

F R I E N D S H I P , T I M E ,
A N D T H E S A B B A T H



R O N A L D A . S H A R P

Wisdom is paradoxical. “Distance,” we are told, “makes affections wander”; yet “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” “A penny saved is a penny earned,” which may be true; but then “Penny wise is pound foolish.” Proverbs are often mutually exclusive. My own favorite example is “Look before you leap” or, alternatively, “Opportunity only knocks once.”

Watch it! Go for it! Be careful! Seize the moment! It begins to sound like the conflicting advice of stockbrokers. The proverbial tradition, that reservoir of cultural wisdom, provides a wealth of truisms on virtually every side of a complex issue. But there is one proverb in particular, a proverb that contains a paradox about value, that I hope will provide a useful entrance into the topic of this essay: the relationship between the ideal of friendship on the one hand and the meaning of the Sabbath – the Jewish conception of Shabbat – on the other. I will argue that the Sabbath and friendship give a new value to time, moving time as we usually experience it into a gift economy where it is differently measured, in every sense of the word.

The old Latin tag I have in mind is this: “Friends are people who waste time together.” For Americans, still deeply influenced

by the Puritan tradition, wasting time has always been considered a sin. Together with the Protestant work ethic, the American preoccupation with efficiency and the capitalistic imperative to produce have long nurtured a suspicion of any activity, even any human relationship, that wastes time. Yet the Latin tag expresses a paradoxical wisdom that in my view is at the heart of friendship. In a strictly utilitarian sense, friendship can be seen as both labor intensive and wasteful of time that could be more profitably spent on productive enterprises. The proverb simultaneously acknowledges that perspective and critiques it by punning on the word *waste*, thus implying that in a proper understanding of friendship it is envisioned as moving in a time zone in which the traditional instrumental understanding of time is exposed as a shallow illusion. This is a wisdom that is also embodied in the Jewish concept of the Sabbath, which is based on a conception of time that in my view has crucial implications for an understanding of friendship.

This proverb is especially relevant at the present historical moment, in which time has not only been dramatically accelerated but also pervasively commodified. Both the Sabbath and friendship, on the other hand, participate in a gift economy. In his important work on gift theory, the cultural critic Lewis Hyde begins with a fundamental distinction between commodity exchange and gift exchange, arguing that the defining feature of art, for example, is its participation in a gift economy in which the whole is always larger than the sum of its parts. “Unlike the sale of a commodity,” he says, “the giving of a gift tends to establish a relationship between the parties involved.” I want to argue that friendship and the Jewish conception of the Sabbath both participate in that same gift economy, particularly with respect to time. Just as the Sabbath provides an antidote to treating time as a commodity, something that should not be wasted, friendship reconfigures both our understanding and our actual experience of time. I want to extend the implications of Hyde’s distinctions and, by locating friendship and the Sabbath in a gift economy, explore their power to release time from instrumentality, from something understood as a commodity, something that must be spent usefully and productively, and transform it into something that functions in the dimension of gift exchange, where the central dimension of bonding is spiritual.

In *The Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath Day*, the Jewish feminist writer Francine Klagsbrun observes that even “ancient Roman writers mocked the Jews for their ‘laziness’ in abstaining from work on the Sabbath,” but the commodification of time has increased exponentially since ancient Rome. The Jewish theologian and philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel’s extraordinary *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* captures the paradoxical quality brilliantly. While arguing that the Sabbath creates a monument of time, Heschel is interested in the mysterious but potent ways in which time can be invested with spirituality. “Holiness in space, in nature,” he writes, “was known in other religions. New in the teaching of Judaism was that the idea of holiness was gradually shifted from space to time, from the realm of nature to the realm of history, from things to events”: “While Jewish tradition offers us no definition of the concept of eternity, it tells us how to experience the taste of eternity. . . . The world to come is therefore not only a posthumous condition, dawning upon the soul on the morrow after its departure from the body. The essence of the world to come is Sabbath eternal, and the seventh day in time is an example of eternity.”

