



The Patterns of the Qal Conjugation in Mishnaic Hebrew: Between the First Vocalized Editions and the Oral Reading Traditions

by: Ariel Gabbay



At an early stage in the history of Hebrew, as in other semitic languages, there was an orderly formal distinction between active and stative verbs:

Pa'al – active verbs

כָּתַב - he wrote (Joshua 8: 32)

זָרַק - he dashed (Exodus 24: 6)

נָתַתָּה - she gave (Judges 5: 25)

בָּחָרוּ - they chose (Genesis 6: 2)

Pa'el – stative verbs

לְבִישׁ - he was (is) dressed (psalms93: 1)

זָקַן - he was old (1 Samuel 4: 18)

כִּבְדָּה - she was heavy (Judges 20: 34)

יָבְשׁוּ - they became dry (Joel 1: 12)



Pa'ol also stated situations:

יָכַל - he could (1 Kings 5: 17)

יָכְלוּ - they could (Exodus 8: 14)

יִגְרַתִּי - I was afraid (Deuteronomy 9: 19)

compared to:

עָבַדְתִּי - I served (Genesis 29: 25)



There was also a distinction in the future forms:

Yif'ol – active verbs, **Yif'al** – stative verbs

יִרְדֹּף - he will pursue (Deuteronomy 19: 6)

יִטְרֹף - he will devour (Psalms 7: 3)

יִגְדֹּל - he will be grown up (Genesis 38: 11)

יִשְׁכַּב - he will lie (Genesis 30: 15)

However, already in B.H the formal distinction was blurred, and quite a few of the stative verbs appear in the active patterns:

Alongside with **לְבִשׁ** - he was dressed (psalms 93: 1), **וּלְבִשׁוּם** - he wore them (Leviticus 16: 4), we find: **לְבַשׁ** - he wore (Esther 6: 8)

אָהַב - he loved (Genesis 27: 14), **אָהַבְתָּהוּ** - she loved him (1 Samuel 18: 28)

But: **אָהַב** - he loved (Genesis 37: 3)

The future form of **חָפֵץ** – he wanted – is **יְחַפֵּץ** (psalms 147: 10) but also **יְחַפֵּץ** (Deuteronomy 25: 7 et al.)

The future form of **שָׁכַן** – to dwell – is always **יִשְׁכֹּן** (Numbers 23: 9 et al.)

Guttural verbs require the vowel a

stative meaning:

יִשְׂמַח - he will joy, יִפְחַד - he will fear, יִמְעַט - he will decline, יִשְׁקַע - he will sink

active meaning:

יִפְתַּח - he will open, יִשְׁחַט - he will slaughter, יִטַּע - he will taste, יִזְרַע - he will sow

Mishnaic Hebrew

What happened to the patterns **Pa'el** – **Yif'al** in Mishnaic (rabbinic) Hebrew?

in perfect - **Pa'al** has taken over all forms, while **Pa'el** has disappeared.

חס"ר - diminishing, missing, etc.

In Biblical Hebrew:

בָּד הַקֶּמַח לֹא כָלְתָה וְצִפְחַת הַשֶּׁמֶן לֹא חָסָר [The jar of meal was not spent, neither did the cruse of oil diminish (1 kings 17: 16)]

וְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה כָּלְפַלְתֶּם בַּמִּדְבָּר לֹא חָסְרוּ [Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness so that they lacked nothing (Nehemiah 9: 21)]

In Mishnaic Hebrew:

חָסַר (MS Kaufmann, MS Parma *Nega'im* 14: 10 et al.), חָסְרוּ (ibid, *Ohalot* 2: 3 et al.),
חָסְרָה (ibid, *Bekhorot* 6: 1)

Yet, **Pa'el** is common in M.H as an adjective or participle:

* **חָסַר** [if] A mikveh was measured and was found lacking (in its quantity) *Mikva'ot* 2: 2]

חִסְרָהּ? [How much can the *sela* (coin) be eroded? (*Baba Metzia* 4: 5)]

* **יָשַׁן** [An oath that I don't sleep (from now on), (*Nedarim* 2: 1)]

יָשְׁנִים [sleep (mpl) (*Tamid* 1: 1)]

* **יְבֻשִׁים** [dried fruit (*Makhshirin* 6: 3)]

יְבֻשׂוֹת [dried dates (*Tevul Yom* 3: 6)]

However, **Pa'el** may change to the dominant pattern **Po'el**, which was originally used for active verbs.

