

רוח

hebrew

Meaning:

- Wind
- Breath
- Spirit

Noun. Occurs about 380 times in the Old Testament.

Though usually feminine, רוח sometimes takes masculine verbs and adjectives, especially when referring to the Spirit of God (רוח יְהוָה).

The plural רוחות often means winds rather than spirits.

The word רוח (ruach) is a richly layered term with several interconnected meanings depending on context. It is one of the most theologically significant words in Scripture.

The root idea is movement of air, which naturally extends into several related senses:

- Wind – a literal breeze or storm (e.g., “wind of the sea” in [Exodus 10:13](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigExodus 10:13

Hebrew וַיֹּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת מִטְהוֹ עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיְהִי הָרוּחַ בְּהַג רֹחַ קָדִים בָּאֶרֶץ כָּל הַיּוֹם הַהוּא וְכָל הַלַּיְלָה הַבֹּקֶר הָיָה הָרוּחַ הַקָּדִים נֹשֵׂא אֶת הָאַרְבֶּה
ESV So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts.

καὶ ὅτε ἦν ἡ ἑσπέρη ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ἦν ὁ ἅπας ὁ ἀνέμος ὁ βορρῆος, καὶ ἦν ὁ ἀνέμος ὁ βορρῆος ὁ ἁπας ὁ ἀνέμος ὁ βορρῆος...

- Breath – the animating force in living beings (e.g., “the breath of life” in [Genesis 6:17](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigGenesis 6:17

Hebrew וְאֲנִי הֹנֵנִי מִבֵּיא אֶת הַמַּבּוּל מִיָּם עַל הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁחֵת כָּל בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ רֹחַ חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִגּוֹעַ
ESV For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. NIV I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in i...).

- Spirit – an invisible, life-giving, and personal force—whether human, angelic, or divine

So רוח can refer to anything from a physical wind to the spiritual presence of God. The same Hebrew word thus bridges the natural and the supernatural—the air that moves the trees and the Spirit that moves hearts.

It is frequently paired with God or Yahweh, that is, The Spirit of God (רוח אֱלֹהִים) and Spirit of the Lord (רוח יְהוָה) are commonly found the Old Testament.

Human Beings and רוח

When applied to people, ruach refers to the inner life or disposition:

- [Genesis 41:8](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigGenesis 41:8

Hebrew וַיְהִי בִבְקָר וַתִּפְּעֶם רוּחוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא אֶת כָּל חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרָיִם וְאֶת כָּל חֲכָמֶיהָ וַיְסַפֵּר פָּרְעֹה לָהֶם אֶת עֲשֵׂה עֲשֵׂה עֲשֵׂה
ESV So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

δὲ πρῶτῃ καὶ ἐταράχθη ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀποστείλας ἐκάλεσεν πάντας τοὺς Αἰγύπτου καὶ πάν... -
Pharaoh's spirit was troubled

- [Proverbs 16:32](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigProverbs 16:32

Hebrew מִי שֶׁיֵּשֶׁב עַל הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהִיָּה וְהָרוּחַ תֵּשׁוּב אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַןָהּ
ESV Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. NIV Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.

ἀνὴρ ἰσχυροῦ ὁ δὲ κρατῶν ὁργῆς καταλαμβάνομεν πόλιν - A person who controls his spirit is better than one who conquers a city

- [Ecclesiastes 12:7](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigEcclesiastes 12:7

Hebrew וַיָּשׁוּב הָעָפָר עַל הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהִיָּה וְהָרוּחַ תֵּשׁוּב אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַןָהּ
ESV and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. NIV and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. NLT

καὶ ἐπιστρέψῃ ὁ πνεῦμα εἰς τὸν θεόν ὃς ἔδωκεν αὐτό... - The spirit returns to God who gave it.

Here, spirit represents the non-material aspect of humans, their emotions, thoughts, and will.

God and רוח

The Spirit of the Lord (רוח יְהוָה) is profoundly important:

- [Genesis 1:2](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigGenesis 1:2

Hebrew וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תִּהְיוּ וְחָשֹׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם
ESV The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. NIV Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

ἡ δὲ ἐγγὺς ἡ ἀόρατος καὶ ἀσκοτός ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ... - "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

- The Spirit of the LORD empowers prophets, judges, and kings, e.g. [Judges 3:10](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigJudges 3:10

Hebrew וַיָּבֹאוּ עָלָיו רוּחַ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁפֹּט אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַלְחָמָה וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ אֶת כּוּשָׁן רִישַׁתַּיִם מֶלֶךְ אֲרָם
ESV The Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his

hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.

καὶ ἐπαύτὸν πνεῦμα κυρίου καὶ ἔκρινεν τὸν Ισραηλ καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐπὶ τὸν πόλεμον καὶ παρέδω...

- In [Ezekiel 36:27](#) plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big Ezekiel 36:27

Hebrew וְנָתַתִּי רֹחִי בְּכֶם וְעָשִׂיתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר בְּחֻקֵּי תִלְכוּ וּמִשְׁפָּטַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם
my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. NIV
And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά μου δώσω ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ ποιήσω ἵνα ἀντὶ τῶν δικαιοῦμασίν μου πορεύησθε καὶ τὰ κρίματά μου φυλάξησθε καὶ ποιήσητε... God promises, "I will put My Spirit within you."

Here רוח expresses God's dynamic, personal presence and power - His life-giving energy that creates, inspires, and renews.

