



# ALEVISM







## Who are we?

Britain Alevi Federation (BAF) is an umbrella organisation for approximately 300.000 Alevi living in United Kingdom.

There are twelve Alevi Cultural Centres and Cemevis serving people in UK. These centres are based in London, Glasgow, Coventry, South London, Croydon, Harrow, Bournemouth, Nottingham, Doncaster, Hull, Sheffield and Edinburg.

## Alevism:

Alevi are the second largest belief community in Turkey. However language, belief and ethnic background is not registered in the national census therefore, it is not possible to have official statistics about the number of Alevi. On the basis of reliable academic research, the population of Alevi is estimated at approximately 20 million out of 70 million population in Turkey.

## What is Alevism;

Alevism is not a stagnate belief but has evolved by interacting with various beliefs, spiritual doctrines and cultures over a wide geographical area from Central Asia to Balkan Mountains throughout the history. A process of gradual convergence between various different mystical schools since the 13th century constitutes what we call Alevism today. The concept of Alevi is actually a broad term covers different language and ethnic communities sharing same belief components. What defines Alevi belief can briefly be summarized as follows;

- In Alevism, every human being is a carrier of the essence from God.
- God in Alevism is Hakk, which means the truth.
- If God created all living thing then, human being is the most sacred thing in the world.
- Therefore, Alevi consider every living creature sacred as the carrier of an essence from God.
- Alevi call each other can (soul), which is gender-neutral name. As a result of this understanding, the position of women in Alevism is equal to that of men.
- Alevi consider god, cosmos and human in a total unity. This unity is symbolized with an exclamation, Hakk Muhammad Ali, which unities three most sacred person in Alevism, God, the Prophet Muhammed and Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet.
- A well-known verse of Hallaci Mansur, a Sufi poet from the 10th century, indicates the unit of God and human in Alevism, Ene'l Hakk (I am one with God).
- The founder saint of Bektashism, Haji Bektash Veli, from the 13th century explains this importance with his saying "My Kaabe is the human being".
- Alevi do not consider God as fixed into a place of worship, iconography or written books but He is la-mekan (placeless) and human hearth is His only domicile.
- Therefore, Alevi do not fear God but only bear love for him and they do not believe in paradise or hell but an infinite circulation until one reach the status of perfection and reunion with where he or she comes from.
- Alevi consider all holy books and the prophets with great respect. Because, for them, the aim is one but ways to reach this aim can be various.
- This understanding prioritizes reason over dogma, as Haji Bektashi Veli says, "the end of the path would be dark if the path is not science."
- Alevi consider all nations as one regardless of ethnic, racial, gender and linguistic differences simply because each creature carries the same sacred essence.
- Humanism, egalitarianism, mutual assistance, and gender-equality are the main social characteristics commonly shared by Alevi communities. Their lodge-centered social



organization is based on a kind of agrarian socialism.

- A well-known sayings of Seyh Bedrettin, a religious scholar and rebel to the Ottoman Empire, "everything except the cheek of lover can be shared", explains this egalitarianism perfectly.
- As a result, resisting against the injustice expressed with a phrase "allegiance with the oppressed (mazlum)" and "standing against the tyrant (zalim)" has become the main social attitudes in Alevism.

## The Term of Alevi:

An Alevi is a person who follows faith of Alevism. As mentioned, the concept of Alevism is a broad concept covers various ethno-cultural communities has their own communal names such as Alevi, Bektashi, Kızılbaş, Tahtacı, Nusayri and Abdal are labeled in general with the concept of "Alevi". It is not possible to locate Alevism in either Shi'ism or Sunnism as the two main branches of Islam. Today, we are very well informed about branches but not very confident about roots of Alevism. The question of origin is still a controversial issue even among Alevis. Ali, as the main sacred person in Alevism, considers whole world as the place of worship, consequently, any good behavior can be classified as worship in this world.

Alevism have been forced for political reasons to live a closed social life in rural areas for centuries and as a natural result of this condition, they fundamentally dwell on the traditions of oral accounts and their unique social institutions. The oral tradition narrates the Alevi history embedded in epic tales as its nature would suggest. The oral tradition in Alevis takes its position among the public with saying which are performed together with the saz (a traditional music instrument) and lyric togetherness and menkibes (mythical stories). Both of these elements contain to a great extent special sayings and meanings originating from the inner structure of the community.

