

**Monday, February 28, 2011. Judith Shulevitz, "What Can We Learn From the Sabbath?"**

MR. GALBRAITH: It's my pleasure to introduce our introducer. Dr. Nick Bozanic and I were both at the Interlochen Arts Academy at the same time, and now he's Jill Muti's dean of faculty. She is, of course, a former Interlochen student. So is our next speaker. This is incestuous to the nth degree, and I'm so delighted.

Would you please welcome our introducer, Dr. Nick Bozanic, a great creative writing teacher and a great academician.

DR. BOZANIC: It's an especially pleasurable privilege for me to have the honor of introducing this morning's speaker because, as it happens, as Bruce indicated, Judith Shulevitz was a student of mine at the Interlochen Arts Academy, so naturally, I take the former teacher's entirely unwarranted personal pride in their subsequent achievements. Those achievements include a distinguished undergraduate degree at Yale University, from which she graduated in 1986.

Very shortly after leaving Yale, Judith began making her mark as a cultural critic, as a co-editor with Margaret Talbot of *Lingua Franca*, and then as one of the founding editors of the pioneering online journal *Slate*. Judith has also served as deputy editor of *New York Magazine*, was a regular columnist for *The New York Times Book Review*, and has contributed and continues to contribute review and essays to such journals as *The New Yorker* and *The New Republic*, among many others.

A recent example of Judith's work which might be of special interest to this audience and germane to her topic today is a piece that appeared in *The New Republic* not long ago called "Downtime On The Overcontrolling Parent."

Judith Shulevitz' presence here today confirms what was evident even when she was a student at Interlochen. She's a scholar of the first order. Possessed of a wide-ranging and penetrating intellect, capable of synthesizing seemingly disparate concepts into new structures of sense and motivated by that most potent, though too little esteemed intellectual stimulus, chronic persistent ambivalence or uncertainty. Pestered by what she does not understand, Judith probes and prongs every available resource to ameliorate if not allay that unease. Moreover, as a writer -- here I take very personal pride -- as a writer, Judith retains much of that poetic sensibility and a poet's sensitivity to nuances of language she first revealed as a high school creative writing student. Her work consequently combines the measured argumentation of the scrupulous scholar with metaphoric flourishes that condense cautious reasoning into aperçus of crystalline clarity. Nowhere is this more in evidence than in Judith's brilliant and deeply moving first book, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time*. Winner of the American Library Association's 2011 Sophie Brodie Medal for Jewish Literature, a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award, named one of *The New York Times'* 100 notable books of 2010, and one of the five best nonfiction books of 2010 by *Jewish Daily Forward*.

I have had to resist the temptation to quote lengthy illustrative passages from this beautiful book, but indulge me this one observation by way of hinting at the relevance of the Sabbath to the concerns of educators. Judith cites a remark by the Babylonian scholar Sa'adiah Gaon that the Sabbath affords men leisure to meet each other at gatherings where they can confer about matters of their religion and make public pronouncements about them and perform other functions of the same order, much as we are doing here. She brings this up in reference to the Jewish holiday Shavuoth, which commemorates God's giving the Torah to Moses on Sinai, and is an occasion devoted to study and discussion.

It struck me that in some ways schools are institutional analogs, more or less secular in nature, of Shavuoth, and it reminded me that the word "school" derives from the Greek "schole," which means leisure, that in which leisure is employed, discussion, philosophy, a place where time is in play. And "scholastic" derives from the Greek word "scholazein," meaning to devote one's leisure to study, to be at leisure. The educational institutions which we serve were founded upon this understanding that sustained study is a function of leisure or respite

from the rigidity of the workday. And as we are here today on sabbatical from our various routines in order to engage in study and discussion, we have reason to be grateful that Judith Shulevitz is here to speak with us about a topic essential in the root sense to what we all hold dear.

Please welcome Judith Shulevitz.

MS. SHULEVITZ: I have never had an introduction like that, and I'm a little choked up, actually.

Nick was my favorite teacher in high school. He's the one -- you know, there's always one -- who inspires you. He inspired me tragically to try to become a classics major at Yale, which I just explained to him is something you can't actually do if you haven't done Greek and Latin in high school. But I don't blame him for it. I'm grateful for the years I spent struggling with those languages.

I called this talk "What we can learn from the Sabbath," and I am going to talk about that. But another title I sometimes give is "The necessary and impossible Sabbath," because the central contradiction of my book is that it is necessary and it has become impossible, and we have to sort of figure out a way to navigate between those two things. And I'm going to start my talk by talking a little bit about the impossible part. Then I'm going to talk about the necessary part. And in between, I'm going to talk about myself, which is a proceeding I pursue in the book. And you might think, Well, what do I care about Judith Shulevitz and her dissatisfaction with her life? And I can't blame you for thinking that. So therefore, I just reassure you that -- I hope that you'll think that there's a payoff for all this autobiography.

