



Editorial

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'Food is the new fur for the celebrity with a conscience,' proclaims an *Observer* headline. Like the environment, our topic last year, food is rarely out of the news and is increasingly an area of moral concern. The physiological need for food is something we all share of course, but food is also far more than that: it has huge cultural and social significance – we share food with friends and family, there are all kinds of conventions and rules around food, we mark special occasions with it.

The questions we invited our contributors to consider included: What beliefs and values and injunctions about food does your community have? Why do people fast? Why vegetarianism? What and how do you celebrate with food? How do you cater for a mixed faith gathering? Does food bring people together or emphasise separation and difference? We didn't of course expect all our contributors to answer all these questions, but we have gathered together some fascinating responses from a stimulating Shap mix of religious and belief perspectives, and from a range of personal and academic voices. As in previous issues, we include some of the religions, beliefs and denominations that do not always feature in Religious Education textbooks or syllabuses and therefore may be less well understood – so there are contributions from Zoroastrian, Bahá'í, Humanist and Pagan writers and from an Orthodox Christian. And, as last year, we list some extra web-resources on our topic in a separate article.

We found it fascinating that some religious food traditions are so eclectic and that such diverse contributors share so much; unexpected commonalities and alliances emerge when you read all the articles – which, even in this new on-line format, is well worth doing. For example: our Pagan contributor found little to criticise in the religious slaughter described by Jewish and Muslim contributors; writers from various traditions offer a range of arguments in favour of fasting; there is support for vegetarianism from very diverse sources; and feasting and sharing food, given the means and a reason to celebrate, seem to be almost universal.

Shap is an independent charity committed to the provision of accurate information for those who want to know more about the world's religions and beliefs. We have made some minor editorial decisions, but we need to say, as always, that the transliteration of specialist terms and the opinions expressed in the articles are those of the writers themselves, not of the Shap working party (which is almost as diverse as our contributors). This year, for the first time, the journal is published directly on the Shap website, where we hope it will reach a wide readership. Next year's e-journal will focus on interfaith issues, and offers of contributions are welcome.

We thank all our contributors and Peggy Morgan who proof-read this year's articles, as well as the many members of the Shap Working Party who work so hard to produce the other, highly recommended, Shap resources which can be found or purchased elsewhere on this website: Lesley Prior and Farley Marsh for their teaching resources on this year's topic for Key Stages 1 and 2, as well as last year's [Key Stage 1 resource 'What should we eat and why?'](#); Peter Woodward, Roger Howarth, Eleanor Nesbitt, Clive Lawton, Roger Butler and Wendy Dossett, who produce the Shap Calendar and editorial notes; and Anne Krisman and David Rose who produce the pictorial calendar. Finally, we are, as ever, very grateful to Mike Berry, Shap's administrator, for his efficient and cheerful management of the Shap office.