

# RE/BOOK

All of us, together

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*“You will either step forward  
into growth or you will step  
back into safety.”*  
—Abraham Maslow

/ An introduction

———— There are those rare moments in one’s life when you get to look around and exhale, close your eyes for a split second to freeze the memory, and hear the voice inside your head saying quietly: “remember this.” I had one of those moments, on March 19th 2014. Sitting in a dark room, I heard my first nigun.

Let me back up for a second. I was raised Catholic, a reluctant little altar boy who liked the churchy smells and rituals, but pretty much abandoned religion when I was in my teens. I worshipped at the altar of Punk Rock for a few minutes, but that was it. I’m sure like many others of my generation, organized religion felt dusty, arcane, and kind of preachy. It felt old in a bad way. It didn’t feel like me.

Fast-forward almost 40 years. I’m working in my dream job, a designer in one of the best design firms in the world. We’re getting to tackle some of the trickiest, hairiest issues in the world and exact positive change in healthcare, education, and social causes. I get to work with people who feel the same way; people who are driven, kind, helpful, optimistic. I’m traveling the world and seeing and saying things I never thought possible, with nothing holding us back. We talk a lot about how to create “disproportionate impact” in our work and are bold in our ambition. When the opportunity came

to help one of the world's oldest cultures "bring people back to the table," we jumped at it.

And so I found myself here, the only non-Jew in a room full of Jews.

"Close your eyes" said the rabbi. "Nobody is going to judge. We are all here." She started to sing. The nigun is essentially a tonal prayer, and everyone joins in. It's a trust fall in musical form. At first, I held back, waiting for others to start. Then I jumped. And something happened that I can't describe. I felt pure joy. Optimism. Happiness. Belonging. Belief. We started to design together. The ideas flowed.

I have learned this: that design is actually a lot like being Jewish. Designers ask a lot of questions and love to debate. Believe me, so do Jews. Jews believe in sitting around a table and talking about ideas. That is the core of the design process. At IDEO, we position things as inclusive questions, framing every issue as an opportunity, asking How Might We? Jewishness is, in my opinion, one big How Might We? Our worlds overlap, profoundly. We seek meaning. So do you. You seek ways to engage people and make them feel seen. So do we.

So, the journey of "Redesigning Jewishness" has begun. A larger group of us – filmmakers, rabbis,

writers, scholars, photographers, musicians, philosophers and policy makers – congregated (pun intended) recently and the same thing happened. People talked, shared, ideas flowed and we made stuff. Told stories. Created systems to connect us. New tools to rekindle old rituals. Designed new rituals, delivered in traditional ways. New ideas to welcome the curious, engage the lapsed, and retain the faithful.

I'm not rushing off to convert, don't worry. But I speak from all of us at IDEO; it is and continues to be a blessing to work on this. A gift.

So...back to Maslow. The child of first generation Jewish immigrants from Russia who overcame prejudice and struggle. He dedicated his life to the study of one thing: how we as people might become our best selves, become more connected as communities, become more together as a race, I can't think of a better rallying cry to bring us all together, and start a journey of welcoming people through the door into new ways of being Jewish, one that leaps forward into growth, and never steps back into safety.

**-Paul Bennett**

Who are we  
designing for?



A peek inside  
the lives of  
the people we  
hope to move.



### *Nathan*

On a bright October afternoon, we sit with a young man named Nathan in his living room, overlooking the eastern slope of Potrero Hill, to the Bay beyond. Nathan is thirty-three, teen-idol handsome, and charming as the day is long.

We've been having the kind of conversation that's rare outside intimate friendships, bouncing back and forth between family and religion, childhood and fatherhood, fear and love.

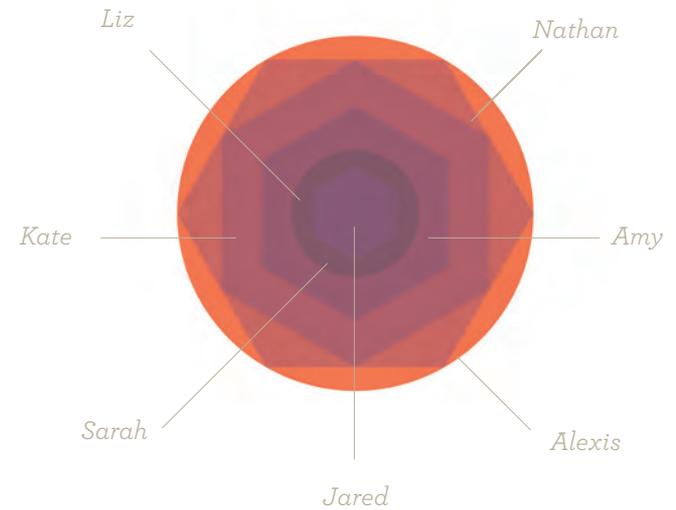
Nathan looks into a mysterious void just above your head when he's gathering his thoughts. "Right now," he says, "I feel further away from my Jewish identity than I ever have."

