



## **SPIRITUAL DECEPTION MATTERS**

### **Destructive Groups/Cults**

#### **A. Definition**

A Destructive Group is defined more by its behavior/actions than its belief. The term cult is often over-used. SDM uses the term Destructive Groups to refer to groups which act in ways that seek to gain control over peoples' lives. This can include a strong domineering leader, threats and punishment for not agreeing with the group, and excessive financial requests.

A group must have all of these characteristics to some degree to be considered destructive:

- Self-appointed 'messianic' leader(s) focusing followers' veneration upon himself or herself, claiming divine selection
- Leaders exercising autocratic control over members' lives.
- Use of deception and misrepresentation for recruitment, retention and fundraising.
- Use of techniques for controlling individual thought and personal privacy that frequently lead to coerced reconstruction of personality.

#### **B. Issues**

##### **Types of Groups**

Groups that are deceptive, destructive and coercive do not necessarily have to be "religious"; some of the most virulent groups are under the guise of therapy, human potential organizations, businesses and political organizations.

##### **Deception in Fund Raising**

Many of these groups use fraud and deception in soliciting funds by exploiting social needs in a community. They also use misinformation to appear to be affiliated with bona-fide service agencies and worthy causes such as drug rehabilitation, and the fight against hunger, homelessness and poverty.

### **Destructive Groups can be Hazardous to Your Health & Wealth**

When people are enticed into a Destructive Group, they may undergo a severe personality change which can result in a rejection of their existing value system, an inability to make decisions independently and an overwhelming desire to follow the group and/or its leader with unquestioning obedience. Destructive Groups seek to put all former relationship in opposition to the 'new way" of life. They seek to separate the victim from his/her money, family and from normal relationships with friends. Such groups may be involved in the systematic abuse of members: malnourishment, beatings, isolation, sleep-deprivation and sexual abuse.

### **People Need to Remain Aware**

The massacres at Jonestown in 1978 have become history, the Unification Church seeks respectability, the Hare Krishnas dispensed with robes and shaven heads – such groups and other have "assimilated" – there is a danger that people will forget.