

Voicing Hebrew

How To Say Its Letters And Words

by Michael Kupferschmid

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ה"ב

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1

Introduction

Congratulations! If you're reading these words you have decided to study Hebrew, or at least to consider giving it a try. Learning a new language is never easy, but I hope to convince you that getting started with this one is not as hard as you might have thought.

1.1 Voicing and Reading

In this book to *voice* Hebrew is to pronounce words that are written using the Hebrew alphabet. To *read* Hebrew is to understand the words as you voice them. You can voice Hebrew without knowing what you are saying, so learning to voice is typically undertaken as a separate first step in learning how to read Hebrew. This little book is about only that first step. It explains the consonants and vowel points that make up the Hebrew alphabet, and the rules for saying words that are written using them. After you have learned how to voice you will be ready to study a bigger book such as [5], [4], [7], or [3], to learn what the words mean and how to put them together.

1.2 Transliteration and Translation

The *transliteration* of a Hebrew word is a string of Roman characters whose pronunciation approximates the sound of the Hebrew. Transliterations are helpful in learning the rules of pronunciation, but they are never perfectly accurate and most people do not find them a suitable alternative to knowing how to voice words that are written using Hebrew letters.

The *translation* of a Hebrew word is an English word whose meaning approximates the meaning of the Hebrew. Many Hebrew words have various nuances of meaning, which can be learned only by seeing the word used in a wide variety of contexts. Translations are helpful in learning Hebrew vocabulary, but most people who are familiar enough with a Hebrew text to know the subtleties of meaning conveyed by its words will find every translation annoyingly imprecise [17, p xv]. The examples in this book incidentally include naïve translations, but it is *not* a goal of the book to teach you vocabulary.

1.3 Ashkenazic and Sephardic

This book teaches only the *Sephardic* or Israeli pronunciation of Hebrew. If you already know some Hebrew from attending classes or synagogue services, the pronunciation you learned

might have been *Ashkenazic*. The more traditional your congregation is, the more likely its teachers and prayer leaders are to be Jews whose ancestors spoke Yiddish in Eastern Europe. In the Hebrew of that culture the taf consonant ט is sometimes pronounced like **s** rather than like **t**, and the chiriq vowel ך always sounds like **ee** rather than sometimes like **ih**. If you have been listening to the Ashkenazic pronunciation for a long time you might think at first that the Sephardic pronunciation is just wrong, but the two ways are equally correct.

1.4 About Hebrew

Hebrew, like English, is an alphabet language, in which consonants and vowels are combined to make words and words are combined to make sentences. But the languages sound different when they are spoken and look different when they are written.

- Residents of Maine and Mississippi sometimes pronounce English in ways so different that they can't understand each other. People who live in different places or who have different cultural backgrounds also pronounce Hebrew differently, and infrequently they too have trouble understanding each other. As mentioned above, this book teaches the Sephardic pronunciation.
- How a letter of the English alphabet is pronounced depends on the word in which it appears. For example, the **o** in **women** sounds different from the **o** in **open**. A Hebrew consonant or vowel almost always has the same sound no matter where it appears. That is why it is possible to correctly sound-out a Hebrew word without recognizing it or knowing its meaning [17, p xv].
- English and Hebrew each use some sounds that are not in the other language. Hebrew has 5 guttural letters, two of which are pronounced in the back of the throat.
- English is written from left to right; Hebrew is written from right to left, both letters within words and words within sentences.
- English letters can be capital or lower case; Hebrew letters have only one case.
- A capital or lower-case English letter is always written the same way. Five of the Hebrew letters are written differently when they are the last letter in a word.
- The English alphabet has 21 consonants **bcdfghjklmnpqrstvwxyz** and 5 vowels **aeiou**. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 consonants **אבגדהוזחטיכמנפעצקרשת**, and vowels that are symbols printed over or under the consonants. There are web sites [21] [22] that discuss the consonants and vowel points in great detail, but the next two Chapters will tell you enough to read the siddur and Tanakh.

1.5 About This Book

I wrote this book for my students in the course “Reading Classical Hebrew” because I teach the consonants, vowel points, and pronunciation of words in a way that differs from their treatment in our otherwise excellent required text [5].

1.5.1 Pedagogical Approach

Like [5] (and many other books including [12], [8] [9], [10], [11], and [14]) this one introduces the Hebrew consonants and vowels a few at a time with explanations and practice after each group. I have divided the letters into groups based on their numerical values, and suggest other devices to help you remember and recognize them.

Because the consonants and vowels are not introduced all at once, most of the words to pronounce in each Practice section of Chapter 2 are of necessity manufactured. The real Hebrew words that can be made from just a subset of the consonants and vowels do not contain every combination of those elements appearing in words that include other letters. Also, some letters appear so infrequently that using real words would not provide many opportunities to say those letters. To give the student experience in pronouncing all of the letters in all of their combinations, I generated the Practice “words” at random except for the first column in each set. After the last set of consonants and vowels have been introduced the Practice exercises and examples all use actual Hebrew words, including some from the siddur, but this is to make the exposition more realistic rather than to teach the meanings of the words.

The first row in each set of Practice “words” is transliterated so that the student can confirm that he or she is saying them correctly, but I have written this book in the expectation that it will be used with an instructor who is listening to the student say the other words and correcting errors as they occur. If you are using this book *without* an instructor, I suggest that you search the internet for sites that use audio to teach Hebrew pronunciation, or that you attend services at a synagogue that uses Hebrew and listen to how the congregants around you pronounce the words. This book is about reading rather than writing Hebrew, so I do not discuss the cursive forms of the letters.

This book distinguishes between the **ih** vowel ם and the **ee** vowel ם, but it conflates the qamats katan and khataf qamats into a single awe vowel ם [15, p xxviii]. The meteg ם is taken to be interchangeable with the ם wedge as an accent mark (see §3.2).

In §3 my approach to explaining the dagesh and sheva is inspired by [1], but for simplicity I have omitted some details and mostly avoided using technical jargon. The grammar that is presented in this book, while fussier than that of [5], should still be regarded as incomplete. If you think that I have *oversimplified* something I encourage you to consult the more advanced texts listed in §5.1. If you notice something that is *not* a simplification but a blatant error, I will be very grateful if you point it out to me by sending email to the appropriate address at the *contact* tab of the web site from which you downloaded this book.

1.5.2 Mechanics

I have used different fonts of English type to indicate **important facts**, *technical words and phrases*, **transliterations**, and *emphasis*. For Hebrew I have used a simple line font, rather than the traditional prayerbook block typeface, so that students can easily imitate it while they are learning the shapes of the letters. The References in §5 are cited in the text by number, sometimes with page or part numbers; for example, [16, p72] refers to page 72 in the siddur by Jonathan Sacks while [7, §6] refers to article 6 in the grammar by Weingreen. Occasionally the English translation of a Hebrew word indicates gender and number by using the abbreviations m for masculine, f for feminine, s for singular, and p for plural.

1.5.3 Acknowledgements

In writing this book I have drawn from more advanced texts including [1], [3], [4], [5], and [7]; web sites including [20], [23], [24], and [25]; and the knowledge of several expert acquaintances. I am grateful to my first Hebrew teacher, Rabbi Dr. Aryeh Wineman, for introducing me to the language in 1987; to the students who have taken my course over the past 18 years, some of whom tested an early draft; and to my wife Nancy for her meticulous proofreading. It is of course to me rather than to any of these people or sources that you must attribute any errors or other shortcomings you identify in the text.

2

The Shapes and Sounds of the Letters

To sound out Hebrew words you need to know how to pronounce Hebrew letters. In this book a *letter* is a consonant with a vowel attached, or a consonant that is sounded even though it does not have a vowel attached. Any vowel can attach to any consonant. They are all listed on the next page, a copy of which you should keep handy from now on.

2.1 The Alephbet

This Chapter will help you learn the consonants and vowels one set at a time so that eventually you will remember all of them. Each consonant has a numerical value, and many students find the shapes and names easier to remember if the values are learned along with them.

set	value	shape	name	vowels
first §2.2	1	א	aleph	◻ patach ◻ qamats
	2	ב, בּ	vet, bet	
	3	ג	gimel	
	4	ד	dalet	
	5	ה	hay	
second §2.3	6	ו	vav	י ohvav ו oovav
	7	ז	zayin	
	8	ח	khet	
middle §2.4	9	ט	tet	◻ chiriq ◻ ee
	10	י	yod	
	20	כ, כּ	coph, caf	
	30	ל	lamed	
	40	מ	mem	
fourth §2.5	50	נ	nun	◻ tsere ◻ segol
	60	ס	samech	
	70	ע	ayin	
	80	פ, פּ	fay, pay	
last §2.6	90	צ	tsade	◻ cholam ◻ qubbutz
	100	ק	kuf	
	200	ר	resh	
	300	שׁ, שׂ	sin, shin	
	400	ת	taf	

consonant	sound	as in	name	
א			aleph	אַלֶּפֶךָ
ב	b	brave	bet	בֵּית
ב	v	victor	vet	בֵּית
ג	g	golf	gimel	גִּימֵל
ד	d	door	dalet	דָּלֶת
ה	h	hotel	hay	הָא
ו	v	victor	vav	וָו
ז	z	zebra	zayin	זַיִן
ח	kh	Bach	kheth	חֵית
ט	t	tango	tet	טֵית
י	y	yoke	yod	יוֹד
כ	c	cold	caf	כָּף
כ	ch	Bach	coph	כָּף
ל	l	love	lamed	לָמֶד
מ	m	more	mem	מֶם
נ	n	none	nun	נוּן
ס	s	some	samech	סָמֶךְ
ע			ayin	עַיִן
פ	p	park	pay	פֶּה
פ	f	fox	fay	פֶּה
צ	ts, tz	nuts	tsade	צָדֵי
ק	k	king	kuf	קוּף
ר	r	red	resh	רֵישׁ
ש	sh	shell	shin	שֵׁין
ש	s	sail	sin	שֵׁין
ת	t	tango	taf	תָּף

vowel	sound	as in	name	
ִ	ih	rich	chiriq	חִירֵק
ֵ	ee	see	ee	חֵירֵק מְלֵא
ַ	ay	play	tsere	צֵרֵי
ֶ	eh	bed	segol	סֶגוֹל
ָ	ah	mahjong	patach	פָּתַח
ֹ	ah	mahjong	qamats	קָמָץ
ֻ	aw	awe	awe	חֻטָּף קָמָץ
ֺ	oo	pool	qubbutts	קֻבּוּטִים
ֹ	oh	pharaoh	cholam	חֹלָם מְלֵא
ֻ	oo	pool	oovav	שֻׁוּבֵק
ֺ	oh	pharaoh	ohvav	חֹלָם

The top chart lists the Hebrew *consonants* in order; the first two are א and ב, so the Hebrew alphabet is referred to as the *alephbet*. The final forms of the coph, mem, nun, fay, and tsade are shown after the non-final forms of those consonants. The בּ, בֵּ, and פֵּ have dots inside of them, which make them sound different from the ב, ב, and פ. The sound given for each consonant is also its transliteration; in transliterating a *word* it is sometimes necessary to interpolate letters or vary their transliteration to clarify the pronunciation or to distinguish between different words that sound alike.

The bottom chart lists the Hebrew *vowel points*. The first nine are shown as they appear around an arbitrary consonant represented by the open square □; in the second the following yod consonant changes the sound of the combination. The last two vowels are pointed versions of the consonant vav. When these points are present the **v** sound of the vav completely disappears in most cases, but rarely the letter is sounded **vo** or **voh**. If an oovav or an ohvav has another vowel attached to it, the oovav or ohvav point is ignored and the letter is sounded like **v** with the attached other vowel.

Only occasionally is it necessary to refer to the consonants or vowels by name, and then we will use the English names given here even though they are in many cases *not* exact transliterations of the Hebrew names.

2.2 The First Set

value	consonant	sound	as in	name
1	א			aleph
2	ב	b	brave	bet
		v	victor	vet
3	ג	g	golf	gimel
4	ד	d	door	dalet
5	ה	h	hotel	hay

You can count these consonants on the fingers of one hand.

