

Lesson Six

The Importance of Work and Service

Aims

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to

- gain knowledge and understanding of
 - religious attitudes to the purpose and importance of work
 - work as service and prayer, e.g. sewa
 - careers – including a case study of a believer who regards work as a vocation
 - business and enterprise – including views on acceptable and unacceptable performance, the economy, and raising of money through taxation
- evaluate issues relating to religious attitudes to the purpose and importance of work, careers, the use of money and business and enterprise

Context

This is the first of two lessons on Topic 3 of your GCSE course in Religious Studies for Unit 1: Religion and Work.

Key Words

Business: a commercial or industrial firm. Sometimes business refers to the occupation, work or trade in which a person is engaged.

Career: way of making a living, often in a profession.

Economy: the system by which the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services is organised in a country. The generation of wealth through business and industry.

Enterprise: a project or task that requires boldness or effort and a willingness to try new approaches or actions.

Vocation: a career which the individual feels called to by God.

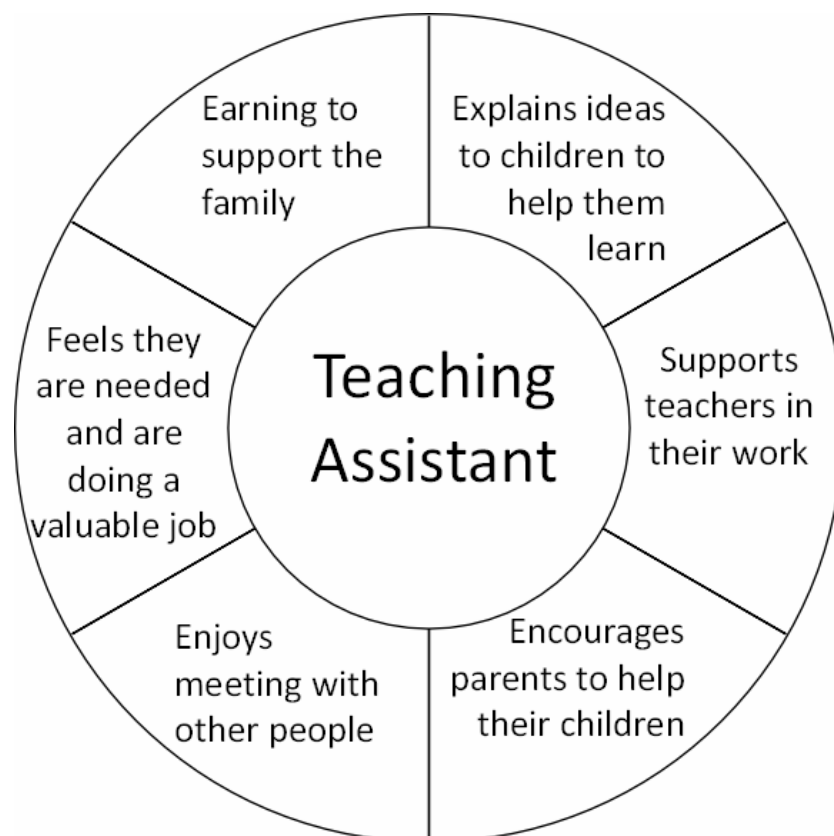


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Religion and Work

In Lesson Four we considered what is meant by work, and the differences between work and leisure. Work is important for human beings. It enables them to earn money to support themselves and their families with food, clothes and somewhere to live. It provides ways in which each individual can help society and become a good citizen – making a contribution to the lives of others. It enables people to have self-respect, to make friends and to use their skills and it gives them a purpose in life. ‘Work’ is usually paid employment – but we have seen that many do unpaid work, for example, looking after children or a home, or doing voluntary work. Without work, a society could not function and every individual is encouraged to use their ability and talents in productive, but not necessarily paid, work.

