

I've always been a terrible liar. When I was a little girl, it was my body that would give me away. I would fidget or blush or avert my face, and my parents would always know that I wasn't being honest with them. Even as I got older, however, and learned to hide my fibs in more sophisticated ways, my parents were never fooled by my small acts of deceit. My eyes always gave it away.

I have long been struck by the large number of metaphors that connect learning with sight. We talk about the need for educational *vision* and the importance of *seeing clearly* our goals and objectives before starting to plan lessons or programs. In terms of assessment, we speak about measuring *perceptible* differences in student performance. We endeavor to *focus* our students on the material at hand and to *open their eyes* to new experiences and ways of thinking. We even refer to students as *pupils*!

Jewish tradition, too, sees the eyes as very much connected to good teaching. In Bava Mezia 33a, in the context of a discussion about relieving one's rabbi from a heavy burden even before relieving one's own father, the rabbis enter into a conversation about exactly who should be considered a *rav* - a spiritual teacher. Rabbi Meir holds that the term *rav* should be limited to the one who instructs a student in "wisdom" (understood by Rashi as meaning the intelligent understanding of arguments which lie beneath a particular section of text) rather than referring to one who simply teaches Bible and Mishnah. Rabbi Judah presents an opposing viewpoint, explaining that the teacher from whom the greatest part of a student's knowledge comes is the only one deserving of this special title. Finally Rabbi Yossi presents his opinion: *afilu lo heir eynav elah b'mishnah achat zeh hu rabbo* – Even if he only taught him a single Mishnah, he is still his rabbi.

Apart from the fact that I happen to agree with this final definition of rabbi, that even a person who has only imparted one concept or piece of text should be considered a teacher to you, I am deeply touched by the words attributed to Rabbi Yossi in describing the process of teaching and learning: *heir eynav*. While this phrase has come to mean "he taught him," the words literally mean "he lit up his eyes." For me, this is what education is all about.

I would imagine that the phrase *heir eynav* is used because it is only when we see a student's eyes brighten with the light of understanding that we really know that the student has learned. Just as my parents could always judge my level of honesty by watching my eyes, so too can a teacher judge her students' level of comprehension by watching theirs. The eyes say it all.

Perhaps, however, the phrase *heir eynav* is used not because the eyes indicate whether or not a student has comprehended the material under consideration, but rather because the eyes also indicate whether or not the material has really penetrated that student, touching her in a deep and meaningful way. Perhaps the phrase *heir eynav* is used because education is not just about literacy – about knowing facts and figures – but it is also about personal growth and development – about making meaning of what has been taught to you. Rabbi Yossi uses the phrase *heir eynav* to indicate that it is only a certain kind of teacher, one who inspires in his student such passion for learning that it consumes his body like a flame, that should be considered *rabbo* – his rabbi. It is only when you've lit a spark in someone's soul, when you've changed them in some small way for the better, that you have really become their teacher.

In this season of graduations, we at BHCBE wish all members of the class of 2017 Mazal Tov and are so very proud of their accomplishments and achievements. And we hope that members of our congregation will come out this evening as we celebrate our 10th grade confirmands, 12th grade graduating students, youth award winners, and USY leadership whose commitment and contributions to this community have left such a strong mark. Our blessing for all of our graduates is that they will continue on a path of both teaching and learning, lighting up the eyes of those whom they encounter and having their own eyes lit up in return by sources of inspiration that they should always manage to find. We look forward to seeing where their journeys will lead!

B'hatzlacha Rabbah – our heartfelt congratulations to all of our graduates and their very proud families!

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Annie Tucker