



## BRAINWASHING--WHAT IS IT?

### #7 DOCTRINE OVER PERSON

#### A Series on Lifton's\* Eight Points of Thought Reform

**Doctrine Over Person** means allowing the cult's teachings to take front and center stage over everything else you have experienced in your life. Doctrine Over Person is taking many of the experiences you've had and either denying they ever existed or suppressing/avoiding them in order to perpetuate the belief system of the cult. In other words, even if you know something is NOT the way it is presented by the cult, you skew your value and belief system in order to align with the cult's doctrine.

For instance, when cult members are told it's *loving* or necessary to shun family members, most do it, even if it doesn't feel right. Here's an example of what one Jehovah's Witness said:

April 15, 1988 *Watchtower*:

*Cutting ourselves off completely from all association with (my disfellowshipped sister) Margaret tested our loyalty to Jehovah's arrangement. It gave our family opportunity to show that we really believe that Jehovah's way is best. Lynette. The Watchtower continues: What may seem harsh to outsiders is both necessary and really a loving thing to do.*

Cognitive dissonance is anxiety resulting from inconsistency between one's beliefs and one's actions. Cult members who put their human experiences secondary to the doctrine taught by the cult live a conflicted life.

Most human beings recognize that it is not healthy, nor loving, to forever shun a family member (i.e., never acknowledge or speak to them again). In order to survive emotionally as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, however, it is imperative that they shut down their emotional reaction to shunning for the greater good of the organization. They put the religious doctrine/dogma over the person (both the person they are shunning and their own personal needs as well).

While we all get into "tiffs" with relatives and may not speak to them for a while, common sense if nothing else tells us that LOVE does not derive from HATE. And yet cults teach their members to fear and/or hate their blood relatives.

Here's what the *Watchtower*, July 15, 1974, p. 442, said: *You have seen the benefit of godly love, but do you know how to hate? These very strong words are an expression of godly hate, and you too must have this quality to be pleasing to God. Hate causes a feeling of disgust to well up inside you. You loathe, abhor, despise the object of your hatred. Godly hatred never has as its object our Christian brothers, no matter how imperfect.*

Becoming a mother myself helped me forgive my mother for adhering to the Watchtower's policy of shunning. She has shunned me since 1981. Although I know my son loves me, I realize now that I'm a mother, my love for him is unsurpassable and that his love for me most likely pales in comparison to mine. Likewise, although my mother's shunning has been hard for me, I can only imagine the pain she has had to live with for the last 26 years!

I have found that empathy and putting *person* over doctrine goes a long way in facilitating forgiveness.

\*Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism—A Study of Brainwashing in China*