

Salaam: The Neglected Greeting of Islam

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Abstract: Salaam is no longer practiced in many Muslim communities who converted centuries ago but were never duly imparted knowledge about the religion. Islam has given a sacred gift to each Muslim in Salaam. It is incumbent upon Muslims to practice it and never begin conversation with other Muslims unless they say Salaam as per the Imami Talim. It is not only a greeting but a Dua of protection. In the age of technology and science, moral values and teachings taught by the religion to promote a refined society are neglected at large by all nations, and unfortunately Muslims are one of them. Salaam is used to express courtesy and promote constructive and positive feelings. Greetings granted by the Qur'an to Muslims is a Dua as a spiritual standpoint. Salaam should never be written in an abbreviated form because it is one of the "Asma ul-Husna" and to make it short is its deliberate insult which is a punishable offence according to the Law of Islam. People mostly waste time in Khurafat (flapdoodle) and try to save their time only in reciting and writing Salaam which is a superior kind of Dua. The Imams of Ahl al-Bait (as) provided Talim in this regard which is enough to understand the Barakah of this word, in Zahir and Batin.

1. The Imami Talim of Salaam:

Prior to the advent of Islam it was common among the dwellers of the Arabian Peninsula to greet with: "Hayakallah" which translates to may Allah grant you life or "Sabha'bil Khayr An'im Sab'ahan" which means good morning, how are you?

In this context, once when somebody came in the presence of Abi Abdillah Al Imam al-Husain (as) and said: [1]

"Kaiyfa Anta Aafak Allah"?

How are you? May Allah keep you safe.

Abi Abdillah Al Imam al-Husain (as) immediately corrected him gently, gave him the basic Talim of Islam and responded to him in the following pleasant manner:

"As Salaamu Qabalil Kal'amu Aafak Allah."

Say Salaam prior to beginning talk that may Allah protect you.

Then he taught:

"Laa Taazan ul-Ahad Hatta Be Salaamin"

Do not grant permission anyone to talk with you until they say Salaam.

At another place Moula al-Husain (as) transmitted the reward of Salaam precisely as follows: [2]
“There are seventy good deeds in the Salaam – sixty nine for the person who says it and only one for him who responds. He is a miser who does not reply to the Salaam”

Qur’an directs us to respond to Salaam in a more courteous manner. [3]

Wa Alaykum Afdal us Salaam is one of the best responses to As Salaamu Alaykum. The arrogant never initiate saying Salaam and sometimes even consider it below dignity to reply. They slightly move their head or smile instead of replying with “Wa Alaykum As Salaam”. As per the Nabawi traditions, these people are the most miserly. Moula al-Husain ibn Ali (as) informs in this regard: [4]

“Abkhal al-Bakhil Yabkhalu Fis Salaam”

The greater miser is the one who shows misery in replying to Salaam.

Rasulullah (S) declared in clear terms: [5]

“Whoever does not reply (to Salaam) is not from us”

A Hadith conveys: [6]

“The principle of humility is to begin with Salaam.”

Muslims greet each other by saying As Salaamu Alaykum which entails the Barak’ah of Asma ul-Husna as well as that of Islam. Salaam means safety, peace and protection. World over different nations and religions have their own distinct form of greeting. The following meanings and connotations of the word “Salaam” offer an understanding of the unique and unmatched way of this greeting in Islam:

- The activity of protecting someone or/and something
- Pact to cease hostilities
- Promoting harmonious relations
- The state of being certain that adverse effects will not be caused by some agent under any condition(s)
- The absence of mental stress and anxiety

A Muslim conveys the above messages to the one whom he greets by saying As Salaamu Alaykum. How different and meaningful this message is than just uttering good morning. Verbal greetings are usually accompanied by some kind of physical act that complements the verbal expression.

2. Salaam upon you people of the grave:

The greeting in Islam not only increases friendship, harmony and respect, but also signifies the fulfillment of the rights of Dua for Muslims. Salaam is one of the Asma ul-Husuna (beautiful names of Allah). This Salaam is highly recommended when visiting the Rawdat al-Nabi. At the graves of the chosen people of Allah to whom the Qur’an addressed as “Ibadeh’il Lazi’nastafa” reciting Salaam is greatly suggested. Furthermore, it is also a Sunnah to recite this Dua when one enters the graveyard: [7]

“As Salamu Alaykum Ya Ahl al-Qubur Min al-Mumineen Antum us Sabiqun wa Ana Bekum Lahiqun”

Salaam upon you people of the graves from the believers; you preceded us and we shall meet you soon.

