



Can in Raa Haqi Belief and Folklore

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Summary

This entry examines the meaning of can in Raa Haqi belief and folklore through its relationship with the formation of the body, the four fundamental elements, divine blood, the soul, death, and the idea of returning to the world. Can primarily means life and vitality and is identified with the soul residing within the body. The formation of the cosmos and the body is explained through fire, air, earth, and water, collectively known as *çar nesil*. The addition of the body and can to these four elements creates the sixfold whole known as *şeş cihad* or *şeş icad*. Fire is regarded as a sacred trust bestowed upon humanity by Haq through Ali; water as Haq's mercy and the source of life; earth as the material substance of the body and a trust temporarily granted to human beings; and air or wind as one of the components of vitality. The four elements are also associated with the sacred fourfold grouping of Gabriel, Ali, Muhammad, and Allah, as well as with the Four Doors of Şeriat, Tarikat, Marifet, and Hakikat. The manifestation of can within the body is identified as the soul, while divine blood is understood as the soul's material manifestation. According to the creation narrative, this blood was taken from divine beings and transferred to Adam, who was still a lifeless body, thereby bringing him to life. Death is interpreted as the gradual withdrawal from the body of the thirty attributes received from Haq and the return of the trusts received at creation to their original owners. The form in which the soul will return to the world is determined by the posthumous tribunal known as *Oli Diwan*. The soul, however, does not cease to exist. Following judgement after death, it returns to the world in a new form and continues its existence across generations. Can therefore refers not only to biological life, but also to a continuing cosmological circulation between human beings, divine beings, the fundamental elements of nature, and successive generations.

Keywords: Adam, Adem, air, Ateş, Azrael, Azrail, blood, Blut, Can, *çar nesil*, death, Earth, Erde, Feuer, fire, hava, kan, Luft, Ölüm, Raa Haqi, ruh, Seele, *şeş cihad*, soul, Su, Tod, Toprak, Wasser, water

Can, the Body, and the Elements of the Cosmos [1]

Can means life and vitality and refers to the divine essence that makes the human body a living being. The totality of existence, recorded in the dictionary as *vücud-u âlem*, is

explained through *çar nesil* and *şes cihad*. *Çar nesil* consists of fire, air, earth, and water. When the body and *can* are added to these four elements, they form the sixfold whole known as *şes cihad* or *şes icad*. The body represents the material and temporary dimension of human existence, while *can* represents the life and soul within it (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

Within this classification, the human body and the cosmos are not conceived as separate structures. The fire, air, earth, and water that constitute the body are also the fundamental elements of the inhabited world. The manifestation of *can* in the body depends upon the union of these elements with the body and soul. Life is therefore not merely a bodily process, but the outcome of a unity established between the elements of nature, divine origin, and the material body. Death does not signify the complete disappearance of this unity, but the beginning of the elements' return to the places from which they came (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Çakmak 2007, 59-71).

Çar Nesil: Fire, Air, Earth, and Water

The four elements known as *çar nesil* are not merely components of material existence. The concept of "Çar" also refers to the sacred fourfold grouping consisting of Allah, Gabriel, Muhammad, and Ali. The four elements are likewise associated with the doctrine of the Four Doors: earth with Gabriel and *Şeriat*; fire with Ali and *Tarikat*; wind with Muhammad and *Marifet*; and water with Allah and *Hakikat*. The material constitution of human beings and the cosmos is thus interpreted through the same fourfold order as the sacred figures and the fundamental doors of the Path (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

Fire, known as *adır* or *agır*, is a sacred trust bestowed upon humanity by Haq through Ali. It is believed that fire was sent to the world through lightning and that lightning represents Ali's *Zülfükar*. Practices arising from this sacred character include refraining from extinguishing fire unnecessarily, not throwing unclean objects into it, and recounting bad dreams

to it. Fire may also represent the uncontrolled self and a power capable of turning into evil. The element that makes life possible and the power that puts human beings to the test therefore coexist within the meaning of fire (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

Water, known as *auwe* or *aw*, is regarded, together with earth, as one of the two fundamental sources of life. Water is a form of nourishment bestowed upon living beings from Haq's own mercy and is also a sacred mystery. The designation of rain as *Rama Haq*, meaning "Haq's mercy," reflects this understanding. The recounting of bad dreams to water, the recitation of prayers over it to protect against the evil eye and other forms of harm, its use in forty-day purification practices following childbirth, and its role in various rituals show that water is regarded not only as sustaining the body but also as an element that protects and purifies life (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

Earth, known as *hard* or *erd*, refers both to the world in which material life is sustained and to the substance from which the human body is formed. Earth is regarded as a trust granted by Haq to human beings so that they may secure their livelihood. According to the creation narrative, when an attempt is made to take a portion of earth to form the human body, the earth refuses and declares that the created being will betray it. Azrael ultimately promises that the portion taken will be returned to the earth. Only upon receiving this promise does the earth agree to participate in the creation of humanity. The words "*To ra bi, oncia yenê to*," meaning "They came from you and will return to you again," express this covenant between creation and death (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Çakmak 2007, 59-71).

