

Spinoza devoted his final days to writing about Hebrew grammar. But he died before he finished the work. Nonetheless, it was made available to us under the title—Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae, because his friend Jerig Jelles published it, along with other texts such as Ethica and the tractate of politics, in a single volume that we now know as Opera Posthuma.

As compared to his other philosophical texts, Spinoza's Hebrew grammar has not received much attention from scholars in the field. In 1850 Jacob Barnays discussed Spinoza's Hebrew grammar for the first time. Since then, only a handful of studies have become available.

The reason Spinoza's Hebrew grammar has not been widely appreciated may be related to a distrust of Spinoza as a grammarian. That view is already seen in Barnays, and became more apparent in N. Porges (1922) who wrote: " Spinoza was no philologist. He was knowledgeable of Hebrew, but not a great Hebraist at all. His grammar exhibits many mistakes, that are not like print-errors smuggled into consideration, but like inaccuracies and shortcomings in his grammatical knowledge."

While what makes Porges so critical of Spinoza's Hebrew grammar is certainly worthy of close investigation, we also should remember the words of admonition by the editor Jerig Jelles as well. Please take a look at No. 1 in the handout. The editor, on the contrary, trusted Spinoza as a competent expert "who was immersed with Hebrew since a very young age, and later for many years devoted to this, and came to possess a new perspective of it thoroughly." According to the editor, Spinoza wrote this work as a service to serious students who studied Hebrew diligently, and also intended his grammar to have a mathematical precision, by which he meant to establish the principles of the language that would not be swayed by exceptions. Thus, in Spinoza's grammar, the editor expected something more than a mediocre introduction to simple readers.

Another important fact to be considered is the booklist of Spinoza's library which was discovered in 1885. From it, Spinoza appears to have consulted the works of major grammarians like Moshe, Joseph and David Kimhi, Ibn Ezra, Eliyahu Levita, and Abraham de Balmes. Therefore, I think, when Spinoza discusses something unusual like the neuter of Hebrew nouns, or like the passive voice of hitpael, it is likely that he was aware of the gaps between his claims and ordinary Hebrew grammar.

In short, Spinoza's Hebrew grammar needs to be read more carefully with its medieval background. For his grammar was, after all, a reaction to the medieval understandings of Hebrew to which he had been exposed. Yet, those modern scholars who criticized Spinoza seem to rush to judgment before understanding his points, influenced by what the Bible students of the 19th century believed to be scientifically correct. At least regarding shewa, I contend that Spinoza was not only misunderstood, but his intention was distorted by those later critics.

Now I would like to turn to the handout; please look at No. 2. As I said, Spinoza did not complete the text of Hebrew grammar, and therefore, the one who is responsible for the final form of the text, as it was published for the first time, was the editor of Opera Posthuma, Jerig Jelles. Land and Vloten, however, believed that the text contained errors, and needed to be reedited by the professionals like them who knew Hebrew well. Indeed, they corrected not only errors of vocalization, but also rearranged the layout of paradigms, and gravely emended the text at several crucial spots. My concern is about their addition of the word (non), which makes one read the text, "qua sola audiri non possit." The text of the first print, however, has "qua sola audiri possit," without "non." If one follows the Land and Vloten's edition and translates the text into English, it would read "every shewa is an absolute syllable which can not be heard by itself." This edition is significantly different from the text of Opera Posthuma, which reads, "every shewa is an absolute syllable which can be heard by itself". Amazingly, Land and Vloten provide no justification for their change, except to say that "the word is omitted by the editor of the first print."

This emendation is widely accepted: see No. 3,4,5; but, if the emendation should be accepted, it will bring about internal contradictions within Spinoza's argument. First, if the shewa cannot be heard by itself, how can it still be called

in his grammar

Since he who was not an expert of Hebrew,

line 5-6

always must adhere to the previous or the following syllables

gamats and segol which he also called syllables

a "syllable"? Certainly, ^{all the time} the other syllables like gamats or segol can be heard by themselves, and Spinoza seems to assume no difference in presenting the shewa as a syllable (See the handout No. 6). ^{A#} Moreover, if shewa cannot be heard by itself, but must adhere to the preceding syllable or to the following one, then how can Spinoza know that the shewa has its own sound, shorter e, by itself? (see No. 6) ^A Regarding this point, Ashkenazi's French translation tries to minimize the contradiction by understanding "absoluta" as "very weak" which is not what the word means literally (No.5), and also by criticizing Spinoza's choice of the word "syllaba" in a footnote; ^{the} this criticism by Ashkenazi is important for understanding the whole issue. I quote it with my translation;

##"The word syllable is improper; the shewa which is pronounced is a syllable that is extremely short. Regarding the non-pronounced shewa, it indicates an absence of the vowel; only the pronunciation of the consonant is heard. In all the cases, the shewa is not a syllable."

