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The Japanese Way in America: A comparison of the spiritual beliefs, habits, and ideas of the American Religious 'Nones' and Contemporary Japanese Nationals

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The Japanese Way in America:
A comparison of the spiritual beliefs, habits, and ideas of the American
Religious 'Nones' and Contemporary Japanese Nationals

Religion, Psychology, and Intercultural Studies

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Abstract

There has been growing interest in the religiously unaffiliated within America. This growing interest has caused a new name to come about, the Nones. The present discussion attempts to give context to the rise of the Nones and to compare the religious beliefs and habits of these American Nones with the Japanese Nationals who inhabit Japan. There are many similarities between these two groups relating to ethics, interactions with people, and connection with nature. These comparisons show that there is a possible connection between people which explains spiritual experience, even outside that of normalized, institutional religions. This “intuition of the sacred” is vital in understanding human spiritual experience and, arguably, what it means to be human. Intuition of the sacred may explain why some spiritual beliefs and experiences of the American Nones are similar to the Japanese Nationals. By looking at the categories of sacred Space, Time, Nature, and Human Experience through the lens of the question: “What does it mean to be human?” it can be discovered that there are interesting similarities between the spiritual lives of the American Nones and the Japanese Nationals. This “Japanese way in America” may show that although the Nones are new linguistically, the concern noted by researchers and religious leaders about the growing group and their irreligiosity is actually unnecessary. With a spiritual focus on relationships and daily living, the American Nones and the Japanese Nationals have a lot in common.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The beginning was just chaos, there was no order at all. The world was like “an ocean of oil.”¹ This world was completely unlike our own, yet here is where the incipience of our modern world with airplanes, trains, smart phones, and microwaves occurs. This murky, atramentous sea would proceed to birth a being. This being was known as *Kuni-toko-tachi*, or the Eternal-Ruling Lord. Along with this deity, the High-Producing-god and the Divine-Producing-goddess were thrust into existence as well. These three would prove to be the originally generative force that would create mankind, the gods, and everything else in existence.² This beginning is a mythic one, but that does not mean it is irrelevant to daily society. The sacred is all around us in our lives. Sometimes it is seen, while other times it is not. The sacred nonetheless plays a deep role in the spiritual lives of the American Nones and the Japanese Nationals, the foci of this project.

The Land of the Rising Sun is a truly unique nation. The origins detailed above show the mythic beginnings of Japan as a country. This is quite the contrast with the modern technological marvel that it has become today. Tokyo is one of the most technologically advanced cities in the world. This story contrasts greatly with the advanced nation, and this is why Japan is a good subject for this research. The clash of ideals from both the western and eastern world make Japan a very interesting nation to look at from both a religious and cultural perspective. The myths of the past and the

¹ J.A. MacCulloch and George Foot Moore, *The Mythology of All Races in Thirteen Volumes* (New York: Cooper Square Publications, 1928), 222.

² MacCulloch and Moore, *The Mythology of All Races in Thirteen Volumes*, 222.

technology of the present collide in a strange and mysterious way. In this paper specifically, the object of study will be Japanese religion and how it compares to the beliefs and habits of the religiously unaffiliated “Nones” that are present in America today. Through a comparison of these different yet also similar views through the lens of what it means to be human, this paper will try to show that there is a deep similarity in the religious beliefs, habits, and ideas of the Japanese Nationals and the American Nones.

The American Nones are a relatively “new” group that have recently claimed a lot of public attention. These are the people who claim to not be affiliated to any particular religion yet do not deny spirituality in their lives.³ The Nones are not enigmatic people who have come to hate the church. Rather contemporary religious affiliation is more complex, and in order to help detail the situation, examples of Japanese thought will be presented to show that similar cognitive processes have been around for centuries. The hypothesis of this paper is that the “Rise of the Nones” is not an entirely new movement but has deep similarities to systems of belief that have already been established. These similarities can be seen in the beliefs, habits, and ideas held by the Japanese Nationals within their own religious context. This comparison will be one based on the specific spiritual beliefs and habits within each culture, systematized into the four categories that Mircea Eliade outlines in his book *The Sacred and The Profane*⁴.

³ Mercadante, Linda, “Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious,” in William Parsons, *Being Spiritual but Not Religious*, (London: Routledge, 2018), 122-139.

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, (San Diego: Harcourt, 1987).

In order to accomplish all of this The Japanese Nationals and American Nones will be compared after preliminary study is given to both of these groups. Chapter two covers the historical context of both groups and looks at how each has evolved over time to its present state today. For the Nones, this chapter will explore past perceptions and names of the group. The history of the Japanese Nationals will be more of an introduction to the culture and religious landscape at large. Chapter three will look at the actual beliefs systems of the Japanese Nationals and the American Nones. Both groups will be detailed in what they currently believe and give broader relevant context to each group as a whole. Both of these chapters will provide historical and religious context to the belief systems that are to be compared. These chapters will also answer the question of “what does it mean to be a Japanese National or an American None?”

Chapter four will be the point where both groups’ spiritual beliefs, habits, and ideas, are compared to each other. Using Eliade’s four categories along with Ethics, the two groups will be compared and contrasted. The results will then be stated at the end of chapter four before yielding the discussion of chapter five. Chapter five will then conclude the project looking at the research through the lens of the question “what then does it mean to be human?” The response will consider the comparison and then deliver some practical and theoretical applications. It should also be mentioned that research for this project included a combination of reading books and immersion in both cultures. In this way, the following information will be a combination of experience and study.

Chapter 2 – Historical Context

Context of the Nones

The “American Nones” are those that have chosen “none of the above” when answering surveys about which religious organization or institution they are affiliated with.⁵ The key word here is *affiliated*. The American Nones are unaffiliated, but still regard themselves as spiritual, people who are outside the boundaries of traditional religion.⁶ Many names have been given to people who have professed similar beliefs in the past. The “unchurched” was a popular one, as was unaffiliated. “Churchless” and “unsaved” were also used in the past. However, some terms were harsher, with titles including “heathen,” “pagan,” and even “infidel.” Some American Nones themselves have even added to this nomenclature, with self-titled names such as “metaphysicals” or “freethinkers.” All these are titles that have been used to describe the Nones, or people similar in their beliefs, in the past.⁷

⁵ A quick note should be mentioned here. While I do my best to describe the context of the Nones, part of the culture and understanding surrounding the American None framework is the idea of self-identification. The Nones are a dynamic group that is difficult to characterize in its entirety. Throughout this paper, unless explicitly identified as otherwise, the understanding is that the descriptions are general, with plenty of room for exceptions or differences. The personal, individualized spiritual life of the Nones cannot be so easily put into bounded terms like Buddhist or Christian doctrine can. Religions and cultures are alive and made up of living people, thus they may change over time and include sub-groups and those who may disagree. This is important to keep in mind throughout the entire paper, not just here.

⁶ Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of Americas Nones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 10-15.

⁷ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 26-27.

The discussions surrounding the Nones has been vast. Fuller writes about three different types of unchurched people. The term *unchurched* was accepted in the past referring to those who were outside the normalized boundaries of institutionalized religion. First, there are those who are not religious at all. These are the ones who do not believe in a supernatural force or a divine being. Specifically, Fuller uses the term “Secular Humanist.” Next, there are those who are not a part of a church but attend every so often. This group may also include those who attend church monthly, possibly even biweekly, but do not become a member of the church. The third group of the unchurched is the one Fuller titles as those who “should nonetheless be considered religious in some broad sense of the term.”⁸ These are the “spiritual but not religious” types who believe there are objects outside of the empirical sense of humanity but do not affiliate themselves with a specific religion or denomination of Christianity.⁹ For the purposes of this paper, it is important to see how these understandings of the Nones have come to be, as the umbrella term of “None” may apply to all of these categories.

In 1990, Barna Research Group studied the unchurched. They found that 70% of the 906 adults that were studied had “favorable impressions of Christianity as a religion.”¹⁰ This finding is not true of the present. “Regarding views of organized religion, a slight majority of atheists, agnostics, and nonaffiliated believers express ‘hardly any’ confidence in religious institutions.”¹¹ Interesting, however, is Baker and Smith’s finding

⁸ Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

⁹ Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious*, 2-4.

¹⁰ *Never on a Sunday: The Challenge of the Unchurched* (California: Barna Research Group, 1990), 3.

¹¹ Joseph Baker and Buster Smith, *American Secularism: Cultural Contours of Nonreligious Belief Systems* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 90.

that “62% of atheists, 76% of agnostics, and 86% of nonaffiliated believers report believing there is “basic truth in many” religions.”¹² With this in mind, the American Nones are not defined as irreligious, rather they are unaffiliated. The Nones are those who still have some semblance of spiritual life but are not within a religious organization. However, they are not altogether denying the ineffable reality of spiritual experience. In the Barna study, 53% of the adults studied thought Christian Churches were friendly, and 46% believed that churches were involved in the community.¹³ The Barna Group also compared religious beliefs of the Unchurched and the Churched and found that over half of the Unchurched believed that Christ was the Son of God, that he rose from the dead, and that he reappeared after his resurrection.¹⁴ The Unchurched, at least from this Barna Group study, were not ignorant of Christian theology and even agreed with it for the most part. Based off this Barna report, there was still a lively and growing spiritual consciousness within the Unchurched, yet they were still outside the realm of institutionalized religion. Compared to today, however, things have changed a bit. Those who consider themselves agnostic and atheists were extremely unlikely to believe in supernatural beings scoring close to a zero on a zero to five scale. The unaffiliated were a bit higher and held an average amount of belief in supernatural things at a 2.5 on the scale. Interesting, however, is that some atheists (1.1) and agnostics (1.3) still considered the belief in paranormal activity, such as ghosts or ESP as possible. Actively religious people were at a 1.7 on the scale while the unaffiliated were

¹² Baker and Smith, *American Secularism*, 90.

¹³ *Never on a Sunday*, 14.

¹⁴ *Never on a Sunday*, 21.

at a 2.2.¹⁵ Thus, those unaffiliated with a particular religion are almost as equally likely to believe in extraterrestrial life as they are to believe in a supernatural being.

Another important context of the Nones that should be discussed is the fact that western culture, in general, has been shaped by Christianity. Many of the terms understood in the United States, and indeed the West broadly, are terms within the context of Christianity. This is not necessarily bad. Rather, when it comes to spiritual motives, it is especially important to notice the effects of Christianity on not just the childhood development of some Nones, but even in their language or the very way they describe their spiritual practices. The Christian influence is prevalent, even to the point of some Nones self-titling themselves as a “Jesus Follower” instead of being called Christian because of the political and social baggage that comes with the term Christian.¹⁶

The knowledge of the history of the Unchurched is vital in understanding the present-day realities of the American Nones. Those who were originally dubbed “Unchurched” have become a part of the umbrella term “None.” While names may vary, the key thing to understand is that the Nones did not just appear all of the sudden. There has been an ongoing transition that has been documented for decades¹⁷. While the ideas that the Nones are unaffiliated may be shocking to some, it is important to remember that even in America, this is not altogether a novel idea.

¹⁵ Baker and Smith, *American Secularism*, 92.

¹⁶ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 35-36.

¹⁷ Baker and Smith, *American Secularism*, 83-87.

