

## Interview

# Rabbi Mark Solomon

*The Sabbath today among London Jews.*

**S***habbat Shalom*: The Sabbath was a biblical command made centuries ago. What does the Sabbath mean to Jews in the setting of London as we approach the year 2000?

**Solomon**: The Sabbath means many different things to different Jews on different levels. I will start off with the simplest level and perhaps lead to the more profound levels of understanding.

On the simplest level, there are many different aspects of Juda-

ism. To many Jews, the Sabbath is a day of identifying as a Jew. Many Jews live throughout the week very much the same as everybody else in society. But when it comes to Friday night, in many Jewish households, candles will be lit, blessings will be said, the wine is shared, and this to many Jews is the most important experience of the week. That moment of lighting the candles and making the blessing over the wine reaffirms their identity and their commitment as Jews.

Of course, there are many Jews

who live very Jewish lives every day of the week, and to them Sabbath brings that Jewishness to a new peak of experience that cannot be kept during the week. *Shabbat* is a day of escaping or retreating from the secular world into a spiritual state which is marked out by rituals at its beginning and end, rituals that fill the day, special *Shabbat* activities—not just blessings and prayers. Special kinds of things that people do to make *Shabbat* a day of rest involve going to the synagogue and being with the community; also, perhaps, even having a nap in the afternoon, which can be a very important aspect of keeping the *Shabbat*; going for a walk; or spending time with the family, which may not be possible during the week. The modern phrase “quality time” has a special meaning when it comes to *Shabbat*. *Shabbat* is the Jews’ quality time for being with other Jews and for being with God in a way that you can’t during the hurly-burly of the rest

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of the working week. That is what *Shabbat* should and does mean to many Jews. But there are levels of meaning a lot more profound than that; so when we bring *Shabbat* in by making *kiddush*, the prayer of sanctification over the wine, it marks the beginning of *Shabbat*. There are two themes that emerge and that are repeated in the various prayers throughout the day of *Shabbat*. One theme is the Exodus from Egypt. Although we have the special festival of Passover for celebrating the Exodus in a special way, *Shabbat* is a weekly celebration of the Exodus from Egypt, which meant for the Jews the cessation of slavery and being free in some way. And so for Jews today, *Shabbat* has the meaning of cessation from the slavery of the "rat race" of struggling for a living and surviving in a world where it is not always easy. *Shabbat* is the day when the people, who can do it (unfortunately, everybody can't), cast off that slavery and feel free for that time—free to be involved in the things that one wants to be involved in, joining with the family or the Jewish community. "Recharging the spiritual batteries" is a term you often hear Jews talking about with regards to *Shabbat*. So that is the theme of the Exodus: freedom from slavery and work.

Then there is the somewhat deeper theme that comes out in the *kiddush*. *Shabbat* is the memorial of the creation of the world. The seventh day, according to the biblical account, God rested from the work of creation, so we imitate God in resting. Throughout the week, as Jews see it, our human task is to be creators, to share with God, to be one with God in that work of creation. Through our everyday work and through our religious activities, we are co-creators or partners with God in what is often called love, which means the

repair or the betterment of the world. God has created a world, but there is a lot of work left for us to do to make that world habitable by humans and the kind of world in which we want to live and God wants us to live, so that is the work of the week from a spiritual perspective. *Shabbat*, then, is a day when we stop doing that work and instead of *doing*, we concentrate on *being*.

Perhaps one could say, instead of being creative, *Shabbat* is the day when we allow ourselves to become fully conscious of being creatures. In a sense, *Shabbat* is at the very heart of Judaism. For many people, *Shabbat* is the most original, the most distinctive, and the most important expression

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for which Judaism stands. Though there are many other festivals, many other observances, *Shabbat* is really in a sense the axis of Judaism.

