

# Compendium of Life Principles: How to live a satisfying life and form meaningful relationships?

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# Chapter 1

## Preface

The goal of this writing is to summarize a set of rules that I believe to be important and beneficial to follow while making personal decisions. Most are obvious principles, but they are sometimes overlooked. So, I believe it is helpful to remember and repeat what's important.

To explain my view with an analogy: Principles serve as a compass that, in a dark tunnel where the road ahead is unclear, can help find the right way out, without getting lost. So, I say follow the compass when in doubt.

Overall, this is meant to be a practical guide, aiming for what is best personally and “what can help” rather than prescribing morals on “what should”. Since I believe actions are ultimately what counts, I expressed the principles in the form of actionable terms, with pointers for further concepts to learn.

With these in mind, the first principle and a warning to follow:

### 1.1 Principle of Advice

- Take all advice with a grain of salt, think critically and assess limitations.
- Realize there is no single answer, multiple paths can reach the same destination.
- But, don't ignore what is obvious. If everywhere smells shit, look under your shoe.
- Most importantly, live and be true to yourself.



## Chapter 2

# Relationships

### 2.1 Principle of Self-Value

- Value yourself first.
- Stand up for yourself, don't let others mistreat you.
- Acknowledge that you are not responsible for other people's happiness.
- Take responsibility for yourself and your happiness.
- Limit altruism, do not sacrifice yourself for others.
- Not to say be selfish, but don't be self-less either. Have an identity.
- Don't let your value be defined by your value to others. Remember your value to yourself.

### 2.2 Principle of Nonmaleficence

- Do not harm others if they don't harm you or anyone else.
- Do not tolerate, trust or accept those who would use and harm others for selfish reasons.
- If retaliation is warranted, make sure magnitude is proportional to, and not exceed the intended harm or actual harm (whichever is greater).
- (Try to) Protect those who are in need, who are harmed by others for selfish reasons. Particularly those who lack the power to protect themselves.
  - Only if you can. Don't be a hero. See principle of self-value, you are not responsible for other people's happiness.
  - But remember the poem: "First they came for..."

## 2.3 Principle of Loyalty

- Do not betray those who are loyal to you.
- Be loyal to those you trust, and aim for mutual benefit.
- Choose your allies well. Go for people who won't betray you but will lift you up.
- In return, provide support and encouragement to your allies. Lift them up.
- Obey the rule of reciprocity in your interactions, for as long as you wish to sustain a connection.

## 2.4 Principle of Reciprocity

- Follow the rules of reciprocity, to form or continue a connection:
  - Key loop: Give what you take  $\Leftrightarrow$  Receive what you give.
  - Reciprocate when you receive a favor, if feasible.
  - Don't be transactional. Give without an expectation to receive. Don't give when you can't afford not to receive.
  - If your favor is not reciprocated, don't blame or demand. But also, don't repeat if the favor is costly to you.
    - \* If this happens, take it as a signal that the other party isn't interested in connecting with you. So, stop the loop.
    - \* Similarly, don't reciprocate if you would like to stop the loop. It doesn't have to last forever.
  - While reciprocating, aim for a favor that is equal or slightly more in magnitude than what you received.
  - Start small to initiate the loop, and grow your way up.
  - Ignore small variations and violations as trust builds up.
- Understand reciprocal altruism. That's the nature's way of establishing cooperation. Trust it.
- Clarify beforehand if you will expect something back from a favor.
  - That's a transaction. Negotiate and come to an agreement beforehand. Verbally if it is someone you trust, or by written contract.
  - Do not hold any previous favors you've done as leverage, particularly unsolicited. That would be manipulation. Deals are negotiated beforehand.
- Exercise caution and assess motivation behind any favors.
  - Check out the notes on reciprocal relations and goodwill for further reading.
- When in doubt, match the other person's efforts.



