

Conjugation for Liberation: Hebrew Verbs for Talmud Learners

1 Why Learn Grammar

Take a moment and consider: *Why are **you** embarking on this grammar exploration? What are you hoping to learn / to be able to do? What past learning experiences are you bringing into this space?*

The study of grammar can often feel like a complex endeavor; as learners we can feel disempowered about the idea of “grammar” as an outside force, a source of information and rules that people around us know and understand. We often use the word “grammar” to describe all the pieces of a word or translation, or the movement from inside to outside, that we can’t quite understand.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines grammar as “(the study or use of) the rules about how words change their form and combine with other words to make sentences.”

Put simply, “grammar” is about the norms and the systems behind that process that we uncover as we go “inside” of words and sentences. Grammar is how we put together the words and sounds each time we reconstruct a word after dissecting it to its smallest components (a three-letter root, prefixes, suffixes, and infixes).

As queer folks and folks committed to multiple ways of knowing, we may have encountered grammar as a rigid and restrictive set of rules. We know the ways in which grammatical systems have been used to disenfranchise people throughout history. Many of us have also had “grammar” weaponized against us in our own lives, and for so many of us just the idea of “grammar” can represent patriarchy and schooling. All of this is real and true, and we bring these experiences to our learning. And yet! The

exploration of grammar can *also* serve as a key that helps us unlock new arenas of empowerment in our learning.

We are not here to be prescriptivists, to “learn grammar” as a subject or a field of study so that we can dictate the ways in which grammar *should be used*. We come to this work as aspiring players, learning the systems that will help us play in, with, and through our tradition with more tools and more confidence. Our focus is on the work of decoding grammatical structures, noticing and uncovering what is in our texts, and revealing meaning at the highest level that we can.

2 From Root to Verb

There are two kinds of words in Hebrew: words with roots, and words without. Words without roots are called particles. A root is a combination of letters associated with a kernel of meaning. Roots encode the core meanings of most words in the Hebrew language. Many words with related meanings can be derived for a single root, but a root on its own is not a word. The category “words with roots” includes verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and many prepositions. Particles comprise a much smaller set of words including pronouns, conjunctions, question words, and some prepositions. This workbook will focus on the formation of Hebrew verbs because they are the fundamental building block of the Hebrew language.

As we just learned, verbs are built from roots. The root—a combination of three (or rarely four) letters—encodes the core meaning of the verb. For example, the root of the verb **כתבת** is **כתב**. The root **כתב** conveys the basic idea of “writing” and is shared by many words that have to do with writing. The verb **כתבתי** means “I wrote”. The verb **מכתיבים** means “they dictate”. The related noun **מכתב** means “a letter.” And the noun **כתובה** (*ketubah*) means “document.” (You might be familiar with this word in a wedding context.) Hebrew verbs are formed by combining a root with prefixes, suffixes, infixes (collectively called affixes) and vowels that together specify their individual shades of meaning. In the above examples, the root letters appear in bold; the non-bold letters are affixes. Don’t worry—we’ll get to vowels soon.

In this workbook you will learn the system by which roots are combined with affixes and vowels to form verbs. To put it another way, you'll learn how a root like כתב combines with the pattern הִי— to make כתבתי — “I wrote.”

Fundamentally, verbs are words in a language that describe actions. To turn a root into a verb in Hebrew, we must specify three things about that action—its **subject**, **tense**, and **binyan**. Binyan is a feature unique to Semitic languages. It will be discussed extensively in later sections of this workbook—for now we'll put a sticky on it. The terms subject and tense may be more familiar to you—these terms are widely used in describing grammar across languages. If these terms are new, they, and several related concepts, are defined in the paragraphs below. If you feel comfortable with terms already, skip to the next section.

A verb's **subject** is typically the person or thing that performs the verb's action.¹ A verb must be conjugated to match the person, number, and gender of its subject.

Person is the grammatical term used to describe the way the subject of the verb relates to the speaker. When the subject and the speaker are the same, we call this situation first person (i.e.: the subject is “I” or “we”). Second person describes the situation when the subject is the person who is being spoken to (i.e.: the subject is “you” or “y'all”). Third person is when the subject of the action is a third party not present in the conversation (“it”, “he”, “she”, “they”, “the cat”, “patriarchy”).

¹ This is true for verbs that convey action in the active voice. For verbs in the passive voice, the subject receives the actions. Grammatical voice is explained in more detail in §5 Binyanim, below.

Number is a little more straightforward. Number describes whether an action is performed by a single actor or a collective. We use the terms singular and plural to describe these situations.

