

Chapter 2 My Life in the Unification Church

As a child, I had always been very independent. I wanted to be a writer and poet, but during my college years I struggled to find a career path in which I could make enough money to pursue my dreams. When my girlfriend dumped me in January 1974, I wondered if I would ever find true love.

I had always been an avid reader; during that time I began to read a great deal of psychology and philosophy. My neighbor next door, a mathematician, introduced me to the writings of G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky. I became interested in what was presented as ancient, esoteric knowledge. Much of what I read described humanity's natural condition as being "asleep" to the truth and in need of someone more spiritually advanced to teach us about higher levels of consciousness. The suggestion that one should join a spiritual school was embedded in those books.

At age 19, I knew I was never going to be happy as a businessman, like my father, living my life to pursue money. I wanted to be a creative writer. I wanted answers to the deeper questions. Is there a God? If so, why is there so much suffering? What role was I to play in the world? Could I do anything to make a difference? I felt extreme internal pressure to make a big contribution to humankind. I had been told all my life how intelligent I was and how much I would accomplish when I grew up. But I was going to graduate in another year and I felt like time was running out.

I had already become a "foster parent" of a little girl in Chile to whom I sent money each month. I had decided that writing was probably my most important pursuit, and so I wrote. Still I felt it wasn't enough. I looked out at the world and saw so much in the way of social injustice, political corruption, and ecological destruction that it seemed I could do very little. I knew that I wanted to help change things, but I didn't know how to go about doing it.

One day, as I was reading a book in the student union cafeteria, three attractive Japanese women and an Italian-American man approached me. They were dressed like students and carried college textbooks. They asked if they could share the table. I nodded, and within minutes, they engaged me in a friendly conversation. I thought the women were pretty

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cute. Since I had a three-hour break between classes, I stayed and talked. They told me they were students too, involved in a small community of “young people from all over the world.” They invited me to visit them.

The semester had just started and I thought I might be able to get lucky with one of the women, so I drove to their house that night after class. When I arrived I found a lively group of about 30 people from half a dozen countries. I asked if they were a religious group. “Oh, no, not at all,” they said, and laughed. They told me they were part of something called the One World Crusade, dedicated to overcoming cultural differences among people and to combating major social problems, such as the ones I was concerned about.

“One world where people treat each other with love and respect,” I thought to myself. “What idealists these people are!”

I enjoyed the stimulating conversations and energetic atmosphere at the meeting. These people related to each other like brothers and sisters and clearly felt they were part of one global family. They seemed very happy with their lives. After a month of feeling depressed, I was invigorated by all that positive energy. I went home that night feeling lucky to have met such nice people.

The next day I ran into Tony, the man who had approached me in the cafeteria. “Did you enjoy the evening?” he asked. I answered that I had. “Well, listen,” Tony said. “This afternoon Adri, who’s from Holland, is going to give a short lecture on some interesting principles of life. Why don’t you come over?”

I listened to Adri’s lecture a few hours later. It seemed vague and a bit simplistic, but optimistic, and I could agree with nearly everything he said. However, the content of his speech didn’t explain why everyone in this group seemed so happy all the time. I felt there must be something wrong with me or something exceptional about them. My curiosity was engaged.

I wound up going back the next day. This time another person gave a talk about the origin of all the problems that humankind has had to face. This lecture had a decidedly religious tone; it dealt with Adam and Eve and how they were corrupted by a misuse of love in the Garden of Eden. At that point I didn’t notice that my questions were never answered, and didn’t suspect I was being deliberately strung along. However, I did feel a bit confused and said I didn’t think I’d be coming back.

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When I said this, a silent alarm seemed to go off among the people in the house. As I walked out and got into my car, a dozen people came running out into the icy February air in their stockinged feet (it was the custom to remove shoes in the house) and surrounded my car. They said they wouldn't let me leave until I *promised* to come back the following night. "These people are crazy," I thought, "standing outside in the freezing cold without shoes, without jackets, holding me hostage because they like me so much." After a few minutes I relented, mostly because I didn't want to feel guilty if one of them caught a cold. Once I had given my word, I wouldn't think of not following through, even though I didn't really want to go back.

When I returned on Thursday night, I was barraged with flattery from all sides, all evening. This practice, I would later learn, was called "love bombing." I was told over and over what a nice person I was, what a good person I was, how smart I was, how dynamic I was, and so forth. No fewer than thirty times they invited me to go with them for a "weekend away from the city for a retreat in a beautiful place upstate."

Over and over I told them that I had to work as a waiter on weekends and could not go. Before I left, I was pressured to promise that if I were ever free on a weekend, I would go. I had not had a free weekend for a year and a half, so I was certain I would not have to keep my promise.

The next day I phoned my boss at the Holiday Inn banquet office to get my schedule for the weekend. He said, "Steve, you're not going to believe this, but the wedding was called off this afternoon. Take the weekend off!" I was flabbergasted. Was this a sign that I was *supposed* to go to this weekend outing? I asked myself what Gurdjieff or Ouspensky would have done in my situation. They had spent years searching for greater knowledge.

I called the people at the house, and off I went that Friday night.

My Indoctrination: How I Became A Moonie

As we drove through the tall, black, wrought iron gates of a multimillion-dollar estate in Tarrytown, New York, someone leaned over and told me, "This weekend we'll be having a joint workshop with the Unification Church." My immediate reaction was a series of questions.

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“Workshop? Church? What is going on here? Why didn’t anyone tell me this before?” I protested. “How can I get back to Queens?” Instead of responding to my questions, they immediately turned it around on me and made it my issue. “What’s the matter, Steve? Have a problem being with Christians?” one man asked me with an attitude. “No,” I said. “Afraid we are going to brainwash you or something?” another person asked. “Not at all,” I said, indignant at the insinuation that I was weak-minded.

We were herded from the van into a small wooden structure nestled in some large trees. I had a feeling of dread. I gave myself a little pep talk. I reminded myself that I had bicycled across the U.S. when I was 16, worked on an archaeological dig in the Negev desert in Israel when I was 17, and driven across Canada to Alaska when I was 18.

I got my courage up. “Listen, I really think I would like to go back to Queens,” I told one of the members, a pleasant young man with blond hair and a smile pasted to his face. “Oh, come on, you’ll have a good time!” he said, patting me on the back. “Anyway, there’s no one driving back to the city tonight.” I decided to make the most of the situation and avoid creating a scene. We climbed the stairs and entered a room that I later learned had once been an artist’s studio. A large blackboard was at the other end of the room. Metal folding chairs were stacked neatly in a corner.

Within a few minutes we were divided up into small groups. The leaders handed us sheets of paper and crayons and asked us to draw a picture with a house, a tree, a mountain, a river, the sun, and a snake. Nobody asked why; everyone just obeyed. (Much later I was told that it was a form of projective personality test used to learn about people’s psyches.)

