229887 - Is Gift Giving a Form of Bribery in Islam?

the question

I work in a government job, and I have other female colleagues at work. What is the ruling on exchanging gifts among ourselves, whether that is when one of us gets married, or to strengthen bonds among us? Please note that there are no vested interests among us, because none of us is the boss or manager of another; rather we are all at the same level. I suffer from intrusive thoughts (Waswas) and I overthink everything; I cannot distinguish between a gift and a bribe. I would also like to ask: sometimes I bring some chocolate with me, and I offer it to all the employees in the section; can I offer it to my boss too, or is that not permissible? And I would like to ask: my mother died approximately two years ago, and when she was in the hospital, sometimes we would bring chocolate or Ma`mul (date-filled cookie) and other things, and I that on many occasions, if I am not mistaken, we gave money to the nurses so that they would be more keen to pay extra attention to my mother, even though at that time I do not remember whether I thought even for a moment that it was a bribe, but now when I remember the past, I feel that it was a bribe, and I regret it, and I do not want to be cursed. If I want to give up this sin and I regret it, what do I have to do now, so that my Lord will turn to me in mercy? Will the prayers and fasts of the last two years be affected?

Summary of answer

Giving gifts is something that is encouraged, because it softens hearts and strengthens the bonds of Islamic brotherhood and sisterhood. Bribery is something that is forbidden, because of what it leads to of wrongdoing and transgressing people’s rights, and reinforcing selfishness. The difference between them is clear.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Is gift giving a form of bribery in Islam?

Giving gifts is something that is encouraged, because it softens hearts and strengthens the bonds of Islamic brotherhood and sisterhood.

Bribery is something that is forbidden, because of what it leads to of wrongdoing and transgressing people's rights, and reinforcing selfishness.

The difference between them is clear. A gift is something that a person gives to someone he loves, whereas a bribe is something that is given to someone so that the giver will gain something to which he has no right, or to waive a duty that he owes to someone else.

Ruling on gifts given to employees

With regard to gifts that are given to employees, if it is given because of his position of authority in his workplace – meaning that it is because he is a boss or judge – then it is forbidden.

The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade that, because it may be a means of making that boss or judge inclined towards the person who gave him the gift, so he may favour him and give him something to which he has no right.

Based on that, what a worker gives to her colleague at work is a gift and not a bribe, because the reason for the gift is friendship and love, and the recipient has no authority or power because of which she might favour the one who gave her the gift.

Is giving a gift to the boss prohibited in Islam?

As for giving a gift to the boss , this comes under the heading of bribery or is a means that may lead to that, because the boss has power over the workers, and this gift may influence some of her decisions.

But in the case of small things, such as giving pieces of chocolate, which people usually do and do not consider it a bribe, especially if it is given to all the workers in the office, without singling out

the boss for anything extra, it is not appropriate – and is not something that people usually do – to give something to all the workers then exclude the boss!

Can you give a gift to the nurse or doctor to pay extra attention to the patient?

The patient or his family should not give a gift to the nurse or doctor , because this may lead to them paying extra attention to this patient, and that will be at the expense of all the other patients, and in some cases it may lead to the nurse not being motivated to do her job, and not taking care of the patients as he or she is required to do except after being given this gift.

But that may be overlooked in the case of small things such as chocolate and the like, which people usually overlook.

Shaykh `Abd Al-`Aziz ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

What is the ruling on giving a gift to the doctor after he has treated the patient? Is it allowed or permissible or forbidden?

He replied:

“If he – meaning the doctor – is in a government hospital or a government clinic, he should not be given anything. But if the gift is given to him after he has finished and after the treatment has ended, with no prior promise or anything, then perhaps there is nothing wrong with it. However, not doing that is more prudent, even after that, because that may lead to making prior agreements of this nature, which could lead to the doctor paying extra attention to that patient and neglecting others. What I think is that he should not be given anything, even after treatment is finished, so as to close the door and leave no room for such agreements. So he should not give him anything; rather he should offer supplication for him, and pray that he be guided and helped. And he may say: May Allah reward you with good; I ask Allah to help and guide you… and similar kind words." (Nur ‘Ala Ad-Darb 19/380-381)

Previously on this website we have explained that gifts that people give to workers because of their position are not permissible. Please see the answer to question no. 83590 .

If the Muslim does something forbidden and does not know that it is prohibited, then Allah will pardon him. Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And there is no blame upon you for that in which you have erred but [only for] what your hearts intended. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.} [Al-Ahzab 33:5]

The one who was unaware of the ruling did not deliberately commit sin, and that does not have any impact on your previous acts of worship such as prayer and fasting.

Allah, may He be Exalted, also says regarding those who consumed Riba in the past, before they knew that it is prohibited:

{So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists may have what is past, and his affair rests with Allah. But whoever returns to [dealing in interest or usury] - those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein.} [Al-Baqarah 2:275]

Do sins affect good deeds?

You should understand that there is no connection between anything that you have mentioned and your righteous deeds and acts of worship , whether that is prayer, fasting, Zakah or anything else, and whether what you did was permissible or prohibited. Whatever you did of [good deeds] will not be spoiled by the fact that you committed some other error , so how about if, at that time, you were unaware and did not realise that it was wrong? And how about if the thing was in fact permissible, and there was nothing wrong with it?

The most important thing we advise you to do now is to ignore these intrusive thoughts altogether, and seek refuge with Allah from them, and pay no attention to them at all, because if they gain control over you, they will soon spoil your affairs in this world and the hereafter.

There are many answers on our website about intrusive thoughts (Waswas) and how to deal with

them. We hope that you will read these answers and benefit from them. We also advise you to consult a trustworthy specialist doctor, because combining two types of treatment – one based on acquiring knowledge, changing your behaviour and strengthening your faith, and the other based on a physical, medical approach – will hasten your recovery, by Allah’s leave, and will relieve you from the pain of Waswas.

And Allah knows best.