ZOROASTRIANISM, SHINTO, BAHA'I, SCIENTOLOGY, WICCA, AND SENECA TRADITIONS

What Makes a "World Religion"?

FIGURE 9.1 © Chon Day 1993/The New Yorker Collection/ www.cartoonbank.com.

The Religion Toolkit: A Complete Guide to Religious Studies, First Edition. John Morreall and Tamara Sonn.

The earth is but one country,
and humankind its citizens.

BAHA ULLAH, FOUNDER OF BAHA'I

Overview

Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism are generally called "world religions," but this designation is questionable since it is not based on a set of features they share. For example:

- Judaism is ancient and influenced many later traditions, but it is followed by only a tiny fraction of the world's population, while Zoroastrianism is older than Judaism and also influenced later traditions.
- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are found throughout the world, but so is Baha'i; and Confucianism and Taoism are not international traditions, and they call themselves "teachings" rather than religions.
- Shinto is a national tradition, but its practitioners sometimes say it is a religion and sometimes say it is not a religion.

Such issues lead scholars to try to be more inclusive in their survey of religious traditions. In this chapter we shall survey six more traditions, pointing out key characteristics that may help us understand the phenomenon of religion.

- Zoroastrianism is the ancient tradition of Persia. It is monotheistic and scholars believe that its teachings about the purpose of life, the coming of a savior, and the afterlife influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

- Shinto, the ancient tradition of Japan, is so closely related to the rulers of Japan that it is often designated simply a national tradition rather than a religion, even though it involves belief in spiritual beings and rituals focusing on personal and family matters rather than political issues.
- Baha'i is less than two centuries old and accepts all other religions as valid.
- Scientology was invented by one man as a kind of psychotherapy; then he began calling it a religion.
- Wicca was developed in the 1950s to resurrect the "nature religions" of the British Isles before the arrival of Christianity.
- The Seneca, a Native American tribe, had no word or concept "religion," though other people often talk about their "beliefs" and "religious rituals."

After surveying these traditions, we shall return to the issue of defining religion, noting the political and legal implications of the designation.

What Makes a "World Religion"?

In the last three chapters, we have explored seven major traditions that are alive and well. This is far from a complete examination of the 10,000 traditions identified by The *World Christian Encyclopedia* as today's religions, not to mention the thousands that have gone extinct. We chose Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism because they are commonly called "world religions" – the "Big Seven" – in Religious Studies textbooks. But what makes them count as "world" religions? Is it because they are followed by huge numbers of people? This is not true of Judaism. Judaism is included because it is foundational to two traditions that are followed by large numbers of people. But if this is enough to be counted a "world religion," then Zoroastrianism should count too, because of its enormous influence – in the perspective of Religious Studies – on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But Zoroastrianism is not called a world religion. Is a "world religion" one that it is followed by people in diverse regions around the world? This does not apply to Confucianism and Taoism, for example, but they are among the Big Seven.

In fact, the inclusion of the seven traditions in the standard listing of "world religions" is somewhat arbitrary. It grew out of the early efforts by European scholars to understand the phenomenon of religion, which we discussed in Chapter 3. As we saw, it took some effort for Western Christian scholars to recognize non-Christian traditions as religions at all, rather than as mere "superstition," "magic," "heresy," or even the dreaded "paganism." The phrase "world religions" came into use when the first Parliament of the World's Religions was held in Chicago, during the time of the 1893 world's fair (the World Columbian Exposition), but representation at the Parliament was neither systematic nor comprehensive.

In light of such criticism, many universities have changed their "World Religions" courses to courses focused on specific traditions, such as Chinese traditions or Islamic Studies. Over the past several decades, scholars have thought more carefully about other categories as well, and have tried to treat all religious traditions with equal respect. Some have rejected the

What Is a Pagan?

FIGURE 9.2 Wiccan Beltane Fire Festival, Edinburgh, spring 2008.
Jeff J. Mitchell/Getty Images.

People who grew up in a monotheistic tradition often hear non-monotheists referred to as "pagans." Dictionary definitions of the term range from "non-believer" to "polytheist" – someone who believes in more than one god. The photo above, from *National Geographic*, depicts what it calls a "pagan fire fest," actually a Wiccan Beltane celebration of spring in 2008.

The term "pagan" is avoided by scholars of religion because of its negative connotations. The term comes from a Latin root that means someone from the countryside rather than from the city. The connotation goes beyond today's adjective "country" – referring to someone who is unsophisticated and lacks polish, someone with the characteristics valorized in "country" music in the U.S. (See Gretchen Wilson, "Redneck Woman" and Hank "Bocephus" Williams Jr., "A Country Boy Can Survive.") Reflecting the correlation between religion and politics throughout history, a pagan was someone not involved in the central government's urban religious organization and therefore was considered untrustworthy and a potential threat. So the Latin *paganus* refers to someone both uncivilized (literally: not living in settled/urban society) and uncouth (literally: not known to anyone in our group; outlandish – meaning from "outside our land" and therefore strange, foreign). A pagan was someone who did not recognize the religion of the city – the religion that legitimized the central government. This is why a pagan was a potential traitor, just like anyone else who failed to recognize the principles that legitimate the government.

