

Cults: Some Theoretical and Practical Perspectives*

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"I am your brain . . . what I wish must be your wish. Our strategy is to be unified into one with ourselves, and with that as the bullet we can smash the world."

— Sun Myung Moon

Few readers can be totally unaware of the critical social crisis facing the Jewish family that is represented by the recent cult phenomenon. While perhaps having been deeply entrenched while fighting two major social crises, an increasing divorce rate and a burgeoning number of intermarriages, and perhaps having been too quick to write off Key '73 as a harmless fad, many of our important educational and social service agencies have been caught with their guard down by the cult movements. The numbers, the names and other statistics are still either skimpy or unreliable, yet the incidents, the calls for help and the inability or lack of knowledge to help are painfully evident. There are many cults, each with its unique characteristics and philosophy, and there are countless individual reasons for the attraction to and for joining a cult. Yet, some generalizations can be usefully advanced for consideration, derived at this early stage by the few interviews deprogrammers and counselors have had with individuals who have left or been brought out of cults, or by pure professional speculation.

I will analyze some of the psychosocial dynamics which conduce such a surprisingly large proportion of today's adolescents toward cults. I will discuss the means by which cults entrap and then reinforce commitment from their acolytes. This analysis will also isolate some of the weaknesses in certain types of

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Jewish family structure and with certain levels of religious affiliation which may encourage susceptibility to the lure of cults. Finally, some practical considerations in dealing with the potential cult candidate will be offered.

"Cult" is a popularism which includes the following of Sun Myung Moon, perhaps the most economically powerful, philosophically noxious and motivationally unscrupulous of all the "cults." Moon claims a membership between 10,000 to 30,000 with 2,000 to 10,000 full time members. Given a conservative estimate of about 5,000 member Moonies in the United States alone, Rabbi Maurice Davis, an expert on the Moon cult and founder of C.E.R.F. (Citizens Engaged in Reuniting Families), estimates that 12 percent of this membership is Jewish, 35 percent Catholic, 40 percent Protestant. Moon owns industries, hotels, etc., and has been documented to have a hand in sponsoring numerous public and private scientific symposia.¹ Under the rubric of cult are also included the Hare Krishna, the Jesus People and Jesus Freaks, Scientology (a pseudo-therapeutic psychological self-help group which is not officially connected with any specific "religious" affiliation),² Maharj Ji's Divine Light Mission, and numerous others thinly styled after some of the far-Eastern esoteric religions. In North Ameri-

¹ B. Rice, "Messiah from Korea," *Psychology Today*, 1976, 9(8), p. 36-47. Other documentation has been presented by Maurice Davis. CERF can be reached at 252 Soundview Ave., White Plains, New York, 10606.

² See G. Malko, *Scientology: the New Religion*, New York: Dell, 1970; P. Cooper, *The Scandal of Scientology*, New York: Tower, 1971; and the partisan view of O. Garrison's *The Hidden Story of Scientology*, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1974.

can countries in which many of our Jewish adolescents have recently tripped on drugs and radical politics, cults have apparently become a new opiate for the youth of the 70's. Indeed though adults and even second generation cult children are numbered in the gross membership, the central target population of cults is the adolescent — and for no accidental demographic reason, as we shall see.³

Trying to differentiate cult from legitimate religion is a difficult task, our intuitively based preconceptions notwithstanding. First, long-standing moral and legal traditions of democratic countries which preserve the sanctity of free religious expression tend to encourage conservatism with regard to publically demarcating legitimate versus illegitimate belief systems. This tradition is also one of the primary obstacles against blanket criminalization of cults at this time; though specific practices such as kidnapping, when cults can be proven to have committed them, would readily be considered illegal. Proposed definitions, based on the criterion that true religion, in principle, does not seek to violate a person's freedom to practice the religion of one's choice, become muddled over sensitive issues such as conversion, legitimate versus illegitimate missionizing, etc. In fact, I have often been greatly disheartened to find that during lecture and discussion groups on cults to adolescents many delight in sophomoric debate over whether the Jewish community has any right to interfere with the "choice" of other adolescents to affiliate with a cult. Unfortunately, latent in this commitment to libertarianism at the expense of Jewish survival is the gaping psychosocial need for something which apparently neither society at large nor Judaism in specific is supplying. Yet, the aforementioned "philosophers" were at least of the majority of similarly poorly affiliated youth who attend lectures, classes, etc. Obviously, 12 percent of Moon's 5,000 American members have, for the time being, found the

