



## KORCZAK'S CHARACTER AS EMERGING FROM DESCRIPTIONS OF 'THE LAST JOURNEY'

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In this series of essays we sought to examine Korczak's character within the myth of 'The Last Journey'. In the various texts, Korczak's character becomes huge, gathering under its wings all those who were sent on this horrible journey, including those whose names are unknown, and have no memorial stone. Korczak's story is a memorial for all of them, it symbolizes them all.

From the 'The Last Journey' texts reviewed, emerges a perception of heroism, in the sense of transcending personal-human fears, and Korczak as remaining loyal to his life long principles until his last moment. All the texts we have looked at depict Korczak as a symbol and a role model.

Alongside these common perceptions, different authors wanted to stimulate diverse perceptions in the readers, through different emphases incorporated in their descriptions. Some authors emphasized the representation of Jewish values. Others emphasized humanity, protest and defiance, leadership and leading, fatherhood, and some sought to shatter the myth and emphasize Korczak being a human being as **everyone else.**

Korczak's choice to stay with the children, and the descriptions of his marching with them on 'the last journey', though he knew the meaning of the decision - reveals how much his worldview was ingrained in him, accompanying him all his life - until the very end. Along 'The Last Journey' all of Korczak's ideas reach their peak of realization. Therefore, although to an outside observer Korczak's choice - to go with the children to their joint death - is depicted as heroic, it seems that for him that was a natural continuation of his life, the only possible choice, as far as he was concerned.



Various texts tell of release and escape offers that Korczak received during 'the last journey'. Historically, there is documentation that Korczak received proposals from friends and colleagues to leave or hide before entering the ghetto, when the winds of war were just beginning to blow in Europe. He refused them all. The release offers described in the last journey, if they did exist, came in a situation where everything was already lost and there was no longer really a choice.

Some of the authors refer to their set of expectations from the Jewish community, and from members of Jewish people, from a moral, social and human point of view. They find that secular Korczak fulfills what they would expect from a traditional Jew, sometimes much more than religious Jews do. These descriptions emphasize his humanistic worldview, his inner self, which was not subject to change even in the face of the changing environment as a whole.

Korczak is depicted as raising a flag of protest, actually showing an option to maintain human dignity even when humanity seems to be completely trampled. The myth says that even if the results cannot be changed, it is possible to disagree with what is being done. Even when it is impossible to resist by force, it is possible to express protest and contempt. Others can take this action as well, and it seems that the author writes the description to allow more people to adopt the idea.

The act of walking on 'the last journey' engraved in the collective memory the choice Korczak made to go with the children and his dying with them. This is a story of heroism which, sometimes, overshadows Korczak's rich work throughout his life. It seems possible to treat 'The Last Journey' as a myth in itself, existing alongside the rich lifework and character of Korczak, which have become a myth in itself.