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Learning healing relationality: Dynamics of religion and emotion

This chapter approaches religion – and specifically present-day lived religious expression – from the perspective of emotions and learning to work with emotions. The particular emphasis is an approach that understands emotions as dynamic ways to relate to the self, different kinds of others, and the world. This relationality is in many more or less subtle ways enhanced, guided and regulated by religious teachings and rituals. The dynamics of religion and emotion are also strongly present in contemporary forms of “spirituality” that are closely connected to a wider therapeutic culture offering countless methods and pedagogies for individuals to learn to tend to their emotions, and to enhance their emotional lives (see, Wilce and Fenigsen 2016). After discussing the complex conjunction of religion and emotion and several theoretical ways of framing and approaching this conjunction, I provide an ethnographic case-study involving Finnish women engaging angel-spirituality as an example of a globalizing religious culture in which emotions receive attention as key to self-understanding and as dynamic relations between human and super-human others and, ultimately, with the whole universe. As June McDaniel (2004: 266) writes, emotion in religious life is not a passive response to the world, but an active engagement in it.

Religion and the dynamics of emotion

Religion and emotion have strong and multiple connections in history as well as today. Sentimentality and “the sacred heart” in Christian mystic traditions, bhakti or “the devotional way” in Hindu traditions, and compassion as well as detachment in Buddhist traditions each provide a window into the ways in which emotion can be important in religious worlds and ritual lives. Many religious teachings and ritual practices highlight particular emotions that may be anything between humility and pride or joy and fear (Corrigan 2004a: 19; Riis and Woodhead 2010, 69–94). Religious traditions and rituals also often function as emotional socialization or “schooling of emotions”, in the sense that they set cultural models of how such emotions as grief, joy and anxiety are to be felt and expressed in changing life circumstances (Douglas 2011: 37–67; Frazer 2007; Halloy 2012).

Religious ritual can sometimes be emotional to the point that even the ritual language does not convey the desired messages or effects so much by its referential content and vocabulary as by other communicative means, such as sound and embodied rhythm. Examples of this are laments and glossolalia. Lament (ritual weeping) is a special ritual language most often addressing those in grief and those beyond this life, the ancestors. Glossolalia (speaking in tongues) is language spoken in a

state of religious ecstasy when encountering God in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. Laments and glossolalia are examples of emotionally charged religious expression – and modeling of religiously recommended emotion – embodied to the extent that it is difficult to describe them without emphasizing their distinct intense bodily performance.

Emotional styles vary between cultures, and not all religions or rituals foster particularly strong feelings and expressions. For instance, prayer can be a quiet and intimate expression instead of a loud public and collective performance. Sometimes low rather than high emotional key is the norm; such is the case for instance in the Lutheran ritual culture in Finland. It is also important to remark that in its lived reality religious emotions can fluctuate in intensity between high motions and routinization. As an interviewee of Iddo Tavory and Daniel Winchester (2012, 352) recounts:

“Sometimes the faith is high, sometimes the faith is low. The ease and feeling of practice can fluctuate.... Sometimes I feel like God is just there, man—everywhere, in everything. Other times, well, sometimes you feel like you’re just goin’ through the motions, unfortunately. (Interview with Abe, a convert to Islam)”

One important feature of many kinds of religious and ritual expression is their special kind of relationality in the sense that emotional communication often includes both human and super-human partners and interlocutors. Both laments and glossolalia address not only fellow humans but also super-human others such as spirits, ancestors and gods (see Corwin and Brown, this volume). Catholic people can hold very close and intimate relations with their patron saints, as discussed by Robert Orsi (1996) noting the intensity of the written correspondence that Italian immigrant women held with a particular popular saint. Moreover, in religious contexts emotions and emotional expression are not understood to belong to humans only but also to their super-human partners in communication. A variety of emotional qualities can be attributed to divinities, saints and spirits as can be seen in religious iconography, for instance in the presentations of Jesus as the Man of sorrows. We will see later how also angels can be imagined and depicted as embodying and communicating a quite large spectrum of emotions. According to anthropologist Charlotte E Hardmann (2004) powerful and complex emotions often saturate the relations between humans and spirits.

Emotions in the religious sphere (those of humans as well as spirits and divinities) are not only tender and positive but can cover a much wider and quite complex emotional specter. Images of the fierce and revengeful Hindu goddess Kali provide one example of this. In the Old Testament, divine anger is well exemplified in the talk that God holds to Job after the latter has complained about his loss and despair. Even such emotions as fear and terror may become targeted and cultivated in rituals (Whitehouse 2004). In traditional Karelian culture, the spirits of the ancestors can express emotions of hurt or revenge when their needs are not met, as our research team was able to document in Russian Karelian villages in the last years of the 20th century. We encountered widows who complained about their dead husbands’ spirits near to violent visits in their dreams (the deceased were angered and insulted by the fact that an old burial ground was taken for other use and thus becoming desacralized). (Stark et al. 1996.) Even socially disruptive emotions (such as anger of humans, gods or ancestors) can thus find place, function and legitimacy in religious worlds (see also Hardman 2004).

