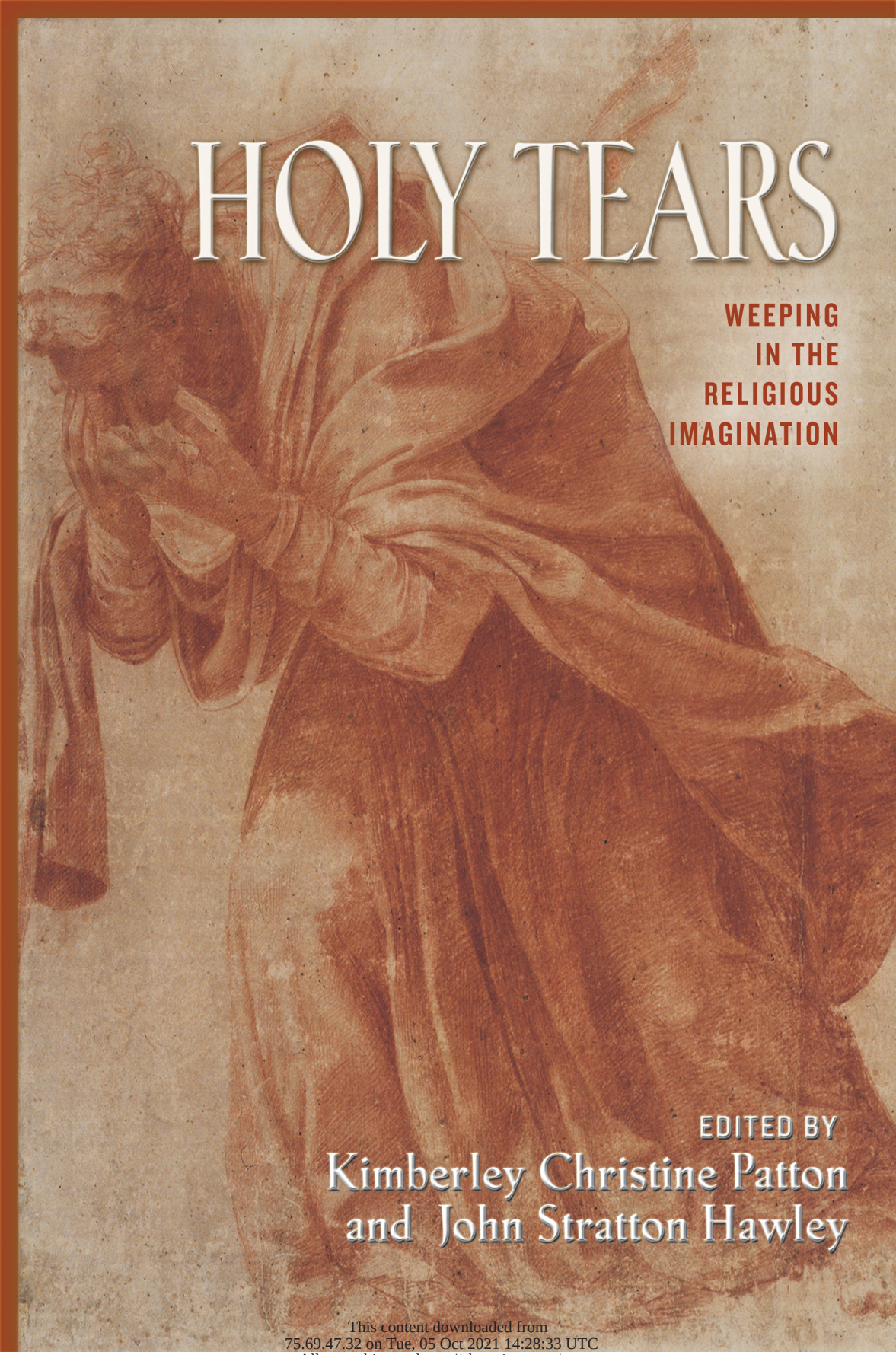


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HOLY TEARS

WEEPING IN THE RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

EDITED BY

Kimberley Christine Patton
and
John Stratton Hawley

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON AND OXFORD

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for

Nell Shapiro Hawley
Christina Eleanor Beck
Rosemary Yael Amira Beck
Constance Rose Uran

For you, beloved daughters,
may God wipe away every tear

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—From the day on which the Temple was destroyed
the gates of prayer have been closed, as it says,
Yea, when I cry and call for help He shutteth out my prayer.
But though the gates of prayer are closed,
the gates of weeping are not closed, as it says,
Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry;
keep not silence at my tears.
—Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Berakhot* 32b

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Professor Carol Zaleski of Smith College and Professor Steven Hopkins of Swarthmore College read the initial draft of the manuscript with great care and appreciation for the subject. We have profited greatly from their trenchant criticisms and suggestions, and we express our gratitude to them here.

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When, for a week, it seemed that the tape of the interview with Reverend Betsee Parker from Ground Zero was hopelessly corrupted, with no opportunity to rerecord, the careful technical work of Christina Bickford, Stanislav Gasanenko, and especially Lucian Tion at Barnard College Media Services saved the day. Kimberley Patton also thanks Gay Schoene for her friendship and courage during that ordeal, giving strength that allowed the editors boldly to attempt a re-creation of the lost interview before ultimately witnessing the restoration of the original.

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Jack Hawley wishes to acknowledge that the lion's share of editorial responsibility for this book has been borne by Kimberley Patton, from inception to completion. It has been she who carried the subject always in mind and believed in the project intensely. The book emerged primarily out of the wide and intimate network of intellectual friendships she has developed over the years. Kimberley was the editor almost entirely responsible for soliciting contributions from the authors who appear here; sometimes she also suggested revisions along the way. She arranged for the panel presentations at the American Academy of Religion that brought us together, presented the book proposal to the Press, drafted most of the introduction, and assembled the final manuscript for publication. She has refused, after repeating urgings, to accept a title page that would bear her name alone, but Jack wants to record that this has far less to do with justice than with generosity and a deep sense of collegiality.

For her part, Kimberley Patton wishes to thank Jack Hawley for his collaborative work on this project as coeditor. We have walked together every step of the way into the world of a topic in the study of religion that was new to us both, yet somehow deeply familiar; we have done so in fascination, laughter, sadness, and the occasional disagreement. Absent this mutual journey and Jack's willingness to undertake it, despite his eloquent and chronic misgivings, the book would never have been born: from its genesis in his tears shed singing Bach's devotional cantatas by way of public tribute to a retiring mentor, to myriad discussions about religious weeping between us by phone, letter, e-mail, in person, and even on the radio (a Canadian Broadcast Corporation special edition of the show *Tapestry,* recorded in Toronto in 2002), to our work together on the two AAR panels in the wake of September 11 and Jack's providential idea of including some theological reflection on the disaster in *Holy Tears,* to our resulting hours in New York City in 2002 and early 2003 in the presence of Betsee Parker, reliving with her the awesome story that appears here, dwelling in what Nehimia Polen refers to as "the mysticism of catastrophe"—and often weeping with her as we did.

Kimberley Patton writes, "Co-writing the introduction with Jack in an attempt to do justice to this collection of other scholars' superb, wide-ranging work on weeping, I find myself once again grateful beyond measure for all he has brought to this endeavor. And I am astonished by the ways in which the work—and the contemplation of the subject of weeping in the religious imagination—has strangely sustained rather than drained us.

"*Holy Tears* truly has had a 'life of its own,' one for which I cannot account, but which I think Jack Hawley and I have experienced, in our own very diferent ways, as a mystery."

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Introduction

Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley

"But though the gates of prayer (*sha'are tefillah*) are closed, the gates of weeping (*sha'are dim'ah*) are not closed." Isn't weeping a kind of prayer, a liquid entreaty? Yet it is not prayer, not utterance. Inchoate, messy, "running," a sign of being "overwhelmed" or helpless, even unable to speak ("choked up"), how could *tears* in this Talmudic passage, from a tradition that so enshrines the oral and written holy word, supersede *prayer?* How could weeping, born in a matrix of inarticulate despair, beat out praying—in its richly embroidered tapestry of memory, petition, and praise—as a better portal to heaven? In any number of the traditions examined in this cross-cultural, diachronic volume, tears carry not only power but unique power: God is unable to ignore them, and the psalmist is compelled to remind Him of this: *Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; keep not silence at my tears*.

On Tears in Religious Experience and Mythic Memory

Like all human body fluids, tears, as they flow through the religious imagination, are richly charged with symbolic meaning and ritual efficacy. The shedding of tears, a physiological function in response to intense emotion or physical pain, has metaphysical importance in religious thought and experience equal to that of other vital fluids that have borne far more intense scholarly scrutiny—the blood of sacrifice, childbirth, and menstruation, for example, or the charged fluids of semen or spit. Among the very earliest expressions of distress in the infant's range, tears remain a profound existential signifier at all stages of human life, particularly in the face of fear, loss, or despair. Crying is a response of the parasympathetic nervous system that helps return the stimulated organism to homeostasis. In much the same fashion rituals often encode tears as a *lysis*—a release or "unbinding"—of whatever might have exerted an impact on the religious community recently or even in the distant past.

Often tears seem an expression of surrender before the inexorable, but myth and tradition repeatedly point in the opposite direction, stressing the view that weeping can actually transform what had seemed fixed forever. The tears of the flame-born phoenix heal. The tears shed at death's harsh blow can resurrect, reversing even mortality. And often, when nothing else will work in conversation with the implacable gods, tears bridge the abyss between creatures and the source of their destiny. Feeling the Buddha's unbearable absence

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at the empty throne at Bodh Gaya or in a faded shadow in an Indian cave, the Chinese pilgrim who has journeyed so very far to see even a trace bursts into tears at the sight of the relics, sorrowing at his unworthiness in having been born so many centuries after the Realized One. In response to his weeping prostrations, a radiant image of the Buddha appears, one far more majestic than the evanescent shadow. The pilgrim's tears fall in response to sacred *absence,* yet create sacred presence. Trickster Coyote, desperately in love with a star, falls back into the center of the highest mountain peak when she screams her refusal to leave the sky; his heartbroken tears fill the hole, creating Crater Lake in Oregon. Emblems of powerlessness, tears nonetheless conjure power, and beyond that, fertility and wholeness. They soften the hard decrees of fate or seasonality by "watering" them. Leaking, rolling, they drip through the contours of human experience, responding to pain or ecstasy and drawing the attention of others to their source.

Tears are not limited to the intrahuman realm; they often play an efficacious or even theurgic role. Weeping can evoke divine response, especially that of compassion or mercy, where none had previously been forthcoming. Human tears provoke divine tears and transport the weeper, or bring rain in time of drought, or express social critiques too harsh and dangerous to say in any other mode. Commenting on the electrifying language of modern Greek lament, the anthropologist Loring Danforth writes that tears are "both water and poison . . . the ultimate mediator." They "both facilitate and block communication" and are "able to pass across the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead, the very boundary that they may also create."[1]

In turn, the powerful gods can themselves shed tears. When the God of Israel weeps, as He does in response to human catastrophe in texts ranging from the rabbinic to the Hasidic, a certain ultimacy is implied. In divine weeping, God joins human beings in a mystical "communion-in-suffering" that explodes questions of theodicy and instead both ratifies and transcends mortal grief.

In *Memoirs of the Blind,* Derrida elevates tears over sight as "the essence of the eye," writing, "The revelatory or apocalyptic blindness, the blindness that reveals the very truth of the eyes, would be gaze veiled by the tears."[2] As well as expressing the distress that comes from the heartbreak of earthly loss, tears shed in a religious context can both produce and represent nonattachment and enlightenment—a sign of a clarified mind, a heightened sensory perception, or an awareness of "the emptiness at the heart of the world." Tears blur the sight of the weeper yet paradoxically open the inner eye, producing a kind of "visionary blindness." Andrew Marvell's words come to life: "Thus let your streams o'erflow your springs, / Till eyes and tears be the same things: / And each the other's difference bears; / These weeping eyes, those seeing tears."[3]

Weeping may act as a conduit between realms, literally "carrying" prayers to the remote reaches of the other world, whether conceived as chthonic or

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celestial; this is clearly their function in the classical Greek and Aztec funerary fields. They can be necromantic, summoning the "thirsty" dead and in a sense revivifying them for the sake of the living weeper in need of ancestral communion, advice, or intervention. They can be ethical, releasing communal tensions or reinscribing necessary social boundaries. They can be personal and physiological. But in many religious traditions, tears are also cosmological. They participate in the interaction of the various planes of existence, in particular the watery ones; they can even integrate these planes. Through their very liquidity—the life force that is expressed and then lost as it is shed—tears are homologized to sacrificial blood, to mother's milk, to semen, to bodies of water of every kind, and to raindrops, which are the "tears of the sky," linked to the vital cycle of drought and rainfall. The presence or even manipulation of weeping, especially in sacrificial contexts, can thus serve a potent supplicatory function through homology.

Lawrence Sullivan explores this constellation of ideas in his commentary on the apocalyptic chronicles of the late sixteenth-century Andean Guaman Poma, who wrote in his history of his people, "To write is to weep." Sullivan associates weeping with other nontextual symbolic vehicles such as dreams, flowers, sounds, pottery, and boat building. For Guaman Poma each of these connects to a particular mode of thinking, and collectively, says Sullivan, they function as "material spiritualities":

> Guaman Poma's notion of the effectiveness of weeping springs from Inca concepts of what it means to weep. They arose from images of the first destruction of the world, sometime after it was first created. The dancing stars of the Milky Way and the sacrificed animal constellations (for example, Mother Llama and her crying child, Baby Llama) whose tears stream profusely from their bright eyes, appeared on the horizon for the first time at the beginning of the deluge, the first rainy season that initiated a New Age. This is not just literary metaphor. Perhaps one could call it metonym. Whatever the topic tag we apply, the symbolism of weeping is coinvolved here with the material reality of flooding rainwaters and a new quality of time. When he says, "To write is to weep," Guaman Poma uses the efficacious power of weeping to understand what writing might be and what the quality of time is, for which writing stands as a symptom. Guaman Poma's approach turns our notion of text on its head because he uses other vehicles of intelligibility, in this case ritual weeping, to circumscribe the limits of scripture and to find out where the boundaries of text as vehicle of meaning might be.[4]

Sullivan thus highlights the religious potential of weeping. Far from being inchoate because it does not involve words as its primary thrust, weeping is "a nontextual basis for reflecting on the human spirit's engagement with the world." It is "a new hermeneutics of culture," "a mode of intelligibility," "a symbolic vehicle for the full load of human experience."[5] As vehicles of feelings that go too deep for language—the sorrow of exile, the sparkle of ecstasy,

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the weight of memory, the wound of empathy—tears resist the abstracting intellectual process along with every other alchemy of sublimation. They serve as gatekeepers to a level of emotion that, like holiness, eludes a certain range of normalcy. Yet at the same time, weeping "guards the gates," preventing open communication and complicating efforts at translation or interpretation. Tears resist grammar; they are ineffable. Something about tears tells us that we cannot really experience the pain of another, any more than we can appropriate memory. Tears are subjectively sealed—and yet they are contagious.

Goals and Scope of the Present Volume

Recent years have seen a swell of interest in the uniquely human habit of shedding tears. Two books in particular have attracted wide attention: Tom Lutz's broad-spectrum *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*[6] and James Elkins's controversial challenge to the dry-as-dust world of formal art history, *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings*.[7] Although both of these works touch on the importance of religion in comprehending tears—Lutz regards religion as an important aspect of their social history, and Elkins acknowledges the fundamentally religious impulse that lies beneath human emotional responses to art—neither author addresses the connection between weeping and praying in any depth.

This book attempts to do just that, examining in social and historical context the role played by tears, weeping, and lamentation in the life of religion. Half of the essays collected here were first presented in two successive panels presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion—at Denver in 2001 and at Toronto in 2002. Because the field is new, we added to this germinal group by commissioning articles from other scholars whose work we knew to have touched on the theme of religious weeping in the past, even at points when their primary attention was focused on other topics. Considering the ubiquitousness of tears in the literature and practice of religion and in the "mind" of myth, it is odd that weeping has received so little sustained attention. Yet as far as we are aware, this book is the first comparative foray into the field.

Our goal in *Holy Tears* is to chart theoretical grounds for approaching the category of weeping in the comparative and historical study of religion. Some of the many questions with which these essays contend are:

Is religious weeping primal, or is it culturally constructed?
Is it universal?
Is it spontaneous?
What does weeping *do* in the narrative of lived religion?
What is the relationship of weeping to vision and its loss, and to visionary insight?

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Is weeping a form of speech, "in the sense that it is postulated as an entity in language where its meaning to social actors is also elaborated"? Or is it instead an extralinguistic kind of communication to levels of experience that are naturally aligned to the ineffable or holy? Is it more potent than speech?[8]

With their deeply social function—catalysts of and symbols for profound bereavement, erotic or mystical yearning, liminal movement and transformation, collective reconstitution after trauma, or particular states of spiritual attainment—how are tears distinguished from other bodily fluids in the religious imagination?

What is the relationship between religious weeping and gender, and what are the reasons for that relationship in any given context?

Is weeping always related in some way to an awareness of finitude and death, or can it play other roles altogether?

Do human tears affect the superhuman realms—the powers, the gods, or cosmic wheels?

Does God—or do the gods—ever cry? If so, when, and why?

In opening up this vast terrain for comparative analysis, *Holy Tears* can by no means be exhaustive, only emblematic. This volume comprises a wide range of essays on tears past and present. It includes discussions of ancient and modern Greek lamentation and funerary practices along with classical Mexica cosmology and prayerful petition. It explores biblical, Talmudic, and Hasidic notions of God's weeping. It investigates the "poetics and politics" of tears in early and medieval Japan, drawing attention to the peculiarly Buddhist ideal of shedding spiritual tears of nonattachment, as in the practice of *shikan* meditation. Elsewhere in the volume one meets the passionate, merit-bearing tears of Indian and Pakistani Shīʿī mourning assemblies (*majlis*es) in response to the recitation of poetry evoking the death of the Prophet's grandson Ḥusain fourteen centuries ago at the Battle of Karbalā. Quite a different kind of ritualized weeping appears in the "strange tears" a bride is expected to weep in Yorùbán marriage rituals (*ẹkuń ìyàwó)* in Nigeria. As in Hindu wedding ceremonies but in this case even more systematically, she must allow grief to rise as a counterpoint to the "organized joy" pertaining elsewhere in the ritual, in order to express the effects of being separated from her family, her home, and all that is beloved and familiar.

Regarding the Christian tradition, the volume touches on religious tears as interpreted in both Western and Eastern Churches. For the West there is an essay on the public spirituality of the wailing mystic Margery Kempe and another on the iconology of the tears of Mary Magdalene in medieval and Renaissance art and theology. The latter are surprisingly retrieved and reinterpreted in the light of modern war in Picasso's *Weeping Woman*. For Eastern Christianity we present two essays on the shedding of tears as a central theme in Orthodox mysticism, monasticism, and devotional theology.

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Our interest in this topic was born out of two very different "streams" that converged one day in 2000 on the occasion of the retirement of John Braisted Carman at Harvard Divinity School, beloved teacher, colleague, and mentor to both editors. At his teacher's request, Jack Hawley constructed a bridge between the intense Hindu religiosity called *bhakti*, a field to which John Carman had introduced him, and the choral works of J. S. Bach; the paper was called "Bachti." In doing so, Hawley undertook to sing a few bars from Bach's cantatas, but found he had to stop a few times as tears welled up. He later apologized to Kimberley Patton, who had organized the event, but she responded by rejecting the apology on the grounds that weeping, after all, plays a significant role in the life of religion and not least in the cantatas of Bach himself. Thus spake Patton, the comparativist theologian of religious experience, and Hawley thought it wouldn't hurt to listen.

We discussed this topic more at lunch, and as it seemed it would not die, we went on to propose our first panel in Denver, where essays were offered by Gary Ebersole, Kay Read, Gay Lynch, and Rabbi Nehemia Polen. Jack Hawley responded to these papers, which seemed so strangely knit together that we preserved their order in this volume. Kimberley Patton could not preside as scheduled, as she was due that week to deliver her second daughter, whose infant tears in homologous relationship to repentance are the subject of her essay, "Howl, Weep and Moan, and Bring it Back to God: Holy Tears in Eastern Orthodox Tradition." Her sister Laurie Patton, of Emory University, chaired in her stead.

Time had conspired to make this first AAR "weeping" panel an unusually potent event: it occurred only two months after the tragedies of September 11, 2001. The air in the room was thick. Tears welled close to the surface for those who had traveled there by plane and who still lived in the collective shock of what planes had done that bright fall day. This shock and its aftershocks seemed somehow able to gather to themselves the individual, personal losses and tragedies of both speakers and members of the audience.

Gay Lynch, whose son Andrew died in his sleep at age twenty-one owing to undetected myocarditis, explicitly dedicated to his memory her paper, "Why Do Your Eyes Not Run Like a River?" on ancient and modern Greek funerary lamentation. Andrew's father, John, and his closest friend were also present. In the mood of acknowledged and unacknowledged grief that prevailed in November 2001, many there felt an oscillation between the personal and the transpersonal that opened naturally onto the realm of religious expression. It was an uncanny experience, even in a performative ritual framed by an academic panel at the annual meeting of a professional organization: twenty-minute presentations staged between the movable walls of a convention center that could have been located in any American city of a certain size.

The wake of grief occasioned by September 11 and the violence and devastation we have recently seen in Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel and Palestine, and

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elsewhere throughout the world continue to offer a poignant context for this volume. We conclude it with a meditation on the theology of weeping that emerged from pastoral responses to the World Trade Center tragedy, as described in our interview with Reverend Betsee Parker, the Episcopal priest who became Head Chaplain of the New York City Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and leader of the multifaith chaplaincy team at Ground Zero. Reverend Parker and her associates have blessed every human remain discovered at the site to date and have helped shoulder the pain of families and friends of the victims of September 11 who traveled to New York from around the world.

Sometimes in the ritual context, as at the AAR panel in 2001, personal weeping can break through situational boundaries and become transpersonal, as though one could experience the sorrows of the world, the weeping of all humanity. Something like this occurs in the account that the Oglala Sioux visionary Black Elk gave John Neihardt of his first attempt at healing after the great initiatory visions of his youth. A man named Cuts-to-Pieces begged him to try to save his desperately ill son. In response, Black Elk says, he "cried to the Spirit of the World, making low thunder on the drum" as he invoked the powers of the four directions and of the "sacred, cleansing wind." He remarks that although he later realized that "only one power would have been enough. . . . I was so eager to help the sick little boy that I called on every power that there is."

> I had been facing the west, of course, while sending a voice. Now I walked to the north and to the east and to the south, stopping there where the source of all life is and where the good red road begins.
>
> Standing there I sang thus:
>
> "In a sacred manner I have made them walk.
> A sacred nation lies low.
> In a sacred manner I have made them walk.
> A sacred two-legged, he lies low.
> In a sacred manner, he shall walk."
>
> While I was singing this I could feel something queer all through my body, something that made me want to cry for all unhappy things, and there were tears on my face.[9]

Only a few figures are able to bear for long this grief, this "something that made me want to cry for all unhappy things," which can include an awareness of the world's sin or brokenness, and such holy persons generally respond with weeping: Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as *mater dolorosa* is a paradigm of this cosmic weeping. Weeping is also a gift *from* God, as the Eastern Christian desert monastic tradition insists, or even a sign of God's favor, as Santha Bhattacharji remarks in her essay on Margery Kempe, a medieval Englishwoman whose life was surrendered to extreme, often disruptive weeping. Diane Apostolos-

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Cappadona explores in her essay the *gratia lacrimarum* and the artistic portrayal of Mary Magdelene throughout medieval art; tears became an artistic attribute of certain figures, just as the palm is symbolic of martyrdom or the halo identifies a saint in a triptych.

Other traditions, however—or aspects of the same traditions that single out the weeping of holy persons as special—hold up this unbounded awareness as the very mark of what it means to be an awakened being and consider that it is incumbent upon every religious person. In Shīʿī Islam, for example, to weep for Ḥusain is to weep for the world: this is weeping that must be learned, cultivated, and drawn forth as an act of paradigmatic submission (*islam*) by all. "Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside," writes the Arab American poet Naomi Shihab Nye,

> You must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
> You must wake up with sorrow.
> You must speak to it till your voice
> catches the thread of all sorrows
> and you see the size of the cloth.[10]

Shīʿī Muslims in Iraq annually carry before them an enormous cloth stained with the blood they have drawn by their own self-flagellation as they walk on pilgrimage to Karbalā to mourn there the martyr's death of ʿAlī, Ḥusain, and their family. The "thread of all sorrows," the "size of the cloth," is displayed for all the world to see.

Comparative Trajectories through Holy Tears

The first essayist in our volume, Gary Ebersole, who has made religious weeping an object of research for many years, has cautioned repeatedly against the superficial comparative approach of choosing a theme, then lining up examples where this theme seems to occur, like stuffed birds in a natural history museum. This method fails to get at the complex interplay of similarity, difference, and nuance that actually begins to emerge as one reflects on any comparative topos. We attempt to elucidate a few of these here and invite readers to formulate any others that may come to mind as they work their way through the book.

Weeping: Spontaneous vs. Scripted; Private vs. Public

Consider the complexity with which spontaneity and ritual expectation confront each other in religious weeping. At a superficial level—superficial even if directly named as such in a particular religious context—they seem oppo-

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sites. Yet if one pauses to think, they almost never emerge as truly separable. Weeping in response to unexpected, collective trauma facilitates the experience of individual pain and, as it alternates with the discourse of group lament, affords an outlet for depths of grief that might otherwise be overwhelming both to individuals and to the communities in which they gather. There is no reason to think that personal pain is the true fountain or stimulus for weeping as a religious phenomenon, any more than we should regard the self as individually, biologically given.[11] The discourses of grief are collective, and historically, weeping has often been highly scripted as an aspect of socioreligious expression. As our Japanese, Mexica, Greek, and Yorùbán materials show, many traditions insist on the shedding of nonspontaneous tears, as in nuptial, sacrificial, and funerary rituals. Clearly spontaneity and authenticity are not universally equated in religious constructions of weeping, as they seem to be in the West.

American or Northern European readers may find it initially surprising to learn how often weeping is understood as a *collective* religious act, with "work" to perform that goes far beyond the personal, far beyond what private subjective emotion can fuel. In the Mexica thought world, as Kay Read reveals in her essay, "Productive Tears: Weeping Speech, Water, and the Underworld in Mexica Tradition": "The good speech sounds spoken by tears ultimately produced good results in people, crops, and the cosmos. Bad weeping sounds occurred at inopportune moments and at out-of-place locations, and they resulted in bad things." On behalf of every infant, from the womb until coming-of-age, Aztec adults wept to the goddesses of childbirth and to the night wind, the lord of the Near and the Nigh. At that point the torch was passed; children were taught to weep also, as the elders and their students did, for the sustenance of the world: "It is said that the lord of the Near, of the Nigh, yet hears, receives their weeping, their sorrow, their sighs, their prayers, because it is said they are good of heart."

Funerary weeping is an excellent example of the collective work of weeping. In northern industrialized climates we are offended, if somewhat intrigued, by the concept of paid mourners at a funeral. Lutz writes in *Crying,*

> The relative quiet of funerals in England, Scandinavia, and the U.S., for instance, has been explained as the result of an individualist culture in which emotion is largely seen as a private fact of life. The culture in which professionals are hired with the idea that the more mourning the merrier, goes this line of reasoning, are cultures in which the community comes together to heal what it sees as a communal wound. The Chinese belief that mourners' tears comfort the dead, too, suggests that crying at a funeral is done not out of an individual sense of loss but because of the community's sense of what must be done. Our lack of weeping is a mark of how little we value the community.[12]

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Funerary weeping can be, as Gay Lynch says, "a crucial non-verbal signification . . . [that] catalyzes the transfer of lament discourse to another singer. . . . Besides expressing emotion, . . . lamenters are also responsible for keeping the memory of the deceased alive. . . . [T]ears carry the dead forward in the stream of life." Weeping carries with it "a moral necessity" that ensures the well-being of the dead in the afterlife and ensures that they will not be forgotten: tears are imagined in Shīʿīte poetry as a "chain" that, to quote Bard, "binds mourners and those they mourn." Aminah Ja'far of Hyderabad, a professional *majlis* reciter, sings, "The chain of tears of sorrow for Ḥusain is never severed / Fātimah's handkerchief stays damp forever." Jacob Olúpọ̀nà in his essay with Ṣọlá Ajíbádé draws our attention to the fact that in Òyó-Yorùbá culture, "Tears and ritual expression generate a link to the spiritual world of the ancestors." The weeping at death may even do more: In Babylonian Talmud *Shabbat* 105b, God collects and stores away the tears of those who weep for a worthy person. Herbert Basser tells us that commentators on this passage say the tears are stored to resurrect the dead at the Last Judgment.[13]

Yet the tension between individual and communal emotion is electric with possibility. Basser makes this the central problem of his essay, "A Love for All Seasons: Weeping in Jewish Sources," observing: "For a personal loss one has to go through a process of diminished mourning while for the memory of a national loss one has to go through a process of expanded mourning. One's natural tendencies are at all times challenged: intensified when weak, softened when overbearing. What seem to be polar opposites are in fact analogous correspondences between the private loss and the national loss—not simple converses but complex conversations between prescribed reactions."

Ritual Weeping as Social or Existential Protest

Following suit, ritual weeping as a performative act may encode aesthetic and social values, as well as express ideal or appropriate hierarchical relationships; Jacob Olúpọ̀nà's ethnography of Yorùbán tears shows how they "serve as a medium for bestowing communal values on motherhood and virginity." But weeping can just as frequently challenge these with equal force, showcasing sites of contestation. Olúpọ̀nà also shows how Yorùbán weeping serves as "a metaphor for conveying deep-seated cultural angst about gender relations, social tension, and familial conflict," as the bride-to-be, lamenting her lost childhood, kneels weeping before her parents to entreat their blessings and those of the gods:

> Father! I come to receive my blessings and prayer wishes,
> That I may not give birth to "born-to-die" children,
> That I may not be infertile,

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That the man I am about to marry will love me,
That the parents-in-law I meet in my new home will love me!
Blessings upon me this day, today!

The fact of weeping indicates that we are dealing here with a rupture in the social fabric; but the fact that weeping is expected, even required, shows that culture (or religion) nonetheless understands itself as being able to accommodate and encompass that tension.

Yet what of crying as an expression of personal emotion, inaccessible interiority? In the West we may readily resonate with Tom Lutz's observation that "crying allows us to turn away from the world and toward our own bodily sensations, our own feelings. Our feelings overwhelm the world, or at least our ability to process any new information about the world."[14] Yet Gary Ebersole worries about any tendency to think in terms of emotion when studying ritualized tears, in that the word carries with it our own cultural notions of individual, interior affectivity. Rather, ritual weeping may display "social, political, or gendered, moral, and even cosmological aspects" of predetermined hierarchical relationships. As Ebersole says, "Ritualized weeping is a culturally choreographed act, a stylized . . . expression of emotion. . . . I cannot say too strongly that instances of ritual weeping do not provide us with any access to emotions pure and simple." Ritual weeping is never a private act; it always assumes an audience. Ebersole reminds us that even the psalmist, when giving voice to his own distress, weeps before YHWH. Furthermore, weeping can and does operate within aesthetic frameworks and political expectations. So in religion, crying often turns the individual not *away* from the world but *toward* it, in communication of something vital, something upon which life—or its very meaning—depends.

Although Ebersole's caution about "emotion" with respect to "ritual tears" may be well grounded, we do not believe that a complete divorce between the two terms is necessary. Rather, these essays seem to ask us to proceed in the direction he himself marks out, as would also be indicated by the introduction to a collection edited by Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Language and the Politics of Emotion*.[15] The editors argue that emotion and discourse should not be "treated as separate variables, the one pertaining to the private world of individual consciousness and the other to the public social world."[16] Emotions are intimately involved in the triage of "sociability and power."[17] Collective religious authority, or even the state per se (the two of course often being historically inseparable), has always had a vested interest in regulating the public discourse of emotion, including weeping, and as both Ebersole and Basser show, protracted grief can prove threatening to the empire or to the ongoing life and "immunity" of the religious community.

At the same time, as in the case of Suseri-bime's controlled poetry of tears

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(Ebersole), or the Nigerian bride's tears in the marriage rites (Olúpọ̀nà), or the long, rich history of Greek female lamentation (Lynch), ritualized weeping can be subversive. It is able—and even expected—to protest structures of gender domination and other arbitrary, dehumanizing kinds of oppression. Protected by the ritual container, such critique is unassailable, whereas it might have been lethal if it had been expressed in other ways.[18]

Furthermore, as Amy Bard observes, tears can be socially scripted precisely for the purpose of overwhelming the partitions that give any society its structure: "Tears can . . . express, activate or intensify, and spread an emotional response. . . . Boundaries between officiants, authorities or orators, on one hand, and listeners or ordinary participants, on the other, never rigidly demarcated, become increasingly fluid as the *majlis* progresses. Ultimately, tears mark a realm that *all majlis*-goers enter, a realm where words cannot go."

"A realm where words cannot go": Time and again in these essays, one encounters not so much a validation of the postmodern idea of tears as *a mode of language* but instead the startling insistence on *the superiority of tears to language*. At the same time, there is a recognition that the two, words and tears, are intimately entwined in the religious imagination.

The Genders of Weeping

No partition in society is as universally observable as the one that separates the worlds of women and men—and invites them, by the same token, to interact. Not that this partition is always the same, but some conceptual and social division along the biological fault line seems universal. Tears spread themselves lavishly and obtrusively along this border, perhaps coming as no surprise, given their greatly ambivalent potentialities. In essay after essay in this book it emerges that weeping—more so perhaps than any other physiological response that all human beings share—is susceptible to parsing out along gender lines. But this scarcely happens in the same way in every instance. Such constructions vary from culture to culture and time to time.

At first glance this protean claim seems debatable. It is striking how often public, collective, ritual lamentation is assigned to women, perhaps especially in regard to funerary weeping. This happened in ancient Japan, Greece, and Mexico, and it can be observed in modern-day India, Greece, Iran, and many other places. It is scripturalized, too. In the Hebrew Bible, for instance, we meet the figure of Rachel weeping for her children in exile and we hear the "daughters of Jerusalem" wailing for the demise of that paradigmatic city, symbol of societal cohesion and divine-human concourse.[19] When Margery Kempe is taken aback at her own extravagant displays of tearful agony, as Santha Bhattacharji reports, she hears Christ reassuring her that she "is to be an example to other sinners, so that they might know that whatever they have done, they need not fall into despair." Her lamentations are intended to be public, and in

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Margery's world, they are intended to be female. The sufferings of Christ are the prime stimulus for her tears, but it is the example of Jesus' mother weeping at the foot of the cross that serves as her principal catalyst and guide. Similarly, when Radha is deified in the course of Hindu history, the tears she sheds before her female friends to bewail an absent Krishna are not an embarrassment to her divinity but part and parcel of what makes her perfect.

Yet it would be a mistake to think that weeping—either publicly or privately—is simply the province of women. In the ancient Israelite tradition, Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Jeremiah are made exemplary by their tears; and for Christians the same can be said not only for figures like David (again) and Peter but for Jesus himself. Similarly, as William Chittick makes clear, Abū Bakr and the Prophet Muḥammad serve as paragons of public weeping in the world of Islam. One might plead, in the Christian case, that it is no accident that Jesus was moved to speak about the cleansing power of tears as he reacted to the behavior of a woman (Luke 7:49): the weeping of the sinful woman seems more visceral, more natural, more unguarded than the weeping of men. But one would also have to reckon with the fact that in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, nothing of that naturalness is lacking when Muḥammad's tears are described. In many societies, Muslim and otherwise, it is thought inappropriate for women to act in the public realm with the same degree of ease as men. This might explain why "emotional," discourse-breaking acts like weeping would especially characterize women's entry into the public sphere, while men are apt to hold the public stage through "ceremonial" acts that perpetuate and reconstitute a social system.

Yet *majlis* weeping for the slain Ḥusain, grandson of the Prophet, is both emotional and ceremonial, and is hardly confined to women. It and similar acts of lamentation seem to concede that there are times when open bereavement is the only possible response for either sex. Bishop Kallistos Ware writes in his essay, "An Obscure Matter": "In the tradition of the Christian East outward and visible weeping is not on the whole considered weak and unmanly, and it is not associated particularly with women. Nor . . . is it regarded as embarrassing. An Orthodox Christian, today as in the past, feels free to weep openly at a funeral and indeed at church services generally."

Still, the men and women of Shī'īte Islam display their agonies in gender-partitioned spaces; and generally speaking, women's worlds tend to be more pervaded by tears than men's. When Hayyim Nachman Bialik tells of how his mother's tears, kneaded into the dough she baked, somehow laid the foundation of his spiritual education, a tremor of recognition is apt to be felt by sons brought up in religious worlds quite different from his. Herbert Basser is our reporter here, and when he goes on to relate how the wife of Rabbi Rehumi, separated from her husband, wept tears powerful enough to cause the man's demise, it is hard to imagine that the story could have been told with the genders reversed. True, as Basser explains, this tale has a broad resonance: "The

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falling of the tear from the eye, separating from our bodies, is like a death experience." But that does not displace its specifically gendered meaning, namely, that women's sometimes painful devotion is the real basis for the religious learning that absorbs men.

It is worth pondering the possible causes of this cross-cultural, cross-religious tendency to associate tears especially with women. Should one think of it in structural terms? Does the similarity between grammatical speech and the structured public life carried on by and for men make the less public, less structured realm of women a natural analog for speech-disrupting tears? Or is it biological? Might the permeability and "wetness" of a woman's body—socially refracted, of course—suggest that tears merely express and extend the physical efficacy that is peculiarly hers? There are no simple answers to questions like these, however persistently they arise. And to repeat, the gendered constructions of tears do not always align.

Absence and Presence

We have already mentioned the symbiosis between the absence and then presence of the Buddha reflected in the tearful outburst of the pilgrim Hsüan-tsang. David Eckel uses this historical account as a springboard to tease out the significations of these ideas in Mahayana philosophical thought in his essay, "Hsüan-tsang's Encounter with the Buddha: A Cloud of Philosophy in a Drop of Tears." Similarly, Mary Magdalene, standing in John's Gospel as the first person in the radiant yet occulted presence of the risen Christ, fails to recognize him and weeps bitterly for his absence. Given all we have said, it becomes plain that it is no accident that in that account, the first words uttered by Jesus after his resurrection to life as a human being were, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Haunting in their tenderness, these two simple questions revolve around the central existential challenges in human experience: how to deal with both the presence and the absence of God. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona shows how, in Western art and tradition from the fifteenth century onward, Mary Magdalene becomes "*the* female weeper . . . whose bodily contortions and facial expressions symbolized the human conditions of anguish, fear, terror, regret, and sorrow as well as the salvation of 'the gift of tears.'" Tears are her visual attribute. They flow in penitence at her conversion and in her wilderness solitude, and then again at the Crucifixion, raising her to the status of exemplary Christian in paintings such as Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* or Titian's *Saint Mary Magdalene* or Caravaggio's *Penitent Magdalene*. Whether contrite or sorrowing, the Magdalen responds to acute forms of separation from God.

Weeping is a primordial emblem of such separation, a root metaphor. In Judaism it is a frequent attribute of *galut*, the experience of exile from Paradise, from the Promised Land, from home. Herbert Basser explores the weeping of

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exile and the sadness of Rachel in the Book of Jeremiah, "a voice heard in the wilderness, weeping for her children, because they are no more." In Rachel's lament for her children in exile, in her loss of loved ones and of home, the majestic heritage of the earlier weeping city goddesses of Sumer is heard. There is Ninlil: "Alas for my city, alas for my house. . . . Ur has been destroyed, its people have been dispersed!" And there is Inanna: "I will cry woe, I will cry oh; I will cry oh again and again; I will cry oh for my house, I will cry oh for my city." Again, "The bird has its nesting place, but I—my young are dispersed."[20] In Sufi poetry, as we learn in William Chittick's essay, "Weeping in Classical Sufism," the primordiality of exile is represented by Adam himself, and his tears are its sign: "The first of all strangers was Adam, the forerunner of all those who grieve was Adam, the father of all the weepers was Adam." Similarly in Orthodox Christianity, as Kimberley Patton shows, Adam's lament outside the gates of Eden is chanted at the dawn of Lent, the season of reckoning and repentance culminating in the drama of Christ's Passion, death, harrowing of hell, and resurrection.

The lost Eden need not be imagined as a fixed, originating place in topographical space, yet it is true that the idyllic world of Braj, where the Hindu god Krishna spent his childhood, tends to function in this way. What is different, however, is that in this mythology it is not humanity (here Adam's role is played by the female *gopī*s, the cowherd girls of Braj who were drawn so intensely to Krishna) that casts itself out but God (that is, Krishna) who departs. The heartbreaking withdrawal of God the lover from the soul is the fulcrum of Jack Hawley's exploration of the uncontrollable crying of the *gopī*s. Their reaction to Krishna's unbearable absence is celebrated in the works of the sixteenth-century poet Sūrdās and his contemporary Mīrābāī, who is described in the hagiographical literature as "a latter-day *gopī*." Their passionately longing tears, compared in the *bhakti* poetry to monsoon floods, generate "a landscape all their own": "Our tears, too, without shores to restrain them, overrun their bodice-banks, flood our breasts."

This yearning, called *viraha*, resonates with the Sufi notion of *ḥurqa* presented by William Chittick, a term that describes the agony of separation from the Beloved. At every turn upon its "Path" Sufi thought ratifies the idea of, as Hawley says of Krishna's *gopī*s, "separation by love as a life-and-death matter." This Sufi-Vaishnava analogy has not gone unnoticed by adherents of the two traditions. In South Asia they are neighbors—and sometimes more than neighbors, as Muslims and Hindus sing each other's devotional weeping songs.

Weeping as the Generation of Water

The traditions covered in this collection do not fail to notice that tears are water whose source, the eyes, is the powerful organ of seeing and knowing, and

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often the primary means of being seen and known. The production of tears is thus often homologized to other kinds of waters: rain, lakes, the ocean, celestial waters, and the "moist" underworld. As Kay Read notes, Mexica artists drew tears in exactly the same way as rivers, and one possible meaning of the word most frequently used for "tears" (*ixayotl*) is "face-water." This homology finds perhaps its most poignant expression in the four months before the rains came, beginning in early February (Atlcahualo, the month of "Abandoned Water"). These were the months when children were sacrificed so that the rains would return each year, and if the sacrifice was to be efficacious, tears had to be shed. If the small victims cried during their long walk up the seven mountains surrounding the Valley of Mexico, the mountains after which they were named, it was said that it would "surely rain"; children's tears were necessary for the rains to come and the people to survive. This is perhaps the harshest example in the history of religion of the power of tears, and yet by the same token it is perhaps the most vivid.

With their symbolism of flooding and washing, tears cleanse and purify, so much so that in the Abrahamic traditions they are often the sina qua non of repentance, and in contemplative strands of Hinduism and Buddhism the hallmark of celestial insight into the nature of things. Similarly, the twelfth-century Persian Qur'ānic commentor Maybudī wrote, "Wash the heart with the water of regret and grief so that you may reach the greatest purification." Mechthild von Magdeburg, a late thirteenth-century German nun, saw the suffering of souls in purgatory and asked, as Moshe Barasch puts it, "How can they be helped?" Barasch goes on to report the answer: "She asks God, and his reply is, by bathing them in tears, in tears of love."[21] Barasch associates this with the Talmudic exegesis of Ezekiel 9:4, to the effect that weeping washes sin's mark from a person's face.

The dead are thirsty; tears slake their thirst. In modern Greek thought, the dead perish from "withering thirst." This idea draws from the ancient Greek Lake of Memory, fed by the tears of the bereaved in the upper world, connecting it with the thirst and dryness of Hades. As Gay Lynch writes, "[I]t is the mourner's moral duty to weep sufficient tears to make a lake or a spring to record the thirst of the dead." Margaret Alexiou recorded a modern lament, pregnant with the tone of reproach so familiar in these songs, whose words gave Lynch the title of her essay:

> Why do you stand there, . . . like strangers?
> Why do your eyes not run like a river,
> so that your tears become a lake and make a cool spring,
> for the unwashed to be washed, for the thirsty ones to drink?

Other bodily liquids such as milk, semen, or blood can be homologized to water and hence to tears, so one finds tears interchanged with these in various

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aspects of the religious imagination. As Lynch explains, the tears that drip from the eyes can also be symbolically represented by the drops of oil poured onto a grave from a slender libation vessel, the *lēkythos*, that is left there as a permanent grave offering. This monument is understood to be able to start the flow of "tears" when flesh-and-blood mourners have to return to their homes and resume the business of living. The connection between tears and other liquids also appears prominently in Amy Bard's study of *muḥarram* performances. In 1997 in Lahore, Pakistan, she recorded a lament for Ḥusain's son Akbar that spoke of tears' inadequate ability to quench the thirst of the martyrs dying a hot, cruel death in the desert of Karbalā:

> Oh, my lion, you never obtained the pleasures of youth . . .
> Not a drop of liquid, except for the shedding of tears, did you get
> You were raised drinking milk to your heart's content, then denied water

Bard observes that in this formulation mother's milk (the "milk debt" that children owe their mothers, gorily acquitted in the premature death of Akbar), the blood of martyrdom, and the shedding of tears by surviving mourners are structurally collapsed and interchanged in the laments, with any one liquid conjuring the other. She points out that this economy of interchangeable liquids is a major theme in the *marṡiyah* genre of literature and performance, the object of her study.

Weeping vs. Crying

Thus far we have used "weeping" and "crying" interchangeably, but many traditions distinguish between them. Buddhists in medieval Japan saw weeping as a catalyst for and sign of clear perception of the world, achieved through meditation, while they understood crying to be one of the hallmarks of egotistical attachment to worldly bonds—passions and all. Following out this distinction in Western Christian art, Apostolos-Cappadona observes that saintly weeping, the dignified weeping of transcendence, had "distinctive bodily postures and motions": quiet sitting, "measured breaths . . . the sounds of silence." Crying was quite a different thing. In its presence, "the entire body [was made] to signify the total breakdown or letting go of all societal and engendered modes of behavior. . . . [L]achrymal effluvium clogs the crier's nose and mouth. . . . [S]he gasps for breath. . . . Sounds of distress—sobs, wails, shrieks—emanate from her mouth. . . . Her body is wracked with tension, tremors, and the muscular contractions associated with states of fear, stress, loss, or despair."

In this dichotomy, weeping signifies a kind of spiritual trust, a profound insight into the order of things, whereas crying signifies its opposite. In a contrast that is similar but not so polarized, the Eastern Christian tradition seems

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at various points in its devotional history to distinguish between the "gift of tears," which flow quietly in response to celestial stimulus, and the heaving sobs that are the fruit of the lower passions; however, the anguish that consumes body and soul when at last the heavy awareness of one's own sinfulness breaks through the ego's defenses is undeniably a form of spiritual weeping.

By no means is the distinction upheld in every tradition: as Santha Bhattacharji shows in her essay, Margery Kempe most certainly represented her passionate, full-bodied, audible, and sermon-disrupting wailing as a gift from God, ratified in numerous visions of Christ and of the Virgin Mary, who said as much. Margery's highly physical weeping in response to "the hair shirt in her heart," the contrition she understood to have been given to her by Christ, assumes at times a deeply intercessory character. She wept, sometimes two hours at a time, not only for her own sins but for the sins and physical sufferings of humanity, for souls in purgatory. And she assures us in her autobiography that this weeping is efficacious. Christ tells her, "I have ordained you to kneel before the Trinity to pray for the whole world, for many hundred thousand souls will be saved by your prayers."

The Weeping of God

One might think that when the Qur'ān says, "[I]t is He who makes to laugh and to weep"—a "cosmic pair," in Chittick's term—it is merely affirming that God is the source of all emotions. But for Muslims, this is taken to mean that God actually has a special love for those who weep, since to cry is to exhibit human sensitivity. "Were you to know what I know," says the Prophet in a famous ḥadīth, "you would laugh little and weep much." Centuries later in a devotional poem Chittick discusses, God says to King David, "Go right ahead into the house of my friends, for I love the broken and grieving."

On this understanding, weeping is the appropriate response to creaturely existence, while heaven is the place of laughter, where all doubt, confusion, and separation melt away. In Islam, only unbelievers typically laugh here on earth, whereas the friends of God weep; and in the afterlife, their conditions are reversed. We find a pattern something like this in Margery Kempe as well. In response to her first heavenly vision of Christ, where she hears music, Margery exclaims, "Alas that I ever sinned; it is very joyful in heaven." Yet this realization inaugurates her life of continual weeping, "with profownde teerys, syhyngys, and sobbyngys, & sumtyme wyth gret boistows cryingys as God wolde sende it, & sumtyme soft teerys & preuy wyth-owtyn any boistowsnesse."

In Eastern Orthodox Christian spirituality, says the Jesuit scholar Irénée Hausherr, "[W]eeping ends in the kingdom of heaven, and only there."[22] The Syrian writer John the Solitary of the fourth or fifth century, meditating on this theme, remarks, "When man's mind is in the region of the spirit he does

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not weep, just as angels do not weep. Moreover, if tears always came from a spiritual state, the just would always weep in the kingdom, since there they are spiritual."[23] In the great eschatological banquet described by the prophet Isaiah, where the Lord of hosts will "make for all peoples a feast of rich food" and "destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples," God will also "wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth" (Isa. 25:6–8 passim). God himself will "wipe away the tears": this vision has reverberated throughout African American spirituals, where of heaven it is sung that "there'll be no more crying there."

But does God himself weep, and if so, why? That, perhaps, is the ultimate question. Chittick writes, "Given the fact that both laughter and weeping derive from God, we can ask if they pertain to the divine Reality itself, or if God brings them into existence only in created things." In Islam the answer is: the latter. In keeping with the heavenly nature of laughter and the place of weeping as a sign of mortality, God laughs in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth but never breaks into tears.

In the mythopoetic imagination of Judaism, however, God assuredly weeps. In the Babylonian Talmud, God sheds two tears into the sea as he recalls Israel's suffering in exile (*b. Berakhot* 59a). Elsewhere in the same tractate, he roars in pain at night when the angels would sing his praises, remembering that he destroyed his own temple and scattered his children. The motif of darkness here is significant. It suggests the element of intimate privacy that becomes explicit in *Hagigah* 5b, where God is discovered retreating to his Inner Chambers to weep. And why? Because he knows that the sight or sound of his grief would overwhelm and destroy the fragile hope of the world. Rabbi Nehemia Polen approaches this motif from the perspective of the Hasidic rebbe Kalonymous Shapiro, "the rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto," and concludes that in Shapiro's view God's grieving privacy could be broken. "[Avoiding] the platitudes of theodicy," as Polen writes, Shapiro taught that in times of great suffering, "the *hasid* can push in, join his tears with God's, communing with God in suffering, just as at happier times we commune with God in shared joy." Thus *devekut*, "communion with God," can mean participation even in his frightening, threatening weeping. Polen elaborates on this ancient midrashic theme with the startling suggestion that the last eight verses of the Pentateuch—traditionally regarded as having been written by Moses yet containing the problematic fact of Moses' own death—were not only written by God, as the Talmud suggests, but by God in tears at the death of his beloved creature. Polen describes these tears as "the only disclosing solvent for the Absolute."

Holy Tears ends with the emergence of the same theme in Reverend Betsee Parker's narrative of her experience at Ground Zero. The way in which she approaches God's weeping—not as a poetic ideation but as a fact—makes it so startling as to be life altering, and it had something of this effect on the editors

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as they interviewed Reverend Parker in New York City in January 2003. As she and others worked in pathology at the morgue at Bellevue Hospital blessing, cataloging, and storing the exploded remains of the victims of September 11, they independently and repeatedly heard an inexplicable drone that each on her own interpreted as "God crying." Without knowing of the rabbinical tradition of the Inner Chamber, Parker describes a sense of having overheard someone in his bedroom weeping—something meant to be private, something too unbearable and dangerous to share:

> And I had happened quite unexpectedly upon this just as if you walked into the room of a cabin or something and saw someone sitting and weeping quietly and you had not meant to see this. You had no intention of coming in. People like some privacy when they weep, and we usually try to give people that privacy in our daily living, if you think about it.
>
> To hear this—and it was inescapable; wherever I walked in that place that day, it pierced into me deeply. *The feeling was terrifying—of what in the world was I doing hearing this sound of the weeping of the depths of the—of God?* And the sound—the only sound on earth that I could really compare this to was a very low drone. It reminded me of some of the Eastern musical instruments—very primitive musical instruments. It had a very, very deep vibrating resonance. It sounded kind of like a sitar in its lowest registers. It sounded like an [Australian] didgeridoo, or a *koto* from Japan—an instrument made out of, say, a large hollowed-out log, or some of the African string instruments you can hear when [you] go out into the bush in East Africa. It had a primitive, deep, ancient, penetrating sound.
>
> To hear it was actually a physical experience, because you could almost feel your ribcage vibrating as it is very deep, and when you hear a deep register on certain instruments it makes you vibrate . . . there was that experience with it. . . .
>
> . . . It made me want to run and hide. I felt so inappropriate. I didn't know—I felt like I was—you know—walking in on God. "God—you just made a mistake! You let me hear you crying!"

Pressed as to why she thought God might have been weeping, Parker answered without hesitation: "My sense was that [it was because] those whom he loved the dearest had been ravaged and hated and destroyed by those whom he loved the dearest."

Does God really cry? Muslims find this an impossible thought. Other religious traditions raise deep questions about the very notion of "God": in such contexts, what can it mean to speak of "God weeping"? We hope this volume provides some clues about how one might translate these tears into other languages. At the same time we also keenly feel the limits of such efforts. Like the other tears that flow through these pages, these are holy tears, but are they also unique to the time, to the place, to the religious framework of those who hear them?

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We hope that this book will raise such questions, and many more, and that it might inspire new work in the comparative study of weeping in the religious imagination.

January 28, 2004
Feast of Ss. Ephraim and Isaac, the Syrians
"The Weepers"

Notes

1. Loring M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 111, passim. In these traditional laments, tears destroy the living with their bitterness ("my tear was burning hot, and it dyed the handkerchief black") while at the same time they nourish and sustain the dead, preserving ancient Greek ideas ("Say a few words to me and shed a few tears. / So that the tears can become a cool spring, a lake, and ocean, / and flood down into the underworld; / so that the unwashed can wash, and the thirsty can drink; / so that good housewives can knead and bake their bread; / . . . so that little children in school can make ink to write" (109, 110–11).

2. Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), originally published as *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'auto portrait et autres ruines* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990), 122–29. Inspired by St. Augustine's *Confessions*, especially the saint's words regarding his weeping on the death of his mother, Monica, Derrida explores the relationship among tears, vision, and blindness. See also John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 308–29. We are grateful to Steven Hopkins for drawing our attention to this important reflection.

3. Andrew Marvell, "Eyes and Tears," in *The Complete Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

4. Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Seeking an End to the Primary Text," in *Beyond the Classics? Essays in Religious Studies and Liberal Education*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Sheryl Burkhalter (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 52–53.

5. Sullivan, "Seeking an End." We are indebted to Gay Lynch, contributor to this volume, for highlighting these particular phrases on weeping from Sullivan's essay.

6. Tom Lutz, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).

7. James Elkins, *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

8. We quote Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, Introduction to Lutz and Abu-Lughod, eds., *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction, Paul Ekman and Klaus R. Scherer, eds. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Éditions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 1990), p. 12. Thanks are owed to Elizabeth Busky of Harvard Divinity School for the term "extralinguistic" as a description of tears' relationship to language, and for her insights on this point.

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9. Black Elk, as recorded by Nicholas Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, "Summoning the Spirits for the First Time," in *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* 21st c. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). The problematic nature of Neihardt's account of Black Elk's spiritual autobiography does not negate the authenticity of this particular story, especially as its underlying motifs are borne out in other Lakota religious experiences. Weeping is especially crucial in summoning divine power ("crying for a vision"), and this ritual idea is also refracted in the present story. See Julian Rice, *Black Elk's Story: Distinguishing Its Lakota Purpose* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), ch. 5, especially pp. 69–70 on the *hanbleceya* ceremony. See also Lee Irwin's documentation of the quest for visionary power in the accounts of nineteenth-century Plains peoples: isolation and suffering "attracted the pity" of supernatural helpers; hence these were ritually summoned by self-wounding and by protracted crying, especially by young males. See Lee Irwin, *The Dream Seekers: Native American Visionary Traditions of the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

10. Naomi Shihab Nye, "Kindness," from *Words under the Words: Selected Poems by Naomi Shihab Nye* (Portland: Far Corner Books, 1995).

11. See the discussion in William S. Sax, *Dancing the Self: Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Lila of Garwhal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6–15.

12. Lutz, *Crying,* 222–23.

13. We encounter here another paradox in the history of religious tears: As fleeting as they seem, as ready to evaporate, they repeatedly emerge in different stories and customs as more precious than gems, and as eternal. Tears, it turns out, are able to be stored and accounted for; and this reckoning can have enormous consequences, as the Talmudic example shows. Apostolos-Cappadona's essay in this volume speaks of the lachrymatories, "teardrop bottles" in the ancient Levant and Mediterranean that collected the tears of mourners and were buried with the dead, and of the custom whereby young warriors would gift their beloveds with such bottles before leaving for battle, to be examined upon their return for evidence of faithfulness, the literal number of tears shed. In the "Life" of [the eleventh-century Russian] St. Theophilus the Weeper, from *The Prologue from Ochrid,* we read that "Theophilus was a monk in the Caves in Kiev. He wept constantly for his sins, catching his tears in a basin. An angel appeared to him at the time of his death, and showed him a very large basin full of tears. These were Theophilus's tears, that had fallen to the ground or been wiped away with his hand or had dried on his face. *Thus in heaven they know and keep all our tears along with our sufferings and labors and sighs for the sake of our salvation*" (emphasis ours). From *The Prologue of Ochrid: Lives of the Saints,* by Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, trans. Mother Maria (Birmingham, England: Lazarica Press, Serbian Orthodox Church of the Holy Prince Lazar, 1986), pt. 4, "Dec. 29," p. 385.

14. Lutz, *Crying,* p. 23.

15. Lutz and Abu-Lughod, eds., *Language and the Politics of Emotion.*

16. Ibid., 11.

17. Ibid., 1. Sarah Trone, a Master of Theological Studies candidate in the seminar "Weeping in the Religious Imagination" at Harvard Divinity School in the spring of 2003, brought these passages to Kimberley Patton's attention in her final essay, "Tearful Complaint: Lament as Social and Political Protest."

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18. For an Indian example of women weeping in protest, see Veena Das's essay on women caught in Sikh-Hindu riots, "Our Work to Cry: Your Work to Listen," in *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia,* ed. Veena Das (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 345–98.

19. For the significance of weeping in Jewish women's later devotion to the figure of Rachel, see the research and analysis presented by Susan Starr Sered in her richly comprehensive article, "Rachel's Tomb: The Development of a Cult," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2:2 (1995): 103–48.

20. Cited in Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Weeping Goddess: Sumerian Prototypes of the Mater Dolorosa," *Biblical Archaeologist* 46 (spring 1983): 69–80. Ninlil's lament for Ur is found in S. N. Kramer, *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur,* in The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago Assyriological Studies 12, ed. J. A. Wilson and T. G. Allen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940). Inanna's lament is in Joachim Krecher, *Sumerische Kultlyrik* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966).

21. Moshe Barasch, "The Crying Face," *Artibus et Historiae: An Art Anthology* 15:8 (1987): 33.

22. Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: La doctrine de la componction dans l'Orient chrétien,* Orientalia Christiana Analecta 132 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1944), English translation, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East,* Cistercian Studies Series 53 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982), 154.

23. Sven Dedering, Johannes von Lykopolis, *Ein Dialog über die Seele und die Affekte des Menschen,* trans. Irénée Hausherr (Leipzig-Uppsala-Haag, 1936), 16–18.

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The Poetics and Politics of Ritualized Weeping in Early and Medieval Japan

Gary L. Ebersole

In this essay I will use selected examples of ritualized weeping from ancient and medieval Japanese texts to make several points concerning the comparative study of tears. Although all of my examples are from Japan, each will serve to illustrate issues that have broader import. Comparison is the basis of all knowledge, yet too often in our studies our comparative methods are implicit, ad hoc, and unexamined.[1] Let me begin by making a few general observations based on years of study of instances of ritualized weeping across space and time. First, in the study of ritualized weeping, we must never forget that our object of study is not emotion per se. For our purposes, it is important to take to heart Vincent Crapanzano's cautionary note: "It is important to distinguish carefully between emotions, the expression of emotions, and the glossing of emotions. The failure to do so has led . . . to considerable confusion."[2]

Ritualized weeping is a culturally choreographed act, a stylized, not spontaneous, expression of emotion. As such, Crapanzano's second topic—the expression of emotions via ritualized weeping—is properly the object of study by historians of religions. So, too, is the discourse about and around the shedding of tears, including the "glosses" of specific types of ritual tears or instances of ritualized weeping that are offered by individuals and religious communities. Like all ritual performative arts, weeping is subject to critical evaluation. However, I cannot say too strongly that instances of ritual weeping do not provide us with any access to emotions pure and simple. Indeed, to assume that emotion per se exists is to assume that emotions are a part of human nature and, thus, at base precultural. Charles Darwin epitomized this stance insofar as he believed that human emotions, like other aspects of human nature, were a biological inheritance and the result of a long process of evolutionary adaptation. He expected to find that other animal species, especially those most closely related to humankind and highly social species, also have emotional lives, even if these were less developed or, to put this another way, more primitive.[3] More recently, investigators, such as Paul Ekman, have sought to isolate universal expressions of specific emotions. Historians of religions, though, should not be drawn into the reductionist quagmire of trying to determine what emotions really are or what emotions—if any—are universal.

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Indeed, we must use the very category of "emotion" for comparative purposes with great care. Emotion is a fairly recent Western construct—that is, the term has a history and its meaning has varied over time. Let us remember that as late as Descartes "emotion" was a term in physics akin to "propulsion" in our current lexicon. Medieval philosophers and theologians spoke of the "passions" and "affections," not the emotions. Not only are these terms not synonymous with emotion, they are based on very different understandings of human nature, of body and mind, and of the relationship between these. Such differences are only heightened when one turns to other cultures and religious traditions. Most discussions and definitions of "emotion" are confused and confusing because too often our own cultural and historical assumptions are carried willy-nilly into our study of other cultures and time periods.[4]

Once we accept that ritualized weeping is not caused by "real" emotion, understood as a spontaneous and natural affective response to some stimulus, we are free to turn our focus to the ritualized shedding of tears and the glossing of these. Ritualized weeping is a performative act, and instances of it must be analyzed as such. The cases of weeping we will be concerned with are stylized performances of socioculturally constructed and recognized affective displays. To put this another way, the shedding of tears in a tightly scripted program of stylized acts is a performative act, complete with actors and an audience. Even when engaged in by a lone individual or an isolated person, ritualized weeping is not a private act. The King David of the Psalms, weeping on his bed at night, had an intended audience—YHWH, as well as, later, those who heard or read his lamentations and prayers. In the study of ritual tears, we must pay attention to both the weeper and the intended audience for these affective displays.

To say this implies that we must pay careful attention to both the poetics and the politics of ritualized weeping, although these are not always—or, better, rarely—discrete. Ritual weeping often functions as a means of marking out or displaying ideal hierarchical relations between individuals, as well as at times between humans and deities or other beings. (Alternatively, tears may serve to dissolve hierarchical differences temporarily, but a discussion of this type must be deferred for the moment.) These relationships may involve social, political, gendered, moral, and even cosmological aspects. Through the shedding of tears, a ritual weeper often seeks to represent himself or herself as being in an appropriate state vis-à-vis another person in a given situation; alternatively, ritual tears may mark the fact that the expected and appropriate relationship has been broken by one party. With these comments, we touch on one of the more important political aspects of ritualized weeping—the ability of ritualized tears to offer or provoke critical commentary on interpersonal relations.

Not all instances of weeping are equally effective in offering such critical commentary or in marking social distance or proximity. There is an art to

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shedding tears effectively, and an artful performance indicates mastery of the poetics of weeping. The poetics or aesthetics of weeping, if you will, is culturally and historically variable; it also varies according to a person's age, class, gender, occupation, and so on. While ritual weepers may use tears to mark the rupture of a moral relationship, for instance, they are themselves subject to potential criticism (or sympathetic affirmation) from members of the audience on aesthetic and performative grounds, as well as on moral ones. Thus, the poetics and politics of ritualized weeping are interwoven.

In *Ritual Poetry and the Politics of Death in Early Japan*, I demonstrate the prominent role that weeping played in the funerary rites in the ancient Japanese imperial court. A few examples from this performative locus will serve as an initial illustration of the poetics and politics of ritual weeping. To begin with, we might amend the old saw that has it that "in politics timing is everything" by adding "poetics." In ritualized weeping, timing and an aesthetically appropriate performance (not always a pleasing one, for sometimes a weeper must be seen to be disheveled, out of control, or oblivious to the requirements of ordinary cleanliness and propriety) are both crucial. When to begin crying, how long to continue, when to increase and decrease the volume of one's voice or lachrymose flow, when to pause, when to break one's syntax with sobbing, and so on are all shared concerns of both the weeper and the audience (which may include deceased persons, as well as the living, and absent deities).

Man'yōshū 149, a verse from a seventh-century Japanese anthology of poetry and ascribed to a recently widowed empress, alludes to the fact that a ritual weeper is subject to criticism from others. Courtiers apparently had begun to criticize the widowed empress, who continued to mourn her husband ritually six months after his demise. In this instance, though, due to the position and status of the actors, much more than propriety was at stake. As would be the case many centuries later in nineteenth-century Great Britain, when Queen Victoria faced growing criticism in the press and even in the House of Commons for her protracted mourning for her beloved Prince Albert, weeping was also at times a matter of state. In ancient Japan, under the practice of double burial, a new sovereign could not be formally installed until ritual weeping and mourning by the widow and other consorts had ceased and the corpse was interred. Thus, protracted ritual mourning, which prevented burial and blocked preparations for the succession rites, had the potential to create an unstable liminal situation.

In Japanese court politics, then, where timing was everything, the ritualized shedding of tears could be a powerful weapon when wielded by women from within the gendered and secluded funerary space of the *mogari no miya*. This was a temporary "enshrinement palace," quickly built on the palace grounds, in which the corpse of the deceased was laid out. The social fiction observed by all—and expressed through euphemisms, which allowed people to observe

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the taboo on mentioning death—was that the emperor was not dead but had "hidden himself in the clouds." As long as mourning rites continued, the hope was held out that the emperor's animating spirit might yet be ritually enticed to descend again into his lifeless body. Secluded with the corpse within the *mogari no miya,* the widowed empress and all the emperor's female consorts performed mourning rites designed to call back the spirit of the dead. This included the oral recitation of ritual laments known as *banka*. In the verse at hand, originating from within the temporary enshrinement palace, the voice of the widowed empress can be heard resisting the demands of her critics and members of potential rival factions outside that she conclude the mourning rites:

sumeramikoto kamuagari-mashishi	A poem by the Yamato Empress
nochi Yamato no ōkisaki	after the Sovereign ascended
no tsukuri-mashishi mi-uta isshu	as a god [= died]
hito wa yoshi	People say, "Enough,
omoi yamu to mo	stop thinking of him!"
tamakazura	Yet I cannot forget
kage ni mietsutsu	while I still see your image
wasurenu kamo	in the wreath of jewels.[5]

In a related case in *Man'yōshū* 658, yet with significant differences, the reigning Empress Saimei's extended mourning of many months for an eight-year-old grandson seems to have made her politically vulnerable, as several well-placed ministers attempted a coup d'état.[6] In this instance, the empress's tears were taken to be signs of (female?) weakness. That is, because of the child's relatively low political status (he was not immediately in line to succeed), her mourning would have been judged to be excessive by some. More important, her mourning is represented as having been inappropriate precisely because it was an expression of personal grief. Moreover, because the empress was not ritually confined to the *mogari no miya* after the child's death, as she would have been in the case of the death of her husband, she could—and did—indulge her grief by repeatedly visiting sites outside the capital where she had once enjoyed the company of the beloved child. Her frequent absences from the capital seemed to have contributed to the hatching of the scheme to overthrow her.

Not every instance of ritual weeping is political at this high level, of course. The everyday lives of ordinary persons are also filled with occasions in which the poetics and politics of affective display are involved. Moreover, not all tears are shed in specifically religious ritual contexts; rather, they often are found in ritualized social situations—that is, in broader social situations in which there is still a shared set of sociocultural expectations placed on the individuals and/or groups involved. Our access to such instances of ritualized

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weeping in ancient Japan, as well as elsewhere, is usually through written sources, although at times visual and other material evidence also exists.

One example of the sort of insight we can gain into the poetics and politics of gendered tears in early Japan is found in a vignette preserved in the *Kojiki* (712). Here we can still hear, I want to suggest, the voiced protest of a married woman in a polygamous society—a voice that no doubt speaks for many women over time and space who found themselves in similar situations. Significantly, the story pivots around the woman's refusal to shed tears as expected and offers a pointed countergloss on the cause of the tears of women. The story, which originally would have been performed in song and dance, goes this way. Suseri-bime is unhappy over her husband's frequent dalliances with other women. One day when her husband, Ōkuni-nushi, seeks to go out to see one of his female friends, out of pique Suseri-bime ignores him. In stony silence, she refuses to perform her expected wifely duties of preparing his clothes and then seeing him off properly, in spite of his repeated orders that she do so. Embarrassed no doubt by this public show of disobedience, Ōkuni-nushi finally announces that her indifference is feigned, little more than a charade hiding her true feelings of love for him. (Given the socioeconomic status of the couple, we may assume that servants and other persons would probably have witnessed the scene and, thus, constituted an audience—whether intended or not—for this back-and-forth.) Egotistically, the husband asserts that her love and jealousy will spill over in a flood of tears of love and longing for him as soon as he has gone:

Beloved wife of mine,
When I go off
With my men
Flocking like flocking birds;
When I go off
With my men
Accompanied like birds of a company;
Although you may say
That you will not weep—
Your head drooping,
Like the lone reed of *susuki* [pampas] grass
On the mountain side,
You will weep;
And your weeping will rise
Just as the morning rain
Rises into a mist.
O my young wife
Like the young grass!

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In response, Suseri-bime gives her husband a cup of sake, even as she gives expression to her pain as a woman in a polygamous social system:

Since you
Are a man,
On all the islands,
You row around,
On each and every promontory
You go around,
You must have wives
Like the young grass.
But I,
Being a woman,
Have no man
Besides you,
Have no husband
Besides you.
Under silken curtains,
The fluffy ones,
Under covers of *musi* fibers,
The soft ones,
Under covers of *taku* fibers,
The rustling ones,
My breast, alive with youth,
Soft as the light snow,
You will embrace
With your arms
White as a rope of *taku* fibers.
We shall embrace and entwine our bodies;
Your jewel-like hands
Will entwine with mine.
With your legs outstretched,
O come, my lord, and sleep!
Partake, O my lord,
Of the abundant wine![7]

This tearful protest brings Ōkuni-nushi back to her, albeit only temporarily (he soon takes up his carousing ways again). For our purposes, however, it is important to analyze with some care the social logic informing this example of the artful deployment of tears. If we can understand how and why the depiction of this woman's ability to move another person, who occupies a hierarchically superior and more powerful social position, to act in ways that she desires is "realistic," then we will have gained important insight into the poetics and pol-

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itics of ritualized weeping. Ki no Tsurayuki (884–946) alluded to the power of song and poetry in a famous line in the Japanese preface to the *Kokinshū,* the first imperial anthology of *waka* (the classical thirty-one-syllable verse form): "Poetry/song, without exertion, moves heaven and earth, stirs the feelings of gods and spirits invisible to the eye, softens the relations between men and women, and calms the hearts of fierce warriors."[8] Scholars have long taken this passage either as constituting evidence of the belief in the magical power of words (*kotodama shinkō*) in medieval Japan or, alternatively, as so much hyperbole and little more than a Sinified literary flourish.[9] I want to argue, however, that what we have here is an acknowledgment of the social "magic" of skillfully performed affective displays to move more powerful persons.

Let us carefully analyze the poetics and the politics of these tears. On the one hand, in this episode from the *Kojiki,* we find the male (Ōkuni-nushi) attempting to naturalize the tears of his wife and, implicitly, all married women—"your weeping will rise / Just as the morning rain / Rises into a mist." The attempt to naturalize such tears is designed to obfuscate or deny their true causal source in the social system rife with gender inequality. On the other hand, though, we see the woman (Suseri-bime) resisting the imposition of this gendered construction on her. She does this first by consciously regulating her tears, initially refusing to weep precisely when the male construction of "female nature" would have her unable to control her feelings. That is, she refuses to allow her tears to be emplotted in the male's egocentric and phallocentric narrative. Instead, she relocates her tears in her own controlling narrative, stripping away the ideological façade of the male naturalization of female tears to reveal the real cause of her pain and tears—the fundamental gender inequality in the social structure. Momentarily at least, she is able to put her husband on the defensive by "playing to" her audience to gain their sympathy and by playing on her husband's sense of face. As I suggested above, we may assume that this emotional "scene" would have been witnessed by others present in the house. In this situation, the husband would have been placed in the position of having to respond to these tears, which had been redefined as signs of a deeply felt and authentic sense of pain caused by his actions.[10]

Let me now turn to a few instances of ritual and ritualized weeping from medieval Japan. I cannot trace here the gradual changes in the performances and in the valuations of affective displays over time and among different social groups in Japan. But I do want to suggest how ritual tears change over time within the same culture—that is, to suggest something of the cultural history of tears. Moreover, I want to indicate a few things about tears shed in explicitly Japanese Buddhist ritual contexts, as well as to present an initial analysis of the medieval Buddhist glossing of tears. In an important sense, it is the discourse around tears and the specific narrative representations of weeping individuals and groups that create a cultural and religious typology of tears. Finally,

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I want to continue the analysis begun above of specific performative acts of ritualized weeping in terms of the poetics and politics of affective displays.

It hardly needs to be mentioned that Buddhist thought and practice have long valorized the goal of achieving a state of mental and emotional equanimity in the face of the vicissitudes of life. This soteriological goal is epitomized in the innumerable images of Gotama the Buddha sitting in meditation under the bodhi tree, unperturbed as Mara repeatedly tempts him and unmoved in the face of all the frightening things thrown at him. While this religious attitude toward human affective or emotional responses was not unknown in Japan, and while the members of some religious groups actively pursued the goal of achieving a state of equanimity, the overall situation was much more complicated. Lived Buddhism, if you will, took place in the world and, therefore, Buddhists necessarily had to engage human affective responses to events in the world and to the ways of the world (*yo no naka*) more generally. In doing so, medieval Japanese Buddhists developed a remarkable variety of highly sophisticated religio-aesthetic disciplines (*michi*) designed, among other things, to evoke specific spiritually valorized affective responses, including *mono no aware*, *yūgen*, *wabi*, and *sabi*, to the world. That is, medieval Buddhists not only cast certain emotional responses (jealousy, anger, greed, lust, etc.) in a negative light, they also ascribed positive, even salvific, qualities to other affective responses to the world. In a well-known verse, the Buddhist poet-monk Saigyō (1118–1190) captured the ambivalence and seeming contradictions found in medieval Japanese Buddhists' attitude toward human emotions and affective responses to the world:

hana ni somu	A heart-mind
kokoro wa ikade	dyed in blossoms
nokoriken	still remains
sutehateteki to	in the body I thought
omou waga mi ni	had shed the world.[11]

On the one hand, the religious ideal of leaving or casting off the world retained its hold over the imagination of medieval Japanese Buddhists. On the other hand, many Japanese Buddhists developed and stressed aspects of the Mahayana tradition that affirmed the phenomenal world to be the locus of salvation if and only if one's understanding of it and affective response to it were proper. This point bears our careful attention, especially insofar as it is key to an appreciation of specific types of ritualized weeping in medieval Japan.

Let us begin by explicating Saigyō's verse above. The significance of the act of "casting off the world" (*yo sute*) would seem to be obvious enough, yet in medieval Japan it frequently took on a form and meaning distinct from the archetypal model of Gotama abandoning his kingdom, wife, and child. Saigyō's own hermitage or "grass hut" (*sōan*) was located in the hills of Yoshino, a beau-

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tiful area not far from the capital famous for its cherry blossoms. Yet Saigyō was hardly alone or cut off from human intercourse there, for many other monks also were in "reclusion" in Yoshino. Moreover, Saigyō and other poet-monks often scurried back to the capital whenever a major poetry contest was to be held or for other seemingly secular occasions. How are we to understand this? Were Saigyō and other poet-monks being hypocritical? Or are our expectations misplaced, perhaps, insofar as they are informed by our modern dichotomous concepts of the sacred and the secular? In medieval Japan, by "reclusion" and "casting off the world" we need to understand not so much cutting oneself off from human contact as seeking a situation in which one could immerse oneself in the natural world, characterized according to Buddhist teachings by constant flux and change (*mujō*). Moreover, we must appreciate that the impermanence of all things in the world, the emptiness at the heart of all existence, was finally not a source of despair or deep anxiety. Rather, the phenomenal world was recognized as such and affirmed by medieval Japanese Buddhists. In the early fourteenth century, the priest Kenkō expressed a common medieval Buddhist position on the religious efficaciousness of the appropriate affective response to *mujō:*

> If man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino, never to vanish like the smoke over Toribe-yama, but lingered on forever in this world, how things would lose their power to move us! The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty.[12]

What needs to be stressed here is that Japanese Buddhist ways of knowing the Truth were not so much cognitive as they were feeling-based. In medieval Japanese epistemology, there is no Cartesian separation of mind/body or cognition/affect. Rather, the organ and faculty of right perception is known as *kokoro,* perhaps best translated as "heart-mind." The vocabulary of medieval aesthetic criticism, including such crucial terms as *kokoro ari, mono no aware,* and *hon'i,* points to the feeling-based form of deep spiritual understanding. Such understanding involved penetrating beyond base sensory perceptions of the phenomenal world to its essential nature. Japanese Buddhists came to believe that if human beings become enmeshed in the samsaric world through ego attachments, then an ego-less form of realizing the true nature—the Buddha nature—of the world was necessary. In other words, from a Mahayanist perspective, it was ultimately necessary for persons to overcome even such "tough" or resistant dualisms as self/other and samsara/satori.

In order to achieve this end, numerous Japanese turned to the esoteric Tendai Buddhist practice of *shikan* (concentration and insight). In this form of meditative praxis, a person focused his attention and mind on an object (a statue of a buddha, a painting), something in nature (wisteria, cherry blossoms, a hazy moon), or even a poetic topic (the dew of Adashino, autumn dusk), concentrating to the point that the individual merged with the object as distinctions of inner/outer, this buddha statue/the cosmic Buddha, and so

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on were dissolved. This meditative practice was also employed by numerous medieval poets and practitioners of other artistic ways. Japanese Buddhists developed numerous religio-aesthetic disciplines, known as *michi*, which were held to be spiritually efficacious. The practice of *kadō*, "the way of poetry," was considered to be on par with sutra recitation, the carving of sacred Buddhist images, and other ritual practices.

However, neither literary scholars nor historians of religions have heretofore adequately appreciated the significance of the fact that tears were apparently shed in the practice of *shikan* meditation. The famous poet Fujiwara no Teika, for instance, described in a memoir how his father, Shunzei (1114–1204), a poet-monk, had combined this meditative practice with his poetic practice:

> Very late at night he would sit by his bed in front of an oil lamp so dim that it was difficult to tell whether it was burning or not, and with a tattered court robe thrown over his shoulders and an old court cap pulled down to his ears, he would lean on an arm-rest, hugging a wooden brazier for warmth, while he recited verse to himself in an undertone. Deep into the night when everyone else was asleep he would sit there bent over, weeping softly.[13]

The meaning of these tears is not transparent, however, any more than their function is. Their meaning and function can only be appreciated by reconstructing the operative religious and cultural assumptions of medieval Japanese Buddhists, as well as their religious anthropology and religio-aesthetic ritual practices. It would be a serious mistake to carry our modern Western assumptions concerning human nature, emotions, epistemology, the discrete categories of "religion" and "literature," and so on into our interpretation of our textual evidence. We may, however, approach a fuller understanding of the meaning and function of weeping in these medieval ritual practices by returning to a preliminary explication of the poetic categories of *kokoro ari*, *mono no aware*, and *hon'i* in the medieval period.

Most scholars approach these as aesthetic terms—which they are, of course—but in focusing almost exclusively on their aesthetic aspects, we have missed the crucial importance of the fact that they are first and foremost *religio*-aesthetic terms. That is, their semantic field includes the ritual practices of poetic composition and recitation, as well as the aesthetic qualities of specific poems. As noted earlier, *kokoro* is best translated as "heart-mind" in order to suggest the medieval Japanese epistemological assumption that knowledge, understanding, or forms of acute perception involve feeling as well as cognition. In Saigyō's poem presented above, the phrase "blossom-dyed heart-mind" (*hana ni somu kokoro*) points to the poet's feeling-based knowledge of *mujō*, the state of constant flux, change, and impermanence of the world, epitomized by the ephemeral cherry blossoms of spring. Not all feelings were judged to be of a piece, of course. The emotion of a person entranced by the beauty of cherry blossoms is, in religious terms, qualitatively different from the emotional

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response of *aware* evoked by the identification of the ephemerality of the blossoms with that of the whole phenomenal world (*mujō*).

In medieval Japan, as in all cultures and periods, specific feelings or affective responses were singled out as having spiritual efficacy while others were felt to be detrimental to achieving spiritual insight. *Mono no aware* is perhaps the most important example of the former insofar as it was held to be the appropriate Buddhist affective response to the essential nature (*hon'i*) of the things of the world. *Aware* is a sense of pathos, but it does not entail a resigned acceptance of the world as it is. Rather, *aware* involves an affirmation of the ephemeral nature of all things, including human life itself. This is the informing sense of the monk Kenkō's statement, cited earlier: "If man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino, never to vanish like the smoke over Toribe-yama, but lingered on forever in this world, how things would lose their power to move us! The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty."

Finally, *hon'i* (*pen-i* in T'ang Chinese poetics), like most Japanese religio-aesthetic terms, defies easy definition. In its technical usage, *hon'i* refers to the emotional essence of something; in other words, it is the core affective response that, according to tradition, some thing or phenomenon (the rising moon, the cries of cicadas, the sound of wind in the pines, etc.) ideally evokes in sensitive persons. The distinguished literary scholars Robert Brower and Earl Miner translate *hon'i* variously as "essential nature," "correct handling (of a poetic topic)," "decorum of feeling," "conventional treatment," and "real significance." They note that *kokoro* was often used as a synonym of *hon'i*. By the mid-eleventh century, *hon'i* had come to represent, they suggest, "the consolidation of a now venerable poetic tradition and the imposition of severe limits upon the range of poetic subjects and expression."[14]

All this is well and good, but, paradoxically, it does not get to the core meaning of this complex of terms for practitioners such as Fujiwara no Shunzei. *Kadō* was not merely an aesthetic pursuit; it was a form of religious praxis. This means that as scholars we must not focus our attention only on the poem as literary artifact, nor even as the verbal product of such ritual practice. Rather, we need to pay careful attention to poetic composition and recitation as ritual activities in themselves. When we fail to do this, we risk falling into the trap of substituting our concepts and understanding of the world for those of medieval Japanese Buddhists. An instance of this may be seen in Brower and Miner's evaluation of *hon'i*: "It can readily be seen that such a concept [*hon'i*] already places severe restrictions on the poet. . . . [P]ersonal freedom is not permitted: the poet must focus upon the [assigned poetic] topic and the imagery appropriate to it."[15] The problem here is that personal or individual freedom as such was not a primary value for Buddhist-inspired poets such as Shunzei. We cannot hope to appreciate Shunzei's pursuit of poetry as a religious discipline unless we bear in mind the Buddhist goal of overcoming ego-based ("personal") attachments and ego-based discriminations.

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Shunzei's *shikan*-informed poetic practice, including the all-night recitation of poems, was held to be a functional equivalent of sutra recitation. Focusing and concentrating one's mind and body in this way, intentionally restricting the range of one's mental imagery and feeling in meditative practice, is no more to be understood as a negative loss of "personal freedom" than the significance of someone's undertaking a religious fast is adequately grasped if it is assumed to be nothing more than a severe restriction of diet. Neither fasting nor restricting one's focus in meditation are "pinched" experiences; they are disciplined acts in service of a religious goal. When Shunzei and others like him use *hon'i, aware,* and *kokoro ari* ("having/coming out of *kokoro*") to characterize a poem positively, they are pointing to its association with a liberating experience, not a severe limitation. Shunzei's tears can be understood only in this light.

