

Rabbi Leonid Feldman

TO LEONID FELDMAN,
OUR RABBI AND FRIEND.

WE WISH YOU AN
ABUNDANCE OF CHEER
AND TREMENDOUS
SUCCESS IN ISRAEL.

WE WILL MISS YOU
IMMENSELY.

TINA AND MANNY NEWMARK
& FAMILY

The Book of Chai



Rabbi Leonid Feldman



The Book of Chai

•
A Collection of Mitzvah Memories
from Rabbi Leonid Feldman's
Eighteen Years of Spiritual
Leadership at Temple Beth El

2004 - 2022

•
Produced by
Peter Weisz

West Palm Beach, FL

©Copyright MMXXII
All Rights Reserved



The Book of Chai



Copyright © 2022 by Temple Beth El, West Palm Beach, Florida
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be translated, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without express written permission from the author.

Published by:

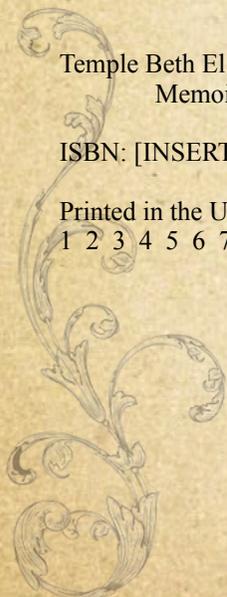


Peter Weisz Publishing, LLC
7143 Winding Bay Lane
West Palm Beach, FL 33412 USA
info@peterweisz.publishing.com

Temple Beth El • All rights reserved
Memoir — Biography — History — Judaism — Philanthropy

ISBN: [INSERT ISBN]

Printed in the United States of America by Blurb.com
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Rabbi Leonid Feldman

Dedication

The Temple Beth El family dedicates this book to Rabbi Leonid Feldman in recognition of and in gratitude for his years of devoted and inspirational leadership of our congregation.

The Book of Chai



Acknowledgements

The publishers of this book wish to extend their special thanks to those individuals without whose valued assistance this book could not have been produced.

Tisha Skeete
Alan Bell
Ilan Kottler

The Book of Chai



Contents

Dedication	5
Acknowledgments	7
Introduction	11
The Legend of Leonid	15
About Temple Beth El	17
Welcome from Our Lay Leaders	21

Memories

Stories	37
Images	113
Scrapbook	177

Words of Tribute

Tribute Messages	213
------------------------	-----

The Book of Chai



Introduction

Mark Twain once defined a “classic” as a book that people praise but don’t read. I don’t believe that was the type of book the president of our shul had in mind when he called me in February of 2022.

“I want you to make a book,” he told me. “A book of memories.” Ilan Kottler had, by this point, served as a dynamic lay leader at Temple Beth El in West Palm Beach for nearly a decade and he knew two things for sure.

One, the shul was facing a major milestone in its nearly 100-year history with the departure of its popular spiritual leader, Rabbi Leonid Feldman. After eighteen years on the bimah, the 69-year-old Conservative rabbi had recently announced that he was stepping down and making Aliyah to Israel.

Two, Ilan knew that I produce memoir books chronicling the life stories of extraordinary individuals, many of them Jewish.

It took a bit more conversation for me to understand exactly what Ilan had in mind. He wanted to collect memories about the Rabbi Feldman years at Temple Beth El and bind them into an attractive book that

would be presented to him in December when he was slated to return to the community in order to preside at the installation of his successor and to officially receive his designation as Rabbi Emeritus.

“I want this book to be able to generate memories of the rabbi’s life at Temple Beth El,” he explained. A book filled with eighteen years of memories. A book of life. A Book of Chai.

Impressed by this noble concept, I nevertheless needed to focus on the more prosaic aspects of such a book project.

“Where will the content come from?” and “How will the project be funded?” Ilan had the answers. He had clearly been thinking about this for a while.

“For content, we reach out to our congregants, to the rabbi’s many personal friends and colleagues from around the world and ask them to share a cherished memory. They can phone you, or write up a story and send a few photos by email. You collect it and put it into the book.”

And the money?

“That’s easy,” Ilan assured me. “We sell ads in the back of the book.”

“And other than the rabbi, who is the audience? Who is going to read this book?” I asked.

“Everybody. It will be available to congregants at the event. And I want it to be sold at bookstores and online at places like Amazon.”

