# *Is ḥārâ an Emotion? Reconsidering Anger in the Hebrew Bible*

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**Abstract**

It is common to assume that there is a group of words in Biblical Hebrew that all denote the emotion of anger. This article questions that assumption by means of a re-examination of the verb *ḥārâ*, which is understood to be the most commonly used term for anger. Part 1 of the article is devoted to distinguishing between the terms *ḥārâ lᵉ* and *ḥārâ ʾāp̱*: One describes a passive response such as being insulted or frustrated, while the other describes an active response of a higher-ranking person directed at a person of lower rank. Part 2 focuses on the idiom *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* and demonstrates that this idiom does not denote a spontaneous, uncontrollable emotion that prompts external action, but rather denotes the action itself, which may take various concrete forms. The literal and metaphoric meanings of the two expressions are clarified anew in light of these findings.

**1. Introduction**

The verb *ḥārâ* appears dozens of times in the Bible and is considered the most common way to signify anger in Biblical Hebrew.[[1]](#footnote-1) This consensus is based on the assumption that there is a single concept of “anger” throughout time, and that in every language there are “terms” whose role is to signify that concept.[[2]](#footnote-2) On the basis of this assumption, all meanings of this general “anger” are assigned — generally without sufficient critical examination — to the Hebrew verb *ḥārâ* and to additional expressions in Biblical Hebrew that are considered synonymous to it, such as QZP, ḤMH, and K(S. All these expressions are interpreted as expressing the emotion of anger,[[3]](#footnote-3) which can be defined along general lines as an internal, subjective occurrence, spontaneous and uncontrollable, which may often lead to, or be expressed by, aggression.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In this article, I intend to question these basic assumptions. I will focus on the verb *ḥārâ* with the aim of demonstrating that this verb does *not* denote the emotion of anger. I will do this in two stages. First, I will distinguish between the idiom *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* and the texts where the verb *ḥārâ* appears without the noun *ʾāp̱* but with the preposition *lᵉ*. The main difference between them, which has been noted but is not as widely known or as firmly and precisely grounded as necessary, is that *ḥārâ lᵉ* conveys a sense of feeling saddened, frustrated, or offended, while *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is more like — but apparently not identical to — what we would call anger. An additional difference, which has not yet been pointed out, is that the idiom *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y*, X is almost always of higher status than Y, and is never lower; for the expression *ḥārâ lᵉ*, this is not the case. I will then discuss the metaphorical meaning of these idioms.

In the second part of the article, I will focus on the expression *ḥārâ ʾāp̱*. I will examine five texts in which it is unreasonable to interpret this idiom as expressing anger. This will lead to a new explanation of the idiom *ḥārâ ʾāp̱*, as an expression whose role is to define particular actions or words as an exercise of power in a hierarchical framework: The person whose *ʾāp̱* is *ḥōrê* is almost always the higher in status, and the action described as *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is his *real-world* response to the actions or words of the lower-ranking individual.

**2. *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* vs. *ḥārâ lᵉ***

The verb *ḥārâ* appears 83 times in the Bible,[[5]](#footnote-5) and the noun *ḥᵃrôn* appears an additional 41 times.[[6]](#footnote-6) In most of these occurrences, the noun *ʾap̱* appears as the subject of the verb *ḥārâ* or in construct with the noun *ḥᵃrôn*, to which must be added several occurrences of the idiom *(bo)ḥᵒri-ʾāp̱*. There are 93 occurrences in all of *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* in its various forms.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Scholars have observed that the verb *ḥārâ* tends to appear in the phrases *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y* or *ḥārâ lᵉ*-Y, but in general they do not try to explain why there are two different idioms or what the difference between them is; the general assumption is that they are synonyms.[[8]](#footnote-8) Mayer Gruber does distinguish between these expressions, arguing that *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y* expresses X’s anger at Y, while *ḥārâ lᵉ*-X expresses sadness or depression,[[9]](#footnote-9) but this important distinction has not been widely accepted.[[10]](#footnote-10) In this section, I will try to establish this distinction, to understand the meaning of each idiom more precisely, and also to suggest two additional differences between them: one connected to their metaphoric meaning and the other to their use with regard to social status.

