ABIGAIL SARAH BAGRAIM

THE HASIDIC SPIRIT AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE ART OF MARC CHAGALL

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MY INDEBTEDNESS TO THE HUMAN SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL FOR THE AID OF A BURSARY IS GRATEFULLLY ACKNOWLEDGED

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INTRODUCTION

The artist Marc Chagall will need no introduction to persons interested in the arts, for his success as an artist was such that his name has become a household word throughout most of the world. He was in fact one of the few artists to achieve international fame and recognition during his own lifetime.

In considering Chagall's art the observer is immediately struck by the constancy of his vision and his almost obsessive repetition of certain symbols and themes. In this way Chagall has created his own fantasy world, one with which the observer soon becomes acquainted and grows to love and understand. The setting of the Chagallian dream world is that imaginative world of his childhood mileu, mostly scenes of rural Russia and the town of Vitebsk in which he was raised. A frequently recurring aspect in Chagall's work is the portrayal of Jewish symbols and Biblical themes, which the observer soon perceives to be an intrinsic part of the Chagallian dream world.

Chagall's genius has long been recognised and critics and authors have engaged in lively and lengthy discussion concerning every aspect of his art and incredible personality. Some of the more favoured topics which have been discussed are the variety of his themes and subject matter, his development over the years, his complete mastery of technique and various media, his astonishing use of colour and form, and his phenomenal output of work.

One aspect of his work which, while it has not been overlooked, has not been so thoroughly examined is the fact of his Jewishness, his Hasidic upbringing and his mystic spirit. This essay aims to examine this aspect and its premise will be that the mystical spirit of Hasidism, the Jewish tradition in which he was raised, in fact inspired Chagall's artistic nature as a young man, providing direction for his heart as well as subject matter for his canvasses. That it in fact gave life to his own mystic spirit.

The first chapter is purely informative, opening the discussion by detailing the precepts of Jewish mysticism and setting out in some detail the founding beliefs and philosophies of the Hasidic tradition. The second chapter proceeds to deal with circumstances and factors personal to the artist. The discussion places Chagall within the pre-revolutionary Russia of his youth and sets his family within that context, describing the joy and abundant love of his Hasidic upbringing, factors which nurtured his poetic soul. The final chapter deals with Chagall's art and attempts to document the influence of his Hasidic upbringing upon his art, before turning to deal with his mystical outlook and the role Jewish mysticism and Hasidism in particular can be shown to have played in the origins and development thereof.

CHAPTER I

JEWISH MYSTICISM

Marc Chagall presents an entirely new world to the observer. This is the inner world, the world of the psyche and the dimension of the soul. He leads one to the realization that the rigid distinctions we make between subject and object and linear rationality are constructed by ourselves. He shows us the power of the human mind, the beauty of the soul and the unity of the universe.

Chagall's son-in-law, Franz Meyer, has described the mission behind Chagall's paintings to be: "to put the soul, the mysterious centre of the human creature, above all else"[1] and he describes Chagall's art as: "a total integration of reality in the great adventure of painting, the union of within and without, of soul and world."[2]

In his discussion of Chagall's distortions, Meyer states: "...far from subordinating his painting to the laws of exterior reality through which a man can lose his soul, he (Chagall) represents another reality wherein his soul can find itself" [3]

The soul can be seen as that part of each person which is immortal. It comes from God before birth and returns to God after death. In Chagall's case his predilection with matters of the soul demonstrates his involvement with Jewish mysticism. In mysticism as a whole the soul is centrally important. In Hasidism, a sect of pious Jews who believe that life should be filled with joy and high purpose, the soul is seen as an echo of God, as a small voice within one. The Hasid sees his task as being to bring

1. Meyer, F. Marc Chagall, p.597.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. p.47

out the soul of everything, that is, the inner essence of everything.

Chagall's Jewishness is a complex issue. On the one hand his personal outlook has been described as: "... firmly sometimes humorously, non-sectarian";[1] and his art as functioning: "often as nondenominational fantasy."[2]

On the other hand, Chagall himself has described "the mystique of Hasidism" as one of the "principal elements" in his work.[3] In this regard, Meyer states: "Chagall was not the interpreter of a religious universe - he lapsed forward from the movement to paint independent of any doctrine or movement"[4]

Dr J. Abelson describes a true Jewish mystic as: "One who is a cosmopolitan, and, to him, the differences between the demands and beliefs and observances of one creed and those of another are entirely obliterated in his one all-absorbing and all-over-shadowing passion for union with reality."[5]

In his transcending of all barriers which separate race from race and religion from religion, Chagall can be seen to have displayed the behaviour of a true mystic.

1. McMullin, R. The World of Marc Chagall, chapter III.
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Meyer, op. cit. p. 15
5. Abelson, J. Jewish Mysticism, p. 3

Although Chagall spent his childhood in the mystical, Hasidic Judaism of the Vitebsk ghetto, as he grew older he refused to commit himself to any organised religion, did not obeserve the laws of the Old Testament and did not partake in general synagogue ritual observances.

Having briefly introduced the reader to Chagall's religious and artistic founding principles, the discussion will turn now to consider the general topic of Jewish mysticism as a whole, whereafter it will deal with various important aspects of Jewish mystical thought, namely the Zohar, the Kabbalah and Hasidism.

Turning then to the topic of Jewish mysticism as a whole, it is clear that Judaism has nearly always possessed an esoteric side. As Dr. Abelson so clearly points out:

> "The Pauline antithesis of law and faith has falsely stamped Judaism as a religion of unrelieved legalism; and mysticism is the irreconcileable enemy of legalism. So the God of the Jew, it is said, is a lawgiver pure and simple and the loyal and conscientious Jew is he who lives in the throes of an uninterrupted obedience to a string of laws which hedge him round on all sides. This implies that he must be a stranger to the idea of love. There can be no fellowship with God, no opportunity for any immediate experiences by which the human soul comes to partake of God, no incoming of God into human life. And where there is none of these, there can be no mystical element."[1]

1. Abelson, op cit. p. 2

Judaism is popularly conceived as a legalistic type of faith based on firstly the mishnah (text) and gamara (commentary) of the Talmud (the digest and interpretation of the Torah, which is the Five Books of Moses); and, secondly, the Old Testament. The mystical elements of Judiasm have however slowly developed within the above-mentioned precepts of the faith and are, perhaps, less well-recognised by the outsider. While the Rabbis and other learned Jews concentrated upon the meaning of words, and even of individual letters, in order to ensure that God's Holy Law be obeyed, a group of mystics, called Hasidim, whose search was for the inner understanding of Judaism, arose.

Jewish mysticism has based itself upon the Zohar which is a mystical commentary on the Bible (and is dealt with in detail below). The purpose of the Zohar is to find in the Bible the secrets of the universe: the mysterious truth about God, the soul, heaven and creation. The main theme of the Zohar is that our ordinary earthly world is a mere reflection of a higher spiritual world in heaven. The lower world is seen as patterned after the upper world, with both worlds interacting and affecting one another. According to the Zohar, God in fact needs the assistance of man to make earth a better place, a place more like heaven. The Jewish mystic has introduced into Judaism a new spirituality. This is described by Dr Abelson as follows:

> "...although the mystic could not know God, he nevertheless felt that it was given to him to transcend the crushing weight of earthly affairs, to be raised above the grosser hindrances of sense and to become an organ reflecting the Divine life."[1]

1. Sperling, H. The Zohar, p. xxi

The mystic Hasid does not look for God only in the synagogue. He looks for God while he is walking or standing, he sees Him even in grief and joy, in sorrow and pleasure - nothing is devoid of God and everything is a part of Him. Rav Kook explains as follows:

> "The life which slumbers in minerals, which is slightly awakened in plants, and which already strongly pulsates in animals, is one and the same; a tree of life reaches from these lowly creatures, over mankind, divided into ever so many peoples and parties, to the angels on high, one living, pulsating, organic unity.... Everything is in God, though God is more than everything. Everything, since it is ultimately rooted in the divine, is ultimately good, and evil is not real but a veiled or a lesser good. There is no place empty of Him."[1]

It is clear, therefore, that Judaism is not only to be viewed as a religion of Rabbinical orthodoxy devoted to obedience to the law, synagogue ritual and public and private religious worship. This is explained by Dr. Abelson in his introduction to "The Zohar" as follows:

> "The arid field of Rabbinism was always kept well watered and fresh by the living streams of Kabbalistic lore ... rendering the Jew capable of a vivid sense of the nearness of God and filling him with a constant longing for communion with Him"[2]

1. Weiner, H. 9 1/2 Mystics, p. 299
2. Sperling, op.cit. p. xiv

It is difficult to articulate the content of a mystical experience. Usually there is a feeling communicated by the geniune mystic that he knows something about the mystery of our existence that we don't know. Such "knowledge" is clearly worlds apart from "scientific knowledge."

In his discussion of Jewish mysticism Dr. Abelson invokes the example of the prophet Ezekiel's vision of God as described in chapter one of the Biblical book of Ezekiel. In the Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (49:8) reference is made to Ezekiel seeing the "chariot": "Ezekiel had a vision of the Glory, which was revealed enthroned on the chariot of the cherubim." This vision of the "chariot" and the exposition of this chapter is generally called "the account of the chariot" (ma'aseh merkavah) in rabbinic literature.

Ezekiel described his vision in bold, vivid and detailed terms. This "account of the chariot" has become a foundation stone of Kabbalah and a point of departure for the mystical tradition. Dr Abelson explains the mystic interpretation thereof as follows:

> "The Jewish mystic sought no rational explanation of them [visions of God].
>
> He sought no explanation of them because he was assured that they stood for something which did not need explaining. He felt instinctively that the Merkabah (chariot), typified the human longing for the sight of the Divine Presence and companionship with it. To attain this end was to him, the acme of all spiritual life."[1]

1. Abelson, op.cit. p. 3.

and later, he continues:

> "It was interpreted as a sort of Divine self-opening, self-condescension to man. The door is flung wide open so that man at the direct invitation of God, can come to the secret for which he longs and seeks. This idea is a supreme factor in the mystic life of all religions. The soul is urged on to seek union with God, only because it feels that God has first gone out, on his own initiative and uninvited, to seek union with it. The human movement from within is but a response to a larger Divine movement from without. The call has come; the answer must come" [1]

The discussion turns now away from the topic of Jewish mysticism in the more general sense to deal with several specific aspects thereof. The first of these more specific aspects to be considered is that of the Zohar (sefer ha-Zohar) or "Illumination" which is the major text of the Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition. It is an immense work arranged in the form of a commentary on the Torah, the Five Books of Moses. It is a mosaic of Bible, midrash (a collection of midrashim, the midrashic literature), medieval homily, fiction and fantasy. Its central theme is the interplay of human and divine realities. Its language is a peculiar brand of Aramaic that breaks the rules of grammar and invents words.

The origins of the Zohar are themselves shrouded in mystery. What is known is that a thirteen century Spanish Jewish mystic, Moses de Leon, of Grenada in Spain, began circulating booklets to his friends and fellow Kabbalists. These contained teachings and tales never seen or heard of before. Orthodox Kabbalists believe that Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai or even his disciples were the actual authors of the work. Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai was a famous teacher of the second century who lived in the land of Israel

1. Abelson, op cit. p. 34

and who, according to tradition, spent twelve years secluded in a cave along with his sons where they had mystical speculations on God, the Torah and the universe, with the Zohar purported to be a record of these discourses. After his death, legend has it, the book was hidden away and secretly handed down from master to disciple, until it eventually fell into the hands of Moses de Leon who took it upon himself to spread the ancient secrets by copying portions of the original manuscripts and distributing them. The majority of modern scholars, however, accept that de Leon himself was the author and that it is a pseudepigraphic production, in that, Moses de Leon used the figure of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai as the vehicle for the transmission of his own ideas in the belief that people would more readily believe in writings by a miracle-working Rabbi than his own.[1]

Dr. Abelson in the introduction to the book "The Zohar" (a translation into English) states:

> "... much has been written ... to show that these devotees of the mystic side of Jewish life and religion were ... men of intellect, scholarship and sound sense who aimed at bringing back to Jewish organised communal life a breath of that mystic sentiment and emotion which are the aromatic life-essence of religion, and which are indispensable to Judaism if it is to continue to play its predestined plan of bringing mankind "under the wings of the Shekinah""[2]

The Zohar has enabled the Jew to feel a vivid sense of the nearness of God and filled him with a constant longing for communion with Him. In the Zohar the reader finds himself wandering through an enchanted forest, a mysticism of the imagination where nothing is dry or doctrinaire.[3]

1. Matt, D.C. Zohar, p. 3
   Jacobs, L. Jewish Mystical Testimonies, p. 80
2. Sperling, op.cit. p. xxvi
3. Matt, op.cit. p. 26

As Dr. Abelson states:

> "The Zohar's allegorism, its symbolism, its erotic terminology, proved excellent material for portraying the ceaseless yearnings of the human heart for union with the Infinite; and the reader is often startled at the ingenuity with which many a simple and innocent Biblical word or phrase is poetically worked up to indicate the physical as well as the spiritual mysteries which surround the deity and the effort of man to become finally absorbed in Him by means of prayer, Torah, study and contemplation."[1]

Dr. Abelson cites two examples of how Zoharic mysticism demands an interpretion higher than the literal:

> "The ceremony of blowing the Shofar on Rosh Ha-shanah gains rather than loses in impressiveness by the accompanying Zoharic prayers which ask that the "angels emanating from the Shofar may bring the prayers of Israel to the divine hearing" ... and on this basis the blowing of the Shofar, far from being a mere stereotyped act of observance of the letter of the Law, rises to become the outward expression of one more of the many mystical beliefs in the unseen spiritual agencies uniting the human with the Divine ..."[2]

The second example Dr Abelson cites relates to the prayer, B'rich Sh'meh Ve'athreh, recited before the reading of the Law on Sabbaths and festivals:

> "The Zohar introduces it with these words: "When the scroll is taken out in the assembly to read therein, the Gates of the heavens of mercy open and the celestial love awakes". The prayer is a truly noble one, teeming with a vivid sense of the nearness of God, combined with an ever felt and never-satisfied longing for communion with Him by means of the Torah ...."[3]

1. Sperling, op.cit. p. xxii-xxiii
2. Ibid
3. Ibid

In citing the above two examples Dr. Abelson demonstrates how Zoharic mysticism can enrich the Jewish liturgy by introducing "a touch of "Ecstacy", of direct intuition of God ... by making it less of a merely external religious exercise and more of a means for transcending earthly affairs for a time ...."[1]

Arthur Green, in the Preface to "Zohar. The book of Enlightenment" describes more generally this aspect of the Zohar:

> "Moses de Leon was able to keep the conventionalized religious language in the background, and to sing loftily of lights and sparks, sun and moon, flowing streams and rivers, and, most passionately, of the unending love between the celestial Bridegroom and His Bride."[2]

This mention of the unending love between the celestial Bridegroom and His Bride is an important theme in Chagall's life and his art. His devotion to his first wife, Bella, and to his subsequent wife, Vava, bear testimony to this. In his art this theme is apparent from his repeated portrayal of couples and is related to the theme of sexuality both of which are dealt with extensively at a later stage in this dissertation.

The Zohar, which has been described as "a three-volume work that seeks to show the foundation for the cosmic architecture of the Most Mysterious Powers"[3] has been seen as evoking "an entire spiritual world system - a world system that works to explain the emanation of the sacred energy from the infinite to the humblest person."[4]

1. Sperling, op.cit. p. xxii
2. Ibid. p. xii
3. Albertson, E. Understanding the Kabbalah, p. 22
4. Ibid

It has been seen "to give to the Jew the conviction of an inner, unseen, spiritual universe - an eternal moral order."[1] The poetic element so present in the Zohar has the effect of "unlocking for the Kabbalist, or any sensitive seeker, the deepest secrets of being ... everything breathes, sparkles and flows. Images, colors, and streaming sermons fill the space between page and reader. The Zohar overwhelms the senses, threatening one's puny, linear understanding with hints of the beyond within."[2] The Zohar assigns deeper meaning to scriptural texts, as can be seen from this quotation attributed to Simeon bar Yohai: "Woe unto the man who sees in the Torah nought but simple narratives and commonplace words .... Every word in the Torah contains a higher meaning and a sublime mystery"[3] Mystics see this higher meaning as the true one. As Edward Albertson puts it:

> "The Zohar insists that there is an inner as well as an outer reality in all phenomena. These different levels of reality arise because the physical universe results from a series of emanations, or precipitations, one from another, having their source in the Divine Being"[4]

The Zohar by its very nature deals with an immense variety of philosophical and mystical themes and subjects. Clearly, even were it within the present author's capabilities, it is well beyond the parameters of this dissertation to treat with all or any of these in detail. The constituent parts of the Zohar, as presented by Dr. Ableson, are briefly listed and detailed below in order to provide some insight into the more central themes of the Zohar:

1. Sperling, op.cit. p. xii
2. Matt, op.cit. p. 26-27
3. Albertson, op.cit. p.24
4. Ibid

(i) The main portion which bears the general title of 'Sefer ha-Zohar'. To this are attached
(ii) the "Sifra-di-Tseniuta" (The book of Veiled Mystery), consisting of five chapters inserted in the Book of Exodus and dealing with the mysteries of creation, the human soul and the relation between spirit and matter.
(iii) "Sitre Torah" (Secrets of the Torah), treating largely of Cabbalistic angeology and the mysteries clustering round the Divine Name and the Divine Unity.
(iv) "Ra'ya Mehemna" (The True Shepherd, Pastor Fidelis), which, besides dealing with topics similar to the foregoing, lays down definite precepts and rules of conduct, the exegesis being usually introduced with the words "The true shepherd saith" - the true shephard being Moses.
(v) "Midrash Ha-ne'lam" (Recondite Exposition), which contains a great deal of Scriptural exposition by the method of "Gematria", i.e. the permutations and combinations of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the Hebrew numerals. It also contains some allegorical exegesis of Scripture reminding one of the methods of Philo.
(vi) "Tosefta" (Additions), some stray fragmentary supplements to the main exegesis of the Zohar in which are contained references to the Sefiroth.
(vii) "Hekaloth" (halls or palaces), wherein are pictured with a dazzling literality the abodes of paradise and hell, the dwelling-places of the varying grades of the angelic hosts and their dealings with the souls of men. There are also in this section several recondite allusions to astrology and magic.
(viii) The Idro Rabba (Greater Synod) and Idra Zuta (Lesser Synod), which are amplifications of (ii), above.[1]

It is necessary, before concluding this discussion of the Zohar, to briefly mention the Book Yetsirah. The Book Yetsirah is the oldest philosphical book in the Hebrew language and, along with the Bahir, is the earliest book of the Kabbalah. The Yetsirah prepared the way for the Zohar and, even more so than in the case of the Zohar, its origins are shrouded in obscurity. Dr. Abelson describes the Yetsirah as: " ... a mystical philosophy drawn from the sounds, shapes, relative positions, and numerical values of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet."[2]

1. Sperling, op.cit. p. xiii
2. Abelson, op.cit. p. 100

At paragraph ii.2 of the Book an explanation is given of the supernatural importance of the forms, sounds and relative positions of these letters:

> "twenty two letters: He drew them, hewed them, combined them, weighed them, interchanged them, and through them produced the whole creation and everything that is destined to come into being"[1]

The Book Yetsirah also introduced for the first time the doctrine of emanation and the doctrine of the ten sefirot which will be discussed later under the heading of the Kabbalah. For the purpose of this dissertation it is sufficient to mention but these few aspects of the Yetsirah.[2]

The second more specific aspect of Jewish mysticism to be considered is the Kabbalah. The Kabbalah, literally "tradition", that is the tradition of things divine, is the sum of Jewish mysticism, the major literary text of which is the Zohar.

Due to the fact that mystery by its nature engenders suspicion and rumour-mongering, it is not surprising that the Kabbalah, which is a mystical tradition, has in consequence become the subject of much ill-informed speculation. One frightening rumour is to the following effect: "Many a student of the Kabbalah has met with an untimely and unpleasant death on a spiritual equivalent of a bad L.S.D. trip"[3]

1. Abelson, op.cit. p. 101
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. p. 13

While not advocating this more hysterical approach to the Kabbalah, it must be stressed that there are, of course, dangers attendant upon untutored and random exploration thereof. The danger consists in the fact that every movement away from the ordered surfaces of life entails risking an encounter with chaos. Flight from the plain meaning of words and facts, a hunger for a deeper experience than that offered by everyday reality, and dissatisfaction with the plain meaning of laws can become an invitation to anarchy. The personality structure of a sensitive individual can easily be fractured by an untutored exposure to the fire of intense psychic experience.

Persons who seek to enter the heady perfume of the Kabbalist's garden and wish to survive should have a stable marriage (Sexual abberations have frequently resulted from unwise experience in the garden of the esoteric. This shall be discussed later on). Such persons should be sufficiently disciplined by commitment to the structuring laws of a life-centred tradition, must obtain certain required knowledge, be obedient to rules and, above all, be accompanied by a competent guide.[1]

Edward Albertson has explained how, in the course of history, this has affected Kabbalists:

> "This is why in the beginnings of its history the knowledge of the Kabbalah was literally hidden, passed from the lips of a teacher to the ear of a disciple, its existence never suspected by the majority of law-abiding Temple-goers or even by many of their rabbis. The discipline of secrecy was strict. There are objects, incantations, and ceremonies too sacred and powerful for the unprepared person to handle or say or participate in without harm to his body or his psyche or both."[2]

1. Weiner, H. 9 1/2 Mystics, p. 21
2. Albertson, op.cit. p. 13

The Kabbalah, which encompasses a massive, detailed and conherent world view of man's relation to the universe, literally means "traditions", whereby, one understands this to mean the tradition of things divine.[1]

As with the Zohar, the origins of the Kabbalah are obscure. What is clear is that it has intrigued both Jew and non-Jew alike for numerous decades. As discussed earlier, the Kabbalah had been received by its disciples from their masters and so perpetuated in secrecy. Only during the fall of the Second Temple did it occur that the masters began to write down their knowledge in manuscript form. This resulted in new danger as, due to the fact that the teacher no longer had control over who was reading it nor over the manner in which it was read, the untutored reader ran the risks previously discussed.

Fortunately, the masters employed another method of veiling the Kabbalah's secrets:

> "There is a second way in which the Kabbalah's knowledge is hidden. Even when its text is held and read, the deepest and truest meanings are not apparent. In that way it may be likened to the Godhead that is its subject: there are many layers of meaning within it. In order to protect the innocent, the authors of the written texts hid the most powerful truths beneath symbol and myth and anagram and complex formuli."[2]

The popularity of the Kabbalistic tradition slowly grew and by the 14th century the term Kabbalist had become the customary designation for the teachers of this hidden knowledge, and the term Kabbalah was used to refer to those existing manuscripts of that knowledge.

1. Scholem, G. On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, p. 1
2. Albertson, op.cit. p. 16

After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the Kabbalah became popularly established in the 16th century.[1] A further rather confusing fact to the uninitiated is that the mystical philosophies of the Zohar have, with time, become centrally important within the Kabbalistic tradition.

To turn now to the mystical philosophies of the Kabbalah, a central principle contained therein is that whatever exists here below on earth resembles what is above. The Kabbalists believe that a person's soul is an echo of God. Dr. Abelson, in his Introduction to "The Zohar", describes this phenomenon: "In the Kingdom of man's soul there are processes going on which are the exact counterpart of those going on in the upper world."[2]

In all branches of the Kabbalah the soul, as a spiritual entity which plays the highest of high parts in man's relations with the unseen, is brought to the fore.[3] The effectiveness of the Kabbalah is portrayed by Edward Albertson as: "... help (ing) the individual push aside the veils in order to see the Godhead more clearly, to remove the obstacles between himself and the Godhead, to enlist him in the effort to help all human souls perfect themselves so that mankind and the Godhead at last are re-united."[4]

The authors of the Kabbalah were aware:

> "... that the final reality of God was beyond man's understanding ... that the power that radiates from the Godhead is beyond man's

1. Albertson, op.cit. p.14
2. Sperling, op.cit. p. xviii
3. Ibid
4. Albertson, op.cit. p. 17

enduring unless it is received at a great psychic distance or "veiled" by psychic obstacles .... They believed it was the goal of every human soul to be re-united eventually with the Godhead ... that the union could occur only when the soul had perfected itself in life or in many lives here on earth."[1]

In the medieval Kabbalah the soul is seen as threefold:

> "There is (i) Neshamah, which is the highest phase of its existence. (ii) Ruah, which is the seat of good and evil, the abode of the moral attributes. (iii) Nefesh, which is the grosser side of spirit and is en rapport with the body and the cause of all movements and instincts of the physical life. Each of these three constituents of the soul has its source in some one or other of the ten sefiroth."[2]

Love is a very important aspect of Jewish mysticism and the soul is regarded as the root of love. A constant flow of energy, of love, is seen to flow up and down the ladder between heaven and earth, between God and man:

> "The soul, says the mystic of all ages ... seeks to enter consciously into the presence of God. And this idea of the soul's unquenchable yearning to be united with its Divine source is reiterated under many forms in all parts of the Zohar ... man's intimacy with God, the soul's union with Him, are described in sexual terminology. It is the union of the male with the female .... The Zohar speaks throughout of cosmic union - a coming together, a fusion of all the manifold universes "above" and "below". The worlds above are "married" to the worlds below. And man, who, mainly by reason of his soul, is a denizen of these multiple worlds, becomes whilst striving after communion with the Divine, a sharer in these cosmic acts of intercourse. ...These pictures of conjugal relations ... have largely prepared the way for those numerous and often obscure allusions which constitute what has been called the "sex mystery" of the Zohar."[3]

1. Albertson, op.cit. p. 14-15
2. Sperling, op.cit. p. xviii
3. Ibid. p. xix-xx

In his book "The Zohar. The book of Splendor" Gershom G. Scholem has presented a small selection of passages from the Zohar. The chapter "The destiny of the soul" describes the journey of an unblemished soul which has returned to God. A selection therefrom reads as follows:

" ... And when such a soul departs from this world, pure, bright, unblemished, the Holy One, be blessed, daily causes her to shine with a host of radiances .... A palace which is known as the Palace of Love sits amidst a vast rock, a most secret firmament. Here in this palace the treasures of the King are kept and all his kisses of love. Every soul loved by the Holy One, be blessed, enters into that palace .... The Lord discerns each holy soul, and taking each in turn to himself, embraces and fondles her ... presenting her with gifts"[1]

This theme of sexuality, viewed as a fundamental force of human life is in line with the Kabbalistic condemnation of the ascetic way of life and, along with its consistent emphasis on the importance of physical well-being as a prerequisite for inner development, the Kabbalah stresses respect for human sexual needs. The Kabbalah teaches us not hedonism, but rather a refinement and exaltation of bodily feelings. This represents a further example of the philosophy that one must make use of higher intentionality to exalt what is ordinarily a mundane activity. The Kabbalah conceptualises that the Ein Sof has its female counterpart, the Shekinah, and that only when the two are united, which is depicted in explicit sexual terms, does harmony truly govern the universe. Human sexuality, according to the theme that that which occurs in heaven is mirrored on earth, is likewise exalted in the Kabbalah which states that the Shekinah is always present when human coupling takes place. The Kabbalah enjoins us to approach the sexual act with reverance bound with joy and thereby to create harmony on earth.[2]

1. Scholem, G. Zohar, p. 91-94
2. Hoffman, op.cit. p. 75-80

The influence of the Kabbalistic vision of sex and sexuality is clearly present in both the work and the life of Marc Chagall. Witness is his repeated portrayal of ecstatic couples in his works and his devotion to his three wives, especially his first wife, Bella. This aspect of Kabbalism, as accepted into Hasidism will be dealt with in detail at a later stage when the life and works of Chagall are discussed.

