128338 - The minimum wording for giving the greeting of salam and returning the greeting

the question

What is the minimum wording for giving the greeting of salam? I know the hadith of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) having to do with that, which says that whoever says “As-salamu `alaykum” will have ten hasanat (rewards) and so on… Based on that, the minimum greeting is to say “As-salamu `alaykum.” My question is: is it permissible for us to say “Salaam” only? Will a person be rewarded for that? Should I return the greeting by saying “Wa `alaykum as-salam” or “Wa `alaykum as-salam wa rahmatullah”, or is it sufficient just to say “Wa `alaykum”?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Spreading the greeting of salam among the Muslims is one of the clear symbols of Islam, and it is a sign of good character and one of the greatest means of spreading love and brotherhood among the Muslims

Muslim (54) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “You will not enter Paradise until you (truly) believe, and you will not (truly) believe until you love one another. Shall I not tell you of something which, if you do it, you will love one another? Spread (the greeting of) salam amongst yourselves.”

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This places a great emphasis on spreading the greeting of salam and initiating it with all Muslims, those whom you know and those whom you do not know. The greeting of salam is the first means

of attaining harmony, and it is the key to creating friendship. Spreading the greeting of salam reinforces the bonds between Muslims and shows the symbol that distinguishes them from the followers of other religions, in addition to what it brings of self-discipline, expressing humility and showing respect to other Muslims. End quote.

The aim of encouraging people to greet one another with salam is to spread love among people. The one who gives the greeting to his Muslim brother should greet him properly, with a cheerful face, and the one who returns the greeting should also return it properly, so as to achieve the purpose, which is creating love and harmony among Muslims.

The minimum wording for giving the greeting is for the greeter to say “Salaam,” and the one who wants to return the greeting may do so by also saying “Salaam.”

Allah, may He be Exalted, tells us about the noble angelic guests of Ibrahim:

{When they came to him and said: Peace (salam). He said: [And upon you be] peace}[Adh-Dhariyat 51:25].

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Al-Adhkar* (p. 245):

Imam Abu’l-Hasan al-Wahidi, one of our companions, said: With regard to the definite article “al-”, you have the choice between adding it (as-salam) or omitting it (salam). I say: But using the definite article is better. End quote.

The best is to add the definite article “al-” when initiating or returning the greeting of salam. So you should say “As-salamu `alaykum” when initiating the greeting, and say “Wa `alaykum as-salam” when returning it.

Secondly:

With regard to returning the greeting, it should be equal or better than the initial greeting. Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{When you are given a greeting, respond with a better greeting, or [at least] with the like

thereof}[An-Nisa’ 4:86].

With regard to limiting the response to saying “Wa `alaykum”, there are two scholarly views regarding that:

An-Nawawi said in *Al-Adhkar* (p. 244-245):

Our companions said: If the one who initiates the greeting says “As-salamu `alaykum,” his greeting is valid. If he says “As-salamu `alayka” or “Salaam `alayka,” that is also valid.

With regard to responding, the minimum is to say “Wa `alayka as-salam” or “Wa `alaykum as-salam.” But if the waw is omitted and one says “`Alaykum as-salam,” that is also valid and it is returning the greeting. This is the well-known correct view that was stated by our imam ash-Shafa`i (may Allah have mercy on him) in *Al-Umm*, and it is the view of the majority of our companions…

Our companions are agreed that if he says in response “`Alaykum,” that does not count as returning the greeting, but if he says “Wa `alaykum,” adding the waw, does that count as returning the greeting? There are two views among our companions. End quote.

Ibn Muflih stated in *Al-Adab ash-Shar`iyyah* (1/340-341) that the Hanbali scholars also differed as to whether it is valid to respond by saying “Wa `alayka.” Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah favoured the view that it is valid, because what this word implies is “Wa `alaykum as-salam,” thus the sentence is complete.

There are reports from the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them) which indicate that it is valid to return the greeting by saying “Wa `alaykum.”

Al-Bukhari narrated in *Al-Adab al-Mufrad* (1023) that `Abdullah ibn `Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Whilst we were sitting with the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in the shade of a tree between Makkah and Madinah, there came a Bedouin who was one of the roughest and harshest of people, and he said: “As-salamu `alaykum.” They said: “Wa `alaykum.” Classed as sahih by al-Albani in *Sahih al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 791.

But the best is not to limit the response to saying “Wa `alaykum,” because this response is something that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) only enjoined when returning the greeting of the People of the Book, as he said: “If the people of the Book greet you with salam, say: ‘Wa ‘alaykum (and also unto you).’” Narrated by al-Bukhari, 6258 and Muslim, 2163.

And Allah knows best.