

# STOLEN MINDS

## Understanding Cults

By Rabbi Michael Skobac





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By  
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## STOLEN MINDS: Understanding Cults

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### ***STOLEN MINDS: Understanding Cults***

**is dedicated  
in loving memory of  
Joseph Faywlowicz**  
יוסף בן קלמן ורבקה, ז"ל

Joseph Faywlowicz had a very challenging life as a result of his recruitment, as a young man, into a destructive cult, and his long involvement with it. Fortunately, over time, he was able to extricate himself from this manipulative group on his own accord. However, this traumatic experience caused him to suffer enormously and endure a very long, difficult recovery. For many years afterward, Joseph was an enthusiastic supporter of JEWS FOR JUDAISM's vital work countering cult and missionary groups... and rescuing Jews from their seductive grasp. With the generous bequest that he left to JEWS FOR JUDAISM, it was Joseph's dream that our organization would be instrumental in preventing others from falling prey to the evils of destructive cults and the lifelong damage they can ultimately cause.

*STOLEN MINDS: Understanding Cults* is Joseph Faywlowicz's legacy to every Jew in the world. May the loving memory of Joseph Faywlowicz, יוסף בן קלמן ורבקה, ז"ל, be a source of blessing and inspiration to all.

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# Introduction

*The beginning of wisdom is the definition of terms.*  
– Socrates

To understand any issue, accurate definitions are always critical. High quality knowledge gives us an edge, whereas poor understanding puts us at a great disadvantage. When dealing with the thorny issue of cults, any primitive or hysterical conceptions we might have leave us vulnerable to the more nuanced realities that exist today within these groups.

To begin, there are at least three understandings of cults that are not very useful.

Firstly, dictionaries define cults as groups that have a common set of beliefs and rituals. This overly general definition would, in fact, seem to include virtually all normative religions. It is often said that many of today's religions were considered cults when they first began. This approach views cults in terms of whether their doctrines or practices are acceptable to mainstream religious groups and whether they seem unusual or strange.

Secondly, some Christian denominations label any religion that claims to believe in Jesus yet, at the same time, maintains unorthodox beliefs to be a cult. These circles, for example, consider Mormons and the Unification Church to be cults. Judaism, as well as most mainstream world religions, would not consider this approach to be relevant.

Thirdly, people often use the word cult as a pejorative term to describe any group they don't like or a group with bizarre rituals or practices. For example, members of a mainstream religious group who appear overly zealous or fanatically devoted are often characterized as belonging to a cult.

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Actually, the nature of a group's beliefs and rituals has nothing to do with the assessment of whether or not it is a cult. We will soon discover that many cultic groups are not even organized around religion or spirituality!

The basic concern with cults focuses on the ethics of their organizational culture and their potential danger to their members and others. Problematic groups will inevitably send up red flags warning us to be cautious and on the alert.

As a starting point for understanding the true nature of cults, we find that they generally have the following three characteristics:

1. A self-appointed leader who exploits the group's members.
2. Deception in the recruitment process.
3. Psychological and emotional manipulation to consolidate membership in the group.<sup>1</sup>

Cults are often misunderstood and hard to identify because the media tends to focus only on the most horrific and dramatically sensational examples, such as the 1978 mass suicide and murder of 914 members of The People's Temple run by Jim Jones in Guyana. Unfortunately, this becomes the model in people's minds for what a cult is.<sup>2</sup>

Today, a major problem is that the stereotypical view of cults prevalent 40 years ago still persists and remains the conventional wisdom. In the 1960s and 1970s, sensational stories reported that these groups compelled members to leave their families, live communally and then deprived them of sleep while relentlessly controlling their diets. These extreme manipulations were popularized in magazines, books and films, such as the 1981 award-winning *Ticket to Heaven*.

The truth is that cults fall along a continuum, ranging from highly controlling and destructive groups to those that are less so. Very few are on the extreme, headline-grabbing end of the spectrum. Because the salient issues with many groups today are

more subtle and nuanced, it's sometimes difficult to see why there may be any concerns at all.

It's not very useful to get caught up in identifying whether a particular group is, or is not, a cult.

However, it is extremely important to determine whether a group exhibits any behaviours that should concern us. To assign the label of cult is far less important than recognizing the red flags and warning signs of manipulation, control and exploitation in the culture of an organization.

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# Understanding the Characteristics of Cults

**S**o far we have described the three elements that cults have in common. Now, let's examine these in more detail.

1. Most cults have a self-appointed authoritarian leader who is accountable to no one. Some groups may have a core leadership consisting of several people, sometimes members of one family. Leaders often claim to have special knowledge, powers or a unique vision. If it is a religious group, they may claim to be extraordinary prophets with a special relationship to God or possess a particular truth accessible only to them. These characteristics apply in various degrees in different groups.

Leaders will foster emotionally dependent relationships within the membership to exploit them, usually for money, power or loyalty, to ensure they “donate” tremendous amounts of time to the group. Leaders may seek to sexually exploit members and



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utilize them for their own purposes and agenda. In the most insidious cults, members are used to commit crimes, although in most groups, the nature of exploitation is more subtle. Leaders often have an “ends justify the means” approach to the ways in which they operate their groups.

2. Cults engage in deception throughout the recruiting process because ultimately, their members will be exploited in some way. No one will willingly join a group if they know, in advance, that they will be coerced to give up their personal freedoms. Because cults often have well-deserved bad reputations, they will use innocuous front names to disguise their true identity and recruiters will deny any connection to the parent group.

The cult’s deception involves not fully disclosing the group’s nature or ultimate agenda. Recruiting programs will often be disguised as an innocent activity. For example, after completing the group’s course of studies, members may invite friends and family to a “graduation” program. Attendees believe they are coming to show support and celebrate a happy occasion, unaware that this event is a high-pressure recruiting opportunity organized by the cult.

In most cases, the group’s real beliefs and teachings will not be disclosed to those who attend initial recruiting sessions. Questions are often put off with the assurance, “We’ll get to that in the future.” Important information is only revealed when recruits have cemented their commitment to the group and are now considered “ready” to hear them.

Money may be raised to help needy people, children or the homeless, but the funds will end up in the coffers of the group. People will not be told where their monies are going and often receive misleading information about how their funds are used.

3. All cults employ psychological and emotional manipulation in the recruitment process and, more critically, to consolidate the commitment of those who join. Their goal is to keep members dependent, loyal and obedient. This objective is achieved by

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the orchestrated use of various mind control techniques that restrict personal autonomy and submerge a person's identity to that of the group.

These techniques of social influence and coercive persuasion ultimately bring about thought reform and personality change. Cults employ intensive interpersonal and psychological confrontation to erode an individual's equilibrium and subsequently bring about conformity, loyalty and compliance to the group. Success is based upon slowly infiltrating and controlling a person's behaviour, sources of information, thoughts and emotions.

Some of the elements used to bring about thought reform include:

- Keeping the person unaware that they are being led through an orchestrated process designed to influence them.
- Controlling the person's social environment, information and time.
- Creating a sense of powerlessness by keeping people from their normal social support network and instilling a dependence upon the group.
- Implementing a system of rewards, punishments and experiences to distance the person from their former social identity and to buy into the group's ideology.
- The use of guilt, shame and fear to promote conformity to the group.

Personal independence is discouraged and most certainly not respected. The outside world is demeaned and the cult's critics are demonized. An elitist "us versus them" mindset is developed. Mistrust of non-members develops and isolation becomes an inevitable consequence. Some groups will separate members from their friends and family.