The consonant א is silent, but often it carries a vowel and then the sound of the letter is the sound of the vowel. Even when an א makes no sound it is part of the spelling of the word in which it appears.

Although they have different sounds, ב and ׀ are really the same consonant. The words in a Hebrew dictionary are alphabetized ignoring any dots inside letters.

A dot in the middle of a ׀ changes it into a ב, which changes the sound from v to b. Later we shall see that the consonants ל, ׀, and ׃ also change their sounds when they have a dot in the middle.

Dots can appear in other letters as well, and they are part of the spelling of the words in which they appear, but **a dot changes the sound only of the ל, ׀, ׃, and ׁ**.

A ה with no vowel attached is silent. This often happens at the end of a word.

Except for the oovav and ohvav, Hebrew vowels are marks placed above or below the consonant to which they are attached. These two vowels sound the same.

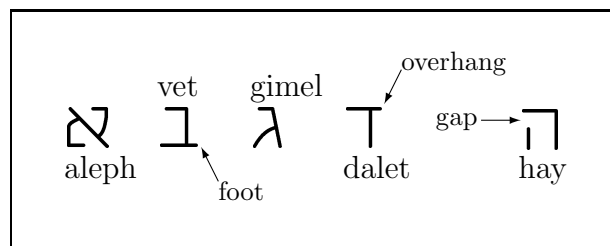
vowel	sound	as in	name
◻	ah	mahjong	patach
◻	ah	mahjong	qamats

To pronounce a letter, say the consonant first and then the vowel.

א and א both sound like **ah**

ב and ב both sound like **hah**

2.2.1 Shapes



This picture shows the consonants drawn larger, and it points out certain features that are important for identifying them and telling them apart. Drawing them by hand might help you to remember their names and shapes.

2.2.2 Sounds

Some Hebrew words sound like English words, though they almost always have different meanings, and many English words can be written phonetically using Hebrew consonants and vowels. Here are some examples you can use to check your pronunciation of the Hebrew letters that you have learned so far (using more of the alephbet makes it easier to write Hebrew that sounds like English). Remember that Hebrew is written and read from right to left.

word	אָד	בּוֹג	גּוֹד	בּוֹב	גּוֹב	הוֹג
sounds like	odd	bog	god	bob	gob	hog
means in Hebrew			chance			

2.2.3 Practice

Pronounce these words and letters. The left column consists of real Hebrew words and their translations; you might find some of them useful in the future, but for the purposes of this book *you need not try to remember their meanings*. The first row includes transliterations so you can check your pronunciation.

אָבִיר	אָה	וֵא	אָה	דָּא	בָּא	הָא	דָּא	גָּא	אָה	וֵא	גָּא	
a father	ha	ah	va	ah	da	ba	ha	da	ga	ah	va	ga
הָאָבִיר	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	
he came	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	
גַּג	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	
a roof	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	
אָשָׁף	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	
a fish	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	
אָלָא	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	
alas!	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	
אָבֵק	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	
a back	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	אָ	

2.2.4 Questions

1. Explain the meaning of the words *consonant*, *vowel*, and *letter* as they are used in this book. What are the English names of the Hebrew consonants? Which of them have final forms? What are the English names of the Hebrew vowels that are listed on page 2? Which of them are introduced in this Chapter? Which vowels are *not* marks placed above or below the consonant to which they are attached?
2. Why is the Hebrew alphabet called the *alephbet*? What does the open square □ represent in this book? Which consonants have their sounds changed by having a dot inside of them?

3. When are the letters ׀ and ׀ silent? When pronouncing a letter, do you say the consonant or the vowel first?
4. How do you write the number 1 in Hebrew letters?

2.3 The Second Set

value	consonant	sound	as in	name
6	׀	v	v ictor	vav
7	׀	z	z ebra	zayin
8	׀	kh	Ba ch	khet
9	׀	t	t ango	tet

These are the rest of the consonants having one-digit values.

The khet ׀ is pronounced with a rasping **kh** sound as in the German pronunciation of the name **Bach**. (Johann Sebastian Bach was a composer who lived from 1685 to 1750 CE.) To make the rasping sound you can hump up the back of your tongue until it touches the roof of your mouth near the back, and exhale through the resulting crack. This sound is essential to the correct articulation of many Hebrew words, so you should try hard to learn how to make it.

The vav ׀ without a dot is pronounced **v** just like the consonant vet ׀ without a dot, but the ׀ becomes a vowel when it has a dot inside it or over it.

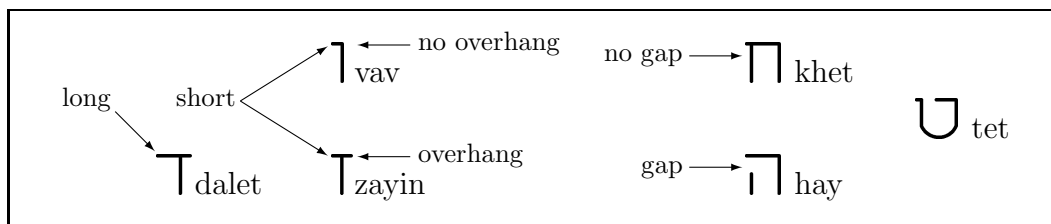
vowel	sound	as in	name
׀	oo	poo l	oovav
׀	oh	phara oh	ohvav

To remember the sound of the ׀ you can imagine that it is a stylized picture of a person rubbing his tummy as he views a dessert cart and says “oo!” in anticipation. To remember the sound of the ׀ you can imagine a person pointing to a star in the sky over the vav and saying “oh!” in wonder.

If some other vowel is attached to an ׀ or ׀, the letter is sounded as **v** followed by the attached vowel. For example, ׀ and ׀, each with a qamats, both sound like **vah**.

In some words an ׀ or ׀ immediately follows an unpointed ׀. Then the printer might combine the unpointed vav into the pointed one so that only the ׀ or ׀ remains. In that case the letter must be pronounced **voo** or **voh**. On the rare occasions when this occurs (there are no examples made from only the letters you have learned so far) you will be able to guess that it has happened, because without adding the v sound it will be hard to say the word.

2.3.1 Shapes



2.3.2 Sounds

word	יֵא	יָא	הַאֵא	זַא	דַאד	וֵא	וּאֵא	זַאד	זַאֵא	אֵאֵא
sounds like	oh	go	toga	booze	dude	vote	hoot	doze	towed	tuba
means in Hebrew	or			scorn	a kettle					

No English word contains the Hebrew sound ח.

2.3.3 Practice

Pronounce these words. Except for the first column, they are randomly generated combinations of letters that probably have no meaning in Hebrew.

יֵא	הַאֵא	וּא	וּאֵא	דַאד	דַאד	זַא	זַאֵא	וּאֵא	וּאֵא	אֵאֵא	זַאד
a hook	goo	vav	boh	dov	daha	khoud	vooga	ooda	vova	khokha	boo doov
בַּאֵא	וּא	וּאֵא	וּאֵא	זַאד	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא
gold											
וּאֵא	זַא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא
stricken											
זַאֵא	זַא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא
a chef											
זַאֵא	זַא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא	זַאֵא
a brand											
אֵאֵא	אֵא	אֵאֵא	אֵאֵא	אֵאֵא	אֵאֵא	אֵאֵא	אֵאֵא	אֵאֵא	אֵאֵא	אֵאֵא	אֵאֵא
he cut											

2.3.4 Questions

1. Write the consonants having numerical values 1-9.
2. Explain how to vocalize the letter ח, and practice doing so until you can easily make that sound.

3. Explain the difference in pronunciation between the following letters.

י יׁ ך ךׁ ךׂ ך׃ ךׄ

How can you remember which of the leftmost two is an oovav and which is an ohvav? How can you usually tell when an oovav or ohvav should be pronounced voo or voh?

4. The German name Bach contains the sound of a Hebrew ך, but does this sound occur in any English word?

5. Describe in words how to distinguish the printed letters dalet from vav, vav from zayin, and hay from khet.

2.4 The Middle Set

value	consonant	sound	as in	name
10	י	y	yoke	yod
20	כ ך	c	cold	caf
	כ ך	ch	Bach	coph
30	ל	l	love	lamed
40	מ ן	m	more	mem
50	נ ך	n	none	nun

These are the first five consonants whose values are multiples of ten.

When they are the last letter in a word, the כ is written as ך, the ך is written as ך, the מ is written as ן, and the נ is written as ך. Each final form sounds just like the corresponding non-final form.

Although the caf and coph have different sounds, כ ך, ך, and ך are really the same consonant. The כ or ך has the sound of a k or hard c, but the ך or ך sounds just like the ך.

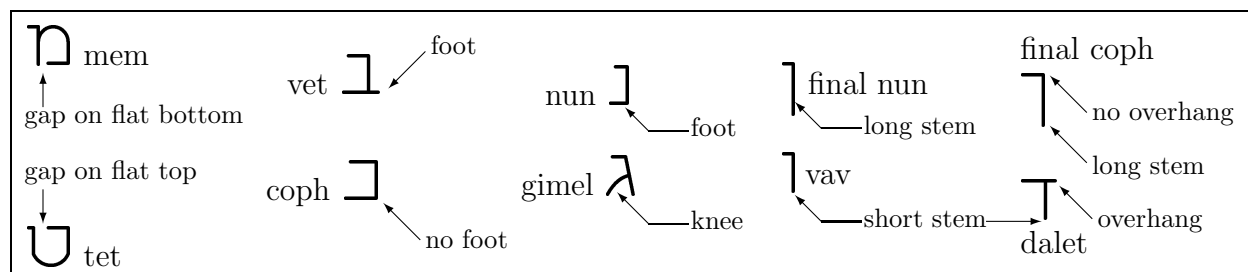
Notice that the כ, ל, מ, and נ happen to be consecutive in the same order as the English letters k, l, m, and n.

vowel	sound	as in	name
ך	ih	rich	chiriq
יך	ee	see	ee

When a letter ך to which a chiriq vowel is attached is immediately followed by a yod, the yod loses its **y** sound and the combination is pronounced like **ee**. In this book a chiriq that is *not* immediately followed by a yod always sounds like **ih**; outside of this book many Ashkenazic Jews pronounce it as **ee** also.

יך sounds like **ih** as in **itch** יך sounds like **bee**

2.4.1 Shapes



2.4.2 Sounds

word	אֵא	בַּב	טֵיז	בֵּט	טָג	אָד	יָט	הֵא	הֵא	כֵּי	דֵּז
sounds like	is	bog	tease	bit	got	dig	yacht	who	he	key	dizzy
means in Hebrew								he	she	since	

2.4.3 Practice

Pronounce these words. Except for the first column, they are randomly generated combinations of letters that probably have no meaning in Hebrew.

מֶלֶךְ a king	יֵילדוּ	חֹכְלָג	בַּלֵּי	כֵּילֶפֶב	אָחָ	יֵיפֶךְ	אֵכְבֶּךְ	בֵּיטְמַח
לְמַדָּן a scholar	טַחֲוִיל	גֶּנְנוֹךְ	הֵיבְפֶן	כַּפְאֵיךְ	פֵּיטֵיִי	זַלְנָה	נֹאזֵי	כַּמְמוֹךְ
אֵילָן a tree	דַּכְבֵּיב	גֹּחֲחִיה	דֹּימֹז	לֵימְהָךְ	כַּנְנֵי	יֵיגָזוּ	מוֹזֶן	מַנְפֹּךְ
מִלּוֹן a dictionary	וֹנְכָח	פֵּיאַאַב	טַמְכוֹן	טֹפְנֵי	פַּבְכוּם	וּוּדְהֵי	נַפְאֹד	יֵיגָךְ
לָכַד he caught	גֹּדֵאַד	הַחְבֵּב	כַּכְפוּו	בֵּיפְנוּ	טֵינְדֵיל	חֹזְלוּ	מַנְמָה	כֵּיהֵו
אָכַל he ate	הֹבְחָה	נֵילְפֵי	נַגְפֶךְ	מוֹמֹז	בַּכְנָג	בַּמְלֵי	הַאֵלֵט	זֹוטְגֹוד
הֵלֵךְ he went	נֵיטְגֹום	מֵימֹזֵא	גֵּיפְמֹז	חַכְנוּם	זֵינְנוּה	נַנְבֵּ	מַמְכֵי	בֹּואְבֵי
גִּלְוִילִים idols	מוֹנוּם	בוּבְטֹוה	דֵּימְנוּי	טֹופְנֶךְ	פֵּיטְאַוּ	פַּפְכֶן	יְמֹחוּ	נֵידְבֵיךְ
פִּילֵם all of them	בֵּינְנוּא	כַּטֵּים	וּבֵיב	וֹדְח	בַּגְפֹּז	לוּבֵיבֵב	נַפֵּן	נַחְגָּה

2.4.4 Questions

1. Of the letters you have learned so far, which have a different form if they appear at the end of a word? Which have a different sound if they appear at the end of a word? Which have a different sound if they contain a dot?

