

# I Can Read Without Vowels!

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*"Litteras didicisti. quando scis, sine alios discere."*  
— Plautus, *Truculentus*, 1. 735. (c. 186BCE)

## 1 Theoretical Background

- (1) **Pronouncing** is different than **reading**:
  - (a) Pronouncing involves sound.
  - (b) Reading involves meaning.
  - (c) Pronouncing mostly involves the letters.
  - (d) Reading involves *ignoring the letters* (Assink & Knuijt 2000).
  - (e) Reading involves recognizing the words.
- (2) Reading Hebrew is different than reading English (Eviatar 1999).
- (3) Vowels are necessary for pronouncing Hebrew, not for reading Hebrew (Frost 1995).
- (4) Vowels are not necessary for recognizing Hebrew words (Frost & Kampf 1993).
- (5) Vowels do not help in recognizing Hebrew words (Navon & Shimron 1981).

- (6) Wrong vowels make it harder to recognize Hebrew words (Navon & Shimron 1981).
- (7) Reading aloud makes reading harder, not easier (Magliano *et al.* 1999), (Rubin & Turano 1992); even though people might silently pronounce their words (Keller *et al.* 2003).

## 2 Observations

- (8) Reading without vowels reinforces the consonants.
- (9) Hebrew structure is clearer without vowels:
  - (a) without vowels: “and” = -ו
    - i. ושלום “and peace”
    - ii. והייתם “and you shall be”
    - iii. ושמור “and keep”
    - iv. ואמונה “and faith”
    - v. ואני “and I”
  - (b) with vowels: “and” = -וְ, -וֹ, -וֵ, -וֹ etc.
    - i. וְשֵׁלוֹם “and peace”
    - ii. וְהִיִּיתֶם “and you shall be”
    - iii. וְשָׁמֹר “and keep”
    - iv. וְאִמוּנָה “and faith”
    - v. וְאֲנִי “and I”
  - (c) without vowels: “king” = מלך
    - i. מלך “king”
    - ii. מלכים “kings”
    - iii. מלכנו “our king”
    - iv. מלכי “kings of”
  - (d) with vowels: “king” = מֶלֶךְ, מְלָכִים, etc.:
    - i. מֶלֶךְ “king”
    - ii. מְלָכִים “kings”
    - iii. מְלָכֵנוּ “our king”
    - iv. מְלָכָיו “kings of”
- (10) Reading without vowels is fun.

### 3 Examples

(11) From <http://www.exc.com/JoelHoffman/Resources>:

- (a) Cognates
- (b) Word structure
- (c) Word find

(12) Games:

- (a) Hangman
- (b) Beads
- (c) Reverse Transliteration

### 4 Discussion

#### Selected References

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