

**The Role of Gender and Prayer in the Poetry of Hava Pinchas-Cohen**

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## **The Poetry of Hava Pinchas-Cohen: Major Poetic Themes**

How does a woman place herself in the corpus of Jewish texts and writings that have been the dominant voices for generations? Might she successfully leave an imprint from her female perspective for the next generation to consider? The poetry of Hava Pinchas-Cohen attempts to do just that. When I began reading her poetry, I was immediately struck by her strong Jewish knowledge paired with her female view of Judaism, prayer and Halakhah. What interested me most of all is the perspective from which she writes: an observant woman pushing the status quo of women in Judaism. The occasion of this thesis presented an opportunity to delve into Pinchas-Cohen's mind, heart and struggles as a Jewish woman living in Israel.

In English, there is not much written on this poet; she seems to be known mostly in literary circles. Professor Miriyam Glazer of the University of Judaism has written a few articles which have served as valuable references for this study. In addition, biographical information from Professor David Jacobson's (of Brown University) forthcoming book as well as from the poet herself proved to be invaluable tools for this study of Hava Pinchas-Cohen.

The corpus of Pinchas-Cohen's poetry ranges greatly in its themes. Glazer notes that the "issues [that] lie at the heart of Pinchas-Cohen's oeuvre as a whole...[include] a critique of contemporary Israeli culture and its commitment to evolving and expressing a poetry rooted in Jewish textual and religious traditions, [and] engages a controversial

problematic in the sociocultural, literary, political and spiritual life of Israel today.”<sup>1</sup>

Many of her poems speak of Eretz Yisrael, ritual, prayer and tradition. Glazer notes that

“[t]o reinforce the connectedness of the Jewish people with the land of Israel, she [the poet] sets her poems in Jewish time, dating them according to the Hebrew calendar, and referencing the Hebrew months of the year within the poems... the language of her... poems becomes a counter-discourse, a multi-layered, allusive Hebrew that demands of its readers a sophisticated and nuanced knowledge of Jewish history and the Jewish textual tradition of Bible, Talmud and Midrash.”<sup>2</sup>

Pinchas-Cohen herself stresses that Hebrew is important to her poetry. “The Hebrew language that I write today is my personal connection to the weighty... flow of the history of the Hebrew language... It ties me as a woman to Hannah’s prayer, to Rachel’s anger at Jacob, to Naomi’s feeling of alienation when she returned to Bethlehem.”<sup>3</sup>

While the aforementioned themes are significant and pervasive, I have chosen to concentrate on the issue of gender in the poetry of Pinchas-Cohen. So prevalent is this theme that three separate sections of poems could be included in this thesis, which seeks to understand how gender in Judaism permeates Pinchas-Cohen’s representation of domesticity, the Yamim Nora’im, and ritual/prayer.

The major question this thesis seeks to address is what happens when women begin to look at prayer, the home, and the holidays that define Judaism? When they engage in this exercise, do they leave an imprint which is different than a man’s? Is their imprint on traditional ways of understanding Judaism overtly “womanly”?

<sup>1</sup> Jamie S. Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley, *Mapping the Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 365.

<sup>3</sup> David C. Jacobson, *Where Are You? Israeli Poets on God and Prayer* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, forthcoming).

The poems selected for this study are samples of the poet's collection. They do not encompass the whole corpus. I hope that the reader of these poems and analyses will use this thesis as a catalyst to delve deeper into the poetry of Hava Pinchas-Cohen.

## Biography and *Dimui*

Hava Pinchas-Cohen was born in Jaffa in 1955 and was subsequently raised in Tel Aviv and Ramat Aviv. Once she married, she moved for a time to the West Bank, and then to Rehovot. She now lives in Jerusalem with her four daughters; her husband has predeceased her.<sup>4</sup> She has written a number of books of poetry and been awarded distinguished literary awards. Her first book of poetry, *Hatzevah Be-ikar (The Colour Mostly)* (1989) won the Luria Prize. She has also published *Masah Ayalah (Journey of a Doe)* (1995), *Nahar V'shekhehah (A River and Forgetfulness)* (1998), *Shirei Orphi 'ah (Poems for Orphi 'ah)* (1999) and *Mashiach (Messiah)* (2003). She was also the recipient of a 1995 Prime Minister's Award in Israel. In addition to writing poetry, Pinchas-Cohen publishes children's literature and literary reviews and edits the cultural journal *Dimui*.<sup>5</sup> "Her poetry has been described by critics as 'personal Midrashim,' which use the discourse of traditional belief without compromising a contemporary woman's empowerment."<sup>6</sup>

Her poems have been honoured for their linguistic and imaginative richness, as well as their spiritual depth and human understanding. The poems of Hava Pinchas-Cohen, in their context, metaphors, symbolism, language, and feeling, draw at once on the present and the personal and on the wells of Jewish tradition: on Midrash, Bible, Talmud, Jewish History, ceremony and ritual."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> David C. Jacobson: this information sheds light on the "Kaddish Yatomah" poem.

<sup>5</sup> Shirley Kaufman, Galit Hasan-Rokem, Tamar S. Hess, eds., *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems From Antiquity to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1999)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Miriyam Glazer, *Dreaming the Actual: Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Israeli Women Writers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 308

Raised in a family with a strong anti-religious bias, Hava Pinchas-Cohen nonetheless “developed a curiosity about the traditional religiosity that had been central to her family three generations previously”<sup>8</sup> in Sephardic Bulgaria. Over time she became religiously observant, eventually marrying a like-minded man whose roots linked him back to Morocco.<sup>9</sup> The poet has written that “[i]t has been an ongoing and painful search that has unceasingly connected and create conflicts between my personal and intimate self and my family, between self-knowledge and an attempt to clarify my relationship to Israel, to a national identity.”<sup>10</sup> She describes herself as not strictly Orthodox or a ba’alat teshuvah; rather, she observes tradition and the religion, though admits to lacking religious “awe” and dislikes having to “submit to external authority, which clearly puts her in tension with the norms of traditional Jewish observance.”<sup>11</sup>

Hava Pinchas-Cohen began editing *Dimui* in 1989, a literary journal concerned with Jewish culture around the world and in Israel. “One of the central missions of the journal is to stimulate the creative talents of all writers attempting to create art that integrates the secular and the religious.”<sup>12</sup> As the poet explains, “the journal is designed to allow for the artistic expression of religious observant Jews, while at the same time being open to the dialectical and experiential worlds of works that combine within them two cultures seeking the right expression.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jacobson

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid (as quoted)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid



In the first few issues of *Dimui*, Pinchas-Cohen wrote in her introductory remarks that the members of *Dimui* are creators, interested in creating within the Jewish and Israeli experience in Israel. She hoped to create a culture of dialogue between the many varied streams of Israeli society, and the forming culture in Israel with Jewish culture in the Diaspora. She noted that the world she lives in now is a meeting place between tradition and modernity and that *Dimui* strives to address this situation. In one of the most recent issues of the journal, Pinchas-Cohen wrote that the whole issue that month would be devoted to women, creation and Judaism. She noted that creation that follows loss is the most natural act that combats forgetfulness. Her striking statement "I create therefore I remember" framed the entirety of her opening remarks.

These words resonated as I read and analyzed her poetry. The idea that forgetfulness causes a story or an idea to flow into oblivion intrigued me. What might this mean for women in a traditionally patriarchal society? If the only ones writing the history are men, the stories written by, about, and for women will be eventually forgotten. What Hava Pinchas-Cohen is doing through her poetry is remembering. By creating her own version, interpretation and understanding of the ancient Jewish texts, she remembers who she is. Women have been members of the human race just as long as men have. The time to reclaim and create anew is now, writes the poet through the words of her poetry. "I create therefore I remember" thus means that she remembers the stories of the women who came before her; she remembers her story too. And it is she who is engaged in the creating. Thus, the poet Hava Pinchas-Cohen is including herself in the makers of history, present reality, and the future.

## Domesticity

Hava Pinchas-Cohen has written many poems concerning the issue of women and domesticity in Israeli culture or the place of women in the home. Many of her poems depict women at home, in the kitchen and/or rearing children. Her poems communicate that Israeli women have been, and continue to be, excluded from the public arena and are missing out on something significant. At the same, though, the poet shows through her poetry the religious side of home life and child rearing. The reader notes that Pinchas-Cohen sees the possibility of revelation occurring in more places than just the synagogue; the private sphere can provide revelatory experiences as well.

In "A Prayer for Mother before Shacharit" ("תפלה לאם בטרם שחרית") the poet asks for strength in her domestic duties. She also juxtaposes domestic service with cultic service; the former a woman's jurisdiction while the latter echoes a patriarchal culture of ancient Israel as well as today. She reflects on the sacrifices she makes everyday that receive no recognition. "The Ineffable Name" ("שם מפרש") sets the poetic speaker at Revelation, where she is still engaged in her domestic duties. The end of the poem reveals a yearning to escape to a place where love is the most important quality, a place where she may feel included and satiated. In "The Colour Mostly" ("הצבע בעיקר") the poem laments the repetition and loneliness of domestic life. Such duties are set in opposition to the foreign, exotic and colourful life of the ancient Priests. Finally, "Two Faces" ("שתי פנים") beautifully depicts a connection between the ancient showbread of the Temple of Jerusalem, the poetic speaker, and one's identity.

This selection of poems represents only a small sample of Hava Pinchas-Cohen's work on the theme of domesticity. These poems clearly show examples of the way in which the domestic life of women changes the shape of their prayers and poetic reflections.

## תפלה לאם בטרם שחרית

- 1 בשעה שאני עומדת לבשל דיסת סלח
- 2 הסר ממני כל מיני מחשבות זרות
- 3 וכשאני נוגעת בגו התינוק ומדה חמו
- 4 שילכו ממני כל מיני טרדות
- 5 שלא יבלבלו מחשבותי.
- 6 ותן לי אמץ לזכך פני
- 7 שיוכל כל אחד מילדי
- 8 לראות פניו בתוך פני
- 9 כמו במראה רחוצה לקראת חג

- 10 ואת החשך המשקע מפנים
- 11 פני—כסה באור.
- 12 שלא תפקע סבלנותי ולא יחר גרוני
- 13 מצעקה מתחבטת ומתעבה
- 14 שלא יהיה לי רפיון ידים
- 15 מול הבלתי נודע
- 16 ושלא יפסק אף לא לרגע
- 17 מגע בשר בבשר ביני לבין ילדי

- 18 תן בי אהבתך שיהא בי די לעמד בפתח הבית ולחלקה
- 19 בפשטות בה פורסים לחם ומורחים חמאה כל בקר
- 20 מחדש ניחוח חלב רותח וגולש וריח הקפה מכסים
- 21 על קרבן תודה וקרבן תמיד
- 22 שאיני יודעת איך נותנים.

### A Prayer For Mother Before Shacharit

- 1 At the time that I stand to cook cereal of fine flour
- 2 Remove all manner of foreign thoughts from me;
- 3 And as I touch the baby's back, and check his temperature
- 4 Let all manner of troubles go from me
- 5 That they not confuse my thoughts.
- 6 And give me the courage to purify my face
- 7 So that all of my children will be able
- 8 To see their faces within mine
- 9 As in a mirror washed for a holiday
  
- 10 And the sunken darkness within
- 11 My face—cover with light.
- 12 That my patience not snap and my anger not flare
- 13 From a struggling, thickening outcry
- 14 That I not be weak
- 15 In the face of the unknown
- 16 And that it not be stopped, even for a moment
- 17 That touch of flesh by flesh between me and children
  
- 18 Instill within me enough of your love that I can stand in the doorway and distribute it
- 19 As simply as one slices bread or spreads butter every morning
- 20 Anew, the incense of milk boiling and overflowing and covering and the smell of the coffee brewing
- 21 The Sacrifice of Thanks and the Perpetual Sacrifice
- 22 That I do not know how to offer.

"A Prayer for Mother Before Shacharit" ("תפלה לאם בטרם שחרית") concerns the act of עבודה, meaning both the ancient act of "worship" and the modern act of "work".

Ancient Israel once engaged in Temple sacrifices called עבודה, though this undertaking is no longer done. The move from sacrifices to prayer maintained the Hebrew verb לעבוד as both are attempts of an individual to connect to, communicate with, and thank God. As noted above, עבודה also defines the modern sense of "work", be it in one's home or in the public sphere. "תפלה לאם בטרם שחרית" reflects the poetic speaker's attempt to sanctify the domestic work that she does, to allow the original meaning of עבודה to truly mean "worship" in its religious sense. The yearning may be great, but throughout the poem the poetic speaker admits her fear that she lacks the competency for this sort of עבודה. The entire poem is a prayer to God, comprised of several requests to the Divine One in this poetic speaker's life.

The poem opens with Biblical and prayer language. The poet has masterfully combined two very distinct actions: cooking breakfast in the kitchen, on the one hand, and participating in Jewish sacred events, on the other. The poet could have chosen to use another word than עמידה, Jewish liturgy's most central and sacred prayer. Instead, the reader is immediately drawn into the scene—why the use of עומדת here? What exactly is this woman preparing in her kitchen?

What is being cooked is even more striking than how the woman is situated while doing it. The poem tells us she is cooking סלת. סלת is an ancient word meaning "fine or choice flour" and was a term used in Biblical times. Found in Numbers 28:9-10<sup>1</sup>, it is seen in the context of the offerings (קרבנות) that the Israelites were to offer to God at specific times. On Shabbat there was an additional offering called Musaf and it included

<sup>1</sup> "וביום השבת שני כבשים בני שנה תמימים ושני עשרונים סלת מנחה בלולה בשמן ונסכו/עלת שבת בשבתו על עלת התמיד ונסכה" <sup>1</sup>

סלח as a meal-offering to God. In using the phrase דיסט סלח, the poet is likening the preparation of morning breakfast cereal to the offering of a sacrifice.

What is particularly interesting is that it is a woman who is preparing this Musaf offering. What the poet is doing is conflating two seemingly opposed worlds—the home where the woman resides and performs her “duties” and the outside, ritualized, communal world where the man performs his “duties”; his עבודה is done outside of the house.

By the end of just this first line of the poem, the reader is left wondering if this woman is “praying” by preparing food. What might that mean for organized prayer in synagogues and for the set liturgy that the Jewish people have relied on for years?

In line two, we are brought into the mind of this woman. What we learn is that this seemingly benign act of cooking (and/or praying) is not so innocent: strange or foreign thoughts permeate her thoughts. One can imagine the flow of such reflections overwhelming her head, posing it difficult to continue with her task. One also begins to question what kinds of thoughts are flowing, what they concern and why the woman considers them “foreign”. Perhaps they are “foreign” because they reflect a non-Jewish desire or perception of the world. עבודה זרה connotations are conjured in the reader’s mind; does the woman think that she is engaging in such an act? In this vein, it is interesting that the word זרות, a negative idolatrous word, should follow words like עומדת and סלח, two positively Jewish terms.

Line three shows the reader that the woman in the poem has other duties besides cooking—namely, caring for her children. Here, she is caring for a child who is sick and we feel a mother’s love, care and affection for her own. Lines three through five seem to

slow down time and we take a break with this mother to check on her baby. Only now in line five has the reader been given an entrée into this woman's mind and heart, and sees the relative importance that she places on her domestic duties. One could speculate that housework and cooking put her in a space where her imagination may run wild, while caring for her children puts her in a happier place, where she feels grounded and needed, comfortable and safe. It is possible to read this differently: that there is no opposition between housework and child-rearing, and that even while engaging in the latter, the poetic speaker feels such dark moments.

In line six, the woman requests courage, as it is clear to her that she bears weaknesses (and has been since the beginning of the poem). It is not clear who she is asking this from—God, herself? Her sick child? The thoughts of her mind? The request she offers is to be able to calm down and to regroup into the person she want to be, the person she wants her children to emulate. Lines eight and nine express this desire. The woman sees that when she is haunted by such “foreign thoughts” she risks her children witnessing this person she has become—really the person she is. For these thoughts are her true person and she fears her children will see this. Additionally, she could be fearful that her children will see her anxiousness and bitterness about her maternal role.

The domestic imagery returns in the final line of this stanza, as washing enters the poem. The use of the word *הג* without any adjective to specify which one simply teaches us that such “washed mirrors” are a habitual act, for any holiday. This duty is but one of the many that she must complete for such *הגים*. The practice of cleansing and preparing one's house for a holiday appears to be a clearly understood act. However, the poet chose



to have the poetic speaker wash a mirror. This may signify two manners of cleaning; the neutral preparing of the home, but also the attempt to clean one's self-image.

This first stanza is entirely focused inside the home where the woman resides. We do not see if and when she leaves it, but we have been made privy to the lifestyle within the home.

The next stanza is an extension of the previous one. The two stanzas connect themselves through their words, if the "darkness" referred to in line 10 is the same as the "thoughts" and "troubles" of lines two and four, and if the "light" of line 11 is the same as her children of lines three and seven. In addition, פני־פני is repeated in lines six, eight, and here in line 11.

6 ותן לי אמן לזכר פני  
8 לראות פניו בתוך פני  
11 פני—כסה באור

This is significant as the phrase פנים אל פנים resonates for the reader. In the Torah, it is used to describe a unique relationship but a few humans experienced with God.<sup>2</sup> In these spiritual encounters, the person would be able to see God's "face" like one sees one's child. Such an intimate experience would be filled with awe, meaning, and understanding. Perhaps in the poet's utilizing of פנים several times, she is implying either that the poetic speaker is experiencing such a moment with her children, or that she is engaged in a פנים אל פנים situation with God as she attempts to sanctify her household עבודה. She seems to be expressing an almost impossible yearning, as no human actually sees God "face to face."

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Bereishit 32:30 and Exodus 33:11

Lines 10 and 11, continuations of the prayer that is this poem, seem reversed entirely from what one would expect. Rather than the light of one's face being shadowed by the darkness, "the sunken darkness within my face-cover with light". This would seem to imply that her natural persona is dark and that only sometimes does the light conceal it. This also tells us that the darkness that surrounds and permeates her face never really goes away; rather, it is only covered up temporarily, masked momentarily. The important question to ponder is what exactly this darkness is. Might the poetic speaker be depressed? If so, what is the cause of this malady? Is she troubled, literally "feeling dark" about women's traditional roles in the home?

