

Biblical Hebrew Course 101
– **Boot Camp** –
Learning to Read Biblical Hebrew
Lesson 7
שְׁעוֹר ז

Developing our understanding of the Hebrew Aleph Bet:
Diphthongs, long & short vowels, and sh'vas



It's exciting learning to read an actual Torah scroll!

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7.01 Sound-a-Like consonants: consonants with the same sound

Did you know in English different consonants can have the same sound?

For example: the “ce” in “notice” has the same sound as the “s” in “plus.”

Notice these consonants sound-a-like:		
Letter	Name of letter	Sound
וּ	vet	v, as in vice
וּ	vav	v, as in vice
ט	tet	t, as in tell
ת	tav	t, as in tell
ח	chet	ch, as in Bach
כּ	chaf	ch, as in Bach
ך	chaf sofit	same sound as כּ; only it is the final letter of a word
כּ	kaf	k, as in keep
ק	koof	k, as in keep
שׁ	sin (pronounced seen)	s, as in set
ס	samech	s, as in set

7.02 Introduce: diphthongs

Standard Sound Of Hebrew Vowels↓				
ֵ ("ee")	ֶ ("eh")	ֶ ("eh")	ֹ ("ah")	ֹ ("ah")
Sound Of Hebrew Vowels With Diphthongs↓				
Note: the change in the sound of the vowel when a yud is added				
“ee” as in sleep	“ay” as in stay	“ay” as in stay	“I” as in isle	“I” as in isle
יֵי	יֶי	יֶי	יֹי	יֹי
Chirek Yud	Tsere Yud	Segol Yud	Kamats Yud	Patach Yud
חֵירֶק יוּד	צִירֵי יוּד	סִגּוֹל יוּד	קָמָץ יוּד	פָּתַח יוּד
NOTE: 1. There are only 3 diphthong sounds to remember. They are: kamats or patch + yod = “I” (sound “I” as in isle); segol or tsere + yud = “ay” (sound “ay” as in stay); and chirek + yud = still has “ee” (as in sleep). 2. Diphthongs are long vowels.				

7.03 Exercise: words with diphthongs (answers on 7.11)

Words with diphthongs: we encourage you to read these words <i>at least once a day</i> .		
Hebrew	English Translation	Identify diphthongs
1) אֲדֹנָיִם	Lord of the lords, hosts (Deut 10:17; Ps 136:3)	Tsere yud: said “ay”: as in “stay” Chirik yud: said “ee” as in “sleep”
2) אֲדֹנִי	My Lord (Ps 110:1)	
3) חַגִּי	In English, Haggai, as in the book of <i>Haggai</i> ; *the Hebrew word is pronounced differently.	Patach yud: said “I” as in “isle”
4) אֵיפֹה	Where? (interrogative or question word)	
5) סִינִי	*Sinai	

7.04 Exercise: review concepts (answers on 7.11)

Identify the concept in the words below			
Hebrew	English Translation	Transliteration	What is the concept?
1) אֶהְבֵּה	love (noun)	ah-hah- vah	<u>Under the first hay</u> : chatef patach
2) חַטָּא	sinner	chah- tah	<u>Under the chet</u> : chatef patach
3) אֶמֶת *	truth *The chatef segol is not a full segol, so it does not count as one of 2 segols in a row	eh- meht	
4) וְאַמִּץ *	& courage (& courageous) *refer to explanation above	veh-eh- mahtz	
5) אֲדֹנִי	My Lord (Ps 110:1)	Ah-doh- nee	
6) אֲדֹנָיו	our Lord (1Sam 16:16) Used to refer to leaders, eg King David (1Sam 25:14, 17; 1Ki 1:43, 47; Neh 10:30; Ps 8:2,10)	Ah-doh- nay *-noo (*“ay”: as in “stay”)	
7) סִינִי	Sinai (the Hebrew name is pronounced differently than the English)	See- ni (*“i” as in “isle”)	
8) מַלְכָּה	queen	mahl- kah מַלְכָּה	The patach (in front of the sh’va) closes the 1 st syllable. The kaf is BedGeD KeFeT & it starts a new syllable.
9) הַגִּדָּה	Haggadah (booklet that tells the story of the exodus from Egypt)	hahg-gah- dah הַגִּדָּה	The gimmel has a dagesh chazak, because it follows a vowel. The 1st gimmel closes the 1st syllable & the 2nd opens the next syllable.
10) בְּמִדְבָּר	in the wilderness or desert (Deut 1:1)	bahm-meed- bahr בְּמִדְבָּר	Dagesh Kal (bet is part of בְּגֵד כֶּפֶת & it does not follow a vowel) Dagesh Chazak (mem is doubled because dagesh follows a vowel.) Dagesh Kal (bet is part of בְּגֵד כֶּפֶת & bet does not follow a vowel)

7.05 Introduce: long & short vowels

The Hebrew Long Vowels are

- Kamats and tsere.
- The three dots: the cholam, the cholam vav, and the shurek.
- The 5 diphthongs.