I found the concept irresistible and Ilan’s enthusiasm contagious. I agreed to do it, and thus The Book of Chai was born.

We got to work right away and assembled a small and capable contingent who assisted me in gathering content. Notices and invitations were sent out to members of the congregation asking them to share some memories about Rabbi Feldman. The rabbi's personal friends and colleagues were likewise contacted and invited to submit a cherished recollection. Finally, patrons, corporate sponsors and underwriters were solicited and asked to place a brief personal message in the book.

You are holding the result of our efforts in your hands. It is my hope that unlike the "classics" that Twain spoke of, this book will not only be praised, but, more importantly, it will actually be read. You are invited to do just that.

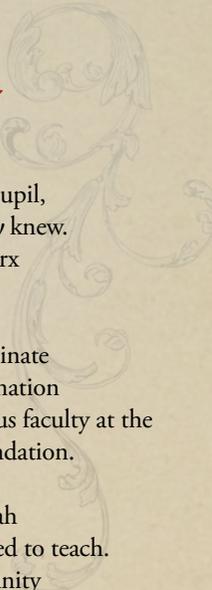
In its pages you will find ample evidence of Rabbi Feldman's amazing eighteen years as spiritual leader of Temple Beth El. Ranging from poignant to uproarious moments, these shared glimpses form a clear portrait of an extraordinary time in the life of our congregation and a special time in the life of Rabbi Leonid Feldman.

If Rabbi Feldman touched your life during those years, either as your rabbi, or in some other capacity, it is my hope that reading these pages will evoke some fond memories for you as well. But even if this book is your first introduction to this charismatic *Talmid Chakham*, I know you will find *The Book of Chai* to be edifying and enjoyable reading.

—Peter Weisz, Publisher
Peter Weisz Publishing, LLC
November 2022



The Legend of Leonid



Threescore and nine years ago
Under the bright red Soviet star
In a land that once was known
As the mighty USSR,

Was born a young lad,
His parents' pride and joy,
By the name of Leonid
The Jewish Kishinev boy.

Come hear his saga,
Come hear his story.
It's a tale filled with triumph
With tears and with glory.

Wise beyond his years
As his school life was beginnin'
A young pioneer,
He followed Marx and then Lenin.

But the boy soon learned
There were things he could not do
Only because
He was labeled as a Jew.

He cried, "I reject all religion!"
Now a real perplexed confuse-nik.
But soon thanks to KGB
He became a real Russian refusenik.

Arriving to Israel
With no connections and no money,
He found it was not so easy
Living on just milk and honey.

So it's off once again,
Crossing the big ocean
Landing in New York
Hoping to make his fortune.

Next he's in L.A.
Where he taught Chekhov and Pushkin.
And then one bright day
He met Prager and Telushkin.

Leonid became their pupil,
Absorbing all that *they* knew.
Moving from Karl Marx
To Moshe Rabeinu.

The Road to the Rabbinate
Became Leonid's destination
As he joined the famous faculty at the
Wexner Heritage Foundation.

He loved to study Torah
But even more, he loved to teach.
His search for opportunity
Brought him here, to West Palm Beach.

And soon a family emerges.
With a son and a lovely daughter.
And on Tashlikh, he goes to the shore.
To cast his bread upon the water.

And so for lo, these many years
He taught us tradition and taught us
Torah.
Taught us how to keep our tongues
From committing *Lashon Hora*.

Now after 18 years on the bimah,
Years of life and love and affection,
Rabbi Leonid has said "Farewell"
And is off in a new direction.

He has said "Shalom" and made Aliyah
And moved to the Promised Land.
Rabbi, make us this promise, too.
Come back and visit whenever you can.

And so, on behalf of your many friends
Who so admire ya and do so love ya
We wish you Mazel on the road ahead
And offer a great big "*Nazdarovya*."



About Temple Beth El

A CONSERVATIVE CONGREGATION;
Established 1926

Temple Beth El was the first attempt to organize a synagogue in Palm Beach County. It assembled at a house on 5th Street in 1919. In those days, the Jewish community was small, and the area encompassed by the initial network of Jews went as far as Fort Pierce to the north, south to Boca Raton, and west to the Glades. As the population in the Palm Beach area grew and as the diverse individuality of the Jewish spirit expressed itself, there became a need for diversity, as well as independent and modified visions of what the synagogue should be.