אב"ד to be lost, perish: **אָבַד** alongside with **אוֹבְדִין** (*Sanhedrin* 10: 4-5)

בט"ל to cease, idle: **בָּטַל** (*Bava Metzia* 2: 9), compared to **בוֹטֵל** (*Avot* 1: 5)

But it should be noted, that the study of the printed editions of the Mishnah shows that the number of the **Pa'el** participle forms was significantly reduced compared to the medieval manuscripts. In the manuscripts of Mishnah we find more **Pa'el** forms, examples include:

”הנר **הַדֹּלֵק** בשבת” [the lamp that is burning on Shabbat (*M.S.K Shabbat* 3: 6)]

”הַטָּהוֹר מתוך הסגר” [one who becomes pure after having been isolated (*M.S.P Nega'im* 8: 8)]

In the printed editions, we can only find: הטהור, הדולק

Future forms in M.H

Yif'ol takes over all the forms.

The meaning of the verb is no longer the most important factor in determining the pattern, but the consonant structure of the root.

Only verbs with guttural third radical show stability in their association, as a category, with **Yif'al**, as in B.H:

יִזְרַע [he will sow (*Kil'ayim* 2: 3)], **יִפְתַּח** [he will open (*Shevi'it* 3: 5)]

In other verbs, the use of **Yif'al** is in deep retreat.

A notable transition to **Yif'ol** is revealed in middle guttural verbs, in contrast to B.H:

יְרַחֵץ [he will wash (*Shevi'it* 8: 11), in B.H: **יְרַחַץ** (Leviticus 1: 9)]

תִּטְעוֹם [she will taste (*Ketubot* 7: 2), in B.H: **יִטְעֶם** (2 Samuel 19: 36)]

יְגַאֵל [he will redeem (*Arakhin* 9: 2), in B.H: **יְגַאֵל** (Leviticus 25: 33)]

יִשְׁחוֹט [He will slaughter (*Beitza* 1: 2) in B.H: **יִשְׁחַט** (Leviticus 4: 24)]

It is worth noting that in B.H, middle guttural verbs appear as **Yif'ol**, mainly in poetry:

אֶזְעַם [I will be angry (Numbers 23: 8)], **יְנַהֵם** [He will roar (Isaiah 5: 29)].


In M.H, the transition to **Yif'ol** is evident in non-guttural verbs as well:

יְלַמֹּד [he will learn (*Bava Metzia* 2: 8, in printed editions & M.S Parma)] alongside with **יְלַמֵּד** (*Bava Batra* 10: 2) as always in B.H.

יְמַתְּקוּ [They will be sweetened (*Uqtzin* 3: 4, in printed editions & M.S Parma)] in B.H: **יְמַתְּקוּ** (Proverbs 9: 17)

שִׁיקְרוּם [it will form a crust (*Shabbat* 1: 10, in printed editions & M.S Parma), compared to **וַיְקַרֵּם** (Ezekiel 37: 8)

To be clear, there are some verbs in M.H that have retained the inflection of **Yif'al** such as **יִשְׁכַּב** (he will lie), **יִלְבַּשׁ** (he will wear), **יִישָׁן** (he will sleep).




But it can be assumed that the biblical language tradition influenced the written version of M.H handed down to us, and the phenomenon of the transition to **Yif'ol** is not represented in its full extent.

It is worth noting that in the great Isaiah scroll of Qumran, additional verbs are documented as **Yif'ol** instead of **Yif'al** in the text of the Masorah:

ישכּוּבוּ [they will lie (1QIsa^a 43: 17) in M.T: יִשְׁכְּבוּ]

יחרוב [it will dry up (1QIsa^a 19: 5) in M.T: יִחַרְבּ]



Along with the transition to **Yif'ol**, another process also contributed to the disappearance of **Yif'al** from M.H:

Many of the stative verbs in the *Qal* conjugation, moved to the passive conjugations (*Nif'al & Hitpa'el*), apparently because the passive and the state are related to each other. Nevertheless, the process of transition to the passive conjugations was not completed, thus in M.H there are still stative verbs used both in the active and passive conjugations without a difference of meaning. Therefore, formal doublets were created in similar contexts.

For example טה"ר in *Qal* [to become purified].

