



Table Talk

Table Talk: Metzora

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Do prayers for healing really work? Scientific study results are mixed.

One of the biggest studies, involving more than 1,800 heart surgery patients and released in 2006, said no. In fact, patients who knew they were being prayed for had a higher rate of post-operative complications, perhaps because of the higher expectations and stress the prayers created, according to the study.

If those results are valid, does it mean we shouldn't tell sick friends we're praying for them? Or does it simply mean the effects of prayer are beyond the scope of science?

In *parashat Metzora*, we learn about the purification procedures for victims of a strange skin malady that affects not only the patients but even the walls of their homes. Only a priest can perform the healing rituals for these patients, and the rituals must be performed according to elaborate rules.

Why? Maybe the Torah is saying that healing-physical and spiritual-is something people need to do together. It's not enough to pray for someone. It's not enough to work alone on improving one's health. If visiting and praying for the sick helps, maybe it's because we're all stronger when we stand together-in our families, in our friendships, and in our spiritual devotions.

At the Shabbat table this week, ask these questions for starters:

1. Have you ever prayed for someone to recover from an illness? Did you do it out of kindness or with the belief that the prayer might help?
2. The Torah is unclear about what causes this strange skin disease. Why do you think that's so?
3. What kind of illness affects a person's skin but also the walls of their house? Why would the Torah describe a disease that way?