



“From every human being there rises a light” . . .

—Baal Shem Tov

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The eighteenth-century founder of Hasidism, known as the Baal Shem Tov, lets each person know that he or she is capable of bringing “light” to the world. The commentary to this poster explores the metaphors of light and darkness in the context of multiple calls of the Baal Shem Tov that we each find our light(s) to shine and spread.

- In religion and art, light is often a metaphor. What are some possible meanings of “light” as it is used in this quotation?
- What people can you point to (either from the past or present) have lived their lives according to this quotation? What kind of “light” did each one share? What “darkness” did they light up?
- What “light” in your own life and personality would you like to strengthen? What might help you do so?

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

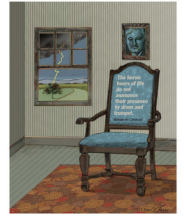
Each image calls out to us to examine it, to note our thoughts and feelings, and relate these impressions to the quotation. Often clues in the artwork suggest meaning and invite interpretation.

In nature, light enables us to see color. Graphic designer Tom Geismar illustrates our quotation by combining color, light, and people in the image.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Why might the artist have used a silhouette, not faces?
- Is light more closely associated with the body or the mind? What do the images on this poster suggest?
- If you had designed this poster, what different images might you have used to illustrate the quotation? Are there any advantages to Geismar’s choices?

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“The heroic hours of life do not announce their presence by drum and trumpet.”

—Benjamin Cardozo

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The commentary to this poster points to the silent heroes who make their mark in the world. Supreme Court Justice Cardozo urges us to seek those heroes who are not “larger than life,” but rather exhibit quiet heroism and bravery in the midst of everyday life.

- What might Cardozo mean by the reference to “drum and trumpet”? What situations are announced by drum and trumpet? Are heroes usually found in those settings?
- What characterizes a hero, or a “heroic hour”?
- Does everyone become a hero at some point in his or her life? How so?
- Can you think of a heroic act you were able to perform? How did it feel? Were you announced by “drum and trumpet”?

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Graphic designer Milton Glaser uses perspective and invites us to explore the layering of private lives, quiet heroism, and public triumph.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Describe the objects found in the different sections of the image. How do they contrast with one another?
- What do you think is symbolized by the quotation in the armchair under the portrait of Cardozo?
- Why might Glaser have included a thunderstorm, but not a drum or trumpet in this image?

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“A human being is like a letter of the alphabet: to produce a word, it must combine with another.”

—Benjamin Mandelstamm

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Benjamin Mandelstamm, a nineteenth-century Jewish Enlightenment figure, challenges individuals to join together—like letters that compose words. The commentary to this poster sheds light on some details of Mandelstamm’s past, and concludes that only when working together can we rebuild, rethink, and shape a culture.

- How do you understand the comparison between people and letters/words? What happens when there are missing letters in a word? What about when there are too many letters in a word? How can you relate these questions to human beings?
- What human “combinations” do you see around you? Which ones are central to your life?
- Other posters and quotations in this series also deal with the challenge of the individual versus the community. How does Mandelstamm’s quotation relate to Hillel’s teaching, “if I am only for myself, what am I?” How does Mandelstamm’s statement about the alphabet compare with the Midrashic statement, “a community is too heavy to carry alone”?

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

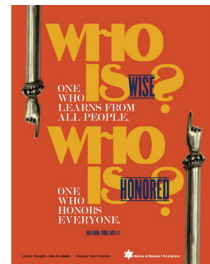
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Graphic designer Carin Goldberg brings the alphabet alive in her depiction of this quotation.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- What was your experience in finding the quotation embedded in the image? How did you feel when you found it?
- What do you think Goldberg meant to convey by the following elements:
 - o Most of the letters are uppercase.
 - o Punctuation marks are interspersed.
 - o Some letters are filled in, others are circled, and still others are crossed out.
 - o Some words are grouped together.

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“Who is wise? One who learns from all people. Who is honored? One who honors everyone.”

