

Before Whom Do You Stand? A Poem by Yehuda Amichai

בְּיוֹם כְּפוּר בְּשָׁנַת תַּשְׁכַּ"ח לְבִשְׁתִּי
בְּגָדֵי חַג כְּהִים וְהִלַכְתִּי לְעִיר הָעֵתִיקָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם.
עֲמַדְתִּי זְמַן רַב לִפְנֵי כּוֹךְ חֲנוּתוֹ שֶׁל עֲרָבִי,
לֹא רְחוֹק מִשַּׁעַר שְׁכָם, חֲנוּת
כְּפָתוּרִים וְרוֹכְסָנִים וְסָלִילֵי חוּטִים
בְּכָל צָבַע וְלַחְצָנִיּוֹת וְאַבְזָמִים.
אוֹר יָקָר וְצָבָעִים רַבִּים, כְּמוֹ אֲרוֹן-קֹדֶשׁ פְּתוּחַ.
אֶמְרָתִי לוֹ בְּלִבִּי שֶׁגַם לְאָבִי
הָיְתָה חֲנוּת כְּזֹאת שֶׁל חוּטִים וְכְפָתוּרִים.
הִסְבַּרְתִּי לוֹ בְּלִבִּי עַל כָּל עֲשָׂרוֹת הַשָּׁנִים
וְהַגּוֹרְמִים וְהַמְקַרִּים, שֶׁאֲנִי עֹכָשִׁיו פֹּה
וְחֲנוּת אָבִי שְׂרוּפָה שָׁם וְהוּא קָבוּר פֹּה.
כְּשֶׁסִּימַמְתִּי הָיְתָה שְׁעַת נְעִילָה.
גַּם הוּא הוֹרִיד אֶת הַתָּרִיס וְנָעַל אֶת הַשַּׁעַר
וְאֲנִי חֲזַרְתִּי עִם כָּל הַמְתַּפְּלָלִים הַבִּיָּתָה.

On Yom Kippur in the Year-of-Forgetting, 1967, I dressed
in dark holiday clothes and walked to the old city of Jerusalem.
I stood a long while in front of an Arab's alcove shop,
not far from the Damascus gate, a shop of
buttons and zippers and spools of thread
of every color as well as snaps and buckles.
A splendid light and many colors, like an open Holy Ark.
I said to him in my heart that my father too
had a shop like this of threads and buttons.
I explained to him in my heart about all of the decades
and the causes and events, such that I am now here
and my father's shop was burned there and he is buried here.
When I finished it was time for Ne'ilah/The Locking.
He too lowered the shutter and locked the gate
and I returned, with all the worshipers, home.

Yehuda Amichai, from: "Jerusalem, 1967"
Translation by Steven G. Sager

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