I'm going to start to bring you inside the process that led to this book and to my appreciation of the Sabbath. I'm going to start by talking about the impossible Sabbath, and I'm going to start by illustrating that by talking about the thoughts that crowded into my head as I sat down to write this book, not a Sabbath-keeper, someone who had run away from her Judaism as soon as she had had her Bat Mitzvah, and all the reasons not to write the book that occurred to me as I sat down to start working on it. Therefore, I boiled them down into four reasons why the Sabbath is not all that attractive, not all that appealing, not something you would necessarily want to write a book in praise of.

I'm going to proceed Lettermanesquely, by listing them. Reason number one. Aren't we better off without it? For many centuries the Sabbath was more or less a tax that you pay in your personal time to whatever religious institution dominated your life and probably your government. The Sabbath is a holdover from the days before we got God out of the public square and an unreasonable demand on our already overtaxed time.

Anti-Sabbath reason number 2. What is there to learn from the day, anyway? We have gotten all the good things there are to get from it. We have the weekend, which is a direct derivative of the Sabbath, by way of unions and also, curiously, by way of Henry Ford, who gave his workers most of Saturday off, because he realized if you're going to have mass production, you must also have time to consume. So he was a big advocate of the two-day weekend.

We have a well-developed love of leisure. We have a richer panoply of leisure activities than at any time in history. We have more freedom to do what we like, when we like, with whom we like, than ever before. So what use is a Sabbath to us?

Reason number three. On a purely aesthetic level, the really strictly observed Sabbath is more often than not somewhat repugnant. I sometimes think about this when I come back from some less-developed country and have a sense of relief to be back in Manhattan, where I live, and back in the 24-hour economy, so that can I shop, dine, and be entertained when I want to, not according to some imposed schedule.

So let's take one of the least attractive Sabbaths in history, and that is the 19th century English Sabbath, at its strictest. I don't know if it was necessarily all that bad, but if you read Charles Dickens, you will think it was,

particularly in an 1836 pamphlet he wrote in opposition to some Sunday legislation that was going to make the Sabbath laws stricter than they already were in this Puritan country.

So I'm just going to read you a little bit of Dickens' pamphlet, which actually doesn't even make it into the book, but I decided it was such a choice passage to read, I couldn't pass it up.

"Sunday comes and brings with it a day of general gloom and austerity. The man who has been toiling hard all the week has been looking towards the Sabbath not as to a day of rest from labor and of healthy recreation, but as one of grievous tyranny and grinding oppression. The day which his Maker intended as a blessing, man has converted into a curse. Churn into the streets. Mark the rigid gloom that rains over everything around. The roads are empty, the fields are deserted, the houses of entertainment are closed. Bend your steps through the narrow and thickly inhabited streets. Observe the sallow faces of the men and women who are lounging at the doors or lolling from the windows. Regard well the closeness of these crowded rooms and the noisome exhalations that rise from the drains and kennels, and then laud the triumph of religion and morality which condemns people to drag their lives out in such stews as these."

Attractive Sabbath.

Reason number four. This is sort of my image of the Jewish Sabbath when I was sitting down to write this book. The Sabbath is not a day of rest and relaxation. It is a day thickly crowded with rules, weird rules, about what you can and cannot do, formulated in an entirely different time to respond to entirely different conditions. What could these outmoded rules have to tell us about how to relax in our stressful modern world?

Here I'm going to do something about as perverse as starting out with all the reasons not to like my subject. I'm going to quote from a review of my book which was written by a formerly orthodox or Sabbath-observant woman about her Friday afternoons.

She wrote, "As a working mother with a long commute, my day of rest required maniacal activity, especially in the winter months when the sun set early. The Jewish calendar, listing the minute for lighting the Sabbath candles, hung on the wall next to the stove, its imperious ukase whipping me into a frenzy to complete the cooking and baking by the appointed moment. At winter's bleakest, this arrived at 4:03. 4:03! The laws of the day decreed that after that instant, there could be no food changed from its raw state to cooked, no fire kindled, no electricity turned on or off. By the time the minute hand moved into place, three challahs had to have been baked, a multicourse dinner prepared for the evening repast and festive food for the next day cooked as well. The children had to be bathed and dressed, and me, too, since to beautify oneself for the Sabbath is a requirement. The prohibitions of the day played havoc with the rest of my week as well. Writing is forbidden on the Sabbath. Reading is allowed, but I could take no notes. Unable even to underline, I devised systems of using hairpins to mark important places in the text. I didn't dare ask the rabbi for his permission."

Okay. So these are all the reasons why you should be really, really glad we don't have Sabbath laws, blue laws, you don't live in a strict Sabbath-keeping community.

