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Abstract  
“From the Depths I Call-Out to You” (Psalms - 130): Janusz Korczak’s Prayer Book - *Alone with God: Prayers of Those Who Do not Pray*  
Prayer, as a turning to God as a Supreme Being before whom human beings stand and express their deepest feelings, hold internal conversations with themselves and the world and undertake serious self-accounting, is legend among the writings of the outstanding humanist moral educator of Polish Jewish origins, Janusz Korczak (1878-1942), and holds a significant place in his world-outlook, educational thought and practice. Through the interpretation of the prayer book Korczak composed, this paper explores Korczak’s conception of God and human beings and his understanding of the aims of praying.  

**Introduction**  
It is generally assumed that Korczak composed *Alone with God: Prayers for Those People Who Do Not Pray* between May, 1920 and September, 1921. It was likely published before Christmas 1921, though 1922 is the date that appears on the inside cover page of the book. Prayer, as a human turning to God as a Supreme Being who is disclosed in nature and life and before whom persons stand and express their deepest feelings, hold internal conversations with themselves and the world and undertake serious self-accounting, is legend among Korczak's writings (Children of the Street, 1901; Child of the Drawing Room, 1906; The School of Life, 1907-1908; The Unlucky Week, 1914; Confessions of a Butterfly, 1914; Educational Moments, 1919; Ghetto Diary, 1942). In light of this it is possible to state that the substance and style in this work, which can be compared to a personal, private prayer book, have deep roots in many other works of Korczak.  

At the same time, this prayer book has singularly unique features: It is the first and only time Korczak composed and published a collection of prayers directly connected to and derived from clear auto-biographical contexts. The most general context was his frequent encounters with death and national and social loss—as a pediatrician serving children with severe diseases in the Berson-Bauman children's hospital in Warsaw (from 1904-1912); as a military doctor in the Russian army in the Japanese-Russian War (1904-1905) and in World War One (1914-1918), and as a doctor in the Polish army in the war between Poland and Communist Russia in 1919.  

However, it apparently was his mother's death in February, 1920 and the specific circumstances that led to it that was the most decisive factor engendering Korczak's need to compose this book of personal prayers. After he returned to Warsaw from the Polish-Russian war in 1920, Korczak continued to serve as a doctor in a military hospital for soldiers suffering from infectious diseases. Concerned that he somehow may pass on contagious infections to the children in the orphanage he led, he decided to move into his mother's apartment in this period. Perhaps due to insufficient caution he indeed contracted typhus and infected his mother with it while she was taking care of him. He recovered from the disease...
but she did not. Her death in and of itself caused him great sorrow, and very profound feelings of guilt accompanied this sorrow since he held himself directly responsible for her death. These very strong feelings, coupled with: his memory of the trauma he underwent when his father died unexpectedly from a mental disease some twenty five years before; the powerful images of death and suffering still fresh in his mind from the war from which he had just returned; the pressures and tensions of his life running back and forth from his work at the orphanage to his work at the military hospital; and the physical attacks on Jews taking place on Warsaw streets in this period that greatly distressed him, intensified his feelings of loneliness, and depression as well as generated suicidal thoughts in him. Several years passed until he was able to significantly recover from these very difficult pessimistic feelings.

The prayer book he penned is composed of eighteen prayers. His choice of this particular number of prayers can perhaps shed some light on Korczak's attachment to the Jewish religious tradition whose most central prayer is the Shmone Esreh, the prayer of eighteen benedictions. However, the similarity between Korczak's prayer book and the key prayer in the traditional Jewish prayer book does not go beyond the similarity of the number of prayers in it.

Many of the passages from the 18 prayers in this prayer book that will be quoted in this paper’s exposition appear here for the first time in an English translation from the original version published in Polish (Silverman, 2017:105-118). These have been translated into English by Ms. Lydia Bauman.

The title of this collection of prayers Alone with God shows that Korczak was concerned with the individual, not the collective, because he was convinced that God’s presence in the world is experienced and conceived within the subjective – context of each human being’s life. The sub-title, Prayers of Those Who Don’t Pray, is paradoxical, of course, unless it is taken to mean people who do pray but always outside of institutional religious frameworks.

It is possible to offer an interpretation of this paradox that is perhaps more incisive and captures the latter’s full power. A brief review of the Spanish religious existential philosopher, Miguel De'Unamuno's (1864-1934) interpretation of this passage from Psalms 14-1: “The malevolent person hath said in his heart, there is no God” offers a useful entrance into the interpretation we have in mind. Honest, simple, innocent people generally and naturally tend to believe in God; many people endowed with scientific, empirical and more complex minds would like very much to emulate this former group of people who find and hold faith in God in relative ease. However, they encounter considerable difficulties, sometimes insurmountable ones, to embrace such a faith. In their hearts they would like to find God, but their minds discourage and prevent them from making this “leap to faith”. According to Unamuno this passage in Psalms does not refer to either one of these two groups. It refers exclusively to a third group of people, and the Psalmist’s wrath in this passage is directed at this group alone. This group’s members are evil-minded, or simply evil people, whose very hearts are appalled by the belief in God and they furiously negate the existence of such a Supreme Being’s existence in and outside of the world. In short, only mean and malicious people do not want deeply and passionately “in their hearts” the presence of God in their lives.

It is possible to propose that Korczak wanted his prayer book to address this rather large second group of people who would like to believe in the existence of a God to whom they can turn in prayer. However, they find it close to impossible to find this God.
At the same time and herein lies the paradox, the difficulties these people encounter in succeeding to pray, and the feelings of pain, suffering and the sense of missed opportunities that accompany these difficulties become a strong call to establishing a connection with God. In this light, the people praying in Korczak’s prayer book are people who succeeded to find God after they undergo a long period of complete alienation from such a Supreme Being. And these people’s prayers are meant to assist people like them to find a way back to believing in and encountering God in prayer.

In light of these introductory remarks, the paper now turns to explore Korczak’s understanding of God, people, the act and aims of praying and the role these play in his world-outlook, educational thought and practice. This exploration will be based mainly on the analysis and interpretation of passages from abridged versions of a selected number of the prayers from the eighteen prayers in Korczak’s prayer book.

