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Terrorism, millenarianism, and death: A study of Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo

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*Terrorism, Millenarianism, and Death: A Study of
Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo*

by
Steven Nicholls

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at Edith Cowan University.

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Abstract

The relationship between death and the millennium is not an area of scholarship that has received adequate attention. Millenarian groups desire the creation of a paradise in the temporal world. The world is seen as corrupt and evil without hope of reform. This viewpoint leads millenarians to conclude that the temporal world must be completely destroyed and created anew, eliminating the corrupt and providing a utopia where the faithful can exist in peace. Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo are two terrorist groups which share this worldview, and believe that they can hasten the millennium by eliminating their enemies. This thesis explores the ways in which Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo understand death, not only as it relates to their enemies, but also as it relates to group members. Hezbollah uses suicide bombings as a tool for eliminating enemies and furthering their millenarian goals. Yet if suicide bombers no longer exist in the temporal world, they are unable to experience the millennium they are fighting for once it has been achieved. Similarly, when members of Aum Shinrikyo began to die unexpectedly, or were intentionally killed by other group members, Asahara (the group's leader) needed to explain such deaths within the context of Aum's millenarian worldview. In addition to locating the problem of 'death' within existing millenarian research, this thesis also questions the very nature of millenarian aspirations within Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo. In the case of Hezbollah, it is argued that establishing the millennium is not the ultimate goal of the group's terrorist activities. Whilst it claims to be fighting on behalf of the Shiite population in Lebanon, it is actually exploiting them to secure a somewhat different objective aimed at the personal salvation of Hezbollah's members in the afterlife. Although the study of 'death' does not contradict Aum's millenarian nature in the same manner as Hezbollah, it is clear that 'death' contributes to our understanding of millenarian groups in a way which should not be ignored to the extent that it has been in the existing literature. Millenarian research performs an important role when studying terrorism, illuminating the beliefs and motivations of such groups. Ignoring the element of 'death' when researching the millenarian nature of terrorist groups can, in some cases, lead to a misrepresentation of the groups' true character.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education.
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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Introduction

Millenarian groups believe that the evils of this world can be eliminated so that collective (not simply individual) salvation can be accomplished on this earth. Evil is seen as being rampant and the decay of the temporal world is believed to be getting progressively worse. Therefore, to eliminate evil and achieve the earthly collective salvation, the world in its present state needs to be destroyed and created anew with the aid of God or a similar superhuman power (Wessinger, 1997, p.49). Millenarianism is therefore a response to a real or perceived problem which threatens the normative structure of a given society. Millenarian groups believe in a form of social salvation that will be immediate, collective, total and importantly, this-worldly. These groups expect the intervention of a supernatural being which will completely transform the world so that it is not simply improved, but is perfect (Cohn, 1970, p.15).

There is a great deal of contestation over terminology amongst millenarian researchers (Adas, 1979; Cohn, 1970; Barkun, 1974; Rinehart, 2006). Cohn (1970) states that millenarianism has evolved from its original meaning referring to the thousand year reign of Christ during the Christian millennium to a more liberal term; 'simply a convenient label for a particular type of salvationism'. Adas (1979, p.11) uses chiliastic, millenarian, and messianic as synonymous terms and cautions the reader that 'to think such terms refers to a distinct person or situation obscures rather than clarifies, closes rather than opens the sociological problem'. Additionally, Rinehart (2006) makes no clear distinction between the terms 'millenarian' and 'apocalyptic'. For the purposes of this study, some clarification of key terms is required. Barkun (1974, p.2) defines 'true millennialism' as those instances in which human beings band together and actually act upon a belief in imminent and total transformation. These millenarian movements form out of a real or perceived expectation of disaster, usually understood to be apocalyptic in nature. Thus, according to Barkun's definition and for the purposes of this study, if the Apocalypse is an idea or expectation of a certain (usually disastrous) event at the end of time, then millenarianism provides a

model or a process for change which will ensure the *survival* of the group's adherents and the purity of the renewed society in the post apocalyptic world.

Those who regard the millennium as imminent expect disasters to pave the way. In a sense, it is disaster itself which often gives rise to millenarian groups. According to Barkun (1974, p.1) 'men cleave to hopes of imminent worldly salvation only when the hammer-blows of disaster destroy the world they have known and render them susceptible to ideas which they would earlier have cast aside'. For this reason, millenarian groups require a prophet to reveal the 'truth' about the present circumstances in the affected community and to reveal the ultimate solution; not through the introduction of a new alien system of faith, but through the reinterpretation and modification of existing religious traditions. Additionally, millenarian groups arise out of cultures with a long history of religious-inspired millenarian doctrines (Rinehart, 2006). Such cultures are already susceptible to a charismatic leader who is seen to have the authority to modify long held religious beliefs. Millenarian leaders promote the idea that by eliminating the evil of this world, the long awaited millennium can be achieved.

Terrorist groups with this worldview are particularly dangerous. Perceiving themselves to be on a mission from God, they attempt to destroy the evil within this world by any means necessary. Rosenfeld (1996, p.83) explains that such groups may anticipate a 'final war' between good and evil and attempt to actively bring it about. Millenarian groups believe that the end is imminent, that this world is predestined to be destroyed (Lauer, 1976, p.132). Yet Barkun (1996, p.4) poses an interesting question; why should those who hold a deterministic view of history do anything other than wait? If history moves ineluctably towards its destined end why must millenarians do anything? The answer lies in the millenarian belief that present circumstances can be transcended. Predestination is countered or supplemented by the millenarian emphasis upon voluntaristic human intervention (Lauer, 1976, p.132). Millenarianism is the agent that comes to provide the terrorist with his or her view of an idealised future. Millenarian expectations characterise what the future has in store in very specific terms, once the evils of the present have been successfully transcended. Millenarianism therefore provides a paradigm for change, giving the

community a clear ideology of progress, the end point of which is an idealized society free from pain, alienation, oppression, injustice, racism and want. In short, 'millenarian expectations serve to direct human behaviour to transform or revitalise society consistent with the ideal future that it portrays' (Rinehart, 2006, p.76). Millenarian groups also believe that although the millennium is predestined, human intervention such as performing 'godly acts'¹ will serve to hasten the arrival of the millennium (Lauer, 1976, p.132).

Millenarians believe that, as god's chosen elect, they alone will survive to experience the joys of the millennium. As defined by Cohn (1970); Barkun (1974); and Rinehart (2006), the expected millennium is a phenomenon existing in the temporal world not in the afterlife. Thus millenarians hold the belief that paradise, salvation and oneness with God can be achieved in the temporal world, and in the immediate future. One does not need to go through the ordeal of death in order to achieve salvation. Wessinger (1997, p.48) believes that it is for this reason that millennialism provides therapeutic value to millenarian groups, arguing that millenarianism is a religious pattern which holds an expectation that finitude can be overcome in the here and now, rather than in an undisprovable afterlife. As a result of this viewpoint, the existing literature on millenarian groups has largely ignored the element of the afterlife. Yet members of millenarian groups such as Aum Shinrikyo and Hezbollah still die in their fight to achieve the millennium, and in the case of Hezbollah, purposely kill themselves in suicidal attacks against their enemies.

The relationship between death and the millennium has not received adequate attention in academic literature. The following chapters provide an analysis of the relationship between death and the millennium. Two terrorist groups which differ greatly in their understandings of how the universe operates have been chosen as case studies. Hezbollah, an Islamic terrorist group, has a linear view of history. In contrast, Aum Shinrikyo is heavily based on the Eastern religion of Buddhism which interprets existence as cyclical, with reincarnation as a central aspect. Although these

¹ 'Godly acts' may be perceived of in many ways, such as performing a specific dance, or other prescribed rituals which are believed to have an effect on hastening the millennium. Hezbollah for example, believes that the murder of Israelis is one such act, sanctioned by God, and necessary as a prerequisite for the establishment of the millennium (Momen, 1985).

differences are significant both groups seek to explain their existence, and justify their actions, based on a millenarian paradigm. Both groups believe in a supernatural saviour who is destined to relieve their suffering and lead them once the millennium is realised.

The focus of this thesis is not on comparisons between the groups', although these inevitably occur. Rather, examples from Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo are used to illustrate how the problem of death affects the beliefs and actions of modern day millenarian groups, however different they may be. Further, it is argued that death presents a significant problem for the study of millenarian movements, pushing the boundaries of accepted definitions. It is not simply enough to classify a particular group as 'millenarian' based on its stated goals and objectives for the temporal world. In cases where such groups believe in an afterlife for deceased members, this must be analysed and included in the process of defining a particular group as millenarian. This thesis explores the concept of death not only as it relates to the enemies of these terrorist groups, but also how death is understood in relation to Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo group members. If Aum Shinrikyo and Hezbollah are indeed fighting for a this-worldly millennium, then an analysis of how these groups explain death within this context needs to be undertaken.

Chapter One analyses the history and development of Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo. Focusing on the religious influences of, and key persons involved within each group, it explores how these have influenced the millenarian worldviews of both Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo. Chapter Two examines the role of death as it relates to the practices of millenarian terrorist groups. Both Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo use terrorism as a means of hastening the millennium. The murder of their enemies is interpreted by these two groups as a 'godly act' which will improve the status of the perpetrator, and in the case of Aum Shinrikyo's millenarian ideology is also believed to improve the status of the victim. This chapter explores the groups' understanding of what happens to a person when they die, including enemies that they kill. Chapter Three contextualises the problem of death within millenarian research. It examines effects of including 'death' into research on millenarian groups, concluding that a re-examination of accepted definitions is necessary. In the case of Hezbollah, for

example, it is argued that its ultimate goal is not to experience the millennium at all, but to hasten the millennium as part of a process of bringing about a *cosmic* salvation for Hezbollah's members.

The element of 'death' has been largely ignored in contemporary millenarian research. Millenarian research performs an important role when studying terrorism, illuminating the beliefs and motivations of such groups. This thesis shows that ignoring the element of 'death' when researching the millenarian nature of terrorist groups can, in some cases, lead to a misinterpretation of the groups' true character.

Due to the nature of terrorism, much of the current information on these groups is classified and therefore closed from public review. Obtaining information on the activities and motivations of these groups is therefore difficult. Additionally, language barriers have prevented access to key primary sources. This thesis therefore relies on English translations or paraphrasing from reputable scholarly authors.

Chapter One: Millenarian Ideologies, Histories and Development

This chapter provides a brief outline of the millenarian ideologies, histories and development of both Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo. *Twelver Shiism* is the specific interpretation of Islam adhered to by Hezbollah. It informs Hezbollah's worldview, dictating how a Muslim should live in order to please God and explaining what happens to a person when he or she dies. In contrast, Aum Shinrikyo's worldview is informed by a potent cocktail of several major religions including Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. This chapter also explores how the spiritual leaders of both Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo reinterpreted traditional religious concepts in order to legitimise the killing of their enemies. In the case of Aum Shinrikyo, the chapter focuses on the religious inspirations of its leader, Shoko Asahara, because of his significant influence on the organisation's world view. Although Aum Shinrikyo exists today in a modified form under the name 'Aleph', this study examines only the period during Asahara's leadership, before his incarceration in 1995.

Twelver Shiism and the History and Development of Hezbollah

For Hezbollah, millenarianism is the agent that comes to provide the terrorist with his or her view of an idealized future, which creates an extraordinary sense of tension between a vision of what the world should be and what it actually is (Rinehart, 2006, p.35). Hezbollah is a group with very specific political goals, which have been defined in accordance with its millenarian world-view. Hezbollah seeks the destruction of Israel, which is seen as an illegitimate state and a destructive cancer in Palestine. Additionally, Hezbollah seeks the elimination of corrupt western influences from the region, and the establishment of an Islamic Order in Lebanon and eventually, in the whole of the Middle East (Alagha, 2006; Harik, 2005; Jaber, 1997). To achieve these goals, Hezbollah believes that it needs the assistance of a supernatural being, the Mahdi. In order to understand the role of the Mahdi in Hezbollah's millenarian expectations, an examination of the religious theology of Twelver Shiism, which

informs Hezbollah's understanding of the temporal world and their role within it as well as their expectations of the afterlife, is required.

