

ADVANCED RITUAL HEBREW READING (and good Hebrew for nitpickers!)

“CLOSED SYLLABLE” VS. “OPEN SYLLABLE”

An **open syllable** is a syllable that begins with a consonant, but ends with a vowel. Every single Hebrew syllable begins with a consonant.

Whenever a consonant is vocalized with any vowel—including a vocalized ך (sh^eva nah) but not including an unvocalized ך (sh^eva na)—a **new syllable** begins.

A syllable that is not open is a **closed syllable**.

When there is no vowel attached to (i.e., below or above) a ה, a ץ or an ם, that letter is not a consonant. It is part of the vowel. (The letter indicates that there is a vowel in the letter beforehand, and it helps the reader notice that.)

EXAMPLES: כִּי is an open syllable because the ך is not a consonant; it is one syllable long.

In the word, מְלָכּוֹת, there are two syllables (מֶלֶךְ and כּוֹת), and they are both closed syllables.

The word אֶמְרָה has three syllables (אֶ, מְ and רָה); they are all open syllables.

ACCENTS

Unless indicated otherwise by the grammatical structure (which requires knowledge of Hebrew) or by a ׀ (meteg) or other accent mark (i.e. “trop” mark) in the text itself, the stress of a Hebrew word always falls on the last syllable. Many books in which vowels are written for their words includes an accent mark to indicate a shifted syllabic stress.

EXAMPLES: קָתְבוּ is pronounced ka-te-VU.

שְׁעָר is pronounced SHA-ar.

DOTS INSIDE LETTERS

If ה (mappik heh) is not marked by a vowel, it is still treated like a consonant. The consonant ה at the end of a syllable is pronounced like the letter ה in any other usage.

EXAMPLE: לָהּ is pronounced with an aspirated “H” at the end of the word.

When the letters ז, ט, י, ל, מ, נ, ס, צ, ק, ש, and שׁ have a *dagesh* (i.e., dot) in them, they are hardened, elongated, briefly doubled, or specially emphasized in their pronunciation—differentiated from the versions of these letters without a *dagesh* (ז, ט, י, ל, מ, נ, ס, צ, ק, ש, and שׁ).

EXAMPLES: הַזֵּי is pronounced with the “Z” of the ז held longer or enunciated louder than the “Z” of the ז in זֵי.

הַטִּיט is pronounced with the “T” of the ט pronounced darker, more emphatically or enunciated louder than the “T” of the ט at the end of הַטִּיט.

הַיִּי is pronounced with the “Y” of the י held longer or enunciated louder than the “Y” of the י in יִיִּי.

הַלֵּל is pronounced with the “L” of the ל held longer or enunciated louder than the “L” of the ל in לֵלֵל.

הַמֵּמ is pronounced with the “M” of the מ held longer or enunciated louder than the “M” of the מ in מֵמֵמ.

הַנֵּנ is pronounced with the “N” of the נ held longer or enunciated louder than the “N” of the נ in נֵנֵנ.

הַסֵּס is pronounced with the “S” of the ס held longer or enunciated louder than the

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“S” of the ס in סיני.

הַצִּדִּיק is pronounced with the “TZ” of the צ pronounced darker or enunciated louder than the “TZ” of the צ in צִדִּיק.

הַקָּרִיאָה is pronounced with the “K” of the ק pronounced darker or enunciated louder than the “K” of the ק at the end of צִדִּיק.

אֲשֶׁר is pronounced with the “SH” of the ש held longer, pronounced darker or more emphatically or enunciated louder than the “SH” of the ש at the end of רָאשׁוּ.

הַשְּׂמֹחָה is pronounced with the “S” of the ש held longer, or more emphatically or enunciated louder than the “S” of either ש in שִׁשׁוֹן.

When the hard letters ב (bet), ג (gimel), ד (dalet), כ (kaf), פ (peh), and ת (tav) are written with a *dagesh*, they are pronounced differently from the soft letters ב (vet), ג (gimel), ד (dalet), כ (khaf), פ (feh), and ת (tav) without a *dagesh*.

More exactly than any other tradition of speaking Hebrew, the Yemenite tradition has preserved distinctions between each of these 6 letters’ hard and soft forms. In Yemenite pronunciation, ג is pronounced like the “J” in “job” and ג like the guttural Arabic letter *ghayin* (“GH”); ד is pronounced like the “D” of “door” and ד like the “TH” in “this;” the ת like the “T” in “tiny” and ת like the “TH” in “thing.”

EXAMPLES: בְּבִיתָּךְ is pronounced *be-vey-TE-kha*.

גַּג is pronounced *GAG* (but Yemenite pronunciation would be more akin to *JAGH*).

דֹּדְךָ is pronounced *do-DE-kha* (but in Yemenite pronunciation, more akin to *do-THE-kha*).

