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Quantum leaps in the wrong direction : where real science ends and pseudoscience begins

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Abstrak

Why, the world asked, did a group of seemingly intelligent individuals, possessing marketable skills, and comfortably housed in an upscale neighborhood, decide to kill themselves? They did it because of their belief that by committing suicide in this manner, they would shed their bodies, or ?earthly containers,? and be whisked away by extraterrestrials to a spaceship and a higher level of existence. Unfortunately for them, their belief was pseudoscientific: it was erroneously regarded as scientific. And how did they arrive at this misguided belief? They arrived at it in a manner characteristic of many pseudoscientists: they received it from a charismatic leader, a man named Marshall Herff Applewhite. The ?classmates,? as they called themselves, blindly and tragically accepted the teachings of someone whose deep-seated ideas about the universe were erroneous. Applewhite had convinced them of the existence of a gigantic alien spaceship, said to be following a comet that had been named Hale-Bopp (after the two astronomers who had first sighted it in July 1995). This spaceship was to take them home to the ?literal Heavens.? Let?s compare the claim of Hale and Bopp two years earlier, that a comet was heading our way, and the claim by Marshall Herff Applewhite, that a gigantic alien spaceship was heading our way.