VOWELS AND SYMBOLS

Educator Guide

Explore our magical world of Hebrew letters

Produced by Jewish Interactive
in partnership with the Michael Goulston Educational Foundation
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THE Ji ALEF-BET SERIES

This educator guide accompanies the Ji Tap course that can be played here:
https://www.jitap.net/store/course/346/

Visit the pages on our website for the whole series:
https://www.jewishinteractive.org/ji-alef-bet-series/

About the Michael Goulston Educational Foundation

In 1957, when Michael Goulston z”l came to the Leo Baeck College aged 26 to study for the Rabbinate, he had no Hebrew at all. He did not even know the Alef Bet and I had the privilege of teaching him the Alef Bet. In 1968 Rabbi Michael Goulston was appointed assistant Rabbi at West London Synagogue (where Rabbi Hugo Gryn z”l was Senior Rabbi) and we renewed our friendship. Tragically Michael died in 1972 but in his years at West London Synagogue he had great foresight and was using a 2-inch Ampex video tape machine to make educational video programs!

Immediately after his death, the Michael Goulston Educational Foundation was formed to continue his work and we published a number of audiovisual programs.

In 2012, upset by the fact that so many of our children (even those starting their Bar/BatMitzvah program) did not even know all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, I had the idea to create a series of videos for 5/6 year olds in which there would be a story about each letter.

In February 2014 (still searching for an organization that had the capability to do this and importantly shared my vision), I came across Jewish Interactive and went to meet their CEO, Chana Kanzen who was immediately excited by the idea as she had already written a number of stories for the same reason. In addition to make it more fun, singing as well as games and puzzles with words which would be associated with each letter would be introduced as this would improve the learning experience enormously.

So at the beginning of 2017 Jewish Interactive and I started working on the Alef-Bet project which has now come to fruition – 60 years after my teaching Michael the Alef Bet!

Having completed Stages 1, 1a (Mish Mash Letters), and 2, which enabled children to learn the alphabet, read simple phrases and then in Stage 3 start learning the structure of the Hebrew language, our research informed us that there was inconsistency in the retention of the learning. We therefore have produced an additional unit which is a ‘vowel recap’ and we will shortly add a game as a companion to recap the letters. These additional recap units will also be useful for late starters whose knowledge is patchy.

Edward Gold
January 2022
Rationale

Vowel Recap

Before starting Stage 3, where Tefilot and Biblical texts are used to teach 6 prefixes and 3 suffixes, students may need to make sure they know how to pronounce all their vowels – in particular the endings ָיו, וּי, וֹי, and the Kamats Katan/Chatuf and the Chataf-Kamats.

We are also preparing a game to ensure all the letters are remembered. This vowel recap and in due course the alphabet game will also be useful for year 5 students who may be less proficient.

We have invented new symbols for both the Kamats Katan and the Chataf-Kamats as the slightly longer down stroke of the Kamats used in many siddurim is not noticed or ignored and even the small ‘o’ superscription in some siddurim is also ignored. Of course, when texts outside of this course are learnt, the students will have to be guided as the regular Kamats symbol is used.

We have used an Israeli in our recordings so you will notice that the Cholam is pronounced as a short vowel, and this is particularly noticeable at the end of words. Also, unfortunately there is usually no distinction between the Segol (short vowel) and the Tsayray (long vowel) except when the Tsayray is spelt with a yod.
Grammar rules

We decided not to teach rules but maintain our discipline of using interactive activity and visuals to teach and leave it to teacher’s discretion whether to teach the rules or not. For ease of reference the relative rules are as follows:

Sheva rules:

- Sheva is sounded at the beginning of a word.
- It is sounded under a letter that has a dagesh.
- It is sounded after long vowels – Cholam, Chirik (spelt with a yod), Tsayray.
- It is silent after short vowels – Patach, Chirik (spelt without a yod), Segol and Kubuts.
- It is silent under ה,ע,א.
- If there are two Shevas together, the first is silent (closing the syllable) and the second is pronounced except when they occur at the end of a word and then they are both silent.

Kamats Katan rules (also called Kamats Chatuf):

- Kamats Katan occurs in closed, unaccented syllables, and is pronounced as short ‘o’.
- Often Kamats Katan is followed by a silent Sheva as in אֶכְלָה (food) and can be distinguished from אָכְלָה (she ate) by the meteg.
- Kamats Katan is also often followed by a hyphen ל־הָֽאָרֶץכָּ.
- Kamats Katan also often follows an accented Kamats as in וַיָּקָם.

Translations and Gender

We have used literal translations rather than apply gender neutral alternatives (which many recent siddurim use) to words such as אָדֹן and אַבּוֹתִינוּ.
Lesson Structure

Every lesson follows the same structure, allowing the student to know what to expect in each section. To get the children used to reading in Hebrew from right to left, the menu starts on the top right, with small arrows indicating the flow. We used voiceover in Hebrew, to slowly introduce these menu items.