***Shabbat Shalom: What special things, Rabbi, do you do on the Sabbath that make it unique?***

**Solomon:** In the traditional Jewish understanding, there are a two complementary aspects of *Shabbat* observance. These are expressed in the two different versions of the fourth commandment, which you find in the *Torah*: one in Exodus and one in Deuteronomy. In each place, the Ten Commandments are given but with some slight differences in the wording. The Exodus version of the Commandment of

*Shabbat* begins: "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." The Deuteronomy version begins: "Observe," or "Keep the Sabbath day." Traditionally, the Exodus version of "Remembering" is understood by the rabbis, who refer to the positive aspects of the observance of *Shabbat*. "Keep the Sabbath day" refers to the negative or prohibitive aspects of *Shabbat* observance. And so these complement one another; and that, incidentally, is the duality of that statement. *Shabbat* observance is behind the custom which grew up in the late Middle Ages to light two candles at the beginning of *Shabbat*: one, representing "Remember," and the other, "Keep." So let's take each of those in turn. (This custom was first promulgated by the mystics, the cabalists, and it caught on and became universal. However, the idea of lighting a *Shabbat* light to light up the house goes way back to the beginning of time.)

**Remember.** One of the rabbinical comments on this is "Remember the Sabbath in words at its coming in and at its going out." The most important aspect of this is the *kiddush* ceremony at the beginning of *Shabbat* on Friday night and the *habdalah* at the end of *Shabbat*. At the beginning of *Shabbat*, we say the blessing, praising God who makes the *Shabbat* holy. It is interesting, of course, that *Shabbat* is *Shabbat* whether we say the blessing or not. When it gets dark on Friday, it is *Shabbat*.

The requirement is that we make our human contribution to the coming in of *Shabbat* by mentioning it and by praising God who makes the *Shabbat* holy. Through saying that and experiencing the entry of *Shabbat*, we can at times sense a spiritual shift from the ordinariness of the week day to the special holiness of *Shabbat*. There

is a lovely idea that *Shabbat* was given an extra soul to give us an extra spirituality throughout the day, which would begin on Friday evening. When we come to the end of *Shabbat*, the *habdalah* is when the extra soul leaves us. One of the aspects of the *habdalah* ritual is to smell spices. My explanation is that it is like the use of smelling salts: When your soul leaves, you need to be revived by smell. So that is why we have the spices when the extra Sabbath soul leaves us.

On Friday night, the candles are lit. The original reason for that was not so much a spiritual reason but a very practical one. In ancient times, most people would get up with the sun and go to bed with the sun. They would eat their evening meal at the end of the day and then go to bed and be ready to get up at the crack of dawn to work. The rabbis ordained that one has to eat a special meal on Friday night after dark. If you eat in the dark, there would be many difficulties, and there would not be a happy atmosphere. So the rabbis added to this by saying that a lamp should be lit before the Sabbath comes in so that there would be light in the house, people wouldn't get in each other's way, and domestic harmony would prevail. *Shalom bayit* means domestic peace is the reason for the light. But, of course, for most people the *Shabbat* candles represent the spiritual illumination of *Shabbat*. Many people go to the synagogue on Friday evening and bring in the *Shabbat* with the community. At home, there is the ritual of *kiddush*: making the blessing over a goblet of wine, which is then shared and, to begin the meal, a blessing over the two loaves of bread especially made in a flattened form called *kabluf*. The two loaves commemorate the double portion of manna which fell on Friday in

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the wilderness. Because they couldn't go out and collect manna on Saturday, which would be work, God sent a double portion on Friday. Thus we have the two loaves to commemorate that time. These are covered with a special cloth which symbolizes the dew that fell and kept the manna fresh.

Another ritual on Friday night in many families is when the parents bless their children with the priestly blessing found in Numbers. This is introduced for the boys with a formula: "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh"; for the girls, "May God make you like Sarah or Rebekah, Rachel and Leah." The blessing of the children is a very emotional moment for the parents. There is a real family atmosphere when celebrating the commencement of *Shabbat*.

Then on Friday night, there is much singing from a whole volume of hymns written mainly in the Middle Ages to be sung at the *Shabbat* table. Many of these are very beautiful, and over the years, each one has accumulated a variety of tunes from different parts of the Jewish world. In many families, there is great fun in swapping tunes, learning new tunes, and singing these hymns, and then having discussion on religious matters. Discussing the Torah reading for the week is done in many families. The meal is concluded with grace after the meal, which is often sung with great gusto!