We all took turns introducing ourselves while seated cross-legged on the floor of the handsome wooden structure, all part of a large estate with an enormous mansion, which I later learned had been purchased from the Seagram family for millions. We were led in singing folk songs. I was embarrassed by the childishness of it all, but no one else seemed to mind. I loved to sing and grew up listening to Peter, Paul and Mary and many others. The atmosphere of the event, with lots of enthusiastic young people all together, brought back warm memories of summer camp. That night we were escorted to bunk beds above a converted garage, and the men and women were put in separate rooms. As it turned out, getting a

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good night's sleep was nearly impossible. Not only was it crowded, but also there were two loud snorers! The other newcomers and I slept very little.

When morning came, an intense young man from the group house in Queens sat down and talked with me. I asked again when the van was going back to Queens. He told me, "We're so sorry, but the brother left already much earlier this morning." He told me that he too had been put off at first by some of the strange things he had heard and seen at his first workshop. He begged me not to have a closed mind but to give "them" a chance to present what he called the Divine Principle. "Please don't judge them until you've had a chance to hear the whole thing," he pleaded. He told me that if I left now, I would regret it for the rest of my life.

His voice was so full of mystery and intrigue that it offset my suspicions and piqued my curiosity. "Now," I said to myself, "I'll finally get all my questions answered." Or so I thought.

In the morning we were led in calisthenics before breakfast. Afterward, we sang more songs. As we sat on the floor, a charismatic man with ice-blue eyes and a penetrating voice introduced himself and the ground rules for the weekend. He was the workshop director. We were told we had to spend all of our time together in the small groups to which we were assigned. There was to be no walking around the estate alone. Questions were to be asked only after a lecture was over, when we were back in our small group. He then introduced the lecturer, Wayne Miller.

An American in his late twenties, dressed in a blue suit, white shirt, and red tie, Mr. Miller exuded the charm and confidence of a family doctor. He began to talk, and talk, and talk. As he lectured for hour after hour, I became very uncomfortable. The workshop was just too weird. I liked almost everyone there: they were bright, good hearted college students like myself. But I disliked the overly structured environment, the childish religious atmosphere, and having been misled about the nature of this weekend retreat. Whenever I started to object, which I did several times,

I was told to save my questions until after the lecture. In the small group, I was always told, "That is a very good question. Hold onto it because it will be answered in the next lecture." Again and again, I was told not to judge what I was hearing until I had heard it all. Meanwhile, I was

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listening to an enormous amount of material about humankind, history, the purpose of creation, the spiritual world versus the physical world, and so forth, much of which presumed an acceptance of what had been said earlier.

The entire weekend was structured from morning until night. There was no free time. There was no possibility of being alone. Members outnumbered newcomers three to one and kept us surrounded. We newcomers were never permitted to talk among ourselves unchaperoned. Day one came and went, leaving my sense of reality more or less intact. Before we went to bed we were asked to fill out “reflection” sheets to reveal all we were thinking and feeling. Naively, I filled them out. I had another restless night but was so exhausted emotionally and physically that I did manage to get a few hours’ sleep.

Day two, Sunday, began in exactly the same way. But now we had all been in this crazy, intense environment for 36 hours, which felt more like a week. I started asking myself, “Is something wrong with me? Why do I seem to be the only person questioning this stuff? Is it more profound than I’m able to grasp? Am I not spiritual enough to understand what they’re teaching?” I started listening to Mr. Miller more seriously and began to take notes.

By Sunday evening I was more than ready for the ride back home. But it grew later and later, and nobody made any move to depart. Finally I spoke up and said I had to leave now. “Oh, *please* don’t go!” several people pleaded. “Tomorrow is the most important day!”

“Tomorrow? It’s Monday and I have classes!” I explained that it was impossible for me to stay another day.

The workshop director took me aside and told me that everybody else had decided to stay for the third day. “No one told you this was a threeday workshop?” he asked.

“No,” I responded. “I never would have come if I’d known it would make me miss a day of school.”

“Well, since you’ve heard the first two-thirds, don’t you want to know the conclusion?” he asked, intriguingly. Tomorrow, he promised, everything would become clear.

Part of me *was* really curious to hear the whole thing. But also, I was dependent on these people for transportation. I didn’t want to bother my friends or family with an emergency call to drive all that way to get

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me—or, worse, start hitchhiking in upstate New York at night in the middle of winter.

I agreed to stay for one more day.

On the third day, we were given an unprecedented emotional high. The most powerful of Mr. Miller's lectures that day was called "The History of Restoration." It claimed to be a precise and accurate map of God's method for directing humankind back to His original intention. "It is scientifically proven that there is a pattern of recurring cycles in history," Mr. Miller declared. Throughout his hours of lecturing, he explained that these cycles all pointed to an incredible conclusion: God had sent His second Messiah to the earth between 1917 and 1930. But who was this new Messiah? No one at the workshop would say.

By the time we were ready to drive back to the city, I was not only exhausted, but also very confused. I was elated to consider the bare possibility that God had been working all of my life to prepare me for this historic moment. At other moments, I thought the whole thing was preposterous—a bad joke. Yet, no one was laughing. An atmosphere of earnest seriousness filled the crowded studio.

I can still remember the final moments of Mr. Miller's lecture:

"What if?... what if?... what if... it is true? Could you betray the Son of God?" Mr. Miller had questioned with passion in his voice, his eyes moving slowly upward as he concluded. Finally, the workshop director had stepped up and prayed a very emotional prayer about how we were God's lost children and needed to be open-minded to follow what God wanted in our lives. On and on he went, praying that all of mankind would stop living such selfish materialistic lives and return to Him. He apologized over and over for all the times in history that God called people to do His will and was forsaken. He pledged himself to a higher level of commitment and dedication. His sincerity was overpowering. One couldn't help but be moved.

When the van finally returned late that night to the Queens center, I was completely exhausted and wanted only to go home and sleep. But I was still not permitted to leave. Jaap Van Rossum, the house director, insisted that I stay and talk with him for a while. I wanted desperately to go. He was emphatic. He sat me down in front of a crackling fire and read me the biography of a humble Korean man I had never heard of before, Sun Myung Moon. The story was that Moon had suffered through tremendous hardships and tribulations to proclaim the truth of

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God and to fight Satan and communism. When he had finished, Jaap begged me to pray about what I had just heard. He told me that I was now responsible for the great truth I had been taught. If I turned my back on it, I would never forgive myself and God would be heartbroken. He then tried to persuade me to stay in the house overnight.

My insides were screaming at me, “Get out! Get out! Get the hell away from these people! You need time to think.” In order to escape I had to get angry and yelled, “No! Get off my case!” and charged out into the night. Nevertheless, I felt guilty for being rude to those sincere and wonderful people. I drove home, almost in tears.

When I arrived home, my parents (they told me later) thought I had been drugged. They said I looked awful: my eyes were glassy, and I was obviously very confused. I tried to explain to them what had just happened. I was exhausted and semi-coherent. When I told them the workshop was affiliated with the Unification Church, my parents became upset and thought I was turning my back on our Jewish heritage and wanted to become a Christian. My mom said, “Let’s go talk with the rabbi tomorrow.” I was happy to agree.

