The Magical Aleph Bet Forest Adventure

A story by Mordechai Chesno



An illustrated adventure for children new to Hebrew

Before You Enter the Forest

Stand by the two trees in your imagination. Whisper your name. When you turn the page, the forest is waiting for you.

Read a chapter together or follow the path on your own. After each story, the Forest Treasure page has a few Hebrew words, a sound to try, and a question to talk about. You can come back to the Aleph Bet Guide whenever you want to look up a letter.

The Forest Path

Aleph to Kaf	Lamed to Tav
Aleph 3 · א	Lamed 25 · ל
Bet 5 · ב	Mem 27 · מ
Gimel 7 · ג	Nun 29 · נ
Dalet 9 · ד	Samech 31 · ס
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The complete alphabet, four letters with two sounds, and the five final forms.

Aleph and the Forest Gate



Once upon a time, in a faraway land, you lived near a forest that the older children talked about in whispers. This was no ordinary forest. They said the letters of the Aleph Bet glowed among the trees.

Curiosity got the better of you. Off you went to see what all the fuss was about.

At the edge of the forest, two great trees touched high above the path, forming an entrance. Behind you, the sun shone. Between the trees, it looked as dark as night. Should you go in?

You really wanted to learn the Aleph Bet, just as the older children had. But now you had that first day of school feeling. Your feet wanted to go forward, and your tummy wanted to stay right where it was.

So you took one step. Then another.

Just beyond the trees, a golden letter floated in the air. Standing on tiptoe, you reached out and touched it. Suddenly, a bright light spilled across the path. In the middle of it lay a lion. Wow!

“Welcome, friend. I’m Aryeh,” said the lion. “And that letter you found is Aleph.”

Aryeh waited while you caught your breath. Then he lowered his great golden head until his eyes were level with yours. You reached out and felt the soft fur between his ears.

“Aleph is the first letter in *ahava*,” he said. “That’s our Hebrew word for love.”

You sat together for a moment. You could hear the leaves rustling and the lion’s breathing.

“Now listen to Aleph,” Aryeh whispered.

“Before we speak, we listen,” said Aleph. “Try being silent for a moment. In English, silent and listen use the very same letters.”

You grew quiet. Somewhere in the forest, a twig snapped.

“Find the letters in order,” said Aryeh. “Each will show you the way to the next and teach you something along the way.”

Aryeh tipped an ear toward the trees. From farther down the path came a sweet little tune. “Follow that sound. Bet is waiting.”

Aleph Forest Treasure

א

Words from the forest

אַרְיֵה · Aryeh · lion

אַהֲבָה · Ahava · love

Try the sound

Aleph often has no separate consonant sound in everyday Israeli Hebrew. Look at the vowel mark and try אַ (ah), אֶ (eh), אִ (ee), אֹ (oh), and אֻ (oo).

Courage and listening

You took a step even though you felt unsure. Then you stopped and listened. What's one quiet sound you can hear right now?

For parents and carers

In the story's mystical reading, Aleph's quietness makes room for what follows. Aryeh waits beside you, and in that silence you hear the first hint of the next letter. What can your child hear when you sit quietly together?

Bet and the House in the Branches



Ahead of you, a blue bird hopped from branch to branch, singing the tune you'd heard beside Aryeh. You followed until the bird landed at a nest that looked remarkably like a house. Bright balloons bobbed at the entrance.

"friend, come into my *bayit*," said the bird. "I've just poured some chocolate milk."

Inside, a golden Bet glowed beside a tiny window. You took a long sip. The room smelled like warm wood and felt as cozy as your own home.

"Why do birds build nests?" asked the bird.

"To keep their babies safe?"

"That's part of it," said the bird. "When they learn to fly, they'll know where they can come back to."

You looked out at the enormous forest. It felt good to know that your home would be there when you got back, too.

"Before you go, I have a *bracha* for you," said the bird. "May your own home be a place of warmth and comfort for everyone who visits you."

You thanked the bird and untied the balloons at the door. You thought they might float along above you. Instead, they pulled your heels off the ground.

"Hold tight!" called the bird.

"Safe travels!" called out Bet.

Up you went, past the roof of the little house. The bird waved from the branch. Beyond the treetops, a grey cloud was rolling in.

Bet Forest Treasure

ב ב

Words from the forest

בַּיִת · Bayit · house or home

בְּרָכָה · Bracha · blessing

Try the sound

Look for the dot. בּ makes the b sound in bread. Without the dot, ב makes the v sound in vine. Can you spot the dot in בַּיִת?

Belonging

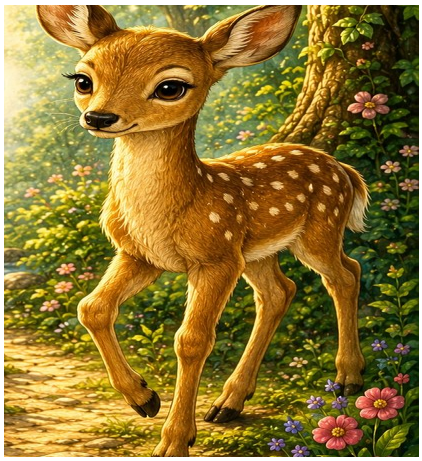
The bird's nest was a place to come back to, no matter how far you flew. Who helps you feel at home? How could you help someone else feel welcome?

For parents and carers

The Torah opens with Bereishit (בְּרֵאשִׁית), whose first letter is Bet. In the story's Kabbalistic reading, the nest is a bayit, a home that can hold what is precious. The quiet light you first met in Aleph now has a place to dwell.

Source · Genesis 1:1

Gimel and the Rain



The first raindrop landed on your nose. Then the balloons lifted you a little higher, and the rain began to fall beneath your feet.

"*Geshem*," you whispered. You watched it patter on the leaves and run in little rivers down the bark. The flowers below lifted their heads. You wondered if the flowers in your own garden were getting a drink too.

A glowing letter drifted toward you. It was tall enough to make you think of a camel stretching its neck to reach a leaf.

"*Shalom*, friend," it said. "I'm Gimel."