Due to its immensity, it is an almost impossible task to attempt to treat with the sacred Kabbalah in its entirety. There is no book large enough to contain it. Even were this possible, one could never reach finality as the aspirant will always have his own individual experiences to add. In consequence, and in the interests of utility, an attempt will be made to detail in general terms the central Kabbalistic themes and philosophies. Only those which affect Hassidism will be treated of. These are derived from two main sources: The Sefirot doctrine of the Zohar and Rabbi Isaac Luria's doctrine of Zimzum, Shevirah and Tikkun.[1]

Firstly, to deal with the Sefirot, which is the plural form of the Hebrew word Sefirah: this derives from the belief of the Jewish mystics that there were ten Sefirot which were the ten powers or qualities within God that He used in creating the world. These powers were visualised as bright spheres of light emanating from the "Ein-sof" (the limitless one) which described the mystery of God.

Joseph Dan explains further:

> "The sefirot doctrine, one of the most fundamental expressions of Kabbalistic mysticism, is based on the belief that the

1. Dan, J. The Teaching of Hasidism, p. 8

> infinite Godhead called Ein Sof ... emanated a series of ten powers, or sefirot, each with its own specific characteristics and functions; and that these ten powers, which are completely divine but have limits because they exist in time, can be described by means of mystical symbolism ... (this) became a mystical system with the introduction of the view that the sefirot were dynamic rather than static.... The Sefirot were intensely personalized. Going far beyond simple descriptions of the functions of the various sefirot, a lavishly imaginative symbolism was used to depict the individual characteristics of each sefirah in extensive detail ... so that the Kabbalists came to see each one as a distinct personal entity."[1]

Essentially the doctrine expounds that not only did, and does, man need God, but God also needed and needs man in order to unfold his plans for the world. God has created the world and now governs it by causing the ten sefirot, his powers or qualities, to emanate from Him.

The sefirot were conceived of as spheres of light emanating from God at the time of creation. These emanations, or sefirot, gave rise to four universes, namely: Atsiluth, Beriah, Yetsirah and Asiah (i.e. Emanation, Creation, Formation and Action). These four universes are apportioned among the ten sefirot. The ten sefirot are named as follows: Kether (the crown); Hokmah (wisdom); Binah (understanding); Hesed (mercy); Geburah (force or severity); Tifereth (beauty); Nezah (victory): Hod (glory); Yesod (foundation); and, Malkuth (kingdom).

It must be stressed that these names are merely surface, arbitrary and conventional descriptives and that the manner in which the sefirot are allocated to the worlds of Kabbalism is an extremely complicated theme which it is not possible to enter in a limited space. Finally, even these sefirot, or attributes of God, do not [2] describe all the aspects of God

1. Dan, op.cit. p. 8
2. Sperling, op.cit. p. xvii

because the Ein Sof is a mystery which the human mind cannot understand, not even in ecstatic meditation.

I turn now to deal with the second Kabbalistic theme previously mentioned, namely Rabbi Isaac Luria's doctrine of Zimzum, Shevirah and Tikkun. One of the reasons for this is in order, later, to document to some extent the evidence in Marc Chagall's work and in his general lifestyle of the influence of the Kabbalistic theory of divine creation through emanation as initially observed by Roy McCullin in his work: "The World of Marc Chagall."

In this regard McMullin has commented as follows:

> "... Chagall's art, for his strongly ethical notions about colour, light, pictorial matter, and "The microbes of the Universe" are clearly related, however remotely, to the esoteric tradition that produced Luria's theory of creation through emanation. They are, at least in part, the poetic residue of centuries of Kabbalistic ingenuity. They might even be regarded as just a slightly modernized and secularized version of the old commandment to cause the holy sparks to ascend.[1]

The Lurianic Kabbalah was formulated by the great visionary and mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria and reduced to theological terms by his associate Rabbi Hayim Vital in the 16th century. It was written in Safed after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.[2] Before this expulsion, the focus of Jewish mysticism had been on Maaseh Merkabah (God's chariot and throne) and Maaseh Bereshit (how the world was created) which were in contrast to the focus the Lurianic Kabbalah later introduced:

1. McMullin, op.cit. chapter III
2. Dan, op.cit. p. 9

> "... Luria's system won such wide acceptance because it addressed two basic questions that Jews have always asked ... : Why is there an exile? and what is the meaning or function, of the commandments in the Torah?"[1]

Luria's myth responded to the yearning for an explanation of Jewish suffering caused by the hardships and degradations of life as a minority among the gentile nations. Unlike his predecessors, Luria made exile the very basis of his conceptions of God, the world, man, and the people of Israel:

> "Luria's cosmic myth begins with a question pertaining to the system of sefirot .... When time and history began, God emanated from Himself something that was less than Himself even though it was a divine power (the sefirot). How was this possible, since until that moment God Himself comprised everything that was ... and thus there was no "outside" into which the Ein Sof could emanate entities that were not Ein Sof? To this question Luria gave the following answer: The process of bringing into existence things that were not purely Ein Sof began with the withdrawal of the Ein Sof from some part of existence, which came into existence by virtue of that very withdrawal. The act of concentration ... by means of which the Ein Sof vacated a portion of itself, thereby making possible the creation of time and space, is called the Zimzum .... In other words, the world came into being because God accepted exile from the space that was thus created."[2]

The second phase of Luria's cosmic history, known as the "breaking of the vessels", describes events that took place after the Zimzum and seeks to explain why God has allowed the terrible tragedy and suffering of the exile of the Jews:

> "The Ein Sof emanated divine lights, and these lights, going through a series of ... steps, assumed the forms of the ten sefirot - or, putting it differently, flowed

1. Dan, op.cit. p. 10
2. Ibid. p. 11

> into "vessels" that were supposed to give them their sefirotic shapes and individuality. The process was never completed as the vessels could not, or would not, hold the lights flowing into them and suddenly broke ... the shattered pieces of the vessels with isolated fragments of divine light (termed nizonot, or "sparks") clinging to them fell downward, while the remaining lights ascended back to the Ein Sof ... the Ein Sof had (according to Luria) originally embodied two potentially opposed powers. The process of Zimzum and creation had been intended to resolve the differences between these powers, but one ... had refused to participate, thwarting the attempt at creation by precipitating the breaking of the vessels. Chaos ensued, and a dualistic world come into being in the empty space vacated by the Zimzum. The rebellious powers occupied the lower part, creating a realm of evil, while the fragments of divine light that had managed to tear themselves away during the Shevirah took refuge in the upper part. The Nizonot that did not escape, ... were trapped in the lower space, and by their presence enabled the evil realm to prevail."[1]

The manner in which this cosmic order affected the individual Jew and helped him cope with his sufferings was explained by Luria as follows:

> "... The myth of the captive sparks gave the exile an immediate concrete significance in the life of every individual believer, because rescuing the trapped sparks ... was not only within the individual's power but a religious task that God had specifically entrusted to every single member of the Jewish people."[2]

Luria conceived the performing of the "mending" of what had been broken, the tikkun, as the task assigned to man:

> "Jewish man, starting with Adam and including every Jew who has ever lived - was created for the express purpose of performing the tikkun . The whole course of Jewish history ... was understood in terms of setbacks and advances in the attempt to perform the tikkun. Adam, for example, should have completed the tikkun but instead, because of his sin, brought about a catastrophic new shevirah in which more sparks were cast down into the realm of evil."[3]

1. Dan, op.cit. p. 12
2. Albertson, op.cit. p. 12-13
3 Ibid. p. 13

Individual man was conceived as contributing to the "mending" in the following way:

> "... A victory for good is scored whenever a human being defeats his evil impulses; the satanic powers win a victory and gain control of more sparks whenever a human being sins. The battlefield ... of the struggle ... is the individual's observance of God's commandments as written in the Torah and elaborated in Jewish law and ethics. Every deed of every Jew takes place within this framework and decisively affects the overall conflict ... since evil, like everything else, can only exist if it is able to obtain sustenance from the divine light, the complete separation that will result when all Jews uplift all the imprisoned nizonot will bring about the total abolition of evil itself, and, thus, the long-awaited final redemption."[1]

The final more specific aspect of Jewish mysticism to be considered is that of Hasidism, known also as the Hasidic movement. The Hasidic movement began in the eighteenth century and rapidly began to assume the social and ideological characteristics that have come to be its main contribution to Jewish life. By the early years of the 19th century Hasidism could boast a sizable library whose volumes reflected its diverse ideological trends, and it came into its own as a movement exercising significant theological influence, rather than existing merely as a social and historical force. In the era preceding the emergence of Hasidism, Jewish culture, which had previously been primarily rabbinical or philosophical, had undergone a great metamorphosis along Kabbalistic lines and became almost totally Kabbalistic during the 16th century with the Kabbalistic philosophy of Rabbi Isaac Luria gaining a position of pre-eminence. In this intellectual and spiritual climate Hasidism came

1. Albertson, op.cit. p. 13-14

under the influence of the Kabbalah in many respects, receiving its fundamental ideas and theological terminology therefrom. While Hasidism's view of the world was unavoidably shaped and coloured by the Kabbalah and its mystical doctrines, Hasidism was not fundamentally mystical. This is because Hasidism was a mass movement and the mystical stance, being intensely individualistic, could not easily be maintained in a formally structured group setting. Inevitably, therefore, the mystical tendencies of the Kabbalah became more generalized as they gained wide popular acceptance and much of the force of Kabbalistic terms and concepts was diluted as they became an integral part of the Jewish spiritual vocabulary. In consequence, the Kabbalah that animated Hasidism is best described, not as a process that transformed every believer into a mystic, but as a collective spiritual attitude toward the world, history and God.[1]

In many respects, Hasidism began as a revivalist movement with its characteristic doctrines, unlike those of the Lurianic Kabbalah, being neither original nor revolutionary, many of them being revitalized versions of ideas that had long been part of Judaism. Joy in prayer and in the performance of religious precepts, love for the whole people of Israel and for the poor and ignorant, and opposition to dogmatic study of the Torah, for example, were all accepted Jewish tradition. Early Hasidic teachers were thus restorers of neglected ideas to the forefront of Jewish religious consciousness rather than innovators.[2]

1. Dan, op.cit. p. 1-8
2. Ibid. p.18

As stated previously in discussing the Kabbalah, the Kabbalistic ideas utilized by Hasidism derived from two main sources: The sefirot doctrine of the Zohar and Rabbi Isaac Luria's doctrine of zimzum, shevirah and tikkun. Most Hasidic teachers preferred the older, somewhat simpler conceptualization of the sefirot found in the Zohar to the more complicated Lurianic system, but they did accept Luria's cosmic history and many of his other revolutionary ideas, although not without considerable modification.

The sefirot doctrine, it will be recalled, is based on the belief that the Ein Sof emanated a series of ten powers or sefirot, each with its own specific characteristics and functions, which are completely divine but have limits because they exist in time. With the introduction of the view that the sefirot were dynamic, rather than static, this had become a mystical system. The sefirot were intensely personalized in the Kabbalistic literature and especially in the richly detailed Zohar. Of importance is the symbolism attached to the sixth and tenth sefirot, namely, Tiferet and Shekinah. Tiferet, the masculine element in the divine world, was the central power among the "sefirot of construction" which created the world and guided its destiny - while Shekhinah, its feminine counterpart, was the divine element closest to man and thus the subject of a large part of human religious endeavour as well as the first possible contact of a mystic ascending to the divine world.

Hasidic theology completely accepted this cosmological system of the sefirot whereby the world was conceived as the mystical pleroma, the "Fullness" of divine powers compromising the Godhead.[1]

1. Dan, op.cit. p. 8-9

The Hasidic version of the Zimzum concept represents an acceptance, in part, of the Lurian system but with modification. In the Lurian system, it will be recalled, the zimzum was a process occuring within the Godhead, that expressed the exilic sensibility and reflected the great mythic struggle in the cosmic world. By describing how God separated Himself from certain of His own divine elements, which remained in the space vacated by the Zimzum, the concept explained how and, to some extent why, it was possible for the world to be created. Hasidism offered a completely different explanation. In the Hasidic view, the zimzum was not caused by an internal struggle within the Godhead but by God's love for what was created, and thus it was not a self-exilic act of the Godhead but an expression of divine charity and love for mankind.

The Hasids agreed that all existing things derived their existence from emanations of divine light from the Ein Sof, but they maintained that the divine light had been so intensely bright in its pristine form that its full power could not be endured and "filtering" was required before existnece of any kind became possible. In consequence, God intentionally diminished His light to a lesser degree of power, commensurate with the limited absorbing capacities of the created worlds and beings. Put differently, He rendered this light visible, or revealed it, by limiting it. Thus, while from God's standpoint the zimzum was a withdrawal of divine light, from man's it was a revelation, or flowing out (not in), of divine light.

In this way, the Hasidic explanation of the zimzum did not include the idea of an inherent conflict within the Godhead and there was no basis for a cosmic catastrophe as in the Lurian system. This elimination of the

Lurianic Shevirah and the obliteration of the dualistic element in the early phases of Luria's cosmic history made it difficult to explain how the scattered divine sparks had come to be trapped in the worldy realm of evil. Some Hasids simply ignored the question, while others adapted pre-Lurian ideas to provide an answer.[1] One such explanation is provided by Martin Buber in the foreword to his work "Jewish Mysticism":

> "They pictured Him at first, before the Creation, alone, complete, supreme. Then from the void He created the Universe, and in so doing sent forth from Himself His own glory or presence - the Shechina - He let it fall upon creation in all its fullness, but man with his limitations, was unable to receive the measureless gift in that fullness, and it was thus scatterd abroad in innumerable sparks ... (which) found homes, not only in man himself, and in all his thoughts and qualities, but also in animals, in vegetation, and even in inanimate things. Thus God was immanent throughout Creation."[2]

Hasidism followed an existing trend whereby Luria's system was demythologized. Hasidism to a great extent rejected the Lurian myth and returned to the older Kabbalistic concepts. Yet, on the other hand, Hasidism retained a dualistic attitude toward the world and the Lurian mythology of the trapped sparks, fusing them into a complex new system which rested on three pillars: the doctrine of the uplifting of evil thought, the doctrine of communion with God, and the doctrine of the Zaddik.[3] These three central themes will be dealt with later, it being necessary beforehand to provide some historical perspective of Hasidism and the circumstances in which it arose.

The Hasidim, a term denoting "pious Jews" originated during the 1730's and 1740's in Poland where most of the large Jewish population were ignorant

1. Dan, op.cit. p. 18
2. Buber, M. Jewish Mysticism and the Legends of Baalshem, p. xii
3. Dan, op.cit. p. 19

and superstitious. This was largely due to the shocking circumstances under which they had to survive. During the fateful decade of 1648 to 1658 hundreds of thousand of Jews perished in the Cossack massacres which were followed by the Russian and Swedish invasions. The end of the seventeenth century was marked by the frenzy of blood libels which resulted in the adoption of violent measures by the authorities or the mob against the alleged ritual murderers, which led to the destruction of synagogues, cemetries, Jewish property and sometimes culminating in the expulsion of the Jews and the execution, sometimes, of entirely innocent people.

The inner life of Polish Jewry began to decline and the spiritual effect of the massacres and persecutions was even greater than the physical. The people turned away from reality and lost themselves in the unknown regions of the world beyond the grave. The masses indulged in speculations about Hell and Paradise, amulets, magic, demons and other mystical fancies and Kabbalistic exercises.

In addition, a messianic movement which was originated by Sabbetai Zevi (1627 - 1676), who was later exposed as a fraud, aroused feverish messianic expectations amongst the Jewish communities of Poland, Turkey and Italy (Zevi proclaimed himself the Messiah in 1665). The news of his arrest and conversion to Islam was slow to reach Poland. Many Jews were abandoning their homes and property in the belief that they would soon be carried on a cloud to Jerusalem. Even the death of Sabbetai Zevi did not lessen the intensity of the movement and many arose to prophesize the approach of the Messiah. The Kabbalist, Haim Malakh, returned to Poland from Turkey and began to secretly preach that Sabbetai Zevi was the

messiah and that, like Moses, who had kept the Israelites in the desert before bringing them to the Promised Land, he would rise from the dead and redeem the Jewish people.

Another agitator was Judah Hassid who initiated a sect called Chassidim who engaged in ascetism and who started propaganda of a mass-emigration to Palestine in order to welcome there the approaching messiah.

In spite of the Rabbinic proclamation of ex-communication against Sabbateans it secretly continued, eventually, however, degenerating into the dangerous Frankish movement whose members resorted to perverted mystical notions and sexual orgies and eventually proved to be the grave of the Sabbatean movement by their conversion to Catholicism.

The masses, frustrated by the persecutions and disillusioned by the messianic pretenders, failed to be satisfied with the rigid formalism of Rabbinism. They yearned for direction and satisfaction of their religious cravings and, in an atmosphere of depression and superstitious belief, with stories of wandering souls and devils, guidance was needed to lead a bewildered generation back to hope.[1]

Exhausted by the struggle to survive in poverty-stricken circumstances, chastised by their leaders for not devoting more time to the study of the sacred books, and bleeding from pogroms, the East European Jewry were beset by a mood of black bitterness (In Hebrew "mora schora"). It was this mass melancholia that the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism,

1. Paz, E. Summer School Lectures of Hasidism, p. 4-7

undertook to change. He began preaching that life should be filled with joy and high purpose, and within a few years he and his disciples had triggered a current of enthusiasm which spilled over and resulted in a religious movement which has remained vital up to the present day and which has several hundred thousand adherents throughout the world. The effect of Hasidism was, thus, to "substitute a warm-hearted breath of mysticism and glowing romanticism, for Rabbinic Scholasticism and avid speculations."[1] The Baal Shem Tov, whose mastery of the Kabbalah was incomparable, made the Kabbalah accessible to his scholars through stories and legends. These scholars were mostly largely uneducated, and it was in this manner that Hasidism began to evolve.

Hasidism succeeded Sabbateanism, and:

> "... (like Sabbateanism) it was based on the Kabbalah but differed from its predecessors in that it "Neutralized their messianic element" which was replaced by emphasis on the personal .... The salvation of the soul of the individual must precede the redemption of the world."[2]

Having provided some background into the forces which animated Hasidism I return now to the three central precepts of Hasidism previously mentioned, namely the doctrine of uplifting of evil thoughts, the doctrine of communion with God, and the doctrine of the Zaddik. The first and the last of the above-mentioned three precepts shall be treated of very briefly as their bearing on the life and work of Marc Chagall is limited.

1. Paz, op.cit. p. 14
2. Rubinstein, A. Hasidism, p. 8

The Hasidic doctrine of the uplifting of evil thoughts arose in response to the difficulties the Hasid had with the Lurian conceptualization of how evil had originated and would eventually be abolished. Luria's system held that evil would ultimately be destroyed, but in making this claim it failed to answer an important question implicit in the cosmic myth; namely, if evil had originated in the contradictory element in the Godhead that had refused to participate in the Zimzum, and thus precipitating the shevirah, then evil is derived form the Ein Sof, the source of all goodness, in which case how can it be completely evil? In order to deal with this question the Hasids developed a doctrine maintaining that evil is really a temporary manifestation of an aspect of the divine light, and that this element will ultimately be re-united with the good elements and be transformed or returned to its original state of goodness. More simply, evil was to be redeemed rather than destroyed.

The difficulty with this notion is that in order to redeem or uplift evil this necessitates the seeking of active confrontation with sin, as an evil element cannot be uprooted unless it has first been able to get a hold on one's soul. Opening oneself to temptation is dangerous, however, as it means that one may actually be drawn into sin which, obviously, was not a philosophy which the pious, strictly observant and highly moral person could safely embrace. In order to deal with the threat of coming into close contact with evil, in order to uplift or redeem it, the Hasidic teachers employed the doctrine of the Zaddik. This doctrine made a distinction between the ordinary Hasid, or simple person, and the Zaddik, a person of superhuman religious abilities. While the Hasid should not engage in such a dangerous practice, it is the duty of the Zaddik to undertake the fearsome task of redeeming the world by meeting evil

head-on, so to speak, in order to overcome and uplift it. The Hasid, on the other hand, was conjoined to adhere to the older Lurian method, namely the cautious traditional path of avoiding evil. To conclude this discussion, the Hasids envisaged a division of labour, as it were, in regard to the tikkun, with the ordinary Hasidim avoiding evil and the Zaddik assuming the extreme responsibility of abolishing evil by purifying it in his superhuman soul and uplifting it to its divine origin.[1]

I turn now to deal with the third central precept of Hasidism, of major interest to the subject of this discourse namely, the doctrine of communion with God (devekuth) which is one of the most distinctive and important doctrines of Hasidism.

The Hasidic understanding of the tikkun process of uplifting the trapped sparks and transforming evil into good followed from the belief that every human soul has a special relationship or connection with certain specific sparks that are rooted near its own place of origin in the divine world. Since one's individual fate and well-being are closely bound to the fate of the sparks with which one has this intimate connection, performing the acts that uplift them advances one's own salvific interests as well as the interests of the Jewish people as a whole. In consequence, participation in the tikkun process offers the individual Hasid a personal benefit commensurate with his own role as well as being beneficial for the entire people of Israel.

In Luria's system, as in the pre-Lurian Kabbalistic literature, the tikkun process had generally been symbolized by the idea of bringing about a

1. Dan, op.cit. p. 19-22

union, often described in sexual terms, between Tiferet and Shekhinah, the cosmic male and female principles. Hasidism retained this idea, along with its associated imagery and terminology, but combined it with the idea of devekuth, or communion.

Hasidism made devekuth into a minimal requirement demanded of anyone who hoped to ascend the spiritual ladder and viewed it as an ongoing experience attainable by all Hasidim, at least while praying and preferably while engaged in other activities as well. Thus, the Hasid aims at attaining a state of communion with the Shekhinah not just occasionally but on a continuing and regular basis. This is evident in the idea that communion is not an isolated devotional exercise restricted to the synagogue but something that can be an integral part of all aspects of life, however mundane. Everyday activities like eating, walking, doing business, or engaging in social intercourse are seen as requiring only a tiny part of one's spiritual powers and should therefore not be a pretext for interrupting the state of communion. Furthermore, since there are divine sparks that can be uplifted in every sphere of life, someone who maintains the appropriate frame of mind when doing something of a worldly secular nature is performing a genuinely religious act. This idea became the concept of avodah-be gashmiut or "physical worship" which holds that the power of communion can transform even a purely physical, material, and secular act into an act of worship in the fullest sense.

This Hasidic theory of communion made extensive use of the Kabbalistic concepts of Katnut ("smallness") and gadlut ("greatness") which applied to the divine powers, with gadlut designating the ideal state of total perfection ordained for each power and katnut designating the lesser state

to which most of the powers were temporarily reduced because of the imperfection of the cosmos in the aftermath of the shevirah. In Hasidic usage these two terms were applied to the two degrees of communion that a person can achieve. In the ideal state of gadlut, the soul withdraws from the world and is immersed in the divine glory. Since the imperfection of man and the world makes it impossible to maintain an unbroken state of gadlut, the devotee is sometimes obliged to descend to katnut, a state which is less desirable, but offers the possibility of active participation in worldly life. It was the application of this idea to the Zaddik, who was held to be constantly moving from imperfect communion in katnut to perfect communion in gadlut, that helped make it possible to see him as an intermediary between this world and the godhead.

The zaddik, being especially concerned with matters pertaining to the sparks with which the souls of the members of his community have a special relationship or connection, becomes responsible for the most difficult tikkinum. It is in this way that the zaddik is expected to confront and uplift evil and sinful thoughts and desires which the ordinary Hasid seeks to avoid. The sins he uplifts are the sins of the members of his community.[1]

It will be argued that the idea that communion is not a strictly isolated and devotional exercise, but something whereby the tikkun process may be performed even in the mundane activities of life, is of central importance to Marc Chagall's life and works and is clearly documented therein. To elaborate thereon, this idea is linked to the Hasidic notion that there is a divine spark in everything. As Dr. Efraim Paz has said:

1. Dan, op.cit. p. 23-29

> "The Baal Shem Tov (the Besht) took over the magnificent Kabbalistic cosmology whereby man is responsible for the fate of God in the world .... The Besht democratised God, making Him a kind, gentle and companionable deity, whose dwelling place is not in the distant heaven, but in the humblest human heart and in nature .... This is the teaching of universality in Hassidism. God ... is embodied in everything ... just as before Creation the world was in God, so is God in the world now .... Since nothing can be conceived without God, there is something of this essence also in the apparent evil of life. He taught men to regard everything from the spiritual aspect, that pain or pleasure serve only through the measure whereby they further or retard the spiritual essence of our being. Eating and drinking may thus become a holy act, and the sight of a beautiful woman awakens in us reflections of the most ecstatic nature .... The maggid (the Besht's successor as the leader of Hassidism) ... enlarged on the doctrine of Deveykuth through his vision of the Omnipresence of God, describing the essence of God as penetrating all existence and embodying everything. It is possible to worship Him with every act. There is a spark of Divinity in all things and everywhere .... The objective of "Thou shalt adhere to Him" is only possible through joy, while fasting and self-affliction bring sorrow, and sorrow is the root of evils."[1]

This means that the Hasid is not expected to renounce the world of the senses and engage in ascetism. On the contrary, he must approach these worldly experiences with joy and verve. For example, God has given man the sense of taste, therefore it is man's duty to eat with pleasure and do it as joyously as possible. One is enjoined not to indulge one's animal impulses but rather to employ these joyously as a means of enlightment and in order to further the process of tikkun: one must engage in the outer world as a means of service to the Creator. As the Besht taught, the Biblical injunction, "hide thyself not from thine own flesh" was to be interpreted as a commandment to stop inflicting pain and deprivation upon one's own body.[2]

1. Paz, op.cit. p. 18-21
2. Weiner, op.cit. p. 125

Hasidism, in other words, denies the existence of a dichotomy between the life of the spirit and life in the world. God has created the world so that we may perform our services to the Creator in it, to perform our duties with devekut. In this way, we will come to experience a world without divisions, one where only harmony and unity exist, where the entire cosmos will be seen as a symphony to God. Hanokh of Alexsandrow (1798 - 1870) illustrates this concept in his unique interpretation of the verse in the Psalms: "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth hath He given to the children of men.":

> "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord - you see they are already of a heavenly character.
> But the earth hath He given to the children of men - so that they might make of it something heavenly."[1]

The concept of the hallowing of the everyday is the essence of Hasidism. This can to some extent be understood in that Hasidism evolved in response to the gloom and impoverishment of Jewry. It preached a glad and joyous faith because in Holy joy God becomes visible in everything - Hasidism took as its motto the verse from Psalm 100: "Serve the Lord with Joy. Come before Him with exulting." It was thus that the Besht taught "that life should be loved and enjoyed - a beautiful and happy experience to be tasted and coveted and not feared."[2]

The Hasidim invoke dancing and singing in the belief that thereby every Jew can arise above his physical limitations and experience the Godliness

1. Rubinstein, op.cit. p. 34-35
2. Paz, op.cit. p.23

of his soul. In dancing the entire body is seen to express religious joy and become subservient to the ecstatic soul and is thus employed as one means of achieving devekut. The Hasidic dance represents the purest form of manifestation and represents the verse from Psalms: "All my bones shall say: Lord, who is like unto thee?"

