

Biblical Hebrew 101

Learning to Read Biblical Hebrew

Lesson 6

לְשֶׁוֹר ו

Look-a-Like Consonants



Fellowshipping!

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!”
Psalm 133:1 ESV

Continue reinforcing the Hebrew aleph-bet

- 6.01 Compare the consonants that Look-a-Like
- 6.02 Vowels: o & oo-type vowels
- 6.03 Fun way to remember the cholam vav (וֹ) and the shurek (וּ)
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- 6.06 Let’s read Psalm 133:1 in Hebrew

6.01 Let's compare the consonants that are look-a-likes

Notice the differences between each of these look-a-like consonants:		
Letter	Name of letter & the difference or uniqueness of the letter	Print
ב	Vet (note: the flat bottom bar)	
כ	Chatef: (note: how the letter is rounded)	
ג	Gimmel (note: foot on lower right)	
נ	Nun (note: top & bottom bars are both short)	
ד	Dalet (note: top bar is straight & extends a bit to the right)	
ר	Resh (note: resh is similar to ד; however, top bar doesn't extend to right)	
ך	Chaf sofit (similar to ר, only tail hangs below the line; this letter only appears as the last letter of a word.)	
ו	Vav (note: similar to ר; only top bar is short)	
ן	Nun sofit (note: similar to ו, only tail hangs below the line; this letter only appears as the last letter of a word.)	
ז	Zayin (note: similar to ו, only top bar is slanted)	
ה	Hey (note: opening on top left)	
ח	Chet (note: there is no opening on top left)	
ת	Tav (note: looks like ח, but has foot on bottom left)	
ע	Ayin (note: how the letter is rounded on the bottom)	
צ	Tsade (note: how this letter has a straight bottom and the cross line is also straight)	
ס	Samech (note: how this letter is rounded)	
ם	Mem sofit (note: how the mem sofit has a flat bottom & a flat right side; this letter only appears as the last letter of a word.)	

6.02 The “o” & “oo” vowels

The vowels we’ve studied thus far have been written below their corresponding consonant. As we’ll learn the “o” and “oo” vowels are slightly different.

1. There are three different ways to write the “o” type.
 - a. The 1st is the cholam vav; it is written with a dot on top of the vav: וְ. It is important to note that the vav is silent and is no longer a consonant; instead it is part of the vowel. Therefore, the only sound the cholam vav has is “o” as in “row.” For example: טוב (tov, meaning “good”)
 - b. The 2nd type of “o” vowel is like the cholam vav, only it is written without the “vav.” For example: בֹּקֶר (bo-kehr, meaning “morning”) Note: the dot slightly to the left side of the “bet.” This vowel is called “cholam” and has the same sound as the cholam vav.
 - c. The 3rd is not as common as the first two. It is called a chatef kamats and is written with a kamats and a sheva under the letter & has a long “o” sound. For example: עֲנִי (o-nee, meaning “poor”).
2. There are two different ways to write the “oo” type of vowel.
 - a. The first is called a shurek. It is written with a “vav” and a dot, which is in the middle of it, וֹ. This “vav” is silent and is no longer a consonant, but part of the vowel. The sound of the shurek is “oo” as in “pool.” For example: שָׁבוּעַ (shah-vooh, meaning “week”).
 - b. And the other type of “oo” is called a kibbutz; it is 3 slanted dots under any consonant. אָ. For example: הַעֲדוּת (hah-eh-doot, meaning “the testimony”)

6.03 Fun way to remember the sounds of the cholam vav and the shurek

- To remember the cholam vav (וְ) & the cholam (ׁ): if I tapped you on top of your head, you’d say “Oh!”
- To remember the shurek (וֹ) & the kibbutz (ָ): if I tapped you in the tummy, you’d say “oo” (as in pool).

Vowels: o & oo-types				
Book print	Name of vowel	Sound of vowel	Block Print	Write each letter
o-type vowels				
וְ	Note: this vowel is always written with the vav & is called <i>cholam vav</i> חוֹלָם וּ (also called: <i>cholam male</i> חוֹלָם מָלֵא)	o as in row	ו	
ׁ	Note: the <i>cholam</i> can be written with most consonants. Called <i>cholam</i> חוֹלָם	o as in row	אָ	
׃	This vowel is <i>chatef kamats</i> חֲטַף קָמָץ	o as in row	אֲ	
oo-type vowels				
וֹ	Note: this vowel is always written with a vav & is called <i>shurek</i> שׁוּרֵק	oo as in pool	וֹ	
ָ	Note: the <i>kibbutz</i> can be written with most consonants & is called <i>kibbutz</i> קִבּוּץ	oo as in pool	אָ	

