

## The Shap working party on World Religions in Education



### **Calendar of Religious Festivals: A treasure of diversity**

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The Shap web site already contains a fascinating essay by Mary Hayward entitled Shap: A brief history. The present article seeks to complement this description by enlarging on the origins of the Shap Calendar, discussing the role of the various editorial teams and offering 'extensive and evocative' quotations from 34 years of the editorials, now collected and mostly available on the website.

This essay has a number of sections:

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### **1. A few Quotations to whet the appetite**

For all the difficulties of producing this calendar, I do believe that it adds to the understanding in the world, and I therefore submit it, not least, as a labour of love.

Preparing a calendar for publication is an odd experience, since it has to do with the death of one 'year' and the 'birth' of another — even though at the time of writing we are still in May. Only in August are the 'cognoscenti' likely to fore-gather in India to determine when certain lunar festivals will occur in the following year.

The Shap Calendar is a *mélange* of Peter Pan, who never grew up, and the Phoenix, the mystic bird that rises again from the ashes of its funeral pyre. The Phoenix image is appropriate in that this edition of the Calendar booklet contains a revised and enlarged text and a number of other changes that we hope will enhance its value to its varied and growing readership. Its past is by no means discarded, but will provide the basis on which we seek to build bigger and better.

Calendars particularly those relating to religious festivals — are very much a reflection of the natural urge to discover patterns within the world of which one is a part. Certainly the major religions have throughout man's history provided a major focus for such patterning which in turn enables the individual to relate to the rhythms of the seasons and of the human life cycle. Circumscribed as we are by the elements of the spatial and the temporal — festivals can assist us in 'making sense of time' while discerning the high moments of the yearly round.

In each case it can be a profitable exercise for the teacher to ask himself why he is using it (a festival) in his particular way, and what are his motives in so doing. Festivals quickly lose their original simplicity and vigour, they tend to become allegory instead of parable, but the search for the original can often turn a fascinating window on the world into a reflective mirror of the Self.

In all cases, I have tried to describe the festival or its principle observances from the point of view of a respectful outsider. I have avoided statements like 'Hindus believe that . . .' and have simply stated the belief. At the same time though, I have not referred to Krishna as the Lord Krishna or the Bible as the Holy Bible. I trust that my middle line treads the correct path.

With a considerable feeling of humility in the face of the complexity of the task, I have tried to abide by the rule that the individual communities should define which festivals they consider to be important to themselves. Omissions and inclusions, however idiosyncratic they may appear, are by and large based on the values of the community concerned and the



values revealed are in themselves an insight into the various different cultures and traditions reflected through these pages.

However, my still considerable ignorance of the subtleties of some of the traditions reflected here may well have led to errors, so that, while retaining the editorial right to maintain some form of balance and restrict the number of entries to ensure that the document is wieldy, adherents and experts alike are encouraged to contribute their comments. The text is never complete and newer religions vie with older ones for full recognition. Such matters are always open to further consideration.

I have dispensed with the practice of attempting to differentiate between major and minor festivals. Invidious though this may be within a single tradition it becomes almost meaningless when one tradition is set against another.

It is refreshing to note, however, how much variety appears each year, since religions have a habit of evoking the unexpected, and festivals are notable for their spontaneity as well as for their adherence to tradition. A number of minor changes need to be updated each time the Calendar appears, such as the numbering of the Jewish and Muslim New Years (5762 AC and 1421 AH respectively in 2002) and the gospel for the Ethiopian year in the Rastafarian four year cycle (Matthew in 2002).

Many aspects of producing a document as complex as the Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals are simply repetitive: the same festivals are included year after year; letters are written to the same individuals and organisations each January; the descriptive material is polished or updated occasionally, but by and large it then continues in what becomes a standard format; the dates and so the positions they take in relation to each other vary since many traditions use a lunar base for their celebrations, and so a major cut and paste operation is called for on the word processor, but the process is basically repeated as in previous years; copy is sent to the printer and proofs are checked for both Calendar and wall chart; complimentary copies are sent to the same people and organisations year by year; much is the same every time.

Who said producing a Calendar of Religious Festivals is repetitive?

## **2. How the Calendar came to be**

In the autumn of 1968 the Christian Education Movement's Journal, *Learning for Living*, carried an article that listed a selection of religious festivals from a number of different religious traditions. In December 1968 Howard Marratt, Head of the Divinity Department (later Religious Studies) of Borough Road College, Isleworth, allocated to one of his new



colleagues the task of setting up a 'clearing house' for information on the study and teaching of World Religions. The first task of this 'clearing house' was to produce a revised and expanded version of the calendar for distribution to the teachers who opted to subscribe to the Mailing list developed the following year.

In the thick snows of April, 1969 the first 'Shap' Conference on **Comparative Religion in Education** took place at the Shap Wells Hotel on Shap Fell in the Lake District. A working party was set up and, at its second meeting in the autumn of that year, held at Lancaster University, a decision was taken to adopt as an aspect of Shap activity the Borough Road projected materials, later identified as: *'a descriptive calendar of festivals in the various world faiths and a list of visual aids, useful addresses, and periodicals of use to the teacher'* along with a *'series of annotated bibliographies prepared by university, college and school specialists in various aspects of world religions'*. These documents emerged as the '**Shap Mailing**' in cyclostyled and stapled format (thanks largely to the hard work of 'Janet', the College receptionist) and were soon ready for circulation to a mailing list of some 1500 subscribers (at 30 pence a set), together with a brief document entitled '**Shap News**', distributed to keep readers up to date with courses, conferences and other developments. Three years later the Community Relations Commission took over the tasks of printing (in booklet form: 'World Religions: Aids for Teachers, 1972) and distribution, along with **Shap News 2**, thanks in large part to the insight of Vivien Stern of the CRC. In each case the calendar was the first of the documents presented to the reader.

### **3. Editors and teams of helpers**

In the autumn of 1973 Peter Woodward, who had stimulated and edited the majority of these initial documents, moved from Borough Road College but continued to edit, collate and distribute the Shap Calendar and the Mailing from his home in Solihull. In 1976 the production of the Calendar reverted to Borough Road, where the Director of the National Society's RE Centre, Desmond Brennan, took over its compilation, working with an invited team of ten 'experts' from different religious traditions. He continued in this role most effectively for six further years, until his illness prevented his further activity.

In 1983 Clive Lawton took over this task and served with distinction single handed for thirteen years in total. In 1996 he handed over the role to a team of three (how could one editor possibly replace him?), Riadh el Droubie, Cherry Gould and Peter Woodward as co-ordinator. They continued to collect dates and modify the text (with the later addition of others such as Eleanor Nesbitt, Harun Rashid, David Rose, and later Jamal Buaben and Roger Howarth) until 2005. When Cherry and Peter stepped down, Roger Howarth took over the leadership role for three years, supported by Eleanor, David and Lynne Broadbent, but then



in 2009 handed it back to Peter Woodward, ably supported by Eleanor, Roger, Clive, Roger Butler, and Wendy Dossett.

