

Aleph-Bet

The Hebrew Alphabet

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- There are about 23 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.
- Some letters have more than one sound and some have special forms used at the end of words.
- Each letter has a numeric value used in gematria that I will include for your reference.

- Let's get started!

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| Letter | Final Form | Name/# | Pronunciation |
|-----------|------------|------------|--|
| א | | Aleph; 1 | (silent) |
| ב, בּ, בֿ | | Bet, Ve; 2 | בּ = b as in b oy; בֿ = v as in v ote |
| ג | | Gimmel; 3 | G as in g immick |
| ד | | Dalet; 4 | D as in d oll |
| ה | | He; 5 | H as in h ey |
| ו | | Vav; 6 | V as in v ote (Note Vav can also be spelled Waw) |
| ז | | Zayin; 7 | Z as in z oo |

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- The next letter that we will learn on our list is call Het.
- The problem Americans face when pronouncing this letter is that we don't pronounce "Bach" as the Germans do. We're going to try and fix that right now.
- To get the positioning of your tongue correct to make this sound, pretend you are going to pronounce an English "g" as in the word "get" ...
- But don't actually make the "g" sound.
- Instead, note where your tongue is in the back of your throat.

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- Now, lower the back of your tongue off your soft palate just a tiny bit; bring it back slightly and force a little air to pass through between your tongue and soft palate.
- Now add a vowel sound as you pronounce the letter.
- Practice several times to get it right.
- Remember, it is *not* a *ck/ch* sound; it's more of a breathy *h* sound.
- You don't have to over-do it and say it too harshly.

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| Letter | Final Form | Name/# | Pronunciation |
|---------|------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| ח | | Het; 8 | Ch as in Bach |
| ט | | Tet; 9 | T as in toy |
| י | | Yod; 10 | Y as in yellow |
| כ, נ, ס | ך | Kaf, Kha; 20 | כ K as in keep; כ/ך Ch as in Bach |
| ל | | Lamed; 30 | L as in look |
| מ | ם | Mem; 40 | M as in me |
| נ | ן | Nun; 50 | N as in name |

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| Letter | Final Form | Name/# | |
|--------|------------|--------------|--|
| ס | | Samech; 60 | S as in sin |
| ע | | Ayin; 70 | (silent) |
| פ , פ | | Peh, Feh; 80 | P as in pay ; F as in fame |
| צ | ץ | Tsade; 90 | Ts as in cats |
| ק | | Qof; 100 | K as in key |
| ר | | Resh; 200 | R as in rate |

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| Letter | Final Form | Name/# | Pronunciation |
|--------|------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| שׁ | | Shin; 300 | Sh as in s hoe |
| שׂ | | Sin; 300 | S as in s in |
| תּ | | Tav; 400 | T as in t oy |

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- Let's sing the Aleph-Bet song!

Note: Song does not play in pdf version.

Please play from lesson page.



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- There are 6 letters that often have a dot called a "dagesh lene" inside them.
- These letters are ב, ג, ד, כ, פ, ת.
- They are often referred to as BeGaDKePHaT letters.

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- Sometimes the dagesh in BeGeDKePHaT letters is not a dagesh lene, but is a dagesh forte.
- If there is a full vowel (a vowel other than sheva) immediately preceding a consonant with a dagesh, it is a dagesh forte (strong dagesh), representing a doubling of the consonant in which it appears.
- All other letters (besides gutterals and BeGeDKeFaT letters) can take a dagesh forte.

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- א, ה, ח, ע, and ג are known as gutturals.
- Their sound can't be doubled; they don't take a dot in the center of them called a "dagesh forte."
- As a result of the inability to double their sound, vowel changes (resulting in compensatory lengthening) under gutturals often occur.

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- We will discuss dagesh forte further when we discuss syllabification.

