Ruling the rûaḥ: Emotional Experience and Expression in Ancient Hebrew

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Abstract: Emotions are one of the most fascinating and difficult aspects of human experience, and have received significant attention in biblical studies. This paper explores how one Hebrew lexeme, rûaḥ, provides a point of entry into the complex world of how emotions are expressed in ancient texts. Drawing from some insights of Cognitive Linguistics, it examines the use of rûaḥ to express the experience of impatience and patience, and arrogance and humility. This paper then challenges a long-held but simplistic equation of rûaḥ with anger, and argues that a more nuanced and complex relationship exists between lexeme and emotion than most citations in scholarship suggest.

Keywords: emotions, ruah, breath, anger, patience, arrogance, semantics, metaphor, cognitive-linguistics

1. Emotion in Human Life and the Bible

It is difficult to consider the human person without attention to emotion. The affective dimension is central to our experience as humans and provides an interesting perspective to bring to the Bible—an opportunity to better understand something of the people within and behind these texts. This paper will shed light on a new pathway into understanding the emotional experiences expressed in the Hebrew Bible by focussing on the lexeme רווח.
In Classical Hebrew, רוּחַ exhibits a high degree of polysemy, used in reference to phenomena ranging from the meteorological (wind, Eccl 1:6; Ps 1:4), the divine (Spirit, Judg 3:10; Isa 61:1), other beings ('spirits,' 1 Kgs 22:21), and in diverse ways to humanity. It is within this complex sub-structure of the anthropological uses of רוּחַ that we observe its relationship with emotion. רוּחַ often refers to human breath (Gen 6:17; Job 9:18), and relatedly, life—especially as that imparted to humans by God (e.g., Ps 104:29; Eccl 12:7; Job 34:14).² The רוּחַ is typically localised within the human person, leading to provocative associations between it and the source of human actions and speech—what we might refer to as its volitional use, or perhaps more broadly (if at the risk of anachronism), the internal self.³ Many of these possible uses could relate to the expression of emotion (e.g., the relationship of breathing patterns with emotion), and so it is not surprising that רוּחַ has been associated with affective experience for some time.⁴ However, this usage of רוּחַ is often described either in quite vague generic terms such as “temperament,” “disposition,” “psychic forces,” or with reference to quite specific experiences, especially “courage” and “anger.” The tendency towards lexicographical brevity (what is a “psychic force”?), polysemous translational glosses such as “temper” (which may refer in English to both a person’s general emotional situation or the specific experience of anger), and very limited textual support (the sense “anger” is asserted based on three out of approximately 378 instances of רוּחַ in the Hebrew Bible), indicate that the nature of the relationship between רוּחַ and emotion is ripe for more rigorous attention.

We propose to begin this reappraisal by drawing from the insights of frame semantics, cognitive scripts, and a kind of cognitive metaphor/metonymy to demonstrate the use of spatial figurative language in the depiction of patience/impatience and humility/arrogance, and use these as a point of reference to question the casual equation of רוּחַ with anger.⁵

² The conceptual relationships generated byarkin's potential reference to divine and human (and beyond) often makes precise semantic categorisation possible. This ambiguity is put to good use by the authors of biblical texts.

³ For a recent exploration of some of the connections between רוּחַ and the category of selfhood, see C.A. Newsom, The Spirit within Me. Self and Agency in Ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism (AYBRL; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2021) chs. 2–3.


⁵ Most readers will recognise these approaches to language as belonging to the family of Cognitive Linguistics. While we will address some particulars of these approaches as part of our study below, those seeking a helpful orientation to the field may refer to C.H.J. van der Merwe, "Biblical Hebrew and Cognitive Linguistics:
2. רווח and PATIENCE/IMPATIENCE

The first group of texts we will examine employs רווח to express the experience of PATIENCE and IMPATIENCE in terms of spatial LENGTH.

Proverbs 14:29

ארץ אמס רביה ופערה מרימ אולת.

The “long of nostrils” are great of understanding, and the “short of רווח” exalt stupidity.6

Job 21:4

אם־אהב שעתי ואסימחות לאתרקף רוחי.

Is my complaint against a human being? Or why should my רווח not be shortened?

Exodus 6:9

судך בכול שפшу יישאל ולא שמעו שלימה פקצר והם וを目בה כלש.

Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses because of their “shortness of רווח” and because of their harsh labour.

Micah 2:7

אמרו ביתי יעקב חפץ רווח ייה ואתר toplantı החייו חפץ רווח והיי עד יחשב פ análise.

Should this be said, house of Jacob? Is the “רווח of Yhwh shortened”? Are these his deeds? Do not my words do good to the one who walks uprightly?

Ecclesiastes 7:8

סוב א småיה דבר פארפריט טב אריריהו ונברידיהו.

Better the end of a thing than its beginning; better the “long of רווח” than the “high in רווח.”

Sirach 5:11

יהיוToMany רבעי נדושי וברך רווח משפט.

Be quick to hear but in “length of רווח” speak your answer.