So the key editorial role has been held by four members of the Working Party, Peter (in three instalments, 1969-1975, 1986-2005, 2009-2010), Desmond (1976-1982), Clive (1983-1995) and Roger (2006-2008), together with notable help from some nine other members in important supportive roles.

#### **4. The Role of the Editorial**

The purpose of the present article is to look at a wide range of issues, relating particularly to calendars and methods of dating, in the different traditions covered in the Shap Calendar. It is based on quotations from the **editorials** written in the opening pages of each year's edition. Much of the material here, spanning a period of nearly forty years, is unique and merits a wider audience than being left to 'languish' in the annals of the Shap Archive in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. In recent years these editorials have often received a substantial measure of creative input from the team members, but they have largely been composed by the four Editors in Chief. Several other articles from the Shap Journal and the Shap 'Festivals' book have also furnished a range of relevant insights, and since 2001 the Editorials have featured on the back page of the Shap Journal.

- The Hindu Calendar by Rasamandala Das of ISKCON. (Printed in the Shap Journal for 2004-2005 – Shaping the Future - as part of the Editors' Notes for the Calendar for that year).
- A Hindu Astrologer-Priest's Contribution Tilak Shastri with Ram Krishan Prashar and Eleanor Nesbitt (Shap Journal 2000 – 2001 – Time.)
- Do you want the phone number? Clive A. Lawton (Shap Journal 2000-20001- Time.)
- Millennial Meditations Peter Woodward (Shap Journal 1999-2000 – Can I Teach Your Religion?)
- Festivals in World Religions (Brown A. ed. Longman. 1986; Woodward P. et al eds.1998. RMEP)





## **5. Basic points we have all come to respect - from early editorials:**

From time to time I receive requests for information and criticisms of content. I try to respond helpfully to the first, and humbly to the second. The need for several of these communications might be obviated if the following points are borne in mind:

- (a) It should be clearly noted that all Jewish holy days commence at dusk on the evening before the dates given in this Calendar
- (b) Sikhs and Buddhists usually defer the celebration of significant feasts to the weekend closest to the actual event
- (c) In the case of Muslim holy days, the dates given are only approximate since the precise timing can only be calculated within a few days of the actual event
- (d) In the Christian tradition most major festivals fall on a Sunday or public holiday and even in the case of Roman Catholic weekday feasts, public worship is usually observed before or after normal commitments
- (e) As regards some Asian festivals, a disparity — sometimes quite considerable — may occur in actual dates. This is occasioned by regional variation and local custom, and this is understandable when one considers, for example, the vastness of the Indian sub-continent
- (f) Some traditions contain such observances and restrictions on their holy days that children and adults may be unable to attend school or work if they wish to observe their religious traditions correctly
- (g) Buddhist festivals in particular are difficult to generalise about since in different countries in which large Buddhist communities are to be found different traditions and festivals are observed or the same festival is observed on different dates
- (h) In view of the fact that several eastern traditions do not fix their calendar until the spring of the year in question, many such dates after March in this document are estimates (based on the best calculations available at the time of going to press) and should be treated as such
- (i) In much the same way, Jewish festival dates, as with the weekly Jewish Sabbath, also commence at sunset on the evening preceding the dates shown, and often terminate at 'nightfall', somewhat later than sunset, 'so that the sweetness of celebration lingers on into the coming week

## **6. Differing 'years' and variegated 'calendars' – more quotations**

Compiling this calendar has never been easy. To call it a calendar is, of course, a considerable over-simplification since it contains several calendars rolled into one. The

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Gregorian calendar with which most of us are familiar is only used by a small proportion of the world's religions — and even those who do use it do not necessarily rely on it entirely.

We must continue to remind ourselves that there is no one standard time when all religious festivals and celebrations begin. Bahá'í, Jewish and Muslim holidays begin at sunset on the evening of the day prior to the date given in this calendar.

Calendars themselves vary in length and adoption. The Bahá'í calendar is made up of 19 months, each with 19 days, with an additional four or five days added each year so that observances will coincide with the Gregorian calendar. This is how Bahá'í dates remain the same each year. Sikh dates too (apart from Guru Nanak's Birthday, Hola Mohalla and Bandi Chhor Divas i.e. Divali) are now set (in the Nanakshahi calendar) to conform with the Gregorian calendar. It is worth reminding ourselves that (for example) Hindu, Jewish and Muslim dates do not 'change' - they are set by the calendars concerned, which are calculated on a different basis from the Gregorian Calendar.

Against this panoply of change and uncertainty it is interesting to note the pattern of the number of festival dates that DO NOT CHANGE from year to year. Baha'i, Rastafarian and Pagan dates, National and Secular dates, many Japanese and some Chinese, and certain Christian dates (but by no means all) remain constant each year. Sikh dates too, apart from Guru Nanak's Birthday, Hola Mohalla and Bandi Chhor Divas (Divali), now widely follow a fixed and so a predictable calendar from year to year. Zoroastrian dates use three Calendars, one of which (the Fasli) remains constant while the others (the Shenshai and the Qadimi) move backward just one day each leap year.

To adopt a truly multicultural perspective it is important to note that none of the festivals in this publication 'move about'. It is merely that the calendars in which they are fixed are not calculated in line with the Gregorian one. A community's calendar often enshrines some of its most important perceptions and its rhythms and preoccupations are only strange or inconvenient if one puts the secular year at the centre of one's life. If we wish to be properly aware of the outlook of others it is important to recognise that a month can last nineteen days, that there is nothing natural about a seven day week, that there is nothing obvious about starting a day at midnight, and that we are not only in the twentieth century, but also in the fifteenth century, the second century, the twenty sixth and the fifty-eighth.

Finally, a comment about the fixing of dates for festivals. Days that have been fixed in accordance with the Gregorian calendar (i.e. the arithmetical solar calendar that is in general use internationally) have been printed in bold so that users know that these will be the dates in future years too. The dates concerned include Baha'i, Pagan and Rastafarian dates and most Christian dates. However, the 'Eastern' churches still follow the older Julian calendar and, in any case, the complex calculations determining Easter (and dates



dependent on it such as Lent and Pentecost/Whitsun) in both 'Western' and 'Eastern' churches involve reference to the lunar calendar.

A further area where a different order of complexity prevails lies in the recording of Chinese and Japanese festivals, where both the Calendar and the Shap Festivals book focus on national and cultural aspects as much as on religious issues. While it might seem more appropriate at one level and consistent with our treatment of other traditions to home in on Confucian, Taoist, Shinto and Buddhist faiths and New Religious Movements, the issue is by no means as simple as that, and it seems best to harmonise under the broader cultural headings for the time being. For fuller discussion of these issues the introductory section to the three chapters on Buddhist, Chinese and Japanese Festivals in the Festivals book will reward close attention.

For more detail, please consult the following articles:

**1. The Hindu Calendar, by Rasamandala Das of ISKCON.**

(Printed in the Shap Journal for 2004-2005 as part of the Calendar Editorial for that year).