Unfortunately my rabbi had never heard of the Unification Church, nor had he ever dealt with anyone involved with a cult. He thought I was interested in becoming a Christian. He didn’t know what to say or do. I came away telling myself, “The only way I can get to the bottom of this thing is investigate it myself.” Still, I was afraid. I wished I could speak with someone who knew about this group but wasn’t a devoted member. In February 1974, no one I knew had ever heard of the Moonies.

Ceaseless questions ran through my mind. Had God been preparing me throughout my life for the mission of setting up the Kingdom of Heaven on earth? Was Sun Myung Moon the Messiah? I prayed earnestly to God for Him to show me a sign. Was the Divine Principle the new truth? What should I do? It didn’t dawn on me in my agitated state of confusion that I had been subjected to mind control³¹—that whereas one week earlier, I had had no belief in Satan, now I was afraid that he was influencing my thoughts.

My parents told me to stay away from the group. They didn’t want me to abandon Judaism. My grandparents were Orthodox Jews and I went to Temple, my mom kept kosher and I had a Bar Mitzvah when I turned thirteen. I was very educated about the Nazis and the Holocaust. I didn’t want to change my religion; I just wanted to do the right thing. If

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Moon was the *Moshiach* (Hebrew for Anointed One), I reasoned, then I will be fulfilling my Jewish heritage by following him. Even though my parents opposed the group, I believed that as an independent 19-year-old person, I was capable of making my own decision in this matter. I wanted to do what was right. In doing so, I had been told by members of the group, I could later intervene on my parents' behalf and save them spiritually.

After several earnest days of prayer, I received what I thought was the "sign." Unable to concentrate on my schoolwork, I was sitting on the edge of my bed. I reached down, picked up an Ouspensky book, and opened it to a paragraph at random, which said that history goes through certain cycles to help human beings evolve to a higher plane. At that moment I believed I had had a spiritual experience. How could I have chanced to open the book to that paragraph? I thought that God was surely signaling me to heed Mr. Miller's lectures. I felt I had to go back and learn more about this movement.

Tying The Knot: Becoming An Insider

As soon as I called the center, I was whisked off to another three-day workshop. When I asked a member why I hadn't been told the truth about the group being religious, he asked, "If you knew in advance, would you have come?" I admitted that I probably wouldn't have.

He explained that Satan controlled the world after he had deceived Adam and Eve into disobeying God. Now God's children had to deceive Satan's children into following God's will. He said, "Stop thinking from fallen man's viewpoint. Think about God's viewpoint. He wants to see His creation restored to His original ideal—the Garden of Eden. That's all that matters." (Later, it became evident that this "heavenly deception" was used in all aspects of the organization, including recruiting, fundraising, and public relations. Since members are so focused on meeting their assigned goals, there is no room for the "old morality." The group even uses the Bible to "show" that God condoned deception several times in history in order to see His plan accomplished.³²) By accepting the way in which I was deceived, I set myself up to begin deceiving others.

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Although the workshop was almost identical in content to the one I had taken the previous week, I felt that this time I needed to listen with an open mind and take notes. “Last weekend I was too cynical,” I said to myself.

This time Miller added a lecture on Communism. He explained that Communism was Satan’s version of God’s ideal plan, yet it denied the existence of God. It was therefore Satan’s own religion on Earth and must be vehemently opposed. He said the final World War would be fought within the next three years between communism and democracy (at that time, by 1977), and that if members of the movement didn’t work hard enough, incredible suffering would result.

By the end of those three days, the Steve Hassan who had walked into the first workshop was gone, replaced by a new “Steve Hassan.” I was elated at the thought that I had been “chosen” by God, and that I knew what I needed to do with my life. I experienced a wide range of other feelings, too: I was shocked and honored that I had been singled out for leadership, scared at how much responsibility rested on my shoulders, and emotionally high on the thought that God was actively working to bring about the Garden of Eden. No more war, no more poverty, no more ecological destruction. There was hope! Also love, truth, beauty, and goodness.

At that point, I was still aware of a muffled voice deep within me that was warning me to watch out, to keep questioning everything.

After that workshop, I returned to Queens. I was advised to move into the local Moonie house for a few months to get a feel for the lifestyle and to study the Divine Principle before I made a lifetime commitment. Within the first few weeks of my residence there, I met a powerful leader, Takeru Kamiyama, a Japanese man in charge of the Unification Church throughout New York City.³³ I was instantly drawn to him. He struck me as having a very spiritual, humble character. I wanted to learn everything I could from him.

In retrospect, I realize that Mr. Kamiyama appealed to me because he was very different from my father. He was a visionary. He had a great deal of power and status. My father, a simple businessman, had repeatedly told me that no one person could ever change the world. Kamiyama very much believed that one person could make a huge difference. He was very religious and emotionally expressive. My father, a sincere, intense man in his own quiet way, was not. In looking back

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and analyzing the relationship, I see that Kamiyama became a surrogate father figure. The verbal approval and physical affection I wanted from my father was given to me by this man, who used this emotional leverage to motivate and control me.

As it turned out, I was the first new person to join the center in Queens. Just a month earlier, the big center in Manhattan had been divided into eight satellite centers spread out in different boroughs. Since I was the first, Mr. Kamiyama said it was a sign that I was meant to become a great leader. He made me one of his 12 American disciples and oversaw everything I did. I never attended a 7-, 21- or 40-day workshop—the normal sequence. I was groomed very carefully by Kamiyama and Moon.

Although I had never liked being in groups before, my elite status in this group made me feel special. Because of my relationship with Kamiyama, I would even have access to the Messiah himself—Sun Myung Moon—who was a projection of the ultimate father figure.

Life With “Father”: Get Closer To Moon

Sun Myung Moon was a short, stocky man who had more than the average share of charisma. He was born in 1920 in what is now North Korea. He carried himself like a small sumo wrestler in a extremely expensive business suit. He was a shrewd manipulator and communicator, particularly with those who were indoctrinated to believe he was the greatest man ever to walk the face of the Earth. Moon usually spoke either Korean or Japanese and used a translator. I was told he did so for “spiritual” reasons. During my membership, I was present at more than 100 of his lectures and participated in about 25 leadership meetings with him.

Mr. Moon and Mr. Kamiyama knew how to cultivate their disciples to be loyal and well disciplined. Members of the core leadership were trained to follow orders without question or hesitation. Once I had become totally indoctrinated, all I wanted to do was to follow my *central figure’s* instructions. I was so committed that my new identity completely suppressed the real me. Whenever I look back now, I am amazed at how I was manipulated and how I learned to manipulate others “in the name of God.” I can also see very clearly that the higher I

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rose in the hierarchy, the more corrupted I became: Moon was making us over in his image. Once he actually told the leaders that if we remained faithful and carried out our missions well, we would each be President of our own country one day. We too would have Mercedes Benz automobiles, personal secretaries, and bodyguards. By this point, I was encouraged to decide what country I might like to run when Unificationism took over the world.

