



Through a traditional prayer, the speech of a secular Israeli author and a poem by an Israeli poet, we will explore the definition of miracles, our ability to identify or see them and the relationship between miracles and gratitude.

1

**Al HaNissim Prayer**

This prayer is said on Purim and Chanukah and is a statement of gratitude for the miracles and redemption of our people during the events commemorated by these holidays:

על הנסים ועל הפרקון ועל הגבורות ועל התשועות ועל הנפלאות ועל הנחמות שפעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה

*Al hanissim, v'al hapurkan, v'al hag'vurot v'al hat'tshuot v'al hamilchamot sh'asita lavoteinu bayamim hahem baz'man hazeh.*

.....

**Translated as:**

We thank You for the miracles, for the redemption, for the mighty deeds and saving acts, wrought by You, as well as for the wars which You waged for our ancestors in days of old, at this time.

Most of the prayer seems to be referring to miracles of the past, but the end of the sentence states: "at this time".

- 1) What is the relationship between past miracles and the present?
- 2) Is the element of time necessary in order to be able to express gratitude for the miracles mentioned?

2

*"... I am speaking here tonight as a person whose love for the land is overwhelming and complex, and yet it is unequivocal, and as one whose continuous covenant with the land has turned his personal calamity into a covenant of blood. I am totally secular, and yet in my eyes the establishment and the very existence of the State of Israel is a miracle of sorts that happened to us as a nation — a political, national, human miracle. I do not forget this for a single moment. Even when many things in the reality of our lives enrage and depress me, even when the miracle is broken down to routine and wretchedness, to corruption and cynicism, even when reality seems like nothing but a poor parody of this miracle, I always remember. And with these feelings, I address you tonight."*

*-Israeli author, David Grossman, speaking at the 11th anniversary memorial for Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin*

*Reflection Questions:*

- 1) Do you think miracles are only supernatural occurrences or can they be found in daily realities?
- 2) Is the ability to see miracles subjective and a matter of perspective, or is it an objective occurrence?
- 3) Do we need the perspective of time to be able to see miracles?
- 4) What is the connection between the ability to see or identify a miracle and the ability to express gratitude?

3

*Miracles*

From a distance everything looks like a miracle  
but up close even a miracle doesn't look like that.  
Even someone who crossed the Red Sea when it split  
saw only the sweating back  
of the man in front of him  
and the swaying of his big thighs,  
or at best, in a hasty glance to one side,  
fish in a riot of colors inside the wall of water,  
as in a marine observatory behind panels of glass.

The real miracles happen at the next table  
of a restaurant in Albuquerque:  
two women sat there, one with a diagonal  
zipper, altogether lovely,  
and the other said, "I kept it together  
and didn't cry."  
And after in the red corridors  
of the foreign hotel I saw  
boys and girls who held in their arms

tiny children born of them,  
and they held  
sweet little dolls.

*-Yehuda Amichai, translated by Robert Alter*