The prayer continues as the poetic speaker asks for something to control her emotions. Clearly, she feels incapable of doing so herself, or perhaps it is that she fears it will become uncontrollable, thus the appeal to God. The cause of this "snap" would be line 13, an escalating outcry that would reach its zenith with tremendous ire. The consequence of this "flaring of anger" would be line 14, weakness and powerlessness. The poetic speaker wishes not to fear or be helpless in the face of things she does not know or cannot yet understand. She fears that which lies ahead, and she does not want these fears and anxieties to cause her to disengage from her family. As seen in lines 16 and 17, these phrases reflect her anxiety that one day she may not be able to physically touch her children. As children grow older, the physical intimacy she so loved may become less common. For, in her mind, by maintaining this very real connection, she is staying "in touch" with them.

In the final stanza, the woman offers a final prayer, a petition to God. In line 18 she requests God's love but not for the reason one might assume. This phrase seems to

imply that she is not yet receiving God's love, or not receiving nearly enough (the use of *די*). And because of this lack, she is not presently praying publicly. Only if and when love comes to her from her God can she, or will she, go to *הבית*. It is interesting to note that she does not want to enter the House completely; rather, she is choosing, or perhaps resigning to just be at the entrance. Whether she wants to enter wholly or not is not clear. Perhaps she is remarking on the status of women in prayer: their subordination, omission, and exclusion. By the use of *בית* here, she is playing on the dual associations of home and temple (the Temple of Jerusalem where the original *עבודה* took place). Also, it behooves the reader to note that some Temple sacrifices occurred in the *פתח*, the entrance. Finally, by stating that she is in this entrance-way, the poetic speaker is remarking on the liminal space she is in; in this place, she is both inside and outside the house.

This final stanza may be understood in yet another way. This request may not concern a house of prayer at all; rather, the doorway of line 18 refers to the front doorway of the woman's own home. One imagines her acting as the guardian of the house, seeing her children off to school each morning, each one contently full from breakfast. And at the end of the school day, she stands at the doorway and ushers them in again. This prayer offered is modest one. She wishes God to provide her just enough love so that she may carry on these duties. Building on the "modest" prayer, the woman is not asking for everything, but for this threshold need.

The poem returns to the subject of cooking in line 19, replete with bread, butter, milk and coffee. Noting that these actions have "simplicity" takes our attention back to the second line of the poem, where the woman struggles to keep focused on the task

while others thoughts permeate. Perhaps it is the simplicity and boredom that allows such reflections to occur.

Cultic imagery is brought back into the poem in line 20, as נִחֹח is used to describe "milk boiling". נִחֹח is a biblical word used to describe the incense of the sacrifices that God received and enjoyed. It appears as if this woman is offering her own version of a קֹרְבַן נִחֹח to God in her kitchen, which alludes back to the first line of the poem.

These offerings are acting as two kinds of korbanot; one of Thanks (תודה) and one that is Perpetual (תמיד). The choice of these sacrifices is not to be taken lightly. As a wife and a mother, this woman in this poem continually makes "sacrifices" for her family. She feels as though she does not know how to offer thanks for her family (תודה), especially when she is angry, impatient or frustrated. As well, she may not feel sufficiently thanked for the עבודה that she does every day. The perpetual challenge of persisting with these duties day after day is the major theme of this poem. She is praying for help and guidance for the ability to persist and prevail.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, Vayikra 1:9 and 6:8

## שם מפרש

- 1 כלם כבר הלכו אל ההר ומחכים
- 2 מחכים לראות, בשקט רב מחכים,
- 3 שלא כמנהגם גם החמורים, גם הגמלים
- 4 בשקט הזה צפור לא ציצה
- 5 גם ילדים על כתפי אבותיהם,
- 6 והשקט רב מנשא כמו לפני דבר
- 7 נורא וגדול ואני עוד רציתי
- 8 להספיק ולתלות את הכבסים
- 9 לעשות זמן לעצמי לתקן ריחותי
- 10 וחממתי את החלב לתינוק, שלא ירעב
- 11 שלא יבכה חלילה, ברגע הלא
- 12 מתאים, כמה זמן עד כלות. הצפיה
- 13 שתתיבש הכביסה והתינוק מה.
- 14 איש לא ידע
- 15 ואני ראיתי שרוח קלה, כמו נשימתו של איש ישן, עברה
- 16 בכבסים ונפחה כרסה
- 17 של כתנתי ומפת השבת
- 18 היתה מפרש לבן באמצע המדבר
- 19 ויצאנו משם על התכלת
- 20 הרחק למקום בו
- 21 נפרט רמונים ונאכל עסיסם
- 22 למקום בו
- 23 לאהבה
- 24 שם מפרש.

### The Ineffable Name

1 Everyone's already gone to the mountain and they're waiting  
2 Waiting to see, waiting in great quiet-  
3 Even, strangely, the camels and the donkeys-  
4 In this quiet no bird twitters  
5 Or children upon their fathers' shoulders.  
6 And this quiet is overwhelming, as if before an  
7 Awesome and massive event. But I still wanted time  
8 To hang up the laundry,  
9 Take some personal time to freshen up  
10 And I warmed the baby's milk, so that he will not grow hungry  
11 That God forbid, he should cry at the wrong  
12 Moment, however much time until then. One can expect  
13 That the laundry will dry—but the baby...  
14 No one knew  
15 And I saw that a soft breeze, like the breath of a sleeping man, passed  
16 Through the laundry and expanded the belly  
17 of my nightgown and the Shabbat tablecloth  
18 Was a white sail in the middle of the wilderness  
19 And we left there on the sky-blue  
20 Far away to the place where  
  
21 We will split open pomegranates and drink their juice  
22 To the place where  
23 Love is  
24 The Ineffable name.

\* Translation based on Miriyam Glazer's translation in Dreaming the Actual: Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Israeli Women Writers.

"The Ineffable Name" (שם מפרש) exemplifies Hava Pinchas-Cohen's goals as a poet. Her best poems express "a poetry rooted in Jewish textual and religious traditions,"<sup>4</sup> as this is the struggle the poet is engaged in every day. Novelist and essayist Shulamith Hareven argues that fewer and fewer secular Israelis are becoming learned in Jewish texts, due to a variety of political and socio-cultural reasons.<sup>5</sup> As such, explains Miriyam Glazer, Pinchas-Cohen, herself a religious Israeli, strives to weave Jewish history, text and tradition into her contemporary poetry. "Pinchas-Cohen shares the concern articulated by Hareven that Hebrew is becoming a language 'devoid of cultural resonance,' that a 'linguistic confrontation with ourselves' is vital if the language is to be save from 'extinction.'...[this concern] is at the heart of many of her poems."<sup>6</sup>

The power and importance of this poem are proven, insofar as it was chosen to be included in *Shirah Chadashah*,<sup>7</sup> a recent anthology of Hebrew poems. Indeed, one of the sections of *Shirah Chadashah* is named after this very poem, "שם מפרש". Finally, this poem was chosen to be the opening to one of Hava Pinchas-Cohen's poetry collections, *מסע איילה*.

In this poem, the poet is imagining the moments that led up to the revelation at Sinai, drawing "at once on the traditional belief that all Jewish souls were gathered at Sinai."<sup>8</sup> This preparation is felt even more as the poet has set the poem in real time, though it is written in past tense. By doing this, the reader feels as if she is about to receive Revelation herself.

<sup>4</sup> Jamie S. Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley, Eds. *Mapping The Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 2001), p. 358.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. as quoted by Miriyam Glazer

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 361

<sup>7</sup> Miron Isaacson and Admiel Kosman, eds. *Shirah Chadashah*, (Ramat Hasharon, 1996)

<sup>8</sup> Jamie S. Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley, Eds. *Mapping The Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 2001), p. 365.

The scene opens and the audience immediately encounters a woman who is still at the camp. The rest of her group is already at Sinai, awaiting Revelation. The first question one must ask is why is this woman not there? Is she the only one who stayed back, or are there other women with her? Perhaps this is a sacred moment in and of itself, as she is finally alone, with a few moments of solitude to cherish. One must next ask why, at this moment in time, would she choose to be apart? Wouldn't Sinai, when the Torah and Jewish Law was revealed, be a place one would not hesitate to reach?

The repetition of מחכים in lines one and two imply that a lot of waiting has already happened, at that more waiting is yet to come. Maybe this woman knows this and does not intend to miss anything important; she knows they will be waiting for a while, and has not a moment to spare.

Line three teaches the reader how very quiet the setting was by the mountain. The animals, who themselves are incapable of understanding the gravity of such events, were still. The quiet was so immense that צפור לא ציצה, taken from Midrash Rabbah 29:9. No animal made a noise, it was so still. Nothing, spoke, squeaked or flew at this time.

Line five notes that the children are sitting on their fathers' shoulders. The reader notes not only the literal, but also the metaphorical aspects here. This phrase serves as a metaphor for generational continuity; the lineage and knowledge will pass from father to son. One cannot help but notice the conspicuous absence of women here. Men, children and animals are all standing, awaiting the moment, but where are their women? Perhaps they are all back at camp with the poetic speaker, preparing themselves and finishing with their domestic duties.



Line six explains that this quiet is רב מנשא, as too much to bear. This lack of noise is too much for whom? It might be to the women, as they never have this silence. Or maybe everyone standing and waiting is expressing this feeling, that it is just too overwhelming for them; that the anticipation is unbearable. The word דבר here could have many meanings. It could simply mean “thing” or “word,” but it could also be making reference to the 10 Commandments that are about to be uttered, called עשרת דברות. By using this word, the poet is keeping her audience completely connected to what is occurring in the poem, namely, the upcoming Revelation at Sinai.

In lines 7-10, the poetic speaker tells her audience that she needs more time to do the laundry, attend to herself, and care for the baby. She admits that, though Sinai is a grand event, if she does not take responsibility for her child, no one else will. In this ultimate act of prioritizing and time-management, she is placing her baby before God, before the community and before Revelation.

The phrase לתלות את הכבסים is making reference to the command in Exodus 19:10 where the Israelites are to wash their clothes in preparation for the events at Sinai. However, lines eight and nine would lead the reader to understand that the woman has not been given sufficient time to ready her laundry or her person. The men surely found the required time as it was the women who cleaned their garments; they are already at the Mount. The women, however, were busy with their regular duties during the allotted “preparation time.”

On the theme of preparation for the events at Sinai, author Judith Plaskow considers the circumstances surrounding Revelation in her book *Standing Again At Sinai: Judaism From A Feminist Perspective*. She notes that given the importance of the events

at Sinai as the key event that established Israel, it is disturbing that Moses warned the people of Israel in Exodus 19:15: "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

She explains:

For here, at the very moment that the Jewish people stands at Sinai ready to receive the covenant-not now the covenant with individual patriarchs but with the people as a whole-at the very moment when Israel stands trembling waiting for God's presence to descend upon the mountain, Moses addresses the community only as men... At the central moment of Jewish history, women are invisible. Whether they too stood there trembling in fear and expectation, what they heard when the men heard these words of Moses, we do not know... If women are invisible from the first moment of Jewish history, can we hope to become visible now?"<sup>9</sup>

Plaskow adds that woman's exclusion from Sinai is even more profound when she realizes that the narrative is not solely history; rather, Torah is "living memory" too.<sup>10</sup> Thus, women are cast aside every time the Torah is read, rendered eavesdroppers "on a conversation among men and between men and God."<sup>11</sup> Rachel Adler enhances this argument writing that, "because the text has excluded [woman], she is excluded again in this yearly re-enactment and will be excluded over and over, year by year, every time she rises to hear the covenant read."<sup>12</sup> Reading the poem through these lenses, one could speculate that the poet, cognizant of the Biblical prohibition, wrote the lines of her poem in order to confront tradition. Instead of writing that the poetic speaker was left at the camp because she was told to or because it was never intended that she would witness the greatness of Sinai, Pinchas-Cohen places power in the woman's hands. The poem reads, "But I still wanted time/To hang up the laundry/Take some personal time to freshen up".

<sup>9</sup> Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again At Sinai: Judaism From A Feminist Perspective*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), p. 25, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.26

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Adler, "I've had nothing yet so I can't take more," *Moment* 8 (September 1983), p.23

It is possible to read these words as empowering the woman, that *she* chooses to stay behind. This reverses centuries of “historical fact” and allows women to feel positive about their status, as women. This shows that women are not typically free to indulge in pure spiritual experiences when they have so many domestic duties.

Back to the poem, in line 11, the mother feeds her child to ensure that he not cry later on (and disrupt the שקט). There exists a double meaning in this phrase. The fear that the baby might cry and make unwanted noise at such an important moment in history is valid; however, the use of חלילה! (God forbid!) implies another understanding. The woman must be thinking: ‘So what if my child cries? The mountain is going to be shaking; he is going to be scared! Since when is God more important than our children? Why will be angry-The men? (It’s their children!)-God? (How can that possibly be?)’ This scenario is analogous to modern prayer communities, where children are glared at and asked to be escorted out of the sanctuary when they utter any noise at all. What does this say about the welcoming nature of our synagogues and how we invite or discourage the participation of the children and young families in our communities?

Lines 12 and 13 continue on this thought as a difference in expectations are outlined. One can expect laundry to dry in a set, given, amount of time, but no such expectations can be made of children. Though he is being fed at the camp, there is no guarantee that he will not grow hungry, tired, or ornery at the Mount. The מה relates to the mother’s worry of how the child will be, of who he will become, after she has finished rearing him. For the onus is upon the mother to raise a content child, and his behaviour may reflect poorly upon her. This centrality of the child attached to the mother

can be seen in other Pinchas-Cohen poems, including "קריעה" and "בקשה", to be discussed later.

איש לא ידע (line 14) refers to many things. First, and in direct continuation of the previous line, no one knew if the baby would become cantankerous. No one knew, as well, when the "revealing" would commence. This phrase connects the reader back to the first two lines of the poem where מחכים was repeated. This phrase also points to the central questions, namely: can humankind ever truly know God?

The topic of laundry again figures in lines 15-18, where imagery of sex and flight enter the poem. To begin with, the image of the breath of a man expanding the belly of a woman's garment connotes creation, intimacy, procreation, and pregnancy. It is interesting to note the parallel with Genesis 2:7, where God blows into Adam's nostrils to give him breath. Perhaps the poet is making an analogy between this event and that of creation, between that which is powerful and that which is not.<sup>13</sup> Next, the Shabbat tablecloth acts like a sail, taking the woman away as if in escape. It is curious that the poet chose to use a Shabbat object as metaphor for flight. Perhaps because it is during the observance and celebration of Shabbat that the poet truly feels at one. For it is on Shabbat that the female speaker feels liberated from her domestic work and may rest. The poet's use of colours here is strategic. A marine image is created by the use of the word תכלת in line 19, which stands in contrast to the dryness of the desert in which the poem is set. The תכלת also have prayer resonances. In one of the paragraphs of the Shema, reference is made to the ציצית; they are to bear תכלת. The sail is described as white, which symbolizes hope for the poetic speaker as she imagines herself sailing away.

<sup>13</sup> That is, the God is to Adam as Man is to Woman

The remainder this poem lies in the imagination, as if the “sail” really took her away from the מדבר. From a contemporary point of view, there are many meanings for “wilderness,” including feeling empty, lost, without direction, alone, confused and abandoned. It seems as if the poet is suggesting that there is a life other than that of religiosity, Law and God.

The pomegranates imagined in the final stanza of the poem signify several things. First, they allude to the garments worn by the High Priest in ancient Israel. Pomegranates are also a fertility image, referring the reader back to earlier lines in this poem (see lines 16-17 and the explication of the nightgown). Mention of pomegranates can be seen in Chagigah 27a, Brachot 57a, Shir Hashirim Rabbah 6:1, and the Zohar).<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Michael Feshbach succinctly summarizes the various significances of pomegranates:

According to the Encyclopedia of Jewish symbols: a) it is one of the seven species associated with the Land of Israel; b) it is associated with love and passion, fire and intimacy; c) it adorned the capitals of the Temple's columns, as well as the robes of the High Priest's (on the hem); d) it was used widely on ancient coins; e) it is used on modern Israeli coins and stamps; f) there is a famous Midrash of it containing 613 seeds; g) the crown-like shape of the top is one of the reasons for its association with Rosh Hashanah; h) it signifies beauty, fertility, joy, love, mitzvot, passion, priesthood, remembrance, sensuality and the study of Torah.<sup>15</sup>

Hava Pinchas-Cohen is using pomegranates in this poem to explain her desire to live life passionately and meaningfully and know love in the same way. She wishes to break open the pomegranate just as she wishes to break open the possibilities that life and love can offer her. By drinking the juice, she is stating that she wants to “drink life up” and completely experience its glory.

<sup>14</sup> The Zohar, Volume 2-Shmot, Parashat Pikudei, page 231A

<sup>15</sup> [www.jewish.com](http://www.jewish.com)

The end of the poem implies that love (אהבה) is an ultimate goal, not God or Revelation. This is so much so that the traditional name for God, "שם מפרש", is not used to describe God at all. Rather, a place far away from Sinai and God is "The Ineffable Name." What does this mean for God and Judaism? The poet is struggling with that question. She places priority on her children, love and the need for her own personal time. Perhaps the ultimate question is whether there is room in her Judaism for all of these things. By saying that אהבה is The Ineffable Name, the statement being made is that love is a sacred construct, even as sacred as God. For it is only with the existence of love in human's lives that they may experience the holy and sacred nature of themselves, their families and God.

## הצבע בעיקר

- 1 כאלו היתה זו בעיה שלי,
- 2 בדידות. זאת לא שלי.
- 3 אני, לביתי כבר עשיתי. ובכל זאת
- 4 מי יתן ידעתי ואכוא עד תכונתו
- 5 של אותו חלל. נסיתי לדעת במלים
- 6 ודברים להבין; מה יאמר לי על עצמי
- 7 על אותו חור בתוכי אני מרכז במעגל
- 8 ומשקלת המטטלת חובקת צוארי.
- 9 הרדיו ישיר והספר יאמר;
- 10 יש חיים אחרים.
- 11 כביסה מקפלת. סדינים מצירים
- 12 גופיות ילדים ומגבת צבעונית
- 13 מלים ישרות בלי צל ובלי אור.
- 14 אותו זמן, יש דברים שקורים מעצמם,
- 15 צפויים; כבסים רטבים שהרוח מיבש.
- 16 שתי כוסות ארז יבש במים,
- 17 רבע שעה על אש נמוכה.
- 18 גם ילד הכנתי שימלא אותי,
- 19 למרות מחשבותי. חי.
- 20 וזה נותן שהות להבין למשל,
- 21 פעמונים הקשורים בחוטי תכלת
- 22 לכנפות הכהנים. הצבע בעקר,
- 23 אחר-כך הצליל.