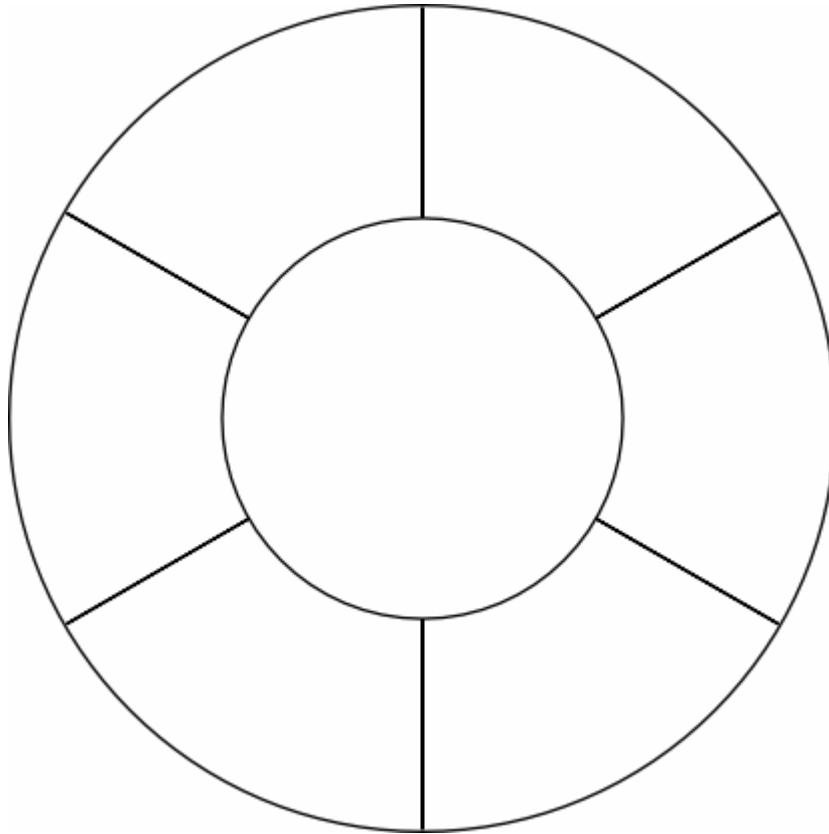
The following is an example of the points a teaching assistant might make if asked about the benefits of their job for themselves and for others:



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Activity 1

Choose another job which you know something about. Draw a similar diagram to show the benefits of this work.

**Religious Attitudes to Work**

All religions believe that work is important and valuable to society as a whole. In the book of Genesis, God is said to have 'worked' for six days creating the world before resting on the seventh. In this story, God gives man the Garden of Eden to work in. Religious believers recognise that at times work is very hard, perhaps physically or mentally demanding, stressful or boring. Equally, at other times it can be rewarding and satisfying. Buddhists believe that 'right awareness', one of the principles of the 'Eightfold Path', is important because it teaches Buddhists to control their minds and feelings and to try to be positive, to make the most of what they have.

Jews emphasise that work helps human beings to have self-esteem and support their families. So both men and women believe their skills and talents are given by God and should be used responsibly to benefit themselves and others.

Christians also believe that work provides an opportunity for people to find a purpose in living and to be creative (see the Parable of the Talents in Lesson Five). Muslims have similar beliefs. Muhammad emphasised that everyone in society plays an equal part in supporting the community – that is, no job is worth more than another. For Hindus, work is directly connected to religious duties. In the past in India, different castes, or groups in society, did different jobs. So while Brahmins were priests, Kshatriyas were the leaders of society and warriors, Vaishyas were farmers and merchants, Shudras worked as servants and below them there were ‘untouchables’, outcasts, who were not generally respected and did the dirty work no one else wanted to do. To some extent, modern city life in India has broken down these barriers and some people may choose what jobs they apply for, but in others parts of India, this more rigid structure is still found. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, rejected ideas of caste and taught that all people are equal and are free to choose their work, as long as it does not conflict with their religious beliefs.