Twelver Shiism is a specific interpretation of Islamic history based around the legitimacy of the twelve Imams. Before the Prophet Muhammad died, Shiites believe he stipulated that his cousin Ali should rule the umma (Islamic community) in his stead. However, after Muhammad died Ali's assumed right was ignored by the majority of Muhammad's followers and Abu Bakr was elected to lead the community. Those faithful to Ali resented Bakr and instead chose to follow the spiritual leadership of Ali and his successors, known as Imams, all of whom were descendants of Ali and Fatima, the Prophet's daughter (Nasr, Dabashi & Nasr, 1989, ix). These Imams were believed to have an esoteric knowledge of Islam due to their blood relationship to the Prophet. The Imams were seen as infallible and were therefore, according to the Shia, the only legitimate authority that a Muslim should follow. Caliphs who are not infallible, such as Abu Bakr, were seen as usurpers and therefore unworthy of their office (Gobel, 1989, p.5). Out of this disagreement, the Sunni and Shiite divide was formed. The dominant Sunnis had political power in the various Muslim communities and as such oppressed the Shiite minority. Early Shiite leaders were killed in failed attempts to regain power from the illegitimate rulers, and in order to survive in an environment hostile to their beliefs, the Shia were forced to develop the principle of *Taqiyya* which condoned the concealment of their faith in order to protect them from persecution (Jaber, 1997, p.8).

Most Muslims believe in a saviour figure, a messiah, who will one day come to restore order and to rule over the umma during the millennium (Upton, 2004, p.39). For Twelver Shiites, they believe that this saviour is their Twelfth Imam, who is known as the *Mahdi*. According to Shiite mythology, the Twelfth Imam has been hidden by God, destined to return at a later date, to 'fill the earth with equity and justice as it is filled with injustice and tyranny' (Tabataba'i, Hussan, & Sachedina, 1989, p.8). The Shiites believe that the Mahdi will purify the temporal world by eliminating their enemies. The millenarian ideology of the Shiites informs their actions, ensuring that they are on the 'right side' and thus will survive as the 'chosen ones' to experience the millennium, living under the leadership of their Mahdi.

Uncertain of the date of the Mahdi's return, Shiites have often assumed that the time for his re-appearance was near. Rinehart (2006) reveals that throughout history Shiites believed that they had found their Mahdi, incarnate in a charismatic figure, who led them in revolt against the existing political system which was seen to be illegitimate according to Shiite beliefs. Such revolts attempted to replace the existing authority with one based on Shia values and justice. Yet time and again such revolts failed. It was this drive for a new society that was just and at the same time free from oppression from outside forces, which transformed Shiism from a political movement into a distinctly millenarian religious sect. For the Shiites only as a result of the rule of the Imams could the anticipated utopian 'millennium' be realised (Rinehart, 2006, p.62). The Shiite's belief in the occultation of the Mahdi allowed the Shia to come to terms with their ongoing oppression; they knew that if they held firm in their beliefs their twelfth Imam would one day return to lead them, liberating them from their misery and rewarding their faith when the millennium was realised. Shiites came to view the temporal world as utterly corrupted and their continued existence became almost completely dependent on the belief that their suffering was a mechanism for the return of the Mahdi. His reappearance was always believed to be imminent, but with each passing year the Mahdi failed to return.

By the middle of the twentieth century the Shiites were still waiting. Living as an oppressed minority on the fringes of Middle Eastern societies, Shiites were growing increasingly impatient. In Lebanon, the Shia lacked political representation and were neglected by the majority Christian and Sunni ruled government. They lacked basic necessities such as running water, hospitals, and schools. Jaber (1997, p.11) observes that in comparison with the Sunni and Christian populations, the standard of living for the Shiites was medieval. The Shiite's long oppressed position in society coupled with a civil war with seemingly no end in sight, and an Israeli invasion, created an appropriate time for a great millenarian legend to unfold (Rinehart, 2006, p.101). When Musa al-Sadr entered the political scene in Lebanon, he initiated a wave of reforms that inspired a religious and cultural awakening of the Shia not seen for over a millennium and a half. Musa al-Sadr represented the Shiites of Lebanon politically, but soon came to be seen in a more divine manner. As Ajami (1986, p.23) observes; Musa al-Sadr's tale merged with the millenarian sensibilities of his people. In the

minds of many Shia in the Lebanese community, he came to be seen as the long awaited Mahdi, who would 'take vengeance on the unjust and immoral and finally save the community in its time of dire need' (Ajami, 1986, p.24).

Musa al-Sadr was directly descended from the seventh Imam, and although he was a political leader, his basic message was a religious one (Rinehart, 2006, p.102). Paving the way for the later formation of Hezbollah, al-Sadr inspired the Shiites of Lebanon, encouraging them to fight against oppression instead of tamely submitting. In order to inspire this courage and defiance in the long oppressed Shiites, al-Sadr modified the existing tradition of Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala. Husayn was the third Shiite Imam who rode out against the ruling Umayyad Caliph in a suicide attack which led to his death, his family's, and his seventy followers at Karbala (Shirazi, 2003, p.x). Traditionally, Husayn's defeat was seen as an example of the hopelessness of rebellion; of the need to be submissive against oppressive authority (Rinehart, 2006, p.132). However, al-Sadr preached that Husayn's martyrdom should be seen as an example of the need to fight against oppression even if doing so leads to certain death. He taught that Husayn's martyrdom should not be mourned, but that it should be celebrated and imitated as a means of transcending the dire position of the Shiites in Lebanon (Ajami, 1986, p.142). In 1978 Musa al-Sadr mysteriously disappeared, and many Shia in Lebanon believed that he had been hidden by God in much the same manner as the Twelfth Imam had vanished into occultation. Never heard from again, al-Sadr was etched into Shia legend and his message to the Shiites of Lebanon gained even more importance and legitimacy.

Rouhollah Mousavi Khomeini, the leader of the 1979 Iranian revolution, provided the Shia of Lebanon with a new leader, which they came to accept as their own. Khomeini promoted the notion of the Wilayat al-faqih; the 'guardianship of the Islamic jurists' (Khomeini, 1981, p.62). The Hidden Imam, whose life was extended supernaturally by God, had yet to return and the awakened and restless Shiite population needed a leader, divinely ordained, who could guide them towards their goals in the Imam's absence. Khomeini preached that Shia communities should accept a legitimate leader who was not an Imam, but instead served in his place with the same authority. Khomeini (1981) argued that God did not intend the legitimacy of his

law, that which was interpreted by the Imams, to be valid for a period of only two centuries; he intended the Islamic state that incorporated his law to exist forever. Khomeini argued that such a government was necessary to ensure justice, to teach the rule of God, to guarantee order and to eliminate sin. To accomplish this, Khomeini declared that since the Imam is hidden, he requires the assistance of representatives in the temporal world to deal with the practical and spiritual matter of guiding the community. According to Khomeini, such a leader should come from the ulama, the Muslim clerics, and should be the most enlightened of the group. Ultimate authority of interpretation would rest in his hands (Rinehart, 2006, p.71). Khomeini's ideas provided a new explanation of the relationship between political authority and the authority of the faith. Nonetheless, the salience and the character of the hidden Imam (and thus the Mahdi) remained unchanged (Rinehart, 2006, p.72). The Mahdi was still expected to return, but the modifications of Khomeini meant that the Shia could be legitimately led towards achieving their millenarian goals until the time of the Mahdi's return (Alagha, 2006, p.89). Khomeini was chosen to perform the role of the faqih, and was keen to export his revolutionary message outside of Iran.

Hezbollah in Lebanon was only too willing to accept Khomeini's ideas, absorbing them into their teachings. As Nasrallah, the current leader of Hezbollah stated;

The Faqih is the guardian during the absence of the Twelfth Imam. The extent of his authority is wider than that of any other person and disagreement with him is not an option. The guardianship of the Faqih is like the guardianship of the prophet Mohammed and of the infallible Imam. When Wilayat al-faqih orders that someone be obeyed, such obedience is obligatory (cited in Rinehart, 2006, p.108).

In 1985 Hezbollah released its first official document outlining its political ideology. The 'Open Letter' which was addressed simply to 'the oppressed', called on Hezbollah's 'friends' (anyone who is oppressed, or who opposes Hezbollah's enemies) to fight against the United States, claiming that; 'America is behind all our catastrophes'. Hezbollah's open letter declared that it would 'vigorously condemn all plans for negotiation with Israel, and regard all negotiators as enemies, for the reason that negotiation is nothing but the recognition of the legitimacy of the Zionist occupation of Palestine' (Alagha, 2006, pp.223-238). According to Hezbollah their

enemies have only two choices; leave Palestine and live, or stay and be destroyed. Hezbollah's aspirations for the temporal world, which is informed by its millenarian ideology, mean that it will accept nothing less.

Asahara and the Development of Aum Shinrikyo

Aum Shinrikyo arose during a time of severe economic turbulence in Japan. After its defeat at the hands of the West during World War Two, Japan was pervaded by foreign cultures promoting values which were in stark contrast to those of Japan's conservative past. Long held traditions and social norms began to be questioned, and by the 1980s many of Japan's youth felt alienated from the rapidly growing materialistic culture. As they completed their education and entered the workforce, Japan's younger generations began to question conformist requirements, wondering whether job security and social conformity was all there was to life (Rinehart, 2006, p.125). Metraux (1999) argues that it was within this context that Aum Shinrikyo appealed to so many disaffected youth.² Many did not wish to replicate the careers of their parents, who championed material gain over spirituality. Further compounding the problem, Japan at the time had no safe haven for those who could not function in mainstream society and as a result groups such as Aum Shinrikyo were seen as the only alternative to conformity (Metraux, 1999, p.1). Such arguments find support from Shimazono (cited in Rinehart, 2006, p.125) who argues that Aum Shinrikyo's membership was disproportionately represented by people in their twenties and thirties, accounting for seventy-five percent of total membership. Thus Aum Shinrikyo's success in attracting membership resulted largely from the general mood of the Japanese youth in the 1980s and 1990s, rather than from the persuasiveness of the group itself.

The youth of Japan were looking for an outlet for their frustrations, where they could express the rejection of their expected conformity (Metraux, 1999, pp.5-6). Esoteric mysticism or religious practices of the 'new-new religions' thus fulfilled a role in Japan which was seen to be lacking. For members of Japanese society holding these views, Aum's declaration that the current age of materialism was coming to an end

² By the mid 1990s Aum Shinrikyo had 10,000 followers in Japan and an estimated 60,000 worldwide, 47.5% of which were in their twenties (Metraux, 1999, p.v).

and that a new age of enlightened spirituality and global peace was emerging, held a great deal of appeal. The notion that the current situation within Japan had to be destroyed in order to hasten this new age was simply an extension of the pre-existing desires of Aum's members (Rinehart, 2006, p.140).

The millenarian notion of destroying the present conditions to establish a future ideal society did not hold great significance for Aum Shinrikyo until the group's later years, from 1988 onwards. Initially, as argued by Metraux (1999, p.9), there was virtually no evidence in the early and mid 1980s that Aum would become so violent a decade later. He notes that there is clearly an observable shift in Asahara's temperament and world views from a position of optimism and world affirming practices, to one of deep pessimism and increased violence most often associated with world rejecting new religious movements. Asahara's shift in focus from his early days establishing a peaceful yoga group in Tokyo, to creating a violently world rejecting religious movement which was determined to initiate Armageddon, must be examined in order to understand the reasons behind Aum's actions.