**2.1 The Meaning of *ḥārâ lᵉ***

The implication of *ḥārâ lᵉ* is not precisely sadness or depression, but more generally a feeling of being unjustly insulted or humiliated, as for example in the story of Cain and Abel:

But to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. *wayyiḥar lᵉ* Cain very much and his face fell. And Yhwh said to Cain, “Why is it *ḥārâ lᵉ* you, and why is your face fallen?” (Gen 4:5-6)

In philosophical discussions of emotion, it is accepted to see a desire for revenge as one of the necessary components of anger. At its root, anger prompts one to act, even if the impulse to act is not always carried out. An additional characteristic of anger is the addressee: Anger is always directed *at* someone. The example of Cain does not match these requirements. Cain does not respond actively and aggressively toward Yhwh; instead, “his face falls.” Active aggression will arrive only in the next phase of the story, and they will not be directed at Yhwh but at Abel; it is important to distinguish between these two phases. Cain’s “face falling” is a passive response to the injustice that God did him when He rejected his offering; this is not anger but a feeling of burning with insult.

Similarly, in the case of Jonah we can see the feeling of being wronged that accompanies the appearances of *ḥārâ lᵉ*:

This displeased Jonah greatly, *wayyiḥar lᵉ* him. He prayed to Yhwh, saying, “O Yhwh! Isn’t this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment. Please, Yhwh, take my life, for I would rather die than live.” Yhwh replied, “Is it that deeply *ḥārâ lᵉ* you?”

Now Jonah had left the city and found a place east of the city. He made a booth there and sat under it in the shade, until he should see what happened to the city. The God Yhwh provided a ricinus plant, which grew up over Jonah, to provide shade for his head and save him from discomfort. Jonah was very happy about the plant. But the next day at dawn God provided a worm, which attacked the plant so that it withered. And when the sun rose, God provided a sultry east wind; the sun beat down on Jonah’s head, and he became faint. He begged for death, saying, “I would rather die than live.” Then God said to Jonah, “Is it so deeply *ḥārâ lᵉ* you about the plant?” “Yes,” he replied, “so deeply *ḥārâ lᵉ* me that I want to die.” (Jon 4:1-9)

As with Cain, so too with Jonah *ḥᵃrôn* is a response to Yhwh’s actions. Here too it does not lead to the active response characteristic of anger but to the passivity and weakness characteristic of someone who is sad, insulted, or frustrated. Over and over again Jonah prefers death to life (4:3, 8, 9). Jonah is suffering: “This displeased Jonah greatly” (4:1) and the ricinus plant is provided to “save him from discomfort” (v. 6). Jonah does no injury; he is himself injured. Now let us compare this same “displeasure” — literally “evil” — when it appears in combination with the other idiom, *ḥārâ ʾāp̱*:

Let not the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth.’ Turn from Your *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱*, and renounce the plan to punish Your people. (Exod 32:12)

And I will break Elam before their enemies, before those who seek their lives; and I will bring evil upon them, My *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱*—declares Yhwh. And I will dispatch the sword after them until I have consumed them (Jer 49:37)

It is important to distinguish between the “evil” and the subject to which the verb *ḥārâ* is connected. Though in the expression *ḥārâ* X *bᵉ* Y it is X who brings evil upon Y, in *ḥārâ lᵉ*-X the evil is done to X himself. *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* denotes injury; *ḥārâ lᵉ* denotes being injured. Indeed, at least in general if not systematically, *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* frequently accompanies violence or physical punishment — anything from imprisonment, by a human sovereign, to mass killing by God. In contrast, *ḥārâ lᵉ* is generally connected to responses in words alone are used in order to express the feeling of being insulted or treated unjustly.

**2.2 The Status Context of *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱***

This distinction between injury and being injured is connected with the hierarchical framework which each of these idioms uses. The expression *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y* obviously involves considerations of status. X almost always outranks Y and is never outranked by Y. In contrast, *ḥārâ lᵉ*-X can be used in various status relationships, including those where X is of lower status. This distinction holds both among human beings and between humans and God. Let us illustrate this with a pair of verses of each kind.

