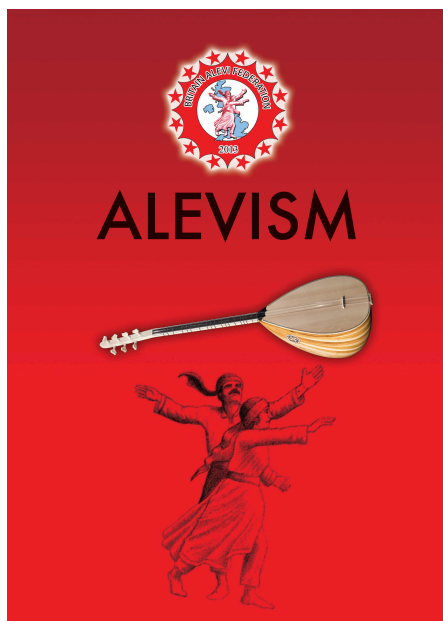


# **Lower Key Stage 2**

## **ALEVISM**



# Why the cemevi is important to Alevi



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## **Learning objectives**

By the end of the three lessons pupils should be able to:

- understand the different ways the cemevi is used by Alevis
- understand how the cemevi reflects Alevi beliefs
- understand the meaning of Hak and the importance of serving others



## Introduction

### **Learning about Alevism: guidance for SACREs and schools**

One of the greatest strengths of the local arrangements for religious education in England is that it enables SACREs and schools to take account of the significant 'other' religions and worldviews in the local area. Whether you are a SACRE seeking to provide options for your schools to meet localised contexts, or an individual school with a significant Alevi cohort, this pack provides you with a basis for planning learning about Alevism within your RE curriculum. For those who may just be looking for another religion for their students to study, one which raises many questions and concepts about what we mean by 'religion', Alevism provides a stimulating and thought-provoking alternative with which to explore religion in the modern world.

In the UK Alevism was recognised as a distinct religion by the Charity Commission (2015). It is estimated that there are approximately 300,000 Alevis living in the UK who are ethnically Kurdish and Turkish. Alevism is a collection of rich traditions and it is difficult to define it clearly and succinctly. Alevi people themselves have diverse interpretations, understandings and practices according to their geographical place of origin and level of awareness of aspects of the traditions. There are differences according to East and West Turkey, rural and urban, Anatolia, the Balkans and the European diaspora. This makes the study of Alevism a fascinating journey of discovery and enquiry, which in turn helps to enrich the religious education in any school, not just those with significant numbers of Alevi children. A brief introduction to Alevism can be found on the website of the British Alevi Federation <http://www.alevinet.org/> by clicking on the 'English' button at the top.

The materials have been developed by the local Alevi communities of Northeast London and the British Alevi Federation, the Prince of Wales Primary School, Enfield, Highbury Grove High School (now City of London Academy) Islington and the University of Westminster Sociology department. All illustrations were produced by Hasan Bolucek. The materials were revised by RE consultant Bill Moore to fit the RE National Curriculum framework. Resources on Alevism, both general and specifically designed for schools, can be accessed on their website: [http://www.alevinet.org/RP.aspx?pid=Alevism-Resorces\\_en-GB](http://www.alevinet.org/RP.aspx?pid=Alevism-Resorces_en-GB)

In exploring Alevism, children are encouraged to learn:

- what the main beliefs and teachings are;
- the sources of wisdom that inspire and sustain Alevi life;
- how Alevi people live out and express their faith in different contexts in Turkey and the UK;
- what Alevism has to say about the nature of reality and truth underpinning life;
- what it means to be an Alevi and what it has to say about human identity, diversity and belonging;
- core Alevi values and living in a community.

Learning will be planned to suit the context and ethos of each school, in accordance with the appropriate agreed syllabus. The structure provided here is illustrative to support planning for appropriate knowledge, understanding and learning as children progress

through their education. In planning children's learning, teachers may take the following into consideration:

- what can children learn about Alevism as a religion or worldview from an exploration of the beliefs, practices, structures and sources of the faith?
- how can we provide opportunities for children to reflect on their own experience and values through their exploration of Alevism?
- how can we help children make sense of what it means to be an Alevi through their exploration of Alevism as lived and practised in the UK and Turkey?
- which central concepts in Alevism provide the richest opportunities for critical reflection and analysis?
- what insights can Alevism provide into what it means to be human, how we should live and the nature of reality that might help children reflect on how they make sense of life?
- how might an exploration of Alevism contribute to a child's growing sense of self in relation to their world?

On behalf of the Alevi community, we hope you find the materials produced here useful to your SACRE, school and children.