You held the balloon strings in one hand and reached out with the other. Gimel was cool to the touch, like a smooth stone after rain.

"Do you see that little patch of green?" asked Gimel.

You looked down. A plant that had been drooping by the path was standing a little straighter.

"It only needed a drink," you said.

"And the cloud had one to spare," said Gimel.

The rain softened. A young deer stepped out to drink from a puddle. As if the balloons knew it was time, they lowered you until your shoes touched the wet path. You tied the strings to a low branch so they could dry in the breeze.

"Remember," said Gimel as you set off, "even a small act of kindness can brighten someone's day."

Through the trees ahead, you saw a door standing all by itself.

Gimel Forest Treasure

ג

Words from the forest

גֶּשֶׁם · Geshem · rain

גִּנָּה · Gina · garden

גָּמָל · Gamal · camel

Try the sound

Gimel makes the g sound in go. Say geshem, gina, and gamal. Can you hear the same sound at the start of each word?

Kindness

From up among the balloons, you saw the rain give a thirsty plant a drink. What's one small thing you could do to help someone today?

For parents and carers

The Talmud reads Gimel and Dalet together as gemol dalim, an invitation to give to people in need. In the forest, the rain reaches the plants that need it. How can we notice what someone needs before they ask?

Source · Shabbat 104a

Dalet and the Golden Key



As you neared the door, you spotted another forest friend inside. It was Dov the bear. He beckoned you closer. “Come in!”

You’d begun to feel hungry. Dov sat eating a honey and peanut butter sandwich, with a little honey on his nose.

“*Shalom*!” he said. “There’s enough for two.”

Peanut butter and *d’vash* sandwiches were your favourites from home. You sat beside Dov and told him about the balloons. He listened all the way to the part where your feet touched the ground again.

Then the door gave a soft golden glow.

“What makes your *delet* so special?” you asked.

“Watch,” said Dov. He opened it a little wider.

A tiny mouse stood at the threshold. The mouse looked at the table, then back at the path.

Dov beckoned to the mouse. “Come in.” He broke off a piece of his sandwich and set it on a little plate. The mouse stepped inside.

Above the doorway, a golden Dalet lit up. You saw how a door could make room for someone, just as Dov had made room for you.

Dov handed you a small golden key.

“What does it open?” you asked.

“The doors that kindness creates.”

You tucked it into your pocket. The room was warm, and after the climb and the rain, your eyes were beginning to close.

As you began drifting off to sleep, you heard Dov whisper, “Open your heart to new friends and new beginnings.”

Dalet Forest Treasure

ד

Words from the forest

דֶּלֶת · Delet · door

דֹּב · Dov · bear

דְּבַשׁ · D’vash · honey

דִּירָה · Dira · apartment

Try the sound

Dalet makes the d sound in door. Say delet, dov, and d’vash. Can you hear the d at the start of each word?

Opportunity

Dov opened the door wider and shared his sandwich. What could you say to someone who’s standing nearby and wants to join in?

For parents and carers

The Talmud pairs Gimel and Dalet in a teaching about giving. In the story’s mystical reading, Dov’s open door gives kindness a place to enter. What helps us notice someone who hasn’t yet found the words to ask?

Source · Shabbat 104a

Hey and the Gift of Breath



You curled up beside Dov and fell asleep. When you awoke, Dov was still there. A butterfly rested on the windowsill, and a warm light floated just beyond your nose.

You breathed out. The light formed a little golden letter.

“Hey,” said Dov.

You thought he was greeting you, so you said, “*Shalom*.”

Dov laughed softly. “That’s its name. Look again.”

You let out another breath. There it was, the letter ה, Hey, floating in the air for a moment before it melted away.

“Breath is a special gift,” said Dov. “You’ve had it with you all day.”

You hadn’t paid much attention to it until now. You took a gentle breath and let it go slowly. This time, you could feel your shoulders relax.

“I think I’ll remember that when the path gets dark,” you said.

At the doorway, you stopped to thank Dov for the sandwich and the key. Then you took one more breath. A golden mist drifted from your mouth and curled around you like a scarf.

As you were leaving, Dov said, “Keep noticing the beauty around you with curiosity and joy.”

You could still smell honey on your fingers. Ahead, the trees were beginning to darken, but you felt ready to go. Something green stretched between two branches, catching the last of the light.

Hey Forest Treasure

ה

Words from the forest

הוֹרִים · Horim · parents

הַר · Har · mountain

הִיפּוֹפּוֹטָם · Hipopotam · hippopotamus

Try the sound

Say har slowly. Can you feel the little puff of air as you start the word? Try that same h sound at the beginning of horim.

Wonder

You'd been breathing all day. When Hey appeared, you noticed what a quiet little wonder that was. Take a gentle breath. What else can you notice around you?

For parents and carers

In Genesis, God breathes life into the first human. In the story, the glowing Hey gives that invisible gift a shape the child can see. You might pause together to give thanks for something you usually do without thinking.

Source · Genesis 2:7

Vav and the Connector Vine



The green thing was a vine. It curled around one tree, stretched across the path, and curled around another. A little golden mist from Hey still clung to your shoulders as you stepped closer.

"*Shalom*!" said the vine.

"You can talk?"

"Of course," it said. "I'm Vav. Watch what I can join."

A bee landed on a flower. Two squirrels scampered along the vine from opposite trees and met in the middle. The branch dipped as they bumped noses.

Then Aleph and Bet floated down and settled beside each other. Together they made the word *av*, father. Vav curled into place at the beginning. Now the word said *ve'av*, and a father.

"Such a little word," you said.

"Little enough to fit between two big ideas," said Vav.

You thought about all the people who helped you grow. Some lived close by. Others were far away. You could still think of something that joined you to each one.

Vav looped a little tendril around your wrist like a friendship bracelet. Then the vine stretched ahead through the trees.

"Follow me as far as I go," said Vav. "And wherever you go next, bring people together through friendship and caring."

You did. At the end of the vine, something bright zipped across the path.

