

## CHAPTER

# 1

# LIVING IN OVERDRIVE

*We're Moving Too Fast*

**W**e live in speeded-up times. We value hustle, big goals, and the rush of accomplishment. We love efficiency and effectiveness. Even our leisure activities can feel like boxes on a checklist. Meditate: Check. Exercise: Check. Volunteer: Check. Cook a nice meal: Check. Plan special activities with the kids or with friends: Check. We add more and more tasks to our days until our lives feel more like one long list of things that must get done than a series of deeply soul-satisfying experiences.

In his famous movie *Modern Times*, Charlie Chaplin plays his Little Tramp as a factory worker at a company whose goal is to speed up production. To that end, the company introduces the Billows Feeding Machine, which feeds lunch to the workers while they are still on the assembly line. Work never stops. The proud inventor of the machine, J. Widdecombe Billows, introduces Charlie's character to the revolving platefuls of food, the automatic food pusher, and the hydro-compressed, sterilized mouth wiper. There are three delicious courses, but poor

Charlie cannot eat fast enough, and the machine goes out of control, maniacally slapping food all over his face. Today, few of us would even consider a three-course lunch; instead, we eat nutritional power bars so we can skip lunch altogether and keep working. Is Charlie, the Little Tramp, enjoying his lunch break? Of course not. We're not enjoying ours much either.

## WE ARE WORKING TOO HARD

Let me introduce you to a few people I know who are trying their hardest to live well and who feel trapped in nonstop activity.

Alan, a computer-savvy physician, went into health information systems with a strong sense of a healing mission, fully intending to contribute his unusual skill set to transforming the way medicine is delivered. But his description of an average day shows the deep impact of his team's chronic overwork.

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*Sleep poorly. Awaken worried about getting through day because of fatigue.*  
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*Pledge to stay cool, avoid snapping.*  
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*Arrive in time for first meeting, but without real time to organize day because meetings start earlier and earlier—eight o'clock is the new nine o'clock.*  
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*Rush from meeting to meeting—never fully prepared.*  
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*Keep trying to stay friendly, calm, avoid “anger seepage.”*  
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*Rush home late, no time to clean up from day.*  
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*Many things undone, swear to do them that night. Skip exercise.*  
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*Cranky with family. Wife, kids don't think you are much fun.*  
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*Work after dinner but don't finish.*  
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*Go to bed worrying about items left unfinished. Fall asleep at 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. after taking an Ambien.*  
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Alan sees the irony that his own health is suffering as he misses out on good times with his family and feels constantly overwhelmed and exhausted. He wants to break free from the cycles of tension he feels caught in—recently, he started meditating, which helps a bit—but most of the time, he just can't stop, even to take one weekend off. Like many people, Alan lives in a tyranny of busyness under a trance of constant action.

Alan is just one of millions of people struggling to keep up within a culture avid for productivity. The American Institute of Stress reports that job pressures are far and away the major source of tension for Americans. Job stress costs an estimated \$300 billion (yes, that's billion, not million) a year in absenteeism, turnover, diminished productivity, and medical, legal, and insurance costs.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, ongoing stress ultimately causes people to work far less productively, thus requiring more time on the job to complete the same amount of work. Why do people put up with the stress? *When people believe that their value comes from their accomplishments, it is especially hard to stop striving for those accomplishments.*

Barbara is a lawyer for a real estate conglomerate outside of Atlanta. Like many lawyers, she tracks her time in six-minute increments. She's under constant pressure and feels that she doesn't have enough time even to track her time properly. She is constantly behind. Weekends are a blur of catching up on errands and household maintenance and squeezing in a workout and an occasional brunch with friends. Barbara deeply values her friendships and misses time connecting with herself and others. She would love to take a break of some kind, any kind, but she is too far behind to consider a vacation.

