

# **Alevi Teaching**

**Remzi Kaptan**



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**Remzi Kaptan**



Remzi Kaptan (1976) is an Alevi writer and intellectual. Since his youth he has dealt with the problems of the Alevis and their solution. In the Alevi society his writings are held in high esteem. Remzi Kaptan has published books as well as numerous articles and essays about the Alevi doctrine and awareness.

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## Welcoming Speech

Lived Alevism is a humanistic, tolerant doctrine in close touch with nature.

It's characterized by tolerance, cosmopolitanism, modesty and charity.

We Alevis stand for religious freedom, observance of human rights and equal rights for women in society.

In Alevism the focus is on people.

Alevism has the objective to create a personality satisfied with itself, with society and nature.

One may also call it a mature person who has understood the meaning of life.

The objective is to be reached by means of the doctrine of the four gates and the forty pillars (4 Kapı 40 Makam). This doctrine represents the Alevi system of values.

The Alevi moral and the system of values are based on the message of Hacı Bektaş Veli: „Control your tongue, your hands and your loins! (Eline, beline, diline sahip ol!) “

We Alevis believe in one God, acknowledge Mohammed as His prophet and worship him.

The other prophets in the scriptures are respected as much as the prophet Mohammed.

Furthermore, Hz. Ali is the first successor and the twelve imams are the subsequent descendants of Ehlibeyt.

The community prayer is held in the worship service called “Cem”.

However, the Cem-ceremony does not only serve for praying, but simultaneously carries out tasks as e.g. the administration of justice and dispute settlement in the Alevi society creating a peaceful community.

Hence the Cem-ceremony is not only a religious practise, but it has profane and secular functions, too.

The ritual dance “Sema“, which is part of the prayer, has a high priority in the Alevi faith.

This dance is accompanied by Saz (long-necked lute) und mystic songs.

Women and men move circularly turning around and rotating around their own axis.

This dance does not only symbolise the universe, the orbit, but also the regenerating nature.

We Alevis fast during twelve days in the month of grief Muharrem and after those days we dispense the sweet „Aschure“.

Abstinence should not only be practised once a year; it’s every Alevi’s duty to practise ascetics.

With this book we attempt to provide a brief overview of the Alevis and Alevism.

## **Vows (İkrar)**

Alevism is a doctrine faith and pursues the objective of reaching human perfection.

Taking the vows (İkrar) shows the willingness to follow this path of faith responsibly and honestly.

These vows mean devotion; a promise to fulfill the duties and rules, and to practise passionately the Alivi doctrine.

It's not a privilege to be of Alevi descent. Alevism may also be learned and eventually adopted through initiation (İkrar).

When entering the initiation the person promises not to do any wrong respectively not to act unjustly, that means the person must not infringe anybody else's rights.

In Alevism this is outlined with the following words: "One must control one's hands, tongue and loins!" which means not to eat anything stolen or forbidden, to maintain loyalty towards the spouse as well as to show respect and acceptance to other races and religions.

The person should pronounce the vows with this knowledge and conscience.

In this sense, there's no turning back, thus this step should be carefully considered.

Those who break their vows, will be relegated from initiation. These people are called 'excluded' (Düşkün).

## **Belief in God**

We try to thank God for the creation of the eternal beauty in this world showing him our appreciation.

Life comes from love; it consists of love. Love is also the key for understanding and for a close relationship. Nowadays, this moral concept is quite limited. People lead a rather antithetical life.

Why? There are several reasons we will not discuss here. Our actual topic is love for God. We experience his infinite love and mercy. His goodness and mightiness are not to be compared with human abilities. As Yunus Emre put it:

*“Hell and paradise consist of a couple of villas and a couple of maidens. Give them to those who like them. I only need You, You alone.*

We don't believe in a God who advocates wars, frightens and punishes us. We don't believe in a God who distinguishes between languages, genders, colours, beliefs, or races and accordingly punishes or presents people. We don't believe in a God who leads people to wage wars in His name.

We believe in a God who has mercy and possesses infinite love and goodness. He doesn't distinguish between races, languages, and genders. His justice is the only truth. We don't believe in Him because we're afraid of the hell, or pray to enter paradise. We believe because of love for all the beauties, as a sign of gratitude to be able to live and breathe. These points by themselves are enough to believe in Him.

## **The prophet Mohammed**

Hz. Mohammed was born in Mecca in the year 570.

His father Abdullah died even before he was born. His mother Emine died when Hz. Mohammed was only six years old.

Thereupon his grandfather Abdulmuttalib took care of him.

When he also died, Hz. Mohammed was adopted by his uncle Ebu Talib.

Ebu Talib was the father of Hz. Ali.

Hz. Mohammed and Hz. Ali grew up in close brotherhood and friendship.

Hz. Mohammed's family belonged to the tribe of the Quraysh, being part of the mighty clan of the Hashemite's that enjoyed great reputation in the city of Mecca.

In those days the inhabitants of Mecca were idolaters worshipping statues and symbols positioned around the Kaaba.

In the beginning Hz. Mohammed was working as a shepherd.

His uncle Ebu Talib, a very skilled businessman, introduced him to business life and Hz. Mohammed accompanied him on his business trips to Syria and Yemen.

During one of those trips the attention of a merchant's widow Hatice was drawn to him.

In the year 595 he married Hatice.

They had six children; two sons who died in their infancy and four daughters.

One of them was Hz. Fatima, Hz. Ali's wife.

The abundance of power and wealth led to an increase of oppression and exploitation in Mecca.

Therefore, Hz. Mohammed turned away more and more from the people of Mecca.

He lived secluded in a cave of the mountain Hira.

There the Archangel Gabriel announced him the first revelation in the year 610: *“Read in the name of your Lord, the One who has created mankind! Recite it! Your Lord is almighty like nobody in the world. He, who has taught the use of the reed pen, has taught the people everything they didn’t know before!”* (Sure 96, 1-5).

After that order the Archangel Gabriel left him and did not appear to the prophet again until the year 613 with another revelation.

When Hz. Mohammed communicated the message to the people: *“Allah is the only God! The last judgement is near!”* nobody believed him except for his wife Hatice and his cousin Ali.

They were the first to believe Hz. Mohammed and to follow him. The Quraysh vehemently rejected the Islam, but they protected him and his wife, since they belonged to the same clan. Hence a new faith arose.

As time went by, the number of worshippers constantly increased.

The Kaaba was a place of pagan pilgrimage.

That was a profitable business for the Quraysh.

In his sermons Mohammed invited the people to believe in the only true God and to reject the pagan idol statues.

He achieved to influence many people.

Therefore, the Quraysh had to put up with significant losses.

In the beginning, the rich people in the city of Mecca tried to dissuade Hz. Mohammed from his monotheistic faith.

When they did not achieve it, they turned wrathful and violent.

The pressure became increasingly stronger, so in the year 615 Hz. Mohammed advised his few followers to settle out to Abyssinia (Ethiopia).

Some did so and left, nevertheless Hz. Mohammed stayed in Mecca and continued to prevail over the idolaters in Mecca.

Many of those who travelled to Ethiopia returned as they didn't get along well in the foreign country.

When his wife Hatice and his uncle Ebu Talib died in 619, life became unbearable for the prophet Mohammed.

However, he didn't stop preaching the word of God to the mankind.

Hz. Mohammed received an invitation from Yathrib 350 km north-east of Mecca. In those days five tribes were living in Yathrib: two pagan and three Jew ones.

The pagan tribes had a conflict regarding the control over the city and needed a mediator to solve the problem.

At that time followers of the prophet Mohammed emigrated from Mecca and settled down in Yathrib.

This condition continued till 622, when eventually on September 24<sup>th</sup> 622 Mohammed came to Yathrib, too.

Later Yathrib received the name Medina.

This name was derived from Medinat an-Nadi (the prophet's city). The date of the resettlement (Hidschra = emigration) was taken as the starting point of the Islamic calendar.

Hz. Mohammed took care of law and order in the city of Medina and achieved a peaceful coexistence.

Therefore, he was appointed chief and head of the community.

This community regarded itself as a religious greatness and called

itself Umma (nation).

Hz. Mohammed waged several major and smaller wars against the idolatrous city of Mecca. Those were called Bader war (624), Uhud war (625) and Hendek war (627).

After occupying the city in the year 630 he returned peacefully to his home town Mecca.

Until the prophet's death on June 8<sup>th</sup> 632 in Medina he converted the major part of the tribes on the Arabian Peninsula to the Islam.

The religion extended widely, but just after the prophet's death confrontations arose in the Islamic world.

Accordingly, very few people attended the prophet's funeral.

As time went by, opinions split; the Ehlibeyt (the prophet's family) on one side respectively Hz. Ali and their followers who declared themselves in favour of the Islam and on the other side those who presented their pagan idol worship as Islam and followed this understanding in the name of Islam.

## **Overview of the prophets and the message of the last prophet Hz. Mohammed**

All the prophets from Hz. Adam to Hz. Mohammed bore the divine light.

Therefore, we Alevi accept and respect all the messages of the emissaries, we believe in the message of the prophet Hz. Adem (Adam), Hz. Halil Ibrahim (Abraham), Hz. Davut (David), Hz. Musa (Moses), and Hz. Isa (Jesus) to the message of the last prophet Hz. Mohammed.

Hz. Mohammed is the head of the Ehlibeyt family.

Together Hz. Mohammed and Hz. Ali constitute the light of the universe.

After Hz. Mohammed's death his religious view was revised.

Also in today's Islamic world those who follow the message of Hz. Mohammed with love and dignity are not necessarily accepted.

People try to promote the old Arabic paganism and the culture of those days under the guise of Islam.

The families of the Umayyads (Emevi) and Sufyanids who trace back to Abu Sufyan Ibn Harb (Ebu Süfyan) fought against Hz. Mohammed and his religion until the very end.

Those were very mighty and presented themselves as believers, although they really were against the prophet's teaching.

They allied with each other and changed the theology of Hz. Mohammed.

By and by they were considered Moslems and returned to their former positions.

In every respect they were rulers and sovereigns of the Islamic state.

Today it's still attempted to practise the old convictions of the Umayyads (Emevi).

For hundreds of years those who approach the true Islam have been punished and excluded.

After the prophet's death the Umayyads have assumed power. In the process they have been supported by the Abbasids.

The Islam was changed and reduced; they added many wrong statements to the revelations of Hz. Mohammed thus representing the faith "badly".

People were silenced to cover up the truth.

Hz. Imam Hussein fought against it and tried to convince the people of the Islam dictated by Hz. Mohammed.

The Umayyads and the Abbasids counteracted and put him under high pressure.

Unfortunately, they were successful. His preaching was dubbed superstition.

## **The Holy Ehlibeyt**

The Ehlibeyt family, also called the prophet's family, consists of Hz. Mohammed, Hz. Ali, Hz. Fatima, Hz. Hasan and Hz. Hüseyin. These five persons form an inseparable unit. They are holy, pure and perfect.

The belief in God was revealed for the first time by the prophet Adam to the mankind. Ultimately the truth reached the people's hearts through the Ehlibeyt family. Through that family, love for God became a manifestation in the people's hearts.

The prophet's family is like an ark. Who boards it, will be redeemed obtaining well-being. The belief in the Ehlibeyt family means accept the existence of God. It means self-discovery, contemplation and harmony. They are the forerunners of justice, the leaders of fraternity and peace.

The belief in their existence is the only true faith. They are holy, pure, unspoilt, and thus an example for mankind.

Our goal is not to compare the different creeds or to criticise, but to emphasise certain aspects to express their importance.

Unfortunately, the Ehlibeyt family was not understood and esteemed in its own society, neither in the past nor is it today. The population is still suffering from it. The Ehlibeyt's reputation was not damaged in the outer sense by their relatives' impurity and wickedness (zahir). Quite the contrary, the others' fraudulent conduct made the prophet's family more credible. It's not right to rank them among the clans that were far from the truth. It's not at all justified to evaluate them according to that. The prophet Mohammed is the Ehlibeyt's father, Hz. Ali is the gate to science; the paradise's owners are Hz. Hasan and Hz. Hüseyin, and the mother Fatima is everybody's mother.

The knowledge about the truth (hakikat) and about God is the basis

for life; it's the consistence of a world full of tolerance, love, and faith.

All the other theories do not correspond to reality. Can it be God's will to despise people, to have no tolerance and acceptance, and oppress or degrade women? Isn't He the creator?

Don't we defy God's commandments through our behaviour? Isn't it grotesque to adopt this behaviour as a base and declare faith as unnecessary?

For centuries the message of the Ehlibeyt to mankind hasn't been understood.

Those convinced of these teachings and preaching it, have been tortured without any reason.

There are many convinced followers of the Ehlibeyt who didn't abandon their path of faith despite this malice.

The number of the followers isn't important – they have always been a minority.

Eventually our only sun is warming the entire mankind giving life to all of us.

## **The significance of the twelve Imams for the Alevi**

The twelve Imams in Alevism rank among the holy persons respectively they are a rule which has coined and shaped the basis of the doctrine.

Thanks to these people and their descendants Alevism could be passed on to this day.

Therefore, they are of greatest or even infinite importance.

They reflect God's eternal light (Hakk'in nuru) and the divine truth on earth.

They are the Prophet Hz. Mohammed's descendants through Hz. Fatima and Hz. Ali. It wouldn't be right to leave them out.

The Ehlibeyt are the family's basis; together with the twelve imams they form a perfect unity.

Hz. Ali is the first imam and equally the founder of the present dominion (Imamet). It arose after the prophet's death.

At this point we have to mention an important issue: The twelve imams are elected guides or religious leaders not due to their feudal ancestry, but due to their knowledge about the Alevi doctrine.

Of course that means the (decisive) hidden doctrine (batın) of the Alevism is not at everybody's disposal. This knowledge is something they were born with.

With their knowledge all the imams were ahead of their time and provided an example.

Some of them are better known due to their influence in history such as Imam Ali, Imam Hüseyin, Imam Cafer Sadik, and Imam Muhammed Mehdi, but the others are not less important.

They are mentioned in several sures of the Quran and they also

play a significant role in the Alevi liturgy. The prayers tell about the love for the Imams.

The clericals (Dede, Pir) preach very often about the lives of the twelve imams. They are the topics of religious songs. Those songs are mainly Duaz-I Imams written especially for them. Furthermore, they are represented in the poems and songs of the seven great Alevi poets.

The sad truth is that eleven of the imams did not die a natural death.

They were assassinated, poisoned, or hanged.

Imam Mehdi, the last link of the chain, was spared and is recognised in Alevism as the future redeemer.

The Alevis believe that he is hidden, but he didn't die. One day he will return and show us the right way.

After this general information about the twelve imams I want to try to present them in the following text in a short version.