Professor Martin Buber describes the Hasidic dance as follows:

> "Out of a thousand waves of movement it evokes in a kindred and visible form an image of the many fluctuations of elation and dejection in the enraptured soul."[1]

The dance is an aspect of the general ecstacy, the highest form of exultation, which the Hasid strives to achieve:

> "The true Hasid is in a state of deep love, love that rules his thoughts and sentiments. His love is more powerful than his bodily strength, and is so encompassing that he feels his chest cannot contain it. The passion raves and storms within him and he finds no peace. The dancing, singing movements, are outward signs of the turbulence within, the flash in his eyes signifies his submersion in the eternal - Eden of love. The Hasid is deeply in love with God and he acts as a lover. All his senses, all his life, all his ideas, all his spiritual might, all the fibres of his soul are tied, intertwined and concentrated in this love. Religion to the Hasid, is boundless love of God, more than his body can bear. To describe this state the Hasid has coined a term: "till the consumption of the soul." It does not mean that one dies, but that one reaches the climax, when it seems the soul will escape the body out of love."[2]

In conclusion, the discussion of Jewish mysticism and its various components and adherent philosophies contained in this chapter have been

1. Buber, op.cit. p. 4
2. Paz, op.cit. p. 37

documented for the purpose of relating the influences these philosophies had on the life and work of Marc Chagall. The exact manners in which these influences were manifested shall be detailed in a later chapter. It is sufficient, at this stage of the discussion, merely to mention that Chagall arose from a Hasidic community, that his parents were Hasids and his upbringing Hasidic. Although Chagall in his adult years never explicitly became an exponent of any one movement or philosophy, it will be argued that the influences of his early years remained with him throughout his life, yet that he preferred to retain his artistic liberty, avoiding involvement with the debates of the day, in order to pursue his goals untrammelled by dogma or other restrictions.

The historical basis for this argument has already been laid by Roy McCullin in the book "The World of Marc Chagall" where the following is stated:

> "It (the theoretical Kabbalah) existed in a popularized form ... and ... was still current when Chagall was growing up in Vitebsk"[1]

1. McMullin, op.cit. chapter III

CHAPTER II

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHAGALL'S ARTISTIC APPROACH

Israel Yeshayahu, the speaker of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) lauds Marc Chagall in the following terms in the foreword to the book "Tapestries and Mosaics of Marc Chagall at the Knesset" by Ziva Amishai-Maisels:

> "Chagall is then the greatest Jewish artist of our time, one whose Judaism anticipated his art and served him as a source of living inspiration for his creative imagination. The Jewish way of life, Jewish history, and the biblical heritage, as well as secular knowledge and power of observation, nurtured his poetic soul. His entire oeuvre, in all its richness and variations, is the fruit of these influences.
>
> Was there anyone more worthy and able to decorate the Knesset's State Reception Hall?"[1]

This richly deserved accolade conferred upon Chagall at what for him must have been an occasion of the most joyous honour bears within it some profound truths. The further discussion in this chapter represents an attempt to illustrate and document just what these factors were that "nurtured his poetic soul."

In this discussion, much stress has already been laid upon the Jewish mystical traditions which informed the community into which Chagall was born and in which he spent his formative years. Yet the question remains, what motivated this man who later became so honoured and revered, and what was it in himself and his personal circumstances that inspired him and led him on to achieve such heights and such excellence?

1. Amishai-Maisels, Z. Tapestries and Mosiacs of Marc Chagall at the Knesset, p. 14

In attempting to seek answers to these perplexing questions this chapter will be devoted, in the main, to a discussion of Chagall's background. To begin with the discussion will be concerned with the position of the Russian Jewry of Chagall's time, in the so-called "Jewish Pale of Settlement", whereafter factors more personal to the artist, such as his family life, the places of his upbringing and his feelings of love will be dealt with.

Chagall grew up in ambiguous surroundings. On the one hand he had a sheltered and protected childhood in a devoutly religious, stable home; yet, on the other hand, he grew up in the midst of poverty, pogroms and anti-semitism. The reaction of the Russian Jewish community of Chagall's era was not to resort to despair in these circumstances of misery and grief, not to become a pessimistic and downtrodden nation, but rather to become a nation exalted and sustained by their sense of God and Godliness.

Chagall was born in the village of Pestovatik in 1887 and spent his formative years in nearby Vitebsk, a factory town in what is known as "White Russia" which borders in the west with Lithuania and with Poland.

Beginning in 1772 a forbidding though invisible wall began to rise all around the Jewish communities of Russia, the Ukraine and Poland with Jews being forbidden to reside anywhere outside those places in which they were already settled. This geographic restriction became known as "The Jewish Pale of Settlement", with Jews who wished to travel outside the defined boundaries thereof being required to obtain special residence and travel permits, failing which they were arrested and punished.[1]

1. Ausubel, N. Pictorial History of the Jewish People, p.231

The Pale as defined in 1804 consisted of Lithuania (the provinces of Kovno, Vilno, Grodno and Minsk); the south-western provinces (Vohlyn and Podol); White Russia (Vitebsk and Mogilev excluding the villages); Little Russia (Chemigov and Poltava minus the crown hamlets); New Russia (Kherson, Ekoterinoslav, Taurida, and Bessarabia minus Nikolaev and Sevastopol); the province of Kiev minus the capital; and, the Baltic provinces (for old settlers only).[1]

During the reign of Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825), who was influenced by the winds of liberalism then blowing in western Europe, there began a new and brilliant era for the Jews of Russia, Poland and Lithuania. Those who had already fallen under the spell of Moses Mendelsohn and his Enlightment movement (Haskalah) flocked into the High schools and universities. Many Jews became merchants, brokers, bankers, manufacturers, doctors, teachers, journalists and government contractors. They, and especially their children, became quickly Russianised and quite a few even converted.

This Haskalah movement was current and thriving during Chagall's youth and many of his contemporaries were actively associated therewith. The Judaica Encyclopaedia describes the term Haskalah as:

> "The Hebrew term for the Enlightment movement and ideology which began within Jewish society in the 1770's. An adherent of Haskalah became known as maskil (pl. maskilim) ... Haskalah continued along new and more radical lines the old contention upheld by the Maimonidean party in the Maimonidean Controversy that secular studies should be recognized as a legitimate part of the curriculum in the education of a Jew. For Jewish society in Central Europe, and even more so in Eastern Europe, this demand conflicted with the deeply ingrained ideal of Torah study that left no place for other subjects.... The Haskalah movement contributed toward assimilation in language, dress, and

1. Greenberg, L. The Jews in Russia, vol. 1, p. 11

> manners by condemning Jewish feelings of alienation in the galut (places outside Israel) and fostering loyalty toward the modern centralized state. It regarded this assimilation as a precondition to and integral element in emancipation, which Haskalah upheld as an objective ....
>
> Moses Mendelsohn is generally considered to be the originator of the Haskalah movement (the "father of the Haskalah"). However, this opinion has to be corrected in that a desire for secular education had already been envinced among the preceding generation of German Jews and some individual Jews in Poland and Lithuania, during the 1740's ...."[1]

It was through the Haskalah movement that the door of secular culture, so to speak, was opened for the ghetto Jew. It was also responsible for the revival of the Hebrew language and literature, the awakening of Jewish nationalism and, in consequence the birth of the Zionist movement (which sought spiritual and political emancipation of Jews in the ancient homeland of Israel). The movement created tensions amongst the Jewish community as the orthodox leadership saw in it a threat to the preservation of Judaism. These fears were certainly not groundless as is demonstrated by the weakening of Judaism and the defections from Judaism which followed in its wake. The leaders were aware that for the ghetto Jew, the Jew in a state of diaspora (exile from the land of Israel) it was the orthodox way of life which had been most effective in safeguarding both Judaism and the Jewish way of life and which had, in turn, compensated the Jew for the disabilities he suffered. They realised that through secular education the youth would become equipped for a world that would not accept them, yet at the same time they would thereby be rendered unfit for life in the ghetto. The members of the movement persevered however, regardless of the cost in suffering and the loss of inner peace, for they were not prepared to shut out the light of the world

1. Encyclopaedia Judaica Jerusalem, p. 1433

about them even if to do so was the only means of preserving their spiritual heritage.[1] During the latter part of Alexander I's reign the liberal tendencies of his earlier years of rule suffered a serious setback and, frightened by his own liberalism, he nullified all of his reforms, including those for Jews, and constricted the Pale of Settlement even more.[2] A decree was issued barring Jews from living in the villages and forcing them to live only in the towns and cities. His successor, Tsar Nicholas I (1825 - 1855), continued his policy of uprooting the Jews and extended it to areas previously unaffected. The result was massive suffering, poverty, starvation and aimless wandering from town to town. In addition, in 1827 Nicholas I established a compulsory period of 25 years armed service for Jewish recruits. The reasons informing this new system were simple: to take Jewish boys aged between twelve and eighteen years from their environment at an impressionable age, to keep them in places stationed far from Jewish influences for 25 years, and in this way to thoroughly Russify them. The recruits became known as "cantonists" with officials having to deliver specified numbers from each community to the army.[3]

Louis Greenberg describes the horrors of the cantonist system:

> "The conscripts destination was usually as far away from the Pale as possible and the trip was an ordeal which initiated the children in a long career of physical suffering and spiritual torment. The military guards, in order that they might pocket the money allotted for transportation, forced these unfortunate children to make their journey, often lasting from six months to a year, on foot. The famous Russian writer, Alexander Gertsen, gives a graphic portrayal of such a march which he encountered in 1835. The cantonists were falling into line ready to resume their march .... "Poor unfortunate children! The boys of 12 or 13 managed

1. Greenberg, op.cit. p. 188-189
2. Ibid, p. 10
3. Ausubel, op.cit. p. 232-233

> somehow to stand up but the little ones of 8 or 9 .... No artist's brush could paint the horror. Pale, emaciated, frightened faces looked out of the ludicrously clumsy soldiers uniforms, casting about helpless pitiful glances at the soldiers. From their blue lips and the blue veins under their eyes, it was obvious that they were suffering from fever and exposure. A sharp wind was blowing, and these sick children, loveless and helpless were marching straight to their graves ...."[1]

It was hoped hereby to gradually wean an entire generation of male Jews from their religion and lead them to accept the creed of the orthodox Russian church. "Chappers" (the communal official snatchers or kidnappers) were even allowed to kidnap children of 6 and 7 years old. It was not until the coronation of Alexander II (1855-1881) that the cantonist system was abolished.[2]

Alexander II expressed his philosophy in the slogan "One Russia, One creed, One Tsar" which, in relation to the Jews meant the beginning of the dismantling of the separatist policy. However, those Jews who did not accept conversion suffered oppression and all the pains and penalties of being unwanted, unprivileged aliens to a greater degree than before. Alexander II's slavophile creed also led to the emancipation of the serfs which led to further economic hardships for the Jews for they began to compete directly in the labour market as artisans and merchants. Similar to his forbear, Alexander II changed his policies in the latter part of his reign. The advancement of the Jews was seriously hampered by the Polish uprising in 1863 which led to an unfavorable change in government policy towards the Jews and in 1871 the first government-approved pogrom took place in Odessa.[3]

1. Greenberg, op.cit. p. 49
2. Ausubel, op.cit. p. 233
3. Ibid. p. 233 -234

With the accession of Alexander III (1881 - 1896) to the throne the Jews were again subjected to a campaign of terror and new disabilities. He regarded the modern democratic spirit and all intellectual enlightment as leprous diseases with which "the vulgar" new middle classes were infecting society. And, he was convinced, the worst of these bourgeois elements were the Jews.

Immediately after Alexander III's coronation a pogrom broke out in Elizavetgrad and from there it spread fanwise into Kiev and Odessa. In the Kiev district alone there were pogroms in 48 towns. From there, the epidemic of violence and bloodshed moved into the districts of Volhynia, Podolia, Chernigov and Poltava, where it raged all that year. There was also a massacre in Warsaw.[1]

Louis Greenberg discusses this horror as follows:

> "Beginning with the regime of Alexander III the pogrom became an established, frequently recurring feature until the fall of the Tsardom in 1917. These attacks upon Jews, although not directly engineered by the central government, were at all times tolerated by it .... Having fortified themselves with liquor, the howling Russians would swoop down upon the Jewish quarter, and there would follow an orgy of pillage and looting .... Apparently the Tsar's deep-seated hatred of the Jews and the intense antisemitism which permeated his regime paralyzed the will to check the undercover anti-Jewish machinations of the Sacred League (secret group of high officials formed in March 1881 consisting of arch-reactionaries and rabid anti-semites) and thus encouraged the provincial authorities in their criminal neglect or connivance."[2]

In May 1882 the so-called "May Rules" were enacted as temporary measures, but in fact remained in effect till the fall of the Tsardom in 1917. In

1. Ausubel, op.cit. p. 234
2. Greenberg, op.cit. p. 19-25

terms of these rules, which were widely misinterpreted, in some districts Jewish Villagers were not allowed to move from one village to another, and even a change of domicile in the same village could result in the loss of residence rights. Renewals of leases was forbidden to Jewish tenants who were banished by the police. Due to this arbitrary interpretation of the rules 10 000 Jews were expelled from their homes in the cold winter before the highest Court of Appeal stopped the expulsions.[1]

During the period of Alexander III's rule the police of the cities outside the Pale conducted periodic searches for Jewish residents and forced them to liquidate their businesses and depart within 48 hours. For a bribe a Jew sometimes managed to postpone or cancel the date of expulsion or escape having his home raided at night. In 1887 a "numerus clausus" was enacted restricting the numbers of Jews admitted to secondary schools and universities. The admission of Jews to these institutions became dependent upon the number of non-Jewish students, creating extreme problems in areas with large concentrations of Jews. The situation became so ludicrous, as Sholom Aleichem describes,[2] that in some cases Jewish parents paid for and maintained a Christian student at a school in order to get their own child admitted. In 1891 in St. Petersburg some 2 000 Jews were expelled from the city, many in chains like criminals, and in the same year in Moscow massive expulsions began with 20 000 Jews, almost two thirds of the Jewish community, eventually being expelled. One comforting thought, however, is that the Russian people were not themselves responsible for the hardships and cruelties imposed upon the Jews during the reign of Alexander II. The guilt therefore must be ascribed to the emperor and a small clique of court dignitaries who were in complete charge of Russian affairs.3 Alexander III, being weak-minded

1. Greenberg. op.cit. p. 31-32
2. Ibid. p.37
3. Ibid. p.32-47

and despotic, allowed himself to become the tool of his former tutor Pobiedonoster, the aristocratic procurator of the Holy Synod, and the formula he worked out for the liquidation of the Jews in Russia was arithmetically neat: one-third by conversion, one-third by emigration and one-third by starvation.[1]

When the imperial government opened the gates to emigration, the mass-exodus began. Those who did not have the passage money to America, where most wished to go, compromised and emigrated to England, Germany, France and other European countries.[2]

The Jewish leaders were divided on the question of whether or not to support emigration. The upper bourgeoisie feared that any attempt to promote it would be regarded as an unpatriotic act, and the majority agreed that an acceptance of emigration would undermine the struggle inside Russia for emancipation. Only a minority advocated emigration. However, as the pogroms and suffering increased the majority began to favour emigration and from 1884 onwards mass-emigration took place.[3]

As Louis Greenberg states:

> "Driven by fear of pogroms, confined to an ever-narrowing ghetto and hampered by growing economic restrictions, they yearned for a chance to build a new life for themselves in friendlier climes. The two countries which figured prominently as centres of refuge were the United States and Palestine, the first for the economic opportunities offered by its vast underpopulated areas and the second because of its

1. Ausubel, op.cit. p. 234
2. Ibid.
3. Greenberg, op.cit. p. 62-64

> sentimental historical appeal .... Jewish nationalists ... advocated the rebuilding of Palestine as a national home as the only solution to both the economic and spiritual problems of the Jew. Thus it came about that in the early 80's political and cultural Zionism was formulated and the Zionist movement landed in Russia."[1]

During the reign of Tsar Nicholas II (1894 - 1918) the assualt upon the Jews was intensified with the pogroms becoming wholesale massacres. As for the expulsions and humiliations, there was no end to the cruel decrees and indignities that were heaped upon the helpless Jewish population. Massive pogroms within the Pale in the period 1903 to 1906 can be linked directly to orders from the central government and the Tsar himself, and evidenced both the police and army not only assisting the marauders but actively participating in the pogroms.[2]

Nicholas II created an organization known as the Black Hundred which declared as its programme the extermination of the Jews and the previous pogroms became but a faint prelude to the violence perpetrated by the Black Hundred in the revolutionary period around 1905 and after.[3] As Louis Greenberg explains:

> "Along with the physical attacks in the streets came legal assault upon the Jews, with such endlessly adverse interpretations of laws affecting them that life in the period following 1905 became a nightmare for them."[4]

Expulsions of Jews from areas outside the Pale and from villages inside the Pale assumed a mass character. For example in the spring of 1910

1. Greenberg, op.cit. p. 65-66
2. Ibid. p. 48-83
3. Ibid. p. 54
4. Ibid. p. 82

twelve hundred Jewish families were exiled from Kiev in the most brutal manner with neither the aged nor infants spared.[1]

The Romanov reign ended in 1917 when the Soviet, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, deposed Nicholas II and dissolved the coalition government he headed; and, at the order of the Ekrnteringburg, both he and his family were executed in 1918.

The Pale, abolished as a temporary war measure by the tsarist government, was not restored and on March 22, 1917 the new Provisional government conferred complete civil equality upon the Russian Jews, abolishing all restrictions against them and placing them on an equal footing with the rest of the population.[2]

What must be stressed concerning the above analysis of the Russian Jewry is that not all the discriminatory measures and violent acts perpetrated against the Jews have been detailed. Only a selection thereof have been presented, as to document the entire period in any detail would be an enormous task clearly beyond the scope of this discussion. The importance of this historical outline is in its relation to the lifetime of Chagall. The reader will recall that the first pogrom took place in 1871 and that Chagall was born in 1887. It is clear that Chagall spent from 1887 to 1906 in Vitebsk, within the Pale of Settlement, and that some of the worst excesses of anti-semitism were perpetrated during this period. From 1906 to 1910 Chagall studied in St. Petersburg. Although this was outside the Pale it was by no means a haven for Jews and it is clear that Chagall

1. Greenberg, op.cit. p. 85
2. Ibid. vol.2. p. 109-110

suffered there as shall be documented later on. Only upon leaving Russia and arriving in Paris in 1910 was Chagall able to experience life free from discrimination as both an artist and a Jew.

In introducing this chapter it was stated that the discussion would treat largely of Chagall's background in an attempt to seek answers to certain questions which were, roughly: what motivated the man and what inspired his art? Before turning to deal with Chagall's family background and those other factors more personal to his make-up, it is necessary to document his unique artistic approach as evident from his art and writings. It is hoped that in this way, by first presenting a synopsis of his artistic approach as it crystallized out in his mature and established art, the reader will benefit thereafter in reading of the individual factors which informed and gave life thereto.

In much of Chagall's art Vitebsk, the town in which he spent his formative years, is used as a setting. The manner in which he portrays Vitesk has been a subject of much discussion amongst those authors and critics concerned with his work. It seems there is general agreement that his portayal represents more a state of mind than of the physical reality. As Sydney Alexander points out: "for the physical act of seeing is only the trampoline from which Marc Chagall takes off on his acrobatic visions. He is a seer, not a see-er. He witnesses, he testifies. His world is all transformation, myth."[1]

This is well illustrated in Chagall's depiction of his stetl (Jewish village) in richly oriental colours whereas, in reality, the dominant

1. Alexander, S. Marc Chagall, p. 17-18

colour of the stetl was mud. Similarly, Chagall's wooden houses are mother-goosish dwellings of good fairies and demons.[1] These are good examples of how Chagall in his artistic approach generally refused to merely portray reality, in an assertion that truth lies elsewhere, beyond the world of normal appearances.

In viewing Chagall's work it is necessary at the outset to realise that Chagall did not attempt to faithfully record historical data concerning Vitebsk or any other place. What obsessed Chagall was the mileu of his childhood, reinvented rather than recreated, for the real Vitebsk of the period bears little resemblance to the Vitebsk he portrayed. The world he sought to create is comparable to that portrayed by the authors Sholom Aleichem, Isaac Babel or I.L. Peretz and recalls the common heritage of folk tradition and the surreal quality of so many Yiddish idioms. This world combines sentimentality, a sense of humour and self-dramatization. Saul Bellow describes the somewhat ironic circumstances which gave rise to the Eastern European Jewish humour which informed Chagall's view:

> "The Jews of the ghetto found themselves involved in an immense joke. They were divinely designated to be great and yet they were like mice. History was something that happened to them, in as much as it was the coming of the Messiah - their Messiah - that would give it meaning. Every male child was potentially the Messiah. The most ordinary Yiddish conversation is full of the grandest historical, mythological and religious allusions. The creation, the fall, the flood, Egypt, Alexander, Titus, Napoleon, the Rothschilds, the sages, and the Laws may get into the discussion of an egg, a clothes-line, or a pair of pants. This manner of living on terms of familiarity with all times and all greatness contributed, because of the poverty and powerlessness of the chosen, to the ghetto's sense of the ridiculous."[2]

1. Alexander, op.cit. p.18
2. McMullin, R. The world of Marc Chagall, chapter 3

In seeking to understand Chagall's obsessions one must also consider what it meant to be a Jew in Tsarist Russia, living with the humiliations, the threats and the pogroms. It was largely by force of circumstance that Chagall became the dreamer he was in order to escape the bitter reality. His autobiogrpahy "My Life" is filled with records of dreams as is his painterly work. The author, Alfred Werner, in his book "Chagall - Watercolours and gouaches" explains this aspect as follows:

> "... it seems plausible that the instability and wretchedness of Jewish existence in Tsarist Russia was more likely to develop a tendency to nostalgic day-dreaming than the comparative peace and security of the bourgeois merchant home in which Pissaro grew up.
>
> In his study of Chagall's Jewish background Isaac Kloomok traced the Master's "surrealism" to his youth in Vitebsk: "An imaginative Jewish child, who lived in a poor home, in a wretched street, where the visible world was miserable and colourless, without joy and without beauty, did not have far to go to escape his unacceptable surroundings. Not far away from his bed and his table lay the path to an infinitely rich and bountiful super-terrestrial world - a free world, with no boundaries and no barriers, a world into which he was carried away by the breath of his whole community in the hours of great festivity. The Jewish child began in infancy to learn the path of escape from the unrewarding world of reality."[1]

Alfred Werner reports that Chagall once stated, "Were I not a Jew (with the meaning I put in the word) I would not be an artist at all, or I would be someone else altogether." In commenting on this statement, Werner suggests that it should be amended to read: "Were I not Marc Chagall, son of proletarian Jewish parents, born and raised in the ghetto slums of Vitebsk under the terror of the last Romanoff, etc."[2]

1. Werner, A. Chagall - Watercolours and gouaches, p.17-18
2. Alexander, op.cit. p. 20

These characteristics of conscious distortion of reality and myth-making which are so patent in Chagall's paintings are also strongly evident in his autobiographical sketch "My Life". In this work "facts" bear the same relationship to "real facts" as they do in his paintings, with "real facts" being resmelted, as it were, in a crucible to make a work of art into a metaphor-machine. The prose of events therein has been transmuted into poetic drama and reality has been rearranged therein quite as freely as in his canvasses.[1]

Sydney Alexander elaborates:

> "Chagall tells us much about the stars ... "my sweet ones" ... but he doesn't say very much about the mud of unpaved streets, the unattractive garments of men and women alike, the tasteless decor of even middle-class and wealthy families, the generally unaesthetic surface of life in the Pale of Settlement."[2]

In this way, the artist is seen to preserve not the reality but rather a memory of what never really was.

How did Chagall come to do this? Instead of setting out to objectively paint the history of Vitebsk and the Jews under Tsarist-rule, he experienced, in a very intense way, this enormous and historical upheaval and expressed it by his depiction of his various characters (animals included) and their relationship to that upheaval. In this way he expressed the deep indentification between his own experience and the events surrounding him with the assistance of his various folk-type characters. Yet, however, he does not seek to deny the objective,

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 22
2. Ibid

external nature of Vitebsk, rather, this became irrelevant to his message, for only those aspects which were internalized by him and which, when mingled and identified with his other experiences, contributed to the creation of his paintings. Viewed in this way Chagall's paintings and autobiography can begin to be appreciated as that great artistic accomplishment of a mystical artist who achieved complete identification and unity between external and internal elements.

The writing of "My Life" was begun in Russia in 1921 when Chagall was 34 years old and was completed in Berlin in 1922. It was first published in French ten years later. While at first glance appearing to be a ramble of extreme naivete, "My Life" is in fact illusively arranged to express his life in a unified and spiritual manner. It is more valuable as a psychic autobiography than as a straight forward narrative of the events of his life and times. A further aspect thereof which merits consideration is the fact that Chagall was most adept at hiding his real feelings and contrived to write the work in such a way that no matter how much one seeks to read into it there will always remain areas which we will never fully comprehend.[1] This is perhaps remarkable in that it is an approach to authorship reminiscent of the authors of the Zohar and firmly rooted in the Jewish mystical tradition.

In "My Life" reality is overtly dissembled just as it is in Chagall's paintings. For example, when relating his impressions as a young boy of a wedding ceremony, once the ceremonial words "Bride, Bride! Think what awaits you" have been announced, Chagall reacts as follows: "At those words, my head gently detaches itself from my body and weeps somewhere near the kitchen where the fish are being prepared."[2]

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 21
2. Chagall, My Life, p. 33

Elisa Debenedetti in her analysis of Chagalls' mythmaking states that: "... in order that "My Life" might be fruitful as a true autobiography of Chagall, it would be necessary to correlate it with an apparatus of notes that would spell out everything."1 In other words, notes of everything to which Chagall alludes or had disguised within high points in the book would have to be documented. The style in which he writes is also remarkable in that, like in his paintings, he combines hermetic allusiveness with almost shameless confession. Thus, he at times hides under the bed, as it were, and at other times flings off the covers and shows himself and his beloved naked in an intimate embrace.[2]

Chagall's works demonstrate his propensity for concealment, as Sydney Alexander explains:

> "Again and again, both in My Life and in his paintings, the imagery is that of concealment, the child hiding in his mother's skirts against an alien intrusion, an antagonistic world. There is the Outside, and there is the Inside. Inside all is snug and warm, the safety of the maternal enclosure. Outside blow the cruel winds of criticism, competition, manipulation. One acts out there, as one must, only to return as soon as possible to the warm shelter of the Inside for nourishment and re-arming."[3]

Chagall himself wrote: "You can't imagine how happy I am and I don't know why - when I am lying down flat under a bed or on a roof in some sort of hiding place."[4] Hiding seems to be one of the chief components of Chagall's joy. He wants to "creep" into his pictures. He wants to "hide his feelings in the opulent tail of a circus horse." He loves to look out at the street from his hiding place at the window. His pictures are

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 21
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. p. 32
4. Chagall, M. op.cit. p. 72

full of lurking images, scratched in obscured corners of the stained glass, peering out of trees, lost in velvety deep blue night skies, swallowed in bouquets of flowers.[1]

Jean Cassou, in his book "Chagall", has remarked how Chagall did not detach himself from his completed works but remained singularly "inside" them. And so it was, therefore, that when questioned about his work, Cassou reports, Chagall always replied in plastic terms. Furthermore, Chagall kept silent on his private life, his inner world, and defended this by his personal charm and his character. Jean Cassou explains how Chagall comported himself in his dealings with others:

> "In his dealings with others Chagall may appear to resemble those equally charming creatures of aerial wonder from his own world of fable ... (with his) ... bleating love ... for all people ... portrayed in so many of (his) ... pictures. But from this angelic state of early purity to the burning intensity of the flame of love, it is the same heart expressing it's emotions, an essentially religious heart for which nothing exists that is not in some way linked and related to universal life."[2]

To sum up, Chagall's artistic approach is extremely ambiguous. On the one hand his work reflects an intimate exposition of his inner feelings and his background, while on the other hand he withholds himself from his audience. His distortions are arranged to present a mystical mileu of his own making to which his audience is given only selected entrance. An overwhelming deep-felt joy and spirituality pervade and all the while one is left guessing.

