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The fine art of thank-you notes: speed, diplomacy are the keys

After thumbing through the various pages of *Traditions*, you've probably turned to your prospective bride or bridegroom and said, "Honey, I may be wrong, but I venture we now know everything there is to know about preparing for the wedding ceremony."

It's true, you've probably learned more than you'll ever need to know about shopping for wedding gowns, choosing a florist, selecting a caterer and picking out a photographer. However, there's a lot more to a wedding than these small, often irritating, preliminaries.

"Just write the stupid thank-you notes, all ready, or I'll belt you one."

Therefore, in the interest of speed, here's a quick checklist.

1) Be sure to keep specific list of who gave what. In the sheer euphoria of opening our gifts (a level of excitement my wife was unable to equal during the course of our honeymoon), we neglected to keep a careful catalog of our gifts. We ended up with the cards in one pile, the presents in another.

Unfortunately, there's little to do in a situation like this, except to write very vague notes, extolling the virtues of marriage, and carefully evading specifics. Don't take the chance my wife and I did. To one relative with an unknown gift we wrote:

Dear Uncle _____ and Aunt _____:
 Thank you so far for the nice gift. It's something that will provide immediate use to Alice and I, and we appreciate it.
 Love, _____

Unfortunately, they gave us maternity insurance.

2) Honesty is not always a virtue. The old saying goes, "It is sometimes better to give than to receive," and once you open some of your wedding gifts, you'll see why this axiom was first written.

No matter how trivial the gift, a thank-you note must be written. Obviously it is better not to let on just how useless an item it is. Don't make the mistake my well-intentioned bride made when thanking a great aunt for a rather piddly present:

Dear Great Aunt _____ and Great Uncle _____:
 Thanks for the gift. We really appreciated it. After all, every little bit helps. Love, _____

You're going to have to pretend the gift was worthwhile. For example:

Dear Great Aunt _____ and Great Uncle _____:
 Thank you very much for the McDonald's gift certificates. Alice and I love those hamburgers so much and \$5 worth of them will come in quite handy. Hope all is well, _____

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Mike Frost

After all, there's the act you have to do after the ceremony. The fear of having to do it occupies your thoughts during the wedding, and during the long drive from the church to your honeymoon suite. And well it should: it is one of the most important — yet misunderstood — parts of marriage.

I refer to, of course, the writing of thank-you notes.

Writing thank-you notes is a lost art. I came to realize this six months after my blushing bride and I first merged checking accounts, as we romantically refer to marriage. A half year after the fact, my dearly beloved was still composing messages of gratitude.

It's not that we received all that many gifts. In fact, after we were married, we had to move into a smaller apartment just to fit in all the gifts we received. Rather, the problem was my sugar-lipped spouse had never learned the ins and outs of writing thank-you communiques.

I think my father said it best, when, shortly after I officially reached manhood in the eyes of Jewish law, he pulled me to his paternal side and uttered these sage words of advice:

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