The Seven Benyamin

For Hebrew Verbs
In the Menorah Form

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The Seven Binyanim

The Meaning

Hebrew Verbs can be classified into any one of the seven binyanim (בניינים) Each binyan portrays a particular aspect of the shoresh (שורש) "root". The word binyan in Hebrew means "a building" or "structure". The idea is that we can build all verbs by obeying certain rules, and that Hebrew Verbs have structure. Binyan comes from the three-letter shorsh: bet-nun-hey (בנ) which is related to another shards: bet-yud-nun (בין) which means "understanding". Through structure we can understand Hebrew verbs.

An Introductory Example

Here is a classical example of one Hebrew shards is inflected throughout all seven binyanim. The root is chaf-tav-vet (כתב), which conveys an idea of writing. One may have heard of the ketuba ( כתובה) which is a "marriage contract". This is because a marriage contract is a written agreement.

1. He wrote. 
catav קותב

2. He engraved. 
cittew קותב

3. He dictated. 
hichtiv הכתיב

4. He corresponded. 
hitcattev הכתוב

5. He was dictated. 
huch'tav הכותב

6. It was engraved. 
cuttav כתוב

7. It was written. 
nich'tav כתוב

The first thing one notices is that all seven of the examples you can see the same three-letter root, but the meanings have changed. All of the examples still convey the idea of writing, but are inflected into different aspects of writing.
The 1st Binyan is called Pa'al. (פעל) It's the form of the root which conveys the simple aspect of the Shores. Such as: “he wrote a book”, or “he wrote in the sand”, or “he wrote his phone number down.” Nothing can be simpler than that. That's why the Binyan is also called Qal, which means “easy” or “light”; for this is the easier or lighter meaning of the Shores.

The 2nd Binyan is called Pi'el. (פיעל) It's the more intensified aspect of the Shores. "He engraved tablets", or "he wrote in stone", is a lot more difficult and more intensive than simply writing down something with ink. It's still the action of writing, but it's harder to do.

The 3rd Binyan is called the Hiph'il. (הפעיל) It's the causative aspect of the root. This means that the person is not doing the action himself, but causing something else to do the action. In our particular example, "he dictated" is causing someone else to write. “He dictated every word of the letter as I typed”. It also conveys the meaning of "taking control", like a dictator. Such as: "the dictator dictated the laws".

The latter three Binyanim are equivalent to the first three Binyanim, but are in the passive voice. These are appropriate for sentences like “the book was written”, “the stone was engraved”, and “the letter was dictated”.

- The 7th Binyan is equivalent to the 1st, and it's called Niph'al. (נפעל)
- The 6th Binyan is equivalent to the 2nd and is called Huph'al. (הופעל)
- The 5th Binyan is equivalent to the 3rd and is called Pu'al. (فعل)

The 4th Binyan is called Hitpa'el (התפעל) because it is both Passive and Active at the same time. This is called the reflexive/cooperative aspect. In this particular example, "corresponding" is both active and passive in the cooperative aspect. Actively “he wrote letters” and passively “received letters that were written to him”.

The names of the Binyanim come from taking the above example, and replacing the root letters with pey-ayin-lamed (ל ע פ) The root conveys the meaning of "action", "movement", or "working", which is what a verb is.

The problem with these names is that they have a silent ayin as the middle root letter, which makes it difficult to see how the verb structure works. Thus there is another way of representing the names of the Binyanim by replacing the root with kuf-tet-lamed (ל ט ק), which means “kill”:

**The Menorah Diagram**

The *Binyanim* are compared to a seven-candle Temple *menorah* (מנורה), where on one side of the candelabrum there are the active aspects, and on the other side the passive aspects. The equivalent *Binyanim* are connected by the stems of the candelabrum, forming a symmetric picture of the *Binyanim*.

