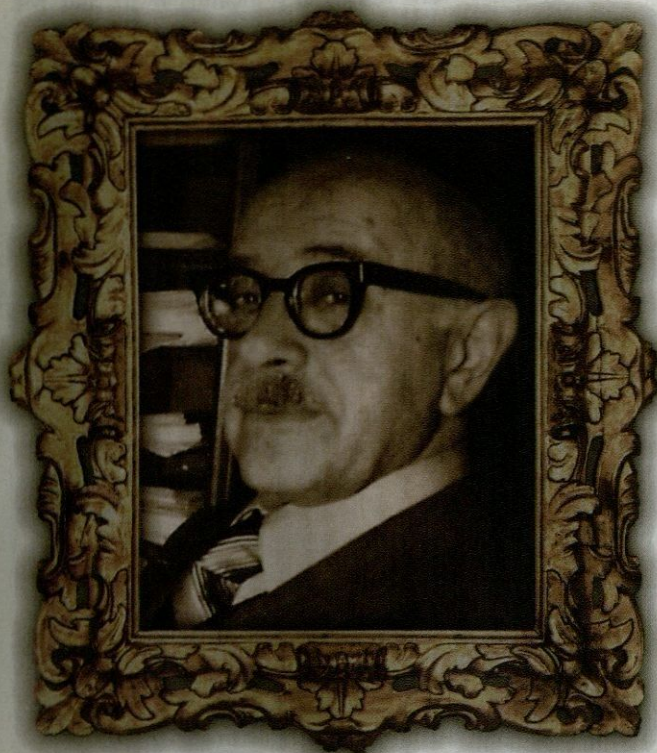




PHILIPP FELDHEIM
1901-1990
by Rabbi Mayer Schiller

Everywhere you turned there were *seforim*. *Seforim* and Jewish books. They rested on chairs and filled shelves which reached to the ceiling. In the back, there were nooks and crannies. Here the texts were older and the air more stuffy. But for me, and for thousands of others, the seeming disorder was a wondrous scene and the whiff of aging texts was the scent of Eden's Garden.

You didn't visit Feldheim's Bookstore on the Lower East Side. You immersed in it. As in a *mikvah* or a vibrant *beis midrash*. It enveloped you in the particular "*geshmak*" of an age when Divine texts and one's relationship with them were bathed in an endearing innocence unique to the years of fledgling Orthodoxy in America.

Presiding over this holy chaos was the irrepressible Philipp Feldheim. He sat in his office (in reality, just another of those aforementioned nooks), cigar in his mouth, a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face. He had a strong personality, but nonetheless, possessed that most majestic of *middos* — the ability to listen and hear the words of others. The store was visited by Jews from all backgrounds, *roshei yeshivah* and their *talmidim*, *rabbanim* and laymen, committed and non-observant, and even by non-Jews. With each of them he had an indi-

vidual rapport, as business was invariably mixed with personal, and religious guidance freely dispensed.

Mr. Feldheim was a businessman who saw the proper conduct of his financial affairs and the pleasantness of his daily contacts as a Divine imperative. And his creativity was such that he launched a novel publishing enterprise which formed one of the foundation stones of American Orthodoxy. What was the spiritual core of this sturdy, God-fearing man?

He was born in Vienna in 1901 and raised in the atmosphere of the Chasam Sofer tradition common to Central European Jewry. He was sent to learn in Galanta under the tutelage of Rav Yosef Zvi Dushinsky. The latter's fusion of saintliness and scholarship would inspire his young disciple through all the permutations of a much-traveled life.

Interested in communal affairs at a young age, he enthusiastically attended the Second Knessia Gedolah of Agudath Israel in Vienna in 1923. By that time, he had begun work as a textile manufacturer and printer. Married in 1930, he settled in his birthplace with little thought towards the apocalyptic upheaval that was just around the corner.

Arrested on Kristallnacht on November 10, 1938, he resolved to leave Austria. After first making sure that all the members of his immediate family would also be able to leave the hell that Vienna had become for Jews following the Anschluss, he finally departed via Rotterdam on September 1, 1939 — the day Germany and the Soviet Union attacked Poland. He arrived in Hoboken, New Jersey, 12 days later on *erev Rosh Hashanah* with his wife, three children and \$30 in his pocket.

Settling in Williamsburg, his first efforts to find employment in the textile business proved fruitless, due to his insistence on Shabbos observance. This led him to the *seforim* field, which originally meant that he sold a small amount of *seforim*, acquired via Europe, out of his apartment. However, as the war closed down his old world sources, he was urged by Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz of Torah Vodaath to begin his own Jewish publishing firm. Mr. Feldheim's first efforts were the essential *rishonim* needed for yeshivah students.

