ROOTS: GRAMMAR

Roots are the basic morphemes\(^1\) for forming words in Aramaic and Hebrew. This is a unique feature of Semitic languages: most roots consist of three consonants and the idea of the root is modified through prefixes, infixes, or suffixes.

The simplest form of the verb is the *P'al* 3rd person masculine singular in the perfect tense.\(^2\) This simple form generally preserves the root. We follow Sokoloff in our practice on this website, and list the root without vowels \(^3\). While you are reading this, you may want to print out the following two pages from Dictionary > Vocabulary: MFW Roots, and Roots and Cognates. Start with the MFW Roots page. So:

אמר

is a root meaning "say, speak".

The verb in the *P'al* 3rd m.s. perfect tense is: 

ינאשה אלוהיה אמר לה

From the root, the Zohar uses the following nouns [see Roots and Cognates]:

*with the prefix* - מ-

מיאמר - saying I.16b

מימפר - command, word\(^4\) II.78a

*with the infix* - כ-

אמרה - utterance I.16b

*with the suffix* - נ-:

אמר - Temple I.2a

Kiddush, sanctification I.5b קדושה - holiness I.14b

קדש - holy, Sanctuary III.73b

*with the infix* - ר- - כ-

קדש - holy, holiness I.13b

*with the suffix* - נ-:


1. A morpheme is the smallest grammatical unit in a language.
2. This is also the form i.e., the perfect 3rd m.s. that is listed in Aramaic dictionaries such as Jasnow and in Modern Hebrew dictionaries such as the Megiddo. The *P'al* is explained under the Verbs Grammar section of this website.
3. See "MFW Verb Roots" under the Dictionary > Vocabulary section.
4. Where did the נ of the root go? It was assimilated; see our Verbs Grammar section.
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And here are the adjectives:

- with the infix יָ- :
  קָדוֹשׁ - holy l.5b
- with the infix יָי- :
  קָדָשִי - holy, sacred l.1b

Not all roots have a corresponding noun in the Zohar; for example, we have not yet found any nouns formed from the roots בָּאְלָה go, walk, בָּאָה go, come, הָמֵי see, or נָהַט descend, go down.

Similarly, not all roots have a corresponding verb in the Zohar. The root עָלִי [rise, increase value] is an example: though its verbal form is so far in our research lacking, the Zohar uses a noun, adverbs, and adjectives which are all formed from the root.

Here is a noun:

- with the suffix יָי-
  עִילָה - loft l.33a

The adverbs:

- with the prefix י- :
  עֵילִי - from above l.2a
  מַעֲילֵי - from above l.11a
- with the infix יי- :
  עֵילָה - beyond, above l.6a
  מַעֲילָה - high, supernal l.4a

The adjectives:

- with the prefix י- :
  עֵילִי - m. best l.13b
  מַעֲילָה - f. sublime l.211b [Marg.]

- with the infix יי- : sort of...; the second root letter has a dot, the dagesh, to show assimilation of the yod
  עֵילָה - upper pl. l.13a
  מַעֲילָה - high, supernal l.6b

5. Question: what is the infix?