

# THE EX-MORMON DILEMMA: Loss of Roots, Identity and Story<sup>®</sup>

December 11th, 2011

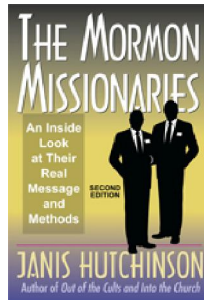
*The previous article, "Is the Bible Reliable?" can now be found in the Newsletter Archives.*

*Sign up to be notified every time a new article is posted!  
Scroll down and click on the contact link in the left-hand column  
and send your email address.*

## "SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT"



**NEW!**  
**"SECOND EDITION"**  
**OF**  
**THE MORMON MISSIONARIES: AN INSIDE LOOK**  
**AT THEIR REAL MESSAGE AND METHODS.**



*Release date: January 2012*

*Published by Cross and Pen Ministries*

### **How is this edition different from the first?**

The characters and storyline remain the same as in the 1994 Edition; however, the Second Edition contains updated statistics for the LDS Church through December 31, 2010 (*rather than 1994*). This includes such things as the number of members, projected membership for the future, the church's estimated wealth, missionary activity on the Internet and more. Endnotes have also been brought up to date.

In addition, there is an added chapter that provides an overview of the LDS Church's current evangelistic plan for its missionaries, instituted in 2004. It is entitled, *Preach My Gospel*. The chapter outlines their lesson material and shows how it differs from the 1986 missionary plan called, *Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel* that was used up until 2003.

This Second Edition will be a soft-cover book, and available for purchase on my website. It will offer the usual one-click method of payment via PayPal or other credit cards. I will send out a special e-mail announcement when it becomes available.

## BE SURE TO WATCH FOR IT!

Now, on to the article . . .

### THE EX-MORMON'S DILEMMA OF LOSING ROOTS, IDENTITY AND STORY *Explaining the ex-cultist's disorientation*

Below is Chapter Five from my book, "*Out of the Cults and Into the Church*." The material in this chapter is crucial for Christians to understand, especially if they intend to help and/or mentor former Mormons (*or former members from any cult*) to successfully assimilate into a Christian church. The chapter is particularly helpful for new Christian converts from cults to read, because it enables them to understand why they are having (or did have) such a difficult time in the transition process.

The book explains all the numerous losses that former cult members experience, but this chapter zeroes in on only one—loss of roots, story and identity. Since you will be jumping into the middle of the book, the following information will bring you up to date.

**Background:** The narrator of the chapter is a teacher at a Bible College. She is also a former Mormon who holds a small support group for five individuals, most of whom still have lingering problems after converting to Christianity.

#### Characters:

Melanie (*ex-Mormon*)

Judy (*ex-Mormon*)

Richard (*ex-Hare Krishna*)

Elizabeth (*Ex-Moonie*)

Myra (*ex-Mormon*).

**Note:** At the end of every chapter in *Out of the Cults and Into the Church*, there is a section entitled, "*How Can Christians Help?*" Each one addresses the subject that the chapter covers; therefore, at the end of the below Chapter Five, you will find the same thing.

## CHAPTER FIVE

"I feel like I've been dematerialized," Melanie moaned, as she looked up at me from the chair on my front porch.

This was the strange statement I was greeted with as I arrived home and found her waiting for me.

"What on earth do you mean?" I asked, as my glance took in her forlorn expression.

"You know, formless, invisible, unconnected, like—well, have you ever watched Star Trek?"

Unlocking the front door, she followed me into the house while I unloaded my armful of packages. Motioning towards the patio we went outside. With a significant sigh, Melanie slumped into one of the lawn chairs.

"Well, what's this all about," I prodded. "And what on earth does it have to do with Star Trek? Are you saying," I laughed, "that you're advancing so fast in your Christian church, that you feel you're in warp drive?"

Her exasperated look quickly sobered me.

"I know I've come a long way already," she began, "but something still isn't right and I can't put my finger on it. The only way I can describe it is to use the transporter room on the Starship Enterprise as an example . . . even if it is a TV show."

"Okay, I'm with you so far," I said.