Like many Americans, Barbara feels that if she takes time off, she will put her work and her job in jeopardy. Americans have among the fewest paid days off of workers in any developed country, and what days they receive are often forfeited: In 2013, US employees failed to use 500 million vacation days—more than *\$100 billion* worth of paid time.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the United States is the only advanced economy that does not mandate vacation time. Twenty-five percent of full-time workers in the

United States have no paid vacation at all. Not surprisingly, 70 percent of Americans feel vacation deprived. By contrast, the Netherlands is almost as productive as the United States, yet the Dutch “work shorter hours each day, get six weeks’ paid vacation, and are even given an 8% holiday bonus,” according to a 2012 *Time* article.<sup>3</sup>

Layla is an interior designer in suburban Chicago. She chose to work from home so she could have more control over her time and more time with her kids. But it’s not working out that way. Layla loves her work. Color, texture, and fabric feed her sense of vitality, and she has a special gift for helping people create a deep sense of home. But her days are a conglomeration of attending client meetings, ordering furniture, writing proposals, invoicing, and responding to urgent client requests. Her kids are in after-school care, and her weekends are packed with errands and cobbled-together playdates. When asked about the possibility of dedicated time off each week, Layla responds, “I love the idea, but that’s out of the question. I just have too much to do.” She’s been having trouble sleeping as she runs *the everydayathon*, an apt term coined by Loyola University philosophy professor Al Gini, PhD. Self-employment, sadly, doesn’t get us off the treadmill.

Layla joins the millions of us who are sleep deprived—40 percent of Americans, according to a recent Gallup poll. Good sleep is just as important to our health as exercise and good food. Researchers have found that remaining awake for 17 to 19 hours in a row leads to an impairment of cognitive abilities similar to being legally drunk.<sup>4</sup> Imagine what happens after days, weeks, months, and years of sleep deprivation. Yet many of us believe that we can forgo hours of sleep and pay no price.

From an early age, Nashville-based James looked at his overworked baby boomer parents and swore he was going to live a different kind of life. Now he’s a musician who loves playing gigs on weekends and working with troubled teens during the week. He has a couple of interesting part-time jobs, and he makes sure he always has time for music, his true love. Yet James doesn’t get a break either, for, as he told me, he never feels that he has quite earned it. He’s considered practicing a type of Sabbath time, but he rarely thinks he has done enough to merit carving out real down-

time. He knows he would love it, but, like his parents, oddly enough, he can't make the time to fully rest and renew his soul.

Alan, Barbara, and Layla face the same challenge in their individual ways: Our culture is obsessed with getting things done. Even James, the musician who has constructed his life to avoid being like his overworked parents, struggles to take time for himself. The social and economic pressures of work and achievement are so fierce that they even shape the experiences of those who consciously try to resist them.

We live in a world that doesn't understand the true, measureable value and benefits of downtime, and we are suffering because of it.

Do you see yourself in these stories and statistics? I do. I move too fast and do too much. I'm juggling work, motherhood, marriage, improving my health, connecting with friends, and homeschooling my son, not to mention trying to get good food on the table and maintain a livable home. I'm always striving to learn how to manage my time better and be more focused. In fact, I wrote a book about it: *It's Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys*.

Fortunately, I have found this weekly release valve that saves my life. That is what this book is about. Before I describe the path to oasis time, however, I want us to understand some of the causes and effects of our nonstop lifestyle. It's worth naming the high price we pay so that we fully commit to envisioning new ways of getting our lives back.

## HEALTH COSTS OF STRESS

Stress can motivate us and boost productivity in the short term, but the *chronic* stress most of us experience is toxic. Here's how costly long-term stress is to our health: According to the American Psychological Association, 75 percent of health-care costs are associated with chronic illness, and stress is a key driver of chronic illness. More than 133 million Americans—or 45 percent of the population—have at least one chronic condition, such as arthritis, asthma, cancer, heart disease, depression, or diabetes. And these are just a few examples of the many chronic illnesses that negatively affect the lives of Americans.<sup>5</sup>

Consider, for example, the impact of stress on one of our country's

most costly chronic diseases, diabetes. According to the American Diabetes Association, “In people with diabetes, stress can alter blood glucose levels in two ways: People under stress may not take good care of themselves. They may drink more alcohol or exercise less. They may forget, or not have time, to check their glucose levels or plan good meals. Stress hormones may also alter blood glucose levels directly.”<sup>6</sup> Some studies have suggested that unhealthy chronic stress management, such as overeating “comfort” foods, has contributed to the growing obesity epidemic. Half of us in the United States are either diabetic or prediabetic.