דָּךְ is pronounced *KAKH*. פִּיפִּיּוֹת is pronounced *pi-fiy-YOT*.

תּוֹרָתוֹ is pronounced *to-ra-TO* (but in Yemenite pronunciation, more akin to *to-ra-THO*).

The letter *Alef* appears with a dot (either a *mappik* or a *dagesh*) in it 4 times in the Hebrew Bible: Genesis 43:26, Leviticus 23:17, Job 33:21 and Ezra 8:18. The letter ו appears with a dot (either a *mappik* or a *dagesh*) in it about a dozen and a half times in the Hebrew Bible.

When there is a dot inside the letter ו, there are at least 3 possible pronunciations:

1) If the ו comes immediately after a consonant (in the same word), then this is a long *shuruk* vowel vocalizing that consonant.

EXAMPLE: הוּבְאוּ is pronounced *hu-ve-U*; not *huv-u*.

2) If the ו comes as the first letter of a word, the ו has the sound of a *shuruk* preceded by an א: pronounced like אוּ; however, ו at the beginning of a word is a short *shuruk* vowel.

EXAMPLE: וּבְשׁוֹךְּבָּהּ is pronounced *uv-shokh-be-KHA*; not *u-ve-shokh-be-kha*.

3) If the ו has a vowel sign attached to it, then this is a consonant pronounced with an emphasized or elongated “V” sound of ו.

EXAMPLE: וְיָהּ is pronounced *iv-VAH*.

VOCAL & NON-VOCAL SH^EVA

Many Hebrew books with their vowels marked do not differentiate between an

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unvocalized $\dot{\text{}}$ (*sh^eva na*) and a vocalized $\dot{\text{}}$ (*sh^eva nah*). 6 things indicate when a *sh^eva* is *na* or *nah*.

1) If the first letter of a word is marked by a *sh^eva*, then the *sh^eva* is vocalized.

EXAMPLE: לֶהֲדִלִיק is pronounced *le-had-lik*; not *lhad-lik*.

2) If a letter is marked with a *sh^eva* and has a *dagesh* (i.e., dot) in it (ב, ג, ד, etc.)—which always doubles, elongates or hardens the sound of a letter—then the *sh^eva* is vocalized. But, if the last letter has a *sh^eva* and a *dagesh*, the *sh^eva* is not vocalized.

EXAMPLE: דִּבְרָה is pronounced *dib-be-rah*; not *dib-rah*. However, אֶת is pronounced *AT*; not *a-te*.

3) If the same letter appears consecutively in a word, and the first letter has a *sh^eva* beneath it, the *sh^eva* is vocalized.

EXAMPLE: נִדְּהָ is pronounced *na-de-DAH*; not *nad-dah*.

4) When there is one letter with *sh^eva* and the letter following also has a *sh^eva*, the second *sh^eva* is vocalized.

EXAMPLE: שִׁיבְתֵּי־כַחַּ is pronounced *shiv-te-KHA*; not *shivt-kha*.

5) If the vowel sign preceding the *sh^eva* is a long vowel and this is the only spelling of the word, then the *sh^eva* is vocalized.

EXAMPLE: וַיִּצְאוּ is pronounced *vay-YE-tze-u*; not *vay-yetz-u*. However, גַּאֲלָתָא is pronounced *ga-AL-ta*; not *ga-a-le-ta* (because this word has received a modified spelling by being the last word of a phrase and becoming **pausal**; had גַּאֲלָתָא not been the last word in a phrase, it would be spelled גַּאֲלָתָא).

The long vowels in Hebrew are $\dot{\text{}}$ (*kamatz gadol*), $\overset{\cdot}{\text{}}$ (*holom*), ו (also *holom*, written “full” or *plene* in Latin), זֶרֶה (*tzere*), ו (*shuruk*) when not the first letter of a word, and י (long, full *hirik*)

EXAMPLES: יַשְׁבְּהָ is pronounced *ya-she-VAH* (because the *kamatz gadol* is long).

וַיֹּאמְרוּ is pronounced *va-yo-me-RU* (because the *holom* is long, and the ו works here only as a vowel-marker).

חֹשֶׁבִים is pronounced *ho-she-VIM* (because the *holom* is long).

תֵּשְׁבוּ is pronounced *te-she-VU* (because the *tzere* is long).

מִלְכֻתְךָ is pronounced *mal-khu-te-KHA* (because the *shuruk* is long).

בְּרִיתְךָ is pronounced *be-ri-te-kha* (because the full *hirik* is long).

