

Greeting in Islam

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي ; وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي ; وَأَحْلِلْ عُقْدَةً مِنْ لِسَانِي ; يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي

As-Salam Alaikum (i.e. peace be upon you) is the greeting of a Muslim. Subhan-Allah! What a great greeting. It should be known that **As-Salam** is one of the Names of Allah and it means ‘*The Source of Peace*’. Let us study some important facts about *Salam* – the Greeting in Islam.

A. How *Salam* began or came into being?

Salam has been the greeting of believers right from the day one i.e. when Adam (AS) was created. Go through the following narration in this regard:

Narrated Abu Hurairah (RA): The Prophet (PBUH) said, “Allah created Adam (AS) in ‘His Image’ sixty cubits (about thirty metres) in height. When He created him, He said (to Adam), ‘Go and greet that group of angels sitting there, and listen what they will say in reply to you, for that will be your greeting and the greeting of your offspring.’ Adam (went &) said, ‘*As-Salam Alaikum* (i.e. peace be upon you).’ They replied, ‘*As-Salam Alaikum Wa Rahmatallah*’ (i.e. peace and Allah’s mercy be upon you).’ So they increased ‘*Wa Rahmatallah*.’” The Prophet (PBUH) added, “So whoever will enter Paradise, will be of the shape & picture of Adam. Since then the creation of Adam’s offsprings (i.e. stature of human beings) is being diminished up to the present time.”

(Hadith No. 6227, Book of Asking Permission, Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 8).

In the narration above, the phrase ‘His Image’ means that Adam has been bestowed with life, knowledge, power of hearing, seeing, understanding, but the features of Adam are different from those of Allah, only the names are same. For example: Allah has life and knowledge and power of understanding, and Adam also has them, but there is no comparison between the Creator and the created thing.

B. *Salam* shall be the greeting of believers on ‘The Day of Judgement’ & in Paradise.

It is mentioned in Qur’an that the believers will be greeted by *Salam* at the time of their meeting with Allah. Refer to the following verse:

تَحِيَّتُهُمْ يَوْمَ يَلْقَوْنَهُ سَلَامٌ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَرِيمًا

“Their greeting on the Day they shall meet Him will be ‘*Salam*’. And He has prepared for them a generous reward.”

(Aayah No. 44, Surah Al-Ahzab, Chapter No. 33, Holy Qur’an).

Further, when the believers shall enter Paradise (Be-izn-Allah), they shall be greeted there by *Salam*. This too is mentioned in Qur’an, have a look:

وَأَدْخِلَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ تَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلَامٌ

“And those who believed and did righteous deeds, will be made to enter Gardens under which rivers flow, – to dwell therein forever, with the Permission of their Lord. Their greeting therein will be *Salam*.”

(Aayah No. 23, Surah Ibrahim, Chapter No. 14, Holy Qur’an).

C. Initiating the *Salam*

It was narrated that Abu Umamah (RA) said: Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) said, “The one who is closest of people to Allah, the Most high, is the one who initiates the greeting of *Salam*.”

(Hadith No. 5197, Book of Etiquette, Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 5).

Can there be a better narration than this to emphasize the greatness of the person who initiates *Salam*? If we follow Sunnah of our beloved Prophet (PBUH) in this matter, we come to know that he even greeted small children with *Salam*. And on the contrary give a thought to the condition of Muslims at present. Whoever possesses wealth or a big position, he/she feels that it is not they who should greet others, and rather others (whom they think inferior to them) are to greet them. Sadly, pride has overtaken the essence of their greetings.

Nevertheless, the importance of initiating *Salam* should be understood well by us. However, there is one crucial thing to remember: **It is not allowed for a Muslim to initiate greeting with a Non-Muslim.** Following hadith proves this:

It was narrated that Abu Hurairah (RA) said: Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "Do not initiate the greeting with the Jews or Christians, and if you meet one of them on the street, drive him to the narrowest part of it."

(Hadith No. 5661 (2167), Book of Salam, Sahih Muslim, Vol. 6).

Still there is one more situation which asks for clarification. It is mandatory that when a Muslim meets a Muslim, they should greet each other with *Salam*; on the other hand it is not allowed for a Muslim to initiate the greeting with a Non-Muslim. So **what shall a Muslim do when he/she comes across a gathering which consists of Muslims as well as Non-Muslims? Should he/she initiate the greeting of *Salam* or not in such a situation?** There is a hadith which answers this question too.

