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An Examination of *Salafiyyah* Scholars' Discourse on Kneeling and Bending as Manners of Greeting in Islam

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Abstract

Bending, bowing, and kneeling are popular greetings across various tribes and societies, especially in Nigeria. The admissibility or otherwise of these manners has attracted the attention of Salafiyyah scholars in Islam. Relying on different sources, both from the Qur'ān and aḥādīth, the past and present scholars in the Salafiyyah bloc have declared these manners as forbidden in Islam, which may even constitute Shirk (associating partners with Allah). The objective of this paper is to examine various pieces of evidence that are relied upon by these scholars for making such declarations, having realized that the issues of kneeling or bending, among others, are not expressly declared as such in either of the two primary sources of Islamic legislation compared to other acts that constitute ḥarām or shirk. The exegetical and analytical methods of research were adopted in this paper. The two methods enable the assessment of relevant verses of the Qur'an and aḥādīth of the Prophet in the light of classical Mufasssirūn's submissions on those verses and renditions of scholars like Al-Bani on most cited aḥādīth on the issue of bending as a manner of greeting in Islam. After a critical examination, the finding revealed that most verses are grossly misconstrued; the most relied upon ḥadīth is weak, while the supporting ones are unfounded. It was also discovered that there are a lot of misconceptions, misunderstandings, and overgeneralizations in the Salafiyyah scholars' submissions regarding the issues of bending and other manners of greeting. This paper, therefore, concluded that there is no substantive basis for a declaration of kneeling and bending while greeting as either ḥarām or Shirk due to the absence of express provision from the Qur'ān and ḥadīth.

Keywords: *Salafiyyah*, Greeting, Bending, Prostration, Hugging

Introduction

The greeting is one of the common features of every culture, race, and tribe of the world. Regardless of religious background, every society holds expression of pleasantries via greeting in high esteem. Each situation that spans man's life has an equivalent form, manner, or style of greeting, and it is generally a norm that before the commencement of any activity that will bring at least two persons together, greeting serves as the key thereof. As a religion meant for humanity, Islam prescribes manners of greeting and sets standards for them. There is no doubt that greeting in Islam is a combination of expression of *taslīm* with bodily acts, ranging from handshaking, hugging, and kissing, among others, as may be deemed appropriate or convenient for one. Other manners of greeting that have generated controversies among Islamic scholars are bending, kneeling, and bowing. This is because they are primarily customary and peculiar to some places and customs, especially African societies. Scholars, therefore, argued over their permissibility or otherwise in Islam. Some Nigerian scholars like Shaykh Muhammad Ali Jabata, Abdur-Razaq Alaro, Abdur-Razaq Ejigbo, Abdul-Fatah Sarumi, and Abdul-Ghaniy Jumat, among other *Salafiyyah* advocates in the Southern part of Nigeria, are prominent when it comes to discussing acceptable manners of greeting in Islam. They argued against bending, kneeling, and bowing as manners of greeting, and are vehement in their condemnation of them. They do not mince their words in declaring them as *haram* (prohibited) and that they constitute *Shirk* (associating partners with Allah). The pro-kneeling and bending scholars include Shaykh Mutiullahi Esininobiwa, Nurudeen Ibrahim Al-Misri, and Adam Alfanla. They raised questions to argue the legality, permissibility, and acceptability of these greeting manners, stating that they are marks of honour, respect, and expression of mutual love and concern for one another. They also alleged that references by the *Salafiyyun* are twisted to suit their purposes because anything that will constitute *haram* or *Shirk* would have an express declaration from either the Qur'an or the authentic *hadith* of the Prophet.

The objective of this paper is 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.

This article adopted both exegetical and analytical research methods to achieve the set objectives of this paper. 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 the 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.