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- There are 4 letters that change their form when they appear at the end of a word; these are final sofit letters:
- כ becomes ך
- מ becomes ם
- פ becomes ף
- צ becomes ץ

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- It is not unusual to confuse certain letters when first learning Hebrew. Please pay close attention to:
- ד (dalet) and ר (resh)
- ה (he) and ח (het)
- ו (vav) and ר (resh)
- ו (vav) and נ (nun sofit)
- ו (vav) and י (yod)
- ע (ayin) and צ/ץ (tsade/tsade sofit)

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- Notice that some letters have the same sounds but may be transliterated differently to distinguish them.
- ח (transliterated *ch*) and כּ (transliterated *kh*)
- ט and ת both have the *t* sound
- ס and שׁ both have the *s* sound

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- Hebrew vowels can be divided into two major groups: regular vowels and vowel letters.
- Please be aware that Hebrew grammars offer slightly different vowel pronunciations for e-class and i-class vowels.
- You need to listen to audio and practice to get a good handle on vowels because it's not an exact science.

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- Long Vowels:

- A-class Qamets אָ a as in father
- E-class Tsere אֵ e as in they or ten*
- O-class Holem אֹ o as in hope

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- Short Vowels

- | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|---|----------------------------|
| • A-class | Patach | ַ | a as in father |
| • E-class | Seghol | ֶ | e as in met |
| • I-class | Hireq | ִ | i as in pin or machine* |
| • O-class | Qamets Hatuf | ֻ | o as in hope |
| • U-class | Qibbutz | ֹ | u as in pull or rule* |

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- B. M. Rocine teaches, “A qamets in a closed and unaccented syllable is called a qamets-hatuf and should be pronounced as a holem.”
- The qamets hatuf occurs only in closed, unaccented syllables, as in חֶבֶט or כֶּלֶם. The qamets hatuf never appears in a closed, accented syllable.

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- Reduced (Hateph) Vowels

- A-class Hateph Patach פֿ a as in amuse
- E-class Hateph Seghol פֿֿ e as in metallic
- O-class Hateph Qamets פֿֿֿ o as in commit or
hope

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- Vowel letters are also known as matres lectionis.
- They are vowels written with the consonants ה, ו, י.

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- Vowel letters written with ה (He) can only appear at the end of a word:

- A-class Qamets He אָה a as in father
- E-class Tsere He אֶה e as in they
- Seghol He אֵה e as in bet
- O-class Holem He אֹה o as in role

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- Vowel letters written with ו (Vav):

- O-class Holem Vav

בו o as in role

- U-class Shureq

בו u as in ruler

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- Sometimes א can be a consonant and sometimes a vowel.
- If it is accompanied by a vowel, it is a consonant.
- The א in אָהַב is accompanied by a qamets, so it's a consonant that is pronounced "v".

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- Vowel letters written with ם (Yod):
 - E-class Tsere Yod םֿ e as in eight
 - Seghol Yod םֿֿ e as in bet
 - I-class Hireq Yod םֿֿֿ i as in machine
- Vowels written with Yod (י) or Vav (ו) are often referred to as historically or unchangeably long vowels.

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- An Israeli cantor taught me that:
 - Tserere is pronounced as an “e” in “met.”
 - Hireq is between an “i” in “sit” and “machine;” it’s closer to “i” as in “machine.”
 - Hebrew grammars say to pronounce a patach-yod-vav or qamets-yod-vav at the end of a word as “av.” (בְּנֵי־וַיְ would be pronounced “ba-nav.”)

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- Defective writing refers to vowels that are written without their consonant. Three patterns of defective vowels are:
 - Holem Vav (בִּוּ) → written as Holem (בִּי)
 - Shureq (בִּיּוּ) → written as Qibbuts (בִּיֵּוּ)
 - Hireq Yod (בִּיּוֹ) → written as Hireq (בִּיֹּ)
 - (plene) (defectiva)

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- There are two basic types of shevas:
- Silent Shevas (שְׁוָ) are never pronounced or transliterated.
- Vocal Shevas (שְׁוָ) have a short or hurried pronunciation and sound like the *a* in amuse.
- Bear in mind that some grammars refer to “Reduced (Hateph) Vowels” as “Compound Shevas.”

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- ***Biblical Hebrew A Compact Guide***, Miles Van Pelt, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, copyright 2012.
- ***Biblical Hebrew An Introductory Grammar***, Page H. Kelly, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, copyright 1992.
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- ***Learning Biblical Hebrew A New Approach Using Discourse Analysis***, B.M. Rocine, Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., Macon, Georgia, copyright 2000.
- http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_Two/unit_two.htm



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