

## Muslim Greetings: A Critical Analysis of Salafi Scholars' Views on Kneeling and Bending Etiquette in Islam

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### Abstract

*This paper delves into the discourse surrounding traditional Islamic greetings, specifically focusing on the viewpoints of Salafi scholars regarding the practices of kneeling and bending as manners of greeting in Islam. Drawing upon a comprehensive review of primary sources, classical texts, and contemporary scholarly works, this study critically examines the arguments and interpretations presented by Salafiyah scholars. It investigates the theological, cultural, and historical contexts shaping their perspectives on the appropriateness and religious significance of these greetings. Furthermore, the paper explores the implications of these viewpoints within the broader Islamic community and discusses potential avenues for inter-sectarian dialogue and understanding. By engaging with diverse scholarly viewpoints and contextualizing them within broader Islamic teachings, this analysis contributes to a nuanced understanding of greeting etiquettes in Islam and facilitates constructive discourse within the global Muslim community.*

*Keywords: Salafiyah scholars, Islamic greetings, Inter-sectarian dialogue*

### INTRODUCTION

Greetings are universal across cultures, esteemed as a common feature regardless of religious affiliation. Each society has its unique forms and styles of greetings, reflecting its cultural norms and values. In Islam, greeting manners are prescribed and upheld as standards for interaction. These encompass both verbal expressions of taslīm and various bodily acts such as handshaking, hugging, and kissing, tailored to individual preferences and circumstances. However, controversies arise among Islamic scholars regarding certain greetings like bending, kneeling, and bowing, which are customary in specific regions, notably African societies. These practices prompt debates concerning their compatibility with Islamic principles.

In the discourse on acceptable manners of greeting in Islam, several Nigerian scholars, including Shaykh Muhammad Ali Jabata, Abdur-Razaq Alaro, Abdur-Razaq Ejigbo, Abdul-Fatah Sarumi, and Abdul-Ghaniy Jumat, prominent figures

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Received: December 31, 2023

Revised: February 4, 2024

Accepted: February 25, 2024

within the Salafiyyah movement in the Southern region, strongly oppose bending, kneeling, and bowing as forms of greeting. They categorically condemn these practices, declaring them haram (prohibited) and equating them with Shirk (associating partners with Allah). Their stance is uncompromising, emphasizing a strict adherence to what they perceive as authentic Islamic teachings.

On the contrary, scholars such as Shaykh Mutiullahi Esininobiwa, Nurudeen Ibrahim Al-Misri, and Adam Alfanla advocate for the permissibility and acceptability of kneeling and bending as gestures of honor, respect, and mutual affection. They challenge the arguments of the Salafiyyun scholars, questioning the validity of their interpretations and insisting that anything considered haram or Shirk must have clear prohibitions in the Qur'an or authentic hadith.

This debate underscores the complexities inherent in interpreting Islamic teachings and applying them to cultural practices. It reflects differing perspectives within the Muslim community regarding the flexibility of Islamic principles in accommodating diverse cultural norms (Luth & Ahmad, 2023). As scholars on both sides present their arguments, the discussion extends beyond mere etiquettes of greeting to encompass broader questions of religious authority, textual interpretation, and cultural adaptation within Islam.

The objective of this paper is therefore to examine the views and submissions of *Salafiyyah* scholars on manners of greeting in Islam, especially their declaration of kneeling and bending as constituting *Shirk*. It is essential to examine the basis of this declaration by them because it is not expressly declared in the Qur'an or any authentic *hadith* of the Prophet. As indicated above, the declaration has been generating debates among various scholars in Nigeria and needs to be correctly looked into to put the matter to rest. This will go a long way in appraising different views on manners of greeting in Islam and providing the Muslims of Nigeria and across the globe, especially where the practice is customized, a better understanding that can lead them out of the wilderness of doubts and confusion.

The article adopted an exegetical and analytical methods to achieve the set objectives. The methods are appropriate and suitable because the topic is a textual study. Both will avail the need to thoroughly analyze various verses and *ahadith* that *Salafiyyah* scholars relied on in their position on kneeling and bending while greeting. This will be guided by the explanations of classical *Muffasirun* and the categorization of the scholars of *hadith* on the frequently cited *ahadith* to determine their genuineness, authenticity, and reliability. The discussion is more comprehensive than in Nigeria or Yorubaland, where the issue generates rumbles. However, it focuses on the generality of *Salafiyyah* in modern times since it is not a

peculiar case to the country. The inductive and deductive approaches were adopted to gather in-depth knowledge from various materials consulted for this paper.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Greetings and Respect in Islam

The significance of greeting in Islam is paramount, with Qur'an 24:61 commanding believers to express salutations upon meeting, while Qur'an 4:86 obligates responding to greetings. Islamic teachings outline various rules governing greetings, including the Prophet's guidance on prioritizing elders, those sitting, and larger groups in greetings. Even during significant events like the Prophet's nocturnal journey, he emphasized the importance of greeting at each stage (Rahemtulla, 2017).

