A Motherly Prayer

The Religious Experience in the Construction of Female Identity

in Two Prayer-Poems by Hava Pinhas-Cohen

# Introduction

The religious poetry written by the recently deceased Israeli poet Hava Pinhas-Cohen[[1]](#footnote-1) (1955-2022) is widely viewed as groundbreaking.[[2]](#footnote-2) Her poems, published beginning in the mid-1980s, typically deal with themes related to femininity, and have an intertextual style.[[3]](#footnote-3) They reflect a wide range of sources from Jewish literature: the Bible, Midrash, and Aggadah, liturgical poetry, the Kabbalah, prayers, and more.[[4]](#footnote-4) Hava Pinhas-Cohen’s poetry is characterized by a complex, multilayered conversation with Jewish sources.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This article examines the relationship between the feminine/maternal experience and the religious experience in two of her poems: “A Mother’s Prayer before Dawn (*Shacharit*)”[[6]](#footnote-6) and “Request,”[[7]](#footnote-7) both published in *Journey of the Doe* (1994/2015). They take the style of a maternal prayer, which reflects the Jewish, feminine, Yiddish tradition of *Tkhines (Supplications)*.[[8]](#footnote-8) Like *Tkhines*, which revolve around the life of the Jewish woman and her duties, these two poems revolve around the poet’s life and her duties as a wife and mother. In these poems, she prays for her children, her family, her people, and herself—as a mother. Within the traditionally feminine genre and literary framework of the *Tkhines*, she appropriates canonical Jewish texts, which bear a patriarchal-masculine stamp, and through them shapes her identity as a woman and a mother.

In the two prayer-poems analyzed here, Pinhas-Cohen converses directly, personally, and intimately with God. She addresses God with love, or with defiance. Some of her prayers are soft and conciliatory, others are harsh and piercing. The titles of these poems indicate that each of them is, in fact, a “prayer before the prayers;” that is, a prayer said in preparation for the traditional prayer service, alluding to the liturgy included in some prayer books: “We beseech you, merciful God, that You will accept our prayer with mercy and willingly; amen, selah.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

The Hebrew word *shacharit* in the poem’s title means both sunrise and the traditional Jewish morning prayer service; here it refers to the latter. In an interview, Hava Pinhas-Cohen said that her inspiration for writing this poem was an encounter with a “prayer before prayer” that she happened upon in a prayer book.[[10]](#footnote-10) Similarly, the title of the poem “Request” implies that it belongs to the genre of *baqashot* (requests), liturgical poems that members of the Mizrahi and North African Jewish communities traditionally say before the Shabbat morning (*shacharit*) prayers.[[11]](#footnote-11) The titles of these two poems transform them into liturgical texts.

In the two poems quoted below, the relationship between the mother and her children is a central feature in the development of the poet’s identity.[[12]](#footnote-12) Both poems open with a description of a mother feeding her baby. In the first, she prepares porridge for him, and in the second she breastfeeds him. Both poems portray a daily, concrete, maternal scene and also express broad theological, cultural, and social worldviews. In these poems, the female-maternal perspective is a prism for processing general issues, which go far beyond the narrow, private, feminine sphere.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In many of Hava Pinhas-Cohen’s poems, it is possible to see descriptions of marginalized “feminine” and domestic tasks, such as breastfeeding, childcare, cooking, and housework, while she simultaneously uses the patriarchal-masculine “father’s language” that characterizes canonical texts. She takes elements from the male religious-cultural world and adapts them to her needs in terms of describing female and maternal identity. The female experience takes place in the “border zone” between the male-centered culture and the female-marginalized culture, an area that stimulates processes of identity formation, the quest for cultural belonging, and creativity.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Alicia Ostriker claimed that female creators may bring about a change in women’s status by undermining the existing language and revising the mythology that was shaped by a distinctly patriarchal influence.[[15]](#footnote-15) She said that women writers “steal the language” of patriarchal culture. The connection to canonical texts aligns their writing with an authority that does not exist in the writing of poets who concentrate solely on their private feminine world. Eileen Showalter defined the unique place of female artists, who work simultaneously within the realms of “father culture” and “mother culture.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Their texts use the “mothers’ language” while changing and adapting it to the creator’s personal expression and style.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Feminist literary criticism emphasizes the dual character of female writers’ language,[[18]](#footnote-18) which originates from an awareness of both female self-identity and the hegemonic male literary tradition. Hava Pinhas-Cohen’s poems reflect this duality and portray the writing of a female poet who is consciously consolidating her identity through a dialogue with the male cultural-religious world.