"church–sect–cult" taxonomy that we mentioned in Chapter 1, seeing the term "church" as reflecting a unique (i.e., not universal) Christian paradigm, and "cult" as unnecessarily prejudicial. "New Religious Movements" (NRMs) is a phrase introduced by American scholar J. Gordon Melton (b. 1942) in the 1970s and adopted by many scholars in place of "cult." As well, many universities have introduced the study of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) into the curriculum, along with other "indigenous religions" of colonized areas – such as Native American Religions.

Zoroastrianism

History and Teachings of Zoroastrianism

Before Islam came to Iran (formerly called Persia) in the 7th century, Zoroastrianism was the major religion there. It probably began in the 9th or 10th century BCE, but it appears in historical records only in the 6th century BCE. Founded by the prophet Zoroaster, it was the state religion of several Persian empires. Iran today lies between India to the East and what the ancient Greeks called Mesopotamia to the West. Scholars of religion are therefore not surprised to find that Zoroastrianism has much in common with both Hinduism and the Western monotheistic traditions. Many of the core beliefs of Christians, Jews and Muslims have earlier counterparts in Zoroastrian tradition. According to Mary Boyce (2001,1), "Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed world-religions, and it has probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith." Ideas in Western monotheism about the cosmic struggle between good and evil, the coming of a savior who will ultimately vanquish evil, a final judgment, and life after death are examples.

As we saw in Chapter 2, according to Zoroastrian teaching, the single eternal and transcendent god, Ahura Mazda, created a beautiful and orderly universe. Evil is represented by Angra Mainyu, also known as Ahriman, an evil spirit independent of the great creator Ahura Mazda. All of history is characterized by the conflict between good and evil, but in the end Ahura Mazda will triumph over all evil.

Zoroastrianism teaches that human beings participate in the maintenance of a well ordered universe by thinking, speaking, and acting well. Prefiguring the biblical teaching, Zoroastrianism teaches that at the end of time, a savior – a **Saoshyant** ("one who brings benefit") – will renew the world, restoring its perfect order. The Saoshyant, according to tradition, will be born of a virgin – a characteristic that was later stressed in Christian and Islamic teachings about Jesus. Dead people will be resurrected and they, along with the

people still living at that time, will be judged. From a History of Religions perspective (see Chapter 4), this appears to be a forerunner of biblical teachings about the Last Judgment.

The details of the final judgment vary slightly in different Zoroastrian traditions. According to some versions, judgment will be by ordeal. People will have to walk through a river of molten stone. To those whose thoughts, words, and deeds were pure, the river will feel like cool milk. Those who contributed to disorder through dishonest thoughts, words, or deeds will, of course, burn. According to another version, people will have to cross a very narrow bridge suspended above fires of molten rock. Those whose thoughts, words, and deeds were pure will be guided easily across the bridge by the luminous reflection of their souls. This reflection will be in the form of a pure – or "virginal" – angelic figure, a daena, standing in paradise at the end of the bridge.

Scholars have coined a technical term for a "guide for the soul" – **psychopomp** – because such figures are found in a number of traditions around the world. The psychopomp role can be played by ancestors, for example, as they are in some African traditions, or angels, as in some folk traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the modern Persian language, the term for the daena is *din*, which, as we saw in Chapter 1, is used for the English term "religion" – so that religion becomes the "guide for the soul." The Persian term is also related to the Sanskrit *dharma*, which, as we saw in Chapter 7, can be translated as law or duty – also appropriate "guides for the soul."

Interestingly, scholars see the Zoroastrian daena as a possible source for the traditional Islamic teaching of the houris. As we saw in Chapter 6, houris are mentioned in the Qur'an as "pure companions" for those who make it to heaven. But in Islamic traditional literature (hadiths), they are described as voluptuous heavenly virgins awaiting righteous men. It goes without saying that these traditions have been passed on by males, some of whom have determined that there will be precisely 72 such beauties awaiting them. Why 72? The Muslim traditionists do not explain. But in a fascinating coincidence, the special belt – kushti (or kusti) – that Zoroastrians wear for prayer is made of 72 perfectly white wool threads. These 72 threads represent the 72 chapters of Zoroastrian scripture (Yasna, the main collection and the ritual recitation of scripture). Kushti means "pathfinder," again indicating a connection with the notion of daena as a psychopomp. The Zoroastrian undershirt worn during prayer is called a shudreh (or sedreh), "good" or "righteous path." And in another fascinating coincidence, some scholars relate the term shudreh to the Sanskrit *shudra*. As we saw in Chapter 7, in Hindu teaching the shudras are the lowest varna. But the root meaning of the term in Sanskrit is "color of the soul," which seems to tie in with the notion of the daena as a luminous reflection of one's conscience.

