

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #171

Mormonism vs. Scientology: A Comparison

29th Jun, 2021

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today is part three of our three-part series on Mormonism and Scientology.

[00:00:30] In part one we learned about the history of Mormonism, from its [unusual¹](#) [founding story²](#), how Mormons ended up at Salt Lake City to how a Mormon almost became a US president.

¹ interesting because different from others

² the story of how it began



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[00:00:44] Then in part two it was on to Scientology, from its probably even more [bizarre³ founding story](#), its [eccentric⁴ founder⁵](#), L.Ron Hubbard, how it managed to [get a grip on⁶](#) Hollywood and of course, the [controversies⁷](#) around it.

[00:01:03] If you haven't listened to those two yet, I would recommend listening to them first, as a knowledge of both Mormonism and Scientology will be helpful for getting the most out of today's episode, where we are going to compare and [contrast⁸](#) the two, and then leave with some thoughts on what questions both these belief systems raise about religion in general.

[00:01:29] OK then, let's get started.

[00:01:33] Now, you might be thinking that a comparison between Mormonism and Scientology is [artificial⁹](#), that it is like comparing a dog to a watermelon, and that there is no value in it.

³ very strange

⁴ not based on what is generally considered normal

⁵ someone who starts an organisation

⁶ take control of

⁷ intense discussions and disagreements

⁸ compare and show the differences of

⁹ made up, not natural



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[00:01:46] It certainly isn't a comparison that either group [endorses](#)¹⁰.

[00:01:52] To a Mormon, a belief in Scientology is [wholly](#)¹¹ [incompatible](#)¹² with their belief system.

[00:01:59] And to a Scientologist, Mormonism is equally weird and strange.

[00:02:05] The system of worship is different, the belief in a God is different, the way in which the organisation is structured is different, they are certainly different belief systems.

[00:02:17] But, as we will learn about in today's episode, they have more in common than either group might like to admit.

[00:02:25] Let's start with the [founding story](#) of the religion, because for both Scientology and Mormonism, they are inseparable from the men who created it.

[00:02:37] For starters, the lives of both [founders](#)¹³, Joseph Smith Junior and L.Ron Hubbard have been greatly [romanticised](#)¹⁴ by their followers.

¹⁰ supports

¹¹ completely

¹² not able to exist with

¹³ people who start an organisation

¹⁴ considered better than they were



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[00:02:46] Smith's story is, as you will remember, of a young boy who is visited by God and Jesus, told where to find these mysterious golden plates, and translates an ancient Egyptian language to create The Book of Mormon.

[00:03:02] And for L.Ron Hubbard, his is the story of a war hero who creates a new [self-help](#)¹⁵ system that he turns into a religion and becomes the [foundation](#)¹⁶ of Scientology.

[00:03:15] That's the official [policy line](#)¹⁷, of course.

[00:03:19] But to a critic of Mormonism or Scientology, Smith's story is of a [charlatan](#)¹⁸, a [fraudster](#)¹⁹ who [exploited](#)²⁰ the divisions of 19th Century America to draw people into his [fraud](#)²¹.

[00:03:34] And for critics of L. Ron Hubbard, he too is a [fraudster](#), an [out-of-luck](#)²² science fiction writer who believes the key to wealth and success is by starting a

¹⁵ the activity of helping yourself without depending on others

¹⁶ basis

¹⁷ a set of facts and ideas used as the basis of an organisation

¹⁸ someone who says that he has knowledge and skills that he doesn't

¹⁹ someone who gets money by telling lies

²⁰ took advantage of them in order to gain money

²¹ the crime of getting money by telling lies

²² not successful



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religion, and he manages to rewrite history to position himself as a hero, when in fact he is nothing of the sort.

[00:03:55] This leads us on to our second point of comparison, that both Mormonism and Scientology have been [labelled](#)²³ a [cult](#)²⁴.

[00:04:04] Now, if you look up the definition of the word “[cult](#)” in a dictionary it will tell you that it is something like “a system of religious [devotion](#)²⁵ directed towards a particular figure or object”.