Heretofore I have argued that we need to reconstruct the specific cultural, religious, and historical assumptions informing the meaning of medieval Buddhist ritual tears, including those associated with *shikan* meditative practice. However, historians of religions have noted the presence of ritual weeping in numerous mystical traditions—Jewish, Sufi, and Christian to mention just a few. This suggests the need to search for a potentially shared or "core" psychosomatic experience induced by copious weeping. While this is not the place to pursue this inquiry in depth, it may be suggestive to note the ways Shunzei's ritual weeping structurally resembles that found in Jewish mystical practices. Moshe Idel and Elliot Wolfson have uncovered a two-thousand-year-old history of ritual weeping that remains associated with diverse Jewish mystical practices even when the prevailing theology changes significantly. Extensive ritual weeping seems to have been a common practice among Jewish mystics, leading to revelations and/or a disclosure of secret knowledge.[16] Usually it was found together with fasting, mourning, self-induced suffering, and sleep deprivation. Jewish mystics engaged in ritual weeping for extended periods of time late into the night or for up to seven days and nights at a time. Shunzei's practice also involved sleep deprivation, as well as a reduction of other sensory stimuli—most notably visual stimuli. We do not know if fasting was involved, however.

Idel notes that some Jewish mystical practices of weeping show a remarkable "correlation between the technique and the nature of the [resultant] revelation." In this regard, he points to a form of "participation mystique"—that is, conscious acts of identification with the divine or aspects thereof "intended to induce a state of deep melancholy culminating in weeping."[17] In Shunzei's *shikan*-informed poetic practice, the intense concentration and single focus also was intended to produce a sense of identity, as well as an emotional state of *aware,* which shares a family resemblance to melancholy. Idel offers an intriguing psychosomatic explanation for the widespread association of weeping with mystical insight in the Jewish tradition that may be pertinent to

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Shunzei's poetic practice, especially in terms of the role the restriction of sensory stimuli plays. According to Idel,

> the hyperactivation of the ocular system represents a concentration on one mode of perception at the very moment when all other doors of perception are progressively being repressed. This new balance of stimuli prepares the way for paranormal states of consciousness focused upon visual experiences. In such cases, the ideas or concepts upon which one has focused his intellectual and emotional activity tend to reveal themselves through the hyperexcited medium. From a more strictly psychological point of view, the visions that follow a painful or sorrowful state of mind can be related to what Marganita Laski designated as "desolation ecstasies."[18]

For the moment, this line of inquiry must remain suggestive rather than conclusive. Let me return to medieval Japan, where the Buddhist association of weeping with meditation and other ritual practices was pervasive. Another example from the medieval religio-aesthetic tradition, dealing with a different genre, may help to further clarify the meaning of ritual tears. In surviving fragments from what was originally a lengthy treatise on *imayō*, a popular Buddhist song form, the retired emperor Go-Shirakawa (1127–1192) recorded hundreds of these songs. Fortunately for the historian of religions, he also wrote about his assiduous study and performance of *imayō* as a religious discipline. Apparently Go-Shirakawa had scandalized many persons in the imperial court through his cultivation of the art of *imayō*. Most especially, his close association with the primary creators and performers of these songs—women known as *asobi*—was unusual, to say the least, for someone of his social status.[19] *Asobi* were marginalized, lower-class female entertainers, often itinerants who also performed religious roles as shamanic mediums. In the popular imagination, *asobi* were also associated with prostitution, much as gypsy women in the West were. Thus, Emperor Go-Shirakawa turned the social hierarchy of the court upside down when he apprenticed himself to—or, perhaps better, became a disciple of—an elderly *asobi* named Otomae. The scandalous nature of this relationship, however, is not without religious significance: viewed from a Mahayanist perspective of nondualism, this can be seen as an act of nondiscrimination or of collapsing this-worldly and only apparent distinctions of high and low. Be that as it may, Go-Shirakawa made unabashed claims for the power and efficacy of the performance of *imayō* as a form of ritual praxis:

> While singing *imayō* on my pilgrimages to temples and shrines, I have often experienced divine revelations. . . . When *imayō* are sung with sincerity at shrines or temples, they bring about divine revelations and fulfill our wishes. They obtain for people their desire for official positions, prolong human life, and immediately cure illnesses. . . . Why shouldn't singing *imayō* contribute to my securing a seat on the lotus pedestal in paradise?[20]

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It would be a mistake to dismiss statements such as this as little more than grossly inflated claims for the magical power of poetry or song. Rather, we must recognize that for medieval Japanese esoteric Buddhists, whether it was the composition of *waka,* the singing of *imayō,* or the deep contemplation of *mujō* heard in the cry of cicadas, diverse forms of religio-aesthetic praxis were all held to be capable of focusing and clearing the mind and, thereby, opening one to a revelatory psychosomatic experience. In seeing behind the surface of things, as it were, and in hearing the Buddhist truths spoken by the wind in the pines and the cries of migrating geese, it was widely claimed that one could achieve a heightened state of extraordinary consciousness. Such states were often accompanied by tears. Let me return again to Emperor Go-Shirakawa as he recalls a pilgrimage he had made to the famous three shrines of Kumano, deep in the mountains:

> I secluded myself for three days at each of the three shrines of the Hongū, Shingū, and Nachi, during which time I performed the summary recitation of the Senju Sutra a total of one-thousand times. On the 12th day of the same month, we arrived at the Shingū Shrine and I dedicated offerings to the gods. The necessary rituals were performed as usual.
>
> Late that night I went up to the main shrine again and after the circumambulatory walk I stayed up all night in the ceremony hall chanting the Senju Sutra. Some people were there, but they dropped off to sleep in the corner of the hall, and nobody was sitting in front of me. Even Michiie, who was supposed to assist me in rolling the sutra scroll, was dozing off.
>
> The noise of the offerings gradually subsided just past midnight. As I gazed toward the sanctuary, the sacred mirror was glittering here and there in the dim lamplight. I was deeply moved; *tears began to flow* and my heart became serene. About dawn, as I continued weeping and reciting the sutra, Sukekata, his own night-long religious service over, came into the ceremony hall. I suggested to him, "How about singing *imayō*? Now is the perfect time!"[21]

Note the similarities to the account of Shunzei's ritual practice cited above—late-night or all-night recitative and meditative practices in dim low light, the calming and focusing of one's mind, a glittering or flickering point of light, and the shedding of tears by the reciter. Moreover, in both ritual practices, the individual weeps all night long. The shedding of tears was not, it would seem, incidental to these religious practices; they were an essential part.

Even the gods, we are told, were frequently moved to tears by religious practices such as these. Go-Shirakawa, for instance, reports that once, as a Buddhist priest was in the midst of performing an all-night ritual, a *kami* spoke to him from the top of a pine tree, reciting a line from a well-known *imayō*—"Now is the time for our hearts to melt."[22] Needless to say, melting heart-minds produce (and produced) tears in the human realm and the divine.

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Interestingly enough, Idel argues that in Jewish mystical practices there were two types of ritual weeping—first, "mystical weeping," introduced earlier, designed to induce visions and to gain access to esoteric knowledge, and then "theurgical weeping" that was "intended to induce weeping above—internal processes within the Divine triggered by the shedding of human tears."[23] Here, too, we find an intriguing parallel to the Japanese case.

Ritualized Weeping and Narrative Tears

Up to this point we have focused our attention on the ritual weeping of religious elites, especially those who engaged in disciplined meditative practices. This was not the only context in which weeping took place in medieval Japan, of course, nor was this the only locus where tears were accorded spiritual or moral significance. I want to turn now to selected instances of the narrative representation of crying to provide a broader sense of the cultural history of tears in Japan. Historians of religions must avail themselves of a wide variety of texts to reconstruct the past. Even fictional narratives can be precious documents, for they often mirror the contemporary sociocultural reality by, among other things, representing the prevailing cultural and religious values. Other narratives served as vehicles of cultural critique, challenging existing values and social structures, or presented the positions of specific subcultures on a variety of issues. These subcultures include specific religious sects or communities, and socioeconomic groups (for example, peasants, marginalized groups, merchants). We need to pay attention to who was criticizing what or whom in any given text, as well as to the issue of how the discourse around emotions or weeping served to create collective identities and differences. Yet other narratives are unabashedly didactic in intent, as they present social and religious ideals or models for emulation.

My next example of ritualized weeping comes from a thirteenth-century collection of tales, known as *Senjūshū*. The tale is based on a famous episode in the legendary life of the poet-monk Saigyō, recorded in a pair of *waka* poems that are preserved in *Sankashū*, an anthology of Saigyō's poems, in the imperial poetry anthology, *Shinkokinshū* (1206), and elsewhere.[24] Here we are not dealing with the description of weeping as a part of a religious ritual practice; rather, we have a value-laden narrative representation of weeping embedded in a popular religious narrative. As I argued earlier, historians of religions need to pay attention not only to instances of ritual weeping but also to the representations (literary, artistic, and so on) of tears and to the discourse around specific instances of weeping. Insofar as popular tales were major vehicles for conveying religious values, a careful analysis of the significance the tears of the paradigmatic characters had for medieval audiences can reveal important information. However, just as the lachrymose scenes that fill eighteenth- and

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nineteenth-century works of sentimental literature in the West are no longer easily appreciated by readers today, the extravagant emotional displays found in many medieval Japanese texts seem overwrought and the tearful scenes contrived.[25] But we must not let our own cultural-historical sense of what is or is not an appropriately modulated affective display get in the way of our work as historians in reconstructing the cultural work specific lachrymose scenes played in medieval tales. With that caution in mind, let us turn to this popular tale.

One day, while Saigyō was on a pilgrimage, a fierce storm suddenly blew up. The itinerant monk sought shelter in a simple hut in the village of Eguchi, famous for its *asobi*. Ducking inside the hut, he encountered the occupant, an *asobi* who worked as a prostitute. Soon she recounted her tale of woe to Saigyō, including the story of how years before she had been forced to become a prostitute. Finally, she informed Saigyō that as a result of the life she had led, she had finally decided to take the tonsure and to devote herself to spiritual concerns:

> "Although the evening bell sounds every day from the temple in the fields," she went on, "*this evening, its sadness blinds me with tears*. We do not know how long we will live in this impermanent floating world of sorrows—how pointless it all seems. At dawn I am moved by the songs of birds lingering over their farewells and my mind is tranquil. . . ." *The woman wept, sobbing uncontrollably*. Impressed and grateful to have heard her story, *I [Saigyō] could barely dry my own tears*. . . . *As I journeyed homeward I wept at the thought of her noble resolve*. *My heart[-mind] was stirred, sensitive to everything I saw*. Is this the meaning of the phrase *kyōgen kigo* (wild words and ornate phrases)? . . . Why shouldn't our acquaintance create in me the germ of highest enlightenment?

Note that the woman's tears reflect her sincerity, while Saigyō's tears shed in sympathy—or, better, in recognition of her sincerity and religious resolve—are themselves presented as a sign that he, too, had gained deeper spiritual insight ("My heart-mind was stirred, sensitive to everything I saw") and renewed resolve from having heard her life story. In other words, this encounter—not a chance encounter, but one no doubt determined by the characters' karma—leads Saigyō to a deepened religious understanding and a heightened sense of acute perception with soteriological import. What better case, one is expected to say, to illustrate the emptiness of the world and the vicissitudes of life than the pathetic tale of this woman? The narrative ends with the following words spoken by Saigyō:

> Whether there is an autumn wind rustling the reeds, or a storm scattering the leaves deep in the mountains, or autumn rain mixing with the leaves, *when a person is pensive it is the evening sky that calls forth tears*. When we listen at dawn to the monkeys' lonely cries by a tall pine tree or hear the call of migrating geese, *our mind becomes clear and tears flow*.[26]

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This passage is quoted in the fifteenth-century *renga* (linked verse) treatise *Sasamegoto* by the poet-monk Shinkei (1406–1475).[27] Once again we find the elements of mental concentration—here parsed as "when a person is pensive"—clarity of mind, and a heightened sensory perception of selected phenomena associated with weeping. The phrase "our mind becomes clear and tears flow" indicates that in medieval Japan a clear insight into the emptiness at the heart of the world (*kono yo no naka*) was believed to produce tears, but it was equally the case that weeping contributed to this insight. That is, weeping both produced a heightened sensory state and functioned as an external sign of a newly achieved internal spiritual state.

In medieval Japan, Buddhists shed distinctive sorts of ritual and ritualized tears that were held to be spiritually efficacious. Some tears led to deep religious understanding, some marked the person shedding them as having achieved a specific spiritual state, and still others functioned as signs of spiritual indebtedness to another person or of another karmic connection (*kechien*). All of these sorts of ritualized religious tears (as well as additional types) were distinguished by Buddhists from tears that were taken to be signs of debilitating attachment to the things of the world. A full history of medieval Buddhist tears would have to detail all of the ways the Buddhists themselves determined the significance of specific instances of weeping. Obviously I cannot attempt this in this limited format but must content myself with sharing a few examples of such medieval Buddhist glosses.

Let me begin with a depiction of a negative example of ordinary or mundane tears produced by ego attachments. The Kamakura Buddhist priest Mujū Ichien (1226–1312) compiled a fascinating collection of tales known as *Shasekishū*. A number of these tales include value-laden representations of the tears shed by diverse individuals. In his commentary on one such tale, Mujū Ichien's misogyny (common in many Buddhist writings) is in evidence. He ascribes the failure of a monk to realize spiritual release at death to hysterical tears of the monk's wife, who is "naturally" attached to the things of the world and the flesh. Pure Land Buddhists believed that by dying with the *nembutsu* on one's lips and one's mind focused firmly on Amida's Western Paradise one was assured of immediate rebirth there.

> A priest at a mountain village temple fell into the ways of the world and exchanged [wedding] vows with a certain woman. While they were living together with deep mutual affection, the priest fell gravely ill and was sick for many days. Because his wife had nursed him ever so tenderly, he was very close to her and had few contacts with his disciples or others. He felt that he had been most wise to have established this mutual relationship and looked forward to a peaceful demise. Finally, in the fullness of time, his original desire to follow the Way returned and he continually repeated the name of the Buddha. Thinking

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> that his end was at hand, he sat up in the posture of meditation and joined his hands. Facing the west, he recited the *nembutsu*.
>
> "Oh no! You are leaving me. Where are you going?" cried his wife, throwing her arms around the monk's neck and pulling him down.
>
> "For heaven's sake, let me die in peace!" pleaded the monk, lifting himself up to recite the *nembutsu*. But again she toppled him over. Although the monk lifted his voice to recite the name of the Buddha, he died on his back, wrestling with his wife. The manner of his passing was most unbecoming. I wonder if it was an obstacle to his obtaining salvation?
>
> Such incidents are rare. But when wife and child are lined up before us and we see their grief and yearning, how could they not be an impediment for those of inferior capacities? Those who truly wish to be freed from illusion should cast off the impediments to the Way which leads to the mountain of Enlightenment and loosen the mooring lines of the boat which crosses the sea of passions [to the Other Shore].[28]

In his commentary on this tale, Mujū clearly seeks to devalue "ordinary" tears of grief and affection that are based on ego attachments. Yet I suspect that most modern readers of this tale (Japanese, as well as Westerners) would find it hard to follow his lead. As an emotional response to the scene presented by Mujū, this reluctance is not without significance: it marks a major change in religious values in Japan over time, as well as a cultural difference between medieval and modern Japan. As scholars, we often assume a fundamental cultural difference between inhabitants of the West and the rest, but here we have, I believe, a case in which both modern Japanese and Westerners share a sense of alienation. Either way, this reader's response points to the need for a history of emotions.

Without a history of emotions, our studies of other times and places will continue to suffer from debilitating methodological problems. As a consequence, we either find ourselves apologizing for representations of affective displays that grate on modern sensibilities or seek to explain away the differences. Perhaps the most serious and common evasion of scholarly responsibility, however, is to appeal to an "easy" universalism that denies that any real difference exists between us and people in other times and places. The following statement by a scholar of *otogi-zōshi*, a genre of medieval Japanese tales, is typical of this move: "With their appealing human context and entertaining narrative form, *otogi-zōshi* are easy to appreciate without reference to arcane aesthetic principles, historical processes, or religious doctrines."[29] In other words, this scholar implies that *otogi-zōshi* are a "safe" genre since they do not present a challenge to our assumptions; nor do they require any intellectual or historical work in order to appreciate them. Yet even a cursory analysis of a

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single tale of this genre from the late medieval period should suffice to demonstrate the falsity and intellectual bankruptcy of this position.

Shichinin no bikuni ("Seven Itinerant Lay Nuns"), a late medieval work, contains seven first-person accounts by itinerant Buddhist nuns of how they came to become nuns and to pursue enlightenment. In essence, each tale deals with the reformation of the narrator's understanding and evaluation of ordinary emotions. The second tale, offered by a nun in her thirties, also engages the issue of theodicy. It opens:

> I am from the First Avenue in the capital. As people normally do, I got married and was intimate with my husband, but he regretted the fact that, despite the passing of years and months, we did not have a child. I, however, never felt that way. I was always thinking about the emptiness of this sad world and worrying about my fate in the world to come. On long, autumn nights when I lay awake until morning, a sense of the transience of things would come over me, and the fading cries of dying insects would arouse my sympathy. So when I made pilgrimages to worship the [*kami*] and Buddhas, I prayed only for the will to strive for enlightenment and for a life [as a nun] apart from this sad world.[30]

The tale sketches a tension many women must have felt in medieval Japan and elsewhere, as they were subject to apparently conflicting social and religious values. On the one hand, women were expected to marry and bear children; on the other hand, the religious ideal of casting off all ties to the world was also proffered to them. Although the tale addresses a common cross-cultural human situation, the interpretive "spin" put on it is culturally and historically specific. I will argue, however, that it would also be a mistake to assume that this interpretation was one all medieval Japanese Buddhists would have accepted. Finally, we should note the now familiar connection drawn here between sleepless nights (no doubt filled with crying), deepened religious insight, and renewed religious dedication.

With this setup, the plot develops quickly. An "extraordinary child" is born to the couple. "He was not only very beautiful, but he was precocious and clever. He had a sweet voice and would hug his father and me and say things beyond his years." Needless to say, the parents and everyone around the perfect child, too good for this world, are completely taken by him. The tale next introduces a folkloric element of symbolic inversion involving a crane, a symbol of longevity. One day, the doting father decides to kill a crane in order to treat his son to a special meal, but things go awry. The nun describes the pathetic scene when the father attempts to slaughter the crane:

> The knife blade flew out of its handle and stuck in [my son's] breast, piercing him clean through. He screamed in fright, thinking his father had done it to chastise him. "I won't ever go near a bird," he cried. "I won't do anything bad; I won't be cross. I'll do just as you say, Father." He pressed his hands together and began to sob.

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In spite of all the efforts of the parents to save the child, he dies. The nun reports, "My husband and I became hysterical. We screamed at the heavenly deities and wailed at the divinities of the earth. We felt no shame; we were quite crazed with grief."[31]

Up to this point, the emotional responses of the parents seem perfectly normal to us as modern readers. Similarly, the young woman's initial dilemma as she is caught between competing cultural values of motherhood and the pursuit of salvation is familiar. In other words, we recognize and identify with the characters' emotional lives. If the tale stopped here, Virginia Skord's claim that such Japanese tales can be appreciated without any knowledge of "arcane" aesthetics, historical developments, or Japanese religion would ring true. Modern readers can, perhaps, even accept the next narrative development in which the husband "fakes" an emotion. All readers can identify with the character's decision to observe the culture's canon of proper emotions in outward form and to mouth the standard religious rhetoric of the day in order to conceal his real intentions:

> At length my husband regained control of himself, *checked his tears*, and observed consolingly: "Everything is determined by our past actions." He said nothing more and pretended to fall fast asleep. He waited until I was up and about, and then he stabbed himself with the same knife. . . . As it had done to our son, the blade pierced his heart and came out his back.[32]

The retention of tears here is the inverse of the shedding of "crocodile tears." The latter is a false affective display of sympathy designed to conceal one's real feelings and intentions; the husband's checking of his tears here is a false display of emotional equanimity, a highly vaunted Buddhist attitude. Either way, whether tears are shed or checked, there is the recognition that affective displays alone are not always reliable signs of a person's spiritual state or of a religious intention. Let us pick up the tale again.

The nun then reports that, in despair, she was ready to commit suicide herself. Fortunately, she was persuaded not to and, instead, followed the advice that she should take religious vows in order to work for the salvation of her son and husband. Of course, readers (or medieval auditors) would have recognized that taking the tonsure had been her stated desire all along. This knowledge may well have complicated the tale's reception, since it is, after all, the deaths of her husband and son that allow her to realize her own desire. In such a situation, might not the woman have felt guilty over these deaths and wondered anxiously if she had somehow caused this perverse wish fulfillment? The text does not permit readers to entertain this possibility, however. It quickly provides another ending, which will no doubt offend the sensibilities of some (or most) modern readers. If I am correct, it may well have intentionally offended many late medieval Japanese as well.

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After the young nun concludes her tale of suffering and woe, a new authoritative interpretive voice is introduced in the text and the tale concludes abruptly. Having listened to the oral account, an elderly nun—the only other voice introduced—asserts that if the young woman has indeed read the Lotus Sutra, as she claims she has, then she should realize that all of the troubles and recent events in her life were actually blessings in disguise. Surely, the elderly nun opines, it had to have been Kannon, the Compassionate Bodhisattva, who had graciously assumed the forms of the son, the father, and the crane: "'It was all the bodhisattva's way of bringing you to salvation. We can trust in [Kannon]. You are to be envied.' Everyone [present] rejoiced."[33]

If we are to appreciate this tale, we cannot allow our modern secular (or religious) sensibilities to guide us. We can, however, use our comparative knowledge gained in our work as historians of religions to understand this tale—and the depiction of tears therein—as a religious didactic narrative. This tale was one of many circulating in late medieval Japan that sought to offer the final verdict concerning religious truth and human nature. As scholars, we do our own readers a disservice if we re-present tales such as this as depicting the worldview and values of all late medieval Japanese Buddhists. Rather, we must try to relocate and read this tale, with its declamatory narrative and interpretive voice, within the broader discursive field of late medieval Japan.

The tale collection *Shichinin no bikuni* seems to have come from the Mt. Koya region, the site of the headquarters of the esoteric Shingon sect. (This is the same area to which the retired emperor Go-Shirakawa traveled on pilgrimage, as noted earlier.) It is difficult, however, to determine its precise provenance. What we can say is that these tales would have circulated in a context where diverse Buddhist sects and groups competed for a hearing, patronage, and followers, as well as sought to create or sustain a collective identity. These included Shinshū, Pure Land, Hossō, Sōtō and Rinzai Zen, Jishū, and Shūgendō groups, to mention just a few. The blunt, declarative, and intransigent tone of the tale's ending suggests that it came from the milieu of an embattled religious minority, not from a community whose worldview and assumptions constituted the prevailing common sense. The rigid dogmatism would speak to those already within the fold, while marking out a sharp difference from other religious groups and, thus, strengthening a communal sense of identity.

We need to recognize and take seriously the audacious goal of the author(s)/narrator(s) of the tale. This was nothing short of effecting radical change in "normal" human emotional responses to pain and suffering and in the responses to narratives (factual and fictional) of suffering and woe. The text admits no tears of sympathy into the final scene, for instance, as one would find in sentimental works of moral didacticism or in the *Genji monogatari*. As

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in the tale of Saigyō and the Eguchi *asobi,* here a first-person narrative of suffering and woe is said to move hearers to a deeper religious commitment. The reception of the second nun's tale, coupled with the elderly nun's declamation of the meaning of the events therein, is portrayed in decidedly scandalous terms—"everyone rejoiced." The clear implication is that any tears shed at this time were tears of joy. At the same time, the message is clear that such tears would be the only proper ones.

How are we to understand this ending? Bruce Lincoln would, no doubt, call this "a fiction within a fiction" and caution us that "we must not permit ourselves to be caught up too completely by the blandishments of the text."[34] As a secular historian of religions, I would agree in large part with him on this. Yet, I still want to argue that we cannot appreciate the cultural (Lincoln would prefer "ideological") work the text sought to perform in the late medieval period unless we take seriously the role that religion can play (and has played) in the social construction of reality for believers of many stripes. When accepted as a paradigmatic text by the members of a community, a work of fiction can create a psychological and social reality insofar as these persons model their collective and individual responses to the vicissitudes of life on the responses of characters in the privileged text.

In this light, the elderly *bikuni*'s reinterpretation of the tragic events represents what might be called a "fundamentalist Buddhist" understanding of causality. I introduce this phrase for two reasons. First, the elderly nun's interpretive activity takes place within a communally constructed world of meaning in which the faithful all believe that no matter what befalls any of them, "we can trust in Kannon." This is strikingly similar to a common Christian response to a tragic death: "The Lord giveth and taketh away" and we can but answer, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." In other words, the old nun's response is of a kind found elsewhere in the history of religions. While not perhaps a standard response, it is certainly not an unknown one. Second, her interpretation of the tale gains the immediate assent of all present because they share the same exegetical practice. Like fundamentalist Christians,[35] the elderly nun appeals to a scriptural "proof text," a scriptural parallel, in order to legitimate her reading of the current situation. "When we read the Lotus Sutra, we learn that [Kannon] became the Lady Jōtōku and her two sons, Jōzō and Jōgen, in order to convert the king."[36]

Not all Japanese Buddhists would have accepted this reading of the situation any more than all Christians today would accept a fundamentalist position. Nor would all persons in late medieval Japan have accepted the claim that the Lotus Sutra alone provided proof texts for coming to an authoritative understanding of contemporary events. My point is that presumably some people—let us style them "fundamentalist Buddhists"—did come to accept the religious worldview this and other narratives offer and they came to employ the same exegetical practices. Doing so would have led to not only a

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change in viewpoint but a radical re-formation of one's emotionology. I have offered my own interpretation of this tale in order to demonstrate that paying careful attention to the depictions of tears and other affective responses in texts is one way of gaining access to the religious lives of persons in the past and in other places.

The "Second Nun's Tale" in *Shichinin no bikuni* testifies to a significant change in the lived world of meaning of some Japanese Buddhists from that offered by the monk Kyōkai in his ninth-century tale collection, *Nihon ryōiki*.[37] In the latter collection, the compiler/editor constantly seeks to explain stories of extraordinary events in the world through an appeal to the working out of the consequences of the universal law of karma. In *Shichinin no bikuni*, the implied audience's faith in the bodhisattva vow of Kannon to save all sentient beings, coupled with the conviction that a proof text from the Lotus Sutra provides an authoritative guide to understanding individuals' current situations, mitigates the otherwise harsh inevitability of the working out of the universal law of karma. The death of an apparently innocent child, for instance, is no longer necessarily due to the karmic consequences of actions in a previous life. Nor do the seemingly disreputable acts of the husband in the tale necessarily have negative karmic consequences. This is so because the child, the father, and the crane are all declared to have been part of a compassionate deception, an illusion created to help Kannon to fulfill her bodhisattva vow one person at a time.[38] These "facts" or "fictions" mitigate the young nun's need to work for the salvation of her son and husband, allowing her to pursue her own instead. Just as Nancy Ammerman notes that the conviction of being saved is the most important sense of one's being a Christian fundamentalist, here we find evidence of late medieval Buddhists who felt that everything that happened in their lives was meant to contribute in some way to their own salvation.

Conclusion

In this all-too-brief survey of selected types of ritualized weeping in the ancient and medieval periods of Japan, I have tried to present a preliminary sketch of the poetics and politics of affective displays, using selected exemplary texts to do so. A fuller and more nuanced treatment will have to wait for another time. Moreover, were it possible for me here to extend the survey down to the early modern period, I would carefully analyze the poetics and politics of tears in the writings of Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), among others. Bashō represents an important transitional figure, with one foot in a refigured traditional past and the other lifted in movement in a rapidly changing world of possibilities. In his poetry and poetic travel journals, Bashō plays with permutations of the central themes of absence and presence in Japanese religious

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practice over the centuries. The story of the religio-aesthetic uses of *katami* (objects, sites, or persons that provoke memories and recall the deceased and the past) and *ato* (traces, ruins) is a major untold chapter of Japanese cultural history and of the history of tears. The history of tears promises to contribute to a new kind of history of religions, one that places less emphasis on intellectual history and more on lived religion. This would include, most especially, the emotional or affective lives of religious individuals and communities. The study of the poetics and politics of ritualized weeping discloses that affective displays, the discourse around affect and emotion, and lived lives all have a history. Pierre Bourdieu once famously claimed that an entire cosmology was instilled in the psychosomatic bodies of members of the next generation through the imperative, "Sit up straight!"[39] I have tried to suggest that ritualized tears, too—both shed and checked—have a history behind them, a history that historians of religions have yet to write.

Notes

1. See Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), for some thoughtful reflections on doing comparative studies.

2. Vincent Crapanzano, "Glossing Emotions," in *Herme's Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire: On the Epistemology of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 230.

3. See Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 3rd ed. (1872; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

4. Cf. the contradictory and circular definitions given in Webster's for "emotion": "1. an affective state of consciousness to which joy, sorrow, fear, hate, or the like, is experienced, as distinguished from cognitive and volitional states of consciousness. 2. any of the feelings of joy, sorrow, fear, hate, love, etc. 3. any strong agitation of the feelings actuated by experiencing love, hate, fear, etc., and usually accompanied by certain physiological changes, as increased heartbeat, respiration, or the like, and often overt manifestation, as crying, shaking, etc. 4. an instance of this. 5. that which causes or effects such a reaction: *the powerful emotion of a great symphony*" (emphasis added).

5. *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (hereafter *NKBT*), 4:88–89. The *tamakazura* (wreath of jewels) was a ritual object into which the mourners sought to call back the animating spirit (*tama*) of the deceased. The word for "jewel"—*tama*—is homonymous with that for "animating spirit."

6. For a fuller treatment of this case, see my *Ritual Poetry and the Politics of Death in Early Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 183–87.

7. Donald Philippi, trans., *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), 109–12. For the original, see *NKBT,* 1:102–05.

8. *NKBT,* 8:93.

9. It is universally recognized that Ki no Tsurayuki drew here upon a similar claim found in the major preface to the classical Chinese *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*). Acknowl-

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edging this borrowing does not detract from the significance of the claim being made. Rather, if I am correct, it indicates that in many hierarchical societies tears can at times function as "weapons of the weak."

10. The recorded version of this tale ends with, "Thus singing, [Suseri-bime and Ōkuni-nushi] pledged each other with their wine-cups and, embracing each other around the neck, remain enshrined until the present day" (Philippi, *Kojiki,* 112). This is a reference to stone carvings, known as *dosojin,* still found in some rural areas today, which were used in fertility rites. While male commentators over the years have pointed to this passage as an injunction for women to control their jealousy, I suggest that women (and, perhaps, not a few men) heard a different message in this tale.

11. *Sankashū*, no. 76; *NKBT,* 29:32.

12. Donald Keene, trans., *Essays in Idleness: The Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 7.

13. This passage is from *Sasamegoto,* a fifteenth-century *renga* treatise by Shinkei, cited in Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 257. Fuller details of Shunzei's poetic practice can be found in his *karon* (poetic treatise), *Korai fūteishō,* reprinted in *Nihon kagaku taikei.*

14. Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry,* 255. An extended discussion of *hon'i* may be found on pp. 252–57.

15. Ibid., 253.

16. See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 74–88, and Elliot R. Wolfson, "Weeping, Death, and Spiritual Ascent in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys,* ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 207–44.

17. Idel, *Kabbalah,* 85.

18. Ibid., 88. The reference to "desolation ecstasies" comes from Marganita Laski, *Ecstasy: A Study of Some Secular and Religious Experiences* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 168–70.

19. These women were known by other terms as well, including *miko* (medium or shamaness), *arukimiko* (itinerant *miko*), *asobi-me* (courtesans), and *kugutsu*(*-me*) (female puppeteers).

20. Yung-Hee Kim Kwon, "The Emperor's Songs: Go-Shirakawa and *Ryōjin hishō kudenshū,*" *Monumenta Nipponica* 41:3 (1986): 291, 297. See also Yung-Hee Kim, *Songs to Make the Dust Dance: The "Ryōjin hishō" of Twelfth-Century Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

21. Yung-Hee Kim, "Emperor's Songs," 290–91, emphasis added.

22. Ibid., 291.

23. Idel, *Kabbalah,* 76.

24. The *Shinkokinshū* includes the following prose head note and two poems, ascribed to Saigyō and the *asobi:*

> #978 Saigyō. Composed upon Saigyō's being refused a room for the night in Eguchi, where he was detained by rain on his way to Tennōji Temple.
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | yo no naka o | In this world where |
> | itou made koso | it's difficult to renounce |
> | katakarame | everything, |

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kari no yado o mo	how can you deny me
oshimu kimi kana	temporary lodging?

#979 Asobi Tae

yo o itou	Since I've heard
hito to shi kikeba	you've renounced this world,
kari no yado ni	I'm only saying
kokoro tomu na to	you shouldn't leave your heart-mind
omou bakari zo	in a temporary lodging.

(*Shinkokinshū, NKBT,* 28:215)

These poems involve a witty repartee based on the common Buddhist use of *kari no yado*—literally "a borrowed roof" or "a temporary abode"—as a euphemism for the human body. For more on the imagery here, see William R. LaFleur, "Inns and Hermitages: The Structure of Impermanence," in *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 60–79.

25. Karen Brazell, a scholar and translator of medieval Japanese literature, notes the difficulty such texts present to modern readers but offers little in terms of methodological guidance: "In common with . . . much other court literature, . . . *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* sometimes strikes a tone of melancholy that grates on the modern reader, who may see in it an indulgent self-pity. Sleeves damp from weeping soon become soppy. In mitigation it can be said that melancholy was an acceptable tone in Lady Nijō's day, when it was treasured as a sensitive response to the transience of life" (*The Confessions of Lady Nijō,* trans. Karen Brazell [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976], xxii–xxiii).

26. Episode 119, emphasis added in order to highlight the similarities with other reports of all-night rituals and weeping. An annotated version of the text may be found in Nishio Kōshi, ed. *Senjūshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970).

27. For a literary study of Shinkei and his poetic practice, see Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen, *Heart's Flower: The Life and Poetry of Shinkei* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

28. Robert E. Morrell, trans., *Sand and Pebbles (Shasekishū): The Tales of Mujū Ichien* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 146. See *NKBT,* 66:119–204.

29. Virginia Skord, *Tales of Tears and Laughter* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 3.

30. Margaret Helen Childs, *Rethinking Sorrow: Revelatory Tales of Late Medieval Japan,* Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies No. 6 (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1991), 99.

31. Ibid., 100.

32. Ibid.

33. Childs, *Rethinking Sorrow,* 102.

34. See Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 22.

35. For a good introduction to the lived world of meaning of fundamentalist Christians, see Nancy Ammerman, *Bible Believers* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

36. Childs, *Rethinking Sorrow,* 101.

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37. For an annotated version, see Endō Yoshimoto and Kasuga Kazuo, eds., *Nihon ryōiki, NKBT* 70. See also Kyoko Notomochi Nakamura, trans. and ed., *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The "Nihon ryōiki" of the Monk Kyōkai* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), and William R. LaFleur, "In and Out of the Rokudō: Kyōkai and the Formation of Medieval Japan," in *The Karma of Words*, 26–59. I have critiqued LaFleur's reading of one tale from this collection that deals with tears—see "The Function of Ritual Weeping Revisited: Affective Expression and Moral Discourse," *History of Religions* 39:3 (February 2000): 211–46.

38. The "scandal" here, if that is what it is, of explaining away human pain, suffering, and even the deaths of "innocent" human beings is akin to that found in the Book of Job. There, too, Job's wives, sons, and daughters are narrative "ciphers" and replaceable. In the "Second Nun's Tale" the apparent deaths of the son and husband are attributed to a divine vow; in the Book of Job, Job's suffering and the deaths of his family are ascribed to a wager between God and Satan.

39. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 94.

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Productive Tears:

Weeping Speech, Water, and the Underworld in the Mexica Tradition

Kay Almere Read

Productive Tears

Tears flowed as many splendorous, sonorous, watery drops in the dry Mexica (Aztec)[1] world of pre-Conquest Mexico. Both restrained and loudly they flowed. As controlled as elegant speech and as wild as bestial howling they flowed. As apparent expressions of remorse, disappointment, anger, frustration, loss, and pain they flowed. People cried when rulers were installed, over pregnancy, and at weddings and funerals, when punished and castigated, and during the dry season when they yearned for rain. They were the stuff of prayerful petitions made by people and ancestors to each other and the gods; tears created well-formed and well-received advice, and made certain human sacrifices were effective.

What can one make of this huge and seemingly chaotic variety of Mexica tears? If they are the province of the young or women, then why do an apparently equal number of old people and men weep? If they are no more than the overflow of emotion, what then does one make of tears when they appear during highly controlled speech acts? And if controlled weeping is only insincere "crocodile tears," how then can one explain their appearance during the most serious of moments: when rulers were installed; at birth, marriage, and death; or when the drought-stricken world lay like a great "serpent" "slavering," "burning," and "crackling" in the heat, crying for rain?[2]

First, tears served as honorable or good speech, orderly audible products of one's needs and good intentions, and these watery products carried their own potent productive forces. As such, ritual weeping was as sincere and sincerely controlled as it comes among the Mexica; because second, shedding tears created good things. As with well-spoken words, tears at the appropriate moment and place and in the approved style could move various deities to assist the ruler in good governance and people in good living; shape the moral behavior of the younger generations; reform the already guilty; balance out the cosmos

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when disturbed by those beyond reformation; and serve as a kind of "counter-rain" that brought the real thing on schedule. Third, when properly expelled, tears' flowing embodied ethical powers. Tears could prove morally productive by releasing tensions in communities and individuals (a socially beneficial action); integrating spatio-temporal cosmic levels, as well as social levels among the living and the dead; and establishing boundaries among social, political, and economic groups. The good speech sounds spoken by tears ultimately produced good results in people, crops, and the cosmos. Bad weeping sounds occurred at inopportune moments and at out-of-place locations, and they resulted in bad things. To weep properly created communal, social, political, and cosmic orders; to weep improperly messed them up.

Cosmic and Human Waters

All these numerous and varied constructive outpourings become more comprehensible if one understands the cosmic world in which they flowed. The Mexica lived in their own version of a millennia-old Mesoamerican cosmic dwelling, which consisted of a dry upper world sitting above a moist underworld. In between rested Earth's Surface (*Tlalticpac*), upon which dwelt people, animals, plants, and all manner of beings, including trees, mountains, rivers, springs, and clouds. All in this cosmic dwelling was alive in some sense and, therefore, held various powers to affect the lives of others. Above this dry bubble of a dwelling space arched the Sky-Waters (*Ilhuicatl*), which formed the wet roof of the cosmic house. At each of the four quarters a great tree arose forming the cosmic house's corners, and a fifth arose in the middle supporting the roof's highest arch. The sun flowed through the celestial waters by day and dove into the underworld at night, traveling through its moist passageways until dawn. The moon, planets, and all the stars flowed through the sky during the night and traveled by day through the underworld.

Beneath Earth's Surface, in the cosmic basement, a reversed moist world of rotting corruption existed. This underworld included, among other places, the Land of the Rain Gods (*Tlalocan*) and the Land of the Dead (*Mictlan*). Water was contained in these inner worlds, held inside the mountains, which loomed like great pots guarding their precious contents at each of the four corners of the cosmos. Dark and dank, the underworld was interlaced with underground rivers, tunnels, and strange and fertile lands whose inhabitants ate the opposite of what people ate on earth. Underworld creatures ate rotten, diseased, and dead things; and they consumed excrement, blood, bones, and animal and human flesh. But these gruesome meals also provided nourishment for what people ate on Earth's Surface: beans, squash, chilies, and especially corn. Just as trees and corn extended their roots into the ground to eat the fertilizer of

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wet, rotten plants and excrement, life on dry Earth's Surface required the corruption of the moist world below for its very existence. And, of course, trees, plants, and corn could not live without the water encased in those great mountainous pots, which only the gods dwelling therein could release in a timely manner. In turn, the underworld beings required people to bury their excrement in the fields and periodically offer them meals of animal and human bones, flesh, and blood. Without such food, they would starve to death; and if they starved to death, the cosmos would dry up and all its other inhabitants would starve.[3]

In actuality, water often did prove a scarce commodity. These people lived in a semi-arid climate and a topography in which water lay hidden inside the earth except for those moments when it happened to fall from the sky or bubble up in springs. Of course the Mexica were no fools. They exploited this dry land to its fullest, irrigating the terraced hillside farms with runoff and damming off the salinated portion of their great basin area so that they might take advantage of the one portion of wetlands that was spring-fed. And there, out of the muck from the bottom of the wetlands, they constructed raised-mound fields for their crops, farmed fish, and hunted frogs, lizards, ducks, and an enormous variety of other birds and water creatures.

But drought could and did happen periodically. Normally, the Mexica enjoyed two seasons, a wet one from about April to November and a dry one from about December to March. Sometimes that drought extended through much of the year or lasted for several years, creating havoc with the crops and other living things. Such a drought happened in 1450–54. During the first year of that drought the Mexica ruler gave away food, but his supply had decreased so much by the second year that he could not feed his people. So he fed them a last grand meal, said he could do no more, and told them to fend for themselves. Some moved to better lands, others sold themselves and their children into slavery, and many simply died before the rains finally returned three years later.[4] Water proved a serious issue in this world, perhaps the most serious of all possible.

In fact, water paired with images of war served as an all-pervasive metaphor for almost everything good and right. War was the primary way in which the products of moisture were gained. Fertile agricultural fields were depicted as moist and the battlefield as dry. In the moist summer, one waged symbolic war in the agricultural fields to capture the crops from their underground roots; in the dry winter, one fought on battlefields to capture human sacrificial meals for the underworld beings. In the summer, the gods sustained humans with rivers of rain; in the winter, humans sustained the gods with rivers of blood. One ate the other, for there was no such thing as a free lunch in this world. Instead, one remained "indebted" to those who so generously gave of the good things in life.

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Good, Tearful Speech

Tears in such a watery yet dry cosmic house carried great force, for they were the water humans produced. Mexica artists drew tears in exactly the same way as rivers,[5] and one possible literal meaning for "tears" (*ixayotl*) is "face-water."[6] Just as the godly, cosmic waters could produce and sustain the beings of the entire cosmos, little human rivers (in a more limited way) could produce and sustain things important to people. As water carried a potent creative force, on a lesser scale, so, too, tears—and they did so in an amazing variety of ways.

Carefully formulated speeches combined with tears petitioned gods and elders for things of which people felt particular need, such as water. At the height of drought, a prayer begging for rain was made to the Tlaloque and Chicomecoatl, rain deities who resided inside the mountains. This was done in a highly formalized style of speech, and it was then that the prayer maker compared a person's heart to a serpent who "lies within; lies slavering, lies panting, lies crying out. It is a frightful thing as it burns, as it cries, as it crackles."[7]

However, not all petitions were specifically for rain, although water often remained a subtle metaphor for good things. Formal petitions also went to Tezcatlipoca, the Night Wind, asking for a good life and relief from poverty and suffering. The prayer maker spoke on behalf of the suffering poor and their children, who went about in rags, dry-mouthed and reduced to nothing but skin and bones, "weeping and sighing." The prayer maker asked Tezcatlipoca, whom he described as having "sweetness, fragrance, riches, and wealth," to show compassion to the common folk, to appear in their dreams, and raise their heads a bit with his powers. The word used here, *mopaltzinco*, is quite interesting. Translated by the early Christian missionaries as "grace," it literally means "your honorable inner wetness," or as a frozen speech form, "by your means."[8] Certainly good things came by Tezcatlipoca's means, but the prayer maker also metaphorically likened those good things to the riches of a wet cosmos and poverty to the scarcity of a drought-ridden one.

Prayers at a Chief Speaker's (*tlatoani*)[9] or ruler's accession ceremonies established the duties of the new statesman, and one of these duties was weeping. A dignitary capable of fine speech told the new ruler to "put your shoulder to the bundle, to the carrying frame," for the Chief Speaker was to carry the city on his back like a baby in a pack. Then the elder advised the ruler: "Sigh; be sad; call out in sadness to our lord, to the lord of the Near, of the Nigh. He perhaps is not seen as a man, for he is the Night, the Wind.[10] Submit yourself to him; weep, sigh." But the prayer maker also warned the new Chief Speaker that even though he will "see in dreams that which the lord places upon [him]" and that the lord will make him his "lips," "jaw," and "ears," he must weep well and not manifest his fury or anger, or cause anyone else to cry out in sadness. If he does that, he will cease to dream, for the lord of the Near and the Nigh will go away and replace him with someone else.[11]

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The formal weeping of both the living and the once-living helped ensure the health and security of an unborn baby as well. Again weeping to the lord of the Near and the Nigh (indeed, many of these weeping prayers are addressed to the lord of the Near and the Nigh, the Night Wind), an elder begins to shed tears for the life within a newly pregnant mother. He notes that those ancestors who have died, those who have gone to reside "in the water, in the cave," protected us by weeping over us as they would have "wept over [this new life], would have been apprehensive over it, would have marveled, would have considered it a precious thing." He then asks, "Who will weep for it [now]?" Who will be apprehensive over it and marvel at it now that they are gone? The midwife is asked to perform these tearful duties that the ancestors can no longer manage, even though she might sound clumsy by comparison. She respectfully accepts this duty from the elders who have been both weeping to her and crying out to the elderly goddesses of childbirth. It now becomes the midwife's tearful duty to plead to the goddesses on behalf of the child, for she is "skillful" at such things.[12]

The younger generation also was wept over and to, and advised to do likewise. After all, they needed all the help they could get to become calm, humble, responsible adults who knew their place in human and cosmic societies. Holding up the elders and their students as examples, a father explains to his son, "It is said the lord of the Near, of the Nigh, yet hears, receives their weeping, their sorrow, their sighs, their prayers, because it is said that they are good of heart." The son is told he must also humble himself, as do these good weepers, and cry out every midnight, when one day becomes the next.[13] The ruler tells his daughter when she has come of age, "Be devout night and day. Sigh many times to the Night, the Wind. Plead with, speak to, cry out to him, stretch out your arms to him" because he gets pleasure "to hear you at night; then he will . . . give you that which is your desert, your merit." In this weeping night vigil, she must rise from her bed promptly, sweep, wash the gods' mouths, and burn incense.[14] A pregnant woman also is told to hold the vigil, to diligently sweep and clean for the gods, and "especially sigh with all your might. How will it be in a few days? How will it be with us?"[15] Poignant questions, when one remembers the extreme dangers of childbirth.

And finally, good tearful speech could be directed not just to gods but to people as well. A newly betrothed woman "wept much" to the elders of her husband's family that when she came to live with them she would be of no use to them and bring only sickness and pestilence. Nevertheless, they showed her great favor, because she already had prospered by "their motherhood, their fatherhood."[16] Of course, as Tom Lutz points out, her tears might reflect sincere regret over leaving her home for her husband's,[17] but if so, she expresses this regret in the highly formalized structure of good, tearful speech.

Tearful, prayerful petitions were not the only form of the Mexica's weeping words. Good speech could also elicit tears from the guilty or cause their tears

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to disappear by replacing them with sacrificial waters instead. Misguided youth wept when castigated for their idleness. Worse than a good speech could have happened to these hapless boys, so their tears may have been as much in gratitude as a demonstration of their remorse and intention to reform. The same pictorial codex shows weeping younger boys and girls being threatened and pierced with maguey thorns and held over chilies burning in a fire, causing painful burning tears to be shed for their idleness and incorrigibility. However, the reverse of this appears in the form of a young novice priest who takes his punishment of being poked with thorns more stoically.[18] After all, this was a form of sacrificial bloodletting, and if he were to be a priest, he had better get used to it. For him, his offering of water must come as blood and not tears. The punishment itself was viewed as a form of weeping, which was intended to stop any crying on the miscreant's part. A Chief Speaker passed judgment on criminals by "weeping for them, and stopping their tears."[19] After all, he had the power to sacrifice them if their crime was great enough. In other words, good, tearful speech produced good things, while sacrifice caused a different kind of water to flow, one that reordered the cosmos by making up for someone's disturbing behavior. Such blood was metaphorical water, and such criminals were considered excrement to be fed to the appropriate deities as excrement was fed to the corn growing in fields.[20] Which brings us back to water.

The most amazing rites of weeping occurred according to the seasonal calendar governing a round of largely state rites focused on agriculture and war. The solar year was divided into eighteen twenty-day months, with five "uncounted," "unlucky" days at the end.[21] These months marked the passage of the sun and the seasons. Approximately ten months received rain in one form or another (the really useful wet months numbered only about seven). The other eight were largely dry. Weeping occurred at key points only during this dry half; in fact in at least one ritual during the wet season, people were told they must not weep.

The first month of the dry period, Quecholli (October 30–November 18), celebrated the beginning of the hunting season and included the sacrifice of women playing the parts of two female deer deities. They went to their death singing lustily and weeping.[22] A Mexica myth described the sacrifice of two two-headed female deer who tried to seduce two male hunters. They were successful with the first, and thus "ate" him, but the second escaped and eventually captured the strange deer and sacrificed her.[23] It would appear that the women in the ritual might have been playing the parts of these mythical deer, singing out bawdy cries and weeping. Sexuality produced new life, and hunting fed it; both were sacrificial acts that produced fertile bloody water. As the dry season moved in, hunting and its symbolic counterpart, war, replaced agriculture as the major source of fertile sustenance; the Mexica moved from rainwater in the fields to bloody water in the forests and on the battlefields.

During Quecholli or the previous month (Tepeilhuitl, October 10–29), a movable feast called Atemalcualiztli occurred every eight years.[24] This

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elaborate rite celebrated the wealthy, inner riches of the moist underworld and mountains. Creatures and the dead who lived in those places appeared, and participants honored especially Tlaloc, the rain god. People shed tears and fasted on water tamales for seven days and then broke loose with a great feast. They fasted because they had abused corn a great deal, causing it to grow old; the festival made it young again.[25] A widespread myth, which may have been linked with this rite, describes how corn was held inside a mountain; when a lightning god (who himself was rotting) cracked the mountain open and released it, the rain gods then snatched it all away.[26] This rite not only periodically rejuvenated corn—the crop that metaphorically stood for all other crops—but possibly also recognized how it now had been snatched away by the rain gods and locked inside the mountain. People must fast in order to rejuvenate the crop and get the rain gods to release it.

The next annual weeping rite after Quecholli honored war—those acts that brought the sacrificial bloody water that would feed the hungry beings of the underworld. An elderly goddess, Ilamatecuhtli, was slain after dancing alone and weeping. Young girls took part in a rough mock battle with young boys who, in play, hit them with bags filled with corn so hard that it brought tears to their eyes (of course, the feistier of these young women fought back with strong poles).[27] In this rite, participants shed tears as blood would be shed on the battlefields; all three—tears, blood, and battle—produced the sustenance of the deities and people.

The most powerfully poignant rites occurred during the four months before the rains began, when things were at their driest. Beginning in early February in the month of Atlcahualo (or the month of "Abandoned Water"),[28] very young children were sacrificed for the next four months.[29] They were identified as offerings if two swirling cowlicks grew on their heads and were bought for a high price from their mothers, for they were particularly "precious debt payments." Sacrificed at seven mountains surrounding the Valley of Mexico (for which the young offerings were named), they went to their deaths amid great weeping. There was "sighing for them"; people had to keep vigil with them all night (and would be shunned if they did not); and if the children cried, it was said that it would "surely rain."[30] While only one or two children were sacrificed per month in a normal year, a burial cache with skeletons of forty-two children, ages two to seven, has been unearthed at the Templo Mayor, or Great Temple, in the center of what is now Mexico City. This heartbreaking cache has been correlated to the years of the great drought (1450–54).[31] The suffering must have been great indeed during those years to demand such a high debt payment.

Finally, the only ritual in which weeping was expressly disallowed occurred just before the last harvest season in the month of Ochpaniztli (August 31–September 19). This is the last month of gentle, steady rains good for growing

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crops. After this (if they have not done so already), the rains will turn into violent storms before they finally taper off in Quecholli. The rite honored Tonantzin, a mother god, and was performed in absolute silence. The female sacrificial offering went to her death believing not that she would die but that she would sleep with a great lord. She was deceived in order to make her happy, for if she cried, many warriors would die in battle and many women on the battlefield of childbirth.[32]

What do we make of these weeping speeches and tearful rituals petitioning and honoring rain? First, they repeat, in more ways than one, the cosmic spatio-temporal order. In what would be a structuralist's delight, the Mexica seemed to have neatly tied up the seasons, the land, agriculture, war, social orders, and life itself into one lovely, moist formula of dry : wet :: the upper world : the underworld :: war : agriculture :: poverty : wealth :: people : ancestors :: life : death. Moreover, only the various and complex interactions of all these multiple dualities keep things alive; each pair relies on the other for their continued existence.

There is, however, a bit more here than meets the simple structuralist eye. Tears were wept in particular ways, depending on the circumstances; we have not, for example, dealt yet with funerals, which were not at all the restrained weeping suggested by all those good speeches. How do these fit in the picture? And surely tears served more functions than simply as a lovely, symmetrically perfect way to structure life and the cosmos.[33] No matter how balanced, life still presented all kinds of personal and social challenges. From those that come with death to wars, which maim, kill, and disrupt ordinary life in immense ways, life is not always a pretty thing. It is not that a structuralist reading of this is wrong, it is just that there is more depth here than that. After all, one can travel a long way from the top of the cosmic house to the depths of the underworld, and from one of the four quarters to another. So, what else was going on?

Tearful Speech's Style and Moral Messages

Mexica tears produced a carefully formed, nonverbal, but nevertheless noisy language that was intended to both express emotion and create or re-create morally good orders on a number of cosmic and human levels. Both Tom Lutz and Gary Ebersole note how often tears are indeed socially controlled, becoming a performative aspect of rituals and ceremonies. Lutz, in his book on the history of crying, speaks of weeping as a kind of primal language that can "express complex, contradictory desires." According to Lutz, we cry because we want something, although our emotions are often mixed in these pleading petitions. Jeffrey A. Kottler argues that tears produce a language that has both

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form and content.[34] Ebersole adds that tears create "symbolic fields," which may participate in "moral discourse."[35]

Certainly all this appears in the Mexica material. We have already explored their symbolic fields of crying with their complex and even seemingly contradictory emotional implications.[36] Remember how the Mexica always seemed to petition for something with their tears, how they expressed desires for a good life devoid of present suffering; good, even-handed governance in the face of potentially harmful leadership; a healthy baby and simultaneous sorrow at the loss of ancestors; a good life with a new family and perhaps understanding over one's sorrow at leaving home; possible relief for leniency in dealing with misbehavior or the restoration of order disturbed by extraordinarily bad behavior; and most of all, the precious wealth of rain in the face of an arid reality. But how now are these "symbolic fields" expressed? If crying is a language, what is its "linguistic" style or structure? And finally, what is its moral import?

First, tears appear at least indirectly linked both in verbal and pictorial texts with a sense of the power of wind and sound. Many of the prayers are directed to the lord of the Near and the Nigh, the Night Wind, or Tezcatlipoca, who whispered in one's ear when the world turned dark.[37] It is true that Tezcatlipoca had the power to bring riches and wealth, but he also could inflict illness on people who did not properly fast or abstain from sex before rituals. And while the source of sweet fragrance, he also sent out evil smells such as those of skunks or when an animal has sprayed. When such foul odors blew through the night air, people said that Tezcatlipoca had "broken wind."[38]

In other words, Tezcatlipoca took form as a bodily wind that could send either wealth or disaster. Both came as odorous breezes from the underworld: the sweet fragrance of flowers growing from the earthy rotting loam or the foul smells of excrement itself.[39] One used the soft and loud sounds of weeping, windy expirations themselves, to control the good and nasty possibilities of the odoriferous night winds. Since night was associated with the disease-ridden, cold, and dark underworld, this makes some sense. The sounds of tears flowed like the night winds themselves in order to bring good things and avoid those undesirable things night winds brought. For this reason, one could not weep just at that point in the moist summer when the fragrant crops were ripening for fear of bringing on dark winds of destruction that would kill both warriors and women engaged in essentially life-producing battles.

Pictorially, Mexica artists drew glyphs indicating speech, little scrolls emanating from a person's mouth like so many little puffs of air. When, for example, young boys called out the name of a newborn babe, each was shown with a speech glyph floating out from his face.[40] Speech bore particularly formative powers, for sounds carried a force of their own. Just as the force of a Chief Speaker's speech was embedded in his name, "He-who-speaks-it" (*Tlatoani*), so, too, his tears; part of his speech was to be weeping. How else could he petition the gods, especially the lord of the Near and the Nigh, the Night Wind?

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As properly formed speech expelled potent breath, so, too, the sounds that went with tearful, human rivers.

The multiple layers of meaning embedded in the word *choca* (to weep) give a hint as to the complexity of tears' "linguistic" structure. *Choca* means, variously, to cry, weep, howl, bleat, roar, moo, and bark.[41] In other words, the sounds of crying could be as quiet and restrained as gentle weeping or as wild as a whole zoo of beasts in an uproar. Weeping, no matter how formal our texts have suggested so far, was not necessarily quiet.

The texts are not always clear which meaning one should take, although one can often make educated guesses. In those using highly formalized speeches, weeping often appears paired with "to sigh" (*elcihcihui*, or *suspirar* in Spanish). At such times, the recommendation may be to also appear "sad," as in the elder speech maker's advice to the newly installed Chief Speaker. "To be sad" (*tlaocoya*) was linguistically linked to "a petition," "mercy," or "favor" (*tlaocolli*) and "to be merciful" (*tlaocolia*).[42] Such links suggest a more restrained form of weeping aimed at more measured needs than those stemming from great emotional desires. At other times, such as in the midnight vigils, weeping and sighing also appeared with "to cry out" (*tzatzahtzi*), which has the extended meaning of "to crow" and "shout repeatedly."[43] In these instances, weeping seems to act more like emotional lamentation than the carefully measured words of a ruler, for example, seeking good things for his people.

Funerals for rulers and warriors provide examples of loudly expressed crying and howling. When a ruler died, women from his lineage, his primary, secondary, and tertiary widows,[44] and old women hired for the purpose would set up a frightful weeping and moaning all over the city. The sixteenth-century historian Fray Diego Durán notes that many of them wailed even if they did not feel like it.[45] Both Lutz and Kottler remind those of us who come from a society that often inhibits displays of grief, making it a private affair, that other societies have a strong sense of community in which grief must be made public.[46] This is at least part of what is going on here.

But the loud sound of such crying and profuse flowing of tears also helped move the ruler into the moist and rotting underworld Land of Death. Moreover, royal funerals were occasions to call in both one's allies and one's enemies as a way of establishing new political relationships and boundaries. A strong ruler's death could draw hundreds of politically tied mourners. The allies confirmed their support, and the enemies recognized the essential difficulties to be had overcoming this particular city's strength. The death of a weak ruler might draw only a few allies, and the enemies might choose simply to stay away as a mark of their contempt. Following the funeral, the city could expect trouble in terms of collecting tribute, staving off revolts, and other challenges to war. Funerals thus showed off a city's power as well as its grief. The force of such sonorous tears produced new relationships among the living and the dead on personal, societal, political, and even economic levels.[47]

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Likewise, the mournful and loud weeping of old men accompanied the return of the Chief Speaker and warriors from battle, lamenting the deaths of those who did not come back.[48] The elders and relatives of a dead warrior fasted for eighty days, eating only one meal per day and not washing either their hair or faces until their tears encrusted the dirt to them, creating concrete masks of weeping. At the end of this mourning period, elderly priests scraped the tearful dirt from their faces, wrapped it in paper, and buried it at Tztatzcantitlan or "Place Where the Wailing Ends." This last ceremony was called the "Vestiges of Tears."[49] In a dramatic, protracted gesture, wailing tears became melded with the crud of the underground and then buried there. As the dead moved into the Land of Death, so, too, the loud, piercing tears of those they left behind.

If tears, both loud and soft, could form and re-form human communities and move people from one state to another, then they surely bore moral import as well. On the one hand, one might argue along with Lutz[50] that just as tears of emotion physically, even chemically, work to reduce emotional tension, such tears of funeral lamentations release the tensions brought on by death. The same may be true for the many complex, contradictory emotions apparently felt in the face of poverty, governance, birth, marriage, and drought. On the other hand, weeping rituals also integrated the various cosmic spatial and temporal levels with the realities of human lives on Earth's Surface. Moreover, these watery rites also integrated numerous social levels among the living and the dead, parents and their children, in-laws and their daughters-in-law, new mothers with their unborn babies and extended families, rulers with their subjects, and cities with both their allies and enemies—or at the very least, tears drew the boundaries that were to exist among all those folk. Symbolically, a series of dualisms gave moral structure to numerous and highly complex communal entities in this intricate moist, yet dry, cosmos.

Weeping served as morally productive acts that created cosmic and social goods. When social orders became upset, weeping helped restore them. Tears produced rain in times of drought; funerals created new personal, societal, political, and economic relationships; and castigation and punishment remade social boundaries and limitations. By drawing on the moist and dark winds of the underworld, weeping speech structured and restructured life on Earth's Surface. Well-formed productive tears kept the Mexica universe functioning.

Notes

1. By the Spanish Conquest in 1521, the Mexica had not called themselves Aztec for several centuries. Indeed it is no accident that the Spanish city, which rose on top of their capital Tenochtitlan, was named Mexico City or that the country came to bear that name.

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2. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex: A General History of the Things of New Spain,* trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research and University of Utah, 1953–1982), bk. 4, p. 37.

3. For further cosmological information, see A. López Austin, *The Human Body: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988); Kay A. Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); and Kay A. Read and Jason J. González, *Handbook of Mesoamerican Mythology* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio Press, 2000).

4. Fray Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain,* trans. Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 238–41.

5. See, for example, Eloise Quiñones Keber, ed., *Codex Telleriano Remensis: Ritual, Divination, and History in a Pictorial Aztec Manuscript* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), fols. 112, 41v; and *Codex Magliabechiano,* produced by Zelia Nuttal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1903), fols. 65v–66r.

6. Tears or *ixayotl*: face-watery substance (*ix[tli]-ayotl*); or face-discharge (*ix[tli]-xayotl*) (Frances Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983], 110).

7. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 6, p. 37.

8. Ibid. *Mopaltzinco* is indeed a frozen form that signifies "by your means." "Grace," the customary translation, however, bears the heavy weight of Christian colonial interpretation such as is found in the often sermonlike Spanish of Sahagún's commentary. Sahagún's language was picked up less than one hundred years later by the Jesuit grammarian Horacio Carochi (1579–1662) in *Compendio del arte de la lengua Mexicana* (Mexico City: Editorial Innovación, 1979), 37; again about two hundred years later by Rémi Siméon in the nineteenth-century *Diccionario de la lengua Náhuatl o Mexicana* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1981), 370; and again in the twentieth century by people like Richard J. Andrews in *Introduction to Classical Nahuatl* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), 461. "Grace" signifies a theological view concerned with the relationship of free will to God and is not at all commensurate with indigenous, Mexica views. While my translation is somewhat unusual, it makes more sense than notions of Christian grace (*mo-palt[ia]-zin-co*: your-<to wet>-honorable-postposition, inside of, in the time of).

9. The political figure the Spanish chroniclers called "king" or "ruler" was called a *Tlatoani* in Nahuatl, which literally means he who speaks it (*tla-[i]toa-ni*: subj-<speak>-agent), a title indicating the power of speech. It has become convention to translate this as "the Chief Speaker."

10. As "the Night, the Wind" (*iooali, ehecatl*), the lord of "the Near and the Nigh" (*tloque, naoaque*) is another form of Tezcatlipoca, a major god for the Mexica (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 6, pp. 7–9), and one closely aligned with both rulership and their patron god, Huitzilopochtli. In this form, Tezcatlipoca is always close by, like the wind, within hearing distance, for "near and nigh" is based on the postpositions "close to" (*tloc*) and "adjacent to," or "within earshot" (*nauac*) (Karttunen, *Dictionary,* 183, 309).

11. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 6, pp. 50–52.

12. Ibid., 137, 152.

13. Ibid., 114.

14. Ibid., 95.

15. Ibid., 142.

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16. Ibid., 130–31.

17. Tom Lutz, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 213–14.

18. *Codex Mendoza* in Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), fols. 70r, 59r, 60r, 62r.

19. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 6, p. 76.

20. Louise Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989); López Austin, *Body,* 400–405; López Austin, *Una vieja historia de la Mierda* (Mexico City: Edicíones Toledo, 1988), 13–16, 48–50; and Read, *Time and Sacrifice,* 152–55, 166.

21. The five days left at the end of the eighteen months of the solar year, or the *nemontemi,* literally were "not counted" because they were considered "idle" and, therefore, unlucky; if one were to count them, they would bring their bad luck into the year to come (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 4, p. 137; Read, *Time and Sacrifice,* 106–07): 20 days × 18 months = 360 + 5 bad days = 365 days.

22. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 2, pp. 134–40.

23. *Codex Chimalpopoca* in *History and Mythology of the Aztecs,* trans. John Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 151–52.

24. Atemalcualiztli shifted because it was timed by another calendar that did not set itself on the sun, rather as Easter shifts because it is timed by the lunar calendar. Hence, the feast occurred either in Quecholli or the preceding month, Tepeilhuitl (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 2, pp. 238–39).

25. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 2, pp. 238–39; Sahagún, *Primero memoriales,* trans. Thelma D. Sullivan (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), fols. 254r, 65–69; facsimile edition: Sahagún, *Primero memoriales,* ed. Ferdinand Anders (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); *Codex Telleriano Remensis,* fols. 11r, 24–25, 168–70, 259–60; and Fray Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 238–47, 296.

26. *Codex Chimalpopoca,* 146–47; Read and González, *Mythology,* 173–79.

27. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 2, p. 156.

28. *atl-cahualo:* water-abandon, nonactive.

29. According to Sahagún, these months were: Atlcahualo (February 12–March 3), Tlacaxipehualiztli (March 4–23), Tozoztontli (March 24–April 12), and Huey Tozoztli (April 13–May 2). See Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 2, for extended descriptions of these rites. One of these rites is also described in Durán, *Gods,* 154–71.

30. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 2, pp. 1–2, 43–44.

31. L. López Luján, *The Offerings of the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan* (Niwot: University of Colorado Press, 1994), 192–206, 347.

32. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 2, p. 119. This rite may have married off the young woman to Huitzilopochtli, in a repetition of an historical event related by Durán in his history of the Mexica (*History*, 37). Since Huitzilopochtli was the patron god of the Mexica, this would then make her their mother.

33. For example, I have suggested elsewhere that the manner in which these cosmic pairs interacted was not completely dualistic but took more the form of an eating continuum, in which the entire cycle of hunting, capturing, eating, digesting, excreting, feeding, and hunting again occurred. Rituals could emphasize one or more points

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on this continuum depending on the moment and need (Read, *Time and Sacrifice,* 130–37).

34. The literature on weeping is not vast and is largely lacking in coherent studies outside the West. Of recent work, Gary L. Ebersole, "The Function of Ritual Weeping Revisited: Affective Expression and Moral Discourse," *History of Religions Journal* 39:3 (2000): 211–46, forcefully points out the need for such studies and some of the shapes these studies might take; and both Lutz's *Crying* and Jeffrey Kottler's *Language of Tears* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996) include some cross-cultural material, although Kottler, as a therapist, comes to the topic from a perspective concerned largely with creating healthy emotional lives in our own society. Both Lutz and Kottler also take into account the complex interaction of the physical and nonphysical aspects of tears. Of the two, Lutz's work is the more comprehensive culturally and historically. Kay Carmichael's *Ceremony of Innocence: Tears, Power, and Protest* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) takes a somewhat poetic approach to the topic. Other works include: Marilyn Bonham, *The Laughter and Tears of Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), on children's tears; Helmuth Plessner, *Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behavior* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), on tears and laughter; and William H. Frey II and Murial Langseth, *Crying: The Mystery of Tears* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985), on the psycho-physical groundings of tears.

35. Ebersole, "The Function of Ritual Weeping," 214.

36. Of course, it is extremely difficult to know for sure what emotions the speakers are feeling. The best one can do is surmise from the words of the text what the emotions were at least supposed to be. A couple of texts do suggest cases in which the source of tears was largely emotional. One Mexica ritual seemed to elicit tears of anger and frustration. During Uey Tecuilhuitl (August 2–21), the ruler handed out food to people, but it apparently was not enough; those at the end of the lines waiting for their share missed out and cried out in apparent frustration. In other words, these tears were not necessarily meant to be part of the formal ceremony (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* bk. 2, p. 103). *The Codex Magliabechiano* (fols. 76v–78r) also shows sick people weeping, presumably from pain, in healing ceremonies.

37. See note 10.

38. J.L.M. Furst, *The Natural History of the Soul in Ancient Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 140–41.

39. The god Quetzalcoatl-Ehecatl served as the daytime counterpart to Tezcatlipoca. Quetzalcoatl-Ehecatl blew the Mexica sun into motion at its creation, and as the planet Venus, he followed the sun closely on its path through the watery sky. Quetzalcoatl's bodily wind thus emanates from his mouth, while Tezcatlipoca's blows from his rear. As the daylight illuminates the mouthy edible production of the upper worlds, so the night obscures the excremental production of the underworld.

40. *Codex Mendoza,* fol. 57r.

41. Karttunen, *Dictionary,* 54; Siméon, *Diccionario,* 107.

42. Karttunen, *Dictionary,* 287.

43. Ibid, 311.

44. A Chief Speaker found his wives among his allies and conquests, for marriage structured complex political and economic alliances. The primary wife came from the Mexica's most valued ally, secondary wives from willing alliances, and tertiary wives as

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tribute from those he conquered (Kay A. Read, "Sex, War, and Rulers: Mexica Royal Images of Boundary Breaking and Making" in *In Chalchihuitl, in Quetzalli/Precious Greenstone, Precious Quetzal Feather: Mesoamerican Studies in Honor of Doris Heyden*, ed. E. Quiñones Keber [Lancaster, CA: Labyrinthos Press, 2000], 162, 166).

45. Durán, *History*, 301.

46. Lutz, *Crying*, 200, 202; Kottler, *Language*, 111–12.

47. Kay A. Read, "Death and the Tlatoani: The Land of Death, Rulership, and Ritual," in *Representing Ritual: Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagún*, ed. E. Quiñones Keber (Niwot: University of Colorado Press, 2002), 143–74.

48. Since war often involved capturing soldiers alive to sacrifice later, the enemy carted them home as living captives, leaving no dead bodies for their compatriots to bring back to the soldiers' families. In such cases the lost captive was regarded as dead, even if the deed was not yet done upon the return of the troops. Deaths did occur on the battlefield, but the texts do not make it clear whether the bodies were brought back or left behind. Since war could take place at a great distance from home, travel was by foot, and no draft animals existed to carry goods and equipment, the Mexica may not have brought any bodies back with them. At any rate, these rituals used the clothing and equipment of the dead warriors and substituted a wooden image for the body (Durán, *History*, 149–52).

49. Durán, *History*, 301, 149–52.

50. Lutz, *Crying*, 27, 68.

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"Why Do Your Eyes Not Run Like a River?"

Ritual Tears in Ancient and Modern Greek Funerary Traditions

Gay Ord Pollock Lynch

Introduction

This essay illustrates the multiple and often mutually contested meanings of tears in ancient and modern Greek lament ritual, and it considers their remarkable contribution to the cultivation and dissemination of aesthetic form and creativity. First, I will offer basic commentary on Greek ritual lament. Second, to illustrate Gary Ebersole's assertion that "[t]he object of study for historians of religion is not only ritual weeping practices per se, but also the . . . activity . . . that takes place around tears more generally,"[1] I will describe selected classical white-ground funerary *lēkythoi,* humble oil pots, that were the favored offerings, both below and above the ground, to the Athenian dead during the better part of the fifth century B.C.E.

I have chosen these particular oil vessels for two reasons: first, because they are inscribed with artistic renderings of ritual lamentation practices; and second, because they are performative. In other words, I hope to show that these delicate vases, on which burial rites are realistically portrayed, vividly articulate and translate lamentation into a visual language. I am calling upon the archaeological record as a visual bibliography to illuminate the meanings of ritual tears in Greek lament tradition.

Greek Ritual Lament

Since the "mists of time," women in Greece have come into situational community within a dense web of ritual boundaries to lament—in essence, to bewail—the deaths of loved ones. Lamentation ritual in Greek culture is an ancient, rhetorically complex tradition of funerary practices involving multiple modes of expression. Among these modalities are lament poetry, the oldest recorded type of song in Greece;[2] emotive techniques of the body; and prescribed funerary rites in a traditionally approved sequence.

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Of particular significance for this discussion is the fact that streams of glistening tears, from antiquity to the present day, have been considered crucial to the performance of each expressive mode of lament ritual behavior. Tears are as much a part of the syntax of lament as words. Tears traditionally accompany emotive gestures of the body, and they punctuate and actually define different sequences of funerary rites. Strange as it may seem to those of us who associate tears with spontaneity, they are obligatory in these contexts; without them the rituals we are considering are incomplete or even meaningless.

Far from a "spontaneous" show of emotion, lamentation in Greek tradition is a well-orchestrated sequence of high intensity. Weeping and lamenting are carefully regulated forms, cultural containers if you will, into which emotions of grief and sorrow are channeled, amplified, and poured back out according to the perceptions and shared understandings of the community.

Both ancient and modern Greek literary sources advocate the shedding of tears during rites of death and burial. For example: Elpenor, companion of Odysseus who dies in an accident on Circe's island, admonishes Odysseus in Hades, "[D]o not leave me behind unburied and unwept";[3] Electra cries out in horror at her mother's crime: "Ah, cruel reckless mother . . . a husband you had the heart to bury unlamented!" (Aesch. *Lib.* 429–33); and Margaret Alexiou, in her pioneering and unforgettable investigation of Greek lament, draws our attention to the modern Greek proverb, which is from a lament that inherits the ancient imperative of tears, "What is he doing in Hades unwept and without memorial?"[4]

These and countless other literary sources attest to the network of obligations and values that has sustained Greek mentality about death and burial rites for centuries. While literary tradition tells us that ritual tears are a critical Greek value, classical white-ground *lēkythoi* show us.

Lēkythoi

These oil vessels of understated grace, as described by David Gordon Mitten, "with disc base—cylindrical body—concave neck—and trumpet mouth,"[5] had a special part in ancient Greek ceremonies connected with the dead: at the *prothesis* (as it was and still is called), when the dead lay in state, *lēkythoi*, containing sweet-smelling oil, were placed by the bier to anoint the body and to perfume the room. *Lēkythoi* were placed in the grave and hung on the tombstone or placed on the steps at the burial and at subsequent graveside visits.[6] The outpouring of liquids, libation, in this case the precious commodity of oil, was a common religious act designed to both appease and nourish the dead. The tall slender neck of the white-ground *lēkythoi*, with its flat top and angular inner edge, was designed to pour a fine, slow stream, calculated to waste not a single drop. A thin coating of pure white clay—a white "slip"—laid over the

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Figure 1. White-ground *lēkythos* by the Achilles Painter, 440–435 B.C.E. Height: 37.1 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989.281.72.

lēkythos as a surface for figure work heightened both the expressiveness and the efficacy of funerary ritual iconography.

As we shall see, the depicted scenes consistently conveyed continuing communication between the living and their beloved dead. Made for strictly private use as offerings to the dead from their nearest relatives, funerary *lēkythoi* were an intimate form of personal communication and communion between the surviving family and the loved one into or onto whose grave they were placed. The six Attic vessels I will discuss all date between 485 and 425 B.C.E. of the classical period. Four principal subjects can be distinguished on these

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vessels: first, the *prothesis*, the laying of the body on the bier; second, family visits to the grave; third, women preparing for such a visit; and fourth, scenes that mythologize death.[7]

Our first *lēkythos*, by the Achilles Painter, now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (see fig. 1), illustrates an essential feature shared by ancient and modern Greek eschatology, namely, that the dead are literally present in the vicinity of the grave and are capable of experientially receiving ritual acts addressed to them there by the living. Here the sensitive artist, whom J. D. Beazley calls "the classical painter *par excellence*,"[8] offers what classical scholars have agreed is an epiphany of the deceased at the grave.[9]

This superbly preserved *lēkythos* is decorated with a poignant graveside encounter. On the cylindrical body, the figure zone, a tall young man—the living mourner—clad in a dark red himation, approaches a funerary *stēlē*. His right arm is extended in a gesture of prayer. On the other side of the *stēlē* is a smaller boy, clad in a vermillion himation, who looks straight across the grave at the living mourner. His right arm is slightly raised and appears to touch the *stēlē*, while his left arm is lowered, with forefinger pointing toward the ground. Just above him hovers a tiny winged figure, shown in silhouette, its right arm raised to its head in a gesture of mourning. This winged figure denotes the boy as the one who has died, for it symbolizes the *psychē*, the animate element in human beings that the Greeks visualized as departing at the moment of death, like a little breath or a puff of wind. Here it flutters and weeps above the dead youth, who seems to point to his present dwelling—the tomb and the earth.

Not only does this scene render eschatology in artful form, it also presents us with a visual language of a number of modern laments; for example, the conventional "unfulfilled wish" lament, surviving across thousands of years, to which, astonishingly, the dead may reply:

> —Tell me, tell me . . . when you will return, that I may
> lay marble on the courtyard, for you to take a stroll.
> —When the olive makes wine and when the grape makes oil,
> and when the sea runs dry and is sown with wheat
> then . . . I shall return from black Hades.[10]

The "unfulfilled wish" lament is always accompanied by weeping. In this case, tears participate in discourse that performs a vital function. As Margaret Alexiou notes, "[B]y asking for the impossible, the mourner gains an assurance that the dead has accepted his lot and will never return."[11]

Our second *lēkythos* is by the Sabouroff Painter and is now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (see fig. 2). It shows the *prothesis*, the laying out of the body. The action of *prothesis* confirms death and provides an opportunity for the performance of lamentation. On the figure zone the dead is shown on the bier. The bier is adorned with ribbons, traditional signs of reverence and

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Figure 2. White-ground *lēkythos* by the Sabouroff Painter (*ARV* 846, no. 190), second quarter of the fifth century B.C.E. Height: 31.7 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 07.286.40 (Rogers Fund, 1907).

respect. At the head of the bier stands a heavily mantled man, who maintains "a kind of grim decorum."[12] A woman, whose hair has been cut short as a sign of mourning, stands at the center of the bier with both arms raised to her head, the traditional two-hand mourning gesture. She laments openly, tearing her hair and striking her head, along with another woman who stands at the foot of the bier.

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Here at the bier, and later at the grave, groups of women—in antiphonal interplay—create a concert of voices that echo one another, respond to one another, and guarantee one another. This interplay constructs a kind of affective enclave, which is considered a sign of the "the good death." Cooperative antiphonal relations generate responses of validating verbal and nonverbal significations as women "take" the lament from one another. Tears are a crucial nonverbal signification, for when the singer's pain becomes overwhelming, her stylized weeping catalyzes the transfer of lament discourse to another singer.[13] The shedding of tears, then, functions as a kind of critical hinge on which ritual lament discourse is dependent. This discourse as a whole constitutes a dialogue between the mourners and the deceased and recounts specific information about the history of the deceased. Besides expressing emotion, which is considered "the preserve of women"[14] in cultures as diverse as those of Finland, the New Guinea highlands, and Greece, lamenters are also responsible for keeping the memory of the deceased alive. This is to say, as Nadia Seremetakis suggests, that the continuation of mourning discourse after stylized weeping assures the continuation of the deceased's memory.[15] In this way, tears carry the dead forward in the stream of life.

Here at the bier, in tearful community, begin the rites in which survivors share, in some sense, the journey of the dead and turn together toward a long process of reaffirming relationships, mobilizing resources, and legitimating, anew, a ruptured social order. The *prothesis* scene on this *lēkythos* mirrors a society that has internalized cultural values and behavioral norms in which tears play a critical role.

The third *lēkythos*, now in the National Museum in Athens, is by the Painter of Athens 1934 (see fig. 3). It shows a woman on the right side of a *stēlē* who has fallen to her knees and is beating her breast with her right hand—*kommos*—a formalized ancient ritual gesture of the body that enables the expression of the inexpressible. *Kommos* is traditionally accompanied by weeping. Tears thus unite women's "private" grief with formalized ritual lament. In this case, the *lēkythos* captures the compulsion of the ritual occasion not articulated elsewhere and artfully displays emotions as "*embodied* thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that 'I am involved.'"[16] It also shows us that the power of lamentation is not wielded by words alone.

Kommos is an expression of divine essence and power, for at the Festival of Adonis, the *Adonia*, Aphrodite mourned the death of the young god by solemn lamentations, weeping, and the beating of breasts.[17] The rightness of conduct before the dead is prescribed by a language of gestures handed down over centuries. This *lēkythos* shows us that in the act of *kommos*, tears render the body a vehicle of transformation: the symbolic breakdown of the body, through gestures of self-affliction and subsequent reconstruction, points toward a renewal of creative powers; or perhaps, as Walter Burkert has suggested, self-afflictive gestures redirect the aggression felt in response to

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Figure 3. White-ground *lēkythos* by the Painter of Athens 1934 (*ARV* 1236, no. 1), third quarter of the fifth century B.C.E. Height: 25 cm. Athens, National Museum, 1934.

the shock of death inward, since the invisible enemy cannot be attacked directly.[18]

Our fourth *lēkythos* shows that part of the activity encompassing ritual tears is the beribboning, the bewreathing, and the anointing of the grave marker. It is by an artist "near the Timokrates Painter" and is now in the Elvehjem Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin in Madison (see fig. 4). In the figure zone are shown two women who have prepared their reed baskets and

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Figure 4. White-ground *lēkythos*, near the Timokrates Painter, ca. 460 B.C.E. Earthenware, painted slip decoration in white-ground. Height: 40.3 cm. Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin–Madison. Edna G. Dyar Fund and Fairchild Foundation Fund purchase, 70.2.

are proceeding to the grave. The woman on the left, a matron, wears a black mourning cloak over a red-brown sleeved peplos, while the other, possibly her maid, is dressed in a sleeveless (Doric) peplos that is fastened by a fibula, an elaborate cloak pin. The matron has a diadem in her hair. Each woman carries a basket painted to match the other's clothing.

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Of ritual significance are the tubular fillets and the flat ribbons (*tainiai*) in the baskets. The fillets were made of thick white wool and were then stuffed with rose leaves.[19] They were laid, in a circular position, on the base of the *stēlē* like a wreath. The flat ribbons were wound around the *stēlē* and then tied into a knot or a bow. These, a mark of homage, were used for honoring the dead.[20] In the baskets the women also carry *lēkythoi,* intended for ritual libations.

The arrangement of these offerings in the baskets was a serious matter, governed by traditional rules,[21] much like the orderly basket arrangements of oil, wicks, matches, and flowers one sees, carried by women, in rural Greek cemeteries today. No "token pilgrimage"[22] this but rather reverent symbolic action. Why "reverent"? Because the care lavished on the tomb has to be a gift of love to be received by the dead in the proper spirit. In Sophoclean language, heartless offerings were to be "throw[n] . . . to the winds" (Soph. *El.* 436). "Negative motivation" is equally important, for fear of the agitation and vengeance of the dead arising from neglect of proper offerings is a recurrent theme in laments throughout Greek tradition.[23] *Lēkythoi* convey a treasury of ritual attitudes toward death. This one, in particular, shows the affinity of lament practices with the visual arts.

Our fifth *lēkythos* is now in the National Museum in Athens. It is by the Inscription Painter (see fig. 5). In the figure zone we see a woman who weeps as she presents her offerings of ribbons at the *stēlē*. On the right side of the *stēlē* another woman (partial view) brings a basket of offerings. Draped around the shaft of the stēlē is a flat ribbon. In the field, on either side of the *stēlē,* hang *lēkythoi.* A plausible explanation for the four circles on the lower step of the *stēlē* base is that they are the artist's conception of indentations that held offerings and vases.[24]

When anointed with oil and decked with garlands and ribbons, the *stēlē* served as an object of ritual devotion and as an objective correlative for the social matrix of the community's response to death. In Greek tradition, the "reading" of this response is organized by the ethics of kin support and tending of the *stēlē,* for it is here, in the world of physical space, that the conversation between the living and their dead takes place. Recent anthropological field studies show that today, just as in classical times, the state of the *stēlē* speaks to the moral condition of the living kin and their dead.[25] Loring Danforth's research shows that as women gather at the grave "to keep the dead company," they wash, clean, and scrub the markers "as if they were houses."[26]

During these visits of graveside care, women's tears bear a moral necessity that is bound up with basic well-being after death; in both ancient and modern Greek eschatology, death imposes a condition of thirst and dryness on the dead. This condition is already acknowledged by Odysseus on his visit to the underworld in his search for his lost colleague, Elpenor. It was only by pouring out drink offerings that Odysseus was able to summon the soul of his fallen colleague.[27] Today, the association of withering thirst with the dead is still so

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Figure 5. White-ground *lēkythos* by the Inscription Painter (*ARV*748, no. 2), second quarter of the fifth century B.C.E. Height: 36.5 cm. Athens, National Museum, 1958.

close that *i dhipsasmeni* (the thirsty ones) is synonymous with *i pethameni* (the dead).[28] In modern laments it is the mourner's moral duty to weep sufficient tears to make a lake or a spring to quench the thirst of the dead, as in the following lament, recorded by Margaret Alexiou:

> Why do you stand there, . . . like strangers?
> Why do your eyes not run like a river,

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so that your tears become a lake and make a cool spring,
for the unwashed to be washed, for the thirsty ones to drink?[29]

Tears at the grave in Greek tradition thus cross the boundaries between the visible and the invisible worlds and make possible the contact between the living and the dead. In fact, they nourish and water the dead and slake their thirst. But there is a more subjective aspect of this watering, this weeping: to quench the thirst of the dead is to bestow memory upon them, for in Greek eschatology it is the Lake of Memory, which is fed by tears of the bereaved living, from which the dead drink.[30] By reuniting the dead with the living, through memory, tears create a future for the living, for they retrieve the dead into a repatterned historical existence that becomes for the living a means of continuity and sustenance.

