

Hebrew Podcasts

Lesson 2 – Alphabet

Beginner Level

Hello, and welcome to Lesson 2 of Hebrew Podcasts.

In this beginner-level lesson we'll review the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. We'll say the name of each letter and hear a word or two that begin with that letter. We'll then discuss pronunciation.

Here to help us is Noa.

Hello Noa. שלום נועה.

Shà-lom נו-à

Hello. שלום!

Noa, let's begin with the first letter of the alphabet...

Alef (À-léf) אֵלֶף



This letter, אֵלֶף, is one of a few letters in Hebrew that can serve as either a consonant or a vowel. Hebrew uses accents called Nikkud rather than vowel letters to indicate the sound. There are five basic sounds in Hebrew: א (À), א (É), א (EE), א (O), and א (OO).

We should mention that in modern Hebrew writing, the Nikkud is simply omitted. You'll need to read whole words and remember how to pronounce them.

So אֵלֶף is mostly used as a consonant. Let's see an example...

A lion אֲרִיָּה Àr-yé

That's a lion – אֲרִיָּה. The א sound comes from the throat. It sounds like the u in up, but a bit more from the throat.

Noa, what's the second letter in Hebrew?

Bet (Bét) בֵּית



The letter בֵּית has an interesting quality. It has two possible sounds. The first is a stressed sound that's similar to the letter B, and the second is a loose sound similar to the letter V. Let's see an example of the former...

A duck בָּרָווֹז Bår-vàz

That's a duck – בָּרָווֹז. We hear the B sound in בָּרָווֹז. For an example of the V sound of בֵּית you may remember that in our previous lesson we learned the word אוֹהֶבֶת, which means 'loves'. You can hear the V sound in אוֹהֶבֶת.

Gimel (Gi-mél) גִּמֵּל



The letter גִּמֵּל is pronounced like G in go. Let's see an example...

A camel גִּמֵּל Gà-màl

A camel is גִּמֵּל. This letter also has an interesting feature. When there's an apostrophe on the letter גִּמֵּל, it's pronounced like G in George. Old Hebrew doesn't have this sound. In modern Hebrew we use an apostrophe on the letter גִּמֵּל to make this sound. This is useful for spelling words borrowed from other languages.

Transcription

We'll use transcription in our lesson guides to help you read new Hebrew words. You should read the transcription as if it was English. We'll use hyphens to help the pronunciation. We'll use é and à to better approximate the Hebrew sounds. You should pronounce those as you would in French. Are you familiar with the expression déjà vu, or the word résumé? If so, then you should pronounce these two accents accordingly. Otherwise, pronounce é like the e in let and pronounce à like the a in bark or the u in up.

Finally we'll use h (the letter h with an underscore) to denote the sound of the letter Het (ה) or the loose version of the letter Kaf (כ). You should refer to lesson 2 to hear this sound.

The Hebrew Alphabet

Hebrew letters look quite different than English, some of their sounds are not found in English, and they are written from right to left, nevertheless, the two alphabets are not as different as it first appears.

For starters, even the word alphabet is similar to the Hebrew אֲלֶפֶת. Alphabet originates from the first two letters in Hebrew, אֵלֶף and בֵּית, as well as the Greek alpha and beta.

Consider the following 12 consonants. They are in the same order in Hebrew as their equivalent sounding letters in English.

א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ	ל
A	B	G	D	K	L	M	N	P	Q	R	S



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Dalet (Dà-lét)

דלֵת

ד

The letter דלֵת sounds like the letter D. Let's see an example. Since we're using animals as examples, the word for a bear is...

A bear

Dov

דב

Okay, moving on...

He (Héy)

הא

ה

The letter הא sounds like H in English. At the end of a word, the letter הא can be silent. Like אלף, הא can also function as a vowel, often at the end of a word. For example, the second הא in the word אהבה, which means love, serves as a vowel, and we don't hear any H sound.

Noa, what animal begins with הא?

A hippo

Hi-po-po-tàm

היפופוטם

היפופוטם as you probably guessed means a hippo.

