

The Israeli Center for Victims of Cults

Who is Who? Who is Behind it?



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By Willy Fautré

The Israeli Center for Victims of Cults

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Brussels, 1 September 2018

The Israeli Center for Victims of Cults

Who is Who? Who is Behind it?

The Israeli Center for Victims of Cults (ICVC) is well-known in Israel for its activities against a number of religious and spiritual movements that are depicted as harmful and dangerous. Over the years, the ICVC has managed to garner easy access to the media and Israeli government due to its moral panic narratives and campaign for an anti-cult law.

It is therefore not surprising that the ICVC has also emerged in Europe, in particular, on the website of FECRIS (European Federation of Centers of Research and Information on Cults and Sects), as its Israel correspondent.¹

For many years, FECRIS has been heavily criticized by international human rights organizations for fomenting social hostility and hate speech towards non-mainstream religions and worldviews, usually of foreign origin, and for stigmatizing members of these groups.² Religious studies scholars and the scientific establishment in general have also denounced FECRIS for the lack of expertise of their so-called “cult experts”. Courts have also rejected their “mind control”, “brainwashing”, and “mental manipulation” theories as unfounded.

The Israeli Center for Victims of Cults

The emergence of the ICVC did not occur in a vacuum. In the mid-1970s, the organization Yad L’Achim used the media to warn against cults from the East, and in 1978, a Knesset member of the Likud party, Itshak Itshaki, requested a hearing about the activities of the Hare Krishna among the Israeli youth.

Meanwhile, in the United States, some of the executive members of the powerful “Cult Awareness Network” (CAN)³ were Jews, and since the early 1970's, some rabbis in the US acted as “deprogrammers” or “exit counselors” for the Jewish community; thus, in 1980, an initiative was taken to create “The Task Force against Cults”. The members “task force” compiled and submitted a report to Dr. Joseph Burg (the then Minister of the Interior) who

¹ See <http://www.fecris.org>

² See the special issue of Religion-Staat-Gesellschaft, *Journal for the Study of Beliefs and Worldviews*, “Freedom of Religion or Belief Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality, A Case Study: FECRIS”, ed. by Willy Fautré/ Human Rights Without Frontiers and published by Gerhard Besier and Hubert Seiwert, Technical University Dresden (Germany), 224 p. (2012). It covers FECRIS questionable activities in Austria, France, Germany, Russia and Serbia”. It was afterwards published in Russian and in French (with some updates). All the versions are also available on internet: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/our-reports/>

³ The Cult Awareness Network (CAN) was an organization created by deprogrammer Ted Patrick that provided information on groups that it considered to be cults, as well as support and referrals to deprogrammers. It was founded in the wake of the Jonestown (Guyana) mass-murder suicide (1978) and was shut down in 1996. Its name and assets were later bought by a group of private donors (some of whom were Scientologists) in bankruptcy proceedings; with the transfer of ownership, the organization was renamed the New Cult Awareness Network.

was in charge of the cults operating in Israel, stressing that they were familiar with their activities in the US.

In 1980, an organization by the name of “Concerned Parents against Cults” was founded by Nathaniel Blasbalg and officially registered in 1983.

As numerous kibbutz members were joining new religious groups at that time, the Kibbutzim Association opened its own “cult handling” department; Psychiatrist Mordechai Kaufman and psychologist David Green headed the “Child and Family Clinic” in Tel-Aviv and social worker Gabi Zohar (who later became an activist in the ICVC) also worked in the department.

The ‘delivery’ of the ICVC

The process of legally establishing the ICVC was rather complicated. The ICVC was originally registered on 21 August 2006 as “Kav-Lamaslul - A Public-Benefit Company, Inc.” However, on 6 November 2006, the organisation’s general assembly decided change the name to “The Center for Victims of Cults in Israel, Inc.” Yet, twenty days later, another general assembly established its current name: The Israeli Center for Victims of Cults, Inc.⁴, based at 3 Elimelech St. Ramat Gan 52415.

Following a request for an “adequate management” confirmation introduced by the ICVC a few months later, the Israeli Corporations Authority of the Ministry of Justice⁵ identified some unclear practices. First, the request for adequate management was submitted without the company signature. Second, the constitution of the ICVC was changed according to the shareholders’ assembly on 1 April 2007 that included only two shareholders, Mrs. Ayelet Kedem and Mr. Rony Montzesh, although according to the Registrar of Companies there were seven shareholders.

On 18 September 2007, a shareholders’ meeting was held via conference call. The minutes clearly suggest there were a number of internal disagreements: Two shareholders resigned (Rony Montzesh and Esti Oren), two new ones were approved (Orna Barak and Ruti Bar On), and Ayelet Kedem was reconfirmed as CEO, a position she held until 2008⁶ when she left for unknown reasons. Her successor, Danit Keren, was a student of spokespersonship in the university of Bar-Ilan and a former member of the Messianic Jews movement.

For at least the first two years of the organization, the majority of the workforce at the ICVC consisted of contemporary and former activists at Yad L’Achim.

Public objectives

The objectives of the original legal entity that have remained unchanged are among others:

⁴ Ministry of Justice, Registrar of Companies.

⁵ Letter of the Authority to Virzhbinsky Yaakov/Tax consultant, POB 1804, Bnei Brak 51249

⁶ Ayelet Kedem was the first CEO (2006-2008). She was followed by Danit Keren (28/7/2008 - May 2010) and Rachel Lichtenstein (2011 until today)

- “Acting in favor of the Israeli public in regard to the activity of cults, organizations, and spiritual study groups in Israel and around the world which act in a manner detrimental and abusive of the public physically, emotionally, and financially and so forth.
- Conducting educational activities such as conventions, lectures, assemblies, and seminars on the purposes of the company and/or any other pertinent topic.
- Establishing therapeutic frameworks for treatment of victims of the aforementioned entities, as well as families of the victims, and establishing educational programs whose purpose is to train therapists in these frameworks. (...)
- To circulate and publish books, pamphlets, and magazines, and promote media exposure concerning matters pertaining to the company goals.
- To promote legislation concerning the activities of cults, organizations, and spiritual study groups that afflict and exploit the public.”

This is in line with the typical agenda of any anti-cult movement affiliated with FECRIS in Europe that wants to eradicate real or perceived competitors on the religious market, whatever its religious or ideological background or the personal motives of its founding member(s).

In the shadow of the ‘secular’ ICVC, a hidden extremist religious agenda

Behind the scenes of the ICVC, which claims to be secular, another movement is in fact at the helm: a religious, extremist orthodox movement by the name of Yad L’Achim [A Hand to the Brothers], formed in 1950, whose stated goal is to bring back more Jews from other Jewish groups to ‘orthodoxy’, to integrate Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union in their movement, and to fight against non-Jewish religious and spiritual groups proselytizing among Jews⁷. Yad L’Achim is also firmly endogamous and staunchly against marriages of Jewish

⁷ In its 2016 annual religious freedom report, the US Department of State stated: “The ultra-Orthodox organization Yad L’Achim reportedly continued to pressure Jewish women not to date non-Jewish men and offered Jewish women what it termed “escape” assistance from cohabitation with Arab men, i.e. facilitating the covert departure of women and their children from the homes they shared with their Arab spouses, sometimes by “launching military-like rescues from hostile Arab villages,” according to the organization. Lehava continued to operate a hotline for citizens to inform on Jewish women who were suspected of having romantic relationships with Arab or other non-Jewish men and reportedly made public the names and phone numbers of the men involved to discourage intermarriage.

