

Chapter 18

WHY?

When circumstances such as I've written about saturate the lives of people, the universal question always asked is "Why?," or "How could that have happened?" There's an answer to this question, but unfortunately it's not easily grasped. I believe to this day, that all who were in the group did nothing for their own personal gratification. We gave our all for what we believed was God's will and inescapable command.

Human behavior is one of the most beautiful, yet sometimes tragic, of life's mysteries. Like skipping rocks across the water, I've only briefly touched upon the elements of this story. Much like prison confinement, I find myself lacking language to adequately describe the experience. Day-in, day-out, moment-by-moment experiences are simply impossible to share; there's too much detail that is outside the realm of normal human experience. Cult settings are quite similar. The controlled experiences of each day affect the members. It's mistakenly assumed that people who find themselves involved in such a setting are merely weak, or in some way flawed. This would be true only to the degree that we, as human creatures, are all weak in some way or at some time. But should such weaknesses be considered flaws? We all have weaknesses, and we all have weak times. Consider these times much like the formation of a storm. With the right mixture of various meteorological influences, clouds and strong winds appear at the onset of the storm, but it still comes down to the matter of effects mixed with timing.

Jesus spoke of how man watches the sky, in order to forecast the weather (Matthew 16:2-3), yet he also expressed how similar are the influences that work upon man. So, when searching for the answer of how these settings and activities occur, we must recognize in all the humility of human fallibility that when faced with the appropriate circumstances, cultic settings will be the natural result. When human behavior goes astray from what is established as normal, we hesitate to consider the equal possibility of natural influences producing natural results. One of my greatest hesitations in writing this book is that various biases will affect the reading of it. Christians will determine that it is merely Mormonism—and RLDS Mormons will determine that it is merely "Lundgren-ism."

The deficiency I hope will be revealed is not lack of accountability, but rather vulnerability. These deficiencies occur at any of the numerous cross-roads of life. We all face times of struggle and weakness in our lives, and the propensity toward these settings are born at those times. The phenomenon does not often affect a large percentage of the people because seldom does the

appropriate setting cross the path of the individual's life at the appropriate time. Nor will every setting influence every person the same way.

I recall hurricane Andrew—a mixture of influences and timing. Had the timing been different, the effect of the influence would have come together differently, and the area (and persons) impacted by its devastation would have been different as well. But with all the conditions right for the formation of a hurricane that would hit south Florida, so it did. In like manner, when the right setting crosses the path of the individual's life at the right time the individual will be vulnerable to it. We are not, however, left without an "escape" (1Corinthians 10:11–13). The more we come to understand these stormy settings, the better prepared we are to defend ourselves against them. Sometimes this defense means the ability to forecast, thereby avoiding the point of contact.

Five people are now dead who had every promise of a happy life by way of their benevolent and loving attitude toward others. People in similar groups have also died. Therefore, it's my hope and prayer that we not judge these people more harshly than we would ourselves. In the book of Job we read that there was an unforeseen enemy that came and stole away his prosperity; then there suddenly came a great wind that killed Job's children. The book of Job is a story of human disaster and loss, yet at the end of the book we read that Job's knowledge of God came from his understanding that God is beyond all comprehension (Job 42:1–5). We can come to understand that these settings occur, by way of the influences that create them. But why those influences have the effect they do is something that, as yet, must be attributed to God's omniscience by confession of our own human limitations.

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A SERMON WAS PREACHED IN BRANSON, MISSOURI, one day in May of 1987, which resulted in a change in plans Susie and I had made for our vacation. The speaker was a guest at our congregation and made an abrupt change to his sermon midway through. This was the same day that we would have left on vacation to a different location. Why did he come to preach on that day? Why did he suddenly change the context of his sermon to speak on an issue that I was, at that moment, struggling with? Why, at that particular time, did he suggest Jeff Lundgren, of all people, as a tour guide for showing us the Temple? Upon meeting Jeff and Alice, why did I find that my sister (who had no association with this guest speaker) knew them too, and spoke of what fine people they were? Were this preacher to have spoke just five months later, Jeff would no longer have been working at the Temple. Why such timing? Are these just coincidences that have no answer? How can we make such examples of timing of less effect, and make our belief of God's direction within our life of greater effect?

