

SYLLABLES, SHEVA, AND THE DAGESH

Syllables

A syllable is a group of letters that are pronounced together in a word.

There are two kinds of syllables

An “open” syllable: consonant + vowel: **שׁ**

A “closed” syllable: consonant + vowel + consonant: **לח**

Sheva

three very short vowels **שׁ, שׂ, ש׃**. Each of these is made up of a vowel (, ., -)

“Vocal sheva” is a very short vowel, pronounced like the first “e” in severe

דְּבָרִים

“Silent sheva” has no pronunciation and serves to close a syllable.

מְדַבֵּר

Telling the difference between vocal sheva and silent sheva is easy

One basic rule: “short and silent.”

If a short vowel comes before the consonant under which there is a sheva, the sheva is silent

מְדַבֵּר

יְקַטֵּיל

If a sheva is under the first consonant of a word, the sheva is vocal. (This sheva is not preceded by a short vowel.)

דְּבָרִים

If there are two shevas in a row, the first is silent and the second is vocal. (The first is preceded by a short vowel and is silent, the second is not and is vocal.)

יְקַטֵּלוּ

Dagesh

Hardens the Pronunciation of the begadkefats **כ, ב, and פ**

The begadkafets ת פ כ ג ב They have two pronunciations - hard and soft.

Double the Consonant קטל

If a dagesh is in a consonant other than a begadkefat, it doubles the consonant

If a dagesh is in a begadkefat

If the sound before the begadkefat is a consonant, the dagesh hardens the consonant

מדבר

Since the sheva is preceded by a short vowel, it is silent and closes the syllable. So the dagesh is preceded by a consonant.

קדש

If the sound before the begadkefat is a vowel the dagesh is strong

Practical Application

Psalm 91:1

The one dwelling in the shelter (secret place) of the Most High, will remain in the shadow of the Almighty.

Psalm 91:1 BHS

יֵשֶׁב בְּסִתְרֵי עֲלִיּוֹן בְּצֵל־שְׁדַי יִתְלוֹנֵן:

Psalm 91:2

I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!”

Psalm 91:2 (BHS)

אָמַר לַיהוָה מִחֲסִי וּמְצוּדָתִי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתַי־בְּרַחֲמֵי:

Qal Imperfect First Person Singular אָמַר

Preposition with a Masculine Singular Noun לַיהוָה

Singular Noun with the First Person Singular Pronoun מִחֲסִי

Coordinating Conjunction with Feminine Singular Noun with a First Person Singular Pronoun וּמְצוּדָתִי

Masculine Plural Noun with a First Person Singular Pronoun אֱלֹהֵי

Qal Imperfect First Person Singular attached to a Preposition with a Third Person Singular Pronoun אֲבֹתַי־בְּרַחֲמֵי