

Ikigai Summary

By Héctor García

If you've heard of Jiro Ono, you'll be familiar with the idea of Ikigai, even if you've never been confronted by the word before. Jiro Ono is a 95-year-old sushi master, regarded as the best in the world.

Ikigai is a book of wisdom that examines the importance Japanese culture places on four intersecting tenets. These ideals, namely passion, mission, profession, and vocation, are central to leading long, productive, and full lives. A rich life, or "iki," comes from meaning and realizing one's dreams and aspirations, or "gai."

Authors Héctor García and Francesc Miralles provide us with tips on applying Japanese ikigai to our own lives. And, by doing so, they ensure that we'll live more purposeful and centered lives.

This summary will briefly guide you through the simple and beautiful idea of ikigai. We'll explore the concept of ikigai, evaluate meaning and purpose, and delve into the ideals of ikigai. By analyzing research from science and psychology, and drawing on the people of Okinawa, the authors also show how the principles of ikigai can increase longevity and scaffold a blissful life.

The Big Question

What makes you get up in the morning, and what's your reason, or reasons for living?

The French call it "*raison d'être*," the Japanese call it ikigai. Whatever you choose to call it, we all need to search within ourselves and find out what makes us tick. Whether it's a career, a sport, a hobby, we need to identify what we love doing, and what inspires us as we start each day. You may find that you have more than one ikigai; however, whatever you identify, you should hold it at the center of your life.

Have you ever heard of Blue Zones? There are five of them, The Ogliastra Region, Loma Linda, The Nicoya Peninsula, Ikaria, and Okinawa. Blue Zones are places that have been identified as the healthiest in the world, with higher than average rates of longevity. At the top of the longevity list is Okinawa, and when researchers delve into what makes the population so unique, the common thread is ikigai.

To find your ikigai you need to be focused, but don't obsess over it. If you don't find it first, it'll find you. Remember, it should be a balance between vocation and profession, and passion and mission. You need to do what you love and find meaningful, while also answering your true calling and earning a living.

There are two methods we can use to kickstart the process.

You may be familiar with the first method if you've read Viktor Frankl's poignant book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl argues that life is nothing without meaning. To find one's meaning, he suggests Logotherapy, a form of psychotherapy that aims to uncover our true purpose. Frankl argues that the greatest motivator in life is to create meaning, and that we will only be fulfilled when we do this. Meaning can change and evolve, so we need to foster awareness.

The second way we can help to find our ikigai is by undergoing Morita therapy. At the heart of Morita therapy is giving in to our feelings and emotions, rather than trying to control them. It's a slow and patient process that's aimed at decluttering thoughts and emotions. It requires us to go to bed for a week, and observe silence. After that, slow and repetitive processes are added into the day. These activities might include chopping wood, doing breathing exercises, or performing basic chores. After this process, you'll achieve greater clarity and self-awareness.

Five Principles to Live By

People in Okinawa have a sense of clear purpose, and they live a relaxed but busy life. They're not sedentary, and they busy themselves by forging a strong sense of community, working hard, and celebrating often. The principles that help them lead long and abundant lives are avoiding stress, cultivating positive and healthy habits, valuing friendship and community, living life at a steady pace, and embracing a spirit of optimism.

Nowhere was this spirit more evident to the authors, than in a small village called Ogimi. Ogimi is an exceptional place because it has the highest longevity rate of all of Okinawa. The authors give the example of attending a joint birthday party for a 99, 94, and 89 year old. At this particular celebration, the 89-year-old was considered to be young. The party was incredibly festive, and they celebrated by singing karaoke, and playing a local low-impact game that they lost to a 104-year-old woman.

Immersion in Flow

Have you ever been so immersed in something that you lose all sense of space and time? What were you doing? The answer to this question might help you to identify your ikigai.

You might be familiar with the term flow, from *Flow* and *The Rise of Superman*. Leading researcher on positive psychology, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, coined the idea of flow, and describes it as an optimal state of consciousness. It's the state of complete focus where you're concentrating so hard on an activity that you just focus on the moment.

They say that 'Time flies when you're having fun.' Being in a state of flow is when we find enjoyment in what we're focused on. The idea of ikigai is that we should be so passionate about pursuits that we lose track of time, and find immense fulfillment in what we dedicate our lives to. Flow allows us to have a clear sense of purpose, be energized by our work and pursuits, and to live in the moment.

The Japanese place huge value on flow. They distinguish between high-value and low-value activities, and for this reason, they're seldom sedentary and lead purposeful and productive lives.

Flow is the state between anxiety and boredom. When you're looking to get into a state of flow, make sure that you challenge yourself, but that it's not too challenging that it causes you stress. If you look at your comfort zone, increase the difficulty level by 4% so that you're challenged enough to stretch your abilities. Getting into a state of flow is also about setting goals for ourselves. Every day, write down a list of achievable goals, because it'll help you commit to what you need to do, and alleviate the temptation to procrastinate. Adopt a state of mindfulness and minimize distractions to help you focus. Finally,

remember that multitasking is a myth.

