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### CNI News - 'Mass Suicide Linked to Decades-Old

From: [RSchatte@aol.com](mailto:RSchatte@aol.com)  
Date: Fri, 28 Mar 1997 01:01:20 -0500 (EST)  
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Feature Story of the Week

MASS SUICIDE LINKED TO DECADES-OLD UFO CULT  
Leader Marshall Applewhite Is "Bo" of Notorious "Bo and Peep"  
By Michael Lindemann

The quasi-religious cult group publicly known as The Higher Source orchestrated an elaborate suicide ritual to "shed their containers" (bodies) and move to a higher level of existence, where they believed they would meet beings in a spacecraft trailing Comet Hale-Bopp. Thirty-nine members of the group, including their leader, quietly took their own lives in a mansion in the secluded community of Rancho Santa Fe, near San Diego, California.

CNI News has confirmed that the reclusive elder leader of the suicide group, referred to in news reports as "Father John," is Marshall Applewhite, who with his one-time partner Bonnie Lu Nettles founded a highly regimented UFO contact cult in 1975. Applewhite and Nettles became known as "Bo and Peep," but inside their secretive group they also were known as "Do and Ti." Their followers sometimes referred to them simply as "The Two."

In the late 1970s, after several failed predictions of mass UFO landings and dashed hopes of being "beamed up" by space brothers from a higher dimension, Bo and Peep disappeared from public view. Peep, aka Nettles, died of cancer in 1985. But their following, never large but always well-funded and fiercely loyal, resurged strongly in the early 1990s.

In 1993, under the new name "Total Overcomers Anonymous," Applewhite and his followers placed a nearly full-page ad in USA Today. The headline ran, "UFO Cult Resurfaces with Final Offer." The ad explained that the group was in the process of a last round of recruitment, in preparation for a great transition to a higher level of existence.

"Earth's present 'civilization' is about to be recycled -- 'spaded under,'" the ad proclaimed. "It's inhabitants are refusing to evolve. The 'weeds' have taken over the garden and disturbed its usefulness beyond repair."

Sometime between 1993 and 1997, Total Overcomers apparently evolved into the outward business known as Higher Source, behind which was the millennialist cult known as Heaven's Gate. Applewhite's leadership style is everywhere apparent, in the tight discipline, the uniform dress, the immaculate house, and the language of the cult's web site and videotaped farewell

messages.

The Heaven's Gate website ([www.heavensgate.com](http://www.heavensgate.com)) described the group's desire to leave Earth and rendezvous with a spaceship for a trip to "the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Whether Hale-Bopp has a 'companion' or not is irrelevant from our perspective," the site proclaims. "However, its arrival is joyously very significant to us at 'Heaven's Gate.' The joy is that our Older Member in the Evolutionary Level Above Human (the 'Kingdom of Heaven') has made it clear to us that Hale-Bopp's approach is the 'marker' we've been waiting for -- the time for the arrival of the spacecraft from the Level Above Human to take us home to 'Their World' -- in the literal Heavens. Our 22 years of classroom here on planet Earth is finally coming to conclusion -- 'graduation' from the Human Evolutionary Level. We are happily prepared to leave 'this world' and go with Ti's crew."

The term "Ti's crew" suggests that the group believed "Ti," aka "Peep" or Nettles, having already "graduated," is on board the spacecraft awaiting their arrival.

Thus it seems clear that this mass suicide, gruesomely bizarre to the uninitiated, was fervently embraced by Applewhite's group as a long-awaited release from earthly existence. The appearance of Comet Hale-Bopp afforded a convenient trigger, but was in no way the cause.

The suicide scene indicated that all the deceased were willing participants. When found, the 39 bodies appeared serene. Each person apparently reclined on a cot or bed after ingesting a drug and fell asleep. The chest and head of each person were draped in purple cloth. None of the bodies showed any wounds or signs of struggle.

Among the weirder aspects of the event is the likelihood that the suicides occurred in three phases over a period of several days. By the time the bodies were discovered, the house was already filled with a horrifying stench of decaying flesh.

The exact cause of death will not be known until autopsies are performed. According to experts, this is the largest mass suicide in U.S. history, and also only the second time in history that a person's death can be directly linked to a comet.

(The first, in 1402, involved Italian prince John Visconti, who was told by his astrologers that a comet's appearance would bring him ill fortune. When the comet actually did appear, Visconti collapsed from fear and died.)

Houston, Texas amateur astronomer Chuck Shramek appeared on Art Bell's late-night radio program "Coast to Coast" last fall and described a possible "Saturn-like object" that he had photographed in the vicinity of Comet Hale-Bopp.

In the weeks following Shramek's original report, speculation ran rampant on the internet that the comet might be accompanied by a huge UFO, though Shramek himself never made such a claim.

In the wake of the mass suicide, Shramek has been besieged by phone calls from the national press. However, there is no indication that members of The Higher Source were ever in contact with Shramek, or that he knew anything about the group.

Most of the dead were in their twenties, and all apparently lived and worked together in the mansion where they died. Outwardly, The Higher Source was a business that specialized in designing high quality web sites. Clients and neighbors of the group said that all the Higher Source members were clean-cut, well-groomed, intelligent, quiet and seemingly happy people.

Several visitors to the home told investigators that the Higher Source members referred to themselves as monks and treated the nine-bedroom mansion as a temple, requiring outsiders to replace their shoes with booties when they entered.

They called each other "brother" and "sister," and reportedly called Applewhite "Father John."

Nick Matzorkis, a Beverly Hills businessman who employs a former member of the Higher Source group identified only as Rio, said on

Thursday that someone from the cult sent Rio two videotapes this week that described their intentions. Rio received the videotapes by mail Tuesday evening, Matzorkis said. One video was a statement by Applewhite, identified in that instance as "Doe." The other video contained each member's taped farewells.

Matzorkis told ABC's "Good Morning America" that he and Rio discussed the videos on Wednesday, then went to the house. Rio went in and found the bodies.

"When he came out he was as white as a sheet.... At that point no one else in the world essentially knew this had taken place," Matzorkis told ABC. He said they then notified police.

The work of removing the bodies from the mansion began Wednesday afternoon and proceeded through the night into Thursday morning. Autopsies will be performed over the next several days. The names of the deceased are being withheld pending notification of kin.

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