Demographics also play a part in understanding who the American Nones are. In a few surveys done by various groups, the majority of Nones are usually younger and male.¹⁸ This is not to say that the only people who claim to be Nones are male or young; but this clarification can show that there may be a consistent thread throughout the Nones.¹⁹ Along with this, most Nones are politically moderate to liberal. This finding remains consistent for most topics including view of government and view of gender and sexuality.²⁰ James Emery White cites a Pew Forum research study that showed a significant majority, 71%, of Nones were white in 2012.²¹ With this information in mind, hopefully a more comprehensive understanding of the American Nones can be reached.

Self-Identification is fundamental for understanding the Nones. This poses a few linguistic problems. Many traditionally held definitions of words may mean something a bit different within the context of the specific Nones who are describing themselves. Nevertheless, the more prevalent ones will be addressed before continuing. It should be remembered throughout this project that much of the content is nuanced and sometimes topics and groups may be fuzzy or abstract rather than neatly concrete and easily measurable. This is mainly detailed in Elizabeth Drescher's list of terms in her book *Choosing Our Religion*.

¹⁸ Joseph O. Baker, and Buster G. Smith, "The Nones: Social Characteristics of the Religiously Unaffiliated" (2009).

¹⁹ Barry A. Kosmin, Ariela Keysar, Ryan Cragun, and Juhem Navarro-Rivera, "American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population," Trinity College Commons, (2011).
http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/NONES_08.pdf.

²⁰ Baker and Smith, *American Secularism*, 188-189.

²¹ James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*. (Michigan: Baker Books, 2014), 22.

- **Atheist:** One who does not believe in a transcendental being or force that rules supreme over the universe.
- **Agnostic:** There can be nuance here, but the term ranges from saying that one does not believe one can know for certain if there is a transcendent being or force to one who humbly admits the lack of evidence and claims doubts of such a being or force.
- **Secular Humanist:** One who, whether consciously or not, is influenced by the Enlightenment. This view highlights the innate goodness of humanity and the rationality that all humans are capable of. A belief in the “human spirit” may also be present.
- **Spiritual:** The pursuit of spiritual growth and development. Also, a focus on human relationships.
- **Spiritual-But-Not-Religious (SBNRs):** One who usually believes in a transcendent being or force, but is usually not affiliated with a religion, even though they may practice the spiritual practices of that religion.
- **None:** One who claims “none of the above” when asked about religious preferences on a survey or to which religion one belongs to.

As stated in her own book from which these terms are addressed, this is by no means exhaustive or complete.²² However, all of these terms may fall under the umbrella term of “None.” The definitions of these labels may be up for interpretation as

²² Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 28-29.

well. This is not to say that the Nones are “wishy-washy” or lack resilience in their beliefs. The difficulty arises from, as mentioned previously, the difficulty of describing spiritual experience.

Another reason that the specific terms detailing one’s beliefs are so significant yet nuanced is due to the contemporary philosophy of Post-Modernism. Post-Modernism is a critique of the Modernist philosophy that was prevalent in the post-enlightenment period. Post-Modernism is defined mostly by its skepticism of overarching metanarratives and a rejection of the deification that reason received from enlightenment thinking. This skepticism of metanarratives has a few consequences. The first is the denial of religious affiliation that was mentioned before. This translates into the belief that no single religion has a monopoly on truth. There are a variety of places that can help one further their spiritual growth, even if they are considered strange or on the fringes by most people.²³

The other consequence is the somewhat eclectic nature of a None’s spiritual beliefs. Some Nones may draw from Christianity, Buddhism, and pseudoscience. Still, others may speak of personal experience and horoscopes with the same tone of credibility. Since no single religious organization has all the answers, it is perfectly acceptable to try to find answers in other places.

Finally, the last piece of the context of the Nones that will be mentioned is that of individualism. The West, in general, is very individualistic; individualism is understood

²³ “Postmodern Worldview,” AllAboutWorldview, 2018.
<https://www.allaboutworldview.org/postmodern-worldview.htm>.

as the focus on what is good for the individual person and the necessity of personal responsibility. For this group, it can be understood a bit more as the “personalization” of spiritual experiences. This can easily be seen in the ideas held by American Nones. This individualization context allows many Nones to choose for themselves what they believe.²⁴ This individualism does not mean an absent of community, however. In fact, it would be better to say that “individual religion” is based in the social world. Things are shared and communal experiences enhance bonds. The individual still has a large focus, but no one lives on an island.²⁵ Ultimately, the individualistic culture of the west is important in allowing the individual the freedom of exploration amongst the plethora of philosophies that have been presented in human history.

Overall, many aspects have contributed to the context of the Nones. They are a new linguistic category, but they did not come into existence just because of a new definition. The Nones have existed as many different titles, sometimes self-described, sometimes not. The context that has led up to the “rise of the Nones,” as the title of White’s book so claims²⁶ is vastly different from that of the Japanese. This will be treated in more detail in the next section.

Context of the Japanese

²⁴ It may be possible to make the argument that the reason some Nones are unaffiliated is correlated simply to the fact that their ideas are much more eclectic and nuanced than no single group or association has come about yet that fits their own beliefs. This would be an interesting correlational study but is not discussed much further here. Nonetheless, the idea may help some to understand the cognitions of the Nones and therefore is mentioned in this note.

²⁵ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 120.

²⁶ White, *The Rise of the Nones*.

According to Japanese legend, two divine beings were sent down to the earth to procreate and spread life all around them; they were known as Izanagi (the man who invites) and Izanami (the woman who invites). After landing on an island, Izanagi went one way, and Izanami went the other. They both met each other on the other side of the island, and there they got married. After getting married, they progenerated many things until Izanami, the wife, died with similar symptoms to a fever. Dragged down to the underworld, Izanami was chased by her husband. When Izanagi reached her in the underworld, his wife pleaded with him to not look upon her. Desperate to see her, Izanagi lit a light in the darkness to gaze upon his beloved's face. The only issue, however, was that she was ugly and decaying and furious that her husband had blatantly ignored her request. In absolute rage and anger, she ran from him and summoned dark spirits to attack her once loving husband. Izanagi barely escaped the wrath of the woman and just before leaving earshot heard her threaten his progeny, "I will kill one thousand people every day for as long as the world turns" she exclaimed to her previous lover. Quickly, Izanagi responded: "Then I shall father one thousand five hundred humans every day." And so, Izanagi left his enraged wife behind and, fleeing to Japan, proceeded to birth his number and watch his wife kill her number.²⁷

This story describes the origin of humanity in Japanese mythology. While there is no direct parallel to it for the Nones, this story gives us a mythic context for the other people group in this project. The question of relevancy of this myth does have merit, though. The question of "how religious or spiritual is Japan, really?" is an important one

²⁷ MacCulloch and Moore, *The Mythology of All Races in Thirteen Volumes*, 221-224.

to address. Ellwood points out that “[in] Japan, the religious and the secular are not easily separated. What looks to be this-worldly beauty may actually have a religious background – and then that background may turn out to be slippery by Western concepts of religion.”²⁸ The mythic and the present collide in ways that are not so easily ascertained in the Western understanding of religion. The Japanese Nationals, just like the American Nones, have their own context which influences everything from daily life to philosophy and to religion. While the influences may be different, they are nonetheless just as important to examine.

Before getting too far, it would be best to define exactly what is meant by Japanese Nationals in this paper. “Japanese Nationals” will be defined as those who are culturally and ethnically Japanese who inhabit the islands of Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu in the country of Japan. Religiously they are those who hold to the teachings of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.²⁹ Thus, the focus will be more on the main island of Honshu. Japanese Nationals are citizens of Japan, but this excludes Koreans, visitors, and Asian-Americans, at least for the definition that is used in this paper, not necessarily in general. Now that the group has been identified, it is important to relate the factors that have affected this group.

²⁸ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 3.

²⁹ For the sake of this study, Christianity in Japan will not be taken into account in the actual comparison of the two groups. However, many sources may include history from a Christian perspective or mention Christianity. The account of Christianity in Japan is worth telling, but there is sadly no such space in this project. Others have done a very good job at detailing the persecution and maintenance of the religion in Japan since its introduction. For further reading on this, Richard Drummond’s *A History of Christianity in Japan* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1971) and Samuel Moffett’s *A History of Christianity in Asia* (Volume II, New York: Orbis Books, 2005) would be a good start and informed this project’s context.

The first glaring difference is that Japan is much older than America and is in an entirely different part of the world. The influences on Japan have been much different from those on the western world. Historically, China has been one of the biggest contributors to Japanese culture.³⁰ The several systems of writing, the kana and the kanji, are based on the original Chinese characters that were brought over to Japan. Kanji literally means “Kan,” as in the Chinese dynasty, and character (ji). This is not just delegated to written language. Religion, philosophy, and even art have all been impacted by the influence of the Chinese. Chinese culture has been, and still is, an important factor in the growth of the Japanese nation and culture.

Each religious or philosophical system will be analyzed in a more detailed manner later, but, for now, a quick overview of each would be beneficial. Shintoism is the folk religion of Japan and has an origin along with the country itself. Shintoism is understood in a polytheistic sense. Even to this day Shintoism can be understood as a “civic religion” and is an important part of social life in Japan.³¹ The main deities of Shintoism are called the *kami*.³² These deities may be best understood as “anything that can fill us with wonder and awe”³³ There is a lot more to unpack, but this polytheistic folk religion is fundamental to understanding the religious landscape of Japan. Many *matsuri*, or shrine festivals, include reference to the *kami*. These festivals are all over Japan at various times of the year, depending on the specific *kami* that is enshrined.

³⁰ Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000) 20.

³¹ Robert Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion* (London: Routledge, 2016), 62.

³² Usually translated as “god” but such a definition may not articulate the nuance of the word or be too reductionistic.

³³ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 62.

Offerings may be given and a prayer, called the *norito*, is given along with these presents. Celebrations such as dances and feasts are also present as well.³⁴ As mentioned prior, these ceremonies are both equally cultural and religious and inseparable into either category alone.

Confucianism is the next belief system to be addressed. Along with Buddhism, Confucianism came from China to Japan. While more of an ethical system than a perfect definition of “religion,” Confucianism has its “spiritual” aspects as well. Confucius was a traveling Chinese philosopher who taught more on how people should involve themselves in society rather than the metaphysical mysteries of the world.³⁵ The early Japanese intelligentsia was intrigued by the teachings of both Buddhism and Confucianism and sought to spread their ideas to the rest of the Japanese. This can be seen in the Seventeen-Article Constitution by Prince Shotoku in 604 CE which was “the first statement in Japanese history of the need for ethical government.”³⁶ Virtue is an important goal in Japanese Confucianism and has had an impact on Bushido, or the samurai honor code, another connection between the philosophical and political. This “way of the warrior” greatly influenced the ethical boundaries of the Samurai warriors, a class during the divided warrior states period of Japan.³⁷ Another influence Confucianism had on the Japanese was an awakening of the appreciation for the culture of China, which, as mentioned previously, greatly influenced Japanese society.³⁸ So

³⁴ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 30.

³⁵ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 25.

³⁶ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 26.

³⁷ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 160.

³⁸ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 213.

Confucianism is not just a thought system; it has had its hand in the politics and evolution of Japanese society for millennia.