2. Of the letters you have learned so far, Which have the guttural **kh** or **ch** sound? Which have the sound of a **k** or hard **c**?
3. What number is represented by 100?
4. In the Ashkenazic pronunciation of Hebrew, the chiriq vowel ם always sounds like **ee**. When does it sound like **ee** in the Sephardic pronunciation that is used in this book? Explain.
5. How can you distinguish between the characters that are printed for a vav, a zayin, and a final nun?
6. Beginning Hebrew students learn that “Who is he, and he is she.” This book is not about the meanings of the words that it uses as examples, but from the sounds of examples you have seen can you explain this mysterious slogan?

2.5 The Fourth Set

value	consonant	sound	as in	name
60	ס	s	some	samech
70	שׁ			ayin
80	פּ פֿ	p	park	pay
	פּ פֿ	f	fox	fay
90	צ פֿ	ts,tz	nuts	tsade

These are the rest of the consonants having two-digit numerical values.

Some Sephardic Jews give שׁ a short guttural sound, made like that for a ן or ן but with the tongue withdrawn to touch the back of the throat. The inflection is subtle and most people have a hard time making it, so we will consider שׁ to be a silent letter. Often an שׁ carries a vowel and then you can pronounce the vowel, but even when it does not the consonant is part of the spelling of the word in which it appears.

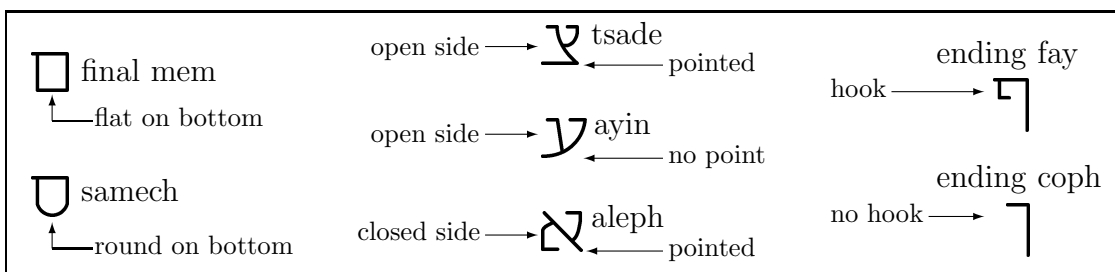
When they are the last letter in a word, the פּ is written as פֿ, the פֿ is written as פֿ, and the צ is written as פֿ. Each final form sounds just like the corresponding non-final form.

Although they have different sounds, פּ and פֿ are really the same consonant. You can remember that the **pay** פּ has a dot inside if you imagine it representing a **pea** in a **pod**.

The צ can sound like either **ts** or **tz** depending on which feels more natural in pronouncing the word where it appears.

vowel	sound	as in	name
ם	ay	play	tsere
מ	eh	bed	segol

2.5.1 Shapes



2.5.2 Sounds

word	סַפּוּי	אָט	לֶס	נִיד	מַיְבִי	פֶּטְס	פֶּג	פִּיל	טַל
sounds like	safety	ate	less	need	maybe	pets	peg	peel	sale
means in Hebrew		a pen		motion				an elephant	

2.5.3 Practice

Pronounce these words. Except for the first column, they are randomly generated combinations of letters that have no meaning in Hebrew.

אֶבֶן	פֶּמֶלֶח	דִּמְחֶפְטוּף	דַּבְּמַאָּפ	צַבְמֶשְׁכֶּף	בּוֹפֵינְצִיב	וִצְנַיִנְטְסַג
a rock	femfaymlokh	dimcheptsoof	davmaycop	tzavmeskhef	bofveentziv	vitznayntsag
עֵנָב	כְּסֵמַעְבֵּט	בּוֹלְזִמִּין	נּוֹהֶפְפֶּתַע	צַבְצַבְצַב	פֶּלְדָּצֶה	פִּנְדִּיוֹן
a branch						
צָפּוּף	מְפִנְבֵּי	גִּימִינְבֵּי	צִזְכִּימֶפֶף	צַמְנִיגֶם	מְנַמְאָּח	צַצְפִּיחֶם
crowded						
פֶּלֶא	כְּצַמְמַח	פֶּאנּוֹאָן	טְזוֹזוֹזוֹן	פֶּפְגִּיפְצַע	צַצְפֶּנּוֹז	נּוֹסְמִיטְפֶּק
a marvel						
צָפוֹן	כְּבַחְנִנְח	וִילְחֶטְד	פּוֹאָבִיפִּיג	צַסְפִּיכֶךְ	צַצְוִלְטִי	פּוֹפְסִצְוִי
north						
נָסַע	הַחֶפְיֵהוֹג	גֶּאזוֹבֵי	אָצַעְבֵּיךְ	עַבְבִּי צַדֶּךְ	כִּיפְכֶּבֶה	כְּפֶפְמַפֶּל
he traveled						
עֵצָה	פֶּיטִיּוֹב	פּוֹוֹכְטֵלֶךְ	פּוֹבְפֶּכֶבֶן	אָכְפּוֹבְבֶךְ	וִילְנּוֹאָעוֹ	פֶּסְגִּטְצַד
anger						
עַם	גִּימִצְוֶה	צַבְצַבְצַבְוֶה	כְּבִבְצִיג	אֵיטְמִלֶּה	יַחְוִבְצַךְ	גִּזְוֶה
once						
צָף	כְּבִגְכֶּצוֹ	מְנַכִּיפְצִי	לּוֹפְדֶּךְ	מִיֶּהֶדְנֶךְ	הוֹפּוֹנְזֶךְ	פִּיעֶפְכֶּצִים
he floated						
עֲצָף	הַפּוֹזְכֶּטֶם	דּוֹפְצִנִּיע	צוֹנְמוֹוֶכֶךְ	טִיבֶהֶכְבֶּךְ	פּוֹמְצַחְצוֹ	יִיֶהֶצוֹעֶנֶךְ
he wounded						
טָבַח	כְּכֶטֶךְ	מְעַפְפֶּנֶךְ	טוֹיֶפְפֶּדֶךְ	פִּיזְעָהֶצוֹ	פּוֹסְגִּיז	לּוֹבִפִּידְעוֹי
he mocked						
רָפָן	הַפּוֹפֶךְ	אָבּוֹפְעוֹט	פּוֹסִיכְנֶךְ	חִיבּוֹבֶלֶם	טְנַבְצַלֶּךְ	חְנִימֶב
a wish						

These words are hard to pronounce just because they are long, but many of them also include awkward letter sequences even though they are made up of possible Hebrew syllables. We shall see in Chapter 3 that Hebrew provides a device for making such words easier to say.

2.5.4 Questions

1. The *gematria* of a word or sequence of Hebrew consonants is the sum of their numerical values. Write down a sequence of Hebrew consonants that has the gematria 25.
2. If a letter has no sound, such as an aleph or ayin that does not carry a vowel, can it be omitted in writing the word in which it occurs? Can you tell when a word is pronounced whether or not it includes such a letter?
3. Correct this spelling of the word רָפָּא , which means “he split open”
4. The צ and the ץ both have curved segments. How can you distinguish them?
5. Using the consonants and vowels that you have learned so far, make up a Hebrew word that sounds like an English word.

2.6 The Last Set

value	consonant	sound	as in	name
100	ק	k	king	kuf
200	ר	r	red	resh
300	שׁ	sh	shell	shin
	שׂ	s	sail	sin
400	ת	t	tango	taf

These are the last of the consonants, and they count by hundreds.

The ק looks like the Roman letter P, so you must be careful not to pronounce it as one.

Israelis roll their pronunciation of ר by humping the tongue partway towards the roof of the mouth, but most non-Israelis do not.

Even though they are pronounced differently, שׁ and שׂ are really the same consonant. You will know which leg gets the dot if you remember that “**s**in should be *left* behind” and that “**sh**e is always *right*.”

Sometimes the letter ת appears with a dot inside. In this book ת and תּ both always sound like **t**. Outside of this book everybody says **t** for תּ , but many Ashkenazic Jews say **s** for ת and some Sephardic Jews say **th** for ת [4, §1.4] when it appears at the end of a syllable.

The ק sounds just like the ע ; שׁ sounds just like ו ; ת sounds just like ו . Earlier we saw that כ is pronounced like ק and that an unpointed ל is pronounced like an unpointed ק . An

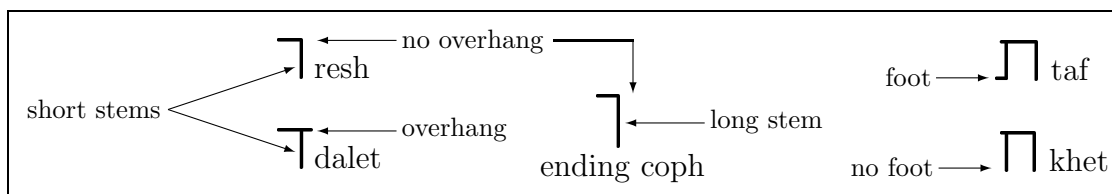
unpointed \aleph and an unpointed \beth are both silent. When you look in a Hebrew dictionary for the spelling of a word and all you know is its pronunciation, you might have to check several possible spellings before you find the right one.

vowel	sound	as in	name
\aleph	oo	pool	qubbutts
\beth	oh	pharaoh	cholam

The qubbutts \aleph and the oovav \aleph both sound like **oo**, and the cholam \beth and the ohvav \beth both sound like **oh**. Many Hebrew words have alternate spellings depending on whether an **oo** sound is written with a qubbutts or an oovav, or on whether an **oh** sound is written with a cholam or an ohvav. The spelling is called *plene* if an oovav or ohvav is used, or *defective* if a qubbutts or cholam is used instead, but both spellings are pronounced the same. Thus \aleph and \aleph (meaning still or yet) are both pronounced like **ode** while \beth and \beth (meaning Ruth) are both pronounced like **root**. This can be an additional complication in using a dictionary, which might [19, p vii] include only the plene spelling. The dot of a cholam can be anywhere on top of the consonant, so \beth and \beth both sound like **oh**.

The dots over the right leg of the shin and over the left leg of the sin are *not* the cholam vowel but part of the letter, and they do not give either letter an **oh** sound. When a cholam appears on the letter that precedes a ψ or follows a ψ , the dots are often combined. For example, the name $\aleph\psi\aleph$ is commonly rendered $\aleph\psi\aleph$, with the surviving dot serving both to indicate that the letter is a shin and to provide the **oh** sound in **Moshe**. A ψ with a dot at each end, ψ , might be pronounced either **sho** or **so** depending on the word; a dictionary giving the plene spelling will reveal which it is.

2.6.1 Shapes



2.6.2 Sounds

word	שׁוֹר	פִּייל	שֵׁב	קָר	קוֹל	פֶּטְי	תְּבוּת	שׁוּק
sounds like	shore	tile	shave	car	coal	petty	toot	shook
means in Hebrew	an ox	wire	sit!	cold	a voice	a fool	a berry	a market

2.6.3 Practice

Pronounce these real Hebrew words. You do not need to remember their meanings.

