

LEAVING CLOSED COMMUNITIES

Coordinator: Jan Adler

Leaving a faith-based community or a group that is based on a political ideology can sound to the outsider as if it would be a liberating experience. In fact, whether the people who leave are born into or join as an adult, the actual experience of leaving is often very painful and difficult to negotiate. We read memoirs by people who have left groups such as Scientology, Amish, Jehovah's Witness, Chasidic sects, Communist Party, terrorist groups, and cults and discuss the complex issues involved in what first brought them to the group, what led to their decision to leave and their struggle in starting a new life. The similarities and differences in these experiences are examined.

Readings:

Mormon Girl: A Memoir of An American Faith by Joanna Brooks

Additional reading material will be emailed to study group members each week.

Jan Adler has coordinated a wide range of study groups at the IRP.

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Week 1 - Introduction and Hasidic atheists who don't leave their communities

Reading- *Undercover Atheists* by Batya Ungar Sarogn

Questions

What other factors other than losing their families might be impacting on the Hasidic atheists decision not to leave their community?

Week 2 - Man leaving Hasidic sect

All Who Go Do Not Return

What has he gained since leaving his community? What has he lost?
What helped him make the transition?

Week 3 -Technology and leaving a fringe religious group (Westboro Baptist Church)

Unfollow from New Yorker 11/23/15

How did the technology of the modern world act as a catalyst to this person's leaving?

How is it similar or different to the previous week's leaving?

Week 4 - Being asked to leave the Communist Party

Reading- Richard Wright from *The God That Failed*

Week 5 - Leaving a cult (Jonestown)

excerpts from *Seductive Poison*

Week 5 - Leaving Islamist extremism

Excerpts from *Radical: My Journey Out Of Islamist Extremism*

Week 6 - Leaving Scientology -Excerpts from *Beyond Belief*

Week 7 - Leaving Mormonism- *Mormon Girl*

Week 9 - Woman expelled from ultra orthodox sect

Cut Me Loose: Sin and Salvation After My Ultra-Orthodox Girlhood

Week 10 - Leaving the Amish

Growing Up Amish

Week 11 - Female priest giving up the priesthood

Leaving Church

Week 12-Wrap up