

Ikigai, the Reason for Being

Ikigai, the Reason for Being

Page | 1 Good morning everyone. This is Dharma espresso for today on Ikigai, the reason for being.

I would like to tell you the following story:

In a small village outside Osaka, a woman was seriously ill and close to death. In a sudden vision, she found herself in heaven, facing all her predecessors.

She heard a voice asking: “Who are you?” She replied: “I am the mayor’s wife.” The voice asked back: “Oh, I didn’t ask whose wife you are, I just want to ask who you are.” “Oh, I am a mother of four children.” “Oh, I don’t ask whose mother you are, I only ask who you are.” “Oh, I am a teacher.” “No, I don’t ask what you do; I just want to ask who you are.” In continuing, she replied: “Oh, I am a Shintoist.” “No, I didn’t ask about your religion.” Finally she answered: “Oh, I am the one who gets up every morning, takes care of her family, and cultivates the children’s minds in school.” That answer then awakened her and brought her back to earth.

The next day, when the sun rose, she felt she had found the meaning and purpose of life. She got up, prepared food for the children, got ready for her teaching job, and felt that the day was extremely beautiful and happy. She had found what the French people call “raison d’être,” the reason for being, what the Japanese call “Ikigai.” This is a very important philosophy, which is the philosophy of finding the very reason for being, why we live: “Ikigai.”

In the so-called Confucian culture, familiar to the Vietnamese and Chinese, we always think of ourselves in a particular relationship. For example: I am the child of my father and my mother; I am of this family, or of that family; I am the older brother of this man, the younger brother of that woman; I am the father of this young guy studying at Harvard; I am the father of this young girl studying at Stanford; I am the owner of this Tesla car, etc. I am this and that, always defined in a certain relation, and that relation always having to do with fame, status, or power. As you see, we think of ourselves in certain relations, but we don’t think of who we are. The finding of who we are is called “Ikigai”. It is the philosophy of finding the reason for being, the reason for existence. As a human being, each one of us sooner or later will go and search for it. Looking for the reason for existence is also a mission of ours.

Today, I will talk about 10 wisdoms connected with the finding of the reason for being which enables us to accomplish these 10 things. On the reverse side, once we have done these 10 things, we will gradually but very clearly find the reason for existence and know who we are. Once knowing who we are, our life will be very happy because we will no longer run after superficial matters.

The 10 wisdoms are as follows:

First, stay active. Don’t be passive, don’t sit still, always be on the move, keep exercising, keep talking, and keep busy doing things.

Ikigai, the Reason for Being

Second, take it slow. In everything take it easy, don't rush, don't be frantic, and don't be nervous. Be gentle and easy.

Third, don't fill your stomach too much that you're unable to stand up and fall asleep right on the table.

Page | 2 Fourth, surround yourself with good friends.

Fifth, get your body in good shape for your next birthday; otherwise, you might not reach your next birthday.

Sixth, smile. Don't spend a day without smiling. Some people watch YouTube the whole day and keep laughing. It is not a bad idea as it is a way to keep us happy. It is important, however, to smile and make others smile.

Seventh, reconnect with nature. It is very important to go out and take a walk. It's important to smile and walk in nature.

Eighth, give thanks. We should always give thanks to our ancestors and to nature. Be grateful to our parents, predecessors, nature, and everything around us. Always appreciate.

Ninth, live in the moment, in the present. Yesterday is gone and the past cannot be changed. Tomorrow has not arrived yet, and should not be worried about. Live in the present, and enjoy the company and the conversation with the people in your presence.

And finally, tenth, follow your Ikigai, your reason for being. Every day, we should find ourselves following our reason for being rather than following money, fame, gossip, or superficial matters. We should live in a way that our reason for being grows clearer. In going deeper into the subject, you will see that Ikigai consists of 4 elements:

First, Ikigai is the thing that we love to do with all our heart, with devotion and enthusiasm, as if it is our mission.

Second, it must be a thing that we are good at doing.

Third, it must be something that is universally needed. Take painting or drawing as an example, we may be good at it, but it must be geared to what the world needs.

And last, we have to do something that we can get paid for to support our livelihood. So, if you love and are good at painting, you produce paintings needed by others or paint subjects needed by the world. In the end, people, companies or organizations can use and pay for your talents. If you do so, you will be happy, and will see your reason for being very clearly.

Therefore, those four things are:

What you love

What you are good at

What the world needs from you

And what you can get paid for

These four things make up the so-called Ikigai, or the reason for being, and we always feel happy because we are able to do those four things.

Ikigai, the Reason for Being

I will continue this subject later. I wish you a nice day and hope you find your Ikigai today.

Dharma Master Heng Chang

Page | 3

(Translated and transcribed by Compassionate Service Society)