So given all this, what's there to say about the Sabbath? Why did I sit down to write a book essentially in praise of it, although with heavy doses of ambivalence, as Nick as told you.

Here's what I was thinking. To have become a big enough and important enough practice to have swallowed up a full one-seventh of people's lives for at least 3,000 years, the Sabbath must have had something to recommend it. And here was my hunch. If I could figure out what that something was, I would be onto some ideas about work and rest and the proper organization of time that I thought might be fading from our modern consciousness along with the laws that keep you from buying beer on Sunday morning.

Just so I don't disappoint you here, I am not going to be able in the few minutes left to me to answer all the

charges against the Sabbath I have just leveled, and this is a slightly cheesy move, but it's true. If you want the full answer, you're going to have to read my book. But what I do want to do is put in context what I was thinking, what I was feeling, the matrix in which the lessons that I learned came from.

So that brings me to another internal battle I was fighting. Thinking about the Sabbath was not just an intellectual exercise for me, though I very much wanted it to be. Before I wrote this book, I had never really written on a Jewish subject. Maybe an article here or there, but not really. And I was a serious, self-important writer and critic. I needed anything I was working on to be intellectually credible, not the pursuit of some obscure ill-understood religious quest.

So when people ask me why I was working on a book about the Sabbath, I said this. I thought that a structured period of nonproductivity could be very useful for an overscheduled society. And you know, that's true. I do think that. But that is not what was driving me. There was something much murkier at work, and what was at work was, I didn't like my life. One problem with my life was that every day seemed drearily and exactly the same as the next. I was an ambitious young editor and journalist, and whether I was at work or not, somehow I was always at work. If I was reading, it was for work. If I was with friends, I had met them at work and we talked about work. When I had time off, I shopped or cleaned. Once in a while I arranged a trip somewhere, and then I escaped the grinding routines of career and self-maintenance, and I became a very diligent tourist.

So I was looking for something. I don't know if it's exactly rest, but something else, something I could import into my life, some way to change my life. And eventually, it dawned on me. At this time I was living in Park Slope, Brooklyn, which is a place full of beautiful old churches. And it dawned on me that these buildings, which were architecturally quite odd when you bothered to look at them and had elaborate symbols all over them which I didn't begin to understand even when they were on synagogues and ought to have been much more out of context than they were because we'd all gotten so used to them, I realized these were places in which these unbelievable dramas get themselves played out every week through the medium of some of the greatest literature of all time, which was not read aloud, it's chanted aloud, sung aloud, and in synagogues, anyway, fondled and kissed. And it began to occur to me that churches and synagogues and mosques have become the repository of the poetic in our time. Churches, synagogues, and mosques are where people go for something else. Something accessible and acceptable, and yet, if you stop to think about it, filled with ideas that are so radical, they'd be rejected out of hand in any other context.

But there was something else I was looking for, though I didn't know it at the time. Just to fill you in on the curious process of rationalization that accompanied my very ambivalent rediscovery of Judaism, I started going to synagogue in part -- or this is what I told myself -- out of architectural curiosity.

So I was living in Park Slope, and this movie called *A Stranger Among Us* came out. It starred Melanie Griffith. You know who she is, right? So generally, as you know, she plays the blond bimchette. In this movie, she is a policewoman who goes undercover -- in my opinion, rather implausibly -- in a Hassidic community. It's a very amusing movie and I recommend it. It's a lot of fun to watch. In this movie, however, she goes to the synagogue, and there was this synagogue that was just an unbelievable picture postcard of an old steeple in the old country with a bimah in the middle and a women's balcony, and I read that the scene has been filmed, in fact, in a nonorthodox synagogue down the street from me. And when the film crew came, they took out all the old but sort of pedestrian pews and whatever, and they put in old-fashioned pews and beautiful chandeliers and scrubbed everything until it had a spiritual gleam.

And I went in to see this one Saturday and I sat in the back of the sanctuary and I was thoroughly amused by the Disneyfication of my ancestral architecture, and I burst into tears.

So why tears? That's a long story which is only somewhat answered by the book, but let's just say that what drew me to the synagogue was not the Disneyfication of my ancestors, but the fact that I'd been waiting for a very long time for a space in which to cry, and though I didn't know this until later, I'd been waiting for a time

in which to cry, as well. I'd also been waiting for someone to come along and adopt me, but I didn't know that yet, and it took me a really, really long time to get invited home for lunch. And I don't know how many people in this room go to synagogue on Saturday mornings, but if you do, then you know that that's a really long time. So I was emitting waves of discomfort and confusion, but finally, some bold soul did invite me home for lunch, and I did become part of this Sabbath community that was completely different from any community I'd ever been a part of. I had been living a very traditional, demographically segmented life. That is to say, I lived in a city, I knew people in my age bracket whom I had maybe gone to college with or met through people I'd gone to college with, and I knew people in my profession. And this community was a community, which I'd never been a part of. It was socially broader than any I'd ever been in. It was richer, poorer, older, younger, educated, less well-educated, and I fell in love with it.