I learned how to present the introductory lectures of the Divine Principle within the first three months of my membership. By that time, I had recruited two more people, who became my “spiritual children,” and was instructed to drop out of school, quit my job, and move into the center.

My hair was cut short and I started to wear a suit and tie. At the suggestion of a senior member, I had done a 40-day “indemnity condition”—giving up my friends and family for forty days, not seeing them or communicating with them in any way. This is a practice used by several cults and in particular about the two years Mormon ‘missionaries’ are kept from their families.

I donated my bank account to the center and would have given my car, except that my parents had the title. I had to abandon my Chilean foster child because I had no way to earn money to send to her. I was asked to sacrifice my “Isaac.” The Moonies reminded me of the Biblical story of Abraham and how God asked him to sacrifice his beloved son. I was told my creative writing, especially my poetry, was my “Isaac.” I dutifully threw out everything I had written—some four hundred pieces. Of course, Isaac never actually had to be sacrificed, but the Moonies manipulated me. They got my cult self to throw out a large stack of papers that my authentic self spent countless hours on, over many years. Work that I had nurtured as if it were nurturing like a child. I put my poems into the garbage can while my superiors watched. The psychological effect was powerful.

Once I had officially dropped out of college, I was sent back to the campus to recruit new members. The leaders told me I could go back to finish my degree the following year. A lie. When I later told them about my desire to teach, they informed me that the Family—as members refer to the movement—was planning to start its own university in a few years, and I could be a professor there.

I was also ordered to set up an official student club at Queens College, even though I was no longer a student. The club was to be

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called Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles, or C.A.R.P. Within a couple of weeks I had done so, and I was made C.A.R.P.'s director. Although I told students that C.A.R.P. had no affiliation with any other group, I received all of my instructions and funding from the director of the Unification Church in Queens. We sponsored free lectures, poetry readings, anti-Communist political rallies, and free movies, all while seeking to meet potential converts. I recruited several people, and they were instructed to drop out of college, too. At that point, we were the most successful C.A.R.P. chapter in the country.

I was in a high-speed daze of exhaustion, zeal, and emotional overload. I generally slept between three and four hours a night. Almost all my time that first year was spent recruiting and lecturing. Occasionally I went out with others "fundraising"—selling flowers or other items on the street—to support the house and the operations of the New York church. I was also ordered to fast for three days, drinking only water. Later, I would do three separate seven-day fasts, having been told that fasting was an "indemnity condition" (a supposed restitution to God for some past transgression).

During my time in the group, I was directly involved in many political demonstrations, though they were usually organized under the names of front groups. (Over the years, the Moon organization has created and used hundreds of such groups.)³⁴ For example, in July 1974, I was sent to the Capitol steps with several hundred Moonies, under the name National Prayer and Fast for the Watergate Crisis, to fast for three days and demonstrate in support of then-President Richard Nixon.

Before joining the Moonies I had had several arguments with my father at the dinner table about Nixon. My father, a businessman, was at that time a die-hard Nixon supporter. I voted for McGovern and had always felt strongly that Nixon was not to be trusted. In fact I had often referred to him as a crook. Now, in the heat of my Moon-inspired prayer vigil *for* Nixon, I called my parents from Washington to tell them about the fast. Because my father had always been so staunchly behind Nixon, I thought he would be pleased.

When I told him the news, my father said to me, "Steven, you were right. Nixon's a crook!"

"But Dad, you don't *understand*; God wants Nixon to be President!"

"Now I *know* you are brainwashed," my father said. "The guy's a crook."

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It was only after I left the group that I laughed at the irony of that moment.

Later in 1974, I was part of a seven-day fast in front of the United Nations.³⁵ There was a pending vote on whether the UN would withdraw its troops from South Korea because of human rights violations. We were personally instructed by Sun Myung Moon not to tell anyone that we were members of the Unification Church or had any political motivation. That time we had a front group called The American Committee for Human Rights for Japanese Wives of North Korean Repatriates. We successfully shifted the delegates' focus from human rights abuses in South Korea to those perpetrated by North Korea. The vote to withdraw was defeated. The Moonies claimed a victory and we were told the South Korean government was pleased.³⁶

Being so close to “the Messiah” was exhilarating. I felt incredibly fortunate to be part of this movement. I took things very seriously because of the potential spiritual repercussions of everything I did. I thought my every action had monumental and historical implications. I strived to be the perfect son of the “True Parents”³⁷—obedient and loyal. (These two virtues were valued above all else.) I always did what I was told, and then some. I wanted to prove my loyalty, and I was tested many times by Kamiyama and other leaders.

As a leader myself, I was able to see and hear things that rank-and-file members never could. Once, in late 1974, Moon took a few of us to inspect some new real estate he had acquired in Tarrytown. As usual, he gave an impromptu talk. “When we take power in America,” he said, “we will have to amend the Constitution and make it a capital offense for anyone to have sexual relations with anyone other than the person assigned to them.” He explained that any sex that was not God-centered was the greatest sin a person could commit. If a person could not overcome temptation, it would be better to take away their physical body. We would be doing them a favor, and make it easier to restore them to righteousness in the spirit world. I thought of all the married people not in the movement who were destroying their spiritual bodies by having sex. At the time, I didn't stop to think of the mass genocide that might result if we took over America and the world.

Leadership had other benefits, too. On one occasion, Moon gave me an Italian hand-blown glass figurine and \$300 in cash as presents. I even

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played softball with his son and heir apparent, Hyo Jin Moon. Twice I ate with Moon at his lavish dinner table. I came to love the feeling of getting up in front of hundreds of people and giving a Sunday service or a Divine Principle lecture; of having members look up to me as a wonderful, spiritual person.

There were even “miracles” in my life. At one point I learned that all American members had been ordered by Moon to undergo 120-day leadership training. Much to my surprise, Kamiyama interceded with Moon to keep me from being sent to that training session. I was brought before Moon—referred to by members as “Father”—and before I knew what had happened, he put his hand over my head and announced that I had just graduated from the 120-day program! When I asked Kamiyama why he had requested my exemption from the training, he told me that I was too important where I was in New York and that he didn’t want to lose me. I had received the approval of a man who, I thought, was God’s representative on Earth.

Moon had an interesting, fairly typical narcissistic way of behaving—nice then nasty, double bind of motivating leaders. He would be nice to us at first, buying us gifts and taking us out for dinner or a movie. Then he would bring us back to his estate and yell and scream about how poorly we were performing.

Moon also liked to stimulate the highest degree of competition between leaders in order to maximize productivity. He would single out someone who was very successful at recruiting or fundraising (he did this with me), and present that person as a model of excellence, shaming the others into being more successful. It is ironic that whereas Moon’s stated goal was to unify the world, many of his strategies fostered jealousy and spite among leaders, virtually ensuring a lack of unity.

