

## Vocal and Silent Shevas

### Introduction - The Two Types of Shevas

There are two forms of the sheva (ְ):

1. The vocal sheva (שׁוֹא נֶע)

The vocal sheva has a very brief sound, like the catch between the ‘b’ and ‘l’ in ‘blue.’ Although brief, vocal shevas are actual vowels, with the normal grammatical results. E.g., a **beged kefet** letter following a vocal sheva does not take a dagesh kal. A vocal sheva also creates a separate syllable.

2. The silent sheva (שׁוֹא נֶר)

The silent sheva usually simply closes a syllable, and has no sound. A silent sheva is not treated as normal vowel. A **beged kefet** letter following a silent vowel does take a dagesh kal. A silent sheva does create a syllable.

### Identifying Sheva Types

The following patterns distinguish between the two types of sheva:

**A sheva under the first letter of a word is always a vocal sheva.**

יְרִיעֶת (Exodus 36:8)

שְׁכֶם (Genesis 35:4)

Note: There is one exception. The first sheva in שְׁתַּיִם (two) and derived forms such as שְׁתַּיִם (twelve, feminine) and שְׁתַּיִ (twelve in construct), is silent.

**A sheva at the end of a word is always silent.**

וַיִּלֶּךְ (I Samuel 22:5)

לִקְטָתָהּ (Ruth 2:19)

**A sheva under a letter which follows a conjunctive ׀ is silent.**

וְכַתְּבֶתֶם (Deuteronomy 6:9)

וְדַבֵּר (Numbers 23:3)

**When there are two contiguous shevas, the first is silent and the second is vocal.**

שְׁבִתָּהּ (1 Kings 8:30)

אֲשֶׁתָּהּ (Genesis 12:18)

**A sheva under a letter containing a dagesh is a vocal sheva.**

אֶת-הַתְּרָפִים (Genesis 31:21)

וַיִּפְלוּ (Leviticus 9:24)

**A sheva under the first of two identical letters is vocal. It is needed to allow the consonants to be pronounced.**

הַנְּנִי (Genesis 9:9)

נְדָדָה (Esther 6:1)

The exception is when the two consecutive shevas are at the end of a word. In this case, both shevas are silent.

כַּתְּבִי (The feminine second person singular perfect of כָּתַב)

וַיִּבְרַךְ (Genesis 37:35)

**If a letter with a sheva is followed by a *beged kefet* letter without a dagesh, the sheva must be vocal. Otherwise, the dagesh would have appeared.**

בְּרַכּוּ (Siddur)

**A sheva which follows a long vowel is vocal.**

קוֹלֶךָ (Judges 18:25)

וּמְלֹאוֹ (Isaiah 13:21)

The long vowels are: ם ן ף ץ ף ץ ף ץ (kamats gadol).

Note: As indicated above, the conjunctive ם is an important exception. A sheva under a letter following a conjunctive ם is silent. And they are all over the place.

**A sheva following a secondary accent on a long vowel ( either a metheg or the first trope mark on a word with two trope marks) is vocal. This is common in third person perfect verb conjugations.**

אֵכֶלָה (Numbers 21:28)

וַיִּאֲמְרוּ (Genesis 38:21)

**On the other hand, a sheva following a secondary accent on a short vowel is silent.**

וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב (Genesis 1:5)

יְהִיָּה (Genesis 5:6)

The short vowels are: ם (without ם) ף (katon) - ם

**A sheva following a retracted accent is vocal.**

רַדְפֵי צֶדֶק (Isaiah 51:1)

הִיתָה זֹאת (Judges 21:3)

**However, a sheva following any normally accented syllable is silent.**

יְכַלְתִּי (Genesis 30:8)

הַלֵּילָה (Genesis 1:16)

## The Intermediate Sheva

To avoid having two consecutive shevas at the start of a word when a preposition is prefixed, the vowel of the prefix is converted to a full vowel. Thus

בְּ + שְׁכֶם > בִּשְׁכֶם

In these cases, the remaining sheva is silent. Note that in the example the בְּ does not receive a dagesh kal even though it follows a silent sheva.

When a conjunctive וְ is prefixed to word beginning with a sheva, the וְ is converted to וַ and the remaining sheva is silent.

וְ + בְּנֵי > וַבְּנֵי