Also like Abrahamic traditions, Zoroastrian scripture was revealed to the human race through a prophet, in this case Zoroaster. The holy volume is called the Avesta. It includes the **Gathas**, hymns attributed to Zoroaster, as well as later writings, totaling twenty-one books.

Other aspects of Zoroastrian teaching about spiritual beings are complex and have evolved over time. For example, Ahura Mazda's communication with humans comes through a number of Entities or Attributes, called the Bounteous Immortals. In Zoroaster's writings, these Immortals are sometimes presented as abstract concepts and other times described as if they are persons. In one version of the theology, Ahura Mazda had rival twin sons, Spenta Mainyu (Bounteous Spirit) and Angra Mainyu (Destructive Spirit). The first

Freddie Mercury, Famous Zoroastrian

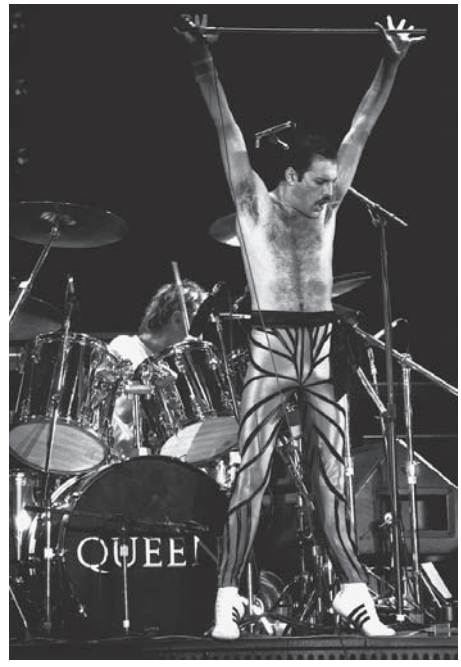

FIGURE 9.3 Freddie Mercury.

Freddie Mercury (d. 1991), lead singer of the British band Queen, was born Farookh Bulsara to Indian parents who were Parsees. He grew up in Mumbai and was initiated into Zoroastrianism at age 8 in the ancient ceremony called Mayjote. After a bath of purification, during which a priest chanted prayers, young Freddie stood before one of the eternal fires and repeated the prayers of acceptance into Zoroastrianism. Then he was given his *shudreh*, a shirt made of white muslin symbolizing innocence and purity. Around his waist the priest tied the kushti, a cord made of pure white lamb's wool symbolizing service to humanity. The kushti was wrapped around him three times to remind the young boy of the three aspects of Ahura Mazda – creator, preserver, and rebuilder of the world. Finally, the boy was showered with rice, rose petals, coconut, and pomegranate and dressed in his new clothes.

In Mumbai, Freddie attended St. Peter's boarding school, where he learned Western classical music along with Indian music. There he and four schoolmates formed the rock band The Hectics, in which he played piano. When he was 18, Freddie's family moved to Britain, where he attended Ealing College of Art in London. Later he played in several bands, most famously Queen, which he formed with Brian May, Roger Taylor, and John Deacon. Freddie wrote most of their hit songs, including *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *We Are the Champions*. When Mercury died in 1991, his funeral was conducted by Zoroastrian priests in the ancient Avestan language.

chose good, and so is associated with truth, justice, and life. The Destructive Spirit, Angra Mainyu, chose evil and so destruction, injustice, and death. In Zoroaster's telling, these forces are under the ultimate control of Ahura Mazda. However, after Zoroaster was gone, some of these forces were re-described by later generations as gods themselves. In some interpretations, Ahura Mazda was identified as the god of good and Angra Mainyu as the god of evil, calling into question the monotheism of Zoroastrianism.

In the 7th century, when Arabs brought Islam to Persia, many Persians converted to the new religion. In the 8th–10th centuries, Zoroastrianism was suppressed in Persia, so many of its members emigrated east to India, settling in the Gujarat and Marahrashtra states, especially around Mumbai. There they were called "Parsees," that is, Persians. Most Parsees were farmers until the British colonized India in the 18th century. They flourished under the British, adopting British customs and dress. By the 19th century, the Parsees were well known in Indian society for their education, generosity, and success in business.

Today there are fewer than 200,000 Zoroastrians worldwide, mainly in Iran and India. Famous Zoroastrians include the orchestra conductor Zubin Mehta, the rock musician Freddie Mercury of the band Queen, and the Tata family, who are car manufacturers in India. While Zoroastrianism discourages marriage with outsiders, many Zoroastrians in modern times have intermarried. Women are encouraged to join the professions, too, so they tend to have fewer children than their neighbors. Intermarriage and the low birth rate have contributed to the decline in the number of Zoroastrians.