Islamic greetings and their etiquettes embody decorum, respect, honor, and mutual love. While the general formula of *taslim* is universal, other greetings vary based on time, place, and individual status. For instance, Islam recommends saying "Yarhamuk Allahu" when someone sneezes.

Controversies arise not from greetings themselves but from accompanying bodily acts, particularly bending and kneeling, common in African cultures. These practices predate Islam's introduction to the region and are seen through the lens of *Sharicah* by scholars. Polemics often revolve around whether these customs align with Islamic principles.

Proponents of bending and kneeling as greetings argue that neither the Qur'an nor authentic hadith prohibit such practices. They contend that these gestures demonstrate respect and humility, essential tenets of Islam, especially when greeting elders or authorities. They cite Qur'anic verses that emphasize humility, such as chapter 17, verse 24, instructing children to lower their wings in respect to their parents, and verses directing the Prophet to show humility to his followers. Although the Prophet may not bend or bow to his followers as the leaders, humility is embedded in the teaching. The scholars in this category also adjudged bending and kneeling as in tandem with the *hadith* of the Prophet, which says:

وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ أَوْحَى إِلَيَّ أَنْ تَوَاضَعُوا حَتَّى لَا يَفْخَرَ أَحَدٌ عَلَى أَحَدٍ

...Indeed, Allah revealed to me that (Muslims) should behave to one another so that no one feels despised (Muslim, No.2865).

The above quotation is an excerpt from an extensive report from the Prophet, covering three issues: respect and humility inclusive, one of the pro-bending scholars relied upon in their submissions. The tradition is equally in line with the culture of the people across various societies regardless of their religious inclination.

According to Duranti (2001), this is because greeting is not cultural, religious and universal.

### **Controversies Around Manners of Greeting in Nigeria**

Over time, disputes over greeting customs have surfaced within families and communities across Nigeria, sparking upheavals and tensions (Achi, 2021; Olowo, 2021). Instances have been reported where refusal to bend while greeting has led to significant consequences, even affecting marital arrangements. In one case, a groom's refusal to bend while greeting the bride's parents nearly halted a marriage ceremony until the intervention of an Islamic scholar. Similarly, disagreements over bending as a sign of respect have arisen, with parents and scholars insisting on adherence to traditional customs.

In recent years, incidents of children refusing to bend while greeting their parents have become more common, leading to societal labels and tensions. In certain cultural settings, such as palaces, where prostration or bending is customary when greeting the king, refusals have resulted in serious repercussions, including banishment. These conflicts highlight varying interpretations and expectations surrounding greeting gestures.

The refusal to bend or kneel during greetings is perceived differently by individuals. Some view it as a display of arrogance, while others see it as a departure from Quranic and hadith teachings on prostration. Such disputes have fueled animosity and strained relationships among different segments of society, including between teachers and students, parents and children, and within extended families.

This reluctance to bend during greetings is increasingly normalized in Nigerian society, with individuals fearing social stigma or judgment for adhering to traditional customs. These tensions and conflicts are not unique to Nigeria and may be observed in other societies, both within and beyond Africa.

### **Salafiyyah Scholars and Qur'ānic Discourse on Bowing and Prostration**

Prominent among the *Salafiyyah* scholars in the discussion about manners of greetings are Ibn Bāz, Ibn Al-<sup>c</sup>Uthaymīn, and Al-Bānī, among others. The Nigerian *Salafiyyun* are noted for frequently referencing these scholars as the source of inspiration for their position on bending and kneeling while greeting. Their arguments stemmed from two primary Qur'an expressions — *rukūc* (genuflection or bowing) and *sujūd* (prostration). There are many places where the Qur'ān references both (*rukūc* and *sujūd*) as the exclusive rights of Allah, which must be accorded to Him in worship. In this context, *Salafiyyah* scholars forbid, according to either of them, to fellow creatures while greeting, expressing pleasantries, or as a mark of honour and respect from a younger person to an elderly individual. Al-<sup>c</sup>Uthaymin

(2009) submits that what is due to Allah must not be accorded to any creature, or else one becomes an infidel.

