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

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

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

Auschwitz, the epitome of human demonic creativity in the twentieth century, marks the loss of our moral orientation. Its scandalous reality – an industrial complex of death – shatters our basic trust in human morality. Civilized, educated people committed the worst crimes one can imagine there, even as they used words like "good" and "evil," framed their actions in terms of human decency, and led family lives in the proximity of the camp. Unavoidably, their actions lead us to question the very legitimacy and effectiveness of any moral discourse. In the concentration camps, language was no longer a reliable representation of reality.[[1]](#footnote-1) The world went out of its mind.

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1. Steiner, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)