Buddhism in Japan also had an impact on the political environment of Japan as well as the religious landscape. The Buddhism that exists in Japan is from the Mahayana branch of Buddhism which traveled from India through Tibet into China and, and then into Japan. When Kyoto was the capital of Japan, esoteric Buddhism (A sect of Buddhism focused on secret rites related to enlightenment) was extremely intriguing to many upper-class political figures. This sect of Buddhism was introduced by Kukai (also known as Kobo Daishi, or Great Teacher Kobo) who was also given the credit for creating the *kana* syllabary. It is even posited that Sanskrit, the holy language of Buddhism, played a role in the evolution of the *kana*.³⁹

Through the history of Buddhism in Japan multiple sects of Buddhism have emerged, making it comparable to the denominations of western Christianity. Influenced by Hindu thought, Buddhism is the teachings of the Buddha, or Siddhartha Gautama.⁴⁰ The Buddha taught four noble truths. First, there is suffering in this world. This realization is necessary for the next truth. Second, the suffering that pervades all life is caused by desire. Other words that may be used to describe desire are cravings, thirsts, attachments, or lusts. Thirdly, there can be an end to the suffering of this world. Finally, this end of suffering is brought about by following the eightfold path. The

³⁹ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 51.

⁴⁰ Different sects of Buddhism may have different names, stories, or origins of the Buddha. Such historicity of the Buddha, however, is not the focus. The main emphasis is the enlightening knowledge that has been granted to humanity through the Buddha.

eightfold path includes right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (or meditation).⁴¹

While this is the historical Buddhism that first sprouted in India, the Buddhism seen in Japan differs in doctrine and rites depending on the sect. For this study, the sects will be emphasized will be Pure Land Buddhism and Zen Buddhism.

Outside of religion, there are other influences as well that affect the Japanese. The people of Japan have an understanding of *Shudan Ishiki*⁴², or “Group Consciousness.” This could be understood as the collective nature of the culture that is the opposite of the individual culture of the West. This is a different understanding of the nature of society. Japan is a collective society; therefore, the group is emphasized over the individual. This means that group success is interpreted as personal success, group failure is interpreted as personal failure, and group opinions are interpreted as personal opinions. Individuality is different from an individual based society, such as America. There is individuality, but one ought to conform to the group opinion in order to maintain social harmony. Social harmony is important because it enables personal individuality to flourish. Individuality is understood differently. People have different sets of skills and abilities in different areas. This is inevitable and provides individual variance in society.⁴³ Therefore, the success that is attained by the group is much

⁴¹ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 81.

⁴² Quite literally: 集団 - “Shudan” or Population, Group, Mass and 意識 - “Ishiki” or Consciousness

⁴³ Roger Davies and Osamu Ikeno, *The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing) 195-198.

greater than the success attained by one person because no one person can do everything.

To help define the group, there are two other concepts related to *Shudan Ishiki*. Those who are *uchi* are insiders. These people are family and friends. This also includes *shinrai* or acquaintances. These acquaintances may be a friend of a friend of a friend of a close family member. The other concept is *soto*. Those who are *soto* are outsiders. This may refer to a person with whom one does business with or a traveler who asks a question. An outsider to a Japanese does not have to be a foreigner.⁴⁴ Fundamentally, *uchi* is an intra-collective idea while *soto* is an extra-collective one.

The influences on Japan are plentiful and detailed greatly in other research. The history of Japan has been influenced greatly by China, but in the most recent centuries by the West. Spanning from the Russo-Japanese War to the Second World War, Japan has been a power that gained awe and criticism from the West. So, one cannot say that Japan is impotent or unimportant to the rest of the world. For the rest of this project a closer look at the three religions of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism will be detailed.

Chapter 3 – Spiritual Habits, Beliefs, and Ideas

Spiritual Habits, Beliefs, and Ideas of the Nones

The spiritual habits, beliefs, and ideas of the American Nones which are similar to the Japanese, are difficult to pin down and generalize. Nevertheless, in order to compare the general beliefs of the American Nones and Japanese Nationals, a

⁴⁴ Davies and Ikeno, *The Japanese Mind*, 196.

somewhat general idea of the spiritual habits and beliefs of the Nones will be outlined here. As mentioned in the overview, due to self-identification and individualism, the number of habits of the Nones may be the same number of people that claim to be Nones. However, this does not mean that no patterns or similarities arise within this group. This section will be about a broad overview of the main concepts considered sacred and held by the Nones along with some quotidian anecdotes.

Borrowing heavily from Elizabeth Drescher's book *Choosing Our Religion*, the focus of the Nones' spirituality is around what she calls "the four 'F's." These four 'F's stand for family, friends, Fido, and food.⁴⁵ These four topics will be covered in this section, along with another portion dedicated to some specific practices.

The first "F" that most Nones in the interviews done by Drescher mentioned was family. Family is an extremely important aspect of the spiritual lives of many Nones. A key focus on the spiritual experience of the Nones is on the relational.⁴⁶ That is, the sacred is seen in the connectedness, or in some cases theophany, between a person and another person. This is easily seen within families. A parent and a child have a significant connection. While it is possible for that connection to be abused, it can also be an important motivation for growth or medium for wisdom. Some Nones mentioned that the very reasons they had left religious organizations previously or were now unaffiliated were because they wished to spend more time with their families. Because family is so important, it is important to spend time with them. This may be difficult to

⁴⁵ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 44.

⁴⁶ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 119.

do if the mother is in two different groups after church, the father is an usher and teacher, and the children are all in classes or church sports. The danger of not just overcommitting, but over involvement as well at a church may become a serious problem.

Another topic related to this is raising a family as an American None. One of the interviewees of Drescher explained that they received considerable backlash from family members when deciding not to raise her daughters in a religious tradition.⁴⁷ Withdrawal from the church, if one does not return with children, usually means that the children themselves remain outside of the religion. Baker and Smith point out that, “[while] religious retention has fallen, secularity has nearly caught up with organized religion in terms of keeping people in the belief system in which they were raised.”⁴⁸ This does not mean children are raised in a home without any spiritual experience. Rather, the experience is more based on the individualized spiritual beliefs of the parents. Most American Nones seem to be cautious in bringing up their children in a specific religious tradition so that they have the same freedom their parents did in choosing their religion.⁴⁹

Another thing to mention about family is that it does not necessarily mean blood-related kin. Brotherhood and sisterhood may occur among friends or family friends. Some people may be adopted into families. The relationships, however, are just as important in family gatherings and are nurtured accordingly. Familial relationships

⁴⁷ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 220-221.

⁴⁸ Baker and Smith, *American Secularism*, 82.

⁴⁹ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 223-225.

are important to the Nones. While family will be understood differently by everyone, the aspect that there is a social community of love and solidarity in one's life could be understood as a religious aspect for the Nones.

Friendship is the next aspect of the four F's that will be addressed. One specific interviewee discussed that he had a friend he considered a "soul-mate."⁵⁰ This is not a soul-mate understood within the idea of romance but, rather, a literal spiritual friend. This is a closeness that can really only be described using spiritual terms. Close friendships have an air of authenticity about them. Friends can know the true essence of each other and, as they mature together, can encounter a closeness that may be described as "intimate."⁵¹ Some other words that may be used instead of soul-mate are "brother" or "sister." These are not people within a person's biological family, rather they are people who have a bond with the person that may come on par to that of familial ties. Closeness is not the only requirement to see the spiritual depth of friendship, however. Another interviewee talked of the "miracle" that occurred when she met one of her good friends who encouraged her.⁵² This encouragement, or, if it may be put this way, this granting of life with words, engendered a relationship that may not have normally occurred. Encouragement, presence, closeness, vulnerability,

⁵⁰ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 131.

⁵¹ Here is another example of the difficulty of language. Intimacy here can be understood in a platonic way, but the true vulnerability that close friendships have is difficult to describe with simple words. Experience is again emphasized.

⁵² Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 133.

service, compassion, and love are just a few aspects of friendship. Close friendship is a dynamic relationship that can easily have spiritual aspects tied to it.⁵³

The third of the four Fs may not be so obvious at first. Fido is an average name for a dog, so the F this time is related to the relationship Nones may have to their pets. This may seem peculiar to some, but the authenticity of these experiences is not to be ignored. Research has shown that “Animals provide medical, therapeutic, and social support in a wide variety of clinical and domestic settings. They serve as expert trackers and identifiers of bodies, chemicals, and explosives for police departments, security agencies, and the military.”⁵⁴ The social support of life is something that should really be emphasized. If the spiritual lives of the Nones are indeed relational, then these relationships with pets are not just pragmatic ones, but possibly religious ones as well. The phrase “dogs are man’s best friend” is an old one with plenty of veracity. An interviewee of Drescher’s talked of his “therapist cat” who would come in at just the right time during arguments between people and dissolve all sorts of tension.⁵⁵ Animals are not just husks that move. They are fundamentally related to the spiritual lives of some Nones. This may not be the case everywhere as not every None has a pet. Yet, those who do have pets may count them among their family members. If a pet is counted among family members, it is a short distance to consider that relationship a spiritual one.

⁵³ The difference between family and friends is very contextual and personal. Someone might see a close friend as a brother, while another person might see a similar person in a similar situation as a friend. Although there is a more subjective line here between these two F’s, the point is that relationships between people is extremely important in the daily lives of the American Nones.

⁵⁴ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 139.

⁵⁵ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 141.

Food is the last of the four Fs but exerts influence in all the other three. Some anthropologists have argued that it is very possible that most things in cultures and developed societies can be traced back to an origin in food. Fox makes a very intriguing observation: "Apart from the physiological prediction, we can be sure that eating as display - as a code of messages about selves and status, role and religion, race and nation - will persist in an animal that lives by symbolic communication."⁵⁶ Food is a vital aspect of social gatherings. Festivals, get-togethers, even coffee dates are just a few examples. The social lives of humans, not just Nones, are connected to food in some respects. Food preparation and food sharing are important aspects of some American None's lives. Drescher interviewed a baker⁵⁷ who found it spiritually moving to share her bread with friends, family, and even strangers if she had some on hand. Drescher herself was even gifted with some of this bread. The kitchen, then, may become something like a church. The intense preparation, possibly with multiple people involved, produces an "atmosphere," if that term may be used, that some might call religious. There can be community and solidarity in having a meal with other people. These are sacred moments which should not be glossed over so easily.

There are two more aspects of the spiritual lives of the Nones that should be mentioned. Prayer is not simply confined to a monotheistic religion. Many different religions have prayers and different ways to do them. This also applies to the Nones but in less orthodox ways. There are many aspects to prayer within the understanding of the

⁵⁶ Robin Fox, "Food and Eating: An Anthropological Perspective," 2014.
<http://www.sirc.org/publik/foxfood.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 145.