Greetings and Respect in Islam

The importance of greeting in Islam can always be emphasized. It is one of the religious designs that Muslims should express salutations at the point of meeting; Qur'an 24:61 commands that people greet in *taslīm*, while Qur'an 4:86 directs the response to greetings as an obligation. Various rules regulate greetings in Islam. The Prophet instructs that the young should greet the old first, the one walking should greet the one sitting, and the smaller group should greet the larger one.¹ It is equally reported that when the Prophet embarked on the celebrated nocturnal journey of *Isra' wal Mi'raj*, he announced his arrival at each stage with a greeting.² The Islamic greeting and its etiquettes depict decorum, calm, respect, honour, mutual love, and concern for one another. Apart from the general greeting formula of *taslīm*, other forms of greetings aligned with an individual's time, place, and state or status, as the case may be. An instance is the greeting when one sneezes, where Islam recommends *Yarhamuk Allahu*.

It should be pointed out that generally, greeting does not generate controversies among the scholars of Islam but the bodily acts that accompany it, especially the bending and kneeling that are common to Africans. Wójtowicz³ summarised various African cultures vis-à-vis greetings, including Akan, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Ewe, South Bantu, and Swahili. He identified different manners of greetings, including handshaking, hugging, bending, bowing, and even prostrations from younger ones to elders and subjects to the rulers, as the case may be. Africans practiced these manners before their contact with and acceptance of Islam. It is, therefore, one of the effects of their connections. It

¹ Al-Bukahri, *Sahih 'l-Bukhari* (Beirut: Darul-Fikr, 2010, No.6231).

² Al-Bukahri, No.3887. and Muslim, *Sahih Muslim* (Beirut: Darul-Ihya' 'l-Arabi, 2005, No.163).

³ Beata Wojtowicz, "Cultural Norms of Greetings in the African Context," *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 69, no. 6 (June 29, 2021): 171–87, <https://doi.org/10.18290/rh21696-10>. p.322

should be pointed out that scholars view different customary practices of the people through the lens of *Shari'ah*. Therefore, some areas of polemics are bowing and bending as manners of greeting.

The traditional scholars who double as the pro-bending and kneeling scholars while greeting argued that there is no provision in the Qur'an or authentic *hadith* of the Prophet prohibiting such practices. They submitted further that both constitute respect and humility, which are some of the essential teachings of Islam. Moreover, these are better done when one bends or kneels to greet elders or someone in a position of authority. They buttress their arguments further with chapter 17, verse 24 of the Qur'an, where the children are directed to bring down their wings in humility and respect to their parents. Also, Qur'an 15:88 and 26:215 instruct the Prophet to lower his wings 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 أَحَدٍ⁴

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

The above quotation is an excerpt from a larger report from the Prophet. It covers three issues: respect and humility inclusive, one of the pro-bending scholars relied upon it 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, greeting is not cultural, religious, or universal.⁵

Controversies on Manners of Greeting among Muslims in Nigeria

Over the years, there have been different upheavals occasioned by manners of greeting between two persons, even within families and societies across Nigeria. There are cases of refusal to knot marriage ties (*aqdun-Nikah*) when the groom refuses to bend while greeting the bride's parents. It took the intervention of the *Mallam* (Islamic scholar) who officiated the occasion before the marriage could be conducted. On another occasion, as the would-be husband insisted, the parents and the Mallams also stuck to their guns. They insisted that the husband should bend as a mark of honour and respect to them. The marriage ceremony was allowed to continue only after the groom danced to their tune. The cases of a child refusing to bend while greeting the parents are more rampant in recent times to

⁴ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, 2865.

⁵ Alessandro Duranti, "Universal and Culture-Specific Properties of Greetings," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (June 1997): 63–97, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1997.7.1.63>. p.22

the extent that whoever dresses in his trousers above the ankles amongst Yoruba is tagged as *áwon tí wón kin tè kiyàn* (those who do not bend while greeting people). In the palaces where the king must be greeted in prostration or bending, the refusal of some subjects to bow to the king in greeting has resulted in many troubles. An example of such was given in Edo state, Nigeria, where a subject who was a member of the *ahlu' s-Sunnah* refused to bend while greeting the king and was banished from the palace. In another scenario, the king, who belonged to the *ahlu-Sunnah* group, maintained that he should be greeted not in a bending posture but standing. This was seen as an insult to the tradition of the society, and it took efforts between him and his subjects before it was resolved.