1 Korczak’s conception of God

I know that the human mind is too small to comprehend God, it is just a drop in the sea. You the only Almighty, there is nothing you don’t know or cannot do. Everyone turns to you, and you choose to agree or disagree. (Little Girl's Prayer)

God, when I love this child more than anything else, maybe through my love of him I love you, since you God are present, present, and present in a child--the greatest mystery of all”. (Mothers Prayer)

But after all, You are not only present in a human being’s tears but also in the lilac flower’s scent. You are not only in the heavens but also in a kiss. (Prayer of Playfulness)

Part of You is my spirit, and so you have rebelled against yourself. I--God, challenge you, God, as my equal. (Prayer of Rebellion)

The first passage from the small child’s prayer above intimates Korczak’s belief that the human mind is much too tiny to comprehend the essence of God’s infinite Being. Due to this Supreme Being’s infinite nature, human reason does not and cannot have an answer to the question of God’s nature. A firm belief in God stemming from Korczak’s encounters with creation – the natural world and all the creatures inhabiting it, coupled with deep respect for human reason, and for the infinite and impenetrable nature of God are interrelated themes which appear in many of his writings and are major features of Korczak’s religious world view. One of the first expressions of these themes appear in the following entries from Korczak’s semi-auto-biographical work published in 1914 Confessions of a Butterfly. According to Korczak scholars it is likely that the reflections and confessions of the fictitious young university student, who calls himself the Butterfly, reflect Korczak’s state of mind as a young adult:

January 20
This morning I really prayed the way a human being should pray…I was completely aware of what I was saying, not so much in the words, but in my thought and spirit. Only this type of praying can strengthen a person; only this type of praying becomes a reflective being. The other type of praying can be likened to the ramblings of a beggar on church steps. (As I now experience infinite harmony in God I’m no longer surprised this Being has no beginning
and no end. The cosmos and the stars, not the priest lends testimony to me of
the ‘Creator of worlds’ existence). I’ve created for myself a new type of faith.
Its direction is not yet entirely clear to me; but I know it is based on the purity
of the human spirit. It claims God exists. What is God’s nature? Human reason
does not have an answer to this question. Behave fairly and do good deeds, pray
not to petition God but in order to never forget Him because we can see God in
everything. (146-147)

April 10
I’m afraid of the dark, afraid of hallucinations…Books seem to make me
nervous but they protect me from something even worse. I have come to deny
and reject ritual practices. But I still believe in God and prayer. I preserve them
because it’s not possible to live without them. It’s not possible that human
beings are a mere accident.” (Ibid: 156-157)

The dialectic of the human heart’s certainty of God’s presence in the world and the human
mind’s certainty of the impenetrability of this Being makes it possible to experience God’s
Presence in bold anthropomorphic images, such as the ones quoted in the last three passages
heading this section. For the mother who has just given birth to her first child, God, the
greatest secret of all secrets, is found in her newborn baby. For the free spirited young woman
who prays the prayer of playfulness God is found not only in a human being’s tears but also
in the sweet smell of lilac flowers; not only in the heavens but also in a kiss. And for the rebel
who prays the prayer of rebellion part of God is in him so when he rebels against God, God
takes part in this rebellion (See also Korczak, 1996, Vol. 2: 19-21; 24-5; 33; Korczak, 1999:
73; 77). The very fact that persons who pray in the” Korczakian spirit” discover the Divine
presence in Nature (the real world and its creatures) suggests that observation, contemplation
of and reflection on the world are in themselves forms of prayer.

In a way strongly resembling images of God and manners of talking to and with this Supreme
Being heard in Black gospel music and spirituals, God is present to Korczak’s praying people
as their closest, intimate, wise and caring best Friend – God is their Friend of all friends. The
people praying in most of these 18 prayers turn to God in first person single possessive
pronouns, such as my Lord, my God. With very few exceptions, the adjectives they employ
when they turn to address God are very friendly, soft and gentle: God is “precious”, “precious
beyond everything”, “good”, “beloved”, “forgiving”, “kind-hearted”, “smiling”,
“compassionate”, etc. The nature of their turning and relating to God is always direct and

It is possible to hypothesize that the liberty Korczak takes in employing rich, radical and rash
– at times playful and ironic, usually engaging and often shocking - anthropomorphic imagery
in his and his prayers’ God-talk stems from the uncompromising anthropocentric nature of his
religious humanism. Since rational-critical reflective human beings cannot possibly gain access
into the essence of the infinite Supreme Being they call God, the best they can do is to imagine
this Being in terms of the human at its best – of humanity in its finest actual achievements and
highest (possible) aspirations.

Stating this in terms of an educative model we can say any human image or representation of
God that assists human persons to confront more sensitively and successfully the difficulties
and dilemmas life poses to them, and that motivates them towards life-constructing and
ameliorating acts is not only legitimate but desirable and praiseworthy. In a way of
summarizing these points we can say Korczak’s God is human beings’ Great, Old, Wise and Closest Friend of Friends Who Ever-lends them support and encouragement to grow, flourish and create, and to accompany and do good to the world and to all others in it, human ones especially, and human children most especially.

In Korczak’s prayer book God’s presence is at once immanent – in the world - and transcendent - and beyond it. In a Rabbinical Mystical formulation “God is the Place of the world – God is everywhere - but the world is not this Supreme Being’s place”. Or, the world contains God but God is not fully contained in or by it. Korczak’s religious world view was panentheistic: he believed that God was in every created thing, while intimating that at the same time God existed beyond it.

Korczak’s anthropomorphic images of God indicate a clear theistic, transcendent element, which is expressed in the connections he sees between nature, humankind, and their Creator, and in the importance he attributed to personal, direct prayer. This view of Korczak as a panentheist differs from those who claim that he was a pantheist, meaning that he believed that God and nature were identical. Nevertheless, the transcendental elements in his thought are thin. He believed there was just one Divine commandment: to love one's fellow person (as in Lev. 19:18)¹. He attributed no importance to ritual commandments, and his prayers were personal, composed of radically anthropomorphic images. Moreover, his attitude toward death was stoical, not based on an ordinary theistic system of reward and punishment.

