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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTS OF SIR AND MUHABBET IN THE ALEVI-BEKTASHI BELIEF SYSTEM OF THE BINGÖL-KIĞI REGION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF WESTERN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Recai BAZANCİR[1]

ABSTRACT

This study comparatively examines the concepts of *sır* (sacred mystery) and *muhabbet* (ritualized dialogue) within the Alevi-Bektashi faith of the Bingöl–Kığı region, through the lens of Western anthropological theories of ritual, symbolism, and community. Employing a qualitative design, the research is based on in-depth interviews conducted with Seyyid Selçuk Sevin, a religious leader from the Kığı–Karer area. Data were analyzed through a hermeneutic and interpretive approach, with particular attention to themes such as ritual performance, symbolic communication, and collective identity. Findings reveal that sır does not represent knowledge attainable through reason alone but rather a sacred truth disclosed only to those who undergo spiritual transformation and moral refinement. Likewise, muhabbet is not a casual conversation but a ritualized and dialogical practice that emphasizes ethical listening, spiritual maturity, and communal learning. The analysis engages with Turner's concept of liminality, Geertz's interpretive anthropology, and Assmann's theory of cultural memory, thereby situating local religious practices within broader anthropological debates. Furthermore, Alevi notions of muhabbet are compared to contemporary Western community-based rituals such as sharing circles, circle work, and intentional community talks. While these practices share principles of sincerity, attentive silence, and reciprocal witnessing, Alevi practices differ in that they are deeply intertwined with the pursuit of sacred knowledge and metaphysical engagement. In this respect, the study contributes both to the deeper understanding of the Alevi-Bektashi worldview and to a critical reassessment of the applicability and limitations of Western theoretical paradigms.

Keywords: Alevi Bektashi Faith, Sır (Sacred Mystery), Muhabbet (Ritual Dialogue), Hermeneutics, Bingöl-Kığı

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BİNGÖL KİĞI BÖLGESİ ALEVİ-BEKTAŞİ İNANCINDAKİ SIR VE MUHABBET KAVRAMLARININ BATIDAKİ ANTROPOLOJİK GÖRÜŞLER ÖRNEKLEMİNDE KARŞILAŞTIRILMASI

Recai BAZANCİR[1]

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Bingöl–Kiğı bölgesindeki Alevi-Bektaşi inancında yer alan sır ve muhabbet kavramlarını, Batı antropolojisinin ritüel, sembol ve topluluk anlayışları çerçevesinde karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Araştırma nitel bir yöntemle yürütülmüş; Kiğı Kârer yöresinde yaşayan Alevi dedelerinden Seyyid Selçuk Sevin ile gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine görüşmeler temel veri kaynağı olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Veriler, hermenötik ve yorumlayıcı analiz yaklaşımıyla çözümlenmiş, özellikle ritüel performans, simgesel iletişim ve topluluk inşası gibi temalar ön plana çıkarılmıştır. Bulgular, Alevi-Bektaşi inancında "sır" kavramının akılla kavranabilecek bir bilgi değil, ancak bireysel dönüşüm ve manevi olgunluk süreciyle açığa çıkan kutsal bir hakikat alanı olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. "Muhabbet" ise rastgele yapılan bir sohbet değil, etik dinleme, ruhsal olgunluk ve ritüelleşmiş diyalojik paylaşımın hâkim olduğu kolektif bir öğrenme ve topluluk pratiğidir. Çalışma, Turner'ın liminalite yaklaşımı, Geertz'in yorumlayıcı antropolojisi ve Assmann'ın kültürel bellek kuramı ile ilişkilendirilerek değerlendirilmiş; bu sayede yerel inanç pratikleriyle evrensel antropolojik teorilerin kesişim noktaları tartışılmıştır. Ayrıca Alevi muhabbeti, Batı'da son dönemlerde gelişen "sharing circle", "circle work" ve "intentional community talks" gibi topluluk temelli ritüel pratiklerle karşılaştırılmıştır. Bu benzerliklere rağmen Alevi inancındaki sır ve muhabbet, yalnızca psikolojik ya da sosyal bir denge arayışı değil, aynı zamanda kutsal bilgiyle temas etme amacı taşıması bakımından farklılaşmaktadır. Bu yönüyle çalışma, hem Alevi-Bektaşi inanç dünyasının daha derinlemesine anlaşılmasına katkı sağlamakta hem de Batı merkezli antropolojik kuramların sınırlarını eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla yeniden tartışmaya açmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alevi Bektaşi İnancı, Sır, Muhabbet, Hermenötik, Bingöl-Kiğı.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study explores the central concepts of *sır* (mystery, secrecy) and *muhabbet* (spiritual dialogue, intimate communion) within the Alevi-Bektashi belief system of the Bingöl-Kığı region. These notions structure not only the ritual and theological life of the community but also its ways of knowing and transmitting collective experience. While *sır* marks the boundary of the sacred and the transmission of esoteric knowledge to initiates, *muhabbet* functions as a dialogical practice where believers gather to share spiritual insight and reaffirm communal values.

The research investigates these categories through an anthropological and comparative lens, aiming to clarify how they operate as local epistemological systems while resonating with broader theoretical discussions on secrecy, ritual, and symbolic meaning. The main research question guiding this study is: How do the practices of *sır* and *muhabbet* in the Bingöl-Kığı Alevi-Bektashi community embody distinctive epistemological principles that challenge or enrich Western anthropological understandings of knowledge and ritual? Fieldwork was conducted with Seyyid Selçuk Sevin, a *dede* whose oral narratives form the core of the study. These accounts illustrate how *sır* and *muhabbet* are practiced and transmitted within communal life. Methodologically, the study combines ethnographic observation, textual analysis, and hermeneutic interpretation to achieve a multilayered understanding of both local meanings and their anthropological significance.

In theoretical terms, the discussion draws selectively on Western anthropology—not to equate traditions but to highlight shared intuitions about transformation, ritual participation, and symbolic communication. Victor Turner's (1969, p. 94) notion of liminality illuminates how *muhabbet* functions as a transitional space where ordinary distinctions are suspended, fostering communal unity. Likewise, Clifford Geertz's (1973, p. 89) conception of religion as a system of symbols helps interpret *sır* as a boundary between the visible and the invisible. Mary Douglas's (1966, p. 45) reflections on purity and danger further clarify *sır* as an organizing principle that sustains moral order and group cohesion.

These frameworks, when applied carefully, reveal that Alevi-Bektashi concepts are not derivatives of Western theories but independent expressions of similar epistemic concerns. The *sır* sustains ethical secrecy and sacred knowledge, while *muhabbet* embodies dialogical communication and spiritual reciprocity—echoing Marcel Mauss's (1925, p. 67) notion of gift exchange. Such comparisons are heuristic rather than structural; they serve to expand anthropological reflection by foregrounding non-Western systems of knowledge.

