

[Bribery Is Disruption Of Society and Culture](#)

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## Bribery Is Disruption Of Society and Culture

The briber and the bribed are equally guilty and bound together in the bad karma of their secret crimes

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A young man is riding his motor scooter in busy Kuala Lumpur. His tail light is out, and he knows it. Hearing a siren behind him, he slows and is pulled over by a motorcycle policeman. In Malay, the officer informs him of the infraction, pulls out his ticket book, then indicates through well-known signs that a small bribe would take care of the matter. Heart pounding, palms sweating, the boy musters up his courage and says, "Are you asking me to bribe you? I'm not paying you anything. What is your badge number? Take me to your superior!" Visibly shaken, and seeing the youth is no easy mark, the officer spins around, mounts his bike and speeds away.

There was a bad feeling about this true incident. The cop knew he was committing a crime. The youth was tempted to become the accomplice, but resisted, sidestepping, for the moment, one of society's most sinister problems. Yes, briber and bribed are bound together in their dishonest, dark deed. Reluctance, resignation, efficiency, disdain--none of these sentiments

relieve a person from the guilt, the ever-accumulating kukarma, the bad karma, of the crime.

There are three kinds of bribery. The first is the most common--withholding services one has been paid to perform until that additional, secret compensation is paid. The second kind is a little more subtle. Favors--contracts, concessions, legal immunity, etc.--are given to those who pay a bribe in cash or kind. The briber offers money, saying, "I am giving you this money, and this is what I want you to do," and if the party receives it, that is what he must do. It's a purchase of secret, unauthorized use of influence, position or authority. The third form of bribery, even more subtle, is to provide a service and then exact a reward. This is, however, the most easily detected of all, because when asked for another service, it is denied--that is if the gift, after the first service was performed, was not given or was not large enough.

Bribe comes from old French, meaning a morsel of bread given to a beggar. Says Webster's Dictionary, a bribe is "1) Anything, especially money, given or promised to induce a person to do something illegal or wrong; 2) anything given or promised to induce a person to do something against his or her wishes."

Bribery money when received is bad money, because it is gotten--in whatever of the three ways, in cash or kind--by psychological force, the arousal of greed, or by devious coercion. In many countries, bribery has become a way of life. Bribes are demanded, and usually paid, for most anything, from getting a contract signed to buying a train ticket. A prominent politician told me he found it impossible, simply

impossible, to get anything done without it. Most, but not everyone, would agree. A successful, sophisticated Bangalore woman, now in her forties, swears she has never, ever, paid a bribe in her entire life.

Spiritual people and institutions sometimes feel compelled to accept or pay bribes because the alternative is so frustrating or because their sense of mission is so strong, and they want it to go forward at all costs. Still, it must be remembered that it is not only what you do that is important but how you do it. Bad money cannot be purified by spending it on good projects. Rather, bad money sours and fails them.

In our spiritual fellowship, we have a rule that we do not engage in bribery, even when it means great sacrifice. In our efforts to carve a granite temple in Bangalore to be shipped to Hawaii--for which we established a village of a hundred workers and their families--we have been called on time and time again to hand over a bribe. Yes, a giant project can be hampered by a small bribe. We had to ask ourselves, shall we pay the petty pittance to keep the electricity on or the phones working? It was hard sometimes not to submit, but now it is known that we don't pay and the bribers no longer ask. One previous bribe seeker actually apologized for his earlier demands.

By not accepting or engaging in the opportunities of bribery, my devotees are telling the community that bribery is unacceptable and ultimately unnecessary. If enough people are following this kind of principle in any society, then bribery will go away. If enough people are not, then bribery becomes

the accepted way of doing business, and everyone will use bribery as a source of additional income, and a means of getting things done. The acceptance of a bribe is an affirmation of the practice. Every time a family, an individual, a community, a nation disavows or rejects the practice of bribery, then bribery is diminished. To walk away from a bribe, to reject a bribe or to refuse to pay is to fulfill Hindu Dharma.

Where does bribery begin? The same place as everything else--at home, often at a young age. Mothers bribe their children to behave and earn good grades. Fathers bribe youths to marry according to their race and financial position. Those who take bribes and pay bribes raise a corrupt family. Mercy, through personal prayaschitta, sincere penance, can help relieve the bad karma but that, too, is all for naught unless the practice is stopped. The power of decision rests on the character of each person in the family. If that power is used rightly, the kukarmas clear. If not, the family and all members go down and down and down, for bribery is stealing and being stolen from. It is similar to walking into someone's house late at night, opening their cash box and taking money. Bribery has the same emotional and psychological impact. He who pays a bribe is an accomplice to the person who demands it. He who accepts a bribe, proffered to buy his favors, is likewise bound to his crafty benefactor. There are two criminals in each case, he who accepts and he who pays. Inwardly, karmically, astrally they are bound together as one. Those who pay bribes for the sake of efficiency or accept gifts without examining the intent may deem themselves innocent, but they are not. Karmic law spares no one.

Bribery breeds an educated criminal generation. It blocks the

free flow of business. Bribery disrupts positive projects. Bribery diverts creative energies to worries about who, if not paid, will disrupt the progress, cut the phone lines, turn off the electric power or otherwise cause delay after delay after delay. Bribery is devastating to the economy. No one knows how much anything really costs, and since it is illegal money, black money, the recipients don't pay taxes on it. Two sets of books have to be kept. Honest companies are put out of business by dishonest, bribe-giving competitors.

What can be done about bribery? On the governmental level, there are instructive examples from recent history. Twenty years ago in America, undercover FBI agents approached various politicians and offered them bribes to help a fictitious Arab company gain American business. A few politicians accepted the bribes and quickly found themselves jailed. Every politician got the message. Just this year, New Orleans hired a new police chief to reform its notoriously corrupt police force. First he demanded and got the officer's pay doubled. Then he arrested, prosecuted and fired the next 65 officers caught taking bribes. The rest, it's said, no longer risk their now well-paying careers for bribe money.

Internationally, only the United States has a law preventing its companies from bribing foreign officials. Other countries--including all of Europe--have refused to pass similar statutes on the excuse that it would put their business communities at a disadvantage. In fact, the bribes so paid are even tax-deductable. Yet, the same companies paying a bribe in their own country results in prosecution. One organization, Transparency International (Otto-Suhr-Allee 97-99, D10585, Berlin, Germany), is attempting to end this global double

standard which makes it so difficult for individual countries to root out the scourge of bribery.

From a psychological point of view, bribery is a criminal consciousness, of deceit, cheating, on the darker side of life. Guilt is always involved, secrecy, and fear of being caught for extorting funds, fear of what might happen if bribes are not paid, worry over obligations incurred by accepting bribes. Such surreptitious dealings create an erosion of trust in society. A healthy society is based on honesty, openness, love, trust and good will. And correct me if I am wrong, but there is no country that has made bribery legal within its own borders, even where it is tolerated as an accepted way of life. It is at the grass roots level, in the home, in schools, in the marketplace, office and factory, that bribery should first be stopped. Hindu Dharma is the law enforcer. Simply don't bribe. It really is OK not to bribe. More and more, not bribing is becoming acceptable behavior.