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 33
2. Cassou, J. Chagall, p. 284

In some respects, therefore, Chagall cultivates a seeming naivete which he consciously exploits in order to intrigue and mesmerize. Snippets of insight into his personality abound, but he ensures always through his secret nature that what is private to him will remain so. It is necessary, therefore, in seeking to establish the factors which influenced Chagall's character to rely on source material other than that which he himself provides.

To turn then to a discussion of the more personal factors which influenced the development of Chagall's artistic approach it is necessary, firstly, to provide some historical data.

Chagall was born in Pestovatik on July 7, 1887 and spent his formative years in Vitebsk. Probably founded before the 10th century and mentioned in Russian chronicles as early as 1027, Jewish tradesmen came to Vitebsk in the 15th century, possibly earlier. In 1897, when Chagall was ten years old, Vitebsk had a Jewish population of 39 520 out of a total of 65 371. There were several synagogues, many houses of prayer, schools for boys and girls, a rabbinical school, a Talmud Torah, a Jewish hospital. Jewish merchants carried on extensive trade with foreign countries and Jews were especially prominent in manufacturing. Vitebsk had fifteen Jewish machine shops, Jews worked in linen mills, manufactured eye-glasses, were cabinet makers and the like. What is remarkable is that not a trace of this imagery appears in Chagall's paintings and this serves to prove that he almost never, with the exception of very brief realistic periods, painted what he saw but what he felt.

Whilst Chagall's depiction of cities are perhaps psychic foundations, his depiction of nature, stenographic as it might be, bears a closer relationship to tangible fields, skies and seas. In no sense a land-scape artist, his in-scapes are nevertheless affected by his surroundings. It is not too difficult to trace in Chagall's paintings the various places from where he crafted them. It is clear that the countryside of the Vitebsk area was firmly imprinted upon Chagall's memory of images and was relied upon by him throughout his life. As a boy Chagall made frequent trips through the country to his maternal grandfather, the butcher at Lyonzo, and consequently from his earliest years imagery of town and country interflowed, with fields of grain appearing juxtaposed against wooden houses and mingling with villages, towns, forests, streets, houses and humanity.[1]

Vitebsk was the second largest city in the province and, since more than half of its population were Jews, there was no ghetto either physically or psychologically. There were of course the usual majority of poor and those of modest means, but there were also numerous professionals and rich merchants among the Jewish community. In addition, especially as they became more emanicapated through education and participation in liberal movements, the Jews were inevitably Russified.

Young Marc also visited his paternal grandfather, the rabbi at Rejitsa, and was influenced by the vast flat plains, the shrubbery, and the lush

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 18-19

Russian landscape of the countryside through which he passed. In the small stetls he travelled through the Jewish men wore the ritual fringes and the black flowing caftan and fur-trimmed hat which they had inherited from the Ukranian and Polish gentry. In the villages he also saw the peasants in their shapeless clothes woven of thick brown linen, with their full beards and sturdy boots constantly hurrying to and fro.

While the Jewish villagers in many ways lived lives that were indistinguishable from that of their Russian neighbours, there was much that set them apart: they were fixed in the ritual of centuries, distinctive in their food habits and ceremonials, buried in their own cemetries, and practised distinctly Jewish professions - circumcisers, cheder-melameds (teachers in Jewish primary schools), psalm sayers, makers of tsitsis (fringed garments) and jesters who entertained at weddings. They were also furriers, caterers, weavers, grocers, peddlers, rope-makers, tailors and carpenters.[1]

It was a seemingly peaceful area dotted with hamlets and villages, studded with orthodox and Catholic churches as well as synagogues. However, this calm was sometimes broken by a wave of pogroms against the Jewish villages and neighbourhoods. Sydney Alexander describes how Chagall depicts this:

> "So, frequently, in Marc Chagall's most lyrical works, the violence is there: sometimes implicit in the hysterical garish colours and grotesque maceration of "normal" form, sometimes explicit in images of burning isbas, proud old Jews clasping onto their Torahs like children clasping onto Mama's skirts, Christ Crucified in tallith and phylacteries."[2]

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 22-23
2. Ibid. p. 24

Animals abounded in the streets, alleyways, fields and between the isbas (wooden houses). There were chickens, geese, ducks, cats, dogs, goats, cows, and all of these creatures soon inhabited Chagall's canvasses.

The life of the Jews in Russia was defined to a large extent by the Russian Christian life surrounding it. Although synagogues and churches, Jewish folk-art and Russian icons co-existed, the "host culture" was rarely out of sight or mind, even the painting "The feast of Tabernacles" includes a church in the background. Chagall, who grew up within these two nonvisual traditions, used the Jewish soul and the Russian architecture and landscape to create his masterpieces.[1]

To turn now to the family within which Chagall was raised. Chagall's parents were Hasidim and his family members were followers of the saintly rebel, Baal Shem Tov, the eighteenth-century revivalist who liberated the untutored masses of Jewish people from the arid intellectualist approach to religion and who taught his followers to live in beauty and happiness, in joy and in nearness to God. The Jews were taught to be near God, to see God in their everyday lives and, in their belief that they were God's chosen people and that no matter how dark the present might be, that the glory of Israel would ultimately triumph. In this way the Russian Jews were able to survive the twofold curse of poverty and pogroms.[2] This approach to life is certainly evident in Chagall's works which express the gaiety of life most profoundly and portrays suffering in a serene and balanced manner.

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 24-27
2. Werner, op.cit. p. 17

If one accepts the logic of the sociological perspective that every person, and consequently every artist, inherits his ways of thought and feeling from a group culture, it is obvious that those of Chagall are more than partly derived form the vibrant, mystical and largely Hasidic Judaism of Vitebsk. Chagall himself did describe the mystique of Hasidism as "one of the principle elements" in his work. This is also apparent from his memoirs and those of his first wife, Bella, as portrayed in her autobiographical sketch titled "Burning Lights" (an allusion to the ritual candles lit on Jewish holidays). Both of their families were devout Hasidim and their lives were a perpetual round of fervently joyous religious celebrations. These impulses towards a wholesome existence and the will to happiness were drives that the Jews most implacable enemies never succeeded in suppressing and, Chagall's and Bella's families, like the other Russian Jews, believed that the longer grief endured in the ghetto the deeper the joy would be for it.

As Chagall grew to independence he gradually lapsed into a state in which he lacked commitment to organized religion. However, even as late as 1915 when he was a married man of 28 years, he still sought the advice of the rabbi on the question of whether he should move to St. Petersburg. Right through his life the influence of Hasidism remained with him in his painting, his philosophies and in his everyday life. A good example of this can be seen in his tendency to oversentimentalize, an aspect which at times distresses even his friendliest critics:

> "Chagall says his grandfather's public praying was as sweet as "new honey", and speaks of Jews unfolding vestments "full of tears from the whole days prayer." He tells how his father would prepare the prayer books for his mother: "In one corner, he writes: "Begin here." Near one moving passage, he notes:

> "weep". In another place: "Listen to the cantor"... "And mamma would go to the temple assured that she would not shed tears in vain but only in the right places."[1]

However, as the tone of this passage shows, a sense of humour always accompanied this sentimentality and dramatization. This Yiddish sense of humour with which Chagall grew up and which is evident in many of his drawings and etchings has perhaps become best known through the stories of the well-known Yiddish authors Sholom Aleichem, a writer of the Pale, and Isaac Bashevis Singer. An example of one of Sholom Aleichem's writings, contained in his book "The Great Fair" describes a scene with his friend Shmulik from his childhood shortly before the rabbi's death:

> "To be sure, all this did not happen as quickly as it takes to tell. A rabbi does not lie down and die so easily. He, who had always been frail and sickly - partly because of too much fasting and partly from undernourishment - finally took to bed in his old age. For over a year he lay paralysed without eating or drinking a thing - only studying, praying and struggling with the Angel of Death. Shmulik swore ... that every evening at twilight ..."That One" flew in through a crack in the window, stationed himself at the Rabbi's, head, and waited to make a grab for his soul should he ever stop praying. But the rabbi was too clever for him. Not for a single moment did he stop praying and studying, praying and studying.
> "What does he look like?"
> "Who?"
> "That One?"
> "How should I know?"
> "You said he comes every night, so you must have seen him."
> "Stupid! Anyone who lays his eyes on "That One" won't live to tell about it! How could I have seen him?"
> "Then how do you know he comes?"
> "What do you think he does? Sit in the sky waiting for an invitation?"....."[2]

The story continues after the rabbi's death:

1. McMullin, op.cit. chapter 3
2. Aleichem, S. The Great Fair, p. 22-23

> "Shmulik knew everything - even what went on there. And he talked about it as though he had been there himself. It was this way: the rabbi did not really die. He merely transported himself to another world, a better world, where he was greeted with the finest delicacies of paradise ... you actually envied the rabbi who was now having a good time. You quite forgot that only a short while ago he was lowered into a dark narrow grave, covered with sticky black earth, slapped down with wooden shovels, and that Shmulik himself had said Kaddish (prayer for the dead) because the poor rabbi had died childless and left no one behind to pray for his soul."[1]

It is interesting to note that a sketch of Chagall's is used as an illustration in the front cover of the book "The Great Fair".

Sholom Aleichem, like Chagall, helps that old world to live on in the Jewish imagination. His writings traverse the townlets and villages of the famous Pale of Settlement. Maurice Samuel comments:

> "We could write a Middletown of the Russian-Jewish Pale basing ourselves solely on the novels and stories and sketches of Sholom Aleichem, and it would be as reliable a scientific document as any "factual" study; more so, indeed, for we should get, in addition to the material of a straight forward social inquiry, the intangible spirit which informs the material and gives it its living significance."[2]

Chagall's work can be seen in a similar light, especially his writings. He succeeded in his art and writings, as Sholom Aleichem did in his books, to present a perfect expression of a people, their wit, their pathos, their heart and their special idiom. It is clear too, that this is the world of Chagall's family.

1. Aleichem, op.cit. p.22-23
2. Samuel, M. The World of Sholom Aleichem, p. 6-7

The Hasidim believed that worshipping should be made joyful. In Vitebsk the most pious Jews sang for God loudly and regularly, and whenever they could they danced for Him. In "Burning Lights" Bella describes the celebration at her home of the festival of Simchat Torah, which marks the completion of the year's weekly readings of the 5 Books of Moses:[1]

> "The table is pushed to one side, the chairs are kicked away, the walls themselves seem to be swaying. The tablecloth slips. Pieces of cake and some glasses fall to the floor. The men begin to leap, to stamp in one spot. They turn the flaps of their coats, and they form little dance circles. Their shoulders are bent, their hands are interlocked .... People cannot see one another, no one sees himself. The dancers boots kick high curves .... Now no one remains sitting at the table. The table itself takes motion.... And father, always so quiet, so calm, moves from his place, makes his way toward the dancing men, and falls into the whirling ring. The chain of people gives a tug and swallows him. The women in the corners are thrilled ... their husbands make merry .... With a shout, a tall thin Jew bounces into the room. He turns a somersault and lands on his feet. He twists on the floor like a worm, and in one jump lands in the kitchen .... All of them are dizzy; they can barely stand on their feet. They drop into the chairs exhausted. With their heads bent, they lie for a while in a faint .... All of them jump up from their seats as though they had been lashed, and run with tottering legs out into the street. Father runs with them ...."[2]

Chagall's family name was originally Segal, an extremely common name in Byelorussia. Chagall's father first changed it to Chagal, and the painter himself added the second "l" in order to Frenchify the pronunciation. Chagall's father Zachar, who was apprenticed early in life to a herring merchant, laboured for all of his 32 working years hauling herrings for the pitiful income of 20 roubles a month. Zachar was a religious man who rose early in the morning for prayers at the synagogue before departing to

1. McMullin, op.cit. chapter 3
2. Chagall, B. Burning Lights, p. 112-113

his ceaseless labours. He was a sullen man who, after his backbreaking work, was always tired and wont to fall asleep at the table. The family were observant Jews participating in all the religious traditions and festivals.

His mother, Feiga-Ita, was a lively, maternal and homely woman whose cheerful personality brought warmth and love to her brood of nine children (two boys and seven girls, of which Marc was the eldest and one of whom died at birth.) Feiga-Ita was also an enterprising woman who, in order to supplement her husband's meagre income, opened a small grocery shop and later had three small isbas built. With this added income one cannot say that the family was poor, but certainly their means were modest.

In both words and paint Chagall offers us propitiatory images of his work-belaboured father. In a real life portrait of 1914 he shows us Zachar, not asleep, but grimacing his misery under the questioning glance of a grandmother and a cat.[1]

Sydney Alexander suggests that the abundant fish in Chagall's canvasses "that swim or fly vertically and horizontally, surveying snow-white Russian towns or sunlit riviera beaches, keeping time with grandfather clocks or sprouting unlikely gull's wings" are, in fact, nothing more than the herrings of Zachar, rather than the symbols which others have sought to attribute to them, namely, symbolic of Christ, or of the male organ.[2]

1. Alexander, op.cit. p.27-29
2. Ibid. p. 29

Chagall's relationship with his mother was extremely important to him:

> "... the indefatigable Feiga-Ita managing her defeated drudge of a husband, her grocery shop, her building operations, completing poor Zachar's unfinished prayers, undoubtedly became in the eyes of her eldest son a combination Rebecca-Isis-Mary figure, the primordial Great Earth Mother image that was to condition Chagall's amorous life. In his wife he sought always the managing mother: someone to love him, protect him, surround him with maternal warmth and security ...."[1]

Another relative who entranced Chagall was his grandfather, the butcher of Lyonzo with whom he spent many vacations. Once during a feast day the grandfather disappeared only to be discovered up on the roof munching on carrots. In his autobiography Chagall remarks about this incident: "Not bad for a painting" and indeed, how numerous are the bearded Jews on rooftops he portrays in his paintings![2]

The relevant passage in "My Life" is:

> "The feast of Sukkot or Simchat Torah.
> They look for him everywhere
> Where is he, where is he?
> It turned out that because of the fine weather we were having, grandfather had climbed on to the roof, sat down on the chimney-pots and was regaling himself on carrots.
> Not a bad picture.
> I do not mind if people, with joy and relief, discover the enigma of my pictures in these innocent adventures of my relatives. How little that matters to me! My dear fellow-citizens, you are welcome."[3]

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 32
2. Ibid. p. 35
3. Chagall, M. op.cit. p. 21

It seems as if these earliest childhood experiences provided Chagall with enough documentation for his entire life. Roy McMullin gives his reader a touching insight into the world of the young Chagall in a paraphrase of certain events Chagall depicted in his autobiography:

> "... his father a laborer in a herring depot, going to the synagogue every morning at 6, winter and summer; his Uncle Juda muttering prayers at the window; his Uncle Israel swaying and singing at the synagogue; his Uncle Neuch borrowing a tallith (prayer shawl), reading his Bible aloud, and then playing the rabbi's song on a violin; and himself singing with the cantor, praying to be hidden in the Holy Ark with the Torah, imagining tiny ancient Jews in the depths of his father's Passover wine, waiting in a dark courtyard for the prophet Elijah and the white chariot to appear ...."[1]

In this family unit, surrounded by his seven sisters and his mother, Chagall experienced nothing but miracles.[2] He was an enraptured elfin child, shy, cuddled by his mother and sisters and given to fainting fits when confronted by difficulties. Dream-Vitebsk had the power of hallucination for him. It was only with maturity and the use of accepted symbolism that every peddler with the sack became the Wandering Jew, and every cow the Christ. However, even as a little boy, Chagall experienced the extraordinary in the commonplace, the legendary in the quotidian, which surely is the mark of the poet and of the mystic.[3]

At the Cheder, the religious school for Jewish youth, the young Chagall entered seriously into the world of the Bible whose personages he was later to portray as if they were his Vitebskian neighbours. In Cheder he

1. McMullin, op.cit. chapter 3
2. Alexander, op.cit. p. 32
3. Ibid. p. 40

learned enough Hebrew to read the Holy Books; to his parents he spoke Yiddish and, to his brothers, sisters and friends he spoke Russian. A rabbi also came to his home to give Bible instruction.

When he was 13 his mother tried to enrol him in the communal Russian school but was unsuccesful due to the "numerus clausus". Undaunted, his mother bribed a Professor with 50 roubles, and Marc entered the Professor's third grade course. In the ensuing 6 years at the communal Russian school Marc progressed regularly but never distinguished himself.[1]

His first introduction to art was via a schoolfriend with whom he began copying magazine illustrations. After this event there was no stopping the budding young artist and he was soon enrolled for lessons with Yehuda Pen a provincial portraitist. His father in an ambiguous gesture typical of a pious Jew, who while washing his hands of sinful image-making and yet at the same time yielding to the importuning of a busy little wife desirous of advancing her darling son, would spin the 5 roubles required for Pen's lessons out to Marc in the courtyard.

Jehuda Pen was a portrait artist and salon painter who held the traditional notion of art as the tasteful and skilful rendering of what the eye perceives. Chagall, in some ways influenced by the winds of change the Haskalah movement was sending blowing through the Pale, was not likely to receive too much sympathy from him. For Chagall's cheeks were

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 40-41

too pink (he had already aquired the habit of rouging them) and his vision was turned too much inward to be concerned with perfecting his grasp of external reality. During the few months he studied with Pen his paintings were in an anti-realistic realistic style, with lumpish clods of pigments resolving into middle-class Russians and village Jews, with clumsily drawn hands. These anatomical and perspectival distortions were not only signs of the technical limitations of a young artist, but also a declaration of independance from the eyes.[1]

In 1905 the first abortive Russian revolution occurred. It had tragic consequences for the Jews, setting off a new wave of pogroms.[2] For example, in 1906 in Bialystok, a town some 300 miles from Vitebsk, eighty Jews were killed, an event which caused much concern within Chagall's community.[3] Chagall, 19 at the time, decided to escape the confines of Vitebsk and to move to St. Petersburg.[4] His father, despite his misgivings about his son's strange profession, co-operated to the extent of obtaining from a merchant a temporary certificate stating that Marc had been employed by him to deliver some merchandise in St. Petersburg. And so it was that in the winter of 1906/1907 the young Chagall moved to St. Petersburg, the capital on the Neva, the window on the west.[5]

In St. Petersburg he got work as a retoucher with a photographer. This work providing insufficient income, he approached a famous sculptor, I.S.

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 45-46
2. Ibid. p. 54
3. Ibid. p. 87
4. Chagall, M. op.cit. p. 70
5. Alexander, op.cit. p. 56-58

Guinsberg who, apparently taken by Chagall's charm gave him a letter of introduction to his brother Baron David Guinsberg. The Baron, an influential Jew who was one of the very few who might have audience with the Tsar, was disposed to helping his co-religionists, especially young artists. A small suite in his large house was set aside to house Jews who were illegally in the city, while the Baron sought to obtain documents for them. He gave Marc a monthly subvention of ten roubles which lasted for some four or five months before it was abruptly terminated. Thereafter he met the lawyer Goldberg who had the "right" to hire Jewish servants so long as they dwelt and took their meals in his house, and took up residence there.

On arriving in St. Petersburg Marc had failed the examination for entrance to the School of Arts and Crafts. He then entered a more accessible school, the Society for the Protection of the Arts, where he spent two unfruitful years in an unstimulating environment, before leaving in 1908. Thereafter, with frequent visits home to Vitebsk, he pursued his art studies in the capital at a variety of schools and with private teachers, living always very poorly and always engaging in various subterfuges to obtain the necessary legal permission to reside in the capital. On one occasion, on returning to the capital without a safe-conduct, he was arrested at the frontier as he had failed to pay the necessary bribe and spent several weeks in prison in the company of thieves, prostitutes and the like. On his release he became apprenticed to a sign-painter and did a series of signs, which work he seemed to enjoy.[1]

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 56-61

During the period which Chagall was in St. Petersburg (1906-1910) the Hasidic world of the Russian Jewry, which Chagall celebrates so nostalgically, was being shaken out of its centuries-old closure. This process was taking place not only from without, but from within too by virtue of the combined forces of assimilationists, Haskalah enlightment, westernization, mass emigration, secular movements of Bund and Zionism, as well as Marxist's internationalism and anti-semitic practices.[1]

Traditional Judaism, already cloven in two, with the intellectualized Talmudism of the rabbinate being ranged against the emotional, intoxicating Hasidic movement, was being further battered by the Haskalah movement and the forces it gave life to, namely Socialism and Zionism.[2]

Most young Jews of Chagalls generation participated - either organizationally, or emotionally - in one or other of these movements. In fact many participated in armed resistance groups within the Russian political spectrum while others participated in the rise of the great mass of Jewish artisans and factory workers against the centuries-old domination of rabbis, scholars and the small group of wealthy Russianized educated Jews (who served as bartering agents with the Tsar, exchanging loans of money for liberalization of restrictive legislation). The disintegration of Vitebsk, that was to cultiminate in the Second World War, had begun.[3]

What is remarkable amidst all of this social upheaval is Chagall's indifference to the powerful forces that surrounded him. As Sydney

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 87
2. Ibid. p. 54
3. Ibid. p. 54,55,87

Alexander says:

> "That Marc Chagall managed to negotiate amidst all this agitation - social, political, religious, national, cultural - that rocked the Jewish enclave in Eastern Europe ... bespeaks astonishing gifts of equilibrium, indifference, devotion to one's own craft, fanatical ambition, and complete seizure by the Muse."[1]

In addition, he also remained indifferent to a large extent to the new modern trends in the world of art which were current in St. Petersburg which was as much aboil with revolutions in painting, literature and in the theatre at the time as it was in the realm of politics. Chagall tended to borrow indiscriminately on occasion, but never became a slave to any movement or cult. And, concerning the massive waves of violence being heaped upon the Jews in the pogroms of this time, it is interesting to note that the only blood on the pages of "My Life" is that of the slaughtered cows at his grandfather's barn in Lyonzo!

Among the scattering of teachers Chagall studied with in St. Petersburg, Leon Bakst was undoubtedly the most renowned. Yet, even under Bakst, Marc remained his own man. He knew he could learn nothing from Bakst, perhaps from no-one. He felt incapable of receiving real instruction and that the most he could achieve from any school would be certain information. Fundamentally, he trusted only his own instinct. The real importance of the period of 18 months he spent with Bakst, was that there he first discovered the influences of Paris - Bakst's studio was a Europe in

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 55

miniature in which Chagall first breathed a new air of sophistication, of elegance, a hint of Paris.

The Deputy of the Duma, Maxim Vinaver, befriended Marc and did everything he could to encourage him. It was through him that in 1910, when he was 23 years old, Chagall was enabled to go to Paris. Vinaver purchased two of his paintings and guaranteed him an allowance of 40 roubles a month which made the move possible.[1]

During the years 1909 and 1910 Chagall began to share his time equally between Vitebsk and St. Petersburg. It was during one of his visits home in 1909 that he met Bella Rosenfeld, the girl who was to become his future bride and muse, the soul (nishoma) of his family, just as his mother had been to her family. This blissful union was to last all of 29 years, until Bella's untimely death in 1944, and demonstrated Chagall's durability and the singleness of his passions. Bella's role as muse and manager , vestal virgin, mother, counsellor, angel and housekeeper is celebrated in literally hundreds of paintings. Even after her tragic death Chagall continued depicting her celebrated image.

This relationship, as it demostrates Chagall's strong erotic sense, is firmly rooted in the framework of the Jewish family tradition. In practice, and contrary to the subordinate position Jewish Law ascribed to them, Jewish women were often the ruling force in the home, the core of activity who attended to the training of children, and were sometimes

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 87-95

active in independent business ventures, if not involved in their husband's. The role of the ceaselessly active Jewish mother, the pulsing heart of the family, the cohesive nucleus has become legend and Bella was no exception to this tradition.

Chagall met Bella at the home of his then girlfriend Thea Brachman. Bella came from a wealthy family and had won a gold medal as one of the four best lycee graduates in Russia and had ambitions to become an actress. She was typical of the new young generation of Jews, enlightened and independent, and had studied and lived alone in Moscow.

Bella's memoirs published in her book "Burning Lights" were written in Yiddish in the same mystical style Chagall employed. Her description of her paralysis upon her first encounter with her future husband, albeit written some 35 years after the event, is a veritable epiphany, making of it the visitation of an angel and illustrating the strong passion that remained alive between them over the years:

> "Toward whom is Thea inclining her ear? Her father must be in town, taking care of his patients. Is that a shadow outlining itself in the opening of the door? I am afraid. Laughter chokes in my throat. Who is there? What is she hiding from me? The door noiselessy opens. My back burns. I am nailed to the spot. I fear to turn around. A flame seems to pursue me. I see it sliding along the walls. The face of a young man emerges. A face as white as the wall....
>
> While I was thinking about him, his face floated toward me, changed, like multiple faces. They glided, one pursuing the other: here, his glistening eyes, his glittering teeth; a luminous ray emanated from him; there, on the same visage, a dark screen descended; the light disappeared, I could no longer see anything ...."1

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 87-95

The imagery Bella invokes here is identical to that which Chagall employs in the numerous works he was to dedicate to Bella: rays of light, swooping heavenly creatures, emanations, multiple faces, metamorphoses, phosphorescent dots, sprinkles and sheen and glimmerings in deep flesh-blue skies. Indeed, sacred and sexual epiphanies employ the same imagery.[1]

Their union was an extremely happy one and clearly exerted a strong influence on Chagall's art, as Sydney Alexander has observed:

> "Out of this domestic Eden, lived and remembered, poured an endless series of painted epithalamia: Bella as goddess; Bella as Venus; Bella as the Shulamite of the Song of Songs; Bella as the bride in her sperm-spurting gown, a sex comet; Bella as a white whish of rocket soaring toward the moon; Bella as Bella Bella Bella."2

To bring to a conclusion this discussion of those more personal factors which influenced Chagall in his work, it is appropriate to turn now to deal with the theme of "love" which is omnipresent in his work, his life and his philosophies. As Lionelli Venturi remarks:

> "... Chagall's natural impulse is all toward kindness, pleasure, joy, confidence and happiness. To him the light brought into the world by these things is sacred and even in the greatest adversity he cannot forget them .... From boyhood on, thanks to his good looks, he had loved and been loved; he embraces everything there is in heaven and earth and the animal world - cows, for example, familiar and cherished since childhood. Later on he discovered flowers and landscapes. Faced with human beings, he is timid and suspicious. But he is easily moved and exalted by love."[3]

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 87-95
2. Ibid. p. 83
3. Venturi, L. Chagall, p. 13-14

This abudance of love stems from Chagall's childhood years, his upbringing in a Hasidic family in which he was immersed in song and gaiety and which he so joyfully portrayed. Chagall himself wrote:

> "Everything may change in our demoralized world except the heart, man's love, and his striving to know the divine. Painting, like all poetry, has no part in the divine; people feel this today just as much as they used to. What poverty surrounded my youth, what trials my father had with us nine children. And yet he was always full of love and in his way a poet. Through him I first sensed the existence of poetry on this earth. After that I felt it in the nights, when I looked in the dark sky. Then I learnt that there was also another world. This brought tears to my eyes, so deeply did it move me."[1]

As earlier described, Chagall's own home life was warm, secure and loving despite the lack of means. In the Jewish tradition the home, as a focal point of the honoured family life, has assumed a significance much more pronounced than in the case of other cultures and has become one of the most important facets of Jewish religious life. This is even more so in times of adversity, and was very much the case in Chagall's own home.

