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**Janusz Korczak and Yitzhak Katzenelson**

**Two Educators in the Abysses of History**

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

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

Global wars and genocides, unprecedented man slaughter in two world wars, the dark shadow of the Holocaust of the Jewish people, the presence of the atomic bomb and the constant threat of apocalyptic nuclear war, religious fanaticism and world terror fueled by religious radicalism, global waves of refugees, pushed out of their homes by political violence and economic crisis's – all threat the ongoing flourish of Human civilization. It draws a problematic picture of our world and paint dark shadows above human horizons. Its presence in our consciousness endangers our belief in the basic goodness of human beings and its ability to work for a better world.

Auschwitz, the pick 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 of human morality. Civilized, educated men committed the worst crimes one can imagine. They used the words "good" and "evil", spoke about human decency and even led their family lives in the proximity of the camp, and yet it did not prevent their crimes. Unavoidably, we question the very legitimacy and effectiveness of any moral discourse. Language was no more a reliable representation of reality.[[1]](#footnote-1) The world went out of its mind.

The destruction of the Twentieth Century left us with no bridges that can lead us back into our heritage. Human society in general, and the Jewish society in particular, were orphaned. Our past worlds stored the building blocks of our present. These cultural storage spaces are lost behind the images of World War II.

The dramatic historical experiences have shaken our trust in the perspective of our future. We do not know if we can trust our culture to guide us in a decent path into the unknown of the 21st century. When people reach a new reality, they rely on their reality judgment and the lessons they draw from their past. In the Twentieth Century, Jews failed to "read the map". Nothing in their past prepared them to the horrors of the Holocaust. It is doubtful whether recent historical experience can serve as their Twenty First Century road map.

The moral roots of modern society go down into the textual and ritualistic worlds of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Monotheistic scriptures provide us, even for secular people, the vocabulary and lexicon of our moral language. However, the religious ideas of moral justice and Divine Providence lost its credibility in the face of such an unprecedented destruction. Hardly any decent theodicy can explain the horrors of those years, and settle the principal enigma of the co-existence of factories of death and God's just Providence. Christians and Muslims hardly mobilized their religious traditions to resist Nazism and defy its genocidal policies towards the Jews, Roma people or any other groups of victims. The Catholic Church stood by when the Germans implemented the "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem" in what they saw as a post-Christian world. The majority of the Muslim world was beyond the Holocaust territories, though the Jerusalem religious leader, the Mufti Hag Amin El-Husseini, embraced the genocide against the Jews for his own nationalistic interests, giving it also religious justification. The reality of Auschwitz claims to refute the validity of all monotheistic traditions.

Enlightenment and education were Messianic beliefs of the modern men. Modernized Jews and non-Jews alike believed that the new era of Enlightenment – rationality, science, Humanism, liberal values of individuality, human freedom and civil rights, modern education – would lead humanity into a better future of all human solidarity. Jews embraced modernity, and celebrated its promise of emancipation, and integration into their host societies. Only a minority among the Jews believed that Zionism, a particularistic Jewish national revival, auto-emancipation, is the best answer to "the Jewish problem".

This "Messiah" turned in first half of the Twentieth Century to be a false Messiah. German university professors, schoolteachers, businesspersons, white-collar professionals, artists, clergies – joined the Nazi movement and offered their good service to the devil of nationalism and racism. Following the 1933 July concordant between the Vatican and Nazi Germany, the German church succumbed itself to the demands of the regime and the clergy had to conform to the German authorities. Education in all levels was mobilized by the Nazis to recruit new supporters and delegitimize ideas of all men equality, human rights and democracy. Science and higher education, highly developed in German cities, did not stop the Nazi "Tsunami", though, its product, technology, have served Hitler's war machine very well. It was only external forces, the armies of the Allies, which in World War II, put an end to the German Third Reich and freed the world from the Nazi nightmare.

In such critical times – in the face of mass murder in an unprecedented scale, the recurring genocides in various parts of the world, the present threat of a nuclear war, the mistrust of humans' ability to lead its society in a constructive way, the growing skepticism towards human moral discourse – men desperately search for moral orientation.

Where people can get a moral orientation? Can education be our ethical Archimedean stand? Students may rightly point to the historical fact that educated people with internal unshaken moral consciousness did not have better chances of survival in times of total war and terror. Primo Levi, told us in his late reflections on the reality of Auschwitz that those who had collaborated, in some way, with the agents of death had more chances to survive.[[2]](#footnote-2) They may rightly ask, what is the relevancy of education in a post-Holocaust era? Why one should be educated if it not helps him to survive or to stand up against the currents of evil?

The collapse of civilization in the Twentieth century is not only about the collapse of our cultural and moral ideas, but also about the betrayal of individuals who lead human civilization into its mass graveyards. Leaders from all sides of the historical drama, good or bad, had mislead their people or abandoned them. Among others, it open the discussion about the role of individual intellectuals and educators in our society in such critical times. What was their role, then, during WWII, and what may be their role in future historical crossroads? What we can or should expect from our teachers? Can they be leaders and 'agents of change' who provide their students with proper words, moral compass and new social orientation or maybe they are just obedient civil servants who follow the dictations of authority, state's authority, cities' and the families? Do they have original message to their students or just the words society wants them to say?

In the background of our question stands the image of the classical philosopher and teacher, Socrates. Society had sentenced him to death because he questioned the conventions of society and endangered the status-quo of the Athenian polis. Socrates' legacy touches the very essence of education and educators' identity – what educators are supposed to be. Should they challenge the morality of their society? Should they stand up and resist evil in their community? The answers to these questions are essential to the future of society and the professional image of educators. Can society rely on its' educators in times of radical crisis? Educators may be important, one would claim, only if they are autonomous people with an authentic voice.

Historiography of education can find some answers to these questions in the stories of educators who became leaders of their society in most difficult times. This is the starting point of this exploration - a comparative study of two noted Jewish educators that in times of radical crisis showed leadership and resistance to reality, **Janusz Korczak** (Henryk Goldzmit, 1878 - Treblinka, 1943) and **Yitzhak Katzenelson** (1886 - Auschwitz, 1944). Both Korczak and Katzenelson stories open a window into the struggle of Jewish intellectuals, educators and social leaders, with the realities of the Jewish people in the middle of the Twentieth century.

Why Korczak and Katzenelson? The initial choice to study their legacy is coming from a very personal perspective. Korczak's image was present in my childhood worlds. "The Janusz Korczak School" – this was the name of my childhood's elementary school. Fantastic Polish stamps carrying his image, and the image of his literary hero King Matt (Mathew) the First, were on display at the school's library. A few of them decorated the stamp album I had at home and was later lost. The school's students were familiar with the story of the child king, who tried, and failed, to establish a children kingdom. We all saw the color full feature movie (1958) that was based on Korczak's book. Korczak's pedagogical writings were present in the rich home library of my parents Zvi Shner and Sara Neshamit-Shner.

However, Korczak was still just another story, out of many, I heard at home and at school, of people who struggled heroically with the Nazis. Only when I got the volume of Korczak's Pedagogical Writings, when I became myself an active educator, Korczak became a meaningful element of my spiritual landscape. Discussions with my father, Zvi Shner, a Holocaust historian and a leading figure of the Ghetto Fighters House Holocaust Museum (GFH), opened before me deep layers of Korczak's legacy. Yitzhak Perlis's rich introductions to the four volumes of Korczak's writings (1974-1976) became the basis of my exploration of Korczak's thinking. Since then, for nearly four decades, I ponder on Korczak's thought and it enriches my own educational thinking.

Nonetheless, as inspiring as it may be for me, during years of my academic work, I have learned that Korczak's thought has difficulties in finding its place in the recognized academic landscape. The historical discourse about Korczak is sweeping his image away to the realm of Holocaust and Genocide Studies and diminishing its meaning. For the wide public Korczak is a Holocaust martyr, and the association of Korczak's educational work with the Holocaust and the reduction of his legacy to a story of martyrdom overshadow about forty years of inspiring educational work and does not do justice to its true meaning and place in the history of humanistic pedagogy.

Korczak's own writings add to this difficulty. The apparent fragmented character of his writings makes it even more difficult to accept Korczak's legacy as a respectable part of the field of educational philosophy. Korczak was suspicious towards elaborate educational theories, from reasons we will discuss later on, and a surface reading of his texts hardly reveals a clear structured philosophical thinking. It appears more as a flow of thought, and an arbitrary cluster of beautiful ideas, rather than a rational disciplined discourse.

Can we place Korczak on the field of Judaic Studies? Korczak's unclear national identity adds to these difficulties to grant Korczak a clear "shelf space" in academic libraries besides other Jewish philosophers. The fact of his stance between different cultural and national worlds – which we will discuss later – with no clear, immediate belonging to one social circle or one defined cultural identity, takes Korczak's legacy away from the recognized field of modern Jewish thought. It seems that his thought is not "Jewish" enough, in the eyes of traditional categorization of Jewish identity, to fit into such a category.

The overall result of these problems in Korczak's identity is that in academic circles Korczak, despite his appreciation as a world known educator, his writings are not accepted as a 'philosophy of education', nor as 'Jewish philosophy', and he is commonly missing from the Twentieth century humanistic discourse. Teachers' colleges and university schools of education tend to evade his thought and at large, he is missing from 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 all of these important philosophical fields.

While Korczak carries the universal vision of all men solidarity, Yitzhak Katzenelson, the second object of this study, carries the mission of his people's national revival. Whereas, Korczak was a Cosmopolitan, both a Pole and Jew and maybe none, Katzenelson was a Zionist, and he as well was present in the library of my parents, bearers of the legacy of the murdered Jewish people in World War II. The Ghetto Fighters House – the Holocaust and Heroism Museum, which my parents, together with the members of the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz, founded on April 1949 – bears the poet's name. Yitzhak Katzenelson, the Bible and Drama teacher, the Hebrew poet, was part of the identity of this institution. While Korczak represented the founders' broad humanistic worldview, Katzenelson represented their commitment to the story of their people.

Katzenelson poetry is characterized by the sharp polarity between the joy we can encounter in his pre-war writings and the pain, rage and despair, which dominates his later writings during the Holocaust years. His pre-war poetry was light, childish in its character, joyful. His popular children's song "Five Years of Michael"' which most of the children of new Israel learned to sing when they entered elementary school, "The Beautiful Nights of Canaan" and "Gilu HaGelilim" (cheer up the Galilee-s) were popular cheerful folk songs that expressed optimism and love of life and his trust in the return of his people to his homeland. His poetry and children's writings draw a bright picture of future Jewish life in the Land of Israel.

However, in the years of World War II, under the German's terror and destruction policies, Katzenelson gradually lost his joy of life. His writings in the Warsaw Jewish ghetto express the tragic reality of his people. His most bitter texts from the Vittel concentration camp in France, "The Vittel Diary" and "The Song of the Murdered Jewish People" which became part of the liturgy of Yom HaShoah, the Holocaust Commemoration day, express ultimate pain, rage, and despair. While Korczak never seas to dream his humanistic vision, Katzenelson takes his audience into the depth of the abysses of history; force them to confront the real meaning of the Holocaust, which is despair. Katzenelson is bitter, poison to the soul, and schoolteachers, as well as the Ghetto Fighters House's educational staff, hardly able to deal with his bitter testimony and despairing outcry. Katzenelson's texts give us a new understanding of the realities of the Holocaust: loneliness, helplessness and despair. It is not a source of pride, strength or educational revenue as many Genocide Studies or Holocaust Education programs seek. It is a "black hole" without consolation; this is the truth of the Holocaust. How can present educators deal with this most bitter historical heritage? Katzenelson's Holocaust is paralyzing the mind and is freezing the blood. It leaves us with no words to contain and express the depth of the agony. I hope that this discussion will make these texts more accessible to educators and teachers who try to make their students understand the realities of the Holocaust from the victims' perspective.

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

Korczak and Katzenelson do not represent themselves alone. Like the founders of the Ghetto Fighters House, Twenty Century Jews had in their identity these two opposing options. It was a common Jewish dream to become a citizen of the world, respectfully accepted into the family of Man. It was also a legitimate Jewish dream, most of the time the dream of a minority among the Jewish society, to return to the Jewish ancient homeland and to revive Jewish life there. It is the vision of renewed life and the memory of total destruction and death, which lies underneath this life. In the mind of many Jews, Korczak's vision and Katzenelson's dream and nightmare live side by side in a tensed coexistence. In days of radical crisis, this ideological schizophrenia got a drastic meaning.

A comparative discussion of Korczak and Katzenelson's stories may open an avenue 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 make judgments, nor to decide who reacted in a better way to the impossible situation of terror, ghettoization and destruction. We were not there and we are in no place to make any judgment, but we can try to understand; we can raise questions about the role of leading figures, community leaders, social activists and teachers in radical times. We can ask and try to understand what happened, how they responded and why.

The meaning of these two stories of educators' resistance to brutal power goes beyond the particularity of Jewish history. The Holocaust was a tragic laboratory of human spirit and a prism through which hidden aspects of humanity have revealed. It opens a universal discussion about the role of educators in any society in days of crisis and destruction. How educators, everywhere, can and should respond to a genocide? It brings forward the principal question what we expect from educators in the face of injustice and oppression. What is their responsibility? Whom they are accountable to and about what? Should they be active members in resistance movements because they are educators and share the responsibility of human future? It is 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. **Korczak and Katzenelson in the Context of the Holocaust Discourse**

What was the Holocaust? The Twentieth century "saw" other genocides beside the Holocaust. Crimes against humanity still happened in all parts of the world. Human history is the sad story of ongoing violence and bloodshed. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the *event*, the ideology behind it, aiming to wipe away a whole people, the modernized methodologies of its implementation – all sums up into a unique event that goes far beyond what human history showed us. Men's wrestle with the meaning of the Holocaust is not declining in time. It catches our imagination and challenges our understanding of humanity, our metaphysics, our language and our self-image as modernized human beings. It is a "black hole" that threatens to swallow all our spiritual energies and wipe away 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 of life, but is it a real possibility? Can we leave Auschwitz behind in the name of the 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 novel "The Town beyond the Wall" (1995)? We wish for a renewed world of men, but we cannot achieve it without, first, entering the abysses of the Holocaust or as Wiesel put it in his novel, returning to the place of the suffering. Even if we will 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 it. "*The Holocaust",* he said *"… 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 a destruction of our cosmos, our created ordered world, and our civilization. After the Holocaust, claims Neher, we need the courage to recreate our world from the beginning as what happened during World War II destroyed, besides millions of victims also our cosmos, our sense of being at home in this world. However, the pass to this desired resurrection cannot bypass the realities of destruction.

The universal aspects of two world wars of the Twentieth century and the events that come under the collective title "the Holocaust of the Jewish people" catch our attention and engage us in urgent discussions of human identity. The drama of this extreme manifestation of evil gains high rating in our culture. 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 common imagination. It is everywhere. It became – even if we do not like it – part of modern men's identity.

The Holocaust became also an essential part of our educational discourse. Many hold that the drama of extreme evil and human suffering in the Twentieth century must be a central part of our educational agenda. We tell our students the history of Anti-Semitism, the longest hatred in human history; we teach them about the modern manifestations of racism, fascism and totalitarianism and the collapse of liberal democracy and we finalize 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 with professional didactics the monuments of death that the Germans erected throughout Europe. They learn, in principle and in details, how a modernized society built a machine of war, terror and destruction that dominated the entire continent and threatened the rest of the world.

Besides a surge of adrenaline it gives us – and to our students as well, so we hope – an easy ethical explanation of the world, describing human reality in clear 'Good' and 'Bad' terminology or black and white colors. The events of World War II, the Holocaust of the Jewish people included, are put in front of our children in sharp contrasts of 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. In the past fields of war and places of terror, destruction and mass murder, evil prevailed, but here, today, we experience the opposite Good. It is a clear and comfortable lesson and hopefully 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 our century and try to foster the opposite in their minds and hearts. From the story of Anti-Semitism, we derive the rejection of demonic mythological hatred of Jews or any other group of people. From expressions of Xenophobia, we take the rejection of all religious, ethnic or 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 men, freedom and individual autonomy. The story of totalitarianism and 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 became 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. In our current discussions of the phenomena of radical abuse of human rights, we frequently use the words "Nazi" and "Nazism. Quite often popular discourse manipulates this vocabulary– from different ideological perspectives – to define something people deeply disagree with. Too often, we define our opponents as "racists" or even a "Nazis". The very very bad person of today is a "Nazi".

However, if we reject such use of extreme words in everyday experiences, we recognize that the moral lesson we can get from images of terror and mass murder, and the analogies we can draw between past genocides and present realities become problematic. What we can learn from the life stories of arch murderers – which became the celebrities of the Twentieth century – or from the descriptions of industrial like mass murder of millions of people? Radical evil always attracted our imagination and the great villains were always celebrities and heroes of popular legends, literature and movie industry, and yet the moral lesson we derive from it is not convincing.

It is a common saying 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, and yet we all know that in reality most people are not in the process of becoming arch murderers, even without this antidote of Auschwitz images.

These good intentioned educational analogies, which are common trends in "Holocaust and Genocide Studies" programs, are based on an unchecked optimistic assumption that people who are exposed to pictures or stories of radical evil internalize the 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, nor an empirical proof; on the contrary, there is ample evidence that the human psychology works differently, and that people who suffer violence tend to repeat it to others.

The educational discourse about the Holocaust should go beyond the naïve expectations that 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 is next to the prison yard. The children would see the criminals and will 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.

If it was true, that exposure to stories of evil makes people better, then the phenomena of evil was self-destructive or, better formulated, self-amending. People would see acts of evil and will become better people. We know that human history does not develop in that way, and we need a more complex picture and a more critical discussion of the educational coupons that we hope to get from Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Contrary to the stories of evil, there are the stories of the victims. What we can learn from the history – quite often untold – of the victims of radical evil and degradation of humanity?

Among the millions of victims of Nazi Germany, the Jewish people had a unique and terrible place. It was the par-excellence victim group of Nazi ideology and policies of terror and annihilation. The Jewish people as a whole was destined to disappear. To an extent, the Nazis achieved their mission to destroy the Jewish people. Today, Jews can tell their children that "once upon a time there was" a rich Jewish world in Europe and the Islamic countries. This world is no more, just a fading story in our memory. Communities for hundreds and thousands of years, rןch with life and culture do not exist anymore. The ancient Jewish civilizations of the Yiddish, Ladino and Jewish Arabic are no more. A Jewish "Atlantis" remains only as a legend. We can assume that such a destruction is part of the Jewish experience for many years to come.

A catastrophe of such magnitude has far-reaching effects on its subjects, yet as far as we delve into the world of the victims, we do not reveal clear ethical messages nor a sense of strength. There are no clear answers to the questions raised by the experiences of the victims. In general, the Holocaust, or any other genocide, is not a source of pride and strength for its victims. It shatters their world – 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, cultural decay, breakage of family ties, exploitation of others and even collaboration with the oppressors. A few can look back at their behavior in those days with pride and sense of strength. Korczak suggested in his ghetto diary, which will be discussed here in length, that one day people will 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-5)

Primo Levi, the Italian Jewish writer, world known for his reflections on his experience as an Auschwitz prisoner, wrote about the shame of the survivors who look back and remember the level of humiliation and self-destruction the situation of terror and imprisonment caused them. It is not their blame nor their guilt, but it is their shame.[[6]](#footnote-6) In his known book, "*Is this a Man?*" (1947), Levi opens his interpretation of the Holocaust experience with text, a poem, which became the motto of his entire writings; he wonders about the human image 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 Man and ends with the words taken from the Jewish vow in the traditional proclamation of "Shema Israel" ("Hear, Israel!"). Levi's poem raises the universal question about the humanity of all men. It is not only the Jew, but any camp prisoner. It is not the oppressors' image that bothers him, but the victim's image, the camp's prisoner who lost his or her human image. Levi's book is not another piece of Holocaust historiography, nor just a personal testimony, but a philosophical invitation to understand the reality of men.

The shift of focus from perpetrators to victims is not simple. It is common to say in the Holocaust discourse that those who created the death machine had lost their humanity; they are the "human monsters". Levi's discourse questions mainly the human image of the victims and hence all men. This is not an easy claim, and yet this is the authentic reality of the Holocaust victims and survivors: the loss of their humanity. This is the essence of the Nazi system of destruction, the terror, the destruction of the human image of certain populations, the uprooting of people from their homes, deportations and the ghettoization, and finally the concentration camp reality and the systematic annihilation of its inmates. Very few, says Levi, can go to their death with pride.[[7]](#footnote-7) Very few went out of the Holocaust years with a sense of pride of their conduct and very few could say that they went through hell and passed the test of humanity. Even fewer could say that they actively resisted the Germans. Their human obvious helplessness became their shame.

The Holocaust is a looking glass through which all secrets and qualities of humanity have revealed. The perspective of the victims reveals a broad diversity of human conduct: human failure and human heroism and between a panorama of gray shades that one cannot judge but can try to understand. The "Gray Zone", in Levi's terminology reveals also the behaviors of camp prisoners who failed the moral test in inhuman conditions[[8]](#footnote-8).

Nevertheless, it was not a total failure of the idea of humanity. It is possible to identify in the darkness of the Holocaust fragile sparks of light, instances of human courage and dignity. As the Holocaust philosopher, Emil Fackenheim suggested, it give us back some of our lost human dignity.[[9]](#footnote-9) We praise these precious moments, as they save us from total despair. If we want to encourage the good in ourselves, and find anchors for life in the future, we must find these sparks of human dignity in our past. The rare stories of men that 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 of our study of the legacies of two educators - Jewish educators – Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldzmit) and Yitzhak Katzenelson. Both Korczak and Katzenelson, known public figures already before the Holocaust, were trapped in the very same historical situation and – each one in his own way – resisted it. They were both in the Warsaw ghetto at the same harsh reality and knew one each other. Katzenelson wrote about Korczak in his "Vittel Diary" (1943) and described the public performance of the Rabindranath Tagore's play "The Postman" by the orphanage children.[[10]](#footnote-10) Nonetheless, the two reacted to the ghetto reality and the German policies of terror and death in opposite ways.

Both Korczak and Katzenelson played an active role, though different one, in the broad phenomena of Jewish resistance to the German death policies. As such, both can be a source of inspiration in our efforts to rebuild the human cosmos in a post-Holocaust reality. Contrary to the personal images of the perpetrators, their role in Holocaust education program is a positive one, serving as a model of human bravery and solidarity in the face of radical evil. I hope that it will be a more affective moral modeling for young people of today, in general, and young educators, in particular.

This study of Korczak and Katzenelson is not limited to the war years of 1939-1945. The context of their response to the dramatic days of the Holocaust is their entire legacy, their biography, their writings and their pre-war work. One has to assume that their whole life experiences play a role in shaping their conduct in days of radical crisis, war, persecutions and approaching death.

1. **Two Educators**
   1. **Janusz Korczak**

Janusz Korczak was a Jewish Polish intellectual, pediatrician, writer, and a father to children in two boarding schools in Warsaw. For almost four years under German occupation in World War II, and nearly two years in the dying Warsaw Jewish ghetto, he headed his known "Dom Sierot" orphanage from Krochmalna Street 92 as an island 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 August 5 1942, he and the entire orphanage, children and staff, were sent to Treblinka.

The ghetto chapter of Korczak's life ends an inspiring history of pedagogical work and prolific writings. His ideas inspire generations of educational thinking: a better world would come about through better education and a better education depends on a different understanding of children. The child is a complete person, not a person in the making, but a person here and now. Childhood is an end of itself and children have rights to a fulfilling life.[[11]](#footnote-11) His ideas had entered the first international declaration of 'The Rights of the Child' in Geneva on 1924.[[12]](#footnote-12) He was not only a theoretician, but also an educator in practice, a "total" educator who combined both rich writings about education and pioneering practice.



Janusz Korczak  
GFH archive # 13166

Korczak's pedagogy is known for the 'children democracy' that he implemented in both of his orphanages. The children were part of a rational community that enjoyed a rational discourse within the "children parliament", "children's court" and the institution's newspaper. Besides the work with his children, Korczak's public discourse included the editing of a popular children's newspaper, *Mały Przegląd* (Little Review), and a popular program of "*the old Doctor*", on the Polish radio (1930-1936). His known children's books included *King Matt (Mathew) the First* (*Polish: Król Maciuś Pierwszy,* 1923) and *Katiush the Magician (Polish: Kajtuś czarodziej*, *1933)*.

Korczak was born as Henryk Goldschmidt on 1878 (or 1879) to a well-to-do assimilated Jewish family and like many Jews in modern times, he nourished the universal dream that one day all men will be part of a unified humanity with no discriminations along religious, ethnic or racial divide lines. Integration into the general Polish society was the actual direction of the Goldschmidt family that gradually, from generation to generation, left its Jewish unique characteristics behind. Only when little Henryk was five years old – so he recalls years later in his ghetto diary – he first learned about his Jewish identity.[[13]](#footnote-13) The tension between his Jewish and Polish identities has characterized his entire life, which always moved between his belonging to the Polish society and culture, or his un-belonging to it, and his belonging, or his un-belonging, to the Jewish society and its culture.

In 1898, Korczak began his medical studies and in that year, he started his literal career and joined a literary competition in which he even won a prize. For that competition, he adopted the pseudonym Janusz Korczak, an echo (or misspelling) to 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). Young Henryk Goldzmit adopted the name of a Polish national character – not a marginal fact in his search for a recognized identity. As Goldzmit young Henryk was a Jew, an outsider, while as Janasz Karczak he was part of the Polish national narrative, an insider. Henryk Goldzmit kept his Polish mask, and it remained his known name for the rest of his life. What was at the beginning just a pseudonym for a literary competition turned to be a lifelong identity statement.

In 1901, he published his first book "The children of the Street" (*Dzieci ulicy* ) which deals with the poverty children in the city. His second book "The Salon Children" (*Dziecko salonu*) – which first was published in a periodical – appeared in 1906. This book made Korczak famous and gained his popularity in the 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 society.

On 1904-1905 Korczak served as a medical army officer in the Russian-Japanese war. During the years of 1906-1908 Korczak went to pediatric studies in Berlin, Paris, and London. Along with his return in 1909-1910, he guided Jewish and Christian children in summer camps, part of his social activity to enable inner-city children to spend healthy time in the country, and there his pedagogical approach started to take shape. The summer camps, which continued to work until World War II, were for Korczak the decisive areas of educational activity. There he reached his decision to dedicate his life to educational work and leave behind his medical career, a painful decision that occupied him all his life thereafter.

In 1912, Korczak took upon himself, together with the Jewish "Orphans' Aid" (Ezrat Yetomim) society of Warsaw the establishment of the Dom Sierote orphanage at Krochmalna Street 92, which he directed until the deportation to Treblinka.

In 1914-1918, with the outbreak of World War I, Korczak served again as a medical officer and towards the end of the war, he joined Maryna Falska, herself a strong-minded social activist, to establish another institution, this time for Polish refugee children in Kiev. On their return to Warsaw on 1919, he established with Maryna Falska the "Our Home" (Nash Dom) orphanage, for Christian children, which they lead together until 1936, when he had to leave the institution.[[14]](#footnote-14) All these years Korczak shared his time between these two children's communities, the Jewish orphanage, and the Christian orphanage. He was not able – as he believed, it should be – to bring these children, Jews, and Christian, together.

Along his growing involvement with children, Korczak developed his humanistic philosophy and educational worldview, expressed in numerous books, articles and public lectures. In 1908, he published his famous article "School of Life". On 1919 Korczak published his book "How to Love Children", which he thought about and wrote it's drafts during the years of WWI, and holds in its 4 parts – "the child in the family", "the boarding school", the "summer camp" and "in the orphanage" – his core ideas about education. His pedagogical writings continued in various articles and lectures, including his seminal work, *The Child's Right to Respect* (1929).

As a humanist, Korczak wrote about various aspects of humanity and not only pedagogy. On 1922, Korczak published his book of prayers, *Alone with God* (Sam na sam z Bogiem) containing 18 prayers of different people. The book expresses in a literary way his understanding of the human religious sentiments. Korczak's religious ideas go beyond any established religion, but he did not give up the religiosity of people, which is part of their human identity. The book is not a Jewish prayer book, nor a Christian one, but rather a humanistic book, which opens a window into the souls of ordinary people.

Korczak had a rich literary career and he is mostly known as a children's writer, though the dividing line between his belletristic and educational philosophy is sometimes unclear. On 1923, Korczak published his most known book, *King Math the First* (*Król Maciuś Pierwszy*) which secured his position as a leading children's writer. The story of King Matt, a ten years old child who becomes a king after his father death and tries to establish a children's kingdom and implement a few social reforms, contains in a literary way the educational utopia of Korczak. It also points a blaming finger towards the adults who fail its realization. Math, a child, is too naïve to be aware of the plots of people around him, and he finally leads his kingdom to its failure. Children deserve respect for both their qualities and their limitations. The message of the novel, a central idea in Korczak's worldview, is that without an honest guidance, children cannot guide their life by their own.

The story of Matt continued in less known novel *The Little King Matt on the Deserted Island* (*Król Maciuś na wyspie bezludne*, 1923). The plot here carries as well Korczak humanistic worldview. Like Napoleon, Matt is sent to an exile on a deserted island, escapes and regain his kingdom, just to give it up again, as he disillusioned about the realities of life.

Korczak's literary career continued with *Little Jack* (1924), *When I Am Little Again* (1926), *Madmen's Senate* (Senat Szaleńców, humoreska ponura, 1931),and *Kaytek the Wizard* (translated as *Kaytus the Wizard*) (1933). Today, we can see the play Madmen's Senate (1931) as a terrible prophetic vision of the rise of the Nazis to power two years later.

Korczak was an active journalist and journalism had a major place in his educational toolbox. On 1926, Korczak established 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 journalism in any serious educational work. An educational institute without a newspaper suffers from educational shuffle and has no spinal cord for his activity.[[15]](#footnote-15) In this children's journal, Korczak succeeded to maintain relations also with children in Palestine, the Land of Israel, who were invited to send their texts to this children's written "meeting place".

Korczak had visited Palestine, the Land of Israel, twice. The first time on 1934 when he mainly stayed at Kibbutz Ein Harod, and observed the life in this young utopian socialist community of pioneers.[[16]](#footnote-16) It was not the ideological phraseology of the kibbutz movement that interested him, but the existential human efforts to build a new society in an old new homeland.

On 1936, he visited Palestine for the second time and this time he traveled to other towns and villages to broaden his understanding of the land and its people who experiment with their life and their children's life the possibilities of a new society and new human relations.

The political atmosphere in Poland changed in accordance with changes in neighboring Germany. The political reality became darker and hostile trends narrowed the steps of Jews in Poland. At 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. Poland became less homey to Korczak and he, in response to the deteriorating social reality, became closer to the Zionist movement; Jewish children in the Land of Israel were among the topics of his writings.[[17]](#footnote-17)

On the outbreak of World War II, Korczak again acted as a Polish patriot and walked in the streets of Warsaw dressed in his Polish medical officer's uniforms. He was needed again. His radio program returned for a short time, and he was busy in giving medical help to the people of the bombarded Warsaw. For a short time, Korczak felt that he again belongs to the Polish society.

In 1940, Korczak ran eventually the last summer camp for the Krochmalna 92 orphanage children. The Germans occupied Poland, but Korczak continued his efforts to give his children the opportunity to feel free in the countryside. On November 1940, following the German decrees, the orphanage moved to a new location inside the ghetto together with all the Jews of the city. In the ghetto reality, for about 22 months, Korczak worked hard, day by day, to feed and protect his children. In those months, he struggled stubbornly against despair to keep the orphanage as an island of love and humanity in a dying ghetto.

From May 15, 1942, until August 3, 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 to hundreds of children. The diary survived the war and it gives us a rare lesson of the role of an educator in days of a radical crisis.

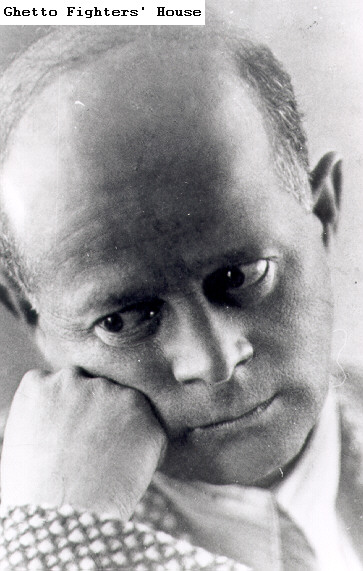
On August 5, part of the liquidation of the ghetto population, and on that day the liquidation of the ghetto children's houses, Korczak was sent to the death camp of Treblinka along with the entire orphanage, 192 children, and about 7-10 staff members. Korczak was 64 at his death. Stefania (Stefa) Wilczyńska, his partner in the leadership of the orphanage, was 56.[[18]](#footnote-18)

* 1. ***Yitzhak Katzenelson***

Yitzhak Katzenelson – became known as "the mourner of the Holocaust" - was born to his parents Yaakov Binyamin Katzenelson and his mother Hinda from the Davidson family in Karlitz Lithuania in 1986. His father, a "maskil" (modern Jewish scholar) and Hebrew writer who was ordained as a Rabbi but did not want to make rabbinic status his source of living. From him, Yitzhak got his broad Hebrew education and deep love for his people.[[19]](#footnote-19) His mother came from 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 on 1906 Yitzhak started to work as an educator in the family Hebrew school, part of the family network of Hebrew educational institutes. Lodz, an industrial city, with no religious status or national importance, became the dwelling of reviving Jewish life in Hebrew and Zionist activity. The Katzenelson family education network included a kindergarten, elementary school, and a gymnasium. Nonetheless, the language that was spoken in the Katzenelson family home was probably Yiddish.

Katzenelson was a gifted teacher, a prolific writer, poet and dramatist and an active member of the Zionist movement. Besides Hebrew, Katzenelson wrote also in Yiddish. Many of Katzenelson’s poems were set to music by various composers, distributed and sung all over the Jewish Diaspora and in the Land of Israel and became “folk songs”, with very few people knowing who had written them.



Yitzhak Katzenelson  
GFH archive # 19002

In his early years of writings, Katzenelson was called by the nickname of "the playboy" of Hebrew poetry because of the childish charm and playfulness that characterized his poetry.[[20]](#footnote-20) In 1910 his first poetry book, "Dimdumim" ("twilight" in Hebrew) was published in Warsaw. In 1912, he established the "Hebrew Stage" theater where he could stage his drama. In 1938, he published the three volumes of his whole poetic work. In the introduction to this edition, Katzenelson apologized that he deals with poetry in time that his people is with great stress. Today, one can read in those words, Katzenelson's piercing intuition about the catastrophe, which is waiting for his people.

On 1925, Katzenelson had visited the Land of Israel, Palestine, for the first time and in 1933, he visited it for the second time.[[21]](#footnote-21) All of Katzenelson's writings are full of the spirit of the Land of Israel. His public work is totally connected to the Zionist enterprise, the national revival of the Jewish people. Two of his cousins were among the main leaders of the socialist Zionism in Israel, Berl Katzenelson and Yitzhak Tabenkin. Other members of his extended family immigrated to the Land of Israel. He had close ties with the Jewish settlers in Palestine and with the Zionist movements in Poland. His visits to the Land of Israel were also the preparation for his own planned immigration. He even bought a piece of land in Tel Aviv for his future home. Immigration was definitely part of his future perspective, but because of various reasons, health problems, questions about his place in the theater community in Israel and his obligations in Lodz, he delayed the practical move until it was too late.

In the years of 1935-1939, Katzenelson lead intensive cultural work in Lodz: teaching poetry, holiday parties, Shabbat evening celebrations ("Kabbalat Shabbat") in the Borochove "kibbutz hakhshara" ("preparation kibbutz") in Lodz.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The Germans occupied Lodz on September 8, 1939. Katzenelson’s Hebrew school was confiscated and the poet had to go into hiding as other public figures that the Nazis sought their heads. As soon as he could, he escaped to Krakow, where he stayed for about a couple of months, and then with help of friends, he continued to Warsaw. He reached Warsaw around November 17-19, 1939. In November, shortly after the poet's escape, his wife Hannah and his three sons, Zvi, Benzion and Benyamin, were arrested and deported to Krakow. From there they later on escaped and joined him in Warsaw in January 1940.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In Warsaw, the Katzenelson family was one family among hundreds of thousands of refugees who composed the nameless Jewish masses of the city. In the first months in Warsaw, Katzenelson was lost. He mourned the loss of his immigration plans, which several weeks before being at hand, and he had no orientation what to do among the Jewish masses. After a few months of silence, Yitzhak Zuckerman, who just smuggled his way back to Warsaw to from the Soviet-occupied parts of Poland, and reorganize the Dror movement, had heard about the poet and his existential situation and invited him to join the circles of the pioneering movement.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Katzenelson was adopted by the “HaHalutz” ("HaHalutz" means "the Pioneer" in Hebrew) pioneering movement to become a teacher in the "Dror" (Freedom) movement's first underground seminar after the occupation, a seminar that restructured the spiritual identity of the movement in days of occupation. Zuckerman describes in his memoirs, the Katzenelson's place in this founding seminar, and his role in the 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-25)

The seminar gave birth to a new movement with an identity of shared responsibility for the Jewish people, and a deep sense of comradeship. Katzenelson was an important part of it. Later he became a teacher in the Dror's underground gymnasia and was part of Dror's other cultural activities. Zuckerman – like other survivors of this group of social leaders – described the unique place that Katzenelson had in the underground circles and the intimate relations that 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-26)*

Katzenelson was the speaker of the comrades' spirit, in days of joy and in days of grief, giving words to the most intimate feelings of his young friends. This was his utmost resistance to the reality of persecution: writing, teaching, reading poetry and playing drama. When days of sorrow came, he saw his entire people as "a collective Job" recalls Zuckerman and he wrote his play "Job". The ghetto people became the ancient exiles to Babylon and the prophet Ezekiel was with them. People suffered from the cold and hunger, and he wrote his "Songs of Cold" and "Songs of Hunger". Katzenelson was writing in Biblical style and pathos. Zuckerman described him in the image of a Biblical prophet who inspires his people. Katzenelson became – as his young comrades describe him – an older brother and a mentor, expressing every whisper of their heart.

Katzenelson showed that even when the body is chained, the spirit could remain free. A free spirit can resist radical oppression.From the time he joined the underground circles, Katzenelson had a prolific time. He ran Bible reading groups,[[27]](#footnote-27) taught Jewish history and literature, lead 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.

Katzenelson started to publish in the ghetto underground periodicals – about 45 poems that gave words to unspoken internal realities, 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 and 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 caught his wife Hannah and their two younger sons, Ben-Zion (14 yea rs) and Binyamin (11 years), among the masses of ghetto Jews, and sent them to Treblinka. His poem "The day of my great agony" (Yom Assoni HaGadol, Hebrew) that the beginning of its writing is dated for that day expresses the catastrophic reality of this bitter day when his entire world is ruptured.

Katzenelson and his older son Zvi became part of the Jewish Fighting Organization. On January 18, 1943, Katzenelson found himself among the comrades of a Jewish Fighting Organization (J.O.B.) “Dror” fighting squad who prepared themselves for an armed resistance, later to be known as the "January Uprising". We have a testimony of Zivia Lubetkin, we will discuss later on, about the word of encouragement that Katzenelson said at that event just before the first battle on Zamenhof Street. The poet became the spiritual spoke man of the resistance movement when it prepared itself for the last battle in the ghetto.

Katzenelson was too old to, actually, take part in the fighting and after the January 1943 first armed act of resistance, when the Jewish Fighting Organization prepared itself for the coming uprising, Zuckerman reached the decision and the poet, his son Zvi and one of the movement older activists, *Tuvia Borzykowski*, were taken to a hiding place outside the ghetto. Zuckerman recalls:

*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-28)

As Zuckerman says in a later place in his memoirs, *they weren't needed for the struggle, the uprising. […]*"[[29]](#footnote-29) And 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 Arian side of Warsaw.

Unfortunately, they did not remain in that secret apartment for long. Yitzhak and Zvi Katzenelson got forged Honduras citizenship documents and went out of their hiding place to hotel Polski, which was claimed to be a safe gathering place for foreign citizens. Zuckerman had suspected that Hotel Polski was a trap of the Gestapo to catch hiding Jews, but he failed to prevent the poet from entering the place, which soon proved to be indeed a German trap.[[30]](#footnote-30) In the above place in his memoirs, 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, set for Jews with allegedly foreign citizenship. The inmates of the Vittel camp were supposed to be exchanged with German citizens – a promise that turned to be an illusion. During his stay in Vittel, Katzenelson could maintain some ties with the outer Jewish world. His stay in this camp became known even to his family in the Land of Israel, but even the leader of the Zionist labor movement, his relative, Berl Katzenelson, failed to find a way to rescue him from the camp.

Vittel was organized as a detention camp with comparatively much better conditions than in other concentration camps.[[31]](#footnote-31) In hotel Providence, part of the camp, in which the Poet and his son were kept, Katzenelson had some privacy, a desk and a chair; he could write. There and then, among other texts, he wrote two of his most important works, which deal with the Holocaust: a diary, which was titled later on as his "Vittel Diary" ("Pinkas Vittel" in Hebrew) and the fifteen cantos poem "The Song of the Murdered Jewish people" (in Yiddish). It took him three and a half months to write them. On March 1944 part of Katzenelson's writings were smuggled outside the camp. The poet, with the help of Miriam Novitz, buried two copies of "The Song of the Murdered Jewish people" in the camp.[[32]](#footnote-32) One 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.

