

# THE MEANINGS AND ADDRESSES OF SALAM IN PRAYER

ALIREZA SALEHI<sup>1</sup>

TRANSLATED BY MAHBOOBEH MORSHEDIAN

**ABSTRACT:** *Salam (Peace)* is a Qur'anic term with a wide range of deep meanings and various practical aspects and manifestations. This divine word is a name of Allah, and many hadiths have been reported from the Holy Prophet and Imams regarding its meanings. In many religious texts, including prayers, ziyarahs, and social interactions, its manifestations are clearly seen. As the best deed and act of worship and the most beautiful display of servitude to Allah, prayer has some elements, including Salam. This article first identifies and summarizes the most important meanings of Salam on the basis of authentic Arabic and Persian dictionaries. Next, on the basis of these meanings, the most significant implications will be investigated, namely, the philosophy of Salam in Prayer.

## *The Statement of Problem*

As will be mentioned in the literal analysis of the word 'Salam', there are fifteen meanings for this term. On the basis of legal injunctions, Salam is an element of prayer. In this element of prayer, the praying person recites three sentences. The two first sentences are

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<sup>1</sup> The faculty member of Islamic Azad University, Southern Tehran Branch

recommended, and the last one is obligatory. First, Salam is said to the Holy Prophet, then to 'us', and the righteous servants of Allah. In the last sentence, Salam is said to 'you'. The first question this article addresses is: Among the fifteen mentioned meanings of prayer, which one is congruent with the spirit of prayer and its addressees? The second question to be answered is regarding who the addressees of the second and third sentences are ('us' and 'you').

### *Introduction*

Salam is a key Qur'anic term and has a wide range of meanings in Islamic culture. This blessed word is used as a name of Allah and also as a word of salutation among Muslims. Salam is among the elements of prayer<sup>1</sup> and the ending part of this divine obligation. Like other elements of prayer, it enjoys profound aspects, some of which will be referred to by those who know the truth and mysteries of prayers based on hadiths by Prophet Muhammad and the Imams. No doubt the way to more reflection on this issue is open, and we have a long way to gain perfect knowledge.

As mentioned above, Salam has a wide range of meanings, most of which are materialized in the Salams mentioned in the Holy Qur'an.

The main questions about Salam in prayer include a) which of the various meanings and concepts is related to the depth of prayer more, b) which idea about the philosophy of Salam in prayer is more likely to be true and valid, and finally, c) who the addresses of Salam are in each of three sentences and which message is conveyed to them.

Benefiting from the support of Allah and using the hadiths of the Imams and valuable points about the philosophy and secrets of prayer,

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<sup>1</sup> By element, it is not meant the Rukn which is a jurisprudential term used in the treatises of Practical Islamic Rulings. Five things are Rukn: intention, saying Allahu-Akbar to start the prayer, standing before Ruku', Ruku' and two Sajdas.

these questions will be answered as much as possible. In addition, a comparative study will be conducted on books of “Secrets of Prayer” (*Asrar al-Salat*) and other similar books.

### ***The Meanings of Salam***

In order to find out about the main meanings of the word Salam, it is necessary to examine and analyse what is mentioned about this divine word in reliable Persian and Arabic dictionaries. Then the similar redundant meanings should be omitted, and a precise conclusion should be reached about the meanings of Salam. Accordingly, first the following data was gathered and classified: numerous points raised in such well-known dictionaries as *Lisan-ul-Arab*,<sup>1</sup> *Majma’-ul-Bahrain*,<sup>2</sup> *Kitab-ul-‘Ayn*,<sup>3</sup> and *Tahdhib-ul-Lughah*,<sup>4</sup> whatever commentator on and philologists of Arabic like *Tarihi*,<sup>5</sup> *Zubaidi*,<sup>6</sup> *ibn Qutaibah*,<sup>7</sup> *Raghib*,<sup>8</sup> *Jeffry*,<sup>9</sup> *Suyuti*,<sup>10</sup> *Khurramshahi*,<sup>11</sup> *Insafpur*,<sup>12</sup> *Dehkhoda*,<sup>13</sup> *Reyshahri*,<sup>14</sup> *Mustafa*<sup>15</sup> and may other philologists referred to about Salam in their books; mentioning all of them is beyond the constraints of this paper. Afterwards, common points were omitted, and fifteen separate meanings were obtained as follows:

1. health, being away from all scourges; healthy, and pure,
2. a name of Allah,

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<sup>1</sup> vol.2, p. 289

<sup>2</sup> vol.6, p.84

<sup>3</sup> vol.7, p.256

<sup>4</sup> p.445

<sup>5</sup> the entry of ‘Silm’

<sup>6</sup> the entry of ‘Silm’

<sup>7</sup> vol. 1, p. 239

<sup>8</sup> the entry of ‘Silm’

<sup>9</sup> p. 258

<sup>10</sup> vol.1, p.121

<sup>11</sup> p.1206

<sup>12</sup> p.585

<sup>13</sup> p.13711

<sup>14</sup> p. 2571

<sup>15</sup> p. 446

3. well-being, peace,
4. security and safety, being safe from each other,
5. reconciliation,
6. salutation,
7. farewell,
8. tranquility,
9. submission and surrender,
10. a word which is not futile, the strong and purposeful word,
11. the name of a tree which is immune from any pest,
12. the name of a hard stone which is secure from any kind of erosion,  
large, broad, and small stones,
13. asking for permission,
14. veneration and reverence,
15. a long stick resembling a tree branch.

### ***Meanings of Salam in Prayer***

As mentioned above, there are fifteen meanings for Salam in various dictionaries. These definitions will be examined to see which one conforms to the spirit of Salam in prayer. For this purpose, many references and books on philosophy and secrets of prayer are consulted and their important points and discussions are mentioned in this article. In addition to referring to main viewpoints on various aspects and summarizing the points, the conclusions are reported briefly. Hence, at first the main viewpoints on the meanings and addressees of Salam in prayer are addressed. While so doing, points about the philosophy and interpretation of Salam in prayer and its links with the Ascent (*Mi'raaj*) of the Holy Prophet will be presented.

***A. The Main Viewpoints and Ideas on the Meanings of Salam in Prayer***

1. Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani, Imam Khomeini, Shahid Thani (the Second Martyr), Hajj Mirza Jawad Maliki Tabrizi, Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli and others deem Salam in prayer to refer to “security”. This is based on a well-known hadith attributed to Imam Sadiq in *Misbah-u-Shari’ah*. He said:

Salam at the end of prayer means security. That is, whoever obeys the commands of Allah and acts upon His Messenger’s Sunnah humbly will be immune from worldly afflictions and punishment in the hereafter. Salam is a name of Allah which He has endowed His servants with so that they use it in their transactions, keeping things in their trusts, and their relationships, keeping company and socializing with each other. And if you want to act upon the meaning of Salam, you should fear Allah, and your faith and wisdom should be immune from you; that is, you should not taint them with sins. You should not annoy your guardian angels (who record your deeds), and not drive them away with your bad deeds either. Likewise, both your friends and enemies should be immune from you and your actions. Whoever does not adhere to Salam is neither secure nor submissive. He is lying about his Salam even though he pretends to adhere to Salam in front of people.

2. As regards the meaning of security, Hajj Mirza Jawad Maliki Tabrizi wrote, “From these words, deduce the ruling of saying “Salam” to people. Do you say “Salam” to somebody while you do not wish him good health, all blessings, or some of them? Is it something other than hypocrisy? Can one expect the reward that Allah has promised in return for such a Salam? In addition, know the status of your saying Salam to the Prophet and the Imams in

prayer and while visiting (doing *ziyarah*) their holy shrines.” (ibid, 368).

