

Dear Uncle Mike,

I'm in my forties and unattached. I just finished a relationship that lasted several years and ended badly. That's not my problem. To be honest, I think it's a good time for me to be alone. I have a career, friends, and a full life. My problem is my friends. They think a man my age shouldn't be alone and persist in trying to 'fix me up'. When I tell them I'm not interested, they (especially the women) think I'm hiding my real feelings and am wallowing in unspoken loneliness. Nothing could be further from the truth. Any suggestions how I can get this across?

Free in Astoria

Dear Free,

For getting messages across, nothing beats behaving consistently. If you're not pining for love and companionship, it will show. So will denial. Uncle Mike's guess is that you're still licking your wounds. While he compliments your ability to be alone (a rapidly vanishing ability), he wonders if you might not be whistling dixie. Your women friends will be the first to pick up on this.

If, on the other hand, you're being honest with yourself, be honest with your friends. Meet these new women and, if they interest you, carve out the sort of relationship you want. One needn't always be in love but it's hard to have too many warm human contacts. Lay your cards on the table. Tell them you've taken a vow of abstinence until you learn how to be a friend.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Do you think political correctness is just a fad? I hear that men are now supposed to get oral permission from women at each step leading to physical intimacy. As a woman, I regard this as insane and a serious attack on romance. What say you?

Debbie in Portland

Dear Debbie,

What can you say about fascism?

If Uncle Mike's understanding of politics is correct, political correctness is a contradiction of terms. Politics is a dialogue between factions, the final faction being the individual. If, in order to be correct, an idea must agree with consensus, political action becomes a shell game, art and science become handmaidens to those with something to sell, and the human spirit is reduced to something much like gruel.

As for negotiating intimacy, Uncle Mike regards it as one of the few things worth dying to prevent. In his experience, intimacy is always the result of collective bargaining, both partners bringing something to the table. Love occurs between spirits, courtship anchors it to reality in the mutual exchange of trust and devotion. To turn this into a game of Mother, May I? denies humanity from both sides. It's hard to see love flourishing under these conditions. Or, for that matter, fun.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Ever since I took my daughter to see Jurassic Park, she's eight, she's been wanting a baby alligator. Do they make good pets?


Laura S., Beaverton

Dear Laura,

In a word, no. You should explain to your daughter that even Steven Spielberg dinosaurs are pretend. Alligators are real, usually unpleasantly so. Tell your child that, being a

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reptile, alligators divide the world into two parts: That which should be killed and eaten and that which should only be killed. When she whines that it will only be a baby, tell her that only makes the little psychotic quicker on its feet. Explain that cuddling is a concept at least a hundred million years beyond the alligator's grasp and that play is something they don't even do with their food. As anyone unfortunate enough to live near alligators (and crocodiles are not one bit better) will tell you, they're about as much fun as puff adders.

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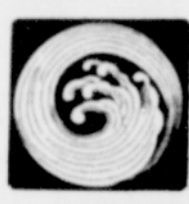
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2. YOU MAY WANT TO STRETCH OUT IN A RECLINING POSITION TO COMPLETELY RELAX.
3. PLUG STEAM CORD UNTIL DESIRED TEMPERATURE IS ACQUIRED. IF BREATHING IS DIFFICULT, BREATHE THROUGH A COLD WET WASH CLOTH.
4. REENTER THE STEAM ROOM FOR ANOTHER 10 MINUTES. REPEAT THE PROCESS. USE ENOUGH STEAM FOR YOUR OWN LIKING.
5. AFTER REPEATING THE CYCLE 2 OR 3 TIMES, END WITH A SOAP AND WATER SHOWER AND RINSE WITH COLD WATER TO CLOSE PORES. DON'T GO OUT INTO COLD OR WET WEATHER UNTIL YOU ARE DRY AND HAVE FINISHED PERSPIRING. OR YOU MAY GET CHILLED!
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