

# The Layers by Stanley Kunitz

I have walked through many lives,  
some of them my own,  
and I am not who I was,  
though some principle of being being abides,  
from which I struggle not to stray.  
When I look behind,  
as I am compelled to look before I can gather strength to proceed on my journey,  
I see the milestones dwindling toward the horizon and the slow fires trailing from the abandoned  
camp sites,  
over which scavenger angels wheel on heavy wings.  
Oh, I have made myself a tribe out of my affections, and my tribe is scattered!  
How shall the heart be reconciled to its feast of losses?  
In a rising wind the manic dust of my friends, those who fell along the way, bitterly stings my face.  
Yet, I turn, I turn, exulting somewhat with my will intact to go wherever I need to go,  
and every stone on the road precious to me.  
In my darkest night when the moon was covered and I roamed through wreckage,  
a nimbus clouded voice directed me: " Live in layers, not on the litter."  
Though I lack the art to decipher it,  
no doubt the next chapter in my book of transformations is already written.  
I am not done with my changes.

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