According to NGOs, societal attitudes toward missionary activities and conversion to other religions continued to be negative. Many Jews continued to oppose missionary activity directed at Jews, saying it amounted to religious harassment and reacted with hostility toward Jewish converts to Christianity. Religious groups including the Messianic Jews and Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to proselytize and invited members of the public to participate in peaceful religious observances in public spaces such as parks and public walkways, according to observers. Those perceived as attempting to proselytize Jews faced harassment by the anti-assimilation groups Lehava and Yad L’Achim.”

See <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.

women to foreign workers and Arabs; the organization claims to receive over 1000 reports of mixed marriages annually⁸.

Thanks to its good relations with the media and in the political arena as well as through the instrumentalization of the “secular” ICVC, Yad L’Achim has managed to publicly demonize a number of religious and spiritual movements it is fighting whilst staying in the shadow of the ICVC. Thus, in 21st century Israel, Hindu movements, contemplative practices, and mainly movements seeking to offer an alternative to orthodox Judaism—such as kabbalistic or Hassidic groups—are labeled by the ICVC as offensive cults.

A struggle for power inside Judaism

The modus operandi of Yad L’Achim is as follows: Yad L’Achim identifies a Jewish movement that offers an alternative to the Jewish orthodox worldview, immediately adds it to its cult list, and the ICVC follows suit. Then, the center tries to find former members of that movement who are willing to speak out against the movement, typically making accusations of sexual abuse or other criminal acts. An orchestrated media campaign is then launched to publicly disparage the legitimacy of the group’s leader. At the same time, the ICVC uses its connections in the welfare ministry and the police to open an investigation that will bring additional media coverage.

For the most part, these cases are closed without trial or end in a far less grave conviction than originally sought. However, by that time, irreparable damage has been done to the movement’s public image and may lead to its slow death.

In this way, ultra-orthodox Judaism instrumentalizes the main mechanisms of society to impose its sole legitimacy of Judaism, not only in the religious field but also in the shaping of domestic and foreign political policies.

A key actor in the campaigns of Yad L’Achim and the ICVC is a millionaire and former secular Jew who converted to ultra-orthodox Judaism: Rami Feller.

About the So-called Experts of the Israeli Center for Victims of Cults and Yad L’Achim

Rami Feller⁹

⁸ Due to the negative attitude of Yad L’Achim in the Israeli media, there was a need to correct its public image and the establishment of the ICVC, an officially non-religious association, to fight against ‘cults’ provided such an opportunity.

⁹ Rami Feller was born 1954. He went to high school. His parents were secular Jews. His father was a famous Professor of Agricultural Engineering who taught in the Haifa Technion, the Israeli parallel of MIT, and is a war hero (https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/רמון_פלר). His mother was a school teacher. Per a news article about Rami Feller published by a Haredi newspaper in 2008

(<https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/16/ART1/715/380.html>), he started working as a salesman while he was in the army (Navy), selling rugs and couches. For some time, he was an insurance agent and then he discovered the world of stereo devices. He started the company RAMPAL and got up to 3.5\$ Million in

The ultra-orthodox millionaire Rami Feller established the ICVC in 2006, a fact that is played down and concealed by the ICVC to this day.¹⁰ Until recently, he was the main donor of the movement. During the first two years the ICVC received more than two million shekels from Feller or from the association “The Office for Charity Matters Inc.”¹¹ that was founded on 11 February 2003¹² (an association that has Feller as its only donor) – an amount corresponding to 97% of the ICVC’s income.¹³

In the early 1980s, Rami Feller started to take prominence in Yad L’Achim¹⁴ where, according to some media, he held the position of “operations officer”. He was said to have repented to orthodox Judaism after his electronics marketing business underwent serious financial difficulties and almost went bankrupt.¹⁵

Feller is also mentioned in Amnon Levi’s book, “The Haredi”, in a chapter dedicated to Yad L’Achim, as a “Repent Jew active, in the organization, considered to be an international authority on the subject of mystical cults”.¹⁶

Feller is said to have asked an American deprogrammer “to extract” his sister, Michal, from the Church of Scientology, which she had voluntarily joined, and subsequently she also became an ultra-orthodox Jew. This sort of operation, which was mainly practiced in the US during the 1970s - 1980s, concretely implies abduction and forced change of religion (deprogramming), sometimes in confinement.

In a 2012 video interview (no longer available online but still in possession of an Israeli religious studies scholar), the interviewer presented Feller as the man who founded the ICVC. Not only did Feller confirm that he was the ICVC’s founder (a fact he had denied a year earlier in a Yediot Aharonot article) but he admitted that he was also a “deprogrammer”.¹⁷

annual sales until in 1980 he went bankrupt and his father had to bail him out. He was then 26. Per the same article, he went on a spiritual journey in Zen Buddhism and even tried his hand in Scientology and Hare Krishna but also experimented LSD. By the mid-80s, he repented to ultra-orthodox Judaism and so did his siblings. He is married to a lady from a very wealthy Jewish family from the UK and they got five children whom they educate in the faith of ultra-orthodox Judaism.

¹⁰ Mula, Shosh. 2011. “The Haredim to the Cults.” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 4 March: 38-43.

¹¹ This was made possible after the bylaw of “The Office for Charity Matters Inc.” were amended to allow the support of organizations that fight against cults (at a time when there were non such officially).

¹² He resigned as director in 2008 but he continued to serve as the main donor.

¹³ Mula, Shosh. 2011. “The Haredim to the Cults.” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 4 March :38–43.

¹⁴ Yad L’Achim was established in 1950 to help new immigrants adjust to the newly born country and to help them find a ‘suitable’ religious framework. Over the years, its attention has turned to more complex problems, including how to counter the threat posed by foreign missionaries. Fighting missionaries sent by all sorts of movements abroad, has long been one of Yad L’Achim’s top priorities.

¹⁵ Kobi Bruk, “Rami Feller, Born Again”, 7 Days edition of Latest News Daily Newspaper, ca. 1985

¹⁶ Levi, Amnon (1988) “The Haredim”, Ketter Publishing House, Jerusalem. Chapter 15 – “The Haredi Underground – Yad L’Achim”.

¹⁷ Excerpt from the program of Hidabrut (“Dialogue”) Channel in which Rami Feller was interviewed (<https://www.hidabroot.com>):

Interviewer: You decided to establish what is called “The Israeli Center for Victims of Cults”. Before we get to your life story, which is fascinating, what is this thing?

RF: We simply... inform the public on the dangers of cults, handle all sorts of cases, in families that are hurt, treat the victims themselves.

Interviewer: With psychologists and so on?

The interview was published on the website of “Hidabrut”, which is closely linked to the organization “Arachim” (“Values”),¹⁸ a well-known Haredi organization¹⁹ that is also dedicated to bringing secular Jews back to ultra-orthodox Judaism, mainly through lectures on the subject.

Feller contributed in various ways to the 1987 report of “The Committee to Examine the Phenomena of Cults (New Groups) in Israel” set up by Deputy Minister of Education Tassa-Glazer's in 1982,²⁰ notably through the direct contacts that the Tassa-Glazer committee had with Yad L'achim, Concerned Parents against Cults, and himself.

Tassa-Glazer Report itself was in fact written by Nurit Ramon's,²¹ M.A. student in criminology, reportedly in coordination with Feller.²² She wrote it on her own, without much coordination with the committee, and it seems that both she and Feller were settling scores with their personal enemies: the Emin movement and Church of Scientology, respectively. However, the Israeli media, some politicians, and the various anti-cult activists considered the report a valid and authoritative source of information on new religious movements in Israel.

Eventually the (real) experts in the committee, scholars of psychology, sociology, etc., refused to undersign her report and resigned from the committee.