Hebrew (and Aramaic) are languages that exist within, and descriptively reinforce, a binary gender system. Nouns and verbs in Hebrew have grammatical **gender**. This means that verbs take different forms depending on the gender of the subject and all subjects are grammatically gendered, even for things that we don't usually think of as gendered like "windows," "the afternoon," and "justice." The gendering of objects and people coercively through language can be harmful and icky. There is *also* some powerful drashy-drashy potential that can come from exploring these aspects of language. As we learn grammar for the purpose of decoding and better understanding the ancient texts that we've inherited, we are engaging with information about how language was used in the time of the Rabbis.²

Hebrew uses **tense** to communicate when in time an action occurs. We use the terms **past, present, and future** to name these time categories.

² A note on grammatical gender: As noted above, we're learning grammar that *has been*, not dictating what *should be*. As we learn grammar for the purpose of decoding and better understanding ancient texts that we've been given, we are engaging with information about how the language *has been*. There are many new systems that have been developed by trans and non-binary folks to incorporate non-binary gender schematics into spoken and written Modern Hebrew. For more on this, see the Non-Binary Hebrew Project (<https://www.nonbinaryhebrew.com/>) or the Multi-Gender Hebrew font system, among other projects.

3 Specifying Subject and Tense

Past-tense verbs are formed by adding a suffix corresponding to the person, number, and grammatical gender of the subject. If you encounter and recognize one of these past tense suffixes, you will immediately know quite a bit about the meaning of the word—specifically you will know the person, number, and gender of the subject and when the action occurs. For example, if you see the word כתבתִי and recognize the suffix תִּי, you know that you are dealing with a past-tense, first-person, singular verb (even if you don't recognize the root). The table below shows the suffixes associated with each subject in the past tense.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	תי—		נו—	
2nd	תָּ—	תְּ—	תֶּם—	תֶּן—
3rd		הָ—	וּ—	

The future tense is formed by adding a prefix (and, in some cases, a suffix) to a root, as shown in the following table.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem. ³
1st	א—		נ—	
2nd	ת—	תִּי—	תֶּן—	תֶּנָּה—
3rd	י—	ת—	יֶן—	תֶּנָּה—

While in the past and future tenses, a verb must be conjugated to agree with its subject in person, number, and gender, the

³ The plural feminine forms above are found in biblical texts and are generally not used in later strata of Hebrew. Instead the forms marked masculine plural above are used for both masculine and female subjects.

present tense is conjugated to agree with the subject in number and gender only⁴. You may recognize that these present-tense suffixes are also used for Hebrew nouns and adjectives.

		Singular		Plural	
		Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st, 2nd & 3rd		—	ת— ה—	ים—	ות—

A note on...notation: Throughout this workbook, various combinations of person, gender, and number will be abbreviated using a numeral, followed by one or two letters. For example, **1s** indicates first-person singular; **3mp** indicates third-person masculine plural.

⁴ This is because the present tense in Rabbinic Hebrew developed from the Biblical Hebrew participle—a verbal adjective—and, for that reason, the present tense suffixes are similar to those of Hebrew nouns and adjectives. (The evolution of the present tense is discussed more fully in the section about binyan pa'al).

4 Binyanim

As we learned above, to form a verb from a root, a pattern of affixes and vowels must be added to specify its subject, tense, and a third quality unique to Semitic languages—*binyan*.

By placing the same root into different *binyanim*, the meaning is changed. *Binyanim* change the meanings of verbs in two distinct ways.

One way that a *binyan* transforms the meaning of a root is by changing the **voice** of a sentence. For verbs in the **active voice**, the subject is the person or thing that performs the action. In contrast, for **passive** verbs, the subject *receives* the action. Let's consider a few examples in English. In the active-voice sentence "Sally kicked the ball", Sally is the subject and she *performs* the kicking. The ball in this sentence is the **direct object**—that which *receives* the action. In the passive-voice the receiver of the action becomes the subject. In the sentence "The ball was kicked," the ball still *receives* the kick, but has become the subject. For **reflexive** verbs, the subject both performs and receives the action. For example, "Sally dresses herself."

The second way that *binyan* transforms the root does not neatly parallel English grammar and is best understood by example. One root could mean "to write" in one *binyan*, "to engrave" in another, and "to dictate" in a third. "To write" is the simple meaning of this root, "to engrave" is a more intense way of writing, and "to dictate" is to cause someone else to write. In Hebrew, each of these meanings can be expressed by conjugating the same root using a different *binyan*.

