

“For My Birthday”

by Yehuda Amichai

Thirty-two times I went out into my life,
each time causing less pain to my mother,
less to other people,
more to myself.

Thirty-two times I have put on the world
and still it doesn't fit me.
It weighs me down,
unlike the coat that now takes the shape of my body
and is comfortable
and will gradually wear out.

Thirty-two times I went over the account
without finding a mistake,
began the story
but wasn't allowed to finish it.

Thirty-two years I've been carrying along with me
my father's traits
and most of them I've dropped along the way,
so I could ease the burden.
And weeds grow in my mouth. And I wonder,
and the beam in my eyes, which I won't be able to remove,
has started to blossom with the trees in springtime.
And my good deeds grow smaller

and smaller. But
the interpretations around them have grown huge, as in
an obscure passage of the Talmud
where the text takes up less and less of the page
and Rashi and the other commentators
close in on it from every side.

And now, after thirty-two times,
I am still a parable
with no chance of becoming its meaning.
And I stand without camouflage before the enemy's eyes,
with outdated maps in my hand,
in the resistance that is gathering strength and between towers,
and alone, without recommendations
in the vast desert.