In 2002, Feller published a book, *Yearning for the Deep*²³ together with Dr. Boaz Caspi, who is actually Dr. Shalom Srevernik, an ultra-orthodox rabbi and one of the top lecturers in the

RF: There are some volunteers that are psychologists and all sorts of volunteers, social workers... The truth is that I am not so active in the day to day activity, **I am more the one who founded and funded it**, today I am not involved at all, but the thing I am involved in, and what I am an expert in, is to get people out of cults.

¹⁸ Arachim was founded in 1979 by a team of academics, scientists, and Torah scholars in Israel. According to their website (<http://arachimusa.org/>), their purpose is to strengthen Jewish identity and bring Jews on all levels closer to Judaism. The organization is not associated with any political body whatsoever and exists through the assistance of private individuals who look upon the strengthening of Jewish identity as a supreme value. It mainly organizes lectures and seminars to spread its message. Dr. Boaz Caspi, A.K.A. Rabbi Sahlom Srevernick, is a well-known lecturer at Arachim.

¹⁹ Haredi Jews are easy to recognize. Men wear black suits and wide-brimmed black hats, women wear long skirts, thick stockings, and [head coverings](#).

These devout Jews live in cloistered communities. The word “Haredi” is a catchall term which covers a broad array of theologically, politically, and socially conservative [Orthodox Jews](#), sometimes referred to as “ultra-Orthodox.”

Haredi Jews strive to limit their contact with the outside world, avoiding, as much as possible, both non-Haredi Jews and non-Jews, except for business or other necessities of daily life. However, certain groups of Haredim, notably, but not exclusively, members of [Chabad Lubavitch](#), do make contact with non-Haredi Jews for the purpose of encouraging others to adopt more stringent religious observance.

In July 2018, three female tourists were barred from riding a cable car down the Manara Cliff in northern Israel because a group of Haredi Orthodox men would not ride with them (<https://bit.ly/2NCf7hb>) and in June, the pilot of an Austrian Airlines flight had to leave the cockpit and convince several women to change their seats after Haredi Orthodox men refused to sit next to female passengers (<https://bit.ly/2MIMcH1>).

For more information, see for example <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/haredim-charedim/>

²⁰ According to an article in “Haaretz” from the 1st of March it was in 28th of February.

²¹ Nurit Ramon was a former (disgruntled) member of a new religious movement called Emin, which might explain why it is the most prominently featured movement in Tassa Glazer's report (about 200 pages!)

²² Kobi Bruk, "Rami Feller, Born Again", 7 Days edition of Latest News Daily Newspaper, ca. 1985. In this article, Feller boasts that he is in touch with the committee.

²³ This book belongs to the category of "Psychology and Social Sciences". It was published by a secular publishing house called "Modan".

Arachim repenting organization.²⁴ The book warns of the grave danger awaiting young Jews joining religious and spiritual movements that originate from the Far East and non-orthodox Jewish movements, in general.

In March 2011, the newspaper *7 Days of Yediot Aharonot* exposed Rami Feller as the founder and main sponsor of ICVC.²⁵ The investigation carried out by journalist Shosh Mula found that “The Office for Charity Matters Inc.” was 80% funded by Feller (He gave 9.4 million out of 11.7 million for the year 2007).

It was also discovered that Feller made the following personal donations to the ICVC in 2011 and 2012:²⁶

- In 2011: 98,700 shekels (86% of the total donations)
- In 2012: 220,000 shekels (61% of total donations)

His software company, RAMPAL, also donated 59,400 shekels in 2012.²⁷

This public exposure led Feller to increasingly withdraw his financial support from the ICVC.

This is the profile of Rami Feller, a supporter of ultra-orthodox Judaism, who calls himself a “cult expert” and is treated as such by the media and politicians.

ICVC Directors

Ayelet Kedem

Ayelet Kedem, a journalist, was ICVC’s first director during its initial two years.²⁸ For unknown reasons, she resigned in 2008 and had been the only secular person at the ICVC.

Her experience on cult issues was limited to a sensational news report she authored on “Silken Tiger”, a group that operated in Israel in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In her capacity of head of the ICVC, she also wrote the story “Emotional Enslavement Disguised as Spirituality”, which was published on the website of the Psychological Service of the Ministry of Education.

²⁴ The word “repenting” Jew is used by the ultra-orthodox to designate moderate and secular Jews or Jews who joined non-Jewish religions but finally “repented” their errors and converted to the ultra-orthodox movement.

²⁵ Mula, Shosh. 2011. “The Haredim to the Cults.” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 4 March:38–43.

²⁶ Source: Report by the associations registrar (in the authors’ possession)

²⁷ Rate: 1 EUR=4.20 shekel and 1 USD=3.65 shekel.

²⁸ On 23 March 2008, she sent a letter to the Dedication Register concerning her salary in which she said that ICVC was a small company and, apart from her secretary, she was the only full-time employee, in charge of everything: “I stand behind all of the above projects: I am a former journalist for the “7 Days” supplement to the *Yediot Achronot* newspaper. I am the one who established the center, and I am also the initiator and actual producer of all of the center’s activities: I meet with parents, I meet with officials at the Department of Education and with parliament members, I provide public relations for the center, put out messages for the media etc. etc. This means: I am not only the mere CEO, but act as CEO of operations and I act in a number of different fields at the same time.

Danit Keren

Danit Keren, a student of spokespersonship at Bar-Ilan University and a former member of the Messianic Jews movement,²⁹ succeeded Ayelet Kedem from 2008 to 2010.

During her mandate, she brought in secular people, like Amir Zmora, to try to build a secular face for the ICVC³⁰.

On 16 January 2010, she was featured in a story, “A Ray of Light in the Darkness” in News 1, in which she explains the ICVC’s objectives and activities: a) lobbying in the Knesset, 2) lecturing in schools, c) providing activities among youths in risk religious groups, d) running an active website, and e) holding seminars for the general public.

On 10 February, Danit Keren participated in a morning show on TV in which she compared the Kabbalah group Bnei Baruch³¹ with those of Elijah Chai and Goel Ratzon who were sentenced as criminals to heavy prison terms. Keren and the ICVC subsequently apologized for that insulting comparison that could be prosecuted as defamation and their apology was afterwards published in the newspaper *Israel Hayom* (27 September 2011).

On 14 February 2010, a bill of indictment was submitted by the general prosecutor to the court in the Gaol Ratzon case³² on the name of some of his numerous wives and the ICVC’s role in this case reinforced its positive image in the media, the police, and in the eyes of the Israeli public.

Rachel Lichtenstein

Rachel Lichtenstein is the current director of the ICVC, serving since 2011. She is a Haredi Jew with no academic background. Her professional background includes working at a computer store and in Yad L'Achim's anti-missionary department.

²⁹ The origins of Messianic Judaism, (a branch of which is “Jews for Jesus”) can be traced back to the Christian missionary activities among Jews in the 19th and early 20th centuries. By the 1960s and ’70s Messianic Judaism was gaining popularity, known by many as “the Jesus people,” and eventually Jews for Jesus.

All of the major denominations of Judaism have rejected it as a form of Judaism. Within Christianity, Messianic Judaism is sometimes seen as a group within the evangelical community. At times, various Christian leaders have publicly criticized Messianic Jews for their aggressive missionizing in the Jewish community and for misrepresenting themselves as Jews. More info at: <https://bit.ly/2BtZl0w>.

³⁰ Zmora filed an affidavit in a court process in 2016 in which he recounts the ICVC’s story and how he helped build it since 2006, only to find out that Rami Feller and orthodox Jews were actually behind it, and he decided to leave in 2008.