His religious faith and the demands it made on him flowed from his understanding of Creation. Korczak learned about God from this Supreme Being’s creation of the world and the creatures inhabiting it, and not from a historical revelation. His religiosity was rational and sensitive. Korczak could have adopted Terence's saying that nothing human was alien to him, as his motto. According to him, a person's willingness to take responsibility for the advancement of his fellow, to support him, underlies his humanity and is the test of his religiosity.

Korczak's faith in God was entirely based on love of God, not fear. He regarded God as people's best friend in their struggle to reduce evil and increase goodness. For him, God was the greatest good that people could imagine and seek to resemble. God was the source of human yearnings for a better world founded on compassion. God was close to all who called out to him and could be revealed to every creature, in every action and feeling, in every sentient being. Korczak called Him “the educator of educators” and “the physician of physicians.” This God made only one demand upon people: to love and honor themselves, their fellows, and nature.

This conception of the interrelationship between God and human beings offers us a key towards understanding the major existential – intellectual and emotional –source of Korczak’s disinterest in and opposition to the structures and strictures of explicit religions in general and to those of Catholicism in particular (Korczak’s familiarity with the latter religion was significantly more extensive than with Judaism).

To Korczak’s sense and sensibilities these structures and strictures tend all-too-often to diminish, devaluate and distort at once the spiritual-rational-ethical nature of human beings and the impenetrable ineffable nature of God. Putting this more pointedly, these structures and strictures dehumanize. A detailed analysis of these prayers, would show that Korczak
located the powers of dehumanization in the following dimensions of explicit religions, especially Catholicism’s orientation, organization and practices:

God as a Grand Inquisitor who induces fear in human beings, punishes them for their bad failings and failings; bestows on them material benefits in exchange for their loyalty and good deeds. God is severe, lacks irony, never laughs, suppresses human beings’ freedom of thought, and freedom to try to live life to its fullness.

God as only truly accessible to human beings through chosen intermediaries arranged hierarchically and through performing prescribed specific ritual acts. These usually uproot religion from the “Ministry” of the Interior –affairs of the heart and spirit, and transplant it into the Ministry of Finance; Religion becomes a base of political and economic power, catering to and serving the needs and interests of the religious institution’s hierarchies at the expense of the people faithful to it. These official agents of God also engender a process through which the rituals, the symbols incrementally ever-gain more importance than the ethical-spiritual meanings symbolized in them. Humans become robot-like mindless ritual-dispensing ‘machines’ instead of spontaneous, searching, struggling, reflective rational spiritual beings.

2 Korczak’s portrait of people who pray

A careful examination of Korczak’s portrayal of human beings who pray in his prayer book discloses that they turn to prayer when they are ready to speak sincerely and open-heartedly with this Supreme Being. These praying people bring the totality of their feelings, sensitivities and thoughts in their prayers to God.

In light of this it is possible to say that in Korczak’s eyes prayer is persons’ most exposed encounter with themselves and God. Furthermore, a review of most of these people’s prayers suggest that they see themselves as persons who essentially want to be good yet often find themselves overpowered by sinfulness. Consequently, they often turn to prayer to seek God’s help to become better people and to resist sinful temptations.

It is possible to divide the prayers in Korczak’s prayer book into two main categories: Prayers of people who are experiencing specific emotions and prayers of people who hold a specific position or status. The range of the feelings expressed in the first category of prayers is very broad and extends from ecstatic joy to profound sadness, from serenity, tranquility to uncontrollable rage. Examples of such powerful emotions abound in these prayers. In the way of two examples among many more:

- The individual who prays the prayer of sadness describes the bitter sadness that envelops her:

  Sadness, oh God, sadness. I took my heart out of my breast, oh God, how God, quietly my heart is beating. Oh God, quietly, quietly my heart is beating, oh God, oh God, out of my breast I took my heart. Tear stained, sad heart of mine, sad heart, tear stained.

- The person praying the prayer of complaint castigates God for the radical sense of loneliness he experiences:

  You abandoned me God, is it something I’ve done?
  I am alone now and I lost my way.
  I got lost in gloomy dusk, I got lost in the gloomy thicket of life.
You abandoned me God; how have I offended you?
Alone and troubled I wander.
…What have I done to you, God, that you should leave me now, just as my feet are tangled in thorns, and my hands and heart are bleeding?...
The prayers in this category are emotionally high-charged ones that burst out of the persons praying them as if they truly feel they can not contain their feelings on their own and that they must share them with God in the form of a prayer. The prayers in the second category are less intense and impassioned. However, they too disclose that the individual people praying them are motivated by an existential need to share their inner-most feelings, concerns, questions with God and they too approach this Supreme Being in a position of exposure, honesty and sincerity. Since they are aware that God knows everything, the individuals who pray in the spirit of Korczak – Korczakian prayers - do not want to and also know they cannot hide anything before God; they entrust this Supreme Being with their “deep-down things” feelings, thoughts and appetites. This standing in front of God in complete honesty, sincerity and openness even if some of the thoughts and feelings that are expressed are difficult, unkind and offensive ones is the common thread that ties all these different prayers together.

3 Praying: Its essence and aims

Each of the eighteen prayers in Korczak’s prayer book is unique and fascinating. While warranted, an in-depth analysis and interpretation of each of them is beyond the scope of this paper. In light of this our analysis and interpretation of them here will focus on several prominent features these prayers hold in common. Combined together these features will afford us a window into the essence and aims of prayer in Korczak’s eyes.

