

FOREWORD

How does an idealistic young man with a loving marriage and a sense of spiritual purpose, derived from his Christian faith, become involved in a cult? John was unaware that his local church was affiliated with a church run by an abusive pastor. What he did know was that his local pastor, who he respected and trusted, was impressed with this pastor and John was encouraged to move inside Jane's church.

This is an account of how an innocent person can be vulnerable to the deceptiveness and exploitation of a pastor, whose Christian church had all the elements of a cult. Many cults are deceptive and appear as legitimate organizations at the outset. Members are taken on a step-by-step journey that exposes them to increased manipulation and control over time. If John knew in advance the extent of all that would be required of him, he most likely would have been reluctant to join. Whaley's unique doctrine demanded that members totally conform to her messages from God; and these messages encompassed every aspect of her followers' lives, including family, career, and financial matters, in addition to spiritual concerns.

As with other high demand groups, Jane Whaley had a special vehicle to hook all of her followers into submitting to her ideology. Her hook was loud prayer, which had elements of both positive and negative reinforcement. Loud prayer, an overwhelming experience, used to cast away the ever-present Devil, was utilized to bring Deliverance to straying members. To cope with the bombardment of loud prayer, John retreated and he would lose track of time and disconnect from his feelings, thoughts, and those around him. The deafening sounds and words seemed to take on a life of their own. Whaley reinterpreted the dissociation that loud prayer fostered as a spiritual experience revealing the power of God to cast out the Devil. Another mechanism that kept members on the right path was the desire to avoid the painful onslaught of loud prayer, a vehicle that members were supposed to embrace as "enjoyable."

Other cults use different dissociative processes, such as chanting, meditation, or lecturing. Cult groups employ this bombardment of the senses, plus some degree of isolation from the outside world and restriction of communication within the group, to increase the impact of the cult leader's message. If successful, these techniques move members into a state of intense anxiety and confusion in which they are induced to abandon previous coping mechanisms. Therefore, they inevitably enter into a dissociative state, which is reinterpreted as being some form of a higher power. This belief promotes the members' veneration of the leader and acceptance of the ideas presented. In addition to deception and positive and negative reinforcement, cults also employ group pressure, intimidation, and environmental manipulation. All of this coalesces to develop a new "pseudo-identity" that is formed above the recruit's original personality (West and Martin, 1996, pp. 268-288).

Initially, when filled with doubt, John would remind himself that to have doubts was sinful and, instead, to focus on all he was gaining by his membership. This was how he convinced himself to incorporate his leader's message. Lalich refers to this experience as "bounded choice," two complex processes that occur simultaneously in such situations: conversion and commitment. Lalich states, "There is fusion between the ideal of personal freedom (as promised in the stated goal of the group or its ideology) and the demand for self-renunciation (as prescribed by the rules and norm " (2004, pp. 14-15). In other words, the cult leader demands proof of loyalty to his beliefs; and the cult member believes that, by renouncing his previously held views (which now become devalued), he is attaining the path to purity.

What allowed John to leave? Despite all of this manipulation, after many years, John became increasingly troubled. He saw how Whaley's life contrasted with her followers. In one example of the leader's secrecy, Whaley hid church finances. In one example of hypocrisy, she lived in luxury while she told her followers that to be more spiritual they should not covet worldly pleasures. Instead, they typically shared homes, tithed, and were pressured to spend numerous hours volunteering for the church. Most of all, John began to feel that he was straying away from all that

he loved about his Christian faith. Nevertheless, the impetus to leave came when John took the courageous step of refusing to return to an ill suited church run job. It appeared that his better-suited employment, outside of church control, had enabled him to tap into his own desires as separate from God's (Jane's). It also allowed John to rebel against the leadership.

John had a heartbreaking decision to make. Although John felt it was intolerable to remain, the decision to leave was frightening and painful: Members were told that if they leave God's (Jane's) path, they would go to Hell. If John left the church, he would have to leave without his beloved family. Cults destroy the family by interfering with intimacy between family members. Whaley had convinced his family that John was leaving God and his family must shun him in order to get him right with God (Jane).

Outside the cult, John provides support to other former members. He has bravely written his insightful memoir to warn others. Now he lives with the hope that someday those in the group, especially family, would read this book and leave. John Huddle displays warmth, kindness, and humor in his poignant account of the process of enmeshment and extrication from a cult.

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