For further information please contact the British Alevi Federation  
<http://www.alevinet.org/>.

See also: *The School of Alevism* on YouTube

## Some basic Alevi beliefs for teachers

### God

- The Alevi word for God is 'Hak' which means Truth. Hak is not a person or even a personal God, but more like a force or an energy. 'May Hak be with you!'
- Alevis believe that everything in the whole universe is the expression of Hak. The universe and Hak are 'one'.
- Alevis believe that we are all from the universe and all will return to the universe. We are all one with the universe. We are all equal. We are one with nature and must live at one with nature.

### Humanity

- There is something of Hak present in all living creatures and most fully in humans.
- Because of this, all people are equal and all living creatures are sacred. Alevis call each other 'can' (pronounced 'jan'), meaning 'soul'. This represents the belief that within all people is the spark of Hak, the soul.
- Alevis consider all nations as one regardless of ethnic, racial, sex and gender, and linguistic differences, simply because each creature carries the same sacred essence of life.
- Humanism, egalitarianism, mutual assistance, gender equality and challenging oppression and injustice are the main social characteristics commonly shared by Alevi communities.

### Other religions

- Alevis consider all religions and living philosophies to be different ways of reaching Hak.

### Code of Morality in Alevism:

In Alevism, morality is the main requirement of belief. A person who cannot control their behaviour is not regarded as suitable to participate in Alevi rituals. This morality is simply explained with the motto:

*Being the master of one's hand, tongue and loins*

which requires Alevis not to behave immorally by using their hand (e.g. do not steal), their tongue (e.g. do not tell lies), their loins (e.g. respect other people's bodies).

These rules summarise a strong moral system which is described as *thinner than hair, sharper than a sword*. A person who is not capable of conserving his or her morality is not regarded as suitable to participate in Alevi rituals.

### Teaching about Alevism

Alevism provides a rich source of learning and reflection. Identity and diversity can be explored both within Alevism and between Alevism and other beliefs as can the concepts of truth/reality, religion, belief, humanism and humanity. It has rituals that express beliefs which can be superficially simple and yet which can be interpreted in increasingly deep and mystical ways. Its origins lie in the distant past, with a host of syncretic accruals from other faiths and beliefs over the centuries. Alevism as it exists today provides a fascinating window through which to explore the nature of reality, the universe, what it means to be human and the nature of the 'good life'.

**It is important for teachers to know that there is a debate within Alevism about its relationships to Islam and whether it is a part of Islam or completely distinct from it. Whatever its origins, it is not the purpose of these lessons to enter into this debate but to present to children how Alevism as a distinct religion is practised today.**

### **Notes on using the handbook**

The Handbook provides suggested activities for each lesson along with the PowerPoint slides to accompany them. The PowerPoint slides reproduced in the Handbook are available in separate folders.

The italics in the Teachers' Notes are information that provide background to the lesson activities rather than the actual content of the lesson.

Links on the slides work on the actual slides but not on the copy of the slides in the Handbook.

## Lesson 1

### What is the role of the cemevi?



#### **Learning outcome:**

- *I can describe the different ways the cemevi is used by Alevis*

#### **Exercise 1**

##### **Teachers' notes**

*Activity:* Ask the pupils to name different religious buildings they know of (e.g. church, mosque, gurdwara).

Ask if anyone knows what the cemevi is. *This is pronounced as 'jemevi'.*

#### **Exercise 2**

What makes a place special and important to people?

- Look at these pictures and say what might make them important to some people.

