Rules for Analyzing Hebrew Verbs

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Note 1: Please call any errors or unclarities to my attention (rklein@lstd.edu)

Note 2: When a root is called “pê wāw” in this document, the dictionary form is, of course, written with an initial yôd.

1. Learn thoroughly the Qal Perfect and Imperfect paradigms so that you can write and recite them and so that you can recognize instantaneously that a suffix like ָת indicates 2mp Perfect. The PGN (person, gender, number) of any Perfect or Imperfect verb form in any Pattern can be identified by knowledge of the Qal Paradigm. In every Pattern there are two stems: The Perfect Stem and the Imperfect Stem (usually the Imperative, Infinitive Construct and Infinitive Absolute, and Participle are based on the Imperfect Stem). In the Qal the Infinitive Absolute and Participle are not based on this stem and must be memorized). On the Niphal participle, see below.

2. Begin analysis of any verb form by marking off the prefixes and suffixes.

The first example is Perfect 2fs (ח), the second 3fp or 2fp Imperfect (תְּתָן), and all we can say about the third (ו) is that it is 3 common plural perfect or masculine plural imperative.

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3. For the Perfects of the Derived Patterns (everything but Qal), let the name of the Pattern be your guide (that is, the 3ms will sound like the name of the Pattern). Niphal begins with nun, Piel and Pual have a dāgēš forte in their middle character and can be distinguished by their vowel sequence (i-e for Piel, or u-a for Pual); Hiphil, Hophal, and Hithpael begin with Hi-, Ho- (qāmeṣ ḥātûp) and Hith- respectively.

If the form is perfect, as identified by the suffix, and there are no prefixes and no dāgēšes, the form is Qal. e.g. קָמִית from קֵם

4. If an Imperfect has a yôd prefix, it is a 3m form (singular or plural); if it has a tāw prefix, it is a 3f or 2m-2f form (singular or plural); if it has an aleph or nun prefix it is a 1st person form (singular and plural respectively).

5. Identify the Pattern of Imperfects and other forms based on the Imperfect Stem (usually the Imperative, Infinitive Construct and Infinitive Absolute, and Participle are based on the Imperfect Stem) by the recognition points.

Qal: hîreq-šēwāʼ ֶה or ֶחַ, etc.

Niphal: Niphal triangle ֶיֵטַל (formed by hîreq--dāgēš forte--qāmeṣ)

With a Guttural ֶיֹאִם (Compensative lengthening instead of dāgēš forte)

Pē Wāw ֶו וָ (Note the Niphal triangle)

(With a Hollow Verb ֶו י. The dāgēš results from the assimilation
of the Nûn of the Niphal)

**Piel** and **Pual**: A dāgēš forte will be in the middle letter and a vocal šēwā‘ā under the prefix consonant; one can distinguish Piel from Pual by the sound of the vowels (a Pual will have a qibbûṣ under the first root consonant).

The dāgēš in the middle letter sometimes disappears when there is a šēwā‘ā under the letter (Seow, p. 59).

Note: By definition, a Hollow verb cannot double its middle letter. Instead we have patterns called **Polel** (יֹקֹמ) and **Polal** (יֹקַמ). That is, the final letter of the Hollow root is doubled. The forms above are Imperfects; these patterns also have all the other tenses.

**Hiphil**: Note the patah under the prefix ֵי.

[Sometimes a patah will show up in the Qal prefix before verbs beginning with a guttural יָעֹס.]

**Hophal**: Note the qāmes ַחֲטִיִּפ under the prefix followed by a silent šēwā‘ašṭṭ.".

A qāmes ַחֲטִיִּפ is a short vowel and appears only in a closed, unaccented syllable. Before dāgēš forte, the qāmes ַחֲטִיִּפ is replaced by a qibbûṣ. ְיַקֵּטל = Hophal Perfect from נְשֹׁט.

**Hithpael**: yith-, tith-, áth-, or nith- prefix ר, ת, נ, ת. There will also be a dāgēš forte in the middle letter of the root.