Zoroastrian Rituals

The energy of Ahura Mazda, the creator, is represented by fire, the sun, and light in general. (This is why General Electric used "Mazda" as a brand name for light bulbs from 1909 to 1945.) Zoroastrians pray in front of a fire or a source of light. Rituals center around fire, keeping it lit, and feeding the fire five times a day.

The centrality of fire in Zoroastrian ritual has misled some into believing that Zoroastrians are "fire-worshipers." They do not worship fire. Instead, fire represents Ahura Mazda and it is seen as a purifying element. Zoroastrian worship services are carried out in a "fire temple" – a building that houses an urn with a fire and a source of water. The fire is in a small central room with no other source of light. The fire is maintained by a priest, the only person allowed to enter the special room. The priest conducts the Yasna service, the recitation of Avestas in their entirety. At the end of the recitation, the priest makes an offering "to the water" of a mixture of hoama twigs (see Chapter 7), pomegranate, and milk, for symbolic purification.

The most important Zoroastrian holiday is the beginning of the new year, **Norūz**, believed to have been founded by Zoroaster. It is celebrated on the first day of the vernal (Spring) equinox, around March 21. Even after Zoroastrianism was marginalized by Islam in Iran, Norūz remained a popular holiday, as it is still throughout regions influenced by Persia. It remains a holiday in many parts of Central Asia, India, Afghanistan, and Kashmir, though generally without religious significance for non-Zoroastrians, and is celebrated by Baha'is and some Muslims as a religious holiday, too.

Similar to Jewish practice associated with Passover, Zoroastrians prepare for Norūz with a thorough housecleaning. As well, on the last Tuesday evening of the year is the

FIGURE 9.4 A Zoroastrian priest starts a fire as part of Sadeh, the ancient feast celebrating the creation of fire. © Eye Ubiquitous/SuperStock.

"Festival of the Fire." People build fires outside and jump over them. In the secular celebrations of Norūz, people think of this as marking the transition from the old year to the new year. The religious meaning is expressed in a prayer in which people consign their fears, weakness, and suffering to the fire for purification, exchanging them for courage, strength, and health in the new year.

It is also common for people to precede the holiday with prayers at the family cemetery. Reflecting the folk belief that the ancestors' spirits visit at this time, children traditionally put on "ghost" costumes and go from house to house to get sweets.

On new year's day itself, people put on new clothes and begin a 12-day period of visiting family members and friends, where they are served sherbet, pastries, and dried fruits and nuts. A special table is set for Norūz, the "Seven S's" (*haft sin*) table, with flowers and seven items beginning with the letter "s." These items symbolize good things for the new year: rebirth, wealth, love, beauty, health, and patience.

Zoroastrians share with Hindus a concern for purity. This is perhaps most evident in their unique funerary practice. According to Zoroastrian rules of purity, a corpse is utterly impure – the ultimate pollutant. Only specially ordained "pollutant caretakers" – nasellars – can handle them safely. The nasellar takes the corpse to a dakhma – a circular tower with an inclined plane on top (known in English as "towers of silence"), where it is exposed to the elements (and birds of prey) until all that is left are bones. Once the bones are thoroughly dried out, they are put in a pit at the center of the tower where they gradually disintegrate and disappear into the soil, eventually to be washed to sea.

Shinto

History and Teachings of Shinto

As we saw, many of Zoroastrians' foundational beliefs are shared by other monotheists throughout the world, and the secular celebration of the new year in the spring is popular in diverse cultures. Shinto, by contrast, is an ancient tradition grounded in one place and one culture, Japan. It flourished in Japan long before the Chinese traditions of Confucianism and Buddhism arrived, and has continued to reflect Japanese culture and values throughout the ages.

Shinto has no founder, no inerrant doctrines, and no scriptures that are considered sacred, as if they were revealed by a god. The oldest written record of its teachings and practices dates from the 8th century. Known as the **Kojiki** ("Records of Ancient Matters"), this text includes a story describing the creation of Japan. The gods commissioned the creation of a new, perfect land. After some missteps, the eight islands of Japan were created. The missteps had to do with attempts to defy the laws of nature – which in the story included the priority of males over females. According to the story, when the man and woman commissioned by the gods to create this beautiful place began their project, the woman greeted the man first – and nothing happened. Then they tried again, but with the man speaking first; this time things went much more smoothly.

