

The Hebrew word “hineni” (הִנְנִי)

Meaning, Usage, and Significance

Meaning and Context in Hebrew

In Hebrew, the word *hineni* (הִנְנִי) literally means “**here I am**,” or more fully, “behold, it’s me.” It is an emphatic response, composed of *hinneh* (“behold” or “here”) with a first-person suffix, essentially saying “*Behold me!*”. Importantly, *hineni* is **not** a casual statement of location or presence. Unlike a simple “I am here” (*ani po* in modern Hebrew) used to mark one’s physical location, *hineni* conveys being fully present and attentive. In everyday contexts, someone might answer a roll-call with a plain “here” (*poh* in Hebrew), a matter-of-fact reply indicating physical presence. By contrast, saying “hineni” implies **total attention and availability** – a deep readiness to respond. It is “more emphatic than the normal word meaning simply ‘here,’” carrying a sense of **volitional and emotional engagement** rather than just physical presence. In other words, *hineni* means “*Here I am, fully at your service.*” It communicates that the speaker is **completely present**, ready to listen and to act, even before knowing what will be asked.

Biblical Usage and Significance

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, *hineni* appears at critical moments when someone is **called by name**, and they answer with this one-word declaration. It occurs about 17 times in Scripture, primarily in **Genesis, Exodus, 1 Samuel, and Isaiah**. In these passages, *hineni* is used as a response to **God’s call** (e.g. by Abraham or Moses), to the call of an **angelic messenger** (God’s proxy), and even in human relationships like a parent calling a child or vice versa. In each case, the word signals that the person has **stopped everything else and is fully attentive** to the one calling. As a result, the Bible often uses *hineni* to set the stage for a pivotal encounter or command. When we see someone say “Here I am,” the narrative is about to shift – the person’s story is about to change in a dramatic way at God’s direction. In this sense, *hineni* carries a **theological significance** beyond its literal meaning: it denotes a heart posture of **readiness, trust, and self-surrender** in moments of divine encounter. As one commentator explains, *hineni* is “not a declaration of location. It is a statement of **existential presence** – *Here I am, completely, wholly for You*”.

Key Scriptural Examples of “Hineni”

Several famous biblical figures uttered *hineni* in response to God, illustrating its depth of meaning:

- **Abraham (Genesis 22)** – When God tested Abraham by calling his name, Abraham answered, “Hineni”. This immediate **“Here I am”** signified Abraham’s willingness to listen and obey even before knowing the command. In the same chapter, Abraham responds “hineni” two more times: once to his son Isaac (signifying fatherly attentiveness) and once to the Angel of the Lord who stops him from sacrificing Isaac. Each *hineni* highlights Abraham’s **faithful readiness** and attentiveness to both God and others.
- **Moses (Exodus 3:4)** – At the burning bush, God calls “Moses, Moses!” and Moses replies, “Hineni”. Here *hineni* marks Moses’s **open-hearted response** to God’s presence. It’s as if Moses says, “Yes Lord, you have my full attention.” This declaration precedes God’s commissioning of Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. Moses’s “here I am” shows his willingness to engage with God (even though moments later he feels unworthy, the initial response is one of availability).
- **Samuel (1 Samuel 3)** – As a boy serving in the temple, **Samuel hears God’s voice** calling his name at night. Not recognizing it at first, he runs to Eli saying “Hineni, here I am, you called me”. After Eli realizes God is calling the boy, Samuel responds to God’s next call. Though the text has him say, “Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening,” the narrative emphasizes his posture of *hineni* – readiness to listen. Indeed, the Hebrew text uses “hineni” as Samuel’s response each time he hears his name (even when he mistakenly runs to Eli). Samuel’s eager “here I am” illustrates a servant’s **attentiveness and obedience** toward God’s voice.
- **Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8)** – In Isaiah’s temple vision, when the Lord asks, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?”, the prophet responds, **“Hineni, send me!”**. Isaiah’s use of *hineni* here —“Here I am, send me”—shows him **volunteering wholeheartedly** for God’s mission. It conveys both his immediate readiness and his total surrender to God’s calling on his life. Isaiah offers himself before knowing the details of the assignment, exemplifying *hineni* as a response of **faith and willingness**.

These examples (among others) show that saying *hineni* is consistently associated with moments of **divine calling or important duty**. Whether it’s Abraham facing the ultimate test of faith, Moses receiving a daunting commission, young Samuel learning to hear God’s voice, or Isaiah offering himself as God’s messenger, *hineni* reflects a **trust-filled “yes”** to God. It indicates that the person is **present and ready** for whatever God asks next. Notably, *hineni* is also used in human relationships in Scripture – for instance, Isaac calls “My father,” and Abraham replies “Hineni, my son” (Gen. 22:7), or Jacob calls to his son Joseph, who answers “Hineni” (Gen. 37:13). In each case, it conveys attentiveness and responsiveness to the one calling, whether human or divine.