The following table provides a basic outline of the binyanim and their meanings:

Binyan		Voice	Intensity
Pa'al (Kal)	פָּעַל / קַל	Active	Simple
Pi'el	פִּעֵל	Active	Intensive
Hif'il	הִפְעִיל	Active	Causative
Hitpa'el	הִתְפַּעֵל	Reflexive/Reciprocal	Reflexive/Reciprocal
Nif'al	נִפְעַל	Passive	Simple
Pu'al	פֻּעַל	Passive	Intensive
Huf'al	הֻפְעַל	Passive	Causative

Below we will examine the meaning transformation associated with each binyan by tracing the transformation of the root **כתב**. The core, inside meaning of **כתב** is “to write.” The table below shows the past-tense 3ms form of **כתב** in each of the seven Hebrew binyanim⁵.

⁵ Traditionally, the past-tense 3ms form of a verb is used as the “name of the verb” in dictionary entries and grammar books because it is the simplest conjugation. The past tense 3ms forms of the root **פעל** have given the binyanim their names. The preference of the masculine singular is product of patriarchy built into the Hebrew language—let’s notice that, and put a sticky on it.

Binyan		כתב	Translation
Pa'al (Kal)	פָּעַל / קל	כָּתַב	He wrote
Pi'el	פִּעֵל	כָּתַב	He engraved
Hif'il	הִפְעִיל	הִכְתִּיב	He dictated
Hitpa'el	הִתְפַּעֵל	הִתְכַּתַּב	He corresponded
Nif'al	נִפְעַל	נִכְתַּב	It was written
Pu'al	פּוּעַל	כָּתַב	It was engraved
Huf'al	הִפְעַל	הִכְתַּב	It was dictated

In this section we have learned how binyanim transform the *meaning* of a verb. In the remaining sections of this book, we will learn how each binyan transforms a verb's spelling and vocalization. Each section below will present the regular conjugation paradigms for one of the seven Hebrew binyanim (but first we will take a brief detour to discuss irregular verbs).

5 Strong and Weak Roots

As was just established, each binyan has a characteristic pattern of affixes and vowels which combine with a root to form a verb. The presence of certain letters in a root disrupts these regular patterns—these are termed **weak roots**. **Strong roots**—those for which the root letters do not produce any disruption—are termed שְׁלֵמִים (whole) in Hebrew. Weak root letters can be divided into a number of classes depending on letter(s) in the root which produce the irregularity.

Types of Weak Root Letters:

1. **Guttural letters** (ע ה ה א and sometimes ר), those whose sound is articulated in the back of the throat produce several peculiarities.
 - They cannot take a dagesh hazak (strong dagesh)—the dot in the middle of a letter which doubles it. In pi'el and hifil the middle root letter normally receives such a dagesh.
 - These letters prefer to be followed (and often preceded) by vowel sounds produced in back of the mouth—in particular patach⁶ (א). When they close an accented syllable they receive a “furtive patach” which is pronounced before the consonant (e.g. לִשְׁמַעַ - lishmo-a' / לִפְתַּח - lifto-ach)
 - Additionally, the gutturals do not accept vocal sh'va and instead take hataf patach, hataf kamatz and hataf segol (אַ אָ אִ) depending on contexts.

⁶ Want to review the names of the Hebrew vowels? There's a cheat sheet in the appendix.

2. **The root letters** ך ן ף convert to vowels when they appear in some positions in a root, and sometimes they disappear entirely.
3. **The letter** ן when it is not followed by a vowel sound (i.e. when its vowel is a silent sh'va, ך), assimilates to the following consonant. (This is the same process by which, in English, the prefix "in-" plus the word "regular" become "irregular", or "in-" plus "logical" becomes "illogical.")

The root פעל is traditionally used to name the positions of letters within the root. Thus, the first position is called Pe, the middle is Ayin, and the final is Lamed. Contemporary grammarians often use Roman numerals to indicate these positions instead, but the traditional naming is still widely used.

Final Root Letter	Middle Root Letter	First Root Letter
ל or Lamed or III	ע or Ayin or II	פ or Pe or I

The weak roots are classified by identifying the position of the weak letter within the root. Pe Guttural or I-Guttural means the first root letter is an ן ף ך or ע. The major classes of weak verbs are as follows:

1. Pe Guttural or I-Guttural
2. Ayin Guttural II-Guttural
3. Lamed Guttural III-Guttural
4. Pe Vav/Pe Yod I-Vav/I-Yod
5. Ayin Vav/Ayin Yod II-Vav/II-Yod (also called hollow roots)
6. Lamed He III-He
7. Pe Nun I-Nun
8. Double Ayin (Double Lamed) Geminate roots

6 Binyan Pa'al – פָּעַל

In this section, we will encounter our first full verb conjugation paradigm. We begin with the paradigm for binyan pa'al, which will then serve as a model as we learn the other binyanim. For binyan pa'al, כתב is our model root.

