



SUBSTANCE ABUSE



Setting the Stage

Mickey Mantle's First Hand Account of His Struggle With Alcohol

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I began some of my mornings the past 10 years with the “breakfast of champions”—a big glass filled with a shot or more of brandy, some Kahlúa and cream. Billy Martin and I used to drink them all the time, and I named the drink after us. Sometimes when I was in New York with nothing to do, and Billy and I were together, we would stop into my restaurant on Central Park South at around 10 in the morning, and the bartender would dump all the ingredients into a blender and stir it right up. It tasted real good.

Unfortunately for everybody else around me, one “breakfast of champions” and they could kiss the day goodbye. After one drink, I was off and running. And unless I had a business engagement, I’d often keep on drinking until I couldn’t drink anymore.

Drinking had become an all-too-frequent routine for me. If I had a drink to start the day, I’d go out for lunch and go through three or four bottles of wine in the course of the afternoon. White wine. Red wine. It didn’t matter, and I didn’t care about the quality, either. In fact, I thought if I was drinking wine, it wasn’t really drinking. To me, wine wasn’t liquor.

At one time I prided myself on being knowledgeable about good wine. But over the years I just drank so much of it that I didn’t care anymore. Late one afternoon, after I’d finished a round of golf, a guy sent over an expensive glass of port. I was drinking Absolut vodka on the rocks, and as the guy watched,

I poured the port right into my Absolut. He came over to me in shock and said, “Man, that was a \$15-a-shot port I sent over here.” And I said, “Oh, I’m sorry. We drink these all the time. We call them Abort’s.”

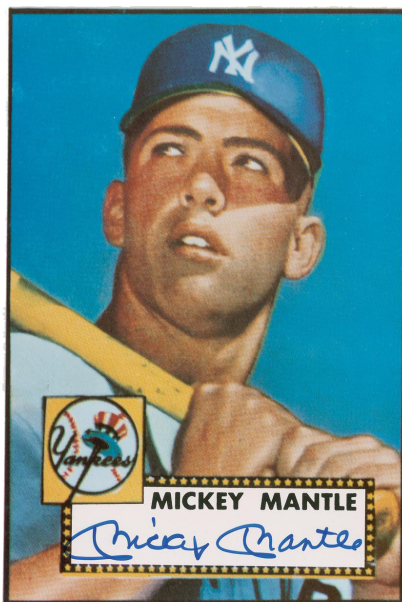
I always took pride in my dependability when I was doing public-relations work, endorsements and personal appearances. I always wanted to do my best. It was when I had no commitments, nothing to do or nowhere to be that I lapsed into those long drinking sessions. It was the loneliness and emptiness. I found “friends” at bars, and I filled my emptiness with alcohol. In those instances I was almost totally out of it by early evening. I could hardly talk. I’d try to get somebody to go to dinner with me, and I’d start drinking vodka martinis. I’d order a meal, but I wouldn’t eat. I’d just sit there and drink.

In the past five years I used alcohol as a crutch. To help me overcome my shyness and make me feel more comfortable before all those personal appearances, I’d warm up with three or four vodkas

before leaving the hotel, go straight to the cocktail party and have three or four more drinks, and then I’d start feeling, Whew, all right. Let’s go....

I’d forget what day it was. What month it was. What city I was in. There were dozens of personal appearances and card shows that I had agreed to be

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“*In the past five years I used alcohol as a crutch.*”

at, but when the time came to go, I'd argue that I had never agreed to the commitment in the first place. But I always made the appearance. I'm still proud of that.

It wasn't only recent events that had disappeared from my memory because of all my drinking. I was the best man at Billy Martin's wedding in 1988, and I hardly remember being there.

The loss of memory really scared me. I told a couple of the doctors I play golf with at Preston Trail Golf Club, near my home in Dallas, that I thought I might have Alzheimer's disease, and they said, "Well, you're probably not there yet, but you better start watching your drinking. You'd better cool it a bit." I was scared that the alcohol had changed my brain.

You know, I was watching somebody take infield practice the other day, and I saw him catch a ball and throw it, and I was trying to think. What did I look like throwing a ball? Did I take a hop or a skip or a jump or something? I can't even remember. And then someone's always asking, "What was your favorite pitch to hit?" But I can't remember what my favorite pitch was or where I liked to hit it.