The use of loaded language and thought-stopping clichés serve to change members' thought processes and compel them to

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conform to the group's way of thinking. Isolation from external influences and strict management of information keep people under control. Peer pressure within the group coerces members to tow the line.

Privacy is not respected. The group discovers a member's greatest fears and uses them as a manipulative tool. Public confessions of personal wrongdoings and faults also help to keep people under control.

For the member who wants to leave or does not conform, the fear of surefire disaster in the outside world becomes a terrifying prospect. The group is the only place where a person can obtain constant salvation, peace, success, goodness, friendship and love.

People are kept very busy, and not given time to think and reflect. Group members often lose their ability to think critically as the group, slowly and surely, destroys this vital faculty.

These extreme tactics are employed in the more totalitarian cults. Less destructive cultic groups use more subtle methods that are more difficult to detect.<sup>3</sup>

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# The Cultic Landscape

**A**lthough most people assume that all cults are religious in nature, this is certainly not the case. Any group or relationship in which people are manipulated, controlled and exploited is cultic by nature.

## **Religious Cults**

Most religious cults in North America involve a connection to Christianity, which is the ambient religion. Cultic groups rooted in

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Eastern spiritual traditions, including Buddhism and Hinduism, are also popular.

Many religious cults are apocalyptic and focus on what they believe to be the imminent end of the world.

- **Political Cults** include far-left and far-right wing groups, as well as various racist organizations. Some people believe that modern day terrorist groups fall into this category.
- **Commercial/Marketing Cults** recruit people as slaves to sell their products. Some multi-level marketing groups and pyramid schemes have also displayed cultic characteristics.
- **Psychotherapeutic Cults** include groups focusing on personal transformation, psychological insight, awareness and enlightenment.
- **New Age Cults** comprise a large subgroup, including flying saucer and outer space phenomenon groups, channelers, groups focused on teachings of Ascended Masters and organizations obsessed with conspiracies.
- **Satanic Cults** include groups that focus on devil worship, witchcraft or the occult.
- **One-on-One Cultic relationships** can include psychotherapists, personal trainers, yoga and martial arts instructors, life coaches, as well as abusive personal relationships.

### **Large Group Awareness Training Seminars (LGATS)**

There is disagreement among Cult Awareness experts regarding LGATS, sometimes called Mass Therapy Groups. Should they also be classified as cults? In truth, the question is purely academic because we shouldn't be overly concerned about whether a group is, or is not, technically termed a cult. What is vitally important is whether or not there are any issues of concern about the modus

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operandi of the group. If people want to commit their precious time and hard-earned money to any organization, it is essential to conduct a thorough investigation, along with a risk-assessment and cost-benefit analysis, before joining.

Large Group Awareness Training Seminars (LGATS) are an outgrowth of the human potential movement popular throughout the 1970s. Today, they operate as lucrative businesses offering retreats, usually for several days over a weekend. These seminars, often held at posh hotels or retreat centres, attract dozens and frequently hundreds of eager attendees. Usually, the self-styled guru who founded the group claims to have a unique approach to helping people become more effective, productive and happier in all areas of their lives.

The seminar experience is extremely intense. To supposedly help participants achieve unprecedented breakthroughs in self-awareness, trainers take them through exercises that are emotionally and psychically confrontational. These grueling experiences are allegedly designed to discover the internal blocks that hinder people from reaching full potential in their professional lives and personal relationships.

Over the course of the seminar, participants establish a unique camaraderie among themselves. Many report that the experience was very positive, and the insights into who they are and how to improve their lives were extremely helpful.

On the other hand, there is a tremendous amount of controversy surrounding most LGATS, and rightfully so. I have spoken with many people who were initially very enthusiastic about their experiences. However, when their friends told them about the seminar's inherent problems, these participants asked for my input. I always clarify that if they had spoken to me before attending their seminar, I would have described some potential concerns and advised them to proceed with caution. Because these people had already invested a significant amount of time and money in the organization, they were now predisposed to

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defend the group against any criticism and not be open to re-evaluating their involvement.

Before attending a program, people must be clear about their goals and achievable gains. As well, it is essential to investigate all groups, regardless of their slick presentations and endorsements. In being cautious, there is nothing to be lost and much to be gained. Today, it's easy to investigate almost every organization by doing an Internet search for videos, recent publicity and purported gurus. If red flags pop up, people must ask themselves if they can accomplish the same goals with an accredited therapist who doesn't trigger any alarms. Caveat emptor: Let the buyer beware!<sup>4</sup>

A partial compilation of potential problems associated with personal development programs include:

- Program recruitment personnel are often vague or secretive about what actually takes place. It's extremely difficult to make an informed decision when the people persuading you to attend insist that they can't really explain what happens because, "You just have to experience it for yourself!"
- The programs assume that all participants are being sabotaged by the same psychological blocks and therefore, they offer a one-size-fits-all solution to hundreds of attendees. This simplistic approach highlights one of the many problems in attempting "mass therapy."
- To attend a program is an expensive undertaking. A three-day seminar, with room, board and sometimes travel, can cost thousands of dollars. This is a serious investment and compelling reason to carefully investigate any LGATS before registering!
- Trainers are usually not professionally trained therapists. Because these seminars often dredge up very painful and traumatic past experiences, a trainer's competency – or lack thereof – is a serious issue. It's hard enough for

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a professional therapist with years of qualified training and expertise to work one-on-one with a client to uncover psychological obstacles. At LGATS, untrained facilitators work simultaneously with hundreds of people. For the vulnerable participant, this unnerving experience can be even more painful than a private therapy session because an intimate traumatic event is publicly shared with a large group of strangers.

- The training of the LGATS “trainers” is not regulated, accredited or supervised by any outside professional organization. As a result, there is no quality control over who will lead a mass therapy seminar.
- Some LGATS engage participants in exercises that can be humiliating and traumatic. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know this in advance, since many LGATS organizations maintain secrecy about what takes place at their programs.
- One of the trainer’s many jobs is to encourage participants to register for follow-up programs. Inevitably, any contact trainers have with participants after the seminar is over will focus on pressuring them to attend the invaluable Next Level or Advanced Program rather than inquiring about the participant’s progress. This behaviour exposes the group’s true priorities and should be a red flag.
- People who have attended LGATS are not only squeezed to attend very expensive follow-up programs, they are also pressured to recruit their friends and family to experience what they have just experienced.
- An even greater concern is that some groups not only push participants to recruit new members, they also cajole, convince or manipulate them to volunteer dozens of hours each week to assist at the group’s offices and also staff their weekend retreats. In some cases, participants became virtual slaves to the organization and subsequently neglect their other personal responsibilities and relationships.

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- There is a tendency in LGATS to foster a sense of dependency on their programs. The message constantly conveyed is that only this organization has the keys to access personal insight and transformation. Rather than genuinely liberating people, the group's single-minded focus is to have people return again and again.
- Marriages and relationships have been disrupted when one person gets deeply involved in the LGATS culture and their significant other remains skeptical or resents all the time and money invested in the programs.
- Another serious concern involves the actual teachings of the group and their theoretical foundations. Some doctrines are based upon questionable psychological principles, while others are rooted in spiritual concepts from non-Jewish religions at variance with Judaism. Often, LGATS are held over Shabbat, and this presents a myriad of problems for those who observe the Sabbath.
- Finally, there are two seminal questions. Are LGATS truly effective in bringing about personal transformation? Secondly, can this goal be achieved through other approaches with virtually no downside? Real change takes years and years of work. We must remain skeptical about any organizations, programs or seminars that promise to change our life over the course of a few weekends and insist that we constantly return to their increasingly expensive advanced courses to actualize their programs' potential.

