

A Man in His Life Yehuda Amichai

A man in his life has no time to have
Time for everything.
He has no room to have room
For every desire. Ecclesiastes was wrong to claim that.

A man has to hate and love all at once,
With the same eyes to cry and to laugh
With the same hands to throw stones
And to gather them,
Make love in war and war in love.

And hate and forgive and remember and forget
And order and confuse and eat and digest
What long history does
In so many years.

A man in his life has no time.
When he loses he seeks
When he finds he forgets
When he forgets he loves
When he loves he begins forgetting.

And his soul is knowing
And very professional,
Only his body remains an amateur
Always. It tries and fumbles.
He doesn't learn and gets confused,
Drunk and blind in his pleasures and pains.

In autumn, he will die like a fig,
Shriveled, sweet, full of himself.
The leaves dry out on the ground,
And the naked branches point
To the place where there is time for everything.

1. In *Kohelet's* world, as many scholars now understand it, that Chapter 3 poem, TO EVERY SEASON, is making the case that every situation appears to have its own particular place or "cubby hole" in life, a discrete, almost inviolate position in the vast libretto of our lives. For *Amichai*, by contrast, the world appears substantially multifaceted, with its variety of feelings and actions - sometimes even the reverse of each other - existing side by side. Since there is no time for everything, life's opposites, the contradictions of being, must be grasped together and carried along simultaneously. What do you make of *Amichai's* recasting of *Kohelet's* words? Who better captures how your life has unfurled?
2. Several years back, at highly regarded Kenyon College in Ohio, the commencement speaker told this story: *There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says: "Morning boys, how's the water?" The two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes: "What the hell is water?"*

How do you understand this parable, applied to your lives, and the world in which you were raised and have nurtured others? Is the "water" of your life different than that which your loved ones have experienced, that world in which your children, and grandchildren "swim?" Or that your parents "swam" in? And what differences do you feel that makes, in your life, and in theirs? **And how come the young fish don't understand the question?**
3. Imagine you were in your late '70's, just winding up that appointment with your long-time primary care physician, who had just sent out a letter announcing her retirement. That notice had introduced a tender, nostalgic feeling into this last professional encounter. Seeking to end on a helpful, and also hopeful, note, the internist put these questions to you: *"Barry, the chart shows that you first came to see me as you were turning fifty. As you look back from where you are now, what would you say are the **life issues** that you have faced since then that did not occur to you when you first came to the office? And what about its counterpart? Which **life issues** seemed so important then that seem of much less consequence today?"*