

Giles Coren Notebook

When does gratitude demand a gratuity?

How should kindness be rewarded? Is it truly its own reward or is it our duty to see that a good turn done to us, by a total stranger, has its payback somewhat earlier and somewhere more convenient than in Heaven? It's tricky. It's really tricky.

So, listen ... I was in a Nisa Local in west Wales a few days ago for a few bits and bobs (bottled water for my children because "the tap water tastes of pencils", sliced white bread, Panda cola, Findus crispy pancakes, superstrength cider and badger ham ... because that is what they sell in a Nisa Local), when I got to the till and realised that I had left my wallet at the property that I had rented deliberately to inflate the Welsh housing market and put local families in hostels.

I had my phone with me, but my Apple Pay is linked to my Amex (because I have literally no idea how to change it to my far more useful

bank debit card) and nowhere west of Bristol takes Amex. In fact, if they even get wind of the fact that you have an Amex card, they burn you to death inside a giant wicker accountant.

I apologised to the guy on the till and asked if he could please put my groceries aside while I drove back to the house I was renting specifically in order that he should never be able to afford a property in his home town to get my wallet. But then a lovely Pembrokeshire accent just behind me said, "How much is it, love? I can pay for those and you just pay me back online."

"It's £13.74," I said to a lady of about my age, wearing a red T-shirt and a big smile. "Are you sure?"

"Of course, dear, you're on holiday. You don't want to go haring around in this heat — here, Barry, put it on my card — I'll write down my details and you do it whenever."

And so she did. She's a local cleaner — working mostly in the rentals that are supposedly tearing her community apart —

and just obviously a very good person. As all Welsh people are. Which is why I married into them and come here on holiday every year. So I felt a bit bad tearing up her bank deets in the car and cackling at the tidy con that I had pulled.

Not really. I paid her immediately and was about to round it up to fifty quid as a thank you, because that seemed like the right thing to do, when I realised that it might be a bit condescending. It might embarrass her. I didn't want her to think that I thought she had helped me out with any hope of advantage. Or that I had made a mistake. But I want something good to happen to her.

Can I send her something a bit later, as I have her details? What about at Christmas? And if fifty quid, then why not £100? Why not £1,000?

If she randomly does a favour for a stranger who turns out to be rich, should the story not end with that kind woman getting some big reward that makes her week? Or makes her Christmas? Or am I just

being smug and narcissistic and vile?

Tell me! Tell me what to do ...

Biting back

I was in a pub garden later that sunny day where a man at the next table was having trouble with his dog. It was yapping away annoyingly all afternoon and kept slipping out of its lead and jumping on to the table. Then it ran off with his packet of crisps, knocked over my pint and growled menacingly when anyone tried to calm it down, terrifying my children.

"Lovely little fellow you've got there," I said to the dog owner, who had just been bitten on the hand as he tried to pull the animal off his young daughter. "Is he a rescue dog?"

"Not yet," the guy replied.

Snooze fest

Out of a clear blue sky, I have found a miracle cure for snoring called "Mute", which involves a double plastic loop — not unlike a weeny pair of spectacles — that you put up your nostrils, quite deep, with the centre arm across your philtrum. It holds your airways open and, when you nod off, your sloppy middle-aged palate doesn't default to mouth-breathing.

My wife is overjoyed, I'm getting the best sleep I've ever had and, best of all, it means I can start going to go the theatre again.