The notes contained in the article mentioned above will serve to show how complex is the process of fixing accurately the dates of festivals, and why it is often difficult to obtain firm dates as early in the year as we would like.

The article goes into some detail about:

The Era, The Year, The Month, The Week, The Day, Festivals, and Variance in Festival Dates.

Please see the full article for greater detail about the Hindu Calendar.

**2. Do you want the phone number? Clive A. Lawton (Shap Journal 2000-20001- Time.)**

Why try to be precise about dates, when this whole article will be dedicated to trying to detach us from them? But I suppose it must have been in around 1403 that I first took up the responsibility of editing, and then completely revamping, the Shap Calendar.

It took me a couple of years before I felt that I had sufficient understanding of the festivals and the way the different calendars worked, by 5744 I was ready to make the changes that seemed necessary.

It was, if I remember rightly the year of Mark, or was it the Dragon? But we launched on an unsuspecting world a new-look calendar with a new text, a wall chart and many new additions.

In an attempt to get around this, I made it my business to understand as best I could how each calendar works. There are solar calendars, based on the 365 day year, and lunar calendars, based on the 29.5 day lunar month and, by far the most popular, the luni-solar



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calendar, which is based on the lunar month but makes occasional adjustments - usually a leap month from time to time - to bring it back in line with the solar cycle, so that the seasonal festivals happen in the right season.

The Muslim calendar is the only well known one which is purely lunar, entirely indifferent to the seasons and pacing in more years to a century than an ordinary Gregorian can manage. (So next time you feel miserable about reaching your fortieth birthday or your fiftieth or whatever, take refuge in the thought that you're younger than you would be if you were counting in Muslim years!)

In Britain, we know the solar calendar from the widespread Gregorian one, but there are other wonderful versions. I particularly like the eccentric but beautifully sweet Baha'i calendar which has nineteen months of nineteen days - and four or five days left over which are slipped in before the nineteenth (last) month. In case that seems arbitrary to some who are unfamiliar with it, you should remember that nineteen has a powerful calendrical significance, because it takes a cycle of nineteen years for the lunar and the solar calendar to line up properly again. So what the Baha'is have done is simply take this number and feed it back into their months and 'weeks'.

However, it's certainly not stranger, I have to say, than the Christian inspired calendar with which most of us in this country are most familiar. Like all calendars it tells us a lot about the priorities, history and patterns of the people who use it. There's the seven day week, which makes no sense, but simply reflects the Jewish story of the seven day creation. Then there's the weekend which again follows through on the Jewish tradition - unknown elsewhere - of a weekly day of rest. The days of the week are largely Nordic, while the names of the months are Roman.

The pattern of the months is determined by Roman Emperors' egos, making it necessary to devise mnemonic rhymes to remember which month 'hath thirty days'. Pretty well every other group can use a mnemonic rhyme which I've just made up: 'If one month's got thirty days, then the next one will probably have 29. And vice versa'. Baha'is, of course, have just got to remember this poem which I've also just made up: 'The first month has got 19 days - and so have all the rest.'

But back to the calendar our schools use. We've got two 'Christian' calendars overlaying each other. There's the Easter cycle, which is lunar, (Jewish) and the Christmas cycle, which is solar (Roman). Beyond all that, we've got a fair number of Christians - Eastern Orthodox - who didn't follow the Roman Catholic Pope Gregory's proposal that the calendar needed further adjustment, and so are about 14 days adrift from other Christians in their calculations. (That also explains why the famous Russian Revolution - the October Revolution - happened in November!) Finally, the year we think we're in - 2000 - is as much



the fault of limited medieval calculations and the fact that zero hadn't yet been invented as anything accurate that can be said about time.

Of all the dates, the one I found hardest to understand was the system for determining Chinese New Year. While it was a regular luni-solar calendar like those of the Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and so on, the proximity of the intercalatory leap-year insertion to the new year date left me no room for error and I'd already come unstuck one year. I could easily work it out if there had been a leap year the previous year. Then I knew there couldn't be one in the upcoming year. There was a racing certainty, if there wasn't one in the second year, that there would be one in the third. But how to be certain of that second year? And since a leap year in a lunar calendar adds an extra month, a false calculation could knock out my estimates by perhaps 20 or more days.

So I decided that I would have to try to get help from a Chinese source. I contacted the Chinese Cultural Centre where I lived. 'Did they yet have the dates for New Year in 18 months time, please?'

'No' came back the answer. 'The information hasn't come through yet'. Same problem as I had. Eager to short circuit the process of details being passed around, I thought that, if I could find out the sources of their information, I could get straight to the source and speed things up. 'Just hold on a moment' she said, 'I'll check the address.' A moment later she was back.

'It's someone called Clive Lawton from the Shap Calendar of Festivals in World Religions. Do you want the phone number?'

### **7. The calendar – Approaches/Methods/Structures – all from editorials:**

In revising the text of the Calendar we have taken careful note of the replies to last year's Calendar Questionnaire and of the responses contributed by a number of colleagues committed to or with expertise in the major religious traditions. Our grateful thanks are extended in this connection to those listed below.

They were asked for comment on the greetings used at festival times, the distinctions between major and minor festivals, some indication of festival customs and rituals and of National and Harvest festivals and celebrations, related scriptural quotations and references, an indication of how festivals are observed in Britain, and the colours, clothes and foods linked to specific festivals. Evidence of their responses will be seen in the modifications to the text of this booklet that follow. This is, however, an ongoing process,



and comments from readers with a view to further improvements in future years will always be welcome.

Of those replying to the questionnaire 64% indicated they would also welcome an enlarged package of materials, either containing additional visual materials or other festival aids. There was very limited support for producing a commercial glossy Calendar with photographs. Working Party members have been active accordingly in developing a set of A3 photographs with teaching notes, a set of festival celebration/good wishes cards, and a set of symbols for the major world faiths on a floppy disk. Details will be circulated when available.

Quite obviously the initial intention was to cater for the growing interest in the teaching of world religions as well as to familiarise teachers with the religious traditions and customs in an ever increasing multicultural society. The calendar has therefore served to complement R.E. syllabuses, the planning of assemblies in due season, and to indicate the pattern of major observances which might occasion leave of absence from school or work as occasion demands.

Other requests have affected slightly the wording of some of the booklet's text for certain Sikh and Orthodox Christian festivals; and after some discussion of whether mention of the Prophet Muhammad should be followed with the blessing 'Peace be upon him' or some other appropriate symbol, it was felt best not to set such a precedent and to avoid wherever possible terms like 'Lord' that in Christian or Hindu contexts might equally imply a devotional or committed approach.

For instance, it has been pointed out that the prefix 'Chinese' before certain oriental celebrations could be misconstrued as if such traditions were still flourishing in China itself. It remains to be seen how things will develop there now that a new regime has come to power. Suffice it to say that 'Chinese' merely refers to the origin of the festival while allowing for the fact that Hong Kong, Taiwan or Malaya may be the more likely reference point for contemporary consideration.

