

Who Am I?

—How to Reinvent Yourself After Leaving the Watchtower Society

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"Looking back after nearly three decades, I would compare [life as a JW] to a narrow, cramped tunnel—dismal, stale, dingy and claustrophobic—like an everlasting underground N.Y. subway trip. There's never any light at the end—because there never is any end. There is the eerie but dim artificial glow of the light of "the truth" and an occasional burst of "new light"—much like an electrical short on the rail. It gets hypnotic and lulls one into a stupor.

"A voice comes over the PA [Public Address] at regular intervals: 'Next stop, New Order... soon. Next stop, New Order... soon. Next stop... etc.' But there are no stops. You realize that it is just an old recording, and you wonder if there even IS a conductor.

"For those who get off and make it back to the real world, suddenly they are confronted with a bewildering array of roads to choose from: narrow ones, wide ones, and everything in between. Everyone around you seems to be purposefully proceeding on their way with a plan and goals; you feel like a bystander; a vagrant.

"For decades all you had to do was sit and let someone else guide your present and future. Now, although enjoying the taste of fresh air and wide open spaces, which way to go? How do you plan your route if you have no destination? Maybe it doesn't matter so much, after all. Maybe it's enough to just start walking and breathing, getting a feel for freedom. Just stay in the sun and put as much distance as possible between you and the terrible stale tunnel to oblivion."

Axel, ex-JW

In the foregoing story, Axel beautifully describes what happens when people leave the Watchtower Society. It is sad to see so many lives in turmoil because of a religion. But that has often been the case down through the centuries. Being one of Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) and then leaving can literally leave one in shambles—emotionally, religiously, and even financially. But your self-identity takes the biggest hit of all.

As you well know, the primary difference between JW's and mainstream religion is in the "getting out." There is no honorable way out of the Organization. You can never just "quit," if you do, you will be shunned by every other JW (the same as being disfellowshipped). If you were raised as a JW, this would most likely mean your entire family and all the friends you have ever really known. True, some JW's just fade away slowly, but this can also (in some cases) *prolong* the recovery process. Like a broken bone not properly set, some never heal correctly. The consequences of shunning, in my opinion, compound an already difficult "crisis of conscience." Shunning removes the support system you had in place for coping with other major life changes as they came along.

Very likely, at one of your most difficult (if not *the* most difficult) times of your life, the ones you need the most are the very ones who have abandoned you. Don't let the thinking that "you are the one who left" concern you. This is nothing more than fuzzy logic; a flimsy excuse for intolerance of another person's right of Free Will.

The intent of this article is to address the "compounded consequences" that come with changing your worldwide perspective due to doctrinal disagreements. It is also meant to encourage and to provide a path to recovery.

Interestingly, doctrinal disagreements can also result from intense adversity, whether within or outside the congregation, because adversity often forces a person to re-examine his or her life and worldview.

Emotional Cycles

In [my own experience](#)¹ of being raised a JW and then leaving, I went through cycles of deep pain, anger and grief, and a sense of having lost myself. Everything that I had once used to define myself was now gone. I wondered, "Who exactly am I?" It seemed that the very core of my self-identity was blurry, vague, and ambiguous.

I also experienced deep emotional immobility. I felt burned out. I had no drive or ambition—I felt like my "drive" had driven off without me. I found it difficult to do what needed to be done in my life—so many things went neglected. At the time, I was in sales (a stockbroker), but didn't have the emotional strength to pick up the phone and call prospects, or even clients for that matter. I just couldn't deal with any more rejection

¹ See TruthQuest for my story:

<http://www.empowerthespirit.com/truthquest/mystory.htm>

after being rejected by nearly all of my family and friends, not to mention the belief system I had devoted my entire life (40 years) to.

Further compounding the situation, I also went through a divorce. My wife had become an alcoholic, which led to many problems. Life became so traumatic and painful, I reasoned that I would gladly trade one or two years of sweet peace and die at Armageddon, for an eternal life of peace that may not ever come. These problems served to open up my mind, and bring to the fore several Watchtower teachings I really didn't agree with. It also led me to investigate the Society's past, and what I found was shocking, to say the least.

I went through life in a hazy cloud for almost two years (all the time searching) before I had the mental clarity to find some answers. For me, simply discovering the role that Grief and Loss were playing in holding me back was instrumental in my recovery. I believe that Grief and Loss play a far bigger role than any other single factor in recovery.