Paradoxically, but perhaps appropriately as talismans of death itself, tears are also described in modern laments as black, burning, bitter, and poisoned.[31] Such laments are designed to express, by means of poetic hyperbole, the overwhelming experience of grief and hence implicitly the ritual power of tears and lamentation.[32] For example,

. . . my tear was burning hot, and it dyed the handkerchief black.
I washed it in nine rivers, but I could not restore its color.
Then I washed it in a shallow stream, and I did restore its color.
. . . a partridge flew to drink from the stream, . . . its wings were dyed black.[33]

On this *lēkythos* lamentation flows into funerary art. It shows us that ritual objects are not merely accessories deployed or used by humans; ritual objects themselves perform ritual. This small funerary vase sheds tears for the dead, even when no human beings are present to do so.

Our last *lēkythos,* now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, presents a scene that mythologizes death (see fig. 6). The artist is the Painter of Munich 2335, whose works, in Beazley's words, are "tenderer and sweeter"[34] than those of all other white-ground *lēkythoi* artists. On this *lēkythos* the vase painter has juxtaposed the most chilling of tragedies with a most charmingly simple setting: delicately and poignantly he has placed a truly human child, with go-cart in hand, on the rocky bank of a river.

On the right, in his bark, is shown Charon, whom Euripides called the "dark-haired Lord of Death" (Eur. *Alc.* 439) and whose task is to row the souls of the dead across the tear-filled Lake of Acheron to Hades. Charon, the ancients tell us, is "gladdened by the tears of all" (*Anth. Pal.* 7, 68), for they, in fact, provide passage between life and death. Despite Christianization, he persists today in the modern Greek religious imagination as a crucial mediator of the passage from life to death. The child, with his right arm, beckons to his mother, who follows with "light and rapid step,"[35] but she cannot help. There

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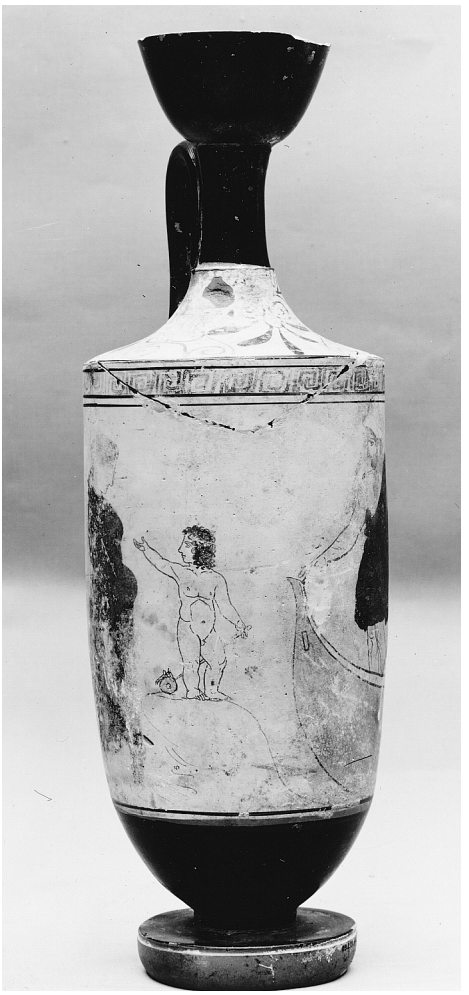


Figure 6. White-ground *lēkythos* by the Painter of Munich 2335 (*ARV* 1168, no. 128), third to last quarter of the fifth century B.C.E. Height: 31.8 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 09.221.44 (Rogers Fund, 1909).

is interplay between mother and child, yet the final result is not union but separation. The little boy, depicted as the departing traveler, stands center stage. It is his death that this *lēkythos* laments.

The scene presents us with a startlingly uncanny visual language of a number of laments spoken by both the living and the dead. I offer two examples: first, a modern lament recorded by Anna Caraveli in Epirus in 1978, where a

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toy cart dating from the fifth century B.C.E., with a striking resemblance to the cart on our *lēkythos*, was recently unearthed from a child's grave:[36]

> A young man was roaming on a high mountain slope . . .
> And Charon was waiting in a hollow canyon.
> Please, Charon, let me through; let me cross the canyon
> Because I'm young and green . . .
> And Charon did not let him cross, and Charon snatched him then.[37]

Second, Charon is often an object of blame and thus, ultimately, a repository of wrath, which in turn leads to soothing catharsis, as in this lament, recorded by Margaret Alexiou:

> Cruel Charon, most cruelly have you taken my child,
> who was my pride, who was my life.[38]

In this case, the *lēkythos*, through the artful rendering of emotion, vividly recreates the meaning of the wholeness for which it longs. Yet, not only are the emotions of the human spirit shown here. Let us closely consider our mythological ferryman.

On many *lēkythoi* Charon is portrayed as eager, aggressive, even coarse; but here the grim ferryman himself seems to be touched by the pathos of the child's untimely death. He is depicted standing in his bark; with his left arm he leans pensively on his oar, as though he were a statue. His right arm rests lowered, on the prow, in hesitation. Charon's face, when viewed close up, plays an important part in this complex play of signification. Here, the subdued Charon, in this scene the very incarnation of the passive mourner, appears to be on the verge of shedding a tear. In this case, the *lēkythos* radically yet quietly whispers that tears soften even the face of Death.

Conclusion

The artistic contents of Attic graves of the fifth century B.C.E. have provided us with a visual record of funerary practices that converge with ritual tears in Greek lament tradition. Our discussion of these has led us to see that the meanings of tears are, as we noted at the outset, multiple and often apparently contradictory. For example, we have seen they can be both nourishing water or lethal poison; and they are able to cross the boundary between the realm of the living and that of the dead, the very same boundary that they may also create.

Beyond these contested meanings, what I hope has emerged from this brief survey is that tears are a source of remarkable achievement and creativity in

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Greek religious response to death. Tears inspire oil vessels that nobly and gracefully make present heartfelt yearnings of the human spirit; tears generate a system of dialogue out of which has emerged the longest surviving of all Greek traditions; tears enact moral relationships. They facilitate the cultivation of community; the infusion of the traumatized body with the cathartic feelings of the soul; the preservation of memory; and mediation between vital but highly opposed realms of existence: life and death, the physical and the metaphysical, the present and the past, the temporal and the mythic. In the face of death, tears integrate its shattering effects and unleash life in new forms.

Moreover, tears in Greek lament tradition are tangible symbols of the most important relationships in life, for when the lamenter is not singing for her own dead, which in Greek village life to this day she often is not, she still draws on her personal experience of loss, translating her private pain into the larger context of the community. As these tears flow, they complete the lives and the love that might seem wasted, for they release those in the isolated kingdom of the dead into the stream of life, into the glistening light again for the comfort of the living. Ultimately, ritual tears in Greek tradition inform the processes of both life and death: while ushering the dead into new and auspicious categories of the other world, they transform the suffering of the living into aesthetic creativity, creativity unleashed at the grave through lamentation. These practices on behalf of the dead Aeschylus called the "heart's food" (*Lib*. 26).

As Emily Vermeule asserts, "The dead are our biggest resource. . . . They know what we want to know and cannot discover without them."[39] In a modern lament the dead admonish the living: "Come, clear my tomb that's overgrown with weeds . . . and cry for me, that you might resurrect me."[40]

"That you might resurrect me": in sum, ritual tears restore and revivify what seemed lost forever.

Notes

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"Sealing the Book with Tears":
Divine Weeping on Mount Nebo and in the Warsaw Ghetto

Rabbi Nehemia Polen

Death—as the death of the other— . . . is emotion *par excellence*,
affection or being affected *par excellence*.
In every death is shown the nearness of the neighbor, and the
responsibility of the survivor.
—Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*

Moses fails to enter Canaan not because his life was too short but
because it is a human life.
—Franz Kafka, *Diaries*

In sublime, heavy cadences, the Torah describes the end of the life of Moses.

And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto mount Nebo, to the top of Pisga, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the Land, even Gilead as far as Dan; and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the hinder sea. . . . And the Lord said unto him: "This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying: I will give it unto thy seed; I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go thither." So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in the valley of the land of Moab. . . . And no person knows of his sepulchre unto this day. And Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; and the days of weeping in the mourning for Moses were ended. . . . And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face; in all the signs and wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt . . . and in all the mighty hand, and in all the awesome deeds, which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel. (Deut. 34:1–12)[1]

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Near the beginning of the Pentateuch God forms the first human out of the dust of the earth and blows the breath of life into his nostrils (Gen. 2:7). The biblical narrative starts with God fashioning Adam by His own hands, vivifying—actually inflating—him by applying the divine mouth to His creature's face. Now at the end of the Pentateuch, in Deuteronomy 34, God decommissions his most trusted servant in the privacy of Pisgah. The second half of verse 5, translated as "ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF THE LORD," reads in Hebrew *al pi Adonai*, literally "by the mouth of the Lord." The Talmud understands this to mean that Moses was taken by a Divine kiss. In other words, God's mouth once again touches the mouth of His creature—we can imagine the strength of the seal formed by that intimate contact—and God withdraws the breath He had emplaced long before. And just as God formed Adam with His own hands, so now does God return Moses to the earth in the same manner: "AND HE BURIED HIM IN THE VALLEY OF THE LAND OF MOAB" (v. 6).[2]

These last verses of the Torah are discussed in a passage of the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Baba Batra* 14b–15a; cf. *b. Menahot* 30a),[3] which asks, "Who wrote the Scriptures?" This crucial question, posed in such a disarmingly direct manner, sets off a long discussion of the books of the Bible. The passage begins with the statement that "Moses wrote his own book and the portion of Balaam and Job. Joshua wrote the book which bears his name and [the last] eight verses of the Pentateuch." This last assertion is established by reference to Deuteronomy 34:5, "So MOSES THE SERVANT OF THE LORD DIED THERE." "Now is it possible that Moses while still alive[4] would have written the words, 'Moses died there'? The truth is, however, that up to this point Moses wrote, from this point Joshua wrote." This view, attributed to Rabbi Judah (or, according to another tradition, to Rabbi Nehemia), is challenged by Rabbi Simeon: "Can [we imagine the] scroll of the Torah being short of one word, and is it not written, TAKE THIS BOOK OF THE TORAH (Deut. 31:26)? No; what we must say is that up to this point the Holy One, blessed be He, dictated and Moses repeated and wrote, and from this point God dictated and Moses wrote in tears."

A troubling dilemma: If Moses wrote the last eight verses, then he apparently wrote an untruth, for Deuteronomy 34:5 could not have been accurate at the moment he was writing. But if Moses didn't write the last verses, then the Torah scroll would have been incomplete and thus not a true Torah scroll.

The paradox is deeper still when we reflect on verse 10: "AND THERE HATH NOT ARISEN A PROPHET SINCE IN ISRAEL LIKE UNTO MOSES, WHOM THE LORD KNEW FACE TO FACE." This verse underscores the uniqueness of the Mosaic prophecy and thus the primacy of the Pentateuch in the biblical canon.[5] For Jews, of course, the Pentateuch is the foundation and generative core of the entire Bible. These verses, placed at the culmination of the Pentateuchal narrative, serve to authenticate the whole book; they are its seal, the ground of its authority.[6] The suggestion that the last eight verses were written by Joshua, while straightforward and plausible, leaves Moses' work unfinished when he

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died, with the all-important lines left out. What does it do to the primacy of Mosaic prophecy if it was a subsequent disciple, a lesser prophet, who made this very assertion?

The question gains troubling power when we note the astonishing sweep of "AND THERE HATH NOT ARISEN A PROPHET SINCE IN ISRAEL LIKE UNTO MOSES." This is a not a prospective statement that looks forward to a distant future but a *retrospective statement,* a categorical declaration spoken from a position of finality, of "last things," sealing not only the Pentateuch but the entirety of prophetic activity in Judaism by espying all of history in its rear-facing view. In the vastness of its sweep it surely rivals Genesis's "IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED . . ." Taken together, Genesis 1 and Deuteronomy 34 are bookends that frame the Pentateuch; they are the ultimate assertions of God-as-Omniscient-Narrator.[7]

That is not all. The last part of verse 10 is also notable: "WHOM THE LORD KNEW FACE TO FACE." Not that Moses knew God face-to-face—but that God knew Moses. In its focus on the singular quality of God's connection to His servant, it goes beyond other passages such as Numbers 12:6–8, whose main concern is the unique character of Moses. Here the stress is the intimacy of the Divine knowing—*yeda'o,* using the same verb the early chapters of Genesis employ for carnal knowledge: "AND ADAM KNEW EVE HIS WIFE" (Gen. 4:1).[8] With the intensity of this spiritual *eros,* it is no wonder that (as our Talmud passage tells us) Moses deviated from scribal convention and did not repeat the words dictated to him.

Jewish tradition largely settled on the view of Rabbi Simeon that Moses himself wrote the final verses as being more consistent with the special position of the Torah ("the Five Books of Moses") in the biblical canon. But what about the problem of Moses writing of his death in the past tense? Commentators noted a striking ambiguity in the phrase, "Moses wrote in tears": it could be understood to mean that Moses wept as he wrote; or that Moses wrote the words *with tears*—instead of ink.[9]

The image of Moses weeping as he wrote has emotional poignancy but does not seem fully consistent with Moses' character in the rest of the Pentateuch. Unlike Jacob, Moses does not weep when he meets his wife-to-be at the well (Exod. 2:15–21; cf. Gen. 29:11). When God threatens to destroy Israel in the aftermath of the Golden Calf episode and Moses insists that their sin be forgiven, his steely defiance includes a cool invitation for God to "ERASE ME FROM THE BOOK WHICH YOU HAVE WRITTEN" (Exod. 32:32). So it is surprising that Moses would weep in self-pity at the inscription of his death. It is also suggestive that in Deuteronomy 34 itself, we are told that "THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL WEPT FOR MOSES" (v. 8); by contrast, "[Moses'] EYE WAS UNDIMMED" (v. 7). Since one consequence of weeping is a blurring of vision, a dimming of the eye, the statement that his eye was not dim actually suggests that as the end approached, Moses did not weep. For all these reasons, it is preferable to

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understand the Talmudic passage as meaning that Moses wrote the words *with tears*.

One must imagine here a kind of scribal darkroom with time as the sacred fixative, so that the tears gradually turn into ink, disclosing their message after Moses had in fact died, thereby skirting the paradox: at the time he wrote in tears the message was not yet readable.[10] The special character of the Torah as God's word and yet "the Torah of Moses" is upheld.[11]

But if Moses did not weep, whose tears are these, with which Moses wrote?

In the death scene of last eight verses, there are after all two characters, Moses and God. Could the tears be not those of the servant but of the Master?

The suggestion that the tears were God's is less startling when we recall the importance of divine pathos in rabbinic thought. As Henry Slonimsky puts it, "The Midrashic imagination is unabashed and strips God of the usual pomp and power. . . . When the enemies had destroyed the Temple, . . . [w]e have a God in tears . . . refusing to be robbed of the supreme prerogative of the heart to weep and to suffer compassion."[12] Unlike later philosophical expositions of Judaism, the Talmud and classical Midrashim are full of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic imagery. For the Midrash (again quoting Slonimsky), "if anyone can be said to be in need of comfort it is God, not Israel."[13] Thus it is entirely possible that the Talmud meant that *God* was weeping—for the loss of His most trusted servant and intimate friend.

This possibility gains likelihood when we recall that the rabbis consistently portray the relationship between God and Moses as intimately personal, including an aspect of physical contact. In this they are following Scripture itself, with such passages as Exodus 33 and 34, where Moses asks God to show him His Glory, meaning His visible form. Working out a strategy for Moses to survive the experience, God puts Moses in the cleft of the rock and protects him with His palm. And as noted above, God Himself buries Moses. Expanding on this, the Talmud *Sotah* 13b describes how Moses was carried from the portion of Reuben to the portion of Gad, cradled in the wings of the *Shekhinah*, which Rashi explains to mean "in the flap of God's Garment of Radiance."[14]

This intimate relationship is compared by the Midrash to that between husband and wife.[15] And the intimacy of God's direct contact with Moses plays a role in the rabbinic understanding of how Torah was given. We are told that Moses acquired his radiant countenance (beams of light: Exod. 34:29–35) while the Tablets were being passed from God's hands to Moses' hands.[16] The Tablets were six handbreadths wide; God's hands held two handbreadths, Moses' hands held two, with two handbreadths of stone separating hand from Hand.[17] And the residue of that brush with the Divine became the rays of light beaming out of Moses' face.

Michael Fishbane cites the early midrash *Sifre Deuteronomy* (343), which describes God's word emerging as fire from His right hand, eventually inscribing itself on the tablets of Moses. Fishbane notes that in the midrashic myth,

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"God's word emerges from the divine essence as visible fire and takes instructional shape as letters and words upon the tablets."[18] While that passage refers to the tablets, we are arguing that our Talmudic passage should be understood in a similar way: tears emerge from the divine self and, with the help of Moses, are inscribed upon the parchment of the first Torah scroll.

Finally, the midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah on our passage makes God's tears explicit: "God kissed Moses and took away his soul with a kiss of the mouth, and God, if one may say so, wept."[19] The only element added by the Talmudic passage in *Baba Batra* then would be that Moses used those divine tears to inscribe the last eight verses and defeat the paradox of a self-referential account of one's death. Moses thus emerges as the exemplar of the human condition, the quintessential person whose life is sealed in the tears of others, whose achievement is only revealed in retrospect, after taking leave of the stage.

Just as Moses stands revealed by the last verses of the Torah, so does God. If the tears are His, we discover that He, too, suffers. He grieves with His creation, laments its pain, feels the anguish of its thwarted yearnings and unrealized visions.[20] For to have made a creature out of the dust, even such a one as Moses, means to have scoped a compass of finitude. As noted above, the Torah begins with God's handiwork exiled from the Garden, and it ends with His servant gazing at the Promised Land from afar. The exile, the unfinished nature of the work, cannot but reflect on the Maker as well; in weeping for Moses, God acknowledges His own entanglement in what He has wrought. God is implicated in finitude and that awareness made tears flow—God's own tears. And as God showed Moses the Land from the top of Pisgah, the Temple was still hundreds of years in the future, and its destruction hundreds of years beyond that, but it was all visible then and there. Who could not but weep?

God wept at the death of His greatest prophet and most devoted servant. As the divine mouth sought out the mouth of the son of Amram, tears flowed from one face to the other face. "The Lord knew Moses": a pouring of the self into the other, completing the other, thus completing the self. For the crown of Divine greatness is just this, that God suffers with His creatures, shedding tears: transcendence melting into finitude.

The only God known to Jews is the God who has poured Himself onto parchment, who so loved His servant that He wept over that creature's death and by weeping, disclosed His own implication in finitude.[21] Tears are the only disclosing solvent for the Absolute.[22] This, then, is the Torah's coda, the summit to which everything preceding has aimed. The capstone of the Torah is the Divine weeping, the Divine eulogy for Moses; it is God's mourning the loss of His love relationship with Moses, thereby revealing the truth and power of that love for him and by extension for Israel and the world. How, after all, could the Torah—inscribing the wisdom of the Infinite One—*end;* how could it remain other than perpetually open? It could only be brought to closure by

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those eight verses, signaling the Divine passion, the Divine engagement with Moses, the Divine willingness to be affected by humanity's greatest exemplars and thus by all humanity.

The power of the Talmudic reading emerges when we note that by its light, 34:10 is *self-referential*. "And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face"—*at that very moment, the moment of death*. If the key to prophecy is relationship, never was the divine-human relationship stronger than when mouth pressed against mouth, when vital ocular fluid flowed from the Holy Ancient One onto the face of the servant, running down his beard, down his robe, like the dew of Hermon, onto the scroll: for there God ordained blessing. A death that was life for evermore. The last eight verses, and by extension the entire Torah, become a completion cycle and a love letter.

And it is just this secret of divine weeping that explains how Moses could have written those final verses. For how could even the most humble of men write "And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses" with equanimity? Only by focusing on God's emotions, not his own. Had Moses wept, his writing would have drowned in a sea of self-regard and subjectivity. It was his contemplation of God's weeping that enabled him to transcend the natural tendency to human subjectivity and to complete the work from God's perspective—that is, to write the Five Books of Moses as sacred scripture, as the cornerstone of everything that is to come in Judaism.

The tradition of ascribing profound emotions to God was largely neglected or suppressed by the medieval Jewish philosophers. Such great thinkers as Maimonides conceived of God as pure intellect; it followed that the only way to approach the divine was by cultivating one's intellect at the expense of other aspects of the human psyche. These tendencies were to some degree balanced and corrected by the flourishing of the Kabbalah, but the full return of the personal, passionate God of the Bible, Talmud, and Midrash awaited the Hasidic movement in the eighteenth century. Hasidism promoted *devekut*—"communion with God"—as a central religious value. In some Hasidic circles *devekut* was understood as loss of ego, the individual self merging with the Absolute. But alongside this tendency there was also a personalistic understanding of God, who bore close resemblance to the deity of Tanakh and classic Aggadah, and who could be approached by the individual *hasid* in prayer and other modes of devoted relationship. In the tales and folk traditions of the movement, the mode of dialogic intimacy held a far more prominent place than that of acosmism and merging with the Absolute, but it must be understood that part of the genius of Hasidism is that the two approaches were seen to complement rather than conflict with each other.

Alongside *devekut*, another keyword in Hasidism is *hitkashrut*—"bonding." What *devekut* describes for the *hasid* in relation to God, *hitkashrut* portrays for the relationship between the *hasid* and the master, known as the *rebbe* or *zad-*

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dik. The ideal is for the *rebbe* and *hasid* to bond soul to soul, heart to heart, destiny to destiny. The bonding is mutual and reciprocal: the *hasid* bonds himself to the *rebbe* and the *rebbe* to *hasid;* but the *hasid* also bonds himself to that which the *rebbe* holds dear. Through attachment to the *rebbe*, even the simplest *hasid* is in touch with God, Torah, and the Hasidic community.

The story of the growth and spread of Hasidism throughout Eastern Europe has been told elsewhere; our concern here is to suggest that for all the complexity and diversity of Hasidic spirituality, the inner life of the movement might be grasped by focusing on the two themes of *devekut* and *hitkashrut*: bonding to God, to the *rebbe*, and the community of fellow *hasidim*.

With this emphasis in mind we might approach the master who penned the final work of Hasidic teachings in Poland, Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapiro (1889–1943).[23] Known as the Rebbe of Piaseczno, he was a multifaceted personality who served as leader to an intellectual elite as well as to the desperately poor common folk of interwar Poland. Famed as a pedagogue and educational theorist, he was also celebrated for his knowledge of medicine. In the Warsaw Ghetto, as Polish Jewry went through its death agony, Rabbi Shapiro continued to teach, to lead, to give material and spiritual support, and finally to show how it is possible to maintain a radiant faith in the midst of the deepest darkness and despair. His last book, which he referred to as "Torah insights from the years of wrath 5700–5702 [1939–1942]," was among the manuscripts he buried in 1943, shortly before the complete destruction of the ghetto. The manuscript was discovered after the war and was eventually published in Israel under the title *Esh Kodesh* (Fire of holiness). Composed during a time of utter personal crisis and communal devastation, after he had already lost most of his family, it is the last work of Hasidism written in Poland.[24]

The great theme of *Esh Kodesh* is weeping—divine weeping. Rabbi Shapiro revisits the aggadic passages on God's tears and through them finds a language to address his community in faithfulness and integrity. The theme of divine suffering enables him to rise above the most likely, understandable response: the silence of collapse and despair. It also allows him to avoid the platitudes of theodicy, to avoid sounding notes that (no matter how holy) would not have rung true in that time and place. Instead, he embraces the midrashic image of God weeping alone in His Inner Chambers, and avers that the *hasid* can push in, join his tears with God's, communing with God in suffering, just as at happier times we commune with God in shared joy.

As he wrote in March 1942, shortly before the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto:

> God, blessed be He, is to be found in His inner chambers weeping, so that one who pushes in and comes close to Him by means of studying Torah, weeps together with God, and studies Torah with Him. Just this makes the difference: the weeping, the pain which a person undergoes by himself, alone, may have the

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> effect of breaking him, of bringing him down, so that he is incapable of doing anything. But the weeping which the person does together with God—that strengthens him. He weeps—and is strengthened; he is broken—but finds courage to study and teach. It is hard to raise one's self up, time and again, from the tribulations, but when one is determined, stretching his mind to connect to the Torah and Divine service, then he enters the Inner Chambers where the Blessed Holy One is to be found; he weeps and wails together with Him, as it were, and even finds the strength to study Torah and serve Him.[25]

What matters most for Rabbi Shapiro and for Hasidism is relationship. Relationship with the other, compassion for the other, suffering with the other is itself a kind of redemption. For what is redemption if not the finding of our most fully human self, in the act of imitatio Dei? It is not just that God suffers with us, for us, because we suffer, but that God is most God when He suffers; He comes most into Himself when He identifies with Israel, with her humanity, her vulnerability, her personal and collective destiny. Similarly, we become most like God when we transcend our own suffering, when we participate in the suffering of others and in the suffering of God. Because God is God, He suffers most intensely, infinitely; His suffering must remain hidden. But because God remains God, He also remains the hope for redemption in a concrete sense. Because humans are human, they do not decide when or how to end their suffering or to claim to know its meaning. But, because humans are human, they can arouse themselves, take hold of inner, hidden resources—in other words, grasp their faith—and thereby hope to arouse God to once again announce His redemptive presence in a world that still awaits Him.

The tears Rabbi Shapiro shed for his own family and community, for humanity, for God, fell on sheets of paper and emerged as words of Torah, words of Hasidism. They brought to a close a period that had begun two hundred years earlier, a period and movement that signaled hope to the Jews of Eastern Europe and a rebirth of religious creativity for Judaism as a whole. Hasidism was miraculously revived after the war in new forms, but the prewar world will never return. Marking the end of one era, Rabbi Shapiro's words, and tears, are now being recovered for inspiration and faith in another.

Were those tears his own, or God's?

Moses dipped his quill into the sacred tears and wrote the last verses of the Torah, sealing his life and his book in the only manner it could be sealed, with the divine ocular fluid, the viscosity of which formed the letters so that the story could be told and made available for those yet to come, yet to appear on the loom of time, to face joy and sadness and joy again, comforted now by the human examples of such as Moses himself, facing the end and thus transcending it, facing the other weeping Face, in the work of compassion that must come to closure but is always open.

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Notes

My understanding of Levinas's thought and its relevance to the theme of this essay have been greatly enhanced by conversations with Dr. Jacob Meskin, to whom I express my sincere thanks. The original impetus for this essay came from Professor Kimberley Patton, who also graciously provided much guidance and encouragement along the way. I am deeply grateful for her help and her friendship, now and through the years.

1. My translation of Deuteronomy 34 is based on that of J. H. Hertz in his *Pentateuch and Haftorahs,* 2nd ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1988), 915–17, with some modifications, notably in verse 6, where Hertz has, "And he was buried in the valley of the land of Moab," using the passive voice (against the Hebrew), no doubt to avoid the anthropomorphism.

2. The ring structure linking God's compassion for Adam in Genesis with his care for Moses in Deuteronomy is noted in *b. Sotah* 14a, the Talmudic passage enjoining human imitation of God's compassionate acts: "Rabbi Simlai expounded: Torah begins with an act of benevolence and ends with an act of benevolence. It begins with an act of benevolence, for it is written, AND THE LORD GOD MADE FOR ADAM AND FOR HIS WIFE COATS OF SKIN, AND HE CLOTHED THEM (Gen. 3:21); and it ends with an act of benevolence, for it is written, AND HE BURIED HIM IN THE VALLEY (Deut. 34:6)."

3. This passage sets out the proper sequence of the biblical books when copied on a single scroll. It has been the subject of scrutiny by scholars interested in the formation of the biblical canon. See Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Hamden, CT: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1976); Louis Jacobs, *Structure and Form in the Babylonian Talmud* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), ch. 3.

4. Following the version in *b. Menahot* 30a, *Baba Batra* has "having died." While the point is the same with either reading, we follow the *Menahot* version because it highlights the problem with greater clarity. Our *aggadah* as found in the Babylonian Talmud is a much expanded exposition of an earlier midrashic theme. Compare the earlier *Sifre on Deuteronomy,* ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969), 427.

5. See *b. Ta'anit* 9a: "Is there anything in the Sacred Writings to which allusion cannot be found in the Torah?" Rashi ad loc.: "Moses [alluded to all Scripture] in the Torah, for the Pentateuch is the foundation of the Prophets and the Hagiographa, and a support for every [verse] can be found in the Torah."

6. This verse recalls others that emphasize the uniqueness of Moses and his prophecy such as Numbers 12:8; cf. also Exodus 14:31, 19:9, 20:18, 33:11. But its placement at the end of the Torah clearly elevates its rhetorical moment; it is the Torah's coda, its final comment on Moses and itself.

7. On this topic I have learned much from Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), especially ch. 2. But while Sternberg cites our *Baba Batra* Talmudic passage, his approach to it is less than fully satisfying in my view, and this essay unfolds along a different path. Jeffrey H. Tigay, "The Significance of the End of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 34:10–12)," in *Texts, Temples and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran,* ed. by M. V. Fox, V. A. Hurowitz,

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A. Hurvitz, M. L. Klein, B. J. Schwartz, and N. Shupak (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 137–43, takes a historicist approach; cf. also Isaac B. Gottlieb, "*Sof Davar:* Biblical Endings," *Prooftexts* 11 (1991): 213–24.

8. Cf. Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 169: "To 'know' another person in Hebrew denotes an intimate relationship. To know 'face to face' pushes the level of intimacy even higher, straining to express near parity or equality." Olson's theological approach to Deuteronomy, while focusing on the biblical text without the Talmudic reading, is remarkably consistent with the perspective we are developing here.

9. See commentaries of *Ritva* (Rabbi Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili), *Maharsha* (Rabbi Samuel Edels), and *Iyyun Ya'akov* (Rabbi Jacob Reischer) to *Baba Batra* 15a (pp. 55a–56a in *Ein Ya'akov* anthology of Talmudic *aggadah,* ed. Romm [Vilna: Romm, 1912]).

10. The Gaon of Vilna proposes another approach leading to much the same result: Moses wrote the letters of the last eight verses but all jumbled together, not separated into words. Only after he died were the letters arranged by Joshua in the format we now have, disclosing their semantic content. This view of the Gaon of Vilna is quoted by Rabbi Hanokh Zundel ben Yosef, *Anaf Yosef* on *Ein Ya'akov* (Vilna: Romm, 1912), *Baba Batra* 15 (55b in the *Ein Ya'akov* pagination).

11. Cf. James W. Watts, "The Legal Characterization of Moses in the Rhetoric of the Pentateuch," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 415–26. Note especially on p. 425, "Moses' scribal role . . . [makes] him the only authorized tradent of divine law."

12. Henry Slonimsky, *Essays* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 6–7. For more recent writing on this theme, see Michael Fishbane, "'The Holy One Sits and Roars': Mythopoesis and Midrashic Imagination," in his *The Exegetical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 22–40. Relevant to our theme is Fishbane's observation that "a spiritual eros animates midrashic exegesis" (19). See also David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 73–95. Finally, Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, in "When the Rabbi Weeps: On Reading Gender in Talmudic Aggadah," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 4 (2001): 56–83, argues convincingly that the rabbinic self-image needed to include tears—stereotypically associated with the feminine—in its understanding of the creative emergence of Oral Torah in the Bet Midrash. Her argument is consistent with the approach taken here, with God in the role of weeper, giving birth to the Written Torah.

13. Slonimsky, *Essays,* 43.

14. For an earlier instance, see *b. Sotah* 11a, commenting on Exodus 2:4, "And his sister stood at a distance, to know what would befall him." The Talmudic *aggadah* explains "sister" not to mean Miriam but rather the Shekhinah—God's manifest Presence. God in the guise of the protective older sister stands watch over baby Moses in the bulrushes.

15. Midrash Debarim Rabbah, ed. Saul Lieberman, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Shalem Books, 1992), 129. The prooftext is Deuteronomy 33:1, "This is the blessing which Moses, the man of God . . ." The passage hangs on a wordplay on the Hebrew *ish,* which can mean "husband" as well as "man." Note that the midrash has Moses as the *ish*—the husband, with God as the obedient wife—a startling idea indeed.

16. Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:12.

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17. Exodus Rabbah 47:11.

18. Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination,* 9. Cf. Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994). See also Admiel Kosman, "Breath, Kiss, and Speech as the Source of the Animation of Life: Ancient Foundations of Rabbinic Homilies on the Giving of the Torah as the Kiss of God," in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience,* ed. A. I. Baumgarten, J. Assmann, and G. G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 96–124.

19. Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:6 (end). Note also the striking passage in *Sifra,* an early halakhic midrash from the school of Rabbi Akiva, on Leviticus 1:1, which uses erotic language to describe the intromission of the Divine Glory into the space between the Cherubim, in order to utter the Word. This midrashic passage is particularly relevant to our theme in that it goes on to say that while humans may not see God in life, they may see Him "at their death."

20. The classic rabbinic text of divine participation in human suffering is the Mishnah at *b. Sanhedrin* 46a: "Rabbi Meir said, When a human suffers, what expression does the Shekhinah use?—'My head is too heavy for me; my arm is too heavy for me.'" The human referred to is a criminal executed for a capital offense. The Mishnah concludes, "And if God is so grieved for the blood of the wicked that is shed, how much more so over the blood of the righteous!" Notable on this passage is the comment of Rashi at *b. Hagigah* 15b, s.v. *Kalani me-roshi* [My head is too heavy for me]: "my arm is too heavy for me, *for I have created this individual who died on account of his sin*" (emphasis added). That is, God grieves for the failure of His creature, a failure that necessarily implicates Him as well.

21. Cf. *b. Berakhot* 5b, in which Rabbi Yohanan visits his ailing disciple Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedat. Rabbi Yohanan, famed for his beauty, uncovers his arm and its radiance lights up the room. Rabbi Eleazar wept "for this beauty which would be swallowed by the dust." On this passage, see Aharon R. E. Agus, "The Flesh, the Person, and the Other," in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience,* 148–70.

22. Cf. *b. Berakhot* 32b: "Rabbi Eleazar said, From the day on which the Temple was destroyed the gates of prayer have been closed. . . . But though the gates of prayer are closed, the gates of weeping are not closed."

23. For a fuller account, see Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994). For an earlier hasidic master who links tears, Torah creativity, and the appearance of new sacred books, see Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, *Likkutei Moharan* (Brooklyn: Moriah, 1974), 2:30, p. 23b; cf. also 1:262, p. 118b.

24. This fact was pointed out by Mendel Piekarz in his Hebrew work *Ha-Te'udah ha-Hasidit ha-Sifrutit ha-Aharonah al Admat Polin: Divrei ha-Rabbi mi-Piaseczno be-Getto Varshe* (The last Hasidic literary document written in Poland: The teachings of the Rebbe of Piaseczno in the Warsaw Ghetto) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979); reprinted in Piekarz's *Hasidut Polin bein Shtei ha-Milhamot u-vi-Gezerot Tav-Shin—Tav-Shin-Heh* (Ideological trends of Hasidism in Poland during the interwar period and the Holocaust) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1990).

25. Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapiro, *Esh Kodesh* (Jerusalem: Vaad Hasidei Piaseczno, 1960), 178–79; translation by Nehemia Polen in Polen, *The Holy Fire,* 119.

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The *Gopī*s' Tears

John Stratton Hawley

If one surveys the chapters we have just read, four postulates about religious weeping rise to the surface. Let me name these four as a way of launching into our primary terrain in this essay: the copious tears that are shed for, around, and by the Hindu god Krishna. Later we shall see how well these postulates capture the dynamics of weeping in the presence—or absence—of Krishna. The four are these:

1. By and large, religious tears are not spontaneous but enacted.

Tears may be biologically given in childhood, but culture builds its fabric by reconstituting that biological givenness, producing tears that are ritualized, enjoined, and sometimes proscribed. They are "good, tearful speech," as Kay Read says about the moral patterning the Mexica expected to find in the sympathetic response between the "water of the face" and the water of the earth. Tears have their poetics, as Gary Ebersole observes, and he tests our poetic sensibilities by offering as an example a woman whose very refusal to cry is a rhetorical act. (Ironically, what she says is apparently in prose; it's her profligate, unfeeling husband who gets the poetry.) Thickening the mix, Gay Lynch shows us that the oblational quality of tears gets ritualized in the very objects that are mandated to attend a Greek grave site—the *lēkythoi*. And perhaps most strikingly, the tears of God invoked by Rabbi Shapiro in Nehemia Polen's portrait of Him are poetically ritualized to suit their precise monotheistic mold: they are a single tear.

2. Tears are not blocks to communication; rather, they communicate.

Tears communicate between persons and gods (gods cry, too), between persons and persons, and between levels of being a person. In the last instance, like Kay Read's rain-producing mountains, they signal a "person" within. In religious settings, tears typically do not mark the limit of communication, but rather continue the process of communicating in multiple and eloquent ways. Gay Lynch shows us an example in which, as women sing lamentations at a funeral, the onset of tears serves to relay the song to the next mourner; here speech and the breaking of speech interact. Gary Ebersole offers an instance in which a wife's lamentation over her moribund husband is portrayed in so literal a way that she prevents him from being saved through the recitation of the *nembutsu*. Those tears communicate to the point of suffocation, and they communicate to us the need to laugh.

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3. Tears are gendered—usually gendered female.

In three of the four chapters we have read, tears are gendered female, as if to dispute a *New York Times* headline that announced, in the wake of the tragedies of September 11, 2001: "Not to Worry, Men Can Cry." In the realms described by Gary Ebersole and Gay Lynch, weeping falls to women. In the Mexico sketched by Kay Read, as so often elsewhere in the world, it is the womenfolk who are required to weep when a ruler dies, and amplification is provided by a corps of what one might call "wet-nurse weepers." Men weep, too (for example, old men weep for fallen warriors), but the sexes weep largely apart. Even in Nehemia Polen's study, where women are not mentioned, gender tracks the tears. God's masculinity seems to correlate with his reluctance to weep openly, although of course the unearthly barren dryness of the Holocaust is beautifully justified with the fear of what would happen if this Primordial Paradigmatic Male were indeed to cry. The very world would cease to be.

4. Tears are very frequently about death.

It goes without saying that a fully developed discipline of lachrymology would have to generate much subtler taxonomies than I offer here. Still I am struck by the fact that in each of the four settings we have so far encountered, tears concern death in some dimension, whatever else their subject may be. When we speak of death, we usually have in mind an event we think of as biological. Yet the truth is that far more is at issue. Death is not just about biology but about society—the severing of society.

Braj, Brajbhāṣā, and *Bhakti*

I ask the reader mentally to retain these four suggestions about religious weeping as we move into a new domain. This is the realm where Krishna encounters a flock of women who surround him with love—not at all an obvious realm for tears but one drenched with them nonetheless. Even as these women experience the joys of being with Krishna, they wonder what it would be like to be separated from him, and that separation sets in all too frequently. The intimacy Krishna sustains with his many women cannot always be simultaneous, and the plotline of his story ultimately means he must be separated from them all. Each of these is a kind of death.

To experience Krishna's realm we must travel to the Braj region of North India, centered at the city of Mathura some ninety miles south of Delhi on the Jumna (Jamunā) River. Braj is celebrated as the place where Krishna first made his appearance in human form. Suitably, therefore, the literature and sculpture that speak of Krishna extend back some two thousand years, but for present purposes let us focus on the sixteenth century, a crucial one in the history of Braj. This was the time when the Mughal dynasty was establishing itself in

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Agra, not far south of Mathura, superseding its Afghan predecessors and quickly extending its influence over most of the Indian subcontinent. To accomplish his ambitious military aims, the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) relied especially on his alliance with Rājā Mānsiṃh, the king of Amber (later Jaipur), who was his principal general and with whose family he intermarried. With Akbar's implicit and explicit support, Mānsiṃh, a Rajput and a Hindu, did an enormous amount to enable Vaishnavism to flourish in a new form in the Braj country, which now lay at the very heart of the Mughal empire.

This Vaishnavism, which we associate with the names of sectarian leaders like Caitanya, Hit Harivaṃś, and Vallabhācārya, has been called a "renaissance," but like most renaissances, its version of the past was overwhelmingly new. The temples built all over Braj in the Mughal period still serve as the great religious institutions of Braj, and the literary and performative culture that flourished in Brajbhāṣā ("the language of Braj") at that time remained arguably the single most dominant force in Hindi letters until the early decades of the twentieth century, when it was marked as parochial and archaic by a new generation of nation-minded Hindi/Hindu writers and literary entrepreneurs. Even so, Brajbhāṣā has continued to flourish, and these same twentieth-century nation builders designated the sixteenth-century poets of Brajbhāṣā as a huge part of the literary heritage of modern Hindi. In the religious realm, which runs largely parallel, the same thing happened. Variously canonized already at the turn of the seventeenth century, the poet-saints of sixteenth-century Braj had long been seen as providing much of the bedrock of *bhakti* (devotional) religiosity in North India, and their poems are alive and well in performance genres of many types today.

Most people would say that the greatest of these poet-saints of Brajbhāṣā is Sūrdās. Sūrdās—or Sūr, for short—is remembered as the blind poet of North India, and the compositions attributed to him are overwhelmingly devoted to probing the dramatic world of Krishna. These are individual poems called *pads* that vary in length; six or eight verses are normal. They are structured through caesura, end-rhyme, and a limited array of metrical patterns; they begin with a title verse that is repeated at least once in refrain; they signal their conclusion by announcing the poet's name, his oral signature; and they are almost always sung. Such performances usually take place in environments we would recognize as religious—home shrines, singing groups, temples, ritualized dramas. But they also appear on the concert stage, in dance performances, and on the lips of traveling musicians, some of whom are blind. Moreover, a certain number of them are mandated for study in the Hindi curricula of Indian schools and colleges, where they are joined by other compositions of poet-saints who were active in the so-called *bhakti* period of Hindi literature.

Another major figure in this lineage is Mīrābāī (Mīrā, for short), a woman poet said to have been a Rajput princess. The story surrounding her life, which

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was already celebrated by the end of the sixteenth century, describes a person so deeply in love with Krishna that she refused to consummate her marriage to a Rajput prince from another state or to worship the deity that was the focus of his family's attention. Ultimately expelled from her marital home, she wandered in the company of religious mendicants who also loved Krishna, but her female identity made her a natural voice for the moods attributed to the cowherd girls (*gopī*s) who surrounded Krishna in his own dramatic world. Sometimes, in fact, her own persona is indistinguishable from theirs, and often it is awash in the same tears.

The poetic traditions associated with both Mīrābāī and Sūrdās were almost certainly oral in the first instance, and this helps explain how they have been able to continue expanding from the sixteenth century to the present day. If someone was inspired to compose a poem in the genres associated with Mīrābāī or Sūrdās, it was natural for the signatures of one of them to become attached to it; if it was memorable enough, that poem would be added to a growing oral corpus. In the case of Mīrābāī, the written record of this process becomes extremely sparse once one moves anywhere close to the period in which she is said to have lived,[1] but for Sūrdās the manuscript trail takes us right back into the sixteenth century itself. In an effort to be accurate in representing a sixteenth-century mood, therefore, I will hew largely to Sūrdās in the pages that follow, relying only on the poems that can be shown on the basis of manuscript evidence to have been either certainly or very probably in circulation in the sixteenth century.[2] Yet since Sūr usually adopts the voice of a woman (a *gopī*) when he chooses to speak with tears, and since Mīrābāī is often celebrated as being just this kind of *gopī*-like woman, it makes sense to begin our exploration of the tears of Krishna's women by considering a poem attributed to her. From there we will proceed to several poems attributed to Sūrdās —poems in which he speaks both through and about the *gopī*s who inhabit the pastoral realm where Krishna became incarnate.

One final comment before we set out on this journey: in the world of Krishna *bhakti*, it is not just Krishna who is the object of devotion but the *gopī*s' suffering as well. It reflects the intensity of the love that ties them to him and is therefore the paradigm for *bhakti* itself, that set of moods and orientations to which worshipers aspire when they are drawn into singing the songs of Mīrā or Sūr. Overwhelmingly these are songs of separation and longing (*viraha*). Not only have these cowherd girls lost their hearts to a mercurial, even promiscuous figure who does not always seem to requite their love, but according to the dominant story line Krishna ultimately deserts them for other reasons as well—to accomplish the great affairs of state. These poems of separation are filled with tears. They are about tears, and when they are performed they frequently produce tears, too. It is striking to discover that fully half of the poems that appear to have been sung in Sūrdās's name in the sixteenth century were poems of separation.[3]

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A Landscape of Tears

We enter the realm of the *gopīs*' tears through words attributed to Mīrābāī—a "latter-day *gopī*," as she is described in an early hagiographical text.[4] Her oral signature will appear toward the end, following a pattern that obtains in almost every *pad*. Disarmingly, the subject of this poem is the weather.

1 I saw the dark clouds burst,
dark Lord,
Saw the clouds and tumbling down
2 In black and yellow streams
they thicken,
Rain and rain two hours long.
3 See—
my eyes see only rain and water,
watering the thirsty earth green.
4 Me—
my love's in a distant land
and wet, I stubbornly stand outside,
5 For Hari is indelibly green,
Mīrā's Lord,
And he has invited a standing,
stubborn love. (PC 82)[5]

This is a powerful poem, and part of its force derives from the fact that tears figure here only as a suggestion—but a pervasive one. It's a matter of mood, and there is only one key word that points to that mood directly: "wet" (*bhījyā*, verse 4). Mīrā is wet, she says, drenched from standing, waiting to see if her lover will return from "a distant land." But why wet? Because of the storm outside or because of the one that rages within? Her determination to stand at the doorway seems to point both ways, in and out. As for the outside, it is "indelibly green" owing to the fact that when you mix the "black and yellow streams"—*kālā pīlā*—you get green. The word *kālā* encompasses not only black but deep shades of blue. Plainly this range of color belongs to the monsoon season, with its deep-dark rainclouds, but it also belongs to Krishna, as is signaled in the original by the word assigned to those "dark clouds" in the first place: *syām*, which means "dark" or "dusky" but is simultaneously a proper name for Krishna, owing to the color of his skin. The lightning's yellow belongs to him, too, for Krishna's requisite *dhotī* is his *pītāmbar*, literally his "yellow garment."

So when Mīrā looks out at the monsoon rain, she sees not only weather but a god—Krishna, in black/blue, yellow, and green. The green is especially poignant, since the word for green is *harā*. The need for rhyme in the penulti-

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mate line transforms it into the feminine—*harī*. So inflected, this word has a secret to disclose, for Hari (with a short "i") is also a common name for Vishnu/Krishna. In that sense, Krishna is present to her: she sees the earth turning green before her very eyes, as it does with such remarkable speed when the North Indian monsoon transforms the dust of May and June to instant verdure. Yet in another sense Krishna is definitely absent. The same rains that make the landscape lush render travel impossible, turning the roads to mud—this at a time when agricultural work stops, the weather cools, and lovers really should be together. But he is not there. So Mīrā stands at the door waiting, and when she sees those colors running together it's not clear whether the blur comes only from nature's external Krishna or also from the one she carries in her heart. Is it the rain or the tears? This is a fecund mix, and the mood of the poem makes clear that it is spawned in separation.

The tearfulness of this particular monsoon poem is only implicit, but there are many others where the parallel between tears and rains is made quite explicit. Examples of this can readily be found in the early reaches of the *Sūrsāgar*—"Sūr's Ocean." Let us consider two.

The situation that provokes tears in the first poem is as follows. An unnamed *gopī* ("herder girl," verse 3) remembers Krishna as Kāma, the "Love-god" (*madan*, verse 2), with his captivating mouth or face (*mukh*) and clothes. A happy thought, one might think, but this Adonis has left the Braj countryside for urban Mathura, stranding the women who have fallen in love with him. Indeed by the time the poem concludes we understand that Krishna—or Kānh, as he is familiarly called (verse 5)—is quite capable of changing both face and clothes, the very things that established his likeness to Kāma. Krishna, the Lord of Sūrdās, is just a street performer (*naṭ*), a one-man show, as becomes clear in the final words of this poem. In laying out this situation, the poet seems to be speaking in the voice of a *gopī* who is present on the scene and observes her friend's desperation. She conveys what she sees to another friend, whom she addresses conventionally as "Mother" (*māī*):

1 Hand on her cheeks, Mother, arm around her knees,
she's writing lines with her fingernails.
2 She sits with her worries and thoughts, lovely woman,
and contemplates his Love-god's mouth and clothes.
3 Her eyes fill with tears. She heaves a set of sighs.
Herder girl, she damns the way so many days have passed
4 With the lotus-eyed one so far off in Mathura,
whose virtues even thousand-hooded serpents do not know.
5 Kānh has made a lie of the time he said he'd come.
If at night she sees more lightning, friend,
how will she survive?

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6 Sūrdās's Lord has come in a flash and gone,
a dancing street performer—
many costumes, many roles. (§241)[6]

In this poem the analogy between tears and rain is established such that tears are in the foreground (verse 3) and the rains serve as a more distant presence (verse 5):

If at night she sees more lightning, friend,
how will she survive?

The implication is that if the *gopī* in question cannot survive a day of sunshine without dissolving in tears at the thought of her departed love, what crisis will befall when day turns to night and the dark color of Krishna is everywhere? Or if it rains and nature amplifies her weeping? Or if the monsoon arrives and it becomes clear that Krishna can no longer return to her side? Or all three?

Elsewhere the analogy between interior and exterior moods spreads itself out in reverse: the rains appear and threaten to stimulate tears, as in the Mīrābāī poem we have already heard. An example of this is provided by a second Sūrdās poem, in which rainclouds billow up like elephants in rut, who charge out of the ponds where they were bathing. Then the *gopī*s' tears well up in helpless imitation and violate the boundaries that eyes are supposed to provide. Here again, as we discover in verse 6, one of the *gopī*s is speaking, but this time it seems she herself is among those who have been overcome: the original is not as explicit on this point as the translation. In any case, she begins with the rains "out there," not with the tears that well up from inside.

1 In all directions the thickening clouds,
2 Like strong, lustful elephants of the Love-god,
break the chains with which they are bound
3 And sprinkle passion from the temples of their fine
dark bodies—they sprinkle little raindrops.
4 They run: they refuse to be turned aside
by the goad of the wind, their mahout,
5 And all beyond control, they shatter the bounds of ponds
with tusks that are rows of airborne herons.
6 Our tears, too, without shores to restrain them,
overrun their bodice-banks, flood our breasts.
7 Once, in time long past, there was a moment when the Lord
of Airāvat joined hands to submit to the Lord of Braj,
8 But now all has changed. Without Kānh, Sūr's dark lion,
our bodies melt like hail upon the ground. (§220)

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Experienced listeners, hearing the poem approach its conclusion, would know that "the Lord of Airāvat" is the Vedic god Indra, since Airāvat is his elephant mount. They would also know the episode being recalled (verse 7), when Indra submitted to Krishna. Krishna urged the cowherds not to worship this irascible sky-god anymore; Indra was incensed and rained a week of rain on Braj; the desperate herders appealed to Krishna for help; and Krishna managed—child though he was—to uproot Mount Govardhan and lift it up on one hand (or one finger) as a huge, one-size-fits-all umbrella. It was then that Indra knew he'd met his match. Though captain of the heavenly Vedic pantheon, he paid homage to this youth, the focus of earthly passion. But where is Krishna now—now that he himself has produced the torrent of tears from which these *gopī*s suffer? The external rains of Indra are bad enough, but these internal rains, caused by Krishna, threaten not just to soak their victims but dissolve them.

The analogy between tears and rain can develop in other ways, too. Consider one more poem in this genre, where the tears we meet belong not to just any *gopī*—someone anonymous—but to Rādhā, Krishna's favorite, and where they are analogized not just to rain but to rivers and dewdrops as well. This time, instead of mostly echoing a landscape that belongs to the monsoon season, they generate a landscape all their own. Again a *gopī* seems to speak, but this time it appears she reports what she has seen not just to one of her friends or the world at large but to Krishna himself (Śyām, verse 2; Gopāl, verse 2).

1 Her two vast eyes began to overflow
2 As she listened to your message, raincloud-dark Śyām,
and remembered how you are, Gopāl.
3 Then brilliant streams of tears flowed down
from her face to the space between her breasts
4 As if a pair of lotuses with roots in Mount Sumeru's peaks
had sent stalks so high they met the moon.
5 As the cloth that covered these two mountains was dampened,
they and the necklace of pearls resting there shone
6 As if the moon were gazing down on lotus-lily buds
whose petals were embellished with a nectar-dewdrop net.
7 How can Rādhā display a love like that,
and you act so otherwise, like this?
8 Sūr's Śyām, how can that desperate, lonely woman
survive now on the crooked things you've said? (§318)

In each of the poems we have considered so far, the visual field is in some obvious way bifocal, simultaneously exterior and interior. In this composition, by contrast, we are presented with a simple icon of a woman who weeps

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(verses 1–6). Yet just at the point when the identity of this icon is announced as being Rādhā (verse 7), a shift takes place, and suddenly a bifocal dimension emerges after all. At this point we are reminded that everything we have been hearing so far is actually spoken to Krishna, whose presence we are forced to recall through the repetition of his name "Śyām" in the final verse. Rādhā's friend, the go-between, is begging him to have as strong a reaction to her tears as she does herself. They will be two sets of eyes gazing at this common icon with the same emotion. Or will they? That is the deeper bifocality. Perhaps the go-between's contemplation of the icon at hand—her elaborate display of Rādhā's tears—is just a verbal maneuver intended to melt Krishna's hard heart. She wants to persuade him that Rādhā's situation is so dire that he must rush to her side and end the loneliness caused by their separation. In the original, actually, these objective and subjective realities—separation and loneliness—are collapsed into a single term, *viraha,* or, to be precise, a derivative of that word, *birahinī:* "lonely woman" (verse 8).

Audiences accustomed to hearing poems like these would understand the situation immediately. Krishna has left the Braj countryside for Mathura, the capital, where he has restored righteous rule by killing the demonic imposter king Kaṃsa. The difficulty is that as the Krishna story is plotted, this move from rural to urban is simultaneously a move from adolescence to adulthood, and as we all know, that is a passage that can only be made once. So Krishna doesn't return to Braj—he cannot—and that leaves the *gopī*s bereft.

The story is often told in such a way that Krishna promises he will return (perhaps he wishes he could) but defaults on that promise. Instead of returning himself, Krishna sends an envoy, Ūdho (Skt. Uddhava), who tells the *gopī*s that if they would just adopt a regimen of yoga and philosophical study, they will discover that Krishna is eternally with them after all—in a subtle form, a stratum of self to which they always have meditative access. This sort of response is even worse than none at all. Such teachings may be the "crooked things" the go-between has in mind as she concludes, for they only exacerbate the *gopī*s' feelings of loss and disillusionment, producing an even more torrential flow of tears than had already been unleashed by separation itself (verses 1–2).

As we have said, the tears to which Rādhā is left in Krishna's absence generate a landscape all their own—or at least they are able to do so in the hands of a skilled poet. The "pair of lotuses" (*jug jalaj*) mentioned in verse 4 flower in Rādhā's eyes, which are shaped like lotus petals. As for Mount Sumeru (that is, Meru), which is called to mind in the same verse, it is the central axis of the universe. Golden in color, it matches Rādhā's skin, and the comparison between it and her breasts implies that it has two peaks (*jug . . . sṛṅg,* verse 4), apparently an idea of Sūr's own invention. The third element in the picture is the moon, a familiar simile for Rādhā's face. And what connects these features is a fourth element, the liquid presence of her tears, which form two streams

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that become metaphorically the lotuses' stems (*nāl,* verse 4). Normally lotuses grow in low-lying rivers and ponds, so it is somewhat startling to imagine them sprouting from the tops of the world's highest mountains, like upside-down rivers forming from the Himalayan snows of her breasts and flowing to the "plains" above. The lotuses' long stems bring their flowers to a level equal with that of the moon, thus enabling them to bridge the gap between earth and heaven—her body and her face. As one can sometimes see in poems describing Krishna as a thief of butter, Sūr delights in describing "meetings" (*mile,* verse 4) between some feature of the face (here, the eyes) and some aspect of the torso (here, the breasts).[7] The mood here is quite different, but the poet's impulse is the same: to provide an integrated vision of the person he describes—indeed, the divinity, for Rādhā has that status.

In verses 5–6 Sūr carries the momentum of his metaphors a step further, describing how Rādhā's bodice appears when flooded by her tears. He works with the images of moon and lotus once again and supplies yet another element that he associates with the moon. This time it is not the stems, representing streams of tears, but a latticework of dewdrops (*amī,* that is, *amṛt*: immortal "nectar," verse 6) resting on the petals, which represent Rādhā's long pearl necklace. Sūr chooses a new word for lotus (*nalinī,* verse 6, not *jalaj,* verse 4) from the immense lexicon available, and the choice is significant. Unlike most lotuses, the *nalinī* is of the night-blooming variety and always white. Furthermore, it is feminine in gender.

The poet now shifts the point of comparison for these new lotuses from the streams of tears, where lotuses had earlier bloomed, to Rādhā's breasts (verse 5). In Indian poetry, the round yet pointed shape of a firm young lotus, when closed, makes it a frequent term of comparison for beautiful breasts. Upon these Rādhā's pearl necklace rests like drops of elixir, but Sūr imagines these dewdrops as having been cultivated by the downward gaze of the moon (Rādhā's face), whose light (moonbeams, which consist of the immortal nectar) gives them their sheen. The same moon graces the night-blooming lotus breasts with brilliance as the thin garment that covers them is moistened by Rādhā's tears. Actually the poet's liquid metaphor provides a fine counterpoint to those tears, which are not specifically mentioned in verses 5–6 but delicately evoked through the complex of other allusions.

Thus the poem develops in a lovely, organic way and sets the stage for the pointed questions to Krishna that emerge in verses 7–8. What has *not* developed in such a lovely way is the "meeting" between Rādhā and Krishna. There is a yawning gulf between them, and Rādhā is not its cause. This is a point made poignantly clear by the speaker of this poem. Who might that be? A go-between, of course, as we have said all along, but that go-between is probably not one of Rādhā's female friends, as we have been assuming. Rather, it is Ūdho himself. Krishna's own messenger is asking Krishna to repair this separation,

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for he himself has been converted from philosophy to philanthropy by the intensity of Rādhā's response. Her tears and those of the other *gopī*s have trumped his words, and his words now serve as their agents:

7 How can Rādhā display a love like that,
and you act so otherwise, like this?
8 Sūr's Śyām, how can that desperate, lonely woman
survive now on the crooked things you've said?

By the time we have threaded our way through the intricacies of this poem, we have a good sense of the work tears can do in the world that Krishna inhabits—poetically, at least. But before we leave the scene, we would do well to consider two additional poems. These supply images one meets time and again in Sūrdās' poems describing the landscape of separation. On the one hand separation is imagined as a swollen, impassable river—other poems call it an ocean. On the other, paradoxically, it is a fire (verse 4). Tears are the principal means by which these two are related. In the first instance, they are the agents of the drowning that is threatened. In the second, by contrast, they provide the hope of survival: they are the firefighters who speed to the scene when the fire of separation starts to blaze. Let us simply hear these in sequence—the floods first and then the fires.

1 Because she's away from you, Lord of Braj,
a river has flooded her eyes
2 And risen to such a high-water mark
that it overflows the eyelid-banks.
3 Glistening new boats—her eyes—cannot move:
with the ropes that kept them moored, my friend,
they're sunken, destroyed.
4 Upward gusts from her sighs fan the waves;
their fury tears apart the *tilak*-mark tree.
5 Collyrium mud has mired the shores of the borders
of her sari, and mired her lips and cheeks,
6 Stranding travellers wherever they might be—
the hands and feet and speech.
7 Lord of Ramā, there is no other cure:
how, unless she sees you, can she live?
8 Gokul is drowning in the river of her tears.
Sūr says, rescue it: extend your hand. (§319)

1 Night and day they mutter and mutter
"Hari, Hari, Hari,"
2 And stare down the road with the *cakor*'s fixed gaze,
oh clever acrobat, since you went away.

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3 Their eyes fill, fill, and drip with tears
that flood the bodices on their breasts
4 As if the frenzied fire of separation had made them vow
to pour a thousand pots of water over Shiva's head.
5 Like dewdrops poised on barley tassles
their lives rest perilously on the bank of time—
6 The time you said you'd go to meet them,
Sūr's Lord. Hurry, that day is at hand. (§323)

Whether separation is understood as death by drowning or death by burning, the poet portrays the *gopī*s' tears as a desperate call for Krishna to come. As in the case of §318, many audiences will surmise that this call is mediated to Krishna—and to us as well—through the voice of Ūdho. Ūdho has learned the power of tears, but he has also learned that they are not ultimately efficacious. The lover to whom they appeal (shall we call this lover God?) must act, and the performance of the poems at hand is itself that appeal. From this perspective poetry—or song—is tears translated into words. And if those words also serve to generate tears when they are performed, then surely their appeal is only strengthened. Or perhaps answered.

Four Marks of Religious Weeping

We now have at least a rudimentary sense of the internal dynamics that animate the world of tears to which Mīrābāī and Sūrdās address themselves when they perform the relationship between Krishna and his women.[8] It is therefore time to return to the level of generality with which we began. How would the *gopī*s' tears look if we mapped them by means of the four vectors that emerged in the earlier chapters of this volume?

1. In a religious context, tears are not spontaneous but enacted.

At first glance it seems almost impossible to conceive how this initial postulate could hold true in regard to the *gopī*s' tears. Everything we have heard makes it clear that these tears can mean nothing inside their own narrative realm unless they are truly spontaneous. Spontaneity is the very source of their power and their appeal. If one thinks a moment longer, however, it becomes equally clear that this is a sword with two edges. Spontaneous in their own realm, yes, but at another level the production of these tears is also a self-conscious act. It is the work of the poet, the singer, the performer. Not only that, it is also the work of members of the audience, both by virtue of their overt participation—they typically join in the refrain—and because poets craft their words partially in anticipation of what they know they can expect from the audience.

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By unpacking some of the dynamics by which these poems operate, I hope I have shown that these verbal expressions about weeping are anything but a reflex of unmediated emotion, even if they produce weeping in the process of doing so. Rather, they proceed on the basis of an often exquisite understanding of poetic structure and an eagerness to exploit the possibilities that the structure of a *pad* implies.[9] In the course of describing the natural force of emotion that tears represent—a language that digs deeper than language—these poems make forceful appeals to the realm of speech in which any poet must operate. In the poem with which we began, the one attributed to Mīrābāī, we found this in the pun on the name Hari (verse 5). In the poem where Sūrdās describes the surreal landscape of Rādhā's tear-stained face (§318), we found it already in the opening lines, where tears are represented as a response to "your [Krishna's] message" (verse 2). They participate, thus, in the world of language. We also found this finely honed attention to discourse in the concluding line of that poem, where Ūdho confronts Krishna with "the crooked things you've said" by means of tear-focused words that he himself shapes.

Although the *gopī*s are sometimes portrayed as noble savages, there is nothing speechless about the poet's appeal to their tears. These tears are understood as springing forth in an environment of words and represented as having consequences there. Not only that, they are self-consciously mediated by words—the words of Ūdho and, standing behind him, Sūrdās. They construct a metaphorical space, and this is what largely justifies the designation the poet gives them: "brilliant streams of tears" (§318:3). We have here not merely a visual fact but a verbal one. Yes, these sparkling streams are Rādhā's tears, but they are also the poet's words about them. Actually, they are an amalgam of the two. If an audience is moved to tears by "seeing" these "brilliant streams," or players in the religious dramas (*rās līlās*) of Braj are reduced to tears in declaiming them, this happens in a setting that is carefully structured and carries the weight of great expectations. It is anything but spontaneous; it is fully discursive.

2. Tears communicate.

We have met this communicative dimension of the poetic emplotment of tears several times, even in the relatively few poems we have considered. Ūdho's situation comes to mind immediately. The *gopī*s' tears truly succeed in getting through to him, and they do so in a paradoxical way.[10] On the one hand, they communicate precisely because they are not rhetorical strategies. They signal the *gopī*s' refusal or inability to engage Ūdho at the discursive level he wishes to establish when he begins preaching yoga and philosophy to them on Krishna's behalf. Yet in another way, this language of the eyes does succeed as rhetoric. It produces sympathetic resonances that translate into words. The *gopī*s' tears are depicted as causing Ūdho to make his appeal to Krishna, an appeal that urges him to abandon all his fancy words and act. It's an appeal to

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repentance—God's repentance, so to speak—and it's experienced by the audience as simultaneously painful and enjoyable.[11] Thus it not only communicates, it communicates multiply.

In the poems of Sūrdās, this change of approach is usually depicted as arising from experience, not debate, but that does not mean that it cannot be framed discursively as well. One example of this can be found when both the *gopī*s and Ūdho, speaking on their behalf, bring to witness a well-known moment in the past: the time Krishna lifted Mount Govardhan to shield the cattle and cowherds of Braj from the ravages of Indra (for example, §§225, 293; cf. 318, 319, 334). It will be recalled that in this famous episode Indra was incensed that the residents of Gokul had determined (on Krishna's advice) to cease worshiping him and the entire pantheon over which he ruled. He expressed his anger through a seven-day torrent of unremitting rain. The cowherd people ran to Krishna for help, and though he was but a boy, he manufactured an appropriately sized umbrella by lifting up the mountain that served as symbolic center of the Braj country.

When this moment is summoned to consciousness in the poems of separation, the point is to urge Krishna to do the same thing all over again. This time, however, he is bidden to take action against the threat that the *gopī*s' tears will engulf Braj to the point of drowning. If he was sufficiently powerful to deal with the king of the gods, is he not also powerful (and merciful) enough to deal with the extent of their own distress? Here their tears serve as the test of his compassion and as the measure of his integrity. Once translated into narrative form through the familiar analogy between tears and rain, they communicate at a new level, complicating and challenging the narrative of Krishna's own life. Their tears call him to action.

3. Tears are gendered—usually female.

In the way Krishna's world is plotted, this scarcely needs to be said. Every poem we have considered is a woman's poem, or if the poet is understood to be a man (Sūrdās), that man projects himself into the female persona of a *gopī*—even the exemplar of all *gopī*s, Rādhā—to have access to the paradigmatic world of tears. Vaishnava theorists have typically insisted that this sort of projection is required not just for the poet but for members of the audience. Theologians and aestheticians of the Caitanya sect called this *mañjarī sādhanā,* in which persons who would taste the realm of Rādhā and Krishna were given authority to do so by visualizing themselves as female servants witnessing the scene.[12] In a narrative realm where God is figured male, the purpose of these female tears is to break through the studied or not-so-studied indifference of the divine heart.

Obviously, this alignment of maleness with divinity does not always happen in Hindu religion, and even in the realm of Krishna the connection is unstable. With the passage of time, and more in some communities of worship and

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performance than in others, Rādhā, too, inherited the stamp of divinity—tears and all. Indeed, *especially* tears and all. She is the very icon of emotional connection (*bhāv*), and if she withdraws her emotion from Krishna, as she attempts to do in the mood of offended anger (*mān*), it is understood to be a defense against the more primal response of weeping (for example, §164).[13]

If she does seem to withdraw her emotional connection, interestingly, that creates a condition in which Krishna, too, can weep (e.g., §§154, 165). His tears in this instance are somewhat different from Rādhā's, in that they respond specifically to the starkness of her anger and self-conscious force of her withdrawal. And they also differ from the tears she or any *gopī* might shed in that there remains a question about their spontaneity. In the second of the two poems I have just cited, this question emerges in part because of our general knowledge of the situation being described and in part because of the artifice that is mobilized to describe Krishna's weeping. It is described as if it were religious, an event in a ceremony of sacrifice—"his eyes the libation" (verse 7)—and considering the fact that at another level Krishna is himself divine, the question of irony emerges pointedly. Here is the poem in question:

1 Ever since your name has entered Hari's ear
2 It's been "Rādhā, oh Rādhā," only this mantra,
a formula chanted to a secret string of beads.
3 Nightly he stays by the Jamunā, in a grove
far from his friends and his happiness and home.
4 He yearns for you. Like a great yogi
he is constantly wakeful through hours that are ages.
5 Sometimes he spreads himself a bed of tender leaves;
sometimes he chants your treasurehouse of fames;
6 Sometimes he closes his eyes in utter silence
and meditates on every pleasure of your frame—
7 His eyes the libation, his heart the fire-oblation,
his mutterings and lapses, food for a Brahmin feast.
8 So has Śyām's whole body wasted away.
Says Sūr, let him see you. Fulfill his desire. (§165)

This careful emplotment of Krishna's tears in the language of religious practice makes us wonder whether these tears are just a ploy on the part of the speaker of the poem, one of Rādhā's confidantes—not a factual description of Krishna's mood. She represents what she says about Krishna as fact, but what she really cares about is the psychological health of her friend, whom she urges to end her exaggerated pique. She wants Rādhā to go meet Krishna—"Fulfill his desire" (verse 8). It is far easier to be confident of the genuineness of Krishna's tears when they flood his face as a child cowering beneath the stick of his exasperated foster mother Yaśodā (§§28, 30, 31) than it is to trust the

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tears reported in this strenuously negotiated amorous domain. In that respect the question of gender remains paramount. Ūdho represents the *gopīs*' tears to Krishna by comparing them to the forces of nature—fire, flood, monsoon—while Rādhā's confidante compares Krishna's tears to elaborate acts of culture.

4. Tears are about death.

This is the explicit message of that pair of poems in which we found Sūrdās representing separation by love as a life-and-death matter—death by flood in the one case, death by fire in the other. The second of these two has an apocalyptic tone. It concludes with the warning: "That day is at hand!" (§323:6). The first poem, with the magic of hyperbole, envisions the entire village or community where the forsaken *gopī* lives as "drowning in the river of her tears" (§319:8). It's comical, but it also tells a fundamental truth, namely, that love—here, the female/male connection, taken as a language for the human/divine connection—is the primary condition of life. Physical existence is but a reflex of love; it is secondary. One could even say that the *gopīs*' world exists to display the claim that if love is withdrawn—society in its deepest sense—then death is imminent. Tears are the central sign of this claim, and that, ultimately, is what makes weeping religious.

Yet the *gopīs*' tears are certainly not religious in a way that cuts them off from realms of existence we might call profane. In many ways, as in their confrontation with Ūdho, they actually stand for the bodily, the sacrilegious: they signify that the lover's physical presence is truly more than words can say. These *gopīs* want nothing to do with a disembodied, spiritualized Krishna, and their tears are proof positive that this is so. Still, the ability to shed one's own tears as one contemplates the *gopīs*' tears is often interpreted by Vaishnavas as the most reliable mark of a truly religious person. It reveals a quality of sympathy that shows a person knows things are more than they seem. Such tears mark transcendence as being relational, and relation as being transcendent. And the landscape that makes it possible to do this double signaling is the landscape of separation.

To see the poetry of Sūrdās performed in the *rās līlā*s of Braj is to get some sense of how this works. These dramas are *līlā*s, as their title declares—*gestes*, sports, plays. Accordingly they tend to be lighthearted, but not all of them are so. Some of the most important *līlā*s are intensely sad, being dramas of separation in which Krishna's departure from Braj and the collapse of its dynamic of love are prefigured.[14] As the songs of separation are performed there, the child actors (actually they are called *svarūp*s—intrinsic forms—to suggest that they are self-manifestations of divinity rather than children playing roles) disintegrate into tears, and so does the audience. Sometimes the plays have to be cut short after an hour or two lest they become too great a psychic burden.

Is this really *līlā*—play? Yes, in the deepest sense. These tears mark the limit of feeling per se, the substance out of which narratives of love, fun, and indeed

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verbal expression as a whole are carved. To play at tears in this pointed way—to perform them—is to anticipate death through a full experience of separation and to shape it into a currency of shared expression. Yet in the last analysis the subject of tears is not actually death in the biological sense. Rather it is the performance of pain and separation—or to turn the coin to its other side, it is the love that literally makes life possible. This is the substrate that weeping recalls and to which it gives us renewed access, as if from our earliest moments on earth. We cry out, but if there is anything "out" about this act—anything transcendent—it is the crying itself. Tears are the markers of transcendence.

Notes

1. See J. S. Hawley, "Mīrābāī in Manuscript" (paper delivered to the conference entitled "Mirabai: Hindu Saint for a Global World," Los Angeles, October 4, 2002), and *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Ours* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 89–116.

2. Many of the Sūrdās poems presented here appear in the 1582 manuscript from Fatehpur, near Jaipur, which has been reproduced in facsimile in Gopal Narayan Bahura and Kenneth E. Bryant, eds., *Pad Sūrdāsjī kā / The Padas of Surdas* (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1982). Others seem very likely to have been in circulation in the sixteenth century because they appear in seventeenth-century manuscripts in patterns that would be hard to explain without postulating a sixteenth-century origin. Information about the editorial process that produced the versions upon which my translations are based can be found in several articles by Kenneth Bryant, the principal editor: K. E. Bryant, "The Bottom of the Page: Representing Variation in an Oral Tradition," in *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Literature, and Culture,* ed. Alan W. Entwistle and Carol Salomon with Heidi Pauwels and Michael C. Shapiro (Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 87–100; "The Fatehpur Manuscript and the *Sūrsāgar* Critical Edition Project," in *Bhakti in Current Research, 1979–1982,* ed. Monika Thiel-Horstmann (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 37–52; and "Toward a Critical Edition of the *Sūrasāgar,*" in *Early Hindī Devotional Literature in Current Research,* ed. Winand M. Callewaert (Delhi: Impex India, 1980), 5–16.

3. Two issues of nomenclature deserve to be addressed before proceeding into the body of the essay. First, I will use the terms "poem" and "song" synonymously, since the *pads* of Mīrābāī and Sūrdās are almost invariably sung. This does not mean that the text of a given poem is invariably tied to a particular style of perfomance—far from it—merely that the idea of sung performance is implicit in the very idea of a *pad*. The second issue of nomenclature concerns authorship. It should be clear from what has already been said that the entire corpus of poems attributed to Sūrdās and Mīrābāī cannot reasonably be attributed to a single biological person in either case. Yet for Sūrdās, where the manuscript record is far more persuasive, I think it does make sense to speak of the group of poems with which we are concerned as if they had originally been given voice by a particular person of that name. It is hard for me to imagine the special characteristics of this collection of poetry without resorting to the idea that a particular poet—a biological individual—served as the core around which the tradition of Sūrdās

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poetry developed. Nonetheless, when I speak of Sūr or Sūrdās in this way, I am using shorthand. Actually my reference is to the poetic persona implied collectively by the poems attributed to him in (so far as we can tell) the sixteenth century. It is a literary person to whom I refer, not a biological one, and doubtless—even in respect to these sixteenth-century poems—the authorship of this literary person is to some extent composite.

4. The hagiographer is Nābhādās, and the poem in which the phrase occurs is translated by J. S. Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer in *Songs of the Saints of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; 2nd rev. ed., Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 123. The original is Nābhādās, *Śrī Bhaktamāl* (Lucknow: Tejkumār Press, 1969), 712–13.

5. This abbreviation refers to the edition of poems prepared by Paraśurām Caturvedī, *Mīrāṅbāī kī Padāvalī* (Allahabad: Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan, 1973). The translation, which Mark Juergensmeyer and I did together, first appeared in *Songs of the Saints of India*, 135.

6. All Sūrdās poems cited in this essay are numbered as they will be in my forthcoming work with Kenneth E. Bryant, *Sūr's Ocean* (New York: Oxford University Press). I am deeply grateful to Vidyut Aklujkar, Kenneth Bryant, Shrivatsa Goswami, Krishna Caitanya Bhatt, Braj Vallabh Mishra, and Mark Juergensmeyer for their help in preparing the translations that will appear in *Sūr's Ocean*.

7. J. S. Hawley, *Krishna, the Butter Thief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 109–12.

8. Many other poems that are translated in *Sūr's Ocean* could be explored, including especially §§334, 337, 345, and 348.

9. Much more can be said on this point. See especially Kenneth E. Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Sūrdās* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), and chapter 2 ("A Grammar of the Pad") of the introduction to my forthcoming *Sūr's Ocean*, vol. 1. The contrary, "spontaneous" interpretation continues to be advanced—most recently in English by Vijay Mishra—but as the analyses provided in this essay will indicate, I do not think it can be sustained. See Mishra, *Devotional Poetics and the Indian Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 17, 31, 82–83, 92–94, 165.

10. On this point, compare also §§249, 264, 265.

11. This situation is worth comparing to the one explored by Kimberley Patton in this volume.

12. See David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 108–14; and Donna M. Wulff, *Drama as a Mode of Religious Realization: The Vidagdhamādhava of Rūpa Gosvāmī* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 29–34.

13. Cf. Donna M. Wulff, "Rādhā as Consort and Conquerer of Krishna," in *Devī: Goddesses of India*, ed. J. S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 106–34; Shrivatsa Goswami, "Rādhā: The Play and Perfection of Rasa," in *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, ed. J. S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1982), 72–88; J. S. Hawley, *Sūr Dās: Poet, Singer, Saint* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 86–91.

14. I have translated one of these, the *akrūr līlā* ("The Coming of Akrūr"), in *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 227–74, and attempted to describe the audience's response.

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Hsüan-tsang's Encounter with the Buddha:
A Cloud of Philosophy in a Drop of Tears

Malcolm David Eckel

In the opening scene of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Krishna pulls his chariot to a stop on the battlefield where the armies of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas are preparing to destroy each other.[1] Arjuna surveys the two armies, and his eyes fill with tears. Confused about his duty, overwhelmed by grief and pity, Arjuna slumps down and refuses to fight. The rest of the text gives Krishna's teaching about duty, discipline, God, and the self. Krishna's teaching is ambiguous and complex, but it can be distilled into a few fundamental metaphors: Krishna teaches Arjuna how to be "firm" (literally to "stand") in wisdom, the way yogis are firm when they sit in concentration, and he teaches Arjuna how to see, not with the blurred, grief-laden vision of the text's opening passage but with the clear eyes of a yogi.

In its concentration on the education of sight, the *Gītā* shares important connections with the formative texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Both traditions are concerned about the relationship between action and contemplation; both use vision as a metaphor for understanding; and both see the eyes as sites for the emotions. But there is a crucial difference. To see the world clearly, Arjuna has to discard the pity (*kṛpā*) that clouds his vision. In the Mahāyāna, a bodhisattva learns to see and respond to the suffering of others. In this tradition, pity is not a weakness to be overcome; it is an achievement to be earned.[2] One Mahāyāna author describes the bodhisattva path as an arduous climb up the mountain peak of wisdom. From the top of the mountain, bodhisattvas look back at the world with eyes that are "moist with compassion (*karuṇā*)."[3] In the *Gītā*, this combination of clear vision with moistened eyes would be a paradox, if not a simple contradiction. In the Mahāyāna it is a sign of the bodhisattva's cognitive sophistication and emotional sensitivity, two qualities that mark the passage from ordinary experience to awakening.

This essay explores the intersection of cognitive sophistication and emotional sensitivity in the work of two classical Buddhist authors. The first is the Indian philosopher Bhāvaviveka (500–560). Bhāvaviveka's account of the bodhisattva path is the source of the image of the bodhisattva's eyes moist with compassion. In a later passage in the same text, he refers to eyes that are moist with devotion (*bhakti*).[4] These two brief references suggest the complex significance of a bodhisattva's tears, uniting the clarity of wisdom with the

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emotional responsiveness of compassion and worship. The second author brings Bhāvaviveka's imagery down to earth in a concrete narrative of pilgrimage and worship. The Chinese monk Hsüan-tsang left his home in China in the year 629, about seventy years after the end of Bhāvaviveka's life, to travel to India and lands to the west. Like other Chinese pilgrims before him but unlike most of his Indian contemporaries, Hsüan-tsang recorded what he saw and left behind a voluminous account of India as he experienced it in the early years of the seventh century. Like most pilgrims, Hsüan-tsang occasionally succumbed to the impulse to embellish his tales, and there is little independent confirmation for many of his stories. But the narrative of Hsüan-tsang's journey gives a point of entry into Bhāvaviveka's world that is lively, rich, and almost impossible to duplicate from an Indian source. It also gives us an opportunity to reflect on what it might have meant for a bodhisattva to walk through the Buddhist landscape of India and respond with tears of not only compassion but worship.

When Hsüan-tsang traveled through the towns and villages of seventh-century India, collecting copies of the scriptures and studying with Indian teachers, he learned to look at the Indian landscape with the eyes of a pilgrim.[5] The account of his travels shows a topography that is marked in both a literal and metaphorical sense by the traces of the Buddha. Every town seems to have its own shrine bearing a relic or image and telling a story that links the site to an event in the life of the historical Buddha, to one of the Buddha's disciples, or to the Buddha of a previous era. The narrative is a rich source of information about the practice of Buddhism in medieval India, but it also makes clear an aspect of Buddhist thought that is almost invisible in the works of Indian philosophers themselves, even though it must have been as obvious to the philosophers as the ground beneath their feet. To see the evidence of the Buddha and hear his teaching did not require an elaborate study of texts. All it took was the stamina to travel in the steps of the Buddha, see the remnants of his presence, and hear the stories that placed each site in the sacred narrative of the Buddha's life.

It is possible to carry the point even further and argue that the landscape was the dominant factor in determining Hsüan-tsang's understanding of the Buddha, more important than the texts we now use to study the narrative of the Buddha's life. Hsüan-tsang had an idea of what the Buddha was before he even went to India, but his understanding was framed and the details were painted in by the stories he heard in the towns and villages that preserved traces of the Buddha's presence. This is true not just in the sense that Hsüan-tsang was able to fill out his knowledge of episodes in the Buddha's life by tracing the Buddha's steps, but because his prior understanding of the Buddha—the understanding that Hsüan-tsang inherited in China as part of the common lore of the Buddhist tradition—was fashioned out of the narratives of events in the life of the Buddha preserved at different pilgrimage sites. As Alfred

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Foucher has pointed out in his life of the Buddha, before the details of the Buddha's life were collected in scriptural form, they existed as common memories attached to particular places or objects, and the memories continued to affect the consciousness of the community as long as there were physical objects that could call them to mind.[6] When we compare the standard accounts of the Buddha's life in texts such as the *Lalitavistara* with the record of Hsüan-tsang's travels, the texts give the impression of a pastiche of stories gathered from the major sacred sites, either by firsthand experience or from the ancient equivalent of modern pilgrimage manuals.[7]

To understand how Hsüan-tsang and his contemporaries conceived of the Buddha, on either a practical or a philosophical level, requires an understanding of the way the sacred landscape of India shaped the community's collective memory of its founder. By this I mean not just that we need to know what the Buddha is said to have done at particular places. By now the traditions about the actions of the Buddha are well-known and have been subjected to intense historical analysis. I mean that we need to ask even more fundamental questions about the way communication through sacred objects and stories affected the way Buddhists understood not just what the Buddha did but what a Buddha is. Pilgrims who visited Buddhist sites in Hsüan-tsang's day heard stories about the Buddha's actions that allowed them to piece together a rough conception of the Buddha's life, just as we might piece together a biography of the Buddha today from different textual sources. But, along with specific information about the Buddha, Buddhist pilgrims also imbibed a certain way of thinking that allowed them to interpret the stories and sacred objects as signs of a particular kind of being. Whether they thought of it explicitly or not, they developed the elements of an instinctive "Buddhology"—an idea of the powers, attainments, levels of being, and so forth that made it possible for the Buddha to affect the lives of followers even after he is gone.

