



## THE GOLDEN RULE OF LIFE

### Philosopher: Immanuel Kant

One day at school, the principal noticed a student, named Thomas, sitting outside the classroom during class time and hanging around alone during the breaks. The principal knew Thomas and found it surprising that he was always alone. He decided to approach him to find out what was going on.

**Principal:** Hello Thomas, can I sit next to you?

**Thomas:** Em, I guess so.

**Principal:** Is this seat taken?

**Thomas:** I don't know.

**Principal:** Thomas I have noticed that you've been alone quite often recently. Is there something that's bothering you?

Thomas looked at the principal with curiosity.

**Principal:** You know, Thomas, as you grow older, especially at your age, you will encounter many challenges and difficulties. Sometimes, you might not know what you should do.

Thomas was listening to the principal and appeared somewhat lost in his thoughts, as the principal continued talking.

**Principal:** There are so many choices, and so many things you would like to do, that feeling uncertain about how to handle them is completely normal.

**Thomas:** Well, that's my main concern. I want to act the way I choose, and not the way others think I should act.

**Principal:** Well, that's a good point, Thomas. Often, our choices are influenced by others rather than what we genuinely want to do. This ties into the concept of freedom, which means acting based on your own wishes.



**Thomas:** But is that really freedom? Sometimes I feel that if I act as I genuinely want to, I might risk being kicked out of my house.

The principal smiled at Thomas.

**Principal:** So how would you want to act? Are you thinking of committing a crime?

Thomas: No! But I still think that if I act how I want to act, my parents will not approve.

And he laughs again.

**Thomas:** I know very well that you are wondering why I'm always alone and skip classes.

The principal looks at Thomas intently and waits to hear what he has to say.

**Thomas:** I can't stand it anymore!

Thomas stands up and continues talking.

**Thomas:** I'm expected to be a good student at school, then go home, and keep up the same image; study, help my brother, clean my room. When I'm with my friends, I have to be a good friend; listen to their problems, support them. It seems like I must follow everyone's expectations - whether it's at school, at home or even with friends.

**Principal:** Well, this might not be a problem. It could also be a valid solution. You're doing things that help you become a better person.

**Thomas:** So, you see this as a solution? How?

**Principal:** Well desire and duty are two different things. And it's not just me saying this, Thomas.

**Thomas:** Then who? Did you talk with my parents?

Thomas laughed as he asked this question. The principal started laughing as well.



**Principal:** No, Thomas. It's Immanuel Kant.

**Thomas:** Oh, okay! But I'm not really in the mood for a lesson about Immanuel Kant right now.

**Principal:** No, Thomas! This is not a lesson, we are having a conversation. I will share what Immanuel Kant believed, and then you can share your own thoughts. According to Kant, it doesn't matter if you are obedient or if you are morally right. For Kant, the most important thing is for a person to consciously choose to behave in a morally proper and ethical way!

**Thomas:** What if I don't want to?

**Principal:** Well, this is an option, but I'm not entirely convinced that you don't want to. I think you are just feeling a bit tired and reacting to what you perceive as the weight of obedience.

Thomas looked at the principal and nodded affirmatively.

**Principal:** To help you Thomas, I will tell you something you may have already heard before: treat others as you want to be treated. Just like you, everyone can discern right from wrong. You need to act in such a way that those around you, including your family and friends, are never just the means, but always the end. This means that we should not take advantage of others for our own benefit.

**Thomas:** How about if we are being exploited by others for their own benefit?

**Principal:** That's a matter of conscience, Thomas. The correct attitude shapes human behavior and defines whether an action is morally right.

**Thomas:** Does that mean that those who act wrongly are immoral?

**Principal:** According to Kant yes. It's because they defy the moral law. However, it's not always that simple to determine what's morally right or wrong.

**Thomas:** And what happens to those who don't act morally? Should they be punished?

**Principal:** Thomas, do you know what it means to be moral and free at the same time? You can only be both when you truly understand your identity and consciously choose to embody it. It must be a conscious choice to act morally and be moral.

**Thomas:** Are you telling me this, so I don't get angry?

**Principal:** No, I'm telling you this to help you understand that your actions as a good student, brother and friend are driven by a choice to be good and moral. It's not about



obeying rules imposed by others. It is a conscious choice that also brings you happiness and pride.

Thomas: May I write down what you just said? It makes sense.

**Principal:** Of course, you can!

**Thomas:** Thank you!

And Thomas runs off to catch up with his friends before the last break is over.