And when that happened, I wanted to know why. What had lured me in? It wasn't God, whom I didn't particularly believe in. It wasn't prayer, which I didn't know how to do. It wasn't architecture. The obvious answer was: It was the Sabbath. All of it. Not just a piece of it. The laws of the Sabbath had produced the experience I'd been waiting for.

If I had to say one thing that is truly exceptional about the Sabbath, it would have to be how well it works. Imagine that there was a job called social architect, and you had it. Your job description would be dreaming up the perfect society, drafting the blueprint for it, overseeing its construction from scratch. Just to be clear, this is not a job you're ever going to have unless you also happen to have the job title of tyrant. But let's just say you did. You cast around to see what's out there in the world for you to model your new society on. And you might stumble upon the Sabbath if high on your priority list is a strong community life. You'd quickly realize that you'd discovered a very good way to achieve it, because the Sabbath can be reconfigured as a four-step program for forging community spirit.

Step one, you'd write laws to limit work time. That would make room for other kinds of time: Rest time, recreational time, family time, time for friends and guests, and, of course, if this was a feature of your desired society, time for God.

Step two. You designate one particular day as everybody's day off. That would coordinate schedules so that people across a wide range of occupations and -- this is important -- a wide range of social classes would all have to stop working at the same time and be forced to deal with one another.

Step three. You'd order that the day off be taken every single week, rather than now and again, so that not working at that time would become a regular habit. Once a weekly rhythm of work and rest had become engrained, it would set your community apart. A distinct schedule would establish clear boundaries between your society and all others, and boundaries are wonderful ways to ensure the cohesiveness of the group.

And step four, to my mind the most important step, you'd make the day festive, filled with song, wine, food, pretty clothes. People would come to look forward to the day as a treat, rather than experiencing the restrictions you'd written in steps one through three as a burden.

That's the way the Sabbath works. That's what it does. All ideas about God, commandedness, morality, and so on aside -- I don't set them aside permanently in the book; just for this point -- setting them aside, you could see the Sabbath as a social technology in the purest and oldest sense, a machine for building community.

So that was the first big lesson I drew from my experience with the Sabbath. It took me a while longer to begin to hear a deeper resonance in the Sabbath, a more explicitly political resonance. The fundamental idea of the Sabbath is so simple, so utterly obvious, yet so radical it is practically invisible. But it is there in the Fourth Commandment. I'm sure you know the Fourth Commandment inside and out, but I'm going to read it anyway. "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord. In it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son nor thy daughter, thy manservant nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle nor the

stranger that is within thy gates."

To grasp how radical an idea that is, you have to grasp how radical an idea that was. 2,500 years ago, when the Sabbath began to be codified in what we now think of as the Bible, at that time, there was nothing else like it in the world, and never had been. It was that very rare thing, a completely original idea. There were holy days or as a 19th-century anthropologist used to call them, taboo days that were like the Sabbath in the ancient world. Nothing comes from nothing. And there's a whole debate about where the Sabbath comes from, which I review in the book and throw my hat in the ring of those who say it comes from a Babylonian custom involving something called the *ume lemnuti*, which were evil or inauspicious days, and they fell on the 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th day of the month, and just to be sort of Borgesian about it, possibly also the 19th.

Anyway, one of the cool things about the *ume lemnuti* is that when you go looking for the history of the Talmud, you don't really find artifacts, scrolls, things that guarantee that the Sabbath was kept. It's a ritual in time; it's not a ritual in space. So it's hard to find the artifact that proves it. But what we do have, we have this text about the *ume lemnuti*. So on the *ume lemnuti*, according to those texts, the shepherd of the peoples -- that's, of course, the King -- must not eat cooked meat or baked bread, must not change his clothes or put on clean clothes, must not offer sacrifice, must not go out in his chariot or exercise his sovereign power. The priest must not deliver oracles, the physician must not touch the sick. It is an unsuitable day for any kind of time, any kind of action.

Note the differences with the Sabbath. The *ume lemnuti* have to do with the king doing certain things, and the priest and the physician. The Sabbath says nothing about kings or priests. It is for everyone. That was new. Until the Sabbath there was nothing in the ancient world that guaranteed the nonelite individual a chance to rest. Kings rested, and priests, and obviously noble men and women, who rested all the time because they had slaves, but not those slaves, not the cattle, not the stranger within your gate.

Moreover, the Sabbath is a festive, auspicious, happy day, a day of goodness and joy, not a day of evil and danger. So the Sabbath is actually a step forward toward two things that we now think of -- as we don't even think of them so much as rights, because we just assume them. First, the right not to work sometimes; and second, the right to be happy, to enjoy yourself, to eat and drink and spend time with your family sometimes.