Yet, even as a recently-arrived immigrant and struggling entrepreneur, the *Klal* was always in his mind. In 1941, with a small group of *baalei batim*, he founded the Vienna Kehillah, Adas Yereim, in Williamsburg, to which he maintained ties throughout his life.

Before long, the apartment could not contain his growing business and "P. Feldheim Hebrew Bookstore" opened in its first home on the East Side's Canal Street. It was shortly thereafter, in the early 1950s, that Feldheim Publishers, under the advice of Rav Joseph Breuer, took the then-revolutionary step of publishing *seforim* in English. Originally, these efforts centered on the translation of German-Jewish classics by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Rav Munk into English; but before long, they encompassed the entire panorama of Torah and inspirational literature.

The motivation for all this was often at odds with sound business considerations. If an author or the translation of a



classic could have a positive effect, Mr. Feldheim would publish it. Often, Mr. Feldheim would urge aspiring authors to commit their lectures and thoughts to writing. It was thus that Dr. Norman Lamm's first work, *A Hedge of Roses*, came to be written.

In 1950, the Feldheims moved from Brooklyn to Washington Heights, where a cardinal principle was that a Jew must have a *rav*, a spiritual and halachic authority in his life. Until Rav Joseph Breuer's passing in 1980, he was Philipp Feldheim's *rav*. Of course, as was his way, he became a member of the *kehillah*'s Board of Trustees.

Forever loyal to the traditions of his upbringing, he would often *daven* in a Washington Heights *shul*, K'hal Adas Chasam Sofer, where for many years he served as the *baal tefillah* on the High Holidays. Belonging to a *kehillah* meant much more to him than mere communal activism. He was a regular and punctual attendee at davening and *shiurim*. Years later, after his retirement when he lived in Monsey, Mr. Feldheim would attend regular *shiurim* and have a daily *chavrusa*.

He continued his involvement in the business until his mid-80s. By that time, Feldheim Publishers was no longer on the East Side. (In its migrations it had traveled from Canal Street to 45 Essex, to 381 Grand, to its final East Side home on 96 East Broadway.) It had evolved into a major publishing enterprise centered in Spring Valley, New York and Israel. The hopes of a Jewish immigrant, who in his early years trekked across America buying and selling *seforim*, had become realized beyond his wildest dreams.

Today, there are many English-language publishers of sacred and popular Torah literature. Not too long ago, though, Philipp Feldheim was a pioneer. In many ways, he was the incarnation of the Torah vision for a working man. He was fiercely committed to honesty and integrity, and dealt with all men in a spirit of empathy and enthusiasm. The strength of his piety was rooted in a love and loyalty to his roots in Central European Orthodoxy.

For me, though, he will forever be that delightful man willing to discuss classical music, soccer and Torah learning. His image is always as the joyous cultivator of that enchanted Torah garden on the lower East Side, in which and from which Torah issued forth to Israel. §

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MOSES I. FEUERSTEIN

B. 1916

by Rabbi Mordecai E. Feuerstein

We, who live at a time where the strength and vibrancy of Torah in America is palpable, cannot readily appreciate the grim possibilities which were predicted for Orthodoxy in the early 1950s.

It was within a decade of the Holocaust. The day school movement was just beginning to spread across the United States; the advent of *yeshivos gedolos* and *kollelim* outside the largest metropolitan areas was still only a dream. The *baal teshuvah* movement (later jump-started by NCSY) had not yet gathered steam, nor had the latent power of the newly-arrived Chassidic communities, struggling to establish themselves, emerged.

Furthermore, the Conservative and Reform movements, effectively organized and rich in resources, seemed to have a lock on the leadership of Jewish organizational life. The Orthodox movement, overwhelmed both in leadership and in resources, and lacking a lay spokesman who could articulate the position of Torah-true Judaism, was a minor player on the American Jewish scene. None of the manifestations of an Orthodoxy-triumphant were as yet evident. On the contrary, Orthodoxy was marginalized and under siege.

It was in this setting that Mr. Moses I. Feuerstein assumed the presidency of the Orthodox Union. His term in office (1954-1966) marked a "turning point" for the organization.

With 'Moe' Feuerstein as president, the Union...bore the impress of a key personality perhaps more distinctly than at any point since the era of Henry Pereira Mendes, himself