### The Colour Mostly

- 1 As if this were my problem,
- 2 Loneliness. It's not mine.
- 3 Me, I've already done for my house. Still
- 4 I wish I knew and I would arrive at the quality
- 5 Of that same space. I tried to know in words
- 6 And to understand things; what it would teach me about myself
- 7 About that same hole in which I am the centre of the circle
- 8 And the weight of the pendulum clasps my neck.
  
- 9 The radio will sing and the book will say:
- 10 There is another life.
- 11 Folded laundry. Illustrated bedsheets
- 12 Babies' undershirts and a colourful towel
- 13 Straight words without shadow and without light.
  
- 14 At the same time, there are some things that happen by themselves,
- 15 Expected; wet laundry that the wind dries.
- 16 Two cups of dry rice in water,
- 17 A quarter of an hour on a low flame.
- 18 I also prepared a child who would fill me,
- 19 Despite of my thoughts. Living.
  
- 20 And this gives me time to understand, for example,
- 21 Bells tied with sky-blue threads
- 22 To the threads of the Kohanim. The colour mostly,
- 23 Afterwards the sound.

\* Translation based on Linda Zisquit's translation in The Defiant Muse.



"הצבע בעיקר" is the title and opening poem of Hava Pinchas-Cohen first book of poetry. The theme of this poem is the repetition of life; the boredom and the loneliness that women endure every day. The poetic speaker is remarking upon her life wistfully, allowing the reader to enter into her inner most soul, revealing the internal dialogue that runs like a script as she goes about her day.

The poem begins abruptly, as if the poetic speaker had been in the midst of a thought and the audience has entered late into the conversation. The speaker tells the audience that *בדידות* is not her problem. The poem continues with a strong statement that the speaker has already taken care of her house and household (*לביתי כבר עשייתי*). The reader must ask here what or how has she done this? Has her husband taken care of her? Have her children or friends done this? Perhaps the woman has taken care of herself—by herself. This seemingly confident proclamation is negated slightly by the very next words,

ובכל זאת. These two words are the first that give the reader an entrée into the poetic speaker's emotional being. Something is missing from her life; there appears to be melancholy in these words.

Line four continues as the poetic speaker tells the audience that she "wished [she] knew", but one is not provided with any further information. What she wishes she could understand is the meaning of the space of her house in which she lives.

The conversation continues as the poetic speaker explains that she has attempted to know and understand things, using words, which would teach her about herself. This line suggests that this person does not know who she is on the inside. The poet used *דברים* to mean "things", though the reader cannot help but make the association with

עשרת דברות, the Ten Commandments.<sup>16</sup> Might the speaker in this poem be trying to understand the Law, Judaism's way of operating? The use of the verb נסיתי teaches that the person has tried, but has failed, perhaps more than once.

The inclusion of a pendulum in this poem alludes to the concept of time which ticks and passes by, much like a metronome minds tempo. Just as the needle swings back and forth to keep seconds or rhythm, life is in constant motion, swinging back and forth, but always moving forward.

The second stanza provides the reader insight into the poetic speaker's life-its repetition and mundane nature. It is interesting that a radio and a book will provide her with the advice she craves. What is the significance of the radio? Is there meaning in its removed status, that one cannot see the personae behind the radio's voice? The ספר might be the Machzor of the High Holy Days. This theory is supported by line 10,

יש חיים אחרים. The reader is immediately drawn into the rhetoric of these Holy Days, that if we would only repent and choose to live good lives, God will inscribe us in the Book of Life and we will be renewed for a new year. The "book" may also be reading material that would stimulate a woman's interest and increase her knowledge. The image of a book giving knowledge of another life speaks to the escapist qualities of fiction.

A paradigmatic statement is seen in line 9,

הרדיו ישיר והספר יאמר

where "radio" is to "book" as "sing" is to "say." The use of two examples to express the same idea is the poet's way of emphasizing her point: There is indeed another life for her, somewhere, anywhere besides where she presently is. The use of the verb "sing" also is purposeful. One can imagine the melodic, happy quality of that message.

<sup>16</sup> Shmot 20:2-14

This phrase could also be alluding to the possibilities that lay before this woman; she could leave the life she has now and pursue a better, more fulfilled life. The banality of housework read in lines 11 and 12 support this argument. It is of interest to the reader that a baby's undershirt is made visually distinct from a coloured towel. As undershirts are usually white, perhaps the speaker of the poem sees herself as 'white', bland and ordinary. Juxtaposed to this is the colour in the towel. Maybe the "other life" is this towel, full of adventure and unexpected adventures.

The ordinary and dull nature of the housework done by this woman is echoed in the previous poem "שם מפרש". Seen as a repetitive theme in Hava Pinchas-Cohen's poetry, this is an indication to her audience of a haunting and troublesome part of her life. The dullness of this work is explained in line 13 of this poem, the last line of this stanza. The text reads בלי צל וכלי אור, meaning that the act of doing and folding the laundry are flat and one-dimensional. The bleakness of these activities is dark and black; they bear neither shadow nor light. Their nature is just as it is, mundane and everyday. Perhaps this is also a commentary on the speaker's life in general; she exists in a world of blacks and greys, where excitement and change rarely occur.

The third stanza notes the expectations placed on this woman. The phrase יש דברים שקורים מעצמם explains that there are individuals in her life who believe that certain "things" occur (as if magically), by themselves. Husbands and children wake to coffee brewing, clothes folded and breakfasts heating.<sup>17</sup> Lines 14-17 could also be the speaker remarking how she comes to expect several certitudes in her life. The length of time for a given amount of rice to cook will always be the same. There is no guesswork involved; she knows with confidence that the clothes will dry in the wind.

<sup>17</sup> Much like the poem "תפלה לאם בטרם שחרית"

The notion of food “filling us up” is carried through to the poet’s next thought.

The poetic speaker prepared a child, as one would a pot roast, שׂמלֶא אֶחָדִי. One would expect a different verb, perhaps “complete” or fulfill,” but the poet intentionally chose “fill” to refer to a child. Just as food might fill a person, the hope is that a baby will do the same. What the poet really means is that she had a child to complete her, to make her feel more whole and needed. What the reader knows is that no child can ever wholly complete anyone. Thus, just as no amount of food will ever fill this woman, so too with this child. Something in her life is unfulfilled and she, mistakenly so, believed that having a child would be the ultimate meal.

This desire for a child is explained further in line 19, as the poet tells her reader that the speaker has many negative thoughts. Despite such feelings that it is not possible to be fulfilled completely through a baby, she endeavoured nonetheless. This third stanza ends with one word, וְהָיָה. The reader is brought back to an earlier use of the word, in line 10. It is as if the poetic speaker is sighing, ceding to her reality, to her life. Though there were hints that “there is another life,” she has not found it. The humdrum nature of her days will continue, and she will live.

In the final stanza Jewish concepts appear explicit, instead of implied as seen above. The unworldly and mundane events of regular life are contrasted to the otherworldly lives of the ancient Priests. It is only because of these automatic domestic duties that the poetic speaker finds the time to daydream and think about Israel, history and the Priests. The beauty of the bells, threads and elaborate clothing of the Priests stand in opposition to the laundry, dishes and cooking that the woman in the poem occupies her hands with. The mind imagines complex scenery where everyone is dressed

extraordinarily and has the time to read books and sing their favourite songs. The bells signify the final touches on the clothing where no detail is spared. The colours of the Priests' clothing are so brilliant that they are can be seen even before the bells are heard. This last stanza signifies a vision, a spiritual moment shared with no one but the woman's undershirts, rice and books. Her life remains as is no matter what any radio will proclaim.

## שתי פנים

- 1 יש צרך להתכוףף שוב אל הקערה
- 2 ברכים על הרצפה
- 3 להכניס ידים אל תוך החמר להרים את החפן
- 4 הרטב, החום והגמיש ולגבל
- 5 ולהביא את ריחו
- 6 אל הפנים ולהטביע אותם
- 7 למסכת מות משככת כאבים ולאחר ההתקשות
- 8 להסיר ולהכין ליציקה, תבנית.
- 9 למשך מהאצבעות מזו ומזו
- 10 את השאריות ולהמתין
- 11 בשתיקה למה שעתיד להיות
- 12 יש צרך לגהר שוב אל הקערה
- 13 ברכים על הרצפה
- 14 להכניס ידים אל תוך המרגרינה, הסכר, הביצים, הוניל
- 15 והקמח להוסיף וללוש זה בתוך זה
- 16 עד שיהיה החמר הלבן והרך בידי להביאו
- 17 אל הפנים ולהטביע בתוכו מסכה
- 18 עגולים עגולים חורים עגלים
- 19 לעינים והדמעות לראות ולהרגיש
- 20 ולהגיש בהרבה טעם טוב ושדולים
- 21 לחם פנים.
- 22 לגהר שוב אל הקערה בשרוולים מפשלים
- 23 שתי כפות הידים באצבעות פרושות אל תוך הבשר
- 24 הטחון, הבצל הקצוץ, שלש ביצים, שום, פטרוזיליה
- 25 ופפריקה מיפו וכחברה וחואיג ממחנה יהודה.
- 26 ללוש ולמלל להכין את החפן הרך והמערב
- 27 ולהביא אל הפנים
- 28 ולחוש בחריפות הדוקרת ולהטביע את
- 29 תבליט פני במגע הקריר והדביק
- 30 למרט השאריות משתי הפנים
- 31 להעביר מיד ליד קציצות
- 32 לבשול והגשה ברטב
- 33 שתיקת הנפש.

## Two Faces

- 1 Once again, there is a need to bend over towards the bowl  
2 Knees on the floor  
3 To insert one's hands into the clay, lift up the wet  
4 Handful, brown and pliable, and define it  
5 And to bring its smell  
6 To one's face and to imprint it  
7 Into a mask of death, a resting place for pain, and after the hardening  
8 To take off and prepare for casting a mold.  
9 To pull from the fingers, from here and there,  
10 The leftovers and to wait  
11 In silence for what will happen
- 12 There is a need to bend over again toward the bowl  
13 Knees on the floor  
14 To insert one's hands into the margarine, the sugar, the eggs, the vanilla  
15 And the flour, to add and knead this into that  
16 Until the white material, soft is in my hands, to bring it  
17 To the face and to make an imprint in it  
18 Circles, circles, round holes  
19 For the eyes and the tears, to see and to feel  
20 And to serve it with lots of good taste and coaxing  
21 show bread/the bread of one's face.
- 22 To bend over again toward the bowl in rolled-up sleeves  
23 Both palms with fingers extended into the ground meat  
24 The chopped onion, three eggs, garlic, parsley  
25 And paprika from Jaffa and kuzbarah from Machaneh Yehuda.  
26 To knead and to utter, to prepare the tender handful that is mixed  
27 And to bring it toward the face  
28 To feel the stabbing spiciness and to imprint the  
29 Relief of my face with a cool and sticky touch  
30 To pluck the remaining feathers from the two faces  
31 To transfer the meat patties from one hand to another  
32 To cook, and serve with sauce  
33 the silence of the soul.

The poem "שתי פנים" is comprised of one template that repeats itself three times throughout the poem, each with its own variation and flavour. Each stanza bears the theme of creation, though different things are created in each one. The word פנים can be found six times in the poem, and is thus a crucial word to understand. Like the previous poems in this section, cooking, preparing food and the kitchen are central to the theme. The voice of the poem is in third person. It is not clear the sex of the poetic speaker; for the sake of ease, "it" will be referred to as a woman through this analysis. The verbs are all in the infinitive, leading the reader to understand that this may not be actually happening, in real time (as juxtaposed to the poem seen above, "תפלה לאם בטרם שחרית"). Interestingly, this poem reads somewhat like a manual or a cookbook.

The poem begins with prayer choreography language. The BDB explains that להתכופך means not only "bend" but also "bow," as one would do during prayer. This allusion is reinforced by the poet's use of ברכים in line two of the poem. The word ברוך comes from the same root, likening the act of being on one's knees to praying or prostrating. In this vein, the reader is reminded of the Malchuyot service of Rosh Hashanah when some clergy and devotees prostrate themselves to God (An in depth analysis of the Yamim Nora'im can be found elsewhere in this work. In just the first two lines of this poem, the audience has been brought into the world of prayer, its choreography and submission to God. The use of שוב in line one is perplexing. One must wonder when this act was done previously. Does this person engage in this activity every day, or only every year on the Holy Days? Or is this all metaphorical and there is no praying truly happening at all?



It appears as though what it being created in this stanza is a creature, or some other model made of clay. In translating חמר the BDB offers two plausible meanings, for this context: mortar or clay. Mortar conjures up images of pyramids in Egypt (slavery), while clay invokes memories of buildings, the Tower of Babel, and golems. This noun is likened to God fashioning human beings, as the material of human bodies. It is possible that the action involved here is pottery of the clay arts, though most likely the poet is still writing strictly in the metaphorical mode.

The poetic speaker is the one active person in this poem, the one who is doing the creating, shaping, molding and cooking. In lines three and four, she is physically getting into her work, manipulating the material to what she defines and decides. This person is completely in charge and can steer this creation process in any way that she chooses. The images brought to mind for the reader is that of God, the ultimate Creator, who shapes, molds and manipulated the cosmos, human beings and earth.

In lines five and six, the person smells this clay material and imprints her facial form into it. The theme of a golem is reinforced here, as a replica of a face is created. This is the first time in the poem that פנים is seen. In this use, פנים literally means a person's face. What the person seems to be doing is forming her "face" or expression in perpetuity.

Line seven of the poem teaches that she is creating a mask of death. Such masks appear throughout history in various cultures and religions. They were cast from the faces of the newly dead to ensure that the person's features would be preserved forever. Many are considered historical artifacts, as death masks were made from the faces of such notables as Beethoven, James Joyce, Chopin, Cromwell, Stalin, Napoleon, Newton,

Rosenzweig, George Washington, as well as various pharaohs and popes throughout history. Dr. Penina Galpaz-Feller, Professor of Bible and Ancient Studies at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem notes that death masks originated in ancient Egypt, where it was believed that the soul would roam around after a person died, looking for the appropriate mask to allow the soul to return to its owner. Throughout the ages, these masks have been created out of such materials as metal, bronze, plaster, leather and solid gold. Death masks had the ability to ward off any demons, protect it from evil spirits and allowed one to hide or scare others.<sup>18</sup>

Galpaz-Feller believes that "the mask allows us to act out our anti-social drives in socially acceptable ways...the mask allows us to play with the bad parts in our souls and get them out."<sup>19</sup> In addition to this, it idealizes the concept of double identity and anonymity while evoking feelings of absence and loss. During the Second World War, the Nazis created such masks in the camps; this was a part of their twisted notion of racial purity.

The end result of the facial impression created in the poem is a mold, a replica of one's face. The stanza ends with the person waiting *למה שעתיד להיות* while the mold is "cooking" and hardening into its final shape. The golem motif is fortified by the end of the stanza. The use of *שתיקה* in line 11 resonates with the previous poem, "שם מפרש" when all those present at Sinai stood waiting, silently anticipating that awesome moment. In this poem, is the person silent due to her anticipation? Is she allowed to talk at this time or is someone keeping her still? It seems as though she is alone; might there be others with her, guiding the creation process? The final words of this stanza remind the reader of

<sup>18</sup> [www.schechter.edu](http://www.schechter.edu); Encarta World English Dictionary CD, Microsoft Corporation, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 1998-2001.

<sup>19</sup> [www.schechter.edu](http://www.schechter.edu)

the Biblical name for God אהיה אשר אהיה - I will be what I will become. Here in this poem, the person is waiting “for what will happen” in the future.

Stanza two opens the same way as the previous one, save the verb usage. Whereas the first paragraph used להתכוּפֵּי, here the poem reads לגַּהֵר. This word change may signify the poet’s connection of prayer with the first stanza in a way that does not apply to this second stanza. Rather than an amorphous, vague creation seen above, in this stanza the person is clearly baking. Though it is not clear what the end baking result will be, it is important to note that this person is busy in the kitchen. The same structure is used as above, as the baker molds the material, kneads it, and imprints her face into it. The poem changes at line 18, as the baker creates holes for facial features, unlike the “mask of death” casting created above. Double meanings begin at line 20, where the baked goods created are served “with good taste”, but so is the ancient showbread of Israel. The witticism of these few lines urges the audience to read on.

The “shew bread” or “show bread” of the ancient Temple played a vital role in the ritual objects of the Ark of the Covenant. This Ark was made with 12 shelves, upon which rested the 12 loaves of לחם פנים. These loaves were baked in iron molds (echoing the activity of the first stanza of this poem), giving them many sides or “faces”. That is how the phrase received its name.<sup>20</sup> This bread was to be on the shelves at all times.<sup>21</sup> The significance of this was that God’s presence and sustenance never wavered.

Throughout the poem, the poet is literalizing the metaphor of לחם פנים (which literally means “bread of the face”), and imagines a face-shaped bread created by her. She has also taken Rambam’s commentary on Sh’mot 25:30 as a metaphor for her life. Now,

<sup>20</sup> [www.ou.org/torah/ti/5761/terumah61/htm](http://www.ou.org/torah/ti/5761/terumah61/htm)

<sup>21</sup> From Shmot 25:30 "ונתח על השלחן לחם פנים לפני תמיד"; also Bavli Menachot 99b

she is the provider of sustenance and nourishment for her family. And if she is physically creating her own version of לחם פנים with her body, then her person is ensuring the continual existence of others.

The third and final stanza begins almost identically to the other two, save for the absence of the phrases ברכים על הרצפה and יש צרך. This stanza is not as concerned with prayer as the other two are; rather, it involves real domestic duties such as cooking dinner. The action happening at this point is cooking, rather than baking as seen above. Line 26 shows the person kneading like before, though the addition of למלל hearkens back to the first stanza and the possible creation of a golem.<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note the disparity between the חריפות (spiciness) of the ground meat and the קריר (cool) touch.

Line 30 seems to be bringing the whole poem together, though it is not clear from what two faces the feathers are being plucked. The end of the poem is the most striking, leaving the audience contemplative and pensive. The finished cooked product is to be served with the “silence of the soul,” also understood as the quiet or serenity of the soul. One must wonder why her soul is silent. Has someone forced it so, or has she chosen to block it up? What is holding her back from expressing her inner most soulful emotions? Viewed another way, might the whole thing be viewed in a more positive manner, namely that she is quietly still and serene?

