To: UTC (Unicode Technical Committee) Document Submissions
Author: Ben Denckla
Subject: UTC Doc: Regarding the name "Heavy *Sheva*"
Date: 5 May 2025

L2/24-274 proposed the name Hebrew Point *Sheva Na* for U+05C8. This name was rejected in favor of the name Heavy *Sheva* (preceded by "Hebrew Point" of course; that is agreed upon). Heavy *Sheva* is not wrong per se, but I propose returning to *Sheva Na* or moving on to Mobile *Sheva*.

The January 2025 report of the SEWG (L2/25-010) discusses the name *Sheva Na* as follows:

> The proposal author suggested the name HEBREW POINT SHEVA NA for the new character, arguing that SHEVA commonly refers to both šewa naʿ and šewa naḥ and when a distinction is needed, it is always šewa naʿ that is spelled fully. This would be consistent with the similar situation of U+05B8 HEBREW POINT QAMATS and U+05C7 HEBREW POINT QAMATS QATAN. The group was not convinced by these arguments and worried about the name SHEVA NA causing confusion about which šewa it represents due to similarity in their names, especially for users with less expertise.

Deborah Anderson further provided me with the following notes from the SEWG discussion:

> Sheva Na' is also a common linguistic term, [so] we should consider alternate names, perhaps graphical names (HEAVY SHEVA?) rather than implying something about the correct character to represent Sheva Na' in all cases.

I would summarize these arguments as follows. The new code point should, ideally, be named *Sheva Na*, but in practice it will make disunification less confusing to give the new code point a graphical name like Heavy *Sheva* rather than a semantic name like *Sheva Na*.

I agree that disunification, at least in the Hebrew block, has been handled in a confusing way. In particular, disunifying by introducing only one new code point has led to ambiguity, forcing the existing code point to do "double duty" upon introduction of the new code point. The existing code point continues to serve a generic (unified) role in some contexts, but starts to serve a specific (disunified) role in other contexts.

Nonetheless, the precedent of *Qamats Qatan* should not have been discarded. By the logic of the Heavy *Sheva* name, *Qamats Qatan* should have been called something like Tall *Qamats*, after its usual (but not universal) appearance.[1]

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[1] *Qamats Qatan* was originally slated to be called "*Qamats* Form 2." This name, while not semantic, was at least not graphically prescriptive like Heavy *Sheva* is. Fortunately, the semantic name *Qamats Qatan* was successfully re-suggested. In this document I am similarly re-suggesting the semantic name *Sheva Na*.

Perhaps the precedent of *Qamats Qatan* was unclear since, confusingly, *Qamats Qatan* appears to be a graphical name, since it means "small *qamats*." Though it may appear to be a graphical name, in fact the "small" refers to size in a phonetic dimension rather than size in any spatial dimension of the mark's shape. In fact the mark is usually larger (in particular, taller) than normal *qamats*.

Also, by the logic of the Heavy *Sheva* name, *Holam Haser* for *Vav* should have been called something like Left-biased *Holam* for *Vav*. In my opinion this and "Tall *Qamats*" would both have been worse names, for their emphasis on graphics rather than semantics.

I can understand the concern that the qualifier *Na* is confusing, for the following reasons:

- Its shortness.

- Its similarity to its opposite in Hebrew (נע vs נח).

- Its even greater similarity to its opposite in Unicode-style transliteration. In that style of transliteration, an English speaker would likely pronounce them identically (*na* vs *nah*). If some or all Unicode documentation must use this transliteration, we might be forced to make a statement that is rendered nonsensical when read aloud like "sheva *na* should not be confused with sheva *nah*."

Such concerns about the qualifier *Na* can be addressed while still retaining a semantic name. For such a name, I suggest Mobile *Sheva* or, if for some reason it is preferred, Vocal *Sheva*.