On April 1944, the poet and his son were sent to Drancy camp in France and from there they were sent after a few days, probably on April 29, to their death in Auschwitz. After the liberation of the camp, Miriam Novitz took his writings out of their hiding-place and they are preserved in the archive of the Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel.

* 1. ***Different Responses to Reality***

Korczak and Katzenelson responded to the same reality of the ghetto in opposite ways: one with the stubborn support of life but with silence compliance. The other with spiritual struggle with reality, outcry and call for resistance. Each way illuminates the other. This study suggests that the different ways in response to a similar reality can be explained by two very different personalities and different personal circumstances. Their cultural backgrounds, their life stories, and their different existential situation may highlight their behavior and explain – without judgment – their different responses.

Korczak was part of a generation of Jews, which its Jewish identity was insubstantial and it sought - only with partial success – its place within the European society. Korczak-Goldsmidt was a typical example of the "cosmopolitan Jew" who hoped to achieve its salvation in a universal culture, part of Humanity in its broader sense.

Korczak knew that he is coming from a Jewish family, but this fact had marginal meaning in most of his lifetime. As he recounts in an article to his children's newspaper,[[33]](#footnote-33) and in his diary,[[34]](#footnote-34) his grand grandfather was an observant Jew, observing the Jewish Rabbinic law and hurry to return home for the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. His grandfather was, as he described him, a person of Modern Hebrew culture, versed in the secularized world. His father, Joseph Goldzmit, like his aunts and uncles, was already part of the Polish bourgeois, with Polish name, a well-to-do lawyer who served Polish clients.

Henryk Goldzmit, as Goldzmit-Korczak has testified about himself, was not familiar with the Jewish culture, did not know Yiddish and Hebrew, and his social milieu was mostly the Polish non-Jewish society. He was part of the young and rebellious Polish middle class, professors and students who envisioned a free Polish state.

Korczak – like many other assimilated Jews of the time – was not a member of the Zionist movement. On its ventures, he looked from a distance. On Jews as a collective he spoke often in the third body language - "they, the Jews". Only during the Thirties, when an aggressive anti-Jewish climate has developed in Poland, Korczak gradually became closer to Jewish life, especially to Jewish fate that later on lead him to his death.

Katzenelson, on the contrary, had an intensive and authentic Jewish identity. In Lodz, the family was nurturing Jewish culture and Hebrew and Zionist education, and developed a chain of educational institutions from kindergarten to gymnasia. Katzenelson was connected with all his soul to all layers 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 the rabbinic literature. His poems' book, "Yesh Li Shir", songs for the Children of Israel (1954) and his stories' book "Behalom Ubehakitz", stories for children (1955), realized the intimate link between the Hebrew and Jewish culture and his educational work.

Katzenelson's poetry was known and sung in Israel and in Jewish communities worldwide. His poems "Ma Yafim HaLeylot BeCenaan" (How beautiful are the nights in Canaan, in Hebrew, 1906), "Shirat HaKotzrim" (The poetry of the harvesters, in Hebrew, 1910) and "Shir HaGalil" (The Song of the Galilee, 1919, in Hebrew) express the deep personal connection he had to the Zionist enterprise and the return of the Jews to their homeland. To his younger brother Avraham he helped to immigrate to Palestine. He visited the Land of Israel twice, and actually prepared to emigrate with his family. Maybe his bonds with the masses of the Jewish people in Poland and his sense of responsibility towards the educational work in Lodz delayed him until the immigration was not possible anymore.

In this biographical point, Korczak and Katzenelson's life stories meet: both of them had visited the Land of Israel twice, both of them stood on the verge of immigration and both of them did not make their decision on time and were trapped in the events of the war.

While Korczak was a person-of-the-world with no intimate connection to the fate of the Jewish people in particular, Katzenelson deeply identified himself with the historical story of his people and with its dream to return to his 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-35) During the years preceding World War II, he already feels the approaching catastrophe. He feels uncomfortable that in such time of national trouble he is busy with the publication of all his poetry: "*As for myself, I feel uncomfortable, very uncomfortable, and nevertheless… he do not control himself and he sings*".[[36]](#footnote-36) In his poetry, he expresses the intimacy with the life of Jews and their culture. Before the war, Katzenelson wrote mainly in Hebrew and a little in Yiddish. In the ghetto, he wrote only in Yiddish and expressed 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.

Besides the differences in their identity, differentiate the life story of Korczak and Katzenelson the question who they are responsible for as their words and actions affected others. Underground people explain in retrospect that it was easier for the young to join the underground and to decide about active armed rebellion because most of them did 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 children of his own he did not have – but he was carrying the very heavy burden of the responsibility to the welfare of hundreds of children and staff. He even added to his responsibility, as during the last months of the ghetto existence, he asked the personnel department of the Jewish council of the ghetto to give him the responsibility for another children's house on Dzielna Street 39.[[37]](#footnote-37) In his reactions to the ghetto reality, Korczak had to take into consideration the children who he was responsible for their life.

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. His underground activity had a powerful spiritual presence for the underground young comrades, but he did not have responsibility for their lives. In fact, the "Dror" (Freedom) movement comrades were those who sheltered and protected the poet and his family, not the other way around. After the main deportation of the ghetto population, when also his wife and their two younger sons were taken to Treblinka, he was in a state of shock and despair. Only his worry about his son Zvi remained.

Korczak and Katzenelson, who share the same historical reality, radically differ in their worldview. Korczak is the universal intellectual who seeks all-human solidarity and see nature as the common basis of all men. The idea of Humanity guides his thought and actions. His philosophy derives insights from Stoic philosophy who sees man as an integral part of the infinite nature. It directs the individual life and enables him or her to accept the hardships of life with acceptance or Stoic Apathea. Katzenelson is the man of Biblical and Rabbinic cultures. He is nourished by the idea of human free spirit and moral responsibility, but within the context of a national existence and Jewish tradition. The image of the Hebrew prophet is standing before his eyes. While Korczak has drawn ideas from Greek philosophers, Katzenelson has intimate talking with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Katzenelson was struggling with reality; Contrary to Korczak, he was not accepting it.

When we put the two personas one against the other, 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 poling identities can explain the different responses of these, two noted personas, to the reality of the Holocaust. Korczak is totally committed to the welfare of his children, but accepts their fate with silence. He cries out in silence and he never loses his faith in humanity. Like Socrates who drank the cup of poison, he accepts his end with silent pride. Katzenelson was spiritually active up to his last days. He sings, and stages theater plays, speaks-up, mourns, curses and calls for revenge and rebellion. In the beginning he is a messenger of hope and consolation. In the end, he is the prophet of total despair.

1. **Janusz Korczak – a Stoic Struggle with the Ghetto Reality**
   1. ***The Last Chapter***

Most people, who heard about Korczak, know only the last chapter of his life. It was nearly two years of struggle within the ghetto walls and then the last march on Wednesday, August 5, 1942, others claim it was August 6, with 192 children, one claims it was 196 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-38) This dramatic and tragic last chapter of his life fixed Korczak in the mind of the public as a martyr of the Holocaust and placed him in the gallery of heroic personas, like Ann Frank, who are known only as part of the Holocaust discourse.

Three years under German occupation, including nearly two years within the sealed Warsaw Jewish Ghetto, tell a unique story of leadership and ultimate commitment of an educator to his children. It answers our principal question about the role of educators in time of radical social crisis and yet this study tries to go beyond the dark cover of the Holocaust, into the exploration of nearly 40 years of rich and inspiring literary career, social activity, and educational work.

It is true that Korczak had all his life an intimate dialogue with death and yet his educational work is dominated by the struggle for life. To live in dignity day after day, to dedicate life to the welfare of others, is more heroic than to die dramatically in battle, says Korczak in his ongoing discourse with his readers.[[39]](#footnote-39) The later parts of this study will explore the ways Korczak dealt with the challenges of life: childhood and children's rights, street children and neglect of children, life of children communities in boarding schools, children literature and educational journalism, pediatrics, children at war times and children in the core of peace and children civic rights.

Treblinka was the last station of three years of life under the German occupation. Korczak and his children, like about half a million Jews of the Warsaw ghetto, were sent to their death. Korczak could save his life and leave to a hiding place in the other part of the city, but refused to leave his children. Nonetheless, the tragic story serves as the starting point of our exploration of a rich and complex legacy that goes back in Korczak's biography far beyond the context of the Holocaust alone.

On that day, the Germans ordered the deportation of the children houses in the ghetto and Korczak's orphanage was among them. A few testimonies tell us about the last march of Korczak and his orphans, from the orphanage last place at Sienna street to the Umschlagplatz (the deportation square) in the other side of the ghetto, about 2 kilometers of walk in a very hot August day. Korczak was leading the procession, maybe holding the hands of two children; one says that he was holding two children in his hands, while others claim that Korczak was already too ill to carry children in his arms.[[40]](#footnote-40) The children marched in order, four, and others claim five children in every row, dressed in their best clothes, carrying their backpacks. The green flag of the orphanage was carried with them. In his diary, Ringelblum mentioned a singing line of children.[[41]](#footnote-41) No one was crying. No one was trying to escape or hide. The older children probably knew where they were going to and yet no one left the lines. It was a silent march to death, which one is unable to understand.

Joshua Perle, who was on that day at the umschlagplatz and survived the war, described how he remembers this horrible event:

*[…] 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.[[42]](#footnote-42)*

Ringleblum's account of the ghetto years gives another testimony about the events of that day by Nahum Remba, who was for many years the director of the education department of the Warsaw Jewish community and currently a Judenraete (the German-appointed Jewish Council) activist. In the days of the mass deportation, Remba set a forged first aid station at the edge of the deportation square and wearing a doctor's coat, he tried to save people and send them back into the ghetto. He describes how he tried to delay the deportation of the children and how he asked Korczak to accompany him to the Judenraete offices to solicit their intervention. Korczak refused to depart from his children, even for a short moment.

In his account, Remba describes the procession of Korczak and his children marching to the deportation place:

*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 […]*[[43]](#footnote-43)

Remba could not hold his tears at the sight of this "cold-blooded murder". The Jewish police officers in the deportation square saluted Korczak. Even the Germans asked who the man who is leading the procession is. In his testimony, Remba describes an astonishing picture: a proud ordered and quiet march to death. Why? One may ask why it was important for Korczak to behave in that way in those crucial moments.

Unlike the masses of the ghetto Jews, Korczak had a choice. Korczak's friends offered him in several opportunities to leave the ghetto to a hiding place in the Arian side of Warsaw; he declined their offers immediately. 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 to leave the Umschlagplatz. Korczak refused and went with his children to Treblinka.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Korczak admirers tend to see it 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 knows Korczak can imagine the possibility that he would save himself and leave his children alone and yet the grave question remains – how a father to hundreds of children prepare himself to their coming inevitable death?

The picture that Perle and Remba portray is unique in its spiritual power. Nonetheless, it raises questions about its meaning. We wonder about this march to death by Korczak and hundreds of children and staff – why it is important for him that they will reach their death in such a quiet and ordered way. Was it Korczak's way to make it easier for the children or a show of spiritual resistance?

Korczak was not alone – other educators went with their children to the deportation square when the order came. Emanuel Ringelblum, the noted ghetto underground historian, mentioned in his diary 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-45)*

How can we categorize Korczak's behavior and give it meaning? In their efforts to understand Korczak's behavior, a few Korczak scholars have defined his total commitment as an act of Jewish martyrdom, "Kiddush Hashem" (the sanctification of God's name in Hebrew), in that way expressed its ultimate meaning and gave it a Jewish tag. However, martyrdom is an obscure definition that is short to explain Korczak's conduct. Korczak was detached from Jewish tradition, and the idea of Kiddush Hashem does not appear in his discourse.

Korczak was a humanist and critical towards the idea of a sacred death: life is the heroic challenge and not death. It is easy to die a heroic death and we honor those who die in battle – it is harder to live the everyday hardships, "*the heroism of life of labor*"*[[46]](#footnote-46).* Korczak dedicated his whole life for the sake of children and their well-being and it was an ultimate commitment well before the war. Ringelblum in his diary dares to ask the difficult question that may occur in the mind whether Korczak's martyrdom that gained nothing, was justified.[[47]](#footnote-47) Nonetheless, we may better claim that no one who knew Korczak could imagine the possibility that he would save himself and leave his children alone.

However, the grave question remains. How a father to hundreds of children prepares himself to their coming inevitable death? What does he say to the children? How he prepares them? Why it was important for him that they will reach their death in such a dignified way?

One may add a question why he did not attempt whatsoever to save a few of the children. We cannot judge Korczak – we were not there – but the question arises: why no one tried to hide or to escape? Even in his ghetto diary, Korczak does not mention a slight thought about hiding places or any attempt to save a few of the children. He accepted the coming death and prepared for it. What is the spiritual stand that is expressed in the last part of his life? Why accept this fate in such a calm way?

August 1942 was the end of a period that lasted 21 months in the sealed ghetto, waiting in a slow decay to its extinction. Death was present in the ghetto daily life, lay in the street; children played next to it *"The children are no longer afraid of death. In one courtyard, the children played a game tickling a corpse."*[[48]](#footnote-48)Death penetrated to the houses. Korczak, as a physician and as one who took care of many children, met it even more than others did.[[49]](#footnote-49) Death was an intimate experience for Korczak and he dealt with it in his discourse and writings. However, as much as death occupies his thought, still the question arises about the meaning of this quite march towards death.

Yitzhak Perlis, a noted Korczak scholar, hinted to the possibility that Korczak's ghetto diary may hint to a possible answer. Four days before the deportation to Treblinka, on August 1, Korczak wrote a short but important thought in his diary, "*Did Marcus Aurelius read the wisdom of Solomon? How soothing is the effect of his memories*”.[[50]](#footnote-50) What can we learn from this passage in the diary? It is not clear to which book Korczak refers in "The Wisdom of Solomon", maybe the Biblical book of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. Nonetheless, a tight reading of this sentence shows that this is not the book, which was important to Korczak. It was Marcus Aurelius' Meditations. The Wisdom of Solomon is the book, which he guesses that could have influenced Marcus Aurelius, which in its turn had influenced Korczak.

We learn that Korczak has read Marcus Aurelius' meditations, the only book he mentions towards the end of the diary, and the content of that book gave him spiritual support; it had a soothing effect on him, helping him to accept the coming death. Marcus Aurelius' Meditations, can open a crucial window to the spiritual world of Korczak. Who was Marcus Aurelius? What he was advocating in his book that helped Korczak to cope with the dooming reality of the ghetto? Following the footsteps of Marcus Aurelius, the emperor of Rome and a Stoic Philosopher, would give us a key to the infrastructure of Korczak's world.

* 1. ***In Search of an ordering principle in Korczak's legacy***

Korczak's ideas and educational work are well known; they are powerful and inspiring, and yet Korczak remained marginal in the field of educational philosophy and history of education. Education Studies hardly deal with Korczak. Why? Partially, it is Korczak's blame; his writings are fragmental; he himself expressed several times his opposition to elaborate educational theories including of his own. The result is that many of those who wrote about Korczak remained with a face value presentation of his ideas; Inspiring as they may be, they could not find any ordering principles behind them and could not construct a coherent philosophy of education from Korczak's texts.

A few of Korczak scholars have tried to define a Korczak Education Theory and place him in the context of modern humanistic education.[[51]](#footnote-51) Korczak was associated with figures like Dewey or Buber, but with limited success. One may put Korczak and Dewey side-by-side on the same shelf of education philosophy, but although we have an evidence that in later years Korczak had a few of Dewey's books in his library, he never mentioned him. We do not know if he was familiar with Dewey's ideas when he had articulated his educational ideas a few years before Dewey has published his main books about education. Dewey's first relevant book is Democracy and Education (1916) and Korczak had published his "How to Love a Child" in 1919, a text he had drafted during the years of World War I. We cannot be sure about it, but it is even questionable whether Korczak could read Dewey as he probably did not speak English fluently.

Buber as well was never mentioned in Korczak's writings; His most important book*, I-Thou*, was published in 1923, four years after "*How to Love a Child*". More important, Korczak and Buber, two humanists, based their thought on opposing ideas of humanity. Korczak was a philosopher of the immanence, while Buber was a philosopher of the transcendence. Korczak in his philosophy of real-life approach to education, which we will discuss later on, was far from the dialogical spirituality of Buber. While Korczak sought educational guidance in nature and in the actual reality of children, their bodily reality, their character, biography and family roots, which altogether determine their fate, Buber looked beyond the actual reality of the person into the realm of the free spirituality of the persona. A person was present to the other, in Buber's view, through his words, in their mutual dialogue. A confusion is understandable. Both Korczak and Buber were humanists, who sought the well-being of people, and both struggled with the reality of people in a modern industrial world, but while Korczak was an essentialist, Buber an existentialist. In their understanding of humanity, and therefore their education ideas, were pointing in opposite directions.

This lack of solid ground to Korczak's pedagogical legacy has marginalized his philosophy in education philosophy studies; nonetheless, the connection to Marcus Aurelius, in the ghetto diary raises the hypothesis that Korczak was expressing Stoic ideas in his leadership in the ghetto.[[52]](#footnote-52) Marcus Aurelius was a Stoic philosopher – and it was probably Stoicism, which helped Korczak in these hard moments. His understanding of death, expressed in his Ghetto Diary as well as in former 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 should take our exploration beyond the tragic end of the ghetto, "the waiting room of death".[[53]](#footnote-53) It is worthy to follow this track also into the previous chapters of Korczak's life, and explore the hypothesis that behind Korczak's understanding of childhood and education, as well as the practices he had implemented in his children's houses, stood Greco-Roman philosophical ideas. .

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

What is Stoicism? Stoicism, originated in the third century BC, at the down of classical Greece, in the columned city square of Athens, the agora, developed to be a dominant philosophical school in the Greco-Roman world and later on influencing the modernization and secularization of Europe.

Stoicism does not have one paved road; it is rather a direction of thought and a state of mind. It contains different interpretations to the radical changes that the Greek world went through after the conquests of Alexander the Great and the collapse of its local city-state structure. Stoicism helped to give 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 worldwide spiritual and political movement, it existed successively for 500 years and influenced the development of Western culture and European thought.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Stoicism was a holistic worldview, which in contrast to monotheistic theology, did not transcend God, nor the human being from nature, but rather explained it as part of the worldly reality. Stoicism understood God as identical with nature or as its immanent spirit. Stoicism has an ontological idea in its basis, a certain claim about reality, but the idea that human beings are also part of this worldly infinity gave Stoicism also an ethical dimension. Stoic philosophy advocated active moral life. It ends with ethics that is humanistic in its essence, advocating the equality of all human beings and the value of 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 had very important influence on the modern European Mind:[[55]](#footnote-55)

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

Marcus Aurelius (121 – 180 AD, Roman Emperor, 161-180 AD) was the latest identified Greco-Roman stoic thinker. As the emperor of Rome, Marcus Aurelius served most of his ruling years with his armies, defending the northern borders of the empire. There and then he wrote his known book 'Meditations' as a source of his own guidance for self-improvement and strengthening, expressing his understanding of Stoic teaching.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Later on, Stoic ideas influenced the thought of the Fathers of the Church. In Christian medieval times, the Stoic thinking was present mostly in undercurrents of European culture, emerging to the surface again in the Renaissance period and the Enlightenment, contributing to the secularization and modernization of European culture.[[57]](#footnote-57) The Stoic emphasis on Nature as the guiding principle of rational life suited the spirit of the New Age natural sciences. The stoic immanent logos became in modernity the immanent laws of nature.

Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* became a favorite book of several noted personalities of modern times, including Frederick the Great, John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold and Goethe.[[58]](#footnote-58) As such, it could also be available to a modern European intellectual like Korczak.

Stoicism as a school got many variations, but if one summarizes the Stoic teaching of several hundred years, one can derive the following principal ideas of Stoic thinking:

* 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, i.e. 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, i.e. rationality, should guide human beings to their happiness.
* Stoic Apathea – Man has to accept the ruling of nature, including death, in indifference.

The actual expression of these ideas changed from one Stoic figure to the other, but in total, that is what comprised the stoic attitude towards life and death.

The emergence of stoicism in the Hellenistic world and its wide acceptance was an answer the new need for an ordering principle to reality after Alexander the Great destroyed the traditional structure of the Greek world. It was a universal worldview, which gave meaning to a new universal political reality and the 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 – he was an Athenian or Corinthian 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. Nature is the universal guiding principle that, on the one hand, can bring all human beings together and, on the other hand, guides the individual in his life in an age of globalization.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BC - 65 AD), an outstanding politician of his time – a Roman senator and an advisor to emperor Nero and a Stoic philosopher – expresses clearly the idea of integrating oneself into the eternal and the determinate flow of reality.[[59]](#footnote-59) Predestination governs us, he says in his Moral Letters, and we have to endure all hardships of life with 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*. (Seneca, *Epistles* vol. 1, epistle XLIX)

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

Nonetheless, following the internal Stoic paradox, Seneca is not a passive and apathetic personality; he is rather an active public figure in Rome. The understanding of human mortality poses a moral duty. A similar call for moral activism appears in Marcus Aurelius' Meditations – the verdict of death should not promote the feeling of passivity and indifference, but rather the idea that in every day of their short life men has 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*.".[[60]](#footnote-60) Stoicism has at its basis a moral pathos, calling men to moral commitment (Pietas) to the improvement of reality.[[61]](#footnote-61) Stoic philosophy, like other pantheistic philosophies, tried hard, with limited philosophical success, to hold together both Apathea and Pietas, the acceptance of the world determination and the call for moral action.

Here, but not alone, in a need for a new orientation, we first can find the connection to Korczak’s own spiritual needs – the non-totally Polish person and the non-totally Jewish person[[62]](#footnote-62) could hope for a new orientation, acceptance, and recognition in a universal Stoic world view: one rational education, one language, one humanity.[[63]](#footnote-63) Therefore, studying Korczak with Stoic eyes may give us a new understanding of Korczak's approach to death and his main educational ideas and the context in which they all stand – an ordering principle to his educational thought and practices.

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

As we set the hypothesis that Korczak followed a stoic path of thinking, we can make further comparisons between Korczak approach to death, in the ghetto and throughout his life before the war, and the 'death talk' frequently found in Stoic texts.

Life and death were an acute issue in Stoic thought and it were acute issues for Korczak as well. For three years under German terror, Korczak tried to keep the everyday life of the Krochmalana 92 orphanage.[[64]](#footnote-64) On December 1940, the orphanage had to leave his spacious building for 28 years and join the rest of the Warsaw Jews behind the ghetto walls. It was the beginning of nearly two years of endless struggle to maintain the orphanage as a safe haven and an island of love for more than hundred children in the dying ghetto.

How Korczak, a father of many children, could shelter them in days of terror, educates them, feeds them, warm them in the winter and gives them spiritual and moral guidance? How can he maintain the children's faith in the goodness of the human being in a despairing situation? How he maintained his sanity in the face of his children's doom?

Historical study of the reality of the Warsaw Jewish ghetto shows that Korczak was not alone in his work with children. One estimates the number of children in the Warsaw ghetto around 100,000 children and about 75% of them needed social aid. It posed a major challenge to the leadership of the Jewish population in the ghetto. On July 1942, just before the massive liquidation of the ghetto population, Centos, the Jewish Children Aid Organization[[65]](#footnote-65), run above hundred children's aid institutions, among them about 30 boarding schools of the sort.[[66]](#footnote-66) We focus mostly on Korczak's work because he was a well-known persona already before the war and because he left us his diary, which opens a rare window into his soul, but the Korczak's orphanage was one children's institute out of many. Many educators took upon themselves the impossible task of taking care of children in the ghetto – a heroic struggle to maintain life and human dignity. They remain unknown, covered by the ashes of destruction and lack of historical records. Korczak's struggle represents a much wider circle of anonymous dedicated educators who took upon themselves a sacred mission in an impossible reality. Their legacy deserves a similar question – how an educator is doing his work in a dying ghetto?

The diary that Korczak started to write in the last weeks of his life gives us a rare window into Korczak's mind and soul, his childhood memories and an intimate account of the ghetto years and his stubborn efforts to keep the orphanage alive.[[67]](#footnote-67) Korczak describes endless days and evenings of walking from one door to another, begging for a contribution of some money, asking 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!*"[[68]](#footnote-68)

Korczak's health deteriorated, but he had to go on and take care of his children. At one point, he assumed responsibility for another children's house. His diary and letters reveal a horrible situation of young children dying in this "*slaughterhouse of children*" as he called it with a bitter sarcasm.[[69]](#footnote-69) At nights, when all were in bed, he was writing and drinking from a bottle of Vodka, ruining his health but keeping his mind free.

In spite of his endless efforts, even Korczak's orphans could not be protected, and the ghetto reality penetrated the walls of the orphanage. When he reflects on his children in his diary on July 15, 1942, he writes, ironically about the *"old"* dwellers of his orphanage who think and talk only about their weakness and sicknesses.[[70]](#footnote-70)

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".[[71]](#footnote-71)* Drinking alcohol helped him to survive Hell and to continue to support his children. Korczak as a doctor had to face this reality quite often and the meaning of death occupied him. The diary reveals that Korczak had nightmares about death.

*What ghastly dreams! Last night: the Germans, I without an armband during a curfew at Praga. 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?*[[72]](#footnote-72)

Confronting his fear of death and the reality of death that has developed around him Korczak develops his idea that death is not an ultimate end. If one deals with death in a rational way, he can overcome the fears of death.

Death occupies Korczak's thoughts all the time, even before the war. He even suggested the idea that death – suicide – may be the only escape from the fear of death. In his diary, he tells that the idea of the liberating death, suicide, occurred to him when he was seventeen.[[73]](#footnote-73) He even testifies in one place that once he suggested to his sister to commit suicide together,[[74]](#footnote-74) an idea that never left him.

Our hypothesis leads us – following Korczak's own reference to Marcus Aurelius - to stoic traditions and to the fact that all Stoic philosophers spoke about the senseless fear of human beings from their death. Death is part of life and should be accepted as such. In his *Meditations,* Marcus Aurelius is making the following statement about the meaning of mortality:

*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*.[[75]](#footnote-75)

The reality of death is inevitable. Death is part of the awareness of the reflective human being and it should be accepted in a spiritual mood of fearlessness. Stoic circles held the idea that the fear of death is irrational; rational people understand that Death is part of Nature "*As generation is, so also death, a secret of nature's wisdom*"[[76]](#footnote-76) – death always hangs over life and men should accept in the Stoic mood of *Apathea.*

In certain circumstances, death is even better than life as it frees men from the slavery to 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*".[[77]](#footnote-77) The "soul in the cage" metaphor – later used also by Korczak – is already related to Socrates in Plato's dialogue Phaedo. There, when Socrates friends are crying after he drank the cup of poison, Socrates is reportedly saying that we should not be sad at our death as it 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*.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Death is the liberation from the slavery of your own physical existence or from external slavery. In Roman political life, suicide was sometimes an acceptable behavior among Stoics. Senator Lucius Annaeus Seneca, the known Stoic philosopher, committed suicide after Nero ordered him to kill himself (65 AD). Josephus Flavius (37-100 AD) put the idea of the liberating suicide in the mouth of the Elazar Ben Yair, the leader of the Jewish zealots in Masada, when he convinces his fellow men to choose death instead of Roman slavery.[[79]](#footnote-79)

Further, in the above Platonic dialogue, Phaedo, a moment before Socrates is drinking the cup of poison, the text mentions a nucleus of a later Stoic idea " *try to bear lightly what must needs be, "* says the court messenger (ibid) and Socrates replies that he will do as he says. When one identifies the inevitable, he has to accept it calmly, in Apathea.

The idea is echoed in Korczak worldview, as he uses nearly the same words to express his idea 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.*[[80]](#footnote-80)

Like the Stoics, Korczak stresses the physical existence of the human being. Men are part of nature – in contrast to monotheistic theologies that elevate humans above nature – and when they die their body continues its existence, but in a different way as part of nature. The words of Socrates about the metamorphosis of the living into the dead and backward are echoed in Korczak words in the above text: death is not the end. The body of the dead will continue its existence as the green grass. Death is, according to the Stoics and Korczak, only a moment of passage from one form of existence to another.

Later Stoic texts have developed the Platonic ideas of life and death into the paradigm of the eternal change in nature; life and death are part of it. Death is an integral part of life and one should accept it calmly. The very same wording appears in Korczak's writings: "*Naively we are afraid of death, forgetful that life is a procession of dying and reborn moments*."[[81]](#footnote-81)

Like Socrates, who did not escape his death sentence, so Korczak, in different historical circumstances, but with a similar spirit, accepted upon himself the verdict of life. Korczak words resemble Stoicism in both content and format. Here and there, death is not the ultimate end as the human being will continue its existence in nature.

The understanding of human mortality poses a moral duty. The verdict of death should not promote feeling of passivity and indifference but rather the idea that in every day of his short life **man** has 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"*.[[82]](#footnote-82)

In his article, "School of Life",[[83]](#footnote-83) Korczak represents a monolog of an old schoolmaster who stands before his retirement. The principal – who may represent Korczak – does not allow his doctors to extend his life, as he does not afraid of death.[[84]](#footnote-84) Fear of death is an expression of spiritual slavery. As in Stoicism, the understanding that life is part of something eternal is liberating. It frees men from the most powerful fear, the fear of death. The school principal refuses to be judged by a theistic God and praises nature that gave him life.[[85]](#footnote-85) Life is the gift of nature. The meaning of life is be found in the understanding that life is an inseparable part of the ever-flowing nature, expressed in the Heraclitean "Panta Rhei", everything is flowing all the time.[[86]](#footnote-86)

The idea of the "Liberating death" reappears in Korczak's diary, where as a physician and a social activist he discusses the idea of euthanasia concerning terminal sick people and criminals. As a doctor and a social activist, it was not the first time that Korczak dealt with the idea of Euthanasia. He considered it – as it becomes present in current discussions of Bio-ethics – concerning dying people.[[87]](#footnote-87) Korczak asks who has the right to perform the act of Euthanasia and answers: "*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*."[[88]](#footnote-88)

In this context, he is also "playing" in his mind – and within his own mind alone – with the horrible thought of euthanasia for the children and the old people in the ghetto, saving them the terrible reality of the coming death. Korczak had no illusions about what **is** awaiting for his children, and he wished to save them from the fear of death and suffering, but he immediately defines this act as 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.[[89]](#footnote-89)*

Korczak discusses the idea of "killing of Mercy" because he understands that the children in the ghetto are "terminal"; He cannot save them from death – he may only save them from the suffering of death. Nevertheless, Korczak never expressed this idea in public; he actually abolished the idea of euthanasia, but the notion of the liberating death remained in his mind.

Korczak knew what is going on with the Jews in Poland and what is waiting for his children. In the summer of 1942, Korczak had to face the inevitable reality of death that approaches his children. He had to prepare the children to face their coming end and to give them some kind of spiritual aid and he chose to advocate them as well the serenity of death. A few days before the mass deportation of the Warsaw Jews to Treblinka, on July 18, the children of the orphanage performed the theater play "The Postman" by the Indian dramatist Rabindranath Tagore. We learn from later testimonies that the hall was crowded – people from all parts of the ghetto population accepted the invitation and came. The mood was somber.[[90]](#footnote-90) Yitzchak Zuckerman and Zivia Lubetkin were among the people who were invited to that evening and Zuckerman recalls:

*On the last Saturday before July 22 (the 22 was Tisha Be-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*.[[91]](#footnote-91)

The people who attended the event were no more naïve about the fate of the ghetto population. The German's murderous acts against the Jews were already known, and when Korczak was asked why he chose this play, he said he wanted to prepare his children to face their death in a calm way.[[92]](#footnote-92)

The Stoic perspective of life and death could help Korczak, besides the alcohol, to 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 that calm and dignified way. It might also shed some light on the troubling question why Korczak did not make the desperate attempt to save at least a few of the children.

Establishing the idea that Stoicism was present in Korczak's struggle with death raises a further hypothesis that stoicism also instructed his lifelong educational work, his understanding of the human being and his ideas about education. We have to explore the possibility that Korczak, the educationalist, was a Stoic philosopher, not only in moments of death but in life as well. In Korczak's early diary The Confession of a Butterfly (1914) when he reflects on his school years, he returns repeatedly to his teacher of Greek culture.[[93]](#footnote-93) We will follow this line of thought and explore the hypothesis that behind Korczak's understanding of childhood and education as well as the practices he had implemented in his children's houses stood ideas that were taken from ancient Greco-Roman philosophies including stoicism.

* 1. ***The ghetto – the Waiting Room of Death***

Life and death were acute issue for Korczak. For three years under German terror, he had to keep the everyday life of the Krochmalana 92 orphanage.[[94]](#footnote-94) In November 1940 the orphanage had to leave his spacious building for 27 years and join the rest of the Warsaw Jews behind the ghetto walls. It was nearly two years of endless struggle to maintain the orphanage in the dying ghetto as a safe haven and an island of love for nearly two hundred children.[[95]](#footnote-95)

How Korczak, a father of many children, shelters them, educates them, feeds them, warmsthem in the winter and gives them spiritual and moral guidance? How can he maintain the children's faith in the goodness of the human being in a despairing situation? The diary that Korczak started to write in the last weeks of his life gives us a rare window to Korczak's mind and soul, his childhood memories and an intimate account of the ghetto years and his stubborn efforts to keep the orphanage life.[[96]](#footnote-96) Korczak describes endless evenings of walking from one door to another, begging for a contribution of some money, asking for food and clothing**.** In the Jewish hospital, he was asking for medicines.

Korczak's health deteriorated, but he had to go on, taking care of his children. At one point, he assumed responsibility for another children house.[[97]](#footnote-97) His diary and letters reveal a horrible situation of young children dying in "*the* *children's slaughterhouse* *(and morgue) at 39 Dzielna Street*", as he called it in bitter sarcasm.[[98]](#footnote-98) At nights, when averyone else **were** in bed, he was writing and drinking from a bottle of Vodka, or a simple alcohol, ruining his health but keeping his mind free: "*Five glasses of raw alcohol mixed half and half with hot water gives me inspiration*".[[99]](#footnote-99)

Death was everywhere in the dooming ghetto and Korczak's diary reveals his struggle with this reality. The meaning of death occupied him. Death was everywhere in the ghetto. Korczak as a doctor had to face this reality even more. Drinking alcohol helped him to survive Hell and support his children. 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".[[100]](#footnote-100)*

At another place in the diary, a similar experience appears again, maybe another description of the same event, maybe another. The children live in a close proximity to death:

*A 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 rein 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.*[[101]](#footnote-101)

Korczak had nightmares about death. There he expresses again the idea that intended death – suicide - may be the only escape from the fear of death or a dead-end reality: "*Is not death such an awakening at a point when there is no apparent way out"?* [[102]](#footnote-102)

Death appears in Korczak thoughts all the time. In his diary, he reveals that the idea of the liberating death, suicide, occurred to him when he was young: "*When I was seventeen, I even started writing a novel entitled suicide. The main character hated life out of fear of insanity*".[[103]](#footnote-103) Korczak was afraid that he is carrying in his genetics the insanity of his father. In one place, he testifies that once he suggested to his sister to commit suicide together as he lost all orientation in his life: "*I could find no place for myself in the world or in life*",[[104]](#footnote-104) an idea that has never left him.

In spite of his endless efforts, even Korczak's orphans could not be protected and the ghetto reality penetrated the walls of the orphanage. When he reflects on his children in his diary (July 15, 1942), he writes ironically about the "old" dwellers of the orphanage who think and talk only about their weakness and sicknesses.[[105]](#footnote-105)

On the summer of 1942, Korczak had to face the inevitable reality of death and give it existential as well as spiritual answers. He had to prepare the children to face their coming death and to give them some kind of spiritual aid and he chose to advocate the serenity of death. A few days before the beginning of mass deportation of the Warsaw Jews to Treblinka, on July 18, the children of the orphanage performed the theater play "the Postman" by Rabindranath Tagore. The hall was crowded – people from all parts of the ghetto population accepted the invitation and came. The mood was somber.[[106]](#footnote-106) When Korczak was asked why he chose this play, he said he wanted to prepare his children to face their death in a calm way.[[107]](#footnote-107)

The idea of the "Liberating death" reappears in the ghetto diary in several places. It has clear Stoic roots. One can conclude that the Stoic perspective of life and death helped Korczak, besides alcohol, to continue his hopeless work in the dying ghetto. It also can explain why it was important for him, on the morning of August 5, that his children would approach their fate in that way.

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

The basic idea of Stoicism is the infinity and eternity of reality.[[108]](#footnote-108) Infinity has a regulative role in human life. The human being is part of this infinity and it gives the human being, his orientation for life, his or her ethics and the pass to fulfilling life 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 his or her place in this infinity, in nature. Understanding the human being as part of nature has besides its ontological meaning also an ethical implication. Human life is regulated not by a transcendental source like in monotheistic traditions, but by the immanent logic of the infinite reality, \*nature. The Stoic Logos, which permeate nature, or its later equivalent in the 17th century Spinoza's "Laws of Nature", dictates the human being the rational way of life that leads to ultimate happiness or redemption.[[109]](#footnote-109)

The idea of infinity sets the seriousness of education in Korczak's eyes. Pedagogy means touching the other and touching the other means, following the idea of the Divine infinity of this world, touching the glory of God – in its immanent sense – or the endlessness of Nature. Every human being, Korczak tells us, is part of this infinity and eternity.

Various texts in Korczak extensive writings elude the idea of infinity and eternity. Korczak was a well-known pediatrician and educator, receiving questions of all sorts about education and parenting. When he deals with questions about the first years of the child's life, the child in the family - a life experience, which he had only through his work as a pediatrician – he gives us an insight of his underlying philosophy.

Young mothers come to Korczak with their questions about motherhood and the health of their child and Korczak answers not with practical prescriptions but with a broader, more philosophical answers, describing the perspective in which one has 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 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 pup.*

*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.*

The Child is not an isolated monad, but rather an integral part of the infinite space, which God is its soul. Being part of infinity stresses the littleness of the individual human being. Who is the person in the context of infinite cosmos? On the other hand, it also establishes the human being's greatness, as he or she is part of such a grandiose reality. Smaller than a bacteria and embraces in his mind the entire cosmos.

Infinity is not only spatial, but also temporal. The story of the human being does not start in his birth. It also does not end in his or her death. Man is part of the eternity of reality. In the same virtual discussion, Korczak places the new born 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."[[110]](#footnote-110)* The human being is not coming to this world out of nothing, ex nihilo, but as a continuation of infinite reality, both spatial infinity and time infinity.

The same idea reappears in Korczak literary study of "Bobo" (1911). Bobo is a baby in Polish. Korczak tries to offer an intimate observation of the human baby. The baby is not a new monad but the outcome of an endless chain of generations, their life, health, food and social reality. When he was born, "*Bobo was already old*".[[111]](#footnote-111)

The idea of infinity offers a different perspective of the child that parents and educators should have. The child, just born, bears the genetics of his immediate parents, but in a hidden text, he or she carries the footprints of a long history of ancestors. The mother is speaking about the child as her own child. Korczak in his sharp language is not denying the ultimate relations between the mother and her baby. He offers her a different point of view, a wider perspective of her child that an endless chain of generations echoes in his or her life.

Korczak is referring both to the genetics of the child that contains in it the footprints of many generations and the child's family story of the child. Both determine much of the child' character and his or her potential in life. The individual, who seems so unique is part of nature and is part of a family, a community and the larger society. All have an impact on his or her physical and cultural identity. To understand the human being is to learn the context of his or her being. As a natural scientist, Korczak is walking here on the edge of 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.

When the educator wants to understand the child, he has to learn about his life in the broadest sense, his place, his health, his genetics, his family history, his community's history etc. The idea that one has to understand a person in the context of his or her reality carries crucial pedagogical implications; education is not a limited, isolated work in the classroom or the orphanage hall, but 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 or her. Nonetheless, the individual is not just a free agent, always in the making, or just an open possibility like in monotheistic traditions or in modern existentialism - it can be studied and explored in a rational way. Education is science, and the rational educator is a scientist who takes upon himself or herself an endless inquiry.

Korczak took upon himself this infinite mission. In that sense, he was a monk, who gave up family life and private children, to become the servant of the cause of the child.[[112]](#footnote-112) In various places, Korczak advocates this seriousness of education. Teaching can be a job for a few hours a day, but if one really wants to meet the child and have an effect on his or her life, he or she has endless work, though the most fulfilling one.

This infinite essence of education brings about a major misunderstanding about Korczak's stand towards the world. Among Korczak's scholars, there is a debate about his religiosity. The fact that several times Korczak is referring to God and his book with individual's prayers "Man and his God"[[113]](#footnote-113) brought about the interpretation of Korczak understanding of God in a monotheistic sense.[[114]](#footnote-114) Others even see it as a proof of Korczak's Jewishness. However, it is more likely to understand Korczak's religiosity in a pantheistic sense and see God as a metaphor for the spirit of infinity. Like in Stoicism, God is not transcendent to nature, but is identical with it or being 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, i.e. religious questions about the meaning of human existence, whose answers are taken 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.*”[[115]](#footnote-115) Questions of life and death are open questions, which demand the openness of the mind toward the infinity of reality; therefore, they demand modesty from the educator who will never be able to give them complete answers.

