

# THE IMPORTANCE AND SUPERIORITY OF SALĀM IN ISLAM

Dr Hafiz Ather Hussain al-Azhari

Islam teaches us to greet fellow Muslims with the words “*As-salāmu ‘alaykum*” (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ) at every opportunity. However, some practices, though frequently performed, are often neglected and their significance not fully appreciated. Greeting Muslims with the *salām* is undoubtedly one of these practices whose true value we often overlook. This paper aims to elucidate the philosophy, wisdom, and superiority of greeting one another in the proper Islamic manner.

## OFFERING SALĀM BRINGS IMMENSE REWARD

The Prophet ﷺ was once sitting with his Companions when a Muslim arrived. He greeted the gathering with the words ‘*As-salāmu ‘alaykum*’. After replying, the Prophet ﷺ replied ‘ten’. Another Companion soon appeared who said ‘*As-salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmat Allāh*’. The Prophet ﷺ and his Companions replied, and then the Prophet ﷺ said ‘twenty’. A third and final Companion appeared and said ‘*As-salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmat Allāh wa barakātuh*’. The Prophet ﷺ returned the greetings and then said ‘thirty’.

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ was indicating that each form of *salām* has its own units of reward, with ‘*As-salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmat Allāh wa barakātuh*’ being the most lucrative. Just by greeting our fellow Muslims, we can reap an immense benefit in rewards from our Lord.

### *Other teachings*

This is also a healthy reminder not to neglect even the smaller ways to gain units of reward from Allāh. Saying hello or good morning also has the same function as *As-salāmu ‘alaykum*, but not the same reward.

## SALĀM IS A DU‘Ā

The meaning of *As-salāmu ‘alaykum* is ‘may peace descend upon you.’ So the Muslim form of greeting is not just a greeting, but a comprehensive *du‘ā* asking for peace in this world and the hereafter.

### *Other teachings*

This indicates that we should pray for our Muslim brothers and sisters at all times and at every opportunity. Our *du‘ās* should be for all and not just for ourselves. The biggest indication of this point is that most of the Qur’anic *du‘ās* begin with *rabbānā* (our Lord) rather than *rabbī* (my Lord).

## SAYING SALĀM IS A REMINDER OF OUR ASPIRATIONS

For Muslims, the ultimate goal is to win the pleasure of Allāh and gain a place in paradise for eternity. Beforehand, Allāh Almighty wants us to acclimatise to this place and to employ its language in advance. In a hadith recorded by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad*, the Prophet ﷺ said that ‘the *salām* is the greeting of the people of paradise.’ When the angels welcome the inhabitants of paradise to their eternal abode, their first words will be:

*Salām Alaykum! You have done well, so enter here to abide therein*  
(39:73).

In fact, one of the many names of paradise is ‘*Salām*’. The Qur’an states:

*And Allāh calls you to the house of Salām (Dar al-Salām) (10:25).*

### *Other teachings*

In this world, it is easy to lose focus on what our purpose of life is. Saying *As-salāmu ‘alaykum* constantly reminds us of our end goal; the pleasure of Allāh and a place in paradise.

## SALĀM IS ONE OF THE NAMES OF ALLĀH

When you greet one another with the word *salām*, we are in fact mentioning of the beautiful names of Allāh Almighty. Therefore, simply by greeting Muslims, we are also engaging in the *dhikr* (remembrance) of Allāh. Seen in this light, our greeting is a request that ‘may Allāh guard over you.’

### *Other teachings*

As the Qur’an clearly indicates, it is through the constant remembrance of Allāh that we believers find true content of heart. Even in our customary greetings, the importance of *dhikr* is stressed and emphasised.

## SALĀM IS A METHOD OF RECONCILIATION

Islam accepts that there will be times when there are fallouts, disputes and misunderstandings between Muslims. Our Messenger ﷺ commanded us to ensure that such disputes do not extend beyond three days. He also added that the ‘best from the two is the one who begins with *salām*.’ So therefore, saying *salām* is a way of easing tensions and restoring peace between Muslim parties.

### *Other teachings*

Saying *As-salāmu ‘alaykum* is the ice-breaker that removes friction and anxiety.

## SALĀM IS A MEANS OF RICHES

Sahl ibn Sa’d al-Sā’idī reports that a man complained to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ of poverty and a restricted living standard. So the Messenger ﷺ instructed him that:

When you enter your house, then perform *salām* [to the inhabitants] if there is someone home. And if there is no one home, then perform *salām* upon me and recite *Surat al-Ikhlās* three times.

The man acted upon this order. As a result, Allāh blessed him with so much wealth that even his neighbours benefitted from his new-found riches. (*Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, Commentary of *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*)

#### *Other teachings*

The hadith is really indicating what *baraka* (blessings) is. It is when we perform an act expecting little but gain much more. Sometimes a meal is laid down for four but it is easily consumed by seven. We say that the food has *baraka*. Saying *As-salāmu ‘alaykum* does not for us expect to lead to much gain, but Allāh provides more than we first assume.

This report also informs us implicitly that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ spiritually lives in the home of every believer. Otherwise, there would be no point in sending *salām* to him.

### SALĀM IS WHERE WE DERIVE THE NAME OF OUR RELIGION

The name of our religion – Islam – is taken from the same word we use to greet one another. Islam means peace and submission. This itself is an acknowledgement that the overwhelming feature of our religion is peace, harmony, love and compassion.

#### *Other teachings*

Based on this reality, it is impossible for our religion to support bloodshed, terrorism and murder if by name, Islam means peace. Those who act with violence in the name of our religion have simply misunderstood what Islam means and stands for. The White House is so-called because it is predominantly white. Islam is so-called because it is the perfect reflection of peace and mercy.