As we have seen (in Chapters 5 and 7, for example), explanations for the subservient status of women are not unusual in religious traditions. They reflect the rise in the social status of warriors as human beings made the transition from hunter-gatherer to agrarian lifestyles and warriors were needed to protect the newly settled land on which people's livelihood depended. With the ascendancy of warriors came the domination of males over females – particularly in their control of female sexuality, as warriors sought to make sure that their offspring alone benefited from the fruits of their labor. However, Shinto is not one of the traditions known for inequality between males and females. The emphasis in the Kojiki is less on social or moral teachings than on the rise of the imperial family who commissioned the text. The second oldest text, the **Nihon Shoki** ("Continuing Chronicles of Japan"), also from the 8th century, focuses even more intently on formalizing the imperial government. These early sources demonstrate that, from the beginning, Shinto has been a strictly Japanese tradition and reflects a fundamental orientation toward nature.

Shinto is not the only tradition that has influenced Japan. We saw in Chapter 8 that Buddhism came to Japan from Korea in the 6th century, and Confucianism not long thereafter. Many Shinto shrines were built on the grounds of Buddhist temples and evidence from the earliest written records of Shinto show signs of Buddhist influence. Starting around 1600, religious scholars in Japan emphasized the unity of Shinto and Confucian teachings in such things as the virtues of filial piety, sincerity and loyalty, and the need for emperors to show wisdom, benevolence, and courage. Still, Shinto remains the indigenous tradition of Japan.

The word *Shinto* comes from the Chinese *Shēntao*, which means "the way of **kami**." In a general sense, kami means divine or supernatural power – "the force" or power of the universe, which is considered sacred in all its manifestations. In a narrower sense, kami

Kamikaze: the First Suicide Bombers?

神風

FIGURE 9.5 *Kami kaze* – "the wind of the kami" or "divine wind."

Most people think of Kamikaze as the deadly attacks by Japanese planes, full of explosives, against Allied sites during World War II. That is indeed the name given to these suicide attacks. The name actually comes from the Japanese *kami*, for god, and *kaze*, wind. It is the name given to the giant storms that protected the Japanese from invading Mongol fleets in the 13th century. The practice of crashing planes into targets began with the use of planes for war. When a plane was damaged or on the verge of being captured, pilots were instructed to use them as weapons – a more honorable course of action. Interestingly, the Japanese were not the only ones instructed to do so. American pilots were told to do the same thing.

refers to various gods and spirits. Some kami are associated with specific natural forces such as wind (*kami kaze*) and waves, and some with natural elements such as rocks and mountains – good examples of what scholars call animism (see Chapter 5). Some kami are associated with more abstract powers such as growth and healing – good examples of anthropomorphism (see Chapter 5). Some are imagined in more human form – including heroic figures of the past and ancestors, and some are considered guardians who protect specific places or clans. Unlike many traditions we have discussed, where deities are in competition with one another, Shinto kami are said to cooperate with each other and with people. They reflect a harmonious natural order. Moreover, because they are guardians of people, establishing good relationships with them brings general prosperity.

Proper relationships with the kami are characteristically maintained through veneration at shrines – both public shrines and private shrines in homes. In contrast to traditions that are based on belief or faith, such as Christianity, and those based on following moral laws, such as Judaism and Islam, Shinto is based on ritual practice – specifically veneration of kami at shrines. This does not mean, however, that Shinto is devoid of moral teachings. In Shinto, bad deeds – such as lying, stealing, and murder – show extreme disrespect and therefore are described as impure. Shrines, as the abode of kami, are pure, and other places are made pure through ceremonies conducted by priests. New buildings, for example, and even cars are commonly purified by priestly rituals.

Schematizing the vast diversity of Shinto, scholars distinguish several kinds of Shinto practice, including folk Shinto, state or shrine Shinto, and sect Shinto. Folk Shinto is the oldest and least systematized form of Shinto practice. It is a rural phenomenon, grounded

in agricultural tradition. Consistent with its oral roots, folk Shinto has a remarkable array of practices and reflects a good deal of syncretism (mixing of elements from a range of sources). Folk Shinto centers on the veneration of small roadside images and on agricultural rites associated with planting and harvest. However, it also includes divination and healing practices (shamanism; see Chapter 5), and spirit possession (see Chapter 2).

State Shinto dates from the earliest written records of Shinto, the Kojiki, which describe the ascendancy of the leaders of a clan who lived near the city of Nara, whose kami was the sun goddess **Amaterasu**. (Many countries identify periods in their history by the name of the ruler or dynasty, such as Britain's "Victorian Era" or the Chinese "Ming Dynasty." But Japan's classical history is commonly divided into periods identified by the name of the region or capital of the ruling family – reflecting the importance of place in Japanese thought. So the period during which the Kojiki was produced is called the Nara period, 710–794 CE.) The ruling clan were described as descendants of Amaterasu, and she was considered the most important kami of all. This clan was therefore recognized as the Japanese imperial household and became the center of the Japanese nation. The Kojiki explains that Amaterasu herself bequeathed to them the **Three Sacred Treasures** in Shinto – the mirror, sword, and jewel, which represent wisdom, valor, and wealth or generosity, respectively.

