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Overview of Hebrew

Hebrew is spoken by over 4.6 million people around the world, primarily in Israel.   It belongs to the family of Semitic languages and originally dates back to Old Testament times.

Hebrew has undergone vast changes over the course of its history, and Modern Hebrew is quite different from the ancient language in which it has its roots.   It went through a renaissance in the 18th century, when Hebrew replaced Yiddish as the language of instruction among the Jews of Europe.   Hebrew was recognized as an official language of Jewish Palestine in 1922, and had established itself as a modern language by the time Israel was officially established in 1948.

Alphabet and Pronunciation

The Hebrew alphabet consists of consonants, and is written from right to left. Vowels, called nikud, are represented by dots and lines, but these are often left out of the written language. In this program, the Hebrew is transliterated, that is, written with the Roman alphabet. The following chart gives the name of each Hebrew character, the symbol used here for transliteration, and an example of its pronunciation.

Letter Name: Transliteration: Pronunciation:

Letter Name	Transliteration	Pronunciation
alef	none	silent, taking the sound of the vowel associated with it
bet	b	as in boy
vet	v	as in very
gimel	g	as in good
dalet	d	as in dog
hay	h	as in hi
vav	v	as in very (or used as a vowel)
zayin	z	as in zoo
khet	kh	as in the German ich (k with friction at the back of the throat)
tet	t	as in top
yod	y	as in yes
kaf	k	as in kite
khaf	kh	as in the German ich (k with friction at the back of the throat)
lamed	l	as in like
mem	m	as in move
nun	n	as in no
samekh	s	as in see
ayin	none	silent, taking the sound of the vowel associated with it
pay	p	as in pay
fay	f	as in fine
tzadik	ts	as in its
koof	k	as in kite
reish	r	as in the French rivier (gargling sound at the back of the throat)
shin	sh	as in show
tav	t	as in top
sav	s	as in see (not used in Modern Hebrew)

Vowels in Hebrew are written above, below or next to the letters. In this Title, the vowels have been transliterated according to the chart below:

Vowels:
a   as in father
e   as in wet
i   as in see
o   as in or
u   as in too

Diphthongs (vowel combinations):
ay   as in hi
ey   as in they

Nouns

A noun is a word that names a person, place, or thing.

mikhal (Michelle)
eilat (Eilat)
boker (morning)

See Also:
Gender and Agreement
Number and Agreement
Articles

Gender and Agreement

The GENDER of a Hebrew noun is either masculine (m.)or feminine (f.).   Generally speaking, feminine nouns end in **a** or **-it,** while masculine nouns usually have no ending:

berakha f. (blessing)
ivrit f. (Hebrew)
boker m. (morning)

See also:
Adjectives
Articles
Pronouns

Number and Agreement

Hebrew has both singular and plural forms.

Generally, masculine plurals are formed by adding **-im**:

bituy, bituyim (expression, expressions)

The feminine plural is usually formed by adding **-ot**:

mita, mitot (bed, beds)

Pronouns also have singular and plural forms:

ata (you [masculine singular]),   **at** (you [feminine singular])
atem (you [masculine plural]),   **aten** (you [feminine plural])

See Also

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that stands for a previously mentioned (or understood) noun.   That noun is called the **antecedent** of the pronoun.

In the sentence,

The house was painted soon after **it** was built.

the pronoun **it** refers back to the noun **house** (the antecedent).

Pronouns can be used in various ways.

They can be the subject of a verb.

> **ani** lo mevin.
> (**I** dont understand. [masculine])

They can also be the object of a verb.

> na-im me-od lehakir **otakh.**
> (Its nice to meet **you**. [feminine])

Here is a chart of personal pronouns:

Subject:	Direct Object:
ani (I)	**oti**
ata (you m.)	**otkha**
at (you f.)	**otakh**
hu (he)	**oto**
hi (she)	**ota**
anakhnu (we)	**otanu**
atem (you pl.)	**etkhem**
aten (you f. pl.)	**etkhen**
hem (they)	**otam**
hen (they f.)	**otan**

Articles

The DEFINITE ARTICLE is **ha-** for all nouns, including masculine, feminine, singular and plural:

hakhaver m. (the friend)
hahazmana f. (the reservation)
hakartisim m. pl. (the tickets)

The definite article is used before both nouns and adjectives:

hamana **ha**meyukhedet f. (the special course)

Hebrew does not have an indefinite article.