Positioning the local (Bingöl-Kığı Alevi-Bektashi practice) in dialogue with the global (anthropological thought) enables this research to contribute to a more plural understanding of epistemology and ritual. The study ultimately argues that the Alevi-Bektashi tradition functions as both a repository of sacred experience and a living anthropological laboratory—preserving alternative ways of knowing that challenge universalist assumptions about religion, knowledge, and community.

2. EPISTEMOLOGICAL LIMITS OF UNIVERSALITY: BRIDGING CONCEPTUAL TRUTHS AND LIVED EXPERIENCES IN WESTERN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

According to Eliade (1959, p. 23), Western religious traditions reveal the epistemological limits of universality by emphasizing divine truths that transcend human comprehension. Doctrines—particularly within Christianity—seek to guide moral and social life, yet their lived interpretations vary widely among believers. Similar tensions appear in Islam and other monotheistic traditions, where universal truth coexists with local diversity. Even within structured systems, a single ethical or social reality remains unattainable, highlighting the gap between abstract universality and lived experience. Özlem (1999, p. 127) clarifies this dilemma: "People try to reach universality in philosophy, science, ethics, and politics... however, claims of universalism lead to polarisation between different thoughts and actions." Thus, universality often functions as an imposition reflecting particular perspectives rather than shared human consensus. Within epistemological debates, truth is commonly defined as correspondence between concept and reality, yet as Özlem (2000, p. 45) notes, such truth is intellectually conceivable but experientially incomplete.

The Enlightenment project epitomized this paradox. Its philosophers envisioned universal morality and knowledge through reason and science, anticipating a global order grounded in freedom and equality. However, these ideals produced totalizing tendencies and ignored cultural and historical plurality. Universalist thought, rooted in positivism, separated the knowing subject from the known object and asserted that rational inquiry could disclose a single, objective reality (Özlem, 1999, p. 65). This model assumed that society and nature existed independently of human interpretation.

Particularist philosophy, by contrast, stresses interpretation, history, and context. Hermeneutic thought rejects the universalist illusion inherited from Cartesian rationalism, maintaining that knowledge always emerges within specific temporal and cultural horizons. In the human and social sciences, the subject–object divide dissolves: individuals exist through relations with others, and knowledge becomes a dialogical act of meaning-making.

Accordingly, all understanding is historically situated and linguistically mediated (Özlem, 1999, pp. 69–71). From a political perspective, particularism challenges universalism's quest for a single model of truth or accuracy. It contends that science cannot produce knowledge detached from human context and that societies cannot be governed solely by rational-universal principles. Truth itself is a historical construct shaped by concrete experiences. Even if universal truth were conceivable, it could not sustain a unified global culture, since culture arises from emotion, volition, and symbolic meaning rather than abstract reason.

Particularism therefore places humanity—not abstract truth—at the centre of knowledge and creation. Human action unites emotional, volitional, and rational dimensions that defy prediction through universal laws. Societies cannot be explained or directed exclusively by rationalist models, for ethical and legal systems vary across communities and resist harmonization into a single norm. Diversity thus represents irreducible plurality rather than deviation from an ideal universal form. Attempts to formulate a "general anthropology" valid for all cultures consequently remain limited.

Language further reinforces this argument. It is not merely a tool of communication but a formative structure shaping cognition and worldview. As Whorf (1956, p. 212) observes, linguistic patterns influence how people perceive and interpret reality, generating distinct cognitive worlds. This linguistic relativity supports the particularist stance that knowledge and culture are contextual, interpretive, and historically grounded rather than universal and fixed.

3. LANGUAGE, TRADITION, AND EPISTEMIC EMBODIMENT IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The Enlightenment epistemology of the West, grounded in subject–object dualism and a mechanistic worldview, defined knowledge as the product of a rational subject processing external input. Philosophers such as Kant formalized this distinction by arguing that intellect and sense cooperate to construct knowledge, a view that privileged abstraction, universality, and detachment of the knower from the known. As Özlem (1999, p. 47) notes, this model established subject-centered knowledge production in the modern social sciences. Taylor (1989) and Foucault (1972, pp. 215–217) similarly observed that this quest for objectivity relied on distancing the observer from the observed.

By contrast, Islamic epistemological traditions—especially those shaped by Sufi metaphysics—present a holistic view of knowledge (*ʿilm*) in which cognition and spirituality are inseparable. Knowledge involves not only rational inquiry but also spiritual purification (*tazkiya*), ethical refinement, and divine illumination (*kashf*) (Al-Ghazālī, 2001, pp. 23–25; Ibn ʿArabī, 1980, pp. 17–19). Thinkers such as Al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī rejected the rigid separation of subject and object, emphasizing instead the unity of knower and known through participatory and transformative experience. This integrative model is reflected in communities influenced by Sufi thought, where transmission occurs through *sohbet* (spiritual dialogue), *zikr* (remembrance of God), and poetic forms such as *ilahi* and *nefes*—didactic hymns central to Alevi-Bektashi gatherings. These practices transform language into an act of remembrance through which metaphysical truths are embodied and preserved across generations (Nasr, 2006, pp. 94–98). Connerton (2010, pp. 72–73) defines such rituals as "embodied memories" that maintain collective identity through performance and participation.

Contrary to the Enlightenment's emphasis on textual abstraction, the Islamic view highlights the embodied nature of knowledge, where cognition, spirituality, and ethics form an inseparable unity. Language is not a neutral communicative tool but a sacred medium carrying divine meaning and reinforcing communal belonging. In Alevi-Bektashi *muhabbet* assemblies, speech functions simultaneously as prayer, teaching, and moral guidance; words are performative and relational rather than descriptive—a way of knowing through presence.

Comparable dynamics can be traced in certain Western pre-Christian and early Christian traditions. Celtic and Germanic belief systems preserved cosmological understanding through ritual and oral expression, while Christian liturgy institutionalized collective worship to sustain faith. These parallels, however, indicate shared intuitions rather than direct equivalence. Similarly, *sohbet*, *zikr*, *ilahi*, and *nefes* in the Alevi-Bektashi tradition function as living practices that integrate faith, knowledge, and ethical conduct (Santos, 2007, p. 12).

Both contexts challenge the abstraction of Enlightenment rationalism by affirming that genuine knowledge must remain grounded in ethical experience and spiritual insight. Through its performative language and participatory rituals, the Alevi-Bektashi tradition articulates a holistic epistemology in which body, word, and spirit form a unified field of knowing.

4. HERMENEUTIC EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE LIMITS OF OBJECTIVITY IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

According to the hermeneutic tradition, the human world—unlike the natural one—cannot be explained through universal laws of causality. While the natural sciences depend on empirical observation and formal models, hermeneutics holds that understanding the human realm requires interpretation rooted in history, language, and ethics. Every act of understanding is therefore partial, not as bias but as recognition that interpretation is conditioned by the interpreter's horizon of meaning. Communication becomes possible only when these horizons meet in dialogue. Gadamer (2004, pp. 278–281) defines understanding as a "fusion of horizons" rather than the decoding of neutral facts. Universal claims to objectivity in the human sciences often conceal ideological assumptions, turning "objectivity" into a means of epistemic control.

