15.1 Religious weeping to protect the community

Northern European religion generally became more centered on either ritual performance or, beginning in the 16th century in the new Protestant churches, explicitly articulated belief. Emotion-mediated relationships with God receded. However in early modern Spain, tears long remained a persuasive index of religious devotion. Teresa of Avila wrote in 1562 that if one lovingly contemplated the Passion of Christ, God rewarded one’s soul by the great gift of softening the heart and enabling or directly evoking tears (Christian 1982:106). Moreover, weeping over the Passion was prescribed by 16th century Spanish religious leaders as a means of purging one’s sins; and if tears didn’t come of their own accord, one should will oneself to weep.

The extent of the efficacy of tears shed in prayer, and particularly in memory of the passion of Christ is very clear from a certain [i.e., any given] person’s revelation. The Lord appeared to the person in spirit and said: ‘If anyone in memory of my passion weeps tears with devotion, I wish to take them into my kingdom as if they had suffered for me.’ (Ludolphus 1502–1510, quoted in Christian 1982:107)

The Holy week processions and the Lenten and revival sermons provoked on a collective level the kind of purgative weeping encouraged in the private contemplation of the Passion. Processions in Holy Week, in which the home town became a Jerusalem, were efficient ways to provoke compassion and tears that served the purgation not only of the individuals in question, but also of towns as collectivities. They thereby averted, hopefully, future collective punishments from God. . . .

Such weeping had to be public. In these collective situations it was as important to see your neighbor’s tears as your own, for only if tears were shed generally could it be known that the hearts of the entire community had been moved. Hence drama that provoked collective weeping not merely served an individual’s spiritual promotion; it was a way to know by tears, the outward signs of the heart, that collective repentence (sic) was in progress.

Small wonder, then, given theological notions of the times, that people were easily moved to tears. A certain kind of tender heartedness and consequent weeping was of vital practical importance to communities, as well as spiritual importance to individuals. Without it God would not be moved. . . . Emotions were serious business; provoked, collective weeping could be effective. One is tempted
to say that it was rational to weep. A science for provoking public tears and compassion existed, with specialized artists, sculptors, choreographers, and actors.

Note that this was a tenderness of heart in relation to Christ above all, not necessarily to other people. The ruthlessness of the Spanish reaction to the iconoclasts of the Netherlands was doubtless due at least in part to the particular nature of this tenderness, which was above all cultivated through the contemplation of images of the Passion and the imitation of the Passion in penitential behavior. From a Spanish Catholic's perspective, the [Dutch] destroyers of images were willfully repeating the Passion. (Christian 1982:109–110)

Citizens had a duty to weep, and to assure that everyone wept, in order to evoke God's kama muta to protect the community. One processional statue of Mary was articulated so that when she met the statue of Christ, her head nodded and she reached out to embrace him, which deeply moved the viewers. And indeed in present-day Seville on Holy Thursday, many of those attending weep as the statue of the weeping Mary emerges from her shrine (Christian 1982:100). In late medieval Europe, and in Spain continuing into the present, “violent, unrestrained, vocal weeping” was represented as a key experience and public manifestation of sudden and miraculous conversion; this demonstrated complete turning to God (Cohen 1996).
15.2 Kama muta in evangelical collective worship

The Protestant Reformation initially rejected ritual practices that included some kama muta drivers, refocusing on reading and preaching on the Bible. To a large extent, for a couple of centuries, Protestant religion came to be construed as declarative belief, rather than participation in defining ritual practices. But then in the early 19th century Transcendentalists and Evangelicals aimed to reorient religion away from mere belief and rote recitation. They saw true religion as union with God—which later, for the Transcendentalists, came to be felt to occur through communion with all of God’s creation. For the Evangelicals, however, the crucial moment was conversion—an immediate, momentary experience.

