldszmit choose this Polish pseudonym as his name for life because he felt the need to be more Polish than the Poles, because somehow he was also a Jew? Did his use of the Polish name mean that he was ashamed of his Jewishness? We may assume that a ‘genuine’ Pole would not need to mask other elements of his identity. Later, when it was no longer possible to be Polish, Korczak discovered he could not live without it: the mask had become an inseparable part of his identity.

As a Pole, Korczak took part in four wars and saw himself as a Polish patriot to the end of his life.[[199]](#footnote-208) Marshal Pilsudski, the leader of the Poland that emerged after World War I, was an exemplary figure for Korczak. Later, during the first weeks of the Nazi occupation, Korczak endangered his life by walking around wearing the uniform of a Polish officer, a pathetic gesture of Polish patriotism. He was sent to the Paviak, the notorious Gestapo prison, but he remained true to his identity as a Polish patriot. Reports about Korczak at the beginning of the war and during the first days of the German occupation show that he felt renewed, even happy, by the turn of events; he felt a strong sense of belonging to the Polish nation. Therefore, it was doubly painful that Polish society and later the Germans refused to recognize his Polish identity and identification.

In a diary entry from 1914, ‘The Confession of a Butterfly’, he wrote, ‘*I love Poland with such might that I am ready to sacrifice everything for it.*’[[200]](#footnote-209) In a later entry, he expressed his deep love for the river ‘grey Vistula’.[[201]](#footnote-210) An entry written while living in the ghetto in 1942 contains the following statement about his identity: ‘*Warsaw is mine and I am Warsaw.*’[[202]](#footnote-211) He felt he belonged to Warsaw: he both rejoiced and grieved with the city. However, a ‘genuine’ Polish person would not have felt the need to make such a declaration of loyalty. Only an outsider, such as a Jewish Pole, would have needed to declare his belonging. His ‘Polishness’ fell just short of being automatic,[[203]](#footnote-212) and his sense of belonging demanded constant legitimation. His national identity did not come naturally, but was something he dedicated himself to achieve.

For years, Korczak fought to be allowed to educate Polish Christian children, and this opportunity was given to him by Maryna Falska in 1919 when they co-founded the Our Home (Nash Dom) orphanage in Proshkov. However, Korczak continued to make a deliberate, concerted effort to be publicly acknowledged as Polish, to gain the legitimacy of being a Pole. These efforts were not rewarded, and he grew increasingly bitter. He increasingly devoted himself to education, first in the Krochmalna orphanage and then in Our Home, perhaps because he felt estranged from the world of adults. His educational work allowed Korczak to escape his existential dilemma for several years.

Korczak’s interest in the poor and in social justice, which was first expressed in his book, *Children of the Street* (Dzieci ulicy; Warsaw 1901), and its sequel *The Salon Children* (Dziecko salonu, Warsaw 1906), grew in response to the social unrest in Poland at the beginning of the twentieth century. This passion for justice was part of the social discourse among the Polish intelligentsia in general and the Jewish intelligentsia in particular; the latter saw their social activism as a way of being accepted into non-Jewish society. Their struggle for justice gave the Jews a sense of belonging and meaning as Polish citizens. Korczak's increasing involvement in the radical left was typical of a Jewish intellectual who felt that altruistic efforts would both facitate his belonging to Polish society and negate the Jewish elements in his identity.[[204]](#footnote-213)

The 1920s were for Korczak years of fruitful educational labor in which he came closer to realizing his universal vision. However, this educational activity demanded that he ignore the growing anti-Semitism. He saw anti-Semitism as a moral fault in Polish society, to be repaired through education and good will, and not as a national Jewish problem that was his as a Jew to solve.[[205]](#footnote-214) This attitude was also typical of Jewish intellectuals who held fast to their utopian universalism. Korczak never ceased to latch on to encouraging signs of tolerance of the Jews, and it was only in the 1930s and 1940s that the sweet illusion of a cosmopolitan human existence in Poland crumbled.[[206]](#footnote-215)

* 1. **Korczak the Jew: Solidarity and Detachment**

There is no doubt that Korczak always felt a certain solidarity with the Jews, but he was unfamiliar with the lifeways, culture and language of the Jewish community then living in the largest Jewish Diaspora. He did not share in the life of the large Jewish population in Warsaw, but looked at it from the outside. He knew he was Jewish, but it did not become a crucial factor in his life until the 1930s.

Korczak came from a well-to-do home, where he received a genuinely Polish upper middle-class upbringing, almost entirely devoid of any element of Jewish culture or education. He perhaps understood a few words of Yiddish, the language of the Jewish masses, but he could not speak it and certainly could not write it.[[207]](#footnote-216)

The story of Korczak's family is the story of the larger Jewish community in Central and Western Europe, which continued to move closer to their non-Jewish surroundings, abandoning the characteristics of traditional Jewish life. Korczak’s weak Jewish identity was typical of Jews from well-to-do backgrounds. The authentic traditional Jewish home was already beyond the horizons of his personal memory; he was familiar with the family’s genealogy, but was distanced from its culture.[[208]](#footnote-218) Korczak's great-grandfather was a religious person who kept a traditional way of life, rushing home from his work as a glazier for the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. The grandfather, after whom Korczak was named, was a Hebrew intellectual and a medical doctor by profession. His father, a lawyer involved in Polish society, worked for the expansion of Judaic studies in the Polish language and gave his children Christian names. Korczak, Henryk Goldzmit, grew up in an assimilated Jewish family that identified as Polish. Like other assimilated Jews in Europe, he had a dream that he strove to realize all his life: to be like everyone else, to be integrated into the general society and to be known in his profession. This dream was destined to be shattered time and time again.

A few Jewish scholars have tried to establish that Korczak indeed had a Jewish identity. They saw in his descriptions of his ancestors evidence of the strong ties he had with his people and heritage,[[209]](#footnote-219) but Korczak wrote these words in his old age, when the reality of anti-Semitism had already shattered his dreams of a pluralistic Poland. Furthermore, the family narrative that he offered in his ghetto diary was characterized by a growing detachment from Jewish traditions. Even more, his multi-generational family story, warm as it was, appeared only in his private diary, not in any of his publications. We can hardly find in his writings any indication that he was Jewish: he concealed those thoughts and feelings of the heart until the last days of his life.

There is a moment in the life of any assimilated Jew, in which she understands that no matter what she does, she is still different – she is not ‘really’ Polish, Russian or German. Sharshevsky describes the reaction of Alexander Hertz, Korczak's peer, when his self-image as a Pole was negated upon his entering high school.[[210]](#footnote-220) Jean Amery recalled the day he sat in a Viennese café, reading the Nuremberg Laws in the newspaper. He immediately understood that society classified him as a Jew, as an inferior human being. Korczak, in his diary, described the day when the janitor's son taunted him for being Jewish, for being different and not belonging. The description is taken from the world of the child who wants to place a cross on the grave of his beloved bird:

*The janitor's son decided that the canary was Jewish. And so was I. I too was a Jew, and he – a Pole, a Catholic. It was a certain paradise for him, but as for me, if I did not use dirty words and never failed dutifully to steal sugar for him from the house – I would end up, when I died, in a place which, though not hell, was nevertheless dark, and I was scared of dark rooms.*[[211]](#footnote-221)

This childhood story was full of meaning for Korczak at the end of his life: it marked the first time that others made him aware of his being Jewish, that he was different and of seemingly lower value, and that he did not belong in Polish society.

In my university classes many of my students who emigrated from different parts of the former Soviet Union share with me their similar experiences. They grew up without a Jewish upbringing, and their being Jewish was of no importance in their lives until society, though some act, made them aware of that part of their identity. Sometimes an incident happened at school or on the street or at the home of a non-Jewish friend. In each case, it changed their self-awareness and brought home the fact that they were different.

Korczak encountered the Jewish national question and Zionism relatively early while studying medicine in Warsaw.[[212]](#footnote-222) His articles about poor Jewish children, which were published anonymously in the *Israelita* in 1904, revealed his concern for this social problem; however, that he wrote these articles anonymously reflected his wish to hide his involvement with his fellow Jews. In 1906, Korczak met poor Jewish children in a summer camp for the first time. Clearly, Korczak was aware of the Jewish problem in general and of his Jewish roots in particular, yet throughout his life he continued to try to find his niche in Polish society and culture. He also felt keenly the burden that being Jewish imposed upon him: when he wrote about his painful decision not to have children, the reason he gave was his being a Polish Jew.[[213]](#footnote-223)

His desire to help the Jewish children in summer camp, the sick and the orphaned stemmed not from a feeling of national solidarity nor a Jewish ethos, but rather from noble ideas of love of humanity and his dedication to the Polish people, which Korczak developed in his youth while engaging in radical socialist activity in Polish society. His altruism was complicated, however: as a Jew he ignored the fight for a Jewish homeland in favor of the struggle for Polish independence and then, with the same willingness and sensitivity displayed toward the Polish people, extended a helping hand to the Jewish child.

Korczak justified his involvement in radical socialism by believing that it would bring an end to the painful duality of his world by fostering the acceptance of Jews into the general society. However, during his years of work as an educator, writer and public figure, the continously harmful behavior displayed by Polish society towards Jewish children, even in a free Poland, filled him with disappointment. Consider this bitter response to a counselor in a Jewish summer camp, who feared that one of the children might, heaven forbid, drown in the river; Korczak replied, ‘*And what, if he drowns? Isn't it the best solution for a Jewish orphan?*’*[[214]](#footnote-224)*

* 1. **A Jewish Orphanage or an Orphanage for Jewish Children?**

The years following the suppression of the Russian Revolution of 1905 were years of crises for the radical left movements. The shattering of the vision of brotherhood contributed to the strengthening of the Jewish national consciousness and Jewish philanthropy. In 1912, Korczak was chosen to be the director of the Jewish orphanage created by Jewish philanthropists, which moved from Franciskanska Street to Krochmalna Street. As a consequence, Korczak became more connected to the Jewish community. In 1919, Korczak became the titular head of the Christian orphanage, Nash Dom; it was actually run by Maryna Falska. In leading the two orphanages and the schools connected to them, Korczak put into practice his special approach to education: his experiences there provided the material for his pedagogical writings .

Korczak, in partnership with his associates Stefa Wilczynska and Maryna Falska, worked to implement in each of the two institutions a holistic educational experience structured along social values and codes of behavior that differed from those of the adult world that surrounded them. Each institution was designed to be a micro-cosmos, the model of a new society, in which the Jew was not different and alien and every child was respected and treated according to his or her needs, regardless of religious, national or racial identity.

In reality, however, the culture of the Krochmalna orphanage was originally Polish, oriented towards assimilation with the aim of merging the Jewish masses into Polish society. Only in the 1920s, due to changes in the circumstances of the national movement, was more time given to the study of Hebrew and the siddur, the Jewish prayer book, and a corner of one of the common rooms was set aside for prayer. Yet there were few trappings of institutionalized religion, even though respect was given to the individual religious feelings of the children.[[215]](#footnote-225)

Some scholars see the existence of a prayer corner in the orphanage as a sign of Korczak's commitment to Jewish tradition; I claim instead that it merely reflected his humanistic sensitiveness and empathy to the deep feelings of others. He himself was not familiar with Jewish rituals, but he saw to it that children who were interested in praying could do so. Similarly, the fact that Korczak enabled children at the Nash Dom orphanage to have their own chapel or space to express their religious sentiments did not prove that he was Christian. He saw prayer as a basic spiritual need of people, Jews or Christians alike. His provision of a place for prayer illustrated his tolerance of religion, his respect for the religious feelings of his children and his understanding that religion is an authentic human phenomenon.

In several of his writings Korczak expressed his interest as an educator in the religiosity of people. He believed that education did not have to involve institutionalized religion, but that the educational discourse did need to address God.[[216]](#footnote-226) The major questions of life and death are religious in their essence.

Even though Korczak was totally devoted to his Jewish children, he remained distant from Jewish life until the rise of the Nazis. The pluralistic place of religious sentiments in his work and the universal language he used in his writings reflected his universal humanism, rather than his Jewishness, and at the same time his tolerance and empathy toward the religious sentiments of others.

* 1. **Zionism and Jewish Identification**

In the 1920s, with Zionism gaining strength as a movement, Korczak began to study it more closely both because of increasing Polish anti-Semitism and because young educators he knew were deciding to immigrate to the Land of Israel. Toward the end of the decade, the Warsaw cell of HaShomer HaTzair, a leftist Zionist youth movement, invited children at the Krochmalna orphanage to join in its various activities. d,sided neither that raged Yet, communal life in the orphanage came to acquire a Zionist flavor.

In 1925, after much deliberation, Korczak added his name to a proclamation by the Jewish intelligentsia of Warsaw favoring the Zionist experiment. It was distributed in honor of the arrival of a delegation of Keren HaKayemet L’Israel (Jewish National Fund) in Poland:

*On this soil, the soil of Eretz Yisrael was the Jewish genius reborn; the Jew, who throughout hundreds of years of slavery, of humiliating exile, dispossessed of creative works, returns to be a man who is consistent with productive work.[[217]](#footnote-227)*

Earlier Korczak had strongly rejected invitations to sign similar proclamations of support for Zionism, but his attitude had clearly changed. The following year he participated a conference of Hebraic educators in Warsaw. His growing support of Jewish nationalism and Zionism was evident also from the weekly children’s newspaper, *Mały Przegląd*, which featured many reports from the Land of Israel. In October 1926, his ‘call to the children of Eretz Yisrael’ was published, which was followed around Chanukah that year by an essay on Mattathias, the Hasmonean.

With the rise of the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s, Korczak began to grasp that his utopian universalism would never be realized on European soil. He came to a new interpretation of this earlier statement: ‘*the problem “man”, his past and future on earth – overshadows the problem “Jewish*"’.[[218]](#footnote-228) Becoming convinced that there was a link between the national rebirth in the Land of Israel and the liberation of his children, Korczak grew more and more active in Zionist matters. ame

Around this time, the number of graduates who were leaving for Israel also grew, and they pleaded with Korczak to join them. On 8 October 1932, in a letter to Joseph Arnon in Israel, he wrote, ‘*My hope is not lost, that my few remaining years will be spent in Eretz Yisrael missing Poland from there.*’[[219]](#footnote-229)This is the first time he expressed his desire to immigrate to Palestine, despite his ties to Poland: this statement showed his stance between two worlds and his inability to live in full in either of them.

* 1. **Immigration to Palestine: Now or Later?**

In the late 1920s he came to see the Jews' return to their homeland as a historical necessity; at the same time he was totally aware of the existential distance between exiled Jews and their ancient homeland. He understood the enormous human difficulties encompassed by the act of return. He discussed the phenomenon of Zionist immigration not through an ideological lens, but through the microscope of a sensitive scientist whose subject was the mysteries of human beings.

In a letter he wrote to a friend in Palestine on 27 January 1928, Korczak described the humanistic experience of being in exile:

*Torn from the land, we acclimated to a soil of pines, snow, and exile – physically and morally. The attempt to tie together two ends of the string that was untied two thousand years ago is difficult matter: it will succeed because this is what history demands, but how much effort and suffering.*[[220]](#footnote-230)

He described the spiritual distance from Eretz Yisrael in terms of a physical incompatibility with Palestine’s climate, sunlight and landscape: the physical reality of the Land of Israel. Korczak, as a physician, and educator, understood that exile affects both the mind and body: his holistic perception of exile was as an existential situation encompassing all aspects of the person's selfhood.

Korczak's descriptions of exile and immigration in letters and articles following his visits to Palestine in 1934 and 1936, are sensitive and empathic, but they were written from a detached point of view, like how a doctor would view a patient or a scientist would look at the object of research. Korczak's observation of the settlements in the Land of Israel was more similar to that of an anthropologist than of a committed partner.

Korczak’s Zionist leanings played out agaist the tumultuous political realities of interwar Poland. During those years, a newly independent Poland, created after 150 years of political non-existence, was wrestling with its identity. This internal struggle pushed to the surface deep-rooted anti-Jewish sentiments: aggressive Polish nationalism strengthened anti-Jewish currents in Polish society. Nationalistic circles, in an effort to define Polish identity more clearly, marked the Jews and other minorities as ‘the non-Polish other’ and tried to push them out of the Polish economy and the country’s political, social and cultural life.

The rise of fascism in Germany encouraged even further the expression of anti-Semitism in Poland, and the years from 1934–1939 were ones of growing hatred of the Jews and increasing restrictions of their freedom. These were also the years, in which Korczak as a Polish public figure, found the ground caving in under his feet. As a result he, like many other Polish and European Jews, experienced an ever- growing sense of Jewish belonging. For Korczak this brought with it a loss of his ties to his Polish home.

The hostile environment in Poland had a big influence on the atmosphere in the orphanage. The orphanage community split into two camps: the Zionists and the communists. Polish patriotism disappeared and Korczak experienced an ever-increasing alienation between himself and the best of his pupils. Nor was Korczak able to identify with either of the two alternatives. This alienation was but another facet of Korczak's multi-faceted exile, created by external circumstances.

Yet this process of alienation was a gradual one; in the first half of the 1930s, Korczak continued to feel a deep connection to Polish society. In a letter written in March 1934 about his dilemma whether to remain in Poland or to leave, he emphasized the fact that he was still part of Polish society:

*There is a lot of work to be done in Poland. I am not idle at the side. And this is my climate and my growth, tradition, the people I know – and the language I master freely. Over there everything will be alien and difficult*.[[221]](#footnote-231)

His letters from the 1930s onward showed the increasing difficulty that Korczak faced while working in Poland. Yet whenever he considered the question of immigrating to Palestine, he recognized how difficult it would be to adapt to life there and to continue to be active as an author writing in a new language and as an educator who did not share a common language with his children.[[222]](#footnote-232) In a letter of 20 March 1933 Korczak clearly expressed the push toward immigration created by the situation in Poland and the pull to stay home, because of the difficulties an old Jew rooted in the Polish language would face in trying to acclimate to Palestine:

*There is much work to do here, in Poland. I do not stand aside, lazy, for this is my climate and my growth, the tradition and the people I know – and a language I command freely. There [in Israel] everything will be strange and different.*[[223]](#footnote-233)

In these few words, Korczak sums up the whole tragedy of Diaspora Jews: that the political circumstances of the twentieth century forced upon them the painful decision of immigration. For Korczak, rooted with every fiber of his being in Poland, there was no national ideology that could sweeten the bitter pill of uprooting. The sceptic humanist was faced with a difficult choice. He knew himself, his feelings and thoughts, and he also knew that Zionist activity could not cover up the pain of uprooting, while literal and educational activities in the Land of Israel would be blocked for him because of his cultural foreignness. In Poland, he was an active person, while in Palestine he would be useless, ‘an unturned stone’: Korczak, the writer, and educator, would face the danger of losing his voice.

Korczak's isolation reached its peak after the death of the Polish leader Marshal Pilsudski in 1935. In 1936, he was forced to shut down his beloved radio program, *The Corner of the Old Doctor*.[[224]](#footnote-234) He also to abandon his work at the Nash Dom orphanage for Christian children.

In a letter of 29 March 1937, Korczak testified to the depression that settled on him after he decided to immigrate, in spite of the language difficulties and his limited financial resources.[[225]](#footnote-235) In another emotional letter written the next day, he described why he decided to leave: because ‘*in Poland today, I can be only a consumer*’.[[226]](#footnote-237) In Poland, he confessed to his friends, he was useless, only a bystander.

Korczak was bitterly aware of the difficulty of his choice to leave. Poland, once a homeland, gradually became a place of exile, but the Land of Israel was going to be another exile. Without mastering the Hebrew language, Korczak, the writer, and educator, faced the danger of losing his voice.

Korczak was thus expressing a human truth – the experience of an entire generation, even those who did immigrate to Palestine and not only Polish Jews but also all Jewish immigrants from the entire Jewish Diaspora. It was an inner experience of detachment and foreignness, which was too often hidden by the Zionist pathos. Exile appeared in his honest deliberations as a psychological reality and a relative issue: for the Jew rooted in Poland or in any other country of exile, moving to the ancient homeland would mean entering a new exile. The new homeland was, in reality, a new exile.

Korczak visited Palestine twice, in 1934 and 1936, and he even planned a third trip, perhaps with the purpose of settling there; however, that visit never materialized. We have about fifty letters, which Korczak sent to friends and former pupils in Eretz Yisrael, as well as diary entries that describe his second visit. All these documents offer a detailed but painful view of Korczak's relationship to the Land of Israel and to his Jewish identity. His visits to Eretz Yisrael gave him new strength and the power to create and to develop a vision and belief in humanity, as described in the following chapter, but also revealed him the trap of exile both in Poland and in Palestine with which Jews had to struggle.

Korczak, the humanist, saw immigration not as an ideological act, but as an existential one. The loneliness of the pioneers was clearly visible to Korczak, and he offered them solace and support. He understood the loneliness of the immigrant in its depth and the human effort required to revive one's life in a new country. For that very reason, it was so difficult for him to decide to immigrate.

He even put a time table on the adjustment process, writing, ‘*How long is the pregnancy, after which a Diaspora Jew becomes a citizen of his ancient new homeland? – It would seem three years.*’[[227]](#footnote-238) He also understood immigration as a holistic project of the human being in which settlers have to adjust their sight, breathing, all their senses and their understanding of reality to their new homeland. Furthermore, each individual adjusted in a different way and pace, with younger people able to adapt more quickly. Perhaps the total dedication of the Zionist pioneers to labor was their way of ignoring the difficulties of adjustment: ‘*The ability to live is still not the ability to work. To work here is to forget everything with no exception (the Jews are not drinking spirits). From this perhaps, stem this religious outlook on work.*’[[228]](#footnote-239) Work is ritual, which enabled the young pioneers to forget the pain and loneliness in their hearts.

In the writings of Zionist pioneers in the first decades of the twentieth century, expressions of longing and loneliness were scarce: sharing such feelings was seen as a luxury and a sign of weakness. One was expected to repress one’s feelings of loneliness and longing for the old homeland, but Korczak – looking at these phenomena from a universal humanistic perspective – suggested that they not be denied. Only empathy and a belief in a great ideal can help one overcome despair.

On 4 January 1938, in a letter to Yosef Arnon, Korczak acknowledged these feelings and brought forward another human truth:

*You are lying to yourself in hiding the longing to your homeland or what is known in Russian as ‘Rodina’ – a place in which you were born. This is not good. One must acknowledge and describe the process of growing into the new soil, and this can only be done through a child – he binds. Do you have one – so*?[[229]](#footnote-240)

Korczak recognized that adjustment to a new home is a lifelong process and that immigrants only put down roots and become part of their new land through their children. It is only those children born in the new land who fully experience it as their home.

As a skeptic and humanist, Korczak focused on the human dimensions and not the ideology of the Zionist enterprise, which did not capture his passion. In various writings, he expressed his empathy with those who emigrated to a far-away homeland and struggled with the difficulties of rebirth in a new world.

* 1. **Giving Up**

Korczak's relationship to the Land of Israel was no less tragic than the loss of his feeling of belonging to his Polish homeland. Korczak fell in love with the charm of the country after his two visits there, deeply identified with those pioneers who tried to develop it, and for some years nurtured the idea of immigration. After returning from his second visit, his exclusion from Polish society increased when he was forced off the radio airwaves and from the directorship of the Nash Dom orphanage, which he had run with Maryna Falska since 1919. He lost that job primarily because of an essential difference of opinion with Falska, but the anti-Jewish currents of the time also played a role in his firing.

