

Mind Control

It was estimated in the eighties that there were over three thousand destructive cults in the USA, involving over 3 million people. (1) At the turn of the 20th century the rate of growth has greatly increased!

One author describes 'mind control' as: '*a system of influence that disrupts an individual's identity (beliefs, behaviour, thinking, and emotions), and replaces it with a new identity.*' (2) In most cases the new identity is one that the original identity would object to if it had advance warning. The solution is: control must always remain with the *individual*. If deception, false teaching, hypnosis and other mind-control techniques are used, then people's rights are being *invaded!* '*Mind control encourages dependence and conformity, and discourages autonomy and individuality*' (3) Mind control is more subtle than 'brainwashing'. Brainwashing is done with minimum choice and maximum force, even to torture.

An example of wrong control is in churches or groups where the individual finds it difficult to leave or is under some pressure not to leave. Many cult groups systematically but usually subtly instill phobias in their people about ever leaving the group. This is often only evident at an unconscious level. The best way to judge a group is to look at the members *freedom to leave*.

Many people become susceptible to mind control and may join cults at a time when they are dissatisfied, unhappy or spiritually 'dry'. This condition may not be evident to anyone but close friends.

The human mind needs a 'frame of reference' to 'interpret' information coming in every second. If the frame of reference (mindset) is changed then the information will be interpreted in a *different* way. Mind control involves control of *thoughts, behaviour and emotions*. *Each one when changed affects the other two*. Control the emotions and you can control the thoughts! The most important development of a mindset is to control the *information* and the *way* the person will receive it. At many Charismatic type meetings, people's basic and normal behaviour can sometimes be changed *dramatically*. To compensate for this the recipient will allow his or her thoughts and incoming information to *accommodate* the *new* behaviour. With many Charismatic experiences, many people do *not* have a frame of reference to interpret the experience and so the recipient will accept a *new* frame of reference, (including new teaching involving scriptures taken out of context). Hypnotic processes and 'group dynamics' are evident in these meetings. An 'altered state of consciousness' (ASC) is produced, which is *different* from normal consciousness, (that which is focused through the five senses). Instead the focus is now *inwards*. As proven by psychological research, in this state the persons *critical faculties* are *diminished* and the person's *defences* against error are also weakened. One cannot *effectively evaluate* and *discern* in this state! In hypnotic type states people may do remarkable feats, such as being glued to the floor or to a chair. Repetition or forced attention for some time may also help to produce this ASC condition, depending on the personality of the recipient. Certain types of personalities, (usually 'open' types) are more susceptible to ASC and the effects thereof.

Some cult groups also use 'thought stopping' techniques. Whenever the cultists has a bad thought or a thought that is foreign to their 'frame of reference', they perform some

activity in the mind to eradicate the unwanted thought. Chanting aloud and speaking in 'tongues' are common practices. 'Speaking in tongues' blocks out other thoughts and leaves the mind relatively *empty* again. Many cult groups use 'tongues'. As one member of the group called '*The way*' said: '*In my group we were taught how to speak in tongues, which was supposed to be a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. We were to do it whenever we started to think for ourselves or question anything*'. (4)

Mind control or indoctrination often has three stages: 1. A time of 'bridge building' where the cult leader or false teacher will give facts that most people will *agree* with. For example, the *Jehovah Witnesses* are masters at initially introducing you to *agreeable* facts, such as the state of the world or the condition of morals in our society. Whatever the method, most recipients will *agree* with what is being initially said. 2. The second phase introduces *debatable facts* that you may not entirely agree with, but by this stage it is a proven psychological fact that many people will *continue* to agree. This is partly due to the *bridge* of trust that was built in the first stage. 3. The third phase gradually puts the listener into a position where he will be given the basic facts or *beliefs* that the cultists or false teacher wants him to believe. This may take hours or months. Each of these phases *decreases* the level of discernment but *increases* the level of indoctrination. Many cult groups arrange to come back for a time of 'study'. *Objective thinkers* will less likely be caught in the second phase mentioned above. Yet once ensnared into the teaching, the recipient will be taught to think in an *objective* way and screen out anything that disagrees with their new mindset (or 'frame of reference')!

Recent studies done on various cult groups have shown that people in cult groups are usually moving towards the *same* personality profiles - like clones. There is nothing wrong with any one personality profile, but the wrong is in all the members being coerced towards the *same* personality type. Tests done on samples of people in cult groups showed similar personality types and marked movements to one or two types of profiles.

Most people assume they could not be sucked into a destructive cult or false teaching! These may well be the ones likely to be deceived! We are not totally rational creatures. *Complete* rationality denies our emotional nature. People don't join cults, they are *recruited!*

People must be encouraged to *think for themselves*. The lack of this is why we have *poor discernment* in our churches and why there is so much false teaching. My message to pastors is clear - make your people *objectively think* about *what* they believe and *why!*

The Greek word for 'discern' is '*diakrisis*' which is made up of '*krisis*' - *to judge*; and '*dia*' - *through*. It essentially means to *judge through* something to separate good from evil and truth from error. The emphasis here should be to judge the *error* first, not the truth. This has been the mistake of the church in recent years. We should test a work by its *error*, not by its truth. It is the error in a thing that needs to be 'purged out'! In the Bible *leaven* is a symbol of sin, error, (1Cor.5:6-8; Gal.5:9), and false doctrines, (Matt.13:33; 16:6-12; Mk.8:15; Lk.12:1; 13:21). In the Parable of the Leaven the woman hides the leaven (error) in the lump (of truth). This leaven or error affects all that is good. In other parables such

as the Treasure in the field; the Wheat and the Tares; and the Dragnet; the worthless (error) is always separated from the valuable (truth). *A little leaven (error) leavens the whole lump...* We are told to *purge out the old leaven*, and to *have the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*, (1Cor.5:6-8).

