THE *PI'EL* INDICATES COLLABORATION

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Cuurent Hebrew-language curriculums and Hebrew-grammar textbooks teach that Hebrew verbs are triliteral and acquire different nuances and meanings when conjugated in different *binyanim.*[1] Very roughly, the *qal* and *nifal binyanim* indicate the active and passive respectively, the *piel* and *pual* indicate the intensive and the passive intensive, the *hitpael* indicates the reflexive, and the *hifil* and *hofal* indicate the active and passive causative.

These rough translations, however, fail to account for all usages, and scholars continue to seek for unifying themes of each *binyan.* This paper discusses the *pi'el binyan.* The classical medieval grammar books, such as the Radak's *Sefer Shoroshim,* the Ibn Ezra's *Sefer Moznayim,* as well as earlier works such as the *Sefer Shoroshim* of Jonah Ibn Ganach, ascribe multiple uses to the *pi'el* including *intensity* (e.g. *shavar (break)* vs *shiber (shatter*)), many-ness (e.g. *kavar (burying a person) vs. mekabrim (burying many people (Nu. 34:04)),* negation (e.g. *lesharesh (to uproot)),* and causation (e.g. *lamad (to learn) vs. limad (to teach, i.e. cause others to learn);* the *pi'el* can also substitute for the *qal* and simply refer to the active, it can be used to change an intransitive verb to a transitive verb (*yavesh (dry) vs. leyabesh (to dry)),* and finally, it can apparently have no relation to the *qal* (e.g. *mahor (pay) vs. maher (hurry).*

Modern scholars are baffled by the *pi'el.* One modern grammar book summarizes as follows: "The question how the function of *piel* in relation to other conjugations, notably *qal*, should be defined still remains one of the major challenges facing Hebrew and Semitic languages".[2]

Doctoral research on the *pi'el* is still current [3]. One paper, reviewing the explanation of the *pi'el* in 10 grammar books, lists 33 meanings of the *pi'el* distributed across seven major categories;[4] another master thesis surveys seven meanings of *pi'el* across 13 grammar books and eight studies [5].

Some scholars approach the *pi'el* by elaborating on the classical meanings of *intensity* and *plurality* often ascribed to the *pi'el* by providing a classification system. For example, *plurality* can indicate many-ness in *space* (e.g. *perhaps my father will feel all over me* (Gen. 27:12)), *time* (e.g. *the way to Schem has fre-*

quent murders (Hos. 6:9)), *the performers of the activity* (the hairs of his head began to grow back (Ju. 16:22) vs. *it will sprout forth (Isa. 43:19)* referring to just one item sprouting*),* or the *recipients of the activity* (e.g. *Can you bind (tie up) all the chains of the Pleiades* (Job 38:31)). [6] Other modern scholars focus on the *intensive* meaning of the *pi'el* and offer classifications of intensity in terms of whether the entire action is repeated (e.g. *Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian continually playing (i.e. mocking) Isaac* (Gen. 18:12), or whether some part of it is repeated (e.g. *he was mourning (lit. screaming) my father my father the chariot of Israel and its riders* (2King 2:12)). [7] An important point about the examples just brought, is that they reflect the interpretations of each author; others might translate these verses differently, which would lead to different formulations of the *pi'el.*

Because this paper's suggested interpretation of the *pi'el* is nuanced, it will take the next three sections to fully define and appreciate it. The paper will then show how the suggested meaning either fits nicely or is consistent with a wide variety of biblical passages.

TWO TYPES OF CAUSATION

To introduce this paper's suggested interpretation of the *pi'el,* we first review two distinct uses of the causative. If I deposit my house keys with a friend to watch my house before going on a journey, then I have caused my friend to watch my house. Such a relationship is known in Talmudic lingo as *ha-mafkid.* The emphasis in this situation is that after depositing my keys with my friend, I walk away and am no longer involved in the act of watching which I have caused him to do.

