



**STATE OF ISRAEL
THE MINISTRY OF WELFARE
AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

REPORT OF

**MINISTRY OF WELFARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES TEAM,
AN EXAMINATION OF THE PHENOMENON OF CULTS IN
ISRAEL**

**Submitted to the Minister of Welfare and Social Services,
Member of Knesset Moshe Kahalon**

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CONTENTS

**Preliminary Remarks - Nahum Itzkovitz, the Team Chairman
The Team's Work
Management Synopsis**

Part I - The Cult Phenomenon - Theoretical Review and Recommendations for Action

- Introduction**
- 1. Difficulties in defining a cult, and its characteristics**
- 2. Usually accepted definitions and classifications of cults**
 - 2.1 Definitions of researchers and counselors**
 - 2.2 Definitions of organizations world-wide and in Israel**
 - 2.3 Classifications of cults**
- 3. Leadership methods, recruitment and conversion**
 - 3.1 Leadership figure**
 - 3.2 Processes of recruitment and conversion**
- 4. Characterization of victims and injuries**
 - 4.1 Characterization of the victims**
 - 4.2 Types of injuries**
- 5. Cults in Israel**
 - 5.1 The Scope and nature of the phenomenon**
 - 5.2 Characteristics of the victims and effects of the injuries caused**
 - 5.3 The legal position**
- 6. Treatment, assistance and support**
 - 6.1 Counseling for cult members**
 - 6.2 Assistance and support for relatives and close associates**
 - 6.2 Solutions for the mass public**
- 7. Recommended action**
 - 7.1 Preventive action**
 - 7.2 Counseling-related interventions**
 - 7.3 Legislative amendments**
 - 7.4 Government decision**

**Concluding summary
Bibliography**

Part II – Manual for Social Workers and Counselors

Introduction

- 1. How does recruitment for cults work?**
- 2. Main points of the recruitment process**
- 3. Profile of cult members**
- 4. Identification of signs of recruitment**

- 5. Potential points of exit**
- 6. The counseling of cult victims**
 - 6.1 Principles of the counseling model**
 - 6.2 Principles guiding action for headquarters team**
 - 6.3 Principles of action for field practitioners**

 - 6.4 The counseling model**
 - 6.4.1 Identification and location**
 - 6.4.2 Initial intervention - diagnosis and assessment**
 - 6.4.3 Structuring the counseling process for the short, medium and long term**
 - 6.4.4 Conclusion of counseling**

Concluding Summary

Preliminary Remarks

I am honored to submit to Knesset Member Moshe Kahalon, the Minister of Welfare and Social Services, the Report of the Ministerial Team which deals with the phenomenon of cults in Israel. The Team was established in order to formulate criteria for examining the phenomenon of cults, their characteristics and their negative effects, which will allow for the determination of ministerial policy.

The field of cults constitutes a marginal phenomenon in terms of its prevalence in Israel, but for the victims and their families, membership of cults constitutes a deeply-rooted source of crisis, which requires the Government and Israeli society, to focus their attention on the recidivist nature of the phenomenon, and to examine ways of assisting victims, both in terms of treatment and in terms of prevention. The cults phenomenon is not new in Israel. An inter-ministerial committee was appointed back in the 1980s, headed by Member of Knesset Ta'asa-Glazer, but the recommendations of the Committee, which were approved by the Government in 1995, were not implemented.

Having headed the Team and having played a leading role in the process, I instructed the practitioners to create an applicable conceptual framework, which will allow for the implementation of our modest recommendations both in the short term and in the medium and long term. We also discovered that the social work profession is not familiar with this phenomenon, thus requiring the professional team, playing a leading role in the preparation of this report, to devise a manual for social workers, along with the Director General's instructions.

I believe that the Team's mission was one of essence, but it does not end with the submission of the Report. In fact, the Report constitutes a first step on a long journey, opening a window to a new world, in which social workers and other practitioners have not yet become involved, and now, they are required to study, diagnose, trace and identify, while demonstrating a high degree of vigilance to this phenomenon, which social services in Israel are now faced with. In this context, the Ministry's Team reserves the right to revisit relevant information requiring further clarification.

I would mention at this point that preparing to deal with this problem cannot remain a welfare matter alone, and that the need will subsequently arise to join forces with other Ministries charged with responsibility for social and economic topics, as well as law enforcement agencies.

I wish to thank Knesset Member Yitzhak Hertzog, the former Minister of Welfare and Social Services, for asking me to head the Team dealing with this complex issue. I would also like to thank cult experts and the relatives of cult members who took the trouble to appear before the Team and to assist us, by providing a considerable amount of valuable information, and I express my special thanks to the team members for their hard work in gathering the information and preparing the Report. I hope that publication of this Report will lead to an increase of public awareness, as well as an improved ability in confronting and dealing with this unique field of activity.

Yours truly,
Nahum Itzakovitz.
The Director General

The Team's Work

The purpose of establishing the Team was to formulate criteria and conduct an examination into the activity of harmful cults, with a view to determining the Ministry's policy on this subject. Members of the Team who are employees of the Ministry, were joined by Sharon Melamed, a Tel Aviv Municipality Social Worker, whose contribution to the Team's work was derived from operation "Voluntary Redemption".

The Team's work included plenary sessions as well as activity of three sub-teams: one for writing the theoretical review, one for formulating instructions for the Social Workers, and one to examine the legal aspects of cult activity.

At the conclusion of every meeting a summary minute was recorded and distributed.

With the setting up of the Team, an appeal was published inviting the public to express their opinions on the subject. As a result, more than 50 diverse responses were received, some of which suggested advice and recommendations for action, while some were personal communications and requests for the arrangement of a meeting.

It was decided by members of the Team that two sub-teams consisting of Social Workers would meet with the correspondents who wished to have a meeting with members of the Team (mainly relatives). The hearing of this testimony was of great assistance in understanding the complexity of the subject.

The Team also conducted a public hearing, affording access to any party that might have been affected and could help in formulating the recommendations. Various experts from Israel were invited to express their views to the Team's representatives; members of the Team also heard from Social Services Departmental Managers in Local Authorities with experience of the Cults issue.

Additionally, in the course of general study tours made by the Chairman of the Team and other members, meetings took place with some of the leading researchers and counselors in this field, in the USA.

The Team is grateful to all those who responded to the appeal, presented their views and contributed greatly to the formulation of the conclusions and recommendations. A special thanks is due to Dr. Gaby Zohar and Ms. Mati Lieblich, for their valued contribution to the formulation of the summarizing report.

Members of the Team (in [Hebrew] alphabetical order of surnames):

- * Mr. Nahum Itzkovitz, Chairman
- * Advocate Batya Artman, Member
- * Social Worker Yael Hermel, Member
- * Mr. Menachem Vagshal, Member
- * Social Worker Niva Milner, Member
- * Social Worker Sharon Melamed, Member
- * Social Worker Hana Slutsky, Member
- * Social Worker Yekutiel Sabah, Member
- * Ms. Ahuva Krakover, Member
- * Social Worker Michal Rabin, Member

- * (Ms. Hana Kupfer, Report Editor
- * Mr. Ido Benjamin, Coordinator

The members of the Team wish to thank the researchers, counselors and other relevant parties who agreed to meet, who forwarded material, contributed their time and expressed their views, all in order to assist in the production of this report "from theory to practice". The following is only a partial list of the persons concerned, as, on account of the wish to maintain their privacy, we have elected not to publish the names of the families who appeared before the Committee.

- * Dr. Gaby Zohar, Clinical Social Worker, Therapist and Counselor to the cult victim families.
- * Ms. Mati Lieblich, of the Hebrew University, Phd Candidate and researcher of cult victims, a teacher in various disciplines and tutor of counseling training groups.
- * Dr. David Green, Specialist in Clinical Psychology and Principal of the "Green Institute" of Advanced Psychology in Tel Aviv.
- * Dr. Uzi Shai, Psychiatrist, Ministry of Health, Tel-Aviv District.
- * Ms. Rachel Lichtenstein, Director of the Israel Center for Cult Victims.
- * Ms. Sharona Ben-Moshe, Legal Advisor to the Israel Center for Cult Victims.
- * Ms. Noa Shalom, Director of Eastern Division, Tel-Aviv Municipality
- * Ms. Noa Shaham, Director of Social Services Department, Lower Galilee.
- * Steven Alan Hassan, Director of the Freedom of Mind Resource Center.
- * Professor Marc Galanter, M.D. Professor of Psychiatry at NYU.
- * Bill Goldberg, Social Worker and Researcher.
- * Lorna Goldberg, Social Worker, Certified Psychoanalyst, Psychotherapist and Researcher.
- * Rick Ross, Executive Director of the Rick. A. Ross Institute.
- * Arnold Markowitz, Director of the Cult Hotline and Clinic of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services in New York City.

MANAGEMENT SYNOPSIS

The phenomenon of cults is complex and multi-faceted. As such, the social discourse surrounding the phenomenon is not consensual, but rather gives rise to expressions of different and at times conflicting opinions. This phenomenon is connected to deep-seated changes in values that have occurred in recent decades and have led to the undermining of the previous social structures. An examination of this phenomenon and its characteristics shows that persons who are recruited into cults undergo a conversion process with the object of achieving control, loyalty and absolute commitment to the leadership of the cult. The range of harmful effects that are liable to occur is far-reaching, and includes mental, physical, sexual and social-related injuries as well as economic ones. There is consequently a need for the formulation of Government policy on this issue.