Activity 2

If you have the textbook *Religion and Citizenship*, look through the chapter on Religion and Work and make a list of the teachings and beliefs about work of the religion(s) you have chosen to study. Alternatively, carry out some internet searches to find out some of the teachings and beliefs about work held by the six religions studied in this Unit.



Acceptable and Unacceptable Work

All religious believers, just like the Sikhs, believe that no one should do any work, paid or unpaid, which conflicts with their religious beliefs. They pay great attention to the teaching of their religion, as presented in their scriptures or in the life and work of their founder. So Buddhists, who believe that people should not do work that leads to the suffering of others, would not sell tobacco, cigarettes or

weapons, and would not slaughter or sell animals for meat. Sikhs also would not sell tobacco or alcohol as abstaining from both is part of the promises they make on becoming a committed Sikh (see the amrit initiation ceremony in Lesson 21 in 'Rites of Passage'). Sikhs teach about 'honest work' (kirat karna) which refers to any work which is useful and benefits society and which will lead to good karma and to a release from the constant cycle of rebirth.

Sikhs also teach about service for others (**sewa**). Sewa is a duty for Sikhs and takes the form of voluntary work done to help the community. For many this will take the form of helping in the langar, the communal kitchen area, cooking, serving, clearing up or cleaning. Others may join organisations or groups to help the elderly, the young or other people who need support or service. Sewa is work which is volunteered without any thought of any reward.



People serving in the langar hall in a Sikh gurdwara
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Langar.jpg>
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Religions do not normally expect believers to do work which is unlawful, or to be involved in work which exploits people, for example, work involving prostitution, pornography or slavery. Exploiting others is against the beliefs of most religions because it takes advantage of the weak or powerless. Jews will not work in farming animals such as pigs that are not 'kosher' and are not eaten. Christians, Muslims and Sikhs will not take work involved in gambling. Buddhists, Muslims and Sikhs would not be expected to work in breweries, or behind a bar.

Careers and Vocation

A **career** may be described as the work done by someone during their lifetime, often in one area of work, but increasingly in several

different areas. Sometimes people plan a career, perhaps while they are at school or college or once they have just started work. They decide on the kind of work they want to do and the direction they want their work to take. In today's fast-moving society, plans may need to change as the years go by and people may find themselves having several jobs, or even several careers. People who plan their career usually expect to gain promotion at various stages, move from one company to another, or set up their own business in order to make the most of their knowledge and skills.

A **vocation** means literally 'a calling'. For a religious believer, this means a call from God to do particular work. An individual may find themselves strongly moved towards a particular career, often involving service to people, for example a call to be doctor or a social worker. At times, it may be a vocation which draws them to a particular part of the world to give help, or perhaps to join a specific organisation which helps people, for example. Save the Children, or Shelter. Sometimes the work will not be easy and people may feel like giving up, but a sense of vocation will often motivate them and help them to keep going. To believe that God is calling an individual does not mean that the work itself is necessarily directly connected with religion, but it will usually involve work which benefits others. People who do not have strong religious beliefs may still refer to their work as a 'vocation' if they feel strongly drawn to work in a particular job or place.

A Case Study of Vocation: Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens)



Yusuf Islam

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yusuf-2009.jpg>

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Yusuf Islam was born in 1948 in London. As Cat Stevens, he made his name as a singer and song-writer in the 1970s and was very successful. His albums sold very well and he also won two song-writing awards.

The singer said that he had been seeking spiritual answers to the meaning of life for quite some time. Several incidents happened which led him eventually to Islam. He was drawn to the call of

prayer he heard when he was visiting Morocco. He was close to drowning at one point and remembers that he called out to God 'If I survive, I will work for you.' A wave took him back to shore but he remembered the promise. Later his brother, knowing he was searching for truth, gave him a copy of the Qur'an. Some people would interpret these events as God 'calling' him.