As you see, Ashkenazi fundamentally disagrees with Spinoza who asserts "every shewa is an absolute syllable". His complaints are ultimately reduced to the demand that Spinoza has to admit the silent shewa (nach). Likewise, the existence of the silent shewa is a priori for Porges and Bloom. This preoccupation explains perfectly why Vloten and Land conjecture the word "non" despite all the contradictions. For the emendation helps them to understand that Spinoza did not exclude the silent shewa, while he defines the shewa as one of the vowels elsewhere.

But if one takes a close look at the text, it is clear that Spinoza does not admit the silent shewa in all occasions, because Spinoza never uses the term << quiescens >> regarding the shewa in the text, except for once, when he mentions how Hebrew grammarians usually ^{call} see the shewa (see, No 2 and 3, the beginning part). This mention may confuse readers ^{notice} if they do not ^{the top} note Spinoza's ^{Stop} different terms ^{terminology} to distinguish the two shewas, namely, <<the pronounced shewa (pronunciatur)>> and <<the hastened shewa (corripiuntur)>> instead of the shewa na (mobile) and the shewa nach (quiescens). ^{the ordinary terms, namely}

By the way, you may ^{realize} notice that Bloom, the English translator, keeps in his translation << the silent shewa >> throughout, as if Spinoza used the term <<

Latin

shewa quiescens >>. But, check Bloom's translation with the original text. The term Spinoza consistently uses is <<corripitur>>, which means to be hurried, ^{or hastened} instead of <<quiescens>>. ^{the hastened} ^{or its conjugated} ^{other forms} ^{the verb} ^{related to it} ^{which means to stop or be silent.}

That is to say, the shewa for Spinoza is not what modern scholars assume it to be. For him, the shewa is definitely a vowel which has its own sound; but, the sound is heard in two different ways. When the shewa adheres to the following syllable, it gets pronounced very well. Whereas the pronunciation is hastened when it adheres to the preceding syllable (namely, one cannot pronounce the vowel as much as it should be because of the vowel sound of the preceding syllable). Thus, Spinoza perceives that the shewa retains the status of vowel in every way; there is no quiescens in the shewa according to Spinoza.

(See 6-A top)

His claim may look strange, but it is consistent with his saying, that vowels in Hebrew are not letters. ^{He understands that} Letters are << the origin of the sound >> ^{They are} like the holes of the flute touched by fingers, ^{which} that cannot be heard in themselves. ^{without man's breath} Letters to be pronounced must be accompanied by vowels, which are indicated by the punctuation. Therefore, according to Spinoza, every punctuated letters must be pronounced, including, of course, the shewa. In this sense, Spinoza would never agree with Ashkenazi, who in the footnote argues for the shewa nach to be "the pronunciation of consonant without a vowel." For Spinoza, the examples of the quiescent letters are Yod and waw - used as Imot Qria for the sounds i and o. (Look at No. 6). ^B They are certainly letters without punctuation. (if one agrees to see the point of holam between the two letters) This understanding of the shewa as a vowel is useful, for instance, if one tries to explain why the reish of the word midbar is not punctuated with shewa, like its daleth, when the shewa means to stop (quiescens). Also, it helps to explain why the word is "malchei" instead of "malkei" if the begedkephet spirantization rule works.

Anyway, my interest ^{has been} is not to show how true Spinoza's Hebrew grammar is, but how wrongly Spinoza ^{is} read by modern scholars. I think, if Vloten and Land (or Bloom and Ashkenazi who have engaged in the study of Spinoza's Hebrew grammar) had been acquainted with the medieval disputes on Hebrew grammar, especially the ones between the Kimhi school and the traditional school, and had they read Spinoza's argument with its background, they would not have rushed to the judgment they did. Those scholars were somewhat blinded by the so-

called "scientific" knowledge of Hebrew grammar of their time, which took the side of the Kimhi school.

