

Aum Shinrikyo

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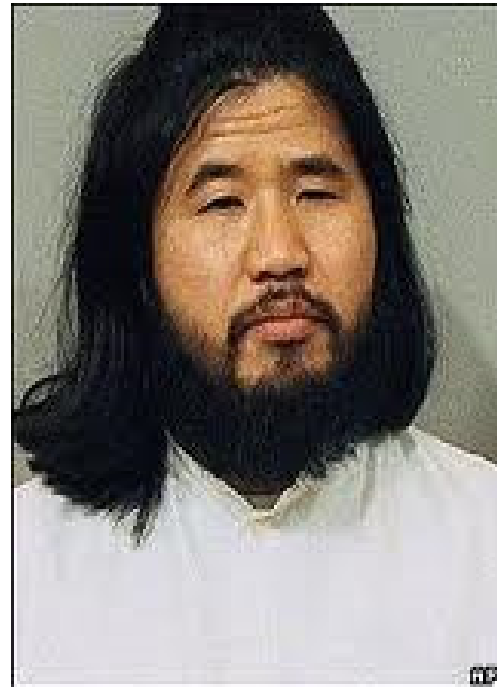
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Outline

- Leadership: Shoko Asahara
- Aum Shinrikyo's Ideology
- Aum Shinrikyo's Scope and Structure
- Indoctrination into Aum
- The Sarin Attack

I. Leadership: Shoko Asahara

- Born Chizuo Matsumoto in village on island of Kyushu; sixth of seven children.
- Attended school for the blind. Older brother was blind, while Asahara's sight was "weak but adequate."
- "Being able to see even a little is prestigious because blind children want to go out and have coffee in a tearoom but can't go by themselves." — Former teacher, to *Time*, Apr. 3, 1995

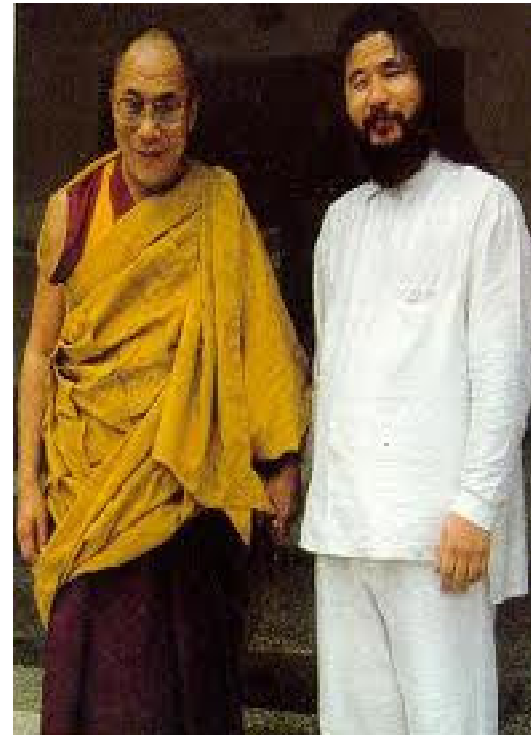


Asahara's Upbringing

- In school, Asahara was seen both as “a champion of social outcasts” and also a bully.
 - Broke another classmate's eardrum in altercation, threatened to burn down dormitory.
- Ran for student body president and lost in elementary, junior high, high school.
- Showed first signs of mastery of physical fitness, body control in high school: judo black belt.
- Became obsessed with money and power while in school: had \$30,000 by graduation.

Early Life

- Failed medical school exams, never attended college.
- Moved to Tokyo suburb, worked as acupuncturist.
 - Made small fortune selling potions like tangerine peel in alcohol (marketed as “Almighty Medicine”); arrested in 1982 for selling fake drugs.
- Became interested in yoga. Traveled to India and Nepal to study Hinduism, Buddhism; pictures with senior lamas were used “to portray himself as an internationally respected religious authority.”



Aum

- 1984: Founds company called Aum; runs yoga school.
- 1987: With ten followers/members, founds Aum Shinrikyo as religious sect.
- *Time*, Apr. 3, 1995: “Japan’s galloping economic miracle in the 1970s and ’80s also spawned a boom in ‘new religions’ offering spiritual refuge to Japanese alienated by materialism. Asahara’s messianic self-image expanded to help fill this void.”

The Savior of This Century

- Asahara starts using titles like “Today’s Christ,” “the Savior of This Century.”
- Claims to be able to levitate (photo).
- Movement ran a number of candidates for 1990 Lower House Diet elections; all lost.



1990 Elections as Tipping Point?

- Shinichi Nakazawa, professor of religion, said that in 1989 “Asahara was an extremely charismatic person ... humorous but rational, while at the same time unsophisticated and unrestrained.”
- In 1990, “I was astonished to find a murky atmosphere surrounding him.... Recent pictures of Asahara show that he is no longer in a tranquil state of mind, but has instead taken on a gruesome persona.”