After the death of Pilsudski in 1935, Polish anti-Semitism became much more virulent, with people openly talking of ‘one million superfluous Jews in Poland’. Korczak's isolation grew and the death of his dream of educating Polish and Jewish children together embittered him. He wrote that a deep personal crisis brought him to the decision to immigrate to Eretz Yisrael.[[230]](#footnote-241) In a letter of 29 March 1937 written to friends in Palestines, he mentioned again this personal crisis and indicated that he has decided to immigrate:

*After a depression, which lasted two months – I have made one last decision: to spend my remaining years in Eretz Yisrael, as of now it would seem, to Jerusalem; there to learn the Hebrew language and after a year, to go to a kibbutz.*[[231]](#footnote-242)

We do not know the the causes of this depression, but these words testify to his mental distress. Two days later, he seemed to question his decision in a letter to his friend Mietek[[232]](#footnote-243): ‘*In May (?) I am going to Eretz Yisrael.*’ The letter continues:

*Old, tired and with no resources, I will make my last attempt. An enormous effort, which I carry unwillingly, as not according to my own will, like according to an order – the order of fate? No more no less, in May (?) I travel to the Land of Israel – and actually, to Jerusalem – for a year. There I have to learn the language. And after that to wherever I will be called….*

*As of now, I have severed all ties here, there are but a few supporters. – And the feeling of running away?… in Poland of today, I could but be a consumer; I read what others write and am sinking in memories for my own benefit alone. I am not allowed to share concealed truths. Maybe Jerusalem will give me strength. – Exile, nostalgia – a life so impersonal, as if I were already looking down from the next world – on the satanic comedy of today's reality. It is not myself that I want to save but my thoughts. I do not want, because I cannot, to detach myself from contact with the Polish reality. I will remain alert to any call, any voice.*[[233]](#footnote-244)

The final part of this letter describes the double exile in which Korczak was trapped: living in Poland meant living in exile, because there, Korczak would ‘*only be a consumer*’and nobody was interested in his ‘merchandise’. However, Jerusalem would also be an exile or a kind of spiritual death, and once there he would be yearning for Poland and its culture. This would be not only a painful longing for something loved; it would also include the sense of having lost the cultural milieu in which he felt more at home than anywhere else: ‘*I cannot detach myself from contact with the Polish reality*.’

In another letter written that same day to Yosef Arnon, Korczak asked him, ‘*I am threatened by a fate of an embittered, resenting, "defeated" old man…. Will I really be able to get straightened out, be born anew, I am not sure*’.[[234]](#footnote-246) Yet he seemed to be addressing this question to himself. He recognized the fact that immigration would be more than just a geographical move and would involve a complete personal transformation, a rebirth. Rebirth is a Korczakian literary idiom. The move to the Land of Israel was not the outcome of a gradual process of deciding to return home, but rather was a metamorphosis entailing painful ‘birth pangs’. Europe was the source of all his thought. What would become of him in a new land? He could fail and remain as a useless, bitter old man.

The letter describes the breaking up of the utopian aspect in Korczak's work in Poland, which he hoped to transfer to the Land of Israel. In spite of everything, he wrote, ‘I still believes in the future of Mankind.’ Where can this humanity be revealed? As a person of two worlds, the Jewish and the Polish ones, who was not at home in either one, Korczak looked for a joint space.

In this letter, Korczak still mentioned his plan to immigrate in May ‘*if no obstacles arise*’. However, two months passed and Korczak painfully retreated from this decision. On 23 May 1937, Korczak wrote to Arnon, who was then living in Kibbutz Ein Harod:

*A year passed and I did nothing…. I am old; my time is short. – I am tired; strength fails. – I have never known how to fight…. I ask you to believe me, that I want to. But, I am not allowed to travel and come to be a burden. You have enough stones in the fields of your work and your lives*.[[235]](#footnote-247)

Korczak was afraid of being a burden to the young pioneers. He was no longer young, and he did not know how he would be able to earn a living. In another letter, Korczak provided another rationale for his giving up on immigrating to Eretz Yisrael: his obligations to take care of the children whom he would leave behind:

*To travel and come to you – there is the responsibility for what I leave here and to what I must obligate myself there. Will I be able to? The danger – it is the possibility of bankruptcy; only I alone can bear the results of having erred. To disappoint trust – is unjust and disgraceful. I became frightened at the last minute.*[[236]](#footnote-248)

Despite his very real responsibilities in Poland, perhaps the real reason he made his decision to stay is expressed in the very last statement: ‘*I became frightened at the last minute.*’ Korczak thus admitted to his friends that in the end, he was afraid to do what several months before appeared to him to be a necessity of fate. Fate, it would seem, planned otherwise.

In that same painful and tragic letter, Korczak still held fast to his universal belief in humanity and his love for every child: ‘*The children, the "Yosekim"* [the Jewish children] *and the "Yashekim"* [the Polish children] *are dear to me all the same. Both here and there, so many manifestations of human kindness, nobility, were trampled in the mud*.’[[237]](#footnote-249) Yet this statement also reveaed his scepticism that Palestine was an exceptional nation: even in the land of Israel, Jewish settlers may harm children. Despite the efforts to create a new utopian society, the reality of family life was still problematic.

In another letter, from 30 December 1937, he wrote,’*One must not allow the world to remain as it is.*’[[238]](#footnote-250) Korczak had a mission to perform, which fate decreed would be running his orphanage and not creating and sustaining his own family, and he would remain faithful to it.

In the earlier mentioned letter of 4 January 4 1938, Korczak gave two reasons for not immigrating to of Eretz Yisrael: his inability to speak Hebrew and a lack of funds, which also prevented him from learning Hebrew.[[239]](#footnote-251) He then wrote at length and emotionally of the spiritual meaning of life in Israel, which for him was not national but universal. Korczak was afraid that he would be a burden and so would be unworthy of settling there. And so in early 1938 Korczak again devoted his efforts in Jewish life in Poland – even returning to the radio airwaves for a time – perhaps to forget his failure to immigrate to Palestine.

Korczak stayed in Poland for several reasons, and it was not clear even to him which tipped the scales toward remaining. However, we may speculate that the most important reason was his consciousness of being caught in the middle between a free authentic Jewishness and Polish rootedness. Had the Polish nation allowed Korczak to live and be active as a Pole, his Jewish identity would have remained dormant. Yet when forced by the political situation to become part of the Jewish public and to identify himself as a Jew, he realized he could not feel at home either as a Pole or as a Jew. It became increasingly clear that he could no longer become fully exercise the Polish option, even though Korczak never relinquished his Polish identity and Polish patriotism. The possibility of going to the Land of Israel and joining the evolutionary course of the Jewish people began to take shape, but in the end he gave up this option as well. What was left to him, and which he ultimately chose, was fulfiling his obligation and identification with the lot of the Jewish children of Poland.

What did it mean to be a Jew in Poland in the middle of the twentieth century? It meant being trapped between exile from the Jewish community and isolation from Polish society; in the end, they were caught between freedom through self-alienation and ripping up of their roots and Treblinka. Assimilated Jews like Korczak experienced not exile from their homeland, but rather an inner exile from Jewish tradition, from which they could not free themselves: was‘’ They were no longer able to be Jewish, but the Nazis and Poles gave them no choice in the matter. They could no longer feel that they were an integral part of Poland because their national affiliation was always questioned and quite often rejected: the ultimate realization of this rejection was the Final Solution.

In this situation, Korczak created his own world, the universal world of all children. The theoretical building blocks for this universal reality were hewn from Stoic philosophy, which emerged in the Hellenistic world when people looked for a universal ordering principle in response to the destruction of their society by Alexander the Great. A universal ordering principle was again needed in response to the rise of Nazism. Korczak drew on the concepts of infinite nature and rationality to structure a world that would bring together all human beings from east and west, north and south, and all races, nationalities and religious affiliations. Korczak's utopia still inspires us today.

1. **The Land of Hope**
   1. **Maybe in the Land of Israel Human Hopes Will Become a Reality**

After he decided to stay in Poland, the Land of Israel remained for Korczak a utopia – a land of longing that he could not enter. Korczak's understanding of Eretz Yisrael, though naïve, is inspiring and at the same time challenging.

It was not Zionism that animated Korczak’s vision of the Land of Israel, but a universal messianism. Palestine was more than a safe haven for individuals or for the Jewish people. Korczak used the universal humanism that characterized his approach to education as a prism through which to envision the Land of Israel as the meeting place of all human prayers: '*All yearning, not Jewish, but human, is directed to the Land of Israel*.’[[240]](#footnote-253) Sadly, this vision has not been fulfilled. Israel today is an arena of bitter conflicts amongst different nationalities and faiths; it is a source and setting for expressions of religious fanaticism, hatred and violence. Jerusalem, whose name contains the Hebrew word *shalom* (peace), is a combustible city on the dividing lines between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The cradle of Judaism and Christianity and a sacred place for Islam, Jerusalem continues to generate fanaticism, discord and violence that threaten the future of humankind.

Korczak was not blind to the conflict between Arabs and Jews and the political complexities of Palestine, and yet he imagined utopian horizons for this troubled land. He saw it as a potential gathering place for all humanity uniting behind the cause of the child; he envisioned it as the world's sanctuary of education.

Just as his vision of Palestine was naïve, so Korczak held unrealistic hopes for improved relationships between Jews and Gentiles in Poland. By the mid- to late 1930s he could not longer work in public positions within Polish society; as he wrote in March 1937 to his friends in Palestine, he could only be a consumer, not a producer, in Poland.[[241]](#footnote-254) With the the walls of anti-Semitism closing in on him, his dream that education would bring all people together shattered. Korczak's most famous book, *King Matt the First*, is a story about a kingdom of children who strive to overcome the differences of race, faith, language, nationality and competing for historical narratives. The children in King Matt's world are able to create an all-encompassing solidarity, but the adults fail them. History has shown that in the real world, as like in the book, adults’ hatred prevailed and human solidarity remained a utopia.

In retrospect, Korczak's continuing but unsuccessful efforts to educate Jewish and Christian children together look pathetic and, given his fate, even macabre. All children of every race and religion were the same for Korczak but not for society. The children of the Jewish orphanage never lived under one roof with the children of the Christian Polish orphanage, nor did they ever even visit one another.[[242]](#footnote-255) From the inception of Nash Dom, the Christian orphanage, the children there enjoyed better living conditions than did the Jewish orphanage children. And when the war started the fates of those children completely diverged: Nash Dom continued to function nearly untouched, but in November 1940, along with the rest of the Jews of Warsaw, the children of the Jewish orphanage of Krochmalna Street were forced into the Jewish ghetto and eventually deported to Treblinka.

As the European sky darkened, the Land of Israel gradually brightened as a source of hope. Like the ancient prophets, Korczak trusted that hope would come out of Zion and the teachings of peace and brotherhood would prevail until ‘*nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*’ (Isaiah 2).

Korczak could not ignore Zionism, but he gave it a universal rather than a national meaning. For him the Land of Israel was not just a physical reality, but a spiritual being, a complex text that demanded decoding and sensitive interpretation. His impressions of his visits to the Land of Israel in 1934 and 1936, as well as his exchange of letters with friends in Palestine, reveal the meaning he gave to the Land of Israel.[[243]](#footnote-256)

While Korczak refused to become a formal or active member of the Zionist movement, he did recognize the historical significance not only of Zionism but also of his own visits to Palestine. He was the first one in his family to travel to Israel, and he clearly saw this visit as making him part of the Jewish story:

*No man, not one of my forefathers, I am the first. I have privileged, I accomplished it. When seeing the far-off Haifa coast – the thought pulsed inside me. The wish that is recited in the prayer every year ‘next year in Jerusalem’ will come true. This is the end of exile. The return after years of wandering and persecution, I have privileged and have reached it.*[[244]](#footnote-257)

Yet Korczak, despite his excitement, retained a measure of distance and did not lose his critical view of Palestine. He was not moved by the national narrative: ‘*the same thing is being done in Australia*’*,* he wrote in an article summarizing his two visits.[[245]](#footnote-258) What made the endeavor to settle Palestine important and interesting to him was his framing it as part of the long human quest for redemption. In a letter he sent to a friend in Palestine on 27 November 1933, Korczak pointed to something beyond the Zionist experiment and its emphasis on the logistics of settlements: ‘*The world does not need new work and more oranges, but rather a new belief.*’[[246]](#footnote-259) Humanity needed new horizons, which could be realized in Eretz Yisrael. For Korczak Zionism was not merely a national project, but rather a great humanistic endeavor with universal meaning: ‘*But in Israel we must see, even through a crack, through the carriage window the attempt to resurrect the land, the language, the Man, his destiny and his faith*.’[[247]](#footnote-260) What was at stake was no less than the future of humankind. The Zionist enterprise was a humanistic revolution, part of the struggle for a better world, rather than a narrow national struggle.

Korczak did not deviate from his universal world view even in times of deep crisis and growing hostilities. Zionist’s national dimension – to provide a safe haven for persecuted people –affected Korczak's life in the most direct way, yet held very little importance for him. Even in his ghetto diary, which was written in the darkest times, he still retained his faith in humanity as a whole. On 27 July 1942, when most of the ghetto residents were sent to their deaths, he wrote that all children, Jewish and Gentile, are of equal value and the German soldier stationed beyond the wall captured his attention as an individual human being.[[248]](#footnote-261)

Korczak's writings are aphoristic, dialogical in style, as if he were engaging in an intimate conversation with himself. It is difficult to obtain a systematic philosophy from them, but they do reveal his complex views of the Land of Israel. Palestine had several layers of meaning for him: his own struggle about whether to move there, which was discussed in the previous chapter; his empathy for those who had immigrated to a troubled and difficult land in order to redeem their people; his seeing it as an important experimental laboratory of new human relationships; and the religious meaning given to life in the land of the prophets.

* 1. **Making Roots in a New Land**

As evident from his letters and articles Korczak was a humanist who was most interested in individuals’ personal struggles – both the failures and successes – to build new lives in a new land. He spoke and wrote as an educator, as an older friend of the young Zionist pioneers, as a doctor and an anthropologist who was studying a great human drama. Korczak expressed disdain for ideological movements that usually turn out to be authoritarian and oppressive: Zionist ideologies as well were subject to his humanistic scepticism. However, he felt empathy for the humanitarian efforts of the young pioneers, and he was very much interested in their human struggle. They shared with him their difficulties and disappointments in the new Israeli society. Korczak suggested forbearance, patience, and acceptance of their difficulties as natural and inevitable elements of any immigration.

In a letter to Madjya Markuze on 25 August 1935, he tried to ease the pain of immigration. He wrote about the process of making roots in a new country, based on his experiences during the Russo-Japanese War:

*There are weeds that easily make roots in any place and there are plants that make roots only through labor and pain – new soil and new sun. But these can be overcome. Make roots; the first year is the most difficult one – the spirit is lost, detached from the body. The second year, giving up together with strong, though short, storms. The third year: only soft memories.*[[249]](#footnote-262)

Using the metaphor of planting, he counseled her that the uprooting process is a long and difficult one, especially for people with a rich personality who have meaningful ties with their former society. It could take as long as three years for the memories of the old homeland to no longer be a source of pain and for that land of memories to give way to a new homeland.

In his article ‘Impressions and Thoughts’ written after his second visit to Palestine, Korczak listed all the changes that European Jews experienced when they immigrated: in the climate, in the landscape from lowlands to mountains, in moving from a city to a village, in occupation from trade to agriculture, in moving the quick pace of life to a slower pace, in living near Arabs, and in switching to a new language. Settlers had to leave their families and live without their former God, traditions, morals and rituals; they had to make the transition from individual to communal life. They had to undergo a multi-dimensional change that would affect all parts of the personality. Making all these changes would be a huge challenge for anyone.[[250]](#footnote-263)

Korczak understood immigration as not only a realization of an idea; it was a total act to which immigrants had to devote all their might if they wanted to overcome the pain of detachment from their birth land and become integrated into their new land:

*How long continues the pregnancy, which after the exile Jew becomes a citizen in his ancient new homeland? Three years I assume: first year – a steady condition of foreignness; second year – alternate despair and rebellion; third year – quite growth, as the land is already his – work, heavens, breath and sweet; irritating and cause impatient the dry skin of the person of the North. I have planted a Birch tree, Chestnut tree, and Sumac tree [Og in Hebrew]; brought them from the gardener's garden to the children's playground. These trees smiled out of freedom and joy only in the third year of their planting*.[[251]](#footnote-264)

In this passage, Korczak continued to mine nature for metaphors for the immigration process, referring to it as a tree in several places. For Korczak, immigration and absorption were natural processes that take time and have both physical and emotional aspects. The absorption process was made more difficult when one tried to repress its difficulties and deny their legitimacy. As a physician and humanist, and not only a pedagogue, Korczak had a holistic understanding of the human experiences of his young friends:

*First year – the longing of the blood, breath, nerves, brain, eyes. Second year, probably harder: restlessness; now, no pains, but like the shock of a bad tooth, as a cracking of joints of the bones; more than that, storming days, echoes of rebellion and no use longing. Third year – you make roots slowly in the new soil. After that, curiosity, how it is now there.*[[252]](#footnote-265)

Two years after his second visit in Palestine, he continued to try to ease the pain of immigration experienced by his friends; in this letter to Yosef Arnon of 4 January 1938, he tried to convince him to accept his difficulties with understanding and forgiveness:

*Dear Yosef,*

*You are lying to yourself in hiding the longing to your homeland, or what is called in Russian ‘Rodina’, a place in which you were born. It is of no good. One has to admit and describe the process of growing into the new soil, and one can do it only with a child – he or she bonds. You have – so? The Land of Israel is harder than countries, which do not touch us emotionally. Brazil, Argentine – and we have, first of all, to leave illusions behind. and the burden of duty and responsibility is heavy. In Brazil you ask: what have I done best? However, in the Land of Israel you ask was it worth? There: what will be about me? And here: what will be with us? There 20-30 years of my life; Here, two thousand years of our life.*

*I met in Harbin a Pole, who was ashamed that he already he is not longing so much' and does not love so much [Poland]. And you are ashamed that you are still longing*.[[253]](#footnote-266)

In this letter, Korczak added two important elements to the understanding of the human experience of those who immigrate to the Land of Israel. The first is the meaning of having a family and children. Immigrants may finally feel at home in their new land when they have a child there, a child who then will have only one home and one homeland. Korczak saw the Zionist enterprise as the creation of new life, the building of a ‘normal’ family life devoid of the abnormalilty of exile.

That Zionism’s mission is the building of a home for a homeless people is still under dispute. In principle, it clashes with the traditional Jewish idea of foreignness. For many generations, Jewish identity was forged in the matrix of exile until it became an elemental aspect of the Jewish mindset: the Jew is the one who has no home, an eternal wonderer who dreams about his or her lost homeland, but does very little to achieve it. Jewish messianism traditionally assigned God the responsibility enable the Jews to return home. Korczak was aware of the historical meaning of the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel, but was not carried away by the messianic energies that emerged from the deep ground to the surface of life.

The second element added by Korczak was the spiritual dimension of the Land of Israel, which might introduce some barriers to integration in the new land but also would give metaphysical meaning to resettling there. For Korczak, immigration to the Land of Israel was not only a personal endeavor but also was part of a historical move and as such had communal significance. In the Land of Israel, there is not only the ‘I’ but also the ‘we’. More than that, life there carries a meta-historical burden: ‘here also two thousand years of life’. Korczak highlighted the tension between the two poles of the pioneering act with which the young settlers occupied themselves all the time: the first represented the intimate aspects of everyday life – the personal adjustment, building a home and family life, the home building and the family life. The second pole was public, communal and spiritual, expressed in a mythical pathos and representing a meta-historical consciousness.

Korczak's letter to Esther Budko-Gad of 27 January 1928 expressed the tension between these two poles: he wrote about his dislike of grand phrases, which he did not trust, and stated that after the initial passion of the Zionist discourse diminished, one was left with the grey reality of life, which demanded great effort and pain:

*The last letter of my lady is an important document for me, which verifies what I had thought about the Land of Israel and the work in it. Many naïve dreams and youth delusions, and bitter disillusionments are bound to the Land of Israel. When the excitement will vaporize, the declamation and the restlessness enthusiastic about high impressions, remain only the disillusioned cold facts.*

*Torn from the land, we [are] acclimated to a soil of pines, snow and exile – physically and morally. The attempt to tie together two ends of the string that was untied two thousand years ago, is difficult matter: it will succeed because this is what history demands, but how much efforts and suffering.[[254]](#footnote-267)*

Korczak understood that settling in the Land of Israel meant spiritual and existential exile from one’s place of birth. It meant moving to an incompatible climate, landscape and physical reality of Eretz Yisrael. Exile is an existential situation encompassing all aspects of the person's selfhood, and "big words" cannot mask the reality of the historical rift of two thousand years of exile nor spare the work of its mending. The act of bridging the gap of history demands hard work every day: there are no shortcuts.

Korczak knew only too well the story of the European revolutions that entangled comrades in big words and then drowned them in rivers of blood. Therefore, in that letter to Esther Budko-Gad, he added this statement: ‘It is very easy to die for the sanctity of an idea.’ It was much harder, and demanded stubbornness and patience, to live out the utopian idea day after day and year after year. He returned repeatedly to the idea of settling the land as Sisyphean work, demanding a lifelong commitment. This was the heroism of a life of labor and the creation of a moral society in the Land of Israel.

The ending of this letter framed these ideas in an even broader perspective:

*The problem 'man', his past and future on earth – somehow overshadows in my eyes the problem 'Jewish'. I will not be misled by clichés of big words about the extraordinary wonders about the child in the Land of Israel. It is bad for him, there, as well, as there also he or she are misunderstood* [[255]](#footnote-268)

Korczak was insistent that his reader see him neither as a silly Hassid nor as a blind follower of Zionism. For him, the Zionist project had to have a universal meaning, which it could obtain only when connected consciously and intentionally to the redemption of humanity in general and children in particular. This mission would be achieved only by hard work, by many small actions. On 17 February 1935 he wrote to his friend Zeev Yoskowitz and his son Binyamin that they ‘*demand from yourself something which more that super human efforts can achieve*’.[[256]](#footnote-270) They were given ‘musical instruments’, but playing music well demands time, not to mention that the world is continuously ‘throwing’ on them more and more people to absorb and integrate into society.

Even in his diary entries in 1942, in a situation that could not be more different from the reality of the Land of Israel, Korczak continued to address the difficulties of absorption and to emphasizes the spiritual dimension of life there: ‘*Young Palestine is making arduous and honest efforts to come to terms with the earth. But the Heaven's turn will also come. Otherwise all would be a misunderstanding, a mistake*.’[[257]](#footnote-272) Without dealing with the metaphysics of life in the Land of Israel, both adjustment to life there and the Zionist project as a whole would have no meaning.

* 1. **Life in the Land of Israel**

Korczak humanistic exploration of the pioneering project in the Land of Israel focussed on the realities of life there, particularly on differences in the upbringing of children. Zionism’s aim was not only to rescue Jews from harm but also to bring about a radical change in values and to create a new person, one connected to nature, free to be creative and released from the oppression of political bonds. Zionism was a call for an identity change.[[258]](#footnote-273)

As an educator, Korczak saw Zionism as enabling a coherent monistic Jewish identity for children, in contrast to the dual identity of modern life. The cultural split between two worlds, the Jewish and the non-Jewish, was the cornerstone of Jewish identity in exile for years and characterized life in Poland as well: ‘*when a Jewish child attends a Polish school, he sees in his dreams his parents' home in Yiddish, and the school issues in Polish. He lacks words for new ideas.*’[[259]](#footnote-274) This split shaped Jews’ understanding of their place in the world. This cultural schizophrenia intensified when the walls of the Jewish ghetto came down and the Jews gradually gained the opportunity to integrate into the general society.

Only in the Land of Israel, concluded Korczak after his two visits to Palestine, would the mother's lullaby be sung in the same language taught at school; only there would children grow up in an integrated cultural milieu. The land – its landscape and its history – would be the mentor of the Israeli-born child, the sabra.[[260]](#footnote-275) From a pure pedagogical perspective, Korczak thus formulated, inadvertently, the important Zionist ideal of self-determination: the quest for an integrative life, cultural holism and auto-emancipation.[[261]](#footnote-276)

The goal of Korczak's first visit to the Land of Israel was to observe changes in the identity of both children and adults in the Land of Israel. He wanted to observe the new form of social organization, the kibbutz, in operation. He therefore stayed most of his time in one place, Kibbutz Ein Harod, even though his friends living elsewhere begged him to visit them. He characterized the Israeli children of the kibbutz as a new species born to the Jewish people, asking whether they were by nature bolder or freer than Polish Jewish children or whether the kibbutz environment made them that way. Here is his answer:

*How to differentiate between a child who was born in the Land of Israel and a child who just came from Europe? If you bump into, tease a European child he or she will cry frightened, ‘Mama!’, and the Israeli born child will just grumble or will call – ‘ass’! Fine: lets try it, and we will see. I pushed a child in the street, and quickly apologized . [He] looked surprised and said: ‘never mind’. No ‘Mama’ and no ‘ass’. It was one out of many, and yet it was my victory. So, I know the child, even the one from the Land of Israel.*

*I would wish that the teacher and the educator, especially the new, the one from Germany, will understand that the respect that the children are commanded to pay the adults is a blunt, filthy, and brutal deception. Behind it hides an evaluation of characteristics, disadvantages and faults, sometimes lurks resentment, scorn and mockery. One has to go above the vulgar rules.*[[262]](#footnote-277)

Unexpectedly, Korczak saw the vulgarity of the sabra not as an expression of a cultureless native, but rather as a combination of new abilities and new manners. The lesson, which he directed at educators who were not born in Palestine, was the need to respect the child and her new world.

