

METAPHORS AND METONYMIES FOR ANGER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: A COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC APPROACH¹

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Abstract

This article emphasises the need of a cognitive linguistic approach to the study of the emotion of anger in the Old Testament. Most of the works to date have reduced the concept of wrath to a just principle of retribution. The detailed Classical Hebrew language of anger, however, reveals important aspects of the ancient Israelite conceptualisation of this emotion that cannot be fitted into such an abbreviated view. The ideal cognitive model of anger as construed by the ancient Israelites, was motivated by cultural, environmental and experiential factors, such as bodily changes associated with the emotion, aspects of the nonverbal communication of anger, the ancient Israelite theory of humours and Palestinian fauna and meteorology.

Key Concepts: Metaphor, metonymy, anger, linguistic approach

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that there are numerous studies available on the topic of anger in the Old Testament, deep insight into its essence as conceptualised by the ancient Israelites is partial. This lack of detailed information on the topic is primarily due to the fact that most scholars have given passing attention to the Classical Hebrew terminology and idiomatic language of anger (cf Boegner 1878; Haney 1960; Eichrodt 1961; Heschel 1962; Vögtle 1965; Stöger 1970; Tasker 1980; Westermann 1981; Herion 1992; Faessler 1997; Baloiian 1992, 1997). In accordance with the dominant Autonomic View of language, these scholars have regarded language to be unrelated to the ancient Israelite thinking and conceptual world (cf Lauha 1983; Taylor 1987:16-8). Consequently, the idea of wrath has been reduced to a law of divine reckoning in answer to human misconduct in accordance with the prevailing theological principle of divine impassibility (see also Kilpatrick 1908; Köhler 1966; Aloysia 1946; Hanson 1946; Morris 1952; Simpson 1952).

The limits of an exclusive theological approach to the study of anger in the Old Testament is accentuated when their meagre findings are measured against the insightful results of the few cognitive linguistic studies that have been conducted on the same topic in recent years (Gruber 1980; Smith 1998; Kruger 2000a; 2000b). In particular, the approach of conceptual metaphor and metonymy to the study of cultural conceptions of anger seems to hold much promise (cf Matsuki 1995; Kövecses 1995).

¹ For the most part this article is based on a chapter of the dissertation submitted at the Department of Ancient Studies, Stellenbosch University, by the same author.

2. Conceptual Metaphor and Metonymy

In their groundbreaking work, Lakoff and Johnson (1980:3) have demonstrated that much of our ordinary conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical. In fact, metaphor and metonymy are regarded as the most important processes whereby mental categories are extended to form new concepts (Taylor 1989:122). Metaphor is therefore not an artistic and rhetorical phenomenon that we can do without (Kövecses 2002:vii-viii). Rather, it is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning, whereby one domain of experience is understood in terms of another (Kövecses 2002:3-4). Conceptual metonymy can be defined in the same way, the only difference being that the two domains of experience form part of the same ideal cognitive model (Kövecses 2002:160). For example, if a symptom of an emotion is used to refer to the emotion itself, the process involved is metonymy.

In the ensuing part of the article, several examples of Classical Hebrew linguistic expressions will be listed that may be interpreted as vehicles for various conceptual metaphors and metonymies that make up the ideal cognitive model of anger in the Old Testament.

3. Conceptual metaphors and metonymies for anger in the Old Testament

Conceptual metaphor often builds on metonymy (Kövecses 1995:191). It therefore seems fitting to start this account of anger concepts in the Old Testament with an interpretation of conceptual metonymies as reflected in Classical Hebrew expressions.

3.1 Conceptual Metonymies for Anger in the Old Testament

Most conceptual metonymies for anger in the Old Testament are motivated by the bodily experience of anger symptoms (Kövecses 1990:52). However, descriptions of several aspects of the nonverbal communication of this emotion also came to be used as idiomatic expressions for anger (Gruber 1980:480-553). The following metonymies can be identified from an interpretation of Classical Hebrew data:

3.1.1 Body Heat as Anger

“Cain was *angry* (חרה)” (Gn 4:5).