***Shabbat Shalom: Is grace generally sung?***

**Solomon:** In many families it is recited in a murmur as most of the prayers are, but in more and more families nowadays, it is sung.

There are, of course, many *Shabbat* foods as well which are served on a Friday night.

On Saturday morning, of course, the main meeting is in the synagogue, where the service is longer with a more elaborate ritual, and the Torah will be taken out and read. The combination of prayer and study is the focus on *Shabbat* morning. Then there is the second of the *Shabbat* meals at lunchtime, which has its own rituals and its own special foods.

The most traditional food for *Shabbat* lunch is *trollop*, at least among Askenazic Jews. This is a hot casserole which is cooked overnight. Of course, you are not allowed to cook on *Shabbat*. There was a sect in the early Middle Ages which believed that we are not allowed to cook or kindle a fire on *Shabbat* (or have any fire kindled before *Shabbat*). Consequently, they sat in the dark and ate cold food. One of the finds of the mainstream rabbinical opposition to this particular sect was the idea that, while you can't cook the food on *Shabbat*, you can keep it warm on a low fire throughout the day and have a hot meal at lunchtime on Saturday. Today, however, this is not thought about so much. This, then, is another cer-

emonial meal. (At breakfast time, many Jews will have a normal breakfast.)

After this meal, there is often the need to go and lie down for awhile or sometimes to go and walk it off. In fact, in our Jewish community, there is a park which is known as the *Trollis* Park because many Jews are strolling there, letting their *trollis* go down.

Toward the end of *Shabbat*, there is the afternoon service and then the third meal. For many people, this generally is more of a snack than a meal. Here, the main focus is not so much on the food as on being together. There are singing and discussions. The atmosphere toward the end of *Shabbat* intensifies and becomes even more spiritual. There is often a poignancy in the third meal, replacing the frivolity of the other meals. That is then followed by the evening service and the *habdalah* ceremony of separation, in which we bless God, who distinguishes between sacred and profane (between the six working days and the seventh day). It is an elaborate ceremony which consists of a blessing over a goblet of wine, a blessing over spices to restore our spirits in the outgoing *Shabbat*, and a blessing over a fire (usually in the form of a large fatted candle with several wicks, not like the single flame of the *Shabbat* candle). This represents fire rather than light. There are various legends about it. Some say it commemorates the beginning of creation, when

God said "Let there be light." This is, after all, the beginning of Sunday, which is the first day

end of *Shabbat*, which is praise for the coming of Elijah, who will announce the advent of the Messiah. So, we have dealt with the *remember* aspect.

**Keep.** Now let us look at the *keep* aspect, which is the prohibition repeated several times throughout the *Torah* of the workings of *Shabbat*, which is to be a day of rest.

Now the *Torah* doesn't say explicitly what is considered work. That was left to the rabbis. Part of their conception of the moral law was to explain the details of the observance of the written law. The rabbis defined work as consisting of 39 categories of activities. These 39 categories are mostly based on the kind of things that people would have to do in order to live throughout the week, for example, various activities concerned with the preparation of food, from sowing, reaping, threshing, winnowing, and grinding grain (agricultural labors), to kneading dough, bak-



(Picture by Jacques Doukhan)

The carrying of the *menorah* on the Arch of Titus as a part of the spoils in the triumphal procession after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.

The seven-branched *menorah* was hence often used as a symbol of the Sabbath which helped Israel to survive in the diaspora. As the great essayist Ahad Haam said: "More than the Jewish people have kept the Sabbath; the Sabbath has kept the Jewish people."

