

February 2015

MAKING JEWISH MY OWN: REBOOTERS ON REBOOT

At the end of 2014, Reboot commissioned Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research (GQRR), an independent research consultancy, to conduct a network evaluation for the organization. As the organization reached its Bar Mitzvah year, Reboot was keen to understand its impact and effectiveness in creating a space for members of the Reboot network (“Rebooters”) to explore their Jewishness and what, if any, changes in their Jewish lives have emerged as a result of participation in Reboot’s network and programs.

In total, 202 Rebooters contributed as part of the research and evaluation process, representing nearly half of the total Reboot membership. GQRR’s methodology involved three interlinked phases: 1) An online forum involving 29 Rebooters, run from November 4-December 4, 2014. Participants were drawn from a range of Reboot locations, mix of industry backgrounds and different Summit years¹, divided evenly amongst gender. 2) An opt-in web survey with 170 Rebooters, conducted December 2-15, 2014. This represents 35 percent of the total Reboot membership. 3) In-depth interviews with five Rebooters, conducted December 9-12, 2014.

“...Being connected to Reboot exposed me to the new-ness of Judaism, my own Jewishness. And for me the essence of that is: ‘Live an examined life, a meaningful life.’ ”

(Online Forum)

The research shows that Reboot plays a significant role for many members, and enables them to connect to Judaism for the first time, or re-connect them after years of detachment or distance. It also opens powerful new perspectives on living a Jewish life, and routes for exploring Judaism

on one’s own terms. Critically, it gives members the confidence to feel a greater sense of ownership over Jewish rituals, practice and customs, and to be able to locate traditional values and themes in a contemporary setting. In contrast to the alienation felt by many toward Jewish institutions, Reboot enables members to feel a greater personal stake in Judaism, and to consider their obligations to future generations. As well as informing individual choices around ritual, holidays and practice, it also inspires a wider set of creative and professional outputs and projects, many of which are shaped by Jewish themes, values and cultural motifs.

¹Every year since 2002, Reboot has invited 30-35 new members to its annual 3-day open space Summit to exchange personal experiences and ideas about Jewish identity and community. Participants at the Summit include new members, members who are returning for a second consecutive year, and faculty. The size of the entire Summit group ranges from 60-70 participants. The Summit is framed by 3 key questions: Who am I? What am I inheriting? What, if anything, do I want to do about it?

Key Findings

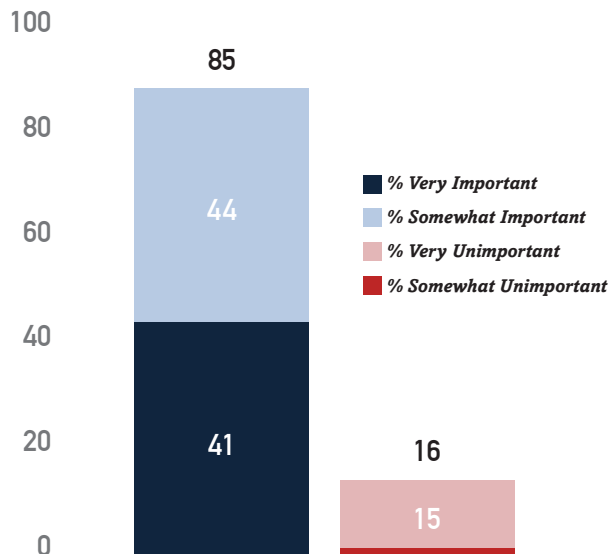
Reboot has connected for the first time or reconnected many to Judaism; it has also opened new perspectives to living a Jewish life and pathways for exploring Judaism on one's own terms. Nearly seven in ten (68 percent) say being Jewish has become more important since their first Reboot Summit, with just over three-quarters (77 percent) feeling Reboot has strengthened their connection to being Jewish. When asked in their own words to describe the impact of Reboot on their Jewishness, themes around connecting to religious belief, finding identity and revitalizing their Jewishness are top of mind.