Contrastively, consider a midwife. While it is true that she enables or causes the pregnant woman to give birth, the causation is different from that of the depositor of keys in that there is continual collaboration between the midwife and delivering woman. The midwife does not walk away and let the woman give birth; she actively collaborates with her. The *pi'el* of the biblical root *yud-lamed-daleth, to give birth,* indicates midwifery (Ex. 1:15,16). The BDB [8] in its explanation of Ex. 1:16 states "*cause (or help) to bring forth, viz. assist or tend as a midwife"* thereby confirming that the causation of the midwife is different than other causations in that it involves assistance.

It is not hard to find other examples where *assistive* or *collaborative* is a better nuanced translation than *causative.* For example, a newly-wed husband is exempted from military service so he can *collaborate* with his wife in happiness (Deut. 24:5). BDB here translates "*cause to rejoice, gladden"* and does not mention the idea of assistiveness or collaboration. But this paper argues that collaborative rejoicing is a more natural translation of Deut. 24.5.

This last example brings up the issue of proof. Traditional methods of proof such as dictionaries (e.g. BDB), grammar books, or even comparisons with other near-eastern languages assist us only partially. Throughout this paper, proof is achieved by an appeal to reasonableness. For example, it is more reasonable that a verse dealing with the happiness of a husband and newly-wed wife should be translated as *collaborative* rather than *causative.*

Sometimes, this reasonableness argument may require novelty in the biblical translation. For example, *lamad,* in the *qal*, means to *learn,* while in the *pi'el, limad,* means *to teach.* But, for example, we prefer to translate Ecc. 12:9, as *And more than Koheleth was wise, he also interactively taught the masses, interactively listened to them, interactively researched with them, and interactively established with them many witty aphorisms.* This translation prefers the idea of interacting with the masses (i.e. collaboration) rather than Koheleth sitting in an ivory academic tower and producing aphorisms. In support of this translation, we know that people frequently visited the king for assistance in personal matters (e.g. 2 Sam 14). Although it can't be proven, it is very reasonable that the King used these occasions to formulate guidance in the form of witty aphorisms that the masses could then share with each other. It would then follow that these formulations were *led* by the King but *assisted with* by the masses. This paper posits that assistiveness is the primary nuance of the *pi'el.* BDB which had suggested assistiveness with the midwives, simply translates as *teach* without further comment; we note, that teaching, in any language, can be both one-sided (lecture format) or interactive.

Also note that we have toned down the strongly *nuanced collaborative,* mentioned in the midwife passage, to a more neutral *interacted* or *assisted.* For unlike say childbirth where the midwife and delivery mother are mutually collaborative, in the king-masses situation, the king is more in a leading position, with

interactive assistance from the masses. In the next section we will explore other verses where *assistive* is a better descriptor than *collaborative* or *interactive.*

ASSISTIVE

In the following verse, *And the remnant of the cult prostitutes, which remained from the days of his father Asa, he eliminated (bi'er) from the land* (1 K22:47), the root *ba'ar* in the *qal* means to *consume* and hence in the *pi'el,* if translated causatively, would mean *to eliminate,* literally, *caused them to be consumed.* It appears from the verse that Yehoshafat did the elimination with his staff and prima facie it wouldn't make sense for the cult prostitutes to collaborate for their own destruction. But very often, when a government crackdown is more interested in elimination than prosecution, deals may be made, for example, "If you stop your practices and inform us of other nearby practices we won't prosecute you." Such a deal reflects assistiveness, where the recipients of the elimination participate in, and contribute to it.

There are other *pi'el* situations, normally translated as causative, where this type of assistance, the recipients becoming instigators of the activity, makes sense and may even be natural: (i) Thus *Saul announced (a recruitment) to the nation (to gather) for war against Amalayk* (1 Sam 15:4) would easily fit a model where those who directly heard from Saul 'passed the word on of a requirement for gathering'; (ii) the word *zamer (to make music, to sing)* occurring numerous times in the Bible in the *pi'el* would also neatly fit a model of 'singing or playing along with the leader' (Ex, 15:20-21 presents an example where song and music playing was responsive and assistive to the leader) ; (iii) *the hail shattered (shiber) all field trees* (Ex. 9:25) which is normally translated as *intensely shattered* consistent with the classical *intensive* meaning of *pi'el,* could possibly refer to a hail storm so severe, that broken trees, instead of falling to the ground, were thrown by the winds to adjacent trees, breaking them, consistent with this paper's proposed model that recipients of the action become new instigators of action.

