A VISUAL GUIDE TO

THE BALINSON HEBREW TYPE COLLECTION

Bibliography Room in the Robertson Davies Library,
Massey College, University of Toronto

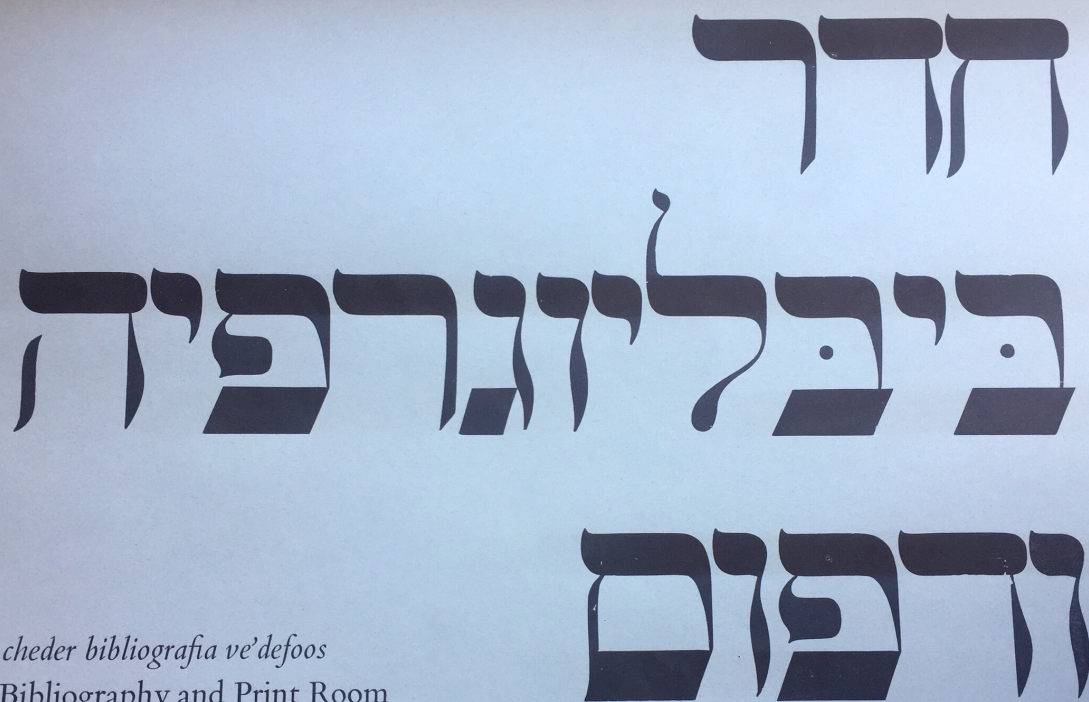## CONTENTS

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BHPC Printing Apprentice 2020-2021

חדר
ביבליוגרפיה
ודפוס

cheder bibliografia ve'defoos
Bibliography and Print Room

א. INTRODUCTION

This visual guide is designed to introduce and interpret the [Balinson Hebrew Type Collection](#), which lives and is actively used for printing in the Bibliography and Print Room at [Massey College](#), University of Toronto (Toronto, ON). The collection includes a selection of Hebrew metal and wood type and represents the only non-Latin typeface within the library's vast type collections.

This guide is a recommended reading for volunteers at the Bibliography Room as well as other letterpress and printing heritage institutions interested in learning more about the Hebrew collection. Therefore, the guide assumes some knowledge and familiarity with metal and wood type and the history printing.

The Bibliography and Print Room can be found in [The Robertson Davies Library](#) at Massey College. The library maintains special collections largely devoted to the history of the book, as well as a teaching collection of five active nineteenth-century iron hand presses and three clamshell presses. The Bibliography Room operates in many ways as learning laboratory and living museum space by hosting classes, printing demonstrations and tours
(Massey College, 2020, "Library").

Since typesetting ultimately comes down to a careful process of copying a given text, the ability to speak or read Hebrew is not necessarily a requirement for working with Hebrew type. In any case, this guide includes a brief overview of the basics of recognizing and pronouncing Hebrew letters (see section ד). Both Hebrew and non-Hebrew speakers/readers alike are welcome!