Vav Forest Treasure

ו

Words from the forest

וֶרֶד · Vered · rose

וִילוֹן · Vilon · curtain

וָו · Vav · hook

Try the sound

Vav makes the v sound in vine. Say vered and vilon. Can you feel your top teeth touch your lower lip as you make the sound?

Connection

The vine gave the squirrels a way to reach each other. Who would you make a friendship bracelet for?

For parents and carers

Rabbi Aaron L. Raskin describes Vav as a hook connecting the spiritual and everyday worlds. When a feeling of care becomes a call, a visit, or a helping hand, someone else can feel it too.

Source · Aaron L. Raskin, Letters of Light, “Vav”

Zayin and the Dancing Spark



Zip! Zoom! Zig-zag!

Tiny golden lights raced around the end of Vav's vine. One stopped in front of you and spun until it formed the letter ז, Zayin.

"*Shalom*, friend!" laughed the letter. "I'm Zayin."

A zebra trotted out from behind a tree. Golden sparks danced along the stripes. The zebra took two careful steps, then spun so fast that a whole pile of leaves flew up.

You laughed and nearly fell over.

"That's my friend," said Zayin. "Always ready to make a little joy."

The zebra tried the same turn again and landed in the leaves. This time, both of you laughed. You clapped a rhythm and the zebra tried to follow it, getting the last beat quite wrong.

"Do you want to try?" asked Zayin.

You stamped once. The zebra stamped back. Soon you were making up a dance as you went.

When the lights began to settle, Zayin caught a spark and placed it in your hand. It was small enough to tuck beside Dov's key.

"A reminder to share your enthusiasm and help others smile," said Zayin.

You took two more dancing steps down the path. Then you noticed flowers on either side of a gate, and you slowed down to see what was growing there.

Zayin Forest Treasure

ז

Words from the forest

זֶבְרָה · Zebra · zebra

זָהָב · Zahav · gold

זֹהַר · Zohar · glow

Try the sound

Say zzz, like the first sound in zip. Try zebra, zahav, and zohar. Can you hear Zayin at the start of each word?

Joy

The zebra danced, and soon you wanted to dance too. What's one little thing you'd like to do with someone you love?

For parents and carers

In the Tanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi describes joy as a source of energy for spiritual effort. Zayin's spark gives that teaching a shape a child can imagine. A shared song or a moment of play can help us find the energy to take the next step.

Source · Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 26

Chet and the Garden Gate



A small turtle was making his way across the path. When a butterfly brushed past, Chaim tucked his head into his shell. A moment later, he peeked out again.

Behind the turtle, two posts and a beam stood at the entrance to the garden. Together, they formed the shape of the letter ח, Chet.

“Welcome, friend,” said Chaim the turtle, opening the gate.

Inside, birds nestled among tall flowers. A rabbit slept in the shade. You could hear the forest outside, but the sound was softer here.

“Why does the garden need a gate?” you asked.

“To give the little things time to grow,” said Chaim. “Look beside your foot.”

Tiny shoots were pushing through the soil. Now that you were looking closely, the garden seemed full of little things growing.

You thought of Hey and let out a gentle breath. The golden mist appeared around your shoulders. It reminded you of sitting beside Dov, where you’d felt safe enough to fall asleep.

Chaim stretched out of his shell. “This is my *bayit*, my home. Some things that shelter us are easy to see. Some we can feel.”

“Like when someone stays with you?” you asked.

“Exactly,” said Chaim. “Care for others and help everyone feel safe and welcome.”

Chaim nodded and placed a golden leaf shaped like ח in your palm. You tucked it beside Zayin’s spark. At the far gate, Chaim lifted one little foot to wave. You waved back, then followed the path into the shade.

Chet Forest Treasure

ח

Words from the forest

חָבֵר · Chaver · friend

חִיוּךְ · Chiyuch · smile

חַיִּים · Chaim · life

Try the sound

Listen to the first sound in Chaim. It's a gentle kh sound from the back of your mouth. Try it slowly, then say chaver.

Safety and peace

Chaim had a shell for shelter. The golden leaf reminded you of people who help you feel safe. What could you do to help a friend feel at ease?

For parents and carers

In a teaching about the sukkah, the Lubavitcher Rebbe describes its shelter as an expression of God's embrace. Chet's garden offers a similar image. The gate shelters what's growing inside, and the people who care for a child give that child room to grow.

Source · The Lubavitcher Rebbe, "The Eternal Embrace"

Tet and the Hidden Treasure



The path grew quiet. Specks of light flashed in the dark. You followed them to a cave whose mouth curved like the letter ט.

Inside, crystals threw tiny stars across the walls. Golden coins lay in heaps. A letter glowed in the middle of it all.

“I’m Tet,” it said. “Can you find my greatest treasure?”

You pointed to a jewel as big as your fist.

Tet smiled. Behind the jewel, a tiger cub was trying to hide.

“This is Tovi,” said Tet. “*Tov* means good.”

Tovi took one small step forward. Then a bird chirped from a dark corner. A fallen branch had pinned one of its wings.

The cub hurried across the cave. You held the little bird still while Tovi pushed the branch aside. The bird flapped once, then flew out into the light.

You looked back at Tovi. The cub’s paws were trembling a little. Tovi had helped anyway.

“Did you find the treasure?” asked Tet.

You nodded toward the cub.

Tet placed a warm gemstone in your hand. Its shape was a tiny ט. You slipped it into your pocket and waved goodbye to Tovi. “Discover your gifts,” said Tovi, “and remember to use them to do good.”

Outside, a point of light hovered above a flower. It was smaller than any jewel in the cave.

Tet Forest Treasure

ט

Words from the forest

טוֹב · Tov · good

טִיגְרִיס · Tigris · tiger

טִפָּה · Tipah · drop

Try the sound

Tet makes the t sound in tiger. Say tov, tigris, and tipah. Can you hear Tet at the start of each word?

Hidden goodness

Tovi's paws were trembling, and the cub helped the bird anyway. Can you think of a time when someone surprised you with a kind or brave act?