At this point, Korczak is differing sharply from the understanding of the human being in the three monotheistic traditions or at least in its main currents. Both Judaism, Christianity, and Islam draw a sharp contradiction between the greatness and glory of God and the smallness and limitation of men. Korczak, as in other pantheistic traditions, overruns this distinction. He portrayes the human being as an endless and most challenging text within the context of the infinity of nature.

Furthermore, Monotheism held the idea that Man differs from the other world's creatures because Man is created in "the image of God". The Biblical text is not clear about the immediate meaning of this phrase, but post-Biblical traditions, developed the idea that the "image of God" has no corporeal meaning, but rather God's free spirit, which was bestowed on men. God has free will and freedom of choice and so men have these qualities, which no other creature has. Human being has a sense of freedom of choice and therefore, also moral responsibility. Man is a free agent like God. Modern existentialism developed it into the idea that Man is always an open possibility. Korczak is not an existentialist but an essentialist – every individual have their own reality, past, family roots, genetics, which determines much of the individual behavior. However, the nature of the individual is never fully known to us. It is a text we may read again and again and never reach its full understanding.

Religiosity in Korczak's philosophy is identical with the wonder of infinity. Life-questions are religious in their essence as they refer to the infinity of life. People get the answers to this kind of questions not through theistic revelations or scriptures reading, but by rational study, 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. Education can never gain final and definite answers as it touches the infinity of life. We gain our knowledge about children and education from our life experience, observation of children, metacognition and reflection. Maybe teaching is a profession, but in Korczak's eyes, education is not a profession but an art or a religious worship of life.

Like in the world of Greek philosophy, the main avenue to the understanding of reality is observation. Korczak advocates rational and meticulous scrutiny of the child and the children's social life. He measures his children weekly, weighs them, and keep a close account of the physical and mental condition of each one of them. 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.

This basic stance towards the children as part of infinity sets the other known aspects of Korczak's pedagogy, his respect for the present of their childhood years, his approach to practical questions in the children's life, his guidance to the young educator who seek his advice, and the way he structured the children's houses as rational communities.

* 1. ***Respect of Childhood***

Korczak's perception of human life as part of infinity is the philosophical context of his famous claim that the child is not a person in the process of making, someone who will be man in the future, but rather a human being now, just in a different stage in his life. The perspective of infinity mandates the idea that the years of childhood are worthy and deserve equal respect as any other years in life.

Understanding human life in the context of infinity mandates a different understanding of childhood. From the perspective of infinity, there is no hierarchy of size, big and small, and no hierarchy of age, young or old. From the perspective of infinity all stages of life has equal value and all creatures have their place. Time is infinite and the life of the child is part of this infinite time.[[116]](#footnote-116)

Time is infinite, and in infinity, any measure of time or evaluation of a specific time, lose its meaning. From the perspective of the infinity and eternity, there are no boundaries between ages of man. Like national boundaries – says Korczak, out of his cosmopolitan inspirations – 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*.[[117]](#footnote-117)

Like national boundaries – says Korczak, out of his cosmopolitan inspirations – artificial boundaries harm people.[[118]](#footnote-118)

Infinity does not know stages, chapters, beginnings or ends. Only men make such cultural definitions of "early" versus "late", "young" versus "old", and "fast" versus "slow". The perspective of infinity erases these artificial boundaries and mandates the same respect to all stages of human life. From a limited perspective of human life, one stage of life may look more important than the other but when one observes human life from an external point of view he or she understands that all stages of life are equal parts of infinite time.

The child is part of a long chain of generations and any stage of his or her life is part of this chain, which transcends one's lifetime. From the perspective of infinity, childhood and adulthood, 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*."[[119]](#footnote-119) Any stage in this endless chain of life is different, but its value is ultimate and therefore equal. Childhood is not an introduction to real life in years to come – it has its own unconditional meaning.

This insight grounds a fundamental idea in Korczak's worldview: childhood is not a preparing stage for the future but a worthy chapter of life. No more no less than any other stages of life. Children are not human beings of the future – they are human being now, though different. As such, the childhood years deserves our respect and 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.[[120]](#footnote-120)*

From the perspective of the infinity and eternity, there are no boundaries between ages of man, maturity and immaturity.

Respect of childhood has pedagogical implications. One must base education on the understanding that the child is an individual with full right to respect to his or her present being. Childhood is not an investment program for real life in the future – it is life by itself. The child is not a human being to come, who dedicates his present for the sake of a distant, unreal, future, but a human being here and now, whom we should help in his present struggle of life:

*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.*[[121]](#footnote-121)

Education, says Korczak, is the science of man. Firstly, it is science, not faith, and secondly, it is about men and not about "children". Men have different stages in their lives, each stage is different, but with the same worth. Education means a relationship between different human beings, with different experiences of life, but with equal rights for happiness and respect.

Equality does not mean similarity. People in different ages are different and any individual among his peers group is different. Human beings are different and we should respect their differences, those between different cultures, different religions, different classes, different families and life stories and different ages. Respect is the recognition of these differences. At the children's house, they all have the same closes, but underneath beats different hearts of different people:

*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.[[122]](#footnote-122)*

"*Only fools ask that all men will be equal* *to one each other*" It was God's will, says 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*."[[123]](#footnote-123) Reality is colorful. People are different, and the challenge of the humanist is to see it and respect it.

Stating Korczak's appreciation of the diversity of humanity, we should refrain from reading Korczak as a postmodern relativist. People deserve respect; nevertheless, people are different also in their ethical qualities. Korczak was realistic about the human condition. There are people who behave better than others do. Like among adults, also among children, there are pleasant children with pleasant character and others who are unpleasant, dishonest or violent.

Respect of childhood leads to "the right of the child". The child is a human being here and now to whom we should help in the struggle of life. Korczak does not remain platonic in his assertion that childhood deserves our respect and therefore children have rights. Respect grounds actual rights, the emancipation of children in society.

Children rights, not as a gift or a grace, and not as part of a clever didactics, but as an essential aspect of humanity, in all ages, was pivotal idea in Korczak's life mission: to let children have was is unconditionally theirs. Korczak was one of the authors of the Declaration of the League of Nations (1924) in favor of children rights, and the recognition of the un-conditionality of these rights: "*I call for the Magna Carta of children's rights*".[[124]](#footnote-124) The right of the child is not a gift of the adults, a grace that can arbitrarily be eliminated when it is convenient for the adult, the parent, the educator. It is not a gratuity that adults give children out of their gracious over power – children’s rights derived from the essential assertion that childhood has its immanent worth.

* 1. ***Children's rights***

Respect of childhood leads to the Korczak known idea of "the right of the child". If childhood is not a mere corridor to life, but an equal stage in human life that deserves our respect then children have rights. The right of the child is not a gift of the adults, a grace that can be eliminated when it is convenient for the adult, the parent, the educator. Rights are not a gratuity that adults give children out of their gracious over power; Children's rights derived from the essential assertion that childhood has its immanent worth. The practicalities of these rights come on top of it. Children have rights not because we graciously give it to them, but because they are human beings now, not in years to come, and as human beings, rights are part of their human dignity.

In historical perspective, Korczak is a link in the chain of educationalists, social philosophers and political leaders who fought for the emancipation of children in modern times. "*I call for the Magna Carta of children's rights* *[…]*".[[125]](#footnote-125) Korczak's idea of children's rights had entered the declaration of the Rights of Children by the League of the Nations, Geneva 1924.

Korczak's ideas eco also in the United Nations declarations of the Rights of Children, November 1959 and November 1989 (General Assembly resolution 44/25) which entered into force on September 1990. Respect and rights go together; Disrespect to childhood leads to disrespect of children and the abuse of their basic rights.

Korczak's call on behalf of children rights is clear in its pathos but not in its content. In his writings he is advocating three basic children rights: the right of the child to die, the right of the child to the present day and the right of the child to be what he is:

*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 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*.[[126]](#footnote-126)

In other places, he mentions other rights, but these three basic rights are important for our discussion.

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 more obvious as they are clearly derived from his appreciation of childhood as discussed above: the child has the right to live his childhood years in full and fulfill his own identity. It is the moral duty of the educator to try to help the child attain these rights. This is an open task as self-fulfillment is an infinite mission, but the educator has to make it the horizon of his educational work.

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? He or she certainly has the right to live his or her own present life, but why they have the right to die?

Here we can discern again Stoic thinking between the lines of the Korczak's text. Korczak sees the fear of death – in accordance with Stoic teaching – as one of the major obstacles of a full life in the present. As the sarcastic joke says, "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*."[[127]](#footnote-127) 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.

There is another Stoic element in the text, which may explain this assertion, an idea that may be more problematic for the modern mind. This is the idea that living beings, including a human being, may have different length of life. This is what nature allotted them and one has to accept it as part of the dictate of nature. The pediatrician in Korczak's identity is expressed here; as a doctor, he knows that sometimes life ends sooner and sometimes-even children die. We encounter in this text the Stoic "Apatheia" together with the Stoic "Pietas". According to the value of Pietas, one has to try with all his might to heal sick people, but if one cannot accept the natural fact of death – Apatheia - he or she will not 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 know somewhere in the back of their mind – of unexpected death. If one cannot overcome this fear, he or she will not be able to take the risk of having children. Moreover, if he or she has children they will not allow them to live.

Korczak's "The Child's Right to Respect" article 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 is relevant to the ghetto reality as well. 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 maybe the ghetto children have 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 to the Present***

The idea of Equal respect for all stages in life infers a total commitment to any moment in human life. If every moment has an ultimate value than it should be nourished as an end of itself and not as a mean for a wage tomorrow that in its turn will serve another tomorrow. Childhood has its own worth – it is not an introduction to real life in the future. Children are not the human beings of the future – they are human being now, though different, and their present life as children deserves respect.

The unconditional value of childhood carries with it educational responsibility, responsibility for the present of the child. It is not just a passive respect of childhood – the educator's mission is to make this chapter in the life of the child fulfilling:

*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 simultaneous 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?[[128]](#footnote-128)*

The escape into the future is an escape from responsibility. Because the tomorrow is not present, the educator is not accountable for it, while the present seems unworthy, and therefore the educator is not accountable to the way it is fulfilled. The passing moment of the child does not get its proper attention.

The future is never present; it is too convenient to evade the present life itself – and taking care of an un-existing reality. Parents and educators are afraid from the present. The future and the past are safer as they are not present at the present. One does not take risks when he or she talks about the un-existing future. The real decisions are those that deal with the present reality.

Responsibility for the present is heavy on the educator's shoulders: he 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 is also part of this wrong educational perspective. For the sake of a future, we 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, naive 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*?[[129]](#footnote-129)

If one **is** able to face the reality of death, he can face also 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 also carries the possibility of the end of life. When we deny this possibility, and evades its risks, we deny life itself.

Parents and educators are afraid of the present. The future and the past are safer as they are not present in the present. The present is challenging and sometimes frightening. It demands accountability. It is safer to deal with the un-present future and evade real life here and now. Life at the present entails risks. In the name of future sake, we tend to evade life, but the truth is that we are afraid of life and its risks. We use the future as an excuse not to be in the present and not to allow the child to live his present life in full. But present life is the only life that really exists and it deserves its respect even if living is risky.

Korczak is offering a challenging perspective on childhood years: we have to take it much more seriously than we used to. We have to be brave enough to allow life in the present and respect its needs. We have to learn the child and his or her needs and we should respect what he or she is and support his or her being as such.

The overall idea of infinity not only erases the common way people value the present years of children; it also stresses the idea that every moment of the present is flowing away in the course of time and will never return. Every moment is singular and as such, it deserves the educator's full attention and ultimate respect. Following, the idea of Hellenistic roots of Korczak's pedagogy, we find his paraphrase of the known words of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus about the ever-lasting change in nature: "*You cannot enter twice the same river*".[[130]](#footnote-130) Korczak turns these words into the reality of education: *"Every time it is a different woman who bids farewell to a different person and welcomes a different one upon his return".*[[131]](#footnote-131) The child, as any living human being, is an ever-changing being. Every day a new mother meets a new human being, her child.

A similar Heraclitean idea recurs in Korczak's "The Rules of Life": where he says that the river of life is flowing and changing at all time:

*[…] 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.*[[132]](#footnote-132)

Stoic teaching relies much on Heraclitus, and here it penetrates to Korczak's philosophical language to express the idea that human reality is changing all the time. Education is not about a fixed known reality, but an ever-changing reality, which demands endless learning and careful attention. Every moment of life is precious and every moment of life demands our respect and support.

Monotheistic traditions developed the idea that life is a corridor to the more important stages of the afterlife. The present is unimportant or worse a temptation that derails men from the right pass to salvation. Modern time's puritanical traditions nourished the idea of the unimportance of the present. The joy of life is a sin or a waste of time. Human beings were created to a life of labor and suffering. Happiness in everyday life is a luxury. Modern, industrial cultures took this idea further and developed the ideas of "saving" and "investment". In capitalistic culture, we save our present assets for vague future days. Therefore, years of childhood are just an investment in the hope of future success, and current happiness is sacrificed in saving programs for days to come. Korczak is challenging this puritanical paradigm of modern civilization. Life is not a saving program or investment, but rather the ultimate reality that we have to live in full.

* 1. ***W******e do not know***

From the basic Stoic worldview arises Korczak's attitude to knowledge, and his role as an alleged professional giver of answers to troubled or confused parents or a counselor to young educators.

Knowledge is a basic ingredient of the Greek spiritual world. The idea of knowledge and the limits of knowledge is an elemental part of the Greek intellectual world. The Logos permeate the world and, therefore, in principle, it can be known, studied and explored. The rational person has to know, both the world and his own being. “Know yourself” – the visitor of the Delphi Temple is advised. But knowing is always also knowing the limits of knowing. Socrates taught us that he knows that he does not know and tried to push his listeners in the 5th century BC Athens to the limits of their accepted knowledge. To learn is to explore territories beyond the borders of one's former knowledge. Defining his role with his listeners, Socrates used to say that while his mother helped to deliver babies, he helps people to give birth to their thoughts. Learning is a transcendent mission of the person who recreates himself in this process of going beyond the borders of his former knowledge. The acknowledgment of the "unknown", the limitation of absolute knowledge, is a major element of Korczak's epistemology and consequently a major element of Education.

Infinity demands Modesty on behalf of the educator. Infinite reality always transcends our knowledge, including our knowledge of the other. We never know the other in full. The idea of infinity must limit the educator's pretensions – his hubris - to know his or her student or his or her child in full and to have a full theoretical explanation of his or her work. Elaborate education theories in spite of their inspirations are always limited. If the child is part of infinity, then the educational encounter is always an open mission and educational theories being always short in their power to give the educator full guidance in his mission. The Socratian insight principally dictates an infinite process of learning, which always bounds with the recognition of the unknown and the ceaseless demand to continue the learning efforts. The unknowing is the beginning of human struggle to find the proper pass of life

As a pediatrician, Korczak knows that his knowledge of nature is always insufficient. Sometimes the doctor does not know the exact physical situation of his patient and quite often, his hands are short to give help. A good doctor always remembers that his knowledge is limited, and so is the educator. A modern educationalist may have difficulties to accept this assertion, but Korczak admits that sometimes an honest educator must admit that he or she are short sighted or shorthanded.

Korczak's pedagogical modesty puts limits on the authority of any scholarly, educational theory or any established educational practice. Academic teacher's education programs can never encompass the whole reality of the child and the educational encounter. The young educator should rather open his or her mind and develop a new attitude towards childhood years, the child, the educator and the relations between them. Love, honesty and modesty, good faith, caring, and patience - are the educator’s best tools rather than scholarly books and serious, elaborate education theories that students can get at academic schools of education.

Korczak uses Socratian language to explain why he cannot give answers to others' questions. This is the top of self-knowledge – to know that most of the reality is beyond your knowledge because the reality is infinite. Rational Pedagogy has to follow these assumptions. If the child is part of infinity and is infinite by itself, then a rational educator must accept the limits of his or her knowledge of the child. Pedagogy is an endless chain of questions and honest – and modest – attempts to find limited answers. Like Socrates, the educator with proper self-awareness and self-criticism must refuse to give absolute answers. When the educator knows that he does not know, he or she 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 own book and Socrates' idea that “I know that I don’t know” is echoing 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.*[[133]](#footnote-133)

Instead of absolute knowledge comes the awareness to the infinity of life and with it the understanding that absolute knowledge is unattainable. This mature understanding is on the one hand a stand of modesty in front of the infinity of reality and on the other hand, is a demand for a ceaseless exploration, with the knowledge that anytime the acquired new knowledge will be also limited and new uncharted territories will be present. Instead of elaborate knowledge Korczak speaks, therefore, on observation and intuition.

Korczak identifies the connection of his thought to the Greek philosophical ideas of "know yourself" and I know that I do not know". In his "The Rules of Life" (1930), Korczak says that he learned the "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 mean 'Know yourself'.*

*It comes that even grownups have difficulties to know themselves, and it is even difficult to 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.*[[134]](#footnote-134)

The "*I know that I don't know*" returns in several places in Korczak writings, the last time in his ghetto diary when he reflects on his entire life.[[135]](#footnote-135) In Korczak’s education, there is no place for established pedagogical theories, which claim to give the parent or the educator full answers to future problems of life. Life demands the educator to confront the infinity of life and the unavoidable unknown that is essential to it.

Years later, following his two visits to the Land of Israel in 1934 and 1936, in an article "om 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.[[136]](#footnote-136)*

In a conversation with young educators about a pedagogical tradition that will guide them in their educational work, Korczak offers the intuition, the common sense, and pedagogical modesty as their main proper pedagogical tools.

*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*.[[137]](#footnote-137)

When educators will gain this stage of intellectual modesty there will be less scientific theories that claim complete knowledge and less educational practices that err to be perfect. Instead of an absolute knowledge of reality, the educator gets awareness of its infinity and his or her own limitations.

The principal "no knowing" is a basic stand for Korczak. When he is requested, as a pediatrician and an educationalist, to deal with the inquiries of parents and young educators about the proper educational action, he offers them the Socratian rationality as a tool to deal with questions that will never have one clear-cut and reasonable answer.

During his two tours to the Land of Israel, when young parents bring in front of him, he had avoided, from the principle idea of the unknown, to give his own answers. Trust – he says repeatedly – open mind and common sense. Instead of pretentious final answers to educational dilemmas, Korczak would claim contemplation, common sense and intuition. One cannot have an absolute knowledge of infinite reality and therefore theoretical books have a very limited value. The educator can start to learn from the point he or she realizes that he or she does not know the absolute reality of the child. The educator faces an infinite mission that no theory of knowledge can totally encompass. True educational encounters always transcend our knowledge. It is an open adventure.

The unknowing is a place of decency and intellectual integrity and the starting point of any genuine learning. This idea reappears in the 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 supremerule "don't harm the sick". I set out for unknown waters*".[[138]](#footnote-138) The acknowledgment of the unknowing is a necessary condition for the embarkment to a new voyage of learning. Without this adventure of ever learning, life becomes boring and an intellectual laziness cover the intellect.

The knowledge of the unknowing, and the infinite commitment to the sake of the child, leads also to the modesty of the educator who understands his occupation as a life assignment:

*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.[[139]](#footnote-139)*

An educator can make mistakes; there is no place to the hubris of a professional knowledge, to claim what is perfect education. One who wants to be prefect and successful all the time, will not be an educator. Here, Korczak translates the Stoic metaphysics into an educational practice. As the human being is an infinite entity, singular and ever changing, the educational encounter becomes endless and ungraspable by any formulas or absolute theories. The educator faces a limitless mission, and so in principal it can promise him a full success or no errors and mistakes.

However, this stand of modesty is also – from the perspective of the educator – the beginning of a new, long and winding adventure.

* 1. ***Reality guided Pedagogy***

The idea of "the knowing of the unknown" dictates the proper state of mind and proper actions to the educator who wants to deal with a specific educational situation.

The classic statement, "know yourself" is referred to the educator who has to learn his own identity, his own feelings, thoughts, abilities and limitations.. It derives directly from the idea that both the children and the educator are taking part in the same infinite reality. Korczak's approach corresponds to this philosophical guideline – before, one makes an educational statement or demands something from the child; one has to follow the teaching of the Temple of Delphi – "Know Yourself!", "*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".[[140]](#footnote-140)*

Self-awareness is not a technical advice, but an essential idea of Korczak's immanent worldview, inspired by Stoicism, following rotos in classic Greek thinking. When one knows himself or herself, and his or her reality, one can act according to his or her authentic own nature and be more effective.

Talking to the frustrated young educator in the boarding school, who struggles with the difficulties of educational work, he suggests the following way to solve a new educational situation – 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.*[[141]](#footnote-141)

In Korczak's pedagogical philosophy, not everything is attainable. Korczak as a pediatrician and a social activist, witnessed the social reality of inner city children, and he has no romantic view about education. Modesty is not only about knowledge but also about what an educator can achieve in his or her 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 immanent 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 his authentic self in order to find his or her proper way, his "own road" in the world. The authentic self has an essence or positive nature that one has to explore. The individuality of the person is not an open possibility – as modern existential philosophies suggest – but an inner reality one has to understand and cultivate.

The same applies to proper pedagogy; the educator who wants to find the best way for the child under his or her supervision have to learn the child and get to know him and his or her nature. The nature of the child will be the educator’s best guide to give him or her the proper educational guidance:

*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.[[142]](#footnote-142)*

The reality shows the educator the proper educational act and it tells him to reconsider his or her expectations.

Following this idea that education should start with the diagnostic of the reality of the child before moving to the prognosis, Korczak had dedicated a large part of his time to the careful watch of his children and the disciplined collection of data about their physical as well as behavioral reality. Observation of nature was the starting point of Greece philosophy in the pre-Socratic era. It became the prime methodology of science. Now, Korczak adopts the same methodology: Observations and contemplation are the keys to proper education.

As a pediatrician Korczak is a scientist of education who meticulously observe the daily life of the children, measure their physical development on a weekly basis and document all aspects of their life. His understanding of children comes out of this careful scrutiny of their life as a whole. Moreover, any educational conduct should come out of this understanding of reality.

The demand of knowledge, of both the self and the other is a fundamental stand in Korczak;s pedagogical world. The knowing of the unknown is a call for study and exploration, and a motivation of intellectual activity , but it also an expression of he seriousness to the ethics derived from the philosophy of the immanence. Accroding to Stoic teaching, reality is the guidance of what is good and what is bad, the wanted and the unwanted. Here, in all the immanent philosophies from the Stoa, through Spinza's metaphysics and ethics, and finally modern age science and Korczak's immanent pedagogy, one face 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 free moral activity in society.

Philosophers of the immanence struggled hard, with no clear success to secure the place of the individual within an infinite and eternal reality.[[143]](#footnote-143) Korczak cannot escape the same predicament. His emphasis on knowing the child, who he is and what he or she can be, is appealing and yet it carries an inevitable problem, which all educators have to deal with when they discuss the nature and character of their children and students.

Korczak's immanent pedagogy – like other philosophies of immanence, Spinoza's for example – faces a principal difficulty: the place of change in the future development of the individual as a free agent. If a child has nature, derived from his or her biography, family history, and genetics, nature that the educator has to study in order to know his way with the child, then the educator faces the danger of predestination and determinism. In immanent pedagogy the answer to the question "who is this child?" may determine the educator's approach to the child. The educational encounter between them would be predestined by this known "nature". It is true that Korczak stressed in a Heraclitean mood that the child is always changing[[144]](#footnote-144) and yet the freedom of the individual to become something that he is not yet, like in modern existentialism, is not there. The individual has nature, or an essence, that determines his or her behavior. The task of the educator is to learn and know this nature.

In this respect, Korczak's understanding of humanity is different than modern philosophies, like Schelling's idea of human ultimate freedom of action (*Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 1809), or the post-modern existential philosophies like that of Heidegger's Dasein (*Being and Time*, 1926), Sartre's Existence (*Existentialism and Humanism*, 1946), or Buber's dialogical thinking (*I-Thou*, 1924), that stressed that human beings have no essence, but free agents with pure "being" or "presence" and open possibilities. In Korczak's eyes, people change all the time, but they are not free from their nature and from their place in the infinity of nature and time, and always have to struggle with their heritage.

Besides rationality, in Korczak's pedagogy there is a holistic observation, which combines the physical bodily existence and the subjectivity of the person. Such an integration exists also in Stoicism where the Logos penetrates the natural reality. As an educator who is also a physician Korczak perseveres on the physical health of his children and dedicate a lot of attention to the following of their growth. Besides weekends community conversations there are also physical measurements of the children and the detailed keeping of the data, the height, weight and other indications of the physical condition of each child. This data is 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?*"[[145]](#footnote-145)

The educational act is perceived as an integrative, inseparable, 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 his keen eye. No dream about a future reality, a sort of new "tomorrow", dictates the educational pass of the educator, but the present reality, what the educator can see in his eyes. This was the guide line along all of Korczak's work. The educator is oblighed to learn the true reality in order to find a true educational pass. This a naturalistic pedagogy, which exist from the modesty of the knowing of the principal unknowing of men.

The educator who knows that the child is part of a rational reality, does not strive to utopian achievements, but to what is achievable in an imperfect human reality. The observation of reality emerges from a spiritual stand of disillusion. Reality has the good and the bad in it. It offers abilities and disabilities, and that the educator has to learn from the observation of the children's life. Otherwise the educator will gain again and again bitter chagrins.

Korczak is a physician and his worldview is shaped by his profession. The physician is not satisfied with the healing of the ill person. He must diagnose the medical problem and from this diagnosis to infer the proper medical response. The educator as well should define his actions based on a proper diagnosis. Korczak is dealing with poverty children, children from broken families, and orphaned children/ Life left its bitter imprint in the identity of these children, and it influence their behavior. Dealing with this kind of children, the educator must learn their history, their background, their physical condition, and from the whole picture to rule out his or her response.

In one of his articles about the special education school (January-March, 1925), Korczak gives his readers a 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*".[[146]](#footnote-146) An immanent pedagogy, a pedagogy that is based on observation of reality, not a revelatory message or a sacred text, is the key to the world and the reality of man, including the child. Korczak's advice to the young educators, repeating many times, is to observe their students strictly and learn them. The gained knowledge is not a pure scientific knowledge. The knowledge of the reality of the children obliges the educator to an educational act which is relevant to reality – otherwise he is not an educator, This is a determination of a clear moral stand about reality. Reality has a regulative role.

In his seminal text, *How to Love Children* (1919), Korczak suggests a watchful observation of the life of children at home, in the boarding school, at the summer camp and the orphanage. The secret of success in education is keen observation and patience. Along his call for observation, attentiveness and respect to what is there, Korczak speaks on the French entomologist Jean Henri Fabre who was proud of that in all his studies he never killed even on insect, just watched the insects' life, their fly and behavior. He suggests the educator to relat to the children like Fabre had related to the insects – a scientific explorer.

*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!*[[147]](#footnote-147)

Korczak later text, Rules of Life (1930-1933), is also dedicated to an alert observation in the children's reality in order to get guidance to educational action. "*There are different people in the world: also adults, also young. Different are also the aunts and uncles, and different are the adult guests*",[[148]](#footnote-148) and the differences continue in many aspects of life. Some people are more kind or friendly than others. Each individual deserves our diagnosis and then a different response according to his individuality.

The immanent pedagogy dictates for the educator his way, draws the horizons of his actions, and his educational inspirations. The child is the raw material" and also the work filed of the educator. The educator is demanded to learn what he or she has at hand and how he or she can achieve the best for the child. "*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...".[[149]](#footnote-149)* The overall aim of education is to help the child to flourish, to develop himself and to realize all his potentialities in full, to be maximum himself.

The respect to the child and the pedagogical modesty to which Korczak call, are coming out, on the one hand, from the understanding infinite essence of the educational encounter and on the other hand from the awareness to its limitations. It puts on the educator's shoulders a very heavy burden of responsibility – to cultivate what is there. This work is not a short-term mission, but rather a continuing act, which always entail new discovery and endless struggle with the fullness of life. It relies on patience and the understanding of both the limitations of the educator's knowledge and his very limited ability to change something in reality.

A moral pathos guides Korczak's life, who dedicated himself in total for the sake of the child. This pathos is fed 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?"*[[150]](#footnote-150) Korczak's life is an effort to fill up any moment of life with an act of grace and help to others; those are the actions that give meaning to life, life of truth and purity even during the most difficult tests.

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

To mend the world, means to mend education – this Korczak's optimistic, maybe naïve, saying echoes an ancient Greek optimistic idea that the world is rational in its essence. A rational world is mendable by a rational discourse. A better and deeper understanding of reality and its logic will bring men to a more ethical and healthier

Socrates walked the street of Athens and tried to bring his interlocutors to a better understanding of the ethical ideas, which they use regularly. In his mind, a deeper thinking would bring about a deeper and more thorough and complete ethics, and therefore, a better conduct. Plato, his disciple, brings us the ideas of Socrates and draws his character, speaks about the idea of the Good. If man will leave the darkness of "the cave" in which he is intellectually dwelling, and will look at the Good, he will follow the dictates of the Good. Therefore, the philosopher should lead his ideal sate. The Athenians did not want ethical thinking and therefore, sentenced Socrates to death. Since then Plato's legacy had a huge career in its efforts to bring men to a rational ethics with the hope that they will no longer wish the death of the philosopher.[[151]](#footnote-151)

The idea that knowledge and rationality are the tools to deal with prejudices and superstitions was also at the core of the enlightenment era, which included also the return to the Classic World, the Stoa included. The French philosopher Voltaire said that superstition is the result of ignorance. He strongly believed in the power of rationality as a redeeming force, expressing his confidence that very soon, when people will be more rational, torture will disappear.[[152]](#footnote-152) Korczak is the offspring of this heritage, which celebrated the idea that the remedy to human errors resides in the human ratio. Men's mistakes are coming out from their misunderstanding of their nature. Probably, from this huge trend Korczak draws his optimistic trust in the power of reason, and therefore also education, to mend the consciousness of man.

This trust of the remedial quality of rationality is the guiding force behind the known Korczak's effort to build a children's democracy. Ideas of children's self-guided communities developed in progressive pedagogy even before Korczak. Educationalists started to talk 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 to these pioneering initiatives, but he realized these ideas in his children communities in his own way.[[153]](#footnote-153)

The rational essence of reality in the Stoic pantheistic worldview opens the door to Korczak's trust of education. It is a major assumption about reality in classical philosophy and in Stoic teaching: the Logos permeate the world; the world is logical and men should conduct their life accordingly in a rational way. Rationality is the main road to human happiness and fulfilling life.

Rational people base their lives on a rational discourse among men. Korczak believed – naively one would say – that we can reform the world through the reformation of education,[[154]](#footnote-154) and first through the rational discourse. Because reality in its basis is attainable to rationality, then the rational discourse is the most effective avenue to achieve conflict resolutions among men. Korczak based his educational philosophy and 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.

Korczak has founded the children democratic communities with the hope that they will exist through mutual respect among its citizens, and with the belief that in the children's world, there will be no more segregation and discrimination of Jewish and Christian children, between rich and poor children and the rights of all children will be respected.

Korczak and his education partners, Stefania Wilczynska at Dom Sierot Orphanage and Maryna Falska at Nasz Dom Orphanage, tailored the two children's houses as rational communities, using a system of rational discussion tools to set a community of rational discourse. This principle is the thread that connects all Korczak's children communities' institutions: children parliament, children's court, newspaper, bulletin board, weekend discussion of all the orphanage community, children and staff together, joint literature reading. All of these institutions, which still fascinate educators, offered the children and the staff an opportunity to think and reflect, both on their personal life and on their place in the community. Even the daily-life spaces like the kitchen and the laundry offered opportunity to common exchange of ideas.[[155]](#footnote-155) Korczak believed that through these rational vehicles he enables the children and the staff to solve their joint dilemmas and problems in a rational and positive way.

As Igor Newerly, Korczak's aid for several years, reflected on the Korczak's children democracy, it had also the Polish context. [[156]](#footnote-156) Poland was "walking" its first steps as an independent Poland, after nearly two centuries of foreign occupation. Democracy was something to be learned among adults and children alike. However, the children's communities were not experimental learning spaces for future life. Korczak believed that rational life is a proper way of social being in all ages here and now.

As much as Korczak appreciated democracy, he was realistic - always critical about his own ideas – and he did not overestimated the ability of children for self-governance. Children cannot manage their social life alone – they must have an honest guidance. Korczak's children democracy was a guided democracy and every one of these community tools served first as the community agora, the community space for the community-wide discourse.

The ground floor institution in the orphanage's democracy was the children's parliament. Here the social code of the children home – with the aid of the staff – was structured. The children in both of Korczak's two children houses had their Parliaments to which they elected members, twenty deputies at a time. The child delegates, with the sensitive guidance of adults, regulate the orphanage community life.

*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.*[[157]](#footnote-157)

The parliament was first an educational tool. Nothing is definite, says Korczak – it is an experiment in a democratic community life. Children had to learn to live up to the community social standards in order to take an active part in its political life.

The democratic institutions are a serious matter and Korczak does not hold a romantic and naïve idea of children's democracy and the ability of children to run their own governance institutions. He was neither naïve about the good will of the adults to guide children in their new independence. Korczak did not think that the children could run this kind of institution alone. Korczak's *King Matt the First* (1923) is a story about the failure of children's government; King Matt's reigning did not get a proper guidance – it was betrayed by the adults – and failed. Both children and the adults can abuse power. Children have rights and deserve respect, but part of this respect is the recognition of their limitations and their need for an honest guidance in life. They cannot lead a democracy alone and they deserve the trustful and honest help of their teachers and parents, and the court was such a guiding tool. Governance institutions should be run cautiously, not to overplay it or make it an 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.*[[158]](#footnote-158)

An analysis of the code of laws developed by this parliament shows this cautiousness. When we study the community code, which this parliament adopted, we learn that its laws were very "soft", serving as motivation to good citizenship. . The parliament was an opportunity to discuss the norms of society. Punishment is soft and limited mostly to educational actions. Being put on trial was more important than the punishment put down by the court.

The 'peers' court', the second major institute of self-governing, is one of the educational institutions, which draw worldwide attention to Korczak's children's houses. In spite of its fame, the children's court was an adult guided institution and it was aimed to protect the members of the community from the violence that is present in the day-to-day life of society:

*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.*[[159]](#footnote-159)

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

The parliament and the court were not sufficient to carry on a rational community. Any rational community from ancient Greece needs an Agora – a common space for common discourse. Besides the children's parliament and court, it was the children's newspaper, which served as such a common space. The newspaper was a stage of ongoing community dialogue in which members of the community could participate. The newspaper is meaningful for the children:

*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.[[160]](#footnote-160)*

The newspaper is the place for the children to express their ideas and sound their needs in a respectable way. It is a serious vehicle for community discourse. For Korczak, the spirit of the institution is there, in the newspaper pages. Everything that has to be said among the members of the community its place is there:

*What is the benefit from 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*.[[161]](#footnote-161)

Sharing thoughts and opinions is in the heart of the rational community. When one writes down his thoughts and print it then others can relate to it in a rational and respectful way. Instead of shouting one's opinion, his or her words have to be written down in a clear and respectful way and shared with others who can respond to it. A written opinion is an invitation for a rational dialogue, the key to conflict resolution and decent human relations.

The newspaper is also a basic democracy learning space. Writing down an idea, the expression of an opinion is a basic democratic skill that people have to learn. Reading others' opinions, listening to others, is the other side of the same democratic skill. One has to learn to be an active an efficient participant in a community dialogue.

The newspaper is the common place for the staff of the institution – it is by no mean just a children's "game". It creates a sense of identity for the boarding school. The community is actually built of individuals, though the shared space enables 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 pape 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.*[[162]](#footnote-162)

The newspaper is the community agora where ideas are exchanged, the narrative of the institution is recorded and the collective wisdom is collected and developed. One cannot see a community – it is not an object – but one can experience it through the shared writings. The newspaper is the milieu in which the community spirit develops.

For Korczak, the community's identity is a spoken, written and read, identity. It is a unique fusion of Korczak's classic ideas and elements from the Jewish world. We already said that Korczak's Jewish roots were weak, though the importance he gives to the newspaper as a community center corresponds with cultural developments among intellectual Jewish circles in Europe in the Twentieth Century, where and when the newspaper replaced the yard of the synagogue as the common space of modernized Jewish circles. In the first half of the Twentieth Century, we witness an unprecedented flourish of Jewish journalism, which was for modernized Jews, who less and less came 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, a supplement to an adult newspaper in Polish, *Nasz* *Przegląd,* creating a community of readers and writers around it. The community of *Mały Przegląd* (1926-1939), his children's Jewish Polish newspaper, reached beyond the borders of Poland and gained readers and correspondents even in the Land of Israel – creating a cross-border community of children and educators - until it violently seased to exist in September 1939. Korczak strongly advocated that every school would have a newspaper that will weave together the life experiences of the institution into a unified life story with identity and meaning. In his vision, one-day student teachers will learn educational journalism as part of their professional studies.

* 1. ***Who is Korczak? The Educator of Life and Death***

Who is Korczak? What is the image that we draw about Korczak as an educator and a philosopher of education? What is the educational legacy that Korczak leaves behind?

Out of the darkness of World War II, we draw the personality of an outstanding educator. The study of Korczak's story, from the last tragic chapter of his life and backwards, teaches us Korczak was all his life a person of struggle. When death became an unavoidable reality, it was Marcus Aurelius and his Stoic ideas a source of strength. The thoughts of the Roman Stoic helped him to find his own response to the reality of a dying ghetto. To Marcus Aurelius' book Meditations he turned to find a spiritual aid. In front of the certainty of death, the Stoic idea of death, took from it its horror. With death one has to struggle in a rational way, and in the end, when one cannot win it, one has to accept it. Death is part of life.

Stoicism, which helped him in the last chapter of his life, was also a guiding force in his philosophical worldview and in his pedagogy. When Polishness was not providing Korczak a full identity and full belonging, and when Jewishness was already a far and fading away reality, it was Stoicism, which provided an infinite rational cosmos in which one could find his or her place.

Korczak's world is important not only because of his educational insights but also because of the historical context of his legacy. The history of the Twentieth century can lead to despair - Korczak gives us a different possibility of a better humanity. Instead of a world of poverty, menace, and humiliation, men can weave a world of mutual respect, justice and faith. Korczak gives us an all humanity vision, Messianic in its essence, of a kingdom of respect and dignity to all, children and adults, Jews and non-Jews alike. In a world divided by ages, social status, faiths, ethnicities and local patriotism, Korczak offers a monistic utopian worldview of all human solidarity. A 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. Korczak's educational work has a philosophical ordering principle, inspired by Hellenistic philosophies as well as ideas taken from modern social pedagogy. In a context of a Judeo-Christian culture, which holds a theistic model of reality that transcends God from the world, Korczak relied on a pantheistic immanent worldview derived from Stoic philosophy. Nature is everything and there is nothing beyond it. God is Nature or Nature's soul.

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 is a very serious mission, though a very difficult one.

The educator has to realize the context of his work and admit his or her limited knowledge – "*I know that I do not know*". Here – at the genuine "I don't know" - starts real education. The "I don't know" holds intellectual modesty, on the one hand, and a great challenge of ever learning, on the other.

Education is about the present; the educator is responsible for the present life of the child. Childhood, the present of children, deserves our respect. Childhood is not a tool or a corridor to the real life of adulthood, but 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 it being fulfilled.

What can be achieved in education? Education derives its possibilities from present reality. Korczak's immanent pedagogy makes the present reality the source and the guide of our educational practice – not what it ought to be but what is possible.

Education should be rational and therefore it demands – like in ancient Greece - an 'educational agora' were 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 educationalists like Froebel or Pestalozzi but also as a modern Stoic. There is a thread of logic that connects all his inspiring ideas.

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

Children have rights – this is a major claim in Korczak's legacy, yet what is the philosophical basis for such a claim. Why children have their rights? We claim that children have rights, but what does it mean? Of course, people love their children and usually dedicate their time and resources to their welfare, and yet the challenge is not to define what we give but what children's rights are regardless of our own feelings? Are the child's rights something more than the adults' good heart grace? How can we substantiate this claim and where we can find the proper words for the demand of children's rights?

In Our efforts to give children their rights, we look for the philosophy that will secure Children's rights in our social discourse and in our Civic Education programs (Gaudelli, & Fernekes 2004; Starkey 2012; Starkey & Osler 2006; 2010, Tibbits, 1996).

We deal with children rights because children are a week part of society. They have no political power nor property, and they depend on the adults in all aspects of their lives. Throughout human history, children suffered injustice. Their life was not important. Their voice was unheard. In many parts of our world children are still, at the beginning of the twenty first century, victims of violence, war crimes, sexual abuse, hard labor, lack of proper education, minimal health care and insufficient life conditions. The emancipation of children remains a challenge to the society of Men.

Where can we find the proper words for the demand of children rights? Janusz Korczak's legacy inspires generations of educators all over the world – maybe it can be the "Archimedean Stand" to move the world to foster children's rights, and to promote a global children's rights discourse (Eichsteller 2009: 377-391; Lewowicki, 1994; Perlis, 1980; Shner, 2012, and others).

* 1. ***An unfulfilled promise***

The idea that children have rights – unconditional rights that are part of their human dignity – is a modern phenomenon. In collective, traditional societies, children had and still have no legal status; they were and they are 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. In his or her childhood years, the person of the future is prepared to enter the community as an effective and obedient part of the adult society. If the child accepts upon himself the duties and practices of the community, then his or her parents fulfilled their traditional duties and gave him or her proper education.