D. Phillipson explains this feature of the old ghettos:

> "In the narrow lanes and by-ways of the old Jewish quarter of many a European town there grew up that beautiful Jewish home-life which, though its story is seldom recorded, is more important than the outer events and misfortunes that historians have made note of. And as we look upon the unsightly houses, the wretched exterior seems to float away and the home-scenes of joy and love and religious constancy shine brilliantly forth - perpetual lamps - and explain how, in spite of woe and misery such as have fallen to the lot of no other people, the Jews have found strength to live and hope on."[2]

1. Knight, N. A Portrait of Marc Chagall. South African Jewish Times, Rosh Hashanah, 5745 - September 1984, p. 64
2. Hertz, H.H. A Book of Jewish Thoughts, p. 10

Centrally important to Jewish home life is the role of the woman of the household. The loving security of the home is created largely through her ministrations, and her position has become honoured in Jewish tradition. In Chagall's life his mother, Feiga-Ita, and Bella were able bearers of this traditional mantle and indirectly contributed much to his art. After Bella's untimely death in 1944 Chagall was so heart-broken that he became a virtual hermit for nine months and was so affected in this time that he was barely coherent. Upon his recovery Chagall established a relationship with his housekeeper, Virginia Leirens, who lived with him as his mistress for seven years before leaving him, unable to cope with his fame. Thereafter, in 1952, Chagall married Valentine Brodsky, better known as "Vava", who incidentally was also his house-keeper, and with whom he shared the rest of his life. Although it is clear that Bella was the only true love of his life, in his later years he became extremely attached to Vava. His romantic life illustrates his basic need for a stable female companion at all times. M. Lazarus has described the figure of the celebrated Jewish woman who, it is clear, played such a vitally important role in the life of Chagall:

> "In the days of horror of the later Roman Empire, throughout the time of the migration of nations, it was not war alone that destroyed and annihilated all those people of which, despite their former world-dominating greatness, nothing remains but their name. It was rather the ensuing demoralization of home life. This is proved - it cannot be repeated too often - by the Jews; for they suffered more severely and more cruely by wars than any other nation; but among them, the inmost living germ of morality - strict discipline and family devotion - was at all times preserved. This wonderful and mysterious preservation of the Jewish people is due to the Jewish woman. This is her glory, not alone in the history of her own people, but in the history of the world."[1]

1. Hertz, op.cit. p. 11

Another valuable insight into the Jewish mother is given by Herietta Szold:

> "Jewish custom bids the Jewish mother, after her preparations for the Sabbath have been completed on Friday evening, kindle the Sabbath lamp. That is symbolic of the Jewish woman's influence on her own home, and through it upon larger circles. She is the inspirer of a pure, chaste, family life whose hallowing influences are incalculable; she is the centre of all spiritual endeavors, the confidante and fosterer of every undertaking. To her the Talmudic sentence applies: "It is woman alone through whom God's blessings are vouchsafed to a house.""[1]

Another example of the manifestation of the theme of love in Chagall's life and works is the Kabbalistic notion of love. Ralph Manheim explains this as it was portrayed in Chagall's art:

> "... the essential is the individual incarnation of the soulful and feminine in man, and this is how the feminine appears in Chagall and dominates his pictures: as a configuration of the magical and fascinating, inspiring and ecstatic soul that transforms the world with the starfall of its colours. For this reason the centre of his work is the relation of the masculine to this type of the feminine: and for this reason it is in the lovers that the secret reality of the world flowers mysteriously over and over again .... But this is the encounter of the transcendent God with his feminine immanence; it is the encounter of Keter and Shekinah, of God and soul, of man and world, which takes place in the inner reality of every living couple."[2]

Yet another aspect of Chagall's background in which the theme of love is evident is the Hasidic tradition in which the adherent seeks always to maximise the love he has in his soul and to guide his thoughts and actions accordingly. As previously discussed, the Hasid seeks always to

1. Hertz, op.cit. p. 12
2. Manheim, R. Art and the Creative Unconscious, p. 140

improve the world by his good deeds as a means of honouring God. A vitally important aspect hereof is to love one's fellow man, to seek "tikkun", the mending of the world, and thereby to do one's part to prepare the world for the messiah. Even though Chagall later lapsed from participation in organized religion, it is amply evident from his work that he retained all of these Hasidic influences: love of all creation, love for mankind, love for his work and, the highest of all loves, love for God.

The great influence which love played in Chagall's thoughts is evident from the fact that, despite all the suffering and adversity which he and his family were faced with, his work in the main is joyful and positive. Not only did Chagall suffer anti-semitism at school, his alien status was brought home to him most forcibly in later life when he was arrested for travelling without the pass which Jews were required to carry. In addition, in his autobiography he tells the reader that he witnessed a pogrom at first hand and, moreover, it is clear that throughout his early years in Vitebsk and in St. Petersburg he must have encountered endless barriers to advancement based merely on the fact of his Jewish background. That is not to mention the poverty, humiliation and degradation which he must also have encountered in his daily life and which can be laid at the door of anti-semitic practices. How did he manage to overcome these baneful injustices and how was he able to portray life in such overwhelmingly joyous and pleasing terms? Obviously the answer must lie in his having been blessed with an exceptionally strong character to be able to overcome these multiple prejudices and to devote himself so singlemindedly to his work; but, in addition, there was also the abundantly rich Hasidic tradition in which he was steeped, which

nurtured him and gave him the qualities of strength and compassion he could not have survived without. Hasidism also reared him in a tradition so abundant in subject matter that it was sufficient to last his entire life-time. But, finally, was it not the Hasidic belief that everything in the world is good, or potentially good and that evil is just a lesser form of good which needs to be redeemed, which gave him the impetus to create so profusely his joyful art? Can we not see his motivation as being an obsession to make the sparks ascend, to colour the world in joy?

In concluding this chapter it is necessary to deal briefly with the influences which affected Chagall after 1910 when he left St. Petersburg for Paris. Chagall himself explains the importance of Paris to his art: "It was from my first arrival in Paris that I could finally express in my work the rather lunar joy that I had sometimes known in Russia, that of my childhood memories of Vitebsk."[1] Chagall revelled in the freedom of Paris and the luxury of nostalgia enabled him to rise above the grim realities of his Russian past and to engage totally in his fantastic imaginative recollections, his thoughts always returning obsessively to his birthplace.

During the four years that he spent in Paris Chagall confronted the two most significant artistic movements then current in Europe, namely cubism and impressionism. He mastered both of these forms skilfully and gracefully, later rejecting them as "scientific" and returning to his own anti-rational, anti-visual conception of painting. He remained independent from all the powerful schools that surrounded him, yet drained

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 101

them of their rational elements, assimilating their lessons, and thereby giving increased authority to his own miraculous world. In this way he was able to accomplish the difficult task of joining east and west.[1]

Chagall describes his reaction to Paris as follows:

> "I left the country of my birth in 1910. At that time I decided that I needed Paris. The soil which had nourished the roots of my art was Vitebsk; but my art needed Paris - like a tree needs water - otherwise it would have withered. I had no other reason for leaving my native land, to which I believe (despite everything) I have remained faithful in my art.
> As a painter and man of the people (and I consider the common people the most sensitive class of society) I felt that plastic refinement of the highest order existed in France. I arrived in Paris with the thoughts, the dreams, which one can have only at the age of twenty; yet perhaps, those dreams have stayed with me for a long time.
> I was inspired by what I saw. But my enthusiasm returned to its starting point. Participating in that unique technical revolution of art in France I returned in thought, in the soul, so to speak, to my own country. I lived as if I were turned back to front."[2]

Chagall brought new life to Paris, reminding his fellow artists that poetry, as against mathematics and science, was important to art, that the humble and the familiar, love and hate, pity and fear, the whole world of the emotions, have their place in painting.[3]

Jean Cassou explains Chagall's creativity in Paris:

> "What he had left behind lived on in his mind and became the source of intense emotions .... They inspired his great hymn to humanity ... despite his human involvement, the poet has the faculty of detachment, the ability to project himself into space like the people in his paintings. Here are his own words:
> Mine alone is the land

1. Ayrton, M. Chagall, p. 31-34
2. Ibid. p. 8
3. Venturi, op.cit. p. 17

> that exists in my soul
> I enter it without a passport
> like I do my own home.
> All other lands have frontiers and formalities to be observed. But the land where he feels most at home is his own inner land, the mysterious place in which his irrepressible vocation takes shape."[1]

By the time Chagall returned to Russia in 1914 he had become an accomplished and masterful painter. The factors which had influenced him up to this stage of his development remained constant, to a large extent, throughout the remainder of his long life of 97 years; and, although he painted prodigiously throughout his life and well into old age, it is not necessary for the purposes of this discourse to seek to trace any further factors from his mature works. The next chapter will seek to demonstrate that the founding characteristics of his art remained, by and large, unchanged for the remainder of his illustrious career.

It remains only to add that Chagall had become an international artist whose work portrayed his assimilation of Jewish culture, and the cultures of the east and the west. Alfred Werner explains:

> "Had Chagall remained in Russia, he would soon have felt the iron fist of Stalinism, as many others did, including another scion of the Ghetto, El Lissitzky. Lissitzky was self-exiled in Germany; when he returned to his native country, the regime employed him as a commercial designer, disregarding his great talent as an artist. Or Chagall might have been one of the Russian millions who were martyred by the Nazi invaders during World War II. Thus, Chagall's immigration to France - and his temporary refuge in the United States during the German occupation - saved

1. Cassou, op.cit. p. 98-99

him as an artist, as well as a person. A Chagall emerged who was primarily Jewish, but also Russian and French; in the final analysis, he had become a world citizen in the realm of art."[1]

1. Werner, op.cit. p. 19

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTIC CHAGALL

In the previous chapter an attempt has been made to outline the background factors which influenced the development of Chagall's artistic approach which, it was postulated, developed to maturity during his Paris years. The present chapter represents an attempt to illustrate by reference to Chagall's works, how these factors can be seen to have pervaded his art throughout his long career and, to a lesser degree, how he refined and developed his central themes. It is clearly beyond the scope of this discussion to attempt an exhaustive analysis of Chagall's numerous works or to seek to trace his artistic development throughout the course of his long career. Reference will be made, rather, to selected works which demonstrate the recurrence of these centrally and thematically important background features and to illustrate their role in his further development. In the further discussion Chagall's attitude to his art in his mature years is significant. This is perhaps best illustrated by the following thought of Michelangelo which he found so applicable to himself:

> "'Where are you going in this weather and with that white beard?' 'I'm going to school to see if there's still something for me to learn.'"[1]

The discussion will deal with the Kabbalistic and Hasidic influences evident in Chagall's art, whereafter it will turn to a consideration of the artist's mystical outlook before dealing, finally, with his art in more general terms. Turning firstly to deal with the Kabbalistic influences, it is convenient to begin the discussion with the broad theme of sexuality and human love which, in its various forms, is an important

1. Amiel, op.cit. p. 136

and constantly recurring element in Chagall's art. The painting "Homage to Appollinaire" (1911/1912) represents the foundation stone of Chagall's numerous and almost obsessive depictions of the relationship between the sexes and helps to explain their importance in terms of the cosmic totality. Meyer describes this work in the following terms:

> "... Time began with the fall of Man and the separation of the sexes; it proceeds from eternity to eternity and man, half one and half two stands like a gigantic hand in the centre of this cosmic clock .... The circle is symbolic of the whole and becomes on a new level the symbol of unity of soul and psyche, of conscious and unconscious, of immobility and activity, as reflecting the link between man and beast."[1]

Within the centre of the circle here referred to Chagall has depicted a being that is half the dual-sexed man from the time before Man's fall, and half the first human couple. Meyer explains how significant this portayal is to all of Chagall's subsequent works:

> "...The "unity in duality" they represent is the basis of all the pictures of couples Chagall painted later, for they are all concerned with the reunion of the parted, the victory of love over separation."[2]

On one level this symbolism can be interpreted in terms of the Theosophical doctrine of the Kabbalah in the Zoharic circle for, to the Kabbalists, the mystery of the sexes in human life is a symbol of the love relation between God's divine "I" and the divine "Thou", and of Creation in its mystic unity, which was shattered by the fall.

The reader will recall from the first chapter that in terms of the Jewish

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 161
2. Ibid.

visionary conception man's being is seen as being comprised of three broad and inter-woven aspects, namely, the nefesh, ruach and neshamah. The nefesh is associated with our lowest, most instinctive attributes which encompass, for example, drives for food and drink. It is also clearly associated with human sexuality. Man is enjoined to transform these sensory functions and drives into tools of enlightment by applying kawanah[1] - that intensity of feeling and complete absorption associated with pious and religious acts and which renders one to some extent oblivious of one's physical reality.[2]

In this way, and by making use of higher intentionality or kawanah, man is able to exalt what might otherwise be ordinary, mundane or even trivial activities and therein honour God.

The Kabbalistic view of sexuality is that it is a basic quality in the universe and considerations of the sex act and the general topic of sexuality appear extensively and openly throughout most of the major works of the Kabbalah, especially in the Zohar. In terms of this concept every aspect of creation is portrayed as stemming from the existence of two primary influences.[3] Edward Hoffman explains:

> "These twin forces, opposite but complementary, appear in the tiniest blade of grass to the furthest galaxies of space. The better able we are to penetrate the nature of this mysterious union - in all its diverse manifestations - the more we will grasp about the highest realms that surround us and consequently our innermost make up as well."[4]

1. Hoffman, op.cit. p. 75-76
2. Minkin, J.S. The Romance of Hasidism. p. 92
3. Hoffman, op.cit. p. 79-80
4. Ibid. p. 80

These oppposing forces in nature are represented in man by the two sexes. Thus it is that in the Bible the stern patriachal "God-The-Father" (Yahweh) has its own female counterpart, the Shekinah, the heavenly Mother, and only when the two are united sexually does harmony truly govern the universe. During the Talmudic era it was observed that the Shekinah draws near to the human realm whenever there is human coupling, which notion became a key feature of the Kabbalah.

One of the Kabbalah's first key texts, the Sefir Bahir, or Book of Brilliance, ascribes great significance to human sexuality as a mirror of the divine structure, and vice versa, with the penis and vagina being explicitly mentioned as earthly counterparts to loftier forces. It is the multifaceted Zohar, the Book of Splendour, that has truly infused the Kabbalah with its vivid eroticism. This volume is permeated with repeated portrayals of the celestial "King" and "Queen" uniting daily in sexual ecstacy in order to sustain the cosmos. The Zohar emphasises in explicit language that whenever marital partners engage in love-making with intense concentration, they help to harmonise all the realms of the universe. In this way, just as the full sexual embrace, when performed with the proper attitude and within the context of marriage, is seen to bring the human couple together on many levels of their being, so too does this act cause peace and love to reign more thoroughly in all the realms: "As above, so below".[1]

Viewed in this context the Kabbalists have come to regard love-making as one of the most powerful spiritual practices we can engage in and, as the

1. Hoffman, op.cit. p. 80-84

Zohar warns: "The Shekinah is always present when marital intercourse is performed as a religious duty, and whoever obstructs such a performance causes the Shekinah to depart from the world."[1] As the Book of Splendour recounts:

> "And when is a man called "one"? When he is male with female and is sanctified with a high holiness and is bent upon sanctification; then alone is he called one without blemish. Therefore a man should rejoice with his wife at that hour to bind her in affection to him, and they should both have the same intent. When they are thus united, they form one soul and one body."[2]

The sanctity of sexual coupling and its importance in cosmic terms is perhaps best illustrated in the following passage in the Zohar in which the creation of the universe is described in terms which appear to allude strongly to a description of mutual sexual orgasm between man and woman:

> "When the upper world was filled and became pregnant, it brought forth two children together, a male and a female, these being heaven and earth after the supernal pattern. The earth is fed from the waters of the heaven which are poured into it. These upper waters, however, are male, whereas the lower are female ... (they) call to the upper, like a female that receives the male, and pour out water to meet the water of the male to produce seed."[3]

A Chagallian depiction of this Kabbalistic notion can be seen in "The Rooster" (1929) in which a harlequin, a female figure more like an equestrienne, is portrayed as embracing a bird in such a way that the silhouette of her back and head exactly complement its jaunty stance. The

1. Hoffman, op.cit. p. 84
2. Ibid. p. 75
3. Ibid. p. 85-86

closeness of the two main figures is reflected by the pair of human lovers in the little boat in the background. Susan Compton has explained the symbolic significance the rooster had for Chagall, noting that for thousands of years the figure of the cock has played a part in religious rites as the embodiment of the forces of the sun and fire. This symbolic meaning can still be seen to linger on in Chagall's works where the cock represents elementary spiritual power. Thus in "The Rooster", the sensuous and sinuous body of the harlequin holding the bird so tenderly can be interpreted as a marriage of the female moon and the masculine sun.[1]

Chagall's depiction of human love and sexuality seems clearly to reflect these spiritual concepts. In "Hommage to Appolinaire" the sex mystery - unity in duality - becomes a symbol of all reality. His portrayal of this polarity is akin to that of Yang and Yin (the prime passive and active principles of the universe which make up the doctrine of Taoism, with Yin being the female principle and the negative force and Yang the male principle and positive force. The forces always contrast yet complete one another and are seen to be present in all of existence and all types of relating).[2] However, the Judaic interpretation can be seen in Chagalls' depiction from its link to the "event" of the fall of Man, which first brought about the separation and the accompanying Kabbalistic belief in the hope of Messiah, the annulment of the separation and the restoration

1. Compton, S. Chagall. p. 210
2. Petrie, A. Your Psychic World A-Z, p. 233

of unity.[1] The painting, besides its spiritual overtones, is one of Chagall's finest and most mysterious works, as Franz Meyer describes:

> "Never before had the rhythms of his forms and the radiance of his colours (luminous gold, silver, reds, greens and blues) combined in such a wondrous, soaring unity. It blossoms before our eyes like a luminous rose - a radiant miracle and a delicate mystery."[2]

Jean Cassou has recognised the mystical Jewish influences in this work, which he so aptly describes as follows:

> "In short this picture - a picture of singular majesty and deservedly famous - must be recognized as an example of the symbolism peculiar to Chagall, which derives unconsciously or consciously from the cosmology and fundamental sexualism of the Zohar. Scholars tell us that already in the Ein-Sof, the "Without End" - an insoluble paradox in itself - there is the distinction of the male being springing up from the right-hand side and the female from the left ..."[3]

Another interesting aspect of this painting is the fact that the hours indicated behind the Adam/Eve androgyne are not just part of a dial but specify the hours allocated to the fall of Man in the Talmudic story of Creation.[4]

Another interesting work which demonstrates these cosmic concepts is "The Farmyard" (1954 - 1962) in which the foreground is dominated by a cow and a cock, the feminine and masculine symbols. A typically rural farmer's

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 162
2. Ibid.
3. Cassou, op.cit. p. 106
4. Compton, op.cit. p. 21

wife comes forward to feed the cow, which provides her with her livelihood, and the saucy cock rushes to share the provender. The animals are those domesticated ones who have lived alongside man for as long as history has been recorded. Their well-being is as important to the farmer's wife as her own - her life is joined to theirs for twice a day she must milk her cow and gather the fowls into the barn to save them from ravaging foxes. The picture reminds us of an existence ordered by the sun and moon and shared by animals and man. This scene is also symbolically depicted for the cow belongs with the woman in the hierarchy of female symbols, signified by the moon overhead, while the masculine cock brushes against the cow, as does a barely-defined masculine profile against the woman.[1]

From the time he first met Bella, and even before their engagement, Chagall began to depict the figure of Bella repeatedly in his canvasses, always presenting her in the most graceful and tender form imaginable. Jean Cassou has commented that by 1914 Chagall's numerous paintings of lovers expressed the hymn to love in its most radiant form. He then embarked on a series of paintings depicting The Kiss, one of the most notable of which is "Lovers in Blue" (1914). Among these are paintings in which the two profiles are inclined towards each other, no longer actually kissing, but portrayed in such a way, with all the lines complementing each other in a combined movement, to create an overall proximity symbolic of The Kiss. Jean Cassou in describing the exquisite melody of line and lightness of colouring in these works, comments as follows:

1. Compton, op.cit. p. 227-228

> "... these are the purest, the simplest and at the same time the most intense and resounding pictures ever to have issued from the inspiration of love. "When a man and a woman are together", it is written in the Talmud, "the Divine Presence dwells amidst them". In the Zohar, too, it says: "When desire unites male to female, the universe is blessed, and joy reigns above and below.." Surely this is the union of two beings, occurring at the beginning of all time in the bosom of the One, that we read of in the verse from the Song of Songs (2,6): "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me." "[1]

"The Birthday" (1915) portrays Chagall in his humble lodgings being visited by his fiance who presents him with a bunch of flowers. After their wedding and with the cementing of their union, Chagall's depictions of the lovers begin literally, to soar. Thus, in "Promenade" (1913) the husband is portrayed with both feet on the ground but with his wife spinning around at arms length at extraordinary heights; while in "Over the Town" (1917 - 1918), he holds her in an embrace and carries her off in a great soaring flight with the houses of the town below appearing as toys. Finally in "Double Portrait with Wineglass" (1917) Chagall depicted himself perched upon the shoulders of his young wife as if weightless in a no less extraordinary triumph of love over the laws of gravity and the limits of human strength. The couple are portrayed as a bridge between earth and sky: the erotic as a means of marrying the terrestrial and the divine. The infusion of refreshing and lively colours such as greens, blues and pinks expresses the warmth and tenderness of his subject and replaces the black and brown hues of his earlier years such as in, for example, "The Dead Man" (1908 - 1910).[2]

1. Cassou, op.cit. p. 72
2. Ibid. p. 73-76

In his article "The Master of the Imaginary" Camille Bourniquel explains the mystical background to the work "Double Portrait with a Wineglass":

> "The famous Double Portrait with a Glass of Wine (1918) in which Chagall depicted himself straddling his young wife's shoulders expresses of course, a joy bordering on intoxication but, above all, the real meaning of the couple. The two of them form a column of which Bella is the foundation of unvarying strength and security and he, Chagall, the dionysiac crowning .... Love and sentiment are not for him mere motivation, simple narrative incidents: they create exaltation, encourage the harmonious liberation of the being freed from that ultimate anxiety, that senselessness: solitude."[1]

A more mature work "Between Darkness and Night" (1943) expands on these earlier themes and interposes the experiences of the war years. Chagall presented himself here as a shadowy introspective presence with the radiant airborne and flame-tipped figure of Bella represented as bringing light into his darkness. The lovers are joined together by a single crimson mouth and around their two-fold face cluster memories of Russia under snow: a single walking street lamp, a mother with a hen's head holding her child, a distant village and a distant moon. Chagall's figure is especially striking as it appears stripped of every realistic and descriptive reference, becoming the quintessence of a form.[2] Meyer in commenting on this work again sees the spiritual significance:

> "...The "strata of experience" lie one above the other, ever new equations of psychic and physical reality. Its force is concentrated in the figures, the already mentioned symbols, the delightful pair of lovers. There we encounter the fiery element, the flame of the soul, the force of change. In the allegory of the lovers we once again find what animates the whole picture, thrusts beyond the individual, binds the heterogeneous, and imbues the whole with pulse and breath. The curious physical -

1. Amiel, op.cit. p. 78
2. Ibid. p. 86

> ethereal compenetration of the sexes becomes the archetype of the subtle dialectic of man and universe which is the subject of Chagall's painting. There is nothing new in that: thirty years before a similar allegory dominated with its mystic sheen the high starry region of Hommage to Appolinaire. Now it radiates no less strong in the midst of the earthy reality of human joy and pain."[1]

This cosmic significance is also portrayed in "Listening to the Cock" (1944) in which the lovers (a cow and a cock) are presented as having a certain human connotation and with the confrontation of the heads of the two animals as significant. The heads of the lovers are painted in a region dominated by the feminine, motherly force of the cow, and the cow's body represents the place where the sexes become united. In contrast and as in "Homage to Appolinaire", the two heads indicate the basic tension through which psychic force manifests itself. The various zones of the picture, formally characterized, assist in expressing the substance of the motifs. In the lower region of the picture there appears a tree growing downwards beside the yellow crescent moon; two white hen's eggs, one inside the cock's body while the other, which contains a little bird, is in front of it; and, a fiddler straddling the cock's rump. The colours help to juxtapose the dreamy warmth of the cow, tranquil and recumbent in her dark violet, with the vivid red of the cock striking out in all directions. The cow and the cock become linked with lunarity and solarity, but the symbols of sun and moon as polar psychic forces are not merely juxtaposed here - their reality is disturbed and complementary like that of Yang and Yin. The picture vividly portrays the wild whirl of day becoming the calm intimacy of night and how night again turns into day.

