

The Basics of Hebrew Nouns and Adjectives

I. Nouns appear in two **genders** and two **numbers**¹ and two **states**:

M. S. absolute דָּבָר	M. Pl. absolute דְּבָרִים
M. S. construct דְּבַר (shortening of vowels)	M. Pl. construct דְּבָרֵי
F. S. absolute תּוֹרָה	F. Pl. absolute תּוֹרוֹת
F. S. construct תּוֹרַת	F. Pl. construct תּוֹרוֹת

II. **Construct chains** consist of one, two, or more nouns in the **construct** state followed by one (or rarely two) nouns in the **absolute** state. Construct chains may be definite or indefinite. If the chain is definite, every noun should be preceded by the article “the.” A construct chain is definite if the word in the absolute is definite. Absolute nouns are **definite** if...

- They have the definite article: דְּבַר הָאִשָּׁה the word of the woman
- They are a proper noun: דְּבַר יְהוָה the word of Yahweh
- They have a possessive suffix: דְּבַר תּוֹרַתִּי the word of my law

III. **Adjectives** can appear in the **attributive** position (a good word) or in the **predicate** position (a word is good).² An adjective in the attributive position will agree with its noun in gender, number, and definiteness. It will also *follow* the noun.

הַדְּבָר הַטוֹב the good word or דְּבַר טוֹב a good word
הַטוֹבִים הַדְּבָרִים the good words or טוֹבִים דְּבָרִים good words
טוֹבִים הַדְּבָרִים The words are good
הַטוֹבָה הַתּוֹרָה the good law or טוֹבָה תּוֹרָה a good law
הַטוֹבוֹת הַתּוֹרוֹת the good laws or טוֹבוֹת תּוֹרוֹת good laws
טוֹבוֹת הַתּוֹרוֹת the laws are good

The comparative use of adjectives is normally expressed by adjective + מִן + noun that is surpassed. מְדַבֵּשׁ מִתּוֹק מְדַבֵּשׁ sweeter than honey.

IV. The **definite article** consists of a ה prefixed to a noun or adjective. The standard vocalization is ה + pátah + dagesh forte. Before gutturals there will be compensative lengthening or virtual doubling (examples in Seow, p. 54).

¹A dual also rarely occurs. It is used primarily with parts of the body that appear in pairs.

²Demonstrative adjectives follow the same rules.

V. **Prepositions** may be prefixes or separate words. If the noun lacks the definite article the prefixed preposition will be pointed with a vocal Shewa. בְּדָבָר in a word. If the noun has the definite article the same rules for vocalization apply as in paragraph IV. בַּדָּבָר in **the** word.

VI. Possession is normally expressed by adding **suffixes to nouns**.

For singular nouns, suffixes of Type A (Seow, pp. 97-98) are used. They resemble very closely the suffixes used with the preposition ל (p. 94).

לו	סוסו his horse	סוסתו his mare
לה	סוסה her horse	סוסתה her mare
לך	סוסך your (ms) horse	סוסתך your (ms) mare
לך	סוסך your (fs) horse	סוסתך your (fs) mare
לי	סוסי my horse	סוסתי my mare
להם	סוסם their horse	סוסתם their mare
להן	סוסן their horse	סוסתן their mare
לכם	סוסכם your (mp) horse	סוסתכם your (mp) mare
לכן	סוסכן your (fp) horse	סוסתכן your (fp) mare
לנו	סוסנו our horse	סוסתנו our mare

For plural nouns, suffixes of Type C (pp. 97-98) are used. They resemble very closely the suffixes used with the preposition על (p. 97). Note that the **yôd** between the noun and the suffix indicates that the noun is plural. For feminine nouns the וֹת ending also indicates that the noun is plural

עליו upon him	סוסיו his horses	סוסותיו his mares
עליה	סוסיה her horses	סוסותיה her mares
עליך	סוסיך your (ms) horses	סוסותיך your (ms) mares
עליך	סוסיך your (fs) horses	סוסותיך your (fs) mares
עלי	סוסי my horses	סוסותי my mares
עליהם	סוסיהם their (mp) horses	סוסותיהם their (mp) mares
עליהן	סוסיהן their (fp) horses	סוסותיהן their (fp) mares
עליכם	סוסיכם your (mp) horses	סוסותיכם your (mp) mares
עליכן	סוסיכן your (fp) horses	סוסותיכן your (fp) mares
עלינו	סוסינו our horses	סוסותינו our mares

basicnouns.nb