³¹ Bnei Baruch is a universalist kabbalah association founded by Michael Laitman in the early 1990s. It is estimated to have around 50,000 followers in Israel, and some 150,000 around the world. For more information, see “Bnei Baruch”, *World Religions and Spirituality Project* (Online Encyclopedia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia), 3 July 2016, <https://wrldrels.org/2016/10/08/bnei-baruch/> and “Pragmatic Kabbalists: Bnei Baruch and the Globalization of Kabbalah”, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, vol. 13, 2 (2017), pp. 1-38.

³² Goel Ratzon’s case: Ratzon, born in 1950, a healer and spiritual teacher, lived in a sort of commune in Tel Aviv with over twenty women with whom he engaged in intimate relations, and about 50 children they bore him. He was indicted with nine articles and in 2014 he was sentenced to 30 years in prison, in addition to financial compensation. This case created a wide moral panic and led to the preparation of an anti-cult report by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services. In the wake of this report, an anti-cult bill was presented in the Knesset.

Her father, Meir Beinbrecher, is an ultra-orthodox Jew and member of a Gur Hassidic congregation, a Jewish movement that in 2012 was at the heart of a large controversy concerning the abuse of psychiatric treatments within its ranks.³³ Lichtenstein's father was named in the Israeli media at the time as one of the main figures in the controversy.

Lichtenstein continues to work with the Knesset on the issue of children in cults and files depositions in the name of the ICVC in a number of court cases that have major media exposure, such as Goel Ratzon³⁴, under the pretense that she and the ICVC have allegedly accumulated extensive expertise on cults. However, the reality is that they have no academic background and there is no appropriate research behind their statements, their accusations or their reports.

Some Other So-called Cult Experts

Galia Ginerman

Galia Ginerman, a former secular Jew who converted to ultra-orthodox Judaism, was simultaneously an employee of Feller's company, RAMPAL, and the ICVC.

She now operates the association, "Bat Israel" (The Daughter of Israel), whose purpose is to bring people back to 'orthodoxy'.

Her Facebook page displays quotes that say homosexuality is an epidemic disease, supports the segregation of women on public transport, and preaches violence against Muslims. She promoted a photoshopped video of a missile flying into the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the most sacred place for the Muslims in Jerusalem.

She also runs a side business removing bad spells and enchantments by using lead for which she charges hundreds of dollars.

Her husband conducts rituals of the "Order of Kabbalists" and "experiential redeeming *magia*" [magic] in the spirit of the Torah.

Dr. David Green

Dr. David Green, a clinical psychologist and director of the Green Institute, is often recommended by the ICVC to people who ask for psychological assistance. His treatments are not free. Dr. Green is often used by the ICVC as an expert witness and was in the trial of Goel Ratzon. In this case, his testimony was completely revoked by the court, which even contested his expertise and the legitimacy of his arguments.

³³ Psychiatric Drugs Become Talk of the ultra-Orthodox Community (Haaretz, 22 April 2012, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5215988>) The Hebrew version naming Beinbrecher: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/1.1680685>

³⁴ Ibid. footnote 30.

He was also a leading member of the team that defined a cult and its characteristics in the report submitted to the Welfare Ministry in March 2011 titled “A report examining the phenomenon of cults in Israel.”

Dr. Gabi Zohar

Dr. Gabi Zohar is a clinical social worker and a therapist. The ICVC recommends him to people who need therapy.

He is the author of a book, *Happiness Knows No Bounds* which heavily relies on debunked mind control theories of Margaret Singer, the work of Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman³⁵.

He has served as an expert witness on behalf of the ICVC in several court cases. The Israeli press raised doubts concerning the legitimacy of his doctorate diploma, as it was obtained using a company known for granting PhDs by correspondence, and in his case, it served as a go between and assisted him in completing his PhD in Hungary.

He also participates in the work of the Knesset committee about children in cults.

Amir Zmora

Amir Zmora is a secular psychotherapist and a media consultant. In 2006, he was asked by the then CEO of the ICVC, Ayelet Kedem, to provide assistance to ‘cult victims’ on a voluntary basis. After one year, he withdrew and gave testimony in the framework of civil case nr. 18188-11-15, Bnei Baruch Kabbalah La'am v. Aaron Appelbaum, saying among other interesting things:

5) Over months of consulting and working for the center, which I did on a completely voluntary basis, I began to notice that the center’s main focus was not the cult victims themselves, people who needed emotional, therapeutic assistance, but rather marking and acting against groups that the center defined as cults.

6) Initially, the center’s focus was on Scientology, but it gradually shifted toward other groups of many kinds, including completely normative and appropriate groups such as practitioners of yoga and meditation, various educational approaches such as anthroposophy, various New Age groups, and even factions of Judaism that the center found unworthy.

The full text of the affidavit can be consulted in Annex I.

Sharona Ben Moshe

³⁵ Flo Conway is a social activist and former journalist for the Saturday Evening Post. Jim Siegelman studied philosophy. Together they published, “Snapping: America's Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change”, a book about the rise of, what they term, “cults” in America.

Sharona Ben Moshe, the ICVC's spokesperson, testified in the trial against Elijah Chen on the basis of her alleged cult expertise which was contested by the judge. Indeed, in Item 35 of the verdict issued on 23 November 2010, Judge Kugman wrote about her so-called expertise:

Mrs. Sharona Ben Moshe was summoned to testify, presenting herself as having a Master's degree in law, being a school teacher, and the spokeswoman of The Israeli Center for Cult Victims. She claimed that she has been engaged in cult affairs since she herself was caught up in one of them and was under its influence for over two years. Mrs. Ben Moshe wished to argue that having read the protocols of the mother's testimony and of the testimony of defendant no. 1, she argued that the defendants' behavior was a "classical conduct" of cult members under a charismatic leadership that isolated them from the outside world. This opinion is in complete contrast to the findings I have established in the verdict. In light of what is said in the verdict, I find it hard to understand the purpose of the testimony. It should also be noted that the witness has no qualifications in psychiatry or psychology, and her entire testimony relied on her own personal experiences and studies she had read, and whose nature was unclear.

Some Dangerous Liaisons of the Israeli Center for Victims of Cults

The huge porosity between the ICVC and the Yad L'Achim – almost a branch or an extension of it - puts this ultra-orthodox movement on top of the list of ICVC's dangerous liaisons. Among them, US deprogrammers highly praised by the ICVC, particularly Rick Ross and Steve Hassan, closely follow.

Yad L'Achim and others praising China's persecution of Falun Gong

China has been repeatedly condemned by UN institutions, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other NGOs for arresting, torturing, and sentencing Falun Gong practitioners to heavy prison terms in unfair trials. Human Rights Without Frontiers has documented more than one thousand cases (among thousands more) in its World Database of Religious Prisoners (See <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>).

However, in 2009, Yad L'Achim published a press release in which they boasted the fact that one of their organization's representatives was invited to participate in a congress in China devoted to the fight against Falun Gong. The propaganda of Yad L'Achim against Falun Gong is accessible on their website³⁶ where it is depicted as an apocalyptic cult and clearly reproduces the anti-cult propaganda of the Chinese authorities.³⁷

³⁶ See <http://www.yadleachim.co.il/?CategoryID=315&ArticleID=1068>

³⁷ They claim that Hong-Ji, the founder of the movement, said in a lecture delivered in Switzerland that the members of the movement must disconnect from all relatives who oppose their method.

On the Haredi website, there is also an article on Benjamin Kluger, a convert from Christianity to ultra-orthodox Judaism and a Yad L'Achim activist, who worked in the Department for the Fight against Missionary Activity with Rachel Lichtenshtein, the current director of the ICVC. He was invited by the Chinese embassy in Israel as "an expert from Yad L'Achim about destructive cults" to the conference in China with the purpose of vilifying and demonizing Falun Gong. In the website article, Rabbi Shalom Dov Lipschitz, Chairman of Yad L'Achim, states: "If the government in Israel had learned from the Chinese authorities how to forcefully fight dubious and destructive cults - the missionaries would never lift their heads".³⁸

Other participants in the controversial conference included several FECRIS representatives: the ill-famed Alexander Dvorkin from Russia, who fully supports the repression of Falun Gong practitioners in China and campaigns against the movement in his own country, and the well-known deprogrammer Rick Ross, who was prosecuted in several US criminal cases, yet still praised by the ICVC.