In the absence of a Government Agency in charge of this issue, the former Minister of Welfare and Social Services, Knesset Member Yitzhak Hertzog, instructed the Ministry to assume responsibility for the task of investigating and studying the topic, and of examining ways of providing assistance and treatment in cases coming to the attention of the social services departments or other agencies of the Ministry. The issue has accordingly been examined, and recommendations formulated, on four courses of action:

Preventive Action

These actions are directed at preventing new members from joining cults and to raising the awareness of the phenomenon among the general public, as detailed below:

- * **Initiation of actions for raising awareness among the general public** - the Team recommends the frequent conduct of advertising campaigns to raise the awareness of the public to the inherent dangers of cults and to the identification of such groups. Additionally, workshops on the subject of cults must be conducted for youth in the high schools and in youth movements. In such workshops information will be provided that will enable the identification and avoidance of cultic groups. The Team also recommends that workshops be held for parents of teenagers in order to raise awareness to such harmful groups. Implementation of these actions requires joining forces with other Ministries and agencies, including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption.
- * **Training of counselors and social workers in the identification of cults and potential victims** - the Team recommends that professionals in a diverse range of disciplines should be trained, including social workers, teachers, educational advisors, psychologists, psychiatrists and family doctors (GPs), so that they can identify in time, signs that attest to the joining of cults. Such training is important because in the initial weeks after joining a cult, before the conversion process has been completed, there is a greater chance of rescuing the person from the cult. The Team also recommends that training programs will be held at the Central School for Social Welfare Workers, run by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services.
- * **Research and establishment of a data base regarding cults** - the information about the activity of cults in Israel and the research in this field, are scanty, certainly in comparison with the USA and other western countries. The Team accordingly recommends the initiation of research and surveys, with a view to

coordinating the data about the nature and prevalence of the cult problem in Israel and developing ways of intervening, based on research and empirical knowledge and on expert knowledge from Israel and the western world.

Therapy based -based interventions

Providing counseling - based solutions for victims of cults and their relatives:

- * **Setting up a unit for dealing with cult victims and their families** - the Team recommends the setting up of a new unit in the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services to handle victims of cults. The unit will operate as part of the Services for the Individual and the Family, in the Department for Personal and Social Services, and will be headed by a national supervisor. The unit will be responsible for formulating the Ministry's policy and for preventive and interventionist methods in this field, will gather information and expertise in the field of counseling cult victims and will instruct the field units in a manner that will ensure a uniform and professional response at all levels. The unit will operate a nationwide "intervention team". The Team will be involved in assisting cult victims and will do so through the field operatives in the social services departments. The Team will also be assisted by external advisors and counselors, as detailed subsequently. These will be employed by an outside body which will be selected in a Tender. The Team will coordinate its activity with other bodies including law enforcement agencies.
- * **Recruitment and training of professional counselors and "cult exit counselors"** - the research literature attests to the fact that in order to deal with the victims of cults it is necessary to be familiar with the special characteristics of this type of injury. Accordingly, the Team recommends the recruitment and training of professional counselors specializing in the field of cults and will provide a treatment solution for the needs of victims. In addition to this, the unit will recruit ex-cult members and train them as "cult exit counselors". These counselors will operate under the professional therapists, and at their discretion, and will oversee victims who were members of their own former cult. The exit counselors' in-depth familiarity with the ways in which specific cults operate is likely to make a unique contribution to the recovery of the cult victims.
- * **Setting up a call center intended for victims of cults and for their immediate environment** - the Team recommends the establishment of a telephone call center which will operate under the unit for dealing with cult victims, and will assist victims and their families. Such assistance is necessary because oftentimes, victims of cults feel isolated and incapable of reconstructing their lives. Their relatives are also on many occasions in distress and are in need of help. Moreover, research shows that assistance to relatives is of great importance to the success of the exit process. The solutions that the telephone call center will offer will include initial mental support, specific information about counselors in this field, referral to support groups and to relevant agencies that provide basic material needs, etc.
- * **Designation of National Insurance Subsistence Allowance for Cult Victims** - the Team recommends that cult victims should be defined as persons in need, for a period of one year, and be awarded a subsistence allowance which will facilitate income support for the period of their rehabilitation. The allowance will assist the cult victims to complete the recovery process in many aspects of life, including employment, studies, etc. The allowance will be awarded as a subsistence

payment, as part of the rehabilitation program run on a daily basis, put together by a social worker from the department of social services department.

Legislative Amendments

There would appear to be cause to consider several legislative amendments, which can be of assistance in confronting cult-related problems. Before progress is made with the proposals, there must be collaboration between Ministries, including an examination of the means of enforcement necessary for their implementation:

- * **Enactment of a law against activity of cults** - this Report proposes a definition of the term "Cult" based on various definitions of theorists, therapists and organizations. The Team accordingly recommends an examination as to whether the definition of a cult, as it appears in the Report, can serve as a basis for a proposed law directed against leaders of cults and against the harmful activity of cults.
- * **Legislative amendments in the field of sexual offenses** - the Team recommends that consideration should be given to amendments to the Sexual Assault Clauses in the Penal Law, similar to the amendments made in the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law (Amendment No. 6, 2010) which could also provide a solution for cases of sexual harm in cults.
- * **Legislative amendments in respect of the Legal Capacity and Guardianship Law-1962** - the Team recommends that an amendment to this should be considered, so that it states explicitly that a situation in which a person is under actual mental or physical control of another person, or is subject to injurious influence on him, will be deemed a situation in which a person is incapable of looking after his own affairs and the courts may consequently appoint a guardian for him.

Government Decision

- * **Ministries and Agencies joining forces** - it emerges from the foregoing recommendations that in order to most beneficially confront the cult problem, complete coordination is necessary in the work of many institutional bodies and professions: the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Justice, the Israel Police, various legal forums including the Family Courts and the Rabbinical Courts, the Local Authorities, the third sector, research bodies and so forth. Consequently, the Team recommends the adoption of a Government Decision on the subject and the formulation of an overall policy which will obligate all the Ministries to join forces in order to confront the phenomenon of destructive cults in Israel.

This Report seeks to review the phenomenon of cults and the adverse activity occurring in some of them, but it only constitutes an initial step in dealing with this matter on a formal institutional basis. In order to prepare for an affective, sustainable and consistent public discourse, a total commitment to the task is necessary and multi-systematic action on the part of other government ministries, the law enforcement authorities, the NGO sector active in this field, and the media.

**PART I - THE CULT PHENOMENON - THEORETICAL REVIEW AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION**

**Writer and Editor: Hana Kupfer and Social Worker Yekutiel Sabah - the
Research Planning and Training Division of the Ministry of
Welfare and Social Services**

Introduction

Researchers of the cult phenomenon make the connection between the emergence of cults and the deep-seated changes in values and in social norms that characterized the second half of the 20th century. These changes were accompanied by the establishment of movements for social progress that placed the emphasis on human rights, freedom and individualism, by a diminution of traditional social structures, in challenging the family and community support networks and coupled with a high degree of geographical and social movement. On occasions, these were accompanied by the strengthening of alternative social structures, including peer groups and other non-family-related social frameworks (Green, 1986; Kohut, 1977; Whitsett, 1992).

These processes have not passed Israel by, where, they have occurred against a background of a sustained external threat and constant absorption of immigrants of different cultural backgrounds. The pressures on Israeli society increased even more after the Yom Kippur War in 1973. The breaking of the national myth as to the superiority of the Israeli Army and the feelings of insecurity that arose, gave rise to desperation in many sectors of Israeli society.¹ Many persons became engaged in self-searching processes and finding a new meaning to their lives, some of them by dedicating themselves to a concept of a return to "the simplicity of nature" and denial of the modern patterns of life which were perceived as having corrupted human beings and exploited their naiveté and ignorance (Green, 1986).

In these circumstances, many found the solution to the need for meaning and a sense of belonging, in membership of cults.² In Israel as in other western countries, many of the cults that have arisen promised their members redemption and purification of the soul and some of them even started out as groups who provided meaning, values and a sense of community for their members. However, on many occasions, these groups, even where they were based on usually accepted and legitimate standards,³ employed unconventional relaxation methods in combination with group pressure, physical disconnection, cultural disconnection, physiological deprivations, conceptual confusion and so forth. These methods are liable to affect the mental condition and personality structure (Zohar, 1992). And indeed, many members of the cults have suffered mental collapse, some of them have even attempted to take their lives or were hospitalized in mental hospitals.⁴ The cult problem is therefore, complex and multi-faceted, and there is no broad consensus on the subject.

The need to institutionally address the issue of cults in Israel arose for the first time at the beginning of the 1980s when the destructive results became known of the activity of the cult led by Rina Shani, which included the complete disconnection of cult members from their families, the use of drugs and the suicide of one cult member. As a result of this suicide, in 1983, the then Minister of Education, Zevulan Hammer,

¹ One can read about the factors involved in the increase of the phenomenon of cults in Israel in greater detail on the internet website of the Israel Center for Cult Victims - /<http://www.infokatot.com>, and Green (1986).

² According to the Hebrew Language Academy, the correct pronunciation of the word in Hiriq is – Kitot.

³ For example, the characteristics of Kabbala or yoga.