Usama bin Zaid (RA) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) passed by a gathering in which the Muslims and Jews were mixed, so he gave the *Salam* to them.

(Hadith No. 2702, Chapters on Seeking Permission, Jami' At-Tirmidhi, Vol. 5).

Therefore, in a mixed gathering, *Salam* should be given for the respect of the Muslims.

D. Responding to *Salam*

Having read the importance of initiating the *Salam*, an automatic question comes to the mind: Is the greeting of *Salam* required to be answered / responded? The answer to this question has already been touched briefly at the start of our discussion in the hadith which explains how *Salam* began (**Section A**). Therefore, it is established that when someone greets us with *Salam*, it is mandatory to give a response. However, there is a manner in which the *Salam* should be answered. To understand it let us go through following verse of Qur'an:

وَإِذَا حُيِّئْتُمْ بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَا أَوْ رُدُّوهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَسِيبًا

"When you are greeted with a greeting, greet in return with what is better than it, or (at least) return it equally. Certainly, Allah is Ever a Careful Account Taker of all things."

(Aayah No. 86, Surah An-Nisa', Chapter No. 4, Holy Qur'an).

It is very important to understand this aayah. The first thing to understand is that it is mandatory to respond to a greeting. The second thing to remember is that the response should also be a greeting, either better than the earlier one or at least equal than that. For example: If someone greets us by saying *As-Salam Alaikum*, our response should be a step better than that i.e. *Wa-alaikum As-Salam Wa Rahmatallah* or at least equal i.e. *Wa-alaikum As-Salam*. Similarly, if someone greets us by saying *As-Salam Alaikum Wa Rahmatallah*, our response should be *Wa-alaikum As-Salam Wa Rahmatallah Wa Barakatuhu* (a step better) or at least *Wa-alaikum As-Salam Wa Rahmatallah* (same as the greeting said to us). Never should we reply to the greeting by saying a greeting lesser than what was said to us like saying *Wa-alaikum* in response to *As-Salam Alaikum*.

Again, the dealing with Non-Muslims in such a scenario is different. We have read in previous Section that a Muslim is not supposed to initiate greeting with a Non-Muslim. But **what should be the response of a Muslim if a Non-Muslim greets him/her?** Following hadith tells us about this:

It was narrated that Anas bin Malik (RA) that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "If the people of the Book greet you with *Salam*, say: '*Wa alaikum*'."

(Hadith No. 5652 (2163), Book of *Salam*, Sahih Muslim, Vol. 6).

This means that whatever greetings are said to a Muslim by a Non-Muslim, the response of a Muslim should be '*Wa alaikum*', that's all. There is a reason behind this ruling. The Jews used to initiate greeting with Rasool-Allah (PBUH) but used to say *As-Samu Alaikum*, meaning 'death be upon you'. Rasool-Allah (PBUH) used to respond by saying *Wa alaikum*, meaning 'and upon you too'. Therefore, there is no certainty about what the Non-Muslims intend to say while greeting a Muslim. Hence this response is to be used.

E. *Salam* is to be said at the time of joining a gathering as well as at the time of leaving the gathering.

It was narrated that Abu Hurairah (RA) said: Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "When one of you comes to a gathering, let him say *Salam*, and when he wants to leave, let him say *Salam*, for the former is not more of a duty than the latter."

(Hadith No. 5208, Book of Etiquette, Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 5).

F. How to respond to a *Salam* while in prayer?

If we are in prayer (i.e. *Salat*), and someone says *Salam* to us, what to do? Should we answer it in the normal manner? Or is there any other ruling about this?

Actually, in the beginning, responding to *Salam* while praying in a normal manner (i.e. verbally, by saying *Wa-Alaikum As-Salam*) was allowed. But later on this was abrogated. However, it does not mean that the *Salam* will go unanswered. There are two ways of answering this *Salam*. First way is to answer the *Salam* after completing the *Salat*. Another way is to answer the *Salam* while in prayer by means of a motion of hand. Ahadith prove that Rasool-Allah (PBUH) has used both means and hence both can be adopted. People might find the latter way of answering as a bit surprising, but following hadith shall remove whatever doubts one might have regarding this:

Suhaib narrated, "I once passed by Allah's Messenger (PBUH) while he was praying, so I greeted him, and he responded by motioning (one narrator said by motioning with his finger)."

