

NON-RELIGIOUS (SECULAR) READINGS

The Hands Ceremony

Xx and Yy, Please face each other and take each other's hands, so that you may see the gift that they are to you.

These are the hands of your best friend, young and strong and full of love for you, that are holding yours on your wedding day as you promise to love each other today, tomorrow and forever.

These are the hands that will work along side yours as together you build your future.

These are the hands that will passionately love you and cherish you through the years, and with the slightest touch will comfort you like no other.

These are the hands that will hold you when fear or grief temporarily comes your way.

These are the hands that will countless times wipe the tears from your eyes, tears of sorrow and tears of joy.

These are the hands that will tenderly hold your children.

These are the hands that will give you support and encouragement to chase down your dreams.

These are the hands that will hold you tight as you struggle through difficult times.

These are the hands that will give you strength when you need it.

These are the hands that will lift your chin and brush your cheek as they raise your face to look into eyes that are filled with overwhelming love for you.

And lastly, these are the hands that even when wrinkled and aged will still be reaching for yours, still giving you the same unspoken tenderness with just a touch.

Frederick Buechner on Marriage

They say they will love, comfort, honor each other to the end of their days. They say they will cherish each other and be faithful to each other always. They say they will do these things not just when they feel like it, but even—for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health—when they don't feel like it at all. In other words, the vows they make at a marriage could hardly be more extravagant. They give away their freedom. They take on themselves each other's burdens. They bind their lives together in ways that are even more painful to unbind emotionally, humanly, than they are to unbind legally. The question is, what do they get in return?

They get each other in return. Assuming they have any success at all in keeping their rash, quixotic promises, they never have to face the world quite alone again. There will always be the other to talk to, to listen to. If they're lucky, even after the first passion passes, they still have a kindness and a patience to depend on, a chance to be patient and

kind. There is still someone to get through the night with, to wake into the new day beside. If they have children, they can give them, as well as each other, roots and wings. If they don't have children, they each become the other's child.

They both still have their lives apart as well as a life together. They both still have their separate ways to find. But a marriage made in heaven is one where they become more richly themselves together than the chances are either of them could ever have managed to become alone.

The Key To Love

The key to love is understanding...
The ability to comprehend not only the spoken word,
but those unspoken gestures,
the little things that say so much by themselves.

The key to love is forgiveness...
to accept each others faults and pardon mistakes,
without forgetting, but with remembering
what you learn from them.

The key to love is sharing...
Facing your good fortunes as well as the bad, together;
both conquering problems, forever searching for ways
to intensify your happiness.

The key to love is giving...
without thought of return,
but with the hope of just a simple smile,
and by giving in but never giving up.

The key to love is respect...
realising that you are two separate people, with different ideas; that you don't belong to each other,
that you belong with each other, and share a mutual bond.

The key to love is inside us all...
It takes time and patience to unlock all the ingredients that will take you to its threshold;
it is the continual learning process that demands a lot of work... but the rewards are more than worth the effort...
and that is the key to love.

On Friendship

by Roy Croft (also called 'Love'; also called 'To my Friend')

I love you, not for what you are, but what I am, when I am with you.

I love you not only for what you have made of yourself, but what you are making of me.

I love you for the part of me that you bring out.

I love you for putting your hand into my heaped up heart and passing over all the frivolous and weak things that you cannot help seeing there, and for drawing out into the light all the beautiful and radiant things that no one else has looked quite far enough to find...

I love you because you have done more than any creed could have done to make me good, and more than any fate could have done to make me happy.

You have done it without a touch, without a word, without a sign.

You have done it by being yourself.

Perhaps that is what being a friend means after all.

What is Love?

by Susan Polis Schutz

Love is the strongest feeling known
an all-encompassing passion
an extreme strength
an overwhelming excitement

Love is trying not to hurt the other person
trying not to change the other person
trying not to dominate the other person
trying not to deceive the other person

Love is understanding each other
listening to each other
supporting each other
having fun with each other.

