

# Bring back to life

Anna Lobaczewska, President of Ruch Obrony Rodzinki I Jednosti (Poland)

## Summary

My Son was recruited to the Caytanya Mission cult at the age of 18. The cult is related to The International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Jagad Guru/Chris Butler is the leader. In Poland the Caytanya Mission began operations in 1991 with modest rented premises, inviting recruits for yoga courses. After a year of complete involvement in the cult my son moved out of the house, dropped out of college and completely broke off contact with his family. At that time, I made contact with other families whose relatives were involved in a variety of destructive cults, while I took part in the intense media campaign by presenting the true face of the Caytanya Mission hoping that my son would hear me and understand that he has been cheated in a devious way. Unfortunately, my actions have not yielded the expected results, moreover I was twice accused by Caytanya Mission of infringement of personal rights: once in Gdansk in 1994 and then in 1996 in Lublin. The process that began in Lublin was a kind of demonstration to which members of the cult came from across the country. My son has been called as a witness against me twice. Each of the witnesses of Caytanya Mission was very well prepared, recited before the Court. Even the testimony of parents and experts did not convince my son and he continued to be hostile against me and the family. In the first instance, I lost the case. The Court ordered me to apologize for wording in my article. However the Court found that Caytanya Mission was a destructive cult. In the second instance (the Court of Appeal) Caytanya Mission abruptly withdrew the lawsuit. Members of the cult and my son were convinced that the process had been won by the Caytanya Mission and my pleas against them were false. After eight years, my son unexpectedly arrived in Lublin as a sunglass street vendor. The whole family had to convince him to stay in the apartment where we had lived before we moved to the suburbs. It took him a long time to accept the offer. Unfortunately, he was manipulated so deeply that it brought confusion to his world of values. Now he seems to be lost and can not find his way of life. His re-entry into normal life is very difficult.

## **"Bring back to life..." – A mother's testimony**

I am a mother, whose son was recruited into the cult Caytanya Mission at the age of 18. The cult is a branch of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. At the head stands Jagad Guru / Chris Butler / Brahpupady known in Poland as a student founder of the Society for Krishna Consciousness. There is no significant difference between Caytanya Mission and the Society for Krishna Consciousness' teachings. In Poland, the Caytanya Mission began operations in 1991 with renting a modest premises for its activities. My son Peter, on the first attendance at the cult meeting was convinced that this is only a yoga course. At one point his behavior, manner of speaking, nutrition, perception of reality and attitude to life, education, family, changed radically and become worrisome. I asked him what had happened that had made him change so quickly but received no reply. He saw demons: it was as if he was in a trance, constantly reciting mantra and became obsessed about body purity. He was losing weight. He often disappeared for days from home, hiding his whereabouts. After graduating from high school, when the time limit came to submit documents to enter university, he hesitated. He decided not to go to college, as he argued that science does not give happiness. My family and I tried to convince him to

study. I knew that the cult would prevent him from submitting the documents. For the cult studying was a useless idea, they were bombarding Peter with arguments to dissuade him from studying. As he had already been subjected to intensive indoctrination, he saw no sense in science nor in acquiring education. Before that he was a good pupil, he had plans for his life, he liked to hike, he was a scout, and enjoyed a game of chess. He was responsible and reliable.

I decided to go to an open meeting and talk with the guru. I was ready to ask guru for permission to study for Peter. I thought that if I did not deny their assumptions, or criticize actions avoiding sensitive issues, and would show a far-reaching tolerance, maybe then I could convince the guru to allow my son to study.

At the meeting 70 people were present, mostly young people but among them there was a large group of adults demonstrating commitment to the lecture and group singing. When the meeting ended, there were only the members of the Mission Caytanya left. I went to the guru and presented the problem peacefully. I said that I was worried that Peter did not want to study although he had such plans before. The Guru called Peter and asked how old he was. He replied that he was over 18. He was a little confused. The Guru told me: "You see, he is an adult, he's already decided." A middle-aged woman listened to that conversation. At some point, she spoke to me: "You are not his mother, he has a different mother." My composure vanished and I exclaimed, "You are a cult". Then Waldemar Kociuba - Guru - found himself in a situation where in front of the members he could demonstrate his absolute power over my son and commanded Peter: "take her out". My son took me by the hand, but did it lamely, the guru seeing his indecision pointed to one of the young people and said to him: "help him." They managed to pull me toward the exit. I saw to what extent my son was subordinated to the guru, and was ready to obey to his every command. At home, Peter threatened me to send me to jail because I offended his guru. How important his guru was to him, if he was ready to send me to jail just for saying that the organisation was a cult. Then I realized that nothing mattered to him any more except for the guru and the cult. He was totally devoted and obedient to them. However, in spite all this he submitted the documents for university to study.

