

In My Daughter's Eyes
דרשה (sermon) for the Yom Kippur 5769
October 9, 2008

I'd like to begin today by reading the lyrics from a beautiful and meaningful song that I'm sure most of you know. It is called "In My Daughter's Eyes," and it is sung by Martina McBride. This is a song with tremendous insight into the relationship not only of a mother and daughter, but the relationship that exists between countless pairs of youngsters and the people they most admire. As I read these lyrics, I ask you to reflect on the children in your lives. For some of you that will be a son or a daughter. Those sons and daughters may be 5 years old or 50 years old. For others, you may think of your grandchildren, or your nieces and nephews, or perhaps younger cousins and siblings. They could even be your students in school or your neighbor's children. Use these lyrics to reflect on those relationships. How does that young person see you? What do they mean to you, and what do you mean to them?

In my daughter's eyes I am a hero
I am strong and wise and I know no fear
But the truth is plain to see
She was sent to rescue me
I see who I wanna be
In my daughter's eyes

It's hangin' on when your heart
has had enough
It's giving more when you feel like giving up
I've seen the light
It's in my daughter's eyes

In my daughter's eyes everyone is equal
Darkness turns to light and the
world is at peace
This miracle God gave to me
gives me strength when I am weak
I find reason to believe
In my daughter's eyes

In my daughter's eyes I can see the future
A reflection of who I am and what will be
Though she'll grow and someday leave
Maybe raise a family
When I'm gone I hope you see how happy
she made me
For I'll be there
In my daughter's eyes

And when she wraps her hand
around my finger
It puts a smile in my heart
Everything becomes a little clearer
I realize what life is all about

The relationship between a person and the young people in that person's life is an amazing one. On the surface, there could be no relationship more one-directional. All the effort, all the time, all the money, flows from the adult to the child. And yet it is those relationships that mean the most to us, and that are worth the most to us. What an amazing thing it is that happens between a father and a daughter, or a mother and her son, or with grandparents or with nieces and nephews. McBride's song, however, captures the essence of what we receive from these relationships. It is an intangible inspiration that is worth so much more than anything we can ever give to those children.

On one level, children project onto us, the values that we try to instill in them:

In my daughter's eyes I am a hero
I am strong and wise and I know no fear
But the truth is plain to see
She was sent to rescue me
I see who I wanna be
In my daughter's eyes

With true love for our children, we teach them to be brave. We teach them to be fair. We teach them to be wise. We teach them all the values by which we want them to live their lives. And because we preach those values, our children begin to see those values in us. We become the hero. We appear strong and wise. They see us as full of virtue. In turn, we see who we want to be in our daughter's eyes.

In my daughter's eyes everyone is equal
Darkness turns to light and the
world is at peace
This miracle God gave to me
gives me strength when I am weak
I find reason to believe
In my daughter's eyes

Our strongest values in life sometimes get jaded when we succumb to what we perceive as reality. Sometimes, we lose site of the ultimate goal. We forget about our own potential, and lose faith in the world. As we look to our children, in their simplicity and purity, we are reminded of the core of humanity. We were all children once. We remember the strength and purity of values that each of us once had. We find reason to believe, in our daughters' eyes.

And when she wraps her hand
around my finger
It puts a smile in my heart
Everything becomes a little clearer
I realize what life is all about

It's hangin' on when your heart
has had enough
It's giving more when you feel like giving up
I've seen the light
It's in my daughter's eyes

Sometimes we feel very small. Sometimes we feel powerless against the perils and demands of life. For even a fleeting moment, sometimes we might consider giving in. We might forget those moral values that perhaps make it harder to achieve "success." We might settle for less than we are truthfully able to achieve. And then, that young one, the one who depends on us and looks up to us, takes our hand. And the strength that they seek to get from us is returned to us 100 times. They have hope. They have determination. They live by the values we have taught them. We can see in their eyes, that their hope came from us. And so, our determination is redoubled through the lessons we have taught the child. We've seen the light . . . it's right where we put it . . . in our daughters' eyes.

In my daughter's eyes I can see the future
A reflection of who I am and what will be
Though she'll grow and someday leave
Maybe raise a family
When I'm gone I hope you see how happy
she made me
For I'll be there
In my daughter's eyes

In our children, we see images of a future beyond our years. We see the hope that who we are will continue into the next generation. We know that the lessons we teach to our children will be our most important legacy. Even when we're gone . . . we'll be there, in our daughters' eyes.

The young people in our lives offer us continuity. Because of this, it turns out that our relationship with our youngest of loved ones is not only our greatest gift, it is also our most solemn of responsibilities. As they grow, they will reflect who we were. And then, an all important question will come into play. Who were we, really? Were we the people they saw when they were 5, or was that just a child's imagination. As our children grow, they will reflect not only the values we taught, but the lives we lived.

Today, on Yom Kippur, we often spend time thinking about who we want to be. But I think that a more important question may be: who do we want our children to be? Who do we want our grandchildren to be? What do we want for our nieces and nephews? I think most of us would say that we want for them everything we had and more. But it's not that easy. Because what we want for them in their lives, we must live out in our own lives. The best way for children to grow to be good and kind adults is for us to be good and kind ourselves. The best way for our children to grow to be more dedicated to acts of charity and justice is for us to dedicate ourselves to acts of charity and justice. The best way for us to strengthen their roots to the Jewish values we want to instill in them is for us to strengthen our own connection to those Jewish values. If we want them to strive to be the best people that they can be, then we must strive to live up to that beautiful image that we see in their eyes. And so, those eyes in which we see our reflection are not only our inspiration, but our obligation. We must take that image, and put it into action.

In a few moments, we will turn toward the Yizkor service (memorial service for departed loved ones). For most of us, we will be remembering some of the people who were our heroes when we were growing up. What the song reminds us is, though, that not only were they our heroes, but we were their hope. It was in our eyes that they saw "a reflection of who they were, and what will be." This Yom Kippur, we hope that we will be able to live up to their hopes. We pray that everything of who they were - their spirituality, their kindness, their caring, is indeed reflected in our eyes. Where they may have fallen short, we pray that we can reflect their hopes that their next generation would achieve success beyond their own.

Some of the people that we remember today, tragically, are the ones whose eyes looked up to us. It was to them that we were the hero, strong and wise, and knowing of no fear. But the song tells us otherwise:

But the truth is plain to see
She was sent to rescue me
I see who I wanna be
In my daughter's eyes

Yom Kippur calls on us to review our lives. We seek to strengthen our own moral and religious character. As we remember those who were our greatest inspiration, let their memories continue to inspire us. As we remember the heroes who raised us, let us be determined to live up to the ideals that they taught us. Through their memories, let us not be resigned to another year like the past, but driven toward a year of religious, spiritual, and moral growth.

As we enter the Yizkor service, let's take a moment to look into the eyes of our parents and grandparents, and then into the eyes of our children and grandchildren. In the eyes of our previous generations, let us find our heroes who tried their best to put us on a good path, and prayed that our lives would positively reflect theirs. In the eyes of our next generations, let us find inspiration and strength - reminders of who we can be. May we be determined to reflect the greatest hopes of our past generations and may we be inspired by what the next generations see in us, and what we hope to teach to those next generations. Even when we are gone, may our lives be lives of holiness, righteousness, and goodness that will be reflected even further, in our daughters' eyes.