**Nathan, we're designing for you.**

### *Our People*

We didn't interview a statistically significant sample of people for this project. But then again, we never do. We're much more interested in going deep: If you want to find out what people truly think and feel, you have to invest the time. Which is how we wound up in Nathan's living room, and the living rooms of a handful of other men and women in their 20s, 30s, and early 40s.

Liz, Kate, Sarah, Jared, Alexis, and Amy. These are the people we're designing for. All spectacularly different, all remarkably similar. If we keep their stories in mind as we design in the days and years ahead, we can't go wrong.





### *Longing, Not Searching*

Twenty-nine and cherubic, Liz possesses a wisdom that's hard to reconcile with her child-like voice. Sipping on a latte, she told us about her birthright trip to Israel. She'd departed America hoping that she'd feel a sense of homecoming and belonging in the Holy Land. Instead, she felt totally alienated when she visited the Wall. "How could I feel spiritual when I'm separate and subordinate?" she asked.

She's not looking for spirituality these days, at least not actively. "It feels like a lot to do for yourself," she explains, "I guess I'm just not yearning for it."

*Standing on the outside, looking in*

A born-and-bred Jersey girl, minus the accent, Kate grew up Christian in a large Jewish community, making friends and falling in love with her fair share of handsome Jewish boys. But no matter how close she got, she always felt like an outsider. "I guess the exclusivity is the thing that keeps the community together, but it's the very thing that makes me feel left out."

**We finish the morning wondering if there's a way we could make her feel welcome, too.**





*Jewish on the “wrong side”*

Jared is the spitting image of Jason Schwartzman with a beard. He’s a half-Jewish single guy, stuck between two worlds. Not “Jewish enough” for some Jews he’s known, too Jewish for the anti-Semites he’s met. You can almost feel his struggle for identity in the halted way he considers his words as he speaks: “If only your dad is Jewish, you’re not Jewish. That’s pretty arbitrary. What kind of community wants to draw that line?”

**How can we let him know he’s welcome?**

*Full of life, far from shul*

Sarah and Alexis live in Oakland with Octavio, a one-year old bouncing ball of energy. Like so many marriages, theirs is interfaith. Sarah grew up Jewish, Alexis vaguely Catholic, simply by way of being Mexican. As they settle into the comfortable groove of family life in their 30s, their days are packed with friends and babies and work.

So we ask Sarah if anything is missing. What about a greater tie to the Jewish community? "I'm pretty happy right now," she replies. "I don't have big gaping holes where I wish something was there. I think you look for answers when you need something to be answered and I'm feeling quite whole right now."

**Still, having Octavio has made them both more interested in building new traditions at home. How could we support their desire for DIY ritual?**





*Turned off by dogma*

Philly native Amy seems as Jewish as they come. It's in the way she talks, the way she looks, the way she thinks. But she never calls herself Jewish these days. She feels a much greater connection with Buddhism.

Judaism feels too judgmental to her. Too formal. And because of that, too empty.

"(Practicing Buddhism) I can just be whoever I am," Amy says. "I'm not being chastised for being too much or not enough of something." She continues to explain, "I care about compassion. That message never came through in Judaism."

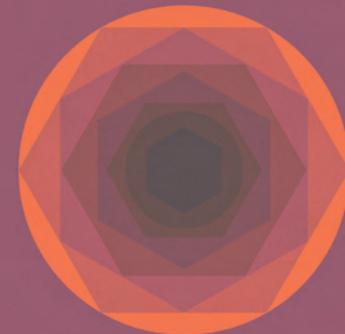
*“Never delegate  
understanding.”  
—Charles Eames*

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It’s so easy to design for ourselves. We fall in love with our ideas because they feel right to us. But if we want to create change, we have to step back from our comfort zones, and into the lives of the people we want to affect.

As ideas come and go and decisions need to be made, ask yourself, “Would this idea work for Liz? Would this concept make Jared feel welcome?”

**Keep asking. Keep learning. Keep iterating. The work will only get better.**



—— The values  
that tie us  
together



### *Our Values*

———— The tasks that lie ahead are way too big for any one person or group to tackle alone. So how do we distribute the load, while staying on the same page? How do we develop a beautiful diversity of ideas that all feel like they spring from a common well?

