

Aron Menczer (1917-1943) was an active member of the *Gordonia* Zionist youth movement in Vienna. Following the incorporation of Austria into Nazi Germany in March 1938 (the Anschluss), he became a central figure in the *Youth Aliyah Organization* in Vienna. Later – from September 1939 until the forced termination of the organization's activities in the spring of 1941 – he directed the *Youth Aliyah* in Austria.

In February 1939 he escorted a youth group to Palestine, but his commitment to Jewish children and youth still left in Austria made him return to Vienna, rejecting further options to leave Austria. Back in Vienna, he continued to facilitate and organize the emigration of Jewish children and youth, and when exit was cut off in late 1940 he concentrated all his efforts on Zionist educational and cultural work.

At Menczer's initiative, the *Youth Aliyah* training facilities in Vienna were turned into a regular Zionist-oriented school, giving hundreds of Jewish children and youngsters the only opportunity to acquire some structured education. At the same time, all the Zionist youth movements in Vienna joined forces under his leadership in an effort to continue their activity under adversity. These acts of resistance, keeping alive Jewish-Zionist identity and social cohesion, coupled with Aron Menczer's charismatic and caring personality, made him and his fellow youth leaders a beacon of light for the Jewish youth in Vienna, sheltering them, at least for sometime, from the darkness of the day.

Menczer continued his social and educational work in the forced-labor camp in upper Austria to which he was sent in May 1941, and in Terezin Concentration camp, to which he was deported in September 1942. In August 1943 he volunteered to join a team chosen to care for 1,200 Jewish children brought to Terezin from Bialystock. On October 5, 1943, he was sent with the children and the team to Birkenau and murdered there.

In memory of Aron Menczer and his deeds, the City of Vienna established, in 2004, the Aron Menczer Research Fund at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, promoting the study of Jewish life, culture and history connected to the City of Vienna.