During these prefatory years, children are weak, dependent, unprotected and therefore quite often been abused by adults. Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist (1837-9) is the classical literary account of this reality. Dickens' novel represented in his time a new awareness of this situation and the beginning of a movement towards the emancipation of children.

In the twentieth century, it was already widely recognized that children deserve rights. In 1924, the League of Nations had adopted***the Declaration of the Right of the Child***. It was the first international declaration of its kind and yet it was still just a principal call, a recommendation, with no real enforcement power (Van Bueren, 1998, 6-9). Korczak, who inspired the writing of this declaration, has identified it as such. "*(...) 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*".[[163]](#footnote-163)

Weak as this charter was, it was the first step in the long human struggle for children's rights. In 1948, the newborn **United Nations** accepted its own declaration of Universal Human Rights, referring to all human beings, without a specific reference to children, and in 1959, it accepted an extended version of the League of Nations Declaration of children's rights. Only as late as 1989, the United Nations General Assembly had accepted its own resilient declaration, ***the Convention of the Right of the Child*** (General Assembly resolution 44/25, New York, November 1989). It came into force in September 1990.[[164]](#footnote-164)

Unfortunately, in spite of these international assertions, even in the 21st century and all over the world, children are still abused and their basic human rights are harmed.[[165]](#footnote-165) We can identify a few major aspects of this troubling reality:

* *War crimes*: children in areas of violent conflicts suffer from war conditions. Many fall victims to warfare activities against the civilian population. In many places, they are even used as part of the military operations as child soldiers (Amnesty International, 2000; Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2013).

Recently, the world has witnessed the unstopped killing of thousands of children in Syria.

* *Poverty:* poverty is one of the major causes of children do not get their basic human rights as food, clothing, proper home, and proper education. In many parts of the "Third World" and in poor sections of the developed world children are still suffering from malnutrition, lack of clean water and proper medical care.
* *Hard Labor*: the developed world enjoys the cheap products of the hard labor of children in the undeveloped countries in the fields, "sweat shops", and factories (Hanson & Vandaele 2003; The Machel Report 2010; Myers 2001).
* *No education*: Children do not have access to proper schooling if from poor physical conditions or because of traditions that limit their access to education and first of all girls. The inspiring story of Malala Yousafzai (<https://www.malala.org/malalas-story>), the Pakistani girl who risked her life for the sake of equal education to all children, girls included, shows this twenty-first-century reality.
* *Sexual abuse*: children are victims of sexual abuse and sometimes serve as sexual slaves. Even in the developed world, many children, mostly girls, suffer from sexual abuse in their family and community (Karp 2007). Even in our time, millions of girls in traditional societies are victim to the custom of female genital mutilation.
* *Improper welfare conditions***:** many children do not have access to proper medical treatment, vaccinations and preventing processes, we have in the developed world and even lack of clean water.
* *Violence in the family and the community*: children, in all part of the world, fall victims to violence within their immediate social circle, beatings, bullying, and neglect. In hospitals, one can see much too often children who suffer violence at home and their community or were injured at home because of insufficient care. Children from broken families find themselves in the street, and the "street culture" becomes their world. [[166]](#footnote-166)

Bullying at schools as well as in social media is a common case of "soft" violence, which is painful, harmful, and sometimes lead to tragic consequences.[[167]](#footnote-167)

* *Refugee Children*: recently the world knows waves of refugees in Africa and the Mediterranean, the results of interreligious conflicts and civil wars. Populations in undeveloped countries suffer also from natural disasters, epidemics, droughts, and earthquakes. The children are the first victims. In Western countries, Israel (the author's home state) included, there is a growing population of illegal immigrants and political refugees. Beyond the political debate about their legal status, lies the reality of children in this population. They are often denied the basic rights of all children: shelter, food, healthcare, education and political security.[[168]](#footnote-168)

The UN Declaration and followings steps of state governments and civic organizations try to tackle all these issues of children's rights abuse, and yet there is still a troubling gap between international declarations and the reality of children all over the world. Why there is such a gap? This a challenge that we all have to face.[[169]](#footnote-169)

* 1. ***Respect of the Child***

Most people know only the last chapter of Janusz Korczak's life: two years with his Jewish Krochmalna Street orphanage in the dying Warsaw ghetto, leading it as an island of love and care, a Sisyphean task to keep the children's community alive, providing the children shelter, food, clothing and even provisional schooling. Korczak entered our collective knowledge as a Holocaust martyr. However, when we go beyond the dark curtain of the Holocaust, we encounter a world-known campaigner of the child's emancipation.

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

Korczak follows a long philosophical tradition of immanence from the Hellenistic and Roman Stoicism. There is no transcendent anchor to our reality – everything is immanent to the only one reality, i.e. nature. The human being is part of infinite nature and nature, not a transcendental God, is the source and context of human existence. Nature, and not a divine revelation, is, therefore, the source of human ethics**.** Korczak worships nature: "*Haven't I the right to be a disinterested worshiper of nature, to watch the shrub become green*."[[171]](#footnote-171)

Such an axiom has far-reaching conclusions also for education and the status of children. From the perspective of spatial infinity, there is no "small" or "big". Every part of nature has an ultimate value. Every creature has its place in reality. From the perspective of the infinity of time, eternity, there is no "old" or "young" and each age has the same worth. Therefore, the "small" and "young" child deserves our respect. Respect of the child and his or her world is a central pillar in Korczak's worldview. If childhood has the same worth as any other stages of life, then it deserves our attention and respect. It also grounds Korczak's claim for children's rights.

In numerous places in his writings, Korczak tries to change the common attitude that childhood is just a prefatory stage for the real life in maturity:

*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.*[[172]](#footnote-172)

Childhood years are not a corridor to the real life. They are life, here and now. We should not waste them for the sake of a vague future. Eternity gives a different perspective to our evaluation of age. Childhood years, like any other stage of life, deserve our respect.

Ultimate worth does not mean, as in common misconception of Korczak, that children and adults are equal in their abilities. Children are new into this world and have less knowledge, experience, and power. Too often, power relations turn into disrespect of the weak and abuse of the children's basic rights as human beings. We have to respect who they are, not what, in our endless expectations, they should 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 belonging 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*.[[173]](#footnote-173)

Respect for the world of the child is respect for the young and passing moments of life. It is respect for the youth. In traditional adults' society, people respect the sternness of old people. Korczak calls for respect of the young moments of a child's life with its naivety. *"Let us demand respect for the clear eyes, smooth foreheads, youthful effort and confidence."[[174]](#footnote-174)*

Respect of childhood years is respect for the present moment. We live in the present. The past is over and the future is still a non-existence. If we respect life, we respect the present of life, any year, any day, any moment of it, "*Respect for the present moment, for today*".[[175]](#footnote-175)

Korczak's understanding that every spark of life, young or old, is part of eternity changes the whole understanding of the role of childhood in human life. Childhood is important, but not as a prefatory stage for future years. It is important because it is life and any life deserves dignity. A few of Korczak's most poetic texts express this idea, which is strange to the ethos of modern industrial society, which sees the childhood years' efforts 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.*[[176]](#footnote-176)

This industrial-capitalist ethos of investment in the future, is immoral and irrational, as we never know the future. We cannot program life like an industrial process. Quoting Louis Pasteur, the famous French Scientist, he says, "*When I approach a child, I have two feelings. Affection for what he is today and respect for what he can become*."[[177]](#footnote-177) We have to respect the presence of life and we never know – it is always a wonder – what it will be.

We try to govern the endless flow of life, but moments of life are not objects that render themselves to our control. Paraphrasing the insight of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus about the ever-flowing river, Korczak tells us that Life is an ever-flowing chain of singular moments; each one different and each one has an 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. [[178]](#footnote-178)*

Any spark of life deserves our respect, any being, any moment and any tiny life experiences of the child. When Korczak tries to understand the child and gives him what he or she deserves, he turns to these two perspectives of infinity and eternity. Life deserves dignity and respect because life is infinite in its very essence. One may say that life is holy because it is infinite in its manifestations.

The idea that life deserves our respect is the very foundation of human rights. It leads Korczak to claim that children have rights, rights that are inseparable from their human dignity.

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

Respect and rights go together. Respect of childhood leads to the idea of "the right of the child". Disrespect to the childhood leads to disrespect of children and the abuse of their basic rights. If childhood is not a mere corridor to life, but an equal stage in human life that deserves our respect, then children have rights. Rights are not a gratuity that adults give children out of their gracious over power; Children's rights derive from the recognition that childhood has its immanent worth. The practicalities of these rights come next.

In historical perspective, Korczak is a link in the chain of educationalists, social philosophers, and political leaders who fought for the emancipation of children in modern times, "*I call for the Magna Carta of children's rights* [...]".[[179]](#footnote-179) It is this call for the child's emancipation, which made Korczak one of the authors of the League of Nations' Declaration of the Right of the Child, Geneva 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.[[180]](#footnote-180)*

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 fulfill 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*."[[181]](#footnote-181) 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. "*Naively, we are afraid of death; forgetful that life is a procession of dying and reborn moments"*.[[182]](#footnote-182)When death approaches us, naturally, by illness or war, we have to accept it with Stoic "Apathea".

There is another Stoic element in the text, which may explain this assertion, an idea that may be more problematic for the modern mind. This is the idea that living beings, including a human being, may have different length of life. This is what nature allotted them and one has to accept it 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.[[183]](#footnote-183)*

The pediatrician in Korczak's identity is present here; as a doctor, he knows that sometimes life ends sooner than we hope, and sometimes, even children die. The text brings together the Stoic idea of "Apathea" and the Stoic idea of "pietas". According to the value of pietas, one has to try with all his might to heal sick people, but if one cannot accept the natural fact of death, he or she will not 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 know somewhere in their mind – of unexpected death. If we cannot overcome this fear, we will not be able to take the risk of having children. Moreover, if we have children, we will not allow them to live.

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".[[184]](#footnote-184) However, the idea that one has to overcome the fear of death return in Korczak's writings in the ghetto reality as well. 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 maybe 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 for life, and yet they have to accept the reality that people die and deal with it with dignity.

The right of the child to live his or her own life gets in Korczak's discourse a broad spectrum of human rights. Fair education is one of the most important ones. Education can change the person's life. While the physician fights illness and death and grants the child with 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".[[185]](#footnote-185) In the background, one may hear the words of Socrates who said that while his mother, a midwife, gave birth to the bodies he, the teacher, gave birth to the souls.

The right of life, growth, and self-fulfilment, got many aspects in Korczak's teaching.

*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*.[[186]](#footnote-186)

The child's emancipation in Korczak thought has a reference to democracy and democratic discourse in society. The child should have the right to express his wills in matters of his or her 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 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.[[187]](#footnote-187)*

This idea is the basis of Korczak's children community democracy, he has implemented in his two orphanages. The child cannot run his life alone, but he or she should have a say in it.

* 1. ***Korczak's Children Democracy – the Social Realization of Children's Rights***

Korczak is known for the children democracy, which he established in his orphanages. These children democracies were not a pedagogical game, nor a lesson for future citizens of the state. They had its internal value as the essential milieu for the realization of children's rights.

Korczak was not the first educationalist to try children's self-government. At the beginning of the twentieth century, before World War I, numerous pedagogical experiments in the West were moving in the direction of the liberating youthful initiative, self-reliance and responsible participation of young people in their own common life. Korczak took over the progressive pedagogical concepts of his age and realized them in a new way and created and organized, in both of his two institutions, a tightly structured, democratic children's society. It applies to all members of the orphanage community of all ages and social statuses.

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

Law and order, if it is not arbitrary, foster human rights. Respect for the child's world does not apply the freedom of violence or abuse of others' rights.[[188]](#footnote-188) Freedom is not chaos. Children have the right of getting protection from the aggressiveness of others. Korczak's children's houses were very organized and run according to strict regulations, far away from today's free education schools, though it was not arbitrary regulations aimed in favor of all the members of the community. Korczak and his partners, Stefa Wilczynska and Maryna Palska, understood that if they want to foster human dignity and the children's rights, they should structure the orphanage in a rational and democratic way as far as the children can handle it.

The children's community institutions aimed to protect children's rights, like the respect of their tiny properties. "*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*".[[189]](#footnote-189) It is easy to dismiss the loss of a child's property, but one has to respect what is for him a valuable belonging. A theft is a crime in any age.

Korczak was not naïve about the character of children. Children, like adults, are not perfect. The child has the right to be a child and not a perfect and righteous person. Therefore, there is law and order in the daily life of the orphanage, but also modesty and forgiveness to the weaknesses of any human being.[[190]](#footnote-190)

The orphanage children had different degrees of citizenship, depending on the assessment of their colleagues as to 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 together with the fulfillment of the community obligations.

The ground floor institution in the orphanage's democracy was the children's parliament. The children in both of Korczak's two children houses, the Krochmalna Street orphanage, and Our Home orphanage had their Parliament to which they elected members, twenty deputies in a time. The child delegates, with the sensitive guidance of adults, regulate the orphanage community life.

*(…) 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.*[[191]](#footnote-191)

The democratic institutions were a serious matter. As Korczak showed in his novel King Matt the First, both children and the adults can abuse power. Governance institutions should be run cautiously. An analysis of the code of laws developed by this parliament shows this cautiousness. Punishment is soft and limited mostly to educational actions.

The children's community tried to enforce its law and order by its court to which all members of the community, including the faculty, were accountable. "*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*"[....].[[192]](#footnote-192)

The orphanage's rules applied 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".[[193]](#footnote-193) Korczak proudly says that twice children sued him because they thought that he offended their rights.

The submission of the staff to the court jurisdiction may look strange, but it directly derived from the idea that children have rights, which are unconditioned by the good will of the adults. The laws aim to protect the individual from the aggression of others and secure his or her basic rights. In the orphanages, it aimed also to put limits to the possible abuse of power by the adults over children.

The court was a dynamic institution, which regulated the daily life of the children's community. It met about once a week. The judges – five each time – were selected by drawing lots among the children who during the past week have had no accusation against them. One of them was a teacher who guided the proceedings of the court. Every fifty cases a new set of judges were selected.[[194]](#footnote-194)

Korczak strongly believed in an exchange of thought and in rational discourse. Influenced by Greek philosophy, he believed that disputes are the result of misunderstandings. The parliament, like the court, were more spaces of joint discussions and learning through discussions rather than institutions of legislation and ruling. They served as the community "agora", which enabled a broad participation of children in the community political life.

Another common space was the orphanage's newspaper, which served as a platform for an exchange of ideas, and regular "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[…].*[[195]](#footnote-195)

The newspaper is the community meeting place, its common memory, and its navigation tool. It maps the everyday life of the community, turns it into the community's history and its identity. In a community with a recognized identity and a common path, life is not arbitrary and human rights preserved.

When we go behind the various inspiring policies that Korczak implemented in his children's communities, we identify not an arbitrary amalgam of wonderful practices, but rather a meaningful philosophical paradigm, which gives context to all of these ideas.

The Stoic infinity is the existential context of the human being and the ordering principle of Korczak's education philosophy. In this worldview, the small and the young deserve respect as any other human being. Children have dignity as any other human being. They deserve our respect to their world, their limitations, and their dreams for the future.

Dignity and respect imply rights. Disrespect makes any claim of rights groundless. Children have rights that are not the gracious adults' gesture of good will. They have the right to live their life in full and get their basic human rights fulfilled.

In his two orphanages, Korczak tried to lead children democratic communities that make respect for children and the protection of their rights a reality. Indeed, it was a utopia. Korczak and the entire Jewish orphanage were murdered. Nonetheless, his advocacy for children's rights remains written in gold letters on our walls.

Even today, in the twenty first century, children's rights all over the world are abused. In war zones, in poverty sections of society and even in the close circle of the family, children suffer from violence, neglect, and insufficient life conditions. Korczak's legacy calls for our attention and cares for their plight. It provides children's rights defenders with the proper lexicon for their social mission.

1. **Between Two Worlds**
   1. ***Who is Korczak: a Jew, a Pole, both or none?***

Polish or Jewish? The question of Korczak's identity occupied the thoughts of a few scholars who want to understand the context of his work and to define his place in the map of the history of education. Those who see themselves as disciples of his legacy were claiming him as their own.[[196]](#footnote-196) In Polish perspective, Korczak is a representative of the best of Polish society and Polish educational thought and practice, a source of pride and inspiration for Polish educators today. Jewish thinkers, Korczak's disciples, and others want to describe him as one of many outstanding Jewish personalities of the modern era like Sigmund Freud or Albert Einstein, an inspiring, though tragic, outcome of Jewish life in Europe. One may offer a different understanding of Korczak as well as many other Jewish intellectuals in modernity: he failed to be at home on both sides, Polish or Jewish.

This study will not represent new historical data about Korczak's identity. We cannot divulge a secret document proving that Friday night candles were lit in his parents' home or other facts of this sort – there does not appear to be such an evidence. The rereading of data collected thus far by Korczak's historians may enable us to construct a new interpretation of his identity and the place education served in his life.

Much has already been written about the dual national affiliation of Korczak and having his roots in Polish culture along with his Jewish identity. One claims that his dedication to the sake of children is the fruition of a basic idea in the Jewish tradition of looking after and caring for fellow man, a Jewish idea being alive – as it would be claimed – in Korczak's heart even without his being aware of it. Further proof given to Korczak's Jewishness that always existed – as it's been argued – is his joining, by himself, the long tradition of Jewish martyrdom: "Kiddush Hashem" (sanctification of God's name). In this perspective, the last chapter of his life defines and gives meaning to his entire life work, but such a line of argumentation is problematic. In his work, Korczak sanctified life, not death, and he did so not in Jewish terminology. In his diary – his most reflective text – as well as other writing he hardly explained his educational mission in Jewish terms.

A better reading of Korczak is given by those who emphasize Korczak's double identity. Miriam Sharshavsky in her thorough and elaborated work *Two Homelands* (1990), adopted a more sophisticated, and therefore probably a more accurate reading of Korczak, emphasizes Korczak double identity and the complication of the human situation that his character represents, being torn between his connection to Polish-ness and his undeniable link to the Jewish people.

We follow these footsteps, though give the known data a different interpretation, arguing that the core of Korczak's identity lies, not in his belonging to a certain social circle, or in his belonging – as Sharshavsky claims – to two identities, but in his not belonging to any nationality and 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 Goldschmidt's life. This very characteristic of Korczak's life defines his Jewish identity and motivated his educational pathos. Korczak is a tragic hero, not only for his death but also in the impossible situation of homelessness and lack of any identity that characterized his entire life. Korczak resembles a Greece tragic hero rather than a Biblical figure. His inspiring dream remained unfulfilled and what all know is his last journey to Treblinka.

George Steiner, a contemporary thinker, and literary researcher, describes modern Jewish identity as based on detachment and homelessness.[[197]](#footnote-197) It is the fate of the modern Jew to be the lonely stranger, but this is also what defines his identity. The destiny of the Jew, as difficult as it is, is to be the eternal guest. Only trees claims Steiner, not people, grow roots in the ground. 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 other homes*".[[198]](#footnote-198) The total loyalty of the Jew is given to human dignity, the "image of God" in Man, and to the struggle against nationalism and fascism in all its forms and facets. Worship of land or state is idolatry; only human dignity deserves our full attention. Korczak is a good example of this kind of identity.

Dealing with modern Jewish identity, we realize that the identity of the Jew in the Twentieth century is often molded not by a specific cultural content, but rather through the lack of any specific cultural content, through a detachment, confusion and a desperate search for spiritual meaning in life. After hundreds of years of secularization and efforts to get emancipated in the European society, Jewish identity in the middle of the Twentieth century is a fractured one with little self-confidence. In the pre-emancipation period, the world of rabbinic tradition was a kind of a portable home for the Jewish person. This "being at home" collapsed in modernity.

Jewish emancipation in modern Europe was built on the nurturing of the Jewish dream of becoming integrated with the surrounding non-Jewish society. We could find, among liberal Jewish circles, an ideology of assimilation and integration into a kind of one universal Family of Man, rationalizing in different ways the abandonment of what remains of the traditional Jewish world. Towards the end of the Nineteenth Century, this struggle for equality and integration reached the stage of impasse; the modernized Jew was left displaced and alienated both from his previous being and from the Gentile-like image, which he tried to wear.

Korczak's life symbolizes best this tragic reality of a generation of Jewish intellectuals that were caught between sky and earth, while the nucleus of their being is being torn and bereft of all illusion of emancipation, on the one hand, distanced and alienated from the Jewish world, on the other. 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 has no choice*".[[199]](#footnote-199) Jewish identity becomes an exterritorial border zone, which the Jewish person cannot leave if he or she remains loyal to itself. Amery argues that it is the experience of a whole generation of Jews, probably "*numbering into millions*".[[200]](#footnote-200) Korczak is one of them.

Korczak – turn between two worlds – hoped all his life that his work for the children will build the longed-for bridge between Jews and Non-Jews. The modern Jew – since the days of Moses Mendelsohn in 18th century Berlin – misled himself into thinking that dual identity is possible. The tragic and heroic story of Korczak is a painful witness of the crumbling of this naïve vision in the middle of the Twentieth century. The Polish society who hugs Korczak in the 21st century pushed him outside, then, in the thirties of the previous century. Korczak spoke about the education and children's rights in universal terms and hoped that the cause of the child will bring all humanity together, but his two children's houses, one for Jewish Polish children and one for Christian Polish children, remained separate until the end, and the Polish society of those days refused the Korczakean universal paradigm. I would not dare say these things had they not been said both by Korczak himself. Korczak admits in honesty, the failure of his life's work, and the impasse at which he arrived. In Poland, he said bitterly in those last years of Polish independence, he is an object devoid of value and in Israel, he would be impotent and lacking any importance.

Dov Sadan, a Korczak scholar, said the following words with sensitiveness and empathy:

*[…] 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.[[201]](#footnote-201)*

The core of Korczak's identity was his stand in the middle with deep feelings of not belonging, perhaps of an insult.

At this point in his life stands his attempt – a somewhat pathetic one – to solve this divide with the building of an ideal home for children which will bypass the old boundaries of the European society. We should understand his educational life's work, being completely dedicated to the child, as a creative attempt to build for himself and his generation a world in which he could be a full and undoubted citizen. Like the Esperanto for Ludwig Zamenhof, the psychoanalysis for Sigmund Freud, Economy for Carl Marx, spiritual life for Franz Rosenzweig, humanism for George Steiner and art and music for many modern era Jewish artists, Korczak hoped that education will be the milieu that will solve the long history of Jewish loneliness and humiliation. His legacy ended in Treblinka and it 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 versed in Polish culture and Polish-ness was the milieu in which he created. When Korczak tells the story of his life in the application letter to the Jewish council in the Warsaw ghetto in which he asks the position of a director in a second orphanage, he draws a picture of a Polish intellectual and public figure, deeply steeped in the Polish culture and society.[[202]](#footnote-202)

Years earlier when picking a pseudonym for a literary contest, a name, which later became his identity, he chose a figure from the Polish national heritage.[[203]](#footnote-203) It is not a marginal biographical detail that the literary Polish mask became his permanent name. Only in the days of the ghetto, Korczak will again sign his papers as "Korczak-Goldschmidt". Did Korczak-Goldschmidt choose this Polish pseudonym as his name for life because he felt the need to be more Polish than the Poles, because, somehow, somewhere he is also a Jew? His identification with the Polish name probably reveals an apologetic element deep in his personality. We may assume that a "genuine" Pole is free of this extra effort. Later, when being Polish is no more possible Korczak discovers he cannot do without it. The mask became 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.[[204]](#footnote-204) Marshal Pilsudski, the leader of post-WWI new Poland was an exemplary persona for Korczak. During the first weeks of the Nazi occupation, Korczak endangered himself with the pathetic gesture of Polish patriotism walking around in a Polish officer's uniform. He was sent to the "Paviak", the notorious Gestapo prison, but he remained true to his identity as a Polish patriot. Reports on the record about Korczak at the beginning of the war and during the first days of the German occupation show a period of revival in his life, almost happiness. He felt that he belongs and important again. Korczak enthusiastically lived his being part of the Polish nation. Therefore, it was doubly painful that the Polish society, and later in the German occupation, refused to recognize his identity and identification.

In his early diary, "The Confession of a Butterfly" (1914), he writes, "*I love Poland with such might that I am ready to sacrifice everything for it*".[[205]](#footnote-205) Later in the diary, he expresses his deep love for the river "gray Vistula" (Korczak 1999, 189).

In his ghetto diary (1942), we find the following statement about his identity: "*Warsaw is mine and I am Warsaw*".[[206]](#footnote-206) He belongs to Warsaw; he rejoices and grieves with the city. However, this kind of declaration of loyalty superfluous to a "genuine" Polish person. Only an outsider, a Jewish Pole, feels the need to declare his belonging.

For years, Korczak fought to be allowed to educate Polish Christian children along the Jewish children, and this opportunity was given to him by Maryna Falska in 1919 when he founded with her the "Our Home" ("Nash Dom") orphanage. Korczak made a conscious and deliberate effort to be known as a Polish persona, to gain the legitimacy of being a Pole. However, in spite of being a Polish patriot, Poland in its first years of independence exposes us to a sad and skeptic Korczak with the images of the war crouched in his heart. His ever-increasing concentration on education, first in the Korchmalna orphanage and then in "Our Home", in Proshkov, is of itself an estrangement from the world of the adults while centering on the world of children. The adult world placed Korczak in an existential dilemma of which his educational work allowed to escape – so it seems – for several years.

Without a doubt, Korczak is the product of the Polish society with all that is good and noble in it, and all efforts of contemporary Korczak scholars to cover up this fact are apologetic and superficial, but that as it may, even when Korczak is a Pole he is a "Jewish Pole", even before he identifies himself as such. His "Polishness" is just short of being automatic.[[207]](#footnote-207) His belonging is not immediate, and it demands constant legitimation. It is not a simple "Polishness", alive, in the sense of a milieu of fruitful creativity of which the creator is not aware of its existence, but a heart's desire and belief that with good will and dedication one may achieve this privileged belonging.

Korczak interest in the poor and in social justice, which was first expressed in his continuing story of 1900, "Children of the Street" (*Dzieci ulicy*, Warsaw 1901) and its sequel "The Salon Children" (*Dziecko salonu*, Warsaw 1906), was part of the social unrest in Poland in the beginning of the Twentieth Century and the social discourse among the Polish intelligentsia in general and the Jewish intelligentsia in particular who felt that social activism is their way of being accepted into the non-Jewish society. The social struggle created a social and ethical milieu, which gave the Jews a sense of belonging and meaning as Polish citizens. Korczak's ever-increasing involvement in the radical left has been only one of concern and involvement in the Polish society and at the same time is so typical of a Jewish intellectual who wants to belong by altruism and through the negation of the Jewish elements in his identity.[[208]](#footnote-208)

The twenties of the Twentieth century were for Korczak years of stable and fruitful educational labor in which he appeared to realize his universal vision. However, this educational activity demanded a certain amount of blindsight to the anti-Semitism, which was present around him at that time. He wanted to see anti-Semitism as a moral fault in the Polish society, a passing illness, to be repaired through education and good will and not necessarily a national Jewish problem, which was his as a Jew.[[209]](#footnote-209) This too, one can claim, a repression, typical to Jewish intellectuals who hold fast to their utopian Universalism. Korczak never ceased to hang on to encouraging signs and only the thirties and the forties brought the crumbling of the sweet illusion of cosmopolitan human existence in Poland.[[210]](#footnote-210)

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

There is no doubt that Korczak felt a certain solidarity with the Jews, however, he was not familiar with the intensive life of the Jews in the largest Jewish diaspora, its culture, and language. He did not share the life of the large Jewish population in Warsaw; he looked at it from the outside. He knew his origins but it did not become a crucial factor in his life until the thirties of the century.

Korczak came from a well-to-do home, where he received a genuinely Polish upper middle-class upbringing, almost entirely devoid of any scrap of Jewish culture or education. Perhaps, he could understand a bit of Yiddish, the language of the Jewish masses, but he could not speak it, and certainly not write it.[[211]](#footnote-211)

Korczak pale Jewish identity is a typical Jewish identity of that time. The story of Korczak's family is the story of the larger Jewish community, even more so in central and western Europe, which continued to move towards its non-Jewish surroundings, losing its characteristics of traditional Jewish life. With Korczak, the authentic traditional Jewish home is already beyond the horizons of his personal memory – he is familiar with the family genealogy, but he was distanced from its culture:[[212]](#footnote-212) Korczak's great-grandfather was a religious person who kept a traditional way of life, pedantically returning home from his work as a glazier for the Sabbath. The grandfather, after whom Korczak was named, was a Hebrew intellectual and a medical doctor by profession. The father, a Lawyer involved in Polish society, works for the expansion of Judaic studies in the Polish language. His children were given Christian names. Korczak, Henryk Goldschmidt, has already grown up in the Polish atmosphere of an assimilated family.

The assimilated Jew in Europe had a dream, which he strove to realize all his life – to be as everyone else, integrated into the general society, known in his profession, similar to his way of life. This dream was destined to be shattered time and time again.

Korczak scholars debated about his Jewish and Polish identities. While in Polish circles Korczak is celebrated as a Polish hero, a few Jewish scholars wanted to establish his Jewish identity. They saw in Korczak's descriptions of his ancestors the evidence of the strong ties he had with his people and heritage,[[213]](#footnote-213) but it is evident that Korczak wrote these words in old age, when the reality of anti-Judaism had already broken his dreams of a pluralistic Poland. Furthermore, the family narrative, which he offers in his ghetto diary, is a story of growing detachment between Jews and their traditions. Korczak is aware of this growing gap, common among so many Jews around him. This description of his multi-generational family story, warm as it is, does not appear in any of Korczak's open publications, only in a private concealed text. When we explore the public sphere, we can hardly find in Korczak's publications the fact that he was Jewish. These were concealed thoughts and feelings of the heart until the last days of his life.

Historically, when does a Jew understand that he is not a Pole? There is a known moment in the life of an assimilated Jew, in which he understands that he is still different, that he is not "real" Polish, Russian or German. Sharshevsky brings the words of Alexander Hertz, Korczak's peer, on the negation of his self-image as a Pole upon entering high school.[[214]](#footnote-214) 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, an inferior human being, something he was not paying attention to. Korczak, in his diary, tells of the day that the gatekeeper's son threw his Jewishness at him, which means his 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.*"[[215]](#footnote-215)

It would appear, on the face of it, as a childhood story, but in a retrospect, it is full of meaning for old Korczak: for the first time society makes him aware of his Jewish being, different, of seeming lesser value and a basic non-belonging.

When in my academic teaching I listen to the stories of young people who came from different parts of the former Soviet Union, and their experience as Jews, many of them tell about similar experiences. They grew up without Jewish upbringing and their being Jewish was of no importance in their lives until society, though some act, made them aware of their error. Sometimes it happened at school, sometimes on the street or at the home of a non-Jewish friend. In each case, the incident changed their self-awareness and brought home the fact that they were different.

Korczak met the Jewish question and Zionism relatively early while studying medicine in Warsaw.[[216]](#footnote-216) His articles about poor Jewish children, which were published anonymously in the pages of the "Israelita" in 1904 show his involvement in the Jewish question. The articles in itself show Korczak's concern about this social problem; his having written anonymously the articles, shows, perhaps, the attempt to hide this fact. In 1906, Korczak meets Jewish children in a summer camp. It is clear that Korczak is aware of the Jewish problem in general and to his Jewish roots in particular, but his life shows his ongoing attempt to find his niche in the Polish society and its culture. Korczak was aware of the complications being Jewish imposed upon him. When he speaks of his painful personal decision not to have children, the reason he gives is his being a Polish Jew.[[217]](#footnote-217)

His appeal to the Jewish children in the summer camp, to the sick and the orphaned, does not stem from national solidarity nor Jewish ethos, but rather from noble ideas of love of man in general and his dedication to the people, which Korczak developed in his youth as part of that radical socialistic activity in the general Polish society. He expresses a kind of dual altruism: a Jew voids his national existence in favor of the struggle for Polish society and then, with the same willingness and sensitivity, goes back and extends a helping hand particularly to the Jewish child.

Korczak wanted to believe that the social struggle would bring an end to the painful duality of his world and will foster the acceptance of Jews into the general society. However, years of work as an educator, writer, and public figure, filled him with disappointment, when he witnessed the continual treacherous behavior towards Jewish children even in a free Poland. Once, in a Jewish summer camp, one of the counselors expressed the fear that one of the children might, heaven forbid, drown in the river; Korczak replied with bitter sarcasm: *"[…] and what, if he drowns? Isn't it the best solution for a Jewish orphan […]?[[218]](#footnote-218)*

* 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 the brotherhood of man disclosed the basic instinct of cultural survival of Jews and contributed the channeling of efforts by Jewish intellectuals to new horizons and to the strengthening of Jewish national consciousness and Jewish philanthropy. In 1912, Korczak is chosen the director of the Jewish orphanage, created by Jewish philanthropists, which moved from Franciskanska Street to Krochmalna Street. This, amongst other things, brought about closer ties between Korczak and the Jewish community. From 1919, Korczak also heads up "Nash Dom" orphanage, which is actually run by Maryna Falska. The reality of the two orphanages and the young educators' schools connected to them offered Korczak the material for his educational writings and the place to put into practice his special approach to education.

Korczak, in partnership with Stefa Wilczynska and Maryna Falska, worked to implement in each of the two institutions a holistic educational experience, which lived within itself, following different social values and code of behavior from those of the adult world, which surrounded them. It was a micro-cosmos, which has to be the model of a new society, where the Jew is not different and alien and where the child, every child, is respected and treated according to his needs, regardless of his religious, national or racial identity.

The Krochmalna orphanage was on the surface a universal institute, but in reality, it was a Polish institution in its culture, with an orientation of assimilation, which sought to merge the Jewish masses into the Polish society. Only in the twenties, due to changes in the circumstances and up-keep of the national movement, was more room given to the study of Hebrew and the "Siddur", the Jewish daily prayer book, and some Jewish appearance was given to the life in the orphanage. Within the walls of the institution, there was a certain indifference to questions of institutionalized religion, but there was a respect to religious individual feelings of the children.[[219]](#footnote-219)

A few Korczak scholars see the existence of a prayer corner in the orphanage as a sign of Korczak's commitment to Jewish tradition, but it only proves Korczak's humanistic sensitiveness and empathy to the deep feelings of others. He himself was not familiar with Jewish rituals but saw to it that children who were interested in praying could do so. In a similar approach, Korczak wanted to enable children at Nash Dome orphanage to have their own chapel or a space to express their religious sentiments. It does not prove that he was Christian as well. Prayer is a basic spiritual need of people, Jewish or Christian children alike. His stand proves only his tolerance of religion, the respect toward the religious feelings of his children and the understanding that religion is a genuine human phenomenon.

Korczak expressed in several places his interest, as an educator, in the religiosity of people. One can educate without an established religion, but he or she cannot educate without addressing God in his or her educational discourse.[[220]](#footnote-220) The major questions of men about life and death are religious in its essence.

The total devotion of Korczak to his Jewish children – along with his commitment to his non-Jewish children – strengthened the myth of his return to Jewish life. However, a more critical view of the orphanage reality shows that Korczak was distant from Jewish life until the days of WWII. The pluralistic place of religious sentiments in his work and the universal language he used in his writings show 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***

Already in the twenties, with the strengthening of Zionism after WWI, Korczak took a closer look at the Zionist enterprise. During those years, he gets closer to the Jewish pioneering youth movements in Poland. The Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair (a leftist Zionist youth movement) cell in Warsaw contact children at the Krochmalna orphanage and invites them to join its various activities. These meetings began to bear fruit in the second half of the twenties when some atmosphere of Zionism and the Land of Israel penetrated the walls of the Krochmalna orphanage.

Korczak himself began to show interest in the Zionist settlement enterprise partly because of the reality in Poland and partly because of those young educators who immigrated to the Land of Israel. In 1925, after much deliberation, he is a party to the wording of a proclamation by the Jewish intelligentsia of Warsaw favoring the Zionist experiment. This is distributed in honor of the arrival of a delegation of the "Keren Ha-Kayemet Le-Israel", the 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 […][[221]](#footnote-221)*

Korczak was hesitant about joining this proclamation because its essence was support and obligation to the building of a Jewish nationality and an affiliation with a new Jewish homeland rather than their present countries. There is a change in his attitude. While in 1900 Korczak sharply rejected similar invitations, he now adds, through struggle and reservations, his signature to the proclamation.

In 1926 we see Korczak part of a conference of Hebraic educators in Warsaw. That Korczak is moved nearer to Jewish nationality and Zionism is evident also from the weekly magazine, "Mali Pcseglond"' which gave room to many reports from the land of Israel. Towards the end of October 1926, Korczak's "call to the children of Eretz Israel" sees print and towards Chanukah he publishes an essay about Mattathias, the Hasmonean. At the end of the twenties another pioneering Zionist movement, "He'Halutz", contacts the orphanage and political activities are stepping up. Korczak, who still believes in the Jewish future in Poland does not side with the Zionist side nor the communist camp in the political debate, which flares within the walls of the institution.

At the end of the twenties and with the rise of the Nazis in Germany in the thirties, Korczak begins to grasp that his utopian Universalism will never transpire on European soil. His statement, "*the problem 'man', his past and future on earth – overshadows the problem 'Jewish'*"[[222]](#footnote-222) seems naïve now and deserves a new reading. Korczak is convinced that there is a reciprocal link between national rebirth in the Land of Israel and the liberation of the children and he becomes more and more involved in the Zionist matters.

The group of graduates who left for Israel also grows, as others follow, and they plead Korczak to join them. The Land of Israel becomes part of his humanistic thinking. On October 8th, 1932 he writes to Joseph Arnon in Israel: "*My hope is not lost, that my few remaining years will be spent in Eretz Israel missing Poland from there"[[223]](#footnote-223).*This is where we first encounter his thoughts about immigration to Palestine, a dilemma that shows the stance of Korczak between the two worlds and his disability to live in full in any of them.

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

In the twenties of the Twentieth century Korczak still lives his Polish patriotism and rejects the suggestions of immigration, however, he does not reject the Zionist experiment. The Jews' return to their homeland – he says – is a historical necessity. Nonetheless, he is totally aware of the existential distance between exile Jews and their ancient homeland. He understands the enormous human difficulties that the act of return carries with it. He discusses the phenomenon of Zionist immigration not through an ideological lens, but through the microscope of a sensitive scientist who studies the mysteries of the human beings.

In a letter to a friend in Israel on January 27, 1928, Korczak describes this humanistic understanding of the nature 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.*[[224]](#footnote-224)

The exile is expressed in spiritual distance from Eretz Israel and physical incompatibility to the climate, sunlight, the landscape, the physical reality of Israel. Korczak, the physician, and educator – his approach is holistic; his perception of exile is an existential situation encompassing all aspects of the person's selfhood.

Korczak's descriptions of exile and immigration, here and in later letters and articles following his visits to Palestine on 1943 and 1936, provide scientific definitions of these historical phenomena, which are valid also for other people in other parts of the world. But, as sensitive and empathic as these descriptions may be, they represent a detached point of view, like the view of the patient by his or her physician or the way, the scientist looks at his or her object of research. Korczak's observation of the settlements in the Land of Israel is more like that of an anthropologist rather than of a believing partner.

Interwar Poland, a new national state after hundred and fifty years of political non-existence, wrestled with its identity. This internal struggle pushed to the surface the deep-rooted anti-Jewish Christian sentiments. Aggressive Polish nationalism added to the anti-Jewish winds in the Polish society. Nationalistic circles, in an effort to define Polish identity, marked the Jews and other minorities as "the non-Polish other", and tried to push the Jews out of the Polish economy, and out of the political, social, and cultural life.

The rise of fascism in Germany encouraged even further the showing of anti-Semitism in Poland, and the years 1934-1939 were years of increasing hatred of the Jews and a restriction of their freedom. These were also the years, in which Korczak as a Polish public figure finds the ground caving in under his feet. The result is, as with many other Polish Jews and other European Jews, that Korczak experienced an ever growing and increasing sense, not of his own volition, of Jewish belonging. With Korczak, the feeling was about a strong loss of home.

The process of alienation was not swift; in the first half of the thirties, Korczak still felt his deep connection to the Polish society. In a letter, March 1934, dealing with his dilemma whether to remain in Poland or to leave, he stresses the fact that he is part of the 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*.[[225]](#footnote-225)

Korczak was a man of the Polish culture and part of the new Poland, but the growing Anti-Semitic winds collapsed his relations with his surroundings.

The hostile environment in Poland had a big influence on the atmosphere in the orphanage. The two sides in the orphanage community became extreme: the Zionists, on the one, and the communist, on the other. Polish patriotism disappeared and Korczak experienced an ever-increasing alienation between himself and the best of his pupils. This alienation is but another facet of Korczak's forced multi-facet exile, for both the belonging to the Polish society and to the Jewish people cannot be in full. Korczak is unable to identify himself with any of the two alternatives.

