



Paper Tefillah

and Other New Work by Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik

Temple Israel Museum | Memphis, Tennessee | January 2012

My work always begins with text.

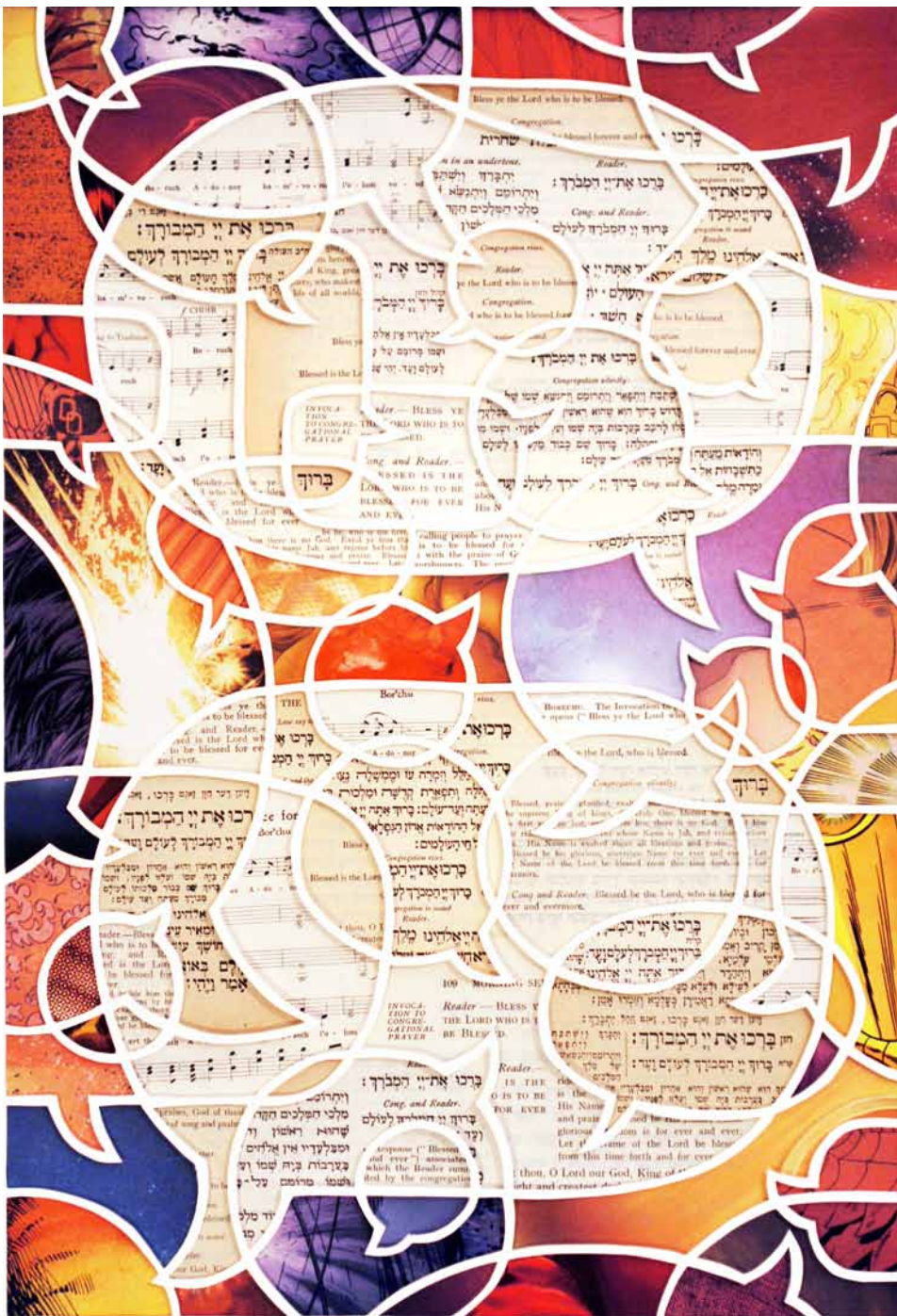
I am influenced by elements of the natural world that are touched by the Divine: the burning bush, the parting of the Red Sea, the orbits of the planets, the revelation at Sinai.

I often incorporate pieces of cut-up comic books, drawing upon the mythologies of that medium to reveal patterns and parallels with my ideas, the stories of our tradition, and the sacred words of our liturgy.

Each of the sixteen papercuts in “Paper Tefillah” represents a prayer in contemporary Jewish worship.

They are intended to convey the feeling of engaging in prayer — to reproduce in paper the worship experience — as well as to represent their meanings.

Each piece is cut from a single sheet of watercolor stock, backed with cut-up comics and cast-off prayerbooks that had been destined for ritual burial in the *genizah*.