⁴ As revealed by the testimonies appearing in the Israel Center for Cults Victims website, and in Zohar's book (1992).

appointed an inter-ministerial committee headed by his deputy, Knesset Member, Miriam Ta'asa-Glazer. The function of the Committee was to examine the situation with respect to cults in Israel and to draft working recommendations. The committee examined inter alia, the following groups: *Hari Krishna*, *Osho (Begwan)*, *the Transcendental Meditation*, *Scientology*, *Est (currently known as the Forum or Landmark)*, *Emin and others*. Some of these cults are still active in Israel, some of them have ceased their activity and many others were established.

The recommendations of the Ta'asa-Glazer Committee, published in a full report in 1987, focused on four main areas: gathering, coordination, distribution of information, and initiation of research; assistance to victims of cults; education; legislation. The committee also indicated several areas in which criminal activity was being perpetrated as part of the cults' activity, including tax evasion, infringement of the Immigration Laws, trading in or use of drugs, unlicensed keeping of weapons and training exercises, fraud in the collection of donations and money and violence towards those opposed to the group and towards its members. However, the 1995 Government Decision, to the effect that the Committee's recommendations should be implemented, has not been followed since, with the exception of one instance in which the activity of the *Emin* cult was restricted. Since then it is estimated that the number of cults in Israel has increased substantially and the number of cult members is estimated to be several thousands.⁵ Despite all this, no institutionalized machinery has yet been set up to control the activities of cults in Israel. Moreover, the public discourse in Israel, including within the political establishment, the NGOs and the media, have seldom so far addressed the phenomenon⁶ extensively and consistently, either due to the difficulty in identifying cults and victims or due to an unwillingness on the part of cult victims to confront leaders of the cults and their members⁷.

The situation of a lack of enforcement and control came to a turning point in January 2010, when a multi-disciplined operation was carried out, the purpose of which was to expose and terminate the activity of the "Goel Ratzon" cult. This operation which was nicknamed "Voluntary Redemption" was carried out along two parallel channels: the first, Police and statutory enforcement, due to criminal offences committed by the cult. The second, multi-dimensional and long term treatment, including psycho-social services, educational solutions, accommodation and medical services for women and children taken out of the cult. These are still being processed even now in the social services departments of several of the local authorities in Israel, under the close supervision of the Headquarters of the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services.

This case, with all its considerable complexity, shed light on the dimensions of the phenomenon of cults in Israel and the gravity of the problem. In the absence of a governmental body with authority to deal with this problem, the former Minister of Welfare and Social Services, Knesset Member Yitzhak Hertzog, instructed the

⁵ This datum is based on the information received from the Israel Center for Cult Victims. The Center keeps a register of requests and information which it receives regarding the victims and the cults operating in Israel. In the USA, the number of cults is estimated at about 3,000 and the number of members as about between two to three million (West and Singer, 1980; Whitsett, 1992).

⁶ However, Van Driel and Richardson (1988) found, in research conducted with several of the leading newspapers in the USA, that for the most part the review presented cults as movements with problematical and controversial characteristics and practices.

⁷ We shall address this issue greater detail below.

Ministry to assume responsibility for the task of investigating and studying the subject, and to examine ways of providing assistance in cases coming to the attention of the Social Services Departments or other agencies of the Ministry. This essay seeks to engage in defining and mapping the cult phenomenon, concentrating on aspects of leadership in the cults and the use of recruitment and conversion methods. Additionally, the essay should refer to the characteristics of the victims, the types of injuries occurring in cults and aspects of the treatment of cult victims.

1. Difficulties in defining a cult and its characteristics

Numerous difficulties are attendant to any attempt to define a "cult" and to identify its characteristics. These difficulties derive from a number of causes: From a normative perspective, there is no social consensus regarding the negative aspects of the phenomenon and the need to overcome it, and there are a number of views, sometimes conflicting, concerning the legitimacy that should (or should not) be granted to the phenomenon. The two leading schools of thought in this sphere are the "cult sympathizers" and the "cult critics". The cult sympathizers argue that at issue is an alternative but nonetheless legitimate culture, whereas the cult critics argue that some of these cults are harmful in various aspects - psychologically, physically, economically and socially (Aronoff, Lynn and Malinoski, 2000). A further substantive difficulty derives from the tremendous dissimilarity of various cults, making it difficult to formulate a general definition (Green, 1986). In addition, a distinction must be made between cults and other cultural groups, religious movements and sects⁸ given certain similarities between them in all that relates to characteristics and practices (Green, 2010; Durocher 1999; Ogloff and Pfeifer, 1992; Crnic, 2009).⁹

The absence of a uniform definition of the phenomenon also poses difficulties in the legal realm. These difficulties include the potential violation of freedom of religion and religious worship caused by anti-cult legislation and the difficulties involved in the imposing legal sanctions on groups with cult characteristics. The reason is that the principal practices of these cults usually comprise acts that are not prohibited by the law - such as idol worship, the establishment of abnormal sexual relations and communal living - provided that they are conducted with the consent of all the parties involved (Ogloff and Pfeifer, 1992). Nevertheless, in certain cases the law may be of assistance, for example, laws that prohibit keeping people under conditions of slavery, child abuse and abandonment etc. Due to the legislative ambiguity and the difficulty of formulating regulation designated specifically to cults, in Israel and in most of the other Western countries no laws have been enacted prohibiting the activity of cults, and which could be utilized in order to bring about their dissolution.¹⁰ Furthermore, fear and embarrassment generally dissuades cult "survivors" from publically condemning the activity of cults which they abandoned, and consequently in many

⁸ A sect is a religious group that has broken away from the usually accepted religious flow and is distinguishable from a cult by the degree of extremity of the methods that it employs, to a lesser degree than that exists in a cult (Green, 1986).

⁹ D. "Background Material for the Preparation of the Standard Protocol on Cults" (Personal Communication, July 2010).

¹⁰ The exceptions with respect to legislation are France and Belgium, both of which have passed laws that proscribe the activities of cults and in appropriate cases authorize the dismantling of cult-oriented groups found to have enslaved or exploited their members

cases they refuse to file claims in courts, making it even more difficult for those attempting to combat them by through legal avenues (Anthony & Robbins, 1992).¹¹

2. Standard definitions and classifications of cults

As shown, any attempt to define a cult is fraught with difficulty, but nonetheless, organizations, theoreticians and therapists from all over the world - and in Israel too - have addressed the issue and even suggested various definitions and classifications which are of assistance in conceptualizing the phenomenon and in mapping its various aspects. In what follows we shall review the various definitions of scholars, therapists and organizations both in Israel and abroad.

2.1 Definitions of Scholars and therapists

Hochman (1984)¹² defines cults as organizations that reshape the personality and the self-definition of the individual so that he adapts himself to new behavioral codes and patterns of behavior and diligently serves the needs of the organization. To that end, such organizations prohibit certain practices and inculcate others, while neutralizing the individual's ability to raise doubts and be critical. In addition they encourage the creation of an elitist mentality which enables their members to view themselves as pioneers who have "seen the light" and are engaged in a struggle to disseminate their ideas despite the opposition that they encounter from hostile forces.

Michael Langone (1993) prefers the term "New Religious Movements" over the term "cults" and argues that groups of this type are to a large degree based on devotion and veneration of a person, an idea or an entity. They utilize methods of re-education with the aim of persuading, controlling or inducing a process of integration or social reorientation so that their members will be absolutely loyal to their values, beliefs etc. This process involves the encouragement of total mental and emotional dependence among the members and the exploitation of members to promote the objectives of the leaders. It results in psychological damage to members of the groups, their families and the surrounding community.

Along the same lines as Langone, Margaret Thaler-Singer (2003) focuses on the relationship of dependence that flows from the belief in the talents of the particular leader, his knowledge or exceptional abilities. Thaler-Singer coined the term "Cultic Relationships" which she maintains, describes with greater accuracy the processes and the relationships that operate in the cultic frameworks and that encourage absolute dependence of a group of persons on one person, for the purposes of making most of life's decisions.

¹¹ The claims were filed in the United States on the civil level by former cult members who had been psychologically manipulated and coerced, and experienced varying symptoms of post trauma as a result of their membership in the cult. The damages claimed in these cases were grounded in tortuous wrongs such as false imprisonment, intentional causing psychological suffering, and fraud. In many cases these claims were unsuccessful because of defective credibility or inadmissibility of testimony of former members of the cults who upon leaving expressed extreme opposition to the activities of the cults and were unable to provide coherent stories that satisfied the strict evidentiary standards of the courts.

¹² In: Tourish & Pinnington, 2002.

Therapist Steven Hassan was once a member of the Moonies-Unification Church and is now helping cult victims. In his book "Releasing the Bonds", Hassan focuses on the negative potential of the cults and explains that "in harmful cults, similar patterns of behavior are found that create the difference between them [the cults] and other bodies. The ability to identify these patterns enables one to ascertain that a cult is involved. Cults are harmful because they use methods of "mind control" to suppress a person's free will, and make him dependent on the leader of the group. A harmful cult functions as an authority based on a leader or group of leaders who exercise complete control over the group. Many of the leaders of the cults are graced with power and charisma. There is nothing inherently bad in these two attributes but they carry the potential for exploiting members of the group. The group becomes harmful when the leader utilizes his charisma and power to depersonalize the members of the group and deprive them of their free will."¹³

2.2 Definitions of organizations worldwide and in Israel

Along with the definitions formulated by scholars and therapists, which focus on interrelationships within the cults and their negative effects on their members, social organizations have also proposed definitions, emphasizing the non-normative activities of the cults and the negative effects of these activities on the individual, the family and society.

