

Afterwards....

The *al hanissim* for Hanukkah is unique in recounting not only God's miraculous intervention at a moment in history, but also *v'ahar ken* ("and afterwards") -- the detailed deeds of "Your children" following the miracle. What is this very human "aftermath" doing in our Amidah, and specifically in the *modim* blessing, when we express our gratitude for God's beneficence?

Perhaps the "afterwards" isn't aftermath after all, but part and parcel of the miracle itself. The *al hanissim* for Hanukkah reminds us that our very capacity to respond to -- even to notice -- God's presence is itself a miracle, a gift from God for which we owe our gratitude.

And not only that. The Hanukkah *al hanissim* understands a miracle to be bilateral, consisting of both Divine intervention and human response. As Abraham Joshua Heschel writes in *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*:

The great quality of a miracle is not in its being an unexpected, unbelievable event in which the presence of the holy bursts forth, but in its happening to human beings who are profoundly astonished at such an outburst.

Thus, until "Your children came into Your shrine, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your sanctuary, kindled lights in Your sacred courts, and set aside these eight days as a season for giving thanks and chanting praises to You," the miracle was incomplete.

Bayamim hahem uvazman hazeh -- "In those days and in our time." Inevitably and repeatedly, the life of the spirit is afflicted by myriad corrupting influences, internal and external. Yet time and again our souls are spared -- we are re-inspired, re-focused, brought back on track -- often in unexpected, unbelievable ways. And time and again we have the opportunity (obligation!) to join with God in making those moments into miracles by responding: by transforming and "re-purifying" our souls, our worship, and our institutions, and by expressing our gratitude for our own miraculous ability to do so.

Hag Urim Sameah