The task of obtaining festival dates is not a straightforward one and it is the complexity of this process which prevents earlier publication of the Calendar each year. Many dates are constant fixtures and remain the same year after year (eg Christian saints' days and many Japanese festivals), and certain others can be forecast for several years ahead with a reasonable degree of accuracy (Jewish, Muslim, Christian, for the most part). There are those, however, mostly in the Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Parsi, and Sikh traditions, which are not determined, in many cases, until late spring of the previous year, and obtaining these dates from our various sources, checking on their accuracy as far as we can, and then inserting them into the updated Calendar makes earlier publication extremely difficult.

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Adherents of non-Christian faiths need to work out an acceptable pattern of observance which usually involves a realistic and judicious arrangement with L.E.A.s and other responsible Bodies. In some cases, minority religious communities, i.e. Buddhists — defer the corporate celebration to the weekend closest to the actual festival date. In other traditions, observance of the precise date is 'de rigeur' and often involves services of worship throughout the entire day(s). An attempt has been made to indicate the festivals of major importance by the inclusion of \*\* when appropriate throughout the calendar. One only hopes that a fair and sympathetic solution can be worked out on this matter which has occasioned some contentious publicity in the press during the last year.

With the increasing pressure of personnel and finance in education, it may be necessary to make a radical decision to rationalise the production of this publication in the future. The solution may lie in the direction of furnishing an informative manual on festivals which would have some perennial relevance, over a span of several years, while periodic supplements would cater for the annual contingencies of amendments and moveable dates.

Initiatives like Local Management of Schools (LMS) are obviously making it harder to propagate centralised perspectives on the philosophy any given institution should hold. We in Shap recognise that each individual school, hospital, workplace or whatever needs to accept the importance of the kinds of sensitivities that this calendar represents. Relying on central authorities to purchase and distribute the calendar on behalf of the institutions under their care is no substitute for the separate institutions wanting it themselves. In the end, I suppose, it is only another dimension of the pluralism we aspire to - genuine diversity maintaining a deep interest in the specific identity of others.

Diary publishers, teacher unions and even religious communities themselves gather their information on festivals from this calendar. More and more individual organisations and groups are attempting, here and abroad, to produce their own summary of the information contained herein. They often try to get the information from us before we publish ours and are frustrated by our reluctance and, in some cases inability, to produce information before we can. We do not publish so late in the year just to inconvenience people. It is all to do with securing reliable dates at the earliest possible opportunity.

There is only slight satisfaction in the pirated, lifted and plagiarised versions that are appearing even abroad without permission or proper credit to the Shap Working Party - which puts in all the work into gathering this information into what is probably a unique document.

The considerable contribution made by the Community Relations Commission over the years in fostering a more congenial climate for multicultural understanding in this country, will be appreciated by many of our readers.





## **8. Millennial issues for 2000 CE**

Finally a word about millennial issues. In last year's editorial we stressed that 'New Year takes different forms and is perceived in differing ways in the various traditions. The Western concept of linear time and the teleological associations it carries in its train should not be seen as universal. It would be inappropriate to generalise about the nature of the year and its beginnings when lunar and cyclic traditions are often accompanied by alternative associations and customs.' This is still more true of the millennium, and it is appropriate to draw attention again to the dangers of viewing time through Western eyes alone.

At the same time the year 2000 presupposes dating from a Christian event, no matter how uncertain and suspect the exact timing may be. This point is dealt with in some detail in the current edition of the Shap Journal where a further article on Millennial issues and the Calendar may be found:

### ***Millennial Meditations Peter Woodward (Shap Journal 1999-2000 – Can I Teach Your Religion?)***

The article also contains information on 'Egyptian Origins of the Western Calendar', 'Roman Leap Frog', 'Finding a date for Easter', 'Christmas When?', 'Give us back our missing days!', 'Larger Leap Frogs (the 'leap-century rule')', and 'Atomic Accuracy'. A few excerpts follow:

Our attempts to ascertain dates in advance for important festivals are, as ever, fraught with difficulty, especially in Indian traditions, and the following tentative guidelines for the year 2000 are inevitably subject to confirmation. It seems likely, however, that Rosh Hashana (the Jewish New Year - 5761) will commence on the evening of Friday, 29 September, 2000, with Pesah being celebrated on ?? April; that Eid ul Fitr will be celebrated twice – on 7 January and again on 27 December (with Ramadan commencing on 27 November 2000) and Eid ul Adha on 15 March (subject to the sighting of the new moon), while the Muslim New Year (Al Hijra) 1421 is likely to commence on 5 April.

Other New Years that fall between January and December 2000 include the Bahai' era where the year 157 begins on 21 March (Naw-Ruz), the Buddhist New Year 2544, which commences on various dates in different countries (eg April in Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and February in Tibet), the Ethiopian New Year celebrated by Rastafarians on 11 September, and the Zoroastrian New Year 1379 (Jamshedi Noruz - March 21, according to the Fasli Calendar). It must be stressed that New Year takes different forms and is perceived in differing ways in the various traditions, and that the Western concept of linear time and the teleological associations it carries in its train should not be seen as universal. It would be



inappropriate to generalise about the nature of the year and its beginnings when lunar and cyclic traditions are often accompanied by alternative associations and traditions.

The year 2000 (AD or CE) is clearly of special significance to Christian communities throughout the world. To set it in context though, it is important to realise where it stands in relation to other significant calendars. At the same time it is relevant to make clear that the alternatives CE and BCE for Common Era and Before the Common Era have grown up in the 20th century as alternatives to the Christian terms AD and BC as being acceptable to secularists and people from non-Christian backgrounds.

For instance, 2000 will see the beginning for the Jewish world of the year 5760 AC (Rosh Hashana – Friday evening, September 29th), dating as Jews see it, from the Creation of the world; the year 2544 according to the Buddhist tradition, commencing on various dates in different countries; the year 1420 AH (Al Hijra or Anno Hijrae - April 5th) in the Muslim calendar, dating from the Hijra (the Migration) of the Prophet of Islam from Makkah to Madinah; the year 157 in the Baha'i tradition (Naw-Ruz on March 21st); the Ethiopian New Year as celebrated by Rastafarians on September 11th; the Zoroastrian New Year (Jamshedi No Ruz) celebrated on March 21st according to the Fasli calendar; the Chinese New Year (Yuan Tan) on February 5th; and the year 5119 in the current Maya great cycle.

If this seems rather complicated, please bear in mind that it is in fact a simplification of a much more complex scene, where there are, for instance, three Zoroastrian calendars, one solar and two lunar, and an abundance of Hindu lunar and solar ones, too sophisticated to summarise here.

The millennium is safely over – or at least it is over for those who celebrated it on 1/1/2000 or earlier. Those who take seriously the issue that there was no year nought in Roman counting (see last year's Shap Journal) will logically celebrate on 1/1/2001. No doubt this issue will recur in a hundred years time or thereabouts. Perhaps there will be further articles in the Shap Journal and mention in the Shap Calendar then – who knows? At least it is appropriate that the current Shap Journal, published along with this edition of the Calendar, is focusing on 'Time'.

