10525 - Is It Sunnah to Reduce the Mahr?

the question

I noticed that people nowadays are increasing the Mahr (dowry) for marriage a great deal.

Is this Sunnah? Does Shari`ah stipulate a certain limit for the Mahr that should not be overstepped?

Summary of answer

Shari`ah does not stipulate a certain limit for the Mahr that should not be overstepped, but it does encourage reducing the Mahr and keeping it simple.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The Importance of Marriage in Islam

Marriage is one of the blessings of Allah, and one of His signs. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And among His Signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect.} [Ar-Rum 30:21]

Allah commanded guardians to arrange marriages for those who are under their care, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And marry those among you who are single (i.e. a man who has no wife and the woman who has no husband) and (also marry) the pious (fit and capable ones) of your (male) slaves and maid-

servants (female slaves). If they be poor, Allah will enrich them out of His Bounty. And Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knowing (about the state of the people).} [An-Nur 24:32]

That is because of the great interests that are served by marriage, such as increasing the numbers of the Ummah, and causing the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to feel proud before the other Prophets, and protecting both husband and wife from falling into prohibitions… and other great benefits.

Mahr in Islam: A Symbol of Honor Not Wealth

But some guardians put obstacles in the way of marriage, which prevented those under their care from getting married in many cases.

That is because they exaggerate concerning the Mahr, and demand huge dowries which a young man who wants to get married cannot afford, until marriage becomes something extremely difficult for many of those who want to get married.

The Mahr is a right that is given to the woman, as enjoined by Islamic Shari`ah, as an expression of the man's desire to marry her. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And give to the women (whom you marry) their Mahr (obligatory bridal-money given by the husband to his wife at the time of marriage) with a good heart.} [An-Nisa' 4:4]

This does not mean that the woman is a product to be sold, rather it is a symbol of honour and respect, and a sign that the husband is willing to shoulder his responsibilities and fulfil his duties.

Is Reducing the Mahr Sunnah?

Shari`ah does not stipulate a certain limit for the Mahr that should not be overstepped, but it does encourage reducing the Mahr and keeping it simple.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "The best of marriage is that which is made easiest." (Narrated by Ibn Hibban, classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sahih Al-Jami`, 3300)

And he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The best of Mahrs is the simplest (or most affordable).” (Narrated by Al-Hakim and Al-Bayhaqi, classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sahih Al-Jami`, 3279)

And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to a man who wanted to get married: “Look (for something to give as a dowry), even if it is a ring of iron.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Why is Reducing the Mahr Encouraged

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) set the highest example for his Ummah in that regard, so that a clear understanding of the basic principles would be implanted in society, and a spirit of simplicity would spread among the people.

Abu Dawud (2125) and An-Nasa’i (3375) narrated from Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) that `Ali said: “I married Fatimah (may Allah be pleased with her) and said: `O Messenger of Allah, let me go ahead with the marriage.’ He said: ‘Give her something.’ I said: `I do not have anything.’ He said: ‘Where is your Hutami shield?’ I said, ‘I have it with me.’ He said, ‘Give it to her.’” (Classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sahih An-Nasa’i, 3160)

This was the Mahr of Fatimah (may Allah be pleased with her), the daughter of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the leader of the women of Paradise.

This reinforces the fact that in Islam, the Mahr is not something that is sought for its own sake.

Ibn Majah (1887) narrated that `Umar ibn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “Do not go to extremes with regard to the dowries of women, for if that were a sign of honour and dignity in this world or a sign of piety before Allah, then Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would have done that before you. But he did not give any of his wives, and none of his daughters were given more than twelve Uqiyah. A man may increase the dowry until he feels resentment against her and says, ‘You cost me everything I own, and caused me a great deal of hardship’.” (Classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sahih Ibn Majah, 1532)

“Do not go to extremes” means do not exaggerate in increasing the dowry. “A man may increase the dowry until he feels resentment against her” means, until he begins to hate her when he is still paying off the debts incurred because of this Mahr because it is too hard for him, or whenever he thinks about the matter. (From Hashiyat As-Sindi `ala Ibn Majah)

Twelve Uqiyah is equivalent to 480 Dirhams, i.e., approximately 135 silver riyals (134.4). This was the Mahr of the daughters and wives of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Majmu` Al-Fatawa (32/194):

Whoever thinks of increasing his daughter’s Mahr and asking for more than the daughters of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were given – when they were the best women in this world in all aspects – is an ignorant fool. The same applies to asking for more than the Mothers of the Believers were given. This applies even if one is well off and can afford it. With regard to one who is poor, he should not give a Mahr greater than he can afford to pay without any hardship.

He also said in Al-Fatawa Al-Kubra:

The words of Imam Ahmad according to the report of Hanbal imply that it is recommended for the dowry to be four hundred dirhams. This is the correct view in cases where the man can afford it. It is recommended to pay this amount and no more.

In Zad Al-Ma`ad (5/178), Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) quoted some of the Hadiths that indicate that the Mahr should be reduced and that there is no minimum amount. Then he said:

These Hadiths indicate that there is no minimum amount for the Mahr… and that exaggerating concerning the Mahr is disliked, and that it reduces its blessing. (End quote)

Hence it is clear that what people do nowadays, increasing the Mahr and exaggerating concerning it, is something that goes against the Shari`ah.

The Wisdom behind Simplifying Mahr

The wisdom behind reducing the Mahr and not increasing it is quite clear:

This makes it easier for people to get married, so that they will not be diverted from it, which will result in all kinds of moral and social corruption.

For more details, please see the following answers:

Is Marriage Valid without Mahr?

How to Calculate Mahr in Islam

Does Mahr Have to Be Given Straight Away?

The negative and harmful consequences of exaggerating concerning the dowry