Religiously justified and regulated emotional expression are not the same for all people. Most notably, people in different social positions, such as women and men, young or old, or elite and the common folk, may be guided to feel and express feelings according to very different feeling-rules and to conduct different emotion work (Hochschild 1997). Often, commoners are expected to express more humility than the members of the elite classes who may be entitled to show pride, for example. Religiously regulated emotions are also often sensitive to historical change. In the

Victorian Age, British men started increasingly to participate in the progressively secular public life while women were expected to be the “angels of the house” (expression made famous by Virginia Woolf) thus safeguarding the Christian morality of the home that was regarded as the safe haven in the middle of a rapidly changing and turbulent society. This role of keepers of the Christian morality and sentimentality, offered particularly to middle-upper class women, stressed the emotions (and accompanying embodiment and expression) that were regarded as suitable for the committed mother and housewife. Later, when women in greater numbers entered the public life and work market, they begun gradually to feel and express emotions differently (more “self-centeredly” as it was sometimes regarded from the outside), and this change in emotional expression wasn’t immediately regarded as religiously or culturally becoming. (Brereton and Bendroth 2001; Sointu and Woodhead 2008; see also Bellah 1984: 85–90.) Different feeling-rules and emotion work may often still apply to women and men both in secular and religious life as is shown also by the example of angel spirituality.

Theoretical approaches on emotion in religion

Emotion has been a central category in some theories of religion and in particular in theories focusing on religious experience. Behind these theories, we can see influences of both Enlightenment and Romanticism philosophies. In Enlightenment thinking, religion has often been presented in critical terms as a particularly strong site of confusing and potentially misleading emotions – this emphasis can still be seen in some critical (for instance Marxist and secularist) theories on religion. By contrast, in the tradition of Romanticism, emotion and religion, along with artistic expression, receive a much more positive value as the seat of authenticity, creativity and meaning. One influential (if also much criticized) line in philosophizing and theorizing on religion and emotion is hermeneutics and phenomenology: philosophers, theologians and religion scholars from Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) to Rudolf Otto (1868–1937) and Mircea Eliade (1921–1986), have written on individual emotions (particularly submission and awe) towards ‘the holy other’ as the heart of religiosity. (See, e.g. Corrigan 2004a: 15; 2008; Riis and Woodhead 2010, 54–69.)

Two classic examples from the influential predecessors of modern theorizing on religion and emotion are William James and Émile Durkheim. Both emphasize the complex power of emotions in religious life; the first linking it primarily to the individual and the second to the society. For the North American psychologist and pragmatist William James (1841–1910), religion was anchored in the solitary emotions of the religious individual and the value of religious emotional experience was to be found in the either positive or negative effects that religion had on his/her life. According to Jeremy Carrette (2008), James did not think there was a distinct category of religious emotion; instead religion provided objects for a more general stock of embodied feelings and was rather just one context for interpreting and molding these feelings into something culturally recognizable and personally meaningful. In his book *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) James was particularly interested in such themes as the first-person mystical experience, the religious experience of the “Twice born” Christians, as well as the “mind cure” and positive thinking (fashionable in his time as it is now). Even if James has been criticized for his Protestant and individualist bias (and overemphasis on faith in comparison to ritual practice), many of his observations remain insightful both in the psychological study of emotion (Carrette 2009) and in analyzing the present-day emotional religious landscape (Taylor 2002).

Emotion had an equally strong place in the thought of French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) but in a quite different way from James. In his theory on religion and society, as presented in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), it was, first and foremost, the collective ritual act

of people coming together, and the often strong emotions connecting to that togetherness (effervescence), which made the foundation of society in that they intensified the representation of the sacred value that was society itself. For Durkheim, religiously charged emotion was a social fact engendered by action, practice and embodied material techniques. Emotion was a collective force, something that, in its full power, creates solidarity between individuals, makes them belong together, stimulates them and transcends mundane life, and thus in important ways constructs their relation to what the society holds as sacred – that is the core cultural value (see also Davies 2011: 51–54). The notion of ‘effervescence’ has been powerful in particular in the research of civil religion and religion-like emotionally charged social phenomena, such as ideologies and festivals. (Pickering 2009.)

