



POPULAR

Danny Masterson Tells Us About His Life in the Church of Scientology

by James Rickman / Photography by Eric Ray Davidson | 11 February 2015





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Beck once told a *New York* magazine writer that Scientology is "always the last question journalists ask." And when Danny Masterson, actor, DJ, restaurateur and second-generation Scientologist, appeared on our cover six years ago, the topic of his beliefs was tucked into a single paragraph toward the end of the story. Reconnecting with Masterson last month, we asked if we could focus in on the religion -- "religious philosophy," as he calls it -- and why it works for him. As it turned out, we spoke with him just after he'd arrived to Sundance, where the already-controversial documentary *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief* was about to premiere. All the more reason to hear a bit of Masterson's story and ask some questions.

You're at Sundance, where *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief* is about to premiere.

I heard about that documentary; the documentary where they interviewed eight people who hate Scientology. Should be pretty interesting. I wonder if Sundance would allow a documentary of, like, eight people who hate Judaism. But you know, my religion's fair game, I guess, 'cause it's new.

When things like this documentary and the book *Going Clear* come out, does it make your life socially awkward?

I only heard about [the book] recently. I do read, I do go out, but no one had mentioned it to me. When I looked into it, I noticed that he couldn't publish that book in Canada or the UK because the libel laws are so much stricter than ours. And so when I asked about it, they're like, "Oh yeah, there's basically like 200 lies in the book and so in England and in Canada he couldn't even publish that book." Anyone can say anything about anything. How true it is, I guess that's up to the reader. If you're going to write something and you don't ask the people who actually do it, then what's the fucking point? We could all interview the KKK about what's cool about being white, but we don't. I don't know; it just seems retarded to me.

What are your first memories of Scientology?

I didn't really notice anything different in terms of my upbringing till I was in junior high school, maybe a little bit before that. I grew up in New York and it was just sort of like, everyone hated their parents and was always cheating and lying, and I was able to just be friends with my parents. A lot of people have that in their life, but I noticed that all my friends who were Scientologists, kids I had grown up with, we all sort of had the same thing: easy communication. It wasn't this whole "us versus them" thing. So I noticed that. I noticed that any times I had trouble studying anything, there was really great literature on how to study, which made learning really easy for myself and my friends. In Scientology, there's no belief system or anyone who's worshipped or whatnot; it's all sort of like college of the mind. And so I grew up not having to go and pray to anyone. I grew up just sort of like, "Oh, if you're thirsty, drink water. That's a logical fucking decision, right?" And you're like, "Yeah, OK, that makes sense." And that was pretty much the basis of my reality as a child.

How old were you when you started coursework?

Probably eight, nine, ten. Just what every religion would have in terms of like, "Be good to thy neighbor," that kind of thing. And then when I was maybe 15, I was like, "Oh, this is fucking awesome." I finally was old enough to read *Dianetics*, which is an unbelievably not-easy book to read because it was written by somebody with a much bigger vocabulary than most of us, in 1950. It just blew my mind. I was like, "That's the reason why I have the thoughts that I have and don't want them, or why I behave in a certain way when something happens and I don't know why." *Dianetics* literally is the answer to that -- just like, here's what it is and here's why, and here are the examples, and see if it works for you. And then when you notice, over and over and over you're like, "Oh shit, that's exactly that same thing, that's that thing I read, that's that thing I read," that's when I took it on for myself as like, this is what I want to study more than any other philosophy.

Do you remember any specific situations where you saw it working?â

It would be hard for me to explain to you, having not read that book. But you know, it's just the study of the mind and cutting it into two parts: the analytical mind and the reactive mind. One is the one that we use and think with, and the other is the one that uses us, and we do things and like, "Why the fuck am I doing that?" or "Why the fuck am I thinking this thing?" Hubbard figured a way to get rid of the reactive mind so it doesn't affect you and it doesn't fucking take over your life.

Sounds like you found your own connection with it in your teens.

Yep. Yeah, everybody does. There's tons of kids I grew up with who were raised Scientologists who now don't do Scientology but are still totally cool with it, and then there's lots of people who're like, "Oh yeah, here, check out this book, it might help your life," and then all of the sudden they're like, boom, "Oh my God, I need this, I need this fuckin' all day long, I want to know all about this." It's a religious philosophy, so when I'm sitting there, studying about something, I'm oftentimes sitting next to guys from Nation of Islam and friends who are fully Jewish and other friends who are Catholic and Reverend Freddie Johnson, who's a Baptist minister.

Can you be any other faith and a Scientologist at the same time?

Yeah, you can be any faith you want to be and be a Scientologist.

What are the things that you wish you could clear up -- the most annoying things that people approach you about?