³ See C. Evans, *Cults of Unreason*, New York: Tower, 1973 and "Cultism and the Young," *Roche Report: Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 1976, 6(13), p. 2-10.

answer to such needs within the soft, matriarchal charisma of the cults.

I think it is amply evident that defining cults — that is, beyond the descriptive level — is difficult at best. Thus, the social service agent involved in work with parents or children on this matter may be forced to accept arbitrary or intuitive definitions. A value judgement will be unavoidable as the worker ponders whether he or she is agreeable to the notion that any movement which takes the Jewish believer away from religion, parents, peers and social milieu threatens Judaism, individually or collectively. The Free Clinic counselor, for example, who treats all "alternative life styles" as value free and equally as opportune for any individual as the religion of the latter's youth, will probably have difficulties accepting a parental claim that, say, Billy's membership in the X-cult is an injustice to Billy's Judaism (unless, of course, kidnapping was involved as the means of introduction to the cult). It is therefore incumbent upon the Jewish social service agent, working out of the school, the synagogue, the family service agency, or whatever, to familiarize himself with both the theoretical and practical considerations which obtain with regard to cults and their victims.

Cults have been broadly characterized by Spartan living conditions — uniformity of dress, diet, style of speech, isolation from former family and friends, strict prohibitions against premarital sex or drug intake⁴ — a far cry from the hostile conception about the goings on in cults harbored by many. It is the manner by which such a way of life is cultivated and reinforced, however, which brings to the fore the more disagreeable aspects of cults. In a sense, one might cite the lack of candidates' awareness of these occlusive methods of indoctrination — lack of awareness specifically promoted by cult leaders — as one characteristic which differentiates cult-type "religious" commitment from true religious belief. And though there are blind believers in most authentic religions, such belief is neither the most desirable level of

⁴ Davis, *op. cit.*, 1976; Evans, *ibid.*

commitment nor is it purposely reinforced.

It should be stated at the outset that no single one or combination of mind controlling techniques is as powerful insofar as captivating the interest of the adolescent candidate is concerned as the very inner needs of the adolescent which the cult way of life appears to be able to satisfy in so many ways. That is, there are two levels at which to understand why cults are so attractive to certain youth: the *practical* level — i.e., what practices ensure candidate interest and allegiance, and the *cosmic* level — i.e., what existential, normal and fundamental human problems or crises are met by the cult? With some thoughtful consideration of these important questions we will hopefully be closer toward understanding the cult phenomenon.

One of the obvious characteristics of cult life is the almost constant movement in which cultees are engaged such as rapidly paced walking through streets, travel, bus rides throughout the country in search for candidates, etc. Other ceaseless rounds of activity include chants, prayers, discussions, calisthenics, soliciting of funds and membership. In Moon cults, new members are constantly followed during all of this activity — even to the bathroom, and, as part of another daily ritual, must write out their thoughts of the day for peer inspection.⁵ As Robert J. Lifton, a noted Yale psychiatrist specializing in the techniques of mind control (brainwashing) used both here as well as abroad in prison camps, describes, such constant movement plays a significant role in setting the ground work, as it were, for a heightened suggestibility which, in turn, can emphasize the attractiveness of cults.⁶ Other possible techniques have been cited. The vegetarian diet, a staple of many cults, allegedly practiced in emulation of the religiously based vegetarianism of Eastern religions, can produce a rapid weight loss leading to a temporary state of euphoria

⁵ Davis, *ibid.*

⁶ Roche Report, *op. cit.*, 1976 and see Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1961.