Study of religion and emotion has received increasing attention during the last twenty or fifteen years. Research is presently conducted under several theoretical umbrellas in anthropology, sociology, history and (social) psychology of religion. For instance John Corrigan (2004b; 2009) has edited a volume and handbook presenting both case-studies and theoretical approaches. There has been a growing interdisciplinary interest in the study of religion and emotion recently both from the perspective of cognitive psychology (tackling the issue of universality of emotions in religion and ritual; see, e.g. Taves 2009; Whitehouse 2004), and from a more social, cultural and relational perspectives as the recent book *A Sociology of Religious Emotion* (2012) by Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead exemplifies. The latter approach is interested in the social and cultural variation and dynamic of emotional and religious expression and performance. One important interdisciplinary field of research in religion and emotion is the study of ritual (e.g. Davies 2011; 37–67). As John Corrigan (2004a, 16) writes, “rituals involving spirit possession, group prayer, dance, and healings are typical subjects for research on the performance of emotion in religion.”

Religion and ritual are fields of culture that remind us that emotion is not only private and mental but also very much embodied, collective and cultural force that is also tightly bound with values and power. Thus, religious ritual and language in many complex ways relate (either connecting or disconnecting) people with their different significant others and the worlds that surround them. This perspective is in line with recent sociological and cultural studies. For instance feminist theorist Sarah Ahmed (2004) emphasizes emotions as not only personal feelings but as something we do and something that is integral to complex power relations and not as oppositional to reason, interest and calculation but in multiple ways entwined with them. Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead point out that emotion is not only reactions to religious power but also in important ways sources of power in both personal and social life. Emotion gives intensity to religious expression and religions often provide to people culturally justified disciplines, pedagogies and language that categorize, hierarchize and justify emotions and sometimes strongly guide their expression and cultivation. This is what Riis and Woodhead (2010: 47–51; drawing on Reddy 2001) call “emotional regimes.”

From the perspective of religion and religious people, emotions transcend the individual and expand to cover many kinds and layers of relations, including material, symbolic and super-human ones. Emotions can thus be regarded as active and dynamic relations between self and the world, as claimed for instance by Peter Nynäs et al. (2015). Moreover, these relations are often actively learned and rehearsed through culturally codified and transmitted sensory, embodied and material practices and processes (e.g. Meyer 2006; Moberg 2016, 383–384; Utriainen et al. 2015). However, although emotion is a regular and powerful feature in religion in general, emotions and emotion-language have also become an increasingly pervasive topic and emphasis in the contemporary culture saturated with “the therapeutic (...) mode of thinking about the self and society” (Bellah et al. 1985: 113). This generalized therapeutic culture invites religion into an interesting dynamic.

Religion in the emotional and therapeutic culture

The relation of emotion and religion is a particularly salient topic in the present-day culture. Religion was a central topic already in Robert Bellah's and his co-authors' influential *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985). This book examines, in subtle analytic ways, the varieties of the ethos and feel of life and self of people in the United States following the counter-cultural waves of the 1960s' and 70s' that they call 'expressive individualism'. Only a little later, the philosopher Charles Taylor (1989) introduced the notion 'expressivist turn of culture' that he roots in Romanticism emphasizing personally felt authenticity, seeking for meaning and means for self-expression. This personal seeking increasingly takes place in the 'secular age' (Taylor 2007) – an age in which religion has become a matter of individual choice rather than transmission of collective tradition (see also Riis and Woodhead 2010: 184–187). It has been pointed out by many scholars that people want to be personally touched and recognized by religion and if they cease to be that, they can easily resign and seek other sources of meaning and value (for Finland, see Niemelä 2006; Nynäs et al. 2015). This is also one reason behind the fact that many institutional religions more and more emphasize experience and emotion. This can be seen, for instance, in the move towards charismatization of the traditional churches (Haapalainen 2015). Furthermore, in the present cultural climate, institutional religions and churches also increasingly engage “spiritual” and “holistic” themes and activities (Woodhead 2011, 14–15).

Cultural sociologist Eva Illouz (2007) is one scholar who has analyzed the contemporary culture through the lens of pervading and ever popularizing emotionality and therapeutic ethos. The culture of emotions and therapeutics on the one hand makes use of the rhetoric of authentic and free emotional expression throughout different cultural spheres and, on the other hand, is a culture of strict regulation, monitoring, control and molding of emotions. There is a particularly heavy emphasis on 'positive emotions', and positive emotional expression, which support the capitalist market ethos making full use of emotion-work (Hochschild 1997) and emotion pedagogies (Wilce and Fenigsen 2016) for tending to our relations to ourselves, others and the world. This is especially well present in the expanding cultural phenomenon that is self-help – area of cultural production that also uses religious or spiritual ritual and rhetorical resources.

Riis and Woodhead (2010, 187–206) write that in the present-day culture, religious language and symbols are becoming detached from their institutional anchors and partly merging into the general cultural reservoir. This process of detachment and merging would imply that religion is not always easily recognizable as a distinct sphere of culture and society. The overall emotional culture tends to blend “religious” and “secular” registers together often with the help of the market-logic. This is particularly visible in the sphere of popular culture and media in which emotional religious symbols travel ever more freely, as analyzed for instance in the recent research anthology edited by Francois Gauthier and Tuomas Martikainen (2013). For instance, (quasi) religious themes and figures appear in popular genres such as phantasy, science fiction and horror (e.g. Harry Potter, Da Vinci Code, City of Angels, Star Wars and Sixth Sense). Along with this, practices originating in religious traditions such as yoga, meditation and even ritual weeping are transformed into wellbeing products for people wanting to learn to take care of their minds, bodies and complex relations (e.g., Frazer 2007; Frisk 2012; Hornborg 2013; Mellor and Shilling 2010; Sointu and Woodhead 2008; Wilce 2011).