Barchu

The Barchu marks the beginning of the formal prayer service, the moment when we stop being just a group of individuals and become a community praying together. In this papercut the many scattered conversations and individual prayers are represented in the multi-colored speech bubbles. When our voices come together in prayer they become the two larger speech bubbles in the center of the piece, the call and response of the Barchu — and the varied images and colors give way to the words of the prayer as our voices become one. The comics used to back this papercut come predominantly from “team-up” titles (such as “Marvel Team-Up” and DC’s “The Brave and the Bold”), in which heroes band together and find that their combined power is more than the sum of their individual strengths.

Various “team-up” titles

Aquaman, Sword of Atlantis #50 (Mar 2007)

JLA: Liberty and Justice — Alex Ross and Paul Dini (Dec 2003)

Marvel Triple Action #11 (Jun 1973)

Ronin #1 — Frank Miller (1983)

The Shadow #3 — Howard Chaykin (Jul 1986)

Wisdom #7 (2007)



Yotzeir

The Yotzeir is a morning prayer which praises God as the Creator of light. This papercut is structured after the Kabbalistic idea of the *sefirot*, which represent different aspects of God and are metaphorically understood as vessels containing God's light. In the creation of the world, the vessels burst and the light was scattered throughout existence; it is our responsibility to fix the vessels by engaging in *tikkun olam* — repair of the world — by seeking out these sparks of light and bringing them together. The ten vessels as represented in this papercut are at the center of a faceted jewel which sparkles with light. The papercut incorporates at its center an image from a Firestorm comic; Firestorm has the ability to rearrange the atomic and subatomic structure of matter (a type of creation). This papercut also includes cut-up pieces of the mutant heroine Dazzler, who converts music and sound into various types of light, and the teenage heroine Dagger, who fights evil with daggers of light alongside her partner Cloak.

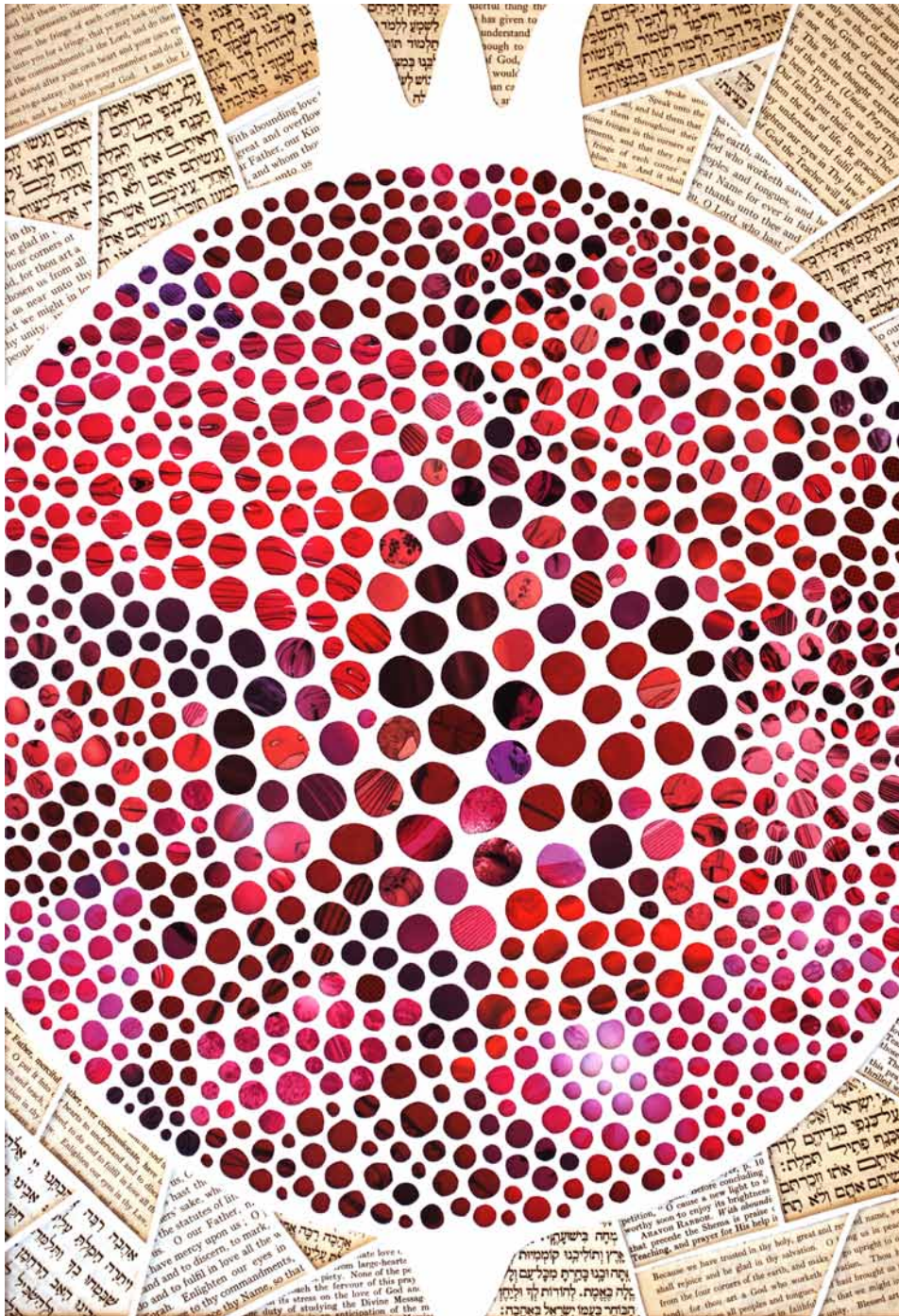
Cloak and Dagger #1 (Jul 1985); Cloak and Dagger: Predator and Prey (1988)
 Dazzler #2 (Apr 1981)
 Elric — Free Comic Book Day (2011)
 The Eternals — Jack Kirby #6 (1976)
 Fury of the Firestorm #1 (Nov 2011)
 Green Lantern: Fear Itself 100-Page Spectacular (Apr 2011)
 Nemesis #1 (2010)
 Omega Men #5 (Apr 2007)
 Planetary — Special Edition #1 (Jun 2009)
 Ronin — Book 1, #1 — Frank Miller (Jul 1983)
 Shadowpact #7 (2007)
 Shatter — Digital Graphic Novel — Gillis (1984)
 Trinity #40 — Kurt Busiek (May 2009)
 Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters — Limited Series #1 (Sep 2006); #5 (Jan 2007)



