

## Speaking Truth To Power

-- Lairssa Franklin

Corruption is defined as a powerful person or group of powerful people that take advantage of their powers and present harmful and dishonest conduct. Throughout history, people have been corrupted and/or hurt by corruption often by governments and ruling powers. Unfortunately, in today's world this is still true. Corruption is still prevalent, and the powers that commit injustices are not just governments. For example, large companies have become so powerful, confronting them about an injustice is intimidating because of their power and influence. Most people encounter corruption in their lifetimes. People who see injustices are often too intimidated and afraid to stand up to the powers committing them in an attempt to stop it. However, there are individuals who despite their personal fears, speak up, tell the truth to others and confront the powerful who make corruption. Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, prophets and leaders of the three Abrahamic faiths, were individuals who centuries ago battled corruption.

In the Jewish religion, Moses saw a corrupt society where thousands of Jewish people were being enslaved. The Christian leader Jesus saw many corrupt actions in the Roman Empire one of which was the disrespect of sacred places. Muhammad, the Muslim prophet, led in a time of lawlessness and disunity; he promoted equality, peace and justice. All three of these men bravely confronted the corruption in their society by standing up to those in power and speaking truths. There is much we can learn from their actions.

For many years, Egyptians enslaved the Jewish people. Moses, a Jew, was in a very different position than all other Jews. He was abandoned by his mother as an infant to prevent him from being killed because he was Jewish. He was found by the Pharaoh's daughter who

wanted to adopt him. Both the non-Jewish Pharaoh and his wife did not know Moses was Jewish but when Moses grew up he learned that he was in fact Jewish. Looking at the Jews, his own people, being whipped, tortured, and killed while he stood in control pained him so he refused to continue to be part of what the Egyptians were doing and left. Not long after, according to Jewish scripture, God first spoke to Moses, and told him to return to tell the Pharaoh to let his people go free. Although Moses was scared, and knew he could lose his life for doing this, he did exactly what he was told to do. The Pharaoh just laughed and dismissed him. God again ordered Moses to go tell the Pharaoh to let the Jewish people go and gave him a warning that if he does not free them, bad things will begin to happen. The Pharaoh continued to laugh at Moses, mocking him and treating the slaves more harshly. Repeatedly Moses risked his life to end the corrupt government that enslaved the Jewish people. After a tenth refusal by the Pharaoh to free the Jewish people, their God sent the Angel of Death to kill every first-born male child of every Egyptian family. The Pharaoh's son was killed. The next day, the Pharaoh in his grief let the Jewish people go free (Exodus 10.24). It was because of Moses "speaking truth to power," and standing up for what he knew was right, that thousands of suffering Jewish slaves were set free.

Like Moses, Jesus was also very good at "speaking truth to power." In his time, under the rule of the Roman Empire, there were vast amounts of corruption and injustice. A sect of the Jewish people, who were led by the Pharisees, were using their temples, houses of God, as market places. The business of buying, selling, negotiating and bribery occurred inside them and so these powerful leaders were not keeping God's house holy. When Jesus became aware of this corruption, he spoke out against it reminding people of God's word. He said, "You have made it a den of thieves." (Jeremiah 7:11) At first, no one listened to him. He was one man, preaching to the people to change their ways. He reminded them of their obligations, as children of God, and

so people began to follow Jesus' teachings. He told the people "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." (Isaiah 56:7) (<http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&id=Mtb58B6naTQC&dq=from+jesus+to+christ&printsec=frontcover>).

Muhammad was born into a community with a polytheistic religion and inequality. There was no safety for individuals or rights to own property. Consequently, there were frequent quarrels and gruesome bloody fights (Nadeem ul Ghnai Rekhi). In Mecca, Muhammad witnessed corruption from childhood to manhood. As a man, he received the words of God and had someone who wrote them down. They describe a belief with morals, laws for equality, and justice. Muhammad then later relayed the messages to the Meccans. Many doubted his sanity and thought him to be possessed by an evil spirit or devil, but Muhammad continued trying to convince people to follow these teachings [early Islam] because he believed they were good for his fellow man.

