

**JOURNAL OF  
NORTHWEST SEMITIC LANGUAGES**

*JNSL*

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**VOLUME 28, No 1**

**2002**

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**THE HOF'AL IN BIBLICAL HEBREW: SIMPLE  
PASSIVES, SINGLE PASSIVES AND DOUBLE  
PASSIVES – AND REFLEXIVES?**

**ABSTRACT**

*Some hof'al verbs may be semantically related as simple passives to non-causative transitive active qal or hif'il verbs of the same root. If the hif'il is the causative of the qal or nif'al, the hof'al is a causative passive. Causative verbs have two semantic units, the causative part and the basic verbal concept. The causative part of a hif'il verb can always have a direct object. Therefore the causative equivalent of an intransitive qal verb is always transitive and can be transformed into a passive. The causative idea becomes passive, but the verbal idea stays intransitive active. This is a single passive. The causative (hif'il) equivalent of transitive qal verbs can be doubly transitive. One direct object is the complement of the causative part and the other is the complement of the verbal part. In the passive transformation the causative part may become passive while the verbal part remains active and transitive. The object of the causative part becomes the subject and the object of the verbal part remains a nominal complement. This is also a single passive. Double passives occur if both the causative and verbal parts of a hif'il verb become passive. The object of the verbal part becomes the subject of the hof'al verb while the object of the causative part is omitted or expressed by a preposition phrase. By checking all occurrences of hof'al verbs the different possibilities of simple, single and double passives are researched, as well as a few occasional reflexive possibilities.*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The title of this article suggests that there are three or four semantic uses of the hof'al verbal stem (or *binyan*)<sup>2</sup> in Biblical Hebrew, namely simple passive, single passive, double passive and probably also reflexive uses. However, in traditional grammars these four proposed theoretical possibilities of the uses of the hof'al are not examined or discussed. The hof'al verbal stem in Biblical Hebrew is usually described simply as the passive of the hif'il verbal stem.

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- 1 This article is based on a paper read at the Sixteenth International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature held at the Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland, 18-22 July 1998.
  - 2 Cf. Waltke & O'Connor (1990:351-352).

Gesenius (1976:146, §53h) only says that the hofal is primarily a passive of the hifil and sometimes equivalent to a passive of the qal, with one example of each. Joüon & Muraoka (1991:166, §57c) say: "The Hofal is the passive of the Hifil in meaning: הִקְטִיל accordingly should normally mean *he was made to kill* = *one had him kill*." Although Waltke & O'Connor (1990:447-452) provide an extensive discussion on the meaning of the hofal, they still relate most of their examples as passives of the hifil, saying: "... the *Hiphil* and *Hophal* stems stand in active : passive opposition". They differentiate between:

- hofals of qal and nifal verbs used intransitively
- hofals of qal verbs used transitively
- denominative and isolated hofals
- modal senses.

Although they do not speak of simple, single and double passives, they do have examples of these categories (according to their translations of hofal examples), e.g.:

- נִגַּד *hif.* to tell someone/something (transitive), *hof.* someone/something is told (1990:451) (simple passive)
- שׁוּב *qal* to return (intransitive), *hif.* to cause something to return (transitive), *hof.* something is caused to return (1990:449) (single passive<sup>3</sup>)
- רָאָה *qal* to see something (transitive), *hif.* to cause someone to see something (ditransitive), *hof.* someone was caused to see something (1990:451) (single passive)
- יָלַד *qal* to bear someone (transitive), *hif.* to cause someone to bear someone (ditransitive) (not: to cause someone to be born<sup>4</sup>), *hof.* someone was caused to be born (1990:447, 448) (double passive<sup>5</sup>).

Waltke & O'Connor's last example (1990:452) could perhaps be interpreted as a reflexive use of the hofal because passive imperatives are rather anomalous: וְהִשְׁכַּבְתָּ אֶת־עַרְלֶיךָ – and cause yourself to lie among the uncircumcised (Ezek. 32:19).<sup>6</sup>

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3 The causative part of the verb becomes passive, but the basic verbal concept (return) remains active.

4 Their use of partly passive translations for **hifil** verbs, e.g. cause to be born/poured, is not justified. These verbs should have been translated actively, e.g. cause (someone) to bear someone, cause (someone) to pour something.

