



Grammar Lessons

for Aleph with Beth

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Lesson 1 - First nouns and adjectives

1.1 Interrogative pronouns

In Biblical Hebrew, there is no question mark (?). You can identify questions by their interrogative pronouns "what," "where," etc. All the sentences, including the questions, will end with this symbol (:) called a *sof pasuq*.

where?	אַיִה	what?	מַה/מָה
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What (is) this? This (is) a...	זֹאת אִשָּׁה: This (is) a woman	מַה־זֹּאת: What (is) this?	זֶה אִישׁ: This (is) a man	מַה־זֶּה: What (is) this?
	זֹאת פָּרָה: This (is) a cow	מַה־זֹּאת: What (is) this?	זֶה פֶּרִי: This (is) a bull	מַה־זֶּה: What (is) this?

1.2 The definite article

The definite article “the” is a prefix attached to the beginning of the word: *ha-* (-הַ or -הָ). There is no indefinite article like ‘a’ or ‘an’; instead, an indefinite noun will have no article. Compare אִישׁ (a man) with הָאִישׁ (the man). The definite article occurs on nouns, and also on any adjectives and demonstratives (*zeh* זֶה ‘this masc.’ or *zo’* זֹאת ‘this fem.’) that directly modify them. This helps us to pair an adjective or demonstrative with the noun it modifies in the same phrase.

Definite article ‘the’	הַ/הָ-
the big bull	הַפֶּר הַגָּדוֹל
this bull	הַפֶּר הַזֶּה

¹ See section 7.3 for why the article has different spellings.

1.3 Adjectives

An adjective describes a property or characteristic of a noun and follows the noun it modifies. In Hebrew, the adjectives agree in gender (masculine or feminine) and number (singular or plural) with the nouns they modify. That is, an adjective has four possible forms: masculine singular, feminine singular, masculine plural and feminine plural. A masc. sg. noun will take a **masc. sg. adjective**, and a fem. sg. noun will take a **fem. sg. adjective**, as in the table below.

<p>גְּדוּלָהּ Fem. sg.</p>	<p>פָּרָהּ Fem. sg.</p>	<p>גְּדוּל Masc. sg.</p>	<p>פֶּר Masc. sg.</p>
<p><i>A big cow</i></p>		<p><i>A big bull</i></p>	

When an adjective directly modifies a noun in the same phrase, it also agrees in definiteness, and takes the definite article prefix **-הַ**, as in the previous examples in 1.2 and below right. If an adjective or demonstrative occurs with a definite noun but does not have **-הַ**, then it must form a sentence with an implied equivalence “is” or “are,” as in the example below left.

<p>הָאִישׁ הַגָּדוֹל</p>	<p>הָאִישׁ הַגָּדוֹל</p>
<p>‘the man (is) big’</p>	<p>‘the big man’</p>

Notice that we know that the adjectives and demonstratives in row 1 below form part of the same phrase as the noun they modify because they are all marked with **-הַ**. By contrast, the demonstratives in row 2 and the adjectives in row 3 do *not* have **-הַ**, and therefore they must be on one side or another of an implied verb “is,” forming complete sentences.

<p><i>This big man...</i></p>	<p>הָאִישׁ הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה</p>	<p><i>This big woman...</i></p>	<p>הָאִשָּׁה הַקְּטַנָּה הַזֹּאת</p>	<p>1</p>
<p><i>This (is) the big man.</i></p>	<p>זֶה הָאִישׁ הַגָּדוֹל:</p>	<p><i>This (is) the small woman.</i></p>	<p>זֹאת הָאִשָּׁה הַקְּטַנָּה:</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><i>This man (is) big.</i></p>	<p>הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה גָּדוֹל:</p>	<p><i>This woman (is) small.</i></p>	<p>הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת קְטַנָּה:</p>	<p>3</p>

Lesson 2 - Plural nouns and adjectives

2.1 מְאֹד ‘very’

One of the functions of the word *mə'od* מְאֹד is to intensify the adjective it modifies, like the word “very.”

good טוב	small קטן
very good טוב מְאֹד	very small קטן מְאֹד

2.2 Plural demonstrative ‘these’

For the singular demonstrative ‘this,’ there is a masculine form *zeh* זֶה and a feminine form *zo't* זֹאת. The plural demonstrative ‘these’ is the same for both genders: *'elleh* אֵלֶּה.

	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	זֶה	זֹאת
Plural	אֵלֶּה	

Just like זֶה and זֹאת, when אֵלֶּה directly modifies a plural noun in the same phrase, it follows the noun and takes the definite article to match the noun (left below). It can also be the pronominal subject of the clause (right below).

<i>These horses...</i>	הַסּוּסִים הָאֵלֶּה	<i>These (are) horses</i>	אֵלֶּה סּוּסִים
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2.3 Plural forms

Masculine nouns take the plural ending *-im* יִם -, while feminine nouns take the plural ending *-ot* וֹת -. An adjective that modifies a noun will agree with it in gender and number, taking the same ending that the noun takes.

<i>bull</i>	פַּר	<i>cow</i>	פָּרָה
<i>bulls</i>	פָּרִים	<i>cows</i>	פָּרוֹת
<i>a big bull</i>	פַּר גָּדוֹל	<i>a big cow</i>	פָּרָה גָּדוֹלָה
<i>big bulls</i>	פָּרִים גְּדוֹלִים	<i>big cows</i>	פָּרוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת

2.4 Irregular plurals

Some nouns are irregular and take the plural suffix that is associated with the opposite gender.

Two of these nouns are אִשָּׁה and עֵז, which take the masculine plural ending ים ם - even though they are actually syntactically *feminine*. We can see their true syntactic gender by the fact that adjectives that modify them take the feminine plural ending ם-ות.

<i>woman</i>	אִשָּׁה	<i>goat</i>	עֵז
<i>women</i>	נָשִׁים	<i>goats</i>	עֵזִים
<i>big women</i>	נָשִׁים גְּדוֹלוֹת	<i>small goats</i>	עֵזִים קְטַנּוֹת

We will see irregular masculine nouns that take the feminine plural ending in future lessons.