It's easy—or easier—with a set of shared values. If everything we do, say, and produce holds true to these principles, we're golden. It also allows for a plurality of voices to exist under a single unifying idea.



*1. Practice unconditional welcoming*

As far as we're concerned, everyone is "Jewish enough." It's time to take the door off the hinges and start waving people in. Let's strive to give every Jew, half-Jew, married-to-a-Jew, and Jew-curious person out there the feeling that they belong at the table. Our every action, fueled by love.

After people come through the door, and that sense of welcome has made them feel at home—helped them feel seen—let's keep that welcome rolling with invitations to engage more deeply.



## *2. Balance humor, head, and heart*

Humor is a funny thing (Pun fully intended.) It's actually a Trojan horse that unlocks our deepest emotions. When we're laughing, and our radar is down, the powerful, meaningful stuff hits us even harder.

So it's important to be funny. But it's also important to be intelligent and warm. When we balance humor, warmth, and intellect, we'll break through the media cacophony and shoot straight to the heart. The trick is not to over-index on any one quality—rather, to mix them in levels that feel right for each communication.



### 3. *Celebrate imperfection*

———— We're all gorgeously human and flawed. And there's no single 'right way' to do anything, let alone be Jewish. So three cheers for diversity, and making mistakes, and doing it your own weird, made-up way.

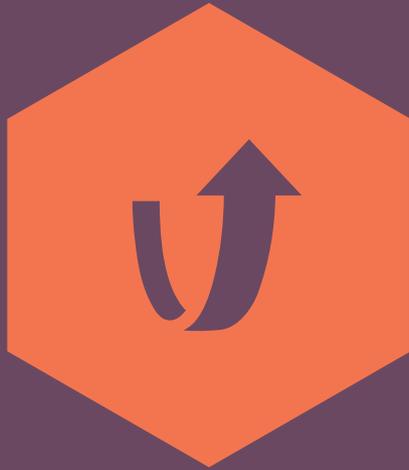
Will there be people who knock us for being too open? Probably. And we'll invite them in, too. Our tradition thrives on contrarians. After all, it's the willingness to debate that makes us Jewish. All we need to do is assume good intentions, and remember that behind every criticism lies a desire to do the right thing.



*4. Give people guidelines and tools, not rules*

————— Nobody wants dogma, but they do want help.

Whenever we offer up knowledge—whether it’s advice on how to host a Shabbat dinner, or a calendar that explains the holidays—we should make it simple and easy to access. And this simplicity belies a tremendous richness and depth that’s available for those who choose to dive in. The key is this: Don’t block the front door with complicated details or strict rights and wrongs. Let people come through and choose to explore the meatier stuff on their own. Or not.



*5. Take what's old and make it new*

— Five thousand years of culture and wisdom? That's some serious lineage, worthy of respect. Still, ancient traditions don't always feel relevant in the modern world. Let's be cross-generational translators and help people find meaning in the history they've inherited. Old traditions can bolster new ideas, adding richness and depth to today's thinking.