# A study of the poem “A Mother’s Prayer Before Dawn (Shacharit)”

The title of this poem carries a double meaning: a prayer in preparation for the morning prayer service, as mentioned above, and a prayer that a mother is saying before daybreak when her work as a mother begins.

A Mother’s Prayer Before Dawn (Shacharit)

At the hour when I am about to cook porridge

May all my strange thoughts recede

And when I touch my baby’s back to check his temperature

Let all my troubles leave me

and not confuse my thoughts.

Give me the strength to wash my face

So that each one of my children

Will see his face in mine

Like a mirror cleaned for a holiday.

And may the darkness that is sunk within

My face—be covered with light.

So that my patience not break nor my throat grow parched

From a troubled thickening scream

May I not become powerless

Against the unknown

And may I never cease for even a moment

To feel the touch of my children’s flesh against my own.

Give me your love so that I will have enough of it in me to stand at my doorway

Sharing it simply as slicing bread and spreading butter each morning anew

The aroma of boiling milk overflowing and the lingering smell of coffee

Is an offering of thanks and an eternal offering

That I do not know how to give.

In this poem, preparing food and childcare are given a central status, in such a way that the entire poem revolves around what researcher Ann Romines called “the home plot.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Susan Starr-Sered, in her sociological research, described how traditional Jewish women perceive their world and defined this as a “domestic religion.”[[20]](#footnote-20) She said that women shape their spiritual lives by “domesticating” the religious world while “sanctifying” everyday life.[[21]](#footnote-21) This poem reflects the perception that childcare, preparing food, etc., are religious activities and even spiritual rituals. The narrator in this poem expresses the conflict between her inner world and her maternal role. The entire poem is the prayer of a young mother who wants to fully experience motherhood without being troubled or distracted from her primary role. Her prayer that “strange thoughts” should not “confuse” her echoes various Hasidic sources that address a person’s struggle with the difficulty of concentrating on prayer.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The poem opens with a description of a mother in her kitchen, about to prepare porridge for her baby. The sequence of her thoughts unfolds for the reader in a stream-of-consciousness style. While preparing the porridge, she wants to be fully focused and attentive to her baby’s needs. She asks for the courage to “wash” her face so that each of her children can see their own face in hers. She wants to be like a mirror for her children to see their reflection, through her. This expresses a desire to negate any narcissism in the mother’s personality. The “washed” mirror, cleaned for a holiday, fits the feeling of worship that is hinted at later.

The poet prays that her difficulties, described as an inner darkness, will be covered with light, that she will not lose patience, that her throat will not become sore from screaming, and that she will not feel powerless “against the unknown.” This is all so that she can maintain an intimate and physical relationship with her children: “And may I never cease for even a moment/ To feel the touch of my children’s flesh against my own.”

The repeated negations— my patience not break nor my throat grow parched…May I not become powerless… may I never cease (in Hebrew always using the word *lo* (no))—emphasize the pressure the anxious mother feels to be a perfect mother. The absence of punctuation gives the feeling that this sequence of requests is said in one breath. In the last stanza, the poem’s tone changes, becoming softer and more relaxed. She prays that the mutual closeness between her and her children will not end and that she will be filled with love that she can give to her children as “simply” as spreading butter on bread. The phrase “Give me your love,” hints at lines from the *ahavah raba* (great love) blessing in the *shacharit* prayers: “And unite our hearts to love and fear your name,” indicating that God’s love is the source of her strength as a wife and mother.