In the beginning, an organization called the Jewish Community Center existed to serve the Palm Beach County Jewish population. By 1922, the Jewish community showed growth in the number of Jewish families in the area. Hence, a movement developed for a separate religious organization within the Center. This matter was presented to the general membership for

action and approval at a separate meeting held at the old Keystone Hotel. The main issue was whether the new organization would be Reform or Conservative. Lengthy discussions and votes on the matter resulted in a majority in favor of the Reform group. The vote brought about a split in the ranks of the Center group.

The Conservative group formed Temple Beth El, and the Reformed forces eventually organized into Temple Beth Israel, which is today known as Temple Israel. As an organized religious group, Temple Beth El held regular Sabbath evening services in a small rented room at the West Palm Beach Women's Club, conducted by lay leader Jacob Fein. Though Conservative, the worshippers were bareheaded—only the leader wore a yarmulke. This system prevailed until 1927.

In 1926, when membership was on the increase, a move was started for a religious sanctuary. After months of deliberation and planning, a 100 × 100-foot parcel of land was purchased on 7th Street, just west of Dixie Highway. A sanctuary seating some 300 persons was erected and dedicated (this building later became the County Health Department).

In the meantime, the congregation had been undergoing procedures for the receipt of a charter. The charter of the Articles of Incorporation of Congregation Beth El is dated March 1st, 1926. The prime signatory was Jacob Fein.

Financial problems arose with the “boom/bust” of the late 1920s and the loss of members to Temple Israel. The remaining group was unable to meet its financial obligations on mortgage payments, which

brought about foreclosure and loss of the 7th Street Sanctuary. When Jacob Fein was left holding the bag after the other signers of the mortgage did not follow through on their obligations, he left Temple Beth El to later become president of Temple Israel.

Following a period of reorganization, the temple was once again consolidated. Land was purchased on Fern Street, and a new sanctuary was built. Rabbi Emanuel Greenstein, as spiritual leader, played an important role in this renewal. Eventually, a religious school building and a social hall were built. This complex is now part of the University of Palm Beach. As the congregation grew, High Holiday services were held in the American Legion Hall on Okeechobee Boulevard.

In the late 1950s, membership had grown to 150 families. Land for a new facility was purchased on Flagler Drive between 27th and 28th Streets. A controversy arose regarding the tenure of the then spiritual leader, Rabbi Max M. Landman, which resulted in the formation of Temple Emanu-El in Palm Beach.

Coincidentally, with the coming of Rabbi Hyman Fishman as the new spiritual leader, momentum was started for a new temple building program. Ground-breaking services were held on May 19th, 1963, and work began on the construction of the building. The construction of Senter Hall was followed by the completion of the adjacent school building. Senter Hall served as both a sanctuary and social hall until the completion of the Fread Sanctuary.

The Fread Sanctuary and the modern house of worship were constructed in 1969 and dedicated over the

weekend of February 13–15th, 1970. Additional classrooms were built in 1970.

Upon Rabbi Fishman's retirement in 2001, Rabbi Steven Westman began his tenure in the pulpit. He was joined in 2004 by Rabbi Leonid Feldman. Westman and Feldman served as co-rabbis until Westman's departure in 2009. In 2012, the Byzantine Revival building that had originally housed Temple Beth Israel in 1924 was physically transported to the Temple Beth El campus, where it was restored and today serves as the Yeckes Family Chapel.

With Rabbi Feldman's departure to Israel in 2022, the congregation is preparing to celebrate its centennial anniversary in 2026.





Welcome



From Our Lay Leaders

Greetings and recollections from some of
the dedicated volunteer leaders who have
served our congregation during the
“Feldman Era”



The Book of Chai



Rabbi Leonid Feldman



President's Message

After 18 years, Rabbi Leonid Feldman is leaving Temple Beth El. We knew this moment was coming, but we just didn't want it to happen. I am saddened that he is leaving us, but happy for him as he moves to Israel and begins yet another new chapter in his life. Rabbi Feldman has been central to Temple Beth El and to all of the lives of its members for the past 18 years. His services, sermons, classes, and performance of life-cycle events have enriched all of us. I think I speak for the whole congregation in wishing him well as he moves on with his life. I anticipate that, as our Rabbi Emeritus, Rabbi Feldman will continue to maintain a close connection with Temple Beth El, returning for future events or connecting virtually, and we may continue to benefit from his wisdom from afar by listening to his ongoing podcasts.

—Moshe Adler, President