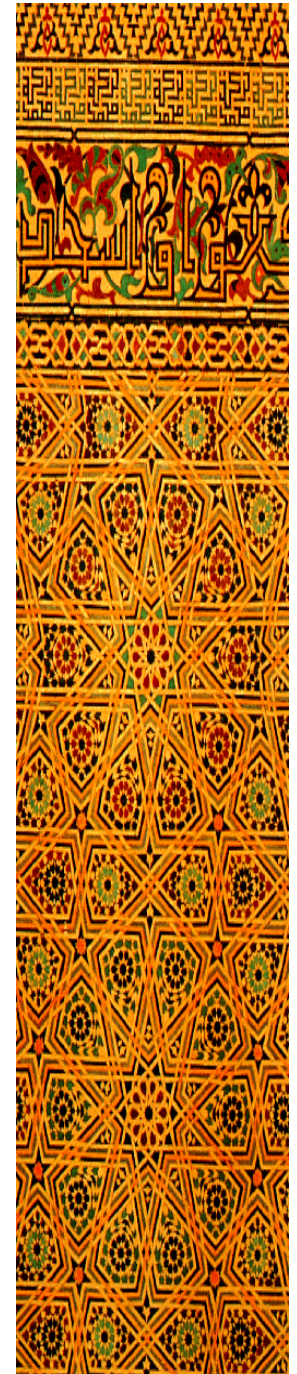


Evaluating Spiritual-Religious-Psychological Groups



Discriminate

- Types
 - Spurious (false; lacking authenticity)
 - Genuine
- Method
 - Compare activities to stated aim
 - Functional criteria



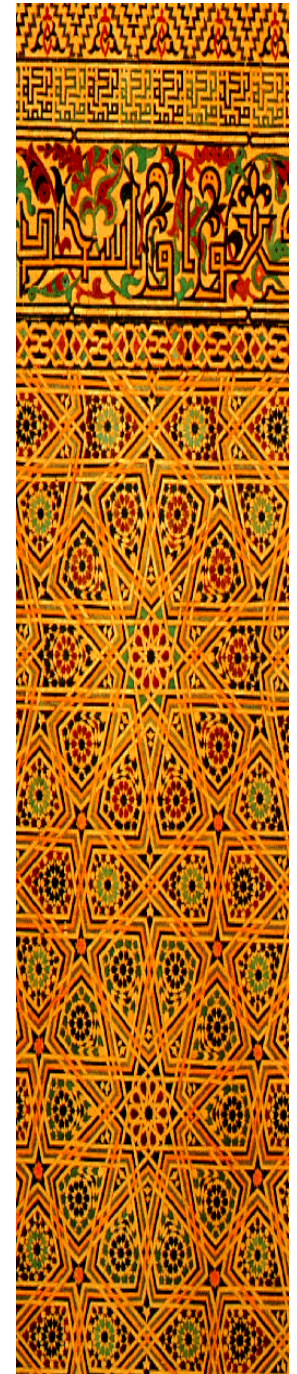
Abusive Leaders

- Claims of Divine authority
- Claims of special knowledge
- Indeed, leader's development DOES make leadership behavior harder to comprehend
- How is the ordinary person to judge?



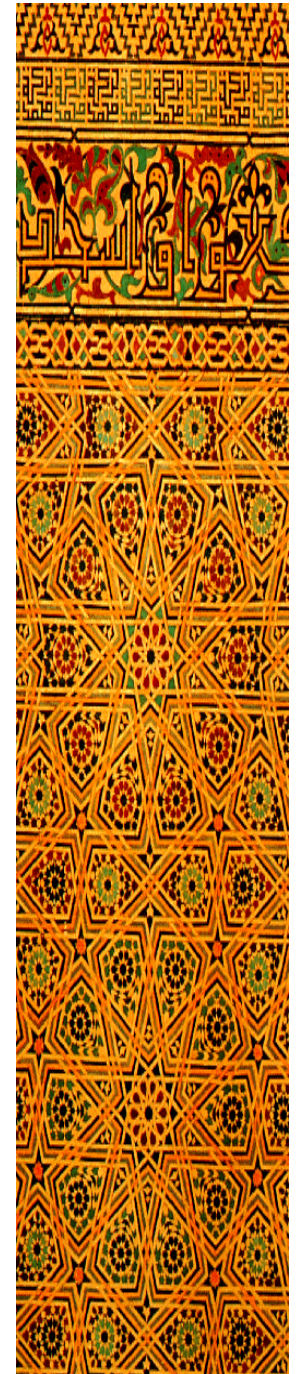
Spiritual Traditions' Goals/Methods

- Consistent
- Permits a functional assessment
- Mystical traditions
 - Same goal
 - Diverse procedures
 - Time, place, people