A peril of graphic naming is shown by the popular ArtScroll series of prayerbooks. In them, *sheva na* is **not** represented as a heavy or otherwise differently-shaped *sheva*. Instead, a letter with *sheva na* has only a generic *sheva* under it, but this generic *sheva* is qualified as *na* by a line above the letter.[2] This shows that there is no consensus that *sheva na* should be represented as a heavy-weight or otherwise differently-shaped version of a normal *sheva*. Here is an image from the introduction to one of the many ArtScroll prayerbooks:



### ✒ Hebrew Grammar

In Hebrew the accent is generally on the last syllable. Otherwise, we indicate the syllable with a *messeg*, a vertical line below the letter: שִׁירוּ. A שְׁוָא נָע [*sh'va na*] is shown by a line above the letter: בָּרְכוּ, except for the first letter of a word, which is always a *sh'va na*. In identifying a *sh'va na*, we have followed the rules of the *Vilna Gaon* and *Rabbi Yaakov Emden*.

Transcribing the relevant part: "A שְׁוָא נָע [*sh'va na*] is shown by a line above the letter: בָּרְכוּ, except for the first letter of a word, which is always a *sh'va na*."

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[2] This could be considered a re-use (or even abuse) of the *rafeh* mark.

If the name Heavy *Sheva* still seems best to the Unicode Technical Committee, I suggest that the limitations of that name be mitigated by one or both of the following:

- An annotation in the names list (current annotations are visible in the [documentation of the Hebrew block](#), among other places).

- A short explanation added to the Hebrew section of the [Core Spec's Chapter 9](#).

Indeed, even if the name Heavy *Sheva* is dropped, one or both of the above seem advisable, to clarify the possibly-confusing situation.

If the name *Sheva Na* is restored, I would suggest annotations like the following (trying to mimic the wording of the annotation currently used for U+05B8 (*Qamats*)):

U+05B0 Hebrew Point *Sheva*

> = *shewa*, *sh'va*

> • used either generically or as resting *sheva* in orthography which distinguishes that from mobile *sheva*

> → U+05C8 Hebrew Point *Sheva Na*

U+05C8 Hebrew Point *Sheva Na*

> = mobile *sheva*, vocal *sheva*

> • may be used in orthography which distinguishes resting *sheva* from mobile *sheva*

> → U+05B0 Hebrew Point *Sheva*

This assumes that the annotation for U+05B0 (*Sheva*) can be updated, as seems to have been the case for U+05B8 (*Qamats*) when U+05C7 (*Qamats Qatan*) was introduced.

For the [Core Spec's Chapter 9](#), I also suggest that *sheva na* be documented in analogy to *qamats qatan*. There, *qamats qatan* is documented in analogy to *atnaḥ hafukh*, and the two marks' documentation is interleaved. But a three-way interleaving might be awkward, so while I suggest that *sheva na* be documented in analogy to *qamats qatan*, I do not suggest that their documentation be interleaved. The current documentation for *qamats qatan* is as follows (leaving out the interleaved parts about *atnaḥ hafukh*):

> [A] number of publishers of Biblical or other religious texts have introduced a typographic distinction for the vowel point *qamats* corresponding to two different readings. The original letterform used for one reading is referred to as *qamats* or *qamats gadol*; the new letterform for the other reading is *qamats qatan*. Not all users of Biblical Hebrew use [...] *qamats qatan*. [...] If the distinction between [the] vowels *qamats gadol*

and *qamats qatan* is not made, then only U+05B8 HEBREW POINT QAMATS [should be] used. Implementations that support Hebrew accents and vowel points may not necessarily support the special-usage [character] U+05C7 HEBREW POINT QAMATS QATAN.

Accordingly, in analogy I propose the following section on *sheva na* (assuming the name *sheva na* is restored):

> A number of publishers of Biblical and/or liturgical texts have introduced a typographic distinction between two readings of the point *sheva*. The original point used for one reading is referred to as *sheva naḥ* (resting *sheva*); the new point for the other reading is referred to as *sheva na* (mobile *sheva*). Not all users of Biblical Hebrew use *sheva na*. If the distinction between the points *sheva naḥ* and *sheva na* is not made, then only U+05B0 HEBREW POINT SHEVA should be used. Implementations that support Hebrew accents and vowel points may not necessarily support the special-usage character U+05C8 HEBREW POINT SHEVA NA.

(This concludes the main part of this document. See the next and final page for a list of supporters of this document.)

# Supporters

Jon Mosesson
Author of L2/24-274, which proposed Sheva Na by that name

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Hillel Novetsky
Publisher of Al-Hatorah

Maxim Iorsh
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(End of document.)

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[3]SII is the Standards Institution of Israel (מכון התקנים הישראלי) (מת״י)