In this respect, Alevi-Bektashi epistemology resonates with the hermeneutic critique of positivism. It privileges lived experience, communal memory, and symbolic expression over abstraction. Within *muhabbet* assemblies, knowledge is not extracted but shared; it arises through dialogue, ritual performance, and ethical participation. Truth becomes relational—experienced through sincerity and presence rather than detached observation. Thus, Alevi-Bektashi knowing represents an interpretive epistemology where meaning unfolds through conversation and collective remembrance. This approach also reveals the limitations of institutional and positivist methods in studying culture. Ethnography confined to empirical models risks reducing lived experience to data. Gadamer (2004, pp. 278–281) warns that anthropology detached from its own historicity becomes self-defeating, replacing interpretation with measurement. What is required, therefore, is a reflexive and dialogical anthropology—one that engages traditions like Alevi-Bektashism as interlocutors, not objects of analysis.

From a folkloristic standpoint, this hermeneutic awareness resists what Assmann (2011, p. 124) terms the "functionalization of cultural memory," in which sacred or epic materials are simplified for didactic aims. When oral or ritual traditions are institutionalized—through textbooks or animations—their performative ambiguity often fades. Ong (2007, p. 160) emphasizes that the oral epic's mnemonic force lies in its live performance, while Bauman (1986, p. 18) reminds us that oral artistry depends on the dynamic interaction among performer, audience, and context.

These concerns are vital for contemporary heritage representation, where digital and educational media favor easily classifiable, "safe" narratives. Goody (1987, p. 93) warns that when performance becomes one-way transmission, interpretive depth and ethical nuance are lost. The hermeneutic approach therefore insists that understanding demands participation, dialogue, and empathy—qualities that Alevi-Bektashi *muhabbet* and *sır* practices continue to sustain as living forms of interpretive and spiritual knowledge.

5. REASSESSING EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN ALEVI-BEKTASHI CULTURE: UNIVERSALISM, OBJECTIVITY, AND THE SUBJECT-OBJECT DIVIDE

Universalism, objectivity, and the subject–object distinction constitute core epistemological concepts shaped by positivist and hermeneutic traditions (Gadamer, 2004). Positivism stresses a strict division between subject and object, privileging empirical verification and context-independent knowledge (Comte, 1896, vol. 1, pp. 78–79). Hermeneutics, conversely, emphasises interpretation and historical situatedness, arguing that knowledge is always bound to culture, language, and perspective (Ricoeur, 1981, pp. 90–94).

Within Alevi-Bektashi culture, these categories acquire distinct meanings. The tradition does not separate knower and known but envisions divine, human, and natural realms as interconnected manifestations of one existence. Knowledge is a lived, spiritually mediated relation rather than detached representation. Rituals such as *cem*, *semah*, and the recitation of *nefes* embody knowing through collective participation. Here, cognition, emotion, and devotion merge, reflecting a holistic epistemology closer to hermeneutic and phenomenological thought than to positivist objectivism (Dressler, 2013, pp. 47–49).

In the Bingöl-Kığı context, it is essential to distinguish between Alevism and Bektashism. Although sharing symbolic frameworks, Alevism in this region remains rooted in oral traditions, the *dede–ocak* institution, and communal practices such as *cem* and *muhabbet*, whereas Bektashism evolved as a more institutionalised Sufi order centred on Hacı Bektash Veli. Thus, the epistemological categories discussed—especially *sır* and *muhabbet*—emerge primarily from Alevi oral heritage, though resonant with broader Bektashi interpretations. As Wilson (2015, pp. 75–78) notes, the twentieth-century notion of a unified "Alevi-Bektashi" identity must be read alongside local distinctions.

According to Ahmet Yaşar Ocak (1996, pp. 112–117), Alevi-Bektashi epistemology transcends modern dualisms by grounding knowledge in lived experience, communal dialogue, and mystical introspection. Knowing involves ethical transformation and spiritual growth rather than abstract theorisation. Practices such as the *cem*, *nefes*, and the oral instruction of *dede* figures cultivate moral consciousness and collective memory, positioning knowledge

as a mode of being. Thus, this tradition challenges Western paradigms by privileging embodied wisdom and ethical sincerity over objectivist neutrality. Yıldırım (2012, pp. 178–201) likewise observes that Alevi-Bektashi truth claims are dynamic and situated, emerging from lived and communal experience rather than universal propositions. Their validity depends on ethical disposition, spiritual maturity, and communal participation rather than institutional endorsement. In this framework, knowledge circulates through *cem* rituals, *nefes* recitations, and the oral guidance of *dedes*, functioning as both memory and moral formation (Connerton, 2010, pp. 42–43). Knowledge thus remains inseparable from the ethical and emotional frameworks sustaining collective identity.

This interpretive model aligns closely with hermeneutic perspectives that reject detached objectivity (Gadamer, 2004, p. 284). In Alevi-Bektashi thought, knowing entails personal transformation and communal responsibility. The sayings of *dede* figures and the symbolic language of *cem* rituals illustrate how meaning is co-constructed through participatory and performative practice (Yıldırım, 2012, pp. 189–190). Knowledge here is less about abstraction and more about what can be called an *epistemology of presence*.

Table 1.
Comparison of Positivist, Hermeneutic, and Alevi-Bektashi Epistemologies

Aspect	**Positivist**	**Hermeneutic**	**Alevi-Bektashi**
Subject-Object	Clear split	Context-based fusion	Ontological unity
Knowledge Source	Empirical, measurable	Textual, historical	Ritual, oral, spiritual
Community Role	Minimal	Important for meaning	Central and co-creative
Transmission	Formal, written	Dialogical, interpretive	Oral, symbolic, performative
Objectivity	Neutral detachment	Contextual interpretation	Ethical, intersubjective
Universality	Context-free, general laws	Historically informed	Spiritually and culturally grounded

Reference: Adapted and synthesized by the author based on comparative epistemological frameworks.

Furthermore, positivist universalism—defined by context-free claims—is challenged by the culturally embedded and esoteric dimensions of Alevi-Bektashi epistemology (Dressler, 2013, p. 54). Internalising ritual and symbolic meaning reveals a distinct interpretative mode of knowledge production (Ocak, 1996, p. 120). Yıldırım (2012, p. 183) redefines objectivity not as detachment but as intersubjective coherence and ethical sincerity within the community. Truth becomes "objective" when it fosters trust, moral alignment, and spiritual resonance. This approach reframes objectivity as a relational and ethical phenomenon, harmonising with post-positivist and communitarian epistemologies that view knowledge as socially situated and value-laden. Sincerity and responsibility thus become criteria for validating knowledge.

Building on Ricoeur's (1981, pp. 96–111) insight that all interpretation is situated and mediated, Alevi-Bektashi epistemology enriches global epistemological discourse by validating culturally embedded ways of knowing. It broadens understanding beyond positivist universalism, asserting that knowledge is not value-free but always grounded in moral and spiritual participation.