Prayer as Encounter

Oh, the bell ... it's him ... I am sorry ... don’t be angry God... It’s you who controls everything after all... bye for now, dear God, thank you; we had such a good time just the two of us. (Loose Woman’s Prayer)

… I will not send you long prayers oh God. Nor countless sighs.... I have no wish to win your favors, or solicit lofty gifts…And yet I will send one heartfelt request, oh God. I have one gem, which I will not entrust to fellow man. In my silent humility you may barely notice me, but in my request I stand before you, God--as a demand of fire... Give children good fortune, lend help to their efforts, and blessings for their hardships…and as a down payment of my request, accept my only asset: sadness. Sadness and work. (The School Teacher’s Prayer)

Both the title itself Alone with God (a person alone with God) of Korczak’s prayer book and the sampling of these two passages from the prayers heading the sub-section above lend clear testimony that in Korczak’s eyes more than anything else praying affords human beings the opportunity to encounter God and hold a personal, unmediated, meaningful conversation with this Supreme Being. The individual praying aspires for the moment when in the midst of her tumultuous life she at once finds and can face God directly and openly share all that stirs in her heart with this Supreme Being.
The view of praying as an intimate encounter generates several perspectives on its nature: Prayer occurs whenever and wherever a person encounters God. Therefore, in depth observation of and reflection on nature entails an encounter with God’s immanence in it and often becomes a form of praying. Indeed, many of Korczak’s own prayers, and many of the prayers offered by characters in his writings (fictional, non-fictional and educational) can be read and understood as odes to creation (Korczak, 2003; 1999; 1998; 1996- Vol. 1; 1996, Vol. 2). The following passage from Korczak’s Ghetto Diary in which he contrasts his world view to Nietzsche's can serve as a very strong example of such an ode to creation:

I intend to refute a deceitful book by a false prophet. This book has done a great deal of harm - Also sprach Zarathustra…I had the honor to speak, with Zarathustra. His wise mysteries…have landed you poor philosopher, behind the dark walls and the heavy bars of a lunatic asylum. “Nietzsche died insane, at odds with life!” In my book I want to prove that he had died painfully at odds with truth… For in the hour of reckoning I am not inside a solitary cell of the saddest hospital in the world but surrounded by butterflies and grasshoppers, and glowworms, and I hear a -concert of crickets and a soloist high up in the sky—the skylark.

Merciful Lord!
Thank you, Merciful Lord, for the meadow and the bright sunsets, for the refreshing -evening breeze after a hot day of toil and struggle. Thank you, Merciful Lord, for having arranged so wisely to provide flowers with fragrance, glowworms with the glow, and make the stars in the sky sparkle.

How joyous old age is. -How delectable the repose. “Man is so immeasurably blessed with Thy gifts, whom Thou hast created and saved” (http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf:15-16).

Prayer as a Pouring-Out of the Soul

Each of the prayers in Korczak’s prayer book expresses and fulfills a specific need or set of needs of the individual who is praying it. At the same a pouring out of one’s soul before God takes place in all of them. The person who prays in the spirit of Korczak – the Korczakian prayer - turns to God with the objective in mind of making this Supreme Being into a partner with whom she can share her inner self, all the stirrings of her soul. She tells God what disturbs her and what are her understanding and feelings about herself and her life. It is possible to propose that in this context prayer realizes a profound human psychological need: To unwind and share the cacophony of painful, disturbing and joyful feelings in one’s inner-self with a Being outside of oneself. In this type of turning the person praying only wants God to listen to her cries, to serve as a silent sounding board for her – nothing more and nothing less than this. (See the Prayer of Sadness and the Little Girls Prayer).

Prayer is not a Business Transaction Yet…

The notions that true prayer is characterized by an intimate meeting and sharing with God, a genuine pouring out of the soul in front of this Supreme Being, and that seeking rewards, benefits, favors etc. from God literally destroys the purity of praying’s meaning and aims appears in a considerable number of the prayers in Korczak’s prayer book. However, a further reading of these prayers intimates that the Korczakian prayers find themselves conflicted and ambivalent about the total elimination of the possibility of soliciting favors from God. On one hand they want to encounter God unconditionally without any “business strings attached.” On the other hand, they know, or feel and believe that God is the source of Good in the world and that this Supreme Being has the power to help and assist them.
This conflict coupled by ambivalence remains and is never completely resolved. However, several of the persons praying seem to have come up with a partial solution to it. This passage from the Loose Woman’s prayer paves the way for it:

How terribly people bother you: everyone wants something, everyone feels entitled to something from you. How do you cope with all this? Sometimes I think that you don’t listen, but how can that be? I resolved never to ask for anything. It doesn’t seem very nice somehow: to love you, supposedly, and suddenly a request, a petition. And yet, I might not ask, but secretly think that just because of that, you will fulfill my wish.

Though Korczakian prayers know on principle that it is wrong to seek gifts or favors from God, they sometimes pursue this course in the hope that precisely because their prayers are truthful ones, not motivated by business-like considerations, God will respond favorably to their requests and will refrain from ‘seeing’ it as an impure or contaminated prayer.

4: Prayers’ Role in Korczak’s World-View, Educational Practice and Theory

As discussed in section 1 above, Korczak’s world view was based on the way he experienced and understood creation. Korczak understood God’s Creation in terms of two endless, recurring, and interdependent processes of life: growth and decay, dissolution and death. Korczak found and identified God’s relationship to the world and humankind in these processes, and his personal relationship to God emerged out of his responses to them. Indeed, his writing is shot through with references to these processes (See Korczak, 1999; 1998: 357-360; Korczak, 2003: 209)

The expression of radical amazement (Heschel, 1955) at these processes is the thread that binds Korczak’s three major responses to these processes. First, this radical amazement inspired his belief in the human capacity of growth, giving him seemingly infinite strength to fortify this capacity in the people he encountered, in particular in the children he educated. This response is at the heart of his strong belief in the possibility of re-forming young people who came from difficult and oppressive backgrounds, whose patterns of behavior were anti-social, so that they would adopt positive, productive, and ethical patterns of behavior. Second, it assisted him in dealing with the inherent, natural limitations that impede human growth, providing him with consolation in response to these limitations. Third, it led him to adopt an attitude of stoical equanimity in the face of the inexorable destructive forces in nature.

All three of these responses inform the core of ‘Ameliorative Compassion’, the foundation and overarching guiding principle of Korczak’s educational theory and practice. After briefly presenting its main features, it will be possible to proceed to demonstrate strong similarities between them and major features of the desirable relationship between God and human beings disclosed in Korczak’s conception of prayer.

