

STATEMENT ABOUT MIND CONTROL IN ISKCON (International Society
for Krishna Consciousness) by an ~~EX-DEVOTEE~~

Throughout this statement all judgements are drawn from my own personal experiences in ISKCON, of which I was a practising devotee, whilst living outside the temple, for a few months, and a full time member for two months.

Why I believe I was under mind control

1. We were not allowed much sleep. At the most we had 5 hours 40 minutes per 'night'. None of the new devotees (bhaktas) felt that they had enough, but we were instructed that sleep was bad because we couldn't be in Kṛṣṇa consciousness whilst in this state - this made us feel guilty if we asked for more sleep. A devotee really had to push the bhakta directors to be given more sleep. Almost all of us felt too guilty to ask for any more.

2. It was not possible to grab extra sleep whilst in the 6 week initial training programme because we were given virtually no privacy. Every moment of the day there was something for us to do. The only day I found it possible to do what I wanted was a Sunday - for about an hour. During this time I used to sneak out of the kitchens (where I was supposed to be washing up) and sit in one of the greenhouses to read a Kṛṣṇa book. Invariably however an older devotee would find me and would tell me what the book meant - so I never had a chance to reflect on what I had read.

At all other times there were other devotees with me. We went to the toilet alone but would soon be asked to hurry up by someone if we were in there too long!

By the time they started to leave me alone I thought only about Kṛṣṇa and things relating to Kṛṣṇa.

3. We had to chant for a few hours every day in order to purify ourselves. We were told that it was essential to our purity and were given specific instructions about concentration on each chant to receive the full benefits. Consequently feelings of guilt were induced if I didn't concentrate and it never even crossed my mind not to do it - even though I found it deadly boring.

At night time they would often put a circular tape on in the dormitories so that we slept with the chant sounding in our minds all night.

We believed that this was purifying us and it gave me feelings of numbness in my mind which invariably led to feeling ecstatically high. This would reinforce my belief that it was purifying me - since these 'highs' were interpreted by ISKCON as god consciousness.

As new devotees we had to chant our rounds in the very stuffy, warm temple room whilst walking round and round in the same direction. The room would contain 30 or more devotees all chanting aloud, this created a background hum, which allied with the stuffy atmosphere, circumambulations, boredom and lack of sleep, and the overriding desire to please the hierarchy of ISKCON authority, helped to create a lack of thought so that the chant filled our minds completely. We were encouraged to begin chanting as soon as the alarm went at 3.00 a.m. in the morning, before we had woken up properly.

4. We were given very sweet, sugary confectionery especially before they wanted to tell us something. We were told that these sweetmeats were very purifying since they had been offered directly to Kṛṣṇa (God). Therefore we were encouraged to eat as many as were available. I always felt good after these little treats.

When I stayed away one night at home by myself, the bhakta directors drove 80 miles to bring me my breakfast! What they brought consisted of about 10 or more of these sweetmeats - nothing else. This was not a normal breakfast for devotees.

5. On some days they would put recorded Kṛṣṇa music or lectures by Prabhupada (the founder of the group) on the loudspeakers which were strung up everywhere around the grounds and buildings so that no matter where you were or what job you were doing you could not help but hear it.

6. The language and topics of discussion amongst the devotees was very limited. Everyone talked in the same way - using the same allegories and cliches, and no one talked about anything except Krsna consciousness. There were no debates as such, just a simple answer - question - reinforcement procedure. Everyone constantly strove to keep their fellow devotees 'high', to keep them from 'spacing out', by being incredibly friendly and complimentary to each other.

7. We had 2 temple services in the morning and 3 lectures, plus chanting, all before we had eaten anything. The temple services evoked a great deal of physical and emotional energy from all the devotees.

Some of the older devotees who led the singing and dancing in the services were adept at whipping up enthusiasm and full participation - making use of slow build-ups to climaxes and perfectly timed sudden lulls, only to be followed by yet another build-up.

After all this energy had been expended and after we felt 'high', spiritual and pure they gave us lectures, sometimes for 2 hours or more solid. It was so easy to accept everything that was said after an exciting temple service.