## **The twelve imams**

- Imam Hz. Ali
- Imam Hasan
- Imam Hüseyin
- Imam Zeynel Abidin
- Imam Muhammed Bakir
- Imam Cafer Sadik
- Imam Musai Kasim
- Imam Ali Riza
- Imam Muhammed Taki
- Imam Ali Naki
- Imam Hasan Askeri
- Imam Muhammed Mehdi

### **Imam Hz. Ali (598 – 661)**

Hz. Ali was born on March 21<sup>st</sup> 598 and assassinated by Ibn Mülcem on January 24<sup>th</sup> 661.

Hz. Ali is Hz. Mohammed's cousin.

Hz. Mohammed educated him.

He is also the prophet's son-in-law, hence the clan leader of the prophet's family.

Hz. Ali was the first man who recognised the Islam as a religion and provided its dissemination.

He was the man of wisdom, courage, and helpfulness.

He was a friend of the oppressed people.

Hz. Ali has never been defeated in war, because he had “superhuman” strength.

Here are some quotations of Hz. Mohammed about Hz. Ali:

– *“I am the fortress of science; Ali is the entrance.”*

– *“Who doesn’t love Ali, doesn’t love me.”*

– *“Who disregards Ali, disregards me.”*

There are many more examples showing the strong ties between Hz. Ali and Hz. Mohammed. The Sunni Islam also recognises the love between Hz. Ali and Hz. Mohammed.

Obviously this is general information. We Alevis have our own characteristic opinion about Hz. Ali, and of course we’ll still discuss it.

## **2. Imam Hz. Hasan (624 – 670)**

He was born as the first son of Hz. Ali and Hz. Fatima and was Hz. Mohammed’s first grandson.

Hz. Hasan remained politically inactive during his life as he followed his father’s and grandfather’s way.

After Hz. Ali’s death many people recognised him as a caliph. But Muawiya claimed the caliphate. Hz. Hasan voluntarily ceded the caliphate to avoid further unrest and bloodshed. In the year 670 Hz. Hasan was poisoned by his wife Cüde (on behalf of Muawiya).

### **3. Imam Hz. Hüseyin (626 – 680)**

Hz. Hüseyin was born 626 in Medina.

He was Hz. Ali's second son. In his veins flew Hz. Mohammed's blood. He had to suffer a lot: First, his father was killed and nine years later his elder brother. He couldn't understand why the people killed their prophets' descendants, although they believed in the Islam and in this religion's messenger. It was Hz. Mohammed who preached to his community before his death: *"I bequeath you two severe things: On one side the Quran and on the other side the Ehlibeyt. These two are inseparable."*

After Muawiya, the first Umayyad caliph and assassin, had appointed his son caliph, Hz. Hüseyin had to leave Medina. Hz. Hüseyin set off for Kufa after having received an invitation of this city's inhabitants. They promised to protect him. 72 companions escorted him on the way to Kufa. When they arrived at the village of Kerbela on the river Euphrates, Yedid's 5.000 troops were expecting them there. Yedid demanded acknowledgement and surrender. It came to a battle between the two sides. Since October 10<sup>th</sup> 680, people mourn Hz. Hüseyin and his companions. This suffering is remembered and there's a fasting in their honour. The massacre of Kerbela is a fundamental part of the Alevi doctrine.

Hz. Hüseyin's youngest son, Imam Zeynel Abidin, survived this massacre. Now he bore the divine light; moreover, he became the fourth imam.

#### **4. Imam Hz. Zeynel Abidin (658/9 – 713)**

Hz. Zeynel Abidin was Hz. Hüseyin's son.

His mother was the daughter of the last Sassanid queen Yazdgird. Hz. Zeynel Abidin was born in Medina. Already in his childhood he was in frail health. Unfortunately, there's not much known about him.

Hz. Zeynel Abidin wasn't politically active since he didn't want more people losing their lives because of the tyrant Yezid. When his father fought against Yezid's army, he couldn't participate due to his illness.

Hz. Zeynel Abidin and the captured women were brought after the massacre from Kerbela to Damascus. Yezid and his followers wanted that Hz. Zeynel Abidin subjected to them.

But he defended himself against Yezid with proud and honour. To this very day he is a symbol of resistance of the Alevis with his deeds and his way of life. After that incident the tyrant released Hz. Zeynel Abidin. Shortly after Yezid died, and Hirsham, an enemy of the prophets, came to power.

At night Hz. Zeynel Abidin secretly distributed food in the poorer districts of Medina. Nobody ever saw him.

Like his ancestors Hz. Zeynel Abidin was also poisoned and killed by his opponent called Velid bin Abdu Melik. He died in 713. His sepulchre is an Alevi pilgrimage site.

## **5. Imam Hz. Muhammed Bakir (676 – 733)**

Imam Muhammed Bakir, Hz. Zeynel Abidin's son, was born in the year 676 in Medina.

After his father had been killed, the community elected him the fifth imam.

He ventured more into the day-to-day political life and tried to bring the successors of the Ehlibeyt under a single roof.

He cared much for the well-being of his community, spiritually as well as materially.

He was educated, religious, and an important historian of Hadiths (records of the prophet's sayings and acts), which at that time have been recorded in books.

There's not much known about his life, as well as about his father Hz. Zeynel Abidin's life.

The caliph Hischam ordered a person called Ibrahim to kill him.

Ibrahim carried out the order obediently and killed Hz. Muhammed Bakir on March 28<sup>th</sup> 733. Shortly before he died, he appointed Hz. Cafer Sadik his successor.

His death caused several insurrections. The best known insurgent group is the Zaidi.

They descend from Zaid, a half-brother of Hz. Zeynel Abidin who organised an uprising in Kufa. Nowadays there are Zaidi in northern Yemen.

## **6. Imam Hz. Caferti Sadek (702-765)**

The sixth imam is called Hz. Caferi Sadik and was born in the year 702 in Medina. At an early age he visited the school founded by his father. He was very wise and discussed with older students about the judicial system, theology and scientific occurrences.

Hz. Caferi Sadik was taught until the age of twelve by his father Muhammed Bakir. As an adolescent youth he collected Hadiths and interpreted them. The fact that his ancestors had been killed by the Umayyad caliphs hurt him much.

He could not accept the caliphate, because the Umayyad dynasty was very despotically towards the Ehlibeyt family and the believers. After his father's death he assumed the responsibility for the community. As a spiritual head he could propagate his theological indications and strengthen them in the community. Thus the Caferi School originated.

Hz. Caferi Sadik's uncle Zaid and his son Yahya have lost their lives in the battles against the Umayyad Empire. Hz. Caferi Sadik knew that it wasn't the right moment to organise an upheaval. He constantly strived for a peaceful solution. Despite his efforts he was poisoned by a contracted killer during the tenth year of the rule of the caliph Mansur.

The Alevi owe their daily routine to Hz. Caferi Sadik as he wrote the book Buyruk (directives). It deals with the Alevi value system and to this day it has lost none of its validity.

## **7. Imam Hz. Musa Kasim**

The seventh imam Hz. Musa Kasim, born 745 in Medina, was the son of Hz. Caferi Sadik.

He has been taught by his father, accordingly his knowledge about theology was very pronounced.

After his father's death his followers split into two groups.

During his lifetime Hz. Caferi Sadik had appointed his son Ismail his successor, however, Ismail already died at a young age.

Thus Hz. Musa Kazim was appointed his successor, but Ismail's followers didn't accept Hz. Musa Kazim as his successor.

They declared Muhammed Ismail, Ismail's son, to be their leader and consequently originated the group of the Ismaili.

Muhammed Ismail's followers thought that the series of imams ended with Muhammed Ismail. That is also called the seventh rule (Imamet).

The Ismaili founded 909 a state in Maghreb, the Fatimid Caliphate.

With the foundation of Cairo (969) the Ismaili doctrine became an official state doctrine.

However, the majority of the believers had accepted Hz. Musa Kazim as the seventh imam and elected him the leader of the community.

Hz. Musa Kasim was a very charismatic and educated man who rushed to everybody's help and tried to keep the people away from unworthy deeds.

Although the seventh imam led a peaceful life, he was put in chains 793 by the unbelieving Caliph Harun Rasid and brought from Medina to Bagdad.

Tortured and humiliated, he lived in the dungeons of Bagdad.

The hatred against the prophet's family and especially against Hz. Musa Kasim was so great that Harun Rasid couldn't tolerate Hz. Musa Kasim in the dungeon and killed him in the year 799.

Hz. Musa Kasim's dead body was buried in a suburb of Bagdad that was named after him. Since then it's called al-Kazimiya.

Today al-Kazimiya is a significant Pilgrimage site for the Alevis.

## **8. Imam Hz. Ali Riza (765 – 818)**

Hz. Ali Riza was 24 years old when his father Hz. Musa Kasim was assassinated.

Ali Riza was born in 765 in Medina like his father and grandfather.

At a young age he already had to make painful experiences due to the oppression.

Before Hz. Musa Kazim was protracted from Medina, he had appointed his son Hz. Ali Riza as his successor. Hz. Ali Riza had a daughter and a son. He had to leave them behind in Medina.

He had no choice since he was exiled to Horasan, a region in north-east of today's Iran. In Horasan, Hz. Ali Riza was insidiously and very brutally assassinated by the caliph al-Ma'mun in 818. His sepulchre is in the city of Meshhed, a city founded out of love and acceptance to Hz. Ali Riza.

Before the caliph of the Abbasid Empire killed him, Hz. Ali Riza was offered the caliphate himself. However, he declined the offer as they demanded from him to hold back the truth and not to practise his theological-political guiding ideology.

Hz. Ali Riza's Imamet lasted twenty years; during these years he had ensured the humanitarian solidarity of the believers.

Before Hz. Ali Ziza moved from Medina to Horasan, he appointed his only son Hz. Muhammed Taki as his successor.

## **9. Imam Hz. Muhammed Taki (811 – 835)**

After Hz. Ali Riza's death in the year 818, his then eight-year old son Hz. Muhammed Taki became the ninth imam.

He was proclaimed imam at the age of eight and like his ancestors he was assassinated when he was twenty five.

As a child he had to marry a daughter of the then caliph al-Ma'mun so that he was well acquainted with the ruling dynasty.

He didn't want the marriage with the caliph's daughter, but his followers did, because as a result they were more protected and for some time they escaped the attacks and pogroms.

Until spring 835 there were no greater differences between the ruling class and Hz. Muhammed Taki.

After the death of Caliph al-Ma'mun, al-Mu'tasim was proclaimed the new caliph. At his command the ninth imam Hz. Muhammed Taki was killed at the age of 25.

Despite his young age Hz. Muhammed Taki was very wise and popular.

He is also known by the name Cevat (the generous one). He was given this name because of his good deeds and the passing-on of the divine love to everybody.

Before he died, he had to clarify two things: The first issue was to declare his son Hz. Ali Naki the successor and the second one to impose his will to be buried next to his grandfather.

As desired, he was buried next to the seventh imam Hz. Musa Kazim in Kazimiya.

## **10. Imam Ali Naki (829 – 868)**

The tenth imam was born in 829.

The imam Ali Naki was educated in his childhood to be an imam just like his father.

He had to witness how the Abbasid rulers ordered to flood the sepulchre of Imam Hüseyin with the water from the river Euphrates.

Thereby visits of the people in Kerbela should be impeded, and the memory of Hz. Hüseyin should be wiped out.

They tried to oppress the Imam Ali Naki and his followers in a variety of ways.

In those days, the Imam Ali Naki was tortured by the rulers, until he was killed in 868.

## **11. Imam Hasa Askeri (846 – 874)**

Imam Hasan Askeri was born in the year 846.

Like his predecessors he wasn't spared; he experienced oppression, torture, and the struggle for power of the dictators.

In 874 the Imam Hasa Askeri died from a poisoning. He left behind his son (Imam Mehdi), the redeemer, who shall restore justice in the world in due time.

He had kept secret the birth of his son due to the difficult times.

## **12. Imam Muhammed Mehdi (869 - ...)**

The Imam Muhammed Mehdi is the last of the twelve imams; he was born in 869 in Sammara.

His father kept his birth secret until the last second.

This was due to the fact that the Abbasid rulers wanted to impede the birth of the twelfth imam at any cost to erase definitely the representatives of the true faith, who refused to accept the unlawful rule of the Abbasids as to preserve and strengthen their own position of power.

According to the idea of the Alevis, Imam Muhammed Mehdi is still living in concealment and will appear before the end of the world.

His title 'Mehdi' means 'the guided one' or 'the legal scholar'.

Further titles are: Lord of the time [sahib-ul-zaman], 'Evidential son of Hasan' [hudschat ibn-al-hasan] and governor of the sword [sahib-alsahif], that means the sword Zulfikar in his possession.

## **Hacı Bektaş Veli**

One of the most important priests of the Anatolian Alevi is Hacı Bektaş Veli.

He was born in 1210 in Niaspur and died around 1270 in Nevsehir.

In his youth he received an excellent education about the mystic side of the Islam by various teachers.

Due to his philanthropy, tolerance, wisdom, and charism he found many followers in Anatolia and occupied an immortal place in their hearts.

He offered emotional support to many people and showed them the way to improve their lives.

One of the reasons why his teaching of the Islam found so many followers was that he imparted his teaching within this Turkish speaking area in this language.

Another reason was the cohabitation of the simple peasantry with the Alevi-Islamic teaching wherefore he became a spiritual master within a very short time.

The philosophy and the mystic side of the doctrine were passed on by folksingers.

Yunus Emre and Pir Sultan Abdal are among the most well-known poets.

The chronicle of his life is very important for mankind, but not as important as his insights.

Many of Hacı Bektaş Veli's findings are still preserved today.

Some of the most meaningful insights are:

- “The end of the way is unclear, if science is not taken into account.”

- “Praised be, who enlightens uncertainties.”
- “Guard the cleanliness of your tongue, your hands, and your loins.”
- “Research is an eternal examination.”
- “Never forget that your enemies are human beings, too.”
- “Respect all cultures, religions, and nations.”
- Men’s beauty is the in their interior.”
- “What you’re looking for, you’ll find in your interior.”
- “We shall be united, magnificent and strong.”

The Alevi moral system is mainly based on the following words of Hacı Bektaş Veli: “Guard the cleanliness of your tongue, your hands, and your loins.”

That is one of Hacı Bektaş Veli’s realizations still providing guidance to the Alevis this very day.

## **Fatima Ana**

Fatima Ana (Mother Ana), the Prophet Mohammed's holy daughter, was born in Mecca.

The good and virtuous lady Hatice and Hz. Mohammed gave all their natural love to Fatima Ana.

Fatima Ana was Hz. Mohammed's only daughter who had own children, since the other three daughters didn't have this privilege.

Fatima Ana is not only revered because she is the spouse of Hz. Ali and thereby the mother of Hz. Hassan and Hz. Hüseyin.

She is the worthy bearer of the Islam among the daughters of Hz. Mohammed.