The refusal to bend or kneel while greeting is understood by different people of different backgrounds in different ways. To some, it is an act of arrogance and pomposity. Some equally see it as a misrepresentation of what the teachings of both the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* are on *sajdah* (prostration). It has caused many bad feelings and expressions of hatred and anger against one another in society. It has also engendered misunderstanding between the Mallams (teachers) and students, parents and children, in-laws, brothers, and the younger ones among the various strata that make up the society. The refusal to bend while greeting is gaining momentum to the extent that it is now becoming a norm in society, and people are shying away from bending during greeting so as not to be seen as someone without adequate knowledge and understanding of Islam. These situations in Nigeria are not unlikely in other societies within and outside 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-^CUthaymīn, 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— *rukū^c* (genuflection or bowing) and *sujūd* (prostration). There are many places where the Qur'ān references both (*rukū^c* 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 or expressing pleasantries or as a mark of honour and respect from a younger person to an elderly individual. Al-^CUthaymin submits that what is due to Allah must not be accorded to any creature, or else one becomes an infidel.⁶

⁶ M.S. Al-'Uthaymin, *Majmū' Fatāwā Wa Rasā'il*, (Riyadh: Darul-Watni ,2009).2:162

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:

وَأِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا...⁷

And behold, We said to the Angels: "Prostrate to Adam" and they prostrated.... 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...⁸

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

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 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.⁹ After an array of explanations, it is concluded that those *Sujūd* are merely for greeting and respect alone without involving worship. Al-Qurṭubī writes:

وأجمع المفسرون أن ذلك السجود على أي وجه كان فإنما كان تحية لا عبادة¹⁰

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.

⁷ Al-Qur'an 2:34

⁸ Al-Qur'an 12:100

⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, (Darul-Kutubil-Ilmiyyah, 2008).1:232

¹⁰ Al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir Qurṭubī*, (Cairo: Darul-Kutubil-Misriyyah, 1964).9:265

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 إِن كُنْتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ¹¹

...Prostrate neither for the sun nor for the moon, but for Allah, Who created them, if it is Him you are worshipping.

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.¹²

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

...وَادْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا...¹³

...Enter through the door in prostration...

Salafiyyah scholars submit in the light of the argument of Ibn Qayyim,¹⁴ Aṭ-Ṭabarī¹⁵ and Ibn Manzur,¹⁶ Among others, 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. The like of Ibn 'Abbās in his *Tafsīr* mentions genuflection (*rukū'*), 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"¹⁷

Abu Ja'far said: Prostration means bending to someone honored or respected. Therefore, every act of honorific bending to anything is prostration.

The above submissions from those scholars including that of Ibn 'Abbās 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:

¹¹ Al-Qur'an 41:37

¹² Abdul-Aziz Abdullahi Ibn Baz, *Fatawa Lajnatu 'd-Da'imah* (Riyadh: Daru Ibn Jawziyyah, 2000).2:383

¹³ Al-Qur'an 2:58, 4:154, 7:161

¹⁴ Al-Jawziyyah Ibn Qayyim, *Zadul-Mi'ad* (Beirut: Darul-Hadith, 2006).4:161

¹⁵ At-Tabari, *Tafsir 't-Tabari*, (Beirut: Darul-Hijrah, 2010).2:105

¹⁶ Al-Ifriqi Ibn Manzur, *Lisanul-Arab* (Beirut: Darul-Fikr, 1999).3:204

¹⁷ Muhammad Al-Faysurabadi, *Tanwirul-Miqbas (Tafsir Ibn Abbas)* (Beirut: Darul-Kutubil-Ilmiyyah, 1998).1:9

عَنْ هَمَّامِ 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 } فَبَدَلُوا قَدْخَلُوا يَزْحَفُونَ عَلَى أَسْتَاهِهِمْ¹⁸

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 ...

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-Uthaymin¹⁹ 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 afterward.

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

وَأَنَّ الْمَسَاجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَدًا²⁰

"And the places of worship are for Allah, so invoke not anyone along with Allah."