MaAriv Aravim

This prayer is the nighttime parallel to the Yotzeir; is the prayer that praises God for bringing on the evening, for ordering the stars and the planets, for the cycle of the seasons and the immutable processes of the universe. We praise God for keeping the heavenly bodies spinning in their orbits, and the papercut is designed to reflect these orbits. At the center is a *hamsa*, an ancient symbol of heavenly protection, with a mystical eye in the center backed with words from the prayer itself. The *hamsa* can be seen as a representation of the hand of God, rolling light into darkness and darkness into light. The piece is composed of various space-related and dark-toned comics, to convey a sense of the evening. One of the main comic book heroes used in the background is Cloak, who harnesses the power of darkness to fight evil alongside his partner Dagger. The piece also features some comic captions which are recontextualized to explore God's role and presence in the universe.

DC Universe #0 (2008)
 Batman #700 (2010)
 Cloak and Dagger #1 and #2 (1985)
 Cloak and Dagger: Predator and Prey (1988)
 Cloak and Dagger — Spider Island #1 (2011)
 Flash #1 — Brightest Day (2010)
 Green Lantern #45 (2009)
 JSA Classified #24 — Dr. Mid-Nite (2007)
 The Legion #24 (2003)
 R.E.B.E.L.S. #10 (2010)
 Silver Surfer #2 (1987)
 Strange Tales Featuring Cloak and Dazzler #9 (1987)
 Thor #400 — DeFalco (Feb 1989)



Ahavah Rabah

The rabbis teach that the 613 *mitzvot* in the Torah are mirrored in the pomegranate, which contains 613 seeds. That's why the pomegranate is the central image in the papercut of this morning prayer, in which we thank God for the gift of Torah. When we read in this prayer that God gathers together people from all four corners of the Earth we gather the four corners of our *tallit* together. For this reason, parts of the prayer are in the four corners of the papercut alongside the biblical verses which command us to wear *tzitzit*. The knots of the *tzitzit* number 613 as well, also representing the commandments. Within the pomegranate are cut-up pieces of characters known for the adherence to a strict code of behavior, including Superman and Captain America. The papercut also features the character of Star Sapphire, whose power comes from great love — the translation of “ahavah rabah.”

Characters include:

Captain America

Metamorpho

Starbuck — from Battlestar Galactica

Star Sapphire

Superman

Thor

Watchmen — by Alan Moore



Ahavat Olam

This is the evening counterpart to the Ahavah Rabah; it is another prayer in which we thank God for the gift of Torah. In this piece the Torah is represented as the *Etz Chaim* — the Tree of Life. The leaves of the tree in this papercut are composed of the letters of the *Aleph-Bet*, the building blocks of the Torah. Within the leaves are sections of the prayer and the Hebrew names of the five books of Moses. All of the comics used to back this papercut are from Superman comics, who adheres to a strict moral code and stands for truth and justice. This is used to reflect the code that we construct out of the teachings of the Torah, and which holds at its core the concept of justice. Because of his color scheme, Superman himself is not represented, but those he loved most are; observant eyes can find evidence of Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen throughout the piece.