Lesson 3 - Conjunction and gender

3.1 The conjunction וְ

The conjunction prefix וְ, וְ, can join many types of phrases and clauses. It is most often translated “and,” but may be translated as “but” or other conjunctions, depending on the context. It is written attached to the word following it.

אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה
'man and woman'

In some contexts, וְ (və-) becomes וּ- (u-), depending on the word it is attached to. This sound change happens:

- 1) before the labial (involving the lips) letters פ, ב, מ, ו
- 2) before a *shewa* vowel וְ

In this lesson, we encounter וְ before the labial letter פ, as in וְפָרוֹת, וְפָר etc. and before a word with the *shewa* vowel וְ at the beginning, as in וְנִעְרוֹת, וְגַמְלִים etc. We will see more examples of this sound change in later lessons.

3.2 Letters with two pronunciations

Some letters (often called the *begadkefat* letters to help remember them²) become fricativized in certain contexts (the airstream is constricted but keeps flowing instead of being cut off completely). In the pronunciation you hear in the videos, only three letters פ, ב, and כ, undergo this sound change, and it is always marked by the absence of *dagesh* (a dot in the center of the letter):

- When they are **marked with a dagesh**, they are **pronounced as stops** (airstream cut off completely, like in *b, p, and k*).
- When they have **no dagesh**, they are **pronounced as fricatives** (airstream keeps flowing, like in *v, f, and χ*).

k	כּ	p	פּ	b	בּ	<i>Stops with dagesh</i>
χ	כ	f	פ	v	ב	<i>Fricatives without dagesh</i>

² The full set of *begadkefat* letters include *bgdkpt*: בגדכפת. In some classical pronunciation systems these are all fricativized, so when they have no dagesh: b → v, g → γ, d → ð, k → χ, p → f, t → θ. However, in Modern Hebrew and the Sephardic pronunciation we are using in our videos, the only letters that undergo this process are כ, פ, ב.

This is why you will hear some letters change their sounds in certain contexts, such as after **-וּ** or **-י**. In this lesson you hear *p* change to *f*, and *k* change to *χ* (a uvular trill like in German “Bach”), as in the examples below. In future lessons you will also hear *b* change to *v*.

וּכְבָּשִׁים	כְּבָשִׁים	וּפָר	פָּר
<i>u-χəvasim</i>	<i>kəvasim</i>	<i>u-far</i>	<i>par</i>
and sheep (pl.)	sheep (pl.)	and a bull	bull

(In the videos, the other *begadkefat* letters **ל**, **ד** and **ת** will always be pronounced *g*, *d* and *t* respectively, with or without a *dagesh*.)

3.3 Gender and epicene nouns

Nouns in Hebrew belong to one of two genders, masculine (**זָכָר** *zaḥar*) or feminine (**נְקֵבָה** *naqevah*).³ In this video we sort all the nouns we’ve learned so far according to their gender. Feminine nouns often end in **הֶֿ** – or **תֶֿ**, but not always.

A few animate nouns in Hebrew have just one form for both male and female sexes. These are called “epicene nouns,” and the word for camel, **גַּמֵּל**, is one of these. The form **גַּמֵּל** could refer to a male camel or a female camel. An adjective or demonstrative modifying an epicene noun would signal if it is a male or female in that context, as in the examples below.

This small (male) camel	הַגַּמֵּל הַקָּטָן הַזֶּה
This small (female) camel	הַגַּמֵּל הַקָּטָנָה הַזֹּאת

Key helps

Why? ← לָמָּה

I don’t know ← אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַת

Such is Hebrew! ← כֵּךְ עֵבְרִית

³ As in Romance languages like Spanish or French, the gender of inanimate nouns is purely grammatical, and is therefore arbitrary and unpredictable: for example, the word for ‘jar’ is grammatically masculine, while the word for ‘cup’ is grammatically feminine even though both are inherently neuter by nature.

Lesson 4 - Subject Pronouns

4.1 Subject pronouns

Subject pronouns have singular and plural forms, and distinguish between **masculine** and **feminine** in the second and third persons. For example, אַתָּה *attah* is ‘you’ when speaking with a man, and אַתְּ *at* is ‘you’ when speaking with a woman. Likewise, אַתֶּם *atem* is ‘you’ when speaking with a group of men or a mixed group, and אַתֶּן *atten* is ‘you’ when speaking to a group of women. The first-person pronouns ‘I’ and ‘we’ are the same regardless of the gender of the speaker. There are two versions of the pronoun ‘I’ that appear in the Hebrew Bible: the most common is אֲנִי *ani*, but אֲנוּכִי *anochi* also appears frequently. There’s no clear difference in meaning between these two 1sg. pronouns.

Singular			Plural		
Masculine	Feminine		Masculine	Feminine	
אֲנִי / אֲנוּכִי		I	אֲנֵחֶנּוּ		we
אַתָּה	אַתְּ	you	אַתֶּם	אַתֶּן	you
הוא	היא	he/she	הֵם	הֵנָּה	they

4.2 Verbless clauses

Just like the sentences in the previous lessons, the sentences in this lesson are verbless. In Hebrew, a simple clause can be formed by juxtaposing the subject and the complement that describes it, with no verb necessary. The complement may be a noun (as in 1) or an adjective (as in 2). In later lessons we will also see prepositional phrases in verbless clauses to describe the location of the subject.

