

## **Keriy'at HaTorah – Rules and Guidelines**

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This short booklet has been prepared to help you learn the basic guidelines regarding the pronunciation of the Hebrew words when reading from the Torah, Nevi'im or Ketuvim. I have attempted to include all the important topics in a short, easy way to understand without having to learn all the complicated grammar rules.

The sections are divided up as follows:

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## Reading Hebrew

### 1) Clear Pronunciation

It is very important to enunciate your words carefully and clearly. There is nothing bad about slow leining. In fact, you will find that you receive many compliments for slowly and clearly pronouncing each word as it should be said.

Similar sounding letters such as **ב** and **פ** or **ד** and **ת** should be pronounced clearly and distinctly.

It is very common for people to pronounce words like **בְּשִׁיפְתֶּךָ** as “Beshiftecha” instead of “Beshivtecha”. This is very important to refrain from doing and it takes some practise before this becomes natural.

### 2) Distinguish between words

It is common for a word to end with the same letter the next word begins with. In this case, it is very important to differentiate between the two words.

For example, if I said “This take wasn’t so good,” it has a completely different meaning from “This steak wasn’t so good”. The only difference is that in the second, I clearly differentiated between the s in the word “this” and the s in the word “steak”.

A few common examples in Hebrew include **על-לבבך, עם משה, דבר רע** and there are many others.

It is equally important not to slur words together to give either false meaning or no meaning, even if they do not have similar letters. Common errors occur with words that begin with the letters **א, ה, ע, י**.

For example, if I said “The sty is a mess,” it has a very different connotation than if I said “This tie is a mess.”

Common examples in Hebrew includes **ברוך אתה** that should be said, instead of **ברו** **כתה** which is how it’s commonly pronounced, **היום על** instead of **היו מל** and many others.

### 3) Emphasis

It is very important to put the emphasis on the right parts of words when saying them. Sometimes this can change the meaning of the word entirely.

For example, the word **בָּאָה** can be read BA-ah emphasising the first syllable, which means “she came” in past tense, however if it is read ba-AH emphasising the second syllable it means “she is coming” in present tense.

There are many such examples; therefore it is advisable to always put the main emphasis on the letter under which the trop of that word appears.

If the word has a number of syllables, sometimes there will appear a Meteg which is a small verticle line under the letter that should be emphasised before the main emphasis.

For example, the word **לִישׁוּעָתְךָ** should be pronounced LI-shoo-A-te-CHA with the main emphasis on the final syllable, and not li-SHOO-at-CHA.

### 4) Sheva Na & Sheva Nach

The Sheva is one of the vowels and looks like this : underneath the letter. Where the Sheva is found in a word and what vowels come before or after it, determine whether it's a Sheva Nach or a Sheva Na.

A **Sheva Nach** is silent and only the sound of the actual letter is said. For example, the word **כִּתְּבוּ** with a Sheva under the **ת** should be pronounced “Kit-vu” and not “Ki-te-vu”.

A **Sheva Na** is vocal and is pronounced as a short “e” sound. For example, the word **הַדְּבָרִים** with a Sheva under the **ד** should be pronounced “Ha-de-va-rim” and not “Had-varim”.

The wrong pronunciation can change the meaning of the word. For example the word **וַיִּרְאוּ** is pronounced “va-yir-oo” and means “And they saw”, whereas the word **וַיִּירְאוּ** is pronounced “va-yi-re-oo” and means “And they feared”. If the Sheva Na under the **ר** in the second word is not pronounced then the reader will be effectively changing the meaning of the word.

The Simanim Tikun illustrates in a bolder font when the Sheva is Na and a less bold font when it is Nach.

## 5) Kamatz Katan

It is important to distinguish between a regular Kamatz ׀, which has a similar sound to “a” in the word “palm”, and a Kamatz Katan which sounds like “o” in the word “boring”.

The Simanim Tikkun illustrates in different Kamatz Katan by giving it a longer vertical leg than the normal Kamatz.

## 6) Nach Nir'eh & Nach Nistar

Any letter that either doesn't have its own vowel or has a Sheva Nach, and it is pronounced in the word, is called a **Nach Nir'eh** and any letter that doesn't have its own vowel and isn't pronounced in the word is called a **Nach Nistar**.

It is easy to tell the difference in the Tikkun, as you only need to pay attention to the vowels of the letters. If it's a Nach Nistar then it shouldn't be heard, for example in the word **וְיִהְיֶה** the ם isn't heard so the word is pronounced “vee-hoo-da” and not “vi-ye-hoo-da”.

## 7) Mapik Hey

Generally when a ה is found at the end of a word by itself, it is a Nach Nistar. However, if there is a Nekuda (dot) inside the Hey, ה, then it is called a Mapik Hey and is vocalised almost by making the Hey sound and breathing out a little.