3. The etiquette of Salaam:

A Hadith recommended reciting Salaam in an audible manner so that it reaches the ears of the intended recipient(s). The person who initiates the Salaam first is closest to Allah and Hadith literature informs us in this regard. When someone questioned who should initiate saying the Salaam, Rasulullah (S) answered: [8]

“The one who (wishes to) be closer to Allah. The rider should greet a pedestrian, a pedestrian should greet the one who is sitting, and a small group should greet the larger crowd.”

Salaam should be offered to all Muslims, irrespective of whether they are acquaintances or strangers. To say Salaam aloud to everyone in the gathering is sufficient. It is not necessary to greet each person individually. However, it is incorrect to greet only a particular person in a gathering.

Furthermore, remember to always convey Salaam in a cheerful manner. In this regard the following conversation is worth mentioning, and available in the Sacred Scriptures. When Yahya (as) met Essa (as) he initiated the conversation by saying Salaam, and was responded by the same greeting. Whenever Yahya (as) met Essa (as), Yahya (as) was always found to be joyful and smiling, and Essa (as) sorrowful, resembling a crying man. Essa (as) asked Yahya (as): [9]

“You smile like a cheerful person as if you are secure and protected.”

Yahya (as) replied:

“You show such sorrow as if you have given up all hope.”

Then the commandments appeared:

“The one who smiles the most is the dearest to Me.”

If a person is at a distance where your Salaam may not be heard then it can be offered by a hand gesture. Sirah Literature talks of a tradition according to which Rasulullah(S) passed by a group of people sitting in the Masjid and signaled the greetings with his hand coupled with saying the Salaam and Abd al-Hamid signaled in reply with his hands. When entering an empty place, house, shop, office, then too, Salaam should be said as follows: [10]

As Salaamu Alayna Wa’ala ‘ibadillahis Saleyheen

Salaam upon us and upon the devoted slaves of Allah

However, it must be noted that it is undesirable to recite Salaam when a person is engaged in the following activities:

- During performing Salaat
- Tasbih or Zikar
- During Khutbah, Majlis, Daras
- When one is busy in Tilawat of the Qur’an
- During Az’an and Iqam’ah
- When one is busy in Dua
- When one is occupied in discussion and research of religious sciences
- While the judge is delivering verdict
- While eating or drinking
- During recitation of Talbiy’ah in the Kabah
- During Ziyar’ah in Al Atab’at al-Muqaddisah (Madinah, Najaf, Karbala)

Another incorrect practice is also common. When someone says: "Convey my Salaam to so and so," do not reply on behalf of them as you are not authorized to do that. Your obligation is to simply inform your parents or whoever the Salaam has been conveyed to about the same. A shocking practice is also prevalent amongst converts to the Muslim faith to write Salaam on the wedding invitation cards prior to the names of the deceased. Does anybody possess the power to hear the Salaam of the deceased from their grave? All credit goes to the dim script writer who designs such text which is blindly followed.

Moreover, when visiting others or calling on the phone always say Salaam. Care should be taken not to visit or contact any person during the resting time and the time of Salaat. Never enter the house of another, however related to them you may be, without permission. For asking permission to enter, ring the bell and when the person of the house enquires who is there, say Salaam aloud and inform your name, instead of saying "me" as Rasulallah (S) instructed. If you realize that the person inside has heard your ring or voice, and is purposely ignoring it, then repeat the ring two more times. If there is no answer after three rings, then as per Hadith you must return.

5. Musafaha & Muaniqah are interlinked with Salaam:

Musafaha is a neglected Sunnah closely interlinked with Salaam and should be made after offering Salaam. This means to place the palm of your right hand against the right hand palm of the person you are meeting and to clasp and shake firmly. Then the one who initiated the Musafaha should not withdraw his hand until the other person has done so. It is a sign of affection and the most perfect form of greeting. As per Ahadith, Musafaha increases affection, decreases sins, eliminates hatred, and develops the relationship.

It is important to note that it is incorrect to brush ones fingers with that of others. This is not Musafaha. It is the practice of Hindu Brahmins, the so-called royal superior race, who feel it is below dignity to touch the lower castes. Amongst a few communities of Indian-Muslims who underwent mass conversions in Gujrat and other places, such acts continue as they never got the opportunity to completely rid themselves of the Hindu beliefs and practices.

Sirah Literature provides us traditions of the kissing on hand and feet as a mark of respect. Wazza bin Aamir transmitted a tradition: [11]

"We reached Madinah and were taken in the presence of Rasulallah (S). We embraced, and kissed his hands and feet in reverence".