The older I got, and the more alcohol I drank, the more I had these weird hangovers—bad anxiety attacks. From what I can recall, I had the first anxiety attack in April 1987. I'd been at the Mickey Mantle-Whitey Ford Fantasy Camp in Florida, drinking with the guys for two weeks, and then I had to go to upstate New York for a weekend card show. That was another two days of drinking. By the time I got on the plane to fly back home to Dallas, I was really dehydrated. And I'm thinking, What if I have a heart attack? The more I thought about it, the more I started flaking out. I tapped the stewardess on the shoulder and said, "Do you

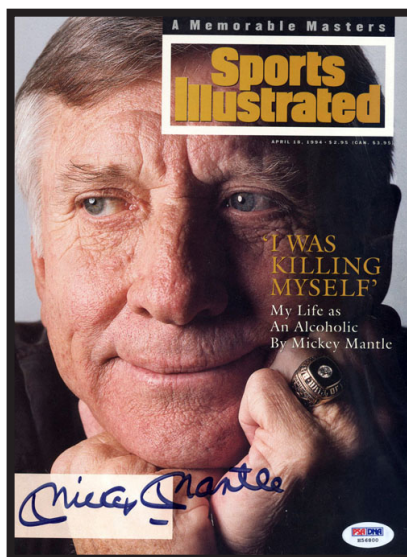
have a doctor in here?" She turned around, looked at my face and said, "Oh, my god, sir, go sit down!" I began hyperventilating. And she said, "I'll give you some oxygen." When the plane landed, there were emergency paramedics to bring me off on a stretcher. My oldest son, Mickey Jr., who had come to pick me up, thought I was dying, and so did I.

There were more anxiety attacks, but they didn't become frequent until the last two years. If I'd go out and get really loaded, the next day I'd wake up hyperventilating. I'd stay at home, drink water and say to myself, "Boy, I'm not going to drink like that anymore." Or I'd call one of the doctors I play golf with, and he'd put me in the hospital for about three days. The doctor would say, "Mick, you've got to quit this. You don't know what you're doing to yourself." And I'd sit there and say, "I know it. Yeah, I know it." As soon as I left the hospital, I'd go straight to a bar.

It got to the point where I was worrying so much about everything—what was happening to my memory, how awful my body felt, how I hadn't been a good husband or a good father—that I was even afraid to be alone in the house. I'd ask my youngest son, Danny, to please stay at home with me. And there

were times when I locked myself in my bedroom to feel safe.

...My last four or five years with the Yankees, I didn't realize I was ruining myself with all the drinking. I just thought, This is fun. Hell, I used to see guys come into Yankee Stadium from Detroit or Chicago; they'd be out taking batting practice, all of them with hangovers. But today I can admit that all the drinking shortened my career. When I retired in the spring of '69, I was 37. Casey had said when I came



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up, “This guy’s going to be better than Joe DiMaggio and Babe Ruth.” It didn’t happen. I never fulfilled what my dad had wanted, and I should have. God gave me a great body to play with, and I didn’t take care of it. And I blame a lot of it on alcohol.

...When you first get to Betty Ford, you have to open up to the members of your dorm unit in group therapy sessions. It took me a couple of times before I could talk without crying. You’re supposed to say why you’re there, and I said because I had a bad liver and I was depressed. Whenever I tried to talk about my family, I got all choked up. One of the things I really screwed up, besides baseball, was being a father. I wasn’t a good family man. I was always out, running around with the guys. Mickey Jr. could have been a helluva athlete. If he’d had my dad, he could have been a major league baseball player. My kids have never blamed me for not being there. They don’t have to. I blame myself.

...The most important breakthrough I had at Betty Ford happened in grief therapy groups, and I think it’s going to change the way I deal with my kids in the future. During my preadmission interview, I told the counselor that I drank because of depression that came from feeling I’d never fulfilled my father’s dreams. I had to write my father a letter and tell him how I felt about him. You talk about sad. It only took me 10 minutes to write the letter, and I cried the whole time, but after it was over, I felt better. I said that I missed him, and I wished he could’ve lived to see that I did a lot better after my rookie season with the Yankees. I told him I had four boys—he died before my first son, Mickey Jr., was born—and I told him that I loved him. I would have been better off if I could have told him that a long time ago.

Dad would be proud of me today, knowing that I’ve completed treatment at Betty Ford and have been sober for three months. But he would’ve been mad that I had to go there in the first place. He would have forgiven me, but it would have been hard to look him in the eye and say, “Dad, I’m an alcoholic.” I don’t think I could have done it. I would feel like I’d let him down. I don’t know how you get over that; I can’t hit a home run for him anymore.

