



## WHAT PURPOSE DO CULTS SERVE?

How does “group think” affect an individual? If we see a mugging on the street, studies have shown that we are more likely to help if we witness it alone rather than in a crowd. Why is that? Because unless trained otherwise, we look for someone else, perhaps someone more trained, to handle the situation, to take responsibility for what is occurring. Look at any culture and generally speaking, there are far more followers in this world than leaders.

Cults exist because most people *want to feel part of something bigger*. However, by virtue of their association with a cult, members who started out feeling uncomfortable with the cult/group—perhaps they didn’t want to be perceived as “different” or were asked to forsake unbelieving family members early on, or didn’t want to be part of the cult’s aggressive sales force—soon find that they end up feeling uncomfortable with everyone outside the group. The need to fit in never really dissipates, for involvement with the cult creates its own brand of exclusion. That’s the oxymoron of cults. The table which I created below shows it better than I can perhaps explain it.

Desire of Cult Member	Reality
To feel accepted/ experience unconditional love. Have a sense of community and purpose.	While seeking acceptance, the cult member ironically forfeits acceptance by up to 99.99% of “mainstream” society while embracing the less populated cult world. Their attempt to “fit in” is severely misaligned. A cult member never fully feels a sense of belonging or a sense that they can trust anyone—other cult members or nonbelievers. Tatling is prevalent in cults and members are often turned in for perceived “sins.” The cult is never at fault and unconditional love does not exist. Just as an abusive husband tells his wife, “You forced me to hit you,” members are taught that it is their weakness that forced the cult to get “rough” with them and put them on notice. They are taught that this is <i>love</i> . Like an abused child seeking acceptance from its parent, or a wife cowering to her abusive husband, the cult member is taught to meekly return to the “fold,” only to be emotionally or physically abused again and again and again. Acceptance in a cult is an illusion.
To feel special. To be “chosen,” as having the “way” or “the sole truth” as part of an elite group.	As mentioned above, the cult member becomes <i>an outsider</i> to society and their biological family as soon as they become involved with a cult. Their involvement can’t help but be viewed as dangerous by all who truly love them. But the more a loving family member tries to engage the cult member, the more they (the cult member), propelled by a cult-induced fear, push their loved ones away. This behavior perpetuates and embellishes the delusion that they are special and that others just “don’t get it.” This act of estrangement follows two of the eight points of mind control described by cult expert, Robert J Lifton: a) Milieu Control and b) Demand for Purity. In addition, cults use coercive persuasion/ subtle mind control, fear and repetitive busy work/indoctrination practices (studies/classes, etc.) to keep their followers involved, believing that they have some exclusive right of passage to something greater. Uniqueness and feeling special in a cult is also an illusion because the opposite is accomplished: you actually become a cookie-cutter clone and any individuality and talents you may have possessed prior to membership become exploited by the cult leader(s) solely for their benefit.

In other words, at its core, a cult does **not** fulfill a cult member’s needs and that’s why so many ex-members of cults feel “conned” or “lied to” by the group after they have left.

When you think about it, people used to survive by being part of a group. A tribe couldn’t exist unless there was unity among the tribes members and there was always one person who vied for that leadership role. That’s why people look for leaders...for a sense of security. It’s why gangs form in the inner cities. People are looking for acceptance and a sense of purpose in their lives. They want to feel they are making the right choices for themselves and their family. Some, afraid to make choices, feel more comfortable letting others do it for them.

Look at the show “Survivor.” In almost every season there emerges one person in each group that appears to take the lead. As long as the leader provides for the rest of the group (usually in the form of food, fire wood or shelter), the group tends to keep the leader around. But as soon as the leader is perceived as no longer needed (or a threat), he is usually voted out. Cults too “vote out” people of the group when they perceive them as no longer “usable.”

In a nutshell, a cult deceives you into joining by (1) lying or never fully answering your questions (“We’ll get to that later” or “You’re like a baby and can’t eat steak yet”), (2) forbidding you to view information critical of the group, and (3) cutting you off from loving family members who may voice concerns about your welfare. Then they manipulate you into staying through overt threats (of excommunication/spiritual or financial doom). **Remember, people don’t join cults. Cults recruit people!**