

HEBREW ALPHABET



A.	Name	Sound	Letter	Name	Sound	Letter
	lamed	l	ל	alef	silent	א
	mem	m	מ ם	bet	b	ב
	nun	n	נ ן	(vet)	v	ו
	sameḥ	s	ס	gimel	g	ג
	ayin	silent	ע	dalet	d	ד
	peh	p	פ	heh	h	ה
	(feh)	f	ף פ	vav	v	ו
	tsadeh	ts	צ ץ	zayin	z	ז
	qof	q	ק	ḥet	ḥ	ח
	resh	r	ר	tet	t	ט
	shin	sh	ש	yod	y	י
	(sin)	s	ש	khof	k	ך
	tav	t	ת	(ḥof)	ḥ	ח

Modern Hebrew equivalents are shown for the consonants. This will be true for the vowels as well. This is by far the simplest system for Hebrew pronunciation. Note the following:

א and ע once throat sounds, are treated as silent letters by most modern speakers.

ג and ך have the sound of “g” as in “gum.”

ו now pronounced with a “v” sound, was originally pronounced as a “w” (the letter name is often written as “waw”).

ח and ך are both a throaty “h” sound—like the “ch” in the Scottish word Loch. This sound will be designated by “ḥ.”

ט ת and ך are all simple “t” sounds.

ס and ש are both “s” sounds.

צ is most closely approximated in English by the sound of “ts” as in **hits**.

ק has a hard “q” sound close to “k,” never the sound of our “qu.”

ש ש In some Biblical Hebrew dictionaries ש is listed before ש but in concordances (and in modern Hebrew) the two are often treated as the same letter or else ש precedes ש

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Hebrew is read from right to left; books (such as the Bible) begin at the “back.” Note that some letters have two forms. The second is called the **final form**, as it is used only at the end of a word. The first form is used at the beginning and middle of a word. Locate both forms of each letter in the examples below:

tsadeh	צדק	peh	פנים	nun	נפל	mem	מה	khof	פל
	ארץ		כסף		בן		שם		מלך

VOWEL POINTS

Full Vowels

B.	Name	Sign	Sound	Class
	qamats	ֿ	a (father)	A
	pataḥ	ֿ	a (father)	A
	segol	ֿ	eh (set)	I/A
	tsere (plene)	ֿ	ei (sleigh)	I
	tsere (defectiva)	ֿ	ei/eh (sleigh or set)	I
	ḥireq (plene)	ֿ	i (machine)	I
	ḥireq (defectiva)	ֿ	i/ih (machine or hit)	I
	shureq	ֿ	u (flute)	U
	qibbuts	ֿ	u (flute)	U
	ḥolem(plene)	ֿ	o (hope)	U
	ḥolem (defectiva)	ֿ	o (hope)	U
	qamats ḥatuf	ֿ	o (hold)	U

Shewa and Composite Shewas

simple shewa	ֿ	no sound	silent
simple shewa	ֿ	slight sound (McCoy)	vocal
composite pataḥ	ֿ	a (around)	A
composite segol	ֿ	eh (effect)	I/A
composite qamats	ֿ	o (olfactory)	U

Note the following:

More than one vowel may have the same sound, e.g.: shureq ֿ and qibbuts ֿ are both heard as “u” in **flute**.

Qamats and qamats ḥatuf are represented by the same symbol but are pronounced differently. Their distinguishing characteristics are discussed in Lesson 6.

Two common marks that affect pronunciation are **maqfep** ^{לְ} which means that the word(s) before it are not accented, and **meteg** _ֿ which indicates an open syllable. The following words show the Hebrew pointing (vowel) system.

meteg ↓ _ֿ is open syllable

יְרֵדָה
נָאֵם

חָלִי

יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֱלֹהִים

maqfep ↓ ^{לְ} is unaccented

אָב
בְּנֵי

כָּל־
הוֹלֵךְ

אֲשֶׁר
וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ

- D. Where no vowel sound was heard, the shewa ְ was used. Either it has no sound (**silent shewa**) or a very slight sound (**vocal shewa**) to link the consonants together.

A shewa is heard as a slight “uh” sound (vocal shewa) when:

1. It is under the first consonant in a word

דְּ | בְּ | רִים
↑ vocal shewa

2. It is the second shewa in a row

עוֹ | מְ | שִׁ | יִ
vocal shewa ↑ ↑ silent shewa

3. It follows a long vowel

דָּם | אֵ | לִ | וֹ
vocal shewa ↑ ↑ long vowel

4. It is under a letter that is followed by the same letter

יְבַרְכֶּךָ *he will bless you*
כְּ | כְּ
↑ vocal shewa

5. It is under a letter with dagesh forte¹

מִיִּלְדוֹת *midwives*
דָּגֶשׁ פֹּרְטֵ | וֹ
dagesh forte ↑ vocal shewa

6. Composite shewas ֶֿ ֵֿ ִֿ are, by definition, vocal. They are used under gutturals and sometimes ך when a vocal shewa is needed. (See items 1–5 above.)