The items in this menu reflect the nature of this series, emphasizing vowel sounds, word-analysis, and reading practice. At the end of the reading practice, in most cases, there are songs for the children to sing along to. The menu provides an opportunity to revise any part of the lesson.
What are we going to learn?
A short introduction to the vowel sound, symbol or combination that will be the main topic of the lesson.

Vowel sounds
An interaction that reinforces the vowel sound or vowel combination.

Finding sounds in texts
The student has the task of finding the relevant sounds or vowel combinations in the texts – tapping them will highlight those sounds. There is a voiceover for each word that is found, reinforcing the word. Kivi’s highlighter is marked with the number of times that the particular vowel is to be found.

Once all the highlighting and analysis has been done, then the student is asked to read the various passages that have been carefully chosen to emphasize the vowel rule that has been taught. Each word can be tapped to see and hear the syllabic breakdown of that word. If there is a song for this verse, students can sing along to it – as karaoke.

Summing up
A screen that summarizes the vowel sound, symbol or vowel combination that was taught or revised in this lesson.
The Hebrew verse is read out, karaoke style, highlighting the word spoken at that time. This will encourage the child to develop fluency when reading the verse. 

**Note:** to have the English read out, tap the English paragraph.

This icon will trigger a song of the verse, so that children can learn the verse with music—a great way to learn a prayer!

This icon takes you to the next screen.

These buttons are always in the lower left and right corners of a Ji Tap game. They take you to the previous and next screens respectively.
Vowel Groupings

We have grouped the vowels in their three academic classes ‘A’, ‘E’ and ‘O’, but we have subdivided the ‘E’ and ‘O’ classes into ‘E’ and ‘I’ and ‘O’ and ‘U’. For convenience, we have added in the Shevas, which are normally dealt with quite separately.

The shading has been used to distinguish between the indistinct, short and long vowels. The darker the shading, the longer the vowel sound. We are not proposing to explain the differences between the similar vowels, but leave that to the educators, should they want to do so.

To download the poster with the Hebrew or English names, click here.
Throughout this series children can practice reading thoroughly in many ways:

1. Try and read a word independently, then click the word to check yourself.

   a. Tap the word ‘baruch’
Lessons

1. Vowel Sounds and Symbols

URL: https://jitap.net/activities/gexc/play/

Overview

We introduce the concept of a Hebrew vowel and recap the basic vowel sounds and symbols. Reading practice is the first sentence of the Shema (שְׁמַע).

We first compare the position of English vowels with Hebrew vowels and then provide an interactive game to ensure familiarity with the vowels. This includes the new symbol that we are using in this series for the Kamats Katan and the Chataf-Kamats. We explain this new symbol and compare the Kamats Katan with the Kamats. We have also used this Kamats Katan symbol with the Chataf-Kamats.

We have used colors to differentiate between the ‘A’, ‘E’ and ‘O’ classes of vowel and used shading to differentiate the long, short and indistinct vowels.

We also introduce the bold Sheva to explain the difference between the vocal and silent Sheva.
Introducing the Bold Sheva

We introduce the bold Sheva so that it can be sounded and differentiated from the silent Sheva.

Introducing Kamats Katan

We have introduced a new symbol to differentiate a Kamats Katan (pronounced 'o') from the Kamats. Some have used an elongated downward stroke of the Kamats, but it is often missed as is the superscription of a small 'o', which similarly is overlooked. We hope this aid will be a welcome solution.
**Reading Practice: First sentence of the Shema**

Students are asked to go through the full set of vowels and highlight each one in this sentence. The number appearing on the highlighter indicates how many symbols with that sound should be found.

For example, in the screen capture below, the ‘Eh’ cylinder is highlighted, with a 2 written on the highlighter. Thus students will know to look for 2 ‘eh’ sounds in the sentence. (This diagram shows the ‘eh’ sounds already highlighted.)

**NOTE:** Whenever the child is asked to find the sounds in words, there is a number on the highlighter. This number tells the child how many sounds there are to find. For example, in the example below, there are 2 shevas to find, since there is the 2 on the highlighter.

![Diagram showing vowels and highlighter numbers](image)

**Song: Shema**

The karaoke song included in this lesson is courtesy of Cantor Tamara Wolfson.
2. Reading with Vowels

URL: https://jitap.net/activities/gfOv/play/

Overview

This lesson is about reading with Hebrew vowel sounds and symbols. Reading practice and songs include Mah Tovu (מַה טֹּבוּ), Tzadik Katamar (צַדִּיק כַּתָּמָר), and part of the Shema (וּכְתַבְתָּם).

In this lesson we use the letter ק to demonstrate how the vowel is pronounced with the letter. (We chose this letter because Kivi wanted to use his name as an example!) From then on, students are asked to analyze the reading passages by highlighting the various vowel symbols. Once highlighted, they can try and read the words. Tapping each word will initiate an animation showing the syllabic breakdown of the word.