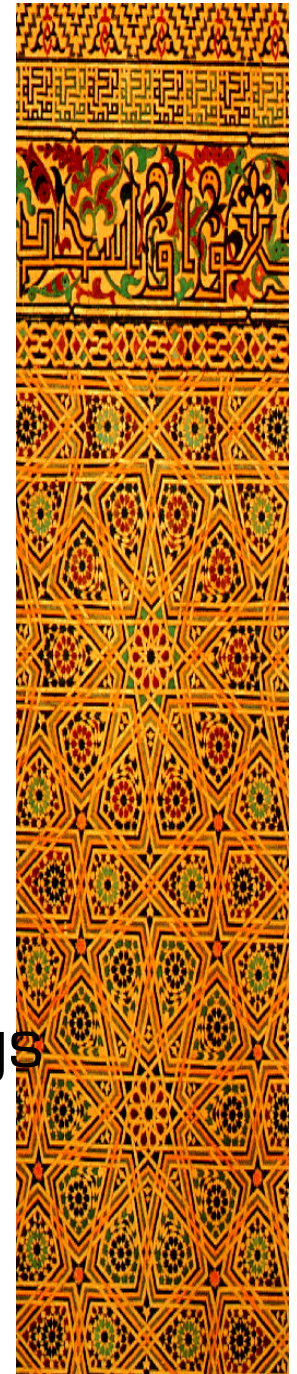
Goal of Mysticism

- Ability
- Direct perception
- Reality
- Underneath the world of appearances
- Shifting from self-serving to serving Reality



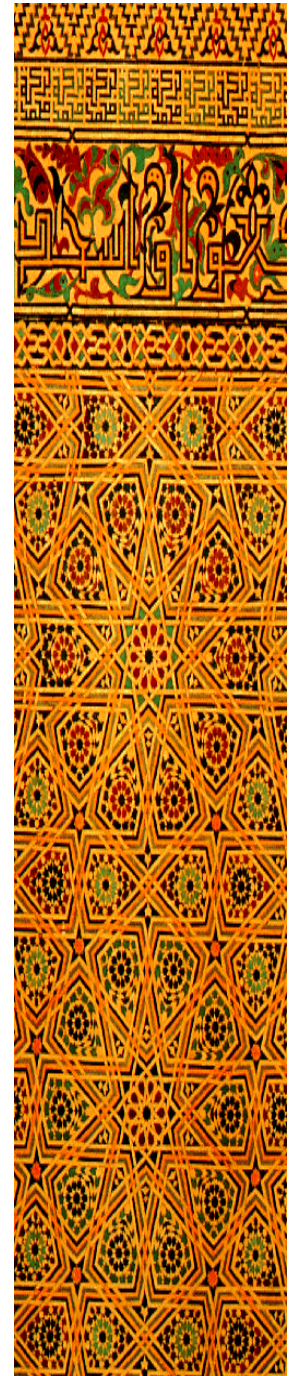
A Functional Basis for this Service Requirement

- Our motivation determines our mode of consciousness
 - Possession & acquisition & defending motive = object mode of consciousness (things are separate)
 - Selflessness & giving & serving motive = receptive mode of consciousness (things are connected)



Selfless Service

- Reality is served for its own sake
- Referred to as “the purified heart” or “non-attachment”
- Developing this orientation as a basis for action in the world
- Long period, right kind of effort
- Enduring change in one’s motivation = enlightenment



