



# TABLE TALK: MIKETZ

Prepared by: Jonathan Eig  
December 16, 2017  
28 Kislev 5778

## Hanukkah

Last week, Roy Moore of Alabama praised the age of slavery in the United States, saying that the people were less divided, families were stronger, and the nation had a sense of direction. That's one way of looking it. And given that Moore is a white Southerner telling the story to a white Southern audience that's not happy with today's political culture, it's not difficult to understand why he would say what he did. Accounts of history always depend on who's giving the account and to whom the account is being presented.

Take the story of Hanukkah, for example. It's the only Jewish holiday firmly rooted in history. We know when and where the events at the root of the holiday occurred. But, still, over the years, the story has been spun for the purposes of the storytellers. Israelis are more inclined to think of Hanukkah as a story celebrating military might and the Maccabees as the first to fight for a Jewish homeland. In the U.S., we tend to focus more on the celebration of light, on the miracle of a flame that burned for eight days, and we talk about light leading the way to new experiences, to peace, justice for all, and for greater understanding among people.

These are the generalized, optimized versions of the story, versions that ignore most of the detailed information we have about the real events. We tell the stories that suit our times. We tell the stories that fit our lives. There's nothing wrong with that, in most cases. But the point of a holiday is not only to commemorate; the point is also to remember. In remembering, we should seek the truth, not accept the truth as it's been handed down. We should shine the light, not just bask in its glow.

As you celebrate Hanukkah and reflect on the election results in Alabama this week, try asking these questions:

1. Can you think of other holidays that are based on historical events where those events might be in dispute?
2. If the story of the Maccabees is really a story of military triumph, why do we place so much emphasis on the miracle of the oil that lasted for eight days?
3. How has the story of Hanukkah been shaped by American cultural habits? Has Christmas played a part?