His letters from 1933 and later years, show the increasing difficulty that Korczak had in working in Poland. However, when he brings up the question of immigration to Palestine, he raises painful soul-searching deliberation out of the deep understanding of his inability to adapt to life there or continue to be active as an author in a new language and as an educator without a common language with the children.[[226]](#footnote-226)

In a letter on March 20, 1933 Korczak clearly expresses the dilemma that the outside circumstances create, those that push him outside of Poland, and the difficulties facing an old Jew rooted in the Polish language, trying to acclimate himself in Eretz Israel:

*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.*[[227]](#footnote-227)

In a few words, Korczak tells the whole tragedy of the Diaspora Jews, that the circumstances of the century forced upon them a Jewish identity and a painful decision of immigration. For Korczak, rooted with every fiber of his being in Poland, there is no national ideology to sweeten the bitter pill of a returning uprooting. The sceptic humanist is exposed to the difficult choice. He knows himself, his feelings and thoughts and he knows that he cannot cover the pain of uprooting with Zionist activity, while the literal and educational activities will be blocked for him because of his cultural foreignness. In Poland, he is an active person, while in Palestine he will be useless, "an unturned stone".

Korczak's isolation reached its pick after the death of the Polish leader Marshal Pilsudski, on 1935. On 1936, he had to leave his beloved radio program, “the Corner of the old Doctor”.[[228]](#footnote-228) The growing hostility forced him also to abandon his work at the ‘Nash Dom’ Christian children orphanage, which he opened in 1919 together with Maryna Palska.

In a letter on March 29,, 1937, Korczak testified on the depression that caught him, after which he decided again to make the effort and immigrate, in spite of the language difficulties and his limited financial resources.[[229]](#footnote-229) A day after, on March 30, in an emotional letter, he says that he decided to leave because "*in Poland today, I can be only a consumer*".[[230]](#footnote-230) In Poland, he confesses to his friends, he is useless, only a bystander.

Korczak is bitterly aware of his difficult choice. Poland, once a homeland, gradually became an exile, but the Land of Israel is going to be another exile. Without mastering the Hebrew language, Korczak, the writer, and educator, is facing the danger of losing his voice.

Korczak is expressing a human truth, the experience of a whole generation, even those who did immigrate to Palestine, and not only the Polish Jews, but all Jewish immigrants from the entire Jewish diaspora. It is an inner experience of detachment and foreignness, which too often the Zionist pathos hides. Exile appears in his honest deliberations as a psychological reality and a relative issue: for the Jew who is rooted in Poland, or in any other exile-country, moving to the ancient homeland will be entering a new exile. The new homeland is, in reality, a new exile.

Meanwhile, Korczak interest in the land of Israel increased and he visits twice, in 1934 and 1936. He plans a third trip, perhaps with the purpose of settling, but the trip never materialized. We have about 50 letters, which Korczak sent to friends and former pupils in Eretz Israel as well as pages of a diary, which summarizes his second trip. All these documents offer us a broad and painful view of Korczak's relationship to the land of Israel and to his Jewish identity. His visits to Eretz Israel gave him new strength, the power to create and a vision and belief in Man, which will be described in the following chapter, but also showed him the trap of exile here and exile there which the Jew has to face and struggle with.

Korczak, the humanist, sees immigration not as an ideological act, but as an existential one. The loneliness of the pioneers is clearly visible to Korczak, and he offers a hand of solace and support. Korczak understands the loneliness of the immigrant in its depth and knows the human effort required to revive one's life in a new country. He experienced it through his own thoughts on immigration to the Land of Israel, an act he could not withstand for the same reason.

When he deals with the existential efforts of people to move to a new country – anyone and anywhere – and try to make roots in their new place, he says, "*How long is the pregnancy, after which a diaspora Jew becomes a citizen of his ancient new homeland? – It would seem three years […]"*.[[231]](#footnote-231) It takes time to reborn into a new place. Immigration is a holistic project of the human being. One has to adjust his sight, his breath, all his senses, his understanding of reality. Different people adjust in different ways and pace. It is shorter for younger people, but it still demands a lot of efforts. Maybe, suggests Korczak, this is the reason of total dedication to work among the Zionist pioneers – their work is their alcohol: "*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 […]"*.[[232]](#footnote-232) Work is part of the rite, which enables the young pioneers to forget the pain and loneliness in their hearts.

In Zionist pioneers' writing in the first decades of the Twentieth century, the expressions of longing and loneliness were scarce. Expressions of such feelings were seen as a luxury and a sign of weakness. One was expected to repress his feelings, but the feelings of loneliness and longing for the old homeland tear a person up and Korczak – looking at these phenomena from a universal humanistic perspective – suggests not denying them. Only a belief in a great ideal can help one to overcome despair and a lot of empathy.

On January 4, 1938, in a letter to Yosef Arnon, Korczak acknowledges these feelings and brings 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*?[[233]](#footnote-233)

Immigration is a lifelong process. The immigrant makes roots and becomes a native of his new land only through his children. Only the children who were born in the new land fully experience the new land as their home.

As a skeptic and humanist, Korczak stands beyond identification with the Zionist enterprise, focused on its human dimensions alone. In various places, he expresses his empathy with those who emigrated to a far legendary homeland and struggle with the difficulties of a total rebirth in a new world, though the phraseology of Zionism as a national movement does not catch his attention.

* 1. ***Giving Up***

The Eretz Israel chapter in Korczak's life is no less tragic than the loss of the Polish homeland. Korczak fell in love with the charm of the country after his two visits to Palestine in 1934 and 1936, deeply identified with those who tried to hold-on to it, and for some years nurtured the idea of immigration. After returning from his second visit, two things happened which express Korczak's exclusion from the Polish society: he lost his popular corner on the Polish radio and he was forced to relinquish directorship of the "Nash Dom" orphanage, which he had run with Maryna Falska since 1919. The reason for being cut off from "Nash Dom" was not just on nationalistic grounds, but also an essential difference of opinion between Korczak and Falska. However, it would seem that the "winds of time" had no small an influence in the matter.

During those years, after the death of Pilsudski, Polish Anti-Semitism gets much stronger; the open talk is of "one million superfluous Jews in Poland". Korczak's isolation grows and his dream of education Polish and Jewish children together is finished. He mentions a deep personal crisis, which brought him to the decision to try immigrating to Eretz Israel.[[234]](#footnote-234) On March 29, 1937, he writes to friends in Israel:

*After a depression, which lasted two months - I have made on last decision: to spend my remaining years in Eretz Israel, as of now it would seem, to Jerusalem; there to learn the Hebrew language and after a year, to go to a kibbutz […]*[[235]](#footnote-235)

We cannot be sure about the causes of this depression, but the words testifies about a great mental distress and about Korczak's pain with this dilemma. Korczak is still undecided about immigrating and thinks about settling in Jerusalem. However, he feels that the transition to Eretz Israel will make him altogether impotent. The obligation to the children of the orphanage is with him and he cannot leave. In an additional letter, two days later, he writes, "*In May (?) I am going to Eretz Israel*", and he explains:

*My beloved Mietek[[236]](#footnote-236)*

*[…] 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. [[237]](#footnote-237)*

The final part of this letter testifies, it would seem, about the double exile in which Korczak is trapped; Poland is an exile, because there, Korczak would "*only be a consumer*", nobody is interested in his "merchandise". And oppositely, Jerusalem will also be an exile or a kind of spiritual death, and there the yearning will be for Poland and its culture. This would be not just a painful longing for something loved, but also the sense of having lost the cultural milieu in which he feels more at home than anywhere else has.

Further, in the letter, he reflects upon himself: "*I cannot detach myself from contact with the Polish reality*". It is a double tragedy. We learn from the letter that also the move to the Land of Israel, as he says in a bitter disillusionment, is not coming home , but a move to another exile, "*to* *life so much impersonal*". And the move is not a realization of a Zionist idea or vision, which Korczak does not hold. It involves a sense of escape and failure. The letter should be taught as a classical document, an insight into the very existence of contemporary Jews.

In another letter, of the same day, to another friend, Yosef Arnon, in the midst of his serious inner conflict, he writes about the move in a comparatively old age to a new land:

*I delayed this writing because of the heavy decision in regard to the travel to the Land of Israel, if not for good, this time for a year. I skip many details. It is only important that I want first be in Jerusalem for a year (?) of isolation and a kind of a kindergarten towards different life, in climate, language and various circumstances. When you are 60… is it possible differently and probably not allowed. Man has duties to his spirit, his thought, as it is his workshop. In Europe (not in Poland) 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*.[[238]](#footnote-238)

He asks – actually asking himself, whether he will be able to have productive new life in the Land of Israel. Korczak as a critical empiricist recognizes the fact that immigration is not just a geographical move, but also rather a completely personal transformation, a rebirth. Rebirth is a Korczakian literary idiom. The move to the Land of Israel is not the outcome of a gradual development of a man who returns home, but a metamorphosis, which entails painful "birth pangs". Europe is the furnace of all his thought. What will be of him in a new land? He can fail and remain as a useless bitter old man.

In the letter, there is also an expression of his ultimate commitment to the reality of children in Poland. Korczak sees his possible immigration as an act of desertion and a betrayal of the children under his custody.

The letter to Moshe Zartal, contains the breakage of the utopian side in Korczak's work in Poland, which he hoped to transfer to the Land of Israel. In spite of everything, he says, "*I still believes in the future of Mankind*". Where this human utopian future can be realized? As a person of two worlds, the Jewish and the Polish, without being at home in both, Korczak looks for a joint space. Korczak's world of the child, should be seen now, coming from Korczak's existential dual failure as a search for a neutral space, devoid of national or religious characteristics. It could bring together Jews and non Jews without prejudices, xenophobia, racism, discrimination and oppression. Many Jews rejoiced in Modern Times with the hope that now a new cosmopolitan reality would arise, devoid o nationality or religion, to which all Jews will be accepted equally. Jews took part, enthusiastically, in the formation of universal visions who offer salvation to the entire humanity, hoping that it will include also the Jews. The vision of the enlightenment, the national patriotism. The social revolution, the vision of one language – the Esperanto, the vision of one human psyche or a global science – all expressed the great Jewish longing for a grand social context that will free them from their isolation. The Esperanto project is an example to a project, which now seems extremely naïve, to create a universal framework in which all men will have a share. Korczak's vision of the emancipated child can be seen as an idea about one human space of activity which is not Polish nor Jewish but an open human sphere.

In this letter, Korczak still speaks of the plan to come in May: "*if no obstacles aris*es". However, two months pass and Korczak painfully retreats from his former decision. In May 23, 1937, Korczak writes to his friend 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 […]*".[[239]](#footnote-239)

Korczak is afraid of being a burden on the shoulders of the young pioneers. He is not young anymore and he does not know what he will be able to do for his living. In another letter, Korczak gives another reason for his giving up immigration to Eretz Israel: the responsibility for what he might 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.*[[240]](#footnote-240)

Korczak is carrying a heavy responsibility on his shoulders, the fate of his Jewish children in Poland. He hesitates lest his going to Israel would be abandoning the post in which he placed himself. Beyond that, the end of the letter expresses a very personal truth: ***"****I became frightened at the last minute"*. Korczak admits 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 holds fast to his universal belief in Man and his love for every child. "*The children, the "Yosekim"* [the Jewish children] *and the "Yashekim"* [the Polish Christian children] *are dear to me all the same. Both here and there, so many manifestations of human kindness, nobility, were trampled in the mud*".[[241]](#footnote-241) The text also reveals his skepticism towards any ideological phraseology: even in the land of Israel, among Jewish settlers, there is much wrongdoing toward children. The efforts to create a new society exist, but the reality is still problematic.

In another letter on December 30, 1937, he writes; "*one must not allow the world to remain as it is*".[[242]](#footnote-242) Everyone should have his or her mark in the world. Korczak has a mission to perform and fate would have it that it be the orphanage and not the building of his own family and he remains loyal to it.

In the letter, which was mentioned before from January 4, 1938, Korczak writes an explanation of his not having come to Eretz Israel, and he lists two reasons: lack of language and lack of funds, which also prevented him from learning Hebrew. "*Without money and without the language I cannot travel*".[[243]](#footnote-243) The lack of money also eliminates his ability to learn Hebrew. He is afraid of becoming a burden.

Afterwards, in this letter, Korczak speaks at length and emotionally of the metaphysical meaning of life in Israel. The meaning of the land is not a national one, but a universal meaning. The land of Israel has a deep spiritual meaning and Korczak is afraid that in his condition he is unworthy of getting there. It would appear that at this time Korczak has again invested his efforts in Jewish life in Poland – and for the time being his work on the Polish radio is also renewed – amongst other reasons, to forget his failure regarding the immigration to Palestine.

Korczak stayed in Poland for several reasons, and it was not clear even to him, which of them tipped the scales. However, the most meaningful of all was Korczak's consciousness of being caught in the middle between free authentic Jewishness and Polish rootedness. One can say that had the Polish nation allowed Korczak to live and be active as a Pole, he would not have been thrown into his Jewish identity. However, when forced by the facts of his life to be part of the Jewish public and to identify himself as a Jew, he came to a determining crossroads. He could not be at home in both of these sides. The Polish option – it became increasingly clear, was impossible, even though Korczak never relinquished his Polish identity and Polish patriotism. The possibility of going to the Land of Israel began to take shape with the chance of joining the evolutionary course of the Jewish people. Korczak was long tormented by his procrastination if to go to Israel and in the end gave up this option as well. What was left to him, and which he ultimately chose, was the obligation and identification with the lot of the Jewish children of Poland.

It seems that a whole complex of reasons led Korczak to his decision: his inability to culturally, identify himself with the Jewish national life, the lack of Hebrew and the thoughts that in the Land of Israel, he would not be able to work with children and write. His strong ties with Poland and its culture, from which he drew his creativity to which he directed it, the lack of funds and the fear that he will be a burden, and finally the responsibility to his children, Probably, the most important reason was his awareness that he is caught in the between of free Jewishness and free national Poland. What is left to him was his commitment to the Jewish children and the rejoining of their fate, and this is what he chose.

What does it mean to be a Jew in Poland in the middle of the Twentieth century? It means life in a trap of double identity, a choice between exile and isolation and in the end, Treblinka, on the one hand, and freedom through self-alienation and tearing of roots on the other. Judaism in this perspective is no longer the outer exile of not being in one's homeland, but rather an inner exile, from which the Jew cannot free himself. Korczak is a typical representation of Jews in Europe, whose Judaism is summed up as not being able to be Jewish, but having no choice in the matter. Judaism is no longer "their home". On the other hand, they cannot feel at home in the place in which they live, either, because their national affiliation is always questioned and quite often rejected by the local nationalistic circles. It always accompanied by a feeling of alienation. Appositively, the move to Palestine, the Land of Israel, promises also a personal alienation from a homeland that was lost many generations ago, anyway, and a need of a painful adoption of a new identity.

In this situation, Korczak created his own world, the universal world of all children. The theoretical building blocks for this universal reality – and this is a topic for another lecture – were taken partly from Stoic philosophy. Classical Stoicism emerged in the Hellenistic world when people looked for a universal ordering principal after their local circles of life were destroyed by Alexander the Great. Nature gives the universal context to the life of all human beings. Here again, when a universal ordering principle is needed infinite nature and rationality are used by Korczak to structure a world that brings together all human beings from east and west, north and south, all races, nationalities and religious affiliations. The child and his or her sake unite all men – Korczak's utopia is still inspiring us today.

1. **The Land of Hope**
   1. ***Maybe in the Land of Israel Human Hopes will become a Reality***

After long deliberations, Korczak remained in Poland and the Land of Israel remained a utopia – a land of longing to which he cannot come. Nevertheless, Korczak's understanding of this troubled land which represents a broad humanistic vision of human solidarity realized in Israel - is still inspiring our minds; naïve vision and at the same time challenging.

It is not Zionism, which Korczak sees in his spiritual eyes when he speaks about the Land of Israel, but a universal Messianism. Korczak's idea of Palestine, the land of Israel, is broader than the personal quest for a safe haven, not for Korczak as an individual and nor for a particular people, the Jewish people, which desperately seeks a safe haven. Universal humanism which characterizes Korczak approach to education was extended also to be 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*.”[[244]](#footnote-244) Sadly, we have to admit that this is a far-reaching utopia rather than a realistic picture, a promise that men failed to fulfill. The Land of Israel is until today an area of bitter conflicts amongst different nationalities and faiths, a source and a stage of expressions of religious fanaticism, hatred, and violence. Jerusalem is by its name the city of peace. The Hebrew word "Yerushalayim" contains the word "Shalom", peace. The name of the city in the ancient layers of the Bible is "Shalem", peace, and the king of Justice, "Melchizedek" (Genesis, 14), governs it. Yet, Jerusalem continues to be in our historical reality the most flammable place on the division lines between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. A tiny piece of land, the cradle of Judaism and Christianity and a sacred place for Islam, attracts in magic cords worldwide attention and remains the par excellence source of fanaticism, human hatred, and violence which threaten the future of mankind.

Korczak, contrary to Jerusalem's present condition, saw the Land of Israel as an invitation to revive our trust in mankind. Korczak was not blind to the interfaith and international realities of Palestine and yet he drew different utopian horizons for this troubled land and described it as the potential meeting place of all men behind the cause of the child. It may be the world's sanctuary of education.

Korczak's exchange of letters with his friends in Palestine shows the ongoing degradation of the Jews-Gentiles relations between Poland and its effect on Korczak's personal situation. Korczak, a well known and respected persona in Poland, gradually lost his public positions among the Polish society. In a letter from March 1937 to his friends in Israel, which we mentioned in the previous chapter, he admits that in Poland he can be a consumer only.[[245]](#footnote-245) The walls of anti-Semitism are closing on him. His dream that education will bring all people together, reaches a bitter impasse. Korczak's most famous book, King Matt the First is a story about a kingdom of children that 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-human solidarity, but the adults fail them. History has shown that in reality like in the book, the adult's hatred prevailed and the idea of all human solidarity remained a utopia.

In retrospect, Korczak's repeating saying that Jewish and Christian children are important for him the same looks pathetic and at last even macabre. The children 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, not even pay visits to one-each-other.[[246]](#footnote-246) The children of "Nash Dom", from the time it was recognized by the state, enjoyed much better living conditions than the Jewish orphanage children. And when the war started the fates of those children were totally different. Nash Dom continued its life nearly untouched, but on November 1940, along with the rest of the Jews of Warsaw, the children of the Jewish orphanage of Krochmalana street were forced into the Jewish ghetto and eventually deported to Treblinka.

Europe failed to fulfill its promise to its children. However, as the European sky darkened, the Land of Israel gradually illuminated as a source of hope. Maybe there, in the land of prophets and great spiritual leaders, it will be different. Like ancient prophets, Korczak trusted that hope will come out of Zion and teaching of peace and brotherhood will 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 different perspective – a universal rather than a national one. The Land of Israel is not just a physical reality, but a spiritual being, a complex text which demands decoding and sensitive interpretation. Following his two visits to the Land of Israel, on 1934 and 1936, Korczak wrote his impressions and thoughts about this land; these writings – as well as his exchange of letters with friends in Palestine – are our key to the meaning of the Land of Israel as it developed in his mind.[[247]](#footnote-247)

While Korczak refused to become a formal and an active member of the Zionist movement he recognized the historical meaning of Zionism and the momentous significance of his own visit. He is the first one of his family to get to Israel. With deep feelings he expresses the historical perspective of his trip:

*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.[[248]](#footnote-248)*

Korczak saw himself as part of the Jewish story and wondered about this moment when he first visits the ancient land of his people, but as we see in his writings, he retained a measure of distance; he was excited but did not lose his broad and critical view. The national narrative remained external to him. "*The same thing is being done in Australia, "* he writes in an article which summarizes the two trips.[[249]](#footnote-249) So, where we can find the uniqueness of this human endeavor? He looks for a dimension that will make it important and interesting: the long human quest for Redemption. In a letter he sent to a friend in Palestine on November 27th, 1933, Korczak pointed to something beyond the Zionist experiment and its emphasis on the practicalities of settlements: "*The world does not need new work and more oranges, but rather a new belief*".[[250]](#footnote-250) Humanity needs new horizons rather than Palestine's Jaffa oranges and it can be realized in Eretz Israel.

The historical dimension of the Jewish people's return to the land of his forefathers is evident in Korczak's writings, but for Korczak Zionism should not be a merely national project, but rather a great humanistic project 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*".[[251]](#footnote-251) What is at stake is no less than the future of mankind. The Zionist enterprise should be seen as a humanistic revolution, part of the all human struggle for a better world, rather than a narrow national endeavor.

Korczak's universal worldview hardly changes even in a time of deep crisis and growing hostilities. The national dimension, which affects Korczak's personal existence in the most direct way – the urgent need for an asylum for persecuted people – hardly emerges. Even in his ghetto diary, which was written in the darkest times, he still held his faith in all humanity. Even on July 27th, 1942 when the deportation of Jews to their death is fully deployed, he discussed the conditions of children from an all human perspective. Days before the deportation to Treblinka, all children are of similar value for Korczak, and the German soldier beyond the wall catches his attention as an individual human being.[[252]](#footnote-252)

Korczak's writings are aphorismic, dialogical in its style, like an intimate conversation with himself. It is difficult to get a systematic philosophy out of it, but it reveals the complex picture he had in his mind about the Land of Israel. The Land of Israel has a few layers of meaning: a layer of personal struggle about possible immigration to Palestine, which we discussed in the previous chapter, a layer of empathy for those who had immigrated to a troubled and difficult land in order to redeem their people, a layer of a great experimental laboratory of new human relations and a metaphysical layer of the religious meaning of life in the land of the prophets.

* 1. ***Making roots in a new Land***

Reading Korczak's letters and articles reveals the observations of a great humanist. What interests him is Man – his struggle, his failures and his successes, his efforts to rebuild his life in a new land. He speaks and writes as an educator, as an old friend of the young Zionist pioneers, as a doctor and an anthropologist who studies a great human drama. Korczak was not a Zionist. Personally, he expressed disgust from ideological movements which turn to be authoritarian and oppressive. Zionist ideologies as well were subject to his humanistic skepticism. But he felt empathy to the humanitarian efforts of the young pioneers and he was very much interested in their human struggle.

In his conversations and exchange of letters with the young people who immigrated to Palestine, Korczak reveals a deep empathy to their human efforts to make roots in a new soil. The young pioneers shared with him their difficulties and disappointments from their new Israeli life. Korczak suggested forbearance, patience, and acceptance of their difficulties as natural and inevitable sides of any immigration.

There is no easy immigration. In a letter to Madjya Markuze from August 25th, 1935, he tried to ease her tribulations of immigration. He wrote about his understanding of the process of making roots in a new country, based on his life experience of the Japanese Russian 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.*[[253]](#footnote-253)

The metaphor is a plant in a new soil. It takes time to make roots. Difficulties of immigration and uprooting from a former home are expected, especially for people with a rich personality who have meaningful ties with their former society. It is expected to be a long process. At the beginning, immigration is a painful human experience, but after three years, the memories of the old homeland become softer. The old homeland, the land of memories, gives place to a new homeland.

The idea of gradual overcoming the difficulties of absorption in a new land Korczak expressed in his article "Impressions and Thoughts" he wrote after his second visit to Palestine. There he lists all the changes that one goes through in the process of making roots in a new land: climate changes, landscape change from lowland to mountains, moving from city to village, shift of occupation from trade to agriculture, from the quick pace of life to a slower pace, living next to the Arabs, foreign language. Life without the former God, its traditions, and rituals, different morality, moving from individual life to communal life, leaving the family behind and more and more changes. It is a multidimensional change, which affects all parts of the personality, a huge challenge for anyone.[[254]](#footnote-254)

Immigration is not only a realization of an idea; it is a total act to which the immigrant is demanded o draft all his might if he or she wants to overcome the tribulations of detachment from the old birth land and integration into the new land. Recognizing the complexity of the challenge, which the new settlers face, he discusses the years' long process and the difficulties it poses:

*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*.[[255]](#footnote-255)

Korczak uses the metaphor of the tree in several places is not only a rhetorical decoration. In Korczak's eyes, immigration and absorption is a natural process, which takes time and it has physical as well as emotional aspects. Part of the difficulties in absorption in the Land of Israel emerge from the effort to depress the difficulties and denying its legitimacy. Korczak is a physician and humanist, and not only a pedagogue, and he expresses 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.*[[256]](#footnote-256)

About two years after his last visit in Palestine, which gave birth to these essays, in a letter to Yosef Arnon, from January 4, 1938, Korczak is trying again to ease the tribulations of immigration and convince his partners in the discussion to accept their 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.[[257]](#footnote-257)*

In his letter, Korczak adds two important layers 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. The immigrant becomes local in his new land when he or she gives birth to a child, a child who has only one home and one homeland. This is an essential definition for the Zionist thought, which sees the Zionist enterprise as the creation of new life, the building of a home of normal life, devoid of the exile abnormality.

The definition of Zionism as the building of a home to a homeless people is under dispute until today. In principal, it collides with the traditional Jewish idea of foreignness. For many generations, Jewish identity was forged in the matrix of exile until it become an elemental aspect of the Jewish mind: the Jew is the one who has no home, an eternal wonderer who dreams about his lost homeland, but do very little to achieve it. The "homeland Judaism" has to wrestle with Jewish Messianism about the meaning of the returning home. Korczak was aware to he historical meaning that the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel may carry, though he himself was not carried away by the Messianic energies that emerged from the deep ground to the surface of life.

The second aspect to which Korczak points, is the spiritual dimension of the Land of Israel, that might put some difficulties I front of the immigrant's integration in his or her new land, but also gives metaphysical meaning to the resettling in this land. The immigration to the Land of Israel is not only a personal endeavor – it is part of a historical move, which has a public significance. In the Land of Israel, there is not only the "I", but also the "We". More than that, life in the Land of Israel carries a meta-historical burden: "here also two thousand years of life". Korczak highlights the tension between the two poles of the pioneering act that the young pioneers are busy with all their time. The first, an intimate one of every day's life – the personal acclimatization, the home building and the family life. The second one is public, spiritual, speaking in a mythical pathos, and represents a meta-historical consciousness.

The tension between these two poles is expressed in Korczak's letter to Esther Budko-Gad from January 27, 1928. Korczak writes about his disfavor of grand phrases, which he does not trust and indicate that after the enthusiastic discourse is calming down, one remains with the grey reality of life, which demands efforts and pains.

*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 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.[[258]](#footnote-258)*

Korczak understands the exile as an existential and spiritual distance from the homeland, for the Jews it is the Land of Israel Eretz Israel. Exile means the incompatibility to the climate, sunlight, landscape, the physical reality of Eretz Israel. Korczak, the physician and educator, approaches the historical phenomenon of exile in a holistic way.

Exile is an existential situation encompassing all aspects of the person's selfhood and "big words" cannot cover the reality of the historical rift of two thousand years of exile and save the efforts of its mending. The act of bridging the gap of history is a daily grey work, which will take time and enormous human efforts. There is no shortcut.

Korczak knows the story of the European revolutions that had drowned their comrades in a entanglement of big words and rivers of blood. Therefore, he adds in the above letter, "It is very easy to die for the sanctity of an idea", but it is much harder, and demands stubbornness and patience to live this idea day after day and year after year. Repeatedly he returns to the idea of a Sisyphean work, grey building and commitment for life. This is the heroism of life of labor and the creation of a moral society in the Land of Israel.

The ending of the above letter gives these ideas 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.* [[259]](#footnote-259)

Korczak is strict that his reader will not see him as a silly Chassid, a blind sighted follower of Zionism. For him, the Zionist project must have a universal meaning, and it gets such a meaning only when it is connected consciously and intentionally to the redemption of Man in general and the Child in particular.

The universal vision is not exhausted by big words and occasional acts of bravery. It is fulfilled in grey, hard, disillusioned human labor. Many small steps are needed to touch the horizons. "You demand from yourself too much" he writed on February 17, 1935, to Zeev Yoskowitz and his son Binyamin. You "*demand from yourself something which more that super human efforts can achieve*".[[260]](#footnote-260) You were given "musical instruments", but playing music itself demands time, not to mention that the world is continuously "throwing" on you more and more people to absorb and integrate in society.

Even in the Ghetto Diary of 1942, in a reality, which cannot be more polarized to the reality of the Land of Israel, Korczak continues to deal with the absorption difficulties and emphasizes the spiritual dimension of life there: "*Young Palestine is making arduous an 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*."[[261]](#footnote-261) Without dealing with the metaphysics of life in the Land of Israel, there is no meaning to the physical adjustment and to the whole Jewish Zionist project.

* 1. ***Life in a New Homeland***

Korczak humanist exploration of the pioneering project in the Land of Israel focusses on Man and the reality of his life. His thought is busy with differences in the life of children in the land of Israel. Zionism is not only a geographical rescue from political threats, but first of all a radical change of values and the creation of a "new Man", connected to nature, free in his creativity, released from the oppression of political bonds. Zionism is a call for an identity change.[[262]](#footnote-262)

In a strict observation of a sensitive educator, Korczak define the problem of the Jewish identity in exile, which is based a dualistic cultural reality. Unlike Political Zionism or Catastrophic Zionism, who see the core of Zionism in the search of a safe haven for the Jews, Korczak represents the vision of a coherent monistic Jewish identity for the child. Instead of two worlds, the Jewish and the non-Jewish the child will grow up in a monistic cultural milieu: "*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*".[[263]](#footnote-263) The cultural split, in which the Jewish person is situated, was the corner stone of Jewish identity in exile for generations. It happened in any place to which the Jews came in their wondering and influenced their understanding of the Jews' place in the world. This cultural schizophrenia had intensified when the walls of the Jewish ghetto came down and the Jews gradually got the opportunity to integrate into the general society.

In the modern era, the Jew's identity is characterized by a dual cultural belonging. The quest of emancipation is built on the duality of the Jewish person who seeks along a thin Jewish particularity, to be part of the general society. From this reality of Jewish life, arises also the split in the world of the child. Only in the Land of Israel, concluded Korczak after his two visits to Palestine, the mother's lullaby merge with the teaching language at school – both in Hebrew. In the Land of Israel, not as in exile, the children grow up into a total reality that constructs their identity. The land – its landscape and its history – is the mentor of the Israeli-born child, the "sabre".[[264]](#footnote-264) From a pure pedagogical perspective, which seeks to allow the child to grow in an integrative cultural milieu, Korczak formulates, unintentionally, a main Zionist idea of self-determination: the quest of an integrative life and cultural holism, self-determination and auto-emancipation.[[265]](#footnote-265)

Korczak's first visit to the Land of Israel was dedicated to the quest of a change in the identity of bot the adult and the child in the Land of Israel. Therefore, he stayed most of his time in one place, kibbutz Ein Harod, in spite the begging of his hosts. He observes the Israeli children as a new species that was born to the Jewish people, and asks whether the children here are nature children, bolder, free from the exile outlines that the Zionist paradigm attributes them, or the characteristics that Korczak was familiar with in poverty children along his work. Here is his answer:

*How to differentiate between a child who was born I 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. 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.*[[266]](#footnote-266)

Unexpectedly, Korczak do not find the vulgarity of the Sabre (the Israeli born child), a cultureless native, but a combination of new abilities and new manners. The lesson , which he directs at current educators, who are not Palestinians by birth, - they have to change and respect the child and his or her new world.

In his essay, "Impression from the Land of Israel", Korczak seeks the impact of the local 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*."[[267]](#footnote-267) He appreciates the special bond that the local children have with their environment, expressed in their bare foot walk on the rocky soil and the unmediated touch with nature, which enable a kind of health that one do not find among Jewish children in Poland.

Influenced by Stoic teaching,[[268]](#footnote-268) Korczak holds the idea that men are an integral part of nature and translates it into pedagogical practice. In a broad philosophical perspective, the human being is not "created in the image of God", but in the mold of its place in nature. In a more practical perspective, nature is the proper context for raising children. Korczak worked hard to take every summer the poverty children to a summer camp in the countryside. However, he understands that the summer camp, as wonderful as it is, is only part of the life of the inner city children, a contrast to their everyday experience.[[269]](#footnote-269)

The reality of the Land of Israel village is different: nature is an inseparable part of life. Israeli children grow up in nature. They know its delicate secrets.[[270]](#footnote-270) The Zionist myth of the 'New Man" is realized in front of his scrutinizing eyes: the Israeli child, the Village child, is healthy, natural, connected to nature. In the Land of Israel, so he testifies to his audience in Warsaw, the bond to the land is authentic, part of the routine of life, the mold of identity.

Korczak confesses that personally, he is not part of the land and the village experience, but that sometimes longings and a spark of a wish to be part of this unmediated experience is lightened in him.[[271]](#footnote-271)

The Zionist myth of "the new Man" is realized in front of his eyes: the Israeli child is different from the exile Jewish child, a stereotype which the Zionist thought intentionally cultivated and reached even medical circles who looked from the illness of the exiled Jews.[[272]](#footnote-272) The Israeli child is healthy, natural, connected to nature. This is the "village child", the opposite of the poverty, inner city, child. For Korczak the Zionist act is not a national act but an educational challenge. And it is first of all the building of a real and authentic home, in which the child can construct his or her world in a healthy way and deep connection to the environment of his homeland.

*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.[[273]](#footnote-273)*

The child of Kibbutz Ein Harod represents the new Israeli child who is connected to nature. The kibbutz's child is growing up within a local reality, and is living it in an unmediated way. Not like the parents, to whom Palestine is a foreign country, the local children.

The kibbutz children – Korczak paid close attention to their life during his first visit on 1934 to Kibbutz Ein Harod – seemed to him as free and healthier children who learn intimately their environment of life. Contrary to their parents who struggle bitterly to make roots in their new land, they are not in exile anymore – they are an authentic part of the reality of the country. They solve the secrets of the land; know its nature, going barefooted on its soil, its wildlife and its climate. They are at home.

**8.4. The Kibbutz – a Total Laboratory of Life**

As a holistic educator, Korczak is fascinated from the total educational milieu, which he find in the Israeli village. The children can be "read" and learn from within their childhood reality. He observes their ways of life when they go for a walk, work in the field, play in their yard. In the simplicity and authenticity of the young settlements, Korczak finds a pedagogical uniqueness.

The land in its holistic reality should be also the classroom of the educators – the best education is derived from life. Korczak does not trust elaborate educational theories that miss – in an academic pretentiousness – the infinity of life. He is afraid of the city educationalists who rely on established theories that avoid the basic fact that education is always an open quest[[274]](#footnote-274) and advise the young parents and educators to seek their answers in life, relying on their common sense and intuition. Korczak, a known figure in Europe, is a pedagogical authority for the young settlers, and his visits to Palestine were opportunities to discuss basic questions of life, which bother young parents who were cut off from the family support circle. How frequent I should feed a baby? When and how much to wash children? How to dress them on hot summer days? How to deal with questions of discipline?

His answers to this perplexity rely on his holistic approach to education and its bond to the dictates of nature. Common sense and authenticity are the parents' best guides. Educators should rely on their own judgment and peel off the frilliness of professional pedagogy. In his essay "so and so on children" (July 1937) he writes:

*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 chicken, and from the chicken will pass to the children than 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*.[[275]](#footnote-275)

The Kibbutz appears as a unique laboratory of education. It provides both the setting, the social milieu, the children and their educators. In the history of the Kibbutz Education, this idea was realized extensively and education, in all ages, was an integral part of the life of the kibbutz community. However, in general, Korczak's advice to be cautious about elaborate pedagogical systems was evaded and for several decades, Kibbutz Education got an orthodox character.

The Kibbutz social phenomena is another aspect of the universal lesson that Korczak takes from his observation of the Land of Israel. The settlement project inspires him, but not as a national project but as a human experiment, a living laboratory. It is a world research institute, which will develop the vaccination against exploitation of children in particular and human oppression in general so common in 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 total 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 life and the life of their children*.[[276]](#footnote-276)

More than anything, Korczak sees the Zionist enterprise – especially the Kibbutz – as a human laboratory on the road to a better society. Korczak looks with wonder how the young pioneers try in their life and their children's life to structure a new society with new human relations and mold a new Man. "*Life is not a game*", says Korczak. "*One must have the courage to admit the seriousness of life*".[[277]](#footnote-277) The young pioneers take upon themselves the challenge of humanity: to treat Life with seriousness and respect. This is the supreme test of Zionism: the fulfillment of the ancient prophetic promise of a new society with different human relations. Korczak speaks like a modern prophet Isaiah, who sees that one day a new teaching of human solidarity will come out of Zion.

In his visit in one of the places in the Land of Israel, in a kibbutz, which he did not specify its name, he hears someone singing a song of "yearning" and he adds, "*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"*.[[278]](#footnote-278) The village's life is the creativity workshop from which a new poetry will come out with a new understanding of Man, including the child.

In several places, Korczak is writing at length about these real-life experiences of the young settlers in the Land of Israel, its successes and failures. He admires the vision, and yet he is calling for compassion and moderation in its fulfillment in life.[[279]](#footnote-279) As a naturalistic Ethicist, he is aware of the limitations of people and their weaknesses. Yet the moral pathos of a visionary educator is there: life in Israel offers great opportunities for a new form of education and a new kind of educators – those who respect the lives of children and listen carefully to their own intuition rather than to professional theories of education.[[280]](#footnote-280)

* 1. ***Jews and Arabs***

Korczak's second visit to Israel made him face the Jewish-Arab conflict, and here as well he assumes a critical humanistic attitude without any nationalistic phraseology. The year of 1936 saw the Arab uprising against the British and bloody clashes between Arabs and Jews and yet Korczak's observation of Palestine remains detached and objective. Here and there human suffering and human weaknesses. He is not drafted to the Jewish perspective of reality in Palestine or the Land of Israel. The Jews are forced to come to Palestine because they have a great mission to fulfill there – the struggle for human future. And the Arabs are also part of this human struggle for better life. Korczak is not judgmental and he looks at the Arabs as humans who just start to struggle for their own destiny. He shows empathy and sympathy for their poor condition and their first attempts to promote a national revival parallel to that 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*.[[281]](#footnote-281)

Korczak shows a great sensitivity for the Arab children who grow up in poverty not far from the Jewish children.[[282]](#footnote-282) As an external observer, he looks with wonder and hope at the Jewish children and Arab children who look at one-each-other through the fence of the kibbutz. Here and there, children try to find their way in life. Korczak gives no voice to the fear of a national confrontation, even when these comments are made just after the bloody incidents of the 'Arab Revolt' of 1936**.** The Arab children deserve their rights as all children.

Korczak humanism allows him an intimate contact with the Christian Holy Land. Jesus interests him as an individual who struggles for the cause of men. Nazareth and Jerusalem interest him. Jesus of Nazareth is one persona in a line of individuals who struggled for a better human existence. Therefore, the Bahai movement whose world centers are located in Haifa and Akko at the North of Israel in the western part of the Galilee.

*When I looked at Nazareth from above, I do not 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.[[283]](#footnote-283)*

The land of Israel was, is, and probably will be, the largest laboratory of the human spirit through all history. Dreamers and people of vision are attracted to this land throughout human history.

It is fascinating to see the strain of sympathy with which he writes about the Bahai faith and its vision of universal peace and syncretism of all world faiths which will take place in the Land of Israel.[[284]](#footnote-284) Korczak even mentions a field trip with the children of Kibbutz Ein-Harod to a Bahai village across the Jordan river.[[285]](#footnote-285) The Land of Israel is the meeting place of all the great cultures. The historical fact that one may see as the source of all tensions and conflicts between people about the ownership of this troubled land seems for Korczak as an opportunity for the revival of humanity. The Land of Israel is the land of all men and it is, hopefully, the place, in which moral and just society will come into being again.

* 1. **Metaphysical Dimension**

The Land of Israel receives in Korczak's writings a metaphysical dimension that recounts its place in the history of Humanity's great spiritual traditions. His language reveals a religious dimension, though not a theistic but rather a humanistic one. Men have the moral mission to change the world for the good, "(…) *it is forbidden to leave the world as it is"*.[[286]](#footnote-286) This is the call of the Holy Land to all men to be involved in the long human drama. Korczak's empathy to his young friends in Palestine should not hide from our eyes his broader utopian idea, a universal humanistic Messianism.

Education gets in Korczak deliberation a form of a messianic vision. The kibbutz in particular and the Zionist experiment in general are the historical opportunity to fulfill the longed for reform in education and the emancipation of the child: “*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*.”[[287]](#footnote-287)

In a letter to his friends in Ein Harod, David Simchoni, he expresses his religious fascination with what is happening in the Israeli villages:

*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*.[[288]](#footnote-288)

Korczak points to a 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, gives birth to a new approach to children. Korczak once wrote – his most quoted text – that to reform education means to reform and mend the world.[[289]](#footnote-289) The Land of Israel, especially the kibbutz communities, can be the sanctuary of this grand reform.

Korczak's vision is wider than the practicalities of Zionism or even the urgent need of a safe haven for persecuted Jews: "*The world does not need new work and more oranges, but rather a new belief*".[[290]](#footnote-290) Universal humanism is 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*”.[[291]](#footnote-291) This Land is not only the landscape, the climate, the rocks, and the sun burned mountains – the Land of Israel is a multicultural religious text, which attracts the yearnings of all men. It symbolizes the spiritual dimension of human life and Man's struggle for justice and redemption.

Korczak, the assimilated Jew, foreigner to the climate and landscape of Palestine-the Land of Israel, writes poetically about its spirituality. In the Land of Israel, the heavens are higher and deeper; the stars are brighter, hiding a secret that put 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.*[[292]](#footnote-292)

The Land of Israel's sky tells this spiritual history, which demands efforts to grasp and respond to. It puts a spell on people. It has a kind of reactivity, which no other land has. Its metaphysical dimension is too powerful for many. It even makes people lose their sanity – a kind of a Holy Land Syndrome, which people try to evade by means of everyday matters and sometimes with violence and bloodshed. To our misfortune, Korczak's understanding of the dangerous spiritual potential of this land proves to be realistic until today.