In this essay I would like to trace the essential elements in this logic of Buddhahood by looking not just at the philosophical sources but at evidence buried in the sacred objects and stories through which even the philosophers, at some time in their lives, would have become acquainted with the Buddha. The question in part is a question about grammar or, as a semioticist might say, a question about the code that makes it possible for knowledgeable Buddhists to interpret certain objects or symbols as signs of a Buddha. But the question grows out of concerns that also are central to the study of religion. To understand how Christians perceive the nature of Christ, it is just as important to understand the symbols or the interpretive habits that make "the body of Christ" a sacrament to a community of believers as it is to understand the theological categories of traditional Christology. The logic of worship or iconography shapes a Christian's perception of Christ, and the logic is so deeply ingrained in Christian tradition that it is difficult to conceive of a theologian working without it. The same is true in a different way for Buddhist philoso-

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phers. The fact that the logic of worship is not more visible in the study of Buddhist thought is due more to our fragmentary knowledge of the tradition and the difficulty of mastering more than a small portion of the sources than to any failure of imagination on the part of the Buddhist philosophers themselves.

To focus on the logic rather than the content of Buddhist conceptions of the Buddha requires even more attention than usual to the form of the questions we ask. It is tempting to approach the definition of the Buddha head-on and search the literature for passages that answer the question, "What is a Buddha?" just as someone might begin a study of Christology by searching the literature of the Church for passages about the nature of Christ. Passages that respond to this question do exist in Buddhist literature, but they are not always useful. Buddhist sources have a tendency to deflect direct questions about the identity or "selfhood" of any being, and questions about the identity of the Buddha are no exception. A direct question often provokes a negative answer or a response so impenetrable that it suggests a problem with the question itself. A Pali text, "The Group of Discourses" (*Sutta-nipāta*), says of the Buddha, "I am certainly not a brahman, nor a prince, nor a *vessa,* nor am I anyone (else). Knowing (and renouncing) the clan of the common people, I wander in the world, possessing nothing, being a thinker. Wearing a robe, houseless, I wander with shaven hair, with self quenched, not clinging here to (other) men. You have asked me an unfitting question about my clan, brahman."[8] Another Pali text, "The Discourse to Vacchagotta on Fire," deals with a question about the identity of the Buddha by saying: "The Tathāgata is deep, immeasurable, and unfathomable like the great ocean. It is not appropriate to say that he arises, does not arise, both arises and does not arise, or neither arises nor does not arise."[9] The two passages respond to different questions, but both suggest that a direct approach to the identity of the Buddha will lead to frustration and may even be misleading.

A more useful way to frame the question is to combine the perspective of a pilgrim with the perspective of a philosopher and ask: "Where do I look to find the Buddha?" For a pilgrim the question could be nothing more than a way of asking directions to a sacred site (or directions about how to approach or interpret a sacred object). For a philosopher it is a question of defining the "place" (*āśraya*) where the attributes of a Buddha are located.[10] The passages from "The Group of Discourses" and "The Discourse to Vacchagotta" indicate that the correct experience of a Buddha may be an experience in which one seeks and does not find a Buddha. But, even if this is the case, it is still possible to say to a pilgrim or a philosopher that there is a place where this experience occurs more directly, more easily, or more profoundly than other places, and this place shapes the idea of what a Buddha is in the mind of the person who seeks him.[11]

Foucher mentions eight major sites that contributed cycles of stories to the legend of the Buddha,[12] but there is surprising disagreement in the sources

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about the way these sites are ranked and interpreted. The Pali account of the Buddha's death in "The Discourse on the Great Decease" (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*) mentions four places that a person should "see and be moved by" (*dassanīyāni saṃvejanīyāni*): the place where the Buddha was born, the place where he attained enlightenment, the place where he delivered his first sermon, and the place where he passed away.[13] Hsüan-tsang's predecessor, Fa-hsien, who visited India in the early decades of the fifth century, reports that there are four sites regularly associated with the appearance of a Buddha: the place where he becomes enlightened, the place where he delivers his first sermon, the place where he preaches and confronts opponents, and the place where he comes back to earth after preaching to his mother in heaven.[14] *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (*Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*) stresses that there are two cities that had particular importance in the Buddha's career: Śrāvastī and Rājagṛha.[15] The sources clearly have different ideas of what made a site important. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* seems to reflect an early pilgrimage tradition associated with the places where key moments of transition occurred in the Buddha's life. These were places that should be "seen" (that is, visited) either in person or by an act of remembrance. The author of *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* seems to be more interested in explaining why the Buddha delivered his teaching more frequently in one place than in another. In Fa-hsien, the peripatetic and the textual interests seem to have been merged to create a single list. But all three sources indicate an awareness that the land has a sacred shape: some sites are made more significant than others by the remnants they bear or the stories they bring to mind.

The actual stories associated with these sites are quite varied. In the region of Śrāvastī, where the Buddha is said to have spent a large part of his teaching career, Hsüan-tsang describes more than twenty locations associated in some way with the life of the Buddha.[16] In the area of the city itself there are ruins of a great hall erected by King Prasenajit for the Buddha. A nearby *stūpa* marks the spot where the king built a monastic compound for the Buddha's aunt. Outside the city there is a series of sites surrounding one of the early Buddhist monastic centers, the Jeta Grove. By the time of Hsüan-tsang's visit, the original monastic buildings had fallen to ruin, but the site still was marked by the presence of several pillars and a number of small *stūpa*s. One *stūpa* marked the spot where the Buddha had ministered to a sick monk. Another marked the spot where the Buddha's disciple Maudgalyāyana, a monk who was known for his extraordinary magical powers, tried and failed to lift his more learned colleague Śāriputra off the ground. Still another *stūpa* is said to contain physical relics of the Buddha and to create a "mysterious sense of awe." Outside the city in another direction there was a town associated with the Buddha Kāśyapa, one of the predecessors of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni. The worship of Kāśyapa was focused on a *stūpa* similar to the shrines of Śākyamuni, and it too contained physical relics.

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The impression these sites made on Hsüan-tsang seems to have varied considerably from place to place. Hsüan-tsang says that some of the sites, particularly the sites that housed relics of Śākyamuni (or of previous Buddhas), displayed a sacred aura that might very well cause someone, in the words of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, to tremble or be strangely moved. Hsüan-tsang often reports that the sites manifest a mysterious light or heavenly music, or have the power to bring about miraculous cures. The sites also functioned as reminders of edifying stories. The Jeta Grove, for example, did not contain relics per se, but it was associated with the story of the Buddha's lay disciple Anāthapiṇḍika. Hsüan-tsang pauses long enough in his description of the physical features of the site to tell how Anāthapiṇḍika bought the grove for the Buddha by covering the ground with gold pieces and in the process set a standard of generosity to which future lay disciples, with a few notable exceptions, could merely aspire. Hsüan-tsang also describes deep ravines near the monastery where the earth was said to have opened and swallowed a number of unfortunate individuals who attempted to persecute or slander the Buddha. Hsüan-tsang tells of an image of the Buddha in the ruins of the monastery itself that combined the miraculous quality of a relic with the ability to remind a visitor of an edifying story. Fa-hsien had reported that King Prasenajit, the king who ruled the region during the life of the Buddha, had become so attached to the Buddha's presence that when the moment came for the Buddha to travel to heaven to teach the Dharma to his mother, the king commissioned an image to occupy the Buddha's empty seat. When the Buddha returned to the monastery, the image got up from its seat and went out to greet him. The Buddha directed the image back to its place and explained that the image would serve as a prototype for the creation of similar Buddha images in the future.[17]

Hsüan-tsang's account of the area associated with Śrāvastī gives it the look and feel of a major Buddhist site, with a rich overlay of stories and monuments, but there are other sites in Hsüan-tsang's narrative that are encrusted even more heavily with the traces of the Buddha's presence. Hsüan-tsang's description of Sārnāth, the town in the outskirts of Vārāṇasī where the Buddha is said to have preached his first sermon, depicts a much more active pilgrimage site than a visitor would find today. In Hsüan-tsang's time, the site was dominated by a large monastery.[18] Inside the monastery was a temple that housed a famous image of the Buddha in teaching posture. To the south and west of the monastery there was a *stūpa* that marked the spot where the bodhisattva who many lives later became the Buddha was born as a partridge to teach his companions respect for elders.[19] In a nearby forest another *stūpa* marked the spot where the bodhisattva was born as the king of a herd of deer and offered to sacrifice himself for the other members of the herd.[20] Hsüan-tsang lists these sites in no apparent order, along with other shrines that commemorate Kāśyapa Buddha's prediction of the enlightenment of Śākyamuni, and Śākyamuni's prediction of the enlightenment of Maitreya.[21]

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In other sections of the narrative, Hsüan-tsang's emphasis seems to fall less on stories of the Buddha's career than on veneration of the Buddha's remains. In the early stages of his trip through northwest India, he passed through a region where even the smallest villages seemed to boast their own *stūpa*s with the hair and nail clippings of the Buddha. These shrines do not necessarily bear a distinctive legend about the life of the Buddha, but they often are associated with miraculous or extraordinary events. Hsüan-tsang tells the story of a *stūpa* that exudes a black, scented oil and on quiet nights buzzes with the sound of music.[22] According to local legend, the oil was the remainder of a man who came to deposit a relic in the *stūpa*. When the man approached the *stūpa* with the relic in his hands, the *stūpa* is said to have opened miraculously to let him in, but when the *stūpa* began to close, and the man tried to leave, the hem of his garment caught on a rock, and he was crushed between the stones of the *stūpa*. Fortunately not all monuments in the northwest were this grisly. The region also boasted the presence of *stūpa*s honoring the Buddha's robe and staff and the ruins of a shrine that was said to have once held the Buddha's begging bowl.[23]

The central region of the Ganges Basin, where the Buddha's active teaching career was focused, was also fertile ground for the veneration of relics and other marks of the Buddha's presence. Here the remnants often took the form of marks left by the Buddha's robe or feet.[24] Hsüan-tsang describes a spot near Sārnāth where the impression of the Buddha's robe was engraved on rocks in the bed of a river. According to a local legend, the spot was defended by a Nāga, and the marks in the riverbed were accorded the same respect as a *stūpa*. Hsüan-tsang also notes the existence of a number of *stūpa*s associated with the relics of the Buddha's cremation. By the time of Hsüan-tsang's visit, these relics had been divided and redivided several times, and each division had given rise to a complicated series of legends. Hsüan-tsang did what he could to unravel their history. When the relics were present, he commented on their distinctive characteristics and tried to account for the story that brought each one to its present resting place.[25]

Hsüan-tsang's account of different sacred sites is a reminder that what we loosely call "relics" could come in different varieties.[26] Relics could be the actual remnants of the Buddha's body, or they could be objects like a footprint, a begging bowl, or a mark on a wall that are associated with the Buddha in only a conventional or accidental sense. Relics also could function quite differently in different contexts. Some clearly were treated as if they had power in their own right and were worthy of worship. Others seem to have more of a teaching function: they marked events in the life of the Buddha and reminded a visitor of an edifying story. Some levels of the tradition have attempted to bring order to the classification of these holy objects by grouping them in a series of categories. Some objects consist of the physical remnants of the Bud-

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dha's body (*sārīrika*), some are objects that the Buddha used during his life (*pāribhogika*), such as the begging bowl that once was housed in the northwest, and some are simply depictions or representations of the Buddha's form (*uddesika*).[27] It is clear from Hsüan-tsang's travels, however, that the diversity is even greater than this, especially when one includes the relics of Buddhist saints, relics of the bodhisattva who became the Buddha, relics of previous Buddhas, and marks of extraordinary events (such as the *stūpa* that emitted scented oil) that convey a message about the worship of the Buddha but are associated only indirectly with the Buddha himself. By his own account, Hsüan-tsang's journey led him through a landscape that was richly endowed not only with signs of the Buddha's power but with a series of reminders that showed how these signs functioned in a complex system of worship and religious instruction.

To say that Hsüan-tsang traveled only as a pilgrim would be misleading.[28] Hsüan-tsang was attracted to India as much by the open-ended search for texts and sacred knowledge as he was by the lure of sacred sites. But there still was a sense in which Hsüan-tsang experienced the landscape as a conventional pilgrim. When he stood on the ground of a sacred site he was on the same footing, literally and figuratively, as an ordinary Buddhist devotee. Whether Hsüan-tsang's learning would have caused the guides to have been more thorough about transmitting local traditions or more generous in embellishing them with detail, we do not know. (To judge from his own record, Hsüan-tsang's learning does not seem to have been a serious restraint on their imagination.) But Hsüan-tsang would have walked the same ground, seen the same ruined foundations, and heard the same stories about the Buddha's bones or the marks of the Buddha's robe as an ordinary pilgrim. And he would have used those signs and stories to construct a framework for understanding the being who left those marks behind.

How can we begin to reconstruct the framework of understanding that lies behind Hsüan-tsang's account of these signs and stories? In a paper titled "Exploratory Observations on Some Weeping Pilgrims," T. H. Barrett suggests that we can start by trying to understand why Hsüan-tsang was reduced to tears when he first laid eyes on the site of the Buddha's enlightenment.[29] In Samuel Beal's translation, the story of Hsüan-tsang's visit to the Bodhi Tree goes like this:

> The Master of the Law when he came to worship the Bodhi tree and the figure of Tathāgata at the time of his reaching perfect wisdom, made (*afterwards*) by (*the interposition of*) Maitreya Bodhisattva, gazed on these objects with the most sincere devotion, he cast himself down with his face to the ground in worship, and with much grief and many tears in his self-affliction, he sighed, and said: "At the time when Buddha perfected himself in wisdom, I know not in what condition I was, in the troublous whirl of birth and death; but now, in this latter time of image

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(*worship*), having come to this spot and reflecting on the depth and weight of the body of my evil deeds, I am grieved at heart, and my eyes filled with tears."[30]

Barrett traces the emotion in this passage to a combination of factors in the intellectual and cultural world of seventh-century China. Like many of the lyric poets of the late T'ang Dynasty, Hsüan-tsang approached this symbol of intellectual achievement with a sense of melancholy over the inevitable loss of the splendor of the past,[31] and his sense of melancholy was deepened by a Buddhist sense of karmic unworthiness. Hsüan-tsang had missed the auspicious moment when he could hear the Buddha in person simply because he was trapped in the web of his previous actions. Instead of visiting the site of the Buddha's enlightenment when the Buddha could have conveyed its meaning, Hsüan-tsang was condemned to arrive centuries later, when the signs of the Buddha's enlightenment were already beginning to decay and disappear.

The key element in Hsüan-tsang's experience, and the one that seems to have triggered the deepest emotional response, was the sense of absence. Hsüan-tsang had an acute sense that the Buddha he longed to see was not there. This is not to say that the shrine itself was in an unusual state of decay during Hsüan-tsang's time. Hsüan-tsang saw many monastic compounds in other parts of India that had been reduced to ruins, but the site of the Buddha's enlightenment still was an active focus of worship. Nor was the shrine lacking in physical representations of the Buddha. Hsüan-tsang's biographer points out that the shrine contained a "figure of Tathāgata at the time of his reaching perfect wisdom." But the activities of worship and the physical image of the Buddha gave way in Hsüan-tsang's mind to a feeling of absence. It is as if Hsüan-tsang had placed himself inside the devotional scene represented by the "aniconic" images of the empty throne at sites such as Amarāvatī.[32] His tears seem to invert (or are they simply another way of expressing?) the joy that seems to radiate from the faces of devotees as they kneel before the place of the Buddha's absence. Even though he saw an image of the Buddha, he perceived the image as a sign of absence, and he responded to the absence with tears.

How can we probe more deeply into the meaning of these tears? It is hard to ask this question and not be overwhelmed by the feeling of cultural distance—not just the chronological gap of nearly fourteen hundred years that separates us from Hsüan-tsang but also the gap that separates Hsüan-tsang as a representative of the Chinese literati from the world of an Indian sage. It is encouraging to know, however, that Hsüan-tsang was not unique when he responded to this emotional sight with tears. Hsüan-tsang's reaction reflects not only the tears that are shed by the bodhisattvas in Bhāvaviveka's text—tears that Bhāvaviveka saw first as expressions of compassion, then finally as expressions of devotion—but also the tears of other Indian devotees who struggled like Hsüan-tsang in a quest for insight.

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The name of the young pilgrim whose quest consumes the last few chapters of *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* is Sadāprarudita, "Perpetually Weeping." Sadāprarudita's journey leads eventually to the vision of the teacher he is seeking, but in the early stages he shares Hsüan-tsang's sense of sadness and self-reproach.[33] Sadāprarudita starts with a dim feeling that he is surrounded and led by the power of a teacher, a teacher who functions as a surrogate of the Buddha but whose identity Sadāprarudita does not know and whose presence he has not yet seen. His journey then brings him slowly and painfully into the teacher's presence. The journey starts when Sadāprarudita hears a voice saying: "Go East, son of good family!" But the journey soon dissolves in tears when Sadāprarudita realizes that he does not know how far he has to go.

> Before long it occurred to him that he had not asked the voice how far he ought to go. He stood still just where he was, cried, sorrowed, and lamented. For seven days he stayed in that very spot waiting to be told where he could hear the perfection of wisdom, and all that time he paid no attention to anything else, and took no food, but simply paid homage to the perfection of wisdom.[34]

After weeping and paying homage to the Perfection of Wisdom for seven days, he finally had a vision of the form of the Buddha and was given a description of the town where his teacher lived. When he heard the description of his teacher, he became "contented, elated, overjoyed, and jubilant" and began to hear the voice of his teacher speaking to him. Eventually, after Sadāprarudita has learned to visualize Buddhas and bodhisattvas in countless world systems and to sense the encompassing "power" of his teacher, even when the teacher is absent, he finally makes his way physically into the teacher's presence.

Why do these two travelers seem to feel such melancholy? I doubt that there can be any definitive answer to a question that depends so much on conventions and matters of taste that centuries have only obscured. But it is clear that both travelers respond with emotion to the absence of the person who is the goal of their quest. For Hsüan-tsang the signs of the Buddha are present, but the Buddha himself is absent, and the absence is an occasion for lament. For Sadāprarudita the teacher's power is present, but the teacher himself is absent, and the teacher's absence is a cause to weep. In both cases it is the sense of absence that brings the tears. For both of the travelers the sense of absence also changes over time. As they travel on their separate journeys, they have the experience of reaching toward or falling away in a chronological sense from the presence of the Buddha (or, in Sadāprarudita's case, the teacher who is the surrogate of the Buddha). The Buddha or teacher has not been or will not always be absent. If Hsüan-tsang had been present at the tree of enlightenment during the career of Śākyamuni, he would have been able to stand in the Buddha's presence. It was just his own bad luck or his own past actions that denied him that opportunity. In Sadāprarudita's case, the

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teacher's absence may have been discouraging, but he still could look forward to a time when he could stand in the teacher's presence. For Hsüan-tsang and Sadāprarudita the sense of absence is diachronic: it changes over time. What has been present in the past or what might be present in the future is not present to them at the moment they shed their tears.

By itself the diachronic sense of absence is not surprising or even complex. It is a common experience to lament the loss of a more wonderful age or long for the appearance of an age that is more perfect or fulfilling than the present. But this sense of absence takes on more complexity of meaning when it is expanded in another direction. It is not only possible for the Buddha to be present at one moment and absent at another; the Buddha can also be present and absent simultaneously. The *diachronic* sense of the Buddha's absence can be combined with a sense of absence that is *synchronic*: the relationship between the presence and absence of the Buddha can be manifested over time, and it can be manifested at a single moment. The classic example of the *synchronic* sense of absence is the well-known passage in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.120 about the relationship between the physical Buddha and the Buddha's teaching: "What is there, Vakkali, in seeing this vile body? Whoso sees Dhamma sees me; whoso sees me sees Dhamma. Seeing Dhamma, Vakkali, he sees me; seeing me he sees Dhamma." But it is not necessary to search the scriptures to find an example of such a basic idea. For the last few years students in introductory courses in Buddhism have learned to "see" the Buddha through the film *The Footprint of the Buddha*.[35] In this film the narrator starts his search for the Buddha by visiting a sculptural representation of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* in Sri Lanka. As he stands in front of the stone image, he hears a sermon about the virtues of mindfulness, then he turns his search for the Buddha to one of the Buddhist pilgrimage sites in northern India. Standing in front of the ruins of the great *stūpa* at Sārnāth, he voices the suspicion, "It is not exactly that the Venerable Anandamaitreya [the monk who had interpreted the statue for him in Sri Lanka] disapproved of my trip to India, but I had the distinct impression that he preferred a living teaching to a dead relic."

Anyone who has encountered Buddhist teaching on more than the most superficial level will have a favorite story to illustrate the idea that a Buddha who is present to the senses also in some sense is absent—and vice versa. But it is worth reminding oneself how many different variations can be generated out of this simple contrast. A well-known example is Hsüan-tsang's visit to the cave of the Buddha's shadow. Legends known to Hsüan-tsang associated the cave with a Nāga king who was converted by the Buddha and became a protector of the Dharma.[36] When the Nāga king realized that the Buddha would not stay with him permanently, he told the Buddha that he was afraid he would fall back into his old violent ways. To restrain the king and remind him of what he had been taught, the Buddha agreed to leave his shadow on the wall of a cave. The Buddha went on to predict that all the Buddhas of the pres-

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ent era would appear in the same place and leave behind their shadows in the same way. By the time Hsüan-tsang visited the cave, the shadow was no longer visible. Only after strenuous and tearful recitation of scripture and many prostrations was Hsüan-tsang able to see the form of the Buddha appear as a momentary flash of light. It took more prostrations and ardent promises before the cave finally was filled with light and Hsüan-tsang had a full vision of the Buddha's form "as when the opening clouds suddenly reveal the golden Mount and its excellent indications."[37]

With all of the different personalities in the story, including the Nāga king, the living Buddha, the Buddha's form, Hsüan-tsang, and the Buddhas of the future, the passage elaborates the contrast of presence and absence in almost an endless series of permutations. The Nāga king fears the absence of the Buddha, so he is given a reflection of the form that reminds him of the Buddha's presence. When the form itself has begun to disappear, a visitor like Hsüan-tsang has to engage in acts of religious discipline to make the form of the past Buddha become present. Finally, all of these events anticipate a story that will be played out again and again in the future, as more Buddhist travelers and Buddhas come and go. Added to these diachronic relationships there is a play on the relationship between the Dharma and the Buddha's physical form. Before Hsüan-tsang gets to the cave, he already is a learned and accomplished monk. In a sense, he already understands and is in possession of the Dharma. What he lacks is the Buddha's physical form. When he confronts the absence of the Buddha's form, his learning allows him to reverse the relationship in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* between the Dharma and the Buddha's form. He does not use the physical form as a sign to point to the Dharma. Instead he chants the Dharma to make manifest the physical form.

One way to account for the range of meanings that comes from combining the diachronic and synchronic types of absence is to use the interpretive model Stanley Tambiah has developed to describe the use of amulets in modern Thailand.[38] Amulets are blessed by a forest saint, stamped with the saint's image, and distributed in a complex system of exchanges to collectors and devotees throughout the country. Tambiah argues that the amulets are signs that take on the function simultaneously of a symbol and an index. As he uses these terms (following the tradition of semiotics that stems from Charles Peirce), a *symbol* is associated with its object only by a conventional rule, while an *index* stands in a direct existential relationship to its object. To say that an amulet is simultaneously a symbol and an index means that it stands for the saint in a conventional or symbolic sense, the way the wheel stands for the Buddhist Dharma, and that it makes present, in an existential sense, the saint's power. In other words, an amulet makes a double statement about the saint it signifies: by functioning as a symbol, it shows that the saint is absent, and by functioning as an index, it shows that the saint (through his power) is present.

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This double message, however, is only a part of the amulet's meaning. When Tambiah asked his Thai informants to explain how amulets could give protection and prosperity to the person who wears them, he received a range of answers that suggested more complex modes of interpretation. A businessman said that the amulet brought him good luck because it reminded him to be diligent and practice morality in his business dealings.[39] A monk said that the amulet recalled the Buddha's virtues and reminded him not to do evil. The two responses suggest, among other things, that the function of amulets as signs of a Buddhist saint cannot be reduced to a simple act of reference. They do symbolize the saint, and they do indicate the saint by making present his power, but they also shift attention away from the saint toward a moral message. The message for the businessman was one of diligence and virtue. For the monk it was a message of "Go and do likewise." The message could not be confused either with the saint himself or with the saint's power, but it still was a natural part of the amulet's function, at least in the mind of the businessman and the monk.

It is a long way from Hsüan-tsang in the cave of the Buddha's shadow to a collector of amulets in modern Thailand, but there is a model of interpretation that ties them together. In each case there is a physical image that stands for and at the same time embodies the power of a saint, even when the saint is absent. In addition to this symbolic and indexical relationship to the absent saint, there is an assumption that the physical image stands in relationship with a teaching. Someone who wants to interpret the signs fluently and relate one type of signification to the other has to grasp the complex relationship of presence and absence. To "use" an amulet or "see" the Buddha's shadow, a person has to be aware that both of these embody the power (which may be present, as in the case of the amulet, or absent, as in the case of the shadow) of an absent saint, and a person also has to know that the physical object is related to a teaching (which also may be present or absent). What is present can be used to call to mind what is absent and vice versa. In the case of the amulet, the teaching is not present as a physical object; it is only the object that reminds someone of the teaching. For Hsüan-tsang in the cave, the teaching is even more present than the object, and he uses the teaching to make present a vision of the Buddha's physical form.

Tambiah's concept of the *indexical symbol* helps open up some of the complexity involved in interpreting the signs of Buddhist saints, but there are other possibilities as well. Another concept that has been used to interpret similar signs in other cultures is Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the *chronotope* (literally, a "time-place"). Like the road in a picaresque novel or the salon in a novel by Stendahl or Balzac, a chronotope is a place where space and time intersect to give a particular interpretive structure to a series of events. Bakhtin himself explains a chronotope by saying, "In the literary and artistic

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chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history."[40] We are not likely to confuse Hsüan-tsang's cave with the drawing room in a French novel, but Bakhtin's concept is still helpful in two ways. First, it shows how important it is to have a particular point in space or a particular spatial structure to focus and symbolize a particular act of understanding. This is the aspect of Bakhtin's chronotope that caught Keith Basso's eye as a way of describing the attitude of the Western Apaches toward the geographical features of their own landscape.[41] Basso found that the Apaches tied particular features of the landscape with particular stories, and they used the landscape, like the feature of the sites Hsüan-tsang visited in India, to fix the stories in a person's mind—to "shoot" a person with a story—and drive home a moral point. A second suggestive aspect of Bakhtin's definition of the chronotope is the connection between a particular point in space and a community's perception of its own history. The Bodhi Tree had such great impact on Hsüan-tsang because it forced him to stop for a moment and reflect not only on his own history but on the history of his community.[42]

Another way to approach the meaning of Buddhist signs of the Buddha might be to use Michel Foucault's concept of a *heterotopia*. Foucault himself introduces the concept indirectly by using the concept of a *heteroclite*. He defines a heteroclite as a state in which "things are 'laid,' 'placed,' 'arranged' in sites so different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all."[43] A heterotopia is a place where there is a heteroclite. It is a place where there is a radical disjunction of thought, not simply a point where incongruous elements are linked together, but a point where the idea that incongruous things can occupy any common conceptual space is radically challenged. In a heterotopia, "all the familiar landmarks of thought are shattered, ordered surfaces and planes are broken up." Foucault associates this shattering of familiar categories with Borges's well-known, fictional quotation from "a certain Chinese encyclopedia":

> Animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.

According to Foucault, Borges's passage itself is a place where certain concepts are juxtaposed that cannot go harmoniously together. As a result, the passage also is a place that figuratively is no place, since the concepts that purport

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to reside there cannot be set in any conceivable relation. Heterotopias like this undermine not only the concepts they seemingly contain but also the relationship of container and contained. As Foucault says, they "desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of language at its source."[44]

To transpose Foucault's concept from a literary context to the places where a person confronts the simultaneous absence and presence of the Buddha may seem to stretch the concept to the breaking point, but there is something to be said for considering the signs of the Buddha's absence as points of incongruity that challenge the stability of conceptuality itself. The sites where someone discovers the Buddha's presence in his absence, and vice versa, are like the room in *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti* where the bodhisattva Vimalakīrti greets a group of visitors in a state of feigned illness. When the visitors come to inquire about his health, they expect to find his room filled with all the trappings of a wealthy and urbane lay disciple. Instead they find that Vimalakīrti has stripped the room of everything but a single cot. Vimalakīrti then uses the empty room as a device, a topos, to challenge the idea that there can be any space where anything can be located:

> ***Mañjuśrī:*** Householder, why is your house empty and why have you no retinue?
> ***Vimalakīrti:*** Mañjuśrī, all the Buddha-fields themselves also are empty.
> ***Mañjuśrī:*** Of what are they empty?
> ***Vimalakīrti:*** They are empty of emptiness.
> ***Mañjuśrī:*** What is empty of emptiness?
> ***Vimalakīrti:*** Imaginings are empty of emptiness.
> ***Mañjuśrī:*** Can emptiness be imagined?
> ***Vimalakīrti:*** Imagination itself is also empty, and emptiness does not imagine emptiness.
> ***Mañjuśrī:*** Householder, where is this emptiness found?
> ***Vimalakīrti:*** Mañjuśrī, emptiness is found in the sixty-two kinds of false views.
> ***Mañjuśrī:*** Where are the sixty-two kinds of false views found?
> ***Vimalakīrti:*** They are found in the deliverance of the Tathāgatas.
> ***Mañjuśrī:*** Where is the deliverance of the Tathāgatas found?
> ***Vimalakīrti:*** It is found in the first thought activity of all beings.[45]

When this deliberately bewildering conversation is over, Vimalakīrti uses his supernatural power to transport thirty-two hundred thousand thrones from the Merudhvajā universe and place them in his room, leaving his own town and the continent of India "as they were before." The act is meant to be a palpable demonstration of the malleability of space, or of space as no-space. Vimalakīrti's "inconceivable liberation" includes the ability to use space to undermine the notion of space itself.

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Perhaps the best way to name the point where the Buddha's absence intersects with his presence is with the modern Buddhist concept of the "locus" of absolute nothingness, developed first by Nishida Kitaro and extended by his disciple Nishitani Keiji. In *Religion and Nothingness*, Nishitani describes the understanding of Emptiness as a way of standing correctly on the ground beneath one's feet: "Only when the self breaks through the field of consciousness, the field of *beings*, and stands on the ground of nihility, is it able to achieve a subjectivity that can in no way be objectivized."[46] But Nishitani also makes it clear that this "standing" is not a matter of exchanging one standpoint for another: "In standing subjectively on the field of nihility (I use the term 'stand' and refer to nihility as a 'field,' but in fact there is literally *no place* to stand) the self becomes itself in a more elemental sense."[47] This "standing" is a standing that is no standing. Speaking about Emptiness, Nishitani says: "The standpoint of śūnyatā is another thing altogether. . . . As a standpoint assumed at the far side itself, it is, of course, an absolute conversion from the mere near side. But it is also an absolute conversion from a near side looking out at a far side beyond. The arrival at the far side is nothing less than an absolute near side."[48]

What these three concepts, from Bakhtin's to Nishitani's, have in common is the idea of "place." Whether a sign of the Buddha is a place where the consciousness of a community becomes particularly vivid and apparent, a place where conceptual systems clash and reveal their incompatibility, or a place that is no place but around which it is possible to have a distinctive form of "conversion," the sign is still a specific location, a "place" that can be understood by someone who has the right interpretive knowledge. Part of this interpretive knowledge is the ability to perceive and respond to the absence that is given spatial location in that particular place. If we want to dig more deeply into the meaning of Hsüan-tsang's experience of the Buddha, we need to step from the shoes of a pilgrim into the shoes of a philosopher and ask what it means to picture the Buddha as a place where an absence is present.

To take the next step into the philosophical tradition that lies behind the works of Hsüan-tsang and Bhāvaviveka would take us beyond the scope of this essay. It is enough to note that tears are associated in both cases with a bodhisattva's encounter with the vision of reality represented by the Buddha. Like the Buddha, they also seem to be connected with a complex dialectic of presence and absence. If we could pursue this point further, we would find that this dialectic is mirrored in the two truths that characterize the Mahāyāna concept of Emptiness: to understand reality as the Buddha understands it is to follow a Middle Path and know that reality is simultaneously present and absent. All this is well-known in the literature of Buddhist philosophy.[49] What is not so well-known is the way the bodhisattva's awareness of Emptiness is distilled in what Bhāvaviveka referred to as "moistened

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eyes" and Hsüan-tsang experienced as tears. To "see" reality as these philosophers saw it, in a tradition where philosophy itself is referred to simply as "vision" (*darśana*), is not merely to view it with detachment but to be moved by what one sees—to be moved by the suffering of others and filled with devotion by the sight of the Buddha. Wittgenstein spoke of condensing a cloud of philosophy into a drop of grammar.[50] Here the condensation takes shape as a drop of tears.

Notes

1. This essay is excerpted and adapted from Malcolm David Eckel, *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992; reprint, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), ch. 3.

2. "Pity" (*kṛpā*) is used as a synonym of "compassion" (*karuṇā*) in verses 2.5 and 8 of Bhāvaviveka's *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā*s. Chapter 2 of this text has been translated in V. V. Gokhale, "The Second Chapter of Bhavya's Madhyamakahṛdaya (Taking the Vow of an Ascetic)," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 14 (1972): 40–45. For more commentary on the text as a whole, see Eckel, *To See the Buddha.*

3. Eckel, *To See the Buddha,* 174.

4. Ibid., 187.

5. Samuel Beal, trans., *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World* (1884; reprint, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992).

6. Alfred Foucher, *La vie du Bouddha* (Paris: Payot, 1949), 18.

7. Ibid., 108–09.

8. *Sutta-nipāta,* ed. Dines Andersen and Helmer Smith (London: Pali Text Society, 1965), 80; translation quoted from K. R. Norman, trans., *The Group of Discourses (Sutta-nipāta)* (London: Pali Text Society, 1984), 1:76.

9. *Majjhima Nikāya,* 1: 487–88.

10. At the beginning of the fourth chapter of *The Flame of Reason,* Bhāvaviveka frames the dispute between the Mahāyāna and the Nikāya Buddhist (whom Bhāvaviveka refers to as a Disciple—*śrāvaka*) about the nature of the Buddha as a dispute about the "place" (*āśraya*) where enlightenment is located.

11. Kees W. Bolle makes a similar point in "Speaking of a Place," in *Myths and Symbols: Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade,* ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Charles H. Long (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 127–39. He argues that Indian religion is incomprehensible without understanding the symbolic significance of specific locations. Sacred places give to the religions of India what Bolle calls "topographical religiosity."

12. Foucher, *La vie du Bouddha,* 19.

13. *Dīgha Nikāya* XVI.5.8. Parallel passages in other versions of the sūtra say only that faithful men and women should "recollect" (*anusmaraṇīya*) the four places. See Ernst Waldschmitt, ed., *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra,* vol. 3, Abhandlung der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin: Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur, und Kunst, no. 3 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1951), 388–89.

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14. James Legge, trans., *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms* (1886; reprint, New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp. and Dover Publications, 1965), 68.

15. Étienne Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)* (1949; reprint, Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1966), 1:176–79.

16. Beal, *Records,* 2:1–13.

17. Legge, *Record,* 56–57. The story has obvious importance in lending the Buddha's authority to the creation of Buddha images. It is repeated widely in Buddhist literature. See Padmanabh S. Jaini, "On the Buddha Image," in *Studies in Pali and Buddhism,* ed. A. K. Narain (Delhi: B. R. Publishing, 1979), 183–88. Hsüan-tsang associates the story first with King Udayana of Kauśāmbī and only secondarily with Śrāvastī (Beal, *Records,*1:235, 2:4).

18. The cycle of stories associated with Sārnāth is found in Beal, *Records,* 2:44–61 and in Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1904–1905), 2:46–59.

19. *Vinaya* 2.160–62.

20. *Jātaka* no. 12.

21. Watters points out that there is considerable inconsistency in the story about the prediction of Maitreya's enlightenment. The *stūpa* is described as being near Vārāṇasī, but the prediction is said to have taken place when the Buddha was staying at Rājagṛha.

22. Beal, *Records,* 2:60–61.

23. Ibid., 1:96–99.

24. Ibid., 2:49.

25. The largest distribution of relics was associated with the reign of Aśoka, e.g., Beal, *Records,* 2:66–68. For a discussion of this aspect of Aśoka's career, see John Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 109–19.

26. Here I use the word "relic" or "relics" to represent not only *śarīrāṇī* ("bones") or *dhātu* ("element" or "constituent"), which are constituents of the Buddha's physical body, but also objects that become holy by connection with the Buddha's form. John Strong suggests this expanded usage when he points out that relics are "not only the bodies, bones, or ashes of saints . . . , but also objects that they once owned and, by extension, things that were once in physical contact with them." See his entry, "Relics," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 12:275–76. When the word "relic" is applied not only to the physical remnants of the Buddha's body but to objects that become holy by association, it comes close to the meaning of the word *caitya* (Pali *cetiya*), which could be translated as a more general term such as "holy object."

27. The word used in this classification of such "holy objects" is *caitya* (Pali *cetiya*). See the *Kaliṅgabodhi Jātaka* (*Jātaka* 4.228). A similar classification occurs in *The Questions of King Milinda (Milindapañho*), ed. V. Trenckner (London: Williams and Norgate, 1880), 341. This system of classification is discussed by Richard Gombrich in *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 105, and by Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah in *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 200–205.

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28. Raoul Birnbaum has pointed out that the journey breaks the boundaries of the standard typology of pilgrimage. See "Thoughts on T'ang Buddhist Mountain Traditions and Their Context," *T'ang Studies* 3 (1984): 5–23.

29. T. H. Barrett, "Exploratory Observations on Some Weeping Pilgrims," in *The Buddhist Forum, Volume 1, Seminar Papers 1987–1988*, ed. Tadeusz Skorupski (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990), 99–110.

30. Samuel Beal, trans., *The Life of Hiuen-tsiang* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1914), 105.

31. Stephen Owen comments on the melancholy tone of T'ang poetry in *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

32. Susan Huntington has argued persuasively that these aniconic images are not meant to be representations of the Buddha in which the Buddha is absent but representations of shrines like the one visited by Hsüan-tsang at the site of the Bodhi Tree where the central object of devotion is an object or place made sacred by the Buddha's former presence. See Susan L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985).

33. Edward Conze, trans., *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary* (Bolinas, CA: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), chs. 30–32.

34. Ibid., 278.

35. The film is an episode in the series *The Long Search*, first transmitted by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1977.

36. The episode is found in Beal, *Records*, 1:93–94, and Beal, *Life*, 60–63. An earlier account of the cave appears in Fa-hsien (trans. Legge), p. 39.

37. Beal, *Life*, 62.

38. Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints*, 4–5. Tambiah adapts his analysis of signs from Arthur W. Burks, "Icon, Index, and Symbol," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9 (1949): 673–89.

39. Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints*, 199–200.

40. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

41. Keith Basso, "'Stalking with Stories': Names, Places, and Moral Narratives among the Western Apaches," in *On Nature: Nature, Landscape, and Natural History*, ed. Daniel Halpern (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1986), 95–116.

42. It was able to have this impact not only because of its connection with the historical Buddha but also because of the place it occupied in Indian Buddhist cosmology. Hsüan-tsang repeats a tradition that the Buddha's "diamond throne" (*vajrāsana*) is the center of the trichiliomegachiliocosm (*trisāhasra-mahāsāhasralokadhātu*) and explains that all the Buddhas of the present era will attain enlightenment on the same site (Beal, *Records*, 2:116). Étienne Lamotte has commented on the history of this tradition in *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, trans. Sara Boin (London: Pali Text Society, 1976), 94–96.

43. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, translation of *Les mots et les choses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xvii–xviii.

44. Ibid., xviii.

45. Translation adapted from Lamotte, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, 118–19.

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46. Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 16.

47. Ibid., 17.

48. Ibid., 138.

49. For sources, see Eckel, *To See the Buddha*, 65–72.

50. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd. ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 222.

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Weeping in Classical Sufism

William C. Chittick

Weeping is mentioned in a positive light in the Qurʾān, the Ḥadīth, and much of Islamic literature. Anyone who has attended a session of Qurʾān recitation can attest that it is not only an accepted but even an expected phenomenon in Muslim praxis. But what exactly is its significance? If we want answers provided by Muslims, the best place to look is in the writings of the Sufis, who have played the role of depth psychologists and spiritual therapists for most of Islamic history. Two other major schools of thought—jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and dogmatic theology (*Kalām*)—have little to say about the inner workings of the soul. As for the Hellenophile philosophers, they aimed at transmuting the soul into pure intelligence and acquiring virtue, but they rarely discussed phenomena associated specifically with religious practice.

The Qurʾān and Ḥadīth

The Qurʾān mentions "weeping" (*bukāʾ* and derivatives) in seven verses and "tears" (*damʿ*) in two more, and these verses become points of reference for much of the later discussion. The revealed book praises weeping in connection with the recitation of its own verses: "When the Qurʾān is recited to those who were given knowledge before it . . . , they fall down on their faces weeping, and it increases them in humility" (17:109). A ḥadīth instructs the believers to weep while they recite the Qurʾān, or at least to try to weep (*tabākī*).[1] Many ḥadīths speak of the Prophet's own weeping. One tells us that he was reciting the prayers of Abraham (Qurʾān 14:36–37) and Jesus (5:118) for their respective communities. Then he lifted up his hands in supplication and said, "O God, my community, my community!" and he wept. God revealed to him that he would not be disappointed.[2] Another ḥadīth tells us that he wept upon visiting the grave of his mother.[3] Still another says that when his infant son Ibrāhīm died, he wept, and one of his companions said to him, "You too, O Messenger of God?" He replied that he was moved by mercy (*raḥma*). Then he said, "The eye sheds tears and the heart grieves, and we say only what pleases our Lord. O Ibrāhīm, we are grieved at parting from you!"[4]

Once when the Prophet was passing through a village, he saw a woman cooking bread in an open fire and holding her child on her hip. When flames

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shot up, she quickly jumped back. Later she came forward and said, "Is not God 'the most merciful of the merciful' [Qur'ān 7:151]." The Prophet replied that he was. She said, "A mother would never throw her child into the fire." The Prophet bowed his head and wept. Then he said, "God does not chastise any of His servants but the defiant and recalcitrant, those who defy God and refuse to say, 'There is no god but God.'"[5]

The ḥadīth literature often ascribes weeping to Abū Bakr, the Prophet's close companion and the first caliph. The sayings are summed up in the remark of one of the other companions: "Abū Bakr was a man who wept much [*bakkā'*]—he had no control over his eyes."[6] He seems to be the prototype for the occasional ascetic in later literature to whom is applied the attribute *bakkā'*. Despite the opinion of some of the Orientalists, however, there is no evidence that there was a group of people known by this label.[7]

Although weeping is generally praised, some authors view it as a sign of immaturity, and Abū Bakr is also cited as someone who passed beyond the stage of weeping. In explaining the meaning of the Qur'ānic verse, "Then your hearts became hardened after that, so they are like stones, or even harder" (2:74), an eleventh-century commentator tells us that there are two sorts of hardening. In the case of the ignorant, hardening means unkindness, cruelty, and distance from God. In the case of those who are pure and knowledgeable, hardening is firmness in knowledge and purity. Then he cites Abū Bakr: When he would see people weeping as they listened to the Qur'ān, he used to say, "I was like that until 'hearts became hardened.'"[8]

Given the dialectical structure of Qur'ānic rhetoric and Islamic thinking in general, one can hardly speak of weeping without mentioning laughter (*ḍiḥk*).[9] The Qur'ān suggests that the two need to be understood as one of the many cosmic pairs: "Surely it is He who makes to laugh and makes to weep, it is He who makes to die and makes to live, it is He who created the two kinds, male and female" (53:43–45). That there is something archetypal about laughter and weeping is indicated in a ḥadīth about the Prophet's ascent to God (*miʿrāj*). When he reached the first heaven, he saw Adam sitting with two large groups of people, one on each side. When Adam looked to his right, he would laugh, and when he looked to his left, he would weep.[10] The Qur'ān places "the companions of the right hand" (56:38) in paradise and "the companions of the left hand" (56:41) in hell.

The later tradition is generally critical of laughter. This is partly because the Qur'ān ascribes it and related phenomena—such as "mockery" (*istihzā'*) and "derision" (*sukhriyya*)—to the unbelievers in their dealings with the believers. It tells the unbelievers that in fact they should be weeping: "Do you wonder at this talk? Do you laugh and not weep?" (53:59–60). A frequently cited ḥadīth makes a similar point: "Were you to know what I know, you would laugh little and weep much."[11] The Prophet also said, "Avoid much laughter, for much laughter deadens the heart."[12] Although I have not seen it mentioned, the

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corollary seems obvious: "Weep much, for much weeping enlivens the heart." Despite the praise of tears throughout the literature, however, the ḥadīths attribute laughter to the Prophet far more often than weeping.

If the Qurʾān makes clear that weeping is an appropriate attribute of believers in this world, it also says that laughter will be their attribute in the next world: "The believers will be laughing at the unbelievers" (83:34). It associates laughter with the experience of the beatific vision: "Some faces on that day shall shine, laughing, joyous; some faces on that day shall be dusty, overspread with grime" (80:38–41). Even more interesting, the ḥadīth literature tells us that God laughs. According to one report, God laughs at the despondency of someone whose fortune is about to change. When asked if God really laughs, the Prophet replied that he does, and a companion remarked, "We will lack no good from a Lord who laughs."[13]

Another ḥadīth tells us that after the resurrection, a certain person will keep on pleading with God not to throw him into hell, and God will agree on the condition that he not ask for anything more. The man breaks his promise, and God moves him closer to paradise, again extracting the promise that he will not ask for more. This happens several times. Finally, God laughs and places him in paradise. In one of the several versions of this ḥadīth, the narrator, Ibn Masʿūd, concludes it like this:

> The man will say, "Are You making fun of me, and You are the Lord of the worlds?"
>
> Then Ibn Masʿūd laughed. He said, "Will you not ask me why I laughed?"
>
> They said, "Why?"
>
> He said, "God's Messenger laughed like this, and they asked him, 'Why do you laugh, O Messenger of God?'
>
> "He answered, 'Because of the laughter of the Lord of the worlds when he said, "Are you making fun of me, and You are the Lord of the worlds?"'"[14]

Another ḥadīth tells us that the prophets and their communities will be waiting for God to appear on the Day of Resurrection. When God reaches Muḥammad's community, he will ask them why they are standing there, and they will say that they are waiting for their Lord. He will tell them that he is their Lord, and they will ask him to show himself. "Then He will disclose Himself to them laughing."[15]

Early Sufism

When the early Sufi teachers mention weeping, one of their first concerns is to classify its causes. Qurʾān 5:87 speaks of people weeping as the result of the "recognition" (*maʿrifa*) of the truth (*ḥaqq*) of the recited Qurʾān: "When they

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hear what has been sent down upon the Messenger, you see that their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth that they recognize" (5:83). In commenting on this verse, Ibnʿ Aṭā (d. 922) adds four other positive qualities of the soul that may cause weeping: joy, regret, fear, and burning (*ḥurqa*), the last of which is the agony of being separate from the Beloved.[16] The Sufi manuals mention weeping but rarely give it a separate discussion. One exception is provided by *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* (The book of flashes) by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 988). In a miscellany toward the end of the book, he cites weeping as a significant topic and quotes the words of Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 899), who divides weeping into eighteen sorts according to three categories: from God, toward God, and over God. Weeping from God is fear of God's chastisement and grief at being kept apart from him. Weeping toward God is the yearning of lovers to meet their Beloved. Weeping over God results from separation after arrival or from "weeping in joy at the arrival at Him, when He embraces [the seeker] in kindness like a suckling child nursing at the breast of its mother."[17]

As the Sufi authors began to put together more systematic works, one of their favorite genres was description of the stages of spiritual growth. They offered diverse schemes describing the "stations" (*maqāmāt, manāzil*) on the path to God, typically enumerating them in terms of archetypal numbers—seven, ten, twelve, forty, one hundred. Rarely do they single out weeping as a specific stage, though it often comes up in passing. Only when we look at some of the more complex meditations on the stations does weeping enter into the title headings. In *Mashrab al-arwāḥ* (The drinking places of the spirits) Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209) describes 1,001 stations in twenty categories of fifty stations each, capped by the realization of full perfection. Five of the stations are named after weeping: weeping, the drying up of weeping, weeping from the Real for the Real, weeping in laughter, and weeping in ecstasy. "Weeping," Rūzbihān tells us, "takes place in over a thousand stations," and this may suggest why it is rarely singled out for a separate discussion.[18]

Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), always an insightful analyst of praxis, has no separate discussion of weeping in the longest and most influential of his fifty books, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Giving life to the sciences of the religion). He gives the topic some attention, however, in the third section of its fourth and last part, which is dedicated to fear (*khawf*) and hope (*rajāʾ*). These two are often mentioned in the Qurʾān and are frequently discussed in the Sufi manuals. Although he cites one of the early Sufis to the effect that fear and hope are the two wings of the soul in its flight to God, he devotes most of the chapter to fear. In doing so, he mentions many examples of weeping by the Prophet, his companions, and the pious. He tells us that those who fear God's justice, severity, and wrath will find it easy to perform the ritual obligations and to obey the revealed law. "Fear is that which encourages good deeds, dulls the appetites, and discourages the heart from depending on this world."[19] His explanation of why he does not stress hope throws light on the whole tradition:

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> It is best to let fear dominate over hope—only, however, until the imminent approach of death. At the time of death, it is best to let hope and a good opinion of God predominate, for fear plays the role of a whip encouraging activity, and now the time for activity has passed. The person near death is not able to act and he cannot endure the causes of fear, for they would break his heart and hurry his death. As for the spirit of hope, that will strengthen his heart and make him love his Lord, in whom he hopes. No one should depart this world without loving God and loving to encounter Him. For, [as the Prophet said,] "When someone loves to encounter God, God loves to encounter him." Love is linked to hope, for when someone hopes for something from someone, he considers him beloved. And the goal in all knowledge and all practice is to recognize God, so that recognition may give rise to love.[20]

The most influential theoretician of Sufism, Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), has relatively little to say about weeping in his enormous compendium, *al-Futūḥat al-makkiyya* (The Meccan openings). He devotes only one of its 560 chapters specifically to the topic. In fact, however, the short chapter 313, "On the knowledge of the station of weeping and wailing," focuses on the role of the prophets in their communities and touches only briefly on weeping itself. He tells us that the prophets have achieved the station of perfect servanthood (*ʿubūdiyya*), which demands being empty of self and full of the divine presence. God, however, has made them his representatives, so they must make manifest the attributes of lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and divine authority. Making God's attributes manifest introduces a certain duality into their relationship with him, for in effect they are setting themselves up as minor gods. Outwardly they display lordship and remain far from God, but inwardly they remain his servants and stay near to him. They weep because of wariness (*taqwā*) and caution (*ḥadhar*), for they fear not giving the station of religious obligation (*taklīf*) its rightful due. In support of this interpretation, Ibn al-ʿArabī cites Muḥammad's saying, "I am more wary of God than any of you, and I have the most knowledge."[21] He rightly points out that the Prophet said this after his companions remarked on his extraordinary exertion in acts of worship, even though this Qur'ānic verse had already come down: "Surely We have given thee [O Muḥammad] a clear victory, that God may forgive thee thy former and thy latter sins" (48:2).[22]

Elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī comments on the verse, "These are they whom God has blessed among the prophets. . . . When the signs of the All-merciful were recited to them, they fell down prostrate, weeping" (19:58). In this case, he says, the prophets wept in joy, for the signs of the "All-merciful" reached them. "Mercy does not demand severity and magnificence, but gentleness and tenderness."[23]

Several times Ibn al-ʿArabī comments on a saying of Abū Yazīd Basṭāmī (d. ca. 874): "I laughed for a time, I wept for a time, and now I neither laugh

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nor weep." Generally, he understands this as reference to Abū Yazīd's having reached "the station of no station," the level of spiritual perfection in which the divine image has been fully actualized and absolute servanthood has been achieved.[24] In one passage, he invokes the saying in a legal discussion: If someone laughs while performing the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), does this invalidate the prayer? Most jurists hold that it does. Ibn al-ʿArabī says that it depends on the state of the person. If the person is heedless of God, then laughter will invalidate the prayer. But if the person is receptive to the self-disclosure (*tajallī*) of God within the Qurʾānic verses that he is reciting, laughter will simply display the appropriate response. This is why Abū Yazīd, who had been completely overcome by the Qurʾān, would sometimes laugh and sometimes weep.

> During the Qurʾān recitation in the *ṣalāt,* the states of people with God are diverse—if they are among the folk of God, those who ponder the Qurʾān. One verse makes them sad, so they weep; another verse makes them happy, so they laugh; still another verse astonishes them, so they neither laugh nor weep. One verse bestows a knowledge, another verse makes them ask forgiveness and engage in supplication.[25]

In still another passage, Ibn al-ʿArabī confirms that God's self-disclosure determines whether a saint will laugh or weep. He mentions as examples two men whom he has met, though he makes clear, both here and elsewhere, that such people are rare.

> There is a self-disclosure that makes to laugh. I have never seen anyone in this path who was among the folk of laughter except for one man, who was called ʿAlī al-Salāwī. I journeyed with him and was his companion in both travel and town in Andalusia. He never ceased laughing, like someone enraptured who comes to his senses only occasionally. I never saw him say anything sinful. As for the weepers, I have seen only one of them: Yūsuf al-Mughāwir al-Jallā in the year 586 [1190 A.D.] in Seville. He accompanied us and was showing his states to us. He was in great anguish, and his weeping never lapsed. I was his companion when I was also the companion of the laugher.[26]

Theological Implications

Islamic theological thinking in its diverse forms begins by unpacking *tawḥīd*, the declaration of divine unity that is the first principle of faith and is expressed most succinctly in the formula, "There is no god but God." This means, in brief, that nothing is true and real but that which is truly real (*al-ḥaqq*). Everything derives from the Real and returns to the Real, and tears are no exception. It is typical of Qurʾānic rhetoric to make this explicit—"It is He who makes to laugh and makes to weep" (53:43).

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Given that both laughter and weeping derive from God, we can ask if they pertain to the divine Reality itself, or if God brings them into existence only in created things. We have seen that the ḥadīth literature offers examples of God's laughter, but nowhere does Islamic literature, so far as I know, suggest that God weeps. There is a definite disproportion between laughter and weeping. The first is a divine attribute, the second is not; both are attributes of creatures. As creaturely attributes, neither of the two is good in itself, but, by and large, weeping is praised and laughter is blamed. In the few Qur'ānic mentions, laughter in this world is ascribed to the unbelievers, and laughter in the next world to the folk of paradise.

Given that God laughs and is the cause of laughter and weeping, we might derive three divine names, though they are not mentioned in the standard lists: He who Laughs, the Bestower of Laughter, and the Bestower of Weeping.[27] These partake of the same structural relationship as three names commonly mentioned by the theologians: the Living (*al-ḥayy*), the Life-giver (*al-muḥyī*), and the Death-giver (*al-mumīt*). God is the Living who never dies, but all things in the universe are constantly shifting mixtures of life and death.[28] So also, it would seem, God is the laugher who never weeps, but all things in the universe are mixtures of laughter and weeping. In the same way, God is the light of the heavens and the earth (Qur'ān 24:35) and "He made the darknesses and the light" (6:1). The Qur'ān is then "A Book We have sent down to bring the people forth from the darknesses to the light" (14:1), that is, from death to life, from ignorance to knowledge, from tears to laughter. Only in joining with God can death, sadness, and suffering be overcome.

If the tradition suggests that weeping is more appropriate for the soul than laughter, this is because human beings are by definition separate from God and immersed in death and darkness. It is true that God created Adam in his own image and "taught him all the names" (Qur'ān 2:31), but this is simply to say that God has a special regard for human beings, not that happiness is guaranteed. Weeping appears as the natural response to human awareness of distance from the Creator, who is the source of all being, good, consciousness, and joy.

Ibn al-ʿArabā explains that people are divided into two basic sorts, as suggested by Qur'ān 11:105, which tells us that in the next world they will be either wretched (*shaqī*) or felicitous (*saʿīd*). "In this world, the attributes that the wretched will have in the afterworld appear in the felicitous—that is, grief, affliction, weeping, abasement, and submissiveness." As for the attributes that the felicitous will have in paradise, such as happiness and joy, they appear now in those who will end up as wretched.[29]

One might object that weeping may stem not only from grief and suffering but also from mercy and compassion, as indicated in various ḥadīths. If God sent Muḥammad as "a mercy to the worlds" (21:107) and God is "the most merciful of the merciful" whose "mercy embraces all things" (7:156), surely he should weep in sympathy for the suffering of his creatures. But Islamic theol-

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ogy stresses the divine qualities of the human rather than the human qualities of the divine. As Muḥammad (and other prophets) are instructed to say in the Qur'ān, "I am but mortal like you" (14:11, 18:110). It is true that Muḥammad manifests the divine attribute of mercy, but God does not display the all-too-human weakness of tears.

Moreover, to suggest that God weeps would be to give too much credit to the human standpoint relative to the timeless, God's-eye view of things. God creates the universe out of mercy, love, and wisdom. The inscription on his Throne, upon which the "All-merciful" is sitting (Qur'ān 20:5), reads, "My mercy takes precedence over My wrath." The disproportion between mercy and wrath does not allow God to weep—not even in the anthropomorphic imagery employed by much of the ḥadīth literature—for God sees that in fact all is well. Thus Ibn al-ʿArabī cites a ḥadīth that tells us God will take "the two handfuls"—the blessed and the damned, the felicitous and the wretched—and cast one handful into paradise and the other into hell, each time saying, "I do not care" (*lā ubālī*). Why should God not care, given that he is throwing a vast group of people into pain and suffering? Because, Ibn al-ʿArabī tells us, his mercy embraces all things, even those who end up in the deepest pit of the Fire. "The final issue of both [handfuls] will be at mercy, and that is why He does not care."[30]

Kashf al-asrār

Any attempt at a serious review of the role of weeping in Islamic literature would demand a major monograph. Sufi poetry alone provides countless examples. Let me instead provide a few samples of typical discussions from one seminal work, *Kashf al-asrār wa ʿuddat al-abrār* (The unveiling of the secrets and the provision of the pious) by Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī. Completed in the year 1126, it is one of the longest and most popular commentaries on the Qur'ān in the Persian language. Maybudī divides his explanation of verses into three stages: literal Persian translation, detailed exposition of the diverse opinions of the early authorities, and "allusions" (*ishārāt*) to the inner meanings of the text. The third stage, in contrast to the first two, offers some of the most beautiful prose passages in the Persian language. The book provides a foretaste of the imagery that would soon come to predominate in the poetical traditions of the Persian, Turkish, and Indic languages, traditions that became the major vehicles for the Qur'ānic worldview in the vast majority of the Islamic world.

Maybudī well understands that weeping may have a variety of causes. He suggests some of them in his remarks on the verse, "They fall down on their faces weeping" (17:109):

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> Weeping is the state of the beginners and the attribute of the travelers—each person according to his own state and every traveler in the measure of his own activity. The repenter looks upon his own sin and weeps in fear of punishment. The obedient person looks upon his own defective obedience and weeps in fear of falling short. The worshiper weeps in fear of the outcome: "What will be done with me tomorrow?" The knower looks at the beginningless precedent and weeps: "What was done to me and decreed for me in eternity without beginning?" All this happens in the path of the travelers and is a sign of the weakness of their state. As for those who have been stolen away from themselves and achieved stability, for them weeping is an imperfection and a defect in their path. Thus it is related that Junayd was sitting with his wife and Shiblī entered. His wife wanted to cover herself, but Junayd said to her, "Shiblī is not aware of you, so sit." Junayd kept speaking to her, and then Shiblī wept. When Shiblī began to weep, Junayd said to his wife, "Cover yourself, for Shiblī has come back from absence to awareness."[31]

Like others, Maybudī sees both laughter and weeping as appropriate signs of sanctity. He explains this in the context of 2:180, which instructs believers to prepare last wills and testaments. The rich leave behind their property, but the poor in spirit leave behind their stations, among which are laughter and weeping.

> The disobedient person fears for himself because of his bad deeds, but the knower fears for himself ten times as much because of the sincerity of his deeds and the limpidness of his states. There is, however, a difference between the two: The disobedient person fears the outcome and is afraid of punishment, but the knower fears God's majesty and manifestation. The fear of the knower is called "awe," and the fear of the disobedient is called "fright." . . .
>
> Awe is a fear that puts no veil before supplication, no blindfold over perspicacity, and no wall before hope. It is a fear that melts and kills. As long as the awestruck person does not hear the call, "Do not fear and do not grieve" [Qur'ān 41:30], he does not relax. . . .
>
> Bishr Ḥāfī began weeping and wailing when he was near death. They said, "O Bishr, is it that you love life and you dislike death?"
>
> He said, "No, but stepping forth to God is hard." . . .
>
> There is another group who come forward to the disclosure of God's beauty and gentleness at the time of going. The lightning of intimacy flashes and the fire of yearning flames up. . . . Makḥūl Shāmī was a manly man, unique in his era, and overcome by the pain and grief of this tale. He never laughed. During his dying illness a group came to see him and he was laughing. They said, "O Shaykh! You were always full of grief. Right now, grief is even more fitting for you. Why are you laughing?"
>
> He said, "Why should I not laugh? The sun of separation has reached the top of the wall, and the day for which I have been waiting has arrived. The doors of

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heaven are open and the angels are clearing the way: 'Makḥūl is coming to the Presence!'"[32]

In commenting on 2:238, which commands people to be watchful over their daily prayers, Maybudī provides a long mythic disquisition that ascribes the origin of each of the five prayers to one of the prophets. He tells us that Adam, the first human being and the first prophet, was also the first to perform the morning prayer, in gratitude for the passing of night.

When he came from heaven to earth, it was the end of the day. As long as he saw the brightness of the day, he had a bit of ease, but when the sun was concealed, Adam's heart became a mine of grief. . . . He had never seen night, nor had he suffered darkness and grief. Suddenly he saw the darkness that reaches the whole world, and he was a stranger, ill, and separate from his wife. In that darkness he sometimes sighed, sometimes turned his face toward the moon, sometimes whispered silently to the Threshold. . . .

The first of all strangers was Adam, the forerunner of all those who grieve was Adam, the father of all the weepers was Adam. It was Adam who laid the foundation of love in the world and Adam who set down the custom of night vigils. He established the tradition of moaning in the pain of separation and crying in the middle of the night. . . .

At last, when the breeze of dawn began to breathe like a lover and when the army of morning burst forth from its ambush and clamored against the darkness of night, Gabriel came with the good news: "O Adam! Morning has come, peace has come! Light has come, joy has come! Brightness has come, familiarity has come! Arise, O Adam, and recite two cycles of prayer in this state—one in gratitude for the passing of the night of separation and distance, one in gratitude for the morning breath of good fortune and union."[33]

Maybudī typically associates weeping with the fire of love and the burning of the heart. In commenting on 2:247, "God is the friend of those who have faith," he begins by explaining why God is kinder and gentler to the weak than to the strong, and he cites the saying of God, related by the Prophet, "I am with those whose hearts are broken for Me." Then he provides various tales to illustrate the point:

It has been reported that on the Day of Resurrection, one of the broken and burnt will be taken to the Presence. God will say, "My servant, what do you have?"

He will say, "Two empty hands, a heart full of pain, and a spirit troubled and bewildered by the waves of grief and woe."

He will say, "Go right ahead into the house of My friends, for I love the broken and grieving." . . .

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David said, "O God, I take it that I must wash my limbs with water to purify them of defilement. With what shall I wash my heart so that it may be purified of other than You?"

The command came, "O David! Wash the heart with the water of regret and grief so that you may reach the greatest purification."

He said, "O God, where can I find this grief?"

He said, "We Ourselves will send the grief. The stipulation is that you stick to those who are grieving and broken."

He said, "O God, what is their mark?"

He said, "They wait all day for the sun to go down and for the curtain of night to descend. Then they begin to knock on the door of the cell of 'We are nearer to him than the jugular vein' [50:16]. Burning, weeping, and sighing all night, full of neediness and melting, their heads placed on the ground, they call on Us with longing voice: 'O Lord, O Lord!' . . .

"From the All-compeller the call comes, 'O Gabriel and Michael! Leave aside the murmur of glorification, for I hear the sound of someone burning. Although he has the load of disobedience, in his heart he has the tree of faith. He was kneaded with the water and clay of love for Me.'

"From the day they came into existence until the day of resurrection, the proximate angels have placed their hands on the belt of serving Me. They observe My every command and burn in hope for one glance. But then they put the fingers of longing in the mouth of bewilderment—'What is this? We do the service, and the love goes there! We do the running and rushing, and they have the arrival and seeing!'

"The Exaltation of Unity answers them with the description of esteem: 'This work is done by burning and grief, and they are the mine of burning and the quarry of grief.'"

Without the perfection of pain and burning,
    don't mention the name "religion."
Without the beauty of desire for union,
    never lean upon faith.
On the day of arrival, sacrifice
    your wretched, bleeding heart
only to the spirit-catching, curling tresses
    of the Beloved.[34]

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Notes

1. Ibn Māja, Iqāma 176. Ḥadīths are cited following the numbering system of J. Wensinck, J. P. Mensing, and J. Brugman, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1936–1969).

2. Muslim, Īmān 346.

3. Nasā'ī, Janā'iz 101.

4. Bukhārī, Janā'iz 43; Muslim, Faḍā'il 62. Another ḥadīth says, "We were with God's Messenger at a funeral. He sat at the edge of the grave and wept until the earth became wet. Then he said, 'My brothers, prepare for the likes of this!'" (Ibn Māja, Zuhd 19). The general tenor of the ḥadīths, however, is critical of ostentatious weeping and wailing as a sign of mourning, partly because this seems to have been the rule among women in the pre-Islamic period. The juridical literature strongly discourages it, and preachers criticize excessive grief as a sign of disbelief in the divine mercy. For a good selection of ḥadīths on weeping for the dead, see Tabrizi, *Mishkat al-masabih*, trans. James Robson (Lahore: Sh. Muḥammad Ashraf, 1963–65), 360–68.

5. Ibn Māja, Zuhd 35.

6. Bukhārī, Ṣalāt 86.

7. So says Fritz Meier in his excellent survey of the literature that ascribes weeping to early Muslims, s.v. "*bakkā*'," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960-), 1:959–61.

8. Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār wa ʿuddat al-abrār*, ed. ʿA. A. Ḥikmat (10 vols., Tehran: Dānishgāh, 1331–39/1952–60), 1:239.

9. On the role that complementary attributes play throughout the tradition, see Sachiko Murata's detailed study, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

10. Bukhārī, Ṣalāt 1; Muslim, Īmān 263. See also Tabrizi, *Mishkat al-masabih*, 1269.

11. This saying is frequently cited and is found in most of the standard ḥadīth collections.

12. Ibn Māja, Zuhd 19.

13. Aḥmad 4:11.

14. Muslim, Īmān 310. Compare Bukhārī, Ṣalāt 129; Tawḥīd 24.

15. Muslim, Īmān 316.

16. The text is from the important Qur'ān commentary *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* (The realities of exegesis) by Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021). Cited in P. Nwyia, *Trois oeuvres inédites de Mystiques musulmanes* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1973), 48.

17. *Kitāb al-luma*ʿ, ed. R. A. Nicholson (Leiden: Brill, 1914), 229.

18. *Mashrab al-arwāḥ*, ed. N. M. Hoca (Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1974), 285. For the five passages on weeping, see pp. 110, 241, 265, 280, 285.

19. *Iḥyā ʿulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Hādī, 1992), 4:242.

20. Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 4:243*.

21. Bukhārī, Imān 13; cf. Muslim, Ṣiyām 74.

22. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Cairo, 1911), 3:50–51.

23. Ibid., 1:511.

24. Ibid., 3:539.

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25. Ibid., 1:356.

26. Ibid., 2:187.

27. There were diverse criteria by which theologians decided which divine names should be included in their discussions, and by no means did they necessarily adhere to the notion that God has "ninety-nine" names. If the three suggested names are not listed, this is no doubt because they lack a certain majesty. In a similar way, the theologians exclude some divine names that are mentioned explicitly by the Qur'ān, such as "Best of Deceivers" (Qur'ān 3:54, 8:30).

28. To the objection that much of the universe is inert and lifeless, a Sufilike Ibn ʿArabī replies with metaphysical, theological, cosmological, and scriptural arguments to show that life and consciousness are the source of all things and are found everywhere.

29. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt,* 2:211.

30. Ibid., 3:463. Ibn al-ʿArabī devotes a great deal of attention to the issue of the ultimate happiness of all creatures. For a review of some of his arguments, see William Chittick, "Ibn al-ʿArabī's Hermeneutics of Mercy," in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture,* ed. Stephen Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 153–68.

31. Maybudī, *Kashf,* 5:637.

32. Ibid., 1:480–81.

33. Ibid., 1:653–54.

34. Ibid., 1:709–10.

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"No Power of Speech Remains":

Tears and Transformation in South Asian *Majlis* Poetry

Amy Bard

Introduction

In this essay, I explore ritual weeping as a transformative process and address specifically how crying can concretize feelings and align multiple perspectives and complex emotional claims. I frame tears within ritualists' experience of poetry in today's South Asian Shīʿī Muslim *majlis* (the "mourning assembly"). *Majlis* genres and their performance context incorporate several themes explored by other contributors to this volume: the cosmic exchange of water; tears as an efficacious performance, often inextricably bound to poetic lament; and the notion of tears as a doorway between realms.

The *majlis* customs and rituals of Urdū-speaking Muslims are embedded in a variety of regional, religious, and political traditions; more complexity colors their "emotional contour" than a focus on weeping alone might suggest.[1] Yet weeping for Imām Ḥusain, martyred in 680 C.E., is arguably the act that defines the participant in the assembly, the mourner. Shīʿī traditions recount how Ḥusain, the Prophet Muḥammad's grandson, and his family were tortured at Karbalā (in present-day Iraq) by the forces of Yazīd of the Ummayad clan. Yazīd was one of a series of leaders who claimed the Islamic caliphate and in so doing displaced the Prophet's son-in-law, ʿAlī, and his progeny after him. Yazīd's massive army slew Ḥusain's small but valiant party of warriors, first depriving them of all access to water, and took the women of the *imām*'s household captive after the massacre.

Majlis poetry about this tragedy depicts tears as the only water in a desert where children are perishing of thirst; as a substance mixed with henna powder to anoint a soon-to-be-widowed bride; as the sun in a weeping cosmos; and as a realm of grief beyond words. As those present in the *majlis* respond to images of suffering and crying in recited poetry, it becomes evident that the economy of the mourning assembly produces, invests, and recycles tears.

The *majlis* raises insistent questions about the aesthetics and purposefulness of ritual weeping and about the assessment of tears. To what extent are ritual tears "instrumental" and to what extent "expressive" of inner states?[2] Gary

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Ebersole, writing on medieval Japanese Buddhist ritual, states that "ritualized weeping is a culturally choreographed act, a stylized, not spontaneous, expression of emotion," and that "like all ritual performative arts, weeping is subject to critical evaluation."[3] Does the artfulness of programmed, cued tears preclude a personal response to a deeply felt tragedy? If, following Ebersole, we question the universality of the equation of "authentic" tears with spontaneous tears, are the concepts of "interiorization," "exteriorization," or "embodiment" helpful for understanding ritual weeping? The fluid, cyclic, and transformative character of the Shīʿī mourning assembly, I suggest, may lend new insight into the mutability of not only tears but sentiment, emotion, and the roles of ritualists themselves.

In addition to its centrality in the sectarian mourning assembly, the lesson of Imām Ḥusain's righteousness in the face of certain doom has appealed to storytellers and poets all over and beyond the Islamic world. Mary Frances Dunham, a scholar of Bangladeshi poetry, says that narratives about Ḥusain's battle in the Karbalā desert are to Muslim literature what stories of the Trojan War and the *Mahābhārata*'s Kurukshetra battle are to Greek and Hindu lore.[4] Iranian dramas known as *taʿziyeh* and Indian epic poems called *marsiyah*s (which merit a chapter of their own in any history of Urdū literature) are just two of dozens of forms the Karbalā theme takes.

The *marsiyah* is characterized by variegated poetic texture and content—encompassing the martial, the comical, and the elaborately scenic—but by its end, listeners in the mourning assembly should be moved to tears and even picture themselves present at Karbalā, the corpses of Ḥusain and his martyr companions before their eyes. I introduce my poetic examples of tears, then, by working back from the final verse of a popular, fifty-three-stanza Urdū *marsiyah* poem from India:[5]

> Speaking thus, the King of the age took his son's body and left
> Whilst the doleful messenger, striking himself, set off towards his homeland
> No sooner had he left than the thirsting King was slain
> Now is the time for tears, Mūnis, no power of speech remains
> Here you have my image of the oppressed Akbar's murder
> Here you have my description that will turn even a stone to water
>
> —Mīr Navāb Mūnis (d. 1875)

Kah ke yih lāsh-e pisar le ke chale shāh-e zaman
Pīṭtā qāṣid-e ġhamnāk gayā sū-e waṭan
Ūske jāte hī hūe qatl shah-e tishnah dahan
Mūnis ab rone kā hai waqt nahīñ tāb-e suḳhan
Maqtal-e Akbar-e maẓlūm kī taṣvīr yih hai
Sang pānī ho jise sunke woh taqrīr yih hai[6]

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In the poem, "the thirsting King," Ḥusain, is first slain by the death of his eighteen-year-old son Akbar and then actually joins him in martyrdom. The poet Mūnis expends his own words and tears to memorialize the fallen heroes and to slake Ḥusain's thirst. Mūnis effects a transfer of precious water through weeping and posits tears as a means of transformation: they convey him (and ideally his listeners) into a world of grief beyond words. Mūnis also issues a poetic boast, which, however dolefully proffered, is hardly subtle: his description, so effective that it reduces "a (heart of) stone to water," is a crucial aid to tearful transformation.

Before delving further into poetic examples that illustrate how weeping and images of weeping effect their transformations, I will provide some background on the South Asian mourning assembly. I should emphasize that my essay grounds the act of ritual weeping in the poetry and performance of the mourning assembly and does not claim to detail the doctrinal subtleties of Shīʿī suffering, sectarian debates over the religious propriety of weeping, or challenges to Shīʿī understandings of Imām Ḥusain's history. There is a substantial body of literature that addresses these crucial issues in depth, but far less attention has been paid to the nuanced ways in which poetic recitation interlocks with the actual practice of ritual weeping, especially in the Indian and Pakistani Shīʿī women's gatherings in which I collected most of my data.

Background

Shīʿahs account for 10–15 percent of the Muslim population in India and Pakistan.[7] In this community, mourning assemblies for the Prophet, the twelve Shīʿī *imām*s, and a few other members of the Prophet's family are held on these individuals' death dates wherever they fall in the year, and some South Asian Shīʿahs hold small household *majlises* every week. The first months of the Islamic calendar, Muḥarram, Ṣafar, and Rabī ʿul awwal, though, commemorate Ḥusain's tragedy and constitute Muḥarram, the major season for mourning assemblies. Shīʿī men and women usually conduct separate, largely parallel Muḥarram assemblies over a period of at least ten days annually. For many observant Shīʿahs, mourning gatherings, processions, and other rituals continue for a full two months and eight days (based on the Islamic lunar calendar). The assemblies offer general lessons about righteous living and the spiritual authority of *imām*s, leaders descended from the Prophet. They culminate, though, with poetry, sermons, and relics that recall how Imām Ḥusain, the third such leader, gave his life for his refusal to swear fealty to the Ummayad caliph.

Tensions over the Muslim caliphate had created partisan rifts from the time of the Prophet's death in 13 A.H./632 C.E. In the Shīʿī view, the Prophet's

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cousin ʿAlī, and the descendants of ʿAlī through his wife Fāṭimah, the Prophet's daughter, were endowed with miraculous spiritual qualities that gave their lineage a unique, sacrosanct claim to guide the Muslim community.[8] Shīʿahs consequently hold that the first three caliphs (Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and Uṡmān) who ruled after the Prophet's death violated this claim in bypassing ʿAlī. Sunnī Muslims generally venerate the three as just leaders and close companions of Muḥammad. ʿAlī's eventual murder intensified this division, and the Ummayad caliph Muʿawiyah then supplanted ʿAlī's son Ḥasan. Ḥasan was reportedly poisoned, after which certain supporters of Muḥammad's descendants, based in Kūfah, asked ʿAlī's younger son Ḥusain to lead their opposition to Muʿawiyah's son, Caliph Yazīd.

Yazīd, moving to quell this rebellion-in-the-making, had his massive army ambush Ḥusain's group en route to Kūfah and cut them off from the Euphrates. Having chosen death rather than swear fealty to Yazīd, Ḥusain was left to watch his women and children tormented by hunger and thirst; once Ḥusain and his men were killed on the tenth of Muḥarram, his family in turn beheld his decapitated head raised on a pike as they marched, captive, to Damascus. It can hardly be emphasized enough that the Ḥusain-Yazīd conflict, for Shīʿahs, is far more than a battle over temporal power; it is synecdochical of the timeless struggle between good and evil. Ḥusain and his family suffered insult and worldly defeat, but they are seen as morally victorious, for they awakened Muslims to the atrocities Yazīd perpetrated in the name of Islam. Accordingly, Muḥarram also has some festive dimensions, although today these are sometimes muted among South Asian Shīʿahs in the context of sectarian tensions between Sunnī and Shīʿī Muslims and due to a perception that certain Sunnīs make light of Ḥusain's noble and tragic death.

Sunnī Muslims in fact generally acknowledge Ḥusain's sacrifice but not the spiritual infallibility, leadership rights, or intercessory powers of Shīʿī *imām*s. Sunnīs rarely listen to sermons or participate in weeping and breast-beating within the mourning assembly, but in many communities they play an active role in Muḥarram's public processional rites, including the construction and display of replicas of Ḥusain's tomb called *taʿziyah*s.

Shīʿahs have held majlises in the Indian subcontinent since at least the sixteenth century C.E.; until the late eighteenth century none of the assembly's dirges, laments, or narrative poems was considered to have much literary merit.[9] By the nineteenth century, the Shīʿī rulers of Avadh state in North India had elaborated Muḥarram rites and lavishly patronized poets who memorialized Ḥusain. The Muḥarram customs and literature of this region and of its major city, Lucknow, had great impact on Shīʿī practices all over the subcontinent.

The central protagonists in the *majlis* episodes I will discuss include Akbar, Ḥusain's beloved eighteen-year-old son; ʿAbbās, Ḥusain's half-brother who died trying to fetch water for Ḥusain's family; Qāsim, a nephew of Imām

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Ḥusain who married the *imām*'s daughter Kubrā before the Karbalā battle; and Zainab, Imām Ḥusain's sister, who advised him, protected his other relatives, and initiated mourning assemblies for him. Additional characters are Sajjād (Zain ul ʿabidīn), Ḥusain's son, the only male survivor of Karbalā, who became the fourth *imām*; Bāno, a wife of Ḥusain said to be the daughter of an Iranian king; and Suġhrā, an ailing daughter of Ḥusain who was not present at Karbalā. Today's mourning assemblies usually begin with groups of reciters and soloists offering tribute and lament to these personages through the poetic genres *soz, salām,* and *marśiyah*.[10] *Marśiyah,* the most literary and lengthy of the Urdū genres, may be chanted or spoken in a dramatic, declamatory mode that is augmented with gestures, but most often the poetry is rendered melodically. Because of religious prohibitions against music it must be "read" or "recited," never "sung."

In the sermon that follows the poetry, a preacher first expounds the teachings of individual *imām*s, the implications of important concepts (such as "ʿ*amal,*" action) in Islamic living, or the esoteric meaning of a Qurʾānic verse.[11] Toward the end of each *majlis,* the speaker summons listeners to the desert battlefield of Karbalā, focusing on one horrifying aspect of Ḥusain's battle: perhaps ʿAbbās's bloody dismemberment when he tried to fetch water for suffering children; perhaps Qāsim's body, decked in wedding finery, being trampled by cavalry; or Ḥusain's sister Zainab protecting her last surviving male relative, the ailing Sajjād. Listeners and the speaker invariably break down into tears as the final torments are recounted. Metrical dirges called *nauḥah*s follow the sermon and are accompanied by breast-beating and impassioned cries of "Yā Ḥusain!" A symbolic visitation to the martyrs through a *ziyārat* chant, prayers, and the recitation of the Qurʾānic Sūrah-e Fātiḥah close the assembly.[12]

Thirst, Tears, and Suffering Bodies in *Majlis* Poetry

Highlighting poignant kinship bonds, *majlis* poetry articulates and elicits tearful expressions of love for Ḥusain, encouraging listeners to participate in the bereavement and separation experienced by the *imām* and his family. Popular pietistic writings and literary criticism classify the poetic scenes, dialogues, and formulaic expressions that trigger tears in any number of ways, but I choose here to focus on images of tears themselves. The images are embedded within the conventional martyrdom or lament scenes, known in Urdū and Persian as *mubkī-goshe,* that reach the highest pitch of pathos.

The *marśiyah* verse I initially cited positions the tears of the poet and his listeners as a response to the "thirst" of Ḥusain as he perishes in the desert. In a verse from the middle of the same poem, Ḥusain's wife Bāno mourns her son Akbar, again demonstrating, in lines 3 and 4, the ubiquitous replacement of

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water with tears.[13] I heard the verse, presented in a raw, hoarse, heterophonic style, performed in May 1997 by a group of amateur female reciters in Lahore. The lines focusing on tears are highlighted here and in verses discussed later in the essay.

Oh, my lion, you never obtained the pleasures of youth
Oh, you second Joseph, you had no peace in this foreign land
Not a drop of liquid, except for the shedding of tears, did you get
You were raised drinking milk to your heart's content, and then denied water
You died without even bringing me a bride, my son
All Bāno reaped is ground to dust, my son

A'e mire sher tujhe luṭf-e javānī nah milā
Chain pardes meñ a'e yūsaf-e ṡānī nah milā
Qaṭrah-e āb bajaz ashk fashānī nah milā
Dūdh pī pī ke pale aur tumheñ pānī nah milā
Mar ga'e mujhko dūlhan bhī nah dikhā'ī beṭā
Ḳhāk meñ mil ga'ī Bāno kī kamā'ī beṭā

With its yearning for things not obtained, its invocation of Akbar's mythic beauty (through the comparison to Joseph), and its juxtaposition of his lion-like valor and tears, this verse reiterates all the promise Akbar's life held and all that he was denied.

We soon observe that tears and water are parts of a comprehensive exchange of vital fluids. Mother's milk, as in the fourth line here, often forms an element in the bodily and spiritual transactions of martyrdom and bereavement. Indeed in the fifteenth verse of the poem, both milk and blood become part of the cycle of transformation; Bāno exclaims, while weeping over Akbar's gory wound, "Your body quivers and your life departs / And the smell of my milk wafts from that blood."[14] At times this expenditure of milk, blood, and the tears of surviving mourners is condensed into the cultural idea of the "debt of milk" (*dūdh kā qarẓ*) that children owe their mothers. When a child faces untimely death, he asks his mother to free him from that debt.[15] At Karbalā, such situations were a repeated cause of anguish, and so for *majlis*-goers, mention of the *dūdh kā qarẓ* calls up an almost immediate association with the unnatural sorrow (and thus tears) generated by youthful death and maternal loss. Tears mark another variation on this theme in the conventional marsiyah depiction of the mother of Ḥusain's six-month-old son Asġhar, who weeps that she cannot nurse her baby because her body is so wasted from hunger and thirst.[16]

In another expenditure of vital liquids, Akbar offers his blood for the cause of his father, Ḥusain, even as Bāno has given Akbar her milk. The hero is pictured "tongue lolling out of his mouth, thirsting to the bone," while "blood

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flows from his wound."[17] This image draws on a broader poetic association between a wound and a mouth, so that the parched, thirsty mouth and the "wound-mouth" from which liquid flows concretize the contrast between Akbar's unbearable thirst and his copious blood.[18] The flowing blood resonates with another stock image, that of the "bloody tears" wept by the distraught, the dying, and the forsaken; these are a formulaic motif of passion and despair in the *marsiyah* and in almost every genre of Urdū poetry.[19]

Blood and milk, then, may be transformed into tears, while tears may in turn become ritually significant water. In a Panjābī poem performed by popular soloist Zāhidah Ḥaiderī of Lahore, tears substitute for the water mixed into henna paste and painted in festive designs on the palms and feet of a bride-to-be. The wedding, commemorated on the seventh of Muḥarram, joins Kubrā with her cousin Qāsim just before he is slain in battle:

> O, at the entrance to the tent Qāsim's mother said
> "My son the groom is gone to war
> **O, I've mixed tears into the henna paste**
> **My chance to apply the henna has come and gone**
> O, now the hour has faded
> Today my Kubrā's hopes stay confined in her heart
> O, today the lamp of Ḥasan Raẓā's lineage
> Is extinguished in the desert."
>
> *ho dar kheme te ākhe māñ Qāsim dī te*
> *mendhā banṛhā gin te gayā*
> ***ho maiñ hanjvāñ nāl ghol lā'ī mehndī***
> ***maiñko lāvan dā waqt lang gayā***
> *ho hūñ waqt ḍhale*
> *mendhī Kubrā de te armān aj dil vich rahyā*
> *ho aj divā Ḥasan Raẓā de ghar dā*
> *saharā de vich bujh gayā*

In that Qāsim is Ḥusain's nephew and Kubrā his daughter, the family-oriented basis of Ḥusain's sufferings underlies the potent juxtaposition of water and tears, henna and blood, marrying and burying. The allusion to wedding ceremonies is also indicative of the ways in which *majlis*-goers, perhaps especially women, insistently incorporate life-affirming rituals into Karbalā commemorations. The mixed emotional texture that results enhances the affective participation of many present, framing bereavement, loss, and separation against celebration, fertility, and union.[20]

Mirzā Dilgīr, a nineteenth-century contemporary of the great *marsiyah* writers Anīs and Dabīr, deploys yet another example of interchangeable water and tears near the end of an Urdū marsiyah:

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[Ḥusain speaking]
"This is my answer to her letter; this is my message:
Tell my daughter, oh helpless one,
That her father the *imām* has been martyred in prostration for prayer
And even at the last, he never had a draught of water
Be still now, and don't shed more tears; hold firm!
Hold firm, and distribute water, in the name of your father."[21]

Ḥusain here instructs another of his daughters, Suġhrā, to channel the tears that acknowledge his thirst into the broader ritual gesture of distributing water in the names of the Karbalā martyrs—now a cherished Muḥarram tradition.[22]

Tears, Testimony, and Emotional Claims in the Mourning Assembly

I want to return now to the poet Mūnis's original image of tears, thirst, and melting. Mūnis said his description of Akbar's murder would turn a stone to water, that is, melt a stony-hearted person to tears. This metaphor hints at eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Indo-Muslim literature's broad endorsement of the *dil-e gudāḳhtah*, the "melted/meltable heart," as a cultural value. Poetic descriptions of Karbalā's unendurable desert heat and literary commentaries on the impact of the marsiyah also invoke the melting stone as the embodiment of hot, impassioned transformation.[23] As the literary critic Shams ur Raḥmān Fārūqī has pointed out, though, the developed person in the classical era was envisioned as one sensitive enough to "melt" or weep when touched by *any* kind of moving poetry.[24] Although a formulaic image, the "melted"—read "weeping"—stone thus speaks to *majlis* tears on several levels.