In passing, this last example, Ex. 9:25, has troubled the academic researchers of the *pi'el.* The usual approach, as mentioned above, is to interpret the *pi'el* as *intensive,* with the corresponding English translations of *shattered* vs. *broken.* But intensiveness is rather vague and not specific. Thus, attempts are made to

concretize the intensity, for example, an intensity arising from the multiplicity of trees affected or intensity arising from repeated *breaking* of each tree leading to the translation *shattering* vs. *breaking*. The approach proposed in this article of *assistiveness* is thus a competing suggestion for interpreting intensity.

THE PROPOSED APPROACH TO THE *PI'EL*

We are now in a position to precisely define the fundamental approach of this paper as well as outline the rest of it.

> *Pi'el has a fundamental meaning of assistiveness in the sense that the recipients of an activity, themselves, become new instigators of the activity. This assistiveness can manifest itself in several ways including (i) actual collaboration (as in the case of a midwife and delivering mother both working to enable the mother to give birth), (ii) reciprocity as in a husband and wife gladdening each other, (iii) participation (as in singing along with a leader or passing on announcements directly heard), or (iv) a multiplier effect (as in the broken trees of a hail storm falling on other trees and breaking them). This assistiveness is distinct from causation where the causer of action (for example depositing an object to be watched) walks away from the activity after the causation is done.*

At this point, the paper has two possible directions. We could suffice with applying this proposed approach to situations where traditionally the causative is used and observe that the proposed approach is more nuanced and fits better. Alternatively, and actually done, we could attempt to apply this approach to other uses of the *pi'el.*

To accomplish this the following sections will study the possible applicability of assistiveness with the following usages: (i) *pi'el* involving inanimate objects or abstract ideas (e.g. *the vine makes people happy* (Ju. 9:13)*, sanctify the Sabbath, God's law gladden the heart* (Ps 19:8-10)), (ii) *pi'el* as a denominative (making a static verb transitive for example, *kabed*, *to honor*) or as *privative* (negating the meaning of a verb, for example, to *uproot* or to *disgrace* from verbs meaning *to root* and *show grace*).

ANTHROPOMORPHIC PASSAGES

The vines' anthropomorphic assertions that *it gladdens people* (Ju. 9:13), can be re-interpreted by noting that people, gladdened by wine, in turn reciprocate by composing songs, poetry, and slogans praising wine. This type of reciprocal assistance in an anthropomorphic passage would also apply to passages such as *the commandments of God gladden people* (Ps. 19:8-10) since the people in turn praise and promote those commandments; it would also apply the numerous passages where God sanctifies the Sabbath and holidays, since the Sabbath and holidays confer and share their holiness with the Jewish people. For a contrast, where the *hifil,* not the *pi'el,* is used, consider sanctifying a first born animal which simply results in the animal being offered and consumed but does not result in further reciprocal sanctifications (cf. Deut. 15:19 where the *hifil,* causative tense, is used, not the *pi'el*).

THE PERSPECTIVE PRINCIPLE

The root *shin-lamed-mem* in the *qal* is a stative verb and means to be whole, while in the *pi'el* it is a transitive denominative of making whole, *to pay.* A typical verse is *the owner of the pit shall pay* (to the person owning the animal that fell into the pit and was damaged) (Ex. 21:34). We can view this situation from two perspectives: From the perspective of the recipient of damages, he is being made whole, is having fixed the damage he incurred. But there is also the perspective of the pit owner: by paying for damages, he re-establishes a relationship with the damage recipient; the damage recipient need not avoid the pit owner knowing that accidents do happen and when they happen, he will be made whole by payment.

