

Greeks. This time, however, imitation did not threaten, but rather ensured Jewish survival.

In the years following their victory, when the Jews were able to celebrate Sukkot on the right date (in Tishrei), they added a new, eight-day festival in Kislev, the month of their military triumph, to celebrate it. The very notion of creating a religious holiday to commemorate a military victory was a *Greek* idea: what Jew had ever heard of celebrating a holiday that wasn't commanded in the Torah? Other Greek ideas also crept into Jewish thought—ideas that would later become central to our tradition, such as life after death and the notion of a “soul.” (Some of these concepts may have had earlier roots in Egypt and Mesopotamia, but their shape and form as we encounter them in post-biblical Judaism was decisively influenced by this encounter with Hellenism.)

You might ask, if the Maccabees, those bulwarks against assimilation, succumbed to Greek styles and influence, then how were they any different from the pro-Greek Jews they had once so violently opposed?

The difference was this: The Maccabees, although eventually open to the world around them, were Jews first. Their being *selective* in their openness *guaranteed* rather than threatened Jewish survival. The assimilationists knew no boundaries; they would have traded Zeus for God and trophies for circumcision, discarding the ancient mark of the covenant of our people. In doing so they would have shared the fate of the Amorites, the Edomites, and every other ancient people who swallowed Greek culture whole and ended up digesting themselves. Had we embraced total assimilation, we would have vanished as a separate people.

We also would have fared no better

had the Maccabees' answer to Greek culture been one of total rejection. For Judaism to remain vibrant and rele-

vant, the strong appeal of the Greek way *had* to be addressed. The purists of ancient Egypt chose to wall off their culture, resulting in its demise. Its youths flocked to Greek mystery cults and eventually abandoned the ways of their ancestors.

The genius of the Maccabees was in hewing to a narrow path between the twin perils of assimilation on the one hand and isolation on the other. This approach of preserving the old while being open to the new would become the foundation-

al model of our Reform Movement in the early 19th century. From then until now, we Reform Jews have strived to maintain a state of equilibrium, preserving our distinct Jewish identity while at the same time engaging with the majority culture.

This balancing act is the secret of Jewish survival, and its sanctification as a religious festival is the miracle of Chanukah.

And that's why some cultural *borrowing* from our neighbors may actually be in line with the message of Chanukah—so long as it is an accommodation made *in the context of* Jewish affirmation rather than a blurring of boundaries that may lead to the dissolution of our identity as a distinct minority.

Thus the message of Chanukah remains the same today as it has for centuries: Jewish survival in the midst of a tempting majority culture. We affirm our Jewish distinctiveness anew every time the Chanukah candles glow in our dorm rooms and our dwelling places, our synagogues and our souls. This is, indeed, an ongoing miracle... the light of Jewish life still shining after all of these centuries... *Still Jewish. Still Jewish.* □



Michael Jacobs of Temple Israel, Tulsa, Oklahoma helps his 3-year-old daughter Lilah Mei light the family Chanukah.



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