A General Orientation, New Perspectives in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew (eds. A.D. Hornkohl – G. Khan) (Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures 7; Cambridge: University of Cambridge & Open Book 2021) 641–696. For the most comprehensive “state-of-the-art” for the field more generally, see V. Evans, Cognitive Linguistics. A Complete Guide, 2 ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2019). In keeping with conventions within Cognitive Linguistics, concepts are in small caps to distinguish them from the lexical units used to evoke such concepts in language use. Thus, ANGER is that evoked in various ways by anger, colère, אפק, etc. While these words share sufficient semantic overlap to be frequently offered as cross-linguistic equivalents, each language differs in its conceptualisation and categorisation of feelings.

6 Unattributed translations are my own. In all translations, the transliteration רווח has been substituted for all English glosses, and quotation marks mark intentionally “wooden” glosses pertinent to our analysis.
The figurative language common across these texts is of the relative “length” or relative “shortness” of the רוח. To understand how this metaphor expresses emotion, it is necessary to examine the function of the SHORT/LONG model in light of other anthropological metaphors—especially קצר + נשמה—as well as consider the usage of הרוח in this model.

The root קצר often profiles the schematic lack of length or act of shortening something.7 When used in reference to time, it suggests a prematurely shortened period (with יום, Ps 65:46; 104:24; Job 14:1; with שנה, Prov 10:27). It also regularly appears with anthropological nouns, such as יד “hand” (Num 11:23; Isa 50:2a; 59:1) referring to the loss or lack of power.8 Perhaps most semantically relevant for understanding הרוח, קצר appears with נשמה in Num 21:4; Judg 10:16; 16:16; and Zech 11:8. These anthropological nouns are closely related in this metaphor but they should not be treated as fully synonymous (see below).9 The SHORT metaphors involving הרוח and נשמה depict the lack or loss of capacity of a person or group within the text to endure an event. How this is presented is a matter of perspective, with either the person or group perceiving the situation as intolerable—what we might call impatience (e.g., Zech 11:8)—or the discourse itself evaluating the event and depicting it as unbearable—what we might call exhaustion (e.g., Exod 6:9).10 This metaphor may be characterised as spatial length is capacity to act. When depicting the experience of impatience, the texts demonstrate the lack of the text’s “self” (i.e., the proverbial self, Job, Israel) to control themselves or their circumstance. The verbal instantiation of this figurative depiction likely indicates a premature restriction of capacity that should otherwise exist (analogous to the usage with time nouns above), while the adjectival and nominal uses of the roots likely characterise the resultant state of incapacity. There are few explicit metaphorical mappings present beyond the central correlation of length and capacity, but there are some hints at a cognitive script for this emotion. These scripts are complex culturally-embedded conceptual frames. A frame is any systems of concepts related in such a way that to understand any one of them, one must understand the whole structure. In language, when a linguistic element evokes a conceptual element, all the other related elements within the frame are made cognitively available by it.11 Emotional scripts are abstracted

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7 With both קצר and חזק what the relative “length” is measured against is not inherent to the lexeme itself, it is provided by the context or relies upon a general cultural “landmark” for what counts as long or short.
9 Robert D. Haak’s seminal essay (“A Study and New Interpretation of qṣr npš,” JBL 101 [1982] 161, https://doi.org/10.2307/3260715) is frequently cited as evidence of קצר + נשמה and קצר + הרוח as functionally synonymous. More recently, see the equivalence assumed in Katrin Müller’s otherwise excellent work, Lobe den Herrn, meine "Seele". Eine kognitiv-linguistische Studie zur nähe des Menschen im Alten Testament (BWANT 215; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2018) 146–147. Haak’s study errs on several points, including functionally equating distinct anthropological terms, failing to note the importance of internal or discourse perspective, and over-confidence in his reading of UDB 1.16 6 34. On the Ugaritic texts, see M. McAfee, Life and Mortality in Ugaritic. A Lexical and Literary Study (EANEC 7; University Park: Eisenbrauns 2019) 104–107.
10 Contra Haak’s suggestion (“A Study and New Interpretation of qṣr npš,” 162) that “impatience” and “weakness” are entirely distinct uses of the phrase.
from language data and seek to describe the expected sequence (i.e., related conceptual information) of an experience within a culture, such as the events that typically give rise to an emotion, expected physiological or behavioural corollaries of the emotion, the usual objects, subjects, and moral evaluation of the emotion, etc. For impatience, the causal event is often a perception of imminent death (see the presence of לְמָת in Num 21:5, and potentially comically in Judg 16:16) or grave injustice (Exod 6:9; Judg 10:16; Job 21:4; Zech 11:8). This often leads to complaint (Num 21:5; Job 21:4; Zech 11:9) but may also result in resistance to action (Exod 6:9; Judg 10:16).

The opposing length metaphor is significantly rarer, and likely is an explicit and playful inversion of the short metaphor. The רוח that can be “shortened” in impatience, can also be conceptualised as “long” in patience. In Eccl 7:8 this is evaluated as ethically superior to the related height metaphor we will explore below.