חַן grace	זָרַע a seed	לֵךְ go!	שַׁבָּת Shabbat	בְּגָד a garment	בָּנִים sons	אֶלֶף 1000
סוּר turn aside!	עָשָׂה he did	מֶלֶךְ a king	לֶחֶם bread	כֵּן yes	יוֹם a day	טָהוֹר pure
קוֹ a line	רֶחֶם a womb	צָפוֹן north	טוֹבִים good	בְּרוּךְ blessed	פַּעַם a time	אָדָם red
יָד go down!	מָגֵן a shield	לֵוִי Levi	כַּנָּף a wing	יַיִן wine	אָח a brother	עָף he flew
אָסַף he gathered	עָבַר he crossed	אָמַר he said	סוּר turn aside!	אָכַל he ate	נָתַן he gave	אָהַב he loved
עִם with	נֵר a candle	הוּא he	זוּלָתוֹ his fellow	שָׁנָה a year	שָׂנְאָה he hated	שׁוֹאֵל asking
עֵגֶל a calf	שִׁבְּץ convulsions	רֹאשׁ a head	מִתְּנָה a gift	צָרָה trouble	לֵבָב a heart	וְלֵד an infant
אִם if	בָּם in them	שָׁמָּה a plain	לְהֵרֵד to go down	חֲמֵץ leaven	טַבַּעַת a ring	שֶׁשׁ Sun
תּוֹדָה thanks	סִתְּרוּ hiding place	אֵין there is not	סוֹף end	נָתַן he gave	מְקוֹם a place	זֵיתִים olives
דָּמִים blood	כֵּן thus	בָּשָׂר flesh	רְפוּהָ seaward	בֹּקֵר morning	אֶבֶן a stone	שׁוֹפָר a ram horn
לַיֵּץ a jester	דּוֹרוֹת generations	בָּנוֹת daughters	אַתֶּם you ms	כֶּסֶף silver	כֹּל all	יוֹם a day
שׂוֹרֵים officers	בִּימָה a stage	שָׁלוֹם peace	שַׁבָּת Shabbat	צֹאן a flock	פֶּה a mouth	עָפָר dust
מֵאָה 100	רַבּוֹת many	סֵפֶר a book	שׂוֹמֵר a guard	אַחֵר other	רָע bad	רָשָׁע wicked
לָקַח he took	קָזַק he was strong	חֹרֶף winter	הָיָה he was	בָּנָה he built	עָלָה he went up	בֹּא come!
אֲדָן a pedestal	זָכַר he remembered	עֵץ a tree	קֵדָם east	שָׂרָה Sarah	אֶרֶץ a land	הִזְיָז he moved
קוּם arise!	תֵּן give!	חֹדֶשׁ a month	עוֹף a fowl	עַתָּה now	עוֹלָם a world	אַיִל an ibex

2.6.4 Questions

1. The holiday of Lag baOmer occurs on the 33rd day of counting the omer (an עֶבֶר is a sheaf of barley). Explain the first word in the holiday's Hebrew name, לַג בַּעֲמֹר, לג בעומר.

2. How can you remember which leg of a ׀ or ׀ gets the dot? Is the dot part of the letter?
3. In this book, what is the sound value of the letter ׀? Does it change its sound if it is written ׀? Explain.
4. Suppose that you hear someone say a Hebrew word and want to look up its meaning in a dictionary. Why might you need to try several possible spellings before you find the right one? Give all of the reasons you can think of.
5. Which two Hebrew vowels have an **oo** sound? Which two have an **oh** sound? How are the letter combinations ׀ and ׀ sometimes printed?
6. What is *plene* spelling, and how does it differ from *defective* spelling? Can any word that is spelled one way also be spelled the other?
7. How can you distinguish a printed resh from a printed dalet? From an ending coph? How can you distinguish a taf from a khet?

2.7 The Five Final-Form Letters

The final-form letters were introduced along with their non-final forms in the sections indicated below. Each final-form letter is pronounced just like its non-final form, and they are the same letter in alphabetical order.

introduced	letter	sound	as in	name
§2.4	ך	c	c old	final caf
	ך	ch	Ba ch	final coph
§2.4	ם	m	m ore	final mem
§2.4	ן	n	n one	final nun
§2.5	פ	p	p ark	final pay
	פ	f	f ox	final fay
§2.5	ץ	tz	t nuts	final tsade

The only vowel that is ever attached to a final-form consonant is a qamats on ׀ or ׀, in which case the letter ׀ is pronounced **cha** or the letter ׀ is pronounced **ka**. When a final coph has no vowel attached, it is sometimes rendered as ׀ with two dots inside; these dots do not change the sound of the letter (see §3.4).

The final caf and final pay appear only very rarely in the Hebrew Bible. Genesis 21:16 ends with the word ׀׀׀׀, *vatayvc* meaning “she burst into tears,” and Proverbs 30:6 begins with the words ׀׀׀׀ ׀׀, *al tohsp* meaning “he did not add.”

2.7.1 Examples

Here are some real Hebrew words in which the final-form letters are used, and for comparison some other words in which those same letters appear in their non-final forms.

letter	at the end of a word		not at the end of a word	
coph	אך but ach	בָּרוּךְ blessed be baruch	אָחַל he ate achal	זָכוֹר I remember zochayr
mem	מָקוֹם a place makom	עֵצִים trees aytzeem	מִטְבַּח a kitchen mitbakh	מְחַיֵּי charming khamood
nun	אֶבֶן a stone even	בֵּין between bayen	בִּינָה understanding beenah	נִסִּים a miracle nays
fay	כֶּסֶף silver cesef	יוֹסֵף Joseph yosef	שֶׁפַע abundance shefa	אֵפֶר ashes ayfer
tsade	שְׂרָצָה an insect sheratz	קַיִץ summer kayitz	צָהוּב yellow tzahov	צָא he came out yatza

2.7.2 Questions

1. Which final-form consonants can carry a vowel? What is the vowel?
2. Write down transliterations of ך and ךָ to show how they are pronounced.
3. When a final coph has no vowel attached, it can be printed in two ways. What are they?

2.8 Exercises

1. Decode the following message of encouragement, which consists of English words written (right to left) in Hebrew letters.

יִיְדָנֶג הַיְבִרָה אֶז נָתַטּ הַרְדּ;
פֶּר יִי עַת אֶז אֵינִי!

2. Write the following poem out phonetically using Hebrew consonants and vowels, and give it to someone you love.

Roses are red
violets are blue.
If you pronounce
It says I love you.

3. In these English words the indicated letters have different sounds. Write down a combination of Hebrew vowels and consonants that provides a phonetic spelling of each English word, or explain why that cannot be done.

letter	words in which the letter is pronounced differently
a	ran ate father
e	bet peek
i	pie big
o	shove drove boot pop
u	uniform put
j	jug
ch	check

You should have discovered several sounds that are in English but not in Hebrew. Can you think of any others? What sounds are in Hebrew but not in English?

4. Here are the Hebrew names of the letters in the alephbet. Pronounce each name out loud as you write the corresponding letter beside it.

הַיִּית	וֵין	וּן	הַא	תְּנֵלַת	גִּימְנֵל	בֵּית	אָנָּךְ
עֵין	טְמֵן	נוּן	מֵם	לְמֵד	נָךְ	יּוֹד	טֵית
פָּךְ	שֵׁין	רֵישׁ	קוּךְ	צְדֵי	פֵה		

Under each Hebrew letter name write your own transliteration. To be phonetically accurate these should in some cases differ from the conventional letter names given in the table on the second page of this Chapter (you will find that some of your precise transliterations sound enough like each other to be more easily confused than the conventional names).

5. Write down the Hebrew letters that are silent, the letters that sound like **s**, the letters that sound like **k**, the letters that sound like **t**, the letters that sound like **v**, and the letters that sound like **kh** or **ch**.

6. Write down the final forms of the five letters that have a final form, along with their non-final forms. Draw pictures to show what the vowels you have learned so far look like when they are attached to an arbitrary consonant represented by □.

7. To be able to use a Hebrew dictionary you will need to know the order of the letters in the alephbet. Memorize the consonants in order.

8. Read the words in the following pairs out loud, being careful not to confuse letters that look alike but sound different or look different but sound alike.

אָד chance	נֵר a candle	בֵּן yes	קו a line	רָם high	דָּם blood
צֵם a fast	עִם with	פָּח he spit	כָּךְ thus	שָׁבַר he broke	שֻׁכָּר wages
נָחַר he snored	נָהַר a river	קִיר a wall	פֶּתַח a pot	גַּם also	סָגַר crude
צִוּוּ command!	אָב a father	טוֹב virtue	מִוּם a blemish	עָרֵב bare	תִּשְׁעֵי nine f
חָיָה he lived	הָיָה he was	בָּנָה he built	פָּנָה an easel	שֵׁשׁ garlic	סוּס a horse

9. Read the following real Hebrew words.

אֶבֶן spring	אָהַב he loved	אָב a father	אֶחָד one of	אָח a brother	אָז then
בָּאָה she came	בָּא he came	אָרַב he seized	אֶבֶן misty	אָבַח he consented	אָבִי daddy
אָרַב he concocted	אָרַב a liar	אָרַב booty	אָרַב he trusted	אָרַב he betrayed	אָרַב alabaster
אָרַב cloth	אָרַב plunder	אָרַב he scorned	אָרַב he looted	אָרַב he grew	אָרַב a sexton
אָרַב he sheared	אָרַב he told	אָרַב fleece	אָרַב he broke out	אָרַב a riverbank	אָרַב a sinew
אָרַב he darted	אָרַב he whispered	אָרַב slander	אָרַב a nipple	אָרַב David	אָרַב David
אָרַב meditation	אָרַב he thanked	אָרַב he was	אָרַב she lives	אָרַב he ached	אָרַב he endowed
אָרַב my father	אָרַב he perished	אָרַב alone	אָרַב tall	אָרַב he worried	אָרַב he postponed
אָרַב he sacrificed	אָרַב gold	אָרַב her hand	אָרַב radiance	אָרַב worthy	אָרַב esteem
אָרַב he beat	אָרַב a festival	אָרַב a locust	אָרַב he sinned	אָרַב alive	אָרַב wheat
אָרַב he beheld	אָרַב he celebrated	אָרַב he gladdened	אָרַב terror	אָרַב he hid	אָרַב a buckle
אָרַב a riddle	אָרַב a cook	אָרַב he plastered	אָרַב fitting	אָרַב together	אָרַב a friend
אָרַב a jug	אָרַב thus	אָרַב a lie	אָרַב spit	אָרַב thus	אָרַב thus

3

The Spelling and Pronunciation of Words

In Chapter 2 you learned the Hebrew consonants and all but one of the vowels. In this Chapter you will learn some rules of Hebrew grammar that affect pronunciation, and how to say words.

3.1 Special Categories of Letters

Many rules of grammar depend on whether a consonant belongs to one of these groups of letters.

ג ע ך ן ה ׀ the *guttural* letters
ב פ צ ף ץ the *beged-cepel* letters

It is hard to read the top string of letters as a word, but the bottom string can be pronounced *beged-cepel* (with a hard c). A consonant with a dot is really the same as one without, so the letters ן פ ן ד ן ג ן are also in the beged-cepel group (even though ן has a guttural *sound*).

3.2 Syllables

In Hebrew a *syllable* always begins with a consonant, and consists of either

a consonant with a vowel attached אַ ah
or a consonant with a vowel followed by a another consonant אַר retz

A syllable contains exactly one vowel sound, carried by its first or only consonant. The ee, oovav, and ohvav are vowels, so constructs like אֵי, אִי, and אִשׁ are each considered a single consonant with a vowel. The ee, oovav, and ohvav standing alone are also considered to be a consonant with a vowel, so each can be a syllable by itself.

In Hebrew as in English we read words one syllable at a time, with a natural stop or transition in the sound at the end of each syllable.

אֶרֶץ + אַ + אַ = אֶרֶצְאֶה the land
אִי + אַ + אֵ = אִיאֵה tents
אִי + אֵ + אִשׁ = אִיאִשׁ peace
אִי + אֵ + אִשׁ = אִיאִשׁ a female guard

Usually the accent is on the last syllable of a word, as in the middle two of the examples above; otherwise it is on the syllable before the last one, as in the first and last examples. When a segol is repeated, as in הָאֶרֶץ , the accent often shifts to the syllable bearing the first segol; when a qamats is repeated, as in שׁוֹמֵרֵת , the accent often shifts to the syllable bearing the second qamats.

