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**Edited by Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley:  
Holy Tears**

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# Introduction

Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley



“**B**ut 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

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."<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup>

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

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 involved 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.”<sup>5</sup> As vehicles of feelings that go too deep for language—the sorrow of exile, the sparkle of ecstasy,

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*<sup>6</sup> 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*.<sup>7</sup> 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?

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?<sup>8</sup>

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 Shī‘ī mourning assemblies (*majlīs*) 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 (*ẹ̀kuń 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.

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

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.<sup>9</sup>

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-

Cappadona explores in her essay the *gratia lacrimarum* and the artistic portrayal of Mary Magdalene 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 Shīrī 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.<sup>10</sup>

Shīrī 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 ‘Alī, 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-

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.<sup>11</sup> 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 Yorùbá 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.<sup>12</sup>

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 Shīʿite poetry as a “chain” that, to quote Bard, “binds mourners and those they mourn.” Aminah Jaʿfar 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 Olúpòṅṅà in his essay with Şolá 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.<sup>13</sup>

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 Olúpòṅṅà’s ethnography of Yorùbá 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. Olúpòṅṅà also shows how Yorùbá 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,

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."<sup>14</sup> 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*.<sup>15</sup> 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."<sup>16</sup> Emotions are intimately involved in the triage of "sociability and power."<sup>17</sup> 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

(Ebersole), or the Nigerian bride's tears in the marriage rites (Olúpòṅà), 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.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup> When Margery Kempe is taken aback at her own extravagant displays of tearful agony, as Santha Bhat-tacharji 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

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'ite 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

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 Bassler explores the weeping of

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.”<sup>20</sup> 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 *gopīs*, 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 *gopīs*. 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 *gopīs*, “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

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’anic commentator 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.”<sup>21</sup> 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

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 *marsiyyah* 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

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 Bhat-tacharji 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 cryngys as God wolde sende it, & sumtyme soft teerys & preuy wyth-owtyn any boistownesse.”

In Eastern Orthodox Christian spirituality, says the Jesuit scholar Irénée Hausherr, “[W]eeping ends in the kingdom of heaven, and only there.”<sup>22</sup> 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

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.”<sup>23</sup> 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

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?

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.

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."

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