

Rules for the Sheva
To Pronounce or Not to Pronounce: That is the Question!
 compiled by Tim Hegg • TorahResource.com

Vocal Sheva (שְׁוָא נָע) [connects its letter to the letter that follows it]

1. Any *sheva* at the beginning of a word is pronounced:

לְ (l^echa), כְּתוּב (k^etov), בְּנֵי (b^eniy)

2. Any *sheva* following a letter that has a long vowel is pronounced, unless that letter is accented (indicated in the MT with a cantillation mark).

Short Vowels (הַתְּנוּעוֹת הַקְּטָנוֹת)	Long Vowels (הַתְּנוּעוֹת הַגְּדוֹלוֹת)
<i>patach</i> , פָּ	<i>chametz</i> (not <i>chametz chatuf</i>), כָּ
<i>seghol</i> , סֶ	<i>tzere & tzere gadol</i> , זֶ and זֵ
<i>chiriq katan</i> , חִ	<i>chiriq gadol</i> , חֵ
<i>chametz chatuf</i> , כָּ (as in קָדְשׁוֹ)	<i>cholam & cholam gadol</i> , בּ and בּוֹ
<i>qibbutz</i> , קִ	<i>shuruq</i> , שׁוֹ

Examples:

עִירָהּ - 'iy-r^e-cha

לוֹמְדֵי - lo-m^e-deiy

יְלִכוּ - yei-l^e-chu

Example of the exception, i.e., when the preceding letter has a long vowel but that letter receives the accent:

קָטְנֹתִי - qa-**ton**-ti (Gen 32:11)

יָבֹלְתִי - ya-**chol**-ti (Gen 30:8)

3. Any *sheva* on a letter having *dagesh* is pronounced

Examples:

מִפְּנֵי - mi-p^e-neiy

דַּבְּרֵי - da-b^e-riy

בִּתְּחִלָּה - bi-t^e-cha

4. Any *sheva* on the first letter of two identical letters is pronounced

Examples: נְדָדָה - *na-d^e-dah*, הֶלְלוּ - *ha-l^e-lu*, הִנְנִי - *hi-n^e-ni*

5. Any *sheva* following a letter with *Metheg* (מֶתֶג) is pronounced. The *metheg* is a short, vertical line of the Masoretic cantillations.

Examples:

זְכַרְהָ, *za-ch^e-rah*, שְׁמַרְהָ, *sha-m^e-rah*

6. When two *shevas* follow each other in a word, the first is silent and the second pronounced.

Examples:

שַׁחֲבֵךְ, *shach-b^e-cha*, וְנִשְׁמַעְהָ, *v^e-nish-m^e-ah*, וַיַּחֲלֵאֵל, *v^e-yach-l^e-ail*

7. A *sheva* on a letter immediately preceding any of the פ ת כ ג ד ב letters which does not have a *dagesh* is pronounced.

Examples:

עֲדוּדוֹ, *i-v^e-du*, בָּרְכוּ, *ba-r^e-chu*, יַעֲטֹפוּ, *ya-a-t^e-fu*

8. When a word has two cantillations (*t'amim*), and one cantillation is on the letter immediately preceding a *sheva*, it is pronounced.

Examples:

לְגֵרְשׁוֹן, *l^e-gei-r^e-shon*

Silent Sheva (שְׁוָא נָח) [connects its letter to the letter that precedes it]

1. Whenever the *sheva* is on the last letter of a syllable, it is silent.

Examples:

יִלְמוּד, *yil-mod*, מִשְׁתָּה, *mish-teh*, שִׁמְחָה, *sim-chah*

2. When the last letter of any word has no vowel, it does not take the *sheva*, it simply stands voweless.

Examples:

דוד, *dod*, שם, *shem*, לב, *leiv*

The exception to this rule are the letters ת and ך which do take a *sheva*, but the *sheva* is silent.

Examples:

בַּח, *bach*, אַת, *'at*, לַח, *lach*

3. When two *shevas* follow each other as the last two vowels of a word, both are silent. (This is rare).

Examples:

יַפְּתָ , *yafṭ*, יַשְׁחָ , *yashq*