

WHAT KIND OF A PERSON

Yehuda Amichai

“What kind of a person are you,” I heard them say to me.
I’m a person with a complex plumbing of the soul,
Sophisticated instruments of feeling and a system
Of controlled memory at the end of the twentieth century,
But with an old body from ancient times
And with a God even older than my body.

I’m a person for the surface of the earth.
Low places, caves and wells
Frighten me. Mountain peaks
And tall buildings scare me.
I’m not like an inserted fork,
Not a cutting knife, not a stuck spoon.

I’m not flat and sly
Like a spatula creeping up from below.
At most I am a heavy and clumsy pestle
Mashing good and bad together
For a little taste
And a little fragrance.

Arrows do not direct me. I conduct
My business carefully and quietly
Like a long will that began to be written
The moment I was born.

Now I stand at the side of the street
Weary, leaning on a parking meter.
I can stand here for nothing, free.

I’m not a car. I’m a person,
A man-god, a god-man
Whose days are numbered. Hallelujah.

Translated from the Hebrew by Barbara and Benjmain Harshav, in *A Life of Poetry 1948-1994*,
HarperCollins, 1994.