

Get *Battle for Survival - 4,536 Days in Captivity* by Toru Goto

Michael Jenkins and Larry Moffitt
August 10, 2025



The book has arrived at The Washington Times, and we have copies we will send to you so you can distribute them to anyone involved with religion and faith. That would be any sincere Christian, Muslim or Jew.

In the long shadow cast by religious intolerance, few personal accounts blaze with such clarity and courage as Toru Goto's "Battle for Survival: 4,536 Days in Captivity," the story of a Japanese member of the Unification Church confined for more than twelve years in the ultimately unsuccessful attempt to deprogram him and destroy his faith.

A memoir that chronicles the long years of forcible confinement by those closest to him, this book is a wrenching portrait of spiritual defiance against a society that too often ignores religious persecution. A quietly powerful account to read, and emotionally devastating, it turns a single man's suffering into an indictment of systemic indifference - and, remarkably, a testimony of grace.

Start drawing up your list of good contacts in the churches, mosques and synagogues of your community. In these times of increased intolerance for every faith, this book is necessary to have, to read and to apply to your immediate world.

Massimo Introvigne, freedom of religion champion and publisher of Bitter Winter magazine, writes, "If you read only one memoir this year, let it be Toru Goto's. Not because it's comfortable, but because it's true. And in that truth, we find our shared humanity."

Contact Larry Moffitt ([SanViejo@ gmail.com](mailto:SanViejo@gmail.com)) at Universal Peace Federation with your mailing address and phone number.

See Bitter Winter article attached.

Very respectfully,

Dr. Michael Jenkins
President, UPF USA

Larry Moffitt
Secretary General

BITTER WINTER

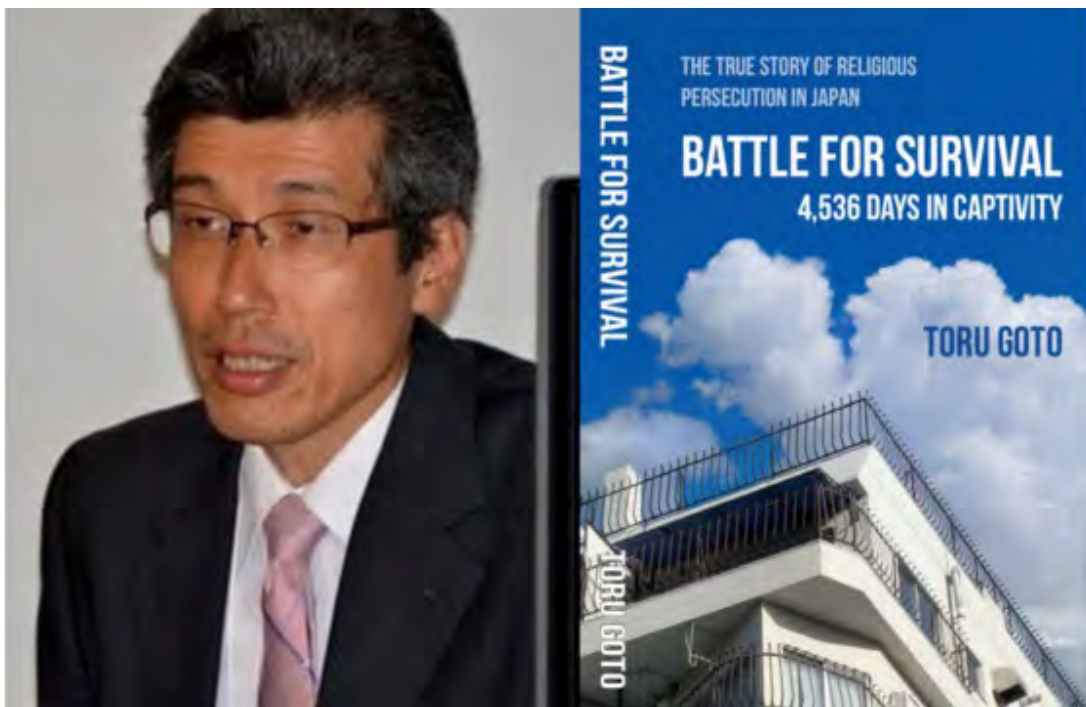
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Link to article: <https://bitterwinter.org/the-battle-for-the-soul-toru-gotos-harrowing-tale-of-captivity-and-courage/>

The Battle for the Soul: Toru Goto's Harrowing Tale of Captivity and Courage

The story of a Japanese Unification Church member confined by his family and deprogrammers for more than twelve years is a narrative that demands to be heard

by Massimo Introvigne 08-06-2025



Toru Goto at the time of his legal victory—and his book.

In the long shadow cast by religious intolerance, few personal accounts blaze with such clarity and courage as Toru Goto's "Battle for Survival: 4,536 Days in Captivity" (Washington DC: The Washington Times Global Media Group, 2025), the story of a Japanese member of the Unification Church confined for more than twelve years in the ultimately unsuccessful attempt to deprogram him and break his faith.

A memoir that chronicles the long years of forcible confinement by those closest to him, this book is a wrenching portrait of spiritual defiance against a society that too often ignores faith-

based persecution. Quietly powerful and emotionally devastating, it turns a single man's suffering into an indictment of systemic indifference—and, remarkably, a testimony of grace.

From the first pages, Goto plunges the reader into quiet dread. The setting is not a prison or remote village, but a typical Tokyo apartment in Sugunami Ward—a place where family dinners and neighborly exchanges should reign. Yet this apartment becomes a site of near-total isolation and psychological warfare. Goto's ordeal began in 1995 when, after years as a dedicated member of the Unification Church, he was forcibly abducted by relatives who viewed his beliefs as misguided. Their intention was deprogramming—to compel him, through relentless psychological pressure and physical control, to renounce his faith. His ordeal would only end in 2008.