—*Yomiuri Daily*, May 17, 1995

II. Aum Shinrikyo's Ideology

- “Aum” was formed from first letter of Sanskrit words for creation, maintenance, destruction.
- Syncretistic: Combined Buddhism with ascetic discipline, New Age occultism, Christian apocalypticism, Nostradamus's prophecies, Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series
- Key elements: Asahara as messiah; attainment of superhuman powers; conspiracy; apocalypse.



Asahara on Asahara

I am the ultimate deliverance. I came to this Earth from a Utopia called Shambara with orders to be a messiah to the human race. I learned the secrets of yoga and achieved deliverance three years ago in the Himalayas. There I acquired supernatural powers through rigours of mind and body. I will help people reach ultimate joy and ultimate happiness. And finally I will lead them to deliverance by bestowing my supernatural powers.”



Cult of Personality

- Asahara would always sit on higher level than followers.
- Followers would bow, kiss his toe.
- “When he found that I was carrying a picture of an Indian saint, he went berserk and said I should not respect anyone but him.” —*Follower*
- “When I look at the way Aum operates, I think Matsumoto is 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.” —*Former classmate*

Supernatural Powers

- Asahara: “If you decide to walk the path of a Boddhisattva, you need to gain *super-siddhis*, superhuman powers.”
- Aum Shinrikyo is the way to attain these powers.
- *Abilities*: levitation, extended submersion underwater, ability to predict the future.



Rules and Regulations

- Sleeping hours regulated: sleep deprivation.
- Contents of meals regulated: starvation, also gorging.
 - Russia: “In one case, a person who threw up was forced to eat the vomit because the food had come from the guru.” —*Moscow Times*, Apr. 12, 1995
- Purification rituals.
 - “I was forced to drink 10 liters of warm water from a rubber hose in a container on the wall every morning to purify me. I had to take the hose and put it down my throat 30 centimeters and swallow two liters of water five times. Then I had to vomit.”

Asahara's Prophecies

- Made many mutually exclusive predictions.
- Enemies include Freemasons and Jews (conspiracies involving sex and junk food), U.S. and Japanese governments.
- “Japan will gradually suffer from economic difficulty after economic friction with the United States and European countries. It will be triggered off in 1990. However, if AUM has at least one or two branches in each country of the world by 1993, the prophecy I make from now will not come true. Conversely, if true Bodhisattvas [do not gather]... Japan will rearm herself in 1993. Then a nuclear war is sure to break out from 1999 to 2003.”

Asahara's Prophecies

- Parliamentary elections, 1990:
 - If voted into parliament, he would protect Japan from U.S.-Japan economic war, surge in nationalism, revival of militarism
 - Why wouldn't he do this with mystical powers if *not* elected?
- Nuclear war will destroy the world by 1999 unless 30,000 people develop supernatural powers to prevent it.
- Asahara would be imprisoned in the 1990s, but "his trial will prove the existence of supernatural power and all 100 million Japanese will become followers of Aum."
- January 1995: said that an earthquake near Kobe was caused by an American "earthquake machine."
- Near the time of sarin attack: predicted that judges who could not tell right from wrong in suits against Aum would suffer a "chemical change unthinkable in normal circumstances."

From the Ashes...

- Aum becomes “the ultimate world religion”
- Asahara will bring a thousand-year kingdom
- Asahara does not die. “When the time comes for me to die, I will discard my body.”



Maintaining Discipline

- Kotaro Ochido, Aum member, was killed for trying to leave the sect (disobeying Aum rules).
 - Handcuffed, strangled with a rope.
 - Killer: “I was forced to strangle him. If I hadn’t done it, the next would have been me.”
- 68-year-old Kiyoshi Kariya was trying to help sister leave the cult; kidnapped, accidentally killed.
- 25-year-old man who wanted to leave sect kidnapped and confined; given drugs that caused memory loss.
- Less severe disciplines:
 - Collar put on naked follower, forced to eat leftovers.
 - Shunning

Tsutsumi Sakamoto

- Tsutsumi Sakamoto, lawyer handling cases against cult.
 - Abducted using drugs
 - Killed along with wife and 1-year-old son
 - Asahara's justification: baby would be "born again in a higher-level world"
 - Asahara: "It is good to eliminate people who continue to do bad things and are certain to go to hell."



III. Aum Shinrikyo's Scope and Structure

- 12,000-15,000 members; likely more when overseas branches included. (One estimate: at least 40,000.)
- Centered in Japan.
- Followers overseas: Russia, Germany, Ukraine, former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, U.S., Australia (Russia largest of these)
 - Asahara once preached to a crowd of 15,000 in Moscow sports stadium. (*Time*, Apr. 3, 1995.)

