



מנחם אב תשפ"ב | August 2022

חגים ומועדים – Holidays and Occasions

Vacation: חֲפֵשׁ או חֲפְשָׁה?

Today **חֲפְשָׁה** denotes a vacation period or other time off from work or school, as in **חֲפֵשֶׁת** **הַקֵּץ** ('summer break'), **יְמֵי חֲפְשָׁה** ('days off'), **חֲפְשָׁה לְלא תְשֻׁלּוּם** ('unpaid leave'), and **מַחְלָה** ('sick leave'). The word **חֲפֵשׁ**, while used mostly for 'freedom' (alone or in phrases such as **חֲפֵשׁ דָת**, 'freedom of religion'), can also mean 'time off,' as in **יְמֵי חֲפֵשׁ** ('days off') and **הַחֲפֵשׁ הַגָּדוֹל** ('summer break' – literally, 'the big break'; [listen to the Naomi Shemer song](#)). How have the meanings of **חֲפֵשׁ** and **חֲפְשָׁה** evolved, creating this partial synonymy?



In the Bible, the related word **חֲפְשִׁי** ('free') appears numerous times; the words **חֲפֵשׁ** and **חֲפְשָׁה** occur once each. Some interpret the obscure phrase **בְּגָדֵי-חֲפֵשׁ** (Ezek. 27:20) as designating precious cloths – garments characteristic of a free person. As for **חֲפְשָׁה**, its one instance may instead actually be an inflected form of **חֲפֵשׁ**. Lev. 19:20, referring to a female slave, says: **וְהִפְדָּהּ לֹא נִפְדְּתָה אוּ חֲפְשָׁה** – 'and she was not redeemed, nor was **freedom** given to her.' Without vocalization (which constitutes a later layer of the written text), the letters **חֲפְשָׁה** also spell the word 'her **חֲפֵשׁ** ('her freedom'). This reading, which equally fits the context, puts the masculine verb **נָתַן** ('was given') in full agreement with its subject – the masculine noun **חֲפֵשׁ** in lieu of the feminine noun **חֲפְשָׁה**. However, this alternative analysis calls for the **ה** of **חֲפְשָׁה** to bear a diacritical dot that the traditional vocalization lacks; hence the word's acceptance as the noun **חֲפְשָׁה**.

In the Academy's [Ma'agarim database of texts](#), the word **חֲפֵשׁ** appears in the book of Ben Sira, in medieval poetry, and elsewhere; its instances far outnumber those of the word **חֲפְשָׁה**. The database shows both words serving from the 19th century not just for 'freedom' but also for 'time off,' with **חֲפֵשׁ** remaining more common overall than **חֲפְשָׁה**. Notably, when using the word **חֲפְשָׁה** in either sense, the texts often echo the Biblical verse: "**חֲפְשָׁה** was given to so-and-so," "gave **חֲפְשָׁה** to so-and-so," etc.

In the National Library's [Historical Jewish Press database](#), the word **חֲפְשָׁה** disappears from use for 'freedom' around 1920, serving thenceforth only for 'time off.' In today's Hebrew, the use of the word **חֲפֵשׁ** has correspondingly shifted largely toward the sense 'freedom' – but not exclusively, so the differentiation remains incomplete (for now).

[להרחבה באתר האקדמיה](#)

גל – Gal

Gal Gadot's portrayal of Wonder Woman has made the name גל famous worldwide. The Hebrew word and name are unrelated to the English "gal," notwithstanding the pronunciation of Gadot's name by some English speakers.

The word גל occurs a few dozen times in the Bible. When Laban pursues Jacob and confronts him at Mount Gilead, Jacob tells his kinsmen to gather stones, and they set up a גל ('mound') at which Jacob and Laban make a pact (Gen. 31). Sometimes a large גל-אבנים ('mound of stones') is placed over a corpse (Josh. 7:26, 8:29; 2 Sam. 18:17). Elsewhere the word גל denotes a heap of rubble or ruins, as in Isaiah 25:2. In the sense 'wave' (a rolling "mound" of water, as it were), the word appears in the Bible more than a dozen times, always in plural – e.g., וְהִמְנוּ גַלְיוֹ (‘its waves roar,’ Jer. 5:22).

