



Dear Uncle Mike,  
 What is your opinion of a promise ring? Like me you might say, what is it? Well, my girlfriend has asked for a symbolic ring, not necessarily stating intentions, only a ring to wear as a promise of a possible future together. She says it will make other men aware that she is seeing someone who is important to her and therefore no longer make passes at her. Though I can understand her point of view, I do not want to commit to anything regarding a relationship and feel if I give the "promise ring" to her that she will expect more. I have decided to follow your lead.

Thad, Portland, Oregon

Dear Thad,

The lead you should be following is that of your friend. Don't look now, pal, but you're already in a relationship. The woman you're in a relationship with is not feeling secure. Uncle Mike has no idea what's in your heart, or in hers for that matter, but she's asking for a commitment you're either unwilling or unable to give. If the woman doesn't understand this, you're either not showing your cards or she's not smart enough to be let out alone. Just for fun, let's assume everyone's being honest, both with themselves and with each other. Let's assume this woman hasn't projected her image of an ideal mate onto your sad little bundle of imperfections and blinded herself to the fact that this could, with luck, be one of those affairs she'll eventually laugh about. Let's assume you're being emotionally honest with her, that you're not secretly committed to noncommittal and are just jolly her along because you'd miss her if she went away. Let's assume no one is being selfish, that both of you have the other's best interests at heart. Let's assume she's not displaying those first signs of neurotic dependency that drive so many partners to strong drink. Let's assume the ring isn't really an engagement ring. No, let's not. If Uncle Mike were a betting man, which he is, he'd wager borrowed money that she plans to wear it on the third finger of her left hand. Regardless what sort of ring it is, it will, in the real world, symbolize more than a promise: it will symbolize a vow she'll come to believe you've made. And while we're on the subject, so will your continuing to occupy this woman's time and stand in the way of her search for something you neither have nor apparently want. There's no future for her in the present you have to offer; the idea is to be there now and you're not. For her, there is no there there. The ring would be frosting on a cake that doesn't exist.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Can cats be trained?

Heidi, Salt Lake City, Utah

Dear Heidi,

Only to do things they'd do anyway. Uncle Mike did watch his old cat Foster train himself to float on his back in Uncle Mike's bubble bath. Uncle Mike eventually trained him to stop. For the record, he used a boot.

Dear Uncle Mike,

A dear friend died recently of AIDS related causes. He was a much loved man and his funeral turned into a social event. Perhaps two hundred at the ceremony and burial. A wake (catered) was held at a private home and seemed to me low theatre, filled with wallowing and despair. My friend was a vital man with an omnivorous sense of humor and a hatred of phony emotions. I am quite sure he would have left soon after he arrived. I am in my mid forties and have been to only a few funerals. After this one, I have told my friends I don't plan to go to any more. They are, to a person, aghast at my decision. They feel it would be a sign of disrespect not just to the deceased but to the family as well. I wonder perhaps if any of your readers have dealt with this loyalty issue.

A. L., Santa Fe, New Mexico

Dear A.L.,

Uncle Mike has, fortunately, no way of knowing what his readers have dealt with. The little they tell him is enough. Funerals are, by necessity, planned and executed by the living. They are collective rituals and so, by definition, social events. With the exception of love, nothing in life generates more emotional imbalance than death. Weddings and funerals are, when normalcy is the standard, whacked out affairs where feats of public behavior can reach startling, and embarrassing, lows. Uncle Mike tends to avoid them with the dedication he otherwise reserves for karaoke and community theatre productions of Hamlet. He does not lack respect for brides, grooms, or corpses; he merely loves not to be around citizens who are eager for emotional catharsis. To Uncle Mike, grief, like prayer and sex, is a ritual best carried out in private and no wake worthy of the name should be allowed to become morbid. But then, Uncle Mike doesn't believe in death. He believes there are things he just can't see anymore.

"Vote early and vote often."  
 - Al Capone (1899-1947)

# THE THERAPY PAGE

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 - Yogi Berra

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"If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one?"  
 - Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

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"While we are postponing, life speeds by."  
 - Seneca (3BC - 65AD)