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Dr. Nova's Matrimonial Checklist:

First, I have found that one of the most important things is ordinary, garden variety politeness, the please and thank you, minor formality, etc. The point of this politeness is not only that it is good in itself, and makes life a little easier and a touch sweeter, but that it mitigates against the greatest danger in marriage, which is that familiarity can breed contempt, or at least can lead to impertinence. A little politeness, especially in trying circumstances, goes a long ways, and then, too, politeness in public makes sure that no domestic dissonance ever leaves the confines of the house. It is humiliation, no matter how minor, that one can't forgive, or that one forgives uneasily and only over great amounts of time.

Never assume that one of you knows what the other is going to say, since while it is often true that you do know, there are times when something unusual will be said, and making this possible is to keep the magic of matrimony alive.

Don't fight it. One of the odd things about matrimony, on a long term basis, is that you don't become two people so much as three, that is you, your husband, and then this other creature who is part wife and part husband. This third, combined creature grows larger and larger as the other two shrink. After a while there is only the third creature, and it can't even remember what happened to the other two. You will know that the third creature is taking over when you can't make a decision without consulting with your spouse (of course, it begins with big items, such as "Should we buy this house?" but it seeps downward from there so you find yourself wanting to consult about the quality of the basil for the marinara sauce).

The time to show largeness of spirit or generosity is just after having won an argument.

Small, considerate gifts, on a regular basis, are appreciated. These show that not only have you been thinking about your partner on a regular basis, you are willing to do something about it.

Also, one of the great advantages of matrimony is the team aspect of it, and it helps to think of this as a Way of Knowledge. It's kind of like the army in which there is the right way, the wrong way and the army way. But whatever the style, this team is the thing that will get you through thick and thin, through the worst nights imaginable and will be there, too, to celebrate the best that you have hoped for. It is, like all good teams, a two way street.

Realize early on that each member of the union will have strengths, and that it is good to accept this. The ideal marriage will have complementary strengths, and the

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ideal couple will be glad to off load what he or she can't do to the one who can. Not great syntax, but I think you get the idea.

For instance, my wife will approach a problem with great attention to practical details, but I will go at it on the basis of abstract theory, of intellectual considerations which will include, but will not be limited to ethics, morality, political science, economic efficiency, not to mention a general all around garden variety philosophy of what is correct. We are best at planning trips: I have my eyes on the horizon, if not the stars, and she will worry about the bath tubs and the food.

Looking the other way is a large part of bliss. It is a variety of generosity.

Finally, it is a good idea to forgive the spouse in the same spirit that one would like to be forgiven oneself.