

The Hebrew Writing System – Lesson 9

Normally, when he (ה) ends a word, it is not pronounced. However, its pronunciation can be strengthened by a mappik (׀) – a dot in the center. This only occurs when it is the last letter of the word.

If pathah occurs under he with a mappik (׀), heth (ח), or ayin (ע), it is pronounced *before* the consonant it is under, rather than after the consonant. This is called “pathah furtive”. For example, ׀׀׀׀ is pronounced “ruach”, not “rucha”. This does *not* form a separate syllable – therefore, ׀׀׀׀ only has one syllable, since the pathah is pathah furtive.

Heth, he, ayin, and aleph are the four guttural letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Because of their breathy, weak pronunciation, they can cause vowels around them to sometimes change, as in the above paragraph. This will become more of a factor when learning how to conjugate the verb. For now, here are the three important rules of gutturals:

- 1) The gutturals and resh (ר) cannot be doubled by daghesh forte.
- 2) The gutturals usually take a compound shewa.
- 3) The gutturals prefer the a-class vowels (pathah, kamets).

These rules can help identify when the gutturals are triggering changes around them.

בְּהַבְרָאָם אֱלֹהִים לְמִינָהּ מִרְחֻפֵּת וְרוּחַ וְהַמָּלְאִים יַעֲקֹב

Vocabulary

נֶפֶשׁ – soul

רוּחַ – spirit, breath, wind

מִזְבֵּחַ – altar

קֹדֶשׁ – holy

גָּדוֹל – great