Superman #350 — Curt Swan (Dec 1978)
 Superman Family #195 (Jun 1979) and #217 (Apr 1982)
 Superman #1 — John Byrne reboot (Jan 1987)
 Superman #3 — John Byrne (Mar 1987)
 Superman Annual #2 — John Byrne (1988)
 Superman: Man of Steel #63 (Dec 1996)
 Superman #123 — first appearance of "Superman Blue" (May 1997)
 Adventures of Superman #424 — Wolfman and Ordway (Jan 1987)
 Superman: Peace on Earth — Alex Ross and Paul Dini (Jan 1999)
 Adventures of Superman #620 (Nov 2003), #594 (Mar 1997), and #619 (Oct 2003)
 Action Comics #832 (Dec 2005)
 Kingdom Come Special: Superman One-Shot — Alex Ross (Jan 2009)

Shema

This is a prayer about the oneness of God. We approach this concept through a series of doorways each in the shape of the Hebrew letter *shin*. On a *mezuzah*, the *shin* stands for Shaddai (one of our names for God). In this papercut, the *shin* represents the *mezuzah* as well as the first letter of the word “shema.” There is a custom to cover your eyes when you say the Shema; as we do we leave behind the busy distractions of the world. The papercut uses a number of different pieces of comics to convey the distractions of the world in the outer portions of the piece, getting more cohesive and focused closer to the center. A caption bubble exhorts us to “Say it... say it again” — as we are taught to say the Shema many times a day; when we rise and before we lay down, and always to have it before us, in our hearts and minds. One of the comics cut up for the papercut is “Countdown to Mystery,” which is where this piece puts us: focusing in, concentrating on the mystery and oneness of God.

300 #2 — Frank Miller and Lynne Varley (Jun 1998)

Countdown to Mystery #1 (Nov 2007)

Eternals #7 (Jan 1977) and #18 (Dec 1978) — Jack Kirby

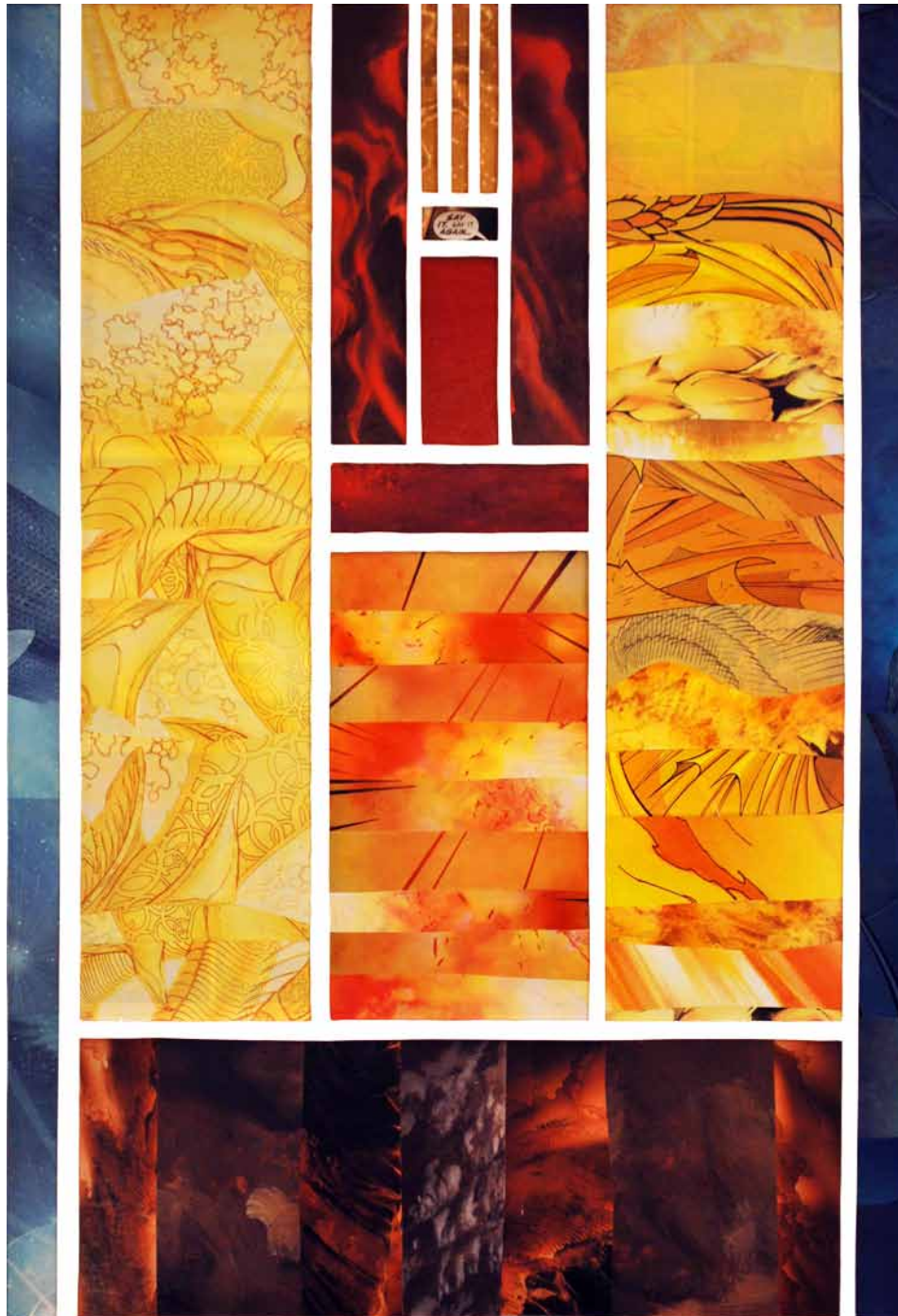
Green Lantern: Fear Itself 100-Page Spectacular (Apr 2011)