Through Reboot, members feel a greater sense of ownership over their Jewishness, and have a new found confidence around rituals, practice and spirituality. For some, this ownership is described as an awareness gained through their Reboot experiences that they have a responsibility to engage with big questions, to interpret practice, rituals and beliefs for today's world and to pass on a legacy. In contrast to the alienation felt by many toward Jewish institutions, Reboot enables members to feel a greater personal stake in Judaism.

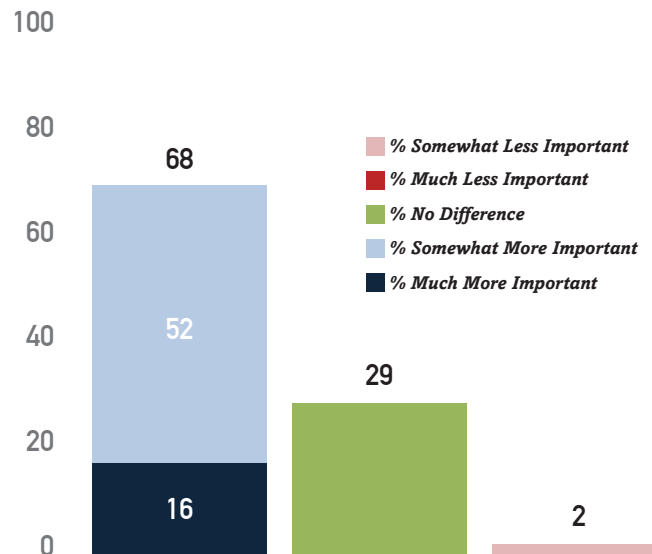
"Reboot has made me feel as though I can claim the label of Jewish even though I didn't have a typical Jewish upbringing nor do I live a very Jewish (religious or traditional) life."

(Online Forum)

*Turning to something different now.
How important is being Jewish in your life?*



Has being Jewish become more important, less important, or has there been no difference in importance since you went to your first Reboot summit?





“I feel more ownership over my Jewish identity and the way I now relate to the wider Jewish world because I’m more empowered to figure out the way that I want to do it, and then feel comfortable around other people knowing that I do it that way instead of feeling like I don’t do it right, or don’t do it proper enough.”

— *Depth Interview*

“My feeling before Reboot was that there was wisdom to be gained from rabbis, synagogues, etc., but that it was a static thing you could observe/glean from, but not so much something living and changing that you could actually mold.”

(*Online Forum*)

Though involvement with Reboot does not, for many, translate into an embrace of conventional Jewish institutions, a fifth (19 percent) have joined a Jewish congregation since becoming part of Reboot, with 22 percent joining other Jewish organizations or groups. For many, it has also raised consciousness of Jewish themes; with many also having adopted, or often reinterpreted, Jewish rituals such as Shabbat, or found new meaning in Jewish holidays. A number still struggle to square notions of organized religion with an attachment to spirituality, but value Reboot as a community to explore these dynamics.

“Reboot has been utterly vital in nurturing the development of my Jewish identity such that I now feel more confident interacting with those traditional bodies (our synagogue, synagogue-based preschool and religious school).”

— *Online Forum*



Even though the organization is still young, being part of Reboot has already informed professional and career choices, and inspired members’ creative outputs. Over a third (36 percent) report creating something (a piece of art, film, writing, or gathering) inspired by Jewish themes. Members of the online panel recount rich anecdotes of work shaped by Reboot, and how wider themes around family, memory and legacy have informed creativity.

Rebooters highly value membership in the Reboot community, and feel proud to be part of a vibrant and dynamic group. Members thrive off the energy and input of fellow Rebooters, and talk of how from their first Summit onwards they have gained inspiration from conversations and collaborations with others. The diversity of the community is held dear, with the mix of people of varying interests and backgrounds seen as the most important aspect of being part of the Reboot network (98 percent seeing it as important, with 56 percent seeing it as very important).

“I am half Jewish but never explored it personally until I was accepted into Reboot. Before Reboot I had never been accepted as Jewish because I am Jewish from my father’s side. Reboot has made me more aware; made me feel included and has become a critical network and community that keeps growing in my life.”