3. Mulla Muhsin Feid Kashani said about the hadith of Imam Sadiq, “If the guardian angels, who record your deeds and are the closest ones to you, closer than your friend and enemy, and are not immune from you, obviously your friends and enemies are not secure from you either. And no one is secure from the one who does not adhere to Salam as referred to in the hadith. He is insincere about his Salam, even though he says “Salam” to everybody.”<sup>1</sup>
4. In the book *Ma’ani al-Akhbar*, Abdullah ibn Fadl Hashemi is quoted as saying, “When I asked Imam Sadiq about the meaning of Salam, he said, ‘Salam means security and finishing the prayer.’ I asked again, ‘May I be sacrificed for you! How come?’ He responded, ‘In the past, it was customary for people to consider somebody’s coming to them and saying ‘Salam’ to them a sign of being secure from their harm. However, if he did not say ‘Salam’ when approaching them, they were not immune from him. Similarly, if they did not say ‘Salam’ in response, he was not immune from their harm either. This was customary among the Arabs. Thus, ‘Salam’ is indicative of his finishing the prayer and being allowed to speak. It guarantees that nothing can enter prayer and ruin it. Salam is a name of Allah which the praying person addresses to the two angels that Allah has assigned to watch his actions.”<sup>2</sup>
5. In *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, a hadith by Imam Ali describes the reason for saying Salam: “Peace be upon you and Allah’s mercy and

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<sup>1</sup> Fayd Kashani, 176

<sup>2</sup> ibid

blessings”<sup>1</sup> in prayer is to seek Allah’s mercy, the Glorified; that is, prayer protects you from the chastisement of the Hereafter.”<sup>2</sup>

6. In this regard, Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli wrote, “Salam can be interpreted as us being covered by mercy of Allah.”<sup>3</sup> In other above-mentioned references, similar explanations can be found.

### **B. The addresses of Salam**

Salam in the final part of prayer including three sentences, namely

1. السلام عليك ايها النبي و رحمه الله و بركاته (“Peace be upon you, O’ the Prophet, and Allah’s mercy and His blessing”);
2. السلام علينا و على عباد الله الصالحين (“Peace be upon us and upon the righteous servants of Allah”);
3. السلام عليكم و رحمه الله و بركاته (“Peace be upon you and Allah’s mercy and blessings”).

The Shi’a jurists considered only the last sentence as mandatory, and they regard the two first sentences as recommended. No doubt the analyses of Salam in prayer carried out here are related to the third sentence. What follows is a summary of the sayings:

1. In his book *The New Treatise*, Imam Khomeini considered the addresses of Salam in بركاته و رحمه الله و بركاته to be angels or those with qualities of angels:

As in Islamic teachings, prayer is the ascent of the believer to Heaven and a spiritual journey. We establish a spiritual relationship with our leaders, Islamic Ummah, all righteous

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<sup>1</sup> السلام عليكم و رحمه الله و بركاته

<sup>2</sup> Majlisi, 254/81

<sup>3</sup> ibid, 148

groups, and angels in the last Rak'at after Tashahud, see them in front of us and say Salam to them because 'In the spiritual journey, distance does not matter,'<sup>1</sup>:

1.1 السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته means the Divine peace, mercy and blessings be upon you, o' the Prophet!

1.2 السلام علينا means peace be on us (who have the same belief and form Islamic Ummah and Hizbullah [the party of Allah]).

1.3 على عباد الله الصالحين means peace be upon the righteous servants of Allah.

Through this Salam, we can keep away from sectarianism and self-importance and send peace and Salam on all those who tread the path of righteousness.

1.4 السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته means Allah's peace, mercy and blessings be upon you (angels or those with qualities of angels).

