

ARTICLE: DECODING THE TRUTH OF AUTHENTIC *IKIGAI*- TO LIVE BETTER

By Sarah Fathima

The trending buzzword amongst bookworms, philosophical enthusiasts, and life coaches recently has been the alluring Japanese philosophy *Ikigai*. But the *Ikigai* we all seem to know is surprisingly not what we assume; according to Japanese culture, it is way better! And beautifully simple.

Various authors and intellectuals have differing and subjective ideas and perceptions of *Ikigai*. At this point, let me give readers a statutory warning: as a humble and peace-loving writer, I do not intend to support or advocate for any one author or individual.

In this breakthrough article, I will present contrasting ideas about this fascinating Japanese concept that piqued my interest and enlighten you on how to channel *Ikigai* in your own lives to unlock the secret to a fulfilling and happy life. For real!

WHAT DOES IKIGAI MEAN?

Ikigai is a Japanese term that blends two words: "*iki*", meaning "to live," and "*gai*", meaning "reason," which translates to "a reason to live." In Japanese culture, *Ikigai* is the reason for our existence, a reason to jump out of bed every morning and look forward to living a series of tiny yet pleasurable experiences.

While some intellectuals associate *Ikigai* with finding value, purpose, or entrepreneurial success, the Japanese version emphasises that *Ikigai* is not about worldly wealth or a vocation. Rather, it is a profound way of living that celebrates the beauty of simple joys.

As quoted by Prof. Gordon Mathews, "The key to *Ikigai* is, it's what makes life seem worth it. It's when you feel 'Damn! It's good to be alive!' And that's an extraordinary feeling to have. It's wonderful that as human beings, we have an *Ikigai* enabling us to experience that."

THE ORIGIN:

Although *Ikigai* has long been a part of Japanese culture, it was first popularised by Japanese psychiatrist and academic Mieko Kamiya in her 1966 book “On the Meaning of Life” (*Ikigai ni Tsuite*).

THE PROBABLE MISINTERPRETATION:

The most popular book on *Ikigai*, “*IKIGAI - The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*”, by two non-Japanese writers, Hector Garcia and Francesc Miralles, includes the Marc Winn *Ikigai* Venn Diagram of purpose.



Image Source: Unsplash

A plausible misconception was born when the blogger, Marc Winn, wrote an inspiring post titled "What's your *Ikigai*?" after watching Dan Buettner's TED Talk on How to Live 100+.

Marc used a translated version of the *Zuzunaga* Venn Diagram of Purpose with '*Ikigai*' replacing the word 'purpose' in his famous blog post.

When I stumbled upon this book at the library, I was amazed by its novel, minimalist contents that promised every reader a more impactful life. The inevitable difference between the contradictions lies exactly here. The popular *Ikigai* Venn diagram, a supposedly Westernised misconception, endorses a formula:

Find the overlap between

- what you love,
- what you're good at,
- what the world needs, and
- what you can get paid for.

According to the Japanese, *Ikigai* is not a destination; it is a journey of self-actualisation. It's not something you chase or achieve, but rather what you feel.

It's all about finding joy in your routine and everyday moments, and making your life wholesome. Those fleeting moments of joy often escape our ignorant eyes without us even noticing.

Every person has a distinct *Ikigai*. For my grandmother, her *Ikigai*, or reason to get up from bed, is her cup of steaming, hot tea that she cheerfully sips every morning and evening.

My *Ikigai* is being able to do all that I thought I couldn't do, and relishing the triumph of laughing over things that once made me cry. Or if that sounds too cringeworthy, my *Ikigai* is my favourite meal: delicious pancakes with chocolate syrup on a bright Sunday. Yours could be entirely different, coated with the essence of the person you are. But we all seek meaning.

"To live is to find your Ikigai; to live fully is to share it with the world."

4 HASSLE-FREE, PROVEN WAYS TO BRING /KIGAI/ INTO YOUR LIFE:

1) Derive contentment from simple pleasures: Life need not always be exciting and thrilling. It's not a chapter from an Agatha Christie novel. Find happiness in everything you

do, no matter how unimportant it seems. There is a hidden joy in normally completing your chores in a day. Routine is not always boring; it can be therapeutic.

2) Live in the present: This is a blunder we all collectively make, feeling entangled in our past or worrying excessively about the unforeseen future. Anchor your mind to the present, to the 'here' and 'now'. You will feel calmer and in control of your thoughts and actions, rather than an oscillating pendulum swinging back and forth in despair.

3) Cherish joyful memories: In today's bustling world, we seldom spare a minute to reflect and be grateful for the happy memories we create, enjoy, and share. Memories are not just tangible pictures on your phone that can be deleted in a second.

Memories are gentle reminders of the genuine happiness we felt, can relate to, and cherish. Take time to revisit your joyous memories and learn to be thankful for the same.

4) Seek harmony: Go with the flow, savour the feeling and state of being at ease. That will enable you to find harmony, balance, and rhythm in your song of life.

Mieko Kamiya quotes: "There is no cruelty greater than to deprive humans of their *Ikigai*. And there is no greater love than to give humans their *Ikigai*."

To summarise, your *Ikigai* does not lie at the centre of those interconnecting circles in the Venn diagram. It is not about weighing your value and equating it to prosperity. It is about living life fully, rejoicing in the simple joys, being mindful of your state of existence, and being present.