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Hebrew diacritics

Hebrew orthography includes three types of diacritics:

- *Niqqud* in Hebrew is the way to indicate vowels, which are omitted in modern orthography using a set of ancillary glyphs. Since the vowels can be understood from surrounding context can help readers read the correct pronunciations of several letters of the Hebrew alphabet (the rafe sign and other rare glyphs are also listed as part of the niqqud system but are not in common use^[k]);
- *geresh* and *gershayim*, two diacritics that are not considered a part of niqqud, each of which has several functions (e.g. to denote Hebrew numerals);
- and *cantillation*, "accents" which are used exclusively to indicate how Biblical passages should be chanted and may possess a punctuating function.

Gen. 1:9 And God said, "Let the waters be collected".
Letters in black, pointing in red, cantillation in blue^[1]

Several diacritical systems were developed in the Early Middle Ages. The most widespread system, and the only one still used to a significant degree today, was created by the Masoretes of Tiberias in the second half of the first millennium in the Land of Israel (see Masoretic Text, Tiberian Hebrew). The Niqqud signs and cantillation marks developed by the Masoretes are small compared to consonants, so they could be added to the consonantal texts without retranscribing them.

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Pointing (*niqqud*)

In modern Israeli orthography, vowel and consonant pointing is seldom used, except in specialised texts such as dictionaries, poetry, or texts for children or for new immigrants. Israeli Hebrew has five vowel phonemes—/i/, /e/, /a/, /o/ and /u/—but many more written symbols for them. *Niqqud* distinguish the following vowels and consonants; for more detail, see the main article.

Name	Symbol	Unicode	Israeli Hebrew			Keyboard input		Hebrew	Alternate Names
			IPA	Transliteration	English Example	Letter	Key		
Hiriq	◌ִ	U+05B4	[i]	i	seek	4	\$ 4 ר	חִירִיק	
Tzeire	◌ֵ	U+05B5	[e] and [eɪ]	e and ei	men	5	% 5	צִירֵי or צִירָה	
Segol	◌ֹ	U+05B6	[e], ([eɪ] with succeeding yod)	e, (ei with succeeding yod)	men	6	^ 6	סְגוֹל	
Patakh	◌ַ	U+05B7	[ä]	a	far	7	& 7	פְּתָח	
Kamatz	◌ָ	U+05B8	[ä], (or [o])	a, (or o)	far	8	* 8	קָמָץ	
Sin dot (left)	◌ׁ	U+05C2	[s]	s	sour	9	(9	שִׁין	
Shin dot (right)	◌ׂ	U+05C1	[ʃ]	sh	shop	0) 0	שׁין	-
Holam Haser	◌ׇ	U+05B9	[o]	o	bore	-	- .	חֹלָם חֹסֵר	
Holam Male or Vav Haluma	◌ׇ	U+05B9						חֹלָם מָלֵא	
Dagesh or Mappiq; Shuruk or Vav Shruqa	◌׃	U+05BC	N/A	N/A	N/A	=	+ =	דָּגֵשׁ or מַפְּיֵק	
	◌׃	U+05BC						שׁוּרוּק	
Kubutz	◌ׄ	U+05BB	[u]	u	cool	\	 \	קִבּוּץ	
Below: Two vertical dots underneath the letter (alled <i>sh'va</i>) make the vowel very short.									
Sh'va	◌ְ	U+05B0	[e] or [-]	apostrophe, e, or nothing	<i>silent</i>	~	~ ;	שְׁוָא	-
Reduced Segol	◌ֵ	U+05B1	[e]	e	men	1	! 1	חֵטָף סְגוֹל	<i>Hataf Segol</i>
Reduced Patakh	◌ַ	U+05B2	[ä]	a	far	2	@ 2	חֵטָף פְּתָח	<i>Hataf Patakh</i>
Reduced Kamatz	◌ָ	U+05B3	[o]	o	bore	3	# 3	חֵטָף קָמָץ	<i>Hataf Kamatz</i>

Note 1: The symbol '◌ׇ' represents whatever Hebrew letter is used.

Note 2: The letter 'שׁ' is used since it can only be represented by that letter

Note 3: The *dagesh*, *mappiq*, and *shuruk* are different, however, they look the same and are inputted in the same manner. Also, they are represented by the same Unicode character.

Note 4: The letter 'שׁ' is used since it can only be represented by that letter

Vowel comparison table

Vowel Comparison Table					
Vowel length ^[1]			IPA	Transliteration	English example
Long	Short	Very short			
א [3]	א [3]	א [2]	[ä]	a	far
י [4]	י [3][4]	י [2]	[o]	o	cold
ו [5]	ו [5]	N/A	[u]	u	you
י [5]	י [5]	N/A	[i]	i	ski
ע [2]	ע [2]	ע [2]	[e]	e	let

Notes:

- [1] : These vowels lengths are not manifested in Modern Hebrew
- [2] : Adding two vertical dots (h'va) to the "short-vowel" diacritic produces the diacritic for "very short vowel" (Hebrew: חטף *hatáf*).
- [3] : The short /o/ and long /a/ are represented by the same diacritic.
- [4] : The short /o/ is usually promoted to a long /o/ (holam male, vav with dot above) in Israeli writing for the sake of disambiguation.
- [5] : The short /u/ is usually promoted to a long /u/ (shuruk, vav with middle dot) in Israeli writing for the sake of disambiguation.