When the accent is on a syllable other than the final one, it is often marked to show that. Some books [4] [5] use a wedge on top of the word at the *beginning* of the accented syllable, as shown on the left below. In the siddur, the Chumash, and some Hebrew dictionaries, the standard way of marking the accented syllable is with a small vertical line called a *meteg* at the *end* of that syllable, as shown on the right.

<p>wedge ↓ הָאֶרֶץ = haAretz the land</p>	<p> שׁוֹמֵרֵת = shoMEret a female guard ↑ meteg</p>
---	--

If an accent mark appears on a syllable other than the last or second-to-last, it denotes a secondary stress and the primary stress remains on the last syllable.

3.3 The Dagesh ◻

Many of the Hebrew words you have seen include consonants with a dot in the middle. This dot is called a *dagesh*, and it can occur in any letter except the gutturals (the guttural letter א can take a dot called a *mappik*, which looks like a dagesh but has a different function).

3.3.1 The beged-cepet Letters

When a beged-cepet letter appears at the beginning of a syllable and **does not immediately follow a vowel sound, it almost always has a dagesh**. In particular, a beged-cepet letter at the beginning of a word almost always has a dagesh unless the previous word in that sentence ends in a vowel. In Chapter 2 you learned that the letters ב , ג , and ד change their sound if they have such a dagesh.

תּוֹרָה	פַּעַם	כָּתַב	דָּוִד	גֵּיד	בַּיִת
Torah	pa'am	catav	david	geer	bayit
Torah	a time	he wrote	David	chalk	a house

When a beged-cepet letter appears at the end of a word it almost always lacks a dagesh.

נָתַתּוּ	שַׁבָּת	אַף	מֶלֶךְ	בֶּגֶד	חַג	אָב
natatta	shabbat	ahf	melech	beged	khag	av
you gave	Shabbat	a nose	a king	a garment	a holiday	a father

3.3.2 Implicit Doubling

When a dagesh appears in a letter that **does immediately follow a vowel sound, the consonant carrying the dagesh is implicitly doubled**. The sound of the consonant is repeated only if that makes the word easier to say, but the doubled consonant always affects the pronunciation of the word through its division into syllables. In these examples, the first occurrence of the implicitly-doubled consonant ends the first syllable and the second occurrence begins the second syllable. A vowel or accent on a consonant that is implicitly doubled attaches to the *second* occurrence. A consonant at the end of a word is seldom doubled.

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{leemmayd } \text{לֵמַמַּיֵד} + \text{וְיִרְיֵה} = \text{לֵמַמַּיֵדְיֵה} \quad \text{he taught} \\ \text{itto } \text{יְתִיב} + \text{אִתּוֹ} = \text{יְתִיבֹתּוֹ} \quad \text{with him} \end{array}$$

The dagesh is retained in both occurrences of an implicitly-doubled beged-cepet letter. According to the first rule above, a beged-cepet letter that immediately follows a vowel sound *need not* have a dagesh, but it *may*, and then it is doubled. Here the א follows the patach.

$$\text{abba } \text{אָבִי} + \text{אָבִי} = \text{אָבִיאָבִי} \quad \text{daddy}$$

Every dagesh has a reason, but you will not learn all of them from this book. When you don't know why a dagesh is present or unexpectedly missing, just think of that as part of the spelling of the word.

3.4 The Sheva ְ

Many Hebrew words include consonants to which no vowel is attached. Sometimes such a word is impossible to say without making *some* sound after pronouncing the vowel-less consonant and before starting to pronounce the next consonant. If you listen carefully as you say this word

הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה

you will hear the sound you involuntarily make when you move your tongue between the first ל and the second ל . That sound is indicated by placing a *sounded sheva* under the first ל , yielding the spelling on the right and the syllables on the left.

$$\text{hal'looyah } \text{הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה} + \text{ל} + \text{ל} + \text{ה} = \text{הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה} \quad \text{praise the Lord}$$

↑
sounded sheva

In the transliteration into Roman letters of a Hebrew word that contains a sounded sheva in its spelling, it is conventional to denote the sheva by an apostrophe following the letter to which it is attached. A sounded sheva counts as a vowel sound, so the second syllable shown above fits the definition given earlier.

Sometimes a vowel-less consonant can be pronounced *without* making a sound after it and the word then comes out wrong. Here are the consonants and vowels of another word.

מְּוֹד

As it is written we could pronounce this *mowed*, but that can't be a *Hebrew* word because it can't be broken into Hebrew syllables (try it). The Hebrew word is actually spelled like this

m'od מְּוֹד + ׀ = מְּוֹד׀ much
↑
sounded sheva

and pronounced with a slight hesitation between the ׀ and the מְּוֹד. To show that a sound should be interpolated to produce that effect, the word is spelled with a sounded sheva.

Exactly what brief, indistinct sound is represented by a sounded sheva depends on the consonants it connects and on the articulation the speaker naturally uses to get from one to the other. In the first example above, for *hal'looyah* some people say *ha-luh-loo-yah* while others say *ha-lih-loo-yah*. In the second example, for *m'od* some people say *muh-od* while others say *meh-od* or *mah-od*.

sheva sound	as in
uh	bug
ih	city
ah	maroon
eh	stupefy

These bridging sounds are ideally of such short duration that one is uncertain which variant was spoken, so they are all equivalent in practice. A sounded sheva is treated like a vowel when dividing a word into syllables, even though its sound is only fleeting.

It is also possible for a sheva to be *silent*. Then it is *not* treated like a vowel when dividing a word into syllables. Some books [17, p IX] print a line over a letter whose sheva is sounded, and some [16, p lvi] make the : symbol bigger when a sheva is sounded, but usually, as in this book, a sounded and a silent sheva look just the same. Then it is necessary to determine from its placement in the word whether a sheva is sounded or silent.

A sheva at the beginning of a syllable is sounded. In particular, a sheva at the beginning of a word is sounded.

sh'ma שְׁמָא + שִׁי = שְׁמָאשִׁי listen!
↑
sounded sheva

When a sheva appears at the beginning of a syllable, that letter is a syllable by itself as in this example.

A sheva at the end of a syllable is silent. In particular, a sheva at the end of a word is silent (even if this produces a final syllable that has too many consonants). The two dots that are sometimes printed in an ending coph ם, which will always be at the end of a word, are actually a silent sheva. If an accented syllable has a sheva, it ends the syllable and is silent.

yisrael	יִשְׂרָאֵל	+	ךְ	+	יְשׁוּ׃	=	יִשְׂרָאֵלְךְ׃	Israel
mishpat	מִשְׁפָּט	+	טְ	+	שְׁ׃	=	מִשְׁפָּטְשְׁ׃	judgment
yitzkhak	יִצְחָק	+	קְ	+	יְ׃	=	יִצְחָקְיְ׃	Isaac
shamart	שָׁמַרְתָּ	+	שְׁ׃			=	שָׁמַרְתָּשְׁ׃	you fs guarded
kamt	קָמַתְּ					=	קָמַתְּ׃	you fs arose
	↑↑				↑			
	silent shevas				silent shevas			

Not every syllable end is marked by a silent sheva, but a silent sheva marks the end of a syllable.

A sheva cannot be silent if that would result in consecutive consonants having no vowel sound between them. If the sheva in הללויה׃ were silent, its decomposition into syllables

hallooyah	הֵלְלוּיָהּ	+	וּ	+	יָהּ׃	≠	הֵלְלוּיָהּ׃	incorrect
					↑			
					silent sheva			

would be unpronounceable because of the לל.

3.4.1 Adjacent Shevas

When two shevas are adjacent in the middle of a word, the first ends a syllable and is silent, but the second marks a syllable by itself and is sounded.

nishm'oo	נִשְׁמְעוּ	+	וּ	+	נְשׁוּ׃	=	נִשְׁמְעוּנְשׁוּ׃	they were heard
ticht'vee	תִּכְתְּבוּ	+	וּ	+	תְּ׃	=	תִּכְתְּבוּתְּ׃	you fs will write
yizc'roo	יִזְכְּרוּ	+	וּ	+	יְ׃	=	יִזְכְּרוּיְ׃	they will remember
mishp'khot	מִשְׁפּוֹת	+	פְּ׃	+	שְׁ׃	=	מִשְׁפּוֹתְּ׃	families
			↑		↑			
			sounded		silent			

In the bottom three examples the consonant bearing the sounded sheva has a dagesh, but because the letter follows a silent sheva, which is not a vowel sound, it is not implicitly doubled.

Except at the end of a word, a sheva that is attached to a letter with a dagesh is sounded. If a sheva is attached to an implicitly-doubled consonant, as in the example below, the sheva on the first occurrence of the consonant is silent and the sheva on the second occurrence of the consonant is sounded. Because of this, in the original (i.e., correct) spelling of the word, the sheva that is attached to the letter with the dagesh is sounded.

$$\text{hann'areem } \square\text{ױ} + \text{װ} + \underset{\substack{\uparrow \\ \text{sounded}}}{\text{ױ}} + \underset{\substack{\uparrow \\ \text{silent}}}{\text{ױ}\square} = \square\text{ױ}\underset{\substack{\uparrow \\ \text{sounded}}}{\text{װ}}\text{ױ}\square \text{ the young men}$$

When a consonant is implicitly doubled its first occurrence ends a syllable, so we could think of it as pointed with a silent sheva whether or not a sheva was originally attached to the consonant with the dagesh.

If two shevas would be adjacent at the beginning of a word, the first becomes a chiriq and the second sheva is silent. For example, when the prefix ׀ meaning “to” is attached to the name ׀׀׀׀׀׀׀, Samuel, the word is written ׀׀׀׀׀׀׀׀ and pronounced lishmooyl.

Some words can be divided into syllables in different ways without violating any of the rules explained above; here is an example.

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{shamroo } \text{ױ}\square + \text{ױ}\text{װ} \neq \text{ױ}\square\text{ױ}\text{װ} \text{ **incorrect**} \\ \text{sham'roo } \text{ױ}\square + \underset{\substack{\uparrow \\ \text{sounded}}}{\text{ױ}} + \underset{\substack{\uparrow \\ \text{silent}}}{\text{ױ}\text{װ}} = \text{ױ}\square\text{ױ}\text{װ} \text{ they will guard} \end{array}$$

Then the correct alternative can usually be identified by applying the following rule.

If the sheva in an unaccented syllable follows one of the vowels ׀׀׀׀׀, or an ױ at the beginning of the word, then it is silent; otherwise it is sounded.

In the example, the sheva in question appears in an unaccented syllable and follows a ׀ vowel. Therefore it is sounded, and the second decomposition of the word into syllables must be the correct one. The awe vowel ׀ is discussed in the next Section.

3.4.2 Enhanced Shevas

Now that you know how to recognize and say a sounded sheva, how would you pronounce the word on the left below?

$$\text{ױ}\text{׀} \qquad \text{ahnee } \text{ױ}\text{׀} \text{ ׀}$$

What makes it hard is that the ׀ has no sound of its own. The same trouble is presented by the װ, and a ׀ or ׀ with a sounded sheva attached would be almost as baffling. In

words where these four letters (the gutturals except for ך) have a sheva, the sheva is silent and a helping vowel sound is added to make the syllable possible to say. The word on the right above is pointed with an *enhanced sheva*, in this case a *half-patach*, so that it can be pronounced **ahnee**. (In addition to serving as an aid to pronunciation, the half-patach appears in the prefix ׀ which [5, §21] signals a question.)

There are two other enhanced shevas, the *half-segol* and the *half-qamats*, which appear in the words below.

emet אמת truth na'awmee נאעמי Naomi

The half-segol should ideally be pronounced more quickly than a full segol, but few people are actually able to do that so for practical purposes the half-segol and the segol have the same sound. The sheva of a half-patach or half-segol is part of the spelling of a pointed word in which it appears even though it does not change the sound of the vowel.

