Hebrew expresses the “of” (possessive) relationship between two nouns by what is called the *construct chain*. This grammatical relationship is created by placing two or more nouns side by side.

The first of the two nouns in the construct chain is called the *construct noun* and is said to be in the *construct state*. The second of the two nouns is called the *absolute noun* and is said to be in the *absolute state*. The absolute form of a noun is also its lexical form.
Chapter 10b – Construct Chain

Examples of Simple Construct Chains

The first noun in each construct chain is the *construct noun*. The second of the two nouns in each chain is the *absolute noun*.

- קֹלְהָאִישׁ - the voice of the man
- מֶלֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ - the king of the land
- סֵבֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ - the servant of the king
- דְּבַר הָנָבִיא - the word of the prophet
- פֶּר הַתּוֹרָה - the book of the law
Construct chains are either entirely definite (the … of the …) or entirely indefinite (a … of a …). The definiteness or indefiniteness of a construct chain is determined by the absolute noun. If the absolute noun is definite, the entire construct chain is definite. If the absolute noun is indefinite, the entire construct chain is indefinite.

Definite Construct Chain

הַנָּבִיא פֶר סֵ

the book of the prophet

Indefinite Construct Chain

נָבִיא פֶר סֵ

a book of a prophet
Chapter 10d – Construct Chain

Noun Definiteness

A noun is considered to be definite under three circumstances:

(1) if it has the definite article as in הַמַּלְכָּה (the queen)

דבר המלכה

the word of the queen

(2) if it has a pronominal suffix as in אָבִי (my father)

בית אב

the house of my father

(3) if it is a proper noun as in שְׁמוּאֵל (Samuel)

לֶבֶד שְׁמוּאֵל

the servant of Samuel
Multiple construct nouns may appear in a construct chain but there is only one absolute noun for each construct chain. The absolute noun is always the last noun in the construct chain. Again, the definiteness of the construct chain depends upon the definiteness of the one absolute noun.

עֶבֶד אֱהִי הַמֶּלֶךְ
the servant of the brother of the king

עֶבֶד בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ
the servant of the house of the king

דְּבַרְיָמֶלֶךְ הָנָּדֶרֶם
the words of the king of the land
When an adjective modifies either the construct or absolute noun, it must follow the entire chain and must agree with the noun it modifies in gender, number and definiteness.

כָּלְּחִיָּהּ חֶגֶרֶץ הַטּוֹב
calḥiya hageret hetob
the good king of the land

כְּלָחָהּ חֶגֶרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה
celahya hageret hetobah
the king of the good land
In the following construct chains, the adjective may modify either the construct or absolute noun. In ambiguous constructions like these, context must be your guide.

בָּבֵר הַמֹּלֶךְ הַטוֹב
the good word of the king or
the word of the good king

לֶאָבֶד הַנָּבִיא הָרַע
the evil servant of the prophet or
the servant of the evil prophet
Just like attributive adjectives, demonstrative adjectives must also follow the construct chain.

Debeirim ha-nabiyyim kela
these words of the prophet

Debeirim ha-nabiyyim
the words of this prophet

Debeirim ha-nabiyyim ha-sefow
the words of this good prophet

Debar ha-nabiyya
the word of this prophet or this word of the prophet
In many instances, a singular construct noun and its lexical (or absolute) form are identical in spelling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexical/Absolute Spelling</th>
<th>Construct Spelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>סוס</td>
<td>סוס horse of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מֶלֶךְ</td>
<td>מֶלֶךְ king of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most construct nouns, however, are spelled differently than their lexical (or absolute) form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexical/Absolute Spelling</th>
<th>Construct Spelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>דָּבָר</td>
<td>דְּבַר word of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תּוֹרָה</td>
<td>תּוֹרַת law of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אָב</td>
<td>אֲבִי father of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 10j – Construct Chain

The Spelling of Nouns in the Construct State: Endingless Nouns (Masculine or Feminine)

In a construct chain, the construct noun surrenders its primary accent and the following rules of vowel reduction apply.