These ideas are even more implausible, historically speaking, when you consider that the people who came up with this practice were farmers, many of them subsistence farmers. Yet they came up with this notion that one day a week they should not plant or sow or bring in their crops.

Stop and think about that, a society that came up with such a notion. What were they thinking? Why did they insist on it so fiercely? I believe that for them the Sabbath was how they communicated their belief in the fundamental dignity of every human being. The Sabbath was proto-egalitarian.

It took me even longer to realize that there was yet another political lesson lurking in the Fourth Commandment. It took me a long time to hear this lesson, because the lesson there goes against the American grain. The notion is this: Not only does everyone have the right not to work every now and again; society has the right -- and indeed, if you want to bring the idea of commandedness back in, the obligation -- to organize itself collectively so as to make that possible. That is, to make it possible for people to rest. Societies, that is, have the right to manage their time. They get to make or they're supposed to make laws of time that say, "This day can be a day of work, this day cannot."

Now, that's a very authoritarian notion when it's embedded in a monarchical society essentially governed by priests, but if you put it in the hands of a democracy, that seems to me like a very extraordinary tool.

Now, I don't mean to make it sound like we in America don't have laws about the use and abuse of time. We do, but the kind of laws you need to get you to the Sabbath make us, nowadays, pretty nervous. In a study of

the American laws that govern time, a book that's very influential in my thinking about this, the Harvard law professor Todd Rakoff asks us to imagine a world divided between two completely opposed regimes of time, a freedom-of-time regime and a constructed-time regime. In a freedom-of-time regime, people dispose of their time as they see fit and the law does nothing more than lay down and enforce the conditions under which individuals and institutions get to swap time for money. "I can work for you for as many hours a week as you'll pay me for at whatever times we both agree on, and only if one of us breaks our side of the bargain does anyone go to court."

In a constructed-time regime, the law designates a certain period of time, a social time, or at least mandates that some period of time, collective period of time, may not be work time. What is Rakoff's main example of constructed law of time-making? The Sabbath. As exemplified by America's now mostly defunct blue laws, six-sevenths commercial time and one-seventh noncommercial; that is, family, religion, or social time.

The freedom-of-time approach sounds right to us because we think of time as money, which is to say, a fungible resource. Anything that gets in the way of freely allocating our time doesn't just get on our nerves. It prevents us from efficiently allocating it; right? In a marketplace sense, it's irrational.

But I would argue that there's a flaw in the main assumption of the freedom-of-time regime, that time is like money, a pure quantity to be divided or spent at will. One minute is not exactly like every other minute, because time changes as it flows. It makes a big difference if you do something now or wait until later and - who you do it with. You all know this intuitively because you would have no social or professional life if you didn't. Fifteen minutes matters a lot when you're showing up for an interview, and counts for nothing if you're coming to a cocktail party.

The true cost of a minute cannot be calculated unless you factor in who's doing what, when, and with whom. So a year-long commitment to one hour of community service at the same time each week is worth a great deal more to a nonprofit organization than a single donation made in cash representing your hourly wages for the same amount of time over a year. Why? Not just because you're making it possible for that organization to accomplish some unpopular task at below-market rates. It's true because your commitment adds value to that nonprofit, and to your town, and to your nation, because as you get to know a like-minded group of people and let them know that they can trust you, you form bonds with your neighbors, and maybe even create a group where none existed before. You add to what economists call human capital and build what third world development specialists call civil society.

So in my book, I argue that the Sabbath is, in a weird sort of way, like that nonprofit. It is an instance, perhaps the most notable instance, of social time. And it shows what social time adds to a community. There is a famous cultural scientist named Eshad Ha'am, and anybody who's in a Jewish community knows his name because it's always attached to a saying which is sent out with synagogues' fliers at least once a year, usually with a fund-raising pitch, and the saying is: "More than the Jews kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept the Jews," which I happen to think has some truth to it.

So do I argue that in my book I'm talking as much about America -- maybe more about America than about Jewish society. And do I say we need to reintroduce blue laws? The answer to that is, it's complicated, I'm ambivalent, and for a nuanced discussion about that point, you'll have to read the book. But I do argue that the Sabbath has become necessary, even if it's impossible. And more for non-Jews, I would argue, than for Jews, who already have one.

When I go to speak in churches, which I do a fair bit, I find that they're very envious of that one thing, the Sabbath. And I think you all know the reasons, that modern life is ever more stressful, we're busier than ever, the boundaries, more importantly -- and I analyze this sort of rigorously in the book -- more importantly, the boundaries between work and nonwork time are eroding, and there is almost never a time now that is not, as Todd Rakoff would put it, not commercial time.

