

## **A standardised braille code for Yiddish proposed by Vivian Aldridge**

(last amended 11th December 2000)

Based on the Hebrew braille code as expounded in "ספר הבראיל" by Rivka Rosenzweig, published (1995) by the Central Library for the Blind, Visually Impaired and Handicapped, Netanya, Israel.

### **Background**

As Yiddish is written using the Hebrew alphabet, it is logical to use the Hebrew braille code as the basis for a Yiddish braille code. However, Yiddish does not always use the alphabet in exactly the same way as in Hebrew. Great variations are encountered in Yiddish orthography, depending on the date and place of printing, the type of publication and so on. For instance, older texts may show German influence in the spelling, books from the Soviet Union may be written entirely phonetically and publications of religiously orthodox circles may show full Hebrew pointing.

Within Yiddish itself the alphabet is also used in two fundamentally different ways:

- words borrowed from Hebrew and Aramaic are usually written as is customary for these languages
- words of other origin (Germanic, Slavic, Romantic etc.) are written more or less phonetically using a modified form of the Hebrew alphabet.

A Yiddish braille code must conform to the Hebrew code and at the same time allow for all orthographic variations without becoming excessively complicated.

### **Rules for the writing of Yiddish**

The letters have all been taken from the Hebrew braille code.

- If the print letter can be rendered by various braille signs according to its pronunciation, then the most suitable must be chosen in Yiddish, e.g. khof (and not kof) in the word ikh (אִיךְ), beyz and not veyz in the word hobn (האָבן)
- The letters of the pairs beyz and veyz (בֵּי, בֵּי), khof and kof (כּ, כּ), pey and fey (פֵּי, פֵּי), shin and sin (שׁ, שׂ) are always to be written with the appropriate braille signs, no matter how - or even whether - they are distinguished from one another in the print.



## Listings of letters, punctuation and braille auxiliary signs

Letters	Name	Dots
א	shtumer alef	1
א	komets-alef	1 - 1,2,6
א	pasekh-alef	1 - 1,4
ב	beyz	1,2
ב	veyz	1,2,3,6
ג	giml	1,2,4,5
ד	daled	1,4,5
ה	hey	1,2,5
ו	vov (consonantal only) *	2,4,5,6
וו	tsvey vovn	2,4,5,6 - 2,4,5,6
װ	melupm-vov *	1,3,6
ױ	kholem-vov	1,3,5
ױ	vov-yud	1,3,5 - 2,4
ז	zayin	1,3,5,6
ח	khes	1,3,4,6
ט	tes	2,3,4,5
י	yud (consonantal only) **	2,4,5
ײ	khirek-yud **	2,4
ײ	tsvey yudn	2,4 - 2,4
ײ	pasekh-tsvey-yudn	2,4 - 2,4 - 1,4
כ	khof, langer khof	1,6
כ	kof	1,3
ל	lamed	1,2,3
מ	men, shlos-men	1,3,4
נ	nun, langer nun	1,3,4,5
ס	samekh	2,3,4
ע	ayen	1,2,4,6
פ	pey	1,2,3,4
פ	fey, langer fey	1,2,4
צ	tsadek, langer tsadek	2,3,4,6
ק	kuf	1,2,3,4,5
ר	reysh	1,2,3,5
ש	shin	1,4,6
ש	sin	1,5,6
ת	sof, tof	1,4,5,6

\* In phonetically written Yiddish words, vocalic vov is always written with the braille sign for melupm-vov

\*\* In phonetically written Yiddish words, vocalic yud is always written with the braille sign for khirek-yud

Punctuation	Name	Dots
,	comma	2
;	semicolon	2,3
:	colon	2,5
.	period	2,5,6
?	query	2,6
!	exclamation	2,3,5
'	apostrophe (geyresh)	3
"	quotes (gershaim)	2,3,6
/	oblique stroke	3,4
)	parenthesis (open)	2,3,5,6
(	parenthesis (close)	2,3,5,6
]	square bracket (open)	6 - 2,3,5,6
[	square bracket (close)	2,3,5,6 - 3
}	brace (open)	1,2,3,4,6
{	brace (close)	1,3,4,5,6
...	ellipsis	2,5,6 - 2,5,6 - 2,5,6
*	asterisk	3,5 - 3,5
-	hyphen (makef)	3,6
	dash	3,6 - 3,6
	long dash	3,6 - 3,6 - 3,6 - 3,6

Sign	Use	Dots
⠠	number sign (with ⠠ ⠠ ⠠ ⠠ ⠠ ⠠ ⠠ ⠠ ⠠ ⠠ )	3,4,5,6
⠠	word in bold or emphatic print *	4,6
⠠	word in a non-Hebrew alphabet *	4,6
⠠	small Latin letter(s) **	5,6
⠠	capital Latin letter (followed by small ones) **	6
⠠	capital Latin letters **	6 - 6
⠠	stressed syllable	4,5,6
⠠	end of emphasis etc.	6 - 3
⠠	dagesh	5

\* Where three or more words appear in bold print or in a non-Hebrew alphabet this sign is doubled before the first word and appears singly before the last.

\*\* Whole words and phrases appearing in Latin letters are introduced by the sign 4,6 and then one of these signs. When single letters are used as a literal ordinal system (e.g. for paragraphs) the sign 4,6 is not required.

## Points for discussion

The following questions - and more - arise in connection with the proposal. My solutions are based on the analysis of many examples of Yiddish written in many different ways. A major consideration was that the form of a word should not be completely altered depending on the style of the print text that it was transcribed from.

1. Is it right to differentiate letters in braille, where they appear the same in print? As Hebrew braille does this, it seems appropriate - and even necessary - to do so in braille, too.
2. Is it correct to always interpret vocalic yud in phonetic orthography as equivalent to khirek yud?
3. Is the yud in the ending yud-ayin of many internationalisms vocalic or consonantal? Is this standard for all such words or does it depend on the preceding sounds? Are there regional variations?
4. Where a khirek has been placed under a yud as a diaeresis to differentiate two vowels from a diphthong as vocalic yud with a separate khirek, is it sensible to write both vocalic yud and a separate khirek?
5. Are both the yudn in the letters tsvey-yudn and paekh-tsvey-yudn vocalic? The placing of the pasekh under both and, very rarely, the placing of two khireks would seem to support this. The YIVO transcription as EY and AY respectively may raise some doubt.
6. Should the pasekh of pasekh-tsvey-yudn be written after the first or the second yud in braille? In works where this Yiddish letter was not available for printing, it is almost invariably written under the first yud. If the two yudn function as one letter, it seems more appropriate to place the pasekh after the pair.
7. Is it correct to always interpret vocalic vov in phonetic orthography as equivalent to melupm-vov, except in the combination vov-yud?
8. When vocalic vov appears in Semitic orthography, are there situations when it is not sensible to differentiate between melupm-vov and kholem-vov? Is a differentiation in the various Semitic endings with vov and sof feasible?
9. Is the yud in vov-yud really equivalent to one with kholem? (Orthodox story books seem to confirm by pointing the vov so.)
10. Should sof and tof always be differentiated by the dagesh sign when this appears in print? Are there examples of words where the presence or omission of dagesh would be different in Hebrew and Yiddish?