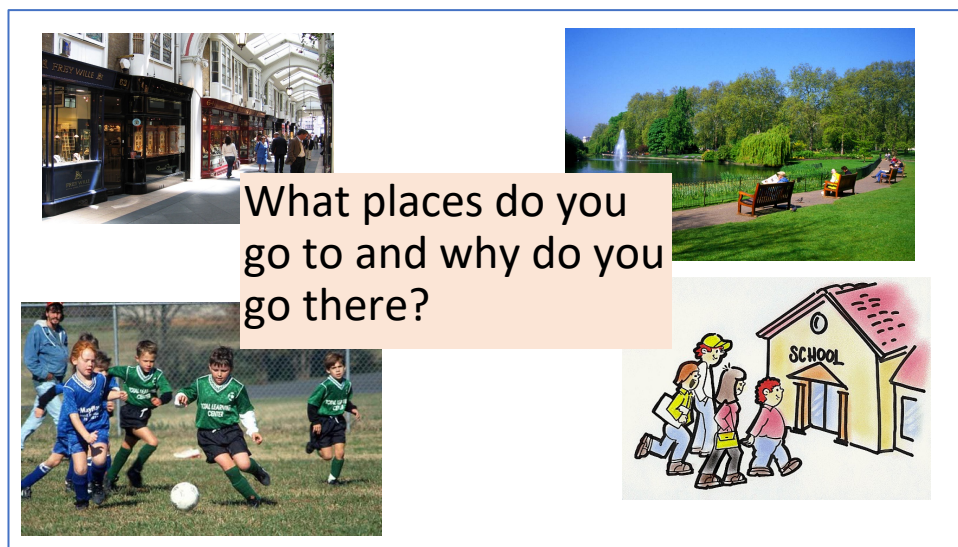


### Teachers' notes

*Activity:* As you share these pictures with the pupils, ask them about the purposes of the places, what is appealing about them, any feelings and experiences, how or what it might get people to think, what features of the place that they notice.

For each one, come back to the question – what might make this place special or important to someone or some people? Is there a difference between a place that is important to one person and more than one? What might make a place or building important to a lot of people? Look at developing the idea of sharing experiences, ideas and feelings, belonging etc.

### Exercise 3



### Teachers' notes

*Activity:* Discuss in groups places children go to, e.g. shops, school, home, swimming pool, football clubs, music clubs, etc. Ask pupils to reflect on the purpose of each place and how the building helps to fulfil that purpose. Again, you can change the images to reflect your local area.

## Exercise 4

Why are these buildings important for Alevi?



### Teachers' notes

*The cemevi on the left is in Turkey and on the right is in London. The former is purpose built; the latter is a converted building.*

*Activity:* Ask the pupils whether it matters if it is purpose built or converted.

What do they think goes on in these buildings?

What makes it a cemevi: The shape of the building? The people who use it? Its purpose?  
(‘Cem’ means meeting, ‘ev’ means house in Turkish)

Is it more important to have a specially designed building?

## Exercise 5

What do you see in a cemevi?  
What do you think is happening?



### Teacher's notes

*Activity:* Explore with the pupils what these pictures show as features of a cemevi. How might they be important to the Alevi community?


What might the big hall be used for? Why are there carpets? Where are the seats? Why are there pictures? Who might they be of? *(not names, just 'important leaders in Alevism' will do!)*

What do they notice? Does it remind them of anything else they know about? *(responses could be worship, learning, circle time, sharing a meal, etc)*

### Exercise 6

## Why do Alevis go to a cemevi?

- Feelings?
- Beliefs?
- Actions?
- Sharing with others?



### Teacher's notes

*Activity:* Help children to recall and reflect on these aspects of what goes on in a cemevi using the headings to help stimulate thinking. This could involve individual written responses, talk-partners and whole class discussion, but personal written work can come before or after oral work e.g. in each case, get pupils to draw a symbol/picture to represent what happens in a cemevi.

Then get the pupils to discuss with a partner the question of why Alevis go to the cemevi, writing a summary in a limited number of words—maybe something like a tweet? Share some with the class.



## Lesson 2

### What does the cemevi show about Alevi beliefs?



#### **Learning outcomes:**

- *I can describe what the cemevi shows about Alevi beliefs*
- *I can describe the roles and responsibilities in the cem*

#### **Exercise 1**

##### **Teachers' notes**

*This will be something to be adapted to the needs and context of the pupils, depending on how much they already know (see KS1) and whether there are Alevi children in the class.*

**Activity:** The purpose is to encourage the children to think about how the cemevi helps the Alevis to live out their religion and way of life. The rituals, the 12 Services and especially the semah express key beliefs. Focus on:

- Hak is in everyone. We need to look for Hak in ourselves and in everyone
- All people are equal
- We should support those who need it
- We should serve and help everyone in the community
- We should all strive to be the best person we can be
- 

This is achieved through the beliefs, teachings and practices of Alevism. The cemevi is where this takes place.

## Exercise 2

### What do you notice about this picture?

The cemevi is the place for Alevis to come together and worship.

This **ceremony** is called **cem**. If possible everyone will sit in a circle facing each other.

- Why do you think they will face each other?
- What do you think this shows about their beliefs about people?



Cemevi in London

### Teacher's notes

Link this slide to the belief that Hak is in everyone and therefore focus on equality and sharing.

*Activity:* Ask the pupils why they think the people sit together and face each other. What do they think it shows about Alevi beliefs about people? Responses could be that facing each other makes them equal and can communicate more easily.

*(A good way to link this to pupils' experience is circle time.)*

## Exercise 3

### What are the main roles in the cem?

- There are 12 Servers (volunteers) who have a duty to perform.
- Each has a role to play in the cem.