The pun created in these last few lines of the poem is a good closure to this chapter of domesticity and women, and resembles a similar pun and poetic structure at the end of the second stanza. The repetitive nature of one's domestic duties is often a labour of love and self-sacrifice. These duties are most often perceived as a “woman's

<sup>22</sup> In the traditional golem narratives, after one physically readied the clay body one recited formulaic Hebrew to bring it to life.

domain". By using pottery, baking and cooking imagery in the context of identity shaping (פנים are molded), the poet is speaking to the most identifiable structures in commonplace society. It is through these activities that a woman may find herself and identify who she is. It also through the repetition of "women's" activities, that one might seek a different lifestyle. Pushing the status quo has been a reality for feminists as they strive to venture into traditionally male-dominated occupations. The "silence" spoken of in the poem could mean two things. Either the contentment of cooking and baking results in the לחם of her face (that is, her identity) that is serene and content, or these same duties result in a disquieted and silent soul with no outlet to properly create her "face" (her identity).

So too with the מסכת מות, the mask that the poetic speaker creates near the beginning of the poem. The imprint of her face is what creates this mask and bears the pain she endures. As the poetic speaker continues cooking and baking, she requires a "mask" for a place where she may hide behind. For when she places that mask on, her personality and her identity (her פנים) change. And once she finds that resting place for her ache, her soul can be silent, still and serene. The ancient use of the death mask has been re-interpreted and re-introduced into contemporary culture. The poetic speaker has a vehicle for hiding herself.

### Yamim Nora'im

Hava Pinchas-Cohen has written many poems on the theme of the High Holy Days, including the Slichot prayers. Through each of these poems, the poet depicts the ways in which gender affects her attitudes and responses to the holidays and her experience of prayer.

My discussion begins with "Remembering our Fathers" ("זכרון אבותינו"). Through the use of memory, the poetic speaker recalls her childhood with her father, as well as previous Yamim Nora'im services. The emotional roller-coaster of these religiously fraught days is juxtaposed with the act of giving birth and nursing a newborn. "Tearing" ("קריעה") places the reader in the midst of the Yom Kippur Ne'ilah service where an aural connection is made and described between the Hebrew words "קריעה" and "קריאה". An emotional and theological crisis ensues at the apex of the service. In "The Day of Atonement" ("יום הכיפורים") another crisis of theological faith occurs. The poetic speaker mourns a silent God as well as the lack of expiation and catharsis available to her. Finally, "Request" ("בקשה") plays on the story of the Akeida by bringing its themes of sacrifice and loss to a contemporary setting. Here, a mother reminisces about the years that have passed and the life she created long ago.

## זכרון אבותינו

- 1 בראש השנה, לא הרכנתי ראש
- 2 במלכיות, אני ילדתי, המלך היה שם לבדו.
- 3 התכסיתי זכרונות. אבי, אבי,
- 4 כמו פרש על כתפיו נשא אותי
- 5 לראות בעד חלון בית הכנסת הספרדי
- 6 בסוף רחוב "שבע טחנות" ליד הירקון
- 7 להיות חלק מהקהל
- 8 הלבן והנושם
- 9 ברגע תרועה
- 10 בנשיפה, בצמצום—
- 11 שעת פתיחה
- 12 ונעילה.

- 13 בחצר, פרח יסמין
- 14 מגדרינה וגויבה בתם לב נשאו סתו.
- 15 לגשם אין ריח. האדמה היא הנותנת ריח רקב ושרשים
- 16 ועלי שושנים נוטפים על האדמה המאוררת
- 17 הם כבר אז ידעו שגם אם הרוח מטאטא סימנים
- 18 יבוא הזכרון
- 19 לטובה וחתן
- 20 לחסד ובעקר לרחמים.

- 21 האם ידע אז אבי
- 22 שאין משאירים ילד לבד
- 23 ליד חלון הומה
- 24 שקול שופר
- 25 קורע מתוכו
- 26 האם ידע.

- 27 ברגע חטוף של אלול
- 28 הלך אבי
- 29 ומדי דברי בו
- 30 זכור אזכרנו עוד
- 31 על כן—
- 32 שלא כסדר העולם
- 33 שנים רבות אחרי—
- 34 ברגע הנקה
- 35 המו מעי
- 36 לו.

# Remembering Our Fathers

- 1 On Rosh Hashanah, I did not bow my head
- 2 During Malchuyot. I was giving birth. The King was there alone.
- 3 I was wrapped in memories. My father, my father,
- 4 He carried me on his shoulders like a knight
- 5 So I could see through the window of the Sephardic synagogue
- 6 At the end of "Seven Mills" street near the Yarkon,
- 7 So I could be a part of the congregation—
- 8 White, breathing,
- 9 At the moment of Tru'ah
- 10 Blowing, contracting—
- 11 The time of opening
- 12 And closing.
  
- 13 In the yard, jasmine flower,
- 14 Tangerine, and guava bore Autumn with a purity of heart.
- 15 Rain has no scent; it is the earth that gives forth the scent of roots and rot.
- 16 And the rose petals flowing onto the airy soil
- 17 Already knew that even if the wind sweeps away signs
- 18 Memory will come
- 19 For favour, and grace,
- 20 For kindness, and above all, for compassion.
  
- 21 Did my father know then
- 22 That one does not leave a child alone
- 23 Near a window, noisy
- 24 As the sounding of the shofar
- 25 Tears out from within?
- 26 Did he know?
  
- 27 In a snatched moment of Elul
- 28 My father left
- 29 And even when I turn against him
- 30 My thoughts dwell on him still.
- 31 That is why—
- 32 Though not in accord with the world's order
- 33 So many years later—
- 34 At the moment of nursing
- 35 My heart yearns
- 36 For him.

\* Translation based on Miriyam Glazer's translation in Dreaming the Actual: Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Israeli Women Writers.



Hava Pinchas-Cohen's dedication to the inclusion of Jewish texts in her poetry is most readily seen in her poem, "זכרון אבותינו". Following the Rosh Hashanah shofar service liturgy, this poem travels through זכרונות, מלכויות and finally, שופרות, masterfully inter-weaving one woman's story. The loss of the poetic speaker's father is felt as she delivers and nurses her baby. Finally, the promise of redemption from the book of Jeremiah is echoed in the last stanza of this touching piece.<sup>1</sup>

Memory plays a crucial role in the themes of this poem. The poetic speaker remembers the Yamim Nora'im as a child with her father; whilst giving birth she remembers him again; the זכרונות section of the Rosh Hashanah shofar service concerns remembering and memory; and finally, the entire poem serves as a meditation on יום הזכרון, one of the names given to Rosh Hashanah.

The poem begins by emphasizing the transcendent and Heavenly God as represented in the Yamim Nora'im liturgy. The image created is of a grand Father to whom we must obey, pray and bow to in reverence. The poet juxtaposes the image of the heavenly father with the very earthly image of her giving birth. One might posit that all grandeur, ceremony and worship are removed as this human act takes place. The audience is simultaneously brought up to the Heavens and down to earth, requiring adjustment and re-understanding. A different understanding of these two lines suggests, however, that childbirth is no base act; the concept of הרת עולמיהם proclaims that on Rosh Hashanah the world is/was born. Creation is the most elaborate and praiseworthy act that God has performed. For this reason, a woman's giving birth might seem to be

<sup>1</sup> Miriyam Glazer, *Dreaming the Actual: Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Israeli Women Writers* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

imitating the very act of the creation of the world, even if on a much smaller scale (more on this below).

The poetic speaker remarks that she is giving birth during מלכויות which is fitting. The theme of the מלכויות section of the Rosh Hashanah shofar service is Creation. "During the "malchuyot (kingship) prayer, one is reminded that all creation stands before God to be recorded in "The Book of Life" for life or for death in the coming year."<sup>2</sup> This section begins with an Aleinu, proclaiming God as King over a united humanity.<sup>3</sup> It appears in this poem that the woman is actually giving birth during the מלכויות prayer. Thus, creation is not only remembered, spoken of, and prayed about, but is in fact happening in its own right.

Instead of praying, this woman was busy creating a life and acting in God's. Perhaps she was praying as well, asking God for a healthy delivery and child. Regardless, she next remarks that המלך היה שם לבדו. The first interesting point to note is that the poet has referred to God as מלך, a charged, patriarchal, and anthropomorphic name for God. This seems appropriate though, as מלך is one of God's names, especially on the Yamim Nora'im. It is plausible, however, that the poet uses this designation in a sarcastic way, poking fun at the idea that one would conceive of God as a King. The act of giving birth seems to weaken the power of the Kingship of God for two reasons. The first is that, on the holiest day of the year when all Jews should be begging forgiveness from God the creator, a woman is creating life of her won. Her immediate needs supplant those of God. The power of the Divine is brought lower as human necessities supercede. The second reason is that, just as God created the world, and continues to create, so too can woman

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 309

<sup>3</sup> Birnbaum siddur

(ironically, one of God's creations). Thus, the all-powerful God must share the glory with humans. The second point of interest is that the woman believes the "King" to be alone. On one the most synagogue-populated days of the year, how is this possible, and where exactly is the "King" that "He" is so alone? The reader also notes the creation language here.<sup>4</sup> The king is alone like Adam before woman comes into being. For the poet to place primordial man and the Almighty in the same situation of loneliness without companionship appears odd and somewhat disenchanting.

In line three the poem begins to bring in זכרונות the second part of the shofar service. While the woman is giving birth, she remembers her childhood with her father, and remembers previous Yamim Nora'im as well. Memories envelop her body and mind. This reader is reminded of a new baby who is wrapped securely in a blanket. So too, memories of the past can keep one feeling safe and protected. The cause of these memories is fairly obvious. At a time when this woman is bringing the next generation into the world, she is reminded of who raised her and what generations of family lived before her. This follows the theme of זכרונות which is about memory.

The third line of the poem concludes with the woman in labour crying, אבי אבי. This could be referring to her father, to God, or to both. The cry to her father is a visceral sob to his memory, to the grandfather that her child will never know and the father that left her. The cry to God echoes the liturgy of the Rosh Hashanah service, אבינו מלכינו where one pleads to God to be forgiven and granted a good year. This double meaning is continued into the next line of the poem, where the delivering mother remembers a specific incident with her father. In her childhood's-eye, her father was a פרש escorting her where she wanted and catering to her desires. It is also possible to

<sup>4</sup> Bereishit 2: 17: "ויאמר ה' אלהים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו"

understand these lines to mean that her father was the horse and the daughter was the knight. God could be the פרש here, as the grandeur of the Yamim Nora'im is carried forth. This act echoes II Kings 2:12 and the cry of Elisha when Elijah is taken away from him upon the chariots to heaven.<sup>5</sup>

The girl in the memory wishes to be included in the prayer community of the synagogue. To do this, her father helps her peer through a window. As an adult, the woman can reflect on her actions and admits, in line seven, that she just wanted to be a part of the congregation, להיות חלק מהקהל. It seems the most plausible that her father had helped her look into the male section of the synagogue. This phrase leads the audience to believe that this young girl was not a part of anything significant. She wished to be a part of this, a part of anything, so much that she enlisted the aid of another person. As well, she was prepared to settle for the minimal inclusion. She did not insist on being in the room with the others; she was content to watch from a removed perspective. That does not sound like she was a part of any congregation, but to her it was enough.

The congregation is described as לבן, which could have several meanings. First, they could have been dressed in all white, as is traditional practice of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. לבן could also be describing the congregation's status, that they were pure of heart. The congregation is also described as הנושם which could be in reference to the next few lines of the poem. By stating that all the people were breathing, the poet could be remarking on the unified, cohesive congregation that the girl was peering into. הנושם could also be describing the girl on her father's shoulders (though it is not conjugated in the feminine, the connection nonetheless can be seen). One might imagine her face

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<sup>5</sup> Miriyam Glazer, *Dreaming the Actual: Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Israeli Women Writers* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

pressed up against the window, creating expanding and contracting fog circles on the glass with her breath. This breathing could also represent the silence, anticipation, and expectation that hang in the air as a congregation awaits the Sounding of the Shofar. Finally, this could be referring to the woman giving birth, as she concentrates on her breath in order to expedite the delivery of her child.

The third and final section of the shofar service is brought into the poem in line nine, as the poet recollects the שופרות prayer. On the level of *pshat*, the congregation's shofar service is re-enacted. The shofar is blown and the girl behind the window watches. On another level, though, these lines are referring to the delivery of the baby. This first stanza concludes with a look ahead to the end of Yom Kippur, to the final prayer of the Yamim Nora'im. In this prayer, one imagines that the gates of heaven are closing and that the last moments to appeal to God will soon be over. The image of a woman giving birth also resonates in these last lines, creating many meanings overlapping one another. As Miriyam Glazer notes, "the imagery of labour and of birth is juxtaposed with the blowing of the shofar, and the opening and closing of the 'Gates of Life' during the Days of Awe, beginning with Rosh Hashanah and ending with Yom Kippur."<sup>6</sup>

The second stanza begins with the audience being transported into a beautiful garden reminiscent of the Garden of Eden and replete with scents and aromas. It also connects with the first stanza, as the girl, who was peering into the synagogue from outside, is standing in this חצר.

Lines 16-18 provide the reader with beautiful imagery of remembrance. Just as the roses, though swept away, will never be forgotten as long as they have someone to remember them, a human being who has passed away will never be forgotten. Jews have

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.309

a wonderful tradition of reciting Yizkor many times during the year, including the Yamim Nora'im, to remember loved ones who have died. The poem notes that זכרון will come. This זכרון will not only be in a person's remembering of others, but of God remembering as well. A major tenet of Judaism's faith is that God has remembered, continues to remember and will remember in the future. By invoking the many attributes of God in lines 19 and 20, the poet is attempting to speak to a variety of Jews, each who might perceive of and connect with God in her own way. The poet is stating that God will remember each and every one of us. So too with the woman in this poem. She will always remember her father; this poem is one large reflection of him and their relationship. Lines 19 and 20 quote from the Sim Shalom, a prayer at the end of the Amidah, which would be said on Yom Kippur day as well. Just as this prayer asks for peace to descend on all humanity, the woman may be requesting the peace for all loved ones who have died.

The third stanza brings the audience back to lines three and four of the poem. Whereas before, when the girl's father was seen as a knight, strong and protective, the father figure in this stanza is absent. The girl has been abandoned. One can imagine the scene, a tall window upon which a small child sits. She turns away from the congregation to tell her father some bit of news and he is gone. This stanza stands in contrast to the previous few lines, where the poet proclaims with pride how God will remember forever. It seems as though this girl has been forgotten by her own father. The use of the word הוּמָה instills in the reader a sense of fear in this child's eyes. The repetition of the phrase הָאֵם יָדַע at the start and again at the end of the stanza is powerful to the poet's audience. To whom is she speaking? Is she receiving a response?

The final stanza serves as a resolution to the total poem, explaining her father's status, her reaction to him today, and what happened to the newborn. The use of the phrase ברגע חטוף teaches the reader that the woman's father left quickly, and without explanation. It is interesting that he died in the month of Elul, as this is the month preceding the Yamim Nora'im devoted to spiritual introspection.

The words of lines 29 and 30 are prophetic ones used in the Zichronot liturgy, taken from Jeremiah 31:19.<sup>7</sup> Just as God will never turn God's back on Ephraim completely, the poetic speaker will always yearn for the love of her father. Miriyam Glazer adds to this thought:

Line 29-31 and 35 and 36 are taken directly from Jeremiah 31:14-19, where the matriarch Rachel is portrayed as the archetypal mother of Israel, imagined "weeping for her children" and "refusing to be comforted" because they are gone (dispersed). "Restrain your voice from weeping," declares the prophet, "Your eyes from shedding tears; For there is a reward for your labour...there is hope for your future." Perhaps that hope is evoked in this poem through the image of the mother not weeping, but giving birth and nursing her newborn.<sup>8</sup>

The deep-rooted yearning that this woman has for her father is repeated in the final lines of this poem. It is felt most when she is nursing her new baby, when her heart, her very core, thinks of him. It is with a heavy heart that this new mother remembers her father, celebrates her child and reminisces about her past.

<sup>7</sup> Silverman Machzor, p. 132:

"הבן יקיר לי אפרים אם ילד שעשועים כי מדי דברי בו זכר אזכרנו עוד על כן המ מעי לו רחם ארחמנו נאם ה'

<sup>8</sup> Miriyam Glazer, *Dreaming the Actual: Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Israeli Women Writers* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), p.311.

## קריעה

- 1 כשהכל קראו
- 2 כשהכל קראו
- 3 וסביבי היתה צפיפות בשמים
- 4 ורחש קפלי בדים חדשים
- 5 "אדני הוא האלהים"
- 6 שבע פעמים—
- 7 אדני הוא האלהים
- 8 עודי סבוכה בשפתי
- 9 מבקשת לעצר בין
- 10 קריאה לקריאה
- 11 נמשכה שמלתי ונמשכה
- 12 ונקרעה
- 13 בידה של בתי
- 14 שהתיגעה
- 15 בקריאתה:
- 16 אמא, אמא, אייממההה



1 When they all called out  
2 When they all called out  
3 And surrounding me was the overcrowding scent of perfume  
4 And the noise of the new folding fabrics  
5 “Adonai Hu Ha’elohim”  
6 Seven times—  
7 Adonai Hu Ha’elohim  
8 I am still entangled in my lips  
9 Asking to stop between  
10 Recitation and recitation  
11 My dress was pulled and was pulled  
12 And was torn  
13 In the hand of my daughter  
14 For she had become tired  
15 In her reciting:  
16 Mom, mom, moooooooooommmmmmm

The poem "קריעה" presents a single, short scene to its audience, allowing the reader to see into one moment of the Yom Kippur service. The Yamim Nora'im are almost over and the setting is during the Ne'ilah service, when "Heaven's Gates" are closing. The poem begins as one phrase is repeated two times. From the start, the poetic speaker is overwhelmed; it is as if she is reliving this one experience all over again by writing this poem. Though the phrase is written in the past,

כשהכל קראו כשהכל קראו

the speaker is very much in the present. This repetition echoes the lines of the Akeida when God calls out to Abraham two times (footnote: quote Bereishit 22:11 in Hebrew). The third line of the poem provides the audience with more insight into this moment in time. The person feels boxed in and surrounded. One imagines a swirling mass of people, commotion, and smells encircling this woman as the sense of claustrophobia sets in. The perfume and new clothing (just purchased for the celebration of Yom Tov) are noted in lines three and four. Both are overwhelming for the poetic speaker: there are too many kinds of perfumes competing for space in the already small quarters, and the rustling of the new fabrics are too noisy for one to pray productively and meaningfully.