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 444

The tree grows out of the region of night into the region of day. The eggs that give rise to new life are linked with the cock by opposite sexual relationships, but their nature and form refer to the maternal element in the upper part of the picture. By the interplay which the motifs achieve on various levels and from the harmony thus created, the observer can behold the harmony of forces which is the foundation of human happiness and cosmic unity.[1]

Besides his numerous works dealing with couples and their harmonious interconnectedness, Chagall also expressed the theme of love in other ways. Just as the Zohar stresses the importance of the feminine aspect in the universe, Chagall did too and in a manner characteristically biblical. The numerous feminine symbols he painted as well as the manner of this depiction bear ample testimony to this. For example "The Song of Songs" (1957) depicts a world peopled with attractive women - an apotheosis of feminine grace. In this work it seems that all nature aspires to the creation of the feminine. A woman seemingly born of the Aeolian harmonies of the wind can be seen nestling in the branches of a tree, while another lies cradled, white and softly sinuous in an enormous palm leaf in a depiction perhaps reminiscent of Eden. In what might be regarded as a paradise regained Chagall depicts lithe bodies interlaced, crowned heads brushing the cheeks of lovely young women, the whiteness of shapely bodies lighting up the evening dusk which all the while are being escorted by birds of good omen floating in the skies above.[2]

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 462
2. Bacheland, G. Drawings for the Bible by Marc Chagall, chapter VIII

In his discussion of the four works, grouped under the title "The Song of Solomon Cycle" (1957-1961) Meyer has commented that these works follow the Bible text less closely than did Chagall's earlier Bible etchings. His insight into the love which Chagall seeks to portray through these feminine-dominated symbols is most helpful:

> "... Solomon's love for the Shulamite is Chagall's love for Bella, as the dedication to her proves, but it is also the ever new, eternal love of all men, at once carnal and chaste, celestial and terrestrial."[1]

Another aspect of Chagall's portrayal of the love theme can be observed in a triad of paintings which show a progression of changes in the emotion of love, from the baser human instinct, through to the pure divine conception thereof. In "The Birthday" (1915), a work in which the colours and forms are picturesquely simplified, the swooning youth has neither arms nor hands. A wingless angel of love, he snatches the desiring lover to himself with the force of his longing. In "The Pair" (1928) the lovers are shown to persist in another dimension of the love experience. Their bodies have now been given hands and arms with which they hold and caress one another soothingly. The bodies are also embellished with foliage and flowers. In the final work, "The Angel with the Palette" (started in 1926 and completed in 1936), the figures of the lovers have been replaced with those of angels, and flowers and foliage with angel's wings.[2]

In seeking to comprehend Chagall's obsession with love and the feminine

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 564-565
2. Erben, W. Marc Chagall, p. 93-94

symbol the following quote from Ralph Manheim is extremely useful, though, it must be added, the writer cannot fully support the observations regarding Chagall's portrayal of the masculine symbol:

> "... There is the beloved over and over again, in endless transformations, as soul, as angel, and as the inspiring power of the feminine .... In all these visions the masculine is dull, bestial, earth-bound, while the feminine blooms in all the colours of a transfigured, unearthly radiance .... But the essential is the individual incarnation of the soulful and feminine in man, and this is how the feminine appears in Chagall and dominates his pictures: as a configuration of the magical and fascinating, inspiring and ecstatic soul that transforms the world with the starfull of its colours"[1]

This encounter of man and woman represents the encounter of the transcendent God with his Shekinah, the encounter of God and soul, God and man, and of God and world. Here the Kabbalistic and Hasidic symbolism of Jewish mysticism can be shown to have infused the reality of an artist drunk with love, whose imaginative palette shows that man is made in God's image, and in whose pictures of human life the world is forever created anew. As Manheim states:

> "For despite all the terror, ... the pogroms and crucifixions ... the fires and wars, this earthly life is the consolation of the Godhead itself, if it is taken as the symbol that it is."[2]

Chagall's artistic world is infused with the Love Idyll theme which he so joyously depicted by way of his ecstatically soaring lovers, his swooping acrobats and his swooning angels. As has been demonstrated in an earlier chapter, it was the abundant spirit of love and feminine wholeness of his

1. Manheim, op.cit. p. 139-140
2. Ibid. p. 141

close-knit Hasidic upbringing that was, as it were, the mother's milk upon which Chagall was raised. And, it was postulated, it was that same spirit of joyous love which was the single impulse that gave rise to his mystical artistic world and imagery.

In seeking to demonstrate that a definite link can be drawn between the Hasidic spirit of abundant love with which Chagall was infused and the mystical, artistic world which he created, regard must be had to the evidence in his works and in his outlook of the influence of the Kabbalistic theory of divine creation through emanation.

The reader will recall from the first chapter that Hasidism adopted Luria's version modified after an optimistic fashion. Instead of viewing God's initial act of creation as a withdrawal to make room for the world, it was seen as simply a diminishing of his light in certain areas in order, partly, to adapt it to the capacity of endurance of his creatures. "Holy Sparks", therefore, were said to be still present in everything organic or inorganic, good or evil. Evil was merely a lower grade of good, and there was no fundamental division between the sacred and the profane.

In practical terms these beliefs were put into effect by believers in the following ways: firstly, all men, whatever defects they might be perceived to suffer from, had to be loved since all men had trapped in them holy sparks; every man had to be humble to enable him to find the proper willingness to love the wicked; man should not spend too much time regretting his sinful ways but should rather strive to establish a happy harmony with God; and finally, every man had a part to play in the

redemption of the world, for whenever he made use of matter in holy ways - by working with it honestly, for example, or even by eating or drinking it joyously - he consecrated it and lifted it closer to the light of God - to use the Kabbalistic phrase, he "caused the holy sparks to ascend."

These influences are evident in Chagall's work and one can scarcely doubt that, in his own psychic fashion, he adhered to the Hasidic belief in the omnipresence of God in nature, that he refused to separate the sacred and the profane, the animate and the inanimate. Chagall's own description of his feeling for his fellow man as "that clamorous love that I have, in general, for all mankind" demonstrates his imperative need to live always hopefully and to seek the goodness in life.[1]

This outlook, as informed by the Kabbalistic philosophy, clearly indicates how the Chagallian spirit of love infused his work and can be seen as informing the mystical, artistic world he created. Jean Cassou explains how Hasidism had this effect:

> "It transports us to a world of emanation where all that exists here below resembles what is above, showing us the various degrees in which the light and warmth of the divine Presence can be experienced."[2]

Cassou continues:

1. McMullin, op.cit. Chapter III
2. Cassou, op.cit. p. 239

> " ... It is essential to liberate the redeeming feature hidden in all things, no matter how bad, the spark that lies buried in every man, no matter how ungodly or how evil. And this liberation is a labour of love. Everything is a matter of love. All work is done in love. And without troubling to imitate the righteous men and the scholars in their efforts to verify this superb, absolute and single truth, it is enough to feel oneself a part of it .... Moreover, this sentiment is one that must be felt with a burning heart, and the man within whom this heart beats must at every moment, with each breath that he takes and with every image that flits through his mind, feel convinced that he is moving towards the accomplishment of this same mission. He must feel that he is feeding the fire with which all other beings are aflame - whether they are beings within the planets, or animals or things - and he must gather up all these flames into one great conflagration."[1]

Haftman explains this poetic exploration of the world of objects as painted by the Jewish immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe:

> "The gentle sadness of this art, its poetic exploration of the world of objects, brings to mind the Hasidic legend of the world as a vessel shattered into a million fragments because it was too full of divine love, each fragment becoming a thing which still preserves a spark of God's love. Sometimes it seems as though these painters were looking for the shards of the vessel and the spark of divine love in them. This changed their mode of perception. The eye searched for legend in reality. The result was a dream about reality, expressed in metaphoric images of reality".[2]

These words are especially true of Chagall. In his art the joyful Hasidic spirit is everywhere. In every object, human, divine, animate or inanimate there is concealed a "holy spark". In every action there always lies the possibility of releasing a "trapped spark". The energy and zest for life of the Hasidic tradition is omni-present. The principle that enjoyment must be sought in even the most mundane activity is given life. The

1. Casou, op.cit. p. 240
2. Werner, op.cit. p.17

spirit of abundant love and generosity towards one's community and family which are so central to the Hasidic way of life abound; and, the belief that God can be honoured in all of man's activities is forcefully portrayed. It was at a Simchat Torah festival with Chagall's family that his grandfather was discovered upon the roof munching on carrots. Was it at all surprising that an artist who grew up in this world should find it natural to turn persons upside-down and to depict angels as acrobats and dancers? As Sydney Alexander points out:

> "... perhaps ... the topsy-turvy, spaceless, boundless, non-Newtonian, Chagallian world reflects the Cabalistic component which is found in Chassidism. The Zohar is populated with happy and luminous souls, shining seraphim flying between heaven and earth. Without doubt, these mystic flights, these interlocked spaces are suggestive of Chagall's paintings .... Chassidism, of course, is antithetical to logic. "The Messiah will not come on the Sabbath, for the holiness of the Sabbath is so great that even the redemption is, by comparison profane." Hence, why should not goats fly?"[1]

Having dealt in passing with some of Chagall's depictions of angels it is appropriate now to turn to deal in some detail with his numerous depictions of angels and angelic figures. At the outset it is important to note that in the further discussion, as also in Chagall's portrayals thereof, the term "angel" is employed in the twofold senses ascribed to it in The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, namely as: "(a) a messenger from God, and (b) a spiritual being."[2]

Chagall has depicted numerous kinds of angelic forms, some examples of which are: The angel of love; the lover as angel; the angel as muse; the

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 51
2. Butterick, G.A. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. p. 128

biblical angel; the messenger; the fallen angel; and, the celestial being. His angels are in fact so prolific that they can almost be seen to flit from one picture to another, and their variety is so great as to range from the swooning angel of love to the ominous ghost of Lucifer. While it is clear that not all of Chagall's angels can be interpreted in a strictly theological sense, it is equally clear, when viewed in the light of Chagall's mystical background, that they can all to some extent be seen as spiritual beings. As The Encyclopaedia of Jewish Religion states in discussing the evolution of angeology:

> "The world of angels ... becomes so bizarre and chaotic as to leave an impression of unbridled imagination. Essentially, the angels serve as the media of revelation and the instruments by which God governs the world. Their numbers are astronomical; their varieties almost endless. All the elements and phenomena of nature are given tutelary spirits."[1]

Certain biblical angelic categories are of special interest. For example frequent reference is made to the Angel of Peace, while the seven (or four) archangels are identified with the "watchers" of Daniel, the "angels of the presence" and the ministering angels of rabbinic ideology. Another example can be seen in the special attention which mystic lore devoted to the Divine Chariot and the accompanying angels.

In the Kabbalah angeology, both speculative and practical, assumes its most extravagent forms, whereas in the Talmud angels are depicted as servants of God and one is forbidden from supplicating them for help.

1. Werblowsky, R.J.Z. The Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Religion, p. 31

Many ancient mystical texts such as the Heikhalot, the Zohar and later Kabbalistic literature attributed to them the most extraordinary powers with the consequence that, despite the disapproval of many rabbinic authorities, appeals were made to them in the form of amulets, incantations and even through interpolations in the liturgy. Kabbalistic angeology remained, nevertheless, essentially monotheistic.[1]

The Kabbalistic foundation of Chagall's inspiration is nowhere more strongly evident than in the fact of his portrayal of the Divine Chariot in the work "Ezekiel's Vision" which vision represents the very foundation of Jewish mystical thought. Another of his angelic works which evidences his mystic nature is "The Apparition" which powerfully transforms the observer away from this mundane world to a higher, more glorious sphere. The angels become a link between man and God, sometimes fusing with both man and with God. Chagall wrote the following lines of verse about this work:

> "Suddenly, the ceiling opens and a winged being
> descends with a crash, filling the room with movement
> and clouds.
> A rustle of trailing wings.
> I think: An angel! I cannot open my eyes, its too
> light, too bright.
> After rummaging about all over the place, he rises and
> passes through the opening in the ceiling, taking all
> the light and blue air away with him.
> Once again it is dark. I wake up.
> My picture "The Apparition" evokes this dream."[2]

In his etching "Abraham and the Three Angels" Chagall has focused largely on the wings of the angels as depicted from behind. Sarah and Abraham

1. Werblowsky, R.J.Z op.cit. p. 31
2. Chagall, op.cit. p. 84

stand aside in the shadow and even the heads, faces and figures of the angels they invited to their table for food and drink are obscured in favour of their massive wings. Though the angels sit at rest, partaking of the food, their wings do not fully close on their bodies, as you would see on resting birds. The angel's wings are still stirred up with the energy that moved them in flight, the momentum has not completely subsided. As they sit in the open air, under the sky, it may be the tease of the air and the call of the sky that do not let them rest calmly. You have a feeling, while you look, as though the wings will fly open and rise with power and lift the bodies up with them. The artist did not plainly show the feathery nature of the wings, but suggested it through their soft, shining texture. Kloomok describes the effect that is thus created:

> "Here is a new reality, not experienced before, appealing to your eye with its convincing realization. You have here a beauty of surface unequaled. And the whole picture is of an exquisite beauty, archaic, idyllic, strange and familiar, as a chapter of Genesis."[1]

Another good example of Chagall's use of angels in depicting the relationship between man and God is his drawing "The end of the Road" in which an old man in a battered coat is seen sitting on the ground, barefoot and with bowed head, his long thin arms encircling his knees. Above him hovers a young angel, pointing to the last piece of road ahead, which Kloomok describes as follows:

> "And here, now, get acquainted with another one of Chagall's angelic tribe. This one is a dear, young and lovely - only he is frightened. He certainly is not

1. Kloomok, I. Marc Chagall: His Life and Work, p. 17

> the horrible ugly Angel of Death. He seems to be frightened of the Death that waits for the old man. In his eyes there is great fear: he may be beholding the horrible Angel of Death standing on the boundary of the beyond. He points with one hand to the road ahead - but he averts his head from there; and in his turn of the head and in the position of the body, he expresses compassion and sorrow. He is a dear, good angel, and I believe in him. He belongs to Chagall's finest creatures."[1]

In similar vein, Chagall's depiction of the messenger angel in "The Sacrifice of Abraham" relates the unity of God and man and their interaction. Neumann describes this angel as follows:

> "a shaft of light that pierces the dark, nothing else. Not a trace of emotion, of human contact, of personal relation. Merely message and command, and now withdrawal of the command by a light radiating from the Light, from the King of Kings. The angel's eye never leaves the magic circle of the Deity, never sees anything but the Deity, even though he is performing a mission and delivering a message in the terrestrial sphere."[2]

In bringing to a conclusion this discussion of Chagall's angels it is of interest to note that many of his depictions thereof employ the angel in the capacity of intermediary between God and man. While at times the stricter Talmudic interpretation of angels is apparent, with the angels depicted as formal messengers of God, more frequently the angels assume more extravagant roles, more in line with the Kabbalistic view of the

1. Kloomok, op.cit. p. 81
2. Meyer, op.cit. p. 393

unity of man and God. This Chagallian blurring of the distinction between man and God, God and angel, angel and man, and, in fact, between angel and man and beast, is clearly influenced by the Kabbalistic concept of the terrestrial and supraterrestrial spheres. It is also present in many of his works which do not portray angels at all, but merely men and animals divested of earthly gravitational forces. It represents, perhaps, Chagall's answer to the major problem of the Kabbalah - how an infinite and utterly transcendent God could communicate with creatures and a world capable only of grasping the finite?

Possibly the most climactic of these works is "The Fall of the Angel" which was begun in 1923 and was only finished in 1947. The tragic nature of the work was such that on his return to France, at a time when he was so much in love with life, he was unable to complete the picture, only beginning to work on it again in 1933. The angel's fall symbolises that of humanity overtaken by disaster and is interpreted by Chagall with elemental violence: A sea of red is falling on the earth like blood; a rabbi clutches his Torah to shield it from danger; a man and a clock are catapulted into the air; the sun and the moon, as in Byzantine crucifixions, appear together in the sky; and, below, and in the background, appears Vitebsk - the cradle of all sufferings. It is a dream summing up all the anxiety of the period, all the major upheavals of human feelings during the preceding forty years, and commiting these to canvas. In 1947 Chagall reworked this canvas and toned down the dramatic violence of 1933. After all the years of suffering and violence his vision had

become further detached, he looked on the world with the wisdom of experience. The rabbi's face now becomes warmly human, the virgin and child are included and the forms are made smoother.[1]

Meyer's comment on the work describes the enormous potency of Chagall's vision:

> " ... one is probably not mistaken in seeing a parallel between the cosmic catastrophe of the angel's fall and the course of recent history. The angel is fire from heaven, a burning brand, an insatiable flame that threatens the sane forces of life. It is true that the details have no connections with current events and the angel's irruption is an overpowering act that takes place in the soul of each one of us. But for that very reason it is contemporary history in a broader sense, namely as the inner fate of every human being in this century."[2]

In the painting the angel does not play an active part, its satanic nature is purely passive. Chagall has depicted it as a woman with heavy breasts and a full figure come from a region of joy and hurled down into the peaceful structure of our human world by an irresistible will. Its face is distorted by fear, its mouth half-open, its eye fixed. Around this eye and its terrifying white the whole picture revolves like a wheel. The angel's hurtling fall and the hectic movement of the other figures fit in this great mysterious mechanism.[3]

1. Venturi, op.cit. p.84
2. Meyer, op.cit. p. 489
3. Ibid

Another aspect of the mystical Kabbalistic tradition which is evident in Chagall's work is his use of Hebrew letters. As has previously been stated, the major problem of the Kabbalah was to explain how an infinite and utterly transcendent God could communicate with creatures and a world capable only of grasping the finite. As Gershom Scholem pointed out, all creation is the expression of God's thought and will, with this expression having to be structured in order to exist. The Sefer Yetzirah (The Book of Creation), one of the oldest mystical texts, states that the clue to the basic structure of creation is the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which are not only symbols of the structure but actually the essential expression of God's will and wisdom. The Hebrew letters are seen as bearing the same relation to God as ordinary language does to man; and, just as man's speech and language reveal his inner thoughts more so than do his deeds and physical creations, in the same way the words of the Torah, God's speech, are the closest man can get to God.[1]

This idea appears frequently in Jewish mysticism, which is a mysticism utterly engrossed with the word. A further development is that since the Hebrew letters are direct expressions of God's thought, meaning must be ascribed not only to the meanings of the letters but also to their form. It has even been suggested by a latter-day mystic that the white space

1. Weiner, op.cit. p. 78

surrounding the letters is also replete with mystical meaning. This interest in the sound and form of Hebrew letters as a key to ultimate mysteries of the Creation is most emphasised in the Kabbalist's concern with the letters of God's name.[1]

Thus, when one notes how frequently it is that Chagall's design is constructed upon the armature of a Hebrew letter, one is led to ponder whether Chagall was concerned with Kabbalistic mysteries. This influence is most evident in his graphic works where this device becomes in fact a permanent design strategy. For example, in the "Dead Souls" series of 1924-1925 the human figures are derived not from observed anatomy but from the calligraphy of Hebrew lettering.[2]

Futher examples of this influence can be seen in the small drawings Chagall did for Peretz and Nister, in which the rhythm of the drawing responds exactly to the Hebraic type-face, the texts being both in Yiddish. As Meyer has pointed out the figures in the illustrations in Peretz's book move in the same solemn, inspired manner as the strokes of the letter aleph, daleth and tav. This is especially so of the exaggeratedly elongated "magician" who rushes and tumbles through the picture in the sort of movement described above.

1. Weiner, op.cit. p.79
2. Alexander, op.cit. p. 169-170

In the illustrations for Nister's tales the graphic urgency of the vignette-like drawings closely match the plastic character of the Hebraic letters. For example, a picture of a woman leaning towards a cock resembles the printed daleth; while in another picture the staircase recalls the rising movement of the sin. Later on, the link between the drawing and the Hebraic character becomes still stronger in accordance with the symbolic "life" of letters in the Kabbalistic tradition.[1]

In addition, this emphasis on the Hebraic lettering has a wider significance for, when regard is had to the fact that as a boy Chagall first learned the Hebraic alphabet, then the Cryllic (used in the Russian language) and only lastly the Roman, one can perceive how the graphic structure of his works appears most influenced by the first, less by the second, and least of all by the third.[2]

Chagall's use of Hebraic lettering can be seen as an analogy with the best vein of Jewish humour. Chagall's pictorial jokes, like verbal jokes, make game of Jewish tradition, blunting its no longer recognized normative force and at the same time adding to it and enriching it in a new sense in the modern existential fashion. Typical of this is the transposition of the alphabetical mystique of the prophetic Kabbalah in some of his drawings. In the Nister illustrations one can already see the assimilation of graphic form to the shape of Hebrew characters. In "Movement", "Abduction" and "Man with Rifle" the analogy becomes far more

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 246
2. Ibid

obvious and, in addition, the use of human figures makes the form here even more like the ideograms of the Kabbalistic tradition. In the ornamental title for the periodical "shtrom" the resemblence is even clearer. As Franz Meyer has remarked:

> "Here, an aspect of the cabala derived from the method of mystical perception expounded by the great Abul-Afiya in his "Way of Names" in the thirteenth century is combined with more ancient trends of alphabetical symbolism to form a "cosmic cipher system." The letter aleph in the reproduction - it signifies God in visual reality - belongs to an alphabet of this sort. When Chagall consciously or unconsciously varied such a form, he did so as he had those of the icons, partly as reference to its sacred-supernatural significance and partly as rejection of its definitely fixed form, always in the sense of the joke about the shadow in which a solemn philosophical proposition is nullified by the reversal of one of its terms. But it is precisely its import, the tension between expectation and nonfulfillment, that - perhaps better than a well-turned phrase - creates an inner emotion which presses beyond objective reality. But that is exactly Chagall's artistic aim."[1]

The discussion now turns away from an analysis of the influence of fundamental Kabbalistic principles evident in Chagall's art to concentrate upon the Hasidic aspects thereof. The reader will by now be aware that a true distinction cannot be drawn between Kabbalistic and Hasidic influences and that the further discussion will of necessity make reference to the Kabbalah - Hasidism having been founded to a large extent upon Kabbalistic principles and sources, and both of which contribute to Jewish mystical thought in the wider sense.

By its very nature Hasidic culture perpetuates itself to some extent in the form of tales which are underscored with Kabbalistic imagery. It is

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 300-301

an oral tradition conveyed by way of tales which linger on in the subconscious and serve as a guide to moral conduct, such as for example the tales of Sholom Aleichem mentioned in the previous chapter.

In his book "9 1/2 Mystics" Herbert Weiner explains the tales of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, one of the most renowned early Hasidic masters and, arguably, the greatest of the Hasidic storytellers. He explains how Rabbi Nachman makes heavy use of symbolism, but that it is a symbolism whose meaning can be largely resolved by familiarity with the Kabbalistic and Hasidic imagery that fed the rebbe's imagination.

Most of Nachman's tales have a clear didactic function, offering a specific way and perspective on life. Most of these tales were not, however, triggered by any obvious outer stimulus, but were started under the mood which Nathan describes as "and the spirit of the Lord rested upon him." They were spontaneous, yet amazingly compact and logically worked out, and are rich with multiple allusions as if they had been prepared for years in the realm of the subconscious, a subconscious linked to the Kabbalistic lore that he had absorbed all his life. Rabbi Nachman let his followers know that in his stories every phrase, every word is filled with holy mysteries, and that they ought, therefore, to be read in fear and trembling. On the other hand, he added, they are also pleasant stories that can and should be read without elaborate interpretation. As Herbert Weiner explains:

> " ... The stories ... see reality through the mystic prism of a world in which distinctions between "the organic and the inorganic, life and death, have become blurred, and everything is included in one great life in which everything is of equal importance"[1]

The action in most of the stories stems from a predicament where something has been lost, stolen or somehow misplaced. For example, two birds that should be mates live at opposite ends of the world; children who belong in a certain house and family have been inter-changed at birth; a king's daughter imprisoned in a mountain fortress, waits for rescue by her beloved. Everything is looking for its tikkun, the repair that will restore the broken harmony and bring together that which belongs together.[2]

As was pointed out in the previous chapter, the influence of this mystical tradition is reflected in both Chagall's and Bella's autobiographical writings. The style of presentation and the story-tale quality is easily recognisable, as is the mystical approach. Gilbert Lascault describes this Hasidic tradition of storytelling and its influence upon Chagall:

> "The Hasidic tradition has often been pointed out as one of Chagall's formative influences .... Hasidism probably had more of a profound and less of an immediately observable influence on Chagall. It taught him to love stories, to see in narration not a simple means of distraction but a way of waking people up. The Hasidic tradition is made up of countless anecdotes, short stories and fables, which it prefers to reasoned arguments. As Rabbi Nahman of Bratislava states: "Most people believe that stories are made to put you to sleep; me, I tell them to wake people up ...."[3]

1. Weiner, op.cit. p. 219-223
2. Ibid.
3. Amiel, op.cit. p. 67, 7

An example of the symbolism of Chagall's narrative art is the painting "Birth" (1910). At that time it was usual for Jewish women to be girded with the band from the Torah scroll shortly after the delivery of a child if labour was difficult. Furthermore, when a male child was born it was a popular custom for vigil to be mounted every night. Friends and relations would gather at the home of the newborn to recite a prayer to protect the child from demons. Chagall's portrayal of the birth includes all of these narrative elements and belongs with a series of narrative subjects, including death and marriage, which he painted in St. Petersburg. The composition of the painting is severly frontalised, the midwife unnacountably standing next to the mother on the bed, which is turned to reveal a self-satisfied man, apparently hiding on the floor next to it. A cow intrudes in the masculine half of the picture where a group of eager men push their way into the room. Likewise a man under the bed-curtain intrudes in the feminine half. The painting symbolises a mystical union with the universe and enables us to become aware of the inter-relationship and the meaning of what exists not only in the sphere of earthly, empirical consciousness but in other spheres too.[1]

The rabbis and profane storytellers accept the disconnected, broken structure of these stories, the holes, gaps, sudden transitions and omitted explanations. In the "Magic Tailor" by Sholom Aleichem one can see how difficult it is to know what the story is about, whether it is joyous or sad. Rabbi Nachman of Bratislava developed the art of uncontrolled narration the furthest. In his stories each fragment

1. Compton, op.cit. p. 16

contains the whole yet threatens it. He tightens the episodic events and lets the narrative float, because he prefers the infinitely small to the infinite, a life with leaps and starts to a life without surprises. Chagall has the same preferences. In particular, the changes in scale and the absences of supporting points on the large canvasses disorient us; there is no concern for the habitual rules of composition: figures are massed together in certain areas of the picture, whereas other areas remain empty; we never receive a message, but the existence of an enigma is imposed upon us.[1]

In introducing the first chapter mention has been made of the tremendous importance matters of the soul play in the Hasidic tradition as well as in Chagall's art. In the further discussion concerning the evidence of the Hasidic tradition upon chagall and his art an attempt will be made to provide some insight into the Hasidic concept of the soul and how this influenced almost every aspect of Chagall's artistic approach.

As has been previously noted, Chagall's anti-realism was evident from the very earliest stages of his vocation to paint. Chagall repeatedly maintained that he wished to paint in a manner that was not realistic, but which was the product of his own personal fantasies, inner impulses and all that occurs in the depths of the heart.[2] Meyer describes the origins of this outlook as follows:

1. Amiel, op.cit. p. 67, 70
2. Cassou, op.cit. p. 93-96

> "Chagall insists that his distortions were meant first of all as a provocation, as an emphatic refusal of realism."[1]

This fundamental anti-realism accords with the iconoclasm of Judaism. The ban on image-making is aimed chiefly at preventing images of the outer reality from weakening the inner reality. Chagall, in his turn, far from subordinating his painting to the laws of exterior reality through which a man can lose his soul, represents another reality, wherein his soul can find itself.[2]

Meyer continues, to say that Chagall's art is a total integration of reality in the great adventure of painting, the union of within and without, of soul and world. This message is a general view of the world, a philosophy of life.

The art of Chagall stands in opposition to much that characterizes our times: to the rationality of science, to utilitarianism, and to the anonymous effect of technical progress. The spiritual reality he has strived to produce since he first picked up a paint-brush is that which governs beings and things. His art is an attempt to re-establish the spiritual reality, communicate it to the observer, and thus cure him of the disease of rationalization. Each painting has this mission. As Meyer exclaims, there is only one way out: "to put the soul, the mysterious centre of the human creature above all else"[3]

Chagall's deep distrust of rationalism and academicism has been shown to stem from Hasidism, the origins of which can be traced to a revolt of the

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 47
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. p. 596-597

mass of relatively uneducated Jews against the arid intellectualism that had dominated Judaism. And in the same way as Hasidism preferred to emphasise matters of the soul rather than adopt a rigid and stylised approach to religious experience, so too did Chagall in his approach to his art.

As Chagall himself said:

> "Personally, I do not think a scientific bent is good for art. Impressionism and Cubism are alien to me. Art seems to me to be a state of soul more than all else. The soul of all is sacred ...."[1]

Kloomok cites Chagall's illustrations of the Bible as good examples of the manner in which he manages to impart "a living breath, a soul, a Jewish soul"[2] to his works. In seeking to demonstrate the truth of the above remark it must be noted that Chagall produced a vast quantity of works in various mediums on Biblical and related topics and that, in consequence, the discussion will treat only with a selection of these works, beginning with certain of the illustrations he did on commission for the Vollard edition of the Bible.