In contrast to it,
By regarding the shewa as not being a vowel, meaning that the shewa does not have its own sound, the Kimhi school sharply deviates from the traditional Hebrew grammar (see No. 7). ^{J. Kimhi says "..." "D. K. says the same in 1863"} Please look at No. 8; it is a page from Mikne Avram, the Hebrew grammar book of the 16th century, composed by Abraham de Balmes. Spinoza knew this work very well, and referred to it. ^{See No. 6} De Balmes tells us that most of the grammarians agree to count seven major vowels and five secondary vowels, ^{whereas} while the Kimhi school divides the vowels into five long vowels and five short vowels. ^{after the argument you see in 1863}

Perhaps, to you the teachers of Israel, I don't need to explain how shocking the Kimhi school ^{is} is to traditional grammarians. The traditional grammarians, like Ibn Ezra or Ibn Janach, did not recognize the vowels in such a quantitative manner as the Kimhi school. They understood the differences of the vowels only by quality. We don't have time now to go into the details, but the point which is crucial to our discussion, is that the Kimhi school dropped the shewa from its count of the vowels. ^{again} See No. 7; with this background, I would like to point out a grammatical hidush of Spinoza regarding the shewa; that is the dismissal of the silent shewa from his grammar. The traditional grammarians who count the shewa among the vowels are referring to the shewa na and hatephim, not to the shewa nach. But Spinoza insisted that there is no quiescence in the shewa; what happens really is that the shewa sound is hastened due to the preceding vowel, so that it is not as much heard as the other shewa. Spinoza and the Kimhi school both tried to achieve a logical consistency in Hebrew grammar. ^{While} While the Kimhi school tried to achieve this by excluding the shewa from the vowels, Spinoza went in the opposite way by regarding the shewa as a vowel in all occasions, excluding the concept of quiescence from the shewa.

Thus, Spinoza's Hebrew grammar, if one reads it carefully with the medieval disputes of Hebrew grammar, will add much to our understanding of the history of Hebrew grammars as well as Spinoza's philosophy. I would like to stop my discussion here, with the hope that more experts of Jewish studies may take a fresh look at Spinoza's Hebrew grammar.

② And for the same reason also a sheva is pronounced when one letter is in the middle of a word, but is not doubled between two vowels, like *הִינֵנִי* *hineni*, where the sheva under the first J is pronounced. For, if it had been silenced, then the J also would have been silenced and would have to adhere to the preceding syllable, and in place of *הִינֵנִי* *hineni*, it would have been written *הִינִי* *hini*.

For the rest, the remaining shevas are always silenced, and it should be especially noted that we expressly stated that every sheva which is pronounced occurs either at the beginning or in the middle of a word. But at the end it is never pronounced.

That it may be better understood, let this be noted, that every sheva is an absolute vowel which cannot be heard but must always adhere either to the previous or succeeding vowel; and so it is that no monosyllable is punctuated by a sheva. Hence it is apparent that a silent sheva is nothing more than the shortest e, adhering to the preceding syllable; however, the pronounced sheva is nothing else than the shortest e adhering to the following syllable; that is why when it is found before a syllable it is on that account to be pronounced even more distinctly. Whence it follows that in the beginning of a word it is impossible to adhere to the preceding syllable. At the end, on the other hand, it is impossible to adhere to the following syllable; and what is more, at the end of a word a dagesh is always silenced, whether after a long syllable or after a short one, whether under a dageshed letter or under a weak one, and finally, whether only one

* In the edition of Paulus Bruder, the negative is omitted. The Editor.

or two occur together. However, when it happens that a sheva occurs in the middle of a word after a long syllable, the rule of pronunciation requires that it adhere to the succeeding; and if there should be two shevas then the first adheres to the preceding and the second to the succeeding syllable. Further, it is also evident why at the beginning of a word there are never two shevas and also not in the middle after a long syllable. For two shevas cannot adhere to a succeeding syllable.

① The vowel sheva, because it is the shortest, is sometimes hastened over and adheres to the preceding syllable and sometimes is pronounced; the former is called by the Hebrew grammarians *Nach* נָח *quiescent* (silent sheva), and the latter *Na'af* נָאֵף *mobile* (moving sheva).

A sheva is pronounced when it occurs at the beginning of a word, or in the middle after a long vowel, like *בְּרֵאשִׁית* *bereshith*, where the sheva under the ב is pronounced, because it occurs at the beginning of the word; also like the following, because they occur in the middle of a word after long vowels, namely *פָּקְדָה* *pakedah*; *בְּרַחֵם* *berechu*; *יִרְאֵהוּ* *yireu*; *פִּקְדִים* *pokedim*; *הִבְיֵא* *hubeu*. If on the other hand, two shevas follow each other consecutively, the second is pronounced as in the word *תִּפְקְדוּ* *tiphkedu*, where the first sheva is silent and the second is pronounced. And hence it is that a sheva noted under a letter punctuated by a dagesh is also to be pronounced, like *פִּקְדוּ* *pikkedu*. For the point in the פ denotes that the p is doubled and the first one is silenced.

4. Endnote of C. Gebhardt (1925, Heidelberg):

keinen Sinn. — 20. Besser *khibbuts*. — Besser *schurekh*. — 27. Ed. pr.: *הִינֵנִי*. Das Schewa ist, wie auch Vloten-Land tun, gemäß 289, 21 hinzuzufügen. — 30. Ed. pr.: *נָח*. Auch Vloten-Land verbessern in *נָח*. — 293. 4. Besser *pakedah*. — Ed. pr.: *פָּקְדָה*. — 5. Besser *pokedim*. — 7. Besser *tiphkedu*. — 9. Ed. pr.: *תִּפְקְדוּ*. — Besser *pikkedu*. — 15. Besser *ghirekh*. — 20. Die Ed. pr. hat: *quae sola audiri possit*. Vloten-Land fügen die Negation mit Recht ein. — 294. 13. Die Ed. pr. hat: *scheva e breve*, was schon Vloten-Land dem Zusammenhang entsprechend in *segol* richtig stellen. — 295. 29. Die Ed. pr. läßt das Zeichen: aus, das Vloten-Land mit Recht anfügt. — 296. 21. Ed. pr.: *הִינֵנִי*. — 297. 12. Besser *makhaph*. — 25. Besser *makhaph*.

5. Ch. III in the French Translation of Joel Askenazi and Jocelyne Askenazi-Gerson (1968, Paris):

LE SCHÉVA

On notera donc particulièrement — nous l'avons clairement montré — qu'un schéva ne se prononce que s'il se trouve soit au commencement, soit au milieu du mot. Il n'est jamais prononcé à la fin du mot.

Pour mieux en comprendre la raison, il faut préciser que le schéva est une syllabe très faible; elle ne peut donc être entendue seule, mais doit toujours se rattacher à la syllabe précédente ou à la syllabe suivante. Par conséquent aucune monosyllabe n'est ponctuée de schéva. Il en résulte que le schéva contracté n'est rien d'autre qu'un e très bref qui se rattache à la syllabe qui le précède. Et le schéva prononcé n'est rien d'autre qu'un e très bref qui se rattache à la syllabe qui le suit; comme il est perçu avant la syllabe, le son en est plus distinct.

Si donc le schéva est au commencement d'un mot, il est impossible qu'il se rattache à une syllabe précédente, tout comme il ne peut, à la fin d'un mot, se rattacher à une syllabe suivante.

C'est pourquoi à la fin du mot il est toujours contracté: qu'il suive une syllabe longue ou une syllabe brève, qu'il soit placé sous une lettre ponctuée de dagesch ou sous une lettre sans dagesch, enfin que le schéva soit unique ou qu'il soit double.

D'autre part, lorsque le schéva se trouve au milieu du mot après une voyelle longue, la règle de prononciation demande qu'il se rattache à la syllabe qui le suit; s'il se présentait deux schéva, il faudrait que le premier se rattachât à la syllabe précédente et le second à la syllabe suivante. Il ressort clairement de ce qui vient d'être dit qu'il ne peut jamais y avoir deux schéva au commencement d'un mot, ni au milieu d'un mot après une syllabe longue. En effet, il n'est pas possible de rattacher deux schéva à la syllabe qui les suit.

34. Le mot « syllabe » est ici impropre. Le schéva qui se prononce est une voyelle extrêmement brève. Quant au schéva non prononcé, il indique une absence de voyelle. Seule la prononciation de la consonne est entendue. Dans tous les cas, le schéva n'est pas une syllabe.