which, again, may foster a heightened state of suggestibility — a state crucial to hypnotic induction. Thus, one can view these diets as designed to bring about psychophysiological change which influences mood; producing the experience of having the “weight of the world lifted off of my shoulders.” If what is involved in cult affiliation is actually some sort of hypnotic-like state, which has in no way been proven, then it can further explain the pervasive experience felt by cultees of an oceanic inner calm as being due to the similar sense of calm and tension reduction often fostered by a well-induced hypnotic state.⁷ The blank stare projected by many such highly induced youth is thus perhaps indicative of this superintense conviction of inner happiness. The evident problem for the prospective therapist, counselor or rabbi, among other things, is that such adolescents are quite happy and satisfied—albeit from certain perspectives an empty and inauthentic happiness—with their new way of life.

It is also conjectured that cults somehow create a severe anxiety over death through group emphasis on the meaninglessness and futility of the candidate's former way of life. Candidates are also made to believe that escape from this ineluctable fate can only be achieved by “rebirth” through the cult.⁸ These anxieties and other beliefs considered important by the cult are reinforced through continuous repetition of certain phrases (“thank you, praise you”), sacred code words (“scientific truth,” “inner living,” “pain engrams”), ubiquitous peer approval, and the continuous states of travel mentioned earlier which all contribute towards breaking down formal patterns of thinking and empty the mind of past associations and appropriate feelings.⁹

⁷ L. Wolberg, *Hypnoanalysis*, New York: Grune & Stratton, 1964.

⁸ Roche Report, *op. cit.*, 1976 and cf. Evans, *op. cit.*, 1973.

⁹ “Sects: the Power of Positive Chanting,” *Time*, 1969, January 17, p. 51.

Cults also rely heavily on manipulation of guilt through extreme polarization of the values of good and evil, right and wrong. Even when initially contacted on street corners, cult indoctrinators will encourage interested parties to think in black-and-white terms. For example, if an adolescent is asked, “Did you find your parents to have been sources of meaningful life understanding?”—a frequent lead-in, recruiters will insist on narrow answers in either/or categories. This technique, especially successful with adolescents, seems to play on the as yet immature preambivalent stage of adolescence wherein ego development is still closely defined along the lines of all-good/all-bad object ties. Further reinforcement of such constricted thinking at cult education sessions, prayer, meditation, etc. also encourages the development of super-strong convictions about cult philosophies and tenets to cover for the obvious inadequacies of such thinking. It is into this state of psychic readiness that one's new and intense conviction in the authority of the cultic leader is nurtured.

Another technique used by Krishna, Moonies and Scientology, in one form or another, is an age-old practice perfected by modern era POW camps and known to have been used by Korean captors on American prisoners of war.¹⁰ Cult candidates are made to confess their personal immoralities and improprieties vis-à-vis the cult's conception of morality and propriety before a judging person of some capacity, thus further engendering this sense of dependence and submission to the control of this allegedly all-knowing judge (in Scientology one reviews painful past experiences—engrams—in the presence of an “auditor”¹¹). Ex-cultees relate that there is often an implicit belief in the power of the in-group to dispense existence, to determine who has the right to live or die, physically or metaphorically—such as in the extreme example of the Charles Manson group or, to a lesser degree, in Moon cults—which also enforces

¹⁰ See Lifton, *op. cit.*, 1961.

¹¹ Garrison, *op. cit.*, 1974.

the exaggerated sense of power and strength.

Hypnoanalysts have also observed that one of the concomitant phenomena of the hypnotic state is that a close relationship is fostered between patient and operator which has the effect of assuaging the patient's sense of helplessness.¹² It would be more than reasonable to assume that the same sort of relationship develops between cult members and their leaders. There is through hypnotism the fostering of an intense focus on an individual's heretofore unexperienced sense of “I.” All of these new sensations—the sense of intense happiness, of one-ness with a group, of self-discovery, power and control—are primary reinforcements in their own right and play a significant role in ensuring the strength of adolescent commitment.

