

## Days of Rest

### *Thought for the Day*

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*Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 19 November 2024*

I've been following the news from Stornoway with more than usual interest as the saga of a supermarket opening on Sunday has played out.

For Jewish people this issue is commonplace – the first mention of the first day of rest known to the world is in the very first chapter of the first book of the Bible, where rest is the final act of creation. Arguably, *Shabbat*, a weekly day of rest, was Judaism's first gift to the world – there is no record of the Greeks or Babylonians or the Vikings or Visigoths taking a day off! And there's no reason for a seven-day week, rather than five or ten, other than that story in *Genesis*.

Clearly different people observe it differently. I remember being taken to task for referring to “observant Jews”, because, as a colleague said, “non-Orthodox Jews are also observant; we just observe differently”. A recent report from the Jewish Policy Research Institute found that fully 80% of Jewish people in the UK light candles on Friday night at least occasionally to mark the start of Shabbat, and others make time for family or friends or consciously take a break from work.

So that's the context in which I read the news from the north – but it's not so much the what as the how! I remember previous controversies about ferries or flights on the Sabbath, but they were framed in terms of desecration, transgression of religious law – sin with all its attendant spiritual consequences. This time, though, despite the biblical quotations on the placards, the commentary was almost entirely about neglecting local custom – not so much a theological as a sociological rift.

Does that mean Scotland has become a more tolerant society? I certainly hope so – not to eliminate disagreement, but if we can disagree reasonably and respectfully and without name-calling, that's a good start!