

Miketz

5779:

In our weekly Lunch and Learn class (Wednesdays from 12-1:30, including lunch), we are studying significant developments in the history of modern Israel. Rooted in the study of primary texts, our discussion focuses on the meaning of those events in terms of Jewish identity and Jewish belief. For example, what did the Israeli victory in 1967's Six Day War mean for how Jews saw themselves, both in Israel and America? What was the religious significance of Jerusalem's Old City being in Israeli hands? Were these events, at some level, made possible because of the divine will?

Those complicated questions continue to inform Israel's policies and politics even now. But this is not the first time such questions have come to bear on the Jewish homeland. As we celebrate Hanukkah this week, we recall the exploits of the Maccabees, whose small army defeated the vastly superior Greek forces, who recaptured the ancient Temple, and whose courage led to the re-establishment of Jewish self-rule. In both of these cases, military victory seemed miraculous. In celebrating the Maccabees' victory, we clearly invoke the power of God to explain their success. Sadly, over the course of decades the Maccabees themselves assimilated into Greek culture and otherwise slipped from the high ideals with which they began, which is why our celebration of Hanukkah emphasizes the initial miracles, of the oil and the victory, not the Maccabees themselves.

How do we understand God's role in the second great reclamation of the Temple Mount, in 1967? Was it, like the first, a miracle that Jews will be celebrating for two thousand years?

And, if so, what will be the legacy of the leaders who won that battle? Will they, too, be remembered for their initial victory but largely forgotten due to later sins? Are the victors in both wars merely the tools of God's divine plan for Jewish control of the land?

The answers are not easily understood. What we should remember is how complicated questions of war and theology are. As we continue celebrating the miracles of Hanukkah this week, let's also recall the complexity of our relationship with God, war and Israel. As the light of the chanukiah glows brighter each night, we pray that so too will our understanding of our sacred history and the meaning of our connection to Israel.

Shabbat shalom and hag same'akh.