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THE PARTICLES וְהַיְהִי AND וַיְהִי IN SEVERAL BIBLE
TRANSLATIONS

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The presentative Biblical Hebrew particles הִנֵּה and הִנְנֶה share one basic presentative meaning, but show some variation in syntactic functions, as follows:

1. הִנֵּה and הִנְנֶה appear in distinct syntactic patterns. While הִנֵּה mostly follows verbs of speech and introduces the contents of the speech, הִנְנֶה generally follows verbs of sight, revelation, and similar contexts, and introduces content clauses conveying the objects of the sight or revelation. Examples of הִנֵּה in this role are (1) וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ הִנֵּה אֶרְצִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ שֵׁב “And Abimelech said, ‘**Behold**, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you” (Gen. 20:15); (2) וַיִּגְדוּ לוֹ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה דָוִד בְּמִדְבַר עֵין גִּדִי “He was told, ‘**Behold**, David is in the wilderness of En-gedi.” (1 Sam. 24:2), which consist of verbs of speech. Examples of הִנְנֶה in this role are (3) וַיִּרְאֵה וְהִנֵּה בָּאֵר בְּשַׂדֵּה וְהִנֵּה-שָׁם “As he looked, he saw a well in the field, **and lo**, three flocks of sheep lying beside it” (Gen. 29:2), which contains a verb of sight, and (4) וַיִּשְׁכַּב וַיִּישָׁן תַּחַת רֵתֶם אֶחָד וְהִנֵּה-זֶה מְלֹאךְ נֹגַע בּוֹ “And he lay down and slept under a broom tree; **and behold**, an angel touched him” (1 Kgs. 19:5), which refers to a revelation in a dream.
2. הִנֵּה and הִנְנֶה should regularly be considered as introducing particles whose syntactic roles are external to their following clause, yet in certain specific cases הִנֵּה may serve as a predicate. Examples of הִנֵּה and הִנְנֶה as introducing

¹ This article is based on a paper presented at the SBL Annual meeting held at New Orleans, Louisiana, on November 21-24, 2009.

from using one fossilized literal translation for all appearances of these presentatives to employing various translation options for the diverse syntactic patterns and contexts.

Saadya Gaon's Arabic translation to the Bible, the Tafsīr, which reflects Middle Arabic in its early Post-Classical stage, is a good example of a flexible translation, which takes into account the assorted options of translation for the presentatives discussed. The following examples demonstrate this point.³

1. The typical translation of הִנֵּה following a verb of speech in the Tafsīr is by הָא.

Although it frequently appears only in Ms. St. Petersburg and not in printed editions like Derenbourg and Ḥasīd, this is most likely an original form later replaced by the fossilized form הוֹדִיא, which is often used in these editions for many occurrences of both הִנֵּה and הִנֵּה. הָא is found, for example, in (10) the translation of וְלִשְׂרָה אָמַר הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי אֵלֶיךָ כֶּסֶף לְאַחֶיךָ “To Sarah he said, **Behold**, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver” (Gen. 20:16). In Ms. St. Petersburg the translation is וקאל לסארה הָא קד אעטית (Gen. 20:16). In Ms. St. Petersburg the translation is “And it was told to Jacob, ‘Your son Joseph has come to you’” (Gen. 48:2). In Ms. St. Petersburg the translation is פאכבר יעקוב וקיל לה הָא אבנך יוסף דאכל אליך. By contrast, the typical translation of הִנֵּה following a verb of sight or a similar context in the Tafsīr is by אדא אל-פגיאאייה. This rendering is common in Ms. St. Petersburg and in the Derenbourg and Ḥasīd printed editions. Such is the rendering, for example, in (12) וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה חֲרָבוֹ פָּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה “[He] looked, **and behold**, the face of the ground was dry” (Gen. 8:13). In Ms. St. Petersburg: וַיִּרְאוּ (13) פנטיר פאדא קד גף וגה אלארץ: “They saw the land of Jazer and

³ More examples see in Zewi 2001.

