

# 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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