The use of רוח and נשימה as compatible lexemes suggests this was a valid and active metaphor in ancient Hebrew. It also suggests that there is some semantic compatibility between רוח and נשימה that motivates their common use. The most obvious semantic overlap between the lexemes is the concept of life. However, the stativity implied in Exod 6:9 and divine referent of Mic 2:7 and Judg 10:16, combined with the clear respiratory parallel אפֶס ארוך in Prov 14:29 suggests that the common semantic reference may be to the related sense, respiration. Normal breathing rhythms are associated with the normal functioning of the self, and represent complete control of one’s actions. Abbreviated breathing patterns indicate the loss of such control, i.e., a loss of capacity to act appropriately (either in impatience or exhaustion). Alternatively, the “lengthening” of breathing patterns expresses the presence of self-control, i.e., the experience of patience. This is consistent with the widespread observation in many languages that physical and expressive responses of an emotion are used to metonymically take the place of the emotion. The link between respiratory lexemes and the realm of self-control indicates at least one point of intersection between the internally-located רוח and the realm of volition, the internally-located capacity to act or restrain action.

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12 There is one further curious Aramaic parallel in 4Q550 13–4, 4, which is part of a complicated court narrative and is often construed as appeasement (perhaps, the “lengthening” of capacity?), see “l’esprit du Roi s’apaisa,” E. Puech, Qumrân Grotte 4-XXVII. Textes araméens, deuxième partie. 4Q550–4Q577sa, 4Q580–4Q587 et appendices (DJD 37; Oxford: Clarendon 2009) 13–15. The only instance of נשימה and נשימה (Job 6:11) appears to profile נשימה as life and so does not evoke the emotion metaphor.


14 Nominal נשימה rarely relates directly to breath in Hebrew, although the verbal root in Exod 23:12; 31:17; 2 Sam 16:14 as well as the potential metonymic relation betweenthroat and respiration (Job 41:13) make it at least plausible. On נשימה as breath, see Müller, Meine “Seele,” 126–141, esp. 136–138. Édouard Dhorme (L’emploi métaphorique, 111) correlates נשימה and נשימה as breath, but then understands this to mutually refer to the internal self (appealing to Isa 26:9).

15 While long observed in emotion and literary studies, this particular cognitive metonym was first stated as such in Z. Kövecses, Emotion Concepts (New York: Springer 1990) 134.
We cannot say with certainty why נשע and רוח are used to evoke the same metaphor—although the distribution of texts makes chronological or lectal explanations unlikely. Perhaps it is a matter of lexical focus, wherein instances where the respiratory motivations for the metaphor are more salient prefer רוח as it is more centrally-evocative of BREATH/BREATHING. By contrast, the stronger association between נשע and LIFE may lend itself to other uses. Alternatively, the lexical selection may be motivated by the textual context, where other uses of רוח may be leveraged in the broader discourse. For example, רוח in Mic 2:7 becomes more significant in light of the characterisation of Micah as “filled” with רוח for justice; or the semantic associations of רוח with SPEECH prompt its use in Job 21:4 or Sir 5:11. Indeed, the use in Eccl 7:8 allows for the spatial play of LENGTH and HEIGHT to be explored below.

3. רוח and ARROGANCE/HUMILITY

The juxtaposition of a LONG and HIGH רוח in Eccl 7:8 introduces the second emotional expression in our study: the depiction of ARROGANCE/HUMILITY as relative HEIGHT.

Proverbs 16:18–19

18 Before destruction, arrogance; before stumbling, “height of rûaḥ.”
19 It is better to be of a lowly rûaḥ among the poor, than to divide plunder with the arrogant.

Proverbs 29:23

The arrogance of humanity brings humiliation; but the lowly of rûaḥ obtain honour.

Ecclesiastes 7:8

Better the end of a thing than its beginning; better the “long of rûaḥ” than the “high in rûaḥ.”

Isaiah 57:15

For thus said the High and Exalted One, who dwells forever, and whose name is holy: “On high and in holiness I dwell, yet with the crushed and lowly of rûaḥ, to revive the rûaḥ of the lowly and to revive the heart of the crushed.”

16 On Mic 2:7 and 3:5–8, see J.R. Levison, Filled with the Spirit (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2009) 41–47.
To understand the emotions being expressed in these texts, we must pay attention to the conceptual structure of the metaphor they evoke—especially the cultural script of the circumstances that lead to and arise from height—as well as the semantic contribution of רוח to these figurative expressions.

 HEIGHT is highly metaphorically productive in Ancient Hebrew, as it is in many languages. When the “high” entity is a person, there is a frequent association between spatial height and social status (SOCIAL STATUS IS PHYSICAL HEIGHT). To be “high” is to be counted as in authority and worthy of honour, and conversely, to be “low” is to be considered of lesser status. The discourse provides the perspective from which this status is to be evaluated. The root רוח is used in reference to Yhwh’s exaltation in Exod 15:1, 21, and is considered an appropriate “elevation” by the wider discourse context. However, the “elevation” of the proverbial figure in Prov 16:18–19 is considered inappropriate and is characterised negatively. The discourse perspective determines the sub-metaphor, ARROGANCE IS BEING HIGH OR EMINENCE IS BEING HIGH. The same perspectivisation occurs with other anthropological nouns in similar metaphors. “Lifting” (נשא) the eyes (2 Kgs 19:22) or head (Job 10:15) are presented negatively as arrogance when performed by the person possessing those bodily members but are presented positively when performed by another to the person (Gen 40:3; Ps 3:3). With elevated “face” (Ps 10:4), “heart” (Prov 16:5; 2 Chr 32:25–26), and “eyes” (Ps 101:5) are all similarly associated with inappropriate self-evaluation. It seems likely that this pattern of perspectivisation and evaluation is maintained when רוח is elevated entity. To have a “high” רוח does not indicate superior status, but rather the self-perception of superior status. The typical internal location of רוח in the person likely motivates its use in this metaphor, approximating what we might call the “internal self.”

