A DESCRIPTION OF THE SEMANTIC FIELD
OF HEBREW WORDS FOR "HIDE"

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The purpose of this article is to present a basic description of the
semantic field of Hebrew words for "hide". To this end the presenta-
tion will be divided into four areas: 1) the general semantic field of
"hide" words; 2) the use of these words in the particular context
of hiding in relation to God; 3) the use of "hide"-related words,
particularly so far as these words function in contexts semantically
related to the context of hiding with reference to God; and 4) the
syntagmatic relations of the phrase str + pnym.

1. The General Semantic Field of "Hide" Words

The major Hebrew verbal roots which constitute the semantic
field of the Old Testament "hide" vocabulary are str, bbl/bbl', spn,
khd, tmn and 'lm. Statistically str is the most frequent of these words,
occurring some 81 times, and 'lm is the least frequent with 28 occur-
cences. Since statistics such as these are readily obtainable from any
good lexicon, it will be of more help in the present study to set forth
the frequency of these words in relation to the various semantic
categories in which they occur. At least three such categories may be
discerned: 1) hiding with reference to God; 2) hiding with reference
to man; and 3) hiding with reference to inanimate objects.

The categories "hiding with reference to God" and "hiding with
reference to man" may be further subdivided along the following
lines. Within the former, "hide" words may be classified on the
basis of whether 1) God is the logical subject of the verb, e.g. God
hides someone, something, or himself; 2) some object, e.g. counsel
or guilt, or some person is hidden from God; or 3) something of God
is hidden, e.g. his works, or his commands. The latter category,
"hiding with reference to man", may be further divided into areas
which have reference to 1) a person hiding himself or being hidden;
or 2) a person hiding something, e.g. another person, information, or an object.

At the outset it must be said that these categories are set forth only as a guideline to the major contexts in which these words occur. By no means do they exhaust the possibilities. They do however help to mark off the semantic opposition between these words with some degree of precision, provided the criteria for assigning one word to one category are carefully explained. In several cases it will be observed that words might easily be assigned to more than one category. For example, a passage such as Amos ix 3, in which the unjust are described as hiding themselves from God's sight, might be justifiably listed among examples either of persons hidden from God, or of people hiding themselves. In the present study a passage of this sort will normally be included among the examples of “hiding with reference to God”. Similarly a passage such as Job vi 10, in which Job declares that he has not hidden the words of the holy one, will also be included among the “hiding/God” passages even though it clearly describes a person hiding something. As a basic guideline for determining the classification of ambiguous passages such as these, it may be generally assumed that all passages which attribute a hiding by, in, with, of, or from God, either directly or indirectly, will be treated as “hiding/God” passages. In other words a firm distinction will be made between the hiding that involves God and the hiding that occurs on a purely human level, e.g. a person hiding himself or something from another person (as opposed to “from God”).

Within the framework of these qualifications, Table 1 sets forth the relative proportions of the “hide” vocabulary within the three semantic categories designated above.

From this table, it can be seen that all six of the “hide” words under discussion occur at least once in each of the three designated categories. The frequency with which they occur in these categories however varies considerably from word to word. str, for example, occurs in the “hiding/God” category some 48 times while tmn occurs only once, a relative proportion of 59% of the total str occurrences compared to 3% of the tmn occurrences. Moreover, the frequency of occurrences varies not only between one word and another within the same category, but also between one word and another in different categories. For example, in 59% of its total occurrences str occurs in the “hiding/God” category as compared to 13% for hhh/ht. In