Deprogrammer Rick Ross

Rick Ross was a notorious deprogrammer closely connected to the renowned but now defunct anti-cult organization Cult Awareness Network (CAN) and was referred to as a "cult expert" by Yad L'Achim and the ICVC. However, he only has a high school diploma and does not have any education or credentials in religion.

Rick Ross was born in 1952 in Cleveland (Ohio). He was adopted by a Jewish family. He moved to Phoenix (Arizona) at age four. His mother worked for the Jewish Community Center and his father was a plumber.

As a child, his adoptive parents had difficulty managing him. At age 6, he was diagnosed with aggressive tendencies by Dr Keith Perkins of the Child Study and Consultation Service in Phoenix. Between ages 11-12, he was subjected to psychotherapy for emotional problems; his relationship with his parents seemed to be part of his psychological problems. When he was 15, Dr Harold McNeely, a clinical psychologist, described him as "infantilized, demanding, argumentative and hostile" and added in his report dated 29 March 1967³⁹ that "he was a very narcissistic, self-centered boy with a very strong wish to be a leader." The doctor concluded

Some quotes:

"Already in 1992 there were members in the Chinese Communist party who wanted to ban Falun Dafa due to their dissemination of superstition and anti-scientific theories – taught by Li Hong-Ji's. In response, the members of the organization recruited political and governmental establishments to suppress and silence the critics and those who oppose the method."

"The danger from this worldview is very real, as seen by the many deaths of Chinese members of the movement - per a private source before the ban".

³⁸ See the full article text at: <https://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/185655>, or the translation of it in the ANNEX II of this paper; and another similar article on another Haredi website: <http://www.bhol.co.il/news70943>.

³⁹ The author of this report is in possession of a copy of Dr McNeely's medical report.

that “Rick’s basic success in life now hangs in the balance... I am strongly aware that Rick has a good chance to work out his problems if he has a real opportunity.” Unfortunately, his parents were unable to continue the long and costly treatment, and his quest for love and recognition, rejection of authority and social norms as well as his desire to be a leader sent him down the criminal path.

Ross was raised in Arizona and attended school there, with the exception of one year when he was sent to the Camden Military Academy in South Carolina for frequently skipping class during high school. He graduated from Phoenix Union High School in 1971.

After briefly working at several companies between 1971 and 1974 – a finance company, an insurance company (terminated due to a personality conflict with the manager), a bank (where he resigned), and a creditors bureau – he got into trouble with the justice system.

He was prosecuted in three distinct cases: an attempted burglary, embezzlement of \$100,000 worth of jewelry, and kidnapping.

Burglary case: On 22 December 1974, 22-year-old Rick Ross and Jeffrey Ward Nuzum were caught in an attempted burglary by Phoenix police and arrested. Ross pleaded guilty to a charge of conspiracy, was sentenced to a USD 250 fine, and placed on probation for a period of one year, which he violated seven months later.

Grand theft by embezzlement case: On 23 July 1975, Ross held up a jewelry store in Phoenix making off with approximately \$100,000 in diamonds and “precious paraphernalia”. It was later discovered that Ross and the clerk had set up the robbery together and split the stolen property. Ross returned all the embezzled items and pleaded guilty. On 26 November 1975, he appeared before a court under the charge of conspiracy. He was fined \$1100 USD, served approximately six weeks in jail, and was placed on probation for four years. During an interview with the *New York Daily News* in 2004, Ross said that he had made mistakes when he was young and he deeply regretted it.

In 1982, Ross became interested in the missionary activities of Christian groups among Jews when he noticed that employees from a religious group working at his grandmother's nursing home were proselytizing the elderly residents. Ross brought this to the attention of the home's director and of the local Jewish community and campaigned to have their activities stopped. Following this, he started working in a number of US Jewish organizations to protect Jews against Christian and other proselytizers.

In 1986, Ross became a self-proclaimed full-time private consultant and deprogrammer. In this capacity, he worked with the Cult Awareness Network (CAN).

In 1987, Ross deprogrammed two former members of the Branch Davidians in upstate New York. When this group was put under siege by the FBI, the CBS television network hired Ross as an on-scene analyst for their coverage of the events, and he was consulted by the FBI as well.

Government agencies' involvement with Ross in the bloody Waco, Texas incident has been criticized by Nancy Ammerman, a professor of sociology of religion, as well as other scholars of religion and the U.S. Congress.⁴⁰

In 1989, the CBS television program *48 Hours* covered Ross's deprogramming of a 14-year-old boy, Aaron Paron, a member of the Potter's House Christian Fellowship.

Jason Scott's kidnapping case: The kidnapping incident that led to the multimillion-dollar judgment against Ross took place on 18 January 1991. Jason Scott, an 18-year-old member of a Pentecostal Church, arrived at his family home in Bellevue, Washington and was violently assaulted by three men hired by Ross. They wrestled Scott to the ground, handcuffed his wrists, tied his ankles with rope, and gagged him from ear to ear with duct tape. He was afterwards thrown on his stomach with his hands beneath him while one of the deprogrammers, weighing 300 pounds, sat on his back. Jason's back, legs, and upper body were bruised and sore from being dragged across the floors, stairs, and a cement patio.

On 23 January 1991, the kidnapers, believing they had successfully "deprogrammed" Scott, took him to a local restaurant to "celebrate." Scott used the opportunity to flee; he called the police and was rescued. In this instance, Rick Ross once again evaded a criminal conviction, but Scott later filed a civil suit against Ross, his two associates, and CAN in federal court.

In September 1995, a nine-member jury unanimously held the defendants liable for conspiracy to deprive Scott of his civil rights and religious liberties. The case resulted in an award of \$875,000 USD in compensatory damages and punitive damages in the amount of \$5,000,000 USD against Ross, \$1,000,000 USD against CAN, and \$250,000 USD against each of Ross's two other co-defendants. Later, Ross and Scott reached a settlement in which Ross agreed to pay Scott \$5,000 USD and provide 200 hours of professional services at no charge. The case bankrupted the CAN, and a coalition of groups that were attacked by the CAN bought its assets and ran a new version of the CAN, which became active in religious freedom causes.

In 1996, Ross started a website with his archives. It was launched under the name "Rick A. Ross Institute for the Study of Destructive Cults, Controversial Groups, and Movements".

In the book *"Cults Inside Out: How People Get In and Can Get Out"* that Ross published on Amazon in 2014, he wrote that after the Scott case he stopped deprogramming work with adults, advising against such interventions with adults because of the risk of legal

⁴⁰ Quote from the INVESTIGATION INTO THE ACTIVITIES OF FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES TOWARD THE BRANCH DAVIDIANS: «Perhaps the most disturbing fact about this information, however, is that all of this drug nexus information originated with Mr. Breault, a disgruntled former member who left the group in 1989. The fact that Mr. Breault maintained an extensive biographical database on present and former members and was working with a self-proclaimed cult-buster Rick Ross in and of itself should have raised questions about Mr. Breault's intentions and credibility to the ATF agents.

Source: <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/104th-congress/house-report/749/1>

consequences. He claims that by 2004 he had handled more than 350 deprogramming cases in various countries.