Stress leads to insomnia. More than 40 percent of us lie awake at night because of stress, and losing even one hour of sleep a night significantly hampers everyday performance. Stressed-out adults can lie awake for hours or turn to sleep medication for help, but sleep aids have significant side effects. Sleeping pill use and emergency room visits that result from overmedication with sleep aids are both on the rise.<sup>7</sup>

Stress may be linked to alcohol overuse. Excessive alcohol consumption is responsible for 88,000 deaths each year, more than half of which are due to binge drinking. About 38 million US adults report binge drinking an average of four times a month, with an average of eight drinks per binge. Most binge drinkers are not alcohol dependent, and one cause of binge drinking is reported to be “winding down” or relaxing after a stress-filled period.<sup>8</sup>

What is causing the stress that leads to so much illness? Workplace-related stress can be blamed for a lot of it, but other stressors include worries about money, housing costs, and family relationships. Unresolved conflict with other people is a source too. Additionally, loneliness and social disconnection are significant stressors that can lead to poor health. Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine found that high rates of loneliness were correlated with the occurrence of heart disease in women.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, *National Geographic* journalist Dan Buettner has written about scientific research into longevity in certain areas of the world where high numbers of people live into their nineties and hundreds in good physical and mental shape. Now known as Blue

Zones, these areas share one essential factor: a sense of belonging, or what Buettner calls “timeless congeniality.”

The American Psychological Association reports that extreme and long-term stress can take a severe emotional toll. While people can overcome minor episodes of stress by tapping into their body’s natural defenses to adapt to changing situations, excessive chronic stress can be psychologically and physically debilitating. Unlike everyday stressors, which can be managed with healthy stress management behaviors, untreated chronic stress may result in serious health conditions, including anxiety, insomnia, muscle pain, high blood pressure, and a weakened immune system, all of which contribute to diabetes and prediabetes.<sup>10</sup>

The \$300 billion annual cost of job stress mentioned earlier doesn’t capture the costs to our lives day to day and year to year. Stress makes our lives harder to live and reduces the pleasure of living. We struggle with creating deep and lasting friendships. We struggle to feed ourselves healthfully. Our enjoyment of ourselves and each other is largely diminished as we race from one activity to the next and then collapse, exhausted, at the end of the day. This is not how we want to live.

## THE COSTS OF TECHNOLOGY

Digital technology is a big piece of what keeps us running. We carry our smartphones, tablets, and laptops with us wherever we go. Google Docs and Dropbox make our work accessible on any device, anytime, anywhere. E-mail, texts, and apps let us stay in constant communication with colleagues, friends, and family alike. Lifestyle apps are omnipresent, whether we use them to grab an Uber ride home from work, order takeout, or look up the schedule of the nearest yoga studio to see if we can fit a class into our day.

While technology can be a boon to productivity and enhance our lives significantly, its downside is becoming more evident. Technology is developing into a significant barrier to communication and connection even among the family members with whom we share our homes. American teenagers average almost nine hours of entertainment media use

each day,<sup>11</sup> while adults, according to a recent Nielsen report, spend eleven hours per day on various media, including the Internet, TV, and radio. In her book *Reclaiming Conversation*, Sherry Turkle quotes a fifteen-year-old who says he would like to bring up his kid the way his parents *think* they are bringing him up. They think that they have cell phone-free dinners and that they are really there for soccer games, but that is not what this teen experiences.<sup>12</sup>