The short vowels in Hebrew are פָּתַח (*patah*), סֶגוּל (*segol*), קֻבּוּץ (*kubbutz*) and הִירִיק (short, defective *hirik*). Hebrew has four ultra-short vowels that appear only in open syllables: חָטַף־כָּמֶטֶץ (*hataf kamatz*, pronounced like a shortened *kamatz katan*), חָטַף־פָּתַח (*hataf patah*, pronounced like a shortened *patah*), שֶׁוֹאֵלֵנָה (*sh^eva na*) and חָטַף־סֶגוּל (*hataf segol*, pronounced like a shortened *segol*).

EXAMPLES: אֶהְיֶה לְיָדְךָ is pronounced *o-ho-li-AV*.

לִירֹאֹת is pronounced *lir-OT*.

הֵחֵרִישׁ is pronounced *he-ḥe-RISH*.

בְּעַל is pronounced *BA-al*.

בְּגֵד is pronounced *BE-ged*.

בְּתֻפִים is pronounced *be-tup-PIM*.

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לְרֹאוֹת *is pronounced lir-OT.*

מַעֲשִׂים *is pronounced ma-a-SIM.*

Many Hebrew books with their vowels marked do not differentiate between a long ִ (*kamatz gadol*) and a short ַ (*kamatz katan*). A short *kamatz katan* can only appear on an unaccented **closed syllable** (meaning, a syllable that begins with a consonant, has a vowel, and ends with a consonant). Additionally, in many traditions, a *kamatz* immediately preceding a syllable marked by either a ְ (*hataf kamatz*) or another *kamatz katan* is pronounced as a *kamatz katan*.

EXAMPLES: קֹזְבִי *is pronounced koz-BI; not ka-ze-bi.*

In many traditions, צְהַרִים is pronounced tzo-ho-RA-yim, but as צְהַרִים (tza-ho-RA-yim) in other traditions.

In many traditions, קְקֹרְבָנִים is pronounced ke-ko-rov-KHEM, but as קְקֹרְבָנִים (ke-ko-rav-KHEM) in other traditions.

גֹּם is a closed syllable. כְּתָבִי has one closed syllable (כֶּתֶב) and one open syllable (בִּי).

COMBINED WORDS

When a ־ (*makkef*) appears between two words, the two words are pronounced almost as if they were one word. Therefore, a *kamatz* that would be *kamatz gadol* might become a *kamatz katan* if a one-syllable word with a *kamatz* precedes a word without a *kamatz*.

EXAMPLE: כֹּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל *is pronounced kol yis-ra-EL, not kal yis-ra-el.*

In very rare instances, a certain word will—grammatically—make no sense when (1) a consonant is vocalized with a *kamatz* that appears to be a *kamatz gadol* (but is actually a *kamatz katan*) and (2) the word is accented with a *trop* mark that is “subservient” to another mark—as, for example, ֿ (*merekha*) is “subservient” (i.e., always followed by) ֿ (*tippeha*). When such a rare coincidence occurs, the consonant that would make more sense with a *kamatz katan* instead of a *kamatz gadol*, the word is treated as if conjoined with the following word. Ultimately, this *kamatz* is pronounced like a *kamatz katan*.

OFTEN MISPRONOUNCED WORDS

בְּרָכוּ | הַמְבָרֵךְ | לְעֹלְמִי | עֲלֵמִיָּא | הַפְּנֵעֵנִי | בְּרַב־חֲסִדָּךְ
| קִדְּשָׁנוּ | וְאֶעֱרָה | הַמְלַמֵּד | לַפְּגָרִים | וּפְקֻדָּנוּ | וַיְהִי
| לְדֹרֹתֶיכֶם | פְּטָמָה | קוֹרְטוֹב | וּמְגִבִּיהָ | בְּרֵאשִׁית |
| וַיְקַדֵּשׁ | הַשְּׁבִיעִי | וַיַּכְלוּ | עִירָךְ | שְׁלוֹשָׁה | שְׁמַע |
| תְּפִלַּת | עֲמֶךָ | לְדַבֵּר | וַתְּהִי | חֲנֻנִי | בְּשׁוֹבְךָ | לְקַדְּשׁוּ
הַפְּקוּדוֹת	וְהַמְרָחִם	תָּמּוּ	וַתִּקְיָמְנוּ	וּלְעִבְדֶּךָ	
הַגְּבוּרוֹת	הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת	כְּשֶׁעֲמַדָּה	וַרְשָׁעִים	שְׁמוֹנֶת	
וַיִּקָּם	וַיִּרְץ	וַיַּדְבֵּר	יַחְלִצוּן	צְדָקָה	וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן
שְׁמִיָּה	וַתִּמְכֶּיָּה	וּמְלוֹאָה	וְהִנְשָׂאוּ	דוֹרְשָׁיו	רַבּוֹת
קִרְאִיו	דְּמִשְׁבַּחַיו	וּשְׂאוּ	וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ	חֲגִלָּה	יִרְבְּעֶם