ב. COLLECTION OVERVIEW

The Balinson Hebrew Type Collection includes 9 different Hebrew fonts in both metal and wood type. Below is a visual tour of the collection:
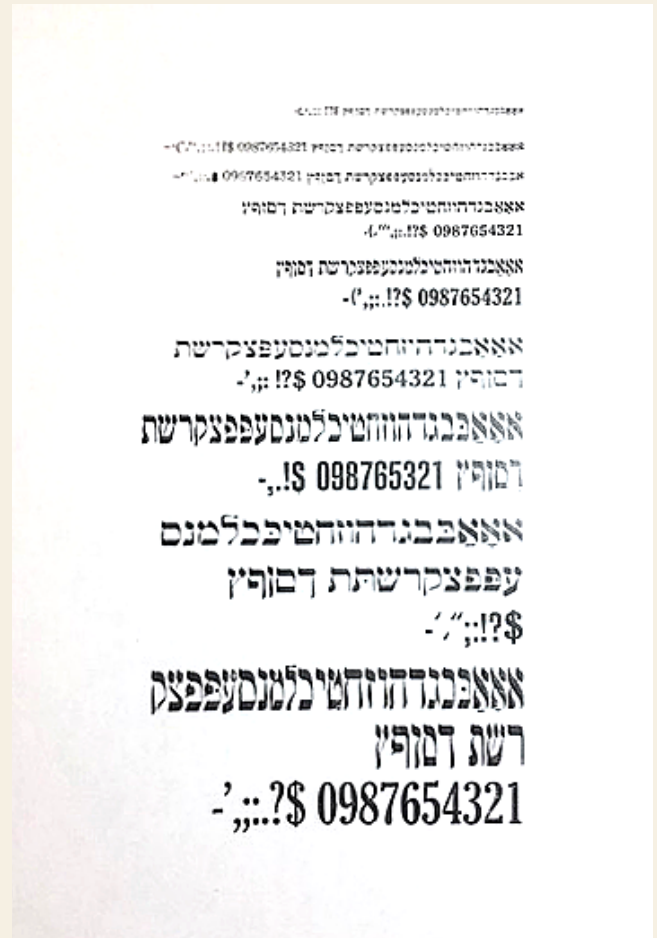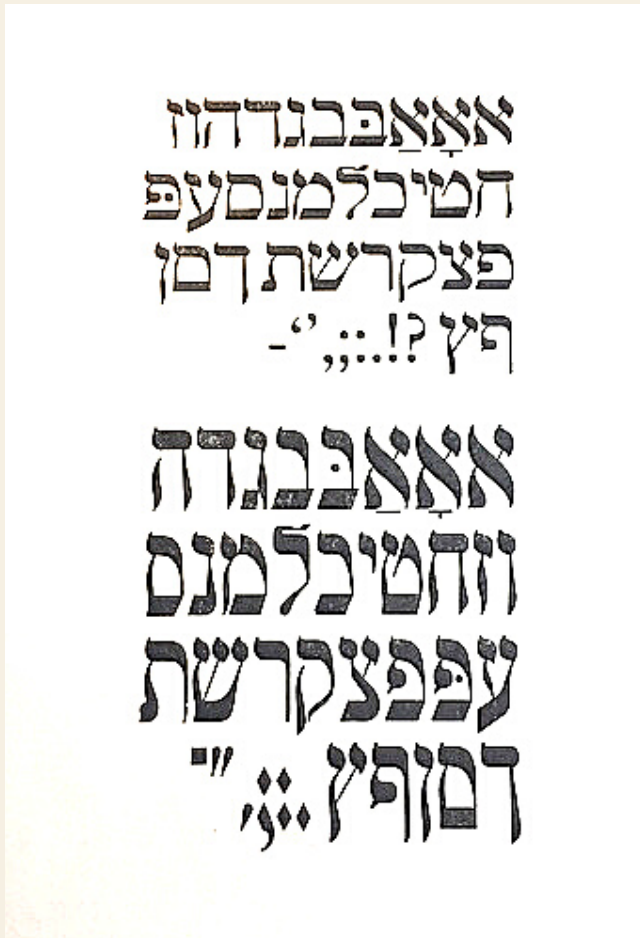
ABOVE: Printed type specimens for all fonts of Hebrew metal type within the collection, organized from smallest (8 pt) to largest (72 pt). Recall: Hebrew reads right to left! Several of these fonts are condensed forms. Take for example the largest font (72 pt) on the bottom of the left page. Whereas the letterforms of the 48 pt font above it are more square in shape, the 72 pt appears more vertically elongated (condensed).

