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

The close of the twentieth century left much of humanity with memories of despair. Yet, perhaps the heritage of people like Janusz Korczak and Yitzhak Katzenelson can serve as an anchor of hope—like a beacon guiding us into a better world.

A variety of factors—from the unprecedented slaughter of human beings in two world wars to the dark shadow of the Holocaust of the Jewish people, the constant threat of apocalyptic nuclear war, terror fueled by religious radicalism, and global waves of refugees pushed out of their homes by political violence and economic crises—each threaten the ongoing flourishing of human civilization. These events create a problematic picture of our world and paint dark shadows around human horizons of possibility. Their presence in our consciousness endangers our belief in the basic goodness of human beings as well as our ability to work for a better world.

Auschwitz, a seminal event of depraved human creativity in the twentieth century, signals the loss of our moral orientation. Its scandalous reality – the industrial engineering of death – shatters our basic trust in human morality. Here civilized, educated men committed the worst crimes one can imagine. Using words like "good" and "evil", they spoke about human decency and even led their family lives in the proximity of the camp. Yet these surface niceties did not prevent their crimes. Unavoidably, events such as these cause us to question the very legitimacy and effectiveness of any moral discourse. Language became no more a reliable representation of reality.[[1]](#footnote-1) The world went out of its mind.

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