

## **Bob Abrams: Installation address**

Shabbat Shalom,

I've been Acting President for the past 6 months, since the passing of our beloved Seth z'l, and it's been an interesting ride thus far. I've had the pleasure to work with very able temple members and committees that plan and carry out many of the great programs and activities that keep Vassar Temple so dynamic and vibrant. I'm really looking forward to the next two years, working with Bob Ritter, our new 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President and a great Board of Trustees and Executive Committee.

I've worked and talked with many of you over the years, but I thought I'd tell you a little bit about my background. Born in the Bronx, I grew up in the New Haven area in CT. I hold a BS degree in Electrical Engineering from University of New Haven and an MS in Computer Science from UCONN. I came to Poughkeepsie in 1978 fresh out of grad school to work for IBM, and I've been in the area every since. This is my 34<sup>th</sup> year with IBM, where I'm a Software Engineer in the mainframe operating system development area.

Marianne and I met in Poughkeepsie and got married in 1981. After our daughter, Jen was born, we attended several "Cradle Roll" events, and eventually joined Vassar Temple when Jen was about to enter Religious School. Both Jen and Danni, (our younger daughter) attended Religious School at Vassar and both are in Confirmation photos downstairs!

Jen, a graduate from Cornell University, is a Civil Engineer at a California engineering firm for the past five years. Danielle (Danni) graduated from University of Rochester, and after working at Fellowships at the NIH and Children's Hospital in the Washington D.C. area, is looking forward to earning a PhD in Clinical Neuro-Psychology at Georgia State University.

My Temple involvement began when hanging around the Temple while Jen was in R/S. I got into a discussion with Marty Shenman (does anyone remember Marty?) about how much the Temple spent formatting and printing the Bulletin, and how much we could save the Temple money by publishing it in-house. Desktop publishing became a pleasurable hobby, and I published the Temple Bulletin for about 10 years, until I was asked to be Secretary of the Board. Since then Marianne has been publishing the Bulletin, as well as producing a number of

colorful documents and brochures over the years.

When I first took over as Temple president, there was a strong perception that the only types of events being held were fundraisers. Now, that wasn't really true, but the perception was there, and it is believed to have contributed to lower participation in other events like Shabbat dinners, adult education offerings and fundraisers that we had to cancel. This perception clearly needs to be turned around, and I'm hoping that the great attendance at recent Adult Ed programs and last week's Picnic Shabbat are signs of good progress. I'm a firm believer that if our members enjoy coming to Temple functions, they are more likely to participate in fundraising events as well.

So, what are my goals for Vassar Temple over the next two years? There are so many initiatives that are currently under way, and others that I'd love to see. If I were to go into all of them tonight, we may be here over this weekend. Much of what the Temple hosts tends to deal with programming for adults, programming for youth, and building improvements. This evening I'd like to focus on engaging our members, and ways in which we can employ additional technology.

It's important to get new members to join Vassar Temple, but it's just as important to focus on keeping the ones we have. I would like all of you to become vital participating elements of the temple. I know that some of you already are. You are engaged in planning and attending one or more of the myriad of activities that VT has to offer whether it relates to ritual, publicity, social action, participating in fun events, engaging Tikkun Olam, buying SCRIP, attending adult education classes, or one of the many other activities that VT offers.

But what about the rest of our members? People who you may know who pay their yearly dues and then show up only on the High Holidays. What is keeping you/them from getting involved? Not a religious person? That's okay. While VT is a religious institution, there are many more aspects and dimensions to it than ritual. There's a very large and vibrant social action component at VT. Consider helping out with food drives, the Lunch Box, or other food related activities. Do you have an acting bug or creative streak? Join in the fun with the yearly Purim Spiel directed by Art and Carol Menken. Would you rather provide culinary delights? Maybe we can have a Kugel bakeoff or other ways in which you can offer interesting food items. You can bake Hamentaschen, or

participate in the Men's Club preparation of the Purim pasta meal. I've done it, enjoyed it, and plan to do it again.

Our goal will be to continue to offer additional fun and enriching activities from fun events such as the Shabbat picnic we enjoyed last Friday evening (Jun 15) and the After Hours Beer Event coming up on July 14<sup>th</sup>, new Adult Education offerings in the coming year, movie nights and the like.

