



Gezer Calendar
10th Century B.C.E

A WORD TO THE STUDENT

Hebrew is both the language of the Ancient Israel of biblical times and the modern vernacular of Israel's daily life and culture. Your knowledge of Hebrew is a key that will unlock the riches of the Biblical Heritage along with the immense sea of post-biblical Jewish texts, and the full range of Israeli cultural expression. With this key you can enter the modern world of radio, TV, film, newspaper, and the fine arts. You will communicate with Hebrew speakers in Israel and world-wide.

This book recognizes that Hebrew study has entered a new phase. The language, once almost exclusively studied by Jews, and in Jewish communal settings, has burst its traditional confines. Hebrew is becoming a subject to be studied, mastered, and appreciated by all—regardless of their religious or ethnic

origins. Because of the international relations that exist with the State of Israel and widespread interest in Jews and their culture, Hebrew is now studied throughout the world. So today, a Japanese or Chinese speaker of Hebrew causes no more surprise than a Chinese individual who knows French. The title of this book, *The Key to Modern Hebrew*, is intended to signal the fact that the study of Hebrew is the *key that unlocks many doors to Modern Israeli culture and to every period of Hebrew creativity*.

GOALS AND PURPOSES OF THIS TEXT

This is a different kind of language textbook. Its goals differ somewhat from other books in that it assumes a North American setting rather an *ulpan* type context in Israel. An *ulpan* program prepares the learner for coping with daily life in Israel. The syllabus of *The Key to Modern Hebrew* aims at preparing students for using the language for discussion of ideas, reading of Hebrew texts, and thinking and writing about ideas and expressing opinions and feelings in Hebrew. (This is not to suggest that the book does not deal with life in Israel. It does, but the focus is not on shopping, the post office and other daily tasks.) Because of those differences, the powerful vocabularies you will acquire are of a special nature. Moreover, this book presents Hebrew grammar in a style and in a sequence that follows a special strategy. As is explained below, we will present Hebrew grammar in a sequence that

aims to move you quickly into high level functions, but postpones an exhaustive presentation of grammar for later stages of your learning.

The Key to Modern Hebrew will provide you with the tools you need to express yourself in conversations and discussions. The initial emphasis is on topics that give you opportunities to **summarize** events, to **describe** persons, things, and events, and to **express your own opinions and emotions**. You will learn to tell about things you have experienced or your plans for the future, and to say what you feel about them. The skills of Listening Comprehension, Reading, and Writing are also primary targets of this book. The textbook was developed in the context of the University of Minnesota's language policy which, at that time, required that each student demonstrate proficiency in Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing as a condition of graduation.

VOCABULARY

The Key to Modern Hebrew provides you with the tools to "negotiate" meaning. You will learn how to explain in alternate ways what you feel or want. The course is based on a **core vocabulary** that allows you to express yourself or explain your thought, even in situations where you do not have the exact word you need. At least, you will be able to describe what it is that you want. (For example, you don't know the word for *carrot*. But you will be able to say, "*It's an orange vegetable that grows in the ground.*") You will be able to explain your wishes and feelings, using a highly compact sub-set of Hebrew that contains words that cover most situations and concepts. So, for example, if you didn't know a specific word you would still be able to describe or explain yourself using the words in your "tool kit" vocabulary.

However, there will be moments when you lack the words that you need to make your point. You may feel that you simply have to "just say it in English". If this happens, first try to think of another way to say the same thing. If that fails, then use your Hebrew to ask for the words you need.

Each study unit contains a sizable number of vocabulary words. *You are not expected to memorize all of the words immediately*. You will be returning to each unit a number of times at the same time that you continue to move ahead in the book. For example, while you are working on new material in Unit Three, you will be reviewing and "reworking" some of the materials in Units One and Two.

The vocabulary lists at the end of each unit have been divided into three categories:

- 1) The **main list** contains words that you need to memorize for the first stage of working with the unit.
- 2) The second group of vocabulary words is labeled "**Initial Low Priority**". These words are high-function words whose status will be upgraded on

subsequent "revisits" to the unit. During the introductory stage, a **recognition level** is sufficient.

3) "**Supplemental Words**" in each unit belong to more specialized topics. For students who have a personal interest in these topics these words might be extremely useful, but the instructor and students may be more selective here.

