



BRAINWASHING--WHAT IS IT?

#4 DEMAND FOR PURITY

A Series on Lifton's* Eight Points of Thought Reform

Another of the eight points of mind control is demand for purity. Life is black or white. There is no gray. In a religious cult member's mind, there can't be any other "God-ordained" group in this world. The leader of the cult must be obeyed unconditionally; no independent thought is allowed. Early on, ties are stretched or cut with non-cult family members to ensure "purity."

In order for the co-dependent relationship to survive between cult member and leader, the cult leader must exert enormous pressure on all members to conform precisely as outlined. If the member does not conform, counseling and shaming, along with peer pressure, is usually attempted first. If that is unsuccessful, then excommunication and shunning is the next practical step to ensure blind conformance through Milieu control (control of one's environment and social circle). In other words, shunning is enacted to *control* the member, not to protect him or her from outsiders.

Robert Lifton describes an individual's internal Demand for Purity like this:

"The individual thus comes to apply the same totalist polarization of good and evil to his judgments of his own character...' He must also look upon his impunities as originating from outside influences—that is, from the ever threatening world beyond the closed, totalist ken. Therefore, one of the best ways to relieve himself of some of his burden of guilt is to denounce, continuously and hostilely, these same outside influences. The more guilty he feels, the greater his hatred, and the more threatening they seem. In this manner, the universal psychological tendency toward 'projection' is nourished and institutionalized, leading to mass hatreds, purges of heretics, and to political and religious holy wars. Moreover, once an individual person has experienced the totalist polarizations of good and evil, he has great difficulty in regaining a more balanced inner sensitivity to the complexities of human morality.'" - Robert J Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism...*, p.425

One of the most rewarding things for me after leaving the Jehovah's Witnesses at the age of 18 was the ability to look upon others I encountered (non-Jehovah's Witnesses) with mutual respect, love and acceptance instead of pity, loathing and fear, and realize that I too was deserving of respect, love and acceptance.

*Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism—A Study of Brainwashing in China*