Heschel is at pains to clarify that this connection with eternity, far from being an abstraction from time, is an embodiment of it: “The seventh day is a *palace in time* which we build. It is made of soul, of joy and reticence. In its atmosphere, a discipline is a reminder of adjacency to eternity. . . . The Jewish contribution to the idea of love is the conception of love of the Sabbath, the love of a day, of spirit in the form of time.” The Jewish conception of the Sabbath provides an important model for solutions not only to the increasingly urgent problems posed by the acceleration and commodification of time in modernity but also to the hunger for both spirituality and meaningful human relationship that has been exacerbated by the acceleration and commodification of time.

If Heschel’s emphasis is on the numerous ways in which the Jewish concept of the Sabbath entails crucial connections between time and eternity, there is a wonderful Hasidic tale that establishes an equally profound connection between time and friendship. In one version of the tale told by Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz, which the anthologist Howard Schwartz indicates “is one of the best known in Hasidic lore,” the issue is why, when two friends

who have been long separated meet, they are, according to the Talmud, expected to say the following blessing: “Blessed is He who revives the dead.” In this tale, Ze’ev Wolf of Zhitomir and Aaron Samuel ben Naftali Hertz Hacoen “had been study partners for many years and were the closest of friends.” But because their work had led one of them to Jerusalem and the other to a yeshiva in a distant town, they had been separated for more than a year. When they met at last they instinctively cried out “the traditional blessing recited when seeing a friend again after more than a year has passed: ‘Blessed art thou Oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, who raises the dead.’”

One of the younger students asks Reb Pinhas the meaning of this curious injunction to bless God for reviving the dead when no one has died. Reb Pinhas’s reply is crucial:

We learn in the Zohar that everyone has a light burning for them in the world above, and everyone’s light is unique. When two friends meet, their lights above are united, and out of that union of two lights an angel is born. The angel has the strength to survive for only a year, unless its life is renewed when the friends meet again. But if they are separated for more than a year, the angel begins to languish and eventually wastes away. That is why we bless the dead upon meeting a friend we have not seen for more than a year, to revive the angel.

Four elements of this conception of friendship strike me as central. First, although it is a human creation, arising out of the union of two lights, the fact that the union occurs “in the world beyond” suggests an important spiritual dimension to this act of human creation. Second, each friendship is unique, since “everyone’s light is unique.” Third, since an angel is born out of the union of the two lights, the friendship is figured as even more spiritually charged. And finally, since the angel must be re-created after a year of separation, time is a critical factor in friendship.

It is this last characteristic upon which I would like to focus. Along with Cicero’s *De amicitia*, Aristotle’s discussion of friendship in his *Nicomachean Ethics* is the most influential treatment of friendship in the Western tradition. One of Aristotle’s central assertions is that friends must live together: “Those who extend

friendship to one another without living together are more like men of good will than like friends. For nothing characterizes friends as much as living in each other's company." For Aristotle time and familiarity are required: "For, as the proverb has it, people cannot know each other until they have eaten the specified measure of salt together." Note the emphasis Aristotle places on the importance of what now strikes us as perhaps the rarest of luxuries in friendship, namely, a kind of daily intertwining of two lives. It is precisely that deep entanglement in the daily temporal contexts of each other's lives that modernity has made so rare. So pervasive is modern mobility that we must force ourselves to recall that throughout most of human history, and in most cultures, friendships were formed in a world in which it was assumed that one's friends would never move away. When Aristotle talks about "living in each other's company," he is assuming that people will continue to live in the same place as their friends. There were, of course, exceptions, but they were so rare that the norm had something of the status of my assumption today that if I take a walk I am unlikely to encounter a tornado. When I begin my walk I do not consciously think that it is safe to do so because I will not be struck by a tornado. That knowledge is tacit, just as the knowledge that people usually do not move would have been tacit for Aristotle. But the opposite is now the case: even in the small towns of America, we recognize from childhood that of course our friends might move away. When we make friends now, we do so knowing this to be the case, and although we have made adjustments to accommodate this stark fact, this historical shift has had a significant effect on modern friendships.

The most obvious accommodations to our mobility have been technological. Given the importance first of postal systems, then of long-distance phone calls, and more recently of email, texting, social networks (especially Facebook), Skype, and cellphones, "living together" has been reconceived in such a way that it seems naive to imagine that we must be physically in contact with a friend in order to sustain a friendship. Is it not even more naive, then, to imagine that, as we are told in the Hasidic tale, the angel of friendship can survive for only one year when friends are apart, after which it must be re-created at their reunion?