Innocent of any Jewish or Christian Messianism, Korczak feels the enormous spiritual "radioactivity" in the meeting place of all men and the land that contains 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".[[293]](#footnote-293)* This Land is not like all the countries in the world – it radiates a radical message to all men.

The Land of Israel, the cradle of the great spiritual traditions, attracts Korczak like in magic cords. He does not understand Religion as a historical phenomenon through the limited prism of its establishments, but as a great adventure of the human mind, that confronts the secret of human existence. Korczak does not affiliate with any established religion, but he expresses a religious sentiment when he discusses the meaning of this Land and recognizes a sense of holiness and spirituality that is immanently present in this land because of its history. The Land of Israel has a metaphysical dimension that attracts all men and makes it a magnet for prophets of all kinds. Korczak, the not fully Jewish and not fully Polish is open to the spirituality of the Land of Israel. One has to listen and to open his eyes to see it.

The Land of Israel tells a spiritual story that demands efforts to grasp and to respond. From a critical, even ironic, point of view, one can say that the spiritual charisma of the land is one of the deepest sources of animosity among people of different faiths and ethnicities. It puts a spell on people who listen to its story. The land of Israel has a kind of reactivity that no another land has. It makes people lose their sanity – a kind of a Holy Land Syndrome, which people try to evade by means of earthly life, "*pleasures of the flesh*" or "*rivers of blood*" (Korczak 1978, 89). Korczak does not deny the realities of this troubled land, but he still holds his belief that it carries the promise of the future of Mankind and its redemption.

Men 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, in order 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 worthy not to be treated as a wunderkind (…)."[[294]](#footnote-294)*

In spite of the pseudo-religious language, the encounter between Korczak and the Land of Israel is a humanistic encounter, in which he tries to explore the spirit of Man. The mountains are difficult, but the human mind is more difficult both to comprehend and to endure. The Land of Israel is important because it opens the door to a deeper understanding of Man.

The Land of Israel, God's vineyard, was asleep for generations, like the Sleeping Beauty in the fairy tales, and now it starts to awake when its people are starting to return to it. However, it is not one nations' land nor the place of one tradition, but the origins of all great traditions and hopefully the birthplace of the new all humanity one,

*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?*

*Not 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 still 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*.*"*[[295]](#footnote-295)

The Land of Israel, concealing the great secret about the encounter of Man and God, arises in Korczak the thought about a new all humanity epos that will complete the trilogy of Monotheistic thought. First came the Hebrew Bible, then the New Testament and now the time is ripe for a third text that will unite all men.

*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*.[[296]](#footnote-296)

The religious struggle over the Land of Israel is today a struggle between three Monotheistic traditions, two of them, Judaism and Christianity, were born in this land, and see it as their sanctuary, and the third faith, Islam, found an anchor in it. Instead of choosing between them who owns the land, he hopes for the creation of a new epos that will found it as a place of all men solidarity. As such, it would also be the realization place of his utopia about respect for the children. In Korczak's Land of Israel utopia, all men dreams meet and merge into an all humanity harmony.

The Land of Israel has a spiritual depth that no another country has. Therefore, it has the power to give birth to great faiths: it was the first testament, the Hebrew, after that the Christian Testament, and now, in the land of Israel a thirst faith, unifying all, will be born.

In his essay "Impressions and Thoughts",[[297]](#footnote-297) Korczak speaks about the third "return" of the Israeli people to its land. He weaves a meta-historical narrative that the Zionist enterprise will integrate into an all-humanity project. The Land of Israel is not just one nations' heritage – it is God's land. For generations, this divine land was asleep and now it was awakened up to fulfill its promise.

This spiritual land has a spirituality that outlives the sanctity of scriptures. Therefore, it will give birth to a new tradition that will create a holy all humanity trilogy together with the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Korczak articulates a messianic vision of the Land of Israel that brings redemption to all men. It is not a personal Messiah nor a transcendent divine redemption, but an internal reactivity of the land that moved humanity forward and now it wakes up from a long sleep, to move humanity even further towards its redemption.

The land of Israel has a meaning for Korczak only through a universal lens and through a new kind of divinity, a humanistic God that belongs to all. Moreover, the land of Israel has the right to exist only if it carries a mission of changing the reality of men. Anything less than a divine challenge of a total change of humanity is 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*.[[298]](#footnote-298)

Here in Korczak eyes, the infinite adventure of education and the immanent religiosity of the land meet. The enormous human efforts to revive the Land of Israel are worthy only if they are in the service of the human quest to form a new universal reality of children and childhood. Korczak is worshiping not the God of heaven, but the God of the earth, i.e. the infinity of life. The Zionist experiment may have legitimacy in Korczak eyes only when it becomes a universal quest for a better life for all.

Like in Isaiah's prophecy, Zion, Jerusalem and the Land of Israel, should be the meeting place of all men. There, he dreams in one of his letters, will be a second League of Nations dedicated to spiritual life, human individuality and the rights of children.[[299]](#footnote-299)

Korczak, speaking in a utopian language, does not remain in the safety of a utopian "territory". Like in 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,"* says Korczak,[[300]](#footnote-300) echoing Marcus Aurelius' stoicism. Zionism, therefore, is not just a possibility, but a historical and ethical necessity and yet only if it has a universal character.

From a personal point of view, Korczak may come to the Land of Israel only if he can enter the 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*.”[[301]](#footnote-301) It seems that Korczak is engaged in writing this Bible, which is about the Magna Carta of children's rights, which it now seems to him, can be written and realized only in the Holy land of all nations, the Land of Israel. Here, in the land of Israel, in Jerusalem, the second League of Nations should be. The League of Nations in Geneva will deal with material issues, like wars, labor, public health. The League of Nations in Jerusalem will deal with individuals and spiritual issues.[[302]](#footnote-302) Korczak believed this land of hope will be – as it was always been – the meeting place of all human spiritual quests.

* 1. **The Land of Hope is still a Utopia**

One has to admit that Korczak's vision of the Land of Israel is a far-reaching utopia rather than a realistic picture, a promise that men failed to fulfill. The Land of Israel is until today in the 21st century, an area of bitter conflicts amongst different nationalities and faiths, a source, and a stage of religious fanaticism, hatred, and violence. Yet, we cannot give up and abandon the long human dream of all men solidarity and peace. We cannot live without the hope of human salvation embedded in Korczak's writings. Like in the stoic pietas, struggling for a better world is not a theoretical issue nor an abstract belief, but rather a moral demand.

Korczak had visited the Land of Israel, then Palestine, twice. He saw meaning in his being first in his family to visit the ancient homeland, but he finally decided to remain in Poland, where World War II caught him and sealed his destiny.

Korczak dedicated his entire life to the cause of children, leading two children houses with inspiring pedagogy, advocating children rights and leading intensive dialogues with children through literature and journalism. The Land of Israel was for him the Promised Land for children. There, they will get their rights – it is written in the language of its stars.

The life of children in the young Israeli communities and their ability to grow up in a holistic and integrated environment fascinated him. While Korczak did not become a formal member of the Zionist movement, he acknowledged its historical meaning as part of all men struggle for salvation. The kibbutz experiment is a pioneering laboratory of new human relations and a just society. He encourages the young kibbutz members to explore further the possibilities of their common life, but he warns them against sealing their life in a dogmatic system, as life is larger than any possible system.

Being a Universalistic humanist, Korczak has a broad understanding of the Jewish-Arab conflict in Palestine. Even in days of hostilities during the "Arab Revolt" of 1936-1939, the Arabs are human beings and not demons.

His broad worldview enables tolerance and empathy to all faiths and traditions including Christianity, Islam and the Bahai faith. All human dreams and prayers are directed to the Holy Land. It is the birthplace of men's greatest traditions. Now, it invites men to come forward with a new call for all men solidarity.

The land of Israel is a holy land that has a special meaning to all. It has a metaphysical dimension that we have to acknowledge. Heavens are different there. The stars tell secrets of old. It does not belong to one people. It speaks to all humanity and reminds men the messianic vision of all men justice and solidarity. It is "*a country searching for God".*[[303]](#footnote-303) In the Land of Israel, men should establish a second League of Nations dedicated to the rights of children.

This inspiring utopia still waits for its fulfillment. In Biblical prophecies, Jerusalem is a value-concept of peace and all men solidarity. Korczak invites us to return to this utopian meaning of the Land of Israel. Of course, utopia is not practical by its very definition, and yet in time of interfaith growing violence, Korczak brings horizons of hope into our education and public discourse.

1. **The Kingdom of Children in Literature**
   1. **Jewish Dream of one Humanity**

Utopia is the product of our free minds. It exists in philosophy, literature and art. It is an expression of the freedom of men to go beyond the reality of life, to fly above earth and beyond the present.

Janusz Korczak is known as a tragic figure, the ultimate victim of 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 Nazi death camps were the realization of a dystopia. In Treblinka, the earth opened its mouth, and the fires of hell burned humanity, physically and metaphorically. Nonetheless, Janusz Korczak is important for us as a utopian, as a prophet of a mended world.

Korczak started his literary career in 1901, when he published his first book "The Children of the Street" (*Dzieci Ulicy*) which deals with the inner city poverty children. In his Ghetto Diary, he reveals that the question of poverty troubled him from his very early childhood, and in this early book, he tries to grasp the social problem of the street children an open a window to their world.

For Korczak, the reality of children added to the problematic political and social reality of Jews in Poland as in the rest of the European countries. The naïve child's question about poverty was coupled by the question of a Jewish child who learned in the age of six that he is different and inferior in his moral, social and political status. Why is it like that? Can it be different? These troubling questions occupied Korczak work and writings.

Korczak searched for a milieu that will accept all men as equal and will wipe away the old dividing lines of faith, nationality, race, social status, and gender. It was a popular Jewish dream, a kind of a modern Messianism: a world of harmony and peace among all. This mended, redeemed, world, will offer also the full emancipation of children. In his modern Polish language, utilizing a Greek philosophical lexicon, Korczak is expressing the End of Days vision of the Biblical prophet Isaiah. Then, peace will prevail among all men. An all-men solidarity will come instead of violence, hatred and wars among people.

Korczak tried to realize his vision of a better human society in his two children houses – the graduates of these institutions had criticized him for being too much idealistic, not preparing them for the harsh realities of society – and it was literature that enabled him to share his vision both with children and adults. When his orphanages' children asked him about the troubling realities of society, he offered them the utopian vision of all-men harmony.

However, literature was also the place, where as a critical realist, Korczak had to admit that his vision is still a utopia. Besides being an educator, Korczak was from early years a social activist. Education was mobilizes to change the reality of children and the reality of all people.

We usually put the burden of peacemaking on the shoulders of statesmen. War and peace are left to the responsibility of political leaders and army generals. However, if the reformation of education is the key to the reformation of the world, as Korczak claimed, [[304]](#footnote-304) then we may ask whether educators have something to say in these matters. Can education be the endeavor that will bring about peace among men? What do we expect from educators to do in times of war or in peaceful times? Do educators have a voice in this crucial matter? Educators - are they obedient servants of the state, agents of socialization, part of the power system of society, helping young people to become patriotic citizens and good soldiers. Or maybe, they are autonomous agents of change, spokespersons of human dignity, social progress, and freedom.

Janusz Korczak had a vision and a voice and he voiced his ideas through his education discourse and work with children. Korczak was, undoubtedly, a patriot of his homeland, Poland, but he was not a silent and obedient civil servant. Society should be changed, and educators can have a share in this change. Writing, in literature and journalism, was his voice. He shared with the children under his custody and with his readers a utopian vision of the World of children who try to realize an all-men solidarity. Together with children, he created his children's journalism and with them he wrote his children literature. In the mouth of the various literary figures in his known novel King Matt the First, he put his words.

Bitterly, Korczak acknowledges in his literature that his idea about all human solidarity is a utopia. Adults always ruin it, but the idea remains; one day all humanity will unite around the cause of children. Without this hope, we are left with a despairing nihilistic worldview. This radical vision – which the world is not ready for – is probably best portrayed in his world known children novel King Matt the First.

The book became a best seller in Poland and beyond, and inspired the imagination of many, making Korczak a world known humanist. In 1957, Korczak's disciples and friends created a full-length color movie based on this novel.[[305]](#footnote-305) We will explore 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 screens many years after Korczak and his orphans where murdered by the Germans.

* 1. **Kingdom of all Children**

In his most famous novel, *King Matt the First* (1923), which earned him his worldwide fame as a children's writer, Korczak described the naïve efforts of children to establish a kingdom of peace where people of all affiliations, Europeans, Africans and Asians, aristocrats and plebs, rich and poor, boys and girls, settle their matters in a just and rational way. Only the adults cynically fail them and return society to the known reality of dishonesty, exploitation and wars. It is the book's message that even if democracy is the ideal political game, children cannot lead a democratic life alone and they need the trustful support of adults in managing their life. However, too often the adults manipulate the children's dependence and betray them.

King Matt has established Korczak's name not only as a children's writer, but also as a leading progressive educationalist who knew the true reality of wars from his very personal life-experience as an army medical officer and tried to establish education and the cause of children as the basis of a world peace.

King Matt is a story of a child prince who became at the age of ten a king after his father's death and tried to create a kingdom of equality and dignity among men. While the children, led by a child king, try to create a world of justice and understanding among people of different races, faiths, nationalities, social status and gender, the adults around them, politicians, doctors, journalists and educators fail them.

The book has clear connotations to Korczak's personal biography 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 drunker - are representations of Korczak himself, who ironically discusses his own failure to offer his children a better reality of peace and harmony. King Matt, the king of children, is also Korczak, who tries and fails – Korczak admits in self-irony – to establish the kingdom of justice and all-men solidarity.

The novel starts with the events around the death of the father king. Prince Matt is orphaned. He is alone. And he points to Korczak- Henrik Goldsmidt – who grew up in a well-to-do family, but when he was 11 years old his father collapsed, and hospitalized in a mental hospital and died a few years later. Orphan-hood was a major element of Korczak's social engagement. Matt, is, therefore, Korczak on the one hand and the subject of his life work on the other.

Matt is alone as he is surrounded by untrusted adults, corrupted ministers and other social agents, who isolate him from the rest of society and use his naivety for their own interests. They do not try to understand him nor listen to his needs as a child. This is the general situation of adults-children relations in Korczak's eyes - a huge misunderstanding and disrespect. Matt is the child Henrik who grew up in a bourgeois home, isolated from the street children.[[306]](#footnote-306) He is also the "every Child" who is mistreated by the adults. This is the accepted lie of education – Korczak's categorical accusation – the adults do not really care about the child's feelings but their own interests. The child chunks in his childhood helplessness, crying for help.[[307]](#footnote-307) The common discourse about education – claims Korczak in numerous places in his writings – is full of hypocrisy; falseness is evident in most of the adult characters in the book.

Loneliness is a major theme in the novel. Even when Matt returned as a victorious hero from the first war, he remains alone. Korczak describes in his personal writings the sense of loneliness that he carries from his childhood when his father misunderstood him. Only his grandmother listened to his dreams.[[308]](#footnote-308) The child, in general, is alone in the adults' society, which does not make any efforts to be emphatic to the life of the child and does not take his emotional life seriously.

Both in the novel and in life Korczak is interested in questions of genetic heritage that determines one's life. In the book, Matt is concerned about being a descendant of kings with problematic characters; one of them is his grand grandfather Bad-tempered Henri. Matt has an ongoing dialogue with his ancestors. He is their heir and successor and he struggles to find his individuality in this chain of generations. In his own life, Korczak worries about the genetic heritage of insanity he might get from his father. "*So I am the son of a madman. A heredity affliction*".[[309]](#footnote-309) 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 chain of generations.

In his professional life, as a pediatrician and a social educator he is talking about the child who carries within him 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 […]*".[[310]](#footnote-310)

Contrary to the modern ethos of individuality, human freedom and ability to change, Korczak is expressing the idea of essentialism: children have in their identity the stamp of generations that determines the course of their life, "*God has written it down in the book of destinies* *[…]*".[[311]](#footnote-311)

Men has the freedom of choice in their life, though it is more limited than we use to think in our modern eyes. We used to the expression that "the sky is the limit" of ones ambitions. As a physician and a social activist, Korczak has a more realistic worldview. One's destiny is also determined by his or her heritage. Essentialism versus Existentialism - this is core of modern dispute about humanity. It is also a focal point of disagreement among Korczak's scholars about Korczak's place in the road map of modern philosophy.[[312]](#footnote-312)

Korczak as a modern Stoic, believed in the rationality of men. Conflicts can be solved by a rational discourse. The democratic structure of the children's community was tended to enable and support a rational exchange of ideas and feelings. Violence and wars could be avoided if people could learn how to solve their conflicts in a rational way. In the novel, King Matt, the child King, expresses this idea, as he confronts the reality of coming war with the "three kings", which threaten his kingdom. *"If I had known them* [the other kings] *before, we might not have had a war at all*".[[313]](#footnote-313) Only lack of knowledge and mutual understanding causes wars.

* 1. ***War***

War and peace efforts are major themes in King Matt the First. Wars also dominated Korczak's personal life who has participated in several bloody wars from the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5), World War I, the Polish-Russian war, and then World War II. Korczak is sincere enough to admit his ambivalence towards wars. Wars are cruel, painful, deadly, and yet wars are glorious and give people a sense of belonging and meaning. In his personal life, Korczak is a honored Polish patriot who proudly wears his officer uniforms. In the novel the child king in the story is joining the war in secret together with his friend Felek and a bravely wins the battle. The sense of military comradeship becomes part of his identity.

The war scenes are naively described in the story and even more so in the later movie, like pictures in children's imagination, but one 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. They wage wars because they seek glory and power. Wars appear to be the adults' childish game. They can make peace but they choose war - the soldiers and the citizens are paying the high price.

Korczak wrote King Matt just a few years after Korczak, a military medical officer, witnessed the horrors of World War I and the Polish-Russian war and its meaninglessness. The three kings in the novel are probably a parable of the three great European kingdoms that joined hands in World War I, Germany, Austro-Hungary, and the Othman Empire, or maybe the three authoritarian powers who had occupied Poland and eliminated it from the European map for about one hundred and fifty years, Prussia, Austro-Hungary and Tsarist Russia. They cynically betray the child king who naively offers them a fair peace treaty.

The irony in the novel is also a self-irony as Korczak admits in various stages of his life that in times of war he personally feels energized, needed again and belonged to something meaningful. Korczak is an example of many Jews in pre-World War II Europe who wanted mostly to feel that they belong to their host nation; patriotic wars gave them an opportunity to express such feelings. Naively, they hoped that it would give them a formal recognition as integrated part of society. Like other Jews, Korczak wanted to be recognized as a Polish patriot.

Years after he wrote the novel, when the Germans attacked Poland in the beginning of World War II, people witnessed Korczak again in Polish military uniforms, energized by the feeling that he is needed again.[[314]](#footnote-314) Korczak is taking part in the doomed Polish efforts to defend Warsaw from the German blitz.

About twenty years after he wrote the book, in his February 1942 application to the Warsaw ghetto Jewish council, he described his participation in three wars – an important element of his identity – and his disdain to boring civil experience, which he tries to overcome.[[315]](#footnote-315) In another place in his diary, he describes the surge of excitement the drama of war gives him, something he misses during the boredom of civil life.[[316]](#footnote-316)

War reveals the secret powers of the people, feels 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, its citizens rediscovered their dignity, united behind Matts' leadership and nearly won the war. Only cowardliness and treason prevented it and caused Matt lose his entire project. Korczak is a Polish patriot, though he is not a militant fascist and he honestly describes the two sides of the wars he has in mind. He joins willingly the war efforts, but seeks peace afterward and critically refers the foolishness and manipulations of generals and politicians.

The kings and the army generals appear ridiculous in the story, caricatures of everything that is absurd in their character. They are interested first-of-all in their glory and King Matt learns how to deal with them: giving 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*".[[317]](#footnote-317) At last, Matt-Korczak naively believes in a different human relationship and lose the game. Korczak sadly admits through the sad ending of the book that Matt's vision is still a utopia and that generals and kings still own the historical stage.

The book portrays one military personality in a very positive way - the young officer who took Matt under his protection in the battlefront and then became his mentor, "the Captain". In Korczak's real life, one general became an exemplary figure for Korczak - Marshal Pilsudski, the leader of new Poland. Korczak saw him as a national hero who fought for the freedom of Poland. After Pilsudki's death, he continued his contacts with his widow.

Korczak himself was a military officer who made education his life mission. Education is more important and nobler than warfare. Korczak was a Polish patriot but not a blind militant or faithful fascist. A rational dialogue is essential to the life of the democratic community of children. It is also crucial to peaceful relations among nations. In his known literary figure, King Matt, in the mouth of Matt, the child King, the following new insight: "*If I had known them* [the other kings] *before, we might not have had a war at all*".[[318]](#footnote-318) Only lack of knowledge and mutual understanding causes wars.

* 1. ***Women***

Korczak never got married and had no biological children. One explanation could be his fears that he might pass the madness of his father to the following generation,[[319]](#footnote-319) but there are other possible explanations. In one of his letters to a friend in Palestine, he explains bitterly that a Jew in Poland, "a slave", better does not have children. He admits that the decision was like a suicide. Then he decided to adopt the idea of the service of the child (Korczak, 1978*,* 198, letter to Moshe Zilbertal on March 30, 1937). When we look back at his entire life, we see a monk that dedicated his entire life to the cause of children.

Korczak had a few important feminine figures in his life. On the one hand, there were his mother and his sister, and on the other hand, there were his two partners in the children's houses, Stefania (Stefa) Wilczyńska at the "Dom Sierot" Jewish orphanage of Krochmalna Street and Maryna Palska at the Christian orphanage "Nash Dome". However, as far as we know, their relations were limited to the professional management of these two institutions. In the ghetto diary, Korczak describes a conversation between two old men. When one of them is asked about his personal life, he says he did not have time in his very busy life for women. Moreover, he hints to an unsuccessful experience he had once with a woman. When the other asks about his children, he says that he has two hundred children, like the number of children Korczak had in those days in his orphanage. One can see both of these two fellows as representations of Korczak.

In another place in the diary, he says that in his childhood years, from seven to fourteen years, he was in a constant state of love. He remembers the girls he loved in those early years. Now he is dedicated to the love of others, of children.[[320]](#footnote-320)

The book is dominated by male figures, though we can mention a few women as well, though their presence in the book is limited and their place in the movie is even smaller. The first is the image of Matt's mother who died when he was a little child and mentioned as a painful memory of love and attention he does not have anymore.

The wife of the railroad guard appears as a momentary mother figure as she helps Matt and Felek on their way to the front at the outbreak of the first war. He remembers her favor on his triumphant return and stops for a cup of coffee with her.[[321]](#footnote-321)

One feminine figure has a most important presence in the novel - the African princess Klu Klu. Korczak is troubled with the question of women's rights and status in society. Klu Klu represents the feminist persona who fights for women's equality "*In my country, in Africa, the girls are as good as the boys in everything*".[[322]](#footnote-322) She has no inferiority complex when she struggles with the boys around her, not in her physical capabilities, nor with her strong personality and wise character.

However, Klu Klu also falls in love with Matt and he ignores her feelings - like Korczak, he is too busy with his duties.[[323]](#footnote-323) Matt saves Klu Klu in a noble act from the teeth of the wolf,[[324]](#footnote-324) but it 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 to the traditional conventions of society. One can discern in her character, both the idealism of Korczak and the images of the two strong women which actually run Korczak's two orphanages. The feminist movement of the Twentieth Century was still waiting for its much later time in the post World-War-II society, and here Korczak brings forward a strong feminist message.

***9.5 Inter-race Relations***

Klu Klu and her home culture in Africa, carry another universal message, which is important to Korczak: inter-race partnership. On the one hand, she comes according to the story from a country of cannibalism; the way it portrayed in the novel, and then in the movie, represents all the common European typecasts of the African people. On the other hand, Klu Klu proves that she is not inferior in any way to the white children.

The book brings the common stereotypical attitude among Western nations towards the people of Africa. Such a description is probably unacceptable to the Twenty First Century Westernized multi-cultural language – a hundred years ago in colonial Europe, it was common. The European kings proclaim, "*We are civilized kings and we do not wish to sit at the same table with cannibals*".[[325]](#footnote-325) Korczak is critical to this pervasive westernized view. In the novel, King Matt makes endless efforts to overcome this racist attitude and convince the Europeans that such inter-race relations are possible. The story suggests that among children race-differences can be abridged.

Nonetheless, Korczak does not adopt a relativist approach to culture, and he does not hide the differences between different cultures - the African peoples have a lot to learn from Western countries - but they can learn and change. Klu Klu expresses the naive idea - not so popular in recent multicultural perspectives - that education can bring progress to undeveloped countries: "*The sooner more children start studying, the sooner we can build a new Africa*".[[326]](#footnote-326)

Korczak believes in education and its capability to change society. It is a Socratic or a Platonic idea - which appears many times in Korczak writings as well as in his pedagogical practice - that rational thinking can change human behavior for the better. Matt has explained Bum Drum that he must stop cannibalism and the story suggests that there is a real chance that it can work. The adults in both cultures - those that represent the tradition and prejudices - try to ruin this equal and mutual relationship but children learn to overcome it. Korczak was a universal humanist who expressed his trust in the future of all men reunion, including natives from far countries, even cannibals from islands near Australia,[[327]](#footnote-327) and from civilized societies in Europe.

The kingdom of Matt is styled as a Polish kingdom and even more so in the movie (1958), but it is a no-place kingdom. It has no name and it exists nowhere but in Korczak's utopia. The same applies to the home country of Klu Klu and her father king Bum Drum, which represents all the non-European peoples. Klu Klu, the black girl, is until the end of the book the most reliable supporter of Matt-Korczak. King Matt is free of the adults' prejudices and has no problem to have Klu Klu or the Asian people at his side. The story realizes the idea of all human solidarity. Korczak delivered through the images of Matt and Klu Klu his hope that one day this all-men-solidarity will be realized in life as well.

Years after, in a much later stage of his writings, Korczak expressed another layer of his utopia when he suggested that this ideal human solidarity should be realized in the "land of Hope", Palestine, the Land of Israel. The kingdom of Matt got a geographic mark, which, in the light of current violent history, only adds to its fantastic character.

* 1. ***Social Idealism***

In his ghetto diary, Korczak described himself as an idealistic child who comes forward with the idea to eliminate the money from the world, a source of all the evils that men afflict upon others. In a no-money society there will be no more poor children with whom the bourgeois child, Henryk Goldschmidt, will not be allowed to play with. His father mocked him for his dreaming character. Only his grandmother respected it.[[328]](#footnote-328) In Kings Matt, there is a point in the story, when the young king discovers the phenomena of poverty and the social reality of poor children. The doctor, another representations 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*.[[329]](#footnote-329)

Korczak's public work started with his engagement with children of poverty. His first book, "The children of the Street" (1901), tells his interest in social matters. A few years later, he left his medical career for the sake of these children. Social idealism was also a popular field among modernized Jews, an avenue to the heart of society. Korczak - all his adult life he tried to improve society, helping the poor, taking care of orphan children, writing about social problems and about the vision of new human solidarity.

The presence of social idealism and its failure is a major element in King Matt story. Poverty and ordinary hard life exist side by side with the corrupted life of the leaders of society in the governmental palace. Matt meets the girl in the garden who wishes she could have a dole. The children of the streets have their unfulfilled dreams and the child king feels that it is his duty to fulfill their wishes. Adults see children's needs as unimportant, childish, and therefore easy to neglect. Korczak-Matt take them seriously.

Matt comes forward with the idea of the journalist to form a children democracy, like the democracy Korczak has implemented in his two children communities.[[330]](#footnote-330) The children will have their own parliament and will make their own decision. With childhood naivety, the children legislate in favor of the children demands. It proves to be disastrous. The state reaches a chaotic state and collapses before its external enemies.

A catastrophic, though a comic situation, happens in the book when the children decide to exchange places with the adults: children run the adults' world and their parents are sent to school.[[331]](#footnote-331) It shows, on the one hand, the child in any adult, who becomes childish in the new situation, but also the clear inability of children to run the adults' world. The result, in the book, is a total collapse of everything.

The exchange of roles corresponds to one of Korczak's known stories "when I am little again".[[332]](#footnote-332) The story carries the message of empathy towards the world of children: if adults really want to understand children, they have to put themselves in their place. However, Korczak in self-irony is not carried away by his dream. In reality, such an experiment will be catastrophic. Children are complete people, but they are children, different from adults with different talents and capabilities. They cannot and should not be adults. They have their own world and they should remain children – they deserve their childhood – and adults have the duty to enable it.

The children democracy failed because the adults betrayed the children's trust and left them alone. Here Korczak reveals an important aspect of his idea of children democracy – it must be a guided democracy. Children have rights, but they are not adults and cannot manage alone. They can have a successful democratic community only if trustful and good intentioned educators aid them. This is true also towards the end of the novel when their own government who surrenders to the enemy betrays Matt and his army. Children need their trustful leaders and the citizens of the state need their trustful leaders as well.

Realism and skepticism dominate Korczak's personality along with naïve idealism. On the one hand, he strives for a better humanity: "*The world does not need work and oranges, but a new faith. The faith in future life must be connected to the child, as a source of hope*".[[333]](#footnote-333) On the other hand, he is very realistic about its plausibility. He is not a romantic idealist and he acknowledges the child's weaknesses. In his conversations with young educators, he stresses his objection to an idealistic picture of children; even among children, there are more moral and less moral people. Even children can be corrupted as it happens in the book even to Felek. Education has a mission to realize a better society, but it is an endless work, which confronts the obstacles of life.

A trustful figure in the novel is the doctor who is taking care of Matt and sees him always as a child and not as a king. The doctor is also a representation of Korczak, a known pediatrician, who is totally committed to the child. The doctor knows Matt from birth, so he says in the book. Korczak, as a pediatrician, knew the child from the moment of birth and wrote extensively about birth and early childhood.[[334]](#footnote-334) He knew the child and demanded respect for his or her needs.

Another adult figure in the novel is the journalist,[[335]](#footnote-335) another representation of Korczak, who edited a children's newspaper, Mały Przegląd (Little Review, a weekly attachment to the daily Polish-Jewish Newspaper "Nasz Przegląd" [Our Review]), had his "the Old Doctor" radio program, and praised the importance of educational journalism.[[336]](#footnote-336) The journalist betrays Matt as a spy who serves the foreign kings and their dishonest world. The journalist image, we can assume, might represent Korczak's sense of guilt – he positioned himself to the children side and yet he is part of the adults' world. Korczak's former students accused him that he did not prepare them for the harsh reality of life, carried by his own utopia. He is asking himself whether he is really serving their needs or maybe he uses them in his world and betrays his duty to guide them in the paths of the real world.

Social justice and the idea of peace go together both in Korczak's real life and in his novel. Generals, ministers, and kings are seeking wars and the simple citizens seek human solidarity and peace. Beside his irony towards the ruling elite, Korczak expresses also in this book his love for ordinary people. In the movie – made by Korczak's friends – it was the ordinary people who towards the end of the story saved the child king from the death sentence. Children and ordinary people have simple, honest feelings, which were lost in the world of power and politics.

***9.6. The Movie and a post-Holocaust Korczak Tradition***

The story ends when King Matt is sentenced to death; he proudly faces his fate. The irony of history: twenty years later, Korczak walked proudly to the train that took him to Treblinka.

Korczak perished in Treblinka with his children, but his legacy remained and became a legend. The story of the child king – who wanted to achieve peace and justice to all and failed – made Korczak, already before World War II, a spokesperson of human solidarity and an advocate of children's rights. The literary figure of King Matt became an icon in Poland. Beautiful editions, posters, stamps, carry the images of this naïve story. It is a story of failure and yet a story of hope that never dies, holding that one-day Korczak’s vision of all human solidarity will prevail. Without it, we are doomed to despair.

After the war, Korczak's disciples, among them his close friend and aid at the children's newspaper Mały Przegląd, the journalist and writer Igor Newerly, made the book into a full-length color movie: Krol Macius I.[[337]](#footnote-337) It is a naïve children movie, maybe not fast enough for the current eye and not sophisticated as movies created in these days, but it is a unique Polish piece of art and a wonderful document of its own. It opens another window to Korczak's ideas about men and education, the interaction between children and adults, peace education and the realities of war.

Like the in the book, the story unfolds in a no-place kingdom. The movie characters speak Polish and much of their style is Polish, but it does not mention Poland and it pretends that it happens in a nowhere land. Korczak's universal vision of human solidarity is 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 the audience of the movie need a special state of mind, an empathic attitude towards children if they want to understand it. The whole movie appears more as a theater play giving the idea that it is just a story, a childish fantasy or adults' utopia. The audience knows the tragic end of Korczak and it gives the whole story another ironic dimension, a utopia that ended in Treblinka.

The first scene shows the orphaned prince, surrounded by a group of ridiculous adults. This is Korczak's second emphatic statement: children in our society are alone, surrounded by adults who do not really seek their good.

Children quite often dream about becoming the rulers of their world – this is a common children's wish to do things by their own, but they need guidance. The child king needs friends and orientation. To his aid come the educator, the doctor, the journalist and they all fail him. To his side comes an older street boy, Felek and he 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 escapes to the front to join the fighting of his army in a naïve gesture of bravery and honor. The war's reality is portrayed in a naïve childish way - the readers and the audience of the movie know very well, like Korczak, that wars are different. It is a common patriotic lie. Naively, Matt wins the war and he asks for peace, but the adult kings are waiting for his failure. World War I ended with the Treaty of Versailles (1919), which forced Germany to pay huge reparations to states that had formed the Entente powers. In King Matt story, the question reparations is a major issue. Matt-Korczak naively believes that peace goes only with waving any financial demands from the other side. Maybe, Korczak in a prophetic vision, identifies one of the causes of the rise of German nationalism that led to a second world war a few years later.

The state needs money and the help comes from an African king Bum Dum and his daughter, Klu Klu, who represent Korczak universal utopia of one humanity that overcomes all differences of race, religion or gender. The two detailed trips of Matt to Africa becomes in the movie one funny trip by a helicopter. The movie looks more like a theater play, performed on a stage. The actors of the Africans are European people painted with black paint all over their body. A toy helicopter is taking King Matt and his companions to the country of Bum Drum.

The "Africans" brings into Korczak's discourse his childhood idea of eliminating money from society. They seek friendship and not gold, while the ministers and the foreign kings are blinded by it.

After peace is won for a while, we see the collapse of the young children democracy into chaos. Matt makes a disastrous children revolution, failed by the ill advice he got from adults around him. The lesson is clear: children's democracy must be a guided democracy, but the adults do not really want it to succeed. As a result, Matt losses the second war with the three foreign kings and sentenced to death. The accusation: 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 – not like in Korczak's real life and not like in the book – has a happy end. In the book, Matt is sentenced – like Napoleon Bonaparte – to life in prison on a deserted island. Maybe, it was the close dialogue that Polish nationalism had with the French national heritage since the Eighteens Century, which moved Korczak to portray Matt as a child Napoleon. Napoleon tried to reform the world, under his ruling, and so Korczak felt like a Napoleon when he tried to change the world and to make it more rationale. Like Napoleon, Matt-Korczak wanted to create a united humanity and like Napoleon, he could not overcome the traditional powers around him.

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 of the drunken soldiers and blew the invading soldiers away in a fantastic naïve scene that looks like a cartoon movie. The movie, created after the bloodshed of the Second World War and after Treblinka, returns to the realm of fantasy. Political Freedom was another kind of a utopia. In the war that just ended, the Poles did not succeed to blow away their oppressors, and in the time that the movie was created, they were actually under another "dark" occupation.

When despair prevails, we need this fantastic utopia if we want to regain our trust in the world of Man. We need it as teachers and parents. We need it for the worldview of our children and students. Otherwise, we might end our education discourse with despair. World War I did not have a happy end, left an overall destruction behind it, including 15 million meaningless casualties. The following world war left even larger destruction and about 55 million casualties. Korczak delivers in King Matt a message of hope. Wars are the stupid games of the adults; children offer us an alternative. Korczak invited his readers to think whether men could end their future wars differently and establish the kingdom of children.

World War II, just 16 years after King Matt was published, caused even a much greater catastrophe. Korczak, the author, went with his children to Treblinka. History endangered men's faith in the basic goodness of humanity. The funny ending of the movie may return the smile to our faces and remind us of Korczak trust in humanity.

King Matt the First has been translated from Polish into many languages, Russian, Ukrainian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, English, Hebrew, German, Japanese, and even Esperanto. It was read by children all over the world and inspired generations of educators and adult readers in general. The rest of Korczak's literary heritage is less known, though all his book adds to the philosophical message of Korczak about humanity and children.

The evaluation of Korczak's literary work in general, and King Matt, in particular, is diverse. There are readers who willingly follow Korczak's magical journey and enjoy the story of Matt for its own literary qualities. It is a wonderful fantasia, which sheds light on various aspects of men, its wisdom and foolishness, virtues and weaknesses, and catch our imagination if we are allowing ourselves to be children in our mind for a while.

Others read King Matt as a literary platform for his humanistic philosophy, promoting values of loyalty and courage, social equality and inclusion, tolerance, peace and all-men unity and brotherhood, participation and democracy, empathy and respect for the world of children.

As such, Korczak's literature as a whole – King Matt and the rest of his very prolific writings - is an important voice in 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 sharp critical realist, disillusioned of any idealization of reality, including the virtues of children, and a bitter critic of the present adults-children relations. 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**

Until World War II Yitzchak Katzenelson was well known among the followers of Hebrew culture in Poland, even if he was not counted among the first rank of poets of his time.[[338]](#footnote-338) The poet of "Gilu HaGelilim" (Rejoice the Galilees" in Hebrew) and "Yafim Ha-Leylot Be-Cenaan" ("How Beautiful are the Nights in Canaan" in Hebrew) saw with great joy the revival of the Jewish people in his ancient homeland. Contrary to the alienated Korczak, Katzenelson was connected with all his being to his people, especially to the folk aspects of it. He was versed in all the layers of Jewish tradition - Biblical, Talmudic, Rabbinic, Yiddish and Modern Hebrew literature - and he expressed intimacy with all trends of Jewish life. The images of Biblical and Haggadic Talmudic heroes filled his world. He spoke perfect Hebrew. His mother tongue", the common language at his parents' home was Yiddish so he was versed in both of these cultural milieus.

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 the Zionist socialist settlement movement. He himself was a partner to the revival of Hebrew culture in Poland. In 1906 he started his work as an educator in Hebrew school, part of the Hebrew education system his family established in Lodz. In 1910, his first poetry book "Dimdumim" [Twilight] was published. In 1912, he founded the "Hebrew Stage" theater in Lodz where he staged his plays.

Katzenelson lived the Land of Israel with all his might. 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 versed with the atmosphere of the Land of Israel and optimism of the coming renewal of the Jewish people. In the years 1935-1939, he leads cultural activities in the Grochov kibbutz (community of Zionist pioneers) in Lodz.

Before the war, Katzenelson was a happy poet, at least on the surface of his writings. His early poetry is light, referring to the ritual of life.[[339]](#footnote-339) However, underneath the literary surface, the darkness of history is gradually present. In the introduction to the three volumes of his poetry, published on 1938, he reveals awareness to the historical political situation and the darkening clouds in the "skies' of his people. Katzenelson apologizes about the fact that he is writing poetry in such hard time of his people. Confronting potential criticism he explains in length that poetry is not an expression of joy but the evading of despair, actually a mean of escapism:

*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.* [[340]](#footnote-340)

Katzenelson is aware of the abyss that gradually opens its mouth under the feet of the Jewish people. His letters to his relatives from the years before the war reveal his historical awareness.[[341]](#footnote-341) He sees the clouds that darken the days of the Jewish people. In the above introduction to his poems book, he explains that if he was not writing poetry he would have to write about the unbearable abyss that was overwhelming his senses and deprive him the joy of life. AT this stage he tries to avoid it. Katzenelson, the joyful poet, draws a painful dilemma, which points with clarity to the reality only a few years to come. To a person who was brought into a deadlock there is an exit only in two options: "*to put an end to his life or to go out singing […] and he chose singing, life*".[[342]](#footnote-342)

His dreams were taking him to the Land of Israel, but he missed the time. The shock of the war is mixed with heavy feelings of defeat and loss. Katzenelson the refugee in the beginning of the war is a beaten person. During the war, his world is changed and he acquired a unique place among the interpreters of Jewish reality. Like a Biblical prophet, he is not the one who sees the future but the one who understand the very meaning of the present. He understood early what others tried to depress – the German intention to liquidate the Jews. One has defined him as one of the important prophets of the Jewish people in a recent generation that we still have not recognized: "*Avraham, the one who sacrifices, Yitzchak the sacrificed, Job and Jeremiah in one personality*".[[343]](#footnote-343)

Katzenelson has arrived in Warsaw from Lodz, via Krakow, probably between November 14th and 19th 1939 after living in Lodz as a hunted person, as he was a central persona in Lodz cultural life, one of the Jewish and non-Jewish elite who was destined to destruction immediately by the German occupation.[[344]](#footnote-344) After his family members – his wife Hannah and his sons Zvi Benzion and Benjamin – also arrived in Warsaw on January 1940, Katzenelson was still trying to find ways to immigrate to Palestine, but on April he understood that hope was lost. This failure was difficult and despairing, his life dream was shattered.[[345]](#footnote-345)

Until May 1940, Katzenelson was deep in his disappointment and in desperate efforts to find sources of living. He wrote nothing. The change came when he was "adopted" by the Zionist pioneering movement.