When Rachel asks Jacob for sons he responds sharply, and the text uses the expression *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y*, as appropriate for the power relationship between them in a hierarchical society:

When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I shall die.” *wayyiḥar ʾap̱* Jacob at Rachel, and he said, “Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?” (Gen 30:1-2)

By contrast, when Jacob’s own dignity is wounded by the search that Laban conducts in his tent and he directs harsh words at Laban, we find his feelings expressed by *ḥārâ lᵉ*-X, for Laban is his father-in-law and also his employer:

So Laban went into Jacob’s tent and Leah’s tent and the tents of the two maidservants; but he did not find them. Leaving Leah’s tent, he entered Rachel’s tent … *wayyiḥar lᵉ*-Jacob and he took up his grievance with Laban. Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, “What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me? You rummaged through all my things; what have you found of all your household objects? Set it here, before my kinsmen and yours, and let them decide between us two.” (Gen 31:33, 36-37)

The second pair of texts that clearly illustrates this distinction between the two uses of the verb *ḥārâ* is found in the story of Uzzah, who reached out to grab the Ark of God and was put to death by Yhwh. In this story the two expressions come one right after the other, so the difference between them is glaringly obvious:

*wayyiḥar* *ʾap̱* Yhwh *bᵉ* Uzzah. And God struck him down on the spot for his indiscretion, and he died there beside the Ark of God. *wayyiḥar lᵉ* David because Yhwh had inflicted a breach upon Uzzah; and that place was named Perez-uzzah, as it is still called (2 Sam 6:7-8)

Yhwh’s response to Uzzah’s action is described with *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y*, while David’s response to Yhwh’s action is described, immediately afterward, with *ḥārâ lᵉ*-X, corresponding to the status of those involved — God on the one hand, human on the other. The semantic distinction that I suggested also holds: Yhwh injures Uzzah; David does not injure Yhwh but expresses his resentment at the injustice that was done to Uzzah. There is, of course, a connection between the status distinction and the semantic one: The higher-ranking individual can perpetrate violence as a direct response to what the lower-ranking individual has said or done. But this is impossible for the lower-ranking person; the most he can do is to express his sense of injury.

**2.3 The Metaphoric Meaning**

We have seen that the idiom *ḥārâ lᵉ* expresses a feeling of being insulted, frustrated, or treated unjustly, which is frequently the province of those of lower status, while *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* denotes the forceful response of the higher-status individual. This analysis can serve as a key to a new understanding of the metaphoric meaning of the two expressions.

In the opinion of most scholars, the root ḤRH is related to ḤRR, which signifies “burning.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Unlike ḤRR, though, ḤRH is never used in the Bible non-metaphorically; but it does occur in the semantic field of “fire.”[[12]](#footnote-12) E.g., “In Your great triumph You break Your opponents; You send forth Your *ḥᵃrôn*, it consumes them like straw” (Exod 15:7) likens the destruction of the enemy at God’s hands to the burning of straw by *ḥᵃrôn*, which here apparently means a flame.[[13]](#footnote-13)

As for the word *ʾāp̱*, it usually means “nose,” but sometimes the entire face, especially in the dual form *ʾāp̱payim*.[[14]](#footnote-14) It too occurs in several texts related to burning: “Smoke went up from His nostrils, from His mouth came devouring fire; live coals blazed forth from Him” (2 Sam 22:9 = Ps 18:9).[[15]](#footnote-15) [[16]](#footnote-16) These texts strengthen the standard scholarly explanation that the metaphor expressed by *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is burning connected to the nose or face.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Usually the expression *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is understood to refer to heating or reddening of the face, an image that is used to express anger in various languages.[[18]](#footnote-18) The expression *ḥārâ lᵉ*- is understood in the same way, based on the assumption that *ḥārâ* by itself is a kind of shorthand for *ḥārâ ʾāp̱*. But I would like to suggest that the image of fire in the expression *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y* is connected first and foremost to the injury being done to Y, not to anything that is happening to X.[[19]](#footnote-19) The expression *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y*, which usually describes a higher-ranking individual exercising power over a lower-ranking one, likens this power to a fire coming forth from the nostrils of X and burning Y.[[20]](#footnote-20) The nose is the organ that sticks out from the face, and it is therefore suitable for depicting an active, outward-facing response.[[21]](#footnote-21) By contrast, in *ḥārâ lᵉ*-X, which indicates a passive response, the fire does not come forth toward another recipient, but the reverse: the fire comes from a cause external to X, and it burns X himself. Somewhat akin to the expression “a burning insult,” the expression *ḥārâ lᵉ*-X likens the feeling of being unjustly insulted or frustrated to a blazing fire that consumes the subject himself, as Jonah says: “so deeply *ḥārâ lᵉ* me that I want to die” (Jon 4:9).[[22]](#footnote-22)

