

After a Snowstorm

by [Shai Afsai](#) (March 2021)



Hunters in the Snow, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1565

My friend,
who is getting his Creative Writing MFA
in New Hampshire,
texts me after a snowstorm:
“I wish I had more to shovel.
How often do we labor anymore?
It’s good for the spirit.”

What man in New England,
if he’s a writer,
doesn’t enjoy playing at being Thoreau
from time to time?

Still, I'm out in the Rhode Island wind
with a substandard shovel in my hand
and a driveway that's not even half cleared
when my friend's text arrives,
and his nonsense annoys me.

With cold fingers, I reply:
"Oh, the bullshit
that life makes us say!
You want to labor
for the good of your spirit?
Find some elderly people
or single mothers in your neighborhood
and shovel for them.
Or even just do your own
fall, spring, and summer yardwork,
instead of paying someone."

He doesn't respond to any of this
until the next day,
and it's clear I've hit a nerve.
But I've done enough labor in my life
to concur with the bible
that much of it's a curse for mankind.
Shoveling for hours
with a constantly runny nose
doesn't lead me to any different conclusions.

And who has patience for more malarkey,
especially during a pandemic
and after a snowstorm—
even from a friend?

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Shai Afsai's articles, short stories, poems, book reviews, and photographs have been published in *Anthropology Today*, *Haaretz*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Journal of the American Revolution*, *New English Review*, *The Providence Journal*, *Reading Religion*, *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, and *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. See more [here](#).

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