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Kol Rinah  
Parashat Toledot  
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Who have you not hugged in eight months? I haven't hugged my parents. I haven't hugged my brother, or my baby niece. I haven't hugged my in-laws. My daughter eight-year-old daughter has not hugged her best friends. My children haven't hugged their grandparents.

There are so many hugs that have been forsaken, delayed, declined.

Physical contact with those whom we love and who love us is so fundamental to who we are, and an elemental expression of affection and caring.

And now, hugs, and any kind of touch, feel unsafe. Perhaps, you, like I, have wondered, what do I do if someone tries to touch me, to hug, to shake hands?

"Perhaps my father will feel me" (Genesis 27:12), Jacob worries to his mother Rebecca when she is sending him to get his father Isaac's blessing. The straightforward sense is that Jacob is worried that Isaac will, by touching Jacob, realize that Jacob is not in fact Esau, the first born.

But at a deeper level, maybe Jacob actually wants his father to touch him, suggest Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Chayot and the Vilna Gaon (quoted in Itturei Torah). The use of the word 'אוּלַי, "maybe," indicates something that Jacob hopes will happen. There's another word, לֵפַן, "lest," that would be used if it were something that Jacob hopes will *not* happen.

Why would Jacob want his father to feel him—to feel him—the real him? So that he will be caught in this deception, because deep down he doesn't want to lie.

Jacob really wants both physical and emotional closeness with his father. But the covering of lambskin that Rebecca recommends prevents Jacob from really being felt by Isaac, and the whole ruse does not allow the emotional honesty and closeness that Jacob desires.

Jacob may also be thinking about Isaac's reasons for wanting to feel him. Perhaps Jacob is worried Isaac will be suspicious. But there can be another reason: "Let us recognize the primal presence of love, as well. We may imagine that Jacob thinks his father will desire to touch and feel him for a very simple reason. Jacob assumes that Isaac will wish to take hold of his beloved son and have the pleasure of touching his child simply because that is what loving people do. Deprived of the sense of sight, Isaac reaches out to his beloved through every sense remaining to him - through taste, touch, smell and hearing." This is what my colleague Rabbi David Greenstein wrote, which inspired this sermon (<https://mailchi.mp/f5f356ce9906/sparks-986418>).

Maybe they will hug me. We're worried about it, and we wish for it. Because we know it's an expression of love, despite its risk.

If we can express our desire to embrace, to shake hands, to hug, to feel each other, if instead of touching we can really look, and really listen—then we can experience some of the closeness that this parent and this child, that Isaac and Jacob deeply want, the closeness we all need.

Shabbat shalom.