Reality Shock

Leaving the Watchtower Society can be likened to "having the rug pulled out from underneath you." I also have likened it to "being taught all your life that the sky is green, only to one day wake up and find out that it is actually blue." The resulting "reality shock" is especially intense if you were raised as a JW, or spent most of your life as one.

The universal "reality" that you once knew so well, indeed, the "reality" that was "the only truth in all the universe," is now totally shattered. It has shaken you to the very core of who you are. Now you are left with a profound sense of grief, loss, and even anger.

It is not uncommon to begin questioning literally everything you ever believed, including God's existence. Many ex-JW's have become Agnostic, some Deists, some even Atheists. This is usually because they can't figure out where God went when they needed Him the most.

Now, with your sense of reality shattered, you are at a crossroads: wander through life enfeebled and broken, or empower yourself to learn the lessons contained in this adversity, and make changes. Obviously, by reading this article, you are searching for answers, and I warmly commend you!

To recover, you have to work through your losses, and *reinvent*, or rediscover who you are—this time without a dysfunctional ideology in the mix.

In the following paragraphs, I discuss seven empowering concepts that have helped me in my quest to redefine myself. It is my hope that you too will find some benefit. If nothing else, *I want to at least provoke you to thought*. Then perhaps you will continue your journey of self-discovery, which leads to recovery.

1. Grief and Loss

Why are grief and loss such big factors in recovery? Well, think about what you have lost. One of the biggest things I lost was my entire support structure—my family and friends—at a time when I needed them the most. I also lost my faith, my God, and myself. In fact, I made a list of over 20 things I lost as a result of my "crisis of conscience."

I found it extremely empowering to put down on paper all of the things I lost, because I could "see it, touch it, feel it." I urge you to do the same. Since we all look at things differently, what I consider a loss, you may not, and this is perfectly acceptable.

As I mentioned, I went through several cycles of grief and loss. I would feel the hurt, then the pain, then anger; and then the cycle would start all over again. You are no-doubt doing the same. And do you know what? This is *okay*! Because your feelings are *normal* and it is *okay* to feel them. In fact, it is healthy to get your feelings "out on the table"—hold them; touch them; caress them; explore them. To reiterate, I found the simple act of recognizing exactly what was causing my despair, helped me the most.

Lately, I have been experiencing another phase of recovery: *Acceptance*. It is important that you face up to what you are feeling; accept the situation as it is (assuming you have done what you reasonably can to make it as good as possible).

I now accept that I will never see or talk to most of my past friends or family ever again. This of course is not my choice, but rather, my respect for their choices. Whenever any JW demands that a disfellowshipped person "come back" and get reinstated before they will associate with them again, the JW is, in essence, holding the relationship over the head of the disfellowshipped person. I refused to be taken hostage to this guilt motivation any longer.

You see, you have every bit as much right as anyone else to believe as you desire! It is a crime for others to hold their relationship with you over your head! This emphatic and personal realization is crucial to regaining your power. Once you believe in your own right of Free Will, you will begin to accept the situation for what it is. Yes it is a tragedy. Yes there is tremendous pain. But each person has the right of Free Will to believe as they wish, and isn't that what we are asking of JW's—to accept us for *who we are* instead of *what we believe*? Each person—JW or not—has the human right of Free Will to choose their own beliefs without judgmentalism from others. This includes you!

Acceptance requires making a stand, and this can be extremely liberating and empowering. Something that will help you with acceptance is to think about what you have gained. Most importantly, you have gained freedom from a controlling, overbearing, and dysfunctional organization! The same could be said of most of your previous relationships. You have also gained the unobstructed freedom to go out and make a *real* difference to the world, instead of knocking on doors with the "Armageddon-is-just-around-the-corner" message neatly in hand.

Undoubtedly you have gained other things also. It is very important that you make a list of these too. One of the most important things I gained was peace—sweet peace—in my home and life. I also gained a special friend who became my wife. She was also raised as a JW and is among the finest people who have ever lived.

Even if all you have gained is freedom from an oppressive organization and lifestyle, isn't this enough? Do you really want to live the rest of your days enslaved to a burdensome ideology with the penalty of death at God's hand if you don't conform to the letter of the law?

