

WHAT IS OUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION?

Dr. Tesfa G. Gebremedhin

As each New Year rolls around, many of us sit down to think and make our New Year's resolutions. It is a time to make resolutions that hopefully will put us in a better situation than the previous years. The most commonly observed typical New Year's resolutions are to go to the gym to lose some weight, to quit smoking, drinking or gambling, to go back to school and earn a degree which is expected to make a difference in one's life, and to bring one's self much closer to the glory of the Almighty God. Among some Eritreans their New Year's plan is to go to Eritrea and visit family members and relatives, or to build a house for retirement, or to search for an auspicious spouse, to get married at a propitious time and have children before it becomes too-late. However, quite recently, among many Eritreans in Diasporas, their New Year's resolutions tend to be making the commitment to actively participate in the Eritrean people's movement and national affairs and to provide financial and material support to orphans, disabled, and families of fallen heroes. Every year after the holidays, many of us vow '*this will be the year!*' we resolve to maintain a positive attitude and good relationships among our peers and stick to our own crowd for our own survival, safety, security and solidarity. But often these vows are cast aside and thrown away like unwanted holiday gifts. Many of us even make ambitious goals in our New Year's resolution and not long after the excitement of the moment has passed, we make all types of excuses for not proceeding with the promise made to ourselves. Thus, most of our New Year's resolutions are not kept because we do not have the will power and determination to stick to our commitment. Our personal character should enable us to rise above the little and petty things we do and say every day and try to be good role models to our children and grand-children in fulfilling our progressive and productive promises.

A New Year's resolution is setting a person up for mental, spiritual and behavioral change, or improvement. While special memories of the old year will stay with us, the idea of learning lessons from them is a positive one. The start of a new year is a time when we Eritreans should be inclined to take the time to evaluate ourselves and think about ways to make improvements in our behavior to spark a new beginning within our relationships among ourselves. We need to be concerned and make a new start to strengthen our relationships with our children and fellow Eritreans and with our heavenly father. Establishing viable communities where we can raise and nurture our children together is a great place to start the New Year's resolution. Eritrean communities and religious institutions, free from political dramas, can create an environment that can allow all Eritrean families to know how best to communicate with one another and help each other in raising their children with love and care. It is obvious that each of us have our own unique flaws. We are all cracked pots and knuckleheads with odd personalities and awkward attitudes. However, it is the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together so interesting, challenging and rewarding. We just must accept each person for whom we all are and look for the good in each of us. Our similar backgrounds have wonderful attributes that can bring us all together as proud fellow Eritreans for the common good and commitment.

It is even tradition in Eritrea to make a New Year's resolution as we used to hear our parents wish for a blessed year with good health, peace, prosperity and a good rainy season to bring abundant harvest to Eritrean families. It is commonly observed that most of us who make New Year's resolutions start out with good intentions. We want to make positive change in our lives and we find resolutions to be a way to get started. However, real change in someone's lifestyle requires more than good intentions. We commit ourselves to resolving personal issues, yet often, fail to keep these commitments. The concept is a positive one: to assess our lives, to contemplate what we wish to modify during the coming year, and then make a promise to that change. The idea is to give people a fresh start and a new outlook for the year, but a better follow-through should always be in place. We need to aspire, focus and be determined to follow our intentions. We need realistic goals, and a realistic time frame for the changes. It takes a series of small steps and efforts to accomplish that change. Once we understand change as a process, it becomes much more valuable and attainable. That is why, we must be the kind of change we wish to see in our Eritrean communities and religious institutions so that our children and grand-children will be able to relate themselves to the cultural heritage and ethnic identity of their ancestors.

The purpose of making a New Year's resolution differs from person to person. For instance, a 50-year-old Eritrean man has been making New Year's resolutions for over 20 years to find a wife. Since he was not going to any social or religious functions, he did not have the opportunity to meet a female partner. Later, out of desperation, he went to Eritrea and got married to a 25-year-old girl. Immediately after she came to Europe to join him, she left him and ran away with a younger man. With that, his dream of getting married and having children were never fulfilled. Similarly, a 50-year-old Eritrean woman also had a New Year's resolution to get married and have children. Unfortunately, every time she had to put the plan to get married on hold because she had to take care of something else first. She had to attend college and complete her dream degree for a better career opportunity; she had to support her sister who was in Uganda and a brother who was in Sudan; and she had to make appropriate living arrangements for her aging parents in Asmara. As a result, the opportunity to bear children had been compromised due to her age. Surely, we all need to have a New Year's resolution that we can proudly accomplish our personal goals while at the same time providing service to our Eritrean communities and religious institutions where our children can identify with their cultural heritage and ethnic identity. The New Year is just another opportunity to finish what we started and to look forward to trying things we have never done before. The courage to realize our faults and our own resolution to mend those faults is essential, especially in the life of our children.