## **9. Readers' Issues and Influence**

### ***a) Other Notable Days – Pagan; Rasta; etc.***

Another main change this year is to the addition at the foot of the wall chart of a new line with a fresh heading: Some Other Notable Days. In the text of the Calendar booklet there will be an indication that these are National, Secular, Pagan or Other. A number of festivals



have been relocated into this line on the wall chart along the lines of last year's editorial (New Year's Day/Hogmanay, St. Andrew's Day, St. David's Day, St. George's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Remembrance Sunday, the Inter Faith Week of Prayer for World Peace, Holocaust Day, Boxing Day) and a number of new ones have been introduced under the title of Pagan festivals (Samhain (Wiccan New Year) – October 31st; Yule – December 21st; Imbolc – February 2nd; Spring Equinox (Ostara) – March 21st; Beltaine – April 30th; Midsummer Solstice – June 21st; Lughnasadh (Lammas)) – August 1st; and the Autumn Equinox (Mabon) – September 21st). Whether Wicca or Pagan Celebrations should be called National or Secular is itself open to some question. If you have a contribution to make to this debate, we shall be glad to hear from you.

However, little revision has been made to the texts this year, although we have normalised the Pagan entries so that they distinguish between Wiccan and Druid celebrations. This has come about after discussion with our Pagan advisor.

This text is unable to include folk and secular festivals and I have accepted the view of many Christians that, despite the name, Hallowe'en falls into one of these categories.

This year's calendar sees a change to our established format. The aim is to make the calendar as accessible as possible to our users whilst ensuring we provide an interesting and modern layout. Much of the information we provide about festivals remains the same but there have been revisions, in particular to the Pagan entries. These have been made in discussion with the Pagan Federation.

#### ***b) Days Off for 'Special Events'***

In addition to the desire to know the date of an actual festival, it has also been found useful to be aware that religious adherents may desire some special concessions or leave of absence to observe appropriate traditional celebrations on certain days.

On similar lines there has been renewed interest in pressurising the Working Party to 'short list' a number of major festivals in each religious tradition that would help schools, colleges, LEAs, teachers associations and employers to determine closures or to ratify absences. The Working Party has expressed serious doubts as to whether it should accept a role in this issue. It feels the complexity of relating what is 'major' and what is 'minor' in one tradition (where these terms may already be used) to others where celebration is less obligatory or occurs mostly at weekends, would require a judgement of Solomon. We also felt that it is for individual communities to determine or to indicate for themselves what is definitive for them, and of course in some traditions there is no single central body that can rule on this for the whole of their community.

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This issue has, however, been raised again in a more specific manner, and the Working Party has been approached to see if it could draft a 'Basic English' type of short list, on which representatives of the different traditions might be asked to comment, in an attempt to ascertain if there is any feasible chance of developing a proposal that could be put, eg, to the RE Council or the World Congress of Faiths or the Standing Conference on Inter Faith Dialogue in Education. Would it, for instance, be possible to invite each religious tradition to nominate two religious celebrations on which it 'would be reasonable to expect pupils, students and teachers of that tradition to be excused attendance from school or college for the first day of the festival'? The question of whether staff absence would be with or without pay would of course constitute a further tricky complication, and even more so if such a list were extended to other forms of employment!

The issue raised by the NUT involves further issues. Does a Working Party like Shap have the right to determine which festivals are 'essential' or should that decision be made by the faiths themselves, and if so by which bodies? Should there be a standard number in each faith or should the concerns of the Seventh Day Adventists or of Orthodox Jews for a wider number than others seem likely to request be given favourable consideration? The Shap Calendar is already regarded as 'gospel' by one Local Authority which only saw its way to give a teacher the day 'off' for Orthodox Easter if the festival was referred to in the Shap Calendar. Is an extension of this desirable or even possible, and could/should it also be further extended to clarify which pilgrimages are of an 'essential or obligatory nature'? This too will be discussed by the Working Party in July. Watch this space . . .

The Working Party has yet to discuss the question in a form as specific as this. But to spark off a vehement debate, to which you are all invited to contribute, a personal first draft from one of the editors might include:

- Anniversary of the Birth of Baha'u'llah, Anniversary of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah, Vaisakhi, Parinirvana,
- Christmas, Easter,
- Birthday of Haile Selassie I, Ethiopian New Year's Day,
- Eid ul Fitr, Eid ul Adha,
- Yom Kippur, Pesah,
- Divali, Dussehra,
- Paryushana Parva, Mahavira Jayanti,
- Baisakhi, the Birthday of Guru Nanak, Farvardigan, Khordad Sal.





### ***c) Yom Ha'Atzmaut***

It is always helpful when issues are raised by our readers, and two questions requiring careful thought have emerged this year. The Jewish Chronicle has queried the exclusion of Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day, from our pages, whereas it was included until the last few years. And the Birmingham Branch of the National Union of Teachers has asked the Working Party to clarify which festivals are 'essential' for observance by adherents and so will qualify for time off from school for pupils and teachers – and possibly with pay in the latter case.

The issue in the first case revolves around the nature of the Calendar, where the focus is principally upon religious festivals. Can an Independence Day celebration be seen as religious, or does the inclusion of Yom Ha'atzmaut open the doors to a range of secular celebrations or nationalist observances which lie beyond our brief? The description in the Shap book *Festivals in World Religions* clearly includes a number of religious rituals and observances. Could this be seen as an especially relevant case, or is the issue of Israeli independence too political a subject for inclusion here? The question will be debated at the full meeting of the Working Party in July and a decision will be recorded here for the following year.

A third issue which has been raised by our readers is that of Yom Ha'atzma'ut, a celebration held by many Jews to mark the anniversary of the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948. The Working Party has twice debated the question of whether this should be reinstated in the Calendar – it was included for many years but was omitted some three or four years ago when the task of compiling the Calendar was handed over to a team rather than, as previously, a single individual. The issue is particularly relevant at present since a number of Arab communities in Israel, Christian as well as Muslim, have objected strongly to various aspects of the celebration and have staged a series of protests and riots against its celebration there. It is, however, a celebration of some religious significance in addition to its political importance, and a liturgy of prayers and cultural rituals has evolved that emphasise the religious aspect of its nature. It is the development of this liturgical aspect that principally led the Working Party to agree to renew its inclusion in the Calendar, and readers may well be interested to read the relevant paragraphs on page 107 of the current edition of the Shap book *Festivals in World Religions* (pages 206-207 in the first edition).

The latter, known as Yom Ha'atzma'ut, has caused a storm within Jewish and pro Israeli communities, in the first place because, having featured it for some years, we chose to delete it from the Calendar as being controversial and political; secondly because when we were pressurised to reintroduce it we included a phrase drawing attention to the fact that



'Many Arab voices, both Christian and Muslim, are currently raised in protest in Israel against its celebration'.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews has asked us to include the festival in our Calendar without this latter sentence or other critical comment. They argue that for Jews this is a religious celebration with a form of words that constitutes a liturgy; that Jews should determine whether or no it is appropriate to include it; that no other festival described in the Calendar receives critical or evaluative comment; and that whether it features alongside other Jewish celebrations or in the 'Some Other Notable Festivals' row, it should be included without further comment.

