

ALEPH-BET (each column reads in the direction of the arrow)

→ simple transliteration	← name	→ name	→ classic pronunciation ¹	→ modern pronunciation	← Hebrew
'	אָלֶף	aleph		--	א
b, v	בֵּית	bet		b, (v)	ב (בּ)
g	גִּמֵּל	gimel		g	ג (גּ)
d	דָּלֶת	dalet	d, (dh like <i>th</i> in the)	d	ד (דּ)
h	הָא	heh		h	ה
v	וָו	vav (waw)	w	v	ו
z	זַיִן	zayin		z	ז
<u>h</u>	חֵית	<u>h</u> et		<u>h</u> (like Bach)	ח
t	טֵית	tet		t	ט
y	יּוֹד	yod		y	י
k	כַּף	kaf		k, (<u>h</u> like Bach)	כ (כּ)
l	לָמֶד	lamed		l	ל
m	מֶם	mem		m	מ
n	נוּן	nun		n	נ
s	סָמֶךְ	samech		s	ס
'	עַיִן	ayin		--	ע
p	פֶּא	peh		p, (ph)	פ (פּ)
ts	צָדִי	tsadeh		ts (like tsunami)	צ
q	קוֹף	qof		q	ק
r	רֵישׁ	resh		r	ר
s	שִׁין	sin		s	ש
sh	שִׁין	shin		sh	שׁ
t	תָּו	tav	t, (th)	t	ת (תּ)

Several letters have a different form when they are the last letter in a word, namely, כ becomes כּ, נ becomes ן, פ becomes ף, צ becomes ץ. Hebrew is read from right to left, thus an example of a different final letter is the nun in the word *min* which means *from*, מִן.

¹ Most letters sound the same in classic and modern pronunciation. Only those that differ are listed here. We will use the Modern Hebrew pronunciation.

VOWELS

short

patach	פָּתַח	◻	a (as in father)	<i>a-class</i>
segol	סֶגוֹל	◻	e (as in send)	<i>i-class</i>
hireq	הִירֵק	◻	i (as in bee in MH)	<i>i-class</i>
qamets qatan (or qamets hatuf)	קָמֶץ קָטָן	◻	o (in closed unaccented syllables)	<i>u-class</i>
qibbutz	קִבּוּץ	◻	u (as in flute)	<i>u-class</i>

long (defective)

qamets	קָמֶץ גָּדוֹל	◻	a (as in father)	<i>a-class</i>
tsere	צֵרֵי	◻	e (as in they)	<i>i-class</i>
holem	הוֹלֵם	◻	o (as in slow)	<i>u-class</i>

long (plene)

qamets yod	יָ		a (as in aisle)	<i>a-class</i>
segol yod	יֶ		e (as in bet)	<i>i-class</i>
tsere yod	יֵ		e (as in they)	<i>i-class</i>
hireq yod	יִ		i (as in bee)	<i>i-class</i>
holem vav	וֹ		o (as in slow)	<i>u-class</i>
shureq	וּ (שׁוּרֵק)		u (as in flute)	<i>u-class</i>

sheva vowels

sheva	◻ (שְׁוָא)	slight uh	--
hateph patach	◻ (חֶטֶף פָּתַח)	shortened a	<i>a-class</i>
hateph segol	◻ (חֶטֶף סֶגוֹל)	shortened e	<i>i-class</i>
hateph qamets	◻ (חֶטֶף קָמֶץ)	shortened o	<i>u-class</i>

The Vowel Chart

		A class	I class	U class		
		a	e	i	o	u
short		◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
<i>defectiva</i>	changeable long	◻	◻		◻	
<i>plene</i>	unchangeable long		יָ	יֵ	וֹ	וּ
reduced		◻	◻		◻	

PRONUNCIATION RULES

A Biblical Hebrew in antiquity was written with only consonants, leaving the reader to supply the vowels and other vocalization based on the context. To eliminate a measure of ambiguity some long vowels were marked by the letters ו, י, and ה. The name David was formerly spelled דוד (see Sam and Kgs) and later דויד (see Chron), thus, דוד and דויד in the Masoretic Text. While this helped it also means sometimes ו and י are consonants and sometimes vowels, and ה is sometimes a consonant and sometimes a vowel marker. In the early medieval period elaborate systems of vocalization were designed, including vowels markings, accents, and other reading signals, to preserve the right reading of the text. The Masoretic system of vocalization that has come to us preserves the consonantal text as it was received, and has its vocalization signals, including vowels, above, below, and within the letters.