Love is not an excuse to stop growing
not an excuse to stop making yourself better
not an excuse to lessen one's goals
not an excuse to take the other person for granted

Love is being completely honest with each other
finding dreams to share

working towards common goals
sharing responsibilities equally

Everyone in the world wants to love
Love is not a feeling to be taken lightly
Love is a feeling to be cherished, nurtured and cared for
Love is the reason for life

From This Day Forward

From this day forward, let us laugh together, and plan together,
let us find our favorite places, and go together...
Let us enjoy the sunshine, and the rain,
being alone together, and in crowds together...
From this day forward, together,
Let us love!

Let Us Walk Together

Let us walk together yet not as one, but such that our shadows are separate and distinct, such that our souls are unbound and free.
Let us share our time, yet do not give all your time, nor take all of mine for in order to develop to the fullest, to be free, we must have solitude and individuality.

Let me wander in solitude, when I need to be alone, yet be near, when I need you.
Let us share our love.
Give freely of your love, but do not smother me, my soul must breathe a free air.
Take my love, but do not demand it, for love given of obligation, is stale and without life.
Let us share our lives.

Share my life, but do not try to shape it.
Let me share your life, but do not let it revolve around me.
Let us share ourselves.
Accept me as I am, do not attempt to change me to fit your dreams.
Respect me for what I am, not for what I was or one day may be.
Share yourself with me, but do not allow me to limit your freedom or bind your soul.
Let us share our minds, thoughts, goals, values and dreams.
Let us develop these within ourselves without restriction or loss of freedom

Thus our two free souls, may wander together as they develop in freedom.
As we share our lives, as we walk through life together, know my love is yours, but not my soul for it must be free.

Blessing For A Marriage ~ James Dillet Freeman ~

May your marriage bring you all the exquisite excitements a marriage should bring, and may life grant you also patience, tolerance, and understanding.
May you always need one another - not so much to fill your emptiness as to help you to know your fullness. A mountain needs a valley to be complete; the valley does not make

the mountain less, but more; and the valley is more a valley because it has a mountain towering over it. So let it be with you and you.

May you need one another, but not out of weakness.

May you want one another, but not out of lack.

May you entice one another, but not compel one another.

May you embrace one another, but not out encircle one another.

May you succeed in all important ways with one another, and not fail in the little graces.

May you look for things to praise, often say, "I love you!" and take no notice of small faults.

If you have quarrels that push you apart, may both of you hope to have good sense enough to take the first step back.

May you enter into the mystery, which is the awareness of one another's presence - no more physical than spiritual, warm and near when you are side-by-side, and warm and near when you are in separate rooms or even distant cities.

May you have happiness, and may you find it making one another happy.

May you have love, and may you find it loving one another.

Excerpt from *The Bridge Across Forever* (Richard Bach)

A soul mate is someone who has locks that fit our keys, and keys to fit our locks. When we feel safe enough to open the locks, our truest selves step out and we can be completely and honestly who we are; we can be loved for who we are and not for who we're pretending to be. Each unveils the best part of the other. No matter what else goes wrong around us, with that one person we're safe in our own paradise. Our soul mate is someone who shares our deepest longings, our sense of direction. When we're two balloons, and together our direction is up, chances are we've found the right person. Our soul mate is the one who makes life come to life.

Marriage Joins Two People In The Circle Of Its Love

-By Edmund O'Neill

Marriage is a commitment to life, the best that two people can find and bring out in each other. It offers opportunities for sharing and growth that no other relationship can equal. It is a physical and an emotional joining that is promised for a lifetime.

Within the circle of its love, marriage encompasses all of life's most important relationships. A wife and a husband are each other's best friend, confidant, lover, teacher, listener, and critic. And there may come times when one partner is heartbroken or ailing, and the love of the other may resemble the tender caring of a parent for a child.

Marriage deepens and enriches every facet of life. Happiness is fuller, memories are

fresher, commitment is stronger, even anger is felt more strongly, and passes away more quickly.

Marriage understands and forgives the mistakes life is unable to avoid. It encourages and nurtures new life, new experiences, and new ways of expressing a love that is deeper than life.