6. BETWEEN PARTICULARISM AND UNIVERSALISM: THE CONCEPTS OF 'SIR' AND 'MUHABBET' IN ANATOLIAN ALEVISM AND THEIR REFLECTIONS IN WESTERN CULTURAL RITUALS

Philosophical debates on truth often oscillate between universalism and particularism. Western philosophy has traditionally sought universal explanations of existence, nature, and society, while counter-currents such as romanticism and hermeneutics have emphasized history, individuality, and context. From the nineteenth century onward, interpretive approaches began rejecting the abstract generalizations of universalism. Doğan Özlem (1999) argues that universality, though intellectually conceivable, never fully corresponds to lived experience. Human understanding can grasp general principles, yet concrete reality remains partial and situated.

Bauman (1991, p. 33) notes that modernity attempted to resolve this gap by imposing rational classifications on complex realities, often overlooking experiential diversity. However, across cultures, shared human conditions—rather than universal theories—give rise to similar ritual and symbolic forms. Anthropological studies confirm that parallels between societies emerge from common existential needs, not from imposed frameworks. Within this context, Anatolian Alevism offers profound insight into the tension between universality and particularity through its core notions of sır (mystery, inner truth) and muhabbet (spiritual communion, heartfelt dialogue).

Sır embodies esoteric knowledge revealed through lived experience, moral maturity, and initiation rather than abstract reasoning. *Muhabbet* signifies dialogical exchange and emotional participation that sustain communal harmony. Together, they illustrate that genuine understanding arises from relational and embodied experience.

These concepts not only enrich the anthropological study of spirituality but also challenge the assumption that knowledge must conform to universal rational categories.

Table 2.
Comparative Table: Anatolian Alevi-Bektashi Culture and Similar Western Traditions

Anatolian Alevi-Bektashi Culture	**Similar Traditions in the West**
Esoteric Knowledge	Gnosis (Gnosticism), Hermetic wisdom
Muhabbet Circle (Spiritual Fellowship Gathering)	Quaker silent meetings, storytelling in folk festivals
Cem Ceremony (Alevi-Bektashi Ritual Gathering)	Catholic mass, Druidic ceremonies
Spiritual Guidance of the Dede/Pir	Monastic mentor, shaman or mystical guide[1]
Communion of Hearts (Spiritual Unity)	Sacred circle spirit, spiritual communities[2]
Spiritual Brotherhood	Quaker companionship, Benedictine paired retreat practices[3]

Reference: Adapted and synthesized by the author based on comparative epistemological frameworks.

Parallels appear in Western mystical and esoteric traditions such as Hermeticism, Freemasonry, and early Christian spiritual practices, all centred on secrecy, initiation, and progressive revelation. In Freemasonry, moral and cosmological meanings are disclosed through ritual degrees, each unveiling a new layer of symbolic truth. Likewise, Renaissance Hermeticism regarded alchemical and metaphysical knowledge as accessible only to initiates through coded rites and oaths (Yates, 1964, pp. 283–310). Eliade (1978, pp. 57–80) also notes that Western esoteric traditions conceive truth as unfolding through secrecy and ritual—an approach that resonates with, but is not equivalent to, the Alevi notion of *sır*.

The ethos of *muhabbet* similarly echoes in Western rituals such as Christian communion or the *agape* meal, where shared participation expresses spiritual unity and love. Both the Alevi *cem* and the *agape* meal embody communal harmony through emotional and performative engagement. Yet, while Western practices often stem from individual devotion, *muhabbet* is inherited and collective, grounded in moral lineage and shared identity.

These analogies should be read as heuristic parallels rather than doctrinal comparisons. They reveal how diverse traditions express similar existential intuitions—secrecy, communion, and transformation—within distinct historical and theological frames. Anatolian Alevism, through *sır* and *muhabbet*, offers a lived epistemology in which knowledge arises from ethical relation and shared spiritual presence, providing an embodied alternative to abstract universalism.

7. UNIVERSAL ECHOES OF ESOTERIC KNOWLEDGE AND SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ANATOLIAN ALEVI-BEKTASHI TRADITIONS AND WESTERN FOLK TRADITIONS

The Alevi-Bektashi tradition stands among Anatolia's most spiritually nuanced and culturally integrated belief systems. Its core principles transcend formal dogma, embodying a lived philosophy grounded in ethical maturity, spiritual embodiment, and communal harmony. Within this worldview, *sır* (esoteric knowledge) and *muhabbet* (spiritual fellowship) function not as abstract concepts but as guiding orientations shaping both personal and collective consciousness.

Sır signifies sacred knowledge that cannot be attained through rational inquiry alone. It demands moral integrity and inner readiness, emerging through spiritual purification and ethical alignment. As Melikoff (1998, p. 94) observes, the preservation of such wisdom depends less on secrecy than on the spiritual maturity of its recipients. Within *cem* and *muhabbet* gatherings—sustained by the hereditary *ocak* structure and the bond of *musahiplik*—esoteric knowledge becomes a shared ethical practice transmitted through dialogue and ritual.

Muhabbet, far beyond its literal sense of conversation, represents an elevated mode of spiritual communion where participants cultivate sincerity, remembrance, and unity. Expressed through *nefes* recitations, poetry, and music, it transforms language into devotion and collective presence. These gatherings embody a performative sacredness in which rhythm and emotion sustain faith and social cohesion.

[1] "Monastic mentor" originates in the Western-Christian context, "shaman" in Central Asian folk belief, and "mystical guide" in Eastern-Islamic Sufi thought, equivalent to the murshid or shaykh.

[2] The Western idea of a "sacred circle" parallels the Alevi cem as a communal space of ritual equality and shared spirituality. Both foster collective identity through music, prayer, and dialogue, though Alevism remains an inherited faith tradition rather than a voluntary community (Ocak, 1996, p. 112; Shankland, 2003, p. 87).

[3] While Quaker companionship and Benedictine retreats evoke shared spiritual experience, they differ from the Sufi izdiva practice, which serves as a pedagogical and initiatory stage within the murshid–murid framework (Chittick, 2000, p. 119).

Comparable intuitions appear in Western traditions such as Quaker silent meetings or Indigenous ceremonial circles, where truth emerges relationally rather than dogmatically. Such parallels illustrate not historical equivalence but shared human efforts toward inner transformation and communal harmony. The Alevi-Bektashi synthesis of ethical embodiment, dialogue, and collective knowledge thus reveals a universal dimension of religiosity—the pursuit of truth through shared experience—while preserving its distinct Anatolian epistemology within the plural anthropology of the sacred.

7.1. The Anatolian Alevi-Bektashi Context: Sır and Muhabbet as Core Constructs

In Alevi-Bektashi philosophy, the concept of sır occupies a central place as an expression of inner truth that resists reduction to intellectual abstraction or formal theology. Unlike doctrinal knowledge acquired through education, sır signifies a lived and unveiled reality—accessible only to those who achieve moral and spiritual refinement in alignment with divine truth. This refinement extends beyond ethical conduct, encompassing humility, patience, loyalty, and sincerity as enduring inner dispositions (Melikoff, 1998).

