

Last summer we had a special tree in the Palace Park. We called it the Wishing-Tree. People visiting the Park were invited to hang up their hopes and wishes for Norway and the world.

Throughout the summer, peoples' wishes waved in the wind. Steadily more were added. The branches on the old Tree hung heavily with the hopes of children and adults, young and old, Norwegians and foreign tourists.

For me, it was satisfying to see so many of the wishes that the people expressed melted together with my own hopes for our country and the future.

2016 became an adventure-rich year for us, filled with gratefulness. In connection with our 25th anniversary as a royal couple, we experienced Norwegian hospitality and warmth at its very best through meetings with people on the anniversary journey along the coast and at the many garden parties that had been arranged. The Queen and I want to warmly thank you for all good memories which were shaped through this special year. One of my primary wishes is that we can meet each other in freedom without fear and restraint, without fences, which create distance. That is one of the most important values in our Norwegian, open society.

On one of the slips of paper a child had written to the Wishing-Tree,
"I wish that all will be kind to themselves."

That I think was a wise wish. Many experience that much is demanded of them so that they become emotionally and physically worn out. But my impression is that many of the demands are also ones we put on ourselves. We struggle with the idea that we are not adequate enough.

The most important for us people, I believe, is to feel that there is use for us, to feel useful, and to accomplish a good day's work. Many, who experience being outside of the working life, perhaps recognize this.

This year we have noted the fiftieth anniversary of finding oil on the Norwegian continental shelf—with all the prosperity that that has created for Norway. At the same time, many have noticed, even within this affluence, many have lost their jobs.

I am impressed at all the willingness for new thinking and new protocols, which I have seen and heard about this year.

One of my wishes is that we will see and embrace all the human resources in our country, so that all can feel that they can contribute and that they can recognize themselves and feel useful—regardless of age, sex, ethnicity and functional ability.

Another wish on the Tree was written by a girl and a boy together.
"I hope that we will make it safe for women to live in Norway—and that we don't have to ask about this several times," they said.

Our society shall be safe for all, especially we must work to make sure that the most vulnerable and most exposed are protected as much as possible. In 2015, the world's leaders set up new guidelines to shape a better world. One of the guidelines concerns fighting violence against women and children. In this area, Norway acknowledged that we must make an extra effort in our own country. If we are going to shape a safe society for all, it is important that we give a description in words of what is happening, and we rely on those who can help with decisive actions.

Oppland County had 4-7 grades in the primary school and in that school was an assignment to write a letter to /the King, which I later read.
"It is important to hang on to traditions from the past,
so they are not packed together and placed in a dusty drawer."

A tree is a fine example of this. The roots are inheritance and traditions. The tree above ground is constantly subjected to pressures which require care through changing times and life conditions. As long as the tree lives, the roots dig themselves slowly deeper and deeper down.

Norway has many traditions, both religious and culturally determined. Many of them are connected to the Christmas Season. As of January 1, 2017, the church is formally separated from the state. At the same time, we recognize that it is 500 years since the Reformation, which became of great importance for the whole society's development. It is important to remember roots and to give new generations the possibility to understand the references in our culture. That includes our history, religious traditions, anecdotes, myths, fairy tales, music, and picture art.

In every culture, in every land, knowledge of this inheritance help to make us more whole as people. It is a treasure to help us to know that we belong to a place, and that we do not live in a vacuum, and that we have been affected and inspired by the same sources as the people who came before us.

This we experienced last year when we invited multi-religious guests to the Palace. We shared the thoughts, expressions, and food from different religious treasure chests. We became close and understood each other better.

It is my hope that we also, in a time with new impulses coming from the outside, will give space to go inside to our own treasure chamber and make the contents alive for ourselves and each other. My experience is that by being secure in our consciousness of our own inheritance, one can easily meet others with an open mind.

The Queen and I were reminded of our marriage during the jubilee church service in Nidarosdomen, June 23rd, which marked the 25th anniversary since we were joined. To have God's blessing over our union—and to kneel where both my father and grandfather earlier had received the same blessing—was felt as a great strength.

Young people express the wish for stability, for their presence to be accepted, for quiet and good conversations. It has always been demanding to be young. But I generally empathize with the young today, who have so many choices and so much more pressure than was the case, just one or two generations ago.

In the midst of this, I am deeply impressed with the young people. You are examples for us older people who have not managed to engage ourselves enough in modern themes, such as our atmosphere and the equal distribution of our bounty. Many of the slips on the Wishing-Tree, especially from young people, express hope for less pollution and a better climate. The social consciousness and awareness that I meet in many of you, who are young today, give me many optimistic thoughts about the future.

One of the finest thoughts that I have heard in the past year came from a policeman who works with youth who are in trouble--the conversation between him and one of the youths in Dagsrevyen last fall. The young man said that the policeman must only be dreaming when he said that a change for him and his buddies was possible.

The policeman answered:

“Perhaps so. But my dream starts with you.” Then the boy became quiet.

My dream for you.

If we have good dreams for each other, if we will each other well—magic can happen. It is better for us to contribute, so that others can have it well, both in our milieu in Norway and as world citizens. A special thank you I direct to all of you that are in service outside of the country and perhaps miss family and friends tonight. Thanks for the contributions you make through the diplomatic and the humanitarian organizations, through the police and the Armed Services—for peace, stability, health, and safety of our fellow human beings.

Dear All,

Both the Queen and I will be eighty years old in the coming year. For us, it is a little unreal. As so many elderly have experienced before us, one seldom feels as old as the number reveals. It gives us great pleasure to meet so many people, who make impressions on us, which give us new ideas, which give us glimpses of the new Norway, opening us to new possibilities and new demands. People, we hope and believe, will manage to build the country much further on values such as loyalty, cooperation, and generosity--people who will embed our society with good energies and deep knowledge.

Life has taught me that it is important for us human beings not to be changed so quickly. We need someone who cares for us. We need to be needed. We need to be seen and recognized—for whom we are. We need someone who has time to listen and to be present. We need to know that we were created for something and someone beyond ourselves.

Therefore, I am glad that this piece of paper blew on the outside of a branch of the Wishing-Tree.

“I wish for a Norway which is rich in its diversity with a capacity to love its neighbors, where one can be as a man is. A country with pure freedom.”

In the New Year, I hope Norway, Europe and the world can exhibit this:

That we, who share this earth, acknowledge that we first and foremost are fellow human beings;

That we manage to join together to work for a healthier world;

That we choose to fight evil with good;

And from the Wishing-Tree in the Palace Park cones the very last hope:

“That all the wishes on the Tree must be fulfilled.”