[00:04:19] The [implicit](#)²⁶ suggestion when using the word “[cult](#)” is that the belief isn’t a genuine religion, that its followers believe in something that cannot be true because it is so [unorthodox](#)²⁷ and strange, and that they have been somehow [tricked](#)²⁸ into believing in it, because of the power of one extremely [charismatic](#)²⁹ individual.

²³ considered as

²⁴ a religious group of people who behave in strange and secret ways

²⁵ loyalty and love for someone or something

²⁶ suggested though not directly expressed

²⁷ different from what is considered normal or expected

²⁸ deceived, fooled

²⁹ charming, attractive



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[00:04:44] We'll revisit this point later on, but it is an important thing to note that both Mormonism and Scientology have, ever since their founding, been considered to be [unorthodox](#) and non-traditional belief systems.

[00:05:00] This is especially true for Scientology.

[00:05:03] Mormonism has become far more [mainstream](#)³⁰, more accepted.

[00:05:08] Mitt Romney, the US Presidential candidate, was a famous practising mormon.

[00:05:14] The US ambassador to China and then Russia, a man called Jon Huntsman, was also a Mormon.

[00:05:22] But is the reason that Mormonism is now more accepted and [mainstream](#) because it is a more attractive, more [sensible](#)³¹, more believable religion?

[00:05:33] Or is it just because it's had more time to develop?

[00:05:37] Mormonism 100 years ago, when the religion was at a similar stage of development to Scientology today, was considered to be as weird and [cult-like](#)³² as Scientology is in 2021, if not more.

[00:05:53] Scientology has not even existed for 70 years.

³⁰ accepted by many people

³¹ reasonable, rational

³² similar to a cult



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[00:05:57] Mormonism, 70 years into its existence had only just [renounced³³ polygamy³⁴](#), or plural marriage, and was still considered to be a [cult-like](#) religion by the majority of the US population.

[00:06:12] Indeed, the early days of Mormonism saw great violence against Mormons, with followers of the religion being attacked, and of course its leader, Joseph Smith Junior, being killed by an anti-Mormon [mob³⁵](#).

[00:06:27] Scientology came over a hundred years later, in perhaps a slightly more [civilised³⁶](#) world, so there were fewer [mobs³⁷](#) attacking its followers, but it too was [labelled](#) a dangerous [cult](#).

[00:06:41] The current [scepticism³⁸](#) and opposition towards both Mormonism and Scientology is thought to be part of the reason that both religions are so [secretive³⁹](#), that the [inner workings⁴⁰](#) of the church are unknown to non-believers.

³³ officially rejected a way of life

³⁴ the custom of being married to more than one person at the same time

³⁵ a large, angry group of people

³⁶ developed in culture or way of life

³⁷ large and angry groups of people

³⁸ doubt regarding the truth of something

³⁹ not sharing information

⁴⁰ the parts of a system that are not known publicly



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[00:06:57] As we heard about in part one, you cannot go into a Mormon temple if you are a non-Mormon.

[00:07:04] And as for Scientology, it is even more [secretive](#), with the inner workings of Scientology only available to those who have continued to progress to higher levels, and paid [handsomely](#)⁴¹ for the process.

[00:07:20] This leads us on to our next similarity, or at least our next point of comparison that people have made, and that is to do with the [vast](#)⁴² wealth that both The Mormon Church and The Church of Scientology have [amassed](#)⁴³ over their relatively short lifespans.

[00:07:39] As a Mormon, you are [encouraged](#)⁴⁴, or perhaps I should say [required](#)⁴⁵, to pay 10% of your income to the church, which has led the church to have a reported \$100 billion [pile](#)⁴⁶ of [assets](#).

⁴¹ a lot

⁴² extremely big

⁴³ collected (especially for a large amount of money)

⁴⁴ persuaded, pushed towards taking an action

⁴⁵ expected to do something necessary

⁴⁶ a large amount



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[00:07:54] And even though there are far fewer Scientologists than Mormons, progressing through the levels of Scientology can be very expensive, costing followers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

[00:08:09] This has meant that the Church of Scientology certainly isn't short of cash either - it has an estimated \$2 billion worth of [assets](#)⁴⁷, including large houses, boats, and other property all over the world.