Note: By definition a Hollow verb cannot double its middle letter. Instead we have **Hithpolel** הִיֹקֹמ. That is, the final letter of the root is doubled.
6. In Piel through Hithpael the Participles begin with a \textit{mem} and are based on the imperfect stem.

\begin{verbatim}
מַקֵּטל, מֻקָּטל, מַקִּטיל, מָקָט
\end{verbatim}

In the Qal and Niphal the participles are not based on the imperfect stem and must be memorized:

\begin{verbatim}
Qal Active Qal Passive Niphal

כּטֶל כּטוֹל
\end{verbatim}

כּטֶל (Qal active participle from a Hollow verb)

7. The Jussive is distinguished from the Imperfect in the Strong Verb only in the Hiphil where the vowel is shortened in the second syllable. In all other Patterns the forms can be either Imperfect or Jussive.

\begin{verbatim}
Hiphil Imperfect יְקִטיל Hiphil Jussive יְקֵטל
\end{verbatim}

(In the weak verbs, the Jussive is distinguished from the imperfect by a shortening of the stem vowel)

8. The imperative is formed in the Qal and Piel by removing the prefix from the 2nd person imperfect forms and making necessary vowel changes for other genders and numbers (see Rule of \textit{šewāʿ} Seow, p. 56). In the Niphal, Hiphil, and Hithpael imperative, a \textit{hē} replaces the \textit{tāw} of the imperfect prefix, and in the Hiphil 2ms a \textit{šērē} also replaces the \textit{ḥīreq} as the stem vowel.

\begin{verbatim}
Qal יָטֶל Niphal יָטָטֶל Piel יָטֶל Hiphil יָטֶל Hithpael יָטֶל
\end{verbatim}
9. The infinitive construct is formed the same way as the imperative 2ms in Qal, Niphal, Piel, and Hithpael. In the Hiphil, the infinitive construct is הַקִּטִיל.

A final tāw (ת) indicates a Qal Infinitive construct in
Pē Yôd: נַשֵּׁב from יָשֵׁב. (Note the loss of the initial yôd)
With suffix: לָכָה from לָכָה. Cf. לָכָה from לָכָה.
Pē Nûn: נָגֶשׁ from נָגֶשׁ. (Note the loss of the initial nûn)
With suffix נַגְשִית from נַגְשִית. Cf. נַגְשִית from נַגְשִית.

A final נ is the sign of an Infinitive Construct in all Patterns for Lâmed Hê verbs.
Qal נַבּוֹת from בָּנִה. Piel נַגְלָות from גָּלָה.

10. The infinitive absolute, from Piel to Hithpael, has similar recognition points to those of the Imperfect.

Piel הַקֵּטֹל or הַקָּטֹל (dāgēš forte in the middle letter of the root), Pual הַקָּטֹל (dāgēš forte in the middle letter of the root), Hiphil הָּנֵקִטָל (pathah in the prefix), Hophal הָּנֵקִטָל (qāmeš hātûp in the prefix), and Hithpael הִהְנֵקִטָל (hith- prefix and dāgēš forte in the middle letter of the root)

In the Qal and Niphal the infinitive absolutes are not based on the imperfect stem. The Qal should be memorized.

Qal נַקְטָל Niphal נַקְטָל or נַקָּטָל Both Niphal forms are rare.

11. If only two root consonants appear in a verb form, the following rules will help discover the third consonant.
a. If there are only two root consonants, and the first is pointed with dāgēš forte, the word is Pê Nûn.

Pe Nûn verbs tend to have the first letter of the root assimilated (dāgēš forte appears in the following consonant). They act like the Strong Verbs in Piel and Pual.

- Niphal Perfect ִנַּגׁש from *
- Hiphil Perfect ִהִּגיׁש from *
- Hophal Perfect (qibbû replaces qāmeš hātûp before a dāgēš forte) ֻהַּגׁש from *
- Hophal Imperfect 1cs ֻאַּגׁש from the root נגׁש .

b. If there are only two root consonants, and the prefix and the first two root consonants (that is, up to the second consonant, but not beneath it) are pointed like the Strong Verb paradigm, the word is lāmed hê.