When I knew him, Moon was a movie junkie. One of his favorite movies was *Rocky*, which he watched repeatedly, he told us. On one memorable occasion he told us that we had to have the same determination as Rocky Balboa to defeat our enemy. Later he spent \$48 million to make a film of his own, *Inchon*, about General Douglas MacArthur’s landing in Korea to stop the Communist invasion. Even though Moon bought top talent in Laurence Olivier and Jacqueline Bisset, *Inchon* was an abysmal failure. It was the most expensive movie ever made up to that time, and received resoundingly bad reviews from critics.³⁸

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Looking back on it all now, I believe one of Moon's major problems was his incredible narcissism and unwillingness to admit he didn't know everything. He had grandiose plans, but he was often shortsighted, as he thought he was above the law. He always seemed more concerned with immediate results than with possible negative consequences in the future. His disregard for legal and accounting advice eventually landed him in jail.³⁹ His use of deception in order to buy real estate and businesses caused great enmity in many communities. His use of political shortcuts, like supporting Nixon, brought him into the national spotlight, but also alerted people to his background and his unethical practices. This lack of foresight eventually caused his organizations tremendous problems.

I became the main lecturer at the national Unification Church office opposite the main public library in Manhattan. That month the headquarters had been moved from Washington, D.C., to bring its American leadership under stricter control. I was made assistant director of the Unification Church at national headquarters and was told to set an example to Neil Salonen, then president of the Unification Church of America. Mr.

Kamiyama told me that Neil needed to learn how to submit totally to the Korean and Japanese leadership in the church, as I had. I had been placed in the headquarters to teach him the "Japanese standard."

In my new position, it was my job to recruit newcomers to workshops. There had been a good deal of negative media reports, and we felt we were being "persecuted." We were told to identify with Jesus and the early Christians: the more people opposed us, the more committed we felt to "go the way of the cross." At that time the media carried some sensationalistic articles and television shows about the Moon cult, which reinforced our fears that Communists were now taking control of America. Re-motivated by our increased level of fear, we continued our recruiting activities at a blinding pace. We all felt a great deal of pressure to recruit a minimum of at least one new person per member per month, and all members had to report their activities each night to their *central figure*. It was as if we were God's army in the middle of a spiritual war—the only ones who could go to the front lines and fight Satan each day.

When Moon decided to give a lecture at Yankee Stadium in 1976, he needed to raise several million dollars for the publicity campaign. At this point, I was sent out with other American leaders as part of a model

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fundraising team in Manhattan. We fundraised 21 hours a day. We were constantly out on the streets, in the worst places imaginable. Once I was almost mugged in Harlem by someone with a garrote who saw me selling candles at night. Another time a man demanded my money and threatened me with a knife near my stomach. As a loyal, dedicated Moonie, I would never let anyone steal God's money and refused. Both times, I narrowly escaped.

Falling Asleep At The Wheel

One irony of my experience in the Moonies is that the higher I rose in the organization, the closer I got to the total burn-out and exhaustion that eventually led to my exit from the group. Because I was so successful at fundraising, I pressed myself to the limit again and again. I had been trained to have little concern for my overall well-being during those days. The most important thing was to work as hard as I could for "Father." Fortunately for me, though, my family had not forgotten about me. They were deeply concerned and desired to see me back to my creative, independent self.

Members were repeatedly told horror stories about deprogramming. I had come to believe that group members were brutally kidnapped, beaten, and tortured by deprogrammers—Satan's elite soldiers committed to breaking people down and destroying their faith in God.⁴⁰ A couple of members were sent around to different centers to tell us about their deprogramming experiences. Fear of the outside world, particularly of our parents, was drilled into our minds. Although I didn't realize it then, each successive deprogramming story was more terrifying—and more exaggerated—than the one before.

After my time on the model fundraising team in Manhattan, I was told that my family was trying to kidnap and deprogram me. I was sent "underground" to Pennsylvania. I was instructed not to tell my family my whereabouts and to have all my mail forwarded through another city. Years later, after I left the group, I suspected I had been sent out of town as a distraction. The Moonies wanted to keep me from pursuing some disturbing questions about the validity of the "time parallels" used in the *History of Restoration* lecture. I had discovered some glaring inconsistencies. It was dangerous for someone in my position in the organization to ask questions that couldn't be answered. The other group

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leaders filled me with so much fear about deprogrammers that my questions were shelved.

I believed my spiritual survival was at stake.

After a couple of months of fundraising on a model team in Pennsylvania, I was put in charge of all fundraising in Baltimore. My regional commander ordered me to have each member bring in a minimum of \$100 a day, even if it meant staying up all night to reach that goal. I had a team of eight inexperienced fundraisers. As a good leader, I had to set an example and stay up with them.

I drove my team hard, and together they averaged over \$1,000 a day in total profit—tax-exempt cash. It was also my responsibility to feed, clothe, and shelter my team, as well as to order, buy, and pick up product—the items we pushed on people—and to collect the cash nightly and wire it to New York twice a week. We sold chocolate mints, peanut brittle, chocolate bars, roses, carnations, and candles. The markups were enormous. A box of mints that cost us 30 cents was sold for two dollars. A ten-cent flower was sold for a minimum of a dollar, and usually two dollars.

People would buy these items from us because they thought they were donating to a charitable cause. Our consciences had been reprogrammed by Moon's value system. We told people we were sponsoring Christian youth programs: a lie. We told them we operated drug rehabilitation houses: another lie. We told them that we were helping orphaned kids: another lie. On the spur of the moment we told them anything that we thought would work.⁴¹ Since we thought saving the world from evil and establishing God's kingdom on Earth was the most important effort on the planet, we didn't see it as "real" lying.

After all, every person but us was being controlled by Satan, and it was up to us "Heavenly Children" to claim money back from Satan for God's Messiah, Sun Myung Moon. We believed we were saving the world from Satan and Communism by selling those products, and that we were giving people the opportunity to help the Messiah create the Garden of Eden on Earth.

At about 5:30 a.m. on April 23, 1976, I was driving the van to pick up the last member of my group, who had been out all night fundraising in front of a 24-hour convenience store. I hadn't slept at all in the previous two days and was driving alone. Usually I had someone ride "shotgun" position to protect me from being attacked by evil forces,

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including “sleep spirits.” As ridiculous as it seems now, I actually believed that spiritual entities were all around me, waiting to invade me and possess me. This was all part of the mind control indoctrination. Staying focused on the True Parents was the only way to ward off the evil spirits. If my attention wavered, I could be taken over. Phobias such as this kept me and other members dependent and compliant.

This time I was overconfident. I fell asleep and awoke abruptly. All I could see was the red back end of the eighteen-wheeler I was driving into at high speed. I hit the brakes, but it was too late. The impact was terrifying. The van was crushed and I was pinned. The pain was excruciating, but I could do nothing—I was trapped. The door had to be sawn off. It took an emergency team about thirty minutes to set up a winch and pull the steering column forward to make enough room to free me. The whole time they worried that the van might catch fire and blow up. My rescuers told me it was a “miracle” that I survived.

