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chapter one

The Signs and Sounds of Hebrew: Orthography and Pronunciation

1.1 Focus.

In this chapter you are to learn:

23 consonants, 5 of which have two forms,

15 vowels, and3 dots: *dagesh lene*, *dagesh forte*, and *mappiq*.

Besides the consonants, vowels, and three dots, this chapter also contains transliteration symbols (English-looking characters for the Hebrew alphabet). They are an initial aid to learning the sounds of the Hebrew characters. The chapter also exposes you to the 5 "weak" consonant principles. They do not need to be mastered now, but you need to be aware of these groups of consonants and categories of behavior. Future chapters will apply them as their topics require.

The CD has flashcards for learning the consonants and vowels as well as phonics lists for pronouncing syllables. You may find it helpful to use these while going through the chapter. The vocabulary for this chapter uses all the consonant forms and nearly all the vowels, so it acts as practice in reading Hebrew.

1.2 The Aleph-Bet.

The letters of the Hebrew alphabet appear in the following chart.

There are no capitals, but some letters have different forms when written at the end of a word. These 5 final forms are listed to the right.

A few letters were pronounced two ways, as signaled by the presence or absence of a dot, called a *dagesh lene* (dah-géysh léy-ney, explained below). Note that a few letters with *dagesh lene* are no longer pronounced differently. (Modern Hebrew pronunciations are favored. Your instructor may prefer another system.)

See the CD for practice writing the letters. Handwritten block letters are more simplified in form than the print that appears in books. Most letters are written beginning at their upper left point and finishing with a down stroke or a stroke moving left (since Hebrew is written from right to left).

Aleph-Bet

1.2.1 Hebrew Alphabet.

'aleph	Х		>	unpronounced (or guttural stop, like h in heir)		
			b	b as in b ent		
bet	ב		ē	v as in vent		
	L.		g	g as in gas		
gimel	ג		īg	g as in g as (formerly g as in dog)		
dalet	Ţ		d	d as in dime		
ualet	Г		₫	d as in d ime (formerly th as in th en)		
he (hey)	Ľ		h	h as in h at (typically silent if ending a word)		
vav	,		v	v as in vent (formerly w as in w ay)		
zayin	٢		Z	z as in zebra		
ḥet	Γ		ķ	as ch in Lo ch Ness		
țet	ß		ţ	t as in toy		
yod (yōd)	٩		у	y as in yes		
1.6	Ņ		k	k as in k ick		
kaf	Ŋ	٦	k	as ch in Lo ch Ness		
lamed	7		1	l as in love		
mem	C		m	m as in m om		
nun	נ	1	n	n as in no		
samech	Q		s	s as in say		
'ayin	ע		c	unpronounced (or guttural stop made farther back in the throat than aleph)		
	í.		р	p as in p it		
pe (pey)	U I	ק	Р p	ph as in ph one or as f in f it		
tsade	Y	<u></u>	ş	ts as in skits		
qof	P		q	k as in k ick / q as in plaque		
resh (reysh)	, J		r	r as in r un		
sin	Ü		ē	s as in say		
shin	Ü		š	sh as in ship		
tav	Ŀ		t	t as in toy		
id V	ת		<u>t</u>	t as in toy (formerly th as in thin)		

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1.3 The 3 Dots. They look the same but do different things.

(a) Dagesh lene (dah-géysh léy-ney).

Dagesh lene can only occur in six letters, \square , \square , \square , \square , \square , \square , and \square , known by the acronym *BeGaDKePhaT* letters. This is only a pronunciation issue. Without *dagesh* lene breath is moving, as in graphite, e.g. \square . Dagesh lene tells you that breath stopped, as in crackpot, e.g. \square . Dagesh lene is like a stop sign.

(b) Dagesh forte (dah-géysh fór-tey).

