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## **The Touch of a Text: Promoting Healing and Compassion**

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***Abstract:*** Touch, being our primary access to the world, is paradoxically least explored. Here I am not aiming to fill in this gap but wish to explore how text whether holy text or a secular one can touch us to the core of our being. To do this task I make a humble attempt to explore the phenomena of touch and its role in the gospel of St. Luke. Luke to me is a gospel of touch. The author takes three Lukan narratives: the restoration of the widow's son 7:11–17; the parable of the Good Samaritan 10:25–37; the parable of the Prodigal Son 15:11–32) to consider the question that might give us an insight how a text not just speaks to us but touches us and leaves us speechless. Besides the text that expresses physical touch as healing, we also have Lukan texts where one is touched to the depths of one's being and moved to compassionate action. The author discerns in each of the three texts a sense/ kind of seeing that triggers compassion that draws the chief person in the text to an act of

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compassion. The seeing that moves a person to the action of compassion is not just physical seeing.

**Keywords:** Touch, Hēpsamēn, Touch of compassion, Silence speaking compassion.

WE MAY NOT KNOW that Aristotle was a philosopher of touch. To him, touch was the primary sense. It appears that he got the right sense of touch. Touch is indeed inescapable. We are always in touch with the earth with our feet and with the air with our skin, with the light with our eyes and sound waves with our ears and water with our tongue. Touch gave us contact with the world of the primary elements of the ancient philosophers. We in India called these primary elements as *panchamahabhutas* (the five basic elements namely, earth, water, fire, air and vacuum (ether). Touch being our primary access to the world is paradoxically least explored. Here I am not aiming to fill in this gap but wish to explore how text whether holy text or a secular one can touch us to the core of our being. To do this task I make a humble attempt to explore the phenomena of touch (Gunn, 1974). and its role in the gospel of St. Luke. Luke to me is a gospel of touch. I take three Lukan narratives: the restoration of the widow's son 7:11–17; the parable of the Good Samaritan 10:25–37; the parable of the Prodigal Son 15:11–32) to consider the question that might give us an insight how a text not just speaks to us but touches us and leaves us speechless.

There is unlikely to be any single theoretical perspective that proves the only meaning of what is human consciousness but it has evolution in it understanding and has a lot of different meanings and theories which give understanding.

## The Compassionate Touch

We can notice a touch of compassionate responsiveness in these narratives. Contemporary thinking of touch does not just deal with flesh to flesh, flesh to stone or flesh to soil touch but also includes how we are touched by a text. Luke is indeed an explorer of touch of the text. He speaks about it, for instance, when he writes about the hearing of scriptures that cause the hearers hearts to 'burn' (24:32). Texts do touch us in several ways and it would be interesting to explore the tact of any text to touch us. This means texts are inscriptions and act like exscription when they touch us. Thinking with Derrida's *Grammatology* (Derrida, 2016) we can think of the touch effect of texts as forms of writing. Texts when they touch us do something (affect) to us. following Derrida, we can think that they 'write into us'. Writing is a dynamic image that can stand for the form of communication of the text. Through a form of 'writing, they ex-scribe into us the world evoked by the text. In fact, texts have a way of writing the world they evoke/ provoke into us.

The word sense is multiple in its meaning. The sense in this sense is touching all our senses. Besides we have common sense, aesthetic sense, moral sense, semantic sense and intellectual sense. We come to sense even nonsense through these shades of senses. Derrida does see a link between the language of sense and the language of touch. Thus, we are physically, emotionally, aesthetically, spiritually as well as intellectually touched. Within

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these touching, we have a narrative touch and even a touch of a voice. Touch is the way we as beings towards each other and the world exist (Leonard, 2014).

Touch mediates our being towards the human community as well as our being towards the earth community (other than the human world). We have a sense of touch in the touching experiences that we receive as well as give. We not only touch the human and the earth community of beings but we are also touched by other humans and the earth community of beings. Hence the ability of the word, especially the scriptures to touch us comes within this range of being touched by other humans as well as things and beings of the earth, the universe and the divine. Receiving touch can be seen as text, texting or ex-scripting/ writing into us. Maybe this will enable us to understand the dynamism in which we make sense of all forms of touchings that we receive. In this sense, even a text in the book/ holy book can materially affect us. Because there is temporal as well as the cultural distance between the text and its receivers, each of us is touched by a text differently.

Touch can be gentle, soothing or violent, abusive or healing and therapeutic. In Greek, the verb *hēpsamēn* means to touch or take hold of. Thus, it can refer to touch as a means of conveying a blessing', but also as bringing harm or injury. Luke being a gospel of touch uses *hēpsamēn* in several of his narrations. It is used of Jesus touching: a leper (5:13); a bier (7:14); children (18:15); the ear of the high priest's slave (22:50). We do not have a sense of violent touch in these episodes. Luke chooses other words to express violent touch such as to whip (mastigoō, 18:33); to beat (*derō*, 22:63), to strike (*paioō*, 22:64); to discipline or scourge (*paideuō*, 23:16, 22). But it appears that Luke has reserved *hēpsamēn* for a healing

touch as we have it in the narrations of the crowd (6:19), the woman who washes and anoints Jesus' feet (7:39) and the woman with the flow of blood (8:44–47).

## Concluding Remarks

Besides the text that expresses physical touch as healing, we also have Lukan texts where one is touched to the depths of one's being and moved to compassionate action. These texts are important as they reveal how touch becomes an exscription and writes into the persons moving that person to acts of compassion and mercy. These narrations are vital because they can open us to the horizons or the way that the text burns our hearts (Luke's image of touch effect of texts). The three episodes that we had set aside to examine use the verb *splanchnizomai*, which means

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to 'have compassion' or 'feel sympathy', literally 'to be moved in the gut'. The first incident is in the story of the restoration of the widow's son outside the town gate of Nain (7:11–17), the second in the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37), the third in the parable of the Prodigal Son (15:11–31). In each case, we can notice a chief character in the narration being moved/being touched into acts of compassion which certainly involves physical touch. One can see in each of the three texts a sense/ kind of seeing that triggers compassion that draws the chief person in the text to an act of compassion. The seeing that moves a person to the action of compassion is not just physical seeing. Like the sense, touch, seeing is also multivalent and is

a language of its own. This is why we may say we are touched by a text (scriptural or secular) only when the text triggers/ ignites a seeing in us. The seeing that is emanating from the text burns our hearts in the Lukan sense and we are moved into a speechless/ wordless silence that speaks through acts of compassion.

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