

Favorite poems

by [Julia Spicher Kasdorf](#) in the [September 7, 2004](#) issue

These days, as some people are bent on making war and others equally determined to keep peace, I return to my former teacher, Yehuda Amichai, a German-born Jew who migrated to Palestine and grew up with the nation of Israel, a soldier, professor and poet. I am fond of "A man in his life" because, like much of Amichai's work, it exists in relation to the Hebrew scriptures--it is derived from them, and it plays and quarrels with them. Like many of his other poems, this one is troubled by history but cannot deny love; it seeks neither perfection nor purity, and instead finds comfort in the articulation of human experience. Among the poem's particular pleasures are its movement from the eternal text to the ephemeral body and its ironic celebration of the aging soul's wisdom, even as the body falters. The surprising final stanza can barely contain its gorgeous metaphor, delivering us to both death and the mystery beyond the limits of space and time. I could add that the poem may seem biased toward one gender--but then, so does the sacred text and culture it comes from--and who has time to go into that?

[A man in his life](#), by Yehuda Amichai.