



Rızalık in Alevism: Dual Interpretations, Communal Practice, and Social Transformation

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Summary

Rızalık (mutual agreement), commonly translated as mutual consent, approval, reconciliation or contentment, is a central ethical and ritual principle in Alevism. This entry examines Rızalık through two related interpretive frameworks: the Hak-Muhammed-Ali path, which links the concept to Qur'anic interpretation, and the practice of seeking mutual consent within the self, society and the 'path'. Drawing on existing scholarship, it first considers the relationship between Rızalık and Qur'anic ideas of divine approval, especially the reciprocal relation between God and the believer. In Alevi practice, however, Rızalık extends beyond personal piety to regulate relations among the self, society and the religious path. The entry then explores how this principle is enacted through the cem ritual, reconciliation, initiation, death rites and the ideal of Rıza Şehri. Finally, it examines how migration, urbanisation, social dislocation and institutionalisation have transformed the social settings in which Rızalık is practised. It argues that Rızalık remains a key concept in Alevism, although its practical expression has shifted, to some extent, from village-based, face-to-face implementation towards more symbolic and institutional forms.

Keywords: Alevi Bektaşî, Alevi-Bektashi, Cem Ceremony, Consent, Dersim Alevism (raa Haqi), Displacement, Kurdish Alevism, Rızalık, Rızalık (consent)

Introduction

Rızalık occupies a distinctive place in Alevism, including Kurdish Alevism, Dersim Alevism (Raa Haqi), and Alevi-Bektashi religious practice and ethical thought. It refers not simply to an internal state of acceptance, but to a relational condition in which individuals seek mutual consent, settle grievances and recognise responsibilities towards others. Tanrıverdi (2026) connects the concept to the Islamic language of divine approval while emphasising that, in Alevi-

Bektashi thought, Rızalık also governs relations among individuals, society and nature. Küçük (2025) similarly presents it as indispensable to the Hak-Muhammed-Ali path and links it to the Qur'anic image of the soul returning to God in a condition of reciprocal contentment. Rızalık therefore combines theology, ethics and social practice.

Its communal dimension is especially significant because Alevi religious life has historically depended on collective relations and reciprocal accountability. Cem ceremonies, relations between dede and talip, ritual kinship, reconciliation and initiation all require consent. Erken (2026), for example, describes the embodied ritual of asking for Rızalık in the cem, while Gültekin (2025) identifies mutual consent as a binding norm within Raa Haqi cosmology, stating: "In cem ceremonies, marriages, and matters of sharing or reconciliation, no decision can be taken without the explicit consent of all involved; otherwise, it is considered a violation of rights" (Gültekin 2025, 28). Rızalık is therefore both a religious ideal and a mechanism through which a community produces trust, resolves conflict and defines legitimate participation.

This entry addresses two connected questions. First, how is Rızalık articulated in relation to Islamic and non-Islamic ethical narratives and moral accountability? Second, how has its social meaning changed with migration, urbanisation, displacement and institutionalisation? The sources considered here suggest that migration and urban transformation have created new spaces for Alevi communal life while also producing significant changes and challenges for the practice of Rızalık.

Rızalık in Relation to Islamic and Non-Islamic Narratives

The Islamic narrative of Rızalık is most clearly expressed through the relationship between divine approval and human moral conduct. Tanrıverdi (2026) argues that Alevi-Bektashi interpretations connect the believer's search for God's

approval with the principle of Rızalık in social life. Divine approval is therefore not confined to a vertical relationship between the individual and God; it also becomes a horizontal ethical requirement through which individuals establish right relations with one another. In this interpretation, Qur'anic injunctions towards peace and reconciliation become an obligation to cultivate mutual acceptance and social harmony. Küçük (2025) develops this connection through Surah al-Fajr (89:27-30), in which the peaceful soul returns to God in a condition of reciprocal satisfaction. Within Alevi thought, this reciprocal relationship becomes a model for social and spiritual life. Küçük distinguishes three forms of consent: with oneself, with society and with the religious path. Self-consent requires moral self-examination before the pir; social consent requires reciprocal accountability between the individual and the community; and consent with the path requires voluntary commitment rather than coercion. Together, these dimensions integrate the individual into the collective and symbolically orient the community towards Hak through the principle "El ele, el Hakk'a" – hand in hand, hand to God. Kreger (2022) similarly describes Rızalık as underpinning a community organised around consensus, moral commitment and a collective ethical order. Rızalık thus links Qur'anic language, Alevi moral discipline and a social vision in which legitimacy depends on reciprocal recognition.

At the same time, the growing body of scholarship on Alevism, together with the development of diverse institutional settings, emphasises the heterogeneity that can be obscured by an overgeneralised Alevi identity. Like other key concepts in Alevism, Rızalık is also interpreted in ways that do not require adherence to Islamic principles. In this line of thought, Ecevitoğlu (2011) argues that, for Alevis, connecting with God individually while bypassing the community is out of the question. Rather, relationships are built through everyday morality, while the cem provides a means of participating in the sacred. Failure to obtain Rızalık, and being declared düşkün (outcast), results in

exclusion from both the community's social world and its understanding of truth.

Rızalık also shapes justice and reconciliation beyond the ceremonial practice of the cem ritual. Dönmez and Çelik (2018) describe an annual process through which an individual seeks society's approval and confirms commitment to the moral rules of the path. Gültekin (2025) discusses Rızalık in Raa Haqi as a binding norm in ceremonies, marriage, sharing and reconciliation: decisions made without the consent of those affected violate communal rights. Moreover, in Raa Haqi cosmology, this worldview encompasses animate and inanimate beings as well as Batin entities, ideally understood as bound by reciprocal agreement. Without consent, inner acceptance of the other is considered contrary to the 'path' (yol) of Raa Haqi and is also believed to cause adversity (Gültekin 2025, 15). The relationship with the surrounding natural world in Dersim Alevism is particularly significant and resembles the beliefs of other Indigenous Peoples who understand Mother Earth as "an interconnected web of life, with humans as one of many components" (Hanoğlu et al. 2025, 8). This perspective is a fundamental element of Dersim's land-based practices and traditional agriculture, shaped by the principle of Rızalık, and efforts are being made to reactivate, preserve and sustain the knowledge and practices associated with this domain (Hanoğlu et al. 2025, 8).

Furthermore, the ideal of a holistic relationship among nature, the individual and society, articulated through Rıza Şehri, or the City of Consent, extends this logic into a utopian social vision. Shaped by a nature- and human-centred philosophy, Rıza Şehri proposes that balanced relations between people and space – or, more broadly, a conscientious organisation of human-space relations that is classless and free from exploitation – are possible (Gülersoy 2019).

Rızalık is also inseparable from ritual practice and is central to communal peace as a form of conflict resolution. In the

cem, the dede asks the community for consent before exercising religious authority, and unresolved disputes are expected to be addressed before worship proceeds (Dönmez and Çelik 2018). Erken (2026) shows how this principle is embodied when participants turn towards one another, make physical contact and exchange sacred words. The body becomes a medium through which equality, acceptance and collective belonging are made visible. Çelik (2014) similarly emphasises teslim-i rızalık, or submission through consent, in which entry into the path and participation in religious service must be voluntary.

According to dedes and pirs, seeking consent during the cem ceremony is, or at least historically was, more than symbolic; they connect it to Alevi belief and theology regardless of its association with Islam. Pir Hasan Ergişi, interviewed in 2025, explained that consent involves individuals attaining inner peace across several relational levels: within the self, within the family, with spouses and friends, with nature, and with the Alevi path. He also stated that, historically, Alevi communities did not rely on qadis, police, gendarmerie, courts or lawyers in the ways they do today. Before the cem, communities resolved disputes internally and supported one another, sometimes assigning community service to those found responsible. Serious transgressions, such as taking a human or animal life, could result in a person being declared *düşkün*. Building on this point, perspectives on Alevism differ. Ali İçlek Dede, who conducted a cem ritual based on the principle of Hak-Muhammed-Ali, likewise emphasised the importance of *rızalık almak*, mediation and conflict resolution during the cem. On 5 June 2025, he remarked that “we had not known the way to court until fifty years ago.” These statements from a dede and a pir, despite their differing views on Alevism’s proximity to Islam, underscore the historical significance of *rızalık almak* for Alevi communities and illustrate how its practice has changed alongside wider structural transformations.

Rızalık through Forced Displacement, Migration, Urbanisation and Institutionalisation

Traditional practices of Rızalık presuppose dense and repeated social relations. In rural communities, individuals were embedded in networks of kinship, ritual kinship, ocak authority and communal supervision. Cem ceremonies brought together people who knew one another's disputes and obligations, enabling the dede to mediate conflict and determine whether participants had reconciled. Rızalık therefore operated as a practical mechanism of accountability as well as a religious value.