To answer this question, we need to acknowledge that we now

live in a period in which we are witnessing, as the subtitle of one book claims, “the acceleration of just about everything.” In that book, *Faster*, the historian of science James Gleick describes a restaurant in Tokyo that charges by the minute rather than the food, and the phenomenon of some users hitting 88 rather than go on the microwave timer because it is faster to press the same button twice than hit two different buttons. (What, by the way, am I going to do with that ninety seconds that it takes to heat up the pizza in the microwave? Glance at my Apple watch to check the stock reports? Read a new text message on my iPhone?)

Surely it is already old news that we are in the midst of a significant shift in the way we apprehend and experience time. Everyone – from professional people to laborers, from teenagers to grandparents – seems to feel rushed. One simple explanation was provided by the economist Juliet Schor in *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, in which she points out that Americans, for example, now work more than medieval serfs, ancient Greeks and Romans, and contemporary subsistence farmers in developing nations. Because people are working more, she argues, they have less discretionary time than they used to. Rather than being “an easy background,” time has become “a scarce commodity frenetically spent.” A raft of books and articles has appeared since the publication of Schor’s study a quarter of a century ago, some of which instruct us on how to use our time more efficiently, some of which examine the historical roots of the modern time crunch – or time famine, as it has been called – and some of which describe specific political or social action, or even individual psychological or spiritual programs for dealing with this new reality. We even have a new profession: consultants who specialize in “time management,” whose teachings have already become a staple of orientation programs for new students at colleges and universities. Despite major technological developments that have indeed saved us time, the 1950s sci-fi fantasies of a four-day work-week and endless leisure have somehow not materialized.

Clearly the same technology – dishwashers, washing machines, computers – that has saved us time has played a major role in transforming our sense of time, in speeding things up and raising our expectations of what we ought to be accomplishing. A few years ago, if I had five minutes before my class started and I was

already fully prepared, it never would have occurred to me that I had a unit of time available in which to do something. Now, five minutes is a unit of time to which I am keenly attuned. I can make a quick call to Paris in that time, or shoot off a text message to a colleague in Australia. There is so much more we can do quickly now that in ways we are only beginning to understand, our internal clocks have been recalibrated, and our sense of expectations intensified.

Much has been written about the role of technology in accelerating time, not only by making it possible for us to do more things quickly but also by leading us to quicken our daily pace. While technology has in some ways saved us time, it has also increased our expectations of what we can do in smaller and smaller units of time. Now that we have all this extra time, we realize that we can use it in ways never before possible, but the result of that awareness has been a radical acceleration in the pace of daily life.

If we return now to the Hasidic tale “The Angel of Friendship,” I hope it will be clear that the mystery behind the meaning of the injunction to recite the blessing over the dead arises from the fact that we do not naturally assume that there is an important connection between time and friendship. The explanation offered in the tale that such a relation is central to friendship calls attention to friendship’s vulnerability, to our need to recommit ourselves to preserving and nurturing its spirit in a world that poses constant threats to the shining of that light. The light of friendship, which in the Jewish tradition reflects the divine light beyond this world, transports us into the gift economy, into the realm of holiness, just as the Sabbath does when it ushers us beyond the familiar utilitarian world. It is precisely because the rigors of temporality are so challenging that the Sabbath becomes an oasis. Just as the candles are ritualistically lit to usher in the Sabbath each week, the light of friendship must be kindled and rekindled in the world of time, defined as it is by transience and mortality, which in the Hasidic tale are figured in the image of the angel wasting away after a year “unless its life is renewed when the friends meet again.” The ritualistic recitation of the traditional blessing of God for reviving the dead is intended to underline the centrality of time and mortality to human experience, and especially to friendship, but also to transfigure them by ritualistically acknowledging

their centrality to human relationships. The angel, one might say, can be born only when one accepts, even embraces the reality of time, transience, and mortality, which is an essential part of what Aristotle means when he stipulates that friends must live together. Just as the Sabbath provides relief from the daily grind, friendship offers a similar balm, but if we approach either the Sabbath or friendship as simply an instrumental means to that end, we will be unsuccessful precisely because the spiritual economy of gift exchange cannot be accessed through the instrumental economy of commodity exchange.