The poem links expressions from the realm of daily, female-motherly activities (cooking porridge, taking the baby’s temperature, slicing bread and spreading butter on it, boiling milk, and making coffee), and expressions from religious worship. She compares housework to the work of the *kohanim* (priests) who gave offerings in the Beit HaMikdash (Temple),[[23]](#footnote-23) specifically the thanksgiving offering, which symbolizes the poet’s gratitude for her relationship with her children, and the daily (*tamid –* which can also mean everlasting) offering, which symbolizes her request that this relationship be everlasting. The poem’s first lines hint at a comparison between maternal actions and religious worship. The porridge is described as *daysat solet* in Hebrew (designating specifically wheat porridge), evoking the fine flour (*solet*) used in the grain offering in the Temple. Similarly, the words used at the end of the poem to describe the scent of the milk and coffee are the same words used in the Bible to describe the scent of the incense offered in the Temple. The poet asks that she be given the ability to devote herself totally to caring for her children, with the understanding that motherhood is a sacred mission.

By linking the world of motherhood to the world of Jewish religious worship, the poet merges her identity as a woman and mother to the historical line of the Jewish tradition. This link is a source of strength for her. At the same time, the feminine language of action (boiling milk for the baby and making coffee) “covers” the language of the religious-masculine worship practiced in the Temple, from which women were excluded. She sees her prayer, or the act of writing the poem, as a preferable substitute for giving the offerings.[[24]](#footnote-24)

It is also possible that Pinhas-Cohen’s words about the offerings refer to the binding of Isaac, and hint at her maternal anxiety about the bereavement and the sacrifice of her sons.[[25]](#footnote-25) This issue leads to the next prayer-poem, which refers to the biblical story of the *Akedah* (the binding of Isaac).

# Study of the poem “Request”

Many poets have looked at the story of the Akedah as a mythical template for interpreting current events.[[26]](#footnote-26) In modern poems about the Akedah, less emphasis is given to the relationship between man and God, which has been gradually replaced by a focus on the relationship between the individual or nation and Jewish historical-national existence.[[27]](#footnote-27) The poem “Request” continues in both the traditional approach, in which the Akedah is seen as an expression of an individual’s religious faith and the national approach, in which the Akedah is seen as an expression of the trauma of the Shoah (Holocaust) and the tragedy of children who died in Israel’s wars. However, this poem is told from a specific angle, the maternal viewpoint, which gives the poem its strength and power.

# Request

When a baby is in my arms

Its life woven with human milk

At nights there come heartbeats, thumping voices

Trains—

At a certain station in that land

Barefoot and weak

I spread my arms

Like the horns of a ram in a thicket

The earth whispering to the heavens

Hear, make a canopy of your mercy

Like shade of the vine and the fig tree

Please, do not put me to the test.

There is wood and thicket, a smell of fire

And the sight of smoke. Don’t play hide-and-seek

With mothers—

Weakly I cover my eyes

My voice is lost in a scream

That can’t be heard.

Where are you? [How could this happen?]*[[28]](#footnote-28)*

In another interview, Hava Pinhas-Cohen said, “The *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible) serves as a starting point for my life, and an opportunity to go into the depths of human experience through the eyes of those who preceded me here.” [[29]](#footnote-29) She specifically mentioned the Akedah: “The story of the Akedah draws me back every time, to a different character each time, and this probably depends on the biographical stage I’m in at a given time.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Her many poems about the Akedah express national, or personal issues, but the striking common characteristic is that they are all told from a female perspective.

In the poem “Request” the poet prays that she, as a mother, will not experience the fate threatened by the Akedah; that of sacrificing her sons on the altar of the homeland.[[31]](#footnote-31) The poem opens with the intimate scene of a mother breastfeeding her baby.[[32]](#footnote-32) The metaphor “Its life woven with human milk” illustrates how the act of breastfeeding creates a fabric of life that connects the mother to her baby.[[33]](#footnote-33) The image of breastfeeding as weaving elevates “the home plot” [[34]](#footnote-34) to the artistic-aesthetic realm. Then the peaceful image of breastfeeding is suddenly violated: the rhythmic heartbeats felt during breastfeeding become the pounding sounds of trains, which allude to the horrors of the Shoah. The poem focuses on the anxiety that afflicts mothers even when their children are still breastfeeding babies, portraying the thoughts of a young mother trying to push away a nightmare.

