



Greeting Non-Muslims

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In an article called "Salam is a greeting for Non-Muslims" Sheikh Faysal b. Anwar Mawlawi discussed the hadith: "...Do not initiate the salaam with the Jews and Christians and when you meet them on the road, force them to go to the narrowest part of it..." [Muslim]. The Shaykh wrote:

".....this hadith 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 Banu Qurayzah. This is established by another authentic hadith 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]....."

In response to this explanation a sincere Muslim brother emailed me and wrote:

"...I don't think it is really convincing. Because the Prophet peace be upon him also included Christians. In Sahih Muslim, Book 26, Number 5389 we read: ".....Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger [may peace be upon him] as saying: Do not greet the Jews and the Christians before they greet you"

doesn't use the words: "Jews and Christians" , unlike the version in Muslim's Sahih. It's important to point out that the Arabic version of the hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari uses the term "Ahl al-Kitâb" [People of the Book]. The hadith in question therefor reads: "do not initiate salam with the Jews alone" , "Christians alone" , or "both Jews and Christians". In other words the Arabic term "Ahl al-Kitâb" can be interpreted or understood as a reference to both Jews and Christians. This could be the reason why

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In the previous quote Dr. Ahmad Shafaat confirms that the original version of the hadith discussed in this paper, doesn't say or read: "do not initiate the greeting of Salam with the Jews and Christians" but: "do not initiate the greeting of Salam with the *ahl al-kitab*". Dr. Ahmad Shafaat in the Journal of the Muslim Research Institute also points out that the term *ahl al-kitab* was only used in reference to the Jews here. However [he later on points out] since Christian are also called ahl al-kitab, some scholars interpreted the hadith [under discussion in this paper] as a reference to both Jews and Christians, i.e. they included the Christians in this rule as well [and believed the hadith was a general command]. However earlier in this paper we pointed out with evidence from other hadith that *the term ahl al-kitab was only used in reference to the Jews here* [during a state of war].

Secondly one should realize that if a Muslim in this context would start to send peace blessings upon a Jew, it was very likely that he would receive a curse like "death be upon you" back. In this case moreover it would turn out that the Jew would have the last word since the Muslim initiated the greeting. Such incidents would of course hurt Muslims and bring them in a weak position [something that would be very undesirable in a state of war]. Therefor the order: "...do not initiate salam with the Ahl al-Kitâb..." was given in a *specific context* [it relates to a state of hostilities which had erupted at that time against the Muslims] to counter balance the attitude of certain hostile Jews. There is nothing wrong in initiating the greeting of Salam with peaceful Non-Muslims.

The hadith in Sunan Abu Dawud narrated by the brother in his email towards me does not disprove our opinion [and the fatwa by Sheikh Faysal b. Anwar Mawlawî] in any way. The father of Suhayl ibn Abu Salih simply interpreted to term "Ahl al-Kitâb" [in the hadith discussed in this paper] as a reference to both Jews and Christians. Perhaps the hadith: "...We are going forth in the morning against a group of Jews, so do not initiate the greeting of 'Peace' with them..." did not reach him, or he was perhaps unaware of Bukhari's "version" of the narration [Allah swt knows best] . Further we read that the father of Suhayl ibn Abu Salih interpreted the hadith of the Prophet [discussed in this paper] as a general command, i.e. he believed that Muslims were not allowed in general to initiate the Salam with the Non-Muslims. This opinion however contradicts some verses in the Qu'ran, as pointed out by Sheikh Muhammad Al-Mukhtar Al-Shinqiti here:

".....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....." ³

Uthamah Ibn Zayd reports:

The Prophet [sws] once passed by a mixed gathering of Muslims and Jews and said Assalamu 'alaykum to them. ⁴

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

4: Tirmadhi: No. 2702

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]

Commentary by Dr. Zohorul Hoque on the verse:

“....And when they [these righteous people] hear idle talk [or foolish arguments about things sacred], they [making their protest, 4:140; 6:68] turn aside [and leave politely] from it and say: for us are [the rewards of] our deeds, and to you are [the consequences of] your deeds ; - [we have no ill-will against you, rather we wish:] Salam [or Peace] be upon you’ [25:63, and invite you to the Religion of Peace, 16:125 ; 29:46] ! [After we have found this Light and Guidance, we cannot return to the Darkness of Ignorance, so] we do not follow the ignorant.....” ⁵

The commentary by Dr. Zohorul Hoque confirms that the verse in question describes how Muslims should respond against idle talk [or foolish arguments about things sacred] of the non-believers.

⁵: Dr. Zohorul Hoque, Translation and Commentary on the Holy Qur’an, [Holy Qur’an Publishing Project , 2000], p. 673