The Jewish view of time shares this emphasis on the transfiguration of human time. According to Heschel,

While the deities of other peoples were associated with places or things, the God of Israel was the God of events: the Redeemer from slavery, the Revealer of the Torah, manifesting Himself in events of history rather than in things or places. . . . Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time. . . . The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals. . . . Jewish ritual may be characterized as the art of significant forms in time. . . . The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time.

That the Hasidic tale places such emphasis on the importance of time in friendship suggests to me a deeper connection that has not been developed in the tradition but which, I would suggest, could be most fruitfully: namely, the relevance of the Jewish conception of the Sabbath for both the amelioration of our current time crunch and for the understanding and flourishing of friendship, which, among many other challenges in modernity, must also accommodate the time famine.

One way of getting this issue into focus is to contrast Heschel's conception of the Sabbath with the secular conception of the weekend. Although both are necessary time-outs from the world of work, the central function of the weekend in secular society is to allow us to return to work refreshed. In that sense, it is the weekly equivalent of a holiday or vacation. But as Heschel observes, "The Sabbath is not for the purpose of enhancing the efficiency of [our]

work. The Sabbath is not for the sake of the weekdays; the weekdays are for the sake of the Sabbath.” In our increasingly work-oriented conception of reality, such an idea seems utterly foreign. We belong, after all, to a culture that has invented the terms “real time” and, even more significant, “quality time” – a coinage designed to assuage our guilt for not spending enough time together by identifying the time we do spend together as somehow especially significant or heightened. Both terms reveal how thoroughly time has been transformed into a commodity and an instrumentality. Time off is now justified because it provides stress relief or refueling time, or perhaps some sort of armor that we can put on when we reenter time’s rapid stream again (or, more appropriately, when we get back on the treadmill).

Contrast this view with Heschel’s conception of the Sabbath. “The day was a living presence,” he says, using *presence* in both its spiritual and temporal senses, “and when it arrived they felt as if a guest had come to see them. And, surely, a guest who comes to pay a call *in friendship* or respect must be given a welcome” (emphasis mine). This is very close to the literary critic George Steiner’s conception of a work of art as a “real presence,” something that appears at the doors of our consciousness and that we must welcome in with the high courtesy extended to all guests. “Its spirit,” Heschel continues about the Sabbath, “is a reality we meet rather than an empty span of time which we choose to set aside for comfort or recuperation.” Celebrating the Sabbath might, of course, lead to comfort or recuperation, but it is not in order to achieve those effects that we celebrate it. The logic here is the logic of gift exchange. While a genuine gift is given without any expectation of return, it is often the case that something will come back. Many religions have their version of “Give and ye shall receive.” But if the reason we give is in order to receive, then the act is no longer a gift but an investment, what Lewis Hyde calls “commodity exchange.”

Consider the application of this model to friendship. It is true that if I relate to my friend on the model of gift exchange, I will be not simply a giver of gifts but also a receiver. But if my motive for giving is that I want something in return, what I am giving is no longer a gift. “It is true,” as Hyde says, “that something often

comes back when a gift is given, but if this were made the explicit condition of the exchange, it wouldn't be a gift." If my friend calls me in distress at 2 A.M. and I talk him through a difficult time, I am extending my friendship – the gift of my compassion, my concern, my time, my advice, my love. It is true that if I give to my friend in this way, I am likely to nurture a friendship one of whose fruits might later be a kindness – an act of friendship – that comes to me in return. But if my motive for giving to my friend is that I hope to get something later, my act is neither a gift nor an act of friendship but rather a commodity exchange in which I purchase my friend's future acts of friendship by extending acts of friendship to him now. This is the crisis insurance model of friendship: I invest in a future safety net for myself by providing one for my friend now. It is a perversion of friendship, for in a genuine friendship, reciprocity arises not from a sense of obligation but from a desire to give to the friend. "When we barter," says Hyde, "we make deals, and if someone defaults we go after him, but the gift must be a gift. It is as if you give a part of your substance to your gift partner and then wait in silence until he gives you a part of his. You put yourself in his hands."

There is a medieval midrash that demonstrates this dynamic in ways that bear directly on the deep connections I have been outlining between friendship and time. The version I quote is from *Beit Ha-midrash*, assembled by the nineteenth-century Viennese scholar Adolf Jellinek and reprinted in Francine Klagsbrun's *Voices of Wisdom*:

True Friendship

There were two close friends who had been parted by war so that they lived in different kingdoms. Once one of them came to visit his friend, and because he came from the city of the king's enemy, he was imprisoned and sentenced to be executed as a spy.