All I could think was “Father, forgive me” and “Crush Satan.” Over and over I chanted those lines to try to focus my mind on God and beg His forgiveness. I thought what had happened was “spiritual”—that I had been tested by Satan in the spirit world and had been defeated, and that this was what caused the accident, not the fact that I hadn’t slept in days. Like any dedicated cult member I blamed myself for not being “pure” enough. It didn’t dawn on me that I was programmed to be chronically sleep deprived.

I felt that I had been chosen by God, tested by this holy mission, but had failed.

Deprogramming: How I Found My Way Back To Myself

After two weeks in the hospital and an operation for my broken leg, I got permission from my Moonie superior to visit my sister Thea. I was able to do this for several reasons. Thea had never openly criticized my involvement in the Moonies. When I talked with her, she appealed to my love and told me that she wanted her newborn son to know his Uncle Steve. I made a deal with her: don’t tell my parents or Stef, my oldest sister, that I was coming to visit, since I feared they might try to deprogram me. Also I was a trusted leader—someone whose faith in God and in the group was believed to be absolute. I convinced Kamiyama that

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it would be a “good condition” for Satan (my sister) to take care of one of God’s soldiers (me), not diverting members from their work by tending to me.

The accident, however, began breaking the Moonies’ hold over me in several ways. First, I could sleep, eat, and rest. Second, I could finally see my beloved sister. Third, I could slow down and think, being away from the group’s constant reinforcement. Fourth, Thea decided to tell my parents, so a plan to rescue me was put into place. Fifth, I had a cast on my right leg from my toes to my pelvis, so I couldn’t move without crutches. I could neither fight nor run away.

I was sitting on the living room couch at my sister’s home, when my father appeared unexpectedly. He sat down next to me and asked, “How are you doing?” When I said “fine,” he stood up. He said, “That’s great!” He took my crutches to the other side of the room. Suddenly, on cue seven more people appeared and announced that they had come to “talk to me about my affiliation with the Unification Church.” I was shocked, and realized I was trapped. I told them to call my office and make an appointment to speak with me.

Since I was thoroughly programmed, I immediately “knew” that the deprogramming team had been sent directly by Satan. In my terror, their faces looked like images of demons. It was very surprising to me, then, when they turned out to be warm and friendly. They spent several hours talking at me about what they knew to be wrong with the Moonies. As a committed member, I did thought-stopping, sang “holy songs,” chanted and prayed silently to keep from hearing them. After all, I had been told all about deprogramming by leaders of the group. I wasn’t going to allow my “faith in God” to be broken by Satan. I kept telling them that they needed to make an appointment and that I did not want to speak with them.

The next morning my father said that we were going to go for a drive to see my mother. What had actually happened, I learned later, was that the Moonies had called to see why I hadn’t reported in and were on their way to rescue me. Believing that my mother would be sympathetic and put an end to the deprogramming, I eagerly hobbled on my crutches and got into the back seat of the car, with my broken leg outstretched. My father was driving, and two of the deprogrammers sat next to him. I became angry, though, as my father passed the exit from the Long Island Expressway to my parents’ home. While it might seem hard to believe,

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my first impulse was to kill my father by reaching over and snapping his neck. I actually believed it was better to do that than betray the Messiah! As a member, I had been told many times that it was better to die or kill than to leave the church.⁴²

At that point, however, I was still confident that they could never break me. I knew I would have other chances to escape, so I decided not to kill my father, myself and the others in the car. When we arrived at the apartment in which the deprogramming was scheduled to continue, I refused to get out of the car without a fight. I threatened my father with extreme violence. I told him that I would fight to my death and if I bled to death, it would be on his conscience.

My father turned around from the driver's seat and started to cry. I had seen my father cry only once before: a couple of tears when I was fifteen when my grandmother died. Then, as now, I felt a big lump in my throat and an ache in my heart. "This is crazy," he pleaded. "Tell me, what would you do? How would you feel if your son—your only son—went away for a weekend workshop and all of a sudden disappeared, dropped out of college, quit work, and got involved with such a controversial organization?"

That was the first time since I had joined that I allowed myself to think—for even a moment—from his perspective. I felt his pain, his anguish and worry, as well as his parental love. But I still believed he had been brainwashed by the Communist media.

I answered, "Probably the same thing that you're doing now." I meant it. "What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Just talk to these people," he replied. "Listen to what they have to say. Then your mother and I will be able to sleep at night, knowing that you have heard the other side and that we have done the responsible thing." "For how long?" I asked.

"For five days," he said.

"Then what—can I go back if I want to?"

"Yes, I will drive you back myself. If you want to come out, that will be your choice."

I thought about the proposition. I *knew* that what I had been doing was right. I *knew* that God wanted me to remain in the group. I *knew* the Messiah personally, in the flesh. I *knew* the Divine Principle by heart. What did I have to fear? Besides, I believed that I could prove to my

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parents once and for all that I wasn't brainwashed. Also, I knew that if I remained with my parents involuntarily and then escaped, I could be ordered to press kidnapping charges against them. I didn't want to do that.

I agreed to stay and listen, voluntarily. I would not contact the Moonies for five more days. Also, I would make no effort to escape. I would talk to the ex-members and listen to what they wanted to tell me, taking breaks as often as I wished.

The former members were not at all what I expected. I assumed, because of my training, that they would be cold, calculating, unspiritual, money hungry, and abusive. They were warm, caring, idealistic, and spiritually minded, and they treated me with respect. As former members, they should have been miserable and guilt-ridden. They weren't. They were very happy that they were out and free to lead their lives as they were doing. All of this was very perplexing.

I was a very difficult person to deprogram. I fought the process with prayer and chanting and threw up expert barricades of denial, rationalizations, justifications, and wishful thinking. The former members brought out psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton's book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* and discussed the techniques and processes used by the Communist Chinese (the enemy!) to brainwash people during the 1950s. It became obvious to me that the processes we used in the Moonies were almost identical. A big question for me began to emerge, "Does God have to use the same tactics as Satan in order to make an ideal world?" Thinking and reasoning for me at that time felt like wading through waist-high mud.

On the fourth day they discussed Hitler and the Nazi movement, comparing Moon and his philosophy of world theocracy to Hitler's global goals for German National Socialism. At one point, I remember getting angry and saying, "I don't care if Moon is like Hitler! I've chosen to follow him and I will follow him till the very end!" When I heard myself say that, an eerie chill went down my spine. I quickly suppressed it.

On the morning of the last day of deprogramming, I had the indescribable experience of my mind suddenly opening up, as if a light switch had been thrown. The former members had asked me to read one of Moon's speeches to members of Congress.⁴³ He was talking about how he said that Americans were too smart to allow themselves to be

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brainwashed by a Korean, and how that he respected Americans very much. I had listened to him say, on at least a dozen occasions, how stupid, lazy, and corrupt Americans were, particularly politicians. Also, three Americans, former members, were sitting in front of me, and they each took turns telling me that they had been brainwashed by Moon.