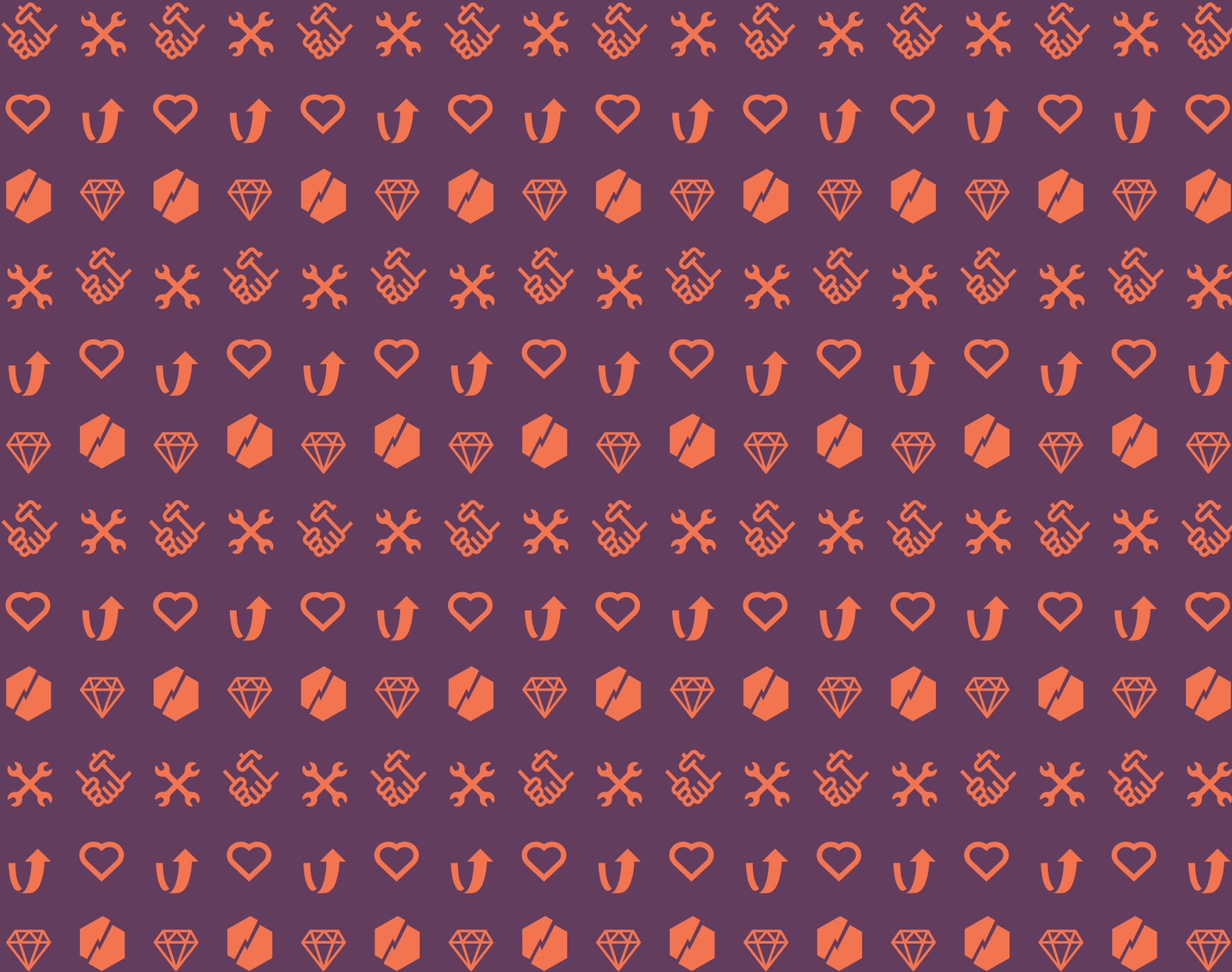


### 6. *Make it gorgeous*

It's not enough to produce work that has a clever idea behind it—it's got to be well-crafted. Carefully written, beautifully art directed, thoughtfully made. The first bite is taken with the eye, after all.

Why? Because beauty moves people in ways they can't articulate. It's the difference between, "Meh" and "You've got to see this!" That's why it's so important to invest in thoughtful design.

Now, this doesn't mean we have to make it all ourselves. We can also be curators of the great work that's already out there. When we see things that deserve more attention, let's raise them up. There's so much wonderful stuff floating around in the world—we can be of great service simply by making it more visible and accessible.



—— Dot Dot Dot

An ellipsis, rather  
than an ending

So, here we are, on the last few pages of a book that doesn't end. Scholars have been reinterpreting Jewish texts for 5,000 years, and we fully expect that to continue. What you're reading here will be ripped apart, reassembled, made better, revised again, and never feel quite finished. Tradition and guilt and frizzy hair don't grow in a day. Neither does a new way of being.

— A couple  
things to  
remember  
as we go  
forward:

*1. No is easy*

Let's try doing the hard thing—saying Yes. That's going to feel wrong at times, especially for those who have strongly held beliefs or are averse to change. But being optimistic and saying Yes has real kung fu power. It breaks bias and skepticism in half like sheets of wood.

## 2. *A pie, not a slice*

There are a lot of creative people out there who are hard at work making great stuff. We want to build on those ideas, get them a bit further along, and create a toolkit to help us all invent beautiful things. If we start laying claim to ideas and acting like patent trolls, we all lose. New collectives—like Kickstarter and Etsy and AirBnB, to mention a few—celebrate individuals, but also have a greater mission in mind. It's time to design for the whole pie.

There's an annual practice on our most somber holiday, Yom Kippur, of beating our chests with our fists and asking for forgiveness for all the screw-ups of the year before. Built into our commitment not to repeat the harmful action in the future is an acknowledgment that we'll probably screw up again next year, and could we please be forgiven for that now, too.

In that spirit, shouldn't there be room in every new design, every starry burst of creativity, every bald, blinking, newborn movement, to try, fail, learn, and fail again? We think so. In the words of that old Jewish sage, William Blake, "Forgive what you do not approve, and love us for this energetic exertion of our talent."

