

Stephen Mitchell studied with Soen Sa Nim from 1973-77 during which time he compiled and edited *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. From 1978-80 he was a student of Aitken Roshi. Other books include *Into the Whirlwind: A Translation of the Book of Job* (Doubleday, 1979), *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke* (Random House, 1982), *Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet* and *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (Random House, 1983, 1984), *Sonnets to Orpheus* (Simon & Schuster, October 1985), and *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* (Harper & Row, spring 1986).

I, 19

*Though the world keeps changing its form  
as fast as a cloud, still  
what is accomplished falls home  
to the Primeval.*

*Over the change and the passing.  
Larger and freer,  
soars your eternal song,  
god with the lyre.  
Never has grief been possessed,  
never has love been learned,  
and what removes us in death*

*is not revealed.  
Only the song through the land  
hallows and heals.*

II, 12

*Will transformation. Oh be inspired for the flame  
in which a Thing disappears and bursts into something else;  
the spirit of re-creation which masters this earthly form  
loves most the pivoting where you are no longer yourself.*

*What tightens into survival is already inert;  
how safe is it really in its inconspicuous gray?  
From far off a far greater hardness warns what is hard,  
and the absent hammer is lifted high!*

*He who pours himself out like a stream is acknowledged at last by Knowledge;  
and she leads him enchanted through the harmonious country  
that finishes often with starting, and with ending begins.*

*Every fortunate space that they softly pass through, astonished,  
is a child or grandchild of parting. And the transfigured Daphne,  
as she feels herself become laurel, wants you to change into wind.*

II, 16

*Over and over by us torn in two,  
the god is the hidden place that heals again.  
We are sharp-edged, because we want to know,  
but he is always scattered and serene.*

*Even the pure, the consecrated gift  
he takes into his world no other way  
than by positioning himself unmoved,  
to face the one end that is free.*

*Only the dead may drink  
from the source that we just hear, the unseen pool,  
when the god, mute, allows them with a gesture.*

*Here, to us, only the noise is offered.  
And the lamb keeps begging for its bell  
because of a more quiet instinct.*

I, 22

*We are the driving ones.  
Ah, but the step of time:  
think of it as a dream  
in what forever remains.*

*All that is hurrying  
soon will be over with;  
only what lasts can bring  
us to the truth.*

*Young men, don't put your trust  
into trials of flight,  
into the hot and quick.*

*All things already rest:  
darkness and morning light,  
flower and book.*

## ...and Poetry

III

*Brew us the magic in which all limits dissolve,  
spirit forever bent to the fire!  
That fathomless limit of evil, first, which revolves  
aslo around those who are resting and do not stir.*

*Dissolve with a few drops whatever excludes in the limit  
of the ages, which makes our past wisdom a fraud;  
for how deeply we have absorbed the Athenian sunlight  
and the mystery of the Egyptian falcon or god.*

*Don't rest until the boundary that keeps the sexes  
in meaningless conflict has disappeared.  
Open up childhood and the wombs of more truly expectant*

*generous mothers so that, shaming all that is empty,  
and not confused by the hindering wood,  
they may give birth to future rivers, augmenting the sea.*

VIII

*We have overheard fountains all our days.  
They sound to us almost like time.  
But much more closely do they keep pace  
with eternity's subtle rhythm.*

*The water is strange and the water is yours,  
from here and from far below.  
You are the fountain-stone, unawares,  
and all Things are mirrored in you.*

*How distant this is, yet deeply akin,  
long unriddled and never known,  
senseless, then perfectly clear.*

*Your task is to love what you don't understand.  
It grips your most secret emotion, and  
rushes away with it. Where?*

IV

*Seek no more than what the stela knows,  
and the mild image sculpted in the stone:  
almost cheerfully, with a lightness, as  
though they were exempt from earthly pain.*

*Experience no further than the pure  
direction in the world's withdrawing stream—  
ah, perhaps the icy jewels she wore  
in the dimly lighted room.*

*Be all the more consoled by what you see in  
the elements that are most truly yours.  
Wind consoles, and fire is consolation.*

*Here and There: you must be gripped by both,  
strangely without a difference. Otherwise  
you drain the whiteness from the whitest cloth.*