*Imagine Your New President*

*By Joe Bejjani*

Imagine your new president…

But what if we were asked much more than imagine, or wish for something to be, what if we were asked to embody the things we imagine…

So let me tell you, yes you, Lebanese citizen, regardless of who you are and where you come from, how you can be a great Lebanese president!

I imagine the new president to be able bodied, with a sharp mind and witty spirit, able to handle the tough challenges of diplomacy in internal and international affairs.

They would have to be present, to be present with the people, to travel and commute with them, to share with them happy and sad moments, and to listen to their needs and aspirations with an open heart.

They better be humble, to reject needless luxuries and live like the average Lebanese; to have a normal car, no drivers and to frequent ordinary people.

Humble enough to resign when they feel like they can’t do anything to change a certain situation, and decent enough to resign after a major catastrophe and disaster.

The ideal president would be close to every community in the country, to understand and cherish the differences we have and the common identity we all share.

It is better for the president to have more executory power, to truly be the head of the State. Because we’ve all witnessed what a state with multiple heads leads to. Who wants Lebanon to have multiple heads in command? Like a monstrous hydra from Greek mythology. The Lebanese political system needs reform, to allow for a clearer power hierarchy.

The president should aspire to lead a strong economy, with powerful industrial and agricultural sectors. The head of state would work to establish new business and trade deals with the international community, to get Lebanon to become part of the World Trade Organization and to have strong economic ties with neighboring Mediterranean countries as well as the whole world.

We long for the nation’s leader to be independent from internal or external special interests’ groups, to be independent in their judgements and in their decisions.

It is also preferrable for them to be a previous public servant or to have a history and legacy in civil society and civil service, to be less of a corrupt background, but to have a background in transparency and good governance, to be involved in their community and to have connections throughout the country.

We’re close to the presidential elections, and there is no place for wishful thinking. We want our president to be elected based on their record in promoting the rule of law, and not on Nepotism and special interests.

The new Lebanese president will have to tackle the hard questions at hand, and try to find a common ground between all parties in order to work in combatting corruption and reviving the Lebanese Economy.

They will have to restore the Lebanese relations with the outside world, and actively help in reestablishing the Lebanese banking sector, because no society can survive and thrive without banking and commerce.

The president should abide by the Lebanese constitution,

“To safeguard the constitution and Lebanon's independence, unity, and territorial integrity”[[1]](#footnote-1)

They would have to defend the territorial claims of Lebanon over its own seas and to defend Lebanese natural resources from being overtaken by hostile foreign powers.

The new president will have to reject corruption in all its forms and clientelism.

They would never use their political power for personal and familial gain and would not naturalize people based on their allegiances and their commitment to them,

They would never appoint family members to high positions of power and prestige.

The new president would not appoint government workers based on their religious affiliations or political leanings, the public sector would have to be remodeled and restructured around competency and education.

The new president would never accept bribes or funding from special interest groups, which would render the president unable to freely function and represent the people faithfully.

In a nutshell, I want my new president to be different from what we were used to have.

I want a leader to be my president, a person who has leadership over the people.

And by leadership, I mean a leadership of service.

**Leadership of service**:

Leadership of service, a leadership based on principles, and not on personal interests and greed.

The real leader is chosen for their service and courage, they take on the responsibilities of a nation and aspire to serve it to the best of their abilities.

This is contrary to what we were used to in Lebanon, with so called “Zaims” actively trying to render the population reliant on them for services, jobs, food, education and medical help.

A real leader serves, and doesn’t seek to be served.

The president should guide by example, be a role model for young people, and especially those who aspire to enter the public sphere.

The leader of the country must be a moral person. They should lead a moral life, treat their spouse and children with utmost care and respect, the presidential family must resemble as much as possible, the ideal Lebanese family.

There is no leader that works alone or ever succeeds alone, that’s why it is important for the president to delegate the best positions in the country for the best possible candidates and to appoint the best aids to help in making the best possible decisions.

*Every great president starts off as a citizen.*

And any president has to be a great citizen before being elected.

To be actively engaged in their household as minors and to be in good relations with their parents.

To have an easy-going attitude, and to never stop playing, even after growing up, because play helps us understand the world in a better way.

To be civically engaged and to volunteer in helping the community as teenagers.

As a university student, the future leader should be active in the defense of the interests of their fellow students without leaving anyone out.

And that is how good leaders are made, they are born courageous, but life and good education makes them fit to lead and to shoulder the responsibility of the common good.

*Had to stop writing these lines when a power cut happened…*

We can’t accept to live like that anymore, or accept that our leaders and presidents do nothing about it.

Think of it for a moment, the main priority of most past politicians and deputies was how to share power and government seats between themselves, like splitting a cake.

Few actually care for the people struggling.

So, if I wanted to imagine the best president, they would be the one voicing the concerns of the people above all else.

I conclude my piece with an idea we have dismissed for many years now, and that is the importance of societal change in preparing for political change.

Politics is downstream from culture, and therefore the work to be done long term would be to reform the Lebanese culture and rid it of corrupt tendencies like “wasta” and “mouhasasa”, and reform the political system and the electoral laws to better reflect the aspirations of the people.
The new president is probably reading these phrases now or listening to them, they may be elected sooner or later, but one thing is for sure, they have to learn a lot and prepare themselves for this responsibility.

So, after imagining the ideal president, I think it is time for each one of us to embody this ideal, to thrive to the best of our abilities to serve more than be served, to give more than take, to lift people up from their misery and daily struggle, to lessen the burdens of the poor, and to help the ordinary citizens thrive and not just survive.

Imagine your new president, they said, but better yet embody the next president

Live the ideals you wish your leaders had; the values you wish your society cherished

And slowly but surely, when you succeed in governing yourself, you will be chosen to lead and govern others.

And as the proverb says, “Govern yourself and you can govern the world”.

1. Article 49 of the Lebanese Constitution [↑](#footnote-ref-1)