In 1977, Stevens became a Muslim and adopted the name Yusuf Islam. He then sold all his guitars at auction and gave the money to charity. Although the imam at the mosque he was attending told him that his conversion did not have to mean giving up his career in pop music, Yusuf decided that there were too many temptations in continuing with his musical career. He decided to use the money he had gained from his music in helping others, and became involved in many educational projects. He established several Muslim schools and set up The Association of Muslim Schools in the UK. In 1999, he founded the charity 'Small Kindness' and has supported orphaned children and families in the Balkans, Indonesia and Iraq. The title of the charity comes from this verse from the Qur'an:

*"Have you not seen the one who denies Faith?
Such is the one who repulses the orphan;
And who does not encourage the feeding of the poor and needy.
So woe to the worshippers, those who are neglectful of their prayers;
Those who would be seen but refuse even small kindnesses."* (Quran 107:1-7)

From 1985-1993, Yusuf Islam was chairman of the charity, Muslim Aid. He felt he had a vocation to serve others in anyway he could. He has received several awards for his work in promoting peace. In the 1990s, he began to do more musical performances again, writing songs and establishing a recording company. He said that he had come to realise that, providing he did not break any Muslim laws, he could make a contribution by singing and composing. He realised that there were very few musical resources which could be used to teach children about the Muslim religion and produced a children's album called *A is for Allah*. A percentage of the proceeds goes to the charity, 'Small Kindness'. In an interview he said:

"In Islam there is something called the principle of common good. What that means is that whenever one is confronted by something that is not mentioned in the scriptures, one must observe what benefit it can bring. Does it serve the common good, does it protect the spirit, and does it serve God? If the scholars see that it is something positive, they may well approve of what I'm doing."*

(*As cited in Wikipedia entry for Yusuf Islam; there cited as from 'Mingels, Guido, "To Be, You Must Give up What You Are – Interview with Yusuf Islam, *Arabia*, 12 December 2006, Retrieved 21 July 2008)

Business and Enterprise

In the UK, business is important because it provides the goods and the services which people need to live. A business may be described as an enterprise, and individuals can be described as 'enterprising'. The word 'enterprise' suggests an approach to business which is creative, energetic and innovative. Enterprising people are: prepared to think of new ideas, flexible, able to change and adapt, and willing to take well-judged risks.

Sometimes, businesses provide goods or services for other businesses and sometimes they deal directly with the public. There are private businesses, owned by individuals or groups who need to run their business at a profit. They may have shareholders who have invested money in the company and expect to be paid something in return for their investment. Private businesses also need to pay their employees and develop their business. There are also public sector businesses which are owned by the government. These are chiefly involved in providing services to people, e.g. schools and hospitals. These services are not intended to make a profit and the money used to run them is raised by taxation.

The Economy and Taxation

An economy is the system through which goods and services are bought, sold or provided. Sometimes the economy is healthy – people are buying goods, they are able to obtain the jobs they want, and there are opportunities for new businesses. At other times the economy can slow down, or even experience a 'recession' when costs rise, e.g. the cost of fuel. At these times, people cannot buy as much, unemployment increases and opportunities to begin new businesses decrease. The economy in the UK is, of course, affected by what is happening in the rest of the world.

In order to provide services for people, the government requires those who are earning to contribute a percentage of what they earn in taxes. This taxation enables those employed in the armed forces, the police and other public services to be paid. It also ensures that all people in the country, whether they are tax payers or not, are able to use the National Health Service and that all children are able to go to school. The government also raises money through other taxes. For example, businesses are taxed on the profits they make, and there are taxes on cigarettes and alcohol. The government regularly reviews the level of taxation in relation to what money the country needs to raise – for example in January 2011, Value Added Tax (VAT) payable on many goods and services, rose from 17.5% to 20%.