Heralds of Galactus #2 (May 2007)

Kingdom Come #4 — Mark Waid and Alex Ross (1996)

Secret Origins Starring JLA #32 (Nov 1988)

Shadowpact #13 (Jul 2007)





V'ahavta

This prayer is really an extension of the Shema. The prayer reminds us that *ha-d'varim ha'eileh* (“these words”) should be in our hearts at all times; that we should remember these commandments and teach them to our children, and speak them wherever we are. The papercut represents text, as opposed to image — the black and white and gray of printed words. At the same time it is a representation of God’s presence in our lives, the Pillar of Cloud that led us through the desert by day, and the Pillar of Fire by night (seen behind the words at the bottom of the papercut). In the center of the Pillar of Cloud is the yad which we use to read from the Torah, where this prayer is found. The comics used in this papercut are all from titles about younger heroes, including the Teen Titans, Infinity Inc., and The Legion of Super-Heroes.

Infinity Inc. #52 (Jul 1988), #3 (Jan 2008)

Legion #22 (Sep 2003), #24 (Nov 2003)

Tales of the Teen Titans #57 (Sep 1985)

The New Teen Titans (Wolfman/Perez) — #1 (Aug 1984), #3 (Nov 1984), #5 (Feb 1985), #13 (Oct 1985), #20 (May 1986)

Teen Titans #4 (Dec 2003), #7 (Mar 2004), #13 (Sep 2004), #35 (Jun 2006)



Geulah

Redemption is the subject of this prayer, and its papercut has as its primary imagery three upraised fists, breaking their chains. In the Geulah we speak about God as our Rescuer and our Redeemer. Redemption is more than no longer being slaves; it is being truly free people, owning our destiny and moving forward. In this papercut I have represented this freedom with outstretched hands, backed with numerous cut-up comic panels featuring people of many races and backgrounds — because none of us can be truly free until we are all free. The background is composed of cut-up and re-stitched pieces from the “Blackest Night” series, in which heroes are killed and brought back in an existence that mimics life but isn’t; they are controlled by an evil force that uses them against one another. Freedom is more than action; it is owning ourselves and our intentions and being free to serve God and ourselves.

Blackest Night (various)

JLA: Liberty and Justice — Alex Ross and Paul Dini (2003)

Shazam: Power of Hope — Ross and Dini (2000)

Superman: Peace on Earth — Ross and Dini (Jan 1999)