The poet compares herself, simply spreading out her arms, to a ram with its horns caught in a thicket, an image suggesting that the anxious mother is also a victim of the Akedah. The poet’s description of herself is characterized by lack: her feet are bare, her arms are weak and powerless (the word “weak” appears twice in the poem), her arms are outstretched in supplication, and her voice is lost. She feels isolated and lacking, her soul emptied by distress.

The poet turns to God with a request (as stated in the title) and asks God to hear her whisper, like the earth whispering to the heavens, which is a request for peace, and to “make a canopy of your mercy/Like shade of the vine and the fig tree.” The reference to covering her eyes recalls the practice of covering one’s eyes when saying the prayer *Shema Yisrael.* The expression “canopy of your mercy” echoes that in the Shabbat and holiday evening prayer service: “And spread over us a canopy of mercy and life and peace.” The image “Like shade of the vine and the fig tree” echoes this biblical verse symbolizing peace and tranquility: “Every man under his vine and under his fig tree,” (Kings 1: 5).

The poet appeals to God: “Please, do not put me to the test.” This succinct phrase alludes to three issues in the Akedah story. The first refers to the perception of the Akedah as a test, as written in Genesis (22:1) “God tested Abraham.” The second refers to God’s commandment to Abraham: “Take your son,” (Genesis 22:2). The third refers to the salvation that came in the end through the angel’s words to Abraham: “Do not stretch out your hand against the boy,” (Genesis 22:12).

The poet pleads for a canopy of peace to be spread over her. She does not want to be tested as Abraham was. But in her growing anxiety, she already senses the looming Akedah. Like Isaac, who noted, “Here are the fire and the wood,” (Genesis 22: 7), the poet notes that “There is wood and thicket, a smell of fire/ And the sight of smoke.” All the signs of preparing for a sacrifice are present. The mixture of senses in the description, the smell of fire and the sight of smoke, further emphasizes their tangibility. However, unlike Isaac, who did not know what was coming and innocently asked, “Where is the sheep for the sacrifice?” the poet knows very well what danger she is facing is, and responds with the powerful phrase, “Don’t play hide-and-seek/With mothers*—*.”

The pause that interrupts the flow of these lines emphasizes the determined and resolute response of the poet, who declares that, as a mother, she is not willing to accept the fate of the Akedah. The phrase “Don’t play hide-and-seek/With mothers*—*” highlights her femininity and makes this the main argument in the poem. In this context, femininity and motherhood are not seen as an inferior starting point, but the opposite; they are an advantage. While in the biblical story, the father is offering the sacrifice, in this poem it is the mother who is making the sacrifice. The mother in this poem does not take the place of Sarah, who is absent from the stage in the original biblical story,[[35]](#footnote-35) but rather that of Abraham. The poet claims that precisely because of this (!) God must stop hiding, since with mothers, apparently, one should behave more responsibly. One should not “play” with them, or test them with “manly” trials.[[36]](#footnote-36) Through this deconstruction and reconstruction of the biblical story of the Akedah in which the mother takes the place of the father sacrificing his son, the poet evokes the female world.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The poet describes this looming Akedah as God’s face being hidden, like in a game of hide-and-seek, in which one participant covers his eyes while the other hides. However, this is not an innocent, childish game, but a difficult theological game that the hiding God and the searching poet are “playing.” The poet covers her eyes, but not as children do in an entertaining game, but rather out of fear. This fear has some “weakness” in it, stemming from her reluctance to witness the impending sacrifice of her child. Her cry is not the playful shouts of children, but “…a scream/That can’t be heard.” This silent cry recalls someone waking from a nightmare. The oxymoronic lost and unheard scream that ends the poem paradoxically echoes even more strongly.