In the light of this verse, Ibn Kathir²¹ and Al-Qurtubi²² 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:

¹⁸ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih 'l-Bukhari*. No.3403

¹⁹ Ibn Baz, *Fatawa Nur Ala Durbi*, (Riyadh: Maktabatu 's-Shamilah, 2010). 11:32

²⁰ Al-Qur'an 72:18

²¹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, . 4:412

²² Al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir Qurtubī*,.9:265

عَنِ الْعَبَّاسِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ إِذَا سَجَدَ الْعَبْدُ
سَجَدَ مَعَهُ سَبْعَةٌ أَطْرَافٍ وَجْهُهُ وَكَفَّاهُ وَرُكْبَتَاهُ وَقَدَمَاهُ²³

On the authority of Al-^cAbbās 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.

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 a misconception exists in this explanation, as the verse has nothing to do with manners of greeting or body limbs.²⁴ 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 argues further that there are different shades of explanation for this verse from different scholars. Some interpreted it as referring to mosques or places of worship. Some scholars even submit that it relates to *Ka^cbah*. In the light of Al-Qurtubi's *Tafsir*, he explains that there are two interpretations of this same from Ibn Jubayr. The second one, which he considers most appropriate, is that the verse was revealed in response to Jinn's request from the Prophet.²⁵ Also, Al-Qatada explains that the verse is to protect the sacredness of the mosque against sacrilegious activities, mainly as it was being carried out by the Jews and Christians who turned their places of worship into commercial centers.²⁶ This is the general submission across various *Tafasir* on the verse, as the two eminent scholars cite equally. This, therefore, means that the submission of Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi from Ibn Jubayr is rare and unpopular among the scholars of earlier times. So, it can not stand in this discourse.

Also, from the above analysis, there need to be more common grounds between the submission of the *Mufasir* like Al-Qurtubi, as indicated above, and those of the *Salafiyyah* scholars. This is because he categorized prostration into two. In other words, the prostration of worship differs from that of greeting, whereas the latter does not make such differentiation. This, however, does not mean that the submission of Al-Qurtubi allows prostration to other than Allah, but one can argue that he based his divisions on the intention (*niyyah*) of the one who prostrates. Moreover, as it is known, intention occupies an integral part of every

²³ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*. No.491

²⁴ Ibrahim Zubair Al-Misri, *Kashfu 'l-Ghīā'i* (Ilorin: Darul-Kitab Wa Sunnah, 2019). 231

²⁵ Al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir Qurtubī*, 9:265

²⁶ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:412

act that a Muslim does. Almost every *Mufāssir* and scholar agreed and submitted that the practice of bending or prostration should be guided by intention.

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 شرائعهم 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 وتعالى²⁷

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 ^CIsā, 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 Kathir 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 practiced throughout his life. Details are in the next subhead.

Salafiyyah Scholars and the *Hadīth* 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 pyramid form of selection by picking *aḥādīth*, which are central to discussions on kneeling and bending as the manner of greeting. Therefore, two traditions are central to bowing, bending, kneeling, and prostration as manners of greeting, according to *Salafiyyah* scholars, and both shall be discussed in detail. It is pertinent to point out that their (*Salafiyyah* scholars) various submissions stemmed from the abovementioned verses. In other words, in their bid to explain those verses, they brought the *aḥādīth* to be discussed to drive home their point.

The first of the two traditions is that of Mu'adh Ibn Jabal, to which various Quranic exegetes mentioned earlier made particular reference. It is said that the Prophet sent Mu'adh Ibn Jabal to Sham (Syria) on an assignment, and upon his return, he prostrated to the Prophet, replicating the custom of the people of Sham. This was rightly rejected by the Prophet, stating that it (prostration) is due only to

²⁷ Ibn Kathir.

