Melek-i Tavus

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Summary
Melek-i Tavus, or Meleka Tavus, is a cosmological figure in Raa Haqi creation narratives. He initially holds an important position in the realm of angels but later becomes known in the world as Şeytan (Seyta). According to the creation narrative collected from Nesimi Kılagöz, Melek-i Tavus is created from fire and is the chief of 366 angels. However, he is first removed from the celestial order by water because of an error he commits in the realm of angels. Later, after the creation of Adam, he is expelled from Haq Dina because he refuses to prostrate before him. In Raa Haqi narratives, Melek-i Tavus / Şeytan is not regarded as the sole source of absolute evil. Rather, he is understood as a counter-figure in the human trial related to nefs, will, reason, recognition of truth, and responsibility.

Keywords: Lucifer, Melek Tavus, Melek-i Tavus, Raa Haqi, Şeytan

His Position in the Realm of Angels [1]

In the *Raa Haqi* creation narrative, *Melek-i Tavus* is not an ordinary angel. He is positioned as the chief of 366 angels. In this respect, he has a high status in the celestial order. In the narrative transmitted by Nesimi Kılagöz, this central position makes his later fall and his being called Şeytan meaningful (Gezik 2022, 363-88). This creation narrative from Dersim differs from widespread Alevi creation narratives in Anatolia, especially in the central role it gives to Gabriel and *Melek-i Tavus*.

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According to the narrative, during the celestial feast arranged by Gabriel, all the angels remain in their places and look at the perfect structure. However, *Melek-i Tavus* rises from his place, saying that his ritual purity has been broken. In his dialogue with water, his concern only with external purity is criticised. Water tells him that the real matter is not external purification but inner truth and self-knowledge. After this event, *Melek-i Tavus* is removed from the celestial order. Therefore, his first error is described not merely as disobedience, but as an inability to see inner truth and to know himself (Gezik 2022, 363-88).

His Refusal to Prostrate Before Adam

After Adam is created, all the angels are commanded to prostrate before him. *Melek-i Tavus* is also given a second opportunity. Yet he refuses to prostrate before Adam. His justification is that he was created from fire, whereas Adam was created from earth. He considers fire superior to earth and refuses to bow before Adam, who was created from clay.

In Kılagöz's narrative, this attitude of *Melek-i Tavus* is associated with his inability to see the light within Adam (Gezik 2022, 363-88). In other words, the problem is not only that he establishes a hierarchy between the substances of creation. The main issue is that he fails to recognise the sacred essence behind Adam's outward body of clay. After this event, *Melek-i Tavus* becomes a being who "does not know himself" and is known in this world as Şeytan.

Here, becoming Şeytan does not signify an innate and absolute evil. It refers instead to failure in the trial of knowing, seeing, recognising, and positioning oneself correctly before truth. *Melek-i Tavus* falls because he does not recognise the light within Adam and the sacred qualities that *Haq* has given to the human being.

Eve and the Forbidden Wheat Narrative

The second important role of *Melek-i Tavus* in the narrative concerns his making Eve eat the forbidden wheat. According

to the narrative, while Adam and Eve are living in paradise, only wheat is forbidden to them. *Melek-i Tavus* takes the form of a peacock and then enters paradise by taking on the skin of the serpent. He finds Eve and persuades her to eat the wheat. After Eve eats the wheat, she becomes aware of her nakedness, and Adam then also eats it. As a result, Adam and Eve are expelled from paradise and sent to the world (Gezik 2022, 363-88).

In this narrative, *Melek-i Tavus* appears as a decisive trial figure in the process of humanity's descent into the world. Wheat is not merely a forbidden food. It marks the beginning of the human relationship with knowledge, body, gender, death, lineage, and worldly life. For this reason, the role of *Melek-i Tavus* is understood not simply as leading humanity into evil, but as that of a cosmological counter-figure who initiates the human trial in worldly life.

The Name Şeytan and the Trial of the World

In the oral tradition of *Raa Haqi*, Şeytan's name in the other world is *Melek-i Tavus*. This name points to his original angelic position. According to the narrative, *Melek-i Tavus* / Şeytan is one of the first angels created by *Haq*. He is created from fire and is the chief of 366 angels. He stands out as the only angel who can question *Haq*'s decisions and oppose his commands (Gezik 2022, 363-88; Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

With his refusal to prostrate before Adam, the struggle between the human being and Şeytan begins. According to the narrative, Şeytan challenges Adam, and *Haq* sends both of them to another realm, that is, to this world. Thus, the world becomes the place of confrontation between the human being and Şeytan, and the space in which the human being is tested through their own will (Gezik 2022, 363-88; Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

In this trial, the human being is not entirely helpless. *Haq* has given the human being thirty qualities from himself. The

foremost of these are reason, *fam*, *izan*, and *marifet*. There are stations that represent these four qualities, and the person receives support from those who represent these stations: *musahib*, *rayber*, *pir*, and *mürşid*. These qualities enable the human being to distinguish truth in the face of Şeytan and to be responsible for their own actions.

Responsibility, *Nefs*, and Human Will

In the *Raa Haqi* tradition, Şeytan is not seen as the sole cause of the evil committed by human beings. Human beings have the capacity to decide their own actions. *Haq* does not directly intervene in worldly affairs; the human being makes choices through reason, understanding, conscience, and knowledge of the *Yol*. For this reason, evil is not attributed only to the external influence of Şeytan. The human being's own *nefs*, pride, ignorance, and inability to see truth are also part of this process (Gezik 2022, 363-88; Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

This understanding foregrounds human responsibility in *Raa Haqi* ethics. Şeytan exists, but it is not considered right to place all human mistakes entirely upon him. The human being is responsible for their own actions. For this reason, Şeytan is both a testing figure and a figure that makes visible the dark tendencies within the human being in the *Raa Haqi* tradition.

For this reason, in *Raa Haqi* narratives Şeytan is not a being who is wholly degraded, cursed, and treated as the sole source of all evil. Like every being created by *Haq*, he is not completely devalued in terms of his source of creation. Yet because he sees himself as superior, does not recognise the light within Adam, and falls into error before truth, he falls outside the *Yol*. For this reason, in some narratives he is not referred to directly as "Şeytan," but rather as "that word," "he," or by his former name, *Melek-i Tavus*.

Conclusion

Melek-i Tavus / *Seyta* / Şeytan is a multi-layered figure in

Raa Haqi creation narratives. Although he is initially the chief of 366 angels, he is removed from the celestial order as a result of his error and his refusal to prostrate before Adam. Yet this fall is not explained only through disobedience or evil. The fundamental flaw of *Melek-i Tavus* is his inability to see the light within Adam's earthly body and to position himself correctly before truth.

For this reason, *Melek-i Tavus* / Şeytan is one of the central figures through which the *Raa Haqi* tradition explains the human trial of will, responsibility, *nefs*, reason, and recognition of truth. He represents not only an external enemy facing the human being, but also the state of illusion, pride, and inability to see truth that must be controlled within the human being. In this respect, the narrative of *Melek-i Tavus* interprets the problem of evil in *Raa Haqi* cosmology not by linking it to an absolute and external source, but through human responsibility and inner trial.

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.

References & Further Reading

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