

Over the years, I have tried to instill in my readers, my close friends, and my family the importance of imagination. Being able to imagine something, is being able to will it. As we start a new decade, I wanted to confide in you the wishes I carry with me. While some (maybe even most) of them may sound fictional, they are not unattainable. You see, fiction and reality go hand-in-hand. We must be able to imagine a better future in order for us to do everything in our power to make that imagination a reality. With this in mind, here are my 10 imagined wishes for 2020 and beyond:

1. May people around the world realize that totalitarianism is not only a form of government; it is a state of mind. We can be in the most democratic country in the world, and still be totalitarian, merely by refusing to accept “the other,” or a point of view that differs from our own.
2. May we all unite to fight tyranny wherever we see it, and to speak up against injustices, not only when it’s convenient to do so. We can’t continue to turn a blind eye to human rights violations, simply because condemning them would be politically inconvenient. May media play a larger role in reporting such violations, for once we know of atrocities, we are less likely to remain silent, as knowledge inevitably leads to an urge to protect the innocent.
3. May tyrants and totalitarian regimes realize their weaknesses and inadequacies vis-à-vis the will of the people. An ongoing example is the Islamic Republic. The regime slaughtered 1,500 people in the last few weeks, simply because they resented its rule. The regime is so weak, it’s silencing people not for carrying weapons, but pens. Not for possessing bullets, but signs.
4. May we never give up on books because heavens know they haven’t given up on us. But, may we be careful not to become utilitarian readers. Books should be read, first and foremost, for the pure and sensual joy of reading, of discovering, of unexpected adventures in unknown places, satisfying our curiosity and giving us the gift of true empathy.
5. May we not get so narrowly focused on being politically correct that we confuse the presence of heinous acts and words in great novels to mean the approval of said acts and words. May we allow ourselves to dig deeper and realize that they are there to reveal the truth, to show us reality as it is, to make us uncomfortable with things the way they are—that is how we fight rape, racism, and other realities, by digging deep into them, understanding them, and finding them intolerable.
6. May we stop prioritizing sciences in school curriculums at the expense of arts and humanities. May we stop pitting scientists and artists against each other. May we never forget the words of Nabokov who said: “you need the passion of a scientist and the precision of a poet,” or the words of Einstein, who was articulate, well-read, and a lover of classical music, “I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.”
7. May good writers, good teachers, and good artists unite so that, in the words of Langston Hughes, we can let America be America again. A beacon of hope. The land of the free. America exported democracy to all corners of the world; it can’t afford to be undemocratic. It is not enough to express our frustrations with the way things are; we must act on them. We must make a difference by leveraging our strongest assets, our voices and our votes.
8. May we let go of this mentality that one must be a woman to fight for women’s rights, must be Iranian to fight for Iranians’ rights, or must be Muslim to fight against a mandatory veil. We are human. We can all fight for human rights.
9. May we never lose our curiosity. May we find it in our hearts and souls and take it upon ourselves to fight indifference, arrogance rooted in ignorance, and the degradation of imagination and ideas.
10. May we never lose hope. As long as we are armed with our imagination, we can always imagine a world that does not currently exist and that seems so out of reach.