Most important for our consideration at this point are the *cosmic* or existential adolescent needs which, when unanswered by standard societal or religious structures, are easily manipulated and intensified by the aforementioned techniques. That is to say, rather than consider youthful interest in cults as some abnormal phenomenon, it is more useful to consider such attraction as one of many possible alternative solutions to the critical conflicts inherent in adolescence and, in the case of certain of these conflicts to be discussed, to mankind in general. While abnormality may enter the picture; i.e., concerning the extent and degree of such commitment, what a youth might be persuaded to do while under the heady influence of such commitment, what latent personal pathologies become exacerbated by extended isolation from family, etc., the basic needs or conflicts which motivate the diverting of energy toward a cult are truly developmental or normal. It is unfortunate that only when we have shaken ourselves from smug expectations of the-ways-things-are-supposed-to-be that we realize, insofar as this Jewish social crisis is concerned, that the very elements which cults offer

¹² Wolberg, *op. cit.*, 1964 and A. Weitzenhoffer, *General Techniques of Hypnosis*, New York: Grune & Stratton, 1957.

today's adolescents are precisely those understandings, meanings-of-life, rules, customs, senses of togetherness and self-discovery, cosmic relatedness and authority which had been the domain of religion, good parenting and society at large. It is not my purpose to launch wholesale battle against the faults of modern day Jewish leadership, of many Jewish parents' sense of Jewish responsibility, or of Jewish education, though certainly others might feel this a proper format through which to lay groundwork for combating cults. However, it is clearly my intention to underscore those human needs whose fulfillment through the Jewish religious and social worldview need be addressed and re-examined by concerned Jewish educators, rabbis, social service workers and laypersons.

One crucial perspective from which to view adolescent development and which highlights factors that add to the attraction of cults is that of ego-formation. Adolescents, as part of a successful resolution to their unfolding psychosexual development, have to disengage from infantile dependencies or, what Anna Freud termed a "loosening of infantile object ties." Ego-development thus is dependent upon the establishment of internal boundaries differentiating self from outside world; internal objects from external ones. With the advent of healthy ego-/or self-differentiation comes the need to find objects outside of the self which can be invested with love and then incorporated into the self. The rub is that in normal development such internalized objects remain differentiated within the self; in pathology, one recognizes that such objects become confused with weak self-boundaries. It could be suggested that in the case of certain individuals, whose sense of inner incompleteness is so great, the need to find an object outside of themselves that will complete them becomes overwhelming. Furthermore, the excess of positive affect and interest extended towards such youth by eager cultists is readily idealized as one such love-object.

It has been noted in general that adolescents have an almost infallible way of finding a re-

gressive out from life so as to delay growing up and to avoid accepting adult responsibilities and roles.¹³ Surely, our society is one in which clear-cut adult roles are hard to find—indeed, some ex-cultees have mentioned that cults provided clear authority figures who did not seek to imitate adolescents. Thus, by offering strong parental figures, cults have managed to attract those persons who are deeply involved in the search for such models. Adolescence is also a period when one is expected to establish new relationships in which one has a vital ego stake but in which one has often not yet had the chance to test oneself or to learn how other people will respond to one's advances. Again, the cults have seemingly picked up on this sense of trepidation and seductively offer fool-proof routes to interpersonal relating experiences.

Fears are another inseparable aspect of much of adolescent development. Maslow and Fromm have eloquently made the case for the exquisite quandary adolescents experience as they confront their many fears: fear of growing yet fear of remaining dependent; fear of asserting oneself yet fear of being left alone; fear of relating to others yet fear of being alienated.¹⁴ This pervasive fear of every step in forward movement is only exacerbated by the rapidity and complexity of society's own momentum. And while, on the one hand, it is true that "prolonged adolescence" itself constitutes a sometimes pathological delay of adult responsibility taking,¹⁵ on the other

¹³ There are those who feel that adolescence, in general, is but a stage of abnormality within the continuum of psychological development. The more acceptable view, from at least this author's standpoint, is that adolescence is "not an affliction but a normative crisis." (E. Erikson, "The Problem of Ego Identity," *J. Am. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 1956, 4, pp. 56-121, pp. 72-73.)

