

Rhythms of Jewish Life

By M. J. SPIVACK.

A
DAVIDIC
ABSTRACTION



your finger on your throbbing pulse and know that life is a rhythm. Thus the sea throbs, thus throb the night and day, thus throb the worlds of the universe as

they spin from era to era in their vast orbits.

We are born out of the rhythm of births into the rhythm of the cradle, and the giddy rocking of the child is but a mortal segment of the circling of the stars.

Our lives wax and wane with the rhythm of the earth, no less than the growth and decay of the earth echoes the eternal change of the cosmos.

The rhythms of the world are many. The major rhythms of man are two—the rhythm of the spirit and the rhythm of the flesh. The perception of these rhythms through their various manifestations constitutes the greatest aesthetic thrills of life.

How are these rhythms manifested in Jewish life?

First in prayer. The seventh day and the seventh day and the seventh day have been hallowed ever and ever. The Sabbath has been the pulse of religion.

And in prayer we are forever turning towards the East. Here is the great rhythmic memory of the race. "If I forget thee, O, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning."

Our fleshy rhythm is the rhythm of home-yearning. This is the tune of the exile: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion."

Think of the threnody of Jewish suffering. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord!" Again and again. The sombre tom-tom of tragedy. The yoke of Egypt. The cruelty of the desert. The subjection in Babylon, Spain, Russia. Each word repeats the scarlet chord.

Think of the rhythm of eternal faith. "My heart is fixed, O Lord, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise."

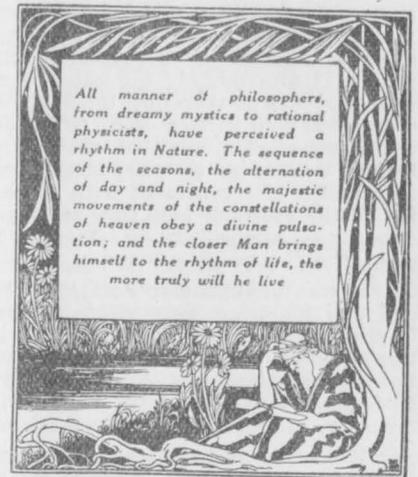
Then think of the rhythm of eternal search. Search for the

truth, and search for peace. Across the ages our footsteps echo, from mountain to mountain wall. With his staff beating time the wanderer keeps on and on, and on.

There are countless moments in the life of the nation and many moments in the lives of individuals when the rhythm of events becomes startlingly apparent and men get a lightning glimpse of the ways of nature. One can almost hear the mighty beat of Time; for all the cosmos pulsates.

Some day a rhythmic history of the race will be written. A philosophic analysis and a poetic synthesis of all the significant events of Jewish life from Abraham down to Herzl. The writer of such a history will discover grand cycles of facts resolving themselves again and again into a wonderful and characteristic rhythm. Oswald Spengler laid his finger on the pulse of history and evolved "The Decline of the West." Havelock Ellis laid his finger on the pulse of existence and evolved "The Dance of Life." Who will examine the pulse of Jewish life? We feel the rhythm. Why should we not know it?

Some time ago a friend and I stood on an out-of-the-way corner talking about life and lives. Presently he called my attention to an open window across the street. There was a private little prayer-room up there, and against the window we could see the silhouette of one old Jew as he rocked forward and backward in prayer. The supplicant rocked from side



All manner of philosophers, from dreamy mystics to rational physicists, have perceived a rhythm in Nature. The sequence of the seasons, the alternation of day and night, the majestic movements of the constellations of heaven obey a divine pulsation; and the closer Man brings himself to the rhythm of life, the more truly will he live

to side, then forward and backward again. Now he bowed, stepped back, bowed again and was through.

"It is a dance!" cried my friend.

Did the old Jew know he was repeating a sublime rhythm, an immemorial rhythm? Perhaps. A million Jews pray in this manner and never know the glory of their movements.

Rhythm in prayer is not peculiar to the Jews. It is more pronounced in other races. Some peoples work themselves into states of rigid ecstasy with their violent religious rhythms. The great beauty of the Jewish prayer-rhythm is its delicate reserve.

No doubt the most beautiful rhythms of Jewish life are those which are so spiritual that they can be perceived only by a few very sensitive souls.

We are the rhapsodic children of the Muse, and the Bible of our hearts is made of song and prayer. This is indeed the rhythmic bond on which all our hopes for a united world are based.

To those who have learnt to love them, rhythms are a surging beauty, a felt music, a Godly glory. All the great moments of life are rhythmic. The lives of great men are one continuous symphony.

The Psalms of David come nearest to expressing the rhythm of the Jewish heart. Perhaps it is sufficient that we have them.

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