Meteg

Meteg is a vertical bar placed below a character next to the niqqud for various purposes, including marking vowel length and secondary stress. Its shape is identical to the cantillation marks of *pasuq*.

Geresh

Geresh is a mark, (') that may be used as a diacritic, as a punctuation mark for initialisms, or as a marker of Hebrew numerals. It is also used in cantillation.

As a diacritic, the *geresh* is combined with the following consonants:

letter	value	with geresh	value	English example	usage
ג	[g]	גֿ	[dʒ]	age	slang and loanwords (phonologically native sounds)
ז	[z]	זֿ	[ʒ]	vision	
צ	[ts]	צֿ	[tʃ]	change	
		(non standard ^[2])			
ך	[v]	ךֿ	[w]	quiet	
ד	[d]	דֿ	[ð]	there	For transliteration of sounds in foreign languages (non-native sounds, i.e. sounds foreign to Hebrew phonology). ^[3]
ח	[ħ]	חֿ	[χ] ^[3]	loch (Scottish)	
ס	[s]	סֿ	[sʰ]		
ע	[ʕ]	עֿ	[ʁ]		
ר	[r]	רֿ			
ת	[t]	תֿ	[θ]	think	

Cantillation

Cantillation has a more limited use than vowel pointing, as it is only used for reciting the *afikah*, and is not found in children's books or dictionaries.

Gershayim

Gershayim between the penultimate and last letters (" e.g. פּוֹצֵטֿ"א marks acronyms, alphabetic numerals, names of Hebrew letters, linguistic roots and, in older texts, transcriptions of foreign words. Placed above a letter " (e.g. פּוֹרֿ"י) it is one of the cantillation marks.

Disputes among Protestant Christians

Protestant literalists who believe that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is the inspired Word of God are divided on the question of whether or not the vowel points should be considered an inspired part of the Old Testament. In 1624, Louis Cappel, a French Huguenot scholar at Saumur, published a work in which he concluded that the vowel points were a later addition to the biblical text and that the vowel points were added not earlier than the fifth century AD. This assertion was hotly contested by Swiss theologian Johannes Buxtorf II in 1648. Brian Walton's 1657 polyglot bible followed Cappel in revising the vowel points. In 1675, the 2nd and 3rd canons of the so-called Helvetic Consensus of the Swiss Reformed Church confirmed Buxtorf's view as orthodox and affirmed that the vowel points were inspired.

See also

- [Arabic diacritics](#)
- [Q're perpetuum](#)
- [Hebrew alphabet](#)
- [Hebrew spelling](#)

Notes

*^ The rafe sign (רַפֵּי, ‏ְ) which is used to mark fricative consonants in the YIVO orthography of Yiddish; is no longer used in modern printed Hebrew. Rafe may appear in masoretic manuscripts as well as other older texts where the soft fricative consonants and sometimes matres lectionis are indicated by this sign.

References

1. [Cantillation](#)
2. Vav with geresh, "וּ", is non standard and its usage is therefore inconsistent"Transliteration Rules" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20080228042853/http://hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il/PDF/taatiq2007.pdf>) (PDF). Archived from the original (<http://hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il/PDF/taatiq2007.pdf>) (PDF) on 2008-02-28. issued by the Academy of the Hebrew Language states that both [v] and [w] be indistinguishably represented in Hebrew using the letter וּ. To pronounce foreign words and loanwords containing the sound [w], Hebrew readers must therefore rely on former knowledge and context, see also [pronunciation of Hebrew וּ](#) v.
3. The sound [χ] represented by וּ is a native sound in Hebrew; the geresh is however used only to distinguish Arabic "ح" from "ח" when transcribing Arabic (in which context just וּ—without geresh—represents ח / [ħ]), whereas in everyday usage וּ without geresh is pronounced [ħ] only dialectically but [χ] commonly.

External links

- [A free online course to learn the Hebrew Vowel System](#)
- *Rules for Spelling without Niqqud* - a simplified version of the Rules, published on the Academy of the Hebrew Language website.
- Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar §5*m* for usage of Geresh in abbreviations; §7, §8, §9, §10 for vowel signs; §12, §13, §14 for Dagesh, Mappiq and Rafe; §15, §16 for the cantillation signs and Maqqeph.
- [Hebrew tutorial on how to use diacritics in Word](#)

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