LEFT: The larger fonts on the bed of the press, typeset, inked and ready for specimen printing.

A closer look at the typefaces

Assortment of Hebrew wood type, in fragile condition

48 pt Hebrew metal type, sharing a galley with 10 pt metal type tied up below

Large (142 pt) Hebrew display wood type. This font includes one horizontally elongated letter, the alef (א), pictured here in the upper lefthand corner.

Type cases

RIGHT: When this collection first arrived to the Bibliography Room, some of the Hebrew metal type was stored in old handmade type cases. The metal type otherwise arrived in the type cases pictured below, or simply typeset and tied up in galleys.

ABOVE: 72 pt Hebrew metal type stored in its type case

RIGHT: Label on 10 pt "light" (condensed) Hebrew metal type refers to the type as "Jewish"; this does not come as a surprise given that this type collection came from a Canadian Yiddish newspaper, and the word "Yiddish" actually means "Jewish" (see Provenance, section ג).

Type case lays

The Hebrew metal type collection is now arranged in cases based on the following type case lays (maps). These layouts document the pre-existing layout of the Hebrew type cases, with some minor adjustments for the placement of punctuation and letters that are combined.

Left panel:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
ד	ם	ו	פ	צ					

א	ב/בּ	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז
ח	ט	י	כ	כ	ל	מ
נ	ס	ע	פ	פ	צ	ק
ר	ש	ת	ת	ת	אַ/א	punctuation

Right panel:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
ד	ם	ו	פ	צ					

א	ב/בּ	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז
ח	ט	י	כ	כ	ל	מ
נ	ס	ע	פ	פ	צ	ק
ר	ש	ת	ת	ת	אַ/א	punctuation

Split Hebrew upper case (the letters are arranged alphabetically, from left to right). This case lay maps out the arrangement of the Hebrew metal typefaces that share a single case. This particular two-font holding type case is known as a "Wells Job Case" (Bolton, 2016)

Lower case — left panel:

$		(	’	‘	”
ד / !	ו	צ	ד		ע
? / ם	ל	מ	נ		ה
כ/כּ / ז	אַ	ק	א	space	

Lower case — right panel:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
ס	ב/בּ	פ	ג			ף / 9 ; ץ / 0	
אַ	י	פ	ו	ש	ח	ת	
ט	ר			; .	: –	,	

Hebrew lower case. Much like an English lower case, here the Hebrew is not arranged alphabetically, but by frequency of use (presumably for Yiddish, rather than Hebrew, typesetting). (Lower case: Bolton, 2009).

Some Hebrew printing projects to date

Hebrew sign for the Bibliography and Print Room, printed by Leora Bromberg:

Hebrew printing projects continued

Hebrew Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) cards, printed by Leora Bromberg:
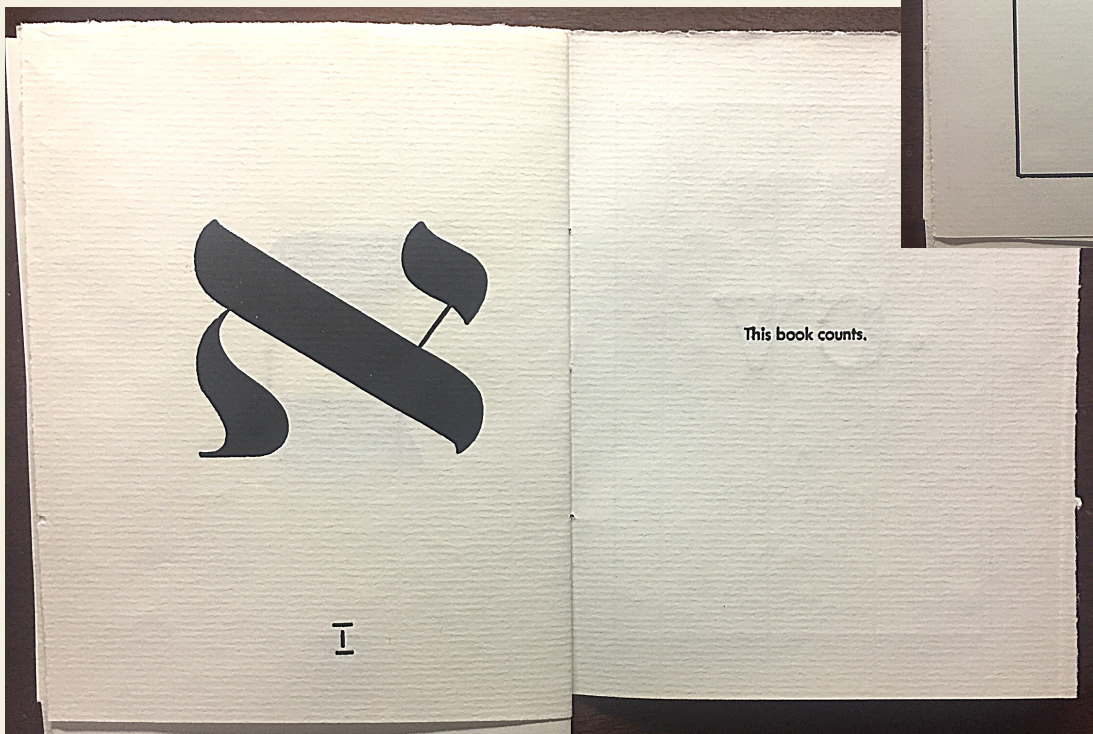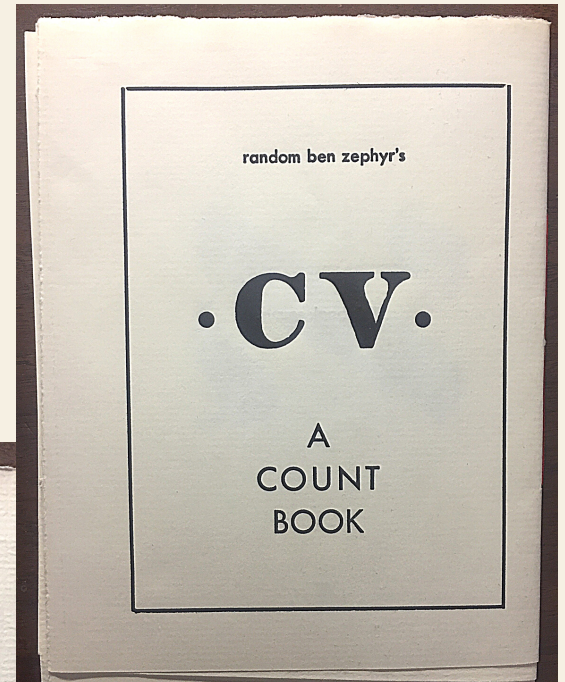
Hebrew printing projects continued

"CV: A Count Book" printed by Random Ben Zephyr (Randall McLeod), 2018.

Each page of this book presents a Hebrew letter in the order of and alongside its equivalent numerical value.

The first page reads "this book counts":

This book counts.

ג. PROVENANCE

The Balinson Hebrew Type Collection bears the name of its previous owners and their legacy within the Jewish community and in Yiddish printing in Canada. The collection was acquired by Massey College In 2013 from Joan and Morley Balinson. The Hebrew type was originally used by Morley's grandfather, Henry Balinson, who founded the International Press Printers, a print shop in Hamilton, Ontario, which operated from 1911 through the 1960s (Massey College, 2020, "Balinson Hebrew Type Collection"). This is where Henry Balinson printed Hamilton's only Yiddish-language newspaper, "Yiddishe Shtime de Hamiltoner" (the "Jewish Voice of Hamilton"), which was in print through the Second World War, from 1933-1943. Every issue of the newspaper opened with an editorial written by Henry, entitled, "Mein shpatsir iber Hamilton" ("My stroll around Hamilton"). The newspaper typically shared commentary on social, political and religious life in Hamilton at the time (Historical Hamilton, n.d.).

The heart and soul behind the paper and the print shop, Henry spoke 11 different languages, and "was an outspoken, intelligent, dynamic member of the Hamilton community." His grandson Morley first started helping out around the print shop as a young boy, and continued the legacy of Hamilton's International Press Printers until the late 1960s (Massey College, 2020, "Balinson Hebrew Type Collection").

This tied up type, found among the Hebrew collection at Massey College,
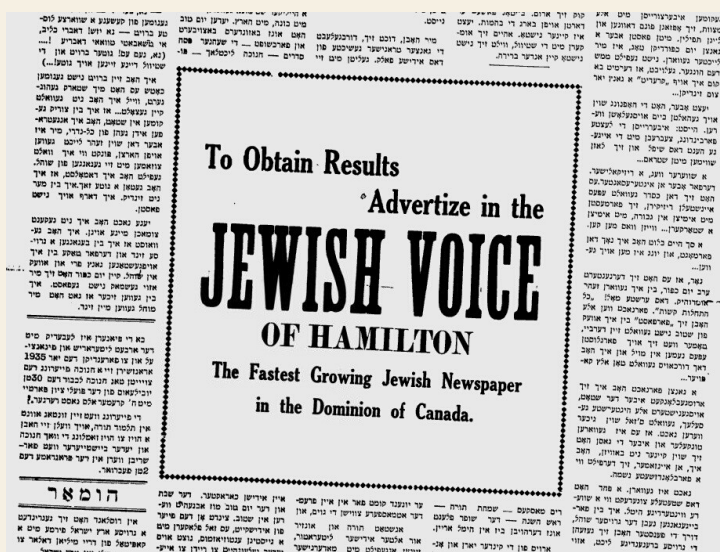bears the Hebrew and English name of Morley Balinson. It reads as follows:
      "Moshe Ariyeh Ben Yedidiyah
      Morley Balinson"

The Jewish Voice of Hamilton preserved

by Ben Shragge
December 2013
Published in the [Hamilton Jewish News](#)

The Hebrew type used to print Hamilton's only Yiddish-language newspaper will now be preserved at the University of Toronto's Massey Library.

The late Henry Balinson, a typesetter, journalist, labour activist, editor and owner of International Press Printers, published the Yiddishe Shtime de Hamiltoner ("Jewish Voice of Hamilton") monthly from the early 1930s to the 1940s.

His son, Morley, and daughter-in-law, Joan, who arranged the donation, have worked to preserve Henry's print legacy and the world of movable type it represents.

Balinson, who emigrated from Odessa, Ukraine, in 1911, was the heart and soul of the Jewish Voice of Hamilton. He wrote, reported, typeset by hand, ordered the cuts of the photographs, recruited advertisers and arranged for printing and distribution.

When asked if Balinson was religiously Orthodox, Conservative or Reform, Morley replied, "Labour." Balinson was co-founder of the Hamilton chapter of the [Arbeiter Ring](#), a Jewish socialist organization, and a card-carrying member of the typographer's union. Yet he still knew enough about religion to argue Talmud in Hebrew with the local Polish priest.

Morley recalls the paper going out to about 700 of the 1000 Jewish families in '30s and '40s Hamilton, at the price of a dollar a year.

Each issue included Balinson's signature column, Mein shpatsir iber Hamilton ("My stroll around Hamilton"), which provides a panoramic window into the Hamilton Jewish community of the time.

One "stroll" takes Balinson to Beth Jacob synagogue, where he asks "our Great God to put an end to the war," but is disappointed that "the rabbi was giving his sermon to empty seats." In an ageless complaint, Balinson asks "Where are you, Hamilton Jews? What are you so busy with?"

Balinson witnesses a congregant shouting at the rabbi at Ohev Zedeck Hess Street Shul. He plays cards and bridge at the Arbeiter Ring. He argues with the principal at the Talmud Torah school. He reports on a fatal car accident involving members of the Grand Order of Israel (a fraternal lodge). He attends a meeting at Adas Israel synagogue, where a new set of officers is elected, followed by schnapps. Finally, Henry signs off with "Have a good year, and let us live to see the downfall of Germany, Italy and Japan. Then we will sing and dance."

Domestic reporting was the paper's focus, but the Jewish Voice of Hamilton did its part in rallying the community against Hitler.

In a 1935 issue, one of the paper's occasional English-language pages features a call for boycotting the German Olympics, and that "the participation by any Canadian athlete in the Olympic Games in Germany should forever remain a blot on his name, a discredit to his team, a challenge of disapproval of Olympic Ideals in Canada!"

Jewish Hamiltonians' dismay at fascism is also reflected in domestic political appeals, for which the paper provided a platform.

In a 1937 election issue, one candidate's ad proclaims, "If you don't want a Hitler in Canada, vote O'Hanley!" More cogently, a Conservative Party supporter argues that "chaos in Government in turn produces a new political system—usually a Dictatorship, and always under such a system the Jews have suffered greatly, as witness the situation in Germany," so Jews should avoid voting for "new and untried parties" like the Stephansites, Social Credit or CCF (the precursor to today's NDP).

As antisemitic persecution mounted, the paper's call to action loudened accordingly. Joan notes "there was a very significant issue about fundraising for the war through the Red Cross," which promoted a rally held at the Royal Connaught hotel.

The war hit close to home when Balinson's son, Alexander, a Royal Canadian Air Force flight sergeant, lost his life over Malta in 1945.

Driven to despair, Balinson published an emotional front-page eulogy, lamenting that "since the time of Adam and Eve, a brother has killed a brother." By eulogy's end, Balinson vows to "break off my ties with the world."

He was true to his word, as Balinson quit publishing the paper soon after. "I really think he had no heart to continue," Joan said.

Henry died of a stomach hemorrhage at age 75 in 1961, and Morley inherited the print business.

In addition to her mission to preserve the Jewish Voice of Hamilton's legacy, Joan expressed a larger desire to "preserve this whole industry of movable type that started with Gutenberg." She noted a decline in appreciation for the art and craft of quality printing, of the kind in which Balinson and her husband specialized.

Yet there is some turnaround. Members of Hamilton's arts community, like Mixed Media's Dave Kuric, who helped to scan old issues, are interested in print as an art form.

The Jewish Voice of Hamilton is part of Hamilton's Jewish history, but Joan and Morley hope the art and appreciation of the skill of printing will be part of Hamilton's future as well.

Read a 1943 editorial by Henry Balinson.

ד. WORKING WITH HEBREW TYPE
An introduction to Hebrew type and script

Hebrew is a Semitic language, meaning that it is descended from Semitic script, which dates back to around the seventeenth century BCE (Avrin, 1986, p. 21). The Hebrew (and Yiddish) alphabet includes 22 letters, with the addition of 5 final forms (**sofit** letters; Kaf- ך, Mem- ם, Nun- ן, Fe – ף, Tzadik- ץ). The 5 sofiot (plural) represent letters within the Hebrew alphabet that assume a different form when they appear at the end of a word. The script also includes some unique punctuation and diacritical marks, called **nikkudim** ([nee-koo-deem], or nikkud [nee-kood], singular) which serve to indicate pronunciation. This is important to keep in mind as Hebrew is a consonant-only script (aka, an "abjad"), meaning that the pronunciation of vowels is typically inferred (Sadan, 2018). Most of the typefaces in the Hebrew collection do not include nikkudim, but when they do, these marks are cast onto the face of the type piece along with the letter and are usually stored in their own separate compartment of the type case. When in doubt, it is best to opt for the letters without nikkudim, as Hebrew remains legible without any vowel marks, through inference.

From the perspective of an English-speaker, or non-Hebrew speaker, the key thing to remember about the Hebrew language is that it is written and read from right to left. This also impacts the design and geometry of the letters, as the "open letterforms" face towards the left side, and serifs or other details on the letterforms typically also curve towards the left. The script appears in two different forms: square (printed/formal) and cursive (how Hebrew script typically appears when written by hand). Unlike the Latin alphabet, Hebrew has no "cases" (minuscules/majuscules) or italic forms (Sadan, 2018).

The weight of Hebrew letters hangs from the top line, which is referred to at the mem height (like the Latin x-height). The script includes one ascender (letter that extends above the mem-height)— the letter ל (lamed), which is often curved or shortened in order to save space in the type line. As for descenders (letters that extend below the mem-height), Hebrew has five: in four of the five sofiot listed above, as well as in the letter ק (kuf) (Sadan, 2018).

Glossary:

Sofit (sofiot, plural): A letter that assumes a different form when it appears at the end of a word. A trick to remembering this term is that in Hebrew, "sof" means "end." In Hebrew, the following 5 letters have a variant final form: Kaf- ך, Mem- ם, Nun- ן, Fe – ף, Tzadi- ץ

Nilkud (nikkudim, plural): the combination of dots or lines that accompany Hebrew consonants, typically attached above or below the letter, with the exception of one that is inserted inside the letter's counter (called a "dagesh"). These marks serve to indicate the pronunciation of vowels that accompany the consonants.

The Hebrew alphabet

Name	Form	Sound	Numerical value
Alef	א	a / silent	1
Bet	בּ	b	2
Vet	ב	v	2
Gimel	ג	g	3
Dalet	ד	d	4
Hay	ה	h	5
Vav	ו	v or oo	6
Zayin	ז	z	7
Chet	ח	kh	8
Tet	ט	t	9
Yud	י	y	10
Kaf	כּ	k	20
Khaf	כ	kh	20
Khaf sofit	ך	kh	
Lamed	ל	l	30
Mem	מ	m	40
Mem sofit	ם	m	
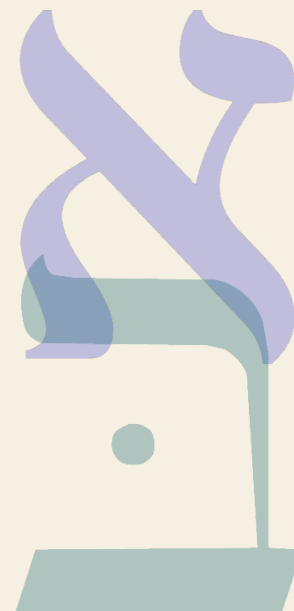
The Hebrew alphabet begins with the letter alef (א), and ends with the letter tav (ת).
Because of its first two letters, the Hebrew alphabet is often referred to as the "alef-bet" (Jewish Virtual Library, 2020).

| Name	Form	Sound	Numerical value
Nun	נ	n	50
Nun sofit	ן	n	
Samekh	ס	s	60
Ayin	ע	ay / silent	70
Pay	פ	p	80
Fay	פ	f	80
Fay sofit	ף	f	
Tzadik	צ	tz	90
Tzadik sofit	ץ	tz	
Kuf	ק	k	100
Raysh	ר	r	200
Shin	שׁ	sh	300
Sin	שׂ	s	300
Tav	ת	t	400
Sav	ת	t	400

Note: In modern Hebrew, the last two letters, tav and sav, are both pronounced as tav, even in the absence of the dagesh (point) inside the letter (Chabad, 2020).

The three width classes of Hebrew

When it comes to Hebrew metal and wood type, it is helpful keep in mind that Hebrew letters fall into three different width classes:

(Image source: Sadan, 2018)

אההחטמסססעקשת ■

בדכדלפפצץר ■

גוזינן ■
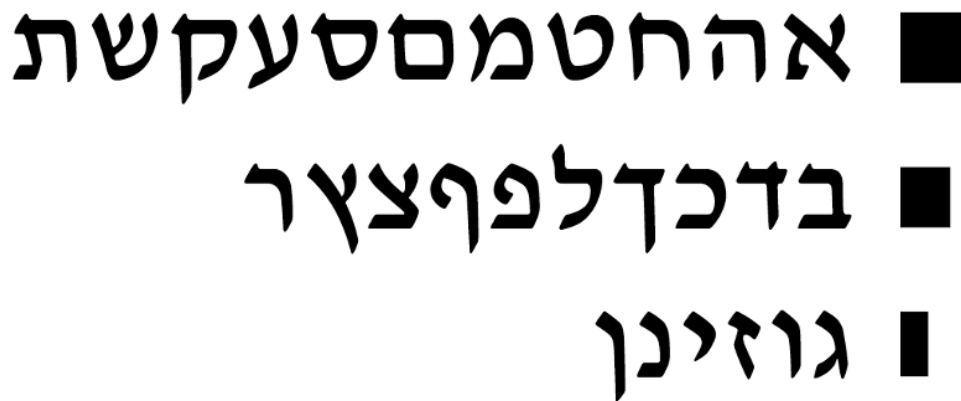
1. "Closed" letterforms, which feature 2+ vertical strokes are the widest
2. "Open" letterforms, which feature a single vertical stroke. These are slightly more compact
3. Narrowest letters, with minimal horizontal strokes

