

## **If I am only for myself, what am I?**

### *Thought for the Day*

*Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)*

*Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 15 December 2010*

When was the last time someone came on Good Morning Scotland and offered to pay more tax? No – it can't have been *then*, 'cos radio hadn't yet been invented!

I'm serious – I benefited from free University education when I needed it, and although – believe me – academics don't exactly top the Times Rich List, I *want* to give something back, so the next generation can have the same benefit.

Last year I spent a week in that five-star hotel known as Intensive Care after toothache caused me to break my wrist (ok, I know – if you want the whole story ask me back for a half-hour interview!), and ever since have been trapped in my GP's revolving door. Sure, I'm not offering to pick up the whole tab for Intensive Care, but why not a small charge for visiting the doctor, as they have in France, so long as those who can't afford still it have free access to all the health care they need?

This far from original thought was sparked off by the more than usually revolting student protests about the trebling of tuition fees south of Hadrian's Wall – which if you believe some chattering Cassandras is a new Mason-Dixon Line, south of which slavery is about to be reintroduced! Surely everyone can see that there's a difference between those who have benefitted paying back a debt to the society that supported them, even if it's compulsory through income tax, and threatening future beneficiaries with more debt than the value of a good-sized family car!

That's not to say I am in agreement with those who demand rights while sparing no thought for the society on which they thereby impose obligations. If "the Big Society" is to be anything more than an empty slogan, it means recognising that we all have obligations to one another. As Hillel, one of the most important contributors to the Talmud said, "If I am not for myself who will be for me – but if I am only for myself, what am I?"