



Table Talk

Table Talk: Miketz

Prepared by: Jonathan Eig

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It's tough being Hanukkah. First of all, no one can agree how to spell your name, which is murder for SEO. Plus, you can't really go head-to-head with jolly mall Santas and expect anything good to come of it.

Hanukkah is a minor Jewish holiday, but Jewish kids still try to defend it to their Christian friends, saying eight nights is better than one. The unintended consequence may be more Jewish lawyers.

Jewish people throughout history have struggled with being in a minority, as we're reminded in Miketz this week, which finds Joseph living in Egypt, working for Pharaoh, married to an Egyptian, and raising kids outside the Jewish tradition.

In many ways, Joseph is a symbol for every Jew who has ever felt isolated or lonely in a society that makes him a minority.

It's fitting that we should read his story on Hanukkah, a holiday that raises questions about the pitfalls and merits of assimilation. Does it help us stay strong as Jews to have our own holiday that pits menorahs versus Christmas trees and Adam Sandler versus Mariah Carey? Or does it weaken our sense of identity?

For Joseph, survival depended on remembering his identity as an Israelite in exile. It depended on faith in God. You know who else remembered their identity and fought to preserve it? The Maccabees. Which brings us back to Hanukkah.

As the Festival of Lights nears its end, try these questions at the dinner table:

1. Other than Hanukkah, what are some of the things that separate Jews from non-Jews?
2. Would it be easier for Jewish people if they blended in more? Would it be better?
3. Did Joseph's loneliness as a Jew in Egypt make him more eager for reconciliation with his family? If so, why didn't he try to contact his family sooner?