A pedagogy based on ameliorative compassion includes:

1. Viewing the difficult actions of a pupil as an expression of the experience of his present self;
2. According respect to the pupil's present self, including a tolerant and patient attitude toward negative behavior and traits;
3. Pedagogical forgiveness, respecting the pupil and accepting her as she is, building relations of trust between pupil and educator, which are a necessary condition for
having any educational influence on a pupil;
4. Offering the pupil opportunities for action that will challenge her to improve herself and the society in which she lives;
5. Calling upon the pupils to acquire the tools and skills necessary for self-improvement and social improvement, to practice them and to apply them in life.

Ameliorative compassion enables the educator to help students overcome their innate and socially conditioned limitations and become better people. However, the educator must also be aware of the limitations of this compassionate relationship itself, as expressed in Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer: “Father, give us courage to change what must be altered, serenity to accept what cannot be helped, and the insight to know the one from the other.”

According to Korczak, ameliorative compassion and its concomitant, pedagogical forgiveness must characterize the worthy educator's attitude toward the pupil and his ways of working with her. The worthy educator truly respects the pupil and is involved in her life, caring for her and sincerely desiring to help her overcome her difficulties and achieve her goals. Hence, the pupil feels that the educator is not interested in judging her. The non-judgmental, compassionate educator deals with the pupil in the here and now.

The parallels between the features of these worthy educators who build relationships with their charges based on: attentive listening to their needs, struggles, joys and problems; genuinely caring for them; treating them with respect and compassion; patient acceptance of their shortcomings; refraining from judging, indicting and punishing them for their misdeeds; and at the same time encouraging them to choose paths of self-re-formation, and between God’s relationship to individuals who are ever-turning to pray to this Supreme Being are or at least appear to be quite apparent.

In this context it is worth remembering that Korczak’s God is an extremely user-friendly Supreme Being. Korczak calls this God “the educator of educators” and “the physician of physicians.” This God ever-encourages human beings to grow, flourish and create, and to try to do good to the world and to all the creatures who inhabit it. This God issues one and only one command: My children - love your neighbor (see end note iii.).

Concluded-Yet-Ever-to-be-Completed
End Notes

i. I owe this interpretation as well as several others in this paper to Ms. Limor Reiz, a student from the Hebrew university who took a seminar I gave on Korczak’s Legacy, fall semester, 2016, and wrote her final course paper on Korczak’s prayer book.

ii. Korczak’s play The Senate of Madmen, was first performed in the Athanaeum theatre, the most important workers’ theatre in Warsaw on October 1, 1931. This play is set in a mental asylum. In its seventh scene one of its saner patients, the old man, shares a fable with a young boy named Yanek about “How God took to His Feet and Ran away from the sanctuary the townspeople built for Him.” It is possible to locate Korczak’s conception of God and vision of the desirable relationship between human beings and God in this fable. In God’s appearance in front of the townspeople the only words spoken out loud by this Supreme Being to them are issued in the form of the following command: “My children - love your neighbor.” (Silverman, 2017:123)

iii. The appendix to this paper contains eleven prayers from the eighteen prayers in Korczak’s prayer book. These prayers were translated into English from Polish for the first time by Ms. Lydia Bauman. And they were abridged and edited by the author of this paper. The Prayer of: Sadness; Complaint; Rebellion; Reconciliation and the Joyful prayer belong to the first category mentioned above: Prayers of people who are experiencing specific emotions. The Mother’s, the Loose Woman’s, Young Child’s, Old Man’s, Little Girl’s and School Teacher’s respective prayers belong to the second category mentioned above: Prayers of people who hold a specific position or status.

iv. In this last line Korczak alludes to a passage in a church hymn of F. Karpinski.

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Alone with God: Prayers of Those Who Do Not Pray

With prayer I fastened together the whispered secrets of your soul.
I know that with and through God, each and every being’s life must bind world’s vast expanse. I know. I am certain of it--so help me God.

Mother’s Prayer

Bent over you, my darling child, why so precious to me, my little one?--Like so many, I know, I believe, believe, believe that unseen amongst thousands, I will know your voice, unheard, I will know your lips suckling at my breast--you, my only one.

Without words I understand you, without a sound you’ll rouse me from the deepest sleep--with but a look, a wish.

My child, life’s true essence, you are to me a wistful memory, a sweet yearning, my hope and my consolation.

Be happy my child. Forgive me, God for not addressing you, if I pray it’s in fear that in a jealous fit you will harm him. I fear to put my trust even in you my Lord--for you take children from their mothers and mothers away from their children. Tell me, why do you act so?--this is not a reproach, only a question my Lord.

Forgive me, God, that my love for him is greater than my love for you - for I brought him into the world, as did you, my God: we share the responsibility and jointly carry the blame for his life and even now for his suffering. We must be vigilant.

He suffers - crying.

God, when I love this child more than anything else, maybe through my love of him I love you, since you God are present, present, and present in a child--the greatest mystery of all.

I do not believe in sin. If there is sin then my love would be sinful, but can a mother’s love of her child be a sin? ...

Give him happiness, my God, so that he will not complain that we have granted him life. Such happiness is unknown to me but you know what it is; it is your duty to know it. Therefore, you must provide it!

See, I'm searching, bent over you, my darling child, and asking with all my heart, do you understand--will you understand? --Tell me. --Give me a hint by blinking your eyelids, through the movement of your tiny hand--give me a sign that no one else will understand other than the two of us: God and me, your mother. --Tell me you won’t have complaints against life and me; tell me, my dear child, you hear my heartfelt prayer.
Loose Woman's Prayer

My dear God, it is so long since we spoke. Perhaps I don’t pray that often because I dislike kneeling. Yes, I’ll put away my cigarette, but I will sit on the sofa looking at flowers. Surely you will not be offended, the Kind, Loving God that you are. You never once harmed me. And yet I have been wicked many times, disobedient. I have so many sins.

Just look. I want to pray, and already a sinful thought enters my head. Because I felt like saying:

- Sit here Old Man, next to me—closer—do not be afraid, I won’t do anything—unless you want me to. Such a sin, such an unclean thought.

