212039 - Is it prescribed for the imam to greet the people in the mosque when he comes in?

the question

We have an imam in the mosque; when he enters the mosque from behind the people, the mu’adhdhin gives the iqaamah (call immediately preceding the congregational prayer) straight away, and the people make room for him to pass, and he does not greet anyone standing in the rows until he reaches his place at the front of the mosque. I advised him to greet the worshippers when he enters the mosque, so that he may earn the love of the worshippers, and so that Allah, may He be exalted, might bless us with paradise for spreading the greeting of salaam as our Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) taught us. But his response to me was that this is not the Sunnah, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not do that, and there is no evidence that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did that. So what should I do? We disagreed, and I asked him for evidence to that effect, and he replied that during the iqaamah it is not permissible to greet anyone with salaam, because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not do that.
So my question is:
If this imam right in what he says? Is it permissible for the imam to come from behind the worshippers and from a distance when the iqaamah is being given for the prayer?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

It is prescribed for the one who enters the mosque – whether he is the imam or one of the worshippers – to greet the people in the mosque with salaam, because of the general meaning of the hadiths that have been narrated concerning this matter. For greeting with salaam generates love and harmony among people, and not greeting with salaam generates ill feeling, resentment

and grudges among people.

In the answer to question no. 114225 we stated that the view of most of the scholars is that it is permissible to greet with salaam a person who is praying so long as that will not lead to distraction or cause one who lacks knowledge to spoil his prayer.

Shaykh Ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

If a person enters the mosque, should he greet the people with salaam?

He replied: He should greet the people in the mosque with salaam. If there is someone in the mosque, he should greet him with salaam before he starts to pray. He should say salaam, then start his prayer, whether it is a prayer to greet the mosque (tahiyyat al-masjid) or regular Sunnah prayer. If the people in the mosque are busy, he should still greet them with salaam, even if they are reading Qur'an. The one who is reading can pause, say "Wa 'alaykum as-salaam," then resume his reading.

End quote from Fataawa Noor 'ala ad-Darb (11/344).

Shaykh 'Abd al-Kareem al-Khudayr (may Allah preserve him) was asked:

Some people, when they enter the mosque, give the greeting of salaam, even though the people who are there may be busy, praying or reading Qur'an. Should one give the greeting of salaam in this instance, and what about returning the greeting on the part of the one who is there?

He replied:

If the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was greeted with salaam whilst he was praying, he would return the greeting with a gesture. So the one who enters the mosque should give the greeting of salaam; one who is reading Quran should return the greeting, one who is sitting there should return the greeting, and the one who is praying should also return the greeting, with a gesture. End quote.

http://www.khudheir.com/text/4068

It is not appropriate to be hasty in passing judgement before examining the matter, and describe every action for which one does not know of specific evidence as being an innovation. A scholar may reach a conclusion, based on his examination of the shar'i texts, that a particular action serves a clear interest, and there is nothing in the shar'i texts to the contrary; rather the general shar'i guidelines support it in principle and point to it. Thus is more akin to al-maslahah al-mursalah (consideration of public interest) than to innovation (bid'ah).

See the answer to question no. 160876

If someone researches the question of whether the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) greeted his companions (may Allah be pleased with them) every time he entered the mosque, perhaps he will not find any evidence to that effect, so he may think that doing that is an innovation. Hence, if he is an imam, he may enter the mosque and the people may make room for him, and he may pass between their rows and their groups, whilst they are looking at him, not speaking and not greeting them with salaam, on the grounds that this is contrary to the Sunnah and is, in his mind, an innovation which it is not permissible to do! Such ijtihad is subject to further review: spreading the greeting of salaam is a Sunnah and is more emphatically so in the mosque; there is nothing wrong with greeting someone who is praying; and greeting with salaam is one of the greatest means of spreading love and affection among people. So it is prescribed to do it, especially if not doing it may generate ill feeling and resentment. Paying attention to all of these factors is part of the Sunnah and is part of Islam.

If we may sometimes refrain from doing something that is recommended and prescribed, for fear that it may undermine some clear interest, then doing something which is supported by the shar'i texts in general terms – rather the shar'i texts emphasise the importance of spreading it and doing it at all times, even if there is no proof that it should be done at a particular time or in a particular situation – in accordance with the general guidelines and in accordance with a clear interest, is more appropriate.

Yes, if the imam enters the mosque when the mu'adhdhin is giving the iqaamah for the prayer, and the people are busy getting up to pray and straightening their rows, then there is no blame on

the imam or anyone else if he enters the mosque without saying salaam. The matter is broad in scope.

With regard to the issue of entering from the back of the mosque, and making his way to the mihrab, this depends on the design of the mosque and its doors that lead to the outside. If the mosque has a door at the front which is nearer to the mihrab than the rear doors, then it is preferable to enter from that door, and is less likely to lead to stepping over people and pushing through the rows, unless the rear door is easier for the imam and more accessible to him.

Whatever the case, such an action should not be the cause of disputes, differences and division. The members of the congregation should not condemn the imam for such matters, especially if he thinks that what he is doing in this instance is the right thing, and that is not his usual habit or attitude with people in other situations, and he does not usually refrain from greeting people with salaam. Rather he is only refraining from giving the greeting of salaam in this situation on the basis of his misunderstanding of the Sunnah. So such a person should not be condemned or criticised for such an attitude; rather he should be given sincere advice and the matter should be discussed with him, and if it does not become clear to him that it is contrary to the Sunnah, then we hope that there will be no blame or sin on him.

And Allah knows best.