(*Survey*)

“Frankly, I came to Reboot with a very complicated, even negative relationship to Judaism. Growing up, my parent’s relationship to Judaism felt stale and obligation-based, not enriching. Reboot was instrumental in my opening myself back up to Judaism, redefining it for myself in a way that’s relevant and resonant, and re-engaging on my own terms.”

(Survey)

As Reboot looks to the future, members feel optimistic about the network. Rebooters place emphasis on continuing small-scale and local events in their respective cities. Members value intimate get-togethers, and the chance to consider Jewish topics with like-minded peers. When asked what Reboot could do in the near future, members most want to see a summit-like experience in their city (46 percent) and curated salons where Rebooters share their art and work (36 percent). A number also

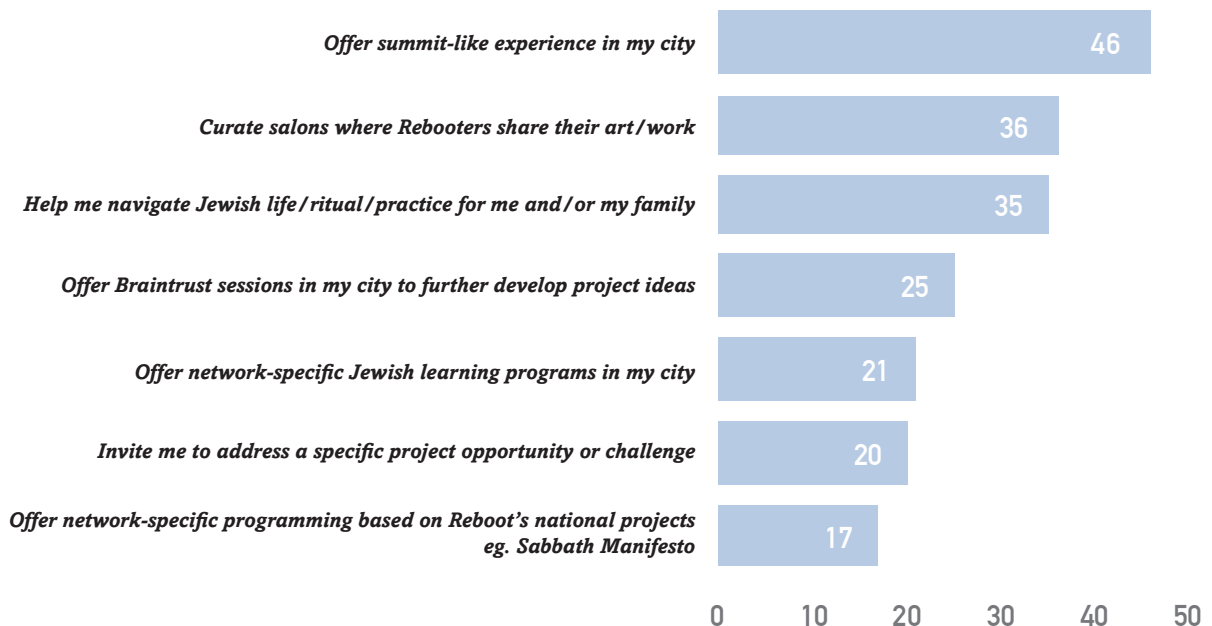
“A lot of our traditions are pretty old-country, but my nieces and nephews grew up here, and don’t have the context, so having had a less rote experience via Reboot has led to discussions between my sister and me about how we can make the holidays more interactive, relevant and meaningful for them.”

(Online Forum)

express a desire for Camp, a weekend gathering of Rebooters from all cohorts, to come back.

Reboot should consider how to connect to members’ needs around family life and bringing up children, and also look at how further initiatives can strengthen the bonds built at the initial summits.

Here’s a list of things Reboot could do in the near future. Pick the two things you think Reboot should prioritize.



“Reboot puts Judaism in play, makes it active and alive. It presents the same big question, but from dozens of angles a year: What am I going to do with my Jewishness? It asks questions that beg answers. Questions that cannot be ignored. Dozens of times a year, those questions put me in play, and those questions pull me toward interacting with Jewishness.”

(Online Forum)