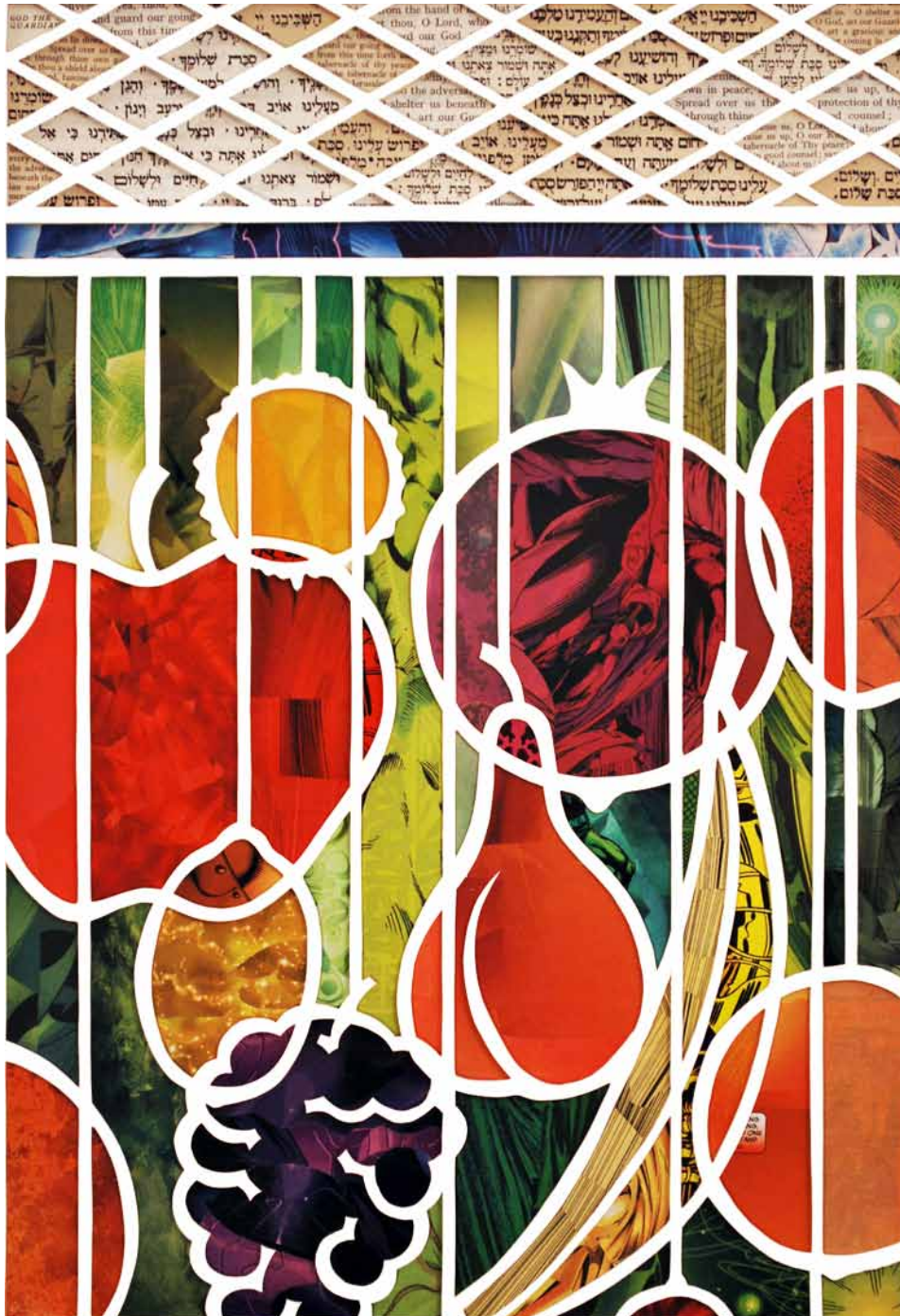
The Ultimates #13 (2004)



Mi Chamocha

This prayer comes from *Shirat Hayam* — the “Song of the Sea” which celebrates our crossing the Sea of Reeds as we fled from Egyptian slavery. This papercut focuses on the experience of marching through the sea, with walls of water towering above us, held back by the power of God. This piece attempts to place the viewer in the waves, surrounded by God’s power. Within the papercut are various exclamations of joy and wonder and awe, courtesy some speech bubbles from comics. Up through the center of the waves float the words of the prayer. Aquaman and Sub-Mariner are represented in the background, as characters whose existence is linked to water.