## Alevi Cosmology:

Alevi cosmology understands the relation between god, cosmos and human in a unity. Hallacı Mansur explains this philosophy as follows,

"There is no other being in the universe than God (unity of being). This states that; I am something, when trying to express oneself as something apart from God and that is wrong; therefore one has to only say I am one with God (Ene'l Hakk)."

It is believed that Haji Bektas Veli determines the principles necessary to become a mature human. He explains it by the statement "the servant is able to reach God through four gateways, forty stations and become his friends." This gnostic understanding of self-spiritual-development is the main task before Alevis in their relation with the cosmos. Within this gradual development, human, as a being coming from the essence of the God, can manifest their sacred potential and evolve from the stage of ham (immature) into that of insan-ı kamil (mature). The stages of this process are explained as ; şeriat (sharia) is the way to be born, tarikat (is the way to promise), marifet is the way to be self-conscious, and hakikat is the way to find God in one's own self. These stages are explained in analogy with educational system, from primary to higher education.

Jonh Kingsley Bridge briefly explains the doctrine of the four gateways in reference to Bektashism, "the Şeriat:; (shariat), orthodox, Sunni religious law, the tarikat or teachings and practice of the secret religious order, the marifet: mystic knowledge of God the hakikat: immediate experience of the essence of reality. A mystic teacher of Islam, one who sought as my mürşit [the spiritual guide] to teach me, explained to me the meanings of these four terms by taking the idea of "sugar" as an example. One can go to the dictionary to find out what sugar is and how it is used. That is the şeriat Gateway to the knowledge. One feels the inadequately of that when one is introduced directly to



the practical seeing and handling of sugar. That represents the tarikat Gateway to knowledge. To actually taste sugar and to have it enter into oneself is to go one step deeper into an appreciation of its nature, and that is what is meant by marifet. If one could go still further and become one with sugar so that he could say, "I am sugar," that and that alone would be to know what sugar is, and that is what is involved in the hakikat Gateway" Bridge (1937: 102).

### **Code of Morality in Alevism:**

In Alevism, morality is the prerequisite of belief. A person, who is not capable of conserving his or her morality, is not regarded as suitable to participate in Alevi rituals. This morality is simply explained with the motto, "Being the master of one's hand, tongue, and loins," which requires Alevi not to behave immorally by using their hand (do not steal), their tongue (do not blasphemy), their loins (do not commit adultery). These rules summarize a strong moral system, which is defined as "thinner than hair, sharper than sword." Those who do not observe these basic moral principles are regarded as düşkün (the sinner), which is excommunicated from the community life with a strong social isolation.

### **Rites and Ceremonies:**

It is a universal fact that all communities have their own faith practices and calendars originated from their particular cosmology.

Ayn-i Cem (the ritual of gathering) is the main ritual in Alevism. This special ritual is modeled on a mystical event, the Assembly of the Forty Being (Kırklar Cemii), includes 17 women and 23 men. They gather with the motto of "all for one, one for all." This narrative portrays a sacred and secret gathering which the Prophet Muhammad participated on his way back from Miraç (heavenly journey in which he meets God). Ali, as the leader of this gathering, opens the secrets of belief to Prophet during the ceremony. The notable narrative used by Muhammed was "I am the city of knowledge but Ali is the gate."

However, there are various forms of Cem. The most regular cems are conducted on weekly basis. In these gatherings where men and women can come together under the same roof, the belief community converse about daily as well as spiritual issues, chant Alevi deyiş (hymns), perform semah (ritual dance) and consume lokma (communal meal) at the end of the ritual. Given the fact that the human being is the most sacred thing in cosmos in Alevism, occasional muhabbet (conversation) is also frequently referred as a part of ritual. However, the significant gravity of the main cem rituals called ikrar (the admission) and görgü cemii (the manners ritual) cannot be denied in practicing Alevism.

Anyone who is born into an Alevi milieu is not directly accepted as an Alevi but has to be upgraded from the sphere of social to that of belief community. This upgrading is achieved with a special cem ritual, the admission, organized for a specific person who is willing to be upgraded. The requirement for admission varies in nuances according to different local traditions but a common framework requires the person to complete his or her adolescence, to be married, and to have musahip (eternal brother of the path).