During the summer I hardly saw my son as he was constantly away from home, sometimes coming for a few days, but not talking to us, not replying to questions. I tried to find out where and with whom he was staying, with no result – he always managed to disappear. During the semester, he had no time to study, and was busy with meetings of the cult. He could not keep up with the increasing demands of the cult and study at the same time. At some point he began to pack his things. It was in winter. I did not know or did not want to know that he was preparing to leave home. This happened in late January. He said that he was leaving to study at the Institute for Studies of Identity - known as the Caytanya Mission, registered as a religious association. I asked him to leave me his address to keep contact with him. He did not answer. The cult people were waiting for him in the street.

I did not lose hope because I did not believe that one could live in absurdity all one's life, and one cannot change all that was part of you - for the family and for a society. Nobody was prepared for it. Peter has not contacted us, we did not know his whereabouts.

But one evening he came. He looked strange, he was very aggressive and on the door step he was screaming that I should apologize to the guru. I tried to calm him down, but unfortunately he did

not hear me. It was impossible to talk to him. He was yelling at me all the time, repeating the same thing. He sat in front of the glazed cupboard and with all his strength struck his head on the window. He did not care that he was injured, and still furiously demanded that I apologized to the guru. The row ended late at night. He did not go to the Caytanya Mission, but slept in his room. The next day he was completely different and had lost his previous aggression. I asked him whether, before coming to the house he was in the Caytanya Mission and what had happened him there. He nodded and blushed. I guess he realized that he was given something that had such an influence on him. Soon he went and did not return.

I was brought before the Court by Caytanya Mission twice for infringement of personal rights. In the first trial, which took place in Gdansk, the editor of the "Educational Review" who printed the article "Intercontinental sectarianism" was accused along with me. At one of the last hearings Caytanya Mission withdrew its claim which I accepted with relief.

After two years, I was called back to Court in Lublin. The trial was a peculiar show attended by members of the cult from all over the country. Members were reimbursed their travel expenses. In support of the indictment all my appearances: radio, press and television had been collected and sentences quoted, when I had accused Caytanya Mission of manipulation, changing personality and warning about addiction. Witnesses that testified before the Court did not confess belonging to Caytanya Mission but they spoke of how happy they were and the positive impact that it had on their lives. These were well-prepared and learned beforehand testimonials. The Court received a stack of documents, that contained thanks proving the cult charitable activities in Poland and abroad, and lists of Catholics supporting the education of Caytanya Mission and even presented a letter of prominent politicians who supported their activities. The Court never checked the authenticity of these documents. The cult called men of science of religion to witness. They pointed to the diversity of the religion but did not see the negative impact it had. They relied on documents and interviews with members of the Caytanya Mission. They heard an unusual witness, David Muncie spiritual master from Thailand. His presence was meant to be a very important event in this case for members of the cult and the Court. Between the designated Court hearings, an emergency hearing was called. A spiritual master, with an interpreter, in a Court room full of Caytanya Mission believers lectured for 4 hours on the philosophical base of the cult. The lecture was an example of a sophisticated manipulation of various elements drawn from the philosophy of Hinduism and Christianity. He had to convince Catholic members and also the Court that the Caytanya Mission doctrine does not contradict Christianity, and allowed to get rid of doubts, if they had any. One had to be confirmed theologian to make a careful study and find a distortion and falsification. Unprepared persons could not notice such differences. And such an assumption gave the leaders of the organization courage to appear in Court.

My witnesses were parents whose children had been recruited by the cult and subject to its destructive influence. Witnesses were also people who were acquainted with the cult: they spoke of the unhealthy relationships prevailing there and those who frequented their meetings showed up the manipulation, trance states, and hypnosis used during the lectures. Scientists and clergy also testified.