Under this union of Shinto with the state, the government supported thousands of shrines and provided offerings to the kami. By around 900 CE there were 3,000 shrines throughout Japan receiving state offerings. As the strength of the central government declined, however, state Shinto declined along with it. After 1300, the government supported far fewer shrines and offerings. Nevertheless, the Three Sacred Treasures remain symbols of the imperial authority to this day (even though their precise locations are not known with certainty and no one but the emperor and priests of the imperial household are allowed to see them). Clearly demonstrating the fusion of religious authority and political power, the word for "government" in Japanese is *matsuri-goto*, which means "affairs of religious festivals," and the Japanese emperor remains today the symbolic head of state as well as the highest authority in Shinto.

"Shrine Shinto" refers to the common practice centered on visits to any of the thousands of shrines spread across the length and breadth of Japan. People go to shrines and express their respect for the kami on special occasions, and to ask for protection and assistance with specific undertakings. As well, major public celebrations, such as seasonal festivals, are marked by visits to shrines.

"Sect Shinto" is a term devised in the 19th century for practices not conducted at state-maintained shrines but in private halls instead. Sect Shinto is often described as a more spiritually oriented practice than the nationalist state Shinto. Scholars currently identify 13 groups practicing "Sect Shintoism." They include groups concerned with purification, healing, and devotion to a specific kami such as that of the sun or Mount Fuji (the highest peak in Japan). Some of these groups are considered "new" – dating from only the last century.

Shinto Rituals

The most common Shinto ritual is worship at the family shrine – the kamidana. A kamidana is a "kami home" where the family kami lives. The kamidana is usually on a high shelf and contains a special object called a shintai – which can be a mirror, a stone, or any of a wide

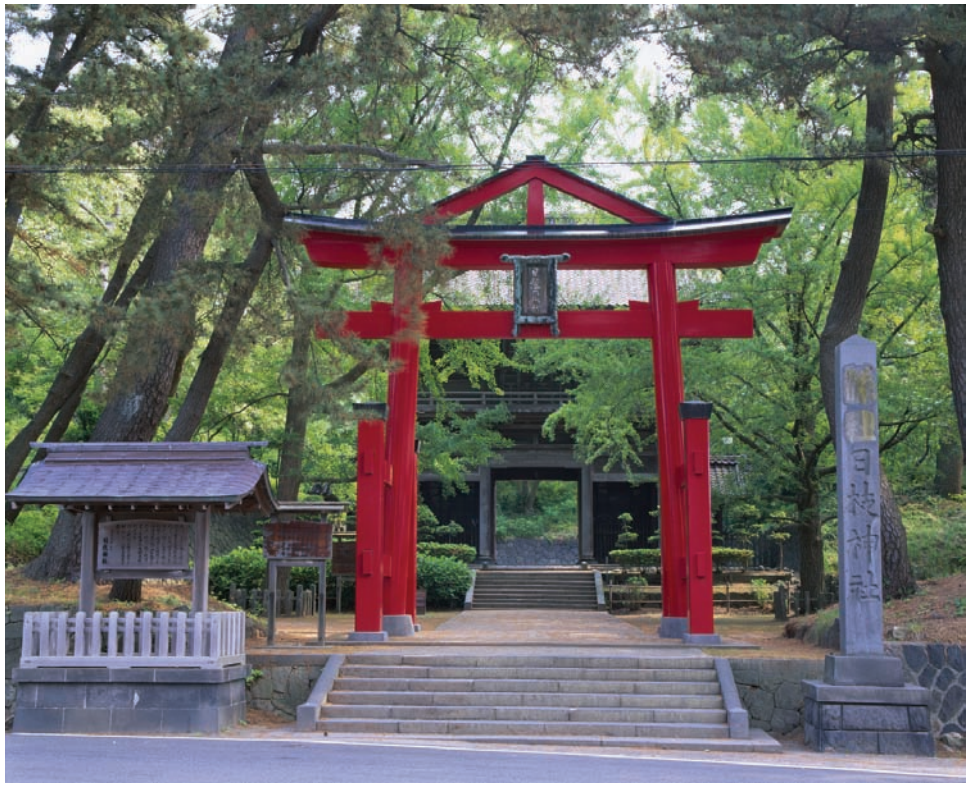

FIGURE 9.6 A Shinto shrine with a torii gate. © JTB Photo/SuperStock.

variety of other things that are considered suitable places for the kami to abide. (Kamidana are also commonly found in Japanese martial arts studios called dojos.) Kamidana ritual is simple. It begins with washing the hands and involves prayers and gifts of food and flowers to the kami in the shintai.

Public Shinto shrines are identifiable by their distinctive gates – torii. Torii are constructed of two upright members and two lintels, the upper one longer than the first lintel and curved. Torii are often unpainted, but if they are painted, it is in bright reddish-orange (vermillion). Shrines may have more than one such gate. Some have many, since it is common for people to donate torii in gratitude for blessings. Crossing through a torii symbolizes entry into sacred space, the domicile of the shrine's kami.