Once the admission is completed, the person has to observe certain moral principles and social codes briefly explained above. In this sense, görgü cemii (the manners ritual) appears as a communal mechanism to evaluate each member of the community whether they observe these principles and codes or not. These rituals are conducted in every year during the winter seasons. Each participant is asked to declare if he or she has any complains about any other members of the community. The community collectively judges those who are believed to vio-



late any of moral principles and can be punished for their transgression by according to varying sanctions such as organizing a communal meal or paying for a communal project. If he or she violates one of the main taboos such as adultery or murder, the punishment will be capital and he or she is excommunicated from every sphere of communal life. This system of communal control is celebrated by Alevi as a perfect form of human sociality.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is also interpreted as follows, be master of hand as be master of what you produce with your hand, namely, your labor; be master of your tongue as to preserve your culture; be master of your loins as be responsible about your children.

### **The Institution of Consent:**

At the beginning of any ritual or ceremony, each participant is asked for his or her consent (rıızalık) for the gathering. If he or she has any complaints, the community has to take this appeal into consideration. In principle, none of these gatherings can be initiated without the common consent of the participants. Alevism consider this mechanism as the genuine form of democracy.

### **The Institution of Spiritual Leadership:**

Dedes (grand-father) are the group of spiritual leaders believed to be descended from the holy lineage coming from Ali, Ahl-i Bayt. Dedes are at the top of not only spiritual but also social role. They do not only conduct spiritual rituals but also guide all manners of social life. In principle, each Alevi community has to be subjected to a specific dede family. Each dede has also to be affiliated with a spiritual center called Ocak (hearth).

There are also well-structural hierarchical relations among dedes as well as ocaks which are explained the principle El ele el Hakk'a (hand by hand, hand to God). In this sense, there is no omnipotent spiritual position in Alevism but a chain of auto-control. Each dedes is the guide of his talips (followers) but they are also subjected to the supervision of ocak as well as bounded by communal consent of their followers. There is a circular supervision among talips, dedes, and pirs, which is explained as el ele el hakka (hand by hand hand to God).

### **The Component of Alevi Belief Culture:**

#### **Music in Alevism:**

Music is the most significant component of Alevi cultural life. Its presence is felt everywhere. Anatolian folk music is mostly based on Alevi. The greatest minstrels of Turkey have emerged from the Alevi community. Music is one part of Alevi rituals. Dede or Zakir supplicates (niyaz) to saz three times before cem, and then starts playing. Saz is also called "the stringed holy book." As they say, there is no word without the saz, and no saz without the words. Saz (bağlama) is a holy musical instrument for Alevi. The feelings, thought and beliefs of the folk are expressed with the accompaniment of music. Deyiş, düvaz-ı imam, mersiye, miraçlama, semah are different types of Alevi Music.

#### **Tradition of Aşık (Minstrel):**

Aşık, Zakir or Ozan are terms used for the minstrel or bards who sing poems on belief and social issues, while playing an instrument. Minstrel also has significant position in Alevi worship. They acquire a holy personality by this position. Their music expresses also feelings and troubles of the Alevi folk.

#### **Semah in Alevism:**

Semah is a state of trance, constructed over the togetherness of Alevi music, teachings and dance. This state is regarded as part of worship, and is a distinctive feature of Alevism. It is an indispensable part of basic rituals of Alevi cem ceremonies. When it comes to the semah part of cem, Alevi perform ritual dance accompanied by the poetry sang and music played on saz. One of the most popular semah is Turnalar Semahı (the Crane Semah) which symbolizes the movements of crane, around a circle that symbolizes the universe.



## **Virtuous Personalities in Alevism: Poets and Saints:**

Given the fact that poetry and music have indispensable significance in Alevi culture and spirituality, most of the virtuous personalities in Alevism are poets. In fact, Alevis specifically venerate seven poets as their grand poets who are Seyyid Nesimi (14th century), Yemini (15th century), Pir Sultan Abdal, Virani, Kul Himmet, Hatayi and Fuzuli (16th century). Apart from these seven grand poets, certain sainted persons are further accepted as sacred in Alevism such as Haji Bektash Veli (13th century), Abdal Musa (14th century), Yunus Emre (13th century), Kaygusuz Abdal (15th century), and 12 imams (e.g. I.Huseyin 7th century).

### **The Twelve Imams:**

The Twelve Imams are another common Alevi belief. Each Imam represents a different aspect of the Universe and are recognized as twelve services or oniki hizmet which are performed by members of the Alevi community.

Imam Huseyin;

(3rd imam of 12): why Alevis respect Huseyin is because the way he lived and stand against tyrant Yezid in Kerbela in 7th century.

When Hüseyin clashed with Yezid's army, Huseyin and his followers were 72 people and Yezid's army was 3000 solders.

