**WEDDING SPEECH**

**FOR**

**TAMER ABDELAAL**

Hello everyone!!! We did it!!!! We made it!!! We’re here.... the deal of a lifetime is **DONE**!!! ... and Rifi and I get to take this time, in this incredible setting, to bask in the warmth of this moment, this feeling, and the love, understanding, and support that so freely flows from all of you... our “nearest and dearest.” Rifi and I have traveled far... both literally and figuratively, over the past ten years, and if there are two people that understand the adage, “That which doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” it’s **DEFINITELY** the two of us... We also know that when true, deep, enduring love hits, it’s something to not be ignored... it’s rare and great... it bridges cultures and echoes history... love goes beyond generations and customs.... it transcends time... it’s something that exists within all of us... and it only truly thrives when shared.

That being said..... as I was growing up in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I had lots of thoughts and dreams, and of course, **BIG IDEAS**.... I mean.... this is **ME** we’re talking about!!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). “ Go into tech...” they said... “It’ll be **really** interesting” they said.... and by “they,” I mean those voices in my head... you know the ones... they never go too far away... they’re always there... they may have met the voices in **YOUR** head.... but I digress.... so I went into tech... got a job at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and did my thing..... and saw and met the world.... Little did I know, ten years ago, that my world was about to change forever when I went to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and through \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, met a client........ her name was Rifi..... and, to paraphrase Lou Reed, “Stick a fork in me.... I’m **DONE**.” Of course, life being what it is, we are always tested. And each test helps us discover our strengths....determine the “non-negotiables” in life, and find a way to live... in peace... and love... and in awe of the incredible beauty and humanity that exists in all of us... no matter who we are... where we worship... or where the roots have sprouted that, ultimately, connect us to each other.

This weekend, Rifi and I have “made it official” and the blessings we count every day are magnified when they are reflected in the love and support we receive from each one of you. We know how lucky we are to have found each other. We know how deeply we care... about our love... our connection to all of you... and the incredible history and heritage we bring with us, through our lives, to reaffirm what makes us special and unique. I believe that somewhere, somehow, there’s an irony that gets brought to light in our situation.... and somehow, we have, and will, continue to prevail... to celebrate the traditions that make us who we are while building and sharing the undeniable love that stems from our cultures.

A lot has been said about love, tolerance, acceptance, cultural diversity, respect, and compromise. It’s been said in all languages, throughout the world, and the concept of tolerance transcends time, and borders, and considerations. While I can understand the need, in past generations, to sustain a certain amount of pride and devotion to one’s heritage, life and existence have evolved. We are all **global** citizens... the world is shrinking... really... but that’s **ANOTHER** story for a different time.... we are all living, breathing examples of how reality has evolved... how connections take hold... no matter where in the world we find ourselves... and how exposure, acceptance, understanding, and infinite respect for **HUMANITY**... at every level, makes us richer, more tolerant, and more able to share compassion, kindness, and ultimately, **LOVE**.

A couple of days ago, I saw a quote online. “Our greatest strength is our courage to express love.” (**If you want to make a little joke you can say**)... I mean... who **EVER** dreamed that Instagram would **go deep**??? (**And wait for the laugh**).... but that’s just a tiny example of the way this world has the ability to open our eyes and encourage acceptance... that was not available to the people that came before us. I don’t want to believe, nor do I want or intend myself, my wife, or my friends, family, and those yet to be born, to be ruled by fear. I want to live boldly, love unconditionally, and share the joys of life with Rifi and everyone that believes in us and in a world in which cultural diversity, interfaith marriage, and tolerance, joyfully, respectfully, coexist. Today, Rifi and I have dedicated our lives and our love to that belief. It was our differences... our uniqueness, that brought us together.... we believe in encouraging and celebrating those differences while reaffirming the humanity that binds us all together. ... and while we come from different, age old backgrounds.... it really doesn’t matter whether we are Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Catholic, Rasta..... in our core... both individually and collectively, we are the **SAME**...light is light... the light of our souls have guided us for millennia and will continue to do so, regardless of the external narratives we use to transport our souls. As the Dalai Lama has said, “All major religious traditions carry basically the same message... that is love, compassion, and forgiveness... The important thing is they should be part of our daily lives.” Bishop Desmond Tutu said, “My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human **together**.” And, of course, from Rumi, “There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.”

There are a few unalienable truths I’ve learned in life so far.... I **BELIEVE**... there is only **ONE** God, and while we may pray in different ways and sing different songs, go to different places of worship, be it church, mosque, temple -- God loves us all and wants us all to do the same basic things, which is to be good people and **LOVE** each other. I also **KNOW**, without question, that I **LOVE** Rifi with all my heart, that we are better, stronger, more respectful and compassionate **TOGETHER**, and that, in the end, **LOVE** **prevails**. Thank you all for sharing our lives... and our **path** (**HS- I personally can’t stand the word “journey,” but if you prefer it...use it**), We **LOVE** you!!! Here’s to the future!! (**HS - I didn’t include a toast... not certain if all of the guests would participate... but if you think it’s appropriate, we can tweak this ending**)