Past Tense

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	כָּתַבְתִּי		כָּתַבְנוּ	
2nd	כָּתַבְתָּ	כָּתַבְתְּ	כָּתַבְתֶּם	כָּתַבְתֶּן
3rd	כָּתַב	כָּתְבָה	כָּתְבוּ	

Future Tense

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	אֶכְתֹּב		נִכְתֹּב	
2nd	תִּכְתֹּב	תִּכְתְּבִי	תִּכְתְּבוּ	תִּכְתְּבֶנָּה
3rd	יִכְתֹּב	תִּכְתֹּב	יִכְתְּבוּ	תִּכְתְּבֶנָּה

Note that the 2ms and the 3fs have the same form—these forms are only distinguishable by context. The plural feminine forms above are found in biblical texts and are generally not used in later strata of Hebrew. Instead, it is more common that the forms marked masculine above are used for both masculine and feminine subjects.

The pa'al future tense typically takes a holam (וְ) after the second root letter. Some otherwise regular verbs take a patach (אֶ) instead. Verbs that take a holam are said to be אֶפְעַל (ef'ol), while verbs taking are patach are אֶפְעַל (ef'al). The only way to tell if a

verb is eʿol or eʿal it to look it up in a dictionary or grammar reference book. The root לָמַד is eʿal. It's future tense conjugation is presented below.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	אֶלְמַד		נִכְתָּב	
2nd	תִּלְמַד	תִּלְמְדִי	תִּלְמְדוּ	תִּלְמַדְנָה
3rd	יִלְמַד	תִּלְמַד	יִלְמְדוּ	תִּלְמַדְנָה

Present Tense / Active Participle

As mentioned above, the present tense in Hebrew is derived from the **active participle**—a **verbal adjective** that is best understood through example. The core meaning of the root כָּתַב is “to write;” the active participle means “writing.” For a root which means “to run”—“running.” “To sit”—“sitting.” “To redeem”—“redeeming.”

In the transition from Biblical to Rabbinic Hebrew, the active participle was adapted for use as a present tense⁷. But, the creation of the present tense did not replace the participle meaning of these forms, and therefore הוּא כּוֹתֵב can mean “he writes” and “he is writing,” and הָאִישׁ הַכּוֹתֵב means “the writing man.” Because adjectives—and therefore participles—do not have grammatical person, the present tense verb forms do not vary by person either.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.

⁷ Biblical Hebrew does not have tense. Instead, the perfect aspect was used to express completed actions; the imperfect was used for incomplete actions. The perfect and imperfect were recycled as the past and future tense, respectively.

1st, 2nd & 3rd	כּוֹתֵב	כּוֹתֵבֶת	כּוֹתְבִים	כּוֹתְבוֹת
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Passive Participle

In addition to the active participle discussed above, pa'al verbs also have corresponding passive participles. The passive participle is an adjective that describes a recipient of a verb's action. The following table illustrates the relationship in meanings of the infinitive, active participle, and passive participle in English.

Infinitive	Active participle	Passive participle
To write	Writing	Written
To redeem	Redeeming	Redeemed
To wash	Washing	Washed
To send	Sending	Sent

The pa'al passive participle is often referred to using the vowel pattern of its masculine singular form—פֻּעוּל (pa'ul).

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st, 2nd & 3rd	כּוֹתֵב	כּוֹתֵבֶת	כּוֹתְבִים	כּוֹתְבוֹת

For the nerds: Grammarians theorize that pa'ul is a remnant of a full-fledged binyan, that was the passive complement to the pa'al. The complementary passive binyanim of pi'el and hif'il—pu'al and huf'al—are still used in full. You may now be thinking, "Wait, isn't nif'al the passive complement to pa'al?" While nif'al frequently fills the semantic role of the simple passive, etymologically nif'al and pa'al are not closely related. Grammarians still debate the original role and function of nif'al.

7 Binyan Pi'el - פִּעֵל

Pi'el is characterized by a dagesh hazak (a strong dagesh) in the middle root letter in all its forms. The dagesh hazak doubles the letter it marks, meaning דַּבֵּר is theoretically equivalent to *דַּבְּרָר.⁸ Certain letters, gutturals, cannot be doubled and therefore create irregular conjugations when they appear as the middle root letter of a pi'el verb. The guttural letters are א ה ח ע ר. These irregular conjugations are beyond the scope of this workbook.