You (are) a donkey.	אַתָּה חֲמוֹר:	1
You (are) small.	אַתָּה קָטָן:	2

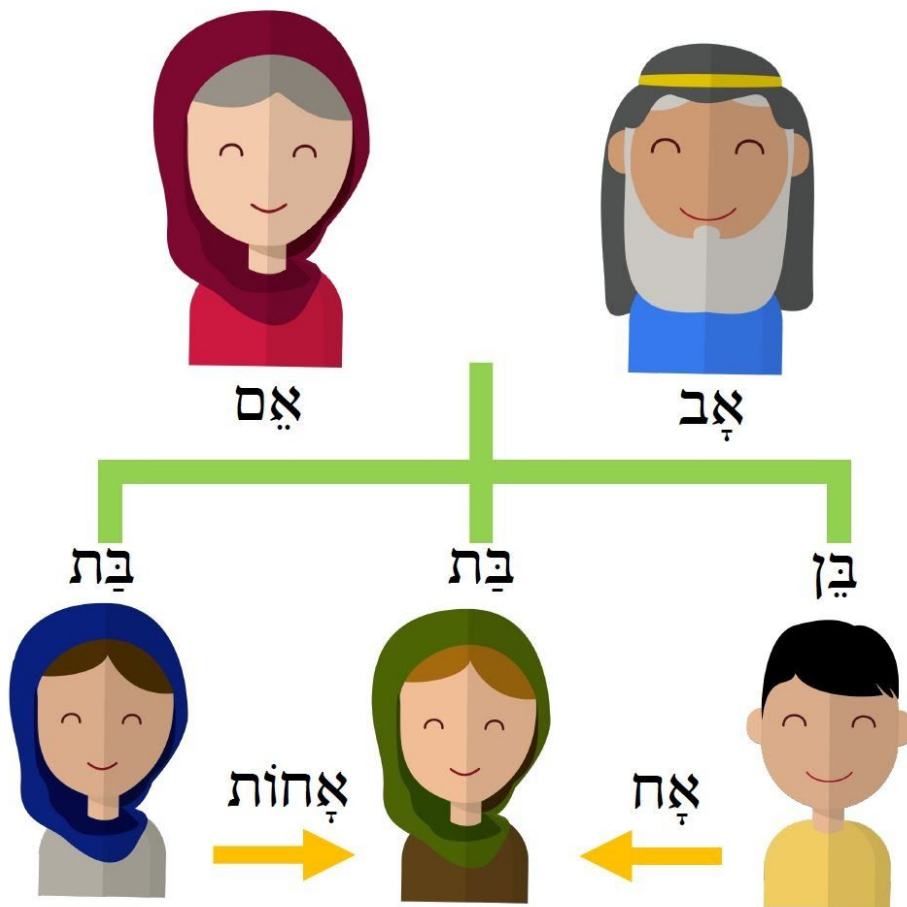
In some contexts, we may also see the complement come first and the subject afterward.

What (is) she?	מַה־הִיא:	1
A small woman (is) she.	אִשָּׁה קְטַנָּה הִיא:	2

Key helps

Conjunction וְ. It has many translations in different contexts, but here it marks a counter-statement after a negative statement, similar to “on the contrary” or “but rather...”

Lesson 5 - Family terms



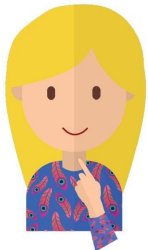
5.1 Possessive pronoun suffixes

Hebrew marks possession with pronominal suffixes on nouns. In this lesson we encounter three of those suffixes: the first person singular ‘my’ ׀, - and the third person singular masculine ‘his’ ׀- and feminine ‘her’ ׀ִ׃.⁴ Often when these suffixes are added to a word, the vowels of the noun stem contract or are shortened. Here ׀ם → -׀ם.

⁴ The letter *he* marked with a dagesh ׀- *-ahh* distinguishes it from a *qamets he* ending ׀ִ -*a*.

׀ִ - is pronounced with an *h* sound at the end instead of a pure *a* vowel like ׀ִ .

שְׁמָהּ	שְׁמוֹ	שְׁמִי	שֵׁם
<i>her name</i>	<i>his name</i>	<i>my name</i>	<i>name</i>



שְׁמִי בַת



שְׁמוֹ אֲבִירָם



שְׁמָהּ שָׂרָה



5.2 Construct forms

This lesson teaches terms for family relationships. Notice that the words for the relationships ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ are the same as ‘man’ and ‘woman.’

In this lesson, you will hear some of the words change form when a possessor follows. These are called “**construct forms**” in Hebrew grammar, and this is a fundamental feature of the structure of Hebrew. This is covered in more detail in Lesson 11, but for now, just focus on understanding the alternate forms of the words when they have a possessor.

<i>Abraham is Isaac's father.</i>	אֲבִירָהֶם אָבִי יִצְחָק	אָב ← אָבִי
<i>Esau is Jacob's brother.</i>	עֵשָׂו אָחִי יַעֲקֹב	אָח ← אָחִי
<i>Sarah is Abraham's wife.</i>	שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲבִירָהֶם	אִשָּׁה ← אִשְׁתּוֹ

Note that some words change the spelling of their vowels slightly when they are in construct form, but the pronunciation is not affected.

<i>David is Jesse's son.</i>	דָּוִד בֶּן-יֵשׁוּעַ	בֶּן ← בֶּן
<i>Rachel is Leah's sister.</i>	רָחֵל אָחוֹת לְאֵהָ	אָחוֹת ← אָחוֹת

All nouns that are followed by a possessor are in construct form, but some words, like אָב and בַּת, are exactly the same in construct form as their free form (called “absolute form”).

<i>Sarah is Isaac's mother.</i>	שָׂרָה אִם יִצְחָק:	אִם ← אִם
<i>Whose daughter are you? (lit. daughter of who (are) you?)</i>	בֵּת־מִי אַתָּה:	בֵּת ← בֵּת
<i>Jacob is Leah's husband.</i>	יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ לְאָה:	אִישׁ ← אִישׁ

Note that even though the word אָחוֹת *ahot* 'sister' ends in *-ot* אֹת־, it is singular and *not* plural.⁵

5.3 Letters with two pronunciations

We saw in 3.2 how the *begadkefat* letters *p* פּ and *k* כּ change their sounds in some contexts and become fricativized to *f* and *χ* respectively. In this lesson, we hear *b* בּ undergoing the same change: After *-v* וְ-, it loses the *dagesh* and becomes בַּ, and is pronounced *v*.

k	כּ	p	פּ	b	בּ	<i>Stops with dagesh</i>
χ	כַּ	f	פַּ	v	בַּ	<i>Fricatives without dagesh</i>

בַּ is a labial letter, so it triggers the change of the conjunction from *və* וְ- to *u-* וְ- that we saw in section 3.1.

