



Ask Uncle Mike

Dear Uncle Mike,

My sister died recently and I'm taking it a little harder than I thought I would. She was okay with it mostly, but there were times she was afraid and didn't want to leave. Now I'm wondering if all my lofty thoughts about next lives aren't just whistling past the graveyard. Any words of wisdom about death?

---Alice R., Portland

Dear Alice,

Sorry, not a one. Having seen no evidence for it in nature, Uncle Mike doesn't believe in death as defined by those with a personal interest in promoting fear of it. Uncle Mike believes devoutly in change (not that he does not fight it sometimes tooth and claw) and in the question, from what to what?

Here's the thing, Alice. If you believe Einstein, the universe is a four dimensional sphere in which space/time is, while unbounded, quite closed. It has no outside. Given this, Uncle Mike cannot imagine where the dead would go. There is, moreover, the problem with conservation of matter and energy. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

As for the spirit, Uncle Mike relies on the rules of quantum cosmology first set out in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Freed from inertia (see: vale of tears), the spirit (or, as Uncle Mike calls it, the point conscious observer) expands. Slowly at first, then faster, until it finally reaches the velocity of light. As experiences go, this is not one Uncle Mike would miss for all the world. At velocity c, space/time (and with it, the universe) disappears--- in the same nanosecond that your mass becomes infinite and your perspective is coterminal with all that is. It would not be stretching things to call such an event personally cosmic.

In Buddha physics it is attachment, as opposed to the universal curvature of space/time, that lures us back, shrieking and thrashing, into this best of all possible worlds. Current thought, by the way, allows for an infinite number of them.

Anyway, for what it's worth, the sanest words on death Uncle Mike ever heard came from Wendell Berry, in *Memories of Old Jack*: "It is no tragedy when, at the end of a life, a man dies."

Dear Uncle Mike,

My wife likes to flirt and it drives me nuts. Maybe if you tell her to stop, she will.

---Fed Up in Pacific City

Dear Fed Up,

Can I call you Fed?

I'm afraid you've come to the wrong mail slot. Uncle Mike is a staunch defender of flirting. Libertine that he is, he regards it as the glacial counterpart of lively conversation and, like the reading of good books and the shooting of pool, he thinks it should be encouraged.

Flirting is, if nothing else, a behavior rampantly displayed throughout the animal kingdom. Were we curious enough to look, we would discover that slugs flirt, although very slowly. Done well, which is to say when no one takes it seriously, flirting is about as destructive as two kittens with a ball of yarn. Done badly, of course, people have been shot.

If your wife's always been what great grandad called 'a coquette', and if she's older than sixteen (something Uncle Mike profoundly hopes), the chance of her changing is one click this side of none. If she's just started flirting, you've got trouble, Fed. Without sitting down and talking with you both for several months (something Uncle Mike is deliriously unwilling to do), there's little way of knowing what, if anything, has turned things nasty. Maybe she just does it to drive you nuts. Women have been known to do that.

You might tell your wife that if she's being demonstrably coy in the workplace, she's flirting with a federal crime. Any gender specific behavior that interferes with a coworker's job performance comes under the heading of harassment. No, Uncle Mike is not kidding. Your wife should know that men are easily led to day-dream by women who only meant to sharpen their claws on the jerks.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My girlfriend's thinking about getting breast implants. She's 25, old enough to make her own decisions, and it's okay by me if she wants bigger boobs, but are these things really safe now?

---Concerned in Bend

Dear Nitwit,

As Uncle Mike understands it, here is your question: should the woman you love hire someone to slice open her breasts and shove in a pair of AMA approved whoopee cushions so she'll more closely resemble a beer ad and therefore enhance her sense of self worth?

Being as kind as possible, Uncle Mike doubts either you or your friend have thought things sufficiently through. That, or you haven't got the brains God gave a pair of horseshoes.

If you love this woman, tell her that sexual marketing ploys that involve self-mutilation are not, as they say in your men's group, okay. Suggest that she take the money she was going to spend making a mockery of her genetic dignity and blow it on a week for the two of you someplace with palm trees, massage oils, and banana daiquiries---where you, Concerned, will do nothing but think of new ways to impress upon her that, just as God's elves made her, her beauty is for you the antidote to a poison you've taken. And anyway, you're a thigh man.



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