Song of Songs 4:12 presents גל in an unusual context: גן נעול אחתי כלה, גל נעול מעין התום. Some construe this גל as 'garden,' as in the parallel phrase גן נעול ('a locked garden') at the beginning of the verse. This reading appears in ancient translations of the Bible, including the Septuagint and the Vulgate. Others interpret גל as 'spring [of water],' in line with the juxtaposition of גל נעול with מעין התום ('a sealed spring') in the second half of the verse. This understanding recalls the word גלה (also from the root גלל), often rendered 'spring' in Josh. 15:19 and Judges 1:15.



Today the word גל means 'wave' also in extended senses, as in English – e.g., גל קול ('sound wave'), גלי רדיו ('radio waves'), גל חם ('heat wave' or 'hot flash'), גל קר ('cold snap'), גל חדש ('new wave'), גל עלייה ('wave of immigration to Israel'), and גל תחלואה (literally, 'wave of morbidity') for an epidemic wave. It is also the technical term for a tilde (~).

As a name, גל is a popular modern choice for both boys and girls. Data from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics show that for newborn girls the affectionate form גלי (Gállí) has seen a growth in favor in the 21st century, surpassing גל, while the diminutive form גלית (Gallit, 'wavelet'), once a popular girl's name, has grown rare. For boys גלי remains an uncommon choice.

[להרחבה באתר האקדמיה](#)

מטבעות לשון – Idioms and Expressions

קפיצת הדרך

Can you name the popular English-language book that borrowed this expression? Hint: a film version of the book came out in 2021.



In contemporary Hebrew, the verb **קפץ** typically means 'to jump.' In the Bible, though, **קפץ** means 'to close, contract' – usually, one's mouth or hand. For instance, Deut. 15:7–8 says not to close your hand to your needy brother but rather to open your hand to him: **ולא תקפץ את־ידך מאחיר האביון, כי־פתח תפתח קמץ**. In this meaning **קפץ** is close to **קמץ** ('to clench') and the roots **ק"ץ** and **ק"פ**, all phonetic cousins.

The Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 95a) brings a midrash that **שלישה קפצה להן הארץ** (in some other sources: **נתקפצה** or **נקפצה** rather than **קפצה**), generally understood to mean that for three people the land "contracted," shortening the distance from one place to another. One of the three was Abraham's servant, who set out from Canaan to Aram Naharayim to seek a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:10) and, according to the midrash, miraculously arrived the same day. Upon returning with Rebecca, "the servant told Isaac all the things he did" (Gen. 24:66). According to the Rabbis, the servant revealed praiseworthy matters: **מה שקפצה הדרך לפניו** – that the way contracted before him (Genesis Rabba 60:15; some manuscripts read **הארץ**, 'the land,' instead of **הדרך**, 'the way').

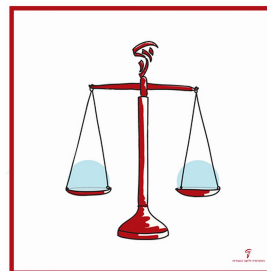
From such turns of phrase came the expression **קפיצת הדרך** designating fast traversal of a long distance supernaturally. (Contemporary Hebrew speakers are apt to picture this rapid transit as a giant leap from one place to another, as if the noun **קפיצה** here meant 'jump,' its prevalent sense today.)

In the chorus of the El Al song – which longtime patrons of the airline will recognize from decades of hearing it played upon touchdown – Naomi Shemer calls air travel "the miracle of **קפיצת הדרך**" ([view the lyrics](#) and [listen to the onboard rendition](#)). And in English – to answer the riddle posed above – the Hebrew phrase serves as a key term in Frank Herbert's 1965 novel *Dune* (released as a film in 1984 and 2021): Kwisatz Haderach. The book's glossary explains: "'Shortening of the Way.' This is the label applied by the Bene Gesserit to the *unknown* for which they sought a genetic solution: a male Bene Gesserit whose organic mental powers would bridge space and time."