As noted earlier, Rızalık is not merely a component of the cem ritual; it underpins broader aspects of Alevi practice and the philosophy of life. In his study "Çıralık (Hakullah): Hak, Pir ve Talip Adına Bir Katkı Sistemine Dair," Gezik (2013) discusses the practice of receiving çıralık and its significance. One important feature of traditional Alevi practice was the annual visit that spiritual leaders (pirs) made to their disciples (talips). During these visits, disciples appeared before the pir, issues within the community were addressed, and the bonds between pir and talip acquired a sacred dimension through the cem ceremony. In the final stage, pirs visited the disciples' homes to offer prayers, after which family members provided a financial contribution. Alevi in Dersim and surrounding areas call this contribution çıralık, while those in other regions generally call it hakullah. The prayer received in exchange for çıralık is understood by the disciple as confirmation of membership in the community; a pir should accept çıralık only from individuals who fulfil the requirements of the path and have secured the community's consent, or Rızalık. This example suggests that Rızalık is central to Alevism not only in the practice of çıralık/hakullah, but also in communal practices among followers of the path and in relationships with nature. Economic, social and political changes, however, have created new challenges for sustaining such practices amid internal and external migration.

Displacement and migration challenged this infrastructure by separating individuals from the local networks through which consent was secured. Although the literature

considered here does not provide a detailed history of forced displacement, Tee's (2023) discussion of Alevi migration to Istanbul illustrates the consequences of communal separation. Analysing Alevi aşık poetry, Tee describes the isolation experienced by migrants who could no longer hold the cem in its familiar communal form. Because sharing lokma requires participants to have declared Rızalık with one another, the loss of the ritual community also meant the loss of a key setting in which mutual consent could be enacted. Under conditions of dislocation, Rızalık could therefore become something remembered, mourned and symbolically reconstructed.

Urbanisation intensified these changes. Dönmez and Çelik (2018) distinguish between rural Alevi communities and more formally organised Bektashi structures associated with urban centres. Migration to cities weakened some village-based mechanisms of social regulation while creating a need for new forms of collective organisation. In more anonymous urban settings, a single ritual community could no longer regulate everyday relationships as comprehensively as in a village cem. Yet urbanisation did not eliminate Rızalık. Instead, the principle could increasingly operate as an explicitly articulated ethical value, reproduced through newly organised forms of communal and religious life.

Institutionalisation further transformed its function. Contemporary Alevi organisations operate within legal, secular and public arenas that differ considerably from the traditional ocak-talip structure. Kreger (2022) shows how Rızalık can be used in contemporary settings to interpret religious freedom, consensus and communal authority. His discussion of the Hacı Bektaş shrine illustrates negotiations between inherited ritual authority and modern ideas of freedom of conscience. Rızalık thereby becomes not only a rule governing interpersonal disputes but also a language through which collective ethical and institutional claims can be expressed.

At the same time, ritual practices preserve its older

relational meaning. Sert and Yalçın (2024) describe taking Rızalık or helallik from relatives and community members before burial, including the settlement of moral debts and communal approval of ritual procedures. Death rites therefore illustrate adaptation without abandonment of the principle's central logic. Across cem ritual, initiation, reconciliation, migration narratives, contemporary institutions and funerary practices, legitimate Alevi sociality continues to depend on reciprocity, responsibility and consent.

Conclusion

Rızalık is best understood as a relational principle linking Alevi theology, ethics, ritual and social organisation. Its Islamic narrative is rooted in reciprocal approval between God and the believer, while Alevi traditions extend the principle to relations among the self, society and the religious path. Through cem ritual, initiation, dispute resolution, Rıza Şehri and funeral practices, consent becomes both a spiritual condition and a social requirement.

Migration and urbanisation altered the circumstances in which this principle could be practised. The weakening of village-based networks disrupted face-to-face mechanisms of accountability, while urban anonymity made communal reconciliation more difficult. Yet these transformations also encouraged Rızalık to be rearticulated as a portable ethical value and, increasingly, an institutional language. Contemporary Alevi organisations and ritual communities continue to reproduce the concept in new settings. Rızalık therefore demonstrates both continuity and adaptation: it remains anchored in reciprocal responsibility while changing form in response to displacement, mobility, urban life and institutional reorganisation.

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