Against this it has been argued that this is an essentially political day and so has no place in a Calendar of Religious Festivals, that its inclusion opens the way for other political and Independence Day celebrations to be listed, and that the violent rioting that attaches to it in Israel each year suggest its inclusion must be accompanied with some comment about these events and the controversial nature of its role in our Calendar.

The Calendar sub-group and the Shap Working Party as a whole have now considered this issue on a number of occasions and the day is featured in the Jewish row without further comment for the coming year, pending further debate. Your comments on the issue are invited.

#### ***d) Holocaust Day***

Then there is the introduction in January 2000 of what has become known as National Holocaust Day. This is totally separate and different from Yom Hashoah, the Jewish celebration that is an annual reminder of Jewish (and other) sufferings in the second world war. Its basis is more political than religious, and its intention is to embrace all aspects of British community life in its opposition to racism and fascism, and to focus on other examples of recent persecution as well as on that carried out by the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s. It is in fact closely comparable to similar happenings in a number of other countries and might perhaps be better designated as International Holocaust Day. Our Working Party debated at its meeting in December 2000 the issue of whether we should include the Day in our Calendar in the light of its importance to schools and colleges. This raised the wider issue of whether we should have a section in our wall chart for National events. At the moment our decision is that it would be inappropriate to include a political celebration in a Calendar of religious festivals, but comment and contribution is invited, especially as a further innovation this year is to include the Calendar Editorial in the annual Shap Journal, where it may well evoke further correspondence.



***e) Individual Religious Traditions:***

***Festivals in some Indian traditions***

The number of days in the year that have religious significance presents a major challenge for the compilers of any multi-faith calendar. Moreover, within most faith communities there are celebrations and commemorations that are specific to distinct cultural or religious groupings. Among Hindus, for example, millions may celebrate the birth anniversary of a number of spiritual leaders who are unknown to millions of other Hindus. For this reason the Shap calendar normally includes only the dates for major Hindu festivals - those which all or most Hindu communities celebrate. In the UK another factor has also been taken into account in making our selection for the Shap calendar: i.e festivals which are regularly celebrated and are open to public view. Accordingly, Ratha Yatra, a festival celebrated in Puri in the Indian state of Orissa and unknown in other parts of India, is included because of its high profile among UK Hindus. Although the Ratha Yatra celebrations in London are organised by a single, specific grouping, (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)), they draw participants from a wider Hindu spectrum.

Over recent decades the number of South Indian / Sri Lankan Hindus in the UK has grown, in relation to the longer settled communities of north Indian background, and it is possible that, for this reason, the calendar's editorial team may need to consider including other of their festivals and dates in the future.

Not only are Hindu festivals very numerous but the ways in which their names are represented in the roman alphabet are also diverse. The challenge faced by authors writing in English on Hindu issues is complex for a number of reasons:

(a) the roman alphabet is NOT used with phonetic consistency in English (whereas Indic languages are written phonetically in the scripts concerned); one has only to consider the difficulties that native users have on first reading/hearing some English place names, or the range of possible pronunciations for 'ough', or the multitude of homophones (such as 'foresight', 'Forsyte', 'insight' and 'incite') to perceive the nature of this problem;

(b) Indian languages and their alphabets include a number of distinctions that are not made in English (between 'd' and 'dh', for instance and between 'd' and 't' pronounced with the tip of the tongue in different positions on the palate); in fact, the conventions of scholars of Indian languages (which carefully represent each of these consonants) often diverge from English spellings that are now in widespread use; and in many cases the popular forms are less likely to be mispronounced by readers who are unfamiliar with the language concerned than are the scholarly transliterations (especially when these have been stripped of their diacritic marks, which are so off-putting to the 'lay' reader).

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(c) vowels too present problems! On seeing an 'a', readers often pronounce it like the 'a' in 'far', whereas in the Indic word concerned it may be so 'short' as to be almost inaudible. English speakers are unlikely to know that speakers of Hindi will pronounce 'Rama' as 'Ram' in e.g. the name of his birthday, 'Ramanavami'/'Ramnavmi', whereas in 'Raksha Bandhan'/'Raksha Bandhana' the only long 'a' ('a' as in 'far') is the second one in 'Raksha'. To give another example, in 'Ratha Yatra', the only long 'a' is the first one in 'Yatra'. ('Ratha can sound very like the English word 'rut'.)

It will be clear from the above that the editors of the Shap calendar have felt forced to use their own judgement in the spellings we have adopted in a variety of cases, even at some risk of being less consistent than we would ideally wish; and that there are good reasons for these inconsistencies, whether they be within this calendar or between transliterations in this calendar and the spellings that may be found in other contexts.

It is additionally not only the spelling of a festival but also its name that may vary, and indeed these may well change over a period of time. So the autumn festival of lights is both 'Divali' and 'Deepavali' (Dipavali). Both names invoke the little wick light ('diva'/'deep'). However, in recent years users of the calendar will have noticed that the festival also has a new name in the Sikh calendar. This is 'Bandi Chhor Divas', literally the day ('divas') when prisoners ('bandi') were freed ('chhor'). The new name makes the point that it happened to be on the day of the (Hindu) Divali festival that the Sikhs' sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, was released from gaol (though only on condition that a number of Hindu rajas would be released at the same time.)

### **Sikh**

In a break with previous tradition all Sikh dates too (apart from Guru Nanak's Birthday, Hola Mohalla and Bandi Chhor Divas i.e. Divali) are now set (in the Nanakshahi calendar) to conform with the Gregorian calendar

We have also received requests asking us to include a number of Namdhari Sikh festivals and some further Ismaili ones also. You will find therefore that there is some change to the material in Our Calendar booklet relating to Basant (Vasanta Panchami) and to Vaisakhi, and some additional material for Hola Mohalla/Mahalla and Asu da Mela. Ismaili material is still awaited and may not feature until next year's edition.

There is, at last, some important news about changes in the determination of Sikh festival dates. After years of discussion, the Nanakshahi calendar came into effect at Vaisakhi, 2003. This calendar was designed by a Canadian Sikh, Pal Singh Purewal. It means that the majority of Sikh dates will now be constant from year to year by reference to the Gregorian (i.e. secular) calendar. Previously Sikh dates were determined by the (Hindu) Bikrami





calendar. The dates of three festivals, Hola Maholla, Bandhi Chhor Divas (i.e. Divali) and the Birthday of Guru Nanak will continue to be set on the basis of this older calendar. It is possible that some Sikh organisations may continue to observe other dates too, according to the older calendar. This year's Shap calendar also takes into account for the first time the additional celebrations of the Namdhari Sikhs, one particular stream within the Sikh community.

After much deliberation the Sikh community worldwide has decided to fix most of the dates that Sikhs observe on a permanent basis, and the dates for all but one of the Sikh festivals shown here have been determined in Amritsar and are likely to remain the same from year to year. The exception is the Birthday of Guru Nanak, which is still undecided, but is likely to be known by the time of next year's Calendar.