The American Organization, American Family Foundations (AFF) defines cults as "an organization or movement that demonstrates great or excessive loyalty to a person, idea or object and employ manipulative, coercive and unethical methods of persuasion and control, intended to promote the objectives of the leader of the group, and which harm or cause real damage to members of the organization, their families or community" (American Family Foundation, 1986).

Towards the end of the 1990's The Canadian organization involved in of the research of cults, Info-Cult, proposed a definition similar to that of the AFF, according to which a cult is: "a manipulative group that exploits its members and is liable to cause them psychological, economic damage and even physical harm. The group exercises absolute control over the behavior, thought and emotions of its members. It utilizes various methods of manipulation to transform them into loyal, compliant and submissive members. The Info-Cult is also concerned with the special status of the cult groups and their leaders. "This special status places them at odds with accepted social norms and conceptions as well as with the family unit and its values. Cults generally conceal their nature and real objectives from future members by misleading and misguiding activity intended to attract new recruits".¹⁴

The Israel Center for Cult Victims defines a "cult" as a pseudo-spiritual group or a spiritual study group that enslaves its members. The enslavement is mental and economic, and sometimes even sexual in nature. The group has a leader who claims to be in possession of the absolute truth [...] the leader is the truth, the truth is the leader and the two are inseparable. In addition, all the cults are based on various exercises,

¹³ The Hebrew translation is taken from the site of the Israeli Center of Cult Victims.

¹⁴ For additional information one can go to the organization's site at: <http://infosect.freeshell.org/infocult/ic-home.html>.

such as meditation or group dynamics, participation in which is a condition for membership of the cult. This definition resembles its predecessors with respect to the aspects of the special status of the cult and the use of methods of control and persuasion. However, the Israel Center for Cult Victims conceptualizes the activity of cults by resorting to the term “enslavement”, which expresses the nullification of a person's selfhood, and his subjugation to the cult's extreme practices.

From all of the aforementioned definitions it may be concluded that a cult is characterized by the bonding around a leader, an idea or an entity; it confers its accepted doctrine with the status of absolute truth. It employs manipulative methods of control and persuasion; and enslaves its members. Apart from the definition of the phenomenon, the major differences between cults underscores the need for a classification that enables a proper mapping out of the phenomenon.

2.3 Classification of cults

Cults can be classified and sorted according to various classification axes which appear in the existing research literature and suggest two methods for classification of cults: The ideological axis that focuses on the cult's agenda or on the methods that it employs, and the formal or organizational axis that focuses on the structure of the cult.

Green (1986) suggests a classification based on the dominant ideology or agenda of the cult and divides the existing cults into four main categories: (a) cults in which religion is a central component of their ideology (being of a Western, Christian or Jewish orientation, or a combination thereof); (b) cults with an Eastern religious orientation, principally Hinduism; and (c) cults that base themselves on an esoteric concept, which also includes mystical, philosophical-scientific and therapy related elements; and (d) cults or organizations that purport to offer therapy to their members, that are not based on an ideology, or on mystic or religious symbols. Hassan (1988) suggests a similar form of classification based on the dominant agenda of the cult. He argues that these organizations can be divided into four main groups: (a) religious groups; (b) political groups; (c) groups engaged in educational or psycho-therapy activity; and (d) commercial groups.

Zohar (1992) suggests a further form of classification, different in substance, which focuses on the organizational and formal structure of the various cults:

- * **Closed cults** - communal cults whose members live in one territory, for the most part in rented premises. The commune has one leader based on a hierarchical structure, with no ability to democratically elect its position holders, so that the status of the members of the cult is not equal. Closed cults are characterized by a strong feeling of solidarity, strict observance of laws and commandments and immense power of group pressure. The most prominent examples of cults of this nature are *Hare Krishna*, and Rina Shani's cult (which no longer exists in Israel).
- * **Open or partially closed cults** - cults that operate a center of worship or study, in which its study and spiritual activities are conducted. The members of this type of cult live within other social frameworks, are exposed to persons who are not members of the cult at their places of employment, and in other family and social frameworks, and they meet for the purpose of the cult's study and spiritual activity

several times weekly. As a result, the level of the segregation and isolation is less than in closed cults and less obvious, at least in the external environment. *Scientology* and *Emin* are examples of cults of this type.

- * **Mass-therapy methods** - courses and seminars that teach exercises for attaining peace of mind, realization of personal potential, increased concentration, higher achievements etc. The courses are given by cults seeking to increase their strength and enlarge the number of their votaries, by disseminating their therapeutic methods. These methods utilize intellectual and mental manipulations that are liable to trigger changes in the cognitive state. A clear example of a cult of this type is the *Transcendental Meditation Movement*.
- * **Psychological marathons** – a format of courses and seminars that was developed in the 1980's, using methods deriving primarily from the sphere of social psychology, psycho-drama, hypnosis, healing by movement, and other therapeutic methods that enable the provision of mass-therapy in a short and concentrated time frame. The psychological change in these marathon sessions is attained exercising minimal control over the condition of hundreds of participants, using extreme methods of humiliation and elevation, public confessions and intense peer pressure following completion of the course, continuation workshops are offered in order to solidify and intensify the influence of the cult among the participants. *Est* (currently known as *Landmark or Forum*) and *Humanication (I.M.)* are two of the cults that employ these methods.

In addition to these classifications, cults can be classified according to the principal sociological characteristics of their activities (Langone & Lalich, 2006).

- * **Leadership:** The cult is concentrated around a charismatic person with exceptional leadership ability. The leader imposes a taboo and sanctions on the conduct of the members and dictates a detailed life-style for the members of the group.¹⁵
- * **Secrecy:** Those joining the group undergo an admission ceremony in which they pledge allegiance and commit themselves to the preservation of the cult's secrets.
- * **Detachment:** Encouragement verging on coercion to sever ties with the old social contacts combined with retreat and isolation from the outside world.
- * **Orthodoxy:** A demand for strict ritual commitment with no questions asked or doubts expressed.
- * **Obedience:** A demand for absolute obedience and subservience to the cult leader and imposition of sanctions when these are not complied with as required.
- * **Missionary:** Activities for recruiting additional members.
- * **Fundraising:** Involvement of cult members in raising economic and other resources on behalf of the cult and its leader.

¹⁵ In certain cults with a more complex hierarchical system, or in which the authority is decentralized, the Guru of the cult appoints leaders or masters who are directly subordinate to him and who manage the activity of the cult.

- * **Giving up property:** A demand that all private property be dedicated to the cult or to its leader.
- * **Solidarity among members of the cult:** mutual encouragement among members of the cult, characterized by exceptional demonstrations of empathy. Creation of intensive kinship among the members, and dedication of most of their time to activity within the group and for its benefit.
- * **Doctrine:** Ideology that forms the basis of the cult's activity, which explains and interprets the world in a new form, by the use of methods of changing awareness (meditation etc) which maintains fidelity to the cult and the leader.
- * **Ceremonial:** Strict observance of the conduct of ceremonies as part of the process of indoctrination undergone by members of the cult.

In addition, Lieblich suggests the classification of cults according to the degree to which they are harmful, or the degree to which they use harmful methods. This form of classification is likely to assist in the drafting of policy principles that are to apply to this field, as well as in determining the order of priorities at the policy implementation stage (Lieblich, personal correspondence, January 17, 2001).

The methods of classification and the sociological characteristics presented above are of assistance in defining the cult phenomenon, having regard to the differences between the various cults. It emerges from these that it is not possible to regard cults as one uniform unit or groups with a uniform structure, but rather that there are basic common characteristics which can be identified in the majority of the cults, as well as differences in their nature and in the ways in which they operate. In view of this, in order to be able to monitor the cults and their activities, the classifications that have been proposed must be regarded as being scales, meaning that each of particular groups can be identified and mapped in terms of its position on a particular scale.

On the basis of the definitions and classifications reviewed above, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services Team has adopted the following definition:

Harmful cults are groups that are united around a person or idea, by the exercise of methods of control of thought processes and patterns of behavior, for the purpose of creating an identity that is distinct from society and by the use of false representations. For the most part these groups encourage mental dependence, fidelity, obedience and subservience to the leader of the cult and his objectives, exploit their members with a view to promoting the objectives of the cult, and cause mental, physical, economic and social damage (in one or more of these fields), to members of the groups, their families and the surrounding community.

In view of this definition, we shall now address the leadership methods and the processes of recruitment and conversion that the cults employ.

3. Leadership methods, recruitment and conversion¹⁶

3.1 Leadership figure

A cult is controlled for the most part by one leader (Green 2010), who is generally the founder of the group, being the one who controls the processes of acceptance of the decisions made in the context of the group. The figure of the leader is the subject of dispute. Lieblich (2009) argues that "the phenomenon of spiritual teachers who cause damage to their students is widespread in general, and in Israel in particular... [however] the starting point is the assumption that most of the teachers who are called spiritual, do not begin as criminals, rapists and charlatans. Our assumption is that these teachers, when starting out, had experienced a significant epiphany" (page 281).