B The **begadkephat** letters, namely, ב, ג, ד, כ, פ, ת, have **dagesh lene** (weak) (דגש קל) dagesh qal) in them when they are the first letter of the word (i.e., ב, ג, ד, כ, פ, ת). A dagesh in a תּ (begadkephat) letter is a lene if it is preceded by a consonant and forte (strong) if preceded by a vowel. In three cases the dagesh affects pronunciation.

ב	b	כ	k	פ	p
ב	v	כ	kh	פ	ph

C All letters except the gutturals, namely, א, ע, ה, and ח, and the letter ר, can take a dagesh forte (e.g., שׁ). A **dagesh forte** (דגש חזק) dagesh hazaq) means the letter is actually doubled, that is, אשׁשׁ is made up of the consonants אשׁשׁ.

D A **furtive pathach** occurs in a word that ends with ח or ע and a vowel under it. The vowel is pronounced before the consonant in these cases, e.g., רוח is pronounced *ruah*.

E An **open syllable** is consonant-vowel (cv). A **closed syllable** is consonant-vowel-consonant (cvc). Thus, קַטַל *qa-tal* has an open and a closed syllable. For our purposes vocal shevas count as full syllables (*contra* Ellis, 22-25; *contra* Weingreen, § 5 [p. 9]; *contra* Kelley, 19-20), for example, we will count two syllables in אֶשְׁוֹ, *she-va'*. Long vowels are usually in open and short vowels in closed syllables.

F The final syllable of the word is usually stressed. The accent or **tonic** syllable is preceded by the **pretonic** syllable which is preceded by the **propretonic** syllable. Two words connected by a **maqquph** are pronounced together. Thus the syllables of אֶל-מוֹשֶׁה are pronounced *el-mo-sheh*, with no accent on *el* because it is propretonic.

G **Shevas** are tricky. In general a vocal sheva (שְׁוֹ) begins a syllable, and a silent sheva (שׁוֹ) closes a syllable.

1 **When is a sheva vocal?**

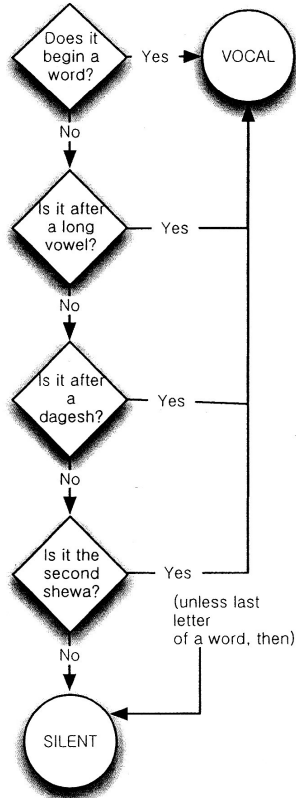
- (a) If it is under the first consonant in a word,
- (b) if it is the second of two consecutive shevas,
- (c) if it is under any consonant with a dagesh hazaq,
- (d) if it follows a long vowel. The diphthong (vowel combination) patach-yod יַֿ functions as a long vowel in that a sheva following it will be vocal,
- (e) if it separates two of the same consonants (otherwise they would have been merged by a dagesh),
- (f) if the consonant after the sheva is a begadkephat letter and does not have a dagesh.

2 **When is a sheva silent?**

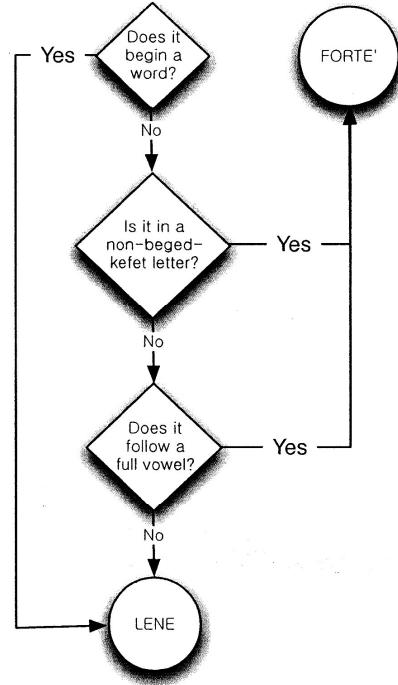
- (a) If it is preceded by a short vowel,
- (b) if it is at the end of a word,
- (c) if it is the first of two consecutive shevas (מִשְׁפָּטִים *mish-p^e-tey* [judgment of]). Two shevas in a row can be silent at the end of a word קָטַלְתָּ *qatalt* (you killed).

tips for *sheva* and *dagesh*²

Is it a vocal sheva?



Is it a dagesh forte'?



dagesh forte' = double the consonant

Syllable Notes:

CV = open - usually long vowel (may be short if accented)

CVC = closed - usually short vowel (may be long if accented)

Last syllable is normally accented.