Greek Connections - the LXX and New Testament

In the Greek Septuagint, רוח is usually translated as πνεῦμα, carrying the same range of meanings: wind, breath, spirit. This continuity explains why in the New Testament, πνεῦμα is used for both the Holy Spirit and human spirit.

Theological Reflection

The word רוח testifies to the living God who breathes life into creation and into His people. Just as God's רוח gave life to Adam ([Genesis 2:7](#) plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big Genesis 2:7

Hebrew וַיִּצְרֵהוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפֶרֶת מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לִנְפֹשׁ חַיָּה ESV then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. NIV the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. καὶ ἔπλασεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς κ...), so His Spirit gives new life to believers ([Ezekiel 37](#) and [John 3:8](#) plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big John 3:8

Greek τὸ πνεῦμα ὅπου θέλει πνεῖ, καὶ τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ἀκούεις, ἀλλ' οὐκ οἶδας πόθεν ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγει· οὕτως ἐστὶν πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος. ESV The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." NIV The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit...).

It reminds us that God's presence is both powerful and personal, unseen yet active. It moves like the wind, revives what is dead, and empowers those who trust in Him.

Comparison between רוח and נֶפֶשׁ - spirit and soul or life



Aspect	נֶפֶשׁ (*Soul / Life*)	רוּחַ (*Spirit / Breath*)
Root Meaning	“To breathe” or “to live”; connected with the *living being* itself	“To blow” or “to move air”; connected with *breath, wind,* or *animating force.*
Concrete Sense	The *person as a living being*—life, appetite, or self	The *invisible vitality or power* that animates life; the immaterial “breath” that comes from God
Physical Connection	Closely tied to *bodily life* and *blood* (e.g. *Leviticus 17:11* — “the life [נֶפֶשׁ] of the flesh is in the blood”)	More closely tied to *breath* and *air*—God’s life-giving power, distinct from material form
Emotional / Psychological Sense	Describes the person’s desires, emotions, and individuality (e.g. *Genesis 34:3* - “his soul was drawn to Dinah”)	Describes the person’s inner drive, will, or disposition (e.g. *Proverbs 16:32* - “he who rules his spirit”)
Divine Usage	Rarely applied directly to God; usually describes human or creaturely life	Frequently applied to God - “Spirit of God” or “Spirit of the LORD” - showing His active presence
At Death	The life departs when the body dies - life as we know it ceases	The spirit/breath returns to God who gave it (*Ecclesiastes 12:7*)
Greek Equivalent (LXX)	ψυχή	πνεῦμα
New Testament Parallel	The “soul” represents personhood and individuality	The “spirit” represents the God-given life force or spiritual connection with God

In Biblical anthropology, both נֶפֶשׁ and רוּחַ are essential parts of human life, but they emphasize different dimensions:

- The word נֶפֶשׁ points to the whole living person - their emotions, appetites, and physical life. When Scripture says a “soul” is hungry or joyful, it refers to the person's lived experience in the body. In short, it is the the living self
- The word רוּחַ emphasizes the invisible breath that gives that self life and consciousness. It is what comes from God and returns to Him - the spiritual dimension that links humanity to the Creator. In short, it is the life-giving breath or spirit from God.

Thus, in biblical thought, humanity is both נֶפֶשׁ (a living being) and animated by רוּחַ (the Spirit or breath of God).

Grammatical Forms of רוח in the Old Testament

Description	Example (Reference)	Form
Absolute singular — the basic dictionary form, “spirit,” “wind,” or “breath.”	Genesis 1:2 plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigGenesis 1:2 Hebrew וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תִּהְיוּ וְנָהוּ וְחָשָׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם ESV The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. NIV Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ἡ δὲ γῆ ἥν ἄρα τοῦ καὶ ἀλυσκότος ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἔπεφερε τοῦ ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος... - “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”	רוח
Definite singular — “the spirit,” “the wind.” Uses the article ha when specific	Genesis 8:1 plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigGenesis 8:1 Hebrew וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת נֹחַ וְאֶת כָּל הַחַיָּה וְאֶת כָּל הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל הָאָרֶץ ESV But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. NIV But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, an... - “God made a wind pass over the earth.”	הָרוּחַ
Construct singular — “Spirit of God,” “Spirit of the LORD.” Expresses possession or relationship	Judges 3:10 - “The Spirit of the LORD came upon him.”	רוחַ יְהוָה
1st person singular suffix — “my spirit”	Genesis 6:3 - “My Spirit shall not strive with man.”	רוּחִי
2nd person masculine singular suffix — “your spirit”	Psalms 51:13 (English 51:11) - “Take not Your Holy Spirit from me”	רוּחְךָ
3rd person masculine singular suffix — “his spirit”	Genesis 41:8 - “His spirit was troubled”	רוּחוֹ
3rd person feminine singular suffix — “her spirit”	Isaiah 26:9 - “My spirit within me seeks You”	רוּחָהּ
Absolute plural — “spirits,” “winds.” Usually natural, not divine	Psalms 148:8 - “Stormy winds fulfilling His word.”	רוּחוֹת

Definite plural — “the winds,” “the spirits”	Zechariah 6:5 - “These are the four winds of heaven.”	רוחות השמים
Plural with possessive suffixes — “his/their spirits”	Psalms 104:4 - “He makes His messengers winds”	רוחותיו / רוחותיהם
Prepositional forms — with prefixes such as בְּ- (in), לְ- (to), מִ- (from)	Ezekiel 37:9 - “Come, O wind/spirit.”	בְּרוּחַ / לְרוּחַ / מְרוּחַ

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