Rushed parents are often unaware of how hurt their kids feel when they are not available. To parents, it often seems like all kids want is more screen time. We don't realize that, in fact, our absorption in our own devices is sending a powerful message to our children. When Tanya Schevitz, a leader in the digital detox movement, talked with eighth graders about technology challenges, she thought they might discuss peer pressure on social media, or sexting. What they said instead floored her. They only wanted to talk about how hard it was to get their parents' attention. One eighth-grade boy said, "When my mom is on her phone [texting or e-mailing or on Facebook], she doesn't even talk to me. I will try to talk to her about important stuff, but she's on her phone and she doesn't even look up. It happens a lot." Another boy said, "My dad will just ignore me when I'm trying to talk to him. I don't think it is intentional. He will be on his e-mail or on Facebook, and there is just a big silence when I say something. I just get angry."<sup>13</sup>

I didn't think I checked my phone that much or made calls that often when I was with my son, Ari. But when he was nine, he delivered his verdict: I was a phone addict. Every time I picked up the phone, he would say, "You see, you're on the phone again." At first I brushed off his critique. Couldn't he see that I used my phone significantly less often than most people? But although that might have been true, I still used it when he was around. When he began asking for more screen time, I reluctantly started taking his feedback seriously. I wanted to model for him that making face-to-face connections is more important than digital availability; to do that, I needed to change my own phone behavior. He taught me to keep my phone down—even for brief text exchanges—so I could keep my hands and mind free to be totally present with him. I

treasure the spontaneous moments of connection and humor that I would miss if I were still tethered to my phone and making excuses for it.

Face-to-face connection is vital for well-being. People thrive when they spend regular mealtimes and playtimes together, and the potential costs of missing these times are huge. Research shows that kids whose families eat meals together are more likely to succeed in school, consume healthy food, and feel self-confident. Perhaps most important, these kids are far less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol.<sup>14</sup> Researchers at Emory University have found that sharing family stories—something that can happen only when parents and children have windows of relaxed time together—can lead to higher self-esteem, better family functioning, greater family cohesiveness, and lower levels of anxiety in children.

The benefits are not just for kids: In her book *Wired to Connect*, about relational neuroscience, Amy Banks, MD, cites study after study that demonstrates conclusively and irrefutably that relationships help us be well and emotionally healthy.<sup>15</sup> We disconnect at our peril. Staying meaningfully connected with others leads to a greater sense of calm, less stress, less anxiety, greater productivity, better cardiovascular health, reduced likelihood of cancer, and fewer premature deaths from all causes. Whew! We need to find the time and attentiveness to make these essential connections happen. Moderating our use of digital technology is one essential step.

## THE COSTS OF BURNOUT

The combination of a stressed immune system and the overuse of technology can lead to another serious outcome: burnout. This one word is so powerful, and yet it hardly captures the deep emotional and spiritual costs of losing one's inner flame. Burnout is serious and hard to repair. Waking up without a taste for the day ahead destroys joy. We can get used to living that way—and many people do—but it leads to life as a form of despair rather than an embrace of the richness around us.

Many of us aren't savoring our lives. We may have more than enough in the way of belongings and interesting activities, yet we have a pervasive sense of emptiness, a vague dissatisfaction. Burnout diminishes our abil-

ity to savor our quality of work and our relationships. People who are chronically tired lose their gusto. At that point, life tastes like dust because we've become too exhausted to relish it.

For activists and entrepreneurs alike—indeed, for all of us—Trappist monk Thomas Merton's words describe another aspect of the most costly aspects of burnout: losing access to our inner wisdom.

*There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist most easily succumbs: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.<sup>16</sup>*

At times, we vaguely realize the cost of our extreme achievement-oriented lifestyle, but it is even more expensive than we think. In his stunning book, *The Rest of God*, Pastor Mark Buchanan eloquently describes his costly descent into burnout.