1. Qamets (and sometimes Tsere) changes to Pathach in a final closed syllable.

- מִשְׁפָּט judgement ➔ מִשְׁפּ judgement of
- מִזְבֵּחַ altar ➔ מִזְבַּח altar of

2. Qamets or Tsere change to Vocal Shewa in an open, unaccented syllable.

- נָשָׁלות peace ➔ נָשׁalom peace of
- מָקוֹם place ➔ מְקוֹם place of

3. Both rules 1 and 2 may apply to the formation of a noun in the construct state.

- דָּבָר word ➔ דְּבַר word of
- לֵבָב heart ➔ לְבַב heart of

4. In monosyllabic nouns with changeable long vowels, the long vowels reduce to the corresponding short vowel.

- בֶּן son ➔ בֶּן son of
- כֹּל all ➔ כָּל all of
The masculine plural ים and dual ים endings change to ים (Tsere Yod) in the construct state and then the rules of vowel reduction apply.

אֱלֹהִים God ➞ אֱלֹהֵי God of
בָּנִים sons ➞ בְּנֵי sons of
עֵינַי (two) eyes ➞ עֵינֵי (two) eyes of
דְּבָרִים words ➞ דִּבְרֵי words of

In the last example, both propretonic reduction and Rule of Shewa have applied to produce the construct plural.

דִּבְרֵי ➞ דִּבְרֵי ➞ דְּבָרִים
Feminine singular nouns ending in תּוֹרָה change this ending to תּוֹרַת in the construct state and then the rules of vowel reduction apply.

- תּוֹרָה law  ➞  תּוֹרַת law of
- מַלֶּכֶה queen  ➞  מַלֶּכַת queen of
- שָׁנָה year  ➞  שָׁנָת year of
Chapter 10m – Construct Chain

The Spelling of Nouns in the Construct State:
Feminine Plural

Feminine plural nouns ending in וֹת retain this plural ending and then the rules of vowel reduction apply.

מַמְלָכוֹת

kingdoms

מַמְלָכוֹת

kingdoms of

שֵׁמוֹת

names

שֵׁמוֹת

names of

שָׂדוֹת

fields

שָׂדוֹת

fields of

בְּרָכוֹת

blessings

בְּרָכוֹת

blessings of

In the last example, both proper tonic reduction and Rule of Shewa have applied to produce the construct plural.

בְּרָכוֹת

בְּרָכוֹת

בְּרָכוֹת

בְּרָכוֹת

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Chapter 10n – Construct Chain
The Spelling of Nouns in the Construct State:
Certain Monosyllabic Nouns

Certain *singular monosyllabic nouns* add Hireq Yod to their stem in the construct state. Do not confuse this Hireq Yod with the 1cs pronominal suffix (אָבִי "my father").

- אָב father ➔ אֲבִי father of
- אָח brother ➔ אֲחִי brother of

The *diphthong* יִ (as in בֵּית) changes to Tsere Yod in the construct state.

- בֵּית house ➔ בֵּית house of
- עֵין spring ➔ עֵין spring of
Chapter 10o – Construct Chain

The Spelling of Nouns in the Construct State: Segholate Nouns

The lexical (or absolute) form of a singular Segholate noun is spelled the same as its corresponding construct form.

ךְלֶמֶקֶר
king ➔ מַלְכֵיְהוּ
king of

ךְסֶפֶר
book ➔ סֶפֶר
book of

ךְבּוּר
morning ➔ בּוּר
morning of

ךְנַר
boy ➔ נַר
boy of

The plural construct form follows the pattern of מַלְכִּים (kings of).

ךְלָכְיִים
kings ➔ מַלְכִּים
kings of

ךְבּהָיִים
servants ➔ בּהָיִים
servants of
Nouns ending in נֶּה have a singular construct form with an נֵה ending.

שָׂדֶה field ➞ שְׂדֵה field of
מַחֲנֶה camp ➞ מַחֲנֵה camp of