Many people today find the hybrid and increasingly preponderant category of “spirituality” a welcome affordance that escapes or actively rejects the religion-secular binary (Huss 2014). The category of spirituality works as a sort of blender in which different religious, therapeutic and also entertaining ingredients can be reformed into new fluid and adjustable perspectives (on fluid religiosity see, Motak 2009; Taira 2006). The new hybrid and adjustable perspectives (the products of the blender) can discursively reject the modern religion-secular dichotomy and, perhaps precisely

because they are such hybrids, provide plausible devices for both coping and creativity in the many complex situations of the present time.¹ The way to validate these cultural devices is either efficacy (“it works with me in this instance”) or felt emotional authenticity (“I feel that this is deeply right and true”, see, e.g. Woodhead 2008). It seems to have become important for many individuals in the western world to monitor and judge life through how they personally (or their closest reference-group) feel about things. This theme is found also in a lot of spiritually flavored talk about and practice on emotions – which is one way in which religion engages and enriches emotional and therapeutic culture.

Examples of religion and emotional relationality: two cases

Before taking the reader through my own ethnographic case study of angel spirituality in Finland, I will briefly present two studies in contemporary religious and emotional expression and pedagogy in order to show that we are dealing with a wide cultural phenomenon with interesting variation. The first example, representing more traditional yet simultaneously a quite modern type of religion, is anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann’s (2012) study on how some U.S. Evangelicals learn to make God their best friend, with whom to share and communicate the most intimate feelings and aspects of life. The second example comes from Finland and represents instead a form of contemporary “spirituality”: scholar of religion Johanna Ahonen (2014) has studied Finnish people’s emotional attachment and commitment to a female Indian guru.

In *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (2012), Tanya Luhrmann investigates the cognitive, emotional and rhetoric practices and techniques through which people learn to make God intimately real in their daily lives. In religious practice such as those at the Vineyard evangelical church that is the context of Luhrmann’s research, intense emotions and intimacy are extremely important. Luhrmann argues that emotional intimacy is not simply inherent in religious experience; rather, it is something that can and has to be learned through meticulous and committed practice. The idea(l) of intimacy and intense emotional relation to God are embedded in the religious language of the written texts (including the Bible as well as the workbooks for practice) and in the religious speech, such as sermons and personal testimonies. One special way to communicate with God in the Vineyard congregation is speaking with tongues (glossolalia) which is simultaneously considered a gift and a skill.

One example of this emotional pedagogical ethos is the *topos* of the heart that is quite familiar in Christian mystical traditions (Luhrmann 2012: 101–131). Luhrmann detects a strong and imposing idea that one can learn to develop one’s heart in such ways that it becomes possible hear God literally talk in the depth of one’s heart. Through learning to embody this idea(l) it becomes possible to experience a wide specter of complex emotions (fear, guilt, longing) in the safe intimacy of the heart. Through regular prayer and committed practice, the emotions become increasingly more positive and supportive also in life and relations outside ritual contexts. Eventually God can become one’s best friend. This embodied intimacy, as gained through ongoing dialogical exchange with a super-human interlocutor, is regarded by the people studied by Luhrmann as both spiritual and therapeutic.

In her article *Finnish women’s turn toward India: Negotiations between Lutheran Christianity and Indian Spirituality* (2014), Johanna Ahonen analyses interviews with Finnish women and men who

¹ It is also possible to argue that this is a return to the predominance of folk religion in the sense that folk/vernacular religiosity much less than many institutional religions emphasizes boundaries between such spheres of life like wellbeing, livelihood and entertainment.

have become interested in Eastern religions and particularly the version of devotional bhakti Hinduism as represented by the female Indian guru Mata Amritanandamayi, often called Mother Amma. Amma is very popular in Finland in attracting both male and female participants from different age groups and walks of life, to her *puja* rituals. Many of the participants are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. According to the interviews, these Lutheran followers feel that meetings with Amma give them a spiritual and emotional fulfillment that they cannot find in their native religion, which they suggest has a much lower emotional key. However, they also say that through devotion to Amma they have learned to understand and appreciate their own birth religion as well. What happens in the meeting with Amma that enhances that particular learning?