There are numerous accredited life coaches or therapists who can help us achieve our personal goals, and what's more, they don't have a whirl of controversy surrounding them. As well, Judaism has a wellspring of profoundly deep and effective teachings for personal growth that have passed the test of time.<sup>5</sup>

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# Who is Vulnerable

Anyone can be vulnerable to cult recruitment at certain times in his or her life. People never really join a cult; they get recruited into them. Whenever manipulative, deceptive and high-pressure recruitment techniques are brought to bear on vulnerable, at risk people, there is a good chance they can be successfully recruited.

Vulnerability is usually the result of a life crisis or major transition. Oftentimes, people who get involved with cults have gone through a severe change or trauma that has disrupted their equilibrium during the year prior to their recruitment.

The following situations can render anyone of us vulnerable:

- Going to new school. First year students at colleges and universities are particularly vulnerable.
- Moving to new city or country. International students at universities are very vulnerable.
- Death in the family, divorce, breakup of a relationship, loss of a job.
- Health crisis.
- The elderly facing their mortality.
- Adolescents individuating from their families.
- Exam time at school. During finals, some cult recruiters hang out in libraries or near the student counseling offices.
- People who are lonely, depressed, anxious.
- Recent traumatic experience. Car accident, failing a course, sexual attack, mugging, fire, flood, loss of home and belongings.
- People with excessive worries. Cults exaggerate our worries and fears, and then present their group as the only solution to our problems.

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People can be worried about:

- Illness
- Pandemics
- Environmental crisis
- Nuclear war
- Crime
- Economic collapse
- Terrorism
- Identity theft
- Bullying
- Death

As well, people can feel guilty over a personal failure, letting someone down, having an abortion, cheating on a spouse or double-crossing a friend.

Also vulnerable to cult recruitment are:

- People who are seekers and remain unfulfilled by conventional religions because they have not yet found meaning and purpose in life.
- People with difficulty tolerating ambiguity and look for absolute, black and white answers and ultimate simple truths to explain life's complexities. Cults provide a clear structure in an alienating and uncertain world.
- Individuals who are highly idealistic and believe they can change the world. People who are disillusioned and feel that the government or "system" is not working properly. Cults present "the" answer to solve all the problems that plague us.
- People who engage in magical thinking or are prone to seeing conspiracies everywhere.<sup>6</sup>
- People with low self-esteem. By becoming part of a movement greater than themselves, they can feel a sense of importance.

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- Individuals who lack a loving and supportive home life and meaningful friendships.
  - People who come from an overly protective family that inhibited independence. Cults provide the ability to break away and individuate.
  - People who come from families that had rigid and unrealistic expectations for their children. Those who felt, as children, that they could never please their parents.
  - People who have had a hard time finding themselves and establishing meaningful relationships.
  - People who lack critical thinking skills, are gullible, naïve, not street-smart and can't easily spot a scam.
  - People who are unfamiliar with the manipulative techniques of cults.
  - Individuals who feel a sense of invincibility and believe they can never be recruited.

The factors that can render someone vulnerable to cult recruitment can affect all of us at some point in our lives regardless of our presumed invincibility. These times of unexpected stress and confusion lead to a loss of ability to think critically and therefore, the risk of being manipulated into a destructive organization is very high.<sup>7</sup>

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# The Harm that Cults Can Cause

Of those who joined cults and subsequently left, 51% reported their experience was extremely damaging and even years after leaving, some still felt traumatized. Some of the harmful effects of being in a cult include:

- Loss of free will, loss of control over one's life.
- Disintegration of family and other important relationships.
- Loss of many productive years of life.
- Difficulty trusting others and developing intimate relationships.
- Problems thinking independently, thought processes become very rigid with a reduced use of irony and abstract thinking.
- Being used as a slave by the cult.
- Financial loss and suffering, huge amounts of money given to group.
- Hallucinations, panic attacks, guilt feelings, identity confusion, paranoia. In more extreme groups, suicidal tendencies, health deterioration.
- Physical, sexual abuse in the group.
- Criminal behaviour, murder, suicide, gun running, drugs, fraudulent activities.
- Anger with oneself for being sucked into the cult.
- Reluctance to join legitimate organizations or religions.

Obviously, less extreme groups will exert less dramatic damage on its members.<sup>8</sup>

If someone is going to invest considerable time and money in an organization, it makes solid sense to look both ways before crossing the street. Using a simple Internet search, the wary

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discerning consumer can easily uncover the controversies surrounding an organization, and discover other places where the same potential benefits are readily available – without the baggage.

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# The Recruitment Process

**P**eople are usually recruited into cults between the ages of 17 and 35, and frequently by a friend or family member. Of course, older people can also be drawn into a cult and sometimes, the recruiter may be a stranger. In our virtual world, the Internet can easily become a person's initial contact with one or many of these groups.

In most cases, people are not aware that they are being manipulated into a cult because they are kept in the dark throughout the process. When manipulative techniques are brought to bear on vulnerable men and women at a susceptible time in their lives, they can be successfully recruited regardless of their academic or professional achievements. When experiencing extreme stress or personal transition, their guard can be down and their critical thinking skills not functioning at peak levels. Simply put, they cannot see through the deception occurring right in front of them!

In the initial phases of recruitment, the group rarely provides full-disclosure about its nature, agenda and goals. Cults sometimes use innocuous front names. Recruiters meet people at reputable social programs or educational facilities, and skillfully use these one-on-one opportunities to learn about potential members. Armed with this personal information, recruiters can now build the necessary rapport and frame the cult's goals in terms that satisfy the interests and needs of their unsuspecting targets.

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Soon, recruiters will ask these people to attend a second group function. By making small requests that seem innocent, the recruiter begins to weave the inevitable web. The targeted person begins to make small commitments in line with the cult's agenda, including small investments in time and/or money. Eventually, these first-round steps pave the road, and allow the cult to cement a more encompassing and intense commitment.

Spending time at the cult's programs exposes potential recruits to a growing vortex of sophisticated influence tactics. Now, people are on cult turf, far away from their own environment. Recruits can be "love bombed" as so many members overwhelm them with constant attention and sweet-talking compliments. Sometimes, recruiters of the opposite sex will even flirt with them to plant the hope of a romantic relationship.

Amid all this emotional stroking, the recruit's equilibrium becomes disturbed and off-kilter. In a new unfamiliar situation, not knowing anyone except the person who brought them to the program, the recruit assumes the natural tendency to follow the lead of others and conform to the surrounding groupthink. When everyone else in the group exhibits an absolute certainty about the cult's ideology, these hapless people begin to doubt their own convictions.

As they are drawn further and further into the group's web of influence, they may be introduced to more senior or seasoned members who begin to enhance the status of the leader or paint the goals of the cult with compelling strokes.

Sometimes, recruits can encounter unfamiliar jargon, concepts or ideas that destabilize them with feelings of ineptitude. To alleviate this stress, people are provoked to keep on conforming and playing by the rules. At the same time, their many questions remain unanswered, deflected or put off to a vague future date.