While the LENGTH metaphor with ים displayed a preference for SHORT over LONG values, the HEIGHT metaphor appears equally valid at either end of the scale. Prov 16:19 preferences the category of ים ים over the arrogant. Just as a person may locate themselves

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19 In Hebrew, the verbal forms of roots such as ים, ים, ים, etc. are used of spatial location (confirming the metaphor), but the nominal forms commonly carry the figurative meaning (suggesting this metaphor is deeply embedded).
20 Similarly, ים appears positively of Yhwh in, for example, Isa 5:16, but negatively in Prov 16:18–19, Isa 3:16.
21 R. Hentschke, ים, TDOT II, 359. The one exception to the negative evaluation is 2 Chr 17:6, where Jehoshaphat is described as having a “high heart in the ways of Yhwh.” This supports our proposition above regarding the importance of discourse perspective.
22 Nicole L. Tilford (Sensing, 151) suggests that in such metaphors, the inner nature of the experience preferences proprioceptive motivations, given the close relationship between an individual’s awareness of themselves in space and their “sense of corporeal being.”
as superior to others (depicted as being high), they may similarly locate themselves as inferior to others: humility is being low. There are wider metaphorical associations between a low position on a vertical scale and being in a state distress. This conceptually aligns humility with the potential or reality of suffering as indicated even in our passages by עניים (Prov 16:19) and דכא (Isa 57:15).

In Prov 16:18–19 and 29:23 we see a highly-compressed emotion script for arrogance/humility. When the discourse agent (i.e., the person in view in the text) moves themselves up the vertical scale, there is an expectation that they will “fall” downwards to the bottom of the scale: arrogance (= height) inevitably leads to destruction (= low status/distress). The inverse is also shown in which “low” things are eventually lifted from their state to a place of greater esteem by another, usually divine, agent (Prov 29:23; Ps 9:14; 30:2; 40:3; 113:4–8; Isa 57:15). This metaphorical scale, and the script it assumes, warns against self-elevation. To evaluate yourself beyond what is spiritually and social advisable is to invite an inevitable correction. Indeed, it is judged wiser to adopt a “lower” position and self-estimation than invite the “fall” that awaits the “high of רוח.”

4. רוח and anger

We began by arguing that the role of רוח in emotional expression has been long recognised but insufficiently studied. So far, we have demonstrated how רוח is used in the expression of two distinct emotional experiences that are depicted using spatial figurative language that leverage the polysemy of רוח in subtle and poignant ways. The final part of this exploration is also the most speculative: reappraising the relationship of רוח and anger.

רוח has been closely associated with the specific emotion of anger, as widely attested in English translations, standard lexica, and textual commentaries. 25 While anger is one of the most studied emotions in linguistic and biblical studies, there has been very little work

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23 King, Surrounded, 100–132. עניים instantiates a further metaphor where distress is fragmentation.
24 Philip D. King (Surrounded, 114–126) demonstrates how verticality is productive in depicting distress, which may explain the description of the endpoint of the “fall” due to pride as שבר “destruction.” For ANES parallels, see also G. Zisa, “Going, Returning, Rising: The Movement of the Organs in the Mesopotamian Anatomy,” Kaskal 16 (2019) 453–476.
25 For example, “temper, especially anger,” BDB s.v. “רוח,” 3c; “ill temper, rage, wrath,” HALOT s.v. “רוח,” 7f; “anger,” CDCH s.v. “רוח” 3b(7); “directly, רוח indicates only impulsive, life-strengthening psychic forces such as anger, rage, courage, perseverance … even more intense arrogance, as sometimes even manifest directly in excited breathing,” Westermann – Albertz, “רוח,” TLOT III, 1210; “the person’s own רוח is the source of phenomena associated with aggressiveness, whether anger or courage as the virtue of one’s own spiritual strength,” Fabry – Tengström, “רוח,” TDOT XIII, 389. Further, Johnson, Vitality, 26; “breath as the hard breathing through the nostrils in anger,” C.A. Briggs, “The Use of מים in the Old Testament,” JBL 19 (1900) 133; “physical strength, courage, and anger, and viewed sometimes as the seat or source of all of these and especially of violent agitation,” W.R., Schoemaker, “The Use of מים in the Old Testament, and of Πνευμα in the New Testament: A Lexicographical Study,” JBL 23 (1904) 18; “ce qui a permis cet usage, c’est l’influence de la colère sur la respiration,” Dhorme, L’emploi métaphorique, 81.
done in clarifying the nature of its relationship with רוח. In addition to the terse glosses provided by lexica, previous studies referred to “psychic vitality,” “physical powers,” or “one’s own spiritual strength,” that when present in abundance manifest as anger. These descriptions are rooted in often unexpressed theories of human composition and behaviour that limit their ability to elucidate these uses of רוח.