If you look at the Japanese for inspiration, you'll see an abundance of individuals who have dedicated their lives to a single craft. These individuals are known as Takumi. Tatsuru Rai has devoted his life to making the best soba noodles in Japan. Jiro Ono is the world's greatest sushi master, and Tesshu Takemori makes near-perfect handmade makeup brushes. The message is, choose one thing, focus on it but don't obsess over it, and pursue excellence and meaning through your ikigai.

The Secrets to Longevity

Longevity and ikigai go hand-in-hand, and you can't have one without the other. The Japanese believe that youthfulness can be maintained and that we need to connect our bodies with our minds in order to harness our vitality and life force. If you keep your enthusiasm and joie de vivre, you'll live a longer and more fulfilling life.

Studies show that the mind is incredibly powerful when it comes to controlling aging. We need to focus on two things: coping with stress and keeping our minds busy and purposeful.

Stress has been shown to age our cells, and contributes to insomnia, high blood pressure, stomach and chest pains. Managing stress is absolutely crucial, and the book provides numerous tips on how to adopt a more serene way of living.

As with all of the other muscles in our body, the brain has to be exercised. We need to keep our brains sharp by getting out of our comfort zones and stretching ourselves, continuously seeking knowledge

and skills, and playing games. Western culture is increasingly sedentary, and we have to adopt the mindset of moving more throughout the day. This doesn't mean we have to join a gym or run marathons; there are loads of other ways to build movement into our daily routine. Housework and gardening are highly productive ways to get moving, and opting to walk or take the stairs makes a big difference to upping activity levels. The book also suggests a range of activities, such as yoga and Tai Chi. These exercises get us moving and help to forge connections between the body and mind.

Western culture has also adopted a very dangerous attitude towards sleep. Sleep isn't something that we should be starving ourselves of. We've been led to believe that working more and sleeping less should be rewarded. However, studies show that we need sleep to be productive. Sacrificing sleep is highly detrimental to our health, and it actually makes us worse at our jobs. So if you want to stay young and live longer, you need to focus on getting a good night of sleep as often as possible.

Diet is also crucial. When analyzing the Okinawan diet, scientists have discovered that they consume fewer calories than most other places in the world. The Okinawans restrict their calories, but they have excellent and highly nutritious diets. They consume almost no empty calories, and they only eat until they're 80% full. Many of them practice intermittent fasting, or have days where they eat fewer calories.

Although the population generally eats small and limited portions, their diet is incredibly varied. On average, they consume 18 different types of foods per day, and favor many vegetables and legumes. Furthermore, their diets are low on salt and sugar and very high in antioxidants. If you want to up your antioxidant intake and add some variety and exoticism to your daily plate, why not try sweet potatoes, miso, kelp, tofu, or oily fish?

Other great things to add to our diets are beverages like green tea and jasmine tea.

Adopting a Resilient Mindset

How do you react when things don't go your way?

We can continually improve how we deal with setbacks, and if we truly want to master our ikigai, we have to learn how to handle obstacles. To develop a more resilient mindset, we need to embrace life's imperfections and the fact that time is limited. What's more, we need to discard any feelings of fragility and learn to build our strength from within.

The Japanese embrace two beautiful terms, "wabi-sabi," and "iche-go iche-e." Wabi-sabi is the belief that there's beauty in imperfection, and that reality is better than fantasy. It's the idea of finding flaws and seeing the beauty within them. Perhaps you've heard of kintsugi? This is the art of repairing broken pottery by fixing it with lacquer, usually dyed gold. Rather than hiding flaws with clear glue, the Japanese celebrate the breakage by drawing attention to it. Iche-go Iche-e is about celebrating the here and now. Many Japanese objects and their traditional architecture are distinguishable by the use of natural and fragile materials. This focus on the delicate and impermanent, emphasizes the ethereal and fleeting quality of life, and reminds us to live in the present.

Building resilience is also about protecting yourself. As the saying goes, 'Don't put all your eggs in one basket.' Create options for yourself, so if things don't go as planned, you have alternatives; you also need to balance taking risks and being conservative. Get rid of low-value pursuits that sap your time and energy needlessly; focus instead on everything

that adds value and meaning to your life.

In Conclusion

Ikigai is a book that shows us that there's extraordinary beauty in simplicity. By embracing the rhythm of life, and pouring our energy into meaningful pursuits, we will live longer and more fulfilled lives.

We should all be inspired by the number of Japanese *Takumi* who are way past the Western retirement age. In fact, the Japanese believe that we should never retire, and that we need to keep up with our *ikigai* indefinitely. Whereas many of us think that to achieve our goals we need to rush through processes, the Japanese believe that true accomplishment comes from a steady but energetic pace.

Finally, connect your body and mind to your purpose, and realize that your body needs to be nurtured in order to fulfill this purpose. Focus on eating well, exercising often, sleeping more, smiling, and being sociable. Connect with friends and family, delight in the wonders of nature, live in the moment, and find harmony through gratitude.

Searching for perfection is futile; instead, why not find your *ikigai* and celebrate the beauty of imperfection.