"Well," she began, "to transport from the planet's surface to the ship, coordinates are set and one's body is dematerialized, beamed up then rematerialized. But sometimes something goes wrong. If something is amiss with the coordinates, the particles of the person's body never stabilize. They try to materialize, but can't. They fade in and out, indicating the person is lost in a disassembled state somewhere."

"Go on," I said.

"Well, that's the way I feel in my Christian church. I keep asking myself, Who am I? What am I? Where do I belong? There was a pitiable quiver in her voice.

"I don't have answers to these questions," she continued, "because I don't feel I have any identity. I'm still floating around 'out there', shapeless—in a state of non-materialization. It's an awful feeling!" she said, nearly on the verge of tears. "I don't know what the problem is."

Heaving another deep sigh, she said, "I'm sure I must be a disappointment to God. Why can't I be like other Christians—all serene . . . untroubled . . . smiling all the time . . ."

Reaching for her hand I gently patted it. "They didn't come out of a cult," I said quietly. With that, she burst into tears.

As I tried to comfort her, I marveled at her ability to find the appropriate analogy. Fortunately, I was a "Star Trek" fan and could visualize the 7up-like-bubbles of Star-Trekkian body-particles trying to materialize. What was more fortunate was that I understood what Melanie was really trying to say. Her concerns struck a responsive chord in my own heart.

Melanie's problem? She had lost the three most critical ingredients to maintaining a stable life—roots, story and identity.

Mormonism offered a strong sense of these fundamental components, but when Melanie left the Mormon Church she gave them up. Christians had told her, and rightly so, that her former roots and identity were no longer valid. But for her to suddenly lose such powerful stabilizers without having had time yet to firmly establish new ones, it left her suddenly empty. When this happens, there is only one way to describe how an ex-cultist feels—alone.

To suffer this kind of "aloneness" leaves a new convert totally destitute. A sense of derangement prevails that Melanie aptly described as formlessness and non-materialization. It causes such serious repercussions, not to mention barrenness of soul, that although a former cultist is unable to analyze why she is so miserable, she seems to know that returning to the cult will alleviate the problem. When she imagines herself returning, her joyous feelings are often described as "coming home." I knew this from my own experience. I had to keep Melanie from considering this option.

Wiping her eyes with the Kleenex I offered her, Melanie began rubbing her temples.

"I don't think there's any hope for me. Why," she moaned, "isn't this any easier? Or," she said abruptly looking up, "do you even know what I'm trying to say?"

"Melanie, I think that what you are saying, in 'Trekkian' terminology of course," I smiled, "is that you gave up the cult's 'coordinates' to beam into Christianity. Disengaged from them during transit, but not being firmly grounded in the Christian church's yet, you have no strong coordinates to lock you in. As a result, you fade in and out between the two worlds with materialization not taking place."

"That's exactly what I'm saying!" Melanie said with delight. "But," she added, "I'm not really sure what coordinates are, and it seems they're critical to my materialization."

"Coordinates," I said, "are any set of numbers used to specify a particular location—like the two coordinates of latitude and longitude. Therefore, the location coordinates to beam someone into a starship, pulls together the disassembled particles of the person's body, stabilizes and materializes them at the new location."

"But," Melanie interrupted, "what are they, in my case?"

"Simple," I replied. "God designed in all human beings, a set of three stabilizers so people can function as well-adjusted individuals. They are the most powerful coordinates a person can lock into, and you've lost yours. The three coordinates are—roots, story and identity. Let me explain.

"*Roots*, spiritual or physical, tell an individual or a people where they came from, why they're here, how they started, why they do the things they do, and why they are who they are. In any culture this is achieved through myths and stories from one's parentage, heritage, nation's heroes or, as in your case, the Mormon culture.

“Through its *sacred stories* and myths, you acquired a powerful sense of roots—roots which dug deep, not only into the modern-day Mormon church's story, but back beyond the individual stories of Joseph Smith, Christ, Moses and Adam, to eternity past. According to Mormon teaching, you were biologically begotten by God and a heavenly mother in a pre-mortal world. You had brothers and sisters, with Jesus as your elder brother. You indeed had a unique identity—you had divinity flowing through your veins! You believed you were told in that world that you had a mission to come to earth and someday you would return ‘home.’ Through this and other myths you acquired roots and a well-established identity.

“There are three kinds of stories.

