

Sometimes pronouncing a different vowel than the one indicated in the text changes the meaning of the word. Be careful to pronounce the vowel as given in the text.

לְמַדְתִּי	li- <b>ma</b> -de-tí	<i>I have taught</i>	(Deut. 4:5)
לִמַּדְתִּי	la- <b>ma</b> -de-tí	<i>I have learned</i>	(Prov. 30:3)
חִטְּאוּ	hí-te-'u	<i>they shall be purified</i>	(Ezek. 43:22)
חָטְאוּ	hà-te-'u	<i>they have sinned</i>	(1 Kings 8:50)

### Incorrect syllabic stress

In some cases, a change of syllabic stress can result in a change of meaning. Compare the following pairs:

בָּאָה	<i>she is coming</i>	בָּאָה	<i>she came</i>
שָׁבוּ	<i>they returned</i>	שָׁבוּ	<i>they captured</i>
שָׁמָּה	<i>desolation</i>	שָׁמָּה	<i>to there</i>

### Errors in rhythm—pausing too long after *tevir*

In general, just as the first-level disjunctives (*'etnahta* and *siluk*) indicate a greater break than do second- or third-level disjunctives, one would expect that a second-level disjunctive indicates a greater break than a third-level disjunctive. That “in general” is not true for the second-level disjunctive *tippeha* and the third-level disjunctive *tevir*. The pause/break in the sentence after *tevir* (third-level) must be *longer* than the pause/break after *tippeha* (second-level). Notice how much difference is made in the meaning of these two verses depending on where the greater pause is placed (indicated by a space in the verse and translation):

Anyone who works on the Sabbath will be put to death (Exod. 31:15).

כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בַּיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת מוֹת יוּמָת:

Anyone who works on the Sabbath [he] will be put to death.

כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בַּיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת מוֹת יוּמָת:

Anyone who works on the Sabbath will be put to death.

כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בַּיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת מוֹת יוּמָת:

The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do (Deut. 8:1).

כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִּי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם תִּשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת

The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do.

כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִּי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם תִּשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת

The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do.

כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִּי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם תִּשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת

### The *te'amim* do not always indicate the stressed syllable

Although the *te'amim* are commonly called *accents*, it is important to realize that some of the *te'amim* do not indicate the stressed (accented) syllable. Several of the accents are prepositive (they always appear on the extreme right side of a word) and several are postpositive (they always appear on the extreme left side of a word)—regardless of which syllable is actually accented. In such a case, you have to use your knowledge of Hebrew to know which syllable is to be accented. In the following lists, the name of the *ta'am* is given, and an example of its use with the word דְּבַר (in one case, מִלָּךְ is shown).

The following four *te'amim* are prepositive (the last two only found in the ספרי—*the three books of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms*):

יְתִיב	מִלָּךְ
תְּלִישָׁא־גְדוּלָּה	דְּבַר
גִּירָשׁ מִקֶּדֶם	דְּבַר
דְּחִי	דְּבַר

The following four *te'amim* are postpositive:

סְגוּלָּה (סְגוּלָּתָא)	דְּבַר
זִרְקָא	דְּבַר
פִּשְׁטָא	דְּבַר
תְּלִישָׁא־קִטְנָה	דְּבַר

Two of these in practice cause no problems. The *yetiv* only appears on words that are accented on the first syllable (thus the reason for מִלָּךְ as the sample word instead of דְּבַר); accordingly, the accented syllable will be the one under which the *yetiv* occurs. In the Leningrad Codex the Masoretes marked any word having a *pash-ta* with a *second pashta* if the accent was not on the last syllable. Since the *BHS* is a faithful copy of the Leningrad Codex, the “double” accentuation appears there. Thus, for example, in Deuteronomy 11:17 the word אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם has an extra *pashta*

on the next-to-last syllable, since that is the syllable to be accented. For comparison, the word מַעַל in the same verse has only the “true” *pashta* marked, since the word is accented on the last syllable.

