

This is the Hebrew alphabet, in the ‘square’ script used in your Hebrew Bible. Notice that it is written from right to left:




א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י כך ל מם נן ס ע פף צץ ק ר ש ת

And here it is in a different, simpler font, so you can see the basic shapes of the letters without all the curlicues:



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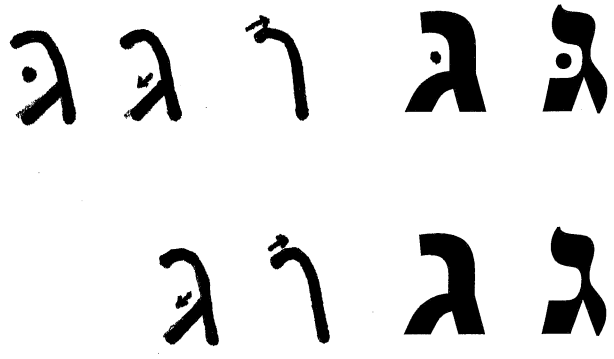
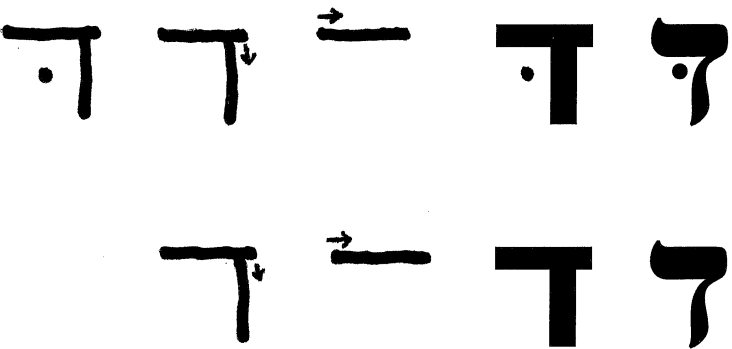


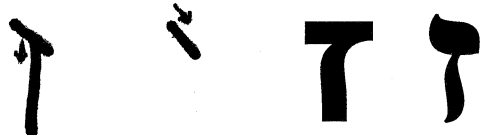

There are many different ways of forming these letters when you write them, and eventually you’ll find a way which works for you. To get you started, I’ve drawn each letter in stages below. Alongside each letter is its name and its sound; when the sound doesn’t correspond directly to a letter or sound in English, there’s a footnote explaining the sound (or sounds) it makes.

Notice that some of the letters have two different forms: one for when the letter comes in the middle of the word, and one for when it comes at the end of the word. These letters are called ‘final’ forms (‘sofit’ in Hebrew).

Name	Sound	
alef	(no sound)*	
beyt	b	
	b†	

* This is a silent ‘glottal stop’ – a very brief pause, like the Cockney pronunciation of ‘bottle’ as ‘boh-ul’, with a break in the sound in the middle of the word.

† The beyt is one of six letters (the others are gimel, dalet, kaf, pe and tav) that sometimes appear with a dot in them:  instead of . The dot is a sign that the letter has its ‘hard’ pronunciation rather than its ‘soft’ one: a ‘buh’ rather than a ‘vuh’ sound for בּ, a ‘puh’ rather than a ‘fuh’ sound for פּ, etc. (In the modern pronunciation system some of these differences have faded – gimel, for example, is always pronounced ‘guh’. This is mainly because European languages don’t have these sounds, so the Europeans who revived Hebrew as a spoken language found them difficult.) We’ll discuss why these dots occur when we start to study these letters as part of words; for now just remember that the dot affects the pronunciation. When the letters are transcribed, their soft pronunciation is distinguished by a line above or beneath the letter.

gimel	g g	
dalet	d d	
he	h	
vav (waw)	v (w) [‡]	
zayin	z	
het	h [§]	


[‡] This is personal preference: ancient Hebrew speakers probably pronounced ‘w’, but moderns almost always use ‘v’.

[§] This is a harsher ‘h’ sound than the he: it’s more like the ‘ch’ in the Scottish ‘loch’. Notice that both H letters look very similar in the Hebrew script – be sure to distinguish between them when reading and writing. Notice also that when written in Roman letters, the het has a dot underneath it.

tet	t ^{**}	ט ט ט
yod	y	י י י
kaf	k	כ כ כ
	<u>k</u>	כ כ כ
kaf sofit		כ כ כ
lamed	l	ל ל ל
mem	m	מ מ מ
mem sofit		מ מ מ

^{**} This is a harsher 't' sound than the tav (although most Western speakers don't distinguish it). When written in Roman letters, it is distinguished from the tav by the dot underneath.

nun	n	נ נ נ
nun sofit		ן ן ן
samek	s	ס ס ס
ayin	(guttural noise in the back of the throat)	ע ע ע
pe	p	פ פ פ
	p̄	פּ פּ פּ
pe sofit		ף ף ף

šade	š ^{††}	
šade sofit		
qof	q	
resh	r	
šin	š ^{††}	
šin	š	
taw	t	
	<u>t</u>	

†† This is a 'ts' sound; it is properly transliterated š (an s with a dot underneath), but you will often see it written ts (and the letter written 'tsade' instead of 'šade').

†† This letter is used to represent two different s sounds. They are distinguished by the location of the dot: a dot on the right means it's a 'sh' sound (transliterated properly as š), while a dot on the left means it's a regular 's' sound (it gets the accent on top to distinguish it from the samek, which also makes an s sound). The letter is called šin or śin, depending on which sound it's representing.