Out of different places that the word *sujūd* occurs in the Qur'ān, there are five verses that form the kernel of *Salafiyyah* scholars' discourse on the subject matter. Qur'an says:

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا...

*And behold, We said to the Angels: "Prostrate to Adam" and they prostrated....(Q.2:34)*

The above verse accounts for what transpired between Allah, Adam, and the angels. They (angels) were ordered by Allah to prostrate to Adam, having failed to match him intellectually, as a mark of honour and respect, which they all did, except Iblīs.

Another reference is what transpired between Prophet Yūsuf, his father and his brothers. Al-Qur'an says:

وَرَفَعَ أَبَوَيْهِ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ وَخَرُّوا لَهُ سُجَّدًا...

*And he raised his parents high on the throne (of dignity), and they fell in prostration...(Q12:100)*

This scenario occurred when the members of Yusuf's family came to Egypt and met him in a very high position of authority in the country. The father and everyone at that scene prostrated to Yūsuf as a mark of his royal greeting.

It is pertinent to point out that *Mufāsirūn* (exegetes) like Al-Qurṭubī (1964) and Ibn Kathīr have compiled different shades of interpretation on these verses in their various works. The bone of contention is whether those prostrations accorded to Adam and Yūsuf in their respective cases are gestures of worship or marks of respect and honour (Ibn Kathīr, 1999). After an array of explanations, it is concluded that those *Sujūd* are merely for greeting and respect alone without involving worship. Al-Qurṭubī (1964) writes:

وأجمع المفسرون أن ذلك السجود على أي وجه كان فإتاما كان تحية لا عبادة

*Exegetes are unanimous that the prostration, in whatever manner, is meant for greeting and not for worship.*

This is the submission of Al-Qurṭubī, having examined various narrations and submissions of different scholars, and it seems to be the proper perspective of the entire scenario. This, therefore, presupposes that *Sajdah* can be for worship or respect.

The *Salafiyyah* scholars equally argued in the light of another Qur'anic verse to drive home their point of making bending and bowing as a forbidden act in Islam. The verse reads:

...لَا تَسْجُدُوا لِلشَّمْسِ وَلَا لِلْقَمَرِ وَاسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَهُنَّ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ

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...Prostrate neither for the sun nor for the moon, but for Allah, Who created them, if it is Him you are worshipping. (Q 41:37)

With the provision of this verse, therefore, prostration to other than Allah, the *Salafiyyah* scholars argued, is prohibited, and doing it can eject one from the fold of Islam (*Fatāwā' l-Lajnatu' d-Dā'imah*, 2000).

Another verse of the Qur'ān that attracts the attention of the *Salafiyyah* scholars vis-à-vis bowing is:

...وَادْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا...

...Enter through the door in prostration...(Q 2:58, 4:154, 7:161)

*Salafiyyah* scholars submit in the light of the argument of Ibn Qayyim (2006), Aṭ-Ṭabarī (2010), and Ibn Mazur (1999), among others, that the implication of this verse where Allah orders the Israelites to enter through the door in prostration is that there is no difference between bowing, bending, and prostration. They argue that the verse must not be taken in its ordinary sense because one cannot enter through a door in prostration but by bowing or bending. Ibn ʿAbbās (1998) in his *Tafsīr* mentions genuflection (*rukūʿ*), otherwise called bowing in conventional language. He writes:

قال أبو جعفر: وأصل "السجود" الانحناء لمن سجد له معظماً بذلك. فكل منحن لشيء تعظيماً له فهو "ساجد"  
*Abu Jaʿfar said: Prostration means bending to someone who is honoured or respected with it. Therefore, every act of honorific bending to anything is prostration.*

The above submissions from those scholars including that of Ibn ʿAbbās seem to have been in opposition to the Prophetic explanation of the verse as recorded by Al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. While giving the corresponding *ḥadīth* to the verse above, he reports:

عَنْ هَمَامِ بْنِ مُنَبِّهٍ أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ أَبَا هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ يَقُولُ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قِيلَ لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ { ادْخُلُوا  
الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا وَقُولُوا حِطَّةً نَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ خَطَايَاكُمْ } فَبَدَّلُوا فَدَخَلُوا يَرْحَفُونَ عَلَى أَسْنَانِهِمْ

*On the authority of Himām bin Munabbih, who heard Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with him saying that the Messenger of Allah, may the blessing and peace of Allah be upon him, said, "It was said to the children of Israel: Enter the gate in prostration and seek forgiveness, we shall forgive you, your faults." But they changed (Allah's order) and entered, crawling on their buttocks ... (Al-Bukhārī, No.3403)*

