

President's Report 2015, by Bob Ritter

In the words of the opening of Emet Ve-Emunah in Mishna Tefila.

"Standing on the parted shores of history we still believe what we were taught before ever we stood at Sinai's foot; that wherever we go, it is eternally Egypt and that there is a better place, a promised land; that the winding way to that promise passes through the wilderness. That there is no way to get from here to there except by joining hands, marching together."

The end of this month of June marks one year as your temple president. But it feels longer! And that's because it is a continuation of a journey that began three years ago when I accepted the position as Bob Abram's 1st VP and became part of a team effort that continues to this day. There are others on the team.

I would first like to announce/acknowledge Sandra Mamis for her being chosen by the Officers and Trustees to receive this year's Vassar Temple Founders Service Award. Sandra follows Marge and Art Groten who received the award last year. And it is customary for the previous recipient to present the award. We are privileged to bestow this award on Sandra whose organization of our Passover dinners, Breakfasts, Galas, Scrip, and other programming build community, and represent out temple at some of our best moments.

Marge and Art present Founder's Award:

I would also like to acknowledge Melissa Erlebacher who our Ritual Committee has chosen for this years Arnold Award which will be bestowed at Selichot. Speaking of Ritual, this July, Ron Rosen will step down as our Temple Ritual Chair after 6 years, a record I believe. I'd like to ask Susan Hecht to read a proclamation of the VT Board of Trustees. Ron's ritual committee report can be found in the Committee Reports Roll-up. Copies of that available - please contact Sherrie at the temple office and she will email it to you.

Next I would like to thank my fellow Officers and Trustees. You do your service without celebrity, without reward, but not without thanks! And, let's include our Committee Chairs, Men's Club and Sisterhood, and Ritual Leadership too. Let us all give a round of applause for all our lay leaders and volunteers who serve only to serve our beloved temple. This remarkable history of service is why Vassar Temple's history dates back 167 years. Present dedication and service preserves the past and make possible! It is our responsibility. That is why I said Hineni when Ed Garber called me!

And then there are the individual acts of members who don't necessarily lead a committee, or hold a title, and yet they find the private motivation to serve our temple. This can be any one of you, and I hope it is. Because this temple depends on the individual efforts that happen throughout the year, and through the years, and often don't get even a mention in our bulletin. People like Polly and Kamil Lewis, Michele Sinn, Shaari Roland, Zoe Weinstein, Eric Rosenfeld, Kristin Judd, and others. I'd like to ask Susan Hecht to once again read another Board proclamation which speaks to the dedication of a couple who exemplify the devotion and loving kindness I'm speaking about.

I'd also like to thank Marian Schwartz, one of the most determined and dedicated champions for social action this temple and I have ever known. Her passion for instilling Jewish values in our children is as commendable as it is fierce. Our social action committee is involved with many projects: food drives, preparing and serving meals for Lunch Box and the homeless shelter, voter awareness, recording books for children in need, the CROP Walk for Hunger, community service on Mitzvah Day, and so much more. Marian will tell you that the scope of what we can accomplish is only limited by your ideas and your willingness to join in. Please read the handout and image the satisfaction you can derive from knowing that you're making a difference.

Holy lovely is our tent – if we take care of it! Our building is a holy place and we have an obligation to take care of it. It is expensive yes, but what would our predecessors, who were much fewer and found the wherewithal to buy the land and build this temple and move here say if we let this building deteriorate. We honor them by respecting the needs to maintain and invest in the temple which they entrusted to future generations, you and me, and we will entrust to future generations!

I know it is disconcerting to have construction going on in our temple! But I am also glad that so many critical improvements are being addressed. From the failing boiler, to water damage, a kitchen that was falling apart, to our magnificent stained glass windows covered by clouded plastic, and a social hall that needs to see brighter days and greater usage, we are doing what we can within our means for the future of our synagogue. Each temple faces generational challenges. You, the members, are to be commended for sustaining this 167 year old congregation at this time. I am personally grateful to my friend Chuck Stein, Chair of the House Committee, along with Men's Club and Sisterhood and all the dedicated volunteers who support our efforts to maintain this holy place.