—Ben-Zoma, Pirke Avot 4:1

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

These famous teachings of the second-century sage Ben-Zoma emphasize the mutuality in human relationships. The commentary suggests that, according to Ben-Zoma, both wisdom and honor can be attained only when we involve others—learning from them or honoring them.

- What other answers could you compose to Ben-Zoma’s questions, “who is wise?” and “who is honored?” How do Ben-Zoma’s answers differ from yours?
- Why might Ben-Zoma emphasize that the wise person must learn “from all people”? Why not just from other wise people?
- Similarly, Ben-Zoma teaches that to be honored, you must honor everyone. Why doesn’t it suffice to honor those who deserve it?
- Can you share a personal experience with one of these teachings?

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

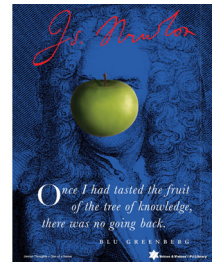
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Alan Peckolick’s work uses a simple design, minimal images, and a variety of fonts and colors to depict Ben-Zoma’s teachings.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- How do fonts and colors play a role in depicting the quotation?
- What is the significance of the two yads (Torah pointers)? Why are they pointing in opposite directions?

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“Once I had tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge, there was no going back.”

—Blu Greenberg

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Blu Greenberg strove to break gender barriers and redefine what it means to be a modern Orthodox Jewish woman. Here she shares her experience of harmonizing feminism with Orthodox Judaism. In the quotation, Greenberg makes a Biblical reference to tasting the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

- What kind of “knowledge” is associated with the tree of knowledge in the biblical story?
- Why was there no “going back” for Greenberg? What had changed after she tasted the “fruit of the tree of knowledge”?
- Have you been exposed to knowledge that changed your perspective and showed you that “there was no going back”?

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Designer Henry Steiner employs the images of Sir Isaac Newton and the apple to illustrate Greenberg’s words.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Why do you think the artist decided to make Sir Isaac’s face and signature prominent?
- What special connection does the apple have to both the quotation and the image? What is suggested by the fact that the apple actually covers Sir Isaac’s face?
- What other images of knowledge could have been employed to depict Greenberg’s quotation?

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“A community is too heavy to carry alone.”

—Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:10

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The commentary to this Midrashic teaching suggests two aspects to consider: That one seeks out others as a community in which to live and practice Judaism, and that one must put aside personal fulfillment or ambition for the good of the community. True religious and spiritual development is possible, suggests the commentary, only when we function as a community, and not as individuals.

- What constitutes a “community”?
- Do you agree with the idea that people are better off in a community than on their own? Why or why not?
- What communities do you belong to? What shared responsibilities exist in each of these communities?
- Other posters and quotations also deal with the challenge of the individual versus the community. How does this Midrashic quotation relate to Hillel’s teaching, “if I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?” Or, with the quotation from Mandelstamm, “a human being is like a letter of the alphabet: to produce a word, it must combine with another”?

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

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In this collage, designer Ivan Chermayeff challenges us to think about what it means to be a community and what happens when a community is “too heavy to carry alone.”

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- What adjectives would you use to describe the collage? What feelings does it trigger?
- What elements did Chermayeff use to depict community? Do these images describe all communities?
- What role do the hands play? What do they add to the depiction of the quotation?

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“Man’s life depends on the trees of the field.”

—Adapted from Deuteronomy 20:19

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Two different lessons were drawn out from this verse in the commentary: On the one hand, humankind must act responsibly toward trees/nature because our lives depend on them. At the same time, the trees/nature needs mankind to tend and protect them. Humankind and trees/nature are, thus, engaged in a mutual relationship: if we care for the earth and its resources, the earth will care and provide for us.

- Can you think of current examples of the mutuality and partnership between mankind and earth?
- How would you describe the major challenges in preserving nature, versus needing the resources of nature?
- What are you personally inspired to contribute toward the mutual relationship between humankind and nature?

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

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Designer George Tscherny’s composition interprets the Deuteronomy verse with minimal, but thought-provoking, imagery.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Why do you think Tscherny chose a pear to depict this quotation? How would the effect be different had he used the image of a tree?
- Why do you think the artist put a human face on the pear?
- What emotions does this image evoke?