Today women are still degraded in many Islamic countries and they are prohibited from almost everything.

During Fatima Ana's lifetime, harmony persevered between men and women because Fatima Ana was the holy woman of the Islam.

She died at very young age; however, all she bequeathed is of great importance.

The princess of the prophet's house was very intelligent, just, and friendly.

Her sermons, poems, and traditional words made that she became the mother Mary of the Islam.

Due to her elegance and indescribable beauty she was given the byname Zehr (the lady of the light), because she always irradiated the divine light from which she arose.

In Alevi theology Fatima Ana is recognised as "Sayyidatu nisa'l 'l.'alamin" (Leader of all women in the world), because none of the honourable descendants of Hz. Mohammed would have existed without her.

After the prophet's physical death, Fatima Ana's spouse Hz. Ali was an example for all men and Fatima Ana a model for all women.

In life she was a perfect woman; she was exemplary in all areas of life; as a daughter, as a woman, and at the same time as a mother.

The prophet loved his daughter so much that he told his believers. *"After my death my community will split into 73 groups, but only those who keep to the Ehlibeyt will be able to open the heavenly gates."* Fatima Ana loved her father so much that after his death she didn't stop weeping anymore.

She was so sad and exhausted that her delicate body only endured those torments for 37 days (in some traditions this period of time is about half a year).

Fatima Ana died 37 days after the Prophet Mohammed.

She was buried in Medina.

## **Pir Sultan Abdal**

Pir Sultan Abdal is one of the holy poets of the Alevis.

Pir Sultan Abdal is also recognized by many Non-Alevis as a historical personality whose name stands for resistance and revolution.

Pir Sultan Abdal's real name is Haydar.

He originated from the Yemen. His dates of birth and death are not known, but it's estimated that he lived in the sixteenth century.

The particularity of his character was that he expressed his opinion fearlessly and he could consciously bear the consequences without changing his opinion for fear.

Because of his popular poems it is assumed that he was a great personality of his time. He was not just a poet, but in political terms simultaneously a spokesman and a leader of his nation.

The Osman Empire knew about his followers' love for him, so he was considered dangerous and condemned to death. However, hanging him the Osman Empire couldn't destroy him, rather they immortalized him in his people's hearts.

The topics of Pir Sultan Abdal's poems are Alevism and the love for his ancestors.

Those ancestors are in the first place Hz. Mohammed, Hz. Ali, the twelve imams as well as Hacı Bektaş Veli. In his poems he says that people can only put an end to their sufferings with a revolution. In the sixteenth century the Alevi and other non-Sunni people were suffering a lot through the Osman Empire.

The Empire demanded from the people particularly high taxes oppressing them violently.

Therefore, it came to numerous uprisings endangering the

avaricious and power addicted empire.

The empire fought against the insurgents, whereby many innocent people died, too.

Pir Sultan Abdal travelled through Anatolia to organize the civil uprising. He didn't want to get only the Alevis on his side, but all the citizens suffering the unjust system of the empire.

One of his means of propaganda was his poetry dealing with fraternity and justice in Alevism.

Pir Sultan Abdal possessed an extensive knowledge of Alevism, as his poems reflect.

He lived to propagate his religion.

Alevism demands from the Alevis to defend themselves against injustice and oppression and Pir Sultan Addal has already proved this with his attitude and resistance in the sixteenth century.

He was condemned to death by the Pasha Hinzir (Hizir).

Pir Sultan Abdal is one of the heroes of Alevism since he defended suppressed fellow citizens and fought against the Osman Empire until his life came to an honourable end.

Through him a tradition began: Never surrender to injustice, but always fight against it.

Today Pir Sultan Abdal's resistance is also one of the fundamentals of Alevism.

## **Cem**

Over time, every religious community has created its own specific rituals.

Basically those rituals and ceremonies are core elements of every religious community.

They serve the community feeling and also differentiate us from other creeds. For the Alevis, the Cem ritual is a main feature that distinguishes Alevism from other Islamic orientations.

The word Cem comes from Arabic and means “coming together or meeting”.

The origin of the worship service is the meeting of the secret forty saints of Alevism (Kirkklar Cem`i).

In one central point it differs from the others: The Alevi community is not only committed to God, but also to every single member.

They have to “agree” with one another (razi olmak); that is: They must understand each other.

There must not be a conflict or hostility among the attendants. In such a case the spiritual leader of the Cem (Dede or Ana) has to resolve the discrepancy explicitly and re-establish harmony.

Only then the service can begin. Purity and harmony of the attendants allow the Cem to take place.

Assassins, thieves, and unbelievers must not take part in the service. Here we have to say that with unbelievers we mean people who do not recognise religious values and rules.

This is a very extensive topic; therefore, it’s impossible to explain it in just a few sentences.

Hence it makes sense to go to a house of prayer (Cem evi) and

inform oneself there.

We want to try to make you understand the importance of the service and explain it.

For centuries faith has been neglected and not practised.

To revive the understanding of faith it is recommended to visit the Alevi service and to find one's own identity there. It's evident that this is the way to inner calmness and balance, to peace and harmony.

It's possible that the mystic and spiritual atmosphere of the worship service remains essentially inaccessible to those who have not taken part in it for centuries.

Consequently these deficits may compromise the Cem ceremony, but as a result the meaning and importance of the service is not changed or reduced.

The deterioration of information and goods in today's society is rapidly increasing.

This should not be an indicator for the services.

Quite the contrary, people need the peaceful elements of a doctrine more than ever.

Despite the deficits the participants, who visit the service with sincere openness, will understand the true sense and reason of those ceremonies.

For the malicious, the house of prayer becomes a place of narrowness and restriction.

Before the service begins, there's a test of sincerity; according to that, one has to kiss the entrance door of the Cem ceremony (niyaz) as a sign of respect and, in addition, one must not step on the threshold.

Thus the soul is purged from evil thoughts. This changed state of awareness leads to an intuitive and emotional perception of the service.

Important topics are addressed such as the ritual Semah dance, the sacrificial banquet, persons on duty, the prayers, the four gates and the forty portals, the religious poems and songs, the “community on the path” or brotherhood of the families, and the prayer candle (as a symbol of God’s eternal light).

These contents are steps of the Cem and have to be appreciated by all the participants with love and respect. It’s not a theatre play, not an exhibition of dance and music.

There’s a serious message behind that service.

It offers and gives interior peace to many people, showing the way to purity, caring for unity and fraternity, and helping us to become a mature and perfect human being. Moreover, the principles “to die before one dies” and “existing without being anything” will be explained.

The service belongs to the people who swear fidelity to their faith. It stands for giving account (dara durmak) as Mansur in those days.

It’s the place, where love and greatness are hailed, and where purity and sincerity have their place. The service is the only true place!

## **Prayer pronounced during the Cem ceremony:**

In the name of God, the merciful Lord ...

The evening may be blessed, the evil turned from us and granted us the good.

May God accompany us on the way of the Ehlibeyts, the twelve imams, the fourteen innocent ones (14 Masum-u Paklar), the seventeen girded ones (Kemberbestler), and the 40 Saints and keep us on the right way.

Our wishes and heartfelt prayers may be fulfilled.

May God help us, and never let us meet vile persons.

May He protect and light up our houses and not let us shed bitter tears.

May He let us live our lives at a young age and not make us suffer, when we are old.

Give us peace, grant us power to resolve our problems, release us from liabilities and financial hardship, let our sick people get well and be healthy.

Let fertile rain fall from the sky to bless the fields with it.

Hizir shall come running and help us, when we are in danger; Imam Ali may rescue us from misery, Hünkar Hacı Bektaş Veli may stand by us.

Do not elude our prayers; we beg you, listen to us.

Amen (Allah, Allah) gracious God, we thank you for the hidden truth and for the benevolent saints!

## **The twelve services**

The worship service (Cem) and the carried out twelve services let us / make us understand that we rather should lead our lives on this level.

Those services are prime examples for it.

They are based on devotion, unity, fraternity, and love.

Items we need today to lead a “peaceful” life.

Initially we have to regard the Cem as well as the twelve services as a whole.

The divine service provides us the chance to come together, to form a unit, and to attend commonly our religious duties.

The main task of the service is to pray traditionally to God.

Furthermore, it opens up an opportunity to thank God, to bear responsibility towards him being aware of it; for our own existence, for life in the form of a human body, for the real world, and for mankind living in it. All the prayers, all the religious songs, and all the applications brought together during a Cem lead us to reach the highest level of human awareness, and to stay constantly on this level enabling us to become a mature and perfect person (insan-ı kamil).

Each of the mentioned twelve services has a special meaning in the world which is visible for us (zahiri), but also in a figurative sense in the invisible world (batini).

Here is a short overview of the services:

**Dede:** This service is called Pirlik, the service of the spiritual leader. He conducts the Cem and therefore, he prescribes the procedure of the Cem.

**Rebher:** He represents the Pir’s assistant and also conducts the

Cem.

**Çerağ/Delil:** He lights up the place of the Cem as well as the hearts of the praying people.

**Gözcö:** He observes the participants with his eyes and his heart drawing the attention to mistakes.

**Zakir:** With his guitar and his voice the Zakir makes us become a unit.

**Süpürgeci:** This service has the task to clean the place of the Cem and also the (impurities of the) participants' hearts.

**İznikçi/Meydancı:** He takes care of the correct course of the Cem.

**Niyazcı/Kurbancı/Lokmacı:** This service distributes the sacrificial offerings without exception and equitably to the attendees.

**Saka:** This service shows the participants the importance of life and the significance of carrying on with it from the point of view of imam Hüseyin.

**Tezekar/İbriktar:** The Tezekar has the obligation to carry out the symbolic physical washing keeping clean the thoughts as well as the feelings.

**Peyikçi/Haberci:** The task of the Payikci is to inform the people, where, when, and how the Cem ceremony takes place.

**Kapıcı:** Through the Kapici, evil feelings and thoughts are kept away from the “pure and clean” place of the Cem.

## **Semah – the Dance of God**

Semah is a ritual dance and belongs to the twelve services of the Cem, the Alevi worship service.

The rhythmical dance, the sound of the Baglamas (bouzoukis) and the related prayers put the soul of the people into a state of trance and achieve an enthusiastic mood during the service.

Semah is the devotion to God. Only those, who know the veritable origin and feel the streaming love, can understand this feeling of elation. Man is a tiny mortal being on this infinite and endless world. Concurrently and since the beginning of time, mankind holds hidden secrets as Imam Ali already used to say: *“If you are aware of yourself, the entire universe is a point in your soul, but if you aren't aware, you just are a point in the universe.”*

The Semah dance also holds hidden secrets. It's the love for God projected outward. It's not just a spectacle – considering it as such you will never understand this state of love.

To belong to this devotion and love, we have to enter another dimension.

This ritual dance must not be considered as an ordinary dance or even as folklore with a cultural-historical background. Semah is part of the Cem and therefore, it belongs to the services which have to be fulfilled.

The worship service generally stands for personal happiness and respect. Moreover, it consolidates fraternity and the feeling of unity. Equally disputes are resolved and frustration and trouble are removed. Eventually the spiritual life is tacitly revealed before God and the community, and this force is followed in the heart.

We are taught to become good persons. Furthermore, the Cem service helps us to develop into more mature and perfect human beings (inasn-i Kamil).

Semah is part of our faith. It must be kept on the right level and should not be underestimated.

We try to explain everything in a detailed manner, so that it's more understandable and more sensible for outsiders: The dance is associated with a religious context and ritual ecstasy.

It is always experienced collectively.

The dancers turn around barefooted, pure, selfless, and honest trying to represent love and devotion to God.

The luminous faces of the Dedes (descendants of the Ehlibeyts) show the contentment with the Kirklar-Semah. Kirklar means the forties and is an indication of the secret forty saints of Alevism.

The Semah is the way to wisdom, one step towards the truth and purity.

Every religious song that is sung and every recited poem is internalized by the dancers, and brings them to ecstasy. Literally they fly towards the sky like cranes.

Meanwhile the dancers enter an ecstatic unity.

They disconnect from reality and together they find their way back to the present location.

Only this spiritual state makes us understand the Semah dance.

Hence it receives the right value; otherwise many people will simply consider it cultural and historical folklore.

## **The personal devotion / the personal practise of the Alevi faith**

As a practising believer of the Alevi doctrine I try to transmit my knowledge in the form of discussions, books, and cooperative work.

Thereby I encounter frequently asked questions.

Do the Alevis have an individual service?

What does such a service look like? Do they have specific rules or forms of praying?

Do the Alevis only pray together in the services?

Do they also pray alone and silently?

I'm also asked for my personal faith and religious orientation: How exactly do I pray? Does God answer my prayers, or will He react to them?

While I answer those or similar questions, I try to explain primarily, what the Cem ceremony, the Alevi service, looks like and what its effects on my spiritual world and consequently on my life are.

After I have outlined the Cem service and its goal first, I go on explaining the topic "personal devotion".

(Those, who have a closer interest in the Cem service and the spiritual conception of the world I acquired as a result, should look this up in my books.)

First of all, I have to say that the individual devotion is not bound by any rules, movement patterns, times or locations.

Consequently we can pray to God anytime and anywhere and try to be close to him.

For many people it seems to be difficult to understand that the Alevis can't be identified by any of the well-known signs of faith.

Because the Alevis, quite contrary to the other communities, have no obligatory and fixed movement patterns, neither do they meditate as Buddhists do.

Neither is the cross as a triple symbol of any importance to the Alevi as it is common for Christians after the prayer.

Unintentionally we compare Alevism with other religions looking for signs and movements of faith.

But the Alevis have no specific rules for their personal devotion.

They pray in the language, in the form, and at times they prefer. Basically it takes its time, until we have interiorized this religious concept, because our mind is involuntarily prejudiced by the guiding principles of other religions.

There are multiple reasons for praying.

Depending on the situation I pray with personal thanksgiving or for the ever-present help in difficult times.

Equally I pray to God to honour Him for the magnificence and the beauty of the earth. Besides I express my gratitude for being on the right way and emphasise my love for the Ehlibeyts.

On Thursday evening before Friday night in any case I recite the prayer to waken the light (Dadil / Cerag). Apart from that I don't stick to specific times for praying.

Early in the morning, before I begin my day, I principally express my gratitude reciting a prayer as follows:

“Almighty God, praise and thanks for one more day I live to see.

Oh my God, guard me from people who try to lead me astray.

Spare me from people who don't understand my situation.

Keep me away from perfidies.

Furthermore, help us to find the correct path in future.”

It also happens that I pray during the day to communicate with God.

I also feel the need to pray before I fall asleep.

“Almighty God, my only goal is, to lead a life according to your will or agreement (Rizalik).

In this short life, keep me away from cruelty.

Guard me from people who are addicted to their selfishness and demand.

Keep me away from the evil and don't let me depend on evil people.