*I noticed at some point that the harder I worked, the less I accomplished. I was often a whirligig of motion. . . . To justify myself I would tell others that I was gripped by a magnificent obsession. I was purpose-driven. . . . The inmost places suffered most. I was losing perspective. Fissures in my character worked themselves into cracks. Some widened into ruptures.<sup>17</sup>*

Tony Schwartz, who is known for his breakthrough energy-based approach to time management, observed that if he wasn't being productive, he got scared.

*I have spent much of my adult life struggling to believe it is acceptable to simply, and deeply, relax. I come by this conviction honestly. Both my parents worked obsessively. I grew up believing my value was inextricably connected to what I accomplished—with my brain—in every moment. If I wasn't producing something tangible, I quickly began to feel anxious and unmoored.*<sup>18</sup>

When Schwartz faced open, unscheduled space or time, or just one of the simple pleasures of life, he became very uncomfortable. While he doesn't call it burnout, he describes how he lost his taste for simple pleasures. He didn't even like walking his dogs, because he felt it was a waste of his time. He wasn't able to relax and simply enjoy the moments that could be enjoyable.

Leadership development consultant Dave Schrader, PhD, offers a powerful metaphor for the way many of us feel about work and life: “The bullet has left the gun, and we're trying to outrun it” before it hits us in the back, Dr. Schrader says. “There is no rest, no recovery, and no useful reflection when we're running that hard.”<sup>19</sup> It's true that we can feel energized by having so much to do and no time to think. Yet at the end of the day, we might sit in an exhausted stupor, feeling a trace of sadness because we've lost the ability to relax as wholly as we work. Burnout means that we aren't sure why we are doing what we are doing and we just don't care as much in a world that desperately needs care and conviction.

## THE BENEFITS OF DOWNSHIFTING WEEKLY

The answer to the pressing problem of not having enough time is to downshift for one day a week. This may sound completely paradoxical, if not semi-insane. Am I arguing that the solution to not having enough time is not to develop better time-management skills but to learn the skills for taking a day off every week? Yes, that is exactly what I am saying. By routinely—one might even say religiously—taking time to rest, relax, and savor life, we restore ourselves so that we manage our working hours with far more gusto and heart and, often, more productivity.

Many employers are coming to realize that giving employees solid breaks is good for business. More and more companies are enforcing e-mail time-outs, vacation days, and mandatory shutdowns during holidays. PricewaterhouseCoopers is experimenting with no after-hours e-mail. Johnson & Johnson is promoting e-mail-free weekends. Not long ago, investment bank Goldman Sachs told its junior investment analysts that they had to take Saturdays off. JPMorgan Chase and ten other banks soon followed with one required weekend off a month. (Many European companies forbid e-mail use after hours.) Even though just anticipating after-hours e-mail leads to greater exhaustion, it's hard to stop checking. Some companies are going so far as to eliminate e-mail entirely—both in and out of the office. According to a 2015 BBC article, “While the no e-mail trend seems like it would be only for the most maverick of companies, it's taking root in a range of industries . . . even Halton Housing Trust, a UK-based housing nonprofit [that] manages thousands of homes.”<sup>20</sup>

Morten Primdahl, CTO of Zendesk, based in San Francisco, one of the fastest growing customer relations management companies says, “Most of the office is empty by 6:00 p.m. most days. Some people have long commutes, some work on the train, some need to pick up children; and we embrace the need for flexibility and the requirements of a modern family because of our belief in the benefits of a balanced life.”<sup>21</sup>

We may want to create more awareness and joy in our lives, but most of us won't consider a full day off each week, or even part of a day, because we have too much to do. We fear that if we take a break, we will get further behind and lost under a mound of unfinished tasks. Much of this comes from a cultural bias for constant action and a lack of awareness of the high costs of constant work.