The Zionist movements were in chaos after the occupation of Poland, but when the "Dror" (Freedom) movement rearranged itself during May-June 1940 under the leadership of Yitzchak (Antek) Zuckerman, Katzenelson found himself a home. He went out of his helplessness and got a favorable audience. He resumed his writing, especially in Yiddish, the language of the Jewish masses. And so, after months of silence as a refugee among thousands of refugees, Katzenelson found his spiritual home among the circles of the Zionist underground movements.

In his memoirs, Antek Zuckerman said that he knew the poet from his school education and he describes how he met Katzenelson through one of his friends, Korninansky, and invited him to be part of the movement's circle of 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.[[346]](#footnote-346)*

Zuckerman recognizes at that testimony the special place Katzenelson had in his worldview and how meaningful he was for the movement members. In another testimony, he says "*We went through the whole hell with Yitzhak Katzenelson".[[347]](#footnote-347)* 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.

On May 1940, a decision was made in the "Dror" movement to run a nationwide seminar for educators and Katzenelson accepted the invitation to be one of the speakers at the seminar. The seminar – long days of joint study and conversations about national, cultural and ideological issues - was a moment of change in the life of the reviving movement and also in Katzenelson's life in Warsaw.[[348]](#footnote-348)

On June 1940, a decision was made to establish an underground "Dror" gymnasia – the Germans banned Jewish schools - and Katzenelson was invited to teach Hebrew and Bible. On August 1940, the gymnasia started to operate in underground conditions. Katzenelson, the teacher, left a deep impression on his students. Years after, his former student Havka Folman-Rabban is writing:

*[…] 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.[[349]](#footnote-349)*

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

*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…!*[[350]](#footnote-350)

Folman-Rabban survived Auschwitz and got the privilege to read the poet's words in his diary. Katzenelson remained for Folman-Rabban as a teacher for life and a source of inspiration years later when Folman-Rabban joined the founding group of the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz in Israel and the founders of the Ghetto Fighters House who is named in memory of Yitzchak Katzenelson.

Katzenelson was integrated into the cultural and educational life of the "Dror" movement and published regularly in its underground press. The members of the movement were his immediate audience. In conjunction to the "Dror" gymnasia Katzenelson founded a drama group and with it, he performed Biblical drama in front of hundreds and thousands of the ghetto inhabitants. Zivia Lubetkin, one of the underground leaders, writes about the spiritual leader who joined the 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*.[[351]](#footnote-351)

Besides cultural activity, Katzenelson tried to be involved also in activities of raising money for the underground.[[352]](#footnote-352) Sometimes, his connections to problematic personas in the ghetto were not accepted easily by the underground leadership.

Katzenelson wrote out of deep identification with the ghetto population and its lot. Zuckerman is testifying that

T*here 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 - in Yiddish, the language of his people in the Warsaw ghetto*.[[353]](#footnote-353)

The main cause in his writings at the first months of his ghetto writings is an effort to strengthen the spirit of the Jewish population and to give meaning to its experience. He is doing so through the use of metaphors and texts with many connotations to the Biblical world, generations of Jewish traditions and the modern Hebrew literature.

On the other side, his writings were fed by his deep involvement in the reality of the ghetto and his close ties to the Jewish population in general and to the Zionist pioneering movement in particular. His writing was, therefore, more than individual expression. In his words, there are 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*. [[354]](#footnote-354)

The faces of all the murdered Jews seem as 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.*"[[355]](#footnote-355)

In our current terminology, Katzenelson was a secular person, but he had a strong faith in the revival of his people, love for Jewish culture, love of people and dedication to the Jewish masses he lived with: *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…"*[[356]](#footnote-356)

Katzenelson was the most prolific among the ghetto writers. We know about 45 writings from the ghetto period, from which 32 survived the war, hidden in underground archives, and available to us today. 11 of these writings are dated. His ghetto writings include poems, plays, translations, public speeches, narrative poems, and hymns (Szeintuch, 2000). In the Vittel concentration camp where he was sent with his son Zvi after he was captured by the Germans in Hotel Polski he wrote among other pieces the diary, we call today "the 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 under German occupation and it existed for a comparatively long time, from October 1940 until its total destruction on May 1943. Under the German rule terror was an ever-present reality. On the one hand, it was not totally closed and isolated from the rest of the country. News from the implementation of "The Final Solution" in all parts of the Third Reich streamed to it. On the other hand, when the policies of oppression and deportation were gradually implemented in all parts of the German occupation, the ghetto inhabitants could carry on activities of mutual aid, culture, and education and finally to forge armed underground. The news on terror and murderous acts against Jews in the east – eastern parts of Poland, Belorussia, the Ukraine, and Russia – gradually penetrated the ghetto. Its process brought the understanding among the underground circles that this fate awaits all the Jews. It is a new reality, to which Jewish tradition has no answer.

The growing understanding of this totally new reality – this is what defined the development of Katzenelson's writings from the optimistic writing of solidarity and consolation during the first year of the ghetto, to texts that stressed the no end of the reality of Jews and despair.[[357]](#footnote-357)

From the beginning of 1942, when the reality of terror and death became clear, Katzenelson writings reach a turning point. On the one hand, it contains the praise of Jewish spirit which German terror does not break. Jewish spiritual resistance is the proof that the Jews do not surrender to the German brutal oppression. And on the other hand, it contains poems of anger, curse, and call for revenge and rebellion. Hatred of the Germans is evident. Emanuel Ringelblum describes Katzenelson's poem "Yizkor" (Remember!) and adds that though the poem does not excel in its artistic style it is impressive and contains an authentic call for revenge.[[358]](#footnote-358) This poem, the first version of Yizkor from the summer of 1940 and the second version of the summer of 1941, did not survive and lost. Lubtekin recalls the reading of this poem in the community at Dzelna 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.[[359]](#footnote-359)*

In the first year of the ghetto, Katzenelson was active within the educational and cultural frames created by the underground, especially "Dror", but also other movements. In those months, he was occupied by cultural activities, which aimed to strengthen the spirit of the people and give them hope that in the future reality will be better. There is no acceptance of the present but efforts to gather the strength to pass 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 (The Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz) in Israel holds 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 – especially those who were written during the last months of 1943 and January 1944 in the concentration camp of Vittel, France – despair is blatant; they are probably unsuitable for the Israeli ethos of renewal. Therefore, those who lead the development of the culture of remembrance in Israel tend to evade them. Teachers do not introduce them to their pupils. These texts reveal the understanding of an educator who was in the midst of the Holocaust events but also could detach himself from their harsh reality and write his reflections. They reveal his understanding that those events – the destruction of the Jewish people in Europe – are founding events in Jewish history.

The Holocaust is a shattering event that brings chaos, a return to nothingness, to the Jewish world, wiping out its moral horizons. With the destruction of all meaning, cynicism, nihilism, and despair overrun the world of all men and the world of Jews. A place where everything is lost with no meaning and no ethical directions – a reality in which everything is on the edge of annihilation – is a place in which it is very hard to be. This is the very place to where Katzenelson invites his readers.

Hebrew and Jewish culture created a large variety of responses to human suffering, especially through theodicy which tries in many ways to process the facts of evil in the world, its injustice, the existence of incomprehensible death, making them part of a known and meaningful reality. Otherwise, monotheistic culture faces the danger of disintegration and moral chaos. Monotheism expresses in its core the human aspiration for unity and meaning. Searching for one overall explaining principle to reality. The creator of the word, the master of the world who run his world injustice is such a rational guiding principle. When justice is violated, the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions defend themselves through theories of theodicy that overrun the dissonance with which struggles anyone who expects the world to be just and confront the opposite. Biblical literature, all the chapters of Rabbinic literature, medieval and modern Jewish philosophy – all struggle with the existence of evil and suffering in a world that is supposed to be judged and governed by an almighty God.

Yitzhak Katzenelson, like a senior member of his generation of Hebrew poets, Haim Nahman Bialik, Was familiar with the various layers of the Hebrew culture' including the Biblical and the Rabbinic ones; As a creative writer, he is using it in his texts to give meaning to the Jewish reality in the war. From his arrival in Warsaw in the middle of November 1939 until his last days in the camp of Vittel in the beginning of 1944 he went through a spiritual journey in which he used models taken from theodicy to give meaning to a reality that becomes harder and harder every day.

From the getting organized of the Dror (Freiheit, Freedom) movement towards new activity in May 1940, Katzenelson got a creative milieu and a supporting audience. People use to associate the underground with the later armed uprising in 1943, but the road that ended in armed fighting started with extensive spiritual and social resistance. "Dror" built a whole network of cultural and social activities including an agricultural farm in the suburb of the city, the underground press, a school, drama groups and a children choir.[[360]](#footnote-360)

The underground educators' seminar, organized by Dror, in the first weeks of the movement's renewed activity, and then the establishment of the underground Dror gymnasium in August 1940 were for Katzenelson a source of vital doing and a stage to express his interpretation to the ghetto reality. The drama group that he established and the Bible reading evenings he was leading were public stages where he read his poems and in which he offered the people of the ghetto his interpretation to their reality, an interpretation which gave them hope and a vision of days of redemption. In his plays "On the Rivers of Babylon" (March 1941) and "Job" (June 1941) he integrated Biblical chapters from Ezekiel and Job. Zivia Lubetkin, one of the leaders of the Dror underground, testified in a retrospective about the important place that Katzenelson's plays had in the life of 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 the Dror community] 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.[[361]](#footnote-361)*

Lubetkin emphasizes the fact that the story of Job, apparently one of the darkest books of the Bible, was a source of inspiration for the inhabitants of the ghetto. Yitzhak Zuckerman testifies about the play Job in the same way: "*This was very encouraging; indeed it did not save anyone from death but raised up the head of the young and the child*".[[362]](#footnote-362) Why Katzenelson chose these Biblical portions? What is it in these Biblical texts, which worked so powerfully on the minds of the ghetto people? Why dramatic plays, which deal with stories of human agony and national disasters, are a source of consolations in days of imprisonment in a ghetto?

The selection of these two Biblical topics "Job" and "on the Rivers of Babylon" is not a mere selection. Katzenelson is not portraying in the making of these texts into theater plays high artistic qualities, but it carries an important interpretation and therefore it got such enthusiastic responses. "Job" deals with the suffering of the individual. "On the Rivers of Babylon" deals with the suffering of the collective. In both of these plays, there is an effort to bring the present situation of the Jews into a narrative perspective, which promises its audience horizons of return to good life from the abysses of history. It gives the ghetto inhabitants hope.

"On the Rivers of Babylon" stages for the dying ghetto people the end of the first temple struggle with the reality of destruction and despair. This reality had, for the people of its time, the potential to lead to despair, spiritual decay and social disintegration of the people of Judea. Song 137 of the Psalms represents best this spirit of despair that held the exiles of Judea:

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 despair of the exiles is abysmal. In front of the mockery of their Akkadian capturers, the exiles have no answer nor hope. We can imagine the measure of despair someone has to experience in order to write verse number 9. The despair of the ancient exiles touches – in Katzenelson play – the despair of the ghetto Jews. In the current play, we see an empathic text that aimed not to express the ancient suffering but the difficult present. The ancient psalm becomes a lyric tool with which the ghetto prisoners express the experience of their own destruction. This verse gave them also the words for the curse they wish will strike their oppressors.

But, the deep the despair also the strength of the tidings concealed in the psalm for those who know the continuation of the ancient story, which the exiles did not know when they expressed their despair. Jews already know the good ending of that story: the exile came to its end with the proclamation of Koresh, King of Persia, in the year of 539 BC. Those exiles who wanted to were among the returnees to Zion a year later. Therefore, the connection of the people of the ghetto to the ancient exiles carries with it, on the one hand, a message of empathy to their own suffering and on the other hand a glimpse of hope that they also are going to be saved. The ancient narrative of redemption may become the current narrative of redemption from the Germans.

For the same reason, the story of Job carries with it a hope for a good ending. Indeed, the misfortune of Job was deep and horrible and the entire book is busy with Job's struggle with his unexplainable and apparently unjustified suffering, but the reader of the book already knows its end. In the "first" ending of the book, God returns to the reality of Job. Job was appeased as his world returned to be a meaningful cosmos. Facing a growing experience of chaos and lack of God's presence in their life, the ghetto inhabitants meet through the play the place in the ancient collective narrative where the person Job experienced the absence of God and later on gained its renewed presence. They too can hope for such a return.

In the "second" ending of the book, God gave Job back all that was lost including new children. A modern-minded person would wonder whether the closure of the frame story of Job with Jobs recovery, the return of lost property and the birth of other children keep the philosophical quality of the book. How can a new set of children compensate for the lost ones? How it solves the problem of the unjustified death of the former children? But Katzenelson does not deal in his reading of Job with his dramatic reading group in clarifying philosophical questions of theodicy. The book is important for him because of its vocabulary of suffering and because of it's good end, with no passing of a verdict on its literary or philosophical quality.

The Jews of the ghetto are part of an ancient story that gives meaning to their current reality. As Job in the ancient story, so the Jews today do not carry the blame for any sin that may justify their difficult reality. Like Job they also eligible for repatriation. When Job suffered his misfortune, he did not know the ending of his agony and therefore his questioning of his fate is so severe. The "Jobs" of the ghetto already know the good ending of the Job story. This is the lesson concealed in the text of Katzenelson's plays: the promise that one-day reality will be better.

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

With the growing hardships in the ghetto, persecutions, and growing evidence on murder acts in the regions under German occupation, the justification of reality and the consolation for the people became harder. The Nazi logic behind the reality of the ghetto is a logic of crawling destruction: isolation, hunger, cold, diseases and brutal terror.

Katzenelson is wording 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 looking with awful helplessness at his starved children and he cannot do anything to give them something to eat. In an outcry of despair, he says that they may leave their home to die at 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…*

(29.5.41)

With endless pain the father, Katzenelson himself and any other father in the ghetto reality, looks at his freezing children but he has no way to heat the house in the cold winter of 1942. The population is slowly destroyed by the conditions of the sealed ghetto.

**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?*

(10.2.42)

Katzenelson gives words to the cry of every parent in the ghetto who helplessly sees the agony of his children. Families cannot overcome their reality and collapse. People leave their homes. Children are left to their fate in the streets of the ghetto. Many children are seen at the streets of the ghetto begging for help. Adolf Berman, the director of Centus, the Jewish Children Aid Organization, during the occupation years, described a reality of thousands of abandoned children among the 100,000 children in the ghetto (Berman, 294-308). Jewish self-aid, as extensive as it was, could not give shelter to many of them. Emanuel Ringelblum, the head of the Jewish self-aid efforts and the noted ghetto reality historiographer, left us with a painful account of children's tragic reality in the ghetto; many are just live in the streets of the ghetto.[[363]](#footnote-363) Jewish society starts to disintegrate.

Reality is not only hunger and cold but also terror and death. The news about the fate of Jews in the occupied Soviet regions conquered by the Germans after June 1941 reach Warsaw. Katzenelson tries to strengthen the spirit of his people in the ghetto also in impossible circumstances. The poem on Shlomo Zelichovsky (June 1941) was written a moment before the mass killing reached the ghetto itself. It is still stamped with traditional formulas of faithful strengthening – the heroic martyrdom, "Kiddush Hashem".

The poem describes a catastrophe: the Germans executed, in the evening of "Shavuot", Pentecost, (1941) ten Jews from the town of Zdunska-Wola (Poland) in order to scare the population from acts of resistance and keep them in a state of terror and total obedience. Katzenelson describes the execution around the image of one of the executed Jews, a Hassid Jew, Shlomo Zelichovsky, who went – as it was told – singing to the gallows, calling the Jewish forced audience to keep their spirit 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 Zelichovsky's name –*

*He lifted up mankind, He lifted man on high. (1969:52)* [[364]](#footnote-364)

Shlomo Zelichovsky was in his own mind, as well as in the imagination of the poet, a Jewish martyr who continues – in the way in which he reacts to the situation – a chain of ancient Jewish martyrs who understood their approaching death as a "holy death" and accepted it with joy.

"Kiddush Hashem", holy Jewish martyrdom, is a formula of theodicy. The decision to accept the coming death as holy is an interpreting decision, which gives holiness to mere death. It loads death – the most troubling fact of life – with meaning. It turns political defeat into spiritual victory. For many generations "Kiddush Hashem" was a form of response, which makes it easier for Jews to accept their historical trial as well as an ideal example and ultimate moral compass for generations to come.

Rabbi Akiva, the most important Jewish martyr in Rabbinic tradition, died – as it told in the Talmud – while chanting enthusiastically the "Shema", the Jewish declaration of faith (Babylonian Talmud, Berachot, 61:b) He died when he said the word "one" in the prayer, the tip of the Jewish declaration of faith. He accomplished the last and the highest commandment possible after which there is no higher way of worship. Only the one who deliberately died because of God's worship actualizes love of God in its highest degree.

The image of Rabbi Akiva got "mass" in Talmudic literature and became in Jewish martyrology the most important person among the ten legendary martyrs (*Aseret Harugei Malchut*) who died for the sake of their faith after the Romans tortured them.[[365]](#footnote-365)Rabbi Akiva's tradition inspired generations of Jews who went deliberately to their death when the only alternative was to blasphemies God and leave their faith.

Shlomo Zelichovsky was sanctifying in his mind the name of God. He went to his death on the evening of Shavuot and saw himself, as Rabbi Akiva in his time, getting the highest privilege to become a martyr. The traditional interpreting formula of Kiddush Hashem turns the fact of death from a mere human disaster and total helplessness in the face of the Nazi terror into a great 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!  
Lets's sing, Jews, let's break into melody![[366]](#footnote-366)*

The act becomes also in the reality of Shlomo Zelichovsky – through the poetic intermediation of Katzenelson – an exemplary act for all Jews. "*It is our fortune that we die like that*" speaks Shlomo Zelichovsky in the plural language: "our", we are the privileged. Now, as in old days, it is the Jews' privilege to die when the declaration of faith is on their lips and in their hearts.

One principal difference, though, from the rabbinic texts we can find in the Katzenelson's text: while Shlomo Zelichovsky glorifies the name of God, Katzenelson glorifies the name of Man. The poet does not glorify the name of God but the name of Man who shows such a spiritual strength. People are the main characters of Katzenelson's writings and not God's actions. Nonetheless and regardless of this principal shift towards a humanistic paradigm, he understands the heroic act of the Hasid Shlomo Zelichovsky as an expression of strength and spiritual defiance.

Katzenelson places the Twentieth Century martyr along the very long tradition of Jewish heroism. The ten murdered Jews of Sdunska-Wola are in the eyes of Jelichovsky and Katzenelson the "Ten Martyrs" of antiquity in the days of the decrees of the Romans in the Second Century AC. Now the current reality got its meaning; it is comprehensible. It can be confronted as much hard as it is. The poet believes that he can sing a song of glory to the name of the recent Jewish victim, in that way give it meaning, and make the hideous act bearable.

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

Reality did not bring in its wings consolation. Death penetrated to the streets and houses of the ghetto. News of mass killing in the east of Poland and the Baltics by the special units that followed the advancing German army reached Warsaw. The shadows of death reached the ghetto. Consolation became impossible. Finally, in the summer of 1942, the deportation of the Jews of Warsaw to Treblinka began.

On August 14th, death touched Katzenelson personally when among the thousands of deportees who went to their death were also Katzenelson's wife Hannah and his to younger sons Benzion (14) and Benjamin (11). Already on that day, the poet cries out his great loss in his Yiddish poem "The Day of My great Disaster" (Yom Asoni HaGadol). His world collapsed on his head, and he can no longer find words of consolation. He becomes the poet of revenge who gives voice to the concealed words of the young comrades of the underground. He curses the Germans and their partners and he praises those who hold weapons and revenge.

After this bloody summer, Katzenelson poetry becomes poetry of the absurd, rebelling the traditional formulas of theodicy. The reality of extermination is known and experienced in all its grievousness. Death is not the lot of selected individuals, ten martyrs of this time, but the fate of the whole of the Jewish people. All the Jews became martyrs. One can no more praise suffering and death as the sanctification of His name.

Suffering becomes unbearable. In the last great poem, which he wrote in the ghetto, "the Song of the Rabbi of Radzin" (November 1942 - January 1943) he can no more settle the absurdity of the Jewish reality. He tells the heroism of the individual who struggles with no divine support. In this poem, we encounter the bravery of a man who proves that his spirit is not broken even when reality lost its meaning and can show no justification. Trains travel throughout Poland telling the bitter truth: the world lost all divine providence. It is a nihilistic world with no judgment and no 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?*[[367]](#footnote-367)

The world lacks basic justice as it is expressed in Epicurean formulas, which rejects all kinds of just divine governance of the world. "There is no judgment and no judge –God left his world and settled in heavens" (Midrash Palms, 10). God is still an existing being, a present persona, 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*.[[368]](#footnote-368)

While God is helpless, "his hand is short"' the Rabbi is the one who reveals strength. He is the one who rejects this helplessness. 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, when the death train travels throughout Poland the Rabbi is going out for his grave mission, to bring the dead Jews in those train cars to a decent Jewish burial. He buys the dead and then buries them. In a picture of deep cosmic sadness, he approaches a car, which seems empty but then he hears a crying voice. He identifies God standing at the corner of the dark death train car and weeps.

*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.[[369]](#footnote-369)*

The Rabbi of Radzin listens to God's crying but he can do nothing about it. He has no consolation, not even to the crying God. He goes from one train car to another to face the reality of his murdered people. In the poem "Shlomo Zelichovsky" the overall tone is a tone of overcoming and triumph, like the spirit in the description of Rabbi Akiva's death. All my life – says Rabbi Akiva in this Talmudic Midrash (Babylonian Talmud, Berachot, 61:b) – I waited for the time when I will be able to give my life for the sanctification of God's name. The act of Kiddush Hashem is a personal triumph, a high accomplishment of faith. Here, in contrast, the moment is a moment of total despair and then a decision to go beyond despair into human action.

The bravery of the Radzin Rabbi is the bravery of someone who is beyond despair or consolation. He is left with only one last task: to bring to burial those Jews who never got a grave. This is the outcry of Katzenelson: the Jewish people is dead and even a grave does not exist. The Rabbi of Radzin listens to God, crying on his children, and he has no consolation, not to God and obviously not to men.

The cry of God in the corner of the train car brings forward another traditional connotation, which Katzenelson, versed in Jewish traditions, is well familiar with. There is a Rabbinic Midrash (5th-7th century AD), which describes the Spirit of the Holy cries over its exiled children (The Midrash on Lamentations or Eichah Rabbah: 1). Jewish literature describes two images of God. God wrath is the cause of the destruction, but God also empathized with the fate of His people. This image of God got its place in Jewish tradition as well.

In the Talmud we find a story of Rabbi Yossi who heard the cry of God at the hind-part of the Holy of the Holiest, the inner part of the temple:

*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 the poem of Katzenelsohn contemporary Hayim Nahman Bialik, "Alone":

*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”.*

The Talmudic motif of God's cry for the fate of His people echoes in the modern Hebrew poetry, but with significant differences. In the Talmud, the cry is heard in a ruin in Jerusalem, maybe the ruins of the temple, the Holy of the Holiest of old days. The Divine cry in Bialik poem is heard in the deserted Beit Midrash, the Holy place of Jewish communities in exile. In Katzenelson's poem, it is heard at the corner of the cattle train car. The train car is the Holy of the Holies of this time. The cry here is the cry of a helpless God who can only cry and wait for the consolation of man.

The Radzin Rabbi poem expresses a deep spiritual breakage. God becomes helpless. It is a useless God. The Rabbi bravery is the bravery of a man who does the last charity act for his murdered people. God is only crying at the corner of the dead people train car, the moving coffin, and do nothing. More than that, God' cry is unwanted – he is left behind and the Rabbi and his community leave the house of prayer and turn to a different road.

The poem of the Radzin Rabbi ends with a meaningful new birth of the tradition of the Ninth of Av (Katzenelson, 1969: 128). The original Ninth of Av was the destruction of Jerusalem. Now, says Katzenelson, we have the Ninth of Av in every Jewish town. But Katzenelson changes the tradition when the Rabbi of Radzin refuses Rabbi Akiva's end. I wish, says the Rabbi, that I could die like Rabbi Akiva "*I wish I would have his end*"' but this paradigm is irrelevant now. Rabbi Akiva, as it was told in the Talmud (BT, Brachot, 61:b) taught the Torah in public and let the Romans catch him and sentence him to death. The Rabbi of Radzin knows that he can have Akiva's fate by returning to his home but he declines this fate and does not return home. He does not let the Germans catch him and declines martyrdom. The Rabbi rebels against his former world. The destruction of which people have to lament in these days – he decrees his community – is not the destruction of old days but the current destruction of Jewish Lublin and its neighboring towns.

In writing the Rabbi of Radzin poem Katzenelson became the poet of the absurd uprising, the absurd activism of man who understands that now all the responsibility lies on his shoulders only. The rebellion is in its essence the decision of people to take responsibility on their fate. It is the decision of man to do something even when there is no hope; when there is no God there is Man.

* 1. ***Armed Resistance***

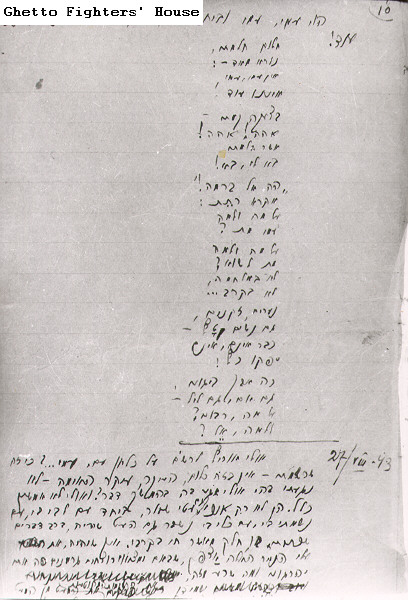
On July 1942, the Nazi death machine reached Warsaw. His wife Hannah and his two younger sons were caught and were sent to Treblinka. Katzenelson and his older son Zvi became part of the Jewish Fighting Organization.

On January 1943, the Germans entered the ghetto and Katzenelson and his son could not go out to the Tebens Shultz factory and had to remain with the underground comrades.[[370]](#footnote-370) They were among a “Dror” fighting squad, on January 18th, 1943, before the first battle on Zamenhof Street, when the members of the Jewish Fighting Organization formed fighting groups and prepared to surprise the Germans carrying grenades, pistols, iron bars and Molotov cocktails.

Yitzhak Katzenelson’s words on that day remain in the hearts of those who were privileged to hear them. Zivia Lubetkin, a leading member of the Jewish fighting organization (ZOB) recalls in her memoirs the words of Katzenelson just before the January revolt began:

*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…" His words, spoken with holy fervor, lit a flame in our hearts.[[371]](#footnote-371)*



A photo copy of the text of "I had a Dream",   
The GFH Archive, # 19160

Katzenelson’s former writings, as well as his educational work, were a mode of spiritual resistance. Here he became part of the armed resistance in the ghetto - he has a place in the development of the spirit of the armed uprising.

Antek Zuckerman, the leader of the ‘Dror’ movement and the depute-commander of J.O.B. during the Warsaw ghetto uprising, wrote in a retrospect about Katzenelson's place in the resistance movement: "*[…] 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*".[[372]](#footnote-372) One cannot understand the derive behind the decision to fight without the spirit of resistance that was part of the Jewish underground and now turned to be the spirit of the uprising. Katzenelson was an important part of it.

Katzenelson was too old, to actually take part in the fighting and, after the January 1943 battle, and when the Jewish Fighting Organization prepared itself for the coming uprising, Zuckerman reached the decision to send the poet and his son Zvi to a hiding place. When the April 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising began, Katzenelson and his son were already 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 could respond on the fate of Jews in the war in an overall view, even if not full and not accurate from a historiographical perspective.

The diary he wrote, in Hebrew, and was called by the publishers of his works "Pinkas Vittel", the "Vittel Notebook", written from May 22nd,1942, to September 16, 1943,[[373]](#footnote-373) includes a detailed description of the Holocaust events, as well as a personal interpretive response to it. The diary shows an extensive knowledge of the fate of Jews in Europe and the "Final Solution" process. Katzenelson describes the process of mass killing in details and states the number of "over six million" or even seven million Jewish victims (Katzenelson, p. 189).[[374]](#footnote-374)

Katzenelson responds to reality as a commentator, as one who asks to find meaning in the events. As a Bible teacher and as a man of generations of Hebrew culture, he uses formulas of Jewish culture to give meaning to his experiences. Jewish culture provides him with the proper vocabulary and lexicon to give words to what he sees. The loss of Hannah and his two sons, Benzion and Benjamin, becomes one with the loss of his people. The fate of the Katzenelson family and the fate of the Jewish people is the same. Hannah is the image of all Jewish mothers. Benzion and Benjamin are the representation of all the murdered Jewish children. The personal grief merges 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*.[[375]](#footnote-375)

Katzenelson is connected to his people in his heart. The loss of his family and the loss of his people are one, an endless nightmare.

Close to these words there is a poem in the diary which became a central element of the Ghetto Fighters Museum liturgy for the 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 wherfore?*

*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?* [[376]](#footnote-376)

Facing the national destruction Katzenelson states a terrible truth: a whole people was murdered. This is a fact beyond the numbers – a whole people, a whole civilization, a whole world is gone.

This is not only a summary of hard historical facts but an interpretive statement. Of course, not all the Jews in the world were murdered, nonetheless, murder and destruction in such scale mean nothing else but the reality that a whole people was murdered. The poem put forward an interpretive truth: the Jewish people was murdered. This is the truth that goes beyond the grief of the poet himself.

On a personal level, Katzenelson expresses a total despair. Insanity holds him. 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.* [[377]](#footnote-377)

Everything died for Katzenelson: his pen is broken, his heart is broken, his soul dead. The private grief of a father that lost all his family is understandable. But for Katzenelson the private grief is translated also into a national grief. The man who mourns over his wife mourns over all Jewish women. The father who mourns over his children also mourns on all the murdered Jewish children. Katzenelson became a national mourner, the one who expresses the lamentation for the entire people.

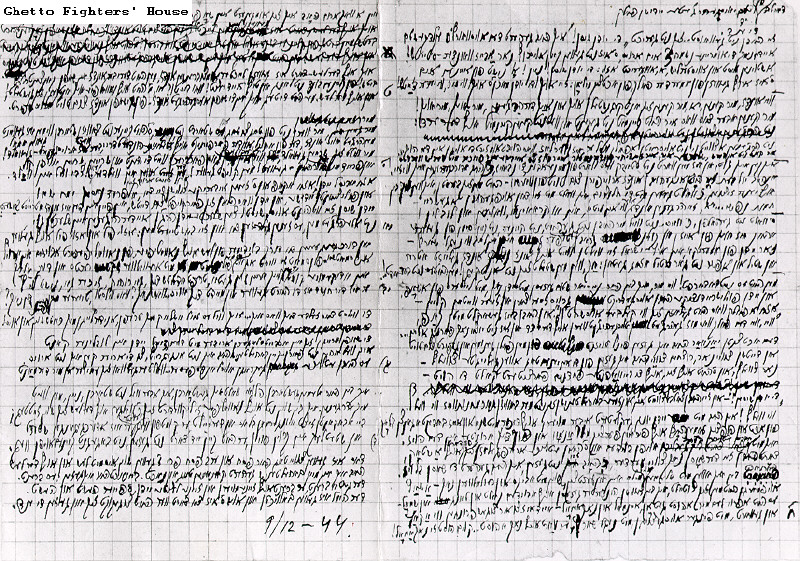
Katzenelson knows that the murdered European Jews are only part of the Jewish people. I know – he says – that there are Jews in America and the Land of Israel and that they will have wonderful children but all of them will not be the replacement for the murdered people.

*[…] 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…*[[378]](#footnote-378)

"I have seen" ("Raiti") says Katzenelson in a Biblical Prophetic language that converts Past to Future tense that there will be many Jews in the world. But this is not a consolation. The living in the future is not a substitute for the dead. In the good ending of Job a new set of children substituted for the dead children. Here, in the diary, Katzenelson rejects the solution. The newborn cannot be a compensation for the dead. There is no replacement for a murdered beloved human being. The loss is ultimate. Maybe, even the idea that life continues is unbearable.

Katzenelson adds in a language of prayer his desperate hope that despair will not crush those Jews there when they will hear about the total destruction here. Facing such destruction, such abysses of evil must lead to despair. "Lets not," says who thinks that this is what is likely to happen.

What we can do, asks Katzenelson, so that despair will not consume the Jewish people? Despair is the natural response to destruction in such magnitude. Despair carries the danger of the loss of will to life and the ability of the Jewish people to continue its life. It is a "black hole", which swallows man's life energies and his faith in man and human future. Years later, the Jewish Holocaust philosopher, Emil Fackenheim writes about the danger of despair who eats the life energies of the Jewish people. Therefore, he formulates the idea of the 614th commandment that compels the Jews to resist despair. Jews are not allowed to despair from the continuation of Jewish life. Katzenelson points to this danger already in the eye of the storm, in the very days of the Holocaust.



Manuscript of the Song of the Murdered Jewish People  
GFH Archive, # 19149

In the following text Katzenelson hopes that Jews of the future will do whatever they can for 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.[[379]](#footnote-379)*

The connotation is clear, the letter of support the prophet Jeremiah had sent to the Judea 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).

The ironic use of the Biblical text by Katenelson – similar to his ironic treatment of Ezekiel – comes to emphasize the opposite message he has in his time. In Jeremiah's words, there is a place for hope for renewal. Here, a year after the great deportation of the Warsaw Jews to Treblinka and the annihilation of millions of European Jews there is no hope. With the same ancient words, the prophetic message of consolation becomes a message of despair. Despair becomes the central theme in the diary. It is impossible to relate to, to touch with words, the millions of murdered Jews. The talk about "the millions" is an escape from the horror. One can touch individuals, one person, another person, another individual. And then one reaches despair. How one can say the ancient mourning pray on one after the other counting into millions. The Jewish "Kaddish", the mourning pray, is an expression of consolation and justification of God's ruling in the world. In regular life, the mourner recites this prayer before the grave of his beloved one. 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. Reality is not chaotic but infused with a metaphysical order. There is still God in the world and therefore there is a place for hope. But when the dead person is joined by another one and another one, 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) are prayers still valid? Can they settle 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!*[[380]](#footnote-380)

Every lost soul is a whole world – a traditional Jewish idea – and we don't really know her. Every human being who died for nothing renews the question about human life and death. "Every soul of Israel is an abyss".[[381]](#footnote-381) Many of the dead remained nameless. In Katzenelson's mind, they got faces and names: all the women get the image of Hannah, all the children get the image of the murdered Banzion and Benjamin. The stand in front of the infinite loss and infinite grief is insanity.

* 1. ***The*** ***Dead Bones will not Return to Life***

Katzebelson's great poem "The Song of the Murdered Jewish People" – originally written in Yiddish, consists of fifteen cantos, each containing fifteen stanzas of four lines, written with simple rhyming – describes the chain of events as he was witnessed to. It did not get until now proper exploration and its pedagogical use is nearly nothing. Its words are poison to the soul. In this poem, Katzenelson succeeded to express in depth the abyss where he was. It gives a voice for everyone that the Holocaust memory is a living memory.

The Song of the Murdered Jewish People is a ballad, telling a story, a sad story that has a bitter ending. What is the opening scene of the story?. The poet, carrying a harp, a troubadour who wants to express his story words of a song. He stands up in the ruined city street and calls his people to gather around him. Here is the first layer of the irony in his words: as there is no living crowd to come as there are no more Jews. He is the last Jew. There are a few individuals, also in campo Vittel, but the people as a whole is no more. Therefore, the poet calls his dead people to gather around him in a huge circle as in a huge dance.

*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 soup.*

*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 3-5th, 1943) [[382]](#footnote-382)

We see a horrible picture: all the dead Jews are gathered in a huge crowd to listen to the last song sang on the dead people, the lamentation. Beyond the connotation of the troubadour, we have another connotation which carries another layer of irony: it is not just a song, but a mourning pray.

It is a horrible imaginary picture: all the dead Jews are invoked and gathered in a huge circle to listen to the last song on the dead Jewish people, lamentation and elegy, the requiem of the Jews who once lived in Europe.

Beyond the image of the troubadour, comes the image of the Jewish minyan – the Jewish minimum quorum for prayer and the Jewish chanting of the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, and words of elegy, lamentation, and parting. The troubadour becomes the prayer leader. There is no one to say the last prayer over the dead, so the dead people are summoned from the numerous places of death all over Europe, mass graves and hips of human ashes, rivers, and swamps where the remainings of the burned corps were thrown by the murderers, to say the Kaddish for themselves. Katzenelson is summing in his literary world a huge circle of murdered people, young and old, men and women who 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*

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*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! [[383]](#footnote-383)*

In Wiesel, "The Night"' when Jews face their incoming death they started to say Kadish for themselves. Here the image is even harder – the dead are called to say the Kadish after they were killed. There is no one left to say after their death words of lamentation.

When the poet is calling all the dead to raise up from the valleys of death, death camps, swamps, and forests and gather around him in a huge circle there is a connotation to another image with deep exegetical meaning. The valley of the crushed to dust bones of Katzenelson is the valley of the dried bones of Ezekiel:

*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 narrative picture in Ezekiel is the classical Biblical metaphor for the hope of national revival. However, like in former layers of Katzenelson's references to Biblical literature, here as well, the reference to Biblical imagery is overturned. Ezekiel's vision of the valley of the dried bones is not a prophetic vision of the resurrection of the dead as it is quite often interpreted. The dry bones that will be covered by skin and flesh and will return to life is a parable of hope about the national resurrection, a source of hope for the exiles from Judea who will one day return to Zion. The exiles doubted the possibility of return and the prophetic picture is aimed to regain their faith in the people's future.

The exiled people – says the prophet – will eventually return to full national life. This return is dependent of course on repentance and spiritual renewal. This mending of the people's spirit is possible because man is now – as the prophet says – responsible only for his own conduct for the good or for the bad:

*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 overturn of the people, when it will occur, will bring the end of exile. This is the condolence message the prophet Ezekiel is conveying: there is a perspective of hope. But Katzenelson refers directly to the words of Ezekiel and claims the bitter irony in which the prophecy of condolence is seen 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. (Katzenelson, 310)*

*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.*

(15, 10, 1942) [[384]](#footnote-384)

The same Biblical words are used to convey the hopelessness of current reality of the Jewish people. Even Ezikiles' parable is useless as not even bones remained of the murdered Jews. The Biblical text draws the grand image of the valley of dry bones which return to life. The prophet tells his people that at the end the exiles will return to Judea. It actually happened after the fall of Babylon in front of Koresh, the Persian king. Here at the European valley of the dead, the dead are summoned to sing the last song, the last lamentation, over the dead people that will never return to life. It is the last act of parting from a world that will never return. Ezikiel's message of condolence overturned to a message of despair. There are no bones to resurrect them; they were crushed to dust. Everything is totally destroyed. There are no 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 lost its relevancy. At the end of this part of the poem, the poet says:

*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.* (Katzenelson, 312; October 15th, 1942)

Ezekiel and Jeremiah's prophesies are a luxury now, mockery of the poor. The hope conveyed in those prophecies only strengthen the understanding that now only despair remains. Katzenelson is the Jeremiah and Ezekiel of his time but with a totally reversed message. The hope in the words of the ancient prophets just adds contrast to the total despair in the words of the current prophet.

* 1. ***Empty Heavens***

With the collapse of the Biblical prophecies of hope collapsed the entire Jewish cosmos with all its structures of meaning. Part 9 of the poem "The song of the Murdered Jewish people" is dedicated to the "Heavens", to the sky. Katzenelson does not struggle with the question of God's existence. He is interested in a broader question: the very possibility of the existence of metaphysics as the horrors wiped away the entire human space of ethics. For Katzenelson it is not a theological dilemma but a humanistic question. Heavens is a value concept which represents in Jewish-Christian and Islamic traditions the dwelling of God and the basic values of Good, Justice and mercy. To heavens, the praying person is raising his eyes and hands in request of Redemption. The direction up is the direction of the Good in our language and the direction down is the direction of failure and evil.

What we know of heavens today? Korczak describes a cosmic vacuum, which is also 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!* (23-26/10/1943; Katzenelson, 1969: 331)

*2.*

*Your vulgar blue remained cloudless, glistening falsely as always.*

*The red sun, like a cruel hangman, resolved in its orbit.*

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*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!*

(23-24-25-26, 11, 1943)[[385]](#footnote-385)

Katzenelson uses harsh words to describe the ethical nature of heavens, " vile whore" and " *glittering like the eyes of mice*". Heavens promised the good and demanded the good, but they betrayed those who believed in heavens. Heavens saw how the Jews are taken by the multitude to their death and remained silent. They accepted what they have seen. It is now known that heavens are not a source of life, of 'living water", as it was in the belief of so many generations. Heavens were revealed now empty and lifeless: "*O you desolate, empty heavens, wide and desolate as the desert*".[[386]](#footnote-386) Heavens are meaningless.