The phrase quoted in line five is from the end of the Ne'ilah service, when the congregation recites "Adonai is God" seven times together. This moment of the service serves as the crescendo to the entire Yamim Nora'im period. Some Jews even consider this repetition an ecstatic moment between themselves and God. The inclusion of שבע פעמים in line six is another purposeful tactic used by the poet to teach her audience about Judaism and Jewish texts. The repetition of אדני הוא האלהים in line seven acts as a shortened version of the seven times this phrase is repeated.

In line eight, the poet begins to explain the trouble she is experiencing with this Ne'ilah prayer. For some reason, the words are knotted inside her body, entangled as she attempts to recite them. The poem continues, and explains that something or someone is asking her to stop uttering this phrase. At this point in the poem, it is not clear whether it is a voice inside her head, God, or some other outside force.

What is clear is the connection between סבוכה and the Akeida, as the ram in the story of Genesis 22 is גאחו, בסבך, entangled in the thicket. The poetic speaker is experiencing difficulties physically uttering the words, but is also suffering on the inside. She is having trouble reciting the faith credo **אדני הוא האלהים** so many times.

The repetition of the words **קריאה** and **גמשכה** in lines 10 and 11 echo the earlier repetition in the Ne'ilah prayer. Now, the reader learns that someone is continuously pulling on the woman's dress as she is trying to pray. Only near the end of the poem does one learn that the daughter has been the one asking and tugging at the woman who is her mother. The scene changes and now the woman is standing wearing a ripped dress with the missing section in her daughter's hand. The cause of this tear was the emotional state of this young child. Line 15 of the poem teaches that she was tired. After a long day of praying, she has grown weary. In her own way, she has been sacrificed; that is, her time and childhood has been spent doing non-childhood things for this day. Of particular importance to note is that the Akeida imagery is being used in this poem in a mother-daughter context.

In line 15, the verb **לקרוא** is used; this word can also be found in line 10 and was implied in line five. Here, the child is engaged in her own version of **קריאה**, filled with whining and impatience. The poem ends with the daughter repeating her mother's name

in a long whine. One must imagine that she "recited" this word at least seven times, likening it to the repeated phrase of the adults, אדני הוא האלהים, in lines five and seven.

This poem provides an audience with a glimpse into a mother's world. Every day of her life is filled with responsibility and constant caring for her children. What is being exemplified here is how true this situation remains even during the holiest of days. Where is the father throughout this adventure? Perhaps he is on the other side of the mechitza, where only adult men are permitted. What does this say about the relative importance placed on women's prayer in general, and the outpouring of one's heart on Yom Kippur in particular? The embarrassment placed on the poetic speaker as she stands in her congregation wearing a torn dress leads the reader to empathize with her.

Finally, a word on the title of this poem is necessary. On one level, the title may be defined as "tearing", alluding to the tear of the dress that will occur later in the poem. On another level though, קריעה is also a term used to define one of the mourning rituals in Judaism. When a loved one dies, one traditionally tears a visible part of one's clothing as a sign of the grieving process and metaphorically, that one's heart has been "torn" due to the loss. The poetic speaker may be feeling a loss at the life that could have been, the prayer opportunities that might have happened, and the kind of Judaism that she might have experienced. The sacrifices that she has made in order to live the way she does and have the children that she cared for could indeed be considered losses or even deaths of some kind. In addition, she feels torn between spiritual desires/imperatives and maternal obligations for her children.

Throughout this poem, the reader notes the poet's difficulty with the liturgy of Ne'ilah. Instead of stating each phrase right after the last, she wants to pause between

each utterance of the credo to consider what it means. As a result of thinking about what the words really mean to her, she is having trouble keeping up with the congregation.

A proper analysis of this poem requires a consideration of the aural connection between קריעה and קריאה. This homonym speaks volumes to the poet's audience. The poem is simultaneously concerned with the physical tearing of a woman's dress, her ripped emotions on this emotional day, her difficulty tearing out the prayer from her reluctant lips, and the recitation of the Ne'ilah prayer of Yom Kippur. The conflation of ideas, terms and themes of this poem occurs through the juxtaposition of these two similar words.

## יום הכפורים

א

- 1 בדרך אל יום הכפורים במורד
- 2 רחוב ששערי נפתחים אל החצרות
- 3 הרוח משחקת במחרוזות התמרים בין הכפות.

- 4 ובין החצרות קול דממה רכה
- 5 ומתוך הגוף רעש מים נופלים וצעקה
- 6 מכח הטבע נדחקים לצאת ולהמלט מבין הצלעות
- 7 הטבור, מהפה או הפת
- 8 אין לדעת, יקירי, האם הגלות היא בפנים או בחוץ
- 9 וכל השערים, כל השערים נעולים.
- 10 שמתי נפשי בכפי ובאתי אל תוך הקהל
- 11 והיה באלם הבלוא שלש דמעות
- 12 בכורי לעזרת נשים מבשמת בזעה
- 13 ושתן יונקים.

ב

- 14 וכך היה עומד כהן גדול שלי
- 15 היה פורש ובוכה
- 16 בוכה ופורש אצבעותיו וכך אומר:
- 17 "אנא ה' העבירני בקרת עדרך
- 18 אני שקראתי סליחות וזעקתי את התחנונים והבקשות
- 19 מוצא עצמי חי את הקשה שבמיתות
- 20 ממרק חטאים לא ידועים
- 21 ביסורים וחליים רעים
- 22 אנא ה'.
- 23 העבירני בקרת עדרך."
- 24 הייתי אז אשה אין אילת
- 25 ושתיקתו של אלהים היתה
- 26 טלית תכריך ושמלה לראשי.



The poem "יום הכפורים" is divided into two sections and tells the story of one woman's Yom Kippur day. She is speaking to the reader personally, as evidenced in line eight of the poem (יקירי). As the events unfold from the poetic speaker's perspective, the audience is brought into her psyche and her emotional state. The poem begins benignly, but as it continues, it is clear that the woman in the poem is experiencing a theological crisis. Her anger and sadness escalate as the Holy Day passes, leaving her feeling alone and spent. Hava Pinchas-Cohen maintains her agenda of including Biblical and liturgical text in her poetry; the machzor is plentifully quoted as are allusions to the ancient Priesthood and practice.

One can imagine the scene at the start of the poem: a congregation gathering together for Yom Kippur, the most significant religious day of the year. The outside physical description helps the reader ease into the upcoming task of praying. The intangible concept of Yom Kippur is transformed into a tangible location in the first line of the poem. This is conceivable when one considers how large the day becomes for most Jews. Yom Kippur truly does become transformed into an event, relived year after year. If Jews express their prayerful selves at synagogue, then Yom Kippur must "be" at synagogue, waiting for them with open gates.

The road to יום הכפורים is sloped, though it is not clear whether it is sloped upward or downward. If the poet implied the former, then the ultimate destination is higher, physically but also metaphorically. An ultimate goal would be to reach the zenith of that slope by Ne'ilah, fighting the difficult uphill battle. If the poet meant the latter, then this road is the physical manifestation of the "ride" all Jews experience on Yom Kippur. We approach the day with full hearts and eager spirits, feeling closer than ever to the Divine.



By the end of the day, we will be brought back to earth and to real life, ready to put into action the promises made.

Noting that the gates of יום הכפורים are wide open juxtaposes the Ne'ilah service and line nine of this poem, when the gates close at the end of the day. Here though, these gates are accepting all who enter from the street; the day is young and the possibility still exists that every man and woman will be written in the Book of Life. The word חצרות literally means "yards", but it could also mean every human soul that is gathered on this Day of Atonement. Thus, when these "yards" return in the fourth line of the poem, the reader understands that the "voice" is within and surrounding each person. The voice that is heard is taken from Unetaneh Tokef of the Musaf service.<sup>9</sup> This expression from God is a gentle whisper, flowing into and through each pore of each individual. The voice could also be our own voices speaking to us from within.

While the praying continues, the protagonist suddenly experiences a jarring feeling. Her body emits rushing water and a shout; both negative, both contradicting the still silence from God. This is inner rage, revealing itself internally and then externally. The strength of this anger is shown in line six as it is explained that these emotions were physically pushed out of her body from every part of her. One of the major tenets of the Yamim Nora'im is Creation, and the poet is playing on this theme. Just as the universe was created and continues to be created; just as humans were created and continue to be created, this woman is engaging in her own kind of creation, only for her it is anger and deep-seated questions.

In line eight, the poetic speaker converses directly with her audience, communicating that she is feeling emotionally exiled. By stating that she does not know

<sup>9</sup> "יקול דממה דקה ישמע"

whether this exile is internal or external, the poet is explaining that she does not know whether her emotional crisis is the direct consequence of something inside of her, or due to an outside force, like a person or God or a hostile person. As opposed to the start of the poem, when the gates were open wide, line nine teaches that they are now locked. It is interesting to note that the gates are not just closed shut; they are locked. By saying this, the woman fears she will not have access to her God anymore, now that she has experienced an outburst of emotion and realization. The repetition of the word שערים only emphasizes the angst that is felt now that they are locked.

On the most basic level, line 10 of this poem can be understood as the poetic speaker offering her whole self to God and to her congregation on Yom Kippur. Looking deeper though, an allusion is being made to a lulav, called כפות תמרים in the Torah.<sup>10</sup> There are a number of translations, including “branches of a date palm”, “branches of palm trees”<sup>11</sup> and “huge hand-shaped branches of palm trees”<sup>12</sup>, the last bearing the most meaning for this poem’s purposes. The lulav is one of the ritual objects of Sukkot, the next Jewish holiday after Yom Kippur. Just as the lulav is shaped like a hand and is used as a vehicle for prayer to God on Sukkot, the woman’s palms (of her hands) are being offered to God as her form of supplication on Yom Kippur.

The flowing water of line five returns and is explained in line 11, where the poetic speaker remembers that there were three tears coming from her. This number could mean a number of things, including the three angels that visit Abraham in Parashat Vayera. Here, the tears are trapped and silent. There is no outlet for the emotional outburst as the setting does not welcome it. These tears are the woman’s metaphorical

<sup>10</sup> For example, Vayikra 23:40: "ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר כפת תמרים וענף עץ עבת וערבי נחל".

<sup>11</sup> JPS translation

<sup>12</sup> BDB translation

“first born,” in that this is the first time she has experienced a therapeutic emotional rush in synagogue before. These could be tears of anger, as seen above, or they might be tears of release and ecstasy as she fully succumbs to the awe of Yom Kippur. Both theories are supported by the next phrase

מבשמת בועה; the former as her anger escalates due to the close, uncomfortable quarters and sweaty congregants; the latter as she is drenched in her own “rapture” of joy and bliss.

The second section of the poem is simultaneously set in ancient Israel and contemporary life. These lines could be seen as an extension of the first half of the poem, quoting the liturgy and her Shaliach Tzibbur, or as a flashback in history to the Priestly cult and the Temple service. The first line describes the physical activity of the Kohen Gadol before he begins to speak. The poetic speaker calls him כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל שְׁלִי, which echoes the liturgy of the Musaf service of Yom Kippur. What is striking is that she calls him “hers”. Why is that? Perhaps she is implying that she has a personal relationship with her prayer leaders or with God (who might be called Kohen Gadol here).

The Kohen Gadol stands crying and is prepared to pray for and bless his congregation. With extended fingers (reminiscent of the “palms” of lines three and 10) he begins his plea: "אנא ה' העבירני בקרת עדרך". This is adapted from Unetaneh Tokef<sup>13</sup> and is one of the most famous phrases from the Yom Kippur liturgy. The prayer that he offers continues through line 23 of the poem. In his plea, the Kohen Gadol prays for the whole nation and all of their sins. Thus, he is praying for the expiation of sins he is not even aware of. The woman in the poem is praying her own plea and is thinking of this concept. What she is requesting is that she be allowed to repent for all of the sins that she has

<sup>13</sup> From Birnbaum Machzor, p. 791: "וכל באי עולם יעבדון לפנך כבני מרחן. כבקרת רועה עדרו. מעביר צאנו תחת שבטו".

committed, even those she is unaware of as well. The prayer ends in a chiastic structure, repeating the plea offered at its start.

The final stanza of the poem is just as forlorn as what came before it. It begins as the poetic speaker sadly remarks that she has no אילת, (a female איל), the animal used to expiate Israel's sins in ancient times. What this means is that she does not have the physical outlet for the removal of her sins. The phrase אילת השחר means daybreak, dawn, hope, or morning star and is the name given to describe Esther<sup>14</sup> who brought a bright, rekindled spirit to the Jews after the dark night of suffering at the time of King Ahashverosh.<sup>15</sup> The implication of this phrase is also that God brought salvation to the people of Israel at their darkest moment, the moment of just before dawn, when darkness is most intense.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Psalm 22 is dedicated to the אילת השחר (footnote: quote 22:1 in Hebrew). By stating אין אילת, the poetic speaker is mourning her lack of dawn, brightness and hope, as well as acknowledging her powerlessness.<sup>17</sup>

This loneliness is exemplified in the next line of the poem, where the poetic voice tells her reader that God is silent. This is in direct opposition to the comforting and soft voice encountered earlier. This mute God manifests itself in the last line of the poem. The תכריך is juxtaposed to the שמלה, as the former is a traditionally male piece of clothing that is simple, while the latter a female one that implies something more special. The word "shroud" is replete with meaning and significance in the Jewish world. One is buried in a simple shroud; on the Yamim Nora'im men traditionally don a *kittel* which resembles the

<sup>14</sup> Yoma 29a

<sup>15</sup> [www.ritualwell.org](http://www.ritualwell.org)

<sup>16</sup> [www.bethisrael-aa.org](http://www.bethisrael-aa.org)

<sup>17</sup> "אין אונים" means "powerless".

death shroud; finally, the clothing of the Kohanim of old included this תכריך. Upon entering the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, he would change from his בגדי זהב to his בגדי לבן. This simple, white outfit is what commentators have called the תכריך. Thus, the poetic speaker is simultaneously creating an analogy between her Yom Kippur experience and the Priests of ancient Israel, and her emotional state and a shroud of death.

The solitude and separation felt by the poetic speaker at the end of the poem stands in opposition to its opening words where the gates were wide open and inviting to all. She finds herself at the end of the day facing a silent God and a crisis of theological faith.

## בקשה

- 1 כאשר תינוק בידי
- 2 וחלב אנושי רוקם את חייו,
- 3 באים בלילות פעימות וקולות קצובים
- 4 רכבות—

- 5 בתחנה מסימת על הארץ הזאת,
- 6 ברגלים יחפות בקצר-יד
- 7 פשטתי זרועות
- 8 כמו קרני איל מתוך סבך
- 9 לחישת הארץ לשמים
- 10 שמע, ועשה סכת רחמך
- 11 כמו צל הגפן והתאנה
- 12 אל תנסני, נא.

- 13 יש עצים ויש סבך, ריח של אש
- 14 ומראה עשן. עם אמהות לא משחקים
- 15 מחבואים—

- 16 בקצר ידי מכסה על עיני
- 17 קולי אובד בצעקה
- 18 אל-קולית

19 איכה

## Request

1 When a baby is in my hand  
2 And human milk embroiders his life,  
3 Pulsations and rhythmic voices come at night  
4 Trains—

5 At a particular station on this land  
6 With bare feet, with powerlessness  
7 I extended out my arms  
8 Like the horns of the ram within a thicket  
9 The land's whisper to the heavens  
10 Shma, and make a shelter of your mercy  
11 Like the shadow of the vine and the fig  
12 Please, do not test me.

13 There are trees and there is thicket, the smell of fire  
14 And the vision of smoke. One does not play hide and seek  
15 With Mothers—

16 With my powerlessness I cover my eyes  
17 My voice is lost in a shout  
18 Voiceless

19 Where are you?

The poem "בקשה" concerns another theme of the Yamim Nora'im, the Akeida.

The broad-ranging sequence of events in this relatively short poem leads the reader to believe it is a daydream or even a nightmare. Perhaps during the reading of the Akeida in synagogue, this woman closed her eyes and began to see parts of her life flash before her like images. Years pass by in an instant and, as she listens to the Torah narrative, her own life is projected into it.

The poem begins with the poetic speaker holding a baby. This is in accord with many of Hava Pinchas-Cohen's poems, which often concern domestic duties. The reader notes in the first line of the poem that the line is *כאשר תינוק בידי* and not *כאשר התינוק שלי בידי*, implying that this woman is caring for any child, or even every child of the world. The missing "my" before "baby" creates the situation of a more general poem that every woman can identify with.

The next line of the poem is very supportive of women and the power within their bodies. It is the woman, with her milk, who provides life and allows the child to grow and live. While nursing her child, the mother can hear the beating of both of their hearts. This pulsing provides her solace, as this is proof that he is alive and well. The "pulsation" could also be the mother's beating, anxious heart as she lies in bed night after night, fearful that her child will not wake in the morning. A normal reaction a parent might have of her child, her fear keeps her awake at night. It is only when she creeps into his room to feel his breath does she feel at ease. There is still another understanding of this word. In this woman's daydream, she could have fast-forwarded a number of years. Now, the child is older and has his own life. Perhaps the mother experiences trepidation that her son will be hurt. Until he is safe in her home, whatever the hour, she will lay awake with a beating



heart. The woman hears the rhythm of trains as she holds her child. This could be how she marks the passing of life and of time. Like a train that makes stops every so often but is always going somewhere, the life of her son is the same. She is remarking on the passing of time, the "chugging" along of years, birthday parties and other special milestones.

The train imagery carries over to the next stanza, where the train finds itself at the certain station. This could mean that something horrible has happened to her son, or that he is leaving home (perhaps for the army) and their adventures will be over. In line seven, the woman extends her arms as if they are the horns of the sacrificed ram of the Akeida. This could mean that she believes herself to be a "sacrifice", or that motherhood itself is a sacrifice of self, or that she would sacrifice anything for the safety and well-being of her child. As an Israeli, the poet could also be alluding to the required army service of all Israeli boys. By sending her son off to war, she could be feeling like she is the one sacrificing her own, her special one.

Lines 10 and 11 are references to prayers. שמע clearly refers to the traditional credo said by Jews three times a day that expresses the oneness of God. The poetic speaker could be saying this word to challenge God. She may be questioning her own ability to believe in the holiness of God while that same God would allow war to exist. The next phrase, ועשה סכת רחמך, is taken from the *Hashkiveinu* of the Shabbat evening liturgy.<sup>18</sup> The words גפן והתאנה line 11 appear numerous times in the Tanakh paired together, in Numbers 20:5, Deuteronomy 8:8, I Kings 5:5, II Kings 18:31, Isaiah 34:4;

<sup>18</sup> The liturgy requests ופרש עלינו סכת שלום, which is slightly different from what appears in the poem. The traditional prayer asks for God to spread a shelter of peace on the world, while the poem asks for God to create a shelter of mercy. It could be significant that the request for peace is replaced by one for mercy. The tone changes to a furtive plea, asking God to be compassionate on mothers everywhere who must endure this pain. The grander desire for peace is held in abeyance as an immediate act of compassion is requested.