The basic inference from this *ḥadīth* is that the children of Israel defied the instructions of Allah, who ordered them to enter through the door in prostration but crawled while entering, giving flimsy excuses. In consequence, their efforts were rendered null and void, and Allah punished them, as could be inferred from the next verse. The question now is that if prostration, as defined by those scholars, is bending or bowing, how come Allah rejects it from them? Let it be remembered

that one cannot crawl while standing. Also, the explanation of Al-<sup>c</sup>Uthaymin (2009) in his *Tafsir* is relevant because he is of the view that the Israelites are to prostrate after entry through the gate to express their gratitude to Allah and not that they should enter a prostrating position. He explains further that prostration, as directed in verse (s), is a status that does not go with entering but indicates what should be done afterwards.

*Salafiyyah* scholars equally argue in the light of another verse of the Qur'an where Allah says:

وَأَنَّ الْمَسَاجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَدًا

"And the places of worship are for Allah, so invoke not anyone along with Allah." (Q72:18)

In the light of this verse, Ibn Kathir (1999) and Al-Qurtubi (1964) reference Sa'id Ibn Musayyab and Sa'id Ibn Jubayr as submitting that the *Masājid* therein refers to the parts of the body used for worship, all of which must not be used in worshipping other than Allah. This is premised on a tradition of the Prophet, which specifies the body parts that should be involved in prostration. It reads:

عَنْ الْعَبَّاسِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ إِذَا سَجَدَ الْعَبْدُ سَجَدَ مَعَهُ سَبْعَةٌ أَطْرَافٍ وَجْهُهُ وَكَفَّاهُ وَرُكْبَتَاهُ وَقَدَمَاهُ

*On the authority of Al-<sup>c</sup>Abbās bin Abdul-Muṭṭalib, who heard the Messenger of Allah, may the blessing and peace of Allah be upon him, saying: When a servant prostrates, seven parts of his body are involved. These are the face, the two palms, the two knees, and the two feet. (Muslim, No.491)*

The submission of Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Musayyab, as quoted by Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi, must be put into proper perspectives. This is necessary because there exists in this explanation a misconception, as the verse has nothing to do with manners of greeting or body limbs (Al-Misri, 2019). The submission sounds illogical. It is like prohibiting the same mouth that one uses to pronounce *takbīr* in *Ṣalāt*, which is the worship of Allah, from mundane usages like praising or saying *taslim* to fellow men while greeting.

Al-Misri further contends that Quranic verse interpretations vary among scholars, with some suggesting it refers to mosques or the Kaaba itself. According to Al-Qurtubi's *Tafsir*, Ibn Jubayr offers two interpretations of the verse, with the latter being considered most appropriate, suggesting it was revealed in response to a request from the Jinn to the Prophet. Additionally, Al-Qatada explains the verse's purpose as safeguarding the sanctity of mosques from sacrilegious activities, particularly those conducted by Jews and Christians who commercialized their places of worship. This interpretation, echoed by Ibn Kathir, aligns with the general consensus among various *Tafsir* scholars.

However, it's noted that the interpretation put forth by Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi from Ibn Jubayr is rare and not widely accepted among earlier scholars, thus lacking substantial support in this discourse.

Furthermore, there appears to be common ground between the views of scholars like Al-Qurtubi and those of the Salafiyyah scholars. Al-Qurtubi distinguishes between prostration as an act of worship and prostration as a form of greeting, suggesting that the latter does not entail the same religious significance. While Al-Qurtubi does not endorse prostration to entities other than Allah, his categorization implies that intention plays a crucial role. It is widely accepted among scholars that intention is integral to every Muslim action.

In essence, while interpretations may vary, scholars generally agree that the practice of bending or prostration should be guided by sincere intention, underscoring the importance of intentionality in Islamic practices.

Also, greeting, as practiced in the cases of Adam and Yusuf, as mentioned above, according to Ibn Kathir, has been abrogated by Allah in the *Shari'ah* of Muhammad. He writes:

وقد كان هذا سائغا في شرانعمهم إذا سلموا على الكبير يسجدون له، ولم يزل هذا جائزا من لدن آدم إلى شريعة عيسى، عليه السلام، فحرم هذا في هذه الملة، وجعل السجود مختصا بجناب الرب سبحانه وتعالى

This was indeed allowed in their laws. If they greet the elder, they prostrate to him, and it remained the same from Adam down to ʿIsā, peace be upon him. However, it became a forbidden act in this religion (Islam). Therefore, prostration is taken as an exclusive right of Allah, the most praised and exalted.

