

Hebrew Language: Alefbet

The Hebrew language is very different from English in several, distinctive ways. Not only are the letters not roman, but many other differences cause it to be a very interesting language.

While we sometimes speak to children of learning their ABCs, we usually use the word alphabet. While the word alphabet comes to us from the Greek alpha and beta, they came from the Hebrew א alef and bet ב, the first two letters of the “alef-bet.”

As in any language, knowledge of the alphabet is an initial and prime prerequisite to learning anything about the language. Hebrew is no exception. Yes, the characters are strange to us, but, yes, they can be learned. We learned the romance characters we use as a child. So, let’s pull out the rote inhibitions and learn to recognize them, using flash cards, online computer software, or any other way that helps you. Resources include:

- http://hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_One/unit_one.html
- <http://judaism.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.netwaysglobal.com%2Fhebrew%2F>
- http://hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_One/Letter_Chart/letter_chart.html
- http://www.hebrewworld.com/html_folder/multimedia2.html (my favorite)

On the next page is a quite inclusive table of the alphabet. As you memorize the alefbet, concentrate on the first three columns because they support reading, our first priority; the others will be developed as we need them.

Memorization will be enhanced if you add audio to the senses with which you learn. I strongly suggest one of the several on-line resources to hear the letters of the alefbet, e.g. http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_One/Aleph-Bet/aleph-bet.html. CD’s, etc. are also available.

A few comments, especially highlighting some of the differences with English.

- Four letters, ש, ז, כ, ב, of the 22, have two forms, one with an embedded dot (dagesh) and one without, and are pronounced differently when they include a dagesh.
- Five letters, ך, ן, ם, ך, ן, have a different form when they end a word, but are not pronounced differently.
- No vowels per se occur within the alef-bet, although two letters, ך, ן, can sometimes act like a vowel. Vowels are added by marks below and above the consonants, and will be addressed in a subsequent lesson.

Homework for this lesson consists of memorizing the alef-bet. Granted, you may need more than one or two days, but, “You can do it!”

Letter	Name	Pronunciation	Transliteration	Block writing	Cursive
א	Aleph	silent unless voweled	' or none	א	א
ב ב	Bet Vet	boy vine	b v	ב ב	ב ב
ג	Gimmel	girl	g	ג	ג
ד	Dalet	door	d	ד	ד
ה	Hey	hay	h	ה	ה
ו	Vav	vine	v	ו	ו
ז	Zayin	zebra	z	ז	ז
ח	Chet	Bach	ch	ח	ח
ט	Tet	time	t	ט	ט
י	Yod	yes	y	י	י
כ כ ך	Kaf Khaf Khaf <i>sofit</i>	kite Bach ending form	k kh	כ כ ך	כ כ ך
ל	Lamed	look	l	ל	ל
מ ם	Mem Mem <i>sofit</i>	mom ending form	m	מ ם	מ ם
נ ן	Nun Nun <i>sofit</i>	now ending form	n	נ ן	נ ן
ס	Samech	son	s	ס	ס
ע	Ayin	silent letter	' or none	ע	ע
פ פ ף	Pey Fey Fey <i>sofit</i>	park phone ending form	p ph or f	פ פ ף	פ פ ף
צ ץ	Tsade Tsade <i>sofit</i>	nuts ending form	ts or tz	צ ץ	צ ץ
ק	Qof	queen	q or k	ק	ק
ר	Resh	rain	r	ר	ר
ש ש	Shin Sin	shy sun	sh s	ש ש	ש ש
ת	Tav	tall	t	ת	ת

If you learn well from flash cards, a set is available at http://www.hebrewworld.com/html_folder/Flash.html .

As you learn and want to continue learning, several online sources are available to help you, among which are the following.

- http://hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_One/unit_one.html
- <http://www.jewfaq.org/alephbet.htm>
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