![Menorah Diagram](image)

**The Truth**

The *chaf-tav-vet* (ב ת כ) example that has been presented earlier was a *Shoresh* that ideally fits all the *Binyanim*. Yet it must be noted that most *Shoreshim* don’t use all of the available *Binyanim*. A lot of *Shoreshim* can only fit into two or three *Binyanim*, and have no meaning if put in the other *Binyanim*. The average *Shoresh* can fits into four or five of the *Binyanim*.

To be completely honest, the *chaf-tav-vet* (ב ת כ) example presented above only fits into a total of six *Binyanim*. There is only theoretical meaning in the 6th *Binyan*: *kuttav* “it was engraved”. This verb form has never been used in Hebrew. It was only presented in the above example to smoothen off the understanding of how *Binyanim* theoretically work.

As well, the aspects presented in this example aren’t always consistent. Here is a chart to show you the possible aspects each *Binyan* can portray, from most likely to least likely:
1. **Pa'al / Qatal**

   1. **Simple Active**
      - He killed. קָטַל
      - He learns. לָמַד
      - He saw. רָאָה
      - He washed. רָחַץ
      - He broke. שָׁבַר
      - He wore. לָבַשׁ
      - He loved. אָהַב

   2. **Simple Intransitive Active**
      - He was lost. אָבַד
      - He was scared. כָּפַד

2. **Pi'el / Qittel**

   1. **Intensive Active**
      - He slaughtered him. קִיטֵּל אֵתֹו
      - He shattered. בֵּרַשׁי

   2. **Simple Active (No Pa'al Form Exists)**
      - He spoke Hebrew. דִיבֵר עִבְרִית

   3. **Causative Active**
      - He taught. (caused learning) לִימֵּד
      - He lost keys. (caused them to be lost) אִיבֵּד מְפָתָחות
      - He confused. (caused confusion) בִּילְבֵּל

3. **Hiph'il / Hiqtil**

   1. **Causative Active**
      - He showed. (caused seeing) הִאָרְחִה
      - He dictated. (caused writing) כְתִּיבָה
      - He destroyed. (caused utter loss) יִדְבַּד אֱלֹחֶם
      - He dressed a boy. (caused wearing) הִלְבִּישׁ ילֵד

   3. **Transformational**
      - He became white. הִלְבִּין
4. Hitpa'el / Hitqattel

1. Reflexive (One does to oneself.)
   - He killed himself. (He lost himself) הִתְאָבֵד
   - He washed himself. הִתְרָחֵץ
   - He taught himself. הִתְלָמֵּד
   - He dressed himself. הִתְלָבֵּשׁ

2. Cooperative (One does with someone else.)
   - He corresponded (with her). הִתְכָּתֵּב
   - He got married with her. הִתְחָתֵּן איתה
   - They kissed (each other). לְהִתְנַשְׁקוּ
   - Let's see each other again. לְהִתְרַאוֹת

3. Transformational (Words with "got")
   - It got broken. הִשְׁתָּבֵּר
   - He got confused. הִתְבַּלְבֵּל
   - They fell in love. הִתְּאָהֲבוּ

4. Generally Passive
   - He was covered. הִתְכָּסָה
   - He was blessed. בָּרֵךְתּוּ

5. Huph'al / Huqtal

1. Passive of Hiph'il
   - He was dressed up. שִבְּלוּ הִ
   - It was shown. הוֹרְאָה

6. Pu'al / Kuttal

1. Passive of Pi'el
   - He was educated. לוּמַּד
   - Hebrew was spoken. הָרַבָּה דָּבָרָה
7. Niph'al / Niqtal

1. Passive of Pa'al
   - He was killed. נִקְטַל
   - It seemed (It looked like). נִרְאֶה
   - It was broken. נִשְׁבַּר
   - A shirt was worn. חולצה נִלְבְּשָׁה

2. Simple Active
   - He entered. נִנְסָס
   - He met. נִפְגַשׁ
   - He remembered (suddenly). נִזְכַּר