Dagesh forte indicates that a letter is doubled, i.e. pronounced twice. If we used it in English, we would write *lader* for *ladder*. A few letters called gutturals, \aleph , Π , Π , ϑ , and \neg , will not double and so can not take *dagesh forte* (see further at 1.8.2).

(c) Mappiq (mahp-pík).

The *mappiq* can occur only in a *he* at the end of a word. Normally a *he*, \overline{n} , ending a word is not pronounced; the *mappiq* in a *he*, \overline{n} , tells you to pronounce it (in which case it is usually a pronominal suffix; cf. ch. 6).

1.4 Consonant groupings for study.

Be careful to discern the differences between letters in these sets.

(a) With upper right corner.

()	·······						
	Π	Π	Π	٦	٦	٦	5
	Tav	<u>H</u> et	Не	Dalet	Resh	Kaph (final)	Pe (final)
(b)	With mair	n vertical	l stroke.				
	٦	٦	7	7	٦	ב	ג
	Yod	Vav	Zayin	Nun (final)	Kaph (final)	Nun	Gimel
(c)	With uppe	er right c	orner and	d a bottor	n line.		
	コ	\supset	Ð	ב	ב		
	Bet	Kaph	Pe	Nun	Gimel		
(<i>d</i>)	Boxish.						
	D		2	Ü	ಶ		
	Samech	Mem (final)	Ţet	Sin	Shin		
(e)	Two point	t tops.					
	z	ע	۲	Х			
	Tsade	Ayin	Tsade (final)	Aleph			

Aleph-Bet

(f) BeGaDKePhaT letters, with and without dagesh lene.

	Bet	Gimel	Dalet	Kaph	Pe	Tav
stop	ם b) g	J d	D k	D p	J t
spirant] ē (v)] ġ	Ī₫	D <u>k</u> (kh)	D ē (ph)	<u>ג <u>t</u></u>

Stop means breath has stopped; *spirant* means breath is moving. Even if they are pronounced the same in modern Hebrew, they will still be transliterated differently. For example, \overline{n} is transliterated <u>t</u>, even though now pronounced like \overline{n} , t.

(g) Letters with final forms.

	Kaph	Mem	Nun	Pe	Tsade
beg. or middle	\mathbf{D}	ち	נ	Ð	2
final	٦		1	ך	r

- (*h*) Letters with similar sounds.
 - **X** Aleph and \mathcal{Y} Ayin
 - **T** Vav and **D** Bet (no dagesh)
 - \square Het and \square Kaph (no dagesh)
 - \triangleright Qof and \triangleright Kaph (with dagesh)
 - Sin and Samech
 - D Tet and I Tav

Speakers with an Arabic background may distinguish between \mathfrak{V} and \mathfrak{T} , $\dot{\mathfrak{V}}$ and \mathfrak{D} , and \mathfrak{X} and \mathfrak{Y} .

(i) Letters with similar transliteration symbols.

Dentals. \mathfrak{D} , \mathfrak{n} , \mathfrak{n} (as well as \exists and \exists) are dentals, made by pressing part of the tongue against the back of the upper teeth.

 $\begin{array}{ccc} t & t & \underline{t} \\ & \underline{v} & \underline{r}et & \overline{v} & Tav \\ \end{array} Tav \qquad \overline{r} & Tav \\ \end{array}$

Gutturals. Gutturals are made near the back of the throat. English lacks letters corresponding to \aleph , Π and ϑ .

h h . ¬ He ¬ Het N Aleph ♥ Ayin

Sibilants. Sibilants contain an "s" sound.

s ē š ș O Samech Ü Sin Ü Shin L Tsade Cambridge University Press 978-0-521-88542-3 - The Cambridge Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Brian L. Webster Excerpt More information

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1.5 Vowels.

Hebrew vowels come in three classes and three lengths. The three main classes are *a*-class (*ah*-class), *i*-class (*ee*-class) and *u*-class (*oo*-class). The *i*-class includes both "i" and "e"; the *u*-class includes both "u" and "o." The three vowel lengths are long, short, and slurred. Slurs include half-vowels, also called composite *shewas*.

