

The History Of The People's Temple

Posted on October 14, 2019

Jim Jones and the Origins of the People's Temple

The "People's Temple" was a great religious movement started by a person who was a dedicated Christian communist and also a cult leader named Jim Jones. He was the main and major leader of this movement. This movement was started in 1955 in Indianapolis, Indiana, United States of America, and widely spread into many other states after its success and achievement in one state.

Jim Jones was born on May 13, 1931, in Crete, Indiana, United States of America. Crete was a rural area of Indiana State. His father was a veteran of World War I named James Thurman Jones, and his mother was a typical housewife named Lynetta Putnam. Jones's mother believed that his son was a messiah (a leader of a particular group who fights for a cause). When the era of great depression started, it affected Jones's family, and they had to move somewhere to survive. Their family moved to Lynn, Indiana State, in 1934. They lived a very miserable life there and had to survive under the shade of a shack. The shack was a small hut, but it was without plumbing ("Jim Jones").

In childhood, Jones was a weird child who was an insatiable reader. He liked a different kind of people like Mahatma Gandhi, Joseph Stalin, and Adolf Hitler and followed the strengths and weaknesses of all these people. His ideas about religion were very strong, and he took a deep interest in his religion. It was tough for him to make friends because he had very extreme religious views and ideas. His surrounding people and peers found him weird and strange, having strong and extreme religious beliefs as a child. His father was an alcoholic and never paid much attention to the Jones religious beliefs, firmness and ideas. Jones considered alcohol a bad drink, which is prohibited in his religion, so he never paid attention to drinking and dancing. These acts were bad for Jones, and he always considered and believed that these acts were not right and prohibited by God.

Racial Equality, Religious Activism, and Early Growth

Jones always felt sympathy for the African American community because he also had several experiences on that issue. His father once told him about the issue of race in American culture, but he disagreed and fought with him. This fight was increased when his dad would not allow Jones's black African American friends into their house, and this fight became long-lasting. Jones never talked to his dad for several years. His parents separated, and he chose to live with his mom in Richmond, Indiana. Jones completed his education at Butler University in 1951 ("Jim Jones").

In 1955, Jones was 24, and he wanted to serve society, especially the black African American people of the United States. He wants to work for the welfare of society, and he has to take some serious steps to accomplish his dreams. He borrowed a small building in the Indianapolis sector, which was considered a racially mixed area where white and black people lived together. Some people joined him and started to follow him; later on, these people and Jones created a religious group named Wings of Deliverance. A year later, Jones found this name weird, and he changed it to "People's Temple." The purpose of this temple was to provide multiple services to the disadvantaged group of society. This group became famous quickly around the city, and everyone started calling this group based on social activism. A soup kitchen and a small orphanage room were reserved for the persons with disabilities.

Jones spread the message of societal equality everywhere through his movement of "People's Temple." Jones wanted to serve the people, and for that purpose, he changed himself and started to serve as a role model for his followers (Agee, Brooke). Later on, in 1960, Jones and his wife took a huge and brilliant step to adopting a black child, and they became famous and popular in Indiana State. This step was never taken by any couple before in the history of Indiana State (Wunrow, Rose).

Civil Rights, Social Discontent, and the Appeal of the Movement

The beliefs of the people who were the followers of Jones were based on the circumstances of the US after the 1950's era. After World War I, World War II and the era of the great depression created the US conditions unstable and confused in multiple sectors. The offensive war fought by Joseph McCarthy against the idea and approaches of collectivism spread a state of terror among the Americans. They thought that communist people and society would take the takeover of the US people. Another fear of the US people was the nuclear war with the Soviet Union, which terrified them.

People started to raise their voices and started many movements for civil rights. The young nation of the US was disturbed and disappointed in their parent's views and their methods of life. All these situations and disruptions created so much tension in the US nation. Jones came up with revolutionary ideas and approaches which were enchanting and impressing for the people who were depressed and stressed out. Many people joined the temple to decrease their depression and tensions in their lives.

Jones's ideas and approaches attracted disappointed people and young nations who wanted some change in their lives. Numerous people joined the temple services; they were drawn towards the ideas of separation given by Jones, and he attracted the people through his mesmerizing power. He gave the idea of a utopian society in which all the people of America will be treated equally and evenly. This idea and approach encouraged many socially disadvantaged people towards the temple, and they started dreaming about a utopian society which would be based on the concept of equality ("People's Temple Massacre: Welcome To Jonestown").

Charismatic Authority and the Expansion of Personal Control

Jones had an extraordinary, magnificent power to mesmerize the people through his communication. Jones had such kind of impact on their followers that they undoubtedly believed whatever he said. Later on, when Jones gathered so many followers, he encouraged them to sell all their assets and belongings and serve them in the temple. Many people were poor beggars and drug addicts who joined the “People’s Temple” to better their lives and create a peaceful society. People who joined the people’s temple believed that it was the safest place for them. They all trusted Jones and considered him a real leader who was fighting against injustice and seeking peace for his followers.