As Muhammad persisted and continued to preach Islam, most people would walk away, but some began to believe. Eventually he gained more and more believers. This scared the Quraysh (who were his people), the biggest most powerful tribe in Mecca, because it put their power in jeopardy. So they tried to bribe Muhammad with riches and royalty if he discontinued his preaching, yet Muhammad repeatedly declined. The Quraysh began persecuting believers of Islam or anyone who considered converting. So Muhammad and his few followers fled to Medina where the people accepted and embraced the principals of one God, justice, and equality. Many years later, Muhammad, with a large group of followers returned to Mecca and influenced thousands of people. He "spoke truth to power" and as a result, many Meccans converted. It was because of his actions that corruption in Mecca was greatly reduced.

Today, corruption still exists and strong leaders are still needed to “speak truth to power.” Big businesses often hold the power now and impress upon and influence modern day society. People live their lives in and around these businesses, and without realizing it are being manipulated to believe advertisements that are not truthfully presented: a form of corruption. An example of this exists currently in the auto industry in which the new hybrid cars are being promoted as environmentally friendly.

“Today’s Civic Hybrid represents the very latest in our commitment to positive environmental change,” says Honda about their 2008 Civic Hybrid on their website (<http://www.honda.com>). This promotion implies that when one buys a Honda hybrid, they are helping the environment or “going green.” However, there is research to show that this is not necessarily true, at least not to the extent Honda is suggesting. Claims that these vehicles are getting anywhere from thirty-five to forty-five miles per gallon are in most cases proven to be false. When the vehicles are tested for the number of miles they can travel per gallon of gasoline, they usually only tested in city-like driving where the cars perform best. In hybrids, the battery and electricity are only used when braking or when the car comes to a complete stop (like in city traffic). This means that highway drivers who are not braking often, or slowing down, do not get the high mileage the automakers claim. One might argue that the hybrid still gets exceptional mileage for the car it is and they would be right (<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/models/new/honda/civic/sedan-hybrid-4-cyl/road-test.htm>). Even considering this however, if one thinks of the purpose of the hybrid as being environmentally friendly, they have been duped. Automakers making “green” cars need to consider more than just the carbon dioxide that is burned by the car. For example, the battery is made from nickel, copper, and zinc, all which are mined by diesel burning trucks and drills that release carbon dioxide into the air and also

cause thousands of acres of deforestation. These metals then have to be shipped out to another country (via transportation that is not “green”), and with the use of machines (that also use carbon burning fuels) are melted, molded, and cut into the shapes necessary for assembly. After this step comes the shipping of these cut-out parts (by planes, or boats, or trains, all of which put carbon into the air as well) to be assembled into the battery, which is then packaged and shipped (again, by other means of transportation which are not “green”) to the car assembly plant. Lastly, the entire car gets shipped off (which once again is by a transportation that is not “green”) to wherever it is to be sold, which more than likely, will be in the United States. The corruption here then, is that by the time one factors in all the energy used and the amount of carbon dioxide emitted to create a single battery for a single hybrid car, the benefits may be outweighed. So in truth, today’s hybrids do not really have much of an environmental benefit. They could however reduce America’s dependence on foreign oil that could then lead to a more just and peaceful society. These cars also raise awareness of the need to protect our planet.

Creating awareness about the misrepresentations made by the auto industry and the need to repair our environment is how I am going to “speak truth to power.” I am going to educate people on the truth about hybrid vehicles. I am going to do this by creating a video Public Service Announcement (PSA). My PSA will also “speak truth to power” by showing the powerful car companies that misleading the public is unjust and unacceptable. I feel that a video communication project could make a powerful impact because it can communicate to mass amounts of people at once via the Internet and local cable channels. In addition, if every viewer told just one person about the information they will have learned about the environmental impact that hybrids truly have, and their actions could potentially reduce greenhouse gasses.

As the leaders of the three Abrahamic faiths have shown, speaking what is right and true to a corrupt power transforms societies. They stood firm to end corruption for others and unselfishly risked their lives, their family, and their dignity to do what was right. So it is important as an ever-developing people that we continue to do this. The more people there are who are able to “speak truth to power,” the more people will not accept corruption, and the amount of injustices will decrease. This is especially important now because our planet’s environment is in a fragile state. It is still fixable and we as a united people have the capability of fixing it. Reducing false representation and communicating truthful information is necessary to benefit our planet even more. If the human population does nothing, the earth reach soon hit a point where it will not be as easy to fix, and it will continue to get warmer— something scientists tell us could lead to many challenges for humanity (An Inconvenient Truth). Any one person has the ability to “speak truth to power” in their community and like Moses, Jesus and Muhammad have taught us; results of the effort can be very beneficial.

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