¹⁴ A. Maslow, *Toward A Psychology of Being*, Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1954, p. 46 and E. Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, New York: Harper & Row, 1964.

¹⁵ See P. Blos, "Prolonged Adolescence: the Formulation of a Syndrome and its Therapeutic Implication," *Am. J. Ortho.*, 1954, 24, p. 733-742.

hand, our society involves more rapid changes than the average adolescent can assimilate with poise.¹⁶ There is another need during adolescence for *shared* experiences—yet the mobility of like-aged and like-interest peers often works against the fulfillment of such a need. Further, adolescents in many Jewish circles have long since gotten out of the habit of finding the shared experience of religious functions, ceremonies and synagogue involvement relevant. From the standpoint of mental health, functional (relative) ego autonomy—the primary task of adolescence—means that the ego, or sense of self, must conform to the input from the social environment consistently and coherently throughout life. In the 19th and even the early 20th century, psychosocial tasks were relatively congruent.¹⁷ Class, work and social impositions made it difficult to deviate from norms. Today, however, social stimuli are insistently overwhelming and social and psychological tasks are no longer congruent.

The upshot thus far is that ego development today requires a certain flexibility, a greater tolerance for ambivalence and ambiguity. A healthy resolution of the adolescent phase of development requires the ability to tolerate a modicum of tension and to be able to cease mourning for past infantile fantasies and expectancies. An inability to perform these psychic maneuvers can result in personality disorder or, on a lesser level, a disequilibrium or vacuum into which the attractiveness of cults gains entrance. In using cult involvement as an escape from the paradoxes and crises and fears of adolescence, the adolescent individual thereby contracts precisely at a time when a more healthy response would involve expanding; his fears, rather than be resolved, become disguised. One looks at an adolescent in a cult who glibly proclaims his new-found power, strength, love and goodness. In reality,

¹⁶ R. Lynd & H. Lynd, *Middletown in Transition*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1937, p. 315.

¹⁷ J. Conger, *Adolescence and Youth: Psychological Development in a Changing World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1973, p. 482-483.

however, one quickly discerns that with most such cases, one is viewing *fear disguised as strength*, *fear disguised as love* and *fear disguised as goodness*. One had but to increase one's experience with cults and their opportunistic philosophies to learn that fear disguised as strength reveals strength defined as power over others; fear disguised as goodness reveals goodness defined as refraining from, rather than reaching for, productivity in life; fear disguised as love reveals love defined as narcissism, possessiveness and inability to affirm another as a person in his own right.¹⁸ These are masks of fear which, like any of the more well known defense mechanisms, might serve an individual amply well, especially when such masks are part of the ethos of the cultic way of life. Religion, certainly Judaism, has stood the test of time in its ability to assist man in transcending fear rather than merely disguising or suppressing it. Yet, in the absence of the type of religious commitment or practice which must apparently be a prerequisite for benefiting from this latent function of religion, the cults have monopolized on the exigencies of adolescent need.

One benefits, I think, from some further theorizing about possible deeper, so-called existential needs of mankind in general which conduce toward cult involvement. Jules Masserman once wrote of three universal defenses utilized by man—*Ur* defenses—through which man has avoided facing nakedly the grim realities of life. He enumerates: (1) man's belief in his immortality and invincibility, supported by the institution of religion; (2) man's belief in the omnipotence of his various authority figures; (3) man's confidence in the positive function of society and his belief in man's ultimate concern for his fellow man.¹⁹ According to this perspective, man has an

¹⁸ This is an analysis suggested by B.W. Overstreet, *Understanding Fear in Ourselves and Others*, New York: Harper & Row, 1951.

¹⁹ J. Masserman, "The Biodynamic Approaches," In S. Arieti (Ed.), *American Handbook of Psychiatry*, Vol. 2, New York: Basic, 1964, p. 1680-1969.

innate defensive need to invest power in certain institutions as a route to securing personal stability. Obviously, man's ability to place confidence in a belief in man's concern for his fellow man is constantly buffeted by the sordid revelations of the media and perhaps by our own involvement in the world where such concern seems slow in coming. Second, with the decline in traditional religion, man's search for immortality has also become a more difficult one. Man has deep seated needs for transcending the limitations of his finitude and for finding life meaningful on the highest possible level. A sense of transcendence over death is one such method and having some sense of continuity and vitality as a self is yet another.