Past Tense

Our exploration of pa'al verbs can serve as a model for learning the other binyanim. We will see that only two changes must be made to the pa'al past-tense paradigm to form the pi'el past. (1) A dagesh hazak is added to the middle root letter, as described above. (2) the vowel in the first syllable is changed from a kamatz to a hirik. Compare the pa'al and pi'el conjugations below. Notice that, apart from the first vowel, the vowels of pa'al and pi'el past tense are exactly the same (except in the 3ms). For binyan pi'el, we will use דבר as our model root. In pi'el the root דבר means "to speak."

	Singular		Plural	
	Pa'al	Pi'el	Pa'al	Pi'el
3m	דָּבַר	דִּבֵּר	דִּבְרוּ	דִּבְרוּ
3f	דִּבְרָה	דִּבְרָה		
2m	דִּבַּרְתָּ	דִּבַּרְתָּ	דִּבַּרְתֶּם	דִּבַּרְתֶּם
2f	דִּבַּרְתְּ	דִּבַּרְתְּ	דִּבַּרְתֶּן	דִּבַּרְתֶּן
1	דִּבַּרְתִּי	דִּבַּרְתִּי	דִּבַּרְנוּ	דִּבַּרְנוּ

⁸The dagesh in the ך is dagesh kal (a light dagesh) which has no doubling effect.

The pi'el past-tense paradigm is presented in the familiar layout below.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	דִּבַּרְתִּי		דִּבַּרְנוּ	
2nd	דִּבַּרְתָּ	דִּבַּרְתְּ	דִּבַּרְתֶּם	דִּבַּרְתֶּן
3rd	דִּבֵּר	דִּבְּרָה	דִּבְּרוּ	

Future Tense

The vowel under the prefix letters is sh'va (ְ), except in the first person singular. Because א is a guttural letter which cannot take a vocal sh'va, the 1s prefix takes a hataf patach (אָ) instead.

Remember, the dagesh hazak in the middle root letter is found in all pi'el forms.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	אָדַבַּר		נְדַבְּרוּ	
2nd	תְּדַבֵּר	תְּדַבְּרִי	תְּדַבְּרוּ	תְּדַבְּרֶנָּה
3rd	יְדַבֵּר	תְּדַבְּרָה	יְדַבְּרוּ	תְּדַבְּרֶנָּה

Present Tense

The present tense in pi'el (as well as hif'il, hitpa'el, pu'al and huf'al) each take a מ prefix. In pi'el the מ takes a sh'va (מְ) just like the future tense prefixes—in fact the vowel pattern in the masculine singular is exactly the same as that of the future tense.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st, 2nd & 3rd	מְדַבֵּר	מְדַבְּרֶת	מְדַבְּרִים	מְדַבְּרוֹת

8 Binyan Pu'al - פִּעֵל

As we learned previously, pu'al verbs have a passive, intensive meaning. In fact, the pu'al is directly derived from pi'el, the active intensive binyan. Just like pi'el, pu'al has a dagesh hazak in the middle root letter of all its forms.

We will continue to use the root דבר as a model for binyan pu'al. In pu'al, this root means "to be spoken."

Past Tense

Compare the pi'el forms in the previous section and pu'al forms below. To form the pu'al past tense, the vowel under the first root letter is changed from hirik to kubutz. Notice that, apart from the first vowel, the vowels of pi'el and pu'al past tense are exactly the same (except in the 3ms).

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	דִּבַּרְתִּי		דִּבְּרָנוּ	
2nd	דִּבַּרְתָּ	דִּבַּרְתְּ	דִּבַּרְתֶּם	דִּבַּרְתֶּן
3rd	דִּבַּר	דִּבְּרָה	דִּבְּרוּ	

Future Tense

The pu'al future tense is modeled on the past tense 3ms form. Just as in pi'el, the vowel under the prefix letters is sh'va (יְ), except in the first person singular where it is hataf patach (אֶ) instead.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	אֶדְבַר		נְדַבְרוּ	
2nd	תְּדַבֵּר	תְּדַבְּרִי	תְּדַבְּרוּ	תְּדַבְּרֶנָּה
3rd	יְדַבֵּר	תְּדַבֵּר	יְדַבְּרוּ	תְּדַבְּרֶנָּה

Present Tense

The pu'al present tense inherits the מְ prefix of the pi'el present. Notice that the middle root letter is vocalized with a kamatz in the ms.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st, 2nd & 3rd	מְדַבֵּר	מְדַבְּרֶת	מְדַבְּרִים	מְדַבְּרוֹת

9 Binyan Hif'il - הִפְעִיל

Hif'il (as the name implies) has a characteristic ה prefix in the past tense. Notice in the table below, that in the past tense 3rd person, the middle root letter takes the vowel hirik yod which you will also find in in the name of binyan הִפְעִיל (and in all forms of the present and future as we will see below). Remember, the name of the binyan takes the form of the past tense 3ms. The presence of the yod between the second and third root letter of a verb, even in unvocalized texts, is a reliable sign that you are encountering a hif'il verb. However, in the past tense 1st and 2nd person the hirik yod is replaced by a patach.

