

As the author points out in a helpful and lengthy “Introduction” to the fifteen chapters that follow, the “wealth” in the book’s title refers to both “intellectual wisdom and material possessions.” Overall, the book manages to nicely come down in the middle of what I elsewhere* have called the “Proud Identification” vs. “Global Citizen” choice. On one hand it—in paraphrasing Einstein—argues “Jews need to stop apologizing for being who they are. They should be proud of their achievements. Achievements which have contributed to humanity’s health and well being.” On the other hand it 1) documents the Jewish role in globally significant developments (including shaping the world’s major monotheistic religions, storing and communicating information via invention of the alphabet, promoting literacy, making key scientific / economic / cultural contributions, etc.) 2) tells the story of “a true cosmopolitan people,” and 3) offers “lessons for the individual citizen of the world.”

It elaborately answers the question, “What has made one of the Western world’s smallest and most persecuted minority—ethnic Jews—produce some of the smartest, wealthiest, and most influential people on the planet?” In doing so it paints a picture of Jewish character culturally shaped by traits of stubbornness, tenacity, and a pride that “promotes an uncompromising drive to learn and achieve and prove mental superiority”—especially over their anti-Semitic tormentors. Shaped by countless generations of *Talmud* guided education and debate sharpening memory, computational skills, and even promoting love of argument / legal reasoning—and somehow nurturing “imaginative powers” that the author sees as “the key to (legendary Jewish) business success.” Shaped by storytellers. Shaped by traditional dictates that promote “a clean type of life which revolves around learning, work, family, and the community.”

And shaped genetically—in response to persecution and the perceived need to make money to survive—by the following practice. As the author tells it, unlike Christianity—where “the most intelligent individuals were expected to enroll into the clergy, and were prohibited from having children...their genetic potential lost forever”—“Rabbis...were expected to have as many children as they could afford. Rich and wealthy community members were honored to wed their best daughters to Rabbis as well as marry their sons to a Rabbi’s daughter—a practice that enhanced a Rabbi’s family life by marriage into wealth...”—all of this eventually leading to “an increase of intelligent individuals within the community.”

The part of the book I personally found most interesting was the lengthy (twenty-one pages out of a 194 page book) section devoted to “Islam and Judaism” and specifically to Jews’ helping to shape the Qu’ran. While some of it is highly speculative—in particular what happened in the city of Kufa (close to Najah in modern Iraq) in the centuries after Muhammad died in 632 CE. As the author recounts, the Jewish presence in that region began with the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem / Babylonian Exile in the sixth century BCE. So that a thousand years later Jewish population there may have reached into the hundreds of thousands. After providing a complete account of their historic relationship, the author wonders, “Should Jews be given any credit from Muslims regarding: their beliefs; the Qu’ran; the Hadith; and the historic ‘Islamic Golden Age’ in general?”

Three other speculations I also found fascinating: 1) the Hebrew influence on the development of the Arabic language, and—much earlier—2) how Persian domination of Babylon / Judea beginning in sixth century BCE may have pushed Jews toward monotheism. And—as I write in this time of corona virus concerns—3) how Jewish cleanliness / hand-washing habits may have

vastly reduced their death rate during the 14th century European Black Death years. One might ordinarily be skeptical of certain speculations involving religious or cultural history subject matter in that many doing the speculating are heavily influenced by what I have elsewhere called “faith-based” / “wishful thinking”. In contrast the author—who has a science / engineering / business / legal background—stresses that his approach is very much what I call “evidence based.”

I especially like the book’s historical accounts of both anti-Semitism and the Islam / Judaism relationship because they set the stage for what the author offers as the book winds down: suggestions for combating anti-Semitism and eventually resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Regarding the former he advocates “the golden path of tolerance yet firmness—and above all education...the right education—not a biased one.” As to the latter, he hopes for “building a world culture of learning” and using education in “changing people’s hearts and minds.”

Alas, in concluding this review, I’d like to give this book 5 out of 5 stars...but certain obvious deficiencies preclude my doing that. In particular I cite three things. First regarding a request (in the Introduction) from the author, who is not an English native speaker. He asks “I hope you will forgive all English language mishaps.” While I was pretty much able to overlook these and very much enjoyed reading the book, I, second, feel strongly that it needed a good editor / book manufacturing expert. Not only to improve presentation / formatting, streamline use of words, improve punctuation, grammar, etc, but to also to make it more readable and catch possible errors. In this last regard, the only error I noted (there may be others!) was reference to Judah P. Benjamin as “President Jefferson’s” Secretary of War, etc.—when in actuality this man served southern Civil War era Confederate President Jefferson Davis! Third, the book’s usefulness in terms of education / discussion would be enhanced by an index.

Despite these shortcomings, I recommend this book. I thank the author for writing it since it contributed to my own education! If I must provide a numerical ranking, I’d give it 4.5 out of 5 stars. I hope it reaches a wider audience.

* see www.projectworldview.org/choice36.htm