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Pronunciation Guide for Hebrew Geographical Names*

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other than Arabic)**

Pronunciation Guide for Hebrew Geographical Names

Hebrew is a Semitic language, and its script, written from right to left, is alphabetic-defective¹: the basic system of consonant letters is augmented by the vowels which are represented chiefly by points or marks below, within and above the consonants. The correct pronunciation of Hebrew presumes the presence of fully-pointed text, i.e. that all vowels are marked, but this is found in practice only in clerical or instructional/educational texts. The vowel marks are usually omitted in everyday writing and print since Israelis are taught to read without them, but a method of substituting some vowels markers by the two consonant letters ׀ and ׀ (*ketiv malé*, i.e. plene orthography) is generally used to facilitate reading and is applied also to geographical names. Hebrew has no capital letters.

This guide is designed to enable foreign users both to read names in Hebrew maps, and to approximately correctly pronounce Hebrew names in their romanized form.

Generalizing, Hebrew is pronounced in either a "Western" mode (WP) or an "Eastern" one (EP). One of the chief differences lies in the fact that the former ignores the gutturalization of the consonants ׀ and ׀. Stress is not indicated in Hebrew script, but is predominantly on the final syllable, less frequently on the penultimate one.

In the tables below, column 1 = serial number. Column 2 = Hebrew consonant or vowel; the five consonant letters ׀ ׀ ׀ ׀ ׀ have a word-final form, shown in column 2 in parentheses. Column 3 = official romanization². Column 4 = remarks on pronunciation, with examples. Unless otherwise stated, pronunciation is approximately as in English.

Superscript numbers refer to the endnotes.

Consonants

1 ׀ ' The letter ׀ (*alef*)– (1) serves as the carrier of vowel points in word-initial and medial positions, and in itself is not pronounced:

ʔ = a, ʕ = e, ʕ = i, etc. (2) Medially it separates between two vowels or between a consonant and a vowel or *vice versa*: ʕʕʕ ʕʕʕ = e'elim; ʕʕʕʕʕ = Mal'akh ; ʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Ne'dar. (3) Unvowelled it is always mute: ʕʕʕʕʕ

Sasa.

			(4) Word-finally it is also mute: ʕʕʕ = 'Ezra.
2	ʔ ³	b	ʕʕʕʕʕ = Bitan
2a	ʔ ⁴	v	ʕʕʕʕʕ = Gevim
3	ʔ ʔ	g	Hard g as in 'go'. ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Golan
4	ʔ ʔ ⁵	d	ʕʕʕʕ = Dolev
5	ʔ	h	Consonantic, unless word-final where it is mute. Word-initially (if hyphenated in romanization) 'ha' is the definite article: ʕʕʕʕ = Hadar, but ʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Ha-Galil (the Galilee).
6	ʔ	w	As a consonant this is pronounced as v, e.g. ʕʕʕʕʕ = pronounced Vered. When carrying a single dot, as ʔor ʕ, it becomes a vowel. See <i>Vowels</i> , below, Nos. 11 and 13.
7	ʔ	z	ʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Zekharya
8	ʔ		In WP pronounced as velar ch in Scottish 'loch' or in German 'ach', similar to No. 11a below; in EP it is pronounced gutturally (pharyngially). ʕʕʕʕʕ = Sha ar.
9	ʔ	t	ʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Tira
10	ʔ	y	Consonantic as in 'yes' when vowelled, i.e. when word- or syllable initial, e.g. ʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Yehuda, or when word-final after a, u and o, e.g. ʕʕʕʕʕ = Yishay; otherwise it is mute.
11	ʔ ⁶	k	ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Karkur.
11a	ʔ ʔ	kh	Pronounced as ch in Scottish 'loch' or in German 'ach'. ʕʕʕʕʕ = Nofekh.
12	ʔ	l	ʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Lavi
13	ʔ ʔ	m	ʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Moran.
14	ʔ (?)	n	ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Nirim
15	ʔ	s	ʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Segula
16	ʔ	‘	The letter ʔ ('ayin) is a glottal stop and (1) serves as the carrier of vowels and gutturalizes them, (2) medially it slightly separates between two vowels, e.g. ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Na'ura, or between a consonant and a vowel: "ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Zar'it. In WP it is pronounced similar to ʔ (No. 1, above).
17	ʔ ⁸	p	ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Palma im
17a	ʔ ʔ	f	ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Nofekh
18	ʔ ʔ		As ts in 'lots'. ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = almon, pronounced Tsalmon
19	ʔ	q	Pronounced as k ⁹ . ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Qedma, pronounced Kedma
20	ʔ	r	ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Reva a.
21	ʔ	sh	Pronounced as in 'shot'. ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Shuval
21a	'	s	ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Sara
22	" ʔ ⁵	t	ʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕʕ = Tamar.

In the Hebrew rendition of *foreign* geographical names the following consonant letters are used in combination with a diacritic:

?	j	as j in 'joy'
?	zh	as z in 'azure' or as French j in 'jour'
?	gh	as Arabic (ghayn)
?	ch	as ch in chief
"	th	as unvoiced th in 'thing'.

Vowels

(? stands for any consonant letter; in Nos. 11 and 13 the letter ? is part of the vowel).

1	?	a	as a in 'father'
2	?	a	as a in 'father'
3	?	a	as a in 'father' ⁹
4	?	e	as e in 'bet'
5	?	e	as e in 'bet'
6	?	e	as e in 'bet'; in WP often as ay in 'say'
7	?	e	as a <i>sheva na</i> ' this is pronounced as e in 'become'; as <i>sheva na</i> • it is mute ¹⁰
8	?	i	as ee in 'see'
9	?	o	as o in 'more'
10	??	o	as o in 'more'
11	??	o	as o in 'more'
12	?	u	as oo in 'food'
13	?	u	as oo in 'food'

Notes

- 1 See *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names*. United Nations, New York, 2002.
- 2 'Report on the current status of the United Nations romanization systems for geographical names'. Eighth U.N. Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. Berlin, 2002, document E/CONF.94/CRP.81.
- 3 Both in writing and in print the dot (*dagesh*) in this letter is often omitted, but at word and syllable beginning it does not become v (No. 2a) and must still be pronounced b.
- 4 Does not occur at the beginning of a name.
- 5 The dot (*dagesh*) within this consonant letter does not affect its pronunciation.
- 6 Both in writing and in print the dot (*dagesh*) in this letter is often omitted, but at word and syllable beginning it does not become kh (No. 11a) and must still be pronounced k.

- 7 The letters ק and ק (Nos. 1 and 16) are usually both romanized by the same diacritic, ' , used for ק.
- 8 Both in writing and in print the dot (*dagesh*) in this letter is often omitted, but at word and syllable beginning it does not become f (No. 17a) and must still be pronounced p.
- 9 Seldom also as o in 'more', mainly in closed unstressed syllables, e.g. קקקק = א'א.
- 10 The vowel marker *sheva* is of two kinds: end-of-syllable *sheva na* • which is mute, and beginning-of word or syllable *sheva na* ' , which is pronounced as a faint e (in general linguistics the latter is called *shwa*). In speech it is often omitted. Thus, the generic term קקקק (village), romanized 'Kefar', is usually pronounced 'Kfar', and *sheva* is pronounced shva. .