(Sadan, 2018)

Best practices for Hebrew printing at Massey College:

- When producing a print, aim towards including not just the Hebrew (or Yiddish) and its translation, but also its transliteration (transcription and approximate pronunciation using Latin script). Including transliteration seizes a learning opportunity by encouraging visitors or readers to read/sound out the Hebrew, and not just its English (or other) translation

- Utilize Hebrew terminology; refer to the end letters as sofiot, and the diacritical marks as nikkudim

- When in doubt, avoid letters with nikkudim

- Become familiar with the alphabet before you typeset or distribute type back into its type case. Many Hebrew letters have very similar forms that are often challenging to distinguish, especially in smaller point sizes

ה. OTHER HEBREW TYPE COLLECTIONS

📍 *Rochester, NY: Cary Graphic Arts Collection,*
        Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT)
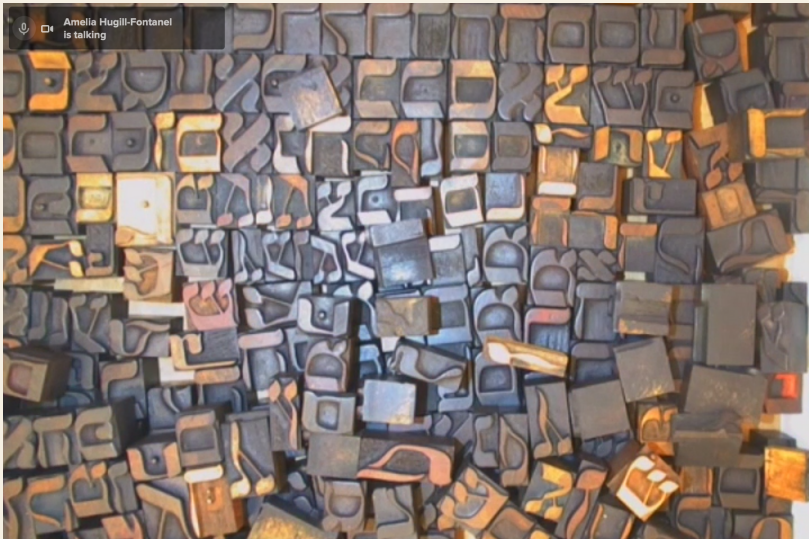
The Cary Graphic Arts Collection holds a vast collection of metal and wood type, including 40 different fonts of Hebrew wood type. Their collection is also actively used for printing and teaching (Rochester Institute of Technology, n.d.)

LEFT: Screenshot of an assortment of Hebrew wood type held in the Cary Collection, viewed over video call with Librarian Amelia Hugill-Fontanel.

📍 *Amherst, MA: The Schepps Family Yiddish Print Shop,*
        Yiddish Book Center

The Schepps Family Yiddish Print Shop at the Yiddish Book Center preserves the last Yiddish linotype machine and a variety of printing equipment including Hebrew wood and metal type display typefaces. This printing equipment is on permanent exhibition. In other words, it is used for display purposes only, and no longer used for active printing projects. Though visitors cannot touch or print with these materials, the space aims to relate the history of the Yiddish press in America
(Yiddish Book Center, n.d.; Halff, n.d.).

Image source: Halff, n.d.

The last known Yiddish linotype machine, preserved at the Yiddish Book Center. The machine was rescued In 1991 from the Yiddish newspaper the Forward, when they transitioned to computerized printing (Yiddish Book Center, n.d.; Halff, n.d.).

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