People go to shrines for special occasions, entering through the torii into the public worship and offering halls. There is another room that only the priest can enter, except for special occasions. This is the room housing the shintai.

Rituals at shrines vary but commonly include bowing to show respect before entering the shrine. People also remove their shoes, again to show respect. Many shrines have basins with ladles so that worshipers may wash their hands, mouth, and feet. Some shrines have bells, which people ring before praying. After prayer people bow again and put their hands together in a clapping motion before completing a final bow.

Japanese weddings are traditionally performed at Shinto shrines. In the most traditional form, the bride is covered in white make-up and wears a white kimono to symbolize that she is a virgin. Her hat is decorated with good luck charms, and she may also wear a hood symbolizing deference to her new mother-in-law. The groom wears a black kimono. The priest purifies the couple and the guests. The couple exchange vows, and then they, their family, and close friends drink cups of sake (an alcoholic drink brewed from rice) to symbolize their union. Traditionally the bride and groom take nine sips of sake. After this, the bride changes into a red kimono (and then into other fancy kimonos or dresses as well) and a festive reception begins.

A great variety of other practices are associated with Shinto, including kagura, ritual dance accompanied by music and believed to protect the souls of the newly departed and to please the ancestor kami. Practices associated with assuring good fortune are also common in Shinto. People can buy (or make an offering in return for) a special amulet for protection, or for a prediction about their future. But many of these practices are a result of Shinto's interaction with other traditions (primarily Buddhist) and are considered folk practices.

Baha'i

History and Teachings of Baha'i

The identity of Shinto and the state in Japan was reinforced in the modern period, beginning with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The power of the imperial family, whose ascendancy was described in the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki, had declined in the Middle Ages, and feudal warlords (shoguns) had taken control of various regions. In 1868, the shoguns ceded authority to Mitsuhito, descendent of the imperial family, who was acknowledged as the Emperor Meiji, "the enlightened emperor." The motto of the government officials was "Shinto ceremonies and political affairs are one and the same." During this period of modernization in Japan, the government set up a Bureau of Shrines, Shinto holidays were declared national holidays, and the emperor was revered as the symbol of the nation itself. It would be hard to find a better example of Durkheim's theory that "God is society, writ large" (see Chapter 4). So intense was the identification of Shinto and the state that, following Japan's defeat in World War II, the American occupation forces "disestablished" Shinto as the state religion and forced the emperor to declare that he was human (rather than a kami).

In contrast to this identification of Shinto with the Japanese state, Baha'i is a religion that forbids political involvement. The Baha'i religion was founded in the mid-1800s by a Persian nobleman who took the name Baha Ullah ("glory of God"). He was born a Shi'a Muslim. His followers said that he was the latest of a series of prophets that includes Abraham, Zoroaster, Krishna, Moses, the Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad. Baha Ullah wrote over 100 works, which his followers believe to be divinely inspired. Today there are over six million Baha'is around the world, representing over 2,100 ethnic, racial, and tribal groups. Their scriptures have been translated into over 800 languages.

Membership is open to everyone who accepts the teachings of Baha Ullah. There are no initiation rituals, clergy, sacraments, or worship rituals. Baha'is are governed locally by an elected assembly. There are also national assemblies, and they come together periodically to elect the Universal House of Justice, which is the supreme administrative, legislative, and judicial body for Baha'is.

The essential message of Baha Ullah is unity and peace. The three basic teachings in Baha'i are the unity of God – Allah in Baha'i texts, the unity of religion, and the unity of the human race. The concept of God is the familiar monotheistic one of an eternal, transcendent creator who is omniscient, almighty, and the source of all revelation.

God has sent messengers since ancient times, Baha Ullah taught. Their messages may sound different, because each was adapted to a specific time and place, but the essential revelation in all of them is one. Thus all the world's religions are valid. Some social rules, such as dietary restrictions, may be specific to one culture at a particular time, but general principles, such as charity and being a good neighbor, hold for all people for all time.

All human beings have a "rational soul," and so can recognize God as their creator. All have a responsibility to recognize the sovereignty of God and the message of his prophets. Through worship and obedience, prayer and serving others, they become closer to God. At death, the soul passes into the next world, is judged, and proceeds with the spiritual development it began in its earthly life. Heaven and Hell are spiritual states of the soul's nearness or distance from God.

The teachings of Baha Ullah include discourses on spiritual growth, and Baha'is are encouraged to meditate on them. Baha Ullah describes stages of spiritual development, beginning with the desire to grow closer to God. One must follow her inclination toward God as a lover is drawn to a loved one. Through patience and perseverance, the seeker will begin to understand the mysteries of life and see God in all creation. Losing all traces of ego, successful seekers will be unaffected by either good or bad fortune, and will abide in ecstatic wonder at the glory of God.

