

## Beyond Belief: Cults, Healers, Mystics and Gurus-Why We Believe

**Arthur Janov**

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*This thought-provoking and important book shows how people are drawn toward dangerous beliefs.*

Belief can manifest itself in world-changing ways—and did, in some of history's ugliest moments, from the rise of Adolf Hitler to the Jonestown mass suicide in 1979. Arthur Janov, a renowned psychologist who penned *The Primal Scream*, fearlessly tackles the subject of why and how strong believers willingly embrace even the most deranged leaders.

*Beyond Belief* begins with a lucid explanation of belief systems that, writes Janov, "are maps, something to help us navigate through life more effectively." While belief systems are not presented as inherently bad, the author concentrates not just on why people adopt belief systems, but why "alienated individuals" in particular seek out "belief systems on the fringes." The result is a book that is both illuminating and sobering. It explores, for example, how a strongly-held belief can lead radical Islamist jihadists to murder others in suicide acts. Janov writes, "I believe if people had more love in this life, they would not be so anxious to end it in favor of some imaginary existence."

One of the most compelling aspects of *Beyond Belief* is the author's liberal use of case studies, most of which are related in the first person by individuals whose lives were dramatically affected by their involvement in cults. These stories offer an exceptional perspective on the manner in which belief systems can take hold and shape one's experiences. Joan's tale, for instance, both engaging and disturbing, describes what it was like to join the Hare Krishnas. Even though she left the sect, observing that participants "are stunted in spiritual awareness," Joan considers returning someday because "there's a certain protection there."

Janov's great insight into cultish leaders is particularly interesting; he believes such people have had childhoods in which they were "rejected and unloved," because "only unloved people want to become the wise man or woman (although it is usually male) imparting words of wisdom to others." This is just one reason why *Beyond Belief* is such a thought-provoking, important book.

**BARRY SILVERSTEIN** (Fall 2016)

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