American Nones. Some described prayer as a feeling while still others counted it as an actual experience such as “thinking about someone.”⁵⁸ Some Nones pray to God/Divine Being while others may pray to a universal Force or energy. Still, others may pray to nothing. Prayer may be used for personal growth or comfort or it may be used to maintain social harmony with other prayerful persons. Most importantly though, prayer may be understood relationally, or connective. This relational connection may be to nature, people, both living and dead, God, or a force.⁵⁹ For the Nones, prayer is not just talking to a monotheistic god or pantheistic force. In fact, it may be a nontheistic prayer. Some Nones described prayer as really thinking about someone. Prayer is more than just thinking good thoughts about someone. It is an experience that changes things as if it really does make a difference. This can be seen in embodied prayers.⁶⁰ These are not simply prayers that inquire of a supernatural being/force to act, rather they are acts of service that actually make a difference in other’s lives. Caring for the earth is one example, as is serving a homeless person. In both cases, the emphasis is on action. Even so, action is not a requirement for prayer. Perhaps a better way to describe it from a None’s perspective would be the manifestation of the intention to change the world for the better.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 178-181.

⁵⁹ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 163-164.

⁶⁰ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 167-168.

⁶¹ This manifestation may not be physical. The idea is more of a harmonious balance of the experiential subjectivity of it all and the objective action that causes good to flourish in another’s life. Prayer, for the American Nones, may be taken literally in some cases, but in others it cannot be understood that way. Thus, the diction used is done so for the hope that the nuanced idea of prayer is conveyed. “It’s more than a simple feeling” is a better way to put it, though that may not be the most formal way.

Morality is the final piece of the puzzle. Some Nones do in fact believe in God and follow moral guidelines similar to Christianity or to the religious organizational context that many Nones came from. However, not all American Nones follow this pattern. Rather, an ethic of care, also known as relational ethics, is the driving force for the morality of Nones. As can be perceived in the four 'F's, relationality is at the core of the morality for Nones. This can be seen in the influence the story of the good Samaritan, told by Jesus of Nazareth. The selfless actions of one man to help another as a foundation for morality says volumes about the ethics of the Nones. Drescher points out that, even though society and norms said otherwise, and others could have responded, the real heroes are the ones who truly make themselves available to those in need.⁶² Relationships are to be taken as a priority and helping those in need stems from this idea. Most American Nones do not view humanity as innately evil but focus on the good in people and respond to it likewise.

The core of the spiritual habits, beliefs, and ideas of the Nones revolve around other human beings. Relationships are paramount to them. Drescher in her book says the following about being a None: "However these spiritualities might be theorized or theologized, the spiritual lives of the Nones, as they themselves articulate their understandings about them, are oriented primarily around interpersonal relationships in which intimacy, trust, and personal authenticity are experienced to a heightened degree."⁶³ That is exactly the point. For Nones, relationships *are* god, at least in a way.

⁶² Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 203.

⁶³ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 137.

Morality, life, even religious experiences all stem from connections to other people. Drescher states, “Unaffiliated spirituality is fundamentally relational, that relationality is expressed through the care of others; and this is a valuable ethical and spiritual orientation in an increasingly cosmopolitan, religiously diverse world.”⁶⁴ Relationships are religion. The Nones care about the world and its inhabitants and seek to better both themselves and other people through compassion and kindness. There are a lot of variations within the group itself, but that is all part of what it means to be an American None.

Spiritual Beliefs, Habits, and Ideas of the Japanese

The spiritual beliefs, habits, and ideas of the Japanese are similar to the American Nones, but somewhat difficult to completely describe. The dynamics of Japanese religion are nuanced and changing as well. Most importantly, however, just like the Nones, the religious landscape of Japan exists somewhat between institutionalization and unaffiliation. A traditional saying in Japan says, “a Japanese person is born to Shinto rites, married with Christian rites, and buried with Buddhist ones.”⁶⁵ Among these rites, one is expected to live according to the ethical standards of Confucianism.

Before going any farther, it is important to discuss the true “religiosity” of Japan. The western understanding of religion is much different from the Japanese

⁶⁴ Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 244.

⁶⁵ “Japan: The Most Religious Atheist Country,” GaijinPot Blog, Matthew Coslett, February 8, 2015, <https://blog.gaijinpot.com/japan-religious-atheist-country/>.

understanding. In the west, the understanding may be that one consistently follows the doctrines and thought of a specific institution. One is a Christian because he or she follows the teachings of Christ. This is not necessarily the wrong view of religion, but it looks a bit different for Japanese Nationals. Religion is not seen as such a detachable thing from life. "For [the Japanese] practices such as those of shrine festivals, temple rites, Buddhist funerals, or New Years are considered 'natural,' just part of being Japanese. They go along with growing up in a Japanese family and being part of a Japanese community."⁶⁶ Religion is not absent, it is considered holistically. It is more integrated in life. The meaning may be more cultural, but this does not separate it from its religious meaning or significance.

Along with this idea is the Japanese concept of "synthesized religion." What is meant by this is that both Buddhism and Shintoism, along with Confucian cultural values, coexist together. Ellwood explains that "new religions can be added, 'stacked up,'" without necessarily displacing the predecessor. In such ways as this, the experienced history of a culture's religion bears its own message."⁶⁷ This "synthesization" is an important aspect of Japanese religion. The integration of religion into culture is a vital, if not *the key component*, that needs to be remembered when discussing the context of Japanese religion.

Confucianism in Japan is not like a normal religion. In Japan, "it seems that religionists can preach and practice a variety of doctrines and methods of worship so

⁶⁶ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 19-20.

⁶⁷ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 18.

long as they inculcate Confucian virtues; get outside that frame, and they may find themselves in serious trouble.”⁶⁸ Although Ellwood is talking about “new religions” in Japan, it is a good starting point. Confucianism is not an organized, doctrinal, and spiritual religion like Christianity or even Buddhism. It is much more of a practical religion that permeates daily life through its ethical philosophy. This is precisely why it is discussed in this project. The goal is to catch a glimpse of quotidian spirituality of the Japanese Nationals, and if Confucianism contributes to that even a little bit, it is worth discussing.

The core values of Confucius, although they have grown and adapted since the founding philosopher’s death, are based upon society. Humans are innately social creatures. We all have family, at least to some extent, and interact with other social beings. Confucius believed that humans’ true nature came from relationships. Once those were extended to a society, he believed the community at large began to speak into human nature. Thus, loyalty and social obligations to one’s relationships were expected from citizens and inhabitants. Those relationships could then be extended to society as a whole.⁶⁹ Filial piety is one of the greatest examples of this philosophy. Even to this day, this ethic can be observed. It is the duty of the oldest son to take care of his parents in their old age. Sons are also expected to bring honor to their family name. This sentiment, honor, has a remarkable impact in Confucian thought,⁷⁰ and the moral

⁶⁸ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 9.

⁶⁹ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 15-16.

⁷⁰ The ideas of honor and respect have been debated for a while. The western ideas of respect and honor are not quite the same as the eastern ideas. Ultimately, it may be best to describe them with their opposites, guilt and shame. Respect is earned and if lost, causing guilt, it is not entirely impossible to gain back more. Honor is not really “gained” at least not in the whole sense of the word. Honor may be able to

implications of living out of duty and service for others rather than for oneself are easy to see with respect to the benefits to society. This showed itself in government too. While governments could become corrupt, ideally the monarch or ruler would work with his advisors, or people of the ruled class, to create a better society. The ruler, in the view of Confucius, should be one with virtue and circumspect.⁷¹

Confucianism came to Japan around the same time Buddhism did.⁷² The difference is that while one is more social and political in nature, the other is a full-fledged religion with its spiritual experiences that lead to the understandings of the universe. This is not to say these do not exist in Confucianism, but Buddhism is much more than a simple philosophy; it is a way of experiencing the divine and attaining enlightenment.⁷³ While there are many different types of Buddhism in Japan, the ones that will be focused on here will be the Jodo School and the Jodo Shin Sect of Amida Buddhism. These are Pure Land and True Pure Land Buddhism respectively. Along with these two sects, Zen Buddhism will also be the subject of some study. These sects were specifically chosen due their origin and explicit effects in Japan itself.

be “regained” by an act that society considers honorable, but it is not exactly accrued over a person’s lifetime like respect. Japan is a shame-based society, so public consequences come with inappropriate actions. This leads into the Bushido idea of Honor and why *seppuku*, or honorable suicide, was considered somewhat of a redemption of the person and family name. There is much more nuance and others have written more than what is swiftly described here.

⁷¹ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 20.

⁷² Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 93-95.

⁷³ It has been argued that Buddhism is not a true religion and more of a philosophy of life. While many of the topics in this project lie in the ether between definitions, Buddhism is absolutely a religion to the same degree that Christianity is. This will be especially obvious when talking about, in Bunce’s words “Amida Buddhism” as faith will be a major emphasis of the sect. Nevertheless, this distinction is important to separate Buddhism from the misunderstanding that it is simply another Confucianism.

Pure Land Buddhism was founded by Honen Shonin, a teacher who began preaching Amida Buddhism in 1175 CE. For a long time, Buddhism was an elite religion. Attaining enlightenment, at least originally, meant spending a lot of time meditating, and for the normal farmer or intense laborer, such time did not exist. Honen Shonin, or Shonin-sensei, held that anybody could be reborn into “The Pure Land” regardless of whether they were monk or peasant. The way to do this was to recite the *nembutsu*, an absolute incantation that did not require meditation or work, only faith. The *nembutsu* is simply the recitation of the Buddha Amida’s name in faith that through his mercy one will be saved and brought into the Pure Land by Amida’s merit. Ultimately, Shonin-sensei made Amida Buddhism a “by faith alone” religion.⁷⁴

Shonin had a promising pupil named Shinran who took Pure Land Buddhism a step further. True Pure Land Buddhism (Jodo Shin school) holds that the recitation of Amida’s name is not mandatory. Rather, Shinran presented the truly shocking idea that Amida gifted faith to those who believed in his name. Even if one did not say out loud the name of Amida, as long as the person had faith and gratitude for that gift of faith, that person would be saved by Amida.⁷⁵ The revolutionary ideas of Shonin and Shinran for the Japanese have changed the understanding of faith in that time for many people.

A key difference of True Pure Land Buddhism from Pure Land Buddhism is that, although there is assurance of faith in this life, true enlightenment does not occur until

⁷⁴ William Bunce, *Religions in Japan: Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1955), 80.

⁷⁵ Bunce, *Religions in Japan*, 83-84.

the next life when one is in the Pure Land.⁷⁶ The original teachings of Buddha were that the goal of this life was enlightenment and that anybody could attain it. The difficulty came into how one attains enlightenment since many did not have time for meditating. Thus, this sect in the Mahayana branch of Buddhism sought to redeem those who could not meditate all the time and lived a normal daily life.

While the concept of the Pure Land sounds a lot like heaven, it is in fact not the same thing. The Pure Land is rather a place where one remains in enlightenment *in order to* enter nirvana. While it is indeed described as a type heaven, with all sort of various music and jewels among the sublime spirit of the Buddha, the goal of the Pure Land is not to remain there forever, but rather to grant a place for people to achieve nirvana than spend all their earthly life chasing after a seemingly impossible goal for most.⁷⁷

Zen Buddhism is much different from the two other sects mentioned. The goal of Zen Buddhism is “transmitting Buddha’s mind directly to the mind of believers.”⁷⁸ In Zen Buddhism, the practices that are most prevalent are silent meditation and abstract contemplation. The truth is not something from scripture to be passed down orally. Rather, it was believed the meditators had to be transmitted the knowledge from the Buddha. The problem was that even when they had achieved this knowledge, there was no real way to convey it. This can be best seen in the *koan*. A *koan* is an abstract riddle that practitioners of Zen are expected to master. Acolytes are given these riddles by

⁷⁶ Bunce, *Religions in Japan*, 85.