Some people may simply think that "*a New Year's resolution is something that goes in one year and out the other.*" However, it is more than turning over the pages of our calendar. It is another chance for us to get it right, or a new opportunity for a fresh start to achieve great things on the grounds of old habits. Every time the New Year approaches, we need to think of the welfare of our children, communities, and religious institutions. We are defined and identified by the kind of community and religious institution we belong to. In our New Year's

resolutions, we should all exercise our gift of life to build our Eritrean communities and religious institutions and explore what kind of life we can make for our children. Our children and grand-children will one day look back on us and wonder about our legacy. So, what will our legacy be? As we are the accumulated outcome of the strength, resilience, determination, courage, pride, wisdom, nobility, and culture of all our fore-fathers and mothers, so are our children and grand-children. They are also the outcome of our character, discipline, dignity, personality, and the love, respect and friendship among ourselves. We need to put our minds together and determine what kind of nurturing environment and appropriate Eritrean social fabrics we can prepare for our children and grand-children to enjoy life. Soon enough it will be their turn to spin the wheel of life and determine the kind of legacy they would like to pass on to their next generation.

Thus, what is the goal of our New Year's resolution? Hope that it is creative and realistic. Every day is a new day; the first day of the rest of our life. It is a miracle day, the very best gift from God. Every day it is important to have a dream, but it is more important to make the dream a reality. We need to remember that things will always go right if we do the right thing. God blessed us in saying: "*When you are sad, I will dry your tears; when you are scared, I will comfort your fears; when you are worried, I will give you hope; when you are confused, I will help you cope; when you are lost, I shall be your guide; and when you can't see the light, I shall be your star shining ever so bright.*" In addition, God blessed us with the power of courage by saying, "*Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*" A good encouragement for us from Helen Keller says, "*A true soldier does not acknowledge defeat before the battle!*" The battle we need to fight for the identity and safety of our children and for the security and solidarity of our communities and religious institution and safeguarding the sovereignty of our own country remains at large. Every single year we grow and change, not remaining the same person all our lives. The New Year stands before us like a chapter in a book waiting for us to write special memories and important lessons learned over the years.

Finally, what is our urgent and practical 2020 New Year's resolution? Our immediate and most important New Year's resolution must be to bring ourselves together in unity and actively participate in our Eritrean people's movement, irrespective of our religious differences, regional affiliations, political views, and ethnic identity. We need to have one big organization under one political leadership based on some common grounds (or umbrella) that can represent all Eritreans in Diasporas. It must be our New Year's resolution for all Eritrean political opposition groups, Eritrean civic organizations, Eritrean professional associations, Eritrean communities and religious institutions, and especially our Eritrean scholars and professionals, to collectively join the *Yiakel* movement in support of our Eritrean youth who are leading the way to remove the reign of oppression, deprivation and subjugation in Eritrea and to give or transfer the political leadership to the Eritrean people. In this New Year the victory of our Eritrean people's movement can become inevitable and eminent only when we appreciate the rainbow of our diversity and nurture the glory of our precious unity as Eritreans. The time is approaching fast for the Eritrean people, both those at home and in Diasporas, to prepare ourselves

to sing the songs of freedom, justice, democracy, and peace, to celebrate the end of all human rights violations, and to observe the rule of law in Eritrea. Now, it is the time that we must be moving from times of bringing ourselves together in unity and integrity towards times of coming together for an immediate action and achieving victory. We must all be prepared to bring our collective efforts, capabilities and commitments to build our strong and powerful nation in Africa. We need to have confidence and courage to make the goal and aspiration of the Eritrean people happen soon while appreciating and cherishing our Eritrean identity. If we just pray and do our best, the divine power of the Almighty God will do the rest. God bless Eritrea and its people!