## 2.5 Principle of Cooperation

- Aim to maximize mutual benefit.
  - Key is to increase total gain by working together.
  - Don't ask for favors that provide little benefit to you but impose a big burden on the other person. Likewise, don't accept requests that comes with great cost to you but only a small benefit to the other person.
- Engage in productive exchanges. In many cases, it is easy to contribute to another person's happiness with minimal cost to yourself.
  - Small acts of kindness can serve this purpose.
  - Take initiative sometimes. It can pay off.
- Defend your interests first. Cooperate only when the interests align and the pay-off will be beneficial to both parties, in short-term or long-term.
  - Not always for foreseeable gains. Give leeway when there is little cost to you.
  - Do good for the sake of doing good, sometimes.

## 2.6 Principle of Respect

- Do not think or claim you are more important than others. Everyone is important to themselves from their perspective.
  - Be aware that your importance to others will generally be proportional to what you can contribute to their lives. Wish to be more important? Contribute more.
  - Or better yet, have some self-esteem and be important to yourself first. Outside validation will never be sufficient by itself anyway.
- Do not judge anyone. But, always assess.
  - Assess their potential to be a trustworthy and valuable ally.
  - Also, evaluate any risks involved with someone. Don't wait for harm to come, take any necessary precautions. Disconnect if necessary. Remember you are responsible for your well-being.
- Avoid stereotypes. Do not make broad assumptions.
  - The world and people are complex. Consider everyone as an individual. Realize that group traits rarely explain individual differences adequately.
- Always be kind, unless otherwise warranted. Don't be an asshole without reason.

- Admit your mistakes. Try to compensate any damage to others, if feasible.
  - Similarly, respect those who admit their mistakes and offer them a chance at redemption. People that try to hide their mistakes wouldn't be great allies.
- Do not believe you are so clever and can manipulate or cheat your way easily. People aren't stupid. The vibe you give will reflect your intentions.
  - In many cases, selfish deeds will come back to bite you, sooner or later.
  - Instead, be sincere and approach people with goodwill. Follow the principle of authenticity to form close relationships.

## 2.7 Principle of Authenticity

- Be honest with yourself, always.
- Do what you say. Say what you do. Follow through your promises.
- Don't lie or mislead others without good reason, especially for personal benefit.
- Be open and honest in your interactions, with people you trust.
- Have people in your life you can trust, where you can be yourself without judgement. Prioritize and make effort to form such close relationships.
- Treat others how you want to be treated yourself.
  - Better yet, treat them how they want to be treated. When feasible.
- Be open with your feelings and aspirations. First, with yourself. Then, with others you trust. This is important.
- Express your thoughts and feelings clearly. Especially when you have a concern. Don't play it off as a joke, nor let someone else dismiss it as a joke.
  - Learn to recognize passive-aggressive behaviors. Prefer assertive communication over aggressive or indirect means, unless warranted otherwise.
- Know your limits. Be assertive in establishing your boundaries. Don't shy away from conflict if violated. But, pick your fights. Goal is to defend. Avoid unnecessary fights, especially if this is not an repeated interaction. Compromise as necessary.
  - In trivial disputes, let the person who cares more have their way, if mutually beneficial cooperation is feasible. But, do not agree what you believe to be untrue. Be true to yourself and defend what's important.

- In conflicts involving repeated interactions, aim for a compromise when possible, unless there is a breach of trust. Threats, manipulation, dishonesty and alike would be immediate violations of trust. Deal with aggression as appropriate.

## 2.8 Principle of Humility

- Accept people as they are and acknowledge that you can't change them.
  - You do not have such power, only they do.
- Be realistic. Admit your weaknesses. But, don't be too hard on yourself.
  - Accept what you cannot change. Prioritize what you can improve.
- Accept when you are wrong. It's okay to be wrong. Can't always be right.
  - Do not attribute your self-worth to being right. So what, if you are wrong?
- Remember that you need other people. Can't do everything by yourself.
  - Can't survive alone, nor live a long, fulfilling life without others.
  - Ask for help, if needed.
- Acknowledge that your thoughts or feelings do not always reflect reality accurately.
  - Admit that you can't know or predict everything. Uncertainty is everywhere in life. Avoid absolute judgements.
  - Check out cognitive distortions and the related notes below.
- Realize that your power is limited and you cannot solve every problem.
  - Do not get lost in group struggles and problems of the world.
  - Focus on what you can solve and control. Primarily your actions. Followed by your neighborhood. Check out stoic philosophy.

