

THE CHICAGO JEWISH NEWS

June 19-25, 2015/2 Tammuz 5775

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One Dollar



How a Chicago philanthropist and investor
who helps wounded vets and
disadvantaged high school students
became a producer of Woody Allen movies

**What accounts for
Jewish achievement?**

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a leader is and isn't**



**Remembering
a Jewish
'Quiz Kid'**

The debate over Jewish achievement

By Steven Pease
Aish.com

Jews have been part of my life in kindergarten, at Harvard

Business School, and throughout my professional career. It was from those experiences that I developed the notion that Jews are the world's most disproportionate high achievers.

A decade ago I began intensive research to test out the hypothesis. Now, after writing "The Golden Age of Jewish Achievement," speaking on the subject, being interviewed on radio and

TV, and soliciting criticisms and arguments to disprove the statement, I have come to believe it is simply true.

As a non-Jew, I am fascinated by the fact that a people which constitute 2/10ths of 1 percent of the world's population and 2 percent of the U.S. population, has made such enormous contributions to the betterment of humanity.

To cite some examples: In hi-tech entrepreneurship, Jewish names include: Intel (Grove and Vadasz), Google (Brin and Page), Oracle (Ellison), Microsoft (Balmer), Dell (Dell), Qualcomm (Jacobs), Facebook (Zuckerberg and Sandberg).

In finance, the names are legion: Goldman Sachs, Rothschild, Warburg, Kohlberg, Kravis & Roberts, Wells Fargo, Lehman Brothers, Bear Stearns, and many more.

As World Chess champions, Jews have held the title 54% of the time since 1866.

In the 113th United States Congress (2013-2015), Jews were elected to 11 percent of U.S. Senate seats.

Jews account for three of the nine Supreme Court Justices.

More examples: Jews make up 23 percent of Nobel Prize winners, 50 percent of Ivy League presidents, 33 percent of symphony conductors, 37 percent of Academy Award directors.

My second book, "The Debate over Jewish Achievement," traces major theories to explain this phenomenon. It uses the technique of a Chronology to expose the strengths and flaws of each one over time. In the end the debate over the factors behind the performance boil down to nature (genetics) and nurture (culture).

My research concludes that, yes, genetic heritage and linkages between most of the world's Jews (the Mizrahim, Sephardim and Ashkenazim) date back thousands of years. But Judaism is not a "race," given that anyone can freely convert, and today you will find Chinese Jews, Ethiopian Jews, etc.

Rather, culture is the most important driving influence behind Jewish achievement. Among elements of that culture:

- The huge premium Jews have placed on literacy and education for more than 2,000 years. Jews graduate from college at more than twice the national average. They attend the best schools, get better grades and go on to pursue productive careers.

- Most Jews believe in progress. They are not passive, nor resigned. They think they have a duty to help improve things. They believe in free will and intend to exercise their minds and body to advance the

ball in the directions they feel important.

- Jews have long maintained very strong family values. They divorce less. They are mostly members of two-parent families. The mother is loving, strong, demanding, and supportive. The father is equally engaged. Most religious holiday events, even for secular Jews, are major family events, as is Shabbat (Friday night dinner). Loyalty to family and kin is highly valued.

- Jewish lifestyle is generally healthy in terms of diet, and the approach to drugs and alcohol is moderate. Kosher conformance has served many purposes, but historically, one of them has been to mandate healthy eating habits.

- Jews typically demonstrate high levels of self-discipline (deferred gratification). We see it in their diet, their commitment to formal education, their careers, and their drive to achieve.

- They encourage and develop their verbal skills and the inclination to speak up, make an argument, debate, and disagree if they feel strongly. Generally, reticence has not been esteemed. The Talmud is a religious tract, but it is also essentially an ongoing academic debate over the evolution of Jewish Law in light of changing circumstances.

- Jews stand up for what they believe in. They have "grit." They champion causes important to them. Wallflowers they are not!