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“Most of the things worth doing in the world were declared impossible before they were done.”

—Louis Brandeis

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The commentary provides background about Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis who fought for social justice and civil liberties. Justice Brandeis’s quotation is linked to both his legal work and his support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

- What examples of “declared impossible” come to mind when you read this quotation?
- What different types of “impossible” are there?
- Have you been in a situation where your ideas or plans faced opposition? Did you prevail, and if so, how?

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In artist R.O. Blechman’s signature style, he depicts characters in an evocative narrative to interpret Brandeis’s words.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- What is happening between the characters? How are they dressed, and what might their attire represent?
- What meaning can you attribute to the wheel? To the bubbles?
- What emotions does this image arouse in you?

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“A miracle cannot prove what is impossible; it only confirms what is possible.”

—Maimonides

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The commentary to this poster seeks to understand how Maimonides, the twelfth-century rationalist philosopher, could accept the possibility of miracles. Maimonides finds miracles in what already exists and has been proven possible.

- What examples of miracles can you point to that involve something “impossible,” something not yet in existence?
- What other examples can you suggest of miracles that confirm “what is possible”? How do we identify both types of miracles?
- Are you equally comfortable accepting both categories of miracles? Why or why not?
- What other conflicts exist between science and faith?

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

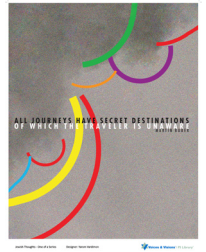
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Designer and illustrator Seymour Chwast offers a vivid depiction of Maimonides and his teaching about miracles.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the illustration?
- Which “miracle stories” are depicted in this illustration? Is there any significance in their placement?
- Which category of miracles is depicted? How does the artist’s interpretation of the quotation compare with Daniel Gordis’s commentary? Would you have expected other examples of miracles based on the commentary?

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“All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware.”

—Martin Buber

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The commentary to Martin Buber’s teaching reads Buber as echoing the story of Abraham and his journey to the land of Israel, reminding us that at every turn, life is a journey. The commentator compares this with the cycle that leads Jews on an annual journey through the Torah, only to begin anew each year. We are challenged by Buber to constantly strive for growth.

- What kinds of journeys are there in life? What could be “secret destinations” of a journey? For what reasons could the traveler be “unaware” of them?
- Think about your own life. Was there a journey you didn’t realize you were on until you reached your “destination”? How was your journey a life-changing experience?
- What process do you use, or could you use, to glean the most out of life’s journeys?

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Israeli designer Yarom Vardimon depicts Buber’s quotation by using simple shapes and colors.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Do you see any significance to the colors, lines, and background? How do they convey the concepts of “journey” and “traveler”?
- What might be the artist’s intent in the layout of the quotation? In the black and white letters?
- What emotions does this image evoke in you?

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“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?”

—Rabbi Hillel, Pirke Avot 1:14

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

These famous teachings of Hillel offer the key to leading a balanced and fulfilling life. The commentary divides Hillel’s teachings into two lessons: First, to strike a balance between attending to one’s personal needs and those of others; and second, never to miss an opportunity by postponing or delaying action.

- What people can you point to fulfill “if I am not for myself” but overlook, “but if I am only for myself”? What about the reverse?
- Do you know people who successfully balance these two perspectives as Hillel charges? How do you manage the balancing act between caring for your own needs and those of others?
- Hillel’s second statement, “if not now, when?” urges us not to procrastinate. Is there something you have been thinking about starting, but have not started? What would help you take the first step?
- Other posters and quotations also deal with the challenge of the individual versus the community. How does this quotation compare with, “a community is too heavy to carry alone” or “a human being is like a letter of the alphabet: to produce a word, it must combine with another”?

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Artist and illustrator Daniel Bennett Schwartz paints a multilayered portrait to depict Hillel’s teachings.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Is the entire quotation illustrated in the painting, or only part of it?
- How are the faces placed in the painting? Is the focus on one or more faces? Why do you think the artist illustrated the quotation in this way?
- Does this painting offer a different reading of the quotation from that explicated in the commentary? Can you reinterpret the quotation in light of the image?