2001. 8. 12, Jerusalem
13th World Congress of Jewish Studies

"Spinoza's Hebrew Grammar and the Medieval Dispute on Shewa"
By Isaiah Teshima, Ph. D.
(Osaka Sangyo University, Japan)

1. Admonitio ad Lectorem: *Opera Posthuma* (1677):

Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae Compendium, quod hic tibi, Benevole Lector, offertur, Auctor rogatu Amicorum quorundam suorum, Linguae Sanctae perstudiosorum, conscribendum suscepit; utpote quem, ab ineunte aetate ea imbutum, postea per multos annos ei sedulo operam dedisse, ejusque genium penitus perspectum habere, in eaque versatissimum esse, probe noverant; et noscent omnes, qui, ejus gnari, hoc quaecunque scriptum, quod intempestiva Auctoris morte, ut plura ejus alia, imperfectum remansit, pervolvere non dedignabuntur. Quale quale sit, ejus te, Benevole Lector, participem facimus, tibi que et Auctoris laborem et nostrum de te bene merendi studium pergratum fore, nulli dubitamus.

2. Cap III in *Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae*; Edition of J. Van Vloten and J. P. N. Land (1883, Hague): pp. 260-261

Syllaba scheva, quia brevissima est, aliquando corripitur, praecedentique syllabae adhaeret, et aliquando pronuntiatur; et ideo a Grammaticis Hebraeis illud נָח *nagh quiescens*, et hoc נָאֵף *nagh mobile* appellatur.

Pronunciatur scheva, quando in initio dictionis, vel in medio post syllabam longam occurrit, ut *בְּרֵאשִׁית* *bereshith*, ubi sub J pronuntiatur, quia in initio dictionis occurrit; ut etiam haec sequentia, quia post syllabas longas in medio dictionis occurrunt, nempe *פָּקְדָה* *pakedah*, *בְּרַחֵם* *berechu*, *יִרְאֵהוּ* *yireu*, *פִּקְדִים* *pokedim*, *הִבְיֵא* *hubeu*. Si deinde duo schevata in medio dictionis se invicem sequantur, secundum pronuntiatur, ut *תִּפְקְדוּ* *tiphkedu*, ubi primum scheva corripitur et secundum pronuntiatur. Atque hinc fit, ut scheva sub litera puncto dagesch notata etiam pronuntiatur, ut *פִּקְדוּ* *pikkedu*. Nam punctum in פ denotat, פ duplicandum et primum corripendum esse. Et hac etiam de causa pronuntiatur scheva, quando una litera in medio dictionis, sed non inter duas vocales duplicatur, ut *הִינֵנִי* *hineni*, ubi scheva sub primo J pronuntiandum est. Nam si corripendum esset, deberet etiam J corripri, et antecedenti syllabae *ghirek* adhaerere, et loco *הִינֵנִי* *hineni* scribendum esset *הִינִי* *hini*.

Ceterum reliqua schevata semper corripiuntur, et apprime notandum, nos expresse monuisse, omne scheva pronuntiandum vel initio, vel in medio dictionis occurrere. Nam in fine nunquam pronuntiatur. Quod ut melius intelligatur, notandum hic est, quod scheva omne est absoluta syllaba, quae sola audiri

non * possit, sed semper vel antecedenti vel sequenti adhaerere debet; atque hinc fit, ut nullum monosyllabum schevate punctetur. Unde apparet, scheva correptum nihil esse quam e brevissimum praecedenti syllabae adherens; pronuntiandum autem nihil aliud est quam e brevissimum sequenti syllabae adherens; quod quia ante syllabam sentitur, ideo ipsius pronuntiatio expressior est. Unde sequitur, in initio dictionis impossibile esse, ut praecedenti syllabae adhaeret; in fine autem contra impossibile esse, ut sequenti adhaeret; adeoque in fine dictionis, sive post syllabam longam, sive post brevem, sive sub litera dageschata, sive leni, sive denique unum, sive duo occurrant, semper tamen corripitur. Cum autem in medio dictionis post longam occurrit, modus pronuntiandi postulat, ut sequenti adhaeret, et si duo occurrant, ut primum antecedenti, secundum sequenti adhaeret. Porro hinc etiam patet, cur in initio dictionis nunquam duo schevata, ut nec etiam in medio dictionis post syllabam longam, occurrant. Nam duo schevata sequenti syllabae adhaerere nequeunt.

* Ed. Pr., Paulus, Bruder, negationem omittunt.
** Ed. Pr., etc.: *scheva*.

