

Jewish Ingenuity

Everyday Products and World-Changing Discoveries Made by Jews

Our designation as a “light unto the nations” refers to the spiritual and moral illumination that the world has absorbed from us and our Torah. Nevertheless, Jews have also left their imprint on the material daily lives of billions of people. The list of patented inventions attributable to Jewish minds is very long, and includes everything from flexible straws to the cure for polio. Read about common, everyday items as well as uncommon, world-changing discoveries that all share one thing: their invention is traced back to a Jew.

For years, many in the Arab world have been avoiding or outright boycotting products sold, developed or invented by Jews – even if it hurts the Arab world far more than the Jews.

For instance, after the Six Day War in 1967, the Israeli army discovered a warehouse in East Jerusalem filled with cases of the polio vaccine. On the boxes it said, “A gift from the people of the United States.” It had been donated to Jordan. However, the Jordanians did not use it even though there had been a polio epidemic there a mere two years earlier. They refused to use the donation because the man who discovered it, Jonas Salk, was a Jew (see below). Better Jordanian children should have polio than admit that they benefitted from Jews.

Yet, even the hatemongers do not comprehend just how pervasive the products and ideas conceived by Jewish minds are in the modern world. Take 55-year-old “Ahmed,” a typical, conscientious Arab/Muslim. His imam gave another impassioned tirade in the mosque on Friday, and this time Ahmed is finally convinced. He is ready to make his house Jew-product free.

The first thing he does when he comes home is go to his medicine cabinet and throw out his aspirin. Aspirin, he knows, was developed by Arthur Eichengrun, a Jew.

Next, Ahmed goes to his dentist for a filling and is offered a shot of Novocain before the work day begins. Mindful of the imam’s pleas, he begrudgingly declines. He’ll have to put up with the shooting pain—another Jew, Karl Koller, introduced an early form of Novocain as a local anesthetic.

Understandably, Ahmed returns home in a rotten mood. Not only did he feel every rotation of that drill, but he cannot take any aspirin to relieve the ache afterward either.

His wife then gently reminds him to take his insulin before his diabetes acts up. At this point Ahmed is forced to take pause. Insulin was also developed by a Jew, a fellow named Oscar Minkowski. For that matter, the digitalis he

takes for his heart, he recalls with horror, is also a product discovered by a Jew: Ludwig Traube.

Is he required to sacrifice his life just to get back at those ubiquitous Jews?!

Ever mindful of his religious duties, Ahmed reaches for his cell phone to call the imam and pose his question. Suddenly, his hand in midair, he stops. He remembers reading that cell phones are also a Jewish invention. The technology behind them was created by Joel Engel.

Maybe he should send an e-mail? But his computer operates on Windows, which was largely developed by Jewish minds. For that matter, Ahmed’s home is powered by solar panels, and solar cells were also created by a Jew!

This boycott business is fast becoming impossible. Ahmed seriously contemplates rejoining his Bedouin cousins in the mountains. At least goats and grass weren’t invented by those cursed Jews—or were they...?

Ahmed’s suffering notwithstanding, let us look at some of these and other inventions credited to Jewish ingenuity.

Aspirin

Aspirin is the most widely used medicine for treating minor aches and pains, as well as to reduce fever. It also acts as a mild blood thinner, making it appropriate for use as a prophylactic against stroke and heart disease. Estimates of the drug’s consumption stand at 80 billion pills per year worldwide.

In ancient Greece, Hippocrates, the “father of modern medicine,” dispensed a bitter powder produced from the bark of the willow tree for the relief it provided from minor pains. Even before his time people would chew this bark for its medicinal properties. How it worked, though, was beyond their understanding. Only many centuries later did scientists isolate from that bark a substance called salicylic acid, from which today’s aspirin is derived.

According to the history books, aspirin

was developed by a researcher working for the German pharmaceutical company Bayer. A French chemist named Charles Gerhardt developed salicylic acid in 1853. But to produce it properly would have to wait for the arrival of a German pharmacist named Felix Hoffman. Hoffman’s father took the chemical to treat his rheumatism, but its high acidity hurt his stomach. In 1897 Hoffman found a way of reducing the acidity without reducing the potency of the drug.

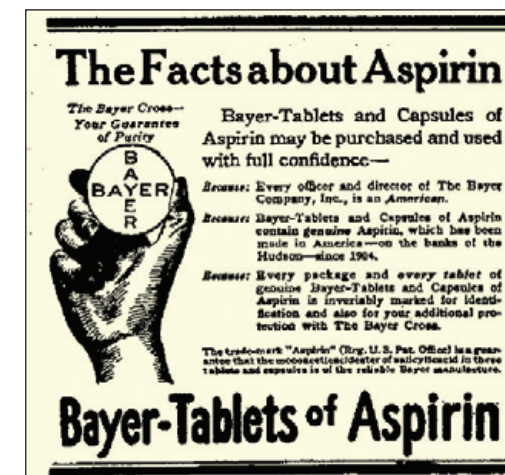
The Bayer Company began distributing the new powder to doctors in 1899 for trial. The results were very positive and soon Bayer marketed the drug under the name aspirin. The new medicine quickly became a bestseller.

But was Hoffman really the one responsible for the development? That assumption came into doubt after World War II. After his liberation from the camps, a German-Jewish chemist named Arthur Eichengrun accused Bayer of revising the facts. He argued that he, Arthur Eichengrun, had been the one to discover aspirin. The Germans, he claimed, did not want to credit a Jew with its discovery.

Eichengrun was born in 1867 to a Jewish



Bayer aspirin, from the original producer of the bestselling drug.



An ad for aspirin.



The team of researchers who developed aspirin in Bayer’s laboratory.