It is additionally not only the spelling of a festival but also its name that may vary, and indeed these may well change over a period of time. So the autumn festival of lights is both 'Divali' and Deepavali' (Dipavali). Both names invoke the little wick light ('diva'/'deep'). However, in recent years users of the calendar will have noticed that the festival also has a new name in the Sikh calendar. This is 'Bandi Chhor Divas', literally the day ('divas') when prisoners ('bandi') were freed ('chhor'). The new name makes the point that it happened to be on the day of the (Hindu) Divali festival that the Sikhs' sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, was released from gaol (though only on condition that a number of Hindu rajas would be released at the same time.)

This name-change highlights another range of complexities with which some users of the calendar may be unfamiliar. One is the fact that calendars record historical relationships between faith communities, even when from their titles they seem to be apparently distinct. Examples could include the linked, albeit uneasy, connections between Samhain, Hallowe'en and All Saints' Day, or between Pesach and Maundy Thursday, for example.) It would be nice to be able to explain, accordingly, that Sikhs have now adopted a name that conveys the particular significance of Divali for their community. (Indeed Bandi Chhor Divas is the name that appears on the Nanakshahi calendar which was authorised in 2003 for use among Sikhs, in place of the Bikrami calendar which they shared with Punjabi (and many other) Hindus.) However, not only do the majority of Sikhs not use the new name but many have probably not yet come across it, and there is increasing disagreement among influential Sikh bodies over which calendar to follow.

(As this paragraph is being written (January 2010) discussions are underway in Amritsar in the Punjab about closing the gap between the Nanakshahi calendar and the Bikrami calendar. This would mean that – officially, as well as widely in continuing practice – Sikh dates would no longer be constant alongside the Gregorian calendar (in general use



worldwide) but would correspond to the Bikrami calendar and would change (in Gregorian terms) from year to year.

### **Muslim**

An interesting byline here is a statement in one particular Muslim Calendar, only recently received, to the effect that "ISLAMIC DATES BEGIN AT SUNSET THE PRECEDING EVENING". Whether this relates to all Muslim festivals or only to some needs to be clarified. While Muslim festival dates, which are essentially lunar, normally move back through the year by ten or eleven days each solar year, it is clear from our experience in determining Muslim dates a year ago that there is considerable diversity between dates given in various Muslim Calendars and in different parts of the world. Here again, clarity and uniformity are not easy to achieve.

In the wide ranging field of Islam our text for all Muslim festivals has been reviewed and in some cases modified, the phraseology for Ashura has been revised, a note has been added about Shia observance of Lailat-ul-Bara'h (the Night of Forgiveness) which coincides with the birthday of the 12th Imam, and a further Shia commemoration, Eid ul Ghadeer (the Festival of the Pool), has been introduced, along with explanatory text produced with the help of members of Shia communities in London (see page xxx).

Among Sunni Muslims the practice of celebrating the birthday of the Prophet arose several centuries after his lifetime and has always been controversial amongst Sunni scholars. There are two aspects to the controversy, first whether it is permissible to celebrate the event, and secondly, amongst those who believe it is permissible, how it should be celebrated. Those who are against celebrating this day regard it as an unacceptable innovation having no basis in the Qur'an or in the teaching or practice of the Prophet. Among scholars who are happy that the day should be marked there is concern that there should be no un-Islamic aspects of the celebration. In spite of these concerns this day is widely celebrated within the Muslim world and is a public holiday in most Muslim countries. We are accordingly retaining its place in our Calendar, but will welcome comment from readers about its inclusion.

Whilst Muslim historians are unanimous in their understanding that the twelfth of the month Rabi' Al-Awwal was the day of the death of the Prophet, there is less certainty as to the precise day of his birth.

Ithna Asheri (12 Imam) Shia Muslims celebrate the birthday of the Prophet five days later than Sunnis on Rabi' Al-Awwal 17. This date also coincides with the birthday of the 6th Shia Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq.

### **Christian**

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In response to a number of letters from various Sources, it has been decided to augment the details describing Christian festivals — the point being taken that, although we are dealing here with the religious ‘host culture’ in Britain, the need for such information cannot be overlooked. At any rate one hopes the selection of Christian festivals will prove acceptable while recognising the impossibility of including all the religious customs which obtain particularly in minority denominations.

It is worth referring again this year to changes made by the Roman Catholic Church in July 2006 to the dating of three of the Holy Days of Obligation within that tradition. The celebration of Epiphany, Ascension and Corpus Christi have transferred, from their hitherto normal weekday celebration, to the nearest Sunday. The entries in this 2008 calendar show this difference, although this year Epiphany falls on a Sunday, therefore, the Roman Catholic Tradition, Anglican and Western non-catholic traditions will all celebrate on the same day.

The 2007 Calendar reflects changes made by the Roman Catholic Church in July 2006 to the dating of three of the Holy Days of Obligation within that tradition. The celebration of Epiphany, Ascension and Corpus Christi have transferred, from their hitherto normal weekday celebration to the nearest Sunday. The entries in the calendar show this difference. At the time of going to press there was no indication that the Anglican Church would follow suit.

In similar vein there are changes afoot in connection with the relation of Orthodox Easter to Western celebrations of the festival, and it is likely that the two will be celebrated on the same date in future years.

A fresh addition to the Calendar is the Women’s World Day of Prayer, and the relocation of National Saints’ Days to the line of Christian festivals, where they are judged to be more appropriate.

The text for Holy week has also been amended to reflect a more accurate understanding of Christian belief about Jesus. Discussion with colleagues and our advisers has brought about the addition of more information about some festivals and changes to the dating of one or two minor festivals.

### **Zoroastrian**

While some are seeking simplification, others are living with complexity. The observance of Zoroastrian dates is particularly complex since there are three Parsi Calendars in use (Shenshai, Qadimi and Fasli), one of which is fixed and two where the year recedes by one day each four years by contrast to the Gregorian Calendar (see Pp 131-132 of the new edition of the Shap book *Festivals in World Religions* for detail). For the time being, our

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custom of including in the Shap Calendar five Zoroastrian festivals (Jamshedi Noruz, Zartusht-No-Diso, Farvardigan, No Ruz and Khordad Sal) will continue.

At the same time our attention has been drawn by the Zoroastrian community in London to the fact that there are other significant festivals which include Jashan-E Sadeh, a Fasli festival to celebrate the discovery of Fire (January 30th, 2000), Jashan-E-Tiragan/ Maidyoishema Ghambar, a Fasli mid-summer festival (solstice) linked to the creation of Water (August 22nd 1999, August 21st 2000), and Jashan-E-Mehergan, a Fasli festival to celebrate the autumn equinox, which is dedicated to the 'Guardian Protector' Divinity (Mithra), protector of the Sun, and ensures Justice (October 2nd, 1999 and 2000). In each of these cases Mr. M. Deboo of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe invites guests from other faiths to visit Zoroastrian House, 88 Compayne Gardens, London NW6 3RU by prior arrangement to witness a Zarathustrian religious ceremony. He may be contacted to arrange an invitation on 0171 328 6018 or by Fax to 0171 625 1685. Mr Deboo can also provide a still more complete list of Zoroastrian festivals on request.