The blessing (*darshan*) of Hindu gods and goddesses – and gurus representing and mediating their power – is usually given through eye contact between the divinity and the devotee. Amma has her own personal way of giving *darshan* in that she blesses everyone (regardless of their social status) by touching and holding the individual in her arms. In addition to the touch and kiss of the guru, the ritual is accompanied by chanting and collective sharing of food. To receive the intimate touch, the followers often queue for several hours. In the interviews they talk about the particular feelings that the meeting with Amma gives to them, many of them recount that the encounter helped them to find their own true emotional inner selves. They enjoy the joyful atmosphere of the meetings and disclose how Amma has changed their emotional image of divinity from fear-provoking to gentle and accepting. Ahonen points out how her research participants also contrast their embodied encounter with Amma to that of the much more low-key emotional style, as well as lack of physical touch, in Lutheranism – thus suggesting that a new religion with a different emotional style can function as complement or corrective to one's native religion. They thus report a kind of emotional process of learning between religions.

Interestingly, the interview-accounts of both Luhmann's and Ahonen's research participants were not only talk about the importance of emotions but sometimes very emotional language in their own right. These accounts given in the relational situation that is the interview appear to me as kind of performative second-level re-enactment and re-enforcement of the first-level reported emotional experience. This kind of many-layered emotionality was also very clearly present in angel-spirituality.

Emotions in angel-spirituality

My own recent ethnographic project focused on spiritual practices with angels that had become increasingly popular among women in Finland in the years around 2010. One possible reason for this popularity is that while the saints or spirits of nature are not available as mediating figures for the Protestants, the figure of the guardian angel has a long and cherished tradition in popular Lutheran religiosity. This familiar cultural symbol may thus have paved the way to the recent very much global and interreligious angel spirituality in Finland as well as in other predominantly Protestant countries (Draper and Baker 2011; Gardella 2007; Gilhus 2012; Uibu 2013; Walter 2016). The fact that the leading international figures in angel spirituality are women (especially Lorna Byrne, Diane Cooper, Doreen Virtue and Maria Zavou) may also be one factor making this religious culture and its emotional style more inviting to women than to men. Interestingly, the popularity of angel spirituality is also culturally controversial in that it has raised severe concern within the Evangelical Lutheran Church as well as in the secular media. The critical comments (in Finland but also in Norway) have pointed out that this popular religious mode mixes Christian and Esoteric religious registers, favors the notion of reincarnation as well as magical rituals for tending everyday matters and, finally, depicts the relations between the angels and the women in disturbingly intimate and reciprocal terms. (Gilhus 2012; Utriainen 2015.)

The practices of present-day angel spirituality that I encountered very much revolved around the theme of emotions and learning how to deal with and heal (with) emotions. The researched women (similarly to the followers of Amma) found that this for them important emphasis on emotions was largely lacking in Lutheranism. Even if the specific ethnographic observations come from Finland, we will see a much more global culture of angel therapy implicated. Furthermore, angel spirituality seems to make an interesting example of emotional religious culture that closely intertwines a traditional style of women's religiosity with a more contemporary spirituality and therapeutic culture.

The material that my reflections draw on comes from several sources: interviews with approximately twenty Finnish individuals; participatory observation during an angel-therapy training course and several other angel-related settings; a questionnaire distributed at the visiting lecture by the Irish writer and angel-seer Lorna Byrne in Helsinki. In addition, the material also contains literature, media material and other cultural artifacts that circulated in the field. I will focus in this chapter particularly on the following issues: emotional crisis and critical phases in life as recounted by the women, ritual emotion-work and relations to super-human partners as ways of tending to those crisis and, finally, the rhetoric of emotions in the interview accounts.

Emotional crisis, women and angels

Angel-spirituality seem to be particularly appealing to women: my questionnaire (N263) indicates that the vast majority of people interested in angels in Finland are women (94%). The majority (73,8 %) of the respondents were also members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland who sought for something like a complementary spirituality with added emotional value. The questionnaire had an open section which revealed that these women turn to angels (and other spiritual practices) for several reasons and purposes that in many ways merge the spiritual and the therapeutic. Such reasons and purposes as mentioned were: to find aid and support in various distressing experiences in life like depression and illness, to seek spiritual growth and development, guidance, better knowledge of oneself and one's emotions, to support their faith and confidence, to be healed, to reduce stress, for general well-being, clarity of thought and purpose in life, to find energy, joy, a connection, and support for making choices in life.

The interviews provide long and often detailed accounts about the various more and less severe crisis and critical moments and ruptures in life. Emotional crises and critical phases of life were present also in the accounts of the research participants of Luhrmann and Ahonen to some extent. It is possible that this particular aspect was even more visible in my research since nearly all the accounts given included life-crises such as illness, unemployment, divorce, and sometimes also a clinically diagnosed depression. One woman artist recounted about a phase of deep depression, hospitalization and recovery through improved self-knowledge which was gained through relationship with angels.

Four or three ... years ago I suffered from severe depression and was taken to hospital. It was in fact very soon after that I painted these angels ... Maybe I got to know myself a little better.