I am so strange: I never harmed anyone, not consciously. I’m quick to apologize, and if I cannot apologize, I weep even though I know my eyes will be red and swollen. Fine—let them be red, let me be ugly since I am so wicked...wicked...wicked...

I am pretty—is that not so? Nothing wrong I think in my speaking the truth? You yourself created me and your will is sacred. Sometimes I even wish I was ugly, not quite ugly but a little bit. No doubt I would have been wiser, more obedient, better. Well, maybe not better. Am I good? --Tell me. What a pity I cannot see you, or I would have sidled up close to you, batted my eyelashes at you, and you would have smiled and said—“Don’t be so silly” You would, wouldn’t you?

You don’t answer me and I would love to know why you create ugly people. I would make everyone beautiful; both women and men, even them. But I will not discuss men with you— you know why. --See: I ’m not jealous. If all women were pretty, the best loved among them would probably be the cleverest ones. And I am not so clever. A pity.

I read only novels, and even then not too carefully. As for poems, I don’t even like them. Though I don’t believe you get clever from reading books. You have to be born that way.

Dear, kind God, I like you so much. Sometimes I’d like to make a sacrifice for you. I do give to charity but that’s not it. Do you remember that time I visited a woman sick with typhus, in order to prove to her that I trust in you; I was so scared. Not of death, no, but after typhus I know people lose their hair and when sick one can say a lot of unnecessary things.

How terribly people bother you: everyone wants something, everyone feels entitled to something from you. How do you cope with all this? Sometimes I think that you don’t listen, but how can that be? No wonder I don’t know—how can I? It seems to me not even priests really know. I resolved never to ask for anything. It doesn’t seem very nice somehow: to love you, supposedly, and suddenly a request, a petition. And yet, I might not ask, but secretly think that just because of that, you will fulfill my wish.

You wouldn’t like it if I wasn’t pretty either, would you? You find me attractive, admit it. Sure, not in the way that people do; but are you not -pleased when you manage to create a thing of beauty?

How stupid of me, is it possible for God not to succeed in something? Everything is like it is because you want it so.

You came up with so many flowers. And some of them quite sinful. A red rose, the highly scented red variety, that’s a sinful flower. Perhaps it wasn’t you who created them, but the devil himself? No, it cannot be: as if you wouldn’t be powerful enough to make sinful flowers fade? Poor you, my Grandpa.

I would so like to help you sometimes, lighten your load, cheer you up. Because, really, to be always thinking of poverty, of chastity, of the orphaned. I hate having fillings, but still I
went to the dentist to have a healthy tooth filled; I wanted to mortify my flesh; and that ass laughed at me. In truth, I also started laughing, although at first I was mad. He probably told all his friends. Ugh what cock-roaches men are. I hate them.

I know, you tell people to forgive. I do forgive them, but it’s even worse. Cheats, ingrates the lot of them--a hundred, a thousand times worse than us.

Oh, the bell ... it’s him ... I am sorry ... don’t be angry God... It’s you who controls everything after all... bye for now, dear God, thank you; we had such a good time just the two of us.
Prayer of Sadness

What sadness oh God, oh God, what sadness.
   Grey sadness. Oh God, oh God, grey sadness.
   Neither sounds nor colors, oh God, neither colors nor sounds.
   Sadness, oh God, sadness.
   I took my heart out of my breast, oh God, oh God, quietly my heart is beating.
Oh God, quietly, quietly my heart is beating, oh God, oh God, out of my breast I took my heart.
   Tear stained, sad heart of mine, sad heart, tear stained.
   Black bird with white wings. Oh God, white are the wings of the black bird.
   Thick mist, black bird, white wings, oh God, white wings, black bird, thick mist, oh God.
   Sadness, oh God, sadness.
   The sun was out, it was, but is no longer, oh God, it is no longer, no longer, the sun was out, oh God.
   Silence, sadness, sadness, silence.
   Silence and sadness, a coffin rocking upon a black wave. Black butterflies drinking black dew off black flowers. Never will man sing again, never will a child smile, the last bell has cracked, all the world’s clocks have stopped, the last tower lies in ruins, the last star was extinguished - for whom would it shine?
   Nothing, there is nothing oh God, there is nothing.
   I open my eyes wide - I look, look, look, God, there is nothing, I see nothing, I listen but I hear nothing, neither a whisper, nor a sigh.
   Grey Lord of silent world, God, I feel around me those black birds with white wings, those black butterflies drinking black dew out of black chalices.
   Such sadness, God, such sadness.
   Neither colors, nor sounds, God, God, neither sounds nor colors, nor tears.

Prayer of a Young Child

Dear God, Sophie did a wee. --Sophie is bad; Sophie did a wee.
Mummy cross with Sophie--bad, bad girl. --Mummy is smacking. --bad mummy. Don’t smack. -
   Don’t smack mummy. --Don’t smack Sophie. --Arm hurting. Afraid--afraid. --Arm hurting, God.
   Sophie scared. --Bad mummy, such a naughty girl.
   Sophie loves mummy and daddy.
   Where’s the wee? --Tummy wee. --I won’t do it again mummy.
   Why did you do it, why did you?
   Warm down the legs--see, see, what is this? Yuck, panties yuck, stockings yuck, shoes yuck. --Mummy is cross with Sophie.
   Bad mummy, bad doll, bad dog, bad such nice dog. Ah, look little dog, here is a potty, use it.
   Sophie is good, don’t smack, mummy.
   My God, where tummy? Sophie afraid tummy, Sophie afraid doctor.
   Don’t be scared Sophie, mummy--not cross, not smacking, mummy will buy, because Sophie is good, good good… Sophie loves God.
Prayer of Complaint

You abandoned me God, is it something I’ve done?
I am alone now and I lost my way.
I got lost in gloomy dusk, I got lost in the gloomy thicket of life.
You abandoned me God; how have I offended you?
Alone and troubled I wander.
A light flashes; who knows, a dwelling, or the deceptive glint of a firefly over a pond?
I see a spring; but who knows, might it be but a mirage of the senses?
My lips are parched, despite the darkness which bakes like sunlight, or maybe freezes, perhaps the fire comes from within me to fight the dark.
I know not.

