

Discover your 'Ikigai'

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." – Ralph Waldo Emerson.

How do you feel about the emotional quality of your life, that enormous part of you that's often called the 'inner self'? Are you stressed, do you find it difficult to sleep, do thoughts of work fill your mind? If so, it may be time to find your 'ikigai'.

Ikigai is a Japanese word that has no direct translation into English. Ikigai means “the reason for being, the sense of being connected to something deeper and more meaningful than day-to-day survival, a quality that brings richness and fulfilment to our lives.”

In Japanese, ikigai is written 生きがい combining 生き, which means 'life', with がい, which means 'to be worthwhile'. Ikigai gives us an invaluable sense of purpose.

When we follow our ikigai, we discover a passion inside us, a unique talent that brings meaning to every day and drives to share the best of ourselves with others.

Every day when we wake up and start a new day, we fill it with great power. We create this day. We create a reason for being in a world that is a lot much more significant than just our personal survival. We create ikigai, the quality of our life, the reason for being.

According to the Japanese, everyone has an ikigai, and everyone has the potential to develop their 'raison d'etre'. We can put the track down in front of our train, and change our direction in tune with our being; in tune with our emotions, our senses, and our integrity. We cannot imagine how energised, alive, focused and full of natural strengths we can feel.

Let's go to Okinawa

Now for a moment let us imagine ourselves on a small island in the south of Japan called Okinawa. The inhabitants of this island are widely known for their extraordinary longevity - there are 24.55 people over the age of 100 for every 100,000 inhabitants - far more than the global average. Is it a healthy diet, a simple life in the outdoors, the subtropical climate or something really precious that shapes their life?

Hector Garcia and Francesc Miralles studied the secrets of the Japanese centenarians in person, in their rural villages, with people who speak ancient dialects.

The first thing that surprised them when they arrived in the village was that incredible friendliness of the residents, an extreme joy that guides them through their whole life. Okinawans live by the ichariba code where they 'treat everyone like a brother', and practice 'yuimaaru' or teamwork, being a part of a community. They nurture friendship, eat lightly, get enough rest, do regular moderate exercise and cherish each new day.

Now let us think about ourselves. Now. Today. Every day. Every moment. In today's hectic life we often wake up with the thought – "I need to go to work, earn money, double the revenue of my business, I need to win this competition and get funding today. I need to earn, win, gain, sell, buy, meet, travel and so on."

We usually don't have time to think about our energy, fulfilment, integrity, stillness, inner harmony and balance. "I just can't fail today, and I need to focus on my business now. I don't have time for morning exercises, healthy food, walking in the fresh air and a weekend trip with family or friends. It's too much for now." These words are may be a bit exaggerated, but they ring true for many of us. We often do not have time for ourselves. From the very first minute when we wake up, we are absorbed with various thoughts, plans, and problems.

I used to think only about work

This is what I used to experience myself about two years ago. I thought only about work. I worked almost 24 hours a day. It was like a circle, never-ending, eternal and gravitational. Work. Business. Money. More money. More business. And I completely forgot about life. Life in its full. Experience in its all senses.

Inner peace. It sounds so big and powerful. And at the same time, so difficult to achieve. But actually it is straightforward - inner peace is our choice. Every day we have between 50,000 and 90,000 thoughts, which are going on all the time, mostly unconsciously. Most of them are the same, and most of them go unnoticed – just a background hum that interferes with our inner and outer world.

Sometimes we have different thoughts on different topics. Sometimes it looks like a nightmare, and you think "How have I even got this in my head?" The only thing we really need in such moments is to switch off all this hum in the head and just pause. Stop for a minute. And when we stop, we can direct our attention to something that really matters, something really valuable and precious. If we realise, that "we are not our thoughts, but we have thoughts", life will get much better.

When my brain analysed everything

There was a period in my life when my brain analysed everything all the time. Even while sleeping, in my dreams I was thinking and worrying about something. It was constant. I thought I could do nothing to break out of this cycle. And I really could do nothing, until I realised one important thing - I am okay. There is nothing wrong with me.

When I get multiple worries and thoughts, I ask myself – “Are these worth worrying about right now? Or can I leave them to one side?” I realised, that if we accept ourselves, the invasive thoughts just pass.

You can change your mind for the better

It is fantastic to discover that our brain changes shape according to how we use it. It's called neuroplasticity.

Our brain has been reshaping and shifting all our lives as a result of the experiences we have had and what we have made of them. Here we think about our vast potential not used yet. We can think about our dreams that we would like to fulfill but think impossible. They are possible. Everything is possible. It just depends on how you approach your goal. How you believe in it. What is your motivation? What is your plan to achieve it? Your attitude. And your actions.

For example, imagine that you have spent the last five years of your life on a job that brings you lots of money, but no personal growth. You may feel like you have lost your energy, motivation and passion for life. But you always have a choice. You can just do it – change your life in one day and start doing what you really love. Or you can keep your great potential buried. Just remember - our brain is prone to neuroplasticity, to changes, to positive changes, to development and improvement.

Appreciate the world

The ability to be appreciative shifts the way we see the world and alters our brain's shape and wiring. We get more connected to ourselves and the whole world. Whatever we focus on gets bigger and attracts more energy. We discover our ikigai.

This article, written by Ekaterina Voznesenskaia, is inspired by the books: 'Mindfulness' by Dr Barbara Mariposa and 'Ikigai' by Hector Garcia and Frangesc Miralles.