

vading and permeating everywhere.
 //4//1//” (SGGSJ, p.1136)

Sikh View on Correct Worship

Realise God in Your Heart

“If the Lord Allah lives only in the mosque, then to whom does the rest of the world belong? According to the Hindus, the Lord’s Name abides in the idol, but there is no truth in either of these claims. //1// O Allah, O Raam, I live by Your Name. Please show mercy to me, O Master. //1//Pause// The God of the Hindus lives in the southern lands, and the God of the Muslims lives in the west. So search in your heart - look deep into your heart of hearts; this is the home and the place where God lives.” (SGGSJ, p.1349)

Inward Transformation through Naam

“I would make Your Name the sandalwood, and my mind the stone to rub it on; for saffron, I would offer good deeds; thus, I perform worship and adoration within my heart. //1// Perform worship and adoration by meditating on the Naam, the Name of the Lord; without the Name, there is no worship and adoration. //1//Pause// If one were to wash his heart inwardly, like the stone idol which is washed on the outside, his filth would be removed, his soul would be cleansed, and he would be liberated when he departs.” (SGGSJ, p.489)

Devotion and Innocent Love

“Ritual practices bind people in egotism; meeting together, they worship stones. //3// Says Kabeer, He is obtained only by devotional worship. Through innocent love, the Lord is met. //4//6//” (SGGSJ, p.324)

Sikh Customs

There are a number of Sikh practices which are sometimes mistaken for being Idol worship and these are examined below.

Pictures and Statues of Sikh Gurus

It is common to find pictures of the Sikh Gurus and Saints within Sikh households. These are items of inspiration and for developing a loving relationship with God and are not worshiped. Statues of the Gurus are much rarer and exist in some of the non-Khalsa Sikh traditions such as Tibetan Buddhists

who usually keep a small idol of Guru Nanak Dev Ji or among Sindhi Sikhs. So statues, idols and pictures can serve as a reminder for the greatness of the Sikh masters but are not objects of worship.

Reverence to the Holy Scripture

The Sikh Holy Scripture is kept in the centre of the main congregational hall and so one might ask what the difference is between a Hindu idol or Murthi in a Mandir and the Sikh Holy Scripture in the Gurdwara?

The spiritual guide in Sikh dharma is the Word of God. It is not the binding of the book, or the pages or the ink, as these simply provide a body for the Guru. The Guru is the sound vibration of the words, which contain the transformational power to heal and elevate the soul.

So the Sikh Holy Scripture is not an idol because:

1. A sound vibration has no physical form and is taken inward to awaken God within our hearts
2. It provides spiritual guidance and is one way through which God communicates with His devotees (through Hukamnamas).

In recognition of the transformational power of the Word, Sikhs bow towards the Holy Scripture. This is one way in which a Sikh develops humility, by touching the highest point of their body (forehead) to the floor, at the “feet” of their spiritual guide.

Summary

Idol or Murthi worship in the traditional sense of the word is not encouraged or supported by Sikh dharma. However pictures and idols can play a positive role as instruments for developing inspiration, humility and love for God.

Sikh Views on Idol Worship



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Sikh Dharma

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Introduction

Idolatry and Idolism appears in many different forms throughout the world and has many different uses and definitions. This essay explores the ways in which idols are used, respected or banned in different religious traditions.

Religious Views on Idolatry

Judaism and Islam

In Judaism, idol worship is a major sin and includes:

1. Worship towards any created thing
2. Belief that a particular created thing is an independent power, or
3. Making something a mediator between ourselves and God

Islam takes a similar position to Judaism, however, it does contain subtle forms of idol worship (as per the Jewish definition) including facing Mecca while praying and respect given to a black stone called the Ka'baa.

Buddha dharma

Buddhists did not originally have statues of the Lord Buddha in their temples. However, with time both the Mahayana and Hinayana schools of Buddhism adopted these tools. Buddha statues in temples and otherwise are symbolic representations of his great qualities and provide a reminder to the believers to develop the same qualities of love and wisdom as those of the Buddha. The statues also provide an object of concentration or visual aid in meditation.