Cult “extraction” of adults and minors that freely chose another religion was a good business for Rick Ross and the media made him famous in the 1980s and 1990s. By sowing moral panic in the minds of parents, spouses, or relatives, he could exploit their fears and get them to pay him thousands of dollars in fees to abduct, confine, and coerce people out of their newly chosen religious faith.

In Israel, Yad L’Achim and the ICVC made sure that Rick Ross was invited as a “cult expert” to partake in the compilation of “A report by a team of the ministry of welfare and social services examining the phenomenon of cults in Israel.”

This led to the May 2011 report of the Ministry of welfare, and afterwards to the establishment of a specific department in the said ministry for the treatment of cult victims in 2012. In 2013, the ICVC was given an annual budget of about 100,000 shekels and was invited to participate in the Committee for the Well-being of Children in the Knesset which played a key role in the drafting of the report “Children in abusive cults”, a follow up of the 2011 report.

A study of Rick Ross’ background shows that he is neither a scholar in religious studies nor a cult expert. He is a Jewish activist trying to fight missionary activities targeting the Jews and to reconvert, including through illegal means, Jews who changed their religion. There are such activists in all mainstream religions combating external proselytism against their religious community and conversions to another mainstream religion or new religious movements.

Deprogrammer Steven Hassan

Steve Hassan, a Jew, is a former Unification Church convert. After leaving Reverend Moon’s movement, he became a deprogrammer⁴¹ and worked with the Cult Awareness Network (CAN) before it went bankrupt. Fees for CAN deprogrammers were then varying between \$2,000 and \$10,000 USD).

In the 1970s, Hassan practiced forms of violent deprogramming involving illegal activities, such as kidnapping, deprivation of freedom as well as the use of psychological and physical violence to have people recanting their change of religious faith.

According to sworn affidavits from two of his victims, Claire Kelly and Arthur Roselle, Hassan and his ‘assistants’ kidnapped them, kept them prisoners for several days, and used physical force and coercion to have them renounce their new faith.

⁴¹ He got a Master's in Counseling Psychology from Cambridge College, not to be confused with Cambridge University or its subsidiaries. See https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambridge_College. So-called “non-profit colleges” in the US are not illegal but they are the lowest possible degree of higher education. They typically grant master’s degrees based on correspondence courses.

In an affidavit dated 20 September 1977, Claire Kelley, of Boston, testified:⁴²

In the ‘deprogramming’ which I underwent, I was confined to one room for three days, with the knobs taken off the windows, and a man seated outside the room for security against any escape attempt. This deprogramming took place in the Weederhold residence in Peterborough (New Hampshire) during Dec. 25 until Dec. 28; 1976.

That during the deprogramming, there was at least one other person present in the room at all times, and that I was always escorted to the bathroom by someone.

That for three days, I was held against my will, in this manner.

That, to the best of my knowledge, the deprogramming was all done under the direction of Steve Hassan, the chief deprogrammer, who was present at most times, during the deprogramming, and who did the actual deprogramming along with Chuck Pinson.

I do hereby declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing statements are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

On 7 July 1979, Arthur Roselle, a former deprogrammed Unification Church member, wrote and signed his first affidavit on his kidnapping and false imprisonment by Steve Hassan and accomplices.

Twelve years later, on 8 November 1991,⁴³ he wrote and signed a second affidavit reiterating the first one. He testified again that he had been held against his will for over a week in 1979 and that he had been a victim of a series of abuses: denial of sleep, denial of privacy, threats of physical violence, and long hours of endless insults against his faith. Eventually, after nine days of such abuse he succeeded in convincing his kidnappers that he had “seen the light” and, therefore, could be released. After regaining his freedom, Roselle filed a formal complaint against the kidnappers with the authorities.

The reason Roselle wrote a second affidavit 12 years later is that Hassan asked him if he would be willing to sign an affidavit he had prepared for him in which Roselle would state that Hassan had never kidnapped or beat him, deprived him of sleep, or treated him unkindly or inhumanly, but that instead he had always treated him with compassion and integrity. This unusual and risky move by Hassan was motivated by the fact that after appearing on the Sally Jessy Raphael TV program, he was named in a 12 million lawsuit for kidnapping, beating, and torturing members of ‘cults’, and he desperately needed Roselle’s help to prove it was not true.

Roselle turned down Hassan’s request because he would be liable for perjury and noted in his affidavit that it was his “wish to have him prosecuted for attempt of subornation of perjury.”

⁴² See <http://www.cesnur.org/2001/CAN/34/01.htm>

⁴³ See large excerpt of it in ANNEX III and the full statement at <http://www.cesnur.org/2001/CAN/33/01.htm>.

Later on, due to the high risk of new court proceedings, Hassan put an end to that practice and re-converted as an “exit counselor”, still a very profitable business that does not involve kidnapping and confinement.

On 8 March 2017, Cult News, run by deprogrammer Rick Ross, published an article about the excessive amount of Hassan’s fees - thousands of dollars, according to a plaintiff - and his trouble with the Board of Registration of Allied Mental Health Professionals:

Steve Hassan has a long history of complaints, including complaints filed with his licensing board.

On April 20, 2012 Hassan was officially notified by the Board of Registration of Allied Mental Health Professionals in Massachusetts that he was facing an official complaint filed by a former client against him. The board advised Hassan in an [Order to Show Cause](#), that he might have his license as a mental health professional revoked or suspended.

The Massachusetts licensing board decided to forward the complaint for prosecution (In the matter of Steven A. Hassan Docket No. MH-12-014).

In June 2011 Hassan was served with three subpoenas and he retained an attorney to respond to those subpoenas. Hassan’s attorney then wrote a letter to the individual that served him, which contained the names of two former clients. Subsequently Hassan posted the letter publicly at his website “[Freedom of Mind](#)” and also used both [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to further share the contents of the letter.

According to Hassan’s licensing board he violated ethical provisions of both the American Mental Health Counselors Association and the American Counseling Association (ACA). Specifically regarding “client confidentiality” and the expectation that “no information will be released without the client’s permission and written consent.”

Hassan’s licensing board also cited an ACA ethical code violation of “failing to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of clients.”

The Massachusetts licensing board concluded that Hassan’s conduct constituted “unprofessional conduct and conduct that undermines public confidence in the integrity of the profession.”⁴⁴

The charges filed against him by a former client were eventually dismissed without prejudice, however, as of May 2013, the Cult Education Institute added a disclaimer⁴⁵ concerning Steve Hassan, noting numerous complaints about him⁴⁶ and saying, among other things:

Steve Hassan does not publicly disclose his fee schedule, but according to complaints he has charged fees varying from \$250.00 per hour or \$2,500.00 per day to \$500.00

⁴⁴ See full article at <https://cultnews.com/2017/03/serious-complaints-about-cult-specialist-steven-hassan/>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See <https://www.culteducation.com/group/1289-general-information/8227-disclaimer-regarding-steve-hassan.html>

per hour or \$5,000.00 per day. This does not include Steve Hassan's expenses, which according to complaints can be quite substantial.

Steve Hassan has charged families tens of thousands of dollars and provided questionable results. One family that recently complained about Steve Hassan cited total fees charged of almost \$50,000.00 and said that the very expensive intervention effort ended in failure. (...)

Steve Hassan runs a for-profit corporation called "Freedom of Mind." Mr. Hassan is listed as the corporate agent for that business as well as its president and treasurer.

CEI does not recommend "Freedom of Mind" as a resource.

CEI also does not list or recommend Steve Hassan's books.