To evaluate the nature of the relationship between רוח and anger two groups of texts need to be examined. The first group are often peripherally cited as evidence of this meaning for רוח and include Isa 25:4–5, related passages such as Exod 15:8; Ps 18:16; Job 4:9, and Job 15:12–13. We will argue that some of the texts in this first group do involve רוח in the expression of anger, but as part of larger metaphorical or metonymic constructs involving meteorological source frames. The second group are those passages that are most frequently presented as evidence that רוח directly evokes the experience of anger: Prov 16:32; Eccl 10:4; and Judg 8:3. We will seek to demonstrate that closer attention to these texts suggest alternative readings of this second group of texts that are at least equally, if not more, persuasive than anger.

4.1. Texts Occasionally Cited as Evidence of רוח as Anger

This first group of texts are only occasionally referenced when discussing רוח as anger. Typically, this group includes Isa 25:4–5, and sometimes related passages such as Exod 15:8; Ps 18:16; and Job 4:9. While only mentioned in the TDOT article and rarely in commentaries on other related texts, we also suggest Job 15:13 belongs in this category.

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Isaiah 25:4–5a

For you are a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the rainstorm, a shade from the heat; for the ṛûaḥ of the ruthless is like a rainstorm against a wall, 5 like heat in a dry land. ⁵

The proximity of other meteorological terms such as זָרָם and חֲרֹב exerts significant contextual constraint on how we understand רוח, namely, as wind. ³⁰ Several times throughout Isaiah, divine anger is portrayed as wind (Isa 11:4, 15; 17:13; 27:8; 30:28; 32:2; 40:7; 41:16; 59:19). Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, this is more typically and specifically expressed as anger is a hot wind—an image grounded in the experience of the sirocco/’east wind’ and the sudden destruction it could cause to crops. ³¹ The metaphor conceptually aligns humanity with vegetation exposed to the hot and dry wind, suffering and wilting as the objects of intense and destructive divine anger (Isa 11:15; 27:8; 30:27–28; 40:7; similarly, Ps 11:6; 83:14–16; Amos 1:2; Ezek 19:12; Jer 4:11; 13:24; 18:17). ³² Notably, all these texts present a divine subject of the experience of anger, directed towards human agonists. Here in Isaiah 25, the imagery is inverted such that human subjects (עריצים) are unleashing their anger as a destructive wind against a divine agonist—to no effect. ³³

Other related texts rarely cited in support of רוח as anger reflect a similar cluster of metaphors. Exod 15:8; Ps 18:16; and Job 4:9 are closely related lexically and syntactically, especially in explicitly joining רוח and the divine אֶפֶס (Exod 15:8; Ps 18:16; Job 4:9) and נשׁמה (Ps 18:16; Job 4:9). These collocations suggest that divine respiration is in view, evoking a further metaphor WIND IS DIVINE BREATH. ³⁴ This metaphor blends with anger is wind/hot wind to form the metaphorical complex above with its typical divine subject.

These texts demonstrate that רוח can be used in the expression of anger. However, overwhelmingly, רוח is used in conjunction with other lexemes to evoke breath (as part

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²⁹ While emending קיר “wall” to קור “cold, winter,” is plausible, דריה makes sense within the characterisation of God as refuge and enjoys the support of Targ. and Isa 28:17, so J.N. Oswalt, Isaiah 1–39 (NICOT 1; Grand Rapid, MI: Eerdmans 1986) 468; B.S. Childs, Isaiah. A Commentary (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2001) 181; J.D.W. Watts, Isaiah 1–33, Rev. ed. (WBC 24; Nashville, TN: Nelson 2005) 385. Given the pairing of storm and heat earlier in the verse, it seems likely that the start of Isa 25:5 should be included as the parallel comparative clause to 25:4c, so Oswalt, Isaiah 1–39, 462.


³² Kotzé, The Conceptualisation of Anger, 170.

³³ Although the potential wordplay of צִון with “Zion” hints at the close relationship between Yhwh and those he protects. This may evoke a more complex cultural frame involving God’s foundation of, dwelling in, and protection of the city of Zion, see J.J.M. Roberts, First Isaiah. A Commentary (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress 2015) 322.

³⁴ See the overlapping meteorological lexemes in Ps 18:11–15.
of wind is divine breath) or wind (as part of anger is wind/hot wind) to express divine anger. The exception to this divine subject in Isa 25:4–5 is likely an intentional poetic inversion of this metaphor and its expectations so as to emphasise God’s protective role.

Job 15:12–13

מָהֵיָכְתֶךָ לְפָנַי וְהָיָרָזָמֶן לְפָנַי. וְהָיַוְקְחֶךָ לְפָנַי. 12 Why let your heart carry you away, and why let your eyes flash, 13 that you turn your ruah against God, and bring from your mouth such words?

This text may be another inversion of the use of רוח for divine anger, reversing the roles of divine subject and human object to accuse Job. Yet, the syntax and discourse context suggests otherwise. In Job 9:18, hiphil שב יבָשׂ appeared with רוח in reference to the relentless of the divine assault upon Job, restricting Job’s life by preventing the return of his breath (see similar collocations in Judg 15:19; 1 Sam 30:2). The similar syntax in Job 15:13 suggests that a similar meaning for רוח is present, breath. This is supported by the immediate context of Job 15:7, where Eliphaz evokes a complex cultural frame, the first human. In the Hebrew Bible and in the ANES more widely, this cultural concept was understood to have been formed of breath and dust (Gen 2:7; Eccl 3:19–20; 12:7; Ps 104:29–30). However, Eliphaz does not appear to be referring to Job’s life in this instance, but rather to how he is using his God-given breath to speak against God—corroborated by explicit references to speech in the b-colon. Arguably, this use of רוח appears in an broader experience of anger, but as with Isaiah and the Isaiah-like texts above, רוח does not directly refer to the experience of anger itself.