Don't let me go astray on the way of the Ehlibeyt.

Protect the people who have to endure suffering.

Leave our souls pure and clean.

Praise and glory be to you.”

When I have finished the prayer, I first move my right hand towards my heart and then to my lips (Niyaz).

It's not important, whether you say your prayers introverted in a silent voice or in a loud voice.

Anyway, one prayer is not like another one, but basically they are built like the examples above.

Obviously people pray believing their prayer will be answered, and this is true for me, too. I try to fulfil my mission. Since God is omniscient.

My personal experience is doubtlessly that my prayers are answered.

## **What does fasting in Alevism mean?**

There's fasting in almost every religion; it is seen as an important rule or as part of the prayer and the doctrine.

Also in Alevism fasting is an important element.

There is the fasting period "Muharrem" in Alevism, also known as "Oniki Imam" (twelve imams) and the Hizir fasting.

The Muharrem fasting begins every year on the twenty first day after the Festival of Sacrifice and lasts twelve days.

The Hizir Fasting lasts three days. In most regions it begins on February 13<sup>th</sup> and ends on February 15<sup>th</sup>. In some regions those dates may change.

The fasting not only re-establishes the body's equilibrium, but it also has a cleaning function.

Through fasting we can learn to dominate or control our own body.

Moreover, it eventually serves to strengthen the spiritual state of a person and is only possible through the control of the entire body and its functions.

In each religion fasting is done in a different way.

Usually it is required to refrain from eating and drinking (completely or partly) and abstain from desires over a determined period of time.

Fasting is practised in Alevism in the fasting period Muharrem as well as in the Hizir fasting period.

During both periods we completely dispense with food and drinks – usually from midnight on until fast-breaking.

After fast-breaking during the Hizir fasting we eat normally until midnight.

However, during the Muharrem fasting until midnight we fast only partly, that is it's allowed to eat and drink – provided the food is vegetarian and we don't drink pure water – as the highest requirement during this time is, not to harm any living being and not to drink pure water.

Since Imam Hüseyin and his family died of thirst in the desert of Kerbela, we have to avoid the intake of non-vegetarian food for those twelve days.

Further important rules to respect in this period of time are: No festivals, no disputes, and no sexual intercourse, because it's a mourning fasting.

## **Why do the Alevis fast in the Muharrem month?**

The Muharrem-fasting, besides the reasons mentioned above, has also a historical background. According to the Alevi doctrine, this fasting was already practised by the first prophet (Hz. Adam) up to the last one (Hz. Mohammed). Today the fasting expresses the mourning for Hz. Hüseyin – the grandchild of the Prophet Hz. Mohammed.

He was cruelly killed by the rulers of the Umayyad dynasty in Kerbela (in today's Iraq) in 680.

With the mourning fasting, the Alevi attempt to recreate the sufferings of Hz. Hüseyin.

The fasting period is a time, a process, when the people get introverted and hold themselves accountable.

In Kerbela Imam Hüseyin led a fight against injustice and against the evil.

Therefore, the Muharrem fasting in its name symbolises the adoration of the good, the humanistic values, and the justice whereas it condemns the evil.

## **The meaning of Ashura (sweets) for the Alevis**

The word Aşure (Ashura) comes from Arabic and means ten. This term refers to the tenth day of the Islamic Muharrem month.

For the Alevis and the Shiites it's the memorial day of Iman Hüseyin's death in Kerbela. Therefore, it's an important day for the Alevis, on which they prepare the sweet Aschura.

There are accounts of many pre-Islamic people (as for example the Israelis) fasting on this day.

It is said that on this day many world changing events occurred having to do above all with the rescue of many prophets from difficult situations. According to the Alevi doctrine one of those mythologies even goes back to Noah.

It's believed that Noah was rescued that day from the Flood, and after that the soup Ashura was prepared for the first time from his provision leftovers as a sign of gratitude.

Ashura is a sweet which today is prepared in the Middle East and in Anatolia after the Muharrem fasting.

As a symbol of commemoration of the twelve imams it contains twelve ingredients such as wheat, beans, dry figs, apricots, walnuts etc. For the Alevis Ashura symbolises the attachment to Iman Hüseyin of the Ehlibeyts (the Prophet Mohammed's family) and to the twelve imams and also the feeling of fraternity and peace.

In addition there is another significance of particular importance.

Ashura serves as an expression of gratitude, because Zeynel Abidin, Iman Hüseyin's son and the prophet's grandson, despite his illness survived the battle of Kerbela, where his father died.

Through him the prophet's descendants (the twelve imams) could continue.

## **Brief information about Muharrem fasting**

The Muharrem fasting takes place on the twenty first day after the festival of the sacrifice and is called the mourning month.

Although today this fasting in the Alevi society is focussed on the memory of the assassination of Iman Hüseyin and his 72 companions, it's important to mention again that the precept of the Muharrem fasting actually goes back to Hz. Adam and has been exercised by all the prophets up to Hz. Mohammed.

So we also have our fasting prayer during the fasting period, and we combine it with the mourning as well as the veneration of all the martyrs who gave their lives for justice and for the good in mankind like Imam Hüseyin.

The battle of Kerbela (680) lasted ten days, however, we fast twelve days because of our love for the twelve imams.

The Holy Hüseyin was the son of Hz. Ali and the Prophet Mohammed's grandson.

The leader of the Umayyads Yezid and his soldiers persecuted, tortured, and assassinated the Holy Hüseyin and his 72 companions in Kerbela in today's Iraq, because he refused to submit himself under the leader of the Umayyads Yezid and his injustice.

Note that the fourth Holy Imam Zeynel Abidin survived that battle and only therefore the heritage of the prophet's family could continue.

Depending on their physical and spiritual state of health the Alevi can fast and mourn twelve days in the Murrahem.

The central point of the fasting and mourning is to dispense with desires.

Moreover, any celebrations such as weddings, the consumption of

meat, offences, rumours, conflicts and bloodshed are prohibited.

The opposition against the oppression of the Holy Hüseyin plays an important role in the Alevi education.

His fight for justice and humanity is transmitted to the descendants in an Alevi family as an ethnic principle.

## **Hizir fasting**

Fasting is a fixed component of many religions which is carried out in multiple forms, at different times, and for diverse motives.

The reasons, why people fast, are individual.

Some fast to express their gratitude to God, some do by conviction.

Some people fast because their prayers have been answered, while others fast to thank for already fulfilled wishes.

Also the fear from punishment in hell or the wish for eternity urges people to fast.

Some try to purify their souls; others want to exercise self-control and self-discipline, or deepen their faith in order to grow and mature with it.

While some renounce to eat anything at all between sunrise and sunset, others refuse to eat any animal foodstuff on certain days.

Another religious group dispenses completely with certain kind of food for a determined time.

According to Alevi understanding there is Muharrem fasting (also called the twelve imams or mourning fasting) and Hizir fasting. People, who try to go their personal way as a dervish and interiorise this doctrine, fast an additional 48 days (48 Persembe Orucu).

Why do Alevis fast on occasion of the Hizir days?

When and how do they fast?

What is the origin of the Hizir days?

Every year in February the Alevis fast during three days to commemorate Hizir, the saint patron (or guardian angel).

Generally we fast in the time from February 13<sup>th</sup> to February 15<sup>th</sup>; nevertheless, some Alevis fast in January, or at the end of January, and the beginning of February.

They are many traditions referring to the Holy Hizir.

According to one tale Noah's companions fasted during three days out of gratitude after surviving the storm.

According to another legend Imam Ali and his wife Fatima were put to the test by God.

Due to the recovery of their children from illness they fasted for three days.

Every evening for fast-breaking, Hizir appeared in another human shape and asked for some food and drink.

Those two tales prove that Hizir fasting expresses gratitude.

Furthermore, that time serves to wish fertility, blessing, well-being, friendship, solidarity, and fraternity.

After the evening meal we eat and drink nothing until the next day at sunset.

Different from the Muharrem fasting during the fast-break we don't dispense with meat and water.

For the fast-break, family, relatives, and acquaintance come together and light a candle in honour of Hizir. Primarily tales and legends about the saint patron are told, also the traditions of other saints are mentioned on those evenings. Furthermore, religious songs are sung.

In the evening of the last day memorials and pilgrimage sites are visited. Hizir fasting is finished with the slaughtering of a sacrificial animal, and eventually with a Cem ceremony.

Here is an example of a prayer pronounced during this time:

“May the wishes and prayers of the fasting be fulfilled.

May the burning candles of love for Hızir enlighten our home and our souls.

Bless the food which you have allowed and given to us for Hızir’s sake.

Bless those who prepared the food and did those deeds.

Protect our families; grant them peace, blessing, and prosperity.

Let us live unity.

Holy Hızir, help the people who suffer hardship or misfortunes.

Help those who lost their hope.

Give a hand to those who need help and show them the truth.

Praise and glory be to You!”

## **The festival of sacrifice is the festival of mankind's liberation**

The festival of sacrifice is an important component of Alevism. According to tradition, sacrificing began with the prophet Ibrahim (Abraham).

The angel Cebrail (Gabriel) prompted Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ismail (Isaac) whereupon their reaction was obedience and submissiveness.

They stood the divine trial.

God sent him a ram for his love and fidelity that he had to slaughter instead of his son.

The slaughtering and eating of the animal does not take centre stage of the festival.

Neither has the sacrifice imperatively to do with bloodshed.

If desired, food can also be distributed with the same intention.

The sense and the objective of the festival are to rescue oneself from the catches of our instincts – to dissociate oneself from the world's material needs.

Man moves up one step with this plan being not anymore in the position of the sacrificed, but in the position of the sacrificing person (sacrificing one's ego).

Those feast days have always had their vivacity; nevertheless, many people ignore or overlook their true philosophy.

That's a sad certainty. We must not continue to make that mistake.

Ismail's rescue is the starting point for mankind's liberation, the effort to dispense oneself of the earthly matter.

The sacrifice shall protect us from wars, hunger and misery.

Those days no longer pass in a festive mood anymore.

Since Ismail's divine trial, wars are still waged, battles of power are fought, and violations of the human rights and discriminations are getting out of control.

Hence we have to celebrate this festival with the fundamental philosophy. And above all we have to live wisely and attempt to orient our lives according to that wisdom.

What's the meaning of living consciously our life?

No matter why it happens, but we must not allow that people become victims. We always and everywhere have to stand up against wars and in favour of a peaceful life. We must not endorse violence and we have to fight against injustice.

We must not tolerate when potentates enrich themselves deliberately and profit-greedy; we have to fight against poverty, exploitation, corruption, and intolerance.

There's a great desire for a peaceful and quiet life. We are longing for sunny and happy days on which mankind is not a victim of egoistic, grasping, and greedy people.

We are greatly longing for the dinners of Halil Ibrahim, where everything is brotherly shared.

Independently of faith, language, race, gender, and skin colour, all of us strive for the days, when diversity of cultures is recognised as a wealth.

Isn't this the real meaning of the festival of sacrifice?

We know that this desire is not easy to realize. For hundreds of years people have oppressed those intentions through wars and hostilities.

Nevertheless, Alevi scholars and saints have attempted for centuries to convey charity, peace, and many other motives with

persistence and perseverance.

It's our goal to continue celebrating this festival with that intention and conviction.

To fulfil our wishes we will slaughter our sacrificial animals and kiss our elders' hands with respect.

With that attitude we'll visit our memorials, the Cem praying houses and with those thoughts give best wishes to like-minded people for a merry feast.

We'll educate our children with that conviction and make them happy.

With this in mind we wish to all, who celebrate it, a merry festival. May God accept the sacrifice and be content giving us his blessings and his mercy.

## **Nevruz / Newroz festival**

Nevruz is a word of Iranian / Kurdish origin and means new day (Nev /New – Roz / day).

According to the Gregorian calendar, March 21<sup>st</sup> is the day of the Nevruz festival. The Nevruz is an important festival for many different cultures. In each culture the Nevruz is perceived and celebrated in a different way.

This festival is celebrated from Central Asia to the Balkans; above all the Kurdish and Persian people celebrate it with great pleasure. Nevruz, in Kurdish *Newroz*, is a great legend in Kurdish history. This legend tells us about the blacksmith Kawa who freed the people killing the cruel king Dahaak.

The Iranians celebrate Nevruz as New Year.

In Central Asia, the Balkans, and the Near East Nevruz is related with fertility and it's celebrate in a special way.

Furthermore, Nevruz has a major importance in Alevism. The Alevis believe that on the Nevruz day important events for mankind and nature have occurred.

- The creation of the world has been completed on that day.
- On that day the holy Prophet Mohammed was assigned the messenger of God.
- The Imam Ali was born on that day.
- On that day Imam Ali married the daughter of the holy Prophet Mohammed, the Holy Fatima.
- The holy Prophet Mohammed declared Imam Ali his successor on the Gadir-hum Day.
- On that day Hacı Bektaş Veli arrived in Anatolia.

- It is believed that on that day the forty saints congregated.
- Under the leadership of Muhtar Saqafi was taken revenge for the assassination of Saint Hüseyin by a secret organisation.
- On that day Adam was created by God.

Since every nation celebrates this festival its own way, the Alevi hold it the following way:

- The festival begins early in the morning.
- Before the common breakfast the priest speaks a brief prayer, subsequently milk is offered.
- Quarrelling people are reconciled.
- Sick and old people are visited.
- Condolences are offered, if somebody has recently passed away in the family.
- The sepulchres of the saints are visited.
- Separate discussion tables for old and young people are prepared at the festival location.
- The youngsters dance “Halay” on the meadow and jump over the fire, while thinking of their wishes.
- Young men and women recite brief poems to each other.
- In the evening the Nevrut-Cem ceremony takes place.

## **Hidirellez**

Hidirellez is a festival that arose for the same reasons and is widespread over Central Asia, in the Middle East and over the Balkans; however, it's celebrated in a different way.

The feast begins in the night of May 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> and is celebrated for two days. It's the time when the two prophets (and patron saints) Hızir and İlyas meet.

Through this meeting unity, blessings and abundance are brought to earth by those prophets in personified form.

Furthermore, this is a period of time when the heart's unexpressed wishes and desires are answered and fulfilled by the almighty creator.

The celebration of the Hidirellez festival is not a sin as some dogmatists claim.

It's just like all the other feasts; a festival that forms a bond between the people and fills them with agreement, happiness, and hope.

It stands for casting off the winter's cold and depressing darkness, the awakening of nature, people being part of nature encountering the lively blooming spring.

During the Hidirellez not only the houses and the gardens are cleaned, but in the same way the hearts, the souls and the minds are purified.

Existing deficiencies, disagreements, errors, or discrepancies in the minds and hearts are examined and reconsidered once again.

Subsequently a cleaning takes place exactly like the thorough cleaning of the house and the new preparation of the garden; a new definition that enables the person to reorient.