The third element referred to as "air" in the entry on *can* is complemented in the dictionary by the concept of *va* or *ba*, meaning wind. Within the order of the Four Doors, wind is associated with Muhammad and *Marifet*. It is also a mobile power capable of bringing news from distant places and of signalling approaching events through its direction and

intensity. Like fire, water, and earth, air is therefore understood not merely as passive matter, but as an active element that participates in the formation of life and informs human beings of changes in their surroundings (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

Şeş Cihad: Body, Can, and Soul

Although the four elements constitute the basis of material existence, they are not sufficient on their own to bring a human being into existence. The addition of the body and *can* to fire, air, earth, and water completes the sixfold formation known as *şeş cihad* or *şeş icad*. The body is the state in which the elements have united in a material form but have not yet acquired life. When *can* joins the body, the body comes to life and the human being emerges. In this account, *can* is not an ordinary force added to the body from outside, but an essence originating in the divine that transforms the material elements into a living whole (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

The manifestation of *can* within the body is defined as the soul. The entry “*Ro / Can*” states that the soul emerges through the divine blood given to the body. The expression “The soul is blood” does not conceive of the soul merely as an abstract entity entirely independent of the body, but in conjunction with the blood that gives life to it. Here, blood is more than a biological fluid: it is the share of life contributed by divine beings to Adam’s creation. The identification of the soul with blood is a cosmological account that explains how the divine essence circulates within the human body and how *can* spreads throughout it (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Gezik 2009, 4-34).

Divine Blood and Adam’s Coming to Life

In the creation narrative, Adam is initially a lifeless body formed from earth. To bring him to life, blood taken from divine beings is transferred to him. Following this transfer, the body comes alive, the soul reaches its bearer, and the

first human being begins to live. Haq's creation of Adam in his own image and his bestowal of thirty attributes from himself upon Adam express the idea that human beings possess divine qualities in addition to their material bodies. *Can* and the soul are the principal manifestations of this divine connection within the body (Gezik 2009, 4-34; Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

One of the portions of blood transferred to Adam is believed to have belonged to Azrael. Azrael's role in creation is not limited to death. It is also Azrael who obtains a portion of earth for the formation of the human body and promises the earth that what has been taken will be returned. Azrael thus both mediates the earth's participation in creation and contributes to the emergence of life by giving his own share of blood to Adam. What is reclaimed at the moment of death is this share of life that was originally bestowed only temporarily (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Çakmak 2007, 59-71).

Azrael, Death, and the Return to Earth

When Azrael reclaims the blood belonging to him, *can* leaves the body and the body becomes a corpse. The corpse is then returned to the earth from which it was borrowed during creation. Death is therefore not the complete disappearance of life, but the separation of the elements brought together at creation and the return of the entrusted components to their original owners. While the body returns to the earth and the divine attributes bestowed upon the human being return to Haq, the soul continues to exist. Death, known as *merdene*, is the fulfilment of the original covenant made with the earth and the return of the body to its material source (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Çakmak 2007, 59-71).

The process of death is explained through the concept of *ro ontene* or *jıyan da*, meaning the withdrawal of the soul. Since the human being is composed of thirty attributes received from Haq, death is believed to begin thirty days before the final breath, with one of these attributes leaving the body each day. Death occurs on the thirtieth day, when

the *ro* departs from the body. This account shows that *can* is not conceived as a singular entity that separates from the body in an instant, but within a gradual withdrawal of the divine elements (Çakmak 2007, 59-71; Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

The Continuity of the Soul and Its Return to the World

Although the body returns to the earth, the soul does not cease to exist. Because the soul comes from Haq, it is not regarded as inherently good or evil; good and evil are instead associated with a person's conduct in this world. The soul's existence after death and the form in which it will return to the world are determined by the divine tribunal known as *Oli Diwan*. Death is therefore not the end of the soul's circulation, but a stage of judgement and transition into a new form of existence (Çakmak 2007, 59-71; Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

It is believed that the soul passes from one generation to another and returns to the world in a new *don*, in accordance with the decision reached after death. This return demonstrates that *can* is not confined to an individual body. The body is temporarily constituted from the four elements and subsequently disperses back into them, while the soul carries divine life forward across generations. The concept of *can* thus establishes continuity between birth and death, Adam and subsequent generations, *Na Dina* and *Haq Dina*, and the human body and the elements of nature (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Çakmak 2007, 59-71).

Conclusion

In *Raa Haqi* belief and folklore, *can* refers to life within the human body, but its meaning is not limited to biological vitality. *Can* occupies a central place within the order of *çar nesil*, formed by fire, air, earth, and water, and the sixfold structure of *şes cihad*, completed through the addition of the body and *can*. While the four elements constitute human beings and the cosmos, they are also associated with the

sacred fourfold grouping and the doctrine of the Four Doors. Explaining *can* as the soul and the soul as divine blood renders human life a trust received from divine beings at creation. Azrael, who participates in the emergence of life by giving blood to Adam, initiates death by reclaiming the same blood; the body becomes a corpse, and the corpse returns to the earth. The soul, however, does not disappear through this dissolution. Following its judgement at *Oli Diwan*, it returns to the world in a new form and continues to live across generations. *Can* is thus the name given to an uninterrupted circulation extending from the divine source to the body, from the body to the earth, and from one generation to the next.

Endnotes

[1] This entry has been adapted to an encyclopaedia format on the basis of the entry "Can" in Erdal Gezik and Hüseyin Çakmak's *Raa Haqi - Riya Haqi / Dersim Aleviliği İnanç Terimleri Sözlüğü* (Raa Haqi - Riya Haqi: A Dictionary of Terms Relating to Dersim Alevi Belief), together with supplementary information from the entries "Çar," "Adır / Ağır," "Auwe (Uwe) / Aw," "Hard / Erd," "Va / Ba," "Ro / Can," "Adem / Adam," "Ro ontene / Jıyan Da," "A Dina / Axiret," "Na Dina / Wa Dunya," "Axrete / Axiret," and "Oli Diwan / Diwana Oli."

References & Further Reading

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