The initiate into evangelical Protestantism, after the required period for achieving abject humility, felt touched and spiritually transfigured by the presence of the divine spirit in Christ, but then the moment was gone. Likewise, the Transcendentalist could, during a spiritual epiphany, thrill at the seeming dissolution of identity in the cosmic order or oversoul, but the moment then passed. . . . the converted Evangelical felt the assurance of salvation, and the Transcendent individual felt the truth of the immediate presence of divinity. (Finseth 1995

Were these transitory moments kama muta experiences? In any case, through such moments, the convert become identified with others who had also converted and ultimately, with the saved in heaven. For Transcendentalists, withdrawal from the secular world and individual conversion led ultimately to “a reunion with a more transcendent society.” “For the Evangelicals, the ultimate goal of the pilgrimage was heaven, where all would be reunited with God; until then, the pilgrims formed a self-contained band of people making their difficult way through the world” (Finseth 1995). Thus conversion, baptism, or the transcendental epiphany of communion with the cosmic order suddenly intensified two relationships at once: the primary CS with God or the oversoul, and through that, the derivative CS relationship with the congregation, the saved, and ultimately with those who would dwell with God in heaven for eternity. This sudden enhancement of the most vital CS relationships is likely to have evoked kama muta.

This hypothesis is supported by descriptions of these sudden CS intensifications that occurred in revival camp meetings. In Scotland and then in North America in the 18th and early 19th centuries, evangelical Presbyterians held huge gatherings, usually of four days, that drew people from a whole community or region (Schmidt 2001). Those who attended joined in one body through the consubstantial assimilation of a Eucharistic commensal feast.

Individual conversions and individual pilgrimages were there—and they were vitally important and strikingly variegated—but these private experiences and quests led back to the eucharist, to a communal feast, to
commensality. Sharp boundaries were drawn around the Christian community, but despite these important lines of exclusion, these sacramental festivals remained profoundly inclusive—gatherings at which people from over wide areas discovered a basis for Christian community and regional cohesion. (Schmidt 2001:217)

People opened their houses and provided hospitality to all, but the masses assembled mostly in a camp. For hours they sang psalms and hymns in unison. The crux of the events were great commensal communion rites at which hundreds or thousands of communicants sat at joined tables eating together, passing food and drink around. People whose identities were otherwise disparate and who would not and did not have affiliated with each other ate and drank commensally, side by side singing together. Their meals were collective Eucharist.

Sitting at the communion table [rather than standing] helped these saints communicate their close, even convivial relationship with their God and with their fellows. Not only “Table-posture” but also “Table-gesture” contributed to making this a communal feast. The saints [Christian participants] were to hand the elements “about from one to another.” They were to receive the elements into their own hands, taking a piece of bread from the sacramental loaf and lifting the cup to their own lips. Thus the elements [of the Eucharist] were divided and shared, passed from one saint to another all the way down the long tables. In partaking, the communicants were united through these shared actions and elements and became “one bread.” These actions among the saints, Willison averred, showed “their mutual Christian Love and Union among themselves, and their Communion and Fellowship one with another.” (Schmidt 2001:100; quotations from Willison 1720)

At the sacrament social distance between people might be dissolved in a variety of ways. As a communal feast, all members shared in its bounties equally. All feasted at the same tables, drank from the same cups, and broke bread from the same loaves. The same spiritual benefits—communion with Christ at his table—were available to all. God in this feast was indeed no respecter of persons. No one, however wealthy or eminent, received a choicer portion, a more delectable bread or finer wine. . . . A great common meal—and the Presbyterian sacrament was quite explicitly such a feast—could be a forceful contribution to a more cohesive, less stratified community. (Schmidt 2001:104–5)

Unlike other social settings, at these meeting the cohesiveness encompassed women, ‘common people’, and, in America, negroes. This was a mutuality that could even reconcile enemies
Participants in the sacrament at these meeting communicants experienced “rapturous love” for Christ and for each other, and loving union with those who had gone to heaven—he deceased who “were still part of their community, forever engaged in this communion of saints” (Schmidt 2001:164, 102). For the classes of persons who were usually disdained and denigrated, whose humanity was habitually denied in daily life, inclusion in these communion feasts must have been an intense and extraordinary experience.
15.3 Fervent worship and torpor