The process now revolves around getting recruits to spend much more time with the group, become involved in its many programs and frequently volunteer. This intensification of activity allows the group to assert much more influence and control in the

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recruits' everyday lives. When they are busily occupied with the goings-on of the cult, they have less time and inclination to reflect and critically evaluate their involvement.

Slowly, the person begins to spend less time with family, friends and acquaintances. Most cults know the negative comments that recruits will encounter from these concerned and caring individuals. Soon, a veteran cult member will discuss their predictable critiques and defuse them by explaining why they are only misunderstandings or the unfortunate prejudices of those who aren't in the know. In the future, when the recruit will hear these charges from loved ones, ironically, the cult gains credibility. After all, the group actually predicted the exact criticism that would come from these unenlightened outsiders.

As cult members continue to solidify a recruit's conformity and loyalty, they begin to foster dependency upon the group. The outside world is seen as a place where there is no real truth, no potential for happiness and fulfillment. The group becomes the only place where one can always feel embraced and experience unique spiritual growth alongside peers in the know.

While recruits are undergoing the process of consolidating their loyalty to the group, they are unaware that they're now entrapped in a carefully orchestrated program. The process is slow, insidious and dangerous. People never join cults with their fully informed consent!

The bonding process resembles the activities required to download a new program on your computer. The screen asks you to read the terms and conditions that allow you to use the application. Hardly anyone – including me – ever reads the three or more pages of small print. We just hit the “next” icon and the “next” icon, repeatedly and mindlessly, until we hit the “finish” icon. And so it is when well-meaning vulnerable men and women unthinkingly proceed down the path set out for them by the cult.<sup>9</sup>

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# Understanding the Dynamics of Influence, Persuasion and Manipulation

**M**ost certainly, it's difficult to imagine how people can manipulate us to believe in things and behave in ways that we would ordinarily never do. Most of us feel we are firmly behind the control panel of our lives. However, researchers in the field of influence have revealed that manipulators subvert and exploit the very tools that we assume give us greater control over our lives.

These tricky tactics are not only used by cult recruiters. We also encounter them in our everyday lives in very innocuous settings, such as sales people, telemarketers, ever-present advertising, politicians seeking our votes and much more.

We don't generally appreciate the complexity of our world and the difficulty in navigating it. On a daily, or even hourly basis, we are bombarded with thousands of pieces of information all clamouring for our immediate attention. To make a simple purchase, we are confronted with overwhelming choices. To read a truth-laced article in the media, we must wade through interminable on-line news reports, opinions from the experts, facts that remain unchecked and more. Without question, we are facing, and often drowning, in an incessant information overload from which we cannot escape.

To make our lives easier, we rely on numerous mental shortcuts to streamline our activities and decision-making processes. Pilots who fly jet airliners use Auto Pilot, an extremely useful computer program designed to facilitate their work. Even though this



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“automatic pilot” can virtually take off, fly and accurately land the plane on its own, pilots do not totally rely on this device and never leave the cockpit to watch the movies with the passengers. We know that computers crash, weather conditions change from initial data input, and programs get hacked. Although Auto Pilot is extremely helpful, nevertheless pilots must always watch the program and the plane’s operation very carefully.

Similarly, the mental shortcuts we use are very handy. However, we must use them carefully because others can “hack” into them and use them against us. When we first learned to read, it was a very, very slow process... one... word... one... word... at... a... time. If we maintained that speed, we’d spend weeks reading one newspaper article. Therefore, as we gain reading skills and experience, we become familiar with words and texts that we frequently see. After several encounters, we store them in our “hard drive” and no longer need to read each passage word by word. When we access our “memory drive”, we dramatically increase the speed at which we can recognize text. However, reading on automatic pilot can be easily exploited.



We’ve each see this sign hundreds of times. If we’re driving along the highway at top speed, we’ll barely differentiate the words as we whirl by. However, if someone asked us what the sign

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said, we'd confidently assert, "Of course. It says, Please keep off the grass." But, we'd be wrong!<sup>10</sup>

Social scientists have discovered that there are six behavioural tendencies that influence our social interactions. These tendencies become personal trends because they are so useful and therefore, we come to rely upon them as types of automatic pilot. Of course, the downside to relying on these patterns is that they can easily be exploited. It is vital to remember that because these mechanisms have been so deeply incorporated into our personalities, we don't even notice when they've been hijacked for the benefit of others.

### **Reciprocation**

The rule that obligates us to give to those who give to us is so pervasive that the normal functioning of societies relies upon it. Obviously, reciprocation is a social dynamic that is both practical and makes sense. It's part of the glue that builds and cements close relationships, and it certainly makes for good neighbours.

Although this social rule has remained sacred, there exist many counterfeit versions that masquerade as true reciprocation. Normally, reciprocation applies to authentic relationships among people, but today many companies are hijacking this dynamic. They generously distribute free samples to invoke the recipients' sense of obligation and guilt, thereby coercing them into purchasing their products. This marketing approach is clearly manipulative.

We must understand that for reciprocation to work effectively, a person does not have to receive something of real value. Just the act of receiving prompts the obligation to repay the debt. Fundraisers, for example, often include in their mailings a trinket or token gift with no monetary value. Nevertheless, studies reveal that this successful tactic results in increased donations by triggering the reciprocation reflex.

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Moreover, the principle of reciprocation does not even require that we receive something tangible because we naturally feel a sense of indebtedness to those who make concessions to us. Under normal circumstances and in real relationships, this makes sense. Unfortunately, the mechanism of reciprocation is hard-wired into our brains and can easily be hacked by unscrupulous people who secure the correct passwords.

For example, influence expert Robert Cialdini and his colleagues conducted an experiment in which they randomly asked passersby if they would volunteer to chaperone juvenile detention centre inmates on a day trip to the zoo. For many, this was not an appealing idea and only 17% of respondents agreed to do so. Another random sample of passersby was asked if they would serve as unpaid volunteers at the youth detention centre for two hours per week over the next two years. Understandably, no one agreed. Then, Cialdini and his associates asked them, “Well, if you won’t do that, would you be willing to chaperone a group of inmates from this centre on a day trip to the zoo?” Although only 17% of the first group were willing to comply, when this same request was presented in place of the more onerous long-term assignment, 50% of respondents complied!<sup>11</sup>

### **Commitment and Consistency**

If every time we were about to do something, we stopped in our tracks to thoroughly evaluate the pros and cons – we’d never get anything done. Therefore, we rely on our past experiences and simply do as we’ve done before. This tendency is reflected in our desire to behave consistently and appear in synch with our previous actions and public positions. Furthermore, we tend not to give as much respect to people who continually change their opinions.

An excellent example of how the rule of commitment and consistency can be very helpful was evidenced in the clever way a Chicago restaurant dealt with the common yet troubling problem of people who make reservations, don’t show up and don’t call to cancel. When taking phone reservations, the receptionist

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changed only two words while conversing with patrons. The number of people who didn't show and didn't call to cancel dropped immediately from 30% to 10%!

Instead of stating, "Please call if you have to change your plans," the receptionist now asked, "Will you please call if you have to change your plans?" and waited until the patrons agreed to do so. Once they made that public commitment, they were far more likely to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with it.<sup>12</sup>

Our culture values personal consistency as a useful rule of thumb. Consequently, we run the risk of mindlessly craving consistency when it's not even the reasonable course to follow. Often, manipulators finagle our agreement to make a small commitment that "won't cost you anything!" This small breach paves the way for them to eventually extract significant commitments that we would ordinarily never make.