The first category of texts, peripherally cited as evidence for understanding רוח as anger, demonstrate that the lexeme can appear in such expressions but only as part of wider figurative networks that express the emotion. As Matthew Schlimm notes when commenting on lexical associations with anger: “although there are cases in which [רוח] has connections with anger … רוח is not innately connected with anger.”

4.2. Texts Centrally Cited as Evidence of רוח as anger

This second category of texts are those that are most commonly cited as indicating an innate connection between רוח and anger: Prov 16:32; Eccl 10:4; and Judg 8:3.
Proverbs 16:32

Better patient than a mighty warrior; and one who rules his רוח than one who takes a city.

A minority of commentators and other scholars understand here as referring to anger. Paul Kruger and Zacharias Kotzé understand this figuratively: Kruger as a metaphor, ANGER is an OPPONENT in keeping with the military imagery of לוח ומדל, and Kotzé as a metonym, HEAVY BREATHING FOR ANGER, in keeping with the parallel use of נשך. Prov 14:29 above similarly juxtaposed נשך and רוח as reflective of emotional states depicting the lack or presence of capacity to control one’s actions, and the conceptual links between PATIENCE and ANGER are significant. However, רוח typically refers to a longer-term relationship of authority over (ב) another, which suggests that the experience of ANGER is not that which requires defeat and subjugation. Rather, רוח more likely refers to the internal self. As Richard J. Clifford aptly puts it, “conquest of self is better than conquest of others.”

Ecclesiastes 10:4

If the רוח of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post, for calmness puts to rest great offenses.

In contrast to a minority of scholars who consider רוח in Prov 16:32 to directly refer to ANGER, Eccl 10:4 is almost universally read as such. This text offers advice on interacting with local authorities. If “anger” is an acceptable gloss for רוח, this verse neatly matches

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40 So Targ. and Syr., both of which use reflexive יש in place of רוח.
43 The ambiguity of נשך is interesting. It is certainly not on the level of theabin “king” in Eccl 8:3, and arguably refers to a less specific and more localised official, “Amtsträgers,” M. Köhlmoos, Kobelet. Der Prediger Salomo (ATD 16/5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2015) 218.
the typical script for anger in Ancient Hebrew suggested by Schlimm. Anger is caused by a perceived wrongdoing, and is typically directed by those possessing a degree of power against those judged responsible for the perceived wrongdoing. It usually entails a separation of some sort between parties, often involving violence, and is almost always negatively evaluated (except for kingly or divine anger, which, like the height metaphors above, is considered appropriate).

Eccl 10:4 depicts a social superior as the subject of anger, which has been caused by perceived wrongdoing. In addition, there is a similar co-text in 2 Sam 11:20a which features חמה, a term more directly evocative of anger: "then, if the king's anger rises, and if he says to you..." This makes the anger reading for רוח plausible. Yet, this does not mean that it is the only possible explanation.

At this point in our study, we have demonstrated that, apart from contextually clear instances of anger is wind, there are only two instances where רוח may evoke anger: here and Judg 8:3. This raises the question of linguistic relevance. There is a tendency in linguistic communication to minimise the cognitive processing effort required for a hearer to infer the intended meaning. If anger is a very rare use of רוח (which, even allowing for the small corpus size of Classical Hebrew, seems fair to say), what is the justification for its use in these two texts? What does this lexeme contribute to these texts that a more direct (i.e., requiring less processing cost) way of expressing anger, such as חמה, does not?

These questions suggest that alternative readings for רוח should at least be explored for these texts. One such reading attempts to provide a metaphorical motivation for the use of רוח, such as heavy breathing for anger. This blends a relatively more typical use of רוח, breath, with the contextually-suggested emotion, anger. However, apart from the divine uses surveyed above (which are themselves blended with anger is wind), there is a paucity of examples where the human experience of anger is presented via respiration patterns. There is also nothing in the immediate context to evoke such metonyms or metaphors.

44 Summarising Schlimm, Fratricide, 63–64.
45 חמה “heat” evokes anger via the physical and expressive responses of an emotion for the emotion metonym. This is an example of Schlimm’s “innate connection,” i.e., the lexeme can be understood as evoking anger apart from any heat lexemes in the context.
46 This concept derives from Relevance Theory, on which see E.-A. Gutt, Translation and Relevance. Cognition and Context, 2 ed. (Manchester: St Jerome 2000). While not strictly part of Cognitive Linguistics, the two share some overlap, see V. Evans – M. Green, Cognitive Linguistics. An Introduction (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University 2006) §13.2.
48 Indeed, while ancient versions often gloss רוח with lexemes that may evoke anger, such as ἐρείτη (Prov 16:32 LXX), θυμός (Prov 29:11 LXX), and ס렇 (Prov 29:11 Syr.), the versions here follow the MT quite closely: πνεῦμα + ἀναβῇ (LXX); רוחא + אנט (Syr.); and spiritus + ascendere (Vulg.). This is all the more remarkable given how greatly the versions diverge in translating the second colon of the verse.
Two further readings rely upon wider semantic associations of רוח. The Targum of Eccl 10:4 expands the reference to רוח to רוח ברה, ורָאשָׁה בַּרְאוֹס, removing the reference to social superiors in favour of a more personal plea that leaves the original text far behind. Stuart Weeks links the use of רוח and על with leadership, as in the narrative of Num 11:29 (presumably, too, Judg 3:10; 1 Sam 10:10; Isa 11:2; 42:1). רוח is thus a mark that “those people are endowed with authority,” and here “a way of describing the urge to take control, which Qohelet believes should be avoided.” Again, this is a fairly specialised use of רוח that would require some contextual information to reliably evoke.