“First, there are the myths and history of a culture's heritage, including heroes who confirm and perpetuate the roots. These myths determine how people and cultures live, behave, how they treat themselves, the world, others and God.

“Secondly, there is the story of the individual community itself—how members relate to that culture, their common problems and how they overcome them.

“Thirdly, there is one's own individual story within their culture. This generally consists of accumulated childhood experiences containing the negatives and positives, the triumphs and tragedies. It also includes a vast array of input from people, places and situations. In your case, Melanie, you acquired your story as a result of input from cult leaders, friends, myths, doctrines, standards, and also through your selfless dedication, service, faith experiences and love for your religious culture.

“*Identity*, on the other hand, is the assurance that individuals, cultures or nations gain as a result of having both roots and story. Identity confirms one's existence, gives assurance that one's everyday world coheres in meaning, and that humanity has a purposeful destiny. It promotes self-esteem and self-image collectively as well as individually. Without it, individuals are strangers to themselves and to others.

“As a result of strong roots, story, identity and a tightly framed network of relationships, you had confidence, security, wholeness, well-being, a good self-image, felt useful and needed. You knew exactly where you came from, what you were, who you were, why you were here on earth, what your mission was and where you were going.

“All three stabilizers of roots, identity and story, tell individuals that they did come from somewhere and that their life is meaningful. This is what you had.”

“Wow,” Melanie gasped. “That's a lot of stuff I never thought of before. I wonder which loss—roots, story or identity—I'm suffering from the most?”

“No way to determine that,” I responded. “They are intermeshed so closely, and are so dependent upon each other that it's impossible to distinguish them once they've been fused into an individual. It's like mixing paints. The artist can have blue and yellow paint lying separately on his palette, but after mixing them together to make green, there is no way he or anyone else can look at the green thereafter and distinguish the blue and yellow anymore. The colors he combined to make the green are so interdependent upon each other, that it has inseparably linked them.

“Similarly, your cult stabilizers, Melanie, like the mixing of paints, blended together and contributed to a singular result—producing a green world for you. But your green world has now been destroyed and you have entered a world of another color, say purple. However, you're not fully purple yet, because it takes a blending of certain colors, meaning certain coordinates, that haven't fully fused in you yet. They're lying on your palette waiting to be combined. Yes, you know you have Christ, and you intellectually know what Christian roots, story and identity consist of, but you're not fully grounded experientially in all that represents yet.

“All you can do at best at this point,” Melanie, “is to see the importance of these coordinates, and recognize that the loss of them fits into the total picture of your disorientation.

“So, to wrap it all up, your combined Mormon roots, story and identity were your coordinates . . . now, they're gone. Without them, and with no new ones firmly established yet, you can't function. Does that sound right?”

Melanie suddenly sagged back into her chair and sighed with relief. “That's it!”

During the week, Melanie's elation over having her unique experience clarified set her flying high. She rehearsed it to Judy, who related it to Richard, who then told Elizabeth and Myra. Excited that someone had so definitively described their common experience, they were anxious to see the next episode of Star Trek. They watched for an incomplete beaming aboard so they could say, “Yep - that's how it is!”

Our next meeting proved fruitful. Not only because the group was intrigued with the Star Trek analogy, but because they were beginning to more fully understand about roots, identity and story. Strangely enough, it came about as a result of popcorn.

Richard surprised everyone by bringing two large bags. So, digging my popper out of a downstairs closet, we poured in the kernels and stood around watching it do its thing. We made five batches, dumping each into a large kettle. After allaying everyone's concern whether I was putting enough butter on, we piled our bowls full and went into the front room.

The enjoyment of watching the popcorn triggered all kinds of memories. Richard and the others began relating stories that, in some way, were connected with popping corn. There were family gatherings, stories told by parents and grandparents, stories told at the dinner table, even stories that explained family tragedies.

Myra recalled her Mormon 'Family Nights.' "We had flannel board stories," she said, "puppet shows and songs, and we each contributed something in the way of talent. Sometimes it was pretty amateurish, but we all laughed and had a good time. And if we didn't pop corn at the end, we figured the whole thing was a flop."

Quickly seizing the opportunity, I said, "All these popcorn stories, without your realizing it, have permanently affected you. They're part of your history—your story! And it's out of them that you live and interpret the world."