...I like the idea of having to stay sober in public, knowing that people are watching me. Now they won’t be buying me drinks. They’ll expect me not to drink. For all those years I lived the life of somebody I didn’t know. A cartoon character. From now on, Mickey Mantle is going to be a real person.

I still can’t remember much of the last 10 years, but from what I’ve been told, I really don’t want those memories. I’m looking forward to the memories I’ll have in the next 10 years.

“*For all those years I lived the life of somebody I didn’t know. A cartoon character. From now on, Mickey Mantle is going to be a real person.*”

I’m hitting the golf ball good these days. I don’t have the shakes anymore. Whenever my liver comes back and the platelet count in my blood gets better, I’m going to have artificial knees put in. While I was at Betty Ford, I started walking, and I went from 214 pounds to 204. To have those guys at Preston Trail and my family and people I haven’t seen in a while say, “Man, I’m glad you went to Betty Ford, you look great”—well, it makes me feel good. I really feel like I won the World Series.

I can’t wait to go back to my restaurant in New York and see how they react when I order a Diet Coke instead of the “breakfast of champions.”



Questions to Consider

- ▶ What emotional factors would lead someone as successful as Mickey Mantle to begin abusing alcohol?
- ▶ What precautions could a person take to avoid the struggle Mickey Mantle had to endure?

ויקרא פרשת קדשים פרק יט:ב

דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדָשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

Leviticus 19:2

Speak to the entire community of Israel and say to them: You should be holy for I, your God, am holy.

רש"י שם

קדשים תהיו - הוּו פרושים מן העריות ומן העבירה,
שכל מקום שאתה מוצא גדר ערוה אתה מוצא קדושה,
אשה זונה וחללה וגו' אני ה' מקדשכם

Rashi, *ibid.*

That you should be holy-meaning that you should be guarded from sexuality and sin, for any place in which you find boundaries from sexuality there you will find holiness.

רמב"ן שם

ולפי דעתי אין הפרישות הזו לפרוש מן העריות כדברי הרב, אבל הפרישות היא המוזכרת בכל מקום בתלמוד, שבעליה נקראים פרושים:

והענין כי התורה הזהירה בעריות ובמאכלים האסורים והתירה הביאה איש באשתו ואכילת הבשר והיין, א"כ ימצא בעל התאווה מקום להיות שטוף בזמת אשתו או נשיו הרבות, ולהיות בסובאי יין בזוללי בשר למו, וידבר כרצונו בכל הנבלות, שלא הוזכר איסור זה בתורה, והנה יהיה נבל ברשות התורה:

לפיכך בא הכתוב, אחרי שפרט האיסורים שאסר אותם לגמרי, וצוה בדבר כללי שנהיה פרושים מן המותרות. ימעט במשגל, כענין שאמרו (ברכות כב א) שלא יהיו תלמידי חכמים מצויין אצל נשותיהן כתרנגולין, ולא ישמש אלא כפי הצריך בקיום המצוה ממנו. ויקדש עצמו מן היין במיעוטו, כמו שקרא הכתוב (במדבר ו ה) הנזיר קדוש, ויזכור הרעות הנזכרות ממנו בתורה בנח ובלוט. וכן יפריש עצמו מן הטומאה, אע"פ שלא הוזכרו ממנה בתורה, כענין שהזכירו (חגיגה יח ב) בגדי עם הארץ מדרס לפרושים, וכמו שנקרא הנזיר קדוש (במדבר ו ח) בשמרו מטומאת המת גם כן. וגם ישמור פיו על רבי ולשונו מהתגאל ברבוי האכילה הגסה ומן הדבור הנמאס, כענין שהזכיר הכתוב (ישעיה ט טז) וכל פה דובר נבלה, ויקדש עצמו בזה עד שיגיע לפרישות, כמה שאמרו חייא שלא שח שיחה בטלה מימיו:

באלו ובכיוצא בהן באה המצוה הזאת הכללית, אחרי שפרט כל העבירות שהן אסורות לגמרי, עד שיכנס בכלל זאת הצוואה הנקיית בידיו וגופו, כמו שאמרו (ברכות נג ב) והתקדשתם אלו מים ראשונים, והייתם קדושים אלו מים אחרונים, כי קדוש זה שמן ערב. כי אע"פ שאלו מצות מדבריהם, עיקר הכתוב בכיוצא בזה יזהיר, שנהיה נקיים וטהורים ופרושים מהמון בני אדם שהם מלכלכים עצמם במותרות ובכיעורים:

Nachmanides, *ibid.*

According to my thinking, when the Torah said “Be Holy,” it was not referring to separating from immorality, as Rashi had explained; rather, the separation being referred to was the one often referred to in the Talmud as “Prushim” or the “Separate Ones.”

