

“Once you choose hope, anything’s possible.” — Christopher Reeve

Hope. It’s kind of a buzz-word these days. After eight years of one of the darkest periods in our country’s history, people everywhere are looking for hope, for a light at the end of the tunnel. Often, that hope is being invested in a particular presidential candidate.

But hope is more than a catchy campaign slogan. And politicians — no matter how well-meaning or charismatic they may be — are fallible human beings enmeshed in a corrupt system. When we pin all of our hopes on one candidate, we risk seeing that hope shattered.

“Hope, in reality, is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man.” — Friedrich Nietzsche

Of course, hope always comes with risks. That’s why cynics everywhere have decried it. For starters, hopes can be pursued in vain. Failure is always a possibility, no matter how hard we try.

But far more dangerous is hope without action. When we engage in passive, blind hope — without doing anything to achieve those things we hope for — we are more likely to suffer failure. And what’s worse, if we didn’t try, we have no one to blame but ourselves for our shattered hopes.

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“Never hope more than you work.”

— Rita Mae Brown

As our hopes fuel our actions, our actions fuel our hopes. When we imagine the world we would like to create, it inspires us to work toward that end. And as we see the fruits of our efforts, it feeds our hopes and encourages us to imagine even greater possibilities.

“Sanity may be madness but the maddest of all is to see life as it is and not as it should be.” — Don Quixote (Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra)

“Come on, be realistic,” you say. “The world is brutal; all this talk of hope is just wishful thinking.”

Is it? Certainly brutality and suffering exist everywhere. But so does joy. And as much as the world keeps us trapped in illusions, frustrations and limitations, it also changes. Societies do evolve, progress does happen.

This is not always obvious. When the president claims dictatorial powers or when we see images of prisoners being tortured, we are appropriately outraged and discouraged about the state of the world.

But even our shock and horror at such scenes should be seen as signs of progress; not long ago, torture and despotism were accepted facts of life.

The world may not change as fast as we like, but one thing is certain: without hope, we would never be able to imagine the world as it should be. And without imagining such a world, we would never be able to create it.

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