The Hebrew Short Vowels are

- For now, all other vowels are considered short.

7.06 Introduce: vocal & silent sh'vas

The sh'va (ְ) can be either vocal or it can be silent.

Note: when a sh'va follows a short vowel, it closes the syllable & is silent.

Example: מֶלֶךְ | כֹּהֵן – sh'va closes the 1st syllable because it follows a short vowel.

- The vocal sh'va has the same “eh” sound as a segol or tsere. The vocal sh'va is slightly quicker than the segol or tsere.
- In this lesson, we will discuss some of the main rules which determine whether the sh'va is vocal (“eh”) or silent.

➤ Level 1: when a sh'va is at the beginning of a word

When the sh'va is <u>under the 1st letter of a word, it is vocal</u> . This sh'va generally has a quick “eh” sound.		
Word	Meaning	Transliteration Explanation: 1. The small “eh” signifies the quick & almost indistinguishable “eh” sound. 2. The bolded, highlighted syllable is accented.
1) לְךָ	for yourself (Gen 6:14)	leh- chah
2) בְּיוֹם	in the day (Lev 19:6)	beh- yom
3) בְּרֵאשִׁית	Genesis (In the beginning) (Gen 1:1)	beh-reh- sheet (commonly pronounced b'resheet)

➤ Level 2: when 2 sh'vas are consecutive, the 1st is silent & 2nd is vocal.

When 2 sh'vas are consecutive (in other words, they are in a row), <u>the 1st is silent & 2nd is vocal</u> . 1. <u>The 1st of two consecutive sh'vas closes the syllable</u> . The 1st sh'va is silent. 2. <u>The 2nd of 2 consecutive sh'vas is vocal</u> It opens that syllable <i>and</i> has a quick “eh” sound. <u>Tip: drawing a line between the sh'vas makes it easier to visualize.</u> נָפְשְׁךָ → נָפְשְׁ כָּךָ		
Word	Meaning	Transliteration
1) נָפְשְׁךָ נָפְשְׁ כָּךָ	your (plural- aka your all's) soul (Deut 6:5)	nahf-sheh- chah נָפְשְׁ כָּךָ
2) תִּשְׁמָעוּ	you will obey (2 nd part of the Shema; Deut 11:13)	teesh-meh- oo
3) אֶרְצְכֶם	your land (2 nd part of the Shema; Deut 11:14)	ahr-tseh- chehm

7.07 Exercise: identify levels 1 & 2 of the sh'va (answers on 7.11)

Grammar-made-simple:

Level 1 of the vocal sh'va:

Level 1: If the sh'va is under the 1st consonant of the word, it is vocal.

Level 2 of the vocal sh'va:

Level 2: If there are 2 sh'vas in a row (consecutive), the 1st is silent (it closes the syllable) & the 2nd is vocal (it opens the syllable).

Word	Meaning	Transliteration	Type of sh'va & why
1) שְׁמוֹת	names (Ex 1:1)	sheh'mot (commonly pronounced: sh'mot)	Level 1: vocal – because it begins a word, it is vocal.
2) שְׁמַע	Shema	sheh-mah (commonly pronounced: sh'mah)	
3) יְלָדִים	boys/children	yeh-lah-deem	
4) יִשְׁמְרוּ	they will guard or keep	yeesh-meh-roo	Level 2: there are 2 sh'vas in a row; the 1 st sh'va is silent & the 2 nd is vocal.
5) נַפְשְׁכֶם	your soul (Is 55:2) (aka your all's soul)	nahf-sheh-chehm	
6) כָּתוּב	write	keh-tohv	

7.08 Introduce: Level 3

➤ Level 3: when a sh'va is under a dagesh chazak*, it is vocal.

(*Review: dagesh chazak explained below ↓.)