"Is this part of the roots-identity-and-story thing?" Elizabeth asked.

"Exactly," I replied.

"Well," Elizabeth began, "I can understand how my childhood stories influence me as an adult, but how does one live out of a story in a religion?"

"There are three kinds of stories in religion," I began. First, ancient stories which predate the establishment of a religious culture; secondly, the story that the culture eventually spins out about itself and, thirdly, one's own personal story as a participant.

"First, I'll tell you about the kind which began thousands of years ago, which helped to form communities—when people gathered together, broke bread and told their culture's stories. In contrast to other ancient cultures which told myths about the world being supported on the back of a giant turtle, or that the sun was drawn across the day time sky in a chariot, subject to a monster who swallowed it at night, Israel told factual stories carefully based upon God's dealing with their progenitors. Later, when Israel formed into a nation, these stories became sacred—like Noah and the Ark. While most religious cultures' stories claim to be sacred, what made Israel's sacred stories legitimate was because they contained revealed truths that God wanted them to know and live by. To further establish the validity of their stories, they were preserved in writing by authors who received inspiration from God, thus giving them divine trustworthiness.

"Stories were the only method that could answer certain questions like, '*What's happening to us? Why did our forefather do what they did? How and why has God dealt with us the way he has? What does God expect of us?*'"

"When the Israelites questioned whether God was going to save them, the prophets always went back to the basic stories of Genesis and Exodus. Through these they reaffirmed their roots and identity, and remembered about God. They strengthened themselves by listening. It created a bond that drew them together, thus creating the second kind of story—their community's.

"Stories always integrate lives into a greater reality, after which life then achieves meaning and purpose. They help to interpret life, dictate how people will respond to problems, and sustain them in the face of challenges. Israel, by living out of their stories, created a second kind of story—their own unique story as a culture. And of course each individual member had their own story of what it personally meant to them."

"Give us a specific example in New Testament times," Elizabeth asked."

"The New Testament Gospel itself is a story, the good news of God's redeeming work through Jesus Christ. It is the story, not only of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, but also the effect of that 'good news' upon a community of believers. God inspired the New Testament writers to accurately record this story and thereby demonstrate through the history of the New Testament church how the Holy Spirit pulled together the patterns of their lives after the crucifixion and resurrection. The church was formed out of the Gospel story, and it lived out that story in daily experience.

"Another example is Mark. Mark contains stories of what Jesus did, which proved who he was; and believers live out of his stories. Matthew and Luke relay parables to us—stories with double meanings intended to make truth more intelligible.

"Stories always do it best. Even Jesus, rather than telling people abstract, metaphysical aspects about the Godhead, told stories . . . 'a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho . . . the Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hid in a field . . . ' and people lived out of His stories. Thus, the latter creates the third kind of story—the individual's.

"Now, a cult does the same thing. It also tells stories about its founder, of ancient prophets, hidden revelations, and their leader's divine calling to those revelations. While they claim their stories are inspired, they can't be, for God was already speaking to Israel and the New Testament church. God is not the author of confusion. Nevertheless, cults promulgate stories that tell members who they are and what their mission is. And like the community of Israel, a cult not only tells a variety of stories, but in the process creates its own story as a singular culture.

"So," I concluded, "cult believers like any religious culture, including Christianity, also live out of three kinds of stories: ancient stories which precede the cult . . . the cult's own story as a community . . . and the third kind, personal stories which develop from simply being a member. Through all three, one gains a particular perspective of God, others and the world. Now that you've entered Christianity, you have new stories to learn about and live out of."

"That's fascinating!" Judy said. "If stories affect us that deeply, that's got to explain why I had so many problems when I first entered Christianity. I was still looking through cult-colored glasses. As a result, I was interpreting, as well as expecting, the church community to be like a Mormon community. Yet, if I could give up the doctrines, why couldn't I give up the stories?"

"Don't feel badly." I said, "People always find more fulfillment in stories than they do doctrines."

"Richard dejectedly shook his head. "How can a person be expected to undo everything that took years to develop and live out of a new story in such a short time? If established Christians understood this better, maybe they wouldn't expect so much from us so soon."

"Or," Elizabeth sighed, "become disappointed in us so quickly."

