

## RECOGNIZING A CULT, AND MORE ....

When the word cult is mentioned, some people may think of the tragedy in Waco, Texas or of Jonestown and the murder/suicides there in 1978, when 913 died following the order of Rev. Jim Jones to drink cyanide laced kool-aid. Cult deception of various forms is alive and well in South Africa. Most cults register with the government as religious organisations or simply as charities of one form or another. What is the problem? It is that people are being deceived, exploited, psychologically coerced, together with the use of mind control techniques people's lives are being devastated.

The cult problem can become a human rights issue. People coerced into cult involvement usually find it is to the exclusion of all else that they have stood for before, whether it be their studies/education, beliefs, careers, families or friends. As the above may suggest, the impact not only on the cult victim, but on his or her family too, can be devastating. Some families have described it as being harder to deal with than death. "It's a living bereavement."

### **What characterises the typical person who falls victim to a cult group?**

1. An economically sound family background.
2. Average to above average intelligence.
3. A good education.
4. Idealistic.

Most cults can recruit and control a person in a matter of three or four days. However, leaving the group is not as easy. Some never leave. For those that do it is often thanks to a lot of hard work on the part of their family and/or friends over a prolonged period of time. Some families elect to take things on themselves, others try to get others to do it for them. For those who do leave there is a process of rehabilitation that follows.

### **How do you recognise a cult and its leaders?**

1. It uses psychological coercion to recruit and indoctrinate potential members. Initially this may simply be with wonderful attention and friendliness, this makes the recruit to drop their defences.
2. It forms an elitist totalitarian society.
3. Its founder leader is self-appointed, dogmatic, messianic, not accountable and has great charisma.
4. It believes 'the end justifies the means' in order to solicit funds or recruit people.

5. Its wealth does not benefit its members or society.
6. Communal living is common.
7. Average person's age at the point of recruitment: 20's.
8. Registered as a religious group.
9. A vision to make the world a better place, be it political, spiritual or other.

### **What techniques do cults use?**

Peer Pressure

Rejection of Old Values

Confusing Doctrine

Megacommunication

Removal of Privacy

Time Sense Deprivation

Disinhibition

Uncompromising Rules

Verbal Abuse

Sleep Deprivation

Replacement of Relationships

Chanting

Confession

Financial Commitment

Finger Pointing

Flaunting Hierarchy

Isolation

Controlled Approval

Change of Diet

Games

No Questions

Guilt

Fear

Dress codes

[techniques of control will vary from group to group]

### **What should be done regarding cult groups in South Africa?**

1. Society needs to become aware of how everyone is vulnerable to manipulation.
2. People need to be educated about mind control techniques, so they can recognise and leave an environment where psychological coercion exists, before becoming a victim.

3. Society needs to become aware that there is a lot of good material on cults to be found in the media. It is useful for updating one's information.
4. People need to learn to question, be discerning and feel it is OK to say NO!
5. More mental health professionals need to be trained to help cult victims.

### **Misconceptions regarding cults:**

1. People don't join cults. They are recruited.
2. People are recruited by a method not a message.
3. People do not stay in cults because they have nothing better to do with their lives, but because psychological coercion holds them there.
4. Cults intend to retain a hold on people for life, or for as long as they are valuable to the cult. i.e. It is not a fad or a phase.
5. Cult members are not strange people, but normal people from normal families.
6. The abuse at the cult group damages the member. Cult leaders should be blamed for the problems caused, not the individual. [So do not fall into the 'Blame the victim' syndrome). It can happen to anyone.
7. Cult members are sincere. (Sincere victims, but sincere.)
8. Cult members are victims and need to be treated with love. They are people who need help, not hostility.
9. Cults recruit people of all ages, not just young people.
10. Cult recruiters are rarely visually identifiable. They usually look like quite normal people who appear to be very friendly.
11. Anyone can become a victim of cult techniques of psychological coercion. The safest people seem to be the seriously mentally ill, or those that know how to recognise a cult.
12. Accurate information on cults is not best obtained by trying to infiltrate a cult. This is far too dangerous.

Alon Christian Fellowship, situated outside Tzaneen, is not a true work of God as they claim to be, but a cult.