5 Both the causative part and the basic verbal concept become passive.

6 Cf. the 1953 Afrikaans translation: *laat jou neerlê (and be laid)*.

The hypothesis of this article is that all four of the proposed hof'al uses (simple passive, single passive, double passive, reflexive) do occur in the Hebrew Bible to a greater or lesser extent. The study tests this hypothesis by checking all occurrences of hof'al verbs<sup>7</sup> in the Hebrew Bible and by classifying them according to these four categories. In other verbal stems only that meaning is given which is relevant for the hof'al. In the exposition below the numbering of homonymous roots are according to KB<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. GROUP 1: THE HOF'AL AS SIMPLE PASSIVE

The hof'al can be the **simple passive** of a non-causative transitive active verb. The object of the active verb becomes the subject of the passive hof'al verb. The active verb can be in the qal or hif'il verbal stem.

### 2.1 *The hof'al is the simple passive of the active, transitive qal*

The hof'al can be the simple passive of a transitive qal verb: the object of the active qal verb becomes the subject of the passive hof'al verb, e.g.

II מלח II: *qal* to salt something (transitive), *hof'* something is salted.

Root	Qal	Hof'al
ארר	curse s. <sup>8</sup> , inflict s. with a curse	s. is inflicted with a curse
בוס	trample s.	s. is trampled
דיש	trample, thresh s.	s. is threshed
II הגה	remove s.	s. is removed (2 Sam. 20:13) <sup>9</sup>
הפך	turn s.	s. is turned
זין	feed s.	s. is (well) fed <sup>10</sup>
I חנן	favour s. (with s.)	s. is favoured, shown compassion
חקק	hew out, inscribe s.	s. is inscribed

7 This study is based on a list of hof'al verbs provided by Verheij, author of "Grammatica Digitalis I". Also cf. Siebesma (1991:106-113).

8 The abbreviation s. is used for someone or something.

9 See Gesenius (1976:191, § 69w).

10 Cf. BDB (1979:266); Clines, Vol. III (1996:97).

I יסד	found s.	s. is founded
יצר	form s.	s. is formed
לקח	take s.	s. is taken
II מלח	salt s.	s. is salted, rubbed with salt-water
נקם	avenge s.	s. is avenged
נתן	give s.	s. is given
נתץ	tear down s.	s. is torn up
נחש	uproot s.	s. is uprooted
/ I שים	put, lay s.	s. is put, laid
שום		
שרד	devastate s.	s. is devastated
שיר	sing s.	s. is sung
שית	put, impose s.	s. is imposed

Many of the examples in this group and the next group may also be regarded as passive qal. "Much can be said for the theory on the old passive of the qal .... However, the theory cannot be proven for a full 100%" (Siebesma 1991:171)."

2.2 *The hof'al is the simple passive of the active, transitive qal and hif'il, both with the same meaning (non-causative)*

The hof'al can be the passive of a simple transitive qal or hif'il verb with basically the same meaning, e.g. דקק: qal crush s.; hif. crush fine s., hof. s. is crushed fine.

Root	Qal/Hif'il	Hof'al
דקק	qal: crush s.; hif. crush s.	s. is crushed (or 3.1.1)
I הנד	utter, mutter s., speak s.	s. is uttered, muttered (Is. 59:13) <sup>12</sup>

11 Cf. Lambdin (1991:253), Waltke & O'Connor (1990:373-376), Williams (1970:43-50).

12 See KB<sup>2</sup> (224).

יָצַק	qal: pour s.; hif. pour s., empty s.	s. is poured, emptied
כָּרַח	qal: cut off s., hif. cut off, exterminate s.	s. is cut off, exterminated
כָּתַח	qal: beat, crush s.; hif. scatter s.	s. is crushed, scattered <sup>13</sup>
נָטַח	qal: spread out s.; hif. spread out s.	s. is spread out
נָסַךְ I	qal, hif. pour out s. (as libation)	s. is poured out (as libation)
נָתַק	qal, hif. draw away s.	s. is drawn away
נָסַךְ II	qal, hif.: anoint s./oneself	s. is anointed
קָרַח	qal, hif. shave s.	s. is shaved bald

2.3 *The hof'al is the simple passive of the active, transitive hif'il (non-causative)*

Simple active verbs can appear in the hif'il without a related qal verb. If such an active hif'il verb is transitive, its root can also appear in the hof'al as a simple passive: the object of the active hif'il verb becomes the subject of the passive hof'al verb, e.g. שָׁלַךְ: *hif.* to throw something (transitive), *hof.* something is thrown.