When two people pledge their love and care for each other in marriage, they create a spirit unique unto themselves, which binds them, closer than any spoken or written words. Marriage is a promise, a potential made in the hearts of two people who love each other and takes a lifetime to fulfill.

On Love~ By Thomas Kempis ~

Love is a mighty power,
a great and complete good.
Love alone lightens every burden, and makes rough places smooth.
It bears every hardship as though it were nothing, and renders
all bitterness sweet and acceptable.

Nothing is sweeter than love,
Nothing stronger,
Nothing higher,
Nothing wider,
Nothing more pleasant,
Nothing fuller or better in heaven or earth; for love is born of God.

Love flies, runs and leaps for joy.
It is free and unrestrained.
Love knows no limits, but ardently transcends all bounds.
Love feels no burden, takes no account of toil,
attempts things beyond its strength.

Love sees nothing as impossible,
for it feels able to achieve all things.
It is strange and effective,
while those who lack love faint and fail.

Love is not fickle and sentimental,
nor is it intent on vanities.
Like a living flame and a burning torch,
it surges upward and surely surmounts every obstacle.

What Is Love? ~ Author Unknown ~

Sooner or later we begin to understand that love is more than verses on valentines and romance in the movies. We begin to know that love is here and now, real and true, the

most important thing in our lives. For love is the creator of our favorite memories and the foundation of our fondest dreams. Love is a promise that is always kept, a fortune that can never be spent, a seed that can flourish in even the most unlikely of places. And this radiance that never fades, this mysterious and magical joy, is the greatest treasure of all - one known only by those who love.

From "The Velveteen Rabbit" by Margery Williams

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"Union" by Robert Fulghum

You have known each other from the first glance of acquaintance to this point of commitment. At some point, you decided to marry. >From that moment of yes, to this moment of yes, indeed, you have been making commitments in an informal way. All of those conversations that were held in a car, or over a meal, or between baseball innings – all those conversations that began with, "When we're married", and continued with "I will" and "you will" and "we will" – all those late night talks that included "someday" and "somehow" and "maybe" – and all those promises that are unspoken matters of the heart. All these common things, and more, are the real process of a wedding. The symbolic vows that you are about to make are a way of saying to one another, "You know all those things that we've promised, and hoped, and dreamed – well, I meant it all, every word." Look at one another and remember this moment in time. Before this moment you have been many things to one another – acquaintance, friend, companion,

lover, dancing partner, even teacher, for you have learned much from one another over these years. Shortly you shall say a few words that will take you across a threshold of life, and things between you will never quite be the same. For after today you shall say to the world – This is my husband. This is my wife.

“When a Man and a Woman Are in Love” by Stephen T. Fader

His life lies within hers and her life lies within his. Each lives as an individual, yet they also live for one another. Each strives for independent goals, but they also work together to achieve their dreams. They will give to one another what they need to survive and help fulfill each other’s wants. They will turn one another’s disappointment into satisfaction. They will turn one another’s frustration into contentment. They will work as a mirror, reflecting to each other their strengths and weaknesses. They will work together to alleviate the emotional walls that may separate them. They will work together to build a better understanding of one another. They will learn to lean on each other, but not so much as to be a burden on the other. They will learn to reach out to one another, but not so much as to suffocate the other. They will learn when it is time to speak and when it is time to listen. They will be there to comfort each other in times of sorrow. They will be there to celebrate together in times of happiness. They will be one another’s friend, guiding each other to the happiness that life holds. They will be one another’s companion, facing together the challenges that life may present. When a man and a woman are in love, his life lies within hers and her life lies within his. Together they will love one another for the rest of their lives and forever.

“The Art Of A Good Marriage” by Wilfred Arlan Peterson

Happiness in marriage is not something that just happens.
A good marriage must be created.
In the art of marriage, the little things are big things...
It is never being too old to hold hands.
It is remembering to say “I love you” at least once a day.
It is never going to sleep angry.
It is never taking the other for granted; the courtship should not end with the honeymoon, it should continue through all the years.
It is having a mutual sense of values and common objectives.
It is standing together facing the world.
It is forming a circle of love that gathers in the whole family.
It is doing things for each other, not in the attitude of duty or sacrifice, but in the spirit of joy.
It is speaking words of appreciation and demonstrating gratitude in thoughtful ways.