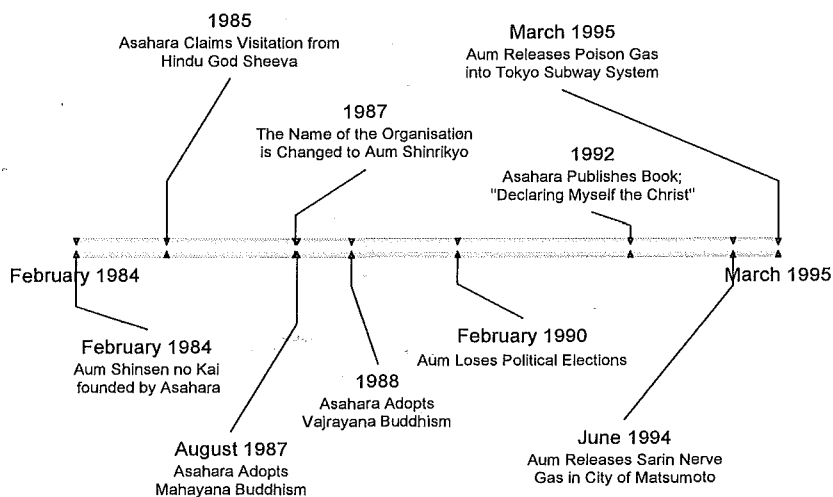
An historical analysis of Aum Shinrikyo focuses largely on the guru Asahara Shoko. Asahara's birth name was 'Chizuo Matsumoto'. He was born in 1955 in Kyushu, the southernmost island of Japan. Blind in one eye and with severely impaired vision in the other, Asahara's parents sent him to a school for the blind. With his vision less impaired than some of the other students, Asahara bullied and intimidated his classmates, taking advantage of them in the process (Lifton, 2000, p.14). It was in this environment that he gained an understanding of how to function as a dominant figure, knowledge that no doubt served him well in his later years.

Reader (2000) argues that Asahara's frequent angry outbursts and tendencies to bully younger children also reveal a fragile personality unable to handle opposition and prone to violence when thwarted. Such characteristics stayed with him into later life. Virtually every act of violence committed by Aum was an aggressive response to people who had opposed, or who Asahara believed were working against, the Aum movement (Reader, 2000, pp.41-42). Providing further evidence of the influence of Asahara's turbulent formative years, one of his former classmates at the school for the

blind told *Time Magazine* reporter Edward Desmond he believed that Asahara, in forming Aum Shinrikyo, was 'trying to create a closed society like the school for the blind he went to. He is trying to create a society separate from ordinary society where he can become king of the castle' (Desmond, 1995).

Throughout his life, it would appear that Asahara was obsessed with power. He felt rejected from his family who had sent him away. Due to his blindness he was unable to fulfil his desire to study medicine at University. Asahara instead gained work in an acupuncture clinic, and later became involved in selling herbal medicines. He claimed that it was as a result of his academic frustrations that he began to take a serious interest in religion and became involved in ascetic practices (Reader, 2000, p.45). Like many Japanese, Asahara had been brought up with the religion of Buddhism. Yet he found little spiritual satisfaction in Buddhist practices, claiming that they were merely customs devoid of religious content. Asahara was similarly dismissive of other established religious traditions in Japan, claiming them to be 'formalistic, lacking in spiritual dynamism and weak in ascetic practice and spiritual endeavour' (Reader, 2000, p.46). Seeking to define his own religious path, Asahara decided that he would develop his own methods to obtain spiritual satisfaction.

Figure 1.1. Timeline of Major Events in the History and Development of Aum Shinrikyo



In 1984 Asahara opened a small Yoga centre in Tokyo called *Aum Shinsen no Kai* (The Aum Association of the Mountain Wizards). Kaplan and Marshall offer a critical view of the group's early years; 'It was a fancy name for what was actually a one-room Tokyo yoga school with a profitable sideline in phoney health drinks' (1996, p.11). Kaplan and Marshall's critique is not unfounded, as several years earlier Asahara was arrested for selling fake Chinese medicines, fined 200,000 yen (approximately AU\$2,000) and ordered to serve a short prison sentence as punishment (Lifton, 2000, p.17). Asahara's troubled beginnings were countered by his determination. Following the success of his yoga school, Asahara was inspired to continue his spiritual journey in search of enlightenment.

According to his own account, in 1985 while engaging in ascetic practices Asahara attained enlightenment and subsequently received a visitation from the Hindu god Shiva. In Hindu tradition, Shiva is the destroyer of the world; responsible for dissolving worlds which are worn out and useless, and responsible for destroying ignorance (Zimand, 1928, p.83). Asahara claims Shiva told him that he had been appointed as the 'god of light who is to lead the armies of the gods' and to create an ideal society made up of those who have attained psychic powers; a society called the kingdom of Shambhala (Shimazono, 1995, p.388). A Hindu god, appointing Asahara the task of establishing a Buddhist utopia, illuminates the diversity of Aum Shinrikyo's religious influences. Asahara's understanding of the universe was derived from a mixture of traditions such as Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, and also in the groups later years, from Christianity (Verity, 2005, np).

In Buddhist tradition, Shambhala is imagined to be a hidden valley which exists somewhere in North-eastern Asia. According to tradition, the King of Shambhala, Rudra Cakrin, will be reborn as a Messiah to defeat the infidels in a final war and establish the reign of Buddhism. Such legends were not unnoticed by Asahara during Aum's formative years, and according to Tanaka it was at this time that Asahara's messianic self-awareness was spawned (cited in Shimazono, 1995, p.388). Asahara's duty, appointed by Shiva, fuelled his own messianic importance endowing him with a renewed sense of purpose. Asahara returned to Japan with a new mission; to help others to achieve enlightenment as he had done, so that he could populate the land

with enlightened 'superhumans' and lead them during the coming millennium. Asahara's understanding of Shambhala differed from the existing traditions; he believed that his mission was not to seek out the existing Shambhala, but to 'transform Japan itself into Shambhala as the first step towards making the whole world Shambhala' (Asahara, quoted in Brackett, 1996, p.70).

Until 1986, Asahara's group had developed predominantly around yoga, emphasising the spiritual benefits for the individual practitioner. In 1987, however, the group began to assume an ardently religious character with Asahara promoting his new messianic image, and his classes focusing on the attainment of *satori* and *gedatsu*. *Satori* is the term for enlightenment and occurs when a person is awakened to the temporary nature of the material world. When one has achieved *satori* it means that he or she becomes indifferent to the material world and recognises that true happiness can only come from within one's own mind. *Gedatsu* can only come after the realisation of *satori* when the person becomes liberated and achieves a state of absolute freedom and happiness (Shimazono, 1995, pp.389-395). Yet Asahara seemed to have difficulty defining when exactly an Aum practitioner reached *gedatsu*. In an attempt to solve this Asahara declared to his followers that he had indeed reached the final stage of yoga and attained 'final *gedatsu*', only to discover that there were still more stages beyond and that he could thus never be satisfied. As a result of this realisation, Asahara moved on to the practice of Mahayana where 'one takes one's own suffering as happiness and one takes the suffering of others as one's own' (cited in Shimazono, 1995, p.394).

Asahara recalls what led him down the path of Mahayana Buddhism;

...my practice was completed, but what kind of state did I achieve as a result? I obtained absolute freedom, happiness, and joy... In short, I could not have been happier. But my soul, my deeper self, was not satisfied. How should I express it – I could not bear the fact that only I was happy and the other people were still in the world of suffering. I began to think: I will save other people at the sacrifice of my own self. I have come to feel it is my mission (Asahara, 1992, p.13).

Metraux (1999) believes that Asahara regarded himself as a Bodhisattva, a being who has overcome his own suffering but who postpones his departure from society to devote himself unselfishly to the salvation of other less fortunate beings. According to Repp, 'a Bodhisattva aims at attaining perfect awakening by taking on the suffering of other living beings, and in the process helping them to attain awakening' (2005, p.161). Yet these activities were not entirely unselfish. By performing these acts, the Aum practitioner was also gaining merit for him or herself;

When you are suffering, your past bad deeds are being washed off, which means you can be reborn in a higher world in your next life. But when you take your joy as joy, you are losing your merits (Asahara, cited in Metraux, 1999, p.25).

By helping others 'unselfishly' Asahara was in fact performing an act which would improve his own spiritual merit. Asahara remained optimistic that everyone could be saved, so long as they followed his instructions; one of which required the group to establish peaceful Aum communes as part of the process of recreating Japan as the kingdom of Shambhala (Lifton, 2000, p.22).

Asahara's concept of Shambhala exposes an important and recurring element of Aum Shinrikyo's dogma; the reinterpretation of existing traditions. In traditional Tibetan Buddhism, Shambhala exists at a specific location, hidden from the unenlightened and revealed only to those who are deemed worthy to see it. Shambhala is central to the millenarian expectations of Tibetan Buddhists. As the world becomes increasingly corrupted, it is believed that Shambhala will be the last place on earth where the teachings of Buddha are preserved. It is from here that the god-king of Shambhala is expected to ride out against the leader of the evil forces and slay them, ushering in the Armageddon, an event which few will survive (Upton, 2004, pp.60-61). Asahara's authority for reinterpreting such traditions came from his own messianic self conception. It is understandable that committed, isolated followers of Asahara's might come to believe such claims as truth. However, by 1988 Aum was attempting to recruit new members with pamphlets which were making overly grandiose claims about Asahara;

This kingdom (Shambhala), ruled by the god Shiva, is a world where only those souls which have attained the complete truth of the universe can go. In Shambhala, the ascetic practices of messianic persons have made great advances in order to lead souls to *gedatsu* (emancipation) and save them. Master Asahara has been reborn from there into the human world so that he might take up his mission as a messiah. Therefore, the Master's efforts to embody truth throughout the human world have been sanctioned by the great will of the god Shiva (Brackett, 1996, p.70).

The fact that people with no prior dealings with Aum Shinrikyo were able to read this recruiting pamphlet and be inspired to become a member reveals Asahara's success in merging long standing religious traditions with his own ideas.

Asahara's self promotion as a 'super-human' being was readily accepted by Aum's followers, revealing the extent to which Aum members were willing to accept what most of society would reject. The 'superhuman abilities' of Asahara were not only promoted on religious grounds; he claimed scientific support as well. Asahara claimed that his blood had been analysed at the laboratories of Kyoto University, and found to contain a special form of DNA unique to Asahara alone (Reader, 1996, p.38). Members of Aum were charged a fee of ten-thousand dollars³ for the privilege of drinking the Guru's blood, which they believed would infuse with their own and thus enhance their ability to achieve a higher state of consciousness, as Asahara had done (Brackett, 1996, p.15). In 1989 Sakamoto Tsutsumi, a lawyer who had been contacted by concerned parents of Aum members, obtained definitive proof that no such tests were carried out on Asahara's blood, disproving the Guru's 'scientifically proven' super-human legitimisation. Sakamoto disappeared shortly after, along with his wife and child. After the 1995 sarin gas attacks, it was discovered that Sakamoto and his family had been killed by members of Aum Shinrikyo, who confessed that they were acting on orders from Asahara. (Reader, 1996, p.40). Sakamoto's murder marks the point at which cleansing through death entered Aum practices, although at this early stage it was through practical necessity rather than religious doctrine. Sakamoto was threatening Asahara's mission and was therefore eliminated.

³ Note that there is some discrepancy on the amount charged; Brackett (1996, p.15) claims the fee to be \$10,000. Kaplan and Marshall (1996, p.17) claim it to be \$7,000.