But we should first be aware that English is odd in how it writes vowels. In English, the letter "a" makes the sounds in fat and fate; "e" those in bet or beet; "i" those in high or hit. But most languages use "i" for the sound in beet; "e" for the sound in hay; and "a" for "ah," as in father, but *not* that in fate. Hebrew vowels are treated in this more common way. In this chart, a 1 or 1 is part of writing the vowel; they are not consonants in these cases (cf. 1.8.5). A box stands for any consonant.

class	length	name	vowel	trlit.	pronunciation
	long	qametz (gadol)	_	ā	ah as in father (longer than <i>patah</i>)
<i>a</i> -class	short	pataḥ	Ē	а	ah as in father (shorter than <i>qametz</i>)
	half	ḥaṭaph pataḥ	.	ă	like <i>pataḥ</i> , but extra short
	long	ḥireq yod	٩	ī	ee as 2 nd i in intrigue (normally with <i>yod</i>)
	short	ḥireq	Ļ	i	i as 1 st i in intrigue
<i>i-</i> class	long	tsere yod or tsere	•	ē	e as in hey (with or without <i>yod</i>)
	short	segol	Ļ	e	e as in get (rarely with yod)
	half	ḥaṭaph segol		ĕ	like <i>segol</i> , but extra short
	long	shureq	٦□	ū	oo as in sh oo t
	long or short	qibbutz		ū u	oo as in shoot (may be long or short)
<i>u</i> -class	long	ḥolem vav or ḥolem	io i	ō	o as in vote
	short	qametz hatuph	Ţ	0	o as in bottle (or as in vote, but short)
	half	ḥaṭaph qametz		ŏ	like <i>qameṣ ḥaṭuph</i> , extra short
class: all	slur	vocal shewa	:	ə / ^e	very short vocalic slur
class: none	not a vowel	silent shewa = absence of vowel		none	silent; marks end of a syllable within a word and rarely at the end of a word

Hebrew Vowel chart 1.

There are variations in how people speak. In modern Hebrew *pata*^h and *qametz* may sound alike; *tsere* may be pronounced like *segol*. Follow your instructor.

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1.5.1 Notes on vowels.

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- (a) Qametz, long ā, and qametz ḥaṭuph, short o, look alike, □. (English also uses the same vowel sign for more than one sound, e.g. the letter "o" in lob, lobe, love.) Most qametzim are long ā. Distinguishing the two will be explained in ch. 2.
- (b) *Qibbutz*, \Box , can be long \bar{u} or short u.
- (c) Holem. The *holem*'s dot, \Box , may blend into that of a following $\mathbf{\mathcal{U}}$.
- (d) Shewa.
 - Vocal and silent *shewa* look alike, □. Distinguishing them is best done in the context of learning syllables (ch. 2), but see also 1.7 below.
 - A composite shewa is a shewa written beside a vowel to show that its length is in between a short vowel and a slur. Composite shewas appear with the gutturals: X, ヿ, ヿ, and リ. (These letters can sometimes accept a silent shewa; but they always take a composite shewa instead of a vocal shewa.)
 - **Vocal** *shewa* is a slur. Vowels may reduce to a vocalic slur, as some English dialects slur (or virtually skip) the first "o" in *potato* or "e" in *Melissa*. Not much vowel remains, less than the short vowels in *pot* and *melt*. Regardless of the original vowel class, once they are reduced the vocal *shewas* sound alike. Unlike English, which writes the same letter regardless of how much it is actually pronounced, Hebrew signals this reduction by writing a vocal *shewa*.
- (e) *Full vowels*. Long and short vowels are considered full vowels. Slurs, both vocal *shewas* and composite *shewas* are not full vowels; they are too much reduced.