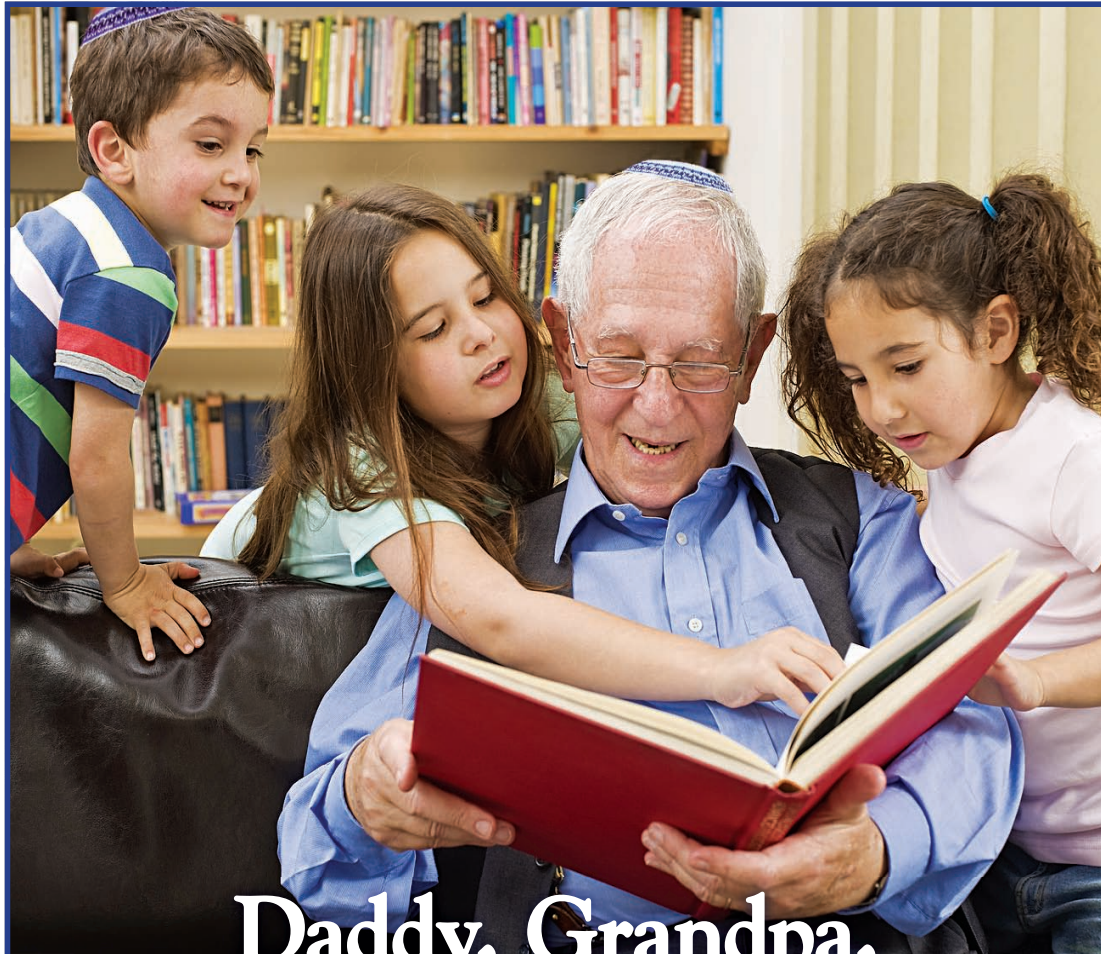
- Ethical behavior has been inculcated in Jews by the Torah and Talmud. God demands it.

- Rationality is also embodied in the Talmud and in the lives of most Jews. One must deal with the facts on the ground and adapt. The Diaspora made anything less than this approach unfeasible. For most of 2,000 years, Jews had to exist as a small minority among other cultures, co-existing with countless other peoples, tribes, and cultures with substantially different beliefs and native languages. Staying alive demanded rationality and adaptability.

- In the same vein, Jews feel a strong sense of duty to each other and to those less fortunate. Jews are among the most charitable and philanthropic of people.

There is nothing unique about any of these cultural attributes. In fact, most of them are consistent with the cultures of other high performing groups of people around the globe. Yet the combination and intensity makes for a uniquely Jewish experience, one that has undeniably produced more "good" far beyond expected norms.

It also demonstrates how more of us can achieve and contribute. We need not have Jewish genes to appreciate and learn from the Jews' stunning performance.



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