



THE TOUCHABLES

Dear Parents,

The importance and value of physical affection between parent and child is usually left up to culture and nature. It is either something one's family is very attuned to and it figures prominently in the relationship, or it is not given that much significance and is not emphasized. Some parents may be aware that babies and young children need extra warmth and benefit from touch, but one rarely hears that the bond between parents and children is quantifiably changed by the amount of touch.

“...the bond between parents and children is quantifiably changed by the amount of touch there is.

The idea that touch can actually increase the emotional connection between parents and children can be gleaned from this week's *parsha*. When *Yaakov Avinu* is about to give a blessing to his grandchildren *Menashe* and *Ephraim*, the *Pasuk* tells us “...he brought them near and he kissed them and he hugged them” (*Bereishis 48:10*). The *Seforno* explains that *Yaakov* did this “in order that his soul cling to them so that his *Beracha* will take (better) effect.” From the *Pasuk* and the *Seforno* it is made clear that the hugs and kisses were needed because *Yaakov* was nearly blind by that point and unable to set his gaze upon them. Nevertheless, we see the power to bind that physical contact possesses.

Putting some thought into what the *Seforno* is saying, the concept is difficult to understand. *Yaakov Avinu*, one of the most perfect beings ever to walk the planet was nearing the end of his days and very much wanted to give his grandsons a special blessing. He understood what the power of a blessing is, he appreciated the great potential of his grandchildren and he obviously put great thought into what he was about to do. He was no doubt experiencing great depths of love and affection for the children of the beloved son he thought he would never see again. Was something lacking in his connection to them?

“Yaakov felt it necessary to strengthen the emotional ties to his grandchildren through physical affection.

Apparently there was. *Yaakov* felt it necessary to strengthen the emotional ties to his grandchildren through physical affection. We all agree that there is always a benefit to the child to receive hugs and kisses from *Abba* and *Ima*. It strengthens his sense of security, trust in his parents and makes the world a better place. In the case of *Yaakov Avinu*, the *Seforno* is teaching that there was a benefit to the (grand) parent *Yaakov* through this show of affection – he, *Yaakov*, felt more connected to his grandchildren as a result of his kisses. Ultimately, the (grand) children benefit.

We can learn a number of important lessons from here. First, we can always love our children more, we can always strengthen the relationship. Second, physical affection has the power to strengthen the bond between parents and children. Third, we cannot take our relationship with our children for granted. If *Yaakov* needed more than his existing intellectual and emotional connection to *Menashe* and *Ephraim* to truly feel their closeness, we can assume it is certainly required of us.

“We dare not leave the hugs and kisses only to demonstrative people from certain cultures.

The Torah is teaching us the power of physical connection between parents and children. We should constantly be looking for ways to strengthen our bond with our children, and we should appreciate the power of endearing physical contact. We dare not leave the hugs and kisses only to demonstrative people from certain cultures. We all need to harness the power of the hug and the kiss to cement the eternal bonds with our offspring.

Best wishes for a well-connected, loving *Shabbos*,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann