



Shalom, Alekum



Shalom, alekum is an Eastern world salute meaning, “in my mind, in my mouth, and in my heart, I wish you peace.” (See note at the end of this Letter.)

When men say this, perhaps at a wedding, other feasts or on the street, they also touch three fingers to their forehead, mouth and heart, in that order. The Hindu’s use three fingers based on their religious trinity. Their trinity consists of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Isn’t it interesting that denominational Christianity isn’t the only organized religion that worships three gods? The Muslims don’t worship three gods, but only one. When the Hindu’s use the three fingers, they are declaring several



things; their religious beliefs, their desire to wish others well, their humility for others, their respect for others and even their love for one another. Men will do this to as many people they meet, even if they meet a thousand. Perhaps you have seen this gesture in action but never known what it meant. They are practicing “shalom, alekum.”

I don’t expect you to start doing this in your fellowships and dinner parties, but I would like you to understand the humility and respect behind this gesture.

Would you allow me to be so bold as to say that true humility and true respect are reminiscent of the past, godly characteristics largely gone by the way?

I’m not trying to open a huge can of worms, but I am trying to focus in on something that Jesus unashfully declared. Do you remember... “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” from Luke 14:11? It is in this parable that you’ll find shalom, alekum. Let’s take a look!

Luke 14:7-11 And he [Jesus] put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked

Shalom, Alekum

how they chose out the chief rooms [should be “seats” instead of “rooms”]; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room [should be “seat” instead of “room”]; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room [should be “seat” instead of “room”]. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room [should be “seat” instead of “room”]; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

***For whosoever
exalteth himself
shall be abased; and
he that humbleth
himself shall be
exalted.***

At first sight, you might have a difficult time relating to this parable. If you do, it’s because you may not have had to follow seating rules such as they maintain in the East. In the East, at a formal gathering, a wedding, a feast, or some other grand event, no name cards are used, and there are no seat assignments – at least visible ones. Why is this? First of all, they sit on the floor on cushions. Also, the people actually know where to sit. Placement is dependent on one’s stature or honorable position in life. People know each other quite well. In fact, it is not uncommon for any given person to live in the same city his entire life, never leaving that area! They all become very familiar with each other and have a sort of pecking order.

When Mr. so and so would come in to the feast, he would know just where to sit. If he went to a “higher” seat than he deserved, the

people would start complaining and the host would come up to him and say, “Mr. so and so, you are sitting in the wrong seat and must move to a lower seat.” The person would have to get up and follow the host to his proper place – in shame. This would be terribly uncomfortable and most people simply would not subject themselves to this. On the other hand, if Mr. so and so would come in to the feast and sit in a lower seat than he deserved, the host would come to him and say, “Mr. so and so, you deserve to sit in a higher seat. Please come with me.” He would then lead the man to his higher seat. During this transition, something wonderful would take place. All the people at the feast would stand up while the host slowly led the humble person to his higher seat. They would stand with their heads bowed down and hold up three fingers, saluting the man with shalom alekum by saying “in my mind, in my mouth, and in my heart, I wish

Shalom, Alekum

you peace.” This is the meaning behind “then shalt thou have worship” in the preceding verses!

The man, in the above example, was a truly humble man for taking a lower seat than he deserved. All the people respected him for his humility. They publicly declared their respect for his humility by this wonderful salute. Here’s another neat fact. When the host led the man to his higher seat, he led him in a unique way by following behind his guest. Keep in mind that the host never ate with his guests. He positioned the guests according to their deserved honor and would not sit with them. This way, he could easily honor everyone properly. Have you ever heard the scripture, “He must increase, but I must decrease” from John 3:30? The host was doing exactly that kind of thing as he followed his honored guest to his deserved seat. There is a great humility present in these words, something that the people

of the East boldly expressed. Jesus Christ had no problem doing this and neither should we.

Humility and respect are abundantly present in the lifestyle of Hindu’s as well as many other peoples of the East. Sadly, I seldom see these characteristics in Western ways. I often tell my children that we are all far too spoiled, expecting everything to come our way and to be absolutely perfect. Any sane man will quickly recognize that there are surely rocks in every stream, including his own pathway of life, yet he is one to quickly turn around and demand perfection from those in his life. Natural laws are involved. Where fluid flows, the generated force and movement will naturally uncover what lays in the path. Life is also a force and when it moves, things in its path will become exposed. What a paradox! Demanding perfection, yet recognizing that it is not available today. Go figure.

If you are spoiled, expecting everything to be handed to you on a silver (or even worse, a gold) platter, then you also will have the accompanying trouble of lack of respect for others and humility for just about anything.

Some people really have to work for what they have and then they have to fight to keep it. These people have a much easier time with respect of others and humility before others. I suppose it would be fun to ask, “of which sort am I?”

***A**re you spoiled,
expecting
everything to be
forever perfect,
denying the ever-
present reality of the
rocks in the streams
of life?*

Or are you a bit more seasoned, realizing that a good life will take a lot of hard work, especially when a few rocks show up? If this question is difficult to perceive and answer,

Shalom, Alekum

try it from a different angle. Ask yourself if you are respectful of others (always), and if you are humble before others (yes, even when driving in rush hour traffic).

If you are honestly respectful and honestly humble, I salute you with shalom alekum. If you are not, I respectfully and humbly ask you to read the following verse:

For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Luke 14:11

These words are real, and Jesus Christ REALLY spoke them!

There is a time coming when you will be rewarded for ALL of your goodness including respect for others and humility.

In fact, respect for others and humility before others, according to Jesus, are at the top of the list.

Shalom alekum, in Christ,

Jerry D. Brown

Note: Shalom alekum appears in many languages in different forms. I have seen it spelled many different ways. Some examples are as follows:

- Salam Alekum - Republic of Yemen; Egypt; Afghanistan
- Salām alekum – Cairo, Egypt
- Chelem alekum – France
- Assalam-o-alaikum - Pakistan
- Salam U Alekum – Saudi Arabia
- Salaam Alekum – The Gambia, West Africa
- Salahmalekwum - Sierra Leone
- Asalaamu alekum – Swahili in Africa
- Salem Alekum – Nigeria

This is a short list I compiled myself and there are many more to add, but you get the picture.

If you ever want to respond to such a greeting, you can by saying, “Wa alekum es salām – and hello to you!” You can also simply reverse the two words spoken to you, i.e., Alekum Salam!