36:16, Jeremiah 5:17; 8:13, Hosea 2:14, Joel 1:7, 12; 2:22, Micah 4:4, Habakkuk 3:17, Haggai 2:19, Zechariah 3:10, Psalms 105:33, Song of Songs 2:13. Whether it is referring to the good and prosperous times experienced by Israel or is recalling what once was but is no longer due to God's displeasure, these two words speak of growth, prosperity, happiness, abundance, plenty, and sweet fragrances. In this poem the poetic speaker continues her personal prayer to God with these words. She wishes that God would listen to her and have mercy on God's children, just as God was compassionate in the Tanakh to the ancient Israelites. Her ideal would be for her family to sit under a vine and the fig tree in peace and safety.

The third stanza continues with the Akeida imagery, and paraphrases a Biblical verse. In Genesis 22:7, Isaac asks his father Abraham,

"הנה האש והעצים ואיה השה לעלה"

Later, when Abraham is poised to sacrifice Isaac,

"וירא והנה איל אחר נאחז בסבך בקרניו"

What the poet has done here is conflated two verses, bringing in the סבך from Genesis 22:13 into the narrative of Genesis 22:7. The phrase מראה עשן is full of allusions. עשן itself appears in the Torah in reference to Revelation at Mount Sinai. In Shmot 19:18 and 20:15 the mountain was "smoking" for God has descended upon it.<sup>19</sup> The concept of smoke conjures Biblical images for the reader of the pillar of fire (which was God) that led the Israelites as they traveled through the wilderness at night.

Lines 14 and 15 allude finally to Isaac's mother, Sarah, who is conspicuously absent in the Biblical narrative. The poetic speaker is asking, demanding, and pleading

<sup>19</sup>19:18: "זהר סיני עשן כלו מפני אשר ירד עליו ה באש"

20:15: "וכל העם ראים את הקולות ואת הלהיט ואת קול השפר ואת הזהר עשן"

that she not be kept in the dark on this matter. She also does not want this Akeida to occur at all, for this “trick” is not funny at all. Brought back to the start of the poem, one sees the connection a mother can have with her young. The chance of him leaving her care and dying would be too much loss for her. There is no fun in the possibility of offering her son up as a sacrifice to his country. Line 14 is also making reference to the Musaf service of Yom Kippur, where מראה appears numerous times, often when speaking of the Kohen.

The final stanza brings the reader back to the congregation, to the daydreaming woman in her seat. As the nightmare reaches its zenith, she covers her eyes as if to shut it out. She could also be offering a spontaneous prayer to God to protect her son as he becomes an independent adult in society. In this moment, she wants to shout, though no sound is heard. This is reminiscent of the Akeida, when a loud voice from heaven calls to Abraham, though unlike that biblical scene, no voice is heard. This could be because the woman remembered where she was and thought it might be inappropriate, or it may be that her fear had escalated to the point where she physically could utter nothing.

The final line of the poem alludes once again to the Torah, as איכה is a word found in the story of Adam and Eve. There, God is asking where they are; here in this poem, the mother is asking where her son is. This mother is simultaneously Sarah the Matriarch and the poetic speaker, ever fearful that some crisis will befall her baby. This word also echoes the Akeida, where Isaac asks Abraham where the offering that they will sacrifice is located.<sup>20</sup> The poetic speaker could be asking God where the sacrifice is, as she does not intend to offer her own child.

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<sup>20</sup> Bereishit 22:7

The culmination of the fear expressed throughout this poem is expressed in the last line of the second stanza, where the poetic speaker echoes the narrative of the Akeida. Unlike Abraham who rose to the challenge of being tested, she is praying not be tested at all. The emotional turmoil of being asked to sacrifice her son would be too much. If she is indeed concerned with the state of affairs in Israel and the army, she does not want to offer her son up as a קורבן to an institution that just may follow through with the killing.

This line could mean something entirely different, that this is the poetic speaker's question to God. In a time when war is the expected norm (especially in the Middle East), she is asking God why it is still happening and where God is throughout all of this. For a loving and compassionate God would not allow such turmoil to befall Israel in particular and the human race in general.

The poem "בקשה" is a reflective piece by a mother of her child. Any mother might feel the same emotions and fears as this one has throughout her child's lifetime, but the scale is graver in Israeli society. The setting of the synagogue, during the Yamim Nora'im allowed such a meditation to exist.

The Yamim Nora'im play a crucial role in the life of Hava Pinchas-Cohen. It is through the liturgy and experience of the Holy Days that the poet may imagine other settings and other circumstances. Though some may not be positive, they do reveal a yearning in the poet's heart to re-imagine and re-define woman's place in Judaism and in her community.

### Fashioning Prayer

This group of poems expresses the struggle in which Hava Pinchas-Cohen is engaged, regarding such themes as prayer, ritual and religious garb. From the trappings and wrappings of prayer, to the mechitzah that separates the sexes, to the need to find her own voice in ancient prayers, the poetry of Pinchas-Cohen reflects her desire to be included in the religion in which she is a member.

In "Being Alone" ("התייחדות") the poetic speaker expresses her desire to wear ritual objects and be included in the congregation. Her exclusion leaves her feeling alone and isolated, yearning more and more to be considered a full member of Judaism. "The Priestly Blessing" ("ברכת כוהנים") also concerns themes of ritual garb and prayer. Here, the physical barrier that separates men from women is blurred as the poetic speaker encroaches into the forbidden zone. "A Woman's Mourner's Kaddish" ("קדיש יתומה") is the poet's attempt to fashion her own version and interpretation of the traditional Kaddish. By doing this, she is stating the heretofore exclusion of women from this central prayerful expression. Finally, "Photosynthesis" ("פוטוסינתזה") echoes the sentiments of the other poems; a desire to be a part of something true and meaningful in Judaism. The power expressed in the poem in favour of women expresses the poet's refusal to blindly accept the status quo.

It is through these poems that the poet articulates such desires that do not, in reality, exist for her. The power of poetry is that it allows this manner of commentary and observation to play out safely.

## התייחדות

- 1 אנשים גבוהים בטליתות
- 2 כמו צפרים לבנות
- 3 על הרי ירושלים.
- 4 מה נסתר תחת הגלימה—
- 5 מלכות לשעה,
- 6 אולי. ואני במחשבה
- 7 זרה מה כמהתי או, מה
- 8 להתכנס ברגלים יחפות ולחסות
- 9 תחת טלית הכהן הגדול שלי
- 10 ובתפלת כהנים, שמים, שמים
- 11 ידיך לפני. רציתי שתמשך התפלה
- 12 ויהיה גג על הראש, וקירות לבנים.
- 13 כל הקהל לפני
- 14 יניד גם ראשו המלכין
- 15 ואולי אז, גם כל הגסטרות
- 16 יהיו גלויות
- 17 כמו משמעות
- 18 ההרים סביב—
- 19 לירושלים.

Being Alone<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Men are tall in their tallitot
- 2 Like white birds
- 3 Upon the hills of Jerusalem.
- 4 What is hidden under the robe—
- 5 A throne for a time
- 6 Perhaps. And I with my strange
- 7 How I longed or how to
- 8 Come together with bare feet and to find shelter
- 9 Under the tallit of my Great Priest
- 10 And in the Prayer of the Priests, two, two
- 11 Your hands forward. I wanted the prayer to go on
- 12 And be a roof on the head, and the walls would be white.
- 13 The whole congregation in front
- 14 Would nod its whitening head
- 15 Maybe then, also, all of the hidden things
- 16 Would be revealed,
- 17 Like the significance
- 18 Of the surrounding hills—
- 19 Of Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> Can also be translated as "Communion" or "Association," which would yield a different tone to the poem.

The poem "התייחדות" expresses entrenched ritual-based desires of Hava Pinchas-Cohen's poetic speaker. The poem expresses the speaker's desire to wear a tallit of her own and be included in rituals from which women have traditionally been excluded. The title of the poem echoes this yearning as the poetic speaker believes herself to be alone, with no comfort, no security and no welcoming "ritualized" community. The poem is set in the poetic speaker's contemporary Orthodox Israeli synagogue. She is using her experience of ברכת כוהנים to create the many metaphors that appear in this poem.

The first few lines of the poem appear to be positive in nature as the poetic speaker describes the men when donning ritual garb. The use of לבנות in line two expresses the pure, natural, and wholesome feeling she carries with her throughout this memory. She is also thinking of the traditional white tallit of men. The simile noting that "men are as birds" places them above her, literally, as watchmen to the City of Jerusalem. There is a protective image set up here in just the first few lines. In the third line of the poem, the poet is imagining herself overlooking the congregation, its bodies and heads rising and falling, and the birds flying. The reader understands where she is situated by the use of the phrase הרי ירושלים.

However, this sense of peace is muted when one views the opening lines of this poem through different eyes. The very first lines indicate that the poetic speaker, who is a woman, is not wearing a Tallit as the men are. The use of גבוהים to describe these men implies that they carry power, strength, and control. The poetic speaker could be recalling her childhood when the large white tallitot the men of the congregation stood far larger than she did. It also alludes to Divine status; the men are so high in their ritual garb that



they mimic God. This image is not a positive one, and in fact lowers the status and importance of women concerning ritual.

The Priests in ancient Israel would wear a specific piece of clothing under their tallitot, called גלימה in this poem. The poetic speaker expresses her discontentment that she is unaware of what lies underneath. The desire is completely asexual; it is the hidden areas of ritual that enrage the poetic speaker. Her desire to know and be included is clouded by what lies "under the robe" of the Priests. As a woman, she fears she will never have the answers revealed to her.

What lies under the clothing, perhaps, is מלכות לשעה. Not a commonly used phrase in Jewish texts, it does appear in the Midrash on Ruth.<sup>2</sup> In an explication of Ruth 2:14, Rabbi Yochanan interpreted "And she sat beside the reapers" to mean that "the throne was taken from him [David] for a time."<sup>3</sup> Thus, if one reads this understanding and translation back into the poem, one sees that the poetic speaker is alluding to the finite nature of life and the Priesthood, or kingship, or any kind of authority. This is supported by the word "perhaps" in line six. The scenario set up is temporary and will only last "for a time".

The poetic speaker is described as זרה. This though is strange because it is not of the norm. It is foreign, not of this world, yet she yearns to participate in the rituals. These desires are עבודה זרה in their feminist impulses. What the poetic speaker wishes to do is to be gathered under the tallit of the Great Priest (who blesses the kahal in bare feet) and to experience its shelter. The image brought to mind is a beautiful one; the woman craves the protection of the Priest as well as the enveloped feeling of the tallit. Note how a

<sup>2</sup> דות רבה פרשה ה"ה ואמר

<sup>3</sup> Hebrew: Midrash Rabbah, (New York, E. Grossman Publishing House, 1971).

English: Midrash Rabbah, (London, Soncino Press, 1983).

masculine presence offers shelter to the feminine. Another way to read these lines is that the poetic speaker wishes to be the one offering the blessings. By going under the Priest's tallit she wants to supplant his task and give blessings herself, or just be included in the blessings.

The תפלת כוהנים referred to in line 10 is the traditional Blessing that the Priest would say to the people (this is still done in some communities today too). He would raise his hands high, having each hand in two clusters, and pronounce the Priestly Blessing from a special platform (hence the double use of שמים). The themes of this Prayer include safety, security, and peace from God to God's children. This matches the shelter that was sought out above in lines eight and nine.

Line 12 of the poem branches into a slightly broader subject, namely the architecture of prayer. The poetic speaker wants the tfillah to continue and the temporary white shelter created by the tallit (as the men drape them over their heads) continue to be a roof. She is imagining and re-constructing the physical space of prayer, but she is also speaking of the architecture of prayer and ritual itself. The white walls of line 12 echo the white birds (who are men in tallitot) of line two.

The poem changes beginning with line 13. The possible realization of the yearning and desire comes to fruition as the poem comes to its close. A nod of approval by the congregation acts as the catalyst for the changes that will happen momentarily. Calling the heads מלבין פנים echoes a phrase in Hebrew, להלבין פנים, which means "to humiliate someone." There are several instances of the use of this phrase in text, including one Rashi commentary on Bereishit 38:25.<sup>4</sup> Is the poetic speaker remarking on the

<sup>4</sup> Rashi writes "לא רצתה להלבין פניו" for why the father-in-law was sent away, meaning that Tamar did not want to put her father to shame in public.

humiliation of the congregation? This use in the poem could be the poet's way of exploiting the concept of humiliation. In the context of this poem, it is the woman who will be humiliated for thinking these thoughts.

What follows in the plot of the poem is that all things hidden and secret will be uncovered for this person. The example offered in this poem of such a hidden item is the significance of the surrounding hills of Jerusalem. This is but another way that Pinchas-Cohen uses her poetry to teach and inform her readers of history. For one knows that for centuries the hills around Jerusalem have served as strategic military bases. Mountains can mean so many other things, though. Their size and stature invoke majesty, loftiness, protection and ascension, and the knowledge that they are not human-made invokes beauty, history and purity. The famous Biblical story involving Abraham and Isaac occurred on a mountain, הר המוריה; mountains can thus also mean destination, journey, sacrifice and trial. By using this as her prime example, the poet has managed to encapsulate millennia of fact, history, defeat and triumph into a few lines of poetry.

In the beauty of these final lines, a cyclical structure is created. The poem began speaking of the hills and ends with them as well. This creates a ring structure much like the hills that surround the city of Jerusalem. Thus, the poem's context is also its construct.

Hava Pinchas-Cohen has woven history, Bible, tradition, ritual and prayer into one strong poem. Her innate desire to be a full member of the Jewish people and to express that Judaism in a way that fulfills her is expressed in this poem, "התייחדות".

## ברכת כוהנים

- 1 וכשהם רכונים וטליתותיהם מכסות על ילדיהם
- 2 מי כאהל זקוף ולבן ושוה צלעות
- 3 ומי שמיתריו מתוחים לצדדים לפקע
- 4 זה בצד זה, מכסים ושויים ואינם ידועים
- 5 מהמקום הגבוה בין הוילונות ממנו אני מציצה
- 6 בעינים גלויות—
- 7 ראיתי גם טלית רכת קפלים אדמה ואפלה
- 8 שסימני הגוף תחתיה נעלמים
- 9 עד שכהו עיני והייתי כעור
- 10 פעם רואה ופעם אינו
- 11 ועיני שפכו מים רבים
- 12 נכח פני הנשים
- 13 שקוצות שערך (בלולות בחנה לקראת החג)
- 14 יוצאות מתוך כסוי הראש וימים קשים
- 15 פרושים לפניהן על מגש זכר
- 16 למתנות הנדונה
- 17 והן תמהות על העין שלי הפתוחה
- 18 כמים ואגלי זעה שלהן שוטפים ממצחן לקמטי העינים
- 19 ומחוץ לבית
- 20 אורב שרב
- 21 ומדבר אחד הייתי שנים.

### The Priestly Blessing

1 And when they are bent over and their tallitot cover their children  
2 He who is like an upright, white tent, equal on all sides  
3 And he whose strings are stretched to all sides, splitting  
4 this side to that side, covered, equal, and unknown-  
5 It is from their high place between the curtains-that I peek out  
6 With open eyes—

7 I also saw a tallit with dark red soft folds  
8 Underneath which any signs of a body disappear

9 Until my eyes dimmed and I was as if blind  
10 One moment seeing, the next moment, not  
11 And my eyes poured out a lot of water  
12 Right in front of the women  
13 The locks of whose hair (mixed with Henna in honour for the holiday)  
14 Come out from within the head covering, and the difficult days  
15 Spread out before them on a memory platter  
16 For dowry gifts  
17 And they were amazed by my open eye  
18 Like water and droplets of their sweat, flowing from their foreheads towards the  
    creases of the eyes

19 And outside the house  
20 A dry heat wave lies in wait  
21 And from the one thing, I became two.

"ברכת כוהנים" concerns many of the same themes as the poem "התייחדות". The poet is writing about ritual garb, ritual, prayer and the division of the sexes. The title of this poem places it in history, though it is written in real time as well. This "double-duty" allows the poet to express issues that have concerned Israelites (Jews) in general and women in particular across generations in a single phrase. What this may indicate is the poet's admittance that little has changed in the realm of ritual, prayer and women in some expressions of the religion.

The poem opens in the middle of a conversation already in progress. It seems to the reader that the poetic speaker has already witnessed activity that has organically led into line one of the poem. As in the opening line of "התייחדות", it is men who are donning the ritual garb; the women are conspicuously absent from the action of bending over. The children are covered, but they are the only demographic mentioned. This echoes the poem "שם מפרש" where the men and the children are waiting at Sinai for Revelation while the women are elsewhere.

There are two different types of tent structures described in lines two and three. The tallit described in line two reminds the reader of Abraham's open tent in Parashat Vayera. The use of זקוף invokes images of strength, poise and status. לבן is a colour often used by Hava Pinchas-Cohen in her poetry. Here, it could be included to describe someone as pure, holy and without sin. All of these descriptive words illustrate the man in the tallit of line one of the first line of the poem. Line three depicts a scene quite opposite. Here, the man's tallit strings are needed by so many children and is being stretched out to its limit. Amazingly enough there is enough string and material to shelter everyone in need, like a tent might accomplish, though it split by the end of the phrase.

There is a famous text on this subject, where all of the Israelites fit into the Temple, even though its physical space would never have been able to contain every body. In Mishnah Avot the text teaches that 10 miracles were produced for the forefathers in the Temple. The eighth is that though the people “stood pressed closely together, they yet found ample space to prostrate themselves.”<sup>5</sup> This teaching is repeated in the Bavli Masechet Yoma, where the commentary explicates that “when the time came for the people to bow down, a miracle occurred and the area became spacious enough for each person to prostrate himself.”<sup>6</sup> The Midrash uses this teaching in Bereishit Rabbah and Vayikra Rabbah.<sup>7</sup> Several analogies prove this incident that happened in the Temple. The poet has used her knowledge of these texts to indicate how large and all-encompassing the tallitot of the men were.

The repetition of the word שוה in lines two and four indicates something interesting. The poet is suggesting that the tallit is covering everyone equally. The word “equal” carries other associations to the reader’s mind; the equality of the sexes, and the full inclusion of all members of society. Those equally covered by the tallit are unknown (אינם ידועים) however to the women on the other side of the Mechitza. The phrase ואינם ידועים of line four serves as a good oppositional force to this “equality” mentioned above. The poetic speaker is claiming that it is the men who are not known or recognizable.