While there is no mention of goosebumps or chills in the accounts we’ve located, kama muta is strongly indicated by the tears and warm feelings in the heart when people suddenly felt close to God and each other while commensally communing, followed later by feelings of revival and refreshment. What is striking—though not entirely unique—is the prevalence and salience of the many vigorous ecstatic actions, non-verbal utterances, and then often quiescence or torpor. We have noted similar actions in some Sufi worship, and below in this chapter we will see some of these signs and symptoms, and new ones, in contemporary charismatic Christianity. This syndrome of practices can only have been learned, presumably through the typical cultural process of observation and imitation. But this does not exclude the possibility of this suite of actions being concomitantly afforded by extreme kama muta involving hyperactivation of the neurochemical, neuroanatomical systems that are generally active in milder experiences of kama muta. These phenomena also remind us to keep in mind that not only these extreme actions but also weeping, placing the hand over the heart, a deep breath with a pause in breathing, and other sensations of kama muta are not simply afforded by the psype, including its psychosocial neurobiology, but also reinforced and elaborated, or suppressed and minimized, by cultural preos. Thus even within one culture region and the within the one domain of religion, the salience, prevalence, and particulars of the sensations and signs of kama muta are historically mutable.

By the middle of the 19th century, norms of decorum and practices of ‘self-control’ undermined these festal communions for a while; religious faith came to be seen as a private matter for family life and ritualized church services (Schmidt 2001:169–212). As the focal event of evangelical religious practice, large-scale commensal communion was replaced by individuals coming forward in church to be prayed over, accept Christ, or be baptized. These more individualized, more decorous worship practices were less evocative. In 1848, James Alexander nostalgically recalled when “Whole assemblies were often bathed in tears, and moved as the trees of the wood are moved by the wind;” he regretted that contemporary practices lacked the gladness, fervor, and joyfulness of the old communions (Alexander 1848, quoted in Schmidt 2001:212). “The shortened communions simply did not produce, as one American Presbyterian lamented, ‘the same intensity of enjoyment—the same ardor of love—the same sweet sense of the divine presence, which were the accompaniments of the celebration in former days” (Schmidt 2001:206). We wonder whether Alexander and others’ nostalgic mnemonic re-experience of the CS-intensification feelings of these events was itself kama muta. In any case, at the time they wrote, there were still two more Great Awakenings to come.

Late 19th century revivalists such as Dwight L. Moody, Ira D. Sankey, and Charles Grandison Finney attracted great crowds to their sermons in the largest auditoriums of the big cities, and sold many millions of hymn books which enabled people to more or less reproduce in smaller
settings their mass revival experiences (Sizer 1978). The sermons and gospel hymns of these celebrity preachers afforded an experience of adoring blissful intimacy with a loving Christ, a relationship that was in many respects a romantic, sometimes almost erotic communion. Furthermore, these revivals created “a community of intense feeling” based on shared emotional experiences of conversion and love for Jesus (Sizer 1978:52; italics in original; see also pp. 129, 138). It seems likely that many participants experienced kama muta from either the intensification of their CS relationship with Christ or the sudden formation of community among urban strangers. It would be fruitful to look in diaries, letters, and newspaper stories for reports of the sensations and symptoms of participants.
15.4 Kama muta letters to denominational publications

In denominational newspapers and magazines from 1910 to 1945, letters from participants in this strand of Protestantism reported “praying for one another’s needs, sending anointed handkerchiefs other objects as signs of grace, and continually assuring one another of the ardent prayers sent out in their behalf”, perhaps connecting writers and readers in kama muta (Griffith 1998:222). The testimonial letters often reported their need for CS relationship.

For these particular women, frequently isolated in far-flung mountain communities, mining areas, and mill towns, congregational life was at best fragile and more often unavailable. Like later generations of Pentecostal women, urban and rural, who participated in Women’s Aglow Fellowship and sent myriad testimonials and prayer requests to the wide readership of Aglow magazine, these letter writers focused their prayer narratives on sick children, wayward husbands, and feelings of loneliness, reaching out for sympathy, healing, and community through the prayers of women near and far. Narrating their own lives not primarily in terms of their own sin, which was most often relegated to accounts of the past, but more in terms of unmerited pain and illness, these women assured one another that healing was obtainable through faith (if not absolutely predictable), that sufficient prayer worked miracles, and that the ultimate earthly result of their petitions would be a passionate emotional closeness with the loving God. (Griffith 1998:228–229; for more on Aglow, see supplementary note 48)