Aquaman
Justice League International
Sub-Mariner



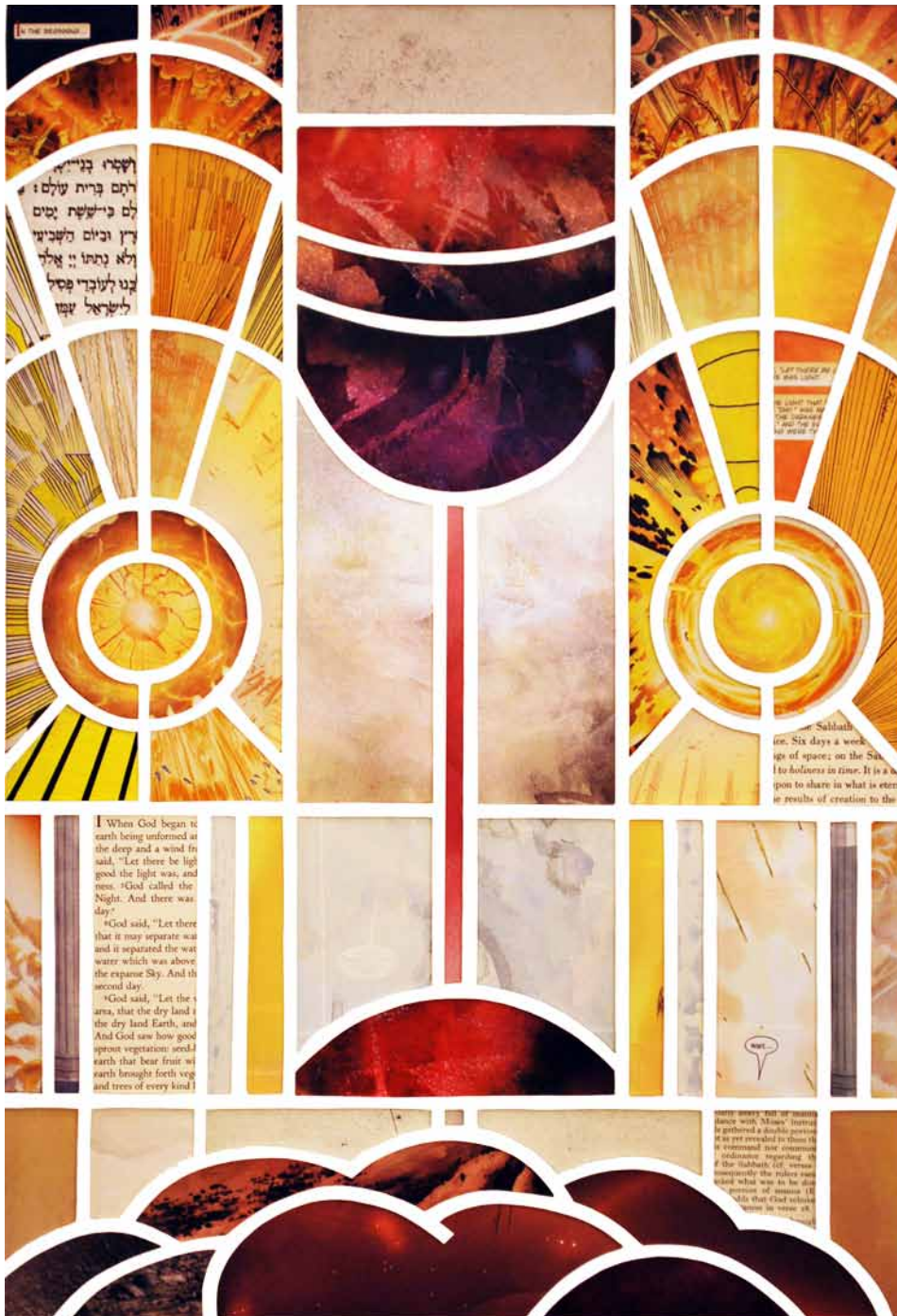
Hashkiveinu

In this evening prayer we ask God to shelter us in a *sukkat shlomecha* — a shelter of peace, using the metaphor of the booth we build during the festival of Sukkot to remind us that safety and protection come from God. The papercut presents the viewer as within that *sukkah*, seeing the rich colors of hanging fruit, covered by a lattice of natural fibers made up of the prayer itself. As we leave the day behind and darkness settles around us, we are surrounded in safety, protected by the words of the prayer, and sheltered by God. The blue strip of sky seen between lattice and fruit is pieced together from the character Dove, from the title “Hawk and Dove”; she is a heroine who embodies power and peace.

The Eternals — Kirby
 Green Lantern: Fear Itself 100-Page Spectacular (Apr 2011)
 Hawk and Dove #2 (Dec 2011)
 Justice, Inc. — Book One (1989)
 Powerless — with The Watcher (2005)
 Spectre #10 (Jan 1988)
 Warlock and the Infinity Watch #12 (Jan 1992)
 Watchmen — Alan Moore (1986)
 X-Factor #106 (Sep 1994)

Additional characters include:

The Blackhawks
 Dr. Fate
 Green Arrow
 The Hulk



V'shamru

This prayer celebrates Shabbat, the day of rest, the seventh day of creation, when God rested from the labors of making the world. Shabbat is celebrated with two candles, a cup of wine, and two loaves of challah. This papercut speaks to this celebration, including each of those ritual objects, but also to creation itself, with captions and speech bubbles that hint at creation's grandeur. In some of them we see how the writers of comics sometimes leverage the words of the Torah to further their stories.