We can now proceed to a more accurate understanding of the expression *ḥārâ ʾāp̱*. The assertion that this expression does not denote the emotion but the actual exercise of power, which might consist of a variety of concrete actions, will be clarified by a precise study of several texts where this expression appears. The next section of the article will be devoted to this study.

**3. *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* as a Category of Action**

The expression *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* always appears alongside descriptions of concrete, aggressive responses — verbal or physical. This state of affairs is apparently what led to the common understanding that this idiom signifies anger. This standard syntactic structure supposedly indicates that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* denotes the internal, spontaneous, uncontrollable emotion, on account of which — as an expression of it or a result of it — comes the external response: the speech or action that express the anger. Let us look at two examples of this structure:

When his master heard the story that his wife told him, namely, “Thus and so your slave did to me,” *wayyiḥar* *ʾap̱pô*. 20 So Joseph’s master had him put in prison, where the king’s prisoners were confined. (Gen 39:19-20)

They forsook Yhwh and worshiped Baal and the Ashtaroth. *wayyiḥar ʾap̱* Yhwh at Israel, and He handed them over to foes who plundered them. He surrendered them to their enemies on all sides, and they could no longer hold their own against their enemies. (Jud 2:13-14)

Both examples fit the status relationship that we observed: The *ʾāp̱* of X *ḥōrê* at Y because of what he did. The chain of causality described here would seem to be this: In the first text, Joseph’s master hears what his servant is accused of, and as a result *ḥōrê ʾap̱pô* — that is, he feels anger, as a result of which he has Joseph put in prison. So too in the second text: The Israelites serve other gods, and as a result Yhwh *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* at Israel, that is, He was angry at them, and as an external expression of His anger He surrendered them to their enemies.

Even though this understanding arises intuitively from many texts, there are not a few texts which are quite difficult to explain if we assume that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* denotes the emotion of anger. In what follows, I will discuss five examples of this kind. Based on these examples, I will advance an alternative suggestion: that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* signifies not an emotion but a category of action. Just as punishment and vengeance are neither emotions nor specific actions but rather designate the social and moral context of concrete actions in the framework of a specific relationship — so too I will seek to demonstrate that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is the characterization of an exercise of power in response to words or deeds that are inappropriate in a particular power relationship.

*ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* is therefore not a concrete action like “walking” or “eating,” but it is also not an emotion, like “grief” or “fear.” It is an expression that *characterizes* an action, and it is therefore always accompanied by a concrete description of the way in which the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* occurred. But this does not mean that the concrete action is the result of the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱*. To ground and clarify this argument, we turn now to a discussion of the texts.

**3.1 *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* as Controlled Action**

One of the characteristics of an emotion is its spontaneity: No one chooses whether or not to feel a specific emotion; at most, one can choose how to express the emotion that one feels. In this, emotion differs from action, which is a result of the will.[[23]](#footnote-23) Yet in the story of the calf in Exodus, *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is explicitly presented as the result of a decision. Yhwh informs Moses of His intention to destroy the people, and Moses dissuades Him from doing so:[[24]](#footnote-24)

Yhwh further said to Moses, “I see that this is a stiffnecked people. **Now, let Me be, *weyiḥar ʾappî* against them that I may destroy them**, and make of you a great nation.” But Moses implored Yhwh his God, saying, “**Let not, O Yhwh, *yêḥerê ʾappekā* against Your people**, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand … And Yhwh renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people. (Exod 32:9-14)

According to the assumption that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* denotes emotion only, it is difficult to understand the request “let Me be, *weyiḥar ʾappî* against them,” since the possibility that Yhwh is asking Moses to permit Him to feel a specific emotion is implausible. Moreover, if the threat of destruction implies divine anger, it would be reasonable to assume that this emotion has already been aroused, even though no verb in the text says so explicitly.