The ultimate aim and result would be God’s eternal embrace. Pentecostal writers described this experience of sudden union with divinity. One woman wrote:

“To the honor and glory of God I desire to witness to what the Lord has wrought in me. My hungry soul has received the Comforter! It was at the close of the day, Easter Sunday, 1908, that the Holy Spirit came in and filled my life. I can never fully describe the ecstasy and glory of these three hours, as I was prostrated under the mighty power of God. Even now, as I write of it, tears of joy flow so that I can hardly see, and the Holy Spirit fills and thrills my entire being.”

Committed to witnessing to what seemed by nature marvelously unutterable, Pentecostal women employed an erotic terminology of penetration, abundance, and sensate fulfillment, suffused with desire for a divine invasion of the physical body.
The sexual undertones of this language suggest the tactile quality of religious experience and also point to the relationality at the heart of Pentecostal theology. God is no abstract, transcendent being in these narratives but a living, immediate presence; likewise Jesus plays an intimate role in the lives of believers, conversing with them on the most ordinary of subjects and acting as a sympathetic, affectionate companion to them in their times of loneliness. Like other Christian women [they] interpreted Jesus quite literally as a lover or husband. (Griffith 1998:230)

Evidently these women experienced imagined consubstantial assimilation with Jesus, that, when the experience was abrupt and profound, apparently evoked kama muta. They certainly wept.

Throughout this Pentecostal culture, weeping acted as a crucial sign of sincerity, if not its sine qua non. In printed narratives, surrendering to God was very often accompanied by crying; heartfelt feelings of repentance, sorrow, and joy were marked with tears. (Griffith 1998:231)

These tears were closely linked to “feelings of happiness and relief” that worshippers felt when God satisfied the “hunger” in their hearts—their intense appetite for perfect CS.
15.5 Worshipful participatory action in Ghana

De Witt describes the service in the 4000-seat Christ Temple in Accra:

The format of the two hour Sunday service has several stages and at each stage the interaction between performer and audience plays a different role in mediating between the physical and the spiritual world and establishing a relationship between the individual believer and Jesus Christ. The first half hour is ‘praise and worship’ time, led by the praise and worship song team on stage with backing from the church band. The first few songs have a fast and stirring beat and are aimed at lifting up the people and invoking the Holy Spirit in the auditorium. The crowd participates by clapping, dancing and singing along with the song texts projected on the screen. This is followed by a few slower songs, during which people lift up their hands in surrender to the Lord, singing along, praying aloud, at times crying. (De Witte 2011:498)

The sermon and the whole experience evoke awe and kama muta sequentially or simultaneously:

The whole, multisensory atmosphere in the auditorium contributes to the sense of being touched that people express after listening to the sermon, and is specifically designed to do so. It is first of all [pastor] Otabil’s words, however, that are experienced as touching and empowering. Church members frequently told me how the message had encouraged, motivated and reassured them. Some even spoke in more physical terms of being moved, hit, pierced, pushed forward, chastised or even knocked down by the power of his words/His Word. (De Witte 2011:500–501)

Pentecostal, charismatic, and evangelical churches that emphasize personal, emotionally direct relationships with God are fast growing, especially in the Global South. Kama muta drivers are an intrinsic part of them. It seems likely that kama muta is engendered by practices such as the laying on of hands and being slain in the spirit.

As thousands can testify, there are times when the healing effect of prayer can be felt physically. It is possible that with the laying on of hands you might feel a sensation of warmth or the flowing-in of energy. This is one indication that an inner healing is taking place and you can be thankful for it. (Berggren 1975:106)
15.6 Worshipful tears, hugs, and kisses

A large international charismatic organization, Aglow International (formerly Women’s Aglow Fellowship) holds meetings, often with large attendance, at which participants tell stories of abuse and shame, seeking the love and protection of Jesus and God. (Compare with the stories in addiction recovery groups; see Chapter 5.) “Most speakers are adept at getting their audiences to identify with them through the use of humor and self-deprecating anecdotes” (Griffith 1997:76). These stories, often with musical accompaniment, typically end with the speaker inviting participants to come up where she can lay hands on them and pray for them. Sometimes hundreds come forward.

