Syllables: Nikud = Syllables

We have already learned that there can be both ***open syllables*** (ending in a soft vowel sound) and ***closed syllables*** (ending in a hard consonant sound with no vowel after it) The next thing we need to understand about syllables in Hebrew, is that *all syllables begin with a consonant*, with the exception of a Vav acting as a vowel (such as shureq) in which case this conjunction generally stands alone as a syllable. However, as discussed, the syllable can end with either a consonant (closed) or another vowel (open).

The important thing here to grasp is that there is **ONE VOWEL PER SYLLABLE**. In other words, the number of syllables in a word is the same as the number of vowels. When in doubt count the nikud! This is somewhat of a gray area with the silent vowel, sheva, but as a general rule it is also counted as a syllable.

Syllable Marks

Most Hebrew words will carry the accent on the LAST SYLLABLE. However, this is not always the case and that is where these marks come in.

With the exception of some words joined by a hyphen *(called a maqqef in Hebrew*) such as:

כִּי־טוֹב

Every word in the Tanakh has an accent mark on the stressed syllable. In total there are there are 48 poetic accent marks used in the text.These marks (like the vowel marks) may appear above or below the word.
We are not going to attempt to learn them all, as again, the focus of this class is to give you the tools you need to study the Biblical Hebrew in the Tanakh. However we will learn about the two main types and the three most common ones.

Pausal vs. Connecting

Most accent marks fit into one of these two main categories. Pausal or '*Disjunctive Accents*,' as their name suggests, mark a pause or break in the reading of the text. We don't think about it much but in English our punctuation functions this way as well. When we read aloud we pause at commas, semicolons, colons, and periods in English.

Pausal/Disjunctive Marks
There are lots of these pausal accent marks you might see in the Hebrew text, but the two most common are:

א
^

• ***AtnacH***- Placed under the last word of the first half of a verse.

א֑

• ***Sillug*** - Placed under the last word of the second half of a verse.

By pausing when you come to these marks, as you would a comma in English, you will find a poetic meter is obtained.

Connecting/Conjunctive Marks

There are also a good handful of these but the main and most common one is called the *Munach:*

It appears as a little foot under the Reish in the word RuacH. As the name suggests, it acts as a bridge joining (in this example) the R sound to the shureq (ooh). This tells us this word is pronounced not as *Ver-oo-**acH***, but as *V'-**roo**- ach*, with the accent falling not on the last syllable but on the middle syllable.

'*Punctuation*'
In addition to these, there are also the maqqef (hyphen) that joins two words as if they were one. We have seen this come up in this last lesson.

כי־תוֹב

There is also the *Sof Pasuk,* which appears similar to a colon, it functions as a period. You probably notice the word Sof the masculine form of Sofit (final) as in Nun Sofit, Mem Sofit etc. This mark acts exactly as a period, closing a verse.

הארצ׃

There are some manuscripts in which the Pey (or if you prefer, Fey since the dagesh is not present) is used to close a verse as well- sometimes after the Sof Pasuk, other times it is enclosed in brackets.

ה ויקרא אלהים לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה ויהי ערב ויהי 5

בקר יום אחד {פ}

Hebrew Root Words

Traditionally, all Hebrew words go back to a three letter root word, called a *shoresh*. Some more modern words do not follow this format, but in general this is the rule. As we have seen, more complex Hebrew words can be formed from these root words depending upon nikud or by adding a prefix and/or suffix to that root. As we have seen, prefixes are often a single letter, and some are prepositions such as Beyt or Lamed (in, to, of, on, etc.). Some are articles such as Hey (the), and finally others are conjunctions such as Vav (and). Suffixes can be pronouns (she, he, you, our, etc.), possessives (soandso's), or can indicate gender and number (female/ male, singular/ plural, etc.)

Below we will go through a few variations of Root words we have already learned:

רֹאשׁ (Rosh) Head, Chief, etc. *(Masculine Noun)*

רֵאשִׁית (Reishit) Beginning *(Feminine form)*

בְּרֵאשִׁית(B'resheet) **In** (*the*) Beginning

אֱלֹהַ(E'lo-ha) Creator/Mighty One

אֱלֹהֵי(E'lo-hei) El of

וֵאלֹהֵי(Vey'lo-hei) And El of

אֱלֹהִים(E'lo-him) One of Mightiness

Hopefully, this helps you see the pattern of how words are built by adding these various prefixes and suffixes to a root word. To aid you in recognizing this pattern appear in words we will now introduce Pronouns and Pronominal Suffixes:

Pronouns:

As is the case in English, in Hebrew, the pronoun (he she, they, etc) agrees with the previously mentioned subject (antecedent) in gender, person, and number.

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter*
1st Person Singular (I)			Ani אֲנִי AnokHi (אָנֹכִי)
2nd Person Singular (you)	Attah אַתָּה	At אַתְּ	
3rd Person Singular (he, she, it)	Hoo הוּא	He הִיא Hiv (הֶוא)	
1st Person Plural (we)			אֲנַחְנוּ AnacHnoo Anoo (אָנוּ)
2nd Person Plural (you)	Atem אַתֶּם	Aten אַתֶּן (אַתֵּנָה) Ateynah	
3rd Person Plural (they)	Haym הֵם (הֵמָּה) Haymmah	Hayn הֵן (הֵנָּה) Haynnah	

**same for male or female subject*

Pronomial Suffixes:

In Hebrew a noun often has a pronoun attached to it as a suffix so its as if in English rather than saying 'his friend,' the word friend would turn into friendhis (or friendher). Here is a table showing those 'pronomial suffixes'

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
1st Person Singular (my)			iyee אִי
2nd Person Singular (your)	ka אְךָ	eykH אֵךְ	
3rd Person Singular (his, hers, its)	oh וֹ	ah אָהּ	
1st Person Plural (our)			aynee אֵנִי
2nd Person Plural (your)	aykHem אְכֶם	aykHen אְכֶן	
3rd Person Plural (their)	ahm אָם	ahn אָן	

**same for male or female subject*

NOTE: The Aleph used here might be any consonant an Aleph is used for uniformity only.