On Hidirellez day people in the orders, at the pilgrimage sites, in the countryside, and at home share not only a donated festival banquet, but also friendship, brotherhood, agreement, hope, and peace.

We include in our prayers and supplications our families beginning with ourselves, close acquaintances, and the entire mankind asking for well-being, abundance, peace, and fraternity.

We ask our almighty creator for a meaningful and fulfilled life. Hızir and İlyas are messengers of blessings, abundance, hope, and faith. With this in mind we worship them.

Just like our examples, we should offer our helping hand to the distressed persons or to the ones, who ask for our help, to the best of our ability.

Isn't that the goal, the symbol of Hızir and Hidirellez?

Isn't it true that every person is carrying a potential Hızir within?

Yes, it is!

Wouldn't all the peoples' problems resolve by themselves, if they met with such an attitude; that is, if you met everybody as if you were a Hızir, and help everybody as if you were a Hızir yourself? Consequently and with this in mind I wish you a beneficial Hidirellez!

## **The Alevi moral system**

The Alevi moral system is based in great part on the following words of Hacı Bektaş Veli: “Guard the cleanliness of your tongue, your hands, and your loins.” This is presumably one of the most comprehensive sentences in the world.

The Alevi history achieved with that sentence what others couldn't accomplish with many books and words.

The tongue, the hands and the loins are organs able to develop and liberate the human being and society, but they can also lash and degenerate.

Now let's deal with the Alevi moral system word by word:

**HANDS:** Hands do useful and good things as well as useless and bad things. If somebody does not control the cleanliness of his hands, he could for example become a murderer or a thief. If somebody controls the cleanliness of his hands, he becomes productive. A person, who generates, produces, manufactures, or works on something, is a good person. A good person does not only serve himself, but also society. He provides social security and contentment.

**LOIN:** With the loin sexuality is meant. If you dominate your sexual feelings living your own sexuality for yourself, you don't do any harm to you or to society. A person, who cannot contain his instincts, may easily become a pervert, a sex offender. Such people don't only harm themselves, but also society.

A person, who is able to contain his instincts, can give well-educated children to society. Ill-bred children are a nuisance for society. Hence follows that a person who controls the cleanliness of his hands as well as the purity of his loins, is not only a person who doesn't harm himself, but he also can start a family and educate children useful for society.

TONGUE: People communicate with each other through their tongue. We can transmit good and bad things to our fellow human beings. A man should guard his tongue against lies and malicious gossip and not use it to tell such nonsense. A person who doesn't tell lies and malicious gossip and doesn't circulate rumours, guards the purity of his tongue. A person should correct incorrect things he has heard. He should speak without violating the other's dignity.

Haci Bektaş Veli's book called "Makalat" is still available today. In that book a preacher says to a man: "A man has three friends. As soon as he dies, one of them stays at home, the other one will desert him, and the third one accompanies him. The friend, who stays home, is his heir; the deserter is his family and friends. The ones who accompany him are his good deeds."

The one who controls or at least tries to control the purity of his tongue, hands and loins, is a good person. While he guards his hands, he doesn't exert violence or commit a crime. While he guards the purity of his loins, he lives his sexuality for himself. This person will become an excellent father, mother, or life partner. While he guards the purity of his tongue, he doesn't tell lies or trash. If the human beings would just keep a little to Haci Bektaş Veli's words, any kind of degeneration and bigotry would come to an end.

## **Musahiplik (Companionship)**

What is Musahiplik (companionship on a common path)?

When and under what circumstances did it come into being?

In the Alevi value system, Musahiplik refers to an afterlife brotherhood or sisterhood. In Alevism a companionship on a common path takes a much more important place than a physical brotherhood or sisterhood.

In the Musahiplik the Musahips (brothers and sisters) take a common path. They follow the same value system, are on the same spiritual level, represent the same opinions, and share the same feelings. Even if bodily brothers and sisters aren't responsible for each other's living, in the case of the Musahips this is different. The Musahips are not only responsible for their companion's living, but also for the rest of the events in the other's life, no matter if they are negative or positive. They must not only share everything together, they are even responsible for the other's life just like for their own life.

Musahiplik is a brotherhood /sisterhood whose effects extend far beyond worldly limits into the universe. This unity is always present and has to be understood as infinite. This link does not only serve the individual's well-being, but also benefits society. This is one of the fundamental principles of the Alevi society. Social cohesion is based on respect, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. In this respect Musahiplik is the base of the harmonic way of life within the Alevi society.

In consideration of all these important aspects for the Alevis we'll try now to illustrate Musahiplik which is so existential for Alevism. Apart from the knowledge and understanding of the theoretical terms, it's of fundamental importance that Musahiplik is practised and transmitted to the following generations. The term

Musahiplik comes from Arabic and means friendship. However, in Alevism the term is defined as companionship on a common path and commitment to the Alevi doctrine. The apparently secular development is generally traced in Alevi sources to the time after the Hicret (the emigration of the Prophet Mohammed to Medina in the year 622). Although some sources trace it back to the time of the first people converted to the Islam in Mecca, the great majority assumes that Musahiplik developed during the time in Medina. Certainly there are also other spiritual aspects. As we don't want to give a deeper insight, but just a general overview, we limit ourselves at this point exclusively to a brief summary of the aspects listed above. Interested people may obtain further information from other Alevi sources.

Due to the pressure of the heathens in those days, Hz. Mohammed emigrated from Mecca and followed an invitation to Medina. Therefore, the Muslims gathered in Medina and after the Hicret Medina became the centre of the Islam. Due to the emigration two groups developed. On one side the locals (Ensar – helpers) and on the other side the group of the recently immigrated (Muhacir – religious refugees). A social separation was inevitable. The locals, the Ensar, enjoyed all the advantages of the “native right” not uncommon in those days. Quite the contrary, the religious refugees had to accept all sorts of hardships. The pressure of the pagans and the citizens of different faith worsened their situation even more. So Musahiplik arose in those days under arduous conditions. The bases and the development of the companionship on a common path were recorded by Hz. Mohammed in the Quran in the Enfal sure 72, 73, 74, 75 (the perishable nature of war). Correspondingly the companionship was accepted between an Ensar (helper) and a Muhacir (refugee of faith) and the covenant of Musahiplik was made between both sides; they became companions on their path. Only through this companionship, the penniless immigrated

foreign Muslims (Muhacir) were enabled to participate in the agriculture and the riches of the natives (Ensar). Moreover, in case of a companion's death, the other one had the obligation to adopt and care for the family of the deceased person. Hz. Mohammed personally settled the companionships. Even though we have no exact data about the number of the first companionships, it can be assumed that the number of the first Musahips was more than a hundred.

The companionship between a native (Ensar) and a stranger (Muhacir) was mandatory. Therefore, many natives had the desire to covenant with Hz. Mohammed. However, Hz. Mohammed chose Hz. Ali as a Musahip. There are a lot of literature sources regarding this and we just want to give a brief summary of them.

Here we just presented some summarized information about the emergence and the development of the Musahiplik. For a better understanding and practical application we would also like to present briefly some spiritual and mystic aspects. The spiritual and mystic definitions are different from the apparently discernible secular definitions. In the religious concept it's assumed that the covenant was already made before the beginning of the universe; that is before the "Bezm-i-Elest" (the council of souls). **The almighty creator asked the council of souls: "Am I your God?" And he obtained the answer "Yes". Consequently to this answer Allah created the universe.**

Therefore, it represents the continuation of the "Bezm-i-Elest". The Musahiplik of Hz. Mohammed and Hz. Ali is carried out by the "forties" (the "forties" [Kırklar] are the concealed saints of Alevism). It is also traditionally conveyed that the floor with the heaven and the archangel Gabriel with Hz. Adam have covenanted a companionship with each other. Furthermore, there are traditional transmissions that Moses (Hz. Musa) with Aron (Hz. Harun), as well as Moses with Hizir and the twelve apostles with

each other had comparable companionships.

We have tried to facilitate a summarizing insight into the emergence and the development of the Musahiplik from the apparently discernible secular and from the spiritual / mystic point of view. As a conclusion and emphasising our statements we would like to point out that the Musahiplik has been transmitted by Hz. Mohammed and Hz. Ali. The choice of a Musahip and the acceptance of the vows are one of the corner stones of Mohammed's and Ali's path. As far as possible every Alevi has the duty to covenant a companionship. In the choice of the companion one should principally observe that this companionship is far more than just a bodily brotherhood or sisterhood and will last until the decease. Correspondingly the Musahip should be chosen appropriately. The Musahiplik must be agreed voluntarily of one's own accord. Of course the voluntary choice will not contradict the advice of the parents, of the Pir, the Rehber, or the Mursit. The Musahips must enter the companionship according to the decision sealed in the course of a service. Thereupon the scholar will inform the Musahips again about the high and difficult requirements involved in the companionship and they will make a vow. This vow will enable the companions to experience the spiritual / mystic death and the rebirth of their souls (ölmeden ölmek). For the companions this step opens up a path to a new life where they will mature and reach the perfection of their souls. Those who have a Pir (Alevi priest), a Rehber (guide), or a Mursid (teacher, master) can account themselves lucky. Equally those can account themselves lucky, who make their vows, die in the spiritual sense, and are allowed to experience the new birth of their souls (ölmedem ölmek). One can account himself lucky, if one takes that path and lives completely in that sense.

## **Death in Alevism**

### **The body dies, the soul remains**

For all living beings death is inevitable.

Thus it's understandable that this topic has always concerned the people.

Each religion has another concept of what will happen after death.

It's important to know, what position the Alevi adopt on this matter.

Concerning this topic we'll have to address certain issues that have a fundamental impact on our life: What does our faith tell us about death?

What does our concept of afterlife look like?

And how can we make use of the knowledge about death in our daily life?

First we have to make clear: Knowing that our own life will end some day in death, as well as the way every individual deals with death, has great influence on our life and also on every moment of life.

Consequently we can divide the people into groups according to their concept of death.

One class of people puts a limit to their life and also life after death believing that with their body's death their soul also dies.

Therefore, according to their idea there's a great nothing after death – everything ends with death.

On the other side there are people who believe just the opposite: They connect things with afterlife that they are missing or do not possess in their secular life.

Thus they believe in preformed dogmas accepting them as true.

To be able to lead a paradisiac life after death, they are willing to suffer distress and anguish in their real life in this world; they accept sins as correct and allow every kind of nonsense.

There are also people who don't care at all about life after death (or don't believe in it) living aimlessly from day to day.

We have to distinguish them from those, who likewise deal with vanities or even focus their life on them, only to oppress the fact that death will occur in the course of their life.

The list could continue endlessly.

In contrast the Alevi are of the opinion that with death the body dies, while the soul continues to live, but finally both return to the origin; that is one strides to God.

To stride to God means to encounter the real source, since thereby the longing is satisfied, and reunification is fulfilled.

Hence the Alevis live their life aware of their belief in death and in life after death.

Historically, this attempt to protect the essence of faith and to live it, has encountered enormous pressure, missionary work, and assimilation within society.

Due to these circumstances some Alevis broke up with this belief and tended to the generally accepted belief in death and life after death prevailing in society.

Some Alevis have acquired a concept of faith which by no means should be confused with the original and proper concept.

The Alevis believe that death, as described above, means striding to God (Hakka Yürüme), encountering the origin, and reuniting with their origin.

In this faith, the person should live as productive as possible.

He shall act according to his own will, however, always using it in a positive way and internalize peace (first of all within himself, with nature, and with every living being).

He shall not maltreat his body. Most important is that he orients his soul according to the educational approach of the four gates and the forty portals, acquiring and practising this knowledge to obtain wisdom and maturity.

In Alevism, striding to God is a fundamental construct of faith since it explains the return to the origin; that is the return to God.

Every person who has lived according to that principle and thus has reached certain maturity during his life, does not consider death something negative, but metaphorically speaking as a happy reunion of two people in love.

Consequently that means that selfish people, whose life is determined by lust and instincts consisting solely of hatred and grudge, cannot consider death neither as reunification nor as return to God.

The state of those immature souls doesn't allow them to become part of the origin of all beings.

The only way to prevent this is to leave behind immaturity and achieve perfectness.

Only then it's possible to become part of this light.

The decisive question, we have to ask now, is what will happen to the person who doesn't reach that maturity before his death and hence doesn't become part of that brightness.

The answer to that question possibly is the definition of hell.

This expression may mean a place that serves as a possibility for those souls to mature "by hindsight".

Frequently the world is already similar to hell.

There are also places on earth resembling paradise.

The spatial or symbolic representation only serves for a better understanding. In reality there's no need for such places.

Hence we can conclude that death is the way to reunification and stands for the end of yearning, whereby eventually heaven will be reached, whereas hell represents not to have reached maturity and reunification.

Consequently the way, we have to strive for, is to obtain that maturity, and to put an end to yearning after death, in order to reach happiness in both worlds, in the secular world as well as in afterlife.

A life led in accordance to these criterions bristles with happiness, comfortable feelings and beauty.

## **The objective of Alevism**

Alevism isn't based on only one objective; there are several aims we pretend to achieve with our faith.

Here we are going to mention only some of them.

The main objective is to understand the meaning of life. This is only possible becoming a perfect or mature person. It's a long way to go and a long process yet implying other objectives, which facilitate many things in a person's daily life.

This is expressed in the social communication as well as in the conduct towards our fellow human beings and nature.

A perfect human being, the so called „İnsan-ı Kamil“, means a person who has realized himself or herself. In the Alevi terminology that person is called someone who has discovered God within himself, has united himself with God, and achieved truth and knowledge.

This includes satisfaction with oneself, with the surroundings, with society in general, and with nature. Thereby a general peace is created among the people and also between people and nature.

Peace has been a very important phenomenon throughout the ages, and also today many unsatisfied individuals in search of their personality desire peace, ywhereas discontent and wars are reigning all over the world.

To better understand the described situation, we should regard the family as society's smallest unit. Here it becomes obvious how necessary the above mentioned phenomenon is for all people.

The Alevi worship service “Cem” plays a special role in the Alevi society. It contributes immensely to the general peace within society with its diverse components, above all the popular tribunal conducted during the Cem.

This could serve as a model for all communities and is highly recommended.

Of course this is only a very small example of the Alevi doctrine to obtain general welfare. There are numerous properties of Alevism which could be mentioned here, but we already refer to them in our other articles.

In this situation we can see Alevism as a solution for public welfare. However, this goal can only be reached, if it exists not only in theory, but it's interiorized and practised by everybody.

Public welfare eventually depends on every single person; therefore, the conscious perception of the Alevi doctrine is the most important goal of Alevism.

Thus the meaning of life would be better understood; as a result we could lead a useful life which also would yield positive results in society.

## **The voice which cannot be silenced**

Some people will ask what this voice might be, and who wants to deprive it of its force.