If Mūnis and his contemporaries asserted themselves as catalysts in the act of religiously meritorious weeping with declarations such as, "Here you have my description that will turn even a stone to water," poets and reciters today continue to activate a web of associations that connect the mythic Karbalā figures with Ḥusain's current mourners. Shīʿī popular literature and oral sources cited by the Islamicist David Pinault, for example, describe how it was foretold to Ḥusain's mother Fāṭimah that she and Ḥusain's father and brother would die before his martyrdom, whereupon she asked in anguish, "Who then will perform *matam* [usually taken to mean physical acts of mourning, including self-flagellation] and weep for Ḥusain when he dies?" In answer, *majlis* rhetoric positions weeping as a sacred duty that fulfills God's promise to Fāṭimah that he would create a community to mourn her son. The responsibility of preachers and poetry reciters, Pinault confirms, is "to evoke the sufferings of

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the Karbalā martyrs so powerfully as to make the congregation weep. In this way both *zakir* [orator] and congregation acquire *savab* or religious merit."[25]

The lore surrounding the *majlis* also holds that when those who hear and absorb descriptions of Karbalā weep, the holy figures Fāṭimah and Zainab (Ḥusain's mother and sister) collect their tears as treasured pearls.[26] What better testament of devotion to Muḥammad's grandson, who was abandoned by all but a handful of supporters in his lifetime, than the thus "solidified" tears of the believer's "melted" heart? In inexpensive popular Shīʿī literature, this image surfaces repeatedly in visual as well as verbal form. A perfectly curved—and blood-red—tear shed from a beautiful eye, for example, adorns the cover of a poetry book titled *Gauhar-e ġham* (Pearls of sorrow).[27] Here the pearl does double duty, signifying both tears and choice poems.

Some poets extend this notion of solidified tears by picturing tears as a "chain" that binds mourners and those they mourn, as in the next poetic example recited by Aminah Jaʿfar of Hyderabad:

Remembrance of Ḥusain's sorrow still ornaments our gathering
The lamp has been extinguished, but the light remains
The chain of tears of sorrow for Ḥusain is never severed
Fāṭimah's handkerchief stays damp forever
The tents were uprooted from the Euphrates, but
The brow of ʿAbbās remains raised in a scowl
When ʿAbbās sought permission to enter the battlefield
Zainab was simply left regarding her own arms[28]
Remembrance of Ḥusain's sorrow . . .

Żikr-e ġham-e Ḥusain se maḥfil sajī rahī
Ġhul ho gayā chirāġh magar raushnī rahī
Ashk-e ġham-e Ḥusain kā ṭūṭa nah silsilah
Rūmāl-e Fāṭimah meñ hameshāh namī rahī
Ḳheme Furāṭ se to haṭā'e ga'e magar
ʿAbbās-e nāmdār kī te'orī chaṛhī rahī
ʿAbbās lene ā'e jo maidān kī raẓā
Zainab bas apnī bāzū'oñ ko dekhtī rahī
Żikr-e ġham-e Ḥusain . . .

The word used here for "chain," *silsilah*, it is worth noting, has rich connotations related to the concepts of lineage or a system for the transmission of memory, spiritual power, or knowledge from person to person. In this case tears effect a physical link, a spiritual continuity, and a sense of community.

How do the mourners of today describe their own responses to Ḥusain's story? Few use the common verb for crying, *ronā*, to describe communal *majlis*

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tears, although they may describe an individual's participation in the event as crying. Some urban elites who emphasize a more muscular Shīʿīsm do employ the phrase *ronā-dhonā* ("crying and such"; "weeping and wailing") disparagingly to portray the vulnerability and so-called sentimentality of the typical mourning assembly. *Majlis* participants often refer to their own weeping as shedding tears (*āñsū bahānā*) and to mass weeping as the *ġham*, or "sorrow," or as *mātam*, which are considered specific sections in the *majlis* format. *Ġham* and *mātam* are both good examples of emotion words in the Shīʿī ritual setting that incorporate not only a condition but actions and ideological practices. *Mātam* can indicate a state of "mourning" but also specific meritorious acts: weeping, breast-beating, or self-flagellation with chains or knives. The mourners themselves are *mātamdār*, those who do or "have" mourning, or *ʿazādār*.

Some *ʿazādārs* say that when they listen to episodes about the untimely death of a brother or son, their own sensitivities to parallel losses they have suffered are touched. Others assert that personal bereavement cannot and should not be connected with Ḥusain's indescribable sufferings, and still others note that their own family tragedies are a means of comprehending the far greater sorrow of Ḥusain.[29] The mourner, then, assumes some responsibility for interpreting what ritual propriety is and which dimensions of Ḥusain's tragedy are most profoundly moving. In so doing she shapes to some degree publicly invoked artistic and rhetorical tropes and the notion of salvific tears. Whichever belief *majlis*-goers cite, in an enormous number of cases, individual descriptions and exhibitions of Muḥarram crying convey a profound impression of deeply felt, personal suffering.

Majlis-goers' enacted yet impassioned tears are indicative of weeping that is both instrumental and somehow expressive of inner states. Many analyses of ritual tears, though, dwell largely on cued tears as a reflection of controlled "sentiment." Many non-Shīʿahs who come into contact with the Shīʿī *majlis*, and some reform-minded Shīʿahs, assert that *majlis*es are so awash in programmed sentiment that a speaker or reciter has only to say the name of a Karbalā hero for listeners to burst "automatically" into tears. A North Indian Sunnī Muslim recently reminded me that some in her community jokingly label *majlis* tears with the term *makkārī*, which connotes "crocodile tears" or deceptive "playacting" because of the way Shīʿī mourners "shut them on and off." She wondered whether patterned responses, rather than the nuanced content of poems or sermons, determined when tears would flow.[30] Similarly, the Shīʿī author Rāhī Maʻsūm Raẓā, in an autobiographical novel, pokes fun at uneducated village Shīʿahs—notably women—who seem primed for such a conditioned response:

> I cannot be sure about other Shia ladies but I do certainly know that the women of my family did not even need to hear about the afflictions of Imam Husain to make them cry. It was quite enough just to hear his name.[31]

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Accordingly, Raẓā's lovably ignorant female characters cry wildly during a commemoration of Imām Ḥusain's birthday, failing, because of their limited command of standard Urdū, to realize that they are attending a celebratory function and not a mournful one:

> As the Maulvi was criticizing poets, the name of Imam Husain somehow cropped up. From the ladies' side came the sound of a woman's voice wailing, "Oh, my lord!" This was one of my aunts. Father went across at once. My aunt had her face covered and was weeping bitterly. Father said, "Sister! This is a joyful gathering."
>
> "Oh, if he weren't born, then how could he have been martyred at Karbala. . . . Oh, brother . . . !" said my aunt in mid-wail. And so if the name of Imam Husain is sufficient to make you cry, it doesn't really matter what the majlis-speaker is saying.[32]

What might seem a very different assessment of weeping, one evident among casual commentators and scholars alike, assumes that *majlis* mourners' weeping expresses authentic, if highly orchestrated, emotion generated by associations between the tragic Karbalā paradigm and the misery of their daily lives. The journalist M. Laxmaiah, for example, finds that some non-Shīʿahs, members of the rural Hindu "scheduled castes" in Andhra Pradesh, connect Yazīd's oppression of Ḥusain with their own experiences of suffering and discrimination and their firm resolve to fight for justice. Many educated Shīʿahs remarked to me that especially in the gatherings of lower-class women of their own community, *majlis* tears are an outlet for social frustration and that weeping for Ḥusain sublimates personal tragedies and bereavements. Mary Elaine Hegland takes the alternate but related view that the *majlis* is a forum for women's resistance against patriarchal control.[33]

Too often both the "programmed sentiment" approach and analyses that stress catharsis carry a rather patronizing tone or tend to deny agency and understanding to ritual weepers. Within limits, though, the idea of tears and other exhibitions of group mourning as exteriorizations of personal woe, an embodiment of community identity, or membership in a community of suffering does seem to have a certain applicability to Muḥarram mourning. The ethnomusicologist Regula Qureshi also shows that rhythmic "communal chest beating" in the South Asian *majlis* articulates "solidarity."[34] Similarly, Richard K. Wolf has documented in the musical ensembles that accompany Muḥarram processions rhythmic patterns that substitute for mournful words and articulate unity, or divisions and tensions, depending on the degree of convergence and coordination in performance.[35]

The richly visual and oral performances of Muḥarram can certainly be seen to function as stimuli as well as "expressions" of emotion and identity. The varied sound qualities of poetry recitation and oral discourse—from the asynchronous chanting of amateur performers who weep even as they recite to the

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resonant, clear delivery of talented soloists—play a crucial role in creating the effective *majlis*. Similarly, poetic imagery and relics such as tombs, battle standards, coffins, and shrouds can be viewed as combining to transport participants to Karbalā to join in the mourning of Ḥusain's surviving family members.[36] Indeed, Mahmoud Ayoub, the scholar of Islam, describes the most important *majlis* transformations as working largely from the outside in. Ayoub explains, in agreement with many Shīʿahs worldwide, that "the suffering of *Imām* Ḥusayn has been taken by the Shīʿī community to be a source of salvation through the interiorization and emulation of that suffering."[37] Sermons and poetry that repeatedly ask *majlis*-goers what they would have done if they had been with the *imām*, that strive to render listeners imaginatively present at the Karbalā slaying ground, provide some confirmation for Ayoub's view, as do practices in which the devout dress as prisoners or battlefield drummers in Muḥarram processions.

In the interest of acknowledging both the crafted quality and the personal intensity of *majlis* tears, the channeling of pain and grief both inward and outward, I suggest that ritual speech, especially appreciation for poetic speech, accounts in large part for the fluidity with which mourners in South Asia individually navigate the *majlis*'s ideal emotional state. Along with *majlis* poetry's sheer aesthetic appeal, the genres provide verbal patterns we might classify according to the historian William Reddy's concept of "emotives." Reddy defines an emotive as "[a] type of speech act different from both performative and constative utterances, which both describes (like constative utterances) and changes (like performatives) the world, because emotional expression has an exploratory and a self-altering effect on the activated thought material of emotion."[38] Emotives include statements such as "I love you" or, in the *majlis*, "We are mourners!"[39]

Emotives such as "now is the time for tears!" (as seen in the last stanza of Mūnis's marsiyah) can articulate a communally idealized sentiment, activate or intensify a feeling on the part of the individual making the emotional claim, and spur others to participate in or share in the experience of the person making the claim. In a sense emotives are tools or training mechanisms for achieving what is the desired state in the Shīʿī mourning assembly. Reddy also cautions, however, that emotives' effects are unpredictable; as he puts it, they "represent an attempt at translating that is always inadequate. Rather than confirming the state described, they may produce the opposite effect or no effect." In the *majlis* context, such absence of confirmation would be manifested in an inability to weep, an example of "ritual failure."[40] Female *majlis*-goers do indeed describe ineffective assemblies by saying that a particular style of recitation alienated them so much that they "couldn't shed a single tear" or that they were tempted to laugh instead of cry.

The concept of the emotive enriches and illuminates the intimate, paradoxical link between words and tears. Poetic utterances represent a substantial

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proportion of the mourning assembly's emotives, and though frequently very formulaic, they are masterfully blended into affecting character portraits and dramatic scenes. Most South Asian Shīʿahs concur that without poetry, there *is* no *majlis*, and that the quality of poetry content and recitation may directly affect the quality of *majlis* tears, even the production of any tears at all. Thus, the mass crying, slogan shouting, and invocations of the names of the Karbalā martyrs that punctuate poetry in rhythmic waves rarely indicate that "it doesn't matter" what the preacher or poet says.

In fact, in a variety of religious and secular settings, successful Urdū poetry recitation hinges upon a finely honed, learned sensitivity to allusions and literary conceits, upon heightened personal and communal responsiveness. Many *majlis*es, like the poetic gatherings known as *mushāʿirahs*, thrive on listeners who praise (*dād denā*) specific feats of verbal wordplay and gestural or melodic embellishments of poetic texts. Astute audience members can predict the final lines of verses based on meter, rhyme, and subject matter, and chime in to successfully complete a stanza. By focusing on the aesthetic underpinnings of the emotionally charged majlis, we significantly diversify perspectives on Muharram, complementing scholarship that has paid considerable attention to Shīʿī clerical arguments regarding the merit of majlis weeping.[41] Sources of authority that sanction weeping do play an important role in understanding the background of Shīʿī doctrine, popular piety, and identity, but the broad, cultural ideal of responsiveness to poetry, which is shared across sectarian lines, also comes into play in the *majlis* and incidentally helps explain the impact *majlis* narratives have on many non-Shīʿahs. Existing Urdū literary criticism, however, provides little help in exploring either lament or the overall texture of this poetry, for since the nineteenth century critics have generally dismissed the pathos, or bathos, in the *marśiyah* and directed their praise toward its battlefield heroics.[42]

Much as Urdū poets continue to produce compelling verse within topical and stylistic constraints, *majlis* weepers individualize weeping that is guided and framed by culturally appropriate "emotives." The poetic conceit of love in the heart that melts into precious water, courses through the body, and then solidifies into gems assumes a shared knowledge that at Karbalā, the water needed for survival and on which blood and milk depend is always in short supply. Within the system of convertible vital fluids that *majlis* narratives invoke, tears are both a stand-in for water and a potent, distilled end-product. This system seeps into the artistic reception that is ritual weeping as well: it is the audience's emotive responsiveness that is likened in *majlis* texts to "melting" into water and the tears from their melted hearts that Ḥusain's women reverently collect. The vivid imagery of this cycle may also support the practice of shedding blood through self-flagellation with knives, chains, or swords. Despite proclamations by clerics, including Sayyid ʿAlī Khamenei in Iran, that such forms of *mātam* are *najis* (polluting or impure) and should be

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abandoned, they enjoy immense popularity in processions and major gatherings in the Indian subcontinent.

On one level, then, poetic emotives elicit tears, and at another level we might even extend Reddy's concept of emotives by configuring tears, self-flagellation, and other physical acts of mourning themselves as the sort of "emotional claims" that verbal emotives represent. Like Mūnis's words, tears can also express, activate or intensify, and spread an emotional response. Potentially, then, each *majlis*-goer issues an emotional claim and influences others as she does so, just as the poet Mūnis or the *majlis* preachers dissolve into tears themselves. Boundaries between officiants, authorities, or orators, on the one hand, and listeners or ordinary participants, on the other, never rigidly demarcated, become increasingly fluid as the *majlis* progresses. Ultimately, tears mark a realm that *all majlis*-goers enter, a realm where words cannot go. Yet poets do, after all, wield the language of emotives to describe and arrive at holy tears.

It is undeniable that *majlis* tears are directed tears, most often enacted in a setting that underlines the importance of community; yet interiorization, as well as emulation of and identification with the Karbalā characters, promotes a personal dimension of this dutiful, communal mourning. As Kimberley Patton writes, "[T]ears are far less a *symbol* of a condition than they are an efficacious vehicle for the far-reaching change of that condition. What they 'mean' in the religious imagination is in the end far less important than what they 'do.'"[43] And *majlis* tears change the world and the individual; they demonstrate faith and accrue merit, even as they transform words and memories into something tangible.

Notes

1. I borrow the term "emotional contour" from Richard K. Wolf, who theorizes emotional texture and contour as representations of how the affective character of a ceremony changes as its constituent rituals unfold. "Emotional contours," he says, "might be envisioned as a series of imaginary graphs, tracking the changing degree of intensity that an individual may experience over time during a ritual." See Richard K. Wolf, "Emotional Dimensions of Ritual Music among the Kotas, a South Indian Tribe," *Ethnomusicology* 45:3 (2001): 381.

2. On the limitations of these categories and the persistence of the problematic dichotomy drawn between them by social scientists who study ritual, see William S. Sax, *Dancing the Self: Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

3. Gary Ebersole, "The Poetics and Politics of Ritualized Weeping in Early and Medieval Japan" (in this volume).

4. Mary Frances Dunham, personal communication with the author, March 15, 2003.

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5. Working from the end of Mūnis's *marśiyah* toward the beginning might seem to distort the poet's narrative, but because *marśiyahs* are episodic and experienced by listeners as familiar and malleable collections of verses, this is not really the case. Reciters often reorder verses or simplify and rearrange individual lines as they convey the plot and the emotional texture of Ḥusain and Akbar's story.

6. Mīr Navāb Mūnis, *Majmūah-e Marśīyah-e Mīr Mūnis, Jild-e Suvvum,* 2nd ed. (Lucknow: Naval Kishor Press, 1881), 222. My transliterations of this poem into Roman script reflect Munis's archaic spellings (e.g. "ūs" for "us", "muj" for "mujh," etc.).

7. Assessments of the Shīʿī population vary, but this is a fairly consistent estimate. In India, approximately 12 percent of the population are Muslim, and Shīʿahs account for perhaps 10 percent of that community. Muslims make up about 25 percent of the total population of the subcontinent. See David Pinault, *Horse of Karbalā* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 14; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shīʿī Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 277.

8. The actual emergence of sects labeled "Sunnī" and "Shīʿī" was a gradual process, during which followers of various descendants of ʿAlī and the Prophet's daughter Fāṭimah also branched off from the main group of partisans of ʿAlī (Shīʿahs). Some of these groups (Ismāʿīlīs, Bohrās, etc.) maintain a separate identity today, while others have been reaggregated into "Twelver Shīʿism," so called because of its lineage of twelve *imāms*. See Momen, *Introduction,* 45–60. Yann Richard, *Shi'ite Islam,* trans. Antonia Nevill (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 35–38; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam,* trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 61.

9. Rashīd Mūsavī, *Dakan meñ marśiyah aur ʿazādārī* (New Delhi: Taraqqī Urdū Bureau, 1989), 13; "Dakan meñ marśiyah kā ravāyat 1700 ke ba'd," in *Urdu Marśiyah: Seminar meñ parhe ga'e maqālāt,* 2nd. ed., Shārib Rudaulvī (Delhi: Urdū Academy, 1993), 71–87; and personal communication with the author, June 2, 1998. For further information on early (fifteenth-/sixteenth-century) Dakhanī *marśiyahs,* see Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdū Literature,* 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), 204–8; ʿ*Abdulra'ūf ʿUrūj*, *Urdū marśiyah ke pānch sau sāl* (Karachi: Shāriq Publishers, 1987), 30–31.

10. These genres, and the proportion of prose to poetry in the *majlis,* vary according to region and language within India and Pakistan. My focus here is on the Urdū terminology and is not meant to minimize the vibrant Muḥarram literature found in, for example, Panjābī, Avadhī, or the languages of Pakistan's Northern Areas. The Urdū data rather reflect my own research expertise and the prominence of Urdū as a lingua franca for South Asian Muslims who also speak other languages.

The main genres of the assembly may be briefly distinguished as follows:

soz	Usually a poem one or two verses in length, the *soz* captures a well-known moment of lament from the Karbalā story. The format of *soz*es varies and may employ a couplet, four-, five-, or six-line structure; many "classical" *soz*es are verses from a *marśiyah* with an *aaaabb* rhyme scheme, sometimes set to classical Indian ragas.
salām	Couplet form, usually *aa,ba,ca* rhyme scheme, but sometimes *aa,bb,cc,* etc. The *salām* usually offers praises of the Shīʿī *imāms* and immediate members of Prophet Muḥammad's family.

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marsiyah	Six-line verse form, anywhere from eight to over a hundred verses in performance, *aaaabb* rhyme scheme. The *majlis* genre with the highest literary stature, the *marsiyah* details skirmishes on the Karbalā battlefield, as well as the prelude to and aftermath of the conflict between Ḥusain and Yazīd. It includes invocation and praise, long stylized description and dialogue, and lament.
nauḥah	Couplet form, recited after the *majlis* sermon, often by all *majlis* participants, usually accompanied by rhythmic breast-beating.

11. A lecture on *ʿamal*, for example, was delivered in May 1998 by lay preacher Sūfiyah Nāsir of Lucknow. Many male and female orators deliver a whole series of lectures (especially during the first ten or twenty days of Muḥarram) on a single overarching theme. David Pinault, Syed Akbar Hyder, and other *majlis* scholars have analyzed the sermons of famous male preachers, especially the extremely popular Rashīd Turābī, in considerable detail. See Pinault, *The Shiʿites* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 115–20; Hyder, "To Die and Yet Live" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000) 101–2. My research focused more on female orators, including the young Shabīh uz-Zahrā Bokhārī of Lahore, Sūfiyah Nāsir of Lucknow, and Dr. Zakiah Ḥasan of Hyderabad.

12. *Ziyārat*, defined broadly as a pilgrimage, has at least three connotations in the Shīʿī context: an actual pilgrimage to Shīʿī holy places (Karbalā, Najaf, Mashad); a small, often metal, replica of one of the *imām*'s tombs, usually housed in an *imāmbārah*, or Shīʿī gathering hall; and the chant mentioned here. This *ziyārat* blessing in Arabic addresses several Karbalā heroes and *imām*s, and signals the formal closure of the *majlis*. Each of its lines begins with the phrase "as-salām o alekaya" ("salutations" or "peace be with you"). The *majlis* participants stand to face Karbalā, heads bowed, each individual's left hand clasping her right before her; the right index finger pointing straight ahead. Midway through the *ziyārat*, the participants make a quarter turn to the right (toward the tomb of the eighth *imām*, al-Rażā, d. 818 C.E., in Mashad), bow slightly, and then turn back to their original position.

13. The traditions considered most historical and authentic deem Ḥusain's wife Umm-e Lailā Akbar's mother, while popular Shīʿīsm usually casts his Persian wife Bāno in this role. The popular trend may reflect an urge to align Shīʿī South Asia with Iran, but Akbar Hyder (personal communication, August 25, 2001) also points out that metrical considerations probably play a role in determining which woman's name appears in a line of verse.

14. *Sansanātā hai badan jān chalī jātī hai / Is lahū se to mire dūdh kī bū ātī hai* (Mūnis, *Majmuah-e Marsīyah-e Mīr Mūnis*, 218).

15. This forgiving of the milk debt, referred to as *dūdh / shīr bakhshnā*, appears in many *marsīyahs*. Typically, according to Syed Akbar Hyder, women in the *marsiyah* use their suffering as mothers as a kind of "rhetorical leverage" to "keep their offspring in line." Ḥusain's sister Zainab is often depicted telling her sons she will not forgive the milk debt unless they fight beside Ḥusain, or that they must pay off the debt (*dūdh kā qarz ʿadā karnā/utār denā*) by fighting to the death. Hyder recalls that in his childhood in India he was told that because mothers go through a lot of hardship when breastfeeding (especially during the middle of the night when a child cries), it is incumbent upon a person to ask her/his mother to forgive him/her for putting the mother through such hardships (Akbar Hyder, personal communication with the author, April 24,

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2002). Even today individuals in serious health conditions, including women in the throes of labor, may ask their mothers to free them from the debt of milk they consumed as infants.

16. In *majlis* rituals and processions, replicas of cradles and poignant *lorī* (lullaby) poems evoke the infant Asġhar, one of the last to die before Ḥusain himself was killed. As in the case of Akbar, much *majlis* poetry depicts Bāno as the mother who mourns Asġhar, but another wife of Ḥusain, Rabāb, is his mother according to older written accounts.

17. *Muñh se bāhar hai zubāñ tashnā jigar martā hai/Dam hai sīne meñ rukā zaḳhm se ḳhūn jārī hai* (Mūnis, *Majmūah-e Marsīyah-e Mīr Mūnis,* 217).

18. In one example from the *ġhazal* genre, the great poet Ġhalīb says to the cruel beloved, *Jab tak dahān-e zaḳham nah paidā kare ko'i / Mushkil kih tujh se rāh-e suḳhan vā kare ko'i:* "Without creating a wound-mouth / It's difficult for anyone to communicate with you." *Dīvān-e Ġhālib* (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1996), 216.

19. The motif of "bloody tears" can be traced to such earlier Persian classics as Firdausī's epic *Book of Kings,* the *Shāhnāmeh,* in which it is "a common phrase":

> A hundred thousand serried soldiers flee
> From him—shall I have strength to stand against him?
> Must my eyes weep tears of blood for ever?

The translator of *The Legend of Seyavash,* one portion of the *Shāhnāmeh,* points out that bloody tears appear also in Latin literature and cites Burton to suggest that the notion of weeping blood may not be entirely metaphorical, since mourners in ancient Turkey would score their faces, mingling blood with tears. This vivid image provides an interesting parallel with the physicality of emotion in the *majlis*. See Ferdowsi, *The Legend of Seyavash,* trans. Dick Davis (London: Penguin, 1992), 25, 139; Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989–2000).

20. See Amy Bard, "Form, Function and Feeling in 'Women's Songs' as Poetic Genres of the Shīʿī Mourning Assembly" (paper delivered at the annual meetings of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Toronto, 2000).

21. Ḥakīm Shaikḥ Abūl Qāsim Ḥusām, ed. *Ḥilāl-e Muḥarram* (Hyderabad: Kutabḳhānah Ḥaidarī, 1990), 1:290. Dilgīr, incidentally, was the pen-name of a Hindu poet, Munshī Channū Lāl Lakhnavī. Mujāvar Ḥusain Riẓvī reports that the great *marsiyah* writer Anīs praised Dilgīr's work highly. See "Urdū marsiye ke ġhair muslim shuʿarā," in *Urdū marsiyah: Seminār meñ paṛhe gaʾe maqālāt,* ed. Shārib Rudaulvī (New Delhi: Urdū Academy, 1993), 131.

22. In present-day Lucknow, the erection of *ṣabīl* stalls serving water and *sharbat* (a cool, sweet drink) still dramatically changes the face of the old city, creating a distinctive seasonal atmosphere. In 1998, when I returned to Lucknow around the fourth of Muḥarram after a trip out of town, the huge black-curtained stalls on Turia (Victoria) Street obscured the entrances to my neighborhood's winding lanes so thoroughly that I had difficulty finding my own house.

23. The great poet Anīs's best-known *marsiyah* provides a classic example of rocks melting at Karbalā. Selections like these are typically full of puns and can be quite playfully embroidered: the heat of the desert is generally conflated with the suffering inflicted on Ḥusain and his companions by that heat and reflects a more general phenomenon in the *marsiyah* of nature and the cosmos mirroring Ḥusain's experience:

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Animals didn't stir from the lakes until eve
The salamander [or "the sea" itself] resorted to the fishes' abode
If the deer were languid, the cheetahs were burnt black
The rocks melted down like molten wax
The crimson fled the flowers, the verdure the grass
Water hunkered down in wells, it longed so for shade

Jhīloñ se chārpā'e nah uṭhte the tā bah shām
Maskan meñ machhliyoñ ke samandar kā thā maqām
Āhū jo kahile the to chīte sʏāh fām
Patthar pighal ke rah ga'e the maśl-e mom-e ḳhām
Surkẖī uṛī thī phūloñ se sabzī gyāh se
Pānī kuñvoñ meñ utrā thā sā'e kī chāh se

See Mīr Anīs, "*Jab qaṭaʿ kī musāfat-e shab āftāb ne*," in *Bazm-e Anīs*, ed. Naiyar Masʿūd (Lahore: Packager Ltd., 1990), 352, verse 117. The melting stone motif is also a shorthand acknowledgment of powerfully effective poetry, as when the literary critic Āzād writes of the eighteenth-century poet Saudā that despite the poet's flaws, "when he [successfully] depicts a situation or an event, even a heart of stone turns to water." "Āzād," Muḥammad Ḥusain. *Āb-e ḥayāt*, 2nd ed. (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdū Academy, 1982), 148–49.

There are important Middle Eastern precedents for this image, beginning with the Qur'ān's reference to Moses striking the rock to make twelve springs gush forth. After the initial description, a more explicit connection between rocks and stony-heartedness is found:

> Then, even after that, your hearts were hardened and became as rocks, or worse than rocks, for hardness. For indeed there are rocks out of which rivers gush, and indeed there are rocks which split asunder so that water floweth from them.

See M. M. Pickthall, trans., *The Glorious Qur'ān* (New York: Muslim World League, 1977), 2:60, 74 (pp. 11, 13). Classical Arabic secular writings that revel in the subtleties of rhetoric and eloquence, such as the entertaining *Assemblies of al-Hariri*, also invoke a skilled raconteur's ability to melt down stones:

> I have entered straits, and opened roads that were closed, and witnessed frays, and soothed tempers, and curbed the restive and closed nostrils in the dust, and melted the frozen, and softened rocks.

See *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, trans. Amina Shah (London: Octagon, 1981), 261.

Kimberley Patton's example, in this volume, of the "weeping" rock in the work of St. Gregory the Eastern Orthodox theologian (which also references the biblical image of Moses striking the rock) points to the resonance of this motif across religious traditions and to roots that are probably shared:

> send compunction upon me, the wretched one,
> and, as you did in the past

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with the rock in the desert,
make my stony and petrified heart
gush forth fountains of tears

See Kimberley Christine Patton, "Howl, Weep and Moan, and Bring it Back to God": Holy Tears in Eastern Christianity" (in this volume), and *Voices in the Wilderness: An Anthology of Patristic Prayers*, trans. and ed. Nikolaos S. Hatzinikolaou (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1988), 41–42.

24. Shams ur Raḥmān Fārūqī, personal communication with the author, June 1989.

25. Pinault, *Horse of Karbalā*, 102, 116.

26. Vernon Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shiʿi Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 85.

27. Sayyidah ʿAzīz Faṭimah Jaʿfarī and Begam Sayyid Muṭāhir Ḥusain Jaʾfarī, eds., *Gauhar-e ġham* (Lahore: Iftiḳhār Book Depot, n.d.).

28. ʿAbbās the standard-bearer was Ḥusain's half-brother. ʿAbbās is known for his passionate loyalty and anger (thus the furrowed brow) and for his determination to fetch water for the dying children of Ḥusain's camp. As ʿAbbās tried to convey his filled waterskin back from the Euphrates, Yazīd's forces severed his arms and eventually killed him. In a type of poetic parallel often drawn between the male martyrs and female survivors, as ʿAbbās prepares to depart, Zainab gazes at her own arms, soon to be chafed by the enemies' bonds. This identification between the arms of Zainab and ʿAbbās echoes frequent poetic juxtapositions of the headless Ḥusain and the unveiled Zainab, the shroudless Akbar and his mother, exposed to the public eye as a captive.

29. In circumstances where deaths from disease, sectarian violence, and poor medical care are far from rare, many are the occasions on which a recent death within a family, partnered with poetic images of distraught Karbalā survivors, renders mourners hysterical or physically ill with grief. Zakia Zaheer of Delhi found that poems about Ḥusain's son ʿAlī Akbar attained a new potence and immediacy for her after the death of her own beloved son (personal communication with the author, January 1997). While her attitude toward *majlis* mourning is shared by many Shīahs, others with whom I spoke seemed to partake of the approach Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali documented in the Lucknow of the 1820s, wherein women resolved to cast aside all personal sorrow, as well as comforts and luxuries, to devote themselves to mourning for Ḥusain. See Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali, *Observations on the Mussalmauns of India* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1974 [1832]), 23–25.

Negotiating a third path, my college-age research assistant in Lahore, Ṣadaf Batūl, said she balanced what she felt were the dangers of either privileging or marginalizing personal sorrow by asking herself during a *majlis*, "If I am in such pain over my father's death, what must Ḥusain have felt, sacrificing his beloved family, one after the other?" This view seems to have a historical precedent in *marśiyahs* written by the great classical poets for female patrons on the occasion of the death of patrons' family members. In these poems, the poet may remind the patron that her own suffering hardly compares to the more profound suffering the women of Karbalā had to endure. See, for example, Hyder, "To Die and Yet Live," 164–65.

30. Personal communication with the author, October 15, 2002.

31. Rahī Māsʿūm Raẓā, *Ādhā Gāñv* (Delhi: Akshar Prakashan Private Ltd., 1966). I have here adapted a translation by Gillian Wright, *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli* (Delhi: Viking, 1994), 38.

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32. Ibid., 39. Raẓā's comment about clerics "criticizing poets" is an interesting indication of the tension surrounding the poetry so central to popular piety; some conservative Shīʿahs (including Mushtāq Naqvī, whom I interviewed in Lucknow in 1998) find *majlis* narratives and poetry problematic whenever they take liberties with the (rather sparse) factual, historical accounts of Karbalā. Those who defend these poetic embellishments say they are permissible because they actually make the events seem more "real" to listeners.

33. M. Laxmaiah, personal communication with the author, November 1998. Qāsim Raẓa, Maskūr Ḥusain Yād, and Zakia Zaheer all analyzed the *majlis* as a catharsis for personal bereavements (personal communication with the author, 1996–1998). See also Mary Elaine Hegland, "Popular Piety during Muharram: Shia Muslim Women and the Life Cycle in Peshawar, Pakistan" (paper presented at the Twenty-third Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, 1994), 1.

34. On *majlis*es as expressive of "solidarity" for "a community of listeners characterized by past suffering as a minority," see, e.g., Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, "Musical Gesture and Extra-Musical Meaning: Words and Music in the Urdū Ghazal," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 28:3 (1990): 476, and "Islamic Music in an Indian Environment: The Shiʿa Majlis," *Ethnomusicology* 25:1 (1981): 41–71.

35. See Richard K. Wolf, "Embodiment and Ambivalence: Emotion in South Asian Muharram Drumming," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 32 (2000): 81–116.

36. See Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam*, 85, 112–13.

37. Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (New York: Mouton, 1978), 15.

38. William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 128.

39. For examples of emotives, see ibid., 102–03, 107.

40. In developing the concept of ritual failure, Ronald L. Grimes suggests that "[for ritual participants] engaging in ritual criticism presupposes that rites can exploit, denigrate, or simply not do what people claim they do." See "Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances," in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 262.

41. Pinault, *Horse of Karbalā*, 99–108; Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam*, 80–89; J. R. I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shīʾīsm in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

42. See, for example, Sadiq, *A History of Urdū Literature*.

43. See Patton, "Howl, Weep and Moan."

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Ẹkuń Ìyàwó:

Bridal Tears in Marriage Rites of Passage among the Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá of Nigeria

Jacob K. Olúpọ̀nà with Ṣọlá Ajíbádé

An important but hitherto unexplored theme in the Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá religious imagination is the role and significance of tears. Many rituals and ceremonies, especially performance rituals of transition, include spontaneous and "nonspontaneous" or feigned tears. For example, in the ceremony (*ìjéwọ́*) announcing the impending death of a senior chief (*ẹ̀hàrẹ*) in an Òndó-Yorùbá town, the children of the deceased dress transversely to indicate that it is not a normal time. They proceed to the palace of the king (*ọ̀ba*) to inform the king's emissary (the *ọ̀ba* himself is forbidden to take part in burial rituals) that their father is gravely ill and is about to join his ancestors. They will be told to go back home to take good care of him. The children return to the palace to impress on the *ọ̀ba* the gravity of the illness, and again they are told to do everything humanly possible to ensure that their father does not die. On the third and final occasion, they return to announce that their father has died. In response, the *ọ̀ba*'s emissaries pretend to weep in turn as they sing the praises of the deceased chief. After the staged "theatrical" tears are shed for the deceased, the death of the high chief will be officially announced to the public.

Like the induced tears in the mortuary ritual that mark separation from one stage of affairs to another, tears and weeping play important roles in rituals of marriage because they signify a break in time and space. They mark the rupture in previous relationships, marital status, and state of being before new ones are fashioned and set in motion. *Ẹkuń ìyàwó,* bridal tears in the marriage ceremony among the Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá of Nigeria, is a paradoxical example of weeping during rituals surrounding what is considered a supremely joyous ceremony—marriage. For the Yorùbá people, parting (*ìdágbére*)—whether on a short or long journey or as a result of marriage or death—is often marked by weeping, thus indicating the deep emotional trauma of parting and disconnection. Weeping may also provide a medium for expressing anxiety about the unknown and uncertain future.[1]

In this essay, we argue that the *ẹkuń ìyàwó* performance and ritual process provide an avenue for expressing a bride's deep emotions at the time of marriage. Collectively, lamentation and tears, ceremonial dances, and poetic utterances

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serve as a cultural text exposing and exploring familiar realities of the female matrimonial life among the Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá people. Tears and discourse create, as Robert Desjarlais remarks about the poetry of healing in the Nepal Himalayas, "some of the basic forms and tensions of their existence."[2] The "epiphany" that ritual tears and performances produce can be so powerful for the audience "not only because the moment is revelatory but because the world revealed by it accords with basic bodily disposition and so seems apt and valid and of the natural order of things."[3] The Yorùbá culture perceives tears, like other bodily fluids such as blood, semen, and saliva (spit), as beyond the mundane, anchored in the transcendent and the sacred. The person from whom they flow is able to "summon the imaginative forces needed"[4] to cope with her next stage of life as wife and sexual partner, at times to an uncaring husband, and as the mother of his children. Tears and ritual expression generate a link to the spiritual world of the ancestors. They also serve as a medium for bestowing communal values on motherhood and virginity and as a metaphor for conveying deep-seated cultural angst about gender relations, social tension, and familial conflict.

Of the three most important personal rites of passage in indigenous Yorùbá culture and society (naming, puberty/marriage, and death), marriage is the only ritual in which an individual may personally take part. The other two rites are carried out without the conscious knowledge of the person for whom the rite is performed. Puberty and marriage ceremonies, especially for females, are both secular and religious occasions during which the society's moral values and social and cultural history are displayed. Particularly for women, puberty and marriage ceremonies represent occasions when society defines a woman's role in the nuclear and extended family, her matrimonial home. Society defines how and when gender roles are acted out and contested, lineage and family history are reenacted, and past occurrences in the lineage and/or family are recounted. Ceremonies of puberty subject a young woman to tests of endurance, a quality she will need when she enters her matrimonial home as a wife and an outsider. Grieving the loss of the bride to her lineage and family, she and her entire family and relatives perform a spectacular ritual drama of tears.

However, just as the occasion is one of "sorrow" and "joy," a marriage celebration also allows the elders to pass down the lessons of their lineage to the bride to enable her to cope with the vicissitudes of life in her new home. The custodians of the oral genre (*oríkì*) and the family historical and cultural memory, the elder women of the house, teach the bride-to-be about the family ethos using traditional lyrics and song. Marriage is no ordinary event, and the response of individuals (the bride and her parents, siblings, and relatives) to all these facets of the ceremony lead to profuse tears and weeping (*ẹkuń*). By *ẹkuń ìjàwó*, we mean the tears and emotional outbursts that the prospective bride displays in her patrilineal home (*ilé-baba*) on the evening of her departure to her new matrimonial home (*ilé-ọkọ*). The tears appear as she reminisces about her past, present, and uncertain future.

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Ethnography of *Ẹkuń Ìyàwó*

As a religious and social ceremony, *ẹkuń ìyàwó* begins with propitiation to Èṣù, the Yorùbá deity of the crossroads and the messenger of the gods. Propitiation enables the maiden to enjoy a peaceful transition. Èṣù has the dual personality of troublemaker and purveyor of trouble. At times he is regarded as the deity who can either spoil or make an event successful; thus, Èṣù must be appeased before all other things are done. Long before the actual day of marriage, the family of the bride prepares for the ceremony by informing all their relatives and friends of the coming event. The bride's unmarried age-mates, called *olóṣùrìn* or *ẹgbẹ́ ìyàwó* (playmates who go around together), visit the bride's house to reminisce about their childhood experiences together, express anxieties about the coming events, and rehearse the lyrics and songs that they will perform during the ceremony.

The ceremony proper begins on the evening of the bride's departure from her home. Accompanied by her friends, she tearfully proceeds to make the rounds of her family and lineage houses to bid them farewell, as she is about to embark on her journey to the bridegroom's house. The visit is characterized by the bride's dramatic tears and utterances of sonorous choruses, echoed by the bridesmaids who accompany her to all the places she goes. It is the hysteria of the bride-to-be and her bridesmaids that gives the Ọyọ́-Yorùbá ceremony the name *ẹkuń ìyàwó* (bridal or maiden's tears).[5]

Maidens who are able to perform *ẹkuń ìyàwó* with theatrical zeal bring great honor to their parents, who deluge their daughter with numerous gifts (*ẹrù ìyàwó*) to take to her new husband's home (*ilé-ọkọ*). Responding to their daughter's tears, the bride's parents may burst into tears themselves or suppress their tears in silence. For the Ọyọ́-Yorùbá, *ẹkuń ìyàwó* demonstrates publicly the degree of affection the parents have for their daughter as much as it demonstrates the degree to which the daughter will grieve for her parents' home upon marriage. Though the tears are a very personal and emotional reaction to the losses suffered by family when a daughter leaves her patrilineal home, they also reflect broader social and cultural issues such as gender relations, female sexuality, and ancestral veneration, which permeate the society.

Content of the Oral Recitation in *Ẹkuń Ìyàwó*

On the day of her departure to her husband's dwelling, the maiden begins shedding tears as she recounts in chanting her experiences of growing up in her home and preparing for her marriage and the uncertainty she feels about her future. She begins with her parents, as she kneels in front of them to pray, as tradition dictates, and to recite these verses:

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Father! I come to receive my blessings and prayer wishes,
That I may not give birth to "born-to-die" children (*àbíkú*),
That I may not be infertile,
That the man I am about to marry will love me,
That the parents-in-law I meet in my new home will love me!
Blessings upon me this day, today!

Addressed to her father, the bride's heartbreaking lament is intense and full of prayerful requests focusing on central issues of concern for a daughter about to become a wife—infertility and pregnancy. In this culture, infertile women are abhorred as outcasts, and they may lose the interest of their husbands. If pregnancy fails to occur within a year or two after marriage, a woman begins to worry about her ability to "bear fruit." The anxiety about and fear of infertility induce panic and tears. However, once a child is born, the new mother faces another anxiety brought on by the high rate of child mortality, especially repeated death in infancy, called *àbíkú*. *Àbíkú* refers to children of "repeated" births; that is, they die and they are reborn only to die again in infancy. This African phenomenon has formed the subject of cultural, political, literary, and metaphysical speculation.[6] If parents suspect that an infant who dies is *àbíkú*, they consult diviners and medicine healers to halt the vicious cycle of infant death.

A maiden's parents-in-law, especially her mother-in-law, are major causes of anxiety, uncertainty, and even hysteria. This is reflected in the lament in which she beseeches her father to pray that she may find favor in the eyes of her prospective parents-in-law. The lament often challenges what is perceived as the low status accorded new wives, one that places them in precarious situations in their marital homes.

The bride-to-be may also address a prayer to her mother, as follows:

Mother, pray for me so that I may meet with favor my mother-in-law!
Because if you prepare the pounded yam (*iyaṅ*),
They [the parents-in-law] will say it is full of stakes (*kókó*).
If you prepare yam flour (*ọ̀kà*), they will say it is not good enough.
Blessings upon me today.

The bride is concerned here with the general perception of the groom's parents as uncompromising with their daughters-in-law and the seniority that all others in her new house may claim over her, reflected in the marriage terminology adopted in Yorùbá kinship systems. A bride must refer to her husband's male *children* by former marriages metaphorically as *bàbá-ọkọ* ("father"-in-law) and to her husband's female *children* as *ìyá-ọkọ* ("mother"-in-law) to demonstrate her respect for them and her acceptance of her junior position and sta-

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tus relative to these children. These terms signify both the low status that a traditional marriage casts upon her and the respect that she showers upon her husband's children. The prayer also alludes to the wifely duty of preparing her husband's staple meals of *iyańi* (pounded yam) and *ọkà* (yam flour-starch). In late evening in a typical traditional Yorùbá home, one often hears the sound of the pounding of yam with pestle and mortar. The ability and skill of a new wife to produce finely pounded yam may earn her the praise of her husband's parents, just as her failure to do so may earn her condemnation. These demands may produce anxiety and fear in a bride, who typically does not know much about her parents-in-law before her wedding.

The title of Karin Barber's book, *I Could Speak until Tomorrow*,[7] is derived from a phrase that reflects the depth of the experience and knowledge of women in the recitation of *oríkì* in the bride's lament (*ẹkuń ìyàwó*) collected from the Ọ̀yọ̀ town of Òkukù.

> Speak on, speak on, that's the way of the pestle,
> Keep talking, keep talking, that is the way of the stirring-stick,
> If you want me to speak, I could speak until tomorrow,
> It is my work, it is my trade.
> I never weary of it.
> I do not get bored with it.[8]

The first two lines refer to the sound of unrelenting pounding of the pestle and the stirring-stick as women prepare the staple meals for their households. The women reciters use the metaphors of women endlessly pounding yam to convey their deep knowledge of *oríkì*. The lament may also indicate a woman's acceptance of her new role, which has now become part of the *ẹkuń ìyàwó* performances in Òkukù Town. Although Karin Barber focuses on the "intensity and length" and "profusion" of the *oríkì* chant,[9] the wailing also signifies a larger question of women's status and describes experiences of domestic and physical labor in Yorùbá patriarchal society. Just as in a woman's hands the pestle and stirring-stick work nonstop, so are they expected to recite *oríkì*. Women who master these skills are understandably proud.

The bride must also say farewell to her siblings, and this she does in the manner in which she addresses her parents. Kneeling before her younger sister, she laments:

> It is for the sake of my marriage; I kneel before my lesser sister.
> May this occasion bring blessing upon me.

Here, in tears of despair, the bride captures what may be her fate in her matrimonial home, where upon her arrival, as custom demands, she is expected to

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show full respect to the *children* of the household—no matter their age. By kneeling before her junior sister, the bride reverses her role, gaining a foretaste of her new status in wedlock. Her weeping also speaks of the Yorùbá norms of etiquette and rule of seniority that require the junior woman to show respect to her seniors by kneeling before them in greeting, a position conveying her humbleness and subordinate status. Here, the maiden acknowledges that the institution of marriage requires her role reversal if she is to earn the blessings of her sister, achieve a successful passage, and succeed in matrimony.[10]

Before this, through the separation stage, the bride gradually renounces her lofty status as a pampered and beloved daughter in her patrilineal house and assumes the subservient status of a new wife in the groom's patrilineal household. After the marriage ritual, the bride's relationship to her junior sister reverts to senior status, even as the bride goes to her matrimonial home. She retains seniority in her patrilineal (father's) house.

Memory and Emotion

It is not unusual for a maiden to have lost her mother by the time she is ready to wed. This tragic loss calls for an especially deep hysteria of tears on her part at the time of her wedding because the ceremony also brings back the memory of her deceased mother.

If a bride's mother is still living, she plays an important role in the wedding of her daughter. Not only does a mother produce a significant amount of the bride's apparel (*ẹrù ìyàwó)* to take to her new home, but a mother will also continue to support her daughter in her new situation. Having experienced what her daughter is about to go through, a mother normally gives the most useful advice to the bride. The absence of her mother's support in this situation leads to emotional outbursts of tears.

If a bride has lost her mother, it is an occasion to show her relationship with her deceased mother's sister, who now acts as a surrogate mother. In this instance, a bride's tears may indicate both tragic loss and hopeful expectation. First, she prays to her deceased mother to assist her in managing her new status. Next, she appeals to her surrogate mother to play the role of her own true mother, although she recognizes the difficulty in assuming such a role.

> May my mother's spirit in heaven provide me with children.
> Just as trifoliate yam (*èsúrú*) does not grow without many roots (children),
> My mother's (ancestral) clothes passed down to me.
> I will use them to carry my babies.
> May my mother's spirit grant me children:

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The trifoliate yam does not grow infertile.
Oh, blessings upon me tonight.

The trifoliate yam is a metaphor by means of which the bride compares the yam's many stalks (children) to her own fertility, as she implores her mother's ancestral spirit to enable her to be fertile and procreate like the trifoliate yam. The emphasis is on a beloved ancestral spirit who is capable of granting the requests of the living, especially on matters of fertility and procreation, because these spirits would like to ensure the continuity of their lineage on earth. Thus, the maiden expresses her desire to use the cloth (wrappers) she inherited from her deceased mother to carry the baby on her back, as the Yorùbá custom of child care dictates.

After leaving her father's house accompanied by her best friends, the bride goes to the home of her aunt who acts as her surrogate mother to greet her. To the surrogate mother she laments:

My mother's sister, forget me not,
Because I know that if Mother were alive,
She would be responsible for taking good care of me.

The bride's cry of anguish often induces similar responses from her aunt, who is reminded of her dear deceased sister and the obligation to her children. Responding, the aunt may repeat the maiden's earlier lament.

May your dear mother's spirit in heaven assist you to have children.
The trifoliate yam does not grow without reproducing.
The clothes of your heavenly ones, you will use to carry your own baby.

The aunt utters a silent prayer to her deceased sister's spirit to aid the daughter in fulfilling the role of wife and mother. This prayer may be accompanied by a plea that her deceased sister's spirit not "sleep" in heaven but respond always to help her daughter here on earth. This is regarded as the supreme prayer to an ancestor—to act as a guiding spirit to the living. Often in Yorùbá society one may hear a mischievous mother-in-law complain that she is failing to control and influence satisfactorily or even to drive away her daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law's deceased parents and ancestors—especially a departed mother—act as avengers. If a mother-in-law fails in her evil machination, she begins to suspect that the failure is caused by the deceased mother's spirit, which is protecting the young woman. Such "failures" are signs that the ancestors are ever active to protect their daughters against evildoers. To be called *ọmọ-òkú-òrun* (child of a deceased parent) is to invoke a deep sense of being cared for by one's ancestral guardians.

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As committed and empathetic as an aunt may be in helping her niece cope with marital issues, the lament of *ẹkun ìyàwó* points out the reality of losing one's biological mother and leaving the care of children to surrogate mothers. The surrogate parent can never replace the biological parent. The lament of the bride acknowledges this:

> She who says she will do as my mother
> Cannot quite do as my mother.
> He who says he will do as my father
> Cannot quite do as my father who begot me.

The Yorùbá believe that there is no substitute for parental care. Surrogate parenthood can never entirely replace parental care. Motherhood is supreme, and many Yorùbá proverbs point to the trauma and loss experienced by the orphaned bride or child. For example, one proverb refers to the value of adorning one's daughter with buttock beads that add beauty to a girl's physique. Another proverb says that just because one's daughter is naturally beautiful, one does not pass the beads on to someone else's daughter, even if she needs them. Clearly, a surrogate parent's first responsibility would be to her own daughter. Yet another proverb refers to the motherless child who carries no open wound on her back because there will be no mother to take care of it for her. These Yorùbá proverbs derive their meaning from Yorùbá experiences of the significance of motherhood.

As the thought of her deceased parents weighs down on her, a maiden may burst into tears of grief and recall her lineage and family history (in praise poems), depending on how knowledgeable she is of her lineage and traditions. In similar wails of grief, the bride's age-mates and extended family members join her to shed tears of remembrance for the deceased parents.

In the past, girls were trained how to perform *ẹkun ìyàwó* during their nuptial ceremonies. A girl was taught by the elder women of the lineage with melodious voices and deep memory of the content of the lyrical songs. Why was so much emphasis placed on training young girls in *ẹkun ìyàwó* tradition? As a marriage institution, it was considered important for older women to pass down the lore of the family and lineage to the new generation. However, more important, it was absolutely essential for the elder women to train them in performing the roles of wife and mother in their new matrimonial home. Upon marriage, the groom's family informs the bride's family, in a symbolic manner, of the outcome of the virginity test administered the night of her first sexual encounter with the groom. In a patriarchal society, such as the Yorùbá, maidens who were found to have lost their virginity before marriage faced humiliation and brought shame upon their family and lineage. As teenage girls reach puberty, the women of the house teach them the ethics of

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good living and the consequences of engaging in untoward behavior, including sex before marriage and extramarital relationships such as concubinage after marriage.

Virginity, Procreation, and Virtue

One of the concerns of the *ẹkuń ìyàwó* rite of passage and performance is to play out the cultural and social issues surrounding the bride's new role and to reflect on how prepared she is for it. It is not unusual for the maiden to burst into extensive lyrics in which she tells a story that situates her within the unfolding ritual. It is also not unusual for her to boast about her virginity and virtuous character to warn her parents-in-law not to mistake her for an irresponsible girl. The bride may sing typical lyrics thus:

> There once was a river located in the deep forest.
> People who line up in front of this river must not look back at it.
> Those lined up behind it cannot reach it.
> I, Àṣàkẹ́, reached it and took of its water to wash my face.
> My face then becomes that of a beautiful maiden,
> My buttock, heavy with beads.
> If you count the beads on my buttock tonight,
> And find out they are incomplete,
> All of you, my bridesmaids, remove my clothes and strip me naked!
> Blessings upon me tonight!

These lyrics refer to the customary *ìbálé* test of virginity. On the wedding night, the groom attempts the first sexual contact with the bride to determine whether she has been faithful to him during courtship. Courting often entails sexual abstinence. If the *ìbálé* is successful, the groom's parents send gifts, including food and drink, to the bride's parents to thank them for their virtuous safeguarding of the maiden. Among the gifts, they send a full keg of palm wine. However, if the bride fails the *ìbálé* test, the groom's parents may send only half a keg, indicating incompleteness, a sign of their displeasure, which may bring shame upon the bride's family and its lineage.

In addition, the lyrics refer to a metaphoric river located in a virgin land, an allegory of the bride's status as a virgin. Although before her present courtship she had been courted by both married and unmarried men (a reference to those who have lined up both in front of and behind the Virgin River), no male has touched or spoiled her virginity.

As a sign of her confidence in her virginity, the bride challenges her bridesmaids to strip her naked if the report reaches them of a failed virginal test. The bride undergoes the test the night she arrives at the groom's home. Proof of her virginity is that her buttock beads remain intact. They have not been

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disturbed by her suitors, who in a struggle to have sexual contact with her may shake or tear the beads off. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the older women to teach young girls about the taboos of sex.

The bride's new matrimonial home (*ilé-ọkọ*) is a schooling process in itself (*ilé-ẹ̀kọ́*) because as a new wife, she begins very quickly to learn new rules and to face a reality that differs markedly from her previous experiences. As a daughter, she was secure in her patrilineal home and even wielded some authority over outsider "wives" who married into the lineage. After her marriage, she becomes an outsider wife herself.

Ẹ̀kuń Ìyàwó as a Rite of Passage

Ẹ̀kuń ìyàwó is a rite of passage, a frequent subject of conversation in scholarship on African society and religion. As a ritual and social ceremony that marks the transition of maidens and unmarried females to womanhood and bestows marital status, it fits well into van Gennep's model of tripartite *rites de passage* and Victor Turner's conceptual schema describing liminal processes. The ceremony begins with the appropriation of the Yorùbá deity of the crossroads, Èsù, whose very essence signifies transition and crossing from one stage to another. *Ẹ̀kuń ìyàwó* portrays many instances of reversion, a characteristic of *rites de passage*. The bride must reverse her position of authority to ask for blessings by kneeling before her junior sister. At a certain time in the ceremony, the bridesmaids burst into sexually explicit lyrics that are not sung in ordinary times. The essence, however, of *ẹkuń ìyàwó* is its evocation of tears that signify the transitional, transformative process to which we will now turn.

While the anthropological and literary sources on the status of emotion in human culture and society are many, few focus on emotions that relate to puberty and marriage rituals, especially the oratory that accompanies performance ritual. Lila Abu-Lughod's description of Egyptian Bedouin love poetry, called *ghinnawa,* may help clarify the social fact of *ẹkuń ìyàwó*. Abu-Lughod argues that *ghinnawa* love poetry is a "social text" that portrays the social condition of the Bedouin. Contrary to the general view that this genre reveals mainly the emotional expression of individual actors, the genre in fact mirrors the social life of the society that creates it. Abu-Lughod remarks,

> Far from *ghinnawa* being an expressive stage for individual emotionality, and far from this representing an inner state, therefore, the conventional poetic form must needs be regarded as rhetorical usage which itself constructs emotions as legitimate social phenomena, as social facts.[11]

We argue that *ẹkuń ìyàwó* reflects the bride's existential angst as a prospective wife. The ceremony, especially the maiden's lament, reflects the social milieu of the maiden. It is a "social text" that can be read and interpreted.

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The poetic utterances of the bride are performances that indicate gender relations in Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá society and that emphasize the significance and role of sensibility. Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, who work on expressive genres and gender relations in the Highland society of New Guinea, point out the usefulness of sensibility paradigms in the Highlands, referring to the expression of feelings in genres such as songs, myths, folktales, and ballads.[12] They argue that these genres, especially the songs, convey an "image of a lively, sensuous, dramatic set of sensibilities"[13] associated with courtship and marriage. The importance of the genre for gender relations among the Highlanders informs our analysis of *ẹkuń ìyàwó* performance. Unlike previous ethnography that presents such songs as reflections of the "ethos of male denigration of women" and portrays "gender relations as marked by antagonism or exploitation," Stewart and Strathern's analysis privileges issues more central to women's life in Highlander culture such as "fertility, reproduction, and power."[14] Our understanding of *ẹkuń ìyàwó* strikes a balance between these apparently bipolar perspectives. The Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá celebration of culturally significant values and ethos in the society—such as reproduction, marriage, and ancestral spirituality—at the same time portrays the female's marginal status in that society.

Play and Humor in Ẹ̀kuń Ìyàwó

A bride who sheds insufficient tears or shows indifference to the dramatic outpouring of tears in the rites of passage may be perceived as stone-hearted (*ọ̀dájú*), and parents go to great measures to ensure that their daughter sheds copious tears on this occasion. However, the Yorùbá also abhor excessive tears. The Yorùbá ethos of balance and moderation (*ìwọ̀ntúnwọ̀nsì*) is regarded as ideal. In such ritual, the bridesmaids (*olóṣùrìn* or *ẹgbé ìyàwó*) must interject the *ìyàwó* ritual performance with humorous lyrics and satire to bring laughter to the bride's face. The bridesmaids create an atmosphere of play, jest, and exuberance for the wedding party. Play and jest are normally part of ritual life,[15] and the bridesmaids resort to bawdy and sexually humorous lyrics to create laughter. Nevertheless, the lyrics still convey significant themes.

> Alábàkẹ́ has just returned from the forest, fetching firewood for cooking.
> Let her vagina be wide open for sexual intercourse.

The sexual innuendo in the lyrics of the love song refers to the fact that when the soon-to-be bride reaches the groom's place, she will go to fetch firewood for cooking, just as she will also be involved in making love with her new husband. Yorùbá culture views physical labor and sexual intercourse as realities of married life. Such songs, it is assumed, cause the bride to laugh and be less anxious.

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If on their way to visit a relative of the bride the bridal party passes by a group of men, the party may sing thus:

> Does it mean that there are no men with penises in this place?
> In a sea of vaginas that are running around?

These traditional songs are rendered to provoke laughter in the midst of the tears that accompany the maiden's performance. Although tears and laughter appear contradictory, it is interesting to note, as Gustave Lanson observes, that tears can play a dual role, expressing sensuality on one hand and indicating virtue and goodness on the other.[16]

However, the above song about female sexuality, men, and marriage also reflects a major concern of *ẹkuń ìyàwó*, especially as it affects the unmarried prepubescent girls in the maiden's party, namely, anxiety about their future. As Joyce Flueckiger remarks about *bhojali*, a similar Hindu verbal song of maidens, such songs reflect the immediate concerns of unmarried girls, in particular female peers who have formed close friendships.[17]

The explicit body images of vagina and penis may also suggest a licentious period that *ẹkuń ìyàwó* denounces. In this time for courting and marriage, joy and sadness mingle together symbolically.

Conclusion

The ethnography of the *ẹkuń ìyàwó* ceremony reveals it to be a rite of passage that employs metaphors of weeping and tears to convey poignant messages about Yorùbá marriage practices. Spontaneous and feigned tears may be interpreted as signs of virtue signaling the bride's reflection on her past and future life in a critical moment of her transition to adulthood. Unlike the tears shed in burial celebrations, *ẹkuń ìyàwó* are joyous tears, yet they signify anxiety, fear, and uncertainty, especially in seeking fertility and the protection of the ancestors. *Ẹkuń ìyàwó* also challenges the assertion that the present situation in Africa—where laxity in male and female sexual mores has fostered such epidemics as AIDS—is due to the lack of a premarital sex taboo in traditional African societies. The strict and virtuous practices of sexual abstinence before marriage are signified in the tears and weeping of the *ẹkuń ìyàwó* ceremony, revealing numerous cultural structures, such as lineage, kinship systems, ancestral obligations, and virtuous ways of being.

Notes

I thank Dr. Ṣọlá Ajíbádé, a lecturer whom I interviewed at Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀ University, Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Nigeria, for offering the details of the *ẹkuń ìyàwó* ceremony. The interpretation and analysis are mine.

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1. The Yorùbá often distinguish between joyful tears (*ẹkuń ayọ̀*) and sorrowful tears (*ẹkuń ìbànújẹ́*). They also characterize false tears as *ẹkuń èké*.

2. Robert Desjarlais, *Body and Emotion: The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 133.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. The ceremony is also called *rárà ìyàwó* (bridal lamentation) among some Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá people.

6. I lost four siblings in infancy thought to be *àbíkú* children. It was later that Western-trained medical doctors speculated that the children might have died because of sickle-cell anemia, a trait found in my family.

7. Karin Barber, *I Could Speak until Tomorrow: Oríkì, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

8. Ibid., 78–79.

9. Ibid.

10. See Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960); Victor Witter Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

11. Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 121–22, citing the work of Lila Abu-Lughod, "Shifting Politics in Bedouin Love Poetry," in *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Paris: Éditions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 1990), 24–45.

12. Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, *Gender, Song and Sensibility: Folktales and Folksongs in the Highlands of New Guinea* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

13. Ibid., 215.

14. Ibid., 216.

15. Victor Witter Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

16. Gustave Lanson, *Nivelle de la Chausée et la comedie larmoyante* (Paris: Hachette, 1887), 226, cited in Sheila P. Bayne, *Tears and Weeping: An Aspect of Emotional Climate Reflected in Seventeenth-Century French Literature* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verleg, 1981), 13–14.

17. Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, *Gender and Genre in Folklore of Modern India* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 41.

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A Love for All Seasons:
Weeping in Jewish Sources

Herbert W. Basser

Bleary-Eyed Views of the Role of Tears: A Story

The synagogue Sabbath morning service enhances the holiness of the day. The worshiper ascends, heaven bound, by engaging the rapturous poetry of the ceremony. There is nothing too much or too little in it. I had been sailing smoothly through the service one bright and sunny Saturday morning in 1970; the synagogue was full and the rabbi had just finished his sermon. The cantor came forward to continue the rhythm of the service. The congregation was rising to hear God's name magnified and sanctified in preparation for the additional service of the Sabbath. We were prepared to enter the trancelike state of the silent devotionals. The clockwork familiarity with the service dulled me into losing the next few moments. The trance broke. After a few moments I absorbed the scene; an unusual commotion was happening at the front of the synagogue. Then I saw her. A little, very petite, older woman, likely in her eighties, had run halfway up the stairs leading to the Torah Ark. Several able men were trying to stop her. What was going on? With ease she evaded the arms trying to grab her as she rushed by the rabbi who stood there perplexed and dumbfounded. She grabbed the curtain of the Ark and pulled it to one side and forced open the gates of the Ark, which held a full array of Scrolls of the Holy Torah. She had breached heaven itself. Immediately she began to cry and shriek in Yiddish, beseeching God and his holy angels not to abandon her. I do not know who she was or what her story was. No one had any idea how to react, and as suddenly as she had appeared she soon disappeared, descending the podium with great dignity while tears clouded her eyes.

The service continued and no one mentioned or referred to what happened. It was as if it had not happened. That scene haunted me for years. It still does. Who was that woman? Why did we not recognize in that moment that here was the most primal and essential act of faith possible in an institutional setting? Institutional settings are made for symbols and the Holy Ark is the greatest symbol available. It made sense that this was the only possible access this woman could have had to God's own ear. Clearly the act was premeditated since she had

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to have had a plan of action to make her way through the "men's section" from the "women's balcony" but it was essential. So why did it faze me and others?

There is a place and a time for tears. What I witnessed would not have seemed so jarring were it not in the middle of the Sabbath service in the synagogue. That event has stayed in my memory since I was a young man, over thirty-five years ago. It seems to me as I reflect back that this woman was beyond tears and her pleading now needed to be placed at God's throne. Far from being sacrilegious, her act was one of deep piety. Although one is forbidden to mourn in public on the Sabbath or make demands of God, the rabbi quickly weighed the options at the time and wisely decided to let her be.[1] Her cries were cries of pain, and I doubt if they assuaged her pain since she was not in need of sympathy but in need of God's answer. I do not know what happened to her. But I thought of her years later when I read the report given by Rabbi Eliezer Zussman Sofer of his eulogy of Rabbi Abraham Samuel Benjamin Sofer (1815–1871). He discussed the meaning of tears in Judaism. For him, tears mollify and soften human pain; they come from the mercy of God to naturally ease one's anguish when one pours out his or her heart with tears. But if one cries too much the ducts dry up and the pain festers unabated. The rabbi noted that Jeremiah had begged God to provide him with more tears to give comfort to his soul—"and so am I parched from over-crying, my eyes are squeezed dry!" he bemoaned (Jer. 9:1). Clearly, this woman had to have suffered greatly in her life to act as boldly and "transgressively" as she did. All other avenues of help were closed.

This woman belonged to people who had suffered greatly in Europe in her lifetime. She had unquestionably shed many tears in response to personal catastrophes, exiles, "relocations," and likely the slaughter of her family and friends. And her culture gave her the opportunity and the freedom to express her distress and anguish. This was a strong woman. Weak people do not barge in on God on the Sabbath, if at all. What she did was not simply an act of private crying of a broken woman. It was a public, religious act, a pleading or protest into God's ear. She needed to do it publicly, ritually, symbolically because she sensed that would be more effective than simply crying in private. The sheer audacity of the act ripped it from the normal and pushed it into the poetry of Israel's ceremony that day. Not any day—the Holy Sabbath, the Holy Synagogue, the Holy Ark at the point of the service where intellect and emotion intersect. The line between private anguish and ritualized expression of that expression melted.[2] We who looked on felt the tension of her rituals, her pain, and our service of joy and transcendence. So we outwardly continued as if nothing disturbing had rippled through the calmness of the day. All of us felt the tension between her desperate act of brazen disturbance as we were soaring to the heights of Sabbath peace and her personal needs, expressed in the sacred container of a public ritual that unexpectedly became part of it.

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This was not an ambiguous act. While one might consider crying to be a direct response to human catastrophe, an unmediated and universal, essential behavior, this woman expressed her anguish in the symbols available to her through her religious culture. I think the fact she was a woman made her behavior somehow more socially acceptable, more fitting. It is more acceptable for women to cry in public. Men's tears are arguably more powerful because they are so "over the top," so socially transgressive. Here I investigate the tension between tears as a ritual expression of remorse and loss that is culturally regulated and tears as personal grief. My study will center on a few passages in the wider Jewish literature from the first century through early modern times. Ritual expression is different from private expression, although both express intimacy and need, in that it is meant to be efficacious and solve a problem. Private mourning is personal sadness.[3] Yet the two can merge experientially, and it is at the juncture of these two modalities of weeping that we consider the rabbinic portraits of tears.

Coping with Unanswered Tears

What troubled me most about the interruption of the synagogue service was the uneasiness of unanswered tears. Tears are supposed to be answered in Jewish tradition; important passages in the literary tradition tell us that tears are more efficacious than prayer. In pursuing this idea we can observe that images of tears in world religions have strong parallels in Judaism. Beverly Moon identifies "tears" as a "symbol of humanity at its deepest, most common level."[4] She notes that many cultures have folktales concerning the dire consequences for those who mourn too long and too loud,[5] and she outlines a belief in some societies that tears are an irreplaceable fluid.[6]

The notion of tears as sacrifice is not unique to pagan cultures. We will have occasion to examine Jewish sources that paint moving images of Abraham's tears dripping from him to his son to the sacrificial pyre and to the slaughtering knife. We will look at figures of tears covering the altar in Jerusalem. While Moon finds hints in some religions of tears as the agent of resurrection, Jewish commentators impute this very motif to the Talmudic idea that God counts and stores away righteous tears.[7] Ibn Habib's collection of commentaries to the Talmuds, *Eyn Ya'acov,* explains that the purpose of storing such tears is to resurrect the mourner with them. Moon notes the common theme that penitent tears stir up divine passion, a common notion in Jewish sources that we will examine further. In short, most of the pictures she gives of the role of tears in various religions apply to Judaism.

Yet, what happens when we do not know if crying has been heeded? The need and dependence of the crying child cannot be ignored. The universal human response is to find ways to stop the tears because they are unbearable.

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There is a famous case of an English nanny, eighteen-year-old Louise Woodward, who came to trial in November 1997 in Boston for the murder of baby Matthew Eappen, who would not stop crying. She shook the child to stop its tears. The Massachusetts jury found her guilty of second-degree murder; however, the judge overturned the original life sentence and sentenced her to less than a year. Whatever the legal considerations, it is clear some people cannot tolerate the frustration of not being able to satisfy a child's incessant tears. Commentators and modern scholars who write about tears find ways of satisfying the need to end the tears. In a moving portrait, discussed below, the Talmud tells us that a broken heart expressed in unbounded tears brought about the destruction of the Temple, while the broken heart of Jeremiah resulted in tears that continue to flow.

That little woman who flung open the gates of God's habitation on the Sabbath haunts me because I do not know what happened to her pain as a result of her lamentation. Unheeded tears confuse us. Beverly Moon has nothing to say about tears that go unanswered. David Stern presents a midrash comparing God's rejection of Israel to a father who repeatedly tried to placate his crying son by lifting him higher and higher.[8] The son needed pampering and his father responded. When the son spat at his father and sullied him the father cast him away. That is the end of the midrash. Stern notes that weeping children unfailingly garner affection and concern. But Stern cannot accept the rejection as final. He adds his own supposition as part of the midrashist's intent: sooner or later the child Israel will cry again and God will lift up His people, taking them in his arms once more. I am tempted to agree with Stern's ending, as I am tempted to imagine that the scene of the distraught woman in the synagogue also had a happy ending.

Both stories, however, end too abruptly. We need to look at more stories, stories in which Israel ignores God's tears. In many cases, the editors of the stories juxtapose them with stories that have happier endings so as to conclude on a positive note. In fact, Jewish practice has long demanded of those who mention sorrow to end on a positive note. Preachers of sermons end with a message of comfort, and public readers of biblical books that end on a negative note repeat verses from earlier in the text that have a redemptive motif; closure is a psychological and ritual requisite, and the absence of it gnaws at us.

Exile: How Early Rabbis Pictured the Rift between Ritual Mourners and Private Mourners

Our little old lady finds her counterparts in much earlier mythic images and stories told by rabbis over the last two thousand years.[9] The ancient editors of these stories allowed the stories to stand in tension and in unity with each other. According to the Book of Jeremiah, when the Temple was to be

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destroyed, God called upon professional lamenters to ready themselves. These women used ritual techniques to provoke tears as proxy criers to stimulate the tears of the people in public mourning rituals. "Take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may drip down tears [*horid dim'ah*][10] . . . teach your daughters wailing" (Jer. 9:17–19). In Jeremiah, God himself has begun to cry.[11] But this crying is the cry of protest against the crimes of Israel that have necessitated his harsh destruction of the nation. Israel's deceit and idolatry lead God to make Jerusalem into heaps. And for these crimes God himself takes to wailing (Jer. 9:10). Later, it is the matriarch Rachel who intercedes with tears, weeping for her children who have gone into exile. In Jeremiah 31:14–17, God says that Rachel's voice is heard in Ramah, bitterly weeping for her children in exile.

Rabbis reflected on these verses and drew extraordinary scenarios to express their own ambiguities about public, ritual mourning and personal, private crying. The center of the storm is performed in *Petichta Eicha Rabbati*, unit 24, a collection of midrashic themes concerning the Book of Lamentations. The themes of private and public, of unprovoked and of ritual crying are taken up as the stories mix together in a symphony of alternate views—seeing it first one way and then another and then a third until all the dimensions give us depth.

> *And in that day did the Lord, the God of Hosts, call to weeping and to lamentation, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth!* (Is. 22:12). When the Holy One, blessed be he, sought to destroy the Temple, he said: "As long as I am in it, the nations of the world cannot touch it." . . . Then he began to cry and say: "Woe is me!" . . . Then the angel Metatron[12] came and prostrated himself on his face and said: "Master of the Universe, I will do the crying but you must not cry." He replied that if you do not leave me cry here I have a place that you cannot enter and I will cry there. "But if you will not hear it, My soul shall weep in secret chambers for the pride." (Jer. 13:17)

In the above piece we find that God rejects the vicarious crying of professional weepers, even that of his "stand-in" angel.[13] God's tears bring some kind of closure; surely he will not ignore his own pleas. But intertwined with this is the idea of frustration, since God, too, has nowhere to turn for consolation. That very passage runs into another passage looked at from the opposite angle.

> When God beheld the Temple in ruins he said to Jeremiah, . . . "My son, go and call upon Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Moses who are skilled in crying. . . ." They, for one reason or another, did not understand the purpose for it and Jeremiah was too embarrassed to tell them the reason. So Moses went to the angels and there discovered that the Temple was destroyed and Israel had been exiled and he rent his clothing and wailed until his voice reached the Patriarchs. They too rent their clothes and began to wail and placing their hands on their heads cried until their voices reached to the gates of the Temple. . . . *And in that day did*

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the Lord, the God of Hosts, call to weeping and to lamentation, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth! (Is. 22:12)

The unit ends with Mother Rachel receiving the consoling promise that at the end, her children will be restored to their borders. In this story the mourning and intercessions of the Patriarchs, Moses, and Rachel succeed in interceding. So we have a dialectic, a dialogue between public and private modes of crying. At the end, there is a message of consolation brought about by the hand of a skilled editor.

The tension between professional ritual and heartfelt, extemporaneous tears is heightened in another midrash cited in *Targum Sheni* to the Book of Esther. Here Jeremiah's private mourning is praised. I abridge the large passage at the end of chapter 2 of *Targum Sheni*.[14]

> When death and destruction overwhelmed the Jews as the Temple was destroyed Jeremiah accompanied the Jews to Babylonia. As they passed by the gravesites of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Jeremiah implored them shouting and crying: "Our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Arise from your graves and behold your children, Israel, going into captivity and exile." God told him to leave them alone (cites Jer. 16:5: *Enter not into the house of wailing, neither go to lament or bemoan them; for I have taken away my peace from this people*.) He went to the graves of the Matriarchs and beseeched them: faithful mothers Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, "Arise from your graves and behold your sons and daughters, the people of Israel, whom you raised in the true faith, going into captivity and exile." God said the voice from Ramah has already been heard (cites Jer. 31:15: *A voice has been heard in Ramah, the wail of very bitter weeping,—Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are not*.) And so Jeremiah beseeched the prophets Moses and Samuel. This also was discouraged (cites Jer. 15:1: *Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, my soul [would] not [turn] toward this people. Send [them] out of my sight, and let them go away*.) He went to the grave of mourners and beseeched them; again to no avail. (cites Jer. 16:5: *Enter not into the house of wailing, neither go to lament or bemoan them*.) Finally Jeremiah himself mourned and wailed and cried over the house of Israel that had gone into captivity and exile. . . . Jeremiah was crying and moaning the whole way and there fell off from his eyes (*nathru* = Hebrew *nashru*) two tears which became two fountains[15] that are there until this day.[16]

This midrash stands alone but perhaps is meant to be read with other passages in mind. One is tempted to find in it some message of consolation. Nature, the world, mourns Israel's exile, too. Redemption shall surely come soon—but maybe not. The above *midrashim* apparently stand in tension and profound dialogue with each other. In the first, God insists that he must cry; in the second, he beseeches Jeremiah to wake up his beloved dead to cry for their children; in the third, Jeremiah is left to cry on his own. The tensions are not

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meant to be alternates but rather creative views of one phenomenon from a variety of vantage points. Thus the editors have combined some of the stories to float on top of each other with little or no pause between them. So great is Jeremiah's personal act of crying that his first two tears become enshrined in water-producing fountains that spring eternally. That is, they have become public and ritual; they will be enshrined, instantiated, "available." His tears will be constantly flowing in the exile for the people of Israel, and while Jeremiah has long been deceased his tears continue to mourn for the exiles "until this day."

The poignant theme of the passage is framed in the motif of teaching Jeremiah to mourn by himself and ends with the motif of Jeremiah's own tears flowing eternally. The tension is resolved by a synthesis that transforms Jeremiah's crying into a never-ending flow. The above passages are to be read as an internal dialogue within a single thought frame. It is true that the passages are scattered in different compilations; yet the literature shows a unity in language and form that is too surprising and substantial to consider them as completely separate units. The point is to read them in unison since they are the blocks out of which the Jewish imagination is formed.

The theme of God crying, mentioned above, is pervasive in Jewish literature and needs to be explored a bit further. In a midrash quoted above we saw that God cries in a hidden, secret chamber, and this picture finds its place in the Babylonian Talmud, *Hagigah* 5b (and other places, too). It would seem that the Talmud would provide a secret chamber of God in Heaven that is reserved for his private tears. The verse at issue is Jeremiah 13:17.

> *But if you will not hear it, My soul shall weep in secret chambers for the pride.* (Jer. 13:17).

> Rabbi Samuel son of Inia said in the name of Rav: God has a place and its name is "Secret Chambers." What is the sense of "*for the pride*"? Rabbi Samuel son of Isaac said: For "their glory" that has been taken from them and given to the nations of the world. Rabbi Samuel son of Nahmani said: For the "glory of the Kingdom of Heaven." But does God weep? For behold R. Papa said: God does not weep, for it is said: *Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary!* (Ps. 96:6). There is no contradiction; the one verse refers to the inner chambers of the [heavenly palace], the other verse refers to the outer chambers.[17] But behold it is written: *And in that day did the Lord, the God of Hosts, call to weeping and to lamentation, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth!* (Is. 22:12).[18] The destruction of the Temple is different, for even the Angels of Peace wept [over it]; for it is said: *Behold for their altar they cried outside; the Angels of Peace wept bitterly.* (Is. 33:7). *And my eye shall drop tears and tears, and drip down tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive* (Jer. 13:17).

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> Rabbi Eleazar said: What is the sense of mentioning "tears" three times? One for the first Temple, and one for the second Temple, and one for Israel, who have become exiled from their place.

The upshot here is that the very idea of God crying as portrayed by Jeremiah is called into question. The Talmud justifies his tears by recourse to biblical verses that mention crying in inner, secret places and crying outside. Scripture seems to mention two types of crying: public and private, inside and outside. Midrash is more than exegesis and commentary. It is an art form to discuss ideas in deeply mythic proportions. God's crying must be taken seriously. Since the destruction of the Temple, humans and God have one thing in common: the ability to cry. God may cry in private, *but cry he does*.

These stories show us that the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, like the expulsion from Eden, can be expressed in laments. Laments can be seen as journeys of tears that find secret, inner channels of the interior life. These channels are hidden from all and become illuminated by tears that drip into the most interior recesses. As this happens, and a link of tears is forged between God and his people, God becomes more engaged with his creation. Both strive for a wholeness that eludes creation as we know it. As long as the Temple stood, God was a God who was separated from his creation, dwelling in heavens accessible mainly through Temple ceremony on earth and other formal provisions. After the destruction, through his tears, he is joined to his children. There is a new divine mystery.

Reflections on the Role of Tears in Jewish Thought

It is an anthropological truism that we build our worlds through externalizations and internalizations. Belief shapes experiences and experiences shape beliefs. Tears are both a product of experience and a frame of mind. At times, they come from the inside and show outside while at other times they are provoked from watching others grieve outside and affect us inside. They influence others; they express intangibles; they release tension. Tears are involuntary and immediate; they are response and stimulus at the same time. The mystery of crying is that through tears the outside world and the interior worlds merge deep inside the human spirit. That is why tears are the medium of a theology that must remain unspoken. To explain tears is to explain them away. But they can be portrayed in myth and story, and they are, in paradoxical and haunting ways.

Sometimes tears represent expressions of infinite religious yearnings and at other times, tokens of remorse and despair. The Jewish tear traditions often weave a fine tapestry around these poles. That tears function at once on different levels makes crying a potent religious ritual that totters on the abyss of chaos and disintegration and requires some type of boundaries. The tear is a

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transient, clear world that wobbles and can fall into oblivion. So the tradition fears crying as much as it commands it.

The result is that the tradition makes room for public tears and crying but limits them and regulates them. The public Jew may cry, must cry, but only in confines that keep weeping in boundaries. Public acts can be regulated—private ones, not so much. It is as if the tradition believes that tears not only serve important functions but also can be brought forth at will and turned off at will. But even when they cannot be so arbitrarily regulated and even when angels cry, nonetheless, God's demands for living according to his will transcend the tears. For a thousand years or more, up to the present, when a Jew dies, the mourner recites, "[May God's name be praised in] the world he has created according to his will."[19]

From the outset, laments were a way of expressing sorrow over sin and its consequences. Exile was understood to be the greatest ill of sin. And God's anguish was twofold: he had to uphold the consequences for Israel's betrayal of his commandments and he had to suffer Israel's humiliation at the hands of others who demanded Israel abandon their God. In the distinction made famous by Jonathan Z. Smith, the literature shows us the map, not the territory. The territory itself can lead to despair, lack of resolve, suicide. What cannot be encouraged is wallowing in self-pity, railing overly against God, self-hate.

Jewish mourning laws are meant to contain, not dispel, grief. Life must continue. Jewish law demands that a bereaved person not be mollified before the funeral. The *liminal* status of such a person is marked by exemptions from having to perform the positive injunctions of the Torah. In this way, the bereaved stands at the margin of life. But after the funeral there are limits to the intensity of public mourning: three days, a week, thirty days, a year. Each period is set with appropriate levels to decrease outward mourning. And the reverse holds in ritually mourning the destruction of the Temple: three weeks, nine days, one day. Each period is set with appropriate levels to increase outward mourning. For a personal loss one has to go through a process of diminished mourning while for the memory of a national loss one has to go through a process of expanded mourning. One's natural tendencies are at all times challenged: intensified when weak, softened when overbearing. What seem to be polar opposites are in fact analogous correspondences between the private loss and the national loss—not simple converses but complex conversations between prescribed reactions.

An historical overview of tears in Jewish literature suggests that different themes were favored in different times. Although we are primarily concerned in these pages with the role of tears in postbiblical Jewish literature,[20] we might note how various authors depicted tears in different historical periods. In the biblical period, tears signify sadness, mourning, and distress.[21] At times the mourning was private[22] and other times communal.[23] This usage is evident

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as well in postbiblical literature until the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 C.E.[24] After that, Talmudic sources (70–600 C.E.) reflect on more positive roles for tears and consider the possibility that there can be tears of joy as well.[25] Sometime during this period, tears gained cosmic dimensions and were pictured as having active historical effects. While the universal notion of pain and anguish was often noted and the suffering of national losses was commemorated, the rabbis conceived of a third kind of tear: a tear that was private and public, that merged and blended the private and the national. These were tears that at once were externally provoked but internally spontaneous.