⁷⁷ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 35-37.

⁷⁸ Bunce, *Religions in Japan*, 88.

their masters and are expected to meditate on them for days, weeks, months, or however long it might take to solve them. These riddles are extremely difficult, and it would be surprising to find someone who could complete their riddle in a day. One example of *koan* would be “what does a clap with one hand sound like?” The paradoxical abstract riddles are, in Zen thought, one of the gateways to understanding the mind of the Buddha.⁷⁹ In addition to religious thinking, Zen Buddhism has contributed to politics, architecture, theatre, ethics, and the daily life of the Japanese.⁸⁰

The third, but most innately Japanese religion to discuss is Shintoism. To start, it may be prudent to tell another story. Amaterasu, the sun goddess, was deeply offended by her brother Susanoo, the god of storms, and hid in a cave. Since the sun goddess was hiding in a cave, the sunlight had gone out, and there was no light in the world. The rest of the *kami* (gods) got together and deliberated amongst themselves until a solution came about. The goddess of dance, Uzume, started to dance and the rest of the *kami* that were present began to laugh. Amaterasu, curious about the cause of this revelry, poked her head out of the cave and, by seeing her beauty reflected in a mirror, gradually left the safety of the cave. Thus, light was returned to the sky and the heavens.⁸¹

While there is no clear hierarchy of gods, Amaterasu is an important one. She, along with Susanoo and Tsukiyomi, the moon goddess, was born from the body of the bathing Izanagi, who is credited for the creation of the Japanese people. To this day, it is

⁷⁹ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 144-145.

⁸⁰ Bunce, *Religions in Japan*, 90.

⁸¹ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 74-75.

believed the emperor is descended from the blood-related line of Amaterasu. This is an extreme honor and therefore the emperor is implicated in many religious rites in Shinto.⁸² This makes Shinto different from both Confucianism and Buddhism. There are a multitude of festivals for various gods or goddesses that are different from village to village. Some villages have multiple shrines in the area that people take care of, so this possibly means multiple deities. These *kami* are related to life and vitality, even marriage, rather than death, which is related to Buddhism.⁸³ The emphasis on the joys of this life are ultimately the prevailing ideas of Shinto. Life is a joyous occasion, indeed, and the parties that surround this knowledge create a very unique culture and religion.

The final topic to mention is the importance of cleanliness versus uncleanliness. Shrines, in Japan, are designed with a *torii*, or gate, at the front, designating that the shrine is separate from the common world. Inside the compound, there is a cleansing station. This station is used to wash one's hands, face, and even sometimes the insides of one's mouth. This is a symbolic cleansing as water is considered purgative of uncleanliness. This can even be seen in normal Japanese homes or living spaces. Many Japanese have separate slippers for the bathroom than for the rest of the house. While there is a practical application for this, the spiritual aspect of cleanliness versus uncleanliness is an important note.

The Japanese vary widely in their religious understandings. There are indeed zealous Buddhist monks and traditional Shinto believers. Even today some still faithfully

⁸² Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 74-75.

⁸³ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 9.

hold to the original teachings of Confucius. Yet, most Japanese hold to a combination of all those. Shinto is optimistic about this life but says little about the next. Buddhism is hopeful about the next life but talks mostly in terms of suffering in this one. This interesting dynamic between multiple belief systems affects everyday life for the Japanese and show that there is much to explore with reference of the religious landscape of Japan.

Chapter 4 – Comparison of the American Nones and Japanese Nationals

Introduction

At this point in the project the question “how are the spiritualities of the American Nones and the Japanese Nationals similar or different?” This section will attempt to answer that question using four different concepts of Sacred Space, Time, Nature, and Human Experience. In addition, this project attempts to answer this question through the lens of another question: “What does it mean to be human?” Before answering this question, a brief introduction to the context of this methodology will be discussed.

Mircea Eliade, author of *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, discusses four different aspects of sacredness that religions have in common. Eliade himself works with less popular religions and more primitive or older ones. One example of these groups would be the Achilpa, an Arunta tribe from Australia. Another example would be a Native American tribe called the Kwakiutl. Both of these people groups have a distinct religious system from any of the world’s major religions. But this also means

they have a unique perspective from the lens of “what does it mean to be human?” This allows him to truly get at the core of the issue of what is sacred and what is profane.

While the Japanese and the Nones are sophisticated and culturally diverse, the ideas of Eliade still, arguably, apply to these spiritual understandings of the world as well.⁸⁴

First, it is important to know what exactly the four areas are in which Eliade finds similarities among religious systems. Sacred Space is the first one. This is simply a place that is set apart from the profane. This can be done in many ways. Some religions construct buildings while others prepare a shrine. Still others wrap a rope around a place that is considered sacred. The key idea here is that the space that is considered sacred is completely, whether truly physically or symbolically, set apart from the outside world, the profane world.⁸⁵ The profane world is simply that which is not sacred. It does not necessarily have to be evil or malevolent. Normal, everyday items are part of the profane world. Pots, pans, televisions, roads, houses, and even tire swings are all examples of items from the profane world. While that doesn't mean these objects cannot be sacred, they are more or less a part of daily life rather than distinctly set apart by theophanies.

The second aspect is Sacred Time. Sacred Time is a moment in existence that has significant meaning or a measure of awe that is then considered to be sacred. Sacred Time is not mundane like the rest of life which is filled with work or play. Instead, these moments are special. They can be celebrations or memorials. They can be happy or sad

⁸⁴ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*.

⁸⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 62-65.

times. Whatever the case may be, they are celebrated in a way that separates them from the rest of time. This separation can be obvious, or it can be a blurry gradient rather than a thick line. One such example may be Christmas in Japan. While Christmas was originally introduced as a Christian holiday, it has become extremely commercialized. There is still an aspect of sacred time as the common event of being with a special someone over this holiday is held by the public consciousness of the culture. It may not be a complete connection to the birth of Christ like it would be in Christianity, thus slightly blurred, but the longing for a person to be with is succinctly present. Sacred Time can also be combined with Sacred Space to create a special moment that occurs at a special place on the planet.⁸⁶

The third and fourth aspects are a bit different from the first two. The third aspect is the Sacredness of Nature. This will become clearer later in this paper but for now, it can be described as the power of nature. A mountain, valley, or a volcano are great examples. A windstorm or a bolt of lightning are also evidence of the sacredness of Nature. These are all examples of the power of nature and while that is an aspect of the sacredness of Nature, there is much more to it than just raw elemental power.⁸⁷ Nature is related to the sacred in symbols. Water is given purifying capabilities in Christianity, Shintoism, and Buddhism. Mother earth yields food that sustains humanity and allows them to continue to survive. This is not the end to the symbol of the mother, however. Eliade states: "In a number of languages man is called the earthborn. It is

⁸⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 68-72.

⁸⁷ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 116-118.

believed that children 'come' from the depths of the earth, from caverns, caves, ravines, but also from ponds, springs, rivers."⁸⁸ Mother earth then does not just mean a natural symbol of provision, but also origin.

Finally, there is the sacredness of life and human existence. Life and death are very interesting topics within religions, even still to this day. This power of life, this sanctified living, is one aspect of sacredness that all humans witness on this planet. Religions have various creation stories of humanity. Some talk of a single creating God, still others say a karmic force simply birthed man into existence in this universe. Life and human existence are sacred things within themselves which is a vastly different reality than the profanity and danger of death.⁸⁹ Each one will be discussed in detail, but it is important to notice the fluidity of each category.

As previously mentioned, a sacred time and a sacred place can be combined into something much more awe-inspiring. However, nature and sanctified life can also be implemented into this sacred moment. A brilliant example of this is the creation of the world. At a sacred time, in a sacred place, nature and life are at once created. This act is almost holy in comparison with all other things. Another example would be the birth of Jesus Christ or the Buddha. This event is a sacred moment in a sacred place that brings forth a savior figure that will lead humanity to salvation and ease the suffering of profane existence. This sanctified life is remembered in a sacred place annually at a

⁸⁸ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 140.

⁸⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 162-179.

sacred time. It is important to remember though that these aspects of the sacred all affect each other in many ways.

The following four categories will be used to compare and contrast these two spiritual realms of thought from the Japanese Nationals and the American Nones. Each category will include examples from the Japanese and then examples of the American Nones with reference to the specific category in question. Following this, a conclusion will be drawn from these examples to show how similar or different these two groups truly are. The context in the preceding chapters were meant to introduce the separate worlds. Now that these doors have been opened, these worlds can be explored in a deeper way and yield specific examples of how both the Japanese Nationals and American Nones view the world. The results shown from these comparisons will be examined from the perspective of the question: "What does it mean to be human?" Since the categories are so broad, as are the subjects of comparisons, for the sake of space, only a few examples will be used at most for the categories.

Sacred Space

Sacred space, most simply, would be a place like a shrine or holy monument. It is a space where a spiritual experience has or can occur. The sacred is felt and experienced as a reality in a physical location. Perhaps even a relic would be a good example. This can be seen in the spiritualities of both the Japanese Nationals and the American Nones.

Sacred Space can easily be seen in the architecture of the Japanese. Upon visiting a Shinto shrine, a person will first see a Torii. This gate is a physical object that,

along with a rope with paper (in some places this rope is more symbolic or replaced with a fence), separates the shrine from the rest of the space around it. After walking into this sacred space, a cleansing area is given to sojourners so that they may cleanse their hands and mouths before worshipping the deity that is enshrined at this shrine. After cleansing oneself with water, that person would approach the main worship hall. However, the key thing to note here is that the holy item that is enshrined is not within the worship hall itself. Instead, this sacred item, belonging either to a deity or to a deified human, is kept behind the main hall. This keeps it far away from the eyes of the worshippers who have come to pay offerings and request wishes from the enshrined god. Here, it is evident in multiple places that the sacredness of this space is separated from the profane. Firstly, there is a physical barrier between the outside and inside. The normal world is no place to keep a holy relic, thus a sacred dimensional plane is required to house the item. Even more so this item is kept in an enclosed building behind the main worship area. Instead of it being cheaply displayed like a trophy, there is another separation between the follower and the holy item. In this way, even their eyes are not shown the sacred item. The washing of hands and mouth is not entirely a sacred space issue in itself, but because of the space set apart from the world, it is tantamount that a person who wishes to worship cleanses himself of the ungodliness that he brings in from the profane world.