- the land of Gilead, **and behold**, the place was a place for cattle” (Num.32:1). In Ms. St. Petersburg: פראו בלד יעזר ובלד גלעד **פאדא בה** מוציע מאשיה.
2. The particle הִנֵּה playing the role of a predicate, is translated in Ms. St. Petersburg by הָא or by a demonstrative pronoun. The presentative הָא is found in: (14) וַתֹּאמֶר (14) הִנֵּה אֶמְתִּי בַלְהָה “Then she said, ‘**Here is** my maid Bilhah’” (Gen. 30:3), translated in Ms. St. Petersburg as קאלת הָא אמתִי בלהָה. An example with demonstrative pronouns is (15) וַיֹּאמֶר לָבֶן לְיַעֲקֹב הִנֵּה הַגֵּל הַזֶּה וְהַנֵּזֶה הַמְצֻבָה אֲשֶׁר גָּרַתִּי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ (15) “Then Laban said to Jacob, ‘**See** this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me’” (Gen. 31:51), translated in Ms. St. Petersburg as פקאל לבן ליעקוב וקאל לבן ליעקוב. This verse contains two occurrences of הִנֵּה. The second is probably a second הִנֵּה coordinated by *waw* unrelated to the typical uses of הִנֵּה in contexts of sights and dreams. Such renderings are rare in the Derenbourg and Ḥasīd editions, although demonstrative pronouns appear in the translation of Gen. 31:51 in the Derenbourg edition twice: וקאל לבן ליעקוב וקאל לבן ליעקוב, and in the Ḥasīd edition once alongside the fossilized הִנֵּה: וקאל לבן ליעקוב וקאל לבן ליעקוב. Such a translation well reflects the status of הִנֵּה in these examples as bearing meaningful content, which is part of the clause itself.
3. In reply to a call the particle הִנֵּה is generally translated in the Tafsīr by לביך, a special particle for this role in Arabic. This translation appears in Ms. St. Petersburg and in the Derenbourg and Ḥasīd printed editions. An example of this rendering is (16) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְרָא הִנֵּה (16) “[God] called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘**Here am I**’” (Exod. 3:4). The Arabic translation of Saadya according to the three sources is וקאל יא מוסי יא מוסי קאל לביך.

Thus all syntactic functions and contexts of these two presentatives, הִנֵּה and הִנְנִי, are nicely and consistently reflected in the Tafsīr.

III.

Now what about other Bible translations? This question is still open for investigation. A good example of a comprehensive study on this matter, referring to Greek and two English translations is Andersen 2003. As for the examples presented so far, you might have noticed that the translation I used for the aforementioned examples, the *RSV*, frequently employs one rigid translation for all occasions, namely ‘behold’. Nonetheless, even the *RSV* shows some flexibility in its translation of the particles. Example (3) above, Gen. 29:2, has two occurrences of הִנֵּה, of which only one is rendered into English—and the word picked for the translation is ‘and lo’, not ‘behold’. More important, the *RSV* for Example (7), 1 Sam. 26:22, renders הִנֵּה by ‘here is’, and the *RSV* for Example (8), 2 Kgs. 4:25, renders הִנֵּה by ‘look’ and ‘yonder’ (= here is). The *RSV* seems to manage to reflect the special nature of הִנֵּה in these two verses as a predicate pointing at a specific location in the clause to which it belongs. The *RSV* also displays sensitivity to the special use of הִנֵּה as a reply to a call, translating it by ‘here am I’ in example (9), Gen. 22:7. Still the flexibility revealed in the *RSV* is clearly not as diverse and consistent as that in Saadya’s Arabic Tafsīr.

The *JPS* displays a variety of translations for הִנֵּה and הִנְנִי, which are clearly more diverse than those of the *RSV*. In example (1) above, Gen. 20:15, וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ הִנֵּה אֶרְצִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ שֶׁב הִנֵּה אֶרְצִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ שֶׁב, the *JPS* employs ‘here’ after a verb of speech instead of ‘behold’ in *RSV*: “And Abimelech said, ‘**Here**, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.’” In example (2), 1 Sam. 24:2, וַיִּגְדֹּן לוֹ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה זָרוּד בְּמַדְבָּר עֵין גִּדִי, the *JPS* does not employ any translation after the verb of speech, in contrast to the *RSV* which

has 'behold'. The *JPS* translation is "He was told that David was in the wilderness of En-gedi." Example (3), Gen. 29:2, וַיֵּרָא וְהוּנָה בְּאֵר בְּשֵׂדָה וְהוּנָה-שָׁם שְׁלֹשָׁה עֶדְרֵי-צֹאן רֹבְצִים, exhibits once 'there' in the *JPS* translation: "**There** before his eyes was a well in the open. Three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it," while the *RSV* employs 'and lo'. In this case the *JPS* shows a tendency to create a relatively free version, which is typical in other *JPS* renderings as well. A genuine attempt to convey the real meaning of הנה is revealed in example (4) above, 1 Kgs. 19:5, וַיִּשְׁכַּב וַיִּישָׁן תַּחַת רֶתֶם, אֶחָד וְהוּנָה-זֶה מִלְּאֲךָ נִגַע בּוֹ, whose *JPS* translation is "He lay down and fell asleep under a broom bush. **Suddenly**, an angel touched him." The adverb 'suddenly' is employed instead of the *RSV*'s rigid translation 'and behold', indicating an unexpected revelation.

