

Procession

Opening

Please be seated.

Welcome, family and friends, to Jon and Layluma's wedding.

Before we begin, let me remind you to turn off your phones and put away your cameras. Jon and Layluma have arranged for plenty of photographs tonight, so there's no need to worry about that during the ceremony. Let's all double check our phones, just to be sure. (check my phone) ... Thanks.

We are here today to witness and celebrate the marriage of Layluma and Jon.

I know that Jon and Layluma are so pleased to have you here today. All of you—friends, family, new, old—all of you are here because you mean so much to Jon and to Layluma, and all of you are here because you have helped them become who they are now, both individually and as a couple. Jon and Layluma are today's stars, and let us celebrate them, just as they celebrate you and everything you have given them.

Let us also think today of those who could not be here. Let us think of those who are distant, unable to travel, and let us think of those no longer with us whose memories we cherish. Let those who are not here with us today celebrate Jon and Layluma through us, and let us celebrate them as well, through our celebration of Jon and Layluma.

Address

As many of you know, I am an academic, and Jon and Layluma asked us for our favorite books—so I cracked some of my old texts as I thought about their wedding day. What can philosophy tell us about love and about marriage?

Perhaps the most famous philosophical vision of love comes to us from Plato's Symposium. Plato tells us of a group of friends trading theories about the nature of love. One of the friends is Aristophanes the playwright, and Aristophanes tells a fantastic, mythological story about love.

On Aristophanes' telling, in the distant past, people were powerful and sufficient—so much so that they were threatening to the gods. In response, Zeus cut everyone in half. We humans are thus now incomplete, half of what we should be. When we find our other half, we are in love. Our other half completes us, forming a whole person again.

It's not just the Greeks who thought of love as us finding that which was missing in us as individuals and who thought of marriage as us coming together to form one complete whole.

Think of Genesis. God takes a rib from Adam while Adam sleeps, and God uses the rib to create Eve. Adam and Eve are thus importantly of one person. As Genesis tells us, a husband and wife become one flesh.

Or think of William Blackstone, the 18th century law professor. Blackstone tells us that English law treats the husband and wife as one legal person, with the wife's person "incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband."

There is something sweet in these ideas of love and marriage and in the idea of the married couple as one unified person. I'm always going to be soft for couples who describe their partners as "their better half."

But I wanted to find another model of love to offer Jon and Layluma today. And so I turned to the 19th century English reformers John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill. Like Layluma and Jon, Harriet and John knew each other for some time before they married, and so like Layluma and Jon, we can be sure that Harriet and John married whole-heartedly, intentionally, and after great reflection.

Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill did not approach love and marriage thinking of incompleteness, of deficiencies to be addressed, of becoming one person. Instead, they thought of marriage as the highest sort of friendship, a partnership between

equals. What does it take to get that sort of marriage? Here are two pieces of advice from the Mills.

First, see the good in the person you marry. After meeting Harriet Taylor, John Stuart Mill wrote:

I had always wished for a friend whom I could admire wholly, without reservation and restriction, and I had now found one.

Harriet Taylor was an impressive woman. She was a poet, she had written a history of the first English printer, and she was working on essays on morality and politics.

But it wasn't just that Harriet Taylor was admirable. It was that Mill admired her. We can miss the good in others if we are too wrapped up in our own lives, or if we are too engaged by some bad we see in the world. Mill had to be open to admiring Harriet and had to be receptive to the good in her. We can see in Mill's words a compound instruction:

know what you think is important, good, and impressive,
be open to finding it in others, and especially in your partner,
and then celebrate it.

There's so much good in both Jon and Layluma. They are tender, funny, conscientious, joyous, and hard-working. They are surely admirable! So take Mill's advice, and be sure to admire each other. While life will get busy, and while the ordinary affairs of daily living consume attention, I hope you put yourselves in the mind of besmitten John Stuart Mill, and notice and admire each other wholly, without reservation or restriction.

Second, enjoy more of the world via each other. In his work The Subjection of Women, Mill writes of the ideal couple:

the constant partaking of the same things, assisted by their sympathy, draws out the latent capacities of each for being interested in the things which were at first interesting only to the other. ... [A] real enriching of the two natures, each acquiring the tastes and capacities of the other in addition to its own.

It isn't that you find someone who likes what you like, and then the two of you do those same things together. Nor is it that you form a pair of complements, each separately living your own life. Nor is it that your partners' likes just rub off on you.