What have I done to you, God, that you should leave me now, just as my feet are tangled in thorns, and my hands and heart are bleeding?
Give me an Angel of Sadness. It’s not joy I ask for, nor green peaks, azure dreams, or heavenly beams of light. Sadness at least, for how am I to wander alone, companionless again, wading and bleeding my way through darkness?
To myself I complain, to my soul I confide my grievance against you, my grievance, God.
I am not asking - but demanding from you, my God.
With you I set out on my path, am I now to walk alone, abandoned when I’m lost and weary and when in the thicket I know not the way?
Do you remember God, I trusted you, have you forgotten, God, those naively whispered exchanges, those softly confessed secrets, those doleful tears shed for you?
It was not reproach but disbelief, not doubt, but anxiety, not anger but entreaty I felt when I saw you leaving me, receding, disappearing.
With not a word.
I look within me for blame, but none is so great that rather than admonish me or warn me, you should want to leave me altogether.
And if you should come back now, what will I say to you, what will you reply?
I lost my way in gloomy dusk, and God went somewhere far away, leaving me alone.
I hang my complaint from a necklace of tears upon my chest. It is your fault, God.
Prayer of Rebellion

Don’t hold me in contempt Almighty God, as I myself disdain the mockery that is my life, for only death can penetrate my armor, and I scoff at death.

I--so many bucketfuls of dirty water, slop clothed in skin. That is how you made me, almighty, just for fun.

You gave thought wings; but the snout of life gnawed at the wings, smeared shit on the wounds. Hey, I could have reached heaven on those wings, but heaven is only for your meekly adoring flunkeys.

But there is neither submission nor devotion in me, only rebellion. Not aggression, but defensive pride.

Standing tall, I don’t ask for mercy and I don’t fear punishment.

I am a world all to myself, I am the master of my world and I am its God. I am my own command, my own signal to action, my own will to create and destroy. I have my own suns and my own thunder within me.

My will be done.

I’ll make blood boil white hot, I’ll set all bells of lust ringing, I will weave a single thunderbolt out of all sinful desires, smallest whimsies even, I will fill thoughts with poison--I will light a great furnace on the altar of my revolt against you and lay myself on it. This is what I want.

I don’t want old age, munificent gift of steady descent into the grave, the charitable offering of slow death.

I am a slave in revolt, who has but one remaining freedom, the sole word of resistance--no!

I want not, I will not--I will not listen--I do not give in.

Part of you is my spirit, and so you have rebelled against yourself. I--God, challenge you, God, as my equal. I pit an Almighty God of mockery against a God of revenge: I will crush you, tear you apart, trash you within me.

So that you disown and punish me--and let me remind you--burn in the fires of hell.

You are the Almighty, yet baseness triumphs, taunting and hounding homeless Virtue.

You are the Almighty, yet powerless Truth wrestles with the voracious ocean of lies.

Justice covered her eyes.

All is baseness and lies in man’s dual nature, all except tooth and claw.

So, I growl at you like a dog, a predator ready to jump, I long to sink my teeth into you--I measure the distance with bloodshot eyes--and charge--into nothingness.

That’s why I believe that you have created and controlled us to court blasphemy.
Prayer of Reconciliation

I found you my God, and I’m happy like a lost child who sees the figure of a loved one at a distance. I found you my God, and I am happy like a child who, woken from a bad dream, greets a gently smiling face with a happy smile. —I found you my God, like a child left in the care of an unkind stranger, who breaks free and after many hardships and adventures shelters at last in the embrace of a beloved person, listening to the song of their heart.

Who is to blame, that absorbed in carefree amusement, I distanced myself from you, my God? —that a market stall of trinkets, raucous music, monkey on a chain and a bright throng at a fair seduced a frivolous soul?

Who is to blame, that in pursuit of the forest berry, hopeful that just beyond those trees he will find so-so many—all the sweeter for being unexpected, all the sweeter for being gathered by his own industrious hand—too far into the treacherous forest will the lad wander.

Who is to blame that, naively preferring a lively sight over a dull one, and the clamor of a dancehall to softly whispered secrets, I should search out illusory happiness with my eager lips and heart?

One tear of anxiety at being alone in a crowd—--and here you are with me, together again my God.

The night is dark. But under the eyelids of the sleeper much is happening. A swarm of frightful comets, grimacing faces, fires, blood, gales, whirlpools—-one moment I swim through murky waters, the next, I chase a thunder—laden cloud on strangely heavy wings, then again a red-head sinks her teeth into me, or a flame with a friend’s face drags me into a swamp; I want to scream—-a cold hand grasps my throat - slowly a bell - or is it a clock? --rings out.

A single whimper—-that I feel helpless--and we are together--you are with me.

Who is to blame that in a deranged moment the mind was filled with ghostly ravings?...

And here is the worst ...
That your bright presence, God, was darkened by the shadows of your deceitful devotees.

Through a dark thicket I was forced to wade
Old Man's Prayer

Lord God, just Judge--I am sorry to leave this life, but it is time to die. --Not many of my peers still remain on this earth--cemeteries are full of them. --First went masters and venerable ones, then elder brothers, then friends. One was struck down by a thunderbolt, another, sleep closed his weary eyes for eternity. Of some it is said “God’s will”, of others “ah well, it was time--he was old”

-I know, we must make way for the newborn, the young--they’ve grown up and are hungry for action. For us, the old ones, silence. And which is the deepest silence if not that of the grave? --Often I speak with them at length--the living with the dead, about the good old days. Were they good? Would I want to start that journey again? Perhaps out of an unmanly fear?

Lord God, Just Judge--I am sorry to leave this life, its remaining, dying embers of warmth and happiness. I walk with short steps, chew my food unhurriedly, speak quietly, my blood courses slowly through my veins--maybe it will last longer? --It is so nice to look at the green vegetation and the sun; how deep and how abundant everything is around me, how momentous and wise.