The interviewees attributed their emotional crisis either to what had recently happened in their lives (e.g., divorce, unemployment) or to a difficult past and childhood. I heard several accounts about very complicated relations with the members of one's childhood family and about attempted psychotherapy, as well as Lutheran pastoral care, which had not helped as much as needed. Some women even considered that the ongoing or repeated difficulties in their life may have to do with something that had happened not in this life but in some remote past life. The idea of reincarnation

was thus brought into the accounts to explain emotional problems that were found to be too difficult to heal by any standard therapeutic or counselling means. One woman gave her reflection in the very middle of a crisis rather than with a hindsight. (This account is important also in that it shows the darker side of the present-day ethos of endless emotional self-development and its demands.)

Thus all those tough [moments] helped me develop spiritually and I received more understanding, perhaps, of my own life, my own past and family members (...) Because, you know, a human being develops all the time, and now I think that my development comes with such speed that I can't necessarily bear it. One medium and spiritual healer told me that I must be an extremely ambitious person because of what I have chosen, at the point when I chose this life (...) does one have to do all those things in one life?

However, in most cases angels, or other super-human but simultaneously very intimate and thisworldly relations, seemed to give (at least some hope of) therapeutic help, and the interview accounts were mostly narratives of healing from emotional crisis through relations with angels. Many reported finding clarity and relief in their own complex and confused emotional lives through encounters with angels and other spiritual devices – so much so that angel-spirituality can be said to be largely about emotion-work (Utriainen 2014).

Once I received from this angel a kind of sword. And then I had some kind of (...) chains that were around my feet, like symbolic chains, so I felt that with the sword I could free myself from some chains (...) and I link them to my own life like and my parents..

It is kind of a spiritual preparation process (...) You are taken into very deep waters so that you'll be made to reflect on your whole being (...) all those old emotional blocks and fears, and all that, and you'll be made to confront all that in your life and accept and go through it, and they will be healed with angels.

Emphasis on emotions and emotion-work is very explicit also in the books and other (often globally circulated) materials that were used by the women as their sources of inspiration and learning. For instance, North American angel Doreen Virtue, who is well known also in Finland, explicitly uses the title “angel-therapist” and has published books and meditation cds bearing on “angel therapy” (Virtue 2011). Her angel therapy oracle card decks, and the individual cards bear such themes as “Integrity”, “Clear yourself”, “Emotional sensitivity”, “Cut your cords”, “Release” “Mediumship” and “You are not alone”. At the time of my fieldwork, the angel-healer Maria Zavou from Greece visited Finland several times providing “spiritual operations” which aimed at healing from emotional traumas originating in past lives. This kind of merging of the categories of therapy and religiosity provides a telling example of how religion is braided together with the more general emotional culture. These examples also testify about the global nature of this culture (for how this works in the Internet, see Uibu 2013).

Emotional contacts and healing rituals

Anthropologist of religion Susan Sered (1994: 119–141) notes that according to cross-cultural research, religions dominated by women – and particularly lower class women – tend to focus strongly on interpersonal relations and emotions (see also Sointu and Woodhead 2008; Trzebietowska and Bruce 2012). Sered also finds women's religions often notably more thisworldly in orientation than otherworldly oriented male-dominated religions: women's religiosity tend to favor relations to immanent deities rather than transcendent ones. Furthermore, instead of separating between sacred and profane spheres of life these religions rather tend to merge sacred and profane together. One particular cultural sphere in which this kind of predominantly female religious style is

present is healing. Healing-rituals can juxtapose with rituals of crisis (e.g. rituals of mourning) as well as more routine everyday tending-rituals (Bell 2008) whereby many quotidian and homely matters become the focus of attention (for traditional everyday tending rituals, see, e.g. Keinänen 2010).

The presence of angels was in many ways described as emotionally supportive and healing. This emotional and supportive presence or touch of the angels was sometimes recounted to happen through the human senses and as very thisworldly sensations. Many women told me how they had learned to “feel” or “sense” the angels with their skin: how the angels, suddenly or when invited, come and touch them, tease them, and caress them or talk to them. (This is very similar to the first contacts that the spirits of the dead can make with their future mediums, and what anthropologist Diana Espirito Santo relates to William James’ idea of “a sense of reality”, see Espirito Santo 2012, 264.) This theme of physical signs of contact appeared also in the literature that the women read, such as in the in Finland very popular book by the Irish Lorna Byrne: *Angels in My Hair*.² The touch of angels was particularly said to protect oneself and one’s children. The angelic touch was told to take the form of the Archangel Michael’s (imaginary) protective overalls in which the mother dressed her small children or a protective shield around the house for the night. These small everyday rituals were like visualized prayers with an imagined intimate touch.