The letter הא has an important use. It's used for the definite article. It has a name in Hebrew. It's called הַאֲדִיעָה. It is not a separate word like 'the'. Instead it's attached as a prefix to the word that follows. Let's look at a few examples:

הַאֲרִיָּה, הַבָּרָז, הַגָּמֶל, וְהַדָּב.

Hà-àr-yé, hà-bàr-vàz, hà-gà-màl, vé-hà-dov

This means the lion, the duck, the camel, and the bear, respectively.

Next, we come to the sixth letter which is...

Vav (Vàv)

וּ

ו

וּ is often used as a vowel. It can sound like O. For example, in the word אוהבת. It can also sound like the double O in book. For example, in the word גמור that we heard in our previous lesson when Rina said גמור בסדר.

וּ can also be used as a consonant and sound like the letter V. Noa, let's hear an example of a word like that. How do you say a virus?

A virus

Vi-roos

וירוס

וירוס means a virus. This word is obviously borrowed from another language. Hebrew is an ancient language that has been revived around the end of the nineteenth century. Therefore, words like virus, atom, and telephone were brought into Hebrew from other languages.

The letter וּ has another function. Because Hebrew does not have a letter that sounds like W, it uses two consecutive וּ to make this sound. For example the word וולבי which means a wallaby. This usage is typically for words that were borrowed from another language.

Letters as Numbers

Hebrew letters can also be used as numbers, with א being 1, ב being 2, and ג being 3. For example, 'יום ג' means Tuesday, which is the third day of the week. 'יום ו' is Friday. (Saturday however is special, it's שבת.)

The following table shows the value of each letter. Numbers are written by stringing letters so that their values add up to the number.

א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90

ק	ר	ש	ת
100	200	300	400

For example, ל"ג is 33 because ל is 30 and ג is 3 (30+3=33). The double quotes " does not count. It's usually used to denote an abbreviation.

Terminal Letters

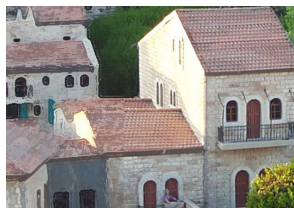
אותיות סופיות

O-ti-yot so-fi-yot

There are five Hebrew letters that are written differently when they are at the end of a word. These are:

שלום	כף סופית	ך
Shlom-hà	Kàf so-fit	
שלום	מם סופית	ם
Shà-lom	Mém so-fit	
מצוין	נון סופית	ן
Mé-tsoo-yàn	Noon so-fit	
ינשוף	פא סופית	ף
Yàn-shoof	Pé so-fit	
עץ	צדי סופית	ץ
Éts	Tsà-di so-fit	

עץ means a tree or wood.



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Okay Noa, what's next?

Zayin (Zà-yin)

זין ז

The letter זין sounds like Z. Now, how about an example?

A fly זבוב Z-voov זבוב

A fly is זבוב. So זין sounds like Z, except when there's an apostrophe on the letter זין. In that case, it is pronounced like the letter J in French. For example in the French name 'ז'ורני'.

Noa, let's spell the word זבוב.

זין, בית, ו, בית, זבוב.
Zà-yin, Bét, vav, bét. z-voov.

Okay, let's go on.

Het (Hét)

חית ח

Now that's a hard one to pronounce. Let's hear that again...

Het חֵת Hét חית

חית really doesn't have an equivalent sound in English. It sounds similar to J in Spanish like in the name José. חית is pronounced from the throat, like the sound made when you're clearing your throat.

Okay Noa, let's do a couple of examples with חית.

A pig חזיר Hà-zir חזיר

That means a pig – חזיר. And...

A donkey חמור Hà-mor חמור

A donkey is חמור. This word, חמור, is also used for name calling, meaning an idiot, and it's a rather mild expletive.

Let's go on...

Tet (Tét)

טית ט

The letter טית sounds like the letter T. For example...

A tuna טונה Too-nà טונה

טונה mean tuna as in tuna fish. Noa, let's spell טונה.

טית, ו, נון, הא, טונה.
Tét, vav, noon, héy. Too-nà

Okay Noa, what's the next letter?

Yud (Yood)

יוד י

When used as a consonant, יוד sounds like the letter Y. When used as a vowel, יוד sounds like I in pig. Let's see an example of יוד as a consonant.