For parents and carers

Rabbi Elazar tells of a light from the first day of creation that God called good and hid away for the righteous. Tet's gemstone is the story's image of hidden light. When Tovi helps the bird, you catch a glimpse of a goodness that was there all along.

Source · Chagigah 12a

Yud and the Spark of Possibility



The light above the flower was so small that you took it for a firefly. Then it curved into the letter י and floated down to your palm.

"*Shalom*, friend," it whispered. "I'm Yud."

"I could almost close my hand around you," you said.

"Come and see what else would fit."

Yud led you to an oak whose branches seemed to hold up the sky. At its roots lay an acorn.

"Could that great tree really begin with something this small?" you asked.

Yud nodded. The little letter rose again, and the letters you'd met so far appeared among the branches. You saw a tiny point of light wherever a letter began to take shape. In your mind, you called them out. There was Aleph, and there shone Bet, Gimel, Dalet, Hey, and Vav. As you looked around, Zayin flickered, and Chet and Tet were there too.

"Every story begins with a letter," said Yud. "And a friendship can begin with one *shalom*."

You thought about how the mouse had looked when Dov invited it in. It had taken only a few words and a piece of sandwich.

Yud set a star no bigger than a raindrop in your hand. "The Spark of Possibility," said Yud. "Even a tiny act of kindness can make a big difference."

You put it beside Tet's gemstone. Then you watched Yud rise into the sky until you couldn't tell the tiny light from the stars.

Ahead, the path climbed into a bank of silver clouds.

Yud Forest Treasure

י

Words from the forest

יָד · Yad · hand

יֶלֶד · Yeled · boy or child

יַהֲלוֹם · Yahalom · diamond

Try the sound

Yud makes the y sound in yes. Say yad, yeled, and yahalom. Hold out your palm as if Yud were about to place a tiny star in it.

Find ten Yuds

Ten little י letters are hiding on this letter trail. Can you find them all?

וילזנ
יטולז
נזזול
יניזיי

Small things matter

An oak can grow from an acorn. A friendship can begin with a *shalom*. Who could you say *shalom* to tomorrow?

For parents and carers

In Kabbalah, Yud is the tiny point that represents Chochmah, or divine wisdom. It is also the first letter of God’s four-letter Name. The acorn gives children a way to picture what can be held in a small beginning.

Source · Likutei Torah, Re’eh 18a

Kaf and the Open Hand



Above the trees floated a silver cloud shaped like an open hand. It lowered until it brushed the path, then curled into the glowing letter כ.

“I’m Kaf,” said the cloud. “Come, friend, and see what your hands can do.”

In a clearing ahead, a koala stood beside a little wooden gate. Beyond it, a bird was stretching for a berry. A squirrel was trying to roll a nut over a root. In a sunny patch, a little flower drooped.

You reached into your pocket. Dov’s key fitted the gate. Once it swung open, you could bend the branch close enough for the bird to pluck the berry.

You held the nut steady while the squirrel climbed over the root. Then you used Chet’s leaf to shade the flower while the koala fetched water.

“I didn’t give away very much,” you said when you were done.

The koala held out two open palms. “The squirrel could have pushed that nut all morning. You stopped and helped.”

You looked at your hands. There was a smudge of dirt on one thumb.

Kaf smiled. “How else could you use your hands to help, give, and share?”

You were still thinking about that when you noticed a tree so tall that its top disappeared into the clouds.

Kaf Forest Treasure

כּ כ ך

Words from the forest

כַּף · Kaf · palm of the hand

כּוֹכָב · Kochav · star

כֶּתֶר · Keter · crown

כֹּחַ · Koach · strength

Try the sound

With a dot, כּ makes the k sound in kite. Without the dot, כ can make the kh sound you practised with Chet. Can you hear both sounds in kochav? At the end of a word, Chaf takes the form ך, as in מֶלֶךְ (melech, king).

Generosity

You used Chet's leaf to shade the flower and Dov's key to open the gate. What could you give someone today using your time or your hands?

For parents and carers

In the story's mystical reading, Yud is a point of possibility and Kaf is a vessel that gives it room to take shape. A cupped hand can hold a gift. An open hand can share it. The possibility Yud showed you becomes something another creature can receive.

Lamed and the Tallest Tree



A lamb stood at the foot of the tallest tree you'd ever seen. Its trunk curved at the top like the letter ל, Lamed. You opened your mouth to say how tall it was, but the lamb tipped one ear upward.

"Wait until you see the view from the top!" called a voice.

An owl with silver and gold feathers fluttered down. "I'm Yanshuf. This is Lamed. Would you like to see what you can find from a little higher up, friend?"

The first branches were easy. Then your foot slipped.

"I don't think I can," you said.

"Did you know all the letters when you came into the forest?" asked Yanshuf.

"No."

"And here you are."

You looked for the next branch and reached for it. The lamb was still below, watching. Higher up, words glowed on the leaves. You could read kindness, joy, and friendship. Those leaves felt like old friends.

At the top, you could see water shining between distant trees.

"Will I ever be done learning?" you asked.

Yanshuf laughed. "I hope not."

Yanshuf gave you a golden acorn shaped like ל. "The Seed of Learning. See what grows if you keep asking questions. And remember to share what you discover with others."

You climbed down, one branch at a time. At the bottom, the lamb was waiting. Beside the lamb stood an old friend…

Lamed Forest Treasure

ל

Words from the forest

לִלְמֹד · Lilmod · to learn

לֵב · Lev · heart

לַיְלָה · Layla · night

Try the sound

Lamed makes the l sound in leaf. Say lev, then layla. Can you hear two l sounds in layla?

Learning

You'd learned one letter at a time. You could climb one branch at a time, too. What would you like to learn next? What's one small step you could take?

For parents and carers

Lamed reaches above the other letters. In the story, its tall shape suggests how learning lets us see farther. The Hebrew verbs lilmod, to learn, and lelamed, to teach, share a root. Invite your child to teach you one thing they discovered on the climb.

Mem and the Pond of Reflection



At the foot of Lamed's tree, a familiar letter was waiting.

"Aleph! What are you doing here?"