In hif'il, we will use the root דלק as our model. In hif'il, דלק means "to cause to burn/to ignite/to kindle."

Past Tense

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	הִדְלַקְתִּי		הִדְלַקְנוּ	
2nd	הִדְלַקְתָּ	הִדְלַקְתְּ	הִדְלַקְתֶּם	הִדְלַקְתֶּן
3rd	הִדְלִיֵּךְ	הִדְלִיֵּךְ	הִדְלִיֵּךְ	

Future Tense

In the future tense the ה prefix is replaced by the standard future tense prefixes. The prefix receives a patach in the future tense. As mentioned above, the hirik yod after the second root letter carries through all the forms. Notice the similarity of the past and future 3ms.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	אֶדְלִיק		נְדְלִיק	
2nd	תְּדְלִיק	תְּדְלִיקִי	תְּדְלִיקוּ	תְּדְלִיקְנָה
3rd	יְדְלִיק	תְּדְלִיק	יְדְלִיקוּ	תְּדְלִיקְנָה

Present Tense

The present tense is modeled on the future 3ms. A מ prefix replaces the standard future prefixes, but its vowel remains a patach. The מ prefix is common to the present tense of all binyanim, with the exception of pa'al and nif'al.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st, 2nd & 3rd	מְדְלִיק	מְדְלִיקָה	מְדְלִיקִים	מְדְלִיקוֹת

Notice that the feminine singular suffix is a ה, rather than a ת as we saw in binyan pa'al and pi'el previously.

10 Binyan Huf'al - הִפְעַל

Ready for a formal analogy? Huf'al is to hif'il as pu'al is to pi'el. That is to say, huf'al is the passive counterpart to hif'il and is directly derived from it. Just like hif'il, hu'fal takes a ה prefix in the past tense, a ה in the present, and the standard future tense prefixes in the future. The vowel which follows the prefix has evolved over time. In biblical texts we find the kamatz hatuf⁹ (הִ) which makes the sound "o" as in the word "cost." In Rabbinic and later stages of Hebrew's development the kamatz hatuf is replaced by a kubutz (הֻ) or even a shuruk (הוּ) which make the sound "u" as in pull and rule, respectively. The workbook will present the huf'al paradigm using a kubutz.

Huf'al is by far the least used of Hebrew binyanim. In fact, I struggled to come up with a single real life example of its use in the Talmud. We will use the root דלק as a model for the huf'al although that form is not found in Rabbinic literature.

Past Tense

While the first syllable of each form is הִה throughout the past tense, the remainder of each form matches the pa'al, as we have seen previously in other binyanim.

⁹ Yes, the kamatz hatuf and the regular kamatz (sometimes called kamatz gadol) look exactly the same. For a funny combination of phonetic and historical reasons the same symbol is used for two distinct vowels. There are complicated rules to figure out which is which, but you won't need know them in order to conjugate verbs and recognize verb forms.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	הדלקתי		הדלקנו	
2nd	הדלקת	הדלקת	הדלקתם	הדלקתן
3rd	הדלק	הדלקה	הדלקו	

Future Tense

Just as in hif'il, the future tense is modeled on the past 3ms. Compare the two in the charts above and below.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	אדלק		ידלק	
2nd	תדלק	תדלקי	תדלקו	תדלקנה
3rd	ידלק	תדלק	ידלקו	תדלקנה

Present Tense

The present tense is modeled on the future 3ms. A מ prefix replaces the י. The second root letter receives a kamatz rather than a patach.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st, 2nd & 3rd	מדלק	מדלקת מדלקה מדלקה	מדלקים	מדלקות

Several forms are possible for the fs. If you think you have encountered one of these forms, look up the root in the dictionary and carefully examine the entry to see if your form appears.

11 Binyan Hitpa'el - הִתְפַּעֵל

The binyan hitpa'el has (no surprise here!) the prefix הַת in the past tense. The ה of the prefix is replaced by a מ in present tense and the regular prefixes in future tense. Only in the future 1s does the vowel change (from hirik to segol, i.e. תִּצֵּט). Like in pi'el, a dagesh hazak appears in the middle root letter unless it is a guttural (א ה ה ע ר).