That leaves only six *te‘amim* that you have to think about when reading the biblical text (and only four outside of the books of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms). If you are not sure which syllable is to be accented, choosing the last syllable will be correct more times than not. If you want to be more careful about it, you can find an occurrence of the same word with any *ta‘am* other than these six—that will give you a definite guidance (although you will need to be careful to find the word with the same vowels as the one with one of these six *te‘amim*). Or, you can listen to a recording of the text, and follow the accentuation you hear there.

### The *te‘amim* sometimes change the expected stressed syllable

There are several situations where the Masoretes changed the stress of certain words. One well-known situation is the retraction of the stress from the last syllable to the penultimate syllable in the *vav* consecutive with imperfect (the *wayyiqtol*): The word יִקַּם is accented on the next-to-last syllable, with the *ta‘am* indicating the change in stress. This is the (normal) change from the contextual imperfect form of the verb, יָקַם, which is accented on the last syllable. (There is also a vowel change, not unexpected with a change in the accented syllable.)

Another very common change is caused by words in pause. Here is Deuteronomy 11:14–15:

וְנָתַתִּי מִטָּר-אֶרְצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֶה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאֶסְפֹּתִי דִגְנֶךָ וְתִירְשֶׁךָ  
וַיִּצְהָרְךָ: וְנָתַתִּי עֹשֶׁב בְּשָׂדֶךָ לְבִהְמֹתֶךָ וְאֶכְלָתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ:

The standard pronunciation of a singular word with the pronominal suffix הֶ- has the accent on the last syllable. Similarly, a second-person masculine singular verb ends with an accented הֶ-. Yet in these two verses, the syllable *before* the הֶ- is accented three times, and the syllable *before* the הֶ- is accented one time. (Compare that with two words accented on the הֶ- and two words accented on the הֶ- in the same two verses.) As in the changes mentioned in the previous paragraph, there are also usually changes in the vowels of the words in such a case.

These changes are only meaningful in the context of the Masoretic accentuation of the biblical text. Thus, you need to read or chant the text as the Masoretes have pointed it, not as you think it should be. For example, you need to accent דִּגְנֶךָ on the next-to-last syllable, and not read it as if it were written דִּגְנֶךָ—which isn’t the form here, but it *is* the form in Deuteronomy 12:17.

Pausal forms are normally only seen with the stronger disjunctive *te‘amim* of level one and two. However, pausal forms can be found even with level-three and level-four disjunctive *te‘amim*. Deuteronomy 13:6 begins with these words:

כִּי יִסִּיתָ אֶת־יָדְךָ בֶּן־אִמֶּךָ אוֹ ...

What makes this situation noteworthy is that the *ta'ām* on the word אִמֶּךָ is not only a level-four disjunctive *ta'ām* (that is, one of the weakest of the disjunctives), it is also prepositive. So the general rule for prepositives applies here: you have to figure out the accented syllable on your own. At this point, a continual careful attention to pronunciation is a great help in figuring out the situation. Normally, the word is accented on the last syllable, and the consonant just before it has a *shava*: אִמֶּךָ. However, here the vowel in the penultimate syllable has been lengthened to a *seghol*, indicating that the accent has been moved back one syllable. So the correct pronunciation will accent the אִ syllable.

For the record, pausal forms in words in which the *penultimate* syllable is normally pronounced have the accent moved *forward*, to the last syllable (not *backward*). This is the case for third masculine singular *wayyiqtol* forms (*vav* consecutive with imperfect), which are normally accented on the penultimate syllable. An example of this shift in accent occurs in Proverbs 30:4:

מִי עָלָה־שָׁמַיִם | וַיֵּרֶד

The last word is normally written וַיֵּרֶד, with the accent on the penultimate syllable. Here, the last syllable has been lengthened to a *patah*, since the word is in pause, and the accent has moved *forward* to the last syllable. Although this is marked with a level four disjunctive *ta'ām*, it is not a prepositive, so you can easily see the accented syllable.<sup>75</sup>

This is not a difficult rule to follow. Just look for the accented syllable, and pronounce the word with the accent as indicated. If the *ta'ām* is a pre- or postpositive *ta'ām*, you would have to analyze the word in any case to determine which syllable is to be accented.

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<sup>75</sup> You can read up on pausal forms in Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, edited by E. Kautzsch, translated by A. E. Cowley, 2nd English ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 96–98 (§29i–v).