The woman’s language in this poem is nonverbal; the whisper in the beginning becomes “lost” in a “scream that can’t be heard.” This recalls Kristeva’s perception regarding women’s language, which has an emotional, physical, pre-verbal origin.[[38]](#footnote-38)

As for the content of the cry: the question “Where are you?” was also heard in the primordial game of hide-and-seek in the Garden of Eden. In that story, God asked the question, directed toward Adam, who sinned and hid, whereas in this poem, the mother directs the question to God. The response is poignant. Any reality in which there is a danger of a child being sacrificed raises questions of faith, whether it refers to the biblical Akedah or symbolizes the Shoah or sacrificing children on the altar of the homeland. The same question that God addressed to Adam the poet addresses to God: Where are you, while your children are being bound for slaughter? How could this happen? The threatened Akedah evokes the harsh feeling of God’s face being hidden.

Does this poem express anti-religious sentiment? I don’t think so. There is a strong feeling of being close to God, even if this raises difficult questions. The question “How could this happen?” (or “Where are you?”) is harsh and distressing, but there is no doubt that it stems from deep religious feeling.

The allusion to the liturgical prayer-poems in the title of the poem, “Request,” reinforces this feeling. The whole poem is nothing but a prayer, and the questions of faith it raises only strengthen the mother’s plea.

# Conclusions

In both of the “prayer before a prayer” poems discussed here, religious experience is described through the relationship between a mother and her children and is a central feature in the poet’s process of forming her identity as a woman and a mother. In the first poem, she turns to God out of her inner conflict. As a mother who finds it difficult to devote herself completely to her maternal role, she asks God to help her fulfill her desire: “Give me your love.” In the second poem, she turns to God out of anxiety as a mother who is afraid that she will be forced to “bind” (sacrifice) her son, and asks “Where are you? How could this happen?”

Whether the tone is soft and pleading (as in the first poem), or harsh and defiant (as in the second), in both cases, the poet’s powerful and natural connection to God is shown to be the foundation for her identity, and religious faith is described as the source of her strength as a woman and mother. In the poem “A Mother’s Prayer Before Dawn (*Shacharit*)” Hava Pinhas-Cohen alludes to the priests’ service in the Temple, and in the poem “Request” she reinterprets the biblical story of the Akedah. In both cases, she adapts the distinctly patriarchal-masculine roles (the priests offering sacrifices, and Abraham sacrificing his son) to her feminine perspective. In the first, the mother caring for her children is likened to a priest making offerings. In the second, the mother breastfeeding her baby is contrasted with Abraham binding his son for sacrifice. The poems appropriate the ceremony or texts in a way that simultaneously expresses belonging to a tradition and protesting against it. In this way, they express the poet’s autonomous inner world.

Deconstructing and reconstructing these myths is done not only to protest against the position of women in society and culture but also as a re-examination of the fundamental principles of the Jewish religious tradition (such as the meaning of the Temple offerings and the commandment to sacrifice Isaac in the Akedah story). The subversive tone in these poems regarding the exclusion of women from religious worship, or the patriarchal historical story of the Akedah, does not contradict the strength of the religious belief described in them. This duality characterizes the poems discussed here, as well as many other poems by Hava Pinhas-Cohen, in which she gives an authentic spiritual expression to the complexity of life as a woman in Jewish culture.

