



Kirvelik (2)

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Summary

This entry examines the institution of kirvelik (Kivralık / Kirve / Kewra / Kirêw & Male Circumcision) in the context of Dersim Alevism (Raa Haqi), not merely as a social practice accompanying the circumcision ritual but as a distinctive relational form surrounded by sacred meaning, producing strong moral obligations and enduring bonds. Kirvelik also functions as a mechanism for establishing peace between different families and tribes, resolving disputes, and creating long-term “kinship” relations. In this respect, it is referred to as “Prophetic friendship,” thereby gaining religious legitimacy. Within the Raa Haqi tradition, kirvelik is defined through both *zahir* (exoteric) forms and *batın* (esoteric) forms that are no longer practiced today. Esoteric kirvelik is established through the visits of saints (*ziyaret*) and through *batın* beings; in such relations, the child is entrusted directly to the protection and shadow of a sacred being (the *ziyaret* and the saint). By contrast, exoteric kirvelik is established as an irreversible moral contract through ritual elements such as *niyaz*, *gülbeng*, the hand-washing ceremony, and the “bloody towel.” This bond creates a marriage prohibition extending across four generations and prescribes severe sanctions in the case of violation. In this framework, the entry demonstrates that within the Raa Haqi belief world kirvelik is not merely a ritual accompaniment but a central social and ethical institution structured through consent (*rıza*), loyalty, responsibility, and contact with the sacred.

Keywords: Kirvelik, Sünnet

Kewra / Kirêw [1]

Kivra refers to the person who stands beside the child undergoing circumcision and supports the family during this process. In the context of Dersim Alevism (*Raa Haqi*), *kirvelik* is regarded not merely as a form of individual solidarity but as one of the principal social mechanisms through which enduring bonds between different families are established. This relationship is also referred to as “Prophetic friendship” and carries strong moral legitimacy. Marriage between *kirves* is strictly prohibited; this

prohibition also extends to the relatives of the parties up to the fourth degree. The bond of *kirvelik* remains valid for four generations. Moreover, *kirvelik* functions as a conciliatory mechanism used to resolve hostilities and conflicts between tribes.

During the establishment of the *kirvelik* bond, the family that will take a *kirve* prepares *niyaz* and visits the house where the *kirvelik* will be established, placing an apple, three candles, and twelve coins on top of the *niyaz*. These twelve coins are called *Des u diye Mehemed* ("Muhammad's Twelve") and refer to the Twelve Imams. *Kirves* visit each other once a year accompanied by *niyaz*; this visit generally takes place in the autumn months and signifies the renewal of the *ikrar*. In this respect, within the *Raa Haqi* tradition *kirvelik* functions not merely as a ritual accompaniment but as a sacred relationship that generates long-term responsibilities and reciprocal obligations.

Batıni Kirvelik

As a practice that is no longer carried out today, *batıni kirvelik* is established through a relationship with the *batın* realm and sacred beings. Those who establish *kirvelik* in the *batın* visit the place belonging to the saint (*ziyaret*) who will be accepted as *kivra*, together with the child. After a candle (*çıra*) is lit, the child is entrusted to the protection of the sacred being with the phrase "*no kerm esto pêsa to*" ("this soul is entrusted to your shadow"). If the *kivra* has not been determined beforehand, recourse is made to intention (*niyet*). For example, when one goes to the place where *kivra* will be established in the *batın*, the first person encountered there may be accepted as the *kivra*. If the saint concerned does not have a specific *ziyaret* place, the bond of *kirvelik* is established by distributing *niyaz* in his name. In some cases, *kirvelik* is limited solely to *ziyarets* and is established through the sacred place itself, without being directly connected to a particular family.

