For Lois Rubins, ז״ל
by
Rabbi Jonathan Lee Jackson

Each of us comes into the world made of two eternal things, two things which can never pass away from the universe. Two things that join only through miracle and chance.

We are star dust and we are breath. Our bodies are the stuff of ancient stars. Our life, force, we call this our breath in Hebrew, our soul. We are breath and stars.

Once, everything that exists in the universe was singular, of one substance, in one single space. But since the moment the universe was born, everything began to wander from its origin, from the center of everything that exists. New things became possible as matter wandered.

When we are born, we are the dust of stars. When we take our first breath we animate that dust; we take air from the world that countless generations have breathed. We are ensouled. We are all different, each of us. No two of us was made of exactly the same substance or or of the same life. None of our courses are ever the same.

As we live, as we live and grow, as we move through our world, we change and grow. Eternity laughs to see what we can create of our two first gifts, our life and our body. When we are alive, we are as powerful and as uncontainable as water. We flow, we swirl, we rush, and we trickle. But we always move. We always change.

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When we pass on from our lives, when breath and body part from each other's precious company, everything that water course of our life has touched is still changed, is still the way it is *because* of the flow and rush of our lives. Perhaps we no longer grow. Our star dust that was once our bodies floats to another part of our universe. Our breath is exhaled one last time, and joins the winds that circle the world.

But we are never gone, not from this world, nor the stars, nor those whom we have touched, and certainly never from those whom we have loved.

A curious and thoughtful student once asked her teacher, saying "You are wise. What happens to us when we pass on from this life? Are we ever gone from the world?"

Her teacher replied, but not with any words. The teacher took one candle, and handed the other to the student. The teacher lit the flame of the candle in her hand. She blew it out. After a few, quiet moments the teacher asked her student, "was that flame?"

The student said, "yes, that was flame." The teacher asked the student to light the candle in her hand, so she did. The teacher asked the student, "is that not also flame?"

The student looked at the flame now burning on her candle, how the candle in her hand held flame exactly as her teacher's candle held flame. She looked at her teacher and smiled, that was her silent answer, having perceived eternity in the depths of her soul.

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Flame to flame. Star dust to star dust. Breath of the universe, of God, whatever that holy word means to you, breath to breath. Soul to soul. We are never gone. Life, to life, to life, and so to eternity.