And generally, I would go into a little riff now about technology and what it's doing to our time, but Nick actually asked me to read a passage in the book which he thought would have a lot of bearing on what you do in your schools. I think you'll see why, as I go along. It's about summer camps; not schools, but sort of the same idea.

I talk in the book about growing up in Puerto Rico. We're from Detroit.

"Sometime in the mid-1970s, my mother, certain that our Puerto Rican sojourn had weakened, if not destroyed, her children's sense of Jewishness, began looking for a Jewish summer camp to send me to. She wound up choosing the same summer camp that she had gone to in the 1940s, an archetypal scattering of cabins, rec halls, and playing fields in rural New Hampshire. This was the institution in which my mother, a public school student, had acquired her religious Zionism. I did not appear likely to follow her example. I was a girl growing up in the honky-tonk part of an American colony, Puerto Rico, used to spending my spare time sneaking into hotels to swim in warm, clear, forbidden pools. And suddenly I was forced to take swimming lessons in an ice-cold, dark-brown body of water, which the instructors called a lake that was clearly no more than a pond. My friends at home were the transient children of businessmen briefly stationed on the island, some American, some European. We had mastered the tone of world-weariness meant to let people know that we were well-traveled, if a bit neglected. My fellow campers, on the other hand, were students at Jewish day schools from the decorous middle-class suburbs of Boston. I had to play games I'd never heard of, like tetherball, and pretend to know something about the TV shows that were constantly alluded to, even though Puerto Rican television broadcast only a handful of American programs, all a year or so late and dubbed into Spanish.

"I could fake, though, acquaintance with American pop culture, but I couldn't fake being Jewish. My after-school Hebrew school left me with no knowledge of the language, whereas my peers could read the Bible in the original. Nor did I know what to do when we gathered to pray first thing in the morning. I was particularly confused by one move, a series of steps ending in some bows that were required at the beginning and end of the standing silent prayer. I usually tried to imitate the person praying in front of me, which made everyone behind me snicker.

"The camp had been founded in the 1940s, along with dozens of others like it and scores of Jewish schools, in response to rising anti-Semitism in Europe as well as in America. Once America entered World War II, echoes of the Nazi attack on Jews began to be audible at home. Zionism went from being the cause of a small clique of radical intellectuals to being hugely popular among American Jews. And Judaism as a religious practice, which had lost many adherents to the jazzy freedoms of secular Americanness, began to gather followers back unto itself. American Jews, as the theologian and sociologist Mordecai Kaplan declared, were returning to Judaism like prodigal sons.

"Parents began to fret about teaching their children how to be Jews. Jewish schools were an obvious answer. Jewish summer camps were a nonobvious one. We can all imagine why a school would appeal to a parent who wants to teach her child some specific body of knowledge or inculcate a particular set of values, but what made camps so attractive requires a little teasing out.

"It is no coincidence that in the 1940s experimental social psychology, whose practitioners invent dramatic and intense situations to study how groups affect individuals, and vice versa, began to take an interest in camps. Nor should it be a surprise that American social psychology entered its heyday when refugees from Nazism began to arrive. The social experiment that was Nazism, the astounding transformation of ordinary Germans from enlightened-sounding democrats to regimented bystanders to mass murder, made it clear to everyone who lived through it that there was such a thing as a group psyche, that it could turn individual psyches inside out, and that it could be manipulated. And then, of course, there were those other camps.

"Kurt Lewin, who did more than anyone else to convince psychologists that they ought to be studying the

workings of power within and among groups rather than limiting themselves to individuals -- he invented the term "group dynamics" -- fled Germany in 1933, when Hitler came to power.

"Muzafer Sherif was born in Turkey and studied at Harvard, but returned to teach in Turkey. Before he got there, though, he attended lectures at the University of Berlin, where Hitler was in his political ascendancy."

So I go into a little bit of Sherif's history and how he was thrown in jail and was rescued by some people at Yale.

"Lewin's preoccupation was socialization, how individuals reconcile themselves to the mores of the group. His best-known study was of a boys' club in which he showed how different styles of leadership -- autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire -- can reliably produce entirely different kinds of groups. Lewin saw that the value of camps for indoctrination lay in their isolation, in their being cultural islands, which allowed them to create alternate societies without interference from the dominant society. Isolation helped minimize resistance to new and different ideas.

"Sherif was curious, among other things, about how groups develop norms; that is, values and standards of behavior, as well as of sets of who's in, who's out. He answered these questions by staging experiments in actual summer camps. In 1954, Sherif and his wife led one of the most famous experiments in social psychology, the Robbers' Cave experiment." I assume most of you have heard of this, named after a state park in Oklahoma that they used. "Anyone who has lived through a summer camp color war will recognize the Robbers' Cave experiment as an only slightly exaggerated version of the same thing. It involved two busloads of 12-year-olds, all well-adjusted boys from similar backgrounds, lower middle class, white, Protestant. Over the course of three weeks, the boys were made to form groups to which they became passionately attached, developing distinctive rituals and coming up with emblems, such as flags and ways of tying knots. Then they were incited to compete, which they did with ferocity and personal bitterness. In the end, they were led to make up. This last part took a very long time, and happened only after they were made to work toward common goals of great importance to all of them, restoring the camp's water supply and raising enough money to rent a movie.