Yet, today we live an age of "historical dislocation;" i.e., there is a break in the sense of connection which men have long felt with the vital symbols of their cultural traditions. At the same time, we are witness to a flooding of imagery produced by the extraordinary flow of post-modern cultural influences over mass-communication networks. Each individual is touched by everything, overwhelmed by superficial messages, undigested cultural elements and endless partial alternatives to all aspects of life.²⁰ In short, our sense of the symbolic is being threatened by simple historical velocity, by the existence of the everpresent possibility and feasibility of nuclear disaster which threatens all modes of existence, and by the decline of theological faiths and symbolic interpretations of reality and being. To the degree that Jewish life has suffered serious neglect in these areas of need because, in part, Judaism has been construed by so many of our youth as irrelevant and otiose and, second, because so many have failed to understand just how broadly Judaism does in fact address the sorts of psychic needs discussed thus far—has its adolescent community been easy prey for cults. We must begin to accept Judaism's role in providing for a meaningful inner formulation of self. "Our ways of symbolizing life,

²⁰ R.J. Lifton, *History and Human Survival*, New York: Vintage, 1971 ed.

continuity and vitality with a sense of self as alive becomes a psychiatric paradigm rather than an instinct and defense. It involves a double level of functioning—psychological interactions without varied environments, and a level of ultimate concern to which religion usually directs itself . . ."²¹

Cults have benefited from the far reaching effects of societal alienation of its adolescent community. Alienation—the sense of "existential outcastness"—can lead to various responses: withdrawal, rebellion, rejection of specific, undesirable aspects of society, family, religion, etc., or a constructive, continued search for belongingness.²² I have already enumerated many of the major causes of such alienation. The lack of historical connectedness with one's Jewish past, which itself is attributable to many factors whose discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, only serves to make this alienation more intolerable. The age-old involvement of adolescents with adult religious ceremonial practices has also diminished to a point where useful identificatory models are hard to find—and soon are no longer sought. The greatest concern is that alienation from others leads sooner or later to self-alienation. Self-alienation, in turn, only leads to any number of pathological alternatives to coping; one of which has been the interest in cults.

In summary, I have tried to show just how cults cater to several psychosocial and cosmic needs of modern adolescents and to stress how, in most cases, the cult appeal has been precisely to supplant the element of religion so obviously vital to a satisfying, meaningful, transcendent mode of existence. Cults offer extreme togetherness, vitality, continuity, psychological defenses of all sorts, something approaching religion, and symbolic responses to youth's quest for meaning in the universe. In many cases, adolescent needs mentioned in

²¹ Roche Report, *op. cit.*, 1976.

²² K. Keniston, *The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society*, New York: Dell, 1960 and see Conger, *op. cit.*, 1973. cf. also L. Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations*, New York: Basic, 1969.

the foregoing are only different in degree of urgency from the analagous needs of existentially estranged and religiously impoverished adults.

What practical considerations emerge from this analysis? Several can be enumerated which flow from both this abstract analysis as well as from the experience gleaned from the notes of those few who have actually worked with such adolescents and their distraught parents.

Adolescence is a state of normative crisis which is subject to the deleterious effects of rapid change and inconsistency. Parental norms, values and expectations, by way of long-range prevention, must be clear and relatively firm. On the other hand, modern adolescents must be reared in such a manner as to promote an ability to tolerate ambiguity which will inevitably be a characteristic of our society for some time to come.

Religious values, if they are expected to bear the burden of providing psychic supports and wholesome routes to transcendence and symbolic and self-integrity, must be clearly enunciated and practiced by adults.

Educational systems which purport to address the religious needs of modern youth need to stress learning of biographies of past Jewish charismatic historical personalities and to incorporate the teachings of past and present Jewish religious leaders (as opposed to political leaders) into courses which stress the vitality of certain past outlooks and perspectives on life and its problems.

