

# Finding My Ikigai

Category: Getting Motivated

written by Saleena Gul Arif | November 12, 2024

As I read the book *Ikigai* and explored the Japanese concept of that name—essentially, finding life’s purpose—I was drawn to the serene depictions of rural Japanese life, where people find meaning in simple routines—tending gardens and engaging in community rituals that foster longevity and happiness. The stories are beautiful, and it’s heartening to know that places exist where life is peaceful and its purpose clear. Yet I approached this book during a period of existential reflection, seeking guidance on finding purpose amidst the complexity of modern life. In this context, the concept of *ikigai* offered inspiration but lacked practical answers.

One question stayed with me: As a parent, can purpose be anything beyond caregiving, especially when children are young and dependent? Parenthood—with its demands on time, energy, and love—is a profound and consuming purpose. But for those of us in health care, must purpose be found outside of work, in hobbies or leisurely pursuits, if one’s work itself is a calling? For me, a physician dedicated to the foundations of the medical system—primary care, geriatrics, inpatient internal medicine—purpose is interwoven with the act of service to my patients. I spend countless hours doing patient care, often making sacrifices that impact my family’s needs. This work doesn’t feel separate from purpose; it feels like an expression of it.

In medicine, I find my *ikigai* not in a specific role or specialty but in the act of holding the system together for those who need it most. My commitment to patient care—the hours spent with each person, the conversations held, and the sacrifices made—all speak to a life of service. Why, then, should I seek another purpose? Sometimes I feel as if my work itself is my purpose, an offering to the world around me, and that feels complete.

Reflecting on this, I realize that perhaps my *ikigai* is the bridge between my roles as a parent and a physician. Both roles are meaningful; both fulfill a need for connection and compassion. Rather than separating them, maybe the path is to see both as facets of a single, evolving purpose—to serve and nurture, whether in the context of family or community.

*Ikigai* has reminded me that purpose is often found in small, everyday acts. For now, my purpose is here, in the lives I touch and the lives I build, one moment at a time.

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