The half-qamats sounds like a shortened o, more like **aw** than **oh**. The enhanced sheva notation is used for that sound in some books [5, p166]; other books instead use [16, p lvi] an enlarged qamats or [15, p xxviii] the notation shown on the left below. We will think of that as a full vowel named awe, so it is listed as one in the table at the beginning of Chapter 2.

vowel	sound	as in	name
◻	ah	honest	half-patach
◻̇	eh	bed	half-segol
◻̆	aw	law	half-qamats

For the purpose of dividing a word into syllables, the enhanced shevas and the awe are all considered vowel sounds. Here are some other words in which they appear.

אָנֵיִּיָּהּ עָנִי אֱלֹהִים אֱמוּנָה מַחֲנֶה חֲדָס
awneyyah awnee eloheem emoonah makhaneh hadas
a ship poor gods faith a camp myrtle

3.5 Other Vocalizations

- When the last letter of a word is ך and the vowel underneath it is a patach, the letter is pronounced **akh** rather than **kha**. This patach is referred to as *furtive* because it sneaks ahead of the consonant and gets pronounced first. In a word with a furtive patach, the accent is on the preceding syllable. Here are some examples.

רוֹאֵךְ כּוֹאֵךְ נוֹאֵךְ שְׁלֵיֵךְ שָׁמַיֵךְ לְשַׁבַּיֵךְ
rooakh coakh noakh shaleeakh samayakh l'shabayakh
spirit strength Noah an emissary joyous to praise

- When a yod has a vowel it is pronounced as y followed by the vowel. In the two examples on the right, יִ is a yod with a vowel.

יָלֵד	יָתוֹם	יְבָרְכוּכֶם	עֲבִיּוֹן	עֲלִיּוֹן
yeled	yatom	y'varchoocha	evyon	elyon
a child	an orphan	they will bless you	a poor person	supreme

- When a yod follows a consonant with a chiriq, it is part of the **ee** vowel, as in **ahddeer** below. When the **ee** vowel is attached to a yod, יֵ is pronounced **yee** as in **khayeem** and **vihyeetem**. The yod that is part of the **ee** vowel carries no vowel of its own, except in the rare case when a repeated yod is elided. That happens in the contracted spelling of **teeyayv** on the right, where the yod carries a tserere as well as serving as part of the **ee** vowel.

אֲחַדְדֵיר	חַיֵּים	וְהַיְיָתֶם	טֵיַיב	טֵיַיב
ahddeer	khayeem	vihyeetem	teeyayv	teeyayv
majestic	life	and you mp will be	he improved	he improved

- When a yod has no vowel and is the last letter of a word, it sounds like y.

עֲנוּי	אוּלַּחַי	אֱלֹהַי	מַתַּחַי	עֵלוּי	גוֹי
inooy	oolahye	elohay	matahaye	eelooy	goy
torment	perhaps	God of	when	a prodigy	a nation

- When a yod has no vowel and is *not* the last letter of a word, it is *silent*. In particular, **when a word ends with the letters יו they sound like v**. When Hebrew is written without vowel points, such as in a Torah scroll, this locution is used to clarify that the vav is to be pronounced v rather than as an oovav or an ohvav. Each of these words contains a silent yod.

תֵּתְצִיְנֶה	רַגְלֵיךָ	רַגְלָיו	אֵלָיו	מַעֲשָׂיו	סֻתָּיו
techezenah	raglecha	raglav	aylav	ma'asav	s'tav
they will behold	your feet	his feet	to him	his works	autumn

- When two vavs are adjacent in the middle of a word, the first is silent and the second sounds like v.

$$\text{ca-ve-ret} \quad \text{תָּרַת} + \text{יָ} + \text{בָּ} = \text{תָּרַתְבָּ} \quad \text{a beehive}$$

↑
 silent

Recall that an oovav or ohvav to which some other vowel is attached sounds like a v followed by that vowel, so here יָ sounds like veh.

3.6 Other Diacritical Marks

In addition to the vowel points, the dagesh, and the sheva, other marks can accompany Hebrew letters. You should be familiar with the most common of them, so that you will recognize those that affect the way in which words are voiced.

- Hebrew lacks certain sounds that are necessary in pronouncing loan words from other languages. When a *geresh* ם follows a Hebrew consonant it changes the sound of the consonant. These are its most common uses.

letter	sound	as in
ם	ch	choice
מ	j	juice
ן	th	thanks

- A *gershayim* ם is placed before the last letter of a word to show that the word is an abbreviation or [18, p ix,x] a number written using Hebrew letters. The word on the left below is an acronym made from the first letters of the words ם, the five books of Moses, ם, the books of the Prophets, and ם, the books of the Writings.

ם	ם	ם
tanach	5712	712
Hebrew Bible	1952	1952

In Chapter 2 you learned the numerical values of the Hebrew consonants. In the example in the middle above, the “word” is a number whose value is the sum of the numerical values of the letters, except for the ם which the geresh indicates should be multiplied by 1000.

$$ם = 2 + 10 + 300 + 400 + 1000 \times 5 = 5712$$

This example happens to be the publication date of a book. The year 3760 in the Hebrew calendar corresponds to year zero in the secular calendar, so the year 5712 in the Hebrew calendar corresponds to 1952 CE. On the right above this same date is written using a common shortened form in which the ם is assumed.

- When portions from the Torah, the Prophets, and certain books of the Writings are read in the synagogue, the words are chanted to a melody. In printed texts, the musical phrases of the appropriate melody are indicated by *cantillation* or *trope* marks written above and below the words. For an example of text printed with trope see [16, p99]; for an explanation of two of the marks see [5, p281].
- A Torah scroll itself contains only words and spaces, with no punctuation or trope, but sometimes letters bear calligraphic embellishments called *crowns*. These marks do not affect the pronunciation or meaning of the words.

3.7 Exercises

- From memory, write down the guttural and beged-cepet letters. What are some special ways in which letters in these two groups are treated?
- Which of the following sequences of consonants and vowels could be a Hebrew syllable? If any could *not* be, explain why. Is it true that anything you can pronounce could be a syllable? Is it true that anything you can't pronounce could never be a syllable?

נְשָׁנָה נָתַן אָ פָּ עֵיבָב שֵׁן טָגָה שֵׁטָה קִיגָה

- Write down a transliteration into Roman letters of each word below. The transliterations of the individual Hebrew letters are listed in the table at the beginning of Chapter 2.

תּוֹרָה	שַׁבָּת	כָּתַב	עָף	גֵּיד	מֶלֶךְ	בַּיִת
Torah	Shabbat	he wrote	he flew	chalk	a king	a house

- Break each of these words into syllables and then pronounce the word. How can you tell which syllable should be accented?

מְשֻׁפָּחוֹת	דְּרָכַיִם	יִכְתְּבוּ	אַבְרָהָם
families	ways	they will write	Abraham
מְשֻׁפָּחוּיָם	וּבְלִבְתָּי	הֵלַכְתִּי	יְהוּדָה
their bowing	and in your going	I went	Judah
הַבָּאִים	מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם	וְאַהֲבֶתָּ	הוֹצֵאתִי
they who come	your mp deeds	and you will love	I brought out
הַמוֹצִיא	נוֹתְנִים	וְצִדְקָה	הַדְּבָרִים
who brings forth	we are giving	and righteousness	the words

- What is a dagesh? Which letters never have one? Which letters usually have a dagesh when they are the first letter in a word? What letters always have a dagesh when they are the last letter in a word? When does a dagesh change the sound of a letter?
- Put a dagesh in the following words wherever one is necessary, and read each word. Which words have their pronunciation changed by the addition of a dagesh?

לֹקֵם	דָּבָר	גָּדוֹל	עֵגֶל	פּוֹתֵם	כֹּחַ
he is taking	a word	big	a calf	he is opening	strength
לְפָנַי	בֵּיתַי	הוֹרְתָיו	תָּמִיד	פָּנָיו	פָּעַל
before	my houses	parents	constant	his face	he acted
בָּנָה	חַיִּים	חַי	שְׁנַיִם	אֲוִלַּי	בָּנָי
he built	life	alive	two	perhaps	my sons
שְׁוֵוָה	בְּרִית	סִיווּן	גְּבוּל	דָּמִים	הַמְּלָכִים
equal to	a covenant	Sivan	a border	blood	the kings

7. Describe two functions of a sounded sheva. How is a sounded sheva denoted in the transliteration of a word into Roman letters? What brief, indistinct sound is represented by a sounded sheva? In decomposing a word into its syllables, does a sounded sheva count as a vowel sound? Can a sounded sheva ever be on the first letter of a two-letter syllable?

8. What is the function of a silent sheva? How is a silent sheva denoted in the transliteration of a word into Roman letters? In decomposing a word into its syllables, does a silent sheva count as a vowel sound? Can a silent sheva ever be on the single letter of a one-letter syllable?

9. A grammarian proposes that we think of the sheva in this simple way.

A sheva always ends a syllable. If the syllable consists of a single letter, then the sheva also begins the syllable and it is sounded. If the syllable consists of two letters, then the sheva is on the second letter and is silent.

Is this summary correct? If not, present an example to show why it is incorrect.

10. When two shevas are adjacent in the middle of a word, how does that affect the division of the word into syllables? Which sheva is silent and which is sounded?

11. If a letter with a dagesh has a sheva, under what circumstances is the sheva sounded? When does the presence of a dagesh indicate that a consonant is to be implicitly doubled in determining a word's decomposition into syllables?

12. Is a sheva that ends an accented syllable silent or sounded? How can you tell whether a sheva in an *unaccented* syllable is silent or sounded?

13. What happens when two shevas would be adjacent at the beginning of a word?

14. Decompose each of the words below into syllables, and provide a transliteration into Roman letters. Identify each sheva as silent or sounded, and if a consonant is implicitly doubled show both of its occurrences in your decomposition. All of these tongue-twisters are from the siddur, and appear in the blessings before the Sh'ma or in the Sh'ma itself.

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| וְהִשְׁבַּחְתֶּם | and they are praising |
| וְהִתְנַשְּׁתֶם | they raise themselves |
| הַמְאִירִים | the shining lights |
| וְהִתְנַחֲמֶם | and you taught them |
| קוֹמְדֵי | upright |
| בְּצִוְיֹתֶיךָ | in your commandments |
| וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם | and bowing down to them |

15. Which syllabification is correct? How can you tell?

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \text{hinnee} \quad \text{׃} \quad \quad \quad + \quad \quad \quad \text{׃׃׃} = \text{׃׃׃׃} \text{ here I am} \\
 \text{hin'nee} \quad \text{׃} + \quad \quad \quad \text{׃} + \quad \quad \quad \text{׃} = \text{׃׃׃׃}
 \end{array}$$

16. What is the function of an enhanced sheva? What do the three enhanced shevas look like and sound like? (The half-patach has already appeared in several previous Exercises, so if you worked them you already know how to say it.) Is the awe vowel actually an enhanced sheva? Explain.