Moses responds “Hineni” at the Burning Bush. 17th-century painting by Domenico Fetti (public domain).

Heart Posture of Readiness and Surrender

Saying “hineni” is much more than acknowledging one’s name was called – it is a **heart posture**. The word expresses an attitude of **total readiness, availability, and humility** before the caller. In the biblical instances, the one who says *hineni* is effectively saying: “*You have my full attention and I am completely at your disposal.*” There is a sense of **surrender and trust** in

this response. As one scholar notes, *hineni* “conveys more than physical presence. It conveys a **volitional, emotional, fully engaged presence**”. The person is present not just bodily, but with a willing heart. For example, Abraham’s *hineni* implies “*I am here, Lord, ready to do Your will,*” even though he did not yet know the painful test ahead. Similarly, when young Samuel responded in the night, “Here I am,” he made himself available to receive God’s message, demonstrating a **servant’s openness**.

This heart posture is one of **obedient submission**. To say *hineni* to God is to effectively say “yes” before hearing the request. It is a “**powerful declaration of surrender and complete availability to God,**” a willingness to do whatever the Lord asks **without conditions or prior knowledge**. In this way, *hineni* reflects profound **faith and trust** – the person trusts the Caller (God) enough to offer an unqualified yes. There is also an element of **intimacy** in this response. God’s call is personal (“Abraham!”, “Moses!”, etc.), and the reply “Here I am” is personal as well – a direct answer to the One calling. It indicates a close relationship where the individual knows God’s voice and responds with openness. In Isaiah’s case, *hineni* in the divine council (“Here I am, send me”) shows intimacy by his immediate volunteering for God’s cause.

Moreover, *hineni* implies **readiness to sacrifice or serve**. The individuals who say it often end up in situations requiring great obedience or risk: Abraham was ready to sacrifice his beloved son; Moses had to confront Pharaoh and lead a nation; Isaiah was sent to a stubborn people. Their *hineni* was the first step of surrender that led to obedient action. One commentary describes it as a “powerful declaration of **availability and readiness**” – a heroic willingness to step into whatever God calls one to. In essence, the word *hineni* captures a heart that says: “*Lord, I am fully present with You, and I am ready for Your will.*” This is why *hineni* is often highlighted in sermons and teachings as an ideal “**here I am**” response to God – one of **faith, obedience, and devotion**.

“Hineni” and the Theme of Obedience in Calling

Because *hineni* is frequently uttered at the moment of calling, it is tightly connected to **obedience and divine mission**. Each biblical “hineni!” precedes an instruction or revelation from God – and the ones who say “here I am” go on to **obey God’s command**. For instance, after Abraham’s *hineni*, God asks him to sacrifice Isaac, and Abraham proceeds in obedience until God stops him. Moses’s *hineni* leads to God sending him to Egypt, and despite initial hesitation, Moses accepts the call. Samuel’s attentive “here I am” postures him to receive a difficult prophetic word to deliver to Eli. Isaiah’s *hineni* (“send me”) leads directly to his commissioning as a prophet. In all these scenarios, saying “hineni” was an expression of **willing obedience** – a readiness to act on God’s word. It is as if the person, by saying *hineni*, has already **accepted the assignment** before it’s given. This is why one Hebrew teacher describes *hineni* as “an offer of **total availability**” – the person is reporting for duty to whatever God asks.

Crucially, *hineni* implies obedience **without knowing the details**. This aspect distinguishes it as a response of **faith**. One commentary notes that by saying *hineni*, “we are saying we will do whatever the LORD asks, **not even knowing in advance what that might entail**”. There is a surrender of control: the person doesn’t ask, “What do You want, God?” before answering, but

answers first, trusting God's goodness. This is the epitome of **obedient trust** in divine calling. It reflects the belief that God's call is sovereign and good, and our role is simply to answer and follow. Thus, *hineni* is the language of those who are **yielded to God's will**. It ties into the broader biblical theme that *obedience flows from faithful availability*. As one writer put it, "His wish should be our command" – whenever God speaks, the proper answer is *hineni*, the willingness to comply with whatever He desires.