1.5.2 Changing vowel lengths.

As we learn more about the structure of Hebrew, we will find that different circumstances affect vowel length. Changes in vowel length typically occur within the same vowel class. For example, short a may lengthen to a long \bar{a} or reduce to vocal *shewa*. The next chart helps to see the vowels by class and length at the same time. After the names and sounds are learned, this will be the more useful chart.

		long	short	slur (vocal <i>shewa</i>)	slur with א , ח, ח, ש (composite <i>shewa</i>)
a-class	а		\Box		
i-class	e i	ت ر. ت ت.	Ļ		
u-class	o u	i : 10 :			

Hebrew Vowel chart 2.

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1.6 Distinguishing one *dagesh* from another.

Remember what each *dagesh* does. *Dagesh forte* indicates a letter is doubled. *Dagesh lene* indicates a begadkephat letter is spoken as a stop, i.e. the sound cannot be held out as in "ph," but must have stopped as in "p," (*graphite* vs. *crackpot*). Distinguishing them is practiced in ch. 2.

Rule 1. Dagesh forte follows a full vowel within the word, e.g. $\frac{bl}{le(h)}$ and $\frac{bl}{le(h)}$ and $\frac{bl}{le(h)}$ hag/ $g\bar{a}/d\bar{o}l$. In begadkephat letters, both will be pronounced as stops.

Corollary A: *Dagesh* beginning a word is *dagesh lene*,¹ e.g.] *ben*.

Rule 2. Dagesh lene follows a stop. A stop is either a consonant ending a syllable or a pause between words (if there is a pause), e.g. $\forall \neg \neg i miq/da_i$.

Corollary B: *Dagesh lene* cannot follow a vowel or vocal *shewa*; the moving breath of the vowel does not permit it. If a word ends in a vowel and the next word begins with a begadkephat letter, the begadkephat letter will not have *dagesh lene* unless there is a pause, or stoppage of breath, between the words, such as between sentences. We will learn about pauses later.

Corollary C: If *dagesh* follows *shewa*, the *shewa* must be silent and the *dagesh* must be *dagesh* lene.

Illustrations from English. In the word *ladder*, the doubled "d" is pronounced after a vowel (Rule 1). The first "d" ends a syllable and the next "d" begins a syllable. Hebrew writes one "d" and puts a dot, *dagesh forte*, in it to show it is doubled, e.g. \neg for *lad/der*, i.e. \neg \neg \neg (with both *dalets* pronounced as stops with *dagesh lene*).

In the word *crackpot*, the "p" follows a consonant which ended a syllable *crack/pot* (Rule 2). Since it is not preceded by a vowel, doubling it would make no sense, e.g. *crack/ppot*. Likewise it would make no sense to begin a word with a *dagesh forte*, e.g. *ppot* (Corollary A). The moving air of a preceding vowel blows *dagesh lene* out of *begadkephat* letters, turning them into spirants. Hebrew does not say *tap*, but would say *taph* instead (Corollary B).

1.7 Distinguishing *Shewas*, initial rules of thumb:

Remember what they do. Vocal *shewa* is a reduced vowel; silent *shewa* ends a syllable (more in ch. 2). Distinguishing *shewas* need not be fully mastered in ch. 1.

- (a) Silent shewa is usually preceded by a short vowel.²
- (b) Vocal shewa is usually preceded by a long vowel or silent shewa.
- (c) Beginning a word, shewa is vocal, always.
- (d) If there are two *shewas* in a row, the first is silent, the second vocal (almost always).

¹ The rare occasions in which *dagesh forte* can begin a word are discussed in ch. 23.

² Silent *shewa* may also be preceded by an accented long vowel. Accents are discussed in ch. 2.

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1.8 Weak Consonants: consonants with special behaviors.

Some consonants have special rules. We will deal with them more as chapter topics raise them. This list exposes you to what is coming. At this point you only need to know what the special groups are and have a basic recognition of their behaviors.

1.8.1 Begadkephat Letters: \Box , \exists , \exists , \exists , \exists , \Box , \Box , \Box , \Box .

Begadkephat letters can take dagesh lene and are then pronounced as stops.

