

APPENDIX D - THE VOWEL SYMBOLS AND THE DAGESH

THE NAMES OF THE VOWEL SYMBOLS

קָמֶץ	אָ	(קָמֶץ חָטוּף) קָמֶץ קָטָן	אָ
פֶּתַח	אֲ	שׁוּרוּק	אוּ
סְגוּל	אָ	קוּבוּץ	אָ
חִירִיק	אִ	שׂוּא	אִ
חוֹלֶם חָסֵר	אֲ	חֶטֶף-קָמֶץ	אָ
חוֹלֶם מְלֵא	אוּ	חֶטֶף-פֶּתַח	אֲ
צִירִי	אִ	חֶטֶף-סְגוּל	אָ

1. The Dagesh דָּגֵשׁ

There are two kinds of דָּגֵשׁ, both of which look exactly alike in print. They are called **דָּגֵשׁ קָל** and **דָּגֵשׁ חֲזָק**. The דָּגֵשׁ קָל appears (in fully pointed texts, i.e. with vowel marks) in six letters: **ב ג ד כ פ ת**. As you know, our pronunciation of the consonants is affected in only three of these: **ב כ פ**. In the other three, we ignore the dot. (In fact, many readers are not aware of the dot until it is pointed out to them.)

The **דָּגֵשׁ חֲזָק** appears in all of the letters of the alphabet except for **האח רע**. Note the mnemonic: *the brother is bad*. The purpose of this dot is to **double the length of time the sound is pronounced as though the letter were represented by a musical quarter note instead of an eighth note**. However in ordinary reading, people ignore the **דָּגֵשׁ חֲזָק**. You may encounter it in artistic readings especially of biblical texts, and in "virtuoso" chanting of the Torah scrolls in the synagogue.

In the consonants **ב ג ד כ פ ת** the same dot can serve both to change the sound (from /v/ to /b/, /f/ to /p/ etc) and to double the consonant. The reasons for the **דָּגֵשׁ** are somewhat complex and will not be discussed here. But here are a few of the simple points.

When you see a **ב כ פ** at the beginning of a word, even if there is no dagesh in the letter, it should be pronounced as though it has a דָּגֵשׁ. – ביקש בנימין פנינה פועל כמה –
כסף

In the middle of word, if a בגדכפת letter begins a new syllable, that is, the preceding letter is marked with a שׂוּא, then it should be pronounced as though it has a דָּגֵשׁ. –

מישפחה = מישפחה הַסֵּבֵר = הַסֵּבֵר אשכנזי = אשכנזי

Please note that הלכה הלכו כתבה כתבו verb forms like פעל seem to be exceptions to this rule. They are not really exceptions, but the full discussion of the issue must be postponed.

When the *dagesh* is used to indicate doubling it is called a *dagesh xazak*, דָּגֵשׁ חֲזָק. It regularly appears in certain noun, adjective, and verb forms. For example: "cantor" חַזָּן, "red" (f) אֲדָמָה, "he told" סִפֵּר, "he taught" לָמַד. The example סִפֵּר illustrates a case

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where the דגש חזק serves both to double the consonant and to change it from a *spirant* to a *stop*. In addition to specific word types, the דגש חזק appears as part of the definite article, "the". For example, "the desert" הַמִּדְבָּר .

THE דגש קל THAT "DISAPPEARS"

Notice that words that begin with בגדכפת letters can change their pronunciation ($b > v$, $k > x$, $p > f$) whenever a ל or ב is attached as a preposition..

a request	בְּקִשָּׁה
please	בְּבִקְשָׁה
a school	בֵּית סֵפֶר
to a school	לְבֵית סֵפֶר

When the *dagesh* is used for this purpose it is called a *dagesh kal*, דגש קל .

Given the complexity of these rules, it is not surprising that native Israelis frequently ignore the rules of the *dagesh*. Thus you will often hear a sentence like:

"He said to Bat Sheva" הוא אמר לבת-שבע where the presence of the *dagesh* in her name is a "violation" of the grammatical rules.