

The וָו הַהִפּוּךְ (Vav of Reversal) - Part Two

From the Desk of the Old Torah Reader

In the previous lesson, I discussed the וָו הַהִפּוּךְ when it changes the future-tense form of a verb to have a past-tense meaning. In this lesson I will discuss when it changes a past-tense form to have a future-tense meaning. Unlike in the first case, there is no universal indicator in the second case that the vav is reversing the tense—the reader may have to infer from the context what makes sense. However, there is an indicator that often does tell the reader that a reversal is to be understood. This indicator is found on verbs that follow the patterns shown by the examples:

וְאָמַרְתִּי, וְאָמַרְתָּ

(that is, first-person and second-person singular with a vav in front.) If the placement of the word's primary accent is on the last syllable rather than on the next to last, then that is a reliable indicator that the vav is reversing the tense from past to future and the examples should be understood as, “And I will say,” and, “And you will say.” Call this the general rule of this lesson. The placement of the accent can usually be determined by the location of the טַעַם, (the *trope* symbol) but not always, but that is a topic for another lesson.

Now let's see some examples: For first-person in standard usage we see in 3-12: **וְאֲנִי הִנֵּה לָקַחְתִּי אֶת־הַלְוִיִּם מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**

(And I, behold I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel)

The placement of the טַעַם on לָקַחְתִּי, by the next to last syllable, shows the accent is there, as you no doubt knew already from Hebrew school or the cradle depending on where you learned Hebrew. However, in 6-7 we

have: **וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם**

(And I will take you to Me as a people) The accent is on the last syllable, and the tense is construed as future.

Here's an example from 40-15 for second-person: G-d is telling Moses to anoint Aaron's sons just as Moses did for their father. (And you will anoint them just as you anointed their father...)

וּמִשַּׁחְתָּ אֹתָם כַּאֲשֶׁר מִשַּׁחְתָּ אֶת־אַבְיָהֶם

Notice how the first **וּמִשַּׁחְתָּ** (And you will anoint) has the accent on the last

syllable whereas the second one (you anointed) does not have the leading וְ and has the accent on the next to last syllable.

Here's an example from דְּבָרִים 16-12 that shows that the general rule is not completely general:

וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי־עַבְדְּ הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְשָׁמַרְתָּ וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה

(And you will remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you will observe and will do these statutes.)

The וְזָכַרְתָּ and the וְשָׁמַרְתָּ show the accent on the last syllable, but what happened with the וְעָשִׂיתָ? The answer is that verbs whose roots have a הָא in the third position such as עָשָׂה do not follow the general rule of this lesson and always have the accent in the next to last position. This can also be seen a few words down from the previous quotation, in דְּבָרִים 16-15:

וְהָיִיתָ אֵלֶּיךָ שֹׁמֵחַ because the root of the verb is הִיּוּ.

Next, I am going to present some complications to what I have previously said. If you're not into learning about not-too-common situations, you may skip to the last paragraph of this paper.

I have to back off a bit from the exception to the general rule I just put forward. Sometimes, verbs with הָא in the third position do follow the general rule; and this is when the verb is of the construction that puts a וְגִשׁ in the letter in the second position of the root¹. This can be seen in שְׁמוֹת 25-13: וְעָשִׂיתָ בְּיָדֶיךָ עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וְצָפִיתָ אֹתָם זָהָב (And you will make poles of acacia wood and you will overlay them with gold.) The root of צָפִיתָ is צָפָה and therefore the accent should go on the next to last syllable according to the exception, but as you see in the example, the accent is on the last syllable as the general rule would dictate.

Another exception to the general rule exists with verbs with אָלֶף in the third position as can be seen in בְּרָאשִׁית 17-19: וְקָרָאתָ אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק (... and you will call his name Isaac ...).

1. I am trying to avoid technical terms in the body of the paper. For the knowledgeable, the example shows that verbs in פָּעַל follow the general rule even though their root ends in הָא. This also seems to be true for הִפְעִיל, as we see in וַיִּקְרָא 26-9; but דְּבָרִים 28-12 seems to follow the exception..

There are other occasions in which the general rule does not hold. Consider the passage in **דְּבָרִים** 8-10: **וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ** (And you will eat, and you will be satisfied, and you will bless ...) The first and third verbs follow the general rule, but what's with the **וְשָׂבַעְתָּ**? Well, the **טַעַם** for that word, you may notice, is an **אַתְנַחְתָּא**, and that indicates a major pause; and at major pauses all sorts of changes can occur including moving the accent from its usual place; and that's what happened.

Here's another situation in which the general rule is broken. In **שְׁמוֹת** 25-12, we have **וַיִּצְקֶתָּ לּוֹ אַרְבַּע מַבְּעֵת זָהָב** (And you shall cast for it four gold rings ...) The accent of **וַיִּצְקֶתָּ** is pushed back because the word comes with little pause immediately before another word, **לוֹ**, that has the accent on its first syllable. For euphonious reasons, the two accented syllables are usually not allowed to come one after the other unless there is enough of a pause between them. This pushing back does not occur in **תִּנְּ**², with verbs like **לְקַחְתֶּם** or **לְקַחְתֶּן** (second-person plural.) They almost always³ have their accent on the last syllable—even in cases where two accented syllables would come one right after another. In general, with words ending in **תָּם** or **תֶּן** or in **כֶּם** or **כֶּן** or in **הֶם** or **הֶן**, the force for putting the accent on the last syllable overrides the force for pushing it back when two accented syllables occur next to each other.

When all is said and done, if the Torah reader just places the accent according to where the **טַעַם** indicates and is not led astray by modern Hebrew usage, then all will be well—not just with **וְהִפּוּדָה** concerns but with other matters too. The student of Torah can use the general rule of this topic to get the intended tense when it applies but still must be aware that there are exceptions and situations where one must use the context (or a translation) to determine the meaning.

2. As distinct from modern Israeli Hebrew.

3. An exception is found in **שְׁמוֹת** 19-5.