The accounts were delivered not only in the interviews but also in the peer-group meetings such as “angel-evenings” in which the women shared their life-stories and helped each other to realize how they could invite the angels to become part of everyday life. In these gatherings, angels were talked about as best friends, companions and partners in practically all spheres and moments of life. These findings come very close to what Lurhmann reports in her study with the Evangelicals in North America, only her research participants communicated intimately with God. One recurrent theme shared with the interlocutors of Lurhmann, as well as found in the globally circulating angel literature, is the emphasis on *not to being alone* and without emotional support when carrying complex everyday responsibilities, decisions and choices:

Our own angel is with us all the time. He is right by your side even now.
(Unpublished angel healing course workbook)

This seemed like one key experience in a modern woman’s life: one is independent but simultaneously often alone and wanting companionship and some participatory agency that would counterbalance the downsides of individualism in a complex world (see also Utriainen 2013).

In participating peer-group gatherings in private homes and public spaces such as bookstores and lecture-halls, I encountered shared enthusiasm of learning the different ways and methods for contacting angels and inviting them to give support and joy in life. The women eagerly shared their angel experiences and tips of reading and other for them important sources. The most interesting angel gathering for the topic of this article was the angel-healing course that allowed me to observe and participate in ritual practices whereby special methods of emotion-work were learned, enacted and reflected. (For the details of the angel-healing ritual, see Utriainen 2017b.)

The angel-healing course was organized at the home of the teacher, a woman in her sixties, and it counted six women participants. The meetings were accompanied by a workbook compiled by the teacher. In addition to learning about angel traditions in Christianity and other religions (Western Esotericism in particular) we learned and rehearsed practices and rituals from making an angel-amulet (see Utriainen 2016) and meditation (Utriainen 2013) to how to perform the angel-healing

² Quite similar to Amma, Lorna Byrne also blesses people by hugging them individually. See: <http://www.lornabyrne.com/#start> [Accessed October 1, 2018]

ritual. We were also encouraged to talk to the angels as to our best friends about anything on our mind. Emotions were a recurrent theme in all the course-material and practices as well as lot of talk and discussion. In my interview with the teacher, I asked why she thought people were interested in her course and other angel-healing services. In her answer, she stressed that people feel at loss with their emotions in today's world and seek guidance and comfort.

Her angel-healing course workbook presents the archangels in relation to the clearly positive and supportive emotions or relations that they embody and which are symbolized by distinct colors. The colours belonging to each angel expressed emotions or emotion-like energetic qualities: Raphael was associated with turquoise and tranquillity and healing, Gabriel with white and communication, and Jofiel with yellow and joy, for instance. We were told that if we felt irresistibly drawn by a particular colour, it could be a sign that this angel is approaching us and giving us a message related to that energy and emotion.

When learning to perform the angel-healing ritual, the healer-trainee was taught to observe in detail her own feelings and sensations during the whole session and, afterwards, to be ready to put these sensations into words and in dialogue with the feelings of the person being healed. These vocabularies were understood to refer simultaneously to the individual's emotions and to the presence of healing angelic and cosmic energies which the angel-healer was expected to learn to contact (for instance through visualizing colours). Emotional energies were understood to travel in the cosmos, and the general idea in healing with spiritual energies is that the healer only mediates ("channels" is the word used) cosmic/divine energy for the person being healed. In the end, also angels were often understood to be ultimately mediators of this universal healing energy. That is why the healer is advised to keep herself as pure and clear (of pollution such as negative thoughts and emotions) as possible. This idea of clearing emotional blocks is forcefully present for instance also in Doreen Virtue's angel therapy books and materials – which makes this idea to belong to a more general and global ethos of emotions.³ The workbook of the Finnish angel-healing course summarizes this idea in this way: "The light/energy that flows through the angels purifies your being, but it is only through your own work and effort that you can keep your own spiritual vessel clean."

The ideal of emotional and energetic purity is not, however, always reached in lived reality. One healer recounts in her interview that she writes down the messages she receives in her sessions because she feels that this helps her to distinguish the authentic message from the input of her own "ego": "I must write [it down] because from that writing you see at once if it is pure text or if something from yourself has gone into it ... Because I am not yet so skilful that everything could come through all clear." This citation highlights that learning to work on emotions using spiritual energies is understood to be a delicate process that takes time, effort and commitment.

Rhetoric of emotion in angel spirituality

The shared feature of the interviews and the talk that the women had together in the gatherings is that they highlight the importance of emotions as something that both complicates and nourishes life. As such, emotions were talked about mostly as connecting and beneficial forces, but also as dangerous and potentially disruptive ones: "... if you let any emotion [loose], it is extremely frightening – because it is so powerful", as one of the interviewees put it. In this rhetoric of emotions as highlighted in the quotation, lack of contact to and control of one's emotions could potentially lead to emotional chaos, loss of horizons and loss of self and agency.