Religious Attitudes to Business and the Economy

'To be idle is a short road to death and to be diligent is a way of life; foolish people are idle, wise people are diligent.' (The Buddha), (Buddhism)

'That is also why you pay taxes, because the authorities are working for God when they fulfil their duties. Pay then what you owe them; pay them, your personal and property taxes and show respect and honour for them all.' (Romans 13:6-7), (Christianity)

'Let him avoid (the acquisition of) wealth and (the gratification of his desires, if they are opposed to the sacred law, and even lawful acts which may cause pain in the future or are offensive to men.' (Laws of Manu IV:176), (Hinduism)

'He who brings goods for sale is blessed with good fortune, but he who keeps them till the price rises is accursed.' (Hadith, Ibn Majah, Darimi), (Islam)

'Be wise enough not to wear yourself out trying to get rich.' (Proverbs 23:4), (Judaism)

'The hands of the gurmukh (those who are God-centred) are blessed, for their toil in the service of God and the sangat (the Sikh community)They bow low to the Guru and embrace their fellow devotees with joy. They labour to earn an honest living, and distribute part of their income for the benefit of others ... Ego and pride have been lost through serving others.' (Var 6:12), (Sikhism)

Activity 3

Read Sections 3.2 and 3.3 (-ages 54-57) in *Religion and Citizenship*. 'Religious believers do not need to be concerned about business and enterprise. They should just concentrate on their religious beliefs.' What do you think? Explain your opinion.



A Case Study: The Story of the Shopkeeper

There was once a man who had a shop in which he sold cottons and threads, scissors and needles, ribbons and lengths of material. One day the man had to go to buy some new fabrics, and he left his assistant in charge. 'Look after the shop,' he said, 'And remember, if anyone wants to buy that blue cloth, you must sell it at half price. It has a flaw in it that goes through the length of the fabric. So it is not perfect – it must be sold for £5 and not for £10.' The assistant said he would remember.


He had a busy morning and sold many different things. Then a customer came in wanting blue cloth. She looked at silks, cottons and satins in different shades of blue which the assistant showed her. Then the woman saw exactly the colour she wanted, high up on a shelf. 'That's it!' she said, 'That's exactly what I want.'

The assistant took down the fabric and spread it out over the counter. He knew he should point out the flaw and tell her that the cloth was half price but he didn't. He held his breath. The woman asked the price and, looking at the ticket which said '£10', he told her, '£10'. He thought to himself, 'Why do I need to tell her about the flaw? She has not noticed it. She wants this colour and she will pay £10. The shopkeeper will be delighted that I've got £10 for this when he expected to receive only £5.'

However when the shopkeeper returned, he was not pleased. He told the assistant, 'This is dishonest. I told you the fabric had a flaw in it but you did not point this out to the woman. I told you to charge £5 because of this flaw, but you have charged her the full price.' The assistant was shocked. 'I thought you would be pleased', he said. 'You have gained an extra £5'. The shopkeeper was angry. 'You are missing the point,' he said. 'I will have to find the woman and give her back the £5.' The assistant did not think this was possible – he did not know where the woman lived. The shopkeeper was determined to find out and he did. He called on the woman and explained the situation to her.

The woman listened and reassured the shopkeeper that she did not mind paying £10 because she really wanted this particular colour in the fabric. She had seen the flaw, but did not mind it. The shopkeeper explained, 'I value absolute honesty in my dealings with customers. I want to treat other people in the same way as I would want them to treat me. I expect honesty from others and I want to be honest with you.' He insisted on returning the extra £5 to her. The woman was very grateful. She thanked the shopkeeper and added, 'I wish everyone was as honest as you.'