Conclusion

Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo were able to attract followers to their cause and legitimise their millenarian ideologies by reinterpreting existing religious traditions. These groups, by claiming divine sanction from existing traditional deities, were able to more easily convince potential and existing members of the necessity of their plight. Once the authority to reinterpret such traditions was established, the leaders of both groups were able to manipulate group members into performing 'godly acts' such as murder in order to further the groups' millenarian goals. In both cases, the millenarian aspirations of the groups materialised out of pre-existing desires within the population.

Chapter Two: The Problem of Death for Millenarian Groups

Hezbollah sees the killing of God's enemies as a religious requirement. Their worldview is such that they see it as the duty of every able bodied Muslim to kill the enemy wherever they find him. Hezbollah is unconcerned with the fate of those that they kill. Since their enemies' deaths are simply a part of God's plan, it is believed that God will judge them accordingly. Aum Shinrikyo, however, came to believe that if everyone could not be persuaded to join the group and learn how to achieve salvation from the evil and corruption of the temporal world, then the deaths of the non-believers at the hands of enlightened Aum members would provide an alternate path for their salvation. Eventually, Aum saw all non-group members as the enemy, and believed that by killing them they were actually saving the deceased from a less favourable rebirth. Traditional religious traditions were reinterpreted to make the act of killing itself a spiritually beneficial practice for both the perpetrator and the victim. Similar explanations were used when members of Aum Shinrikyo themselves began to die, either unexpectedly or at the command of Asahara himself. The death of group members posed a problem for Aum Shinrikyo, as will be examined, but it is in Hezbollah where we see a true paradox. Martyrdom, the primary method of attack employed against its enemies, involves the premeditated death of a group member. Thus, since the martyr no longer exists in the temporal world, he⁴ is unable to experience the very millennium he is fighting for. The death of a group member, therefore, presents a significant problem for millenarian groups.

Hezbollah: Killing God's Enemies to Hasten the Millennium

Hezbollah believes that the murder of its enemies is an act sanctioned by God which grants them benefits in the temporal world as well as in the afterlife. For millenarian

⁴ Within Hezbollah, martyrs are generally men. Although some women have martyred themselves in the struggle against Israel, such women are usually called 'Palestinian suicide bombers', and thus are not attributed to any one particular group such as Hezbollah. What is known, is that Hezbollah have disallowed women from martyring themselves in suicide bombing missions in the past (BBC News, 2002, np).

groups such as Hezbollah, the death of non group members is a necessary and inevitable outcome of producing change. Believing that they have divine authority to purify this world, the deaths of the non believers can be justified on religious grounds. Since God wants the world to be cleansed, eliminating those who are perceived to be a part of the problem is necessary. Although an outsider may see such 'cleansing' actions as sinful, a form of genocide or murder, the group's members hold a different view. Since Hezbollah is basing the legitimisation of such actions on religious grounds, by analysing the texts which inform the group's worldview we discover what Hezbollah believes will happen to those that they kill, and what they believe will be the consequences of such actions for their own selves.

Hezbollah draws much of its legitimation for the use of violence against its enemies from the Qur'anic concept of Jihad. Hezbollah stresses two different understandings of the word 'jihad'; the *smaller jihad* which is most commonly referred to as 'holy war', and the *larger jihad* which refers to the spiritual struggle with one's inner self. Hezbollah believes that one cannot engage in a holy war unless the spiritual conditioning of the larger jihad precedes it (Alagha, 2006, p.137). One might assume that such a requirement would allow for careful reflection and consideration, as to whether engaging in a holy war is really the best course of action. Yet it is apparent that the spiritual conditioning of the greater jihad is undertaken in order to spiritually prepare oneself to kill and to be killed. Rather than self meditating on the subject in order to decide right from wrong, the greater jihad is required in order to prepare the soul of a potential fighter in accordance with Hezbollah's interpretation of the Qur'an. This is revealed in the comments of Nasrallah, Secretary General of Hezbollah; 'A man who actively seeks to avoid the Lesser jihad but claims to pursue the Greater jihad, has necessarily failed the Greater jihad test' (quoted in Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002, p.123).

Supporting this, Hezbollah cites the jihad waged by Husayn at Karbala as proof that it should wage its own jihad against Israel's occupation of South Lebanon. Hezbollah believes that this form of jihad is a religious obligation which cannot be ignored by Muslims. Thus, according to Hezbollah, this obligation remains incumbent upon all believers even if Israel does not fire a single bullet, because its very occupation is an

act of aggression and a form of subjugation which necessitates a defensive jihad (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002, p.125).⁵ Hezbollah, acting as a representative of the Shiites in Lebanon, believes that not all Muslims are obliged to fight if certain members of the community, in this case Hezbollah, choose to fight on their behalf (Jaber, 1997, p.87; Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002, p.126).

Such religious obligations are not without their rewards for the faithful. In order to discover the true motives behind Hezbollah's jihad against its enemies, the group's millenarian ideology needs to be explored. For Twelver Shiites, jihad is directly associated with the return of the Hidden Imam, the Mahdi, who will rise to defeat the forces of evil on earth thus initiating the millennium and leading the Muslims during their finest hour (Rinehart, 2006, p.60). Momen supports this notion, explaining one of the signs which Shiite Muslims believe will precede the return of the Mahdi; "The Arabs will throw off the reins and take possession of their land, throwing out the authority of the foreigners" (1985, p.168). Therefore, Hezbollah's actions against its enemies must be seen in the light of their millenarian expectations. According to Shiite belief, jihad is simply a necessary requirement in order to initiate a cycle of events which will eventually lead to the reappearance of the Mahdi and thus, the establishment of the millennium.⁶

Hezbollah not only expects, but desires an external enemy to wage jihad against. Jihad is the means by which the Shiite faithful are brought closer to God, and only by removing their enemies from Palestine can Hezbollah hope to achieve its millenarian goals. Negotiations with Hezbollah are simply not possible when one analyses its policies on dealing with foreign enemies. This is supported by Alagha (2006, p.134) who argues that Hezbollah subscribes to Khomeini's view that even if the US and Israel declare "there is no God but Allah", effectively converting to Islam, this call will not be accepted and the Muslims will continue their struggle against the US until they crush the US hegemony and uproot the cancerous gland (Israel), which is implanted in the midst of the Muslims. Thus we can see that even if Hezbollah's

⁵ On the necessity of Jihad: 'Fighting is obligatory for you (Muslims), much as you dislike it. But you may hate a thing although it is good for you, and love a thing although it is bad for you. God knows, but you do not' (The Qur'an, 2:216).

⁶ See Figure 2.1 (page 31) for a flow chart showing the relationship between Hezbollah's actions in the temporal world, and the result of such actions.

enemies are driven to the point of renouncing their own faith and converting to Islam, Hezbollah will not stop until their enemies are either destroyed or leave the land.

One must keep such realities in mind when analysing the actions and motives of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, himself a devout Shiite, whose administration maintains strong ties with Hezbollah. In Ahmadinejad's *Open Letter* to American President George W. Bush, he invited Bush to convert to Islam. In a later interview with a reporter in Jakarta, Ahmadinejad stated that 'If the call is responded to positively, there will be no more problems to be solved' (Islamic Republic News Agency, 2006, np). Yet according to Khomeini's logic, such a call could never be accepted. Ahmadinejad's motives for making such claims therefore need to be analysed.

Hezbollah's desire to hasten the return of the Mahdi and thus initiate the millennium can be seen in the beliefs and actions of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Henry Crumpton, the head of Counter Terrorism at the US State Department, argues; 'the Iranians have complete command and control of Hezbollah. You can't talk about Hezbollah and not think about Iran. They are really part and parcel of the same problem' (2006, np). Hezbollah receives significant financial,⁷ material and ideological support from Iran. Without such support scholars agree that Hezbollah could not function effectively (Harik, 2005; Jaber, 1997; Hamzeh, 2004; Rinehart, 2006). Given this relationship, Ahmadinejad's continued provocation of the west and insistence to obtain nuclear capabilities should be interpreted in light of the apocalyptic expectations of the Twelver Shiites. In his first speech to the United Nations, Ahmadinejad closed with a prayer to God;

"O mighty Lord, I pray to you to hasten the emergence of your last repository, the promised one, that perfect and pure human being, the one that will fill this world with justice and peace"
(Ahmadinejad, 2005, np).

⁷ Although an exact figure is unavailable, Hamzeh (2004, p.62) estimates that Hezbollah receives as much as 1 billion dollars worth of funding from Iran annually. Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary General, downplays Iran's financial aid, claiming; 'the figures one reads in the media are incorrect; it is not true that we receive between \$100 million and \$150 million per annum' (quoted in Noe (Ed.), 2007, p.229).

Such rhetoric is examined by Robert Tanter (cited in Lappin, 2006, np), who argues that Ahmadinejad believes that he can facilitate the return of the Mahdi by initiating conflict in the Middle East between Muslims and non-Muslims. Tanter believes that Iran's attempt to develop nuclear weapons are tied directly to the Iranian Presidents belief that by initiating a nuclear conflict with the West, the world will be in a catastrophic state which would bring the Mahdi out of occultation to fight against the enemies of Islam.

Ahmadinejad's reasoning is founded in readings from the vast body of prophetic literature of the Shia which mention specific events which must occur before the Mahdi returns. Momen (1985) explains some of the signs which Shiite Muslims believe precede the return of the Mahdi;

The Arabs will throw off the reins and take possession of their land, throwing out the authority of the foreigners. Death and fear will afflict the people of Baghdad and Iraq, and a fire will appear in the sky and redness will cover them (1985, p.168).

From such descriptions, one can see how the political policies of Iran and Hezbollah are intended to fulfil the requirements for the Mahdi's return. The establishment of an Islamic Order, the elimination of western influence in the region and a seemingly nuclear apocalyptic event bringing 'fire in the sky', illuminate the real goals of Hezbollah and Iran. Ahmadinejad, however misguided, believes that he can bring the world into a certain state of affairs, fulfilling these signs and thus hastening the return of the Mahdi. Iran's influence on Hezbollah's policies and actions cannot be ignored. Given Iran's history of supplying weapons to Hezbollah, and its history of carrying out Iran's bidding against Israel⁸, if Ahmadinejad is able to secure nuclear weapons it is extremely likely that Hezbollah will have access to them shortly after. Danny Yatom, the former head of Mossad argues that;

⁸ Michael Evans & Jerome Corsi (2006, p.147); Ahmad Hamzeh (2004, p.146); Judith Harik, (2005, p.39) all argue that Hezbollah's actions against Israel are dictated by Iran. Additionally, Raymond Tanter, president of the Iran Policy Committee, argues that Hezbollah's deliberate initiation of war with Israel in 2006 was at the direction of the Iranian regime and aimed at diverting world attention from Iran's nuclear program (Iran Policy Committee, 2006, p.81).

The United States is vulnerable to terror attacks by Iran through proxies. They call the United States the 'Big Satan' and Israel the 'Small Satan'. Their horrible dream is to destroy all of America and Israel. What drives them is their belief that they must kill all the infidels, Jews, Christians, and build a new Islamic World (quoted in Evans and Corsi, 2006, p.81).

In order to achieve this goal, Hezbollah's Secretary General, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, claims that there are no limits placed on Hezbollah during its struggle against its enemies;

Muslims are allowed to use any means at their disposal, for there are no conditions regarding weapons to use or troop numbers when a country is under threat (Hassan Nasrallah, quoted in Noe (Ed.), 2007, p.231).