Dagesh forte's double consonant both closes the preceding syllable and starts the next.

נָ and נִ do not close syllables but leave them open.

- 3 Examples? In the phrase לֵךְ-לְךָ the first sheva is silent because it closes a syllable and the second sheva is vocal because it opens a syllable, thus it is pronounced *lek-l^e-ka* (Go! only used in Gen 12:1 and 22:1 [lit. go-for-you]), or in the word יִזְרְעֵאל the first sheva is silent and the second is vocal; thus, the pronunciation is *yiz-r^e-e'l* (Jezreel).

² Used by permission. Thank you to my colleague, Fred Putnam who passed along this chart from a student.

- 4 The sheva signifies the absence of a vowel. The sheva symbol ם resembles the *sof pasuq* : which marks the end of each verse; the similarity is especially close in the case of the silent sheva that marks the end of a mid-word closed syllable. Follow the rules on vocalization above (G.1, 2) and know that some differences of opinion remain on ambiguous situations (e.g., Joüon, 8, leans toward silent shevas, and Hoffer toward vocal shevas, see *Supplement*, D [p. 6], S2.12).
- H There are several **diphthongs** (vowel combinations) that have distinct sounds: ם sounds like *ai* in aisle; ם still sounds like *a* in father but held slightly longer toward *ou* in ought or *ai* in aisle; ם sounds like *oy*; ם sounds like *av*, and ם - 3ms noun suffix the ם is silent so it sounds like *av*; ם sounds like *ei*; and ם sound like *oo-ie* or *ü-ie* as in bouy (see Joüon, 6d, 7c n.1; 8d).
- I The qamets gadol (qamets) ם and qamets qatan (qamets hatuf) ם look identical. Whereas **qamets gadol** is pronounced like patach, **qamets qatan** is pronounced like holem and occurs *only in closed, unaccented syllables*. The rule is: A syllable which is closed and unaccented must have a short vowel (Weingreen, 2, 7; Gesenius, 26.5). The vast majority of the time ם signifies the qamets gadol sound. The cases in which ם signifies qamets qatan are: when sheva follows as a syllable divider ם ם ם *hok-ma*; when a closed syllable is formed by dagesh forte ם ם ם *honneni*; when a closed syllable loses its accent because of a maqqeph ם ם ם *kol-ha'adam*; in a closed final syllable without an accent ם ם ם *vayyaqom* (Gesenius, 9u; see note on 8.1e; for exceptions see Joüon, 6,1). The **meteg** (ם *bridle*)—small vertical line to the left of ם (i.e., ם)—signifies that ם is a qamets gadol and that the sheva under the next consonant is vocal. For example, ם (they listened) is pronounced *sham^e'u* (*sha-m^e-’u*). Meteg is a sort-of half-accent and often occurs in propretonic syllables.

RELATED MATTERS

- J One of the difficulties in learning Hebrew is that the vowels change frequently, and consonants shift at times, in the course of speaking/writing, causing words to look and sound different than the “normal” form which are learned for vocabulary quizzes. The inflectional elements are a big part of what students need to learn and overcome.
- 1 Shifts in vocalization occur in the course of speaking in English, shifts which are akin to the kind we find in Hebrew. For example, when *modern* becomes *modernity* the o goes silent and the e is barely vocalized, thus, if spelled according to pronunciation it would look like *m'd^ernitee*.
 - 2 Ancient written Hebrew did not have vowels. The vocalization of the text included the vowel sounds that were a part of spoken Hebrew. The vowel pointing was added in the medieval period by the Masoretes to preserve the pronunciation of the scriptural language. Thus, the vowels do not have meaning per se. Rather the vowel points show the traditional pronunciation of the consonantal text.
 - 4 It is recommended that the student not rely heavily upon sound associations in vocabulary memorization because of the frequency of phonetic shifting.
 - 5 The student should be patient and expect many idiosyncrasies. Memorize the “normal” elements, and even the “normal exceptions,” even while knowing that the exceptions are many. In short, the student who expects few constants will avoid some of the frustrations of learning biblical Hebrew.

K Spoken and written Hebrew changed in antiquity, like any other language. Judges 12:6 illustrates pronunciation differences in regional dialects: the people of Gilead said שִׁבְלֵת *shibboleth* and people of Ephraim said סִבְלֵת *sibboleth* (see Ross, 1.3.3). The study of biblical Hebrew today refers to the Hebrew represented in the Masoretic Text published in BHK, BHS, and BHQ (the text of codex EBP. I B 19a of the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg; formerly known as the Leningrad codex).