What we need to remember is that for millennia, many in the Western world have kept a weekly day of rest and renewal—with no catastrophic consequences. Indeed, that day off can have the opposite effect. Retired professional basketball player Tamir Goodman (aka the Jewish Jordan) credits his day of rest with being “the backbone of [his] energy and

... power throughout [his] basketball career.” San Francisco Bay Area entrepreneur Noah Alper says, “There is no question in my mind that Shabbat was key to my success. It gave me the rest I needed. It would recharge me for the whole week.” Senator Joseph Lieberman attributes his stamina to his Shabbat observance. He writes, “I have always been able to work harder on the six days knowing that the seventh day of rest is coming. He was even able to run for vice president while keeping a Sabbath.”<sup>22</sup>

What does restorative time look like? Meaningful rest and renewal require more than just a break from regular activities. A full oasis in time includes *downtime*, *sleep time*, *time in reflection*, *connecting time*, and *playtime*, life-giving activities that are key parts of the “Healthy Mind Platter” as described by neuroscience researchers David Rock, PhD, and Daniel Siegel, MD. In fact, according to Drs. Rock and Siegel, these are *the fundamental nutrients for a healthy mind and a happy life*.<sup>23</sup>

This recipe for a healthy mind and happy living is identical in many ways to the activities of a Sabbath, a practice whose benefits are by no means limited to the religious. The word *Sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word that means “to stop or cease.” What are we stopping? We stop working. We stop trying to get things done. We stop thinking that we are in charge. We stop prioritizing doing over being.

But there is far more depth to a Sabbath than simply stopping our routine. We don’t just stop; we also *enter* an experience of timelessness. One hallmark of a Sabbath is that it is different from the regular week in activity and in tone. We enter a different world, what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously describes as our “palace in time.”

Those who have embraced the idea of a break from daily life note the different quality of this separate time. For many, the absence of technology is a key factor. In his bestselling book *Hamlet’s BlackBerry*, William Powers describes his family’s experiment with an Internet Sabbath.

*We’d peeled our minds away from the screens where they had been stuck. We were really there with one another and nobody else and*

*we could feel it.* There was an atmospheric change in our minds, a shift to a slower, less restless, more relaxed way of thinking [*emphasis mine*]. *We could just be in one place, doing one particular thing and enjoy it.*<sup>24</sup>

*New York Times* food journalist Mark Bittman writes about his decision to take twenty-four hours off of his digital life each weekend: “Once I moved beyond the fear of being unavailable and what it might cost me, I experienced what, if I wasn’t such a skeptic, I would call a lightness of being. *I felt connected to myself* rather than my computer.”<sup>25</sup>

Arianna Huffington talks about a family vacation when everyone decided to put down their phones to travel with no social media contact.

*Almost immediately, I was floored by the realization of just how much my phones had become almost physical extensions of myself—I would instinctively reach for them like phantom limbs! Unplugging meant rediscovering and savoring the moment for its own sake. Which is to say, taking in a view without tweeting it. Eating a meal without Instagramming it. Hearing my daughters say something hilarious and very shareable without sharing it. The unplugged version of myself was better able to give these things my full attention. And when I came back to the office, I was truly refreshed.*<sup>26</sup>

While Powers, Bittman, and Huffington found that taking a break connected them to themselves and their loved ones, bringing dedicated weekly time off into our lives can also help connect us to our planet. We are steeped in a brew of media messaging, popular culture, and entrenched habits that encourage an insatiable appetite for consumption without awareness of the environmental consequences. Time off for reflection and connection can pierce the veil of our environmental unconsciousness and deepen our awareness of how our nonstop consuming and producing creates danger for us as a species.

Indeed, entering a different world predicated upon stopping our daily

habits has practical and positive consequences for the planet. Yosef Abramowitz, three-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee, notes that by taking time away from the cycle of consumption, we can see the impact we have on the planet. For example, in Israel on Yom Kippur, when a high percentage of citizens stop driving, the air quality drastically and visibly improves. Abramowitz, who is also known in Israel as Captain Sunshine for his promotion of solar energy fields, says that if we all took a day off from consuming and producing every week, we would collectively solve the problem of greenhouse gas emissions that promote global warming.