Huseyin said:

... Don't you see that the truth is not put into action and the false is not prohibited? The believer should desire to meet his Lord while he is right. Thus I do not see death but see happiness, and prefer this to living with enemies in sorrow.

### **Mansur Al-Hallaj;**

a Persian mystic poet. His politically critical and theologically heretic poetry, his exclamation in a state of ecstasy Ene'l-Haq (I am one with God, who is the truth) has become the motto explaining the relation between cosmos, God and human in Alevism.

However, he was tortured to death in 922 in Bagdad because his thoughts considered as blasphemous against Islam.

### **Haji Bektash Veli;**

(master of Bektashi Dergahi, Academy), is the founder saint of Bektashism, Sufi spiritual order, established in the 13th century. His spiritual doctrine is accepted as one of the earliest form of universal humanism symbolized with the unity of a gazelle with a lion.

The heatless is from the flame, not from the iron sheet,

The miracle is in the head, not in the crown,

Whatever you are searching for, search in yourself,

Not in Jerusalem, or not in Mecca!

H.Bektashi Veli

### **Yunus Emre;**

(student of Haji Bektash Veli), one of the most impressive poets of the Anatolian Sufi tradition, is believed to have lived in the 13th century. His poetry exemplifies unconditional tolerance in Alevism:

If you break someone's heart

This prayer you perform is no good

None of the seventy two nations of the world

Can wash the dirt off your hands and face

### **Seyyid Nesimi;**

who was born in 1369 in Bagdad, is the great sufi poet. His poetry advocated the philosophy of vahdet-i vücud (unity of existence). His ideas were regarded as blasphemous by the ulema in Aleppo, and he was executed by being skinned in 1417.



Come, come nearer,  
There is a way to make up for missed prayer and fast  
But not of the time passed without you

Pious people called this wine of love as a sin–  
I fill my goblet myself and drink it myself, it doesn't interest anyone  
Sometimes I fly to sky and watch over the world,  
Sometimes go down to ground and world watches me,  
Sometimes I go to medrese and study in the name of Allah  
Sometimes I go to tavern and have fun of wine, it doesn't interest anyone  
Some asked "is the Nesimi" happy with his darling?"  
I am happy or not, she is mine, it doesn't interest anyone.

### **Shah Ismail (Hatayi);**

a descendant of Azeri Sufi saint Safi-ad-din Ardabili and the founder of the Safavid Empire. Among Alevis, he is known by his poetry with the penname, Hatayi. His poets are still recited in Alevi rituals as *deyiş* (hymn). He died in 1524.

### **Pir Sultan Abdal;**

(the follower of Haji Bektash Veli ) was a legendary Alevi poet who is believed to live in the first half of the sixteenth century. His poetry was very critical of the Ottoman Empire. He was put on trial and required to deny his adherence of Shah (Shah Ismail, hence, Alevism) but he refused to obey and executed by hanging by Ottoman Empire authority in 1550.

### **Virani Baba;**

It is believed that he lived in the 16th century. In his poems, he reflected the hidden interpretations of letters and numbers in an enthusiastic and fluent manner.

I am a town crier in a great city  
I am the crier; Ali is the warden of the market  
If I buy less or if I sell more, it is still a profit  
I am the crier; Ali is the warden of the market

### **Edip Harabi;**

was born in 1853 in Istanbul. He worked as a clerk until he passed away in 1917 in Istanbul. He was known as an important Bektashi follower. His poet, Vahdetname (the poet of sacred unity) perfectly portrays how Alevis see the relation between God and human.

Before Allah and the world came into being  
We created it in an instant and announced it  
Before God had any worthy habitation  
We took him in and became his host.

He didn't yet have a name  
He didn't yet have material form  
He didn't yet have an appearance  
We gave him a form and made it just like a person.

We became one with Allah here  
We entered the place of pre-eternity and became one



We conversed there about the secret of the hidden treasure  
We gave him the sacred name Compassionate.

Devriye by Şiri

Before the world came into being in the hidden secret of non-existence  
I was alone with Reality in his oneness  
He created the world because then  
I formed the picture of Him, I was the designer

I became folded in garments made of the elements  
I made my appearance out of fire, earth and water  
I came into the world with the best of men  
I was of the same age even as Adam

I came as Seth from the loins of Adam  
As the prophet Noah I entered the flood  
Once I became Abraham in this world  
I built the House of God, I carried stone

I appeared as Ishmael once, O Soul.  
I became once Isaac, Jacob, Yusuf  
I came as Job, I cried out for mercy  
Worms ate my body, I was in bitter mourning

They coy me in two along with Zachariah  
With John they scattered my blood on the ground  
I came as David, There were many who followed me  
Often I carried the seal of Solomon

The blessed rod I gave to Moses  
I became guide to all the Saints  
To Gabriel the Faithful I was the right hand companion

From the loins of my father came Ahmed the chosen  
The two-edged sword made its arrival from among those who guide on the way  
Before the world was, friend to the People of the House  
I was, while a slave, a fellow sharer of the mystery with God

I mediated much within myself  
Without beholding a miracle I came to believe  
With the Prince of Heroes I rode on Düldül  
I bound on the Zülfikar, I carried the sword

## **Martyrdom in Alevism:**

Alevi understand their historical origin with the motto "allegiance with the oppressed (mazlum)" and "standing against the tyrant (zalim)". They seal their destiny in allegiance with Ali. His right to claim the caliphate was overridden from the political powerful rivals. Then, his two sons, Hasan and Hussein, were killed in their search for justice. The murder of Hussein with his 72 followers in Kerbela in 680 has significant importance in defining



Alevi's we-group identity. Following his death, many people took side with Ali's cause throughout the history and they were punished for their advocacy of Ali. The execution of these people perfectly articulated with the perception of eternal victim destiny in Alevism. What is common in these historical events, "they were killed by a superior state authority which was either de jure or de facto Sunni Islamic" (Reinhard Hess 2007: 282). Reinhard Hess further differentiates the notion of Martyrdom in Alevism and Sunnism. The "absence of violent details... or aggressive interpretation... oriented towards an outward enemy" (ibid. 276) differentiates the notion of Martyrdom in Alevism from that in Sunnism. He also underlines that this album of martyrdom in Alevism is open to further affiliations.

For instance, the Abolishment of Janissary Organization in 1826 is understood as insistent continuation of the Ottoman oppression against Alevism. The Janissaries are infantry unity formed in the 14th century as the household troops of the Sultanate. The Bektashi order was appointed as the patron lodge to this special military force. The Janissary system became politically corrupted during the recession period. As a part of modernization reforms, Mahmut the Second attempted to abolish this force in 1826 and the Bektashi lodges were also aggressively targeted during the massive military campaign against the Janissaries.

It is popularly claimed that Alevis welcomed and venerated the establishment of Republic in 1923. However, this is not true for all Alevi communities, especially, those, who contravened or did not give support to the Republic, targeted by the military campaigns in 1921 in Koçgiri and 1938 in Tunceli. The abolishment of the main Bektashi Lodge in 1925 in accordance to the secularism caused irreversible devastations in their spiritual and social organizations.

This articulation gains obvious political characteristic in the 1970s. Alevi communities were victimized by rightist-Islamist militancy in the Middle and South-Eastern Anatolia during the political polarization in the 1970s. For instance, 111 Alevis were killed in a civil war-like clash in Maras in 1978. Reinhard Hess indicates that these civil victims as well as Alevi leftist militants are "quoted in an Alevi source in a line of continuity with traditional Alevi martyr figures" (2007: 281).

On the second day of the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Festival, 2nd of July 1993 in Sivas, a crowd of thousands people began protesting against the festival after the Friday prayer. When they could surrounded the hotel where the festival participants were staying, the protest got out of the control and 37 person lost their lives in the fire set by the Islamist militant. Two of them were among the protestors and another two were from the hotel personnel. The rest of 33 persons, also includes a Dutch female anthropologist, took their place in the line of martyrdom continuity.

Two years later, in the evening of the 12th of March 1995, an anonymous car opened fire with machine guns to three Alevi café-houses in Gazi District, historically left wing and Alevi shantytown area in Istanbul. An elderly dede, Halil Kaya, and another Alevi person lost their lives. Following this attack, the local residents organized a protest and marched to the police station in the district. The police responded their protest aggressive and the protest evolved into civil uprising and spread to other Alevi shantytown districts under partial curfew. 19 people lost their lives in three days uprising.



## Alevi Calendar:

<b>The Commemoration of Dersim</b>	Massacre in the summer of 1937 and the spring of 1938 of the local Alevi population of Dersim, now called Tunceli Province (in Turkey). Leader of Dersim, Seyit Rıza hanged by Turkish authority	17 Nov 1937
<b>The Fast of Khızır</b>	Hızır is a mythological angle-like persona helps those who are in need of. Whenever Alevis are in a difficulty, they cry "Help Ya Hızır!" to call him for help. To honor Hızır, Alevis fast for three days in every year.	13 - 15 February
<b>The Commemoration of Gazi</b>	The commemoration of 23 people killed in the Gazi District Event in Istanbul in 15th of March 1993.	12 March 1995
<b>Sultan Nevroz</b>	Newruz in Persian and Newroz in Kurdish mean a new day and stands for the New Year Day in the old Persian calendar. Kurds also celebrates as the liberation struggle of Kawa against the tyrant king Zuhal. In Alevism, the night of 21st of March is celebrated as the birthday of Ali and Turks celebrates for the beginning of Spring.	21 March
<b>Hıdırallez</b>	The celebrations for the beginning of Spring.	5 - 6 May
<b>The Abdal Musa Festival</b>	The festival organized in the name of saint Abdal Musa in Antalya.	6 - 7 June
<b>The Commemoration of Sivas</b>	The commemoration of 33 people killed in the Pir Sultan Festival in Sivas in 1993.	2 July 1993
<b>The Commemoration of Çorum</b>	The commemoration of 80 people killed in Çorum province during seven-day bloody attacks by rightists militant on July 1980.	3 July 1980
<b>The Hacı Bektash Veli Festival</b>	The festival organized in the name of saint Hacı Bektash in Nevşehir since 1964.	16 – 18 August
<b>The Masum-u Paklar Fast</b>	Fasting for the Fourteenth Innocents of Ehlibehy-t family who were killed. (according to the Lunar Calendar).	According to the Lunar Calendar
<b>The Muharrem Fasting</b>	12 days (according to the Lunar Calendar*) the commemoration of Hüseyin and his followers.	According to the Lunar Calendar
<b>The Aşure Day</b>	The Asure soup is cooked and shared with any one as symbolizing the peace and love as well as symbolizing the support of Huseyin and followers 's fight in Kerbela on 10 November 680.	According to the Lunar Calendar
<b>The Commemoration of Maraş</b>	The commemoration of 111 people killed in Maraş province during there-day bloody attacks by rightists militant on 19-24 December 1978.	19-24 December 1978



## **Alevi Geography:**

It is a historical fact that Alevi settlements are concentrated more in remote mountainous areas in contrast to Sunni communities generally settled in plain and flat regions and usually dominated town and city centers. This social and geographical isolation is an obvious result of the confrontations between Alevi and Sunnis and centuries old oppression applied by the latter over the former. Given the fact that this geographical concentration determines their ways of living, Alevi were traditionally either semi-nomadic herding or household based agriculture society before the 1960s. Considering their economically and socially disadvantageous position emerged as a result of this isolation, it would not be surprising to note that Alevi largely participated internal and external migration waves started in the 1950s. Today, traditionally rural background Alevi communities have largely been urbanized in Turkey and Europe.

## **Alevi in Europe:**

It is largely claimed that Alevi are overrepresented among internal and external migration waves emerged in the 1950s. The bloody attacks targeted Alevi at the end of the 1970s in Çorum, Elbistan, Maraş, Malatya, Sivas and Yozgat, enforced their participation especially in international migration waves to Europe. Today, it is estimated that approximately a million Alevi are living in Europe. The European Alevi Confederation represents more than 250 Alevi Cultural Centers, which are organized under national federations in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.

## **Alevi Demands in Turkey:**

The abolishment of the Directorate of Religious Affairs: which is a massive public institution with over hundred thousand employees but do not provide services for Alevi, Assyrians, Christians or Jews but only for Sunnis. Alevi rightfully claim that religious services should not be sponsored by the state according to the secularism principle.

## **The abolishment of compulsory religion courses:**

The courses on religion have become compulsory for secondary education with the military coup in 1980. The curriculum of these courses is partially depended on Sunni Islam. There are thousand cases in which Alevi pupils are illegally forced to practice Sunni rituals and to memorize Sunni prayers. If they refused to do so, they are intentionally failed. Following a complaint filed by Hasan Zengin and his daughter Eylem, both Alevi, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that the content of these religious classes violated human rights and contradicted the principles of plurality and objectivity in 2008.