There is a common expression that we like to tell ourselves when we are hurt, "It just takes time." Time does heal, but only if you take the right steps to work through your grief in the right way. You don't want the "demons of your past popping up unexpectedly," as one ex-JW expressed it. Therefore, you must "complete" your grief by learning the lessons contained in the pain, then you can move forward in your recovery and progress. I strongly encourage you to read some books on the topic of Grief and Loss. A good one is [The Grief and Loss Recovery Handbook](#),² by John James and Russell Friedman. Others are also available on the market that should give you a good perspective.

So as you work through your grief, loss, and pain, don't forget that what you are feeling is normal and okay. Even proper healing takes time—like a bone *properly* set—so don't be discouraged. If you deal properly with your grief, loss, and pain, you will find that they will slowly dissipate, and your power will return.

2. Dealing with Anger

There are so many things to be angry about after you leave the Watchtower Society. The anger of being lied to for so long; the anger of family and friends abandoning you; the anger of being shunned; and to top it off, the anger of the injustice of it all.

It is completely normal to feel angry about your situation, and it is a sign that you are coming to terms with your pain and grief. Many of us initially may have tried to be

² <http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/grief/grief.html>

kind to JW's who shunned us. But after a while, it gets old. Anger can build up inside.

It is normal to get to a point where you want to "shun the shunners." I went through this phase and felt exactly as one ex-JW wrote:

"My attitude toward my JW family has really changed in the last couple of years. I used to think (perhaps somewhat optimistically) that they wouldn't treat me in such a fashion if the Society didn't require it from them, or as they would mistakenly see it, if *God* didn't require it of them.

"But I don't believe the Society requires them to lie to, spite or otherwise mistreat family members who are disfellowshipped, as long as doctrinal discussions, etc., are not engaged in. Yet, many JW's are very deliberate in the cruel way they treat disfellowshipped persons, far beyond what THEIR RULES call for.

"So, I'm thinking that I should SHUN those who are shunning me. No more benefit of the doubt. I will now treat them the same way they treat me. Why should I be understanding to someone who wouldn't even visit one of her own children who lay in a hospital with serious injuries after being struck by a car? Not even a phone call. That's just plain spiteful.

"I will not devote anymore time or energy into trying to maintain a relationship with the JW's in my family. It's just not worth it. It's time for me to think of them as if they do not exist at all." — Mike

I want to point out here that this attitude in neither right nor wrong. It is just a stage we go through because of the cruelty of shunning. Sometimes, this "shun the shunners" attitude is justified. There are certain JW's that I really have no desire to associate with, regardless of their religious beliefs. So I avoid any and all interaction with them. Furthermore, this attitude is very powerful when kept in the proper perspective.

Anger can also cause us to lash out at JW's, but it is important to channel your anger in the right direction. Rather than lash out at JW's when you are shunned, it is much healthier to maintain control, not allowing the cruelty of others to control what you say and do.

For whatever it is worth, it may help to remember that for the most part, JW's are enslaved and are victims too—and most of them unwittingly. They believe that by shunning you, they are remaining loyal to God. We all believed that at one time, to a greater or lesser degree. They don't stop to consider how the act of shunning is irreconcilable with the concept of a loving God.

It is important to express your pain and anger proactively and *positively*, keeping in mind the "human condition." Those who shun you show careless disregard for the human condition. I personally do not wish to be like them, and I suspect you don't either. Therefore, whenever I see a JW, I treat them with kindness knowing full well why they are shunning me. This doesn't mean that I don't kindly endeavor to make solid and reasonable points as I have the opportunity. They may think they are being loyal to God and "showing me," but I know who I am, and I know who they are.

For example, when being shunned or treated coldly, I have told more than one JW, "You know, I didn't cease to be a human being when I was disfellowshipped." I want them to feel from an emotional perspective the pain of what they are doing, and maybe even some [Cognitive Dissonance](#).³ Then perhaps the next time they see a disfellowshipped or disassociated person, they will think twice about being cold and unloving. This is not being codependent. I am not trying to control them, but I am maintaining my self-respect and dignity. Codependence is when you *continue* trying to make others associate with you when they refuse. Remember, part of working through your grief is to come to acceptance.

Notice the comments of another ex-JW:

"I will no longer be like a simpering dog, begging for scraps of attention from any of my family, including my own daughters... I simply will not make the first move, they will have to seek me out. When and if they do, I will extend all the love I still have for them." —Dan

You can see that Dan was working through his anger and beginning to channel his anger in a productive way. He was coming to acceptance, and showing respect for others' right of Free Will.