The effects on the women present seem immense. Throughout the room women are sobbing, embracing each other, praying over one another, shouting out in the name of Jesus for the demons of shame to leave the bodies of those they inhabit and defile. Some women fall to the floor, “slain in the spirit,” as if entranced or temporarily unconscious; others wail with anguish, as helpers and friends gather round to guide them through a torturous process of remembrance, exorcism, and forgiveness. . . . Some quietly share stories with those sitting near them about violence and shame they experienced as little girls or adolescents, still struggling with feelings of guilt and anger and seeking reassurance and comfort from each other. (Griffith 1997:56–57)

Some may fall down, "slain in the spirit," while others weep with sorrow or joy and tell each other intimate details about their lives. (76)

In prayer the woman surrenders her sense of boundaries. (77)

This closeness does not occur spontaneously but requires effort on the part of the one seeking it. . . . It is felt as a kind of surrender of the will and a pure receptivity, and the resulting feeling is one of being utterly filled with love and peace. Women often talk of this feeling as akin to having God wrap his arms around them, both as an expression of love and as a means of protection from the harsh world. Here they are able to “experience the nurturing side of God’s character.” (129)

During and immediately after these events, “hugs, kisses, and frequent caresses are all part of the scripted behavior that Aglow women enact” (Griffith 1997:124).

Griffith’s participant observation indicates that

The kind of intimacy these women seek with God is not one-sided: they do not merely receive God’s love but endeavor to give love back to God; sharing their
secrets with God, they ask that he share his with them. A common phrase in Aglow parlance is “to know the heart of God,” referring not to total understanding of God’s will in ordinary things but to experiential knowledge of and participation in God’s loving compassion for all people, as well as his pain and suffering when his people suffer. . . . In this way, the women seek to nurture God, protecting him from those who curse or ignore him and bring him pain. This maternal dimension to the relationship completes the circle of intimacy, as each party fulfills the role of nurturant protector to one in need. (Griffith 1997:135–6

In sum, the gender-focused kama muta drivers of Aglow International generate healing kama muta motes from the intensification of a bond with God who literally embraces them and replaces the errant, unreliable, unsupportive men in the women’s lives. God understands, cares, protects, accepts and loves women who feel degraded by the sexual abuse and violence they have suffered. Held in God’s embrace, these women’s shared kama muta in their relationship with God accompanies and augments the sudden bond of newly revealed shared suffering: the shame and self-blame that isolated each woman becomes a bond that connects them when they discover that these other women have experienced the same abuse, humiliation, and neglect. Kama muta glows among them.

Contemporary men also have similar experiences. One popular book which claims to have sold over a million copies recounts a Benny Hinn’s experiences of personal communications from the Holy Spirit (Hinn 1990). Two years after his first vivid experience of presence of the Holy Spirit, Hinn went with a friend on a bus to attend an evangelical healing service in Pittsburgh. When the evangelist, Kathryn Kuhlman, appeared, and the singing began,

I was on my feet. My hands were lifted, and tears streamed down my face as we sang “How Great Thou Art.” It was as if I’d exploded. Never before had tears gushed from my eyes so quickly. Talk about ecstasy! It was a feeling of intense glory. . . . I thought I had been totally raptured. . . . In my young Christian experience, God had touched my life, but never as He was touching me that day. . . . As I stood there, continuing to worship the Lord, I opened my eyes to look around because suddenly I felt a draft. And I didn’t know where it was coming from. It was gentle and slow, like a breeze. I looked at the stained-glass windows. But they were all closed. And they were much too high to allow such a draft. The unusual breeze I felt, however, was more like a wave. I felt it go down one arm and up the other. I actually felt it moving. . . . For what seemed like ten minutes, the waves of that wind continued to wash over me. And then I felt as if someone has wrapped my body in a pure blanket — a blanket of warmth. . . . The Lord was closer to me than He had ever been. . . . Then I heard a voice that I knew must be
the Lord. It was ever so gentle, but it was unmistakable. He said to me, “My mercy is abundant on you” . . . . My prayer life to that point was that of a normal, average Christian. But now I was not just talking to the Lord. He was talking to me! And oh, what a communion that was! . . . . I sat down crying and sobbing. There was nothing in my life to compare with what I felt. I was so filled and transformed by the Spirit that nothing else mattered. . . . At that moment I felt, as the Word describes it, “peace . . . which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). . . . Never in my life had I been so moved and touched by God’s power. (Hinn 1990:5–7)