(Hadith No. 925, Book of *Salat*, Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 1).

In other narrations we find that Rasool-Allah (PBUH) even responded by motioning the palm of his hand, with his inner palm facing downwards and outer palm facing upwards. Anyhow, the point is that we can respond to *Salam* while in prayer by a motion of our hand or finger(s).

G. Not to greet or respond to the greeting when in toilet?

Ibn Umar (RA) narrated that a man gave *Salam* to the Prophet (PBUH) while he was urinating, but the Prophet (PBUH) did not return the *Salam* to him.

(Hadith No. 2720, Chapters on Seeking Permission, Jami' At-Tirmidhi, Vol. 5).

Therefore, while in toilet (or rather, while answering the call of the nature), we should neither say *Salam* to others nor should we respond to their *Salam*.

H. Can men greet women, and vice versa?

It is definitely allowed for men to greet women and the women to greet women. Whoever says that it is not allowed to do so, is absolutely wrong. Have a look at following hadith:

Asma bint Yazid narrated, "The Prophet (PBUH) passed by us while we were with some women, and greeted us with *Salam*."

(Hadith No. 5204, Book of Etiquette, Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 5).

I. Greeting in absence and response to it

Salam may be sent to someone in his/her absence, irrespective of whether the person (to whom the *Salam* is being sent) is alive or dead. *Salam* is sent to dead, as we all know is

recommended whenever we enter (or pass by) a graveyard. It is also mentioned in Qur'an that we should send *Salam* to Allah's Messenger (PBUH).

إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

“Allah sends his *Salat* (graces, blessings, honours etc.) on Rasool-Allah (PBUH) and so also His angels. O’ who you believe! Send your *Salat* (*Salam*) to him and you should greet him (Rasool-Allah, PBUH) with Islamic way of greeting i.e. *As-Salam alaikum*.”

(Aayah No. 56, Surah Al-Ahzab, Chapter No. 33, Holy Qur'an).

There is another situation to be discussed in this Section. Suppose someone comes to my home and he meets me alone. And at the time of leaving he asks me to convey his *Salam* to so and so friend of mine, I should convey it. Moreover, on hearing the *Salam* from the visitor, my so and so friend should respond to it as he would have responded to a *Salam* given to him directly by any Muslim in his presence.

J. A general rule about who should greet whom.

Abu Hurairah (RA) said: Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, “The one who is riding should greet the one who is walking, the one who is walking should greet the one who is sitting and the smaller group should greet the larger group.”

(Hadith No. 6232 & 6233, Book of Asking Permission, Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 8; Hadith No. 5646 (2160), Book of *Salam*, Sahih Muslim, Vol. 6).

In some other narrations it is also said that the young should greet the elder. However, all these should not be made as a compulsory rule; rather this is a recommended approach for Muslims. But for example, if a sitting person takes the initiative and initiates the *Salam* with a fellow colleague who is walking, it doesn't mean that the former has done anything wrong or anything contradictory.

Concluding remarks

Dear brothers and sisters, *Salam* is a great greeting. The greatness of *Salam* can be understood by the fact that it leads us to Paradise. It might sound strange, but it is true. Following hadith tells us about this:

It was narrated that Abu Hurairah (RA) said: Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, “By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, you will not enter Paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I not tell you of something which, if you do it, you will love one another? Spread *Salam* among yourselves.”

(Hadith No. 5193, Book of Etiquette, Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 5).

I interpret this hadith in two ways. First thing to understand from this narration is the greatness of *Salam* and the significance of spreading the Islamic greeting among ourselves. The other message to be learned from this hadith is that we Muslims are supposed to spread peace and harmony among ourselves (*Salam* means peace) and live united.

Spread *Salam* among all the Muslims. Start with our homes / families. It is our responsibility to teach our children the Islamic way of greeting. Children see their ideals in their parents; therefore, we have to teach them by example. Keep all those *Hi, Hello, Good Mornings* etc. aside; greet in Islamic manner.

Be united. Live happily in harmony and peace. May Allah bless all the Muslims with peace. *As-Salam Alaikum Wa Rahmatallah Wa Barakatuhu*, to all.

And Allah knows best.

May Allah forgive me if I am wrong and guide us to the right path...Ameen.

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ; وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ ; وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ .