

## Ashkenazic and Sephardic Hebrew

### You say "Shabbes," and I say "Shabbat."

There are two different Hebrew pronunciation systems in use today: one common to Jews of Europe and one common to Jews from the Mediterranean. This article is reprinted with permission from [Aleph Isn't Tough: An Introduction to Hebrew for Adults](#) by Linda Motzkin published by the [UAHC press](#).

There are two different systems of Hebrew pronunciation encountered today: Ashkenazic and Sephardic. The Ashkenazic pronunciation was used by the Jews of Eastern and Central Europe, in countries such as Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Russia. The Sephardic pronunciation was used by the Jews of the Mediterranean regions, including Spain, Greece, and North Africa.

Until the middle of the 20th century, most American synagogues used the Ashkenazic Hebrew pronunciation, as the majority of American Jews were of Ashkenazic descent. After the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, however, there was a gradual shift in American congregations toward using Sephardic Hebrew, since that is the standard pronunciation used in Israel.... One can still hear both Ashkenazic and Sephardic pronunciations used when referring to certain holidays, prayers, or lifecycle events, as in the following examples. (The accented syllable is written in bold letters)

Sephardic Pronunciation	Ashkenazic Pronunciation	Written Form
Shabbat	Shabbos	שַׁבָּת
Bat Mitzvah	Bas Mitzvah	בַּת מִצְוָה
Shavuot	Shavuos	שְׁבֻעוֹת
Sukkot	Succos	סֻכּוֹת
Simchat Torah	Simchas Torah	שִׂמְחַת תּוֹרָה
Yitgadal v'yitkadash	Yisgadal v'yiskadash	יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ

The two types of Hebrew are identical in their written forms. It is only their pronunciation that distinguishes them. Notice that Sephardic Hebrew words are generally accented on the last syllable, while Ashkenazic Hebrew words are generally stressed on the second-to-last syllable. Sephardic Hebrew does not distinguish between the two vowels אָ and אַ, introduced at the beginning of this chapter (pronouncing both of them as *ah*) while in Ashkenazic Hebrew אָ is pronounced as *ah* and אַ as *aw*. Sephardic Hebrew does not distinguish between תּ and ת, pronouncing them both as *t*. In Ashkenazic Hebrew, the letter תּ is pronounced like a *t* when it has a dot in the middle (תּ), and like an *s* when it does not have the dot (ת).

## Deuteronomy 6:4-9

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֶחָד

*Sh'ma Yis'ra'eil Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad.*

Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. In an undertone:

בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

*Barukh sheim k'vod malkhuto l'olam va'ed.*

Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.

וְאַהַבְתָּ אֵת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ

*V'ahav'ta eit Adonai Elohekha b'khol l'vav'kha uv'khol naf'sh'kha uv'khol m'odekha.*

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לִבְבְּךָ

*V'hayu had'varim ha'eileh asher anokhi m'tzav'kha hayom al l'vavekha.*

And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart.

וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְדַבָּרֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָם

*V'shinan'tam l'vanekha v'dibar'ta bam*

And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall speak of them

בְּשֹׁבְתְךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ

*b'shiv't'kha b'veitekha uv'lekh't'kha vaderekh uv'shakh'b'kha uv'kumekha*

when you sit at home, and when you walk along the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up.

וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ

*Uk'shar'tam l'ot al yadekha v'hayu l'totafot bein einekha.*

And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל מְזוֹזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ

*Ukh'tav'tam al m'zuzot beitekha uvish'arekha.*

And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.