Allah. The Prophet said further that if he had the authority to make someone prostrate to a fellow being, it would be for the wife to prostrate to her husband.²⁸ It is important to remark that this *ḥadīth* has been declared as authentic or sound by different scholars, including some *Salafīyūn* like Al-Bānī.²⁹ Lacks credence from the perspective of the *Sīrah* of the Prophet. A study of the life of Mu^cadh shows nothing to indicate that the Prophet sent him (Mu^cadh) to Sham; neither did he (Mu^cadh) travel to Sham throughout the lifetime of the Prophet. The only time he voyaged to Sham was during the reign of either Abubakar.³⁰ or Umar,³¹ The first and second *Khalīfah* of the Prophet, respectively, never returned to Madinah but died there due to an outbreak of epidemic plaque.³² According to Ibn Kathir and Ad-Dhahabī, among others, the only place where the Prophet sent him was Yemen, and as he was going, the Prophet predicted that he (Mu'adh) would not return to meet him (Prophet) alive, but his mosque and his grave. Ibn Kathīr writes:

أن معاذًا لما بعثه رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إلى اليمن خرج معه يوصيه ومعاذ راكب ورسول الله يمشي تحت راحلته ; فلما فرغ قال: " يا معاذ إنك عسى ألا تلاقاني بعد عامي هذا، ولعلك أن تمر بمسجدي هذا وقبري ". فبكى معاذ خشعًا لفراق رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم... وهذا الحديث فيه إشارة وظهور وإيماء إلى أن معاذًا رضي 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 يومًا³³

²⁸ Abu Abdullahi Ibn Majah, *Sunnan Ibn Majah* (Beirut: Darul-Fikr, 1997, No.1853 & 1854).

²⁹ Nasirudeen Al-Bani, *Ṣaḥīḥ Wa Da'īf Ibn Mājah* (Alexandria: Markaz Nur 'l-Islam, 1999).4:353

³⁰ Muhammad Al-Kandahlawi, *Hayatu 's-Sahabah* (Beirut: Mu'asisu 'r-Risalah, 2000).1:479

³¹ Ad-Dhahabi Shamus 'd-Din Muhammad, *Siyar 'A'lām 'n-Nubalā'* (Cairo: Darul-Hadith, 2004).1:452

³² Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya Wa Nihaya* (Beirut: Darul-Fikr, 2007).7:110

³³ Ibn Kathir, *Sirat 'n-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Darul-Ma'rifah, 1997).309

Indeed, when Mu^cadh was sent by Allah's messenger, may Allah's blessing and peace be upon him, to Yemen, he (the Prophet) accompanied him with instructions. Mua'ad rode while the Prophet was trekking along with him. When they got to the departing point, the Prophet said: Oh, Mu^cadh! 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^cadh 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^cadh 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^cadh was in Yemen when the Prophet died but returned to Madinah during the tenure of Abubakr, the first *Khalīfah*. Prominent among those reports is when the Prophet asked him how he would referee when he got to Yemen, and cases were brought to him.³⁴ Although Al-Bānī³⁵ rated this hadith as weak, many other authentic reports testified to the journey and presence of Mu^cadh in Yemen, as reported by Al-Bukhari, among others. Some of them include the one that focuses on the method of *da^cwah*³⁶ and the one that commands ease in approach to issues.³⁷ 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 أينحي له ؟ قال لا قال أفيلترمه ويقبله ؟ قال لا قال أفياخذ بيده ويصافحه ؟ قال نعم هذا حديث حسن³⁸

³⁴ As-Sijistani Abu Dawud, *Sunnan Abu Dawud* (Beirut: Maktabatul-Islamiyyah, 2001, No.3592). Muhammad Isa At-Tirmidhi, *Sunnan Tirimidhi* (Beirut: Darul-Gharbul-Islami, 1998, No.1327).

³⁵ Al-Bani, *Ṣaḥīḥ Wa Da'īf Ibn Mājah*....471

³⁶ Al-Bukahri, *Saḥīḥ 'l-Bukhari*. No.1496 and 4347

³⁷ Al-Bukahri. No.3038

³⁸ At-Tirmidhi, *Sunnan Tirimidhi*. No.2728

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.

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 ʿAbdullahi's inclusion in the chain of its narration. Al-Bānī, therefore, submits on one hand that:

فإن رجاله كلهم ثقات غير حنظلة³⁹

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 الالتزام⁴⁰

In (another) chain of narration from Abi Bilāl Al-Ash^carī (who said), we were told by Qays bin Ar-Rabi^c on the authority of Hishām bin Hisān from Shu^caīb, except that "prostration" (*Sujūd*) is mentioned instead of "embracement."