I had the first negative thought about Moon in over two years: “What a snake!”

That was it. Over two years of programming started collapsing like an elaborate house of cards. It had all been built upon one belief, that Moon was God’s greatest chosen man in all history—the Messiah. But if he was a liar, that meant he wasn’t trustworthy and wasn’t of God.

I believed in a God of Truth.

I started to cry inconsolably.

I asked everybody to leave the room.

I cried for a very long time. Someone returned and gave me a cold compress for my forehead. My head pounded, and I felt like a large throbbing open wound. That night was the most painful time of my whole life.

Recovery: Returning To Me

After rediscovering myself, I had a whole new string of questions in my mind. How could I have ever believed that a multimillionaire industrialist from Korea was the Messiah? How could I have turned my back on almost every moral and ethical principle I’d ever had? How could I have done so many cruel things to so many people? The fantasy I had used to inspire myself day after day and month after month was gone. What was left was a frightened, confused, indignant person. I felt as though I had awakened from a surreal dream and wasn’t sure what was reality—or as if I had stepped off a skyscraper and was headed toward the Earth, but I kept falling and never hit the ground.

I was overwhelmed by many emotions. I was sad and missed my friends in the group, particularly my “spiritual children,” the people I recruited. I missed the excitement of feeling that what I was doing was cosmically important. I missed the feeling of power that single-mindedness brought. Now, all I knew was that my leg was broken. I was broken. I felt tremendous embarrassment about having fallen for a cult.

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My parents had told me it was a cult. So had my friends. Why hadn't I listened to them? Why hadn't I trusted them? It took me many weeks before I could thank my family for helping me. It was months before I could even refer to the Moonies as a cult, publicly.

I read for months. For me, the burning issue was how the Moonies had ever managed to convert me and indoctrinate me so thoroughly that I could no longer think for myself. I read everything I could get my hands on about brainwashing, attitude change, persuasion, thought reform, mind control, undue influence, and cults. At first, the act of reading itself was extremely difficult. I had read only Moon literature for more than two years. I had trouble concentrating and was sometimes spaced out for long periods, not comprehending what I was reading. I was told that the mind is like a "muscle" and would regain its power through exercise. I forced myself to look up words in the dictionary. I forced myself to read line by line until I worked my way back to being able to concentrate and read pages at a time and be able to explain what I had read.

Living at home was difficult. I was pretty depressed. My leg needed a second operation. Since I still had a full cast on my leg, I needed crutches to move about, to eat, even to go to the bathroom. I was unaccustomed to being so dependent. I had been running a house and controlling the lives of many members. Now I was a captain with no one to lead. I felt terrible for what I had put my family through. They were wonderful to me, but I felt a tremendous sense of guilt.

I felt even more guilt for what I had done as a Moonie. I had lied to people, manipulated them, tricked them, and induced them to abandon their families, education, and relationships to follow a would-be dictator.⁴⁴ The guilt turned to anger the more I studied mind control.

I tracked down Dr. Robert Jay Lifton and arranged a meeting at his apartment in Manhattan. He was curious to know why I was so interested in a book about Chinese brainwashing he had written 15 years earlier, in 1961. He was amazed when I described to him, in detail, what the Moonies do to recruit members and how they run their 3 day workshops, their 7 day workshops, and their 21 day, 40 day, and 120 day workshops. He said, "What you are telling me is so much more sophisticated than what the Chinese did in the '50s. It's like a hybrid mutation of a virulent virus strain!"

Lifton shifted my entire perspective on myself when he said, "Steve, you know more about this than I do, because you've lived it. You know

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it instrumentally. I only know it theoretically and second-hand. You must study psychology and take what you know through your experience and tell others about it.” He later asked me to co-author a book with him on mind control (something that was never to be). I was flattered by his offer and intended to take him up on it, but the timing wasn’t right for me.

I Decide To Go Public

Meeting Lifton transformed my life. Instead of looking at myself and seeing a college dropout, a poet with no poetry (I sorely regretted throwing those four hundred poems away), and a former cult member, I saw that perhaps there was a higher purpose for me. At that time, although I was no longer a Moonie, I was still thinking somewhat in black and white terms: good versus evil, us versus them. The world’s most renowned expert on brainwashing thought that I had an important contribution to make, that what I had experienced could be useful in helping people. By this time I had started attending cult awareness meetings of people affected by the problem and was approached by many parents of people in the Moonies. They asked me if I would talk to their children still trapped in the Moonies. I agreed.

It was then, in 1976, that I seriously began taking steps to become a professional counselor. At first I had my work cut out for me; there were then no alternatives to forcible deprogramming. I had undergone a little training as a peer counselor at college before joining the Moonies. I myself had been deprogrammed. Most helpful of all in talking to members was that I had been a Moonie at a high level, and I knew the group doctrine and policies inside and out. I reread Moon’s *Divine Principle*. I studied the Bible and sorted out which things Moon said about it were true, which ones weren’t, and what was taken out of context. I established my own belief system. I was involved with deprogramming for about a year. A couple of the cases may have involved abduction by parents or people they hired; most were cases in which members came home to visit and weren’t allowed to leave. Some of these were legal conservatorship cases, in which the family received legal custody of an adult child. (Such conservatorship laws are now gone. This change is partly the result of legal and lobbying efforts by cult

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lawyers, as well as by more well-intentioned people who did not understand the gross human rights violations of mind control cults.)

Fortunately, I was never sued. All of my cases were successful, except two, when the Moonies went back to the group. The exhilaration of helping someone reclaim their life and be restored to their loved ones is beyond words. The closest thing I can use to describe the feeling is how I felt when a friend of mine had a leg cramp in the ocean and was going under and I ran out to the waves, dived in, swam as hard and fast as I could and managed to pull him safely to shore. However, I disliked the stress of forcible deprogramming and wanted to find some other way to help members of destructive cults.

After a year of going public, giving lectures, and doing television and radio interviews, I decided that I needed to figure out who I was again. I went back to college for a semester at Yale and temporarily dropped out of my life as a full-time cult fighter. I wrote poetry, played basketball, went out on dates, and tried to be normal. I did not like Yale, switched to Boston University, volunteered to be a counselor in two student counseling agencies and got in touch with myself again.

During this time, though, Moon was making new and bigger waves. In Congress, the House Subcommittee on International Relations held a lengthy investigation into Korean CIA activities in the United States and other efforts by Korean agents to influence United States' government decisions. I agreed to help the investigation as much as the committee wanted, provided they not ask me to testify publicly. The truth was, as the highest-ranking recent defector who knew a lot of the inner workings, I was afraid of being harassed and possibly murdered. I didn't really follow the "Koreagate" investigation, except when I read an occasional article. I was absolutely confident that the government would expose the Moon group and it would be destroyed.

