

MODERN HEBREW CURSIVE

(Based on the method described in: Aleph Through the Looking Glass [Learn to Write the Hebrew Script] / Jonathan Orr-Stav)

Its evolution from Square Hebrew print characters— and how to get to it from standard Roman italics

Although biblical scribes used "proper" print letters when copying Scriptures, for day-to-day purposes people developed a quicker way to write the various letters. Thus, the print forms gradually changed to become the modern cursive. Here's how it happened:

The shared ancestry of the two scripts (both are descended from the Old-Hebrew/Canaanite script) is, serendipitously, most apparent in the Hebrew cursive and Roman lowercase italics, thanks to the natural tendencies of the writing hand. This can be exploited to ease the transition from Roman to Hebrew in three simple steps: Mirror, Modify, and Change Slant.

Old Hebrew/Canaanite	Assyrian ("Square") Hebrew	Quick Print <sup>2</sup>	Casual Print <sup>1</sup>	Modern Hebrew Cursive*	Modify <sup>2</sup>	Mirror <sup>2</sup>	Letter name and Roman historical/graphic equivalent	Notes
א	א	א	א	א	א	א	aleph <sup>3</sup>	<p>1 This is how it evolved in Ashkenazi Jewish communities. In other communities the evolution was different—but the Ashkenazi cursive served as the basis of the modern Hebrew cursive.</p> <p>2. The natural tendencies of the (right) writing hand (known as <i>chirodynamics</i>) are the same in all scripts. So to adapt a mirrored Roman letter to Hebrew, one often needs to remove or add, bits to it, to make it comfortable for right-to-left writing. This, coupled with the shared ancestry of the two alphabets, usually results in something very like the modern Hebrew cursive equivalent.</p> <p>3. Technically, the <i>aleph</i> is not equivalent to an A, as it is "vowel carrier" that can bear any vowel. Nevertheless, historically, it inspired the Greek and Roman A, which is why it represents <i>aleph</i> in SimHebrew.</p> <p>4. As evident from its form, the original Canaanite <i>heh</i> was co-opted by the Greeks to serve as the vowel letter E.</p> <p>5. Linguists refer to <i>vav</i> as <i>waw</i>, but in modern Hebrew its phonetic value is /v/, and originally, it was the inspiration for F.</p> <p>6. The Canaanite <i>Het</i> (pron. like the Spanish <i>J</i> in <i>Juan</i>, or <i>ch</i> in <i>loch</i>) was the inspiration for the Greek/Roman H.</p> <p>7. The Canaanite <i>tet</i> was originally conceived as a <i>tav</i> with a circle around it. Although it inspired the Greek <i>theta</i> (Θ), the Romans dropped it entirely, so the transition here from italics <i>t</i> to cursive <i>tet</i> is purely graphic.</p> <p>8. The Hebrew <i>iod</i> (pronounced yod) is commonly equated with y—but historically, it is the origin of the Greek <i>iota</i>, and therefore, of the Roman <i>i</i>.</p> <p>9. As evident from its Canaanite form, the <i>caf</i> is really the forefather of the Roman <i>k</i>, not <i>c</i>—but in Assyrian Hebrew script, its similarity to the Roman <i>c</i> became so compelling, that it is easier to treat it as its counterpart.</p> <p>10. The Canaanite <i>samekh</i> began the Greek Ξ, but was dropped from the Roman lineup. Meanwhile, in Assyrian Hebrew, it changed beyond recognition.</p> <p>11. The <i>ayin</i> is not really the equivalent of the Roman y (like <i>aleph</i>, it is a vowel carrier, but pronounced in the throat)—but its graphic similarity to y makes it the ideal representation of <i>ayin</i> in SimHebrew, and a useful aid for Hebrew learners.</p> <p>12. The <i>tzadi</i> was not adopted in the Roman alphabet, but think of it graphically (as well as audibly) as a combination of <i>t</i> and <i>z</i>.</p>
ב	ב	ב	ב	ב	ב	ב	bet	
ג	ג	ג	ג	ג	ג	ג	gimmel	
ד	ד	ד	ד	ד	ד	ד	dalet	
ה	ה	ה	ה	ה	ה	ה	héh <sup>4</sup>	
ו	ו	ו	ו	ו	ו	ו	vav <sup>5</sup>	
ז	ז	ז	ז	ז	ז	ז	zayin	
ח	ח	ח	ח	ח	ח	ח	Het <sup>6</sup>	
ט	ט	ט	ט	ט	ט	ט	tet <sup>7</sup>	
י	י	י	י	י	י	י	iod <sup>8</sup>	
כ	כ	כ	כ	כ	כ	כ	caf <sup>9</sup>	
ל	ל	ל	ל	ל	ל	ל	lamed	
מ	מ	מ	מ	מ	מ	מ	mem	
נ	נ	נ	נ	נ	נ	נ	nun	
ס	ס	ס	ס	ס	ס	ס	samekh <sup>10</sup>	
ע	ע	ע	ע	ע	ע	ע	ayin <sup>11</sup>	
פ	פ	פ	פ	פ	פ	פ	péh	
צ	צ	צ	צ	צ	צ	צ	ẕadi <sup>12</sup>	
ק	ק	ק	ק	ק	ק	ק	quf	
ר	ר	ר	ר	ר	ר	ר	resh	
ש	ש	ש	ש	ש	ש	ש	shin	
ת	ת	ת	ת	ת	ת	ת	tav	

\* Font: Ktav Yad CLM by Maxim Iorsh

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