

## Particles of Entreaty

וְעַתָּה יְהוָה קַח־נָא אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּנִּי

And now, O Lord, **please** take my life from me (Jonah 4:3)

Biblical Hebrew uses a number of particles for additional emphasis to words, phrases, and statements. Three such particles—particles of entreaty—are found in specific contexts where one individual, or group, is requesting or seeking the favour of another.

- i. The entreating particle נָא is most often attached to a word with a *maqef*, and frequently appears together with verbs in the volitive mood—imperative, jussive and cohortative. It is additionally attached to particles such as אֶל and הִנֵּה, yielding the forms אֶל־נָא and הִנֵּה־נָא. The simplest way to translate this particle is with “please”, “I beg you” or “if you please”. In Gen. 19:20, Lot pleads with two angels for an alternative place to which he can escape. In this context, his very life is at stake, and that of his family, and the particle נָא adds a degree of urgency to his plea.

אִמְלֹטָה נָא שָׁמָּה

**Please** let me escape there (Gen 19:20)

Genesis 13:14, below, shows that in certain circumstances it is better not to translate the particle at all. The text also reveals that social status does not affect how the particle is used, and it may appear in contexts where a subordinate addresses a superior, or a superior, addresses a subordinate. In Gen 13:14, the biblical author uses the particle to express the latter, God’s words to Abraham.

שֶׁא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה שָׁם

Lift your eyes and look out from the place where you are (Gen 13:14)

- ii. The particle נָא on occasion is reinforced and appears in the form אֲנָא (or אֲנֶה). This form should be considered slightly stronger in force, and interpreted as “for pity’s sake”, or “I beseech you”. In Jonah 1, the sailors find themselves pleading for their lives because they do not want to be held accountable for the death of Jonah. In this context, the particle אֲנָא is used to provide a degree of added emphasis as the sailors beg for their lives.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲנֶה יְהוָה אֶל־נָא נֹאבְדָה בְּנַפְשׁ הָאִישׁ

And they said, “**We beseech you**, Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life” (Jonah 1:14)

- iii. The particle בִּי is an interjection that is best interpreted as “pardon” or “excuse me”. It is a term expressing a polite request in contexts where a subordinate addresses a superior. Frequently, biblical authors adopt the term when an individual seeks forgiveness for causing (or potentially causing) an offence. In Exod. 4:10, we find the particle used as Moses is politely trying to refuse the mission God had set before him. In this instance, Moses knows that his attempted refusal will offend God to some degree.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה בִּי אֲדֹנָי לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אֲנִכִּי

And Moses said unto YHWH, “Lord, **pardon me**, I am not a man of words” (Exod. 4:10)