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A Sermon Against Sermonizing

By Anna Narinskaya

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FROM THE PULPIT / Проповеди
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The title “Проповеди” — or “sermons,” the name of the weekly program on Dozhd TV — really irritates me.

As I understand it, this title was chosen specifically for that purpose, and that irritates me even more.

It bothers me because it exemplifies one of the main ailments from which my fellow journalists and I suffer.

For some reason that I can’t understand, we have all decided that we have the right and obligation to preach, instruct and open other people’s eyes to the real truth. What gives us this right?

It turns out that many journalists —who own their own apartments, sip double cappuccinos in the morning and take regular vacations to beautiful destinations — have an opinion as to whether those who are less fortunate than ourselves should stage demonstrations on Manezh Square or should show greater appreciation for the freedom of speech that is actually our bread and butter, not theirs.

In the past, Muscovites were accused of having a poor knowledge of the rest of the country. The best journalists would travel to some faraway place like the Urals , Chukotka or Sakha and file a story as if reporting from another planet. Today, after the radical changes the capital has undergone in recent years, we don't even know Moscow.

Now the few daring journalists among us venture not to the Urals or Chukotka but to some low-rent, depressed district of Moscow to profile people who seemingly live on some other planet.

And whenever those "aliens" stage a riot on Manezh Square or do something else we don't like, we immediately unleash a flood of words about how terrible everything is, which inevitably turns out being a condemnation of the people themselves.

Of course, this is not for lack of tolerance. We have more than enough tolerance it seems to me — at least in theory.

The bigger problem is indifference. We don't give a damn about the lives or feelings of people so far removed from us. We don't know anything about them, nor do we care or want to learn more.

We just want the world to conform to our chosen and beloved point of view — one that curses xenophobia and waxes indignant over the undemocratic way our rulers switch places without even bothering to consult us.

Most Russians couldn't care less about the elites' game of musical chairs among top spots in the Kremlin and Cabinet, but they do care a great deal about specific injustices committed by the authorities. Meanwhile, my colleagues and I are practically untouched by such problems, and it is inexcusable how little we speak about the serious injustices that do exist.

I do, however, believe in the power of words. I know that words can cause significant changes in society. But as long as our words are no more than smug, self-centered and egocentric sermons, nothing will change.

And I'm afraid that even my own little sermon here won't change a thing.

Anna Narinskaya is a journalist with Kommersant. This comment appeared on "From the Pulpit" ("Проповеди"), a joint television project between Dozhd TV and The Moscow Times. "Проповеди" can be seen on tvrain.ru

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