Similar in principle to Dan's comment, Mike made an interesting comment above: "It's time for me to think of them as if they do not exist at all." I have also adopted this mindset. Like Dan above, it is not out of spite, or a lack of love. Rather, it is out of a strong need to move on and get "past the past." It is also out of respect for their right of Free Will.

It is mentally exhausting to hold on to the hope that your family and friends will accept you one day. The only way they will ever accept you is if they themselves leave the Organization. Unfortunately, it is unlikely this will ever happen. So it is extremely important to let go of the "holding on." Don't keep one foot in the past while you have your other foot in the future. It is critical for your re-

covery that you move on with your life. Do the grieving. Feel the pain. Experience the heartache. Let it have its work complete (to use a familiar Bible phrase). **Then move on! Move forward!** Let the past stay in the past. Look to the future where you can make a difference in your life and the world around you. This is where the concept of "shunning the shunner" should be viewed in the proper perspective. Don't *shun* them. Just *move past them* and their mindset.

So, as you reinvent yourself, don't allow your anger to make you bitter. You may go through bitterness for a time, just don't stay there—it will eat you alive. Interacting with others who are going or have gone through the same thing is not only comforting, but also empowering.

Many have found comfort in participating in ex-JW discussion boards (www.Jehovahs-Witness.com is one popular one). Additionally, reading the life stories of how others survived the pain of leaving can also be quite empowering. Many stories are available online (check [TruthQuest](#)⁴ for links).

3. Fear and Guilt

One very common mindset among those who have just left the Organization is the belief that the Society still has the "Truth." They also still buy into the idea that Jehovah God is going to destroy the wicked at Armageddon. This can cause extreme feelings of guilt and shame, not to mention fear. By not coming to terms with this mindset, they remain enslaved to a codependent ideology.

One ex-JW aptly described this condition, and identified it with the term, "unhealthy drifting":

"What I [call] "unhealthy drifting" is leaving the organization in body but not in mind. Many have left the Organization, but still believe all the doctrines, and they beat themselves up mercilessly for their own failure to live up to Watchtower Society requirements. They verbally defend the Organization whenever questioned, even though the Witnesses may disrespect and shun them.

"I recommend active recovery for the sake of complete healing, to get rid of internalized shame, to get rid of the inner discord that comes from repressing what we know, to get rid of the tendency to judge, to open oneself to reconnecting with their own spirituality in a healthier context, to learn how we've been affected by mind control so as to unravel it's effects, etc." —Terence

³ <http://www.propaganda101.com/SocialPsychology/cognitiv.htm>

⁴ <http://www.empowerthespirit.com/truthquest/index.htm>

I myself had similar feelings as I was coming out of the Organization. I wondered how those who had left could go on not being afraid of dying at Armageddon. I couldn't understand how they could just give up on the "wonderful hope of a Paradise Earth." I was curious as to what their mindset was—did they just not care anymore? How could they have come to know the "Truth," and just walk away? I was still enslaved.

Well, it did not take me long to figure it all out. By doing research on exactly what I had believed all my life, I found that it was nothing more than somebody else's fanatical belief system that was "inculcated" in me from infancy as the only "Truth" there was. It became clear to me that the Bible itself is the "mother of all cults." It is literally riddled with cult-like teachings. Once I made these startling discoveries, I understood why others could leave without worrying about dying at God's hand.

The key to overcoming feelings of guilt and shame is to discover for yourself the real past of the Watchtower Society (if you haven't already). I encourage you to read [Crisis of Conscience](#),⁵ by Ray Franz, it will open your eyes as to the Society's bloodguilt, and by extension, God's Organization. As Jesus said, "The Truth Shall Set You Free!" But brace yourself, your "sky is about to change from green to blue!"

Another area that JW's use with impunity is guilt motivation, and it is important to understand precisely what it is. Motivation by guilt is nothing more than an effort to control—a personal boundary violation. As an example, for many centuries religionists have taught the doctrine of Hell Fire in an effort to control and manipulate the masses. It was so easy: "If you don't conform, you'll burn in hell forever." Is the doctrine of "dying at Armageddon" any different? *Do not submit to this kind of guilt motivation from your JW family, friends, or the Society any longer!*

Closely related, but worse yet, is shame motivation. Shame is when you feel bad about yourself, rather than something you have done. An example is if you were ever told, "You're stupid" or "You're no good." These were efforts to control you through shame—an appalling misdeed. When you are disfellowshipped or you disassociate, JW's are in essence saying, "You're not good enough," and they reaffirm this message every time they shun you.

