



Welcome to Shap's Jubilee

This collection of material is being gathered together for our Jubilee celebration – a couple of days of celebration and recollection, back at the Shap Wells Hotel in Cumbria where it all started fifty years ago. But what is a Jubilee?

In the Bible, there is a commandment to enact a 'Yovel' (j-b-l), translated into English as 'Jubilee'. The legislation is startling and probably impractical! Every 50 years, all private (landed) property accumulated in the preceding 5 decades is to revert to its original owners. The assumption is that the various tribal allocations will become skewed over that period – about two generations – and the faults and failings of your grandparents – or indeed their clever dealings and achievements - should not be allowed to define your own position and progress. Each fifty years, the reset button is to be pressed.

It is not clear that this legislation was ever actually applied (certainly there is no record of it being so) and we know that such utopian redistributive ideas often lead to horrible manglings of society to no-one's benefit in the long run. (Think of the land redistributions in Zimbabwe or the forced dispossessions of the early USSR.)

So surely that's not what we are all about here now. And for two reasons...

Firstly, we don't want to press the reset button and return to where we were 50 years ago. In fact, on the contrary, we want to be sure that things have moved on – and preferably incontrovertibly!

Secondly, we want to overturn any suggestion that the holders of whatever sense of privilege it was fifty years ago are never again understood to automatically hold that power or have the right to call the shots they once had.

So far, so different.

But in one way, the idea of the Jubilee is entirely apposite. It asserts that accumulated privilege should not be allowed to remain forever. The essential equality of all must be respected and occasionally reinforced. I think this lies at the heart of Shap's mission. Diverse people's approaches to religions must be treated with proper respect. Humanity is not best served by overlooking the developed assumptions of hierarchy and ranked validity that so many societies take for granted, including our own in the late 60s and onwards. If inequalities have crept in through whatever historical forces have played their part, we must intervene strenuously to put things back in order.

So maybe this event and this collection of material is an apposite reminder of why we had to fight for a fairer and more open-hearted approach to the religions of the world than was current when we started fifty years ago and why the struggle has not been easy, perhaps even now, or perhaps, once again.



If we carry the spirit of that resolute refusal to allow the ways things have become to be the way things have to be, then achieving our own Jubilee is no bad thing.

And one more thing...

The word Jubilee has another origin. It is also rooted in the Latin word for rejoicing, jubilation. And surely no-one can grudge us that. As we lay down our Shap cudgels in the hope that others will take them up and fight the relevant fight for the next fifty years, whatever that may be, Shap members might be allowed a little relief and relaxation. This is a Jubilee. Jubilate! Rejoice!

Clive Lawton

President