In a California neighbourhood, a researcher posing as a community volunteer went door-to-door asking homeowners to allow a large public service billboard to be placed on their front lawns urging people to drive carefully. Of course, 83% of those surveyed refused!

Two weeks earlier, another group of homeowners was asked to place a three-inch square sticker in their window urging people to be safe drivers. When the researcher polled this group, she reported that almost everyone agreed because her request was so insignificant. However, when she later approached this group to ask them to place the large billboard on their front lawns, 76% agreed! Their desire to act consistently with their prior behaviour drove them to make a commitment that the first group considered to be entirely unreasonable.<sup>13</sup>

### **Social Validation**

In situations where we don't know what to do, it's perfectly reasonable to take our cue from others around us. For example, we're at a wedding where the customs are unlike anything

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we've ever experienced. We feel uncomfortable and fear we'll do something embarrassing. Prior research would have been a good idea, but few of us do that. For now, we must remain attentive to what other people are doing and just follow along.

Although this tactic makes sense and can serve us well, it's far too easy to mindlessly utilize it and, in so doing, become exploited by people seeking to manipulate us. For example, people laugh more frequently when television shows use "canned laughter" and rate them as funnier than the same show without the artificial giggles and chuckles. People react as if the show must be really funny since many other people are laughing. In truth, no live people are laughing, and the joke is on them since they have been manipulated so easily.

Sadly, there are countless ways in which our tendency to rely on others to show us how to behave can be utilized against our own best interests. Advertisers often stage phony endorsements to persuade us to jump on their cool bandwagon because "Everyone's doin' it!" Cults routinely employ peer pressure to get recruits to comply with their beliefs and practices.<sup>14</sup>

### **Liking**

There are so many people in our lives who are always competing for our attention and want our positive responses to all their requests. How do we determine who to seriously consider and who to ignore? A reliable screening tool is to determine how much we like these people and how meaningful is our connection with them. Because this straightforward dynamic makes a lot of sense, we tend to say yes to those people we trust, admire and share affection.

Manipulators seek to exploit this tendency and have myriad ways to make us to feel a sense of rapport with them. These ersatz connections are carefully cultivated to extract our affection and cooperation. It's critical that we understand the crafty ways in which these people are able to get us to "like" them.<sup>15</sup>

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Some of their techniques are simple, such as frequently using a person's name in conversation or giving compliments, but these ploys must be wielded subtly to ensure people don't get turned off. Creating a sense of similarity can also stimulate rapport. Salespeople and cult recruiters always search for things or interests they have in common with their targets and may even fabricate connections to lubricate their persuasive agenda. "You're into cross-country skiing?! Me too. Hey, that's great. I'm going next weekend and..."

To cultivate rapport, more seasoned influence purveyors often employ more sophisticated technologies, such as NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) and mirror body posture, voice and breathing to create a sense of familiarity. They may even access eye movements to determine if a person's primary sense is visual, auditory or kinesthetic. If you're an "eye" person, they'll speak to your eyes rather than your ears. "Do you see what I mean?" rather than, "Do you hear what I'm saying?"<sup>16</sup>

### **Authority**

All the mental shortcuts we employ to navigate our complicated world are extremely useful and make perfect sense. In fact, going through life without them would be like flying a plane without an autopilot. Sadly, our problems begin when we mindlessly rely upon our trusty rules of behaviour and never bother to check if, perhaps, the autopilot should be disengaged for a particular time period.

It makes good sense to teach our children that if they ever get lost or need help, they should approach a police officer, never a stranger on the street. If we want to ensure that the house we're about to purchase has no major problems, we'd be wise to engage a professional home inspector. If we're confused about the treatment for a persistent health problem, we must contact our family doctor or medical specialist. Because we're only human and can't know everything, seeking the advice of experts is our only recourse.

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Mind saboteurs can deftly exploit our reliance on authorities by feigning expertise and posing as credible sources of knowledge. All too often, we are blindsided by people flashing symbols of authority to gain our compliance. Men and women appear on television in pristine white lab coats hawking diet supplements and other miracle cures. Advertisers bank on the impact of a celebrity's endorsement to promote their product or service. We know that the opinions of a glamorous movie star, supermodel or athlete carry no genuine relevance, but as symbols of status and gravitas, many people take them seriously. Unscrupulous promoters attempt to lend credibility to their inept spokespeople by having them spout a lot of jargon or deceptively call themselves doctors.

There have been instances where individuals have performed fake miracles to gain people's trust and loyalty.<sup>17</sup> Scam artists who offer seminars on developing psychic ability demonstrate that they can read minds or predict the future. Of course, these people have no real powers, but all they need to do is create the impression that they do.

To see how this might be done, follow these instructions:

1. Think of any number between one and nine.
2. Multiply that number by nine.
3. If you now have a two-digit number, add the two digits together.
4. Think of the number you now have and subtract five.
5. Now, give your number a letter equivalent. So, one is A, two is B, three is C, four is D, etc.
6. With the letter you now have in your mind, think of the first country that begins with that letter.
7. As you think of that country, identify the second letter in the country's name.
8. While you focus on that letter, think of a land animal whose name begins with that letter.
9. Try to visualize that animal in your mind's eye and think of the colour normally associated with that animal.
10. Now read the prediction found in footnote.<sup>18</sup>

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This is a relatively simple party trick, but manipulators can employ sophisticated magical illusions or other “miracles” to create the impression that they possess special powers. When we confer credibility to people, we must always remain on guard to ensure that our assumptions are real and not based upon a façade.<sup>19</sup>

### **Scarcity**

Robert Cialdini relates an amazing story about a jewelry store in Arizona that couldn't sell any of its recently acquired turquoise gems. The owner had to go out of town for a few days and left the store manager a note asking him to “price the entire selection at 1/2.” When she returned, to her shock she discovered that all the turquoise had been sold! What happened? The manager misread the note and doubled all the prices.

The explanation of this counterintuitive event is based upon a distinct mental shortcut that people commonly use. Most of the tourists who frequent the store are not experts in the quality of jewelry. Therefore, they rely on the assumption that if something is expensive, it must be of high quality. At the regular price, the turquoise gems didn't move, but at double the price, they jumped off the shelves. Similarly, we often assume, and rightly so, that the more rare something is, the more valuable it is.<sup>20</sup>

There is another factor at play in our inclination to value things or opportunities that appear to be scarce. People don't like to lose their options and the ability to make their own choices. When we fear that something may no longer be available, its value and desirability increases. Savvy advertisers warn us, “Supplies are limited!” or “Special limited time offer!” Cults often play on this dynamic. They claim to possess secret knowledge unavailable to those outside the group or profess to be very selective about those allowed entry to their inner circles.<sup>21</sup>

We rely on these kinds of mental shortcuts because they make sense, prove themselves in the field and are extremely useful. However, by always relying on our autopilots, we tend to use them



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indiscriminately. We're not concerned that wily people with their own agendas want to exploit our reliance upon them for their own ends. As they deftly tap into our habitual decision-making patterns, they fly under our radar and like mental judo, they use our thought processes against us. Unfortunately, we are unaware that we are being manipulated.

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# Warning Signs of Cultic Involvement

**T**he following signs are often observable when someone has become involved with a destructive cultic group:

1. Sudden and dramatic personality changes, such as loss of sense of humour.
2. Difficulties with marriage, roommates and other relationships.
3. Withdrawing from friends and family.
4. Committing tremendous amount of time and/or financial resources to a group to the exclusion of previous interests.
5. Obsession with promoting the group, its ideology and agenda.
6. Growing dependency upon the group.
7. Difficulty thinking independently or critically.
8. Being secretive about their own activities, and vague or defensive about the group.
9. A sudden and consuming interest in issues, such as sin, personal purity, dangers to global survival, knowing God, overcoming stress, personal growth, and claiming that only their group has all the answers.