[להרחבה באתר האקדמיה](#)

מנחים לענין – **Timely Terms**

אזונים ובלמים Checks and Balances



In the National Library's [Historical Jewish Press database](#), this Hebrew term initially parallels the word order of the English "checks and balances" – **בלמים ואזונים** – and first appears as **אזונים ובלמים** only 15 years later, in 1973. Both forms persist, but the version **אזונים ובלמים** now predominates and is the form found in the Academy's dictionaries – [civil-law terms](#) (2019) and [political-science terms](#) (2022).

The noun **בלם** (singular of **בלמים**), a modern coinage, denotes a brake (of a vehicle) or some other check or restraint. It is derived from the same root as the ancient verb **בלם** – originally 'to block, stop, check,' and now also 'to brake.'

In modern Hebrew, the verb **אזן** and its associated noun **אזון** mean 'to balance' and 'balancing, balance'; they are related to the Biblical word **מאזנים**, 'pair of scales' – also called a balance. The word **מאזנים** looks and sounds very much like **אזנים** ('ears'), raising the tantalizing possibility of a shared origin – uncanny in light of the modern discovery of the ear's role in maintaining balance. However, evidence from other Semitic languages indicates that in fact the original roots of the words **אזנים** and **מאזנים** differ, though in Hebrew the roots both manifest as **אז"ן**.

[להרחבה על שורשי המילים אזניים ומאזניים](#)

חדשות וארועים – News and Events



**הזמנה להרצאה:
גרסא דינקותא - ילדים יוצרים בעברית
Upcoming Talk:
From the Mouths of Babes –
Children Create in Hebrew**

Dikla Abarbanel, a skilled and experienced editor, will draw upon children’s Hebrew – in all its charming inventions, creative analyses of words, and amusing interpretations of expressions – to explore the subject of language acquisition and innovation. Her talk (in Hebrew) will take place online on Thursday, September 1, at 19:00 IDT.

Attendance is free of charge, but advance registration is required. The organizers invite participants to submit children’s ingenious Hebrew creations on the registration form, for possible inclusion in the talk.

[לפרטים נוספים ולהרשמה
ללוח האירועים וההשתלמויות](#)

**מושב האקדמיה בקונגרס העולמי למדעי היהדות
AHL Session at the
World Congress of Jewish Studies**

The Academy held a well-received session on the first day of the 18th World Congress of Jewish Studies, which took place on August 8–12. At the session, introduced by Academy president Prof. Moshe Bar-Asher, AHL employees presented findings, issues, and insights from their work on the Historical Dictionary Project and in the Academic Secretariat. The talks addressed the processing of the Biblical text for the Historical Dictionary Project (digitization, markup, grammatical analysis); the language of Rashi’s commentary on the Talmud; Judah Ibn Tibbon’s Hebrew translation of *The Kuzari*; and the preparation of computerized noun-declension tables.

[The Academy's English Website](#)

[לאתר האקדמיה בעברית](#)

[Friends of AHL Website](#)



**רשימת שמות היישובים בישראל
List of the Names of Settlements in Israel**

The Academy has released a [list of the names of settlements in Israel](#) – cities, towns, villages, tribal settlements, kibbutzim, etc. – to help establish consistent spellings on signs, in the media, in government publications, and elsewhere in the public domain. The Government Naming Committee decides the names of settlements; the Academy’s contribution lies in the spelling and vocalization. The list spells each name in three alphabets – Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin – and provides the Hebrew spelling both with and without vowels. The Latin spelling is generally a transcription of the Hebrew or Arabic name (e.g., Kfar Tavor, Kafr Kanna), with a few exceptions (e.g., Jerusalem, Safed, Acre, Nazareth). Certain issues are still under discussion, so the Academy anticipates updates to the list.

[לרשימת שמות היישובים בישראל](#)



הקונגרס העולמי ה-18 למדעי היהדות

[Subscribe to our Newsletter](#)

[Subscribe a Friend](#)

[Donate](#)