Its future form in B.H is always: יִטְהַר (e.g. Leviticus 15: 13)

In M.H, according to MS Kaufmann (11th century), the future forms are vocalized both as *Qal* and as *Nif'al*:

יִטְהַר (*Nazir* 6: 11, 7: 2), לִיטְהַר (*Tohorot* 4: 11), vs. יִטְהַר (*Nega'im* 7: 4, 5), לִיטְהַר (*Nazir* 9: 2)

This situation of two reading alternatives also emerges from the world's first two Mishna editions printed with full vocalisation, both from the middle of the 17th century: the Amsterdam Mishnah and the Constantinople Mishnah.

In A.M, as in MSK sometimes יִטְהַר and sometimes יִטְהַר

but on the other side of Europe, according to C.M, only the *Nif'al* forms are used: יִטְהַר

Another common verb is קר"ב [to come forward, approach].

Its future form in B.H is always: **יִקְרַב** (e.g. Genesis 37: 18)

In M.H, according to MS Kaufmann, the future forms may be vocalized as *Qal* or as *Nif'al* with no difference of meaning: **יִקְרַב** (e.g. *Zevachim* 8: 2) compared to **יִקְרַב** (e.g. *Eduyot* 7: 6)

The indecision between the two alternatives is also revealed from the two 17th century Mishnah editions.

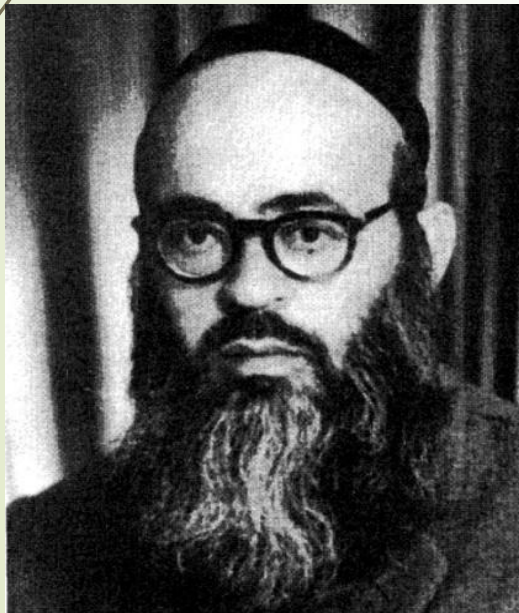
In A.M: **יִקְרַב** (ד"א, זבחים ב, ג), compared to **יִקְרַב** (ibid, 8: 2)

In C.M: **תִּקְרַב** (*Nazir* 6: 8), compared to **תִּקְרַב** (ibid, 4: 4)

Examining the recorded documentation of the oral traditions

The indecision between **Yif'al**, and **Yippa'el** is also revealed in reading traditions of M.H, recorded in the second half of the 20th century.

<https://hebrew-academy.org.il/%D7%90%D7%95%D7%A1%D7%A3-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%A1%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA/>



* In the reading of the Moroccan rabbis, the future forms of the *Qal* verbs קָרַב and טָהַר, are always in *Nif'al*: יִקְרַב, יִטְהַר

* However, in the reading tradition of Djerba (Tunisia)

we can hear the two alternatives in one paragraph in the Mishnah:

”יביא שאר קרבנותיו וְיִטְהַר... תביא שאר קרבנותיה וְתִטְהַר” [Let him bring the rest of his offerings and be purified... let her bring the rest of her offerings and be purified (*Nazir* 6: 11)]

”הראויה לחטאת תִקְרַב חטאת... לשלמים תִקְרַב שלמים” [the one that is fit for a sin offering, will be sacrificed as a sin offering... for a peace offering, will be sacrificed as a peace offering (*Nazir* 6: 8)]


* In the Yemenite reading tradition, two readings are heard as a future form of טָהַר: יִטְהַר (*Nazir* 7: 2) alongside with יִטְהַר (ibid, 6: 11), but only one reading is heard as a future form of קָרַב : יִקְרַב

The interface between writing and reading

In the discussed issue, the very deep influence of the written version of M.H on the Hebrew that was realized in reading, is clearly revealed. In most cases, the vocalisers marked the vocalization signs according to the form given in the text. It must be remembered that the text of the Mishnah is considered sacred, so it is not expected that anyone would dare to change it.

1. As we have seen, there are traditions in which the realization of the written form "יטהר" is regularly in the *Nif'al* conjugation יִטְהַר etc. (and never יִטְהַר etc.). Accordingly, we would expect to find the past form נִטְהַר. In fact, we find only the *Qal* form טָהַר, since this is the only form written in the text, which the readers could not change.

