

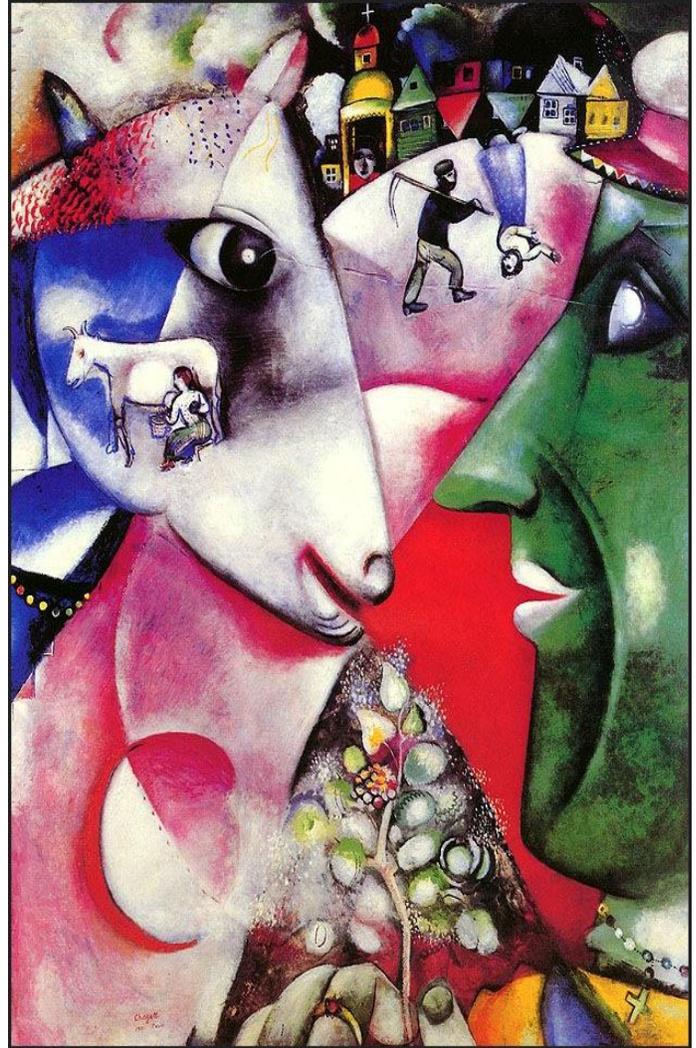
ATTACHMENT #23

FAMILIARITY, THEOLOGY & THE WORLD

Discussed in conversations of Bertha Blau, Barney B. Radov, Eileen Goldman, Mitzi Kerness, Barney R. Radov, Alan Kreiss and Barney Halperin.

FAMILIARITY, THEOLOGY AND THE WORLD

It is impossible to know with any certain clarity the world view or philosophy or gestalt of those born in Tsarist Russia before W.W.I., in a world that had changed little for a thousand years. Their private or internal lives were insular, provincial, sectarian enclaves of home, family and peddling, bounded by adversity, terror and uncertainty. The war and subsequent Russian Revolution only added further chaos, danger and terror. Even more striking was the U.S.: an alien but inviting land bereft of fear, pogroms, *shtetles* or starvation. The family, typically, was deeply religious, ethnically loyal, insular, optimistic, and fiercely capitalist. Squaring Genesis thinking and market economics was accomplished with facility, even ease. Part of that picture is captured by the son of Russian Jews, two years out, the late Nobel Prize winner, Saul Bellow, a Hyde Park neighbor of three children of the arrival of 1922 (Menya's grand-daughter and Muni's daughter, Lynda Falkenstein, and Luba and Morris' grandsons, Adam and Joel Levin) in his 1998 talk on being a Jewish writer in America [from NYR, 10/28/11]. His discussion is descriptive of a very Radov mindset.



Marc Chagall, I and the Village

[Marc Chagall, a Russian Jew of the same age as Jacob's older children (born 1887), uses painting to conflate family, religion and superstition. His prints decorated the Radov homes of the Erie immigrants].



La Bible Moise

So, in my first consciousness, I was, among other things, a Jew, the child of Jewish immigrants. At home our parents spoke Russian to each other, we children spoke Yiddish with them, and we spoke English with one another. At the age of four we began to read the Old Testament in Hebrew, we observed Jewish customs, some of them superstitions, and we recited prayers and blessings all day long. Because I had to memorize most of Genesis, my first consciousness was that of a cosmos, and in that cosmos I was a Jew. I suppose it would be proper to apply the word 'archaic' to such a representation of the world as I had – archaic, prehistoric. This was my 'given' and it would be idle to quarrel with it, to try to revise or efface it.

For many, including the Radovs, the religious part, though, had, if not an irreverence of theology, a relaxed take on detail. While pre-dating the term *Kiddish Club* – where people leave the synagogue during the middle of the service, say the *Kiddish*, and have wine, talk, even play cards – the exit was there, the talk common, and the jokes and informal conversation ubiquitous. My (dim) memory of attending an Orthodox service with Joe, Morris, Gus, Barney B. and others born in Russia or barely here was of, if not social, a sociable gathering: part religion, part ceremony, part family, part gossip, part laughter, then another dose of religion, and finally on to lunch. *Shul* (synagogue) was too familiar, even congenial, to allow too much formality, sternness or discomfort. It was also too familiar to give rise to skepticism, criticism, doubt or any theological, metaphysical, ethical or wider philosophical second-guessing. In general, there was little space between self, family, community, and religion. That world view faded with great alacrity with new generations, strangers to the idiosyncratic, adverse, but disappearing, world of the Russian *shtetl*.



Marc Chagall, Russian Wedding