Hinn further reports (pp. 49–50) that one of his early encounters with the Holy Spirit “moved me to tears” when he heard the Holy Spirit’s response to his question, “What am I supposed to do with you?” The Holy Spirit replies “I am the one who fellowships with you” and he realizes That’s it! The Holy Spirit is the one who communes, who fellowships with me. The author reminds the reader, “Remember, there are no selfish requests in fellowship — just friendship, love, and communion.” In short, Hinn’s sudden, intense CS connection to God evokes crying, a feeling of something that is probably goose-bumps and chills, followed by warmth. In other words, kama muta motes. Moreover, whether oral or written, testimonials such as this are prototypes for others of when and how to experience kama muta, what the sensations mean, the significance of the total experience, and its extraordinary merit.
15.7 Kama muta in Hasidic or Cabalistic Judaism and other religions?

Although in these chapter we have focused on CS strands of Vaishnavism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, with brief mention of Mormonism, surely kama muta is vital to other CS-oriented religions. What about the other Abrahamic religion? Although some Jewish traditions are primarily framed with reference to ritual and taboo, does kama muta emerge in the ecstatic tradition of meditative Kabbalah, and Hasidism. Cabbalism and Hasidism are centered on the mystical text called the Zohar.

God is here described as En Sof, the endless and infinite and all. ‘For all things are in him and he is in all things: he is both manifest and concealed. Manifest in order to uphold the whole, and concealed for he is found nowhere.’ God projected himself from ten Sefiroth, channels of light (perhaps from sappir, sapphire rays), by which the divine existence became perceptible and comprehensible. The last of the Sefiroth is the Shechinah, ‘indwelling’, the presence of God in individuals, communities, and places.

The unity of God and the world was believed to have been originally complete, in the harmony of En Sof and the Shechinah, but when evil appeared there was disorder and the Shechinah is now in exile, appearing only in isolated persons and places. The goal of existence, therefore, is the restoration of the original unity, though moral perfection and communion with God. Every individual must aim at this divine unity, but it is particularly communal [collective], and when the Messiah comes and the Temple rises again then the Shechinah will be reunited with God and all things will return to the original harmony. (Parrinder 1976:116-117)

Do Hasidic or Cabalistic Jews experience sudden unity with God, and thence kama muta? It is intriguing that biblical and other Hebrew texts exhort people to šimḥā, ‘joy,’ when they consume sacrificial meat and wine in collective celebration; have sex; praise Yahweh; or anoint someone with oil to make a ritual passage from one state to another, such as birth, conversion, marriage, or the cessation of mourning (Anderson 1991). Even the consumption of non-sacrificial meat or wine, or study of the Torah, were moments for šimḥā (Anderson (1991). Anderson (pp. 108–109) concludes that what these circumstances of šimḥā all have in common is that one is rejoicing in the presence of God. Are some instance of šimḥā kama muta? What are the physical sensations of šimḥā? We ask for help from colleagues who read Hebrew and are familiar with Cabbalism and Hasidism.
There are other religions that focus on union with the divine, including Sikhism, some strains of Vedanta and Tantric Hinduism. It would be fruitful to look for kama muta in the experience of worshippers and the practices that may evoke it in these religions. And we should find out whether kama muta is salient in the other very widely-followed religion, Taoism? In other religions without explicit semantic doctrines about CS with deities, kama muta may still be evoked by synchronous rhythmic movement, collective singing and drum or other music, ritual commensalism, marking of bodies alike, and other forms of consubstantial assimilation.