[00:08:25] Its leader, David Miscavige, also reportedly travels everywhere on a private jet and only wears [custom-made](#)⁴⁸ leather shoes from London.

[00:08:36] Yet another similarity is about what a tight [grip](#)⁴⁹ both religions hold on their followers, and how hard it is to actually leave the church once you are in.

[00:08:47] There are [countless](#)⁵⁰ internet groups and forums of ex-Mormons and ex-Scientologists, where experiences are shared with others who have gone through a similar thing.

[00:08:59] Let's start with Mormonism.

⁴⁷ highly valued property

⁴⁸ specially made for him

⁴⁹ control

⁵⁰ too many to be counted



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[00:09:01] Mormons place a lot of importance on the family unit, and there are [countless](#)⁵¹ stories of [heartbreak](#)⁵² when one family member decides to leave.

[00:09:13] Naturally, this isn't unique to Mormonism, and there are just as many stories of [devout](#)⁵³ Catholics, Protestants, Muslims or Jews who have experienced similar family breakups when a child or [sibling](#)⁵⁴ decides to leave the religion.

[00:09:31] When it comes to Scientology though, leaving is even harder.

[00:09:36] If someone looks like they are going to leave the church of Scientology, they are [labelled](#) a [Suppressive](#)⁵⁵ Person, and the church will reportedly force other Scientologists to [break off](#)⁵⁶ all contact with them.

[00:09:50] Mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, there are tales of families being [torn](#)⁵⁷ [apart](#)⁵⁷ because one person wants to stop being a Scientologist.

⁵¹ too many to be counted

⁵² disappointment and sadness

⁵³ showing deep feelings and loyalty towards a religion

⁵⁴ a brother or sister

⁵⁵ someone with psychological issues who is not fit to live in a society

⁵⁶ stop

⁵⁷ seperated, destroyed



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[00:10:01] As we heard about in the last episode, the Church of Scientology keeps detailed records on all of the personal [confessions](#)⁵⁸ of its members during their [auditing](#)⁵⁹ sessions, during their therapy-type sessions, and it is believed to use this material as [blackmail](#)⁶⁰ to stop people leaving the church.

[00:10:23] So, once you're in, it's not so easy to get out.

[00:10:28] Now, while it is possible to debate some of the similarities that we have mentioned, there is one similarity between the two that is [undeniable](#)⁶¹.

[00:10:37] They are two of the most successful modern religions, if by modern we define this as being created in the past 200 years, and if by successful we define it as global influence and number of followers.

[00:10:52] No other actual religion comes close.

[00:10:56] There are, of course, other [branches](#)⁶² of religions, such as Pentecostalism and evangelical Anglicanism, but these are both [branches](#) of Christianity, they aren't unique religions.

⁵⁸ formal acts of admitting having done something wrong in order to be forgiven by god

⁵⁹ a Scientology method used with the purpose of ridding one's mind of negative past influences

⁶⁰ the act of forcing someone to do something by telling them that they will share their secrets if they don't do it

⁶¹ unable to be denied, certainly true

⁶² divisions, parts



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[00:11:11] Why is this then? What [factors](#)⁶³ have allowed Mormonism and Scientology to [flourish](#)⁶⁴?

[00:11:17] We've discussed some of the [factors](#), but there is one important one we haven't yet covered in detail, and that is to do with where they were founded.

[00:11:29] They were both [founded](#)⁶⁵ in The United States of America.

[00:11:33] For Mormonism, one of the reasons it is thought to have been [adopted](#)⁶⁶ so [enthusiastically](#)⁶⁷ by its early supporters is that it placed the Americas at the heart of its religion.

[00:11:47] To remind you, The Book of Mormon, the religious text at the heart of the religion, says that the United States is the Promised Land, that the Garden of Eden was located in Missouri, and that early Jewish settlers had moved to the Americas in 600 BC.

[00:12:07] Naturally, in a country with such a strong sense that it is the best country in the world, this message found a [receptive](#)⁶⁸ audience.