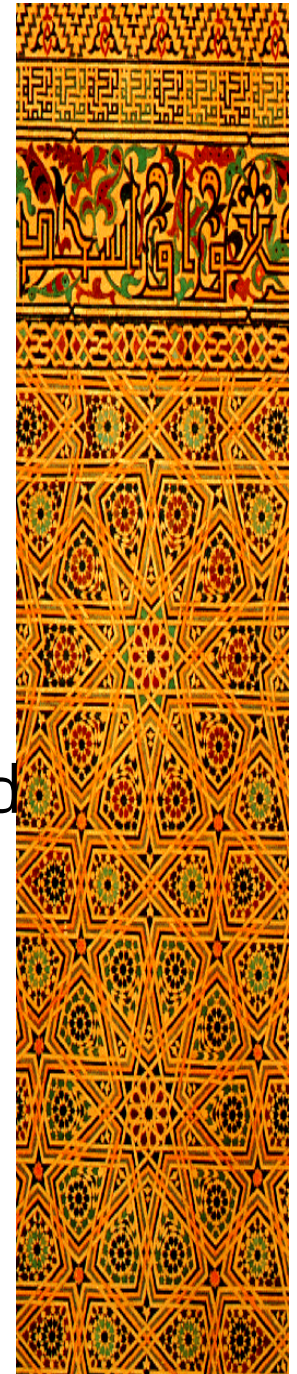
Thus...

- The Teacher can't bestow Truth on someone else
- The capacity to perceive the truth/Truth must be developed
- No short cuts



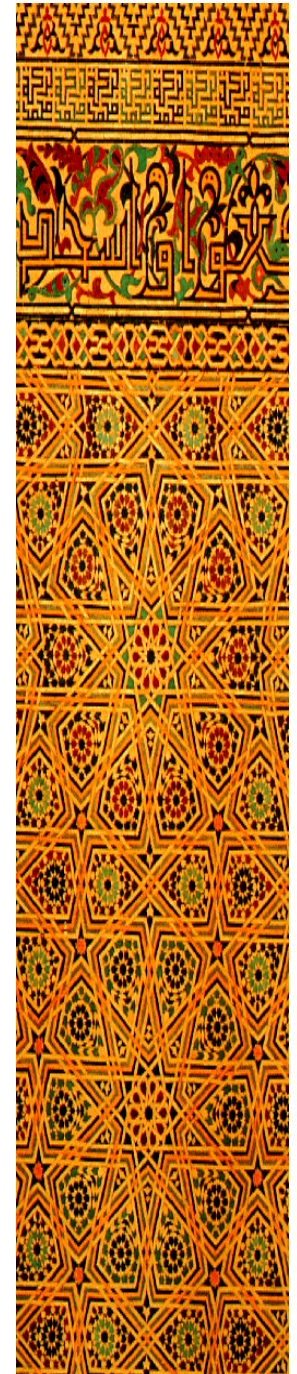
These Developmental Requirements

- Provide a basis for assessing religious movements
- Genuine spiritual groups
 - Assist the student shift from self-centered to Truth-centered
- False spiritual groups
 - Appeal to greed, fear, desire for unusual experiences (then labeled Knowledge)



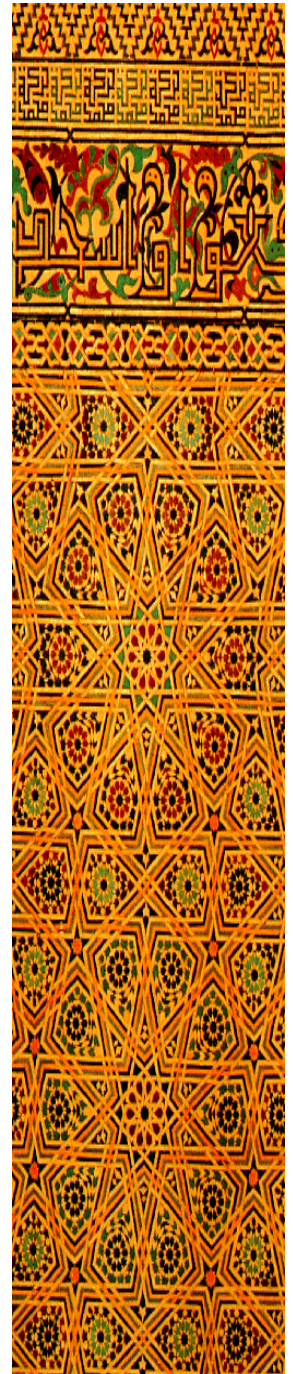
False Spiritual Groups

- Appeal to vanity
 - Bestow attention, flattery
- Use attention to seduce, attract
- Use condemnation to induce conformity
- Manipulate via guilt (regressive relationship with the teacher)