of the week. Other stories connect it with Adam and Eve who, having just left the garden of Eden, experienced darkness for the first time and were terrified, thinking that perhaps the world was now coming to an end. God comforted them and showed them how to produce fire. So they created the first fire. While these are only legends, they are poignant ones. Then there is the final blessing of separation. After that, people sing songs wishing one another a good week and also a very famous song for the

ing, and a whole class of work in preparing bread. Then there is another set connected with the making of cloth: Weaving, sewing, tying knots, and so on, are categories of work. Other categories include the kindling of any fire or carrying anything whatsoever from a private into a public space or vice versa, or carrying anything for about six feet within a public domain. You may carry things about the house, but you may not carry anything outside the house into the street. That is probably enough to de-

scribe some of the categories of keeping. These are part of the 39 broad categories, and in the Talmud each one is defined into a large number of specific activities which are forbidden. This makes altogether a very complicated legend of what one is not allowed to do on *Shabbat*. There are many Jews who observe this with great strictness, and there are others who do not observe it quite so carefully. In progressive Judaism, by and large, we don't go along with the idea that all of these manifold activities are absolutely forbidden. The emphasis is more on creating a day of rest and spiritual refreshment in whatever way is appropriate for the person. So while Orthodox Jews consider it forbidden to drive on *Shabbat*, progressive Jews may not find the synagogue close enough to walk to, and therefore it is appropriate to drive in keeping with the spirit of *Shabbat*; and one might possibly go for a drive into the country to enjoy nature.

Orthodox Jews won't use a telephone on *Shabbat*, whereas a liberal Jew might feel that phoning a relative whom they can't visit is a very appropriate way of spending time on the *Shabbat*.

An Orthodox Jew won't listen to music on *Shabbat* or, indeed, play a musical instrument, whereas a progressive Jew might feel that it is relaxing to listen to a sonata, or playing the piano is very relaxing and an appropriate way of spending *Shabbat*. So the interpretation of how one rests on *Shabbat* varies widely for different Jews. The principle underlying it is the same.

***Sabbath Shalom: Are Sabbath restrictions irksome to Jews in England today?***

**Solomon:** The answer is Yes and No. Many Jews do find that the traditional restrictions are irksome and, therefore, are modi-

fied in various ways. Some, not so much out of principle but merely in pragmatism, can't quite manage a particular restriction, so they, perhaps with a slightly bad conscience, don't keep it. There are, of course, many people who feel for economic reasons that they have to work on *Shabbat*. This is very unfortunate, because that is purely against the whole spirit of the day. Those Jews who belong to Orthodox synagogues perhaps feel somewhat more ashamed of having to work on *Shabbat* than the Jews who belong to progressive synagogues, where a slightly more flexible and understanding attitude often prevails about the exigencies of people's lives. Progressive rabbis would encourage someone who has to work on Saturday morning to come to the

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synagogue on Friday night, and so at least have part of *Shabbat* intact. However, it has to be said that for those Jews who keep the *Shabbat* in all of its traditional strictness, it generally isn't irksome. It is part of a way of life, which is often learned in childhood, accepted, and becomes part of the pattern of living. It isn't seen as the wrench that it would seem to be to any person who isn't used to that pattern of lifestyle. The fact that you can't switch on lights, use the telephone, or switch on the television is not important to the Jews who grow up experiencing that kind of *Shabbat*. Also to the Jews who accept it in a later stage of life, it becomes a very normal lifestyle to practice. It is more

than just normal. The great virtue of that kind of *Shabbat* is that abstaining from all of those activities which are so taken for granted during the week really lifts *Shabbat* out of ordinary life and very clearly marks it out as a day apart, a day filled with spirituality and utterly different in every way from other days of the week. That is something which most progressive Jews don't have to the same extent, because they do a lot of things on *Shabbat*. They do switch on lights, use the telephone, and drive cars, and *Shabbat* is not as different from other days of the week as it is for Orthodox Jews who keep all the restrictions.

***Shabbat Shalom: Do the Orthodox Jews and the more liberal ones who really believe that they are keeping the Sabbath feel also that there is a special blessing from God in remembering and keeping the Sabbath?***

**Solomon:** Oh yes, absolutely! *Shabbat* is spoken of in our prayers as a gift from God, as something that God has bequeathed to us. *Shabbat* is a treasured possession, a day of delight, and one of the aspects of Judaism most cherished by Jews of all varieties. There is a lovely rabbinic legend about the days of the week all pairing up with one another and *Shabbat* being left out and complaining to God that all of the other days of the week have a partner and saying, "I am by myself and have no partner."