**Watch the video to learn about the servers and their roles.**

<https://youtu.be/PkKTpIW5hmA?si=Fe8c45mM6zLMK2qN>

### Teacher's notes

*Activity:* Ask pupils if they remember any of this from KS1.

Discuss how schools could not work if there were no teachers, learning support assistants, pupils, playleaders, head teachers, office staff, site managers, cleaners and parents. Each has a role to play. Each is important.

*There are notes which explain the Twelve Servers which can be found at the end of this unit. Also, there is another video link here: <https://youtu.be/5DAVlgWIZD4?si=ofzporhVS38GzYA8>*

#### **Exercise 4**

**What are your roles and responsibilities?**

- What are your roles and responsibilities?
- What do you do to help other people?
- Do you have a role at home?
- What is your role at school? Do you have tasks to perform?

#### **Teacher's notes**

Discuss with the class their own roles and responsibilities.

#### **Exercise 5**

**Draw a picture of yourself and write about your role/responsibilities.**

## Lesson 3

### What is the meaning of Hak and the importance of serving others?

#### **Learning outcomes:**

- *I can explain the meaning of Hak and discuss the importance of serving others*

#### **Exercise 1**

##### **Teacher's notes**

*Activity:* Ask children how they help others in the school, at home and elsewhere. Why do they do this?

#### **Exercise 2**

##### What does Hak mean?

- Hak means truth.
- For Alevis, we are all special or sacred because we all have Hak in ourselves.
- Do you think everyone is special or sacred? Why?
- If all humans are special/sacred, how should we treat each other?
- Alevis believe that Hak is in nature too.



##### **Teachers' notes**

*Activity:* Encourage your pupils to reflect on what this means.

Ask what help children need in order to get through life and who will provide that help.

Can anyone live through life without the help of others?

Do we have a duty to help ALL people?

Imagine what life would be like if no-one helped others.

What are the implications for the environment?

### Exercise 3

What does 'we are all equal' mean?

Therefore, we should treat each other with respect.



#### Teachers' notes

Activity: Ask pupils what does 'We are all equal' mean. Is this the same as we are all the same?

### Exercise 4

What do you see in this picture?

In the cem ceremony this is shown in many ways.



#### Teacher's notes

*The hand over the heart represents the presence of Hak in the person.*

## Exercise 5

What do you see in these pictures?



### Teacher's notes

*Candles are lit and prayers, hymns, words and poems are performed while the saz is played.*

*Activity:* Explore the symbolism of light (knowledge, good, enlightenment, Hak).

Explain that for Alevis, there is no Holy Book (unlike e.g. Christianity, Islam, Sikhism) but the teachings and beliefs are expressed through the music, poetry and hymns with the saz.

What do you think 'holy book with strings' means?

So how important are the hymns and poems? Why?

Candles are lit and prayers, hymns, words and poems are performed while the saz is played.

## Exercise 6

What do you think is happening in this picture?



### Teacher's notes

*There are two elements to this and you may want to focus carefully on how you explore this with children.*


*The first part is that through the music, poems and movements of the semah, the dancers have deep feelings of becoming one with Hak and each other. They become immersed in the dance in a way like children can become immersed in a story. This helps Alevis experience the equality and unity of all humanity as expressions of Hak. The words of the hymns and poems remind them of how they should live, whilst the music and dance engage them more deeply as a group in the feelings and attitudes needed to become the best they can be.*

**Activity:** How do you become the best you can be? Who can help you to become the best you can be?

## Exercise 7

### Why do Alevis go to a cemevi?

- Feelings?
- Beliefs?
- Actions?
- Sharing with others?



### Teacher's notes

**Activity:** Use this slide to encourage pupils to recap and reflect on what they have learnt.

## Exercise 8

### What have you learnt about Alevism and the cemevi?

What have you found most interesting in your learning about Alevism?

What do you think is the most important belief in Alevism? Why?

What do you think is the most important practice in Alevism? Why?

How would you explain Alevism to someone who doesn't know about it in no more than three sentences?

**Teachers' notes**

*Activity:* This can be done on something like *Post It* notes and gives children an opportunity to discuss what they have learnt over the three lessons.

Then get them to put their ideas together and sum them up into a paragraph to stick into their books.

If you want, you could provide a worksheet with questions to serve as a reminder of the key features of Alevism and the role of the cemevi. Or it can act as a learning journal entry in their books.



## **Teacher's notes: The 12 Services of the cem ceremony**

### **PIR (DEDE /ANA)**

A Pir is a religious leader in the Alevi belief and they lead the cem ceremony. At the start of the cem the Guide invites the Pir into the centre of the cem. The Pir first greets the Guide and everyone at the cem, then asks for consent from everyone in order to lead the cem ceremony.