If you have access to a computer you should use the *The Key to Modern Hebrew* Computerized Flash Card Program (for IBM PC only). Otherwise you should make your own flash cards to prepare for your weekly quizzes.

NON-ANALYZED WORDS AND PHRASES

Each unit contains some words or phrases whose grammatical form is not explained or analyzed in that unit. They are presented without a grammatical analysis because they enable you to say useful and necessary expressions--even though you cannot analyze them grammatically yet. Make them part of your repertoire. These expressions will enable you to express yourself confidently, correctly and idiomatically at an early stage of your studies. As memorized expressions they will serve as models for grammatical structures which will be formally and systematically taught at later stages of your mastery of Hebrew.

NON-EXHAUSTIVE GRAMMAR EXPLANATIONS

Some of the presentations of grammar are deliberately brief. They provide enough information for you to begin using the particular structure. More expanded treatments will be provided at a later point in your study. But even before you master the technical grammar, you will be able to speak, write, and read at a more mature level—even though you may not have an exhaustive grammatical conception of the expressions you can use.

AUDIO MATERIALS

The recordings that accompany each unit are very helpful for acquiring reading proficiency, proper pronunciation, and as an aid to listening comprehension. They will accelerate your acquisition of these skills. They also contain renditions of the songs that are part of each unit.

SONGS

The songs provide an enjoyable way to work on pronunciation practice and they are a painless way to memorize useful vocabulary and acquire grammatical models. However, the songs should not be treated as texts to be analyzed or fully translated. Just have fun! The song vocabularies are supplied solely to give a general idea of the song's content.

ARTISTIC READING

Life-long pleasure can be your reward for memorizing the short poems in each unit. They have been chosen for their artistic beauty and their provocative content. You will never regret the time spent committing them to memory. At a minimum, you should be able to read them without error and with voice expression that reflects a full appreciation of the meaning

WRITING AND READING MODERN HEBREW SCRIPT

This course introduces you to the script (written) form of the letters, rather than the printed form normally used in published materials. You will learn the script form of the letters first, before moving on to printed letters. This sequence is helpful because:

- 1) The written letters are more distinctive and less easily confused with one another.
- 2) You will be able to write new words as you acquire them, and thus reinforce vocabulary acquisition.

It is important that you not use English letters when you jot down a Hebrew word. Be sure to write in the Hebrew alphabet... even if it takes longer or you are unsure of the correct spelling.

Script Letters

ת ש ר ק צ פ ס נ מ ל כ ' ג ח ז ו ה ז ט א ב

In Units One and Two the Hebrew texts are presented in script form. Block Print letters are introduced in Unit Three. However, you will continue to use script for all your written work. Your instructor will use the script on the whiteboard as well.

Block Print Letters

א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י כ ל מ נ ס ע פ צ ק ר ש ת

MODERN HEBREW SPELLING

The Hebrew alphabet contains only consonants—not vowels. In modern Hebrew, the symbols that indicate the vowels (in Hebrew, *nikkud*) have been largely discarded, on the assumption that readers understand what they read and instinctively supply the correct vowel sounds to produce the most logical reading for each context. (Exceptions are children's literature, poetry, and biblical texts which always include the symbols that indicate the vowels.)

This course prepares you to read Hebrew as it is printed in Israel, i.e., without the marks to indicate the vowels. In the early stages of instruction we will include the vowel symbols where there could be ambiguity. When sounds and words are spelled out in Latin characters" they will usually be enclosed in slashes (*/shah-lohm/*). The names of consonants, vowels, and all Hebrew words will be italicized in this unit.

The style of Hebrew spelling employed throughout the book aims at rigorous consistency. (Such is not yet the case in many Israeli newspapers.) This book's spelling policy goes beyond the guidelines provided by the Hebrew Language Academy in an effort to make the reading of Hebrew easier and more efficient. The practice followed here spells almost all nouns that belong to the same category in the same style. Thus both מִינהל and מִכתב are spelled with the letter */yood/* to indicate the */ee/* vowel. In typical Israeli publications מִכתב is spelled without the */yood/* (מכתב) and the reader is expected to read it correctly. The words in this text that deviate from the suggested rules are fairly few in number.

There is a long and noble tradition associated with the study of Hebrew. The joys and the fascination that are soon to be your lot, place you in the company of the millions of those who learned Hebrew as a matter of personal desire — Welcome!