We tentatively suggest a novel reading that better explains the use of רוח while acknowledging the contextual adherence to a typical emotional script. The verbal root עלה is incredibly common (~894x in the Hebrew Bible) and can evoke many of the varied metaphorical uses of height. When combined with an על prepositional phrase, it most commonly refers to vertical movement with hostile intent (e.g., Judg 6:3; 15:10; 1 Kgs 15:17)—likely motivated by a cultural model in which defensive structures were typically associated with geographical height. Alternatively, it may refer to gaining superiority over another according to the status is height metaphor (Deut 28:43; Ps 137:6; Prov 31:29). If we allow that רוח does not refer to anger here, we may consider other more conventional uses such as the internal self. This usage was already noted as motivating the use of רוח in the height metaphors for arrogance/humility above. This generates a plausible reading of the text wherein עלה and על profile the relative height (i.e., status) difference between the ruler’s self-perception and the proverbial “you.” The מושל exhibits an inflated self-estimation that is exerted against the reader, with Qoheleth counselling the reader to remain at “your post” (neither proudly contesting, nor meekly grovelling).

This reading is at least as plausible as the anger construal, better explains the choice of רוח, and enjoys greater support from clearer emotional expressions involving the lexeme. Given the significant overlap in the cultural models for anger and arrogance in the ANE (e.g., status imbalances), the ethical advice on either reading remains remarkably similar. Even if this particular reading is not considered persuasive, the questions regarding the universal acceptance of the anger reading must be seriously considered by future engagements of this text.

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51 Crenshaw (Eclesiastes, 170) sees something of a vertical metaphor at play here in the contrast of מרפא and רוח, יניח and עלה, even though the second colon of this verse is highly ambiguous.
52 This may even motivate the shift from general wisdom statements to the second-person address in this verse.
53 Indeed, חום may act as a foil to the movement profiled by עלה: remain in the appropriate “level” befitting your status until equilibrium is restored.
Judges 8:3c

Then, their ruhām relaxed(?) from against him when he spoke this word.

Judg 8:3 is the final and most frequently cited text in support of רוח as anger.54 The Ephraimites take issue with Gideon's victory over the Midianites, complaining that they are denied their role in the fight (Judg 8:1). Gideon assures them that their capture of the Midianite leaders was superior to his victory (8:2), and the situation is defused (8:3). Construing רוח as anger yields a very plausible reading of the text: Gideon reassures the Ephraimites, and their “anger subsides from against him.”55

There are at least two issues with this assumed reading. The first simply repeats the question asked above. If anger is a permissible sense for רוח, it is a rare one. What does this lexeme contribute to this discourse unit that a more typical anger lexeme does not?56

The second issue is how רפה is to be understood in this context. The verb can refer to the loosening or slackening of something (Job 12:21), but more typically appears with יד to refer to discouragement or weakness (Lachish Ostracon 6 lines 5b–7; 2 Sam 17:2; Ezra 4:4; 2 Chr 15:7; 1QpHab 7:10). This state often arises because of verbal communication (2 Sam 4:1; Jer 6:24; 38:4). רפה may also refer to abandonment (Deut 4:32; 31:6; Ps 138:8). It is difficult to know what sense is intended in this context, and it certainly does not appear to constrain רוח to anger.57 Rather, we need to find a construal of this text that makes sense of both of these lexemes with minimal contextual constraint applied to either.

As above, we need to seek a more compelling reading for this text. Like Eccl 10:4, some have suggested the metonym heavy breathing for anger explains both רוח and the discourse context.58 Similarly, too, some suggest a rare anthropological instantiation of the anger is wind.59 Unfortunately, רפה nowhere appears with lexemes of breath or wind


55 Syriac explicitly encodes this reading, “Messiah; then their anger departed from him.”


57 Pace Mark S. Smith, who argues that, “it is the verb ‘to subside’ ... that points to ruah here in the semantic field of anger(?)” (M.S. Smith – E. Bloch-Smith, Judges 1. A Commentary on Judges 1:1–10:5 [Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2021] 535).

58 So K&D 4:351; Kotzé, Conceptualisation of Anger, 86; L.A. Dietch, Authority and Violence in the Gideon and Abimelech Narratives. A Sociological and Literary Exploration of Judges 6–9 (Hebrew Bible Monographs 75; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix 2015) 84. While we remain unconvinced for this reading, Linda A. Dietch’s rendering is semantically and poetically apt: Gideon’s words cause their “huffing and puffing to cease.”

59 Johnson, Vitality, 26.
in Ancient Hebrew that might validate such a combination, although the typically divine subject of anger is wind counts against that reading.