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“When I marched in Selma, I felt my legs were praying.”

—Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The commentary to this poster points to the transcendental nature of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s famous march in Selma for civil rights. Heschel discovered profound religious meaning in acts of social justice and in the civil rights movement.

- What does Heschel mean that marching for civil rights in Selma with Martin Luther King, Jr. felt as if his “legs were praying”? How can a march be compared to prayer?
- How can the act of promoting social justice become a religious experience for someone? Can you think of other situations in which mundane experiences are infused with, and sanctified by, spiritual meaning?
- Have you personally had a transcendent moment in which you felt the day-to-day transformed into a spiritual experience?

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Graphic designer Paula Scher’s image draws us back to the civil rights movement of the 1960s during which Americans rallied to end discrimination and grant equal rights to persons of color.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Civil rights marches often drew thousands of participants. Why do you think the artist chose to depict just one marcher?
- Why might the artist have chosen to depict only the lower, bottom half of the figure, and not the face?
- Does this image convey the notion of praying, mentioned in the quotation? How so?

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“There is nothing more whole than a broken heart.”

—Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The commentary to this quotation reflects upon challenging life experiences that seem to “break” us, but end up strengthening each of us as a person. In a similar vein, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk celebrates the completeness of a broken heart. This oxymoron requires our attention and clarification.

- How can the same heart be both “broken” and “whole”?
- Can you think of examples of people who grew and became more “whole” through life experiences that appeared to “break” them?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation? How did you move from brokenness to growth and wholeness?
- Does this quotation about brokenness say the same as does the quotation of Rabbi Nachman of Breslau, “if you believe breaking is possible, believe fixing is possible”? How are the statements similar—and different?

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Designer Michael Peters conveys the meaning of the rabbi’s quotation by using a single image on a solid-colored background.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Why do you think Peters uses two bandages to create the heart, and not a single heart-shaped bandage?
- Compare this image with the one depicting the quotation of Rabbi Nachman of Breslau, “if you believe breaking is possible, believe fixing is possible.” What message does each poster convey about the themes of brokenness, healing, and fixing?

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“If you believe breaking is possible, believe fixing is possible.”

—Rabbi Nachman of Breslau

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Rabbi Nachman of Breslau wrote of a world that is broken. Here, however, he offers a glimmer of hope: by looking beyond the brokenness, one can begin the process of fixing and healing.

- What examples of “breaking” can you think of that “fixing” seems possible? Can all broken things be fixed? Can something broken ever be put back together perfectly?
- How does Rabbi Nachman’s statement explain the process of return and repentance that we engage in before the High Holidays? What types of relationships do we seek to repair and fix? Can broken relationships ever be completely fixed?
- Is there a link between these words and the quotation of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk: “There is nothing more whole than a broken heart.” How are the messages similar—and different?

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Graphic designer Art Paul offers a fragmented portrait to illustrate this quotation.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Why do you think the artist chose a broken face, and not any number of other broken items?
- What feeling is conveyed by the fragmented, pieced-together face?
- How is the concept of fixing addressed in this illustration?

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“Love is stronger than death.”

—Song of Songs 8:6

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The commentary interprets this verse from Song of Songs as instructing us to “live lovingly” and “help life win out in this world.” By valuing life over death, and choosing to live our lives infused with love, we can overcome the challenges that death ultimately poses.

- From where does love get its strength? If death is our ultimate end, why is love stronger than death?
- What happens to life if we allow death to overshadow it?
- How does the larger context in Song of Songs shed more light on this quotation? In this passage, the male lover professes his great love for his beloved: “Bind me as a seal upon your heart, a sign upon your arm. For love is stronger than death, its jealousy bitter as the grave. Even its sparks are a raging fire, a devouring flame. Great seas cannot extinguish love. No river can sweep it away.”