Aleph smiled. "friend, do you remember what we learned at the forest gate?"

"Before we speak, we listen."

Aleph nodded and slipped away between the trees.

Then you heard it. Mmmmmmmm…

You followed the soft hum to a pond. Moonlight rippled across the water as an otter slipped past. A silver shape rose and curved into the letter מ, Mem.

"I'm Mem," said the letter. "Tell me, who are you becoming?"

You had been ready to tell Mem all the letters you knew. But this was a different sort of question.

The pond grew still. In the water, you saw yourself opening the little gate in Kaf's clearing. Then you saw your foot slip on Lamed's tree and watched yourself reach for the branch again.

Splash! A little golden fish popped out of the water.

"I'm Mira!" she said. Then her voice grew quieter. "I've been practising that jump all day. Did you see it?"

"I did," you said. "Would you show me again?"

You stayed to watch. This time, when Mira jumped, you were ready to clap. Mira beamed. You could see how much it meant to her that you had stayed.

Before you left, Mem gave you a silver droplet with tiny stars floating inside.

"The Drop of Reflection," said Mem. "When the world gets noisy, take a quiet moment. Notice how others feel, and respond with care."

Mem Forest Treasure

מ ם

Words from the forest

מַיִם · Mayim · water

מַרְאָה · Mar’ah · mirror

מַתָּנָה · Matanah · gift

Try the sound

Close your lips and hum mmm. Say mayim slowly. Can you hear m at both ends? The last letter, ם, is the form Mem takes at the end of a word.

Compassion

When Mira’s voice grew quiet, you stopped to listen. Staying to watch her jump was a small way to show you cared. Who could you give a little more time to listen to today?

For parents and carers

In the story’s mystical reading, Lamed’s tree reaches upward toward what we can learn, while Mem’s water invites us to look inward at how that learning changes us. Ask your child what moment from their own day they’d like to see in Mem’s pond.

Nun and the Seed of Patience



The path opened into a sunny meadow. A stream ran beside it. Among the little green shoots stood a glowing letter.

"*Shalom*, friend," said the letter. "I'm Nun. Welcome to the Garden of Growth."

A snail was crossing the path. It had barely reached the edge of a leaf.

"Do you ever wish you could go faster?" you asked.

"Sometimes," said the snail. "But look how far I've come since breakfast."

A silver trail stretched all the way to the stream. Slowly, the snail was getting where it wanted to go.

Nun asked if you'd like to plant something. You took out Lamed's golden acorn, dug a hole, and covered it with soil. Then you sat back on your heels.

Nothing happened. You leaned closer. Still nothing.

"Give it a little water," said Nun. "Then let's see how far our friend grows."

You poured water over the soil. By the time the snail reached the other end of the leaf, a green tip had begun to push through the earth.

"Already?"

"Outside this forest, an acorn takes much longer," said Nun. "Even here, the roots had to begin where you couldn't see them."

Nun gave you a glowing Seed of Patience. "Keep trying," said Nun, "and take one small step at a time." You tucked it into your pocket and left the acorn where it was. You hoped the snail would come back one day to rest in its shade.

Nun Forest Treasure

נ ן

Words from the forest

נֶבֶט · Nevet · sprout

נַחַל · Nachal · stream

נֵס · Nes · miracle

Try the sound

Say nnn, like the first sound in nest. Try nevet, nachal, and nes. The last letter in גָּן (gan, garden) is ן, the form Nun takes at the end of a word. It still makes the n sound.

Perseverance

The snail crossed the path a little at a time. The acorn began to grow under the soil. What's something you're learning that feels a little easier than it did before?

For parents and carers

In the story's mystical reading, the bent shape of נ suggests a humble beginning, while the upright ן suggests the strength that can grow from it. The acorn's roots begin in the dark, long before anyone can sit in its shade.

Samech and the Circle of Friendship



Beyond Nun's meadow, flowers grew in a ring around an old oak. Even the butterflies flew in circles.

Something round and golden rolled out from behind the tree.

"*Shalom*, friend! I'm Samech."

"You look like a big hug," you said.

Samech laughed. Before the letter could answer, a little voice cried, "Help!"

A squirrel clung to a branch high above you. You reached up, but the branch was too high.

"Samech," you said, "I think I need help too."

A familiar green vine curled around the trunk. It was Vav! Yanshuf fluttered onto a branch below the squirrel, and Dov came to stand beside you. Samech rolled around the oak, casting a warm circle of light.

"Try this branch," called Yanshuf.

The squirrel found the vine and put one foot on the branch. Then came another step, and another, until the squirrel was low enough to hop into your arms.

"I did it!" said the squirrel.

You laughed. You'd wanted to help, and asking for help had been the first thing that worked. With everyone's help and encouragement, the squirrel had found a way down.

Samech placed a little golden ring in your palm. "The Circle of Friendship. Keep it for a day when you need someone beside you. And when a friend needs encouragement, help them keep going."

When you looked back from the path, the squirrel was still sitting beside Dov, telling everyone how the branch had looked from up high.

Samech Forest Treasure

ס

Words from the forest

סֵפֶר · Sefer · book

סָבָא · Saba · grandfather

סוֹד · Sod · secret

Try the sound

Say sss, like the first sound in sun. Now say sefer, saba, and sod. Trace a Samech in the air as you say the sound.

Support

You asked for help, and your forest friends came. With them nearby, the squirrel found the courage to take the next step. Who could you ask for help with something hard?

For parents and carers

In the story's mystical reading, Samech's circle pictures a kind of care that surrounds us. The friends stay close while the squirrel finds its footing. Think of a time when someone's quiet presence gave you the courage to do something for yourself.

Ayin and the Feather of Understanding



Beyond Samech's circle, the forest grew darker. Two golden eyes blinked from a branch overhead.

"Yanshuf!" you said as an owl swooped down. A rabbit looked up from beside the stream.

"My name is Ayin," said the owl. "Yanshuf is my cousin. Ayin is also the Hebrew word for eye. Come and see what you notice, friend."

The rabbit sat very still under a tree.