## 2.9 Principle of Emotionality

- Realize that humans behave emotionally as much as they do logically. Learn the necessary skills to navigate both landscapes.
- This is multi-faceted. Consider the following:
  - Emotional awareness for starters. Learn to name your feelings and be aware of them. Make use of feeling wheel.
  - Emotional regulation. Learn to manage your emotions without being damaging.

- Emotional expression. Learn to convey your emotions effectively. Acknowledge that it’s a subjective experience. Prefer “I” language when possible. Don’t forget to express positive emotions like love and gratitude.
- Empathy. Learn to be socially aware and recognize emotions of others.
  - \* Level one, place yourself in other person’s position and assess how you would feel.
  - \* Level two, assess how they would feel based on their beliefs and perception that are different than yours.
  - \* This skill usually brings compassion as well.
- Emotional validation. Learn to convey that you understand and accept other person’s emotions. Relate to the situation if you can, “I would have felt the same in that situation”. Realize that you do not have to condone actions.
- A caveat: Acknowledge, but don’t believe your feelings blindly. They are quite real themselves, but not necessarily what they imply.
  - For example, suppose you feel guilty. This doesn’t necessarily mean you are guilty or made a mistake. Similarly, if you feel anxious, doesn’t necessarily mean you are in danger.
  - Negative emotions are warnings, but they can be false alarms. Use logic to discern. Check out `emotional_reasoning` for more information.

## 2.10 Principle of Attachment

- Be capable of accepting loss. Don’t try to avoid the inevitable.
  - Understand sunk cost fallacy, and try not to fall into it.
- Don’t be afraid to attach, it doesn’t have to be permanent.
- Walk away, if a relationship becomes consistently harmful or otherwise not worth it in the long run.
- Check out attachment styles.

## 2.11 Principle of Intimacy

- Aim for consensual, mutual pleasure in sexual relations.
- Be safe first, then be open and playful.
- Don’t underestimate the effect of mentality, emotionality, and power dynamics.
- Don’t assume porn and erotica reflect reality.

- Check out love languages. Speak the same language.
  - 1) Words of affirmation and compliments, 2) Quality time, 3) Acts of service, 4) Physical touch, and 5) Gifts.

## 2.12 Key Takeaways

Overall, relationships can be complex and nuanced, as they require a delicate balance. There is indeed a lot to balance. While these apply to more than relationships, heed the following in your interactions:

### 2.12.1 Principle of Balance

- Balance being selfless and being selfish.
- Balance giving and taking.
- Balance emotionality with logic.
- Balance serious with humor.
- Balance being carefree with respect.
- Balance asserting boundaries with compromise.
- Balance optimism and trust with caution.
- Balance future concern with living in the moment.
- Balance hope with effort.
- Balance rules and responsibilities with enjoyment.
- Balance staying in comfort zone with taking initiative.
- Balance foreseeable with exploration of the unknown.
- Balance being dependable without falling into predictable.
- Finally, balance self-interest with a genuine interest in others.
- Most importantly, balance valuing others with valuing yourself.

## 2.13 Notes

### 2.13.1 Reciprocal Relations and Goodwill

- Ally yourself with others who will engage in reciprocal behaviour in good will.
- Prioritize forming mutually beneficial connections. Engage in reciprocal behavior and do favors because you care.
  - Not because you have something in mind that you would like to receive.
- Accept favors proportional to what you are willing to give.