³ See also <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3jjojw> [Accessed 1, October 2018]

The women told that they worked with the angels to learn to purify and understand their sometimes very confused emotions – it is as if unclear emotions would endanger their orientation in life. By contrast, clear and pure emotions, and the ability and means to constantly mend, adjust and reflect on them, can provide a much needed and appreciated guide and navigator in a complex modern society with its challenging and changing situations, such as endless choice-making and demanding relationships. One of the women talks about this with serious tone using a progress model: “Very, very big challenges, yes, yes. I have been in very heavy moods and heavy phases of life. And now that I have all the time like gone forward, it is easier and lighter.” This same language on the imperative of emotions can be found in the abundance of angel material that these women have mentioned to me as their inspiration and most important sources.⁴ The rhetoric of the importance of emotions, of gradual emotional growth as well as learning and development is also familiar in the wider culture of women’s magazines and self-help literature, which shows the pervasiveness of the cultural emotional and therapeutic ethos (Illouz 2007).

While emotions can be regarded as authentic, the cultural value of regulation and management of emotions is very much also present in the rhetoric of angel-practices. Some women openly reflect on this by saying that angels are a more efficient and cheaper form of therapy than any other they have tried. This stance is mirrored in the questionnaire by a comment of a crisis therapist who reported that she decided to come and listen to the very popular “contemporary mystic” Lorna Byrne’s lecture on angels precisely because she meets many patients who seek help from angel-related or other similar practices, and she wanted to learn something of their power for many people. Angel therapy is thus also from the outside regarded as being something with which people meet real emotional challenges.

Since emotions are depicted as powerful and potentially explosive energy, all means and methods that help deal with them are regarded welcome. Angel practices provide various such means and measures for identifying and clarifying emotions and (when so identified and clarified) for taking them as one’s mirrors and guidelines in life. Moreover, emotions were understood not only to belong to the individual but also as embodied and psychological counterparts of cosmic energy that penetrates and relates all being.

One can perhaps summarize the rhetoric of emotion present in angel-spirituality in the following way: emotions are presented as thick and opaque, wild (and perhaps sacred) universal energy that needs to be rightly channeled, purified and clarified in order to render them beneficial and empowering forces. According to my interviewees, with angels’ help it was possible to transform the unwieldy emotions into psychological, social, moral and spiritual tools. Moldable emotional energy – often portrayed as one version of omnipresent cosmic energy – was expressed to connect and relate individuals (in both good and bad, or productive and unproductive, ways) with the world and its various kinds of others. This is how the therapeutic and religious became to be merged in a spiritual emotional culture.

Conclusion: From emotions in religion to therapeutic spirituality

This chapter has discussed the dynamics between religion and emotion and selected ways of scholarly approach of their conjunction. I have approached emotions particularly from a relational perspective as something that connects people with their often complex worlds. Emotions are

⁴ The first page of the guide book for Doreen Virtue’s *Angel Therapy Oracle Cards* says: “Angel Therapy is a powerfully effective and safe healing modality that helps you release fears or other emotional blocks, receive guidance about your life purpose and other issues, and heal your body and life”.

embodied, social and communicative forces that in the religious context often also involve other than human partners. According to sociologists (of religion) we are presently witnessing a particular relatively global trend of emotionalization and therapeutization of culture in which also religion interacts. The presently growing popular phenomenon of “spirituality” with its strong emphasis on learning the many varieties of healing and wellbeing (self-help) practices is an example of such interaction.

As case study, I presented my own ethnography with Finnish women who engage in a version of globally present form of lived religiosity that is angel spirituality. Angel spirituality serves as example of a particularly strongly gendered spiritual culture that in interesting ways combines traditional female religiosity engaging emotional and relational issues and salient aspects of contemporary therapy-culture in being saturated with the emphasis of learning (through) emotions. The theme of emotions and learning through emotions runs through the narratives about emotionally charged life-crisis which many modern women meet in some points of life when being abandoned or left on her own to make difficult choices or when embarking on new paths in life. In peer-group gatherings, the women together learned to conduct healing rituals and other therapeutic techniques by which they can invite angels to take part in tending to these crisis and quotidian concerns. These methods of emotion-work were leaned as portable devices to be taken in use whenever needed in the course of day and life. As such, these devices provided complements to both traditional religion and secular therapeutic services.

In the language and rhetoric of the interview accounts and other materials, emotions were understood to be potentially dangerous and disruptive forces but also as crucially important key to self-understanding and, when worked on, as navigation devices in the complex situations of modern life. On a more cosmic note, emotions also became to be associated with the all-life-penetrating energies that connect individuals to the whole of cosmos – to the extent that the angels themselves could be depicted as embodying and communicating the variety of emotional energies. This spiritual culture, with its language and practices, presents a rich and complex conjunction of the therapeutic and religious and thus a telling example and version of our time’s emotional culture. The case of women and angels also however shows that even if emotion was understood as the core of the individual self, it was not confined to the individual alone but simultaneously pictured as in multiply and powerful ways relational.

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