

Hebrew For Singers

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In recent years there has been an increasing interest in performing Jewish choral literature on programs other than within the Jewish Service. Academic training in higher education usually neglects this area in both repertoire and proper performance. There are no set guidelines available for pronouncing the transliterations that appear in the literature, short of learning to read the actual language and then having that Hebrew written in the music.

Listed below is a system compiled by this writer that is based on selected, yet common, Jewish choral music. This system includes a variety of ways one Hebrew sound may be transliterated. The phonetic symbols in the fourth column employ the International Phonetic Alphabet symbols and the stress mark, which precedes the stressed syllable, as used in Kenyon and Knott. *A Pronouncing Dictionary To American English*, (G & C Merriam Company, 1953).

A very helpful source has been an article on transliteration compiled by a committee representing faculty from several

Hebrew institutes including: Hebrew Union College, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Rabbinical Assembly, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. [Contact the author for more information on this article, Editor.] They have formulated a specific sign for each sound (the ones marked with an *) in the hope of having this become a universally accepted system some day soon.

Use the tools of this system as a beginning. They will assist conductors in a better understanding and will go beyond mere rote repetition. After attaining this level of pronunciation, it is still recommended that conductors check their work with a local cantor or rabbi, or a student who reads Hebrew. To sing this repertoire in its original language is to bring a new, yet vital, dimension to the growth of any choir. The conductor's scholarly effort is certain to provide singers and listeners with a greater appreciation and understanding of a special genre of choral music.

Vowels

English vowel	English word	Transliteration of Hebrew	IPA symbols	Spelling of vowel in transliteration
ū	date	r'tay	rə ^ˈ te	ay*
		b'shachbeynu	bə ^ˈ ʃaX ^ˈ benu	ey
		y'malel	jə ^ˈ ma ^ˈ lel	e
		yivneh	ˈjəvne	eh
ō	home	meiata	mei ^a ˈta	ei
		shovas	ʃ ^o v ^a s	o*
		me	mi	e
ē	eat	mee	mi	ee
eh	bed	imrei	ˈimre	i*
		yihyu	ji ^ˈ jiu	ih
		zoh	zɛ	eh
oo	moon	melekh	ˈmɛlɛX	e*
		b'shuv	bə ^ˈ ʃuv	u*
		b'shuv	bə ^ˈ ʃuv	any consonant followed by an apostrophe
neutral uh	a cross between pit and put	hashomayim	ha ^ˈ ʃo ^ˈ ma ^ˈ jim	a* also ah
ah	father	adonai	a ^ˈ do ^ˈ na ^ˈ i	ai
ahi	night	yisroel	jisr ^ˈ ɔ ^ˈ ʔel	o
aw	bought			(the aw sound is out of date)

Consonants

In order as they appear in the Hebrew alphabet and sounding in Hebrew as they would in English.

b,g,d,h,z,l,y,k,l,m,s,p,f,r,v

The combinations ch, tz, and sh, are also in the Hebrew alphabet as single consonants. In English it is a combination of two for the one sound.

ch	ach	chayey	Xa ^ˈ jei	ch
		hug	Xag	h
		hug	Xag	h
tz	hits	arets	l ^a rɛ ^ˈ ts	ts
		tzuri	tsu ^ˈ ri	tz
sh	sh	shomayim	ʃo ^ˈ ma ^ˈ jim	sh