We posit two possible readings that may better explain the text. The first is that רפה may somewhat obliquely evoke the arrogance is physical height metaphor explored above.\(^{60}\) This is salient to the immediate context where the central issue of the text is the indignation of the Ephraimites, and Gideon’s speech intends to “placate the Ephraimites by massaging their inflated egos.”\(^{61}\) It also construes רוח in an established manner, as referring to the self of the Ephraimites that has been elevated over and against the divinely-chosen judge, Gideon. In response to his soothing words, the corrective “downwards motion” of their רוח is portrayed by רפה.\(^{62}\) However, this would be an unexpected use of רפה.

The second, preferable, reading is that רוח refers to the part or aspect of a person capable of and responsible for action, their volition. There are several elements that support this, although they are admittedly fairly indirect. The first is the use of רפה in Jer 49:24, where it appears to refer to the loss of the will to fight in Damascus. Analogously, in Judg 8:3, the Ephraimites lose their will to fight against Gideon, with רוח present to explicitly indicate their volition. The second is the strength of convention associating יד and רפה as indicating a loss of ability to act. We noted above a further convention associating יד and קצר to refer to the loss of capacity to at in a situation, and how this illuminated the collocation of רוח and קצר. Is it possible that in the specific semantic field of capacity, רוח and יד were sufficiently compatible to generate the unique רוח and רפה collocation here? The discourse context at least maintains the typical cause of the loss of capacity via a verbal communication that removes the impetus to action.

The conventional reading of רוח as directly referring to anger may well be correct. We have sought to demonstrate that the passages typically used as evidence of this close relationship between רוח and the expression of anger are not as simple as they appear. They can, and perhaps should, be explained in terms of other, better attested, uses of רוח and broader metaphoric and metonymic depictions of emotional experiences. When רוח features in the expression of anger it is within fairly well-established metaphors of divine action, and never without contextual markers that indicate its metaphorical or metonymic conceptualisation by, for example, meteorological lexemes marking anger is wind. There

\(^{60}\) Robert Boling’s (Judges. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary [AB 6; New York: Doubleday 1975] 150) translation of רוח as “indignation” perhaps encodes something of this construal.


\(^{62}\) So Targ. ים (see also 2 Kgs 2:15 Targ.), which can refer to physical descent or evoke the height is status metaphor, “to go down in status or value”, C.A.L, s.v. ים. Perhaps also we could elicit 1 Kgs 11:26 (see also Exod 14:8; Num 15:30; 33:3), where a possible inversion of the יד + רפה metaphor depicts rebellion against an authority figure using יד + רוח. This might suggest that “raising” and “relaxing” were considered semantically compatible partial antonyms, although the unique.
is at least cause for caution in using *anger* as a gloss for רוח in translations and scholarship without significant exegetical warrant.63

5. The Unruly רוח

Ancient Hebrew has many ways to depict emotional experience, especially through metaphor and metonymy. The use of רוח in expressing such emotions has been long recognised, but rarely examined closely. Reading texts with the aid of modern advances in linguistics provides new avenues for understand how these expressions function and the experiences to which they point. **Patience** and **Impatience** are depicted via metonymy, where the breathing patterns of the experiencer of the emotion stands for the emotion itself, evoking the presence or absence of capacity to act in a situation. **Humility** and **Arrogance** are depicted metaphorically as the relative height of the self over against others, with a cultural expectation of self-elevation being moderated by external agents or circumstances. Not only did רוח provide a place of entry to examine these two pairs of experiences, but it also allowed us to question the long-held link between רוח and *anger*. The relationship between this lexeme and the expression of *anger* is more complex and nuanced than the casual citations of texts and translational glosses often imply, and at the very least scholars need to abandon mere citations of lexica in support of this reading.

In these and other emotional expressions we did not examine (such as רוח and lexemes of fragmentation such as שבר, נכה, דכא with רוח to depict *distress*), we see רוח reflecting the person experiencing the emotions—their breathing, capacity to act, and self-estimation. Given that the same רוח may be both “lengthened” in patience and “shortened” in impatience, “elevated” in arrogance or “lowered” in humility, the sage’s words in Prov 16:32 gain renewed poignancy. Wisdom lies not in the strength to gain power over others, but over oneself.

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63 A related factor awaiting further research is the translational equivalents provided in the early versions, especially the LXX. רוח appears to be understood as *anger* in Prov 16:32 (ὠργῆς); 17:27 (ὁργῆς, μακρόθυμος); 18:14 (θυμὸν); 29:11 (τὸν θυμὸν αὐτοῦ); Ecc 7:8 (辭י, דכא, מלקד). ὀργὴ clearly demonstrates that רוח was (rightly or wrongly) understood as equivalent to *anger* by the translator. θυμός likely also reflects this understanding—although the semantic range for θυμός makes it a peculiarly apt counterpart to רוח, as θυμός may also refer to a person’s self or volition. It would be worth examining how the polysemy of רוח and polysemy of θυμός influenced the translation equivalents offered in the LXX. For example, the compound μακρόθυμος (used for the length metaphors above) appears to be a Septuagintal neologism designed to reflect Hebrew phrases and that entered wider Greek much later (the only non-biblical/Christian reference occurs in the 4th century epigram of Pallas-das, *Analecta Patristica*, 11.317.1).
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