From the above excerpt, therefore, Ibn Kathīr opines that the practice has been abrogated by Allah, who makes it His exclusive right. They (*Mufāssirūn*), accordingly, submitted that prostration and bending as manners of greeting had been replaced and limited to the pronouncement of *taslīm* alone (Al-Qurtubi). This may not be appropriate because both actions are different, though they correlate highly. *Taslīm* is the word of mouth while kneeling and bending are actions of the limb, and they are in the same category as hugging, handshaking, and kissing, among others, which the Prophet practised throughout his life. Details are in the next subhead.

### **Salafiyyah Scholars and the *Ḥadīth* Discourse on Bending or Kneeling to Greet**

Generally, there are many traditions of the Prophet on manners of greeting and many verses of the Qur'ān, some of which have been explained above. This paper adopts a structured approach, employing a pyramid selection method to focus on hadiths central to discussions on kneeling and bending as forms of greeting. Two specific traditions, according to Salafiyyah scholars, are pivotal in



understanding the practice of bowing, bending, kneeling, and prostration as greetings, and both will be thoroughly examined. It's worth noting that these scholars' interpretations are informed by the Quranic verses discussed earlier. Thus, in their attempt to elucidate these verses, they bring forth hadiths to reinforce their arguments.

The first tradition involves Mu'adh Ibn Jabal, a figure referenced by various Quranic commentators. According to this tradition, Mu'adh was sent by the Prophet to Syria on a mission. Upon his return, Mu'adh prostrated to the Prophet, imitating the custom of the people of Syria. However, the Prophet rejected this gesture, asserting that prostration is exclusively reserved for Allah. He further stated that if anyone were to have the authority to make someone prostrate to another, it would be a wife to her husband. While this hadith is deemed authentic by scholars like Al-Bani, its credibility is questioned concerning the Prophet's biography. Historical accounts suggest that Mu'adh did not travel to Syria during the Prophet's lifetime. His only journey to Syria occurred during the reigns of either Abu Bakr or Umar, the first and second caliphs respectively, and he passed away there due to a plague outbreak. The Prophet's prophecy to Mu'adh prior to his journey only mentioned Yemen as his destination, foreseeing that Mu'adh would not return to him alive but would have his mosque and grave in Yemen, as recorded by Ibn Kathir and Ad-Dhahabi. Ibn Kathir (1997) writes:

أن معاذًا لما بعثه رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إلى اليمن خرج معه يوصيه ومعاذ راكب ورسول الله يمشى تحت راحلته ; فلما فرغ قال: " يا معاذ إنك عسى ألا تلقاني بعد عامي هذا، ولعلك أن تمر بمسجدى هذا وقبري ". فيكى معاذ خشعا لفراق رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم... وهذا الحديث فيه إشارة وظهور وإيماء إلى أن معاذًا رضى الله عنه لا يجتمع بالنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم بعد ذلك ; وكذلك وقع، فإنه أقام باليمن حتى كانت حجة الوداع، ثم كانت وفاته عليه السلام بعد أحد وثمانين يوما

*Indeed, when Mu'adh was sent by Allah's messenger, may Allah's blessing and peace be upon him, to Yemen, he (the Prophet) accompanied him with instructions. Mu'adh rode while the Prophet was trekking along with him. When they got to the departing point, the Prophet said: Oh, Mu'adh! It is possible that you may not meet me again after this year, but you will return to meet my mosque and my grave. Mu'adh busted crying for fear of departing the Prophet. May the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him...(Ibn Kathir then remarks) This tradition indicates that Mu'adh never met with the Prophet, may the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him, after that because he was in Yemen when the farewell pilgrimage of the Prophet took place after which he, may the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him, died after eighty-one days.*

Every other report on this incident bears testimony that Mu'adh was in Yemen when the Prophet died but returned to Madinah during the tenure of

Abubakr, the first *Khalīfah*. Prominent among those reports is the one that the Prophet asked him how he will adjudicate when he gets to Yemen, and cases are brought to him (Abu Dawud, No.3592 and At-Tirmidhi, No.1327). Although Al-Bānī (2000) rated this hadith as weak, many other authentic reports testified to the journey and presence of Mu'adh in Yemen, as reported by Al-Bukhari, among others. Some of them include the one that focuses on the method of *da'wah* (Al-Bukhari, No.1496, 4347) and the one that commands ease in approach to issues (Al-Bukhari, No.3038). Also, there are no such reports on his journey to Syria, but after the demise of the Prophet.

