

Foreword By Steven Hassan

In 2004, Masoud Banisadr courageously published his autobiography, a chilling yet inspiring account of his idealistically motivated entry into Mojahedin-e-Khalegh (MeK), his rise to high rank within the organisation, his subjection to brainwashing, and his subsequent defection and difficult return to normal life, but without his beloved wife and greatly distanced, geographically and emotionally, from his children.

Now Masoud turns his attention outward, deploying his experiences and intellect in the service of and as a warning to others who may be susceptible to falling prey to a destructive cult such as MeK, with similar disastrous consequences.

Having also been deceptively recruited into a front group of a destructive cult, the Unification Church, or Moonies, I too was the subject of powerful psychological influence techniques but was fortunate to find myself in a situation in which, by a process now known as deprogramming, my family hired ex-Moonies and others to rescue me. That was 1976 and I have been working full time helping others ever since. I became a mental health professional, authored three books, became Director of Freedom of Mind Resource Center at freedomofmind.com, and have developed a Strategic Interactive Approach to empower family, friends and others to ethically influence a cult member to start reality-testing, thinking for themselves and making independent decisions.

A destructive cult differs from a benign cult by the use of four overlapping components of Undue Influence. Controlling: Behaviour; Information; Thought and Emotions (BITE) are the main influence points to help create a new cult identity. This cult identity suppresses the person's authentic self and is made to become dependent and obedient to the cult leadership.

Masoud Banisadr takes this thinking a step further. In this superbly researched and sharply analytical book, he correctly identifies destructive cults as a form of modern-day enslavement, comparing it with the slavery of old times and providing many striking instances of the numerous similarities and the few differences.

Banisadr further offers a profound insight into the sequence of steps by which a victim's sense of identity and self-esteem are dismantled, first, in some cases, by rational influence techniques, then by mind control and finally by brainwashing, at each stage by manipulation of the person's feelings and emotions and the actions that arise out of them. Banisadr has devised a unique mathematical model to describe the way in which these processes work. Drawing extensively but without self-pity on his own experiences, he also movingly recreates the suffering that victims of brainwashing undergo.

However, as Banisadr fully recognises, knowledge in itself is not enough. In the final chapter of *Destructive and Terrorist Cults: A New Kind of Slavery*, he asks what can be done, considering legislation and a universal raising of awareness to prevent the development and curtail or ban the activities of destructive cults, as well as the counselling and rehabilitation of former cult members. At the time of writing, the world is assailed by monstrous and appalling troubles and conflicts, many of which stem from the brutal activities of terrorist cults. Banisadr's work therefore comes into our hands at a critically important time, performing a service to all who would see prevail the freedom of the individual to think, to believe and to be.

The author's passionate commitment to freedom and autonomy, his compassion and humanity, and his intense feeling for justice shine through every line of this remarkable book.

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