“Lest the avenger pursue the slayer because his heart *is warm* (חם)” (Dt 19:6).

“They are all adulterers, *burning* (בער) like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises” (Hs 7:4).

“Indeed, they are *inflamed* (קדה) like an oven, their heart *burns* (בער) within them” (Hs 7:6; translation by Stuart 1987:114).

“The king was very angry and his anger *burned* (בער) in him” (Es 1:12).

3.1.2 Snorting as anger

“YHWH was *angry* (נחם)² because he made man on the earth and he *became furious* (עצב)³” (Gn 6:6).

² This root properly means “to breathe pantingly” (Köhler and Baumgartner 1958:608).

“With the *blast* (רוח) of your nose the waters were gathered together” (Ex 15:8).

“Don’t kill me in your *anger* (אף ארדך אף)” (Jr 15:15).

“Is YHWH *upset* (קצר רוח)?” (Mi 2:7).

“They have quieted my *anger* (רוח) in the North Country” (Zch 6:8).

“The foundations of the earth were exposed by your rebuke, YHWH, at the *blowing* (נשמה) of the *breath* (רוח) of your nostrils” (Ps 18:16).

“By the *anger* (נשמה) of Eloah they will perish and by the *blast* (רוח) of his nose they will be destroyed” (Job 4:9).

3.1.3 *Frowning as anger*

“Why are you *angry* (חרה) and why has your *face fallen* (נפל פנים)?” (Gn 4:6).

“An *angry* (עו פנים) nation that will neither smile upon an elder nor show favour to a youth” (Dt 28:50; cf Gruber 1980:508-9).

“They have made their *faces* (פנים) *harder* (חזק) than a rock” (Jr 5:3).

“Who knows your *anger* (אף אף)?” (Ps 90:11).

“The favourable hand of our God is upon all who seek him, but *his anger* (אף אף) is upon all who reject him” (Ezr 8:22).

3.1.4 *Glaring as anger*

“And Saul *was angry* (עין) with David from that day onwards” (1 Sm 18:9).

“Those who hate *pinch* (קרץ) with their eye (עין) in vain” (Ps 35:19).

“Why do your eyes *glare* (רום)?” (Job 15:12).

“My enemy *sharpens* (לטש) his eyes at me” (Job 16:9).

“He *pinches* (קרץ) with his eyes” (Pr 6:13).

“*Pinching* (קרץ) the eye causes a wound” (Pr 10:10).

3.1.5 *Gnashing of teeth as anger*

“With godless mockers of a cripple they *gnash* (חרק) on me with their teeth” (Ps 35:16).

“His anger tears, and he who hates me *gnashes* (חרק) on me with his teeth” (Job 16:9).

“All your enemies open their mouth against you. They whistle and *gnash* (חרק) their teeth, saying, ‘We’ve swallowed [her]’” (Lm 2:16).

3.1.6 *Internal pressure as anger*

“For as churning milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so *stirring up* (בייז) *anger* (אף) produces strife” (Pr 30:33).

³ According to Wenham (1987:144), *hi עצב* “is used to express the most intense form of human emotion, a mixture of rage and bitter anguish.” See also Dhorme (1963:119) who points to an equivalent expression in Akkadian that means “anger.”

⁴ אף can be regarded as a metonymy for “breathe” (organ for function) (Dhorme 1963:81; Gruber 1980:507-8).

3.1.7 Redness in the face as anger

“And Jacob’s face *glowed* (חרה)⁵ against Rachel” (Gn 30:2).

“And Jonathan rose from the table *with a glowing face* (בחרר אף)” (1 Sm 20:34).

“For their land became a horror because of the wrath of the oppressor and the *heat* (חרון) of his anger” (Jr 25:38).

3.1.8 Agitation as anger

“Because of your *quivering rage* (רגו) against me” (2 Ki 19:28).

“He will *shake with anger* (רגו) in the valley of Gibeon” (Is 28:21).

“You have slain them in a *rage* (זעף)⁶ that reached up to heaven” (2 Chr 28:9).

3.1.9 Internal agitation as anger

“And YHWH was *wroth* (עצב)⁷ because he made man on the earth” (Gn 6:6).