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

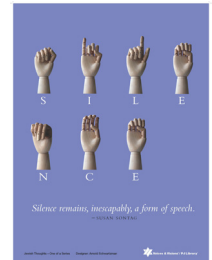
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Israeli designer Dan Reisinger’s modern-looking graphic offers a powerful interpretation of this quotation.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- What is the relationship between the words “love” and “live”? How do the colors contribute to this relationship?
- Is death represented at all? What message is Reisinger conveying by the absence of “death”?
- What personal emotions does this image bring out?

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“Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech.”

—Susan Sontag

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Susan Sontag was a prolific writer, a social activist, and a cultural critic who understood the impact and potential of silence. The commentary cites the example of silence at a shiva house to illustrate how silence sometimes is a powerful response. What does it mean to be silent? Is silence simply an absence of words or speech, or is it something else entirely?

- What forms of communication exist without speech?
- Silence can be powerful, but not all silences are the same. Think about a time when people remained silent and did not speak up against an injustice. What does their silence say?
- What about the opposite case, such as a “moment of silence”? In such a case, what does the silence convey?

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Designer Arnold Schwartzman uniquely illustrated the words of Sontag to add a further dimension to her quotation.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Why do you think the artist chose to represent the quotation with sign language? What other images might have been used to portray silence?
- The hands on the poster are mechanical and artificial. What do you think the artist is trying to suggest about speech and silence by using a mannequin’s hand?
- Why might have Schwartzman broken up the word “silence”?

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“I found a fruitful world, because my ancestors planted it for me. Likewise I am planting for my children.”

—Talmud, Taanit 23a

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The commentary notes the background to this Talmudic statement: This is the answer of Choni, a first-century BCE sage and miracle worker, to justify his planting a tree that will not bear fruit for seventy years. Choni suggests that much of what we do in this world may not help us directly, but future generations will reap the benefits.

- What does the story of Choni and the carob tree teach us about how to live our lives?
- What “fruits” did you inherit from your ancestors?
- Do you view yourself like Choni, who is “planting” for future generations? What are you involved in that will not bear fruit for a long time?
- What will be your legacy? How would you like to be remembered by your family? By your community? By the world?
- How does this quotation compare with Rabbi Tarfon’s teaching about the responsibility to partake in “the work of perfecting the world”? What is similar and what is different in these messages?

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Designer Mervyn Kurlansky’s image uses patterns of color, creating shapes that build on one another.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted Choni’s statement without the image?
- What is the central image of this poster? What other image(s) might have been used to depict the quotation?
- What do you think the artist chose to convey with the different shapes, patterns, and colors in the image?

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"It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but you are not free to desist from it either."

—Rabbi Tarfon, Pirke Avot 2:21

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

According to the commentary, this famous adage in Pirke Avot encourages us to join the chain of the covenantal legacy and contribute our share toward perfecting the world. Rabbi Tarfon tells us that, while no single person or generation is responsible to perfect the world, each person or generation is obliged to do its part.

- Why do you think Rabbi Tarfon teaches that no one person is responsible for finishing "the work of perfecting the world"? If we "are not free to desist," what are we actually required to do in and for this world?
- What life lessons can be learned from Rabbi Tarfon's outlook?
- What role do you play in the multigenerational task of "finishing the work"? Give an example of how you are involved in helping to change or improve the world.
- How does this quotation compare with the Talmudic statement by Choni about intergenerational planting: "I found a fruitful world, because my ancestors planted it for me. Likewise I am planting for my children"? What is similar and what is different in these messages?

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Each image calls out to us to examine it, to note our thoughts and feelings, and relate these impressions to the quotation. Often clues in the artwork suggest meaning and invite interpretation.

Illustrator and designer Bob Gill depicts Rabbi Tarfon's teaching with a compelling and thought-provoking image.

- How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- Why do you think the artist chose to illustrate the world in this way? Does the form remind you of familiar games or toys?
- Why do you think Gill made the structure look as if it may topple, instead of resting on a firm foundation?
- What do you think the hand represents? Why do you think it is important to show a hand adding the next piece? Is this the final piece of the structure?

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