Root	Hif'il	Hof'al
חָבַא	hide s.	s. is hidden
חָלַל I	begin s.	s. is begun <sup>14</sup>
חָרַם I	dedicate s. by the ban	s. is dedicated by the ban
טָוַל	throw s.	s. is thrown (or 5)

- 13 In this case it could be argued that the qal and hif'il have different meanings, while the hof'al expresses the passive of both meanings.
- 14 Cf. Clines, Vol. III (1996:234-235) who considers the verb חָלַל I as two homonymous roots, i.e. חָלַל I (profane) which does not occur in the hof'al, and חָלַל II (begin) which does occur in the hof'al.

I יבל	bring s.	s. is brought
cj II * ידע	set s.	s. is set, placed
יצג	leave s.	s. is left
יצע	spread out s. as bed	s. is spread out as bed
II ירה	water s. (give s. to drink)	s. is watered (s. is given to drink)
נגד	tell s.	s. is told
I נוף	wave back and forth	s. is waved back and forth
נכה	strike, beat s.	s. is beaten, struck
II עוד	warn s. (+ -ב) <sup>5</sup>	s. (+ -ב) is warned
עמם	cover s.	s. is covered, darkened
I פרר	break s.	s. is broken
I קטר	make s. to go up in smoke	s. is made to go up in smoke
ריק	pour out s.	s. is poured out
I שלך	throw s.	s. is thrown
II תלל	deceive s. (+ -ב)	s. is deceived

#### 2.4 *The hof'al is a simple passive (of no other verbal stem)*

In some cases no semantically related active verb can be supplied for the simple passive hof'al verb.

Root	Hof'al
חתל	s. is swaddled
I פזז	s. is overlaid with fine gold
II קצע	s. is made with corners
רבך	s. is mixed, stirred

15 Prepositional object (cf. Waltke & O'Connor 1990:165).

רעל II	s. is adorned, veiled
שור	s. is twisted

### 3. GROUP 2: THE HOF'AL AS SINGLE PASSIVE

Many hif'il verbs are semantically related to qal or nif'al verbs of the same root, very often as their causative counterpart. If the hif'il is the causative of the qal or nif'al, the hof'al is a causative passive. Causative verbs are semantically complex. They have two semantic units, the causative part and the basic verbal concept. The causative part of a hif'il verb can always have a direct object. Therefore the causative equivalent of an intransitive qal verb is always transitive<sup>16</sup> and can be transformed into a passive, i.e. a *single passive*.<sup>17</sup> The causative idea becomes passive, but not the verbal idea. The object of the causative part of the hif'il verb becomes the subject of the hof'al verb, e.g. עמד: qal to stand (intransitive), hif. to cause someone/something to stand (transitive), hof. someone/something is caused to stand.

#### 3.1 *The hof'al is the single passive of the causative part in the hif'il, while the verbal idea remains active and intransitive*

The causative (hif'il) equivalent of an intransitive qal or nif'al verb is transitive. The direct object is the complement of the causative part of the verb, while the verbal idea remains active and intransitive. In the hof'al the causative idea becomes the passive, and the hif'il's object becomes the subject. The verbal part stays active and intransitive. This is a single passive, e.g. יכה: nif. to be right (intransitive), hif. to cause someone to be right (reprove someone) (transitive), hof. someone is caused to be right (is reproved) (cf. Job 33:19).

##### 3.1.1 The hof'al is the single causative passive of the qal (= single passive of the hif'il)

Root	Qal	Hif'il	Hof'al
בוא	come	cause s. to come, bring s.	s. is caused to come, is brought
גלה	go into	cause s. to go into	s. is caused to go

16 Cf. Junger (1987:79).

17 According to Junger (1987:86) Hebrew actually has pseudo-passives because valency reduction of the agent of the active construction usually occurs.