We are taught to be circumspect as watchmen of ourselves, our households and our church family. Prayer is an essential part of our stewardship in

faith. Even in our natural frame we see only a 180-degree view of our surroundings. This is, perhaps, why we pray for a hedge of protection, so that if and when a destructive influence comes our way, our omniscient Savior will draw our senses toward His protection, rather than toward distractions that serve to pull us to where we ought not look.

Journalism, from the social psychology viewpoint teaches that the media cannot only forecast what public opinion will be, but can actually create it. This is why freedom of the press was so very essential to our nation's founding fathers. To control and centralize the information relayed through the media to a society is to control and centralize the view that that society will have of their world. This heavily influences our view of "reality." Social isolation is a common component of cult settings. Distraction of the individual(s) by stimulating the senses may elicit feelings of guilt, humiliation and fear or, conversely, positive sensations such as love, or sacred duty. But isolation also limits what might be viewed as possible choices of a given issue. The book of Proverbs gives splendid insight. Consider the following. "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him" (Proverbs 18:17, NIV). From another chapter, we find that a balanced view in our dealings is quite important to God. Therefore, our sources of information must be balanced in order to obtain a view of Truth. "Differing weights and differing measures, the Lord detests them both" (Proverbs 20:10, NIV).

Our judicial process has been set up to present two opposing views of a given issue. If only one side were allowed to speak, then it would be impossible to gain a fuller view of the issue. As mankind, we are a step above that of the animal kingdom. Therefore, we have the ability to process information. However, in order to process it correctly, we must be allowed an appropriate, or balanced, view. Otherwise, our only choice will be bias.

Robert J. Lifton has composed a list of eight basic principles, commonly found within cults. They are:

- Control of communication.
- Emotional and behavioral manipulation.
- Demands for absolute conformity to behavior prescriptions derived from the ideology.
- Obsessive demands for confession. (Promotes guilt over minor issues and used as a source of control).
- Agreement that the ideology is flawless.
- Manipulation of language in which clichés substitute for analytic thought.
- Reinterpretation of human experience and emotion in terms of doctrine.

- Classification of those not sharing the ideology as inferior and not worthy of respect. (Lifton, pp. 419–437, 1987).¹⁰

Each of these principles was not only present, but heavily embraced within all that was taught and lived within the group at Kirtland. When these principles are employed, the effect is quite real and very powerful. As individual and corporate behavior begins to change, even conscience becomes a tool for entrapment. It's a slow process, each step moving in a direction contrary to one's previous actions of conscience. At certain points, one becomes locked into a continuation of that contrary direction by the mere fact that previous conscience values have difficulty processing the steps taken thus far. Therefore, any turning back would be invisible by one's changing view of reality, but also prohibited by the response that would be received by the previous conscience values. This is why, for the Christian, grace is so important. It allows the sinner to become renewed, Jesus becoming our sin of past failure (2 Corinthians 5:21).

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MUCH LIKE HEARING AN OLD SONG CAN STIMULATE MEMORIES, other senses can stimulate memories as well. There was an odd mixture of odors that hung in our nostrils the night the Averys were killed. This lasted about a week or so for me. But after leaving the group, and as time began to separate me from the influence within the group environment, I began smelling those odors of hay, trash, books, gunpowder and even blood all over again. It began about a month after my incarceration, two months from the time I left the group. Even at this time, those odors are frequently revived in my nostrils. We have a Lord that forgives. Even a dead and dormant conscience can be made whole and restored to life through him. But we still must face the pain and the anguish (penalty) that destroyed our sense of conscience to begin with. This can be a very difficult thing to do.