In his essay, ‘Impression from the Land of Israel’, Korczak described the impact of freedom on children: ‘*I saw that their walk on the rocky terrain is different. Put down their feet in two stages – at the beginning they check with the toes if the surface is even, and only* *then the whole foot and a step forward. Luckless, tiny and falls upside down*’.[[263]](#footnote-278) He appreciated the special bond that the children had with their surroundings, expressed in their barefoot walk on the rocky soil and the unmediated contact with nature, which enabled a healthiness that one did not find among Jewish children in Poland.

Influenced by Stoic teaching, Korczak translated the idea that people are an integral part of nature into pedagogical practice.[[264]](#footnote-279) He believed that human beings are not ‘created in the image of God’, but in the mold of their place in nature. Therefore, nature is the proper context for raising children. Every summer Korczak made it possible for poverty-stricken children to enjoy summer camp in the countryside. However, he understood full well that summer camp, as wonderful as it was, was only a part of the life of the inner-city children, a sharp contrast to their everyday experience.[[265]](#footnote-280)

The reality of kibbutz life in the Land of Israel was different: nature was an inseparable part of everyday life. Israeli children grew up surrounded by the natural environment and knew its secrets.[[266]](#footnote-281) Korczak saw the realization of the Zionist ideal of the ‘new man’ in the Israeli children he observed: they were healthy and connected to nature.[[267]](#footnote-282) In the Land of Israel, so he told his readers in Warsaw, the bond to the land is authentic, part of the routine of life: it molds identity – and even though it felt alien to him, he wished to enjoy that unmediated experience[[268]](#footnote-283):

*A land – in Hebrew Adama (earth), bed, cradle.*

*Look with suspicious at the adults. Mother, that the Hebrew in her mouth is distorted, a praying grandfather, the teacher who does not know what is the name of this plant, what is the name of that bird. When they came and announced that there is a poisonous snake in the bushes, ‘did you see it?’ no, they did not see , but they know, as the startled call of the birds told them. An innocent lizard, incriminating scorpion, an innocent snake, deadly viper. All have to be known, and they know.*[[269]](#footnote-284)

In contrast to their parents who struggled bitterly to put down roots in their new land, the kibbutz children were not in exile anymore: they were an authentic part of the reality of the country. They knew the secrets of the land, its wildlife and its climate: they were at home.

**8.4.** **The Kibbutz: A Human Laboratory**

As a holistic educator, Korczak was fascinated by the comprehensive educational milieu that he found in the kibbutz. He observed the children closely, ‘reading’ them and learning about them in their childhood reality, as they went for a walk, worked in the fields or played in their yards. In the simplicity and authenticity of the young settlements, Korczak found a unique pedagogical environment.

Believing that the best education is derived from the land and from everyday life, Korczak distrusted elaborate educational theories that missed – in their academic pretentiousness – the infinity of life. Relying on established theories caused educators to forget the basic principle that education is always an open quest,[[270]](#footnote-285) and he advised young parents and educators to use their common sense and intuition to find answers to their questions. His visits to Palestine were opportunities for Korczak to share his pedagogical expertise with young parents, who were cut off from the support of their families. He addressed such basic issues as how frequently to feed babies, how to bathe them, what should they wear on hot days, and how to discipline them.

In his essay ‘So and So on Children’ (July 1937), he wrote,

*I am scared from the city-pedagogues, afraid from the seminars. I had said: it is better that the [woman] educator will work five years with chickens, and from the chickens will pass to the children then she will work on the basis of formal accomplished certified knowledge.… the children are growing up into their lives, which are the lives of their parents. This is the explanation for the local patriotism of the kibbutz children*.[[271]](#footnote-286)

At the outset the kibbutz was a unique laboratory of education. However, it was soon influenced by traditional pedagogical systems and theories, despite Korczak’s advice, and kibbutz education became more orthodox in character. Despite these changes, Korczak was inspired by the kibbutz model, whose adoption he thought could prevent the

exploitation of children in particular and oppression in general found throughout Europe:

*Life is hard, go beyond the child and the adult before they grow into it. I can confirm with full responsibility to my words, that they seek in honesty and in totality to solve the serious fundamental problem of common work and common life of people different people by race, faith, culture, sex, temper, knowledge, talents, qualities and ambitions. Seek – it is important not to hide, to evade lies – to solve the problem. More than that, they try in their life and the life of their children – seek, adapt, suffer, change, accept. In this game, they involve with full trust – I repeat – all their lives and the lives of their children*.[[272]](#footnote-287)

Korczak looked with wonder at the efforts of the young pioneers to mold a new type of individual and to create a new society built on new types of human relationships . ‘*Life is not a game*’, says Korczak. ‘*One must have the courage to admit the seriousness of life.*’[[273]](#footnote-288) The young pioneers were taking upon themselves the challenge of treating life with seriousness and respect. The supreme achievement of Zionism was the fulfilment of the ancient prophetic promise of a new society with different human relations. Like a modern Isaiah, Korczak saw that one day a new vision of human solidarity would come out of Zion.

In a visit to another unspecified kibbutz, he heard someone singing a song of ‘yearning’ and noted, ‘*I am probably mistaken, but it seems that here lies the future of the Israeli lyrics. Here is the harvest field for poets and musicians. The depth of truth and simplicity – for adults and children*’.[[274]](#footnote-289) He envisioned the kibbutz as the creativity workshop from which a new poetry would emerge based on a new understanding of humankind, including the child.

While admiring the vision and efforts of these young pioneers, he called for moderation in their effort to create a new society.[[275]](#footnote-290) As a naturalistic ethicist, he was fully aware of the limitations and weaknesses of ordinary people. At the same time he was a visionary educator who welcomed the great opportunities that life in Israel offered for a new form of education and a new kind of educators – those who respected the lives of children and listened carefully to their own intuition rather than to professional theories of education.[[276]](#footnote-291)

* 1. **Jews and Arabs**

During Korczak's second visit to Israel, he faced the realities of the Jewish-Arab conflict; the Arab uprising against the British and bloody Arab-Jewish clashes had occurred earlier in 1936. Yet Korczak's observations remained unemotional and objective; he did not adopt wholesale the Jewish perspective of reality in the Land of Israel. He recognized that both Arabs and Jews were engaged in the human struggle for a better life; he looked on the Arabs as humans who had just started to organize to achieve their own destiny. He showed empathy for their poor living conditions and understood that their first attempts to promote a national revival paralleled those of the Jews:

*The Jews are being deported from Europe because they are needed at another front in the war for humankind's tomorrow. They carried out their duties well and quickly, amazingly quickly. The Arabs already know not only how to shoot and throw bombs – that is a marginal detail in their new ‘daily’ journal. They opened their sleepy eyes, saw their poverty and misery, and sensed that they themselves were responsible for this. Here also, the plowing is a meter deep and there are many rocks strewn on the field*.[[277]](#footnote-292)

Korczak showed a great sensitivity for the Arab children who grew up in poverty close to the kibbutzim and Jewish settlements.[[278]](#footnote-293) As an external observer, he looked with wonder and hope at the Jewish and Arab children who examined each other through the kibbutz fence. In both the Arab and Jewish communities, children were just trying to find their own way in life, and they deserved the same rights. He gave no voice to the fear of a national Arab-Jewish confrontation, even though he was writing soon after the bloody Arab uprising of 1936**.**

Korczak was also very interested in Nazareth, Bethlehem and other sites holy to Christians. He saw Jesus as an individual who sought to improve the welfare and conditions of humankind, as one in a line of dedicated individuals who struggled for a better human existence. He had a similar view of the Bahai movement whose world centres were in Haifa and Akko:

*When I looked at Nazareth from above, I don’t know why, but I asked myself a great question: who was Achad Ha’am and what did he write? Secondly, I remember, when standing in a garden on the Carmel, in front of the mausoleum of the Persian Ali Muhammad Bab, or Hussein Baha-Ullah: 20,000 of his followers were tortured to death, the cult is one hundred years old and has half a million believers. (The children of Ein-Harod visited its settlement beside the Jordan on a school trip several years ago).*

*And here is this cult’s program:*

*The unity of the human race – and to forget prejudices; belief must unite; independent search for truth; belief and knowledge and intelligence fitting each other; an international language taught in all the schools in the world, art, science and work for all, not a competition but working together; a comprehensive peace*.[[279]](#footnote-294)

Dreamers and people of vision have been attracted to the land of Israel throughout human history. It is fascinating to see how positively Korczak wrote about the Bahai faith and its vision that universal peace and the fusion of all world faiths would be realized in the Land of Israel.[[280]](#footnote-295) Korczak even mentioned a field trip he took with the children of Kibbutz Ein-Harod to a Bahai village across the Jordan River.[[281]](#footnote-296) He saw the Land of Israel not as an arena of conflict between peoples who each claimed ownership of it, but as the meeting place of all the world’s great cultures that would bring about the revival of humanity. It would be a place where a moral and just society would again come into being.

**8.6 The Land of Israel's Metaphysical Dimension**

The Land of Israel for Korczak played a pivotal role in the history of humanity's great spiritual traditions. He believed that humankind has the moral mission to improve the world – ‘*it is forbidden to leave the world as it is*’[[282]](#footnote-297) – and that the Holy Land called on all people of good faith to be involved in the human drama. Despite Korczak's concern for his young friends in Palestine, he held on to a broader utopian idea: a universal humanistic messianism. His language had a religious dimension, but it was humanistic, not theistic.

Korczak saw education as a means to realize the messianic vision. The kibbutz in particular and the Zionist experiment in general provided the historical opportunity to fulfil the longed-for educational reforms and the emancipation of children: '*If there is a country in which they permit the child, in all honesty, his dreams and fears, his longings and doubts - perhaps it is Israel. There they should erect a monument to the anonymous orphan*.’[[283]](#footnote-298)

In a letter to David Simchoni, his friend in Kibbutz Ein Harod, Korczak expressed his religious fascination with what was happening in the kibbutz communities:

*A country searching for God. Perhaps someone will say: and India, and China? Perhaps. But here – in longing (Kissufim), in surrender, in isolation, in shame – we will become strengthened, not a need, not a desire, but the necessity of life, the very existence, and its end*.[[284]](#footnote-299)

Korczak pointed to the compatibility between the spiritual essence of the Land of Israel and its being a sanctuary of education. Life in the Land of Israel, the land of God, naturally gave birth to a new approach to children. Korczak’s most-quoted statement is that to reform education is to reform and mend the world.[[285]](#footnote-300) For Korczak, the Land of Israel, especially the kibbutz communities, could be the sanctuary of this grand reform.

As mentioned, Korczak's vision of Zionism was broader than its practicalities or even its role in providing the urgent needed safe haven for persecuted Jews: ‘*The world does not need new work and more oranges, but rather a new belief.*’[[286]](#footnote-301) Universal humanism was the prism through which one should see the Land of Israel – the meeting place of all human prayers: *‘All yearning, not Jewish but human, is directed to the Land of Israel*’.[[287]](#footnote-302) The Land of Israel is more than the landscape, the climate, the rocks and the sunburned mountains: it is a multi-cultural religious text that attracts the yearnings of all people. It brings to life the spiritual dimension of human life and humankind's struggle for justice and redemption. Its, which, gives the Land of Israel.

Korczak, the assimilated Jew, for whom the climate and landscape of the Land of Israel were so foreign, wrote poetically about its spirituality. In the Land of Israel, the heavens are higher and deeper; the stars are brighter, hiding a secret that puts a spell on human souls:

*Even the beautiful night – its stars are largest – and most respectful. They speak in a foreign language. They speak in a very important language, in the language of the Bible, about eternal, secret matters. The stars of the land of Israel demand an effort of the emotions and thought, and do not leave a moment of rest. I tried to examine my own impression, my subjective one, in my conversations. I even had the theory – perhaps that is why people run away from the voices of the stars, and silence them, a little here and a little there, in pleasures of the flesh?*

*One day, psychologists will deal with the danger of evening in the land of Israel when people refuse to listen to the eternal truths of the stars and their categorical commands. The pure words emitting from them they will attempt to drown in a wave of blood.*[[288]](#footnote-303)

The Land of Israel's sky tells this spiritual history, whose understanding demands that people make an effort to respond to and grasp it; it puts a spell on people. It has a kind of reactivity that no other land has. Its metaphysical dimension is too powerful for many, even causing people to lose their sanity: it may lead to a recognized condition, the Holy Land Syndrome, that people try to evade either by throwing themselves into everyday matters and ‘*pleasures of the flesh*’ or engaging in violence and bloodshed: *rivers of blood*’.[[289]](#footnote-304) may be seen as adeepfountTo our misfortune, Korczak's understanding of the dangerous spiritual potential of this land is still relevant today. He did, butbelieveddredemption ofhum

Korczak, without falling under the sway of Jewish or Christian messianism, felt the enormous spiritual ‘radioactivity’ in the meeting place of the great monotheistic traditions: *‘Every corner of the world has its own 3000 years, but the history of the land of Israel is connected in a different way with human history.*’*[[290]](#footnote-305)* This land is unlike any other country because it radiates a radical message to all humankind.

The Land of Israel, the cradle of the great spiritual traditions, attracted Korczak as if he were under its magic spell. He conceived of religion not as an historical phenomenon, but as a great adventure of the human mind that seeks the secret of human existence. Korczak did not affiliate with any established religion, but he recognized the holiness and spirituality that wre immanently present in this land because of its history. Being neither fully Jewish nor fully Polish, Korczak was open to the spirituality of the Land of Israel that one just had to listen and open one’s eyes to see.

People relate to the Land of Israel as a value concept, as the aim of their dreams, as a space of holy traditions. Those who come to this land have to struggle stubbornly, physically and spiritually, to understand what it tells. It demands the truth: ‘*The Land of Israel is allowed not to be afraid of the truth, not to be afraid of peeling off the Bronze from it … it is worthy not to be treated as a wunderkind.*"[[291]](#footnote-306)

In spite of his use of this pseudo-religious language, Korczak encountered the Land of Israel through the lens of humanism as he explored the spirit of humankind. Surviving in its arid climate and mountainous landscape was difficult, but it was even more difficult to comprehend the human mind. The Land of Israel was important precisely because it opened the door to a deeper understanding of humankind.

The Land of Israel, God's vineyard, was asleep for generations, like the Sleeping Beauty of fairy tales; it began awakening in the twentieth century when young Jewish pioneers started to settle there. However, it was not the land of only one people nor of only one tradition, but rather the cradle of all great traditions and, one hoped, the birthplace of new ones encompassing all of humanity:

*Did you know the country that fell asleep and will sleep for generations? Did you know the country, God’s vineyard, whose pride is that it told about God to many nations and instilled a new faith in peoples and predicted new starlight and the sound of new ideas?*[[292]](#footnote-307)

According to Korczak, the Land of Israel, whick he saw as concealing a great secret about the human encounter with God, would soon inspire a third epic in the trilogy of monotheistic thought. First came the Hebrew Bible and then the New Testament; the time seemed ripe to Korczak for a third text that would unite all humankind:

*Not so the Bible. Not the prophets. More than I know I feel that here is the birth of a complete poetry. The sanctity of the book has vanished, but its value remains. It would be strange if the new Hebrew language did not use its right and ability to create a new epic – not as a continuation of today, now – as a completion of a trilogy, after the holy writings and the New Testament*.[[293]](#footnote-308)

The religious struggle over the Land of Israel was being waged by three monotheistic traditions: two of them, Judaism and Christianity, were born in this land and see it as their sanctuary, and Islam found an anchor in it. Instead of fighting over who possessed the land, he hoped this new epic would legitimize it as a place of human solidarity. As such, it would embody respect for children. In Korczak's vision of utopia, all the people’s dreams would meet and merge into an all-encompassing harmony.

In his essay ‘Impressions and Thoughts’,[[294]](#footnote-310) Korczak wrote about the third ‘return’ of the Israeli people to its land, in which the Zionist enterprise would become part of a project encompassing all of humanity; the third epic in the holy trilogy would guide a new tradition that will bring redemption to all humankind.

For Korczak, the Land of Israel had meaning only when viewed through a universal lens and through a new kind of divinity: a humanistic God that belongs to all. Moreover, it had the right to exist only if its mission would address the lives of all people. Anything less than a a total change in humankind would ot not enough:

*If I wanted to come to the Land of Israel it’s not because I have an illusion; it’s because we need to tell people that only God (although a new one, not one of 2,000 years ago) will give the Land of Israel the right to exist and the hope of finding the way. Not the God of heaven, but the God of the Earth, not an ideal, but human, attainable and unknown*.[[295]](#footnote-311)

In Erezt Yisrael, the infinite adventure of education and the immanent religiosity of the land meet. However, the enormous human efforts to revive the Land of Israel will be worthy only if they are in the service of the human quest to form a new universal reality of children and childhood. Korczak worshiped not the God of heaven, but the God of the earth: the infinity of life. The Zionist experiment had legitimacy in Korczak’s eyes only when it became a universal quest for a better life for all.

As in Isaiah's prophecy, Zion, Jerusalem and the Land of Israel should be the meeting place of all humankind. In Jerusalem, as Korczak dreamed in one of his letters, there will be formed a second League of Nations dedicated to spiritual life, human individuality and the rights of children..[[296]](#footnote-312) It would complement the work of the League of Nations that handles material issues such as wars, labor and public health.

Though Korczak wrote in a utopian language, he did not remain solely in the safety of a utopian ‘territory’. According to the Stoic Pietas, struggling for a better world is not a theoretical issue or an abstract belief but rather a moral demand. ‘*It is forbidden to leave the world the way it is,*’ wrote Korczak,[[297]](#footnote-313) echoing Marcus Aurelius's Stoicism. Zionism, therefore, is not just a dream but a historical and ethical necessity, but only if it has a universal character.

Korczak wanted to come to the Land of Israel to enter a dialogue with infinity, with the God of the land, with its history and moral teaching: ‘*If I want to come to Israel, it is to talk with God and with the past. People need a new Bible*.’[[298]](#footnote-315) He wanted to be engaged in writing this new Bible – the Magna Carta of children's rights – that he felt could be written and realized only in the holy land of all nations, the Land of Israel.

* 1. **The Land of Hope Is Still a Utopia**

Korczak's vision of the Land of Israel was utopian, rather than realistic, and it has yet to be fulfilled. Bitter conflicts amongst different nationalities and faiths, religious fanaticism, hatred, and violence continue to plague the country. Yet, we cannot abandon the dream of solidarity and peace; we cannot live without the hope of human salvation embedded in Korczak's writings. As according to the Stoic Pietas, struggling for a better world is a moral imperative.

Korczak dedicated his entire life to the cause of children, and the Land of Israel was for him the Promised Land for children. There, they would finally secure their inalienable rights: it was written in the language of its stars.

The life of children in the holistic and integrated environment of the kibbutz communities fascinated him. The kibbutz was a pioneering laboratory of new human relations and a just society. He encouraged the young kibbutz members to explore fully the possibilities of communal life, but he warned them against sealing their lives in a dogmatic system, because life is larger than any human-made system.

Being a universalistic humanist, Korczak understood that even during the Arab Revolt and conflicts from 1936–1939, the Arabs were human beings and not demons. He was also tolerant and sympathetic to all the faiths and traditions whose dreams and prayers were directed to the Holy Land.

As the birthplace of humanity’s greatest spiritual traditions, the land of Israel is a holy land that has a special meaning to all; it has a metaphysical dimension that must be acknowledged. The heavens are different there because the stars tell secrets of old. The Land of Israel does not belong to one people, but speaks to all humanity and reminds all of the messianic vision of justice and solidarity: it is ‘*a country searching for God*’*.*[[299]](#footnote-317) In the Land of Israel, there will be established a second League of Nations dedicated to the rights of children.

Korczak invited us to return to this utopian meaning of the Land of Israel. And though tfulfilment, Korczak brought horizons of hope into our education and public discourse.

1. **The Kingdom of Children in Literature**

**9.1. The Jewish Dream of One Humanity**

The vision of utopia is the product of free minds. Existing in philosophy, literature and art, it is an expression of the freedom to go beyond the reality of life, to fly above the earth and beyond the present.

Janusz Korczak was a tragic figure, the ultimate victim of political reality. As a Jew, he was sent together with his children and the entire Warsaw Jewish ghetto population to the death camp of Treblinka: the very realization of a dystopia. In Treblinka, the earth opened its mouth, and the fires of hell burned humanity, both physically and metaphorically. Nonetheless, Janusz Korczak was a utopian, a prophet of a broken world.

Korczak’s literary career began in 1901 with the publication of his first book, *The Children of the Street* (Dzieci Ulicy), which deals with the lives of inner-city poor children. The stresses and challenges of poverty troubled him from his very early childhood, and in his first book, he opened a window to the world of street children.

For Korczak, the problematic political and social reality of Jewish children in Poland and in the other European countries exacerbated the stresses and challenges of poverty. The situation of poor Jewish children became more complicated when they started school and learned that they were different and were seen as inferior morally, socially and politically. Why was their situation like that? Could it change or be improved? These troubling questions were a focus of Korczak’s work and writings.

Korczak searched for a society that would accept all people as equal and would erase the dividing lines of faith, nationality, race, social status and gender. This dream was shared by many Jews: a modern kind of messianism, it envisioned a world of harmony and peace among all. This mended, redeemed world would also enable the full emancipation of children. In modern Polish terms but using a Greek philosophical lexicon, Korczak expressed the end of days vision of the biblical prophet Isaiah.

Korczak tried to model a better human society in his two orphanages, and when his children asked him about the troubling realities of society, he offered them the utopian vision of harmony and solidarity. It was through literature that he shared his vision both with children and adults. However, his children’s stories were also the venue where he, as a critical realist, had to admit that his vision was still a utopia.

We usually put the burden of peacemaking on the shoulders of statesmen; we leave war and peace to political leaders and army generals. However, if the reformation of education is the key to the reformation of the world, as Korczak claimed,[[300]](#footnote-318) then we should expect that educators would have something to say about these matters as well. Can education be the vehicle that will bring about peace? Should educators be obedient servants of the state, agents of socialization, and part of the power system of society, helping young people become patriotic citizens and good soldiers? Or should they be autonomous agents of change and spokespersons for human dignity, social progress, and freedom? Do educators have a voice in matters of politics and of war and peace?

Janusz Korczak had a vision and a voice. He was undoubtedly a patriot of his homeland, Poland, but he was not a silent or obedient civil servant. He felt that society needed to be changed and that educators should play an important role in bringing about this change. He shared with the children under his custody and with his readers a utopian vision of the world of children in which universal solidarity would be realized. He expressed his vision directly through his children's journalism; in his children’s literature, he put his words and thoughts in the mouths of the literary figures he created.

Korczak bitterly acknowledged that his vision of human solidarity was just a vision: it was a utopian dream, destined to be ruined by adults. Yet he clung onto the hope that one day all humanity would unite around the cause of children; indeed, without this hope, there would remain only a despairing, nihilistic world view. Korczak described his radical vision – which the world is still not ready for – in his world-famous children’s novel *King Matt the First*, published in 1923.

The book became a best-seller and inspired the imagination of many children and adults, making Korczak a renowned humanist. In 1957 Korczak's disciples and friends helped create a full-length color movie based on this novel.[[301]](#footnote-319) This section explores Korczak's educational legacy in general and his utopian vision in particular through the lines of the novel and the lens of the movie, which came to the screen many years after Korczak and his orphans were murdered by the Germans.

**9.2. Kingdom of All Children**

In *King Matt the First*, Korczak described the naïve efforts of children to establish a kingdom of peace where children of all stripes – Europeans, Africans and Asians; aristocrats and plebs; rich and poor; and boys and girls – would settle their matters in a just and rational way. Unfortunately, the adults around him – doctors, journalists and educators –cynically fail, manipulate and betray the children, and society returns to the known reality of dishonesty, exploitation and wars. It is the book's message that even if democracy is the ideal political system, children cannot lead a democratic life independently: they need the trustful support and guidance of adults to manage their lives.

The book has clear connections to Korczak's life story and his philosophy of education and educational work. The main adult characters in the book – the teacher, the military captain, the doctor, the journalist, and the drunkard – are representations of Korczak himself and his own perceived failure to provide his children a world of peace and harmony. King Matt, the king of the children who tries and fails to establish the kingdom of justice and human solidarity, also represents Korczak.