For instance, the word **בָּה** would be read “ba-hh” and not just “ba”. It is a guttural sound and much easier to pick up by listening to someone pronounce it.

When a Hey is found in the middle of a word and has a Sheva under it, it is pronounced with the same sound as a Mapik Hey. This is a very important aspect that most people don't know.

For example, the word **תִּהְיֶה** is commonly pronounced “ti-hi-ye” or “ti-i-ye”. However, the correct way to pronounce it is as if it's written “**תִּהְיֶה**” i.e. “tihh-ye”. The same rule applies to words such as **יְהִי**, **לְהִיט**, and many others.

It is very important to pronounce Mapik Hey correctly as it changes the meaning of the word.

For example the word **אִשָּׁה** should be pronounced “i-shahh” which means “her husband”, however if someone pronounces it “i-sha” without the Mapik Hey then the meaning is “woman” which is completely different.

## 8 ) Patach Genuvah

Patach Genuvah is a Patach that is found under a ח, ה, or א at the end of a word. Ashkenazim pronounce these words by adding an א before that last letter.

For example the word מְזַבַּח should be pronounced like מְזַבְּאָח and not מְזַבְּחָה. The same applies for words such as שְׁבוּעָה, נְחִי, רְקִיעַ, and many others.

Therefore if the Patach is under a Mapik Hey the same rule applies. For example, HaShem's name אֱ-לֹהֵי should be pronounced אֱ-לֹאֵה.

## 9) Dagesh Kal & Dagesh Chazak

The Dagesh is a dot ◌ in the middle of a letter and it indicates the strong expression of that letter. A letter that does not have a Dagesh is called Rafah. There are two kinds of the Dagesh.

The first is **Dagesh Kal**, which is found only in the letters כּפּ"ת and it's job is to differentiate between the Rafah and the Dagesh.

For example, בּ is Refuyah and is pronounced "vet" whereas ב is Degushah and is pronounced "bet". Another common example is פּ and פ etc.

The second kind is **Dagesh Chazak**, which indicates a specific intensity in the letter in which it is found, and it is pronounced as if that letter is repeated.

For example, in the word אֵלֶּה the ל has a dagesh chazak and the word is pronounced "El-leh" although there is no pause between the two so it sounds as if the ל is especially strong, "Elleleh".

There are a number of rules that govern when a letter has a Dagesh Chazak, but the Simanim Tikkun illustrates in clear bold font the different kinds.

## Te'amim (Trop, Cantillation)

The Te'amim are musical notes that are applied to the entire TaNa"Ch. These notes, in addition to enabling the TaNa"Ch to be read in beautiful music, also indicate punctually how the verses are to be read.

### 1) Mesharet & Mafsik

The Trop act as a form of punctuation for the TaNa"Ch. There are two broad categories of Trop, Mesharet (lit. accompany) and Mafsik (lit. stop).

A Ta'am (Trop) that is **Mesharet** is one that is not followed by a pause in the reading or singing.

A Trop that is **Mafsik** is followed by a pause, in order to punctuate the sentence. There are four categories of Mafsikim:

- |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) Kesarim - Emperors | 3) Mishnim - Dukes    |
| 2) Melachim - Kings   | 4) Shalishim - Counts |

They descend in the length of pause that follows, with Kesarim being the longest.

### 2) Singing the Trop

The custom has developed the following different Te'amim, each of which has its own unique tune:

- 1) Torah - The tune used every Shabbat, weekday, fast and most festivals during the Torah reading.
- 2) Haftarah - The tune used every Shabbat, fast and most festivals for the Haftarah reading, which is taken from Nevi'im (Prophets).
- 3) Yamim Nora'im (High Holidays) - The special tune used in the morning Torah reading for Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur.
- 4) Megillat Ester - The tune used for Megillat Ester (Book of Ester) on Purim.
- 5) Megillat Eichah - The special, sad tune used for Megillat Eichah (Lamentations) on Tish'a BeAv.
- 6) Megillot Shir HaShirim, Rut, Kohelet - The special tune used for the three megillot that are read during Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

There is also a special tune, not connected with the Te'amim that is used for Shirat HaYam (The Song of the Sea) in Shemot (Exodus) Chapter 16, and the mention of the journeys of B'nei Yisrael through the desert in Bamidbar (Numbers) Chapter 33.

## Further Reading

The art of Torah reading is difficult to master correctly, and it takes years of practise and learning to become totally familiar with.

The following are a few helpful references that I found useful in my studying.

Em LaMikra HaShalem, by Nissan Sharoni 5761

Chanting the Hebrew Bible, by Joshua R. Jacobson

Ta'amei HaMikra

Tuv Ta'am

Lechem HaBikurim

Minchat Shai

## Feedback

Please feel welcome to contact me with any feedback or comments regarding this booklet:

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