Financial

- Sect became very wealthy: some estimates place wealth at \$1.2 billion.
- Businesses included computer assembly firms, chemical plants, hospitals, publishing houses, construction firms, fitness clubs, retail stores, restaurants.
- Followers who wanted to become monks would give all worldly possessions to the sect.
 - Followers starved while Asahara grew fat, drove a Rolls-Royce.

Minor Sources of Income

- Around \$10,000 to be initiated into Aum by drinking Asahara's blood.
 - “The Sacred Master asked us to tell him how it tasted. Most people said salty or sour.”
- Sperm initiation: also \$10,000.
 - “But no-one is quite sure what this may entail.” — *Sydney Morning Herald*, Oct. 19, 1989
- Snip of Asahara's beard or bottle of his bath water: \$345.
- Special “head gear” to give followers the same brain waves as Asahara: about \$100,000.

“State Within a State”

- Aum had 22 ministries and agencies, many names taken from Japanese government.
 - Construction Ministry
 - Defense Agency
 - Education Ministry
 - Finance Ministry
 - Health and Welfare Ministry
 - Home Affairs Ministry
 - Intelligence Ministry
 - Medical Treatment Ministry
 - Russian Affairs Ministry
 - Science and Technology Ministry

Science and Technology Ministry

- Involved in manufacture of sarin: produced 5.6 tons.
 - Could *theoretically* kill 10 billion people. (*Kyodo News Service*, 1995)
- Headed by Hideo Murai
 - Graduate of Osaka University, specialized in space physics
 - Computer enthusiast when young, later interest in supernatural power, religion
 - Teachers described him as “serious and brilliant”



IV. Indoctrination into Aum

- Despite strong science education, young Japanese (1990s) more superstitious than their elders.
- Professor Sadao Asami, expert on religion at Tohoku Gakuin University: “there are no religious studies in Japanese schools so young Japanese are utterly ignorant of the world’s great religions, thereby lending themselves to be easily duped by charlatans like Asahara.”
- “This could explain why young Aum members see nothing contradictory about Asahara’s so-called teachings, which claim to be patterned after Tibetan-style Buddhism, yet at the same time he reveres Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and creation, and warns about Armageddon, a decidedly Christian concept.”

—*Straits Times*, June 4, 1995.

Cognitive Openings

- Sadao Asami: “Many of these people had been lured into the sect immediately after they met with a personal trauma, such as a serious accident, a chronic illness or the loss of a close family member.”
- Compare NYPD’s *Radicalization in the West* (2007) on salafi-jihadi radicalization. Finds that a cognitive event—loss of a job, alienation, discrimination, death in the family—produces an identity crisis that shakes previous beliefs, readies individuals for new identity, new beliefs.



Control Techniques

- Sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation, food deprivation
- Hallucinogenic drugs: LSD, stimulants
- Russian member: cult leaders encouraged her to “free her mind of all information it had received in her worldly life.” *Moscow Times*, Apr. 12, 1995.
 - “I soon believed the universe was black and only wanted what was bad for me, and that only Aum wanted what was good for me.”
 - Coming Armageddon, only Aum priests would be saved.

Control Techniques: Children

- Hours studying sect's theories.
- Given (unnecessary) shots constantly.
- Never let outside, told the air was full of poison gas.
- Sleep deprivation.
- Many required to wear Aum's battery-powered head gear.
 - “The children complained that the electrodes stung and gave them headaches.” —*Guardian*, 1995
- Some eyebrows dyed green; never explained.

Who Joins?

- “Aum seems to have a particularly strong pull for a certain type, known as otakuzoku, which roughly translates as ‘nerds,’ or overeducated techno-heads and science-fiction buffs who are young and bright, but slightly off.” —*Philadelphia Inquirer*, Apr. 16, 1995
- Leading organic chemistry expert: 30-year-old graduate of Tsukuba University.
- 28-year-old physics major from Tokyo University “who joined the sect in his search for meaning in religion.”
- Legal adviser: 35-year-old lawyer; youngest person to pass Japan’s national law examinations.
- French language specialist: researched and translated Nostradamus’s prophecies.
- Several former members of Japanese Self Defense Force (SDF); Asahara’s security detail.