See Also:
Nouns
Gender and Agreement
Number and Agreement

Adjectives

An ADJECTIVE agrees in gender and number with the noun it modifies.   Like nouns, adjectives usually end in **-a** for the feminine, **-ot** for the feminine plural, and **-im** for the masculine plural. Like singular masculine nouns, singular masculine adjectives retain their base form.

boker tov   [m. singular] (good morning)
mis-ad**a** tov**a**   [f. singular] (good restaurant)
dolar**im** amerika-iy**im** [m. plural] (American dollars)

Adjectives usually follow the nouns they modify:

kheder (room) zugi (double) = double room

See Also:

Adverbs

ADVERBS are words that modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs. Hebrew adverbs are not formed by adding a suffix, as in English.

Examples of adverbs:

po   (here)
mishehu po medaber anglit? (Does anyone here speak English?)

rak   (only)
ani medaber rak ketsat ivrit.   (I only speak a little Hebrew.)

me-od   (very)
na-im me-od lehakir otkha. (Its very nice to meet you.)

efshar   (possible)
efshar ledaber yoter le-at? (Is it possible to speak more slowly?)

bediyuk   (perfectly)
ani mevin bediyuk. (I understand perfectly.)

akhshav   (now)
hakol beseder akhshav. (Everything is fine now.)

See Also:
        Adjectives

Verb Conjugations

Verb conjugations in Hebrew vary according to gender:

ani **medeber** ivrit. (I speak Hebrew [masculine])
ani **medaberet** ivrit.   (I speak Hebrew [feminine])

All Hebrew verbs have a root, to which consonants and vowels are added in different patterns, or binyanim.   There are seven different binyanim.

An example of a verb conjugation, with the root ktv:

lekhtov (to write)

Present tense:

kotev (I write, you write, he writes [masculine])
kotevet (I write, you write, she writes [feminine])
kotvim (we write, you write, they write [masculine plural])
kotvot (we write, you write, they write [feminine plural])

Past tense:

katavti (I wrote)
katavta (you wrote [masculine singular])
katavt (you wrote [feminine singular])
katav (he wrote)
katva (she wrote)
katavnu (we wrote)
ketavtem (you wrote [masculine plural])
ketavten (you wrote [feminine plural])
katvu (they wrote)

See Also:
        Negatives and Questions

Negatives and Questions

In everyday Hebrew, the negative is formed by inserting **lo** after the subject:

ani **lo** mevin. (I dont understand. [masculine])

Questions that may be answered yes or no can be formed simply by changing the intonation:

At medaberet anglit.   (You speak English. [feminine])
At medaberet anglit? (Do you speak English? [feminine])

Questions words, such as **ma** (what), **eyfo**, (where), **kama** (how much), **matay** (when) or **eykh** (how) usually come first in the sentence, and the rest of the words remain the same:

ma shimkha?   (Whats your name?)
eyfo hasherutim? (Wheres the bathroom?)
kama ze lelayla? (How much is it per night?)
matay efshar lehikanes? (When is check-in?)
eykh mekhinim oto?   (How are they prepared?)

See Also:

Prepositions

PREPOSITIONS are the connecting words that show the relationships between words in the sentence. Nouns, pronouns, noun phrases, gerunds or noun clauses can be the complement of prepositions.

Simple prepositions in Hebrew include the following:

avur	for
im	with
legabey	about
al yad	next to
la	to
ba	at, in
le	for

halikha **la**bank	Going to the Bank.
dusiakh **ba**bank	Dialogues at the Bank
toda **avur** ha-ezra	Thanks for your help.
metugan, **im** harbe limon.	Fried, with lots of lemon.
kama ze **le**layla?	How much is it for the night?

Conjunctions

CONJUNCTIONS join words, phrases and clauses together.

Commonly used conjunctions in Hebrew include:

ve (and)
pegishot **ve**divrey berakha
(meetings and words of blessing)

aval (but)
eyn shum moshavim zeminim al yad hakhalon, **aval** ani yakhol latet lakh moshav al yad hama-avar.
(There are no seats by the window, but I can give you a seat by the aisle.)

o (or)
bemakhleket hatayarim **o** bemakhlaka rishona?   (Regular car, or reserved seating?)