17. Give an example of a furtive patach. When a word ends in a furtive patach, which syllable is accented?

18. Summarize the rules for pronouncing a yod. A yod is sometimes silent; is a vav ever silent? Explain.

19. Practice reading the following words until they are easy to say.

בְּרָכָה a blessing	אַתָּה you fs	אֲנַחְנוּ we	אֱמוּנָה truth	אַהֲבָה love	אֲדָמָה earth
גָּנַב steal!	גֵּוֹיָה a corpse	גְּדֻלָּתְךָ your greatness	גְּאֻלָּה redemption	בְּבַיִת in a house	בְּרַבּוֹ bless!
הַלִּיבוֹת customs	הִלְכָה she walked	הִמְלִיכוּ they crowned	הוֹמִילָה a homily	הַבֹּזֵה a bee	הַדְּבָרִי my way
זִלְפָּה Zilpah	וְאֶחָד and one	זָכַרְתִּי I remembered	וְזֶה and this	וְאֵלַךְ and I will go	וְדָבָר and a word
חִפְצוֹ his wish	חֻבְלִי my territory	חֲסָדִים kindnesses	חַטָּא sin	חֲדָשָׁה new	זְקֵנָה an old woman
בְּטוֹרָם before	גָּמַדְתִּי I finished	דְּבָרַי words of	זְמַן a time	טַעְמוֹ its flavor	שְׂדֵי fields of
יִשְׂרָאֵל Israel	יַעֲקֹב Jacob	טוֹפְלִי my treatment	טוֹב good	יִתְבַּר he will say	טַפְּחָם their children
לְהַדְלִיק to kindle	לְפָנַי before	כֹּהֲנִים priests	כְּתוּבָה ketubah	כַּאֲשֶׁר when	כְּתִבְתֶּם they mp wrote
רַחֲמִים mercy	נֶאֱמַר as is said	מְאֻדָּךְ your all	מְשֻׁפָּחָה a family	מִצְוָה a command	מַעֲשֵׂה a deed
עֲלִיוֹן supreme	סַנְחֶרִיב Sannacherib	סִיסְרָא Sisera	סִפְרִים books	סַלַח forgive!	נַעֲמִי Naomi
צְדָקָה charity	פְּעָמִים times	פְּלִשְׁתִּים Philistines	פָּנָיו the face of	פְּרִי fruit	עֶזְרָה Ezra
נֶאֱמָן faithful	קִשְׁתּוֹ his bow	קִדְּשָׁנוּ he sanctified us	קִדְּשׁ holiness	צֵלְמוֹת death shadow	רְשׁוּת permission
שֶׁרָפִים Seraphim	שֵׁלְךָ yours	נְשִׁיבָהּ divine presence	שִׁבְעִי seventh	שׁוֹמְרֵי guardians of	רַגְלֵינוּ our feet
תְּשׁוּבָה repentance	תּוֹלְמוּד teaching	הַמְּבֹרָךְ he who is blessed	צְבָאוֹת armies	טְהוֹרָה pure	לְעוֹלָם forever

20. The *Sh'ma* is the canonical declaration of faith recited twice each day by every observant Jew. It contains many words that are difficult to pronounce, so reciting it is a good way to practice your skills at voicing Hebrew text. The following lines are the first paragraph of the prayer. A translation is given below.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד
אֶחָד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד
וְאֶחָד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכָל לְבָבֵנוּ וּבְכָל נַפְשֵׁנוּ וּבְכָל מְאֹדֵנוּ.
וְהָיִי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲנֹשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּנְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לְבָבֵךָ.
וְשָׁנַנְתָּם לְבִנְיָן וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בַדֶּגֶר וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ.
וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאָזְנוֹתַי עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיִי לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינַיִךָ.
וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֵיךָ.

Listen, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Blessed be the honored name of his kingship forever. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your self. And these words which I am commanding you today shall be upon your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk in the way and in your lying down and in your rising up. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

3.8 Encouragement

!מְזַן טוֹב! If you've reached this point in your study of Hebrew you are ready to begin learning what the words mean and how they are put together into sentences. Please do not be discouraged if sounding them out is still a struggle; most students who get this far can voice only with difficulty and deliberation. Your speed, smoothness, and accuracy will all improve with practice.

You should also not be discouraged if you find yourself consulting this book for the spelling and syntax rules you have studied. Later you will find them useful for figuring out some of the words you encounter, but the vocabulary you are about to start learning will increase in difficulty only gradually so you need not master all of the pronunciation rules right away.

I hope that you will continue to learn, and that as you begin to understand what you are reading you will find it an inspiration and a delight.

4

Answers and Solutions

This Chapter provides my answers to all of the Questions in Chapter 2 and to all of the Questions and Exercises in Chapter 3. Some of them have more than one right answer.

Answers To Questions

2.2.4.1 A Hebrew *consonant* is one of the characters אבגדהוזחטיכמנפעצקרשת. The ׀ is rendered ׀̇ or ׀̈ depending on its sound, and the dot is part of the consonant (at least one book [4, §1.1] considers ׀̇ and ׀̈ to be separate consonants). A Hebrew *vowel* is a pattern of marks that is attached to a consonant by being printed above, below, or to the left of it to complete its sound. If □ represents an arbitrary consonant, these are the vowels.

□̇ □̈ □̉ □̊ □̋ □̌ □̍ □̎ □̏ □̐ □̑ □̒ □̓ □̔ □̕ □̖ □̗ □̘ □̙ □̚ □̛ □̜ □̝ □̞ □̟ □̠ □̡ □̢ □̣ □̤ □̥ □̦ □̧ □̨ □̩ □̪ □̫ □̬ □̭ □̮ □̯ □̰ □̱ □̲ □̳ □̴ □̵ □̶ □̷ □̸ □̹ □̺ □̻ □̼ □̽ □̾ □̿ □̿̇ □̿̈ □̿̉ □̿̊ □̿̋ □̿̌ □̿̍ □̿̎ □̿̏ □̿̐ □̿̑ □̿̒ □̿̓ □̿̔ □̿̕ □̖̿ □̗̿ □̘̿ □̙̿ □̿̚ □̛̿ □̜̿ □̝̿ □̞̿ □̟̿ □̠̿ □̡̿ □̢̿ □̣̿ □̤̿ □̥̿ □̦̿ □̧̿ □̨̿ □̩̿ □̪̿ □̫̿ □̬̿ □̭̿ □̮̿ □̯̿ □̰̿ □̱̿ □̲̿ □̳̿ □̴̿ □̵̿ □̶̿ □̷̿ □̸̿ □̹̿ □̺̿ □̻̿ □̼̿ □̿̽ □̿̾ □̿̿

A *letter* is a consonant with its attachments (none, a vowel, a dagesh, a sheva or enhanced sheva, an accent mark) that make it part of a word. The English names of the Hebrew consonants are aleph, vet or bet, gimel, dalet, hay, vav, zayin, khet, tet, yod, coph or caf, lamed, mem, nun, samech, ayin, fay or pay, tsade, kuf, resh, shin or sin, and taf. Of these the coph or caf, the mem, the nun, the fay or pay, and the tsade have final forms. The English names of the Hebrew vowels are chiriq, **ee**, tsere, segol, patach, qamats, awe, qubbutts, cholam, oovav, and ohvav. All of the vowels are introduced in Chapter 2 except for awe, which is introduced in §3.4.2. The oovav and ohvav are separate characters rather than being points.

2.2.4.2 The Hebrew alphabet is called the alephbet because its first two letters are א and ב. In this book the open square □ represents an arbitrary consonant. The א, ב, ג, and ד have their sounds changed by having a dot inside of them.

2.2.4.3 The א and ב are silent if no vowel is attached to them. When pronouncing a letter say the consonant first and then the vowel, except for the furtive patach discussed in §3.5.

2.2.4.4 The number 1 is represented by the consonant א.

2.3.4.1 The consonants having numerical values 1-9 are א=1, ב=2, ג=3, ד=4, ה=5, ו=6, ז=7, ח=8, and ט=9.

2.3.4.2 The letter ט can be vocalized by humping the back of one's tongue up until it touches the roof of the mouth and exhaling through the resulting crack.

2.3.4.3 Reading from left to right, the letters sound like oo, oh, v, va, va, va, va. The oovav reminds me of someone rubbing his tummy which is inside the vav, while the ohvav reminds me of someone pointing to a star that is over the vav. On the rare occasions when an oovav or ohvav should be pronounced voo or voh, the word in which it appears would otherwise be difficult to say.

2.3.4.4 The sound of a ן does not occur in any English word.

2.3.4.5 A ך can be distinguished from a ך because its top line is longer and sticks out to the right of the stem. A ך can be distinguished from a ך because the top line of the zayin sticks out to the right of the stem. A ן can be distinguished from a ן because it has a gap at the top of its left leg.

2.4.4.1 The consonants that have been introduced so far are ןמנכ׳טחזוהךדגבז. Of these, the ן or ן becomes ך or ך, the ן becomes ן, and the ן becomes ן when they appear at the end of a word. Each of these consonants has the same sound whether it appears at the end of a word or not. When a ן is written ן its sound changes from b to v; when a ן is written ן or a ך is written ך its sound changes from c to ch.

2.4.4.2 Of the consonants introduced so far, ן and ן have the guttural kh or ch sound. Of the consonants introduced so far, only ן or ך has a hard c sound.

2.4.4.3 Adding together the numerical values of the letters we find that ןט = 6 + 9 = 15.

2.4.4.4 In this book the chiriq vowel sounds like ee only when it is followed by a yod to make the ee vowel, ך׳. The Ashkenazic pronunciation fails to accurately vocalize words such as ך׳׳׳׳׳ which should be pronounced Yisrael rather than Yeesrael.

2.4.4.5 The ך can be distinguished from the ך because its top line extends over its stem to the right as well as to the left. These characters can be distinguished from the ך because both have a shorter stem.

2.4.4.6 The slogan derives from the sounds of the Hebrew word for he, which is ך׳ and pronounced hoo, and the Hebrew word for she, which is ך׳ and pronounced hee (see §2.4.2).

2.5.4.1 Here are some strings that have a gematria of 25: ךדכ, הכ, ךי.

2.5.4.2 For a word to be spelled correctly all of its letters must be present. Because some letters are silent the correct spelling of a word often cannot be determined by hearing it spoken. Instead it is necessary to find the word printed in some document that is known to be correct, such as a dictionary, textbook, siddur, or Chumash.

2.5.4.3 The given spelling uses the final forms of the first two letters and the non-final form of the last. The correct spelling of the word is ן׳׳׳׳.

2.5.4.4 The \aleph has a sharp lower right corner but the \beth does not.

2.5.5.5 The string $\aleph\aleph\aleph$ means nothing in Hebrew, but sounds like the English word “milk.”

2.6.4.1 The string $\aleph\aleph$ has gematria $3 + 30 = 33$, so the holiday’s Hebrew name means “the thirty-third (day) in the counting of the omer.”

2.6.4.2 The slogan “she is always right, but sin is to be left behind” is a reminder that the shin \aleph has the dot on the right and the sin \beth has the dot on the left. In each case the dot is part of the consonant.

2.6.4.3 In this book, \aleph always sounds like τ , and its sound does not change if it is written \beth . Many Ashkenazic Jews say \aleph like \mathfrak{s} , and Sephardic Jews sometimes say \aleph as \mathfrak{th} .

2.6.4.4 Often the sounds that are produced when a Hebrew word is pronounced can also be produced by pronouncing other sequences of letters and vowels. In some cases these are real words that are homonyms of the original, but in most cases they are not words at all. Here are some sources of ambiguity in the spelling of a word when all you know is its sound.

- The letters \aleph and \beth sound alike; the letters \beth and \daleth sound alike; the letters \daleth and \aleph sound alike; the letters \beth and \beth sound alike; the letters \beth and \beth sound alike.
- The vowels \aleph and \beth sound alike; the vowels \beth and \beth sound alike. Some words can have either a plene or a defective spelling.
- The consonants \beth and \beth are always silent; the consonants \beth , \beth , \beth are sometimes silent.

2.6.4.5 The vowels \beth and \beth both sound like **oo**. The vowels \beth and \beth both sound like **oh**. The letter combination $\beth\aleph$ is sometimes printed $\beth\aleph$; the letter combination $\beth\aleph$ is sometimes printed $\beth\aleph$. In such a case the dot over the \beth serves both to indicate whether the consonant is a shin or sin and to provide the **oh** sound of the cholam that was elided.

2.6.4.6 Plene spelling uses \beth and \beth ; defective spelling uses \beth and \beth instead. Many words can be spelled either way, but some are always spelled in one way or the other.

2.6.4.7 A \beth can be distinguished from a \beth because the top line of the \beth extends past the stem of the letter and the top line of the \beth does not. Both can be distinguished from a \beth because it has a longer stem. A \beth can be distinguished from a \beth because the \beth has a foot while the \beth does not.

2.7.2.1 The only final-form consonants that can have a vowel are the \beth and \beth , and the only vowel they can have is a qamats.

2.7.2.2 The \beth is pronounced **cha** and the \beth is pronounced **ca** (with a hard **c**).

2.7.2.3 When a final coph has no vowel it is printed sometimes as \beth and sometimes as \beth .

Solutions To Exercises

2.8.1 When the English words written in Hebrew letters are pronounced, they say

Reading Hebrew is not too hard;
for you it is easy!

2.8.2 Here is one way of writing the poem phonetically using Hebrew consonants and vowels. While some English words can be exactly transliterated, most include sounds that are not precisely the same as any in Hebrew.