The pursuit of sır is not an individual endeavour but a relational process transmitted through a spiritual pedagogy sustained by generations. Guidance is offered by a pir or dede whose authority derives not from institutional hierarchy but from embodied wisdom and communal trust. The pir functions both as a conveyor of hidden knowledge and as a mirror through which the seeker perceives their own potential for transformation. This pedagogy depends less on textual mastery than on moral resonance and the subtle transmission of hâl—a spiritual state that is experienced rather than taught (Lossky, 1976).

While muhabbet etymologically denotes “love” or “conversation” (Devellioğlu, 2004, pp. 47, 664), within Alevi-Bektashi culture it expresses a sacred mode of openness and companionship. Rituals such as the cem, nefes recitations, storytelling, and poetry become communal vessels through which sacred meaning flows. Each participant acts as a co-creator of this atmosphere, dissolving hierarchical boundaries in favor of shared sincerity and presence (Melikoff, 1998, p. 97). Such gatherings foster a form of “spiritual democracy,” where truth emerges through collective resonance rather than individual dominance. As confirmed in interviews with Seyyid Selçuk Sevin, participants value muhabbet not for personal authority but for the shared rhythm of ethical presence and mutual witnessing. The purpose is not to debate metaphysical truths but to embody them—living what is known and knowing what is lived.

Together, sır and muhabbet articulate an epistemology grounded in ethical transformation and communal experience. They challenge intellectualist models of knowledge by affirming that sacred truth is inseparable from embodiment, ethics, and community—something experienced, lived, and shared rather than abstractly possessed.

7.2. Parallels in Western Folk and Mystical Traditions: Gnosticism and the Hidden Knowledge Paradigm (Sır)

Within Western spirituality, certain historical currents—most notably Gnosticism—illustrate analogous intuitions concerning hidden or esoteric knowledge. The term gnosis, derived from Greek, denotes salvific insight: an awakening that transcends rational comprehension and doctrinal instruction (Jonas, 2001, p. 43). Gnosticism, while distinct in theology and cosmology, shares with Alevi-Bektashi thought an emphasis on inner awakening rather than mere belief, and on transformation rather than adherence to external dogma.

Both frameworks locate truth not in abstract propositions but in the experiential process of unveiling—a journey requiring moral discipline, inner purification, and ethical alignment. In Gnostic circles, this process unfolded within symbolic rituals designed to safeguard spiritual knowledge, a feature reminiscent of the Alevi principle that sır should be shared only within trustworthy spiritual communities under the guidance of a pir or dede.

Yet it is essential to note that such parallels remain structural and anthropological rather than theological. Whereas Gnostic esotericism evolved within a dualistic cosmology separating spirit and matter, Alevi-Bektashi spirituality sustains a unitive vision in which divine truth permeates creation. The resemblance, therefore, lies not in identical beliefs but in shared epistemic orientation—the conviction that true knowledge transforms the knower. Both perspectives challenge modern assumptions that equate truth with empirical verification, instead proposing a relational and ethical epistemology in which knowing and being are inseparable.

In this comparative light, the Alevi-Bektashi conception of sır stands as a culturally grounded articulation of an enduring human pattern: the pursuit of sacred knowledge through self-transformation and moral sincerity. This recognition preserves the distinctiveness of Alevi tradition while situating it within a broader anthropology of spiritual experience—one that values ethical readiness and communal trust as the genuine foundations of knowing the divine.

7.3. Quaker Silent Worship and Spiritual Equality

The Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, emerged in seventeenth-century England as a radical alternative to established Christianity. Rejecting hierarchy and dogma, Quakerism embraced a democratic and experiential spirituality centered on the Inner Light—the divine spark within each person, independent of clerical mediation. This belief fostered an egalitarian form of worship in which silence became the vessel for divine presence.

In Quaker meetings, participants sit together in silence, awaiting an inward movement of the Spirit. There are no clergy, sermons, or liturgies; truth arises through collective stillness and authentic speech inspired from within (Dandelion, 2008, p. 67). This participatory and non-authoritarian structure mirrors, in function if not in form, the muhabbet gatherings of the Alevi-Bektashi tradition. In both contexts, spiritual authority stems not from office but from moral integrity and the capacity for deep listening. Yet while Quaker worship is entirely non-hierarchical, muhabbet unfolds within ritual order (erkân) under the moral guidance of the dede.

This horizontal and dialogical structure parallels the *muhabbet* gatherings in the Alevi- Bektashi tradition. Just as the Quaker meeting does not revolve around a single preacher or institutional hierarchy, *muhabbet* does not function through rigid dogma or external control but unfolds through mutual respect, shared wisdom, and emotional sincerity. However, unlike the egalitarian framework of Quakerism, the Alevi- Bektashi path acknowledges a hereditary spiritual authority embodied in the *dede*- a figure whose legitimacy derives from *ocak* (lineage) descent. Within this framework, the *dede* serves as both an inherited and recognized authority and as a moral and spiritual guide who exercises leadership through humility, ethical example, and dialogical engagement rather than authoritarian imposition. The emphasis thus lies in communal discernment supported by hereditary legitimacy, where shared silence and mutual reflection constitute a sacred space of spiritual co-authorship, allowing each voice to carry potential insight and each silence to hold sacred depth.

While parallels may be drawn between the participatory ethos of Quaker meetings and the dialogical atmosphere of *muhabbet* gatherings, these similarities should not be interpreted as suggesting a structural or theological equivalence. Rather, such comparisons serve to illuminate how distinct traditions employ dialogical and communal practices to cultivate sincerity, presence, and ethical awareness. In this respect, the Alevi–Bektashi *meydan* represents a culturally specific and spiritually grounded context where sacred knowledge is shared through lineage-based authority, ritual embodiment, and collective resonance. Thus, the act of gathering- whether in a Quaker meeting house or an Alevi *meydan*- can be viewed as an analogous form of spiritual methodology that privileges listening, sincerity, and mutual presence, while remaining rooted in markedly different historical and theological foundations.

7.3.1. Monastic Mysticism and Hesychasm

Eastern Orthodox Christianity's hesychasm represents one of the most disciplined and introspective forms of Christian mysticism. Rooted in the Desert Fathers and formalized on Mount Athos, it centers on cultivating inner stillness (hesychia) as the path to divine communion. Practitioners repeat the Jesus Prayer—"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"—as a meditative act uniting heart, mind, and breath into contemplative focus. The goal is theosis: an experiential union with the Divine achieved through silence, bodily stillness, and ethical purification (Lossky, 1976, p. 123).

This emphasis on transformative quietude resonates deeply with the Alevi-Bektashi understanding of spiritual refinement. In both traditions, silence signifies fullness of presence rather than absence of speech. The Alevi concept of hal, a spiritual state transmitted through embodied example rather than verbal teaching, parallels the hesychast practice of learning through presence and reflection. Similarly, Western Catholic monasticism—particularly in the Benedictine and Trappist traditions—cultivates silence as a form of listening to self, community, and the divine. The ora et labora (pray and work) ethos integrates contemplation with action, echoing the Alevi emphasis on ethics and communal service.