God comforts *Shabbat* and says, "Don't worry. The Jewish people, the people of Israel will be your partner." So there is a kind of marriage between *Shabbat* and the people of Israel. Of course, there is the very famous statement by Ahad Haam, a great modern Jewish thinker and writer, who said, "More than the Jewish people have kept

the *Shabbat*; *Shabbat* has kept the Jewish people." I think that we all sense to some extent that *Shabbat* is very crucial in our being Jews, our remaining Jews, and our remaining together and alive and as a people.

***Shabbat Shalom*: What are the times for the Sabbath, and why?**

**Solomon**: The answer is less simple than what one may think. There is a debate that goes way back into Talmudic times about when in fact days begin and end. It is generally accepted that in Judaism the day begins the evening before, when it gets dark. But is that the moment of sunset, or is it the moment of nightfall? That is the question that has never been satisfactorily resolved. Nightfall, incidentally, has generally been defined as the time when one can see three medium-sized stars distantly spaced out in the skies. That means that it is really dark. So does the day begin at sunset or at nightfall? There is an uncertainty built into Jewish practice. The sway that is here expressed is that in order to fulfill all of the possibilities, one acts as if *Shabbat* begins at sunset on Friday and does not end until nightfall on Saturday—in other words, an hour or so after sunset. So *Shabbat* is not twenty-four hours; it is about twenty-five hours. The rule is that the *Shabbat* candles should be lit at least eighteen minutes before sunset on Friday to allow for a slight additional space, and one is allowed to extend the end of *Shabbat* quite some time beyond nightfall. When one is involved in eating the first *Shabbat* meal, for instance, it could be carried on into the night with the discussion that goes with it. *Shabbat* ends for you when you make *habdalah* and declare *Shabbat* over. You can't do it before nightfall, but you can do

it anytime after nightfall.

***Shabbat Shalom*: When do you prepare for the Sabbath?**

**Solomon**: The most intense preparation for *Shabbat* is on Friday, especially Friday afternoon. In households where *Shabbat* is really kept seriously, Friday is a flurry of activity, and the closer to the *Shabbat*, the greater the flurry becomes because, traditionally speaking, we are not allowed to cook on the *Shabbat*. All the food has to be cooked before *Shabbat* begins. As mentioned before, food may be kept warm right up until lunch time on Saturday. However, the food has to be cooked to an edible state before sunset on Friday. So that is a large part of the activities. But it goes far beyond that, because in many of the households, the house is cleaned thoroughly on Friday, and everything is shining, clean, and special. The table is set, often with a white tablecloth, the best silverware, and other items in readiness for the *Shabbat* meal. The body also should be clean and spruced in readiness for *Shabbat*. And so the whole family will be queuing up for the bathroom to get ready for Friday evening and to get dressed in their *Shabbat* best. Friday is really a busy day; and, of course, before the cooking is done, there has to be the shopping, which can be done at any time, but often it is on Thursday or Friday morning when people will be out doing their shopping for Sabbath. So that is the practical preparation that will be done.

But in a more spiritual way, the whole week is often seen as a preparation for *Shabbat*. In Jewish tradition and in the Hebrew language, the days of the week do not have names such as Sunday, Monday, or Tuesday, but they are numbered. Sunday is called *yom rirshon* (the first day) and Mon-

day, *yom sheni* (the second day). The Talmud asks: Why are the days named in this way: the first day, the second day, and so on? It answers: They are named toward *Shabbat*. Sunday is the first day approaching *Shabbat*. Monday is the second day approaching *Shabbat*, and so on through the week. One counts the days from one to six and finally reaches the seventh day, the *Shabbat*. In the Talmud, there are many stories of how the rabbis of old would think of *Shabbat* from the very beginning of the week so that whenever they would come across a particularly nice fish or a delicious cake, they would say, "This will be for *Shabbat*," and then put it aside for that time. So the whole week is a spiritual process toward the culmination of *Shabbat*.