There is no God in heavens as generations of naïve believers beheld. One may ask whether God was in heavens in the past, as it is in Wiesel's The Night. There, God that was an intimate companion for the young Wiesel is executed by the horrors of the camp. God that was present in every moment of young Wiesel is no more present, but in his memories or as an unsolved question. The answer of Katzenelson is different and more radical. He goes in his despair beyond Wiesel. If in the Poem on Radzin Rabbi God is portrayed as helpless and he stands in the corner of the death train and cries,[[387]](#footnote-387) here in the last song God is a non-existence, a mere illusion or deceit. God was never present, not in heavens nor on earth. Now we know that heavens were always empty.

Not only the present dramatically changed – the whole past is found to be false, a big lie, indecent deceit: "You have always deceived us, lied also to my prophets, already to my prophets and my ancestors!".[[388]](#footnote-388) If all tradition is a big lie then there is no future, no present, and no past – everything is a false story.

I bitter irony the poet is saying 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. The Jewish metaphysics was grounded on the belief that - now revealed as a lie – that there is a God in heavens, God of Justice, and that his justice governs the entire reality. Now it becomes clear, to the disappointment of anyone who raised his prayer to heavens that this narrative of faith, which Jews Christians and Muslims followed for generations, is false. The blunt reality is that heavens are no better than earth.

The erasing of heavens connotes to Bialik's poem "On the Slaughter" (1903). Katzenelson's audience knew the relations of the poetry of despair to the poetry of Bialik already in the days of the ghetto. Mordechai Tannenbaum, one of the leaders of the underground in Warsaw and then the leader of the underground in Bialystok is saying in his letters that Katzenelson went far above Bialik in his bitter curses (Tennenbaum, 1984: 44). It is also in Bialik poetry, that the response to the brutal evil and injustice is the claim that the moral world order is 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.[[389]](#footnote-389)*

Like with Katzenelson, the address of Bialik's poetry is not God but heavens, that if they do not endow justice on earth, would rot in their infamy of world evil. However in Bialik's poetry, the poem points towards a future possibility of a better reality as it is a rebelling and defying poetry against Jewish passivity, while in Katznelson's poetry heaven is indeed empty and hopeless. There is no one to call to be active anymore. Bialik's poetry responds to a limited event - the Kishinev pogrom of 1903 – which poses a challenge of meaning in a world that seems now chaotic. Katzenelson's poetry responds, however, to an event of much larger magnitudes - a total destruction of an entire people. There are no Jews to respond to it in action. What Bialik had cursed in his poetry became a reality now. What is left is a requiem and elegy.

Like in Bialik's text Katzenelson says that his heart is dead and there is no prayer on his lips anymore – but in Katzenelson's situation, this is not a momentary reaction but a lasting state of despair following total destruction. A similar expression about the death of man's soul after he saw the Holocaust reality bring Wiesel in "The Night" – the sight of the burned children burned his soul forever.[[390]](#footnote-390)

* 1. ***From*** ***Prophecy of Hope to Prophecy of Despair***

In the ladder of despair, Katzenelson is taking us to the very bottom of the abyss of human existence. In the beginning of the German occupation, he was a prophet of condolence. In his Biblical plays, "On the Rivers of Babylon" and "Job" the ghetto inhabitants could find expression to their personal and collective pains and agonies. Thye could hold to their hidden message that the end of their tribulations will be redemption. In the end of 1941, Katzenelson is sensitive and sober enough to understand their historical reality will not have a good ending. In his poems, he expresses the day-to-day hard experience and the deep grief of a parent that cannot save his children the hardships of the ghetto.

When death approaches the ghetto Jewish bravery in Katzenelson's poetry is the bravery of martyrdom, Kiddush HaShem, and strong religious defiance of German decrees. The Jew is going to his death holding his unshaken faith. His body is destroyed but his spirit is firm and he overcomes the Germans who sought the destruction of the spirit of the Jews. However' in his martyrdom poetry, Katzenelson is step by step depart from the Jewish traditional world. While Shlomo Zelichovsky is praising God even in his way to the gallows, Katzenelson is praising Shlomo Zelichovsky. Zelichovaki in his brave martyrdom – going to his death singing – sanctified the human being and not God, "the dignity of Man he has Elevated".[[391]](#footnote-391)

The poet about the Rabbi of Razin expresses, already, a greater spiritual breakage. God, that his name is sanctified by Shlomo Zelichovsky, becomes a helpless God. God's cry is heard from the corner of the holy of the holiest, the deportation train carriage, but now even his cry is unwanted. The Rabbi of Razin is doing the last grace with his murdered people; he brings them to burial. This is the act of the human being who chose, in spite of the helplessness of God, to do the absurd thing. Through the image of the Rabbi, a new Jew emerges in Katzenelson's poetry. It is no more the Rabbi Akiva martyr but the rebel. Also, a new tradition of Jewish remembrance appears. The mourning is not about the destruction of ancient Jerusalem – it is about the destruction of the Twentieth century Jewry.

The Diary of Vittel, written in a melancholic prose. Expresses all the depth of Katzenelson's despair. Katzenelson can draw the main lines of the historical picture of the Holocaust. He describes in details the destruction process and its magnitude. The world was destroyed on the head of the Jew. Its substitute does not exist yet and it is doubtful whether it will ever come to being. One has no way 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 for Jewish continuation.

Katzenelson last poetry, "The Song of the Murdered Jewish People", is a despair poetry; his full, intended, with no reductions description of the Jewish catastrophe. He does not offer to his reader any way to escape the confrontation with the breakage. It is a requiem to the Jewish people and an expression of the total loss of meaning in this world. Heavens were revealed as desolate, a source of the longest illusion of humanity. The Jewish narrative lost its validity. There is no past, no present, and no future. The Jewish people, he says in a bitter irony is just a fairytale, a passing dream.

Katzenelson wrote for the generations of the future. He buried his last writings with the intention that they will reach the post-war generations. He is doing that not as a historian but as a commentator, a lamenter and a prophet, one who gives his audience another ethical understanding of their reality. As such he takes his audience and readers into the core of despair' into the darkest and most awful place, where there is no God, no good, no past, present and future, no ethical orientation, no "right" or "wrong" and no hope – just despair. The Bible teacher who began his way as a prophet of condolence became the prophet of despair.

The reader of Katzenelson's writings understands the meaning of the call to deal with the Holocaust memory as a call to wrestle with despair. The Holocaust is first of all destruction and despair and not a historical story of human bravery, and a source of Jewish continuity. The Holocaust, as Katzenelson teaches us, is destruction, helplessness, fear, orphanhood, and longing with no condolences. The despair arising from the fact of the Holocaust is still with the Jewish people and as an unconscious and unprocessed force it does its destructive work underneath and darkens the world of Jews, as individuals as well as a collective. One can guess that the over blatancy of the Israeli society is mean to silence the dreadfulness of this historical picture. One must ask how this society can confront its memories and mantel its destructiveness.

1. **The Educators in the Abysses of History**

Two characters, two life stories, represent the human struggle with the Holocaust. On one wall of the Ghetto fighters House - a memorial Museum to the Holocaust and Uprising, under the name of Yitzhak Katzenelson that holds the Janusz Korczak archive – the image of the universal educator is inscribed. It is the image of the educator, who was far away from intimate identification with the Jewish national movement. He spoke the universal truth and sought solidarity among all men from all nationalities, cultures and religious traditions.

On the other wall inscribed the image of the nationally minded poet that the Ghetto Fighters House bears his name and his writings are stored at its 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.

This is the space for the activity of these two educators and as such the space for those who want to give meaning to the Holocaust. On the one hand, in the personality and legacy of Janusz Korczak embedded the universal idea of the unity of all men and its realization in a global care of the child, every child. Korczak emphasized the equal dignity of all men and tried to realize this idea in his educational work. His vision of the Land of Israel is the revival of all humanity in the "land of hope". All men aim their prayers to this land. On the other hand, in Katzenelson's legacy, one finds the particular narrative and the particular dreams of Jews, the dreams of Jewish revival of Hebrew life. It was the dream that became a false dream after the total destruction of the Jewish people.

Everyone who deals with the Holocaust and tries to give it meaning arrives at the distinction between the particular and the universal. The universal discourse broadens the circle and invites more audiences to participate in the Holocaust commemoration and to see the event as part of their identity, even if they are not Jews, not part of any other group of victims of genocide and did not take part in WWII. The particularistic discourse invites us to enter the subjective obscurity of the victims. Seemingly, it is an Exclusion of non-Jews from dealing empathically with the Holocaust, but in reality, there is in the texts that Katzenelson left behind an authentic expression of the experience of the victim that you cannot find in the universal discourse of the phenomena of Genocide. The generalization of the Holocaust, which overlaps the personal experience of the victim cannot be authentic. A deep understanding of the Holocaust reality must refer to the personal experience of the victim and the testimonies of the survivors.

Korczak, the universal Jew, and Katzenelson, the nationally minded Jew – both face the challenge of immigration to Palestine. Both had postponed the act of immigration, both were trapped in the German death trap, and paid a high price for it. Here Korczak and Katzenelson have something in common. The delay of immigration to the Land of Israel was connected to the obligation towards the educational work in Poland and the

Both educators put in front of us two major dilemmas which, even after decades are also relevant to present Jewish life. The first dilemma is the tension between the struggle for peace, human justice and men's rights and the national will to exist and live independent political life. Is there in principle a contradiction between these two wishes: universal human solidarity and the fostering of national identity? Hence, Korczak said again and again that the Jewish children and the Christian Polish children are important for him all the same. The picture is of all-men struggle for human dignity. With Katzenelson, we face a national picture, and the lamentation of the loss of all Jews, mothers like Hannah and children like Benzion and Benjamin, and the active call for resistance and uprising.

The answer is not easy. Even in our days (2013), there are many Jews who look for the message of all-humanity while on the other hand, the state of Israel is still struggling with its legitimation in the eyes of the world. And there are those who claim that even the very existence of the State of Israel is unjustified. Following this line of thought, Korczak, the universalist, the Jewish martyr who speaks a universal language is worthy of the attention of those who deal with the Holocaust. Korczak's memorial monuments can be found all over the world, while Katzenelson – who refused to be a silent victim and called for Jewish national revival before the war and Jewish resistance during the war - remained unknown beyond certain Zionist circles.

The acknowledgment of the existence of these two personalities in the Jewish culture of commemoration is not obvious also in the circles of those who struggle with the meaning of Jewish existence and Jewish identity in a post-Holocaust era. Korczak is known to the wider public mainly through the story of his martyrdom together with his children and educational staff. Though, Korczak has a much broader relevance for the recent discourse of Jewish identity as he represents in his life story the legacy of many modernized Jews who sought the expression of their identity beyond the circle of national life. He represents the universal Jew who hoped and believed that he or she can find his or her place anywhere in the modernized world. Even today, in the Twenty First Century, when the world borders are comparatively open and social walls of segregation had fallen, many of the world Jews choose to live in other countries rather than in Israel. Their Jewish identity continues the legacy of Janusz Korczak. They look for an all-human truth rather than a nationalistic one. More than that, in the postmodern discourse the talk about national identity and national revival is understood as a narrow chauvinistic discourse. Frequently, there are calls to eliminate the national aspects of the State of Israel in order to diminish the apparently evils it causes to its non-Jewish citizens.

Many Jews nurtured in modernity the hope to be just a "human being", like all men with no particular national identity. The most particular Jewish dream was to be a person of the world, a cosmopolitan person who does not have any particular "we", just "me" and all men. The most known story of Janusz Korczak, King Matt the First, describes a utopian children state, apparently with no geographical and historical context. It is a universal parable about the state of humanity and the way it should go beyond the painful divisions of humanity to groups hostile to one each 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 part, a central part, of this universal all human solidarity messianic vision.

In spite of this noble aspiration, we know both from Korczak's story and from reality that Korczak's vision failed. The educator and his children went to their death, while the Christian Polish children continued their life comparatively safe and well. Even today, when we deal with his universal educational legacy, we remember that the utopian idea of all men solidarity cannot secure the welfare and happiness of man. In Matt's story, all the citizens blow together and fly away from the enemy, but it remains a childish fantasy. In real history, this is not enough to realize the idea of all men solidarity. Nonetheless, we cannot give up – even from our mature understanding – the hope embedded in this vision that one day all men 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 with a bitter despaired world.

The second dilemma, her days as the Holocaust events and which troubles Jews who deal with the meaning of those events, is the proper response to the events. Is the proper response to the Holocaust is understanding and acceptance with internal integrity or whether active resistance and uprising. Korczak, the Jewish-Polish Stoic, looked at his reality and tried to understand it. The human being is part of infinite nature - this is the framework in which man has to understand his place in the world and the context of his historical situation. His response to the ghetto reality was, on the one hand, endless struggle to keep the orphanage alive as an island of love and light in a dying ghetto and on the other hand an acceptance of the "game rules" dictated by the Germans. His reaction to reality came out of a position of a rational explorer who scrutinizes reality and tries to understand it. Who is not turning against it, he struggles inside it.

On the other side, the emotional Jew, the person of the heart and words of poetry, the person of the Jewish culture, Jewish society and Jewish national revival movement, calls for an active response, resistance, and armed uprising. The uprising is an element in the individuality of Katzenelson and it can be understood by the Zionist ethos, which he lived with all his might. Katzenelson is a person of the Biblical literature, which founds the individual as a moral subject, a free moral agent who has responsibility for his conduct. A fundamental idea in the Biblical literature, which Katzenelson expresses in his literal and educational work is that the individual is not subject to the determinism of nature; the individual has a free choice. Therefore he is responsible for God, men and his consciousness to his deeds. Katzenelson represents in the historical dialogue we portray here between two figures, the possibility of taking a moral position, in reality, emerging from his heart and consciousness rather than a remote stoic exploration of it. His reaction to the Holocaust was not an acceptance; his writing is an outcry for resistance and rebellion. His dialogue with God is bitter. He did not give up his struggle until the last days. From his despair, he continues to write his rebellion against heavens and earth.

We here not to judge these two roads as we were not there. We have to understand it. And when we face history today we have to learn the concrete situation and the principle dilemmas that come out of it. What is demanded from us? When we have to read the situation and integrate ourselves in its course and when and where we have to try to change it.

The expression "do not go like sheep to the slaughter" which is bounded forever with the Holocaust discourse and the idea of resistance is not only a late expression by younger generation towards the Holocaust victims. It was, from the first moment already then and there a call for action expressed first by Abba Kovner and later on by other underground leaders. This call is an expression of the ethical crossroad into which the Jewish population was taken in those days. Korczak and Katzenelson resemble this crossroad and its difficult dilemma.

Yitzchak Katzenelson is identified with this dilemma, though his character I known only to the limited circle of those who deal with the Holocaust commemoration. Many of the children in Israel knew very well the children poem "Hamesh Shanim Al Michael" but knew nothing about the poet who wrote it. Katzenelson dealt with the pain and the anger from a private angle and did not try to relate to the Holocaust from an all humanity perspective, which maybe makes the lesson of the Holocaust more appealing and attainable to educational work and politically correct. But his response is authentic, close to his pain and inner soul, evading the escape to comfortable remote generalizations. Katzenelson is taking his readers into the most difficult realm of danger, to a place which tell us truly what the Holocaust is for its victims. But Katzenelson, like Korczak, does not bring rescue. Katzenelson, like Korczak, could not change the course of death.

What is the common things to Korczak and Katzenelson besides the historical reality that trapped them? Both where authentic representatives of the Jewish exile. Both were trapped in a reality of war, terror, annihilation, and destruction. Both struggles with the Jewish weakness and helplessness. Each one of them found his own way. Each one of them found in his world the resources to cope with an absurd reality. The reference to both of them gives us the picture of the educational work in that reality. Two stories of two educators, two people of literature, 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.

When young Israelis, members of youth movements, soldiers today or in the past, discuss the Holocaust their encounter with a reality of total helplessness and with the reality of the victims is difficult, an encounter which invites misunderstanding, rejection, and alienation. The young Israelis learned to be strong, learned how to use power and the moral limits of power. The reality of weakness is an enigma for them. The encounter with helplessness has no heroism nor pedagogical charisma as it is with the encounter with evil which offers immediate powerful lessons. The young man, sixty years after the Holocaust turned to be a story, it is difficult for him or her to identify with the Jews struggle for their life. Korczak and Katzenelson, because of the contrast between them, open together a window to the world of the victims. Korczak, and what he represents, without Katzenelson, is a 'Chagallian' unjustified abstraction of the Jews, people with universal moral pathos but with no ground under their feet. Katzenelson and what he represents, without Korczak and his universal vision, is a prophet of despair who takes us into an impasse. They both create a historical duet which marks the arena of Holocaust study and education today.

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2. Levi, 2013, 31-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Yehuda Elkana, "Bezchut HaShichecha", Haaretz, March 2, 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . Andre Neher, "The Silence of Auschwitz," *The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz,* Translated from French by D. Maisel. (Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 1981), p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Korczak, *1980,* p. 174.- [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 1986, 70-87 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Levi, *If This is a Man & The Truce, 1987, p. 24* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 36-69 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Katzenelson, 1969, 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 1967; *Yaldut Shel Kavod*, 1976. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The first **"Declaration of the Rights of the Child"** was drafted by Eglantyne Jebb and adopted by the **International Save the Children Union**, 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-12)
13. Korczak, *1980*, p. 111 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Shner, T., 2008b. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Korczak, *Im HaYeled*, 1974, 413 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Perlis, 1986, 116-166; Tali Shner, 2008a. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 103-138 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Stefania (Stefa) Wilczynska was Korczak full partner in the building and running of the Krochmalna orphanage. Stefa visited Palestine-the Land of Israel three times, and during the third time in 1938, she decided to remain, and was accepted as a member in Kibbutz Ein Harod. A year later, on April 1939, she had decided to return to Warsaw in order to help Korczak in the hard times and stayed with the orphanage during the war until the liquidation of the Warsaw Jewish ghetto. (Friedman Ben Shalom, 2008; Coifman, 2008), [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Even Shoshan, 1969, 355-357 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Even Shoshan, p. 356 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Tsur, 109-110 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Even Shoshan, p. 357 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The arrest of Hannah and the children is told by Emanuel Ringelblum in his letter to his father on December 16th' 1939 (Ringelblum: 23, Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Zuckerman, 1993, p. 56 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Zuckerman, 1993, p. 56 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Zuckerman, *In the Ghetto and the Revolt*, 1985. P. 158, my trans. M.S [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 1993, p. 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Zuckerman, 1993, p. 285 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Zuckerman, 1993, p. 440 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Zuckerman, 1993, 272, 438-445 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Zur, 2012, 199-211. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Novitz, a camp prisoner as well, established close ties with the poet and helped him to save his wirings. 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; Zur, 2012, 208-211. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Korczak, Dat HaYeled, p. 390 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Korczak, Ghetto Diary, p. 197 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Katzenelson, Poems – selection, p. 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Katzenelson, *ibid*, p. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Korczak, *Ghetto Years*, 230-234; Ringelblum, *Last Writings*, (Writings from War Times, II), 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1954, 98-100; 1961; Perlis, in: *Ghetto Years*, 93-101 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Korczak, Dat Hayeled, 1978, 85 (in Hebrew) [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Perlis, in: *Ghetto Years*, 95; Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1954, 98 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Perlis, in: *Ghetto Years*, 93-94; Ringelblum, Diary, #201 (Dec. 1942), *Diary and Notes*, 417; *Last Writings*, 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. in: Perlis, introduction, Korczak*, Ghetto Years*, 96; Ringelblum, Diary (writings from War Times, I), 417 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Nahum Remba / Witness, quoted by Perlis, in: *Ghetto Years***,** 97-98, taken from Ringelblum, *Last Writings*, II, 82-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Perlis is quoting Igor Newerly. See: Ghetto Years, 98. See also: Zuckerman, in Lubetkin, 232, (in Hebrew). This story got no confirmation from any other source. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ringelblum, *Diary* (Writings from War Times, vol. I), 418; See also: Ringelblum, *Last Writings* (Writings from War Times), 28, 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *Korczak, Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ringelblum, *Last Writings*, 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Korczak, *Ghetto years*, 146-147, 155 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ringelblum, *Diary and Notes*, 174 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Korczak, *Ghetto Years*, 206 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Silverman 2003, Copland, 1987 and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Perlis, 1980, 88-89 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. A term coined by Jean Amery, see: Amery, 1984, 21-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Lovejoy, 1961 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Arnold, 1971; Hicks, 1962; Long, 2001; Rist, 1969; Sandbach, 1975; Spiegel, 1980; Shner, 1989 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Marcus Aurelius, 1997 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Shner, 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Hays, 2003, pxlix. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Spiegel, 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, book 4, XIV [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Nussbaum, 2004, 499-501 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Shner, 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. July 18th 1942, Korczak, Ghetto Years, 196 [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. in 1936 he had to leave his second orphanage, "Nash Dome," because of the changes in the political atmosphere in Poland. This orphanage for Christian Polish children remained comparatively untouched and continued its life throughout the war. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Centos, in Polish:  Centrala Towarzystwa Opieki nad Sierotami, (The Central Organization for the Aid of Orphans), an umbrella Jewish organization, founded in 1924, to support Jewish boarding schools and orphanages. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. A. Berman, "The Fate of Children in the Warsaw Ghetto, *The Holocaust: Background-History-Implications,* 1973, 294-308 [Hebrew]. Adolf Berman was the head of Centos during the war. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. The diary was hand written 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 Nawerely at the Arian side of Warsaw just days after Korczak and his orphanage were sent to Treblinka. Nawerely was not sure about his apartment as a secure hiding place and handed the document to Maryna Falska at the "Our Home" ("Nash Dom") orphanage. After the war when Newerely returned from a concentration camp he got the diary and it was at last published in 1958 only after a change in the political situation in Poland enabled it. See: Perlis Yitzhak, "Final Chapter" (introduction) to Janusz Korczak, *The Ghetto Years*, (Tel Aviv: Ghetto Fighters House & Hakibbutz HaMeuchad Publishing House, 1980), ` 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ghetto Years, 147 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Korczak, "letter to the head of the Judenraet", 11-12/2/1942. In: *Korczak, 1993,* p. 85 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. *Ghetto Years*, p. 189 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. *Ghetto Years,* p. 147*; a similar scene appears on page 155* [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. *Ghetto Years*, p. 171 [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. *Ghetto Years*, p. 187 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. *Ghetto Years*, p. 184 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, book 2, VIII [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Aurelius, *Meditations,* Book 4, V; the same idea reappears in many other places. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Aurelius, *Meditations,* Book 6, XXVII [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Plato, *Phaedo,* 2008, text online at the Gutenberg Project. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Josephus Flavius, *The Jewish War against the Romans*, book 7, 8: 6-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. *Ghetto Years,* p. 121-122 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Korczak, "The right to Respect", *Selected Works*, 1967, 489 [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Marcus Aurelius, , book 4, XIV [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Korczak, 2003, 180-316. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Korczak, 2003, 206-207, in Hebrew [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *ibid*, 207 [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. This Heraclitean statement occurs in Plato's dialogue Cratylus and in Simplicius' *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, 1313.11. On the Heraclitean idea that everything flows, see Wheelwright, 1959, 29-36. Heraclitus was very important to the later Stoics, especially to Marcus Aurelius. See: Long, 2001, 56, and we can define a line of thought that connects Heraclitus, Marcus Aurelius and Korczak.. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Korczak, Ghetto Years, 182-186. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Korczak, Ghetto Years, 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Korczak, Ghetto Years, 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Zuckerman, 1948, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Zuckerman, 1993, p. 189-190. Zuckerman is probably mistaken when he recalled the play as "The Dying Prince" and not "The Postman". [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Perlis, in: *Ghetto Years*, 80-81; Lipton, 1988; Doron, 2008. A whole study of the play and its meaning to Korczak is written by Doron "The Play The Post Office by Tagore in Korzcak's Orphanage*", Dor Ledor*, 2008, 217-134 (in Hebrew). Doron mentions several interpretations that were given to the play. Doron sees it as an enactment of a passage ritual, a ceremony of death, but one may prefer the explanation which was given by Korczak himself: a pedagogical act which helped him to prepare his children to the coming end. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. See also: Tadeusz Lewowicki, Janusz Korczak (1978-1942), 1994, p. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. In 1936 Korczak had to leave his second orphanage, "Nash Dome," because of the changes in the political atmosphere in Poland [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. The Krochmalna orphanage moved in November 1940 to his new place in Chlodna street 33 and then to Sienna 16 (See Ringelblum, 1994: 83). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. The diary was hand written 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 Nawerely at the Arian side of Warsaw just days after Korczak and his orphanage were sent to Treblinka. Nawerely was not sure about his apartment as a secure hiding place and handed the document to Maryna Falska at the "Our Home" ("Nash Dom") orphanage. After the war when Newerely returned from a concentration camp he got the diary and it was at last published in 1958 only after a change in the political situation in Poland enabled it. See: Perlis Yitzhak, "Final Chapter" (introduction) to Janusz Korczak, *The Ghetto Years*, (Tel Aviv: Ghetto Fighters House & Hakkibutz HaMeuchad Publishing House, 1980) p. 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Ringelblum, 1994: 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. "Letter to the head of the Judenraet", 11-12/2/1942. In: Korczak*, The Ghetto Years,1980:* 231 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Korczak, Ghetto Years, 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Korczak, Ghetto Years,147. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Korczak, Ghetto Years,155. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Korczak, Ghetto Years, 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Korczak, Ghetto Years, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Korczak, Ghetto Years, 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Korczak, Ghetto Years, 189 [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Zuckerman, 1948: 36; 1990: 107, 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Perlis, in: *Ghetto Years:* 80-81; Lipton, 1988; Doron, 2008.  
     A whole study of the play and its meaning to Korczak is written by Doron "The Play The Post Office by Tagore in Korzcak's Orphanage*", Dor Ledor*, 2008, 217-134 (in Hebrew). Doron mentions several interpretations that were given to the play. Doron sees it as an enactment of a passage ritual, a ceremony of death. From the facts we have it seems rather – as Korczak describes it – an educational event when the children get an opportunity to learn the serenity of death [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. In Hebrew Eternity and Infinity are referred to it is one word "Ein Sof": infinite reality is eternal. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. A discussion of the tradition of immanence and its ethical meaning see: Yovel, 1988; Curley, 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Korczak, "How to Love Children" (1919)*, Selected Works,* 1967, 84-88 [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Korczak, 1999, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. A monk in Hebrew is 'nazir'; in the Biblical Hebrew it means someone who is positively dedicating his entire life to one mission only. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Korczak, 1996, 9-34 [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Silverman, 1996; 2012, 151-199 [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 84-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Korczak, S*elected Works*, 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Korczak, *Selected Works, 1967,* 357. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 1967, 489. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Korczak, *Yaldut Shel Kavod*, 1976, 336-337 (In Hebrew, my trans. M.S.) [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Korczak*, Selected Works,* 1967*,* 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 1967, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 1967, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 1967, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Korczak, *Selected Works,* 1967, 394-395. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Korczak, *Selected Works:* 132-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Fragment no. 91, in Diels, 1934 [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Korczak, 1967, 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Korczak, 1976, 300; my trans. M.S [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Korczak, *Yaldut Shel Kavod*, 1976, 301 [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Korczak, *Ghetto Years*, p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Korczak, *Dat Hayeled*, 1978, p. 78-79. (my trans. M.S) [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Korczak, *Dat Hayeled*, p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Korczak, ghetto Diary, 1980, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Korczak, Selected works, 1967, 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Korczak, Selected works, 1967, 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Korczak, *Selected Works*, 203-204 [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Korczak, *Selected Works ,* 1967, 204 [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Gilad, 1986, 66-1111; Shner, 1987, 29-31, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Korczak, 1976, p. 300; 2003, 206-207 [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Korczak, Ghetto Diary, 1980, 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Korczak, Dat Hayeled, 1978, 254. (My translation, M.S). Also in Selected Works, 1967, 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Korczak, Selected Works, 1967, 293-294. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Korczak, Yalsut she Kavod, 1976, 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Korczak, Selected Works, 1967, 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Aurelius, 2001, Book 12, verse XXII. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Steiner, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Steiner, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Newerly, 1967, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Korczak, 1999, 176 [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Korczak, Selected Works, 1967, 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Newerly, 1967, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Court Gazette no. 1, in Korczak, Selected Works, 1967, 351 [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Korczak, *Selected Works,* 1967, 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Korczak, *Selected Works,*  414-419 [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Korczak, *Selected Works,* 503-523 [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Korczak, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Korczak, *Selected Works*, p. 312 [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Korczak, 1967, 368. Unlike common conception, Korczak's signature is missing from the document. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Van Bueren, 1998, 13-15. Israel ratified the convention by October 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Sofer et al, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Panter-Brick 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Carter & Osler 2000; Kirman 2004 [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Banks, 2009; Mesch et al 2007; Fontes 2005; Freeman 1998; Walsh 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Liebel 2007, 2013; Mama 2010; Melton 1991; Svevo-Cianci, K. A. at al 2011; Welbourne 2002/ [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Korczak 1967, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Korczak *1967*, 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Korczak 1967, 366-370. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Korczak, 1967, 368-370. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Korczak, 1967, 375. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Korczak, 1967, 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Korczak 1967, 356-357. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Korczak, 1967, 416. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Korczak, 1967, 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Korczak 1967, 123 [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Korczak 1967, 123; [I made a few corrections to the translation, M.S] [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Korczak 1967, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Korczak 1967, 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Korczak, 1967, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Korczak, 1967, 355-377 [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Korczak 1967, 376. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Korczak 1967, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Korczak 1967, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Korczak 1967, 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Korczak 1967, 289**.** [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Korczak 1967, 240, 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Court Gazette no. 19, Korczak 1967, 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Korczak 1967, 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Korczak 1967, 350. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Korczak 1967, 313-314. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Korczak 1967, 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Cohen, 1989; Guterman, 1987; 1991; Perlis, 1978; Sadan, 1964; Sharshavsky, 1990; Tal, 1990; 1984; Sharshavsky, 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Steiner, *1977.* [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Steiner, *1977,* 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Amery, 1990*,* 82-101. Jean Amery, born into an assimilated family by the name of Hans Mayer, and died in 1978 in Salzburg, at these days he lived in Belgium, as a cosmopolitan humanist and a Jew. He was completely devoid of religion or aspects of Jewish national culture but claimed that his Jewish identity was forced upon him by history and is based on feelings of deep alienation, desperate search for human solidarity. The number tattooed on his left arm best symbolizes his identity. (Amery, 1990, 94) [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Amery, *1990*, 94 [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Sadan*, 1964,* 218-219 (my trans. M.S). [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Korczak, *Ghetto Years*, 230-234 [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. 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 known one which he used as his name also in his everyday life. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Perlis, "BeMaale HaYezira", in: Korczak, *Yalsut Shel Kavod,* 12-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Korczak 1999, 147, my translation, M.S. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Korczak, *Ghetto Years*, p. 128 [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. See similar idea expressed by Sir Joshua Berlin in "Slavery and Emancipation on the identity of the Jews in Germany (1953). [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Jewish involvement in the radical left at the turn of the century is well-known subject in itself (See Sharshevsky 24-33). [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Sharshevsky, p. 76-77 [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. The difference in reaction between Korczak and Jean Amery is interesting. Korczak never relinquished the illusion of "Polishness". Amery testified that he suddenly understood the illusion and accepted the fact that he was a Jew, and therefore he does not belong (Amery, Mind's Limits 84-90). [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Perlis, in: Ghetto years, 57-59 [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Perlis, "Final Chapter" , in: Korczak, *Ghetto Years*, 64-82; Korczak, *Ghetto Years*, 197-198 [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Guterman, 75-77; Kahana, 177-178 [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Sharshevsky, *Two Worlds,* p. 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Korczak, Ghetto Years, p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Sharshevsky, p. 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Korczak, *Dat Hayeled,* p. 198, letter to Moshe Zilbertal on March 30th 1937 [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Perlis, *Yaldut shel Kavod*, p. 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Sharshavsky, 99-101 [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Korczak, Dat HaYeled, 1978, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Perlis, in: Korczak, *Dat HaYeled,* 1978, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, p. 177, 28/1/1928 [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Korczak, *Dat Ha-Yeled*, p. 177 [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Korczak, *Dat Hayeled,* 1978, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Korczak, Dat HaYeled, 1978, 182, Letter to Yosef Arnon, March 20, 1934. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Korczak 1996, 111-222. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Korczak *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 197-198, a letter to the Lichtenstein family, March 29, 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 198-201. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 92-93 [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 90 [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, p. 214 [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled,* 1978, 36-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 197-198. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. 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 the Land of Israel. (Dat HaYeled, 1978, 435) [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 199 [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled,* p. 207 [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978. 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978. 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled,* 1978. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 214-215. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*, p. 176 [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, p. 199 [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Tali Shner, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. The essay "On a New Epos" – *Dat HaYeled*, 80-84 – was published in Hebrew for the first time in the pages of "Davar", the Palestine Zionist labor movement daily paper, October 4th, 1936. The essay "Impressions and Thoughts" – *Dat HaYeled*, 85-94 – was published in "*Mebifnim* 4:1, June 1937, 131-137. The assay "Impressions from the Land of Israel" – *Dat HaYeled*, 1978,105-138 – is Korczak's lecture in the hall of the Jewish Studies Institute in Warsaw, November 1936, which was given after his second visit to Palestine. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled,* 1978, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Korczak, , *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Korczak, , *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Korczak, *1980,* 211-212. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 189-190. (My Trans. M.S.) [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 87-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 92-93 [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Korczak, Dat HaYeled, p. 133 [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Korczak, Dat AhYeled, 1978, 214-215. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Korczak, ibid, p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Korczak, 1978, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Korczak, Dat Hayeled, 1978, 188.Yoskowitz is 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-260)
261. Korczak, Ghetto Diary, 1980, 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Korczak is not alone in understanding Zionism as much more than a geography change – a whole identity change. In Zionist circles, it were Micha Yosef Berdichewsky, Yosef Haim Brenner, Aharon David Gordon, and later on A"b Yehoshua who expressed similar ideas about the exile Jewish identity into a homeland Jewish identity.. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 92-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. The term "auto-emancipation", was coined by Yehuda Leib Pinsker in his article "Auto-emancipation", 1882, a call to the Jews to take their fate in their own hands.. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 116-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 106. Korczak lectured this lecture at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, on November 1936, after his second visit to Palestine. (Dat HaYeled, 1978, 105-138.) [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Shner 2012, 36-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Korczak, Im HaYeled, 1974, 353-392. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Korczak 1978*,* 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Rolnik, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Korczak, Dat HaYeled, 1978, 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Korczak, Dat HaYeled, p. 100-101 [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Korczak 1978, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Korczak, Dat HaYeled, 1978, 119-120. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Korczak, Dat HaYeled, 1978, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Korczak, Dat HaYeled, 1978, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 83-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 95-108. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*, p. 93 [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, p. 108 [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled,* p. 138 [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, p. 138*.* It stands out and is surprising in view of the fact that until this day the Israeli educational system ignores the Bahai faith and their universal message and continues to see it as a religious sect, a threat or a minority to be avoided. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. *Ibid*. It is probably the Jordanian village of Al- Adasyyih that was abandoned by his Bahai population during the sixties of the 20th century. (See: Ruhe, *Door of Hope: the Bah.Faith in the Holy Land*, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*, 1978, 213 [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*, 1978, 177, a letter to Yosef Arnon, Oct. 8, 1932. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*, 1978, 203, March 30, 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Korczak 1999, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*, 1978, 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*, 1978, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Korczak, Dat Hayeled, 1978, 207; a letter from May 23, 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 85-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 211, a letter to Kotelchuk, Sept. 9, 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 1978, 205, letter to Arnon, March 30, 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*,. 213, letter to Yosef Arnon, Dec. 30, 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*, 211, from a letter to Edwin Marcuse, Sept. 14, 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Korczak, *Dat HaYeled*, 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. Korczak, *Dat Ha’Yeled*, 1978, 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Korczak, 1999, p. 176 [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Wanda Jakubowska, 1958, 89 min. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Korczak, 1980, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Korczak, 1967, 369. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Korczak, 1980, 110-111. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. Korczak, 1980, 187 [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Korczak, 1967, 261 [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Korczak, 1967, 96 [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Shner, 2012; Silverman, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Korczak, 2005, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Perlis, 1980, 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Korczak, 1980, 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Korczak, 1980, 150-151. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Korczak, 2005, 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Korczak, 2005, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Korczak, 1980, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Korczak, 1980, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Korczak, 2005, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Korczak, 2005, 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Korczak, 2005, 148-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Korczak, 2005, 277-80 [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Korczak, 2005, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Korczak, 2005, 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Korczak, 1980, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Korczak, 1980, 110-111. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Korczak, 2005, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Korczak, 1967, 404-419. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Korczak, 2005, 268-274. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Korczak, 2003, 10-177. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. May 1937, Korczak, 1978, 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Korczak, 1967, 93-200; 1999, 67-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Korczak, 2005, 162-165. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Korczak, 1967, 312, 378-391, 455-456. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Wanda Jakubowska, 1957-58, 89 min. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Shmueli, 1986 [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Shmueli, 1986: 177, 185-187, 190-191; Levinson, 1945 [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Katzenelson, 1975, 28-29 ( my translation, M.S) [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Blumenthal, 1953. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Katzenelson, 1975, 30 . [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Shimonovitz, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. On these two months and the circumstances of Katzenelson escape from Lodz to Warsaw see: Szeintuch, 2000, 19-22; Zuckerman, 1969, 358; Katzenelson describes this period of chase and hiding in the Vittel Diary (Katzenelson, 1969, 160). [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Even Shoshan, 1969, 355-357 [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Zuckerman, 1993, p. 109 [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Zuckerman, 1993, p. 595 [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Lubetkin, 1979, 43-44, in Hebrew [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Folman Raban*, They are Still with Me*, 2001, 174-175. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. Katzenelson, Vittel Diary, p. 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. . Lubetkin, In Days of Destruction and Revolt, 1981, p. 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Zuckerman, 1993, p. 111 [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Zuckerman, 1985, 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Katzenelson, *Vittel Diary*, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Katzenelson, *Vittel Diary*, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Katzenelson, *Vittel Diary*, 116 [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. Szeintuch, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Ringelblum 1992, 208, 227 [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. . Lubetkin, *In Days of Destruction and Revolt*, 1981, p. 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Zuckerman, 1993, 61-64, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. . *Lubetkin, In the Days of Destruction and Revolt, 1981, p. 62* [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Zuckerman, *1990*, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Ringelblum, Diary, 1992, p. 100, March 29th, 1940. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. The poem was written in Yiddish following news that reached the Warsaw underground and was published in "Yediot"' the journal of "Dror" on June 9, 1942, about ten Jews in Zdunska-Wola who were hanged by the Germans at the town square. One Hassid, Shlomo Zelichovsky, who were among the ten executed, encouraged the spirit of the crowded Jews, forbad them to mourn and sang all the way to the gallows.(1969: 371). [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Midrash Eleh Ezkerah, (Hebrew), published as "Aseret Harugei Malchut" (The Ten Martyrs) in Julius (Judah David) Eisenstein (editor), *Otzar Midrashim,* New York: 1915, 439-449 [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Katzenelson, 1969, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Katzenelson, Last Writings, 1969, p. 92 (Hebrew, my trans. M.S.) [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Katzenelson, *Last Writings*, 1969, (Hebrew), p. 96-97 [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. . Katzenelson, *Last Writings*, 1969, (Hebrew), p. 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Zuckerman, 1993, p. 262, 281 [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Lubetkin, *In Days of Destruction and Revolt*, 1981, p. 151 [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Zuckerman, "Zichronotiv VeDvariv shel Yitzhak Zuckerman" [Hebrew]. *Edut* 11. 1994, p. 45 [My translation n, M.S.] [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Katzenelson, 1969, 143-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Katzenelson, 1989, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Katzenelson, 1989, 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Katzenelson, 1969, 187. In the GFM archives there are 4 versions of the poem in the poet hand writing. The last version is from August 24, 1943, and this the one that was included in the diary. (See: Katzenelson, note on p. 382) [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Yitzhak Katzenelson, *Vittel Diary*, translated from Hebrew by Myer Cohen, Tel Aviv: Ghetto Fighters' House, 1964. P. 187 [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Katzenelson, 1989, 187; August 24, 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Katzenelson, 1969, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Katzenelson, 1969, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Katzenelson, 1969, 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Katzenelson, 1969, 309, Oct. 5-10, 1943.

     This part of the poem, in which he tries – in a poetic imagination – to gather the dead was together with the previous text mentioned here from the Vittel Diary an essential part of the Holocaust liturgy at the public gathering in Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot. In the last decade these texts were removed from the Holocaust Remembrance program. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Katzenelson, *Song of the Murdered Jewish People*, pp 14-15. ;October 3-5th, 1943 [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Yitzhak Katzenelson, *The Song of the Murdered Jewish People*, Translation from Yiddish by Noah H. Rosenbloom, Tel Aviv: Ghetto Fighters' House & HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1980, 17-20 [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Katzenelson, *The Song of the Murdered Jewish People*, 52-55 [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Katzenelson, 1969, 333. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Katzenelson, 1969: 124-125. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Katzenelson, 1969, 331. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. Bialik, H.N., *On the Slaughter*, *Kol Kitvei*, 35-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Wiesel, 2005, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Katzenelson, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)