On the social level, Baha'is believe that, because the human race is one and its members are equal, sexism, racism, nationalism, and social classes are obstacles to human development. The time has come, Baha Ullah taught, for all peoples to unite into a peaceful and integrated global society. "The earth is but one country, and humankind its citizens," he wrote.

The unity of humankind is well reflected in Baha'i itself. Although its members come from over 2,100 ethnic groups, there are no factions or sects. Even the process of electing local and national assemblies involves no parties, nominations, or campaigning for office.

For a global society to flourish, Baha Ullah said, it must be based on moral principles. They include the elimination of all prejudice, equality between the sexes, the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth, universal education, the harmony of science and religion, a sustainable balance between nature and technology, and the establishment of a world government.

These goals are obviously similar to those of the United Nations, and many Baha'is work in cooperation with the United Nations. Indeed, taking citizenship responsibilities seriously is a major Baha'i value. Baha'is are required to obey the laws of their country of residence and participate in elections. However, they are not allowed to join political parties, run for office, or accept political appointments. Partisan political involvement is considered a violation of the Baha'i ethic of working for social unity.

Jazz Tuesdays at the Baha'i Center, New York City

FIGURE 9.7 Dizzy Gillespie. © Craig Lovell/ Corbis.

Dizzy Gillespie (d. 1993) was one of the greatest jazz trumpeters of all time. His early years reflected the stereotypical jazz life: amazing music interrupted by drugs, alcohol, and violence. He was also irreverent. In 1964 he ran for president. He promised that if he were elected, the White House would be renamed "The Blues House," and his cabinet would be composed of Duke Ellington, Secretary of State; Miles Davis, Director of the CIA; Max Roach, Secretary of Defense; Charles Mingus, Secretary of Peace; Ray Charles, Librarian of Congress; Louis Armstrong, Secretary of Agriculture; Mary Lou Williams, Ambassador to the Vatican; Thelonious Monk, Traveling Ambassador; and Malcolm X, Attorney General. He said his running mate would be Phyllis Diller.

Four years later, Gillespie became a Baha'i. In his memoirs he writes that becoming a Baha'i changed his life. He became a teacher and mentor to young artists.

The Baha'i Center in New York City honors Mr. Gillespie's work, holding jazz concerts every Tuesday. He is now known as the "Beebop Baha'i."

Baha'i Rituals

Like Zoroastrianism, Baha'i teaches that we have a duty to live in the world and improve it. Useful work is a form of worship. Baha'is are required to pray daily and abstain from alcohol and non-medical drugs, gambling and extra-marital sex. They also observe an annual sunrise-to-sunset fast from March 2 to March 20, the final month of the Baha'i calendar, followed by the celebration of the new year on Norūz.

The Baha'i calendar consists of 19 months of 19 days each. The calendar is fixed in accordance with the Gregorian calendar, so four extra days are inserted to make 365. (During the Gregorian "leap year," five days are added.) These "intercalary" days are inserted

FIGURE 9.8 Baha'i temple in Wilmette, Illinois, in the U.S. © Corbis/SuperStock.

just before the month of fasting. Known as Ayyam-i Ha, the "days of H" (which is a symbol of God), they are the occasion for festive meals, family visits, and gift-giving.

Baha'is' greatest celebration is the 12-day Ridvan Festival. It begins on April 21 of the Gregorian calendar, and commemorates the announcement of Baha Ullah as prophet. The first, ninth, and twelfth days are the holiest, and are marked with communal prayers. Other holy days include the declaration of the Bab, the forerunner of the Baha Ullah (May 23), the ascension of Baha Ullah to heaven (May 29), the martyrdom of the Bab (July 9), the birth of the Bab (November 12), the Day of the Covenant (November 26), and the ascension of Baha Ullah's son Abdul Baha to heaven (November 28).

Baha'is have established a number of houses of worship around the world. Currently, there are seven: one each in Wilmette, Illinois, in the U.S.; Kampala, Uganda; Sydney, Australia; Frankfurt, Germany; Panama City, Panama; Tiapapata, Samoa; and Delhi, India. The first one was built in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, but was confiscated by the Soviet government in 1938, damaged by an earthquake in 1948, and destroyed in 1963. One is under construction in Santiago, Chile. The Baha'i houses of worship are constructed with nine sides so that they seem circular. They have no altars or decoration other than the words of Baha'i scripture in exquisite calligraphy. They are surrounded by beautiful gardens and are meant to serve their communities. They are open to all people. No rituals or sermons are conducted in them, only prayer and meditation.

Marriage is a solemn undertaking in Baha'i, an institution that brings great happiness and spiritual development to the spouses, and creates the essential foundation for society – the