It is important to remember that not all of these signs will be evident. With involvement in more benign manipulative groups, these signs will be more difficult to detect.

# What NOT to Do When a Loved One is Involved with a Cult

1. Don't panic! Don't rush to intervene before careful thought, research and planning. You may not get another chance to help.
2. Avoid an emotional overreaction. Don't antagonize by accusing your loved one of being in a cult or being brainwashed.
3. Don't criticize or demean the group or its leader. Don't argue about the group or try to debunk the group's practices and beliefs.
4. Don't reject or disengage emotionally even though you feel your loved one is pulling away from you.
5. Don't let your relationship grow cold or deteriorate.
6. Don't send your loved one any articles or websites critical of his/her particular group, or about cults in general.
7. Don't ask your loved one to speak to a rabbi or psychologist who has no experience in dealing with people involved in cults.
8. Don't underestimate the potential harm that can result from being in a cult. Don't assume cult involvement is just a fleeting interest that's not very serious.
9. Don't feel guilty or at fault. Don't feel alone; there are many others facing similar situations. Don't try dealing with it alone; seek out resources to help you.
10. Don't give up hope in the possibility of recovery from a cult regardless of how destructive it is and how long your loved one has been involved. Never give up!

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# What Families Should Do

**I**t is imperative that you seek highly skilled guidance and work with someone who has extensive experience dealing with cult-affected families. Make sure that you carefully check all their references and credentials.

In the immensely difficult process of rescuing people from cults, the critical role of families and close friends cannot be overstated. The primal nature of these life-long relationships is deeper and more genuine than the manipulative and orchestrated web of control constructed by the cult. Therefore, it is essential to keep focused on your relationship and to invest heavily in strengthening it.

- Strive to keep open all lines of communication. Without being overbearing, try to have regular contact, preferably in person, otherwise by phone or email. Even if they are not very responsive, keep up your end of the relationship.
- Work on building trust and rapport. Express sincere love and reinforce the positive connections you already have. Be creative in fostering more closeness in your relationship. Reminisce about great experiences you shared in the past to help them connect with their pre-cult life. Send an old photograph or poem they once wrote that might mean something to them. Offer to take them on a trip they would really enjoy. Do not arouse suspicion by coming on too strongly. In situations where the relationship has seriously deteriorated, consider working with a highly skilled family therapist.
- Practise non-judgmental active listening. Ask open-ended questions that allow them to share what they see as

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positive about their involvement in the group. Expressing curiosity about the group and their experiences in it builds rapport and models intellectual openness and rationality. At the appropriate time, you will want to encourage them to willingly explore things outside their comfort zone by objectively examining their cult involvement.

- Try to elicit information about the cult and their involvement without sounding as if you are prying or interrogating them. In these discussions, it is helpful to determine how deeply they're involved, how they currently process information and how they think critically. Whereas they will eagerly share glowing reports about the group, it's unlikely they will share their doubts or concerns about their involvement.
- Model critical thinking and problem-solving behaviour to stimulate these skills in the cult-affected person. This can be accomplished by referring to and discussing situations that occurred in their lives or in the news over the previous week. Seeking their input or advice on a personal or family issue can be a good way to build rapport and encourage them to think independently.
- Positively reinforce and gently encourage any non cult-related interests or activities.
- Keep a journal of the information you discover about the cult and any important details about your loved one. These materials will be important for any professional therapist you may eventually consult.
- Learn as much as you can about the specific cult, the general topic of cultic influence, and the process of helping people re-evaluate their involvement in a controlling group.
- Realize that the process of encouraging someone to rethink his or her commitment to a cult can be long and arduous. Resist the urge to rush the process or to prematurely arrange for someone to meet with your loved one – even if this

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person is highly qualified. A successful intervention or exit counseling requires thorough preparation.<sup>22</sup>

- Make sure you take care of your own physical and spiritual needs. You will not function at the high level necessary to help someone else if you become physically run down, emotionally drained or spiritually deflated. Try to use this crisis as a catalyst for your own personal and spiritual growth.
- Prayer is a powerful resource. Consider taking some time to pray in your own words, each day, for the person involved in the cult.

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# Cultivating Cult-Evading

*Fortune favours the mind that's prepared.*

– Louis Pasteur

**P**reventive medicine is certainly no guarantee that illness will never occur – but it certainly increases the likelihood of remaining healthy. Similarly, there are many ways we can help build a sturdy personal foundation from an early age to minimize the chances of being manipulated and controlled.

- Raise children in loving and supportive families with close relationships and open communication.
- Encourage children to develop a group of appropriate close friends and to invest in these relationships.
- Ensure that children grow up with a healthy sense of self-esteem.

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- Help children develop critical thinking skills and become street-smart.<sup>23</sup>
  - Foster a healthy use of digital media.<sup>24</sup>
  - At the appropriate age, explain the principles of persuasion and manipulation and the ways they are used by everyone from salespeople to cult recruiters.
  - Encourage children to discover and develop their personal strengths and skills.
  - Model and teach healthy values, attitudes and personal ethics.
  - Make the home a place where Judaism is experienced as a rich and joyous spiritual path.
  - Help nurture and find a way to channel children's innate sense of idealism and community responsibility.
  - Help children develop effective coping skills for managing stress and tolerating the ambiguities in life.
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## Afterword

*Who is wise? The one who can foresee what will ultimately transpire.*

– *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Tamid 32a*

**T**hroughout our lives, many doors will open for us. We will meet many people and will have to choose which ones to form relationships with. Many opportunities and experiences will become available to us and we will have to choose which paths to pursue.

Our lives are precious, and our time is limited. We all have our unique potential to actualize. We must be open to new people and

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opportunities, but we must also use our powers of discernment and choose wisely.

Our families and close friends truly desire what is best for us and have our interests in mind. There are others with their own agendas who seek to use us for their own ends.

We hope this book will help you navigate the road ahead more safely.

“When you meet the friendliest people you have ever known, who introduce you to the most loving group of people you’ve ever encountered, and you find the leader to be the most inspired, caring, compassionate and understanding person you’ve ever met, and then you learn the cause of the group is something you never dared hope could be accomplished, and all this sounds too good to be true – it probably is too good to be true! Don’t give up your education, your hopes and ambitions to follow a rainbow.”

– Jeannie Mills, former member of  
The People’s Temple

Mills authored the dramatic exposé, *Six Years With God: Life Inside Jim Jones’ People’s Temple*, in 1979, one year after the mass murder/suicide of 914 members of The People’s Temple. She and her family escaped the cult three years earlier. In 1980, Jeannie Mills, along with her husband and daughter, was murdered at their California home.

# Footnotes

- 1 Here are several attempts to concisely define what a cult is:

“A group that practices systematic manipulation of social and psychological influence”, Margaret Singer.

“A group that recruits through deception and retains its membership through coercion”, Pricilla Cotes.