If you feel the bite of this dysfunctional type of motivation, it is important that you re-establish your personal boundaries, that is, what you will or will not accept from those trying to control you. Again, resolve to quit buying into guilt and shame motivation!

Recovery means having reasonable and healthy expectations of yourself. In my own struggle to reconcile my mistakes with who I am, I discovered a powerful truth:

"What I do is not necessarily who I am."

I realized that no matter how hard I tried to do what was right, I could never do it perfectly *all* the time. Yes, I had to come to terms with the fact that I made more mistakes than I liked to honestly admit thus far.

Yet, the significant thing was, although I made my fair share of mistakes, this did not mean I was a worthless or wicked person. So, I finally accepted the fact that *it is okay to make mistakes*, as long as I learned the lesson, made amends if possible, and then moved on with life without making the same mistake again. And I assure you, I will never make the mistake of becoming enslaved to a controlling organization again! I also came to change the way I viewed perfection. I now view [perfection](#)⁶ in the only way that makes sense for a human being.

Take this to heart: ***You are not necessarily your mistakes either!*** Don't be unreasonably judgmental with yourself. And don't internalize fear and guilt, because it will hold you back more than anything else.

Another key to overcoming fear and guilt is:

4. Don't Live In and Remain Enslaved to the Past (Very Important!)

So often, the roadblock to progress and recovery is enslavement to the past. Many who leave the Organization replace one codependent belief system with another, trying to fill an imaginary spiritual void. Some turn to other religions, and are even "Born Again." But it is important to know that *spirituality involves much more than just religion*.

It is not my intent to "subvert" your faith in God, religion, or the Bible with this writing. My intent is to provoke you to a thoughtful and unbiased re-examination of God, religion, and the Bible. If you choose to continue your belief in these, that is perfectly okay. It is your decision, and you are entitled to believe as you wish without judgmentalism. But at least you will have opened your mind and grown spiritually.

A word of caution, though: Be careful of remaining enslaved to the "other" side of the Watchtower Society. There is a fine line to be drawn here. Some have made it their life's work to educate the public on the adverse effects of being a JW; others provide exit counseling and therapy for those that leave. This is fine. But others remain emotionally and mentally paralyzed by fighting the Society in an unhealthy way. If you consume yourself in mentally fighting against the Society, are you not still enslaved, albeit on the other side? The idea here is to

⁵ http://www.freeminds.org/sales/most_burned.htm

⁶ <http://www.empowerthespirit.com/articles/perfection.htm>

recover so you can begin to *really* live, and with freedom. Recovery means moving forward and out of the past, in essence, getting "past the past."

One final thought on this topic: If you are still inclined to be religious, ask yourself, Why? Is it due to co-dependence? Is it due to issues of inadequacy that prompt you to need a "Higher Power" who will love you when you can't love yourself?

Many notable Freethinkers of the past 300 years, such as [Thomas Paine](#),⁷ Thomas Jefferson, and Robert Ingersoll, concluded that we humans become enlightened when religion is cast aside. I adamantly concur. We become *more* attuned to the human condition when we recognize that God is not going to "fix" our problems. We strive for higher virtues when we, once and for all, realize that we are in this "boat" *by* ourselves, and *for* ourselves.

Rather than depending on some ambiguous "Higher Power" to come to the rescue, I urge you to discover and explore your "Higher-Self." I hope that you will come to realize that it is you, and *you alone* that will fix your problems and bring about a better life. This is the epitome of taking [personal responsibility](#)⁸ for yourself and for where you are in life. Furthermore, this is the *only* way to recover from controlling people and organizations.

5. Learn the Lessons, Think for Yourself

In his book, *As a Man Thinketh*⁹, John Allen makes a very interesting observation. He very insightfully states, "Man is where he is that he may learn that he may grow; and as he learns the spiritual lesson which any circumstance contains for him, it passes away and gives place to other circumstances." How true!