It's the voice of Pir Sultan Abdal, Yunus Emre, Hacı Bektaş Veli, Mevlana, Sah Hatayi, Nesimi Sari Saltuk, Hz. Ali and his descendants.

It belongs to those Alevis, who didn't surrender and to all those who no longer will allow that their traditions, culture, religion – in short their existence – is taken away from them.

That's the voice which cannot be purged out of this world; the voice that has always accompanied history in its fight against oppression, assimilation, and destruction as a silent witness.

It has always been and will always be clear and incessant.

This is the voice of those, who Muaviye, Yezid, and Hinzir Pasha as well as the perpetrators of Dersim, Maras and Sivas wanted to destroy.

This voice has caused them headaches and even driven them crazy.

It's the voice of humanity, love, tolerance, and peace. It's the voice of life.

For centuries this voice resounds from the past into our present times. With our help it will also do so in future.

We can only achieve this, when we talk to our elders to learn about the old festivals, customs, and historical events, looking for our own roots, not avoiding culture, but embracing it and allowing it to accompany us hand in hand on the way through life.

“İlimden gidilmeyen yolun sonu karanlıktır” (Reading educates protecting us from stultification).

It's our task to give strength and persistence to that voice, because

it has always made us strong and persistent.

It has shown us a way to spend a more beautiful life with our fellow human beings.

“Eline, beline, diline sahip ol!”

Another way to help our voice to grow is the foundation and the active membership in associations protecting our way.

We have to show it to as many people as possible – to those who want to reinforce our voice even more.

Now it’s your turn, dear readers, to make sure that the struggle of our great mentors has not been in vain.

I wish you all the best and hope that our voice, the Alevis’ voice from all over the world and from different eras, will help, inspire, and encourage you.

## **A perfect man: Hz. Hüseyin**

As we already mentioned several times, Hz. Hüseyin, like his ancestors, was a perfect man.

However, let me say from the outset that Hz. Hüseyin was not a prophet, but he was a truthful man aware of the meaning of his life.

He understood the constellation between human being and nature.

The truthfulness he passed on to his fellow men ensured that the people around him lived together in peace and harmony.

People, who met Hz. Hüseyin, saw in him the divine truth.

All his actions demonstrate the perfection of a human being.

The knowledge he had received from his ancestors Hz. Mohammed, Hz. Ali, Hz. Fatima, and Hz. Hasan completed him in his existence.

He was the man who passed the prophet's values on to the entire mankind.

Many people don't recognize Hz. Hüseyin's perfection.

For them Hz. Hüseyin is a saint who was assassinated in Kerbela.

The assassination in Kerbela is the culmination of a man who always carried the divine light.

With his last breath he still preached all people's equality.

But Hz. Hüseyin's significance for the world is not limited to the massacre in Kerbela; in reality Hz. Hüseyin's entire life is an epic in itself being an example for all people.

The firmness he showed during the massacre of Kerbela is still today a reference point for people who fight against oppression and intolerance.

His nobleness and his fight against the evil are a motivation for the entire mankind.

His character trait to fight against arbitrariness and oppression accompanied him all his life.

Many people, who can't understand the meaning of life today, don't understand Hz. Hüseyin.

Hz. Ali as well as Hz. Hüseyin are concise examples of truthful men.

All people, who want to be truthful in the light of Hz. Hüseyin, always have abided to Hz. Hüseyin's assertions.

Hz. Hüseyin, who even in the last moment of his life passed on the truth and the divine light, told the entire mankind, *"To die in dignity is better than to live every day disingenuously."*

Hz. Hüseyin regarded people, who only are consumerists and materialists, as poor and unable creatures.

According to Hz. Hüseyin these people are slaves of their instincts who never will be truly free.

A man, whose entire mind is dominated by desire and greed, is also able to sacrifice his feelings and his humanity for material things.

Hz. Hüseyin emphasizes that every human being will experience death, but the slave of the material things aren't aware of it and think they would live forever.

Of course people should consume material things, but they should not become slaves of that consumption.

The human being must not despise the lovely things of this world; he shall take part and taste them.

Hz. Hüseyin is an example of the peaceful and harmonic

coexistence of men.

He emphasized again and again that human beings should neither be enslaved nor should they be slaves of their own instincts.

The human being must not forget that he bears the divine within himself.

Only the truthful and the steadfast man can obtain insight and awareness.

Those who do harm to people and thus to humanity, will never obtain insight and awareness.

Hız. Hüseyin served the entire mankind, and he used to say that every human being should serve society to facilitate a harmonic coexistence.

*“Don't be a slave of your instincts, but always be truthful, so that you can become aware of the Divine.”* (Hız. Hüseyin)

## **Why Hz. Ali is Important**

Hz. Ali is one of the most important personalities of all times. It should be noted here that Hz. Ali must not be confounded with the prophet.

When we describe his importance, we don't put him on the same level as the prophet. Hz. Ali was not a prophet; he was and is an example for mankind <sup>1</sup>.

Why is Hz. Ali so important?

Although he was not a prophet, he is important, primarily because he is a member of the Ehlibeyts and due to the fact that he was educated by the prophet himself; that is he obtained the secret or interior (batini) knowledge and awareness (his philosophy of life) directly from the Prophet Mohammed. Therefore, the values symbolized by Hz. Ali's personality are not only important for societies that believe in Hz. Ali, but for the entire mankind. We believe that many problems could be solved, if mankind would understand those values.

Of course Hz. Ali had a political and a military aspect, but he didn't dedicate solely to that. He dealt or was concerned with human life in all its facets. Consequently he developed findings and solutions not only valid for his time, but they were even ahead of his time. Therefore, they are valid as long as mankind will exist.

In the following, I'll try to describe the referred character traits of Hz. Ali with several examples.

Hz. Ali was a philosopher. He proved this by his way of

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<sup>1</sup> It is quite possible that our description of Hz. Ali may seem exaggerated to you, but this is a false impression. Appearances are deceptive. On the contrary it's possible that the description is rather incomplete.

- thinking, his method to analyse events and thus obtaining comprehensive results.
- Hz. Ali is a poet. Hz. Ali's literary work "Nehc'ül Belaga" is highly valued in the Arabian world, ranking right after the Quran. Its style has preserved its appeal and efficiency to the present day.

Hz. Ali is the ideal husband and father. He is Fatima's husband and the father of Hasan, Hüseyin and Zeynep.

Aren't all these personalities / traits determining mankind's destiny? What better statements can be made?

- Hz. Ali is a powerful commander. His military knowledge is undisputed. "La fetta illa Ali, la seyfa illa Zülfikar." (There's no one mightier than Hz. Ali, and no sword surpasses Zülfikar.). This Hadith (recorded traditional quote) of the prophet didn't arise without a good reason.
- Hz. Ali is a politician. Some think that he's a bad politician. To prove this, they refer to the arbitration proceedings with Muaviye (in the battle of Siffin).

People, who are of this opinion, understand politics as fraud, hypocrisy, exploitation, and false sense of honour.

Hz. Ali stood for integrity, justice, and correctness not only in politics, but in all areas of life. He wanted to shake off the bad reputation of politics.

Actually even today we would take Hz. Ali's political attitude for ideal. He pursued an honourable policy.

Some modern Muaviyes (the ruler of the Umayyad dynasty of those days) consider politics only as a source of income to fill their wallets thus exploiting the people.

However, Hz. Ali's political attitude will triumph, because people

expect their leaders to be correct and sincere.

Some “political jugglers” may be able to disguise their “Muaviye politics” for a certain time. However, we can predict that they won’t last very long with their scams.

- Hz. Ali is a defender of human rights.
- For further information we recommend the six-volume book series “Hz. Ali and the human rights” by George Jerdak, where Hz. Ali’s corresponding qualities are described in great detail.
- Hz. Ali is in favour of equal rights.
- When he was a caliph, he received the salary of an ordinary citizen – neither more nor less.
- This was the reason why his younger brother deserted him.
- Hz. Ali’s brother couldn’t understand how a caliph, who was leading the country being the only responsible for the public purse, only received the same salary as an old slave. It seemed unjust to him.
- It’s very hard to write about Hz. Ali’s importance and his way of looking at things. Whatever we write is only an attempt – well, a synopsis of a synopsis.
- To be able to understand Hz. Ali, we need a lot of patience.
- George Jerdak has written six volumes about Hz. Ali, and he still considers his work as insufficient.
- Hz. Ali is one of the most written-about personalities in the world.

People should know and like Hz. Ali. Why should they?

We believe that knowing and understanding him really means success and luck in all areas of life, and we have no doubt about it.

We also believe that one day mankind will really know and understand Hz. Ali and that it will achieve important results from his values. Hz. Ali has already experienced the mankind's lifestyle (such as wars, fraud, conflicts, poverty, agony, etc.) in a sort of micro-format. That's why he could draw his conclusions from it.

Unfortunately, this was not sufficiently understood. Those, who disappointed him most, had been the ones who called themselves his followers.

To understand him will work to our advantage.

And if we don't understand him, we should make a serious effort to comprehend.

Again we would like to point out that the values resulting from Hz. Ali's personality are meant for the entire mankind.

They're not only addressed to certain groups or communities.

Most important is to comprehend and to convey the right meaning, no matter which society we belong to.

## **Some questions to the Alevi and Alevism**

### ***1) How many Alevi are there in Germany?***

An estimated 700.000 to 800.000 Alevi are living in Germany. However, it's difficult to give an exact number.

### ***2) Which ethnic groups do the Alevi in Germany consist of?***

The Alevi who live in Germany are mainly of Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic origin. Apart from those ethnic groups there are also Alevi from the Balkans, from the Near East, and from the Caucasian countries living in Germany.

### ***3) What are the most important festivals and commemoration days?***

Muharrem: twelve day of fasting (mourning fasting)

Hizir: three days of fasting

Hizir Ali's birthday, also called Nevruz, is celebrated on 21<sup>st</sup> of March every year.

Festival of sacrifice

Hidirellez (Hizir-Ilyas) 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> of May

Thursday evening is prayer time (Community prayer: Cem)

### ***4) How is the mourning for Hz. Hüseyin celebrated on the Ashura day?***

This represents the highlight of the Muharrem fasting. Nowadays events take place in associations or houses of prayer (Cem houses), where people are informed about that deed and its historical background. In Alevi families the Ashura dish is

cooked on the end of the twelve days of fasting when the dish is also distributed to neighbours and other people. Meanwhile Ashura doesn't play an important role for the Alevi anymore, but the religious communities are beginning to accept the Ashura day.

**5) *Why does fasting take place in the Muharrem month?***

According to the Alevi doctrine of faith the prayer Muharrem fasting is traced back to the first prophet Hz. Adam and has been practised by all prophets and companions on their path until Hz. Mohammed. Moreover, Muharrem is an Arabic and Islamic name of a month, and according to the Islamic calendar Hz. Hüseyin was killed on the tenth day of the Muharrem month. Thus even today fasting takes place in the Muharrem month calculated according to that calendar. The Muharrem month is not only important because Hz. Hüseyin was assassinated that month, but also because many other important religious events take place during that month. (See also: fasting /Muharrem fasting)

**6) *Why is a tree or a source declared or considered sacred in Anatolia and chosen as a place of assembly or pilgrimage? What makes these places sacred?***

Such places are mostly sepulchres or sites visited by certain important Alevi personalities who were dervishes (priests). We call them Pir (Rehber / Dede / Ana). They are persons who have united to God. According to the Alevi doctrine they have reached the truth or rather achieved (self-) awareness and thus united to God. Thereby in this state they have discovered their own holiness. That's the reason why those places are regarded as sacred. People have hopes and expectations, but they aren't

directly bound to those places and sepulchres. Furthermore, those places serve to consolidate religious rites as well as to strengthen cohesion and solidarity in society.

**7) *Are there consecrated places or consecrated and considered sacred trees or sources in Germany or in other European countries?***

As far as we know, there are none in Germany, but in the Balkan countries (such as Albania, Hungary, Bulgaria, etc.) there are many places like this, because Alevism spread in those countries due to the priests, and in former times these ethnic groups frequently pertained to Alevi orders. Therefore, this cult also developed in those countries.

**8) *Why is there the taboo not to step on the door's threshold?***

For us the threshold is sacred. It symbolizes the person's entrance into our faith or path (to Alevism). This person also changes from one world into another one when entering the faith; he or she is born anew. One cannot become an Alevi without going through this door and confessing to a Pir. That's the first step. Here we also have to imagine it like a metamorphism: If Alevism were a house, you would have to go through the door to get into the house. Furthermore, the word threshold means Dervis (dervish).

**9) *Which animals are used for sacrifices?***

Mostly sheep, cows, and so on. We better mention the forbidden ones: Pigs and hares must not be used (because they are impure). Here we have to note that the not eating of certain sorts of meat is interpreted differently from other religious orientations.

***10) Why do they regard the bones of the sacrificial animals as immortal and worship them?***

Actually we don't know about this sort of belief, but the following can be said about it: According to our doctrine nothing dies that once existed.

***11) Which other shamanistic elements are there in the religion?***

It's hard to believe that Alevism in its external appearance has not been influenced by other religions and cultures; nevertheless, these influences do not constitute the basic foundations of Alevism. Alevism is based on the faith in God – Mohammed – Ali! Yet over time there are certain cultural values which have been integrated into Alevism.

***12) How exactly does a service take place? Are there any differences between Germany and Turkey?***

In Turkey there are only minor site-specific differences. Equally there's little difference between Turkey and Germany.

***13) Does "takiye"(conceal, dissimulate) still play a role for the Alevis in Germany?***

In most cases it's not important anymore, but in some cases the Alevi faith is kept secret, e.g. due to fear for their jobs (only in very rare isolated cases), or because they're afraid of their neighbours (not to be misunderstood due to existing prejudices).

***14) What's the translation of the saying "ser vermerk, sir vermehek"?***

It means that you give or sacrifice your life, but never give away a secret to a stranger (keep silent). This has to do with the (secret) Alevi doctrine which is not open to everybody. Only

persons, who have united to god and hence achieved self-awareness, may know that secret (that truth).

***15) How do we have to understand the sentence “Control your hands, your tongue, and your loins”?***

It means that people have to learn to contain themselves in any respect, be it sex (fidelity in marriage), talking (that is we must know or be aware of what we say; think carefully first and then talk), or theft (never steal / snatch etc.).

***16) Why does Alevism reject the Sunni ritual prayer und almsgiving?***

It's very important and also an obligation to help needy people. Help may not only be provided once a year, but it must be attempted to help people every day. I could fill many pages about the Sunni ritual prayer, but I just want to say in broad outline that we Alevis have a perception of the prayer different from the Sunnis. Nevertheless, we respect the people who practise their religion with the Sunni prayer, and we also expect the Sunni to accept the Alevis in their religious form.