The upshot is that Yhwh does not destroy Israel as He had planned: “Yhwh renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people” — and therefore Yhwh did not *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* at the people, as He might have. Yhwh planned to inflict punishment — literally “evil” — that is, He intended that His *ʾāp̱* would *yêḥerê* but in the end decided against it, so His *ʾāp̱* did not *ḥārâ*. Apparently the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* described in this text is not an emotion but a mode of action: The text really says “*weyiḥar ʾappî* against them in that I destroy them.” Yhwh intended to destroy the Israelites through an action of *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱*, not as the *result* of *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* that (as it were) He inwardly experienced.

**3.2 *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* as the Conclusion of Direct Speech**

In Numbers 12 we are told that Yhwh hears Miriam and Aaron speaking against Moses, with regard to his wife and his prophecy, and He summons the three siblings to the Tent of Meeting, intent on rebuking Aaron and Miriam for their words. From the way things play out, we might understand that Yhwh is angry at the two siblings, and *therefore* He rebukes them. But the placement of the expression *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* does not meet this expectation:

Suddenly Yhwh called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, “Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting.” So the three of them went out. Yhwh came down in a pillar of cloud, stopped at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, “Aaron and Miriam!” The two of them came forward; and He said, “Hear these My words: When a prophet of Yhwh arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is trusted throughout My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of Yhwh. How then did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses!” ***wayyiḥar ʾap̱* Yhwh at them, and He departed.** As the cloud withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales! When Aaron turned toward Miriam, he saw that she was stricken with scales. (Num 12:4-10)

If *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* is an emotion, this description is incomprehensible. We would expect Yhwh’s *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* to be aroused at the words of the siblings, and then, *as an expression or outcome* of His *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱*, He would reprimand them and strike Miriam with scales. But our text presents these in reverse order: First we hear the rebuke; only then are we told that *wayyiḥar ʾap̱* Yhwh, at which point He leaves. After His leaving is noted, it is clear that as He left He struck Miriam with scales. Did Yhwh begin to get angry only after speaking to Miriam and Aaron?[[25]](#footnote-25)

Another solution that has been suggested for this exegetical problem is that the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* was actually aroused because of something that happened previously but is not mentioned in the text, which is saying that this anger continued: “*Still* incensed with them, Yhwh departed.” This interpretation is trying to preserve the assumption that *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* is an emotion and yet explain why it is mentioned only after the action prompted by the anger, but it is completely unsupported by the text. Another possibility is that the anger is expressed via striking Miriam with scales — but the object of the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* is “them,” in the plural, while the scales affected Miriam alone. The possibility that the anger is expressed by Yhwh’s departure is also implausible, because this would still leave unexplained why the anger is apparently aroused after the reprimand, since between the reprimand and the departure nothing happens. Licht’s succinct explanation is the most persuasive: “Apparently the meaning of *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* here is rebuke, and the punishment is mentioned only in the next verse; for if you do not explain it this way, you will find it difficult to see how Aaron was punished.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

Is it really possible that “*wayyiḥar ʾap̱* Yhwh at them” describes not His anger, expressed in the actions that follow, but the rebuke that precedes it? Yes, indeed: It turns out that there are other biblical texts with this same syntactical structure, in which *wayyiqtol* follows direct speech in such a way that is it difficult to interpret it as describing another action performed after the direct speech. Two examples:

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| **בר' לה 10–11:** (10) ויאמר לו אלהים שמך יעקב לא יקרא שמך עוד יעקב כי אם ישראל יהיה שמך **ויקרא את שמו ישראל.** (11) ויאמר לו אלהים אני אל שדי פרה ורבה גוי וקהל גוים יהיה ממך ומלכים מחלציך יצאו. | **Gen 35:10-11** 10 God said to him, “You whose name is Jacob, you shall be called Jacob no more, but Israel shall be your name.” *Thus He named him Israel.* 11 And God said to him, “I am El Shaddai. Be fertile and increase; A nation, yea an assembly of nations, shall descend from you. Kings shall issue from your loins.” |
| **בר' נ 19–21:** (19) ויאמר אלהם יוסף אל תיראו כי התחת אלהים אני. (20) ואתם חשבתם עלי רעה אלהים חשבה לטבה למען עשה כיום הזה להחית עם רב. (21) ועתה אל תיראו אנכי אכלכל אתכם ואת טפכם **וינחם אותם וידבר על לבם.** | **Gen 50:19-21** 19 But Joseph said to them, “Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? 20 Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. 21 And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children.” *Thus he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.*  |

