

THE WEDDING PROJECT

(The wedding of Ben + Carolyn)

The Text in *Wedding Ceremony*



(Image of the Sosibios Vase from the Louvre.)

~~~ OPENING ~~~

Dear Friends, welcome to you all.

We are gathered together in a dark, empty parking lot, near a large, incomplete bridge and deteriorating buildings.

We're joyful to be here, for we know that in the dark, light shines; that incompleteness offers space to make new wholes; and that from less, we can create more.

We are here tonight to witness and support the creation of a new bond between Ben and Carolyn.

Every individual or group is a system, and exists within larger systems.

Each of the systems we call "Carolyn" or "Ben" is (believe it or not) highly evolved. We appreciate what they are today, while recognizing that they are what they are in part because of their own efforts but also because of the love and other emotions, countless actions and omissions, and unending efforts of their sisters, their parents and other ancestors, all of you, and many others during Carolyn and Ben's own lifetimes and before.

For better or worse, the world we live in and the individuals within it, including Ben and Carolyn, have been shaped by others alive now or in the past. Our contemporaries and ancestors have struggled with tragic disasters and afflictions, as have many of us; and like us, they have rarely managed to cope with perfect success. They nonetheless created loving families and communities, rich languages, material and scientific progress, magnificent works of art, the internet, and much more.

Carolyn and Ben wish to acknowledge the efforts of all their forebears and contemporaries – including all of you – to make the best of the bad, and to create and pass on the good. Ben and Carolyn wish to honor and thank both their forebears and you, without whom they would not be here today.

Carolyn and Ben have lived together for twelve years. They've shared many wonderful adventures together. They have also shared various tribulations, such as the deaths of their parents and a flood of their home. They love each other unconditionally, and they tell me they always will. They have each already helped the other become more of what they each wanted to become. They already share all those bonds, as well as others.

Now, Ben and Carolyn are entering a new kind of bond.

~~~ A MORE PERFECT UNION ~~~

To "wed" is to combine. Carolyn and Ben will each always exist as an individual system to some degree; but tonight, they are becoming more closely bound together in one system.

Marriage is a commitment not only to accept and love an Other, and not only to balance what is most important to that Other's welfare – as understood by that person as well as by you – against what is most important to your own welfare, but also to work and play with the Other, so as to realize wonderful possibilities that would not otherwise have been realized; to continually create new ways of *aligning* your paths forward, despite the changes, internal and external, you'll encounter through the years.

The separate identities of each of you as an individual system will to some extent be weakened. This is akin to a kind of death.

But even as you "die," you are creating a new, living being.

Every system has its powers and its limitations. In the union of Ben and Carolyn, each of you will continue to have your own powers and limitations; but the system you constitute together will have the capacity to be better – or at least, more fun and satisfying – than either of you might have been alone; although only to the extent you exercise your individual powers cooperatively.

"Marriage" comes from the etymological root for husband. To "husband" is to use resources efficiently, or to cultivate.

You could each find yourselves limited not only by your own limitations but also by those of your spouse. Alternatively, you can each work to help both of you to transcend the limitations of each of you, while enhancing the strengths of both of you.

Two heads are better than one, and a crowd can show a wisdom that transcends the smarts of any one person within them. The whole created by the bonding of the two of you into one system can be greater than the sum of its parts.

And this is true on many levels; for example, it's true on the level of information and knowledge, in that all of our understanding of the world can be more robust if we take more than one point of view into account.

