



BRAINWASHING--WHAT IS IT? **#3 MYSTICAL MANIPULATION** **A Series on Lifton's Eight Points of Thought Reform**

Robert J. Lifton includes **Mystical Manipulation** in his book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism—A Study of Brainwashing in China* as one of the eight points of thought reform. This simply means that cult leaders espouse to have some exclusive channel to God or powerful insight.

The group I became associated with as a child, the Watchtower organization (Jehovah's Witnesses), has continuously introduced mystical manipulation throughout their history. For example, their sporadic introduction of various projected dates for Armageddon, the end of the world, produced an "awe" effect within the membership for many years. I remember clearly when they repeatedly predicted the end in 1975 but later, when the end did not come, retracted, cleverly laying blame on the members instead for somehow misunderstanding. Unbelievably, Jehovah's Witnesses today will parrot the leaders and deny that 1975 was ever a prediction.

Because groups, like Jehovah's Witnesses, believe their leaders have this mystical power and a sole channel to God, they believe that they can do almost anything to achieve the higher purpose of the group and feel they must protect the leader/organization at all costs. This includes lying. Jehovah's Witnesses justify lying by referring to it as "theocratic warfare."

How is a group able to induce this level of control over a member, one where the member will actually doubt something that they know to be true and then justify lying about it to outsiders?

Fear

Cult members are manipulated primarily through the use of fear. For instance, Jehovah's Witnesses are informed that their lives and others' lives depend upon obedience to the leaders and that they don't want to be "blood-guilty" or "stumble" another Jehovah's Witness through their actions, or by questioning the illogical drivel being pumped into their battered psyche.