וּבֵן	בֵּן	וּבַת	בַּת
<i>u-ven</i>	<i>ben</i>	<i>u-vat</i>	<i>bat</i>
and a son	son	and a daughter	daughter

5.4 Maqqef

You will see some words written connected with a bar ׀, called a *maqqef*. This connects a short word to the word that follows it and marks them as forming one phonological word with one accented syllable. It does not appreciably affect the meaning or pronunciation. It is often optional

⁵ The plural form of אָחוֹת 'sister' is not attested in its free absolute form in the Hebrew Bible, but it may be אָחיות 'sisters.'

in the Hebrew Bible, so in these lessons we try to follow the form that you will see most frequently.



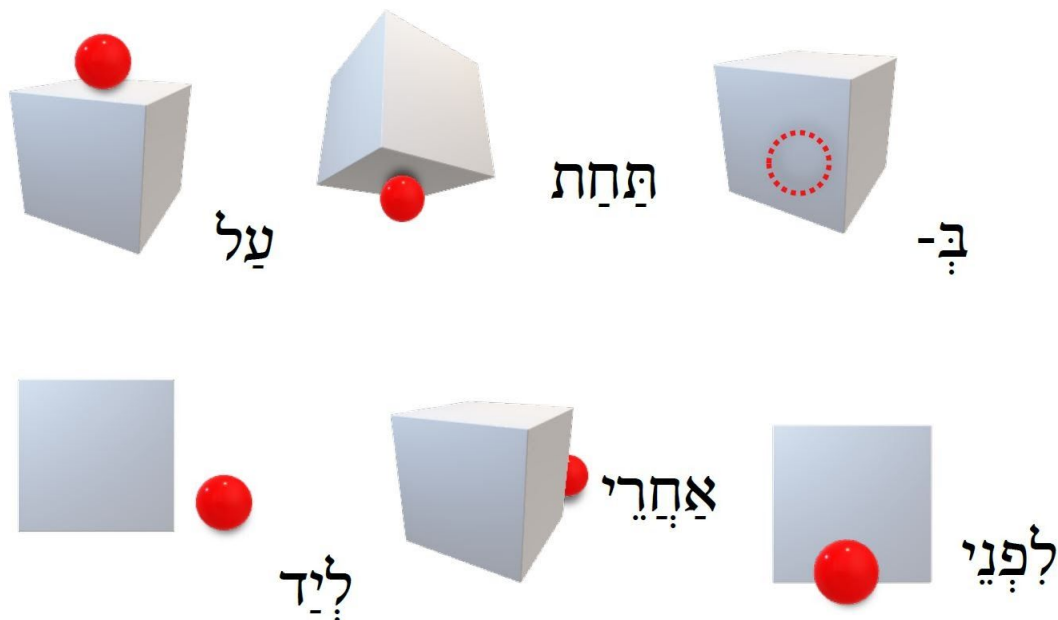
Key helps

Who? ← מי

I don't know ← אינני ידעֶת

Also ← גם

Lesson 6 - Prepositions and Location



6.1 Prepositions

In this lesson, we learn some prepositions that describe location relative to an object. The shortest of these is בְּ-, which is one of three prepositions in Hebrew that consist of only one letter and are prefixed to the following word. It has a broad range of meanings, but in the examples in this lesson it means 'in' or 'on.' As we'll see more in later lessons, the one-letter prepositions combine with the vowel of the definite article ה־ when they occur together on the same word. So בְּ- plus ה־ becomes בַּ- as in the word בַּבַּיִת 'in the house' or בַּדֶּרֶךְ 'in/on the road'.

בְּ- + ה־ + מְדֵבָר = בַּמְדֵבָר
ba-midbar - 'In the wilderness'

The other prepositions are not prefixed to the following words, but עַל- is usually connected with a *maqgef*. As discussed briefly in 4.2, the sentences in this lesson are verbless, with the location of the subject indicated by simply juxtaposing the prepositional phrase with the subject. No verb is necessary.

הָעֵז לְפָנֵי הַפָּר:
'The goat (is) in front of the bull.'

6.2 Imperative verb שים

In this lesson we learn our first verb, in the imperative (command) form, שים *sim*, ‘put!’⁶ In the video, Beth tells Avram to put a cow or horse in specific places.

6.3 את marks definite direct objects

When the direct object of a sentence is definite (i.e. it has the definite article -ה, is a proper noun, or has a possessive suffix), it is usually marked with the preposition את. This preposition has a purely grammatical meaning that is not translatable into English. Like על, את is usually linked to the following word with a *maqfef*-, but sometimes it appears on its own as את.

Notice the difference between the sentence in 1 with an *indefinite* direct object פרה ‘a cow,’ and the sentence in 3 with a *definite* direct object את-הפרה ‘the cow.’

‘Put <u>a cow</u> behind the house.’	שים פרה אחרי הבית:	1
‘No, <u>this cow</u> is on the house.’	לא, הפרה הזאת על הבית:	2
‘Put <u>the cow</u> behind the house.’	שים את-הפרה אחרי הבית:	3

⁶ The form שים is masculine singular, so it is only used when addressing a single male (like Avram in the video). For addressing a single female, it would be שמי.

Lesson 7 - Alphabet part 1

This lesson teaches seven letters of the Hebrew alphabet and four vowel points (called *niqqud*). Hebrew is written right to left and originally was written with only the consonant letters. The system of writing vowels below and above the main line of consonants was added sometime during the last centuries of the first millennium A.D.

7.1 Consonants

Alef א is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and is pronounced as a glottal stop [ʔ]: the light sound of the throat closing between the vowels in “uh-oh.” To English speakers, words that start with *alef* sound like they start with a vowel, but *alef* is considered a consonant.

Bet ב is the second letter of the alphabet, and it has two pronunciations: with a *dagesh* בּ it is pronounced *b* and without a *dagesh* ב, it is pronounced *v*.

Yod י is the tenth letter of the alphabet. It has two functions, one consonantal and one vocalic:

- 1) *Yod* may be a consonant with its own vowel, pronounced like *y* (like יָ *ya*), .
- 2) *Yod* may accompany a vowel on the preceding letter (like יֶ֫ as a vowel indicator or part of a diphthong).