The novel starts soon after the death of the father king, when Prince Matt is orphaned and left alone at age ten. Korczak, Henryk Goldzmit, also grew up in a well-to-do family, isolated from the poor street children who lived nearby.[[302]](#footnote-320) He was eleven years old when his father collapsed and was hospitalized in a mental hospital; his father died a few years later. Losing his father shaped his adolescence and future development. Matt thus represents both Korczak personally and his life’s work.

As king, Matt is alone: he is surrounded by untrustworthy adults, corrupt ministers and other unscrupulous agents who isolate him from the rest of society and take advantage of his naïvete. They do not try to understand him nor meet his needs as a child. Korczak generally felt that adult-child relationships were similarly characterized by misunderstanding and disrespect. Matt is every child who is mistreated by adults and often by educators: according to Korczak, the accepted lie of education is that adults do not really care about the child's feelings but only about their own interests. Meanwhile children wallow in their helplessness, crying for support.[[303]](#footnote-321) The common discourse about education, claimed Korczak in numerous places in his writings, is full of hypocrisy; similarly, the falseness of most of the adult characters in the book is evident.

Loneliness is a major theme in the novel. Even when Matt returns as a victorious hero from war, he remains alone. Simiarly Korczak described the sense of loneliness he felt during his childhood when his father misunderstood him; only his grandmother listened to his dreams.[[304]](#footnote-322)

The novel explores the effect of one’s genetic heritage on one's life. ,Matt is concerned about being a descendant of kings who had poor dispositions; for example, his great-grandfather Henri was bad tempered. Korczak worried about whether he would inherit the genetic heritage of insanity from his father: ‘*So I am the son of a madman. A heredity affliction*’.[[305]](#footnote-323) This may be one of the reasons he never had children of his own. He even thought about committing suicide to put an end to this damaged chain of generations.

In his professional life, as a pediatrician and a social educator Korczak wrote often about children who carried the burden of generations of aggression, poverty, social decay and health problems:

*It is not a child but the centuries weeping. It is the whine of pain and yearning, not because he was told to stand in the corner but because he is oppressed, slave-driven, pushed around and ostracized.*[[306]](#footnote-324)

In contrast to the modern ethos of individuality, human freedom and the ability to change, Korczak was an essentialist, believing that children have in their identity the stamp of generations that determines the course of their lives: ‘*God has written it down in the book of destinies.*’[[307]](#footnote-325)

As a physician and a social activist, Korczak had a realistic world view of children’s ability to transcend the limitations placed on them by their genetic heritage and by society. Despite having freedom of choice, one's destiny is also determined by one’s heritage. Essentialism versus existentialism is the core of the modern dispute about humanity and is also a focal point of disagreement among scholars about Korczak's place in modern philosophy.[[308]](#footnote-326)

**9.3. War and Peace**

Korczak, as a modern Stoic, believed that people were rational and that conflicts could be solved by rational discourse: only a lack of knowledge and mutual understanding cause wars. The democratic structure of his children's communities was intended to enable and support a rational exchange of ideas and feelings. In the novel, King Matt expresses the idea that vHe confronts the reality of an impending war with the three kings that threatens his kingdom: ‘*If I had known them* [the other kings] *before, we might not have had a war at all.*’[[309]](#footnote-327)

Just as war and peace efforts are major themes in *King Matt the First*, so did these issues dominate Korczak's personal life. He participated in four bloody wars: the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), World War I, the Polish-Russian War, and World War II. Korczak was honest enough to admit his ambivalence towards war: wars are cruel, painful and deadly, and yet they are glorious and give people a sense of belonging and meaning. Korczak was an honored Polish patriot who proudly wore his officer’s uniform. In the novel the child king joins the war in secret, along with his friend Felek, and bravely wins the battle. The sense of military comradeship becomes an essential part of his identity.

The war scenes are naïvely described in the story and even more so in the movie – like pictures in a child's imagination – but the reader can easily identify the irony in Korczak's text. Korczak shows the stupidity of wars and the cynicism of kings and political leaders who wage wars in search of glory and power. Wars appear to be the childish games of adults. The adults could make peace, but choose war instead, for which soldiers and citizens pay a high price. Korczak wrote *King Matt* just a few years after witnessing the horrors and meaninglessness of World War I and the Polish-Russian War. The three kings in the novel cynically betray the child king who naïvely offers them a fair peace treaty. They may be a stand-in for the three great European kingdoms that joined forces in World War I: Germany, Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. Or perhaps they represent the three authoritarian powers who occupied Poland and eliminated it from the European map for about 150 years: Prussia, Austro-Hungary and Tsarist Russia .

The irony in the novel is also directed at Korczak himself, who admitted at various stages of his life that war energized him, making him feel needed again and that he belonged to something meaningful: it gave him an opportunity to be recognized as a Polish patriot. These feelings were shared by many Jews in pre-World War II Europe, who wanted to feel that they belonged to their host nation and for whom patriotic wars gave them an opportunity to express such feelings. Naïvely, they hoped that war service would lead to formal recognition of them as an integral part of society. Years after he wrote the novel, when the Germans attacked Poland in 1939, Korczak again donned a Polish military uniform; taking part in the doomed Polish efforts to defend Warsaw from the German blitz made him feel needed again.[[310]](#footnote-328) In his February 1942 application to the ghetto’s Jewish Council to run a second orphanage, he described his participation in three wars – an important element of his identity – and his disdain for boring civil service duties, which he tried to overcome.[[311]](#footnote-329) In another diary entry, he described the surge of excitement evoked by the drama of war, which everyday life did not provide.[[312]](#footnote-330)

War reveals the secret powers of people, felt Korczak, and so it is in the story. In the second war in the book, after the state nearly collapsed and disintegrated because of the children's revolution, the citizens unite under Matt’s leadership and nearly win the war. Only cowardliness and treason prevent their victory and cause Matt to lose his kingdom.

Though Korczak was a Polish patriot, he was not a militant fascist Even though he willingly fought, he sought peace after the battles were over and referred critically to the foolishness and manipulation of generals and politicians. In *King Matt*, the kings and the generals appear ridiculous, as caricatures of absurdity. They are interested primarily in attaining glory, and King Matt soon learns how to deal with them – by giving them many medals: ‘*Matt distributed all sorts of medals during the festivities: the African kings hung their medals from their noses, and the European kings wore theirs on their chests. Everyone was happy.*’[[313]](#footnote-331) Naïvely elieving that human relationships can operate on a different basis, Matt-Korczak lose the game. The sad ending of the book reveals that Matt's vision is still a utopia and that generals and kings still own the historical stage.

The book does portrays one military personality, the ‘Captain’, in a very positive way. This young officer takes Matt under his protection in the battlefront and then becomes his mentor. Similarly, Marshal Pilsudski, the leader of the new Poland, became an exemplary figure for Korczak, who saw him as a national hero who fought for the freedom of Poland. After Pilsudki's death, he remained in contact with his widow.

* 1. **Women**

Korczak never got married and had no biological children. There are several possible explanations for his decision not to have children. As mentioned, he was afraid that he might pass the madness of his father to the following generation.[[314]](#footnote-332) In a letter to a friend in Palestine, he wrote bitterly that it was better for a Jew in Poland, a ‘slave’, not to have children. Instead of having his own children, he decided to devote his life to the service of children.[[315]](#footnote-333) He was like a monk who did not have his own family, but dedicated his entire life to improve the lives of all children.

Several women did figure in Korczak’s life. His mother and sister played an important role in his personal life, and in his work life, he had two partners in running the children’s houses: Stefania (Stefa) Wilczyńska at the Dom Sierot Jewish orphanage of Krochmalna Street and Maryna Falska at Nash Dom, the Christian orphanage. However, as far as we know, their relations were limited to the professional management of these two institutions.

In his ghetto diary, Korczak once described a conversation between two old men. One says he did not have time in his very busy life for women. Moreover, he hints at an unsuccessful experience he had once with a woman. When the other asks him whether he has any children, the first one tells him that he has two hundred children – which was about the number of children Korczak was then supervising. In another entry, he wrote that when he was between the ages of seven to fourteen, he was in a constant state of love. He remembered the girls he loved in those early years, but now was dedicated to the love of others, particularly of children.[[316]](#footnote-334)

*King Matt* is dominated by male figures; with one exception, the few female characters play limited roles, which are even smaller in the film. For example, Matt's mother died when he was a little child, and she is only mentioned as a painful memory of love and attention he does not have anymore. The wife of the railroad guard makes a brief appearance as a mother figure: she helps Matt and Felek on their way to the front at the outbreak of the first war. On his triumphant return home, he remembers how she helped him and stops to have a a cup of coffee with her.[[317]](#footnote-335)

One woman – the African princess Klu Klu – does have an important presence in the novel. She has no inferiority complex in her interactions with the boys around her; she is confident in her physical abilities and has a strong personality and wise character: ‘*In my country, in Africa, the girls are as good as the boys in everything.*’[[318]](#footnote-336)

However, when Klu Klu falls in love with Matt, he ignores her feelings: like Korczak, he is too busy with his duties.[[319]](#footnote-337) In a noble act, Matt does save Klu Ku from the sharp teeth of a wolf,[[320]](#footnote-338) but this act does not lead to a romantic ending. Matt, like Korczak, rejects the possibility of intimate relationships.

Klu Klu is an idealistic figure who fights for the equality of men and women. She is brave, powerful and critical of the traditional conventions of society. One can discern in her character both the idealism of Korczak and the images of the two strong women who actually ran Korczak's two orphanages. The feminist movement of the twentieth century did not develop until after World War II, but this novel has a strong feminist message.

* 1. **Inter-Race Relations**

That the major female character is from Africa conveys another message that was important to Korczak: the equality of all races. Although his description of her homeland as a country of cannibals reflected European stereotypes of Africa in the early twentieth century, the actions and character of Klu Klu clearly prove that she is not inferior in any way to white children.

*King Matt* was written when the major European countries ruled colonies in Africa and when their kings proclaimed, ‘*We are civilized kings and we do not wish to sit at the same table with cannibals.*’[[321]](#footnote-339) That Korczak was critical of this pervasive westernized view is clear in his portrayal of King Matt’s tireless efforts to overcome racist attitudes and promote the possibility of good inter-race relationships. The plot suggests that children can bridge the racial differences amongst them. Korczak did not adopt a relativist approach to culture, nor did he hide the differences between different cultures: he believed both that the African peoples had a lot to learn from Western countries and that they could benefit from exposure to Western culture. Klu Klu expresses the naïve idea, which multi-culturalists may not appreciate, that education can bring progress to undeveloped countries: ‘*The sooner more children start studying, the sooner we can build a new Africa.*’[[322]](#footnote-340)

Korczak believed in education’s ability to change society. This Socratic and platonic idea – that rational thinking can change human behavior for the better – appeared many times in Korczak’s writings and guided his pedagogical practice. In this novel, Matt explains to King Bum Drum, Klu Klu’s father, why he must stop engaging in cannibalism, and the story suggests that there is a real chance that he will listen to Matt. The adults in both cultures, those who represent each society’s traditions and prejudices, try to ruin this equal, mutually beneficial relationship, but the children are able to sustain it. This reflected Korczak’s trust in solidarity between all peoples, including natives of distant countries, cannibals from islands near Australia, and residents of ‘civilized’ societies in Europe.[[323]](#footnote-341)

In the book, the kingdom of Matt is styled as a Polish kingdom and even more so in the film, but it actually is a ‘no-place’ kingdom with no name that only exists in Korczak's utopia. The same is true of the home country of Klu Klu and her father King Bum Drum, which represents all the non-European peoples. Klu Klu is until the end of the book the most staunch and effective supporter of Matt-Korczak. King Matt, free from that prejudice that infects adults, has no problem having Klu Klu or Asian people at his side. The story thus realizes the idea of all human solidarity. Tthrough the characters of Matt and Klu Klu Korczak expresses his hope that one day the solidarity between races will become real and move beyond fiction. Years later, Korczak added another layer to his utopia when he suggested that this ideal human solidarity should be realized in the ‘land of Hope’: the Land of Israel.

* 1. **Social Idealism**

Toward the end of his life, when Korczak looked back on his childhood, he described himself as an idealistic child who wanted to eliminate money from the world, seeing it as a source of all the evils that people afflict upon each other. In a no-money society there would be no more poor children, with whom the bourgeois child, Henryk Goldzmit, was not allowed to play. His father mocked him for having such dreams and for his idealism; only his grandmother respected these facets of his character.[[324]](#footnote-342)

Korczak's activism started with his engagement with children of poverty, who were the subject of first book, *The Children of the Street* (1901). He soon abandoned his medical career for the sake of these children. Throughout his adult life, Korczak tried to improve society by helping the poor, taking care of orphan children, writing about social problems, and advocating a vision of human solidarity.

In *King Matt* the young king, like Korczak, discovers the phenomenon of poverty and the social reality of poor children. The doctor, another representation of Korczak, tells him,

*No, Matt, there are very many children who are weak and sick. Many children live in unhealthy, damp Dark houses, they do not go out to the country, they do not eat enough and often go hungry, and so they become ill*.[[325]](#footnote-343)

Idealism and its failure are major elements in King Matt’s story. Poor children living in difficult conditions exist side by side with the corrupt leaders who live luxuriously in the governmental palace. The children of the streets have their dreams, and the child king feels that it is his duty to fulfil their wishes; hea poorhisreceive government aidThe adults see the children's needs as unimportant, childish, and therefore easy to neglect; in contrast, Korczak-Matt takes them seriously.

Matt comes up with the idea to form a children’s democracy, just like the democratic system Korczak implemented in his two children’s communities. A cornerstone of this system is a children’s parliament in which they will make their own decisions. Unfortunately, with childhood naïvety, the children legislate in favor of their own demands, which proves to be disastrous. The state reaches a chaotic state and collapses before its enemies.

A catastrophic situation, which is portrayed humorously, arises when the children decide to switch places with the adults: children run the adults' world and their parents are sent to school.[[326]](#footnote-344) It shows both that all adults have an inner child – they act childishly in the new situation – and the inability of children to run the adult world. The result is a total collapse of everything.

The exchange of roles corresponds to one of Korczak's stories ‘*When I Am Little Again*’.[[327]](#footnote-346) Its message is that if adults really want to understand children, they have to put themselves in their place. However, Korczak understood that a literal exchange of roles and responsibilities would be catastrophic. Children are complete people, but they are different from adults and lack their experience and capabilities. They cannot and should not be adults. They have their own world and should remain children – they deserve their childhood: adults have the duty to make that possible. For that reason, a children’s democracy can only succeed with the guidance of trustworthy, good-intentioned educators.

Realism and scepticism were important elements of Korczak's personality along with naïve idealism. Although he strove to improve the human condition, he was realistic about the difficulty of doing so. He acknowledged the weaknesses of adults and children alike. In his conversations with young educators, he stressed his objections to an idealistic picture of children; some children were less moral than others. Some could even be corrupted, as happens in the book to Felek.

A trustworthy adult character in the novel is the doctor who takes care of Matt and sees him always as a child and not as a king. The doctor is a representation of Korczak, who as a pediatrician was totally committed to each individual patient. Both the doctor and Korczak knew their child patients from the moment of birth and demanded respect for their needs.[[328]](#footnote-347)

The adult character of the journalist[[329]](#footnote-348) is another representation of Korczak, who himself edited a children's newspaper, *Mały Przegląd* (Little Review), had a radio program and wrote many articles about education.[[330]](#footnote-349) However, this journalist is a spy who serves foreign kings and their dishonest world and betrays Matt. We may speculate that he thus represents Korczak's sense of guilt for positioning himself as being on the children’s side while still being part of the adults' world. In addition, Korczak's former students accused him of not preparing them for the harsh realities of life, because he was too caught up in his own utopian vision. Korczak often asked himself whether he was really serving the needs of children or did he neglect his duty to guide them in the paths of the real world.

In *King Matt*, it is the generals, ministers, and kings who seek wars and the simple citizens who work for human solidarity and peace. are

* 1. **The Movie and a Post-Holocaust Korczak Tradition**

The novel ends when King Matt is sentenced to death, and he proudly faces his fate. The irony of history is that nearly twenty years after the book was published, Korczak walked proudly to the train that took him to Treblinka. In contrast, the film, which was made by Korczak's friends more than a decade after his death, has a happy ending: the commonfolk save the child king from death.

Korczak perished in Treblinka with his children, but his legacy attained legendary status. Even before World War II, the story of the child king, who wanted to achieve peace and justice for all but failed, had made Korczak a well-known spokesperson of human solidarity and advocate of children's rights. The literary figure of King Matt became an icon in Poland. Beautifully illustrated editions, posters and stamps carried the images of this naïve story, which is both a story of failure and yet of hope that never dies.

After the war, Korczak's disciples, among them his close friend and aide at his children's newspaper, the journalist and writer Igor Newerly, made the book into a full-length color movie titled *Krol Macius I*.[[331]](#footnote-350) This children’s movie is not as fast or sophisticated as current films, but is nonethess a unique Polish work of art. It opens another window onto Korczak's ideas about pedagogy, the interactions between children and adults, peace education and the realities of war.

As in the book, the story unfolds in a no-place kingdom. The characters speak Polish and much of their style is Polish, but nowhere is the name of the country mentioned: Korczak's universal vision of human solidarity is clearly not confined to any specific country or state.

The movie, like the book, starts with Korczak's deliberations whether it is suitable for adults. The readers of the book and moviegoers need to be in a special state of mind, to be empathethic towards children to appreciate and understand the story. The film is shot more as a play than as a movie, reinforcing the idea that it is just a story, a childish fantasy or adults' utopia. The audience knows the tragic end of Korczak, which gives the story another ironic dimension: it is about a utopia that ended in Treblinka.

In the first scene the orphaned prince is surrounded by a group of ridiculous adults. It is set up to dramatically convey Korczak's second principle: children in our society are surrounded by adults who do not really seek their welfare, and thus they are really alone.

Children quite often dream about becoming the rulers of their world: they wish to be independent, to do things on their own, but they need guidance. The child king needs friends and support. To his aid come the educator, the doctor and the journalist, but they all fail him in the end. Also coming to his side is an older boy from the streets, Felek, who also fails in his duty to support the child king in an honest way.

A war starts as the result of the adults' foolishness and bad intentions. When Matt is informed about the war, he rushes to the front to join his army in a naïve gesture of bravery and honor. The war is not portrayed realistically, but as through a child's eyes; the moviegoers know very well that wars are very different. Matt’s army wins the war and he asks for peace, but the adult kings are waiting for him to fail. Just as World War I ended with the Treaty of Versailles, which forced Germany to pay huge reparations to states that had formed the entente powers, the question of reparations is a major issue in the film. Matt-Korczak naïvely believes that peace is possible only by waiving any financial demands. Perhaps Korczak, in a prophetic vision, identified one of the causes of the rise of German nationalism that led to a second world war a few decades later.

After the war ends, the state is in need of money, and help comes from an African king Bum Drum and his daughter, Klu Klu, who represent Korczak’s utopian vision of one humanity that overcomes all differences of race, religion or gender. The two trips that Matt makes to Africa in the novel are fused into one, which he makes by helicopter. The actors portraying the Africans are white Europeans who have black paint covering their bodies. The ‘Africans’ bring into the film's discourse Korczak’s childhood idea of eliminating money from society. They seek friendship and not gold, while the ministers and the foreign kings are blinded by wealth.

After peace reigns for a while, the young children’s democracy established by Matt crumbles into chaos. Fueled by the poor advice of his adult advisers, Matt makes a disastrous children revolution. The lesson is clear: a children's democracy needs to be guided by trustworthy adults, but those around Matt do not really want it to succeed. As a result, Matt loses the second war with the three foreign kings and is sentenced to death for hatching a plot to incite all the children in the world to stand up against the adults. In reality, the accused is, of course, Korczak who fought for the emancipation of one-third of humanity, the children.

The movie – in contrast to both Korczak's real life and the novel – has a happy ending. In the book, Matt is sentenced, like Napoleon Bonaparte, to life in prison on a deserted island. Perhaps it was the close connection that Polish nationalism had to the French national heritage since the eighteenth century that moved Korczak to portray Matt as a child Napoleon. Like Napoleon, Matt-Korczak want to reform the world and unify humanity and, like Napoleon, could not overcome the traditional powers to fulfil this mission.

The creators of the movie allowed themselves the freedom to change the ending of the story. In the movie, the simple citizens rescue Matt at the last moment from the shooting squad made up of drunken soldiers, killing them in a cartoonish scene. The movie, created after the bloodshed of World War II and the Nazi death camps, returns to the realm of fantasy. Political freedom was just another kind of unrealizable utopia. In the war that just ended, the Poles did not succeed in eliminating their oppressors, and in the time that the movie was created, they were experiencing another ‘dark’ occupation. happya’s

When despair prevails, we need a vision of hope if we want to regain our trust in humankind. Korczak delivers that message in this novel. Wars are the stupid games of the adults, but children offer us an alternative. Korczak invited his readers to think whether adults could eliminate war and make possible the establishment of the kingdom of children.

*King Matt the First* was the first of Korczak’s books to be translated into English, and it has also been translated from Polish into Russian, Ukrainian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Hebrew, German, Japanese and even Esperanto. It has been read by children all over the world and has inspired generations of educators and adult readers.

Korczak's literary work in general and *King Matt* can be read in many different ways. Some readers willingly follow Korczak's magical journey and enjoy the story of Matt for its literary qualities. They see it a wonderful fantasy that sheds light on the human character: its wisdom and foolishness, virtues and weaknesses. It can capture the imagination of those who allow themselves to touch their own inner child. Others read *King Matt* as a literary platform for Korczak’s humanistic philosophy, promoting values of loyalty and courage, social equality and inclusion, tolerance, peace,unity and brotherhood, participation and democracy, empathy and respect for the world of children.

As such, Korczak's writings as a whole illuminate the ongoing human struggle between utopia and critical realism. It is significant that Korczak was an active member of both philosophical camps. He was a very astute critical realist, disillusioned by any idealization of reality, including the virtues of children, and was a bitter critic of the present state of adult-children relationships. At the same time he was a stubborn utopian, who never gave up his faith in a better future for humanity.

1. **Yitzhak Katzenelson: His Place in the Life of the Warsaw Ghetto**

Before World War II Yitzchak Katzenelson was well known among those involved in Hebrew culture in Poland, even if he was not counted among the first rank of poets of his time.[[332]](#footnote-351) The poet who wrote ‘Gilu HaGelilim’ (Rejoice the Galilees) and ‘Yafim Ha-Leylot Be-Cenaan’ (How Beautiful Are the Nights in Canaan) welcomed with great joy the revival of the Jewish people in its ancient homeland. In contrast to the alienated Korczak, Katzenelson was connected with all his being to his people, especially to its folk aspects. He was well versed in all the strata of Jewish tradition – biblical, talmudic, rabbinic, Yiddish and modern Hebrew literature – and he was familiar with with all the trends of modern Jewish life. The images of biblical and aggadic talmudic heroes filled his world. His mother tongue, the language of his parents' home, was Yiddish, but he also spoke perfect Hebrew and was immersed in both these cultural milieus. He was involved in the renaissance of Hebrew culture in Poland, was a Hebrew school teacher, and founded the re

Katzenelson had close connections, family relations as well as ideological ties, to the Zionist movement in the Land of Israel. His relatives Berl Katzenelson and Yitzchak Tabenkin were among the leadership of Labor Zionism. He visited Israel twice, in 1924 and 1934. Before the war, most of his writings were in Hebrew, and the horizons of his writings were the Land of Israel. His poems, both for children and adults, and his folk stories are all infused with the atmosphere of the Land of Israel and optimism about the coming renewal of the Jewish people. From 1935–1939, he led cultural activities for a community of Zionists then living in Lodz.