“What *angers* (לב לקח) you and why do your eyes glare?” (Job 15:12).

3.1.10 Slaver at the mouth as anger

“I was afraid of the *foaming anger* (האף והחמה)⁸ whereby YHWH *frothed* (קצף)⁹ at you to destroy you” (Dt 9:19; cf Gruber 1980:547).

“His lips are full of *foaming rage* (זעם)¹⁰ and his tongue is like a devouring fire” (Is 30:27).

“The *frothing anger* (חמה) of YHWH *fills* (מלא) me; I am tired of holding it in” (Jr 6:11).

3.1.11 Lifting the hand as anger

“Therefore YHWH got angry with his people and *stretched out* (נטה) his *hand* (יד) over them” (Is 5:25).

“His anger (אף) hasn’t abated (שוב) and his *hand* (יד) is still *stretched out* (נטה)” (Is 9:16).

“And the *hand* (יד) of YHWH will be known by his servants and his indignation (זעם) by his enemies” (Is 66:14).

“I will rule over you with a *strong hand* (יד חזקה), *stretched out arm* (זרוע נטה) and wrath poured out” (Ezk 20:33).

⁵ See Gruber (1980:491) who argues that חרה אף “the face burns” and חרון אף “burning of the face” derive from the well-known reddening of the faces of angry persons.

⁶ Johnson (1973:380) notes that the primary meaning of זעף is “to be agitated.”

⁷ See Footnote 1.

⁸ According to Cohen (1971:702-4) and Gruber (1980:513-50) חמה denotes “poisonous slaver at the mouth of angry individuals.”

⁹ See Cohen (1979:24-5) who provides convincing evidence that קצף has as its basic meaning “foam” (cf Hs 10:7).

¹⁰ For זעם “foam (at the face), anger,” see Gruber (1980:552).

3.2 Conceptual Metaphors for Anger

Several conceptual metaphors for anger in the Hebrew Bible can be regarded as building on metonymy and the interpretation of bodily changes accompanied by the emotion. Kruger (2000a:187-9) has identified expressions in Classical Hebrew that act as vehicles for the metaphor *anger is the heat of a fluid in a container*. This metaphor is motivated by the perception of body heat as symptom of anger and the interpretation of the body as a container for the emotions (Kruger 2000a:187). When the HEAT metaphor is applied to solids, it yields the metaphor ANGER IS FIRE (Kruger 2000a:189).

Environmental phenomena also figured strongly as source domains for metaphoric transfer. By way of illustration, the figures ANGER IS A HOT WIND and ANGER IS A TORRENT, which feature commonly in the Hebrew Bible will be analysed below.

3.2.1 *Anger is a hot wind*

Although the symptoms of heavy breathing and bodily heat may have played some role in the genesis of this metaphor, it finds a more direct source in the sirocco, the hot easterly wind that blows in Palestine (cf Scheepers 1960:11; Noth 1966:32-3). This wind threatens every form of life, bringing the highest temperatures of the year (Scheepers 1960:12). It is so hot that with one gust it withers the vegetation of the spring rains, and so strong that it can cause severe devastation (Albertz and Westermann 1997:1203):

“The grassland (חציר) *withers* (יבש) and the flora (צִיץ) *wilt* (נבל), because the *breath* (רוח) of YHWH *blows* (נשב) on it” (Is 40:7).

“I will *scatter* (פּוֹץ) you like chaff, driven by the *desert wind* (רוח מדבר)” (Jr 13:24).

“It was uprooted in anger (חמה) and thrown to the ground. The *east wind* (רוח הקדים) made it *dry up* (יבש)” (Ezk 19:12).

“YHWH roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures (נאות) of the shepherds *dry up* (אבל) and the top of Carmel (ראש הכרמל) *withers* (יבש)” (Am 1:2).

“On the wicked he will rain glowing lava and brimstone, and a *burning hot* (זלעפות) *wind* (רוח) is the portion of their cup” (Ps 11:6).