Tonight we will vote in Leonard Greenberg as our Treasurer. But for that past year we managed without a treasurer because no one would step forward. Which made matters more challenging for everyone involved with the financial affairs of our temple. But in spite of having one hand tied behind our back we made notable improvements to bookkeeping and reporting which will help us operate

more efficiently and effectively for years to come, thanks in large part to our office manager, Sherrie Geisler, with the guidance of our Finance Committee under the leadership of Sam Finnerman and the extraordinary help of my favorite mench, Bob Abrams. I also want to thank Cathy Bokor who has does a great deal behind the curtain of privacy handling dues relief situations. I must say a few words about this challenge.

In the first year as your President, I've asked the board to make some choices. To drive down expenses while at the same time investing in the future and not passing through either an assessment or raising dues. One expense has risen considerable. That expense is DUES RELIEF. Dues relief is a cost, born by the other members of the congregation. As a congregation, some do more. Some do what they are asked. All we ask is that people do an inventory of their soul, a Nefesh, and give what they can afford so that the weight of operating the temple is shared fairly.

This not me pressuring anyone to give what they cannot afford!! Not at all!! Just my appeal for everyone to do what they can, knowing that the more we share the burden, the better able our temple is to serve all its members and the community.

Onward and upward ...

With the great and tiring work of the Rabbi Search committee chaired by Sandra Mamis in conjunction with a Presidents Advisory Committee, we achieved a milestone with the selection and hiring of a new rabbi, Rabbi Berkowitz, who will begin in just 20 days. And we held a very successful gala and fundraiser to honor and celebrate the retirement of Rabbi Golomb. Positive things will come from those successes. *Onward and upward!*

It is time for another important change! Thanks to a Bylaws task group led by Bob Abrams, we are able to update our temple bylaws in order to comply with new laws governing nonprofits, as well as to adjust our Constitution to current practical needs.

Onward and upward.

Thanks to Roni Stein and a super nominating committee, we have engaged members in new leadership roles with the temple as trustees and as officers. Moving forward I hope that important committee positions will be filled as well. This is essential to the future of Vassar Temple. And as more people discover the blessing of service to their temple the better we will be! This is not to say that previous leadership was lacking. Too the contrary -- many have worked hard and deserve our highest praise and appreciation!! But they also need a rest, and an opportunity to explore new ways

to serve the temple as mentors with great wisdom to share. Your service is not burden, it is a joy!
Service to the temple blesses both you and the temple!

Onward and upward.

There is still much to do, as we turn our attention to those aspects that define Vassar Temple as a Reform Jewish congregation!

In the coming fiscal year, which begins July 1, I will be joined by new officers and Trustees, and Rabbi Berkowitz! I am sure that Rabbi will want time to get the lay of the land, and learn the traditions we value. By the same token, the leadership will continue on a forward path. Rabbi Golomb continues an association with VT as our Senior Scholar - a distinguished role - giving us great rabbinical depth (3 total) and prestige. Rabbi Golomb will continue teaching Talmud on Tuesday whereas Rabbi Berkowitz will take over Torah study. And our newly funded Adult Education Fund will provide us resources to continue providing inspiring classes for members and guests.

Onward and upward.

Now, we must act on expectations for greater change. Now, we must find and develop new methods for enhancing and making more meaningful temple relationships. Now, we must explore ways to deepen our spiritual connection. Now, we must raise the bar on the expectations for our childhood education. Now, we must build on those practices which sustain our temple. Now, we have to concentrate on those things which will make us a better temple.

It is that which makes us better temple, that will make us a temple which helps us to be better people. That is the attraction. Now, we must grow. Jeremiah 8: 4,7 raises and answers a question. "If people break away, can they return? The dove and the swallow know the season of return, What human instinct knows the time to turn back?" In the coming year let us all make room in our hearts for deeper relationships with one another and Judaism.

Onward and upward!

I will close my report with an alternative reading for the Mi Chamochah also found in the Mishna Tefila.

"The Good in us will win, over all the wickedness, over all our wrongs we have done.

We will look back at the pages of written history, and be amazed, then we will laugh and sing, and the good that is in us, children in their cradles, will have won."

Onward and upward!

Thank you.

Bob Ritter, President