

Waking Up to What You Do (excerpt)

By Diane Eshin Rizzetto

Supporting Life

War – Over There and Here

Another difficult arena to take up the way of supporting life is on the battlefield of war. Here is where we can find ourselves digging ourselves deeper and deeper into our convictions in a last-ditch effort to wiggle our way out of the paradox “going to war to save lives.” One truth, however is very clear about all war: it is always a bloodbath and innocents always suffer. This is not news. The greatest writers and artists throughout history have sent us the message: war is brutal! Yet, we have not found our way out of viewing war as a solution to our conflicts.

Some argue that it’s better to go to war to take down an oppressive government so that we can save the future lives of many. Others have the firm conviction that war must never be an option. So the war in the air and on the fields of nations becomes the war between individuals in their hearts. How easy it is to make our own decision by blindly following the people who speak the loudest and with the most conviction. And it’s not limited to those who support killing in war. We can be just as blind in our outrage against war. Someone recently said, “Don’t make war out of peace. Don’t be against war; be for peace.” It’s not easy to give up the old patterns of self-defense. Many of us feel safe in our political domains. If we’re not careful, we can be talked into anything. How are we to keep this precept when cruel despots and tyrants threaten the annihilation of whole peoples? Do we stand by and let it happen? How are they to be stopped? And what if the threat comes to our own soil? The stakes are higher than we can ever know—”nothing that has once been done can ever be undone.” How do leaders go with an open heart to war when nuclear missiles are aimed at their people? *I* would say, they would go with grief, as if to a funeral. And I would answer the same way if asked how a person with an open heart would kill someone who was about to hurt another person, or would raise a glass to the lips of the suffering, dying human being about to swallow the pills to end her life.

Perhaps the real enemy of peace is our stubborn insistence that *our* solution is the *only* solution to a particular conflict. As excited as I am to see the recent images from the robot on the planet Mars, I wonder if we had taken all that collective brain power, energy, money, and creativity and directed it toward finding peaceful solutions to the present conflicts in the world, then couldn’t we have found another way besides war?

This precept places the responsibility directly with us, the individual. How easy it is for us to blame them—the enemy or the government. All of the precepts come together here in the directive *don’t kill; support life*. How do we block out, or *kill*, others’ points of view? How do we find ways to take natural resources that aren’t ours to take? How do we lie and lash out in anger? Whether we do it in our relationships, on the job, at a peace rally, or on the battlefield, what we do as individuals will find its way into our leadership. Stopping war begins with ourselves.

THE PRACTICE

Watch yourself for a week. Watch for the ways you wage war in everyday events—a spilled glass of milk, a coworker who threatens to take the promotion you're hoping for, a store cleric who insults you. What are your weapons and how do they escalate, as the perceived threat grows stronger? Does your shouting shoot down your child's explanation of how the milk spilled? Do you find ways to kill your coworker's chance for advancement or come back with a cutting comment to the insult? Maybe you will not pick up a gun or strike with a bat, but will you kill in your mind? You may be surprised how close you come. When you find yourself about to do, or already having done, battle, do the inquiry work and rest in whatever the dead spot reveals. Sit in the stillness of your experience, breathing in and out. If even for just a moment, this focused, clear attention will break the reactionary patterns of harming others.

If we aspire to living a life in which we support life, then first we must open the door when the killer in us knocks. Working with this precept openly can eventually reveal some aspects of ourselves we would rather keep hidden.