Both traditions thus reject purely intellectual religiosity, advocating a holistic pedagogy that unites inner solitude with collective life. The elder monk and the Alevi dede serve analogous pedagogical roles: exemplars of knowledge transmitted through silence, gesture, and moral integrity rather than argument.

The reference to hesychasm and monastic contemplation is not an equation but a phenomenological analogy. Each embodies the transformative potential of inward experience within distinct theological and historical contexts. In the Alevi-Bektashi view, hal signifies not withdrawal but ethical participation in ritual and community, where remembrance and guidance coexist. The comparison thus functions as an interpretive lens—highlighting shared intuitions of spiritual transformation while preserving the unique doctrinal and social fabric of Alevi-Bektashi tradition.

7.3.2. Indigenous American Ceremonial Circles

Among Native American communities—particularly within the Lakota, Navajo, and other Plains and Southwestern nations—ceremonial practices such as the sacred circle and the inipi (sweat lodge) hold a central

place in communal spiritual life. These are not informal gatherings but sacred frameworks expressing a cosmology in which all beings—human, animal, elemental, and spiritual—share one web of existence. The sacred circle, often formed by sitting or standing together, symbolizes equality, reciprocity, and cyclical continuity. With no head or privileged position, it embodies balance between self, community, and cosmos (Deloria, 2006, p. 78).

The inipi ceremony likewise serves as a rite of purification and rebirth. Within its enclosed darkness, heated stones produce transformative heat while participants pray, chant, and reflect under the guidance of a spiritual elder or shaman. The ritual cultivates humility, introspection, and shared awareness, dissolving boundaries between self and other to renew communal harmony (Deloria, 2006, pp. 78–79). Viewed anthropologically, these ceremonial circles resonate with the Alevi-Bektashi muhabbet. Both practices center on sincerity, respect, and emotional openness as foundations of sacred gathering. Yet while muhabbet emerges from a lineage-bound ritual order, Indigenous ceremonies are grounded in oral cosmologies emphasizing the unity of nature, spirit, and community. The comparison does not imply equivalence but reveals parallel intuitions—how human communities transform participation into spiritual knowledge.

In both traditions, truth unfolds not as fixed doctrine but as a relational event shaped by rhythm, narrative, and silence. Knowledge is embodied and performative, arising through shared experience rather than abstraction. The dede in Alevi practice and the Indigenous elder both act as ethical exemplars who hold space for communal insight.

Though separated by geography and theology, both systems converge in viewing knowledge as relational, ethical, and participatory. Muhabbet and Indigenous ceremonial circles embody an ethics of presence—where healing and wisdom emerge through collective attunement, emotional resonance, and mutual witnessing. The Alevi-Bektashi tradition thus articulates a distinctive relational spirituality that finds cross-cultural echoes without relinquishing its unique theological and historical identity.

7.3.3. Theological and Communal Foundations of Alevism and Bektashism (Güruh-u Naci and the Alevi Secret)

Ethnographic findings and field interviews align closely with Shankland's (2003, p. 142) observation that muhabbet constitutes one of the most vital moral and social institutions of Alevi life. Beyond its ritual dimension, it reinforces equality, solidarity, and collective participation. Testimonies from Seyyid Selçuk Sevin confirm that muhabbet gatherings serve as living arenas where ethical values are practiced, oral culture is renewed, and communal belonging is affirmed across generations. Within this framework, the concept of Güruh-u Naci—"the chosen community"—is intimately connected to the safeguarding of the Alevi sırrı (Alevi secret). Alevism defines itself as a yol (path), a spiritual and ethical lineage sustained through devotion and conduct. The "chosen community" reflects not superiority but responsibility—the duty to preserve and transmit this sacred path across generations (Önder, 2014, pp. 260–261).

The Alevi sırrı represents a traditional practice of protecting religious and cultural knowledge from external distortion. In Kızılbaş Alevism, secrecy serves not isolation but cultural resilience, sustaining trust and internal cohesion. Sacred knowledge is shared only within moral boundaries and under the guidance of spiritual leaders (Önder, 2014, pp. 261–263). This guarded transmission functions as an epistemological strategy ensuring authenticity and ethical continuity within the yol.

Theologically, Alevism and Bektashism share symbolic elements yet differ in structure and emphasis. Bektashism developed as a formal Sufi order with codified stages of initiation, whereas Alevism evolved as a communal identity rooted in descent from Ali and the Ehl-i Beyt. Alevi cosmology articulates a triadic hierarchy—ulûhiyet (divinity), nübüvvet (prophethood), and velayet (spiritual guardianship)—corresponding to Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, and Ali. This framework highlights velayet as the living transmission of divine truth, linking believers to the Ehl-i Beyt while distinguishing Alevism from Shiite imamate theology. Although Kızılbaş Alevism and Bektaşilik influenced one another, their trajectories diverged through differing political and social contexts. The unifying moral core lies in the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli, whose inclusive and rational interpretation of Islam shaped the Alevi concept of Hakk'a ibadet—worship as lived ethics. Hacıbektaş thus endures as both spiritual and symbolic center, embodying the union of philosophy and communal life.

At the heart of Alevi belief lies a set of moral principles and ritual practices collectively called erkân, regulating ethical conduct and social balance. Each stage of erkân operates as moral pedagogy, cultivating discipline and communal awareness. Through these traditions, Alevism has persisted as a cohesive and self-regulating moral community within the Anatolian cultural landscape.

Today, this transmission continues primarily through oral channels led by dedeler—spiritual guides who function as ethical exemplars and custodians of memory. Their authority stems from virtue and lineage rather than clerical rank. Through them, Alevism sustains a living pedagogy in which knowledge is embodied, witnessed, and remembered rather than merely taught.

Table 3.
Comparative Analysis: Functional and Symbolic Commonalities

Alevi-Bektashi Tradition	Western Analogues
Esoteric truth	Gnosis, Hermetic teachings (Jonas, 2001, p. 54)
Spiritual gathering	Quaker meetings, sacred circles, folk storytelling rituals (Dandelion, 2008, p. 24; Deloria, 2006, p. 112)
Cem rituals	Monastic liturgies, Druidic rites, contemplative silence (Lossky, 1976, p. 12)
Guidance	Spiritual mentors, shamans, monastic superiors
Unity of hearts	Sacred community, circle of trust, intentional communities
Spiritual brotherhood	Quaker companionship, monastic pairings

Reference: Adapted and synthesized by the author based on comparative epistemological frameworks.

These parallels are not intended to establish equivalence or direct historical connection but to illustrate shared anthropological intuitions concerning how human communities preserve sacred knowledge and cultivate ethical solidarity. The *sır–muhabbet* paradigm thus emerges primarily as an Anatolian epistemology—rooted in oral transmission, ethical maturity, and spiritual embodiment—while offering a reflective mirror through which cross-cultural commonalities in spiritual practice can be understood.