"The Sherifs may have intended to make a point about how we learn to love, hate, and get along, but they also provided robust evidence that the summer camp, a wholly controlled environment in which adolescents dwell far from parents, classmates, and the media for weeks, even months, is a remarkably efficient instrument of psychological manipulation. One of the most interesting features of the Robbers' Cave experiment has been pointed out by two contemporary social psychologists: The campers perceived the environment as natural and had no awareness of the study or the staff's manipulations. The setting may have been artificial, but the participants experienced it as real. In social-psychological terms, it had high experimental realism.

"I have always wondered why summer camps aren't viewed with greater suspicion. Even plain nonsecular summer camps have their ideological agendas. There's a book called *The Manufactured Wilderness*, which is a history of American summer camps, and she shows in this book that camps were designed to fight back against the moral and physical degradations of the city. So camping has always been about counterprogramming to correct for some unsalutary influence.

"Unlike the Sherifs' campers, I made my counterprogrammers work hard. I skulked around the bunk, complained to anyone who would listen about being forced to participate. I was particularly scornful of the thrice-weekly Hebrew classes, where my ignorance was publicly exposed, and team sports, where I was every team's last pick. I was horrified when I learned that on Friday afternoons we marched down to the showers in our robes and towels and scrubbed ourselves especially clean, then dressed up in blouses and skirts for Friday-night dinner. This was regimentation of the most odious kind. Plus, the girls in my bunk fought one another for access to our few electrical outlets and comparatively scarce mirrors. They wanted to blow-dry their hair into just the right kind of flip and apply the modicum of makeup they were allowed to wear. Then they would try on one another's skirts, swapping them in a round-robin so they could appear to have new outfits each week, rather

than just the one or two they'd brought from home. Hypocrisy, I thought. Didn't these Jews know that excessive self-regard was a sin?

"As the weeks passed, I began to soften. I liked being clean once a week and smelling everyone else's sharp, clean smell. I looked forward to the meal, which featured challah and roast chicken and potatoes and cake, rather than the usual stews and spaghetti. I was served on plates and tablecloths, rather than trays and bare tables. I got to know the songs and prayers well enough to bang on the table at the appropriate moments, even if I didn't have the nerve to look enthusiastic or sing. After dinner there was Israeli folk-dancing, which was cheesy, and dispelled the charm, though years later I still hum the tunes.

"On Saturday mornings, though, there was no loudspeaker blasting Israeli pop songs to wake us up. We were relieved of the burden of a formal breakfast. In the afternoon, there were hours of respite from planned camp activities, time in which you couldn't do anything to win points against the other bunks. You couldn't clean up your bunk, or lengthen your lanyards, or work on your group's theatrical productions, or even acquire your fellow bunkers' savings by beatings them at jacks, which was my one good sport. All you could do was alleviate your boredom. You lay around and chatted or, if no one wanted to talk to you, wandered off for an hour or two to marvel that the sites of your daily striving, the waterfront, the softball fields, the study cabins, could seem so pastoral in the absence of counselors and whistles and scoreboards. The Sabbath of summer camp, because everyone around you observed it, too, felt much more real than any Sabbath I'd ever experienced in the real world, where my mother and my siblings and I seemed to be the only ones who even noticed it.

"Because I spent so much of it on my own, the Sabbath was also the only day of the week in which popularity and the lack thereof failed to dominate my consciousness, when I didn't have to pretend to be indifferent to status rankings whose minute calculations I apprehended in their utmost complexity. I could just be indifferent, at which point, of course, being indifferent no longer seemed to matter.

"So that was what I took away from camp at the end of the summer, the relief of my weekly respite from it. That, and something like a friend. My bunk's head counselor, Marjorie, who was headed to Brandeis that fall, began giving me books to carry off on my Saturday expeditions. These were mostly fairly standard college-freshmen fare, which means that there was a lot of Kurt Vonnegut. One Friday night, though, she handed me her copy of Karl Marx' *Communist Manifesto*.

