



Dear Uncle Mike,
Is it possible to love two people
at the same time?

C.S., Salem, Oregon

Dear C.,
Certainly. It's just not possible to explain it to either one of them.

Dear Sir:
I refuse to call you Uncle Mike. In response to a recent letter you had the unmitigated gall to imply there is no blame and should be no guilt in the abusive and repressive society in which women find themselves. How dare you. It is not "utter rot" for women to demean and belittle those males who administer a physical and personal power system in which women remain either objects or support personnel. Men may not be responsible for all that is wrong in women's lives, just the worst of it. If I can help you with your labeling problem: you're neither a sexist swine, nor a knee jerk masculinist. You're just another (colloquial term for anus).

Former Reader, Seattle, Washington

Dear Former Reader,
Uncle Mike is sad you're not having a good day and even sadder to think he might have helped it along. He's just glad it's a misunderstanding. Uncle Mike is well aware there are men, many too many of them, who compare badly to mindless brutes; and that there are many more who are only jerks with minds, money, and cultivated manners. Uncle Mike recommends that all women ignore them as religiously as he avoids both them and their sisters in spirit. (Of the many things that are gender specific, predatory and usurious behavior aren't among them.)

As for the male dominated power system at large, Uncle Mike shares your urge to throw up. Fortunately, once you realize it was designed, not to keep women in their place, but to grind up the poor and powerless of both sexes and feed them to the rich, issues of gender blend into the background of a rich tapestry of human rights abuse that is, viewed in the right spirit, an impressive piece of work.

Like you, Uncle Mike would love to see the machinery of greed and oppression dismantled and replaced with a garden devoted to the flowering of the human spirit. Unlike you, he has serious doubts it will flower any sooner if women and men, the two necessary components to the only system stronger than a global corporation, would rather take turns gutting each other than practice compassion, understanding, and love. Virtue is the only power available to the peasants; virtue and strength in numbers. The war is over when we want it to be. This brings us to 'personal responsibility': a much neglected chapter in the current annals of self help.

Responsibility is, or was, the act of accepting ownership of the effects caused by our actions; a part of what used to be called 'character' in the days before we all realized we were 'victims'. Responsibility is based on the assumption that we're all on different paths, probably on the same mountain, and that each of us makes up our own path as we go along. We choose our way depending on where we've been, where we think we're going or, too often, what we had for lunch. Every path eventually teaches us that free will doesn't come cheap. Wherever we are, we're there because we decided to be, or because we let someone else decide for us, which is the same thing only worse. The first step to illumination is not to kneecap the last cheap punk who mugged your potential; it's copping to the fact that our lives are the exact products of the decisions we've made. It's us who've kept questionable company, us who've loved unwisely, us who've made poor use of our time, us who've squandered opportunities, us who still haven't learned the difference between pearls and pea gravel. Embarrassing, but there it is.

Regardless which bathroom fate has assigned him, if Uncle Mike exercises poor judgment, he expects the universe to deliver a lesson in the form of the mess he's whistled for. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened, given what came before, and the end of things is always in the beginning. It's hard to imagine a system any simpler or more fair, or one less likely to produce victims. Yes, there are huge, impersonal forces that work against us; but if we choose to arrange our lives so that, were we watching our little comedy from the audience, we'd spill our buttered popcorn screaming, "Grow a brain, you idiot!", how much blame is there left to lay at the feet of others? And, more importantly, isn't there something more constructive and fun we could be doing with our time?

It's easy for Uncle Mike to say this, of course. Being a man, he's in the driver's seat, king of all he surveys. The sound you hear is Uncle Mike slapping his knee and snorting.

Dear Uncle Mike,
I've been reading your column for some time now and unless you're so ugly you frighten children I want you. You're like way cool. You have my phone number. Use it.

Lynne, Reno, Nevada

Dear Lynne,
Uncle Mike's heart soars like an eagle to hear of your unhealthy obsession. As soon as he gnaws through his straps he'll try to get to a phone. Lucky you, Uncle Mike is far from ugly. Especially in his bunny pajamas.

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A pious man is one who would be an atheist if the king were. Jean de La Bruyere

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