Examples

דב חום
Dov hoom
Brown bear

החמור והחזיר
Hà-hà-mor vé-hà-hà-zir
The donkey and the pig

דג טונה
Dàg too-nà
Tuna fish

ינשוף עצים
Yàn-shoof éts-im
Long-eared owl (literally trees owl)

Stressed and Loose

There are six letters in Hebrew that can be "stressed", but in modern Hebrew you can only hear the difference with three of these letters: בית, כף, פא.

When a word begins with one of these letters, then the letter is always stressed.

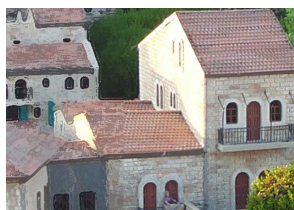
When a word ends with one of these letters, then the letter is never stressed.

Hebrew Dictionary Look Up

When you look up Hebrew words in the dictionary, remember to strip any prefixes.

Examples:

Instead of	Look up
הספר (the book)	ספר (book)
ואני (and me)	אני (me)
שבאה (that came)	באה (came)
לעיר (to the city)	עיר (city)



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An owl

Yàn-shoof

יְנוּשׁוּף

An owl is יְנוּשׁוּף. Another word that begins with יוּד is יֵלֵד which means a child. Next we come to another interesting letter...

Kaf (Kâf)

כָּף



Like we saw before with the letter בֵּית, the letter כָּף has also two possible sounds. A stressed sound similar to K—for example, כָּלֵב, a dog—and a loose sound similar to the Hebrew letter חֵית. In our previous lesson we saw an example of the soft sounding כָּף in the word יְכוּלָה.

Another interesting feature of the letter כָּף is that it is written differently at the end of a word. It's called כָּף סוּפִית.

Let's see a couple of examples of animals that begin with כָּף. The first, I just mentioned:

A dog

Ké-lév

כָּלֵב

כָּלֵב – that's a dog. And another example...

A shark

Kà-rish

כָּרִישׁ

That's a shark – כָּרִישׁ.

Ready for the next letter?

Lamed (Là-méd)

לָמֵד



לָמֵד sounds like the letter L. Any animal beginning with לָמֵד?

A lizard

Lé-tà-à

לִטְאָה

A lizard is לִטְאָה. Noa, let's spell לִטְאָה.

לָמֵד, טֵית, אֶלֶף, הָא. לִטְאָה.
Là-méd, Tét, à-léf, héy. Lé-tà-à.

Let's continue.

Mem (Mém)

מֶם



מֶם sounds like the letter M. And how do you say fossil in Hebrew?

A fossil

Mé-oo-bàn

מַאֲבֵן

A fossil is מַאֲבֵן. The word is derived from אָבֵן, a word that means rock, because מַאֲבֵן describes something that turned into a rock.

The letter מֶם turns into מֶם סוּפִית when it's at the end of a word.

The next letter is...

Nun (Noon)

נוּן



נוּן sounds like the letter N. Like כָּף סוּפִית and מֶם סוּפִית, at the end of a word is נון סוּפִית.

And an animal starting with נון is...

Morphology

A characteristic of the Hebrew language is that most words are derived from a root of 3-4 consonants. Multiple words with similar meaning are derived from the same root.

In our example here, we have the word מַאֲבֵן which is derived from the root אָבֵן. Let's see some other words derived from אָבֵן.

Stone

אָבֵן

é-vén

Fossil

מַאֲבֵן

mé-oo-bàn

Tartar (as in teeth)

אָבֵית

áv-nit

Examples

כָּלֵב נָחֵם

Ké-lév neh-màd

Nice dog

כָּרִישׁ לָבָן

Kà-rish là-vàn

White shark

לִטְאָה זְרִיזָה

Lé-tà-à zri-zà

Literally *nimble lizard* (Lacerta laevis – a lizard native to Israel)

מַאֲבֵנִים

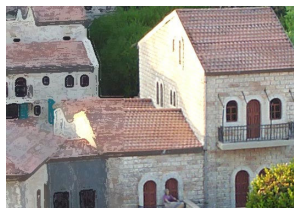
Mé-oo-bà-nim

Fossils

קֶן נְשָׁרִים

Kén né-shà-rim

Eagles nest



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A vulture Né-shér נֶשֶׁר

A vulture or eagle – נֶשֶׁר.