In example (5), 2 Kgs. 5:15, וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנֵה-נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אֵין אֱלֹהִים בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ כִּי אִם-בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, the *JPS* chooses 'now' instead of the *RSV*'s 'behold': "And [he] exclaimed, **Now** I know that there is no God in the whole world except in Israel." In using 'now' the *JPS* probably aims at both הנה and נָא, and imparts to them a temporal nuance.⁴ In example (6), Josh. 5:13, וַיְהִי בַּהֲיוֹת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בִּירִיחוֹ וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהוּנָה-אִישׁ, עֹמֵד לְנֶגְדוֹ וְחַרְבּוֹ שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ "Once, when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him, drawn sword in hand," the *JPS* again avoids any translation, in contrast to the rigid 'and behold' of the *RSV*. The translation 'here is' recurs in example (7), 1 Sam. 26:22, וַיַּעַן דָּוִד וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנֵה הֲחַיִּית חַיִּית הַמֶּלֶךְ, "David replied, **Here is** Your Majesty's spear." This time it conforms to the *RSV*. Another example of a translation by 'there' in the *JPS* is example (8), 2 Kgs. 4:25, וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-גֵּיחִזִּי נַעֲרֹ הֲנֵה הַשּׁוֹנַמִּית הַלְזָה "He said to his servant Gehazi, **There is** that Shunammite woman," in contrast to the *RSV* 'Look, yonder'. 'Yes' in reply to a call

⁴ Such rendering is regular in Saadya Gaon's translation. On הנה-נָא see Fassberg 1994:36-40.

is found in example (9), Gen. 22:7, וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִּי “Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘Father!’ And he answered, ‘Yes, my son’,” in contrast to the RSV, ‘Here am I’. Example (10), Gen. 20:16, וּלְשָׂרָה אָמַר הֲנִהּ “And to Sarah he said, ‘I herewith give your brother a thousand pieces of silver’,” exhibits ‘herewith’ in contrast to the fixed ‘behold’ of the RSV.

The *JPS* as well as the *RSV* have no translation for הֲנִהּ again in example (11), Gen. 48:2, וַיִּגְדַּל לְיַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִהּ בְּנִךְ יוֹסֵף בָּא אֵלַיְךָ “When Jacob was told, ‘Your son Joseph has come to see you’,” and in examples (12), Gen. 8:13, וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה חֲרָבוֹ פָּנִי “He saw that the surface of the ground was drying,” and (13), Num.32:1, וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַמְּקוֹם מִקְּדוֹם מִקְּדוֹם “Noting that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were a region suitable for cattle,” where the *RSV* has ‘behold’/‘and behold’. ‘Here is’ is found both in the *JPS* and the *RSV* in example (14), Gen. 30:3, וַתֹּאמֶר הֲנִהּ “She said, ‘Here is my maid Bilhah’,” and in the *JPS* alone in example (15), Gen. 31:51, וַיֹּאמֶר לָבוֹא לְיַעֲקֹב הֲנִהּ הַגֵּל הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה הַמְּצֻבָּה אֲשֶׁר גָּרַתִּי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ “And Laban said to Jacob, ‘Here is this mound and here is the pillar which I have set up between you and me’,” in contrast to the *RSV*’s ‘see’. ‘Here am I’ in reply to a call appears both in the *JPS* and the *RSV* in example (16), Exodus 3:4, וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מִשָּׁה מִשָּׁה וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מִן-הַבֹּשֶׁת “God called to him out of the bush: ‘Moses, Moses!’ He answered, ‘Here am I’.”

All in all, the *JPS* seems to try to be more sensitive to the nuances of meaning and the syntactic roles of הֲנִהּ and וְהִנֵּה in their context. It often conveys a locative meaning by ‘here’ or ‘there’, avoiding a fixed translation by ‘behold’ and the like, and in many cases it omits any translation of these presentatives. An attempt to render the nuance of unexpected events is found in the *JPS* use of ‘suddenly’ for וְהִנֵּה in 1 Kgs. 19:5. An alternative rendering for a reply to a call by ‘here am I’ is the *JPS* translation

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by 'yes' found in Gen. 22:7. In fact, the *JPS*'s possible renderings of these presentatives are a lot wider. A comprehensive list of them can be found in Andersen 2003:33-39. It includes temporal, locative, and manner adverbs, asseverative words, conjunctions, deictics, exclamations, and more. Yet all these *JPS* renderings, as sensitive to context as they are, lack some consistency, which is better established for this matter in Saadya's Arabic Tafsīr.

IV.

In conclusion, what we see in Bible translations should surely be considered only an interpretation of the Biblical texts and their language. Still, sometimes, as is the case in Saadya's Tafsīr, they well reflect the diversity of nuances in meaning and syntactic roles of certain function and content words, in our case, certain presentatives, while at that same time maintaining a large measure of consistency.

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