The description of the “other side of the curtain” paints a picture for the reader. “The high place” could be speaking of a physical locale as well as a metaphorical space. It could be the women’s section (the balcony) of the synagogue. Or, the men could be situated in an elevated “place” of ego, status, and in general, Judaism. Women are not

<sup>5</sup> משנה מסכת אבות פרק ה משנה ה

<sup>6</sup> בבלי מסכת יומא דף כא עמוד א

<sup>7</sup> בראשית רבה פרשת ד"ה ז בנדה שבעולם; ויקרא רבה פרשה י ד"ה את פר

privy to this place. What happens while the men are high and removed from the rest of those present is that the poetic speaker peers into their world. The knowledge that the men do not know that she does this places her at an advantage. She watches because she is intrigued, because they are rituals and activities that she does not engage in, and because she wants to partake of them herself. Her “open” eyes imply a desire and receptiveness to observe, absorb, and imitate.

The next stanza is only two lines long but is so for a good reason. In these lines, the female poetic speaker describes what she sees on the “her” side. The tallit is depicted as a woman’s body might be; as warm, inviting, soft, and feminine on the one hand, but also as red, bloody (אדמה) and dark and gloomy (אפלה) on the other. It is striking that these adjectives would be used to describe a traditionally male ritual object. The poet seems to be turning accepted ideas norms upside down by likening a tallit to the female body. These tallitot cover and mask the bodies of these men so much so that it is not clear what sex they are. This statement could mean many things. It might mean that the poetic speaker views men and/or the Kohanim as asexual. It might also mean that there could be a woman underneath the tallit. Finally, it might stir up new ideas, namely that if one’s sexuality is hidden or cloaked by a tallit, then why shouldn’t a woman be able to wear one as an expression of her Judaism? The idea set forth in these lines is that the covering is so large and flowing that there would be no possibility of it becoming a vehicle for imagination or seduction.

The third stanza continues the ideas of both the first and second stanzas. The result of the poetic speaker’s peeking for so long into the men’s section is that her eyes becomes blinded. This is the literalization of the admonishment not to look at the Kohen



as he blesses; there exists a legend that if one were to look at the Kohanim during his blessing, one would go blind (the woman here goes temporarily blind from her tears). The outpouring, literally, of emotion that ensues from the stolen glimpse is only seen on the woman's side, where all the women sit. It is here that the woman sobs, though the reaction is not ideal. The response is not found until line 17 of the poem, where the women presumably stared at the poetic speaker for venturing towards the unknown. Perhaps they wondered why they did not do it, or how this one woman had the courage to seek in light of its forbidden nature, or how they could begin their own personal explorations.

Back at line 13, the poetic speaker begins to describe the women in her presence. These wives have their hair covered with a head covering. Practiced in some observant communities, it is done when one marries, as a form of *tzimut* (modesty). The poet is remarking on the action performed by the women in her community that is conspicuously not performed by the men. The sacrifices of women noted in the "domesticity" section of this work are echoed in these lines.

Moving from the physical attributes of the gazing women, the poem continues in line 14 through 16 to describe the lives of the women. Admitting that their days are קשים (difficult), they are left with memories and their bridal presents for the length of their days. The phrase מגש זכר is absolutely beautiful, setting up an image of a wedding with a tray large enough to balance every wedding gift. This brings to mind the marriages that these women have; is the poet claiming that it is the marriages that are difficult? Might these women be more content if they perceived of their head coverings as their own empowering ritual objects?

This same phrase reminds the reader of a famous Natan Alterman poem, "Magash H'kesef" ("The Silver Platter"). Alterman lived from 1910-1970; many of his poems, like this one, tackled key social and political issues facing Israel. In this poem, Alterman discusses the soldiers who died in 1948. It reads *אנחנו מגיש הכסף, שעליו לך נתנה מדינת* "We are the silver salver/Upon which the Jewish State was served to you."<sup>8</sup> The poet is remarking that the sacrifices made by these men and women are laid out on a platter, much like the women in *"ברכת כוהנים"* have done.

The poem ends with another short stanza. The word *בית* could be referring to the Temple in Jerusalem of ancient days where the Kohanim lived; or the House of worship in which one might pray in contemporary times; or even an individual house, in which a family might reside. Whichever is the most correct translation, the next line of the poem is most important. The poem tells the reader that a *שרב* is lurking. This dryness stands in opposition to the outpouring of tears in the previous stanza. Is the poet predicting the reaction to her feminist over-reaching-that there will ultimately be a drying up of her hope? Perhaps this "dry heat" is the poetic speaker herself, waiting for her moment to be a full member of the patriarchal prayer community, waiting for the time when she may don a tallit proudly and pray with the rest of her kahal, have the freedom to look wherever she chooses, have the freedom to bless others, and finally, be able to join in the holiness of her Judaism in a real, and significant way.

<sup>8</sup> [www.gordon.ac.il/mahad/shelach/to\\_read/agadot/133.htm](http://www.gordon.ac.il/mahad/shelach/to_read/agadot/133.htm)  
[www.jafi.org.il/education/festivals/zkatz/zk/read1.html](http://www.jafi.org.il/education/festivals/zkatz/zk/read1.html)

## קדיש יתומה

- |    |  |               |
|----|--|---------------|
| 1  | לא תהיה מנוחתך ולא יצאו לי בנים מזרעך      | יתגדל ויתקדש  |
| 2  | לא אצדיק את הדין ואמר ואמר יתברך           |               |
| 3  | יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבה בעלמא די ברא          |               |
| 4  | כרעותה ורצוני כואב ומכאיב ומטיל צל         | וישתבח ויתפאר |
| 5  | וגם אור ואנו רוקדים על הקצה בקצב           |               |
| 6  | כפול צעדים בין האור השורף לצל הרוטט        | ויתרומם       |
| 7  | נענים בתנועה למושך בחוטים                  |               |
| 8  | יהא שמה רבא מברך לעולם ולעלמי עלמיא        | ויתנשא        |
| 9  | הנה גם אני מכניסה ראש ופנים                |               |
| 10 | למקום בו בקשת "אמן" ו"אמן" כמו לפנים       | ויתהדר ויתעלה |
| 11 | שימשך ויוליך ויוביל ויסחב ויטלטל גשמתי     | ויתהלל        |
| 12 | על אותו סלם שאין לו קץ                     |               |
| 13 | יביאני אליך ויעשה לי דמותך                 | הללויה        |
| 14 | יראה עניי וישמע ריבי ויעשה לך שלום במרומים |               |
| 15 | לעלא ולעלא מן כל שירתא שידעתי              |               |

## A Woman's Mourner's Kaddish

- |   |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 Your rest will not be, and no sons of your seed will come from me                   | <i>Glorified and Sanctified</i> |
| 2 I will not justify the judgment and say and say and say <i>Blessed</i>              |                                 |
| 3 <i>Let God's great name be glorified and sanctified throughout the world whose</i>  |                                 |
| 4 <i>Creation God willed and my will aches and causes to ache, and casts a shadow</i> | <i>Praised and Glorified</i>    |
| 5 And both the light and we are dancing at the edge of a double stepped               |                                 |
| 6 Rhythm between the burning light and the vibrating shadow                           | <i>Exulted</i>                  |
| 7 Answering with movement to the pulling of strings                                   |                                 |
| 8 <i>Let God's great name be blessed forever and ever</i>                             | <i>Extolled</i>                 |
| 9 Here, I'm also inserting my head and face   |                                 |
| 10 To the same place that you requested "Amen" and "Amen" like long ago               | <i>Honoured and Upraised</i>    |
| 11 That it should pull and lead and guide and drag and carry my soul                  | <i>Lauded</i>                   |
| 12 On the same ladder that has no end   |                                 |
| 13 Bring me to you and make me in your image  | <i>Halleluyah</i>               |
| 14 See my suffering and hear my plea and make yourself peace in the Heavens           |                                 |
| 15 <i>Beyond and Beyond all song that I knew</i>                                      |                                 |

\* This translation was created with the help from the Birnbaum siddur, the Gates of Prayer siddur, and  
[www.israel.org/js/source/Judaism/Kaddish.html](http://www.israel.org/js/source/Judaism/Kaddish.html)

\*Aramaic words are italicized

The poem "קדיש יתומה" is an interpretation of the traditional קדיש one of the most well-known doxologies in Jewish liturgy. Recited by Jews after the death of a loved one, it nonetheless does not concern death at all. Rather, it is a proclamation of the sanctity of God's name, and answers some very deep-rooted questions, namely, whether there is a God and what is the meaning of life? It is a declaration of belief in the holiness of God; a hope that God's sovereignty may be recognized by all living beings; and a recognition that all that happens, happens for a reason and in accord with God's will. Finally, it is a prayer for peace from God, for Jews and for the entire world.

Hava Pinchas-Cohen has attempted to fashion her own version of the Mourner's Kaddish in this poem.<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, there is no קדיש יתומה so what the poet is doing it in itself unorthodox. She has interrupted the traditional text and supplied her own thoughts, feelings and interpretations in the spaces. Sometimes, the poet has even left words out or changed the construct or gender of the text to support her statements. Shulamith Haraven<sup>10</sup> notes that Pinchas-Cohen is "engaged in a dialogic process of recovery and re-inscription"<sup>11</sup> through her poetry. In this poem, the poet is trying to find her own voice in the text while expressing discontentment with the greater meaning of the ancient words. The entire poem could be the poet's personal recitation of the Kaddish, for the loss of not saying it otherwise, as Halakhah does not require it of her.

<sup>9</sup> The poet Allen Ginsberg has done a similar thing in his poem "Kaddish", which was written in memory of his mentally unstable mother. Calling it "Kaddish" implies that Ginsberg is attempting to create a new interpretation of the traditional Mourner's Kaddish. Unlike Pinchas-Cohen, Ginsberg strays completely from the form and language of the original text.

<sup>10</sup> As quoted in Jamie S. Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley, Eds, *Mapping The Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 365.

The poem's special layout on the page indicates a different and more creative approach for the poet.<sup>12</sup> Miriyam Glazer notes that Pinchas-Cohen has created "a visually and spiritually bifurcated poem"<sup>13</sup> for her readers. On one side are the italicized words, written in Aramaic and are spiritually infused and positively charged. This is the "men's" side of the Kaddish, including the traditional text. The other side is the "women's" Kaddish, where the un-italicized words appear in Hebrew and more negatively charged. The female side could be the poetic speaker's thoughts as she watches the men pray in their section (on the other side of the poem) and listens to the Kaddish being recited. The statement being made is "this is my Kaddish", meaning a woman's version and interpretation of the doxology, written through her lens.

The poem is book-ended by the theme of peace (see line 14), and begins with a rather angry statement by the poetic speaker. Who is the protagonist speaking here? It seems to be a woman's voice directed to a man, as she threatens him with harsh realities. This could be a woman speaking to her husband, or even to God. The entire poem might be seen as an internal dialogue between a man and God. The first phrase *לֹא תְהִיָּה מְנוּחָתְךָ* acts as a refutation of the hopes in the *El Malei Rachamim*.<sup>14</sup> The latter part of the first line, *וְלֹא יִצְאוּ לִי בָנִים מְזֻרְעֵךְ*, resonates with all of the Biblical matriarchs who experienced difficulty conceiving children. Viewing these two seemingly disparate Biblical narratives in tandem, one could speculate that this first line of the poem outlines punishments given by God to man and woman. This whole poetic expression could also be a woman's attempt to mourn the death of her husband or partner. She is angry, first that he died, but

<sup>12</sup> Though this setup is not her only one. See for example "Journey of a Doe", and "Her, Me, and Yochanan".

<sup>13</sup> Jamie S. Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley, Eds, *Mapping The Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodolphi. 2001), p. 364.

<sup>14</sup> Which states that *בְּנֵי עֵדֶן תְּהִיָּה מְנוּחָתָם*, that the deceased shall rest in Paradise.

also that she wants to say the “Kaddish” in his memory. What the reader is witnessing is this woman’s battle with the difficulties she feels with theology and the Halakhah of mourning in Judaism.

The Aramaic that follows these proclamations is the first two words of the Kaddish, יתגדל ויתקדש. The last thing one would think to do after a sentence as seen above would be to praise God with loving statements such as “glorified and sanctified.” But that is precisely what the poet has done. The absurdity of such a matching requires the reader to wonder what message the poet wishes to teach her audience. Perhaps she is bitter at the doxology itself and believes it to be hyperbolic and untruthful. Perhaps events in her life have caused her to view such God-friendly statements as troublesome or hypocritical. The words יתגדל ויתקדש come from Ezekiel 38:23,<sup>15</sup> when the prophet envisages a time when God will be acknowledged in the eyes of all the nations. These words teach that all Jews are special, for when one recites them even an ordinary Jew has an impact on the total Jewish people, and God is also raised up in greatness and holiness.

The next line of the poem resonates with the Yamim Nora'im, a Time of Judgment (דין) and is taken from Mishnah Brachot 9:5 which states that “one is required to bless [God] over the bad in the same way one blesses [God] over the good.” This verse is linked to the notion of “Tziduk Hadin” (Justification of Judgment), which may be the only connection to death in the entire doxology of Kaddish. The poet has turned this idea on its head. She refuses to “justify the judgment” by saying “Amen” and to agree. The repetition of the word אמר three times in this line is referring to the three times the phrase ואמרו אמן is cited in the Kaddish (save the final paragraph which was added later and is in Hebrew). The purpose of the congregation reciting “Amen” after each paragraph is to

<sup>15</sup> "והתגדלתי והתקדשתי בעיני גוים רבים וידעו כי אני ה'".

support the mourner, the words and God. When one says "Amen" it is as if she has said the entire prayer herself, but because the Kaddish is traditionally recited only by the mourners, these markers allow the congregation to feel involved while giving personal time for those who need to be saying the Kaddish. The final word of this line is יתברך, a word repeated by both Shaliach tzibur and congregation in all recitations of Kaddish throughout the service, save the Mourner's Kaddish.

What the poetic speaker is doing with this line is saying that she will not, or rather, cannot, be a part of the congregation's "Amen's. This could be because she chooses to excuse herself, but more likely it is because she is a woman, and as such is not halakhically required to recite Kaddish or recite "Amen" as part of a minyan. Over the centuries, the rabbis have argued as to whether women may say Kaddish for their deceased parents. Though the practice of allowing them is widely accepted around the world today, there are still some communities who forbid this. A woman's ability to "say and say and say" anything significant is thus curtailed.

The third line of the poem is quoted in its entirety from the conventional Kaddish and attempts to answer the question, 'Why do people die?' It states that "there is a certain pattern to life and death in this world that seems to be inherent in creation. If God is the author of creation, then God created it as a place where people live and then die".<sup>16</sup> Thus, humans die because it is the will of God that it be so, for God created death just as God created life. The belief that God willed creation is opposed immediately in the next few lines by the voice of the poetic speaker. While God wills infinitely, the poet nevertheless claims her own painful will as well. This is because she has no outlet or opportunity to extend this will outside of her person. One of the beliefs of Judaism is that

<sup>16</sup> Ron Wolfson, *A Time to Mourn A Time to Comfort*, (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishers, 1996)



God is the master creator and “do-er”. Where does a human being’s will fit into this plan, and where does a woman’s, especially?

When the text states that *מטיל צל*, it means that the woman’s will, her desire, hurts her and causes her pain. This then casts a shadow as a well as a light on her life. It could be that the woman’s will casts a shadow onto God’s will, or it could mean something much more literal; that her body physically creates a shadow and light on the *mechitza* separating the women from the men.

Lines five and six play on this image of the real shadow as the people pray. These lines appear as a dream or a vision to the woman. The events may not really occur, though in her imagination the activities are true and real. The use of *רוקדים* (dancing) for praying or *shukkeling* creates an image in the reader’s mind. The *צל הרוטט* (vibrating shadow) could be the reflection of the davening men that the woman sees through the translucent separation. The next line of the poem conjures images of God as a master marionette leader who decides when those praying should move. By telling the reader that there are both large and small strings, the poet is including men and women in God’s “manipulating.” According to the Almighty (according to the poetic speaker), women are just as worthy as men of God’s attention and God wants their prayers.

What happens in line eight of this poem is only as a direct result of what occurs in line seven. Marionette imagery is used to imply that there is someone, or something, in charge of the congregation’s utterances. One possibility is that it is the *Shaliach Tzibbur*, who leads the *kahal* in prayer and cues all for their times to pray together. More likely it is God who is the master marionette leader, pulling certain strings when needed and others simply when desired. The idea of humans as God’s puppets has been a theory oft

written in history. Such a discussion leads naturally to the notion of free will of humans vs. the all-mighty power of God.<sup>17</sup>

Line eight is the centre of the Kaddish as well as the poem. In all of the Kaddish, the central verse is this phrase, a public declaration of the belief that God is great and holy, the place where the kahal joins in together. It is no coincidence that the poet placed this verse in this location in her poem. As the central prayer, it is also in the centre of the "women's" altered Kaddish. This only solidifies the theory that this is the poet's individual offering of her version of the קדיש יתום. There is scriptural reference to this phrase; Psalm 113:2, Daniel 2:20 (which is in Aramaic), and Job 1:21.<sup>18</sup> If this poem is the length of the poetic speaker's thoughts as the Kaddish is recited around her, then line eight is a moment in time when she is brought out of her trance. As the public declaration, all those praying have the opportunity to say it together. For a moment, both the men and women are equal, united in one voice.

The next two lines are the poet's assertions that she is to be included. In point of fact, by saying הנה גם אני she is including herself in the people of Israel. In these two lines, the poetic speaker is declaring, "I am here too!" and places herself in history with the rest of Judaism, alluding with לפנים to the events at Sinai and the millennia of Jewish existence that came before her. For if in fact, all Jewish souls were at Revelation, she must have been there as well. It is not clear who is doing the requesting in line 10; is it a man or God? Could it also be the Shaliach tzibbur urging the congregation to recite

<sup>17</sup> Rambam discusses this subject in several of his Philosophical works.

<sup>18</sup> Psalm 113:2: "יהי שם ה' מברך מעתה ועד עולם"  
 Daniel 2:20: "ענה דניאל ואמר להא שמה די אלמה מברך מן עלמא ועד עלמא"  
 Job 1:21: "ויאמר ערם יצתי מבטן אמי וערם אשוב שמה ה' נתן וה' לקח יהי שם ה' מברך"

“Amen”? Whichever it is, this woman is claiming herself eligible to be included and recognized.