Jones not only wanted to do better for society but also wanted to increase his power as a leader. He often used harsh tactics with his followers to reform their lives, and he asked his followers to call him father and showed that he had divine powers. He got so much praise, respect, and admiration from his followers, who made him so much egoistic and self-centred. He declared that he was a rebirth of Lenin and Jesus Christ and that people should follow him as they follow Lenin and Jesus Christ. He started believing that he was a supernatural human and that people should follow him.

Jones used the technique of unquestioning the powers, and this increased the dependency of his followers on him. He asked his followers to cut off all their relationships with the outer world and strictly remain inside the temple. He asked his followers that they should attain and improve the habit of celibacy (a condition of abstention from marriage and sex relationships). He did not follow this condition, and he had several sexual relationships with men and women inside the temple. He emphasized the fact that all women were lesbian and men were gay, but only Jones himself was heterosexual.

Political Influence, Internal Abuse, and Relocation

The “people’s temple” played a major role in the politics of San Francisco. Jones asked his followers to vote for the person he wanted to vote for. If anyone did not vote for the absolute choice of Jones, then he/she suffered from physical abuse. Jones helped the politicians and guaranteed them a certain amount of votes. Jones wanted to increase his power and influence in the world.

With the passage of time, many people inside the temple realized that Jones was not the right person and humiliated them. Some people sought outside help, and many newspapers started to write the rules and regulations of the people’s temple. When Jones came to know that, he punished the people who sought outside help and asked them to ask for forgiveness from him. Some people had to stay up all night and had to perform several duties. There were humiliating sessions in which the people were tortured and humiliated physically and mentally. Jones himself had taken part in it and beat the people with a wooden paddle. The church leaders forced some people to write a letter in which they

had to accept that they had done illegal and immoral acts, even if they hadn't done that. Small incidents which are not even worth considering, Jones considered and gave severe punishments to the people who had made small mistakes. Physical punishments were a major pattern of the people's temple.

He moved his temple to a small town on the Northern side of California. The purpose behind it was he wanted more people or, in other words, more worshippers. He attracts the people of the town through his speeches and support for the black people. He always talked about racial diversity to attract people towards him. He wanted a church which is racially diverse, and he found one in the small town of California. His talk on racial diversity and the civil rights movement attracted and influenced the people. Many people believed that he moved to California because he wanted political power and stability (Sliva, Logan).

Jonestown, Coercion, and Government Concern

Jones shifted his temple to Jonestown and started new weird practices with his followers to take control over his supporters. He began to take drugs to decrease his dissatisfaction and tensions. He also began to incorporate the suicide attempt into his speeches and gave his speeches a thoughtful look. He emphasized the fact that life is a disease, and death is the cure for that disease. Jones became paranoid about his followers, and he wanted his followers should follow him unhesitatingly. He asked many members to drink something just to know whether they were loyal to him or not. He punished the people who disagreed or questioned his powers; even he punished the children. Jones wanted that their followers will never receive any new from the outside world and should always listen to and obey him. People who wanted to leave the temple said that out loud, other people reported this to Jones; and he firmly took action against them and never allowed anyone to exit the temple.

In 1978, an affidavit was issued by Deborah Blakey asking the US government to save the miserable lives of people who were living inside the people's temple. The police department believed that brainwashing and other techniques to control the minds of the people do not appear as allegations of kidnapping. A man named Leo Ryan was allocated to investigate the situation inside the temple in Guyana. He took many people with him on his journey to the people's temple on 17 November 1978. But when they reached the people's temple, guards shot them and killed them.

Mass Death and the Dangers of Unquestioning Loyalty

The next day, on 18 November 1978, Jones asked the followers to drink the Kool-Aid and die because he wanted them to die. Mostly, people obeyed his orders and drank the poison. A massive loss of lives occurred in one place, and a total of 918 people died. A hilarious part was that it included the 276 children who also died by drinking the poison. This event became the biggest attempt of suicide by

numerous people who lost their precious lives just because they followed a corrupt leader. Jones also shot himself in the head and died in his chair. Such a waste of lives occurred just to follow a wrong, egoistic and misleading person (Kilduff, Marshall, and Phil Tracy).

Blind trust or illogical trust in anyone could lead to anyone to a disastrous situation, like the followers of Jim Jones who took their lives with their hands and attempted suicide because their leader wanted them to die. Obedience and conformity are important to follow someone, but people should think deeply before trusting someone. Leaders are the role models and real people for the individuals, so the role models should be perfect or they are people with strong positive characters.

People who followed Jim Jones were not bad people, but they suffered because they chose a wrong and evil leader. Jones was a patient with several mental disorders, and society should be aware of this fact: persons who are extremist or illogical are never good leaders. The choice of a leader or to follow a good person is crucial, and the wrong decision could lead us to a disastrous situation.

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