Zahiri Kirvelik

In *zahiri kirvelik*, the *kivra* is determined in advance and the intention is communicated to him. If a positive response is received, the day and time on which the *kirvelik* bond will be established are agreed upon. On the designated day, the family of the child to be circumcised prepares *niyaz*; a red apple and a pouch containing twelve coins (12 metal coins) are placed on top of the *niyaz*. Taking candles with them, the family goes with their child to the house of the person who will become the *kivra*. After an introductory conversation, the purpose of the visit is restated; once the candle is lit, the *niyaz* on which the apple and the pouch of coins are placed is brought forward. The child's father hands the pouch to the *kivra* saying "*Ni Des u Diyê Mehemediye*" ("These are Muhammad's Twelve") and seats the child on the *kivra's* lap. Receiving the pouch, the *kivra* kisses the child and accepts the *kirvelik* bond by saying: "*Des u Diyê Mehemed sare u çımıne mı sere, Haq pozğınıye mede, ma rişa mekero*" ("Muhammad's Twelve are above my head and eyes; may *Haq* not give us resentment or estrangement; may our faces not be blackened").

Circumcision

When the circumcision is to be performed, a gift is sent to the *kivra* together with an apple, and the *kivra* is invited to the circumcision ceremony. The *kivra* usually arrives one day before the circumcision; the circumcision clothes of the child are purchased by the *kivra*. The *kivra* attends the ceremony bringing the clothing as well as various gifts related to food, drink, and garments for family members.

After the circumcision, the *kivra* bids farewell to the child. The family sends the *kivra* off with previously prepared gifts. On the third day after the circumcision, the *kivra* visits the circumcised child with gifts. With the *kivra's* visit, the child gets out of bed and begins to move around. The *kivra* spends the night in the house; the host usually prepares *soğıs* (lamb kebab), neighbors are invited, and people eat and celebrate together.

Before the circumcision procedure takes place, a *kirvelik* bond is established with a person who will support the child during the circumcision. On the day of the circumcision, at dawn (before sunrise), the *kivra* bathes the child who will be circumcised. With the sunrise, the circumcision prayer begins. This prayer is called *Honika Mehemed*. A table is placed facing the direction of the rising sun; on the table a *şeniye* (tray) is placed, and in the middle of it a *pirozine* (flour sieve) is positioned. A towel is spread over the sieve, *niyaz* is placed to its right, and a *çıra* is lit. The circumciser positions the child who will be circumcised and the *kivra* on his right side, and the child's family on his left side, standing behind the table facing the sun. The assembled community stands behind them, and the *lokma* and *niyaz* brought by the community are also placed on the table. The circumciser asks the community for *rızalık* and recites the circumcision *gülbeng*:

Himetkere (*sünnetçi*)

Himmet Haq ra (*cemaat*)

Na tore tore Ivrayim peyğamber

Kerdo mıqerem pir u rayver

Hast niado Duzgıne Kemer

Adem u Hava ra ust ra na az

Mehemd u Xeyzade bi berz

Ali u Fatamada bi rez

Haq medo sima sare dez.

Qirvan ho kerdo lazek ver

Sayido cemato ke amo pêser

Kewrau son werdo des u dıyine ser

Raye endi tariya nicerene peyser.

Honike honika Mehemed

Sıkıre ma ve Comerd

Ewro biyo neşiv sunet

Haq simare xerkero na odet

Cer hardo dewres cor asmêno kewe

Sayide simaye na rozede
 Od dame od ceme
 Pêro pia biare silavete

(Törenin sahibi İbrahim Peygamber / Daim kılanlar ise Pir ile Rehber / Kayayı mekân tutan Duzgı vermesin keder / Adem ile Havva'dan geldi bu zühriyet / Muhammed ile Hatice'de oldu niyet / Ali ile Fatma'dan kaldı kısmet / Haq vermesin başa dert... Kurban olmuş çocuğa feda / Şahittir buna hazır bulunan cemaat / Kivrallar On İki İmam'a beyan etmiş niyet / Geri dönüş yoktur, yol karanlık, dönenin sonu felaket... *Honikanın* sahibi Muhammed / Şükürler olsun sana *Comerd* / Bugüne kısmet olmuş sünnet / Sizlere hayırlı olsun bu adet... Aşağıda yer, yukarıda gök / Bugün de bizlere tanık / *İkrar* verdik, *ikrar* aldık / Hep beraber getirelim *selavet*)

