

# Yiddish Alphabet Notes

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## Some important notes about the Yiddish alphabet:

- **Direction:** The Yiddish alphabet is written from right to left.
- **Script:** The script form of the letter is sometimes quite different from the print form. You will learn to read the print letters and both read and write the script letters. As you learn to write in script, follow the motions in the video on the website to form the letters correctly.
- **Final forms:** Five of the letters have a different form when they appear at the end of a word. (For example, *langer khof* – ך – appears only at the end of a word, whereas *khof* – כ – appears anywhere else.)
- **Letters that only appear in Hebrew-origin words:** There are six letters (ת, תּ, שׁ, פּ, הּ, בּ) that only appear in words deriving from Hebrew and Aramaic. Each of these letters has the same sound as another letter in the alphabet.
- **Using the *shtumer alef*:** The vowels ו and י, as well as the diphthongs (vowel combinations) ײ, ױ, and װ cannot appear at the beginning of a word. They are always preceded by a *shtumer alef* (א) at the beginning of a word.

To watch a video showing Yiddish letters (both in print and script forms), with audio providing the names of the letters and the sounds that they make, please visit:

<http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/yiddish-alphabet/alphabet-video-and-notes>

## Some additional notes:

- **Rules about *yud* and *khirek yud*:**
  - The letter *yud* (י) can sometimes be a consonant (pronounced "y" as in "yes") and sometimes a vowel (pronounced "i" as in "give" or "ea" as in "leave").
  - When *yud* appears at the beginning of a word (not preceded by a *shtumer alef*) or next to a vowel, it is read as a consonant (for example, יאָ - *yo* and פּיאָנע - *pyane*).
  - When *yud* appears between two consonants or after a *shtumer alef*, it is read as a vowel (for example, פֿיס - *fis* and אים - *im*).
  - The *yud* is spelled with *khirek* (a dot below the yud -- יִ) when it appears next to a vowel and should be read as a vowel, not a consonant (for example, העברעיִש - *hebreish*).
  - The *khirek* also appears under a *yud* being used as a vowel when it follows a *yud* being used as a consonant (for example, ייִדיש - *yidish*) or a *vov* being used as a vowel (for



example, רויק - *ruik*), to distinguish the letter combinations from the diphthongs *tsvey yudn* and *vov yud*, respectively.

- Note that two consecutive unmarked *yudn* spell the diphthong *tsvey yudn* (ײ), pronounced like the English "ei" in the word "weigh". Two *yudn* with a *pasekh* underneath them spell the diphthong *pasekh tsvey yudn* (ײַ), pronounced like the English "aye".
- **Rules about *vov* and *khirek vov*:**
  - The vowel *vov* (ױ) is spelled with a *melupm* (a dot in the center of the letter -- ױ) when it appears before or after the consonant *tsvey vovn* (ױ) (for example, ױוּ - *vu*).
  - A *melupm* is also added to the first *vov* of two consecutive *vovn* when both letters are vowels (for example, טױנג - *tuung*).
  - Note that two consecutive unmarked *vovn* spell the consonant *tsvey vovn* (ױ), pronounced like the English "v".
- **Consonant clusters:**
  - To make the sound "j" as in "jam", use the consonant cluster *daled zayen shin* (דזש).
  - To make the sound "g" as in "beige", use the consonant cluster *zayen shin* (זש).
  - To make the sound "ch" as in "cheese", use the consonant cluster *tes shin* (טש).

### Practice Questions (Answers at the bottom of the page.)

- 1) Can you find the five letters that have a different form when they appear at the end of a word? What are they?
- 2) Which pairs or groups of letters sound the same?

1) כ, מ, נ, ך, ם, צ

2) ב - ך; וו - ח; כ; כ - ק; ש - ת; ס - ת - ט

