



The Golden Age of Jewish Achievement

Steven L. Pease

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"In the wake of the Enlightenment...the suddenness with which Jews began to appear and make a mark in numerous...areas...is nothing short of astounding. It seemed as if a huge reservoir of Jewish talent, hitherto dammed up behind the wall of Talmudic learning were suddenly released to spill over into all fields of Gentile cultural activity." -Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Mind* "Quite suddenly, around the year 1800, this ancient and highly efficient social machine for the production of intellectuals began to shift its output. Instead of pouring all of its products into the closed circuit of rabbinical studies, where they remained completely isolated from general society, it unleashed a significant and ever growing proportion of them into secular life. This was an event of shattering importance in world history." -Paul Johnson, *History of the Jews*

The Golden Age of Jewish Achievement chronicles the astonishing record of one people's disproportionate achievements and the causes behind it. The stunning performance of Jews over the last 125 years can only be compared with that of the Italians during the Renaissance, the Greeks during the era of Pericles, or the Dutch during their own Golden Age. The Golden Age details that record in more than 60 exhibits covering the range from Nobel prizes to Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame awards, from Pulitzer Prizes to chess champions, from philanthropy to Supreme Court Justices and more. But more intriguing is the question, "Why has this happened?" (the question posed by Rabbi Harold N. Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*). Through fascinating stories, such as "Lev Leviev and the Soviet Jews" (at the start of Chapter 20) and "The Jazz Singer" (at the start of Chapter 13) the book illustrates the life and circumstances of hundreds of remarkable Jews before drawing its perspective together in Chapter 25 - Why? Timely, the book raises notions advanced by Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers*, and recent debates over "Jewish genes" as well as Charles Murray's 2007 Commentary article where he argued for natural selection. The Golden Age makes the case for culture. It explains how the evolution of Judaism, coupled with a tortured 2,000 year history has shaped a unique combination of cultural values which have made Jews into the world's most successful tribe of *Outliers*. For example, they were history's first tribe to mandate literacy for all of their people. The book challenges natural selection, second generation immigrant status, and other theories which have been advanced over the years to explain the phenomenon. The Golden Age research is detailed in the extensive exhibits, end notes, bibliography and index containing more than 4,000 entries. But it is the stories and the thought provoking analysis that makes *The Golden Age of Jewish Achievement* a compelling and much discussed read.

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