Before the war, Katzenelson’s poetry had a light, optimistic and happy tone; it focused on everyday life.[[333]](#footnote-352) However, underneath the surface, the darkness of history was always present. In the introduction to the three-volume collection of his poetry published in 1938, he wrote about the worsening political situation and the darkening clouds in the ‘skies’ of his people. Katzenelson even apologized about the fact that he was writing poetry during such a difficult time for his people. He explained in length that poetry is not an expression of joy but a way to ward off despair; it is actually a means of escapism. He noted that if he were not writing poetry he would have to write about the unbearable political situation that was overwhelming his senses and depriving him of the joy of life:

*My people and my God will not ask me about the volumes of my poetry which I publish in this time of trouble to the people of Israel … I, myself, uncomfortable, very uncomfortable – nevertheless… I cannot hold my spirit – and I sing! I sing and do not conceal my songs. I do not hide them for a different time, a better time. I publish it, later with earlier poetry, in one night … when we escape we adopted a unique strength: in any trouble, we can also sing and also fall asleep. We sing from the very depth of the abysses where we have thrown into … before I learned to be steady on my feet I already raised them and run away from the ‘Goy’, who raised an ax over me.*

*From that day I run away … for decades I run away, I shut my ears from the evil winds that blow in them … be happy that I did not make delicatessen out of all of it. I sang on trees and rocks and on nonsense, but on the sights and horrors that happened in front of my eyes, that occurred to me instantly and could overwhelm me and obscure my awake senses, which seek joy … I kept silent not to despair my soul even more. Most of my poetry is a kind of escape.* [[334]](#footnote-353)

In the 1930s Katzenelson used letters to his relatives, and not his poetry, to express his awareness of the abyss that was gradually opening under the feet of the Jewish people.[[335]](#footnote-354) In those years, however, he did not confront the worsening conditions, but tried to avoid them. Katzenelson, then a joyful poet, saw only two options: ‘*to put an end to his life or to go out singing … and he chose singing, life*’.[[336]](#footnote-356)

His dreams were of the Land of Israel, but he never made the necessary preparations to immigrate there, and at some point it was too late to leave Poland. At the beginning of World War II, Katzenelson the refugee was a beaten person: the shock of the war mixed with deep feelings of defeat and loss. During the war, as he adjusted to life in the ghetto, his world changed and he acquired a unique place among the interpreters of Jewish reality. Like a biblical prophet, he did not see the future, but rather understood the very meaning of the present. He realized very early what others tried to deny: the German intention to liquidate the Jews. He has been called one of the important modern prophets of the Jewish people, combining ‘*Avraham, the one who sacrifices, Yitzchak the sacrificed, Job and Jeremiah in one personality*’.[[337]](#footnote-358)

After living in Lodz as a hunted person, Katzenelson escaped to Warsaw via Krakow, probably between 14–19 November 1939. He had been a key person in Lodz’s cultural life, one of the elite who were the immediate targets of the German occupiers.[[338]](#footnote-359) He continued his efforts to immigrate to Palestine even after his wife Hannah and his sons Zvi Benzion and Benjamin arrived in Warsaw in January 1940. However, by April he understood that leaving Warsaw was no longer possible, and his life dream was shattered.[[339]](#footnote-360) He was so despairing that he could not write nor earn a living. He endured months of silence as a refugee among thousands of refugees until May 1940 when he was ‘adopted’ by the Zionist pioneering movement.

The various factions within the Zionist movement were thrown into chaos when the Germans occupied Poland in September 1939. However, under the leadership of Yitzchak (Antek) Zuckerman, the Dror (Freedom) movement was able to reorganize itself in the spring of 1940. It reached out to Katzenelson, providing him opportunities to write and a favorable audience for work. He wrote primarily in Yiddish, the language of the Jewish masses. Thereafter Katzenelson found his spiritual home among the circles of the Zionist underground.

In his memoirs, Antek Zuckerman wrote that he knew of the poet’s reputation from his school days and was introduced to him by one of his friends; he then invited Katzenelson to become involved in Dror’s cultural life and educational work:

*I had known of Yitzchak Katzenelson long before. He was one of the young people of Bialik's generation, a brother and companion of the writers of the ‘Renaissance Generation’ of Hebrew literature; from first grade on, I was taught his poem ‘On the window, on the window, stood a pretty bird.’ And his other poems. Yitzchak Katzenelson was a model for me. The first time I met him in person was in Warsaw, in mid-1940.[[340]](#footnote-361)*

Zuckerman was aware of the special place Katzenelson had in Hebrew culture in Poland and how meaningful his involvement would be for the movement members: ‘*We went through the whole hell with Yitzhak Katzenelson.*’[[341]](#footnote-362) Katzenelson had developed intimate relations with the underground movement in Warsaw and yet Zuckerman also admits that this friendship stood some difficult test when they learned about problematic connections Katzenelson had with a few personas in the ghetto.

In May 1940, Dror convened a nationwide seminar for educators, and Zuckerman invited Katzenelson to be one of the speakers. The seminar’s long days of study and conversations about national, cultural and ideological issues were pivotal in the renewal both of the Zionist movement in Poland and of Katzenelson's life in Warsaw.[[342]](#footnote-363) In the following month, Dror gymnasia were established, and Katzenelson was invited to teach Hebrew and Bible; in August the schools began operating underground. As a teacher, Katzenelson left a deep impression on his students, as one of his former students, Havka Folman-Rabban, later recalled:

*He appears before me. I see him, his face, his shining eyes. And I still hear his strong, deep voice reading from the Prophets. Through his words, he conveyed a meaning we had not previously known and which we did not find in the books of the Bible. This wisdom was so close to us, to our life and spirit, to the way in which we had chosen to live in the circumstances surrounding us.*

*Katzenelson influenced the spirit of the underground 'gymnasia' where I studied.*[[343]](#footnote-364)

Katzenelson was captured by the charm of the young comrades of the underground and developed relationships with them characterized by emotional and ideological intimacy. During his stay in the concentration camp of Vittel, when he thought mistakenly that this student, Havka (Chava) Folman, had been killed in a resistance attack on Cyganeria Cafe in Krakow on 22 December 1942, he wrote this lamentation:

*Dear Chavah Folma! Where are you? You were not yet twenty years of age! I was a teacher! We went through the whole of Isaiah together! I taught you how to act, you and the group of youngsters like you, members of ‘Hehalutz’ at 34 Dzielna Street.… Oh, where are you, my dear Chavah? You, a young Jewess who had to pose as a Gentile! A Jewish ‘Gentile’! On your lips hung the dew of tender childhood! In your eyes shone the early morning light! Yet armed with these ‘Gentile papers you moved in and about the towns and villages where we were being slain!*[[344]](#footnote-365)

Folman survived Auschwitz and had the privilege of later reading the poet's words about her. Katzenelson remained for her a teacher for life; he continued to be a source of inspiration years later when she joined the founding group of the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz in Israel, which established the Ghetto Fighters House named in his memory.

Katzenelson soon became an integral member of Dror’s cultural and educational life and published regularly in its underground press: the members of the movement were his immediate audience. In conjunction with the Dror gymnasia, Katzenelson founded a theatre group that performed biblical dramas in front of thousands of ghetto residents. Zivia Lubetkin, one of the underground leaders, wrote about Katzenelson’s importance to the spiritual and cultural life of his young comrades:

*It is difficult for me to talk about Yitzchak Katzenelson at this moment, but it would be impossible to describe this particular period without mentioning his name. Much of our public, educational, and cultural work among the youth and the adult population, as well as most of our movement activities, the establishment of an underground high school and a movement training farm, bore the stamp of this great man. During the war years, he was one of us, a pioneer, a friend, a guide and a counselor*.[[345]](#footnote-366)

In addition, Katzenelson raised money to fund underground activities.[[346]](#footnote-367) Sometimes, the underground leadership did not accept his connections to problematic personas in the ghetto easily.

Katzenelson wrote out of deep identification with the ghetto population and its lot. According to Zuckerman, ‘there was no sadness that was not his sadness, and there was no trouble that he was not crying on. His heart was full of love to his people, our pioneers, his wife and children … his poetry in those days [is] in Yiddish, the language of his people in the Warsaw ghetto’.[[347]](#footnote-368) There were no boundaries between his personal fate, the destiny of his family, and the fate of his people:

*My people! I called out ‘my People’ but my people no longer live. Like my wife, my Benzion, my Binyamin, they once were living – but they are no more! So my nation! My nation once lived, but is no more; it was murdered*.[[348]](#footnote-369)

To Katzenelson, the faces of all the murdered Jews seemed to be the faces of his wife Hannah and his three boys, Zvi, Benzion, and Benjamin: ‘*all of them had the countenances of my Binyamin, my Benzion, and my Chanah.*’[[349]](#footnote-370)

At the same time, he used his writing to Even though he was a secular person, heusedthat invokedworld of the emHe had a strong faith in the revival of his people, a strong love for Jewish culture and his fellow Jews, and a strong dedication to the Jewish masses he lived among: ‘*I love the whole six million, and also those over and beyond the six million. I solemnly believe that they were all good, like my Chanah, Benzion, and Binyamin.*’[[350]](#footnote-371)

Katzenelson was the most prolific of the ghetto writers. We know of about forty-five writings from the ghetto period: they included poems, plays, translations, public speeches, narrative poems, and hymns. Thirty-two of these survived the war, hidden in underground archives and available to us today; eleven of these writings are dated. In the Vittel concentration camp where he was sent with his son Zvi after he was captured by the Germans in the Hotel Polski, he wrote his *Vittel Diary* (Pinkas Vittel) and ‘The Song of the Murdered Jewish People’ (*Dos lid funem oysgehargetn Yiddish folk*) in Yiddish.

The Warsaw ghetto had the largest Jewish population of any area under German occupation. and it existed for a comparatively long time, from October 1940 until its total destruction in May 1943. Under German rule, terror was an ever-present reality. Yet despite the policies of oppression, which restricted Jews’ freedoms, and deportation, the ghetto inhabitants were able to carry on activities of mutual aid, culture, and education and finally to forge an armed underground. Nor was the ghetto totally closed off or isolated from the rest of the country. News about the implementation of the Final Solution in all parts of the Third Reich, particularly the murderous acts against Jews in eastern parts of Poland, Belorussia, the Ukraine and Russia, streamed into the ghetto. Underground circles gradually began to realize that they and their fellow Jews in the ghetto awaited the same fate. Jewish tradition did not provide an answer to this new reality, and so the underground turned to armed resistance.

As a member of the underground, Katzenelson also came to a growing understanding of this new reality, and the content and style of his writing changed accordingly – from the optimistic writing of solidarity and consolation during his first year living in the ghetto to texts that stressed despair and the inevitable tragic fate of his fellow Jews.[[351]](#footnote-372) That change occurred around the beginning of 1942, when the reality of terror and death became clear. From that point on, his writing had two main themes. It praised the Jewish spirit, which German terror could not break; it lauded Jewish spiritual resistance as the proof that the Jews would not surrender to the Germans’ brutal oppression. His poems also channeled anger, curses, hatred of the Germans and calls for revenge and rebellion. For example, Katzeneleson wrote two versions of the poem ‘Yizkor!’ (Remember!) in 1940 and in the summer of 1941; unfortunately both versions are lost. Ringelbum considered the poem to be an authentic call for revenge, despite not having the best artistic style.[[352]](#footnote-373) Lubtekin recallit it being read aloud to the community at Dzielna Street:

*He dedicated this two-part poem ‘Yizkor’ (Remembrance) to his friends in Dzielna. He read the first part of it to us on Rosh Hashanah (New Year's ) Eve 5701 (1940). We were all seated in the dining room listening to Yizkor, the memorial prayer, in remembrance of our brethren, murdered on the streets of the city, and the many Jewish homes in mourning. Later he composed a second half to the poem. It has all been lost.*[[353]](#footnote-374)

From May 1940 until the following spring, Katzenelson was active leading educational and cultural activities of the underground movements, especially Dror. These activities aimed to strengthen the spirit of the people and give them hope that conditions would improve. They did not counsel acceptance of the present reality, but helped people gather the strength needed to survive the days of darkness.

1. **Down the Ladder of Despair**
   1. **Spiritual Resistance**

The archives of the Yitzhak Katzenelson Ghetto Fighters House at Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot (Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz) in Israel hold the writings of Katzenelson. These documents are our ‘doors’ into the world of the Holocaust, the most important resources for the understanding of its meaning.

In Katzenelson's texts written during the Holocaust – especially those from the last months of 1943 and January 1944 while he was imprisoned in the concentration camp in Vittel, France – despair is blatant. Their nihilistic tone made them unsuitable for the ethos of renewal that shapes the culture of remembrance in Israel. Programs of remembrance do not include them, and teachers tend not to introduce his poems to their pupils.

Personally experiencing the horrors of the Holocaust, Katzenelson understood that those years represented a cataclysmic rewriting of Jewish history. His writings reveal his understanding of the Holocaust as a world- shattering event that plunged the Jewish world into chaos and a return to nothingness, wiping out its moral horizons. It destroyed all meaning, so that cynicism, nihilism and despair overran the world of all humanity and the world of Jews. A place where everything is lost with no meaning and no ethical direction – a reality in which everything is on the edge of annihilation – is a place in which it is very hard to exist. This is the very place to which Katzenelson invited his readers.

All religions face the difficulty of explaining the presense of evil in the world – of providing answers to the questions of why is there injustice and why do the good die young – and of making those tragedies part of a known and meaningful reality. This task is particularly difficult for monotheistic religions centred on one omnipotent God; these religions express in their core , and theysarchingthat explains. How can there be evil, injustice and suffering in a world judged and governed by an almighty God? To explain this dissonance, Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions have developed theories of theodicy. Biblical and rabbinic literature, as well as medieval and modern Jewish philosophy, struggle to reconcile the existence of evil and suffering in a world governed by an omnipotent God.

Yitzhak Katzenelson, like perhaps the most renowned Hebrew poet, Hayim Nahman Bialik, was familiar with the various layers that made up Hebrew culture, including biblical and rabbinic texts. He drew on them creatively, particularly those dealing with theodicy, to give meaning to the increasingly dark Jewish reality in the war.

We tend to associate the underground movements that sprung up in the Warsaw ghetto with armed resistance and forget that the path to violence began with spiritual and cutural resistance. Dror first built a network of cultural, educational and social programs, including an agricultural farm in a suburb of the city, an underground press, a school, drama groups and a children choir.[[354]](#footnote-375)

The underground educators' seminar and the underground Dror gymnasium set up in August 1940 enabled Katzenelson to express his interpretation of the ghetto reality to a small group of leaders, educators and students. The drama group that he established and the Bible study classes that he led greatly increased the size of his audience: on these public stages he offered the people of the ghetto a perspective on their situation that gave them hope and a vision of future redemption. In his plays *On the Rivers of Babylon* (March 1941) and *Job* (June 1941) he integrated biblical passages from Ezekiel and Job, respectively. Lubetkin testified to the important impact that Katzenelson's plays had on the Jews in the ghetto:

*Yitzhak Katzenelson's biblical play* Job *appeared in the Dror Press. It was written in 1941 and its publication was an important cultural event in the Jewish life of Warsaw. Katzenelson gave readings from his works on various occasions. The first such reading was at Dzielna [the residence of Dror members] for an audience of public officials and movement members. He later read to different literary and artistic groups. Everyone who heard him read was inspired. It was evident that despite everything, the Nazis could not break our spirit; there were still creative forces amongst us.*[[355]](#footnote-376)

Yitzhak Zuckerman described the play’s impact similarly: '*This was very encouraging; indeed it did not save anyone from death but raised up the head of the young and the child.*’[[356]](#footnote-377)

Why was the story of Job, who suffered so much hardship, a source of inspiration for the inhabitants of the ghetto? What gave these biblical texts such a powerful effect on the minds of the ghetto people? Why would dramatic plays, which deal with stories of human agony and national disasters, be a source of consolation in the days of imprisonment in a ghetto?

Katzenelson’s decision to base his plays on these biblical characters was not made lightly. Both dealt with suffering: *On the Rivers of Babylon* with the suffering of the collective and *Job* with the suffering of the individual. Both of these plays framed the present situation of the Jews as part of the long arc of the Jewish experience, promising the audiences a return to the good life from the abysses of history. They gave the ghetto inhabitants hope.

*On the Rivers of Babylon* revisited the destruction of the First Temple and the expulsion of the Jewish people from their homeland. This situation had the potential to lead to despair, spiritual decay and social disintegration of the people of Judea. Indeed, the people first reacted by weeping as they were mocked by their oppressors, as expressed in Psalm 137:

1By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept   
    when we remembered Zion.   
2There on the poplars   
    we hung our harps,   
3for there our captors asked us for songs,  
    our tormentors demanded songs of joy;  
    they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

4How can we sing the songs of the Lord   
    while in a foreign land?  
5If I forget you, Jerusalem,  
    may my right hand forget its skill.  
6May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth  
    if I do not remember you   
if I do not consider Jerusalem   
    my highest joy.

7Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did  
    on the day Jerusalem fell.   
“Tear it down,” they cried,  
    “tear it down to its foundations!”   
8Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction,   
    happy is the one who repays you  
    according to what you have done to us.  
9Happy is the one who seizes your infants  
    and dashes them against the rocks.

The exiles were sunk deep in despair, lacking all hope. We can imagine the agony someone had to experience to describe the horrific actions in verse 9.

In *On the Rivers of Babylon*, the despair of the ancient exiles reverberated with the despair of the ghetto Jews. The ancient psalm became a lyric tool with which the ghetto prisoners could express the experience of their own destruction. It also gave them the words for a curse they wish would befall their oppressors.

Yet, however deep was the despair of the exiles, the modern-day Jews knew that the ancient story ended well: the exile came to an end with the proclamation of Koresh, king of Persia, in 539 BCE. Those exiles who wished to return to Zion were able to do a year later. Therefore, the play offered both empathy for the audience’s current suffering and the hope that their travail would end: the ancient narrative of redemption would become the current narrative of redemption from the Germans.

*Job* also carried with it the hope for a good ending. Even though the misfortune of Job was so great and his struggle with his unexplainable and apparently unjustified suffering takes up most of the book on which the play was based, the Jewish audience knew how it ended. In the ‘first’ ending of the book, God returns to the reality of Job. Job is appeased as his world returns to be a meaningful cosmos. Facing chaos and the absence of God in their own lives, the ghetto inhabitants too could hope for such a return.

In the ‘second’ ending of the book, God gives Job back all the possessions he lost and gives him new children. A modern person might wonder whether having one’s property restored and being given a new set of children could ever compensate for the loss of his first set of children? How does God’s actions address the unjustified death of Job’s children? But Katzenelson’s play did not attempt to clarify these philosophical questions of theodicy. The book of Job was important for him because of its vocabulary of suffering and because of its positive ending; he passed no judgment on its literary or philosophical quality.

For Katzenelson, the Jews of the ghetto were part of an ancient story that gave meaning to their current reality. Like Job, they were not to blame nor committed any sin that would justify their difficult reality. Like Job they were also eligible for repatriation. While Job was suffering his misfortunes, he did not know that his agony would someday end, and so he bitterly questioned his fate. The ‘Jobs’ of the ghetto already knew how the story of Job ended and so could understand the promise concealed in Katzenelson’s play that one day their reality would improve.

* 1. **The Bravery of the Proud Spirit**

The Nazi logic structuring the reality of the ghetto was one of inexorably increasing destruction, as experienced through growing isolation, hunger, cold and illness leading to brutal terror. As conditions worsened and more information trickled in about murderous acts in the regions under German occupation, finding consolation and hope became ever harder.

Katzenelson put words to the Jewish suffering in the ghetto. The ‘Songs of Hunger’ (May 1941) and the ‘Songs of Cold’ (February 1942) express the unbearable reality. A father looks helplessly at his starving children; he knows he is unable to provide them food. In an outcry of despair, he says that they may leave their home to die in the street:

**Songs of Hunger**

*B.*

*It is good at home if there is bread in it, even if just one slice.*

*The buffet is open, the last crumb is gone.*

*Let us go out into the street – and not die of hunger in the house*

*Beside a bare and stripped table.*

*It is good to live in a house… do you remember in Lodz, in days gone by,*

*The dining room, pictures decorating its walls,*

*And a white tablecloth… do you remember*

*The loaf of bread… forgive me for describing it now.*

*…*

*It is good at home, if there is even one good thing in it.*

*Let us go out to the street – there the sky arches over every head:*

*Perhaps manna will come down from above, and a miracle will take place here too*

*Your eyes will gaze towards the ceiling in vain.*

*It is good at home if there is bread in it, even if just one slice…*

With endless pain the father looks at his freezing children, but realizes he has no way to heat the house in the cold winter of 1942:

**Songs of Cold**

*A.*

*It’s cold in the house. The chill consumes us.*

*A pack of wolves is running wild through the house.*

*And bears come through the window and settle.*

*I and my wife and our young children*

*Will shiver.*

*And no one sees, and there is no one to hear.*

*And helplessness.*

*Don’t weep, don’t weep here:*

*Your teardrop, even if silent*

*May, God forbid, freeze in your eye.*

*It’s cold in the house. We wander terrified.*

*Terror has fallen upon me in my home.*

*I went out to the silent streets,*



Manuscript of the Song on Shlomo Zelichovsky

GFM archive # 19137

*I trod on people, on the victims of the frost –*

*They are lying like felled trees.*

*Arms stretched out and silent.*

*Like a cry dying in the void, like a cry of woe –*

*And perhaps this greeting of yours,*

*This harsh greeting you will send to me?*

Through his poetry Katzenelson gave words to the voiceless cry of every parent in the ghetto who helplessly watched his or her children in agony. Many children did not even have the support of families; they lived on the streets, begging for food. Adolf Berman, the director of Centus, the Jewish children’s aid organization, estimated that among the 100,000 children living in the ghetto, many thousands had been abandoned.[[357]](#footnote-378) The Jewish self-aid network, extensive as it was, could not provide shelter to many of them. Emanuel Ringelblum, who directed these efforts and was also the noted historian of the ghetto, wrote many painful descriptions of their lives on the streets.

Perhaps the Jewish community could withstand the growing hunger and cold, but not the continuing terror and death, both in the ghetto and in regions occupied by the Germans.Katzenelson tried to strengthen the spirit of his people who were living in such unbearable circumstances. His June 1941 poem about Shlomo Jelikhovsky was written shortly before mass killings began occurring in the ghetto. It is still replete with traditional formulas of faith and visions of martyrdom as heroic, acts of Kiddush Hashem.

The poem describes the Germans’ execution of ten Jews from the town of Zdunska-Wola in Poland on the evening of Shavuot in 1941; this heinous act was committed to keep the Jewish population in a state of terror and total obedience and to scare them from engaging in acts of resistance. Katzenelson centres the poem on one of the executed Jews, a Hassid named Shlomo Jelikhovsky, who went – as it was told – singing to the gallows, telling the Jews who were forced to watch to keep their spirits high:

*Sing, earth, and heaven, sing: sing, God, sing, O, Lord.*

*Sing all you down there, sing all you here, sing all you above!*

*Sing, all your worlds, sing Shlomo Jelikhovsky's name –*

*He lifted up mankind, He lifted man on high* (1969, 52)*.*[[358]](#footnote-379)

Katzenelson portrays Shlomo Jelikhovsky s a link in the chain of Jewish martyrs who understood their approaching death as a ‘holy’ death and accepted it with joy.

Kiddush Hashem, holy Jewish martyrdom, is one formula of theodicy. Accepting one’s coming death as holy gives the attribute of holiness to mere death: it loads death with meaning and turns political defeat into spiritual victory. For many generations, the concept of Kiddush Hashem made it easier for Jews to accept their tragic fates and served as an ideal example of holiness and the ultimate moral compass.

As written in the Talmud, Rabbi Akiva died while enthusiastically chanting the Shema (Berachot 61b). His actual moment of death was believed to have coincided with his saying the word ‘one’ in the prayer, the key word of the Jewish declaration of faith. There is no higher way of worshipping God than dying for his name: those who are martyred because of their commitment to worshiping God actualize the love of God in its highest degree.

Rabbi Akiva is traditionally seen as the most important person of the ten legendary martyrs (*Aseret Harugei Malchut*) who were tortured by the Romans and died for the sake of their faith.[[359]](#footnote-380) Rabbi Akiva's actions inspired generations of Jews who chose death when the only alternative was to blaspheme God or leave their faith.