"This is not a story about how summer camp made me a Communist, because it didn't, although later, inevitably, as a teenager experiencing adolescent rage before the fall of the Soviet empire, I did fling Marxist-Leninist jargon at my father and conflate my own alienation with that of the proletariat. What *The Communist Manifesto* inspired was a fascination with the idea of the community that sets its face against the world and defines reality for itself. I picked this up from Marx' riff about 'Critical-Utopian Socialism,' which had something do with people named Owen and Fourier. Actually, though this went over my head at the time, Marx was ranting against these men, ridiculing their utopian dreams as small-minded, counter-revolutionary, doomed to failure. To me, though, the 19th century idylls he mocked sounded, well, idyllic, with names like Home Colonies, Little Icaria, New Jerusalem. I was coming across this not long after the heyday of the hippie commune. I had no idea that the hippies hadn't been the first to come up with the idea. The utopias Marx described were like likely line drawings accompanying a dry, dull text. They made the revolution imaginable, and since I couldn't seem to be a member of the community I found myself in, I wanted to be a part of that one. These were the real summer camps, the Platonic ideals -- not that I knew from Platonic ideals -- of which my camp was but a wishful shadow. They were genuinely communal, genuinely remote, genuinely unfallen from grace. In them, one might, on a permanent basis, achieve the kind of Sabbath my camp leaders were always talking about, one freed from the evil machinery of exploitation, rather than the corrupted, fashioncentric, Zionist Sabbath of actually existing Jews.

"On the other hand, if you had to live among actually existing Jews, the New-Hampshire-summer-camp Sabbath seemed preferable to the August-in-Puerto-Rico Sabbath. That fall and winter, I wrote my camp

counselor friendly letters, telling her what I'd been reading, and in the spring, when my mother asked me if I wanted to go back the following summer, I said yes."

So thank you very much. That's my talk. I do not know if you have any questions or if you want me to sort of draw the line from what I just read for schools, but I suspect you can draw them for yourselves.

Does anybody have any questions? Yes. You want to come to the mic over there?

**SPEAKER FROM THE FLOOR:** First of all, I really enjoyed your talk. Thank you. And when you first began talking about the Sabbath, sort of the right not to work and the right to be happy, you talked about it as proto-egalitarian. And yet, your quotation earlier was about what it was like for a woman at the 4:03 to deal with the Sabbath. I just wondered how you deal with the gender issues of the Sabbath.

**MS. SHULEVITZ:** I love this question. I'm very happy when I get it, and I don't deal with it enough in the book, I have to admit.

There is no question that the Jewish Sabbath and, I would say, the puritan Sabbath -- and there have been other Sabbaths in history that are like it. Like other Sabbaths for women, they are when women work. Women produce this thing called the Sabbath. They frantically scrub the house, they buy the food, they cook food, they clean the children, they get everybody ready, and then, especially if it's a sort of classic traditional Jewish Sabbath, the men come and eat and sing and pray and discuss Torah and the women serve. There's just no question about it.

So the gender politics of the traditional Sabbath are extremely problematic. I have a passage in the book in which I talk about my weekend with an orthodox family in which I see this. On the other hand, I would say you have to be careful in performing your gender critique of the Sabbath, because it's also a time in which domesticity and the labor of women is honored, at least; right? So at least there's that moment in the society where the honor is given to it in a serious way, not in a sort of token way, I think.

But there's just no question that traditional Jewish society is unbelievably sexist. Men go to synagogue, women don't. Another weekend I spent with some friends of mine in Flatbush, I insisted on going to synagogue, which I love to do now, and the woman of the household did not go. I was one of the few women who did go. And she didn't even know the prayers. Social status in that society is acquired by mastering liturgy, mastering religious scholarship, becoming a hakham and a scholar, and they're shut out of it. There's just no question about it. So it's very problematic.

When I say "proto-egalitarian," I'm thinking in a much broader social scope. I'm just thinking of the idea that even a slave, even a stranger who's more or less the social equivalent of a slave in that society, and even the animals have a right to rest. Sort of a radical idea.

Interestingly, if you listen carefully to the Fourth Commandment, the wife is left out of the list. It's you, your kids, your servants, your animals, the stranger. And the wife is left out of the list. And that's telling. It's unquestionably telling.

In a piece I wrote, I argue that we have to come up with new social arrangements for cooking and cleaning so that the Sabbath can become truly egalitarian. We haven't got them yet. That's why I'm not recommending a return to traditional Sabbath. I'm saying, let's derive ideas which we can apply in other new ways.

Well, I guess that's it, then. Thank you very much.

**MR. GALBRAITH:** We'd like to ask you to remain in place as we begin the memorials, but first, Judith Shulevitz, thank you very much. Nick, for your wonderful introduction, the literary skill comes through. Both of you. And your old headmaster is pretty proud.

This afternoon's session is at 2:30. This evening's session is at 6:30 at the Riviera Theatre across the street. You get there by walking through the long hall of all the shops. Cocktails are at 6:00. We'll be seated at 6:45 at dinner tables for the presentation of the Porgy & Bess, and you'll have your wine also served to you at your dinner table at that time.