Tav ט is the twenty-second and last letter of the alphabet. In the pronunciation we use in the videos, it is always pronounced *t*, with or without a *dagesh*.⁷

Shin שׁ is the twenty-first letter of the alphabet. It is always pronounced *sh* [ʃ] with or without a *dagesh*.

He' ה' is the fifth letter of the alphabet. Like *yod*, it has two functions:

- 1) *He'* may be a consonant with its own vowel, pronounced *h* (like הָ *ha*).
- 2) *He'* may accompany a vowel on the preceding letter (like הַ֫ *bah*) at the end of a word.

As a vowel indicator, *he'* does not add any sound: הַ֫ and הַ֫ are pronounced the same: [ba].

⁷ Some classical pronunciations will pronounce *tav* without a *dagesh* ט as *th* [θ]. Under this system, the name of the letter ב sounds like the name Beth.

Vav ו is the sixth letter of the alphabet. Like *yod* and *he'*, *vav* has both consonantal and vocalic functions, but in this lesson, we only encounter consonantal *vav* as the prefix conjunction **-וְ**. In the third alphabet lesson (Lesson 13), we will see *vav* as a vowel indicator. As a consonant, *vav* is pronounced *v*, just like **ב**.⁸

7.2 Vowels

Qamets ׀ is pronounced [a] “ah” as in “father.”

Hireq ׀ is pronounced [i] “ee” as in “see.”

Patah ׀ is pronounced [a] “ah” as in “father.” We pronounce *qamets* and *patah* the same, but historically *qamets* was a “long vowel” and *patah* a “short vowel.”

Shewa ׀ is pronounced [ə], a short relaxed central vowel like the first and last vowels of “banana” in American English [bə¹nænə].

7.3 Definite article variants

The definite article prefix **-הַ** consists of the *he'* and *patah* and it also “doubles” the first consonant of the following letter (marking it with a *dagesh*).

$$\begin{aligned} \text{הַמְדַבֵּר} &= \text{מְדַבֵּר} + \text{-הַ} \\ \text{הַשֵּׁם} &= \text{שֵׁם} + \text{-הַ} \end{aligned}$$

However, when **-הַ** comes before a word that begins with **ע א** or **ר**,⁹ three letters that cannot take a *dagesh*, the *patah* vowel “lengthens” to *qamets*. Therefore, you will see words beginning with *alef* take the article with *qamets* **-הָ** as in **הָאֵשׁ**. This doesn’t affect the pronunciation, it’s just a spelling rule. We recommend not worrying about memorizing the rules right now, just be able to recognize both **-הַ** and **-הָ** as the definite article “the” when you see them.

As discussed in 6.1, the one-letter prepositions combine with the vowel of the definite article **-הַ** when they occur together on the same word. So **-בְּ** plus **-הַ** becomes **-בֵּה**. We see this in the word **בֵּית**.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{בֵּית} &= \text{בֵּית} + \text{-הַ} + \text{-בְּ} \\ &\text{‘in the house’} \end{aligned}$$

⁸ Historically, *vav* was pronounced like a *w*, so you may hear it pronounced like that in classical pronunciations of Hebrew, or hear the letter called *waw*.

⁹ These belong to the group of letters **ה ע א ר** and **ה**, that cannot take a *dagesh* and therefore cause many other vowel changes throughout the language. In future lessons you will also see the definite article take the form **-הָ** before some of these letters.

Lesson 8 - Parts of the Body

8.1 Dual forms

Most nouns have forms for two numbers: singular (1) and plural (2 or more). However, some words in Hebrew have a dual form (2) instead of or in addition to a plural form (3 or more). Things that come in pairs, like many body parts, often take dual forms.¹⁰ The dual form is marked with the suffix **ים** -.

	Dual		Singular
<i>two eyes</i>	עֵינַיִם	<i>eye</i>	עַיִן
<i>two ears</i>	אָזְנַיִם ¹¹	<i>ear</i>	אָזֶן
<i>two hands</i>	יָדַיִם	<i>hand</i>	יָד
<i>two feet/legs</i>	רַגְלַיִם	<i>foot/leg</i>	רֶגֶל
<i>two palms</i>	כַּפַּיִם	<i>palm</i>	כַּף

8.2 Nouns with plural form only

Some nouns occur only in plural form with no singular form. The word **פְּנִיִּם** ‘face’ in this lesson is one of these. Therefore **פְּנִיִּם** may be translated ‘face’ or ‘faces,’ depending on the context.

8.3 Nouns in construct form

In the last section of the video, all the body parts that appear with a possessor, such as **רַגְלֵי סוּס** ‘a horse’s foot/leg’ or **בֶּטֶן אִשָּׁה** ‘a woman’s belly,’ are in **construct form**, but they sound the

¹⁰ For body parts that come in pairs, the dual form may sometimes be used to refer to more than two: **אַרְבַּע רַגְלַיִם** ‘four feet.’

¹¹ *Qamets* ׀ that appears in a closed unaccented syllable is a *qamets hatuf* and is pronounced [o] instead of [a], so this word is correctly pronounced ‘oznayim.’

same and are spelled the same in construct form as in their free absolute form (except **תָּ** ‘hand,’ which changes its spelling to **תֵּ** in the construct form, but still sounds the same). In lesson 11, we will learn more about construct forms.

Lesson 9 - Things good and bad

9.1 Possessive suffixes review

In this lesson we review the possessive suffixes on the word ‘name’ that were introduced in 5.1. Remember that the conjunction -וְ becomes -וֹ before words whose first letter has a *shewa* vowel, as in the example below.

שְׁמָהּ רוּת וְשְׁמָהּ ¹² נָעֻמִי	מִי הֵנָּה:
<i>Her name (is) Ruth and her name (is) Naomi.</i>	<i>Who (are) they (fem.)?</i>

9.2 The word דָּבָר

דָּבָר means generally ‘thing’ or ‘word.’ In this lesson it is used in the sense of a physical ‘thing’ (1), in the sense of ‘word’ (2) and in the sense of a non-physical ‘thing,’ referring to a matter/situation/affair (3). Senses 2 and 3 are the most common in Biblical Hebrew.