- Exercise caution. If someone haven't earned your trust yet, assess the motivation behind any favors you receive.
  - Is the intention to connect, or is it to leave you indebted before making a request? If it seems like the latter, disengage. It's not worth it.
  - Is the favor big? Refuse, or proceed with extreme caution. Disengage if there are any strings attached, however small.
  - Does the person has a habit of gossip? Refuse, unless the favor is minor or truly needed.
    - \* Instead, start the reciprocal loop by offering a favor yourself, if you would like to connect.
    - \* Disengage, if they don't accept any favors and are only interested in offering on their terms. Their interest may lie in gaining power over you rather than to connect.
- Acknowledge that you are not obligated to fulfill a request in return for a previous favor, particularly from someone you don't trust yet.
  - You can always reciprocate later and make up for it in a way of your choosing. Doesn't violate loyalty.
  - A bad actor may not be happy with this. Not a big issue for someone whose aim is to connect.
  - However, lean towards acceptance if it's going to be a huge help to the requestor while not being a substantial cost to you. Assess risks and potential. See it as an opportunity to connect, if desirable.
- Communicate values clearly. Express appreciation appropriately.
  - Don't pretend something is a huge help while it is not. Likewise, do not understate if something was truly helpful.
  - Do not negotiate favors. Only clarify the benefits and costs to you.
    - \* Negotiate transactions, not favors.
  - Never criticize a behavior that you would like to see repeated. Instead, validate and give positive feedback by expressing appreciation.
- Address the person themself in your communications, particularly in conflicts.
  - Do not gossip, nor bring other people in the middle of your interactions.
  - Likewise, do not trust or ally with someone who engage in such behavior, unless necessary.
- Try to leave good impressions, it makes a difference.
  - However, do not aim to impress people deliberately. That can backfire easily.

- Understand that costly actions are effective signals.
  - They are effective because: They are difficult to fake. For example, carrying expensive jewelry works as a signal of wealth because not everyone can accept that cost.
  - This applies to demonstrating goodwill as well. Time, effort and the resulting history can function as big costs for this purpose. Similarly, the ability to handle rejections or losses gracefully can be an effective indicator of goodwill.

### 2.13.2 Cognitive Distortions

- Understand black swan counter-example and recognize that unpredictable, singular events can occur. Avoid black and white thinking and do not make generalized statements that are absolute.
  - “All swans are white” is an absolute and unprovable statement. But, one counter-example is enough to disprove it.
    - \* Thus, such statements are unlikely to be correct. Exceptions happen.
  - *Over-generalization*: Making sweeping conclusions based on a few events.
    - \* Example: All woman are liars, and therefore, cannot be trusted.
  - *All or nothing thinking*: Dealing in extremes, either absolutely good or bad.
    - \* Example: I was only able to get third place in the race. I am a failure.
    - \* Another example: I was on a diet, but ate chips after dinner. I fucked up. I’ve ruined my diet now. I am a complete failure.
    - \* In reality, magnitudes matter. There is an in-between.
    - \* Think probabilistic, not deterministic. There is uncertainty.
- Do not jump to conclusions. Realize that you can’t know or predict everything.
  - Acknowledge that uncertainty is everywhere in life. Avoid absolute judgements.
  - *Mind reading*: Assuming what someone must be thinking or feeling, beyond reason. Avoid making big conclusions based on minor behaviors. Behaviors only go so far in understanding thoughts and intentions.
    - \* Example: I know you don’t like me. How so? You didn’t invite me to lunch.
  - *Fortune-telling*: Predicting outcomes in absolute terms.
    - \* Example: A depressed person believing they will never improve and nothing will ever be resolved for their whole life.

- \* Another example: I'll never find a job. I'll be unemployed forever.
  - *Labeling*: Overly-reductive description of other people's characteristics.
    - \* Example: He didn't call me. He must be a narcissist!
- Be mindful of behaviors that turn into self-fulfilling prophecies.
  - “You create your own reality” phrase has a point. Beliefs heavily influence perception and behaviors. They can decisively affect outcomes, particularly when it comes to relationships.
    - \* For example, rejection expectations can lead to behaviors that elicit rejection from others.
    - \* They also shape your subjective experiences to a large degree. Placebo effect comes to mind.
  - Optimism and having a positive outlook help in human relations. The vibe you give to others is shaped by your perspective and mood.
    - \* Note that, faking doesn't necessarily help much. Believing does.
  - Believe that future is not fixed and can be changed if not desirable. Exert will and take action. Focus on things that can help, one step at a time.
    - \* You may be unsure whether you will be able to achieve your goals by trying. But, one thing is near-certain: You won't succeed if you never try. Assess pros and cons, then make your move.
  - Examples of defeatist attitude that turn into self-fulfilling prophecies:
    - \* I won't study to the exam. I am going to fail anyway.
    - \* I can't make any friends. People don't like me. I better stay away.
    - \* I'm terrible at math. I'll never understand this lesson. No use listening.
    - \* I won't even try asking out. They'll definitely reject me. I'll be alone forever.
    - \* No one can be trusted. Must be vigilant. Better them than me.
- Emotional Reasoning: Believing emotions as facts, independent of any empirical evidence.
  - Example: I feel jealous, which means my partner must be unfaithful. I wouldn't feel jealous if my partner were faithful.
  - Another example: I feel overwhelmed. It's impossible to even start.