רָזוּ אָרְבֵּי
בְּיִאֲלָצָה אָרְבֵּי בְּלוּ.
עָף יוֹ פְּרִיָּוֹנוֹס
אֶט אֶט אֶעֱרִי לָוּ יוֹ.

2.8.3 In the answer to Exercise 2.8.2 I used אָ to approximate the o of love, but the sound is not really the same so in this answer I concede that there is *no* sound in Hebrew for the o of shove.

letter	word	phonetic spelling
a	ran	no sound in Hebrew for this a
	ate	אָתֵי
	father	no sound in Hebrew for th or er
e	bet	בֵּתֵי
	peek	פֵּיקֵי
i	pie	פֵּיֵי
	big	לֵיֵי
o	shove	no sound in Hebrew for this o
	drove	דֵּרוֹבֵי
	boot	בוֹטֵי
	pop	פֵּפֵי
u	uniform	אֵיֵיֵיֵיֵי
	put	no sound in Hebrew for this u
j	jug	no sound in Hebrew for j
ch	check	no sound in Hebrew for this ch

The Hebrew letters אָ and אֵ have a guttural sound that is not in English.

2.8.4 This is my attempt at more precisely transliterating the Hebrew names for the Hebrew consonants. The ones that sound too much alike to me are **cahf**, **chahf** and **kof**.

consonant	conventional	transliterated
א	aleph	alef
ב	bet	bayt
בּ	vet	vayt
ג	gimel	geemel
ד	dalet	dalet
ה	hay	hay
ו	vav	vav
ז	zayin	zayin
ח	kheth	khayt
ט	teth	tayt
י	yod	yohd
כ	caf	cahf
כּ	coph	chahf
ל	lamed	lamed
מ	mem	maym
נ	nun	noon
ס	samech	samech
ע	ayin	ahyin
פ	pay	pay
פּ	fay	fay
צ	tsade	tsadee
ק	kuf	kof
ר	resh	raysh
שׁ	shin	sheen
שׂ	sin	seen
ת	taf	taf

2.8.5 Here are the Hebrew consonants having the given sounds.

sound	Hebrew letters
silent	א ע
s	ס שׁ
k	ק פּ ף
t	ט ת
v	ו בּ
ch	ח כּ ך

2.8.6 These are the final and non-final forms of the consonants that have final forms.

final form	non-final form
ך	כ
ם	מ
ן	נ
ף	פ
ץ	צ

The vowels that attach to an arbitrary consonant look like this.

◻ ◻◻ ◻◻◻ ◻◻◻◻ ◻◻◻◻◻ ◻◻◻◻◻◻ ◻◻◻◻◻◻◻ ◻◻◻◻◻◻◻◻

3.7.1 The guttural and beged-cepet letters are

ך ע ח ה א *guttural*
 פ צ ב ג ד ו *beged-cepet*

A beged-cepet letter almost always takes a dagesh if it is at the beginning of a word and almost always does not take a dagesh if it is at the end of a word; ך and the beged-cepet letters כ, ך, and פ have their sound changed by a dagesh. A guttural letter cannot take a dagesh. When a guttural letter א, ח, ך, or ע has a sheva, the sheva is enhanced with a helping vowel.

3.7.2 Not every pronounceable 1- or 2-letter string can be a Hebrew syllable, but every Hebrew syllable can be pronounced.

- אָיִךְ cannot be a syllable because it has two vowel sounds
- וֵיִךְ can be a syllable
- אָיִךְ cannot be a syllable because the vowel sound is on the second letter
- וֵיִךְ can be a syllable
- וֵיִךְ can be a syllable (׀יִךְ is a consonant with a vowel)
- יִ can be a syllable
- יִ can be a syllable (the sheva is sounded)
- יִ can be a syllable (the sheva is silent)
- וֵיִךְ cannot be a syllable because it has two vowel sounds

3.7.3 The words transliterate like this: torah, shabbat, catav, af, geer, melech, bayit.

3.7.4 The words syllabify like this.

תּוֹרָה+אָפ+שַׁבָּת	אֵיב+אָפ+אָ	אָב+אָת+אָי	אָפ+אָת+אָל
אֵי+אָת+אָפ+שַׁבָּת	אָת+אָת+אָת+אָת	אָת+אָת+אָת	אָת+אָת+אָת
אֵל+אָת+אָת	אָת+אָת+אָת	אָת+אָת+אָת	אָת+אָת+אָת
אֵל+אָת+אָת	אָת+אָת+אָת	אָת+אָת+אָת	אָת+אָת+אָת

The accent usually falls on the last syllable of a word. If two segol vowels are adjacent the accent is often on the first of them; if two qamats vowels are adjacent the accent is often on the second of them. If the word ends with a furtive patach the accent is on the previous syllable. A reversing vav [5, §17] can shift the accent towards the beginning or end of a verb. But in most cases the only way to be sure of which syllable is accented is by looking up the word in a dictionary or finding it printed with an accent mark.

3.7.5 A dagesh is a dot in the middle of a letter. Guttural letters never have one. Bege-cepet letters usually have one at the beginning of a word, and usually do not have one at the end of a word. No letter always has a dagesh when it is the last letter in a word. A dagesh changes the sound only of **כּ**, **קּ**, **גּ**, **פּ**, **צּ**, and **דּ**.

3.7.6 A beged-cepet letter that is first in a word requires a dagesh (assuming it does not immediately follow a word that ends with a vowel sound); this changes the pronunciation of all the words that began with **בּ**, **קּ**, or **פּ**. The beged-cepet letters that are not first in a word are each immediately preceded by a vowel sound so none of them require a dagesh. The implicitly doubled **פּ** in **הַפְּזָלִים** affects its syllabification and hence its pronunciation. Here are the words correctly pointed.

לֹקֶם	דְּבַר	גְּדוֹל	עֵגֶל	פְּזָלִים	כֶּם
לְפָנַי	בְּיַמֵּי	הוֹרְיוֹ	תַּמִּיד	פְּזָנוּ	פָּעַל
בְּנָה	מֵיִם	חֵי	נְשָׂנִים	אֲוָלֵי	בְּנֵי
נְשׂוּנָה	בְּרִית	סִיווּן	גְּבוּל	דְּמִים	הַפְּזָלִים

3.7.7 The sounded sheva is an aid to pronouncing a vowel-less consonant with (1) a sound that inevitably results or (2) a necessary hesitation. In a transliteration, a sounded sheva attached to a consonant is denoted by an apostrophe following the transliteration of the consonant. The sound of a sounded sheva is **uh**, **ih**, **ah**, or **eh** depending its context and speaker. In decomposing a word into its syllables, a sounded sheva counts as a vowel sound. Because the vowel sound of a two-letter syllable is always on the first consonant, a sheva on the first letter *must* be sounded.

3.7.8 The silent sheva marks the hard stop in pronunciation at the end of a syllable. It does not appear in the transliteration of a word, and it does not count as a vowel sound in decomposing a word into syllables. For that reason it cannot be on the single letter of a one-letter syllable, and it cannot be on the first letter of a two-letter syllable.

3.7.9 This summary is correct! Of course, not every syllable end is marked by a sheva.

3.7.10 When two shevas are adjacent in the middle of a word, the first ends a syllable and is silent while the second begins a syllable and is sounded.

3.7.11 Except at the end of a word, a sheva that is attached to a letter with a dagesh is sounded. When a dagesh appears in a letter that immediately follows a vowel, the consonant carrying the dagesh is implicitly doubled; the first occurrence of the doubled consonant ends a syllable and the second occurrence begins the next. If a sheva is attached to the consonant it is also doubled, as a silent sheva on the first occurrence of the consonant and as a sounded sheva on the second. Therefore, in the original spelling of the word if a consonant that immediately follows a vowel has a dagesh, any sheva attached to it is sounded.

3.7.12 An accented syllable never begins with a sheva, so if an accented syllable has a sheva it ends the syllable and is silent. Whether a sheva on an unaccented syllable is silent can usually be determined by the three rules in §3.4.0 or the first three rules in §3.4.1. If the division of a word is not unambiguously determined by any of these six rules, then the fourth rule given in §3.4.1 can be used. It says that the sheva is silent if it follows one of the vowels $\square\square\square\square\square$, or an ׀ at the beginning of a word; otherwise it is sounded.

3.7.13 If two shevas would be adjacent at the beginning of the word, the first becomes a chiriq and the second is silent.

3.7.14 Here are the decompositions and transliterations. Each sounded sheva is denoted by an ' in the transliteration; the other shevas are silent.

$\square\text{׀}+\text{׃}+\text{׃}\underline{\text{׃}}+\text{׃}\text{׀}$	umshabb'kheem
$\square+\text{׃}\text{׀}+\text{׃}\text{׀}+\text{׃}\text{׀}$	mitnass'eem
$\text{׀}\text{׀}+\text{׀}\text{׀}+\text{׃}+\text{׃}\text{׀}$	hamm'orot
$\square\text{׀}+\text{׃}+\text{׃}\text{׀}+\text{׃}\text{׀}+\text{׃}\text{׀}$	vatt'lamm'daym
$\text{׀}\text{׀}+\text{׃}\text{׀}+\text{׃}+\text{׃}\text{׀}$	kom'meyoot
$\text{׃}+\text{׃}\text{׀}+\text{׀}\text{׀}+\text{׃}\text{׀}+\text{׃}$	b'mitzvotecha
$\square\text{׃}+\text{׃}\text{׀}+\text{׃}\text{׀}+\text{׃}\text{׀}+\text{׃}\text{׀}$	v'hishttakhaveetem

3.7.15 In the first syllabification the sheva must be silent, but that would result in the two nuns being adjacent with no vowel sound between them. That is not allowed according to the third rule in §3.4.0, so the sheva must be sounded and the second syllabification is correct. Sometimes the word for “Here I am” is spelled $\text{׀}\text{׃}\text{׀}\text{׀}$ or $\text{׃}\text{׃}\text{׀}\text{׀}$, in which case the first nun is a separate syllable.

3.7.16 An enhanced sheva replaces a sheva under the letters א, נ, מ, and שׁ to make the syllable easier to say. This table shows the enhanced shevas and how to pronounce them.

enhanced sheva	sound	as in	name
◌ֵֹ	ah	honest	half-patach
◌ֶֶ	eh	bed	half-segol
◌ַַ	aw	law	half-qamats

The awe vowel, ◌ַ, is a simpler symbol for the half-qamats.

3.7.17 When a מ at the end of a word carries a patach, the combination מֶ is pronounced **akh** instead of **kha**. This happens, for example, in the word אֶפְסוֹסִים, which means “an apple.” The accent in a word that has a furtive patach is always on the second-to-last syllable.

3.7.18 When a yod has a vowel it is pronounced as y followed by the vowel. When a yod follows a consonant with a chiriq, it is part of the **ee** vowel. When a yod has no vowel and is the last letter of a word, it is pronounced as y. When a yod has no vowel and it is not the last letter of a word, it is silent. A vav is silent if it is the first of two adjacent vavs in the middle of a word.

References

These are a few of the many books that have been written about how to pronounce Hebrew words; some of them also teach what the words mean and how to use them in sentences.

5.1 More-Advanced Textbooks

Every expositor has his or her own theory of Hebrew grammar; all authorities agree on most things, but no two agree on everything.

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- [4] Pratico, Gary D. and VanPelt, Miles V., *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*, Third Edition, Zondervan Academic, 2019. *Well-organized, thorough, systematic, clearly-written, and easy to read, it has large-format pages and a durable hard-cover binding. This book must be exhausting as an introductory text, but it is excellent for reference although its treatment of the consonants and vowel points differs quite a bit from that given here. It has a good Hebrew-to-English lexicon and a brief index, and each chapter includes a useful summary. Each chapter concludes with an essay promoting the authors’ fundamentalist Christian theology, but these are only vaguely related to the content and can be omitted without affecting the continuity of the exposition. The exercises for this book are published in a separate volume.*
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5.3 Prayer Books

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- [16] Sacks, Rabbi Jonathan, *The Koren Shalem Siddur*, Koren Publishers, 2019.
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5.4 Dictionaries

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