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**"Are there aspects of Judaism that encourage arrogance or that help guard against it?"**

*Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer*

The best, but unfortunate example of Jewish arrogance, because it encourages an attitude of Jewish intellectual and genetic superiority, is our perennial bragging about how disproportionate is the number of Nobel Prize winners who are Jewish.

The best source of this Jewish smug self-congratulation is God's unabashed favoritism, singling out the Jews as the "chosen people." This appointment to be the "light unto the nations", thankfully rejected by most contemporary Jews, historically gave permission for racial narcissism, Jewish chauvinism, and an assertion of aristocracy. Of course, this grandiosity is also undoubtedly a feature of psychological compensation for being oppressed and powerless. At least, we could claim, we're smarter than our persecutors, though it's unclear how much balm and comfort that really provides.

The antidote to this smugness is humility, grounded in the Biblical notion that all humans share a common origin, the dust of the earth, or, with today's knowledge, the stardust of billions of years ago. And the corollary: we will also eventually return to that same dust. Beauty is vain (Prov. 31:30), the hope of mortals is worms (Avot 4:4), and, said Hillel (Lev. R 1), "humility is my exaltation."