

## “Advice for Living”

September 1957  
Chicago, Ill.

*In September King began writing an advice column in Ebony, a black-oriented monthly magazine. The column ran until December 1958, and the questions King answered ranged from queries regarding race relations to those on personal morality.<sup>1</sup>*

**Question:** *My wife and I live in Mississippi. Our children are becoming conscious of racial differences. We are Negroes, but we do not want our children to grow up hating white people for the wrongs we suffer. How can we prevent this?*

**Answer:** You should teach your children at an early age that it is both morally wrong and psychologically harmful to hate anyone. Hate does more harm to the hater than it does to the hated. You must stress the fact that the hate and injustice which have been heaped upon Negroes for many years should be met with

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1. While it is unclear how the initial arrangements for “Advice for Living” were made, King completed preliminary work on this column in July (see D. Parke Gibson to King, 22 July 1957). Lerone Bennett, Jr., a fellow Morehouse graduate and associate editor at *Ebony*, facilitated work on the column by mailing readers’ questions to King in Montgomery. Bennett may also have helped interest King in the idea. An advertisement for the column appeared in the 5 September 1957 edition of *Ebony*’s sister publication *Jet*, advising readers to send family or religious problems to King: “Let the man that led the Montgomery boycott lead you into happier living.”

Sept 1957 love and goodwill. Through such wholesome love on the part of Negroes it will be possible to solve the race problem much more speedily and create a society in which all men may live together as brothers. If this attitude gets over to your child at an early age he will grow up with a healthy attitude toward all people.

**Question:** *I am stationed in an army camp in Alabama. We are treated fine on the base, but the town is extremely prejudiced. Negro GIs can go nowhere with their white buddies. It makes us very bitter. How can I justify fighting for a democracy that treats me like this?*

**Answer:** It is certainly unfortunate that men will be called to defend a democracy that denies them the basic and fundamental rights guaranteed by that democracy. This is one of the basic contradictions of our democracy. You must believe, however, that conditions will continue to improve. Progress has already been made and progress will continue to be made. Democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action is one of the greatest forms of government on earth, and we must have faith to believe that we will be able to achieve democracy right here in America. I would urge you not to become bitter. If you respond to the present situation that you confront in Alabama with bitterness, the new order which is emerging in America will be nothing but a duplication of the old order.

**Question:** *My husband is a minister. He is a handsome man, a fact that has caused him no end of trouble. All of the women in our congregation adore him, but some indicate that their interests are not entirely spiritual. What can he do to discourage them?*

**Answer:** Your husband has the responsibility to minister to the spiritual needs of every member of his congregation. In order to do this he must be sure at all times that his personal life is on the highest moral and spiritual plane. If he remains on this high level of spiritual and moral dignity, even the most aggressive woman will have to respect him. Almost every minister has the problem of confronting women in his congregation whose interests are not entirely spiritual. This he is not responsible for. But if he carries himself in a manner representative of the highest mandates of Christian living, his very person will discourage their approaches.

**Question:** *I hold a responsible position in my town and I am also a deacon of my church. Occasionally, I am called upon to attend cocktail parties. Oftentimes, these cocktail parties are connected with my business position. I attend, but I always feel guilty. What should I do?*

**Answer:** The structure of our society has come to the point that it is almost impossible for business and professional people to avoid being invited to cocktail parties on some occasions. If you are attending such parties because it is a necessary part of your business relationships, hardly anyone could condemn you. However, it is possible to attend a cocktail party and not participate in the drinking activities. This is an individual choice which one must make himself.

**Question:** *My worst fault is a nasty temper. When I'm angry, I say things to those I love that hurt them terribly. How can I overcome my bad temper?*

**Answer:** You are certainly on the right road of getting rid of your bad temper. You recognize that you have this weakness, and you honestly admit it. The first step toward eliminating any moral weakness is a recognition of a weakness to be eliminated. You should also seek to concentrate on the higher virtue of calmness.

You expel a lower vice by concentrating on a higher virtue. If you will continually concentrate on the necessity of being calm and even tempered you will soon remove your nasty temper by this higher concentration. A destructive passion is harnessed by directing that same passion into constructive channels. Finally, you should submit your will to the power and scrutiny of God. Ultimately one is changed by totally surrendering his will to God's will. You cannot solve the problem alone. You must realize the need for depending on a higher power.

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**Question:** *I'm in love with a white man whom I've known for two years. We met at the company where we work. I want to marry him, although both of our parents object. I know that he loves me, too. Should we go ahead and get married anyway?*

**Answer:** The decision as to whether you should marry a white man whom you have known for two years is a decision that you and your friend must make together. Properly speaking, races do not marry, individuals marry. There is nothing morally wrong with an interracial marriage. There are many other things, however, that must be taken under consideration in any interracial marriage. The traditions of our society have been so set and crystallized that many social obstacles stand in the way of persons involved in an interracial marriage. If persons entering such a marriage are thoroughly aware of these obstacles and feel that they have the power and stability to stand up amid them, then there is no reason why these persons should not be married. Studies reveal that interracial couples who have come together with a thorough understanding of conditions that exist, have married and lived together very happily.