And marriage is not just about two people. Scientists tell us that everything is connected to everything else. A good marriage can have helpful effects that go far beyond the two people within it.

~~~ PROJECTION, COMMUNICATION, COMPROMISE + ALIGNMENT ~~~

In order to be loved for what you are, you must reveal yourself to an Other; and that Other must perceive and accept you as you are.

After twelve years, it may sometimes seem like Carolyn can read Ben's mind; and Ben may usually know what to expect from Carolyn; and that familiarity can be comforting. But sometimes our expectations are wrong, or give rise to a reality we would not choose if we'd thought more creatively about the possibilities.

Now that the virtual is encroaching ever more literally on the real, it becomes increasingly important to think about whether and when the distinction matters, to notice what others project onto or for us, and to hold ourselves responsible for what we project onto ourselves or others, our pasts or our futures.

If you assume that the other person already knows all they need to know about you, or if you assume that you already know everything important to know about the other person, those assumptions can close both of you off from possibilities you might have discovered only by expressing your thoughts and feelings.

Perhaps the most fundamental act of love is to simply pay close attention to an Other, to be completely present with them in a particular time and place; and to not presume you understand how they feel, but to ask, to let them tell you, and hear and accept them.

Plato tells us that the only thing Socrates claimed to know was the art of love. But the claim contained a play on words; for in Greek, the word for love, "erôs," was related to the word, "erôtan," meaning, "to ask questions."

And if you listen to your partner not only with your ears, but also with your heart, you will hear your partner's feelings, as well as their words.

The attempt to understand may sometimes seem hopeless, for even our best expressions about ourselves and our world are incomplete and quickly become obsolete. Our very efforts to understand are ravishments that kill a little, even as they create more light.

But even a little light's much better than none; and we probably have nothing much more fun or satisfying to do.

By sharing your thoughts and feelings, you may gain the understanding needed to create new possibilities that enhance the welfare and efficacy of the new system in which you're being united and in which the fundamental, longer-term interests of both of you are not merely compromised, but *aligned*.

And even if you can't reach complete agreement or create a new way of aligning your interests and must simply compromise, your resolution will be stronger because you'll each at least know that your partner fully understands and respects your point of view and that together you've both considered all the important factors and all the solutions you both could think of.

Much of this applies not just within Ben and Carolyn individually and within the new system of their marriage, but also within larger human systems and endeavors.

Like Carolyn and Ben, we've all already shared many adventures and tribulations. For better or worse, we have helped shape each other, and none of us would be where we are today without the efforts of others, past and present. We already have these and other bonds with our communities, our species, and our universe.

And now, thanks to the internet, our ability to affect one another is dramatically expanding. We are free to choose to listen to one another with our hearts, and to work together to create new ways of aligning our

paths forward.

Our potential, collective power to build a better world has never been so great as it is now. And we probably have nothing much better to do – or at least, nothing more fun and satisfying.

~~~ PERMEABILITY + GROWTH ~~~

"Matrimony" comes from the same etymological root as "mother," which means to give birth to, care for, and nurture. True love makes room for growth, and helps growth when help is needed.

The maintenance of a system's identity continuously through time requires a balance between openness and closedness. If a system is too open, it becomes vulnerable to disintegration or invasion. If its boundaries are too closed, it is unable to take in nourishment or helpful information; it starves, or fails to adapt.

The need for balance between openness and closedness of boundaries, to allow growth without instability, while shielding from outside dangers but without stagnation, is relevant both to individual systems and group systems, including the union of Ben and Carolyn as well as larger communities.

Even while you work to make your separate paths run side-by-side, marriage also carries both the possibility and the responsibility to strive for your own growth, as well as to try to help your partner in their efforts to do the same.

Tonight, Ben and Carolyn embrace this possibility and responsibility.

As you undertake new projects and encounter new circumstances, new aspects of yourselves will be born. Indeed, none of us ever even fully knows ourselves; for the core of each of us is a mystery that can never be fully unpacked.