When we take regular time off, we also gain perspective on the larger world. We become less reactive and more open to connecting beyond our immediate communities. Our compassion and empathy for those in need increases.

Clearly, the benefits of weekly time off are enormous. But even though there is spiritual gold here, we will have to dig for it. A day off each week is definitely countercultural, and this treasure may take some effort to mine.

## IS WEEKLY TIME OFF POSSIBLE?

A whole day of rest every week? Who has the time to actually do that? Millions of busy people, that's who—including CEOs, management consultants, secretaries, and tech people. Sabbath observers run the gamut of lives and professions and have all kinds of family pressures. My family and I are among them.

Years ago, I believed I had not a moment to spare for regular time off in my very busy life; my work, studies, and social commitments seemed to eat up twenty-six hours a day. I could have used eight days a week to get everything done, not six. Yet little by little, I found ways to carve out a weekly oasis in time, in part by paying close attention to my own needs and desires, and in part by returning to my Western spiritual heritage.

It took a while. As a young adult, I wasn't the least bit interested in Judaism, my family's heritage. To me, it seemed dusty and out of touch. I knew no Hebrew and wasn't interested in learning any. I started meditating

at age seventeen and went to Buddhist retreats to learn a contemplative path. I fell in love with the Tibetan lineage. It offered a good set of practices to me, and it had nothing to do with the Bible.

In my twenties and thirties, I was a high-energy person who loved my nonstop days. When I went to Yale for graduate school in organizational change, I could stay up until one o'clock in the morning and get up at seven for a class or a breakfast meeting. I ran from meeting to meeting, from lunch with a friend here to a presentation there to drinks and dinner somewhere else. I loved what I was learning about creating healthier workplaces. I was high on action. Life was pressured, turbulent, chaotic, and very disorganized, but I kept moving. I would get tired—very tired—but I could always push through the fatigue.

Until one morning, to my horror, I couldn't get up. I was more than exhausted; something was really wrong. I stopped moving because I *had* to. I consulted with many doctors who had no answer for me, other than "Take a break. Get some rest." They didn't know what I had and didn't know how to treat it. After a year of seeking help, I was diagnosed with an immune deficiency disease. I understood this as a way of saying I had stretched my immune system to its limit. I couldn't live at a crazy pace anymore. I experimented with different diets, more meditation, and reducing my workaholic hours, but it still wasn't enough. I needed a complete overhaul of my life. But how?

Right around then, a friend invited me to a Shabbat dinner. I declined, actually, several times; I was still terribly ill and wasn't interested in going out to an unfamiliar setting. His persistence won out, and so one evening I struggled over to a gathering of his friends, walking slowly because my energy was limited. I remember walking into the living room and lighting candles with a group of people whom I'd never met.

I felt a sense of peace descend over the room and a collective sigh of relief—*the week was over*. We said blessings, performed some rituals, and sang totally unfamiliar songs. I didn't know how to do any of these things, yet those strangers welcomed me in and, over time, became friends. We met every month for a festive Shabbat dinner. With their support, I

learned to slow down, change my life, and stop moving *on purpose*. I finally recognized that not only did I need to slow down, but I also needed to completely shift gears once a week. I needed to allow space for the inef-fable to thrive in my life. I discovered that my health improved if I allowed myself a full day off to recover from the week.

Little by little, I brought this Sabbath practice into my life. First, I stopped trying to work for part of an evening, then for an evening and a morning. I learned to plan a different kind of time. The weekly time “off” was an elixir. Every week, it poured a balm of recuperation on my tired soul. I started to heal from my “incurable” illness. Over a year or two, I experienced the power of stopping my work, my rushing, and my intense focus on getting things done for a whole day every week. To my surprise, my life did not fall apart. In fact, it got so much better.

It took about a year to heal from the virus that had attacked my immune system, but I ultimately regained my health and well-being, finished my doctorate at a more moderate pace, and went on to thrive in the intense, hectic world of management consulting. By then, I had made a habit of entering Heschel’s “palace in time” every week. And I never gave it up.