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^carī, who is found in its chains.⁴¹

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 الالتزام⁴²

³⁹ Nasirudeen Al-Bani, *As-Silsilah 's-Ṣaḥīḥah* (Riyadh: Maktabatul-Islamiyyah, 1996).1:159

⁴⁰ Al-Bani.

⁴¹ Nasirudeen Al-Bani, *Ṣaḥīḥ 'l-Adab 'l-Mufrad*, (Beirut: Darus-Sadiq, 2000). 3:84

⁴² Al-Bani, *As-Silsilah 's-Ṣaḥīḥah*.

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 ، ولا يقبل الرجل الرجل ، قالوا : يصافح الرجل الرجل ؟ قال : نعم⁴³

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 ^cAbdul-^cAzīz who declares it as a *Matrūk* (a class of weak traditions), while Ibn Mu^cayyan said him (Al-Muhlab) as a liar.

Aside from their being faulted by different scholars, juxtaposing 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-to-shoulder with that of Tirmdhi.

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

ولهذا كنت أخرج من المعانقة في الحضر ، وبخاصة أنني كنت خرجت في المجلد الأول من هذه "السلسلة" (رقم 160) حديث هيبه صلى الله عليه وسلم عن الانحناء والالتزام والتقبييل . ثم لما جهزت المجلد لإعادة طبعه ، وأعدت 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 ، وقد صدر حديثا والحمد لله . فلما تبين لي ضعفها زال الحرج والحمد لله ، وبخاصة 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 "⁴⁴

⁴³ Al-Bani.

⁴⁴ Al-Bani.

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 embracing needs to be mentioned in the corroborating reports, based on which I had classed the tradition as vital. 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-Tīhān 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-Tīhān (may Allah be pleased with him), which is narrated in *al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyah*...⁴⁵

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 ، وإذا قدموا من سفر تعانقوا⁴⁶

The Prophet's companions, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him; when meeting with each other, they used to shake hands, and when returning from a journey, they hugged or embraced one another.

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 there.

Other references often cited by the pro-bending scholars but rejected by the *Salafīyyah* 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.⁴⁷ The relevant portions from the two traditions to this paper are:

⁴⁵ Al-Munajjid Muhammad Salih, *How Should We Greet Scholars and Leaders?* 2007, <http://www.islamqa.info/en/20243>.

⁴⁶ Al-Bani, *As-Silsilah 's-Ṣaḥīḥah*.

⁴⁷ Al-Bani.

فَبَرَكَ عُمَرُ عَلَى رُكْبَتَيْهِ⁴⁸

Umar then knelt on his two knees

فَعَجَّنَا عَلَى رُكْبَتَيْهِ⁴⁹

(Umar) then bend on his two knees.

The above excerpts from the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet reflect the posture of Umar in those two circumstances to the Prophet. It is equally interesting that Imam Muslim recorded the first narration in his collection under the sub-head: The Chapter of Veneration of the Prophet. The backgrounds of the two narrations hold that the Prophet was annoyed, firstly with Ḥadhayfah, who bombarded him with questions, and secondly with Umar, due to what transpired between him and Abubakar. In the two situations, therefore, Umar knelt to beg, venerate, and calm the Prophet down, and the Prophet did not oppose or rebuke him for his posture.

It is, however, observed that as relevant as these narrations are to bending, neither Ibn Bāz nor Al-^CUthaymīn referred to these traditions in their respective *fatāwā* (legal opinions) on bending while greeting. The only *Salafiyyah* scholar who discusses them is Jabata.⁵⁰ His submission to these traditions is that ^CUmar knelt for the Prophet not to greet but to soothe, venerate, and calm him down when angry because his (the Prophet's) anger may be disastrous to the Muslim *Ummah*.⁵¹ In other words, therefore, bending, bowing, or kneeling is permissible outside greeting because, in his view, greeting is an act of *ʿIbādah*.⁵² He equally points out that even that action of Umar is exclusive to only the Prophet. Therefore, it should not be used as a yardstick to indulge in kneeling or bending while greeting.⁵³