<i>What (is) this thing? This thing (is) a jar.</i>	מָה־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה: הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה כֵּד:	1
<i>House, the man, father, these (are) words.</i>	בֵּית, הָאִישׁ, אָב, אֵלֶּה דְבָרִים:	2
<i>[men fighting in anger] Is this thing good? No, this thing is very bad.</i>	הַטּוֹב הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה: לֹא, הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה רַע מְאֹד:	3

¹² In a later lesson, we will cover the vowel rule that reads a *qamets hatuf* ָ in a closed unaccented syllable and a *ḥatef qamets* ֿ both as [o] sounds. Because of this rule, the name Naomi נָעֻמִי is correctly pronounced in Biblical Hebrew *No’omi* [noʁo¹mi]. This same rule about *qamets* ָ in a closed unaccented syllable is also why גִּלְיָת is pronounced *Goliat* [gol¹jat].

9.3 Adjectives ‘good’ and ‘bad’

We learned two adjectives in this lesson: טוֹב ‘good,’ and רַע ‘bad.’ Note that they take the same suffixes that we learned in 2.3, agreeing with the noun they modify in gender and number.

	<i>Feminine</i>	<i>Masculine</i>
<i>Sg.</i>	a good woman אִשָּׁה טוֹבָה	a good man אִישׁ טוֹב
	a good land אֶרֶץ רַעֲוָה	a bad thing דְּבַר רַע
<i>Pl.</i>	good women נְשִׁים טוֹבוֹת	good things דְּבָרִים טוֹבִים
	bad women נְשִׁים רַעוֹת	bad things דְּבָרִים רַעִים

9.4 The yes-no question marker prefix

So far, we have seen many content questions with interrogative pronouns, such as מִי הֵם “who (are) they?” and מַה־זֶּה “what (is) this?” On the other hand, a “yes-no” or “polar” question (whose answer is a simple yes or no), is usually signaled with the prefix הֲ- on the first word of the question:

הֲטוֹבִים הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה: טוֹבִים הֵם:
(Are) these things good? They (are) good.

The question marker הֲ- sounds just like the definite article הַ-, but in writing it usually looks different because of the *hataf patah* vowel ְ. The two prefixes can usually be distinguished without difficulty from context since the yes-no question marker always attaches to the first word of the question.

9.5 Hinneh הִנֵּה

The word הִנֵּה is used to draw the hearer’s attention to, present, or point to what follows. It has traditionally been translated in older English versions as ‘behold’ but a more modern idiom would be ‘Look, ...’

<i>Look, (here are) these people</i>	הִנֵּה הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה
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Lesson 10 - Alphabet part 2

This lesson introduces three more letters of the alphabet and three more vowel points (*niqqud*).

10.1 Consonants

Resh ר is the twentieth letter of the alphabet and is pronounced in our videos as an alveolar flap or trill (like the Spanish or Arabic *r* sound). Most Modern Hebrew speakers pronounce this letter as a voiced uvular fricative (like the French or German *r* sound).

Dalet ד is the fourth letter of the alphabet and is pronounced *d*, with or without a *dagesh*.

Mem מ is the thirteenth letter of the alphabet. *Mem* is one of five Hebrew letters that have two forms: one when it occurs at the beginning or in the middle of a word, and another (the *sofit* form: *sofit* means ‘final’) when it occurs at the end of a word. *Mem* מ comes at the beginning or in the middle of a word, and *mem sofit* ם at the end. Both are always pronounced *m*.

10.2 Vowels

Holem ך, written as a single dot above and to the left of a letter, is pronounced like the vowel [o].

Tsere ך, written as two horizontal dots under a letter, is pronounced like the vowel sound [e] “ey” as in “pay” or [ɛ] “eh” as in “pet,” depending on the context.¹³

Shewa ך, written as two vertical dots under a letter (introduced briefly in lesson 7), has two pronunciations:

- 1) [ə], a short relaxed central vowel like the first and last vowels of “banana” in English [bə¹nænə]. This is called a *vocal shewa* or *audible shewa* in grammars.

¹³ Some pronunciation systems will consistently pronounce *tsere* as [e], distinguishing it from *tsere + yod* ך, which is then pronounced as a diphthong [ej]. In our videos, we follow Modern Hebrew, which does not distinguish between ך and ך and in which *tsere* can vary between [e] and [ɛ] depending on context.

When ְ is the core vowel of a syllable, such as when it occurs on the first letter of a word (like יְשׁוּעָה), it is pronounced [ə].¹⁴

- 2) Silent. When ְ comes after a closed syllable (such as in מִדְּבָר and אֲבָרָם), it is not pronounced, and it merely indicates the absence of a vowel. This is called *silent shewa* in grammars. It does not occur on the final closing consonant of a word (e.g. *not* מִדְּבָרְךָ), except for in the word אָתָּה, some second person sg. feminine verb forms, and the letter *kaf* which we will see in later lessons.

At this point in your learning, we recommend not worrying about memorizing all the rules for when a *shewa* is pronounced and when it is silent. You can read about them in detail in any good Hebrew grammar if you like, but for now, we recommend just imitating the sound of the words you hear in the videos.

10.3 *Maqqef* (review from 5.4)

You will see some words written connected with a bar ֿ, called a *maqqef*, like in מִהֵרָאִשְׁמִי. This connects a short word to the word that follows it and marks them as forming one phonological word with one accented syllable. It does not appreciably affect the meaning or pronunciation. It is often optional in the Hebrew Bible, so in these lessons we try to follow the form that you will see most frequently.

¹⁴ Modern Hebrew speakers will often not pronounce *vocal shewas*, so for example, you may hear יְשׁוּעָה pronounced as 1-syllable [ʃmi] instead of 2-syllable [ʃəmi]. Don't let small differences of pronunciation throw you off, just focus on understanding what you hear!