By medieval and modern times, tears were considered to be agents to melt away psychic sludge in order to reach the hidden chambers of one's being. Even the divine psyche could be affected.[26] It remained for the mystical schools of Judaism to see the descent of cosmic tears into human history and to develop rituals known as *tikkun rachel* and *tikkun leah* to merge human and divine tears together.[27] One of our tasks is to focus on the ways that the rabbis understood the power of those tears that merged together the individual and the community. The literature expands the near invisible spaces between the oily upper tear and the watery lower tear, which touch and do not touch. The public, the private, and the divine tear can flow together as one. Although rationally polarized, these tears are experienced together in real life and in art. This is because in all their varied facets and all their many contexts, tears represent one thing and only one thing: a sense of deep love for the other, coupled with an all-pervasive sense of loss.

Uncontrolled Tears as a Source of Danger

The picture of the sorcerer's apprentice flooding his master's chambers with water due to his inept conjuring is the very picture of the danger that the rabbis saw in uncontrolled crying. If allowed to go beyond appropriate measures tears could destroy the world. Our initial foray into the rabbinic portrayal of weeping centered on Jeremiah and the status of the Jew as God's child in exile. The rabbinic understanding of Exile as an existential, cosmic, communal, and personal tragedy has held a firm place in the Jewish spirit throughout the ages. Jewish law enjoins practices of lamenting the destruction of the First and Second Temples and marks certain days for fasting and lamenting as a result of the deep impact of the devastation of Judea on the Jewish psyche.[28] These days and practices are set aside not as expressions of extreme grief but as attempts to focus suffering over many ages and places into fixed times and so draw boundaries around expressions of grief.[29] Jewish law is quite severe in its demand to limit tears of personal mourning as well.

As we saw above, in our excerpt from *Petichta Eicha Rabbati,* God mourns, too. He mourns the "tough love" that has forced him to subject Israel to the

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punishment of exile amid the nations of the world. In *Berakhot* 59a we find that *"When God remembers his children living in distress among the Gentiles, he drops tears (morid dimaʿot) into the great sea, their sound is heard from one end of the earth to the other and they produce tremors."* Jews from the first century onward used the phrase "children who live among the Gentiles" to mean Jews in the Diaspora who are prone to abandon God's laws and covenant.[30] God laments the state of exile because exile is supposed to remind Israel of their sins and instead it has made them more inclined to sin.[31] The theology here is far from crass and needlessly anthropomorphic. It is instead far-reaching and profound. After the destruction of the Temple, God experiences desolation as the world undergoes ontological changes of seismic proportions owing to his tears. God's love of Israel shines through his tears.[32] The rabbis find nothing more powerful than the immensity of these tears and note their chaotic potential: the vibrations can lead to earthquakes and seismic tremors. God's tears, though controlled and but two in number, can wreak havoc.

Tears are dangerous when they exceed their boundaries. Human tears can be instruments of love, but they can provoke jealousy as well. In the following midrashic passage, Jeremiah attempts to placate God by showing how Israel mourns her sins and losses. However, God has seen Israel's tears in her unfaithful cleaving to foreign gods. Tears that overstep their proper boundaries are no longer tears of love but are instead dangerous and harmful. Tears for foreign gods ruin the tears of Israel's appropriate laments. Tears beyond boundaries are no longer tears of love or loss but tears that threaten all social and religious structures.

Midrash Zuta Lamentations (ed. Buber) para. 1 states:

> Jeremiah said to God, "Master of the Universe! Shall the city in which your name and glory abide and to which the multitudes of its people come on the three festivals, 'sit solitary?'" (Lam. 1:1). God said to Jeremiah, "Jeremiah, how long are you going to take their side? Take my side. See how Israel is 'like a prostitute'" (Is. 1:21). *Jeremiah said, "You shall verily cry in the night"* (Lam. 1:2). *God responded, "But the women there are crying to Tammuz"* (Ezekiel 8:14). Jeremiah responded, "Judah has been exiled for its affliction and great servitude" (Lam. 1:3). God responded, "She has revealed her nakedness" (Ezek. 23:18). Jeremiah said, "The ways of Zion are ways of mourning" (Lam. 1:4). And God responded, "You sat [in prostitution] for them on the highways" (Jer. 3:2). Jeremiah said, "Her enemies become captains [over her]" (Lam. 1:5). And God responded, "And you taught them to be captains" (Jer. 13:21). And so the conversation continued. . . . [That is, everything Jeremiah said in defence of Israel, God answered to condemn Israel.][33]

Here we note that crying over sin and exile is meritorious. However, God answers, "they also cry for evil purposes—over the god Tammuz." Thus crying

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is more than an outward act—the inward intent is crucial in determining whether these are divinely religious tears or anti-God tears.

Causing another to cry, privately, with bitter tears can lead to public, national disaster. B. Gittin 58a relates:

> There is a story about a man who desired the wife of his master. He was a carpenter's apprentice. Once his master needed to borrow some money. He said to him, "Send your wife to me and I'll lend her the money." He sent his wife to him. She stayed with him three days. He [the master] then hastened to his [the apprentice's] house, and he said to him, "Where is my wife whom I sent to you?" He said to him, "I sent her away immediately. But I have heard that there were kids having fun with her along the way." He said to him, "What should I do?" He said to him, "If you really want to hear my advice, divorce her." He said to him, "Her marriage settlement is exorbitant." He said to him, "I'll lend it to you and you'll give her the marriage settlement." So he proceeded to divorce her. The other one went and married her. When the time came to pay the debt he had no funds to pay him. He [the student] said to him [the master], "Come and work off your debt." And they [the woman and the apprentice] would sit and eat and drink, and he would stand and pour their drinks. And tears fell off (*noshroth*) from his eyes and fell into their cups. And at that time the decree to destroy Jerusalem was sealed.

The story tells of unspeakable betrayals causing such great pain that tears fell into both cups (the two temples, destroyed in 586 B.C.E. and in 70 C.E.); it thus encapsulates the total lack of fidelity that is paradigmatic of Israel's lack of fidelity to God. Jewish tradition maintains that the Jerusalem temples were built where Abraham's tears "fell off." The temples were destroyed in like fashion by tears "falling off." Also, Jeremiah's personal tears "fell off" and will preserve the Jews in Exile and eventually lead to return. Perhaps that is why "tears fell off" is the expression used in that story, too. Another, more common expression ("dripping down") occurs in a tragic story about tears, a single uncontrolled tear.

The rabbis of the Talmud were capable of highly poetic scenes when it came to discussing tears, with all their inherent ambiguities and nuances. In the following story the rabbis investigate the potent power of a tear that drops and probe its meaning. *B. Ketubot* 62b relates that it was the custom for men to spend years away from their wives in study. Yet, they would periodically return home for special occasions. Rabbi Rehumi was accustomed to returning home every year on the day before Yom Kippur and then one day,

> Rabbi Rehumi studied Torah with Rabba in Mahoza. He was accustomed to go to his wife (= to his home) every Yom Kippur, on the day before. One such day, he got involved in his study. His wife was watching for him. "Now he is coming! Now he is coming!" He did not come. Her mind weakened (with worry). She dripped

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down a tear from her eye (*aḥit dimʿatha,* the Aramaic equivalent of *horid dimʿah*).[34] He was sitting on the roof. It weakened from under him and he "dropped dead."[35]

This story interests us because of its structure. The rabbi is perched on the roof absent-mindedly, his wife waiting for him. When her mind collapses with worry, the roof collapses. When a tear drips from her eye, her husband falls to his death. Her mind is connected to the roof, her tear to her husband. The one becomes the other. The word for wife and house (*bayith*) are the same and thus the concepts themselves interchange. He is atop the house of study while his wife waits for his arrival. While Jeremiah's tears coalesce into eternal springs, her tears embody her husband's death. She waits anxiously for his arrival while he sits oblivious to her anxiety in his study. The critique is obvious. There is no merit in study when it is time to be home. What attracts our attention here is that the woman's tear signifies her husband, just as her emotional state signifies the roof upon which he is studying. When her emotions weaken, the roof weakens. The art of the storyteller leads us to consider the power of her tear. In this case, it proves dangerous. I do not think we should see here some divine punishment, nor some malicious act on the wife's part. Rather, the story highlights the problematic role of tears and the danger lurking behind what they can effect or become.

The falling of the tear from the eye, separating from our bodies, is like a death experience. I think that is what the story intends to teach us. The experience of anxious tears can be a kind of death experience. The story paints the woman's tear in this image. Whether or not the narrator intends us to think that her husband in fact died, we do not know. Perhaps he does. What is beyond doubt is that the wife's experience, expressed by a single tear, lies at the heart of the story.

Tears as Love and Sacrifice

Above in *Targum Sheni to Esther* we noted that the midrashist used a special term, *nathru* (= Hebrew *nashru*), for Jeremiah's tears falling and becoming fountains. That same word has curious connections to literary themes concerning the Temple. Stories using this word straddle the line of private/public because while the act of grief is intensely personal the repercussions are public and national.

The motif of tears falling off eyes in rabbinic literature refers to stories concerning the Temple. When the rabbis talk about the biblical scene in which Abraham is about to sacrifice his son Isaac, they relate the importance of the site where the Temple was to be built. They variously see tears falling off (*noshroth*) from the heavenly angels to Abraham's knife (*Gen. Rabbah* 56:7), or into Isaac's eyes (*Gen. Rabbah* 65:10),[36] from Abraham eyes (*noshroth*)

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reverberating from father to son to woodpile to knife.[37] In spite of the tremendous emotion and outpouring of sadness, Abraham's faith overcomes the pathos of the moment and he reaches for the knife to slay Isaac as God has commanded him. "Tears that break off" signify tears of constructive power because they are tears of both Abraham's love for Isaac and his love for God. The tensions in these unbearable tears are overcome by Abraham's faith. These tears are responsible for building the Temple where Abraham and the angels cried.

But such tears also destroy temples (Jewish stories often telescope both destructions), as we saw above in our discussion of *Gittin* 58a. A most troublesome scene is painted by the rabbis who ponder how Israelite men, themselves returning from exile, could banish their wives and return to their idolatrous ways. As we leave the wailing of Jeremiah and its impact on Jewish thinking throughout the ages, we now focus on tears of the return from exile. These stories concern Nehemiah's return with the exiles. In Malachi 2 we find mention of the returnees from the Exile and their great sins, which is unpacked later by *Genesis Rabbah* 18:7, with special attention to the verses in italics:

> Mal. 2:11: "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah profaned the holiness of the Lord whom he loved, and has married the daughter of a strange god."
>
> Mal. 2:12: "The Lord will cut off the man that does this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offers an offering unto the Lord of hosts."
>
> Mal. 2:13: "*And this have you done a second time, even making the altar of the Lord a cover of tears, with weeping, and with crying out, he shall not regard the offering any more, or receive [it] with good will at your hand.*"
>
> Mal. 2:14: "*Yet you say, Why is this? Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously: yet she is your companion, and the wife of your covenant.*"
>
> Mal. 2:15: "*And did not he make one?*[38]

The rabbinic tradition is quick to pick up the motif and insinuate that Israel has not yet learned the lesson taught by Jeremiah. The Second Temple was just being rebuilt and its first offering consisted of tears—tears of unhappy women signifying the treachery of their husbands and of the Israelite men against God. Hence *Genesis Rabbah* 18:7 (*Yalkut Shimoni,* Malachi 589) states:

> Rabbi Hanan said: When Israel came back from the exile, the faces of the wives of the Jews were darkened by the sun. They left them and went to marry foreign women. Then the Israelite women encircled the altar and cried [. . . a second time after Shitim (reading Mal. 2:13 and Num. 25:1 in concert)].

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"Making the altar of the Lord a cover of tears, with weeping and with sighing etc." (Mal. 2:13).

God said to the men, "how can I ever look at your own tears and sighs when you have stolen and dealt treacherously and drained their beauty from them and sent them away [I cannot turn towards your offerings]?"

Straying after foreign women and straying after foreign gods are linked concepts. Not only is one a metaphor for the other, but the one actually leads to the other. The commentators and editors of the midrashic volumes containing this tradition have examined the variants and tried to make sense of the difficulties in the original texts. The above translation seeks to incorporate both the scholarly explanations and the wording of the original texts. In this tradition and further traditions surrounding the Book of Malachi it is said that the altar itself rejects the offerings of the Israelites, and even their tears, because they have abused their wives by deserting them. The Exile could not end when marriages had gone wrong. Here we contemplate *b. Sanhedrin* 22a, and its parallel, *b. Gittin* 90b.

For anyone who divorces his first wife even the altar drips down tears (*morid dimʿah*) for him. So Scripture states, "And this have you done a second time,[39] even making the altar of the Lord a cover of tears, with weeping, and with crying out . . ." (Mal. 2:13) and continues, "Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously: yet, she is your companion, and the wife of your covenant." (Mal. 2:14)

Another text invites comparison between tears and the altar. Here tears replace the altar and its subterranean caverns. The entire altar and its caverns were some kind of edifice akin to the human tear duct system—allowing libations to flow down and out of the body. To be more precise, the human body is an embodiment of the Temple's altar. Temple and body merge in the sacrifice of tears. *B. Eruvin* 19a states:

Rabbi Joshua the son of Levi explained the verse "The Passers through the Valley of Crying, those who make it (*y-ShYT-wh*)[40] a well-spring" (Ps. 84:6). *The passers* refers to those people who trespass the will of the Almighty. The *Valley* refers to those who are destined for Hell. The "*Crying*" refers to those who cry and drip down tears (*morid dimʿah*) like the *wellsprings* of the *ShYTyn-channels*.

The eleventh-century commentator Rashi wrote: *"Like the well-spring of ShYT-YN-channels*. There was an opening on the altar into which there dripped all the wine libations from the basins that were poured on the altar during the whole year." Rashi refers us to another Talmudic passage that describes how the wine dripped through *ShYTYN* passages in the altar and these passages lead to deep channels that carried the wine out of the Temple precincts. This Talmudic statement praises those who repent and their offer-

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ing is not wine but tears. Even if there is no Temple, tears are consecrated and equal to libations that used to be poured upon the altar in Jerusalem. The apex of this thinking is that tears have now replaced the destroyed altar. Scripture's word choices (*ShYT*) seem to indicate the equivalence.

While tears signal exile and destruction, they have come to replace precisely that for which they mourn. The substitution of the sacrificial system by tears is a very important theme. Many traditions see prayer as the substitution for sacrifice.[41] But the idea of tears acting as sacrifice is poignant and fitting. Its strongest statement occurs in Talmudic passages *b. Baba Metzia* 59a and *b. Berakhot* 32b:

> Rabbi Eleazar said since the day that the temple was destroyed the gates of prayer have been sealed as it is said, "Even when I cry and shout, he shuts out my prayer" (Lam. 3:8). However, even though the gates of prayer are sealed, the gates of tears are not sealed as it is said, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; you are not silent at my tears." (Ps. 39:12–13)

We are pushed to wonder if Rabbi Eleazar meant to tell us that the gates of prayer were shut after the destruction of the First Temple and stayed closed until the present day or if they reopened when the Second Temple was used and closed again when it was destroyed. This puzzlement gives us pause in connection with a modern-day decisor of Jewish law who was asked if it was proper to pray with tears and crying on Rosh Hashannah, the day of penitence.[42] He answered that when the exiles returned from Babylonia they were told to celebrate Rosh Hashannah in joy and gladness.[43] So crying was forbidden. We may now wonder why the arbiter failed to take into account that the sound of the biblical mandatory *shofar* notes of the ram's horn blown in the synagogue on this day were consciously modeled by the Talmudic rabbis upon weeping noises.[44] He also ignored the possibility that the Talmudic rabbis might have considered the gates of prayer to have been opened for the returnees since the altar had been rebuilt. Thus, crying was unnecessary for them to be heard but for us the gates of prayer are shut since the Temple was destroyed once again. The arbiter could have found grounds to recommend crying on that day—but he did not. He must have thought that on Rosh Hashannah symbolic tears are necessary because he felt Jews need to cry as a community. Real ones are forbidden, perhaps because they are powerful and uncontrolled. They short-circuit the official power structures and could introduce outward chaos into the tight structures of public prayer.[45] Public crying is mandated for the ninth day of Av, and no other day, to commemorate the fall of the Temple. Otherwise, crying is best saved for private petitions, times of inwardness, special fast days, and eulogies. Structuring the *shofar* sounds to emulate crying is controllable. There are laws governing how the horn is sounded and when. There remains some controversy whether the *shofar* should be blown in the private parts of prayer, although everyone agrees it

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must be sounded in the public recitations. In sum, the ambivalent attitudes of Jewish tradition toward the power of tears, attractive and repulsive as they may be, stem from the very power of Exile itself. In many ways negative, Exile has encouraged Jews to adhere to a tradition that would otherwise surely have fallen away long ago. And it is this tradition itself that values and fears crying at once.

The World through a Tear Drop

In kabbalistic literature of the late thirteenth century we find mythic portrayals of spiritual ideals that act as a key to decipher the mystical forces at work in the world. In this literature, *Shekhinah* represents a divine manifestation of the ideal of *Malkhut* (Kingdom) as a facet of God while *Knesset Yisrael* represents a kindred facet of this ideal as a facet of the People of Israel. The two are linked so that Israel below represents God's force above. *Kudsha brikh hu* represents a still higher manifestation of ideals. Kabbalah seeks to find ways in which all these spiritual forces can be united and made manifest in the Godhead above and in Israel below. Tears are an important binding agent. A most powerful presentation of this religiously charged coercive, if not magical, role of laments is found in Zohar *Hadash* (*Balak* 55c):[46]

> At the time when *Knesset Yisrael* heard this [the exile of Israel from the Godhead], she raised her voice and 18,000 worlds shook and *Kudsha brikh hu* with her: "a voice was heard on high wailing and crying bitterly, Rachel crying for her children" (Jer. 31:14) and *Kudsha brikh hu* too—"And the Lord, God of hosts called on that day for crying and for wailing" (Is. 22:12). Who has ever seen such desolation in all the heavens! Who has ever seen such commotion and wailing! The result was that all the hosts of heaven thought that all the worlds had been destroyed! And *Kudsha brich hu* said to *Knesset Yisrael*: My only daughter[47] shall be their shield and as a sojourner with our children. She said to him: Master of the Universe, it can not be that after you have raised them and cared for them and nurtured them that you can watch the enemy devour them and abandon us there. And thus *Kudsha brikh hu* said to her to arise and save Israel and bring them from exile: As it is said, "Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your toils shall be rewarded, says the Lord; and they shall come back again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for your future, says the Lord, and your children shall come back again to their own border" (Jer. 31:14). . . . And she went out. When she went out *Kudsha brikh hu* began to lament and say, "How is the gold become dim! [the most pure gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary poured out at the top of all the streets! The Children of Zion, so precious, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen

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pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!] (Lam. 4:1ff.) and afterwards he recited that alphabetically structured chapter of lament by himself to her. Finally, he bound his beloveds with that lament and the decrees [for destruction and deliverance] were sealed.

The idea of "binding" can refer to a quasi-magical process (like uttering incantations) by which what is said (or cried) will surely come to pass. Divine weeping is the mechanism that accomplishes this task. Reciting dirges with alphabetic acrostics has talismanic properties to restore the exiled (*Shekhinah* and Jews) to their proper borders. The mystery of a weeping God and a weeping Israel are deepened by their link in the face of a weeping Rachel.[48]

As we draw the curtain on our discussion, we need to consider once again our small, aged heroine who defied the decorum of the synagogue and the propriety of the Sabbath. We locate her prototype in modern Jewish literature and Yiddish film. Here we find mothers and fathers crying over their illness, poverty, desertion from the faith, neglect of the elderly, and a host of other serious problems parents and grandparents faced. But there is also another motif in these accounts—tears of piety. Consider the last line of Agnon's story, "Tears," which describes a ritual meat slaughterer: "Yisroelki, before he whetted his knife, would dampen the stone with tears."[49] Most moving of all are the stories and poems of Hayyim Nachman Bialik (1873–1934) in which motherly tears sometimes form a submotif. Bialik relates how he would watch his mother pray and cry when she kneaded dough. The image of his sensation of literally eating his mother's tears, her prayers for his spiritual accomplishments, is unforgettable. Young students today are taught the poem he wrote about his mother's Sabbath candles and her single tear at having spent miraculously found money on them rather than on some food. Her anguish at shedding the tear reveals a tension that introduces us to the major theme inherent in Jewish portrayals of pious tears—the propriety of shedding tears for personal needs when issues of religious decorum might raise questions about such tears. I wonder if our heroine faced rebuke from her friends and relatives for her courage. I wonder if God smiled on her as he did on Bialik's mother when she dripped a tear of anguish that extinguished a Sabbath candle. Was hers a tear of remorse or a tear of selfishness? Did our heroine wonder about her actions as well? She must have. God answered Bialik's mother's prayer. Here is how Bialik ends the poem, "My Mother, may she rest in peace," embodying the ambiguity of his mother's tear:

Over the empty table
her Shabbos shawl covering her head
she blesses the holy Shabbos.

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And in that sacred moment
Bitterness

While the blessing dripped
from off her mouth
a single hungry tear
one candle snuffed.

And she cried to the Above
"Shall the Shabbos be
blinded of half her light
for my sin of broken faith!"

Oh sorrowful pity
the heavenly chambers
never shook with such fiery sighs
from but human cries.

When the sacred glory
for God's most righteous
in creation hid
burst in open light
from God's own kiss
upon that pious woman.

May her faith
guard us and Israel
now and forever more.[50]

We recall the tears of Abraham, which rebounded from father to son to wood to knife. Abraham's were tears of love and pity that proved his deep faith. He sacrificed everything to obey God's will. Like Abraham's tear that dripped upon the burning altar, Bialik's mother's tears dripped upon the burning Shabbos candle, showing the extent of her sacrifice, the actual sacrifice of her family's food: a tear of love and loss, a tear highlighting faith. Just as he did for Abraham's tear, God accepted, even cherished, her tear. The tear as it fell gave absolute, perfect and certain meaning to the ritual act of the lighting, transforming it into an act of personal self-sacrifice even as it extinguished the flame.

Can we say that God received the tears of the little old woman who breached heaven on the Sabbath, sacrificing her composure and shattering ritual protocol, with any less love?[51]

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Notes

1. Rabbi Nahum Rabinovich, Dean of Yeshivat Ma'aleh Adumim, Israel, and past principal of Jew's College, London.

2. See Gary L. Ebersole, "The Function of Ritual Weeping Revisited: Affective Expression and Moral Discourse," *History of Religions* 39:3 (2000): 211–46.

3. See Isaiah 25:8 and its reflection in Revelation 7:7.

4. See Beverly Moon, "Tears," *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. M. Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 14:360–61. Her bibliography is extensive.

5. Jewish law limits mourning, as this essay demonstrates. For a powerful example of its tales in this regard, see note 8 below.

6. As Abraham Samuel Benjamin Wolf Sofer (*Sefer Ketav Sofer: Al Hamishah Humshe Torah* [Brooklyn, NY: M. Paskes, 1998], 2:300ff.) had claimed.

7. *B. Shabbat* 105b.

8. See David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 106–08, and my "Review of Stern's *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature*," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press for South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, 1995), 7:33–42. See http://listserv.lehigh.edu/lists/ioudaios-review/ir_index2.html#2.011).

9. The tragedy of exile follows a long trajectory in Jewish sources. First, God's original human creations were exiled from the Garden of Eden. Then, the Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian forces in 586 B.C.E. Around 540 B.C.E., Cyrus concluded his successful campaign against the Babylonian Empire by sending the Jews back to Judea. They stayed there for well over half a millennium, although the dates became truncated in Jewish memory. Catastrophe struck again in the form of a new destruction and exile in 70 C.E. by Titus and his Roman armies. The richly suggestive language of the biblical Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations serve as preludes to establish models for mourning states of exile in postbiblical rabbinic literature. It is in the Book of Jeremiah that the association of weeping and exile receives its first substantial amplification. For our purposes it is noteworthy that God forbade his intercession for the sinning nation (Jer. 7:16, 9:14, 14:11). Later tradition was to wonder if perhaps Jeremiah was supposed to find other intercessors or to simply cry and wail without any prayer. By the end of his writings he is without hope for the lost son of Rachel to return from the desert. Above all, he continues to picture God's love for Judah, who has been faithless. Ultimately, God fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:23) and will be able to restore the lost tribes to their home. Rabbinic literature reflects on sources concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., while in reality it speaks to the condition of Jews in the aftermath of the second destruction in 70 C.E.

10. It was Jeremiah (e.g., Jer. 9:15–18) who introduced the language of dripping down tears—*horid dim'ah*. Only the Babylonian Talmud and its dependent sources continue to use the term.

11. Cf. K. M. O'Connor, "The Tears of God and Divine Character in Jeremiah 2–9," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann,* ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 172–85.

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12. In the late midrash of the *Ten Martyrs of Rome* (ch. 28), the Angel of the Presence, Metatron, warns that if three cries are heard the world will revert to a state of primordial chaos like that disorder before the Creation.

13. See further in this essay for discussions of whether God really does cry. Is the allusion to be taken seriously or just as extreme rhetoric?

14. Compare the translation offered in B. Grossfeld, *The Aramaic Bible Vol. 18: The Two Targums of Esther* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 120.

15. See end of Jeremiah 8 and beginning of ch. 9: "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eye a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" The Targum combines the Aramaic word for tears, DM'YN, with the word "fountainlike," D-M'YN. The Targum midrashist is obviously referring to Jeremiah's lament and tells us that the rhetorical expression in Jeremiah in fact became physical reality.

16. They are truly still running throughout the Babylonian Talmud.

17. Jeremiah's picture of divine wailing presents commentators with the best evidence that divine crying as well as human crying typified by the term "drip down tears" (*horid dimʿah*), has an internal, personal dimension to it. Contemporary rabbinic commentators in their eulogies have developed a sophisticated hermeneutic to see deep meaning in the language used to describe crying. Concentrating on the words used by Jeremiah, *horid dimʿah*, they find the idea that tears drip down outwardly while inwardly they descend into the depths of the soul. In their descent, they reveal the wellsprings of pain and disorder of internal displacement, which they try to assuage. In this way they explain the Talmudic dictum (*b. Shabbat* 105b) that God collects and stores away the very droplets of those who drip down tears for the death of a worthy person. The greatness of this act lies in these tears' penetrating untapped depths of appreciation that what has been displaced in the world effects a personal loss and personal displacement. According to some commentators, these tears have the ability to resurrect the lamenter himself. See Chaim Braun, *She'arim Metzuyanim ba-Halakha* (Brooklyn: Mekhon She'arim Metzuyanim ba-Halakha, 1996), 1:500. He refers us to Aryeh Tsevi Fromer, *She'elot uTeshuwot Eretz Tsevi* (Kiryat Shemuel, 1988–1989), vol. 2, sermon 7 (a eulogy), which says, "Dripping down tears refers to their descent into the depths of the person crying. Even if outwardly he appears repulsive, everyone has an inner innocence somewhere. The tear can descend and penetrate the lowest chambers of the body. Hence, Tears of Purity form when one contemplates his most inward being."

18. In *Petichta Eicha Rabbati* 20:1, the angels question God about heaven being joyful and God responds that Israel's distress is his own (like a mother who suffers birth pangs with her daughter), hence he must wail. The passage is discussed by Peter Kuhn along with all passages where God weeps according to the Talmud and Midrash. See Peter Kuhn, *Gottes Trauer und Klage in der Rabbinischen Ueberlieferung (Talmud und Midrasch)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 156.

19. See Leon Wieseltier, *Kaddish* (New York: Knopf, 1998), for an examination of this motif.

20. A study of tears in the Jewish tradition is something like a study of language in the tradition. So varied and changing, so wispy and ephemeral, so particular and immediate, their images defy ready explanation. For who can say that tears really have different meanings in different periods of history? All that can be said is that the literature prefers certain images at different times. And it is the literature that is historically

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conditioned, not necessarily the society. Jewish literature is the work of artists and thinkers, not of the common folk. What we study here is the legacy of this literary tradition.

21. "He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him" (Ps. 126:6).

22. Genesis 23:2.

23. Deuteronomy 34:8.

24. See for instance, *Tobit* 3:11, 5:17–18, 7:7–8, 10:4–6, and *Susanna* 1:31–35.

25. See Babylonian Talmud *Menahot* 18a, where one cries (*zalgu einav dima'ot, his eyes poured out tears*) for joy at recovering a lost tradition.

26. See Yael Gronner's thesis, "Rachel pleure sur les enfants d'Israël," http://www.chez.com/jec2/deayael.htm.

27. See the artistic rendition by Lynn Gottlieb, "Tikkun Hatzot, Night Mending, A Ceremony," *Shma* 9 (September 1979): 176.

28. See for instance, H. E. Goldin, *The Code of Jewish Law (Kitzur Shulhan Arukh)* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1961), ch. 126, specifying how every joyous occasion, every Jewish house, every Jewish wedding ceremony and meal, and every scene of entertainment are subject to appropriate symbols of mourning and destruction.

29. See H. Y. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), for a discussion of telescoping history into a unique set of days that act as paradigms for all of history.

30. See Acts 21:21 and *b. Shabbat* 88b–89a.

31. A slightly abridged version of Genesis Rabba 19:9 claims that God's lament over exile began with Adam and Eve and the first sin. "Hosea 6:7 states: And they like Adam transgressed the covenant. The outcasts are just like First Adam. 'I brought him into the Garden of Eden [cites Gen. 2:15] and commanded him [cites Gen. 2:16] and he transgressed my commandment (cites Gen. 3:11) so I judged him to be sent away [cites Gen. 3:23] and to be expelled from the garden [cites Gen. 3:24]. And I lamented for him [Gen. 3:9 says AYKhA].' So too in the case of Adam's descendants, 'I brought them into the Land of Israel [cites Jer. 2:7], I commanded them (cites Ex. 27:20), they violated my commandment [cites Dan. 9:11], I judged them to be sent away [cites Jer. 15:1], and to be expelled [cites Hos. 9:15]. And I lamented for them [Lam. 1:1 says AYKhA].'"

32. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843–1926) is reputed to have compared this love to motherly love that knows precisely where her child hurts. Love forms a bond merging mother and child, and the mother feels the pain exactly where the child feels it.

33. Midrash Zuta on Lamentations, para. 1. The homily is found in S. Buber, *Midrash Zuta'al Rut, Ekhah ve-Kohelet* (Vilna: Rom Press, 1925), 51.

34. This story is often explained by a saying in *b. Baba Metzia* 59a, to the effect that a man should always be careful not to unsettle his wife's feelings. Because her crying may be unconstrained, punishment for his insensitivity may quickly ensue. However, this story is much too complex to reduce to this simple dictum.

35. *Nah nafshei* in Aramaic is a common term for death. However here it seems to have its literal sense of "dropping to rest" just as "her mind weakening" is a common term for anxiety but here seems to have also the literal sense of "weakening." The point is that what happens to him physically mirrors what she experiences emotionally.

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36. In *Genesis Rabba* 56:8 Abraham's tears fall into Isaac's eyes, and here *morid dim'a* is used.

37. See J. D. Eisenstein, *Otsar Midrashim* (New York: J. D. Eisenstein, 1915), 146.

38. The rabbis understand "one" to mean a covenant exists between a husband and his first wife based on Genesis 2:24. They are to be one flesh and he is to cleave to her.

39. The rabbis see here a reference to Numbers 25:1, which was the first time the Israelite men betrayed their wives for foreign women.

40. The word means "make" but the letters also could be taken to mean "channels" beneath the Temple that were made at the beginning of Creation (*berai-ShYT*).

41. See Hosea 14:3 for early attestation of this theme.

42. See Ovadiah Yosef, *She'elot u-teshuvot Yehaveh Da'at* (Jerusalem, 1976), vol. 2, s. 69.

43. Nehemiah 8:9.

44. See b. *Rosh haShannah* 33b.

45. In effect, J. Heinemann (*Ha-Tefillah bi-Tekufat ha-Tannaim ve-ha-Amoraim*, 4th rev. ed. [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984], 21) argues that the rabbis considered prayer without real and manifest tears to be completely ineffective but B. Bokser ("The Wall Separating God and Israel," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 73 [1983]: 355–57) maintains that they meant earnest prayer is equivalent to tears. In balance, we note that *b. Berakhot* 8a claims that God does not despise the public prayer of a congregation.

46. Likely written in Spain ca. 1300.

47. I.e., Rachel.

48. Cf. Eitan Fishbane, "Tears of Disclosure; the Role of Weeping in Zoharic Narrative," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 11:1 (2002): 25–47. Also see Elliot Wolfson, "Weeping, Death, and Spiritual Ascent in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism," *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. J. Collins and M. Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 207–47.

49. The story appears in the collection of S. Y. Agnon stories, *A Book That Was Lost and Other Stories by S. Y. Agnon*, ed. Alan Mintz (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 211.

50. Freely adapted from H. N. Bialik, *Kol Shirei H. N. Bialik* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1965), 234–35.

51. I am grateful to Professor Susan Sered for sharing with me her views of specific passages as carefully as if the project were her own. Professor Kimberley C. Patton helped me find the proper nuance for some undeveloped thoughts and improved the flow of the language throughout the chapter. I express my profound thanks to these two scholars for their important suggestions, which have helped shape the present work.

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"Pray with Tears and Your Request Will Find a Hearing": On the Iconology of the Magdalene's Tears

Diane Apostolos-Cappadona

> Tears, especially the large pearl-shaped ones dripping slowly from the eyes, signified that Mary Magdalene had been granted the *donum lacrimarum,* "the gift of tears," as espoused by the church fathers and the medieval mystics. Shed in repentance, the Magdalene's tears symbolized her self-knowledge and recognition of her finitude and guilt. Her tears were the external expression of the spiritual action of the purification of the soul. Therefore, silent penitential tears—not the physical contortions of sobbing or hysteria—became a visual attribute of the Magdalene [see figure 7].
>
> —Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *In Search of Mary Magdalene*

Giving voice to the enigma as well as the power of tears, Senator Robert Byrd lamented, "But, today I weep for my country."[1] This appeal to the dignity of tears was his expression of mourning for the loss of national purpose. On the brink of tears throughout his impassioned speech, Byrd spoke carefully in the public sphere and reserved his weeping for the privacy of personal space. By both word and deed, he personified what might be identified as the Augustinian tradition of tears.[2] Yet, the reality of this appeal to the dignity of tears was more subtle and the fact of the multivalent nature of tears more affective than even Augustine could have conceived. Tears are powerful while softening, intimate while public, compassionate while egocentric, empathetic while sentimental, and liquid while dry. Since the Enlightenment, tears have characterized cultural attitudes toward, if not definitions of, gender and class. Crying is deemed a primal response that characterizes a child's reaction to pain, despair, or frustration. Men don't cry unless they are effeminate romantics like Young Werther, while the female descendants of traditional mourners are identified as the socially appropriate weepers.

Although a natural and universal expression of fundamental humanness, tears are the one form of human effluvia that has "escaped" academic study and religious condemnation. Lamentology has garnered scholarly and theological

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Figure 7. Rogier van der Weyden (Flemish, 1399/1400–1464), detail of *Mary Magdalene* from *The Descent from the Cross*, ca. 1443. Wood, 220 × 262 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Photo Credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

attention in relation to the religious rites for the dead. Lachrymology, however, is an unknown quantity. The anthropologist Mary Douglas has studied the ritual, thereby religious, connotations of bodily secretions such as menstrual blood, perspiration, sacrificial blood, and semen.[3] She concluded that while they are fundamentally a human effluvial liquid, tears have not been formally proclaimed either sacred or taboo. Ironically, we find that the human actions related to tears—most significantly crying and weeping—were carefully delineated in the first Christian millennium. However, we have "erased" those cultural and religious distinctions and replaced them with engendered attitudes toward tears, so that "men don't cry," while women weep.

Tom Lutz has written the cultural history of tears. After extensive interdisciplinary study of the physicality, reality, and interpretation of the phenomenon of tears in Western culture, he advises his readers, "Our best understanding of

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tears comes not from the medical and psychological sciences but from the innumerable poetic, fictional, dramatic, and cinematic representations of the human proclivity to weep."[4] I will expand Lutz's comment to include the visual arts among his evidence for the cultural perception of tears.[5] Curiously, the dimensions of the human most suspect since the eighteenth century—sensitivities, sensibilities, religion, and the aesthetic—attest to and provide primary source materials for our understanding of the meaning and value of tears.

With the Enlightenment, tears became an encoded and performative act. Tears were removed by social convention, by engendered prejudice, and by the public distancing from religion and its ensuant rituals and ceremonies, from what might have been designated otherwise as a *para*-language by medieval Christians. Thus, tears are distinguished as a mysterious yet meaningful "language" that transcends words and gestures. A primal, if not primary, form of communication, tears express feelings both joyful and sad that are beyond traditional language. Our interpretive as well as our communicative skills are critical here, as the exteriority of tears connotes one message to the viewers of the tearful individual while the interiority denotes a different message to the person engaged in the act of shedding tears. Therefore a hermeneutic of tears becomes necessary, as distinctive messages are sent when one views another person's tears and when one sheds one's own tears. What may prove to be most significant is that this visible arousal of fluid from the human eye accompanies an internal feeling or emotion to which the viewer of another's tears responds with empathy, sympathy, embarrassment, helplessness, or disdain. The reality of tears for the weeper is a transcending experience, as her attention is shifted away from the intellect to the fused external and internal reality of her body while the multiplicity of emotions, feelings, and ideas is embodied within the metaphor of tears; most significantly, that is, within the *visual* metaphor of tears.

Contemporary scholars have recognized the category of "the gaze" for interpreting the role of the arts, the concept of visual culture, and the redefinition of gender. Not simply a protracted or intensified mode of looking, the conceptual basis for "*the* Gaze" presumes that there is a right and a wrong way to look: cultured, cultivated, and/or engendered. The lens through which we look and come to know what we have looked at conforms to cultural definitions accepted by the society of which we are members. Looking in this manner is not the process of *seeing* that advocates impartiality and truth. *Seeing* extends the traditional boundaries of looking as it is more than vision and the visual. The act of *seeing* is grounded in the etymology of *aesthetic* from its Greek root signifying the ability to perceive, to come to know, through the senses. The experience of *seeing* coordinates the human imagination, sensitivities, and intuition with the intellect and reason in an integrating encounter without preconditions, conformity, or prejudice. *Seeing* is as fundamental and gender-neutral a human activity as is shedding tears, although the latter has been profoundly culturally gender-inscribed.

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The cultural, social, and religious characteristics, and engendered attitudes relating to tears and "the gaze," are encapsulated in the recent discussions of expanding female roles in the cinema. *Time* movie reviewer Roger Corliss writes,

> [M]en's films are about triumphing over huge obstacles; women's films are about choosing to live (or die) with them. A hero does things; a heroine feels things. Men act, women talk. Men get fixed up, women go up in flames. Men exact a righteous revenge; women explore subtleties and ambiguities—their adventure is an internal journey. Movie men live in the boyhood realm of fables, fairy tales; movie women are grown-ups who confront the real, messy world.[6]

The issue here becomes the reality that the female is the agent of the emotions, she "thinks" with her body, and she communicates through her body. This is a critical interpretive turn we come to know not simply as a psychological turn inward but as the visualization of that turn through the postures and gesticulations accorded to the female figure, especially in the arts. For the early twentieth-century psychologist Louis Danz, this is the retrieval of the fundamental human hapticity that was diminished, if not lost, in the evolution of human consciousness and Western civilization.[7] Among the pantheon of Christian saints, it was Mary Magdalene who came to embody the ability or sense of haptic communication in the arts from dance to painting to sculpture. Her retrieval of this form of communication was not limited simply to gestural or body language but included facial expressions and effluvia, such as tears.

As tears well up in the human eye, and this fluid begins to flow from the tear ducts beyond the boundaries of the eye down onto the cheeks and chin of an individual, a phenomenological shift occurs as this visible emotional arousal presages an inward turn from the mind to the body, from the exterior community to the interior individual. The nature of tears is predicated as much upon the emotion—joy, sorrow, or fear—expressed or signified as upon the difference between weeping and crying. There are distinctive bodily postures and motions that characterize weeping and crying.[8]

"To weep" connotes the otherwise passive condition described as that of still silence or calmness in which the individual weeper softly and slowly releases the lachrymal effluvia from her eyes. Weeping denotes a self-transcending emotion characterized by a spiritual or internal emotional catharsis. The weeper is configured as sitting quietly with a composed balance of silent tears and measured breaths, so that an aura of stillness prevails: the sounds of silence. The position of the weeper's head may differentiate the salvific nature of her tears from the dignified stature of her erect head to the remorseful sorrow of her drooping head.

"Crying," on the other hand, garners the active involvement of the entire body to signify the total breakdown or letting go of all societal and engendered modes of behavior. Tears stream down the cheeks as this lachrymal effluvium clogs the crier's nose and mouth. Her breathing becomes rapid as she gasps for breath; her mouth agape, her hands clenched in exaggerated gestures. Sounds

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of distress—sobs, wails, shrieks—emanate from her mouth and, perhaps, are exacerbated by the rise of fluid—from thickening saliva to salty tears—in her mouth. The otherwise natural and unconscious activity of swallowing diminishes in tandem with the elevation of fluid and sounds. The crier's head may be tilted forward or to the side, or thrown back as her clenched fists reach upward to soften the excretion of lachrymal fluids or to gesture her emotional distress. Her body is wracked with tension, tremors, and the muscular contractions associated with states of fear, stress, loss, or despair. The almost acrobatic contortions of the crier's body parallel the reality of her tears.

Toward a Christian Theology of Tears

The shortest sentence in the Bible, famously, is "Jesus wept."
—Lutz, *Crying*

In his analysis of the relationship between *Pictures and Tears*, art historian James Elkins has noted that "[w]hen Christianity took hold, weeping became commonplace."[9] The scriptural tradition of tears that vacillated between effluvial expressions of sorrow, remorse, and pleasure in the Hebrew Scriptures was transformed in the Christian Scriptures into the symbol and sign of a person's integrity and honesty. Exemplary tears of entreaty are shed in the Christian Scriptures by Peter (Matt. 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:62) and the woman identified as Mary of Magdala (Luke 7:36–38). That which will become an elaborate system of Christian tears begins with the *gratia lacrimarum* in early Christianity and has an identifiable scriptural foundation.[10] This "grace of tears" or "gift of tears" develops as both a tribute to and a gift from God in the spirituality and texts of the Desert Fathers and matures in the fourth-century monastic tradition as exemplified by Antony Abbot, who affirmed that tears were an "official" form of worship. This early Christian monastic theology of the *gratia lacrimarum* is confirmed in the Rule of St. Benedict in which it is pronounced that to be pure prayer, heartfelt prayer must be accompanied by tears.

The Patristic Fathers of the pivotal fourth century—perhaps the most crucial century in church history—enhanced the emerging doctrine of the *gratia lacrimarum*. Their greatest contribution to "Christian tears" is the transformation of the meaning of tears from an affective response to grace to one related to the human experience of finitude and loss. The Eastern Christian Fathers—John Chrysostom, Gregory Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea—were instrumental in this re-visioning of tears with the use of *penthos*, the Greek for "mourning," which becomes *compunctio*, the Latin for "pricking, stinging." This interchange of terms (and meaning) became commonplace in Christian discourse by the mid-fifth century. This was the linguistic and philosophic foundation for the "doctrine of compunction" that would be formulated and codified under Gregory the Great in the late sixth/early seventh century.

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Employed in this manner, the theological concept of compunction signifies the poignant uneasiness proceeding from a sense of guilt and/or remorse.

This early Christian theology of tears espoused by Tertullian, Athanasius, John Cassian, Ambrose, Augustine, and John Climacus advocated that tears were the visual yet silent symbol of the purification of the soul following the recognition of human finitude and guilt. What might be otherwise termed the pre-Gregorian, as in pre-sixth/seventh century, doctrine of Christian tears was established on a clear and conventional exegetical tradition related to the meaning and rites of mourning. Such an understanding is exemplified in Augustine's delineation between public and private tears related to the death of his mother, Monica, in his *Confessions*. Deeply influenced by Antony Abbot and Ambrose, Augustine's definition would be instrumental in the medieval Christian culture of tears.

Through his many teachings and writings on tears, Gregory formulated what might be otherwise identified as the "Gregorian doctrine of Christian tears" in his fusion of the fourth-century monastic tradition and the Eastern Christian concept of *penthos*.[11] Thereby in the late sixth/early seventh century, the fundamental categories of "Christian tears," especially in relation to Mary Magdalene, were formalized.[12] Pierre Adnés categorized these as: tears of penitence, or the purifying tears of fear and regret; tears of love, or grace; and tears of compassion or pity for the Passion of Christ and an eventual basis for medieval Christian mysticism.[13]

During the Middle Ages, Christian weeping was revived with the emergence of lay spirituality and devotions that advocated personal experience as the cornerstone of faith. That which might be identified as the post-Gregorian or ninth-century doctrine of Christian tears became well-established teaching, conventional practice, and ubiquitous. However, by the eleventh/twelfth century, an increasingly personalized reflection was intoned. Bernard of Clairvaux affirmed tears as the visible sign of the love of God; and the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) mandated that the Sacraments of Confession and Eucharist were observed at least once annually.[14] The medieval cult of the piety of tears was influenced by the *imitatio Christi* of Thomas à Kempis while Francis of Assisi was described as having been "blinded" not by advancing age or illness but by too many tears. Medieval female mystics recognized weeping as critical to their religious experience. They produced a "literature of visions" that incorporated personal involvement in which tears were the central element. The mystic Mechtild von Magdeburg voiced a metaphysical explanation of tears as the propagation of God's grace—for as the most human of liquids, tears were shed in repentance, born in recognition of sin, signified self-knowledge, and rejuvenated the soul through salvation.

The female saint who intimated most clearly and personally the Church's teaching on sin, remorse, penance, and redemption was Mary Magdalene. When he preached his thirty-third homily on 21 September 591 in the basil-

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ica Church of San Clemente, Gregory the Great seized upon the theme of the Gospel pericope of Luke 7:36–50 to pronounce a *new* definition of Mary Magdalene for Western Christianity. Perhaps unrecognizable to both her first-century companions and the early church, Gregory's mosaic of the three scriptural women—the anonymous female sinner, most often identified as an adulteress; Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus; and Mary of Magdala, formerly possessed by seven devils—became the standard in the minds and hearts of the Christian collective.[15] With the Gregorian identification of her as both sinner and saint, the Magdalene proffered salvific symmetry through her deeds, emotions, and tears. Her penitence came to garner spiritual significance, especially in the Middle Ages, as pious legends and traditions endorsed her continuing acts of penitence even into the desert, the wilderness, the city of Ephesus, and the forests of France.

Mary Magdalene understood and articulated her Christian metanoia with the elemental sign of her humanness—her body. Visual images as well as stories of her instructed by example: the drama of her conversion, the symbolic piety of her anointing Christ's feet, her laments over his sufferings, her profound wonder at his reappearance, and, throughout every moment, her tears. Her metamorphosis from the sinner to saint was evidenced visually by the artistic transformation—as witnessed in Rogier van der Weyden—of the once elegantly attired and coiffed beauty into a tearful and disheveled female figure contorted by anguished remorse. Then, again, theology fused with cultural attitudes so that Renaissance and Baroque artists, such as Titian, conflated her beauty with her penitential tears.

"But what," the art historian Erika Langmuir writes, "of the imagery of that most problematic female saint, Mary Magdalene?"[16] This imagery is a metaphor for the power of the gaze, for "the gaze," like the Magdalene, has an ambivalent nature.[17] Presentations of her as a beautiful but teary-eyed young woman in a state of partial or total nudity are disconcerting to the modern eye as spirituality, the female body, and tears inhabit separate realms in contemporary culture. Re-visioning the Magdalene and her tears through "the religious gaze" may bring us closer to the believed reality of earlier Christian understandings—that she was sign and symbol of the sacramentality of the body reborn through the redemptive love of Jesus as the Christ. Her tears and physicality transcend human limitations to flourish in the assemblage of the sacred and the secular personae who bear her name.

In this essay, then, my interest is to thread together this understanding of tears, the affective nature of the feminine, the Christian theology of the "gift of tears," and the sacramentality of the body through the iconography of Mary Magdalene as weeper. This singular penitential female saint has had a long and varied history in the Christian tradition as she journeyed from first witness to the Resurrection to the fallen woman. Her transformations have captured and encapsulated the Christian collective throughout the centuries.[18] The

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significance of her tears heightens her appeal, whether as sinner or as saint. The imagery of the weeping Magdalene became the exemplary vehicle for the salvific nature of Christian tears.

On the Iconology of the Magdalene's Tears

> The shadows in Plato's cave are symbols of man's loneliness; the paintings in the Lascaux caves are symbols of his magic powers.
> —Koestler, *The Act of Creation*

The journey from the realm of words about tears into the realm of the imagery of tears is not a simple move from the linguistic to the visual, from the reason to the heart. It is a journey fraught with the terror and the danger of the multivalent, the immediate, and the often contradictory. This is the territory of the visual modality, of the eye, of that part of the human body from which tears flow. The moment given over to the *seeing* of an image signifies a primary act of commitment to the aesthetic, to the dominion of intuition, to the *para*language of color, re-presentation, symbol, and the senses.

However, the experience of the aesthetic, especially the religious aesthetic, may prove to be jarring and confusing. The visual evidence may seem convincing yet contradictory. This is the initial experience when we look at the imagery of tears, especially the Magdalene's tears, for we are stunned by her beauty, awed by her stoic sorrow, and confused by the connection between the pleasure of her beauty and the pain of her despair. Yet it is exactly in this meeting of apparent opposites, what Mircea Eliade might have intended by his *coincidentia oppositorum*, that the primal energy or *dynamis* of the dignity of tears fuses with the sensuality of a smile. As viewers we are entranced, ensnared, enrapt before the paintings of the Magdalene's tear-stained face; and yet we are enthralled by the possibility of those tears while being horrified at what has provoked them. Painters as diverse as the fifteenth-century master Rogier van der Weyden and the twentieth-century genius Pablo Picasso each made a crucial artistic decision to depict the Magdalene shedding tears.

From its earliest theological references, the Christian "gift of tears" has been referenced in the scriptural and visual motifs of the weeping woman.[19] The female figure identified most often with tears was the *magna peccatrix* ("the great sinner")—Mary Magdalene—who shed penitential tears at her conversion, silent reflections, and throughout her solitude in the wilderness (or desert). However, she released copious tears as "the great mourner" at the foot of the cross, at the lamentation and anointing of Christ's body, and during the moments prior to the Resurrection. Although she is only one among several significant scriptural figures who would be adapted into Christian weepers, including David and Peter as penitential saints and Mary of Nazareth as *mater*

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Figure 8. Pablo Ruiz Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), *Weeping Woman*, 1937. Drawing. Oil washed and black ink on off-white wove paper, 40 cm. × 26.1 cm. Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Francis H. Burr Memorial Fund. Image © 2003 President and Fellows of Harvard College. Photo Credit: Photographic Services, Harvard University Art Museums. The works of Pablo Picasso © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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dolorosa, Mary Magdalene became *the* female weeper in the Christian religious imagination, the one whose bodily contortions and facial expressions symbolized the human conditions of anguish, fear, terror, regret, and sorrow as well as the salvation of "the gift of tears."

Although we find that from the thirteenth century, artists reveled in depictions of wailing Magdalenes at the foot of the cross, in the midst of the deposition, or in lamentation, the spiritual reality of her tears was not yet a visual reality. Neither the artistic nor the spiritual turn from a Magdalene who *cries* to the Magdalene who *weeps* had yet occurred. Rather, as Elkins so astutely advises in his analysis of the religious dimension of *Pictures and Tears,* the artist's, and perhaps the viewer's, personal knowledge of crying overrode the iconographic intent. Along this same line, Lutz observes,

> In these and scores of similar paintings, it is the dry-eyed women who seem most anguished and are focused on the dead body, while the crying women are in fact looking away or down. Crying allows us to turn away from the cause of our anguish and turn inward, away from the world and toward our own bodily sensations, our own feelings. Our feelings overwhelm the world, or at least our ability to process any new information from our world.[20]

However, with the advent of the "devotional picture" in tandem with lay devotions and medieval mysticism, artistic renderings of "Christian tears," especially those of the Gregorian Mary Magdalene, moved believers to their own tears through both observation and empathy. As the believer meditated on the visual imagery, she came to see the world through the eyes of one who is "in the picture"—she came to hear what they heard, feel what they felt, smell what they smelled, and experience their experiences as her own. Thereby, the Magdalene's tears would become the believer's own tears, and, by extension, the believer's tears would fuse with those of the Magdalene. So the spiritual reality of medieval devotional art was an aesthetic experience through which all the senses were utilized and integrated and by which the believer came to claim this reality as her own.

Similarly, Mathias Grünewald's agonized Magdalene from the *Crucifixion* and *Lamentation* panels from *The Isenheim Altarpiece* captured Picasso's attention between 1930 and 1932. The medieval German master's imagery not only influenced Picasso's visions of the Crucifixion and *Guernica*[21] but, for the twentieth-century Spaniard, the experiential moments of frenzied agony, shrieking, and tears became his own. As the medieval was a great "era of tears," so, too, were the 1930s, at least for expatriate artists and writers then living in Paris. More likely than not, the then contemporary artistic and philosophic fascination with the re-visioning of the self and the spiritual was prompted as much by Freudian psychology and *le primitif* as by the political and economic struggles. These were the days and this was the place in which Émile

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Cioran, Man Ray, and Picasso talked with each other and looked at one another's works.[22]

> Man Ray's famous photographs of stylized tears, sitting on his model's cheek like plastic pearls, spring from the same Parisian culture as Cioran's book and suggest something similar, highlighting and obscuring the relation between tears as art and tears as experience.[23]

The spiritual effectivity and the visual affectivity of tears, then, become the link between Rogier van der Weyden's fifteenth-century renderings of the *magna peccatrix* as the primary vehicle for the "theology of tears" and Pablo Picasso's twentieth-century presentation of her agony as symbolic of female hapticity.

Rogier van der Weyden and the Visual Origins of the Magdalene's Tears

> Dignity is preserved amidst a flow of tears.
> —Ancient inscription cited in Barasch, "The Crying Face"

Although not the originator of the iconography of tears, Rogier van der Weyden was the first to depict the Magdalene as weeper. In his study on the iconology of the crying face, the art historian Moshe Barasch attributed the interest in tears among fifteenth-century northern European artists to the importance of lay spirituality and devotions, most specifically the *Devotio Moderna,* which made personal experience the cornerstone of spirituality and sought religious experience *without* a surrender to the emotions.[24] Therefore, the emotional restraint of tears symbolized the purification of the soul, while the physical contortions of sobbing or wrenching signified the physical release of pain or sorrow.

Rogier van der Weyden was a theologically complex and iconographically original artist. A diversity of twentieth-century scholars who affirmed the importance of the iconography of the body in Christian art—Erwin Panofsky, Leo Steinberg, Ruth Mellinkoff, and Moshe Barasch—have agreed that Rogier van der Weyden was the "arch creator of archetypes."[25] Therefore, his own invention of this visual motif of the Magdalene weeping bears a relationship to the cultural and religious milieu of his world. These paintings, then, are singular inventions of an imagery of "holy tears" within the context of what the art historian Michael Baxandall has identified as "the period eye."[26] Rogier van der Weyden painted several images of Mary Magdalene and in each of those images he revised or expanded her iconography. In his *Entombment of Christ* (1460, Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze), he painted her frozen in a contorted posture of mute, helpless despair in empathetic parallels to the torso, arms, and head of the dead Jesus. In *The Magdalene Reading* (ca. 1445, National Gallery, London), he represented her for the first time in the silent

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solitude of an engaged female reader whose mind, body, and spirit were consumed by the text she read. In *The Descent from the Cross* (1446, Museo del Prado, Madrid), he depicted her unobtrusive sorrow tempered by lyrical sentiment when for the first time in Western art the Magdalene weeps. Rogier's Magdalene motifs were so formative that the magisterial scholar of iconography Erwin Panofsky noted, "Individual motifs, especially the Magdalene, were never forgotten and the impression made by the other figures could be eclipsed only by later inventions of Rogier himself."[27] Each new iconographic invention was carefully thought out by the artist and reflected his own spirituality as well as the social and cultural milieu in which he and his patrons lived. A study of the little data extant on his life reveals the direction of his sources.

A devout Catholic, Rogier was influenced deeply by contemporary mystical and devotional texts. His interpreters and biographers have documented his knowledge of St. Bridget's *Revelations,* Pseudo-Bonaventura's *Meditations on the Life of Christ,* Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi,* and Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi*. The artist participated in a Holy Year pilgrimage through Italy and had personal connections with the *Devotio Moderna*. As Panofsky notes, Rogier van der Weyden's "truly revolutionary motif" was that of the *Mater Dolorosa* embracing the cross, which had precedents in mystical texts.[28] Further, the Magdalene's role in these medieval devotional and mystical texts included her place as the penitential and therefore contemplative saint who meditated on the uniqueness of her undeserved salvation. Rogier van der Weyden's initial ground for this new motif was, then, both personal and religious.

Studies in northern European art history suggest two important factors for this study of the weeping Magdalene.[29] First is the central importance of individual Christian piety and devotionalism in the thematic presentations of fifteenth-century Flemish art. Second is the emergence of a series of motifs or types as a result of this piety and devotionalism, such as the crying face or use of actual tears, the *vesperbild* or image of Mary mourning her dead son, the Virgin embracing the cross, and the reading Magdalene. In at least three of these cases, Rogier van der Weyden can be identified as the creator of the motif. In fact, the art historian Max J. Friedlander states that "Rogier developed the devotional picture."[30] Although northern art is stereotyped as "cold" or "emotionless" in contrast to the more physically dynamic and passionate images of Italian art, one finds in the work of Rogier van der Weyden and his contemporaries an attempt to present emotion through careful innovation in gesture and pose of the human body in a style of painting that required the contemplation and meditation advocated by the *Devotio Moderna*.[31]

Barasch affirmed the significance of Leone Battista Alberti's proclamation that the painter of *istoria* must present "a clearly legible rendering of the passions his personages are supposed to experience."[32] Alberti recognized the difficulty for the painter who had to subordinate the shape and movement of figures to this task, noting that gestures and facial expression must be in full

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Figure 9. Rogier van der Weyden (Flemish, 1399/1400–1464), *The Descent from the Cross,* ca. 1443. Wood, 220 × 262 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Photo Credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

accord with the emotions being expressed without succumbing to such sentimental or physical histrionics that the painting (and the viewer) is overwhelmed by the internal dramatics. Versed in the spirituality of the *Devotio Moderna* and the Brotherhood of the Common Life, Rogier van der Weyden sought to project the salvific experience of penitential tears through a carefully balanced harmony of intellectual (read theological) and emotional connectors—and what better vehicle for this than the Magdalene?

Rogier confirmed the artistic convention of never contorting a saint's face as an icon of sanctity with emotional expressions in his initial depiction of the Magdalene as weeper (see fig. 7) in his masterful painting *The Descent from the Cross* (see fig. 9). Rather, his Magdalene weeps almost internally—signifying perhaps the purification of her soul—as the large pearl-shaped tears drip from her eyes and stream down her cheeks and nose. Thus, her tears and her activity of weeping are distinguished from those of the mourning woman, who follows the gestural convention of covering her eyes and face with a cloth to wipe away her tears. Ironically, however, careful inspection of Rogier's painting reveals that this crying woman's face is dry—a daring contrast to that of Mary Magdalene.

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These two women—the dry-faced mourner and the tear-stained Magdalene—are positioned almost as bookends, the former at the far lefthand side of the painting and the latter on the far right. However, careful observation of Rogier's composition reveals that the actual "bookends," if you will, are the Magdalene and John the Evangelist. The symbolic and theological implications were apparent to the artist's contemporary audience: the Evangelist designated both the people of the church and the male gender while the redeemed *magna peccatrix* signaled the mediation of the sacraments of the church and the female gender. Additionally, there is a total of four female figures present in this framework: the two dry-faced and otherwise anonymous women, ostensibly the "other Marys"; the collapsed but tear-stained Mary of Nazareth; and the Magdalene. The artist has carefully arranged his female groups: those closest spiritually and emotionally to Jesus—his mother and his female apostle—weep for him while the other women mourn him.

Further, the internal dynamics of this composition are extraordinary in both the rhythms of arcs and curves that unite the individual figurations and in the overarching theology. As Friedlander advises, "He [Rogier] feared rather than trusted in God; indeed, the cast of his mind was theological. Whatever the challenge before him, he always kept his eye on the whole of Christian doctrine."[33] Simultaneously, this is an artist who created iconographic motifs that affirm, if not visually explain, theology—either traditional or new interpretations of doctrines—as Otto von Simson ascertains in his reading of the *compassio* of Mary the Mother in this same painting.[34] As iconographically extraordinary as Rogier's *Descent from the Cross* may be, my current focus is the Magdalene and specifically her tears.

Therefore, consider first her placement within the overarching ovoid form reinforced by smaller intersecting circles, arcs, ovals, and triangles that correlate the three most significant personages: the swooned figure of Mary of Nazareth, the collapsed body of Jesus, and the contorted form of the Magdalene. Thus, the dead Jesus is encased by two weeping women and we note the visual connectors between the triangular formations of their arms and legs as Mary's *com-passio* is paralleled by the Magdalene's *em-pathos*. Their bodies and faces communicate more powerfully than words ever could.

The form-fitting nature of the pale green silk bodice and red brocade sleeves of the Magdalene's garment are counterbalanced by the sharp-edged folds of her ruffle-edged white headpiece and the copious drapery of her dark green silken skirt. All of these contrasting curves and angles move the viewer's eye upward and inward toward the Magdalene's tear-stained face. The tension exuded from the tightly interlaced fingers of her hands clasped in a gesture of prayer is highlighted by the path of her eye. Her sight line appears to be bifurcated first to her right in a parallel line above her bent right hand toward her white unguent jar, and then downward between her interlaced fingers through the path of her left hand and the extended open left hand of the neighboring

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male figure, who holds her unguent jar, toward the feet of Jesus: those same feet that the Gregorian Magdalene washed with her tears and anointed in anticipation of his death. The path of her silent tears follows this same sight line welling up from her eyes, dripping onto her cheeks, nose, and wedding ring, then onto Jesus' feet. Rogier garnered the viewer's attention with the Magdalene's tears as he compressed her narratives within salvation history.

In a wing from the *Braque Family Triptych* (1450, Louvre, Paris), however, Rogier's iconography of the Magdalene as weeper reaches its fullest expression as she is granted the *gratia lacrimarum* espoused by the church fathers and the medieval mystics—the external expression of the spiritual action of the purification of the soul. Thus, in his singular ability to express simultaneously emotional intensity and studied restraint, Rogier has visualized the Magdalene as a signifier of the spirituality of the *Devotio Moderna*.

The theological complexity of the *Braque Triptych* is predicated upon its internal dynamics, iconographic innovations, and liturgical references. Although Rogier positioned her on the side wing, this Mary Magdalene is nonetheless in the middle of the complex theological action. As in *The Descent from the Cross*, she is a "bookend" here with John the Baptist to emphasize that she was the first witness to the Resurrection as he was the first witness to the Messiah. Additionally, this John signified the sacrament of baptism while the Magdalene signified the sacraments of anointing (Chrism and Unction). Rogier emphasized the liturgical references by having her position her white unguent jar between her uncovered and ostensibly blessing right hand as she touched the lid. The base of her jar was supported by the Magdalene's extended but covered (as if in imitation of a sacramental cloth) left hand.

Further, the text painted across the top of the panel is taken from the readings for the Monday of Holy Week: "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard very costly and anointed the feet of Jesus."[35] Her lachrymose eyes and the elegantly dripping tears down her left cheek have an identifiable theological context: she is the anointer, chief mourner, and female disciple; and she has a cultural context, namely, her role in contemporary liturgical plays, devotional books, and lay spirituality.[36] Rogier depicts the silent dignity of her tears as a visualization of Christ's sacrifice for Christian salvation.

Enguerrand Quarton and the Magdalene as Weeper: The First Generation of the Motif

> Tears . . . are marks of devotion, not merely products of grief.
> —Ambrose of Milan

Within a generation of Rogier's tear-stained face on Mary Magdalene, the visual and theological motif of her weeping spread, as exemplified in Enguerrand Quarton's *Avignon Pieta* (ca. 1455: Musée du Louvre, Paris). In this painting

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she is positioned once again as "bookend" with John the Evangelist, as between them rests the dead body of the Crucified on his mother's lap. The arc uniting the Evangelist, the Mother, and the Magdalene acts almost as a "shelter," like the Church, protecting the body of Christ. The Evangelist raises his right hand in a gesture of blessing as his left hand supports Jesus' head. The Mother laments her loss as she prays over her son's twisted body. The copious drapery of their garments, especially those of the Mother and the Magdalene, elevates the emotional and internal dynamics among these three figures. The sharp angles of their hand gestures provide an internal framing and parallel the contorted bends in the dead body, which weighs down his mother's lap.

The posture of the Magdalene's upper body—head, neck, and torso—mimes the dramatic slope Rogier painted in *The Descent from the Cross*. In a bold move, Quarton removed the mantle from the weeper's head so that her copper-colored hair cascades down her left shoulder and back over her russet silk mantle. With this "unveiling," he paralleled her presentations in medieval liturgical dramas and Passion plays. Quarton referenced the Magdalene's fundamental attributes—hair and ointment jar—in conjunction with Rogier's new motif of her tears as visual connectors of her role as anointer and sign of Christian healing in medieval theology.[37]

Arranged in the gesture that Barasch identifies as a gestural symbol of crying, her right hand wipes away her tears with the billowing folds of the yellow silk lining of her mantle. She holds her now elaborately decorated white unguent jar with her left hand—awkwardly positioned as if the only support came from her extended fingers, not from her open palm. However, the linear formation configured between her left hand and Jesus' left hand creates a plane on which this special container appears to have just been passed from him to her. Additionally, the tears from her left eye create a path down her cheek across her nose and the excess lining material of her mantle onto the distorted fingers of Jesus' left hand over his loincloth, as if the tears are dripping into and about to be caught by his right hand—which is bent into the shape of a cup. Mary Magdalene's tears, then, are shed not simply in sorrow or remorse but are received as a liturgical or sacramental offering. She becomes then the vehicle for Quarton's visual endorsement of the Christian theology of tears.

As the motif of the penitent Magdalene weeping in the wilderness moved south, the emphasis shifted from Rogier van der Weyden's initial presentations of the innovative motif of the *Magdalene Reading* [in a room] to an image of extraordinary sensuality. Identified as either sacramental intentionality or the theological excuse for the presentation of the female nude, this sensuality was central to the late Renaissance and early Counter-Reformation ambiance evidenced by Titian's paintings of Mary Magdalene and her tears.

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Titian and the Magdalene: Beauty and Tears

. . . a woman wears her tears like jewelry.
—Lutz, *Crying*

As Rogier van Weyden created a series of fifteenth-century innovations in the Magdalene's iconography, the sixteenth-century Italian master known as Titian re-formed the classical *Venus pudica* into a new way of seeing the Christian female who epitomized sin and redemption simultaneously for Western Christianity.[38] For his re-visioning of Mary of Magdala as both beautiful sinner and penitential saint, Titian decided to breathe new life into the otherwise fossilized *pudica* pose with the symbol of Christian morality: her copious tears. His new "Magdalene motif" proved so popular that Titian painted several versions of this image, including *Saint Mary Magdalene* (ca. 1560, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg).

He presented his viewers with the depiction of a physically mature female who stands erect in a wilderness setting. Yet she vacillates between a state of nakedness and of modesty as her diaphanous white garment loosens, exposing her right shoulder and her ample cleavage. She gently grasps her silken slip and the colorful striped mantle with her left hand as her right hand reaches upwards toward her hair. Her long curled tresses flow dramatically down her shoulders and back, and continue to coil onto her torso highlighting her fulsome breasts. Titian's depiction of her extraordinarily prominent hair as it entwines her shoulders and upper torso creates the formation of a necklace or collar. Perhaps he wished to provide a visual connector to either the "Desert Mothers" or the reformed prostitute turned saint, Mary of Egypt, whose hair grew full and long in order to protect her naked body from the traumas of the desert (or wilderness).[39] Nonetheless, the coyness of the *pudica* pose—an attempt to cover her almost naked body results rather in a recognition of her feminine attributes as the posing of her arms accentuates her breasts, waist, and hips—provides a charming counterpoint to the Magdalene's tear-stained face and the ominous aura of the landscape setting of darkened sky, rough wilderness, and mountain cave. Her solitude and her sorrow fuse with the aura of this nature setting to proffer a time and a place appropriate for her tears: "Weeping[']s] . . . true character is manifested by the person who weeps alone—helpless in her surrender to an emotion which, by its nature, can find no other outlet, whether it is caused by the thunder of a church organ or the fall of a sparrow."[40]

The drama of the moment is frozen in time as Titian portrays the lachrymal irritations of swollen and reddened eyes, from which flow elegant, yet copious tears. The Magdalene's head is tilted slightly back so that her eyes look upward toward the heavens and thereby highlight the welling up of lachrymal effluvia

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in both of her eyes. The tears drip slowly down her cheeks toward the exquisite clear glass container to her right and the skull and book that rest to her left.[41] Visually connected by the linear plane on which they linger, the theological correlation between the vessel of anointing oils, the book of salvation, and the sign of human finitude are undeniable.

The ostensible unguent container that Titian paints proffers an interesting while significant series of visual and spiritual connectors. The unusual shape—that is, a small base that widens at the top only to narrow dramatically at the neck and to be closed with a stopper—is reminiscent of both a lachrymatory and a teardrop bottle. The former was a special class of narrow-necked vessels created for the rituals associated with mourning and burial in the classical Mediterranean world, including Palestine and the Levant. The tears of the deceased person's family and friends were collected and thus preserved in these lachrymatories, which were buried in the ancient tombs. The affinities between this traditional mourning practice with the Magdalene's role in the lamentation, anointing rites, and burial of Jesus were apparent to even the most casual of observers.

However, the visual correlation to the teardrop bottle is unique. It was a well-known Middle Eastern custom that a young warrior would provide his beloved with a "teardrop bottle" before leaving for battle. Again, this bottle was of a special form almost identical with that of the clear glass vessel in the Titian painting. During the warrior's absence, his heartbroken love was to collect the tears she wept for him into the gifted bottle, firmly securing the lachrymal evidence of her true affections with a stopper. Upon his return from the war, the lover would require that his beloved surrender the "teardrop bottle" so he could see if he had been misguided or fortunate in his affections. Once the stopper was removed, the truth would be known: an empty bottle would cause the disappointed young man to depart, while a bottle filled with tears resulted in vows of eternal faithfulness; the lachrymal evidence was the sign and symbol of true and everlasting love. Curiously, after the lovers' union, the teardrop bottle would be used no longer to collect tears but to preserve precious perfumes. The Magdalene's tears as visible and fluid expressions of love, sorrow, and joy merge with the precious anointing ointments and perfumes in Titian's visualization of the "teardrop bottle."

This Magdalene's tears, however, are in keeping with the contemporary reaffirmation of the "theology of tears" as a sign of contrition. As Titian would have been aware, the Fourteenth Session of the Council of Trent promulgated a document on the "Teaching concerning the most holy sacraments of penance and last anointing" on November 25, 1551. The spiritual affinities between this document and the Gregorian Magdalene are apparent, especially in the reference to the psalmist's "every night I flood my bed with tears," and thereto in the visual affinities of Titian's new vision of the Penitent Magdalene.[42]

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Caravaggio, Mary Magdalene, and Lachrymose Sacramentality

Offerings made with tears and submission are pleasing to God.
—Isaac of Nineveh

The bodily postures employed by the controversial Italian baroque master Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio for his renderings of Mary Magdalene were painterly metaphors for the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance as affirmed by the Council of Trent.[43] In his singular version of the *Penitent Magdalene* (ca. 1595, Galleria Doria Pamphili, Roma), she is crouched in the fetal position, visualizing the internalization of emotions, especially remorse and sorrow. Leaning toward her left shoulder, her lowered head droops downward and her chin tilts onto her collarbone in a pose empathetic to that of the crucified Christ. Her beautiful copper-colored hair flows down her back onto her left arm, highlighting both this visual connector to earlier Magdalenes like those of Quarton and Titian and a visual reference to her spiritual regeneration.

He painted her discarded jewelry—golden chains and bracelets, and pearl earrings and necklace—in the lower left corner of the canvas as if to ensure our recognition of this as the first symbolic step in the process of her conversion. Significantly, he included pearls among the Magdalene's jewels. The pearl was a classical Mediterranean symbol for Aphrodite, who was reputedly born of sea foam and carried to shore on an oyster shell. "As the 'tears of the oyster,' the pearl was a symbol of sorrow" and oftentimes the gift of pearls was identified as a gift of tears.[44] Given her popular conflation with the anonymous adulteress and her theological connection with the *gratia lacrimarum*, it may be an irony of history that the descriptive metaphor "pearl-shaped tears" is so often associated with Mary Magdalene. Caravaggio visually enhances these relationships by positioning her discarded pearls so close to the teardrop bottle and by the similarity in the shapes of the lachramatory and the baroque pearl on each of her drop earrings.

Next to her jewels, her clear glass jar, ostensibly containing perfumes and aromatic oils, references her role as "the anointer"—at Bethany, at the House of the Pharisee, and at the tomb. However as in the Titian, this unusually shaped jar connotes the lachrymatory that is identified as the teardrop bottle, and by highlighting its shape and legendary use emphasizes the significance of the Magdalene's tears, which in this instance are not simply preserved but "saved." The clear glass fabrication of the lachrymatory facilitates the viewer's recognition of its contents and their sacramental possibilities: the anointing oils of chrism and unction, and the salvific waters of baptism and the *gratia lacrimarum*.

Her elegant silk jacquard green garment and the silk jacquard russet mantle are complemented by the lace-edged and embroidered white silken blouse

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with its billowing sleeves. These beautiful and dramatic fabrics emphasize the formation of concentric and interconnected circles, and the flow of the drapery—folds, twists, and furls—the spiritual rebirth and human energies at work in the metamorphosis if not rebirth of her body and soul. Her clasped hands rest just at mid-thigh, accentuating her womb and creating a circular form with her huddled shoulders, which is visually echoed by the mantle that encircles her buttocks and knees. The flow of her cascading tresses caresses the upper half of her body and is mirrored by the swirling ribbon of her russet mantle. Her head and torso are thus encased and the viewer's attention is drawn as are her hands inward and upward toward her profile. Her eerily calm face is positioned on a plane diagonal to her lachrymatory as her sparse but elegant tears drip slowly from her half-closed eyes down her nose and right cheek as if to be captured by the glass lip. Caravaggio's *Penitent Magdalene* embodied the transformative moment of Christian metanoia affected by the *gratia lacrimarum*.

Picasso's Affirmation of the Anonymity of the Weeping Woman

> And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?
> —John 20:13

Throughout the history of Christianity, the Magdalene waxes and wanes but she never disappears from Christian devotionalism, spirituality, or art. Neither is she absent or ignored in the works of twentieth-century artists ranging from George Luks to Otto Beckmann, Rico Lebrun, and James Rosen. However, it was Pablo Picasso who recognized and emphasized her enduring power in human consciousness. He painted her in a variety of recognizable guises such as the great mourner at the foot of the cross in his *Crucifixion* (1930, Musée Picasso, Paris) and as the tear-stained shrieking woman in the midst of his *Guernica* (1937, Museo de Reina Sofia, Madrid). Nevertheless, it is through his multiple renderings of the *Weeping Woman* that he retrieves and re-visions the Christian motif of Mary Magdalene as the "holy weeper" into the visual vocabulary of modern culture.[45]

Picasso created some sixty versions—drawings, sketches, and paintings—of the *Weeping Woman* from January through November 1937.[46] The time and intensity given over to this theme both in this eleven-month period and its occasional retrieval until his death in 1973 signify the importance of the motif of the weeping woman for him, as an expression of both the feminine and the human condition. Reflecting on the making of art, Picasso claimed that "[t]he painter takes whatever it is and destroys it. At the same time he gives it another life. . . . [H]e must pierce through what the others see—to the reality of it."[47] The decisive, if not trauma-filled, year of 1937 was accentuated by the saturation bombing of the Basque village Guernica and his own appear-

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ance at the Paris World's Fair.[48] Picasso sought to "pierce through" the fundamental essence, if not the meaning, of suffering, which was then represented for him by the grief of the women of *Guernica* and by the lamentations of his companion, Dora Maar. "Dora, for me, was always a weeping woman. Always. Then one day I was able to paint her as a weeping woman."[49] He fused these public and private female vehicles of tears, as had Rogier van der Weyden almost four hundred years earlier, with the traditional Christian images of *mater dolorosa* and *magna peccatrix*, "taking up the most universal image of suffering . . . Mary Magdalene pouring forth tears for eternity."[50]

Two of Picasso's October 1937 versions of *The Weeping Woman* are helpful for this iconological analysis of the Magdalene's tears. He retained these two works for his private collection—a gesture that I have learned identifies the personal significance of a work to its creator. The hapticity of the female figuration of grief and anguish found in his October 17, 1937, painting (1937, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne) is highlighted by the dramatic tension of entangled geometric forms and the sharp contrasts of the tonalities found in his palette of neutral grays, acid greens, and pinkish purples. Her long flowing hair is a curvilinear study of the visual complexities available through the variegated hues of black, gray, and green. The dichotomy of the desire to believe and the despair of living in the modern age is denoted in the control of the firm hands clasping the handkerchief and the emotion of the elongated tears that wound her right cheek.

Picasso draws the viewer's attention to this woman's distraught and lachrymose eyes by means of the artistic convention of white. The human eye is drawn to the attentive clarity of direction afforded by the use of white as, for example, in the form-fitting tunic of Titian's Magdalene or the billowing sleeves on the blouse of Caravaggio's Magdalene. Picasso creates an upward movement from the lower right corner of this painting where the loose folds of her white handkerchief covering her two hands create a series of intersecting triangles causing the viewer's eye to travel across the distorted "mask" of her face with the white highlights on her chin and clenched teeth toward the "white" space between her eyes and the dramatic elongations of her dripping tears.

By contrast, his ink-and-wash study drawing of October 28, 1937 (see fig. 8) (1937, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge) is more formally intense and dramatic. However, the viewer's initial response is to the softer autumnal colorations of browns, chartreuse, and plum. Her two hands are immediately evident in the lower half of the painting, as her open right hand reaches upward perhaps in agony or a gesture of grief while her clenched left fist appears to be caught in a struggle with her fanglike teeth for possession of the white handkerchief. The drama of her upwardly tilted yet ever distorted Picassoesque mask of a face effects the almost audible visualization of her bitter wails and shrieks. The tensions of her emotions exacerbate her terror and torment as she seems simultaneously to gnaw, swallow, and

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vomit out the white handkerchief—one of Barasch's classic symbols for "the crying face." Her exaggerated elongated tears cut a chiseled path from her eyes down her right cheek to her throat and look to be destined for capture by her opened right hand. The drama of these tears is heightened by the triangular formations of the brown and black mantilla that covers her head.

As re-visioned by Picasso, the *Weeping Woman* is not simply the twentieth-century descendant of Rogier's medieval motifs of the Magdalene but also the visualization of the *cry* of inhumanity, terror, and fear in a world gone awry. She is a visual metaphor for public as well as personal agony—a succinct yet potent image of grief and guilt. Even in the art of the most influential painter of the twentieth century, Mary Magdalene and her tears signify the breadth of human experience from sorrow, grief, and mourning to joy and contentment to loneliness and angst.

Conclusion

[T]here are not many people who have the gift of tears.
—Athanasius

Tears are a mysterious and magical form of expressive bodily liquid. It is significant that they originate from the eye—the source of sight. The connection to the early Christian metaphor of Jesus Christ as the *illuminator,* the one who brings light (read "sight") to those who are blind in spirit and in the eye, to the modality of *seeing* and the source of tears is startling. This preliminary survey of the iconology of the Magdalene's tears has taken us from the earliest Christian understanding of tears to the sophisticated medieval devotions and theology of the *gratia lacrimarum* that generated the iconographic innovations of Rogier van der Weyden to the existential angst and despair of the 1930s and the art of Pablo Picasso.

As the inventor of the weeping Magdalene, Rogier integrated the visual tradition of what Barasch identified as "the crying face" with the theological milieu of the Middle Ages to create a vision of universalized grief and sorrow through the silent body language and lachrymal effluvia of this female mourner at the foot of the cross (figs. 7 and 8). He then affirmed the sacramental and liturgical significance of this offering of bodily liquid in his rendering of the solitude and the dignity of the tears dripping slowly down the Magdalene's face in the *Braque Triptych*. Enguerrand Quarton extends the motif of Mary Magdalene's tears and by his removal of her veiling—in these instances the elegant headpieces painted by Rogier—from her beautiful, long, flowing tresses the artist emphasizes both her scriptural and devotional past and her theological and devotional present.

Titian, on the other hand, reformulates the presentation and symbolism of a classical Mediterranean pose to reaffirm her place in the consciousness of the

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Christian collective—as the beautiful and repentant sinner who is redeemed by Jesus as the Christ. Throughout his canvas, the Italian master visually connects the cultural past of the Mediterranean with the theological present of Western Europe from the Magdalene's pose to the presence of the skull, book, and cave to her long flowing hair and her lachrymatory. Caravaggio emphasizes not simply the hapticity of the female body but highlights the connections between the "fallen woman," the repentant sinner, and Mary of Magdala through the visual connectors of her discarded jewels, clear glass lachrymatory, and improbable but realistic pose. What links the Caravaggio to the Titian and to Rogier's *Braque Triptych* is the power of the image of a woman who weeps silently in solitude—her tears are shed without an overt audience.

Picasso's fascination with the Magdalene and her tears resulted not simply in his magnificent interpretations of her within the boundaries of scriptural narratives and its variants, for example, the *Crucifixion* and *Guernica*. The drama and meaning of her agony and terror also found a magnificent home in his *Weeping Woman* series (fig. 9). He depicted her in solitude but vacillating between the excruciating sounds of silence and the overwhelming externalization of internal trauma. Her elongated tears, as if incised on her cheeks, wound her even more than the saturation bombing or the loss of husband, lover, father, brother, son.

The unspoken connection among the *gratia lacrimarum*, the Magdalene, and Christian art is Gregory the Great. In a series of late sixth- and early seventh-century refining—or perhaps re-visioning—pronouncements, this pope formulated the Magdalene mosaic, the Christian theology of tears, and the definition of Christian art that flowered in the devotionalism and spirituality of the Middle Ages. Once he identified her as both sinner and saint, the Magdalene's penitence and its visual symbol of her tears garnered spiritual significance.

It is my hope that this brief survey of the iconology of the Magdalene's tears has provided a "pause in the action," as the affectivity and effectivity of her lachrymal effluvia evoke that form of response only possible through the agency of the eye—the site of *seeing* and of tears. Ambiguity and complexity, enigma and solution, injury and balm, sinner and saint—Mary Magdalene, especially as weeper, embodies the extraordinariness and the commonality of human experience. She is the living mirror of the *gratia lacrimarum*, the grace, the gift, of tears.

Notes

The title of this essay has been adapted from the sixth chapter of Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayers*. I am happy to acknowledge my student, Daniel G. Callahan, who reminded me of the text in Evagrius Ponticus from which the title of this essay is taken.

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As with much of my writing, I wish to recognize the invaluable contribution of Joseph N. Tylenda, S.J., who read this text and commented on both my "reading" of a Christian theology of tears and any translations from Latin. I am grateful to Professor Kimberley C. Patton, who as coeditor of this volume invited my participation in this collection, encouraged my writing of this essay, and provided insightful comments in my search for understanding of the iconology of the Magdalene's tears.

1. Robert Byrd (D-West Virginia) from his speech, "The Arrogance of Power," delivered to the U.S. Senate on March 19, 2003 at 3:45 P.M. The full text of this speech is available on Senator Byrd's Web site at http://byrd.senate.gov.

2. See Tom Lutz, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 44–46.

3. For a preliminary discussion of both Douglas's statements relating to the religious distinctions between tears and other bodily secretions and her influence on Mark C. Taylor, see Lutz, *Crying,* 301–02.

4. Lutz, *Crying,* 12.

5. Although not central to this current discussion, I would include dance within the arts examined for the study of tears in Western cultural and religious history.

6. Roger Corliss, "Ladies' Night Out," *Time* 161:1 (February 10, 2003): 74.

7. Louis Danz, *Revolution and Picasso* (1941; reprint, London: Haskell House Publishing, 1974). (The title of the first edition was *Personal Revolution and Picasso*.)