It is not expecting the husband to wear a halo or the wife to have wings of an angel.
It is not looking for perfection in each other.
It is cultivating flexibility, patience, understanding and a sense of humor.
It is having the capacity to forgive and forget.
It is giving each other an atmosphere in which each can grow.
It is finding room for the things of the spirit.
It is a common search for the good and the beautiful.
It is establishing a relationship in which the independence is equal, dependence is mutual
and the obligation is reciprocal.
It is not only marrying the right partner, it is being the right partner.

“On Your Wedding Day” (Unknown Author)

Today is the day you will always remember
The greatest in anyone’s life
You’ll start off the day just two people in love
And end it as husband and wife.

It’s a brand new beginning, the start of a journey
With moments to cherish and treasure
And although there’ll be times when you both disagree
These will surely be outweighed by pleasure.

You’ll have heard many words of advice in the past
When the secrets of marriage were spoken
But you know that the answers lie hidden inside
Where the bond of true love lies unbroken.

So live happy forever as lovers and friends
It’s the dawn of a new life for you
As you stand there together with love in your eyes
>From the moment you whisper “I do”.

And with luck, all your hopes and your dreams can be real
May success find its way to your hearts
Tomorrow can bring you the greatest of joys
But today is the day it all starts.

True Love

Author Unknown

True love is a sacred flame
That burns eternally,
And non can dim its special glow
Or change its destiny.
True love speaks in tender tones
And hears with gentle ear,
True love gives with open heart
And true love conquers fear.
True love makes no harsh demands
It neither rules nor binds,
And true love holds with gentle hands
The heart that it entwines.

RELIGIOUS READINGS

1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will

cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Canticle of Love

Let love be genuine and live in harmony;
hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.

Out do one another in showing honor;
be humble and never conceited.

Love is stronger than death
and jealousy is cruel as the grave.

Floods can not drown love and
wealth can not buy it.

Put love above all else;
let Christ's peace rule your hearts.

Always be forgiving,
as Christ has forgiven you.

Love is not jealous or boastful,
arrogant, rude, or stubborn,
irritable, resentful, or possessive.

Love is patient and kind.

Do not love in word or speech only;
love also in deed and truth.

Receive each other in sincerity,
find mercy and grow old together.

**Extract from
The Divine Comedy**

The love of God, unutterable and perfect,
flows into a pure soul the way light rushes
into a transparent object. The more love we
receive, the more love we shine forth; so
that, as we grow clear and open, the more
complete the joy of loving is. And the more
souls who resonate together, the greater
the intensity of their love for, mirror-like,
each soul reflects the other.

IMITATIO CHRISTI

Love is a mighty power, a great and complete good.
Love alone lightens every burden, and makes rough places smooth.
It bears every hardship as though it were nothing, and renders all bitterness
sweet and acceptable.

Nothing is sweeter than love,
Nothing stronger,
Nothing higher,
Nothing wider,
Nothing more pleasant,
Nothing fuller or better in heaven or earth; for love is born of God.

Love flies, runs and leaps for joy,
It is free and unrestrained.
Love knows no limits, but ardently transcends all bounds.
Love feels no burden, takes no account of toil,
Attempts things beyond its strength.

Love sees nothing as impossible,
for it feels able to achieve all things.
It is strange and effective,
while those who lack love faint and fail.

Love is not fickle and sentimental.
nor is it intent on vanities.
Like a living flame and a burning torch,
it surges upward and surely surmounts every obstacle.

Irish Blessing

Author Unknown

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

May God be with you and bless you;
May you see you children's children.
May you be poor in misfortune,
Rich in blessings,
May you know nothing but happiness
From this day forward.

May the road rise to meet you
May the wind be always at your back
May the warm rays of sun fall upon your home
And may the hand of a friend always be near.

May green be the grass you walk on,
May blue be the skies above you,
May pure be the joys that surround you,
May true be the hearts that love you.

1 John 4:7-12 New International Version (NIV)

God's Love and Ours

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Colossians 3:12-17:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Love, Joy, Understanding, Friendship, Courage...

