



Ikigai and Zen thinking share a deep affinity in their quest for meaning, presence, and self-realization. Zen, a branch of Buddhism that has deeply influenced Japanese culture, provides valuable insight into the concept of Ikigai and how to cultivate an existence grounded in the present moment.

At the heart of Zen thinking is the practice of meditation, or "zazen". This silent and still seating aims to calm the incessant flow of thoughts to access a state of clear consciousness and total presence. By cultivating this quality of attention, Zen invites us to fully connect with each moment, to embrace life in all its richness and simplicity. This presence to oneself and to the world resonates with the quest for Ikigai, which encourages us to fully engage in the activities that give meaning to our existence, to find our reason for being in the present moment rather than in a hypothetical future.

Zen also teaches us the art of letting go, the ability to accept life as it is, without clinging to the desires and aversions that stir our mind. By cultivating a state of equanimity and inner detachment, we learn to navigate the highs and lows of existence with serenity and resilience. This wisdom of letting go can nourish our quest for Ikigai, helping us overcome the obstacles and doubts that line our path. It invites us to embrace our deep nature, to accept our strengths and weaknesses with kindness, rather than getting lost in an illusory quest for perfection.

A striking example of the convergence between Zen and Ikigai is that of Japanese martial arts, such as karate, judo, or aikido. These disciplines, which combine physical rigor and spiritual development, are deeply imbued with Zen thinking. The intensive practice of katas (codified sequences), the pursuit of perfection in movement, and the total commitment of body and spirit reflect this quest for presence and self-mastery. For many martial arts

masters, their discipline is more than a sport or a means of self-defense: it is an Ikigai, a path of personal realization and connection with deep values such as respect, courage, and humility.

Zen also invites us to cultivate a beginner's mind, an attitude of openness and freshness in our relationship with the world. Rather than locking ourselves into our certainties and habits, it encourages us to approach each situation with curiosity and wonder, as if we were discovering it for the first time. This ability to reinvent ourselves, to shed our conditioning to embrace the new, is a valuable quality for nourishing our Ikigai. It allows us to remain open to unexpected opportunities, to discover new facets of ourselves and others, to constantly enrich our vision of the world and our reason for being.

Zen thinking also emphasizes the interdependence of all beings and phenomena. It reminds us that we are not isolated entities, but parts of a vast network of relationships that connects us to all living things. This awareness of our deep interconnectedness with the world can nourish our quest for Ikigai, giving our reason for being a wider and more altruistic dimension. It invites us to cultivate compassion, to work for the common good, to find meaning in serving others and the planet.

An inspiring example of this convergence between Zen and Ikigai is Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist. Throughout his life, he embodied a total commitment to non-violence, inter-religious dialogue, and mindfulness. His Ikigai, deeply rooted in the practice of Zen, led him to found practice communities engaged in social action, to write numerous books to share the wisdom of Buddhism, to work tirelessly for reconciliation and peace. His journey illustrates how the Zen quest for inner awakening can translate into concrete commitment to transform the world and alleviate suffering.

Zen and Ikigai thus invite us to a quest for meaning anchored in presence to oneself and to the world. They encourage us to find our unique path by cultivating letting go, open-mindedness, and awareness of our interdependence with all beings. By embracing the wisdom of Zen in our search for Ikigai, we learn to align our inner life and our outer life, to find a balance between personal development and serving others. This path of realization, both intimate and universal, offers us a valuable guide to navigate the challenges of existence and chart our own path to a life rich in meaning and fulfillment.

The meeting between Zen and Ikigai thus opens a space for reflection and practice to cultivate the art of living in mindfulness. It invites us to embrace the present moment in all its richness and simplicity, to find our purpose in total commitment within each moment. By cultivating attentive presence, letting go, and open-mindedness inherent in Zen, we create the conditions conducive to the emergence and blossoming of our Ikigai. This approach, both spiritual and pragmatic, offers us a pathway of wisdom and self-realization, an invitation to live fully and authentically, in harmony with our deep nature and the world around us.

Takeaways:

1. Ikigai and Zen share a quest for meaning, presence, and self-realization.
2. The practice of meditation (zazen) in Zen aims to calm the mind and cultivate an attentive presence, in line with the quest for Ikigai.
3. Zen teaches the art of letting go and accepting life as it is, a wisdom that can nourish the search for Ikigai.
4. Japanese martial arts, imbued with Zen thinking, illustrate the convergence between Zen and Ikigai, combining physical rigor and spiritual development.
5. Zen encourages cultivating a beginner's mind, an attitude of openness and curiosity, valuable for nurturing one's Ikigai.
6. Zen thinking emphasizes the interdependence of all beings, inviting to find meaning in serving others and the planet.
7. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk and peace activist, embodies the convergence between Zen and Ikigai, translating his quest for inner awakening into a concrete commitment to transform the world.
8. Zen and Ikigai invite aligning inner and outer life, cultivating attentive presence, letting go and open-mindedness, to live fully and authentically.