The first two years or so of my incarceration, I was tormented by bad dreams. Eventually, these dreams began to lessen and eventually ceased. Initially, I would find myself back in a group again, Jeff leading and teaching a group of people. Then the dream changed, and I was no longer sitting at the table learning, but rather I was walking around it, challenging Jeff's doctrine. Finally, I would be helping people get away from Jeff's influence and, in a sense, running him off. In the context of my thoughts and the control of my mind he truly was run off—and the dreams ceased. But the mind doesn't function in a vacuum. Whether the vacuum is created by involvement within a cult or leaving one, it is essential to replenish the mind with a process of thought. I'm a spiritual man and always will be. But whether spiritual or not, we all have the same human vulnerabilities, and need, for a belief system. Mao Tse-

¹⁰ Edgar F. Borgatta and Marie L. Borgatta, ed., *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, vol.1, (New York: MacMillan, 1992), p. 215.

tung was not at all a religious fanatic, but the power he obtained by way of a political belief system affects the thinking of millions today.

I had to “rebuild” a system of belief. I’d been betrayed by all I had ever known and believed as true. And as to any specific denomination my experience was quite lacking. I picked up the King James Bible and began reading. We’d been so wrapped up by “law.” The whole reason I moved to Ohio was to “receive the law,” but through all that happened, I failed to see how that Christ had fulfilled all of it. The sad truth was, I really didn’t know what the law was, so how could I see its fulfillment? Yet as I read the biblical message, untainted by denomination or traditional belief, I found that “white stone” with a new name written on it (Revelation 2:17). I found a personal Savior. Not that I chose Him, because it doesn’t work that way (John 15:16). I didn’t have an elaborate supernatural experience. In fact, I’ve learned that though such experiential encounters may be quite beautiful, they can also be misleading. My heart was shattered. I felt reduced to complete nothingness. It was like floating in space, with no solid ground upon which to set my foot and nowhere to stand. There was no security within which to be rooted. But just as Jesus told the sister of Lazarus, that He is the resurrection (Luke 11:25), I, too, came to know this resurrection power of life within the deadness of my soul. As this resurrection happened within my own heart, I felt like those who were witnesses of His vicarious rise from the tomb.

“And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.”
(Luke 24:44–45)

Today there are many spiritual beliefs in the world accessible to us. Most of these teachings have beauty as a component within their principles. Following the example of Jesus who did not come to condemn (John 3:17), as a Christian and clearly a transgressor, I feel that neither is it my place to do so. I find joy in what Jesus has done for me and find peace by way of His merits. But, I do wish to expose how Mormonism’s teachings differ from Christianity and therefore should not be entwined with biblical text. I’ve found that the “temple” is not a building that sits in Kirtland, Ohio. Instead, it is under construction within my very own heart. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). While my life now is not “roses,” I did find what I was searching for. Unfortunately, it was something I had freely within my reach all along. Settings of the type I’ve exposed will flourish due to the mere timing of our day—a new century and a new millennium. It is a time of vulnerability and a crossroads upon the path of mankind.

This book contains the portrait of a cult follower. But the “why” is hidden within common characteristics of all. While my portrait may vary greatly from that of the individual reader, the real essence is quite common among us all. These groups do not produce fruit of the individuals; they produce the fruit of the leader. Although the activities of David Koresh in Waco, Texas were not brought to public attention until two years after the Avery’s bodies were discovered, I’ve been able to document the Branch Davidians’ sincere efforts to serve their God due to the publicity they’ve received while I’ve been in prison. (see Appendix A.)

Nevertheless, we can learn to recognize warning signs. Some understand why things like this happen without personally experiencing the tragedy of a cult experience. We don’t have to repeat history in order to understand it. Ignorance creates a powerful vulnerability.

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OUR CREED

by Ron Luff

It dominates the way we think, and that which we believe.
It regulates the way we hear, the thoughts which we perceive.
It shows throughout our actions, by the choices which we make.
It separates integrity from motives, which we fake.

Despite the way it's manifest in everything we do,
It's something quite intangible, an active part of you.
It's called the creed we live by, and it shapes what we can be.
By image in our mind as in a mirror—what we see.

A creed can be destructive, or a creed can heighten life.
A creed can cry for peace, or it can pang for fervent strife.
It forms within our mind, the right and wrong in what we do,
By what becomes Authority to act—despite what's true.

So by the forming of the creed by which we choose and live,
We find the view by seeking truth, has choice through love, to give.
The creed by which we live will guide our path in all we do.
For life with love and happiness our creed must seek what's true.

May the creed by which we live be dominated by a view through love; otherwise, bias will always influence, and truth will never be found.

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