



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.



PART II USING THE TOOLS: SURVEYING WORLD RELIGIONS

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 Mitsuhiro, 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'i 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.



PART II USING THE TOOLS: SURVEYING WORLD RELIGIONS



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 "Bebop 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 Noruz.

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; Apia, 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



PART II USING THE TOOLS: SURVEYING WORLD RELIGIONS

family. The ceremony itself is simple, consisting of vows to abide by the will of God, made by the bride and groom to each other and witnessed by two people.

Scientology

History and Teachings of Scientology

Although Baha'i is a "new" religion established in the modern age, it is not considered an NRM (New Religious Movement) because of its ancient origins. Baha'i is to Islam as Islam is to Judaism and Christianity, and Christianity is to Judaism. Its roots are in what it calls earlier "dispensations" of the one religion, brought by successive "manifestations" (messengers) of the one God. Scientology, on the other hand, is definitely a new movement, although, as we shall see, there is some dispute as to whether or not it counts as "religious."

Scientology was founded by L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) – an American writer specializing in adventure and fantasy stories. In 1937, Hubbard started developing a worldview based on dualism. "Life is composed of two things," he wrote, "the material universe and an X-factor... that can evidently organize and mobilize the material universe." This "X-factor" is similar to traditional ideas of spirit and soul. In 1950 Hubbard published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, in which he presented a kind of psychotherapy for dealing with harmful emotions such as irrational fears. He invented the term *Dianetics* for the study of "what the soul is doing to the body."

Dianetics is the most popular self-help book of all time, selling over 21 million copies, but it was met with concern by mental health professionals. The American Psychological Association issued a warning in September of 1950 for professionals to avoid "the techniques 'peculiar' to a new approach to mental health called Dianetics," noting that they were not based on empirical evidence. Soon after its publication, Hubbard began shaping the ideas in this book into a new religion that he called "Scientology." This term had been coined earlier in the 20th century to refer to either religious devotion to science or the study of science as a phenomenon. Hubbard used this in a new way to mean "the study of knowledge or truth." In 1952 he published *Scientology, a Religious Philosophy*, and the next year he founded three churches in Camden, New Jersey – the "Church of Scientology," the "Church of American Science," and the "Church of Spiritual Engineering." The movement spread quickly in the English-speaking world.

The core idea in Scientology is that a person is neither a body nor a mind, but an immortal spiritual being. Sometimes Hubbard used the word "soul" to refer to the spiritual essence of a human being. But "soul" means many different things to many different people, so Hubbard devised a new term, **thetan**, from the Greek letter *theta*, a traditional symbol for thought and life. The thetan, he said, is what a person really is. It is "that which is aware of being aware," in his words. According to Scientology, each thetan has existed for billions of years, is naturally good, and has been reincarnated in countless bodies in a process Hubbard called **assumption**.

Scientology teaches that human beings operate on the basis of eight "dynamics" (or impulses) of survival. The first is the urge for personal survival. The second is the urge to



Celebrities in Scientology

From its beginning, Scientology has vigorously recruited celebrities to join the religion and promote it in the media. In 1955 L. Ron Hubbard started "Project Celebrity" to get Scientologists to convert actors and musicians. The Church of Scientology operates special Celebrity Centers in Los Angeles, Paris, and Nashville. According to religion scholar Hugh B. Urban, Scientology has a natural appeal for many celebrities because it celebrates the individual person (as an immortal spiritual thetan), and it valorizes the celebrity lifestyle of wealth and fame. Among the best known celebrity Scientologists are actors Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes, John Travolta, Kirstie Alley, Jason Lee, and Nancy Cartwright (the voice of Bart Simpson), and musical artists Lisa Marie Presley, Beck, and Edgar Winter.

survive through one's family and children. The third is for group survival, as in a corporation or a nation. The fourth is to survive as the human race. And the last four dynamics are the urges to survive through other living things, the physical universe, the spiritual universe, and Supreme Being.

The moral teachings of Scientology are based on these dynamics. Adopting what philosophers call a utilitarian ethic, Scientology teaches that good actions are those that benefit the greatest number of these dynamics and harm the fewest. As **Utilitarianism** would say, good actions are those that bring "the greatest good for the greatest number of people."

Besides helping individuals within the church, Scientologists engage in many kinds of humanitarian aid, and social service programs such as the Narconon anti-drug program and the Criminon prison rehabilitation program.

Scientology Practices

According to Scientology, people develop mental problems because they do not understand themselves and the nature of human life. The goal of Scientology, similar to that of Hinduism and Buddhism, is to help people understand their true nature (bring "enlightenment" or "awakening") and thus achieve happiness. Scientology distinguishes between two parts of the mind. The first is the "analytical mind," which is rational and self-aware. It is similar to what Sigmund Freud called the conscious mind. Mental problems typically originate in the other part, the "reactive mind," which is like what Freud called the unconscious mind. The reactive mind stores mental images called **engrams** from past negative experiences. These engrams are not readily available to the analytical mind, but they cause mental problems when the person has an experience similar to a past negative experience. Just as Freud taught (see Chapter 3), if someone has a negative experience in



childhood with her father, for example, she may experience problems in adulthood with male authority figures. It is such past negative experiences that cause our fears, negative thoughts, and irrational behavior, according to Scientology (and Freud). And because of reincarnation, we carry engrams of our bad experiences from life to life. (This part would have been rejected by Freud, who did not believe in reincarnation.) So the most damaging things in our reactive mind may be from our previous lives. As engrams accumulate in the reactive mind, people move further and further away from their true identity as thetans and so from happiness.

The main religious practice in Scientology is a form of therapy called “**auditing**.” It is designed to help people reach self-awareness, overcome mental problems, and achieve higher states of consciousness. A counselor called an “auditor” uses a device called an electro-psychometer – E-meter for short – to measure mental activity in subjects and detect troubled areas. The auditor asks them questions and gives directions to help them understand themselves and their problems. Traumatic memories are brought into consciousness. Once people understand themselves and their past experiences, they can begin to correct their problems.

The goal is for people to gradually free themselves of their engrams and realize that they are immortal spiritual thetans. Those who study Scientology materials and go through sessions of auditing advance from a status of “Preactive” to “Clear” and then to “Operating Thetan.” The ultimate goal of the religion is to “clear the planet” – to clear all people of their engrams.

Scientology also has several kinds of training to teach people deeper understandings of the nature of life and human beings. For example, according to Hubbard, the thetan can leave the body and exist on its own. Once free of the body, the thetan can “see without eyes, hear without ears, and realize its true nature as an immortal spirit.” Scientology offers ways to achieve this **exteriorization**, although it does not make this information public. But overall, Scientology training and auditing are designed to bring people to a higher state of spiritual existence in which they are free from dependence on the material world. Scientologists therefore call the set of auditing and training procedures “The Bridge to Total Freedom.”

Scientology Rituals

Scientology places far more emphasis on its therapeutic practices than on its rituals. Its auditors are therefore more important than its rituals. Nevertheless, Scientology does ordain ministers to conduct important ceremonies for life events such as weddings and funerals. Such ceremonies are simple in Scientology. At weddings, the couple pledge fidelity, marriage being part of the second dynamic – the urge to survive through

Image not available in this digital edition.

FIGURE 9.9 The Hubbard Professional Mark Super VII E-Meter. Photo by Salimfadhley, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Scientology_e_meter_blue.jpg.