⁶³ facts that influence the result of something

⁶⁴ develop successfully

⁶⁵ began

⁶⁶ accepted

⁶⁷ in a way that shows intense interest and approval

⁶⁸ willing to consider and accept new ideas



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[00:12:17] And when it comes to Scientology, there is certainly something uniquely American about the story of a science fiction writer who becomes an amateur, [self-taught](#)⁶⁹, psychotherapist, and later the head of an incredibly [profitable](#)⁷⁰ church, with a religion based on aliens dropping people into volcanoes and blowing them up with atomic bombs.

[00:12:43] By uniquely American I certainly don't mean [gullible](#)⁷¹, or likely to believe [improbable](#)⁷² stories.

[00:12:50] But rather The United States of America as a country was only 50 years old when Mormonism was [founded](#), and 175 years old when Scientology arrived on the scene.

[00:13:03] It was, and you could certainly argue still is, a land of opportunity, where people are free to believe whatever they want to believe, however [unorthodox](#) and unusual that might have sounded to people at the time.

[00:13:18] It was a country where a man could say he had found some gold plates, or a man could say that he had developed a new psychiatric treatment and turn it into a religion.

⁶⁹ having learned things and skills on his own, without the help of others

⁷⁰ successful financially

⁷¹ easily deceived or tricked

⁷² not likely to be true



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[00:13:29] In more developed, older, countries when people comparable to Joseph Smith Junior or L.Ron Hubbard had tried to start their own religions, they were quickly [shut down](#)⁷³.

[00:13:42] In 19th century China, just as Mormonism was getting started, a man called Hong Xiuquan had claimed to be the Heavenly King and that he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ.

[00:13:55] Although he did manage to [amass](#)⁷⁴ around 30,000 followers, he was captured by the authorities and killed while [in custody](#)⁷⁵. If you're interested in learning more about this, the name for it is the Taiping Rebellion.

[00:14:11] Meanwhile in Europe of the 19th century, [proclaiming](#)⁷⁶ that you had [divine](#)⁷⁷ [visions](#)⁷⁸, or you were Jesus [reincarnated](#)⁷⁹ was likely to mean being [locked up](#)⁸⁰ in a [mental asylum](#)⁸¹, being thrown in prison, or being executed.

⁷³ stopped to exist

⁷⁴ get a large amount of

⁷⁵ in prison

⁷⁶ announcing publicly

⁷⁷ coming from God

⁷⁸ experiences of seeing something in your mind

⁷⁹ reborn in your body

⁸⁰ put in and secured

⁸¹ a hospital for mentally sick people



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[00:14:28] So, what does this tell us?

[00:14:31] What can we learn from the [comparative](#)⁸² success of these two new religions? What can we take from all of this?

[00:14:38] And how does it make us think about our own religions, if indeed you are a religious person?

[00:14:46] The first thing to note is that, when you step back for a minute and think about the details of what any religion believes, it is hard to [objectively](#)⁸³ say that one is more [probable](#)⁸⁴ than the other.

[00:14:59] You might hear about the story of Joseph Smith Junior and the golden plates, and learn about the [inconsistencies](#)⁸⁵ in The Book of Mormon and think, well how could anyone actually believe that?

[00:15:11] Or perhaps you might hear the [founding story](#) of Scientology, and of the galactic lord Xenu who blows up humans with atomic bombs, and think, well that's obviously not true.

⁸² compared to other similar things, relative

⁸³ in a way that is based on facts and truth

⁸⁴ likely to be true

⁸⁵ disagreements between ideas and statements that are contained



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[00:15:24] But is this because the actual details of what Scientologists or Mormons believe are so hard to [fathom](#)⁸⁶, so hard to believe, or is it because we know the [founding story](#), because it is so comparatively recent, and therefore we are more [cynical](#)⁸⁷ about it?

[00:15:44] If the Bible, the Quran, or the Torah had been written 50 years ago and we knew the author, or the person who [uncovered](#)⁸⁸ it, might we feel slightly differently about the actual content of these books?

[00:16:01] What an understanding of Mormonism and Scientology do help us with, I think, is an understanding of human nature.

[00:16:10] As humans, we want to belong, we want to be part of something bigger than ourselves, and we want to be part of something that we believe will make our lives better.