This Salam takes us out of the earthly world and into the world of souls and angels. Finishing the prayer with Salam to angels shows the result of prayer; that is, if a Muslim performs prayer humbly, he will have the features of angels so much so as to reach the rank of angels and say Salam to them.<sup>2</sup>

2. According to Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli, "Salam was originally realized in the Night of Ascent. In that night, when Prophet Muhammad knelt down and recited Tashahhud<sup>3</sup> and Salawat in the end of his prayer, he suddenly saw the lines of prophets and angels

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<sup>1</sup> Risalah Nowin, 100

<sup>2</sup> Bi-Azar Shirazi, 100

<sup>3</sup> The part of prayer where Muslims kneel

in front of him. He was told, “O’ Muhammad! Say Salam to them!” So he said, “Allah’s peace, mercy and blessings be upon you”.<sup>1</sup> Then Allah revealed to him, “Surely peace, mercy and blessing are you and your progeny.”<sup>2</sup>

3. In *Ilal-u-Sharayi*, it is narrated that Imam Sadiq was asked about the reason for Salam, he said in response, “Salam is a means of leaving the prayer.” Mufaddal ibn ‘Umar asked, “So why does the person praying say Salam looking at the right side and not the left side?” The Imam replied, “Because the angel recording the good deeds is on your right side, the angel recording the bad deeds is on your left side, and prayer is a good deed. Thus, Salam is recited looking at the right side. Then he also asked, “Why do not we say Salam with a singular grammatical object, addressing one angel on the right side?” The sixth Imam answered, “We say Salam with a plural grammatical object so that it is addressed to both angels, but looking at the right side indicates the superiority of the angel at the right side.” Finally, Mufaddal asked, “Why do we leave the state of prayer with Salam?” The Imam replied, “Because it is Salam and salutation to these two angels.” Then he added, “Performing Prayer according to injunctions and observing its Ruku’, Sajdah and Salam guarantees security from Hellfire. On the Day of Judgment, if somebody’s prayer is accepted, his other good deeds will be accepted as well. Thus, if his prayer is perfect, his other good deeds will also be perfect; if not, they will be rejected, too.”<sup>3</sup>
4. In the book “Pithy Points”, Ayatullah Bahjat is quoted as saying, “When the servant comes back from the presence of Allah, his first souvenir is His Salam. A part of supplication in Kufa Mosque reads as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> السلام عليكم و رحمہ اللہ و بركاتہ

<sup>2</sup> Kulayni, 3/486

<sup>3</sup> Jawadi Amuli, 148 reporting from *Ilal-u-Sharayi*

“O, Allah! You are Salam (peace), and from You is Salam, and to You returns Salam. O’ Our Lord! Salute us with Your Salam!”<sup>1</sup>

5. An excerpt from the book “The Song of Monotheism” also reads as follows, “[After Tashahhud, the praying person says “Peace be upon you, O’ the Prophet!<sup>2</sup> And Allah’s mercy and His blessing”; “Peace be upon us and upon the righteous servants of Allah”.<sup>3</sup> In every prayer, a Muslim inculcates friendship ties with all righteous servants of Allah in himself. In other words, he repeats his sending of peace on righteous and Muslim servants of Allah every day; peace and Salam on righteous servants of Allah. If here ‘righteous people’ is mentioned, then, “Peace be upon you and Allah’s mercy and blessings”.<sup>4</sup>
6. In *Mi’raj-u-Sa’adah*, Mulla Ahmad Naraqi wrote about some rites and secrets of prayer:

And when you start reciting Salam, you should consider yourself in the presence of the Holy Prophet, the angels close to Allah, other prophets, the Holy Imams, and the guardian angels who record your deeds. You should remember all of them. Then, you should say “Salam” to Prophet Muhammad, who is the chief and the means of guidance and faith, saying, السلام عليك ايها النبي و رحمه الله و بركاته. Finally, you should turn to all of them and say “Salam” to them. Beware of saying Salam negligently without remembering them. Likewise, when you lead a public prayer, address your Salam to all of

<sup>1</sup> اللهم انت السلام و منك السلام واليك يرجع و يعود السلام حينما ربنا منك بالسلام