Hezbollah's fighters will not fear the repercussions of using nuclear weapons in the region as their reward in the afterlife for carrying out God's plan for the temporal world will be even greater (Kohlberg, 1997, p.204). Evans and Corsi (2006, p.81) argue that because of the concept of martyrdom, rather than being deterred by the logic of mutually assured destruction, an extremist such as Ahmadinejad may be attracted by nuclear suicide as long as Israel is destroyed in the process. In the hands of such devoted individuals, nuclear weapons are simply another tool for hastening the millennium and the Day of Judgement; bringing about the end of mankind's existence in the temporal world. It is in this light that the millenarian nature of Hezbollah must be questioned. If Hezbollah's own members are killing themselves in martyrdom operations, they will not be alive to experience the millennium when it is realised as the millennium is clearly only related to the temporal world.

Hezbollah: The Problem of Suicide in a Millenarian Group

The death of Hezbollah's own members illuminates an important problem when referring to Hezbollah as a millenarian group fighting to achieve a this-worldly millennium; one which the faithful will enjoy when their goals in the temporal world are fulfilled. Hezbollah's most devoted fighters are denying themselves the opportunity to experience the millennium when it is finally realised. If Hezbollah's fighters do indeed believe that God wants his followers to experience the joys of the

millennium in the purified temporal world, as Rinehart (2006) argues, then why are they killing themselves purposely in order to achieve it?

Muslims have a very specific set of beliefs concerning death and the afterlife, which can help us to understand the reasons behind their actions in the temporal world. During their time on earth, Muslims believe that God tests their faithful and in doing so decides a Muslim's fate in the afterlife. "This world" is seen simply as a testing ground; merely a gateway to the afterlife. Abdesselem explains it best; 'To Muslims, death is not the end of life, it is simply the end of their period of testing' (1990, p.448). According to Muslim belief, when a person dies his or her body and spirit remains in the grave, awaiting the day of resurrection and judgement at the end of time. Although paradise and hell exist, no-one enters either realm until after the Day of Judgement. On the last day of the temporal world, a great trumpet will sound. The earth will be shaken by earthquakes, the sky will crack and the sea will rise. Every living thing will be annihilated. Following this catastrophic event, a second trumpet will sound and the whole of mankind, either long dead or annihilated on the last day, will be revived from their graves in body, soul and spirit (Gardet, 1990, p.236).

Following the resurrection, God will gather all of mankind together, where they will be judged and either condemned to hell or allowed to enter the gardens of paradise. The choice will depend on their deeds in the temporal world. Willaim Chattick (1987, p.381) explains the trials that one must face during judgement; everyone is required to cross 'the path' which is a bridge that stretches over the realm of hell. For the faithful, this path is wide and they can run across it directly into paradise. For the infidels, however, the path is narrow and sharper than a sword, making crossing the path either extremely difficult or impossible. The infidels, as they are unable to cross the path, fall and burn forever in the fires of hell (Chattick, 1987, p.382). These trials faced on the Day of Judgement dictate Muslims' actions in the temporal world. Everything a Muslim does is seen in the eyes of God and he or she will be held accountable for it. The Muslim therefore wishes to please God in such a way as to make sure his or her 'bad deeds' are relatively insignificant. It is for this reason that martyrdom is seen by some Muslims as the ultimate insurance against the fires of hell.

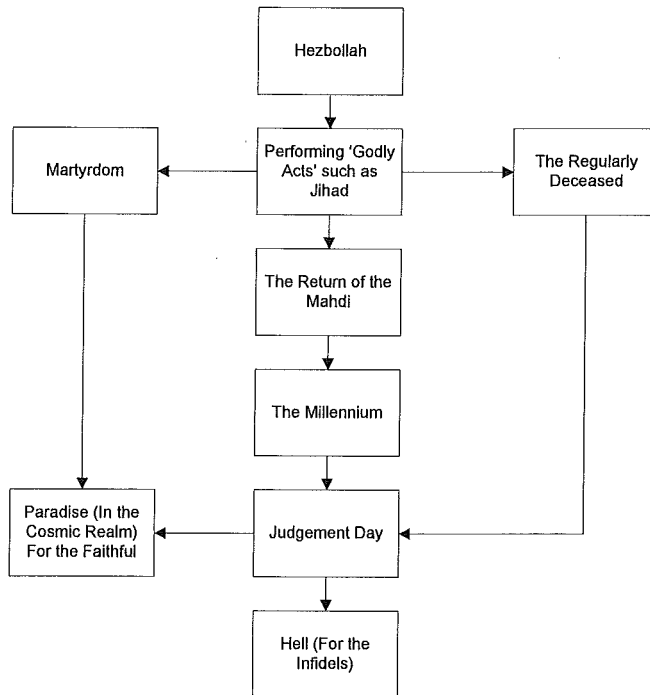
Hezbollah's Shiite Muslims believe that dying as a martyr for God's cause will grant them several concessions in relation to the afterlife. One specific verse in the Qur'an is often used to support this notion;

Never think that those who were slain in the cause of God are dead. Nay, they are alive and well provided for by the lord; pleased with his gifts and rejoicing that those they left behind, who have not yet joined them, have nothing to fear or regret; rejoicing in God's grace and bounty. God will not deny the faithful their reward (The Qur'an, 3:169).

Citing passages such as this, Shiites believe that the martyr does not have to endure the long wait in the grave nor face judgement as the act of martyrdom eliminates all prior sins (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002, p.130). Martyrdom is seen as a direct ticket to paradise where the martyr is allowed to enjoy his rewards immediately. There are several passages in the Hadith which support this view and are often used by Shiites to confirm early entry into paradise for the martyr. However, such passages are often ambiguous. That is, it is unclear if the martyr is admitted to paradise before or after the day of judgement. One Hadith from the Sahih Bukhari collection provides support for the entry into paradise before the Day of Judgement. It gives an account of a mother who came to the Prophet and asked if her son who had been martyred was already in paradise, to which the prophet replied; "O mother of Hartha! There are many paradises and your son is in the (most superior) paradise of Al-Firdaus".⁹

⁹ This passage is quoted from the Sahih Bukhari collection of Hadith, Book 52, Hadith 64. Available in digital form at <http://www.searchtruth.com>

Figure 2.1. Flow Chart Showing the Effect of Hezbollah's Actions in the Temporal World, as Understood through Shiite Millenarian Mythology.



Those who have been martyred are not subject to the same burial rituals as regular Muslims, further distinguishing them from the regularly deceased. Kholberg (1997) describes some of the rituals associated with burying the martyr, noting that it is usually customary to wash the body of the deceased in order to cleanse and purify it. However, since the martyr died performing God's will he was purified at the time of his death by Allah himself. The body is therefore not washed after death, and the martyr is buried in his blood stained clothes which further proves his status as a martyr in the afterlife. Seeing this evidence, it is believed that God will grant the martyr the rewards of paradise greater than any other Muslim as the martyr's abode in paradise is the highest attainable (Kholberg, 1997, p.204). In the temporal world, the martyr endows his entire family with purity and grace and his immediate family is the object of admiration and support, elevating the social status of those left behind (Kholberg, 1997, p.205). Thus martyrdom has benefits beyond those of the martyr himself. Kholberg argues, however, that the status of a martyr can only be confirmed by God. Even if a person is celebrated as a martyr in this world, God may decide that the martyr's intentions were not purely for the glory of God; that he was instead

seeking personal fame and glory for himself or his family and as such does not deserve the rewards of a martyr in the afterlife (1997, p.206). Therefore, the martyr's only concern should be to carry out God's plan for the temporal world, not in the hopes of improving the status of those he left behind, but in the hopes of receiving guaranteed *personal salvation* in the afterlife.

Aum Shinrikyo: Killing to Save

Aum came to believe that in order to cleanse this world of iniquity, corruption and sin, the world had to be destroyed. It was only then that a new, pure and ideal spirituality could be achieved. One major factor in this belief resulted from Asahara's failed political aspirations. In 1989 Asahara established a political party, believing that since a final war was imminent, speed was essential; religion alone could not enact Aum's plans of salvation quickly enough. Asahara believed he needed to develop a political base and authority through which he could advance his Shambhala project (Reader, 2000, p.153). Weinberg and Pedahzur (2003, p.53) argue that it was after Aum's crushing defeat in the elections of 1990¹⁰ that Asahara's views became increasingly pessimistic, claiming that by the beginning of 1990 Asahara's agenda could be summed up in one word; revenge. Asahara believed that the very people he was trying to save had rejected him.

Asahara preached to his followers that they were different from regular people. He convinced them that they did not fit into the outside world, and encouraged them to view outsiders with disdain (Murakami, cited in Rinehart, 2006, p.130). Extending this 'us' versus 'them' mentality, Aum members were taught that outsiders were suffering. Those within the group who followed Asahara's instructions were encouraged to see themselves as working towards relieving not only their own suffering, but also the suffering of others and moving towards a level above the psychological stresses of temporal life.

A distinguishing feature of Aum's millenarian ideology involves the fate of those who were killed by Aum's terrorist activities. Aum Shinrikyo believed that since

¹⁰ Aum's political party *Shinrito* ('Truth Party') received only 1,783 votes out of approximately 500,000 votes (Terrorist Operations: Case Studies in Terrorism, 2005).

those outside of Aum were suffering, the destruction of 'temporal life' was an act of compassion. Murder was promoted as an act of liberation by which god's chosen few could free the common man in Japan from his suffering and 'enhance their immortality, or their subsequent reincarnation, or their journey to the pure land'. Although, as Murakami claims, not everyone in Aum believed this to be true, Asahara nevertheless stressed it over and over again in his lectures (Murakami, cited in Rinehart, 2006, p.130).

Asahara's belief that killing could be an act of salvation for the victims of Aum's crimes needs to be understood in the context of Asahara's approach to death. Aum held the belief, based on Asahara's understanding of Buddhism, that each person is reborn countless times and lives through different types of existences in one of the various realms in the universe. Souls transmigrate at death and can ascend or descend through the realms depending on the deeds of the person in this life. According to Asahara, the task of the Aum practitioner was to accrue spiritual merits and raise his or her consciousness so as to be able to ascend into higher realms (Reader, 2000, p.12). The quality of a person's current life is simply a reflection of present and past karma. Thus if the individual now lives a comfortable life, this is the reward for good deeds performed in present and past lives. The same concept applies for the reverse. In this way the individual is held completely responsible for the quality of life he or she is now experiencing, and pointing the finger of blame at external forces such as a deity, demons or fate, is not acceptable (Ma'sumian, 1995, p.44).

Asahara believed that when an enlightened Aum member killed someone the victim was saved spiritually. Thus, the murder of Aum's enemies could be legitimised on the basis that it had positive benefits for the victim. Asahara developed this notion as a response to his adoption of Vajrayana Buddhism, where he learned of the concept of *bad karma*. Asahara believed that just by living in this corrupt world, people automatically absorbed bad karma which would act against them in their next rebirth. Thus, when an enlightened Aum member killed a non-believer the victim was automatically cleansed of his or her bad karma and therefore had the best possible chance of rebirth in one of the higher realms after death. Since that person was cleansed at the moment of death, and bad karma could only be collected by living in

the human realm, their murder was seen as a process of forced salvation (Matreux, 1999, p.33).

Asahara was able to legitimise the murder of outsiders by modifying the existing Buddhist notion of *poa*. Tibetan Buddhists believe that even though a soul's passage to different realms after death was based on karma, a deceased soul could be assisted to attain a higher spiritual realm through the transference of spiritual merit by the living spiritual practitioner (Reader, 2000, p.17). Traditionally, *poa* was designed as a form of shamanistic aid to help an already deceased person to achieve a higher spiritual realm. But Asahara modified this idea to become a practice of intercession before death in order to save an individual. By interceding in a person's life Asahara believed that the person's bad karma would be erased and since they were no longer living in this corrupt world, they were prevented from accumulating any more bad karma. Asahara believed that *poa* was the only way to ensure that non Aum members could be saved from hell (Reader, 2000, pp.18-19). In doing so, the Aum practitioner would also gain spiritual merit and thus *poa* had spiritual benefits for both the perpetrator and the victim (Steinhoff, 2001, p.145).