[00:16:22] For many people, exactly what that thing is isn't the most important [factor](#)⁸⁹, the most important thing is to be part of something bigger than yourself.

⁸⁶ understand and believe

⁸⁷ believing that people are only doing things for personal gain

⁸⁸ discovered something secret or lost

⁸⁹ a fact that influences the result of something



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[00:16:33] And even if you believe something that might, to the outside world, seem mad and [defy](#)⁹⁰ all logic, even if someone sits you down and says, look, does it really seem [probable](#) that there were golden plates dug up from the earth, or that an intergalactic [warlord](#)⁹¹ threw humans into a volcano and blew them up with nuclear weapons, this doesn't matter because you want to believe it.

[00:17:01] Indeed, one could [draw parallels](#)⁹² with the number of people who believe in certain conspiracy theories even when there is so much evidence that suggests that they are not true.

[00:17:14] For many of us, believing in something and feeling a sense of [attachment](#)⁹³ to that is almost more important than what that thing actually is.

[00:17:24] And coming back to Mormonism and Scientology, even though the religion - like any religion - isn't without its criticisms, there is a lot about the religion that does appear to help its followers lead happier lives.

[00:17:39] If you meet a Mormon on the street they almost always appear to be incredibly friendly people.

⁹⁰ refuse to accept

⁹¹ a military leader

⁹² show ways in which two things are similar

⁹³ connection



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[00:17:46] Perhaps [eerily](#)⁹⁴ friendly, especially to an antisocial Brit such as myself, but they do tend to come across as nice and friendly.

[00:17:55] The [emphasis](#)⁹⁵ on the family unit, and [emphasis](#) on helping others, is certainly a positive aspect, and the growth in the number of Mormons, and the relatively low level of people who leave the church, suggests that it does provide meaning for millions of people around the world.

[00:18:17] And when it comes to Scientology, for certain people it does appear to have helped them with their lives.

[00:18:25] For some Hollywood actors they [credit it](#)⁹⁶ with helping them [get off](#)⁹⁷ drugs, or helping them be better friends or parents, and helping them live better, more [fulfilled](#)⁹⁸ lives.

[00:18:39] And this, of course, isn't unique to Mormonism or Scientology.

[00:18:43] Whether you are a practising Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jew, or whatever other religion, perhaps your faith has helped you find meaning in your life.

⁹⁴ in a strange and frightening way

⁹⁵ importance and attention given to something

⁹⁶ consider it as the reason for

⁹⁷ stop using

⁹⁸ satisfying because they have what they need



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[00:18:53] And if you are not a religious person, it is easy to look at the belief systems of other religions, including Mormonism and Scientology, and think “what a load of rubbish”, but they have clearly brought happiness and meaning to many of their followers.

[00:19:10] There are evidently some people for whom their religious [upbringing](#)⁹⁹, or religious experiences, have caused great [harm](#)¹⁰⁰, but is this any greater for Mormonism and Scientology than it is for any of the other, more established religions?

[00:19:26] I’m not so sure.

[00:19:28] So, to conclude this little exploration, what can we learn from Mormonism and Scientology?

[00:19:36] Firstly, if you are a [charismatic](#) leader with an interesting story, people will follow you, especially if you are in the USA.

[00:19:46] Secondly, these followers can be incredibly [profitable](#), and your religion might turn into a mega business.

[00:19:54] Thirdly, you will not be short of critics, of those who say that your religion is a load of rubbish. But you shouldn’t worry too much about that, because the more you are criticised, the more strongly people will believe in you.

⁹⁹ they way someone is raised, especially by the parents

¹⁰⁰ damage



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[00:20:11] And finally, if more established religions are any example, it might take time, thousands of years even for your religion to become more widely accepted.

[00:20:22] So, who knows what religions, if any, people will be following in thousands of years from now.

[00:20:32] OK then, that is it for today's episode on Mormonism vs. Scientology, and with that comes the end of this little mini-series on these two new but increasingly **influential**¹⁰¹ religions

[00:20:46] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode, and of this series in general.