Sirah Literature provides another example: [12]

"A group of Jews appeared in the Nabawi presence and kissed both his hands and feet. These examples show that for reverence, one can offer respect to the dearest people of Allah in this manner".

Rasulallah (S) says:

"There are no two Muslims who meet and shake each other's hand, except that their sins are forgiven before they part."

Psychologists today say that when two people shake hands, a sort of magnetism is exchanged between them. According to one occult science treatise written in Yemen, when hands meet, the person possessing superior spiritual energy diffuses the negative rays emitting from the other who might not be as spiritually awakened. The act of handshake prompts an exchange of body heat which improves understanding, friendship and love. Moreover, Muaniqah is a Sunnah linked with Salaam. It is permissible to make Muaniqah – to embrace the same sex by holding them and drawing the person close to oneself when they meet after returning from a journey or after a long absence. Hold the person with both arms around the neck and shoulders and draw the person towards your chest.

Muslim history has recorded the Ismailis and their glorious tradition that the vast Kutamah tribe of West Arabia was ideal in their deeds and characters. Due to Da'i Abi Abdillah's training each member of the tribe of Kutamah practiced Musafaha (handshake) and Muanaqah (hugging) after reciting Salaam. The Dai who established the Shia Fatemi Ismaili Empire in West Arabia transplanted Islamic culture in the hearts and minds of the Kutamah. Even the noblest of them would not shy away from practicing this Sunnah with the most ordinary of his Muslim brother. Da'i Abi Abdillah too greeted his visitors in the same manner. This way of greeting was common during the Nabawi era and is still practiced today among Arabs and Iranians. In religious Muslim families a child is taught to say Salaam and follow it by kissing hands of the elders when he/she is just a few years old.

6. Salaam on non-Mahram woman or vice versa:

A question that is raised frequently is whether a man can recite Salaam upon a non-Mahram woman or vice versa. It is not recommended to say Salaam to a single, young non-Mahram girl. If an elder person says Salaam, they could be replied to. Asma once narrated that Rasulullah (S) passed a group of women sitting in the Masjid. He greeted them by raising his hands. This delineates that in a gathering men can convey Salaam to women through signaling. Another narration was reported by Umme Hani [13], the cousin of Rasulullah(S), who visited him (S) while he was washing and she greeted him. He questioned who it was. Umme Hani informed that it was her. Rasulullah(S) said Marhaba! (Welcome). However, a woman should not shake hands with any man who is not a Mahram for her, just as a man should not shake hands with a non-Mahram woman. This is based on the Hadith: [14]

“Verily I do not shake hands with women.”

It has been authentically reported that Rasulullah(S) used to accept the Misaq (pledge of allegiance) from women in words only: [15]

“And no woman ever touched his hand.”

The Qur'an says: [16]

“Indeed in Rasulullah(S) you have a good example to follow.”

Moreover, men shaking hands with non-Mahram women and vice versa are a cause of Fitnah. Shariah, which is perfect, prevents all things which lead to what Allah has forbidden.

7. Important Note to Practice:

One unpleasant practice is very common today. Instead of Salaam, people use "Hi" in online conversation. It is a matter of regret that Muslims are unconsciously committing a sin to mutilate one of the Asma ul-Husna and word of the Qur'an "Salaam" and shorten it as per their convenience to "AoA", "WaS", "AAWRWB" etc. Does this make any sense? It is an insult of one of the greatest names of Allah. What are we saving time for? Is it time or words? I request you to convey the greeting of Islam in a proper manner as "As Salamu Alaykum".

Moreover, please be careful when you use the word "Salaams". The addition of the alphabet Z or S at the end changes the entire meaning of Salaam. Just as in Surah al-Fatiha we say "Sir'at al-Lazina Anamta Alayhim" which connotes "the way of those whom You have blessed" where as if we just change the Anamta to Anamtu it Naudubillah becomes "Whom I have blessed." So you see there is such a big difference because of changing a mere alphabet as instead of referring Allah with Anamtu we start referring to ourselves! The same is the matter with Kulb and Qalb. When we say "Fee Qulubihim Maradun" with the heavy Qaaf, this Ayah reads "In their hearts is a disease," but if we say "Kulubihim" with the lighter Kaaf then it Naudubillah becomes "In their dogs is a disease". Moreover, sometimes people say "Saam Alaykum" in hurry or just habitually; they should know that Saam means death. Therefore instead of greeting with peace they greet with death. The non-Muslim enemies would sometimes distort the Muslim greeting which means "Peace be upon you" and try to ridicule Muslims by it. Muslims should avoid using such wrong pronunciations. Once a group of Jews came in the presence of Rasulullah(S) and intentionally said:

"As-Saam Alaykum"

Death be upon you"

Rasulullah(S) simply replied:

"Alaykum."