The second *ḥadīth*, perhaps the most relied upon in matters of prostration, is the one that was reported by Anas which was originally found in At-Tirmidhi's collection. The *ḥadīth* reads:

عن أنس بن مالك قال قال رجل : يا رسول الله الرجل منا يلقي أخاه أو صديقه أينحني له ؟ قال لا قال أفيلتمه ويقبله ؟ قال لا قال أفياخذ بيده ويصافحه ؟ قال نعم هذا حديث حسن

*Anas Ibn Mālik (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: A man asked: "O Messenger of Allah! Should he bend for him when a man meets his brother or friend?" He said, "No." The man asked: can he embrace and kiss him? The Messenger of Allah replied, "No." He asked: Can he hold his hand and shake him? The Messenger of Allah replied, "Yes." This is a tradition of good status (At-Tirmidhi, No.2728).*

The above tradition, which is the sole authority relied upon by *Salafiyyah* scholars in their arguments on bending, has been rejected from all sides by different scholars, including some scholars in the *Salafiyyah* circle. The devastating blow is targeted at its *sanad* (chains of narration) and its *Matn* (text). One such scholar who has conducted impeccable research on this tradition is Al-Bānī. On the *Sanad* of this tradition, he submits that there are different chains of narration for this *ḥadīth* one of them is reported by Muhammad Yūsuf Al-Firyabī, and it is traced to At-Thawrī. It is declared a weak *ḥadīth* because of Ḥanzalah Ibn 'Abdullahi's inclusion in the chain of its narration. Al-Bānī (1996), therefore, submits on one hand that:

فإن رجاله كلهم ثقات غير حنظلة

*Indeed, everyone who reported it (ḥadīth) is trustworthy except Ḥanzalah.*

On the other hand, Al-Bānī proceeds to point out that there are other chains of narration for the same *ḥadīth* but the wordings differ. Al-Bānī writes:

من طريق أبي بلال الأشعري حدثنا قيس بن الربيع عن هشام بن حسان عن شعيب به إلا أنه ذكر السجود بدل الالتزام  
*In (another) chain of narration from Abi Bilāl Al-Ash'arī (who said), we were told by Qays bin Ar-Rabi' on the authority of Hishām bin Hisān from Shu'āib, except that "prostration" (Sujūd) is mentioned instead of "embrace."*

Al-Bānī states further that the chain of this second report is good (*hasan*), but it has equally been declared as weak by Daruqatni due to Abu Bilāl Al-Ash‘arī who is found in its chains.

Another chain, according to him, is that of Kathīr. He writes:

كثير بن عبد الله قال : سمعت أنس بن مالك به دون ذكر الانحناء و الالتزام .

*Kathīr bin Abdullahi said: I heard Anas bin Mālik narrating that tradition without mentioning bending and embracing each other.*

Also, Daruqatni equally rated this tradition as weak, while Ad-Dhahhabī declared it as *Munkar* (a class of weak traditions). The third from Al-Bānī is that of Al-Muhlab on the authority of Anas. It reads:

المهلب بن أبي صفرة عن أنس : لا ينحني الرجل للرجل ، و لا يقبل الرجل الرجل ، قالوا : يصافح الرجل الرجل ؟ قال : نعم :

*Al-Muhlab bin Abi-Safrah, on the authority of Anas, said: A man must not bend for another man nor kiss him. They asked (the Prophet) if a man shook hands with another man. He replied: Yes.*

Al-Bānī personally faults the chain of the report and quotes ‘Abdul-‘Azīz who declares it as a *Matrūk* (a class of weak traditions), while Ibn Mu‘ayyan declared him (Al-Muhlab) as a liar (Al-Bānī).

Aside from their being faulted by different scholars, a juxtaposition of these textually contradictory reports reveals several irreconcilable contradictions. It is abundantly clear that the Prophet will never contradict himself. Moreover, the fact that none of them independently satisfied the scrutinizing machinery of the scholars shows that they cannot stand shoulder equal with that of Tirmidhi.