Green (2010) elaborates on this point and specifies the personal and behavioral identifying characteristics that generally characterize a cult leader:

- * **Charisma** – The source of the leader's authority is his charisma, his domineering character and the decisiveness that he displays towards his followers, all of which enable him to attract and to control the group.
- * **Absolute authority** - the leader is not required to account for his decisions and his actions to anyone, either internally or externally.
- * **Higher designation** - the leadership is perceived as being graced with special powers, flowing from knowledge, exceptional character traits and metaphysical powers. Accordingly, members of the cult believe that complying with the leader's demands will bring redemption to the world and that failure to fulfill his demands will cause the annihilation of the world and humanity.
- * **The personality worship** - the relationship between the leader and members of the group is based on blind and uncritical obedience.
- * **Building a "hard core" of believers** - the cult leader aspires to initially build a "hard core" of fanatical believers, via whom he subsequently seeks to expand the circle of his believers.
- * **Reliance on supernatural power** - the cult leader claims that he draws his religious power, his understanding, his therapeutic and moral strength from a higher authority, which may be a supernatural, religious, pseudo-scientific or esoteric god. This claim constitutes the absolute basis for his statements and teachings.
- * **A true and innovative message** - the cult leader markets his message as being unique and innovative and as contradicting existing scientific or religious theses. He subsequently establishes his message as doctrine, as an axiomatic determination, and finally as sacred writings.

¹⁶ The terms "recruitment" and "conversion" serve the theoreticians in their discussions of the "re-socialization" process undergone by the members upon joining the cult.

- * **Hierarchical structure** - the relationship between the leader and the group is based on a hierarchical structure, governed by a system of reward and punishment that is valid both in this world and in the next world. The existence of this system compels absolute obedience to the leader and to his teachings.
- * **Discrepancy between messages** – there is a deep discrepancy between the open and declared messages of the leader, according to which he acts out of altruistic motives, and his covert motives - the exercise of power, control and physical enslavement. The result of this discrepancy is that the leader may appear as someone who is manipulative, cynical, and unrestrained, as well as being a charlatan and a crook, whereas the person behind the image is a person suffering from severe mental illness or disturbance.

The cohesiveness of the cult derives to large degree from the power of the leader of the cult. Nevertheless decisive importance also attaches to the conversion process undergone by all those joining the cult undergo, involving methods of compulsion which were initially developed in totalitarian states, as detailed below. Presumably, to the extent that the conversion to the cult is more effective, the members' commitment to the cult will increase and intensify.

3.2 Process of recruitment and conversion

Lifton (1961) identified the following characteristics and constructed a model called "thought reform". This model enumerates various methods of conversion that also constitute stages in the conversion process undergone by members at the stage of recruitment to the cult. Generally speaking, control, fidelity and absolute commitment of members of the cult can be achieved through the use of these methods:

- * **Control of surroundings** - achieved by restricting the means of communication of members of the group with the world outside the cult, including books, newspapers, letters, visits by friends or relatives etc.
- * **Creation of mystic manipulation** – convincing potential recruits to the cult that joining the cult means becoming part of a group engaged in the service of an elevated goal.
- * **Demand for purity** - a demand for absolute commitment to the cult and to its principles. One of the explicit objectives of the group is to generate a change, either on a global, social, or personal level. This goal can only be achieved by absolute adherence to the cult.
- * **Confession and group exposure** - uncritical self-exposure in the presence of members of the group is a routine practice and is applied for the most part in the context of the general meetings of the group. Such personal exposure frequently focuses on the member's confession of his sins, faults and doubts related to his belonging to the group. By means of such personal exposure, an educational-deterrent message is passed on, both to the confessing member and to the listening members.
- * **Sacred scientific doctrine**- the world-view of the group is accorded the status of absolute truth by virtue of which all phenomena of the world receive their

explanation. Accordingly, the doctrine on which the cult's activity is based is immutable, unchangeable and of absolute certainty.

- * **Loaded language** - the group has a treasury of words formulated for its exclusive use. This terminology establishes the exclusive frame of reference for the thought processes of members of the group, and as such precludes the development of critical thought and compels the adoption of a dichotomous perspective in which the group is the source of all that is good and worthy, as opposed to the outside world which is the source of evil.
- * **The doctrine supersedes the individual** - all the previous experiences and personal attributes of the individual are reinterpreted in a negative light according the cult's ideology, which is presented as the supreme value.
- * **The futility of existence** - redemption is only possible by adherence to the group. Leaving the group means ruin.

Holt (in Green, 1986), diligently worked on the development of Lifton's model and drafted a list of the essential structural and psychological conditions for the practice of thought reform:

- * Instituting a prolonged process lasting for months and often for years;
- * Ensuring that the process continues throughout the day and the night;
- * Conducting the process in a controlled atmosphere that does not allow exposure to outside information;
- * Combination of the principles of control based on severance from the support of the old social circle with the acceptance of the principles and beliefs of the new social circle;
- * Establishing thought reform as an individual process;
- * Maintaining a total absence of privacy;
- * A threat to the original personality;
- * Instituting a system of payment - reward and punishment;
- * Establishment of total emotional commitment to the new set of beliefs;
- * Establishment of the symbolic death of the old personality;
- * Encouraging the converts to work in recruiting and converting additional members;
- * Building the new identity.

Thought reform facilitates the achievement of total control of the thought processes and patterns of behavior of the members of the cult, by disconnecting them from their original personality. This prolonged condition is referred to as 'mind control' and is

the subject of dispute among the scientific community and therapists engaged in this field. On the one hand, there is the position of Professor Thaler-Singer, who cemented the use of the concept in the context of harmful activities of cults. She argued that some of the cults' practices, such as the obsessive repetition of mantras, the prayers and single-faceted tasks, focusing on sins and guilt, and the application of intensive group pressure, are liable to nurture processes of compulsion and even of hypnosis in certain cases, all of which suppress free-will and totally enslave the cult member (Thaler-Singer, 2003). It was in this context that Thaler-Singer also testified in hundreds of court cases during the 1970's and the 1980's.¹⁷ The other side of the dispute is represented by several leading scholars in this field, such as Richardson, Bromley, Zablocki and Robbins.¹⁸ They argue that it is difficult to prove the occurrence and effects of mind control, both in scientific terms and in legal terms. Richardson believes that the source of these arguments derives in the main from political struggles, because in the USA they have arisen in an attempt to limit freedom of religion and worship (Richardson, 1991). Notwithstanding the controversy raging on the subject, therapists engaged in this field in Israel¹⁹ argue that from their experience of treatment over many years, it appears that use has been made of methods of mind control as part of the recruitment and conversion processes for cults.

Zimbardo (2002) describes mind control as a situation in which the free will of the individual or the collective is endangered in light of the activity of persons who are changing or distorting the perception of the world, the motivation for action, influence, cognition and behavior. Hassan (1988) adds that this situation can be split into four main components

- * Behavior control – monitoring and control of the physical environment of the cult member, including place of residence, style of dress, type of food, sleep patterns, workplace, participation in ceremonies and rituals, and so forth.
- * Thought control – inculcation and internalization of the cult's doctrine as absolute truth. The doctrine is used not only to filter information originating in the outside world, but also dictates the dichotomous thought processes of the cult member with respect to contents to which he is exposed.
- * Emotional control - emotional manipulation, which also includes creation of a narrow range of emotions available for the cult member, of which the predominant emotion is that of guilt and fear. Other emotions are loyalty and faithfulness to the cult and its leader.
- * Information Control - total prevention of access to information originating from the outside world, such as newspapers and magazines, television and the radio. In addition, there is the guarding of information that passes in personal contacts, both

¹⁷ Lieblich M., Personal Correspondence, 17.01.2011.

¹⁸ Richardson and Bromley wrote a distinguished book on this subject: *The Brainwashing/Deprogramming Controversy: Sociological, Psychological, legal and Historical Perspectives*. Richardson was also responsible for a number of other publications in this field, as indicated in the attached list of sources.

Zablocki and Robbins too wrote an important book on this topic: *Misunderstanding Cults: Searching for Objectivity in a Controversial Field*.

¹⁹ Zohar, G., Personal Correspondence, 17.01.2011; Lieblich M., Personal Correspondence, 17.01.2011.

between members of the cult and among themselves, and between members of the cult, and the family and friends who are not in the cult.

All of these types of control exercise a decisive influence in shaping the spiritual and mental processes that the cult member undergoes and they all combine to create a network of total control (Hassan, 1988).

4. Characterization of the victims and the injuries caused

The use of methods of thought reform in cults causes injuries in a number of aspects. In this section, we shall characterize the victims of cults and describe the types of harm to which they are exposed.

4.1 Characterization of the Victims²⁰

The research literature focuses primarily on the direct harm caused to victims by the activity of cults, in other words to their members and their children living with them. Research conducted in this field indicates that socio-economic characteristics are liable to be connected to joining a cult. The literature points to the fact that a vast majority of the members of cults come from a medium or medium-high socio-economic background (Amir, 1992). Age and personal status are also connected to membership of cults. Those joining cults are between ages 18-35 with the average age of joining being 25, and the majority of those joining (about 60%) being between 18-28. In other words, young adults in their twenties are more likely to be candidates for membership in a cult than adults in their thirties and above. In addition, the majority of those joining cults (70%) are single persons and about 20% are married. The remainder is either divorced or separated (Galanter, 1996, Langone, 1996; Gasde & Block, 1998; Aronoff, Lynn & Malinoski 2000; Dawson, 2003). As opposed to this, an examination of the gender characteristics and family background does not indicate significant differences that might explain the decision to join a cult. Women are represented to a higher degree than men, but the discrepancy is negligible.

