

Maya & Stephen

May 24, 2020



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Welcome &
Announcements

“Love is a Place”

love is a place
& through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places
yes is a world
& in this world of
yes live
(skillfully curled)
all worlds

With these words by ee cummings, my friends, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this place – to your place and our place – on this happy day of promise-making, the wedding of Maya and Stephen.

Please stick around after the ceremony for a slide show, virtual receiving line and further celebration.

I believe the call today is a very simple one. It is to be here. To take pause. To allow ourselves to be present in this moment – wherever we are, together, as a community of friends and family.

In that spirit, I’m going to request that Nina mute your mics, just for now, so that we can be as present as possible for Stephen and Maya.

Now let the celebration begin!

Prelude

Music

Reflections

Well, here we are, called from across the continent, across the generations, to our screens, to our shared purpose. We are called each to our place, everyone to *this* place, to witness the exchange of promises between two people we love, Maya and Stephen.

However we got here, we represent a myriad of traditions, hopes, and expectations. Our paths and the ways of our going are

diverse, yet we all share this gift: the capacity to live our lives in love.

Let us remember that our drawing together springs from that which we have in common. It transcends our differences and will leave us forever connected: It is the love we hold for Stephen and Maya. It is the love they hold for one another.

And this is the gift *they* give to all of *us*. The opportunity to reflect upon our calling to love fully and fearlessly.

There are those who would have us believe that marriage is the happy ending on love's road. We see it in on the Lifetime channel all the time. A couple meets. They go skiing, camping, sight-seeing. They fall in love, move in together, adopt some kittens, have a zoom wedding during a plague, kiss beneath the rounding dome of a summer sky, roll credits.

But here's the deal. Marriage isn't a happy ending. It's not even an ending. It can't be an ending because every one of us is a work in progress, under construction until the day we die. Marriage isn't a destination – it's a journey. A challenging, risky, aggravating, dangerous, amazing, rewarding, and soul-nourishing journey.

If you take your words seriously, you know there's no going back. There's only the future, unlimited and unknowable, and the promise to make the journey together.

The decision to marry is one of the great acts of optimism in this world. And sometimes this is a hard world to be optimistic in. Yet here you are, Stephen and Maya, standing up in front of all these people who love you, ready to make your promises to each other out loud.

Sociologists have identified getting married as one of life's top ten stressors, right between getting fired and suffering personal injury/illness. It's not because getting married is bad. It's because getting married is important. Marriage is about growth, and growth is hard work.

We're not always at our best, when we're trying to grow. We get raw. We test our partner's patience. Marriage is the promise that, while we are trying to grow into our best selves, we will not be alone. Marriage promises that there will be someone to cheer us on, to celebrate our successes, to give us strength when we feel like quitting, to kiss our skinned knees.

Marriage also gives us daily opportunities to be that person for someone else, to develop our own capacity for love,

encouragement, acceptance, and respect. Our soul mate is the one who simultaneously loves us as we are, supports us in our efforts to grow, and has compassion for our resistance to growth.

Love, then, isn't just a feeling. It's a decision.

It reaches its highest form in commitment, the commitment to work together through the irritating times and the devastating times when you don't feel very loving or lovable. It's what reminds you to kiss your partner goodnight, even though he or she has been grumpy all day and *expects* you to know why without being told, and the *last* thing you feel like doing is kissing her or him good night. It's what keeps you murmuring comforting words to your colicky baby at 4am when you have a meeting in three hours or just got off a long shift and what you really want to do is just sleep.

It's what keeps you hanging in there through the moodiness, the anxiety, the weariness – in short, all of the qualities that make you and your partner human. It's what keeps you turning *toward* one another when you feel like turning *away*. It's remembering that we are all works in progress, and conflict is growth trying to happen.

Your capacity to succeed in your marriage will depend upon your intentionality. Its basis is friendship. Its fuel is *trust*, the faith that, when two best friends put their hearts and minds to something, they can navigate the roughest of seas. And its result is *growth*.

I offer you these words from the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke: "It is good to love. Because love is difficult. For one human being to love another human being, that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been entrusted to us, the ultimate task, the final test and proof, the work for which all other work is merely preparation. Loving does not just mean merging, surrendering, and uniting with one another. It is a high inducement for you to ripen, to become something in yourselves, to become world, to become world in yourselves for the sake of one another. It is a great, demanding claim on you. Something that chooses you and calls you to vast distances."

Marriage is making – and keeping – promises about tomorrow, the unknown. And as every mapmaker knows, the unknown is where the dragons be. There's no going back. There's only the future, unlimited and unknowable, and the promise to make that journey together.

Today you are same people you have always been, but now there this new entity, which is the loving life you have brought into

being. Each of you brings resources and strengths to the union that the other needs.

I know you will use your power for good.

And *years* from now, when people ask you how you *fed* your marriage, here's what I want you to be able to tell them:

That you never got too old to hold hands or crack each other up.

That you talked to each other about everything.

That you gave each other room to grow.

That you encouraged each other's dreams.

That you did things for one another in the spirit of joy.

That you looked for understanding rather than perfection.

That you worked for flexibility, patience, and forgiveness.

That you spoke words of appreciation and demonstrated gratitude.

That you never took each other for granted.

That you formed a circle of love that gathered in the whole family.

That you married the right person.

That you worked every day to be the right person.

That you stood together facing life.

Bless you both, and bless your marriage.

Recognition of
friends and family

My friends, Maya and Stephen didn't have to go to all this trouble to have a wedding. I could have married them in their kitchen. But they wanted their family and friends with them.

Friends and family have your back. Friends and family hold you accountable. Friends and family won't let you fail. You are all part of the larger community that will help their marriage thrive. Now that their lives are entering a new phase, your role will be different, but not diminished.

Friends and family, if you are here for Stephen, your relationship with him will change, but he still needs you, and he needs you to support his commitment to his marriage.

If you are here for Maya, you're here for Stephen too. Whoever you came here to support, you are now here for both.

They will never outgrow you. They will never *not* need your love and support.

Wherever your own destiny may carry you, I ask that you continue to affirm this marriage, to keep your hearts open to them, and to include them in your lives. If you are willing to do all of these, please wave your arms and shout, "*We will!*"

Thank you.

Unity ceremony,
part one

Music throughout

This advice is from the book *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* by Robert Fulghum, "Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the paper cup: the roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that."

The roots go down, and the plant grows up. It's kind of miraculous. But it doesn't happen by itself. Every tender seedling, bursting with possibilities, is fragile. It needs enough water, but not too much. It needs soil, light, and air. It needs an environment that provides both foundation and space to grow.

A strong marriage calls for daily attention and care – to one another and to the loving life they are building together. In this spirit, Maya and Stephen have brought this little ivy plant here to symbolize the care with which they promise to nurture their marriage for all the years to come.

Affirmation of intention

Maya and Stephen, the decision to join your lives in marriage is not to be taken lightly. It requires that you travel your lives' unknown journey in hope and trust, that you stand together through all of the challenging and painful experiences you encounter along the way, that you promise to cherish each other, to bear each other's weaknesses and flaws, to comfort each other in times of sorrow, and to encourage each other in creative growth toward wholeness.

In this spirit, I ask you now, do you come today in freedom and without reservation, to give yourselves to each other in marriage? If so, please say, "We do."

Answer: We do

Unity ceremony, part two

Here sits this little ivy plant. This plant in particular is reaching out, growing where it needs to grow. Maya and Stephen told me that they think that's a pretty good metaphor for marriage.

Ivy, being an evergreen, can grow in the most difficult environment. Around the world, it is a symbol of endurance, wisdom, affectionate attachment, and immortality. It stands here to honor this couple's roots and to represent their shared hope for growth.

Stephen and Maya have also brought water -- the vast and ancient source from which life springs and through which life is purified and nourished -- and what we all have in common.

Together, they will water this little vine to symbolize the individual strengths each of them brings to their union. Notice that they're not going to empty their cups completely. They are not giving away their individuality by promising themselves to each other. Rather, they are creating a third entity, a third being called "union," which will depend upon their individual strengths to thrive.

Water plant.

Handfasting

Throughout the world, promises made on the wedding day are promises that *bind* a couple for life.

The exchange of vows is often symbolized by a *literal* binding with cords or garments that encircle the couple and are tied together. That's where the expression "tying the knot" comes from, a centuries-old Celtic ritual called "hand-fasting," in which

a cord is wrapped once around the couple's joined hands for each promise made, and then tied together.

In the Hindu tradition, wedding promises are captured in a ritual called Saptapadi, which means "Seven Steps." The couple's garments are bound together, and they walk hand-in-hand around the sacred fire. With each step they take, they make a promise that will bind them for seven lifetimes.

Today, Maya and Stephen will also make seven vows, binding each one with a cord wrapped around their joined hands. Ready? Please repeat after me:

I promise to be your friend and break bread with you. And so the binding is made.

I promise to affirm your dreams and support you as you pursue them. And so the binding is made.

I promise to share my worldly possessions with you in poverty and in wealth. And so the binding is made.

I promise to give you pleasure and soothe your pain. And so the binding is made.

I promise to nurture our new family and care for your family as my own. And so the binding is made.

I promise to be with you in all of your joys and sorrows. And so the binding is made.

We promise to be partners throughout our whole lives. And so the binding is made.

Maya and Stephen, as your hands are bound together now, so will your lives be joined in a union of love and trust. Remember that it is not this physical knot that holds you together, but the promises you have made. You hold in your own hands, their affirmation of your union.

Exchange of rings

Did you bring the rings?

From the earliest times, the circle has been a symbol of completeness. We see it in the sun and the ever-moving cycle of the seasons. Where does a circle start? The answer is: Always.

The wedding ring is a circle. It stands as a symbol of committed love, unbroken and never-ending.

	<p>Maya, please repeat after me: As this ring encircles your finger, so will my love forever encircle you.</p> <p>Stephen, please repeat after me: As this ring encircles your finger, so will my love forever encircle you.</p>
Pronouncement	<p>There is an African proverb that says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."</p> <p>Maya and Stephen, you have chosen to walk life's journey together. In the presence of your family and friends, you have promised one another your lifelong love and trust.</p> <p>It is therefore my great privilege to pronounce you to be wife and husband. You may kiss.</p>
Kiss	
Blessing	<p>Stephen and Maya, as you go together out into the world, may the good light within you guide your way and the greatness of life's possibilities give you joy.</p> <p>May the sun of many days and years shine upon you.</p> <p>May the love you have for one another grow and hold you close.</p> <p>And long, long years from now, may you look at one another and be able to say, "Because of you, I have lived the life I always wanted to live. Because of you, I have become the person I longed to be."</p>
Postlude	<p>My friends, I am delighted to present to you for the first time as a married couple, Maya and Stephen.</p>