

## Is the struggle for equality a spiritual or practical matter? (7-14 years)

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### Intro for teachers

This is a lesson asking an **ethical** question. Ethics is a branch of philosophy focussed on what can be said to be right and wrong, fair and just.

The enquiry question students will answer is an ethical question: it is about how and why people try to make the world more equal. In this lesson the focus is on wealth inequality, seen through the issue of hunger.

To explore the ethical question the Sikh langar and Trussel Trust charity are used as case studies. The social issue is poverty, hunger and the need for food banks. Students will be engaged in ethical thinking. They will answer the ethical question at the end of the lesson, using these case studies and their own analysis.

### Learning Outcomes (KS3)

#### Emerging

- Explain how the langar is an example of Sikh sewa
- Explain how one action of the Trussell Trust meets their ethical aims

#### Expected

- Explain the ethical principle behind langar and sewa in Sikhism
- Explain the ethical principle behind the work of the Trussell Trust
- Using examples, compare the practical work done by religious and non-religious groups and suggest similarities or differences.
- Offer a supported answer to the question: Is the struggle for equality a spiritual or practical matter?

#### Exceeding

- Offer a supported answer to the question of whether there is a difference between religious and non-religious ethical inspirations to fight inequality
- Using the information studied, give a view as to whether altruism exists or not and why

### Learning activities

**Starter:** start by introducing ways British Sikhs are adapting the duty of *langar* to current situations.

This video shows Ravi Singh, founder of Khalsa Aid, organizing deliveries of home-made food from Bradford to the flooded areas of Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire in 2015:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jNTegoLAR0>

This video shows the charity Sikh Welfare Awareness Team (SWAT) giving hot meals to those homeless on the streets of London, as well as many others struggling to cope:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZmYx5DYGzc>

If you can't access these videos on You Tube try searching for other similar events, using search terms such as 'langar', 'street kitchen', 'homeless', 'Sikhs welfare awareness team (SWAT)'. Find videos which show *langar* on the streets or outside Sikh religious settings.

As students watch ask them to note

- a) Any mention of religious teachings relating to *langar*
- b) All the ways people are being helped

Listen to answers. Talk about what seems to be inspiring Sikhs to give their time, skills and money. How far do Sikhs seem to be inspired by their religion, and how far by a general desire to help others?

### Activity 1: What is the *langar*?

After the starter activity, challenge students to define 'langar'.

Here is the definition, share after the students' discussion:

The word 'langar' is a Punjabi word meaning 'community kitchen'.  
The langar is a meal served and eaten together in the Gurdwara, the Sikh place of worship.  
All are welcome to the langar, Sikhs and non-Sikhs. The food is vegetarian or vegan so everyone can eat it.  
The langar was founded by Guru Nanak in around 1500 CE. Rich and poor, men and women, people from different groups and of different statuses were all invited to eat together. This was to show clearly that all people are equal.  
Today the langar happens at the end of the service in the Gurdwara.

Talk about the langar, has anyone in the class been to one? Find images of *langars* in the UK and around the world, such as the huge kitchens in Amritsar, which feeds 50,000 hot meals a day.

Discuss why eating together symbolizes equality.

### Activity 2: Sewa: service to others

Bring a sweet treat to class, such as a bag of sweets or packet of biscuits. Give a treat to half the class and ask them to choose someone to give it to. The only rule is they cannot choose their best friend. Ask them to reflect on how it felt to give, and how the other half felt to receive. Give the other half of the class a treat so it is even!

Learn about 'sewa'; the principle of service to others in Sikhism. Define 'sewa' as 'selfless service'. Discuss the 'selfless' part of this phrase, what do students think 'selfless' means? Can students give examples of selfless service to others? Below is further information about the principle of sewa:

#### Sewa

Sewa, or selfless service, means supporting or giving to others with no expectation of reward. It is a central Sikh principle, seen as a religious duty for Sikhs.  
Sewa can involve contributing to the community and Gurdwara, or wider work in education or charitable projects.

'Sewa' is a Sanskrit word meaning 'service' and refers to the duty to support and care for the vulnerable and needy in society. The concept is present in a number of religious traditions which emerged in the Indian subcontinent including Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism.

Ask the class for examples of selfless service, whether through charities they are aware of, a person they have learned about, or someone they know personally. Make a list of the board.

Look at this list- how many examples are associated with a religion? How many examples are not associated with a religion? How many religions are noted?

Give groups time to discuss this question: *is 'selfless service' a religious principle?*

### Activity 3: Is altruism possible?

Ask students to talk to their partners about a good act they have done recently. How did they help another person, and what did it feel like to do this act? Discuss as a class whether being good, kind or generous has its own reward.

Define 'Altruism' using the notes below:

#### Altruism

From the Latin *alteri*, meaning 'other people'. The word 'altruism' was first coined by philosopher Auguste Comte, meant to denote the opposite of 'egoism', or selfishness. Altruism describes a concern for other people.

Today the word altruism describes the support of others, or acting for the benefit of others, with no corresponding reward or benefit for oneself. This might be in giving time, money, practical or emotional support or expertise.

In biology social animals are seen to act for the good of the pack, such as by taking risks to protect young or sharing food.

Psychologists question whether 'true' altruism exists because there is usually some benefit, whether social approval, loyalty and gratitude, or a personal sense of wellbeing.

Ask students to discuss whether they think 'true' altruism exists: can they think of an example where someone is disadvantaged for the sake of others, and receives no social, emotional or personal reward.

In conversation link with religious ethics, such as *sewā*. Does such a thing as true altruism exist in religion as in society?

### Activity 4: Wealth inequality

We will consider the work of a well-known charity that supports those in food poverty in the UK: The Trussell Trust.

<https://www.trusselltrust.org/>

Go through the website to get a sense of what this charity does and why. There are videos to watch and facts and figures about food poverty in the UK. Either scroll through some pages with the class, or take screen shots in advance for your PPT.

Make notes of the information gleaned from the website, such as by answering the following questions:

- a) How many people are in food poverty in the UK?
- b) Why do people slip into food poverty?

- c) How does the Trussell Trust try to help?
- d) What does the Trussell trust see as solutions to food poverty?

Ask groups to discuss what seems to inspire this charity and its volunteers. Is this an example of selfless service?

**Activity 5: Selfless service: what is the inspiration?**

Read this article about the *langar*, *sewa* and Sikh ethics in modern Britain:

<http://theconversation.com/from-the-temple-to-the-street-how-sikh-kitchens-are-becoming-the-new-food-banks-44611>

Give out highlighters, ask groups to highlight and then record in a table, these categories:

	What do they do?	Why do they do it?
Sikh Langar		
Trussell Trust		

Complete the table using notes from the above discussion about the Trussell Trust.

**Activity 6: *Is the struggle for equality a spiritual or practical matter?***

Students will now answer this question and present their answers to the class. If you like, break down the question in advance, considering such elements as:

- What religious teachings encourage people to fight for equality?
- What non-religious ethical principles encourage people to fight for equality?
- Is there a difference between religious and ethical inspiration to fight for equality?
- What causes food poverty, what are possible solutions?
- Are religious and non-religious answers to food poverty the same or different?
- Is there practical work done by religious and non-religious groups to tackle food poverty the same or different?

Students should provide an answer to the question using elements of the case studies (Sikh langar and Trussell Trust) as evidence to base their answer on. They should explain their answer.

Students can give a presentation or create one page of A4 as a written answer.