### **THE GUIDE**

The Guide sits beside the Pir and helps them. The Guide has a vast knowledge of Alevi values. The guide helps to maintain communication between the Pir and everyone in the cem.

### **ZAKIR**

The Zakir plays the bağlama (saz) and sits next to the Pir. On the prompt of the Pir, the Zakir summons the 12 servers to the cem with their words and music.

### **DOOR KEEPER**

The Door Keeper seals the door during the cem ceremony and will not open the door until the end of the cem. The Door Keeper is responsible for the security of the cem.

### **THE OBSERVER**

The Cem Keeper maintains order in the cem. Through the Guide, the Cem Keeper passes on the requests of the people to the Pir. The Cem Keeper helps everyone to perform their services. The Cem Keeper holds a long stick. The stick is used only as a symbol and has a rose attached to the end of it.

### **SWEEPER**

The Sweeper's duty is to symbolically clean and purify the cem area. The Sweeper service can be performed several times during the cem.

### **JUG (İbrik) KEEPER**

The İbrik service represents physical purification. It is usually performed by two people. Hands are washed symbolically.

### **LIGHT KEEPER**

Before the cleaning of the place and the symbolic washing of hands candles are lit. Symbolically there are three candles. They represent the light of Hak.

### **FLEECE KEEPER**

The fleece represents the presence of Hak. Whoever testifies beside the fleece reaffirms their commitment to the values of Alevism. Any resolution of conflict between members of the community is formally witnessed beside the fleece.

#### SEMAH PERFORMERS

Semah is one of the most important parts of the cem with women and men performing it together. Everyone wishing to take part can join the semah.

#### WATER SERVER

Following the semah, the Pir reminds everyone of those treated unjustly, murdered, oppressed and discriminated against across the world. The water (Saka water) is distributed to remember those left without water at Kerbela (the site of the massacre of Huseyin and his family in 680 CE). Everyone takes a sip from the Saka water. If the cem is attended by many people the Saka water will be sprinkled on them.

#### FOOD SERVER

All food contributions received from the people attending will be put together and at the end of the cem will be shared between everyone equally. With this service all services are completed.

The candles will be put out. The fleece is taken away.

The 12 servers will come to the centre one more time and will receive approval from the Pir. The doors will be opened by the door keeper.

## Glossary

**Ana:** literally ‘mother’ in Turkish; religious equivalent to Dede (see below).

**Aşure/Germe:** (Aşure in Turkish and Germe in Zazaki) A special dessert made of cereals, fruits and nuts and shared after the Muharrem fast.

**Bağlama/Saz:** (Turkish) An Alevi musical instrument of religious and cultural significance. As a part of religious ceremonies, it is perceived as a holy musical instrument.

**Can:** (Turkish) Literally ‘soul’; an Alevi individual.

**Cem:** (Turkish) Literally ‘gathering’; it is the fundamental ritual of Alevism.

**Cemevi:** (Turkish) Means cem house, a gathering place for cem rituals.

**Dede/Pir:** Dede, literally ‘grandfather’ in Turkish and Pir in Kurdish and Zazaki; clergy belonging to an ocak and believed to be descended from a sacred lineage. Every Alevi is the follower (talip) of a particular dede/pir.

**Hak:** The Alevi word for God, which means Truth.

**Lokma/Loqme:** (Turkish/Zazaki) Food offered during the ritual provided by the followers. It has a symbolic meaning of sharing.

**Ocak/Ucağ:** (Turkish/Zazaki) Literally ‘hearth’; an extended family claiming to be descended from a holy lineage. Ocaks are Alevi institutions of leadership where religious knowledge is passed down orally through the families responsible for the community's religious and social leadership.

**Semah/Sama:** A spiritual and sacred dance that is traditionally performed as a part of cem gatherings. It is a principal form of Alevi worship and a figurative representation of the relationship between humans and the universe.

**Talip/Talıb:** (Turkish/Zazaki) Follower of an ocak. Every Alevi individual is the talip of a particular ocak.

**Turna:** (Turkish) Crane bird, a prominent figure in Alevi poetry and ritual.

**Xızır:** (Zazaki and Kurdish) One of the main cults of Kizilbash Alevism symbolising the sacred power of nature. As the 'God of hard times', it is believed that he is omnipresent and helps everyone in hardship.

**Yol/Rae:** (Turkish/Zazaki) Spiritual path. It is how Alevis describe their faith.

**Zakir:** (Turkish) The musical conductor at the Alevi cem gathering.

**Ziyaret/Jare:** (Turkish/Zazaki) Sacred places of pilgrimage.