“A cult is a highly manipulative group that exploits its members and can cause psychological, financial and physical harm”, Florida International University.
- 2 Other examples include:
  - Charles Manson’s group The Family murdered 8 people in California in 1969.
  - David Koresh led the Branch Davidians in Waco Texas. 76 members, including Koresh, perished in a fire they allegedly set that destroyed their compound in 1993.
  - Shoko Asahara founded Aum Shinrkio, presently called Aleph, in Japan in 1984. They conducted sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway system in 1995 killing 13 commuters and seriously injuring 54.
  - Marshall Applewhite founded the Heavens Gate group in the early 1970s. 38 members committed suicide near San Diego in 1997.
  - The Order of the Solar Temple was founded by Luc Joret. Between 1994 and 1999, 74 members were murdered or committed suicide at locations in Switzerland, France and Quebec.
  - Joseph Kibwetere led the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God in Uganda. Nearly 1,000 members were poisoned or perished in fires in the year 2000 in a mass suicide/ mass murder.
- 3 For more on the mind control techniques used by cult groups to indoctrinate and control its members, see *Dangerous Persuaders*, by Louise Samways. Penguin Books, 1994, pp. 61-95; *Mind Abuse by Cults and Others*, by Adrian and Anne Greek. Positive Action Center, 1985; *Cults and Consequences*, by Rachel Andres and James R. Lane. Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, 1988, part 3; *Cults: Too Good to be True*, by Raphael Aron. Harper Collins Publishers, 1999, pp. 104-111; *Captive Hearts Captive Minds*, by Madeline Landau Tobias and Janja Lalich. Hunter House, 1994, pp. 34-47; *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, by Steven Hassan. Park Street Press, 1990, pp. 53-94; *Recovery From Cults*, Edited by Michael D. Langone. W.W. Norton and Company, 1993, pp. 51-125; *Cults in Our Midst*, by Margaret Thaler Singer and Janja Lalich. Josey-Bass Publishers, 1995, pp. 125-181; *The Manipulated Mind*, by Denise Winn. Malor Books, 1983, chapters 1-9.
- 4 For more on LGATS and similar groups see Singer and Lalich, pp.182-212; Samways, pp. 39-44.



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- 5 See, for example, the dozens of books on self-esteem, personal growth and spirituality by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., including, *The Ten Steps to Being Your Best*, Shaar Press, 2004 and *Twerski on Spirituality*, Shaar Press 1998. Also, see *Battle Plans* by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller and Sara Yoheved Rigler, Shaar Press, 2009. In addition, the teachings of the Mussar movement have become extremely popular in recent years. For an introduction to these powerful tools, see *Climbing Jacob's Ladder* by Alan Morinis, Broadway Books, 2002 and *Everyday Holiness* by Alan Morinis, Trumpeter Books, 2007. See also [www.mussarinstitute.org](http://www.mussarinstitute.org) and [www.madrega.com](http://www.madrega.com)
  - 6 See *Among the Truthers* by Jonathan Kay. Harper Collins, 2011, part 2.
  - 7 For more on the issue of vulnerability, see *Smashing the Idols* by Gary D. Eisenberg. Jason Aronson Inc. 1988, pp. 3-10 and 45-49; *Prison or Paradise* by James and Marcia Rudin. Fortress Press, 1980, pp. 97-105; Aron, pp. 20-21; Samways, pp. 96-100, Singer and Lalich, pp. 15-20.
  - 8 See Tobias and Lalich, pp. 266-268; Singer and Lalich, pp. 83-102; Langone, pp. 151-153.
  - 9 For more on the recruitment process see *A Jewish Response to Cults*, Edited by Gary Bretton-Granatoor. UAHC Press, 1997, pp. 70-77; Singer and Lalich, pp. 104-124; Andres and Lane, part 2.
  - 10 This sign reads: Please keep off the THE grass. For other examples, see *Influence: The New Psychology of Modern Persuasion* by Robert B. Cialdini, Ph.D. Quill Publishers 1984, pp. 15-27.
  - 11 Cialdini, pp. 50-51. See also *The Power of Persuasion*, by Robert Levine. John Wiley and Sons, 2003, pp. 65-89; *i is for Influence*, by Rob Yeung. Macmillan, 2011, pp. 162-180.
  - 12 "The Science of Persuasion" by Robert Cialdini in *Scientific American Mind*, January 1, 2004, p. 72.
  - 13 Cialdini, page 79-81. See also Yeung pp. 115-126 and Levine pp. 159-186.
  - 14 For further discussion of social validation, see *Influencer* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler. McGraw Hill, 2008, pp. 137-166, Cialdini, pp. 115-162; Yeung pp. 15-44.
  - 15 For more on the "Liking" principle, see *Get Anyone to Do Anything* by David J. Lieberman, Ph.D., St. Martins' Griffin 2000, pp. 1-52; *Persuasion: The Art of Getting What You Want* by Dave Lakhani, John Wiley and Sons, Inc. 2005. pp. 16-37 and 95-101; *Modern Persuasion Strategies*, by Donald J. Moine and John H. Herd. Prentice Hall, Inc. 1984, pp. 19-30; Levine, pp. 56-58; Yeung, pp. 153-180; Cialdini, pp. 163-202.
  - 16 See *Make People Like You – In 90 Seconds or Less* by Nicholas Bootham, Workman Publishing 2008; *Magic Demystified* by Byron A. Miles and R. Frank Pucelik, Metamorphous Press 1982; *Solutions* by Leslie Cameron-Bandler, Future Pace, Inc. 1985, pp.29-76; *Influencing with Integrity* by Dr. Genie Z. Laborde, Crown House
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- Publishing 1984; *Introducing NLP* by Joseph O'Connor and John Seymour. The Aquarian Press, 1990.
- 17 See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Popoff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Popoff); *The Faith Healers*, by James Randi. Prometheus Books, 1987.
- 18 See *Easily Fooled* by Bob Fellows. Mind Matters, 1989, pp. 7-23. By the way, are you thinking of a gray elephant from Denmark?
- 19 For more on the principle of authority, see Levine, pp. 29-56 and Cialdini pp. 203-228.
- 20 Cialdini, pp.15-21.
- 21 *Secrets of Power Persuasion*, by Roger Dawson, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1992, pp. 56-60. See also Levine, pp. 141-142.
- 22 For information on how the process of exit-counselling works, see *Exit Counseling* by Carol Giambalvo. American Family Foundation, 1992; Cults: *What Parents Should Know*, by Joan Carol Ross and Michael D. Langone. Carol Publishing Company 1988, pp. 35-127; Singer, pp. 287-294; Hassan 1988, pp. 112-167; Hassan 2000, chapters 3-12; Langone, pp. 155-202; Eisenberg, pp. 225-256; Aron, pp. 112-184.
- 23 See *The Art of Thinking Clearly*, by Rolf Dobelli. Harper Collins, 2013; *Clear Thinking*, by Hy Ruchlis. Prometheus Books, 1990; *Willful Blindness*, by Margaret Heffernan. Doubleday Canada, 2011; *The Art of Deception*, by Nicholas Capaldi. Prometheus Books, 1979; *Predictably Irrational*, by Dan Ariely. Harper, 2008; Levine, pp. 227-244.
- 24 See *Alone Together* by Sherry Turkle. Basic Books, 2011; *The Shallows*, by Nicholas Carr. W.W. Norton and Co., 2011; *The Digital Divide*, Edited by Mark Bauerlein. Tarcher/Penguin, 2011; *The Cult of the Amateur*, by Andrew Keen. Doubleday Books, 2007.
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## Recommended Reading

*Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*, by Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. W.H. Freeman and Company, 1991.

*Brainwashing: The Science of Thought Control*, by Kathleen Taylor. Oxford University Press, 2004.

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*Captive Minds, Captive Hearts: Freedom and Recovery from Cults and Abusive Relationships*, by Madeline Landau Tobias and Janja Lalich. Hunter House, 1994.

*Coercion: Why We Listen to What “They” Say*, by Douglas Rushkoff. Riverhead Books, 1999.

*Combatting Cult Mind Control*, by Steven Hassan. Park Street Press, 1988.

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*Cults: What Parents Should Know*, by Joan Carol Ross, Ed.M. and Michael D. Langone, Ph.D. A Lyle Stuart Book, Carol Publishing Company, 1988.

*Exit Counseling: A Family Intervention – How to Respond to Cult-Affected Loved Ones*, by Carol Giambalvo. American Family Foundation, 1995.

*i is for Influence: The New Science of Persuasion*, by Rob Yeung. Macmillan, 2011.

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*Recovery From Cults*, Edited by Michael D. Langone. W.W. Norton and Co., 1993.

*Releasing the Bonds: Empowering People to Think for Themselves*, by Steven Hassan. Freedom of Mind Press, 2000.

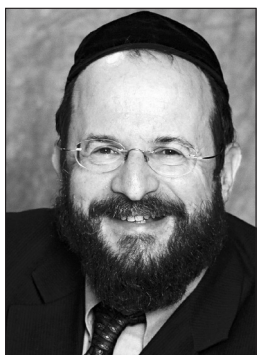
*Snapping: America’s Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change*, by Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman. Stillpoint Press, 1995

*The Manipulated Mind: Brainwashing, Conditioning and Indoctrination*, by Denise Winn. The Octagon Press, 1983.

*The Power of Persuasion: How We’re Bought and Sold*, by Robert Levine. John Wiley and Sons, Inc. 2003.

# About the Author

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Rabbi Michael Skobac has been involved with JEWS FOR JUDAISM (Canada) since 1989 and currently serves as its Director of Education and Counselling. He is a leading authority on missionaries, cults and issues relating to Jewish continuity and Jewish spirituality.

Educated at Northwestern and Yeshiva Universities, he has been passionately involved in Jewish education and outreach since 1975. Previously a campus professional with Hillel groups in Philadelphia, New York and Toronto, he was founding director of Kiruv, the campus outreach arm of the Rabbinical Council of America.

Rabbi Skobac established the New York branch of JEWS FOR JUDAISM and served as a consultant to the New York Jewish Community Relations Council Task Force on Missionaries and Cults. He has developed and taught many courses on Jewish-Christian polemics that are now replicated around the globe.

Rabbi Skobac has advised Jewish communities worldwide in developing responses to the many threats and issues challenging Jewish survival, and has developed innovative responses to missionaries and cults that target Jews.

Rabbi Skobac's publications include *Missionary Impossible: Counter-Missionary Survival Guide*; *The DaVinci Code: A Jewish Perspective*; and *Intermarriage: Is There Light at the End of the Tunnel?* His popular audio recordings include *How to Answer a Christian Missionary*; *Scripture Twisting: How Missionaries Distort the Jewish Bible*; *The Jews for Judaism Counter-Missionary Survival Seminar*; and *The Forest Beyond the Trees: What is Judaism's Bottom Line?*

Rabbi Skobac is a popular, sought-after speaker who has addressed wide-ranging audiences throughout North America,

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Israel, South Africa, England, India, Australia and the Former Soviet Union.

A regular contributor to Jewish and secular media, his columns appear internationally. For over 10 years, he has been a featured guest on two Toronto radio shows, and makes frequent appearances on a wide range of radio and television programs to share his vast expertise.

In recent years, through his presence on the Internet, Rabbi Skobac has made an enormous impact in reaching Jews worldwide. Every day on YouTube and KosherTube, thousands of people view his videos and hear the audio recordings of his many lectures. As well, he personally interacts with and counsels countless others on Facebook and Twitter.

Through his counselling of Jewish families and individuals involved in intermarriage, cults, Christianity or other religions, Rabbi Skobac has personally rescued countless Jews and reunited them with their families, friends and community, thereby fulfilling JEWS FOR JUDAISM's goal of "Keeping Jews Jewish."

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## About Jews for Judaism

**J**EWES FOR JUDAISM is the only international organization exclusively dedicated to countering the multi-million dollar efforts of Christian missionary groups that target Jews, the impact of cults and eastern religions, and the growing rate of assimilation that is devastating the Jewish community.

Our two primary goals are to keep Jews Jewish by strengthening Jewish pride and identity through preventive education, and to save Jewish lives by winning back vulnerable Jews who have been influenced by missionaries, cults, eastern religions and assimilation.

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JEWS FOR JUDAISM achieves its vital goals and promotes Jewish continuity through the following free educational programs, materials and counselling services that connect Jews to the spiritual depth, beauty and wisdom of Judaism.

- 24-Hour Hotline
- Activism & Volunteers
- Advertising Campaigns
- Audio & Video Materials
- Books & Literature
- Campus Programs
- Conferences & Rallies
- Counter-Leafletting
- Crisis & Exit Counselling
- Facebook & Twitter
- Internet Websites
- Lectures & Classes
- Library & Archives
- Monitoring Missionary & Cult Activity
- Outreach to Hebrew-Christians
- Referrals & Information
- Russian Outreach
- Shabbat Hospitality
- Speakers' Bureau
- TV & Radio Programs
- YouTube Video Channel

To date, over 350,000 Jews worldwide have participated in JEWS FOR JUDAISM's successful educational programs and counselling services.

In an average year, JEWS FOR JUDAISM (Canada) achieves the following through the generous help of concerned individuals:

- Provides 1,800 counselling sessions on missionary, cult and Jewish issues.
- Fulfills 2,500 requests for help, information or referrals
- Presents lectures to 7,000 Jews, including youth & seniors.
- Distributes 25,000 free pamphlets, books & audio materials.
- Receives 100,000 visitors to our Internet websites including [www.jewsforjudaism.ca](http://www.jewsforjudaism.ca).
- Receives 500,000 “views” of our online video programs at YouTube and Koshertube.

JEWS FOR JUDAISM unites the entire Jewish community in a common cause. Over the past 25 years, we've earned endorsements from a spectrum of Jewish agencies, rabbis and educators.



# STOLEN MINDS

## Understanding Cults

By Rabbi Michael Skobac

**T**oday, many people assume that destructive cults have gone the way of childhood polio and the dodo bird. This is a dangerous and false assumption. Cults have not disappeared – although many have undergone effective cosmetic makeovers and now fly under our radar.

According to recent estimates, there are now over 5,000 cults operating throughout North America. The lives of countless people are being negatively impacted by these insidious groups.

Because the common perception of the cult phenomenon is rife with misconceptions and misinformation, JEWS FOR JUDAISM has produced this concise guide. This book is packed full of vital information and practical guidance that will empower you and your family.

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*STOLEN MINDS: Understanding Cults* is published by **JEWS FOR JUDAISM**, the only international organization exclusively dedicated to countering the multi-million dollar efforts of Christian missionary groups that target Jews, the impact of cults and eastern religions, and the growing rate of assimilation devastating the Jewish community. **JEWS FOR JUDAISM** achieves its goals through free educational programs and materials, as well as counselling services that connect Jews to the spiritual depth, beauty and wisdom of Judaism and keeps Jews Jewish.

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KEEPING JEWS JEWISH