Most false teachers or cults emphasise that we must not judge at all. This is dangerous to discernment and is a terrorist act to the mind!

Cult groups will often bombard or confuse people with knowledge or facts before they can decipher the information correctly. However, one who is used to judging or analysing information is *less* likely to be confused with a barrage of information.

Many cult groups and some Christian churches give little free time, but rather keep their people busy several nights per week, including weekends. Similarly, in cult groups there is always something to *do*. This may lessen the ability to discern truth from error.

One way to detect a cult group is to examine how much emphasis they place on *money* or *enterprises*. The luxurious lifestyles, real estate and business enterprises of many leaders has been well exposed in recent times, (eg. Word-Faith healers, TV evangelists, etc). These people fleece their followers of money, but worse, they detract from their followers the ability to think and judge for themselves. Many cult groups take the false teachings of Christian groups like the faith healers (Hagin, Copeland, Hinn, etc.), and apply their teachings to further extremes. False teaching that initially may appear relatively harmless often ends up in extremes and excesses. Many even refuse to use doctors and see sickness as the result of sin or a 'lack of faith'. Many have refused medical help and have died causing untold anguish to families and friends.

Emotionalism may also be an integral part of the mind-control of cultish or false teaching. There is nothing wrong with emotion but *emotionalism* is emotion taken too far and contradicts God's command of 'self control', (Gal.5:23). Arguably, the most serious sickness in the church today is its lack of discernment in this fleshly area. Emotionalism seriously affects the mind's ability to discern and plays havoc with the ability to judge error. Many of our churches today unknowingly use hyped services to heighten the experiential side of the personality, yet during the week this may cause an inability to live on a balanced level of spirituality. Similarly, cult groups may use a 'Peak Experience' to which their people base their teachings and future activities upon. This is also evident in many churches where the success of a prayer meeting or a service is based upon experiences or activities that are *outward* manifestations, again involving emotionalism.

Cult groups may also develop in their people a 'persecution complex' so that when they are persecuted or disagreed with they see this as *normal* opposition, thus the more committed and single-minded becomes the 'mindset' to be able to stand firm in what they believe.

So, how do we get people out of false or cultish teaching? We must at some stage, even for a brief time, get them to think from another perspective. Their current reality must be shaken. When dealing with destructive cults it is sometimes wise to think of the person as having *two* identities. The cultist may have something similar to two personalities - one his former identity and now the new identity. If possible we need to get the cultist to briefly think as his *former* identity.

Some counsellors take the cultist back to experiences before he was a member of the group in an effort to connect him or her with their previous identity. The new identity of the cultist has control of his or her consciousness most of the time. It is this identity that has to be broken down. Confusion and pain may result in the cultist's mind, but this is a necessary procedure in 'exit-counselling'. Contact with outsiders is crucial to see a cultist come out of the cult. Literature, tapes and videos can be a vital tool in reforming the 'frame of reference' in a cultist's mind.

At some stage, we might ask the cultist if he would be willing to research the *other side* of the beliefs. If we can get a 'yes' answer, set a time *immediately*. Ask the cultist to inform no-one else of his intention. Then compile or prepare information. Sometimes it may be advantageous to use ex-members of the same group, or seek advice from experts where possible.

I will often relate to the cultist my own experiences in false religion and false teaching. This takes the pressure off their own group and is less threatening. First build *trust*, then gather information, and then plant *doubt* in the cultist's mind. If possible ask *questions* rather than state facts. Act *curious*. This draws responses out of the cultist and builds empathy and trust. Let them think that you have not yet made a final judgement on their group. Do not meet with others in his or her group! I have found this to be too confrontational, less effective and usually detrimental to the mind of the cultist.

Stick to one or two topics at a time. Refuse to be side tracked! Learn when to 'back off' and close the meeting so as to leave a door open for another meeting!

If the person leaves the cult group, the work does not stop, but in a sense begins in earnest. A person who has been put out of a group will often experience the pain of re-adjustment. Depression is common as they come to grips with the sense of betrayal and spiritual abuse. Sometimes there needs to be a 'grieving' period. The ex-cultist will need to be *re-taught*, (Heb.5:12-14).

At some point the ex-member may have a desire to research deeply about the group and answer every question he or she may still have. I recommend that the person then write down their research as this helps to get it 'out of their system'. When I left the Roman Catholic religion and later other false teaching, I found research and writing of much benefit in 'letting go' the pain of re-adjustment.

The mind is a powerful instrument given to us by God. It can be used to bless God or it can be tampered with and abused. The Bible says to...*bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*, (2Cor.10:5), and to monitor and control thoughts, (Is.26:3; Phil.4:8; Rom.12:1,2; Ps.19:14). May we understand the blessings and curses of mind control that many could be set free to worship the true Lord in Spirit and in truth.

Terry Arnold,
TA Ministries, PO Box 1499, Hervey Bay, Qld, 4655
Ph.0411489472
Email: taministries@bigpond.com
Website: www.taministries.net

(Reference: '*Combating Cult Mind Control*' by Steven Hassan).
(1) '*The psychology of the cult experience*', by Glenn Clooins, *The New York Times* 15/3/82. (2) '*Combating Cult Mind Control*' by Steven Hassan, P. 7. (3) *Ibid* P.55. (4) *Ibid* P.91,92.