

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ
וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם

Exercise 1:

Transcribe **the consonants only** of the Hebrew sentences at the top of the page.

Remember, Hebrew reads from right to left!

br'št br' 'lhm 't hšmym w't h'rš wh'rš hyth thw wbhw
wḥšk 'l pny thwm

Exercise 2:

Transcribe **the consonants and the vowels** of the Hebrew sentences above.

bērē'šît bārā' 'ēlōhîm 'ēt haššāmayim wě'ēt hā'āreṣ
wěhā'āreṣ hāyētâ tōhû wābōhû wěḥōšek 'al pēnê
tēhôm

Comments:

- In בראשית, notice how the aleph bears no vowel pointing, not even a shewa, even though it is in the middle of the word. This indicates that it was not pronounced at all. Since the sound of an aleph is very slight, it had a tendency to be dropped in pronunciation, something which occurred at an early date. So, in a transcription of Hebrew, the aleph can be left out (or, it could be placed in parentheses). The same can be said for the aleph on the end of ברא, although there is no visual marker of this (most consonants at the end of the word do not have any pointing).

- By convention, *matres lectionis* are not transcribed. Instead, they are indicated with the circumflex ^ placed over the vowel. An example of this above is the word פני, which is transcribed with -ê, not with -ēy.
- The shewa is not always transcribed as ě because it is not always, in practice, pronounced. The 15th century Hebrew grammarian Elias Levita distilled the reading tradition into five rules for when the shewa is transcribed ě and pronounced as a murmured vowel (called *shewa mobile*, Latin for “moving shewa,” a literal translation of the Arabic term used by Hebrew grammarians), still followed in practice today. They are:
 1. At the beginning of a word (i.e. when on a word’s first consonant)
 2. The second of two adjacent shewas (the second is pronounced but the first remains silent)
 3. After a long vowel (note: this is difficult to define in Hebrew, and there are many exceptions to this rule...)
 4. On a consonant with a dagesh
 5. Under the second of two identical consonants

A shewa that is not pronounced is called *shewa quiescens* (Latin for “quiet shewa”). It should be noted that our one example of *shewa quiescens*, in היתה, follows rule #3, and thus should be *mobile*, but in practice most scholars would pronounce it as *quiescens*. I have transcribed it with ě here.

There is a simple solution for this complex problem: the shewa always indicates the lack of a vowel, but in practice it was sometimes pronounced with a murmur vowel. We will treat this issue in more depth when we discuss the origins of the shewa pointing.

Exercise 3:

Try to translate the Hebrew! Use the dictionary on the next page.

In the beginning (when) God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was wasteland and nothingness, and darkness was over the face of the abyss.