This is seen in a more pragmatic sense too. Upon entering a Japanese home, one will immediately notice the “Genkan” or the foyer. This entrance place is where one takes off his or her shoes before stepping into the inner sanctuary of the house. While

this does indeed keep dirt and grime from being stepped into the soft carpet, it is also reminiscent of entering a sacred and safe citadel where one is set apart from the dangers of the outside world. This is also seen in Japanese hotel rooms. A person is granted slippers with which to walk around the room. There are also slippers that one is expected to use in the restroom. Even if the restroom is only big enough for a single person to go in and is cleaned multiple times a week, it is still understood that one will wear these special shoes when using the bathroom. Even within a house, one must deal with the sacred and the profane. Here the profane is the bathroom which is considered “unclean.” While this is practical, it is most certainly not only that. Even if the bathroom is cleaned and scientifically without germs, the association is still there. The threshold between the floor outside the bathroom and the tile within the water closet is a Torii of its own kind. While not a literal gate for the gods, it separates the entrance of the sacred and the profane.⁹⁰

In contrast, Sacred Space is a bit different for the American Nones. There are no shrines or churches for the Nones specifically. This is because places are dedicated to being sacred spaces by the Nones themselves. The process is much more subjective and based on the experiences of individual Nones rather than objective criteria. Theophanies, or experiences of “god,” for the Nones are much more versed in daily lives. Places may be sacred because of memories or because it yields spiritual peace. With this in mind, many Nones may see their own homes as sacred. There is security or

⁹⁰ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 28-31.

protection in such a place.⁹¹ The house is where one lays him or herself to rest, it is where meals are cooked, laundry is done, and life, just in general, is lived. It can be seen as a reprieve from work, school, society, or any other outside forces. Since relationships and daily life are so important, the house might be the best example of a sacred place for the Nones.

A labyrinth may also evoke spiritual experiences for some Nones, thus causing it to be a sacred space. However, there is a softening of the boundary between sacred and profane for the Nones making this is a more personal experience and therefore no true of every None. Other examples may be real church buildings or synagogues. Still other Nones might find a gym or a library to be a sacred place. Many places in this world can yield a peaceful presence to a person. Some Nones may have places they considered sacred within nature though that will be addressed later on in the corresponding category. The core of what makes a place sacred for the Nones is not if it is aesthetically pleasing or if it is unique. With the Nones, the sacred intersects with the mundane making everyday objects or things into relics and sanctuaries. What makes a sanctuary sacred? Is it because of the stained-glass windows or the wooden pews? It is because of the atmosphere or “vibe” that it puts off? Most likely, it is because of a Theophany (a spiritual encounter), there is a presence of the sacred there that puts the place on the map.

In conclusion, there is a distinct difference between the Japanese Nationals and American Nones with respect to sacred space. One of the most contrasting differences

⁹¹ Drescher, *Choosing our Religion*, 155.

between the Japanese Nationals and the American Nones is cleanliness. The concept of clean and unclean is more of a pragmatic issue for the Nones and there are no consistent holy places to generalize. Likewise, some Japanese Nationals may find a difficult time seeing how a simple house is the sacred building equivalent to a shrine. This does not mean there are no similarities. Some Nones would indeed find the Shrines of Japan capable of being the place of a religious experience. But sacred spaces for the Nones may be more about memories or relationships than about truly holy sites. Relationships are not unique to the Nones, as those are definitely aspects of Japanese religious systems as well. The key difference is that many Japanese Nationals may go to actual shrines, churches, or sacred places that are designated as such by an institutionalized religion. For the Nones, that demarcation is a lot more fluid. With respect to Sacred Space, there is not much that is very similar between the American Nones and the Japanese Nationals.

Sacred Time

Sacred Time is the second topic that will be compared. Just as above, after a few examples have been given for Japanese Nationals and American Nones, a conclusion about the similarities or differences between the groups will be given. Time is sacred in this context because mythic time, such as the creation of the world or the time when the gods and titans fought for control, is reversible. That is, the time of the present is

fundamentally related to the ancient time when important events occurred. As previously mentioned, the creation of the universe is an excellent example of this.

The Japanese have many festivals that are celebrated throughout the year. It is most likely the case that if one village is not celebrating, then another somewhere is instead. "Matsuri" or festivals occur all year round. One excellent example of this is a celebration of the new year's inception. New Year's Day is a celebration of that mythic time relating back to creation because the world is reborn. The old world of the previous year has been lost to the annals of history and this new world of the present has taken its place. The world has been "recreated" in a way by breathing life into a "dying" year that creates a whole new world of opportunities. This time is sacred because it is fundamentally related to the creation of the universe. This rebirth of the whole world at the beginning of the year repeats the creation of the universe and thus is cause for celebration.⁹²

A good example of Sacred Time in Japanese culture is also New Year's Day. Many people will go to a shrine on this day to show their respects to a deity as well as draw a fortune for the coming year. There is an interesting relationship between fortune and future on this sacred day. All throughout the year normal time where one must work, or complete other tasks of life's fortune is considered a part of daily life. However, because the world is considered as being reborn, many go to seek a pleasing fortune for their future. The rebirth of the world is a symbolic rebirth of their own fortune. The shrine-goer is granted the opportunity to have a rebound in luck and wishes. Thus, it is

⁹² Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 95, 104-105.

perceived that heading to a shrine on this day grants a wish more power to come true. Fortune and Future become entangled in the same web and the sacred time adds to the sacredness of positive luck and the profanity that comes with negative condemnations by fortune. This rebirth of the world also brings closer the world of the gods similar to Halloween in which the spirit world and the physical world comes close. The New Year's celebration is significant as it allows the gods to be in proximity to the realm of humans. This can be seen in the presence of the *namahage* in various Japanese New Years traditions. These are ogres who come to villages to take away naughty children. In an interesting juxtaposition to Santa Claus, adults dress up as these ogres to keep children in line with the ethical norms. Instead of being good to receive a reward, the *namahage* provide incentive for children to be good to avoid punishment. While these are simply dressed up adults, the characters are very real to the children with various dances and activities that include them. This time is remembering a mythological one that has an ethical basis for the present.⁹³ Mythic time then becomes a reality in the present through these traditions.

Sacred Time for the American Nones can be related to holidays and celebrations, just like the Japanese. However, Nones are more open than simply holidays and celebrations.⁹⁴ One example that Drescher used was the celebrations of Wednesday at

⁹³ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 48-49.

⁹⁴ By open, it is meant that there is more fluidity or less structure in the lives of some Nones as to what, specifically, is considered sacred time. Holidays, in general, are the easiest to see the connections as most holidays (literally: holy day) can be easily traced back to the origin event. For the Nones, not all holidays are meaningful in the same way, and some Nones may even find days more sacred than others regardless of whether they are holidays or not. This is not exclusive to the Nones by any means, but as a general rule, sacred time is more attached to daily life than specific, planned holidays.

one of the interviewee's homes. In order to further community and solidarity with family and the neighborhood, a celebration on Wednesdays occurred with food, drink, and merry socialization. This Wednesday could also be considered sacred time.⁹⁵ Time spent talking, helping, instructing, or listening to other people could also be considered sacred time as well. While this is just one example, it shows that relational ethics are important to the Nones. These types of events may be the foundation of sacred time for the Nones rather than just plain holidays. This isn't to say holidays have no importance, as holidays are good reasons to get together with family. The distinction is that the holiday is not what is most important, but rather the "get together with the family" is the key motivator.

Mythic time is a bit different, too, since not all Nones believe in the creation story in Genesis or in a creation story at all. Some believe there was a large bang that created all things in the universe while others believe something entirely different. This does not make mythic time irrelevant to the lives of the American Nones, but, similar to the cleanliness issue, daily life is focused more on the pragmatic side of things than mythic ones. Mythic events may still be encountered, like in the New Year's example, but these are not very common due to a lack of ancient mythology to draw from.

In conclusion, both these groups are about equally similar and different. The New Year's celebration is still just as important to the American Nones culturally as it is for the Japanese. Thus, there are more similarities with respect to New Year's than there are differences. Nevertheless, the mythology of the Japanese and the incredible

⁹⁵ Drescher, *Choosing our Religion*, 143.

abundance of festivals that the Japanese Nationals have make these two groups a bit different in practice. For the Japanese Nationals, myths become related to the present world. For the American Nones, while not impossible, myths are less likely to lead the way in sacred time as much as relationships are. While these differences are great, the emphasis on relationships is still extremely important for both groups. Communities in both Japan and America come together to celebrate victories or milestones. Both Japanese Nationals and American Nones show that relationships in these events are important and shouldn't be ignored.

Sacredness of Nature

The Sacredness of Nature will be compared next with respect to both groups. Nature is unbridled and unpredictable. This supposed chaos is intriguing yet dangerous. However, there are also patterns and consistencies within nature that give it a sense of calm and soothing embrace. This mysterious aspect of nature may be worshipped or seen as something to be feared. Even to this day nature is unpredictable. Many technologies have come about in which one may try to predict the patterns within nature to keep those on this planet safe, but these instruments and tools are not all-knowing. Storms are unpredictable, and the United Nations has understood this well. It is against international law to conduct experiments for weather control for the purpose of war⁹⁶. This shows just how much power nature has with respect to humans. Volcanos

⁹⁶ "Environmental Modification Convention." U.S. Department of State.
<https://www.state.gov/t/isn/4783.htm>

spit forth fire that can destroy cities. Earthquakes break open the very ground humans build homes upon and Tsunamis destroys pillars of civilization without any difficulty. This power is mysterious but awe-inspiring. Thus, a sacredness of Nature is understood by many people groups. Whether it is dangerous or whether it is helpful, nature is still considered home.

In Japan this perhaps is shown no better than by Mount Fuji itself. Colloquially known under the title “Fuji-san,” this volcano is quite large. It stands 3,776 meters above sea level and is quite a trial to climb.⁹⁷ This tribulation though is very rewarding as the top of the mountain yields a beautiful sight of the sunrise. Something interesting to note is the various Torii (gates) that one passes to get to the top of the mountain. There are multiple Torii on the top, and there are even shrines at the top for the spirit of the mountain. This titan that reaches into the sky is thus home to mountain spirits and evokes spiritual awe in people. This spiritual awe has attracted pilgrims from all over, regardless of religious background. In the past, many have climbed the mountain to be spiritually renewed and to feel connected with the earth.⁹⁸ This is a perfect example of the sacredness of nature for the Japanese people.

Mount Inari is also an excellent example of this. The mountain is not even close to the height of Fuji but is nonetheless high enough to give a comprehensive view of Kyoto City and the surrounding mountains of the area. This mountain is famous for the one thousand Torii gates around the mountain to the top. These gates are built in such a

⁹⁷ “Mount Fuji.” National Geographic Society. November 09, 2012.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/mount-fuji/>

⁹⁸ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 169.

way that they are to give the feeling of being transported to another world. The beauty of the nature around the shrine is a very part of the shrine itself. This is also evidenced by the two metal temples, Ginkaku-ji and Kinkaku-ji. The Kinkaku-ji is a gold temple that, while impressive itself, is greatly enhanced by the beautiful gardens that surround it. The same can be said of the silver Ginkaku-ji. In both areas, the temple is magnificent, but the nature around it is what enhances the feeling of greatness. Truly, it could almost be argued that nature is the focus of the area rather than the temples themselves. Even when visiting them, one walks around the temples in very little time in comparison with the amount of time one traverses the beauty of the surrounding hills and gardens. This natural beauty is beloved by the Japanese.⁹⁹ These gardens are important thought. Elwood explains that “these gardens, like so much Japanese art combining both aesthetic and spiritual meaning, are neither raw nature nor human geometry, but rather like minimalist abstractions of nature.”¹⁰⁰ These gardens are meant to serve as a means of reaching the buddha. The meditator would focus on these gardens and, after penetrating to the essence of this sacredness of nature, would experience the wisdom of the buddha in all of its glory.¹⁰¹

Many cities, including Tokyo, are excellent examples of a synthesization of nature and modernity. Instead of simply leveling the whole area and building many tall skyscrapers, there are many trees and parks within cities that are notably given a lot of

⁹⁹ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 121-122.