"Elizabeth," I said, "I think the disappointment you sense is frustration within yourself. I don't believe Christians are disappointed in you. They're concerned and want the best for you no matter how long it takes. Anyone for more popcorn?"

Richard eagerly filled his bowl, then asked, "How can you tell," he asked, "if someone has developed roots?"

"You can always tell," I replied, "by listening to what they say. For example, statements such as, '*My people came to America from Scotland . . . I'm of Israel because I was born of a Jewish woman. . . My grandfather was the first trapper in this state . . . My mother was born in New Jersey during the depression of . . .*'"

"Well, those statements," Richard interrupted, "are easy to understand, but how can you tell if a person in a religion has developed roots?"

I then explained that the 'rooting' process in a religion first begins by its claim to having been started by someone of great spiritual stature, like Buddha, Ascended Masters or whomever. Then members, believing this, become rooted thereafter and soon say, '*I belong to the true Israel,*' or . . . '*the man who started our group had a vision from God . . . I had heavenly parents in a world before this one . . . A ritual sealed me into the lineage of Christ . . . I'm a literal descendant of Abraham, because the Holy Ghost changed my blood type . . . I joined Judaism and now belong to the race God chose . . .*'

"Although statements may vary," I said, "they all reflect the same thing—a secure sense of roots based on identifying with the original founder, his sacred calling, and the organization's supposed initiation by God and the sacred stories it perpetuates. One's identity is further acknowledged when the member proudly boasts: '*I'm a Mormon! I'm a Hare Krishna! I'm a Moonie!*'"

"If roots, story and identity do all that," Myra interjected, "it's no wonder we become unglued when we lose them!"

"Some of us are still unglued," moaned Elizabeth.

"Don't feel badly, Elizabeth," I said, "giving up these kinds of fundamentals always creates a crisis. When it happens, one's world collapses with much the same effect as a child finding out there is no Santa Claus."

"Yep, that's what it's like," Elizabeth sighed, "only a hundred times worse."

"Let's drown our sorrows in more root beer," Richard grinned, trying to lighten the mood.

They piled into the kitchen again. After all the popcorn they had consumed it was hard to believe they were still hungry. Judy reached into the refrigerator and grabbed the macaroni salad she brought. Melanie poured a bag of tortilla chips into a bowl and opened some guacamole dip. I opened a can of black olives and watched them as they filled their plates and finished off the root beer.

"Did any of you see the National Geographic documentary on TV last week?" Richard queried, between mouthfuls.<sup>1</sup> It was about an aboriginal race in Australia whose legends are so endangered that they'll soon be lost to the new generation. After understanding this roots and identity thing, I believe I know what these tribespeople are going through."

"I saw the same one," Judy chimed in as she swallowed down half a dill pickle and her last bite of macaroni salad.

"The show began," she said, perching herself on one of the bar stools, "by describing Gagudju laws, traditions and rituals which were over 40,000 years old. It explained that they were on the verge of becoming extinct, not only because of twentieth century inroads, but because they're known only to four elderly tribesmen. Once these tribesmen die, their whole culture will be lost to future generations. The Gagudjus will have no more ties to their own past."

"I couldn't quite understand," Richard interrupted, "why I felt such emotion. But now, I believe it was genuine empathy over their loss of roots and story. And," he quickly added, looking over at me, "identity, affirmation, meaning, purpose and significance. How's that?" he grinned.

"Very good Richard," I laughed. "I also agree—it was a terrific show. However, there was something about the very last scene that I thought was particularly moving. To illustrate the race's desolation, it showed a lonely Gagudju boy of about twelve silhouetted against the evening sky with spear in hand, looking out over the plains of his ancestors. He was facing the new world of the twentieth century that would soon render his world devoid of myths and traditions—one in which ancestors would no longer speak to him. You couldn't help but sense the profound tragedy of a lost and dying culture—a people that would have no more 'story' to explain where they came from, who they belonged to, why they exist, or what their purpose is. It was very moving, to say the least."

"I now understand more fully," Judy mused, "how each of our respective cults also had traditions, rituals, roots, stories, meaning and purpose which we lived out of—all of which contributed to our identity. And for us, like the Gagudjus, it is all dying because we've entered a new world that requires we give up those beliefs."