***Shabbat Shalom*: In a family setting, what are the benefits and blessings of the Sabbath?**

**Solomon**: The benefits of *Shabbat* are incalculable for a family and nowadays more than ever, when throughout the week families tend to be fragmented with each member doing their own thing. With children going to school and after-school activities, there is very little of the day when families are actually together on a daily basis. *Shabbat* is, therefore, the one day of the week when they all make a point of being together: sitting at the table, perhaps looking over the week's activities, and sharing experiences with one another. Having guests is another part of the ethos of *Shabbat*. The guests, of course, may be other family members or friends or even strangers. There is an idea that one may be in a synagogue on Friday night and may meet somebody from out of town who doesn't have somewhere to eat and invites them home. More traditionally, this stranger would

be a Jew, but the stranger could well be a non-Jew. Personally, I have found it very enjoyable to have non-Jewish friends coming to *Shabbat* and sharing with them some of the special experiences. Some of the things you take for granted, but an outsider coming and experiencing it for the first time really enjoys the experiences of *Shabbat*. I have many friends with whom I have been able to share these experiences, and they enjoy them very much.

I have a Catholic priest friend who loves to come to the *Shabbat* and sings the songs and participates in the prayers. This is a lovely experience for him and for us.

The *Shabbat* is not generally an exclusive time for Jews, and they value the participation of friends of other communions and those in the community.

The family context of the *Shabbat* is very important: the blessing of the children on Friday night, as already mentioned, and the fact that the families also go to the synagogue together. There is a distinction between Orthodox and progressive synagogues. In Orthodox synagogues, the family might walk together, but once they have arrived, they sit separately. This is fine to many people and the way they like it to be. Progressive Jews like the experience of sitting together as a family.

***Shabbat Shalom:*** Would some people migrate from Orthodoxy to more liberal synagogues because they want to be a family unit together?

**Solomon:** That is often the reason given for changing affiliation. It needs to be said that this emphasis on the family and of being together with the family, or a part of the family on *Shabbat*, does often make it very difficult for single people or for those who, for whatever reason, don't

have a family. In many communities, there is an emphasis on inviting people who are on their own to become part of a family or share with a family on *Shabbat*. But this doesn't take away the fact that it is often very difficult and quite sad for single people on *Shabbat*. Some single people do join with their friends and create a family of choice, if you like, and enjoy *Shabbat* together. Not everybody is in a position to do that. That is one of the problems that Jewish communities are only just beginning to try to address.

More and more synagogues, at least once a month and sometimes more often, have the *Havallrah Shabbat* meal usually on Friday night, when people don't go home to their families

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*—Ahad Haam*

but actually stay at the synagogue and eat together. This is a way of including everybody.

***Shabbat Shalom:*** Is the Sabbath a weekly celebration among most Jews today in England?

This is a difficult question to actually answer. We don't have statistics that would support or not support such a question. I would like to think that the answer is yes, but I am afraid that it isn't actually, and that it is probably something like 50 - 50. There are a lot of Jews who do not keep Sabbath and who do not light the candles on Friday evening. Of course, there are many people who do not keep *Shabbat* except for lighting Fri-

day-night candles. That is one ceremony that many people do keep above anything else. But there are a lot of people that don't even do that, and who are estranged from Judaism altogether. There are others who keep the Day of Atonement and possibly Passover, but who do not keep the *Shabbat* on a weekly basis.

***Shabbat Shalom:*** Do you believe that there are some aspects of the Sabbath that could appeal to and benefit non-Sabbathkeepers in England?

**Solomon:** The answer is an unqualified yes!

There is an interesting tension about this question in Judaism, because in the Talmud it states that non-Jews must not keep *Shabbat*. It makes the statement rather sternly. I have always found that odd, though I can understand it in a way. *Shabbat* for Jews is very much an aspect of the Covenant and the understanding between God and Israel. It states in Exodus that it is a sign forever between God and the children of Israel. So *Shabbat* is very much a dimension of that Covenant. On the other hand, the principle of *Shabbat* is, aside from the belief in one God, the greatest gift that the Jewish people have given to the world. The idea of the seven-day week is something that came from Judaism and was unknown to the Greeks or the Romans. There is the Roman historian Tacitus who found two aspects of Judaism particularly repugnant and incomprehensible. One is, the Jews refuse to kill babies. The ancient Greeks and Romans quite happily exposed unwanted children or enabled children to die. The Jews didn't do that, and it was incomprehensible to the Romans. The other aspect which he found repugnant was that the Jews gave