No amount of pleas would save him, so he begged the king for one kindness. "Your majesty," he said, "let me have just one month to return to my land and put my affairs in order so my family will be cared for after my death. At the end of the month I will return to pay the penalty."

"How can I believe you will return?" answered the king. "What security can you offer?"

“My friend will be my security,” said the man. “He will pay for my life with his if I do not return.”

The king called in the man’s friend, and to his amazement, the friend agreed to the conditions.

On the last day of the month, the sun was setting, and the man had not yet returned. The king ordered his friend killed in his stead. As the sword was about to descend, the man returned and quickly placed the sword on his own neck. But his friend stopped him.

“Let me die for you,” he pleaded.

The king was deeply moved. He ordered the sword taken away and pardoned them both.

“Since there is such great love and friendship between the two of you,” he said, “I entreat you to let me join you as a third.” And from that day on they became the king’s companions.

And it was in this spirit that our sages of blessed memory said, “Get yourself a companion.”

This midrash, like the similar and more widely known Greek story of Damon and Pythias, emphasizes the importance of friendship, and it does so, significantly, by highlighting the element of time. That the friend returns just in the nick of time is crucial, reminding us again of the importance of both proximity and temporality in friendship – what Aristotle calls “living in each other’s company.” The act of friendship here is figured as a gift – indeed, the ultimate gift of being willing to sacrifice one’s own life for a friend. That gift, the consummate act of self-sacrifice, is in the New Testament transformed into the declaration in John 15:13: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” It is, of course, precisely such an act of self-sacrifice that Christianity attributes to the crucifixion of Jesus, which is conceived as the ultimate gift. The transcendence of death in this midrash may differ from that in the Christian story, but it shares the emphasis on the way sacrifice and gift transport us to another time zone, in which the body is transfigured and the remnants of the commodity economy fall away in the white light of spirit, the same light that is kindled in the Hasidic tale through the union of two souls in friendship and gives birth to an angel.

Notice that this midrash is also cast as a tale of education. The king, who could not imagine the possibility of such a selfless friendship, is not only educated about the value of true friendship; more important, he incorporates that teaching into his own life. He is not satisfied simply to have learned this important lesson. By asking the friends if he can join their friendship as a third party he indicates that he wants to incorporate what he has learned into his daily life. It is not enough to acknowledge the importance of friendship or, to follow out the analogy with the Sabbath, the importance of resting from one's labor. One must act; one must incorporate the gift economy into one's life. The importance of such action is emphasized in this tale by the fact that, by allowing these friends into his inner circle, the king is ignoring or violating the usual boundaries that would separate them. That movement from one realm to another is precisely what I mean when I refer to the movement from the realm of commodity exchange – in which there is a strict separation between the king and his subjects – to the economy of gift exchange. Note that the king does not inform the two friends that they will now be his friends. Understanding that, like all genuine acts of friendship, this is a gift transaction, “I entreat you,” he says, “to let me join you as a third.” He asks them to *allow* him to be their friend.

As both the Hasidic tale and the midrash suggest, in authentic friendship we move into a different time zone, a zone of sanctified time to which we give ourselves over, suspending the desire for material reward or payback, often at considerable risk. “We can only solve the problem of time,” says Heschel, “through sanctification of time.” The same is true of the celebration of the Sabbath. Indeed, both the Sabbath's and friendship's potential to be comforting and recuperative requires that those not be our objectives. In accord with the logic of gift exchange, those rewards will be elusive in direct proportion to the extent to which we pursue them. In *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* the cultural critic Judith Shulevitz reminds us that according to the rabbis, the Sabbath “is a gift from God's treasury. Once a week, his people receive it, and are enriched.” Like all gifts, the value of this one can only be kept alive if the gift is kept in motion rather than taking it out of circulation and exchanging it for a commodity. “The gift,” says Hyde, “is a pool or reservoir in which

the sentiments of its exchange accumulate so that the more often it is given away, the more feeling it carries, like an heirloom that has been passed down for generations. The gift gets steeped in the fluids of its own passage.”

