

Opinions Run Amok

By Jeanne Supin

Bombs are dropping across Southern Lebanon and Northern Israel as I write this. And I suspect neither my editor nor most readers will want to go beyond that first sentence.

It's a terrible opening, a line that would deter me from reading further, too. Like most of my family and friends, I prefer turning away from intentional, human-led destruction. It's not because I lack compassion and genuine concern. It's not really because my own life is so consuming that I can't expand my reach around something distant. I can't even blame it on confusion, for I have studied the region and its conflict for years. Instead, I can't absorb the fact that human beings routinely choose to destroy each other. It makes no sense. It actually makes me nauseous.

I won't talk about the Middle East and the historical payload that fuels these recent missiles. I won't extol the horrors of war in general, and the myriad of deaths it causes. I certainly won't offer an opinion suggesting one side or another is more or less justified. Don't get me wrong – I have extensive information and strong opinions with dozens of resources to bolster my platform. But that's the problem. I have information and opinions about a lot of things, yet they're nothing more than my ego trying to sound smart. I dress them with objective facts, but peek under my skirt and my opinions are merely fancy outerwear for my own naked influences, experiences, desires, and fears.

And for some inexplicable, bewildering, unfathomable, irrational reason I actually believe my own over-dressed opinions are correct – even though the color and fabric are purely personal. What’s worse, more often than not (like right now) I try to force my taste on others, too.

What *is* that? What is my impulse to think I’m Right? And why am I then compelled to convince *others* I’m right, even, presumably, to the point of fighting and killing over it?

I’m not blaming “human nature” or some Darwinian misinterpretation. Natural selection, in fact, suggests species adapt precisely in order to preserve, not destroy, themselves. Individuals may die prematurely along the way – too weak to escape a predator, too small to complete a birth, too fragile to withstand the environment – but the goal is species strength, not individual domination.

Instead, I’m blaming my own undisciplined compulsion to insist I’m Right. Humans are unique among species – we are so wedded to our opinions that we threaten our own existence in their defense. Both Israel and Hezbollah believe they are right, and each intends to destroy the other as a result. It’s really no different elsewhere ... Iraq, Afghanistan, Congo, East Timor, a U.S. street corner plagued with gang shootings, a fence between two national borders, behind the shadow of domestic violence, a parent slapping her child ... different opinions and the strongest hand violently wins. But not for long in evolutionary terms. And certainly not for any *species*-enhancing purpose.

I’m sorry. I am uncharacteristically angry. But that happens when a handful of adults throw deadly temper tantrums, and, as a result, distant screams from dying children wake me in the middle of the night. Opinions run amok may prove our most deadly plague.

So, I’m doing my share to quiet my views, adopting healthy strategies used when all kinds of relationships – personal, professional, political – are in trouble.

- Let go of positions, outcomes, and fears. I’m sunk any time I start with my opinion in tact, my result defined, my guard up. Engaging without those nets is

- far scarier in the beginning but feels significantly better in the end. With practice, the outcomes are usually good.
- Don't make assumptions. It's easy to speculate about someone else's motives, but even if I'm accurate I miss the opportunity to connect. When I ask instead of assume, I get to learn other perspectives, share my own, and transform in the process.
- Really listen. It's a breeze to hear enough for a rebuttal, but it's far more important – and more difficult -- to pay real attention and understand.
- Be kind. No matter what, no matter how hard. Sometimes this requires my relentless discipline – and people don't always act kindly in return. A little justified cruelty sure would feel better in the moment, but I am kind so I can sleep at night.
- Finally, follow any Golden Rule. Every religion, culture, and spiritual tradition has one.

My individual life is small, but ultimately all interactions – from personal to global – are merely relationships among individuals. My efforts to behave openly, kindly, and respectfully should not be done as a way to manipulate others. My opinions and behavior merely remain the only things I can and should control.

Follow A Golden Rule

- ✦ One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts. *African Proverb, undated*
- ✦ Choose thou for thy neighbor that which thou chooseth for thyself. *Baha'i Faith, 1850 CE*
- ✦ Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. *Christianity, 30 CE*
- ✦ What you do not yourself desire, do not put before others. *Confucianism, 551 BCE*
- ✦ One should not behave towards others in a way that is disagreeable to oneself. *Hinduism, 4000 BCE*
- ✦ Do unto all men as you would wish to have done unto you. *Islam, 660 CE*
- ✦ Treat all creatures as yourself would be treated. *Jainism, 900 BCE*
- ✦ What is hateful to yourself do not to your fellow man. *Judaism, 1000 BCE*
- ✦ Do not do unto others what angers you if done to you by others. *Socrates 436 - 338, BCE*
- ✦ Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others. *Zoroastrian Faith 600 BCE*