¹⁰⁰ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 154.

¹⁰¹ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 154.

care. The cohabitation of man and nature in Japanese cities is evidence just how much the Japanese have an intuition of the sacred aspect of Mother Earth.

The Japanese show much of their appreciation for the earth through artistry and skilled painting. “The Japanese... have never dealt with nature in their art in the universalistic sense of trying to discern any grand order or structure; much less have they tried to associate the ideal of order in human society with the harmonies of nature.”¹⁰² Landscapes and completely natural scenery are preferred. The gentle but fierce beauty of the ocean’s waves are looked on with admiration. Raw sincerity was nature of the artist’s brush when depicting nature.¹⁰³ This love of the natural or worn beauty of things can be considered another piece of the celebration of the sacredness of nature.

In comparison to the Japanese, the sacredness of Nature can also be observed in the American Nones. The Nones have the same appreciation of nature and many, as mentioned previously in this project, enjoy meditating in natural areas or taking walks in nature. There is a connection between the spiritual experience of the None and the presence of Nature. There may be a connectedness or a mysterious bond that forms. Gardening is a good example of this. Although seasonal, gardening is an example of an everyday experience in which Nones come into contact with Nature by, literally, “getting their hands dirty.”

¹⁰² Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 132.

¹⁰³ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 133.

This can also be seen in one of the four F's. Cats and dogs are good examples of nature in the daily lives of American Nones. Other pets are also the objects of connections and interactions that may hold meaning for some Nones.¹⁰⁴ These pets are alive and interact with their human owners or companions in unique ways. They are not robots or "husks" without souls. They have life to which humans can also relate. If it can be said this way, there is a type of sacredness in interacting with the world around us. Nature is part of the relational connectivity that one can see in the Nones.

Between both the Japanese and the American Nones, there are quite a few similarities. It cannot be understated that both groups can see Nature as holding something important and the connection humans have to the earth, our home. Both Japanese and American Nones care for the earth, and the political issues that surround that category are topics about which many feel passionate. With regards to political policies and the environment, 68% of unaffiliated believers, 77% of atheists and 79% of agnostics believe the government should have stricter environmental protection laws according to the results of a Pew survey.¹⁰⁵ The embrace of Mother nature can be seen in cities, villages, and everywhere in between. The difficulty in America is sometimes seeing that beauty in major cities. The silent, and sometimes not so silent, beauty of Nature can easily be forgotten in urban, quick-paced societies, but both the American Nones and many Japanese remember mother earth fondly. That connection has meaning for everyday life and even can shape a person's worldview.

¹⁰⁴ Drescher, *Choosing our Religion*, 140-142.

¹⁰⁵ Baker and Smith, *American Secularism*, 178-179.

Sacredness of Human Existence

As with many definitions, the knowledge of life is due to the knowledge of death. A hot drink is hot because it is not cold. There is an understanding of the concept of cold then as not hot. The drink is hot because it is not cold. The knowledge of the word comes from not just knowing the word, but its opposite as well. The same thing can be said of life. A being who is alive is thus a being who is not dead. Likewise, a person who is dead is thus not alive. This is why death, at such a young age, is difficult to grasp since life is all that is known. Because death is profane, life is sacred. Negation of the opposite is not the only way to look at death. Death is not just “not alive” but rather can be seen as an absence of life. However, even this absence of life shows how important the sacredness of life can be, since life has now left the body as opposed to death inhabiting it. Eliade sees that, “for religious man, death does not put a final end to life. Death is but another modality of human existence.”¹⁰⁶

Death is a transition from this world into the next, the afterlife. This can be seen in general but can also be seen in rituals. Many rituals have an initiatory death that leads to a “resurrection” or “renewal” of a person. There is a new birth that takes place. Death is profane but is overcome by a transformation of being. Once the person is reborn, they may experience new things or have a new perspective on the world.

¹⁰⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 148.

Wisdom may be given that was previously inaccessible.¹⁰⁷ Death plays an important role in religious symbolism, making its prevalence in this world something that must be discussed in religions.

In Japanese culture, there is an understanding that death is unclean and those who work with the dead are sometimes ostracized by the living due to their line of work since they are in close proximity to the profane. These are the *Burakumin*, literally the “hamlet people” and include such vocations as undertakers, sanitary workers, and even those who simply work with leather.¹⁰⁸ Here the idea of cleanliness is brought up again. However, this time it is not a separation of space, such as physically separating clean from unclean, but of life and death. Rites of passage are excellent examples too. As a person continues to live, he or she grows older. These rites are milestones that everyone goes through. The sacredness of life is fully shown by the celebration of the rites of passing from one era to another.

An excellent example of a rite of passage within the understanding of the sacredness of life is the coming of age ceremony in Japan. In January every year, any person who has turned twenty in the previous year takes a part of the coming of age ceremony. This is not a small-scale celebration; however, this includes everyone who can attend and includes many events and activities that celebrate the passing of the era of adolescence into adulthood. In Kyoto, many girls who are skilled in the art of the “Yumi” (A Japanese bow) proceed to the Sanjusangen-do temple the day before the

¹⁰⁷ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 198-201.

¹⁰⁸ "Japans Hidden Caste of Untouchables," *BBC News*, October 23, 2015.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34615972>.

celebration. These young maidens participate in an archery tournament to commemorate their passing into adulthood. This is just one example of the activities that occur to celebrate the coming of age of a human being in Japan.¹⁰⁹ The coming of age ceremonies are held all around Japan and include celebration of the transition of children to adults when they turn twenty. This new stage of life includes things like legally being able to drink alcohol, drive automobiles, and gamble. Men usually dress up in suits and women dress up in attractive *kimono*¹¹⁰ and after many pictures and public celebrations, there are usually private after parties. The whole day is a celebration of life and the joys of becoming an adult. While there is no magical transition, the event still holds meaning for those in attendance and those who watch.¹¹¹ The sacred can be found in this celebration of life and growth. Human experience can be seen on full display during these celebrations.

Marriage is another example of celebration of life. This is quite interesting as in Japanese culture, a standard Shinto wedding involves the wife symbolically dying to her old family and becoming a part of the husband's family. Although this celebrates the sacredness of another passing from one segment of life to another, it includes the ritual of dying to an old family and being reborn into a new one. Sometimes a woman is even

¹⁰⁹ "Kyoto's 400 Year Old Archery Competition," *Japan Talk*, July 31, 2015.

<https://www.japan-talk.com/jt/new/kyotos-400-year-old-archery-competition>.

¹¹⁰ A kimono is a Japanese-style of "dress" that is a staple at many celebrations. It is layered and usually tied with an *obi*, or a sash that will keep the kimono closed and in place. There is no direct western equivalent, but it can be used in both formal and informal ceremonies.

¹¹¹ Alicia Joy, "Everything You Need To Know About Japan's Coming Of Age Day," *Culture Trip*, December 28, 2016.

<https://theculturetrip.com/asia/japan/articles/everything-you-need-to-know-about-japans-coming-of-age-day/>.

removed from her family tree and added to her husband's tree, in order to finalize the symbolic death to her old family. This celebration though is still considered a special event and celebration of the union of two people, albeit usually in a more secular manner. As a variation it is interesting to note that many wedding chapels have cropped up in the past few decades. Western weddings have become fairly popular in the recent years and although they are not the same as the Christian weddings they are based upon, they still account for a celebration of life.¹¹²

Of course, marriage, life, and death are all things that are a part of the daily lives of American Nones. Some will hold traditional Christian or religious funerals, but this is of course not required. Each None will have his or her own way of dealing with the spiritual aspect of death. The same can be said of life and marriage. While some have traditionally religious weddings, many Nones choose to have private, non-religious ceremonies to save money or not make a big deal about it. The same is true of Japanese. Although there is a separation between religion and marriage, the spiritual sacredness of that experience still holds meaning. Other personal reasons may account for such a decision as well. Fewer people in general are getting married in contemporary society. Divorces and cohabitation are climbing as well, making marriage an experience that not every None may go through or even desire.¹¹³ It is also true that some American Nones have chosen not to get married or are single. For Nones, the real

¹¹² Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 68-69.

¹¹³ Baker and Smith, *American Secularism*, 68.

sacredness of humanity comes in the relationships and social contact that occur on a daily basis.

This is also true of the Japanese and is where the closest similarities between each group occurs. Both Japanese Nationals and American Nones have a focus on relationship with others as a sacred experience. The influence of Confucianism for the Japanese Nationals and the relational ethics for the American Nones are possibly the greatest explanations for this occurrence. The care for one's fellow human as not a religious maxim, but more of a spiritual posture. This does not mean that the religions of Japan or the spiritual lives of the American Nones are the same. But the focus on others and their well-being is an important part of the daily spiritual lives of both the Nones and the Japanese. This makes this similarity very interesting and very important. This is important because relationships become the basis of spiritual reality, to some extent, for both the American Nones and the Japanese Nationals.

Ethics

Before wrapping up, there is one more area I would like to compare these two groups that lies outside of Eliade's four areas of sacred and profane which I would like to address. A comparison of Ethics, with respect to the Japanese Nationals and American Nones, would be extremely interesting with reference to both groups. Much of the ethical practices of the Japanese come from Confucianism and Buddhism. The collective aspect affects it as well and can be seen in the Confucian concept of *ren*, or love for one's fellow man. From this ethic, a Confucian rule known as the silver rule (because it

focuses on negatives, not positives) has come into the present time. The rule states that: “whatever you do not want to happen unto you, do not treat others in that way.” Linguistically this is the negative version of the golden rule that many American Nones cite as one foundation for their ethical systems. The golden rule states: “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This similarity is extraordinary. Both the Japanese and American Nones have a basis in ethics that are worlds apart yet have come to almost exactly verbatim conclusions of what relational ethics looks like.

It should be mentioned, however, that there is a difference between treating someone how one would desire to be treated and refraining from doing harmful things because one does not desire those harmful things to be inflicted upon oneself. This difference is philosophically important. While these two rules are linguistically related, their implications may lead to different results. People do not love others because they don't wish to be hated, the opposite of both hate and love is apathy, or a lack of passionate emotions. Thus, if there is to be a true similarity, there needs to be a bit more to this than two rules plated in precious metals.

Linda Woodhead looked at the “no religion” population in Britain and, while the United Kingdom is not the same as the United States, she brings an insight into the ethical norms of the Nones that may bring this comparison into a clearer light. Woodhead states: “Ethically, the normality of ‘no religion’ is evident in the non-negotiable view that all human beings have a duty and a right to fulfil their own

potential and help others to do the same."¹¹⁴ Both groups do not just look at a golden or silver rule, but also look at social censure as well. As explored early, *Shudan Ishiki*, or group consciousness looks to the betterment of the group, not just the individual. A person has a social duty to act morally for the betterment of the group.¹¹⁵ Social obligation plays a big role as well, then, for the ethical norms of both groups.