8. This distinction is not "historical" but is, I believe, suggested strongly in the varied disciplinary traditions I interweave here, beginning with the linguistic query raised by Arthur Koestler in his discussion of the relationship between creativity and tears as well as Jeffrey Kottler's discussion of the psychological and physical aspects of arousal in a person who is crying. An appraisal of the historical images of the Magdalene read through the lens of Moshe Barasch's discussion of the iconography of the crying face affirms, I believe, this distinction between crying and weeping in Christian art and thought. See Arthur Koestler, "The Logic of the Moist Eye," in his *Act of Creation* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 271–301; Jeffrey A. Kottler, *The Language of Tears* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996); and Moshe Barasch, "The Crying Face," *Artibus et Historiae* 15 (1987): 21–36.

9. James Elkins, *Pictures and Tears* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 52.

10. For a brief survey of the history of the *gratia lacrimarum,* see Pierre Adnés, "Larmes," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesnes, 1976), 9:287–303. For a more detailed overview, see the early chapters in Sandra J. McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction in Medieval England: Holy Tears* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

11. For example, see any of the following Gregorian texts: *Moralia in Job; Homily of Ezekiel 1:3.16*; *Homilies on 1st Kings 1.2, 3.4–5, 4.18, 5.9*; *Regula Pastarales 30;* and *Dialogi 3.33–34*.

12. Editors' Note: The reader of the Christian history of tears will notice that two Latin phrases, *donum lacrimarum* and *gratia lacrimarum,* are both translated as "gift of tears." *Donum lacrimarum* is the more common; *gratia lacrimarum* represents an ecclesiastical doctrine of tears that is intimately bound up with the understanding of Mary Magdalene as the paradigmatic figure of repentance for sin. In his papal decree on

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penance and tears, Pope Gregory the Great was responsible for the substitution of *gratia* for *donum;* beyond "gift," *gratia* bears the etymological implications of "that which is freely given" and, even more important, the notion of "grace" and thus sanctity. Thus the tears of the Magdalene are holy tears, with universal and exemplary value for all Christians. Hence the author's choice throughout this essay of *gratia lacrimarum,* a phrase whose theological heritage has its roots in the penance of the weeping Western Magdalene.

13. Adnés, "Larmes," 297.

14. Norman P. Tanner, S.J., ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:225–72, see especially canon #21, 1:245.

15. See my essay, "On the Visual and the Vision: The Magdalene in Early Christian and Byzantine Art and Culture," in *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother,* ed. Deirdre Good (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2005).

16. Erika Langmuir, *Pocket Guides: Saints* (London: The National Gallery, 2001), 51.

17. The contemporary emphasis on "the gaze" advocates that there is a right *and* a wrong way to look, and perhaps, within the shadows, there are other possibilities waiting to emerge. "Right" and "wrong" are, however, culturally conditioned categories. Consider the Magdalene's image as a visual metaphor for promiscuity or misogyny when seen by "the male gaze."

18. For example, see my essays, "Images, Interpretations, and Traditions: A Study of the Magdalene," in *Interpreting Tradition: The Art of Theological Reflection,* ed. Jane Kopas (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 109–21; "On the Visual and the Vision"; "Saint and Sinner: Mary Magdalene in Art History," *US Catholic Magazine* 64:5 (April 2000): 17; and the entries in *In Search of Mary Magdalene*. Additionally, the reader should consult Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1994); and Katherine Ludwig Janssen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

19. Medieval Christianity delineated three categories of the "gift of holy tears": penitential tears that purified fear and regret; tears of love (or grace); and tears of compassion wept for Christ. Adnés, "Larmes," especially p. 297, as cited in Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, "Introduction: Cioran: The Temptation to Believe," in É. M. Cioran, *Tears and Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), ix.

20. Lutz, *Crying,* 23.

21. See my "Essence of Agony: Grünewald's Influence on Picasso," *Artibus et Historiae* 26 (1992): 31–48, for an explication of these aesthetic and visual correspondences.

22. The reader is reminded that Man Ray's photographs, *Tears,* are dated 1932–33; the first edition of Émile Cioran's *Tears and Saints* was dated 1937; and Picasso's drawings and sketches after the *Isenheim Altarpiece* are dated from 1930–32; his *Crucifixion,* 1930; and his works related to *Guernica,* 1937.

23. Lutz, *Crying,* 38.

24. Barasch, "The Crying Face," 21–36.

25. For example, see Moshe Barasch, *Imago Hominis* (Vienna: IRSA, 1990); Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting, Its Origins and Character,* 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); and Leo

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Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

26. In Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

27. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 2:257.

28. This reference, both Panofsky's and my own, is to Rogier van der Weyden, *The Crucifixion Triptych* (ca. 1445, Kunsthistoriches, Wien). For Panofsky's discussion, see his *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 1:267.

29. For example, see Craig Harbison, "Visions and Meditations in Early Flemish Painting," *Simiolus* 15 (1985): 87–118; Barbara G. Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece: Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984); Henk von Os, with Eugène Honée, Hans Nieuwdorp, and Bernhard Ridderbos, trans. Michael Hoyle, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300–1500* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Carol J. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); and Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Art* (Abo: Abo Akademie, 1965).

30. Max J. Friedlander, *Early Netherlandish Painting, Volume II: Rogier van der Weyden and the Master of Flemalle* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 22.

31. The transformation of Rogier van der Weyden's motif of *The Magdalene Reading* into the then "newer" motif of *The Penitent Magdalene* reading and weeping in the wilderness followed the contemporary artistic development that the French iconographer Louis Réau termed the Magdalene's "pendant"—St. Jerome who was represented both as a penitent in the wilderness and as a reader in the medieval sense of the term. St. Jerome was depicted with a naked torso to signify not his rebirth but the physicality of his penitence, for once this motif moved south the northern image of the male penitent who reads and visions his finitude *and* his salvation was transformed into one who dramatically and physically experienced his penitence by beating himself on his chest with a rock as he wept, sometimes copiously. For the preliminary discussion of the principle of "pendants" in Christian art especially in relation to Mary Magdalene, see Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1955–59), vol. 3, pt. 2, pp. 846–59; see p. 858 for discussion of the Magdalene and Jerome as "pendants." For a fuller analysis of the relationship between the iconology of the Magdalene reading to that of Jerome reading, see Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, "Picturing Devotion: Rogier's *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child*" in *Rogier van der Weyden's "Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child": Essays in Context,* ed. Carol Purtle (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 5–14; and Apostolos-Cappadona, *In Search of Mary Magdalene,* 54–59.

32. Leone Battista Alberti, *Treatise on Painting* (1435), as cited by Barasch, "The Crying Face," 21.

33. Friedlander, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 2:29.

34. Otto von Simson, "*Compassio* and *Co-Remptio* in Roger van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross,*" *Art Bulletin* 35.1 (1953): 9–16.

35. See the Roman Missal, 414. Note that one of the critical distinctions between Rogier's presentation of the Magdalene and the other four figures in the *Braque Triptych* is the verses painted above their heads. All the other verses—for John the Baptist, Mary the Mother, Jesus as the Christ, and John the Evangelist—are depicted in a curvi-

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linear pattern and appear to be coming from their mouths. There has been much speculation as to whether this proves that the Magdalene "wing" was not original to this group; however, the most recent scholar on Rogerian iconography, Dirk De Vos, proposes that this distinction is appropriate as these are words spoken about the Magdalene and not by her. To review this debate, see Dirk De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1999), 267; Barbara G. Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 117–28; Shirley Neilsen Blum, *Early Netherlandish Triptychs: A Study in Patronage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 29–36; and Blum, "Symbolic Invention in the Art of Rogier van der Weyden," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 46.3 (1977): 103–22.

36. For example, consider the emphasis on the "weeping Magdalene" in Bonaventura's *Meditationes,* where she weeps within the narratives of the Crucifixion, Lamentation, and Burial; see chapters LXXVIII and LXXXII.

37. My study of this painting in the Musée du Louvre in May 2003 affirmed that the only figure who sheds actual tears is Mary Magdalene. However, I want to note the intriguing reality that teardrop-shaped clear liquid drips from the side wound as well as from the forehead and visible hand and foot wounds of the dead Jesus. These astonishing "tears" are not comparable to the flow of clear or white bodily fluid from his side wound found in Byzantine icons and medieval Western images; nor can these be "sweat drops," as they emerge definitively from the wounds as well as his forehead. I acknowledge that I noticed these "tears" for the first time during my most recent study of this painting. I note their existence and my interest in pursuing the possibility that they may be an iconographic invention of Enguerrand Quarton.

38. Although our iconological and theological interpretations may differ, my visual analysis of Titian's *Penitent Magdalene* series benefited greatly from Rona Goffen's relating of the *Venus pudica* pose to that of this Magdalene; see her *Titian's Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

39. For a fuller discussion of the symbolism of the Magdalene's hair, see my essays in *In Search of Mary Magdalene,* 19–20.

40. Koestler, *The Act of Creation,* 282.

41. Ironically, Rogier van der Weyden was the first artist to depict the Magdalene reading.

42. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils,* II:705. The editor identifies this phrase as Psalm 6:7.

43. See further his figuration of the Magdalene in his *Entombment* (ca. 1602–3, Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze) and *Death of the Virgin* (ca. 1605–6, Musée du Louvre, Paris). His *Magdalene in Ecstasy* (1606, Raccolta privata, Roma) is a unique vision of the merging of *eros* with *agape* as it was understood in sixteenth-/seventeenth-century Roman Catholic theology and spirituality.

44. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *Dictionary of Christian Art* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 274.

45. For an in-depth discussion of the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Picasso's *Weeping Woman,* see my entry, "Pablo Picasso, *The Weeping Woman,*" in *Beyond Belief: Modern Art and the Religious Imagination,* ed. Rosemary Crumlin (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1998), 66–67. Further discussion of Picasso's retrieval of Magdalene imagery can be found in my essay, "The Essence of Agony."

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46. For an in-depth and critical study of this topos in Picasso's life and work, see Judi Freeman, *Picasso and the Weeping Women: The Years of Marie-Thérèse Walter and Dora Maar* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994).

47. As cited in André Malraux, *Picasso's Mask* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1976), 137.

48. The reader is reminded that Picasso was commissioned to paint a significant work for inclusion in the Spanish Pavilion of the Paris Exposition in January 1937; that the Basque village of Guernica underwent "saturation bombing" during April 26–28, 1937, and was occupied by Franco's troops on April 29, 1937; that news of this dreadful event reached Paris during the May Day protests and Picasso began the preliminary drawings that same day; and that he delivered the finished canvas to the Spanish Pavilion during the second week of June 1937.

49. Malraux, *Picasso's Mask,* 138.

50. Brigitte Léal, "'For Charming Dora': Portraits of Dora Maar" in *Picasso and Portraiture: Representations and Transformations*, ed. William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 396.

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Tears and Screaming:
Weeping in the Spirituality of Margery Kempe

Santha Bhattacharji

In late medieval Europe, the tradition of religious weeping took on a distinctive form: that of loud and violent sobbing, shouting, screaming, and even falling over and writhing on the ground. This contrasts with the older and quieter tradition of tears developed in the Eastern Orthodox churches, where weeping seems to have been envisaged as gentle and silent, however abundant the tears.[1] This essay will look at the Western medieval tradition primarily through the figure of the fifteenth-century English mystic Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–ca. 1438), whose own weeping and screaming attracted controversy during her lifetime.

To become aware of this controversy, let us begin with a brief overview of her life. Margery tells us, in the account of her experiences that she dictated to a priest who agreed to act as her scribe, that she suffered a bout of madness after the birth of her first child, when she was twenty years of age, from which she was miraculously healed by a vision of Christ.[2] However, this did not lead to a religious conversion. Instead, she went on leading the life of a busy wife and mother among the powerful merchant class of King's Lynn in Norfolk, bearing fourteen children and running two businesses of her own, a mill and a brewery.[3] Yet her businesses failed, and fifteen years after her first vision of Christ, her conversion occurred one night when she heard heavenly music and exclaimed: "Alas þat euyr I dede synne, it is ful mery in hevyn" (Alas that I ever I sinned; it is very joyful in heaven).[4] At this point, her life of weeping begins.

Margery's weeping seems to spring from several different, though overlapping perceptions within her. These can be roughly classified as: penitence for her own sins; penitence for the sins of the world; and intense compassion for the sufferings of Christ. In addition, there are two other motivations that are perhaps distinctive to Margery: she often perceives the life of Christ through the ordinary events and people around her, which disclose Christ to her as the underlying reality of all human life; and she has a personal mission to be a sign, or "mirror," for others, to call them to a similar repentance and awareness of Christ. Undergirding all of this is a sense of personal spiritual nourishment, indeed intense joy, from the weeping itself. As we shall see, this joy arises from a paradoxical sense of the almost unbearable presence of Christ in the incidents

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and places that remind her of his physical life on earth, even though that life was long ago.

These different aspects develop in sequence. Immediately after her conversion, she finds herself weeping uncontrollably when she reviews the sins of her whole life, which she finds herself compelled to do repeatedly, "full many a time."[5] Straight away, she finds herself being criticized by her friends and neighbors. Indeed, Margery comes across in her book as having a strong, self-advertising character, telling us, for instance, that before her conversion she was preoccupied with showing off in fashionable clothes.[6] Consequently, her friends think this is just another form of self-advertisement, not appreciating that this weeping is not something she can control: "Hir wepyng was so plentyuows and so contwnyng þat mech pepul wend that sche mygth wepyn & leuyn whan sche wold, and þerfor many men seyd sche was a fals ypocryte" (Her weeping was so plentiful and so continuous that many people thought that she could weep or stop weeping at will, and therefore many people said that she was a false play-actor).[7] Margery tells us that she formed the habit of rising at two or three in the morning and spending many hours in church praying until midday and sometimes after.[8] While she may have been seeking quiet and privacy, compared to what she could obtain in her busy household, much of this weeping must have been seen by anyone entering the parish church.

This sobbing for her sins seems to have lasted steadily during the next four years or so. During this time, she leads an ascetic life and becomes increasingly averse to the sexual side of her relationship with her husband. Eventually she experiences a spiritual breakthrough, on a Friday before Christmas Day, when her soul is ravished by Christ.[9] Although he assures her that her sins are completely forgiven and that she will go neither to hell nor to purgatory, this strand of personal contrition does not cease. On the contrary, Christ assures her that she will have the gift of contrition until the end of her life and that in place of the hair shirt she has been wearing and which he now commands her to remove, he will give her a hair shirt in her heart.[10]

This inner, more hidden contrition then rapidly widens to encompass sorrow for sin in general. She can weep two hours at a time, sometimes for her own sin, sometimes for the sin of the people in general, for the souls in purgatory, and for all those in any kind of physical distress in this life. Christ tells her: "For I haue ordeyned þe to knele be-for þe Trynyte for to prey for al þe world, for many hundryd thowsand sowlys schal be sauyd be þi prayers" (I have ordained you to kneel before the Trinity to pray for the whole world, for many hundred thousand souls will be saved by your prayers).[11] Margery's weeping thus takes on an intercessory character; even more strongly, her weeping in a sense "ordains" her, giving this lay woman a sacred, if unofficial, role in the church.

This particular theme of Margery's "ordination" as an intercessor grows steadily stronger throughout the rest of her book. The offensiveness of all sin

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to God is for Margery an overwhelming reality, which she feels we should all be deeply aware of. She asks God for "a welle of teerys to constreyn þe wyth" (a well of tears to constrain you with), so that no man need suffer damnation for his sins.[12] She goes on, with one of her vigorous homely analogies: "ȝyf I myth as wel, Lorde, ȝeuyn þe pepyl contricyon & wepyng . . . as wel as I myth ȝeuyn a peny owt of my purse, sone xulde I fulfille mennys hertys wyth contricyon þat þei myth sesyn of her synne" (If I could, Lord, give the people contrition and weeping . . . as easily as I could give them a penny from my purse, I would quickly fill men's hearts with contrition so that they might cease from their sin).[13]

Indeed, Margery develops a form of ministry to others through her stress on contrition. For example, she visits a monastery where a wicked monk is at first contemptuous of her but then asks her if she can tell him in what ways he has most displeased God. She promises to weep on his behalf, after which God reveals to her that the monk has sinned principally in lechery with married women, in giving way to despair, and in keeping certain worldly goods against the rules of his order. Margery confronts him with these sins, and counsels him, "Sorwyth for ȝowr synne, & I xal help ȝow to sorwyn" (Grieve for your sin, and I shall help you to grieve). She urges him to confess his sins and give up his high office within the monastery. On a return visit some time later, she finds that he has undergone a complete conversion and is a peaceful and happy man.[14] Later in her book, Margery is also asked to weep for individuals as they lie on their deathbeds. The text comments rather dryly:

> Also þe sayd creatur was desiryd of mech pepil to be wyth hem at her deying & to prey for hem, for, þow þei louyd not hir wepyng ne hir crying in her lyfe-tyme, þei de[si]ryd þat sche xulde bothyn wepyn & cryin whan þei xulde deyin, & so sche dede.
>
> (Also, the said creature was asked by many people to be with them at their dying and to pray for them, for, though they had no love for her weeping and her wailing in their lifetime, yet they wanted her to both weep and wail when they came to die, and so she did).[15]

This whole strand of weeping for others receives its clearest confirmation while Margery is in Rome. The spiritual breakthrough that she experienced after her first four years or so of intense praying moves her to go on pilgrimage, principally to Jerusalem but also to Rome, where she spends six months on her return journey. There, kneeling one day in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, where the body of St. Jerome was reputed to lie buried, she sees a vision of this saint, who assures her that she is blessed in the weeping that she does for people's sins, for through it many shall be saved. And he assures her that she will be granted a "welle of teerys" (well of tears)—a phrase that becomes something of a leitmotif throughout the book—that shall never be taken from

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her, and moreover that this is "a synguler & a specyal ȝyft" (a singular and special gift), given to her by God.[16]

Although this weeping out of contrition already caused adverse reactions among her neighbors, as we have seen, it is the third strand, compassion for the suffering of Christ, which seems to provoke the noisiest manifestations in Margery—a form of bellowing that she herself calls "roryng" (roaring) and which the Carthusians of Mount Grace, who owned and annotated her manuscript in the late fifteenth century, draw attention to by writing "de clamore" (concerning shouting) in the margin.[17] While her tears had very rapidly moved on from pure contrition to a deep emotional response to anything connected with the life of Christ, it is the pilgrimage to the actual scenes of Christ's sufferings that strongly develops this aspect of her weeping. Her "breakthrough," mentioned above, had opened a whole new chapter in her life: she finally persuades her husband to agree to lifelong celibacy within the marriage; she finds new spiritual directors; and she decides to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land—a major undertaking in those days, necessitating a journey of several months, traveling overland through Germany and down to Venice in northern Italy, and then spending five weeks or so on a boat to the port of Joppa (modern-day Jaffa). Her first real attack of "crying"—"shouting" or "screaming" in modern English—occurs when she visits Mount Calvary in Jerusalem.[18]

The whole of the Jerusalem chapter in her book reflects a sequence of intense emotions on Margery's part. First, on approaching Jerusalem, there is a feeling of joy and sweetness so overwhelming that she nearly falls off the donkey carrying her. Then, the next day, as the Franciscan friars lead the pilgrims on the standard procession round all the scenes of the Passion, she sees Christ in her imagination as vividly as if she had seen his sufferings "wyth hir bodyly ey" (with her bodily eye). Finally, on Mount Calvary she falls to the ground, and "walwyd & wrestyd wyth hir body, spredyng hir armys a-brode, & cryed wyth a lowde voys as þow hir hert xulde a brostyn a-sundyr" (wallowed and wrestled with her body, stretching out her arms, and cried out with a loud voice as though her heart would burst asunder). She emphasizes that this was "þe fyrst cry þat euyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon" (the first [great] cry that she cried out in any act of contemplation), and thus this incident in Jerusalem is a key moment in the development of her whole spirituality of weeping and screaming.[19] This experience repeated itself for many years after. Although Margery's *Book* is not very clear on chronology after her return from the Holy Land, we can work out from various indications that this "roaring" went on for a period of about ten years. Indeed, when she gets back to England, we see Margery undergoing a very similar episode one Good Friday, when she "sobbyd, roryd, & cryed, and, spredyng hir arms a-brood, seyed wyth a lowde voys, 'I dey, I dey'" (sobbed, roared, cried, and spreading wide her arms, said with a loud voice, I die, I die). On this occasion a priest carried her out of the church into the cloister, thinking she needed air.[20]

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This strand of Margery's weeping is closely allied to her equally intense feelings when she receives communion. While still in Rome, she asks Christ for yet another well of tears, wherewith to receive his body with devotion.[21] Again, back in England, we find that her cries on receiving communion necessitate special arrangements for her: the Dominicans give her communion in their private chapel, with two men sometimes having to support her until her cries had ceased. When this arrangement was later stopped, she received communion in her own parish church of St. Margaret's, her cries audible throughout the church and even in the street outside.[22]

At this point we need to pause and take stock of Margery's experience so far. These extreme manifestations have caused some modern scholars to label Margery "hysterical."[23] Yet, at the time, although her neighbors were disapproving and branded her a hypocrite, by and large the church authorities seem to have understood and accepted this behavior. This is because Margery in fact fits into a well-attested late medieval Christian tradition of weeping. Although she seems to be a rare enough example in England to cause, as we have seen, much puzzled reaction, other spiritual writers of the time, such as Walter Hilton, imply that her experience is standard, almost to be expected. In *The Ladder of Perfection*, which we are twice told was read to Margery over a number of years, along with other spiritual works,[24] Hilton maps out with extraordinary closeness the pattern of Margery's weeping during the course of two short chapters.[25] At the start of someone's conversion, he says, God puts various meditations into a person's soul. At first, that person thinks a great deal about his or her sins, with great fits of weeping, and this continues however often they go to confession. Hilton gives scriptural authority to such experience by saying that this is the kind of inner travail depicted in many of the psalms. Then one is led on to meditation on the sufferings of Christ, which is given to the soul as a consoling gift by God. Hilton describes this contemplation as a feeling that one is seeing in one's soul the Lord in bodily likeness, as though he were on earth, and watching him go through the various steps of the Passion—very much as Margery describes when she is in Jerusalem. Hilton phrases the meditator's response to these scenes as follows: the heart is stirred to such great compassion for Jesus "that you mourn and weep and cry with all the powers of your body and of your soul," and this is accompanied by "many sweet tears."[26] Hilton's generally serene style can obscure the fact that to "cry" with "all the powers of the body" could quite easily describe a reaction as extreme as Margery's on Mount Calvary.

She herself seeks to validate her experience in terms of tradition when she describes St. Jerome appearing to her in Rome. St. Jerome is particularly appropriate, as the Middle Ages regarded him as one of the major early Christian writers on the subject of repentance and tears. As a prolific fourth-century Christian writer, and one of the first to write in Latin, Jerome was one of the four most authoritative "Fathers" of the Western Church, along with

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Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory I. Although these themes emerge in nearly all of Jerome's many letters and commentaries, perhaps their clearest statement comes in his "Letter to Rusticus," written to a man who had broken a vow of chastity. To exhort him to repentance, Jerome combed both the Old and the New Testaments for references to weeping and tears, presenting a comprehensive survey of the theme in Scripture. He drew heavily on the psalms and pointed out that Christ himself wept, at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35).[27] Although Jerome provided virtually no commentary on these passages, this comprehensive survey became a short reference work on the topic for later generations. St. Jerome's appearance to Margery thus helps establish her place in an ancient and central Christian tradition of tears. This tradition was manifested strongly in Jerome's contemporaries, the fourth-century Desert Fathers, whose stories circulated widely in the West in the Latin text *De Vitis Patrum*. For example, one Desert Father, Arsenius, kept a cloth on his chest because of the tears that streamed from his eyes.[28]

However, weeping and repentance were also given a wider relevance to the whole church during Lent, the great season of repentance, when many of the scriptural texts assembled by St. Jerome were given a prominent place in the liturgy of both Eastern and Western traditions.[29] The desirability of actual tears of repentance was emphasized in the votive Mass *"Pro peticione lacrimarum,"* which could be offered at any time, specifically to ask for the gift of abundant physical tears. Its prayers include the following petitions: *"educ de cordis nostri duricia compunctionis lacrimas"* (draw forth from the hardness of our hearts tears of compunction); *"produc de oculis nostris copiosa lacrimarum flumina"* (produce from our eyes abundant rivers of tears); "*pro peccatis nostris compuncionem cordis et luctum fluminaque lacrimarum nobis semper largiaris*" (may you ever grant us compunction of heart and mourning for our sins and rivers of tears).[30] These liturgical texts were one of the most obvious ways in which the medieval church authorized the physical phenomenon of weeping and characterized it as a spiritual gift we have to ask for, not a self-chosen activity. However, it is a different tradition, and one very much directed at the laity, which perhaps most fosters the tradition of weeping. In an age when the majority of the faithful could not read, books outlining methods of rather intellectual meditation were of limited usefulness. Instead, the faithful were encouraged to read the "book" of Christ's body, that is, to visualize his earthly life as intensely and vividly as they could, and to feel empathy for his human needs and sufferings. This tradition is most clearly embodied in the handbook *Meditationes Vitae Christi,* ascribed in the Middle Ages to St. Bonaventure, which gave detailed directions for visualising each scene in the life of Christ, in order to arouse this empathy.[31] A Middle English version of this work, *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, was translated from the Latin in the fifteenth century by Nicholas Love, prior of Mount Grace, the Carthusian monastery where Margery's *Book* was kept and annotated.[32] When Margery

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goes to Jerusalem, we see the effects of this cultivated sensitivity to Christ's sufferings. From Margery's account we might think her reactions of roaring and writhing on the ground unique; but the most detailed account of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to have come out of this period, that of the Dominican friar Felix Fabri, shows us that this was a widespread, almost standard phenomenon. When the pilgrims got to the church of the Holy Sepulchre, he tells us, they uttered groans, sighs, laments, and sobs, and some fell to the ground. Others knelt with their arms held wide in the form of a cross; others had to sit down, clutching their heads. Men and women abandoned themselves equally to these behaviors; but in particular, he adds, the women screamed as though in labor.[33]

The particular relevance to women of this religious tradition of physical weeping and mourning is explored in detail by H. P. Weissman under the heading "*hysterica compassio*." She surveys the visual and textual material that represents the Virgin Mary in agony at the foot of the cross and the meditative tradition that encouraged women to identify with her. Sure enough, when Margery is in Jerusalem, it is meditation on the Virgin and other figures at the foot of the cross that helps trigger her screaming and writhing: "Biforn hir face sche herd and saw in hir gostly sygth þe mornyng of owyr Lady, of Sen Iohn and Mary Mawdelyn, and of many oþer þat louyd owyr Lord" (Before her face she heard and saw in her spiritual sight the mourning of our Lady, St. John, and Mary Magdalen, and of many others who loved our Lord).[34] Elsewhere, Christ tells Margery that her loud screaming is partly intended to make men and women have compassion for Mary's grief.[35]

When we look at the rest of Europe, we find many women embodying this tradition of compassionate weeping. Margery's scribe describes one such life at some length: that of Marie d'Oignies, who was born at some point in the late twelfth century and died in 1213. She wept tears of compassion and became physically weak whenever she thought about the Lord's sufferings and incurred the enmity of priests whose services she disrupted with her sobbing and cries; one of these detractors was won over to her side after he himself had the experience of being overcome by uncontrollable sobbing.[36]

Another example, which may not have been known to either Margery or her scribe, is that of Angela of Foligno, a thirteenth-century Franciscan tertiary (that is, a member of the Franciscan Order who continues to live as a laywoman in her own home).[37] Angela was a married woman with children, born around 1248, who may have belonged, like Margery, to the rich merchant classes. She, too, has a priest scribe (this time writing in Latin), who begins his narrative with Angela's conversion in 1285, when she is thirty-seven years old. Her conversion occurs when, despairing over a mortal sin she has never been able to confess, she prays to St. Francis to send her a wise confessor, and she immediately finds one. After confessing fully, she embarks, like Margery, on a life of prayer and penance. Her acute sense of sin finds its only

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consolation in the ability to weep. Angela now has increasingly frequent visions of Christ on the cross and experiences violent ecstasies; if she hears anyone speak of God, she says, "stridebam" (I would scream). This screaming is so controversial that the Franciscans were at first reluctant to admit her; as with Margery, people think she is physically or mentally ill, or, more seriously, "demoniata" (possessed). Once admitted to the order, Angela goes on pilgrimage to Assisi, where she has a particularly intense experience of screaming. On the journey, she is overwhelmed by the sense of the presence of God and on entering the lower basilica at Assisi feels a sense of unendurable sadness at the thought that she might lose this presence. She begins to scream and grind her teeth, and falls to the ground.[38] The friars come running from all quarters to see who is causing this disturbance, among them her confessor, who happens to be staying there at the time. He is so embarrassed and outraged by her behavior that he forbids her to ever come near Assisi again. However, it is this confessor who eventually is so impressed by her that he becomes her scribe, and she seems to have been widely revered toward the end of her life, with a circle of disciples who recorded some of her discourses. She died in 1309 at about sixty years of age.

Margery's controversial weeping and screaming is thus by no means an isolated phenomenon. However, there is one aspect of Margery's experience that seems to be distinctive to her. Both Marie d'Oignies and Angela of Foligno caused disruption in church by their uncontrollable sobbing, but they seem to have been profoundly embarrassed by the public nature of their weeping and saw nothing positive in their disruptiveness. Margery is also acutely embarrassed, but Christ exhorts her to accept her effect on others as an integral and important strand in her particular vocation. In a sequence of two important chapters,[39] he talks to her at length about why he will not take her disturbing cries from her, although she implores him to.

One of Margery's functions, he explains, is to be an example to other sinners so that they might know that whatever they have done, they need not fall into despair.

> "I haue ordeynd þe to be a merowr amongys hem for to han gret sorwe þat þei xulde takyn exampil by þe for to haue som litil sorwe in her hertys for her synnys þat þei myth þerthorw be sauyd."
>
> (I have ordained you to be a mirror among them, to grieve greatly, so that they might learn from your example to have some little sorrow in their hearts for their sins, so that thereby they might be saved.)[40]

Margery, then, has been appointed as a sign to others, first of the power of God to forgive, then as a mirror in which others can see reflected the repentance that should be within themselves. This in fact gives an unusual coherence to

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her experience: grief for her own sins, grief for the sins of others, and disruptive weeping over the sufferings of Christ are all gathered up in one function, whereby she becomes an outer example to others of what their inner life should look like.

Even more distinctive to Margery than this function, however, is the way that her envisioning of Christ's sufferings widens from specific meditation on him in her mind's eye to the actual beholding of him in the people and events around her. Her "roaring," which endures for many years after her pilgrimage to Jerusalem, can be provoked by almost any detail of ordinary medieval life:

> Sumtyme, whan sche saw þe Crucyfyx, er yf sche sey a man had a wownde er a best wheþyr it wer, er ȝyf a man bett a childe be-for hir er smet an hors er an-oþer best with a whippe, ȝyf sche myth sen it er heryn it, hir thowt sche saw owyr Lord be betyn er wowndyd lyk as sche saw in þe man er in þe best.
>
> (And sometimes, when she saw the crucifix, or if she saw that a man was wounded, or an animal, whichever it might be, or if a man beat a child in front of her or struck a horse or other animal with a whip, if she saw or heard it, then it seemed to her that she saw our Lord being beaten or wounded, just as she saw it in the person or animal.)[41]

This kind of vision arises not only from an awareness of Christ's sufferings but from a more general devotion to the humanity of Christ. Thus, when she comes across male babies in their mother's arms, "sche schuld þan cryin, roryn, & wepyn as þei sche had seyn Crist in hys childhode" (she would then cry out, roar and weep, as though she had seen Christ as an infant). If she met a handsome adult male she often cried out and "wept & sobbyd ful sor in þe manhode of Crist" (wept and sobbed most bitterly over the manhood of Christ).[42]

This last phrase gives us an important insight into Margery's spirituality. It is not primarily the sufferings of Christ that move her but the whole fact of his manhood, of his nearness to human beings through his own humanity. Indeed it was the desire to draw near to the physical presence of Christ that initially caused her to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land: she "had a desyr to se þo placys wher he was born . . . with oþer holy placys wher he was in hys lyue" (had a desire to see the places where he was born . . . with other holy places where he was in his life).[43] Thus it is, paradoxically, not the *absence* of the physical Christ through his human death that provokes her mourning and weeping but fleeting glimpses of his *presence*, mediated to her by other physical means: crucifixes, people, animals, events. Her bawling bears witness to the eternal present-ness of the humanity of Christ, as we see in the following incident. A priest, finding her sobbing before a crucifix, tries to soothe her with a well-intentioned platitude: "Damsel, Ihesu is ded long sithyn" (Woman, Jesus is long since dead). She replies: "Sir, hys deth is as fresch to me

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as he had deyd þis same day, & so me thynkyth it awt to be to ȝow & to alle Cristen pepil" (Sir, his death is as fresh to me as if he had died this very day, and so, it seems to me, it ought to be to you and to all Christian people).[44]

This theme of present-ness alerts us to the major underlying dimension of all Margery's weeping: it reflects an intense spiritual emotion, compounded of presence and absence, which nonetheless she experiences as joy. We see this right from the outset when she hears spiritual music: ever after, when she hears any music or merrymaking, she experiences "habundawnt teerys of hy deuocyon" (abundant tears of high devotion) for the bliss of heaven, saying over and over, "It is ful mery in Hevyn" (It is very joyful in Heaven). Her neighbors try to bring her down to earth: "ȝe haue not be þer no mor þan we" (You haven't been there any more than we have).[45] Later on, despite her wish to have her disruptive screaming taken from her, we see that she is very attached to this basic experience of shedding tears. Christ himself makes a distinction between her "roaring," which is a sign to others, and these quieter tears:

> "Also, dowtyr, þu wost wel þat I send sum-tyme many gret reynys & scharp schowerys, & sumtyme but smale and softe dropis. & ryth so I far with þe, dowtyr, whan it likyth me to spekyn in þi sowle; I ȝyf þe sum-tyme smale wepyngys & soft teerys for a tokyn þat I lofe þe."
>
> (Also, daughter, you know well that sometimes I send down many heavy rains and drenching showers, and at other times only slight and gentle drops. And in the same way I deal with you, daughter, when it pleases me to speak in your soul; I sometimes give you slight weeping and gentle tears as a sign that I love you.)[46]

Later we see her using her ability to weep tears almost as a barometer of her spiritual life. Christ explains to her:

> "I am as an hyd God in þi sowle, and I wythdrawe sum-tyme þi teerys & þi deuocyon . . . þat þu xuldist verily wetyn what peyn it is for to forbere me, how swet it is for to fele me, & þat þu xuldist be þe mor besy for to sekyn me a-ȝen, also, dowtyr, for þu xuldist knowyn what peyne oþer men han þat wolde felyn me & may not. For þer is many a man in erth þat, yf he had but oo day in al hys lyuetyme of swech as þu hast many days, he wolde euyr louyn me þe bettyr & þankyn me for þat oo day.
>
> (I am a hidden God in your soul, and I withdraw sometimes your tears and your devotion . . . so that you should truly know what pain it is to forego my presence, and how sweet it is to feel me, and that you should apply yourself all the more to seeking me again; and, also, daughter, that you should know what pain other men have, who want to feel me and cannot. For there are many persons on earth who, if they had but one day in their whole lifetime of the kind that you have many of, would always love me the better, and thank me for that one day.)[47]

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Thus, the many "wells of tears" that she has asked for are, in her eyes, like rain, keeping her soul irrigated and fertile.

We conclude, then, with something of a paradox. Margery's tears, on the surface, are about bitter penitence for sin and about loss: they mourn the death of Christ and participate in the mourning of his mother Mary. But when we look at them more deeply, they turn out to be tears over the closeness of Christ to human beings in his ever-present humanity and to be a blissful presence in Margery's soul.

Notes

1. One of the strongest statements in the Eastern Orthodox tradition can be found in John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Ramsey, 1982), "Step 7," 136–45.

2. S. B. Meech and H. E. Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Early English Text Society o.s. 212 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), ch. 1, p. 8. For her relationship with her scribe, see the "Proem," 1–6. Two other, more student-friendly editions are: Barry Windeatt, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2000); Lynn Staley, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, TEAMS, Middle English Texts series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1996). For a modern translation of the whole text, see Barry Windeatt, trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985). The translations in this essay are my own.

3. Meech and Allen, *Margery Kempe*, ch. 2, pp. 9–10.

4. Ibid., ch. 3, p. 11.

5. Ibid., ch. 3, p. 13.

6. Ibid., ch. 2, p. 9.

7. Ibid., ch. 3, p. 13.

8. Ibid., ch. 3, p. 12.

9. Ibid., ch. 5, p. 16.

10. Ibid., ch. 5, p. 17.

11. Ibid., ch. 7, p. 20.

12. Ibid., ch. 57, p. 141.

13. Ibid., ch. 57, p. 141.

14. Ibid., ch. 12, pp. 25–27.

15. Ibid., ch. 72, pp. 172–73.

16. Ibid., ch. 41, p. 99.

17. Ibid., ch. 28, p. 68n. 4; on ownership of the manuscript and the annotations, ibid., xxxii–xlvi.

18. Ibid., ch. 28, pp. 66–71.

19. Ibid., ch. 28, p. 68.

20. Ibid., ch. 57, p. 140.

21. Ibid., ch. 32, p. 81.

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22. Ibid., ch. 57, p. 139.

23. E.g., E. Colledge, *Pre-Reformation English Spirituality* (London: Burns and Oats, 1965), 222.

24. Meech and Allen, *Margery Kempe,* ch. 17, p. 39; ch. 58, p. 143.

25. Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection,* trans. J. Clark and R. Dorward, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), book 1, chs. 34–35, pp. 105–06.

26. Ibid., 106.

27. W. H. Fremantle, trans., *The Principal Works of St. Jerome,* Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd ser., vol. 6 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1893), letter CXXII, pp. 225–29.

28. *The Desert Fathers,* trans. Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 13. Latin text of *De Vitis Patrum* [Book V of *Verba Seniorum*], J-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina,* Paris, 73:855–1022.

29. For the Western tradition, see the Lenten material in J. Wickham Legg, *The Sarum Missal Edited from Three Early Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1916), 48–115.

30. Wickham Legg, *Sarum Missal,* 402.

31. Sr. M. Jordan Stallings, ed., *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1965).

32. Nicholas Love, *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ,* ed. James Hogg and Lawrence Powell, Analecta Cartusiana 91 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistic, Universität Salzburg, 1989).

33. Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti Peregrinationem,* ed. C. D. Hassler (Stuttgart: Societas Literaria Stuttgardiensis, 1843), 1:238–39. English translation: Aubrey Stewart, trans., *Felix Fabri (c. 1480–1483 A.D.)* (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Texts Society, 1892), 1:283ff.

34. Meech and Allen, *Margery Kempe,* ch. 28, p. 68.

35. Ibid., ch. 77, p. 183.

36. Ibid., ch. 62, p. 153. For the full life of Mary d'Oignies, see *Vita Mariae Oignacensis* by Jacques de Vitry, in *Acta Sanctorum* 25 (Paris: Vickor Palme, 1867). French translation by A. Wankenne as *Vie de Marie d'Oignies par Jacques de Vitry* (Namur: Société des Etudes Classiques, 1989). A partial English translation exists by E. Spearing: "Extracts from the Life of St. Mary of Oignies," in *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality* (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), 87–106; for the weeping priest incident, see pp. 90–91.

37. For the Latin text of Angela of Foligno, see Paul Doncoeur, *Le livre de la Bienheureuse Angèle de Foligno* (Paris and Toulouse: Art Catholique: Éditions de la revue d'ascétique et de mystique, 1925); for an English translation, see Cristina Mazzoni, ed. and trans., *Angela of Foligno's Memorial,* Library of Medieval Women (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999).

38. Doncoeur, *Angèle de Foligno,* 21, 28.

39. Meech and Allen, *Margery Kempe,* chs. 77–78, pp. 181–87.

40. Ibid., ch. 78, p. 186.

41. Ibid., ch. 28, p. 69.

42. Ibid., ch. 35, p. 86.

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43. Ibid., ch. 15, p. 32.
44. Ibid., ch. 60, p. 148.
45. Ibid., ch. 3, p. 11.
46. Ibid., ch. 77, p. 183.
47. Ibid., ch. 84, p. 205.

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"An Obscure Matter":
The Mystery of Tears in Orthodox Spirituality

Bishop Kallistos Ware

Only tears will be weighed at the Last Judgment.
—É. M. Cioran, *Tears and Saints*

"The question of tears . . . is an obscure matter and hard to analyze," writes St. John Climacus, the seventh-century abbot of Mount Sinai, in what remains the classic treatment of the subject in the Christian East. The reason for this, he explains, is that there are so many different forms of weeping: "Tears can come about in various ways. They come from nature, from God, from suffering good and bad, from vainglory, from licentiousness, from love, and from numerous other causes."[1] Climacus is surely right to emphasize the difficulties of the subject. Indeed, instead of referring to the "gift of tears," as is commonly done, it is more appropriate to speak about the "mystery of tears."[2] For there is certainly a puzzling, elusive, and even apophatic character about tears. When language fails us, we weep; tears have an ineffable dimension, giving expression to the intimate feelings that are "too deep for words" (cf. Rom. 8:26). At once physical and spiritual, tears stand at the enigmatic point of intersection between body and soul. They are complex and polyvalent, far more so than laughter. (Yet would it not also be a fascinating task to compile another book, parallel to the present one, on the theology—and especially the eschatological significance—of laughter?)

Seeking a "way in" to this mystery of weeping, let us first attempt to identify certain persons who might serve as models and icons. With these examples in view, let us go on to ask six questions, trying to establish various basic distinctions—although, as we shall discover to our cost, more often than not the distinctions break down and implode.

As we search for a prototype and exemplar for the gift of tears, we need look no further than the Gospels. Christ himself may serve as our model. Never is it stated in Scripture that he laughed, but on several striking occasions he is described as shedding tears. He wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus (John 11:35) and over the tragic fate of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). The Epistle to the Hebrews, perhaps with Gethsemane in mind, affirms: "In the days of his flesh Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (Heb. 5:7). In this context Origen (ca. 185–ca. 254) is not afraid to speak of

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"the tears of God."[3] Alongside Christ, two other biblical figures spring to mind. In the Old Testament there is the prophet Jeremiah, with his *cri de coeur,* "O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night!" (Jer. 9:1). In the New Testament there is St. Mary Magdalene, weeping on Easter morning outside the empty tomb (John 20:11).[4]

In the subsequent life of the Christian Church, the spiritual significance of tears first comes into prominence with the emergence of monasticism in fourth-century Egypt and Syria. Egypt provides us with a memorable prototype in the person of St. Arsenios the Great (ca. 360–449), originally tutor at Rome to the children of Emperor Theodosius I and later anchorite in the desert of Sketis. According to the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers,* "It was said of him that throughout his life, as he sat at his manual labor, he kept a cloth on his chest because of the tears that fell from his eyes. . . . As a result of his weeping his eyelashes had fallen out." He wept with particular vehemence immediately before his death. When news of Arsenios's passing was brought to another Desert Father, Abba Poemen, he exclaimed with tears, "Blessed are you, Abba Arsenios, for you wept for yourself in this world!" And Poemen added, "He who does not weep for himself in this life will weep eternally in the next. So it is impossible not to weep, either here voluntarily, or else there when compelled by torments."[5]

Generalizing the Desert teaching concerning tears, Poemen affirmed, "Whoever wishes to be liberated from sins is liberated from them by shedding tears, and whoever wishes to acquire the virtues acquires them by shedding tears. Tears are the way which Scripture and our Fathers have handed down to us, saying *Weep*. There is no other way but this."[6] Seeing a woman weeping bitterly beside a grave, Poemen remarked: "Not all the pleasures of this world would deliver her soul from mourning (*penthos*). In the same way the monk ought always to have mourning in himself."[7] On one occasion, in the presence of Abba Isaac, Poemen passed into ecstasy; and when he came once more to himself Isaac asked him: "Tell me, where were you?" Reluctantly Poemen answered, "My thoughts were with St. Mary the Mother of God when she stood beside the Cross of the Saviour and wept. And I too wish that I could always weep as she did."[8]

The example and teaching of Arsenios and Poemen are well summed up in one of the anonymous sayings in the *Gerontikon:* "A brother asked an old man, 'What should I do?' And the old man said to him, "We ought always to weep.'"[9] "Pray without ceasing," said St. Paul (1 Thess. 5:17); and the Desert Fathers added, "Weep without ceasing."

The crucial importance of tears is underlined by Evagrios of Pontos (345/6–399), in his youth a disciple of the Cappadocians and subsequently a solitary in the Egyptian desert at Nitria and Kellia. At the beginning of his work *On Prayer,* he observes:

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> First pray that you may receive tears, so that through mourning you may tame what is savage in your soul. . . .
>
> Pray with tears and all you ask will be heard. For the Lord rejoices greatly when you pray with tears.
>
> If you do shed fountains of tears during your prayer, do not exalt yourself, thinking that you are better than others. For your prayer has received help, so that you can readily confess your sins and make your peace with the Lord through your tears.[10]

Here we may note two points to which we shall shortly be returning: tears are in this case specifically linked with sorrow for sin, and they are regarded as a gift from God, not just as the result of our own efforts. Later in the same work, Evagrios makes it clear that tears do not belong exclusively to the preliminary stages of prayer: "When you think that you do not need tears for your sins during prayer, reflect on this: you should always be in God, and yet you are still far from him. Then you will weep with greater feeling."[11] The danger to which Evagrios alludes—that our ability to weep during prayer may lead us into self-satisfaction and pride—is also mentioned by another early ascetic author, St. Mark the Monk (? ca. 430): "Do not grow conceited if you shed tears when you pray. For it is Christ who has touched your eyes and given you spiritual sight."[12]

The early monks were well aware of the difficulties that arise from an exaggerated weeping, artificially induced by willful straining and self-conscious exertion. Tears should not be forced but should flow spontaneously. It is true that Evagrios writes, "At the beginning of prayer force yourself to shed tears and to feel compunction, so that all your prayer may become fruitful."[13] But his disciple St. John Cassian (ca. 360–ca. 435), who in general faithfully follows the teaching of his master, at this point diverges from it. In the case of beginners, Cassian concedes, tears "which are squeezed by a hardened heart from dry eyes" may be "not utterly fruitless"; but in the case of the more experienced "an outpouring of tears should never be forced in this way." Tears "should not be laboriously striven for" but should be "spontaneous."[14]

Abba Isaiah of Gaza (d. 491) shares Cassian's reservations about exaggerated weeping. Once he was visited by two monks, one of whom used to shed tears continually night and day, to such an extent that he could not even eat. His companion felt that there was something unhealthy in such extreme weeping. When they went to consult Abba Isaiah, he confirmed the suspicions of the second monk. "These tears are from demons," he declared. "Have you not heard that everything excessive comes from demons?"[15]

It is time to turn to our six questions. In the first place, are the tears about which these Eastern Christian sources are speaking merely inward and hidden—a symbolic or noetic weeping—or are they also exterior and physical? There can be no doubt that in most instances the texts are referring to bodily

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and physical tears, to drops of water falling literally from the eyes and flowing down the cheeks. But in some texts it is said that there can also be an inner weeping that is not accompanied by any actual tears. For example, St. Pachomios of Egypt (ca. 290–346) remarks, "If someone does not shed tears, even though he is moved at the time when something happens, there is also the possibility of weeping inwardly."[16] The point is illustrated by a story recounted concerning one of Pachomios's disciples, a certain Silvanos. "Tears flowed from his eyes incessantly," we are told, "so that even when he was eating with his brethren he was unable to control his weeping, and his tears were mingled with his food." The other monks asked him not to weep in this way in front of visitors. "For this very reason," Silvanos replied, "I have often wanted to control my tears, yet I was not able." The brethren answered that there was no objection to his shedding tears when alone or in church, "but when someone eats at table with the brethren, it is possible for his soul to weep continually without these visible tears."[17] St. John Climacus adopts a similar approach. He warns his readers against weeping "merely in an outward way," adding: "Hidden treasure is more secure than that which is exposed in the market place."[18]

In the tradition of the Christian East outward and visible weeping is not on the whole considered weak and unmanly, and it is not associated particularly with women. Nor, *pace* the example of Silvanos, is it regarded as embarrassing. An Orthodox Christian, today as in the past, feels free to weep openly at a funeral and indeed at church services generally. A Russian friend of mine, the late Nadejda Gorodetzky, used to recall her first visit to an Anglican church. Moved by the worship, she began to weep. To her surprise, as soon as the service had finished members of the congregation gathered round her with expressions of concern. "Are you all right?" they inquired. "Shall we call a taxi? Can we get you a cup of tea?" "Surely I may weep when I pray," she said to me with some indignation. "What is so strange about that?"

Spiritual weeping, when manifested in this outward and bodily fashion, has an immediate relevance for the Christian understanding of the human person. Tears are symptomatic of the "spiritualization of the senses," to use a phrase of Paul Evdokimov.[19] They emphasize the integral unity of the human person and show how the body is redeemed and sanctified along with the soul.

This brings us to a second question. Are tears, expressed in an outward and bodily manner, to be regarded as an essential element in the spiritual life, or are they merely one possible path whereby we may draw closer to Christ? In other words, should we think in terms of "the *way* of tears" or of "the *gift* of tears"? How far should allowance be made for differences of temperament, since there are some who by character are prone to shed tears readily, whereas others are by nature inclined to weep little or not at all?

Poemen, in a passage already quoted, definitely treats tears as essential—not just *a* way but *the* way: "There is no other way but this."[20] St. Symeon the New

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Theologian (949–1022) is equally intransigent. Following the teaching of his spiritual father Symeon the Studite, he insisted to his monks, "Never receive communion without tears." This advice was not well received: with ironical smiles, his hearers responded, "In that case we shall never receive communion at all!"[21]

There are others, however, in the Christian East who adopt a less absolute view. While they see inner weeping—the spirit of mourning and sorrow for sin—as an indispensable characteristic of the life in Christ, they regard outward weeping as a *charisma* granted to some but not to all. St. Neilos of Ancyra (ca. 430) argues that differences in temperament need to be taken into account: "There is a natural constitution in some people, which does not easily express itself in tears." If God does not grant us the grace of outward tears, then we may weep inwardly in our thoughts, and this will suffice to cleanse us from our sins. It is enough truly and sincerely to *want* to shed tears; this proves that we do indeed feel contrition.[22]

Climacus is in agreement with Neilos. God allows for "the capacity of our nature," he says. Some people shed tears with the utmost difficulty, "like great drops of blood," while others do so "with no trouble at all." What matters in God's sight is not the outward profusion of our weeping but the inner struggles of our heart.[23] Those who have been vouchsafed the gift of tears should not for this reason consider themselves better than those who lack this grace. "Some are not granted the gift of mourning," he states, but the desolation that such people feel at their failure to weep takes the place of the gift itself.[24] Bearing in mind the warning of Cassian and others that we should not force ourselves to weep but should wait for the tears to flow spontaneously, we may surely prefer the more moderate opinion of Neilos and Climacus to the maximalist position of Poemen and Symeon. Let us speak, then, of "the gift of tears" rather than "the way of tears."

In many of the texts quoted so far, tears are regarded as penitential, as an expression of sorrow and mourning for our transgressions, but need this invariably be the case? Such is our third question. May not our weeping also be an expression of joy? Are there not occasions when we weep not in grief for our sinfulness but out of gratitude for our forgiveness? May there perhaps be two kinds of weeping: on the one side, tears caused by the recognition of our own ugliness, and on the other, tears of yearning for the divine beauty; on the one side, tears of sadness at the absence of the Beloved, and on the other, tears of rejoicing at His presence? We may weep because of the darkness within us that keeps us far from God, but we may weep also in glad amazement when we discover how greatly we are loved. Doubtless the Prodigal Son in the days of his exile wept in desolation as he fed the swine. But may he not have wept also from happiness when welcomed home by his loving father and seated in the place of honor at the feast (Luke 15:11–24)?

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Climacus for his part makes a clear distinction between two kinds of tears, those that are "bitter" and those that are "sweet."[25] There is, however, no sharp and rigid line of demarcation between the two, for the first type of tears can gradually and insensibly evolve into the second. Tears that begin by being "painful" become in the course of time "painless"; tears of fear are changed into tears of gladness.[26] Often our tears will have a mixed character, being both sorrowful and joyful at the same time; we become, says Climacus, "like a child who cries, yet smiles in the midst of her tears."[27] He uses in this context the analogy of a honeycomb: "As I ponder on the true nature of compunction, I find myself amazed by the way in which what we call mourning and sorrow are mingled with inner joy and gladness like honey in a comb."[28] The intertwining of these two contrasted qualities leads Climacus to invent a composite word *charmolypi,* signifying "joy-sorrow" (Greek, like German but unlike English, is able to form composite words without employing a hyphen). Elsewhere in the *Ladder* he speaks of "joy-creating sorrow" (*charopoion penthos*).[29] Emphasizing the antithetical character of tears, the Romanian author É. M. Cioran writes in similar terms of their "bitter light."[30]

This notion of a sorrow-joy syndrome has deep roots in Scripture. It is found in Psalms: "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy" (Ps. 126:5). It is found in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh" (Luke 6:21), and "Blessed are those mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt 5:4)—*penthos* (mourning) leads to *paraklesis* (consolation). It is found equally in St. Paul: ". . . always carrying in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. . . . dying, and behold, we live . . . sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 4:10, 6:9–10).

This mingling of sorrow and joy within the experience of spiritual weeping, which leads Climacus to speak of *charmolypi,* also forms a dominant motif in the *Homilies* attributed to St. Makarios of Egypt (but in fact Syriac by background, dating from approximately 380–390):

> Christians have the consolation of the Spirit, tears and mourning and groaning, and these tears are their delight. . . .
>
> Those who have tasted the gift of the Spirit are conscious of two things coexisting within them: on the one hand, of joy and consolation, on the other, of trembling and fear; on the one hand, of exaltation, on the other, of mourning. They mourn for themselves and for the whole race of Adam, because the nature of all human beings is one. The tears of such people are their daily bread, and in mourning they find sweetness and repose.[31]

Thus tears signify participation, either successively or else at one and the same time, in both Gethsemane and Tabor, in both the Cross and the Resurrection. As Climacus expresses it, "If you put on blessed and grace-filled mourning as a wedding robe, you will know the spiritual laughter of the soul."[32]

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Developing the teaching in the *Ladder* concerning the two kinds of tears, the fourteenth-century Hesychast authors Ss. Ignatios and Kallistos Xanthopoulos contrast the tears that originate from fear with those that spring from divine *eros*. Tears due to fear cause us to "waste away" and they "dry us up," whereas tears inspired by *eros* "purify" and "nourish" us. The second type of tears, state the Xanthopouloi, are "generated by an intense and unrestrained desire and longing for the Lord Jesus Christ whom we hold in remembrance" (there is an allusion here to the Jesus Prayer). Such tears lead the heart to "cry out in ecstasy" and to exclaim: "Thou hast bewitched me with desire, O Christ, and thou hast transformed me with divine longing. . . . Thou art all sweetness, O Savior, all desire and yearning ever unslaked, all irresistible beauty."[33] Tears of this second type, then, are in no way penitential. Their focus is not on our sinfulness but on the attractiveness of divine glory, which evokes within us a hunger and craving so overwhelming that it can only express itself in tears.

Bearing in mind this distinction made by Climacus between "bitter" tears of sorrow and "sweet" tears of joy, let us ask a fourth question: may we apply to spiritual weeping the threefold distinction made by Mark the Monk between the contranatural, the natural, and the supranatural?[34]

It would seem that tears exist on all three levels. First, there are contranatural tears: "crocodile tears," motivated by deceit and hypocrisy; sentimental tears, the result of affectation and overwrought emotions; tears of jealousy; tears of frustrated anger, when we do not get our own way. In the short term such tears may provide us with a certain sense of alleviation and release, but in the long term they are destructive.

Second, there are natural tears, for example, when we weep because of the pain, physical or mental, that we or others have to suffer, or when we shed tears because of separation from a loved one or bereavement through death. Such tears, if immoderate and self-indulgent, may do us harm, but on the whole they have a healing effect. Especially in the case of grief for the dead, it is not tears but the inability to weep that damages us. It may often happen, when we first fall in love, that we weep with unexpected frequency; and these years of erotic yearning may likewise have a positive effect.

Third, there are supranatural tears, that is to say, tears that are not simply the consequence of our natural feelings or of our human effort but that are conferred upon us by God as a gift of grace. It is to this third category alone that, in the strict sense, the phrases "spiritual weeping" and "gift of tears" are rightly applied. These supranatural tears are more often joyful than sorrowful, but they can be both at once.

Many Orthodox authorities make a firm differentiation between the second and the third levels of weeping (between natural and supranatural tears). In the words of Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), "The difference between ascetic and 'sensual' . . . weeping is as radical as that between heavenly and

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earthly wisdom."[35] Yet surely the gap between the two is less extreme than these words imply. Nature presupposes grace, and grace builds upon nature; tears that begin by being natural can in the course of time be converted through the action of the Holy Ghost into tears that are genuinely spiritual. The emotion that underlies natural weeping is not to be repressed or mortified but transfigured. Let us not subdivide into watertight compartments, but allow for continuity and interpenetration.

Nevertheless, there is often an externally perceptible contrast between natural and spiritual tears. In natural weeping, the face is frequently—although not always—flushed and contorted, while the whole body shakes with sobbing. This does not happen with spiritual weeping. There is in this second case no facial contortion, no bodily shuddering. The tears flow gently, peacefully, and silently. But this may also sometimes happen with natural weeping. Discernment between the natural and the supranatural is never easy or mechanical.

Our fifth question is linked to the fourth. Do tears express the unfallen or fallen condition of humankind? As regards tears of sorrow over sin, or tears of grief over the dead, the answer seems clear. Such weeping reflects our fallen state, the sadness of our exile. In Cioran's words, "We cry because we long for a lost paradise."[36] Like Adam we weep before the closed gate of the Garden:

> Banished from the joys of paradise,
> Adam sat outside and wept,
> And beating his hands upon his face he said:
> "I am fallen, in thy compassion have mercy on me."[37]

God did not create us for tears but for joy, love, and laughter, states Climacus: "Take away sin, and there is no need for painful weeping with our visible eyes. . . . Adam did not weep before the fall, and there will be no tears after the resurrection, when sin will be abolished, when pain, sorrow, and lamentation will have taken flight."[38] There will be tears in hell—contranatural tears—but there will be no sorrow-filled weeping in heaven: "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more" (Rev. 21:4; cf. Isa. 25:8). Yet may there not still be a place in heaven for tears of joy?

Our sixth and final question is more complex. Should tears, especially when spiritual, be seen in static or dynamic terms? Should they be viewed as a settled condition, or are they to be regarded as transitional in character, that is to say, as forming part of a rite of passage and marking the crossing of a border or frontier? In the latter case, do they often act as a catalyst, indicating the moment of letting go when our sinful self-trust is replaced by a willingness to allow God to act within us?

One Eastern writer who strongly emphasizes the transitional character of tears is St. Isaac the Syrian, Bishop of Nineveh during the seventh century. In

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this connection he makes a distinction between the "partial" or intermittent tears, which may occur at many different points in our Christian life, and the "complete" or continual tears, which occur only at the moment of decisive transition when we pass from what he terms the "bodily" to the "spiritual state."[39] "Tears," he writes, "mark the boundary between the bodily and the spiritual state, between the state of subjection to the passions and that of purity."[40] This transition can be described in eschatological terms as a passage from the present age to the "new age" or the age to come. In Isaac's words:

> The fruits of the inner self begin only with the shedding of tears. When you reach the place of tears, then know that your spirit has come out from the prison of this world and has set its foot upon the path that leads towards the new age. Your spirit begins at this moment to breathe the wonderful air that is there, and it starts to shed tears.[41]

Isaac goes on to describe this transition as a new or second birth. We cry as babies when we are first born into this world, and we cry likewise when we are reborn into the age to come:

> The moment of the birth of the spiritual child is now at hand, and the travail of childbirth becomes intense. Grace, the common mother of us all, makes haste to give birth mystically to the soul, God's image, bringing it forth into the light of the age to come. And when the time for the birth has arrived, the intellect begins to sense something of the things of that other world—as a faint perfume, or as the breath of life which a newborn child receives into its bodily frame. But we are not accustomed to such an experience and, finding it hard to endure, our body is suddenly overcome by a weeping mingled with the sweetness of honey.[42]

The tears here are evidently tears of joy at the marvels of God's mercy, not tears of penitence over sin; yet there is also within them a certain bittersweet quality, since the experience of rebirth is "hard to endure." Isaac makes it clear that he is speaking of actual tears pouring from the eyes and that they flow spontaneously, "without compulsion."[43] These "complete" and continual tears that mark the passage from the present to the new age, he adds, last for about two years, after which they cease.[44]

To indicate this liminal role of tears, as marking transition and new birth, the Christian East habitually speaks of spiritual weeping as a baptism. St. Gregory of Nazianzus (329/30–389/90) enumerates five kinds of baptism: first, the baptism of Moses, when the people of Israel passed through the Red Sea; second, the baptism of John, that is to say, the baptism of repentance; third, the baptism of Christ, administered within the Church; fourth, baptism "through martyrdom and blood"; and fifth, the baptism of tears. In referring to weeping as a baptism, Gregory means that, in common with the third and fourth kinds of baptism, it confers the forgiveness of sins. But he adds that, unlike sacramental baptism in the Church and the baptism of martyrdom, the baptism of

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tears does not just occur once for all but has to be continually renewed; as the Psalmist says, "Every night I flood my bed with tears" (Ps. 6:6).[45]

Climacus interprets this idea of tears as a second baptism in radical and far-reaching terms:

> The tears that come after baptism are greater than baptism itself, though it may seem rash to say so. Baptism washes off those evils that were previously within us, whereas the sins committed after baptism are washed away by tears. The baptism received by us as children we have all defiled, but we cleanse it anew with our tears. If God in his love for the human race had not given us tears, those being saved would be few indeed and hard to find.[46]

St. Symeon the New Theologian is no less definite in his teaching about the baptism of tears:

> When someone suddenly looks up and contemplates the nature of created things, in a way that he has never done before, he is filled with amazement, and tears flow from him spontaneously and without sorrow. They purify him and confer upon him a second baptism, that baptism of which the Lord speaks in the Gospels: "Unless someone is born through water and the spirit, he will not enter the kingdom of heaven." (John 3:5)
>
> In the first baptism, water prefigures tears, and the oil of chrismation prefigures the noetic anointing of the Spirit. But the second baptism is no longer a type of the truth but the truth itself.[47]

We note here that the tears of which Symeon speaks flow spontaneously and are tears of joy. We also note that the New Theologian, like Climacus, seems to place the baptism of tears on a higher level than sacramental baptism. This raises the question: Does this second baptism of tears confer a new grace, distinct from the grace bestowed through sacramental baptism in the font, or is the grace of the second baptism simply the realization and fulfillment of the grace originally received in sacramental baptism? In the case of both Climacus and Symeon, it seems that they definitely have in view the second alternative.[48] Neither of them wishes to imply that sacramental baptism is incomplete, but they are simply concerned to insist that it needs to be verified and lived out in the personal experience of every Christian.[49]

When shortly before his death Abba Makarios of Egypt was invited to give an address to the assembled monks of Sketis, he began with the words, "Brethren, let us weep."[50] Such is the central place tears occupy in the spirituality of the Christian East. "When our soul leaves our body," writes St. John Climacus, "we shall not be accused because we did not work miracles, or because we failed to be theologians, or because we did not see visions. But we shall certainly be called to account by God because we did not mourn unceasingly."[51]

Yes, indeed: it is only tears that will be weighed at the Last Judgment.

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Notes

1. Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 7 (*Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca* [*PG*] 88:808B). The two basic discussions of spiritual weeping in the Christian East, the first by a Roman Catholic and the second by an Orthodox, were written many years ago: Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: La doctrine de la componction dans l'Orient chrétien,* Orientalia Christiana Analecta 132 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1944); English translation, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East,* Cistercian Studies Series 53 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982); and Myrrha Lot-Borodine, "Le mystère du don des larmes dans l'Orient chrétien," *La vie spirituelle* (supplement for September 1936), reprinted in Olivier Clément et al. in *La douloureuse joie,* Spiritualité orientale 14 (Bégrolles: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1974), 131–95.

For the teaching of particular Fathers, see Kallistos Ware, introduction to John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent,* trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York, 1982), 23–27; Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian,* Cistercian Studies Series 175 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 129–42; Hilarion Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 209–15.

I have said nothing in my paper about St. Ephraim the Syrian, as he is discussed elsewhere in this volume.

2. Compare Lot-Borodine's title, "Le mystère du don des larmes" (see note 1).

3. *Homilies on Luke* 38, in *Selections from the Commentaries and Homilies of Origen,* trans. R. B. Tollinton (London: Society for the Prmotion of Christian Knowledge, 1929), 165.

4. Mary Magdalene is also traditionally identified in the West with the unnamed "woman who was a sinner," who washed Christ's feet with her tears in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:37–38). This identification is not customarily found in Eastern sources.

5. *Apophthegmata Patrum* (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*), alphabetical collection, Arsenios 40–42 (*PG* 65:105C–108A).

6. *Apoph.,* Poemen 119 (*PG* 65:353A).

7. *Apoph.,* Poemen 26 (*PG* 65:328D–329A).

8. *Apoph.,* Poemen 144 (*PG* 65:357C).

9. *Histoires des solitaires égyptiens* 141, ed. F. Nau, *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 13 (1908): 49.

10. Evagrios, *On Prayer* 5–7 (*PG* 79:1168D–1170A).

11. Evagrios, *On Prayer* 78 (*PG* 79:1183C).

12. Mark the Monk (alias Marcus Eremita), *On the Spiritual Law* 12, ed. G. M. de Durand, Sources chrétiennes 445 (Paris: Cerf, 1999), 76.

13. Evagrios, *Parainetikos,* ed. W. Frankenberg, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Phil.–hist. Klasse, Neue Folge, Bd. XII, 2 (Berlin, 1912), 560.

14. Cassian, *Conferences* 9:30, ed M. Petschenig, *Corpus Scriptorium Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 13 (Vienna: Geroldi, 1886), 276.

15. This anecdote is found in an eleventh–century manuscript, edited by F. Nau in *Patrologia Orientalis* 8 (1912): 164 [564].

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16. *First Greek Life* 53, trans. Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia,* Cistercian Studies Series 45–47 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980–82), 1:334.

17. *Paralipomena* 3, trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia,* 2:22–23.

18. Climacus, *Ladder* 7 (*PG* 88:804D).

19. P. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie* (Neuchâtel/Paris: Delachaux and Niestlé, 1959), 106.

20. *Apoph.,* Poemen 119 (*PG* 65:353A).

21. Symeon, *Catechesis* 4, ed. B. Krivochéine, Sources chrétiennes 96 (Paris: Cerf, 1963), 312–16.

22. Neilos, *Letters* 3:257 (*PG* 79:512A–513B).

23. Climacus, *Ladder* 7 (*PG* 88:805C).

24. Climacus, *Ladder* 7 (*PG* 88:809D).

25. Climacus, *Ladder* 5 (*PG* 88:776A).

26. Climacus, *Ladder* 7 (*PG* 88:813B). On "painless" tears, see also Diadochos of Photike, *Century* 37 and 60, ed. J. E. Rutherford, Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations 8 (Belfast: Queen's University, 2000), 50, 74.

27. Climacus, *Ladder* 7 (*PG* 88:813B).

28. Climacus, *Ladder* 7 (*PG* 88:812A).

29. Climacus, *Ladder* 7 (*PG* 88:804B, 801C).

30. É. M. Cioran, *Tears and Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 30.

31. Makarios (attributed to), *Spiritual Homilies,* Collection II [H], 15:26 and 36, ed. H. Dörries, E. Klostermann, and M. Kroeger, Patristische Texte und Studien 4 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964), 143, 148–49.

32. Climacus, *Ladder* 7 (*PG* 88:809A).

33. Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *On Those Who Choose the Life of Stillness* 58 (*PG* 147:741A).

34. Mark the Monk, *On Those Who Think That They Are Justified by Works* 83, ed. de Durand, Sources chrétiennes 445, p. 154 (he is not speaking specifically of tears). When employing the distinction between the natural and the supranatural, I follow the Greek Patristic understanding of these terms rather than that which has come to prevail in the Latin West.

35. Sophrony (Sakharov), *Saint Silouan the Athonite* (Tolleshunt Knights: Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991), 25.

36. Cioran, *Tears and Saints,* 3.

37. Kontakion for the Sunday of Forgiveness, in *The Lenten Triodion,* trans. Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1978), 175. Compare "Adam's Lament" in Sophrony (Sakharov), *Saint Silouan the Athonite,* 448–56.

38. Climacus, *Ladder* 7 (*PG* 88:809C).

39. Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises, Homily* 14, trans. A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wettenschappen, 1923), 85–86; Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies, Homily* 14 [trans. Dana Miller] (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), 83. In my text I have used the versions of both Wensinck and Miller.

40. Isaac, *Homily* 35 [37], trans. Wensinck, p. 164; trans. Miller, p. 174.

41. Isaac, *Homily* 14, trans. Wensinck, p. 85; trans. Miller, p. 82.

42. Isaac, *Homily* 14, trans. Wensinck, p. 85; trans. Miller, pp. 82–83.

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43. Isaac, *Homilies* 6 and 35 [37], trans. Wensinck, pp. 63, 164; trans. Miller, pp. 59–60, 174.

44. Isaac, *Homily* 14, trans. Wensinck, p. 86; trans. Miller, p. 83.

45. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 39:17, ed. C. Moreschini, Sources chrétiennes 358 (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 186–88.

46. Climacus, *Ladder 7* (*PG* 88:804AB).

47. Symeon the New Theologian, *Practical and Theological Chapters* 1:35–36, ed. J. Darrouzès, Sources chrétiennes 51 (Paris: Cerf, 1957), 50.

48. As regards Symeon, this is the conclusion drawn by Athanasios Hatzopoulos, *Two Outstanding Cases in Byzantine Spirituality: The Macarian Homilies and Symeon the New Theologian,* Analecta Vlatadon 54 (Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1991), 131–55. Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian,* 203–07, takes a similar view.

49. Such is also the teaching of Mark the Monk, who gives special attention to this question. See Kallistos Ware, "The Sacrament of Baptism and the Ascetic Life in the Teaching of Mark the Monk," Studia Patristica 10 (Texte und Untersuchungen 107 [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970]), 441–52.

50. *Apophthegmata,* alphabetical collection, Makarios 34 (*PG* 65:277C).

51. Climacus, *Ladder 7* (*PG* 88:816CD).

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"Howl, Weep and Moan, and Bring It Back to God": Holy Tears in Eastern Christianity

Kimberley Christine Patton

A few days after my daughter Rosemary was born on a blue moon in November—a hard birth in any number of ways—I noticed that her blue eyes continuously streamed fat little tears. The pediatrician told us that like many infants she had blocked tear ducts and thus could not drain away the fluids that normally wash our eyes, a condition that should resolve itself within a year but that would have to be surgically addressed if it did not. As she began to smile and to interact with us, her continual weeping became more unnerving, for it was hard not to feel as though no matter what her "topmost" mood, she was responding to a deeper level of things, to the world of September 11, a month and a half before her birth, to war and ruin, to irrevocable loss. The tears stopped a few days before her baptism, six months later in May, but not before I had cleaned them out of her ears hundreds of times, marveling at how organic they were, how though they flowed clear, they dried as a membrane, a web, not at all like water that could wash away but very much like blood showing humanity and incarnation.

Of course there was not always a contrast between her mood and her tears. Rosemary wept and continues to weep for the usual infant reasons as well, from hunger and discomfort and fear and weariness and unidentified floating distress. Neonatal anthropologists observe that of the mammal realm, human infants are among the most defenseless for the longest period of time. Unlike foals they cannot stand or flee from predators; unlike eight-week-old Rottweilers, they cannot snap or bite. Unlike bumblebee-sized newborn kangaroo joeys they cannot take a perilous, self-propelled journey up through yards of maternal fur to dark warm pouch safety. What they can do is cry.

Crying, wailing, weeping is all that stands between the infant and the neglect that will lead to its certain death. Physiologists tell us that this cry has evolved in such a way as to be intolerable; this is not our imagination. The very sonar frequency of the cries of a baby apparently occurs in the audible range that is most difficult to bear. The pitch and duration of the cry causes a listening adult to judge the infant's level of distress.[1] The infant's caregiver will go to any length to make it stop by identifying the need and satisfying it or, in

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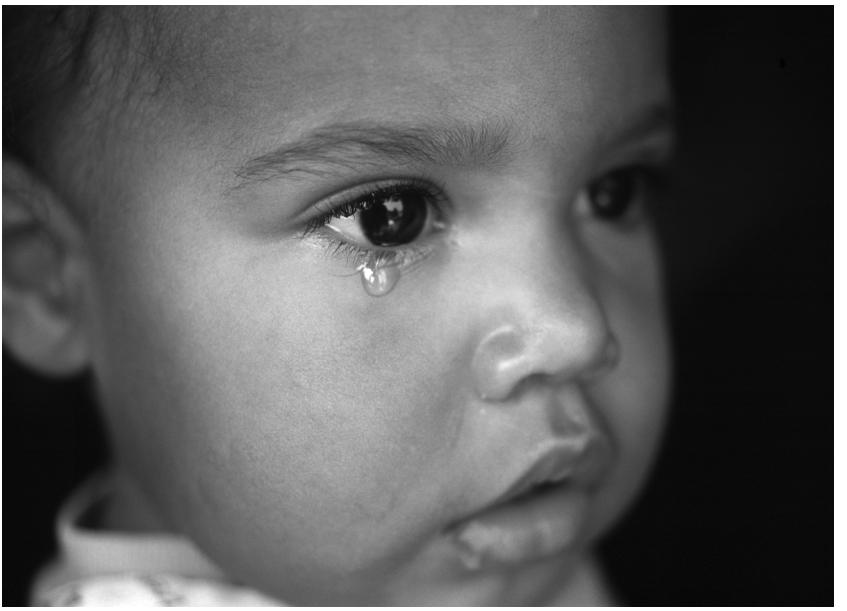


Figure 10. Crying infant, © ImageState.

the anomalous and horrible cases, killing the cry at its source. However, this self-organizing, symbiotic system is supposed to work so that the human infant's weeping will produce a caregiving response from its parent.

Virtually all adults respond to infant cries with marked heart acceleration.[2] Yet if that adult is the parent of the crying child, his or her brain will fire up in the amygdala region, involved in processing emotions, so as to provoke a response; the brain images of childless adults remain either largely unaffected or slightly more responsive to infant giggles than to crying.[3] Mothers experience a quantifiable rise in blood pressure and hypervigilance when their babies cry, and if they are nursing, a lactation response, a letdown of milk. Many mothers have this response to any crying baby, whether or not it is their own. So interestingly, this natural system has a kind of indiscriminate element about it, casting the net of species preservation wider than the genetic family; any crying child will produce a response from any parent, and the future of the race is further protected.

Santha Bhattacharji, the Oxford scholar of the medieval mystic Margery Kempe and a contributor to this volume, wrote me that although she wrote a whole book about Margery and her life and times,[4] when she speaks in public, what people seem to want to hear about most is Margery's continual weeping. She says, "Tears [are] obviously an ongoing phenomenon that modern people are forced to keep well hidden, and which their ministers often have no way

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of responding to." Well hidden indeed; for all of the intellectual reclamation of the individual reality and of response itself, tears remain "at home" in the First World only on stage or in courtroom theatrics. Cultural prohibitions against tears, particularly in public settings, even religious ones, remain powerful indeed. The reasons are complex but probably have to do with their association with a loss of personal control, a surrender to the still devalued world of emotion. "Don't cry" is the phrase of comfort I remember most from my childhood. But deconstructed, what an odd way to comfort a child—with an imperative, however tenderly expressed, not to do that which is the pain's very outlet, the external emblem of the internal, momentarily all-encompassing experience of loneliness, rejection, frustration. "Don't cry."

To realize the negative social charge borne by tears, Americans have only to think of the fall from grace of vice presidential candidate Edmund Muskie in the wake of one episode of public tears in the American presidential election of 1972, and of course to this day males, even very young ones, receive far more pressure not to cry than females. Nevertheless, Bhattacharji is right that tears remain unacceptable for both sexes in developed Western cultures except in rare, highly "determined" circumstances.

One can perhaps understand the social aetiology for this, for in all sorts of professions emotional control is paramount, even vital—the "switch" identified by Reverend Betsee Parker in her remarks about disaster response in this volume—yet the second part of Bhattacharji's observation, that "ministers often have no way of responding to" tears, even in a pastoral context, where one would assume that sociopsychological barriers might desirably be softened, reveals how deep this discomfort lies. Although one might wish to nuance her observation vis-à-vis American and British social differences, I do not fundamentally disagree with her. "It's all right. Don't cry." What does this mean? "Your reality is wrong. Don't respond."

Remembering the medieval gift of tears, and the tears of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Dominic, and St. Francis grieving for the agony of his Savior, Romanian author É. M. Cioran remarks that the Middle Ages were "well acquainted with the technique of producing tears, those proofs of ardent passion"; "the Middle Ages were saturated with tears." Cioran makes an even more radical claim: "The Middle Ages expiated Adam's sin, thus making the Renaissance possible"; "the Middle Ages, having exhausted the contents of eternity, gave us the right to love transitory things." Out of the tragic narrative of the Crucifixion grew, over centuries, lived doctrines of expiatory sorrow: "The whole of Christianity is mankind's fit of crying, of which only salty and bitter traces are left to us."[5]

But this is true perhaps only for Western Christianity, where "the gift of tears" is now all but forgotten. In the Eastern Church, however, the quest for tears continues. Rather than *depleting* the weeper and the well of human experience, tears *generate* the kingdom of God in Eastern Orthodox thought. They

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water the world. Consider the words of St. John Chrysostom, fourth-century author and theologian of Constantinople:

> Think of his tears [St. Paul's]: a three-years space, night and day, he ceased not to weep (Acts 20:31). . . .
>
> What fountain wilt thou compare to these tears? That in Paradise, which watereth the whole earth? But thou wilt have mentioned nothing like it. For this fount of tears watered souls, not earth. If one were to show us Paul bathed in tears, and groaning, would not this be better far to see, than countless choirs gaily crowned? . . .
>
> With these tears the Church is watered, with these souls are planted; yea, though there be fire sensible and substantial, yet can these tears quench it. . . . These tears did Christ pronounce blessed, saying, "Blessed are they that mourn, and blessed are they that weep, for they shall laugh." (Matt. 5:4; Luke 6:21)
>
> Nothing is sweeter than these tears; sweeter are they than any laughter. . . . So the tears are not painful: yea, the tears that flow from such sorrow are even better far than those due to worldly pleasure. . . . For where is the tear not useful? In prayers? In exhortations? We get them an ill name, by using them not to what they are given us for.[6]

Tears remain powerful and precious in Eastern Orthodoxy, not because they are gems like the tears of amber shed by the tree-sisters of the fallen young Phaethon; or unending streams of horror like the tears of the hubristic Niobe, her children struck down by the gods; or dangerous to the hope of the world like the tears of God in the Babylonian Talmudic tractate *Berakhot;* but because they are the only way home. Perhaps nowhere in the history of Christianity is weeping so prominent an omen of sanctity and of return to relationship with God as in the Eastern Orthodox devotional tradition; "holy tears" represent a theological idea developed over centuries from the earliest patristic sources to the lives and thought of historically recent saints. Without tears, the Eastern writers tell us, there can be no true metanoia, no real return to God across the abyss of sin and despair. Tears are more than symptoms of a changed heart; they are, counterintuitively, its catalysts.

One of the most interesting early Christian instances of tears as a devotional vehicle is found in a long prayer written by Saint Gregory the Theologian, who lived in the fourth century (328–390 C.E.) in Caesarea, Alexandria, and Athens.

> O Lord God,
> who pours out mercy and kindness,
> who ever invites me,
> the one who ever turns away from you

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and yet is benefited by you,
send compunction upon me, the wretched one,
and, as you did in the past
with the rock in the desert,
make my stony and petrified heart
gush forth fountains of tears.[7]

Here we see how Gregory appropriates the Numbers episode of Moses striking the rock in the desert wilderness with his rod, the same rod that turned the Nile into blood and parted the Red Sea to release water for the parched Israelites to drink. The hard, unyielding rock is the heart of the closed, unrepentant soul. God, the true agent of Moses' miracle, is entreated to strike once again and to water the plains of the thirsty soul, to let it drink. That life-renewing water whose unlikely source is the stony, petrified rock is made up of tears. Tears will slake spiritual thirst. Tears will allow the soul to live once more, to change from petrification to supple articulation in the hands of its creator. Weeping, not sacrifice and not obedience, is as essential to the life of the soul as water is to the life of the body. In other words, the Christian should yearn for soul-softening and life-giving tears with as much desperation as the Israelites cried out for water. One should want above all to weep, not to refrain from weeping.

As is so frequently the case for Byzantine prayer, liturgy, and theological writing, this desire draws its imagery from the Hebrew Bible, through the Septuagint. The Psalms, with their frequent dwelling on human misery, offer a wealth of images for patristic thought. "Every night I will wash my bed: I will water my couch with tears. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. / When shall I come and behold the face of God? / My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, Where is your God?" (Ps. 42:2–3).

As in many traditions, as Jack Hawley observes, one aspect of ritual tears in Eastern Christianity is predictably related to death and is largely the province of women. Female lamentation is a highly developed ritual of antique heritage, following biblical and apocryphal paradigms (for example, the weeping of Jesus over Lazarus; the weeping of the woman who anoints Jesus' feet with spikenard and wipes them with her hair in anticipation of his death; the weeping of Mary Magdalene in the garden as she sees the freshly unsealed crypt of Christ; and above all the lament of the Virgin for her crucified son). The last example is not only reenacted in chanted recitation of the services of Holy Friday, as the large icon of Christ is taken down from the cross in the sanctuary, but takes well-known poetic form in medieval and later Mediterranean lament. To this day these poems of Mary's grief are often deliberately incorporated by mourning women into individual lamentation for their own dead. Thus the transpersonal weeping of Mary becomes a generative paradigm for the personal weeping of the bereaved; the heartbreaking loss of the divine son

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encompasses all human loss; the grief of the Theotokos, the grief of every mother, and, by extension, of all humanity. This in turn must surely draw at least some of its strength from the Israelite tradition of Rachel's weeping for her lost children, which represents the unmitigated grief of Israel in the prophet Jeremiah and later in the Gospel of Matthew in the story of the slaughter of the innocents.

Yet there is of course the example of Jesus, who provides a male paradigm for weeping. Every veteran of a Bible-based church school curriculum knows the shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept" (*edakrusen*) (John 11:35). The Lord, who apparently knew he would raise his dear friend Lazarus from the dead, nevertheless wept with a broken heart when his friend died. In the fluids of the incarnation, St. Isaac the Syrian, seventh-century Bishop of Nineveh, finds the matrices of communion with God:

> Oh Master Lord Jesus Christ,
> who wept for your friend Lazarus
> and shed tears of sorrow and compassion upon him,
> accept the tears of my bitterness.
> Through your passion heal my passions;
> through your wounds cure my wounds;
> through your blood purify my blood.
> And mingle with my body
> The fragrance of your life-giving body.[8]

Note that although the saint writes in homologies, it is the immortal bodily experience that will redeem the mortal one. The sanctifying Passion of Jesus was *not* the same as the earthly passions of the one who prays, and this is why the greater can heal the lesser. Christ's holy wounds can cure my unholy ones. My unredeemed body can be changed through admixture with the redeeming body of the Son of God. Hence "my tears of bitterness" are only parallel to the tears of Jesus in their composition. Isaac, like Gregory, wants to weep and sees his inability to weep as spiritually dangerous, even disastrous.