These two perspectives reflect two world-views of a legal system: one viewpoint is that a legal system is remedial, its job being to remedy losses; but an alternate viewpoint is that a legal system is holistic, assuring that society as a whole continues to operate despite accidents. This holistic legal perspective is fully consistent with Jewish tort law which in situations of personal damage, besides requiring payment, requires both parties to socially make up; the damager must, in addition to payment, petition for atonement and the damagee is considered cruel if he does not forgive (Rambam, *Chovel o'mazik* 5:9-10*).* The holistic perspective is also consistent with the collaborative aspect of the *pi'el:*

making whole applies to both parties, the damager and damagee who must work together to re-achieve a relationship where all parties feel comfortable in the public thoroughfare.

This perspective approach is very useful to re-explain the privative meanings of the *pi'el.* Recalling that *chesed* means *grace* we would re-translate Proverbs 25:9-10 (with parenthetical explanatory remarks placed in brackets) as follows:

> [If] *you have your dispute, disputing your friend,* [nevertheless] *don't reveal secrets of other people* [to justify your position and think you are showing grace to the person you are disputing with] [Why shouldn't you reveal secrets if it helps your dispute?] *Lest the person listening to you* [with whom you are disputing] [counter-]*shows grace to you* [by explaining the real reason for keeping the item secret] [at which point] *you can't retract what you said.*

In this passage, the underlined words [counter-] shows you grace is normally translated as *disgrace you,* the privative meaning of *grace.* But it is not necessary to create a new meaning to *chesed.* The counter-grace your friend does by telling you the real reason for the secret is an act of grace by him but an experience of disgrace for you. Thus, in this example, *chesed* in the *pi'el* refers to reciprocal action between two parties where they each attempt to assist each other.

Rather interestingly, using this perspective approach, we can explain the anomalous use of *grace* in Lev. 20:17, where incest with a sister is called *chesed.* This word is not problematic if we interpret *chesed* as a nominal form derived from the *pi'el* usage of *chesed* which we have just explained. Siblings may think they are showing grace to each other if they respond with intimacy to a difficult personal situation that unexpectedly arises; that however is the perspective of the present moment. As time evolves their prior relationship will haunt them and prevent a normal sibling relationship. Thus, the intimacy act is anthropomorphically seen as responding to their initial grace with a counter-grace that informs them that in the long run their initial grace creates more problems than solutions.

Similar comments, using the perspective approach, can be applied to other privative uses of the *pi'el.* The root *shin-resh-shin* in the *qal* means *to take root*

(e.g. Is. 27:6) and appears to mean *to uproot* in the *pi'el* (e.g. Ps. 52:7). We would re-translate Ps. 52:7 as *God will also destroy you permanently, remove you from your tent, and re-root you from the land of the living* [to the land of the dead]. Here, instead of translating the underlined passage as *uproot you from the land of the living* we instead change the perspective from where the wicked are being uprooted *from* to where they are going *to*: They are being re-routed from the land of the living to the land of the dead as indicated by the elliptical bracketed insert. Of course, a limitation of this approach is that this elliptical insert is not in the passage; but the double use of movement *from* in the passage, *remove you from your tent and uproot you from the land of the living* naturally poetically suggests an elliptical *from-to* completion to the passage. We see little value in the alternative, creating an extra meaning for a root meaning that occurs once or twice, if using the perspective method we can interpret it with its ordinary meaning.

There are many other examples of verbs that are stative in the *qal* and transitive and frequently causative in the *pi'el.* We review a few showing their relationships with assistiveness and reciprocity.

Manoach's statement, *when your word comes true we will honor you (pi'el* of the root *caph-beth-daleth* meaning honored) (Ju. 13:17), obviously, does not mean that Manoach was going to perform a one-time conferring of honor and walk away; rather, Manoach would probably create a banquet and invite the angel to participate, and it is this participation which shows reciprocity. This interpretation of reciprocity is also hinted at by the surrounding verses in the passage for the Angel, anticipating the request stated, *if you hold me over I cannot eat with you; if you offer an offering it will go totally to God* (ibid. verse 16).