1.8.2 Gutturals: $\aleph, \exists, \exists, \forall, \vartheta$ and sometimes \exists .

Shewa problem: Gutturals reject vocal shewa (and sometimes silent shewa), taking a composite shewa instead.

Dagesh problem: Gutturals and \neg reject *dagesh forte*. This often results in lengthening the preceding vowel, called *compensatory lengthening*. If not, we treat it as doubled anyway and call it *semi-doubling* or *virtual doubling*.

Gutturals also prefer *a*-class vowels. Gutturals may take a preceding or following *a*-class vowel when a word pattern normally does not. Also a **furtive** *pata* \dot{h} may appear before a \Box , \Box or \mathcal{V} at the end of a word, even though preceded by another vowel. For example, \Box is $r\bar{u}^a \dot{h}$; \Box is $miz/b\bar{e}^a \dot{h}$.

1.8.3 Quiet Letters: X and Y.

X 'Aleph. Today *aleph* is not pronounced. When scholars, called the Masoretes, added the vowels, **X** was pronounced at the start of a syllable but had usually become silent (quiesced) at the end of a syllable. This quiescence means that *aleph* will not have a silent *shewa*, and a following *begadkephat* letter will not have a *dagesh lene*.

 \mathcal{V} 'Ayin. \mathcal{V} was a full consonant in all positions for the Masoretes, so it is followed by *dagesh lene*. But since it is a silent letter today, it will "sound" like *aleph*. Pay attention to the spellings, especially as you study vocabulary.

1.8.4 Matres lectionis: 1, 2 and $\overline{1}$.

When 1 and 2 are used as part of writing vowels, they are called *matres lectionis*, Latin for "mothers of reading." Scribes used 1 and 2, as well as $\overline{11}$, to indicate vowels as an aid to reading. 1 and 2 are vowels when they have no vowel or *shewa* underneath. At the end of a word, $\overline{11}$ is usually a *mater*, not a consonant.

) is consistently used for *u*-class vowels, e.g. \square and \square .

" is consistently used for *i*-class vowels, e.g. \square , \square and rarely \square .

T usually indicates a preceding long *qametz*, $\exists \Box \Box$. But it can support *a*-class, *i*-class, and *u*-class vowels, e.g. $\exists \Box \Box$, $\exists \Box \Box$, and $\exists \Box$. Some transliteration systems write *mater* \exists with parentheses, e.g. $\bar{a}(h)$.

With a *mater*, vowels are said to be written "fully." If a *mater* is not used where it is usually expected, it is called "defective." (As you will learn in the paradigms, some *holems* are usually written with *vav*, others without.)

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1.8.5 Diphthongs or contractions.

A consonantal 1 or " may become part of a vowel, typically when ending an unaccented syllable. The contraction of the vowel plus the 1 or " is called a diphthong. It is transliterated differently than other long vowels, with a circumflex (\hat{e}) rather than a macron (\underline{b}). Some systems use a circumflex for all *matres*, e.g. \hat{a} for $\bar{a}(h)$.

Unaccented \square becomes \square ($aw \leftarrow \hat{o}$).³ The vav is now a mater.

Unaccented \Box becomes \Box ($ay \in \hat{e}$). The yod is now a mater.

When you do see \Box , it represents a glide between the vowel and the consonant, similar to "aye" as in "aye, aye, sir."

1.8.6 The assimilation of Nun.

When] ends a syllable inside of a word (*nun* over a silent *shewa*,]) it transforms into a copy of the next consonant. Then it is written as a *dagesh forte* in that letter. To a limited degree we have this pronunciation issue in English:

in + resistible = irresistible, in + measurable = immeasurable,

 $tin + \bar{e}\bar{a}' = ti\bar{e}-\bar{e}\bar{a}'$: $\ddot{\psi}\psi = \bar{\eta}\psi + \bar{\eta}\psi$

As you might guess, there will be issues when the letter after nun is a guttural.