In these two texts, the emphasized sentences relate to the words that were spoken in the previous sentences. They summarize the discussion, defining and in fact characterizing the preceding words as an action: naming in the one case, comforting in the other. Similarly, it appears that the sentence “*wayyiḥar ʾap̱* Yhwh at them” summarizes the words that Yhwh has just spoken to Aaron and Miriam. Just as the naming of Jacob as Israel was not a *result* of telling him that his name would no longer be Jacob, but these words themselves constituted giving him a new name; just as Joseph did not comfort his brothers *about* the words he spoke to them but rather comforted them by saying those words — so too here: the rebuke is not a *result* of the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* but rather the words of rebuke constitute the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱*. The rebuke was the method by which *ḥārâ ʾap̱* Yhwh at Miriam and Aaron.[[27]](#footnote-27) The *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* of Yhwh at Aaron and Miriam was, then, not an emotion but a category of action, directed outward; an exercise of power which in this case took the form of verbal rebuke.

**3.3 *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* and Causality**

The expression *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is always accompanied by concrete action: verbal rebuke, punishment, or vengeance. The question is, what is the relationship between the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* and the action? According to the common assumption that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* indicates an emotion, the answer is that the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* is the *cause* of the action, and the action is the *result* of the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱*. But in the previous section we have seen that Num 12:9 does not fit this causal framework, since *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* appears *after* Yhwh’s rebuke of Miriam and Aaron, making it impossible to view the rebuke as a *result* of the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱*.

A study of other appearances of *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* leads to a similar conclusion with regard to the causal relationship between *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* and its associated concrete action, whether verbal reprimand or physical violence. Now, causality need not always be expressed explicitly: Words like “if,” “then,” “therefore” do not always appear. But given all the biblical occurrences of *ḥārâ ʾāp̱*, if *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is indeed an emotion that leads to action, we might expect to find at least a few cases where *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is explicitly presented as the cause of the action associated with it. Yet there is not even a single such case. There is generally no word of causation in the texts where *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* appears; but when there are such words, they always align the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* with the result, not the cause. *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y* is never the cause of the action that X does to Y, but the result of something that Y did to X:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Connector | Cause | Result |
| You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. **If** you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry **as soon as** they cry out to Me, **and** ***ḥārâ ʾappî***and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans. (Exod 22:21-23) | *}im* | mistreatment of orphans and widows | *ḥārâ ʾāp̱*; killing |
| ***wayyiḥar ʾāp̱* God** **at** his going; so an angel of Yhwh placed himself in his way as an adversary. (Num 22:22) | *ki* | Balaam’s going | *ḥārâ ʾāp̱*; the angel’s placing himself |
| Assuredly, as straw is consumed by a tongue of fire and hay shrivels as it burns, their stock shall become like rot, and their buds shall blow away like dust. **For** they have rejected the instruction of Yhwh of Hosts, spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. **That is why *ḥārâ ʾap̱*****Yhwh against His people**, why He stretched out His arm against it and struck it, so that the mountains quaked, and its corpses lay like refuse in the streets. Yet his anger has not turned back, and His arm is outstretched still. (Isa 5:24-25) | *ki, {al-ken* | rejecting instruction and spurning the word of Yhwh | *ḥārâ ʾāp̱*; smiting the people (a variety of imagery) |
| All nations will ask, “**Why** did Yhwh do thus to this land? **Wherefore that awful *ḥᵒri-ʾāp̱***?” They will be told, “**Because** they forsook the covenant that Yhwh, God of their fathers, made with them when He freed them from the land of Egypt; they turned to the service of other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not experienced and whom He had not allotted to them. ***wayyiḥar ʾāp̱* Yhwh at that land and brought upon it all the curses recorded in this book**. Yhwh uprooted them from their soil in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is still the case.” (Deut 29:23-27) | *{al- me®; me®; {al }∞sûer* | forsaking the covenant with Yhwh — worshiping other gods | *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* (2x); destruction of the land and exile of the people |