"What do you see?" asked Ayin.

"A rabbit."

You looked a little longer. The rabbit's eyes were fixed on a basket across the shallow stream. Three carrots poked out of the top.

"Are those yours?" you asked.

The rabbit nodded. "I dropped the basket when I jumped across."

You stepped over the stones, picked up the basket, and brought it back. The rabbit pulled out the smallest carrot and held it up to you.

"You can have this one."

You sat together and ate. Above you, a golden cloud curled into the shape of ע, Ayin.

"Close your eyes for a moment," said Ayin.

You thought about all the good the forest animals had done, and how much their help had meant to you.

You heard the water slip past the stones and felt the wind on your cheek. When you opened your eyes, Ayin gave you a golden feather. "The Feather of Understanding. Take it with you when you need to look a little closer. Look for the good in others, and try to understand how they feel."

You tucked it away and followed the stream. Farther down the path, someone was singing.

Ayin Forest Treasure

ע

Words from the forest

עַיִן · Ayin · eye

עֵץ · Etz · tree

עָנָן · Anan · cloud

Try the sound

In everyday Israeli Hebrew, Ayin often has no separate consonant sound. Listen to the vowel at the start of ayin, etz, and anan. In some Hebrew traditions, you'll hear a throat sound there too.

Seeing goodness

At first, you saw a rabbit under a tree. When you paused, you noticed the basket across the stream. When has someone noticed that you needed help before you asked?

For parents and carers

In the story's mystical reading, ayin, an eye, and ma'ayan, a spring, offer two images for understanding. A spring brings hidden water to the surface. A patient look can bring someone's needs into view. At Mem's pond, you looked inward. At Ayin's stream, you bring that same attention to someone else.

Pey and the Song by the Bridge



The singing you'd heard beyond Ayin's stream led you to a little stone bridge. A squirrel sat on the wall with an acorn tucked under one paw.

The squirrel sang three bright notes. On the fourth, the voice squeaked. Two frogs on a nearby stone giggled. The squirrel stopped singing and looked down at the water.

A golden letter floated up from under the bridge. "I'm Pey," it said. "*Peh* is the Hebrew word for mouth. Mine can sing, ask questions, and say things someone might need to hear."

You almost said, "Sing it again!" Then you remembered what Ayin had taught you and took a moment to look. The squirrel was holding the acorn so tightly that its cap had cracked.

"I liked the first part of your song," you said. "Would you like me to hum it with you?"

The squirrel nodded. You hummed the three notes you remembered. The squirrel joined in, quietly at first. The fourth note squeaked again.

"That part's tricky," said the squirrel.

"We can try it slowly," you said.

One of the frogs hopped closer. "Sorry I laughed," it said. "Could I try too?"

Soon all four of you were making a tune. The frogs kept time with little splashes. The squirrel sang the last note twice, just for fun.

A pale flower opened between two stones. Pey tucked it into your hand. "A *perach* for the path," said Pey. "When you see it, remember the words that helped the song begin again. Choose your words with care. They can encourage, comfort, and bring peace to others."

You thanked Pey and started across the bridge. On the far bank, two voices were arguing over a basket of berries. You could hear both of them from halfway across.

Pey Forest Treasure

ף פ פ

Words from the forest

פֶּה · Peh · mouth

פֶּרַח · Perach · flower

יְפֶה · Yafe · beautiful

Try the sound

With a dot, פ makes the p sound in pen. Without the dot, פ makes the f sound in fish. Say peh, then yafe. At the end of a word, Fey looks like ף. Try כַּף (kaf, palm of the hand). It ends with the f sound.

Kind speech

When the squirrel stopped singing, you said what you liked about the song and offered to join in. Your words helped the squirrel try again. What could you say to someone who's nervous about trying again?

For parents and carers

In Patach Eliyahu, the Tikkunei Zohar associates Malchut, or sovereignty, with the mouth and the Oral Torah. In this chapter, what you notice with Ayin becomes something another creature can hear and use. Ask your child which words made it easier for the squirrel to sing again.

Source · Tikkunei Zohar, introduction, 17a (Patach Eliyahu)

Tzadi and the Basket of Berries



On the far side of the bridge, two birds tugged at the handle of a berry basket. A young deer stood nearby, watching the basket tip.

“I picked them,” said one bird. “They’re mine.”

“I showed you where they grow,” said the other. “And you promised me some.”

You wanted to tell them to split the berries and be done. Then you remembered what had helped the squirrel sing again. You put Pey’s flower behind your ear and asked, “What did you agree to?”

Neither bird answered at first. The deer nudged a golden letter out from beneath a fern. It rose between the birds and glowed.

“I’m Tzadi,” said the letter. “Set the basket down. There’s time to hear both stories.”

The first bird looked at the ground. “I did promise. I thought we’d find more.”

The second bird loosened its grip. “I can help pick next time. I just wanted you to remember.”

Together they counted the berries into two piles. One berry rolled out and stopped by the deer’s hoof.

“That one’s for our basket keeper,” said the first bird. The second bird smiled and slid it closer.

Tzadi handed you a smooth stone with a little mark shaped like the letter צ. “For the next time a choice feels hard,” said Tzadi. “Choosing to be kind and fair isn’t always easy.”

You pocketed the stone and followed the path. Somewhere ahead, a voice called, “Who’s there?” A moment later, the very same voice called back.

Tzadi Forest Treasure

צ ץ

Words from the forest

צִפּוֹר · Tzipor · bird

צֶדֶק · Tzedek · justice or fairness

עֵץ · Etz · tree

Try the sound

Tzadi makes the ts sound at the end of cats. Try putting that sound at the start of tzipor. At the end of a word, Tzadi looks like ץ. Say etz and listen for the same sound.

Good choices

The first bird had picked the berries and had also promised to share them. Listening to both birds helped you understand what a fair choice would be. What helps you remember a promise when it gets hard to keep?

For parents and carers

The Torah repeats tzedek when it tells us to pursue justice. In his mystical reading of the verse, Ramban connects the justice we practise here with a higher justice. The berry basket gives children a small place to see that connection. A fair choice begins when we are willing to hear the other person.