Qal Imperfect, 2mp, from גלה
Piel Perfect, 2ms, from ענה

The Jussives of Lâmed Hê Verbs are apocopated (shortened):
- Qal Imperfect יגהל Qal Jussive יגהל
- Qal wāw consecutive with imperfect יגהל
- Piel Imperfect יגהל Piel Jussive יגהל
  cf. wāw consecutive with the imperfect יגהל instead of יגהל
- Hiphil Imperfect יגהל Hiphil Jussive יגהל.

Note: The common form יגהל is both pe nûn and lâmed hê from ננה.
c. If there are only two root consonants, and they are separated by a long vowel, the word may be Hollow (ְַַָיֵיֵנָּו Wāw or ְַַָיֵיֵנָּו Yôd). Note rules “c” and “d” belong together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qal Imperfect</th>
<th>Qal Jussive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>יָָיקּובּ</td>
<td>יְָיֵׂשם</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נֶּ־ּכּונֹוָתּ</td>
<td>נֶּ־ּכּונֹוָתּ 2ms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נֶּ־ּכּונֹוָתּ 1cp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hiphil Perfect</th>
<th>Hiphil Imperfect from קּוּמּ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>נֶּ־ּכּוּמּ</td>
<td>נֶ־ּכּוּמּ 3ms; נֶ־ּכּוּמּ 2ms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d. If there are only two root consonants, and the prefix of the imperfect is pointed with a qāmes in an open syllable, the verb is Hollow and the pattern is Qal or Hiphil.

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<th>Qal Jussive</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>יָָיקּובּ</td>
<td>יְָיֵׂשם</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>גֵּיֵׂשם</td>
<td>גֵּיֵׂשם</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נֶּ־ּכּוּמּ</td>
<td>נֶ־ּכּוּמּ 3ms; נֶ־ּכּוּמּ 2ms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the Qal and Hiphil Imperfects of ְַַָיֵיֵנָּו Yôd verbs are identical.
Rules for Verb Analysis (8)

ֶַׂים is Qal or Hiphil Imperfect 3ms from יִׂשים.

e. If there are only two root consonants, and the prefix is pointed with a Naturally Long vowel [a vowel usually written with a vowel letter], the word is Pê Wāw, Pê Yôd, or Hollow.

Pê Wāw (the examples cited are from יִלְדָּה, יִצְבּ and יִרְד).
Niphal perfect. The imperfect is regular: יִצְבּ (Niphal Triangle)
Niphal infinitive construct יִילְדוֹלֵלד .
Hiphil Perfect יִלְדִלד; הָיְלִלד 3ms from יִלְדָּה
Hiphil Imperfect יִלְדִלד from יִלְדָּה
Hophal יִרְדִלד and יִרְדִלד Imperfect and Perfect from יִרְד

Pê Yôd (true pê yôd)
Hiphil יִצְבּ from יִצְבּ

Hollow
Hophal יִקְמָם and Imperfect and Perfect from קְמָם.

Note: Pê Wāw and Hollow roots have the same kind of Hophal forms. Theoretically, קְמָם could come from either יִקְמ or קְמָמ.

The Hiphil perfect of Hollow verbs is יִקְמָם (3ms) and יִקְמָמ (2ms; note vowel reduction in the propretone). Though these forms do not have a naturally long vowel in the prefix and therefore do not fit this rule, the hê prefix is a tipoff that they are Hiphil. The Hiphil participle of Hollow verbs is יִקְמָם.

f. If there are only two root consonants, and the prefix of the Qal Imperfect is pointed with a šērê, the word is Pê Wāw.
Rules for Verb Analysis (9)

Qal imperfect 3mp from נֵיהָב. cf. הָלְך from הָלְך.

g. If there are only two root consonants, and none of the above rules applies, the word may be יָיִן יָיִן.