The final report of the investigation had an 80-page section on the Moonies.⁴⁵ The report found that the Moon organization "systematically violated U.S. tax, immigration, banking, currency, and Foreign Agents Registration Act laws, as well as state and local laws relating to charity fraud." It called for an interagency task force to continue to gather evidence, and to prosecute Moon and other Unification Church leaders for their criminal violations. The subcommittee's Republican minority included its own statement, which said, in part, "It is difficult to understand why the appropriate agencies of the Executive Branch have

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not long since taken action against those activities of the Moon organization that are illegal.”

The report was released October 31, 1978. Three weeks later, California Congressman Leo J. Ryan, a member of the Koreagate investigation, was gunned down at an airstrip near Jonestown, Guyana, while trying to help members of another cult, the People’s Temple, escape the horrors of Jim Jones’ camp. Others with Ryan were shot or killed. I watched the news bulletins about the nine hundred people who were dead because a cult leader had ordered mass murder. Chills went down my spine. I had never heard of the People’s Temple before, but I completely identified with the mindset of its members. I remembered listening to Moon harangue us and ask if we were willing to follow him to our deaths. I remembered hearing Moon say that if North Korea invaded South Korea, he would send American Unification members to die on the front lines, so that Americans would be inspired to fight another land war in Asia.

I spent days thinking about the cult problem. More than anything else, the Jonestown massacre motivated me to become a public activist again. I accepted several invitations to appear on television. I was asked to speak at Senator Robert Dole’s public hearing on cults, on Capitol Hill, in 1979. But at the last moment, all the ex-cult members invited to speak were taken off the program due to political pressure from cults. The hearing was a disaster and the effort to educate the Government officials and the public about the dangers of destructive cults was undermined.

After that, Moon’s political influence began to grow. When Ronald Reagan became president, Moon-controlled groups began funding the New Right political movement in Washington. When it was clear the federal government would do nothing about the Moonies, I decided to organize. I started a group called Ex-Members Against Moon, later Ex-Moon, Inc. I sponsored press conferences, edited a monthly newsletter, and gave numerous interviews. I had considered starting a group of former members from many different cult groups, but I decided that with the release of the Congressional investigation, it would be more effective for me to focus on the Moonies.

I filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the Department of Defense, asking why a Moon company, Tong II Industries, was permitted to make American M-16 rifles in Korea when only the South

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Korean government had legal permission to do so. Was the Moon organization part of the Korean government? Was the Department of Defense giving it favored treatment? The request was turned down on the grounds that revealing the information I asked for would compromise the security of the United States. To this day I cannot confirm what I believe to be the truth—that the Moon group was a creature of the Intelligence agencies.

Meanwhile, I knew that I would not do any more forceful deprogramming. I had to find a way to help people out of cults that would be less traumatic and less expensive, and that would not violate the law. I had read many dozens of books and thousands of pages—everything I could get my hands on—about thought reform, brainwashing, attitude change, persuasion, and CIA recruitment and indoctrination. The next and most important area to research was the field of hypnosis.

In 1980, I attended a seminar by Richard Bandler on hypnosis that was based on the work of the psychiatrist Milton Erickson. Bandler and John Grinder had also developed a model based on the work of therapist Virginia Satir and Gregory Bateson. They called it Neuro-Linguistic Programming, or NLP. The seminar gave me a greater understanding of techniques of hypnotic mind control and how to combat them. I spent nearly two years studying NLP with everyone involved in its formulation and presentation, even moving to Santa Cruz, California to do an apprenticeship with John Grinder. By this time, I had fallen in love and married. Eventually I moved back to Massachusetts when my wife, Aureet Bar-Yam, was given a scholarship to work toward her master's degree in psychology at Harvard.⁴⁶

Over time, however, I became more and more concerned about the ethics of NLP. It seemed to me that its leaders had launched a mass-market campaign to promote NLP as a tool for power enhancement. Bandler and Grinder shifted their focus from training away from therapists and teachers. They started training anyone, especially salespeople and business executives. One of my big problems was their dictum, "Do what works." Eventually I realized that NLP was amoral. It depended entirely on the conscience and good will of the practitioner. This was not too much of an issue with a licensed therapist who had strict ethical guidelines. But it was another matter entirely when practitioners were salespeople or corporate executives who were

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interested in power, money, or sex. I left my association with NLP forever.

I earned my master's degree in counseling psychology from Cambridge College in 1985, allowing me to begin to receive training from experts in the field of clinical hypnosis. I studied the work of Dr. Milton Erickson from his books and tapes, and from people trained by him. I learned a great deal about how the mind functions, as well as how to communicate with people more effectively. These studies gave me a better way to apply what I had learned to help people trapped in cults. It was possible, I discovered, to create a model of the entire process of change that occurs when a person gets drawn into a cult group and then successfully leaves it.

I asked myself a range of essential questions. What specific factors make a person able to move out of a mind controlled psyche? Why are certain interventions successful and others not? What goes on in the thought processes of people who simply walk out of cults? Patterns began to appear. I found that people who were able to walk away without intervention were those who had maintained contact with people outside the destructive cult. When people could maintain communication with outsiders, valuable information that could change their life could penetrate cult-constructed mental walls.

I knew how important my father's tears had been for me. More importantly, I realized that he had been able to *invite me to look at myself from his perspective*, and re-examine my own information from his viewpoint. In analyzing my own experience, I recognized that what helped me most was my own internal voice and my own first-hand experiences, buried beneath all the emotional suppression and the thought-stopping rituals of chanting and praying. Underneath, the real me wasn't dead. Maybe it had been bound and gagged, but I was still very much alive. The accident and the deprogramming had helped move me physically and psychologically to a place where I was able to get in touch with myself. Indeed, it was my ideals and my own fantasy of an ideal world that had lured me into the Moonies. Those ideals ultimately enabled me to walk out and publicly condemn cult mind control.

No matter how deeply the Unification Church virus had invaded the "child parts" of my identity—the real Steve Hassan had not been destroyed. After decades of membership, I have learned that all of my

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“spiritual children”—the people I recruited—have exited the cult. A very great relief.

After receiving my master’s degree, I began a new phase of my life. While practicing psychotherapy and conducting my public education activities, I also worked as the national coordinator for FOCUS, a support group of former cult members who want to help each other. For the past years, I have worked to increase public awareness of destructive cults, undue influence, and mind control. These cults did not go away as the idealistic youth of the 1970s became the young professionals of the 1980s, the leaders of the 1990s and 2000s, and the new retirees of the 2010s. Sadly, destructive cults continue to grow, thrive, and recruit people of all ages and from all walks of life.

Yet, while destructive cults continue to grow, so too does our understanding of the process of mind control and undue influence. The availability of help for mind control victims continues to increase. We know far more about the neurological processes of the brain than we did even a decade ago. As more and more people—especially mental health professionals, social workers, doctors, and lawyers—lose loved ones to mind control cults, a sense of urgency is building. There *are* some basic ways to identify destructive cults, protect yourself from mind control, and help others shake free of its influence. Giving the keys to that knowledge is what this book is all about.