As a former 'deprogrammer' and now an 'exit counselor', Hassan based all of his "scientific" theories (regarding mind control, brainwashing, mental manipulation...) on those of Margaret Singer, despite the fact that these theories were rejected by both the scientific community and the courts in cases of conversions to new religious movements.⁴⁷

Conclusions

The anti-cult organization ICVC is closely connected to the ultra-orthodox Jewish association Yad L'Achim that is in a power struggle with other movements inside Judaism in Israel. Yad L'Achim uses the ICVC as a 'secular arm' that it has indirectly financed and in which it has injected staff from its own ranks.

Through the ICVC, the masterminds of Yad L'Achim have become privileged interlocutors of the Knesset, the government, the judiciary, the police, and other public institutions, and, thus, are able to achieve its objectives: to bring back to 'orthodoxy' more Jews from other competing Jewish groups; integrate Jewish immigrants in their movement; fight against religious and spiritual groups proselytizing among Jews; and campaign in favor of a law against missionary activities in Israel.

The ICVC and Yad L'Achim publicly praise China's repression of Falun Gong and other heterodox religious movements, of which thousands are prisoners in the country.

The ICVC is a secular façade; its successive directors and employees have no academic background in religious matters, and religious studies scholars and the scientific establishment have denounced the lack of expertise of the ICVC's Israeli "cult experts". Along the same line, courts have rejected their "mind control", "brainwashing", and "mental manipulation"

⁴⁷ Those theories have been used in Japan to deprogram thousands of converts to the Unification Church and hundreds to the movement of Jehovah's Witnesses in total impunity from the 1970s. In 2013, Human Rights Without Frontiers lodged a complaint with the UN Human Rights Committee and one year later, Mr Toru Goto, kept in confinement during 12 years for deprogramming, won a civil case against his kidnappers and deprogrammers. These procedures had a deterring effect on the Japanese deprogrammers and they stopped their activities. See the book published by Human Rights Without Frontiers: "Japan: Abduction & Deprivation of Freedom for the Purpose of Religious De-conversion" (Available on Amazon and also at <http://hrwf.eu/forb/our-reports/>)

theories as unfounded. Last but not least, the foreign “cult experts” they have involved in their campaigns and political lobbying activities in Israel have appeared to be experts in forceful change of religion, using psychological and physical violence, hereby violating the laws of their country.

Once more, FECRIS has integrated a controversial association, infiltrated by an extremist religious group, into its organigram.

In Russia, FECRIS’ affiliate is headed by the notorious Alexander Dvorkin, who belongs to the most radical wing of the Russian Orthodox Church, and is known for his hate speech against new religious movements.

In Serbia, FECRIS’ affiliate was close to radical groups inside the Serbian Orthodox Church and to supporters of the Milosevic regime.

In Israel, FECRIS’ correspondent, the ICVC, is close to a controversial, radical ultra-orthodox movement that endorses China’s repression of Falun Gong practitioners and lobby for various forms of segregation.

FECRIS, a state-funded organisation that receives over 95% of its funding⁴⁸ from public money in France, a secular country, alarmingly continues to fail to respect its obligation to remain neutral.

ANNEX I: Affidavit of Amir Zmora

I the undersigned, Amir Zmora, ID 059583302, having been warned that I must tell the truth and that I will be subject to punishment by law if I do not comply, hereby declare:

- 1) I am giving my affidavit as part of Civil Case 18188-11-15 at the request of the Bnei Baruch Kabbalah La’am association (henceforth: Bnei Baruch). I did not receive any fee or any other benefit in return for this affidavit, and I am not a student or activist of Bnei Baruch.
- 2) I live in Timrat, Israel, and am a media consultant and psychotherapist. In 2006, I was asked to accompany the establishment of an entity called The Israeli Center for Cult Victims (henceforth: the center), a title that I participated in composing and which I later regrettably learned did not reflect the true purpose of this entity.
- 3) I came across the activity of what was then an association, and what is today a public benefit company, through my acquaintance with Mrs. Ayelet Kedem, a former journalist in *Yediot Aharonot*, whom I met while I was serving as the spokesperson for the Technion. Ayelet told me that she had been appointed as the CEO of a new association whose role was to assist cult victims, and she asked for my help.

⁴⁸ See the special issue of Religion-Staat-Gesellschaft, *Journal for the Study of Beliefs and Worldviews*, “Freedom of Religion or Belief Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality, A Case Study: FECRIS”, ed. by Willy Fautré/ Human Rights Without Frontiers and published by Gerhard Besier and Hubert Seiwert, Technical University Dresden (Germany), 224 p. (2012).

4) I gladly agreed as I viewed it as a welcome and worthy activity where the emphasis was, from my perspective, treatment of and assistance to the victims themselves. There is sometimes an unconscious hidden crack in man, which can expand during an activity that is worthy and good in the eyes of many. Yet, this does not mean that the activity is hurtful. For example, an individual might train in a gym incorrectly and hurt oneself, but this does not mean that a gym is a dangerous place.

5) Over months of consulting and working for the center, which I did on a completely voluntary basis, I began to notice that the center's main focus was not the cult victims themselves, people who needed emotional, therapeutic assistance, but rather marking and acting against groups that the center defined as cults.

6) Initially, the center's focus was on Scientology, but it gradually shifted toward other groups of many kinds, including completely normative and appropriate groups such as practitioners of yoga and meditation, various educational approaches such as anthroposophy, various New Age groups, and even factions of Judaism that the center found unworthy. For clarity, let me point out that, at the time, even alternative healing methods such as Reiki and its healers were defined as a cult.

7) It is important to note that the majority of the center's resources were allocated against "cults" and that delineating and deciding to take action against a particular group through various institutions was decided by the center's management as a matter of policy, and not as a result of testimonies or victims who approached the center for help.

8) The modus operandi is based on the fact that in Israel there is no legal definition of a cult or distinction made between a group legitimately organizing around a topic or an idea and a dangerous cult where abuse and exploitation take place. Additionally, the center exploits the fact that no formal governmental entity deals with the subject, so the center took the opportunity to appoint itself as the highest authority in this area. The activities of the center are constant identification and labeling of the persecuted organization to the point of undermining its public image. This is how it acted then and this is how the center seems to act today.

9) I saw first-hand people who were confused or hurt being manipulated when they came to the center with many questions about themselves or about a family member, questions that mostly revolved around a sense of remoteness and loss of contact with people close to them. Although it was apparent that many of these problems could be resolved through standard psychological therapy of the victim, the individuals, who were often parents of victims, were led to think that they had fallen into the hands of an injurious cult.

10) These facts deeply troubled me. I viewed this as a violation of freedom of religion and the foundations of democracy. I did not want to continue being a part of such an activity. I came to the center with a sincere desire to help people and not to persecute minority groups, even such that could appear odd to some.

11) Along the way, questions arose for me to which I received no answers, mainly about the agenda behind the center and those leading it, which remained concealed and hidden from me and from the public. I approached Ayelet and shared my concerns and criticism with her. It was apparent she was not surprised and that she, too, was uncomfortable with the situation.

Ayelet told me that she, too, was unhappy with the situation but she thought that we could use this platform to do good, and this is what she was trying to do.

12) Only then, for the first time, did she tell me who was really behind the center: a Haredi businessman named Rami Feller who initiated the center and was its chief donor. At that time, I still didn't know that Feller was a former donor and key activists in the extremist Haredi organization *Yad L'Achim* [Hand for Brothers].

13) *Yad L'Achim* is an organization that deals with "saving lost Jews" by returning them to Orthodox Judaism from groups that it defines as cults, which are in fact any faction that does not belong to Orthodox Haredi Judaism. *Yad L'Achim* has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the Israeli public following brutal actions toward various groups, which is probably why it established a new entity with a "secular, therapeutic façade," which is the center. It should be noted that the current manager of the center, Mrs. Rachel Lichtenstein, was drafted from the ranks of *Yad L'Achim* with whom she worked in the past.

