

# JIA GOTTLIEB MD

## Sample questions

### Where did you get your ideas for this book?

This book represents the distillation of what I have learned over a lifetime of exploration: traveling the world; studying yoga, meditation, martial arts, practicing holistic medicine and raising three daughters.

### Why were you meant to write this book?

I grew up at the intersection of three cultures with a Chinese mother and an Austrian father in a white middle-class suburb of Chicago. From an early age, I learned to bridge the east-west divide and question assumptions that others take for granted. It's no accident that my book begins with a critical look at the cultural assumptions that underlie Western civilization, particularly in regard to pleasure.

As a doctor, I witnessed a great deal of human suffering and learned that 80 percent of common diseases could be prevented by healthy lifestyle choices alone. So why don't we make those choices? A big part of the answer is that we're deeply confused about pleasure. My book is medicine for the soul, offering a simple but powerful antidote to over two thousand years of shared shame, guilt, and ignorance. I argue that the intelligent pursuit of pleasure is the ultimate guide to a beautiful and fulfilling life.

### What is pleasure?

Pleasure and its close cousin, pain, are the twin cardinal coordinates by which we take our bearings. Most people think pleasure and pain are opposites like the north and south poles of a compass, which is not true. Given such basic confusion, it's no wonder so many of us in our pursuit of pleasure end up in pain and suffering.

We need to expand our understanding of pleasure beyond sex and the purely physical. If you stop to think about it, the reason we value things like Beauty, Truth, and Freedom is that they make us feel good; they give us pleasure, which is the very meaning of goodness.

### How many kinds of pleasure are there?

One of the confusing things about pleasure is how many different kinds there are from a kick-ass workout to a Bach cello suite. We can make sense of these differences by looking through a Pleasure Prism, that separates any pleasurable experience into three primary colors: red (physical), green (emotional), and blue (mental). These colors (frequencies) correspond to the three evolutionary stages of the human forebrain: reptilian, early mammalian, and primate. When these three aspects of our being are well cultivated and integrated, they combine to form the clear, white light of spiritual pleasure, which turns out to be the highest pleasure.

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## Why is pleasure critical to our survival as a species?

The greatest challenge that faces us is not global warming, overpopulation, or nuclear annihilation. It is the human appetite. Not appetite per se, which is entirely normal, but the hijacking of our appetite away from natural, authentic sources of pleasure toward the mindless consumption of artificial pleasures that offer short-term thrills at the expense of long-term destruction. The only way to control the human appetite is to sate it, and the only thing that can truly sate it is high-quality, renewable pleasure.

## What do you mean by renewable pleasure?

Pleasure is best understood as a natural resource, as essential to our health and wellbeing as fresh air and clean water. Renewable pleasure is the pleasure one human being exchanges with another. Because we ourselves are its source, it is eminently renewable and sustainable.

## Why do you write that our capacity for pleasure is limited?

Just as we have a limited capacity for pain, we have a limited capacity for pleasure. There is only so much pleasure we can take before pulling back. In fact, many of our self-help efforts fail precisely because of our limited capacity to feel good.

## Why is discipline a myth?

Discipline is based on the notion that one part of me wants to do something that another part doesn't. It is based on inner conflict. But in a war with one's self, there can be no winners. We often fail not because of a lack of discipline but because of it. Discipline, in other words, is debilitating.

## What is the relationship between ecstasy and bliss to sexual orgasm?

For many people, orgasm is the only place they can reliably access the sublime spiritual pleasures of ecstasy and bliss, which is why it plays such a prominent role in our lives. Ecstasy is experienced when one surrenders at the peak of intense active pleasure. Bliss is experienced at the depths of passive pleasure. Thus, an orgasm represents a rapid alternation of ecstasy and bliss, two of the three gateways to Paradise.

## What is the third gateway?

Equanimity (peace of mind), which Epicurus considered the greatest pleasure of all.

## What are the Seven Immutable Laws of Pleasure?

1. **Original Wholeness**—You were born from pleasure and you are born for pleasure. It is your origin, source, and birthright.
- 2.

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3. **Colors**—Pleasure comes in four colors: red (physical), green (emotional), blue (mental), and white (spiritual).
4. **Contrast and Comparison**—Pleasure is relative and continually changes.
5. **Thresholds**—Pleasure is separated from pain by a threshold of intensity.
6. **Cycles**—Pleasure comes in waves.
7. **Desire and Surrender**—Pleasure is an inner dance of effort and relaxation.
8. **Renewable Pleasure**—The highest quality pleasure is that which you exchange with another human being.

## What would it look like to truly live in the pursuit of pleasure?

Most of us, at the core of our being, are driven by fear, the fear of scarcity, the fear of inadequacy, and the fear of death. We spend our lives building bulwarks against these fears, which alas are washed away like castles in the sand. If we continue living from fear and the us-against-them ethos, we will destroy ourselves. It's already happening. Our only hope is to evolve to our next stage of evolution—*homo spiritualis*. This will require a radical pivot from a fear-centric to a love-centric operating system. Pleasure *is* the path!