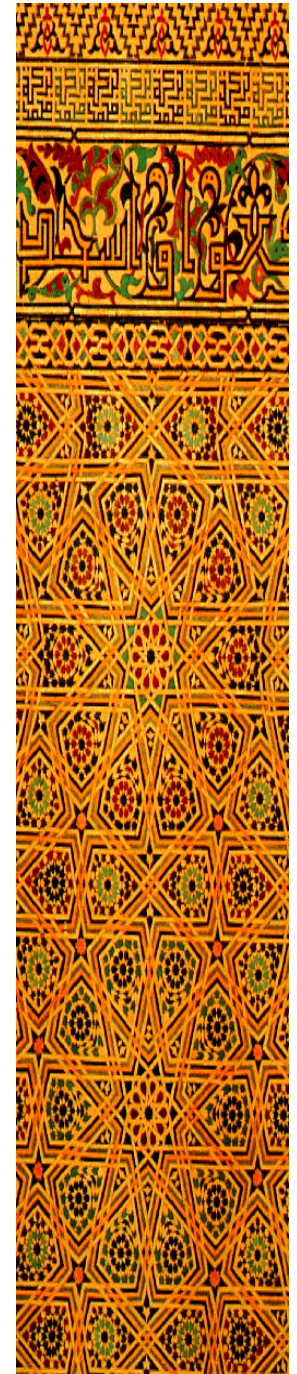
False Spiritual Groups

- Alternate rejection with acceptance
- Repeat dogma
- Restrict access to outside information and to privacy
- Attack a person's previous life and affiliations
- Indoctrinate (uncritical acceptance)



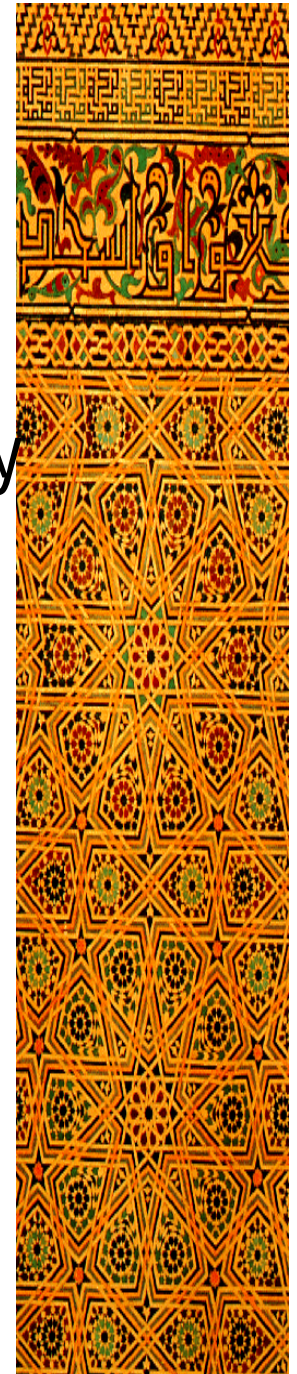
Indoctrination vs. Individuality

- Indoctrination is antithetical to the development of individuality
- Individuality is crucial to this kind of development
- Individuality means 'learning to discern how the perception of the world is influenced by egocentric thought and motivation'
- Rabbi Sushone...



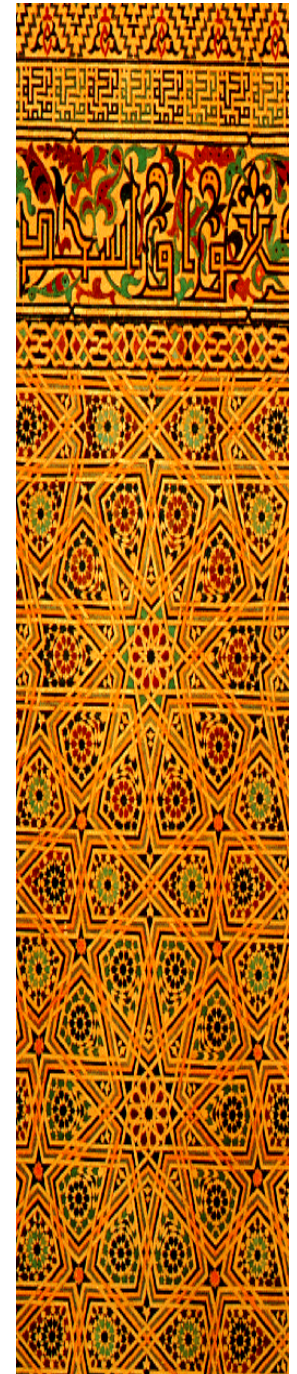
Bogus Leaders

- Fall back on claims of spiritual authority to rationalize exploitative acts
- Can be confronted by relating
 - The requirements of spiritual development to their behaviors
 - Teaching stories (Christian; Sufi; African; Zen; Hindu)