You must learn the lessons contained in your current circumstances—whatever those lessons are for you. The key point here is that when you [learn the lesson](#)¹⁰ contained in this challenge, the adversity passes and gives way to other life lessons (and hopefully less difficult ones!). If you do not learn from your trials in life, then of what value are they? It is like investing years of effort and hardship to build a beautiful mansion, and then abandoning it, never to enjoy its magnificence and security. Why would you ever do that?

⁷ http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/thomas_paine/age_of_reason/part1.html

⁸ See the article, "The Wisdom in the Mirror," at <http://www.empowerthespirit.com/articles.htm>

⁹ <http://www.empowerthespirit.com/articles/asaman.pdf>

¹⁰ See the article, "Empowering the Human Spirit—The Grand Secret of Adversity Revealed" at <http://www.empowerthespirit.com/articles.htm>

Following are some lessons I learned in my experience of leaving the Organization. I pass them on to you in the hope that you may benefit too.

- Don't be judgmental. This may be difficult at first, because judgmentalism is a fundamental precept of the organization you just left, or are leaving. You may be surprised at how deep JW judgmentalism runs. After all, in the JW mindset, virtually every human on earth is wicked and will die at Armageddon. It is important that you don't carry this harmful trait over into your new identity.
- Broaden your tolerance for different life styles and concepts—which may be difficult at first. This does not mean that you have to agree with them. It is not for us humans to judge one another. This includes sexual preference. We must show tolerance for all people on the basis of their humanity. A broad tolerance is especially poignant when all the available evidence indicates that, if there is a God, He has nothing to do with humankind. When you factor this in with cultural diversity, who can say with certainty what is acceptable and what is not?
- Re-analyze viewpoints that you have held and believed were wrong because you were told so. This includes trying to improve the world we live in, voting in elections, and associating with "worldly" people, among other things. *Discover for yourself* what is right and what is wrong—think for yourself!

Let the pain of your experience make you more attuned to the "human condition." When you catch yourself adversely judging others, remember this: *not one of us asked to be thrown into this imperfect world*. Every one of us would trade imperfection for perfection in a heartbeat. As a rule, all of us are trying to do our best, with the knowledge, experience, and resources that we possess at the moment. While we should not use this reasoning as an excuse for our actions, it does nevertheless explain *why* we sometimes do the things that we do.

Furthermore, every one of us has had to face tragedy in our lives. We all face hardships, frustrations, failings, and disappointments on a regular, if not daily, basis. We all have to contend with the difficulties of life, not to mention the unique inner battle we each fight between right and wrong.

Any idea of how much guilt we all carry? Nearly everyone burdens themselves with guilt over one thing or another. In turn, guilt leads to feelings of worthlessness, and sometimes down to a profound level.

With knowing all that we individually bear, *is there any question as to why we humans do the things that we do?* So allow your pain and experience to foster empathy for others, especially those still enslaved to the Organization and others like it.

As you learn the lessons contained in your current experience and circumstances, add them to your core values.

6. Remember Your Core Values

It is your core values that really make you who you are. And what is interesting is that your core values have little, if anything, to do with religion, and everything to do with your conscience, your sense of moral justice, and your attitude toward humanity. You see, if you take religion away from the man or woman, he or she is still human, with human values. But if you take the man or woman away from religion, what is left? Nothing but a concept, and in my opinion, a questionable one at that.

It is we humans that give religion its power—not the other way around. Religion has no life of its own without human empowerment. I dare say that most religionists would *strongly* disagree with my foregoing statement. They will cite example after example of how their own life and many other lives have dramatically changed for the better when they "accepted the Lord Jesus in their hearts."

But what they fail to recognize is, 1) Due to their life circumstances, *they were psychologically and emotionally ready for a dramatic life change*; and, 2) Religion simply provided a convenient and socially acceptable *vehicle* for their transformation. Others have made dramatic life-changes without religion involved.

Many people so easily turn to using a "crutch" to make life changes—that of needing a "Higher Power," such as God. In reality, there is no reliable evidence to prove that a "Higher Power," or God, was ever responsible for dramatic life changes. Rather, it always is our "Higher-Self" that is responsible.