Next...

Sameh (Sà-méh) סָמַח ס

This letter sounds like S. Let's hear a couple of examples. How do you say a horse?

A horse Soos סוס

And a crab?

A crab Sàr-tàn סָרְטָן

Noa, can you spell סרטן for us?

סָמַח, רִישׁ, טֵט, נוֹן סוּפִית. סָרְטָן.
Sà-méh, réish, té, noon so-fit. Sàr-tàn.

Let's go on.

Ayin (À-yin), a goat, a spider עֵין, עֶז, עֶכְבִּישׁ ע
À-yin, éz, à-kà-vish

A goat is עז and a spider is עכביש. עין sounds like the letter אלף but comes from even deeper in the throat. It's the sound that the doctor wants you to make when she examines your throat with a tongue depressor. Nevertheless, in modern Hebrew you will rarely hear the difference between אלף and עין.

Pe (Péy), an elephant פֶּא, פִּיל פ
Péy, pil

An elephant is פיל. The letter פא has two possible sounds. The stressed sound is similar to P like we just heard in the word פיל. The loose sound is similar to F like we heard in the word פִּנְסוֹן. Here פא is at the end of the word and, yes, you guessed it, it's פא סופית.

Tsadi (Tsà-di), a bird, a frog צִדִּי, צִפּוֹר, צִפְרָדֶּע צ
Tsà-di, tsi-por, tsfàr-dé-à

A bird is ציפור and a frog is צפרדע. There's no equivalent in English for the sound of צדי. This sound is approximated by the letter combination TS like in the word pets.

צדי סופית is the fifth and last of the אותיות סופיות, or terminal letters—those letters that are written differently when they are the last letter of a word.

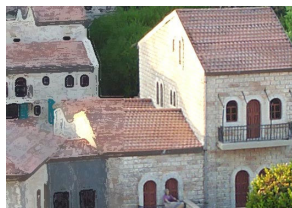
צדי has another feature. If written with an apostrophe, it makes the sound צ'י. For example, צ'כיה and צ'ילה which means the Czech Republic and Chile, respectively.

Noa, what's the next letter?



Examples

	חלב של עז Hà-làv shél éz
Goat's milk	
	פיל אפריקני Pil àf-ri-kà-ni
African elephant	
	צפרדע ירוקה Tsfar-dé-à yé-roo-kà
Green frog	
	קפוד מצוי Ki-pod mà-tsooy
Common hedgehog	
	מראשן לצפרדע Mi-ro-shàn lits-fàr-dé-à
From tadpole to frog	
	שועל אדום Shoo-àl à-dom
Red fox	
	תנין היאור Tà-nin hà-yé-or
Nile crocodile	



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Kuf (Koof)

קוף

ק

The letter קוף sounds like Q or K. Now, this is a bit strange because we already encountered a letter that sounds like that. It was the letter כף in its stressed form. So, you're probably wondering why there are two letters that sound pretty much the same. But this is no different than English with Q, K, and even C, all sounding the same.

How about an animal that starts with קוף, Noa?

A hedgehog

Ki-pod

קיפוד

A hedgehog. קיפוד. That's a prickly animal.

Okay Noa, we're almost done, the twentieth letter is...

Resh (Réish)

ריש

ר

ריש has no identical sound in English. This one is really hard to pronounce for English speakers, just like it's really hard for Hebrew speakers to pronounce the English R correctly.

ריש is approximated by the letter R, although it sounds quite a bit different. ריש is rolled in the back of the throat like when you gargle salt water. Let's see an example. Noa, how do you say tadpole in Hebrew?

A tadpole

Ro-shàn

ראשן

A tadpole. ראשן.

Let's move on.

Shin (Shin)

שין

ש

שין has two possible sounds. The first and more common sound is like the letter combination SH, like in shush. The second sounds like S in snake. You can hear this form in the word ישראל.

