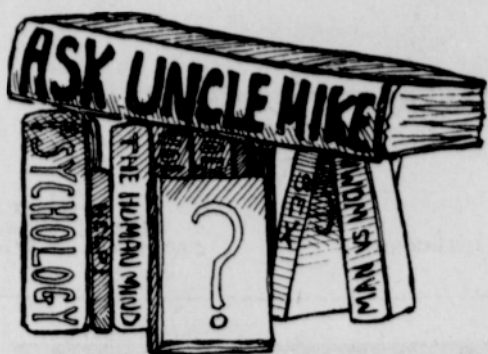


# THE RARY PAGE



Dear Uncle Mike,  
I'm taking a philosophy course at U of O and we're studying hedonism. Do you think human behavior can be totally explained in terms of seeking pleasure? It's not like I'm holding my breath waiting for an answer, just interested in what you think.

Jennifer, Seeking in Eugene

Dear Jennifer,

Uncle Mike is glad you're not holding your breath. Wherever pleasure lies, he doubts it's in that direction.

Can the pursuit of pleasure account for every subplot of the human comedy? Maybe, maybe not. As any machoist will tell you, it depends on what you call pleasure.

It's a pretty funny life and Uncle Mike has done many things he didn't especially want to. Some of them turned out to be more fun than a barrel of monkeys. Most of them were as awful as he'd imagined. Yes, he did them for a reason. Yes, he took some pleasure from his goal oriented behavior. So, for that matter, did his day nurse. Still, it boiled down to doing something unpleasant in order to experience pleasure. Under certain circumstances, they medicate people for this.

Uncle Mike has nothing against pleasure but, after years of painful research, has decided that constantly looking for it make one dull. That we keep looking in the wrong places is the key. As any bungee jumper, or any lover, will tell you: before the will to survive come the lust to experience.

Dear Uncle Mike,

There's this guy at the office I really like. I think he likes me. We haven't gone out or anything but we take breaks together and sometimes he walks me to my bus stop. He's good looking and polite and has a good sense of humor. So what's the problem? It's going to sound stupid but it's his breath. It's really, really bad. Not just sometimes, but all of the time. I keep offering him breath mints but he turns them down. I know it's dumb, but it's a problem.

Gagging in Astoria

Dear Gagging,

Your're right it is a stupid problem and you do sound dumb. Uncle Mike feels like he's in a mouthwash commercial. It's going to be one of those days.

First off, you can't rule out the obvious. Your gentleman frind's breath may smell putrid because he's rotting internally from some horrible commincable disease. It happens more than you think.

Then again, he may just have bad breath. This only seems like the end of the world. Next time he refuses a mint, smile sweetly and tell him he's cute as a bug but his breath smells like moose musk. If he doesn't punch you in the nose, invite him home to gargle.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My girlfriend tells me I'm self centered. I'm not sure what this means. I think of myself a lot but I think of other people too. Besides, who says putting yourself first is always a bad thing? Is there a litmus test for being too self centered.

Terry G., Portland

Dear Terry,

Absolutely. If you're too self centered you'll either be a) alone alot, or b) surrounded by shallow, self centered people. Before performing corrective surgery on your personality, you must consider the possibility that your friend has agendas of her own to grind. In Uncle Mike's experience, the first people to tell you (for your own good) that you think of yourself too much are people who think of themselves too much.

This doesn't mean she's not right about you. It means she might be trying to look at you through a mirror. It's a common problem with humans.

Fortunately, there's a simple exercise gauranteed to get you to the bottom of things. Invite your friend to dinner and keep a lit candle in the bathroom. Everytime you say the word 'I', excuse yourself. Go into the bathroom and hold your palm over the candle until you can't stand it any more. After half a dozens painful reminders, you'll find yourself being more conscious of how much time we spend talking about ourselves.

This is not a cheap trick. It's an exercise ascetics have sworn by for thousands of years and Uncle Mike knows of no quicker path to personal illumination. Buy yourself a disposable lighter and carry the practice with you. By the time you've worked your way past your wrist looking for a spot not already burned, two things will have happened. First, you'll be talking less and thinking and listening more. Second, your perspective (and with it the world) will have changed.

Who says putting yourself first is always a bad thing? Nobody Uncle Mike listens to. Putting yourself first is fine, as long as you remember the first rule: no me, no thee, only this. Life is short, candles are cheap.

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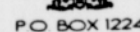
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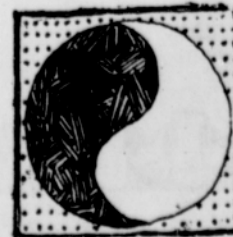
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