

Midnight (Tel Aviv)

Scandal Hits Religious Sects

By HARRY SCOTT

The many self-styled religious cults in the United States have two things in common: they brainwash our young people, and they are dedicated to making money — for their own top brass. In last week's MIDNIGHT, two young "Moonies" told how they stayed to make a fortune for the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, head of the Unification Church. This week, escapees from the Hari Krishna and Divine Light Mission cults tell their exciting stories.

They were interviewed at a rehabilitation center in Arizona which, at no cost, helps young people rescued from the cults. Parents who are concerned about the cults sweeping the country can write for advice to Mrs. Joe Alexander, Freedom Ranch Rehabilitation Center, Box 4340, Tucson, Arizona 85717. Enclosure stamped, self-addressed envelope.

'I Was Taught To Harvest \$\$\$'

"I walked the streets, dressed in flowing Hindu robes, my head shaved, beads around my neck, asking donations in the name of the god Krishna. — 'It sounds ridiculous now, but I thought I was discovering the Absolute Truth.' This is how Pete Johnston, 16, of California, describes his brief sojourn with the Hari Krishna cult.

"On my school vacation last summer, I was invited to spend a weekend at a Krishna temple and learn something about their religion. I rose at 3 a.m. to chant prayers, and for several hours during the day I practiced *gapa*, which is chanting prayers almost

silently to oneself. This has a strong, self-hypnotizing effect. Immediately I said I would stay a little longer, I was sent to another temple in Portland, Ore. That's when the mind takeover really began.

"My head was shaved, except for one lock. I was given Hindu robes and beads to wear. The immediate effect was to isolate me from my former self. I was allowed no newspapers, and was completely cut off from the outside world. Then the brainwashing began in earnest.

"It was hammered into me that all my life outside the Hari Krishna cult was an illusion — my parents, the rest of the world. Only the cult was good, and the only way to serve God was to give myself totally up to the cause of the cult.

"Any food other than the cult's vegetarian diet was sinful. To sleep more than six hours a night was sinful.



KRISHNA FOUNDER: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

"I must have passed the test, for I graduated to the real object of the cult — harvesting money. Three or four of us would make up a team, and on weekends, we'd haunt the center of a town. We'd hand a passerby a flower and ask for a donation. My team's average weekend take was \$600, which we handed over to the temple 'president.' We drew no pay ourselves.

"The Hari Krishna cult is run by an Indian magazine publisher, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Eighty years old now, he arrived in the U.S. in 1965 with \$5 in his pocket. He started chanting in New York's Central Park, and young people started following him. Now he has temples all over the United States and Europe, and he's a multimillionaire.

"He teaches the 'Absolute Truth' philosophy, which is that everything is an illusion except his views. Of course, it is no illusion that the Swami runs around in a Rolls Royce and flies all over the place collecting money.

After a few months, Pete Johnston lost his car. He reported it to the local police, who quickly discovered he was listed as a runaway. Taken back to his parents, they had him "de-programmed." When MIDNIGHT spoke to him, he was still undergoing rehabilitation.

"Thank God my parents got me out! Mind control is a scary thing — I have a first-hand knowledge of it now. The brainwashing methods used by the cults should be made known, so that parents can see what is being done to their children."



BARRIE BAER (right), 22, worked seven days a week, for room and board only when she joined Divine Light Mission. **Pete Johnston**, 16, became a member of the Hari Krishna cult and soon graduated to their main objective of harvesting money. They both are happy to be free of the cults and look forward to their futures.