Lesson 11 - Construct Forms

11.1 Plural forms of son and daughter

The plural forms of the family terms בֶּן ‘son’ and בַּת ‘daughter,’ are:

בָּנִים *banim* ‘sons’

בָּנוֹת *banot* ‘daughters’

11.2 Construct forms

As briefly introduced in 5.2, in Hebrew the relationship between two nouns that is usually expressed with the preposition “of” in English (often called genitive in classical languages), is expressed in Hebrew with what is called a “construct chain.” A chain may consist of just two nouns as in (1) and (2) or three or more nouns as in (3) and (4).

<p>English joins the nouns with “of” ...</p> <p>_____ of _____</p> <p>_____ of _____ of _____</p> <p>Hebrew marks a noun as “possessed” (the following noun is its possessor) by putting it in construct form</p>	<p>אָב ← אָבִי</p>	<p>אָבִי הַנֶּעֶר</p> <p><i>the father of the boy</i></p>	1
	<p>בֶּן ← בְּנֵי</p>	<p>בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף</p> <p><i>the son of Joseph</i></p>	2
	<p>בֵּית ← בֵּית</p> <p>אִשָּׁה ← אִשָּׁת</p>	<p>בֵּית אִשָּׁת הָאִישׁ</p> <p><i>the house of the wife of the man</i></p>	3
	<p>בֵּית ← בֵּית</p> <p>אִשָּׁה ← אִשָּׁת</p> <p>בֶּן ← בְּנֵי</p>	<p>בֵּית אִשָּׁת בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף</p> <p><i>the house of the wife of the son of Joseph</i></p>	4

Plural forms ending in םִיְ - or dual forms ending in םִיְ - both change to end in יְ - in construct form:

בָּנִים ← בְּנֵי בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף <i>The sons of Joseph</i>	נָשִׁים ← נָשֵׁי נָשֵׁי יַעֲקֹב <i>The wives of Jacob</i>	אֹהֲלִים ← אֹהֲלֵי אֹהֲלֵי אַבְרָהָם ¹⁵ <i>The tents of Abraham</i>	עֵינַיִם ← עֵינָי עֵינָי אַבְרָם <i>The eyes of Avram</i>
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Nouns that end in הָּ - change to end in תְּ - in construct form:

פָּרָה ← פָּרַת
 פָּרַת יוֹסֵף
Joseph's cow

Plural nouns that end in וֹת - usually have their vowels constricted or shortened in construct form:

בָּנוֹת ← בְּנוֹת
 בְּנוֹת יוֹסֵף
The daughters of Joseph

An important feature of the construct chain structure is that the definiteness of the final noun in the chain determines the definiteness of the entire chain. An **indefinite** final noun as in (1) means the whole chain is **indefinite**. A **definite** final noun as in (2) and (3) means the whole chain is **definite**.

a house of a man	בֵּית אִישׁ	1
the house of the man	בֵּית הָאִישׁ	2
the house of Abraham	בֵּית אַבְרָהָם	3

Only the final noun is marked for definiteness, so it is *incorrect* to mark a noun in construct form with the definite article -הַ as in (4). Instead, it should be like (2).

the house of the man	בֵּית הַאִישׁ* <i>incorrect</i>	4
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¹⁵ The rule that reads a *qamets hatuf*ֿ in a closed unaccented syllable and a *hatef qamets*ֿ both as [o] sounds means the word אֹהֲלֵי is correctly pronounced 'oholey [ʔoho¹le], just like the name Naomi נְעֻמִי is pronounced no'omi [noʃo¹mi].

11.3 Good or bad in the eyes of...

In Hebrew, a person's approval or disapproval is expressed with the idiom "good/bad in their eyes."

<i>Is this thing good in the eyes of Avram?</i>	הַטוֹב הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה בְּעֵינַי אַבְרָם:
<i>The thing is not good in the eyes of Avram.</i>	לֹא טוֹב הַדְּבָר בְּעֵינַי אַבְרָם:
<i>The thing is bad in the eyes of Avram.</i>	רָע הַדְּבָר בְּעֵינַי אַבְרָם:

Notice that "eyes" in construct form does *not* have the vowel of definite article on the preposition **בְּ-**.

בְּעֵינַי and *not* בְּעֵינַי

Instead, the definiteness of "the eyes of Avram" comes from the definiteness of the final noun in the construct chain: the proper name Avram.

Lesson 12 - Numbers 1-5

12.1 Cardinal Numbers 1-5

This lesson introduces the cardinal numbers one through five. Like adjectives, numbers have distinct forms for masculine and feminine nouns. When counting, the feminine forms are used.

	<i>With masculine nouns</i>	<i>With feminine nouns</i>
1 °	אַחַד	אַחַת
2 °°	שְׁנַיִם	שְׁתַּיִם
3 °°°	שְׁלוֹשָׁה	שְׁלוֹשׁ
4 °°°°	אַרְבָּעָה	אַרְבַּע
5 °°°°°	חֲמִשָּׁה	חֲמִישׁ ¹⁶

Numbers can appear before or after the noun they modify, but the most common pattern is for the number one אַחַד / אַחַת to appear *after* its noun, and the rest of the numbers to appear *before*.

□	<i>one man</i>	אִישׁ אַחַד
□ □ □	<i>three men/people</i>	שְׁלוֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים
□ □ □ □ □	<i>five men/people</i>	חֲמִשָּׁה אַנְשִׁים

Not surprisingly, the number two, שְׁתַּיִם, has a dual form. It is often shortened to its **construct form** before the noun it modifies.

<i>two young women</i>	שְׁתֵּי נְעָרוֹת	שְׁתַּיִם ← שְׁתֵּי
<i>two young men</i>	שְׁנֵי נְעָרִים	שְׁנַיִם ← שְׁנֵי

¹⁶ Hebrew numbers are odd in that the form that appears to be feminine (ending in הַ, -) is actually used with masculine nouns, and vice versa.

Hebrew numbers are odd in that the form that appears to be feminine (ending in הַ -) is actually used with masculine nouns (like סוּס), and vice versa.