This similarity transcends both time and space. The ethics of Jesus and the ethics of Confucius have passed on to groups that are only now somewhat related to them. This adds even more weight to the similarity already seen between each group with respect to relationships. The silver and golden rules are related, but with idea of social obligation and *ren* involved, there is an ethical context to these two rules. The ethics of these two groups come from somewhat sacred and religious backgrounds along within the community that each group is immersed.

Conclusion

The earlier comparisons show that there are three specific areas in which the Japanese Nationals and American Nones are similar. Relationships, the sacredness of nature, and ethical understandings are all extremely similar across these two groups. These are not the only similarities, and there are plenty of differences as well, because neither of these groups are completely unlike the other.

¹¹⁴ Linda Woodhead. "The Rise of 'no Religion' in Britain: The Emergence of a New Cultural Majority." *British Academy Lectures, 2015-16* (January 2016).

¹¹⁵ Roger Davies and Osamu Ikeno, *The Japanese Mind*, 195-198.

There is not much evidence that there is a significant similarity between the Japanese Nationals and the American Nones when it comes to the ideas of sacred space or sacred time. Because of the nature of both spiritual systems, sacred space is understood in different ways and sacred time does not hold the same meaning for each group. This does not mean that there are no connections among these things, as each group applies Eliade's concepts in different ways. This difference is noticeable and therefore there is no real similarities to conclude.

On the other hand, both Japanese Nationals and American Nones see the sacred in human (and sometimes not-so-human) relationships. The sacredness of human life comes to a head in which relationships become the theophanies themselves. These relationships even affect their ethics. While not identical, each group has similar ethical rules that are demarcated by the obligation these groups feel to their personal and global communities. Relationships are the most significant similarities as both groups have a heightened focus on the importance of social capital and connections.

Nature also has its role to play in these spiritualities as well. The connection between humans and nature is a mythic one that goes back to the origin of humanity. Spiritual experiences have a relationship to nature. As shown earlier, there is a focus on being in nature in the temples of Shintoism and Buddhism and the spiritual experiences of the Nones.

There is also a similarity between these groups in the understanding of religion in general. The American Nones incorporate different aspects of spiritualities in their lives that they have experienced. This is not just an arbitrary "pick-and-choose" type of

spirituality. The intersection of multiple faiths come together with experience to produce a personal conglomeration of ideas in the spiritualities of the Nones that is practical in daily life and based in social relationships. For the Japanese, religions have built on each other over time. New religions do not replace the old ones but rather build on top of them. This is what makes Japanese Religions so interesting to study. “In this special country, as religious history rolls along down the centuries, new “layers” of religion are added one on top of the other, but the old – even the oldest forms – seem never quite to disappear.”¹¹⁶ Both groups seem to build upon older religious traditions to form a unique and personalized spiritual world. One that is individuated but still addresses the sacred.

The similarities of the American Nones and Japanese Nationals are seen in relationships, nature, and ethics. These three aspects pervade the quotidian experiences of both groups, making them very important to observe. With these similarities in mind, the next section will look at the possible reason for these similarities while trying to find part of the essence of humanness in daily life.

Chapter 5 – What does it mean then to be Human?

What then does it mean to be human? What is the deeper meaning of these similarities and differences between the American Nones and the Japanese Nationals? These similarities have implications for human experience that will be discussed heavily in this

¹¹⁶ Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion*, 7.

chapter. From this discussion, some practical and theoretical applications will be given to conclude this project.

For the question of “what does it mean to be human?”, the answer proposed in this project will be the following: to be human is to have an intuition for the spiritual. It does not seem to be the case that animals construct religions, cults, or other structured religious institutions. Humans have an intuition for the spiritual in the sense that humans can sense and experience the sacred and find it different from everyday life. The really interesting idea that is seen somewhat in the Japanese Nationals but a lot in the American Nones is the breakdown of this distinction between the sacred and the profane. The sacred can occur every day in mundane life. This blurring of the lines is quite important with reference to the understanding of the sacred then for both the Japanese and the Nones. There are similarities in the spiritualities of both groups in which this occurs. This means the dichotomous understanding that there is only an “in-group” and an “out-group”, with respect to religion, is somewhat of a roadblock to understanding groups with a more holistic approach to spirituality.¹¹⁷ The evidence for this spiritual intuition can be seen in the universality of religion and the spiritual experiences that occur outside religiously affiliated organizations.

This intuition for the spiritual should not be overlooked or glossed over. The possibility that people have an intuition for the supernatural has a good many logical

¹¹⁷ This is not to say that institutional religions are not holistic. Nor is it to say dichotomies are always useless. Membership in a church or institution arguably should indeed be a dichotomous thing. But spiritual experience is more fluid and dynamic and thus does not always fit neatly into categorized boxes. Not everyone has the same religious experience as shown by the American Nones.

consequences. For one, it means that spiritual experience is not just dedicated to one “right” religion. Some people may be more intuitive than others in this regard. Those who are more intuitive in the spiritual realm may become priests, presbyters, imams, rabbis, monks, teachers, or leaders in religious organizations. It would probably be safe to say that historical people like Mohammad, Moses, Jesus, Siddhartha, and Shinran are examples of people who have had an above average intuition for the spiritual. Assuming that such an intuition is normally distributed, then most people are in the average. This also means there are very few people with little intuition for the spiritual, and it could be argued every single person has at least some intuition for the spiritual. This means that *all* people have the ability to interact with the supernatural realm, at least to some degree.

This also would mean that the postulation that there is no such thing as a supernatural realm holds less sway. The goal of science is to observe the empirical realm, and while religion does not entirely deal with empiricism, it would be difficult to argue a biological basis for an “intuition of the sacred.” It is understandable that some may feel there is no depth in concepts like God, karma, or magic, but the prevalence among people, even outside normalized religions, is a very good counterargument to this idea that would need to be addressed. Even with a more secular world, the intuition of the sacred and the profane does not seem to be dying out but rather changing and evolving.¹¹⁸ This can be seen by the very fact that the spiritual lives of people are growing outside the boundaries of institutionalized religion. This growth cannot be so

¹¹⁸ Baker and Smith, *American Secularism*, 216-217.

simply explained by either adherence to a specific tradition or the lasting effects of Christianity. There is something deeper at work that has just as much value in people's daily lives outside of the church as those within it. Job 32:8-9 says "But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand. It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right."¹¹⁹ The context to this verse is that Elihu, who is younger than Job and his three friends, has found the prior conversation unsatisfactory. He has waited for his turn to speak and, in order to show he means well and has authority, he defends himself. He knows that he is young and not as wise as the other men. Nevertheless, he points out that there is something more important than age that lends itself in understanding. The "breath of the Almighty" is within all people. I think that the very intuition for the spiritual is what Elihu is referencing here. There is a deeper reality beyond human, empirical sense.

Humans are animals that have an intuition for the spiritual. Perhaps it could be seen as the desire to create meaning, perhaps it is simply delusional. But these arguments would state then that most, if not all people, are delusional and pathological liars. Spiritual experience is not dominated by one religion, and there are things that occur in this world that evoke awe. Ineffable experiences that simply cannot be described academically, or even verbally, are present all over the world. The unaffiliated, at least in the argument in this paper, are key to understanding this phenomenon. There is simply "more to it than meets the eye" and this is vital to understanding unaffiliated points of view and, arguably, humanity in general.

¹¹⁹ *Holy Bible ESV* (Crossway Books, 2016).

Some other conclusions may include things like creating relationships with the American Nones. Indeed, this is not a unique idea, but the devil is in the details. Seeker sensitive churches may have good intentions, but just saying a church is “welcoming” does not mean people will suddenly come. Real relationship means pursuit of the other person. Just as Jesus leaves the ninety-nine sheep for the one lost lamb, so too ought the church pursue the Nones. The real focus, however, is not on relationships, but on relational experiences in everyday life. The church needs to meet the Nones in the mundane of quotidian existence. Daily life is considered sacred to many Nones, and that is the keystone in the archway of our bridge. The church cannot talk about relationship with a God who is “out there,” as such an impersonal God is of no interest to those who see relationships as sacred. Rather, the church needs to be intuitive as well and see God in everyday reality. The church needs to foster relationships with the Nones by showing them that the God we worship too is part of the everyday, not just on a Sunday.

Many people, in the present research, have begun sounding “alarm bells” in institutionalized religions. There is a general fear that people are leaving the church and promptly becoming either anti-church or anti-religious.¹²⁰ While it is true people are migrating out of the church in some ways, hopefully, this project has shown that such irreligiosity may not be the case. Another hope is that this project has shown the importance of qualitative research about this subject. While many Nones spoke of their disconnect from the church, their positive outlooks towards spirituality is a blessing that needs to be addressed as well as affirmed. There are bridges religious teachers can

¹²⁰ Baker and Smith, *American Secularism*, 85-87.

make to these unaffiliated. Although the purpose of this project is not to provide strategies to religions to attract converts, one example may be to follow some of the strategies of Japanese missionaries. Word of mouth from a friend is one of the most effective ways of spreading the gospel in Japan and many house churches and bible studies exist and are successful in creating disciples of Christ that honor God. Ethics may be a good way too. Appealing to the ethical values of the Nones and possibly showing that there are similarities and just what those similarities mean would be an excellent start as well. James Emery White in his book *The Rise of the Nones*¹²¹ talks a lot more about strategies that church leaders can use to reach the Nones. His focus is on a “reimagining of the church.” While discussing ecclesiology, White says that Christians need to reaffirm their own dedication to the church especially if that is what it takes to attract the Nones.¹²² We must become “one, holy, catholic, apostolic” church that is united with Christ in being a compassionate light unto the world.¹²³

The American Nones and Japanese Nationals have a similar view of relationships and sacredness. Even with all of the differences between the groups, ethical and religious matters emphasize interpersonal connections. This social web of relationships is the primary catalyst for many spiritual experiences. There can be an experience of the divine outside of other people, this is to be sure. However, the theophanies yielded by friends, family, and community have a life-changing impact on many members of both these groups. American Nones and Japanese Nationals connect with existence and daily

¹²¹ White, *The Rise of the Nones*.

¹²² White, *The Rise of the Nones*, 165.

¹²³ White, *The Rise of the Nones*, 167-168.

experience on a social level. In a very real way, the sacred is seen primarily through other people in community. They have similar views of how religion changes. The evolution is careful, and never quite removes the old from the new. This new still witnesses the theophanies of relationships all while still addressing the sacred from the soul.

Prayerfully, this project has shone a light on the spiritual lives of both the American Nones and the Japanese Nationals. Both the Japanese Nationals and the American Nones are interestingly similar with respect to the sacredness of human life and of nature. There are also similarities within sacred space and sacred time, but there are of course differences as well. The goal of this project is not to equate these two groups as the same. In fact, some may find it difficult to see how applying spiritual experiences from one culture to another makes sense or is useful. The argument of this project is not that these groups are the same, but that the unaffiliated nature of the American Nones is not exactly new. The reported rise is actually somewhat of a consequence of the enlightenment and postmodernism. But similar things have been going on in Japan for quite a long time. There is a holistic understanding of religion and culture in Japan and indeed much of the Far East. While it may seem new to the west, it is not entirely new unto the world. Indeed, it almost seems as if there is a Japanese way of doing religion in America that is subtly growing. This Japanese way in America is extremely intriguing and may yield more results if truly studied more closely.

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