14) I spoke to Rami Feller in his office, after which I was even invited to a meeting at his home in Bnei Braq. I met an astute, smart, and pleasant man, who is a very successful businessman and himself was a Haredi repentant Jew [a Jew who was not religious but became so]. He told me that his son was a victim of the activities of what he defined as a cult, where he was exposed to cultures and methods that Mr. Feller strongly opposed. Since then, Feller had decided to act with resolve against groups and methods that in his eyes "take our children captive."

15) Feller gave me as a gift a book that he wrote (with Dr. Boaz Caspi) "The Yearning for the Deep." In it, under the guise of a secular novel, he lays out his agenda that many conventional and legitimate spiritual paths—among them are Zen, Tantra, Adler's method, Frankle, Freud, and Scientology—are all inappropriate and even injurious. He even argues that psychological therapy is problematic because the psychologist acts on his personal set of values (which could be problematic) (p 531).

16) I shared with him that I, too, engaged in cultural, spiritual activities such as meditation, which he might define as a cult, but I don't see them as injurious. It took me a while to understand that it was precisely because of this, I and others who were active in the center, served as a cover up to conceal his real intention which is to delegitimize any Jewish faction that is not orthodox. When I realized this, I terminated my activity for the center. I also know that not long after I left, Ayelet Kedem also resigned from her office.

17) Since then, I have been following the activity of the center. There is no doubt that the center also conducts positive activities such as its assistance to victims of Goel Ratzon and Elijah Chai. At the same time, a substantial part of the activity is still turned toward persecution and destruction of anything that does not coincide with their ideology, similar to the activity of *Yad L'Achim*. The center has given itself the authority to determine which path or faith is legitimate and which is not, much like Orwell's "Thought Police."

18) Over the years, I had the opportunity to know and even accompany, for a fee or gratis, additional communities and groups that engage in spiritual learning from various traditions, including a Jewish organization that teaches the wisdom of Kabbalah not as part of the Orthodox, Haredi learning framework. The center has defined all of them as dangerous cults

and is acting to undermine their public image, and uses every means at its disposal to achieve this, causing colossal damage to good and honest people.

19) This is my name, this is my signature, and the content of my affidavit is true.

Amir Zmora

Confirmation

I the undersigned Hanoch Dov Milwidsky, Adv., REG No. 27177, hereby confirm that on the date of 22.02.2016, Mr. Amir Zmora, ID 059583302, appeared before me and confirmed the correctness of the above affidavit. After I warned him that he must declare the truth and he will be subject to the punishments stipulated in the law if he does not do so, he signed the affidavit.

Hanoch Milvitzky, Attorney

ANNEX II: Yad L'Achim: Assisting the Chinese in their struggle against cults

A member of the Department for the Fight against Missionaries and Cults of Yad L'Achim was invited to a convention of the Chinese authorities on the struggle against cults, where he shared accumulated organisational knowledge with those present.

Rabbi Benjamin Kluger, one of the employees of the Department for the Fight against Missionaries and Cults of Yad L'Achim, English and French speaker, returned this weekend from a special visit to Beijing, the capital of China, where he flew, funded by the Chinese authorities, having accepted the unusual invitation extended to Yad L'Achim by the Chinese Ministry of Interior.

The invitation, which was forwarded to the office of Yad L'Achim by the Chinese embassy in Israel, stated that all travel and accommodation costs for a Yad L'Achim representative would be covered by the Chinese government, in order to bring a "specialist of Yad L'Achim for combating destructive cults" as the invitation proclaimed "a mission of utmost importance".

Participating in the convention was important to Yad L'Achim due to the fact that these cults have many centers of operation in the Jewish population throughout Israel.

"The authorities in China", said Rabbi Kluger upon his return, "are dealing with a few destructive cults for quite some time now, amongst which are the practitioners of the Falun Gong cult based there. This cult is very well known to us here in Israel in its activity amongst many Jewish people of all ages, despite the many sanctions the Chinese governments imposed on it, including outlawing it forthright. The authorities are constantly looking for additional ways to overcome this phenomenon and make it vanish".

The special convention held by the Chinese Ministry of Interior brought together four experts on cult activities from all over the world. Over four days of lecturing, workshops, and symposia, the experts were riveted by Rabbi Kluger's informative words, who presented, one after another, the methods of operations of the cults and even showed the attendees the successes garnered by Yad L'Achim, with divine providence, for decades of activity in preventing and thwarting stray Jews out of the cults they were sucked into.

Those present displayed high interest in the examples Rabbi Kluger presented; Rick Ross, considered to be an international authority on cults, who arrived to the convention from the US, said at the end of the discussions that "the strategic tactic of the Israeli Yad L'Achim organization is worthy of a scientific study in itself". The head of the Faculty for Sciences of Beijing University, who was the convention host, admiringly summarized on behalf of all the participants: "Honorable Rabbi, you have made us all much wiser and we are full of appreciation to the wise words and courageous actions you, the people of Yad L'Achim, are commanding".

Rabbi Shalom Dov Lipschitz, Chairman of Yad L'Achim, referred to these words ironically, saying: "If the government in Israel had learned from the Chinese authorities how to forcefully fight dubious and destructive cults - the missionaries would never lift their heads".

"Regretfully, the Chinese understood what here in Israel they refuse to understand", said Rabbi Lipschitz and he mentioned the statement he published a few days ago to all the heads of the religious and Haredi political parties asking them to announce that they will not be part of any government without a promise to amend the Law against Missionary Activity".

ANNEX III: Affidavit of Arthur Roselle (Excerpt)

I was a member of the Unification Church for 1974 to 1979. During 1976, while an adult member of the Unification church, I was the victim of a forcible kidnapping in Utica, Michigan. Steven Hassan aided, abetted and conspired in my kidnapping and in my subsequent false imprisonment. Several other men also took part in these crimes. The purpose of my kidnapping and false imprisonment was to break my faith in my religious beliefs and thereby "deprogram me". The kidnapers, including Steven Hassan, physically held me captive during the first week of the kidnapping and false imprisonment. I finally managed to escape at the end of the second week.

When I first tried to escape from my kidnapers, they seized my arms and threw me down to the floor. This caused me to hit the tile floor with my chin and cheek. As a result, I received a cut on the inside of my lower lip and bruises on my chin cheek bone. My hands and feet were then tied and I was carried into a small room and placed on a cot. Professional deprogrammers Steven Hassan and Helen Lloyd then began working in shifts to forcibly deprogram me away from my chosen religious beliefs.

During the entire first three days of my kidnapping and false imprisonment, I was tied up. Steven Hassan and Ellen Lloyd took shifts deprogramming me so that I was not allowed to sleep.

When the deprogramming started, I decided not to speak or eat. After two days of not speaking or eating, Steven Hassan threatened to subject me to a series of shots

During the first three days of my kidnapping and false imprisonment, Steven Hassan insulted me and humiliated me as a person. I felt like a capture animal in a zoo.

After the first three days of my kidnapping and false imprisonment, the circulation in my hands was cut off because my hands had been tightly tied behind my back for the entire time.

Both of my hands were badly swollen and were the color of a bruise.

During the first three days, I was always escorted to the bathroom while my hands were still bound and tied. I was not washed or shaved. With help, I was able to urinate into a pot. Due to the embarrassment of being watched at all times, I did not allow myself to defecate.

Steven Hassan frequently asked me to deny the authenticity of my religious beliefs during the time I was being held against my will.

On July 7, 1979, I executed a three page affidavit concerning my kidnapping and false imprisonment. I swore the contents of this affidavit to be true before Mary Beth Pender, a notary public in Kalkaska, Michigan. A copy of the affidavit is attached to this declaration and is incorporated herein.