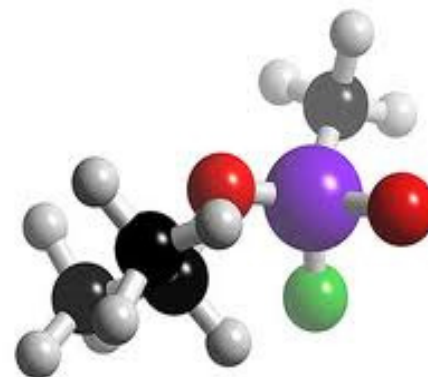
V. The Sarin Attack

Ten typical steps to a terrorist attack:

- Initial target selection
- Initial surveillance
- Final target selection and preparation
- Pre-attack surveillance
- Planning
- Rehearsal
- Attack team deployment
- Execution
- Escape
- Exploitation

Sarin

Council on Foreign Relations
backgrounder: “One of the world’s most dangerous chemical warfare agents. Sarin is an extremely toxic substance that disrupts the nervous system, overstimulating muscles and vital organs. It can be inhaled as a gas or absorbed through the skin. In high doses, sarin suffocates its victims by paralyzing the muscles around their lungs. One hundred milligrams of sarin (about one drop) can kill the average person in a few minutes if he or she’s not given an antidote.”



Ideal Attack

- Ideal attack according to investigators: attack Tokyo with 12 helicopters, each with 20 kg of sarin.
 - Aum brought a Soviet Mi-17 helicopter to Japan.
- Attack was to “take place in November” (keeps with one Asahara prophecy).
 - Casualty estimates: 150,000 to 2.4 million.



Change of Attack Plan

- Attack was moved up because police scrutiny (for the kidnapping/murder of Kiyoshi Kariya) had intensified.
- March 19, 1995: Staged firebomb attack on Aum's own offices.
- March 20, 1995: Sarin released on Tokyo subway, killing 12 and reportedly injuring more than 5500.

Rush to Plan Attack

- Asahara met with senior Aum officials to discuss sarin production, planting gas on Tokyo subway.
- Five attackers held dress rehearsal March 19, beginning at 8:00 p.m.
- Upon returning to cult's compound, they were given two bags each of liquid sarin by Hideo Murai.
 - Were to puncture bags using umbrellas with sharp tips.
 - Attack would occur at the peak of morning rush hour.

The Team

- **Ikuo Hayashi** (pictured). Medical doctor; heart and artery specialist. Graduated from Keio University.
- **Kenichi Hirose**. Held postgraduate degree in physics from Waseda University. Later showed symptoms of sarin poisoning; rushed to Aum hospital.
- **Toru Toyoda**. Studied applied physics at Tokyo University; graduated with honors and earned master's degree.
- **Masato Yokoyama**. Applied physics graduate from Tokyo University's engineering department.
- **Yasuo Hayashi**. Studied artificial intelligence at Kogakuin University; studied yoga in India.



Execution

- [Source: Haruki Murakami, *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*, 2000.]
- **Chiyoda Line.** Wearing surgical mask, Hayashi punctured sarin bag at Shin-Ochanomizu Station.
 - Bags removed by station attendants four stops later; two died.
 - Complete stop next station. Evacuated and cleaned.
- **Marunouchi Line.** Hirose punctured both packets at Ochanomizu Station.
 - Two injured passengers carried off train 14 stops later, but it continued with sarin still on the floor.
 - Continued to the end of the line.

Execution

- **Ikebukuro-bound.** Yokoyama does not fully puncture packets.
 - Train searched; packets not discovered.
 - Passengers became ill; sarin packets removed and train continued. Eventually put out of service one hour and 45 minutes after packets punctured.
- **Hibiya Line.** Toyoda punctures packets at Ebisu Station.
 - After evacuation of first car, train continued for one more stop.
- **Naka-Meguro-bound.** Hayashi punctures packets at Akihabara Station.
 - Some people begin to feel sick. Passenger kicks packets out of train onto subway platform at Kodenmacho Station. Four people in the station die.
 - Puddle of sarin remains on floor; passengers become sick, and train taken out of service.
- **Critique.** Aum “miscalculated how fast the sarin would evaporate, how strong the airflow was, and how the trains would react. So, on balance, the attack was a flop.” —Kyle Olson, chemical warfare expert

Aum After the Attack

- Aum did not try to exploit the attack; claimed innocence.
 - So was it a “terrorist” attack?
- Blamed the U.S., Japan, other religious groups.
- So why the chemicals for sarin?
 - Aum spokesman: “The answer is simple. In every part of our activities, we need chemicals. Every chemical in the world we need. If you consider that we will be left with a wasteland after Armageddon, we need chemicals to fertilize the soil. Why were we doing research on gas weapons? The answer is simple. In order to inherit this civilization, we must not be destroyed.”

Asahara's Capture

- Recall eating regulations imposed on Aum members.
- “One of the clues that Mr. Asahara was hiding in Kamikuishiki, the village where his headquarters was located, was that sect members continued to buy extremely expensive melons of which he was fond. No one else in the sect was entitled to have melons.” —*N.Y. Times*, May 17, 1995.