Like the ideal of time embodied in the Sabbath, the ideal of spending time together in friendship is based on a notion of presence that removes us from the system of material exchange, in which we calculate the value of time as though it were a commodity, and transports us into the spiritual economy of gift. This may help explain the significance of including the commandment to observe the Sabbath as one of the Ten Commandments, on par with honoring our parents and not committing murder. Jews have revered the Sabbath as the cornerstone of God’s plan and the most important of the gifts that Judaism has given to civilization. One interpretation of the creation story in Jewish tradition is that God’s work culminated not in the creation of humanity but rather in the rest and reinvestiture of God’s presence after creation. The six days of labor were accomplished, that is to say, for the sake of creating the Sabbath rest.

The time zone I have outlined is increasingly being eroded in our nanosecond culture, and it is precisely that sanctified sense of time that is essential for the flourishing of both spirituality and friendship. The proverb “Friends are people who waste time together” has two interrelated meanings in this regard. First, a genuine friendship is conducted in the time zone of gift exchange rather than of commodity exchange. Indeed, we move into that time zone by laying waste to the world of commodity exchange. The Sabbath can be ushered in and welcomed as a queen or a bride only when the workaday world is transcended. Friendship’s spiritual power can be tapped only when it is not considered an instrumentality, a commodity whose value must be measured against other commodities competing for our attention. For if spending time with a friend is considered a zero-sum game, always competing against other possible uses of our time, we condemn ourselves to a model of time and human relationships that can no more provide nourishment for true friendship than remaining within the weekday world can provide the nourishment for the spirit that only the Sabbath can provide. From the perspective of commodity exchange, spending time with my friend will always compete

against other, more cost-effective uses of my time. In this sense, time with friends is not only a waste of time in the sense that it is not materially productive but also in the second sense of *waste*, since, according to the commodity model, time is finite, which means that to spend it with a friend is to lose it for a more productive or instrumental use.

For years I have been teased by my friends for taking a ridiculous amount of time to say good-bye. I have no trouble concluding a text message, an email, even a long letter, but saying good-bye after an afternoon, an evening, or perhaps a weekend with a friend has often elicited from me a long-winded effort to articulate how wonderful our time together has been. Shifting my weight from one foot to the other and throwing up ever more desperate volleys of words meant to express my delight and my appreciation, I can go on endlessly, like someone who has just seen a spectacular natural wonder or a major work of art and is desperately trying to express at least a hint of what he or she has just witnessed. Years ago, when my wife and I and our young children would spend a day with friends and it was time to start saying good-bye, my kids always knew that it would be at least another half hour before we left.

Two centuries ago, John Keats observed the same quality in his friend John Hamilton Reynolds. Writing to his brother and sister-in-law in America, Keats told them about a recent party at which Reynolds was negotiating his good-byes awkwardly: “You know at taking leave of a party at a door way, sometimes a Man dallies and foolishes and gets awkward, and does not know how to make off to advantage – Good bye – well – good-bye – and yet he does not – go – good bye and so one – well – god bless you – You know what I mean. Now Reynolds was in this predicament.” Keats’s brilliant coinage of *foolishes* is one hint that he relishes the comic dimension of such moments, but only a year later a different perspective emerges for him on the difficulty of saying good-bye to friends. Twenty-five years old, knowing he is dying of tuberculosis as he languishes in a tiny apartment above the Spanish Steps in Rome, Keats begins what he knows will be his final letter to Charles Brown, his closest friend, by saying that “’tis the most difficult thing in the world [for] me to write a letter.” In the final two sentences Keats tells Brown, “I can scarcely bid you good bye even in a letter. I always made an awkward bow.”

