

# The Principle about Pleasure

---

**“If you pursue pleasure, you enchain yourself to suffering. But as long as you do not harm your health, enjoy without inhibition when the opportunity presents itself”**



This **Principle** may seem shocking the first time you read it, because you may think it is saying, “enjoy yourself, even if you harm others, because the only thing you need to worry about is your own health.” But this is not what it is saying.

Indeed, this Principle explains that it is absurd to harm your health through excessive indulgence in pleasures, or through directly harmful pleasures. In addition, this Principle stresses that if, because of beliefs or prejudices, you negate or deny pleasure, this also produces suffering. It also means that participating in pleasure while you have problems of conscience is harmful.

In summary, the main idea is not to pursue pleasure, but simply to enjoy it when it presents itself. To search for a pleasurable object when it is not present, or to deny it when it does appear, are both actions that are always accompanied by suffering.

This Principle (like all the others) should not be applied separately from the other Principles, nor should it be interpreted in ways that oppose the other Principles. For example, there is another Principle which says, “When you treat others as you want them to treat you, you liberate yourself.” Therefore, the meaning of each Principle changes when they are all exercised together, and not only as single, isolated Principles.

The following legend describes wrong postures concerning pleasure:

*The master gave as a present to his assembled disciples a magic cake, of which one could eat as much as one wished without it getting smaller. But the condition was to eat of it only once a day.*

*The master gave this present before undertaking a long journey, in order to avoid minor problems for the community of monks.*

*A first disciple tried the cake and was astonished by its exquisite taste. But he was scarcely satisfied and started to imagine the following day’s portion. Thus, his obsession with the cake*

*grew from day to day. It became so intolerable to him that he finally decided to put an end to the situation by eating a portion big enough to satisfy his desire till the next ration. But he ended up with such tremendous indigestion that it brought him to the brink of death.*

*In remembrance of this, a plaque was placed in front of the monastery with the following inscription: "He suffers who searches and who desires to conserve."*

*A second disciple, taking into account what had happened, did not at first want to try the cake, in spite of his great desire. It had been said that pleasure brought pain and, therefore, one should also not enjoy pleasure so as not to suffer. One thing led to the other, as experience showed.*

*Nevertheless, it happened that everyday the ascetic imagined mountains of cake without being able to take one bite. Sometimes, upon retiring, enormous cakes populated his dreams, and he awoke with a start, like someone who is bitten by a large ant. Finally, to avoid greater suffering, he one day tasted a piece of that marvelous food. In this way, he betrayed his convictions and moreover increased his obsession.*

*In front of the monastery a second plaque was placed which said, "The sin is not in the cake, nor in the belly, but in what is dreamt and thought of by the mind."*

*Finally, a third disciple asked about the tasks which the master had entrusted before leaving. He saw that the monastery and the farm and the animals had been left uncared for, and that the diverse opinions regarding the matter of the cake had divided the community and so, he started to make himself responsible for everything before the master's return. While he was ordering one of the rooms, he encountered the cause of the scandal. He stopped for awhile, cut a sizeable piece, and savored it slowly. Later he forgot about it, so busy was he with the work of the monastery.*

*On returning, the master saw the plaques by the entrance of the monastery and asked that it all be explained to him. The explanation motivated the master to get rid of the cake. Later he said, "A great injustice has been committed. Put a third plaque up which proclaims: "The excess of a strong fool and the asceticism of a weak scholar lead to the same end. What creates so many problems for the greedy is just a morsel for the saint."*