In this light, the Alevi-Bektashi worldview demonstrates that the safeguarding of sacred knowledge and the creation of communal intimacy through ritual, silence, and narrative are universal human responses to the search for meaning. Yet, their expression in Alevism is singular—anchored in lineage, moral discipline, and participatory spirituality. Far from being a derivative of Western mysticism, it represents a living local epistemology that dialogues with, rather than imitates, other spiritual frameworks.

8. INTERVIEW WITH SEYYID SELÇUK SEVIN: INTERPRETING SIR AND MUHABBET IN THE ALEVI-BEKTASHI TRADITION

Seyyid Selçuk Sevin is a hereditary dede (spiritual leader) affiliated with the Baba Mansur Kur Hüseyin ocak in the Bingöl–Kiğı region. He occupies a unique position within his community as both a transmitter of ritual knowledge and a bridge between traditional Alevi epistemology and modern scholarship. Having received spiritual training alongside formal education, Sevin articulates the concepts of sır (esoteric knowledge) and muhabbet (spiritual fellowship) in a manner that unites oral heritage with contemporary interpretive awareness. The fieldwork conducted with him offered crucial insights into how these categories are lived, remembered, and transmitted within the dynamics of present-day Alevi practice.

According to Sevin, muhabbet is far more than casual conversation; it constitutes a sacred and communal space where ethics, memory, and spiritual maturity are continuously enacted. It is an intentional and emotionally charged environment in which sincerity, humility, and respect form the basis of human connection. Within this framework, muhabbet operates as a "spiritual school" that renews social bonds, sustains moral integrity, and enables the intergenerational transmission of sacred knowledge. Through music, poetry, storytelling, and dialogical exchange, participants not only recall collective memory but also embody the ethical and spiritual principles that define the Alevi path (yol). The ethnographic account below draws upon oral narratives shared by Seyyid Sevin during fieldwork in January 2025. His reflections provide an authentic perspective on the erkân (ritual order) and on the embodied pedagogies through which Alevi identity is maintained. The following section paraphrases his statements rather than quoting them verbatim, in order to preserve the conversational and fluid rhythm of muhabbet while maintaining analytical clarity.

8.1. Muhabbet as a Method of Knowledge Transmission

The data presented here derive from an extended series of field conversations with Seyyid Selçuk Sevin (*Baba Mansur Kur Hüseyin Ocağı*, Bingöl/Kiğı/Kârer; interview date: 15.01.2025). Known both as a spiritual guide and a community educator, Sevin situates *muhabbet* not merely as a cultural form but as an epistemic practice—a living methodology through which sacred knowledge is generated, verified, and shared.

The process he describes transcends the conventional structure of interviews or formal teaching. In *muhabbet*, the act of learning occurs through presence rather than explanation, through resonance rather than instruction. Knowledge is not extracted but experienced; it circulates in the emotional and spiritual atmosphere shaped by sincerity (*ihlas*), humility (*tevazu*), and shared remembrance (*zikr-i cem*).

This relational dynamic reaffirms one of the central insights of Alevi-Bektashi epistemology: truth is not an abstract object to be possessed, but a state of ethical and spiritual attunement achieved collectively. The *muhabbet* thus becomes both pedagogical and performative—a living enactment of knowledge where narrative, emotion, and ritual are inseparable. Within such a framework, knowing is inseparable from being; understanding arises through participation rather than observation. Sevin's dual background—rooted in both the lineage of the *ocak* and the discourse of academic education—enables him to articulate this indigenous mode of knowing as compatible with, yet distinct from, scholarly epistemologies. For him, *muhabbet* embodies a dialogical form of inquiry that resists hierarchy and formalization, situating truth in the ethical relation between participants rather than in abstract theory.

By framing *muhabbet* as a "method of knowledge transmission," Sevin implicitly challenges modern epistemological hierarchies that privilege text over oral exchange, or rational analysis over embodied understanding. His testimony demonstrates that within Alevi tradition, sacred knowledge (*sır*) is preserved not through concealment alone but through moral discipline and relational practice. It is through such gatherings that ethical life, communal identity, and spiritual continuity are continually renewed.

Ultimately, this ethnographic encounter illuminates the deep coherence between *sır* and *muhabbet*: both operate as ethical-spiritual mechanisms that structure how knowledge is experienced, shared, and legitimized in Alevi-Bektashi life. The *muhabbet* is thus not only a cultural heritage but an enduring epistemological model—one that foregrounds listening, empathy, and moral presence as pathways to understanding.

8.2. The Ethical and Spiritual Preconditions of Accessing Sır

During the field interview, I asked Seyyid Selçuk Sevin how the notion of *sır* could be explained to an external researcher—how one might define the meaning of *Hz. Ali* or the essence of Alevism through academic categories. Sevin responded with a saying attributed to Ali: *"There is no correct answer to a false question."* According to him, such a direct question is inherently invalid, because the one who poses it must first undergo a moral and spiritual preparation in accordance with Alevi principles. The person who wishes to understand *sır* must not demand explanation but cultivate readiness. One must first embark upon a process of inner purification and self-inquiry, asking whether they themselves bear a reflection of this sacred mystery as part of their own being.

Sevin emphasized that the true possessor of *sır* is God alone. If a person becomes spiritually mature enough to receive this knowledge, God may reveal it through an intermediary—a *dede*, a *dervish*, or even an unexpected entity within creation. Those who serve as intermediaries are not owners of the *sır*; they are instruments through which divine wisdom momentarily manifests, only when the seeker has attained the necessary moral and spiritual readiness (Oral Source: Selçuk Sevin, *Baba Mansur Kur Hüseyin Ocağı Dedesi–Pir Ocağı*, Interview date: 15.01.2025, Bingöl/Kiğı/Kârer).

Interpreting Sevin's perspective, it becomes clear that *sır* in the Alevi-Bektashi tradition is not simply hidden information or esoteric doctrine. It is an existential truth inseparable from the seeker's inner state, ethical conduct, and relationship with the Divine. Unlike modern conceptions of knowledge that rely on rational transfer or textual codification, *sır* is accessible only through ethical transformation and inner illumination. Its revelation depends less on intellectual effort than on the spiritual and moral maturity of the individual.

In this sense, the emphasis of the *sır* tradition lies not on *what* is known but on *who* the knower becomes. The path to *sır* requires the purification of intention, humility before the Divine, and sincere questioning of one's own being. This orientation reflects the central Alevi principle of *kendini bilmek*—the pursuit of self-knowledge as the gateway to divine truth. Only through turning inward can the external world and its mysteries acquire meaning.

Therefore, *sır* cannot be taught, demanded, or grasped through intellectual striving. It may only be disclosed under spiritual conditions ordained by God, through the mediation of those morally and spiritually prepared to receive and convey it. The *dede* or *dervish* who articulates *sır* does not claim authority over it but recognizes themselves as a servant of divine truth. In Sevin's words, the *sır* does not belong to human beings; it belongs to God, who bestows it at the moment of moral readiness.