And the explanation is that the Torah had already commanded regarding immoral acts and forbidden foods and had already permitted marital relations and the consumption of meat and wine and if so a gluttonous person could find reason to be constantly involved with sexual activities with his wife or with many wives and to be amongst those who consume large amounts of wine and meat, and he could speak endlessly with all sorts of profanity because this is not clearly prohibited by the Torah.

Therefore the Scriptures tell us, after having explained those prohibitions that are totally forbidden, and commands in a general way that we should separate from that which is permissible. One should curtail his sexual activity as the Talmud says in Brachos 22a that the scholars should not be with their wives in marital relations as often as “chickens” and that a scholar should only be involved in this as per his command for this. And that a person should sanctify himself with wine in small amounts as we know the Nazir is called by the Scriptures in Numbers 6:5, “The Holy Nazir”, and he should remember the evils described by the Torah regarding Noah and Lot and so he should separate himself from impurity even though this is not clearly prohibited in the Torah as it is recalled in Chagigah 18b “The clothing of the unlearned men are considered impure to the learned ones and as the Nazir is called holy by the Torah as he also keeps himself away from the impurity of dead bodies. Also he should guard his mouth and tongue from being involved in too much over eating and from disgusting things as is mentioned in Isaiah 9:16 “ All mouths that speak vile things” and he should sanctify himself in this way until he reaches the level of “Separation” as the Rabbis say of Rebbe Chiyah that he never spoke idle chatter in his days. Etc.



Questions to Consider

- ▶ How can over-indulgence diminish holiness even if one is using permissible items?
- ▶ What do you think cultivates holiness?

שו"ת אגרות משה יורה דעה ח"ג סימן לה

איסור עישון סמים בע"ה. ב' דר"ח אייר תשל"ג. מע"כ מוה"ר ירוחם פראס שליט"א

הנה בדבר אשר התחילו איזה בחורים מהישיבה לעשן חשיש (מעראוואנא), פשוט שהוא דבר אסור מכמה עיקרי דינים שבתורה חדא שהוא מקלקל ומכלה את הגוף, ואף אם נמצאו אנשים בריאים שלא מזיק להם כל כך אבל מקלקל הוא את הדעת ואינם יכולים להבין דבר לאשורו שזה עוד יותר חמור שלבד שמונע עצמו מלמוד התורה כראוי הוא מניעה גם מתפלה וממצות התורה שעשייה בלא דעת הראוי הוא כלא קיימם. ועוד שהוא גורם תאוה גדולה אשר הוא יותר מתאות אכילה וכדומה הצריכים להאדם לחיותו ויש שלא יוכלו לצמצם ולהעביר תאותם, והוא איסור החמור שנאמר בבן סורר ומורה על תאוה היותר גדולה שיש לו לאכילה אף שהוא לאכילת כשרות, וכ"ש שאסור להביא עצמו לתאוה גדולה עוד יותר ולדבר שליכא שום צורך להאדם בזה שהוא אסור, ואף שלמלקות נימא שאין עונשין מן הדין מ"מ לאיסורא ודאי עובר על לאו זה ואיכא גם הטעם דאיכא בבן סורר ומורה שסופו שילסטם את הבריות כדאיתא בסנהדרין בפ' בן סורר (ס"ח ע"ב). ועוד שהאב והאם של אלו שמעשנין זה מצטערים מאד אשר עוברין על מצות כבוד אב ואם. ועוד איכא איסור העשה דקדושים תהיו כפירוש הרמב"ן בחומש. וגם הם גורמים לאיסורים הרבה אחרים לבד זה, סוף דבר הוא פשוט וברור שהוא מאיסורים חמורים וצריך להשתדל בכל היכולת להעביר טומאה זו מכל בני ישראל ובפרט מאלו שלומדין בישיבות. והנני ידידו מוקירו, משה פיינשטיין.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein on Substance Abuse