The extent to which *poa* was used as a legitimising agent for the murder of civilians can be seen in the personal account of a senior Aum practitioner whose name was withheld to preserve his or her anonymity;

When the sarin gas incident occurred I thought about the matter in the following way. Even if Aum was responsible, it was the right thing to do. That is because of the appropriateness of the teaching regarding *poa*. Because of this teaching, the incident did not shake my faith in any way (quoted in Michiko, 2001, p.199).

Aum's members, living in isolated communes for many years and exposed only to Asahara's teachings, came to believe in such claims with great conviction. Lifton (2000) argues that as early as 1987, eight years prior to the Tokyo Subway attacks, Asahara was preaching the benefits of killing outsiders at the guru's order;

The teachings of esoteric Buddhism of Tibet were pretty savage. For instance, when a guru ordered a disciple to kill a thief, the disciple went ahead and did it as an act of virtue. In my previous existence, I

myself have killed someone at my guru's order. When a guru orders you to take someone's life, that is an indication that the person's time is up. In other words, you are killing the person at exactly the right time and therefore letting the person have his *poa* (Asahara, quoted in Lifton, 2000, pp.59-60).

All Aum members were made to understand that war and Armageddon were necessary for overcoming the bad karma that increasingly dominated humankind (Lifton, 2000, p.61). Death, however, was not limited to Aum's enemies. When members of Aum Shinrikyo began to die, Asahara needed to develop an explanation which meshed with Aum's existing millenarian worldview.

Aum Shinrikyo: The Problem of Death for Group Members

When Aum's members died unexpectedly while undergoing severe ascetic practices that were supposed to improve their mental state, Asahara was forced to invent new concepts in order to give their deaths meaning (Steinhoff, 2001, p.145). In Aum Shinrikyo, traditional Hindu and Buddhist religious concepts associating death and rebirth with the potential for spiritual enlightenment and liberation were inverted to make the victim's death itself a sign of enlightenment.

The concept of *poa* as a legitimising agent for murder was not restricted to those external to Aum. It was also used to explain the deaths within Aum itself, specifically in the case of accidental deaths which occurred whilst performing extreme ascetic practices, some of which were forced on members of Aum as a form of salvatory punishment. In cases such as these, when there was no intention to kill yet accidental death occurred, *poa* provided the perfect explanation; the integrity of the deceased was preserved in death as to die for the Aum's cause was a noble effort. Those responsible for killing the person were freed from guilt on the grounds that their actions were helping the deceased to achieve a higher spiritual realm. According to Joyu Fumihiro, one of Aum Shinrikyo's most senior members, 'while it was better for people to achieve liberation while alive, it was not at all a bad thing for them to be liberated through dying in a practice initiated by the guru, as this is a case where *poa* occurs' (quoted in Reader, 2000, p.17). Thus it is apparent that whilst Aum's

members preferred to live to experience the millennium when it was finally realised, death was still an acceptable substitute.

The value of the afterlife clearly held an important place within Aum Shinrikyo's millenarian worldview, yet Asahara at times covered up such deaths from his followers, contradicting the supposed spiritual benefits of *poa*. Between October 1988 and March 1995, police reports reveal that as many as thirty-three Aum members were killed (Mullins, 1997, p.320). Ian Reader (2000) explains that one such death occurred to Ochi Naoki who, by expressing his desire to leave the group, was confessing to a grave karmic. Asahara ordered Ochi to undergo 'karmic cleansing', against his will, through extreme ascetic practices. Ochi was tied by his legs and suspended upside down. This was not, according to Reader (2000, p.16), a rare event in Aum as practitioners often subjected themselves to this practice for periods of up to 90 minutes, with rest periods in between. However, as punishment, Ochi was ordered to be kept upside down for much longer and without rest periods. Upon being informed that Ochi had stopped breathing one of the senior Aum members declared to the others present in the room that Ochi had simply entered a stage of enlightenment, where his mind and spirit continued to function without the need for a physical body.

Ochi's death was thus equated with his enlightenment; the cessation of desire and attachment to the body meant that he had the best potential for transformation to one of the higher states of consciousness. Yet after Ochi's death, Asahara ordered that his body be incinerated and the ashes flushed down the drain. Other Aum members were also told that Ochi had later recovered consciousness and had left the commune to return to secular life (Reader, 2000, pp.16-17). Disposing of Ochi's remains in such a way would certainly have been necessary, as the authorities would not accept such a bizarre explanation for his death. However, informing members of Aum Shinrikyo that Ochi had left the group and returned to secular life reveals that not all of Aum's members were devoted enough to Aum practices to accept that Ochi's death equated with his enlightenment. Those present in the room where Ochi died, presumably Asahara's most devoted followers, may have believed the explanation for his death, but it is clear that Asahara feared the consequences of informing the wider Aum

membership that one of their own had been killed, not by an external enemy, but at the order of the guru himself.

Aum Shinrikyo's millenarian ideology was at no stage clearly defined. It evolved with the spiritual development of the guru (see Figure 1.1). Asahara's adoption of Vajrayana Buddhism in 1988 signalled a shift from focusing on the sacrifice of the self to save all beings (as in the Mahayana path), to the more classically millenarian notion of focusing on the salvation of the individual (Reader, 2000, p.128). After adopting Vajrayana Buddhism, Asahara came to believe that not all people were capable of attaining salvation, and as a result, Aum Shinrikyo should focus on preparing its own members for salvation (Reader, 1996, p.45). Vajrayana is an esoteric form of Buddhism which was taught only to Asahara's most devout followers; those who had rejected society and chosen to live with Asahara in Aum's communes (Reader, 2000, p.129). Asahara claimed that Vajrayana Buddhism was the shortest and most effective route to liberation, and as he believed Armageddon to be imminent, time was a serious concern. Asahara declared that the other paths of Buddhism such as Hinayana or Mahayana were more suited to the less devoted Aum members. But Asahara made it clear that those paths were merely lesser stages on the journey to reaching the Vajrayana level (Reader, 2000, p.129).

Vajrayana Buddhism was also responsible for heightening the group's devotion to Asahara and his beliefs. Kisala and Mullins (2001, pp.24-44) note some of the major characteristics of Vajrayana Buddhism; the deliberate commission of evil acts, the affirmation of worldly desires to draw them to the surface, the guru's power to raise souls to a higher world, the extreme difference in the level of people's souls, detachment from earthly desire, absolute devotion, and secrecy of transmission. Kisala and Mullins (2001) argue that Asahara's stress on salvation, which was a Mahayana concept, after the earlier emphasis on *gedatsu* and *satori* (Hinayana concepts) gave rise to a certain tension in the teachings. But since Asahara now provided Vajrayana as a solution, claiming that it superseded both Mahayana and

Hinayana, it provided a way for him to overcome this tension with a ready made solution.¹¹

Shimazono (quoted in Reader, 1996, p.46) exposes another important shift in Aum's focus as a result of adopting the Vajrayana path. Asahara and his followers decided to withdraw further from society and build nuclear shelters to protect Aum's members from the coming Apocalypse. In this way, we can see a sharp and rapid shift from building lotus villages¹² in 1988 to prepare for the development of Shambhala (the ideal kingdom on earth) to the 1990 version of Aum which focused on building nuclear shelters. Thus, it is clear that by the 1990s Aum Shinrikyo had become much more "classically" millenarian as its main focus had shifted towards saving itself from the corruption of the outside world. Aum Shinrikyo was no longer seeking a utopia on earth for everyone to exist during the millennium. Rather, it 'focused on securing its own utopia by building defences from the outsiders' (Reader, 1996, p.46). From 1990 salvation and continued existence in the temporal world was a possibility only for Aum Shinrikyo's most devoted followers (Reader, 1996, p.46). Since 'mass salvation' was now seen as impossible, the rest of the world's inhabitants were fated to die in the coming Armageddon. Instead of being seen as potential Aum members outsiders came to be seen simply as the enemy from which Aum had to protect itself.

Lifton explores the concept of death in relation to Aum Shinrikyo's own members, arguing that 'Aum's requirements for its survival were omnicidal. But since a part of Asahara undoubtedly sensed that the violence unleashed would destroy Aum as well, we may say that Aum was in some degree collectively suicidal' (2000, p.301). Although this is hardly conclusive it does shed some light on Asahara's state of mind when he came to realise that the impending Armageddon was so terrible that he must focus all of his efforts on the salvation of Aum's own members. When analysing Aum Shinrikyo, one must always be mindful of the chronological order of events and statements made by the group (see Figure 1.1). Asahara's beliefs and ideas changed so drastically over the years that it is impossible to interpret a statement of Asahara given

¹¹ See Kisala and Mullins (2001, p.199) for an Aum insider's account of the effect of Vajrayana teachings on his perception of the Tokyo subway attack.

¹² In 1988, as part of Asahara's Shambhala Plan, Aum Shinrikyo began to establish communes throughout rural Japan. Called "Lotus Villages", Asahara believed that these communes would be models of self-sufficient agriculture and attract large numbers of new converts (Hardacre, 1996, np).

in 1990 and apply it to the mindset of the group during any other year. Thus even if Asahara was at one time expecting and preparing for many Aum casualties in the destruction of Armageddon, this cannot be applied as a general trait of the group.¹³

Conclusion

When applied to millenarian research the concept of death, especially the death of group members, creates a confusing array of problems. Aum Shinrikyo's aims and objectives clearly shifted from attempting to create a global Shambhala and secure the salvation of every living soul on the planet, to deciding that time constraints meant that only Aum's current and most devoted followers would survive the coming Armageddon and live to experience the millennium. Thus, salvation for non group members was a possibility only if a member of Aum Shinrikyo interceded before their inevitable death. By initiating Armageddon Asahara believed that since Aum's enlightened members were performing the killings, the victims would be purified at their moment of death and would therefore receive the best possible chance of attaining rebirth in one of the higher realms. Hezbollah on the other hand simply sees itself as carrying out God's plan for the temporal world. Those who are killed by Hezbollah's fighters are seen to be in God's hands, and God alone will judge them along with everyone else (other than the martyrs who are already in paradise) on Judgement Day. Although each groups understanding of the universe is vastly different, both groups share the belief that the elimination of their enemies is a 'godly act' which has an effect on the status of group members in the afterlife.

¹³ See Figure 1 for a timeline showing the evolving ideology of Aum Shinrikyo.

Chapter Three: Situating Death within the Context of Millenarian Research

Death poses a problem for millenarian groups and has not been adequately explored in the existing literature. Hezbollah's reliance on martyrdom as a tool for obtaining its millenarian goals, and its willingness to sacrifice the lives of those it is fighting on behalf of, goes against the very nature of millenarianism. Similarly, on occasion, members of Aum Shinrikyo were subjected to deadly experiments and even killed at the order of Asahara, thereby excluding them from experiencing the millennium. This chapter analyses the paradox and highlights the need to incorporate death as a major element when studying millenarian groups, particularly Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo.

Hezbollah

Berman (2006) argues that Hezbollah's Idolisation of martyrdom reveals that its goal is not peace and stability, but rather martyrdom as a path to the ultimate reward. Hezbollah, claiming to act on behalf of the Shiite population in Lebanon to achieve a millenarian goal for its population, contradict themselves in some of their actions. Mounir Herzallah, a Lebanese Shiite, gives an account of the 'social work' carried out by Hezbollah;

The social work (of Hezbollah) entailed building a school and an apartment building right on top of the (missile) bunker! A local sheikh explained to me, with a smile, that the Jews would lose in any case: either because they would be hit with the missiles or because, should they attack the missile storage, they would be condemned by the world public due to ensuing civilian deaths. Hezbollah was not at all interested in the Lebanese people; they only used them as shields and – when they were dead – as propaganda (quoted in Berman, 2006, np).

Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary General, was asked in an interview whether or not Hezbollah takes into consideration, when making decisions, the suffering of the Lebanese people as a result of Israeli targeting of civilian and economic installations;

We have no other choice. The only alternative is for our territory to remain under Israeli occupation, and for Israel to impose its conditions on us. It is the fate of the Lebanese people to resist and endure the burden of this resistance (Nasrallah, quoted in Noe (Ed.), 2007, p.220).

This disregard for the lives of the Lebanese Shiites stems from Hezbollah's willingness to sacrifice their own lives. Jaber (1997) notes that some Muslims who lost their lives in human bomb attacks had not chosen to die in such a manner. When Hezbollah decided to attack the Israeli military headquarters in Tyre, Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners in the building were killed. To legitimise such actions religious scholars provided Hezbollah with a 'fatwa' (religious edict), stating that if the enemy uses Muslims as human shields then Muslim fighters can kill them in their quest to annihilate the enemy. Such a doctrine is only permitted if the enemy's toll of casualties exceeds the number of Muslim victims (Jaber, 1997, pp.88-89). Hezbollah therefore sees the very people whom they are trying to create the millennium for as expendable.

Saad-Ghorayeb (2002) argues that for Hezbollah not only is personal salvation valued more than the liberation of Palestine, but so is the completion of *wajib shari* (religious legal obligation). Even if Lebanese territory is not liberated, the realisation of the religious duty to engage in a jihad is considered an even greater victory for Islam and humanity, and a greater victory for the martyr whose fulfilment of this duty has rewarded him with God's eternal blessing. For Hezbollah, although the person who is martyred whilst engaging in jihad is deemed to have served Islam and himself to the furthest possible extent, those who fight but do not martyr themselves have still served both Islam and themselves in accordance with the *wajib shar* and have thus earned a place in paradise. For those who die on the battlefield, and whose death was not premeditated, they are seen as a martyr, albeit inferior in rank to the martyr whose death was premeditated (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002, p.131).

Hezbollah's desire to establish the millennium is therefore secondary to the desire for personal salvation.¹⁴ Entry into paradise is the ultimate aim for Hezbollah's fighters and premeditated martyrdom ensures that the deceased achieves the highest level of paradise immediately.¹⁵ Hezbollah's actions against the Lebanese population must therefore be considered in this light; the deceased civilians, although considered 'unwilling martyrs',¹⁶ will never experience the millennium. The regularly deceased; that is, those who are not considered to have died as a martyr, remain in their graves until Judgement Day which occurs after the millennium. Similarly, those who die as martyrs go straight to the cosmic realm of paradise, also bypassing the period of the millennium. Therefore, death in any manner results in exclusion from experiencing the millennium.

In Shiite traditions, the establishment of a this-worldly millennium acts as a catalyst for the destruction of the temporal world and the Day of Judgement, after which this earth is no longer inhabited. Traditional Shiites do not believe that humans have the power to create a paradise on earth through their own efforts. Such a paradise could only come about through the return of the hidden Imam (Tabataba'i, Hussain, & Sachedina, 1989, p.38). As discussed in Chapter Two, Muslims have a very clear tradition concerning the events of the last days. However, Twelver Shiites have a different understanding of these events which concerns the reappearance of their Mahdi before the annihilation and the Day of Judgement. By analysing the order of these events, it becomes clear that the millennium is relatively insignificant for Twelver Shiites. According to Shiite belief the Twelfth Imam, who has been hidden in occultation, will return as the Mahdi shortly before the day of judgement. The Mahdi will be in the company of his 'chosen ones' who will fight with him against the forces of the Antichrist. This final apocalyptic battle will end with the Mahdi securing

¹⁴ A passage from the Qur'an supports this notion; Believers, why is it when you are told; March in the cause of God', you linger slothfully in the land? Are you content with this life in preference to the life to come? Few indeed are the blessings of this life, compared with those of the life to come (The Qur'an, 9:38).

¹⁵ See Figure 2.1 (page 32) for flow chart explaining the effect of Hezbollah's actions, as understood by its millenarian ideology.

¹⁶ Hezbollah considers those who die on the field of battle whilst engaging in jihad to be martyrs even if their deaths are not premeditated. For example Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary General, is quoted as saying 'most of the martyrs (in the 2006 Israeli/Lebanon war) were fighters who were manning the rocket-launchers, or fighting at the frontlines against tanks, and so on' (quoted in Noe (Ed.), 2007, p.398).

victory, after which he will rule for a very short time on this earth, usually believed to be less than twenty years¹⁷ (Momen, 1985, p.166). During the Mahdi's reign, some of the deceased will rise early, including Jesus, Imam Husayn and the other deceased 'Twelver' Imams. The remainder of the dead who are neutral in, or unaffected by, the struggle will remain in their graves until the Day of Resurrection (Momen, 1985, p.166). Even those who die as martyrs for God's cause for groups such as Hezbollah cannot return to fight alongside their Mahdi. They are already in paradise and cannot return. Kholberg (1997) explains this, stating that Shiites believe that when the martyrs behold the delights of paradise, even though they have already achieved their eternal reward, their only request will be that they are brought back to life to be killed again; 'but this will be denied even to them' (Kholberg, 1997, p.204). The Mahdi's rule during this brief period is seen by Muslims as the perfect order, a millenarian existence where Muslims who are *living* during the period when the Mahdi returns are governed by their messiah and their enemies are no longer a threat. The deceased, be they martyr's of Hezbollah or the expendable Lebanese population, will never experience the millennium they gave their lives for.

The Shiites, through their interpretation of the afterlife, see the return of the Mahdi as a necessity for establishing the millennium in the temporal world, and as a requirement for salvation after death. Without the return of the Mahdi, and the establishment of a this-worldly millennium, there can be no Day of Judgement and therefore no entry into heaven other than for the martyr (Rinehart, 2006; Sachedina & Enayat, 1989). Thus, the establishment of a this-worldly millennium can be interpreted as merely a stepping stone to the afterlife; simply the fulfilment of the required conditions to bring about the Day of Judgement and the Muslim's entry into paradise. Secretary General of Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, reveals the insignificance of Hezbollah's millennium for those who survive the fighting;

¹⁷ This point is contested by Tabatabai'I, Hussein, & Sachedina (1989) who note that there are conflicting traditions concerning the duration of the Mahdi's rule. However, all Shiites agree that the Mahdi's rule immediately precedes the annihilation and Day of Judgement. One possible explanation for this conflict can be found in the Hadith; 'Even if the entire duration of the world's existence has already been exhausted and only one day is left before the Day of Judgement, God will expand that day to such a length of time, as to accommodate the kingdom of the Mahdi who will fill the Earth with peace and justice as it will have been filled with injustice and tyranny before then' (Sahih Tirmidhi, Vol.2, p.86; Vol.9, pp.74-75).

All we want is to be able to stand before God on Judgement Day and answer his questions about our actions (Nasrallah, quoted in Noe (Ed.), 2007, p.308).

Nasrallah's statement illuminates the Muslim's need to perform his or her duty in the temporal world; to fight against the oppressor so that God will judge such actions favourably and deem them worthy for admission into paradise. Hezbollah values a this-worldly millennium, brought about through the fulfilment of its political goals only in so far as it is part of a series of events which leads to the complete destruction of the temporal world and their ultimate admission into the cosmic realm of paradise.

Although Hezbollah does fit the definition of a millenarian group (as outlined in Cohn 1970; Adas 1979; Barkun 1974; and Rinehart 2006), it is clear that upon further examination Hezbollah's millenarian goals mask a deeper and far more terrifying agenda. For Hezbollah to succeed in achieving their millenarian goals, they need to create a situation of chaos which they believe is required for the Mahdi to return. If the Mahdi indeed does return, Shiite Muslims believe that his reappearance signals the end of the world and that the Day of Judgement is imminent. Thus, the premeditated suicide of Hezbollah's martyrs, and their willingness to sacrifice the very people they are fighting on behalf of, is explained in the context of what they are really fighting for. For the Shiite Muslims who have been indoctrinated to the ideology of Hezbollah, existence in this world is no longer important. Saad-Ghorayeb (2002, p.128) supports this conclusion, arguing that Hezbollah attaches an unparalleled value to the hereafter which renders life on earth meaningless in comparison. The destruction and renewal that Hezbollah seeks is not to provide a purified existence on this earth for members' enjoyment; Hezbollah's intended destination is in the cosmic realm of paradise. Therefore, Hezbollah's members are not concerned if they die before the rule of the Mahdi, as to them the Mahdi's role is not to lead them during the millennium, but to initiate the annihilation which leads to a *cosmic* salvation.

We can conclude that Hezbollah's goals are certainly millenarian in nature. Hezbollah does believe that by destroying Israel, eliminating corrupt western influences in the Middle East and establishing an Islamic Order in the region, the problems faced by the Shia since the death of the Prophet will be transcended. Through the intervention

of a supernatural being (the Mahdi), the corrupt and evil in this temporal world will be destroyed, the faithful will be saved and the millennium will finally be realised. Based on these traits Hezbollah can be correctly defined as a millenarian group. However, there are also several inconsistencies which millenarian scholars have largely ignored. Hezbollah's main strategy for achieving their millenarian goals, through the use of suicide bombing, eliminates its members from ever experiencing the millennium. These fighters are not simply willing to die for their cause, they are *intending* to die before the millennium can be realized. Those who die as martyrs for Hezbollah are already in the cosmic realm of paradise and cannot return to experience the millennium. The millennium does not involve a merging of the cosmic realm of heaven and the temporal world. The martyrs are in the cosmic realm of paradise and the regularly deceased remain in their graves until the last day, which is the end of the millenarian period. According to Hezbollah's beliefs, only those who have not martyred themselves, or been killed in some other manner, will experience the millennium. That is, a millennium which is only a temporary 'paradise on earth' destined to be eliminated along with everything else in the annihilation. Those fighting for Hezbollah's terrestrial goals have no desire to live in this world once those goals are achieved. The political goals of Hezbollah will ensure that the world is in the correct state for the return of the Mahdi who will establish the millennium. The strategy of martyrdom ensures the salvation of Hezbollah's members in the afterlife. The temporal world is doomed to destruction, and as such, the only concern for Hezbollah's members is to ensure their position in the cosmic realm of paradise by performing 'godly acts' such as jihad, or preferably, premeditated martyrdom.

Aum Shinrikyo

One of the difficulties of studying the millenarian nature of Aum Shinrikyo, in comparison to Hezbollah, is that it had an evolving ideology.¹⁸ Initially Asahara believed that by joining Aum Shinrikyo, and devoting themselves to spiritual and ascetic practices which erased the negative effects of karma, every living person could be saved from a rebirth in one of the lower realms. As time passed, however, Asahara came to believe that a nuclear war which heralded the end of the world was imminent

¹⁸ See *Figure 1.1* for Timeline of the History and Development of Aum Shinrikyo

and that he alone could prevent it by spreading Aum's teachings across the world (Reader, 2000, p.89). By 1990 Aum's focus had shifted dramatically to the belief that war could not be prevented. Aum Shinrikyo had failed to attract the numbers Asahara had hoped for, and Aum's failed political campaign only reinforced his belief that Japan had rejected his message. Since only Aum's members had the ability to counter the effects of bad karma in the temporal world, Asahara believed that salvation for the majority of people must come through their deaths at the hands of Aum practitioners, and the only way to achieve 'mass salvation' was to initiate Armageddon.