***Dagesh chazak: TIP: If a vowel is in front of a dagesh, it is a dagesh chazak.**

- The dagesh chazak doubles the consonant it is in.
- This example shows how a dagesh chazak doubles the consonant it is in. כָּלְךָ = כָּל + לְךָ
 - Note, the לְ has a dagesh chazak. Why? It follows a vowel (כָּ).
 - Because of the dagesh chazak, the לְ is doubled: כָּל + לְךָ = כָּלְךָ
 - The 1st sh'va is silent; the 2nd is vocal: cool-leh-chehm. (Yes, this is similar to Level 2.)

Word	Meaning	Transliteration
		Explanation: 1. The small “eh” signifies the quick & almost indistinguishable “eh” sound. 2. The bolded, highlighted syllable is accented.
1) כָּלְךָ	all of you (2 nd person: you: masculine, plural)	cool-leh-chehm כָּל לְךָ (The lamed with the 1st sh'va is silent; the 2 nd lamed is vocal)
2) הַשְּׁבִיעִי	the seventh	hahsh-sheh-vee-ee בִּי שֵׁן הַשְּׁ - (commonly pronounced hahsh-shvee-ee) (The sheen with the 1st sh'va is silent; the 2 nd sheen is vocal)
3) טַפְּכֶם	your (2 nd person: you: masculine, plural) children (Dt 29:11)	tahp-peh-chehm פֶּי כֶּם The pey is a dagesh chazak because it follows a vowel. The 1 st sh'va under the pey closes that syllable -- & the 2 nd then opens the next syllable.

7.09 Introduce: Level 4

➤ Level 4: when a sh'va follows a long vowel*, it is vocal.

(*Long vowels are listed below↓.)

When a sh'va follows a long vowel*, it is vocal.

***Long vowels:** (This is an introduction to long vowels)

- kamats קָמָץ (ֶ) // tsere צִירֵי (ִ) //
- cholam חֹלָם (ֹ) // cholam vav חֹלָם וּ // shurek שׁוּרֶק (וּ)
- And the 5 diphthongs

For example: הִיְתָה (The sh'va immediately follows the kamats, a long vowel; therefore, the sh'va is vocal. הִיְתָה is pronounced: hi-yeh-**ta**h)

Word	Meaning	Transliteration
1) הִיְתָה	it was (3 rd person: feminine, singular)	hi-yeh- ta h (commonly pronounced hi-yee- ta h)
2) לִבְּךָ	your heart (from the V'ahavta from the Shema, Dt 6:5)	leh-vah- veh -chah (commonly pronounced leh- vahv -chah)
3) כָּתְבִים	write (masculine, plural)	koh-teh- veem (commonly pronounced koht- veem)
4) וּבְאִלָּתוֹ	and his oath	oo-veh-ah-lah- toh

7.10 Exercise: identify levels 3 & 4 of sh'vas (answers on 7.11)

Grammar-made-simple:

Level 3: when a sh'va is under a dagesh chazak*, it is vocal:

- *Dagesh chazak is easily recognizable because the dagesh chazak follows any vowel.
- The consonant with the dagesh chazak is doubled. כָּלָם = כָּל + לָם

Level 4 is when the sh'va follows a long vowel:

If the sh'va follows a long vowel, it is vocal.

The long vowels are:

- kamats קָמָץ (ֶ) // tsere צִירֵי (ִ) //
- 3 dots: cholam חֹלָם (ֹ) // cholam vav חֹלָם וּ // shurek שׁוּרֶק (וּ)
- & the 5 diphthongs

Exercise: Identify Level 3 or Level 4 in each of the words below

Word	Meaning	Transliteration	Type of sh'va & why
1) כָּתְבִים	write (masculine plural)	koh- teh -veem (commonly pronounced koht- veem)	
2) וְנָשְׂאוּ	and they carried, they lifted, to marry (3cp)	veh-nah-seh- oo	
3) יָתִיצְבוּ	and stood (Ex 14:13)	yeet-yahts-tseh- voo	The 1 st sh'va follows a short vowel & it closes the syllable Level 3: the 2 nd sh'va is under a dagesh chazak & follows a vowel – so it is vocal.

