

# ODE - HYMN TO FRIENDSHIP

## Dear Friends,

Never before has the word "Friend" had as much significance for us this evening, and never in any other circumstance I have felt the intense pleasure to pronounce it.

Our joy, Leïla's and own, is incommensurable to find ourselves in the company of those dearest to us from all parts of the world, that we have the joy of knowing and loving. It is all the more significant that this friendship reunion takes place in this imperial city, historic, immemorial and timeless that is Marrakech.

Love and friendship are the two anthems, the two master words of our encounter:

Love because God has filled, with my wife, of a common life and yet so uncommon: they've been 40 years of happiness.

Friendship because it is this strong spiritual link that unites us and illustrates the life each one of us leads in the four corners of the world: a friendship that ignores borders, differences related to race, religion or civilization.

Up to now, we have lived intense joys, mainly through prosperous steps of our professional paths. However, the most intense of joys are those which engage our souls, enabling us to leave the materiality of things, to seek in the deepest part of ourselves that which unites us with the other, the other self - precisely the friend.

Looking back, it is undoubtedly the only policy I believe to have implemented and fully succeeded: to build in my relations, personal and sincere ties, no matter the circumstances of my professional or other encounters.

I have intuitively felt that friendship is the only remedy against melancholia, sadness, renouncement and even misfortune: it is, if I may say so, the true Oxygen of our Souls.

A European thinker, La RocheFoucauld, said, in substance that the maturity of the mind, could be dated the same as the age of a tree trunk, by the number of friendship circles that we form around ourselves.

Over these decades, our friendship has progressed. The more it ages, the stronger it gets.

Before accepting each other as friends, we have no doubt used silk gloves: the choice of our friendship was delicate, sometimes fragile but unquestionably invaluable.

I am persuaded that it is with an iron glove that we firmly hold these links.

Then Dear Friends, may love irrigate our veins with friendship!

May friendship soak our souls!

In these days of reunion, in this agitated world around us, but on Morocco's soil of tolerance and conviviality, I express the wish that our prayers rise to Heaven so that Peace may reign, Peace of the Souls and Peace of the Hearts.

And like us gathering this evening, that Friendship be cultivated for Eternity!