Upon you.

"Asaamu Alaykum."

Death befall on you.

Sal Alaykum

Lanah upon you

Asa Alaykum

You will not get happiness

Saamu Alaykum

May you perish

Asaamo-Alaykum

May you be killed

Assae Kum

You will not see joy

Slam-le-kum

Curse upon you

I conclude this article on the following Ahadith which are sufficient to explain the merits of Salaam:

1. "That person is nearest to Allah who recites Salaam first [17] (not waiting for the other)"
2. "Greet every Muslim [18], whether acquainted or not"
3. "Salaam should always be made before [19] talking"
4. "When replying to Salaam that has been conveyed through a third person, answer by saying: "Wa Alayka Wa Alayhis Salaam" [20], upon you and upon him Salaam."
5. "After making Salaam, if a barrier such as a tree or wall appears [21] (where the view is obscured) one should make Salaam again when meeting them."
6. "A mounted person should greet the one who is walking[22], and a person on foot should greet the one who is sitting; a smaller group should greet a larger group and the young should greet their elders."
7. "When entering a house, make Salaam to the occupants [23] of that house."
8. "When leaving that place (i.e. house) [24], depart with making Salaam."
9. "When entering one's own house [25], recite Salaam to your family; this will be a source of blessings for the entire family."
10. "The completion of visiting the sick is by placing one's hand on the sick person's forehead,[26] and the completion of Salaam is the shaking of the hands."
11. "When two Muslims meet and shake hands [27], their (minor) sins are forgiven before they depart."
12. "Do not greet the Jews and Christians [28] with the words of Salaam"
(This order is applicable for all non-Muslims.)

Selected Bibliography & Notes:

[1] "Balaghat'il Husain", Mustafa Muhsin al-Musavi al-Hayri, Beirut, Lebanon

[2] "Bih'ar al-Anw'ar", vol. 17, Qum. It is a comprehensive collection of traditions of Ahl al-Bait (as) compiled by the Shi'i scholar Mulla Muhammad Baqir, known as Majlisi (d. 1110/1698). It is one of the major Hadith collections and the second source of inspiration in Islam. Probably completed between 1106/1694 and 1110/1698, it contains historical subjects and commentaries on many Ay'at of the Qur'an.

[3] Surah al-Nisa, Ayah 86

[4] "Balaghat'il Husain", Mustafa Muhsin al-Musavi al-Hairi, Beirut, Lebanon

[5] Hadith

[6] Hadith

[7] Etiquettes to recite Salaam on the people of the Muslim graveyard.

[8] Hadith

[9] "Qasas ul-Anbiya", Shaikh Jafar Shibani, Yemen

[10] "Tirmizi": He was born in the year 209 A.H. during the reign of the Abbasid ruler Mamoon al-Rashid

[11] "Abu Dawood": Abu Dawood Sulayman ibn Ashath al-Azadi al-Sijistani was a noted collector of Hadith, and wrote a third of the six canonical Hadith collections recognized by Sunni Muslims, Sunan Abu Dawood. He was born in Sijistan, now known as Sistan in south-western Afghanistan in 817, and died in 888. Widely travelled among scholars of Hadith, he went to Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Khurasan, Nishapur, and Marv among other places in order to collect Ahadith.

[12] "Ibn Majah", Abu Abdillah Muhammad ibn Yazid Ibn Majah al-Rabi al-Qazwini, (824 CE/209 AM—887/273) commonly known as Ibn Majah, was a medieval scholar of Hadith. He compiled the last of Sunni Muslim's six canonical Hadith collections, Sunan Ibn Majah.

[13] "Tirmizi":

[14] "al-Nasa'i", No. 4186 & Al-Muwattha, No. 2. Sunan as-Sughra, written by Nasa'i and also known as Sunan Nasa'i, is one of the six most authentic collections of Hadith (Sihah Sitta). It contains 5467 Ahadith.

[15] "Sahih al-Bukhari", No.2713, 4891, 5288, 7214 & Muslim, No. 1866. Sahih al-Bukhari is one of the six canonical Hadith collections of Sunni Muslims. These Nabawi traditions, or Ahadith were collected by the Muslim scholar Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari (810–870) (about 200 years after Rasulullah(S)).

[16] Qur'an 33:21

[17] Hadith

[18] Hadith

[19] Hadith

[20] Hadith

[21] Hadith

[22] Hadith

[23] Hadith

[24] Hadith

[25] Hadith

[26] Hadith

[27] Hadith

[28] Hadith

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