



Initiatives of Change

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**Batia Gilad**  
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I'm honoured to be here today in this wonderful and nice place among people who devoted themselves to make a change – "Initiatives of Change"

Amongst the key areas of human rights are the rights of the child. Without our concern for children we cannot develop humanity today and of course they are the future.

I represent here 24 associations spread all over the globe – Europe, America, Africa, Australia and Asia – who are working in the spirit of Janusz Korczak - Henryk Goldszmit, the man, the medical doctor, the author, the educator who devoted his life to change the world for the child.

*"...Man is not an educator but a creator of the conditions, environment and atmosphere which affect education and influence educational activity."*[end of quote] [Sachs S. and Plotnik R., *Stefa, the Woman behind Korczak*, p45]

In his beliefs the human future and the life in multicultural society is based on the education, to prepare the child to be *"a useful individual in society – a citizen"*, as Korczak called it.

quote:

*"We are brothers, children of the same earth. We have been preceded by generations who shared a common destiny for good and for evil one long, common path. We get light from the same sun and our crops are destroyed by the same hail, and the bones of our forefathers are covered by the same earth. We have known more sorrow than joy, more tears than laughter and neither you nor we bear the blame for this. Let us work together: let us educate ourselves together..."* Janusz Korczak, *The Society 1910* "

He writes in his diary that from the age of five he decided to make this change, "to throw away all money so there wouldn't be any dirty, ragged and hungry children..".

As a children's advocate, Janusz Korczak spoke of the need for a Declaration of Children's Rights long before any such document was drawn up by the Geneva Convention or the United Nations General Assembly (1989).

quote:

*"Years of work make it increasingly obvious[to me] that children deserve respect, confidence and kindness, that good is derived from them in the cheerful atmosphere of mild sensations, merry laughter, strenuous first efforts and surprises, pure, clear, lovable joys. Such work is lively, fruitful and attractive."*

[M. Wolins, Selected works of J. Korczak, Warsaw 1967, p. 479]

Korczak placed the child at the center of the adults' thoughts. The child is no longer an object that belongs to the adults, but rather an individual. The man who treated sick children as a physician and afterwards tended them as an educator of Jewish and Polish orphans, developed work methods that



Initiatives of Change

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enabled children from the lowest socioeconomic sector to obtain a warm home, education and schooling.

In his pedagogical writings, Korczak mainly addresses the adults – the educators. They are the ones who stand in front of the child and affect his growth and the formation of his personality, and that is the reason for the great importance of the way they are trained. His approach is very insistent and uncompromising:

*"Every child who does not fit the general law must become a legitimate exception. In this case, too, what is needed is conscious, creative and devoted thought on the part of the teacher."* [end of quote][M. Wolins, Selected works of J. Korczak, Warsaw 1967, p.454]

The children's soul is a secret and the educator's job is more extensive to find out the secret. Each one has the right to be heard and to have the conditions to grow up. For that he needs an adult who will guide him and show him the way, will **get to** know him, direct him, and mainly will educate him.

*"Who are you, you wonderful secret and what do you bring with you? How will I be able to help you?"*  
Korczak J. (1918), *How to Love Children*

In his literature for children he focuses on the role of individuals in society centering on the rights and responsibilities of each one. For example in one of his famous books *King Math*, he is dealing with understanding of intercultural relations between different ages, social positions, ethnic differences and adults and children, showing us that there are endless and powerful possibilities for mutual respect, understanding and appreciation but this does not occur on its own without effort, dedication, patience and education.

*Quote: "Life is like a strange dream, but for those who have strong wills and a desire to serve others, the dream can be beautiful - even if the way to the goal is winding, and one's thoughts confused."*  
*Kajtus the Magician*

His approach to the quality of social life we can find in one of his radio talks:

*"You lived - how many fields did you plough,  
How many loaves of bread did you bake,  
How much seed did you sow,  
How many trees did you plant,  
How many bricks did you lay before being gathered to your people,  
How many buttons did you sew,  
How many patches did you patch,  
How many joins did you make,  
To whom did you give of your warmth,*



Initiatives of Change

*Whom did you support as he stumbled,  
To whom did you show the way without demanding a show of gratitude or a prize,  
What was your giving  
Whom did you serve?"*  
**Janusz Korczak (from his talks on the radio)**