Now, on the matter of the Yeshiva boys who have begun smoking marijuana, it is obvious that the matter is totally prohibited based on several essential laws of the Torah. Firstly it ruins and destroys the body, and even if you find healthy people to whom it causes little damage, you will find that it hurts their thinking and they cannot understand things well, and this is a very strict matter because besides it's causing them to be unable to study Torah properly it also stops them from being able to pray properly and to perform other Mitzvos of the Torah because Mitzvos without proper knowledge, makes it as if that Mitzvah had not been performed. Furthermore it causes great desire which is more than the ordinary type of desire for eating which is necessary to sustain life and some will not be able to control this desire and to cause this desire to pass and this is a serious offense because it is written regarding the "Rebellious Son" who has a great amount of desire for eating even though it is for healthy eating so certainly it is forbidden to bring one's

self to even greater desire (for marijuana) which has no benefit to the person since it is forbidden and even though as far as the punishment of lashes goes we never administer lashes in a situation where the prohibition had been inferred from reasoning nevertheless as far as the prohibition goes he definitely violates this prohibition, and there is also the reasoning that we find with the “Rebellious Son” which is that in the end he will follow his habit and eventually steal from people as the Talmud states in Sanhedrin in the chapter of the “Rebellious Son” 68b. And furthermore regarding the parents of the ones who smoke marijuana they will certainly bring pain to their parents and thereby violate the command to honor one’s parents as the Ramban states in his commentary to the Bible. And they also cause the violation of many other prohibitions besides these so the conclusion is that it is simple and clear that it constitutes severe violations and that one must try with all of one’s ability to cause this impurity to pass from all of Israel.

*Your Beloved Friend,
Moshe Feinstein*

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נֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם אוֹהֶבֶת לְהִתְרַגֵּשׁ, לֹא עַל שְׂמֵחָה לְבָדָה רַק גַּם סָתָם לְהִתְרַגֵּשׁ אוֹהֶבֶת הִיא, אִף לְהִתְרַגֵּשׁ בְּעֶצֶב וּבְכִיָּה רוֹצָה הִיא. אוֹהֵב הָאִישׁ לְרֹאוֹת מְרֹאוֹת אַיִמוֹת, וְלִשְׁמַע מַעֲשֵׂיֹת גּוֹרְאוֹת עַד כְּדֵי לְכַבּוֹת כְּדֵי לְהִתְרַגֵּשׁ עַל יָדָו. חֵק וְצָרָד הַנֶּפֶשׁ הִיא כִּשְׂאֵר חֲקִיתִיָּה וְצָרְכֵיֹתֶיהָ. לְכֵן רַק הָאִישׁ הַמְּשֻׁלֵּים חֲקָה זֹאת בְּעִבּוּדָה וּבְהִתְרַגְּשׁוֹת הַתּוֹרָה וְהַתְּפִלָּה, שׁוֹמֵר נֶפְשׁוֹ. מִה שְׂאֵין בֵּן מִי שֶׁעִבּוֹדֵת קָדְשׁוֹ בְּלֹא הִתְרַגְּשׁוֹת הִיא, (אִז) אוֹ שֶׁתְּבַקֵּשׁ לָהּ הַנֶּפֶשׁ הִתְרַגְּשׁוֹת אַחֲרוֹת זוֹלוֹת אִף שֶׁל עֲבָרָה לְהַשְׁלִים חֲקָה, אוֹ שֶׁפוֹף כָּל סוֹף תְּחִלָּה אַחַת מִמִּחְלוֹת הַנֶּפֶשׁ, מִחֶסֶר אַחַת מִצָּרְכֵיֹתֶיהָ.

Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, The Rebbe Piaseczno, from his personal Warsaw Diary, Entry #9

(Please note that this translation is from Yehoshua Starrett's translation of The Rebbe's Diary. This highly recommended book is called: "To Heal the Soul.")

The human soul relishes sensation, not only if it is a pleasant feeling but for the very experience of stimulation. Sooner sadness or some deep pain rather than the boredom of non-stimulation. People will watch distressing scenes and listen to heartrending stories just to get stimulation. Such is human nature and a need of the soul, just like all other needs and natures. So he who is clever will fulfill this need with passionate prayer and Torah learning.

But the soul whose divine service is without emotion will have to find its stimulation elsewhere, it will either be driven to cheap, even forbidden sensation or will become emotionally ill from lack of stimulation.



Questions to Consider

- ▶ Other than through substance abuse, what else in life can bring a "high"?
- ▶ Where in your life do you find emotional stimulation?