We will use the root לְבַשׁ as our model for hitpa'el. In hitpa'el the root לְבַשׁ means "to dress oneself."¹⁰

Past Tense

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	הִתְלַבְּשִׁיתִי		הִתְלַבְּשׁוּ	
2nd	הִתְלַבְּשִׁיתָ	הִתְלַבְּשִׁיתְּ	הִתְלַבְּשׁוּם	הִתְלַבְּשׁוּן
3rd	הִתְלַבְּשׁ	הִתְלַבְּשָׁה	הִתְלַבְּשׁוּ	

Just like pi'el, hitpa'el past tense is patterned after the pa'al.

Compare the pa'al and hitpa'el conjugations below. Notice that the final syllable(s) of hitpa'el and pa'al past tense are exactly the same (except in the 3ms).

¹⁰ The root לְבַשׁ does not actually occur in the hitpa'el in Rabbinic Hebrew but is used regularly in Modern Hebrew and it makes a nice model.

	Singular		Plural	
	Pa'al	Hitpa'el	Pa'al	Hitpa'el
3m	לָבַשׁ	הִתְלַבֵּשׁ	לְבָשׁוּהָ	הִתְלַבְּשׁוּהָ
3f	לְבָשָׁהּ	הִתְלַבְּשָׁהּ	לְבָשׁוּהָ	הִתְלַבְּשׁוּהָ
2m	לְבַשְׁתָּ	הִתְלַבְּשְׁתָּ	לְבַשְׁתֶּם	הִתְלַבְּשְׁתֶּם
2f	לְבַשְׁתְּ	הִתְלַבְּשְׁתְּ	לְבַשְׁתֶּןּוּ	הִתְלַבְּשְׁתֶּןּוּ
1	לְבַשְׁתִּי	הִתְלַבְּשְׁתִּי	לְבַשְׁתֶּם	נִשְׁבְּרֵנוּ

Future Tense

The future tense 3ms and past tense 3ms differ only in the first letter of their prefix. The 3ms then serve a model for all the other future tense forms. Notice that in the forms in which the 3rd root letter receives a vowel (2fs, 2mp, 3mp), the vowel of the second root letter shortens to a vocal sh'va.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	אֶתְלַבֵּשׁ		נִתְלַבֵּשׁ	
2nd	תִּתְלַבֵּשׁ	תִּתְלַבְּשִׁי	תִּתְלַבְּשׁוּ	תִּתְלַבְּשֶׁנָּה
3rd	יִתְלַבֵּשׁ	תִּתְלַבֵּשׁ	יִתְלַבְּשׁוּ	תִּתְלַבְּשֶׁנָּה

Present Tense

Just as the past 3ms serves as a model for the future tense, it serves as a model for present tense as well. Here the ה of the past-tense prefix is replaced by a מ which is common to the present tense of all but the simple binyanim (pa'al and nif'al).

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st, 2nd & 3rd	מִתְלַבֵּשׁ	מִתְלַבְּשֶׁת	מִתְלַבְּשִׁים	מִתְלַבְּשׁוֹת

Notice, in the forms in which the 3rd root letter receives a vowel (i.e. the plural forms), the vowel of the second root letter shortens to a vocal sh'va.

A Peculiar Feature of Hitpa'el

In roots that begin with a צ ז ס ש װ (sibilant letters), several spelling changes occur to make the words easier to pronounce. First, the ת of the prefix switches places with the initial root letter.

השתמש* → התשמש

Additionally, if the initial root letter is a ז, the ת is transformed into a ד. If the initial root letter is a צ, then the ת is transformed into a ט. These phenomena are illustrated in the past tense hitpa'el conjugation of the root צדק, below, but the same change occurs in present and future.

התצדיק* → הצדיק* → הצטיק

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	הצטיקתי		הצטיקנו	
2nd	הצטיקת	הצטיקת	הצטיקתם	הצטיקתן
3rd	הצטיק	הצטיקה	הצטיקו	

12 Binyan Nif'al - נִפְעַל

Many of the observations we will make about the nif'al will be familiar from the previous binyanim we have explored. Nif'al (as the name implies) has a characteristic ך prefix in the past and present tense. In the future tense, the ך disappears to be replaced by the normal future tense prefixes (more on that below).

We will use the root כנס as our model in nif'al. In nif'al this root means "to be brought in/to enter."

