

LESSON SIX: HEAVEN'S GATE - A LESSON ON REVEALED RELIGIONS

Directions: Read the following article on Heaven's Gate, which, unless otherwise noted, was taken from Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heaven's_Gate_\(cult\)#_note-2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heaven's_Gate_(cult)#_note-2)). Then have a discussion with your child based on the questions at the end.

Heaven's Gate was the name of an American religious group led by Marshall Applewhite and Justin Spaid. The group's end coincided with the appearance of Comet Hale-Bopp in 1997. Applewhite convinced thirty-eight followers to commit suicide so that their souls could take a ride on a spaceship that they believed was hiding behind the comet. Such beliefs have led some observers to characterize the group as a type of "UFO religion." They believed that the planet Earth was about to be recycled (wiped clean, refurbished and rejuvenated), and that the only chance to survive was to leave it immediately. The group was formally against suicide, but they defined "suicide" to mean "to turn against the Next Level when it is being offered." They were convinced that their "human" bodies were only "vehicles" meant to help them on their journey.

The group believed in several paths for a person to leave the Earth and survive before the "recycling", one of which was hating this world strongly enough: *"It is also possible that part of our test of faith is our hating this world, even our flesh body, to the extent to be willing to leave it without any proof of the Next Level's existence"*.

The members of the group added "-ody" to the first names they adopted in lieu of their original given names, which defines "children of the Next Level". This is mentioned in Applewhite's final video, "Do's Final Exit", that was filmed on March 19, 1997, just days prior to the suicides.

For a few months prior to their deaths, three members, Thurston-ody, Sylvie-ody, and Elaine-ody, worked for Advanced Development Group (ADG), Inc. (now ManTech Advanced Development Group), a small San Diego-based company that developed computer-based instruction for the U. S. Army. Although they were polite and friendly in a reserved way, they tended to keep to themselves. When they quit working for ADG, they told their supervisor that they had completed their mission. A few weeks later, they were dead.

The structure of Heaven's Gate resembled that of a medieval monastic order. Group members gave up their material possessions and lived a highly ascetic life devoid of many indulgences. The group was tightly knit and everything was shared communally. Six of the male members of the group voluntarily underwent castration as an extreme means of maintaining the ascetic lifestyle.

The group funded itself by offering professional website development for paying clients.

Thirty-eight group members, plus Applewhite, the group's leader, were found dead in a rented mansion in the upscale San Diego community of Rancho Santa Fe, California, on

March 26, 1997. Two former members of Heaven's Gate, Wayne Cooke and Charlie Humphreys, died in copycat suicides. Humphreys had survived a suicide pact with Cooke in May 1997, but successfully committed suicide in February 1998. The mass death of the Heaven's Gate group was widely publicised in the media as an example of cult suicide.

[A cult suicide is a mass suicide by the members of a cult. In some cases all, or nearly all members have committed suicide at the same time and place. Groups which have committed such mass suicides include Heaven's Gate, Order of the Solar Temple, Peoples Temple (in the Jonestown incident) and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God. In other cases, such as Filippians and the Taiping, a group has apparently supported mass suicide but without necessarily encouraging all members to participate (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult_suicide).]

In preparing to kill themselves, members of the group drank citrus juices to ritually cleanse their bodies of impurities. The suicide was accomplished by ingestion of phenobarbital mixed with vodka, along with plastic bags secured around their heads to induce asphyxiation. They were found lying neatly in their own bunk beds, with their faces and torsos covered by a square, purple cloth. Each member carried five dollars in quarters in their pockets. All 39 were dressed in identical black shirts and sweat pants, brand new black-and-white Nike tennis shoes, and armband patches reading "Heaven's Gate Away Team." The suicides were conducted in shifts, and the remaining members of the group cleaned up after each prior group's death.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why did the members of Heaven's Gate kill themselves? (They killed themselves so that their souls could take a ride on a spaceship that they believed was hiding behind a comet. They believed that this suicide was the only chance for them to survive the "recycling" of Earth, which, they believed was going to happen soon.)
2. Were their beliefs stupid? Why? (Yes, their beliefs were stupid because they were not based on reason, and they led the Heaven's Gate members to live ridiculous lives which ended in ridiculous deaths.)
3. Were all of the members of Heaven's Gate mentally handicapped? (No, three members worked for Advanced Development Group, Inc., a small San Diego-based company that developed computer-based instruction for the U. S. Army.)
4. Why do smart people join religions that encourage them to do stupid things?
5. Do you know what a Revealed Religion is? (A Revealed Religion is a religion that is not based on reason. It claims that God, or something like God, revealed

- truth to the founder (or founders) of the religion—truth that cannot be proved but must be accepted with faith. Often revealed religions teach that those who believe this supposed revealed truth will go to Heaven and those who don't will go to Hell.)
6. Can you think of a Revealed Religion that teaches you will go to Heaven if you believe its teachings and you will go to Hell if you don't? (At least to an extent, most types of Christianity and Islam are such religions.)
 7. Do you believe that God should reward people with Heaven for believing something that is probably not true? Why or why not?
 8. Do you believe that God should punish people with Hell for disbelieving something that is probably not true and goes against their God-given reason? Why or why not?
 9. How much evidence is there that Comet Hale-Bopp had a spaceship and that suicide would take one to that spaceship so that one could survive the "recycling" of Earth? (None.)
 10. How much evidence is there that any of the miracles described in the Bible are true or that the Angel Gabriel told Mohammed the entire Koran? (None.)
 11. How is the teaching of Heaven's Gate like Christianity's and Islam's teaching about Heaven and Hell? How is it different?
 12. Can you think of other Revealed Religions? (Judaism, Hinduism, most forms of Buddhism, etcetera,)
 13. Are most religions Revealed Religions? (Yes.)
 14. Is Deism a Revealed Religion? Why or why not? (No, Deism is not a Revealed Religion for two reasons. One, it is completely based on reason. And two, it does not claim that God, or something like God, revealed truth to the founder (or founders) of the religion—truth that cannot be proved but must be accepted with faith. In fact, Deism doesn't really have a founder. It is just a logical philosophy that people in many times and places have discovered on their own by using reason. Deism is a Rational Religion/Philosophy or Natural Religion/Philosophy because it is based on reason, not alleged revelation.)
 15. Why is it dangerous to base one's personal philosophy on a Revealed Religion like Heaven's Gate, most forms of Christianity, and most forms of Islam? (What we believe influences what we think, what we think influences what we do, and what we do can be somewhere between completely good and completely evil. If we base all our beliefs on reason, all our beliefs will be intelligent and sane. If we

do not base all our beliefs on reason, we can believe anything. We can even believe all of the teachings of Heaven's Gate, the Bible, and the Koran.)