As regards the text of At-Tirmidhi's *ḥadīth*, Al-Bānī explains that the rejection of embracing each other, as contained in the text of Tirmidhi's report, contradicts several authentic reports that permit embracing each other, especially when one returns from a journey. He writes:

و لهذا كنت أخرج من المعانقة في الحضر ، و بخاصة أنني كنت خرجت في المجلد الأول من هذه " السلسلة " ( رقم 160 ) حديث نهيه صلى الله عليه وسلم عن الانحناء و الالتزام و التقبيل . ثم لما جهزت المجلد لإعادة طبعه ، و أعدت النظر في الحديث ، تبين لي أن جملة " الالتزام " ليس لها ذكر في المتابعات أو الشواهد التي بها كنت قويت الحديث ، فحذفتها منه كما سيرى في الطبعة الجديدة من المجلد إن شاء الله ، و قد صدر حديثا و الحمد لله . فلما تبين لي ضعفها زال الحرج و الحمد لله ، و بخاصة حين رأيت التزام ابن التيهان الأنصاري للنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم في حديث خروجه صلى الله عليه وسلم إلى منزله رضي الله عنه الثابت في " الشمائل المحمدية "

*For this reason, I used to avoid embracement while at home. However, specifically, when I compiled the first volume of al-Silsilah (No. 160), I included a tradition that reports that the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) detested bending, embracing, and kissing while greeting. Then, when I compiled another volume for reprinting and re-examined this tradition, I noticed that the word*

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*embracing needs to be mentioned in the corroborating reports, based on which I had classed the tradition as strong. I therefore removed, as it will be seen in the new edition in Shā' Allah... praise be to Allah. Later, I discovered that it was a weak narration, and I felt comfortable that I had taken it out, thanks to Allah. In particular, I found that Ibn al-Tihān al-Anṣarī embraced the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), according to the ḥadīth that speaks of the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) coming out to the house of Ibn al-Tihān (may Allah be pleased with him), which is narrated in al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyah...(Al-Munajid, n.d)*

Apart from this text, Al-Bānī continues by pointing out various traditions, which point to how the Prophet embraced some companions like Ja'far upon his return from Abyssinia and how the companions used to embrace each other. He narrates a report from Aṭ-Ṭabarānī, which reads:

كان أصحاب النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم إذا تلاقوا تصافحوا ، و إذا قدموا من سفر تعانقوا

*The Prophet's companions, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, when meeting with each other, used to shake hands, and when returning from a journey, they used to hug or embrace one another (Al-Bānī, 200).*

Having sunk the Imām at-Tirmidhi's tradition into the mud, Al-Bānī appears to be more comfortable with this tradition; he made it the basis of his position and a yardstick to negate the celebrated tradition of At-Tirmidhi. He brought out many traditions that equally allow kissing of some categories of people and the manners thereof (Al-Bānī ).

Other references often cited by the pro-bending scholars but rejected by the *Salafiyyah* scholars are the two instances where Umar, the second *Khalīfah*, is recorded to have knelt to appease and venerate the Prophet. The two lengthy traditions are reported by both Bukhārī and Muslims and many scholars of *ḥadīth*, including Al-Bānī, who classified them as authentic (Al-Bānī).

The narrations above concerning Umar's posture in two distinct situations with the Prophet shed light on his act of kneeling to pacify and venerate the Prophet, particularly when the Prophet was irritated. Notably, Imam Muslim categorized the first narration under the subheading "The Chapter of Veneration of the Prophet." In both instances, Umar knelt in reverence and to calm the Prophet, and the Prophet did not object to his posture.

Interestingly, neither Ibn Baz nor Al-Uthaymeen referenced these traditions in their respective legal opinions on bending during greetings. Only Jabata discusses them, interpreting Umar's actions as permissible outside the context of greeting. According to Jabata, Umar's kneeling was specific to the Prophet and aimed at pacifying him, suggesting that bending during greetings, being an act of

worship, remains impermissible. However, this viewpoint presents a contradiction within Salafiyyah doctrine, which categorizes bending during greetings as an act of shirk (associating partners with Allah). If bending during greeting is deemed shirk, the Prophet would not have permitted it, nor would he have accepted it from Umar. Ibn Taymiyyah's stance, as outlined in his *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, is pertinent to this discussion. He declares bending to kings and scholars during greeting as impermissible, except under duress where refusal could result in severe consequences. Ibn Taymiyyah likens this situation to that of haram and necessity, asserting that necessities dictate exceptions. This perspective clarifies that while bending under duress may be permissible, it does not equate bending with shirk or kufr (disbelief), as nothing legitimizes shirk or kufr in Islam.