- The recognition of cemevi: Although there is no specially designated place for worshipping in Alevism, having a separate building to provide basic social and spiritual services became a necessity for Alevi living in the cities. Alevi established their own cultural centers since the beginning of the 1990s, although the status of these centers is not clearly defined legally. Alevi demand to recognition of cemevis (Alevi cultural centers and place of worship) as a place of worship of Alevi to secure their social, cultural and spiritual practices.
- The abolishment of compulsory Mosque constructing: As a strategy for assimilating Alevi, the central authorities construct mosques in Alevi villages without the consent of Alevi since the 18th century. Alevi demand termination of this policy.
- The Madimak Museum: 33 persons (poets, writers, singers, dancers and artists) were murdered in the Hotel Madimak set fire by a crowd of Islam religious fundamentalist protesting the fourth Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Festival organized in Sivas in 1993. Alevi claim that this hotel should be converted into a museum of commemoration and shame.
- Dersim and Maraş Massacres: In the framework of this previous demand, Alevi also require Turkish government to disclose official archives about the massacres in Dersim 1938 and Maraş 1978. During the violent martial campaign from the summer of 1937 to the spring of 1938, thousands of



Alevi Kurds and Zazas were killed and thousands were forcefully displaced. Despite all attempts by the families, the grave sites of Seyit Rıza (the leader of Dersimi communities executed by the Turkish authorities) and his followers still have not been disclosed. Alevi communities were targeted by a series of the right wing militant attacks at the end of the 1970s in Eastern and Central Anatolian provinces such as Malatya (17-18.04.1978), Sivas (03-04.09.1978), Maraş (19-25.12.1978), and Çorum (02-10.07.1980) and Hatay (14.01.1980). Maraş was the most significant area. Armed right wing militants, called Grey Wolves, killed more than hundred Alevs including new born babies during six-day massacre. In the wake of this blood attacks, Alevs fled these provinces and also Turkey. Most of the Alevs living in the UK are coming from these provinces.

- The Alevi Lodges: Alevs reclaim their religious centers and lodges which were destroyed in 1826 by the Ottoman Empire and then abolished in 1925 by the Republic. These are the most significant institutions in preserving and reproducing Alevi culture. Some of these centers were reopened as cultural museums during the 1960s. Today, Alevs have to buy tickets to enter their spiritual centers. Hence, they demand transfer the ownership of these centers to Alevi associations. All these demands can briefly be summarized under the main demand of constitutional recognition of Alevism as a particular belief.

Alevs in the EU Reports: Progress Report on Turkey's Accession to EU

- 1998: p.19: As far as freedom of religion is concerned, religious education (Sunni) in state primary schools is obligatory. Upon verification of their non-Muslim background, Lausanne Treaty minorities (see below) are exempted by law from Muslim religious instruction. Religious minorities recognized by Turkey are free to exercise their religion, but practice of religion other than (Sunni) Islam is subject to many practical bureaucratic restrictions affecting, for example, the ownership of premises and expansion of activities. The Assyrian Orthodox religion is not recognized as a religious minority and is subject to pressures in the exercise of its religious education. Turkey's Alawi Muslims are estimated to number at least 12 million. There are no government-salaried Alawi religious leaders, in contrast to Sunni religious leaders.
- 2000: p.18: The official approach towards the Alevs seems to remain unchanged.
- 2001: p. 27: freedom of religion: No improvement in the situation of non-Sunni Muslim communities has taken place. The official approach towards the Alevs is unchanged.
- 2002: p. 37: freedom of association and peaceful assembly: In February the Cultural Association of the Union of Alevi and Bektasi Formations was dissolved on the grounds that, according to Articles 14 and 24 of the Constitution, and Article 5 of the Law on Associations, it was not possible to found an association by the name of Alevi or Bektasi.
- 2003: p. 34: Freedom of Religion: As far as the situation of non-Sunni Moslem communities is concerned, there has been a change as regards the Alevs.
- 2004: p. 44: As far as the situation of non-Sunni Muslim minorities is concerned, there has been no change in their status. Alevs are not officially recognized as a religious community...
- 2005: p. 29-30: With respect to freedom of religion only very limited progress has been made since October 2004 in terms of both legislation and practice. Despite improvements in the legislation governing associations, the current legal framework still does not recognize the right of religious communities to establish associations with legal personality in order to promote and protect their religions... Alevi children are subject to compulsory Sunni religious instruction in schools, which fails to acknowledge their specificity.
- 2006: pp. 15-16: There have been no developments in relation to the situation of the Alevi community. Alevs face difficulties for opening their places of worship (Cem houses). Cem houses are not recognized as places of worship and receive no funding from the authorities.
- 2007: p. 17: Alevs face difficulties with opening their places of worship (Cem houses or "Cemevi"). Cem houses are not recognized as places of worship and receive no funding from the authorities
- 2008: p. 18: However, the government's initiative has not been followed through. Overall, Alevs con-



tinue to face the same problems as before, in particular as regards education and places of worship. Since then a slight improvement has been recorded concerning the status of cemevis and Alevi associations. However, the current situation is not pleasant as far as concerning the main demands raised by Alevis.

Alevis in the UK: The UK has never been a destination for contract-based guest-worker labor emigrating from Turkey to Europe. The presence of people from Turkey in this country is mainly as a result of the influx of refugee flows from 1985 to 1995. The exact number of this population is also unknown in official statistics. However, community leaders and academic researches estimate the number of immigrants coming from Turkey at 250,000. Alevis are overrepresented in this population with 200,000 persons heavily concentrated in London. In this sense, London is one of the most important cities with considerable Alevi population in Europe. The geographical concentration of Alevi communities living in the UK diversified since the mid-2000s. Today, considerable Alevi communities living in Birmingham, Bournemouth, Brighton, Croydon, Coventry, Glasgow, Leicester, Liverpool, Nottingham, Manchester, South London. New Alevi Cultural Centers were established in Glasgow, Croydon, Coventry, Bournemouth, South London Since 2008.

England Alevi Cultural Center and Cemevi was established in 1993 in London to meet basic social and cultural needs of newly emerging Alevi population in this city. Britain Alevi Federation (BAF) has sub-branches of Women, Youth, Culture and Media. Since then, BAF provides

1. Legal and advice services: BAF's voluntary solicitors and advisors provide legal, advisory and translation services for anyone who is in need of without demanding any compensation.
2. Educational Services: BAF provides various courses especially for youngsters such as mathematics, Turkish, science, chess, after school classes, English ESOL and Alevism.
3. Cultural Services: BAF organizes annual youth festival, Hacı Bektash Veli Youth Festival, on October since 1993. Our first open-air park festival was organized firstly in on June 2011. Besides these festivals, BAF also invites singers, music bands, Alevi minstrels and theater groups from Turkey and Europe. We also provide courses on semah (ritual dance) and saz (lute-like instrument) so as to transmit Alevi culture to younger generations.
4. Belief Services: BAF also invites dedes from Turkey and Germany to organize cem rituals in London. In the year 2010, we organized 9 cem rituals in London. By providing funerals services, the BAF meet another most significant need of Alevis living in the UK. In the year 2010, 90 funeral ceremonies were organized in the BAF.
5. Media and Public Relations Services: We regularly prepare media-releases to inform wider public about our events and services. In 2010, we commenced a new associational bi-lingual journal and internet-based radio and TV channels so as to increase public awareness about Alevism. You reach our web address ([www.alevinet.org](http://www.alevinet.org)). ([cemevi@live.co.uk](mailto:cemevi@live.co.uk))
6. Charity Sales: We organize charity regular sales to rise funding to provide daily free lunch to our elderly community members and to sponsor low-income Alevi students in Turkey.
7. Cultural and Political Lobbying: In cooperation with Alevi Associations in Turkey and in Europe, we are lobbying in Europe to overcome difficulties of experiencing and practicing Alevism in Turkey. We do also work for developing a good inter-communal dialogue with other communities living in London.

As a result of geographical distribution of Alevis living in the UK, BAF encouraged the establishment of new Alevi Cultural Centers in Glasgow in 2007, Coventry in 2010, South London in 2011, Croydon in 2011, Bournemouth in 2011, Harrow in 2011, Nottingham in 2012, Edinburg in 2014, Doncaster in 2014, Sheffield in 2014, Hull in 2014 and Leicester in 2015.



*“the end of the path would be  
dark if the path is not science.”*

Hace Bektash Veli



## ALEVI CENTRES IN UK

LONDON IAKM CEMEVI • COVENTRY / LEICESTER CEMEVI  
GLASGOW CEMEVI • CROYDON CEMEVI • SOUTH LONDON CEMEVI  
BOURNEMOUTH CEMEVI • HARROW CEMEVI • SHEFFIELD CEMEVI  
DONCASTER CEMEVI • HULL CEMEVI • EDINBURG CEMEVI  
NOTTINGHAM CEMEVI