



“IM TOUCHED”

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The Message: LOVE

We've all been touched by a song or a movie that went straight to our hearts. Our language is littered with sayings where “touching” implies a positive emotional connection with something we've encountered. Touching is intrinsic to our species. Without it we die.

The skin is the largest sensory receptor organ in the body. It is also the first to develop, functioning as early as 8-10 weeks in utero. As such it is one of the most important senses that we have. It is the sense which provides our individuality! the boundary of our mass as separate from the rest of the world. It functions in utero to provide the developing human perceptions of itself as separate from the space outside of itself in all of its facets. It can detect the flow of the amniotic fluid, the pressure of the ever enclosing womb, the light touch of the mother's hand as it rubs over her growing belly.

During the birth itself, the skin is activated by the intermittent contractions which provides preparation for the continuous pressure during its journey through the birth canal. The escape into the openness of the world is a release of all that pressure. The touch pressure to the whole body activates the internal organs that will need to begin to function in a new fashion with breathing air and drinking milk and eliminating the urine, excrement, and gases.

The natural response to the newborn is at once to contact the skin with the mother's skin and provide again some containment which simulates the womb environment. To wrap the baby snug and warm against the breast will immediately calm and comfort the baby. The gentle massage of the irresistibly soft toes and hands and face and body will in fact relieve the baby of some of the stress hormones, which were released during the birth. The mother's continued touch by massage or simply holding and carrying the baby will continue to aide in the activation of the digestive tract, respiratory system, and elimination channels.

Touch is a powerful form of communication. The mother will express her love and intimacy with her baby through her touch. The newborn is nearly irresistible with its satiny smooth skin. The caresses are endless as the mother explores and enjoys the new little wonder. A mother can sit and stare endlessly at the new creation while fondling the toes, and nose, and grooming the eyes and ears and head. The baby basks in the love and reciprocates the stares and coos in enjoyment. The contented newborn is easy to bond with. It is a bond of love and connection with a safe and supportive world, starting with the mother.

During breastfeeding, the release of relaxing hormones is also simultaneous between the mother and the newborn. The mother goes into an almost meditative state of steady and slowed respiration and calmness, as does the baby who receives continuous touch pressure to the upper lip which is a direct stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system, or the system for calmness and relaxation. It is paired with the satisfying feeling of the alleviation of hunger and usually followed by a peaceful sleep.



The newborn's sense of touch is its primary source of orientation to the world. It's visual ability is only accurate as far as the distance between the mother's breast and her face. The new little soul can feel the movement of the mother's body and depends on feeling the surrounding and comforting touch and pressure from the mother's holding. Simulating this touch pressure such as through swaddling is also comforting, but the coupling of the mother's movements with her touch is the most soothing, sedating sensation that the newborn will experience. The newborn who is held and carried in the cadence of its mother's rhythm experiences the oneness and bliss of the continued connection of its experience in the womb. The continuum of life in the womb is made very easy by the use of a baby carrier such as the baby sling. The baby can ride on the mother in the confines of a womb like atmosphere obtaining touch pressure similar to the pressure felt in the womb. Babies who become used to the sling, are easily comforted when distressed by being put in the sling and walked outdoors. The baby rarely cries. The bond with the mother is maintained and enhanced.

When a gas pain or discomfort comes the best comfort is from the mother's touch again. A mother will instinctively hold a baby when it cries and cuddle, walk, and rock the baby to soothe and quiet its cries. A mother's touch is ever healing. An older child will still come with a hurt for a kiss to make it better. Even as an adult when we hurt we want to return to this newborn stage to be cuddled and held in order to remember that feeling of oneness and bliss with the mother. Often we can do this simply by a sympathetic touch on the shoulder, a squeeze of the hand, a hug.

As the baby begins to reach out it will first reach for the mother's face. It is the beginning of the individuation process. Touch guides movement and movement generates exploratory touch. The baby will explore and learn to experience the world both people and objects via touch. The perception of space and size begins with touch and is related to the visual system for a multidimensional perception of the world. There are emotional overtones to nearly every aspect of touch. We love the beach, the feel of the sand and the salt air. We hate slugs, the feel of the slimy creatures on our legs. On a bad day even the tags in our clothes can be irritating. How we receive touch is filtered by our emotional readiness to it. The tone is set in infancy. A child who has experienced sustained nurturing touch in infancy is ready for the challenge of becoming a separate loving exploring individual. What has been received will be given. A baby who has been touched will no doubt touch the lives of endless others.