

'The Last Journey' - Story of a Myth:
**THE LAST JOURNEY OF KORCZAK, STEFA,
THE STAFF AND THE CHILDREN OF THE ORPHANAGE
AS A MYTH**

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2022 marks 80 years to the murder of Korczak, Stefa, the children of 'Dom Sierot' orphanage and the staff members, along with thousands of other children, education and medical staff who were murdered in the great deportation (Aktion) in the Warsaw ghetto in 1942. This year we chose to look at the story of their last journey from the orphanage to the train cars. Many narrators have told the story of 'The Last Journey' - each story slightly different than others, each story reflecting the narrator's worldview.

This series of short articles will refer to 16 Hebrew texts describing this last journey. The basic assumption is that historical truth cannot be established from these texts. We will therefore treat them all as stories, through which the authors sought to convey a certain perception. Our question will be: What perception emerges from each of the descriptions of 'the last journey' myth?

Various characters and events construct 'the last journey' myth. The following series of short articles will refer to some of them, namely: Korczak, Stefa, the educators, the children, the connection between life at the orphanage and 'the last journey'.

The variety of texts

The various descriptions of 'the last journey' were written by different authors, at different times - from a few weeks after the events took place to years later; Some were written in Poland, most were written elsewhere; Some of the texts were written by people who were in Poland at the time of the deportation and even in Warsaw itself. Others were written by authors who were not in Warsaw or even in Poland at the time of the occurrence.

The language in which the texts were written indicates the audience to which the authors intended their writing - Polish, Yiddish, English, Hebrew.

Many texts try to create credibility and authenticity, by describing a seemingly eye-sight testimony by the authors, or testimonies from people who were there in person at the

time and saw it with their own eyes; Naming people who provided the details, and even saying that everything is based on testimonies from people who came from Poland, and there is no reason to doubt the reliability and accuracy of the information they provided. Some texts were written as stories, and they do not purport to describe a historical truth.

Some descriptions are very short, while others are long and detailed. Some of the texts refer to Korczak by name, and to the children as a group while others add as many names as possible, including additional staff members. Some add other characters, such as former trainees of the orphanage and neighbors. Some of the authors refer to others: Germans, S.S., Poles, members of the Jewish council (Judenrat), and even specific people by name.

Different texts refer to different sections of the journey - from the orphanage to the train cars, from the orphanage to the transshipment point (Umschlagplatz); from the Umschlagplatz to the train cars.

Several topics are referred to in all the descriptions:

- **The path:** they left the orphanage and, eventually, reached the train cars that took them to Treblinka, where they were murdered;
- Korczak **did not abandon** the children, staying with them until the very end;
- Korczak remained **faithful to his lifelong path**, his moral and his social-pedagogical being.

From the numerous descriptions of 'the last journey', a rich variety of emphases and messages arise. Each author wanted to tell us something about Korczak, something about Stefa, about the children, the educators, something about the horrible murder. They try to present all these details in a way that forms a unique picture corresponding to their worldview.

What is a myth?

For the purpose of this review we will define myth as follows:

- A consciousness-forming story, which maintains a complex relationship with the truth.
- Focuses on values, to convey a message of how one should behave.
- Reflects culture and creates it simultaneously.
- Aims at a certain direction and therefore not innocent.

Nowadays, shattering myths has become a kind of common and fashionable "bon-ton", and some of the texts seem to try to shatter an earlier myth.

'The Last Journey' Descriptions:

In the following table are the names of the authors and source texts to which we will refer in the series of short articles that follows. All the texts are in Hebrew.

Author	Yaakov Rotem	Aaron Zeitlin	Hannah Morkowicz-Olchakova	Nahum Remba
Source	"The Right to Honor and the Duty to Respect" According to the Doctrine of Janusz Korczak - The Sixth International Conference on the Inheritance of Janusz Korczak	Janusz Korczak's Last Way Published by the Janusz Korczak Ghetto Fighters' House and Association. Page 63: The walk to Umschlag-Platz	The life of Janusz Korczak. Pp. 168-172	Korczak and the children on their way to the Umschlag

Author	Yerachmiel Weingarten	Vladislav Schlenegel	Hinda Levi Lissner	Michael Zilberberg
source	Janusz Korczak - The Tortured Jew	From: Yerachmiel Weingarten Janusz Korczak - The Tortured Jew	In the company of Janusz Korczak (pp. 114-115)	Warsaw Diary 1939-1945 Published by Dvir Tel Aviv. Page 36



Author	Avraham Berman	Paulina Appenschlak	David Hartley-Mark	Joshua Perle
source	Adolf-Avraham Berman, from the days of the underground, 1971, p. 225. © All rights reserved.	The Doctor stayed Biographical novel about Janusz Korczak Translation: H.S. Ben-Abram Kiryat Sefer Publishing Ltd., Jerusalem, 1946 Pp. 289-308	Remember Dr. Janusz Korczak July 21, 2015	The destruction of Warsaw " Translation of the original document from Yiddish to Hebrew by Sara Dover of Perle house & Maya Dover Dafan Pp. 17-19

Author	Vladislav Spielman	Israel Singman (Stashek)	Zvi Sharpstein	Mark Rudnicki
source	The Pianist p. 96	Janusz Korczak Among the Orphans (pp. 162-176)	Great educators in our people From the Ben-Yehuda project	Janusz Korczak's Last Way, "Tigodnik Pauscheny" 1988, b. 45. Also appears in Roman Wroblewski