

Why do many religions object and criticize idol worship when their own followers are kissing the tombs, photos, scriptures, symbols, and even lighting candles in front of their spiritual deities and prophets?

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Hello,

Thank you for this question

The fact of this phenomenon has a couple of roots. The first is just a natural byproduct of limited understanding. This blinkered view might be compared to believing that the moon actually changes shape. Of course it doesn't, but from my perspective it seems to. If I lived with that view, there would be no malice there. Simply ignorance ... not knowing. It is precisely this innocent dynamic, innate to all people that could result in the mistaken belief that we are witnessing "idol worship" when observing the religious practice of others (even though just same thing happens in my faith community, and even BY me!)

The second root, is a bit more "loaded," and probably contributes more to negativity in others when they hear about what you describe.

This second element contributing to seeing error in others but not in ourselves tied to the "missionary" or "outreach" part of religion. People try to "share" their religion just the same way people do with everything they think is cool or helpful. People are always pitching what they like, and trying to get others to join in. (Talk to a jogger or a vegan lately?) For example if we saw a "great" movie, we are anxious to tell our friends. If they then don't like the movie, we're perplexed. How on earth can you not see how great that movie is? (What's wrong with you?) Or we found a great tea, that makes me calm at the end of the day. I keep telling my friend ... the one who needs calming down most about this "great" tea. Do they go get the tea? No.

Religious missionizing or proselytizing is much the same. This difference though is that it often is institutionalized, frequently far more heavy handed, and has carried with it serious wrongs (and even evils) in history.

For people who feel mine is the only way, it becomes hard or impossible to accurately assess behavior of others. We see people doing just the same as me, and I call it "idolatry" or "idol worship." This bias and name calling is nothing more than ignorance. I lack the imagination to recognize that of course these people are not "worshiping" a statue, or a stick, or a stone, or a river. They are doing just what I do. But bound by my "certitude" that only my religion is "true," I am blinded by the precise similarities I see around me.



Here's me NOT worshiping idols ;)

In the end, this phenomenon is much like everything else. If we listen, pay attention, stay open, and try to learn, we gradually dissolve our biases and misunderstanding, abandon inaccurate labels for people, and come to a more sound and subtle grasp of others and of the world around us.