Source · Deuteronomy 16:20 and Ramban's commentary

Kuf and the Voice in the Rocks



"Who's there?" called the voice again.

You followed it to a rocky bend in the path. A monkey stood beside a boulder, holding a lantern and a long golden key.

"I'm Kof," said the monkey. "That means monkey in Hebrew. I asked who was there, and someone keeps asking me the same question."

Kof lifted the lantern. A golden letter glowed on the rock. "I'm Kuf," said the letter. "What could we try to find out who's answering?"

You thought for a moment. "Say something you haven't said before."

"Banana!" shouted the monkey.

"Banana!" came the answer, a little softer.

The monkey giggled. "Even the rocks know my favourite food."

You cupped your hands and called toward the rocks. "*Shalom*!" The same word came back. Then you turned toward the open path and tried again. This time, you heard only leaves rustling.

"It comes back when we face the rocks," you said. "Could it be our own voices?"

Kuf nodded. "That's an echo. Sound can bounce back to you, like a ball bouncing off a wall."

Kof turned the key in a small cupboard beneath the lantern. Inside lay a brass ring with the letter ק, Kuf, on it. Kuf placed it in your palm. "Take it with you. Next time something puzzles you, see what one good question can help you discover."

You thanked Kuf and tucked the ring into your pocket. At the next bend, someone with a notebook was studying three paths. The arrows on the signpost all pointed the same way.

Kuf Forest Treasure

ק

Words from the forest

קוֹף · Kof · monkey

קוֹל · Kol · voice or sound

קֶשֶׁת · Keshet · rainbow or bow

Try the sound

In modern Israeli Hebrew, Kuf makes the k sound in “key.” Say kof, kol, and keshet. Take turns saying a word and being each other’s echo.

Curiosity

You tried calling toward the rocks and then toward the open path. Listening to what changed helped you work out where the voice came from. What have you wondered about today? What could you try to find out a little more?

For parents and carers

The Zohar reflects on Isaiah’s question about who created what we see when we look up. It treats the question as an invitation to seek, even when the answer remains beyond our grasp. Kuf’s echo is a little mystery a child can solve. It can also open a conversation about the things you still wonder about together.

Source · Zohar, Introduction 3:7, on Isaiah 40:26

Reish and the Mixed Up Signpost



At the fork, an owl with a green notebook looked from one path to the next. All three arrows on the signpost pointed straight into a thornbush.

“Did the paths move?” you asked.

“The wind spun the arrows,” said the owl. “I promised to put the rabbits’ arrow right. The young rabbits will be coming home soon, and they use these signs.”

You reached for the nearest arrow. A golden letter appeared on its wooden tip.

“I’m Reish,” said the letter. “Before you turn it, what do you know about the path it belongs to?”

You let go. You’d been about to point the arrow down the widest path. From where you stood, you couldn’t see what lay around the bend.

The owl opened the notebook. On the page was a drawing of the rabbits’ path. It curved past a split rock and a patch of yellow flowers.

You walked a little way down the wide path. No split rock. From the narrow path, though, you could see something yellow. You went closer and found the flowers growing beside the rock.

“This is the one!” you called.

Together you turned the rabbit arrow toward the narrow path and tightened its peg. Then you walked back toward the bridge to check that you could still see it.

Soon two young rabbits came bounding down the trail. They read the sign and turned for home.

Reish gave you a little pencil. “For the next time you have something to work out,” said the letter. “Remember to pause and think before you act.”

You slipped it into your pocket. Farther on, a golden light flickered between the trees. You stopped. From somewhere near the light came a soft sound like “shhh.”

Reish Forest Treasure

ר

Words from the forest

רֹאשׁ · Rosh · head

רוּחַ · Ruach · wind

רֶגֶל · Regel · foot

Try the sound

Listen for the r at the start of rosh, ruach, and regel. Hebrew speakers make this sound in different ways. Say each word slowly and listen for the sound the three words share.

Responsibility

The owl had promised to fix the sign. You helped check where the rabbits' path really went, then made sure the arrow could be seen from the bridge. What's one thing someone is counting on you to do? How will you check that it's done?

For parents and carers

In the Tanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi teaches that the mind can guide how we respond to an impulse. Reish gives the child a moment to practise that. The urge is to turn the arrow straight away. A pause makes room to think about the rabbits who will follow it.

Source · Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 12

Shin and the Quiet Lantern



The golden light came from a lantern in the trees. Beneath it sat a lion in a purple scarf. You knew that golden mane at once.

"Aryeh!" you called. You had so much to tell him that you hardly knew where to begin.

"Shhh," said Aryeh gently. "Listen a moment. I heard something over the sound of the stream."

You could hear the water rushing over stones. Then, underneath it, came a soft tap. You started to tell Aryeh about Kuf's echo, but he tipped one ear toward the bank. You waited. Tap. Tap.

Three points of light rose from the water and joined to make a letter.

"*Shalom*, friend," said the letter. "I'm Shin. What can you hear when you give a sound time to finish?"

The tapping came again. You followed it to the edge of the stream, where a loose twig kept knocking against a reed. A little beetle was clinging to the twig as it bobbed in the current.

"Hold on," you whispered. You lowered a dry leaf until it touched the twig. The beetle walked onto it, and you carried the leaf to the bank.

Aryeh moved over to make room beside the lantern. "Now," he said, "what did you want to tell me?"

You told him about the two birds and their basket of berries. When you paused to remember what happened next, Aryeh waited. It felt good to have time to finish.

Shin set a tiny brass bell in your palm. When you shook it, you had to lean close to hear it ring. "For the next time someone needs a moment to be heard."

You waved goodbye. Beyond the lantern, a trail of small footprints led to two trees that looked strangely familiar.

Shin Forest Treasure

שׁ שׂ

Words from the forest

שֶׁמֶשׁ · Shemesh · sun

שָׁלוֹם · Shalom · peace or hello

שִׂמְחָה · Simcha · joy

Try the sound

With the dot on the right, שׂ is Shin and makes the sh sound in shoe. With the dot on the left, שׁ is Sin and makes the s sound in sun. Say shalom and simcha. Can you hear the difference?