The submissions of Jabata above are self-contradictory, considering the *Salafiyyah* declaration of bending while greeting as an act of *Shirk*. If it is thus classified, how will an act that constitutes *Shirk* be allowed to an individual in a circumstance and become forbidden at another time? If indeed it harbors an element of *Shirk*, the Prophet would not have allowed it, neither from ^CUmar nor to himself as ^CUmar did. A leaf can be borrowed from an authentic report, which shows how sharply the Prophet used to reject, rebuke, and correct acts that constitute *Shirk*. Imam Ahmad narrated an incident from Ibn Abbas in which a

⁴⁸ Al-Bukahri, *Sahih 'l-Bukhari*. No.93

⁴⁹ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*. No.3002

⁵⁰ “Jabata, **Ikunle (Kneeling)**,” *Salafiyyah Half-Hour* (Gravity F.M. Igboho, 2016), <http://www.voicesalaf.com>.

⁵¹ “Jabata, **Ikunle (Kneeling)**.”

⁵² “Jabata, **Ikunle (Kneeling)**.”

⁵³ “Jabata, **Ikunle (Kneeling)**.”

man came to the Prophet and swore with Allah and the Prophet. He (the Prophet) reacted to this immediately, stating will you associate me with Allah as partners? Say, by Allah's wish alone.⁵⁴ An-Nasa'i reports the same.⁵⁵ and Ibn Majah⁵⁶ the Prophet said: Whoever wishes to take an oath should do it with Allah alone. Also, it should be stated that the only thing that Allah specifically warned the Prophet against is *Shirk* (Q39:65). Islam equally teaches that every act that a Muslim engages in constitutes *ʿIbādah*, as long as he is expected to get rewards or punishment from that place. The Prophet is on record to have said that every act of a Muslim, including his lawful intercourse with his wife, earns him rewards or punishment from Allah.⁵⁷ Therefore, to single out a greeting as a unique act of worship based on which the action of ^CUmar is excluded from others is a mere exercise without a basis in Islam.

The submission of Ibn Taymiyyah⁵⁸ This is another relevant issue to this discussion. In his *Majmūc' l-Fatāwā*, he declared bending while greeting some kings and scholars as not permissible. However, where one is forced in a manner that if one refuses, it can lead to arrest, torturing, or forfeiture of properties, it thus becomes permissible. He then likened it to the case of *ḥarām* and necessity, as could be inferred from the Qur'an. Since it is a golden rule in Islam that necessities dictate exception, it is not allowed to bend, but it is permissible under duress. As could be inferred from Ibn Taymiyyah, it is clear that he never regards bending as constituting *Shirk* or *Kufr*. If he did, he would not have made duress a case for its permissibility because nothing makes *Shirk* or *Kufr* permissible in Islam.

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

Having aggregated and examined various views and submissions, modern *Salafiyyah* scholars, as spearheaded by Al-^CUthaymīn and the members of the Permanent Committee of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), it is clear that their opinion on bending the greeting is an absolute rejection of it. Hence, it is declared as *ḥarām*,⁵⁹ but Al-^CUthaymīn⁶⁰ He classified it as *makrūh* (detestable). However, he out rightly declares *Sujūd* for any being other than Allah as *ḥarām* (forbidden), which is tantamount to *shirk*. He is very conscious, as could be inferred from his *fatāwā* (legal opinions) on different occasions. For example,

⁵⁴ H. Ahmad, *Musnad Ahmad*, (Cairo: Mu'asisu 'r-Risalah, 2001). No.1839

⁵⁵ An-Nasa'i Shuaib Al-Khruasani, *Sunnan Nasa'i* (Aleppo: Maktabatul-Islami, 1999). No. 3773

⁵⁶ Ibn Majah, *Sunnan Ibn Majah*. No.2117

⁵⁷ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*. No.1006

⁵⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah Al-Harrani, *Majmu' Fatawa* (Riyadh: Darul-Ibn Affan, 1999).1:372-373

⁵⁹ Ibn Baz, *Fatawa Lajnatu 'd-Da'imah*....24:131

⁶⁰ Al-'Uthaymin, *Majmū' Fatāwā Wa Rasā'il*.21:111

when the question was asked on bowing or bending, he classified them as *makrūh*, and the one that was asked on *sujūd* and *rukūʿ*, he vehemently declared it as both *haram* and an act of *Shirk*. Al-ʿUthaymīn's declaration implies that he recognized that bending or kneeling is not prostration. Thus, their judgment should differ. Also, when an act is declared *makruh*, it does not attract any specific penalty but is ordinarily discouraged.