I drew on the well of traditional wisdom. I learned how much depth I can experience in life when I embrace and learn from my family’s Jewish heritage. I learned that a Sabbath restores rhythm to my life and makes my life livable. No, actually far more than livable, for I now experience a full, lively, and connected life. Shabbat became my lifesaver, and the more I talk with others about it, the more I hear others say the same about their own rest practices.

The modern world’s ambitious goals and untenable pace have made it impossible for us to regularly experience awe, wonder, well-being, and even reverence. We need a sense of timelessness, a space to breathe eas-ily, so that we can experience ourselves and life as a gift and communi-cate our love. We can do oasis time in a totally life-enhancing, life-renewing way. Here in our time desert, oasis time gives us a chance for deep soul replenishment that is no mirage. What I want to do here is

show how you too can take a weekly step off the treadmill and, religious or not, put this healing rhythm into your week.

When we integrate breaks into our lives, we get rhythm. When we get rhythm, we get perspective on our lives. We begin to see that there is life beyond the riveting, demanding pulsing of our workdays. We start to liberate the soul side of ourselves—the part that longs for music, song, dance, connectedness, sensuality, intimacy, and awe. We can replenish ourselves regularly. Then we go back to work with new eyes, new perspective, and new energy. Like William Powers when he returns to work after his digital oasis time, we are calmer. He writes, “We now experienced . . . two states in an intermittent rhythm, so each could be appreciated in contrast to the other. When I returned to my screen on Monday morning, I was still in a Sabbath state of mind and could do my digital business with more calm and focus.”<sup>27</sup> You have a little bit of distance from the workaday world. And when you live in that manner, you reduce the strain and the stress of everyday life. You change your pace during your oasis in time: You change your focus, you change what you are thinking about. You slow down. You turn toward other people in order to simply be with them.

Oasis time needs to be different from your everyday routine—slower, less technologically connected, and removed from the focus on achievement. It’s vital to make a plan for this time, even if your plan is to do nothing, because without our plans and switch-off rituals, we easily revert to our default pace, orientation, and habits. We need strong forces that can lift us out of our everyday patterns. We might plan to be out in nature, to be with friends, to play music, make art, jump in the mud, go river rafting; or we might plan wide-open, unscheduled time to do nothing and go with the flow. The key, however, is a plan: Without the plan and the preparation to execute it, we will revert. “Do” mode will sneak back in, and before we know it we will go back to consulting our to-do lists, checking social media, and speeding up.

There is nothing wrong with an action-oriented default mode. It’s a good way of life. Except for one big thing: Many of us can’t seem to stop

any longer than to pause, catch our breath, wave at one another in passing, and then keep going. As a result, we miss a treasured part of life. The life of being with friends and children, creating in a slow, deliberate, relaxed (for hours) way with no checking phones and jumping up to do the next urgent thing. We need a break from all of the running, doing, and being technologically connected. Part of the problem is that in this busy mode, there is never enough: not enough success, not enough money, not enough attention. We dwell in a state of lack. Even while we are trying to attract more and better somethings into our lives, we feel that something is missing.

How do we forge oasis time? We do it with conviction, determination, and even fierceness. We do this because we need it. We do this because we know that postmodern forces will chew us up and spit us out and, if we aren't careful, we too will look just as rushed, jaded, and unhappy as everyone else on the subway or in the market.

When we commit to oasis time, we seize the rhythm of rest and recovery out of the jaws of nonstop action and live to tell the tale. We become heroes on the journey toward the well-lived life. On the way, we get help and advice from philosophers, researchers, best-selling authors, and other people on the journey. We learn to be smart about corralling the nonstop messages that try to convince us to do more, be more, and have more. We don't need any "more" right now; we need love, care, and regular oasis time to reflect on what is important.

Let's turn to Chapter 2 now to learn where this sustaining social invention comes from.