Listening

When you waited, you heard the little taps above the rushing water. Later, Aryeh gave you time to finish your story. What quiet sound can you hear right now? When could you give someone a little longer to finish speaking?

For parents and carers

The Shema begins with an invitation to hear. The Tanya, drawing on the Zohar, reads its opening verse as a declaration of divine unity. This scene offers a small way to practise giving our full attention. Aryeh does it when he waits through a pause instead of finishing the child's story for them.

Source · Deuteronomy 6:4 and Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 1

Tav and the Gate of Beginnings



You followed the little footprints to two trees whose branches touched high above the path. You knew this place. It was the gate where you'd first reached up to touch Aleph.

Chaim the turtle was waiting there, holding a staff shaped like a letter. Beside him, a child stood with one foot on the path and one foot in the grass.

"I want to go in," said the child, "but what if I lose my way?"

"I know the way," you said. Then you looked between the trees. From here, you couldn't see where the first bend led. "Well," you said, "I know how it starts."

Chaim set his staff on the ground. A golden letter rose from its tip. "I'm Tav," it said. "You've come all the way from Aleph to me. What helped when you didn't know where to go?"

You remembered Kuf asking what you could try, and the time you'd called for help beneath Samech's tree. You took out Reish's pencil and drew two trees on a broad fallen leaf. Between them, you drew the first letter.

"Look for Aleph here," you told the child. "Then we can look for Bet together."

The child stepped closer. "What if I forget the sound?"

"We can try it again."

Tav touched the leaf, leaving a little golden mark. Above the path, the letters lit up in order, all the way from Aleph to Tav. Then their glow faded until just the first light was left.

Chaim handed you a red apple. You shared it with the child on the grass beside the gate. When you'd finished, the child stood on tiptoe.

"I can see it!"

You could see it too. The first time, you'd reached for that light all by yourself. This time, you held out your hand.

Tav Forest Treasure

ת

Words from the forest

תַּפּוּחַ · Tapuach · apple

תִּקְוָה · Tikvah · hope

אֱמֶת · Emet · truth

Try the sound

In modern Israeli Hebrew, Tav makes the t sound in “tree.” Listen for it at the start of tapuach and tikvah, then at the end of emet.

Your best effort

At the gate, you told the child what you knew and offered to work out the rest together. All the times you’d asked, listened, and tried again helped you know what to do. Think of something you can do now that once felt hard. What would you tell someone who’s just beginning?

For parents and carers

In the Talmud, Reish Lakish links Tav to the seal of God, emet, or truth. Emet begins with Aleph and ends with Tav. In the story, Tav leaves a mark on the leaf after the child speaks honestly about what they know. Ask your child what makes “We can look together” a promise they can keep.

Source · Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 55a

If you enjoyed your Aleph Bet Forest Adventure, we’d love to hear from you.

Aleph Bet Guide

Start at Aleph and go down to Tav. Read each Hebrew word from right to left. The sound examples are a starting point for modern Israeli Hebrew.

Example	Sound	Name	Letter
אַרְיֵה · Aryeh (lion)	Usually quiet	Aleph	א
בַּיִת · Bayit (house)	b or v	Bet	ב / בּ
גָּמָל · Gamal (camel)	g as in go	Gimel	ג
דֶּלֶת · Delet (door)	d as in door	Dalet	ד
הַר · Har (mountain)	h as in hello	Hey	ה
וֶרֶד · Vered (rose)	v as in vine	Vav	ו
זֶבְרָה · Zebra (zebra)	z as in zip	Zayin	ז
חָבֵר · Chaver (friend)	kh at the back of the mouth	Chet	ח
טוֹב · Tov (good)	t as in tiger	Tet	ט
יֶלֶד · Yeled (child)	y as in yes	Yud	י
כּוֹכָב · Kochav (star)	k or kh	Kaf	כ / כּ
לֵב · Lev (heart)	l as in leaf	Lamed	ל
מַיִם · Mayim (water)	m as in moon	Mem	מ
נַחַל · Nachal (stream)	n as in nest	Nun	נ
סֵפֶר · Sefer (book)	s as in sun	Samech	ס
עַיִן · Ayin (eye)	Usually quiet in modern Israeli Hebrew	Ayin	ע
פֶּרַח · Perach (flower)	p or f	Pey	פ / פּ
צִפּוֹר · Tzipor (bird)	ts as in cats	Tzadi	צ
קוֹף · Kof (monkey)	k as in key	Kuf	ק
רֹאשׁ · Rosh (head)	r sound	Reish	ר
שֶׁמֶשׁ · Shemesh (sun)	sh or s	Shin	שׁ / שׂ
תַּפּוּחַ · Tapuach (apple)	t as in tree	Tav	ת

Two Sounds and Final Forms

Four letters with two sounds

For Bet, Kaf, and Pey, look for a dot inside the letter. For Shin and Sin, look at which side has the dot above it.

בּ / ב · Bet and Vet · b / v

בּ · בַּיִת is the v in אַהֲבָה (ahava)

כּ / כ · Kaf and Chaf · k / kh

כּוֹכָב · The two forms appear in kochav

פּ / פ · Pey and Fey · p / f

פּ · פָּה is the f in יָפֶה (yafe)

שׂ / שׁ · Shin and Sin · sh / s

שׂ · שָׂלוֹם is the s in שִׂמְחָה (simcha)

Five letters that change at the end

Look at the last Hebrew letter in each example. It is the one farthest to the left.

Example	Final form	Usual form
מֶלֶךְ · melech (king)	ך	כ
מַיִם · mayim (water)	ם	מ
גָּן · gan (garden)	ן	נ
כַּף · kaf (palm)	ף	פ
עֵץ · etz (tree)	ץ	צ

A note on vowels

Vowel marks help you know what vowel to say. In some words, Vav helps show an o or oo sound, and Yud helps show an ee sound. Hebrew pronunciation can vary by tradition.