

What the langar is used for

The langar is a place for sharing food and being part of a community.

Q1. What are two purposes for the langar?

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Q2. Who cooks and serves the food in the langar?

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Q3. Who can eat in the langar?

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Q4. (i) Sikhs eat a meal in the langar after worship. What is this meal called?

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(ii) What are two reasons for eating this meal?

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Q5. Why is the food in the langar vegetarian?

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Answers

1. It is a charity and a part of worship.
2. Volunteers.
3. Anyone.
4. (i) Pangat.
(ii) Sharing food helps people to understand each other; it creates a feeling of friendship and equality; it builds a strong community.
5. So anyone can eat it.

Lesson objectives

- ▶ To show how the langar is used as a form of charitable giving.
- ▶ To show how the langar is used as a type of worship.
- ▶ To show how the langar demonstrates some of the key beliefs of Sikhism.

Lesson outcomes

- ▶ The children know Sikhs give time and money to run the langar as a form of charity.
- ▶ The children know that eating in the langar after worship is part of the worship service.
- ▶ The children understand that key Sikh beliefs such as equality and community are demonstrated in the langar.

Teaching notes

Langar is a Persian word meaning “alms house” and the tradition of the alms house was common in Persia and Moghul India as a public kitchen kept by the rich and used to feed the needy – it was a type of social service. However, in the alms houses, people were separated by caste and religion, with the highest castes getting the best food.

The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, began the tradition of the langar partly as a protest against the inequities of the caste system.

Originally, Guru Nanak established the langar to feed the many followers who came to see him. He made a habit of insisting that anyone who wanted to see him had to first eat a shared meal in the langar, in order to experience the equality of eating with other castes and faiths. Later, it was declared that every gurdwara must have a langar and that it should be ready to serve anyone who comes, at any time.

Non-Sikhs were always welcome, and the Sikh langar became an important charitable institution. However, the langar is more than that. The Sikh langar is designed to emphasise the idea of equality, which is a key belief of Sikhism. This is why people eat sitting on the floor (so no one is higher than anyone else) in a line (so no one is in front and so all the ‘castes’ are mixed together). The langar also embodies the idea of earning your living by honest means and then sharing it with others, another key tenet of Sikhism.

Every Sikh is expected to help in maintaining the langar, by either contributing money, food or time. While cooking, serving or cleaning in the langar, many Sikhs recite prayers or meditate on the meaning of service (sewa).

Complementary work

The children could use secondary sources to find out about types of Punjabi food often served in the langar.

Resources

Information about Punjabi food. See: www.punjabi.net; www.dawaat.com.