Saying good-bye to a friend after a party or an evening together

is in Keats's view not unconnected to saying good-bye to a friend when one is dying. The crucial link is temporality, as it is in both the Hasidic tale and the midrash, in which the resolution occurs in the nick of time. What the Jewish conception of the Sabbath does is to ritualistically distinguish two time zones, the secular and the sacred, and attribute to the latter not only a higher value but one that, if embraced and celebrated, can also transfigure the secular. Friendship, I am arguing, can function in precisely this way as a space that is both distinguished from and capable of transfiguring daily reality. I have been arguing that the genuine power and value of friendship can be discovered only if we experience it in the time zone of the gift – precisely what the Jewish conception of the Sabbath claims about it. From the workaday perspective, spending a whole day outside the world of commodity exchange can only be understood as a waste, unless, of course, it is justified as a necessary break whose central purpose is, by refreshing us, to make us more successful or efficient in the world of work. This is, unfortunately, precisely what our conception of both the weekend and the holiday or vacation has become. But if Heschel is right that “the Sabbath is not for the purpose of enhancing the efficiency of work”; if he is right that “the Sabbath is not for the sake of the weekdays” but that “the weekdays are for the sake of the Sabbath,” then, far from being a waste of time, celebrating the Sabbath – and by extension immersing oneself in friendship – is a sanctification of time. By wasting time in one sense – namely, laying waste to the commodity-exchange value of time – we make possible a relation with time that can only be understood as an increase in value: the opposite of wasting time in another sense. Friends, we recall from the proverb, are people who waste time together. We confront here the paradox that Hyde argues is at the foundation of gift exchange: that “in the world of gift . . . you not only can have your cake and eat it too, you can't have your cake unless you eat it.”

Understanding the conception of time embodied and celebrated in the Sabbath can be a powerful antidote to the deleterious consequences of the time crunch that seems to be such a defining feature of the modern world that it has already achieved the dulling status of the obvious. The consequences for friendship of the acceleration of time are serious ones, and here too the sancti-

fication of time implicit in the Sabbath has much to teach us about friendship. But is there not something ironic in discovering within the Jewish tradition such a rich source for dealing with the speeding up of time? In Aharon Appelfeld's novella *Tzili*, a fugitive, Mark, feels guilty because when he escaped a Nazi camp he was unable to rescue his wife and two children as well. He is now hiding in the forest, where he meets another Jewish fugitive, Tzili, who is also trying to survive alone in that dangerous if beautiful place: "He would sit for hours looking at the wild flowers growing in all the colors of the rainbow. Sometimes he would pluck a flower and whisper: 'How lovely, how modest.' Even the weeds moved him. And once he said, as if talking to himself: 'In Jewish families there's never any time. Everyone's in a hurry, everyone's in a panic. What for?'" Even before the Nazis come and the family flees in terror, Tzili's family lives in a constant rush, working tirelessly to improve themselves and abandoning Tzili in the process. Appelfeld is struck by the contrast between the slowing down of time that Mark experiences in the liminal space of the forest and the frenzy that so often characterizes the daily lives of Jews.

This is a contrast that we find as early as Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, in which Shylock's frantic labors are contrasted with what appears to be the endless leisure of Antonio and Portia. In that play the contrast is directly connected with the more pervasive one between commodity exchange and gift exchange, the former associated with justice and Judaism and the latter with mercy and Christianity. Friendship is a central concern of that play as well, and the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio is based on the model of the gift as opposed to Shylock's defining roots in the world of commodity exchange. Nor should we be surprised to hear Portia, while attempting to describe the extraordinary friendship between her husband and Antonio, make reference to the proverb with which I began this essay, "Friends are people who waste time together." Referring to her husband's profound bond with his "bosom lover" Antonio, she describes them as

Companions

That do converse and *waste the time together*,
 Whose souls do bear an egal yoke of love,
 There must be needs a like proportion
 Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit. [emphasis mine]

However one interprets Shakespeare's view of Shylock, it is clear that Shylock's close connection with commodity exchange is deeply associated with longstanding negative stereotypes of the Jew and contrasted, in that regard, with Christian associations with gift exchange. Shakespeare's association of Jews with commodity exchange and Christians with gift exchange is at the heart of both the dramatic and thematic structure of *The Merchant of Venice*. But there is a magnificent moment in the third act in which Shakespeare shatters the symmetry of the gift/commodity schema that he has so carefully developed in the play. When Shylock learns from Tubal that his daughter has bartered for a monkey the ring that his dead wife Leah gave him long ago, he is devastated: "Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal. It was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys." Even Shylock, who is otherwise the embodiment of commodity exchange in this play, knows something of the gift economy.