Up to this point in the poem, the “masculine” side of the page has been fairly silent. The traditional text has been recited mostly in its order and there has been no additional dialogue inserted between words or phrases. On the “female” side, on the other hand, the conventional text has been interrupted and debunked again and again. The next stanza continues the revised Kaddish, but with a twist. Line 11 appears like and has the cadence of the traditional Kaddish, but is composed of Hebrew words. This is the poetic speaker’s attempt to fashion her own prayer in response to what the men are saying. When feminists endeavour to create their own liturgy or poetry, they are both responding to the existing patriarchal (and possibly misogynist) norm, while trying to create something altogether new. In “קדיש יתומה” the poet is playing off of the existing liturgical structure for the Kaddish but is fashioning it through her own theologically troubled female eyes. Whereas the real Kaddish words are laudatory statements that have no movement and whose function is solely to praise God in concepts, these new “Aramaicized” words imply forward momentum and movement. The hope here is that God “will pull, will lead...” and that by praying, God will ultimately come to do these things.

What is the context of the final word of this line? Does she literally breathe whilst praying, thinking or meditating? Is this a wish, that once the previous things happen, she becomes alive? Maybe this is a statement of her validity as a breathing human being who has the right to pray and be counted. The optimism of line 11 is curtailed by the next line

of the poem. While the previous thought implied forward movement, this one suggests stasis; running but achieving nothing; trying to travel but going nowhere.

Line 13 is a prayer, a wish to be considered by the Maker. The poetic speaker states that she too was created in the image of God and yearns to be embraced by God's loving and protective arms. The "man's" side of the poem appears different at this point. The word הללויה is not in Aramaic, nor is it a part of the Mourner's Kaddish. This word, a doxology in and of itself, may be quoting Psalm 113:2 (as seen above) or Psalm 150.<sup>19</sup> Both are included in the liturgy, the former from Hallel and the latter from Psukei D'zimrah.

The final stanza is the poet's attempt to reconcile both sides of the poem, both sexes in Judaism. This is immediately clear in the spatial configuration of lines 14 and 15, as they are centered across the page. The two sides began to come together in the previous line at הללויה though they continue more completely in this stanza. The traditional phrase עשה שלום במרומי has been rewritten in the poem as יעשה לך שלום במרומים implying that peace has yet to occur, in a future not yet written and realized. The final line has added the word ולעלא, an addition solely for the Yamim Nora'im and has omitted the word ברכתא.

The poet has made an important statement in this poem. On one hand, she believes that one of the ultimate goals of human existence is to be able to praise God, no matter what sex one is, what one's economic status is, or what one's holiness level is. This is proven by the law that all must recite the Kaddish when one's parent dies, the great and pious to the ignorant and sinful. God just wants to be loved and praised, no

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 113:2: "יהי שם ה מברך מעתה ועד עולם"  
 Psalm 150: for example, v. 6: "כל ובשמה תהלל יה הללויה"

prejudices attached. It was in the midst of the poem, in line eight, where this equality of the sexes was seen, if only for a moment. The poet's fashioning of her own prayer is an important statement to be making in Patriarchal Judaism, but also in Israeli culture.

However, on another hand, this is a poem about a woman who is mourning her own loved one, and is struggling with that. She simultaneously wishes to say Kaddish and wishes not to, because of the great grief she is experiencing. This theological and emotional turmoil manifested itself in this poem, where two sides of her emotions appear on the page in the same way.

## פוטוסינתיזה

- 1 חשבתי להיות עלה א-חד
- 2 בין עלי הדשה
- 3 או מחט—
- 4 בין ענפי הארץ
- 5 יחידה בין קהל מרשרש
- 6 קול בקהלה של מטה
- 7 מעבר לפרגוד, רחש נשים
- 8 ממוללות בשפתותיהן תפלת יחידה
- 9 מטפחת צבעונית ובשם שושנים תפל
- 10 עננו אבינו, עננו,
- 11 ונמצאו ודאי דבריהן מכונים
- 12 ובקשתן על חולה או עקרה
- 13 פרנסה או בתולה שעבר זמנה.
- 14 אני—מחצה עשיתי—
- 15 חלון בררתי בתוך מסגרת עץ
- 16 ופניו מזרחה לבית קברות מלבין
- 17 ליד פרדס.
- 18 איך הצמח את האור סופג
- 19 ויודע להטמיע ולהוציא—
- 20 פרי ויהא גם—
- 21 זרע. איך.
- 22 ענני אבי, ענני.

## Photosynthesis

- 1 I thought that I could be just one leaf
- 2 Among the leaves of the plants
- 3 Or a needle—
- 4 Among the branches of the pine tree
- 5 The only one among the rustling community
- 6 A voice in the congregation of Below
- 7 On the other side of the divider, the murmur of women
- 8 Uttering with their lips a singular prayer
- 9 A colourful kerchief and the perfume of lilies is unsavoury
- 10 Answer us, our Father, answer us
- 11 And their words and requests surely found to be
- 12 Directed toward a sick or a childless woman
- 13 A community elder or a young virgin whose time has passed.
  
- 14 I—I made a partition—
- 15 I chose a window within a wooden frame
- 16 Facing East to the whitening cemetery
- 17 Beside PaRDeS/an orchard.
  
- 18 How does the plant absorb the light
- 19 And know to assimilate and eliminate—
- 20 Fruit is also—
- 21 A seed. How.
- 22 Answer me, my Father, answer me.

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The poem "פוטוסינתזה" weaves Biblical, Rabbinic and liturgical allusions into the thoughts and emotions of one woman's circumstances. It surrounds the topic of prayer, division of the sexes, and inclusion, while creating metaphors of the natural sciences and ecology. "פוטוסינתזה" begins with a thought in the poetic speaker's mind. She wishes to be one leaf among many, meaning that she wants to be included in the prayer community, in general. The inclusion of the word א-חד written as it is could be an allusion to the special, carefully annunciated pronunciation of the same word that appears at the end of the most famous doxology, the Shema. By stressing א-חד the poetic speaker could be stating that she does not desire to stand out; rather, she would just like to be one of many, a part of the whole plant. In this vein, she does not see herself as so special or unique, or so important as to command the lead position in the congregation.

Understanding this line differently, the poetic speaker could be intending quite the opposite meaning. Rather than implying that she is not significant, she could be stating that she is important; important enough to be considered a leaf on the plant, needed to make the whole (which may be a privileged position). She could have been content to be on another plant, or off a plant altogether. For this reason, the poetic speaker could be claiming her authenticity and legitimacy in her congregation. For what is a tree without its leaves? And, the reader notes, the word יחידה does mean special and singular.

The possibility of the existence of Biblical allusions begins in the first line of the poem, with the word עלה. Found in various locations in the Torah, it echoes the stories of the Garden of Eden, The Flood and the holiday of Sukkot.<sup>20</sup> Another possible allusion can be found in the next line of the poem. In Bereishit 1:11<sup>21</sup> God creates vegetation,

<sup>20</sup> Bereishit 3:7; 8:11 and Nehemiah 8:15, for example.

<sup>21</sup> ויאמר אלהים תדשא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע עץ פרי עשה פרי למיט אשר זרעו בו על הארץ ויהי כן



seed-bearing plants, and fruit trees. The word used for sprout (verb) and plants (noun) is **אֶשְׂתָּ**. It can also mean "grass" but the translation chosen for this poem is "plants" to invoke Biblical allusions. The concepts of seeds and plants will return in the last stanza of the poem. The use of such allusions in her poetry could be the poet's mode of entry into the canon of Jewish texts. She could feel the patriarchal nature of the narratives and be attempting to "be just one" of the participants in the history, present and future of Judaism.

A repetition of metaphors explicated above appears in lines three and four. The meaning is the same; the wish to be a part of something larger than oneself, possibly to stand out and be noticed as distinct.

The word **יְחִידָה** can have several meanings, including one, only, special, singular, individual, and alone in addition to the chosen word in the translation of this poem. Though all could have been used, "only one" fits into the poem's context best for it is at this point of the poem that the reader understands how very much the poetic speaker wishes to stand out from among the other congregants. Of course, this desire stands in contrast to the halakhah that has governed Jewish communities for centuries; that women's prayer, even in a congregation, is not considered a part of the congregation. In fact, though there may be a room full of praying women, halakhically it is considered as if each woman is engaged in but a personal prayer. Through the poet's words, she is making a bold statement concerning this halakhic background.

When the poet describes the desire for the woman in the poem to be one of the individuals praying Below, there is a double meaning implied. She could either be referring to the physical location of the women versus the men (the women in the balcony,

therefore the men are below), or to the distinction between the two constructs of למטה and למעלה. A concept created by the Rabbis, the former refers to the corporal, human-inhabited earth while the latter refers to the spiritual heavens where God and the angels reside. The poet could be giving the title of למעלה to the men, and the other to women. The reader clearly feels her anger and resentment as she divides the sections of her synagogue in this manner. There is a liturgical allusion here, from the introduction to Kol Nidre of Yom Kippur evening.<sup>22</sup> The idea of there being a Yeshiva in Heaven as well as on Earth has been a popular idea in Judaism for years.<sup>23</sup>

The next few lines the poem brings the reader into the women's section of the synagogue. At first, the physical layout is outlined, noting that a divider separates the men from the women. The poetic speaker then moves to the activity of these women. They are described as murmuring, meaning that no discernable sounds can be heard by the poetic speaker. The image created is a collection of people, each in her prayerful universe, much like the prayerful murmuring action of Hannah in I Samuel 1-2. With grave intention they pour forth their individual prayers to God, hoping to be heard.

The remark of the kerchiefs filled with the scent of perfume removes some holiness and direction away from the expected intention one would assume would be prevalent during a prayer service. Perhaps the poetic speaker is informing the reader that she is experiencing difficulty remaining focused. בשם implies that something has a sweet odour, is pleasant or is spiced.<sup>24</sup> It appears in the Torah in various locations, though is not

<sup>22</sup> בישיבה של מעלה ובישיבה של מטה על דעת המקום ועל דעת הקהל...

<sup>23</sup> ישיבה של מעלה Vs. ישיבה של מטה

<sup>24</sup> From BDB

used in favour of women.<sup>25</sup> Both of these Biblical usages link **בשם** with feminine vanity, a theme prevalent also in this poem.

The first liturgical reference is in line 10 of the poem, when the women utter together, **ענו. אבינו, ענו**. Note that this phrase is completely in the plural. These words can be found in Slichot, the *Hakafot* of Simchat Torah and makes reference to the weekday shacharit service and the Yamim Nora'im.<sup>26</sup> Though Hebrew is naturally a gendered language, it is still jarring to see women speaking of a completely masculine God. To boot, they are calling God "Father", ignoring the possibility that God could be understood in gender-neutral terms or even more feminine ones. By using **אבינו** they are invoking the protective strength of a father figure for themselves.

The final three lines of this first stanza clarify for whom or what these women pray. As women, their hearts naturally incline to what concerns their own lives each day, namely children, illness and aging. These are considered traditionally women's prayers, as seen in such things as *ikhines* literature. This may mean that they are not "on the same page", literally, with the rest of the congregation (the men). Note that these women are not just praying, they are talking as well. It could be that the poetic speaker feels contempt that she is unable to effectively pray whilst the other women talk and murmur. It is possible that the poet is writing ironically here, critiquing the mindset that suggests that these subjects are the only things women think of, during services to boot.

<sup>25</sup> See Isaiah 3:24: Because the daughters of Zion were arrogant and vainglorious, they will be punished by God by having to wear their hair uncovered in public and have their jewelry removed from their bodies. The text notes that "instead of perfume, there shall be rot."; see also Esther 2:12: describing the purification and beautification process undergone by the women of Ahasuerus. The text states that "when each girl's turn came to go to King Ahasuerus at the end of the twelve months' treatment prescribed for women for that was the period spent on beautifying them; six months with oil and myrrh and six months with perfumes and women's cosmetics..."

<sup>26</sup> The Avinu Malkeinu.

The second stanza is slightly more empowering for women, as the poetic speaker is being proactive and is acting in control. It is she who is creating and erecting a mechitzah. She is doing this to physically separate herself from everyone-men and women-in order to offer her prayer. Note that it is a transparent partition that is created. If the intention of a mechitzah is to physically separate men from women, how effective can glass be? The use of a wooden frame for this mechitzah echoes the Garden of Eden prohibition to eat from a tree, but it also reminds one of the exclusive use by Jews of wooden coffins. This idea of death is continued in the next line of the poem.

The focal point of this mechitzah is to be a cemetery, clearly evoking images of death. What humbles each human being is the notion that death is approaching, and one can do nothing to curb its path. The use of the word לבן could be referring to this idea of death; that our physical colouring changes when we expire. The phrase מלבין פנים which was seen elsewhere in this work, means "to humiliate someone." It could be that the very existence of a mechitza is humiliating to the poetic speaker, or that facing death is a crushing thought.

The word פרדס literally means orchard or garden<sup>27</sup> but it also bears a grander meaning. The fourfold method of hermeneutics, as noted in the Mishnah, Baraitot and the Talmud, are *Pshat* (literal or simple meaning), *Remez* (allegorical meaning), *Derash* (moral or homiletic meaning), and *Sod* (mystical meaning). The initial letters of these four words form the acronym פרדס. There is a famous legend surrounding this garden, and its moral is that one may die, experience lunacy or become a heretic if one is not careful. Mysticism can be a dangerous "orchard" if not traveled though cautiously. The

<sup>27</sup> See Nehemiah 2:8 where it is a park containing trees; see also Song of Songs 4:13 where it is an orchard containing fruit trees and plants (BDB)

poet has included this image in her poetry as rumination on her prayerfulness. For her, the Sod of prayer may never be attained because of the institutionalized barriers placed by the community. If she was truly יחידה she might be able to delve into the vast orchard of PaRDes.

The final stanza of this poem brings back earlier themes (see lines 1-4). The poetic speaker wonders how photosynthesis works, and how it is that flora, or any being, functions. The human respiratory system relies on a plant's elimination for oxygen just as it relies on human beings' elimination of carbon dioxide. The question is how living beings know innately to participate in the great circle of giving and receiving so that all creations may live and grow? צמח (plant) can be understood figuratively as well in the Torah. In Psalms 132:17, Jeremiah 23:5 and Jeremiah 33:15, "sprout or growth" is used in reference to a future ruler who has yet to come and who will continue the Davidic line.

The poet is wondering about the mysteries of creation and how it is that human being connects to the universe and to God. She is also pondering how humans sustain themselves physiologically and spiritually—how do they produce "fruit" (offspring, ideas, love, works, poetry, or any other creation). What is necessary to note is that all of these questions are not in the set liturgy that the Jewish people has relied on for years. The poetic speaker, by asking these varied and grand queries, is writing her own personal prayer to God. In this way, she has fashioned her own liturgy, reflecting the concerns and questions that simultaneously plague and intrigue her.

The whole poem could all be a metaphor for human beings and prayer communities. Maybe the poetic speaker is wondering how it is that Jews innately know to create mechitzot and pray as they do? How does the plant (the man) know to separate

himself from his wife in order to more effectively pray to God? Continuing this philosophical discussion, the next few lines of the poem bear layered meanings. On one level, it could be still referring to plants growing, the Garden of Eden, and Pardes. However, it could all be a metaphor as well. Men and women are both human beings, and both live, breathe, eat, sleep and die in much the same way. They may be considered the "fruit" of line 20. Each fruit came from a seed, as evidenced in Bereshit Chapter One. The poetic speaker could be making a statement that all people, regardless of their sex, came from the same place. The division, separation and compartmentalization may not be innate, or what is meant to be in human existence. For we each came from a seed and we are all fruits, each of us.

This could all be understood in yet another way. The poetic speaker could be remarking on the cyclical nature of life, much like the cyclical revolution of photosynthesis. Each fruit comes from a seed, but once eaten, its seed can be re-planted to become a new fruit. This could be a commentary on life, its finite nature, and the inevitability of death.

The poem concludes with a quasi-repetition of the words uttered in line 10. This time, however, there is only one woman praying. The request is in the first person; this is the poet's attempt at fashioning her own liturgy. Here, she is alone, which stands in contradiction to the rest of the poem. Or perhaps she is still with the women, but her prayer is not in tandem with anyone else. This single, solitary prayer appears so much more powerful and meaningful than any communal prayer. The answers to all of the poetic speaker's difficult questions will be answered by Adonai. She still relies on God's infinite knowledge and compassion.

Throughout this last stanza the poet moves her attention from the larger to the very small, from plants to the fruit, which is yielded from that plant, to the seed that created that fruit. This could be the poet's desire to regress, to engage in evolution in reverse. By stating this, the poet could be expressing a wish to be something other than human; perhaps a plant or a tree. This could be the poet's way of communicating that human life bears too many impediments. The hurdles and struggles may not appeal to Hava Pinchas-Cohen; the simplicity of flora; its innate ability to receive and emit the necessary biological essences to survive, interest her.

This poem may be compared to a poem by another poet, Rachel. In "באחד גלגולי" Rachel asks herself if she was ever a beast, or a bird or even a blade of grass? This evolutionary regression echoes Pinchas-Cohen's decline from plant to, finally, a seed. Perhaps Rachel too imagines what her existence on Earth would look like had she been a simple blade of grass. Maybe both of these poets are commenting on the struggles they endure as women in Judaism; the escape to something easier, even if just through their words, may provide them solace and peace.

This section on fashioning prayer has been Hava Pinchas-Cohen's attempt to understand the trappings of prayer. By imagining herself wrapped in traditionally male ritual garb, she can imagine a future where she can literally feel being wrapped and enveloped in her Judaism. By creating new liturgy, the poet is placing herself in the chorus of men who have created meaningful expressions of their souls.

## Conclusion

The poetry of Hava Pinchas-Cohen articulates a desire to be included as a full member in the people of Israel. Through the use of such themes as domesticity, holidays, ritual, and prayer, the poet has sought to include her voice in the existing chorus that surrounds her. It is through the expression of her poetry that the reader learns of her struggles within and without.

The future of Judaism depends on the courageous writings of women like Pinchas-Cohen, ever striving to place themselves both in the chain of tradition and its future. The re-imagining of prayer has opened possibilities for Jewish women in Israel and the Diaspora to imprint their identities into such a conversation.

This thesis would not have existed had Hava Pinchas-Cohen's name not been suggested by my advisor, Dr. Wendy Zierler. My exposure to her poetry, as well as to other Israeli women who are forging new ground, has enlightened me to the creations birthed each day in Israel, and the possibilities that lay before the women of the next generation.



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