



A Heartfelt Hug

There was a rabbi who would visit prisons that had Jewish inmates in order to cheer them up and encourage them. The rabbi's love spilled over that he would even inspire the non-Jewish prisoners, giving them hugs just as he did to the Jewish inmates. However, in one of the prisons he visited, there was a certain inmate that was exceptionally scary-looking— muscular, very tall, covered in tattoos— whom he avoided due to fear. As he was leaving this prison, he heard someone call out from behind him, "rabbi, no hug for me?" It was this scary-looking inmate. The rabbi then gave him a hug. Then the inmate told the rabbi he needs another hug, to which the rabbi conceded. The inmate then began to cry saying those were the first hugs he had ever received in his life. (Obviously, if he would have had some hugs in his life prior to this, he would have been a different person.) Tangentially, about 100 years ago, a rav in Eretz Yisrael who was questioned why he loved Jews that were far removed from an observant Torah lifestyle answered, "Better that I err on the side of baseless love than to err on the side of baseless hatred."

In a similar story, R' Yitzchak Dovid Grossman once made a chanuka party in prison with a music band, donuts, latkes, making it an uplifting experience. When it was over, he said goodbye to everyone and then spontaneously gave a hug to one of the inmates, radiating warmth. With that he made his exit from the prison. A few days later he received a letter addressed to him. It said, "I'm the prisoner whom you hugged just before leaving the chanuka party at the prison. I am now sitting in my cell, crying and writing this letter to you. I want you to know that tonight was the first time in my life that someone gave me a hug or put their arms around me, just because they wanted to show me how much they cared." He signed his name at the bottom of the page.

In one of the Nazi death camps that were liberated by an American soldier's platoon, there were many

starving children. The American soldiers set up a huge pot of soup to feed these children, and the children lined up, eager to receive their share of food. One particular soldier made eye contact with a boy at the end of the line. Since the American soldier couldn't speak the boy's native language, he communicated by offering the boy a hug. After they finished hugging, the soldier looked up and noticed that the children who were previously lined up for soup had postponed their chance to eat and instead formed a line behind the soldier to receive their hugs as well.

The four walls of the Succa and the Schach covering overhead is compared to a child that is totally embraced in a full body-surrounding hug. It is a Divine hug to us, His children (as we are called *בנים אתם לה'*, you are children to Hashem [Devarim 14:22]).

Of course four complete walls are preferable, but the Succa can be made with a minimum of two complete walls and a section of a third wall. Even a child who is older appreciates a smaller hug — an affectionate arm around the shoulder. That is like the minimum Succa — a Succa of two walls and a bit. The Arizal points out three sections — the arm itself from the shoulder to the elbow, the forearm from the elbow to the wrist and from the wrist to the edge of the fingers. This parallels the Succa where the first wall represents a Divine embrace from the shoulder to the elbow; the second wall reflects the embrace of the forearm and the third small wall symbolises the palm embrace. This is what is referred to in *וימינו תחבקני*, His right arm embraces me (Shir Hashirim 2:6. See Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Chag HaSuccos, chapter 4 and Likutei Torah, Derushim L'Succos, pp. 78-79, 82d, 84a-b, 87a.).

The Succa is Hashem's hug to each of us. We must be conscious of His Hug when we enter the Succa and feel His divine, eternal, and unconditional love for us.

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