### **Contemporary *Fatwā* on Bending and Bowing as Manners of Greeting**

After synthesizing and analyzing multiple viewpoints, contemporary Salafiyyah scholars, particularly led by Al-Uthaymeen and the members of the Permanent Committee of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), maintain a firm stance against bending during greetings, unequivocally declaring it as haram, as stated in the Fatwas of the Permanent Committee in 2000. However, Al-Uthaymeen classifies it as makruh (detestable) in his 2009 classification. Nevertheless, he strongly denounces prostration to any being other than Allah as haram, equating it with shirk (associating partners with Allah). This underscores the careful consideration and awareness evident in his legal opinions on various occasions. For instance, while he deems bowing or bending as makruh when questioned about them, he vehemently declares prostration and bowing as haram and acts of shirk.

Scholars in the Permanent Committee of the KSA strictly adjudicate on the act of offering rukuc and sujud to beings other than Allah, citing the hadith of Tirmidhi. Consequently, they classify it as haram and condemn it as an act of shirk, without distinguishing between bending, bowing, and prostration. Neither camp considers intention (*niyyah*) as the criterion for differentiating between greeting and worship regarding bowing or bending. Additionally, both camps align with the submission of Ibn Kathir, as earlier cited, asserting that prostration as a form of greeting, permissible in earlier communities, has been abrogated with the revelation of the Quran.

After examining various evidence and references from Salafiyyah scholars regarding kneeling and bending as forms of greeting, it is evident that there are numerous misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and overgeneralizations in their submissions. This paper's findings highlight the need for careful consideration and nuanced understanding when interpreting religious practices and rulings.

Firstly, the definition of prostration (*sujūd*) has been clearly outlined by the Prophet in his renowned hadith, indicating that it involves specific body parts. Any deviation from this prescribed form renders the prostration invalid as an act of worship. Therefore, *inḥinā'* (bending) cannot be equated to prostration, as evident from the case of the Children of Israel in the Quran and the corresponding hadith of the Prophet. Allah's rejection of their actions, which they sought to substitute with prostration, reinforces this understanding (Mohamed, 2011).

Secondly, instances of prostration in the cases of Adam and Yusuf, as elucidated by various commentators, including those not referenced in this paper, are interpreted as greetings rather than acts of worship. It is widely accepted that these prostrations were not intended as worship but as respectful greetings. The differentiation made by these commentators between greeting and worship, based on intention, remains relevant as intention is integral to human actions.

Thirdly, the narrative involving Muadh ibn Jabal, whether to Sham or Yemen, frequently cited by some scholars, lacks substantiation in the *Sirah* (biography) and primary Islamic sources. Even if it did occur, it should be confined to prostration, as discussed earlier in this paper, and is irrelevant to the topic of bending during greeting (Zakharine, 2013; Flüchter, 2016). Fourthly, critical flaws have been identified in the central tradition that would have settled the controversy surrounding bending and bowing as a manner of greeting. Al-Bani has raised objections not only to the chain of narrators but also to the text of this hadith. Additionally, it is reported that Al-Bukhari deemed it as *Munkar* (unacceptable). These discrepancies undermine any reliance on this tradition to justify an act that may be deemed as disbelief (*Kufr*) (Winter & Hasan, 2016).

Fifthly, the cases of Umar remain unexplained and unchallenged by prominent *Salafiyyah* scholars like Ibn Baz and Al-Uthaymeen. The explanation provided by Jabata in these instances does not withstand scrutiny. It lacks logical coherence to serve as a basis for condemning and rejecting bending and kneeling as forms of greeting and veneration in Islam. Every action of a Muslim is considered worship, and there is no double standard in Islam (Katz, 2013).

## **CONCLUSION**

As discussed above, a cursory glance at the positions of the *Salafiyyah* scholars reveals that their submissions are shrouded in confusion and doubts and are based on wrong and faulty premises. This is because much of the critical evidence they relied upon, based on which they condemn and reject bending and kneeling, among others, as manners of greeting, could not stand in the face of scrutiny. The verses are grossly misconstrued; the most relied upon *ḥadīth* is weak,

while the supporting ones are unfounded. They overgeneralized and gave judgments out of error. If the act indeed constitutes *kufur* or *Shirk*, it would have been clearly stated either in the Qur'ān or an authentic *ḥadīth* of the Prophet or both, like other acts of *kufur* and *Shirk* which the two sources leave no one in the wilderness about them. The submission of Al-'Uthaymin reveals his confusion about it because an action cannot be both *ḥarām* and *makrūh*. Therefore, the *Salafiyyah* scholars should reconsider their position on declaring bending as *ḥarām* or *Shirk* for the absence of express provisions from the primary sources of Islam. It should rather be regarded as *makruh* if they all doubt its permissibility.

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