***17) Why is the pilgrimage to Mecca not mandatory?***

For the Alevis, human beings were made in the image of God, thus the Alevis look for the divine within the people and nowhere else. Accordingly we also pray in a circle face to face, because we see God in the human being.

***18) What does “Caferic and Twelver Shiite form of Islam” mean?***

That means groupings committing themselves to the twelve imams (family and descendants of the prophet). Caferic comes from the sixth imam Cafer Sadik.

**19) Where does the term “Woodcutter” (Tahtacilar) Alevis come from?**

Tahraci Alevis (Tahtacilar) reside mainly in the Aegean and in Western Turkey. They received this name, because their main occupation was woodcutting. Basically there’s no difference between the religious practise of the Tahraci Alevis and the other ones.

**20) Should we read specific texts to be able to pass through the gate of cognisance?**

Yes, we should, but it’s more important to experience living it, as one cannot reach this dimension just by reading. In our doctrine the greatest book to read is the human being itself = self-awareness. The holy and important books for the Alevis are “the Quran” (but also other sacred books such as the Old and the New Testament are accepted; the Alevis call this, “Dört kitabın dördüde Hak” [All four sacred books are words of God]), ‘Nehc’ül Belaga’ (The directives of Hz. Ali), ‘Buyruk’ (The directives) of Imam Cafer-i Sadik as well as ‘Buyruk’ of Seyh (sheikh) Safi and ‘Velayetname, Makalat’ of Hünkar Hacı Bektaş Veli. These books can show/facilitate the way to cognisance to the faithful (Talip), and they also contain rules. For the contemporary Alevis every book that teaches about rationality and science is sacred, because the Alevis believe that the world only can be enlightened by rationality and science.

**21) What does “to show shamefacedness and to live honourably” exactly mean?**

It means for us that we have to live and act according to the rules of Alevism. Of course those rules also imply the general ethic values and norms of society.

**22) *Is there a specific idea of God?***

Yes, there is. It's called "vahdet-i vücüt" and "vahdet-i mevcüt"; that is, the entire universe constitutes God, and we are parts of God. Another term is "Enel-Hak" (coming from the mystic Hallac-i Mansur). This term used to understand that God exists within the human being, what is interpreted as "I am God/I am the truth".

**23) *What are the most important differences between Alevism and Sunnite / Shiite Islam regarding the roles of men and women and the relationship of man and woman to each other?***

It's difficult to express these differences regarding gender equality in a few sentences. However, for a clear illustration we have to mention that in Alevi services men, women and children (all the components of society) pray together. Alevism is a religious community that doesn't make any difference between man and woman in its daily routine or in its religious practise.

## **Number and distribution of the Alevis**

It's almost impossible to determine the exact number and distribution of the Alevis.

Neither in their language nor in other recognisable signs are the Alevis different from their fellow citizens in Turkey.

As they're living in all provinces and big cities in Turkey, they cannot be geographically classified either.

But it's interesting to note that most Alevis live in South-East Turkey and in Central Anatolia.

Generally it is assumed that there are about twelve to fourteen million, but orthodox Sunni sources mention only about four million Alevis in Turkey.

The Alevis in Turkey are of Turkish, Kurdish, Zaza, and Arabic origin.

Moreover, the total number of the Alevis is extremely difficult to determine, since government sources do not create statistics, and if they do, they are withheld and not published.

A reasonable estimate is, however, that there are about 20 million Alevis living in Turkey.

Again it's generally assumed that from those 20 million about 12 million are of Turkish and eight million are of Kurdish origin.

Here Zaza Alevis are regarded as Kurds (and the number of Arabic Alevis isn't even taken into account).

Like in Turkey, the exact number of Alevis in Germany is not known, and there is disagreement about how many Alevis are actually living in Germany.

Neither are there any statistics in Germany about the number of Alevis.

There are lots of estimates about the number of Alevi in Germany from scientist who deal with Alevism.

Some of them say that the number of Alevi among the Turkish immigrants is higher in relation to Turkey.

This is because on one hand the percentage of the Alevi among the Turkish guest workers was outstandingly high, and on the other hand the asylum seekers after the military coup in 1980 were almost exclusively oppositional Alevi.

In Germany there are no regional specifics with regard to the settlement of the Alevi.

Some studies show that a particularly large number of Alevi lives in Berlin.

In their actual structure in Turkey part of the Alevi can be classified geographically.

Even before the increase of the domestic migration and the emigration abroad, some regions in Turkey were considered specific settlement areas of the Alevi.

We can say that the traditional settlement areas of the Turkish Alevi lie in Central Anatolia in the provinces Sivas, Amasya, Corum, Tokat, and Yozgat.

Turkmen Alevi live predominantly in the southern and western regions of Turkey. Kurdish Alevi mainly reside in places in East- and South Anatolia, while Arabic Alevi live in the cities Hatay and Adana.

As a consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation in the 1960ties and increasingly after 1980 many Alevi moved to the big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Izmit, Adana, Mersin, and Gaziantep.

Today, large part of the Alevi lives in the industrial regions of

Turkey. Due to the recent migration of the Turkish population into the cities and the generally increasing mobility today we find Alevis in all the provinces of the country.

All the investigations and indications show that the Alevis cannot be geographically classified.

The domestic migration changed the social structure of the Alevis in Turkey.

The urbanisation radically dissolved the Alevi hierarchy.

Until the mid-twentieth century, the respected leaders were exclusively spiritual leaders, the Dedes.

Urbanisation disintegrated this institution, and the new elite of the Alevi movement (intellectuals, academics, entrepreneurs, and executives) began to form new social structures.

The newly founded and evolving associations, institutions and foundations play an extremely important role in the perception and practise of Alevism.

## **Women's role**

Alevi authors and intellectuals constantly emphasize that men and woman have equal rights. Highlighting the equality they sharply distance themselves from the Sunnis and other Islamic orientations.

Alevis consider the equality of women and men a peculiarity of their doctrine. In the religious context equality may play an important role, but in everyday life there is a clear role assignment. Especially in the rural areas of Anatolia the Alevi still have patriarchal structures.

Although Alevi women in Germany, rather than in Turkey, have more freedom than their Sunni fellow citizens, the basic patriarchal pattern at least partly continues to determine their life.

Many Alevi associations have a committee on woman's rights where specific issues on women's role are discussed.

Due to the equality anchored in their doctrine the Alevis play an important role within Islam. Gender equality is of great importance for the Alevis. This is shown by the fact that the Alevis take part in festivals and celebrations together with their wives, daughters and mothers. In Alevi families equal educational opportunities are offered to sons and daughters.

Such structures are rarely found in other Islamic communities.

Despite those positive aspects, the Alevis who live in German have not achieved to detach themselves from their Anatolian traditions.

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that women are not relegated from daily life by religious rules, but they are rather hampered by their sociocultural background.

Regarding religion also a woman, an Ana (in the absence of a Dede), can lead the Cem ceremony; in the Alevi doctrine this is not

an obstacle, thus women enjoy equal rights. Emphasising the Alevi women's role would contribute considerably to turn the situation of the Alevi movement around in a positive way.

But Alevi women, not unlike the other women from predominantly Islamic countries, have not yet been able develop due to the social structure dominated by men.

This should raise their fellow men's awareness of the fact that Islam doesn't only consist of the oppression of women formulised in the Sharia.

Their low level of education keeps the Alevi women from fully developing in their social and religious role.

To assert herself in the Alevi and other societies women need a higher level of education.

Nevertheless, regarding the structure of the associations and the participation of Alevi women in them, we must conclude that women do not really take part in them.

Even though equal rights are loudly and continuously proclaimed, reality does look different. Alevi women are not found in leading positions, and the reason is that they bear the main burden of household and children's education.

## **A main source for the Alevis: “Buyruk” – “Directives”**

### **In general and history**

The Buyruk book is considered the key source for the consummated belief of the Alevis. It's the book about the foundations of mysticism still preserved in many manuscripts.

The directives are a sort of constitution for the entire Alevism, and deal with religious beliefs, principles, habits and customs, religious ceremonies, and legends of the Alevis.

Originally the directives are the statutes of the monastery Ardebil (in today's Iran). In the sixteenth century the Anatolian Alevism broke up into two parts with the foundation of the Safawid state in Iran: On one side the dervish monastery (the lodges) of Haci Bektaş Veli and his followers (the so-called Bektasiye order) and on the other side the Osman state and the Kizilbas (redhead) Alevis. The dervishes of Ardebil made (mostly oral) propaganda to pull the followers of the Bektasi order (in Western Anatolia) on their side (to eastern Anatolia to the Kizilbas).

According to some sources the directives served as means of propaganda to extend the Ardebil order. The objective was to attract more followers for the Safawid dynasty.

Quite a lot of manuscripts exist of the directives; in almost every Anatolian village there are several copies – a much-read book.

The first Buyruk in Latin characters and printed version was published in 1958 by Aytekin in Ankara.

The second publication was issued by Hasan Ayyildiz in 1962 in Istanbul.

The third one was released by Mehmet F. Bozkurt in 1982.

The fourth publication came on the market in 1988 as a revised edition translated into German.

The origin goes back mainly to Imam Cafer Sadik (702-765), the sixth imam and Sah Ismail. Buyruk contains rules of conduct and behaviour for Alevis including Alevi core values.

The creation myths from the book “Buyruk” represent the “interior” (batini) dimension of the revelation.

It contains examples of the individual’s behaviour reflected in the community.

Buyruk is mandatory for the value system; it explains and supplements the Quran.

For centuries it was a guide for a suppressed social class. For a long time it remained hidden away, and its existence was denied. Among the Alevis the book is called “Directives” of Imam Cafer Sadik or simply “Directive(s)”. In science there are several other names e.g. “The Devout Deeds of the Saints (of Mehmet Fuat Köprülü) or the “Book of the Deeds” on so on.

Many Alevis believe that the book goes back to Iman Cafer Sadik, the sixth Iman and son of the fifth Imam Muhammed Bakir. Imam Cafer had a definite idea of faith and a rigid system of rules. Certain Shiite groups with a dogmatic and juristic orientation refer to him (Caferiye). Sources tell about fifteen books Imam Cafer is supposed to have written. Most of those books are lost today.

But it’s clear that Imam Cafer did not write the “Directives” himself. There are no scientifically valid sources telling us who was the author of “Directives”. According to the current state of research there is talk of Sah Ismail Hatayi or Seyh Safi, and there’s another assertion that it was authored by a writer called Bisati who lived at times of the Safawid dynasty.

## **The significance of “Buyruk” and its content (summarizing):**

Buyruk serves as the main source for the Alevis and provides answers about the duties and customs of Alevism. Essential points are:

1. Legends such as e.g. the assembly of the forty, how Ali became Mohammed’s companion and so on.
2. Ceremonies such as Musahip (brotherhood on their path); Cem (Alevi community prayer).
3. Basic principles of the Alevi doctrine such as e.g. the rules of the mystic path, four gates – forty steps, the three rules of conduct, and the seven duties.
4. Habits and customs.

## **The way to perfection leads through the four gates and over forty steps**

The four gates and forty steps (4 Kapi 40 Makam) are stages to help the person raise his or her own awareness to a higher level – to create a so-called “İnsan-ı kâmil” (perfect/complete human being). This is only possible through internalization and acquisition of an ethically and morally correct behaviour; hence the internalization and practise of Alevism.

The four gates and forty steps are mentioned in the book “Buyruk” (Directives), but we’ll find a precise explanation in the book “Makâlât-ı Hacı Bektaş Veli”, the words of Hacı Bektaş Veli. The perfect human being (the “İnsan-ı kâmil”) is a mature person who has discovered the divine truth within himself and has understood it. This level is reached, if we follow the path over the forty steps. A person, who wants to reach the level of “İnsan-ı kâmil”, is called a “Talip” (layman).

Each of the four gates is like a school. The “Talip” must go through the gates successively, and cannot start with whichever he wants. Just like in a school system we have to complete one school successfully on the way to a higher level school. The person must abstain from bad attributes, mean desires, and instincts on his way to truth and virtuousness. The doctrine of the four gates and forty steps helps him to encounter his origin. The person has to understand that he himself is the key to the truth he is looking for. But he must establish it clearly in his own mind and comprehend that the ego is an obstacle. The ego has to be controlled and dominated through a strict education. For that he’ll need teachers, Alevi clerics who shall accompany and supervise him on his way. Under the guidance of the teachers the layperson shall mature and become a perfect person (“İnsan-ı kâmil”). Each gate has ten steps and apart from the last one also has a special teacher. To become a

perfect person, one must learn those steps and live them with heart and soul. Thereby one must not omit one single step.

The first gate is called “Şeriat”. Hacı Bektaş Veli calls the persons in this gate “Abitler”, the praying ones. In this gate we have to learn the rules for our path and put them into practise. “Şeriat” means order or law. These laws shall serve to allow people to live in peace and harmony in an ordered society. The layman (Talip) shall be prepared by a “Rehber” (a cleric) for the next gates and acquire a certain way of behaviour and thinking. However, we have to note that the term “Şeriat” is not to be equated with the same word of the Sunni Moslems. The meaning of the word may be the same, but the interpretation and realisation is different and cannot be compared.

The second gate is called “Tarikat”, the mystic path. This path means the Ehlibeyts’ path which turns the people into perfect people (“İnsan-ı kâmil”). People in this gate are called “Zahitler”, the religious ones. In this gate called “Tarikat” a person shall get to know the mystic path by entering an order. The order has a hierarchic structure. In this gate the head of the order, the “Pir”, is responsible for the lay people. Here the layman learns to get rid of secular desires, to distinguish true things from wrong ones, and the significance of a virtuous and decent behaviour.

The third gate is called “Marifet”, the gate of cognisance. People in this gate are called “Arifler”, the experienced or wise ones. The laymen in this gate have achieved certain cognisance. In this door the responsible for the laymen is the “Mürşid”.

The fourth gate is called “Hakiikat”, the truth. People in this gate are called “Muhipler”, the lovers. In this gate the laymen learn the origin of his personhood. From now on they will know and see only the truth. They believe in God’s presence in the human being’s heart and in the soul’s origin in God. With this last step the

layman has reached his goal. This gate doesn't require the same control as the other gates, because it's not far away from God. If a layman has gone the way of the forty steps until the end, he has earned the title "İnsan-ı kâmil". A "İnsan-ı kâmil" is also called a "Beytullah" which means "the house of God". This title is conceded to a person, more exactly to a "İnsan-ı kâmil" in the "Zahiri", the external appearance of the Kaaba in Mecca and in the "Batini", the mysticism.

In "Makâlât" Hacı Bektaş Veli did not write in great detail about the two last gates. He only noted that they have ten steps each. It's not possible to describe the exact state of a person in the last two gates. You have to experience it yourself. For Hacı Bektaş Veli it was important above all to approach faith and doctrine with common sense and consistency. Although today it's not easy to follow those rules, it's important to pursue this path with heart and soul.