In preparation for these works Chagall first visited Palestine, Egypt and Syria in 1931. Not satisfied with the work he then produced, he subsequently went to Holland in 1932 to get a closer knowledge of Rembrandt and his Biblical works. Then in 1935 he visited Poland to make fresh contact with the Jewish "old-fashioned" fathers to re-awaken in himself their spirit which he felt he needed in his work on the Bible (he

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 50-51
2. Kloomok, op.cit. p. 75

was not allowed to enter Vitebsk). Then in 1937 he visited Italy to study the religious art of the Italian primitives in an attempt to grasp the spirit of artists uncorrupted by the modern mechanical civilization. The finished products demonstrate not only the quality of his vivid memory, but also the brilliant way he has managed to craft his soul therein, just as he has done in his works of Jewish genre.[1]

Kloomok says of Chagall's "Moses" of the work "Then Sang Moses" (Leisin's Volume. III):

> "You can see the Jewish pure piety, the restrained rapture in the lifted noble head. And it looks as if the whole body sings the psalm. A Sabbath grace and spiritual radiance fall over the whole figure.
>
> See how the crown helps in the structure of the head and adds to the dignity of the figure, not only to its decoration. Also the loose cloak helps to give softness and stateliness to the figure - a convincingly Jewish figure. And whoever it may not be - you have here the work of a noble faculty; a product of a highly poetic imagination - art of the finest quality. And altogether it is only a lightly scrawled sketch.
>
> Here we have a Jewish art, a Jewish plastic - even if you don't accept the figure as a "Moses", or a "David". Call it by any other name, gentile or pagan - it still remains a Jewish image."

Kloomok goes on:

> "In a second place Chagall had made only the face of a "Moses" - and there you have a face of a man of God; a face that beams not with sunlight, not with song, but with wisdom, with divine law. Looking at the face you say to yourself, Yes, God spoke mouth to mouth with this man and left upon his lips a sublime message."[2]

1. Kloomok, op.cit. p. 75
2. Ibid.

Chagall accomplished this effect with only a few scrawls preferring to leave only a scanty notion, not more that a suggestive idea and not fully outlined. It is in this stopping short and not attempting a fuller realization that the integrity of Chagall's artistry is apparent. This is in line with the Jewish belief that man cannot behold God, that man's eyes do not have that power. Thus, just as the old masters represented God as a man in order to observe this belief, so Chagall chose to suggest only an image, something which is initially suggested in a flash and yet not for long enough to rest one's eyes upon. Man cannot create a being higher than himself - he does so at the peril of his art.[1]

Chagall's "David" of the work "David with the Head of Goliath" demonstrates another way in which Chagall succeeds in capturing the soul of his subject rather than mere outward appearances. Unlike the Renaissance sculptors Donotella and Verrachio and unlike Michelangelo, Chagall employs his artistic licence and portrays the mature David as we know him from his later exploits, rather than the youthful David who slew Goliath. In this way he permits us to see his rich nature as it became in maturity. As Kloomok remarks, we see in Chagall's David:

> "... the David, the King David, who cries and tears his clothes in an hour of affliction before the eyes of the whole people, and goes jumping and dancing with the common folks before the shrine - until the well-bred Michal, his wife, will upbraid him and scold him for lowering his Kingly dignity.
>
> He is the sanguine, hot lustful man who, when he sees a beautiful woman bathing, will not refuse himself and must possess her and make her pregnant - and to cover up his deed, will cause her husband to be killed in battle. And he will be truly repentant and bend his heart before the prophet who comes to reproach him for his wantonness".[2]

1. Kloomok, op.cit. p. 75-76
2. Ibid. p. 80

In contrast to Michelangelo, who was seemingly more preoccupied with the psychological animation of his marble than with the character of his David, Chagall's David is more true as a soulful representation of "the ... type of man who would possess all the possibilities of developing the character of the sanguine, many-sided Biblical hero"[1]

Another aspect of Chagall's artistic approach in which his concern with love and matters of the soul is evident is in his technique. No matter what medium he employed, be it paintings, drawings, lithographs, etchings, stained glass windows, mosaics, tapestries, ceramics, or ink sketches (and, it might be added, he mastered them all), he had only one description for his technique.

Cassou explains:

> "(Chagall's) ... technique and the spirit of this technique are one and the same thing ... it is colour itself,[2] handled with love and itself endowed with all the power associated with love .... The word is "chemistry."[3]

Chemistry, as Chagall understands it, is the palpable mystery of colours,

1. Kloomok, op.cit. p. 80
2. While this generalisation is accurate insofar as it relates to the majority of Chagall's works which are in brilliant colour, it must be noted that certain of his works are in black and white only, for example his Bible etchings.
3. Cassou, op.cit. p. 120-122

the weaving by use of colour of some kind of binding spell. It is a mystical term from the vocabulary of a religious man. But it also belongs to the vocabulary of an artisan, a worker who uses materials, mixing them on his palette, applying them to his canvas with strokes that may be light or determined, but always loving; and, it is the colours that bring the canvas to life and give it its soul. One can see in Chagall's painting that the artist has love in his soul and it appears thus in the finished work. As Cassou explains:

> "... The inspiration, or the spirit, is what moves him, the perfection of the supreme art of a particular artist, regardless of what school he may have belonged to or founded."[1]

An example of Chagall's use of "chemistry" in colours can be seen in "The Wedding" (1944) which portrays a real wedding with a canopy under which, according to Jewish custom, the couple plight their troth. There are guests, candles and music. The cock may also be interpreted in the same way, for there was a time when a cock and a hen were carried before the bridal couple at Jewish weddings. Strange beings mix with the guests - a white cow stretches out her soft muzzle behind the groom, and the female head higher up does not belong to a guest. The musicians in the upper zone have outgrown their role. The gigantic violinist, the towering woman with the cymbals, the cello player so blended with his instrument that he has become the angel of music, watch over and protect the happenings on the human level like guardian spirits.[2] The use of "chemistry" here is explained by Cassou:

1. Cassou, op.cit. p. 122
2. Meyer, op.cit. p. 452

> "The ... fantastic elements reach their culmination in "Wedding", with its zones of colour independent of the shapes, relating to spiritual regions rather than to places and people. A vague red canopy virtually cuts the picture in two, with the sombre tones of wedding below contrasting with the brilliance of the musical angels above, a division that inevitably recalls certain visionary compositions by El Greco."[1]

In his later years, colour became the major aspect of his work. In what has become known as his "late style", which reached full flower as he entered his 70's, his obsession with and mastery of colour can be seen to best effect. His colours had developed from the sharp contrasts of his 40's and through the sombre, often frightening, clashes of his 60's to become delicate lyrical tones flowing across the surface of his canvasses. His line, rather than limiting the colour to a given object and acting as its boundary, has become almost independent, delineating the figure but allowing the colour to escape beyond its borders.[2] The subject of "The Wedding" is music and in spite of the intensity of colour, it is essentially a very quiet and lyrical picture. The blues of the background are interrupted by the curve formed by the principal pair of lovers in their boat who are being bathed in the sound of stringed instruments streaming up into the sky. Their pink arc circles the centre of the composition like a halo to the great moon on the right. It meets a green area which plays around a harpist kneeling close beside them, and then disappears past the Eiffel Tower, drawing the arc towards completion, and the eye returns to the white moon which dominates the right side of the picture. The sweeping forms are echoed on the left by further musicians: those above, bathed in incandescent orange-red, are introduced in the corner by a tiny angel blowing a trumpet; below, more musicians

1. Cassou, op.cit. p. 193
2. Amishai-Maisels, Z. Tapestries and Mosaics of Marc Chagall at the Knesset, p. 129

share the intense blue which serves as a kind of sea or river, unifying the whole picture. Their leader stands on a quarter moon and below him, in the foreground, are a second pair of lovers accompanied by a fish and a violin. Further along the base of the canvas is a small figure, looking up at the musical clown who introduces the scene from his unlikely place on the right.

Susan Compton describes another wonderful work as follows:

> "...(In) "The Concert", colour was allowed such a free role that it served as a kind of music in itself - a device which Chagall developed in "Music" (1962-1963). ... In his later paintings Chagall has given colour a controlled freedom, very like the bursts of sound from some great symphony concert ...."[1]

A figure which Chagall often portrayed was that of old Jewish men bent by the years of toil, dressed as beggars and with faces full of sadness. These characters were common in the Pale of Settlement and it is Chagall's Hasidic nature which brings them out onto his canvasses. In Hasidism it is not only the scholars and the leisurely, those who have time and opportunity for long studies, who can come to know God. The Hasid believes that the weak man has perhaps more right to a divine answer, and that richness of heart can surpass all science and all piety.[2]

Chagall recognised this quality of soul in these characters to such an extent that the models he used for his three large "Rabbis", which number among his masterpieces, were in fact three beggars who came to his door

1. Compton, op.cit. p. 16
2. Meyer, op.cit. p. 16

asking for alms.[1] Chagall was moved by the reverence and meekness expressed in the faces of these old Hasidim. In the first of these works "The Pinch of Snuff" (1912) an old Jew, perhaps a rabbi, is pictured seated at a table in the synagogue taking a pinch of snuff from a little box. His old-fashioned corkscrew curls hang down from under his skullcap. The whole picture is restrained, with all the dynamism taking place in the depths.[2] Similarly, in the second of these works, "The Praying Jew" (1914) we are captivated by the overall effect and not by the details. The "tallith" - the prayer shawl with its wide and strict geometry, its stripes and brilliant whiteness - confers an impressive and monumental feeling. The other ritual objects such as the "tefillim" - the prayer philacteries bound to the forehead and the arm by leather straps - are an integral part of the solemnity of the whole and do not distract or divert one's attention from the general effect.[3] The feeling which this work has captured can perhaps be gleaned from what Chagall himself said in telling how he came to paint this picture:

> "Another old man passes our house. Grey hair, a surly look. A sack on his back.
> I wonder: is he even capable of opening his mouth to beg?
> Indeed, he doesn't talk. He comes in and stands discreetly by the door. He stands there for a long time. And if no-one gives him anything, he leaves without a word, as he came.
> "Listen," I tell him, "have a little rest. Sit down. Like that. You don't mind that, do you? Have a rest. I'll give you twenty kopecks. Just put on my father's prayer clothes and sit down. Have you seen my portrait of the old man praying? That's him."[4]

1. Venturi, op.cit. p. 46
2. Meyer, op.cit. p. 191
3. Cassou, op.cit. p. 65
4. Chagall, M. op.cit. p. 118-119

The last picture in this series, "The Green Rabbi" attains the effect through the juxtaposition of arbitrary colours, such as the green face and yellow beard set against a dark background. Venturi explains what Chagall has achieved here:

> "The sight of these poor old men, transmuted by the artist's imagination, becomes the reality of art. His eyes saw three poor Jews, a common enough sight in the Vitebsk ghetto, but on to the canvas his excited imagination projected three epic figures who might have stepped out of the Old Testament."[1]

On another level, Chagall captures that presentiment of inevitable tragedy which hung over that little world and his fantasy has provided the vision of a thing so poignant and so human. Chagall always saw in those old men in prayer, those humble and menaced men, the true witnesses of eternity - as he himself said: "Sometimes there stood before me a figure so tragic and so old that it looked more like an angel."[2]

Chagall had a deep love for the "old-fashioned" Jew, and he well knew his ways and customs, his walk and talk, his grimacing and gesticulating. With only a few wispy scrawls he is able to capture that spiritual countenance or a devotional mood. One can look at a miniature figure and tell immediately that it has a Jewish head and a Jewish expression. He uses a twist of the earlock, a curl in the beard or a crimple in the hat to present a type recognizable at once. With a few sparing touches of the brush he can light up a face with the inner radiance and wisdom of an

1. Venturi, op.cit. p. 46
2. Amiel, op.cit. p. 76

ancient Talmudic sage.[1] Kloomok marvels at the effect Chagall thus creates:

> "It gives me unending delight to study the papers where Chagall had displayed his brilliant short-hand improvisations of Jewish traditional types. As I look at his wise dots and dashes, I do not wonder that the Rabbis find so much to elucidate in a single letter or dot in the holy Scriptures .... "[1]

Kloomok states that Chagall's picture of a synagogue in volume I of Leisin's Collected Poems is an exceptional example of this facility and economy of work. The picture shows a synagogue full of Jewish scholars who have remained to study after the evening prayer. We see the interior of a synagogue with the holy shrine ornamented with two lions, the cantor's desk, a chandelier, tables with lamps and candles, and a score of Jews sitting about with their books. There is enough space to include the windows with a peep of the landscape outside and the crescent moon, enough room for air and spaciousness and enough for spacious framing margins.[2] All this on the page of a book. And yet, as Kloomok observes:

> " ... you can clearly distinguish the types of scholars and their habits of study ... one isolates himself, standing alone by a window - a recluse. Here is a man ecstatic with mystic vision. Here is a student in a heated discussion ... arguing with his hands over an obscure passage. Here is a man proving to an appreciative neighbour his talent of speculative acumen. Here is one with a flaming face of enthusiasm, kindled by the sudden flashes of "light" upon his mind, which opened to him a pass to the treasury of sacred mysteries locked in the small Cabalistic volume in his hands.
> A movement of the hand, the position of the head, the inclination of the body, characteristically tell the story where you can hardly see the face".[3]

1. Kloomok, op.cit. p. 71
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

A marvellous example is "The Sabbath Jew" (in Bella Chagall's "Burning Lights"). The image is of a dignified, venerable well-to-do Jew. Yet the entire drawing consists merely of a circle with a few curlicued strokes making the beard. Not only does the beard complete the head, but it also defines and accomplishes the drawing of the figure. Cut off the beard and you are left with only a circular line with no indication of a human figure. The direction of the beard also provides the inclination of the head and of the whole body, making one aware that the Jew is seated comfortably, in dignified repose at a table one doesn't even see. A few tiny strokes placed with expert knowledge suggest the face of the man, the face of a God-fearing "son of the Torah" and complete the picture of a personable and dignified figure of a Jew.[1]

The drawing "Blessing the Sabbath Candles" (an illustration in Bella's book) is another work which demonstrates this aspect of Chagall's genius. A mother and her young daughter are portrayed standing in front of their lit candles, their faces covered by their hands, saying the prescribed prayers to welcome the Sabbath. (The mother says her blessing slowly and the child repeats the words after her). One can immediately see that the young girl is the daughter, not only from the fact that the situation suggests this, but due to her remarkable resemblance to her mother. The flickering of the candles is suggested by the play of black and white patches in their dresses. One is instinctively made aware which of the candles belongs to the child by the fact that it is smaller and of a different design and also because the artist has deliberately moved it to

1. Kloomok, op.cit. p. 71-72

one side. This has allowed him to display the full face of the girl and creates better balance. The eye, however, knows at once where it belongs and goes from the candlestick to the child and back, creating a dramatic moment. The feeling that the ceremony of the blessing of the candles is very important to the child is created by the contrast between the more perfunctory attitude which the mother takes on and the suggestion that the child's eyes are closed. Chagall has once again succeeded in telling the inner story as well as making a beautiful picture of Jewish home life.[1]

As Kloomok says in commenting on these illustrations:

> "Chagall's graphic art in the Jewish books is a Jewish graphic, not only because of the subjects it decribes, but because he loads his lines with Jewish meaning and character, with Jewish emotions and rhythm."[2]

Throughout his life Chagall made repeated use of certain distinctive symbols and imagery in his works. A few examples are his background settings of small Russian villages, his various animals, combinations of animal, human and spiritual forms as well as his joyful anti-gravitational approach. An important phase in the development of these characteristic features in his work was during the period when he returned from Paris to Russia and spent considerable time working on set designs for the Jewish Theatre in Moscow. What is interesting about this period is the strong emphasis on Hasidic themes, which remained with him ever afterwards.

1. Kloomok, op.cit. p. 72
2. Ibid. p. 73

In 1920 the Jewish Theatre moved from Petrograd to settle in Moscow as a State theatre in a tiny hall seating ninety persons. The theatre manager, Granovsky, invited Chagall to help design the sets for the "Sholem Aleichem Soiree" by the Jewish author Sholem Aleichem - "The Agents", "The Lie" and "Mazeltov" - for the opening production of the Theatre.

Chagall revelled in this situation, taking complete possession of the Theatre and altering not only the stage but the entire auditorium as well; not only designing the costumes and scenery but even deciding the style of the performance. Granovsky realised that Chagall's anti-realism furthered the radical form he sought to achieve and gave Chagall a freer hand than his position entitled him to, in the end allowing Chagall to decide on the smallest details of the production. The production was a tremendous success and was repeated for years.

Chagall brought a new interpretation to Aleichem's plays. He detested the accepted portrayal of them as vulgar farces, demanding instead an entirely different interpretation, different costumes and different scenery in his desire to present the author's curious, airy humour as it ought to be presented, that is, in a manner sapping the firm foundations of reality.[1] Meyer comments on his sets as follows:

> "His sets for Mazeltov ... in which all sorts of side scenes and the magic symbols on the fire screen achieve a break with the "conventional"; his cabaret railway carriage for "The Agents" ... which in the sketch looks like an abstract structure, and his side scene for "The Lie" ... on which a street lamp reclines and

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 292-294

> behind which an actor dives headfirst, created small, "unreal" stages befitting the poetic movement of the plays and full of points of reference for the actors. The costume sketches ... are indeed akin to those for "The inspector General", but the rhythm of the drawing and the way the clothes hang on the lean or plump bodies render the humor, at once sly and sharp, of the Jewish poet. The whole is filled with will-o'-the-whisp fantasy that turns the banal situation completely topsy-turvy."[1]

Chagall was to have a permanent influence on the Jewish Theatre as he painted a number of huge murals to decorate the auditorium. These were later moved to grace the auditorium of the new theatre when more spacious premises were aquired. Meyer remarks on these works as follows:

> "Those were Chagall's largest paintings, except for the sets he designed later for the ballet. The canvas for the main wall measured over twelve by thirty-six feet. But is is not only to their extraordinary size that they owe their importance. Besides summing up the artistic results of the years he spent in Russia, these monumental works were aimed at a large public and have the significance of a manifesto. In the Jewish Theater, as Chagall saw it and represented here as a sort of world theater, life overcomes all superficial strictures. The enthusiasm of his Hasidic forebears fills all the figures, hoists them into the air or makes them walk on their hands. Thus, the true spiritual forces awake to full life and everything partakes of the creative spirit that informs the world."[2]

These murals were painted in oil on canvas and fastened to the walls. The largest, "Introduction to the Jewish Theatre", was intended for the long wall on the left-hand side of the auditorium; four smaller upright ones, "Music", "Dance", "Drama", and "Literature" were for the spaces between the windows on the opposite wall; the long frieze "The Table for the Wedding Feast", for the space above those windows; "Love on the Stage" for

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 294
2. Ibid. p. 296-298

the back wall by the door, and a decorative composition for the ceiling. A small sketch with two goats heads shows us his project for the curtain.

"Introduction to the Jewish Theatre" is based on the chief characters in the actual situation. Efross enters from the left carrying Chagall in his arms; as they pass from Granovsky, a tiny actor greets them. Everywhere people are playing musical instruments or dancing on hands and feet. In the right-hand half of the mural, beasts and humans mingle. The humorous portraits and familiar details resume on a small scale the bubbling enthusiasm that churns up the picture like a whirlwind. The four panels for the opposite wall were dedicated to the "four arts" that, in Chagall's opinion, have their place in Jewish culture - music, drama, dance, and literature - represented by a popular musician, a wedding jester, a woman dancing, a copyist of the Torah and the first poet dreamer.[1]

Meyer describes the overall effect of these murals upon the auditorium as follows:

> "The auditorium as painted from floor to ceiling must have made an overwhelming impression. Everything danced, gyrated, radiated color. The vast work is full of the turbulent fantasy of the Paris pictures transposed into the intenser rhythm of the revolution. Chagall has succeeded in rendering the effective plasticity that was always a peculiarity of his with a new freedom and in producing from the roots of living Jewish tradition a stupendous, entirely modern work."[2]

The Moscow murals portrayed the feverish enthusiasm the Hasidim had for

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 295-296
2. Ibid. p. 298

dancing and singing and how they believed in engaging in these activities as joyously as possible. The basic themes of this Hasidic enthusiasm, so evident in the murals, was continued in the Circus cycles of 1927/1928, 1935/1939 and 1956/1959. The reader will recall from a previous chapter how, in the Vitebskian community Chagall grew up in, it was not uncommon for Hasidim to break into spontaneous dancing and singing in the streets. As Leon Amiel states:

> "In Vitebsk .. the disciples of Abraham Kalisker (a Hasid) made, in the course of certain preaching activities, "dangerous leaps in the street and on the public squares" and lost themselves in "farces". They were, in a way, clowns and acrobats intoxicated by God, and Meyer relates them to the clowns and acrobats of Chagall."[1]

The obvious influence this source of Hasidic enthusiasm had upon Chagall's work is well demonstrated in the murals and also in the sets which he designed for the theatre for a production devoted to "The antique Jewish and Hasidic dance" in 1921. What is of further interest is that the acrobats he portrayed in those sets clearly recall the motifs of the drawings and paintings Chagall did in the period 1913/1915, helping to demonstrate the fundamental influence the Hasidic tradition had upon Chagall. The importance of music in the Hasidic tradition and which became a recurring theme in Chagall's works is also evident in the murals, one of which contains what has come to be known as "The green-faced fiddler in the orange-red coat".[2] This character is clearly related to the painting "The Fiddler" of 1912/1913 in which the violin player is

1. Amiel, op.cit. p. 67, 70
2. Meyer, op.cit. p. 298

standing with one foot on the roof and the other on a little hillock. This work creates an impression of Russian rural life evoking the long running musical "The Fiddler on the Roof". This impression is created by the fiddler himself, the houses in the background, the church tower in the foreground and the contrasting dark and white snow-bedecked setting. The special and evocative quality of violin music for Jewish life was such that it was regarded as a sad song in which one could hear the groan or lamentation of the soul, and in the marvellous and enchanted sounds of which the nostalgia of past youth, dead love and lost liberty could be heard to flow. Meyer describes this work as follows:

> "The movement includes the forms and objects in a more delicate and varied manner; it steals and flits through the picture like the white figure with the halo in the clouds or the one that left the colored footprints in the snow. Once again we find, as in so many earlier works, the dots and dashes that express a strange, nervous vitality. Everything seems to be kept in movement in a delicate, wondrous fashion, as if spellbound by the music. Yellow springs up from below like flowers and grows into the fuller orange that creates a lively contrast with the green on the fiddler's face, to which the cool black-and-white of the snowy landscape lends a peculiar warmth."[1]

In the article "Theater and Revolution"[2] Alain Jouffroy gives us a fascinating insight into Chagall's world vision. He compares the large-scale theatre mural with the "revolution" sketches of 1937 in demonstrating the analogies Chagall perceived between a festival and a revolution. The actors in the picture "Introduction to the Jewish Theater" can be perceived as the equilibrist force in relation to the musicians in the same way that Lenin was portrayed as the equilibrist in

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 192
2. Amiel, op.cit. p. 39-48

relation to the revolution (in a work Chagall destroyed in a crisis of doubt after Bella's death). This posture of Lenin, contrary to all the iconography that has accumulated around the leader of the Russian revolution, in a way makes the history of the world dance, literally turns its meaning upside down: people dream on earth, or play the violin around a sun that has fallen to earth, while a donkey sits patiently on a chair. The armed masses gathered under the red flags look at the spectacle of Lenin, the equilibrist, as if he were a great actor. In both compositions the oblique space is the same and the figures are placed as though in a street parade during an anniversary celebration. In "The Big Circus" (1936) the strolling acrobats extended an invitation to the festival by standing the world on its head. This represents a taking up of the same themes as in the "Introduction to the Jewish Theater" and "Revolution". In the "Introduction to the Jewish Theater" the head of the central violinist flies away, while in "Absinthe" (1913) it is that of the poet, and in "The Big Circus" it is that of the orchestra conductor.[1] As Alain Jouffroy states:

> "The "Introduction to the Jewish Theater" is still the Chagallian archetype of the allegorical representation of the life and role of the creator, artist and poet in society. As one of his exegisists says on this subject: "The circus and art lead to nothing but are everything." Thus "The Big Circus" of 1936 picks up the themes of the picture of 1920-1921 in which the strolling acrobats extended an invitation to the festival by standing the world on its head."[2]

As to the figure walking on his hands at the right of the "Introduction", it reminds us of the "Revolution" of 1937, as if Lenin were only one of the travestied acrobats from the Jewish Theatre or the circus, a

1. Amiel, op.cit. p. 43-46
2. Ibid. p. 46

re-inventor of the world, a clown of history. The world for Chagall is nothing but its own parody, its mask, its double, but at the same time this double, this travesty, unveils its truth. "Introduction to the Jewish Theater", "The Big circus" and the "Revolution" define the omnipotence of the Chagallian dream, which refuses to barricade the frontiers between domains that everyone separates: love, reality, society, poetry, revolution, the circus. Painting enables him to unify, to reconcile what daily life everywhere fragments and opposes. The point to be made is simply that the theatre represented for Chagall the most direct intermediary between himself, the world and history. Although his painting intersected the start of a social revolution, it could still never identify itself with the State the revolution gave birth to. And yet power fascinates Chagall insofar as it is related to the secret disturbance of his work. Jouffroy explains the significance of this for Chagall:

> "Painting allows him to see the world as a stage on which, as in the circus, the collective forces are travestied. In the center of this whirlwind he sees himself as the poet who has lost his head. There is no authority in the world capable of convincing him that he could not lose it as the exuberant fantasies of his pictures prove."[1]

Having documented in some detail certain of the overtly Kabbalistic and Hasidic features of Chagall's work, and having proceeded to the point where we can perceive Chagall's vision of himself as a poet standing, as it were, on the world stage, it is appropriate now to turn to consider

1. Amiel, op.cit. p. 48

Chagall's wider mystic vision, the cosmic vision that informed this approach to life and to his art. Ralph Manheim sets the tone for this enquiry in the following passage:

> "Folklore, the village idyll, the Jewish small town with its petty bourgeoisie, childhood memories - childhood memories over and over again. Who cares about this Jewish town, about all these relatives and bridal couples, these eccentrics and fiddlers, these festivals and customs, sabbath candles and cows - these scrolls of the Torah and village fences? Childhood - that is the milieu from which Chagall never escaped and to which he returns over and over again, regardless of Paris and Europe, of world wars and revolutions. All this may be lovable and touching, unless one prefers to call it sickly and sentimental. Is this all? one is justified in asking. What is all the fuss about? Is all this not a mere variant of modern primitivism, only a kind of colorful, romantic popular art?"[1]

However, there is much more, because in the midst of it there are angels and moons, blazing fires, and the eye of God in the village. For childhood is but the time of great events, the time in which the deepest symbols of the soul are everyday realities, and the world is still radiant from within it's innermost depths. This childhood spans all time and space embracing Abraham's angels as tenderly as the neigbour' ass; portrays the meeting of the bride and groom with the same radiant colour as the moonlit nights of first love. There is no separation between near and far, inward soul and outward world, life's stream flows undivided, joining godhead and man, animal and world. This simultaneity of inside and outside, which receives the world in the soul and the soul in the world, which experiences the promise of the future in the remote past, the

1. Manheim, op.cit. p. 137

guilt of the ages in the anguish of the present - this is the reality of Chagall's childhood, within which the eternal presence of primordial imagery lives in his memory of Vitebsk. And, it is to achieve this that there is no above and below in his art, no rigid inanimate thing, nor any divide between man and animal, the human and the divine. In the ecstasy of love man wears the ass's head of his animal nature and the angel's countenance shines amidst calamity and doom. In all his pictures the soulful divine light, which in childhood fills the whole world, permeates unbroken by the prism of understanding; every bit of the world is transformed into a divine mystery.[1]

While Chagall often stressed the joyful side of life and many of the figures in his works were portrayed in states of ecstatic frenzy, he never forgot tragedy. He reminds us that all painting, particularly his own, is a tragic language often marked by blood, tears and drama. As Camille Bourniquel notes:

> " ... He has experienced and witnessed the Russian revolution, a double rootedness and, finally, the German massacres of eastern European Jewish communities. It is possible that nothing remains today of the Vitebsk that he knew as a child, returned to during the Lenin period where he married Bella and founded an academy for the working classes in those days of famine and denunciations: the image, in any case, remains primordial and has colored his whole life. That retrospective tenderness for those streets, those houses "destroyed with infancy" and its "inhabitants wandering about in the air," those artisans, those woodcutters, those fishermen in the Dvina, those old men, those rabbis, those fiddlers in front of isbas find other justification than the nostalgia of an exile, another setting than picturesqueness. Something unusual is added to the picturesqueness, mixing animals and men, the synagogue and the street, weddings and funerals: a masked menace, the flames of burning towns and pogroms."[2]

1. Manheim, op.cit. p. 138-139
2. Amiel, op.cit. p. 76

This tragic element often exists side by side with the joyful, for Chagall is asserting his mystic belief that evil is merely a lesser form of good, that man must strive for happiness above sadness, joy above gloom. Tenderness and hope are his weapons against the powers of evil. The painting "War" (1964/1966) is a monumental painting setting out the human tragedy of war as it is experienced by everyday people all over the world. In it the sole aggressors seem to be a tiny band of ill-equipped soldiers who rise up upon the neck of the great white mythical creature which dominates the background. The rows of wooden houses, jumbled together and engulfed by flames, represent settlements where innocent people become the victims of greed and the struggle for power. Among the flames which rise to heaven are naked figures who are translated by the flames rather than consumed by them. To their right a little group of terrified people flee in an attempt to escape burning. The white mythical figure dominating the background is as much friend as foe, personifying impotent fear in the manner of some sacrificial beast. It is intended to be benign for two women and a child are lying against it's neck and on it's back stands the cross of Jesus and the oversized figure of Moses calling out his stern injunctions in vain. All of these activities containing the areas of turbulent brush strokes are contained in the upper half of the composition which is divided in two by a strongly defined diagonal. The foreground area is devoted to intimate groups such as the man comforting the woman; the woman comforting her child; the woman mourning a dying loved one; and, parents weeping and praying over their dead child.