	exile	exile, deport s.	into exile, is deported
דבק	stick	cause s. to stick	s. is caused to stick
דקק	be fine	cause s. to be fine	s. is caused to be fine (or 2.2)
זורח II	turn away (intr.)	(cause s. to turn away, turn s.?)	s. is caused to turn away, is alienated
חרד	be sharp, quick	(cause s. to be sharp?)	s. is caused to be sharp, is sharpened
חלה I	be ill, feel pain	cause s. to be ill (feel pain?)	s. is caused to feel pain, is wounded
חרב I	lie in ruins	cause s. to lie (lay) in ruins	s. is caused to lie in ruins, is devastated
טבע	sink (intrans.)	cause to sink, sink (trans.) <sup>18</sup>	s. is caused to sink, s. is sunk
יעף I	be weary	(cause s. to be weary?)	s. is caused to be weary, is wearied
יצא	go out	cause s. to go out, bring out s.	s. is caused to go out, is brought out
יקד	burn	(cause s. to burn, kindle s.?)	s. is caused to burn, is kindled
יקע	be dislocated	cause s. to be dislocated, hang s.	s. is caused to be dislocated, s. is hung
ירד	go down	cause s. to go down, bring down s.,	s. is caused to go down, is brought down

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18 See Clines, Vol. III (1996:341).

ישב	dwell (+ PP)	cause s. to dwell (+ PP)	s. is caused to dwell (+ PP: Is. 5:8)
	be inhabited	cause s. to be inhabited	s. is caused to be inhabited (Jer. 44:26)
כשל	stumble	cause s. to stumble	s. is caused to stumble, is overthrown
מות	die	cause s. to die, kill s.	s. is caused to die, is killed
I מלך	be king	cause s. to be king, make s. king	s. is caused to be king, is made king
נגש	come near	cause s. to come near, offer s.	s. is caused to come near, is offered
I נדד	flee	cause s. to flee, drive out s.	s. is caused to flee, banished
I נוח	rest, settle down, stay	cause s. to rest, cause s. to stay, leave s. alone	it is caused to rest (impers. vb. + PP), <sup>19</sup> s. is caused to stay, is left open
נתך	gush forth	cause s. to gush forth, melt s.	s. is caused to gush forth, is melted
סבב	turn (intr.)	cause s. to turn, turn s. (tr.)	s. is caused to turn, is turned
I סג	deviate	cause s. to deviate, displace s.	s. is caused to deviate, is pushed back
סור	turn aside	cause s. to turn aside,	s. is caused to turn

19 Cf. Frayzyngier (1982:267-290) on the "impersonal passive".

		remove s.	aside, is removed
עלה	go up	cause s. to go up, bring up s.	s. is caused to go up, is brought up
עמד	stand	cause s. to stand, set s.	s. is caused to stand, is set
פנה	turn (intr.)	cause s. to turn, turn s.	s. is caused to turn, is pushed back
קום	rise	cause s. to rise, erect s.	s. is caused to rise, is erected
רום	be high	cause s. to be high, exalt s.	s. is caused to be high, is exalted
שוב	go back	cause s. to go back, bring back s.	s. is caused to go back, is brought back
שכב	lie down	cause s. to lie down, lay s.	s. is caused to lie down, is laid (or 5)
שלם	be at peace	cause s. to be at peace	s. is caused to be at peace
שמם	be desolated	cause s. to be desolated	s. is caused to be desolated

3.1.2 The hof'al is the single causative passive of the nif'al (= single passive of the hif'il)

In these cases the hif'il seems to be the causative of the nif'al, and the hof'al the passive of the hif'il.<sup>20</sup> The resultative meaning of the hof'al quite often converges with that of the nif'al.

Root	Nif'al	Hif'il	Hof'al
יכח	be right	cause s. to be right, reprove s.	s. is caused to be right, is reproved

20 Cf. Siebesma (1991:152-164).

כּוּן	stand firm	cause s. to stand firm, establish s.	s. is caused to stand firm, is established
כָּלַם	be ashamed	cause s. to be ashamed, shame s.	s. is caused to be ashamed, is ashamed
נָגַר	flow	cause s. to flow, pour out s.	s. is caused to flow, is poured out
נִדַּח I	go astray	cause s. to go (lead) astray	s. is caused to go astray, is scared away
נָצַב I	stand	cause s. to stand, set up s.	s. is caused to stand, is set up
נָצַל	be saved	cause s. to be saved, snatch s.	s. is caused to be saved, is snatched away
רַעַל I (c.j.)	be shaken, stagger		s. is caused to stagger, is shaken (or 5)
שָׁחַת	be spoiled	cause s. to be spoiled, spoil s.	s. is caused to be spoiled, is damaged

One hof'al verb apparently has an active meaning. This may be due to a resultative translation in the English and German languages, in which case this verb should rather be categorised as a passive. However, a more precise classification is prevented by the fact that this root does not occur in any other verbal stem.