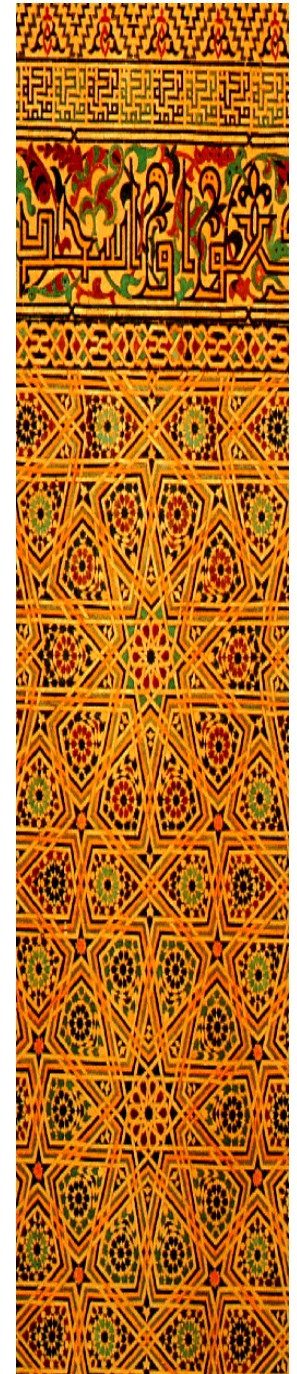
Utopian groups

- Rehabilitative
- Therapeutic
- Need also functional evaluative criteria



Evaluation Criteria

1. Are members reasonably able to love?
 - capacity for intimacy and selfless concern for the other
 - unguarded contact with another
 - capacity to trust
 - acceptance of one's – and another's – own thoughts and desires
 - basically positive self-evaluation



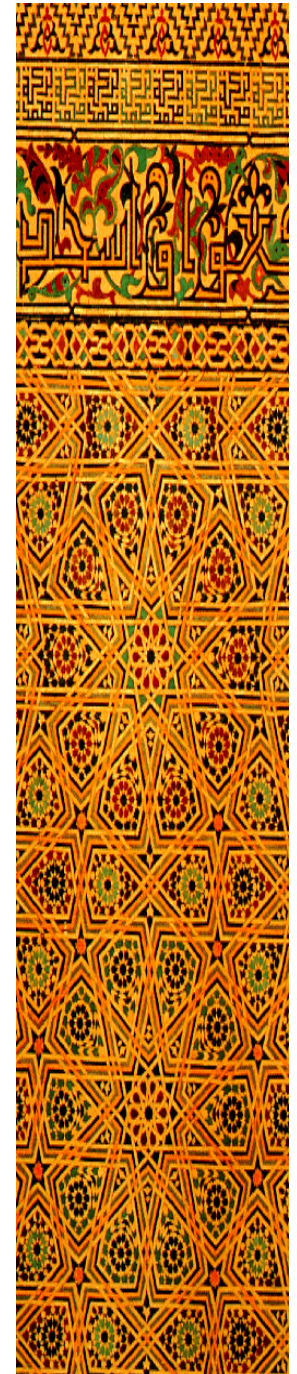
Evaluation Criteria

2. Are members reasonably able to work?
 - impulse containment
 - detach from emotions & fantasies
 - perceive task requirements & carry them out
 - for work to be satisfying, it must be an expression of individuality



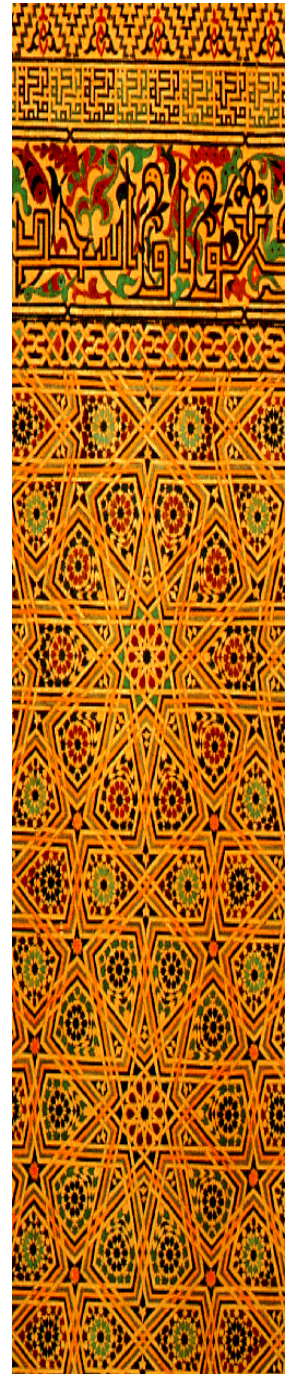
Criteria, continued

3. Are members able to be autonomous?
 - Stand alone
 - Mark of adulthood
 - Decide for oneself
 - Being your own author
 - Giving up dependent fantasies