Part of the beauty of being separate individuals is that the adventure of getting to know our real and potential selves need never end.

~~~ LOVE ~~~

They say love is a mystery. In Shakespeare and other great literature, love is likened to madness.

Still, we consider love the greatest of human emotions. In most religions, it is love that brings the divine into our lives on Earth.

Love is the greatest teacher; it may be that we never really understand anyone or anything, unless we have first attended to that person or thing with a kind of love.

Love lures us toward things we might otherwise avoid and gives us the strength to accomplish the impossible.

Philosophers have sometimes broken love down into categories. These include passion, which ensures the survival of the species by making the shy bold and the wise foolish.

Next is the love of beauty. This brings us pleasure when we see a beautiful work of art, or human being; many here tonight have suffered aesthetic lust as well as other kinds.

Then there is the love of the good: the love we feel for a generous friend, a dedicated teacher, or someone whose words or actions we admire or find inspiring.

Compassion is another variety of love. We empathize with others' suffering and feel impelled to help them, even when there's no obvious gain to ourselves in doing so.

Marriage is an outward sign of the only human relationship created so far in which all of these kinds of love are both permitted and encouraged – passion, love of beauty, love of the good, friendship, and compassion.

Carolyn and Ben, I hope you will each offer to the other as many of these kinds of love as you can, as often as you can.

Years ago, Carolyn heard a minister perform a wedding ceremony in which he repeatedly said, “Give the flowers now.” Another way to say it is, “Act on every loving impulse.”

It's easy to put off doing fun things together, or to just not speak something complimentary or supportive that flickers through your head or heart. But I hope you will always try to notice those loving thoughts and impulses, and to express them. For in so doing, you help make the best potential of your marriage real, and you strengthen not just the person you love but also the system that is both of you.

~~~ FAMILIES + FRIENDS ~~~

This wedding also joins together two families, and two circles of friends.

Marilee, Bonnie and Roy, you've loved and been important to Ben for a long time, and he loves you very much. Do you stand here tonight in support of Ben and to welcome Carolyn and her family as part of your own? [We do.]

Robin, Bob, and Isabelle, you've loved and been important to Carolyn for a long time, and she loves you very much. Do you stand here tonight in support of her and to welcome Ben and his family as part of your own? [We do.]

Ben, in choosing Carolyn, you are also choosing her family; and you have told me of the love in your heart for them.

Carolyn, in choosing Ben, you are also choosing his family; and you have told me of the love in your heart for them.

To all of the family members, as you know, when Ben and Carolyn are married, their first loyalty must be to each other, but they will continue to love you as strongly as ever, and your love and support will be important not just to one of them but, now, to both of them.

And to all of Ben or Carolyn's friends, Carolyn and Ben hope you will come to love both of them, and also one another.

~~~ WEDDING VOWS ~~~

Ben and Carolyn, please join both hands.

Ben, do you take Carolyn to be your lawfully wedded wife, to give to her your appreciation of all that is beautiful or good about her, your passion, your empathy, and your loving friendship, to confide in her your inmost thoughts and feelings, and to honor hers, to value both of your growth more than your own ease, to love and comfort her, and keep her, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others and keeping you only unto her, so long as you both shall live? [Ben: I do.]

Carolyn, do you take Ben to be your lawfully wedded husband, to give to him your appreciation of all that is handsome or good about him, your passion, your empathy, and your loving friendship, to confide in him your inmost thoughts and feelings, and to honor his, to value both of your growth more than your own ease, to love and comfort him, and keep him, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others and keeping you only unto him, so long as you both shall live? [Carolyn: I do.]

~~~ CLOSING + PRONOUNCEMENT ~~~

Before this assembly, Carolyn and Ben have promised themselves to one another in marriage. By the authority vested in me under the laws of the State of Texas and my power as an artist, I now pronounce you a married couple. You may now kiss . . . [PAUSE BRIEFLY for Ben and Carolyn to kiss.]

. . . and EVERYONE may now and always kiss anyone willing to be kissed! [Wedding party and others kiss each other and throw kisses to the assembly and camera.]

Now everyone (YOU!), after you kiss each other, please turn and also throw kisses or wave toward the camera on the balcony behind you, for the people in other times and places who might eventually see the video being recorded tonight.

And please turn on your flashlights when you're ready to leave.



(Image of John Keats' drawing of the Sosibios Vase from Keats-Shelley House.)



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