## **The four gates and the forty steps at a glance:**

The Four Gates and Forty Steps

### **The first gate of perfection is order (Şeriat)**

1. Faith
2. Learn science
3. Attend the service, pray
4. Avoid injustice
5. Be helpful to the family
6. Treat environment and nature with responsibility

7. Follow the rules of the prophets (Ehlibeyts)
8. Care for the others
9. Stay clean and pure internally and externally
10. Have good intentions and do good

### **Şeriat Kapısı ve Makamları:**

1. İman etmek
2. İlim öğrenmek
3. İbadet etmek
4. Haramdan uzaklaşmak
5. Ailesine faydalı olmak
6. Çevreye zarar vermemek
7. Peygamberin emirlerine uymak
8. Şefkatli olmak
9. Temiz olmak
10. Yaramaz işlerden sakınmak

**The second gate of perfection is the mystic path  
(*tarikat*)**

1. Repent
2. Confide in the spiritual teacher
3. Watch out for a clean reputation

4. Strive for good
5. Serve society with love
6. Beware of injustice
7. Always be hopeful
8. Learn a lesson from incidents
9. Distribute gifts
10. Make one's way to God and dispense with secular things

### **Tarikat Kapısı ve Makamlar:**

1. Tövbe etmek
2. Mürşidin öğütlerine uymak
3. Temiz giyinmek
4. İyilik yolunda savaşmak
5. Hizmet etmeyi sevmek
6. Haksızlıktan korkmak
7. Ümitsizliğe düşmemek
8. İbret almak
9. Nimet dağıtmak
10. Özünü fakir görmek

### **The third gate of perfection is the gate of cognisance (*marifet*)**

1. Be decent
2. Keep away from malice, hatred, and selfish feelings

3. Be abstinent and modest
4. Be patient
5. Be bashful
6. Be generous
7. Strive for knowledge
8. Respect and tolerance
9. Be aware of your soul
10. Exercise self-awareness

### **Marifet Kapısı ve Makamlar:**

1. Edepli olmak
2. Bencillik, kin ve garezden uzak olmak
3. Perhizkârlık
4. Sabır ve kanaat
5. Utanmak
6. Cömertlik
7. İlim
8. Hoşgörü
9. Özünü bilmek
10. Ariflik (kendini bilmek)

### **The fourth gate of perfection is the truth (*hakikat*)**

1. Modesty
2. Don't seek negativity or people's errors
3. Do good and don't deprive the people of what is possible (whatever is lying in your hand)

4. Love everything God created
5. Equally see/regard, honour, and respect all people
6. Address the entity of God
7. Comprehend the meaning and approach the secret of God
8. Belief in the refection of God (*Seyr*)
9. Grow in knowledge and thereby approach the solution of God's secret
10. Reach and achieve unification with God

### **Hakikat Kapısı ve Makamları:**

1. Alçak gönüllü/Turab olmak
2. Kimsenin ayıbını görmemek
3. Yapabileceği hiç bir iyiliği esirgememek
4. Allah'ın her yarattığını sevmek
5. Tüm insanları bir görmek
6. Birliğe yönelmek ve yöneltmek
7. Manayı bilmek/sırrı öğrenmek
8. Öze ermek/seyrü suluğunu tamamlamak
9. Hakkın sırrını öğrenmek/öğretmek
10. Allah'ın varlığına ulaşmak

## **The ideal city – Rizalik city as an example of consensual co-existence**

This city's special characteristics are:

- Individual behaviour is based on consensus
- Everybody has to do something for society in mutual agreement
- Harmony is a desirable and ideal goal
- Money is not important here
- Everybody contributes to community whatever he or she can
- Everybody shares with everybody

This ideal social model is based on the principle of consensus. According to Alevi understanding, “Rizalek” aims at a dynamic and dialectic agreement of individuals with community and vice versa.

The people are visibly and noticeably content. There's no envy, no greed, and no jealousy.

There's only one rule and that's agreement.

Nothing happens without mutual agreement.

As soon as the others agree, there's a mutual consensus and there's no dispute, no envy, no vanity, no arrogance, no theft, and so on.

Rizalik results from the Alevism's system of values (four gates and forty steps).

The Riza-Sehri is an example for such a co-existence.

As long as an agreement is reached, everybody is content.

If this rule is broken and consensus is not achieved, there'll be no general or individual satisfaction anymore.

The ritual seeking of consent makes us aware of our own behaviour in a community.

Rizalik city is like a social component of a model of human co-existence in complete harmony.

According to Alevi faith this model of society is based on "Buyruk" (The directive).

## **The problematic issue of research on Alevism**

The deliberate appearance and the participation of the Alevis in public life has inspired lively discussions attempting to define a new conception and terminology of what Alevism is.

In the beginning this discourse caused confusion, so that different opinions were debated. There were heated disputes among the Alevi and non-Alevi scholars and scientists.

The Alevi movement has experienced an upswing for decades and has yielded a diversity of Alevi organisations. Due to the diversity the issue of conceptionally debate of Alevism arose.

Scientifically speaking this is an inevitable phenomenon contributing positively to the debate on the process of self-discovery of the Alevis.

In addition there are political aspects such as the Kurdish and Turkish nationalism and left-wing revolutionary trends. Due to their social potential, the Alevis like to see them in their ranks.

Due to the recent developments the Alevis have to face, they experience a revitalisation of their faith leading to a new forging of their identity.

On one hand the Alevis have rediscovered their religiousness due to the disintegration of the left-wing ideology and the globalisation, and on the other they attempt to gain a new understanding of their own history.

There were lots of publications about Alevism; however, those publications are quite scanty.

Furthermore there is the fact that the Alevis strictly separate their religious opinions and the scientific approaches. That is to say the Alevis have not strived to investigate scientifically their existing religious community. It's obvious that the Alevis have no problem

with science; quite the contrary, they even endorse it. But there are major disagreements among the Alevis about investigation and research on their religious and historical circumstances.

Nevertheless, precisely that research is very important, because the Sunni-dominated Turkish education system has always impeded by all available means any attempt of scientific investigation on Alevism in Turkey.

Due to the lack of those developments and of the scientific research above all, there have been many attempts at interpretation that for the most part are not scientifically proven.

The missing research has led to the fact that many people have tried to define Alevism in accordance to their own ideology and its political usefulness.

Initially many Alevis tried to keep themselves out of this discourse; however, as the discourse carried on, they also got involved. The key point is that the Alevis have developed a new awareness with respect to the exercise of their religion, and they didn't want their history being shaped by ideologies.

It should be noted here, that just as in Turkey also in Germany there are controversial debates, whether Alevism is a philosophy, a faith, a culture, a way of live, or all in one.

The missing element in research and investigation on Alevism and the Alevis is the scientific approach. To better understand the social structure of the Alevis, the teachings and the tradition should be scientifically and objectively investigated.

Despite many recent publications in Turkey and also in other countries, a scientifically objective discourse is still missing.

This prevents the Alevis from being able to appear outwardly as a community. Thereby it's very important, how the Alevis understand their faith.

## **The Alevis' claims against the Turkish state**

To be able to understand the Alevis' present situation in Turkey, we have to take a look at the claims. Lately the Alevi organisations have become more aware of those claims. Since the foundation of the Turkish republic the Alevis have been simply ignored, and now they have begun to claim their rights as citizens. The official recognition of Alevism in Turkey is of general interest. It has to be emphasized that there is a variety of claims especially of the Alevi organisations.

Three “kinds of claims” have been mentioned; defensive claims, competitive claims, and offensive claims. The defensive as well as the competitive claims are pursued by all Alevi associations. These claims are: The establishment of mosques in the Alevi villages has to stop; people who took part in in the massacres of Alevis have to be punished, a place in the media, the same rights as the Sunnis, and neutrality of the state.

However, there's no agreement on the offensive claims. There's still no agreement on how Alevism has to be defined. As we commented in the other chapters there are disputes about what exactly is understood by Alevism. It's about how the state has to recognise Alevism.

In a press release the Alevi association ATAG presents it as follows:

- The administrative organisation for religious affairs has to be abolished or transformed based on the model of modern states, so that it also serves the Alevi citizens and members of other religions. In any case the social representation of the Alevi faith has to be set up and secured!
- Mosques shouldn't be built in the Alevi villages, but the

existing Cem-houses should be transformed so that the Alevi can hold the services and also their other social and cultural activities there!

- The teaching plan for the compulsory religious education must also contain Alevi teachings. Just as any other citizen also the Alevi have the right to learn their faith in school.
- Studies and activities for and about the Alevi culture, philosophy, and literature should be financially supported. All legal obstacles against it have to be abolished. All the persons involved in the massacres in Maraş Sivas, Çorum, and in the Gaza-district should be punished!
- Memorials have to be built commemorating the cruel assassination of the Alevi.
- The same rank valid for mosque must also be valid for Cem-houses, that is: The expenses for electricity, water, staff members etc. should be financed by the state.
- Education societies and high schools have to be founded to train teachers and academics for religious education!
- The monastery *Haci Bektaş (Derga)* is the most important religious meeting place and thereby the crucial Alevi place of pilgrimage. The monastery must not be run as a museum, where an admission fee is charged. The monastery has to be handed over to the Alevi umbrella organisation as soon as possible.
- Any defamation of Alevi in written or visible form as well as false allegations must be prohibited, and those who propagate the calumnies have to be punished.

- The religious days of the Alevis such as Muharrem fasting and other Alevi holydays have to be made publicly known in Turkey. An official status must be granted for them as for the other religious holydays.
- The deliberate appearances in public of the Alevis in Turkey and the requirement of equal rights have shown that the Alevis are in a constant process of change. The requirements of the Alevis in the context of civil rights are obvious demands, but they come up against barriers again and again, because the Turkish republic since its foundation always has advocated a conservative religious view. The current situation of the Alevis in Turkey is the same as for the other religious minorities in the country.

## Some Alevi poems

### **Kainatın aynasıyım**

Kainatın aynasıyım  
Mademki ben bir insanım  
Hakkın varlık deryasıyım  
Mademki ben bir insanım

İnsan hakta hak insanda  
Ne ararsan var insanda  
Çok marifet var insanda  
Mademki ben bir insanım

Tevratı yazabilirim,  
İncil`i dizebilirim  
Kuran`ı sezebilirim,  
Mademki ben bir insanım.

Daimiyim harap benim  
Ayaklara turap benim  
Aşk ehline şarap benim  
Mademki ben bir insanım

**I am the mirror of the universe**

I am the mirror of the universe

Because I am a man

I am the ocean of truth

Because I am a man.

The man and the truth are one and the same

Whatever you're looking for, you'll find in man

Man consists of knowledge

Because I am a man.

I could write the Thora,

I could put the bible into verse

I can perceive the Quran's hidden content

Because I am a man.

I, Diami, am a heap of ruins

I am the earth under the feet

I am an instrument making God's love sound

Because I am a man.

## **Sorma be birader mezhebimizi**

Sorma be birader mezhebimizi  
Biz mezhep bilmeyiz yolumuz vardır  
Çağırma meclis-i riyaya bizi  
Biz şerbet bilmeyiz dolumuz vardır

Biz müftü bilmeyiz fetva bilmeyiz  
Kıl ü kal bilmeyiz ifta bilmeyiz  
Hakikat bağında hata bilmeyiz  
Şah-ı Merdan gibi ulumuz vardır

Bizlerden bekleme zühd ü ibadet  
Tutmuşuz evvelden rah-ı selamet  
Tevalla olmaktır bize alamet  
Sanma ki sağımız solumuz vardır

Ey zahit surete tapma hakkı bul  
Şah-ı velayete olmuşuz hep kul  
Hakikat şehriden geçer bize yol  
Başka şey bilmeyiz Ali'miz vardır

Nesimi esrarı faş etme sakın  
Ne bilsin ham ervah likasın hakkın  
Hakk'ı bilmeyene Hak olmaz yakın  
Bizim Hak katında elimiz vardır

## **Don't ask for our denomination**

Brother, don't ask for our denomination

We don't know about denominations, we just follow our "path"

Don't call us to the community of hypocrisy

We don't know about syrup, we have full chalices

We don't know muftis or fetvas

We don't know about gossip or the preaching of hatred

Regarding the truth we don't know about mistakes

We have the size of Şah-ı Merdan

Don't expect from us divine worship "abjuring all worldly things"

We found the "way of salvation" long time ago

To love Ehl-i Beyt is our symbol

Don't think we'll go astray

Hey you "abjuring all worldly things", don't worship a copy (of a scripture), but rather find the truth!

We are servants of Şah-ı velayet

There is a road to us from the city of truth

We don't know anything else; we have our Ali.

Nesimi, don't reveal the secrets

How shall the unexperienced soul know about the face of "truth"?

God is not close to those who do not know the "truth"

We have our hand at the "gate to truth"

## **Sayings**

“A way without science ends in darkness.”

“Every container narrows more and more, when it’s filled up, but the container of knowledge widens more and more when it’s filled up.”

“There can hardly be any better possession than rationality;  
no better friend than a good character;  
no better heritage than decency;  
no better dignity than knowledge.”

“Do not do unto others, what you would not have them do unto you.”

“Work a lot and pray a little is better than work a little and pray a lot”

“If you want to do something, you first have to believe in it yourself, so that others also can believe in it.”

“Dear Hüseyin, when you should travel to distant places, comply with the local habits and customs!”

“The greatest gift Allah (God) has given to us is our understanding.”

“If you see your life as work, do not put off today’s work till tomorrow, because you never know what will happen tomorrow.”

## **Hz. Ali**

“Do not underestimate any man or nation!”

“Lucky is, who lightens up the darkness of thoughts.”

“Let’s have unity, let’s be great, and let’s be energetic!”

“Rust does not burn by itself, but due to the fire. The mind is in the head, not in the crown.”

“Whatever you seek, you should seek it within yourself and not in Jerusalem, Mecca, or on the pilgrimage.”

“You shall be modest and not break a heart.”

“The universe is the visible shape of God.”

“Ritual prayers do not improve a human being.”

“Deeds are what counts, not words.”

“Don’t pray with your knees, but with your heart.”

“The most important book to read is man.”

“Facilitate a good education for women.”

“There is not man against God, but a together with God in deep connection.”

**Haci Bektaş Veli**

## **A prayer (Gülbank)**

Dear Lord,

Answer our prayers in the names of the Ehlibeyts.

Forgive us our sins, forgive us our mistakes, and have mercy on us.

You are almighty and our protector.

Don't let us go astray and protect us from disaster.

Do not place a burden onto us, for which we have not enough strength.

Gracious God, allow blessings rain down upon us, and give us children who follow the right path.

May Hızır protect us, Imam Ali may accompany us, and Hacı Bektaş Veli may be our helper.

Answer our prayers, and accept them, dear Lord!

Glory and praise be onto You!