In joining your lives may God grant you both...
Love... to afford each other a special quality of time together.
Joy... in the accomplishments of one another.
Understanding... that your interests and desires
will not always be the same.
Friendship... based on mutual trust.

Courage...to speak of a misunderstanding
and to work on a solution
before the setting of the sun.
Compassion...to comfort each other in pain and sorrow.
Foresight...to realize rainbows follow rainy days.
Imagination...to keep with you part of the child you used to be.
Mirth...from your sense of humor.
Awareness...to live each day with the knowledge
that there is no promise of tomorrow.
May God bless you and keep you
in the Palm of His hand.

"Marriage Joins Two People In The Circle Of Its Love"
by Edmund O'Neill (b.1929)

"Marriage is a commitment to life,
the best that two people can find and bring out in each other.
It offers opportunities for sharing and growth
that no other relationship can equal.
It is a physical and an emotional joining
that is promised for a lifetime.

Within the circle of its love,
marriage encompasses all of life's most important relationships.
A wife and a husband are each other's best friend,
confidant, lover, teacher, listener, and critic.
And there may come times when one partner
is heartbroken or ailing, and the love of the other
may resemble the tender caring of a parent for a child.

Marriage deepens and enriches every facet of life.
Happiness is fuller, memories are fresher, commitment is stronger,
even anger is felt more strongly, and passes away more quickly.

Marriage understands and forgives the mistakes life is unable to avoid.
It encourages and nurtures new life, new experiences,
and new ways of expressing a love that is deeper than life.

When two people pledge their love and care for each other in marriage,
they create a spirit unique unto themselves

which binds them closer than any spoken or written words.
Marriage is a promise,
a potential made in the hearts of two people who love each other
and takes a lifetime to fulfil."

Ruth 1:16-17

"Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following after you;
For wherever you go, I will go;
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people shall be my people,
And your [God](#), my God.
Where you die, I will die,
And there will I be buried.
The Lord do so to me, and more also,
If anything but death parts you and me." [\(NKJV\)](#)

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:
If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?
Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (NIV)

Why Marriage? by Mari Nichols

Because to the depths of me, I long to love one person,

With all my heart, my soul, my mind, my body...

Because I need a forever friend to trust with the intimacies of me,
Who won't hold them against me,
Who loves me when I'm unlikable,
Who sees the small child in me, and
Who looks for the divine potential of me...

Because I need to cuddle in the warmth of the night
With someone who thanks God for me,
With someone I feel blessed to hold...

Because marriage means opportunity
To grow in love in friendship...

Because marriage is a discipline
To be added to a list of achievements...

Because marriages do not fail, people fail
When they enter into marriage
Expecting another to make them whole...

Because, knowing this,
I promise myself to take full responsibility
For my spiritual, mental and physical wholeness
I create me,
I take half of the responsibility for my marriage
Together we create our marriage...

Because with this understanding
The possibilities are limitless.

Frederick Buechner on Marriage

They say they will love, comfort, honor each other to the end of their days. They say they will cherish each other and be faithful to each other always. They say they will do these things not just when they feel like it, but even—for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health—when they don't feel like it at all. In other words, the vows they make at a marriage could hardly be more extravagant. They give away their freedom. They take on themselves each other's burdens. They bind their lives together in ways that are even more painful to unbind emotionally, humanly, than they are to unbind legally. The question is, what do they get in return?

They get each other in return. Assuming they have any success at all in keeping their rash, quixotic promises, they never have to face the world quite alone again. There will always be the other to talk to, to listen to. If they're lucky, even after the first passion passes, they still have a kindness and a patience to depend on, a chance to be patient and kind. There is still someone to get through the night with, to wake into the new day beside. If they have children, they can give them, as well as each other, roots and wings. If they don't have children, they each become the other's child.

They both still have their lives apart as well as a life together. They both still have their separate ways to find. But a marriage made in heaven is one where they become more richly themselves together than the chances are either of them could ever have managed to become alone. When Jesus changed the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, perhaps it was a way of saying more or less the same thing.