300 #2 — Frank Miller and Lynne Varley (Jun 1998)

Batman: Lovers and Madmen (2008)

Flash #349 — Infantino (Sep 1985)

Flash: Rebirth #4 (Sep 2009)

Green Lantern Corps: Brightest Day #55 (Feb 2011)

Marvel Universe: The End #6 of 6 (Aug 2003)

Thor #372 — Simonson and Buscema Pin-up

Thor #400 — DeFalco (Feb 1989)

Thor #449 — DeFalco (Jul 1992)

Thunderbolts #108 (Jan 2007)

Ultimate Mystery #1 — Brian Michael Bendis (Sep 2001)

The Sabbath by A.J. Heschel (H. Wolff, 1951)

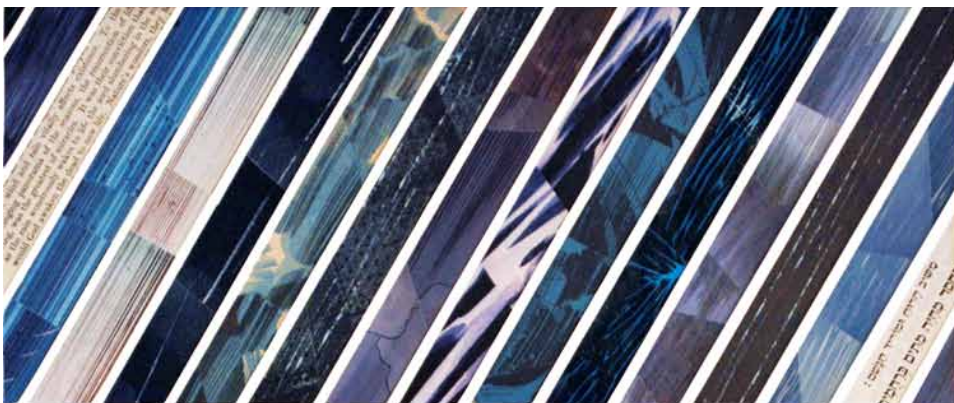


Avot

By invoking the names of our ancestors, we reintroduce ourselves to God with this prayer, the first in the part of the service that we call the Amidah. We reference the patriarchs and matriarchs, and the tent is a symbol of our people: it is Abraham and Sarah's tent, where strangers could find hospitality. It is the tents of all Israel, referenced in the Hebrew at top: *Ma tovu ohalecha* — “How good are your tents.” Within those letters are stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel — each of whom revealed their concern for others through their words and actions. The tent is a patchwork of colors and textures to reflect the early nomadic lives of our people, and features comics that represent our best qualities, including the Fantastic Four, in a reference to the four patriarchs.

Fantastic Four (various)

Superman: Peace on Earth — Alex Ross and Paul Dini (Jan 1999)



Gevurot

This prayer celebrates the power of God, and the papercut which represents it focuses on the line we say between Sukkot and Pesach, asking God to bring rain in its proper season. In addition to controlling the weather, God raises up the fallen, heals the sick, and clothes the naked, all ways of revitalizing us — just as rains revitalize the soil, causing bright green shoots to grow. The vibrant green grass in this papercut is backed by pieces from the Green Lantern mini-series “Brightest Day.”

Batman #600 (May 1989)

Green Lantern Corps — Brightest Day #47 (Jun 2010)

Iron Man #179 (Feb 1984)





Shalom

The dove is a universal symbol for peace; likely because of its presence on Noah's Ark. We associate the dove with an end to trouble, and with peace. The dove in this papercut is in flight with wings unfurled, backed with comics featuring winged heroes who strive to bring peace and defend it, notably Angel from the X-Men, Hawkman, and Zauriel.

300 — Frank Miller and Lynne Varley (Jun 1998)

Air #1 (Oct 2008)

Hawkman #14 (Jun 2003) and #26 (May 2004)

Shadowpact #11 (May 2007) and #13 (Jul 2007)

Superman: Peace on Earth — Alex Ross and Paul Dini (Jan 1999)

Testament — Rushkoff #8 (Sep 2006)

X-Factor #1 (Feb 1986) and #15 (Apr 1987)

The Helmet of Fate: Zauriel #1 (Apr 2007)



Aleinu

This papercut features cut-up comics from numerous “first issues” in which writers and artists attempt to grapple with being in the presence of beings greater than themselves, including Jack Kirby’s “Eternals,” Douglas Rushkoff’s “Testament,” DC’s “Legends” mini-series, and Joshua Fialkov’s very recent “Last of the Greats.” As well, the Marvel character “The Watcher” is included.

Eternals #1 — Kirby (Jul 1976)

Last of the Greats #1 (Oct 2011)

Legends #1 — Byrne (Nov 1986)

Testament #1 — Rushkoff (Feb 2006)

1602: Part 6 — Neil Gaiman and Andy Kubert (Mar 2004)

Captain Victory #2 — Kirby (Jan 1982)

Green Lantern: Brightest Day #58 (Nov 2010)

Green Lantern: Fear Itself (Apr 2011)

Spectre #28 (Apr 1995)

Additional characters include:

The Fantastic Four

The Outsiders

Thor

The Watcher

White Tiger

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