Past Tense

The past tense forms are again modeled after pa'al: the second and third root letters take the same vowels in both binyanim.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	נִכְנַסְתִּי		נִכְנַסְנוּ	
2nd	נִכְנַסְתָּ	נִכְנַסְתְּ	נִכְנַסְתֶּם	נִכְנַסְתֶּן
3rd	נִכְנַס	נִכְנַסָּה	נִכְנַסוּ	

Present Tense

Compare the past-tense 3ms form above with the ms form below. Notice that the only difference is the vowel under the second root letter. When you encounter these forms in Talmud without vowels, you will have to determine from context when the meaning is past or present. After learning the other six binyanim, the remaining forms in the present will seem very familiar.

Singular

Plural

	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st, 2nd, & 3rd	נִכְנָס	נִכְנָסֶת	נִכְנָסִים	נִכְנָסוֹת

Future Tense

In the nif'al future tense, the first root letter receives a dagesh. This dagesh is a dagesh hazak (a strong dagesh) which phonetically doubles the consonant. (It's the same kind of dagesh we encountered in pi'el, pu'al, and hitpa'el above.) Theoretically, the future tense nif'al should have the form *יִכְנָס or *יִנְשָׁמַר. A phonetic process called assimilation occurs, such that the נ "assimilates" to the first root letter producing the forms *יִכְנָס or *יִנְשָׁמַר. Finally, the doubled first root letter is represented by a single letter with a dagesh hazak, producing the forms found below.

Several letters, termed gutturals (א ה ע ה ר), will not accept a dagesh and result in irregular conjugations in the nif'al future. These irregular conjugations are beyond the scope of this workbook.

	Singular		Plural	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
1st	אֶכְנָס		נִכְנָס	
2nd	תִּכְנָס	תִּכְנָסִי	תִּכְנָסוּ	תִּכְנָסְנָה
3rd	יִכְנָס	תִּכְנָס	יִכְנָסוּ	תִּכְנָסְנָה

13 Infinitives

The types of verb forms we explored in the previous sections are called **finite verbs** because the core meaning of the verb is limited to a particular combination of person, number, and gender. However, there is an additional verb form which expresses the core meaning of the verb without being limited in this way—this form called the **infinitive**. For example the word “ran” in the sentence “He runs many races.” is a finite verb (limited to the present tense 3s), while the words “to run” in the sentence “He wants to run as many races as possible.” is an infinitive.

Like the English infinitive, the Rabbinic Hebrew¹¹ infinitive is formed by means of a proposition—in English “to,” in Hebrew לְ. The infinitive follows the form of the 2ms future. In pa’al, pi’el, and pu’al the ת prefix is simply removed and replaced with a ל. In hif’il, huf’al, and hitpa’el, before prefixing the לְ, the ת reverts to binyan’s natural ה prefix. In nif’al a ה replaces the ת, as well.

	Pa’al	Pi’el	Pu’al	Hif’il	Huf’al	Hitpa’el	Nif’al
Fut. 2ms	תִּכְתֹּב	תִּדְבֹר	תִּדְבֹר	תִּדְלִיק	תִּדְלֹק	תִּתְלַבֵּשׁ	תִּכְפֹּס
Infinitive	לִכְתֹּב	לִדְבֹר	לִדְבֹר	לִדְלִיק	לִדְלֹק	לִתְלַבֵּשׁ	לִכְפֹּס

¹¹ A note of caution: In biblical Hebrew the infinite has several uses and comes into two distinct forms. If you hear people talk about the **infinitive construct** and the **infinitive absolute**, note that they are referring to biblical grammar. The Rabbinic Hebrew infinitive carries forward one use of the Biblical infinitive construct and is formed by prefixing the preposition לְ to that earlier form.

14 Gerunds

Early on in our exploration of Hebrew grammar we learned that roots can be transformed (via the addition of affixes and vowels) into both verbs and nouns. The **gerund** is a special kind of noun which names the action of a verb. (In Hebrew the gerund is called שם הפעולה, literally “the name of an action.”) In English gerunds are “-ing” nouns like “writing,” used in the sentence, “Good writing is a lost art.” (But note, English uses the same form for the active participle as in “I spent the whole day writing.” We have already learned that Hebrew does not.) Each of the five common binyanim has corresponding gerund. The gerunds in pa'al, pi'el, and hif'il have both singular and plural forms; the hitpa'el and nif'al have singular gerunds only.

Pa'al	Pi'el	Hif'il	Hitpa'el	Nif'al
כְּתִיבָה כְּתִיבוֹת	דִּיבּוֹר דִּיבּוּרִים	הִדְלָקָה הִדְלָקוֹת	הִתְלַבְּשׁוֹת	הִיכָנְסוֹת