Going to his death on Shavuot, Shlomo Jelikhovsky felt he was sanctifying the name of God and, as the Rabbi Akiva of his time, was receiving the highest privilege of becoming a martyr. Interpreting this act as a form of Kiddush Hashem turns the fact of death from a human disaster and a consequence of one’s complete helplessness in the face of Nazi terror into a stirring declaration of faith and an expression of spiritual might. Defeat becomes a victory of the spirit:

*Rejoice! To die this way is a privilege  
We're lucky! We stand before all Israel, in the sanctification of his name.  
It's a great privilege to be hanged from the gallows!  
Let's sing, Jews, let's break into melody!* (1969: 54)

Schlomo’s act, through the poetic intermediation of Katzenelson, became an exemplary act for all Jews. ‘*It is our fortune that we die like that*’, speaks Shlomo Jelikhovsky using plural language: ‘our’, we are the privileged. In the ghetto, as in days gone by, it was the Jews' privilege to die with the declaration of faith on their lips and in their hearts.

thus dt-csquarely inZwethe modern equivalent of Their deaths were made understandable and could be confronted, however difficult that might besangthe mostgiving his death inghorrific

There is one principal difference, however, between the rabbinic texts and Katzenelson's writings: while Shlomo Jelikhovsky glorified the name of God, Katzenelson glorified the name of humankind who shows such spiritual strength. People, not God’s actions, were the main subjects of Katzenelson's writings. Nonetheless, regardless of Katzenelson’s humanistic paradigm, he understood the heroic act of the Hassid Shlomo Jelikhovsky as an expression of strength and spiritual defiance.

1. 1. **The** **Absurd Bravery**

Death pervaded the streets and houses of the ghetto, living conditions worsened and news of mass killing in the East by the special units that followed the advancing German Army reached Warsaw. In the summer of 1942, the deportation of the Jews of Warsaw to Treblinka began.

On 14 August 1942, death touched Katzenelson personally when his wife Hannah and his two younger sons Benzion (14) and Benjamin (11) were among the thousands of deportees who went to their death. He could no longer find words of consolation, and on that very day, he cried out his great loss in his Yiddish poem ‘The Day of My Great Disaster’ (Yom Asoni HaGadol). He became the poet of revenge who gave voice to the secret words of his young comrades in the underground. He cursed the Germans and their partners, and he praised those who hold weapons and wreak revenge.

After this bloody summer, Katzenelson became the poet of the absurd, rejecting the traditional formulas of theodicy. The reality of extermination became known and experienced in all its grievousness. Death was no longer the lot of selected individuals, ten martyrs at a time, but the fate of the whole Jewish people. Every Jew became a martyr. One could no longer praise suffering and death as the sanctification of God’s name; suffering became unbearable.

In the last great poem that he wrote in the ghetto, ‘The Song of the Rabbi of Radzin’ (November 1942–January 1943), Katzenelson accepts the absence of God. He tells of the heroism of a man who struggles without divine support. He is brave, his spirit unbroken, even though reality has lost its meaning and can show no justification. Trains carrying Jews to their deaths travel throughout Poland proclaiming the bitter truth: the world has lost all divine providence. It is a nihilistic world with no judgement nor judge:

*Where do you go train cars? Say where you go?  
To death, to mass death  
To destruction, without law, without judge, to annihilation  
Without law, without a judge, a voice of knocking, a loud voice:  
Is it the wheels calling? Or Jews in the train cars?*[[360]](#footnote-381)

The world lacks basic justice as expressed in Epicurean formulas, which reject all kinds of just divine governance of the world. It is written in Midrash Psalms 10, ‘*There is no judgment and no judge – God left his world and settled in the heavens*’. God still exists, but as in the ancient Midrash, he is helpless and he cannot save his people. God is there – in the death train cars – but he can do nothing because of his ultimate weakness.

*Suddenly the Rabbi cries out through his cry and tears:  
‘Master of the World, I don’t stand alone  
We stand here we two standing guard here, You too*

*look to Lublin from afar when it dies…*

*You too are hidden as I am here – you only look on…  
just like me, you cannot do anything to save your people…  
I do not stand awake here alone between the walls —  
You too:… and the Rabbi wrings his hands*.[[361]](#footnote-382)

God is helpless: ‘his hand is short’. Instead, the rabbi is the one who shows strength, who acts. He is the one who pushes God out of his house to go and save the Jews of Lublin who are being murdered.

In the last part of the poem, as the death train is traveling throughout Poland the rabbi embarks on his own, serious task: to give the dead Jews in those train cars a decent Jewish burial. He buys the corpses and then buries them. He approaches one train car that looks empty, but then he hears a crying voice. He identifies God standing and weeping in the corner of the dark car:

*He tumbles momentarily, the path is unseen.   
he understands the path that he takes  
Toward the fields, where the train still stands.  
He walks … suddenly, out from a cloud*

*The moon came out, pale, went down cold  
illuminates the train – stands alone  
Each car like an open grave stands bare  
Every car, every car with its wide open mouth.*

*The Rabbi observes this in the pale light,  
no one is inside yet it is as if someone is there!  
Inside someone is crying: the Rabbi asks:  
‘Who cries there – say who?’, please, say, who?*

*and enters the train car: in its dark corner   
silent and hurting, he stood in his misery,  
He stood listening to the crying of the Master of the World…  
the Rabbi remained standing still, a very long time — silent*

*In the empty dark train car, gathered in himself   
the Rabbi did not move a muscle, did not change his place  
To his God crying, he listened with great attention  
He kept silent and said not one word of consolation to Him.[[362]](#footnote-383)*

The rabbi of Radzin listens to God's crying, but he offers no consolation. All he can do is go from one train car to another to face the reality of his murdered people and at least give them decent burials. The poem ‘Shlomo Jelikhovsky’ has a triumphant tone, as Shlomo, just like Rabbi Akiva, was able to give his life for the sanctification of God's name. His act of Kiddush Hashem is a personal accomplishment of faith. In this poem, the rabbi experiences only a moment of total despair, but then gains the strength to transcend these feelings and act on behalf of his fellow Jews.

The bravery of the Radzin rabbi is the courage of someone who is beyond despair or consolation. He is left with only one task: to bury those Jews who did not have a proper grave. This is the cry of Katzenelson: the Jewish people is dead, and even their graves do not exist.

The image of God crying in the corner of the train car has another traditional connotation with which Katzenelson, well versed in Jewish text, was familiar. A rabbinic midrash on the Book of Lamentations written between the fifth and seven centuries describes the Spirit of the Holy crying over its exiled children (Eichah Rabbah 1). The crying God is the God who empathizes with the fate of his people; this image is found in Jewish texts along with that of the angry God whose wrath is the cause of destruction.

In the Talmud we find a story of Rabbi Yossi who heard the cry of God in the innermost part of the Temple, the Holy of the Holiest:

*It has been taught: R. Jose says, I was once traveling on the road, and I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Elijah of blessed memory appeared and waited for me at the door till I finished my prayer.  After I finished my prayer, he said to me: Peace be with you, my master! and I replied: Peace be with you, my master and teacher!… He further said to me: My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin? I replied: I heard a divine voice, cooing like a dove, and saying: Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world!* (Babylonian Talmud, Berachot, 3:1)

The cry of the *Shekhina*, the divine presence in the world, reappears in modern Hebrew literature, for example, in ‘Alone’, a poem by Katzenelson’s contemporary, the father of modern Hebrew poetry, Hayim Nahman Bialik:

*Alone. I remain alone.  
The Shekhina’s broken wing  
trembled over my head. My heart knew hers:  
her fear for her only son.*…  
*Dumbly she clung and wept.  
Her broken wing sheltered me:  
‘scattered to the four winds of heaven;  
they are gone, and I am alone’.*

Thus the talmudic image of God crying for the fate of His people echoes in Hebrew poetry, but with significant differences. In the Talmud, the cry is heard in a ruin in Jerusalem, perhaps in a part of the Temple itself, the Holy of the Holiest. The divine cry in Bialik’s poem is heard in the deserted Beit Midrash, the holy place of Jewish communities in exile. In Katzenelson's poem, it is heard in the corner of the cattle train car: the Holy of Holies of the twentieth century. The sound heard in the car is the weeping of a helpless God who can only cry and wait for the consolation of people.

‘The Song of the Rabbi of Radzin’ expresses a deep spiritual breakage. God is a helpless, useless God, while the rabbi exhibits bravery, doing a last act of charityfor his murdered people. More than that, God's cry is unwanted: he is left behind and the rabbi and his community leave the house of prayer and take a different path.

The poem ends with a birth of a new, meaningful custom to commemorate the Ninth of Av.[[363]](#footnote-384) Tisha B’av originally memorialized the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Now, said Katzenelson, the Ninth of Av should commemorate the destruction of every Jewish town. Yet the poem also rejects the tradition of martyrdom and Kiddush Hashem. Although the rabbi seems to want to die as a martyr as Akiva did, saying, ‘*I wish I would have his end*’, he realizes that this paradigm is no longer relevant. The rabbi of Radzin knows that all he need do to have Akiva’s fate is to go home, where he will be killed. But he declines this fate: by deciding not to go home, he does not give the Germans the opportunity to capture and kill him. The rabbi rebels against his former world. He decrees that his community lament not be the destruction that occurred long ago but the current destruction of Jewish Lublin and its neighboring towns.

In writing the ‘The Song of the Rabbi of Radzin’ Katzenelson became the poet of absurd activism – waged by those who understand they can no longer rely on God and that they now have to shoulder the entire responsibility for their own fate. Absurd activism is the decision to do something even when there is no hope, recognizing that even when there is no God, there is humankind.

* 1. **Armed Resistance**

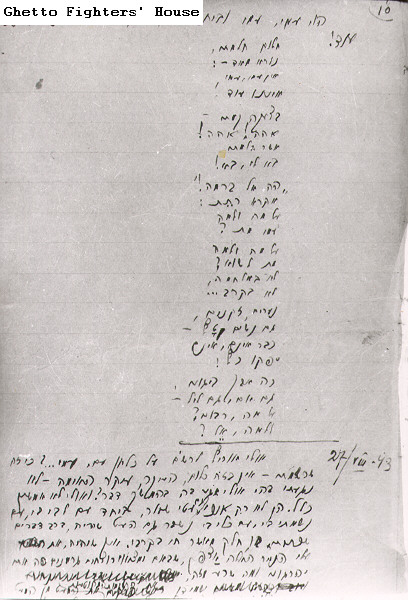
On July 1942, after his wife Hannah and his two younger sons were caught and deported to Treblinka, Katzenelson and his oldest son Zvi became part of the Jewish Fighting Organization (JOB).

On January 1943, the Germans entered the ghetto, and Katzenelson and his son could not longer leave their homes to work at the Tebens Shultz factory; they remained inside with their underground comrades.[[364]](#footnote-385) Later that month, on 18 January, as part of the JOB, they joined with members of a Dror fighting squad in the first battle on Zamenhof Street; the squad, carrying grenades, pistols, iron bars and Molotov cocktails, launched a surprise attack on the Germans.

Yitzhak Katzenelson’s words before the battle stirred the hearts of his comrades privileged to hear them, as Lubetkin, a leading member of JOB, recalled:

*We should be happy that we are preparing ourselves, arms in hand, to meet the enemy and die if necessary. Our armed struggle will be an inspiration to future generations. Let us emulate our brothers in Eretz Israel. They showed no faint-heartedness when faced with danger and overwhelming odds. Their deaths have become an example to generations of Jews.*

*The Germans have murdered millions of us, but they will not prevail. The Jewish people lives, and so will it continue to live. Our eyes will not see it, but they will pay dearly. After we die, our deeds will be remembered forever.*



A photo copy of the text of "I had a Dream",   
The GFH Archive, # 19160

She added, ‘His words, spoken with holy fervor, lit a flame in our hearts*.*’[[365]](#footnote-386)

Although Katzenelson never actually fought the Germans, he played a leading role in the spiritual resistance, as Zuckerman recognized:‘*I announce that Yitzchak Katzenelson, personally never had a pistol, and he never shot even one shot, and he did not kill any German. But what he did was rebellion.*’[[366]](#footnote-387)

Katzenelson was nearly sixty at that time, too old to be of much use in the battle, and so Zuckerman decided to send the poet and his son Zvi into hiding. When the April 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising began, Katzenelson and his son were already secreted in a hiding place outside the ghetto.

* 1. **My People Is No More**

Yitzhak Katzenelson did not survive the Holocaust, but in 1943, when he was in the concentration camp of Vittel, he already seemed to fully understand the ultimate fate of the Jews and the contours of the Final Situation; his writings, even if they were not completely accurate from a historiographical perspective, reflected his prophetic understanding.

He recorded his thoughts and experiences in the camp in a diary that was later published under the title *Pinkas Vittel* (Vittel Notebook). Its entries, written in Hebrew from 22 May 1942 to 16 September 1943,[[367]](#footnote-388) also included a detailed description of Holocaust events occurring throughout Europe and his personal interpretive response to them. He thus did not merely record his personal suffering; his writings revealed his extensive knowledge of the fate of Jews in Europe and of the process of mass killing; he even gives the number of Jewish victims as ‘over six million’ or as high as seven million.[[368]](#footnote-389)

Katzenelson did more than record these horrific events: he tried to find meaning in them. As a Bible teacher and one steeped in Hebrew culture, he turned to Jewish culture for the proper vocabulary and lexicon to describe the destruction of Jewry. The loss of Hannah and his two sons, Benzion and Benjamin, became one with the loss of his people. He saw the fate of the Katzenelson family and the fate of the Jewish people as the same: Hannah was the image of all Jewish mothers, and Benzion and Benjamin the representation of all the murdered Jewish children. His personal grief merged with the national grief:

*Oh, my people! I called my people, I called my people and my people is no more…. As my wife that was, as Benzion my son, as my Benjamin – there were, and no more. And so is my people. there was my people which Is no more, Killed*.[[369]](#footnote-390)

Katzenelson was so connected to his people in his heart that the loss of his family and the loss of his people were one, an endless nightmare.

Close to these words there is a poem in the diary that has become a central element of the Ghetto Fighters Museum liturgy for its annual Holocaust commemoration event:

*I dreamed a dream*

*It was grievously sore,*

*My people had perished*

*It is no more, no more!*

*Woe! Oh, woe! I arose with a moan,*

*My dream is true! I cried with a groan.*

*All atremble I called, oh God! God on high!*

*My people died! Wherefore? Oh, why?*

*In vain they perished. Why? Oh wherefore?*

*Without fight in battle, or call to war.*

*Oh, wring your hands, for they live not!*

*Neither young nor old, neither woman nor tot!*

*So in sorrow, I weep by day and by night,*

*Oh, wherefore, my Master?*

*Oh, why? Lord of all Might?* [[370]](#footnote-391)

In this poem, Katzenelson states a terrible truth: a whole people was murdered. This destruction goes beyond the murders of millions of individual: a whole people, a whole civilization, a whole world is gone. This is not a summary of historical facts, but rather is an interpretive statement. Of course, not every Jew was murdered, but murder and destruction on such a large scale meant that, in reality, a whole people was destroyed. This is a truth that went beyond the personal grief of the poet.

Understanding this truth brought Katzenelson to total despair and nearly to insanity. Where there is no consolation there is madness:

*Shall I continue to record the annihilation of the whole nation, my nation? For what I have so far recorded is as naught. My most terrible dread I have as yet not touched upon. Shall I perhaps deal with it now as I go along? And yet perhaps I shall not continue at all.… For this pen of mine, wherewith I have written most of these notes, has become a living part of me. This pen too is broken, like me, like my soul, like everything with me. In any case, I shall hide these papers of mine, for if the German murderers find them, they will kill me.*[[371]](#footnote-392)

Everything died for Katzenelson: his pen was broken, his heart was broken, his soul was dead. The private grief of a father who lost all his family is understandable. However, for Katzenelson the private grief was translated into a national grief. The man who mourned the death of his wife mourned the loss of all Jewish women. The father who mourned for his children also mourned for all the murdered Jewish children. Katzenelson became a national mourner, the one who expressed a lamentation for an entire people.

Katzenelson knew that the murdered European Jews were only part of the Jewish people, that Jews in America and in the Land of Israel continued to live and would continue to bear wonderful children – yet all of them could not replace the murdered people:

*Oh, my people! My people! I have seen a procession of thousands of children in Eretz Israel [the land of Israel]. I beheld there a nation of children, each one exceeding the other in beauty and charm. I have seen the crowds of Jews in New York. I have visited places where the Jewish tribes have settled in lands beyond the seas… Oh, almighty God of Israel!* ***Let not despair overwhelm them*** *when they learn of the utter annihilation of our people here. Let them take courage, seek out wives and build homes. I am sure that they will bear good, righteous offspring who will be loyal to their nation. In the not too distant future, a great generation will arise, which will outnumber this one.… Yes, a nation will be born. It will be a Jewish nation, great and numerous! But, a nation with its Beth Hamidrash will never more be born…. Oh, my people and its great Beth Hamidrash … you are no more! You are no more.*[[372]](#footnote-393)

‘I have seen’ (raiti) that there will be many Jews in the world, wrote Katzenelson in Hebrew, using a biblical prophetic language that converts past to future tense. But this provided no consolation. Those living in the future are not a substitute for the dead. In the second ending of the Book of Job a new set of children substitutes for the dead children. In his diary, Katzenelson rejected that solution: the newborn cannot be a compensation for the dead. There is no replacement for a murdered beloved human being. The loss is ultimate, and perhaps even the idea that life continues is unbearable.

In the language of prayer, Katzenelson expressed his desperate hope that despair would not crush the spirit of those Jews living outside Europe when they hear about the total destruction of the Holocaust. He urged them not to despair, even though he thought that would be the natural response to destruction of such magnitude. Despair may cause individuals to lose the will to life and thus endangers the ability of the Jewish people to continue. It is a ‘black hole’ that swallows one’s life energies and faith in humankind and its future. Years later, the Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim wrote about the dangers of despair. To combat it, he formulated the concept of the 614th commandment: ‘not to despair of God and not to despair of man’ and its corollary, that Jewish survival denied Hitler a posthumous victory. Jews have to resist despair so that it does not prevent the continuation of Jewish life. Even before the Final Solution was completely implemented, Katzenelson pointed to this danger while living in the eye of the storm.

Katzenelson urged Jews of the future to do whatever they could to ensure the continuation of the Jewish people:

*Let them take courage, seek out wives and build homes. I am sure that they will bear good, righteous offspring who will be loyal to their nation. In the not too distant future, a great generation will arise, which will outnumber this one, which met so cruel an end at the hands of the foul scum of the human species. Yes, a nation will be born. It will be a Jewish nation, great and numerous! But, a nation with its Beth Hamidrash [house of Torah learning] will never more be born.*

There is a clear biblical reference to the instructions given by the prophet Jeremiah to the Judean exiles in Babylon:

*Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease* (Jeremiah, 29: 4-6).

Katzenelson’s ironic use of the biblical text, as did his similar ironic treatment of Ezekiel, delivered a message opposite to that given by his prophetic ancestors. Jeremiah expresses a hope for renewal; in 1943, a year after the major deportation of Warsaw Jews to Treblinka and the annihilation of millions of European Jews, there is no hope. In the same words used by Jeremiah, the prophetic message of consolation becomes a message of despair: the central theme in the diary.

The Jewish tradition provides guidance for mourning loved ones, but how can one relate to the loss of millions of murdered Jews? Even talking about ‘millions’ makes that loss abstract and unreal: it allows one to escape from the horror. Can one say a prayer to mourn the loss of millions?

The Kaddish, the mourners’ prayer, is an expression of consolation and an affirmation of God's rule in the world. Typically, the mourner recites it at the grave of a beloved one and at the anniversary of that death. The meaning of this ritual is that even when reality seems chaotic in the face of death, it is still governed by a mighty just God: it is infused with a metaphysical order. Because God is still in the world, there is a place for hope. But when the dead person is joined by another one and another one, up to millions of individuals, and each one is ‘a whole world’, unique and indispensable, are the Kaddish and El Maleh Rachamim (God is full of mercy) prayers still valid? Can they assuage the loss and grief?

*It is not they [members of the S.S. & S.A., M.S.]. It is not they alone, but the whole German people, all its millions. It is the whole German nation who murdered all the Jews during the course of the last year. Seven million Jews, seven million souls of Israel! Count! One! One soul. Two! Three! Continue further! On and on, up to seven million … count! Count! … you must not stop! For us, a few utterly wretched ones, still living – alas that this should be called living! – this is a memorial service for the departed souls. Count on, count on, until your lips and tongue dry up in your mouth, and the spittle congeals. Count, count! Four Jewish lives, five, six, further, further… don't call out the names of these holy martyrs, because you cannot call out seven million names! You don't know them. No, you don't know them. You knew not their names nor certainly the lives of these Jews and never their inner souls. Woe unto us, that we never acquired even a superficial knowledge of the Jewish soul! Woe unto us that we did not know her. Now she is destroyed and gone forever. Gone forever!*[[373]](#footnote-394)

A traditional Jewish concept is that whenever a soul is lost, it is as if an entire world is destroyed. Every human being who died for nothing raises again the question of the value of human life and death: ‘*Every soul of Israel is an abyss.*’[[374]](#footnote-395) Katzenelson put faces to the millions of nameless Jews who went to their death: all the women got the image of Hannah, and all the children were in the image of the murdered Benzion and Benjamin.

* 1. **The** **Dead Bones Will Not Return to Life**

Katzenelson's powerful poem, ‘The Song of the Murdered Jewish People’, which was originally written in Yiddish, consists of fifteen cantos: each canto has fifteen four-line stanzas. Through a simple rhyming scheme, the poem describes the horrific events Katzenelson witnessed: it succeeds in both expressing the depth of the abyss that was the Holocaust and keeping that memory alive. However, because its words are poison to the soul, it has not found a place in Holocaust education.

‘The Song of the Murdered Jewish People’ is a sad ballad with a bitter ending. It begins as a troubadour, carrying a harp, stands in a ruined city street and calls his people to gather around him so they can hear his song. However, he cannot summon any crowd because are no more living Jews: he is the last one. Therefore, the troubadour calls his dead people to gather around him in a huge circle:

*12*

*Show yourself, my people. Emerge, reach out*

*From the miles-long, dense, deep ditches,*

*Covered with lime and burned, layer upon layer,*

*Rise up! Up! from the deepest, bottommost layer!*

*13*

*Come from Treblinka, from Sobibor, Auschwitz,*

*Come from Belzec, Ponari, from all other camps,*

*With wide-open eyes, frozen cries and soundless screams,*

*Come from Marshes, deep sunken swamps, foul moss –*

*14*

*Come, you dried, ground, crushed Jewish bones.*

*Come, from a big circle around me, one great ring –*

*Grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, mothers carrying babies.*

*Come, Jewish bones, out of powder and sou*

*15*

*Emerge, reveal yourselves to me. Come, all of you, come.*

*I want to see you. I want to look at you. I want*

*Silently and mutely to behold my murdered people –*

*And I will sing… yes… Hand me the harp… I will play!*

(October 3–5, 1943)[[375]](#footnote-396)

And what are the dead Jews gathering to hear? The troubadour sings not a song, but chants the Kaddish. The last song of the dead Jewish people is an elegy, the requiem for the Jews who once lived in Europe. They are gathered as in a minyan, the quorum required for chanting the Kaddish and certain Jewish prayers. The troubadour becomes the prayer leader. Because there is no one to recite the prayer over the dead, the dead people themselves are summoned from the numerous places of annihilation all over Europe – the mass graves of human bones and ashes, the rivers and swamps where the burned corpses were dumped by the murderers – to say the Kaddish for themselves. A huge circle of murdered people, young and old, men and women, lament their own death: the Jewish people is saying its last Kaddish:

*8*

*How can I sing – My world is laid waste.*

*How can I play with wringed hands?*

*Where are my dead? O God, I seek them in every dunghill,*

*In every heap of ashes… O tell me where you are.*

*9*

*Scream from every sand dune, from under every stone,*

*Scream from the dust and fire and smoke –*

*It is your blood, your sap, the marrow of your bones,*

*It is your flesh and blood! Scream, scream aloud!*

*10*

*Scream from the beasts’ entrails in the wood, from the fish in the river*

*That devoured you. Scream from furnaces. Scream, young and old.*

*I want a shriek, an outcry, a sound, I want a sound from you.*

*Scream, O murdered Jewish people, scream, scream aloud!*

*11*

*Do not scream to heaven that is as deaf as the dunghill earth.*

*Do not scream to the sun, nor talk t that lamp… If I could only*

*Extinguish it like a lamp in this bleak murderers’ cave!*

*My people, you were radiant more than the sun, a purer, brighter light!*

*12*

*Show yourself, my people. Emerge, reach out*

*From the miles-long, dense, deep ditches,*

*Covered with lime and burned, layer upon layer,*

*Rise up! Up! from the deepest , bottommost layer!*

*13*

*Come from Treblibka, from Sobibor, Auschwitz,*

*Come from Belzec, Ponari, from all other camps,*

*With wide open eyes, frozen cries and soundless screams,*

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*15*

*Emerge, reveal yourselves to me. Come, all of you, come.*

*I want to see you. I want to look at you. I want*

*Silently and mutely to behold my murdered people –*

*And I will sing… yes… Hand me the harp… I will play![[376]](#footnote-397)*

In Elie Wiesel’s novel, *Night*, the Jews start to recite the Kaddish when they face death. In this poem the image is even more horrific: the dead are called to say the Kaddish after they were killed. After their deaths, here is no one left to say words of lamentation.