Goto's details are relentless in their horror and clinical in their precision. For over a decade, he was subjected to a meticulously orchestrated strategy designed to erode his autonomy. Locked inside, denied all contact with the outside world, Goto's life was reduced to regulated routines and degrading confrontations with hired deprogrammers, religious “experts” who subjected him to hours of theological attacks, emotional manipulation, and strategic exhaustion.

At one point, Goto describes receiving only meager portions of food, leaving him emaciated and malnourished. His weight dropped below 40 kilograms (88 pounds), and no medical help was summoned. There were moments when walking, even standing, became almost impossible—resisting in such a state required not just strength, but belief that something more sacred than physical comfort was at stake.



Malnourished and almost unable to move. Toru Goto after twelve years of detention and attempts at deprogramming.

Over the years, Goto's psychological tactics of resistance became as layered as the assault against him. He refused to answer questions designed to trick him into doubt. He composed letters, though none were sent. He prayed silently, invoking the Unification Church's “Divine Principle” and imagining the outside world—not as escape, but as anchor. He created mental schedules to hold on to a sense of time. As seasons blurred, so did identities: once cherished family members became captors. Trusted elders became interrogators.

The memoir is deeply affecting when Goto recounts holidays spent alone, birthdays ignored, and the devastating realization that even the police—when informed by outsiders—refused to intervene. Society viewed deprogramming not as a crime, but as a familial dispute. The trauma is not just what happened inside the apartment but what failed to happen outside it.

Perhaps the most disturbing element of “Battle for Survival” is not the behavior of Goto’s captors, but the societal blind eye that enabled it. The book indicts Japan’s tacit acceptance of anti-cult practices, where minority religions are frequently discriminated against, and members of these faiths are treated as mentally unsound. Goto outlines the evolution of the “apostasy movement,” an unregulated network of families, religious professionals, and rogue therapists who operated in legal grey zones.

His account forces uncomfortable questions: Why did law enforcement refuse to act? Why were there no protections in place for individuals undergoing forced deprogramming? Why was his suffering not recognized as a human rights violation until long after his release?

The book details how Unification Church members and legal advocates repeatedly attempted to bring attention to his case. Activists organized petitions, held press conferences, and tried to gain access to the apartment. Yet for years, nothing moved. Only in 2008—when Goto’s health was so critical he could barely stand—did pressure culminate in his release, facilitated by members of the Church and its legal team.

Post-release, Goto’s battle continued in court. He sued his family and those involved in his captivity, citing human rights violations and demanding accountability. The legal proceedings were landmark: never before had such a prolonged case of religious coercion been successfully prosecuted in Japan. Goto’s victory—modest in financial compensation—was monumental in terms of moral recognition. It ended the practice of forcible deprogramming in Japan. However, in the heated anti-cult climate that followed the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, there is now a risk that it may return in some form.



Toru Goto with Reverend and Mrs. Moon.

Yet the book is not a celebration of legal triumph. Goto writes about the court case with sobering insight. He expresses gratitude but remains painfully aware of the gaps in justice. Many perpetrators walked free. The system that allowed his imprisonment still has loopholes. His story becomes not just personal but political—a call to action to reframe religious freedom as a human right, not a conditional privilege.

Despite the bleak circumstances, Goto's story is ultimately one of transformation. The faith that sustained him is never portrayed as infallible or indoctrinated—instead, it becomes a deeply personal path through unimaginable suffering. Goto does not preach. He does not attempt to convert. He explains how prayer gave him strength, scripture offered guidance, and divine love—even when abandoned by earthly love—remained the sole force tethering him to sanity.

Some of the most poignant passages in “Battle for Survival” are those where Goto reflects on the complexity of forgiveness. He does not vilify his family wholesale; he mourns their loss of humanity. With genuine sorrow, he wonders what led them to betray him so completely. And this capacity for emotional nuance elevates the memoir from mere documentation to literature—it is as much an exploration of family, memory, and broken bonds as it is an indictment of religious persecution.

The literary style of the memoir is spare, sometimes even stark—Goto rarely indulges in elaborate metaphors or ornate prose. And yet the emotional impact is immersive. Each sentence, measured and deliberate, echoes with the trauma it carries. As readers, we feel the walls close in. We feel the years stretch out. We feel the heartbeat of a man who should have been forgotten—yet who refused to disappear.

For faith communities worldwide, “Battle for Survival” will resonate as both a warning and an inspiration. For non-specialized readers, it offers a jarring look at a society that too often conflates spiritual difference with pathology. For legal scholars and human rights advocates, it is a case study in the intersection of personal liberty and institutional negligence.

The book ultimately expresses the human spirit's astonishing ability to endure. Toru Goto's survival was not passive. It was active, daily, and unrelenting. It was cultivated in the silence of prayer, the pain of isolation, and the conviction that dignity could not be taken without consent. “Battle for Survival” is a chronicle of a hidden war waged in cramped rooms, with no audience and no applause.

And yet, against all odds, its hero emerges not bitter but bold. He teaches us that resilience is not a trait, but a choice. That faith is not weakness, but armor. That freedom is not always granted—sometimes, it must be reclaimed.

If you read only one memoir this year, let it be Toru Goto's. Not because it's comfortable, but because it's true. And in that truth, we find our shared humanity.



Massimo Introvigne (born June 14, 1955 in Rome) is an Italian sociologist of religions. He is the founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions ([CESNUR](#)), an international network of scholars who study new religious movements. Introvigne is the author of some 70 books.