

Agi Mishol

THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS

It's hard for you to believe in reincarnation
but you're willing to try,
considering the alternative.
If only someone would explain
where the souls are, in a city or a town
or a kind of campground,
and how much one can count on a soul
whose entire existence is based on rumor.

I am reading to you from the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*
about the soul's journey to city or town
or that campground,
how it rises out of the body like a dove.

The Tibetans make you laugh
but never mind.

What interests you is the exact moment when everything ends,
how from this one moment to the next
blood and heart freeze within the body
and everything else goes on as if nothing had happened.

My darling,
you are almost 90 and know how to distinguish
between death and the fear of death.
When you fall asleep in your armchair
a breeze flutters the pages of your book
and puffs onward.

Even you can see a bird,
forget about yourself
and become its flight.

And the pinecone I saw outside,
hard wooden fist,
will relax in the end, and release
seeds to the earth.

What happens later doesn't interest you,
whether to be buried or burned,

it's not your problem,
and yet I see from your foreshortened perspective
you're beginning to paint a new horizon
even if it is Tibet
just for a laugh
and I'm simply holding
the palette.

Translated from the Hebrew by Lisa Katz