In these examples *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is indeed found in a causal framework, but always as part of the result and not as part of the cause. Let us take a special look at the last example: If *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is an emotion, we might expect to find a question in the form, “Why did X do such-and-such to Y?”, to which the answer would be, “Because *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y*” — that is, following the accepted understanding, “Why did X do such-and-such to Y? Because X got angry at Y.” But here the structure is different: The question is, “Why did X *ḥārâ ʾap̱ bᵉ Y* and do such-and-such?”, and the answer is, “Because Y did such-and-such.” Two questions — “Why did Yhwh do thus to this land? Wherefore that awful *ḥᵒri-ʾāp̱*?” — relating to the self-same action: the exile and destruction to which Yhwh subjected Israel; nor do the answers to the question distinguish between *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* and destruction, as if the former were the cause of the latter. Instead, both are presented on the same side of the causality equation.

**3.4 *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* by Means of Other Actions**

In the text from Deuteronomy 29 there is additional evidence for the argument that action is always the means by which the *ʾāp̱* *ḥōrê*, rather than the result of the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱*. To see this, we must focus on v. 26, “*wayyiḥar ʾāp̱* Yhwh at that land and brought upon it all the curses recorded in this book,” and especially on the two verbs. At first glance, the verse contradicts the suggestion to view bringing the curse as the means by which *ḥārâ ʾap̱* Yhwh, since there are two separate actions mentioned here: *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* and bringing the curse.[[28]](#footnote-28) But this distinction is not grammatically correct. The syntax of the sentence is well-known in Biblical Hebrew. Despite the free NJPS translation, the second verb is in the form *l-* + infinitive construct, serving the first verb in the sentence adverbially, as in the following two examples using the same Hebrew syntax:[[29]](#footnote-29)

It is the season of the wheat harvest. I will pray to Yhwh and He will send thunder and rain; then you will take thought and realize what a wicked thing you did in the sight of Yhwh by asking for a king. (1 Sam 12:17)

When it was reported to Saul that the troops were sinning against Yhwh by eating with the blood, he said, “You have acted faithlessly. Roll a large stone over to me today.” (1 Sam 14:33)

The first example does not mean that the Israelites did a wicked thing in the sight of Yhwh and *as a result* asked for a king, but that asking for a king *was* the wicked thing that they did. Similarly, in the second example the people are not both sinning against Yhwh *and* eating with the blood; eating with the blood *is* the sin. Asking for a king is defined as acting wickedly in the sight of Yhwh, and eating with the blood is defined as sinning against Yhwh — in both cases we are speaking about a single action; the use of the infinitive construct in each case (“by asking,” “by eating”) explains in what concrete way the more general and “abstract” action of the first verb was done.

We should interpret Deut 29:26 in light of this same structure. There are not two separate actions here, *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* and bringing the curse; rather, we must understand it this way: “*wayyiḥar ʾāp̱* Yhwh at that land **by bringing** upon it all the curses recorded in this book.” Just as there are various actions the doing of which amounts to sinning or acting wickedly, so too Yhwh can perform *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* on the people in a variety of ways. There is not a causal relationship between *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* in Deut 29:26 and the bringing of the curse. This then is additional evidence for the argument that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* denotes a category of action rather than an emotion.

**3.5 Doing *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱***

The last piece of evidence for the claim that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* does not refer to an emotion comes from the fact that it can occur as the object of the verb “to do”:

I will not do [*loœ} }e{§síe*®] *ḥᵃrôn ʾappî*, will not turn to destroy Ephraim. (Hos 11:9)

Is it possible to “do” an emotion? In order to answer this in the positive, we must understand the verb }SÍH in the sense “express, bring to fruition, act in accordance with.”[[30]](#footnote-30) But it is doubtful whether }SÍHever carries this meaning in the Bible.[[31]](#footnote-31) It seems more plausible to understand the phrase in our verse as related not to the *origin* of the action, but to its *nature* and *result*. This emerges also from the parallelism: “I will not do *ḥᵃrôn ʾappî* / will not turn to destroy Ephraim.”[[32]](#footnote-32) A similar pattern, with “doing” something parallel to a concrete action, occurs elsewhere as well:

And he said, “Yhwh, God of my master Abraham, grant me good fortune this day, and do kindness with my master Abraham.” (Gen 24:12)

Then he who is indicated for proscription, and all that is his, shall be put to the fire, because he broke the Covenant of Yhwh and because he did an outrage in Israel. (Josh 7:15)

Just as bringing a suitable woman to Abraham’s servant constitutes the “doing” of kindness with Abraham, and breaking the covenant of Yhwh constitutes “doing” an outrage in Israel — so too destroying Ephraim constitutes “doing” the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* of Yhwh. Even a human being can “do” Yhwh’s *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱*: Samuel denounces Saul, “You did not obey Yhwh and did not *execute* *ḥᵃrôn ʾāppô* upon the Amalekites” (1 Sam 28:18).[[33]](#footnote-33) None of these cases is presenting one thing as cause and the other as effect, one as internal and the other as external. Instead, we find a concrete action, followed by a definition of the kind of activity that action represents.

Just so, *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* can also be used as the object of “bring”:

And I will break Elam before their enemies, before those who seek their lives; and I will bring disaster upon them, *ḥᵃrôn ʾappî*—declares Yhwh. And I will dispatch the sword after them until I have consumed them. (Jer 49:37)

In this verse, the bringing of disaster and the bringing of *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* are one and the same, and the details come only in the second part of the verse, the complete military defeat that the disaster will bring upon Elam. Moreover, syntactically *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* is in apposition to “disaster”; the *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* does not generate the disaster, it *is* the disaster. Again we see that *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* designates a category of action — not an emotion.

**4. Conclusion**

This articles presents several general conclusions with regard to the root ḤRH and the idiom *ḥᵃrôn ʾāp̱* which contribute to the discussion of these specific expressions, to research on emotions in the Bible, and to the understanding of anger, human and divine, in the Bible.

First, it is necessary to distinguish between the idioms *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y* and *ḥārâ lᵉ*-X. The former accompanies a direct response, forceful and sometimes even close to violent, and it is generally directed by a higher-ranking individual at a lower-ranking one. By contrast, the expression *ḥārâ lᵉ*-X denotes being grieved, insulted, or frustrated by at some injustice that was done to X. It is not accompanied by direct violence, and in some occurrences, but not all, it characterizes the lower-ranking person. This distinction teaches that we must think again about the phrase “terms for anger” and examine each of these terms afresh, without preconceived notions.

Recognition that the phrase *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* occurs with specific power relationships and not with others calls into question the assumption that it refers to an internal, spontaneous emotion. This assumption is incompatible with a number of texts from which we learn that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is not an emotion, and that the concrete actions mentioned in connection with this idiom do not constitute the external expression of such an emotion. The conclusion is that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* is a mode of action aimed at someone else, always expressing itself through various concrete actions. The meaning of such an action derives not from the internal world of the characters but from the relationships between them. Further research will make it possible to apply this analysis further, with regard to additional expressions that are regarded as internal or abstract.

As for the metaphoric meaning, we must accept the widespread opinion that *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* denotes “burning of the nose,” but the locale of combustion is not the reddening of the face of the one whose “nose” is “burning,” but the fire directed at the other side, the one at whom the nose is burning. This too leads to the conclusion that *ḥārâ ʾap̱ X bᵉ Y* does not describe the feelings of X as a result of the actions performed by Y but rather X’s exercise of power over Y as a result of actions of Y which X looked upon unfavorably. This conclusion too may be valid with regard for other “anger” terms.

In conclusion, a further possible contribution of this discussion is that it does *not* distinguish between divine anger and human anger. Though there may certainly be differences between the divine and the human — with regard to the causes of anger, the ways to prevent it, and so forth — the basic meaning of the expressions *ḥārâ lᵉ* and *ḥārâ ʾāp̱* does not depend on whether we are speaking about God or a human being. This insight is in opposition to the tendency of scholars to assert that there is a categorical distinction between human anger and divine anger — a distinction that rests on theological considerations more than it does on textual ones — and it has broad implications for dealing with other “theological” expressions in the Bible.

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