Nothing really. I've never been given a hard time my entire life about my belief system or my philosophy in life. Literally never once in 38 years. If people start like asking questions in a way where I feel like they have an ulterior motive, I'm just like, "Dude, just go buy a fucking book and read it and decide for your fucking self what it means. I don't have time to have this conversation with you." If you're curious about something, I'll give you my one- or two-minute version of my opinion on it, but it's also like that's my opinion on what I read. You should read it for yourself, and decide whether you agree or disagree with it. And that's a big thing in Scientology: the shit that is there at this point has been tested over and over and over so that each thing actually works. It's like what I said earlier: "Oh my god, I'm so thirsty." "OK cool, go drink water. That's your solution." And everything basically in Scientology is like, "Here's a problem; OK cool, here's something you can study that will help you find the solution to that problem." There's nothing more to it.

You've used words like "toolbox," "technology" and "study" to describe Scientology. It's all very discipline-based...

Everything in Scientology is just based on logic. I mean, the word Scientology means the study of knowledge. So there's nothing else to it.

Except that it's also a religion, so there must be, right?

What must be?

There must be something more to it than any other scholarly pursuit?

No, not really. It's literally just that. There's books and lectures and whatnot, and then there's the stuff in *Dianetics*, which is the auditing, which is basically going through painful incidents in one's life and erasing them so that they don't upset you. And that's basically it. There's the two different avenues of Scientology and there's nothing else.

So then what would you say is your personal relationship to L. Ron Hubbard?

He's a fucking guy who wrote awesome shit that I love studying. That's who he is. He was a very famous author. He basically spent his entire life studying every great religion, found everything that worked, found things that didn't work, took the stuff that worked, started like questioning it and grilling it and drilling it, going over and over until he could find the things that worked every time, guaranteed. And he was like, "Holy shit, here's a new discovery I've just made. What does everybody think about it?" Everyone goes and studies and checks it out and they're like, "Yeah, actually that does make sense and it does work." And he's like, "Cool, let me try and check into this." And he'd just like go through all these avenues and basically came up with his discoveries and wrote the book *Dianetics* in the 1950, which was his research into the mind. I mean, that's literally it.

But he also had theories about the origin of the world, as I understand it, and the fate of our souls and superhuman stuff that would suggest he's more of a like messiah figure.

No one in Scientology thinks he's a messiah. Everyone thinks he's the founder of a philosophy that we all agree with, basically, and he was a hell of a lot smarter than I was, 'cause I couldn't come up with this stuff.

So does your family celebrate March 13?

My birthday?

Is that your birthday as well?

We celebrate the shit out of it. We have a massive party on March 13.

Is it not also L. Ron Hubbard's birthday?

Uh-huh.

Is that part of your celebration every year?

No. [laughs] There's no religious holiday of LRH's birthday.

That was something I actually found on [Scientology.org](https://www.scientology.org), that there were a handful of religious holidays including his birthday.

Yeah, the special occasions which are anniversaries of things, but then they'll basically like, on LRH's birthday, there'll be an event where they talk about the things that've happened in the past year. On the anniversary of *Dianetics*, they'll talk about, you know, what countries are now having places that deliver *Dianetics*. So there's stuff like that, where it's just sort of like updates on what's happening in the world, but nothing really more than that.

Do you feel like it's fairly democratic? Does the fact that there is coursework that people have to pay for make it less open?

No. I mean, most of the courses cost 20, 50 bucks. If you can't afford to go sit in a room and have someone who's trained in that course give you the lessons and help you study and learn it, then I don't know what to say. I mean, it's cheaper than college. You could argue how expensive college is and then the debt for the next 10 years -- and then how often do you use all of that information? I feel like I got the better end of the deal on that one.

Another thing you hear is that Scientology and psychiatry are pitted against each other...

Yes. You will not find a Scientologist who does not fucking hate psychiatrists. Because their solution for mental and spiritual problems is drugs. So let's talk about putting a Band-Aid on something that's just going to get worse and worse and worse. And the thing is, I'm sure there are tons and tons of amazing human beings who are psychologists or psychiatrists. But it's like, if you study that man is an animal and nothing more than that, and you basically have this fuckin' manual that has, what, 5,000 disorders in it, that you just bill your insurance company -- "Oh, you have PMS disorder, you have caffeine-addict disorder, you have mathematics disorder; here, take Prozac" -- what the fuck is that? Scientology handles those things, those mental problems that people have. It gets rid of them. It gets rid of them by that person doing it for themselves. That's the solution to depression, not fuckin' Prozac and whatever other pill that makes the kid then walk into a goddamn school and kill other kids.

Paul Haggis left the church on account of gay marriage.