[00:20:52] Are you a Mormon or a Scientologist, or do you have any Mormon or Scientologist friends, family members or colleagues?

[00:21:00] What do you think we can learn, if anything, from these two new religions?

[00:21:06] I would love to know.

[00:21:07] You can head straight into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:21:17] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

¹⁰¹ having influence or effect on people



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[00:21:22] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]



Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Unusual	interesting because different from others
Founding story	the story of how it began
Bizarre	very strange
Eccentric	not based on what is generally considered normal
Founder	someone who starts an organisation
Get a grip on	take control of
Controversies	intense discussions and disagreements
Contrast	compare and show the differences of
Artificial	made up, not natural
Endorses	supports
Wholly	completely
Incompatible	not able to exist with



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Founders	people who start an organisation
Romanticised	considered better than they were
Self-help	the activity of helping yourself without depending on others
Foundation	basis
Policy line	a set of facts and ideas used as the basis of an organisation
Charlatan	someone who says that he has knowledge and skills that he doesn't
Fraudster	someone who gets money by telling lies
Exploited	took advantage of them in order to gain money
Fraud	the crime of getting money by telling lies
Out-of-luck	not successful
Labelled	considered as
Cult	a religious group of people who behave in strange and secret ways
Devotion	loyalty and love for someone or something
Implicit	suggested though not directly expressed
Unorthodox	different from what is considered normal or expected



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Tricked	deceived, fooled
Charismatic	charming, attractive
Mainstream	accepted by many people
Sensible	reasonable, rational
Cult-like	similar to a cult
Renounced	officially rejected a way of life
Polygamy	the custom of being married to more than one person at the same time
Mob	a large, angry group of people
Civilised	developed in culture or way of life
Mobs	large and angry groups of people
Scepticism	doubt regarding the truth of something
Secretive	not sharing information
Inner workings	the parts of a system that are not known publicly
Handsomely	a lot
Vast	extremely big



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Amassed	collected (especially for a large amount of money)
Encouraged	persuaded, pushed towards taking an action
Required	expected to do something necessary
Pile	a large amount
Assets	highly valued property
Custom-made	specially made for him
Grip	control
Countless	too many to be counted
Heartbreak	disappointment and sadness
Devout	showing deep feelings and loyalty towards a religion
Sibling	a brother or sister
Suppressive	someone with psychological issues and who is not fit to live in a society
Break off	stop
Torn apart	seperated, destroyed
Confessions	formal acts of admitting having done something wrong in order to be



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forgiven by god

Auditing

a Scientology method used with the purpose of ridding one's mind of negative past influences

Blackmail

the act of forcing someone to do something by telling them that they will share their secrets if they don't do it

Undeniable

unable to be denied, certainly true

Branches

divisions, parts

Factors

facts that influence the result of something

Flourish

develop successfully

Founded

began

Adopted

accepted

Enthusiastically

in a way that shows intense interest and approval

Receptive

willing to consider and accept new ideas

Self-taught

having learned things and skills on his own, without the help of others

Profitable

successful financially

Gullible

easily deceived or tricked



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Improbable	not likely to be true
Shut down	stopped to exist
Amass	get a large amount of
In custody	in prison
Proclaiming	announcing publicly
Divine	coming from God
Visions	experiences of seeing something in your mind
Reincarnated	reborn in your body
Locked up	put in and secured
Mental asylum	a hospital for mentally sick people
Comparative	compared to other similar things, relative
Objectively	in a way that is based on facts and truth
Probable	likely to be true
Inconsistencies	disagreements between ideas and statements that are contained
Fathom	understand and believe



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Cynical	believing that people are only doing things for personal gain
Uncovered	discovered something secret or lost
Factor	a fact that influences the result of something
Defy	refuse to accept
Warlord	a military leader
Draw parallels	show ways in which two things are similar
Attachment	connection
Eerily	in a strange and frightening way
Emphasis	importance and attention given to something
Credit it	consider it as the reason for
Get off	stop using
Fulfilled	satisfying because they have what they need
Upbringing	the way someone is raised, especially by the parents
Harm	damage
Influential	having influence or effect on people



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We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com