1.9 Summary.

Alphabet and vowels. See the charts. Learn the names, sounds, and transliteration values of each consonant and vowel.

Other symbols: dagesh lene, dagesh forte, mappiq.

Dagesh lene signals that begadkephat letters (TDIII) are stops; it follows a consonant or a pause; it cannot follow a vowel.

Dagesh forte indicates a consonant is doubled; it follows a full vowel in a word.

Mappiq indicates that a final he is consonantal and to be pronounced.

For future reference: Peculiarities of certain consonants.

- 1. Only begadkephat letters can have dagesh lene.
- 2. Gutturals reject dagesh forte.

Solution: Compensatory lengthening or virtual doubling.

3. Gutturals reject vocal (and sometimes silent) *shewa*.

Solution: composite *shewa*.

- 4. *Aleph* quiesces at the end of a syllable.
- 5. He, Yod, and Vav may be matres lectionis.
- 6. Yod and Vav may be part of diphthongs or represent contractions.
- 7. *Nun* closing a syllable within a word may assimilate into the following consonant as a *dagesh forte*.

³ Historically vav was pronounced "w."

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At this point you need to focus on learning the consonant and vowel signs well. Review the rest of the material so that you can consult it quickly. It will become more meaningful when we start to look at the structure of syllables and words.

1.10 Vocabulary.

All the letter forms of the Hebrew alphabet and nearly all the vowels (except *haṭaph segol* and *haṭaph qametz*) are used in this chapter's vocabulary. Practice saying the names of the letters and vowels as you learn these words. When you have learned them, you will have learned the basic information of ch. 1.

	-		
1	בּי	mî	prn. who? (424)
2	הוא	hû'	<i>prn.</i> he (1398)
3	הַיא	hî'	prn. she (491)
4	אֲנִי ∕ אָנֹ⊂ִי	'ănî	prn. I (1233*)
5	אָבַקְנוּ	'ănaḥ -nû	<i>prn.</i> we (121)
6	ڐؚٮڔ	gā- dōl	adj. great, large (527)
7	iel	zā-q b n	adj. old, elder (180)
8	עָם	ʿām	<i>n.m.</i> a people (1869)
9	שָׂדָה	ēā- d e(h)	<i>n.m.</i> field (329)
10	<u>ئ</u> ڭر	dā- <u>b</u>ār	<i>n.m.</i> word, matter, thing (1454)
11	אַרְבָּר	mid- bār	n.m. wilderness, pasture, steppe (269)
12	ವಹಿದೆರು	miš- pāț	n.m. law, custom, legal claim/decision (425)
13	שַׁבָּת	šab- bāt	n.f/m. rest, Sabbath (111)
14	מִצְוָה	miṣ- vā (h)	<i>n.f.</i> commandment (184)
15	הַקָּה	ḥuq- qā (h)	n.f. statute, enactment (104)
16	הַכְמָה	ḥo <u>k</u> - mā (h)	<i>n.f.</i> wisdom (153)
17	הָפַלָה	t [°] ēil- lā (h)	<i>n.f.</i> prayer (77)
18		mal- kā (h)	<i>n.f.</i> queen (35)
19	څڅ۲	me-lek	<i>n.m.</i> king (2530)
20	ۿ۪ٚڗ٦	'e -reș ke -sep̄ ne -ḡed॒	<i>n.f.</i> land, earth, ground, territory, region (2505)
21	ڮۣٙۑ٦	ke-sep	n.m. silver, money (403)
22	ۮؘۣڋڗ	ne-ged	prp. in front of, opposite of (151)
23	הוֹרָה	tô- rā (h)	<i>n.f.</i> instruction, law (223)
	<i>adj.</i> = adjective		n.f/m. = noun (may be masculine or feminine)
	n.m. = noun mas	sculine	<i>prn</i> . = pronoun
	n.f. = noun femin	nine	<i>prp</i> . = preposition