Yeah, which is so stupid. What Paul was angry at made perfect sense, but it had nothing to do with Scientology. There was some person who worked at some small church in San Diego who wrote his name and then wrote "Church of Scientology" on Prop. 8, which is the most fucked up thing I've ever fucking heard. That guy got reamed, kicked out, I don't know what the fuck happened to him. But then Paul was just mad that, as a religion, we're not going to come out and say that we are for or against anything, which is a political matter. You'll [hear] over and over where people ask somebody in the church to give their opinion and it's like, "We have no opinion in the world of politics. We are a religion." So if you want to know about spirituality we will talk about that, but not on anyone's stance on the politics of that. I mean, dude, there's a fucking ton of gay Scientologists. There's absolutely nothing on anyone in Scientology being against Prop. 8 in terms of them picking that as their religious stance. And so Paul then took that and went crazy about it, like, "You need to as a church come out and say that you're for gay marriage!" And the church is like, "Well, we're not going to do that, because we're not getting involved in a political matter in California. It has nothing to do with us, so please just fucking drop it." And the other thing is that Paul hadn't done anything in Scientology in fucking 30 years. So Paul is that dude who did some Scientology in the '70s and would hang out with Scientologists but never actually did any Scientology -- never got any auditing, wasn't doing any courses, literally for 20 years. And that's the fucking truth of the matter.

Do you foresee a time when conversations like this will be moot and Scientology will be folded into the larger religions of the world as something that just is?

I think next week, it begins. [laughs] I mean, to me it already is. I haven't had a conversation like this about my philosophy -- I don't think ever. But I love doing it and have no problem doing it. I work, I have a family and I'm

a spiritual being who likes to understand why things happen in the world and want to learn more so that I can have them not affect me adversely. So if that's weird, then, well, you can go fuck yourself.

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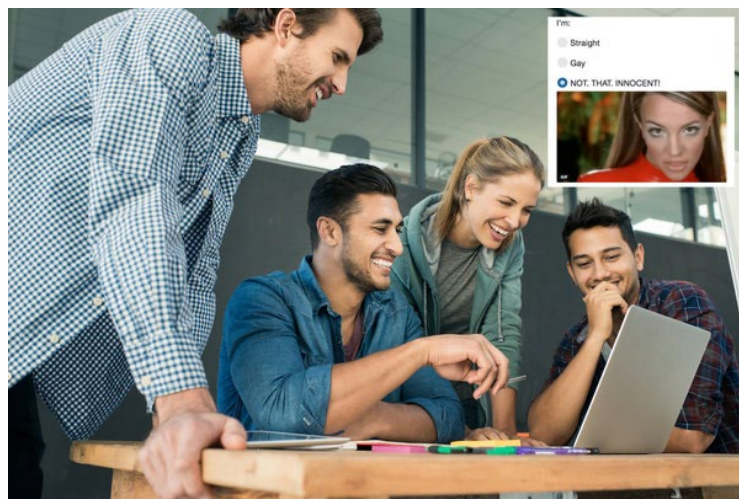
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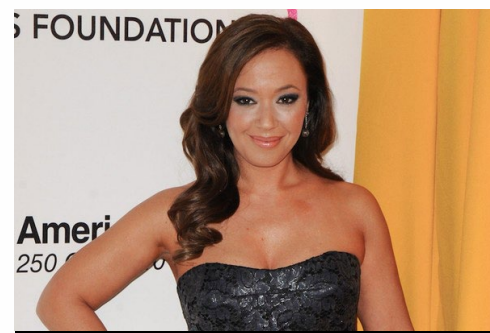
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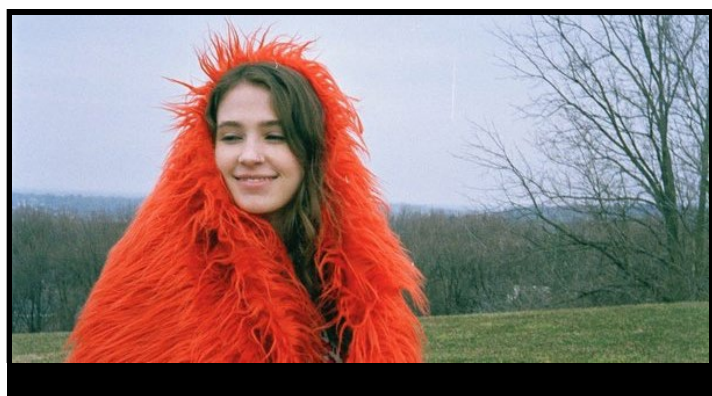
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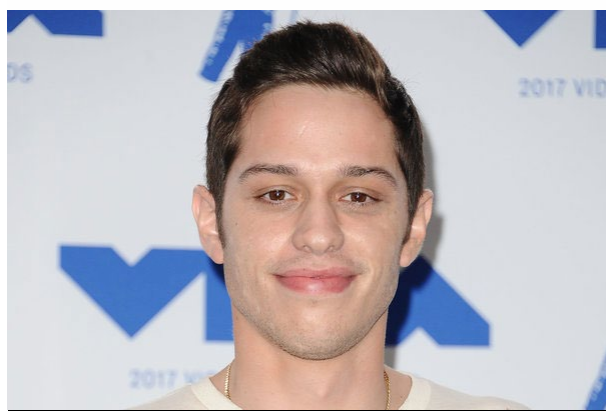
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