



## Salam is a greeting for Non-Muslims

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It is perfectly alright for a “non Muslim” to greet another person with the “Islamic” greeting of peace: “Al-Salam `Alaykum wa Rahmah Allah wa Barakatuh.” However, the non-Muslim will not receive the blessing for the practice that a Muslim does, since the blessing one earns by offering the greeting to someone else comes *from emulating the example* [ *Sunnah* ] of the Prophet [ peace be upon him ] , and a “non-Muslim”, by definition, does not believe in following the Prophet’s *Sunnah* as a matter of faith. It is also permissible for a Muslim to greet a non Muslim with this greeting. This was asserted by a number of Companions and Successors, including Ibn `Abbâs, Ibn Mas`ud, Abu Umamah, Ibn Muhriz, and `Umar b. `Abd al-`Aziz. It was also the opinion of many prominent imams, including Sufyan b. Uyaynah, al-Sha`bi, al-Awza`i, and al-Tabari. Recently, this opinion has been adopted by al-Sayyid Rashid Rida’ in *Tafsir al-Manar* and *al-Shinqiti* in *Adwa al-Bayan*.

This view is in harmony with how the Qur’an represents the “Islamic” greeting of peace as a universal greeting. Allah says: “...O you who believe ! Enter not houses other than your own without first announcing your presence and invoking peace upon the folk thereof. That is better for you, that you may be heedful....” [ *Sûrah al-Nûr*: 27 ]. Allah says: “...And when they hear idle talk they turn aside from it and say: We shall have our deeds and you shall have your deeds ; ‘peace be on you’ , we do not desire the ignorant.....” [ *Sûrah al-Qasas*: 55 ]

He says: “...And the servants of [ Allah ] Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, ‘Peace !...’” [ *Sûrah al-Furqân*: 63 ] He also says: “Consider his cry: ‘O my Lord ! surely they are a people who do not believe’. So turn away from them and say, ‘Peace’, for they shall soon come to know.” [ *Sûrah al-Zukhruf*: 88-89 ]

And: “.... [ The father ] replied: ‘Do you hate my gods, O Abraham ? If you forbear not, I will indeed stone you: Now get away from me for a good long while !’ Abraham said: ‘Peace be on thee: I will pray to my Lord for thy forgiveness: for He is to me Most Gracious’.....” [ *Sûrah Maryam*: 47 ]

There is also ample hadîth evidence to establish the universality of this greeting. The Prophet [ peace be upon him ] said: “Greet with ‘Peace’ those whom you know and those whom you do not know.” [ *Sahîh al-Bukharî* 12 and *Sahîh Muslim* 39 ]. The Prophet [ peace be upon him ] also informed us that when Allah created Adam, He commanded him: “...Go to that assembly – and they were an assembly of seated angels – and listen to how they greet you. Indeed, it is your greeting and the greeting of your descendants. He said: “Peace be upon you.” They said: “Peace be upon you and Allah’s mercy.” [ *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* 3326 and 6227 and *Sahîh Muslim* 2841 ]

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1: Taken from *Islamtoday.com* , “*Salam is a greeting for Non-Muslims*” , by Sheikh Faysal b. Anwar Mawlawî

The Prophet [ peace be upon him ] also said: "Spread the greeting of peace." [ Sunan al-Tirmidhî 1854 and Sahîh Ibn Hibbân 489 ]. There are many scholars who hold the view that it is either disliked or prohibited for Muslims to initiate the greeting of salâm with non-Muslims. They rely on the following hadîth as evidence: "Do not initiate the salutation of Peace with the Jews and Christians." [ Sahih Muslim 2167 ]. However, this hadîth relates to "a state of hostilities" which had erupted at that time against the Muslims. It was, in fact, at the time of the campaign against Banû Qurayzah. This is established by another authentic hadîth where the Prophet [ peace be upon him ] said: "...We are going forth in the morning against a group of Jews, so do not initiate the greeting of Peace with them...." [ Musnad Ahmad 26695 and Mu'jam al-Tabarani al-Kabir 22 / 291. See also Musnad Ahmad 16844 and 17584 ]. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani relates the same from al-Bukhari's al-Adab al-Mufrad and from Sunan al-Nasa'i while discussing this topic in "Fath al-Bari" [ 11 / 39 ]

Therefore, the opinion that the greeting of peace can be used for all people is the strongest one. This view has been held by eminent scholars of all schools of thought. It is certainly the opinion to adopt when living "at peace" in the company of "non-Muslims". Those Muslims who are living in non-Muslim countries should have a concern for outreach. Greeting "all people" in the best of manner " without " showing discrimination is an " essential etiquette " of reaching out to others.

It is also important to understand that the difference of opinion regarding the greeting of salâm with non-Muslims pertains only to initiating the greeting, not to replying to it. When a non-Muslim greets a Muslim with "al-Salâm `alaykum", then it is obligatory for the Muslim to return the greeting. This is because Allah says: "...When you are greeted with a greeting , greet back with better than it or return it Lo ! Allah takes count of all things..." [ *Sûrah al-Nisa* : Ayah 86 ].

This verse shows that it is "preferable" to offer a "better", more generous greeting and it is obligatory to do "justice" and to "at least" return the same. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah explains in *Ahkam Ahl al-Dhimmah* that this ruling certainly applies to "non-Muslims" as well as Muslims.

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Note on the Hadith: "...Do not initiate the salaam with the People of the Book and when you meet them on the road, force them to go to the narrowest part of it...." [ Muslim ]. What is ment by the phrase: "...and when you meet them on the road, force them to go to the narrowest part of it.." ? The saying means: "...do not give way to them if you meet them, so that the way is open for them and you cause restriction to yourself...." Or in other words: "...If they meet a group of you [ Muslims ] , do not split up to let them pass, rather continue on your way and leave them the narrow space if there is a narrow part of the road...." The text does "not" mean or indicate that one should push a Jew aside. This is clearly not the meaning of the text here. And finally one should remember that this statement of the Prophet was made in a specific context. The hadith in question relates to "a state of hostilities" which had erupted at that time against the Muslims. Therefor the hadith does not refer to "peacefull" non-Muslims. Sheikh Muhammad Al-Mukhtar Al-Shinqiti confirms this view here:

"....It is unfortunate that some scholars have misquoted the hadith, "Don't initiate the Salam [ greeting ] with the Jews and the Christians firs" and put as a general rule for everybody, while the statement is taken out of context. The hadith talks about one specific tribe [ Bani Quraiitha ] , in a particular day because they were at fight with Muslims. Since Salam means peace, it did not sound logic to start the people you fight with it. In addition, taking this hadith in general would contradict some verses in the Qur'an. One of the verses is the saying of prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, to his father, Salamun alaika, which mean peace be upon you. This is clear evidence in permitting the Salam between Muslims and non-Muslims. In Sahih Al-Bukhari we read that Prophet Muhammad [ peace and blessings be upon him ] passed by a gathering in which Abdullah bin Ubai bin Salul was present, and that had been before Abdullah embraced Islam. The gathering comprised of Muslims, polytheists, i.e., idolators and Jews. 'Abdullah bin Rawaha was also present in that gathering. When dust raised by the donkey covered the gathering, Abdullah bin Ubai covered his nose with his upper garment and said, "Do not trouble us with dust." The Prophet greeted them, stopped and dismounted. Then he invited them to Allah [ i.e., to embrace Islam ] and recited to them some verses of the Qur'an. The above hadith clearly indicates that the Prophet [ peace and blessings be upon him ] greeted non-Muslims....."

Source: <http://www.islamonline.net/livedialogue/english/Browse.asp?hGuestID=co8rfn>