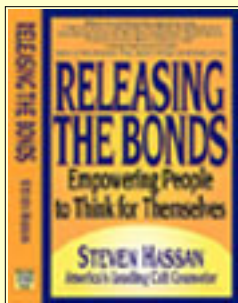




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Frequently Asked Questions

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What is the difference between a destructive cult and a cult?

Essentially a destructive cult is a pyramid-shaped authoritarian regime with a person or group of people that have dictatorial control. It uses deception in recruiting new members (e.g. people are NOT told up front what the group is, what the group actually believes and what will be expected of them if they become members). It also uses mind control techniques to keep people dependent and obedient. Destructive cults try to "clone" people to become small versions of the cult leader, rather than respect people's individuality, creativity and self-will.

Cult groups are any group of people who have a set of beliefs and rituals which are non-mainstream. As long as people are freely able to choose to join with full disclosure of the group's doctrine and practices and can choose to disaffiliate without fear or harassment, then it doesn't fall under the behavioral/ psychological destructive cult category. Of course, there are also those groups which are anti-social (e.g. the KKK, nazis, white supremacists) which teach hate openly which can certainly be considered to be destructive also.

Are all destructive cults religious?

No, in addition to religious cults, there are therapy cults, political cults, business cults. Destructive relationships and destructive psychological influence can take place in small numbers (one person controlling another person, for example) or in groups that become political state/cults which contain millions of citizens. Many destructive cults encompass religious, political and business enterprises.

Are all cults equally as bad?

No, there are definitely wide variations among different organizations. Aum Shinrikyo, the Japanese "nerve gas" cult, used physical imprisonment, illegal drugs, and forms of torture to indoctrinate new members. People would be forced to turn over all of their assets and cut off from their families and friends. If members tried to leave the group or oppose its leadership, often they would be killed. This is vastly different from large group "training" programs which merely use hypnotic techniques to get you to believe the leader is the "messiah" and which inculcates the membership to recruit all of their families and friends.

Is all mind control bad?

"Mind Control" as described in my book is certainly focused on the abuses of the knowledge of the mind. However, I believe that many [mind control techniques](#) (such as hypnosis, visualizations, meditating, prayer, ritual, altered breathing) can be used ethically and to great positive benefit, providing the locus of control is within the individual and there is no hidden agenda to have people submit and turn over their power to some other human being.

Being in control of your own mind includes being in touch with your feelings, having the ability to think analytically, question, look at issues from multiple perspectives, having control of your behavior to take periodic "time-outs" in order to reflect and be able to have access to information which may be "negative" to the group leadership.

Why do destructive cults say that you are anti-religious or bigoted?

Destructive cults have a long history of manufacturing propaganda against "enemies". Groups have mounted a campaign to attempt to convince members and the general public not to listen to me or read my materials because too many people were leaving their ranks.

I am a human rights activist who very much values my spirituality as the core of my existence. I pray and meditate daily. My work has received endorsements from virtually every major religious denomination. I definitely believe in a God who created us with free-will and wants us to use our minds to live lives of love, peace, beauty, and goodness. My work has grown out of my own desire to grow in understanding and to help people to realize that they need not be psychologically constricted.

Are you a deprogrammer?

If the term deprogramming means abducting people and holding them against their wills to help them exit a cult, the answer is NO! While I have always admitted that when I first left the Moon cult in 1976, I did participate in about a dozen "involuntary" interventions with people in the Moon cult, I have not been involved in anything involuntary since 1977. In fact, I have been speaking out publicly against forcible interventions since 1980 or so. Despite this fact, destructive cults have manufactured lies and propaganda in an effort to convince members not to investigate the facts for themselves.

I am a licensed mental health counselor. I got my Master's degree from Cambridge College in 1985, and have taken the time and undertaken the expense to receive counseling training from some of the top people in America and the world. I have experience doing individual, couple and family counseling. I teach communications techniques and strategies and encourage a legal approach which I call "strategic interaction therapy".

What should I do if I suspect a family member or friend is getting involved with a destructive cult?

My best advice is to take a "curious, yet concerned" attitude. Don't get hysterical, don't be oppositional or confrontational, don't ask them if they are in a cult! Position yourself as a possible "recruit" and try to solicit as much information as possible. Ask questions in a friendly manner and insist on getting specific answers. Don't settle for global generalizations or obfuscations or evasions. Ask for any literature, but be cautious about going to meetings without getting properly prepared. I have repeatedly heard of people getting sucked in that way.

If a group is legitimate, it will stand up to scrutiny. Members will be forthcoming with information and that information will be verified by facts. If a group is legitimate, they will not pressure people to make commitments before there is complete disclosure. If a group is legitimate, it will not lie nor will it use phobias to enslave new members.

Get information, maintain contact, try to get the person to engage in researching the group objectively. Talking with former members, particularly former leaders can be extremely useful. Destructive cults vilify critical former members and make up stories to make them untrustworthy. While that might be the case, use your own good judgment to listen objectively to all of the facts to decide.

If you wish to request a consultation with [Steve Hassan](#), please visit our [help](#) section or fill out a [case evaluation form](#).

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