

Op-ed column: Dalai Lama's visit to Albany sponsored by cult-like group

The Dalai Lama should cancel his April 19 visit to Albany, or find a new group to sponsor it. While I have a few issues with the Dalai Lama himself, my primary objection to his visit is the group sponsoring it, the [World Ethical Foundations Consortium](#).

Keith Raniere is founder of the sponsoring group. Sara and Clare Bronfman, heiresses to the Seagram fortune, are co-founders of the Consortium; but what I have to say in this column applies primarily to Raniere.

Raniere is a 1982 graduate of RPI in Troy. In the 1990s he ran a Clifton Park-based \$30 million-a-year multilevel marketing business, Consumers Buyline Inc., that he closed down quickly after two federal agencies and regulators in 23 states alleged it was an illegal pyramid scheme. Among the states Raniere settled with were New York for \$40,000, Pennsylvania for \$20,000 and Arkansas for \$245,000.

Raniere resurrected himself in 1998 when he and his business partner, Nancy Salzman, established the Executive Success Programs (www.espian.net), followed by [NXIVM](#), which was established in 2000. [Executive Success Programs](#) (ESP), now under NXIVM's umbrella, was established, according to Raniere, to "advance human potential and ethics through personal and professional development programs, corporate trainings, and a comprehensive personal and professional coaching program."

Raising doubts

Raniere started NXIVM with a \$2 million loan from Clare Bronfman. Sara and Clare both hold high positions in NXIVM. Their father, Edgar Bronfman Sr., once took some NXIVM courses. However, he now says it is a cult, according to an article about Raniere, "[Cult of Personality](#)," in the October 13, 2003 issue of Forbes magazine.

A number of experts have also claimed that NXIVM is a cult or has cult-like characteristics. These experts include Paul Martin, Ph.D., a licensed clinical psychologist who runs Wellspring Retreat in Ohio, an organization that treats victims of cult abuse. John Hochman, M.D., Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences at UCLA, evaluated ESP in 2003 and stated that it has many cult-like qualities. And Rick Ross, a cult expert and founder of the Rick Ross Institute in New Jersey, which compiles information on cults, also claims that NXIVM has cult-like characteristics.

NXIVM sued both Ross and Hochman in 2003 for \$10 million. NXIVM also sued Martin in a separate lawsuit. Ross and NXIVM are still involved in litigation, and Ross has filed a countersuit against NXIVM.

Stephanie Franco, who also was sued by NXIVM, testified in an affidavit that she was not comfortable with NXIVM because she and other group members were required to bow down to Raniere and Nancy Salzman at the beginning and end of each meeting. Furthermore, Raniere had to be addressed as Vanguard, while Salzman had to be addressed as Prefect.

Disturbing incidents

Carlos Rueda, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Our Lady of Mercy Hospital in the Bronx, has treated three people who were psychologically damaged by taking intensive courses through NXIVM. The worst story, reported in many newspapers, however, was that of Kristin Snyder of Halfmoon, who drowned herself after an intensive ESP seminar in Alaska in 2004. The note she left behind blamed her suicide on NXIVM and claimed she had been brainwashed.

As far as the Dalai Lama's visit is concerned, it doesn't really matter whether or not NXIVM is a cult, Keith Raniere has been involved in controversy for the last 20 years. He been the subject of lawsuits and investigations. He has initiated numerous lawsuits, many of which appear to be frivolous. He also harasses people, according to his former girlfriend, Toni Natali, and her mother. He is hardly a poster boy for humanitarianism, peace and ethics; and his invitation to the Dalai Lama to speak at the inaugural event of The World Ethical Foundations Consortium, which Raniere recently founded, makes one question the motive of the invitation.

Part of the mission statement of the World Ethical Foundations Consortium reads, "We believe truly interdependent, civilized communities are non-violent and utilize compassionate ethical methods and solutions to address the different

problems within. . .”

A review of newspaper and magazine stories as well as court documents reveal that Keith Raniere has not utilized compassionate ethical methods and solutions to address problems. Keith Raniere has brought anything but peace to the Capital Region.

Finding information

But don't take my word for it. Everything I have said and more is documented at www.rickcross.com/groups/esp.html, where you can spend hours reading more than 80 stories and documents on Keith Raniere, Nancy Salzman, ESP and NXIVM from numerous reliable sources, including several Capital Region newspapers.

One wonders why someone of the Dalai Lama's stature would agree to speak at an event sponsored by such a controversial person. And why would Albany Mayor Jerry Jennings endorse this event?

In 2003, Keith Raniere roped actress Goldie Hawn into speaking at Vanguard Week, an annual NXIVM event. When Hawn learned about the controversies surrounding Raniere, NXIVM and ESP, she canceled her appearance.

If Goldie Hawn has the sense not to appear at an event sponsored by Keith Raniere, then cancellation by the Dalai Lama, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, should be a no-brainer.

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