In other words, it was only because of the written version of M.H that the *Qal* form continued to exist.

- 
- 2. The alternating forms, documented in various traditions, also indicate the decisive status of the written text. It should be noted that alternating readings may occur when each of them coincides with the written form. Thus, for example, "יטהר" may be realized, in some traditions, both as *Qal* and as *Nif'al*, that is to say: יְטַהֵר or יִטְהַר.
 - However, the vocalisers did not vocalise in contradiction to the written form.
 - The interchanges יְלַמֵּד/יִלְמֹד, בְּטַל/בוֹטֵל prove that the vocalisers tried to stick to the written version of M.H, since normally we do not find forms such as יִלְמֹד, בְּטַל, יְלַמֵּד, בוֹטֵל.

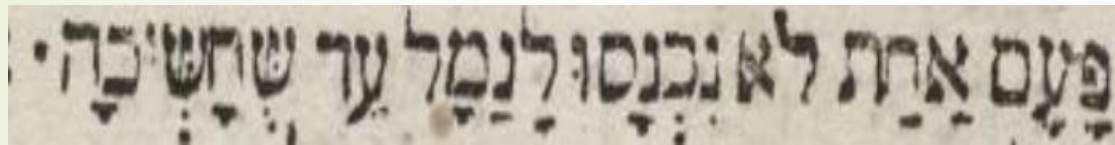
However, in some cases the vocalisers' awareness of their reading tradition stood firmly against the written form.

Here are two examples where the vocalisation probably does not fit the written form:

→  - אהוב את המלאכה **וְשָׂנְאָה** את הרבנות [love work, and hate acting the superior (A.M & C.M, *Avot* 1: 10)] instead of **וְשָׂנְאָה** as in M.S.K]

→  - שאני **שָׂכַח** [that I forget, (M.S.K *Pe'ah* 6: 11) in the printed editions: שוכח]

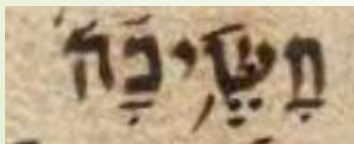
Here are two examples where the vocalisation necessarily contradicts the written form:



פַּעַם אַחַת לֹא נִכְנְסוּ לַנֶּמֶל עַד שְׁחֲשִׁיבָה -

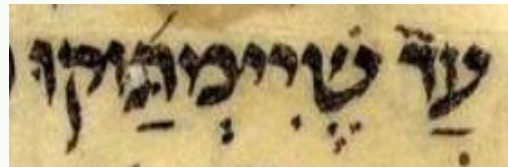
[On one occasion, they did not enter the port until after nightfall (on Friday night) (C.M. *Eruvin* 4: 2)]

In the manuscripts of the Mishnah, such as the M.S.P:

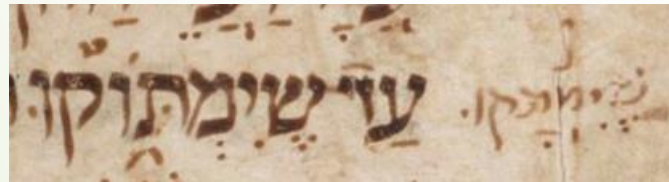


- עד שימתקו [until they will be sweetened (*Uqtzin* 3: 4)] in B.H: ימתקו
(Proverbs 9: 17)]

In M.S.K2:



In M.S.Pb:



in conclusion

- The paradigm of the patterns in *Qal* conjugation, which distinguishes between active and stative verbs, was greatly undermined in M.H.
- In the past: **Pa'el** disappeared from use, and merged with **Pa'al** (חִסַּר > חִסֵּר), apparently already at an early stage of M.H.
- In participle: **Pa'el** survived, but the comparison between the medieval manuscripts and the printed editions from the early modern period shows that even in this category, quite a few of the original **Pa'el** forms merged with **Po'el** (דִּילַק > דּוּילַק).
- In the future, **Yif'al** is gradually disappearing from M.H due to two processes:
 1. **Yif'al** > **Yif'ol** (יִלְמַד > יִלְמוּד)
 2. *Qal* > *Nif'al* (יִטְהַר > יִטְהָר)

Yet, **Yif'al** forms continued to exist, alongside **Yippa'el**, in later periods, until the very last generations (Yemen, Djerba), mainly when they coincided with the spelling.

Nevertheless, there are few cases in which the popular reading tradition prevailed over the spelling (חִשְׂיָבָה).