The hearings were a kind of conversation, attend by my son. He was in the courtroom and listened as ex-members were telling about the trauma they suffered at the time of commitment to the cult, and their parents described their experiences. I was hoping that the testimony of the

victims' families would stimulate him into independent reflection, which would allow him to see the harm caused to its members. I could not talk to him during breaks because he was strictly isolated from me.

From the very beginning, I was accused of being an overprotective mother of a mature adult, able and conscious to make choices. Mission Caytanya applied psychological terror to me. They presented my family as pathological, citing drastic scenes that never took place, indicating that this was the reason why my son left home. They sent me letters that were supposed to cause a feeling of guilt. Crown evidence was to be Peter's testimony. He recited, like the others adepts the well learned lessons, trying to prove that he had taken the decision and said he didn't like the way of our home was run. That it included alcohol, cigarettes and meat. But when I asked him directly whether there was something he wanted to criticize about us as parents, he spontaneously replied that he accused us of nothing. This was in sharp contrast to that what he so widely described. It was as if the two different personalities were fighting inside his mind. He was not frightened, but subdued and sometimes criticized reality. I felt that he was not completely lost. That what happened in his life before Caytanya Mission has not been completely buried, and certainly Caytanya Mission is not the only power that can plan and direct Peter's life.

I decided to call my son as a witness for a second time. It was a way of keeping in touch with him but also to stop the Caytanya Mission from sending my son abroad (as they had such plans). When my agent asked my son how much money he was giving for Caytanya Mission, he answered without hesitation, 200 dollars a month. Everyone in the room burst out laughing. I do not know until today, what that laugh was about.

In first instance, the verdict was not in my favour. The Court made a selection of certain phrases from my appearances and ordered me to apologize to Caytanya Mission in the mainstream press. The Court however admitted that this organization was a cult.

After an appeal the case began right from the start before another court. When the Caytanya Mission realized that the trial was going in a negative direction for them, it decided to withdraw the lawsuit. I did not want to have anything to do with them, and waived their financial claims. But that did not worry the leaders of the Mission Caytanya, they broadcast in the media and above all persuaded their members to date, that they had won a case against me and that my charges against them were completely unfounded.

Suddenly, after seven years, my son appeared in Lublin as a street trader. Surprisingly, we were able to meet him on neutral ground. Family and many people who knew Peter, as if by chance, started talking. Inquired about his life lessons. Certainly this did not leave him indifferent. It gave him a chance to return to a time before the cult, recall memories and forced him to reflect on his situation. At that time my family had moved house and we suggested that he could live in the flat that we had left. Initially, he did not want to hear about it saying it was useless to him. However, after a long persuasion he accepted. The flat needed renovation, so he had to stay with us in our new house. I was able to observe closely the devastation which the cult had caused in Peter's mental state. Perhaps by then he was not so fully engaged in the activities of the cult, but it was easy to see how the cult had brought confusion into his life, guided by the principles that have been taught to him there. The greatest evil, according to him was eating meat. He abided with the principles of vegetarianism, not because of taste or health, but because of the belief in reincarnation. He believed that even a dish that has come into contact with meat could result that

in a future life his soul would return on earth in the shape of a swine and thus of spiritual degradation.

He stopped intellectual development when he joined the cult. Long periods in trance states and meditation, isolation from science, destruction of his personality and the street trade, which was to the cult benefit had resulted in a lack of further educational ambitions. Depression and emotional swings which I could observe, were the consequences of staying in the cult. His entry into normal life was very difficult. He was still hostile to the family and especially towards me.

One time we talked about the Court case. He was convinced that the cult won the case. When we proved that this was not the case, having no other arguments, already desperate, he accused me of calling false witnesses. I never went back to that conversation. I tried to engage my son in the small domestic operations to enter the world of normal duties and responsibilities. Currently, he is very slowly rebuilding relationships with the family and re-reentering life with his past cult ballast. His long stay in the cult, cast a shadow over his life. He is not the last victim of this cult.

Caytanya Mission ceased to use his name on the posters inviting to its lectures. It uses different names, so that no one can associate them with the compromising process. Its main activities moved to the coast, where there are many benefit from members trading on beaches. They developed the production of dietary supplements. They employ many people who are drawn into to the cult often breaking up family bonds and exploit them as their employees.