Similarly, when Achashverosh raised Haman's status (Ester 3:1), the verse using *gidal* the *pi'el* of *gimel-daleth-lamed* meaning to *grow* in the active and to *raise status* in the *pi'el),* the intent of the promotion was not a one-time statement by the King of his elevated position, but rather an ongoing appointment-relationship requiring Haman to reciprocate and assist the King.

Many other verbs, stative in the *qal* and transitive in the *piel* can similarly be interpreted in terms of an ongoing relationship versus a one-time act.

We close this section with a review of the adverbial denominative, words, whose primary meaning is adverbial, which, in the *pi'el* become a transitive

verb meaning causing the adverbial state. Some examples might be *chazek,* to strengthen, or *maher,* to *quicken.* The simple idea of reciprocal and ongoing versus one-time can be used to understand the *pi'el* in these two cases. For example, when God commanded Moses to *strengthen Joshua* (Deut. 1:38), the intent was not for a one time encouragement by Moses of Joshua, but rather for an ongoing and continuing relationship, in fact a mentor-mentee relationship, not very dissimilar from the midwife – delivering mother relationship, in which Moses continually strengthened the future leader. Similarly, when Achashverosh told Haman, *Hurry take the garments and horse you just mentioned and do this to Mordechai* it was not a one-time command, but rather the King implied that he would be watching progress and expected a quick response. We can generalize these two examples by pointing out that adverbs like *strong, quick* are not objective but relative to the standards of the speaker. Therefore, *pi'el* is most appropriate to describe the relationship since both parties are involved till completion of the activity.

CONCLUSION

This article has introduced a new suggested unifying interpretation of the *pi'el, collaborative, assistive, reciprocal,* or *multiplier effect,* the common denominator indicating that *the recipient of the underlying activity is transformed into an instigator of the activity*. We have presented techniques on how to apply this nuance to passages traditionally interpreted employing a variety of alternative approaches to the *pi'el* such as causative, intense, plural, denominative, privative, and stative to transitive. We believe the idea fruitful, capable of shedding light on many passages, and a welcome new addition to the many *pi'el* interpretations that exist.

In presenting these ideas we have appealed to the reasonableness of interpretations, e.g. it simply makes more sense to say that a husband reciprocates with his newly-wed wife on being happy rather than saying he causes her to be happy.

However, in the space of an article we have not pretended that all cases of *pi'el* have been covered. Rather, we have touched on major categories and introduced techniques facilitating interpretation. It is therefore worthwhile to conclude the paper with a challenging example. The root *mem-hey-resh* means

to hurry in the *pi'el* but means *to pay* in the *qal.* Closer scrutiny shows that the *qal* only occurs in connection with marriage and the verbal form is very rare. We next suggest a possible approach.

We may suppose that the primary meaning of *mem-hey-resh* is to *hurry* and as explained in a previous section, because *hurrying* is relative to standards, it is most suitably conjugated in the *pi'el.* We would then conjecture that from *hurry* we obtained the noun *mo-har* marital dowry (there doesn't seem to be any usage of *mem-hey-resh* in the *qal* outside of marriage). It is not hard to guess the etymology: The marital dowry quickens and smoothens the marriage negotiation process by providing assets to the woman as a protection if the marriage does not work out. Thus, *mohar* from *mem-hey-resh* would be an application of hurriedness similar to other applications of *mem-hey-resh* such as the *nifal* which means foolish. RadaQ in his *Sefer Shoroshim* speculates that the *fool* is simply someone who is impetuously hurried (and hence arrives at foolish acts). We would then further conjecture that the verb *mahor yimharenah* which is conjugated in the *qal* is a denominative of *mohar,* meaning *to give a marital dowry.* In summary, we conjecture a semantic evolution starting with the meaning *hurry,* evolving to a noun form, *mohar,* marital dowry, and then evolving further to the denominative meaning giving a dowry, *yimharenah*. The establishment of such semantic evolution, however, requires tools beyond the scope of the present paper. We brought this example to show the challenges still outstanding with the paper's thesis and to show the promise of future research.

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NOTES

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