1. See her website, at: <https://havapinhascohen.co.il/en/home/> (accessed February 23, 2023). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dror Idar, “When the kingdoms changed in the heights: A comparative study of the poetry of Zelda and the poetry of Hava Pinhas-Cohen,” in: Yehuda Friedlander, Uzi Shavit, and Avi Sagi (Eds.), *The Old Shall Be Renewed and the New Sanctified: Essays on Judaism, Identity, and Culture, in Memory of Meir Eyali*, Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 2005, pp. 215-241. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Zvi Luz, “The roots of merging the opposites,” *Gag*, 21, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Hava Pinhas-Cohen’s poems also refer to mythology, the New Testament, and contemporary Israeli literature, but the influence of traditional Jewish texts is predominant. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. According to Gilad Meiri, Hava Pinhas-Cohen appropriated the discourse of male Jewish sources as an act of female emancipation. See: Gilad Meiri, “The center of gravity in the poetry of Hava Pinhas-Cohen: Parting words,” *Ma’ale*, December, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Originally published in Hebrew as “Tefilat l’aym leterem shacharit” in *Masa Ayala (Journey of the Doe)* HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 1995, p. 33; English translation from: *Bridging the Divide: The Selected Poems of Hava Pinhas-Cohen,* (Sharon Hart-Green, Ed. and Trans.), Syracuse University Press, 2015, pp. 52-53. The transliterated word *shacharit* is not included in Hart-Green’s translation, but is provided here because it is essential to this analysis. [I added this last sentence; is it ok?] [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., pp. 48-49 (these are the pages in the English version) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Tkhines* (following the phonetic transliteration of Ashkenazi pronunciation) are prayer books or “supplications” written in Yiddish, which became widespread beginning in the 17th century in Ashkenazi-Jewish communities. They were intended for Jewish women who, unlike most men in their communities, did not know enough Hebrew to pray in the holy language, and so would pray in the spoken language, Yiddish. For more on *Tkhines* see: Tracy Guren Klirs et al., *The Merit of Our Mothers: A Bilingual Anthology of Jewish Women's Prayers*, Hebrew Union College Press, 1992; Devra Kay, *Seyder Tkhines: The Forgotten Book of Common Prayer for Jewish Women,* Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, PA, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For example, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk’s “Prayer before prayer” in the appendix to his book *Noam Elimelech*: <https://www.sefaria.org.il/Noam_Elimelech%2C_Additions%2C_A_Prayer_before_Praying.9?lang=he>. According to Yael Rotenberg, in this poem Pinhas-Cohen is referring to the prayer said by the congregation’s leader during the Rosh Hashanah Musaf prayer service. See: Yael Rotenberg, “‘A path—restrain my feet: Female poets as leaders,” in: Moshe Rahimi (Ed.); *Leading Through Leadership*, Orot Israel College Press, 1973, pp. 193-181. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hava Pinhas-Cohen recalled getting up early in the morning, before the other members of her household, “So I would have one hour to myself before breastfeeding.” She said she felt “agitated, full of worries, unable to relax,” picked up a Siddur (prayer book), came across this prayer before a prayer, and felt the words for this poem flow out of her. See her interview with Vered Levy-Barzilai, “Kicking in all directions,” *Haaretz*, January 17, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hannah Petia, *What are the Poems of Request?* <http://old.piyut.org.il/articles/1032.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In feminist literary criticism, relationships are seen as a central feature of the gender dimension in women’s identity development processes. See: K. J. Gardiner, “On female identity and writing by women,” in: E. Abel (Ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference*, University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 177-191. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Hebrew literature scholar Lily Rattok described transformations in the concept of femininity in the poetry written by female Israeli poets. She noted that starting in the 1970s, these poets began to portray their world in all its complexity: their “feminine” and “marginal” daily tasks as well as broad socio-cultural issues. See: Lily Rattok, “Portrait of the woman as an Israeli poet,” *Moznayim* 62, 1988, pp. 56-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1987, San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books. See also: Yael Rotenberg, 1973, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, pp. 211-213. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Elaine Showalter, “Feminist criticism in the wilderness,” in: Elaine Showalter (Ed.), *The New Feminist Criticism,* New York: Pantheon Books, 1985, pp. 243-266. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Tova Cohen, “Inside the culture and outside it: On the appropriation of the ‘father's language’ as a way of intellectually shaping the female self,” in: Ziva Shamir and Hanna David (Eds.), *Sadan: Studies in Hebrew Literature: Selected Chapters in Hebrew Women’s Poetry*, Tel Aviv, Israel, 1996, pp. 69-110. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Elaine Showalter, “Introduction: The feminist critical revolution,” in: E. Showalter (Ed.) *The New Feminist*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1985, pp. 3-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. [Ann Romines](https://www.google.co.il/search?hl=iw&tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Ann+Romines%22&source=gbs_metadata_r&cad=3), *The Home Plot: Women, Writing & Domestic Ritual*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Susan Starr-Sered. *Women as Ritual Experts*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This “domestication” of the religious world is reflected in some of Hava Pinhas-Cohen's poems, such as “An ineffable name” (*Journey of the Doe*, ibid., p. 7), which describes the experience of being at Mount Sinai from the point of view of a mother who is busy taking care of her children. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For example: “The Holy Baal Shem Tov of blessed memory said that if you encounter foreign thoughts during prayer, actually this is a good sign!” See: *Sefer Baal Shem Tov on the Torah*, Parshat Noah, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Other poems by Hava Pinhas-Cohen that compare housework to the work of the priests in the Temple include: “Word” in *Journey of the Doe*, p. 75, “Two faces” in *A River and Forgetfulness*, pp. 12-13, and “The color is the main thing” in *The Color is the Main Thing*, p. 24. should the page numbers from the translation be given? [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. After the destruction of the Temple and the abolition of the sacrifices, the prayer services, which were developed to mirror the sacrifice services, have been seen as substitute for them. See: Babylonian Talmud, *Brachot* 26, 72: “Prayers were instituted based on the daily offerings.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See: Ahuva Rekanti, “On the poem ‘A mother’s prayer before dawn,’” *Ma'emkim*, 13, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Malka Shaked, Lanetzaḥ ’anagnekh: Hamikra bashirah ha‘ivrit haḥadashah (I’ll play you forever: The Bible in modern Hebrew poetry), *Iyyun (Commentary) II*, Tel Aviv, Israel: Yedioth Ahronoth–Sifrei Hemed, 2005, pp. 109-159. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Ruth Kartun-Blum, “What is this wood in my hand?” *Moznaim* 9-10, 1989, pp. 9-14; Ruth Kartun-Blum, *Profane Scriptures: Reflections on the Dialogue with the Bible in Modern Hebrew Literature*, Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, OH, 1999, pp. 63-65 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. In Sharon Hart-Green’s (2015) translation the last line is translated as “Where are you?” Here, I have added the alternate translation “How could this happen?” Pinhas-Cohen used the Hebrew word אַיֶּכָּה (“how/how could this happen”), which refers to the Book of Lamentations that mourns the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE. Hart-Green translated this as “Where are you?” based on the similar word אֵיכָה. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See interview by Leah Shneer, “Beyond the severed roots: A conversation with Poet Hava Pinhas-Cohen,” *Aleh Siach,* 41, Winter 2019, pp. 59-72. WHICH PAGE IS THIS QUOTE FROM? [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ruth Kartun-Blum sees Hava Pinhas-Cohen’s Akedah poems as part of a wave of female political protest literature. See: Ruth Kartun-Blum, “Don’t play hide-and-seek with mothers: Mothers’ voice and the binding of Isaac in contemporary Israeli poetry,” Revue Européenne des Études Hébraïques, 1, 1999, pp. 13-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The breastfeeding motif appears in several of Hava Pinhas-Cohen's poems. For example, in the poem “Intimacy” (in Pinhas-Cohen, *The Color is the Main Thing*, 2005, pp. 20-21). It is possible that the breastfeeding motif in the poem “Request” was inspired by the midrash describing Sarah nursing Isaac. See: *Genesis Rabbah 53.* [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. In this context, see Helen Cixous on the concept of “white ink,” i.e., breast milk: Helene Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, University of Minnesota Press, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Romines, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Unlike in the biblical story, in the midrash, the rabbis actually give a central role to Sarah; see: Rashi on Genesis 2: 2. Sarah also holds a central place in Rabbi Shmuel ibn Abbas’ liturgical poem, “Time for the gates of acceptance,” <http://old.piyut.org.il/textual/24.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ruth Kartun-Blum, “Don’t play hide-and-seek with mothers: Mothers’ voice and the binding of Isaac in contemporary Israeli poetry,” Revue Européenne des Études Hébraïques 1, 1999, pp. 13-26; See also Rekanti, 2008, p. 20. [verify if a short version of this should be cited] [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Approaching the original text from a new feminist-critical perspective recalls the term “re-vision” coined by the feminist theorist Adrienne Rich. See Adrienne Rich, “When we dead awaken: Writing as re-vision,” in: A. Rich (Ed.), *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1971, pp. 33-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. J. Kristeva, “Revolution in poetic language,” originally published in French in 1974, published in English in: T. Moi (Ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1986, pp. 89–136; See also Chaya Shacham, *Nashim u’masekhot (Women and Masks*), Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 2001, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)