"But," I interjected, "lest we end on a low note, we need to remember what we gave up our former world for—"

Before I could continue, Melanie spoke up. "I can understand losing membership in a tribe, but since we never belonged to a tribe I wonder why we're suffering just as much as the Gagudjus?"

"Oh Melanie, you did come from one!" I said.

She looked up, startled.

"The Mormon Church has a very strong sense of tribalism. In fact, they have a clan mentality comparable to the Jews."

"Mormons," I continued, "call themselves 'modern Israel' and believe they descend directly from the loins and lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through Ephraim and Manasseh.<sup>2</sup> One of the major purposes of a Patriarchal Blessing, is to tell you which tribe you came from."

"Gosh," Melanie said, "I forgot about that. You're right."

"Of course, this isn't unique to the Mormon Church. Other Bible-oriented cults also trace some kind of lineage to ancient Israel. The World Wide Church of God, when previously under Herbert Armstrong, used the Anglo-Israelism theory that claimed that Great Britain and the United States are the true Israel. Others also have their unique perspective on this theory, such as the 'I Am' Ascended Masters, the Aryan Nations, Church of Jesus Christ Christian, Neo-Nazism, and many other so-called Identity groups."

"This tribalism," Judy said, "reminds me of a puzzling statement made by one author. He said that when one belongs to a tribe with its roots, common myths and traditions, "he does not so much live in a tribe, the tribe lives in him."<sup>3</sup>

"I relate to that," I said. "I believe this tribal-indwelling may account for the frustrated phrases new believers often use: 'I've got to get Mormonism, out of me. When is it going to leave?'"

Judy mused, "Maybe that explains what happened to me a while back. Feeling I'd never get rid of Mormonism inside me, it nearly drove me crazy—especially at night. It kept telling me I had to remain true to my birthright—and it wasn't something I could leave and walk away from, because *it* was in me. I had to wait for *it* to leave. I asked a Christian about it, but she interpreted '*it*' as a devil, so I didn't mention it again."

"Gosh," Myra said, "I wonder if that's what's been bugging me? Every now and then, something inside of me makes me cry out to go back—and something inside of me wants to. But in my more rational moments I ask myself, why should I want to? I know Christianity is right. But at night, when I drift in and out of sleep, it's Mormonism, Mormonism, tugging at me. Then I start thinking: If only I could go back, but I can't. If only it were true, but it isn't. I enjoyed the Mormon Church, I loved the Church, I belong to it. I want to go back. But I can't—it's not biblical. Maybe the answer is 'tribalism'."

As the evening continued, each person clarified his or her loss of roots, identity and story as it related to their cult. Desperate to rid themselves of disoriented feelings and loss of identity, they concluded that the major key, and only key, was to constantly read the Bible. Although they knew it sounded simplistic, they believed that through reading the history of Israel as well as the New Testament period, a new sense of "Christian tribalism" would develop. In addition, they would try to replace cult myths with Old and New Testament stories. They also felt that participation in their respective church communities would help to establish stronger roots and a new identity.

The evening proved to be a significant get-together—probably the best we'd had. I was grateful for our little group, so intent on persevering and helping each other. I was truly blessed from listening to them. However, at the same time, I couldn't help but think of the hundreds of other ex-cultists not so fortunate—those who drifted in and out of churches, empty, formless, "dematerialized" as Melanie described, desperately needing to lock into stable coordinates.

Melanie, Myra, Richard, Judy and Elizabeth, worked hard at analyzing their loss of roots, story and identity, and effecting substitutes. It wasn't easy.

Myra, devastated over losing such fundamental components from her life, doubted that anything could ever replace them.

Melanie was fearful her "Trekkie" feeling of "non-materialization" would be permanent. Elizabeth, discouraged most of the time, always needed prodding. Richard and Judy, however, looked at the assignments intellectually, believing systematic effort would pay off.

All in all, they were spurred on by realizing that (1) they had passed the point of no return, so had to press forward; (2) they belonged to a group of friends in which they were expected to relate their progress to; and (3) recognizing their influence on each other, didn't want to let each other down.

Four months later, they reported their progress. However, while listening to Judy and Elizabeth, I learned an important lesson—one that I, personally had not learned until then.