7.11 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES 7.03, 7.04, 7.07, and 7.10

Answers to 7.03: words with diphthongs		
Hebrew	Translation	Identify diphthongs
1) אֲדֹנֵי הָאֲדֹנִים	Lord of the lords, hosts (Deut 10:17; Ps 136:3)	Nun-tsere-yud: said “nay”: as in “stay” Nun-chirik yud: said “nee” as in sleep
2) אֲדֹנִי	My Lord (Ps 110:1)	Chirik yud: said “ee” as in “sleep”
3) חֲגִי	Haggai, as in the book of <i>Haggai</i>	Patach yud: said “I” as in “isle”
4) אֵיפֹה	Where? (interrogative or question word)	Tsere yud: said “ay”: as in “stay”
5) סִינִי	Sinai	Chirik yud: said “ee” as in “sleep” Patach yud: said “I” as in “isle”

Answers to 7.04: identify the concept in the words below			
Hebrew	Translation	Transliteration	What is the concept?
1) אֶהְבֵּה	love (noun)	ah-hah- vah	<u>Under the first hay</u> : chatef patach
2) חָטָא	sinner	chah- tah	<u>Under the chet</u> : chatef patach
3) אֶמֶת *	truth *The chatef segol is not a full segol, so it does not count as one of 2 segols in a row	eh- meht	<u>Under the aleph</u> : chatef segol
4) וְאַמִּץ *	& courage (& courageous) *refer to explanation above	veh-eh- mahtz	<u>Under the aleph</u> : chatef segol
5) אֲדֹנִי	My Lord (Ps 110:1)	Ah-doh- nee	<u>Under the aleph</u> : chatef patach <u>After dalet</u> : cholam
6) אֲדֹנָיו	our Lord (1Sam 16:16) Used to refer to leaders, eg King David (1Sam 25:14, 17; 1Ki 1:43, 47; Neh 10:30; Ps 8:2,10)	Ah-doh- nay *-noo (*“ay”: as in “stay”)	<u>Under the aleph</u> : chatef patach <u>After the dalet</u> : cholam <u>Below the nun</u> : tsere yud diphthong: “nay” <u>After the 2nd nun</u> : shurek
7) סִינִי	Sinai	See- ni (*“i” as in “isle”)	<u>Under the samech</u> : chirek yud diphthong: “ee” <u>Under the nun</u> : patch yud diphthong: “nI” (long “I”)
8) מַלְכָּה	queen	mahl- kah	<u>The kaf</u> : BedGeD KeFeT & it starts a new syllable. Because <u>the sh’va</u> follows a short vowel, it closes the syllable.
9) הַגִּדָּה	Haggadah (booklet that tells the story of the exodus from Egypt)	hahg-gah- dah	Dagesh Chazak (gimmel is doubled because this dagesh follows a vowel.)
10) בְּמִדְבָּר	in the wilderness or desert (Deut 1:1)	bahm-meed- bahr	Dagesh Kal (bet is part of כָּפֶת כָּפֶת & it does not follow a vowel) Dagesh Chazak (mem is doubled because dagesh follows a vowel.) Dagesh Kal (bet is part of כָּפֶת כָּפֶת & bet does not follow a vowel)

7.11 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES, cont.

Answers to 7.07: identify levels 1 & 2 of the sh'vas			
1) שְׁמוֹת	Names (Ex 1:1)	Sheh'mot (<u>commonly pronounced</u> : sh' mot)	Level 1: vocal – because it begins a word
2) שְׁמָע	Shema	sheh- mah (<u>commonly pronounced</u> : sh' mah)	Level 1: the sh'va is under the first consonant & there is no vowel preceding it, it is vocal.
3) יְלָדִים	boys/children	yeh-lah- deem	Level 1: vocal – because it begins a word
4) יִשְׁמְרוּ	they will guard or keep	yeesh-meh- roo	Level 2: there are 2 sh'vas in a row; the 1 st sh'va is silent & the 2 nd is vocal.
5) נַפְשְׁכֶם	your soul (Is 55:2)	nahf-sheh- chehm	Level 2: there are 2 sh'vas in a row; the 1 st sh'va is silent & the 2 nd is vocal.
6) כָּתוּב	write	keh- tohv	Level 1: vocal – because it begins a word

Answers to 7.10: identify levels 3 & 4 of the sh'vas			
Word	Meaning	Transliteration	Type of sh'va & why
1) כָּתְבִים	write (masculine plural)	koh- teh -veem (<u>commonly pronounced</u> kot' veem)	Level 4: sh'va follows a long vowel
2) וְנָשְׂאוּ	and they carried, they lifted, to marry (3cp)	veh-nah-seh- oo	Level 1: sh'va is under 1st letter Level 4: 2 nd sh'va follows a long vowel
3) יַתִּיצְבוּ	And stood (Ex 2:4)	yeet-yahts-tseh- voo	The 1 st sh'va follows a short vowel & it closes the syllable Level 3: the 2 nd sh'va follows a vowel & is vocal