The family background from which a substantial number of the members of the cult come is likewise insignificant. Two-thirds of the parents of members were living together when joining the cult and a third of them are children of divorced or separated parents. However, most of them testified to a lack of significant emotional interaction with their core family, before joining the cult. This situation gives rise to a feeling of depression, insecurity and dissatisfaction (Amir, 1992). Zohar (1992) also identifies personality indicators and circumstantial characteristics that are common to those joining cults: the search for human contact; the need to undergo an experience; the need for authority; the wish to conduct a 'natural' lifestyle; distancing from men (relevant to women in traditionally religious cults); and the conduct of a healthy and ecological lifestyle. In practical terms, those joining cults are frequently in states of crisis in their lives (Popper, 1998) or at a cross roads, such as the end of high school, recruitment into the military, conclusion of military service before commencing studies, moving between workplaces, etc. (Green, 1986; Zohar, 1992), but only 6%

²⁰ The information in this sub-chapter is based mainly on studies conducted in the U.S.A., but it may be presumed that the description of the population is similar in all western countries.

had been hospitalized in mental hospitals prior to joining a cult and the majority of them do not have a history of mental illness (Amir, 1992, Singer & Lalich, 1995; Tobias & Lalich, 1994; Langone, 1993). In this regard, an examination of the amount of use of psycho-active materials before joining a cult reveals that a little less than one third used hard drugs, whereas 60% - used soft drugs. Only 2% had not used drugs at all before joining a cult (Amir, 1992).

From the research reviewed above, it is apparent that members of cults are, for the most part, persons who function in a normative manner in the various social frameworks, but it is possible that a substantial number of them joined a cult as a consequence of an emotional, mental, physical or social deficiency, which led to the search for an alternative lifestyle. It bears mention that in Israel, research was conducted among persons joining cults after they had left the cult, and it was found that the average joining age is 25, 86% of the members were born in Israel, were middle class, with 12 years or more schooling. In addition, 44% of those examined testified to their having been in crisis before joining, and 60% had psychological therapy at some stage during their lives. 11% had been previously hospitalized in mental hospitals and 15% had been discharged from the Army as a result of a severe mental disorder (Amir, 1992).

4.2 Types of injuries caused

The research literature is not unequivocal with regard to the negative effects of cults. Some of the research carried out in the field (Robbins & Anthony, 1972; Levine, 1984) actually found that membership of a cult is likely to have positive therapeutic effects, for example a reduction of the use of psycho-active materials among addicts and development of a sense of independence and competence for life among youth and adults. Amir (1992) also points to the positive personality and socially-related experiences of members in cults, expressed in the emergence of meaning, answers, objectives, and purpose of existence, a feeling of belonging and of self-fulfillment as a result of being active in a cult. However, Aronoff and others (2000) argue that the research in question examined specific aspects in the behavior of cult members without having reference to the range of psychological and behavioral disturbances from which members of cults suffer (Aronoff, Lynn & Malinoski, 2000). The harm caused can be divided into several main categories:

Emotional harm: in order to achieve full control over the members of a cult and to facilitate the complete adoption of the new set of values, the cults attack and attempt to destroy²¹ the original identity of the new recruits by the use of the methods detailed above. Use of these methods may cause member to lose his identity and the original support system, resulting in his complete identification with the cult leader (Goldberg, 1997). In relation to this aspect, membership of a cult has negative signs that resemble being kept in captivity. In actual fact, it constitutes an abnormal traumatic event, not by reason of its rarity but rather because it suppresses the normal human trait of adaptation to life. This is evidenced by the fact that many cult members change their identity, including their names and their external appearance. In this way they abandon the personal and material signs of the original identity, and ultimately erase it. Membership in a cult, similar to other traumatic events, involves a threat to life or

²¹ Goldberg (1997) uses the phrase "destruction of pre-cult identity" in describing the consequences of the conversion process undergone by members upon joining the cult.

to physical and mental wellbeing and in this way the person confronts extreme situations of helplessness (Louis-Herman, 2005). Because of this, cult victims are liable to exhibit various post-traumatic syndromes, such as depression, apprehension, sense of isolation, rejection, sadness, a feeling of not belonging, conceptual disturbances, suicidal tendencies, personal destruction, disassociation, and in some cases even psycho-pathological disturbances (Amir, 1992; Aronoff, Lynn & Malinoski, 2000; Galanter, 1989). Children who are cult victims also develop many post-traumatic symptoms, including extreme changes in mood, a low pressure threshold and hyper-sensitivity, nightmares, bedwetting, behavioral regression, attentive and concentration disturbances, speech disturbances, self-inflicted injury, and so forth (MacHovec, 1992).

Physical injuries: as part of the establishment of the cult leader's total control, cults will sometimes inculcate behavioral formats that affect the physical condition of members of the group, such as an extreme scarcity of food or the regimentation of the manner and quantity of eating, bodily mutilation, restriction of hours of sleep and lengthening the hours of work until a situation transpires in which the members of the cult are working almost around the clock (Anthony & Robbins, 1992; Goldberg, 1997). The result is a change in external appearance, finding expression in a glazed look, a sharp loss of weight and adoption of an abnormal style of dress (Amir, 1992).

Sexual harm: Cults often control the sex lives and the sexuality of their members while exploiting them in doing so. Exploitation of this kind is for the most part expressed in the adoption of one of two extreme patterns of behavior: members of the cult (in a substantial number of cases, female members of the cult) totally abandon themselves for purposes of satisfying the sexual urges of the leader and occasionally of the other members, or alternatively, a total prohibition of engagement in sexual relations, even where the cult members are couples, or a partial prohibition, with the object of splitting the pre-cult couple-relationship and increasing the leader's control over the members (Lalich, 1996). As a consequence of this, the cult attains total control over the amount and the method of having children.

Social and family-related harm: The socially-related harm from which members of cults are likely to suffer is expressed in several ways. Firstly, joining a cult involves the undermining of the family as an institution. This process takes place by the creation of a fictitious family structure as a substitute for the core family, and the convert's previous system of support (Popper, 1998; Goldberg, 1997) and causes the partial or total destruction of the previous family and social relationships. Secondly, the accepted family hierarchy between parents and children is dismantled with the object of enabling the leader to exercise complete control over the cult members and their children. The abrogation of parental authority and severance of the connection between the children and the parents are achieved by breaking up the core family and an exchange of parents/children, changing the children's place of residence without the parent's knowledge of their whereabouts, and physical and sexual abuse of the children. As a result of this, in some of the cases, members of the cult totally abandon their parental responsibility for the welfare and health of their children, and the children no longer see them as a model to emulate, appreciate and admire (Markowitz & Halperin, 1984; Malcarne & Burchard, 1992; Whitsett & Kent, 2003).

Economic damage: Many of those leaving cults report having been systematically and consistently dispossessed of their money and property (Durocher, 1999; Thaler-

Singer, 2003). Members who transfer their money and property to the cult leader and its institutions, do so in total obedience to the demands of the leader, which increase with time. In certain cults, members are required to spend a substantial portion of their time in random and hard daily work, in order to earn additional sums of money which they can pass on to the leader. Consequently, an enormous gap is created between the leader's standard of living and that of the members. In order to conceal their economic activity, some of the cults maintain accounts in foreign countries without their members being aware of the fate of their funds (Zohar, 2010).

The numerous categories of harm and injury-cycles contribute to the extreme complexity of the problem. The development of awareness of this complexity may assist in confronting and dealing with the negative effects in some cases as well as in the development of a system of relevant interventions for the treatment of cult victims and for the reduction in the prevalence of the problem in Israel.

5. Cults in Israel

The discussion of the issue of cults in Israel is divided into three main spheres: an outline of the scope and nature of the phenomenon; characteristics of the victims and the damage; and the position in the legal realm.

5.1 Outline of scope and nature of the phenomenon

At this time there is no formal database in Israel on the subject of cults. It is therefore difficult to estimate how many of them exist, their activities in Israel and the scope of the direct and indirect victims thereof (relatives, members and close associates) among the population. We would point out in this regard that since its establishment in 2006, *the Israel Center for Cult Victims* has received hundreds of calls, mainly from relatives and close associates of victims, who find it difficult to cope with the cult membership of their children, siblings, parents', spouses' and close associates, and the multi-dimensional effects that the cult has on their lives and on the lives of their loved ones.

According to assessments made by *the Israel Center for Cult Victims* and by Israeli researchers engaged in this field,²² it is estimated that there are currently about 80 cults active in Israel (dozens more were active over the years and were broken up),²³ and the number of members in each of them varies between a few dozens to thousands. Moreover, tens of thousands of members of the general public in Israel have so far been exposed to workshops, courses and seminars conducted by cults operating in Israel.

5.2 Characteristics of the victims and effects of the injuries caused

Members of the team interviewed former cult members and the families of cult members at the present time, and it emerges that more than anything else, victims and

²² In Israel there are only a few researchers engaged in this field, among them Dr. Gabi Zohar, Ms. Mati Lieblich, Dr. David Green and Rami Feler.

²³ Details regarding the cults operating in Israel, and the extent and nature of their activities may be found on the site of the Israel Center for Cult Victims,

their families suffer from a shortage of beneficial information which would facilitate early identification of cults and the ways in which they operate, or in cases of membership of a cult, that could provide tools for assisting and supporting their loved ones.

5.3 The situation is the legal arena - Advocate Batya Artman, the Legal Advisor of the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services.