Admitting how painful it was to lose former roots and identity, they felt that they could reject their *cultural story and the myths* of their cult, but concluded there was no way they could reject their *own story*. More importantly, it wasn't necessary. Judy explained.

"I was intimidated by other Christians," she began. "I tried to slice the cult experience—my story—right out of my life, as if it had never happened . . . as if the cult were so evil that it had no decisive factor in establishing the virtues and principles which are now part and parcel of my life. I tried to smother who I was.

"And who was I, really? I was a human being, albeit an ex-cultist, but who, by means of Mormon teachings, had acquired a good self-image, above average standards and high ethics. I had a heart planted with images which to this day still produce dynamics which dictate how I treat myself, the world, others and God.

"I'm a person who remembers, even with nostalgia, many of the good things about the cult, and who has grown as a result of that experience. I am one who has her own way of worshiping and her own way of speaking, and to pretend anything different would be a lie.

"I will still retain my 'story'", she continued, "I have no intentions of rejecting it. Although I have a new identity as a Christian, part of that new identity will consist of what I used to be." (This struck a responsive chord with everyone.)

Elizabeth, because of her shy nature, was hesitant, but began speaking while her eyes brimmed over with tears. "Reverend Moon was my whole world. My adjustment period in a traditional Christian church has been horrendous, and the emotional repercussions beyond description. But I think I'm going to make it.

"No matter how many of my Christian friends would like to believe I have utter disregard and contempt for the cult, I will not, nor cannot, forget my time in it. For others to insist I eradicate the experience is wrong. Like Judy, I know it's impossible to totally obliterate one's own 'story', because both the good and bad are etched into every cell of my mind and body. The longer I try to erase that which was part of me, the longer it hinders me in becoming what I'm meant to be.

"I need to accept my story as having happened—that it was an important part of my history—and that it belongs there. My experience is what shaped me, and as a Christian at this moment in time I am that story."

Everyone burst out in applause. Jumping to their feet, they threw their arms around her. We all knew Elizabeth didn't have a strong personality, and for her to formulate such a decisive conclusion and stand firmly for something was almost more than they could contain.

After their excitement subsided, Melanie shared, saying she felt that by forcing herself to participate in church activities and small group Bible studies more, she was beginning to "materialize." She was finally locking into, she said with a grin, the right coordinates.

Richard's testimony, on the other hand, was not about his personal story. Rather, he described an experience which he claimed finally triggered Christian roots and story in him. First, he amazed everyone by how much of the Bible he had read. But more amazing was the experience he had.

"I don't know if I can put this in words," he began, "because it was actually a spiritual perception which came to me.

"I've been reading Old Testament stories, and previously the only way I saw them was as separate and distinct stories—although interesting and inspiring.

"Well, I was right in the middle of reading the other afternoon when all of a sudden, like the dramatic clashing of cymbals, the whole Israelite history suddenly unified! Every story, beginning with Adam and Eve through Leviticus, Judges, Chronicles, Esther to Malachi—rather than containing isolated and individual stories, harmonized! It was like I could see the hand of God orchestrating the whole thing toward a deliberate and final crescendo. And I saw what that crescendo was—and I was part of that crescendo! The whole history wasn't just for the Jews, but was also *my* history, *my* stories, *my* roots, *my* God and *my* Jesus!"

We all sat for a moment in awe. And although he had claimed it was difficult to put into words, we all understood what had happened to him. Richard, always so factual, had received an outstanding experience and it had changed him. And best of all, his unique experience held a promise out to the others. In due time, their emptiness would be replaced with Christian roots and identity, and it would become their story in a way that would become just as meaningful.

Judy's words closed our meeting: "Each one of us has our time and season," she said. "Richard has shown us that continual feeding on the Word will establish our foundation and help us acquire new roots, story and identity. We need to press on and know that he which has begun this good work in us will carry it on to completion." (Philip 1:6)

During the next few months it appeared to them that they had passed the greatest hurdle of all. But although they had made great headway in giving up their former roots and identity and realized the process whereby they could establish new ones, and although they reconciled their personal story and looked forward to creating a new one, there was one story that each of their individual cults had purposely created which was difficult for them to resolve. Why? Because Christians seemed unable to give them a satisfactory answer.