6.04 *Practice reading*

Read common Hebrew words & phrases below (note: accented syllables are in bold & highlighted)			
Hebrew	Translation	Transliteration	Write
נָכוֹן	right or correct	nah- chon (long “O”)	
כְּבוֹד	glory, honor, or splendor	kah- vod (long “O”)	
כָּל הַכְּבוֹד	All the honor; congratulations. This phrase means the same as the phrase below.	kol -- hahk-kah- vod כָּל & כָּל are spelled differently but pronounced the same.	
כָּל הַכְּבוֹד	All the honor; congratulations	kol -- hahk-kah-vod (pronounced the same as word above; note the kamats chatuf.)	
אֲרוֹן הַקְּדוֹשׁ	Holy Ark (storage cabinet for the Sefer Torah, Torah Scroll; 2Chron 35:3.)	ah- ron -- hahk-ko- dehsh (long “O”)	
לֵאמֹר	to say	leh- mor (long “O”)	
סוֹף	end or close (the same root as סוֹפֵת, as in ‘mem sofit’ ס)	sof (long “O”)	
סוֹפֵת	suffix or ending, as in ‘mem sofit’ ס (same root as סוֹף)	so- feet	
הַעֲדוּת	the testimony	hah-eh- dut	
עֵד	witness (noun)	ehd	
עַד	eternal (literally, until)	ahd	
עַד-עוֹלָם	forever (2Sam 7:16; literally until forever)	ahd-o- lahm	
לְעוֹלָם וָעַד	forever and ever (PS 145:21)	leh-o- lahm -- vah- ehd	
שַׁבַּת שְׁלוֹם	Have a good Shabbat!	shahb- baht -- shah- lom	
טוֹב	Good	tov	
בֹּקֵר טוֹב	Good morning!	bo -kehr -- tov	
עֶרֶב טוֹב	Good evening!	eh -rehv -- tov (Tip: when 2 segols appear in a 3 or 4-letter word, the 1st gets the accent)	
שְׁבוּעַ טוֹב	Have a good week	shah- vu -ah -- tov	
מָה זֶה?	What is this?	mah -- zeh ?	
תּוֹדָה רַבָּה	Thanks a lot!	to- dah -- rahb- bah	
רִגַע	one moment	reh -gah	
עוֹד פְּעַם	one more time; again	od -- pah -ahm	
כֵּן	yes	kehn	
לֹא	no	lo	

6.05 BeGeD KeFeT letters: ת פ כ ד ג ב

There are 6 letters in the Hebrew aleph bet which have 2 possible, but closely related, pronunciations. The term BeGeD KeFeT is simply a device for the easy memorization of these 6 letters.

These 6 consonants are: bet (ב); gimmel (ג); dalet (ד); kaf (כ); pay (פ); and tav (ת).

You will notice in the chart below, when there is a dot¹ in these consonants, there is a change in the pronunciation of 3 of the letters, which are lighted in light blue. (The other 3 sets have letters have no change in sound in Modern Hebrew. However, sometimes there may be a change with Seminary Hebrew or Ashkenazic pronunciation.)

BeGeD KeFeT	Name of letter	Sound	Example	Explanation
ב	with dot: bet	as in ball	רַבָּה (rahb-bah)	NOTE: the bet and vet are pronounced differently
ב	without dot: vet	as in vice	שֶׁבֶט (sheh-veht)	
ג	with dot: gimmel	as in get	גַּם (gahm)	Note: the gimmel is pronounced the same with and without the dagesh
ג	without dot: gimmel	as in get	חָג (chahg)	
ד	with dot: dalet	as in dog	דָּג (dahg)	Note: the dalet is pronounced the same with and without the dagesh
ד	without dot: dalet	as in dog	עוֹד (od)	
כ	with dot: kaf	as in keep	כֶּן (kehr)	NOTE: the kaf and chaf are pronounced differently
כ	without dot: chaf	as in Bach	נָכוֹן (nah-chon)	
פ	with dot: pay	as in pet	פַּעַם (pah-ahm)	NOTE: the pay and fay are pronounced differently
פ	without dot: fay	as in far	סוֹפֵת (so-feet)	
ת	with dot: tav	as in tell	תּוֹדָה (to-dah)	Note: the tav is pronounced the same with and without the dagesh
ת	without dot: tav	as in tell	שֶׁבֶט (shahb-bat)	

¹ In Lesson 9, we will discuss this dot in more detail.

6.05 *Let's read Psalm 133:1: some cantillation¹ markings are in the words below*

Vocabulary for Psalm 133:1 (note: accented syllables are in bold & highlighted)		
Hebrew	Translation	Transliteration
הִנֵּה	behold	heen- neh
מָה	what or how	mah
טוֹב	good	to v (long "O")
וּמָה	and what or how	oo- mah
נְעִים	pleasant, nice, or delightful	nah- eem
וּמָה-נְעִים	and how pleasant, nice, or delightful (the dash or maqqef (מקף) functions similarly to a dash or hyphen in English. Also, with a maqqef, note accents shifts from 1 st word to 2 nd .)	oo- mah nah- eem
שָׁבַת	sit, dwell, or remain, or abide (Tip: when 2 segols appear in a 3 or 4-letter word, the 1st gets the accent)	sheh -veht
אֶחָיִם	brothers	ah- cheem
גַּם	also or moreover	gah m
יַחַד	one, as in together or in unity	yah -chad
גַּם-יַחַד	also or moreover, as one	gah m yah -chad

Psalm 133:1 - Read a complete verse in Hebrew!

(Continue writing names of letters & vowels. This exercise helps to develop your reading skills.)

הִנֵּה מָה טוֹב וּמָה נְעִים שָׁבַת אֶחָיִם גַּם יַחַד:

↑
Shurek

↑
Cholam vav

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” Psalm 133:1 ESV

Guess what?? Today, you read and understood one complete verse in Hebrew!!!

¹ Refer to Lesson 5.06 for more information on cantillation markings.