

Book Review

Ikigai. The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life

Authored by Héctor García and Francesc Miralles. 2017. Translated by Heather Cleary. Penguin Books. New York, NY, USA. 194 pp.

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“Only staying active will make you want to live a hundred years.”

This book review began when a dear colleague of mine who teaches chemistry in one of my professional affiliations surprised me with an email referring to my life as having achieved *ikigai* (Figure 1), a purposeful life.

Although I had heard the term and seen the older people on television who feel forever young in the Japanese island of Okinawa, never have I read about *ikigai*. So, I decided to learn more about, or as some like to say these days, “take a deeper dive” into, *ikigai*. Through my adult life, many people have told me that I look much younger than my real chronological age. Sometimes, I wonder if that is because long ago, I found *ikigai*. Yet, every blue moon, a few others have asked me if I have retired! As I gained courage and confidence in the relatively new culture of the USA, I remembered the words of my major professor in Puerto Rico and began answering that I never plan to retire because “I am forever young”, more or less the spirit of the epigraph to the book and this book review, and that, as a friendly colleague has told me, I have taken an alternative career path.

Finding, or more precisely, making meaning (c.f., Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy), also known as shaping the ever-changing clay of our lives, is essential for experiencing *ikigai*. The material basis of *ikigai* includes eating and drinking in moderation and not taking life too seriously (e.g., treating others like siblings, laughing a lot, etc.). Although nobody knows exactly when our time on Earth will end, living in *ikigai*, like the French, “*joie de vivre*”, could make us live a more fulfilling and grateful life. Gratefulness, the first concept that my dearie wife taught me, goes a long way towards *ikigai*. Some of my colleagues where I work face-to-face often remark that I often look filled with joyful energy. And when I am not happy doing something, I want out of that situation in a hurry.

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Figure 1. Ikigai in relation to other human activities. Authored by YawLifeInc. “This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.” https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Modern_Ikigai.jpg

Although these days I have the same determination to keep working, I like to add that “if I ever become senile, then it is fair to retire” with my realistic and joyful smile. In *Candide* (1759), Voltaire taught us to “cultivate our own garden”, namely, to put our minds and hearts into our own activities, be at peace with ourselves as well as our neighbors, and do productive things.

I hope everyone finds their own ikigai.

For Further Reading

Kudo, A. 2018. *My Little Ikigai Journal. A Journey into the Japanese Secret to living a Long, Happy, and Purpose-Filled Life.* Castle Point Books. St. Martin’s Press. 124 pp.
Mitsuhashi, Y. 2018. *Ikigai. Giving Every Day Meaning and Joy.* Kyle Books. Octopus Publishing Group Ltd. London, England, UK. 110 pp.