their slaves one day off in seven. How ridiculous to give your slaves a day off when that is not what slaves are for. I think the principle which *Shabbat* is actually stating is that all human beings are created free and equal and that the servants and slaves and even the domestic animals need and deserve time off. There is a famous story in the Talmud about the Jew who sold his cow to a non-Jew. After a few days, the non-Jew came knocking at the Jew's door in great rage, saying, "Your cow refuses to work. What kind of a dud cow is this that you have sold me? It won't get up and plow."

The Jew was very concerned and said, "Tell me exactly what has happened."

He said, "I bought the cow, and for the first few days it was fine, and then one morning it just lay down and wouldn't get up and refused to do any work."

The Jew said, "What day was that?"

"It was Saturday!"

The Jew said, "Ah, now I understand. I understand what has happened. As Jews, you see, we give our animals rest on the Sabbath, and so my cow is used to resting and not working on the Sabbath. Now, of course, things are different; it belongs to a non-Jew, and there is no reason why you should lose because of that." He went to visit the cow and whispered in his ear that now he belonged to a non-Jew and would have to work when his owner wanted him to do so. And so, the cow, the poor cow, had to start working on Saturdays.

I think it is very important not only that people should have time off (this is also recognized by our society—people do need time for recreation), but this is also a guarantee of human equality. It is not just one class that enjoys leisure while another class

has to work continually. Everybody should have time for leisure and recreation. In this way, *Shabbat* does take us back to creation and the beginning of the world when, of course, everybody was equal. The Talmud asks, Why did God create one individual, Adam, at first? Why not create lots of people? One of the points is that everybody has the same ancestor. None can say, Mine is greater than yours. We all go back to one person.

I think it also makes for a healthy and happy society when people take time off and preferably take time off together. That is why I must say that, although for Jews it is very convenient when shops open on Sunday in Britain, I still believe that allowing for shops to open on Sunday is a big mistake that our society has made. I am all for restrictions on Sunday trading, because a society—whether Christian, Jewish, or none of these—still needs a day, our day of rest when we don't struggle for a living. We take time to consider. I think we have lost sight of that to some extent. It is easy to go around the corner to Sainsbury's on Sunday, but I believe there is a deeper, more spiritual concern when we say, "The shops are shut today. We should look to something else."

***Shabbat Shalom:*** I suppose the problem is that even many Christians are not worried about their Sunday as a Sabbath any more. What does the Sabbath mean to you personally?

**Solomon:** It is difficult to answer that, for I see a distinction in what I would like the *Shabbat* to mean to me personally, and what it actually does mean on a real basis.

There is the old joke that rabbis are the one class of people who don't have a day off. We work on Saturday, and that is a

dilemma that rabbis have to face, because everybody else can go to the synagogue and relax. Many times when I would like to be praying, I am concerned with what has to happen next in the services, and so on. Nevertheless, with all of the shortcomings that I see in my own observance of *Shabbat*, the gap between what could be and what I would like and what actually is, *Shabbat* is still a very important day for me—partly because I do one job during the week (teaching at the Jewish college), and I am only really with my congregation on *Shabbat*. This is a chance to be with the congregation, to enjoy their company which I do, and to pray in a slightly different way my normal prayers.

I gain a real joy and blessing out of my service to the congregation on *Shabbat*, some weeks more than others. One at times gets a real sense of elation and spiritual harmony, and at other times this may not be present, but the idea that it can be there brings a sense of hope as I look forward to *Shabbat*. I don't have a service in my synagogue on Friday night so I can spend Friday nights at other synagogues.

*Shabbat*, particularly on Friday night, is a time when the family can come together. It is a night when the teenagers generally do not go out to parties or to the disco or whatever. That is the time when they like to have togetherness. It is sad when that is not always the case, when that spiritual commitment for *Shabbat* is not made.

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