BETWEEN FRIENDS with ESTHER EtiQuette



Dear Esther,
I gave a baby gift to a new mother recently and was "thanked" with a picture postcard of the new parents both gazing down at their little bundle in its mother's arms. Printed on the bottom of the picture were the words "Thank you for your special gift." Is this what the new generation considers a proper thank-you card? I hope not.

Signed,
Oldie Goldie

Dear Goldie,
Oh, how delighted I am to have found a fellow cringer at some people's unabashed self-centeredness. Even when attempting to engage in an act of humility, like expressing gratitude, they cannot help but drown it in a pretentious display of themselves. Still, some credit is due for sending out a thank-you card at all. To answer your question, no. I do not think it is proper to use a thank-you card as an opportunity to send a photo of your family to any number of people who have no need or want of your (lovely as they are) smiling faces adorning their homes. Instead of thanking, the message becomes "You gave us a present, now you get to look at us." Save pictures for those people who will actually keep them and enjoy looking at them (grandparents, aunts and uncles...). And even for those who will enjoy your family's portrait, a sincere thank-you note (and do take the time to describe the gift) is still the better way to go. After all, a thank-you is acknowledging them, not you.

There is one exception to this, and that is when you send a photo of the actual gift being used: the birthday girl doing the puzzle, the birthday boy riding his new bike, the young mom pushing the new stroller. This is not self-aggrandizing but rather a way of giving the gift-giver tremendous satisfaction.

Signed,
Esther

Dear Esther,
I am a private person and do not appreciate having people in my bedroom. My husband's family views the marital bedroom as just another room in the house. My mother-in-law and sisters-in-law are very comfortable having group chats on their beds and they even sleep in each other's rooms when their husbands are out of town. I am completely uneasy being in a couple's room (even my in-laws!) and equally uncomfortable having people in mine. It seems my in-laws have not picked up on my body language and they have not noticed my discomfort. They happily breeze in and out of my bedroom. My sisters-in-law leaf through my closet to borrow things and I once found our private bathroom door locked with one of them in there! I need to put up boundaries, but how?

Signed,
Spoiling the Bedroom Party

Dear Spoiling,
Either your body language is super subtle or your in-laws are super oblivious. I'm sure you've tried keeping your bedroom door closed and your in-laws just barge right in. (Note to reader: Do not enter any closed bedroom door. Do not knock on a couple's closed bedroom door unless the house is burning down.) They have no idea they are infringing on your personal space as this is their normal. You're right, it's time to set some boundaries. You or better yet your husband needs to tell the in-laws quite frankly that your bedroom is off limits. You could say something like this:

"Our bedroom is our personal space and I would prefer if you did not go in there without my permission. I view a couple's room as sacred and private and it would mean a lot to me if you would respect that."

I think they will.

Signed,
Esther

Dear Esther,
We have wonderful friends in Crown Heights who are gracious enough to invite us for Shabbos meals whenever we are in town. We always give them presents such as *sefarim*, fruit baskets, a picture of the Rebbe, and the like. However, they are not well off and I'm worried that it's hard for them to buy extra food for us–and that a present

is nice but doesn't make up for money they don't have. On the other hand, I don't want to insult them with a gift that comes across looking like charity. What should I do?

Signed,
Grateful Guest

Dear Guest,

It is thoughtful of you to consider your host's financial situation and to be careful not to embarrass them. In today's day and age food could be considered a gift if given appropriately. When you accept your next invitation, tell your hosts that you are treating them this Shabbos and arrange for the meal(s) to be catered. Or visit mistergreens.com and buy them a generous gift card to Mister Green's, a Crown Heights store which sells top quality fresh produce and has outstanding customer service. There are other Crown Heights stores also that sell gift cards. These are all respectful ways of showing gratitude to a host while alleviating some of the financial burden of *hachnasas orchim*.

Signed,
Esther

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