Criteria, continued

- Signs that autonomy is not tolerated
 - Charismatic leader
 - Making promises or threats
 - Pressure to conform
 - Aping of the leader
 - Inhibited critical thinking
 - Fixation as siblings
 - Ignoring 'transference'



Assess groups:

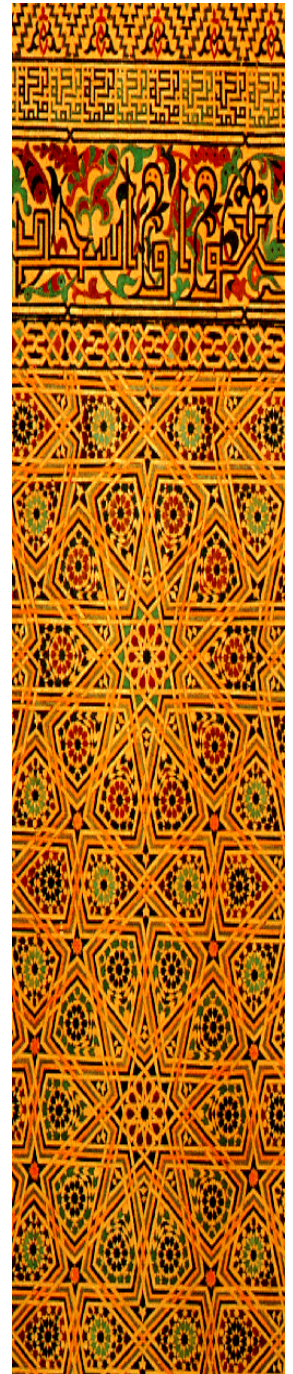
Can the members...

1. Work?
2. Love?
3. Be Autonomous?



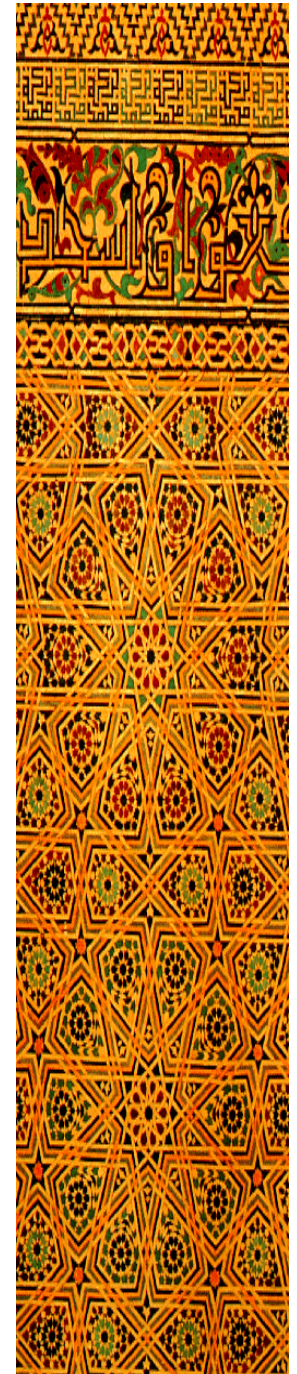
Can group members...

- Resolve conflicts that interfere with intimacy?
- Examine their attitudes toward group leader?
- Examine their attitudes toward the quasi-sibling group?



Groups Evaluations? Remember..

- Large group (not necessarily = success)
- Human activity has flaws & imperfections
- Teachers have personality flaws
 - Can be managed to not interfere with
 - Can be managed to not determine the teaching activity
 - Behavior of teacher and group must contribute to the stated goal of the group
- Careful attention to functional issues makes assessment possible



Reference

- Deikman, Arthur J. (Speaker). (1983). Evaluating Cults and Spiritual Groups (Cassette Recording). ISHK Book Service, PO Box 176, Los Altos, CA 94022.