An Islamic legend

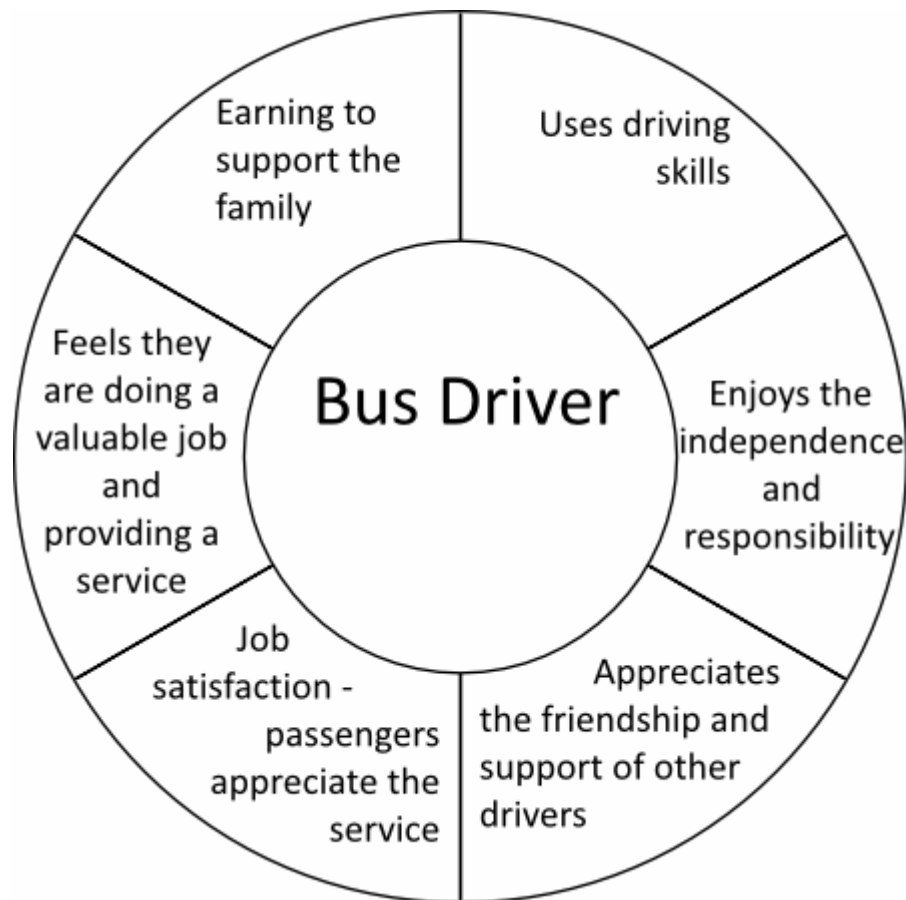
Activity 4	Explain the meaning of the Muslim story of the shopkeeper. Write a series of bullet points about the ways in which he would be seen to be following religious teaching?
	

Self Assessment Test: Lesson Six

1. Explain exactly what is meant by (a) 'a career' and (b) 'the economy'.
2. Give two reasons why religious believers think that work is important.
3. Explain why some religions believe that work connected with the tobacco or alcohol industries would be unacceptable.
4. What is a vocation? Give an example.
5. Explain, using examples, what is meant by 'sewa'.
6. What reasons do religions give for their teaching that work which encourages prostitution or pornography is wrong.
7. Explain the meaning of 'enterprise'.
8. What do Sikhs mean by 'honest work' (kirat karma)?
9. Why will a good business take great care of its employees?
10. Explain why governments need to tax people and goods.

Suggested Answers to Activities

Activity One



Activity Two

The following is an example of the sort of notes you should have now for the religion(s) you are studying.

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Hinduism

'Perform your prescribed duty, for action is better than inaction. A man cannot even maintain his physical body without work.' (Bhagavad Gita 3:8)

Most Hindus are vegetarians.

Unacceptable work includes pornography and working in an abattoir

Honest work is praise and a prayer to god. All life, including work, is dedicated to god.

'A blind man, an idiot (a cripple) who moves with the help of a board, a man full seventy years old....shall not be compelled by any to pay a tax.' (Laws of Manu 8:394)

'That gift which is given out of duty, at the proper time and place, to a worthy person, and without expectation of return, is considered to be charity in the mode of goodness.' (Bhagavad Gita 17:20)

Service to others is a duty.