Cult victims also need help in the legal realm. No law currently exists in Israel proscribing the activity of cults. Nevertheless, in view of the nature of the direct and indirect injuries caused by cults, as detailed in this Report, various provisions exist under Israeli law which may be of assistance and which could apply in certain cases to the heads of cults or their agents, or for the purposes of the protection of victims. The following is a presentation of the sections of the various laws, which may be relevant to the activity of cults:

5.3.1 Welfare Laws: By law, there is power to act with a view to the protection of minors and wards of court. In so far as in certain cases minors or their parents are involved in the activity of cults, in a manner that may damage the minors or damage the functioning of the parents, the following sections may be applicable in relevant cases:

5.3.1.1 Under the Youth (Care and Supervision) Law-1960, upon the application of a Social Worker pursuant to the Youth Law, a Juvenile Court may place a minor under the supervision of a Welfare Officer under the law and also order his removal from the custody of his parents when he has been declared by the Court to be a minor in need. The grounds of need include *inter alia* the inability of the person responsible for him to take care of him or to supervise him, or where he neglects his duty of care or supervision, the exposure of the minor to any bad influence, or his residence in a place regularly used for the commission of an offence, as well as the damage or the danger of damage for any other reason to his physical or mental wellbeing.

5.3.1.2 Under the Legal Capacity and Guardianship Law-1962, where a parent is incapable of, or refrains, without reasonable cause from fulfilling his obligations towards a minor, the Court may appoint a Guardian for the minor instead of the parent, or in addition to him (Section 27-29 of the Law). The Court may also appoint a Guardian for a person, who is not a minor, in a situation in which he is unable to look after his own affairs, either wholly or partially (Section 33 of the Law).

5.3.2 The Penal Law-1977: the main section in the Penal Law relevant to the subject of cults is section 375A, which establishes a prohibition on keeping a person under conditions of slavery for work or services, including sexual services. In this Section, "slavery" is deemed to be a condition under which authority is exercised against a person, such as is generally exercised towards a person's property; for this purpose, **actual control of a person's life** or denial of his freedom, shall be deemed the exercise of such authority.

In addition, the exploitation of distress or weakness of the victim, the imposing of terror or the existence of a subservient relationship or of dependence between the

perpetrator and the victim, constitutes grounds of offense in the relevant sections of the Law, example in the offence of blackmail by way of threats (section 428 of the Law) and in the offence of 'extortion' (section 431 of the Law). Taking advantage of the situation that precludes a woman from freely consenting or exploitation of a relationship of dependency and subservience (in minors from the age of 16-18) constitutes part of the grounds of the offence also in respect of sexual offences (sections 345, 346(a) of the Law), in addition to prohibitions on sexual relations with minors.

Additionally, under the Penal Law, a duty of reporting exists in relation to damage caused by a person responsible for a minor or a helpless person. A responsible person is: 'a person with whom a helpless person is living, or with whom he is with permanently... **provided that a relationship of dependency or subservience exists between them.** "A helpless person" is a person who, because of his age, illness or physical or mental infirmity, mental deficiency or any other cause - cannot provide the needs of his livelihood, health or welfare" (Sections 368A - 368E of the Law).

5.5.3 The Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law-1998: Section 3(6) of the Law, enumerates situations that will be deemed sexual harassment, even where the person harassed has not shown the harasser that he is not interested in the said propositions or references, on the assumption that the context is one in which there an unequal relationship of power and of undue influence. The Law was recently amended by the addition of section 3 (a) (6) (g), which provides that a situation in which the act is perpetrated by the exploitation of a relationship of subservience or dependence by a person who is known as or presents himself as having special spiritual capabilities, shall be deemed to be sexual harassment. This extension could also provide a solution in cases of sexual harassment in a cult context.

5.3.4 Labor Laws: Offences involving the Labor Laws could also characterize activity of cults, including offences against the obligation of granting annual leave and of hours of work and rest, as detailed in the Annual Vacation Law-1951.

5.3.5 Tax Offences: Offences against the various Tax Laws are committed in some of the cults, depending on the characteristics of the activity in each cult.

These areas of legislation could enable the State and private individuals to take legal action against some of the activities that take place in cults, but there is a need for the meticulous and prolonged gathering of solid evidence in order to make use of the existing legislation.

6. Treatment, assistance and support

With a view to the establishment of a system of services and treatment for victims, the injury-cycles must first be identified. There are several main groups who are the direct or indirect victims of the activity of cults and are at risk: (a) members of the cult suffering from a multitude of diverse injuries as a result of the cult's activity; (b) relatives and friends of the cult members, who are forced to cope with the loss of their loved ones to the cult, and who often develop secondary trauma; (c) the general public including individuals who are liable to fall victim to the activity of cults. These groups must be given treatment, assistance, support, and access to information at two points in time: Before joining the cult and after leaving the cult.

6.1 Treatment of members of cults

First, we shall review the methods of the treatment and intervention that have been applied in the past and are currently implemented for cult members. In order to help potential cult members or those who are in the initial stages of joining a cult, there must first be an identification of the psycho-social characteristics and signs of distress that are liable to attest to joining the cult. Successful identification of a potential cult victim can be achieved by noticing a change in the patterns of behavior, such as a gradual disconnection from the routine patterns of life (family, friends, spouses), a change of life-style (dietary, sleep, dress), lack of vocational stability, financial and economic distress etc. It is important to note that the process of recruitment to a cult is continuous over a period of several weeks or up to several months. Consequently, it is of decisive importance to identify the cult victim at the early stages in order to succeed in rescuing him from the cult.

During the period of membership of a cult there is a substantial difficulty in accessing victims, both in physical terms, because on many occasions they are isolated from the outside world, and from the emotional-mental aspect due to the use of mind control. In the past, a method of deprogramming was used in order to rescue cult victims from the harmful environment in which they found themselves. This method was employed mainly during the early 1970's, and it is the only one that applied the practice of forceful persuasion, by the use of force and physical severance from the cult, with the object of carrying out a process of deprogramming of the victim, even while he still belonged to the cult. Additionally, the customary techniques in this method are abduction, isolation and deceiving the cult member, with a view to bringing him within and introducing him to a therapeutic framework. This system has two substantial disadvantages: the inducement of psychological trauma as part of the process of negating the adverse influence of the cult (deprogramming), and inducing a sense of loss of control by the cult member, similar to that practiced in the group, so that in actual fact, from the victim's perspective, the deprogramming experience is liable to resemble the experience he underwent in the cult (Hassan, 2000). Today, this method has been outlawed and therefore its use is not permitted, mainly due to the recognition of the negative affects of the use of coercive techniques for the purposes of cult-rescues, and in view of a series of legal claims brought against therapists using this method.

At the exit stage or thereafter a distinction must be made between victims leaving the cult by choice and those who drop out of the cult as the result of processes, either

within or external to the cult, and the method of treatment and means of support that must be adapted to each individual victim according to the diagnosis of his mental and physical state. The counseling procedures that are available to the therapists at this stage are based on the intervention model, which on many occasions is applied in the treatment of persons suffering from drug addiction. Methods of this kind were developed in the 1980's and 1990's, including the "exit-counseling" method, which makes use of close friends of the member who is on the verge of leaving the cult, and of former members of the same cult who have undergone the rehabilitation process. The therapeutic intervention continues for several days and includes the use of two strategies: emotional and rational. The emotional strategy is implemented by way of direct meetings with the relatives and friends in which a personal interaction occurs following a long period of disconnection as a result of membership of the cult. The rational strategy is applied by conversations with the cult-exit therapist in the course of which an attempt is made to neutralize the psychological influence of the cult and restore the victim's genuine identity, by focusing on questions such as what is a harmful cult; How does the cult harm its members; Can the group to which the victim belongs be identified as a cult; and so forth (Ross, Personal Communication, October 2010). Notwithstanding its many successes, the disadvantage of this method derives from the nature of the specific and non-holistic treatment, because in the course of intervention, there is an apparent over-concentration on the transmission of programs that are of assistance in mitigating the influence of the cult on the victim, and not in the conduct of an orderly and gradual process, aimed at treating the personal and family problems that preceded membership of the cult, and encouraged it (Hassan, 2000).

Following completion of the exit process, the victim has to reconstruct his life. This process occurs in several ways including the increase and establishment of a positive self-image, overcoming physical problems and various illnesses, creation and renewal of family and social ties, finding employment and establishing economic independence etc. During the initial weeks after leaving the cult, involvement, support and sometimes even protection is required on the part of the therapeutic body. During this period continuous help must be provided on a 24 hours a day basis, depending on identification of the immediate needs of the victim. The initial therapeutic process includes finding immediate housing solutions for a specific period of time (for example, placement in emergency shelters), immediate creation of foundations and networks of emotional-spiritual support, the purpose of which is to replace those practiced in the cult and to build basic trust between the victim and the therapist, such as the strengthening of contacts with relatives and friends or the creation of a "significant other" in the life of the victim. In addition, intensive contacts must take place with various institutional agencies, such as Ministries, the Police and the State Attorney's Office with the object of ensuring speedy and efficient treatment in relation to the various administrative aspects entailed in leaving the cult, and in returning to a normal life-style. This contact also continues in the later stages of treatment of the victim.