“My God, make them as a wheel of a war chariot, as stubble before the *wind* (רוח). As fire burns a forest and as a flame licks the mountains, thus pursue them with your *whirlwind* (סער)” (Ps 83:14-16).

“In the morning he sprouts like grass; he blossoms and pushes [and] in the evening he *withers* (מלל) and *dries out* (יבש), for we are *consumed* (בלה) by your anger (אף), we are terrified by your ire (חמה)” (Ps 90:5-7).

“I mixed my drink with weeping because of your anger (זעם) and your indignation (קצף). For you picked me up and let me loose. My days, like a shadow, are sent down and I *dry up* (יבש) like green plants (עשב)” (Ps 102:10-12).

“Man is like grass; his days blossom like the flowers of the field, for the *wind* (רוח) passes over it and it is no longer; its place knows it no longer. But the kindness (חסד) of YHWH always existed and it will last forever for those who obey him” (Ps 103:15-17).

3.2.2 Anger is a torrent

Because of its swiftness and destructive nature, the Palestinian torrent serves as an ideal source domain for anger in the Hebrew Bible (cf Keel 1997:73):

“And his anger (רוח), like a *violent torrent* (נחל שוטף),¹¹ reach unto the neck” (Is 30:28).

“In a *violent flood* (שצף) of anger (קצף) I hid my face from you for a short while” (Is 54:8).

“For the anger (רוח) of YHWH comes like a fast-flowing *river* (נהר)¹² and drives him onward” (Is 59:19).

“I will *pour* (שפך) my *anger* (עברה) on them like *waters* (מים)” (Hs 5:10).

“In an *overflowing* (עבר) *torrent* (שטף) he will bring annihilation in his anger (קום),¹³ and his enemies will be pursued by darkness” (Nah 1:8).

“Then they would have *swallowed* (בלע)¹⁴ us alive in their burning anger (חרות אף). Then the *waters* (מים) would have *washed us away* (שטף), then it would have *gone above* (עבר) our necks – those *raging waters* (מים הודונים)” (Ps 124:3-5).

“The beginning of strife is like *waters* (מים) breaking through; therefore abandon anger (ריב) before it *breaks out* (גלע)” (Pr 17:14).

“Wrath (חמה) is *cruel* (אדוריות) and anger (אף) is *outrageous* (שטף), but who can stand before fervour (קנאה)?” (Pr 27:4).

The image of the Mesopotamian deluge slowly rising in the story of the flood is much less successful in depicting anger, which is mostly characterised by swift and immediate reaction (cf Gn 6:6):

“And the *deluge* (מבול) was on the earth for forty days, and the *waters* (מים) *increased* (רבה) and lifted the ark up and rose from the earth. The *waters* (מים) *rose* (גבר) and *became great* (רבה) and the ark began to float” (Gn 7:17-18).

Closely related to the metaphor *anger is a torrent* is the concept *anger is the sea*:

“Your anger (חמה) *throws itself* (סמך) at me, you have afflicted me with all your *waves* (שברים)” (Ps 88:8).

“Your *anger* (חרון) *covered* (עבר) me; your terrors silenced me. They surrounded me all day long. Together they *encircled* (נקף) me” (Ps 88:18).

4. Conclusion

The conceptual metaphors and metonymies for anger listed above point to a highly structured and detailed ideal cognitive model for anger in the Hebrew Bible. The ancient Israelites thought of anger as an intense emotion comprising several bodily symptoms. They also had specific ways of expressing this emotion nonverbally. In addition, suitable phenomena from their geographic and cultural environment were utilised to conceptualise this sentiment. In view of these findings, it seems inappropriate to reduce anger in the Hebrew Bible to an abstract principle of just retribution. The results further suggest that

¹¹ For this reading, see Raymond (1958:76).

¹² See Raymond (1958:109).

¹³ See 3.2.1.1 above.

¹⁴ This verb clearly evokes the image of the Chaos monster (see Keel 1997:73-4).

Classical Hebrew words and expressions need to be taken seriously in the study of concepts in the Hebrew Bible. In this regard, the cognitive linguistic analysis of metaphor and metonymy seems to present an ideal methodology.

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