

Shabbat

Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein

In 1923, one of our founders, Claude Montefiore wrote *Outlines of Liberal Judaism*, a textbook “for the use of parents and teachers”. It is an early exposition of the essentials of being a Liberal Jew. On the Sabbath he writes:

“I am profoundly convinced as to the paramount necessity of the observance of the Sabbath. Parents must observe it themselves, and they must teach their children to observe it. Any Liberal Jew who on Friday evening goes to a concert, or visits the theatre, or has a dinner party at his house, any Jew who on Saturday rides to hounds, or works without compulsion, incurs, in my deliberate opinion, a grave religious responsibility. He is wounding Judaism at a tender and dangerous point. If ever a ceremonial law passed over into the ethical sphere, if ever a ceremonial law deserved the epithet of divine, that law is the Sabbath.” (p. 256)

A reminder of the social class of our founders comes with the phrase “ride to hounds” as if that itself does not transgress a divine command! But the question is raised:

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A LIBERAL JEWISH SHABBAT TODAY?

Should a liberal Jew do the weekly shopping on Shabbat? Go to the cinema or meet friends in a restaurant on Friday evening? Should we answer emails or switch off the computer (and mobile phone lest we are tempted to stray) on Erev Shabbat? Must our older children stay with the family on Friday night? Are there any rules, are there any recommendations, or does the Movement have nothing to say on the issue that Claude Montefiore found so essential?