This understanding clarifies why direct, analytic questioning of *sır* is regarded as futile. Truth resists external interrogation; it reveals itself through lived sincerity, ethical transformation, and divine timing. In the Alevi worldview, truth (*hakikat*) is not a fixed object of cognition but a process of becoming—a lived encounter between the seeker and the Divine order. Hence, *sır* should not be interpreted merely as an abstract mystical concept but as a manifestation of ethical maturity, ontological awareness, and divine harmony within Alevi thought.

8.3. The "Eye of the Heart" and the Limits of Rational Knowledge

During the field interview, Seyyid Selçuk Sevin emphasized that *sır* cannot be comprehended through reason alone. According to him, any attempt to grasp the inner mysteries of the Alevi path requires not only intellectual effort but also an expansion of consciousness—what he calls "opening the heart." Without education in the refinement of the spirit, one cannot approach the *sırr* of the spirit. In Sevin's view, the person who seeks *sır* must integrate this search into the whole of their life—thought, action, and desire—rather than treating it as an external object of study (Oral Source: Selçuk Sevin, *Baba Mansur Kur Hüseyin Ocağı Dedesi–Pir Ocağı*, Interview date: 15.01.2025, Bingöl/Kığı/Kârer).

Sevin illustrated this by analogy: just as the principles of calculus cannot be internalized without personal engagement and practice, so too spiritual principles must be lived in order to be truly understood. This teaching reframes *sır* not as information to be collected, but as a state of being that arises from sustained ethical and spiritual practice. He also stressed the importance of perceptual readiness. If someone denies the existence of *sır* or closes themselves to its possibility, he chooses to step back respectfully rather than intervene. Such individuals, he notes, live content within their self-constructed truths, and any attempt to impose a different perception may be futile or harmful. For Sevin, wisdom includes the discernment of when not to speak: spiritual communication must be reciprocal and cannot be imposed.

Yet he also remains open to the possibility that divine support will reach even those who reject the notion of *sır*. This refusal to impose belief reflects a broader Alevi principle of spiritual autonomy and mutual respect. Those who do not believe in *sır* may live according to their truths; in turn, they are asked not to interfere with the lived truths of Alevi communities. In this delicate balance lies a deep ethic of coexistence, tolerance, and humility—core values that define the metaphysical and communal orientation of Alevism. Sevin's reflections extend beyond epistemology to a vision of human dignity. He describes modern individuals as burdened with many problems, often unaware of how to cope. In this state of spiritual disorientation, a silent prayer resides within the heart, awaiting awakening. Alevis, he suggests, do not resist the hardships of this world but endure them, having removed the material world from their hearts—not by escaping but by overcoming it from within.

Nevertheless, they carry a wish: that others, too, might one day be liberated from the weight of the world and recognize their true essence. If, in response, others insist that their own framework is the only truth, Alevis do not argue. Out of respect for free will and out of love for the Creator, they choose to coexist and give meaning within that reality, even while knowing humanity is capable of more. Sevin concludes with an image of patient guidance: when the moment arrives and someone genuinely seeks the truth, Alevis will walk beside them like one walks beside a child taking first steps—rejoicing at each movement toward awareness. In that awakening, both seeker and guide may step together from the closed room of inherited assumptions into the open space that belongs to all of humanity.

9. INFERENCES AND CRITICISMS ON THE SUBJECT

The comparative examination of the Anatolian Alevi-Bektashi tradition in relation to selected Western mystical and folk practices reveals a pattern of cross-cultural resonance grounded in shared human attempts to experience the sacred. Although these traditions differ in language, theology, and ritual expression, they converge in their emphasis on spiritual experience, ethical transformation, and the communal transmission of sacred knowledge. Nevertheless, this convergence must be approached critically and contextually, recognising the unique historical and socio-religious realities that define each tradition.

The first key inference that emerges from this study concerns the universality of esoteric knowledge as a spiritual archetype. Across diverse cultural and historical settings, sacred knowledge is rarely represented as universally accessible. Instead, it is transmitted through relational and initiatory processes, revealed only to those who have undergone ethical purification and inner transformation. This suggests a deep anthropological intuition that transcends cultural boundaries: ultimate truths are not obtained through discursive reasoning alone, but through lived experience, ritual embodiment, and moral readiness.

Secondly, the emphasis on collective spirituality—whether through muhabbet gatherings, Quaker silent meetings, or Indigenous sacred circles—indicates a shared understanding of truth as a co-created experience, not a private possession. In all these settings, spiritual knowledge unfolds through presence, listening, and communal sincerity. This insight challenges contemporary models of spirituality that privilege individualism and consumption, and instead affirms an ethic of togetherness that is both epistemic and moral in character.

However, several critical considerations temper these inferences. First, while comparative parallels provide valuable interpretive depth, they must not obscure the historical distinctiveness and socio-political context of Alevism. The Alevi-Bektashi tradition is not solely a mystical philosophy but also a lived identity shaped by centuries of marginalization and cultural resilience in Anatolia. Its rituals carry layers of social meaning that exceed the theological or symbolic parallels observable in Western contexts.

Second, the uncritical use of Western terms such as gnosis or Inner Light to interpret sır or hal risks conceptual reductionism—collapsing different epistemological systems into a homogenized framework. While metaphoric bridges enhance intercultural dialogue, analytical precision demands that each concept be understood within its native cosmology and language.

Third, the history of Western scholarship has at times approached non-Western spiritual systems through romanticized or distanced frameworks, inadvertently flattening their experiential depth. To counter this tendency, the present study affirms the necessity of methodological reflexivity—an awareness that every act of interpretation is itself situated. Understanding sır and muhabbet thus requires attentiveness to the internal logic of Alevi-Bektashi self-understanding and the relational nature of its epistemology.

Finally, the very notion of comparison must be exercised with epistemic humility. The Alevi concept of sır is intentionally veiled and relational; it resists full articulation within academic discourse. A complete understanding of such sacred phenomena may remain beyond the scope of empirical representation—and acknowledging this limitation is an ethical act in itself.

The aim, therefore, is not to dissolve distinctions between cultures but to illuminate shared human orientations toward meaning, compassion, and transcendence. When engaged respectfully, comparative inquiry becomes not a process of assimilation but an act of listening—allowing each tradition to speak in its own voice, preserving both its integrity and its mystery.

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ÇALIŞMANIN ETİK İZNİ

Yapılan bu çalışmada "Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi" kapsamında uyulması belirtilen tüm kurallara uyulmuştur. Yönergenin ikinci bölümü olan "Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine Aykırı Eylemler" başlığı altında belirtilen eylemlerden hiçbiri gerçekleştirilmemiştir.

Etik kurul izin bilgileri

Etik değerlendirmeyi yapan kurul adı: Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü Sosyal ve Beşerî Bilimleri Etik Kurulu

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ARAŞTIRMACILARIN KATKI ORANI

1.yazarın araştırmaya katkı oranı %100'dür.

Yazar 1: Araştırmanın tamamını gerçekleştirmiştir.

ÇATIŞMA BEYANI

Araştırmada herhangi bir kişi ya da kurum ile finansal ya da kişisel yönden bağlantı bulunmamaktadır. Araştırmada herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.