241149 - Can You Uncover the Deceased’s Face to Kiss Him?

the question

Do we have to see the dead person's face after bathing and shrouding him?

In India when someone dies, it is made a must by his family members to see the face of the deceased after wrapping him up in the shroud. The face is purposefully exposed and once the face is shown before leaving the house and once the face is showed after putting the body into the grave, before covering up the grave. If someone refuses to see the face, he is bad mouthed in the community.
Does this have any Islamic influence or is it just a wrong practice being followed over here?

Summary of answer

The basic principle is that the face of the deceased is to be covered, but it is permissible to uncover it in order to kiss him or look at him. However, there is no basis in Islamic teachings for regarding that as obligatory or even recommended.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

No one has the right to state that something is obligatory according to Shari`ah except with proof from the Book of Allah or the Sunnah of His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “Or have they partners with Allah (false gods), who have instituted for them a religion which Allah has not allowed?” [Ash-Shura 42:21]

It is narrated in the Sunnah that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and his companions uncovered the faces of some of the deceased Muslims, but that was not by way of it

being obligatory or even recommended; rather the most that can be said about it is that it is something permissible, that was not done with everyone who died and was not done by every relative with his relative.

Rather some of the scholars restricted that and disallowed uncovering the face of the deceased except for the one who washes him and those who help him.

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said, commenting on Al-Bukhari's inclusion in his book of a chapter entitled Chapter on entering upon the deceased after death, when he has been wrapped in his shroud:

"Because death may lead to changes in the usual appearance of the person when he was alive – and for that reason it is enjoined to close his eyes and cover him – it was thought that it is not allowed to uncover him, to the extent that An-Nakh`i (may Allah have mercy on him) said: No one should look at him except the one who washes him and those who help him, but Al-Bukhari mentioned that it is permissible." (Fath Al-Bari, 4/266)

Hence the jurists stated that it is permissible to uncover the face of the deceased, refuting the view of those who disallowed it, but they did not include it under the heading of things that are recommended or enjoined.

Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"If his family wants to see him, they should not be prevented. That is because of the report from Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: When my father was killed, I started to lift the cloth from his face whilst I was weeping, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not forbid me to do that. `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: I saw the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) kiss `Uthman ibn Math`un after he died, and I even saw his tears flowing. And she said: Abu Bakr came to see the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) when he was wrapped in a striped cloak [after he died]. He uncovered his face, then he leaned over him and kissed him, then he wept and said: May my father be sacrificed for you, O Prophet of Allah; Allah will not cause you to die twice. These Hadiths

are authentic.” (Al-Mughni, 2/350)

These Hadiths indicate that it is recommended to cover the face of the deceased , and they also indicate that it is permissible to enter upon the deceased, uncover his face and kiss him , whether that is after he is shrouded or before. The Hadiths of Abu Bakr and Jabir (may Allah be pleased with them) speak of what happened after death and before shrouding ; the Hadith of `Uthman ibn Math`un (may Allah be pleased with him) speaks of what happened after shrouding , as is clearly mentioned in Al-Bukhari (1243): When he died, and was washed and shrouded in his garments, the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came in.

In conclusion, the basic principle is that the face of the deceased is to be covered, but it is permissible to uncover it in order to kiss him or look at him. However there is no basis in Islamic teachings for regarding that as obligatory, and there is nothing to indicate that it is obligatory or even recommended.

If it is the people’s custom in your country for the family of the deceased to look at him before burying him, and if not doing that will make people think that they have failed to give him his right or it is seen as sign of disrespect, then you should not go against their wishes in that regard, because this comes under the heading of reconciling between people and removing mutual resentment and grudges, as well as paying attention to adopting a gentle approach and explaining the Sunnah to them gradually, and correcting the beliefs and traditions that they have.

And Allah knows best.