

Rabbi Eli Herscher

The son of refugees who had fled Nazi Germany, Eli Herscher was born in Tel Aviv just months before Israel became a State. He was still an infant when the War of Independence broke out. The history of the Jewish people during those years of death and rebirth is deeply engrained in Eli's personal story, as well as the core inspiration for his work on behalf of the Jewish people. The personal and professional have always acted as mirrors for Eli, reflecting his lifetime of work to turn memory – even painful memory – into blessing.

The promise of America embraced the Herscher family as new immigrants in 1954. It was a vibrantly diverse San Jose, California, that welcomed them, so that the family's immigrant "otherness" was never a barrier. The memory of that reception has also been an important source of inspiration and resolve in Eli's life's work to welcome and embrace the stranger.

Upon graduating high school, Eli attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he earned his undergraduate degree in English. In 1970, he entered the Hebrew Union College to begin his rabbinic education. He was ordained a rabbi in 1975, upon which founding Rabbi Isaiah Zeldin invited him to become his partner in the growing Stephen S. Wise Temple, leading to an inspiring career spanning 40 years in this one congregation. They were years of extraordinary growth, not only in numbers, but in the Temple's richness of spiritual and educational program. Throughout the decades, Eli blessed the congregation with his depth of vision, his inspired teaching, his love of Israel and the Jewish People, as well as his innate ability – and mission – to welcome all who entered its doors and make them feel fully at home – Jewish or not, home-born or immigrant, an open tent with an open heart.

Eli met his life-partner, Bonnie, at the Temple. They have been married over forty years and are blessed with three children, all of whom are graduates of the Temple's schools, Dawn, Adam and Sara – as well as (so far!) three precious grandsons.

Eli was named Senior Rabbi Emeritus in 2015. In his active retirement, Stephen Wise Temple remains his Jewish home. He treasures the countless memories and abundant blessings of the generations, just as he continues to nurture, with deep gratitude, the precious friendships borne out of years of devoted leadership.