At the same time, we will need to hold fundraisers. In the budget that was adopted a few weeks ago, the Board committed to raise \$4500 in additional income to balance the budget to meet expenses related to running the temple and hosting all of the great activities. This is in addition to the Gala being planned for December 1<sup>st</sup>, the planning of which is off to a great start. Not to worry though, fundraising events can be entertaining and enjoyable also. While waiting in the Atlanta airport with one of my fellow Scheidt Seminar attendees, I learned of a really amusing and entertaining activity, Trivia Night, that her congregation has turned into a very successful fundraiser. I just received the details about it, and I'm hoping that we can try something like that in the coming year. I'm also hopeful that we can build an event around a Hudson River Cruise. I'm sure there are other great ideas that we can consider as well.

Activities are certainly not limited to adults. I'm very pleased that Lara Cifone will continue to be Youth Group Advisor, and will focus on events to keep the kids engaged with the Temple and each other. Since these kids are going to be grown up and eventually (hopefully) on their own, we want to ensure that they have enough foundation to establish themselves as solid members of the next Jewish generation! We'll see more functions and activities involving the children of our congregation, with the positive initiatives being taken by our Religious School, our Youth Group, and ideas that we can learn from the URJ's Campaign for Youth Engagement.

No matter what stage of life you are in, whether it is single, young married, raising young children, teenagers or young adults, the Temple offers something for you. If not, please say something. Perhaps there is an opportunity to enhance an existing function or introduce new programming.

Engage yourself in Vassar Temple. Make yourself at home. Vassar Temple is truly "where you belong".

Over the past 6 months, I have been fortunate to not only attend the Biennial with more the 5000 other Reform Jews from around the world, but also the Scheidt Seminar with 100 other Presidents who were preparing to take office. At these meetings, you get to see different programs that are occurring at other temples. I recently obtained a list of the many special programs and initiatives showcased by presidents-elect of other Temples and started identifying potential opportunities for Vassar Temple to try.

Congregations across the county have been launching incredible changes involving technology. Vassar Temple has become increasingly better at using social media to disseminate news and info to congregants, as well as share photos and stories about many of our Temple events and celebrations. But looking a little further, some Temples have started to stream their services on a weekly basis, so that congregants, who otherwise couldn't attend services were able to watch and participate from their homes. Some of these congregations have not seen a decrease in attendance, but rather an increase from members who normally wouldn't attend, but saw the service online and then started to come to the service in person.

Other congregations have started a program called Visual Tefillah in which the prayers are projected onto screens. Books are still available for those who are more comfortable holding a book, but each prayer has its own slide that illustrates the prayer, for example showing the parted Sea of Reeds during MiChamocha. The idea is that if the prayers are in front of them, the congregants will get their heads out of the Siddur and participate more. At the last Biennial, Seth took me to a Visual Tefillah service, and I found it very engaging. Since then, I have had the opportunity to participate in a couple others similar services ... the concept show promise.

Even the Central Conference of American Rabbis has embraced technology. Last year, they made our prayer book, Mishkan Tefillah, available for download as an app for iPads. For \$3.99, you too can have the Friday Night Service at your fingertips. This is also a learning tool, as it contains audio files of many of the prayers being spoken and sung right there for you to listen to at home.

Each of these technology initiatives has one thing in common. Their use each seeks to keep the younger congregants involved. If our youth, meaning the youth of the Reform movement, don't stay involved, then we, as a movement are sure to fade away until we are all assimilated and unrecognizable as a

group. It is up to us to ensure that this does not happen.

When speaking with representatives of similar-sized temples, I found that we share many similar issues, but ultimately, we're doing quite well. But we can't stop here. We need to continue to innovate, to find ways to engage with our friends and meet new friends. That should lead to better success with our ritual events, other programming, and fundraisers to help meet the Temple's costs.

So, I thank you for putting your trust in me as Temple President, and I'm looking forward to the next two years.

On behalf of my wife, Marianne and our daughters, Jen and Danni, I wish everyone Shabbat Shalom and a great summer!