The first form of שין, pronounced ש, is called ימנית. The second form of שין, pronounced ש, is called שמאלית. ימנית and שמאלית are the adjectives right and left, respectively.

So, we just saw an example of שין שמאלית in the word ישראל. Let's listen to an example of שין ימנית. How do we say a fox?

A fox

Shoo-àl

שועל

A fox is שועל.

We come to the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Tav (Táf)

תו

ת

This letter sounds like the letter T. It also sounds a lot like the Hebrew letter טית. This makes spelling hard. How can you tell whether to use טית or תו? One clue is that טית is more often used in words borrowed from other languages, like the name of the Israeli town of טבריה which was named after the roman emperor Tiberius.

Left and Right

Right

ימין

Yà-min

Left

שמאל

Smol

ימין and שמאל are the nouns.

Below are their adjective forms

Right (m.)

ימני

Yé-mà-ni

Right (f.)

ימנית

Yé-mà-nit

Left (m.)

שמאלי

Smà-li

Left (f.)

שמאלית

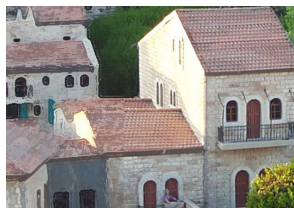
Smà-lit

ימנית and שמאלית are the feminine form of the adjective. We use the feminine form for שין ימנית and שין שמאלית because the letter שין, itself being a noun, is feminine.

Hebrew Dictionary Look Up

When you look up verbs in a Hebrew dictionary you should use the past tense of the verb in the third-person masculine singular. Unlike some other languages, you should not look up the infinitive.

For example, instead of looking for לשחק, (to play) look for שחק (he played). Instead of לשיר, (to sing) look for שר (he sang).



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So, Noa, to finish off, how about an animal that begins in תו?

An alligator

Tà-nin

תנין

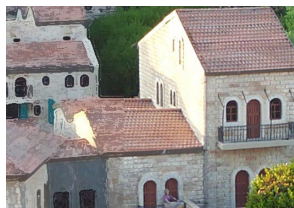
That's right, תנין, which means an alligator.

And with תו we come to the end of this lesson that was entirely dedicated to the Hebrew alphabet. You can find more information in the lesson guide that goes together with this podcast. You can download the lesson guide from our web site at <http://hebrewpodcasts.com>.

That's it for today. In our next lesson Noa will be back. We'll learn some new vocabulary related to school and we'll touch on the subject of counting and ordinal numbers.

Until then

שלום ולהתראות!



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This lesson's vocabulary

elephant	פיל	The letter Alef	אלף
The letter Tsadi	צדי	lion	אריה
bird	ציפור	The letter Bet	בית
frog	צפרדע	duck	ברווז
The letter Kuf	קוף	The letter Gimel	גימל
hedgehog	קיפוד	camel	גמל
tadpole	ראשן	bear	דוב
The letter Resh	ריש	The letter Dalet	דלת
fox	שועל	The letter He	הא
The letter Shin	שין	hippo	היפופוטם
hello	שלום	The letter Vav	וו
The letter Tav	תו	virus	וירוס
alligator	תנין	fly	זבוב
		The letter Zayin	זין
		pig	חזיר
		The letter Het	חית
		donkey	חמור
		tuna	טונה
		The letter Tet	טית
		The letter Yud	יוד
		owl	ינשוף
		dog	כלב
		The letter Kaf	כף
		shark	כריש
		lizard	לטאה
		The letter Lamed	למד
		fossil	מאובן
		The letter Mem	מם
		The letter Nun	נון
		Noa	נועה
		vulture	נשר
		horse	סוס
		The letter Sameh	סמך
		crab	סרטן
		goat	עז
		The letter Ayin	עין
		spider	עכביש
		The letter Pe	פא



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Lesson 2 – Exercise

Match each animal with its Hebrew name. Draw a line between the word and the picture.



זבוב **z-voov**



אריה **ar-yé**



כלב **ké-lév**



תנין **tà-nin**



קיפוד **ki-pod**



גמל **gà-màl**



ברוז **bar-vàz**



סוס **soos**



צפרדע **tsfàr-dé-à**



פיל **pil**

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