

Author: Bálint Róbert Zoltán. Hungarian original was published in Keresztény Magvető, 2009, 115, 126-128, with the title: "A reménység lelke". All copyrights remain with the publisher.

UnitarianTorch contact: [kokenyesi@unitariantorch.com](mailto:kokenyesi@unitariantorch.com)

## The Spirit of Hope

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

2 Tim, 1, 7

My Dear Brethren,

Today I'm bringing thoughts about the New Year to greet the year before us, and to greet you all. Right at the start of my sermon I call upon the poem titled "May God Bring" by Nagy László for support, because the lines of this poem sum up our wishes for our friends and acquaintances, and for ourselves at the beginning of the new year:

"May God bring good luck  
Love, and furnace, burning hot,  
grain into my empty bag,  
into my lonely hand, another hand,  
light into my lamp,  
so I don't have to  
go early to bed  
Answers to questions  
Sent by Him,  
So my faith  
Doesn't cave in  
May God bring light  
Instead of funerals  
Joyful life

To ask, for me,  
Is much shaming,  
God ought to give  
Even without my praying.

I believe that in this melodic, but still deep poem all of our wishes and desires are being expressed.

The new year is a Janus-faced holiday; it looks into the past, but gazes into the future. Likewise, it is customary to take an account of the past, and then to weave plans.

Let us begin with the first; let us glance into the past; let us review last year. When I look at the personal side, the events of our lives, the joys and the struggles, I could speak about matters of every sort, because I see matters of every sort. I see loneliness, abandonment; I hear the sound of prayers for those who departed for distant lands; I see the lonesome state of souls and their struggles. I also see joy; the joy of rediscovering each other, the joy of the embrace of loved ones returning from distant lands, the joy of finding new friends. And all of that is real. I see the daily grind as a mother and father doing their best together and struggling mightily and then I see the face of a quietly sleeping child or grandchild whose peaceful dreams were assured by such struggle and sacrifice. I see neglect and dedication, peacefulness and bickering, intense excitement and disappointment, and I could go on and on to describe the long list of events that happened to us, the events that we lived through. I could talk to no end about joys and about sadness, and when I would weigh one against the other I'm not certain which way the scale would tip. What I'm certain about is that once we complete such an accounting, there are two types of thoughts emerge in our souls about the future. One sounds like this: My God, please bring a better new year. The other sounds like: Please don't bring us anything worse than last year.

Two types of people, two types of thoughts, two kinds of moods. The first is full of trust and hope, while the other is a sigh of fear, hopelessness and resignation. Which one is on the right track?

I chose the lead quote for this sermon from Apostle Paul's letter to Timothy: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." At the start of the new year we couldn't possibly hear a more meaningful reassurance about placing our hopes in the future. God didn't give us the spirit of fear. A frequent source of hopelessness is fear. Fear is such that it may paralyze the soul, and crush the dreams and hopes.

But who might have a fearful soul: in people who don't trust their abilities and willpower. In people who don't trust the kindness of others. Fear is also in the souls of people who don't have faith in God's redeeming love. Thus, fear originates mostly from the lack of trust. Those with a soul filled with fear look apprehensively towards the future. Even though the Apostle reminded us that God didn't give us the spirit of fear, but the spirit of power.

1. What could that mean? First, it means physical strength, so in the mornings we can start pulling the yoke, to gather our strength to tackle our daily chores. Power to apply ourselves at our jobs, and earn a living for ourselves and our families. It also means the power of the soul to belabor on making dreams come true, and to overcome failures. Such power is a blessed gift. God has indeed endowed us with that power as we recall the events and accomplishments of the church, or our personal lives. In the latter we experienced great difficulties, and we ought to give thanks to God that we overcame those difficulties to gather our strength to work night and day to earn our daily bread, and to emerge again and again from the whirlpool of adversities through prayer and faith. We indeed had the spirit of power.

2. God also gave us the spirit of love. I don't have to argue for the beneficial influence of love, as we are all familiar with it. Love binds people together, and from that sprouts sympathy and caring. Those of us who need friendly support, or a compassionate word, or encouragement or consoling may attest to just how important love is. When we receive such help, and help from somewhere always comes, we ought to give thanks to God that he put the spirit of love into our fellow human beings. Through those experiences we regain our trust in our fellow human beings, no matter how many disappointments we may have suffered.

3. Lastly, the Apostle reminds us that God gave us the spirit of sound mind. A further source of our fears is that we can't quite trust our lives onto the care of God. We opine that God is not on our side, because He doesn't perform miracles, doesn't shake things up to bring justice to our cause, doesn't make our difficulties go away in a flash. Don't most of us turn to God when calamity strikes? And that's the time when we demand from Him to show Himself. We don't realize that His care was always with us: He gave

us the spirit of power and the spirit of love. We ought to place our trust into Him, just as we are grateful for His gifts. We ought to seek and recognize that our Almighty Father consistently carries out his laws and statutes, though not through miracles, but, rather, through the unfolding of our everyday lives.

Let us now raise our sights towards the new year before us. I will not expand much effort on this, because the unfolding of the future, the successes and the failures are all unknown to us. However, I will say this much as a reflection on the words of the Apostle: My God, please grant us a better new year. I truly believe that it is possible. God didn't give us the spirit of fear, and I believe that if we start out with hope and with the needed prayers God will grant us the power to fill our empty bushels; He will grant us the love, so we will look at each other with gladness, and speak respectfully; He will bring His light to shine upon the ones needing His care, even without them requesting it. Amen.