The troubadour’s call to all the dead to rise up from the valleys of death – the death camps, swamps, and forests – connotes the the valley of the dried bones in Ezekiel’s vision:

*1. The hand of the LORD was upon me, and the LORD carried me out in a spirit and set me down in the midst of the valley, and it was full of bones;* *2. and He caused me to pass by them round about, and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.* *3. And He said unto me: 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered: 'O Lord GOD, Thou knowest.'* *4. Then He said unto me: 'Prophesy over these bones, and say unto them: O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD:* *5. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.* *6. And I will lay sinews upon you and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.'* *7. So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a commotion, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.* *8. And I beheld, and, lo, there were sinews upon them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them.* *9. Then said He unto me: 'Prophesy unto the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath: {S} Thus saith the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.'* *10. So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood up upon their feet, an exceedingly great host.* *11. Then He said unto me: 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say: Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.* *12. Therefore prophesy, and say unto them: Thus saith the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.* *13. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, O My people.* *14. And I will put My spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I will place you in your own land; and ye shall know that I the LORD have spoken, and performed it, saith the LORD.* (Ezekiel 37, JPS edition)

The vision of the valley of the dried bones is not a prophecy of the resurrection of the dead as it is quite often interpreted. Instead, the rising up of the dead in the valley of the dry bones is the classic biblical metaphor for national revival. Ezekiel’s parable was a a source of hope for the exiles in Babylonia that they would one day return to Zion. It was designed to assuage their doubts about the possibility return and strengthen their faith in their people's future.

However, their return was dependent on their repentance and spiritual renewal. Ezekiel reminded them that change was possible, and each person was responsible only for his or own conduct:

*The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.*

*But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die*. (Ezekiel, 18:20–21)

The spiritual renewal of the people, when it will occur, will bring the end of exile. This is the message of consolation the prophet Ezekiel was conveying: each person will help bring about redemption.

But Katzenelson, referring directly to the words of Ezekiel, inverted his message: in a bitter irony the prophecy of consolation is given in the presence of total annihilation:

*2. I Play*

*1.*

*I play. I sat down low on the ground,*

*I played and sang sadly: O my people!*

*Millions of Jews stood around me and heard,*

*Millions of murdered – a great throng – stood listening*

*…*

*4.*

*O Ezekiel, O you Jew of the Babylonian valley,*

*Seeing the dry bones of your people, you were shocked*

*And lost, you let yourself be led,*

*Like a puppet, by your God into the valley*

*5.*

*When asked ‘Ha-tehyenah?*

*Can these bones live?’ You could not answer,*

*So what am I to say? Woe and grief!*

*Not even a bone remains from my murdered people.*

*6.*

*No bone is left for new flesh, new skin,*

*For a new spirit of life –*

*Look, look, here is a murdered people,*

*Staring at us with lifeless eyes.*

*7.*

*Millions of heads and hands turn to us – try to count them!*

*See their faces and lips – is that a prayer or a frozen cry?*

*Go, touch them.… There is nothing left to touch – hollow.*

*I invented a Jewish people. I made believe in my heart.*

*8.*

*They are gone! They will never be back on this earth!*

*I invented them. Yes, I sit and make-believe.*

*Only their sufferings are true. Only the pain*

*Of their slaughter is true and great indeed.*

*…*

*15.*

*Evoke not Ezekiel, evoke not Jeremiah … I don't need them!!*

*I called them: O help, come to my aid!*

*But I will not wait for them with my last song –*

*They have their prophecy and I, my great pains.*[[377]](#footnote-398)

Ezekiel’s parable has no meaning in the context of the Holocaust, because not even bones remain of the murdered Jews: they were crushed to dust. In the European valley of the dead, the dead are summoned to sing the last song, the last lamentation, over the dead people who will never return to life. It is the last act of parting from a world that will never return. Ezekiel's message of hope becomes a message of despair. There is no more Jewish life and no Jewish world. This is the answer of the twentieth-century prophet to the biblical prophet: you had words of hope, but we have none. The ancient promise has lost its relevancy. This part of the poem ends with these lines:

*Evoke not Ezekiel, evoke not Jeremiah … I don’t need them!!*

*I called them: O help, come to my aid!*

*But I will not wait for them with my last song –*

*They have their prophecy and I my great pains.*[[378]](#footnote-399)

* 1. **Empty Heavens**

The collapse of the biblical prophecies of hope led to the collapse of the Jewish cosmos, with all its structures of meaning. no longerd: he accepted that God was no longer presentRather hwasthe, after the horrors of he Holocaust washed waywas

Part 9 of the ‘The Song of the Murdered Jewish People’ is dedicated to the ‘heavens’, to the sky. In the monotheistic traditions, the heavens are the dwelling place of God and of the basic values of goodness, justice and mercy. The faithful raise their eyes and hands to heaven as they pray for redemption. The upward direction is seen as the path to the good; in contrast, failure and evil lie in a downward direction.

Again inverting tradition, Katzenelson described the heavens not as the place of God or of goodness and mercy but as a cosmic vacuum, a spiritual emptiness:

**To Heavens**

*2*

*Your vulgar blue remained cloudless, glistening falsely as always.*

*The red sun, like a cruel hangman, resolved in its orbit.*

*The moon, like an old vile whore, walked at night.*

*And the stars twinkled shamelessly, glittering like the eyes of mice.*

*3*

*Away! I will not look at you, see you, Know you!*

*O, you deceitful, tricky, lowly heavens on high. How I regret*

*I once had faith in you, confided my joy, my loneliness, my smile and my tears,*

*You are not better than this filthy earth, the big heap of trash!* (23–26 October 1943)

*2.*

*Your vulgar blue remained cloudless, glistening falsely as always.*

*The red sun, like a cruel hangman, resolved in its orbit.*

*The moon, like an old vile whore, walked at night.*

*And the stars twinkled shamelessly, glittering like the eyes of mice.*

*3*

*Away! I will not look at you, see you, Know you!*

*O, you deceitful, tricky, lowly heavens on high. How I regret*

*I once had faith in you, confided my joy, my loneliness, my smile and my tears,*

*You are not better than this filthy earth, the big heap of trash!*

*4.*

O heavens, I praised you, exalted you, in all my songs,

I loved you like a beloved who vanished, melted away like foam.

In my early youth I compared my hope

To your fiery sunsets: "Thus vanished my hope, thus faded my dreams."

5.

Away! Away! You deceived us, my people, my ancient race!

You have always deceived us, my ancestors and my prophets!

To you, kindled by your flames, they lifted their eyes.

For you they had longed with all their hearts.

13.

*There is no God in you! Open your gates, O heavens, open them wide.*

*Take in all the children of my murdered , tormented people,*

*Open them to the great masses. An entire crucified, grief-laden people*

*Is about to enter. O any one of my murdered children is fit to be their God!*

*14.*

*O you desolate heavens, wide and desolate as the desert,*

*I lost my only God in you, yet for them, three isn't enough:*

*The Jewish God, His spirit, and the Galilean Jew, whom they hanged, do not suffice them.*

*They sent us all to heaven, O disgusting, base idolatry!*

(23–26 October 1943)[[379]](#footnote-400)

Katzenelson uses harsh words and phrases – ‘*vile whore*’ and ‘*glittering like the eyes of mice*’ – to describe the heavens, which promised the good and demanded the good, but betrayed the faithful believers. The heavens saw how the Jews were taken by the multitude to their death and yet they remained silent: they accepted the horrors. Thus, heavens were no longer a source of life, of 'living water’, as so many generations believed. They have been shown to be empty and lifeless – '*O you desolate, empty heavens, wide and desolate as the desert*’[[380]](#footnote-401) – and meaningless.

For Katzenelson, there is no God in the heavens, as generations of naïve people believed. Elie Wiesel was one of the faithful for whom God was an intimate companion, for whom God was present in every moment of his young life; that is, until God was executed by the horrors of the camp. Katzenelson’s conception of God was more radical. He went in his despair beyond Wiesel. If in ‘The Song of the Rabbi of Radzin’ God is portrayed as helpless, standing in the corner of the death train car and crying,[[381]](#footnote-402) in this canto God is a non-existence, a mere illusion or deceit. God was never present, not in heavens nor on the earth. The Holocaust showed that the heavens were always empty.

Thus the Holocaust dramatically changed not only the present lives of all who experienced it but also the past: it showed Jewish tradition to be false, to be a big lie: ‘*You have always deceived us, lied also to my prophets, already to my prophets and my ancestors!*’[[382]](#footnote-403) If all of the Jewish heritage is a big lie, then there is no future, no present, and no past: everything is false.

In this canto, the poet says to himself, ‘I was awakened from an illusion of thousands of years’. The whole narrative of the Jewish people is a lie: it never existed. Jewish metaphysics was grounded on the belief, now revealed to be a lie, that there is a God in the heavens, a God of Justice, and that his justice governs reality. The Holocaust made clear the falseness of this narrative of faith, which Jews, Christians and Muslims have followed for generations. The blunt reality is that heavens are no better than the earth.

Bialik’s poetry expressd similar themes, but in response to a specific act of horror and violence, the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. Like the Holocaust, this pogrom raised the issue of finding meaning in a world that seemed chaotic, but it did not portend the destruction of an entire people. Katzenelson’s audience would have been very familiar with Bialik’s poetry; in fact Mordechai Tannenbaum, one of the leaders of the underground in Warsaw and then in Bialystok, wrote that Katzenelson far surpassed Bialik in the bitterness of his curses.[[383]](#footnote-404) One of the themes of Bialik’s poetry is that the response to brutal evil and injustice is the claim that the moral world order has been destroyed:

*If Justice there be, let it now shine forth!  
But if it wait till I'm killed from under the sky  
To shine, let Justice die  
And its throne be thrown to the earth  
And heavens rot with eternal wrong.*[[384]](#footnote-405)

As did Katzenelson, Bialik addressed his poetry not to God but to the heavens: if they do not endow justice on earth, they will rot in the infamy of world evil. In Bialik's poem ‘On the Slaughter’ (1903), the heavens are actually erased. However, Bialik's poetry pointed towards the possibility of a better reality, encouraging rebellion and the defiance of Jewish passivity, while in Katznelson's poetry the heavens are indeed empty and hopeless. There is no one to call people to be active. What Bialik cursed in his poetry had became reality. The only response can be a requiem, an elegy. Both poets responded to the horrors of their times with deadened hearts; both could no longer pray. But in Katzenelson's case, this was not a transitory reaction but a lasting state of despair. A similar expression about the death of man's soul is found in *Night*: the sight of the burned children burned Wiesel’s soul forever.[[385]](#footnote-406)

* 1. **From** **a Prophecy of Hope to a Prophecy of Despair**

As he experienced more and more of the horrors of the Holocaust, Katzenelson took his readers with him to the very bottom of the abyss of human existence. In the early days of the German occupation, he was a prophet of consolation. In his biblical-themed plays, *On the Rivers of Babylon* and *Job*, the ghetto inhabitants could find expression of their personal and collective pains and agonies. They could be buoyed by the plays’ hidden message that their tribulations would end with redemption. In his poems, he expressed the daily struggles of life in the ghetto and the deep grief of a parent who could not save his children from those hardships. However, by the end of 1941, Katzenelson was astute enough to realize that there would be no positive ending for the Jews.

When death became a pervasive part of the ghetto existence, the Jewish bravery celebrated in Katzenelson's poetry was the bravery of martyrdom, Kiddush Hashem: the strong defiance of German decrees is framed in religious terms. The Jew goes to his death with his faith unshaken; his body is destroyed, but his spirit is firm, thus defying the Germans who sought the spiritual destruction of the Jews. While Shlomo Jelikhovsky is praising God even on his way to the gallows, Katzenelson is praising Shlomo; yet in celebrating his brave martyrdom – Shlomo goes to his death singing – Katzenelson sanctifies the human being and not God: ‘the dignity of Man he has Elevated’.[[386]](#footnote-408)

However, as Katzenelson’s martyrdom poetry continued to evolve, he moved further and further from the world of Jewish tradition. ‘The Song of the Rabbi of Radzin’ expressed a deeper spiritual breakdown. God, whose name is sanctified by Shlomo Jelikhovsky, becomes a helpless God. He is heard crying in the the corner of the modern holy of the holiest, the deportation train car, but even his cry is unwanted. Instead it is the rabbi who is doing holy work on behalf of his murdered people: he gives them proper Jewish burials. This is the act of a man, who chose, in spite of the helplessness of God, to do the absurd. Through the image of the rabbi, a new Jew emerges in Katzenelson's poetry – no more the martyr like Rabbi Akiva, but the rebel. A new tradition of Jewish remembrance appears as well: the mourning is about the destruction of twentieth-century Jewry, not of the Temple.

The *Vittel Diary*, written in melancholic prose, expressed all the depth of Katzenelson's despair. Katzenelson drew an historical outline of the Holocaust, as he described in details the destruction process and its magnitude. The world was destroyed on the head of the Jew. A new world does not exist yet, and it is doubtful whether it will ever come to being. It is impossible for an individual to encompass the entire destruction in his mind and give it meaning. And when there is no meaning there is despair. Despair, points out Katzenelson, is the main enemy of Jewish continuity.

Katzenelson’s last poem, ‘The Song of the Murdered Jewish People’, is completely despairing with its unsparing description of the Jewish catastrophe. He does not offer his readers any way to escape the confrontation with the breakage. It is a requiem for the Jewish people and an expression of the total loss of meaning in this world. It reveals the heavens as desolate and so exposes the longest-lasting illusion of humanity. The Jewish narrative has lost its validity. There is no past, present or future. The story of the Jewish people, he says in a bitter irony is just a fairytale, a passing dream.

Knowing that all around him were only dead and dying Jews, Katzenelson wrote for future generations. He buried his last writings with the intention that they would be read by and would inform the postwar generations. He did that not as a historian but as a commentator, as a prophet, as one who gave his audience an ethical understanding of their reality. As such he took his readers into the core of despair, into the darkest and most awful place, where there is no God; no good; no past, present or future; no ethical orientation, no "right" or "wrong" and no hope. The Bible teacher who began as a prophet of consolation became the prophet of despair.

Today’s readers of Katzenelson's writings understand the call to deal with memories of the Holocaust as a call to wrestle with despair. The Holocaust, as Katzenelson taught us, is destruction, helplessness, fear, orphanhood, and longing with no condolences. It is not a story of human bravery or a source of Jewish continuity. The despair arising from the fact of the Holocaust remains: as an unconscious and unprocessed force, it does its destructive work under the surface and darkens the world of Jews, as individuals as well as a collective. One may speculate that the coarseness of Israeli society is a means of silencing its horrors. How can Israeli society confront its memories while dismantling their destructiveness?

1. **The Educators in the Abysses of History**

The life stories of two educators represent the human struggle with the Holocaust. On one wall of the Ghetto Fighters House Museum to the Holocaust and Uprising, named for Yitzhak Katzenelson and holding the Janusz Korczak archive, the image of Korczak, the universal educator, is inscribed. This educator spoke universal truths and sought solidarity with people of all nationalities, cultures and religious traditions. Although his memory is celebrated in the Land of Israel, the universal educator did not identify closely with the Jewish national movement. On the other wall is inscribed the image of the nationally minded poet for whom the museum is named and which stores his archives as well. He dreamed the Zionist dream of the young Land of Israel and lamented the death of his entire people. For Katzenelson, it was a founding event in the history of the Jewish people.

The Ghetto Fighters House is a space for celebrating the legacy of these two educators and, as such, for those who want to give meaning to the Holocaust. Janusz Korczak believed that the ideal of the the unity of all people could be best realized in the care of children, of every child around the globe. He emphasized the equal dignity of all people in his educational work. His vision for the revival of the Land of Israel was a universal one: there all humanity would be renewed in the ‘land of hope’ to which all people aim their prayers. In contrast, Katzenelson espoused a particular narrative and dream of Jews: the hope of the Jewish revival of Hebrew life. It became a false dream after the total destruction of the Jewish people. Interestingly, Korczak, the universal Jew, and Katzenelson, the nationally minded Jew, both seriously considered immigrating to Palestine. Yet both postponed their move and became ensnared in the German death trap.

Everyone who deals with the Holocaust and tries to give it meaning must determine the optimal balance between the particular and the universal. The universal discourse broadens the circle and invites more audiences to participate in commemoration of the Holocaust; it encourages those who are not Jews, or members of any other group of victims of genocide, or who have no direct connection to World War II to see the event as part of their identity. The particularistic discourse, in contrast, invites us to enter the subjective experience of the victims. It may seem to exclude non-Jews from dealing empathically with the Holocaust, but in the texts that Katzenelson left behind there is an authentic expression of the experience of the victim that cannot be found in the universal discourse of the phenomena of genocide. The generalization of the Holocaust to other events, which obscures the personal experience of the victim, cannot be authentic. A deep understanding of the Holocaust reality must be based on the personal experience of the victim and the testimonies of survivors.

This tension between the particular and the universal – between the struggle for peace, justice and equal rights and the national will to exist and live an independent political life – is very relevant today. Is there in principle a contradiction between seeking universal human solidarity and the fostering of national identity? Today, many Jews are inspired by a universal ideals, while the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish state, is still struggling for legitimacy; some continue to claim that its very existence is unjustified.

Korczak and Katzenelson represent this tension. Korczak, the universalist, said again and again that Christian Polish children were as important to him as Jewish children and deserved the same care and educational opportunities. Katzenelson directed his creative energies to developing Hebrew culture in Poland, being a spiritual guide to the ghetto underground, and finally lamenting the loss of all Jews. Korczak is known to the wider public mainly through the story of his martyrdom together with his children and educational staff. Monuments to Korczak, the Jewish martyr who spoke a universal language, can be found all over the world, while Katzenelson, who refused to be a silent victim and called for a Jewish national revival before the war and Jewish resistance during the war, remains unknown beyond certain Zionist circles.

Korczak represents the universal Jew who hoped and believed that he could find his place anywhere in the modernized world, who sought the expression of his identity beyond the circle of national life. Today, he represents those Jews who choose to live in the Diaspora: their Jewish identity continues the legacy of Janusz Korczak. They look for a universal truth rather than a nationalistic one; moreover, in the post-modern discourse, talk about national identity and national revival is seen as narrow and chauvinistic. This translates into calls to eliminate the national aspects of the State of Israel in order to diminish the apparent evils it inflicts on its non-Jewish citizens.

Many Jews nurtured in modernity hope to be just a ‘human being’, just like everyone else, and not to have a particular national identity. Ironically, the most particular Jewish dream of Enlightened Jews was to be a person of the world, a cosmopolitan person who does not have any particular ‘we’, just a ‘me’. Korczak’s best-known children’s book, *King Matt the First*, describes a utopian children state, with no apparent geographical and historical context. It is a universal parable about the state of humanity and how it should transcend painful divisions into groups hostile to one other. The child, for Korczak, stands beyond all national affiliations. Around the cause of the child, all humanity will unite, envisioned the universal educator. The Land of Israel will be a central part of this universal, messianic vision.

In spite of this noble aspiration, we know that Korczak's vision failed. King Matt's story remains a childish fantasy. The educator and his children went to their deaths, while the Christian Polish children continued their lives comparatively safe and well. Today, we know that the utopian idea of solidarity cannot secure the welfare and happiness of humankind. Nonetheless, we cannot abandon the hope embedded in this vision that one day all people will unite behind the cause of the child and indeed will work together to realize a better world for all. Without this utopian vision, we remain bitter and in despair.

For those experiencing the Holocaust, what was the most appropriate response? Was it understanding and acceptance or active resistance and rising up against it? Korczak, the Jewish-Polish Stoic, looked at his reality as a rational explorer and tried to understand and accept it. He saw the human being as part of infinite nature. His response to the ghetto reality was twofold: an endless struggle to keep the orphanage alive as an island of love and light in a dying ghetto and an acceptance of the ‘game rules’ dictated by the Germans. Who is not turning against reality is forced to struggle inside it.

In contrast, Katzenelson – the emotional Jew embodying the heart and words of poetry, the person of Jewish culture, Jewish society and the Jewish national revival movement – called for an active response, resistance, and even armed uprising. He lived the Zionist ethos with all his might. Katzenelson’s work was informed by biblical literature, in which the individual is a free moral agent who has responsibility for her conduct; she is not subject to the determinism of nature, but has free will. Therefore she is responsible for her actions.

Rather than engaging in a Stoic, unemotional exploration of reality, Katzenelson took a moral position, emerging from his heart and consciousness. He did not accept the Holocaust; his writing was a cry for resistance and rebellion, and he engaged in a bitter dialogue with God. He did not give up his struggle until his last days; from his despair, he continued to wage rebellion against the heavens and earth through his writings.

The expression ‘do not go like sheep to the slaughter’, which is bound forever with the Holocaust discourse and the idea of resistance, was a call to action expressed first by Abba Kovner and later on by other underground ghetto leaders. This call is an expression of the ethical dilemma facing the Jewish population during the Holocaust, with which Katzenelson is identified. Today many Israeli children recite the children’s poem ‘Hamesh Shanim al Michael’, but know nothing about the poet who wrote it. Katzenelson dealt with pain and anger from a personal angle, not from a universal perspective, which perhaps makes the lesson of the Holocaust more appealing, translatable to a school setting, and politically correct. However, his response is also authentic, close to his pain and inner soul; it refuses to escape to comfortable, abstract generalizations. Katzenelson takes his readers into the most difficult, dangerous realm of danger, to a place that truly tells us what the Holocaust was for its victims. Nevertheless, Katzenelson, like Korczak, does not bring about a rescue. He, like Korczak, could not change the course of death.

What do Korczak and Katzenelson have in common, in addition to the historical reality that trapped them? Both were authentic representatives of Jewish exile. Both were trapped in a reality of terror, annihilation, and destruction. Both struggled with Jewish weakness and helplessness. Both seriously considered moving to Palestine, and both postponed their move until it was too late. Each one found his own way. Each one found in his world the resources to cope with an absurd reality. Studying both their life stories gives us a complete picture of educational work in that reality. Two stories of two educators, two people of literature and two intellectuals – this is the spiritual framework in which we struggle with the reality of the Holocaust and try to bring something from it to our understanding of the past and our world.

We cannot judge which of these two responses were appropriate, because we did not experience the Holocaust. Our responsibility is to understand both so that when we face conflicts today, we can better appreciate the principal dilemmas they present. What is demanded from us? When, where and how do we have to try to change it?

Young Israelis, when they discuss the Holocaust today, see a reality of total helplessness and the awful lives of the victims. This difficult encounter invites misunderstanding, rejection, and alienation. Young Israelis have learned to be strong and how to use power; they recognize the moral limits of power. The reality of weakness is an enigma for them. The encounter with helplessness has no tinge of heroism nor pedagogical charisma as does the encounter with evil, which offers immediate powerful lessons. It is difficult for young Israelis to identify with the mid-twentieth-century Jews’ struggle. Korczak and Katzenelson, because of the contrasts between them, open together a window to the world of the victims. Korczak, without Katzenelson, represents a 'Chagallian' unjustified abstraction of the Jews, a people with universal moral pathos, but with no ground under its feet. Katzenelson is a prophet of despair who takes us into an impasse. Without Korczak and his universal vision, we remain with a world of no hope. They both create a historical duet, which marks the arena of Holocaust study and education today.