Hindu dharma

Idol worship (Murti Puja) in Hinduism is a relatively recent phenomenon dating back to the 3rd or 7th centuries CE. Hindus in the Vedic period that preceded this would worship in open-air fire alters (yajna-kunda) with no physical representations of gods or goddesses.

Some Hindus regard an idol as just a symbol or a form, which can be used to focus the mind. Other Hindus regard an idol as an entity with a living spirit through which communion with God can be achieved.

Before an idol can be used for worship, there is a religious ceremony which invokes the presence of great souls into the stone images, thus giving them their living consciousness.

Sikh View on God and Idol Worship

The Guru Granth Sahib rejects any worship of physical items such as stone idols, animals or plants. The worship of images, tombs or sacred stones is also rejected because these things do not create inward spiritual experience and instead keep the focus outside of the body temple.

Narada Bhakti Sutras

Naarad Ji was a Hindu sage who helped to associate devotion with idol worship, through his Narada Bhakti Sutras. This had the effect of losing many people to blind faith and so the Guru offered the following wisdom.

"The Hindus have forgotten the Primal Lord; they are going the wrong way. As Naarad Ji instructed them, they are worshipping idols. They are blind and mute, the blindest of the blind. The ignorant fools pick up stones and worship them. But when those stones themselves sink, who will carry you across?" (SGGSJ, p.556)

Saint Dhanna and Stone Worship

Saint Dhanna was a simple, hard working farmer from Rajasthan. He was given an ordinary stone by a Hindu priest and told that the stone was God. So Saint Dhanna lovingly washed the stone and offered the stone food and refused himself food until God appeared out of the stone.

Saint Dhanna had done rigorous meditation in many lives and so his good karma together with his sincere and innocent nature forced a Sargun form of God to manifest itself from the stone! Saint Dhanna's experience shows that stone idol worship is immaterial and that love for God is the path of enlightenment.

"Dhanna served the Lord, with the innocence of a child. Meeting with the Guru, Trilochan attained the perfection of the Siddhas. The Guru blessed Baynee with His Divine Illumination. O my mind, you too must be the Lord's slave. ||5||" (SGGSJ, p.1192)

Idol Worship does not Yield Fruit

Most people who use idols in worship will not obtain any fruits. Saint Dhanna is rare because of his karma and devotion. This is why the Guru advises the following:

"Kabeer, someone sets up a stone idol and all the world worships it as the Lord. Those who hold to this belief will be drowned in the river of darkness. ||136|| Kabeer, the paper is the prison, and the ink of rituals are the bars on the windows. The stone idols have drowned the world, and the Pandits, the religious scholars, have plundered it on the way." (SGGSJ, p.1371)

"Those who call a stone their god - their service is useless. Those who fall at the feet of a stone god - their work is wasted in vain. ||1||" (SGGSJ, p.1160)

God is in the Leaves

The Sikh scripture also mentions that life energy is in the trees and planets which are offered to lifeless inert stones. So this becomes an anti service to God:

"You tear off the leaves, O gardener, but in each and every leaf, there is life. That stone idol, for which you tear off those leaves - that stone idol is lifeless. ||1|| In this, you are mistaken, O gardener. The True Guru is the Living Lord. ||1||Pause|| Brahma is in the leaves, Vishnu is in the branches, and Shiva is in the flowers. When you break these three gods, whose service are you performing? ||2|| The sculptor carves the stone and fashions it into an idol, placing his feet upon its chest. If this stone god was true, it would devour the sculptor for this! ||3|| Rice and beans, candies, cakes and cookies - the priest enjoys these, while he puts ashes into the mouth of the idol. ||4|| The gardener is mistaken, and the world is mistaken, but I am not mistaken." (SGGSJ, p.479)

God is Unborn and Omnipresent

"You prepare sweet treats and feed them to your stone god. God is not born, and He does not die, you foolish, faithless cynic! ||2|| You sing lullabies to your stone god - this is the source of all your mistakes. Let that mouth be burnt, which says that our Lord and Master is subject to birth. ||3|| He is not born, and He does not die; He does not come and go in reincarnation. The God of Nanak is per-