Even beyond the human response, the concept of *hineni* connects with how God Himself engages in the covenant relationship. Interestingly, Scripture at times depicts God saying "hineni" as well – not in answer to a call, but to **announce His own action**. In the prophets, God often says "Hineni" (usually translated "Behold, I Myself..." or "Here I am [doing something]") when declaring that He will intervene on Israel's behalf. For example, God says in Isaiah that when His people call, "I, the Lord, will answer; they will cry for help, and **He will say: 'Here I am'**" (Isaiah 58:9). In these cases, God's "hineni" signals His **readiness to help, to fulfill His promises**. This divine usage highlights an important truth: God makes Himself available to us in love, and He desires us to be available to Him. Our *hineni* is thus a **mirror of God's own faithfulness** – He says "Here I am for you," and we respond "Here I am for You, Lord." This mutual availability lies at the heart of the covenant relationship.

"Hineni" vs. Other Hebrew Responses

It's worth noting how *hineni* differs from other possible Hebrew responses. As mentioned, a simple acknowledgment like "yes" or "I'm here" can be conveyed with words such as **ken** (yes) or **poh** (here) in Hebrew. These would be ordinary replies to someone calling one's name in daily life or in a classroom. *Hineni*, however, is a much **stronger and more personal reply**. Hebrew speakers in biblical times reserved *hineni* for meaningful moments, especially in response to God or to someone deeply respected. One rabbi explains that *hineni* indicates **openness to hear and obey, without yet knowing the request**, whereas a phrase like "**hineni + [verb]**" (often appearing as "Here I am to do X") is used when the speaker already intends a specific action. For example, when God speaks in Scripture saying "hineni" followed by a verb (like "Hineni mevi..." – "Here I am bringing [the flood]"), it means "I am here and I'm about to act". But when a person replies simply "hineni" on its own, it means "I am here *listening* for your instruction". In short, *hineni* (Here I am) as a standalone response implies **submission to the caller's agenda**, whereas "I am here [to do something]" implies the speaker's own agenda or known task.

Another way to see the difference is that saying "**I am here**" (***Hineh ani* or *hi'neni* with slight vowel change**) can introduce one's readiness to perform a duty (for instance, "I am here to fulfill the commandment") – it limits itself to a defined action or duty. But "**Here I am**" (***hineni***) without specifying an action is an **open-ended commitment**. It leaves the next move to the caller. One commentary notes that *hineni* is "not an official mitzvah (command) in itself, but a **dramatic one-on-one encounter** without safeguards". This underscores how extraordinary *hineni* is: the person saying it steps into the unknown, guided only by trust. By contrast, a response like "I am here to do X" stays within the realm of the **known and expected** duties. Thus, *hineni* stands out as the language of **personal relationship and willing obedience**,

rather than routine compliance. It differs from a generic “yes, I’m here” in the same way that a heartfelt **“at your service”** differs from a casual “yep.” As one Israeli ministry beautifully summarizes, *hineni* is “a way of expressing **total readiness to give oneself** – it’s an offer of total availability”. Whenever one uses *hineni*, especially toward God, it carries this rich sense of **wholehearted commitment** that other responses simply do not match.

Conclusion

In summary, *hineni* (“Here I am”) in Hebrew encapsulates a profound message with just a single word. Literally an acknowledgment of presence, it has been used in the Bible as a response of **reverence, willingness, and trust**. From Abraham, Moses, and Samuel to Isaiah, those who answered God’s call with *hineni* demonstrated a readiness to obey and a heart surrendered to God’s will. The word signifies a **posture of intimacy** – the responder is fully present with God – and a posture of **obedience** – the responder is fully yielded to God. It differs greatly from a routine response; *hineni* is **an exclamation of faithful availability**, often made in pivotal moments of divine calling. Theologically, it reminds us that true obedience begins with simply saying “Yes, Lord, I’m here” – before we even know the details. It’s the posture of a servant who stands in the presence of his master, eager to hear and do the master’s will. In our own spiritual life, *hineni* can thus serve as a model of how to respond to God: with **open ears, open hearts, and open hands**, ready to go wherever He leads. As Scripture shows, when God calls, the faithful answer is, “*Hineni – here I am.*”

Sources

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3. Mark Gerson, “**Torah Commentary: ‘Here I am,’**” *CBN Israel* (2020) – Reflection on Genesis 22, noting *hineni* is a statement of existential presence (wholly being there for the caller).
4. FIRM Israel, “**The Hebrew Meaning of Hineni (Here am I),**” via *Treasures in Plain Sight blog* (2024) – Describes *hineni* as a declaration of surrender and willingness to do whatever God asks.
5. Rev. Dr. David J. Zucker, “**Only This and Nothing More? (When God Said ‘Hineni!’),**” *De Profundis* (2018) – Notes that *hineni* conveys a fully engaged presence and contrasts it with the simple “here” (**poh**) used in Hebrew for physical presence.