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1. Steiner 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Levi, 2013, 31–71. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Elkana, 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Neher, 1981, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Korczak, 1980*,* 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Levi, 1986, 70-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Levi, 1987, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Levi, 1987, 36-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Fackenheim, 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Katzenelson, 1969, 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Korczak, 1967, 1976. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. The first Declaration of the Rights of the Child was drafted by Eglantyne Jebb; adopted by the International Save the Children Union in Geneva on 23 February 1923; and endorsed by the League of Nations General Assembly on 26 November 1924 as the World Child Welfare Charter. The original document, in the archives of the city of Geneva, carries the signatures of various international delegates, though it seems that Korczak's signature is not among them. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Korczak, 1980, 111 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. T. Shner, 2008b. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Korczak, 1974, 413 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Perlis, 1986, 116-166; T. Shner, 2008a. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Korczak, 1978, 103–138. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Stefania (Stefa) Wilczynska was Korczak’s full partner in the building and running of the Krochmalna orphanage. Stefa visited Palestine three times, and during her third visit in 1938, she decided to remain and was accepted as a member of Kibbutz Ein Harod. A year later, on April 1939, she decided to return to Warsaw to help Korczak in the hard times and stayed on with the orphanage until the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto (Friedman Ben Shalom, 2008; Coifman, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Even Shoshan, 1969, 355-357 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Even Shoshan, 356 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Tsur, 2012, 109–110. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Even Shoshan, 357. <AU: Which Even Shoshan cite is meant here?> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. The arrest of Hannah and the children is noted by Emanuel Ringelblum in his letter to his father on 16 December 11939 (Ringelblum: 23, Hebrew). <AU: Which Ringelblum cite is meant here?> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Zuckerman, 1993, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Zuckerman, 1993, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Zuckerman, 1985. 158, my trans. M.S. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Zuckerman, 1993, 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Zuckerman, 1993, 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Zuckerman, 1993, 440. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Zuckerman, 1993, 272, 438–445. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Zur, 2012, 199–211. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Novitz, a camp prisoner as well, established close ties with the poet and helped him save his writings. After the war, she came to Israel and joined the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz and the staff of the Ghetto Fighters House Holocaust Museum. On the life of Miriam Novitz and her work to rescue documentation from the Holocaust years see Dror (2008) and Zur (2012, 208–211). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Korczak, 1978, 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Korczak, 1980, 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Katzenelson, 1975, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Katzenelson, 1975, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
37. Korczak, 1980, 230–234; Ringelblum, 83–84. <AU: Which Ringelblum cite is meant here?> [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
38. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1954, 98-100; 1961; Perlis, in: *Ghetto Years*, 93-101 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
39. Korczak, 1978, 85 (in Hebrew) [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
40. Perlis, 1980, 95; Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1954, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
41. Perlis, 1980, 93-94; Ringelblum, Diary, #201 (Dec. 1942), 1992, 417; *Last Writings*, 28. <AU: To what cite does *Last Writings* refer?> [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
42. Perlis is quoting Igor Newerly. See 1990, 98. See also: Zuckerman, in Lubetkin, 232, (in Hebrew). This story got no confirmation from any other source. <AU: Which Zuckerman cite is meant here?> [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
43. Perlis, 1980, 96; Ringelblum, Diary (writings from War Times, I), 417 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
44. Nahum Remba, quoted by Perlis, 1980**,** 97–98, taken from Ringelblum, *Last Writings*, II, 82–86.<AU: Throughout this chapter, the notes do not clearly indicate which Ringelblum cite is meant. Please check each note.> [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
45. Ringelblum, *Diary* (Writings from War Times, vol. I), 418; See also: Ringelblum, *Last Writings* (Writings from War Times), 28, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
46. Ringelblum, *Last Writings*, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
47. 1978, 85 <AU: Which cite is meant here?> [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
48. Korczak, 1980, 146–147, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
49. Ringelblum, *Diary and Notes*, 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
50. Korczak, 1980, 206 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
51. Silverman 2003, Copland 1987 and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
52. Perlis, 1980, 88–89. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
53. A term coined by Jean Amery, see: Amery, 1984, 21–36. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
54. Lovejoy, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
55. Arnold, 1971; Hicks, 1962; Long, 2001; Rist, 1969; Sandbach, 1975; Spiegel, 1980; M. Shner, 1989. <AU: Please supply Arnold 1971 cite.> [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
56. Aurelius, 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
57. M. Shner, 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
58. Hays, 2003, xlix. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
59. Spiegel, 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
60. Seneca, *Epistles* vol. 1, epistle XLIX. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
61. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, book 4, XIV. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
62. Nussbaum, 2004, 499–501, [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
63. Shner, 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
64. 18 July 1942; Korczak, 1980, 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
65. in 1936 he was forced to leave his position at the orphanage for Christian Polish children, Nash Dom, because of the changes in the political situation in Poland. This orphanage remained comparatively untouched and continued in operation throughout the war. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
66. Centos was founded in 1924 to support Jewish boarding schools and orphanages. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
67. Berman, 1973, 294–308 [Hebrew]. Adolf Berman headed Centos during the war. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
68. The diary was handwritten by Korczak and transcribed on a typewriter by one of his staff members. The document was given on Korczak's request to his friend and associate Igor Newerly who was living on the Aryan side of Warsaw just days after Korczak and his orphanage were sent to Treblinka. Newerly did not feel that his apartment would be a secure hiding place, so he handed the document to Maryna Falska at the Nash Dom orphanage. After the war when Newerly returned from a concentration camp, he retrieved the diary, and it was at last published in 1958 when a change in the political situation in Poland made publication possible. See Perlis Yitzhak, "Final Chapter" (introduction) to Korczak, 1980, 9–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
69. Korczak, 1980, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
70. Korczak, 1993*,* 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
71. Korczak, 1980, 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
72. Korczak, 1980, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
73. Korczak, 1980, 147*;* a similar scene appears on p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
74. Korczak, 1980, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
75. Korczak, 1980, 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
76. Korczak, 1980, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
77. Korczak, 1980, 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
78. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, book 2, VIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
79. Aurelius, *Meditations,* Book 4, V; the same idea reappears in many other places. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
80. Aurelius, *Meditations,* Book 6, XXVII [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
81. Plato, *Phaedo,* 2008, text online at the Gutenberg Project. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
82. Josephus, *The Jewish War against the Romans*, book 7, 8: 6–7. <AU: Please supply Josephus cite.> [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
83. Korczak, 1980, *Ghetto Years,* 121–122. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
84. Korczak, "The right to Respect", 1967, 489 > [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
85. Marcus Aurelius, , book 4, XIV [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
86. Korczak, 2003, 180–316. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
87. Korczak, 2003, 206–207 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
88. Korczak, 2003, 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
89. This Heraclitean statement occurs in Plato's dialogue ‘Cratylus’ and in Simplicius's *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, 1313.11. On the Heraclitean idea that everything flows,<AU: Or ‘evolves’?> see Wheelwright, 1959, 29–36. Heraclitus was very important to the later Stoics, especially to Marcus Aurelius. See Long, 2001, 56. We can trace a line of thought that connects Heraclitus, Marcus Aurelius and Korczak.. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
90. Korczak, 1980, 182–186. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
91. Korczak, 1980, 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
92. Korczak, 1980, 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
93. Perlis, 1980, 80–81; Lipton, 1988. See Doron, 2008, 217–134 [Hebrew] for a study of the play and its meaning to Korczak. Doron sees the play as an enactment of a rite of passage, as a ceremony of death, but one may prefer the explanation given by Korczak himself: it was a pedagogical act that helped him prepare his children for the coming end. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
94. Zuckerman, 1948, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
95. Zuckerman, 1993, 189–190. Zuckerman is probably mistaken when he recalled the play as *The Dying Prince* and not *The Postman*. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
96. See also Lewowicki, 1994, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
97. In Hebrew eternity and infinity are referred to in one word ‘Ein Sof’: infinite reality is eternal. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
98. For a discussion of the tradition of immanence and its ethical meaning see Yovel (1988) and Curley (1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
99. Korczak, 1967, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
100. Korczak, "How to Love Children" (1919)*,* 1967, 84–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
101. Korczak, 1999, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
102. A monk in Hebrew is 'nazir'; in biblical Hebrew it means someone who dedicates his entire life to a singular mission. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
103. Korczak, 1996, 9–34. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
104. Silverman, 1996; 2012, 151–199. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
105. Korczak, 1978, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
106. Korczak,1967, 84–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
107. Korczak, 1967, 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
108. Korczak, 1967*,* 357. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
109. Korczak, 1967, 489. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
110. Korczak, 1967, 242 [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
111. Korczak, 1967, 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
112. Korczak, 1976, 336–337 [my translation]. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
113. Korczak, 1967, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
114. Korczak, 1967, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
115. Korczak, 1967, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
116. Korczak,1967*,* 394–395. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
117. Korczak, 1967, 132–133. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
118. Fragment no. 91, in Diels, [1934] 1957. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
119. Korczak, 1967, 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
120. Korczak, 1976, 300 [my trans]. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
121. Korczak, 1978, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
122. Korczak, 1967, 83–84. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
123. Korczak, 1976, 301 [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
124. Korczak, 1980, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
125. Korczak, 1978, 78–79 [my trans]. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
126. Korczak, 1980, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
127. Korczak 1967, 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
128. Korczak, 1967, 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
129. Korczak, 1967, 203–204. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
130. Korczak, 1967, 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
131. Korczak, 1980, 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
132. Gilad, 1986, 66–111; M. Shner, 1987, 29–31, 43. <AU: Please supply Shner 1987 cite.> [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
133. Korczak, 1976, 300; 2003, 206–207. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
134. Korczak, 1978, 254 [my trans.]; see also 1967, 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
135. Korczak, 1967, 293–294. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
136. Korczak, 1976, 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
137. Korczak, 1967, 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
138. Aurelius, 2001, Book 12, verse XXII. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
139. Steiner, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
140. Steiner, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
141. Korczak, 1999, 176 [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
142. Newerly, 1967, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
143. Korczak, 1967, 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
144. Newerly, 1967, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
145. Court Gazette no. 1, in Korczak, 1967, 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
146. Korczak,1967*,* 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
147. Korczak,1967*,* 414–419. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
148. Korczak, 1967*,* 503–523. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
149. Korczak, 1967*,* 503–523. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
150. Korczak, 1967, 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
151. Gaudelli & Fernekes 2004; Starkey 2012; Starkey & Osler 2006; 2010, Tibbits, 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
152. Eichsteller 2009: 377–391; Lewowicki, 1994; Perlis, 1980; Shner, 2012 <AU: Shner 2012a or b?>, and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
153. Van Bueren, 1998, 6-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
154. Korczak, 1967, 368. Unlike the common conception, Korczak's signature is missing from the document. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
155. Van Bueren, 1998, 13–15. Israel ratified the convention in October 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
156. Sofer et al., 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
157. Amnesty International, 2000; Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
158. Hanson & Vandaele 2003; The Machel Report 2010; Myers 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
159. See <https://www.malala.org/malalas-story>. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
160. Karp 2007 [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
161. Panter-Brick 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
162. Carter & Osler 2000; Kirman 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
163. Banks, 2009; Mesch et al, 2007; Fontes, 2005; Freeman, 1998; Walsh, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
164. Liebel, 2007, 2013; Mama, 2010; Melton, 1991; Svevo-Cianci et al, 2011; Welbourne, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
165. Korczak, 1967, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
166. Korczak 1967, 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
167. Korczak, 1967, 366–370. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
168. Korczak, 1967, 368–370. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
169. Korczak, 1967, 375. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
170. Korczak, 1967, 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
171. Korczak, 1967, 356–357. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
172. Korczak, 1967, 416. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
173. Korczak, 1967, 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
174. Korczak, 1967, 123 [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
175. Korczak, 1967, 123; [I made a few corrections to the translation, M.S] [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
176. Korczak, 1967, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
177. Korczak, 1967, 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
178. Korczak, 1967, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
179. Korczak, 1967, 355–377. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
180. Korczak, 1967, 376. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
181. Korczak, 1967, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
182. Korczak, 1967, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
183. Korczak, 1967, 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
184. Korczak, 1967, 289**.** [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
185. Korczak, 1967, 240, 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
186. Court Gazette no. 19, Korczak, 1967, 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
187. Korczak, 1967, 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
188. Korczak, 1967, 350. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
189. Korczak, 1967, 313–314. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
190. Korczak, 1967, 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
191. Sadan, 1964; Gutterman, 1991, 61-71; 1987, 41–84; Tal, B4; Cohen, 1989, 45–61; Perlis, 1987, 368–374; 1984, 585–590; Sharshavsky, 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
192. Steiner, 1977. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
193. Steiner, 1997, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
194. Amery, 1990, 82–101. Jean Amery was born into an assimilated family; his birth name was Hans Mayer. He died in 1978 in Salzburg. In those days <AU: Please specify a time frame here.> he lived in Belgium as a cosmopolitan humanist and a Jew. He was completely devoid of religion or aspects of Jewish national culture and claimed that his Jewish identity was forced upon him by history and was based on feelings of deep alienation and desperate search for human solidarity. The number tattooed on his left arm best symbolized his identity. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
195. Amery, 1990, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
196. Sadan, 1964,218–219 [my trans]. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
197. Korczak, 1980,230–234. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
198. The name originated from the book *Janasz Korczak and the Pretty Swordsweeperlady* (*Janaszu Korczaku i pięknej Miecznikównie*) by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski. In his early literary career Korczak used other pseudonyms, but this name became the most well-known one; he used it both for his writings and his everyday life. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
199. Perlis, 1976, in: Korczak, 1976, 12–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
200. Korczak, 1999, 147 [my trans]. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
201. Korczak 1999, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
202. Korczak, 1980, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
203. A similar idea was expressed by Sir Joshua <AU: Isaiah?>Berlin in ‘Slavery and Emancipation on the Identity of the Jews in Germany’ (1953). <AU: Please provide cite Berlin in the Sources.> [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
204. Jewish involvement in the radical left at the turn of the century is a well-known subject in itself; see Sharshevsky, 1990, 24–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
205. Sharshevsky, 1990, 76–77. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
206. The difference in the reactions of Korczak and Jean Amery is interesting. Korczak never relinquished the illusion of ‘Polishness’, whereas Amery testified that he suddenly understood the illusion and accepted the fact that he was a Jew, and therefore did not belong (Amery, 1990, 84–90). [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
207. Perlis, 1980, 57–59. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
208. Perlis, 1980, 64–82; Korczak, 1980, 197–198. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
209. Gutterman, 75-77; Kahana, 177-178. <AU: Please supply Kahana cite.> [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
210. Sharshevsky, 1990, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
211. Korczak, 1980, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
212. Sharshevsky, 1990, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
213. Korczak, 1978*,* 198, letter to Moshe Zilbertal on 30 March 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
214. Perlis, 1976, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
215. Sharshavsky,1990, 99–101. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
216. Korczak, 1978, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
217. Perlis, 1978*,* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
218. Korczak, 1978, 177, letter of 28 January 1928. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
219. Korczak, 1976, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
220. Korczak, 1978*,* 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
221. Korczak, 1978, 182, letter to Yosef Arnon, 20 March 1934. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
222. Korczak, 1978, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
223. Korczak, 1978, 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
224. Korczak 1996, 111–222. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
225. Korczak 1978, 197–198, letter to the Lichtenstein family, 29 March 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
226. Korczak, 1978, 198–201. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
227. Korczak, 1978, 92–93. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
228. Korczak, 1978, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
229. Korczak, 1978, 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
230. Korczak, 1978, 36–37. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
231. Korczak, 1978, 197–198. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
232. Mietek is Moshe Zilbertal, who immigrated to Palestine in 1932, became a member of Kibbutz Ein Shemer and accompanied Korczak during his second trip to Palestine. See Korczak, 1978, 435. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
233. Korczak, 1978, 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
234. Korczak, 1978, 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
235. Korczak, 1978, 207 [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
236. Korczak, 1978, 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
237. Korczak, 1978, 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
238. Korczak, 1978, 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
239. Korczak, 1978, 214–215. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
240. Korczak, 1978, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
241. Korczak, 1978, 199 [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
242. T. Shner, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
243. The essay ‘On a New Epos’ (1978, 80–84) was published in Hebrew for the first time in *Davar*, the Palestine Zionist labor movement daily paper, on 4 October 1936. The essay ‘Impressions and Thoughts (1978, 85–94) was published in *Mebifnim* in June 1937. The essay ‘Impressions from the Land of Israel’ (1978*,* 105–138) is a reprint of Korczak's lecture given to the Jewish Studies Institute in Warsaw in November 1936 after his second visit to Palestine. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
244. Korczak, 1978, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
245. Korczak, 1978, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
246. Korczak, 1978, 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
247. Korczak, 1978, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
248. Korczak, 1980, 211–212.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
249. Korczak,1978, 189–190 [my trans.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
250. Korczak, 1978, 87–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
251. Korczak, 1978, 92–93. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
252. Korczak, 1978, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
253. Korczak, 1978, 214–215. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
254. Korczak, 1978, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
255. Korczak, 1978, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
256. Korczak, 1978, 188. Yoskowitz was among the founders of Kibbutz Ashdot Yaakoc in the Jordan River Valley and the editor of *Mebifnim*, the bulletin of the HaKibbutz HaMeuchad movement. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
257. Korczak, 1980, 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
258. Korczak was not alone in understanding Zionism as much more than a geography change: it was a whole identity change. In Zionist circles, Micha Yosef Berdichewsky, Yosef Haim Brenner, Aharon David Gordon, and later on A’b Yehoshua expressed similar ideas about the transformation of an exilic Jewish identity into a homeland Jewish identity. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
259. Korczak, 1978, 92–93. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
260. Korczak, 1978, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
261. The term ‘auto-emancipation’ was coined by Yehuda Leib Pinsker in his 1882 article, ‘Auto-Emancipation’, 1882, a call to the Jews to take their fate in their own hands. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
262. Korczak, 1978, 116–117. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
263. Korczak, 1978, 106. This was from his lecture to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw in November 1936 after his second visit to Palestine. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
264. Shner, 2012, 36–59. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
265. Korczak, 1974, 353–392. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
266. Korczak 1978*,* 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
267. Rolnik, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
268. Korczak, 1978, 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
269. Korczak, 1978, 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
270. Korczak, 1978, 100–101. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
271. Korczak 1978, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
272. Korczak, 1978, 119–120. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
273. Korczak, 1978, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
274. Korczak, 1978, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
275. Korczak, 1978, 83–94. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
276. Korczak, 1978, 95–108. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
277. Korczak, 1978, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
278. Korczak, 1978, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
279. Korczak, 1978, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
280. Korczak, 1978, 138. Until this day the Israeli educational system ignores the Bahai faith and its universal message, continuing to see it as a religious sect, a threat or a minority to be shunned. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
281. Korczak, 1978, 138. This was probably the Jordanian village of Al- Adasyyih that was abandoned by the Bahai population during the 1960s; see Ruhe,2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
282. Korczak, 1978, 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
283. Korczak, 1978, 177, letter to Yosef Arnon, 8 October 1932. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
284. Korczak, 978, 203, letter of 30 March 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
285. Korczak, 1999, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
286. Korczak, 1978, 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
287. Korczak, 1978, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
288. Korczak, 1978, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
289. Korczak 1978, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
290. Korczak, 1978, 207; letter of 23 May 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
291. Korczak, 1978, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
292. Korczak, 1978, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
293. Korczak, 1978, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
294. Korczak, 1978, 85–94. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
295. Korczak, 1978, 211, letter to Kotelchuk, 9 September 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
296. Korczak, 1978, 205, letter to Yosef Arnon, 30 March 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
297. Korczak, 1978, 213, letter to Yosef Arnon, 30 December 1937 [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
298. Korczak, 1978, 211, letter to Edwin Marcuse, 14 September 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
299. Korczak, 1978, 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
300. Korczak, 1999, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
301. *Wanda Jakubowska*, 1957–1958, 89 min. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
302. Korczak, 1980, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
303. Korczak, 1967, 369. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
304. Korczak, 1980, 110–111. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
305. Korczak, 1980, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
306. Korczak, 1967, 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
307. Korczak, 1967, 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
308. M. Shner, 2012 <AU: 2012a or b?>; Silverman, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
309. Korczak, 2005, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
310. Perlis, 1980, 21–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
311. Korczak, 1980, 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
312. Korczak, 1980, 150–151. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
313. Korczak, 2005, 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
314. Korczak, 1980, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
315. Korczak, 1978*,* 198, letter to Moshe Zilbertal on 30 March 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
316. Korczak, 1980, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
317. . Korczak, 2005, 86 [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
318. Korczak, 2005, 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
319. Korczak, 2005, 148–149. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
320. Korczak, 2005, 277–280. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
321. Korczak, 2005, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
322. Korczak, 2005, 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
323. Korczak, 1980, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
324. Korczak, 1980, 110–111. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
325. Korczak, 2005, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
326. Korczak, 2005, 268–274. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
327. Korczak, 2003, 10-177. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
328. Korczak, 1967, 93–200; 1999, 67–84. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
329. Korczak, 2005, 162–165. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
330. Korczak, 1967, 312, 378–391, 455–456. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
331. *Wanda Jakubowska*, 1957–1958, 89 min. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
332. Shmueli, 1986 [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
333. Shmueli, 1986: 177, 185–187, 190–191; Levinson, 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
334. Katzenelson, 1975, 28–29 [my trans.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
335. Blumenthal, 1953. <AU: Or 1954, as in Sources?> [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
336. Katzenelson, 1975, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
337. Shimonovitz, 9. <AU: Please supply Shimonovitz cite.> [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
338. On these two months and the circumstances of Katzenelson’s escape from Lodz to Warsaw, see Szeintuch, 2000, 19–22, and Zuckerman, 1969, 358; Katzenelson described this period of running away and hiding in the *Vittel Diary* (Katzenelson, 1969, 160). [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
339. Even Shoshan, 1969, 355–357. <AU: Please supply Even Shosham 1969 cite.> [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
340. Zuckerman, 1993, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
341. Zuckerman, 1993, 595. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
342. Lubetkin, 1979, 43–44. <AU; Please supply Lubetkin 1979 cite.> [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
343. Folman Raban, 2001, 174–175. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
344. Katzenelson, 1964*,* 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
345. Lubetkin, 1981, 48. <AU: Please supply Lubetkin 1981 cite.> [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
346. Zuckerman, 1993, 111 [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
347. Zuckerman, 1985, 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
348. Katzenelson, 1964, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
349. Katzenelson, 1964, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
350. Katzenelson, 1964, 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
351. Szeintuch, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
352. Ringelblum 1992, 208, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
353. Lubetkin, 1981, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
354. Zuckerman, 1993, 61–64, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
355. Lubetkin, 1981, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
356. Zuckerman, 1990, 104 [my trans.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
357. Berman, 1973, 294–308. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
358. The poem was written in Yiddish after news of the hanging of ten Jews in Zdunska-wola in the town square reached the Warsaw underground; it was published on 9 June 1942 in *Yediot*, Dror’s journal. One Hassid, Shlomo Zelichovsky, who were among the ten executed, encouraged the spirit of the crowded Jews, forbad them from mourning and sang all the way to the gallows. Katzenelson, 1969, 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
359. Midrash Eleh Ezkerah [Hebrew], published as "Aseret Harugei Malchut" (The Ten Martyrs), in Julius (Judah David) Eisenstein, ed., *Otzar Midrashim,* New York: 1915, 439–449. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
360. Katzenelson, 1969, 92 [my trans.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
361. Katzenelson, 1969, 96–97. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
362. . Katzenelson, 1969, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
363. Katzenelson, 1969, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
364. Zuckerman, 1993, 262, 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
365. Lubetkin, 1981, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
366. Zuckerman, 1994, 45 [my trans.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
367. Katzenelson, 1969, 143–204. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
368. Katzenelson, 1969, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
369. Katzenelson, 1969, 185 [my trans.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
370. Katzenelson, 1969, 187. In the GFM archives there are four versions of the poem in the poet’s handwriting. The last version is from 24 August 1943 and is the one included in the diary. See note on p. 382. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
371. Katzenelson, 1964, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
372. Katzenelson, 1969, 187; August 24, 1943 <AU: What does this date refer to?> [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
373. Katzenelson, 1969, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
374. Katzenelson, 1969, 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
375. Katzenelson, 1969, 309. This part of the poem, in which he tries, in his poetic imagination, to gather the dead, used to recited just after the previous text from the *Vittel Diary*: together they were essential parts of the Holocaust liturgy at the public gathering in Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot. In the last decade, however, these texts were removed from the Holocaust Remembrance program. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
376. Katzenelson, 1964, 14–15. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
377. Katzenelson, 1980, 17–20 [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
378. Katzenelson, 1969, 312 (15 October 1942). <AU: Is this the date of the entry?> [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
379. Katzenelson, 1969*,* 331–333*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
380. Katzenelson, 1969, 333. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
381. Katzenelson, 1969, 124–125. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
382. Katzenelson, 1969, 331. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
383. <AU: Please supply Tannenbaum cite.>Tannenbaum, 1984: 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
384. Bialik, 1941, 35–36. <AU: Please supply Bialik 1941 cite> [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
385. Wiesel, 2005, 45. <AU: Please supply Wiesel 2005 cite> [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
386. Katzenelson, 1969, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)