Root Hof'al

צָהַב (s. is caused to be gleaming red?) > s. is gleaming red

3.2 *The hof'al is the single passive of the causative part in the hif'il, while the verbal idea remains active and transitive*

The causative equivalent of transitive qal verbs can be doubly transitive. One direct object is the complement of the causative part and the other is the complement of the verbal part. In the hof'al the causative idea can become the passive, and its object then becomes the subject (cf. Lambdin, 1980:244). The verbal part stays active and retains its object. This is also a single passive, e.g. נחל: qal to inherit something (transitive), hif. to cause someone to inherit something (ditransitive), hof. someone is caused to inherit something (cf. Job 7:3).

Root	Qal	Hif'il	Hof'al
אָחַז	grasp s1 (+ dir. obj./ -בְּ)	(cause s2 to grasp s1?)	s2 is caused to grasp s1, s2 is fastened to s1 (+ -לְ) <sup>21</sup>
נָחַל	inherit s1	cause s2 to inherit s1	s2 is caused to inherit s1
פָּקַד	care for s1	cause s2 to care for s1, appoint s2 over s1 (2 objects) <sup>22</sup>	s2 is caused to care for s1, s2 is appointed over s1 (obj.) <sup>23</sup>
רָאָה	see s1	cause s2 to see s1	s2 is caused to see s1 (or 3.3)
רָוַה	drink one's fill with s1 <sup>25</sup>	cause s2 to drink his fill with s1, <sup>24</sup> water s2 thoroughly with s1	s2 is caused to drink his fill, s2 is watered deeply (with s1)

21 Cf. Waltke & O'Connor (1990:165, 210, 198-199) regarding the prepositional object.

22 Cf. Jer. 41:10.

23 Cf. 2 Kings 22:9.

24 Cf. Is. 55:10.

25 Cf. Prov. 7:18.

3.3 *Mixed types*

The object of the verbal part in the hif'il can even become the subject of the causative idea in the passive, e.g.  $\text{ראַה}$ : *qal* to see something (transitive), *hif.* to cause someone to see something, show someone something (ditransitive), *hof.* something is shown (to) someone. Compare Lev. 13:49:  $\text{וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־הַכֹּהֵן}$  – "and it shall be shown to the priest", literally "and it will be caused the priest to see" (*hif.* to cause the priest to see it).

Root	Qal	Hif'il	Hof'al
$\text{ראַה}$	see s1	cause s2 to see s1	s1 is caused s2 to see
			(or 3.2)
			something is shown
			(to) someone <sup>26</sup>

In the next example the direct object of the transitive verbal idea of the *qal* is not expressed in the *hif'il* and *hof'al*. The direct object of the causative idea becomes the subject of the *hof'al*:

Root	Qal	Hif'il	Hof'al
$\text{שָׁבַר}$	break s1	cause (s2) to break	s2 is caused to
	(3.2)	through	break, is broken
		(3.1.1)	(3.1.1)

4. *GROUP 3: THE HOF'AL AS DOUBLE PASSIVE*

There are also *double passives* in the *hof'al* where both the causative and verbal ideas of the *hif'il* become passive. The object of the verbal idea in the active becomes the subject of both the causative and verbal ideas in the passive transformation, and the object of the causative idea is often omitted, e.g.  $\text{יָדַע}$ : *qal* to know something, *hif.* to cause someone to know something, *hof.* something is caused to be known.<sup>27</sup>

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26 The *hof'al* is the passive of the causative part in the *hif'il*, while the verbal idea remains transitive, but the object of the verbal part in the *hif'il* becomes the subject of the passive causative idea, while the object of the causative part in the *hif'il* remains a complement of the new lexeme "be shown".

27 According to Junger (1987:92-95) double reduction of the valency of the verb occurs in this case: both the causer and causee are reduced.