The condition of strong-belief is extremely powerful in humans when combined with motivation. Many people simply do not have the self-esteem to believe in themselves, or in their own "Higher-Self." So they instinctively turn to belief in something they can accept—belief in a God who shows [Unconditional Love](#).¹¹

¹¹ <http://www.empowerthespirit.com/truthquest/unconlove.htm>

Religionists will also support their argument citing the "morality" of religion. I agree that some religions endeavor to give more than lip service to morality. But that is not the point. The point is: From where did religion get *its* morality? The answer is, from humans. Again, some may object saying that we were given our core values through the Bible. But this line of thinking is simply not accurate. For example, what Bible did Joseph read when he resisted Potiphar's wife? He did not have one, but he did have a sense of higher morality. **The only moral value that religion has, is the moral value given to it by moral people.**

"But didn't God create humans in His image?" some may ask. Maybe. Maybe not. Either conclusion does not invalidate my point: Religion is nothing without human empowerment.

The reason I have so laboriously driven this point home is this: We don't need religion to establish our core values. We have everything we need *inside of us* to decide what our core values will be. And furthermore, because of our individual right of Free Will, we are entitled to make the final decision concerning our values.

If you are religiously inclined, then it is quite possible that my foregoing statements have made you very uncomfortable, even angry. Please know that my purpose here is not to anger you; but, as I mentioned earlier, it is to provoke you to thought. And that is all I am really suggesting: that you deeply consider these points, and then draw your own conclusions.

In reinventing yourself, therefore, identify your core values and recognize that you have them because they make sense to you—not because you were given them by some religion or ideology.

But what about such higher human virtues as integrity and loyalty? It is quite easy (and quite common) for JW families and friends to accuse those who leave of losing their integrity, and being disloyal to God. My own mother likened me to Judas Iscariot and told me that I was disloyal, not only to God, but to His organization and to my entire family (who are all JW's).

Do not let this type of faulty reasoning disturb you too much! Here is why:

1. "Disloyal to God and His organization."

From my own research, I discovered major problems with the Society's teachings. I also discovered that the Society is bloodguilty (to use their own term) many times over because of its policies on blood, neutrality, and covering up wrongdoing (such as pedophilia). If God does exist, then He would surely not condone such heinous crimes. Therefore, I am not disloyal to God, and certainly not to His organization (if He even has one, which I seriously doubt).

2. **"Disloyal to my family"** (meaning my parents and siblings primarily, but also my extended family). All I can say here is the following, and I say so with total conviction, confidence and presence of mind:

***"I was not disloyal to my family or God.
Rather, I was loyal to myself!"***

In her essay and book, [The Invitation](#),¹² Oriah Mountain Dreamer asks two powerful questions, "I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself: if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul."

Do you have the courage to be true to yourself and your values regardless of what others think or say? Will you be true to yourself even if it means losing everyone you have ever known and loved?

There is no higher virtue than having self-integrity; being true to the values that you chose through deep and thoughtful meditation.

Above, I mentioned that it is common for JW's, especially family members, to tell you that "you are the one that left." This may sound very good "on paper," but is it really true? Consider how three ex-JW's responded to this:

Axel: "I tell them that the Society left me, since they changed their beliefs to the point where it is not the religion I joined.

"I would also challenge them to prove to you that shunning does not [[sever](#)] [family ties](#)"¹³ as they claim. They are actually saying that their religion and their family is the same, when they are two distinct groups. You could point out that the Bible places a family in it's own distinct category, not as an assimilated component of some larger group. So to leave any group is not to leave the family, any more than leaving the country means you leave your family.

"By using the word "leave," they confuse the issue. Turn it around by using the word that really

fits the situation, "disown," "exclude," or "shun." This makes it clear who "left" who."

AF: "This is easy. JW's complain bitterly about "religious persecution" if the family of someone who converts to JWism gives him a hard time about converting and about leaving his former religion. To avoid being grossly hypocritical, such complainers cannot complain if someone similarly leaves the JW's. Conversely, if a JW allows that it's fine for someone to leave some religion and join the JW's, he must allow that it's fine for someone to leave the JW's and join a different religion, or none.

"Anyone who disagrees can be asked simply, "Why do you disagree?" JW's, when asked that, typically resort to "Well we have the true religion so we're different!" Of course, most religions say the same thing. What the JW typically does is to avoid dealing with his organizationally-mandated hypocrisy and try to steer the argument into one about details of doctrine, which usually gets no one anywhere."

Comf: "I have not left. You have chosen to shut me out. It is your behavior, not mine, that makes this gap between us. I love and accept you; you do not return it."

When viewed in the proper light, the argument that "you are the one who left" just doesn't hold water. Don't buy into this type of shame motivation! Maintain your own personal boundaries.