<sup>2</sup> السلام عليك ايها النبي و رحمه الله و بركاته

<sup>3</sup> السلام علينا و على عباد الله الصالحين

<sup>4</sup> السلام عليكم و رحمه الله و بركاته

Beheshti, 27, 28

those praying behind you. When you put these points into practice, you can hope that your prayer is accepted. Also, beware of praying negligently. As regards the secrets of prayer, some great scholars said that prayer is an example of the way we will be present on the Day of Judgment in the gathering place of resurrection, so in prayer we should remember that state of being. Adhan<sup>1</sup> indicates the second time that Israfil<sup>2</sup> will blow the Horn in the end of Time when the dead will be resurrected, Iqamah<sup>3</sup> represents the call of Allah when He summons His servants, and standing while facing Qiblah<sup>4</sup> symbolizes our standing in the presence of Allah in order to be interrogated for our deeds. These great scholars first talked about the symbolic relationship between all elements of prayer and the presence of man in the gathering place of resurrection, and finally elaborated on Salam.”<sup>5</sup>

7. In the book Jami’ Abbasi, Shaikh Baha’i wrote regarding Salam in prayer:

There are seventeen acts related to Salam, five of which are mandatory and twelve other ones are recommended acts based on Sunnah. The five obligatory acts include kneeling down for reciting Salam, keeping still while doing so, saying *السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته*, and saying this sentence after finishing with the tashahhud, and saying it in such a way that one can hear himself. The recommended acts based on Sunnah include Turak (kneeling down in a way that one leans on the left side and left thigh and puts the front side of right foot on the back of his left foot) as what is done in Tashahhud; placing the hands on his lap; keeping fingers

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<sup>1</sup> Call to prayer

<sup>2</sup> The angel who will sound the trumpet on Judgment Day

<sup>3</sup> The second call to the prayer, recited just before the prayer begins

<sup>4</sup> The direction Muslims turn at for prayer towards the Ka’aba - the House of God in Mecca

<sup>5</sup> Naraqj, 681-682

close to each other; intending to leave the state of prayer; saying Salam to the Prophets, the Imams, angels, believing human beings and Jinns; the prayer leader's intending to address Salam to believers praying behind him; the latter's intending to address Salam to the former; the prayer leader's audible Salam; those praying behind him saying Salam quietly and choice is left to the one who performs prayer individually; both looking at their right side when saying Salam; then those praying behind him looking at the left side to see if there is somebody on their left side – some also say that also if there is wall on their left side; finally, the one who performs prayer individually looking at his right side.”<sup>1</sup>

8. As for the addressees of Salam in prayer, Shahid Thani said:

When you are finished with Tashahhud, consider yourself in the presence of the Holy Prophet and the angels close to Allah, and say, السلام عليك ايها النبي ورحمه الله وبركاته، السلام علينا و على عباد الله الصالحين. Then remember Prophet Muhammad, other prophets, the Imams, and guardian angels who record your deeds and say, السلام عليكم ورحمه الله وبركاته.

You should not address them while you are ignorant of addressees because your deed will be futile and mere pretence. And how can your call be heard when there is no addressee? What would you do if there were not the bounty, sweeping mercy, and perfect compassion of Allah Who accepts the prayer void of its origin and truth due to inattention? Nevertheless, it may not be accepted.

If you lead the public prayer, address your Salam to those who pray behind you, in addition to those who those mentioned above. If you act upon above-mentioned points,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 53-54

you truly observe the right of Salam in prayer and deserve the increasing generosity of Allah.”<sup>1</sup>

9. Mulla Muhsin Feid Kashani’s opinion resembles the aforesaid words of Shahid Thani.<sup>2</sup>

### **Conclusion**

1. The main meaning of Salam is safety and security from the Divine rage on the Day of Judgment.
2. In the Salam of prayer, the prophets, Imams, righteous servants of Allah and angels are addressed by the one praying.
3. In addition to safety and security, Salam in prayer can also refer to salutation.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Jawadi Amuli, 77

<sup>2</sup> Feid Kashani, *al-Mahajatt-ul-Baida’*, 1/393

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