Reading Practice: Mah Tovu (מַה טֹּבוּ).
Song: מַה טֹּבוּ

The song ‘Mah Tovu’ is sung by Danny Maseng. You can visit his website at www.dannymaseng.com. You can watch it on YouTube here: https://youtu.be/n9_o4iwXZZg or listen on Spotify here: https://open.spotify.com/track/4ICl3cXLnJDJzXq96DF7gl?si=ab058b9ec2ce44b9

Reading Practice: Uchtavtam (part of the Shema) (וךְתַבְתָּם).

וּכְתַבְתָּם עלְךָֽמֶּה בִּיהְתָּֽהּ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְקֶתֶרְךָ.

And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(Sh’mah and Shacharit)
Reading Practice: Tzadik Katamar (צדיק קטמר).

The righteous will bloom like a date-palm; לְהַרְוֹק יִפְרָח
They will thrive like a cedar in Lebanon; נַעֲרוֹת בַּלֵּדֶן יִשָּׂאָה
Planted in the house of Adonai, שְׁמַתְנוּ בְּבֵית יְהוָה
They will flourish in the courts of our God. בַּמַּחְצָרָתָא אֲלֹהֵינוּ יִפְרַהְוָה

Song: Tzadik Katamar (צדיק קטמר).

The song Tzadik Katamar is courtesy of Cantors Azi Schwartz and Rachel Brook. The full video is available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/FQoJ-9e88Z4. You can listen on Spotify at https://open.spotify.com/track/0IjiqmMnS0zxol6hAZ34pq?si=d51c3372659342ab.
3. One Dot Two Jobs

URL: https://jitap.net/activities/geqj/play/

Overview

We learn about when one dot has two different jobs, as in the word מֹשֶה. Reading practice is Exodus 15:1 and 11, with the song מִי־כָּמֹכָה.

Although many texts do point words like מֹשֶה, the chumashim and some prayer books do not, so the student is then expected to read מֹשֶה מֹשֶה without a separate sign for the Cholam as the dot of the shin doubles for both the letter and the vowel. A word like עֹשֶה can be confusing, but here the sin has its own vowel (the Segol) so the Cholam has to belong to the ayin.

Reading Practice: Exodus 15:1
Reading Practice: Exodus 15:11

Who is like You, Adonai, among the gods; מִי־כָּמֹכָה בָּאָלֶם יְהוָ֣ה
Who, like You, is majestic in holiness, מִי כָּמֹכָה נָאָדֶר בְּכָלָּשׁ
awesome in praises, working wonders? נַלָּאוּ הָהָלָה לְאָשֶׁה פִּלְאָה:

Song: Mi Chamocha (מִי־כָּמֹכָה)

The song Mi Chamocha is courtesy of the TDHS Rock Shabbat Ensemble (Songwriter: Debbie Friedman). The full video is available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/sS5c-QEbd44.
4. Words Ending in AY and OY

URL: https://jitap.net/activities/gewl/play/

Overview

We learn about words ending with the sounds aye or oy. Reading practice is Genesis 12:2 and the song ‘Elohai Neshama’ (אֱלֹהַי נְשָׁמָה) from Shacharit. The lesson is divided into 3 parts, with reading practice involving each vowel combination.

Reading Practice: Shacharit - Elohai Neshama (אֱלֹהַי נְשָׁמָה)

My God, the soul which You have given me is pure;....All the time the soul is within me I give thanks to You, Adonai my God, and God of my fathers, Ruler of all creatures, Master of all souls.
Song: Elohai Neshama (אֵלוהֵי נְשָׁמָה)

This version of the song Elohai Neshama is by the Chloe Pourmorady Ensemble. The full video is available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/Kx18Cicf04. You can listen on Spotify at https://open.spotify.com/track/0t3OAv3kKs7G0an8AYbcoR?si=216c39f24b0b43e3.

Reading Practice: Psalm 51:17 and Amidah

Reading Practice: Genesis 12:2
5. Words Ending in AV

URL: https://jitap.net/activities/geqf/play/

Overview

We learn about the vowel combination that says ‘AV’ at the end of a word. Reading practice and songs includes verses from Psalms 144 and 145:9 that have examples of words ending in ‘AV’.

Reading Practice: Psalm 144:15

Song: Ashrei Ha'am (Psalm 144:15)

You can view the full song ‘Ashrei’ by Jeremy Gimpel on YouTube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-FYe52WCLw.
Reading Practice: Psalm 145:9

Adonai is good to all and His compassion is over all His works.

Psalm 145:9

Reading Practice: Psalm 145:17

Adonai is just in all His ways and loving in all His works.

Psalm 145:17
Posters for download

We have created posters of the vowel names and sounds for you to download and use in your classroom. Download the print-ready PDF files here. We have 2 versions, one with our Kamats Katan conventions, and the other with the regular Kamats Katan (for adults).

Vowel names in Hebrew
Vowel names transliterated

Long
- Shuruk
- Cholam
- Tsvary
- Kamats
- Kabella

Short
- Kubuts
- Katanomats
- Chataf-kamats
- Chataf-segol
- Patach

Indistinct
- Sheva
- Ah
- Iye
- Ay
- Oo

Hebrew Vowels
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