

PROFILE OF OUR RABBI

By Sally Biales Naft



Dr. Herman Hailperin standing beside his painting presented by the Tree of Life Confirmation Class of 1951

A moving and historic event took place in the Tree of Life Congregation on February 3, when the Congregation at its annual meeting arose in ovation to express honor and esteem for their Rabbi, Dr. Herman Hailperin, by a unanimous vote electing him for life tenure. By that act, the chronicles of thirty years of devotion and selfless service to the Congregation and the community were recalled.

In September of 1921 at the age of twenty-one, when most young men are in the embryonic stage of career selection, Rabbi Hailperin, still a student at the Theological Seminary of America, was appointed by the Tree of Life Board of Trustees. Commuting every week from New York, Rabbi Hailperin conducted services at the Tree of Life Synagogue on Craft Avenue, when Oakland was the hub and center of Jewish population and activity.

So young, yet so full of intellectual promise, he captured the hearts and minds of the Congregation and in March 1922, before his graduation from the Seminary, he was elected Rabbi. Unanimity follows the Rabbi, for the records relate at the time of his initial election, one woman expressed doubt because she thought the Rabbi's extreme youth would not fit in with the background of a Congregation so old. Reassured by the late, revered Sexton, Mr. Abraham Goldstein, and the sagacious, late President, Mr. Sol Rosenbloom, that Rabbi Hailperin's rabbinical lineage and his faculties for knowledge would overcome his lack of years, the enlightened lady withdrew her objection and his election was declared unanimous.

Through the years, Rabbi Hailperin's indefatigable devotion to study, his love for learning, his outstanding reputation for teaching has assumed proportions of great stature. His philosophy "If

a Rabbi possesses strong scholarship, whatever else he does is strengthened by it", is the tenet by which he lives and serves.

As instructor in the Department of History in the University of Pittsburgh he received his Ph.D. from that institution in 1933. Rabbi Hailperin has been Professor of Jewish History at Duquesne University and served a number of years as Director of the College of Jewish Studies at the YM and YWHA. His intense interest and concentrated University activities did not restrict his participation in communal projects throughout his rabbinic career. He served as secretary of the United Jewish Fund in Pittsburgh, as chairman of the United Palestine Appeal, and devoted many years of activity in the Zionist Organization of America.

Scholar, lecturer, author, teacher, he has never permitted himself to become cloistered from the human touch. The courage and love he has evoked in the hearts of the ill, the troubled, and the bereaved is the greatest testimonial to the humanness of a unique personality.

He is a builder who dreamed with the past president, Mr. Charles Rosenbloom, the dream of a new Tree of Life Building which is now nearing completion on Shady and Wilkins Avenues. Though deeply conscious of all things beautiful, be they God-created or man-inspired, Dr. Hailperin is not too greatly concerned with the architectural symmetry of the new Tree of Life building. He envisions the history of our living Judaism that will take place within.

His free spirit labors to add many layers of beauty upon the foundation of Jewish tradition and he calls upon all his people to join with him, for "in the sphere of spiritual things, the more who dig the better."