סוּס אֶחָד		פָּרוֹת אֶחָת	
שְׁנַי סוּסִים		שְׁתֵּי פָּרוֹת	
שְׁלֹשָׁה סוּסִים		שְׁלוֹשׁ פָּרוֹת	
אַרְבָּעָה סוּסִים		אַרְבַּע פָּרוֹת	
חֲמִשָּׁה סוּסִים		חֲמִשׁ פָּרוֹת	

12.2 Imperative verb קַח

In this lesson we learn another verb, in the imperative (command) form, קַח *qah*, ‘take!’¹⁷ Beth tells Avram to take various numbers of cows, horses or people.

12.3 All - כָּל / כָּל־

כָּל (very often written כָּל־, both pronounced [kol]¹⁸) means “all,” “every” or “entire.”

In this lesson we only hear it in the sense of “all” when Beth tells Avram to take all the horses, all the people, etc.

<i>all the horses</i>	כָּל־הַסּוּסִים
<i>every man</i>	כָּל־אִישׁ
<i>the entire house</i>	כָּל־הַבַּיִת

¹⁷ The form קַח is masculine singular, so it is only used when addressing a single male (like Avram in the video). For addressing a single female, it would be קַחִי.

¹⁸ This is pronounced [kol] because of the rule about *qamets hatuf* pronounced [o] in a closed unaccented syllable.

Lesson 13 - Alphabet part 3

13.1 Consonants

Lamed ל is the twelfth letter of the alphabet. It is always pronounced like the letter *l*, with or without a dagesh.

Nun נ is the fourteenth letter of the alphabet. *Nun* is like *mem*, having two forms: *nun* נ when it occurs at the beginning or in the middle of a word, and *nun sofit* ן (the *sofit* form: *sofit* means ‘final’) when it occurs at the end of a word. Both are always pronounced *n*.

13.2 Vowels

Segol ם, written as three dots in a triangle under the letter, is pronounced like the vowel sound [ɛ] “eh” as in ‘pet’ or [e] “ey” as in ‘pay’ depending on the context.¹⁹

Vav in its consonantal use occurs in lessons 7 and 10, pronounced [v] as in the conjunction -ױ. Now we learn the two vocalic uses of *vav*:

- *Holem vav* ם is pronounced [o] as in ‘core.’
- *Shureq* ם is pronounced [u] as in flute.²⁰

There is another [u] vowel called *qibbutz* ם, that is written as three dots in a diagonal line under the letter is pronounced exactly the same as *shureq* ם. This vowel is infrequent. We don’t teach it in the first five alphabet videos because it will still be a long time before we learn any words that are spelled with *qibbutz*.²¹ Just be aware that it exists, and that you will see it in lists of Hebrew *niqqud*, or vowel pointings.

¹⁹ Some pronunciation systems will consistently pronounce *segol* ם as [ɛ], distinguishing it from *tsere* ם [e]. In our videos, we follow Modern Hebrew, which pronounces *segol* and *tsere* both as either [ɛ] or [e], depending on context. For example both נַחַם and its construct form נַחֲמֵם are pronounced [bɛn] with an [ɛ] vowel, while the words נֶחֱם and its construct form נֶחֱמֵם both end in an [e] vowel.

²⁰ Occasionally consonantal *vav* appears with a *dagesh* ם, and thus looks exactly the same as *shureq* ם. You can distinguish consonantal *vav* with *dagesh* (pronounced [v]) from *shureq* (pronounced [u]) because *vav* with *dagesh* will have another vowel with it, such as: ם ם ם.

²¹ Very few basic vocabulary words are spelled with *qibbutz*. It usually occurs in morphologically complex words: When a suffix is added to a verb ending in *shureq* ם, that *shureq* that is now in the middle of the word is frequently changed into a *qibbutz* ם.

13.3 Letters with two pronunciations

As introduced in 3.2 and 5.3, the *begadkefat* letters lose their *dagesh* in certain contexts. The general pattern is that they lose the *dagesh* when they appear between two vowels, such as after the conjunction וְ- or -וְ , as in וַיְבַרְךָ *u-vat* ‘and a daughter.’

Another of these contexts that frequently (but not always) triggers a loss of *dagesh* in a *begadkefat* letter is when the preceding word ends with an accented vowel. In this lesson we see how the letter *bet* ב loses its *dagesh* after שְׁלֹשָׁה and שְׁתֵּי/שְׁנַיִ , words that end in an accented vowel (*shalosháh*, *shatáy*, *shanéy*).

$\text{בְּתִים} \leftarrow \text{בְּתִים}$	$\text{בָּנוֹת} \leftarrow \text{בָּנוֹת}$
שְׁלֹשָׁה בְּתִים <i>three houses</i>	שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת <i>two daughters</i>

The word אֱלֹהִים also ends with a vowel, but because it is the *first* syllable that is accented instead of the *last* one (*‘élleh*), it does not trigger the change.

אֵלֶּה בָּנִים
These (are) sons

13.4 Shewa pronounced after shureq

In lesson 10 we discussed two pronunciations of *shewa* : the *audible* or *vocal shewa* vowel [ə], and *silent shewa*. We summarized the rules by saying that when a *shewa* is the core vowel of a syllable (like when it appears under the first letter of a word) it is pronounced [ə] (such as שָׁמִי *shami*), and when it comes after a closed syllable (a syllable that ends in a consonant, like ‘av’ or ‘mid’) it is silent (such as אֲבָרָם *avram*). In words like וַיְבַרְכָּהּ , וַיְשָׂמוּ , or וַיְנַשֵּׂהוּ , where the *shewa* comes after *shureq* וְ it may appear that *shewa* is coming after a closed syllable and would therefore be silent, but in fact the *shewa* should be pronounced [ə] in these cases.²² Therefore, adding -וְ to a word beginning with a *shewa* vowel will not change the vowel’s pronunciation.

וַיְשָׂמוּ	וַיְבַרְכָּהּ	וַיְנַשֵּׂהוּ
<i>u-shami</i>	<i>u-vənot</i>	<i>u-nashey</i>

²² The rule is that *shewa* is pronounced after a syllable that contains a “long vowel,” including וְ and וּ . Note that Modern Hebrew does not always preserve the pronunciation of the *vocal shewa* vowel, and the video may not always model this pronunciation clearly in the early lessons.

Lesson 14 - to be continued...