This kind of story, common to all cults, is so powerful that even after a former cultist has advanced through most of the stages of recovery, it comes back to taunt him later. This is the subject of the next chapter.

HOW CAN CHRISTIANS HELP?

1. *Understand how essential roots, identity and story are and what it means to lose them.* By comprehending how deeply they are engrained and how intensely they contribute to a person's makeup, it will allow one to see that giving them up and trying to replace them, will not be accomplished overnight.

2. *Direct the convert to new roots, story and identity.* Until Christian roots are firmly planted, new identity established and story developed (all of which take time), there are four avenues which will help during the interim:

a. Purpose and meaning. These are acquired through activity in the church. Ask the new convert (if ready) to participate not only in socials, but also in the church organization. Besides needing a substitute for the busy and active life led in the cult, the new believer needs to feel he or she is contributing to, and is part of, God's cause (This may not be feasible at the convert's initial entry in the church.)

b. In addition: Establish identity through love and acceptance. Until the convert understands more fully his position in Christ (which is his claim to authentic identity), love and caring from the community will carry him during the interim.

c. Establish identity through new friendships. Help the convert make new friends. Tell him you understand his loss of former cult friends, but emphasize that new friends will become just as meaningful.

d. Establish identity and roots, through a home fellowship Bible study. It is imperative that the new convert be in a situation where he or she relates to other Christians and hears them share a common faith in the Scriptures. The more the individual can relate to group-sharing, the more roots and identity will begin to grow.

3. *Necessary groundwork to establish roots.* Convince the new believer that the Bible is really the divinely inspired Word of God. (This is more important than trying to find proof texts which prove one's cult false.)

Clarify how the Old Testament foreshadows the New Testament church. Describe how Christ became the sacrifice once for all; that temple ordinances are done away with; that Christ is the final revelation and no more is needed. It is not uncommon for a former cultist to feel bitter disappointment that there is to be no more revelation than what is contained in the Bible. Being used to extra-biblical revelation and envisioning a greater "plan of salvation" for mankind as taught through their cult, they may not voice this aloud, but their private lament will be, "*Is this all there is to Christianity?*"

Nevertheless, this groundwork will help set them on the path to being convinced of a necessary concept: the Old Testament and the New Testament were not foreshadowing the need for a new cult! To combat the cult's stand that God started the cult, you may find it necessary to learn Bible scriptures the cult uses to claim this.<sup>4</sup>

4. *Necessary groundwork to establish story.* Familiarize the new convert with Old and New Testament Bible stories, emphasizing their context in Israel's history. When applicable, bring out typologies that point to Christ. Help the ex-cultist see the running thread throughout of God's ultimate objective to reconcile man to himself. Explain, in simple terms, how a new convert is spiritually begotten and adopted into the family of God.

5. *Sympathize and show patience when the convert insists on clinging to former roots, story and identity.* Explain to the ex-cultist that the reason he cannot let go is not because God is trying to tell him the cult is right, but for other very human reasons: First, there is love for what was once near and dear to his heart, which is always difficult to relinquish. Second, fear of stepping into the unknown always provokes a feeling of insecurity. This makes one revert to the past and cling to that which is more familiar. But, assure him you understand that he is going through a difficult time.

### Bibliographic Notes

1. National Geographic TV special, aired February 13, 1988, Channel 7, San Antonio, Texas.

2. Every member's lineage is confirmed when one receives his or her Patriarchal Blessing by the laying on of hands, prophecy given, through which one's lineage is declared. Whites usually descend from Ephraim, American Indians from Manasseh, and Blacks from Cain and Ham. This Abrahamic lineage constitutes the elect and they believe those today who find themselves drawn to convert to Mormonism, will also prove to be literal descendants of the elite line of Joseph.

3. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1965), 10.

4. For the ex-Mormon, a thorough understanding of the following scriptures is essential: Isaiah 29:1-4; 11-14; 14:6-7, Mal 3:1; John 10:16; Gen 49:22-26 and Ezekiel 37:15-20. To combat the cult's interpretation, an understanding of the context is imperative.

=====

**Copyright 2008-2012. This story cannot be copied and used in a professional publication without express permission of the author. [www.JanisHutchinson.com](http://www.JanisHutchinson.com)**