The pervasiveness of this stereotypical association of Jews with commodity exchange becomes even more perplexing when we consider that, far from being a peripheral concept in Jewish thought, the idea of the Sabbath – and, as we have seen, its deep connection with gift exchange – is at the center of Jewish thought. The traditional association between Jews and commodity exchange carries with it assumptions about the nature of time that need to be reexamined by a consideration of the implications of the Sabbath for our understanding of time. If we do so we shall discover at the center of Jewish thought and tradition a deep link with a conception of time that is much more compatible with the world of gift exchange than commodity exchange. The sanctification of time that Heschel claims is the only solution to the problem of time is enshrined in the concept of the Sabbath, which is, we recall, itself a gift from God.

If I am right in arguing that we would do well to explore more fully the connection between the conception of time required for friendship and the one embodied in the Sabbath, I would also suggest that we probe other possible connections between friendship and the Sabbath. Judith Shulevitz claims that "the Sabbath . . . is not only an idea. It is also something you *keep*. With other people." "By common consensus," she says, "the day is all

about getting connected. . . . With its laws proscribing work and mandating social encounters – meals, gatherings, study sessions – the Sabbath blocks out time for shedding one’s professional or workaday identity and weaving the bonds of a collective identity.” She also observes that “classical Jewish theology presents the Sabbath as a communal good, rather than an individual one.” We need to be careful about conflating community and friendship. But are there not important connections between the two that would be worth exploring and strengthening? I would submit that we have already begun to witness the blurring of that distinction in the new forms of socializing on the Sabbath that have been emerging in recent years. A colleague of mine, for example, has for the past decade been celebrating it with a group of friends who gather each Friday night for dinner, song, and conversation, a ritual that has its origin in the celebration of the Sabbath but that, according to my colleague, is as close to the practice of authentic friendship as anything he can imagine, and is, he claims, a series of friendships that has been developed and enriched over the years partly by the regularity of their gathering.

I raise these issues not because they are unique to our historical moment but because, with the massive acceleration and commodification of time in recent decades, they have been profoundly complicated and exacerbated. I first began reading and thinking seriously about the time famine twenty years ago, in the mid-nineties. Although the phenomenon was well under way by then, it is remarkable how much it has progressed since. A great deal has already been written about the influence of the Internet on the time famine and also on the implications for contemporary notions of friendship of Facebook’s neologism “to friend.” Leaving aside here the implications of the immense growth of social-networking sites on the Internet, consider just one other example: the influence of mobile phones. The examples I used earlier of making a call or firing off an email while waiting five minutes for a class already feel like ancient history. More than six years ago, a front-page story in *The New York Times* reported that “online chats and text messages . . . are now threatening to eclipse e-mail, much as they have already superseded phone calls. . . . The problem with e-mail, young people say, is that it involves a boringly long process of signing into an account, typing out a subject line

and then sending a message that might not be received or answered for hours.” It has become increasingly rare for young people to converse on the phone. They text on their phones, they occasionally email on their phones, but only rarely do they make phone calls, and when they do, the calls are almost always brief. The concept of chatting on the phone has almost completely disappeared – so much so that if a person calls you without first texting or emailing to set up the call, some now consider such behavior either bizarre or simply rude.

Shulevitz takes up the influence of the cellphone, which she claims “relaxes the implicit contract around time,” in the context of what she calls the “granitic temporality” of the Sabbath. “Electronic communications may turn out to increase the frequency of real-world contacts,” she observes, “rather than replace them. After all, our heightened ability to synchronize our schedules has made it easier to get together.” But there is a huge difference, she claims, “between face-to-face and electronic interlocution. . . . A tellingly coarse term has emerged to describe real-time and real-space encounters: “flesh meets.”” One measure of the gulf separating Aristotle’s assumption that friends must live together and our current mindset is that in his time “flesh meets” were not the *preferred* way of being with a friend but the *only* way. Sorting out the implications of virtual encounters for the flourishing of friendship and for the larger development of community will be an exciting if enormous challenge that includes, but also goes beyond, the issues of time I have been examining in this essay. To make sense of those larger issues, it might be useful to think more deeply about the connections among time, friendship, and the Jewish idea of the Sabbath. The waste of time required for the authentic experience of the Sabbath or genuine friendship rewards us with the gift of experiencing transcendent time, time out of time. It is a Jewish conviction that the Sabbath is a taste of Edenic time or of the world to come, places where time meets eternity. So too, as exemplified by the friends in the midrash who are willing to sacrifice their lives for one another, the devotion of friendship opens the imagination to eternity.