Cem / Cevat

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Summary
Cem is the central ritual within Alevi and Bektashi forms of worship. In the Raa Haqi tradition, cem is not only a collective act of worship. It also signifies purification, rızalık, social order, relation to truth, and the renewal of commitment to the Yol. In the Dersim-centred Raa Haqi tradition, cem is conducted under the guidance of a pir or dervish. Kılamê Haqiye, couplets, nefes, or deyiş are recited with the accompaniment of the tanbur, and semah is performed in appropriate contexts. Cem is the symbolic expression of the wholeness and purity desired both in this world and in the world beyond.

Keywords: Cem, Cevat, Kozmoloji, Raa Haqi, Ritüel

The Meaning of *Cem* in the *Raa Haqi* Tradition [1]

Cem is one of the fundamental forms of worship through which the *Yol* is socially and ritually reconstituted in the belief world of *Raa Haqi*. Those who participate in the *cem* must be purified. For this reason, before the *cem* begins, the *pir* questions his *talips*. Those who have committed wrongs are judged before the community; those who are estranged are reconciled; injustices are discussed; and necessary sanctions are imposed on those who have moved away from the *Yol*. In this way, *cem* assumes a function much broader than individual worship. It becomes a space in which social

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justice, *rızalık*, and moral order are established.

In this respect, *cem* in *Raa Haqi* is not only a religious ceremony. It is also a ground for social reckoning and purification. The fact that the community begins worship as a purified collective is regarded as one of the basic conditions of the *cem* ritual.

The *Cem* Space and the Order of Participation

In the house where the *cem* is to be held, the place of the *pir* or *dervish* who will conduct the ritual is prepared in advance. This place is usually located opposite the entrance door and slightly elevated. In this way, both the *pir* can see the community and the community can see the *pir* comfortably. Those who come to the *cem* also enter according to a particular ritual order.

Participants bring *niyaz* with them. When they enter with their *niyaz*, the *pir* or *dervish* greets them by slightly rising from his place or leaning forward; the community present also joins in this greeting. Participants pay attention to the cleanliness of their clothing and make sure that their collars are not open. Women cover their heads. Those who enter through the door are taken by the host or by a person responsible for the ritual to receive the *lokma* prayer.

The eldest person in the family receiving the prayer stands at the right-hand side, while the others line up to the left according to age. A candle is lit on the *niyaz* that has been brought. The big toe of the right foot is placed over the big toe of the left foot, and the prayer is received with a slight bow forward.

The *Niyaz* Prayer

The *pir* or *dervish* asks the community for permission to give the prayer by saying “Himet Kere” (Himmet eyleyin). The community gives permission by responding “Himet Haq ra” (Himmet Hak’dan). The *niyaz* prayer is then recited:

Jede ra senik ra
Vejiyo çesik ra
Qelvo pak ra
Zerre hast ra
Amo çever ra
Vineto dare ra
Dara sima nur bo
Niyaze sima qewul bo
Moğete sima xêr bo
Loqme sima az u uze simare qelxan bo
Berge çetin versano
Soginiya sima xêr bia ro
Neq u husku sima ra dürbe ro
Qetere des u di Imamura mevisiye
Xizir u Duzgin sima re olvoj bo
Haq sima na raye ra nivisno
Niaze sima qewule Haq bo

(Azdan ya da çoktan / Çıkmış keseden / Temiz kalp ile / Barışık ruh ile / Kapıdan girmiş / Dara durmuş / Darınız nur ola / Lokmanız kabul ola / Niyetleriniz hayırlı ola / Lokmanız size, soyunuza ve sopunuza kalkan ola / Darda yardımcınız ola / Sonunuz hayırlı ola / Hayınlıkları ve iftiraları size uğratmaya / 12 İmamların katarından sizi alı koymasın / Xızır ve Duzgı yardımcınız ola / Haq; sizi bu yoldan uzaklaştırmasın / Lokmanızı Kabul eylesin)

After the prayer is completed, the *niyaz* offerings are received. The burning candle is taken to the other candles, and those who have received the prayer join the community.

Community, *Rızalık*, and Knowledge of the *Yol*

In the *cem*, no distinction is made between women and men, or between elders and children. Children are given places at the front so that they can easily observe the *cem*. Once the community has gathered, the *pir* or *dervish* gives information about the *Yol* and offers counsel and advice. This part of the *cem* usually proceeds through mutual conversations, that is, through dialogue.

At this stage, the community is asked one final time whether there are any estranged persons, complaints, or unresolved injustices. If there is a problem, its *cemat* is also held. The views of those present are taken, and a collective decision is reached. Once unity and togetherness have been established, the *pir* or *dervish* performs *Kılamê Haqiye*, couplets, or *deyiş* with the accompaniment of the *tanbur*.