At least three forms of spiritual tears emerge in Eastern Christian thought that are neither a responsive orientation to death nor especially "marked" as female. The first, most exalted, parallels the "spiritual tears" of medieval Buddhist Japan identified by Gary Ebersole in this volume; the "gift of tears" refers to the gently flowing, ceaseless, and above all passionless condition of spiritual weeping, a charism that is found in many saints, and, indeed, is one hallmark of personal sanctity. These Christian tears in a sense "flow upward," resonating with the Buddhist ideal of tears of nonattachment to the world. They are a human link to the celestial realm rather than a connection to the earthly realm of travail and embodied emotion. They are "sweet," as Bishop Kallistos Ware observes; as a gift of the Holy Spirit, they neither contort the face nor

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rack the body. They are the tears of illumination to which St. Chrysostom seems to refer. As Ware writes of these tears, "[T]hey signify the spiritualizing of the senses, and form an aspect of the total transfiguration of the human person by deifying grace."[9]

The second are the tears shed out of sorrow for the fallen state of the world; as such, this weeping is paradoxically both a universal indictment of the sin-ravaged human community and an expression of universal compassion for it. Examples of such weeping abound in hagiographical literature, from St. John Climacus to St. Silouan the Athonite. The Virgin's weeping after her apotheosis falls into this category and is expressed in the many instances of her miraculously weeping icon; her weeping, though, is an example to both men and women. Parallels exist in other traditions, perhaps most notably in the largely male proto-Sufi movement, *al-Bakka'ūn*, "the weepers" to whom William Chittick draws our attention in "Weeping in Sufism" and whose praxis of crying derived its authority from the Prophet's saying, "Weep or at least attempt to weep!" It is certain that out of Coptic and Syriac ascetic weeping comes historical convergence; "a direct line [from these early Eastern Christian practices] runs to the Islamic *bakka'ūn*."[10]

The third form of holy tears are those that signify repentance. These are "bitter" tears, like "blood from the wounds in our soul," as St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote.[11] This type of spiritual weeping has flourished mostly in male monastic settings but has powerfully influenced ideas of repentance across the social layers of the church.[12] As in the prayer of St. Gregory the Theologian considered earlier, tears both *precipitate* and *indicate* a true softening of the hardened heart; as Father John Chryssavgis observes, tears are the sine qua non of repentance.[13] This is a radical attachment of importance to tears; rather than being a by-product of remorse or an emotional ornament of sorrow, they literally open the doors of reconciliation to God. In other words, it is not enough to feel or to be broken, deeply ashamed, truly cast out: weeping must occur. Some ancient theologians go so far as to assert that without tears one cannot truly repent; St. Symeon the Theologian writes, "Remove tears and with them you remove purification; and without purification no one is saved." This religious logic asserts that without tears that cleanse the soul in penitence, one cannot truly be forgiven by God and thus reconciled to him; hence tears are the axis of salvation itself.

Christian scripture makes tears a powerful objective correlative for repentance in devotion in the famous account in Luke 7:37–50. A "woman in the city, who was a sinner," having learned of Jesus' presence in the house of a Pharisee, wept at his dusty feet stretched out on the couch behind him as would have been the Roman custom, bathing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair, then kissing and anointing them with precious ointment. Simon the host's condemnation of her as a sinner is met with Jesus' question about the creditor forgiving the two debtors of five hundred denarii

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and the other fifty; he whose greater sins are forgiven has greater love for the creditor. Her tear-soaked attendance becomes a model of reproach: "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. . . . Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little" (Luke 7:48). Here divine forgiveness bookends the tears of penitence. The woman apparently weeps tears of repentance in response to the knowledge that she is absolved, as Jesus's mini-parable about the creditor illustrates; yet her lavish, self-abasing act of devotion also provokes his absolution: "Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven'" (Luke 7:49).

Tears are signs of *penthos* (**πένθος**), which shares the same etymology as *pathos*; it is affliction, but it bears a special meaning: "compunction," "regret that is felt in the depths of the heart for having grievously sinned."[14] **Πενθέω** and **παρακαλέω** are used in the Septuagint in Isaiah 61:2, where the prophet says God has sent him to "bind the brokenhearted," those who weep over Jerusalem. The only appearance of the word in the New Testament is the participle *penthountes* in the haunting second verse of the Matthean Beatitudes: "Blessed are those who weep, for they shall be comforted [*paraklithisontai*]" (Matt. 5:4). But so far is the monastic notion of *penthos*, a "fruit of grace," from lamentation for death, indeed for anything earthly, that the weeping that is its stigmatum can barely be said to be associated with more familiar kinds.[15] The "mourning" ones probably meant by Jesus are spiritualized, as are the Beatitudes as a whole;[16] by the time of the early Church, the *penthountes* have become those who weep for their own sins and for the sinfulness of the world.

Clement of Alexandria, Platonically influenced toward moderation, warned against distracting extremes of emotion, "excessive laughter and . . . tears."[17] Yet as Irénée Hausherr observes, Clement acknowledges that tears mean repentance and that "to weep and wear mourning for justice's sake is to bear witness to the most wonderful Law, that is good."[18] The mighty Christian thinker Origen, ultimately rejected as a patristic authority, makes my central point, one repeated by many canonical writers of the Church. He writes in his homily *On Jeremiah*, "Prolonged prayer and intensity of tears incline God to mercy."[19] Tears produce mercy, and there is hope of salvation. *To weeping, and weeping alone, God will pay attention.* But why? What underlies this belief?

Liturgically, the *locus classicus* for this theme is the bitter weeping of Adam outside the gates of paradise, the garden that had been his home until his own disastrous choice resulted in his permanent exile. Adam's tear-stained lament is sung each year in the Vespers preceding the Sunday of Forgiveness, which inaugurates the season of Lent. Its place in the liturgical calendar is again one of catalysis: Adam's tears over his nakedness are a powerful sign of "divorce," not only from the lush Garden of Eden but from a state of grace with God: "Woe is me! . . . now I am an exile from glory." One has lost communion with

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one's Creator, is "cut off," and there can be no more profound loss than this. Adam grieves the lost shared love: "'My soul wearies for the Lord, and I seek Him in tears. How should I not seek Him? . . . I cannot forget Him for a single moment, and my soul languishes after Him, and from the multitude of my afflictions I lift up my voice and cry: "Have mercy upon me, O God. Have mercy on Thy fallen creature."' Thus did Adam lament, and the tears streamed down his face onto his beard, onto the ground beneath his feet, and the whole desert heard the sound of his moaning. The beasts and the birds were hushed in grief; while Adam wept because peace and love were lost to all men on account of his sin."[20]

The seventh-century Bishop of Nineveh, Isaac of Syria, represents this attitude toward spiritual processes when he writes, "From stillness a person can gain possession of the three causes of tears: love of God, awestruck wonder at his mysteries, and humility of heart. Without these it is unthinkable that anyone should be accounted worthy to taste of the wellspring of flaming compunction arising from the love of God."[21] "The wellspring of flaming compunction," a watery and yet also fiery phrase typical of St. Isaac's mysticism, is a feeling of guilt and remorse that so overwhelms, so crushes the ego's defenses that it is possible to perceive and unite with the Creator.

Yet as in everything Orthodox, there is an oscillation here; "what begin as tears of sorrow for sin are changed by degrees into tears of gratitude for gladness." And more than oscillation, deep paradox, for like the Crucifixion itself, "repentance is not negative but positive, not destructive but life-giving, not despondent but full of hope."[22] The tears of repentance are the "catalytic converter" into new life. John Chryssavgis expresses it profoundly:

> Repentance . . . is a continuous pathway . . . a perennial striving, an all-embracing motion and not merely an occasional emotion. . . . Whether related to this continuity and endurance or to the depth of moral sensitivity involved, for the Fathers of the Church there is an intimate link between repentance and tears. There are other criteria, but grief is paramount, and its intensity is proportionate to the depth of repentance.[23]

The theological burden is this: until one weeps in pain like Adam, not only for what has been lost but for one's own culpability in that loss, there can be no restoration. The divine forgiveness that results from the sacrament of confession is understood as a kind of return to the paradise of divine adoption. Hence penitent tears, made up of traditionally purifying salt and water, are characterized as cleansing, clearly mirrored in the modern psychological concept of catharsis. Over and again in Eastern Christian thought the tears of repentance are homologized to the waters of baptism that first dissolve and then re-create the person. "And I was appalled by my old life," writes Archmandrite Sophrony in his spiritual autobiography, "and my soul reached out

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towards the holy Light and gave herself over to tears of repentance."[24] The effect of this, according to St. John Climacus, is radical:

> The fountain of tears after Baptism is greater than Baptism itself, although this may seem a bold thing to say. . . . Our first Baptism we received as babies, but we have all polluted it; through tears we regain the purity of our first Baptism.[25]

What is interesting phenomenologically is that because of their dual catalytic and cathartic roles, tears are often *sought* from God; as Gregory the Theologian asks, "[S]end compunction upon me, the wretched one, and, as you did in the past with the rock in the desert, *make my stony and petrified heart gush forth fountains of tears*." This ventures beyond John Donne's "Batter my heart, three-personed God," for there is a special result that is implored of God: tears. Although quintessentially and perhaps even exclusively human, the tears of repentance are understood as a divinely originating gift. Tears come at God's pleasure. Furthermore, as is so often the case upon close examination of an allegedly indexical relationship, tears are far less a *symbol* of a condition than they are an efficacious vehicle for the far-reaching change of that condition. What they "mean" in the religious imagination is in the end far less important than what they "do."

Of the three types of spiritual tears noted above, tears of repentance precipitate an end to the exile of the heart from its beloved, lost Source and effect a reunion with it. This is an Eastern Christian parallel to the Jewish notion of *galut*, exile, and of the weeping *Shekhinah* who is cut off from the other divine *sephiroth* through the sin of Adam in Kabbalistic anthropogony, as well as Sufi notions of distance. All of these religious ideas carry with them a sense of yearning, of having lost a matrix that was perfect comfort, love, and affirmation. The modern saint Silouan the Athonite, reflecting on Adam's "mighty moan" as he lamented, observes, "He sorrowed less after paradise and the beauty thereof—he sorrowed that he was bereft of the love of God, which insatiably, at every instant, draws the soul to Him. In the same way the soul which has known God through the Holy Spirit but has afterwards lost grace experiences the torment that Adam suffered. There is an aching and a deep regret in the soul that has grieved the beloved Lord. Adam pined on the earth, and wept bitterly, and the earth was not pleasing to him."[26]

"The Makarian Homilies say that a man must 'weep his way back' to paradise," remarks Chryssavgis.[27] Echoing Kallistos Ware's notion of repentance as life-giving, he says, "But tears—a concomitant and a culmination of repentance—are also a turning point in homecoming, a pledge of return, and a firstfruit of its joy. The longing for return from exile is also an anticipation of the glory to come. Tears demonstrate the frontier between the present and the future."[28] Upon this hinge, this swinging pendulum, one state blurs into another and what was is dissolved through tears into what is to come.

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I suggest that Orthodox Christianity, in its insistence on the marriage of tears with true repentance, must have drawn from the historical tradition of theurgic tears in the Hebrew Bible. There are the vocative crying prayers of the Israelites before battle in the Books of Judges and Maccabees, which attend fasting and sometimes sacrifices as a means of "inquiring of the Lord"; they have a divinatory function, but also a mantic one: they are a powerful means of summoning God's attention. Weeping bookends the struggle of the Israelites against the Benjaminites in Judges; at 20:23, at the slaughter of 22,000 of their number, the Israelites seek God's will by weeping; at God's injunction, they redraw the battle lines, and lose 18,000 more. Judges 20:26 tells us, "Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went back to Bethel and wept, sitting there before the Lord." Similarly, 2 Maccabees 13:12 tells of the actions of the Jews under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus in response to the onslaught of Antiochus Eupator and his elephants; the Jews "besought the merciful Lord with fasting and weeping and lying prostrate for three days" before they counter-attacked.[29]

In Israelite religious poetry and histories, tears denote the depth of sorrow. In the devotional tradition of Israel as it is refracted for us in scripture, it is humbled, abashed grief rather than a proud, self-justifying heart that commands God's attention: "A broken and contrite heart, O Lord, You will not despise" (Ps. 51). Hezekiah, sick unto death (2 Kings 20:3), implored God, reminding him of his faithfulness, and "wept bitterly." God answered him, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you." (2 Kings 20:5). Divine *sight* seems to matter enormously in this response, not just hearing. Here in the concept of God's seeing the tears we have a fascinating notion of tears as a kind of offering, a sacrifice, whose *sight* is what moves God to pity. God responds to the acceptable offering with His own presence. Phenomenologically this may bind tears, as a face-to-face event, to the theophany in Psalm 11, where God both visually inspects humanity, as Jon Levenson has noted, and grants those "found worthy . . . a vision of his 'face'":[30]

> The Lord is in His holy Palace
> The Lord—His throne is in heaven;
> His eyes behold (*yeḥezu*). His gaze searches mankind.
> The Lord seeks out the righteous man . . .
> For the Lord is righteous;
> He loves righteous deeds;
> The upright shall behold (*yeḥezu*) His face.

The Prophet Joel elevates tears to the purest form of offering: "Yet even now, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." As with sacrifice, the

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very best tears are those which bring the ruined heart before God's throne. One is reminded of Rumi's verse, "And if you bring a dead heart / carried like a coffin on your shoulders, / God will say, / 'Oh, cheat! Is this a graveyard? / Bring the live heart! Bring the live heart!'"[31]

Let us return to Psalm 42, treated earlier. Now certainly this psalm expresses the desolation of the psalmist that God is absent from him, has hidden His face. He thirsts for God, he longs for God, he can only weep and eat tears day and night. But below the tears as an expression of desolation, I wonder if there does not lie another expectation, namely, that weeping itself is a kind of theurgic prayer, intended and expected to produce divine response, just as the infant's crying produces a response from the parent. That would explain perhaps the emphatic imagery of faces in the psalms: it is God's face that I long to see, that I should see, and it is my own weeping face that should produce that supremely comforting sight. As a thirsty baby who weeps for her loving parent, the one who never fails her, God and I *should* be face-to-face. I will cry to bring him close, to get him to attend to me. I will cry and be victorious.

In Psalm 6, for example, the logic of petition and response unfolds with tears as the fulcrum: "I am weary with my moaning: every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my coach with weeping, My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes. Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer. All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror; they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame" (Ps. 6:6–10). Note the logic here: if God hears the weeping, the enemies will be defeated.[32]

Thus, perhaps, it is *not* to female lamentation traditions in the context of death but instead to the temporary but intense desperation of a crying infant in the context of hope that we need to look, without sentimentality, to perceive what is intended here. "I do not have a painful heart to seek after you," laments Isaac of Syria. "I do not have repentance nor contrition / which bring the children back / to their inheritance; / I do not have, O Master, entreating tears. / My mind has been darkened by worldly and material things / and is not capable of looking at you in pain."[33] Without tears, which do not just flow but *entreat* God, as an infant entreats an adult to respond to it with care, one cannot even feel the pain that inspires God's response and the re-adoption of the soul.

Thus far these two tracks have been running parallel: the tears of an infant and the parental response they evoke; the tears of compunction shed by the penitent soul and the divine attention and forgiveness they attract. Human infant tears parallel those of the sinful, conscious adult mortal in the crucible of divine encounter. The tracks converge within the religious imagination of both ancient Jewish and Orthodox Christian traditions.[34] We have spoken of tears as an efficacious means of entreaty in ancient Israelite religion and of the

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possible contribution of this idea to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. It is interesting that out of a later development of that tradition, the Rabbinic Pseudepigrapha, comes a startling midrash on the book of Jonah that marries the two themes. An eighth century C.E. text titled *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer,* the putative author of whom was the second century C.E. excommunicated rabbi Eliezer son of Hyrkanos, treats the story of the Ninevites' repentance in a chapter titled "The Power of Repentance," perhaps originally a homily for the Shabbat prior to Yom Kippur. The chapter sees (as we sometimes encounter elsewhere in rabbinical writings) the Pharaoh of the book of Exodus as having escaped Egypt, reigning as the new king of Nineveh. When Jonah comes with his prophecy against the sinful Ninevites, the text follows the biblical book in telling us that Pharaoh rose from his throne, rent his garments, and clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes. It then adds that Pharaoh proclaimed both a public fast for the righteous and a public execution by burning of the unrighteous. In addition, he took the radical step of separating women from their children, and clean animals from their offspring.

A great howl of despair, the despair caused by the separation of what belongs together, arose as high as heaven. "The infants saw the breasts of their mothers, and they wished to have suck, and they wept. The mothers saw their children, and they wished to give them suck."[35] The result of this terrible clamor? The Lord hears and is moved to pity. The piteous weeping of bereft infants, orchestrated by the ruler of Nineveh, becomes instead a sign of the sorrowful repentance of the city. The Lord forgives the sins of the people, and "[b]y the merit of 4123 children," the text asserts, "more than twelve hundred thousand men were saved, as it is said, 'And shall I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city . . . ?'"

Finally, and perhaps most powerfully, words attributed to St. Ephraim the Syrian reveal both ideas in an unforgettable way:

> The soul is dead through sin. It requires sadness, weeping, tears, mourning, and bitter moaning over the iniquity which has cast it down to perdition. Howl, weep and moan, and bring it back to God. See how the mother suffers whose child has been snatched away by death and thrown into the tomb; she laments because her love has departed. Even greater sadness should be in a man whom sin has separated from God, that such a lovely image of his goodness should be lost. . . . Weep and moan for your soul, separated from God, this God who is distressed for you as a mother for her only child.[36]

Methodologically, it might be argued that this analogy is similar to the one advocated by Wendy Doniger in her recent theoretical work on comparative mythology, "from the bottom up."[37] Continuities about broad concepts such as sacrifice, or a High God, or an Oedipal complex are eschewed in "grounded" comparative effort; "overarching human universals" are bracketed in favor of "particular narrative details concerning the body, sexual desire, procreation,

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parenting, pain, and death, details which, though unable to avoid mediation by culture entirely, are at least less culturally mediated than the broader conceptual categories of the universalists." In other words, one might argue that the infant whose weeping produces the face of the loving parent is the starting ground, the "bottom" of human bodily experience; the interpretive "up" is the human weeping of repentance that analogously produces divine response, pity, forgiveness, and an end to the unbearable separation between sinner and God. This line of thinking sees the religious structure as the cultural/religious construction, a complexified, perhaps overly determined version of the infant/parent tears.

But like all methods, this one has its premises, its starting points, and these are not unassailable. The premise of Doniger's "bottom-up" interpretation of myth or religious ideas is that "bodily details" of human physiology, human physical relationship, the matrix of our somatic response to the world are "real," verifiable, a good place to ground oneself epistemologically or even philosophically. The main flaw of this method, appealingly solid as it may seem, is that we have no way of knowing whether this bodily narrative is any more or any less real than the world described by religion—the things that are said about God and our relationship to him. Why assume that the physical is more real than the metaphysical? For all we know, the parallels to which I wish to draw attention may result because our experience, even as infants weeping for our parents, may be theomorphic and draw their intensity from a primeval separation from the First Parent, the one whom we remember in love and longing. Thus infant tears would be elevated rather than penitent tears degraded. And tears would become, in this view, not an inadequate form of communication that infants would not use if they could speak but the opposite: a kind of meta-language, one imbued with the authenticity that words can never bear. For "though the gates of prayer are closed, the gates of weeping are not closed."

I hope we have begun to approach an understanding of the importance, the absolute necessity of tears to Orthodox Christian repentance. Tears are the human signal to God not only that one is sorry, not only that one's heart is broken and humbled and that one is awash in inescapable awareness of one's own sinfulness, but that as his child one wishes and needs him to come. In fact, in weeping one expects him to hear and to see the tears, and to come. Theologically, we cannot argue that weeping will produce God, for God is self-originating and cannot be compelled. But in the ritual mind of the ancient Near East and the Levant, recast in the Christian thought of late Antiquity and the Byzantine world and continuing into Orthodox Christian mysticism, we might strongly wish to argue that weeping persuades God to hear, attend, rectify, and absolve. Paralleling the Matthean and Lukan insistence on God's attendance upon the smallest, most transient of events, the fall of a solitary sparrow, St. Symeon the New Theologian writes, "Nothing escapes you, O

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my God, / my maker, my redeemer, / not even a tear-drop, nor even a portion of a drop."[38]

God cannot ignore tears, not even a drop. But does this not imply a contingent view of the godhead? A way out of this theodescriptive dilemma may emerge in considering the role of compulsion in the case of the parent and her weeping infant. We do not say that the mother or father is *compelled* to pick up and soothe the crying child in the same way that a slave is compelled to act—that there is no free will at play. But neither, in a very real sense, is the parent "free" to ignore the weeping. The response is induced out of a deeper exigency, one that originates with Love itself. "Prolonged prayer and intensity of tears incline God to mercy." Tears cause God to bend down to the human level where there is misery. Love recalls the child back to itself for restoration. Love can do no other, because it is Love; as St. Dionysius the Areopagite writes, its self-originating nature is to comfort and to restore its creatures, to draw them back to itself. So with repentance and tears: they catalyze God to act as he must act, because he is God, ever free, yet ever bound inexorably to our wretched, yearning selves.

This potent divine attraction to each of our individual and idiosyncratic dilemmas, to our tears, this mystery of responsive grace, cannot be fathomed but only noted in its mysterious operations. Archimandrite Sophrony, the great modern Russian theologian and spiritual child of St. Silouan who lived a monastic vocation on Mt. Athos for most of his life but spent his last years teaching in England until his death in 1993, tells us of monks who wept for decades in search of God. He says of this phenomenon, "Over the years God's word would come into my heart and mind, and I noticed how in the briefest of utterances the Lord reveals infinitude at the point where our praying spirit happens to be concentrated. . . . Our spirit is led by some mysterious force and in some inscrutable fashion to the very reality of the Eternal God. Events like these do not depend on man but on God's good will toward His suffering creature. We cannot foresee when He will incline to us, and in what form. We only yearn for Him; weep in repentance over our perversion; long for Him to heal us; weary of being separated from Him."[39]

"Weary of being separated from him": though the adults of Nineveh repented, they could not attract God's attention and thus his forgiveness until he heard the terrible cry of their miserable children, who wept for their mothers—an intolerable cry of helplessness and yearning. Infants' cries, the sound and sight of their weeping—this is where we must look heuristically to understand what is meant by the primacy of tears in Eastern Orthodox ideas of repentance. No other human experiential analogy will do, for none so well defines who is involved or what is at stake. Orthodox repentant weeping seems to be not so much about guilt caused by the sin itself but rather about sorrow and horror at the separation from one's Source. As Archimandrite Sophrony writes, "The soul of the repentant sinner, seeing himself inexpressibly far from the Truth

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that he seeks, becomes an aching wound and he beseeches the beloved Lord for mercy."[40]

The tears of infants separated from parental love or milk are not a *metaphor* for this aching, this beseeching of God by the Christian penitent, for the tears of the penitent hurt just as much as those of the infant. In both cases, tears are instead a perfect *expression* of how deep such separation cuts, despite where the responsibility for it lies. And both are full of expectation, the psychological paralleling the theological necessity of *hope in weeping*. Even in their desperation at the fact of separation, tears embody the hope of reunion. Infants who are chronically neglected eventually stop crying altogether, for there is no point; tears have stopped working, or have never worked to begin with.

Walter Brueggemann writes of ancient Hebrew lament, "Where the cry is not voiced, heaven is not moved and history is not initiated. And then the end is hopelessness. Where the cry is seriously voiced, heaven may answer and earth may have a new chance."[41] The infant's and the penitent's are not different tears but comprise instead a continuum of existence from physical to metaphysical reality. For in Eastern Orthodox Christian theology, neither God nor human beings are imagined phantasms of the other. We are instead all weeping. God is weeping, too, as the Talmudic tractate *Hagigah* tells, hidden in his Inner Chamber, and we, increasingly, everywhere, are weeping and wondering when, in the middle of this dark night, he will come and pick us up.

Notes

1. See Brian K. Dessureau, Carolyn O. Kurowski, and Nicholas S. Thompson, "A Reassessment of the Role of Pitch and Duration in Adults' Responses to Infant Crying," *Infant Behavior and Development* 21:2 (1998): 367–71.

2. Philip Sanford Zeskind, "Adult Heart-Rate Responses to Infant Cry Sounds," *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 5 (1987): 73–71.

3. Erich Seifritz, et al., "Differential Sex-Independent Amygdala Response to Infant Crying and Laughing in Parents versus Nonparents," *Biological Psychiatry* 54 (2003): 1367–75. Seifritz, who led the study at the University of Basel in Switzerland, remarked in an interview, "This makes biological sense. . . . Tears signify to parents that something is amiss, generating emotions such as concern or fear, which prompt parental care. In evolutionary terms, this means that a child is more likely to survive and pass on his or her genes" (Helen R. Pilcher, "Parents' Brains Tuned to Babies' Tears: Emotions Triggered by Wailing Tots," *Nature News Service*, December 22, 2003, http://www.nature.com/nsu/031215/031215-13.html.)

4. Santha Bhattarcharji, *God Is an Earthquake: The Spirituality of Margery Kempe* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997).

5. É. M. Cioran, *Tears and Saints*, trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 29–30 passim.

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6. St. John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Colossians," Homily XII, on Colossians 4:12–13, trans. John Broadus, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 13:316–17 passim.

7. St. Gregory the Theologian, "A Prayer of Supplication and Compunction to Our Lord Jesus Christ," *Voices in the Wilderness: An Anthology of Patristic Prayers,* trans. and ed. Nikolaos S. Hatzinikolaou (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1988), 41–42.

8. Ibid., 132.

9. Bishop Kallistos Ware, "The Orthodox Experience of Repentance," in *The Inner Kingdom,* vol. 1 of The Collected Works (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 57. The schema I propose here differs slightly from the one offered by Ware, who distinguishes between natural (or sensuous) tears, which are "usually bound up with the passions" (such as, for example, jealousy, anger, frustration, or self-pity), and spiritual tears. "Sensual tears express our earthly sadness, living as we do in a fallen world of corruption that is moving relentlessly towards death; spiritual tears lead us to the new life of the Resurrection." Spiritual tears are further distinguished by Ware between "two main types" as follows: "[O]n the lower level they are bitter; on the higher level, sweet . . . on the lower level, they are a form of purification; on the higher level, of illumination" (Ware, "Repentance," 56). In this essay I am only interested in spiritual tears, but I would not distinguish so sharply between the higher and lower levels and would add the category of universal sorrow or intercessory tears, which I would argue have characteristics of both of Ware's levels of spiritual tears. Furthermore, as Ware himself admits, the ordeal of sensual weeping can lead to spiritual change, even illumination; "blurring" seems inevitable when classifying tears.

10. Fritz Meier, s.v. "*bakka*'" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam,* new ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–), 1:959–61.

11. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Funeral Oration on the Empress Flacilla,* in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 9, ed. Andreas Spira (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 477.

12. See Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: La doctrine de la componction dans l'orient chrétien,* Orientalia Christiana Analecta 132 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalum, 1944), trans. Anselm Mufstader as *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East,* Cistercian Studies Series 53 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982).

13. John Chryssavgis, *Repentance and Confession in the Orthodox Church* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1988).

14. See discussion in Hausherr, *Penthos,* 7.

15. "Indeed," writes Hausherr, a French Jesuit, "weeping for Christ is not christian. Monastic *penthos* will never be found related to the death of Christ" (Hausherr, *Penthos,* 7). The lowercase spelling of "christian" is in the English translation.

16. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary,* trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 235.

17. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogos,* 2.57.56, in ed. Otto Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus: Stromata Buch* I–VI, 33rd ed., trans. I. Hausherr and A. Hufstader. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1960), 1:191.

18. Ibid., 1:194.

19. Origen, *In Ieremiam* 3:49.

20. Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *St. Silouan the Athonite* (Crestwood, NY:

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St. Vladimir's Press, 1991), 448–49, quoting from "Adam's Lament" in the liturgical handbook, *The Lenten Triodion,* "The Sunday of Forgiveness Vespers."

21. Saint Isaac of Syria, *Daily Readings with St. Isaac of Syria,* ed. A. M. Allchin, trans. Sebastian Brock (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1989), 85.

22. Ware, "Repentance," 56.

23. Chryssavgis, *Repentance and Confession,* 9.

24. Archimandrite Sophrony, *On Prayer,* trans. Rosemary Edwards (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1998), 82.

25. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 7 (*PG* 88:804AM), trans. C. Lubheid and N. Russell, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 137. The disciple of Nicetas Stathatos even says that tears can restore lost virginity (*Century* 2.50 [*PG* 120:924B], trans. in *Philokalia* [*St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth: The Philokalia: The Complete Text,* ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber, 1979-)], 44:120–21).

26. Archimandrite Sophrony, *St. Silouan,* 448.

27. Chryssavgis, *Repentance and Confession,* 10, citing *The Makarian Homilies* 15 and 17.

28. Chryssavgis, *Repentance and Confession,* 10.

29. Commenting upon this military use of tears, Tom Lutz remarks in his recent study, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), "Weeping was an attempt to influence Yahweh through a kind of self-abasement, an announcement of submission before God, like rending one's garments or donning sackcloth and ashes" (43).

30. Jon Levenson, "The Jerusalem Temple in Ancient Devotional and Visionary Experience," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible to the Middle Ages,* ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 43–44.

31. *Rumi: Fragments; Ecstasies,* trans. Daniel Liebert (New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 1981), 55.

32. Lutz observes, "[T]he writer of the Psalms . . . frequently uses his tears in prayer . . . and assumes that prayerful tears will be answered." (*Crying,* 43; e.g., Ps. 5:1–3: "Give ear to my words, O Lord, and give heed to my sighing. Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I pray. O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.")

33. St. Isaac the Syrian, "A Prayer to Our Lord Jesus Christ," in *Voices in the Wilderness,* ed. Hatzinikolaou, 133.

34. St. Isaac says that "the newborn child weeps as it is born into the world; similarly, the Christian weeps as he is reborn into the age to come." See St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homilies* 14 and 35 (37), trans. A. J. Wensinck, in *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh* (Amsterdam: Koniklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923), 85–86, 164–65.

35. *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna,* trans. Gerald Friedlander (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1982), ch. 38, pp. 342–43.

36. St. Ephraim of Syria, *Sermones Exegetici, In Is* 26.10: *"Tollatur peccator et non videat gloriam,"* in *Sancti Patris Nostri Ephraem Syri Opera Omnia* (Rome, 1732–1746), 2:346. Trans. and discussed by Hausherr, *Penthos,* 27–28 passim, and n. 3. Weeping per-

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meates the writings of St. Ephraim; indeed, it is his hallmark and "root metaphor" for religious life. St. Gregory of Nyssa is said to have written in Ephraim's eulogy, "When I start to remember his [Ephraim's] floods of tears I myself begin to weep, for it is almost impossible to pass dry-eyed through his oceans of tears" (*PG* 46:829D).

37. See Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 59.

38. St. Symeon the New Theologian, "A Prayer before Holy Communion," in *Voices in the Wilderness*, ed. Hatzinikolaou, 178.

39. Archimandrite Sophrony, *On Prayer,* 81.

40. Ibid., 52.

41. Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (1986): 66.

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"Send Thou Me":
God's Weeping and the Sanctification of Ground Zero

Reverend Betsee Parker

This is the edited transcript of a conversation between Reverend Betsee Parker, head chaplain of the Ground Zero Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of New York City, and the coeditors of this volume—Jack Hawley of Barnard College, Columbia University, and Kimberley Patton of Harvard Divinity School. The conversation took place in New York City on January 24, 2002.

Kimberley C. Patton: We are honored to be speaking with Reverend Betsee Parker, who has played and who continues to play a central role in the multifaith pastoral response to the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Reverend Parker, you attracted my attention in an interview in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* about your work at Ground Zero and then later with the chief medical examiner up in Bellevue. There you mention the weeping of September 11, in particular the weeping of God. . . . I was anxious to meet you and to hear your thoughts about your heart-shattering work in that pit—in that place of despair.

We were speaking a little while ago about role of "the Pit" in your life—literal pits that symbolize the abyss, the place of hell and hellishness, the place to which Jonah refers when he prays from the belly of the great fish, "You lifted me up from the pit alive." We spoke about your standing a number of years ago on the rim of the gorge at Wounded Knee in South Dakota with a group of teenagers from your parish in Virginia along with descendants of the Lakota Sioux who were massacred there and looking down into that place of death.

I am thinking now of some of the names that the workers at the World Trade Center site called the ruins of the buildings—"the pile," "the Pit," that terrible place to which your life unexpectedly called you.

Reverend Betsee Parker: A lot of the work that I did in Ground Zero was formed by a previous vocation I had in my twenties where I was a veterinary surgical technician. . . . As such, I did not sit up front at the veterinary hospital and take in animals for vaccinations and that sort of thing. I was in the back prepping animals for deep surgery; tying off sutures; often helping to open

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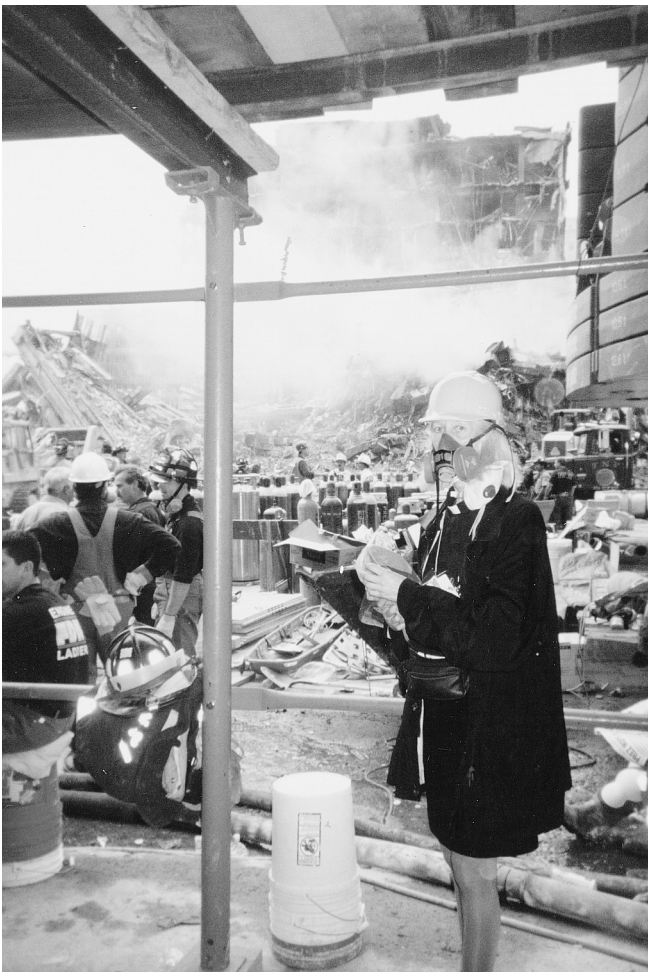


Figure 11. Reverend Betsee Parker at the World Trade Center site (Ground Zero) shortly after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Courtesy Harvard Divinity School Alumni Office, by permission of Betsee Parker.

up the thorax of an animal that was dying; delivering puppies and kittens by C-section, sometimes even blowing life into their little mouths when they came out of the mother. So my twenties were involved in a great deal of pathology and surgery, deep surgery. I suppose you could call the thorax of an animal a kind of pit or deep cavern where there are many lessons to be learned, although at the time it never struck me as such.

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I think in some ways I was attracted to surgery and to going deep into things because the biggest hero in my earliest childhood was my grandfather, who was a surgeon. I adored him, and in my twenties I was searching my heart for what my calling was. I thought that I was going to go into veterinary surgery or that I would go to seminary. So I worked at this hospital for several years and while I was searching my heart and my thoughts, I realized that it [the hospital] was a very lonely place. Caverns are always lonely—they are by nature lonely places. They're sort of like wilderness of Sinai places. . . .

I would spend the greatest part of every day, all week long, fifty hours a week, just in surgery on many different kinds of animals. And as such there wasn't a lot of talking; there was very little mixing with people . . . it was just a great deal of surgery, body fluids, bones, forensic testing, and dental work. One could get tired of that and weary of it. It was exhausting because some of these animals were very heavy. If you had to euthanize them their carcasses were heavy . . . sometimes you have to saw off a head or a leg to test it for tumors. Sometimes you had to open up a tumor and look inside it to create slides from microscopes.

I had a great deal of time during that training to ponder where it was I was called. I decided against veterinary surgery—which is not to say that I put an end to my interest in it. So that particular pit, the pit of the thorax of an animal, the deepest bowels of an animal, is one of the formative areas that actually came to bear in my work in Ground Zero and really, unbeknownst to me, put me in good stead to be prepared for that work.

KCP: Suddenly at Ground Zero you were dealing with all of the fragments and parts in that very graphic involvement with the body. But this time it was not with animal bodies, but rather with the bodies of human beings.

BP: Right, and what also helped me in working in the pit of the belly of the animal or the belly of the beast, if you want to get scriptural about the analogies here, was that I discovered very soon in veterinary medicine that I must find a switch that you just click off—like that—and be able to go forward, sometimes at very rapid speed. If there was more than one surgeon on the table and you had lots of animals to do, you were backlogged and you had to move through your surgery and there wasn't talking; there wasn't time for mistakes; you had to move.

And so, I realized that you had to get through a job and you had to find the way to do it. . . . To me what worked the best was when I spoke very little; I listened a great deal, I stood very still, I paid attention to my work, and I continued to just keep focused on the task at hand, which was to follow through and see it through.

KCP: But at Ground Zero you weren't doing medical work; you were actually blessing these body parts.

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BP: But with [the same] flicked-off switch at the same time. By the time I left the animal hospital two years later, I was very good at being able to do this automatically. And when I went into Ground Zero I found I immediately had to conjure up that skill again.

KCP: Can you tell us the story of that morning—of being called upon to be a priest in a way you had never been before?

BP: When 8:48 came around my husband and I were going down to the entrance of our apartment building to bring a locksmith on the elevator to go upstairs and change a lock for us in our apartment. He stepped on the elevator with us and looked at us and said, "Oh, dear, you two didn't hear what just happened?" I said "No," and he said a plane just crashed into one of the towers at the World Trade Center. And my husband looked at me and I looked at him and the first thing he said was, "You're going to have to put your collar on, aren't you?" And I kind of stammered and stuttered and I said, "Maybe, yeah." And he said, "And it's going to be for a very long time."

. . . The long and short of it is we went up with the locksmith. He changed the lock but he was so disturbed by what we were hearing on the radio that he couldn't finish the job. So he did the best he could and he said, "I knew people in that tower. I have to get out of here; I can't concentrate. I have to get out of here." So by the time he was talking like that, the first tower fell and he was really getting panicky . . . and I was thinking I should get down there. . . . He finished and got all his tools out and did the best he could with this titanium lock.

He left and the second tower fell.

. . . I went down to the site and I took the No. 4 train, which is the subway all the way down to Fulton Street. I didn't know what to do except to put my collar on. I didn't have a mask or a respirator or a dust protector of any sort. I put my collar on before I left and put on a pair of steel-tipped boots and some black trousers, because I figured a skirt wouldn't do me any good down there and as the train stopped at the Fulton Station, which was right down by St. Paul's Church, right at what you would call the epicenter of World Trade No. 2, the South Tower, the doors of the train opened and a whoosh of air sucked into the train that was so full of plaster, dust, smoke, toxins, the smell of jet fuel and fire and steel burning that it hit me like two fists in the face.

It was so powerful and I inhaled and I suddenly couldn't breathe and I was just set back almost to where I wanted to fall back in my seat and in a panic to be sure I could still breathe because it was so thick down there. I stepped off the train and it was in that cloud of dust and smoke that I ascended. . . . As soon as you got out of the train station, and even in the train station, there was a panic and rash of people in tears, running, crying, covering their faces, and, at that point, utter chaos. It was really—to use an analogy—like whirling dervishes everywhere because no one knew [what was happening or what to

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do]—people were spinning in circles; they didn't know which way to run; they'd lost their orientation.

It really was like a fiery furnace that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were subjected to [in the Book of Daniel], or the belly of the great fish that Jonah experienced. The darkness was so pervasive I couldn't see even twenty feet in front of my hand. I did not know my orientation; I did not know where I was.

I found the pillars of St. Paul's Church. It was still standing—thanks be to God. But going down to where the towers were, there were tremendous fires, perhaps like the burning of Berlin or Pearl Harbor in World War II. It looked like a town that had exploded and was on fire . . . and that was only what you could see through the thick clouds of dust, because mostly all you saw was a colorless gray that was so dank and dark and thick and powdery that you could not see sky. You saw darkness and you saw some movement through the dust clouds as people came running toward you. And there was refuse that people had dropped out of their pockets; shoes, socks, briefcases, chairs; everything exploded that you could imagine; pieces of fuselage I even saw up near St. Paul's; and office furniture that had exploded out the windows of the Trade Center. There were bicycles that had melted into the rungs of their racks. It was like a Salvatore Dali surrealist nightmare painting.

KCP: You said there were people crying—people in shock. Did you find yourself crying when you saw this scene from hell?

BP: No, I had already checked that at home. I felt the first weeping when I heard the report that the South Tower fell. I covered my mouth and I kind of gasped and I was about to go into tears, and suddenly I said to myself, "You must steel yourself; it will be necessary to be strong," and I nipped it at home there. I think that's when I flipped the switch I spoke about before. It was well before I got down there, because I didn't do any weeping down there.

KCP: Ever?

BP: Sometimes, yes. But not for long because what the situation presented to me as a chaplain was people agonizing for someone who would still be standing on their feet, who would still be showing some measure of strength, who could be still [be calm]. Once when we spoke before I told you that my nonweeping was my weeping.

I understood very rapidly by paying attention and listening again, as I had done many years before on the surgery table when I was younger; it is very important to see the job through and that could not be done with the luxury of emotion in the way.

KCP: When we first spoke on the phone about tears and weeping in the wake of September 11, you said to me, "From the beginning, my shoulder was wet."

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And I asked you, "Betsee, who was weeping?" And you answered—I'll never forget this—"Who *wasn't* weeping?" And then you began to speak about the weeping of rescue workers and firemen and police and anyone, any officials who came to visit. That was the first time that I myself had ever thought about rescue workers weeping. This seems ridiculous, naïve, now because of course they're human beings [and this thing they confronted was so big, so awful]. But I had only thought about survivors or family members weeping. . . .

BP: They call them [the rescue workers] "first responders." Those of us who were there in the very first days were the most traumatized and experienced the most breakdowns. And you can't determine at what point your system will break down. This is a scary thing, an unknown that I myself didn't know about. I had no knowledge of this [phenomenon] at all. I thought I was just simply going down there to perform a task. I didn't give any thought as to whether my intrinsic strength was great enough to persist and do the work. . . . Some people would break down within the first several hours and had to leave and never returned. The great majority of first responders who visited the site never came back.

But many stayed and worked and wept. There was the very brave commissioner of police, who is a marvelous human being, and the commissioner of the fire department. . . . I think I've never seen a sadder face than his when he would break down and cry down there. The weeping happened at all levels. I saw the tears on Mayor Giuliani's face; I saw them on the faces of the commissioners and the battalion chiefs. I saw tears on Salvation Army people's faces. Our shoulders were soaking wet with tears and you felt like the tears drenched right into your inner body.

There was so much weeping and wetness that we found ourselves going up to St. Paul's for a little bit of respite from that pit . . . to go sit in the pews and do what I call kind of secondary ministry which was not the graphic site, but instead you were in this lovely sanctuary—and your Army Corp of Engineers would come in there, your National Guard would come in, people from FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Association] would come in, specialists from Oklahoma, firefighters from New York City, very young policemen and women came in there. And they would break down very fast. The quickest breakdowns were the youngest workers. . . . I found that experience and older age had a lot to do with coping better. It seems to me that [this coping ability] is related to experiences in life that you have somehow found out how to apply to this situation.

But no matter what the age, it's one thing to be a policeman and go out to a site and have a homicide and have one body you're dealing with and it's a *whole* body and you zipper it into a bag and the coroner and chief medical examiner come out and pronounce the death or whatever—homicide. It's another thing [entirely] to be in a place where the human victim's body is so

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hated, so scorned, and so demeaned that it is exploded and torn and ripped apart, [reduced to] unrecognizable pieces of flesh. That tears a policeman or policewoman down to their soul, and I mean tears down even the most experienced of physicians, who must steel themselves [to deal with such a sight]. That tears someone to the core.

KCP: It seems that in response to that terrible fragmentation, a kind of mission emerged [for you] to bless and sanctify those pieces of human beings, each of them, as they were recovered. Was this a way to restore the dignity of the victims, their theological role as part of God's incarnation? Why did you want to do this?

BP: All of these and more. It was an attempt to say the same thing as in the Book of Job: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though . . . worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" [Job 19:25–26]. I really felt that scripture down there and fought to stand because of what it said theologically, which was: "I am a clarion who declares life in this Pit. . . . By standing and inhaling and exhaling I am declaring life in this place. I don't have to do any more than stand here and inhale and exhale. I am the declaration that life continues in this place of hell."

And I thought that was very significant in that it didn't take any kind of speech or sermon for people to realize that declaration. For traumatized workers all over, construction workers on these big machines, it was just that they could see you and identify you as a religious person *who was standing and not leaving*. They couldn't leave; they were forced by their work to have to be there. I elected to be there. There's a very big difference.

In a way I didn't elect to be there. I would have loved to have not had to be there. But I did respond to God's call. I did say the word, "Yes," and I did cause my feet to step one foot in front of the other and walk forward each day and go there and be there. And that's how I answered the call.

The desire to bless the remains became complicated very early on because of the culture of the Pit in Ground Zero. Now, [officially] we don't say "the Pit" because [the term is thought to be] pejorative. But "the Pit" is what that site is known as in that [particular disaster response] culture, and that is what it will remain, "the Pit" [to all of us who worked there], no matter what the architects put up there. I'm not sure that's bad—that's real; that's realistic. It was a highly catholicized culture [in the Pit]; I mean, the great majority of the first responders were Catholic. The New York City Fire Department had Catholic chaplains; the New York City Police Department had Catholic chaplains, and so on.

So it was a very Catholic culture we had been permitted into, and I, as an ordained woman cleric in this highly Catholic, macho culture, discovered very quickly that I must find a way to be exceedingly sensitive to that high privilege to be standing there in the Pit. It was a privilege—an awful privilege. . . .

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I found that as in so many cases in life, less is more. And it was the case in the Pit, too. The less you said, the more you got done, and the better it went over. People needed to talk and they needed someone who was going to listen and I was there to do that. I really functioned like a sponge that was ready to absorb anything.

John Stratton Hawley: How did people find you?

BP: You mean how did they physically locate me?

JSH: How did they recognize you? How did they know they could come to you?

BP: They didn't know that for sure but in the culture of the Pit, everyone was in uniform. It became a very important part of my work when down there at Ground Zero to wear my collar, which identified what my part was. In a catastrophe nothing is clear. Uniforms have to clarify. Clergy who came down in their uniforms were recognized and honored as such and put to work and kept to work.

KCP: You must have instinctively known that when you put on the collar.

BP: I did. I knew I would be in a culture of police and first-responding MOSs, members of service. I knew that my safety depended on their careful work as well because we did know that the subterranean levels of Ground Zero could collapse under us at any time. In fact, there were tremors under our feet sometimes and a voice would just shout, "Run, run." And you just—where do you run?—run. You don't know where to run; you just do it.

KCP: The decision to bless all the body parts, you said, was complex from very early on. What made it so?

BP: A lot of very powerful emotions—say one of the workers was Jewish, or say a part of a body had a turban on it, the head of a victim.

KCP: You knew that you weren't dealing with all Christians, and that [affected how you determined] what kind of blessing to give.

BP: Right, [our blessing evolved] through trial and error and seeing some clergy make some really goofy, embarrassing mistakes—like one clergy person who went down there and he thought he had to be as Catholic as he could be so he took a little stole and he kissed it and blessed it and put it around his shoulders and he got his little pyx with the anointing oil in it, Lord knows for what because they were all casualties down there at that point and then he pulled out of his backpack a bottle of Evian water and started throwing it all over the remains of people and blessing them. . . .

I started to realize how all of these [symbolic] markers for different [Christian] denominations or [even] for Christianity per se were not helpful. They

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were getting in the way of doing ministry down there; they were revolting to many people; they were harmful and they were causing more pain. I did not think any more pain needed to be inflicted than had already been [done] to all of those victims who had lost their lives.

KCP: It sounded earlier as though you felt that you were dealing with a disaster that was as big as all evil, and so the prayer in a way had to be as big as all of the dimensions of God. Would that be a way of putting it? Because I know you had a team. . . .

BP: We had a multifaith team. I gag at the terms "interdenominational" and "interfaith" because they are such Christian constructs. You know, Christian scholars concocted those buzzwords and that's all they are down there [in that place]—buzzwords—and they don't work, they don't fit. We had religions from all over—we had Taoists, Jainists, you name it, Hindus, Korean Buddhists. We had so many different faiths that the only term I could come up with that justified what the [pastoral response to the] World Trade Center was about spiritually was "multifaith."

JSH: You've spoken about the collar issue, and about one's own particular identity as a helper, and if I understood you rightly, you made a decision on behalf of the team, with the rest of the team really, to try to minimize those markers, even clerical collars, because you felt that they often got in the way of people who came to you for help. You said this happened at a later stage [in the history of September 11], which we haven't really talked about, the stage where your work is at [the large city] morgue [at Bellevue]. But I wondered if you could pick up on that theme a little bit now. And where once again you were receiving people's tears—?

BP: I think what you're speaking of is the transitional phase which occurred nine months after the attack of September 11, which was when Ground Zero technically closed down at the end of May in 2002.

I was invited by the chief medical examiner of New York City, Dr. Charles Hirsch, to stay on to develop a new experimental team of chaplains. I don't use the word "clergy" because some of our chaplains are not ordained, and nonordained persons sometimes make the best chaplains. So we have contingents that are nonordained as well as ordained. And, in this phase, we were going to be shutting down operations in Ground Zero because all of the body parts, more or less, had been found at that time and the mayor's office was technically closing us down.

That did not mean there weren't still things going on down there. I still had a radio into the Deutsche Bank where they were finding parts of human beings, and I would have to come down and bless these remains as they came into the chief medical examiner's office. But the new phase was going to shift gears, such that families and friends of the victims of the World Trade Center disaster were

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going to now have to come down to the chief medical examiner's office [in Bellevue]—perhaps because the body parts of their loved ones had been identified through DNA or other sampling or else because they just were coming down wondering if maybe their loved one was in one of those storage facilities.

So when we shifted gears we had to change from working primarily with the first responders and the uniformed personnel and the doctors, who like us are also in uniform—in a catastrophe, you're in uniform at every level—to working with the bereaved, with "civilians" as we call it when you're out of uniform, with the average person who lost a daughter or a son, or a mommy or a daddy at World Trade. We discovered very rapidly that the comfort level on their part was much greater if we were as "blended" in our appearance as we could be. We [each] wore a patch that said: "Chaplain, Office of Chief Medical Examiner," with a little golf shirt that said "OCME" on it, a pair of trousers, and a pair of loafers—something like this. No one wore collars. No one wore yarmulkes.

It was known we were "chaplains," which was a very generic term at that point. It didn't necessarily mean that we were ordained but that each of us was a person of faith who was there . . . and we were there for persons who had no faith as well as those who did, some coming from halfway around the world. This was much more effective because it did not put up barriers. Sometimes a Roman Catholic woman would come to the [morgue] site in the early days when Ground Zero had closed down and she would say to me, "They found my son and we are going to have the funeral director come in and collect the parts away from this place today. Will you do a blessing? His name was George." It was all right with her that she didn't know whether I was ordained or not. She knew I was a spiritual helper, and it was easier for her to take since as a Roman Catholic she might have been opposed to the ordination of women. [Not to be called a "priest" in that setting] was more sensitive to that [reality]. *I can be a nonperson in order to be a more effective person. Sometimes it's important to erase yourself in order to be more visible.*

KCP: That's like what you were saying about nonweeping being weeping.

BP: Yes, there are so many paradoxes like that that we discovered down there. These things could not have been taught to us beforehand. I never learned any of this in my training from the International Red Cross. They have an absolutely magnificent team of trained specialists who have been all over the world in catastrophes, but the real lessons are down there in your alone time with God.

KCP: Can you repeat the prayer that your team developed together to bless the remains?

BP: The prayer that we used was one that is pretty sensitive I think to every tradition and to no tradition: "May your soul and the souls of all the faithful

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departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace." We eventually dropped the word "faithful." We were criticized for that in some quarters, in some very high quarters. In fact, even the archbishop of Canterbury attacked some of our prayers because he felt they were blasphemous and heretical. . . . We had some problems high up in the ecclesial hierarchy in the early days when we posted on the Internet the prayers that we had suggested.

KCP: How would you respond theologically to someone who said, "Why did you drop the word 'faithful'"? What would you say? Why *did* you drop the word "faithful"?

BP: I didn't know whom I was blessing. And in fact, some of the parts that we blessed may have been animal parts; we did not know at that point because anthropologists themselves do not know initially. They can suspect a part is a soft tissue from a human bowel or a muscle or part of a brain, but even the forensic scientists don't know until the requisite tests have been done. So we were blessing animals, too. And we did do blessings of a rescue dog that was found crushed in his cage . . . that was very emotional . . . it actually caused some of the greatest emotion and weeping on the part of doctors there, because these doctors have been so skillful at shutting down when they work on humans because they're pathologists and anthropologists. But they could not contain their sorrow with animals. So they wept, too—there were lots of doctor tears.

I do think that where we were, at the chief medical examiner's office [at the WTC temporary morgue outside Bellevue Hospital], is the heart of Ground Zero, even though it may physically be removed from where the towers are.

I say it is the heart because the chief medical examiner's office contains a sacred piece of God's humanity there in one large area. When you walk through that containment area you cannot help but feel the power of the experience. People say that who've never been there before; they come for one visit and they feel it and they ask you: "Chaplain Betsee, what is it I feel here that's so strong, *what is it I hear here?*"

KCP: That's one of the most amazing stories that you have to share. I'm thinking about a way to begin it—it's hard to even get into because it is almost unbelievable. Maybe a way of getting into the story about what you heard near those containers might be to tell about the Jewish response. The nine months' vigil that you witnessed.

BP: I was very concerned that we did not have enough Jewish presence on our site. Many of the first responders were Jewish in faith and were subjected constantly to Christian chaplains of many different traditions. I went to the chief medical examiner, Dr. Hirsch, who is himself Jewish, and said I wanted to contact some rabbis and spiritual leaders of different Jewish communities from—I

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didn't care where—any of the boroughs, and even from New Jersey, Connecticut. I didn't care where they came from—just get them here.

I would stop Orthodox Jews on the streets of New York and say, "Excuse me, I don't know if you're from one of the Hasidic communities in the boroughs, but we desperately need prayer books. We need books for the High Holidays." The High Holidays were coming in—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur—and I said, "Please, do anything you can do to get us books. I will meet you at this roadblock and I'll bring books in."

Well, they brought in tons of Zohars. I mean *tons* of Zohars. Believe it or not, the Zohars were gone in about two days or so. Through just it being known that we were in desperate need of Jewish presence down there, they rallied. The Jewish communities of New York rallied. And one layperson set up a rotation of Jewish volunteers from congregations—particularly, in the early stages, on the Upper West Side, but later it expanded into the boroughs.

They were going to do what was known as *Shmirah*. *Shmirah* is something that has been done since the eighteenth or late seventeenth century in some European countries whereby you keep vigil for those who had died, and stay there, physically, and be there while their bodies are in that place, until they are properly prepared for burial. . . . In Jewish tradition this is the highest good deed, the highest *mitzvah* that can possibly be done.

You stay there round the clock [reading the Psalms in order]. If you can't stay, someone relieves you but you continue in the cycle of Psalms. You begin at the first Psalm; the way we did it was, if you can't read it in Hebrew and you only know French, read it in French. If you can read English only, read it in English. If you don't understand Hebrew but you can sound the words, read the Hebrew because it's the sacred language—the pronunciation is made perfect by expressing it in your voice.

So we had all manner of volunteers down there that would come. But the attempt was to do the highest *mitzvah*, the highest deed of love, which in my understanding of Jewish tradition is to accompany the dead person as they await burial. It is the highest deed of love because the dead cannot repay—they cannot return the favor. The Jewish volunteers kept this up for nine months until Ground Zero closed down and then into the first weeks at the morgue at Bellevue.

To my knowledge, there is no precedent for a vigil of this length in the history of the religion. Certain Jewish ritual laws were suspended. Here is how it was redefined: in this marathon vigil after September 11, you did not do *Shmirah* for members of the Jewish community per se; you did *Shmirah* for the world. So that law was suspended. You did not only have males doing *Shmirah*, as would be the norm—the great majority of participants were female. You just simply made sure there was no break in the cycle because bodies were coming constantly and you didn't know which were Jewish and which weren't and it didn't even matter.

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KCP: How did the vigil finally end?

BP: They decided they had set some kind of precedent because there was no ruling in Jewish law for when you stop doing *Shmirah* after that many months. Normally it would be stopped as soon as the funeral had taken place . . . [but so many of these body parts were not still yet identified and so still could not be properly buried]. What the rabbis determined was that they would appeal to the tradition of Lag ba-'Omer, which is a traditional date of stopping mourning [dating from the end of a great plague at the time of Rabbi Akiva][1] and this is what they did. In 2002, Lag ba-'Omer occurred in the spring, and that is when they officially stopped the reading of the Psalm cycle.

However, Jewish clergy and other faithful returned in August before the High Holidays, and on the night of August 31 they did an Orthodox vigil, for which they also suspended Jewish rules and regulations. There were about thirty of them. Now there weren't too many that could keep up in the Hebrew so we needed a *minyan* of readers to read through the whole cycle of Psalms. They needed one more reader and they didn't have someone who could sound out the Hebrew so I offered to suspend my tradition and read through one of the cycles. Although I am an Episcopal priest, I have a lifelong relationship with Judaism and know Hebrew. They gave me the "Aleph" cycle, which I read through.

This took about two and a half hours for all of us to get through at the same time and in that way the entire congregation finished the Book of Psalms together two and a half hours later. Very elegant.

There were women and men who were sitting separately from each other in the Memorial Park, which is the place where the body parts are stored for long-term identification and storage. But obviously the other rule that was suspended down there was that a woman is not supposed to be a part of the *minyan* [that normally comprises] ten males of age. They suspended that; I was permitted to constitute part of that *minyan*.

All of these people simply just put their emotions on hold and went through the motions of doing the prayerful service for the world and for all those who had died, and it didn't matter if they were Jewish or what they were.

KCP: Did the Orthodox Jewish rabbis and others understand it that way—the way you are articulating it? They understood the magnitude of it, that it [the service, under such circumstances] blew apart the [usual halakhic] categories?

BP: I believe they understood all of this; however, Jewish culture being what it is even today in New York City, there are good reasons to be low profile about many things. This was done in a very low-profile and quiet way and was probably the most beautiful act of faith by any community that I have seen in all the work up until today in Ground Zero. It called for the suspension of religious doctrine and dogma and Talmudic law and rabbinic argumentation; it was just simply doing what had to be done.

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KCP: As I remember it was about that time when you went down early one morning and heard that sound. Was it that time or was it—

BP: Well, I think what you're referring to is the sound of the weeping.

KCP: It was in early morning that you went [down there] by yourself; you were alone.

BP: Yes, but it was much earlier than that.

KCP: Had the *Shmirah* stopped?

BP: The *Shmirah* had not even started up the first time I heard the weeping.

KCP: Was it in the fall of 2001?

BP: Yes, it was very shortly after the attack—very shortly after the attack. That was the first time I heard it.

KCP: What happened that morning?

BP: Well, I came onto the site as I did every day about 7:30 or a quarter to eight in the morning.

KCP: Was it at the Pit or at the morgue?

BP: I was at the chief medical examiner's office at Bellevue, at the morgue. One of the things I did each morning was to start my day by walking through Memorial Park where all the body parts are kept and just saying some prayers for those who were there and who died in the World Trade Center. This was just a simple ritual that I had. It took me all day to get up to the end of the site because so many people needed to talk and we would have so many ambulances coming in with more parts. I couldn't even walk the site in eight hours sometimes. So I always started at Memorial Park, which I saw as the heart of the Pit—the heart and soul of God—you know: the locus, the nexus—all those words, the junction where God was.

This particular morning I heard a very deep, very frightening deep moaning sound as I walked through Memorial Park. It frightened me because I had definitely never heard this sound before. And, because I hadn't heard it before, you'd think I didn't know what it was, but I did know.

I knew that I was hearing God weeping.

KCP: You'd never heard anything like that before?

BP: Never. . . .

KCP: Why was God weeping, Betsee?

BP: Well, my sense was that [it was because] those whom he loved the dearest had been ravaged and hated and destroyed by those whom he loved the dearest.

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And I had happened quite unexpectedly upon this just as if you walked into the room of a cabin or something and saw someone sitting and weeping quietly and you had not meant to see this. You had no intention of coming in. People like some privacy when they weep, and we usually try to give people that privacy in our daily living, if you think about it.

To hear this—and it was inescapable; wherever I walked in that place that day, it pierced into me deeply. *The feeling was terrifying—of what in the world was I doing hearing this sound of the weeping of the depths of the—of God?* And the sound—the only sound on earth that I could really compare this to was a very low drone. It reminded me of some of the Eastern musical instruments—very primitive musical instruments. It had a very, very deep vibrating resonance. It sounded kind of like a sitar in its lowest registers. It sounded like an [Australian] didgeridoo, or a *koto* from Japan—an instrument made out of, say, a large hollowed-out log, or some of the African string instruments you can hear when [you] go out into the bush in East Africa. It had a primitive, deep, ancient, penetrating sound.

To hear it was actually a physical experience, because you could almost feel your ribcage vibrating as it is very deep, and when you hear a deep register on certain instruments it makes you vibrate . . . there was that experience with it.

KCP: You said once to me that it made you want to leave.

BP: Desperately. It made me want to run and hide. I felt so inappropriate. I didn't know—I felt like I was—you know—walking in on God. "God—you just made a mistake! You let me hear you crying!" I really didn't know how to act. I was absolutely just dumbstruck that I experienced it. I couldn't get away from it until I left that area and then I just—the sound is so memorable—I mean I can hear it in my ears right now, in the deepest registers, very deep, deep tones.

JSH: Did you hear it many times?

BP: Yes . . . I never knew when I was going to hear it. The shocking thing was that one day, one of the disaster morticians, whom God had placed his hands upon as the primary person to be keeper of the dead, heard it too. This woman from Florida, who had to classify and put a numbering system on every piece of human remain and then log it in on the computer and then take the piece and properly preserve it to be put in the refrigerated area, came up to me one day—she's a Catholic woman by choice, faith's choice—and said to me, "Chaplain Parker, I have something to ask you that—don't laugh at me, please—I hope you won't laugh at me, please, because this really is going to sound like I'm going crazy with my work."

I said, "What is it?"

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And she said, "You know I heard God crying down here today—I know I did," and she said, "I've never heard it and I know I heard it," and I said, "I've heard it too."

"You heard it," she said, and she just broke down and wept.

KCP: That was the first time anyone had spoken to you about it? You knew then that you were not the only one?

BP: Yes, that was the first time, but there were others who told me they heard it, too. Some of the Jewish volunteers who sat *Shmirah* would go down there. They could move anywhere they wanted on the site and say their prayers. They could stand by the amphitheater where the body parts were being identified. If they didn't like that they could go sit up in the trailers and read in the chaplaincy trailer. At that time though—in the earliest days—all it was was a tent. It was not a trailer yet; we hadn't made it yet into that organized of a village. Several of them claimed that they had heard this sound, as well as some police.

. . . I don't know why I was given the honor of hearing this sound, which I'll never forget. I'll never know why I was given the honor to hear that, but I never had an experience in my whole life that was more humbling. I don't know why this person came to tell me—because I never said to anyone that I heard that sound. I never said that. She came to me and told me this.

KCP: While both of you were holding—I'm thinking how close you were to those body parts.

BP: Yes we did a lot of work together. . . . But, you see when she heard it, I was not with her. When she first heard it, she was on her own doing work, and we were both full time on the site. It's sort of interesting, too, that we are both women—it reminds me in a way of the resurrected Christ coming to Mary Magdalene after the Crucifixion; she gets to be the privileged, first one that hears the sound, the voice of God telling her that He is risen.

KCP: Do you remember in the Gospel of John what he says to her? "Woman, why are you weeping?" [John 20:15]

BP: Well, when I heard the sound, I was not spoken to at the same time. I simply was permitted to hear it at length and to sit with that, to deal directly with what I was feeling, because it helped me to understand the depth of the love God has for creation, which is way beyond any depth of love I've ever felt.

KCP: Because you sensed that the despair He felt was because those whom He most loved were so desecrated by those whom He most loved.

BP: Yes.

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KCP: Is part of the reason this touched you so deeply and humbled you so much because you felt you couldn't comfort God—that there was nothing you could do to make Him feel better? When I hear someone weeping or see someone weeping, the first thing I want to do is go and comfort them however I can.

BP: It's a good question you ask but I don't think that occurred to me. I went there [in the first place] simply because I thought of my ordination vows and the scripture that I had read at my ordination, which many, many priests have read at their own ordinations, from first Isaiah, chapter 6. It's the commissioning of Isaiah as a prophet: "*Here am I; send Thou me*" [Isa. 6:8]. And I don't think I had much more in my one-trick-pony head than that when I went down there. Really.

As long as I could say, "Yes," and keep putting one foot in front of the other I thought that I was carrying through an important task and that the rest would form itself. It was like this organic whole that was growing, and if I could shut up long enough and quit screaming at people, and just stand still and pay attention and observe, I would see an organic whole growing up, teaching me what needed to be done there if I would just pay attention and listen. I think I really was very malleable. I was pliant clay in the hands of God down there. A lot of what we did required that we be pliant, and so those who were able to bend the best were those that lasted the longest.

KCP: Because the rules didn't apply.

BP: Right, no rules applied.

KCP: The rules couldn't help you.

BP: No, no. You pretty much threw out everything you've ever learned in the seminary. If the bishops knew a great deal of the things you were doing they wouldn't have been delighted. And coupled with that [necessary transgressiveness], it was necessary to realize how honored you were to be there in that most sacred place with God's most sacred destroyed—*but not dead*—creation. The physical parts were there, but the spirits were gone to God.

KCP: So you didn't feel this was a place of ultimate death, but instead you felt life still there?

BP: I always did. Yes, I thought that I could best proclaim life in the deepest place in the Pit. What is deeper than the place where the torn bodies are interred? How can you go deeper into the very bottom than that?

We were the Ground Zero of Ground Zero and we still are. And we weren't what you call a sexy site and that's part of the reason we didn't get so many chaplains. Everybody wanted a photo op in a place that was much more sanitized, where they could wear their clerical collars and put on a plastic helmet and a pair of steel-tipped boots and look like they'd done something and show

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their grandchildren someday. A great majority of clergy who came down at first did that. And they would not return. There were some, of course, that were very, very stalwart—but in our site at the morgue, there were the smells of decaying flesh, airplane fuel all over your hands, and dirt and filth and materials of destroyed buildings and the smell of burning steel all over your hands. Oh, that smell—you couldn't get rid of it even when you took a shower. . . .

One fire department chaplain said to me, "You're going up there and working with Dr. Hirsch and the anthropologists, aren't you?" And I said, "Yes," and he said, "You have the shittiest job of everyone." And I know he was right but I was somehow offended because I thought of it as the noblest job.

KCP: You have always spoken about it so differently. You speak of being honored.

BP: The thing of it is that doesn't God honor those in the lowliest places? In the Pit at Ground Zero, or at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner [at Bellevue] or out on a landfill on Staten Island?

JSH: Betsee, what about Muslims throughout all this? Can you tell us about the Muslim presence, the role of Muslims? Did Muslims come down to where you were working?

BP: Oh, yes, they did. And for the most part they were very sheepish about sharing with me, but they were relieved that when they did, I would hear their fears—because they were very fearful. We have had participation from a very frightened Muslim community, who did not agree with what happened and just wanted to do their part. We have some magnificent pieces of work by their community. The feelings in New York were running so high then against all Muslim culture, *prima facie*—people were getting so much vindictiveness wielded at them. The day after the attack, for instance, taxicab drivers who were Muslim didn't even come out, didn't even get in their cabs because people were horrible to them. I talked to so many taxi drivers to which that happened, Muslims from all over the world.

It was happening in the Pit as well. And with the culture of working-class members of service—they were furious at what had happened. They lost 343 guys in the fire department and the police and they really were not in a mood to deal with anybody in traditional Muslim garb or professing to be Islamic. Subsequent to that, I found as the months went on and feelings settled somewhat, workers were coming to me from the sites and admitting that they were Muslim, but in the earliest of days they were quite—I think—like Jews who had to be under wraps during World War II or like Episcopalians who had to hide their denomination during the American Revolution. They were really under wraps. Many of the first responders were Muslim. I met many from Pakistan, West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. They just recognized that it was not a good time for them to say anything about their

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tradition and they became very frightened, and they did very acquiescing things like putting little American flags in their office, or God Bless America kind of things, in hopes that someone would walk by their cubicle and see this and understand that they were on the side of America and not a terrorist and so on. They really had it bad, and as chaplains, we had to wait for them to appear more than anything. They knew who we were but they weren't sure even we were safe, and in fact we might not be safe at all because they could tell a lot of us were Christians by our collars.

We also had several magnificent imams and community leaders of the different Muslim religious communities in New York that gave freely of their time to do the best they could as chaplains. I had one chaplain who was a Black Muslim from Harlem; he worked in the Department of Corrections at Rikers Island as a chaplain. He would do what we call the graveyard shift, sometimes weeks in a row—for free, for nothing. He would come down and stand with the anthropologists and recite, in Arabic and in English, prayers for all those who had died. He really got it; he clicked.

And there is still on the site a man who is a janitor from Ivory Coast, who is African Muslim, Sunni I think he is. He had, in secret, ever since the start, been coming down there and sweeping and saying readings from the Qur'ān in Arabic and in a native African language for everyone who died. He hadn't told me this, because he is not technically a chaplain, but yet he has in many ways performed the functions of a chaplain. He was a businessman who was a refugee in Ivory Coast from all this strife. He got out of there and he was grateful to come to America and have a job. Here he ends up a janitor.

KCP: Did he do it from memory or did have a Qur'ān?

BP: He had a little pocket Qur'ān. And he still does and he comes down and visits and sometimes meets the family members who come down.

JSH: It is often said and felt about tears, like music but perhaps even more like music than music, that weeping cuts below the levels of distinction that we build up through words. I wonder if some of that happened.

BP: I think a lot of that happened. I think that the tears equaled the deepest and noblest possible level of communicating from the heart. Weeping is the most deeply communicating sound that the human can make. And words don't get in the way of the sound of weeping. Words only hide the depth but when one hears the sounds—unobstructed sounds, no words in there—you really feel the depths of the emotion that's in the person.

JSH: You spoke earlier—actually, when you were reflecting on God weeping—about the fact that often when people sense that there is weeping, they will keep a respectful distance . . . that there's a kind of etiquette that's estab-

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lished around weeping. What would happen if someone came alone or as a member of a small family and began weeping? What would your job be? What did you see people doing around weeping?

BP: A lot of different things, depending on how the weeping people themselves thought about their weeping. If it were a macho sort of profession, like an anthropologist or a head detective of one of the biggest agencies in New York and they had a need to weep, they would make sure they were in a private place where none of their own people was going to see them weep. They'd break down very quickly and—it's almost like an automatic response whereby if someone [unexpectedly] opened the chaplaincy door, they would suddenly just pop right back into their [public] posturing. So we did have to seek out and create those private places where very proud persons and others could weep with a measure of privacy.

Now we found some of the damnedest places to do that—behind dumpsters, near the fence line to the old Bellevue Hospital—no one could see you back there behind the dumpsters.

JSH: Did people find those areas themselves?

BP: Yes, they did. They would tell you, "Well, I think maybe we can go over here to this storage room for morgue masks which isn't being used. Let's go in there and sort of close the door quietly kind of so we don't get locked in and I'll tell you [how I feel]." Another place that was very handy for weeping was the lobby of the [office of the] chief medical examiner. I think because it was such a public place [with] people coming and going and nobody knows anybody and the general homicides of New York are being dealt with in this place and family members [are] coming to identify bodies and so on. The World Trade Center families would come in there and also first responders and that was a kind of public, neutral place. You know, you'd get a missing person's unit detective come down and say, "I hate my boss—I want to kill him today, I don't want to be here anymore—I'm going to quit—I'm never going to come back to the police department," and they'd tell you everything in the neutral place. Then there might be some tears with it, too. A lot of tears were mixed with rage, and there were lots of scandals on the site.

KCP: And suicide?

BP: Yes, there—I'm not sure how far I should go into that discussion but things did go to that level.

JSH: We were talking just a minute ago about the privacy and etiquette of weeping. Yet weeping often has, certainly in religious settings, a public side, where sites that we would think of as being religious provide a place for people to be able to weep. There it is expected that people would weep; there, in

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those places, the weeping releases something in public that is sometimes hard to get at in private. Did you have some of that, too?

BP: Yes, a real logistical problem that we dealt with was that there were over a thousand first responders on our site. This site is generally there to house 150 people or so, and every space was so overwhelmed that you had to really find the little dumpster slots behind the unused dumpsters and behind the trailers up against walls and so on where people could either stand and smoke a cigarette and talk or let down a bit. Because people were really forced into a lot of public weeping in the early days. Whether they wanted it or not they were forced into it.

I saw a lot of weeping in line when we would have ambulances come in with the remains from the Pit. An ambulance would pull in—there was a whole cortege—always two escorts on motorcycles with their lights going and their sirens blaring. And then there was the ambulance [itself] with all the medical personnel inside there with the body part on the stretcher covered with an American flag. Then when they got down to the site where we were with the other tanker trucks and so on behind them from their company houses or their ladder houses and all of their firefighters getting off these trucks, we would all line up—sometimes three hundred people lined up to do military protocol and a salute. The chaplain came forward, and I always laid hands on the body bag. I did that at risk of possibly Jewish persons thinking it unclean because what my attempt, as I laid my hands on the body bag, was through this gesture I was trying to say—since it was going to be a silent blessing anyway—I was trying to say, "This is loved by God and embraceable and loveable still," and that motion [of laying on my hands] said that. . . .

KCP: Why did you cover the body bag with both hands?

BP: Just because I didn't want it to appear like I was lifting the piece—[literally] laying hands on. This looked too much like you might be getting it ready to set it on a table and touching it with both palms. Sometimes I knew what I was touching under these helmets, you know, parts of scalps and hair would come on my fingers . . . and there were bits of exploded remains on the bag. You couldn't really control all that because the parts were coming [constantly]. Sometimes we'd have thirty ambulances in a row, lined up along 30th Street and coming in from Ground Zero and there was just one after another after another after another.

What I said about "weeping in line" was that the captain of police would call all of the doctors off the table, everyone who was in the medical amphitheater, everybody off the avenue, forensic dentists, everyone, to stand in line and let this cortege come through with the body part and I would come forward and do the blessing and there was a military salute. It was a formal military gesture that the police and fire departments knew and is also done in

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active war zones. So people were forced to stand and let their tears just fall onto the street below the wall. They were at a rigid strict military salute. They were not to move. You can't wipe tears away and so a lot of people wept, sometimes even the captain who was standing there. He would say, "Attention!" and the tears are just going like this! As he barked the commands for the next one, the tears are just like this! And his whole face was soaking wet.

There were people who folded the flags at the military salute. They were folded into quarters like they do and given to the widow, the widower, or family member if this person was identified. So they would keep these flags and classify them along with the body parts. There was a moment when the chaplain comes forward and lays hands on—about thirty seconds of silence while the chaplain is doing a silent blessing and then I step back into the line. I never salute because I don't believe in saluting a flag. I would put my hand on my heart. So the chaplain is the only one really in that line that's allowed to do that—everyone else has got to do this salute.

You would just hear them crying silently next to you and then came the next one and sometimes we would have a downpour of rain and we were drenched and standing at this military salute, soaking wet, and one after another, after another, after another. It was like a factory. You would dream about doing military salutes and blessings all night long. You would dream all night obsessively and not be able to get off it. Some mornings I would come down to the site and I'd been blessing the dead all night long and hearing the weeping and sometimes someone would come up to you and whisper, "Chaplain, when you're done with blessing will you go up to the driver because we think he's gonna break down."

I would finish with the blessing. Then I'd go forward to the front of the cab of the ambulance and they would see my collar and I would see them. Mostly they'd welcome me and open the door up. I didn't open the door. I would wait for them to open it because they might want to cry alone. That never did happen but it occurred to me they need to be in control of the situation that's so uncontrollable so they would usually open the door, look at you, and just in a heap, just sort of collapse into your arms and just weep.

KCP: From the wheel?

BP: Yes, they'd just be sitting and they'd turn from the wheel and just collapse and weep. And you might have to stand there a good ten minutes and not say anything, just let the tears come and not try to stop them, because that was a genuine expression of how upset they were. These people, again as I say, were not electively there. They were forced by virtue of being in that job before September 11. A lot of these people were not fit to be first responders. The great majority of people were not fit. In the early first months the task of the city was to weed out the people who weren't fit for that because there were a lot of breakdowns and there were a lot of medical problems from it.

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The great majority of people aren't fit to work on catastrophe work. It's too dangerous.

KCP: You said once before that you've aged seven years.

BP: Oh yeah.

KCP: Not only the body and all those toxins but you also meant . . .

BP: Emotionally. Yes, and spiritually, certainly. This year, I would say, was more like seven or eight years. This is one of the things that I spoke of as necessary losses that occur in catastrophe work. If you are overexposed to it, it is no different than a war zone, an active war zone with vets who come home with all different kinds of maladies and psychological problems that they have been exposed to there. You don't know at what point your system's going to give way and you get a few signs that it's about to occur but if you don't pay real close attention, you will collapse.

KCP: And it would be easy to miss the signs because you're so [caught up in the work]?

BP: And it can happen at any time. It can happen when you're really thinking you're doing just great and your health is good. It can suddenly happen and you have to learn how to deal with it.

KCP: So, you have to have great respect for the depths of the wound of the healer.

BP: Yes, and you have to take from your volunteers what they truly can give you because some human beings just have a stronger set of arms than others, or some just can run faster. Some can just manage better in that situation and can be exposed to more traumas. You know that from war zones where they don't respect the Geneva Convention and they take prisoners and torture them. Some prisoners come through and they all get horrid scars, but some of them remain resilient longer. It's very much like the death camps in the Holocaust. You know those people couldn't know—the Jews couldn't know when they entered the death camp how long they would last—how long they would bear up with what they were going to experience. In many ways this experience was similar to a death camp experience because of the demeaning of human bodies and the brokenness of bones and body parts.

We had things happening all the time: I would do a blessing of a thorax, say from the breast up of a firefighter, and as soon as we were done, we'd go into the medical amphitheater and place that human part on the table and the head would fall right off the table. This was commonplace because the head is too heavy for the body to bear. So you had garish sights that are the stuff of your worst nightmares happening several times an hour. How much can any-

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one's system bear that? It varies [from person to person] and it's a mystery. You don't really know. It doesn't make you a better worker because you can bear more. It's just that you can log in more hours.

JSH: You were speaking earlier about what you yourself had been able to bear. You began this conversation by talking about the veterinary hospital and the sort of special resiliency that you both had naturally and that you developed before you started in doing this work. How do you feel now, revisiting with us those hours and hours and hours when all this was happening?

BP: I've noticed that since the closing of Ground Zero, I move through different phases in the healing process. Right now I'm in this place: I'm still active on the site. I'm still the head chaplain and still have eleven chaplains working actively for the next three to five years on the site. This is a long-term project, but I don't have to be physically on the site more than one or two days per week now.

If I were to describe what's going on emotionally within me at this time, it's actually a very comforting thing. It's like standing in a forest in late November with all the tones of gray just like they were in Ground Zero: very dank, dusky, dull grays, mist and fog and blurriness and dark, flat tones with leaves falling—the last of autumn's leaves falling from trees onto the ground.

If you stand in the woods long enough and listen and you're just getting a gentle snow that day, you can hear the sound of flakes hitting the dry leaves and you can see the white covering all. You can hear the silence of that process. It feels great. I believe that there is active forgetting which occurs out of necessity in an overly traumatized mind, and that the mind knows very well how to care for itself; it does whatever it has to do to preserve itself.

Right now I know that I am forgetting a lot of early, very horrifying details that I dreamed about obsessively in the early days. People will remind me of a story I told once or something that we discussed and they jog my recall, but if I had just been asked to recite about that topic, I would not have remembered that [detail]. My recall is very good still but the actual memory, out of necessity . . . you only have X amount of K in your computer and after that you have to download some stuff so you've got some more room. That is what is happening.

KCP: Two images emerge for me from this extraordinary story. One is the wound in the body of the resurrected Christ when he appeared in the Upper Room. One of my students reflected in her master's thesis upon the way that Jesus' body was not perfect as it had been before the Crucifixion but rather that it bore the wounds of his Passion. So even in that resurrected body there was the wound in the side, the physical emblem of the ordeal of dying. My student drew great strength from this Gospel account of woundedness and great

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hope in the idea that the Christian story of the Resurrection is not a denial of death but is rather the sanctification and [transfiguration of] death's horror. . . . And speaking of the Zohar, I am also thinking of the Jewish mystical concept of *tikkun ha-olam*, of "repairing the world," reassembling the shards of the fractured world, of reuniting the sparks scattered out of the explosion.

BP: Yes, I agree, and as I said I always did feel like I was a clarion caller there. That I was standing and blowing a trumpet on the edge of the chasm, and the song of the trumpet was, "I am life and I am love and they were loved, and they are and will be loved." And I was the one who announces that. In a lot of ways I was like Elijah. I felt like the one who announces the coming of the Savior, the One that will save this terrible experience, the One that will save us all from our own horribleness. I'm here to announce that He is coming and is present now and has never gone away, and I'll blow that one note on my horn. I've always felt like I was the clarion, the trumpet blower.

JSH: A contrasting image would be the image of the snow falling, which is—that image is silent. That's the exact silence of something very subtle and hard to hear that you can't hear unless you really are silent. So I don't know quite what to say about it but that the image of snow falling on those leaves that you cast made me think back to what you said about God crying and the drone and the undercurrent. . . .

BP: I think that you know, as it says in Ecclesiastes: "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose." When the snow falls on the leaves, what is really happening is that the earth is lying fallow, but that does not mean the earth is dead. It means it is healing and restoring and getting ready for another season of growth.

So I don't see the snow falling and the leaves decomposing as being an image of death occurring and "let it be." I see it as a gift from God that there is a healing and relaxing and quiet, calm time, but what's really going on is restorative and getting ready for the next harvest, the next season of planting and harvest. Because that's the nature of cycles on the earth. It's not that death is occurring in the fields [but] that life is rejuvenating and revivifying. That's what's going on underneath the snow and the leaves.

JSH: And maybe that's what's going on with people crying.

BP: Yes. And it's a good thing, and so it's important not to hamper the fullness of that expression, but to say a few words and let it pour forth. And the more soaking wet my shoulders get, the better it is.

KCP: (Laughter.) And to let that earth grow a beautiful little rose?

BP: Yes, indeed.

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Figure 12. The Reverend Betsee Parker, courtesy Harvard Divinity School Alumni Office.

On May 28, 2003, twenty months after September 11, Betsee Parker gave birth to a daughter, Constance Rose Uran. Rose was in perfect health. At the time Rose was born, Reverend Parker was fifty-one years old.

Notes

Special thanks to Carol Edwards at Harvard Divinity School, who did the challenging work of preparing the initial transcription.

1. As the Jewish liturgical scholar Jon Levenson observes, the *'omer* refers to the forty-nine-day period that begins on the second day of Passover and ends on the day before *Shavu'ot* ("Weeks"; see Lev. 23:9–16). In Talmudic times, this period became, in the main, a time of mourning because it was associated with a plague reported to have killed 24,000 disciples of Rabbi Akiva in the second century C.E. Some suspect that it was the armies of the Roman emperor Hadrian who killed off Jews sympathetic to Akiva, who was reputed to have supported the revolt of Bar Kochba. The aspect of mourning during the *'omer* was reinforced by massacres of various Jewish communities in the Middle Ages. Lag Ba-'omer is a day of celebration that breaks the mournful tone and observances of the *'omer* (of which it is the thirty-third day).

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Epilogue: Tikkun ha-olam

For Rosemary Yael Amira

and Isaac Luria of Safed, "the Ari"

To mend the world these days
Is no small thing,
My tiny flowering plant,
My small, my small, my smallest one—

Yet when I bore you, breaking me,
And wept that night
For every pain I'd ever known,
And every pain I'd dealt—

For thousands buried in the pile,
Lives frozen in one morning's light,
For Jerusalem's fire and blood,
For children wasting on the steppes—

Your pure, kinetic heart
Took up my cry,
And my lament, absurd and lost,
Became your own inheritance—

They told me, without wonder, that for a year
Your new blue eyes would fill with tears,
With ceaseless tears,
And flow—and overflow—

The world has shattered into bits,
The Ari taught
In syllables of gold,
So long ago, in Sfat—

Lion of God,
His face lit up with holy fire,
He danced upon the grave with Shimon,
Shocking every witness—

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The world has broken open,
Its fragile vessels, full of light
Spill glory out in floods,
Which hellish black prepares to drink—

To mend the world,
Exploded, burned, and strewn
In every dark direction,
Is no small thing, O smallest one—

Look, the world is lost, and ruined,
And filled with twisted shards;
My heart, in ruins too,
Owl-haunted, blind with pain—

I turn my face to yours,
Still fresh from watching God,
The angels' songs still ringing
In your ears—

Do you think you can, my small?
Or is the world beyond repair?
And if it is, is that then why
Your tears flow without ceasing?

—*K. C. Patton*
January 7, 2002

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