In the centre a group of refugees, attempting to flee the scene of devastation, suggest the results of war: the homelessness, the rootlessness of the dispossessed. The painting is not one of complete despair, however, as Susan Compton has pointed out:

> "In spite of the tragedy, "War" communicates some message of hope. The refugees are making their way towards images of another kind of life. Moses is calling out to his people, the artist seems to be flying towards Heaven above the figure of suffering on the cross. In the centre is a peasant carrying a sack, Chagall's Elijah, who, according to Hasidic traditions, reappears with his people in times of great need."[1]

In seeking to understand Chagall's attitude towards the joyful and the tragic we must have regard to all the elements which make up his paintings and which inform his mystic outlook.

While most of his work can be seen as a portrayal of his unique, personal experiences, the importance of the intense religiosity and mysticism present therein must not be minimized. These elements exist in his art as an expression of his own personal, unique religious and mystical experiences. His art can thus be seen to combine all of these elements in one, creating, as it were, an intense spiritual autobiography in the guise of paintings.

The influences of his upbringing can clearly be seen in the major Kabbalistic and Hasidic motifs evident in his art, especially the Lurianic

1. Compton, op.cit. p. 234

concepts of mythological cosmic history and mystical redemption. In Chagall's works these elements cease to be mere building blocks of a mystical theology, having been fused with his own personal experiences to become the mystical biography of his artistic soul. Therefore, in seeking to understand Chagall's perceptions of the basic tension between good and evil one must appreciate that he has assimilated the whole enormous Lurianic mythology within the context of his own personal experiences. In the result, he has identified cosmic history (perceived as a continuous battle between the powers of God and Satan) with the battle going on in his own soul. As Cassou has said in discussing Chagall's nature and outlook:

> "A heart such as this is the personification of good will. If it were not so, it would not find love in the rustling of the tiniest blade of grass and in the noise of the smallest of nature's creatures, recognizing in them the driving impulse behind the greatest and most imperious forces. Strengthened by this awareness, good is able to resist the onslaughts of evil. The latter has displayed its destructive folly since the beginnings of the world, and the Old and New Testaments have transmitted to successive generations the events and the characters in this perpetual and deadly war conducted by evil against the forces of love. Our century has in turn known and experienced its cruel impact."[1]

A painting which represents this perception of his feeling of soul is "The Soul of the City" (1945), which was painted during a period of turmoil in his life following the death of his beloved Bella. Chagall has depicted himself in the centre painting a large Crucifixion, with a village in the background. He has a second head, a Janus head, which is looking down at

1. Cassou, op.cit. p. 264-265

Bella, portrayed as a Bride streaming down to his left like a comet from a pulpit dominated by the Tables of the Law and flanked by traditional lions. Dominating the foreground is another woman, or perhaps another side of the first, clasping a little rooster to her chest.

The painting can be interpreted in two ways: firstly, in an objective way as would the observer; and secondly, from Chagall's grieving personal view-point. According to the first interpretation, the juxtapositions in "Soul of the City" - the double-headed artist, the two forms of the woman, the dying man with the frightened doe, and the pairing of colours - suggests the dichotomies of life, the tension between the spiritual and the sensuous. The crucified figure marks one form of spirituality and the bride, streaming down from the emblems of the Jewish Law, represents both the spiritual side of mankind and Israel as the bride of God. The human form of the artist with his green (second) head, and the sensuous woman in the foreground, betray the dualism which is present in the whole of life. The underlying message is of the tensions and dichotomies that exist, if unrecognized, in the life of every man.[1]

Meyer provides the second, more personal, interpretation:

> "The mood is the same as in the large war and Crucifixion pictures; indeed, the personal angle is still more stressed. Grief for the loss of Bella is fused with sympathy for the events of the war and compassion for the destruction of Eastern Jewry. Bella had been very close to the spirit and tradition of Judaism. That is why she has her place in the picture as the bride beneath the ark in the winter night, like a flame that consumes what is transient and preserves what is immortal. It is not, however,

1. Compton, op.cit. p. 219

> between Judaism on the left and Christianity on the right that the painter stands, but between two spiritual possibilities. The one means participation in the endless pain of the world through artistic creation; the other, silent passion in the pure, consuming fire of the soul."[1]

The painting exemplifies how Chagall was able to identify in a deep spiritual way with cosmic phenomena. In both his painting and "My Life" one can see how personal and biographic events are completely identified with cosmic events to produce a cosmic-autobiographical experience. In most of his works he is represented, for his works are representations of his experience. In this way his works as a whole can be seen to reflect his basic attitudes and the variety of his experience. His works represent a unity between the artist and the work of art, involving the complete transformation of every external element into an intense, personal biographic element - a mystical biography of the soul.

Another aspect of Chagall's mystical outlook can be seen in his attempts to raise his world toward universality - to achieve the inclusion of all, to include the whole world, to all men, to the Jewish people and to all existence. In this way he sought to unite the individual with humanity, with the universe and with God. Chagall's was a cosmic vision, for he saw a basic oneness in the universe and had a sense of inter-connectedness between all things. In this way, through his cosmic mystic vision, he succeeded in showing us the oneness of the universe in God.[2] As Manheim states in discussing Chagall's art:

> "The divine and the human travel the same road, the world and man are not a duality of one confronting the

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 470
2. Cassou, op.cit. p. 2

> inseparable unity. The moon rises in the soul of every individual, and the house in whose forehead the eye of the godhead opens is you yourself.
>
> Chagall's aloofness is that of the lover who looks toward the one unknown that gives him the certainty of his own being-alive. It is the age-old covenant of Jew and man with the God who, shorn of all limits, not only offers his succor, but sacrifices himself to every nation and every individual. In each man Sinai burns, each man is crucified; but each man is also the whole of creation and the Son of God."[1]

Chagall's frequent portrayals of the Christ figure is an aspect of his art which falls to be discussed under the heading of his mystic-universality. As has been demonstrated Chagall's work conveys the innermost and most fundamental aspects of the spirit of Judaism, those aspects contributed by the Kabbalah and the Hasidic tradition. Yet, as has previously been stated, Chagall himself was not an observant Jew, preferring to free himself from the strictures of only one denominational belief and from the principal distinction between the revealed Law of Judaism and the Christian New Testament. He painted religious feeling in its very essence, religious reality as he experienced it, in a portrayal that goes beyond the established religions. Sydney Alexander discusses this aspect of his art in the following quote:

> "In Chagall's case distrust of doctrine, a substitution of universal "love" for any established religion, made it possible for the artist to embrace the central Christian image - the Crucifixion - as a symbol of redemptive suffering in general, especially the suffering of his own people during the rise of the Nazis and the tragedy of the war."[2]

Chagall was to make increasing use of the Crucifixion theme during the tragic years of the rise of Hitlerism and World War II: the Jew in

1. Manheim, op.cit. p. 147-148
2. Alexander, op.cit. p. 51

tallith and phylacteries on the Cross, frequently with Torah - embracing mourners and synagogues racked by brown-shirted storm troopers and Jewish angels blowing shofar horns over the Crucifixion.[1]

But Meyer, recognising Chagall's depiction of Christ, remarks as follows:

> "Like all other symbols, Christ has more than one meaning for Chagall. He is the Jewish martyr and the Jewish prophet; he is the "revolutionary" who shares man's fate to the bitter end. He is creative man who pays for every prize with pain. He is also an always simple man in his loneliness and isolation. Toward him bends the tender girl, the bride, the soul. Tenderly her head touches that of the man on the cross like a blossom on a tall stem leaning against another erect plant in the violet space of night. Therefore Christ is also the loved one a young woman embraces in mystical marriage .... For the figure of the painter and the figure of Christ are very close, and Chagall recognizes himself in both. As he wrote in his poem "To Bella," "Like Christ, I am crucified to my easel with nails.""[2]

Thus it is, that in "The Yellow Crucifixion" (1943) the crucified Christ is explicitly characterised as a Jew by the philacteries on his head and the prayer straps on his arm. The Torah scroll and the angel that accompanies it have the same message Chagall saw embodied in Christ. Torah and crucifed Christ tower above the suffering world as warning and promise. If a mystical interpretaion is employed, allowing the colour and form to guide one, one can see that we are led from the horrors of war, in a process involving both man and nature, from the depths of the psyche to the fullness of the spirit. The resultant interpretation one can make is, as Meyer asserts, the following: "Thus the picture celebrates the rebirth

1. Alexander, op.cit. p. 51
2. Meyer, op.cit. p. 490

of life, in the vegetative and spiritual sense, the ever recurrent victory over death, and from afar its symbolism conjures up the idea of the Resurrection."[1]

The theme of Christ on the cross entered Chagall's work during his youth when he made a pen drawing of a Crucifixion. Later, in 1912 he developed this into a painting known as "Calvary" which is not particularly noteworthy. The "White Crucifixion" of 1938 depicts the traditional, bearded figure of Christ being crucified. This painting represents the catastrophe of Jewry which Chagall envisioned, fore-shadowing the universal catastrophe. The victims fleeing hither and thither are Jews and at the foot of the cross are the flames of the seven-branched candlestick. As Susan Compton says:

> "In this picture Chagall demonstrates his sensitive and passionate care for suffering Jews, identifying Jesus of Nazareth as one of them .... Chagall has presented his Christ as the symbol of the suffering of Jewish people."[2]

Cassou in discussing Chagall's mystic vision explains that Chagall identifies himself with suffering and that this leads him to the common ground between religions:

> "He never passes judgement, he does not reason and he is not concerned with knowing the facts. He observes, and in seeing things he becomes part of them, part of their wretchedness, their infinite suffering and their infinite patience."[3]

Another aspect of the mystical experience is the sense of timelessness. This is inevitable when everything which happens is perceived as reflected

1. Meyer op.cit. p. 446
2. Compton, op.cit. p. 214
3. Cassou, op.cit. p. 247-248

in everything else, where every action has some result in the universal process whereby everything is connected with everything else. This timeless sense is clearly evident in Chagall's "My Life" in which objects and people have an indescribably lost and mystical air, where recent and distant events are juxtaposed, and where the action passes from one set of circumstances to another without there being any logical connection. This mystical sense is characterised by the tales of the Yiddish authors, foremost of whom was Sholom Aleichem which have been discussed previously.

Chagall's paintings too have the timeless mystical character of these fables and belong to the same enchanted kingdom. The early works "The Dead Man" (1908) and "I and the Village" (1911) are good examples of this, being both fable and a collection of fables and in which memories and events intermingle as they do in the book in which Chagall describes them. In them no attempt is made to keep to a sequence of time or a strict definition of place. Instead, he makes use of obsessionally recurring objects and beings like magic incantations or litanies in the manner of folk tales. Separate events are fused into one image and the exact description of events is left behind and has evolved into the stuff of folk tales and poetry, with its formula "once upon a time" - But which time? When? And where?[1]

In "The Dead Man" Chagall has depicted a woman rushing out into the street with arms outstretched and wailing with grief. This was a common enough scene in the Pale which was commonly accompanied by scenes of unrestrained pathos. The scene of Chagall's grandfather disappearing on the day of the

1. Cassou, op.cit. p. 43

festival only to be discovered munching carrots on the roof is also recalled, although there is no link in space or time between the two events. In place of his grandfather munching carrots, however, we have one of Chagall's uncles scraping away at his fiddle. There is also the chief figure, lying on the bare earth street and surrounded by six burning candles. There is also a roadsweeper and another figure disappearing from the scene, his dismay expressed by the flowerpots he has let fall to the ground. Cassou, noting how a whole group of unrelated subjects appear integrated in this work, remarks as follows:

> "... this concentration of conflicting elements into one single dramatic scene, into one story, contributes to the story-like character of the painting and constitutes its nature and soul, placing it outside time and space, and taking us with it into a sphere of unreality in which we hear disturbing echoes. They are all the more disturbing, all the more serious and important for us, since ... this is Chagall's ... first truly characteristic work, his Minerva issuing out of his head fully armed with all his marvels and powers of sorcery, complete, unchallengeable, the very incarnation of his genius ...."[1]

In discussing works from Chagall's mature stage in comparison with the works he did when he first arrived in Paris Camille Bourniquel has noted how Chagall's vision has remained unchanged:

> "There are still the same accessories, the same privileged actors, the same fusion of disparate elements, the same "total lyric explosion", to use the words of Andre Breton. A world springing from the unknown more than a half a century ago and which, throughout so much tragedy, so many rents, has retained its youth, it ascendant vitality, its faith, its ambiguity."[2]

1. Amiel, op.cit. p. 71

2. Ibid., p. 71-72

He continues, to discuss the mystical, timeless nature of the works:

> There is a Chagall phenomenon - I was going to write a Chagall mystery: the very presence of this unusual work situated in the heart of our era but not resembling it, rebellious to appearances, having nothing to do with disputes between schools and purely formal research - perhaps anachronistic ... like all prophecies - blending the end and the beginning in a single symbol: duration.
>
> It is this presence - this presence as timeless as everything that helps us to conjure up the platitudes of our time, above all technical and incapable of transposing the imaginary into anything but numbers that comes to mind first when one thinks of Marc Chagall."[1]

In "I and the Village" Chagall depicts an idealised view of a peasant's world: the wide-eyed peasant with a cross around his neck faces the cow which also wears magic beads. They look at each other across a universe, suggested by the disc of the sun and its moon joining at a moment of eclipse. In the distance, behind them, is an upside-down woman seemingly fleeing from a man, as well as two upside-down houses. The cow has a drawing on its cheek. Susan Compton remarks:

> "Larinov (one of the painters and poets who paraded through Moscow in the summer of 1913 with drawings on their faces) explained "why we paint ourselves" in words which also aptly describe Chagall's a-logical approach: "The telescope discerned constellations lost in space, painting will tell of lost ideas .... We want to herald the unknown, to re-arrange life and to bear man's multiple soul to the upper reaches of reality""[1]

Susan Compton continues explaining the timeless universality in the picture:

1. Amiel, op.cit. p. 134
2. Ibid

> "I and the Village is both human and universal: a confrontation of man and his animal, the sun and moon, red and green, upwards and downwards, even life and death. He has created a synthetic reality which still today invites questions of the world we live in."[2]

Chagall's portrayals of nature can also be seen in terms of his mystic vision, for in some of his depictions of nature he managed to achieve religious colouring, to recapture the sacred presence in the world and the qualities of love, happiness and serenity. His portrayal of nature is such as to convince the spectator that he can see the entire cosmos as a symphony to God. Witness to this are the forty two colour lithographs he did as illustrations for the famous pastoral romance "Daphnis and Chloe", written by Longus in the second or third century of this era. As Charles Sorlier explains:

> "The book is enchanting. In it, light is trapped in a stream of colours. No one prior to Chagall had attained such perfection, allying inimitable inspiration with a total mastery of a craft that had revealed all its secrets to him."[1]

The first plate, "The Bird Hunt", with its cold tones dominated by blues, greens and violets, indicates a technique of absolute mastery, but Chagall is still only at the beginning of his adventure. In the other illustrations the colour explodes, embellishing the dream. As Jorlier exclaims, "Chagall the Visionary once again becomes the Thief of fire."[2]

Chagall's enchantment with nature is infectious. The painting "The Poet Reclining" (1915) which was painted in the idyllic period after his first marriage when he and Bella spent the summer of 1916 and 1917 in the

1. Amiel, op.cit. p. 134
2. Ibid.

country, demonstrates how he admitted nature to his soul and how his soul loved it. The kind of innocent and infinite passion with which he loved it can be seen in the depiction of his body extended full length, his body and mind abandoned to the joy of those heavenly days spent with nature. He sees nature as a true mystic, as if every blade of grass, grain of sand, or clod of earth are involved in opening the gates of heaven by awakening celestial love.[1]

As in all of his work, Chagall's mystical portrayal of nature is heavily dependant upon his use of form and colour as well as upon all of the numerous aspects of his technique which have been described in this chapter. The resulting mystical dynamism which characterises his art is demonstrably related to his mystical background, as Meyer illustrates in the following passage:

> " ... the Hasidic spirit remains nevertheless the sustenance and the foundation of his art .... The synagogue retains the music of voices and instruments, and even the dancer's step. The soul surges up toward God like a flame. The true reality, ceasing to be confounded with the wretched here and now, is revealed in the splendid fullness which is hidden behind "things" and accessible only to a sympathetic soul that has put aside all obstinacy."[2]

Chagall's colour and forms which are never at rest show the ecstatic movement of the soul. As B. Aronson wrote, "Chagall's dynamism is the very dynamism of the Hasidic dance," and many a Hasidic teacher has considered reason, and reasonable conduct as being genuine obstacles to

1. Cassou, op.cit. p. 70
2. Meyer, op.cit. p. 15

the knowledge of God. When we recall that the Hasids used to make themselves noticed by throwing somersaults in the market place and by indulging in all sorts of nonsense in public, are we not reminded of Chagall's acrobats and circus artists?[1] "The Synagogue of Safed" (1931) is a painting on a religious theme which demonstrates this mystical dynamism, the portrayal of the soul in the human realm. Sydney Alexander has remarked:

> "It is rather a straightforward, if expressionistic rendering of the whitewashed-walled interior of a little synagogue with the major attention, of course, lavished on the Ark: three red accents against the overwhelming swiftly brushed warmish whitish gray. The tones are pure, the colours clean, the sunlight glaring .... Thus light "like the radiant heavens ..." is by no means incompatible with mysticism. Conditioned by Gothic gloom, we tend to find the very notion of a sunny religiosity as somehow heretical. Yet sunny religiosity is precisely Chagall's brand. The Chassid dances, sings his praise of God. In this respect the noncultist, nonpractising Chagall is chassidic. Later when he turned to stained glass he discovered the perfect medium to express his religious sense: light and color emanating from within."[2]

In concluding the discussion of Chagall's mysticism, Chagall's own thoughts regarding the meaning of the word "mystical", (as stated by him in an address during 1943) are insightful:

> "Some people wrongly fear the word "mystical" and give it too orthodox, religious a colour. One must tear off the term's outlived, musty exterior and take it in its pure lofty, sound form. Mysticism! .... How often this word has been hurled at my head, just as I was formerly accused of being "literary"! But without mysticism would there be a single great social movement in the world? Every organism - be it individual or social - if it is deprived of the force of mysticism ... will it not wilt and die?"[3]

1. Meyer, op.cit. p. 15
2. Alexander, op.cit. p. 304
3. Meyer, op.cit. p. 448

CONCLUSION

Having progressed from the earliest years of Chagall's childhood to the point where his wider, mature mystic vision has been discussed, it is appropriate now to bring the discussion to an end and to attempt to draw from it some conclusion. The reader will recall that the first chapter was devoted in the main to a discussion of basic principles of mystic Judaism as revealed in the Kabbalah and the Hasidic tradition. Thereafter, the second chapter went on to deal with the particular circumstances of Chagall's upbringing in a stable and deeply religious Hasidic home. At the same time, Chagall's family and the time of his upbringing were set in their real context, that of the Pale of Settlement where persecution of Jews, poverty, revolution and general upheaval governed. The third chapter was concerned with tracing the evidence of these background factors in his art, and culminated in establishing and seeking to understand the wider mystic vision he brought to his art.

If one considers the possibilities with which the young Chagall was presented in life, the role model which his father presented to him and the situations which his wider family held in life, one is immediately struck by the immense qualities of strength of character and intelligence which he must have possessed as a teenager. The fact that at such a tender age he was able to rise above the mundane prospects which his life situation dictated and go out into the world alone with the sole aim of bringing his mind to bear on considerations of art, speaks marvels for his vision even at that time. What is more astounding is the fact that even in his earliest works, one can see that he immediately proceeded to deal

with such topics as love and beauty, and the soul and the wider cosmos, of man and his place in the cosmic hierarchy. One would not have been at all surprised if a person in such circumstances had portrayed suffering, despair and evil, or if his heart was visibly bitter, but not Chagall, for he lived in another dimension.

Clearly, Chagall's basic artistic personality and his high intelligence must take much of the credit for these early life-choices, for he was clearly an outstanding man. However, and this has been the premise of this entire discussion, one must also recognise the undeniable fact that it was the infusion of the Hasidic spirit into such a man that gave birth to the astonishing Chagallian world. This is abundantly clear if we have regard to the themes of his earliest works, the themes of love, joy, religiosity and cosmic considerations that, in a man so young, can have had no source other than that of mystical Hasidism. As Camille Bourniquel has said in discussing Chagall's vision:

> "In Chagall's paintings the impatience of the mind demands other extensions beyond the visible. Aragon was right in saying "You paint the gravity whereby the body is made soul." The soul, there is the key word and the final goal of this whole quest. Here the artist recaptures the old Slav and Jewish heritage: nothing in his life has made him budge one inch from these certitudes. He knows how to hide methodical concern, exemplary diligence .... Everything brings us back to that vision which we gradually discover as we study the whole of his work, the depth, the seriousness and the extraordinary coherence."[1]

Alfred Werner describes this mystical Hasidic world which Chagall inherited and which he brought to his art:

1. Amiel, op.cit. p. 74

> "To understand the man who has painted so many roosters crowing for joy, one must try to grasp the essence of Judaism and its most important offshoot, Hasidism ....
>
> ... The Jews themselves remained unshaken in their belief that they were God's chosen people and that, however dark the present, eventually the glory of Israel would be universally acknowledged. Pessimism is voiced in some biblical and postbiblical writings, but it is not prevalent in Jewish thought. While evil does exist, it can be fought by anyone who strongly believes in God and His providence.
>
> Chagall's pictures are delightful illustrations of this philosophy. There may be a melancholy or sad quality in his paintings, but the agony of an unlimited despair is never shown. There is a sense of a metaphysical hope in his work, an optimism deeper than that expressed by the platitude about the cloud with the silver lining. When Chagall paints a beggar in snow, there is a fiddle in his hands, and if he sets a mournful rabbi on the canvas, he adds to this representation of sorrow an innocent white cow as a symbol of peace in the universe. If there is a message in his pictures, it must be this: the world has gone topsy-turvy, but it is still a good world; man is essentially good, a sort of grown child who prefers a boisterous carnival atmosphere come what may."[1]

It can be said, therefore, and almost without fear of contradiction, that it was the mystical spirit of Hasidism which inspired Chagall's artistic nature as a young man and which provided direction to his heart as well as subject matter for his canvasses. But, can the same be said of his mystical vision, the mature cosmic vision which he clearly evinced in his maturity? It would seem that to suggest that Hasidism was resposible for Chagall's mystic vision would be to take the point too far. For, if one considers Chagall's immense intelligence, the diligence of his searching and inquiring mind and the freedom of his spirit, it is apparent

1. Werner, op.cit. p. 17

that his mystic vision was something too personal and too unique to have been borrowed, or to stem from any one source. To assert the contrary would be to rob Chagall of his unique artistic genius and to classify his work alongside that of lesser men. This is the mystic vision, the interior world which Manheim describes as follows:

> "Yet this glowing interior world of Chagall in which things occupy not their earthly place but the place they hold in the soul, the place assigned them by the creation that is even now in progress - this world is by no means an airy figment. Nor is it the world of miracles and magic spells, in which the Jewish mankind that draws Messianic time down to earth in prayer, flies in ecstatic concentration over the historical time of reality. Rather, it is an earthly real world of the soul, whose nocturnal roots reach deeper than the roots of a merely earthly life, down to the primordial stream of the images, which waters every living existence."[1]

While Hasidism cannot claim the great honour of being the entire substance of Chagall's extremely rich mystic vision it did, however, have some influence thereon. As has already been postulated, it was the abundant Hasidic spirit which inspired Chagall the young artist and led him to consider the world from a mystical viewpoint. Once these roots were established, Chagall's mystic vision developed along its own lines, free from constraints of any kind. But the Hasidic spirit remained, for the mileu which Chagall chose in which to explore his mystical universe was the Hasidic mileu of his upbringing, and in this way the Hasidic spirit remained alive and strong within Chagall's works, his essential Jewishness providing the scenario for his mystical flights. As Susan Compton has remarked:

1. Manheim, op.cit. p. 142

"... the family of Chagall were Hasidim. They were distinguished by an extremely mystical state of mind .... Their ethic was founded on charity, on mutual aid, on good works and was addressed to everyone without distinction of the faith, and even to animals, which Hasidim endeavoured not to overload with too heavy burdens. According to their belief, the souls of great sinners were transmigrated into the bodies of animals as punishment for their faults, and they wandered for centuries between paradise and hell. Since childhood, the Hasid was surrounded by a mysterious world of the Cabbala and fantastic, ancient legends. This was without any doubt the source of the lyrical fairytales of Chagall, of his people and animals flying between sky and earth, imponderable, enchanted, carried on the wings of love."[1]

1. Compton, op.cit. p. 31

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