In *cem* rituals conducted by *pirs*, those who wish may perform *semah*. In *dervish cems*, however, *semah* is not performed. This distinction is one of the ritual differences between a *pir cem* and a *dervish cem*.

Tewt and *Keramet*

The climax of the *cem* is the trance state known as *tewt*. A *pir* who enters *tewt* gives news from *botın* (the esoteric realm). A *dervish* who enters *tewt* both brings news from *botın* and displays *keramet*. These *keramets* are usually associated with fire: entering and sitting in the fire in the hearth, placing one's forehead against a burning stove, cooling a burning stove by licking it, turning the fire in the hearth into embers by licking it, placing fire taken from the hearth into one's skirt, or bringing it down onto the bedding on which one is seated are among these forms of *keramet*. Stirring a cauldron of boiling meat on the hearth by hand or placing one's hand into boiling water are also among the *keramets* displayed.

In this respect, *tewt* is one of the most intense moments of the *cem* ritual. It makes visible not only symbolic meaning but also a direct relationship established with the world of *botın*.

Lokma and the Table Prayer

After the ceremony conducted by the *pir* or *dervish* has been completed, portions from the *niyaz* are set aside for the sick and for those who could not attend the *cem*. The remaining *lokma* is distributed among the community. After the meal, the table prayer is given:

Himet kere
Xane Xizir bo
Çeme Muzir bo
Dost savo dismen kor bo
Wesiye ve wayiru do
Lokme sima qadayre qelxan bo
Tua ve dest u pauno sima me bo
Xizmeta sima hêçe mesero
Ma werd kerd kem Haq kem nikero
Ware sima senkero, hurend pırkero

(Himmet eyleyin / Xızırın hanesi ola / Munzur'un bereketi ola / Dostlar salim düşmanlar ise kör ola / Yedirenlerin hanesindan sağlık ve mutluluk eksik olmaya / Lokmanız kadalara kalkan ola / Elleriniz ayaklarınız dert görmeye / Hizmetiniz kabul ola / Biz yedik eksilttik, Haq eksiltmesin / Hanenize şenlik, sofranıza bereket versin)

After the prayer, the floor is swept. If there is time, conversation continues; if not, the community disperses.

Cem, *Cıvat*, and "Calling upon *Haq*"

In Dersim, the Kırmancki expression 'Vengê Haq' dayene is also used for *cem*. This expression means "to call upon *Haq*" or "to summon *Haq*." When a *pir* or *dervish* comes to a village and participants are informed, people do not say "come to the *cem*." Instead, they say: "Bêre pir/devres ama veng dano Haq". (Gelin pir/derviş gelmiş Haq'ı çağıracak).

In Kurmanci, the term *cıvat* is used instead of *cem*. In Kırmancki, *jivatiye* means crying, lamenting, and supplication. This field of meaning shows that the *cem* ritual is understood not only as collective worship, but also as a form of supplication, invocation, and establishing a relationship with *Haq*.

The Language of *Cem*

Until recently, *cems* were conducted largely in Kırmancki and Kurmanci. It is sometimes claimed that the language of

Dersim *cems* was Turkish. However, the Turkish *deyiş* performed in *cems* should be understood mainly as a development of the twentieth century. Turkish is not encountered in *dervish cems*. In *pir cems*, apart from *Kılamê Haqiye* and couplets sung in Kırmancki and Kurmanci, Turkish *nefes* appear only in some *deyiş*.

This demonstrates the historical importance of Kırmancki and Kurmanci as ritual languages in the *Raa Haqi cem* tradition.

Conclusion

Cem, or *cıvat* in Kurmanci usage, is the fundamental ritual space in the *Raa Haqi* tradition where worship, purification, *rızalık*, social regulation, the sharing of *lokma*, and forms of relating to the world of *botın* come together. Conducted under the guidance of a *pir* or *dervish*, *cem* combines individual religious practice with social responsibility. The questioning that takes place before the *cem* begins, the reconciliation of those who are estranged, the resolution of injustices, and the reconstitution of the community on the basis of *rızalık* reveal the social function of this ritual. *Tewt*, *niyaz*, *lokma*, prayer, *Kılamê Haqiye*, *semah*, and the language of *cem* show the rich layers of meaning that the *cem* ritual carries within *Raa Haqi* cosmology.

Endnotes

[1] This entry is based on the corresponding entry published in Erdal Gezik and Hüseyin Çakmak's Raa Haqi - Riya Haqi: A Dictionary of Religious Terms in Dersim Alevism (Ankara: Kalan Yayınları, 2010). The text has been reviewed and updated by the authors of the original publication.

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