As you reinvent yourself, take the time to explore and reaffirm your core values. Accept that it is your core values that make you who you are, not necessarily a religion. Your core values, in turn, motivate you in your Life's Work, which is so important in your recovery.

7. Replacing the Old with the New —Your Life's Work

Before, when you were "in the Truth," you largely defined yourself by your "hope" for the future and telling others about it. Now that you know it's all a BIG lie, you have to figure out what isn't a lie, and move forward.

You can now explore and discover the world around you with a new sense of freedom. But which way do you go? Above, Axel mentioned a good way to begin, "just start walking and breathing, getting a feel for freedom." He also asked, "How do you plan your route if you have no destination?" The answer is to *formulate* a destination. You have to replace what you lost with something with which you can truly make a difference.

¹² <http://www.empowerthespirit.com/articles/invitation.htm>

¹³ The WTS has since changed the information on their website under the FAQ, **"Do you shun former members?"** It used to read as follows:

"Those who simply cease to be involved in the faith are not shunned. In compliance with the Scriptures, however, members can be expelled for serious unchristian conduct, such as stealing, drunkenness, or adultery, if they do not repent and cease such actions. **Disfellowshipping does not sever family ties.** Disfellowshipped members may continue to attend religious services, and if they wish, they may receive pastoral visits. They are always welcome to return to the faith.—1 Corinthians 5:11-13." (Emphasis added)

I found great empowerment in the concept of my "Life's Work." The definition of a "Life's Work" is something that you want to do more than anything else. It burns within you. It adds to "the woodpile" of life, rather than taking away. Therefore, along with your core values, your Life's Work serves to define who you are and make the world a better place. It is an outlet for your core values. It is your purpose in life. It is something you desire to do whether you are ever paid a single dime or not. And the interesting thing about your Life's Work is that even though you do it never expecting to make a dime, the money will usually catch up and take care of itself eventually.

But be careful. Every time I caught myself thinking about making a living doing my Life's Work (Professional Speaking and Writing), I got discouraged because so many are doing it. Only when I realigned my thinking to the conviction that I would speak and write regardless of *ever* earning money at it, did my discouragement leave and my power return.

Your Life's Work becomes especially meaningful, fulfilling and powerful when it benefits you and the world around you. We all have our gifts, and you must determine what your special gift is. (For more on discovering your purpose in life and more, read my book, [The Game Rules for Life](#).¹² Mention that you learned about it from this article, and I will send you a gift copy).

The value of discovering and implementing your Life's Work is that it gives you another focus. As mentioned, before leaving the Organization, you were focused on living the life of a JW, which was largely "busy work"—you did many things, but perhaps didn't accomplish a great deal that resulted in finding true fulfillment. With your Life's Work, now you have the potential to really make a difference.

Issues Regarding Why You Left or Are Leaving

There are many reasons why people have left or are leaving the Organization. This article has dealt with leav-

ing the Watchtower Society due to doctrinal disagreements.

However, there are other reasons why people leave, such as an injustice committed against themselves or someone else; a lack of love on the part of other JW's; and committing some "judicial offense." Beyond this, there are also reasons that can reach down into the very soul. These can include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of yourself or another; unresolved past issues leading to self-destructive behavior; and, alcoholism—yourself or someone close to you.

While this article may bring some comfort in these areas, it is not sufficient to remedy these very serious types of issues. If this is why you left, I urge you to seek competent professional help. Only in this way can you eventually resolve these issues. Please don't put it off. The longer you do, the longer it will be until you reach your full potential.

Conclusion

In many ways, the underlying theme of this article is how to escape enslavement—enslavement to an organization, to dysfunctional relationships; to a religious ideology (including the Bible) that blocks freedom at virtually every turn. It is also about escaping enslavement to yourself—your former self. Real freedom allows you to discover life and the world around you anew.

It is about losing the captive "blindness" that have held you back for so long. It is all about reinventing a new self-image and self-concept—in essence, redefining who you really are, but this time without all the enslaving mindsets and belief systems.

For some of you, your journey has just begun. For others, you are well along. It is my ardent hope that each of you will find what you are really looking for—*yourself!*

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Please Visit

<http://www.DougKelley.com>
<http://www.EmpoweredRecovery.com>

¹² Available at <http://www.DougKelley.com>. Email me at mailto:doug@dougelley.com