8. We were forced to listen to the lecture, we couldn't leave the stuffy temple room all morning (before breakfast). Throughout the lecture we had to sit cross-legged on the floor because we were not allowed to expose the soles of our feet to the statues which we worshipped. We could not sleep because we had to take notes, and the bhakta director kept a careful eye on us so that he could flick water at any dozing offenders.

9. We were actively discouraged from questioning anything an older devotee said. The bhakta director would shout at us if we disagreed with something and would make us feel spiritually impure by accusing us of not accepting the spiritual master. Consequently, we tended to accept everything that was said without question.

10. During my full time membership I had hallucinations. It was supposed to be a sign of spiritual purity if you saw the statues moving and dancing. I saw the eyes of the statue moving, looking around the temple room at the devotees, during the temple services. I felt that I could almost induce this state myself, but at the time I thought this was because I was pure.

11. I feel now that my emotions were not allowed to operate properly. I was actively encouraged to repress my emotions since this is part of the Krsna doctrine. I consequently felt 'high' and happy all of the time. My parents would come and visit me and when I saw them so unhappy it would disturb me, but as soon as they had left I would be surrounded by other devotees who bombarded me with attention and flattery.

Because of their teachings that women are inferior to men and that contact with women is detrimental to the spiritual advancement of men I found it impossible to respond to my mother when she cuddled me; I was like a lump of stone.

The only emotion I was encouraged to feel was happiness.

12. I began to sleep walk a lot. Often I would wake up whilst sitting up in bed or find myself walking around the room. Often I dreamed about being in the temple room so I don't know how far I went whilst sleep walking. I have never done this in the past or since my involvement with the Krsnas.

I can remember my sleeping hours seeming exactly like my waking hours. I did not seem to have any deep sleep; I was constantly aware of Krsna, dreaming about chanting, showers and the temple room. It was as if I was no longer in charge of myself. My activities had become so automatic that they were beginning to happen in my sleep.

13. I didn't want to accept that there was anything wrong with the group. It was so nice there that any clouds on the horizon would be ignored without a second thought. I had no powers whatsoever of critical reasoning and thinking.

14. Everything was provided by the movement, food, shelter, clothing, jobs to do, a daily timetable etc. Consequently there was absolutely no need to think - we were told that we had to concentrate all our thoughts on Kṛṣṇa, the cult made this easy for us. The ability to think only of Kṛṣṇa was synonymous with purity. Thinking about anything else was bad. This was drummed into us constantly and we believed it.

It was so easy to be in the movement without any cares in the world.

15. I underwent a personality change:

- It is against my nature to approach strangers, let alone try to sell them things. I did this whilst in the movement for one month.
- I collected large amounts of money (up to £80 a day), but the thought never crossed my mind as to why I shouldn't have some of it.
- I renounced all material goods completely and began to live as far as possible solely on what the Kṛṣṇas would call a spiritual plane.
- I left my friends, one of whom was in a very emotional condition, without a second thought.
- I left my family without a second thought.
- The Kṛṣṇas convinced me not to take up my university place - by telling me that education was bad and that I would learn more by staying with them.

All in all ISKCON became more important to me than anything else, I became obsessed with the cult and became very selfish in only wanting what I thought to be best for me without considering other people at all.

16. On coming out of the group I had an emotional breakdown, feeling I was being mentally torn by the group and by my parents. After this emotional experience I quickly began to regain my powers of critical reasoning.

17. Several months after coming out I experienced great feelings of being able to think for the first time. It was as if some of my mind had been asleep and had only just woken up.

18. I believe that the practice of Yoga had a detrimental effect on me which probably added to my susceptibility to become absorbed by this group. I did Yoga exercises for about 5 years and Yoga meditation for about 2 years very seriously; the exercises are designed to have an effect on the mind, to make it more disciplined to receive meditation. I would not recommend that anyone follows Yoga any deeper than as an exercise routine - and I am suspicious even of the effects this can have. The effects can reach much further than most people suspect.

When books on mind control and the cults are read it can be seen that all of the above occurrences can be seen as part of a programme of coercive mind control. My personal feelings are that I was subjected to mind control - whether ISKCON deliberately uses these techniques to control their converts is a separate issue, but the bhakta directors do have a manual which instructs them on how to deal with new or potential devotees!

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