טַסְבֹּתי, הִסיב, וַיֵּסב are all from סְבַב (Qal Perfect 1cs, Hiphil Perfect 3ms, and Hiphil Imperfect with waw consecutive 3ms respectively).

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12. Guttural verbs differ from Strong verbs in the following ways:

F = no dāgēš forte; S = Silent šewāá replaced by ūtēp vowel; V = Vocal šewā̀ is replaced by ūtēp vowel; A = Preference for “a-class” vowels. The letter rēš also does not take dāgēš forte.

Piel perfect עִמַּת with compensative lengthening
רִמְרָה with virtual doubling
בִּרְמָה Niphal or Piel Perfect with virtual doubling
בִּרְמַך Piel Perfect. No dāgēš forte in the rēš; compensative lengthening

Qal imperfect יִיָּמְדוּ hūtēp vowel for silent šewāá and preference for “a” vowel

Qal imperative יִיָּמְדו hūtēp vowel for vocal šewāá

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Procedure for Analyzing Hebrew Verbs

13. Examine words to see whether they show any suffixes of the Perfect or any prefixes (and suffixes) of the Imperfect. These clues will give you the tense and the Person, Number, and Gender.

- A verb is an infinitive construct if it has a preposition in front of it (ל,כ,ב), or if it has possessive suffixes like those used on a noun. Other recognition points of the Imperfect also apply.

לִקְטֹול, לַקְטְטַול, לַקְטִּטָל, גַּשֶׁתָּלו, בֶּהְלָטו
(From left to right: Qal infinitive construct from a strong verb; Qal infinitive construct with a preposition from a lāmed hē verb; Qal infinitive construct with a 3ms suffix from נְגַשֶּׂ; Piel infinitive construct; Niphal infinitive construct; Qal infinitive construct from Pê yōd with a 3ms suffix; Hiphil infinitive construct from a pê nūn verb).

Infinitive constructs for Lāmed Hē verbs end in ו
Infinitive constructs for Pê Yōd and Pê Nūn verbs end in ו

- A verb is an infinitive absolute if it is used immediately before or immediately after a finite verb of the same root.

Qal = קְטֻלָーケ. In other patterns, standard recognition forms for the Imperfect apply in identifying the Infinitive Absolute.

- A verb is a participle if it is קְקַטַל in the Qal (active and passive respectively), קְנַטַל in the Niphal, or has a מ prefix in Piel--Hithpael (other Imperfect recognition points apply).
Rules for Verb Analysis (11)

- A verb is probably an imperative if an imperative is used in an English translation. Imperatives are formed by removing the נ prefix from the second person forms of the Imperfect in Qal or Piel, or by replacing it with a ה (in Niphal, Hiphil, and Hithpael; other Imperfect recognition points apply).

14. Determine the Pattern of the verb:
A. If the verb (according to #13 above) is Perfect, the recognition points are the following:
   - Qal--no prefixes, no dāgēšes
   - Niphal--Nûn prefix
   - Piel-Pual--dāgēš forte in middle letter. (Look for the “u” vowel in the Pual)
   - Hiphil--ַ נ prefix (ו [strong verbs], מ [pē wāw].ו or ָה [hollow], ֶח [gutturals])
   - Hophal--ַ נ, (ו [pē wāw or hollow], ֶה [pē nûn])
   - Hithpael--ַ נ

B. If the verb (according to #13 above) is Imperfect, the recognition points are the following:
   - Qal--ו (ו, ג, י for Pē Yôd; etc. for Hollow)
   - Niphal--ו (Niphal triangle). י with initial guttural
   - Piel-Pual--ו יפ (Note šēwāא under the prefix and dāgēš forte in the middle letter)
   - Hiphil--ו (ו Pē wāw; י Pē yôd, י Hollow)
   - Hophal--ו (ו for Hollow or Pē Yôd; י for )
   - Hithpael--ו, etc.

15. Identify the root letters in the form--usually two or three will be present. Choose the third letter. See #11 above for a list of rules on how to determine the third root consonant.
Rules for Verb Analysis (12)