Scholars in the Permanent Committee of the KSA adjudicate purely on offering *rukūʿ* and *sujūd* to other than Allah but citing and relying on the above *Ḥadīth* of Tirmidhi. They, therefore, classified it as *ḥarām* and a condemnable act of *Shirk*.⁶¹ They did not, to any extent, differentiate between bending, bowing, and prostration. Neither of the two camps considers intention (*niyyah*) as the yardstick to determine the difference between greeting and worship vis-à-vis bowing or bending. In line with the submission of Ibn Kathīr earlier cited, the two camps also submitted that prostration as a form of greeting permitted for the earlier communities had been abolished with the revelation of Al-Qur'ān.⁶²

Results and Discussion

Having examined various evidence and references of the *Salafiyyah* scholars on kneeling and bending as a form of greeting, it has been discovered that there are a lot of misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and overgeneralizations in their submissions. The following are the findings of this paper.

Firstly, what constitutes prostration (*sujūd*) has been given by the Prophet in his celebrated *ḥadīth* cited. It must, therefore, involve the seven body parts, and anything added or removed from it renders prostration null and void. It will not, therefore, be admissible from one as an act of worship. To this end, *inḥinā'* (bending) can never be taken as prostration, as could be inferred from the case of the Children of Israel in Al-Qur'ān and the corresponding *ḥadīth* of the Prophet. This is because, if it is, Allah would not have rejected their actions, which they wished to substitute with prostration, as they were ordered.

Secondly, prostrations in the cases of Adam and Yūsuf stand, as submitted by different *Mufasssīrūn*, including those whose works are not used in this paper, that it was a practice that had been abolished with the advent of the *Shari'ah* of Prophet Muhammad, could not stand in respect of greeting. Many *Mufasssīrūn* clearly states that it was done not as an act of worship but as a greeting. Also, the intention with which those *Mufasssīrūn* differentiate between the prostration of greeting and that of *Ibādah* (worship) remains relevant because intention forms an integral part of human actions.

⁶¹ Ibn Baz, *Fatawa Lajnatu 'd-Da'imah*.

⁶² Al-ʿUthaymin, *Majmū' Fatāwā Wa Rasā'il*,...6:241

Thirdly, the story of Mu^cadh ibn Jabal, either to Sham or Yemen, which some scholars across the board frequently cite, lacks basis and credence in *Sīrah* and primary Islamic sources of legislation. Moreover, if at all it happened, it should be limited to prostration, which has been addressed above in this paper, and it is not relevant to bending while greeting.

Fourthly, salient nits have been picked in the central tradition, which would have made bending and bowing as a manner of greeting a non-controversial issue. Al-Bānī has placed stings on not only the *Isnad* (chain of narrators) of that *ḥadīth*, but he has also identified fiddles in its *Matn* (text). It is equally said that Al-Bukhārī declared it as *Munkar*. All these make any reliance on this tradition for such an act that may constitute infidelity (*Kufr*) a grave error.

Fifthly, the cases of ‘Umar are unexplained and unchallenged by principal *Salafiyyah* scholars like Ibn Baz and Al-Uthaymin. The explanation of Jabata in those cases cannot stand scrutiny. It is not logical enough to be taken as a yardstick for condemnation and rejection of bending and kneeling as a manner of greeting and reverence in Islam. This is because every act of a Muslim constitutes *‘Ibādah*, and there is no double standard for anyone in Islam.

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 *kufr* 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 *kufr* 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*, which may not require textual backing, if they all doubt its permissibility.