After the *gülbeng*, the circumciser recites the *salavat* loudly, while the community recites it in a lower voice. Then, first the *kivra*, followed by the child's family, and then the assembled community, place money-according to their means-on the towel covering the sieve. The collected money is used to pay the circumciser's fee; after his consent (*rızalık*) is obtained, *çıralık* is also given to those in need among those present. While the *niyaz* is distributed and *lokma* is served, the child is taken to the place where the circumcision will be performed. A towel is placed over the knees of the *kivra*, and the child sits on the *kivra*'s lap. During the circumcision, a small amount of blood drips onto the towel. If no blood drips, the circumciser smears the blood from his lancet onto the towel. This situation is called "*gon rişiya pesê to*" ("blood has dripped onto your skirt"). This act carries a particular meaning. Resentment, hypersensitivity, betrayal, and disloyalty are considered obstacles to this bond. Those who engage in such behavior despite this blood are considered *yol düşkünü* and are not accepted back onto the path until the Day of Judgment. The bloody towel is given to the *kivra*. If the bond of *kirvelik* is broken, this towel is returned.

After the circumcision is completed, the hand-washing

ceremony is performed. This ceremony is conducted by a person of modest economic means. This person brings a basin to the center, carries a new towel on the left shoulder, holds water in the right hand, and an unused new bar of soap in the left hand. The child's father comes to the basin to wash his hands; with the back of the left hand facing the basin and the upper side of the right hand facing upward, he holds his hands together. On top of these hands, first the hands of the *kivra*, and above them those of the circumciser, are placed in the same manner. The person conducting the ceremony pours water over the circumciser's hands; the circumciser lets the water flow onto the *kivra*'s hands, and the *kivra* passes it onto the hands of the child's father. Afterwards, soap is placed in the palms of the circumciser; after soaping his hands, the circumciser passes the soap into the palms of the *kivra*, and the *kivra* passes it to the child's father. After soaping his hands, the child's father places the bar of soap in the basin. The hands are then rinsed beginning with the circumciser, and the person conducting the ceremony offers the towel for drying. When the hand-washing and drying are completed, the *kivra* and the child's father give money (*çıralık*) to the person conducting the ceremony; the towel and soap are also left to that person. The water used is poured into a clean place where no one will step on it. After the hand-washing ceremony, the circumcision ritual is considered complete.

Conclusion

Kirvelik (*kivralık*) in the belief world of Dersim Alevism (*Raa Haqi*) emerges as a comprehensive relational form that extends beyond biological kinship and is deeply intertwined with ritual, ethics, and the sacred. When considered in its *batini* and *zahiri* forms, *kirvelik* establishes a relationship of sacred protection and entrustment through *batın* beings and *ziyarets*, while also creating an irreversible, intergenerational moral bond between families through the circumcision ritual. Practices such as *niyaz*, *gülbeng*, *rızalık*, the bloody towel, and the hand-washing ceremony demonstrate that this bond is not merely symbolic but

functions as a form of contract that generates strong obligations and sanctions. The marriage prohibition extending across four generations ensures that the *kirvelik* relationship occupies a lasting place in social memory; the severe consequences foreseen in cases of violation serve to protect the ethics of the *yol* and the collective moral order. Within this framework, *kirvelik* in the *Raa Haqi* tradition is understood not simply as a ceremonial accompaniment to circumcision but as a central institution of belief and relationship that operates through *rıza*, loyalty, mutual responsibility, and contact with the sacred, thereby securing social peace and ethical continuity.

Endnotes

[1] Editorial Note: This entry is based on the corresponding entry in Erdal Gezik and Hüseyin Çakmak's *Raa Haqi - Riya Haqi / Dersim Aleviliği İnanç Terimleri Sözlüğü* (Ankara: Kalan Yayınları, 2010). The text has been reviewed and updated by the authors of the original publication.

References & Further Reading

Gezik, Erdal, and Hüseyin Çakmak. 2010. *Raa Haqi - Riya Haqi / Dersim Aleviliği İnanç Terimleri Sözlüğü*. Ankara: Kalan Yayınları.