No, a good couple actively grows toward each other. You find someone you admire, and then you join in with them in their lives, and you do that with sympathy. The things they are interested in will thus become interesting to you. And they'll do the same. This is how a couple can grow toward each other.

Jon and Layluma, you bring together two different and full lives, different families, different passions. But you can each be enriched by the other, by constant partaking in the other's life. I have faith that you are ready for this constant partaking. You have each worked hard on your own, and you have worked hard together to get here. Jon, I trust that you will join Layluma in her life sympathetically, and so you will grow to enjoy the things that bring her joy, and Layluma, I trust that you will join Jon in his life sympathetically, and so you will grow to enjoy the things that bring him joy. Both of your natures will be in this way enriched.

I close with John Stuart Mill on the ideal marriage, where we see both of these pieces of advice:

[I]n the case of two persons of cultivated faculties ..., between whom there exists that best kind of equality, ... so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development I maintain, with the profoundest conviction, that this, and this only, is the ideal of marriage...

Jon and Layluma, I wish you the ideal marriage. I wish both of you a lifetime of the luxury of looking up to each other and admiring each other, and I wish both of you a lifetime of sharing the pleasures of leading and of being led in the path of development. May you two share this best, highest partnership of equals.

Expression of Intent

With that model in mind, it is time to marry Jon and Layluma.

A marriage is a commitment—to each other, to partnership, and to the desire and hope for a life together. A commitment should be knowing, voluntary, and full. And so, before you make your vows to one another, you must confirm to each other, to me, and to these gathered witnesses your intention to be married today.

Layluma, do you freely, knowingly, and without reservation intend to join with Jon in marriage today? If so, say “I do.”

I do!

Jon, do you freely, knowingly, and without reservation intend to join with Layluma in marriage today? If so, say “I do.”

I do!

Vows

Having heard that it is your intention to be married today, I now ask you to declare publicly your wedding vows for each other, to declare the commitments you undertake in your new lives together.

Please face each other and hold hands.

Jon, repeat after me:

I, Jon, take you, Layluma,
to be my wedded wife,
to have and to hold from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness or in health,
in sorrow or in joy,
to love and to cherish,
as long as we both shall live.

And now Layluma, repeat after me:

I, Layluma, take you, Jon,
to be my wedded husband,
to have and to hold from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness or in health,
in sorrow or in joy,
to love and to cherish,
as long as we both shall live.

Rings

(Indicate to the ring bearer)

Jon, Layluma, you have declared your intentions to marry, and you have made public the vows to be upheld throughout your lives. Now you exchange rings. These rings are to be worn as an outward and visible sign of the inward and invisible bond which already unites your two hearts in love. These rings are hardened, durable and lasting. And these rings are burnished, their beauty the product of effort and work.

Jon, please place this ring on Layluma's finger, and repeat after me:

With this ring, I marry you, Layluma, for now, for tomorrow, and forever.

Layluma, please place this ring on Jon's finger, and repeat after me:

With this ring, I marry you, Jon, for now, for tomorrow, and forever.

Pronouncement

As you have declared openly your clear intentions to be considered before all the world as a married couple, and have exchanged rings and vows attesting thereto, it is my pleasure and honor to pronounce you husband and wife.

You may now seal your marriage with a kiss!

Breaking of the Glass

We conclude the ceremony with the traditional breaking of a glass. This is an old tradition, and as befits an old tradition, there are many explanations of its meaning.

Some say that we break a glass to remind us, even in the time of a joyous wedding, that the world is not perfect, that there is destruction and woe, and that we should never forget the wrongs and injustice which call for address.

Some say the broken glass is an incantation, a stand-in for the fragility of human life and the fragility of human love: "The glass shatters, so your marriage may never break."

Some say the breaking of the glass reflects an irreversible change you make here. Just as this glass will forever be broken, so you two will forever be wed.

I say that this glass breaking is yours, a ceremony where the two of you take in all that your families, your heritages, and your friends have given you, and where you decide as a couple how to define your path forward, whether remembrance, incantation, permanence, or anything else. Just as it is for you to decide how to fashion your marriage and how you two will add to that long tradition, it is for you to decide what this glass breaking means and how you two will add to this long tradition. Think, for a moment, of what all this means to you, and then break the glass!

Congratulations!

Recessional

(After everyone leaves) Everyone, you are invited to refreshments and drinks just through that door, and up the stairs to your left. Thanks!