Hindu Charity in Britain – Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS)
Caste system used to affect the kind of work which was done – now largely broken down in the cities

Activity Three

The following answer argues against the statement. You may have written an answer which suggests the statement is correct — or you may have made points for and against the statement but including more than one point of view is not a requirement in this question. This statement uses the religion of *Judaism* to illustrate the points made.

I believe that most religious believers would be concerned about business and enterprise. Unless you are a monk or a nun relying on charity to help you live, you need to work to earn a living. Jews, for example, believe that God expects people to live in the real world and nowadays that may well involve being part of a business. Businesses can help people. They provide people with things they need and they employ people and pay wages. This helps society and gives people opportunities for work. Jews would expect to run honest businesses and would not take part in any dishonest project or a business which went against their religious beliefs, like gambling, for example. They would expect their religion to guide their actions in a business. The Torah says, 'Remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.' This means Jews must always act according to their religious law so that their business is not the most important thing – Loving God with all your heart, mind and strength is the most important – but work could be done to the glory of God.

Activity Four

- All acceptable work should not conflict with religious beliefs.
- Cheating betrays trust and does not show respect for others.
- Deception or cheating is often against the civil law and also against religious laws, e.g. 'No more lying then! Everyone must tell the truth to his fellow-believer, because we are all members together in the body of Christ.' (Ephesians 4:25), (Christianity); 'to abstain from false speech' (Buddhist precept).
- Religious believers do not think that you should exploit or take advantage of people who, for example, appear to have less knowledge than you.
- Religious believers believe in honest work — contributing to the well-being of the community.
- work gives a person self-respect, dignity — cheating clients detracts from this.
- honesty in business is part of worshipping God.

(You may have added quotations or teachings from the religion(s) you have chosen to study.)

Answers to Self-Assessment Test: Lesson Six

1. Career: way of making a living often in a profession.
Economy: the system by which the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services is organised in a country. The generation of wealth through business and industry.
2. i. Enable people to make a contribution to society
ii. It provides an opportunity to be creative, use talents which God has given, etc.
3. Some religions believe that alcohol and tobacco, both drugs, damage the body which God has made. Therefore some religious believers think that people are unable to fulfil their responsibilities towards their families, their friends and perhaps do their work as they might do if they are taking any drug. Alcohol may cloud the mind, or affect proper inhibition which enables people to behave with kindness and consideration to others, etc.
4. A career which the individual feels called to by God. For example, feeling strongly that they wish to serve other people by training to be a doctor.
5. Sewa means service – and is a Sikh word expressing selfless work for others. For example, voluntary work in the langar, cleaning the gurdwara, or hospital visiting, etc.
6. Religions believe that work which encourages prostitution or pornography is wrong because it involves the mistreatment and abuse of human beings. Many religious believers believe that sex is a precious gift from God which should be enjoyed in a stable and long-lasting relationship such as marriage. It should also involve love and no-one should be forced into having sex. No child should be involved in gratifying the sexual instincts of others and religions believe that children should be protected.
7. ‘Enterprise’ can describe a business or a project. It usually describes work which is creative, energetic or innovative. People who are involved with an ‘enterprise’ (and can be described as enterprising) often have new ideas, are prepared to look to change and improve something and are usually prepared to take risks to make it happen.
8. Sikhs mean by ‘honest work’ work that which is completed to honour God – using their talents in the service of others. So there are certain jobs that they would not regard as honest work, e.g. jobs involved with gambling or alcohol, for example.
9. A good business would take care of its employees because it recognises that they are valuable to the business and because each individual and their rights are respected. Employers benefit from employees who are committed and loyal to their business and know that if they treat them as they would want to be treated, the

- employees will respond well and work hard. Employers recognise their responsibilities to those who work for them.
10. Governments need to tax individuals and goods because they need to pay for the services which the government provides – such as those connected with law and order – the police and the armed forces, or those involved in supporting people, such as social services, hospitals and schools.