In the field of Zoroastrian studies we have received welcome support from the organisation 'Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe Incorporated' - ZTFE for short - and have increased the number of their celebrations listed to ten, with splendid help from Malcolm M. Deboo, the President of ZTFE. For further information contact their iconic Centre at the 'Zoroastrian Centre for Europe', 440 Alexandra Avenue, Harrow, HA2 9TL (secretary@ztfec.com , or www.ztfec.com ).

It may be helpful to show here the full list of Zoroastrian festivals now included, especially as the national community operates with two different calendars, which results in four of these festivals being celebrated twice, on widely different dates.

- Fravardigan / Muktrad (Iranian Zoroastrian and Parsee Zoroastrian - Shenshai)
- Jamsheedi NoRuz (Iranian Zoroastrian New Year) and Shenshai Navroze (Parsee New Year)
- Khordad Sal (Iranian Zoroastrian) and Khordad Sal (Shenshai)
- Zartosht no diso (Iranian Zoroastrian) and Zartosht no diso (Shenshai)
- Jashn-e Sadeh (Iranian Zoroastrian)
- Ava mah parab (Shenshai)
- Adar mah parab (Shenshai)
- Jashn-e Tirgan (Iranian Zoroastrian)
- Fravardin mah parab (Shenshai)





- Jashn-e Mehergan (Iranian Zoroastrian)

In antiquity Iran followed a calendar of twelve months, each of 30 days, but they celebrated their New Year on the vernal equinox. The origins of the traditional Zoroastrian religious calendar lie in the second century CE when, by imperial decree, Iran adopted a 365 day calendar instead of the previous 360 day calendar. This new calendar did not account for the quarter day that relates to the modern Leap Year. To ensure that NoRuz, the New Year festival, fell on the vernal equinox, an additional 30 day month used to be added every 120 years by the Zoroastrians in Iran.

Following the Arab conquest of Iran, which brought with it religious and political turbulence, the Zoroastrians overlooked the need to add the extra month, and still today the traditional Parsee Zoroastrian calendar (Shenshai) drifts one day back every four years, since it does not account for the leap year. The modern Iranian Zoroastrian calendar, which is in use today, accounts for the leap year day and has fixed dates which remain constant. Out of loyalty to tradition, many Parsee Zoroastrians felt unwilling to adopt the new leap year calendar, because it reminds them of when Iran was once a Zoroastrian nation. As a consequence the UK Zoroastrian community has ended up with the new year starting on two different days in relation to the Gregorian calendar, one on the vernal equinox around 21st March and the other in mid August.

#### **10. Reliability - Use of 'helpers' – Thoroughness of research**

A strength of Shap's calendar is that dates are checked with authoritative sources each year; but each year also brings new questions, challenges and decisions – so much so that in recent years the editors have offered a commentary on these in their editorial notes. It is this attention to detail which contributes to the authenticity and – we hope - reliability of the calendar.

As ever the Editor would like to acknowledge the assistance afforded by a number of consultants who faithfully offer advice on moveable dates as they occur annually. In order to expedite the editorial process, a special meeting of local religious community representatives was held at the R.E. Centre on Tuesday, 19th May 1981, an innovation which it is hoped might become an annual event. Arising from our deliberations, several amendments and deletions have been made in the calendar, as will be evidenced in this edition. Additionally, note has been taken of a fair range of conscientious correspondence from several sources which has enabled us to make suitable adaptation to the text of the previous calendar. For instance, mention might be made of the fact that in the case of Muslim festivals, the dates given are only approximate since precise timing can only be



determined within a few days of the actual event. Information on this point can be obtained from the Islamic Cultural Centre (London).

### **11. The Calendar and the Shap Book; The Wallchart and the Pictorial Calendar**

Reference ought to be made to Shap's 'Festivals in World Religions' (to be published in 1985) for a greater understanding of the relative importance within a given tradition of any single event.

With the forthcoming publication of Shap's major new book, 'Festivals in World Religions', the time has obviously come for a complete revision of this calendar which has been found so valuable in schools, industry and the social services over the last ten years or so. As a result the text has been completely revised. The selection of festivals and comments about them is largely based on the much more comprehensive volume which will complement this calendar. In its reworked form, the words are all entirely mine.

Newer religions vie with older ones for full recognition. I am conscious, for example, that the Rastafarian community is as yet unrepresented in these pages.

The success of the calendar led Shap to produce a major book, *Festivals in World Religions* (Brown ed.1986; Woodward et al eds.1998); calendar notes are cross referenced to this.

Secondly, attention has been drawn to the need for a Calendar of World Religions and their Festivals, illustrated with photographs or reproductions of paintings, etc. It would be helpful to us to know how many of you would find such a tool of use in your work. And similarly we would find it helpful to have feedback from our readers as to the use made of the wallchart in its larger and smaller formats, and whether these are really of value to centres of education and other places of work.

The Illustrated Calendar of Festivals we mentioned last year is now a reality and you will find on page 24 information about its appearance, cost and distribution. We suspect many of you will find it a valuable adjunct to the existing Calendar and wall charts.

Additionally, 2008 will see our fifth pictorial calendar – a popular innovation offering 12 full colour pictures, designed to be a resource for RE beyond the lifespan of the calendar itself.

The Festivals wallchart has also been modified in a number of minor respects, partly to achieve greater clarity and partly in deference to a number of important requests from within religious traditions. These affect the symbols used in the Baha'i, Jain, Jewish and Rastafarian faiths, and the colouring and layout of the rows and columns.



## **12. The Second 40 Years ...**

The Calendar is an ongoing, developing institution that has emerged from the childhood of its primary use in the school situation to its current adolescence where hospital service and prison, commerce

and industry, leisure services and youth organisations are also making use of its facilities; but the prime of its life is still to come and its full impact in a pluralistic situation lies ahead, when it may well help further to erect the edifice of a genuinely tolerant, multi-cultural society as the natural pattern of life in this country.

If readiness for change is seen as a sign of good health, the Shap Calendar is clearly in pristine condition! Members of the team producing it are all pulling their considerable weight, there are new materials on two underrepresented traditions (Shia and Zoroastrian), tricky decisions have been made about the spelling of technical terms in Asian traditions and which festivals to include/exclude, and the three column experimental format of the last two years has been transformed into a single column version to assist usage, editing and accuracy.

That apart, the important things remain the same: the Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals, first produced at Borough Road College, Isleworth, in 1969 – over 40 years ago – seeks to serve the UK community by providing thoroughly researched, incredibly accurate, and delightfully interesting and insightful data about festivals in all the world's major religions. It is valued in a wide range of useful spheres, educational, social, medical, commercial, and so on. Please use it regularly and recommend it to others – or contact us with challenges to modify it, where you know of areas that still need improvement.