The next stage is likely to continue for months and even for years, and in the course of which the diverse needs of the victim must be identified and answered with holistic solutions. Among the various needs for which the victim requires assistance, are physical needs (medical examinations, adaption of diet etc.), instrumental needs (finding housing solutions, and for transport and travel, basic equipment and

transportation thereof, clothing, hygiene products etc.), therapy and spiritual needs (the conduct of recovery and rehabilitation workshops, financing of individual and family treatment, financing of psycho-social diagnoses, locating psychiatrists with knowledge of the cult scene), social and educational needs (assistance in renewing contact with the community, prognosis and vocational rehabilitation, locating appropriate educational frameworks for children and financing academic studies), and legal requirements (provision of legal advice on subjects related to rights and assets taken by the cult, physical and mental damage caused, difficulty in adjusting and adapting to the new life, and various other acute problems).²⁴

6.2 Assistance and support for relatives and close associates

The relatives and close associates of the cult victim are included among an additional, wider circle of victims, who often suffer from secondary trauma syndromes and from a feeling of helplessness, frustration and loss. They are in need of assistance and support services which are intended for secondary victims of cults, at all the intervention stages. In addition to this as they are critical to the success of the process of the rescuing the cult victim, they must be equipped with the information and tools that will enable them to be recruited for this purpose and constitute a supporting figure for the cult victim.

6.3 Solutions for the public at large

The wider circle of victims includes the public at large, when in the absence of up to date, reliable and accessible information as to the ways in which cults operate and the severity of the harm that they cause, has difficulty in identifying preliminary signs of their activity and their negative influence. In order to equip the public with the necessary information, with a view to confronting the phenomenon, it is desirable that activities should be promoted to increase awareness of the existence of harmful cults, such as advertising campaigns in the media. The internet constitutes an especially important tool for raising awareness, because it is accessible to many households and in particular to the young, who constitute a group at a high level of risk of harm from cults. Public information activity in high schools as well as in youth movements is likely to assist in raising awareness among the youth with a view to preventing them from joining cults.

²⁴ Some of the information brought in these paragraphs is based on the insights of the professional teams who treated the women and children of the cult that was headed by Goel Ratzon. The team comprises representatives of the Individual and Family Authority in the Welfare Ministry, and social services, and representatives from the Welfare department of the Tel-Aviv Municipality, and they have accompanied the female and male victims, from the time that the cult was dismantled and until today.

7. Recommended Action

It appears from the above that due to the intensity of the harm caused as a result of the membership of cults, the treatment of victims necessitates the employment of significant resources and we must be prepared for this, both in budgetary terms and in terms of professional personnel. In addition to this, the management of cases of this type is complex because it requires a multi-system outlook and expertise in treating cult victims. This report accordingly suggests three courses of action, as set out below:

7.1 Preventive action

The preventive tools are directed towards preventing new members from joining cults and raising awareness of the phenomenon among the public at large, as detailed below:

- * **Initiation of actions to raise awareness among the public** - the team recommends the conduct of frequent advertising campaigns to raise the public's awareness of the dangers attendant to joining a cult and the identification signs of groups of a cultic-nature. In addition, workshops must be conducted on the subject of cults for youth in high schools and in youth movements. In such workshops, information will be provided to enable the identification of groups of a cultic-nature and to prevent people from joining them. The team also recommends the establishment of workshops for parents and juveniles, in order to raise the level of awareness and their ability to identify harmful groups. Implementation of these actions requires the involvement of other Ministries, to join forces in working on an inter-ministerial and inter-organizational basis, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption and other Ministries.
- * **Training of counselors and social workers to identify cults and potential victims** - the team recommends the training of practitioners in a variety of disciplines including social workers, teachers, educational advisers, psychologists, psychiatrists and family doctors (G.Ps), so that they will be able to identify premature signs that are evidence of joining cults. Such training is important because in the initial weeks after joining a cult, before the conversion process is complete, the chance of rescuing the person from the cult is higher. The team also recommends that the Central School for Social Welfare Workers, run by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services, should without delay introduce this kind of training program.
- * **Research and establishment of a data base regarding cults** - the information about cult activity in Israel and the research in this field is limited, certainly in comparison to the USA and other Western countries. Accordingly, the team recommends the initiation of research and surveys, in order to coordinate the data about the nature and prevalence of the phenomenon in Israel and to develop methods of intervention based on research and empirical knowledge, and on the knowledge of professional experts from Israel and the rest of the world.

7.2 Counseling based interventions

Providing counseling solutions for cult victims and their families:

- * **Establishment of a unit for the treatment of cult victims and their families** - the team recommends the establishment of a new unit for the treatment of cult victims, within the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services. Services for the Individual and the Family, in the Department for Personal and Social Services, and will be headed by a national supervisor. The unit will be responsible for formulating the Ministry's policy and for preventive and interventionist methods in this field, will gather information and expertise in the field of counseling cult victims and will instruct the field units in a manner that will ensure a uniform and professional response at all levels. The unit will operate a nationwide "intervention team". The Team will be involved in assisting cult victims and will do so through the field operatives in the social services departments. The Team will also be assisted by external advisors and counselors, as detailed subsequently. These will be employed by an outside body which will be selected in a Tender. The Team will coordinate its activity with other bodies including law enforcement agencies.
- * **Recruitment and training of professional therapists and "cult exit counselors"**- the research literature attests to the fact that in order to deal with the victims of cults it is necessary to be familiar with the special characteristics of this type of injury. Accordingly, the Team recommends the recruitment and training of professional counselors specializing in the field of cults and will provide a treatment solution for the needs of victims. In addition to this, the unit will recruit ex-cult members and train them as "cult exit counselors". These counselors will operate under the professional therapists, and at their discretion, and will oversee victims who were members of their own former cult. The exit counselors' in-depth familiarity with the ways in which specific cults operates is likely to make a unique contribution to the recovery of the cult victims.
- * **Setting up a call center intended for victims of cults and for their immediate environment** - the Team recommends the establishment of a telephone call center which will operate under the unit for dealing with cult victims, and will assist victims and their families. Such assistance is necessary because oftentimes, victims of cults feel isolated and incapable of reconstructing their lives. Their relatives are also on many occasions in distress and are in need of help. Moreover, research shows that assistance to relatives is of great importance to the success of the exit process. The solutions that the telephone call center will offer will include initial mental support, specific information about counselors in this field, referral to support groups and to relevant agencies that provide basic material needs, etc.
- * **Designation of National Insurance Subsistence Allowance for Cult Victims** - the Team recommends that cult victims should be defined as persons in need, for a period of one year, and be awarded a subsistence allowance which will facilitate income support for the period of their rehabilitation. The allowance will assist the cult victims to complete the recovery process in many aspects of life, including employment, studies, etc. The allowance will be awarded as a subsistence payment, as part of the rehabilitation program run on a daily basis, put together by a social worker from the social services department.

7.3 Legislative amendments

It would appear that there are grounds for considering a number of legislative amendments, which could be of assistance in coping with the features that characterize cults. Before progress is made with such proposals, there will be a need for inter-ministerial collaboration, including an examination of the methods of enforcement necessary for their implementation.

- * **Enactment of a law against cult activity** - this report proposes a definition of the term "cult" based on the various definitions of theoreticians, therapists and organizations engaged in this field. Consequently, the team recommends an examination as to whether the definition of a cult appearing in the report, can serve as a basis for the submission of a draft law against cult leaders or against cult activities.
- * **Legislative amendments in the sphere of sexual offences** - the team recommends giving consideration to amendments of the Penal Law, with regard to sex offences, along the lines of the amendment made in the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law (Amendment No. 6-2010) which could also provide an answer in cases of sexual harm in cults.
- * **Legislative amendments in respect of the Legal Capacity and Guardianship Law-1962** - the team recommends that an amendment be considered to this Law, so that it would explicitly provide that a situation in which a person is under the significant control of another person in his life or is the subject of undue influence will be deemed a situation in which a person is incapable of looking after his own affairs, and consequently the Court may appoint a guardian for him.

7.4 Government Decision

- * **Interoffice and Inter-ministerial cooperation** - from the recommendations set out above it appears that in order to confront the cult phenomenon in the best possible way, full coordination is necessary in the work of many governmental and professional bodies: The Ministry of Welfare and Social Services, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Justice, the Israel Police, various legal forums including the Family Courts and the Rabbinical Courts, the Local Authorities, NGOs, research bodies and so forth. The team thus recommends that the government adopt a decision on this subject and formulate an overall policy which will obligate all the Ministries to cooperate for the purposes of establishing a mechanism capable of confronting the phenomenon of cults in Israel.

Concluding Summary

The development of harmful cults in Israel and worldwide is to a large degree a phenomenon of the new era, which is bound up with the continuing challenge to the traditional social networks and social bonds. The destructive effect of the cults was clearly demonstrated last year when the activity of a group led by *Goel Ratzon* was exposed to the public. The numerous bodies that came into contact with this cult were exposed to a broad range of injuries including those of a mental, physical, sexual,

social and economic nature. The *Goel Ratzon* case highlighted the complexity of treating cult victims and made it clear that there is a need for the establishment of tools and mechanisms in order to cope with such phenomena in the future.

The team established by the Minister of Welfare and Social Services is but a first step in formulating a comprehensive government policy and establishing the necessary means for confronting the phenomenon, in all its complexity. We hope that other Government Ministries as well as Local Authorities and various counseling agencies will join us in the effort that is necessary and will assist us in implementing the recommendations set out in detail above. This is without doubt a task that will require a display of forbearance and the investment of considerable resources, but we are hopeful of success in meeting it.

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