#### 4.1 *The hof'al is the double causative passive of the qal*

Both the causative and verbal parts of the hif'il become passive, the object of the causative part in the hif'il is often omitted (or expressed by a preposition phrase), and the object of the verbal part in the hif'il becomes the subject of the double passive, e.g. בקע: *qal* to breach something, *hif.* to cause (someone) to breach something, *hof.* something is caused to be breached (cf. Waltke & O'Connor 1990:448).

Root	Qal	Hif'il	Hof'al
בקע	split, breach s1	cause (s2) to breach s1, storm s1	s1 is caused to be breached, is stormed
ידע I	know s1	cause s2 to know s1	s1 is caused to be known, is made known (to s2: + ידע / לדעת).
ילד	bring forth s1	cause (s2) to bring forth s1	s1 is caused to be brought forth, is born
יעד	designate s1	cause (s2) to designate s1, summon s1	s1 is caused to be designated, is ordered, directed
פדה	ransom s1	cause (s2) to ransom s1	s1 is caused to be ransomed

#### 4.2 *Mixed type*

Although the verbal idea in the qal and hif'il is intransitive, the hof'al is a double passive.

Root	Qal	Hif'il	Hof'al
חיל I	be in labor, tremble (3.1.1)	cause s2 to tremble (3.1.1)	s1 is caused to be born, is born (4.1) <sup>28</sup>

28 The hof'al seems to be the passive of the polel (bring forth in labour pains/bring to birth - be brought forth by labour pains/be brought to birth), while the polal seems to be the passive of the hif'il (be brought to trembling).

## 5. GROUP 4: THE HOF'AL AS REFLEXIVE

Because the hif'il does not have a *reflexive* counterpart like the hitpa'el of the pi'el, it could theoretically be possible that the hof'al is also used for this function (just like the nif'al which serves as the passive-reflexive of the qal), e.g. עבד: *qal* to work, *hif.* to cause someone to work, *hof.* to allow oneself to be brought to serve (Holladay 1993:262), i.e. to cause yourself to serve. If this use does occur, it is very rare, and therefore usually not discussed in grammars.<sup>29</sup> The nif'al and the hitpa'el usually function as the reflexive of the hif'il.

Root	Qal	Hif'il	Hof'al
טול	-	throw	throw oneself down (or 2.3) <sup>30</sup>
מכך	sink, go down	(cause s. to go down?)	cause oneself to go down, <sup>31</sup> humble oneself.
עבד	serve, worship s1	cause s2 to serve s1 <sup>32</sup>	cause/allow oneself to serve s1 <sup>33</sup>
רעל I	cj. nif. stagger	(cause s. to stagger?)	cause oneself to stagger, shudder <sup>34</sup> (or 3.1.2)
שכב	lie down	cause s. to lie down	cause oneself to lie to lie down <sup>35</sup> (or 3.1.1)

29 Cf. Bauer & Leander (1962:333, § 46k<sup>1</sup>).

30 Cf. Clines, Vol. III (1996:361).

31 KB<sup>3</sup> (549): "sich ducken"; BDB (1979:568): to be brought low (passive).

32 Cf. Jer. 15:14 (read with pc Mss): יִהְיֶה עַבְדִּי אֶתְּוֹאֲבֵיךָ.

33 "allow onself. to be brought, enticed to serve, worship (a person, god)" (Holladay 1993:262).

34 "schütteln sich" (bestir themselves) (KB<sup>3</sup>: 1181).

35 "sich betten" (KB<sup>3</sup>: 1379), "be laid (down)" (Holladay, 1993:368).



## 6. CONCLUSION

It is not sufficient to describe the use of the hofal verbal stem in Biblical Hebrew simply as the passive of the hif'il (or other verbal stems). The hofal is used to express a wide range of semantic concepts, varying from very simple to very complex values.

To summarise, the hofal verbal stem is used as:

- a **simple passive** of active, transitive, non-causative qal and hif'il verbs (or without a related active stem)
- a **single passive** of the causative part of hif'il verbs where the verbal component remains either intransitive active or transitive active
- a **double passive** of both the causative and verbal components of hif'il verbs
- a **causative-reflexive** verbal stem (reflexive of causative hif'il)
- and, maybe, even as a **resultative-active** (or virtual active) verbal stem.

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