Community Jewish family services must become aware, knowledgeable and efficient in providing services to adolescents either involved or contemplating involvement in cults. Such services must be extended to parents as well and, on some outreach basis or in some advisory role, to schools, synagogues, hospitals, etc. That is, in view of the ethical issue raised in the beginning of this essay, Jewish social service agencies must make evident their interest and willingness to make this apparent psychiatric problem a Jewish one to the degree that their communities define the survival of autonomous Jewish identity as more sacred

than spurious exercises in "value-free self-discovery." Moreover, to this end, social service agencies or concerned independently affiliated professionals might seriously consider formulating working alliances with local Chasidic groups, such as *Chabad*, whose success with at least the crisis stages and immediate follow-through periods with troubled adolescents appears to be relatively significant. The productivity of such intra-community teamwork, if feasible, should be considerable.

The personnel capable of and on-call to perform "deprogramming," a non-professional term for breaking the trance-like hold over cult members, must be considered, for it seems, at this point, that deprogramming is effective in the majority of cases in which it has been used. One must be careful, however, in openly advocating deprogramming with anything similar to a nothing-else-works argument, although such an argument always has its certain inescapable strength when balancing it against an emergency situation involving a real person! That is, it is my opinion that deprogramming is not without a certain degree of psychiatric risk: specifically in cases involving individuals with weak personalities or with just-below-surface, latent psychopathology prior to cult commitment. It is usually difficult at best to ascertain at the moment precisely where each individual stands psychiatrically before some well-meaning deprogrammers have begun their battery of challenges to the adolescent's cult allegiance (and deprogramming can take from one to thirteen hours). Obviously, most hospitals would not consider doing evaluations so as to assist some amateur in performing what is considered "wild therapy." However, deprogrammers must consider carefully the risks that they may be taking in cases where the deprogramming "agenda" calls for more than long, heated debates about fine points of Hindu vs. Jewish philosophy.

What should a parent say to a youth upon becoming privy to his or her plans to experiment with the cult way of life? No pat answers suggest themselves, yet there are options that

must be openly discussed. I think the most difficult and perhaps threatening idea which the parent(s) might have to accept is that their children are clearly declaring dissatisfaction, discomfort and dislike of the parental way of life, expectations, values, etc. Thus, any advance towards compromise with such children will have to involve some degree of open willingness to change and to cooperate in some formal or informal plans for radical re-vamping of past modes of family living and relating.

Assuming that such parents now confront a deprogrammed youth: what next? Again, far too many factors would have to be considered than can be adumbrated here. Yet, it appears vital that parents do not become smug, convinced that the worst is over or that, given a few minor changes and perhaps some new family hobbies, their child is back to stay. The deprogrammed individual is frail, borderline, balancing tenuously on a tightrope between the known and the unknown—between the taste of the regressive irresponsibility of cult life and the unforeseen world of old/new family and social life. If there were fears and ambivalences and tendencies toward regression prior to an adolescent's cult involvement, the deprogrammed youth experiences these ten-fold. The upper limits of the worker's empathic potentials are called into play when accepting such individuals and their phenom-

enological perceptions of reality. If the cults have taught lessons, one is surely that opportune use of vacuums affords great power. We are slowly becoming aware of the uses to which cults have put this knowledge. The Jewish family must now also learn to fill such vacuums with whatever messages and symbols we hold dear. The period following deprogramming is one such critical vacuum into which must be gingerly replaced such missing values.

Conclusion

Hopefully, some of the elements which have emerged from this discussion can be incorporated into programs designed to fill the present lacunae in social services for adolescents involved in cults. Just why some individuals find the cult experience meaningful and cannot see through the patent superficiality of such cults is a difficult question to answer, though some clinically based speculations have been forwarded here. Perhaps Judaism and its internal community structure face in cults a test to its own ability to tolerate challenges which both damage as well as point to important weaknesses. Redefinitions, re-appraisals and restructuring are, in one way or another, all in order; especially when the systems involved concern the survival of the individual as Jew and as person.