The sun and vegetation--do the young understand? --they think that’s how it should be, there is no other way. They don’t understand the meaning of death the reaper, they do not know humility, the meaning of--the end. In vain their ambitions and grievances, their enterprises and their settling of scores--they don’t know the meaning of death the reaper, the meaning of - the end.

We are closer to you Just God, they are in a hurry, they have no time. But we don’t know either, until you tell life’s last secret in the first moment of death; us, children before a baby’s tiny coffin. --I’m not in a hurry to know, it will come--and soon.

I am not afraid, only sorry: so much still to see, to read, experience, everything so new, so interesting, perhaps because it is seen for the last time.

Thank you, Just Judge, for my advanced age. I’ve come to know valedictory beams of sunlight and birdsong, I’ve come to know old man’s love and hope. Everything old is changed again, renewed. You too, God--are changed, heralding unfamiliar good news.

God, --Just Judge, it is time--I know--could I but prolong farewell’s warm embrace--for this new and unfamiliar journey?
Little Girl's Prayer

Omnipotent God, I made a promise to mummy that I won’t fuss anymore, I made a promise that I’ll be good. –It is easy to make a promise but how to keep it? I’m scared. I will try--I really want to. But do we always get what we want? So many times I said : “-from tomorrow I’ll change”.
Maybe this time it will really be the last time!
I’ll keep my promise--I want to. But help me, Almighty God.
You created the world which turns around its axis and around the sun. You created the equator, the meridians and the poles. You created peninsulas, capes, bays and isthmi—mountains, plateaux and lowlands. You created so many mammals, so many plants and so many types of granite and quartz. At your command there are woods full of beasts, at one wave of your hand rivers burst their banks and kings gather their loot or put down their weapons. Nothing happens without your knowledge or without your consent.
I know that the human mind is too small to comprehend God, it is just a drop in the sea.
You the only Almighty, there is nothing you don’t know or cannot do. Everyone turns to you, and you choose to agree or disagree.
I believe with all my heart in your mind and your Kindness, and if I don’t understand everything it’s because I am too young and too stupid. Forgive me God for my blasphemy but I must be honest, in any case there are no secrets from you, because you know my thoughts. --So God Almighty, if you want all people to be good and virtuous, why don’t you create them good and virtuous? --Why do you let them sin? --if you gave people a stronger will, so that whatever they decided to do they could do it. I try, I try so hard, but it doesn’t help. My mummy worries and so do I--Sometimes it’s about something very small, but still I can’t give way. Perhaps it’s because at home and at school, not everything is good and virtuous. I experienced many bad things not through my own fault, but because of lies and filth, which fill the world.
- It is true that I am my own responsibility, but all those lies, gossip and insincerity just spoil things.
God Almighty, I don’t wish to be fickle, I want to do what I am told--but give me the will to persevere--help me--give me just a tiny bit of your omnipotence.
You created the world in one day! So now just say this “Let children be obedient" and let thy will be done.
Joyful Prayer

Radiant God.

I raised my arms, eyes open wide, breast thrust forward, lips smiling, forehead turned heavenwards. I look, I wait, I listen. Through my veins flows not blood but... what? Joy!

What would you like, radiant God, in return for your generous gifts?

I don’t need wings; the ground is not holding me down. Let it: clouds pass above me and around me a thousand greens, innocent and honest and proud. A brook is murmuring.

I look, I wait, I listen. Through my veins flows not blood but... what? Joy!

What would you like, radiant God, in return for your generous gifts?

I stand before you in my festive robe, festooned in silk of solar threads, the rainbow wrapped around my waist, my breath longing for song.

I will not sing; I do not know a song worthy enough.

Joyful awareness that I know, calm peace of mind that I can--sweet sense that I feel.

Without insecurities, I am strong, without doubts I am good. I shall be so forever...

Are you not happy yet? Young diver, are you not able yet to bring up from the depths your own Sun, to meet that of God? Can you not hear inside yourself, young knight, the cries and sounds of God’s battle for you? You will!

You are my brother, God, you’re not my Father.

I lose myself in the joyful tale of your life.

Many paths, each mapped by a different desire.

I believe!

So many truths are born within me.

The truth that I see. The truth that I have a heart. The truth of my thought and of cherry blossom.

The truth that I will hum, --that I will shout.

With enamored whisper of my eyes I kiss the flurry of joyful truths.

- To your health, truth!

Tell me God--how can I repay you for those lavish gifts of yours? For the crystals of snow and bubbles of soap and the swathe of eternity and of heavens?

Yes, yes! --the heart is beating and in the unfathomable depths of the soul, one by one a new feeling is born.

Conception and death are both a joy to me.

Rung by rung with joyful effort I climb towards you, sleep’s silent sister, white death, virgin--queen.

Into your hands.

Swarm of humming birds, flowers, butterflies alighted upon me. I brush then off with playful joy, clap my hands to startle them, catch them and throw them up into the air, without damaging their wings or bending their feathers, without crushing their petals or brushing off the fine colored powder. Bells and chalices soar, fall, soon they grow into the earth, and breathe all around with a new flame of flight.

Arms aloft, lips smiling.

What do you wish for, Lord, in return for your generous gifts?
The School Teacher's Prayer

I will not send you long prayers oh God. Nor countless sighs…. I will not bow low before you or make rich offerings in praise of your glory. I have no wish to win your favors, or solicit lofty gifts.

My thoughts have no wings which could bear my song to heaven.
My words are without colour or scent or flowers. I am tired and heavy-eyed.
My sight is dimmed, and my back bent under the heavy burden of duty.
And yet I will send one heartfelt request, oh God. I have one gem, which I will not entrust to fellow man. I fear man will not understand, will not sympathize, will not pay heed, will laugh it off.

In my silent humility you may barely notice me, but in my request I stand before you, God--as a demand of fire. I may whisper inaudibly, but I make my appeal in a voice of unbending will.

My commanding eye takes aim beyond the clouds.
Standing tall I make my demand, as it is not just for me.
Give children good fortune, lend help to their efforts, and blessings for their hardships.
Lead them not down the easiest paths, but the most beautiful.
And as a down payment of my request, accept my only asset: sadness.
Sadness and work.