- E. Aside from the vowel signs, another mark was used to indicate more precisely how certain consonants were pronounced. This mark, called a **dagesh**, is simply a dot in the center of a letter. The dagesh was also used in certain grammatical constructions you will learn, and so can be found in most letters. In some letters it always indicates different pronunciation as well:

With Dagesh		Without Dagesh	
b	בּ	v	ב
p	פּ	f	פ
k	כּ	h	כ

Three other letters ג ד ל were distinguished by different pronunciation when a dagesh appeared in them, but these distinctions are no longer made in modern Hebrew pronunciation, in which

1. Dagesh forte is addressed in Lesson 1. If a shewa makes a dagesh forte disappear (addressed in Lesson 2), is the shewa still vocal? This is a matter about which grammarians argue.

VOCALIZATION


these letters have only one sound each. We will follow this practice in pronunciation, but the dagesh will still be written in these three letters. These six consonants **ב ג ד כ פ ת** are known as the **BeGaDKePHaT** letters.

Some letters do not take dagesh. These are the **gutturals** **ע ה ח א** and the letter **ק**

- F. Some letters become **quiescent**; that is, they drop out of pronunciation altogether. This happens if a silent letter would have a simple shewa $\underset{\cdot}{\text{ְ}}$ under it. In these cases, the consonant is written (remember, it is part of the sacred text), but the shewa is not:

וִיאָמַר
consonant, no shewa ↑

Assignments

- A. Using the textbook and  **ב א** tracks 2–3, memorize the alphabet and learn to recognize and pronounce the vowels.
- B. Practice reading out loud using the Proper Names and Places Reading Exercise (Reading and Writing G).
- C. Learn to write either block or script as your teacher wishes. Both styles are demonstrated in the Writing Exercises (Reading and Writing H).
- D. Throughout the course, use the Supplement to review, reinforce, and test what you have learned. References to sections in the Supplement will be designated by an **S** followed by the corresponding lesson reference in the textbook. Some discussions in the Supplement—those designated by a **S**—deal with material that may be more advanced or go into more detail than appeals to many beginners. Those sections may be skipped and returned to at a later stage of study.

G. PROPER NAMES AND PLACES READING EXERCISE

D	C	B	A	
דָּן	רוּת	שָׂרָה	אָדָם	1
דִּינָה	גֹּד	מֹשֶׁה	לוֹט	2
יוֹסֵף	לֵאָה	רַחֵל	יַעֲקֹב	3
יְהוּדָה	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אָשֶׁר	לֵוִי	4
רְאוּבֵן	רַבֶּקָה	עֵשׂוֹ	יַעֲקֹב	5
בְּנִימִין	אֶחָדָן	אֶפְרָיִם	זְבֻלוֹן	6
גְּדֵעוֹן	דְּנָאֵל	יִשְׁמָעֵאל	הַגֵּר	7
שְׂמוּאֵל	הֶבֶל	קַיִן	דָּוִד	8
צִיּוֹן	מָרִים	שָׂאוּל	עֵדָן	9
אֶלְיָהוּ	יוֹנָה	דְּבָרָה	חָנָה	10
בְּרָמֶל	בַּעַז	לְבָנוֹן	בָּבֶל	11
עָמוֹס	בְּנַעַן	סִינִי	יְרִיחוֹ	12
יְהוֹנָתָן	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	מְנַשֶּׁה	בֵּית לָחֶם	13
שְׂמֻשׁוֹן	דְּלִילָה	מִלְכִּי-צְדָק	נִינּוּה	14
זְבֻרְיָהוּ	חֲבֻקּוֹק	גְּלִית	בְּלָעַם	15
מִצְרַיִם	אֲבִשָׁלַם	אִיזָבֵל	אֲבִיגַיִל	16
Egypt				
נְחֻמְיָה	עֲזָרָא	מְרִדְחִי	אֶסְתֵּר	17

ל ל

ם ם

מ מ

ן ן

נ נ

ס ס

ע ע

ף ף

פ פ

ץ ץ

צ צ

ק ק

ר ר

ש ש

ת ת

H. BLOCK AND SCRIPT WRITING EXERCISE

Block Writing

Handwritten cursive letter 'z' followed by its block writing counterpart.

Handwritten cursive letter 'b' followed by its block writing counterpart.

Handwritten cursive letter 'd' followed by its block writing counterpart.

Handwritten cursive letter 't' followed by its block writing counterpart.

Handwritten cursive letter 'h' followed by its block writing counterpart.

Handwritten cursive letter 'r' followed by its block writing counterpart.

Handwritten cursive letter 'l' followed by its block writing counterpart.

Handwritten cursive letter 'm' followed by its block writing counterpart.

Handwritten cursive letter 'n' followed by its block writing counterpart.

Handwritten cursive letter 'y' followed by its block writing counterpart.

Handwritten cursive letter 'g' followed by its block writing counterpart.

ל ל ל

מ מ מ נ נ נ

ן ן ן ן ן ן

ס ס ס

ט ט ט

ך ך ך ך ך ך

ץ ץ ץ ץ ץ ץ

ק ק ק

ר ר ר

ש ש ש

ת ת ת

Script Writing

ע ע ז

ו ו פ

צ צ ג

ז ז ד

ה ה ח

ו ו י

ל ל י

ח ח ט

ט ט י

י י

ק ק ד ו ו פ