The millenarian belief that this world was corrupt and evil was expressed in Aum's notion of *bad karma* which was collected just by living in this world. Thus, as long as a person was alive, regardless of their purity, they were jeopardising their chances of attaining a more favourable rebirth after death. The human realm was believed to be the only realm in which merit or demerit could be gained. Rebirths either below the human realm or above it were simply temporary lives of reward or punishment for deeds committed in the human realm.

Of all the religions that Asahara studied and incorporated into his millenarian worldview, it was Christianity that provided him with the bleakest view of the world and introduced him to the concept of Armageddon. In 1988 Asahara was introduced to the Bible, and in particular, to the Book of Revelations of St John. *Revelations* exposes the existence of a text (a book or scroll) bound by seven seals which, if opened, would set forth a chain of events eventually leading to the end of the world. Asahara identified himself with 'The Lamb', the character in revelations who can bring about God's will by breaking open the seven seals (Reader, 2000, p.141). In an effort to combine the Christian notion of Armageddon with the group's existing Hindu and Buddhist inspired ideology, Asahara declared that it was Shiva who appointed him the one to open and explain these seals thereby setting in motion Aum's salvation plan. The plan was to initiate Armageddon on the terms of Asahara, rather than wait for their enemies to destroy them.

Yet at times Asahara seemed unconcerned with the survival of his own followers. As discussed in Chapter Two, he showed an apparent lack of concern when members of

Aum Shinrikyo died since their deaths could be explained as simply a case where *poa* had occurred. The expendable nature of Aum's followers became more evident during Asahara's pursuit to develop biological weapons in the early 1990s. Feasts which were held for his 'special guests' contained food which was laced with biological agents, allowing Aum Shinrikyo's scientists to test the effects of such toxins on Aum's own members. Kaplan and Marshall (1996) argue that not only were these experiments designed to perfect Aum's own biological weapons, they were also designed to test the effects such toxins would have on Aum's followers if their enemies attacked them by such means; a possibility which clearly frightened Asahara (1996, p.232).

During the 1990s Asahara grew increasingly paranoid that his enemies, including the United States and the Japanese government, were using chemical and biological weapons against Aum Shinrikyo. In 1995 Asahara gave a press conference where he claimed that Japanese or American aircraft had been attacking Aum's facilities with sarin gas as a form of religious persecution. Asahara even released a video showing Aum's doctor injecting sick group members with a sarin antidote in an attempt to prove his claims. Asahara also frequently spoke of himself as being close to death as a result of these attacks, and believed that the only response to the Japanese governments attempts to 'oppress a prophet' was to wage war against it (Lifton, 2000, pp.42-43).

Although Aum Shinrikyo had ambitious plans for destroying the temporal world, Aum's only major terrorist attacks were not primarily designed to fulfil any of the group's millenarian goals. They were designed to provide a distraction from legal proceedings being carried out against Aum Shinrikyo (Wheelis, 2004, p.111). In 1991 Aum Shinrikyo bought land in Matsumoto and began construction on a processing plant. When the locals discovered this the owner of the land filed a civil suit to invalidate the sale and the case went through the long processes of the town's district court. In May 1994, when Asahara's lawyer indicated that Aum was likely to lose the case, Asahara decided to act. On 27 June 1994 Aum launched a sarin gas attack on the complex where three judges involved with the case were lodged. Although a change in wind direction saved the lives of the three judges, the attack caused seven deaths

and over 150 casualties. The judges were too sick to attend court and the ruling on the land dispute was postponed indefinitely (Kaplan and Marshall, 1996, pp.138-146).

Aum's attack on the Tokyo subway system was also carried out to provide a distraction from police investigations into Aum's criminal activities. Members of Aum Shinrikyo, on Asahara's order, had kidnapped and questioned a man named Kiyoshi Kariya about the whereabouts of his sister, a former Aum member who had fled the group. When Kariya died during the interrogation, Asahara ordered his remains to be disposed of in the usual manner of incineration and depositing the ashes into a nearby lake. However, witnesses saw the numberplate of the rental van used to kidnap Kariya and police followed the paper trail back to the member of Aum Shinrikyo who had signed for the van (Brackett, 1996, pp.122-123). When Asahara learned that the police planned to raid Aum's facilities, he again decided to act.

Asahara ordered his scientists to prepare sarin gas for an immediate attack. Time constraints, however, meant that the sarin produced was impure and thus much less lethal than was desired. Asahara ordered five of his followers to board five different subway cars, travelling along three different lines, all converging at Kasumigaseki station near the Metropolitan Police Department (Brackett, 1996, p.127). The men carried bags of sarin wrapped in newspaper which they pierced with their umbrellas before exiting the train. The odourless and colourless gas was expected to silently spread throughout the carriages, with all three trains converging at one central location, infecting the entire station when the doors were opened.

The attack killed twelve people and over 5,500 people were injured, many of them seriously. Some victims needed their eyes surgically removed from the effects of the gas, others simply slipped into a permanent vegetative state (Kaplan and Marshall, 1996, p.251). If Aum scientists had been given more time to purify the sarin, the number of casualties would have been much higher. Lifton (2000) argues that Asahara ordered the Tokyo sarin attack not only to divert the police but to hit out at society in general, activating the energy of world destruction. Aum's final plan for Japan was yet to be realised. Given enough time Asahara intended, through the use of a large Russian MI-17 helicopter he had purchased, to have his followers spray massive

quantities of sarin over Japan's urban populations (Lifton, 2000, p.180). Such an attack, if successfully executed, would have resulted in millions of casualties and fulfilled Asahara's apocalyptic vision for Japan.

For Asahara, the people of this world were so hopelessly defiled that their inevitable fate was the lowest of reincarnations. That sense of defilement encompassed just about any personal or social experience outside of the guru's teaching and the world of Aum; to the point where one could say that reality itself was a defilement. With both matter and reality, indeed all of human life, so defiled, the process of purification could only be achieved by nothing short of killing on a planetary scale (Lifton, 2000, p.205).

Lifton argues that Asahara took on what could be called the ownership of death. 'He became the ultimate arbiter of every level of death from that of an individual to that of the entire world... all death everywhere was absorbed and orchestrated within his being' (Lifton, 2000, p.210).

The key to these attacks, and what separates Aum's millenarian plan from Hezbollah's, is the concern that was shown for the survival of the attackers. Brackett (1996) notes that on the morning of the Tokyo sarin attack the five members of the team swallowed sarin antidote pills and were given hypodermic syringes containing atrophine sulfate; a drug effective in treating sarin poisoning (Brackett, 1996, p.129). Clearly, it was important to Asahara that the attackers lived. The evil and the corrupt were to die, but the members of Aum Shinrikyo who were carrying out the divine plan for worldly salvation not only had further work to do, but were also expected to live to experience the millennium. When the corrupt and evil were no longer walking the earth, and only Aum members survived to populate the newly created 'Shambhala', Asahara would have achieved his mission.

Although Aum's only major terrorist attacks were aimed at distracting the authorities, such attacks do not alter the group's motives. Aum's goal was to bring about Armageddon in order to hasten the millennium and ensure the survival of Aum's members in the temporal world. The building of nuclear shelters for Aum members to retreat to in the event of a non-Aum initiated Armageddon supports this view. Aum Shinrikyo did not promote suicide. It intended to populate the post apocalyptic world

with spiritually enlightened Aum members. Support for this argument is also found in the group's post-Armageddon political goals. Rinehart (2006) reveals that by 1994, the group had modelled its hierarchical structure based on that of the Japanese government. Such a structure was based on the belief that following the coming Armageddon it would be the leadership and organisation of Aum that would survive and become the functioning government of Japan (Rinehart, 2006, p.153).

The murder of Aum dissidents and experimentation on Aum members with biological agents indicates that anyone who fell out of favour with Asahara immediately became an enemy and was subjected to *poa* in the same manner as the enemy. According to Asahara's worldview, if he truly was the saviour of the world then he had a religious obligation to kill. Those who would die at his hands in this life would be reborn in the next having accumulated less 'bad karma' than they otherwise would have if he had not acted (Lawson, 2000, pp.11-12). Asahara believed that the millenarian society of Shambhala was to be populated by a race of spiritually enlightened super-humans. Thus, in Asahara's mind, if a person was no longer deemed worthy to be a group member, they did not possess the qualities necessary to survive Armageddon and experience the millennium. Therefore, death at the hands of an enlightened Aum member was the best alternative. It was their alternate salvation. Unlike Hezbollah, Aum Shinrikyo's millenarian ideology was such that it took on the responsibility of providing salvation for its enemies. Whereas in Hezbollah Allah (God) was responsible for judging the deceased and sending them either to hell or paradise, in Aum Shinrikyo it was Asahara who held this responsibility. In this way, Asahara absorbed the roles of God, Messiah, leader and spiritual teacher.

Conclusion

Millenarian groups desire the creation of a paradise in the temporal world. Millenarian inspired terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo are prepared to hasten the transition to that paradise by eliminating enemies, thus purifying the earth. Yet when steps to obtain a hastened paradise require group members to sacrifice their lives, understanding such deaths in the context of millenarianism becomes difficult. Even Rinehart (2006), who analysed the millenarian nature of both Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo, failed to take into account the groups' understanding of death when he defined them as millenarian. Hezbollah, for example, has millenarian tendencies but cannot be defined as a group fighting to achieve an exclusively millenarian goal. It is clear that Hezbollah's use of martyrdom, their willingness to sacrifice the population it is fighting on behalf of and the immense value placed on performing actions in the temporal world to ensure *personal* salvation in the afterlife, values the establishment of the millennium only as a stepping-stone to a cosmic salvation. Hezbollah places no emphasis on actually living to experience the millennium when it is realised.

Asahara's preoccupation with gaining spiritual merit in order to attain a higher rebirth after death appears similar to Hezbollah's concept of martyrdom. In Aum Shinrikyo, however, emphasis was placed on saving the souls of non group members from being reborn into a lower realm. It was only those who were not Aum members who were doomed to die. Aum Shinrikyo's early emphasis was on preventing Armageddon by recruiting and producing enough 'enlightened' followers to convert firstly Japan, and eventually the entire world, into the Buddhist millenarian society of 'Shambhala'. It was not until the group's later years when it focused on the protection of its existing members from the corruption and evil in the outside world, that it became truly millenarian, accepting the inevitability of Armageddon. Asahara believed that his followers, through spiritual conditioning and ascetic practices, had the ability to survive Armageddon. He therefore took steps to speed up its delivery. By initiating Armageddon himself he could give 'victims' their *poa*, which they would not receive if Aum simply waited for Armageddon to occur on its own.

Asahara's willingness to sacrifice his own followers by subjecting them to *poa* gives cause to doubt the group's millenarian nature. Since the deceased were believed to be reborn in the cosmic realm it is questionable to what extent Aum Shinrikyo, during the period between 1988 and 1995 when it was killing its own followers, was truly millenarian. However, such murders occurred only when Asahara believed that a member had done something which equated with their rejection of the group's values. Asahara believed that such people were no longer suitable to be members of Aum, therefore they did not have the ability to survive the Armageddon. Since they were unable to live in the millennium when it was realised, the only option was for them to receive their *poa* at the hands of an Aum member.

Although the study of 'death' does not contradict Aum's millenarian nature in the same manner as Hezbollah, it is clear that 'death' contributes to our understanding of millenarian groups in a way which should not be ignored to the extent that it has been in the existing literature. Millenarian research performs an important role when studying terrorism, illuminating the beliefs and motivations of such groups. Ignoring the element of 'death' when researching the millenarian nature of terrorist groups can, in some cases, lead to a misrepresentation of the groups' true character.

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