## Chapter 3

# Happiness

### 3.1 Principle of Effort

- Take responsibility for your happiness and well-being.
  - As an adult, it is your responsibility. Take reins, don't take the role of a victim.
- Focus on what you can control.
  - Focus on what's ahead and what you can change. Don't get stuck living in the past. Leave out what you cannot control. Make peace with them. No one is omnipotent.
  - Don't take responsibility for events out of your control. Take responsibility for what you can influence. This is the essence of stoic philosophy.
- Take action. Do what you need to do.
  - Fulfill your needs first. Ensure your safety.
  - Take care of your health and physical well-being. Also, mental health.
  - Build strong interpersonal relationships that feel meaningful.
  - Ask: What would make you proud of yourself?
- Check out Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
  - Physiological needs first. Food, sleep, shelter and so on.
  - Safety needs afterwards. Personal, emotional and financial. Also, health.
  - Love and social needs comes next. Trust, acceptance, intimacy, sex. Friends, family, community. A sense of belonging.
  - Esteem needs later. Self-respect, confidence, competence. Being proud of yourself.

- What comes afterwards? Living true to yourself. How does it happen? Aligning your beliefs and actions. Doing what you believe is right. Having a sense of purpose and meaning.

## 3.2 Principle of Serenity

- Learn to be content with what you have.
  - Limit wants. Wants have no end if left unbounded, since it is human desire to always want more. Aim to understand why do you want what you want. What do you truly desire?
  - This doesn't mean don't be ambitious. Quite the contrary. Exercise actions you deem appropriate, but leave out the rest. Don't mull over what could or should have happened.
  - Don't compare yourself with others. Comparison is a thief of joy.
- Be cautiously optimistic.
  - In essence, hope for the best and prepare for the worst.
  - Be realistic, don't neglect to take precautions. But, stay optimistic afterwards. Believe that it is going to be okay, one way or another. Don't worry too much, especially for things out of your control.
  - Appreciate the good in your life. See the glass half full.
- Don't take yourself or life so seriously.
  - A little humor goes a long way. Life is too short to worry too much.
  - Stop to smell the roses along the way. Appreciate beauty.
  - Don't let work define you. View it as a part, a means for a purpose.

## 3.3 Principle of Purpose

- Focus on the process, not outcome.
  - Life is not a race, don't rush till the end. Grand finale is already determined from the beginning: Your life will come to an end.
  - Don't forget the future and the long term. But also, don't forget there is an end. Do the things you want to do while you can.
  - Enjoy the process. Be open to trying new things and explore.
- Consider right actions, rather than right outcomes.
  - Buddhist philosophy: The source of frustration is not losing. It is the desire to win, the desire to reach a particular outcome. Related comic.
  - Doing and expecting are different. Do, but don't expect.

- Engage in actions because they are right, given the available knowledge. Do not regret a contrary or undesirable outcome of an action that seemed right at the time. See it as a learning experience, it is part of the process.
- Be content in knowing that you did what you are supposed to do, regardless of outcome.
- Aim for a meaningful life, not for happiness.
  - Aiming for happiness typically leads to comfort and pleasure seeking behavior. Successful in the short run, but detrimental in the long run for happiness.
  - Paradoxically, aiming for what feels meaningful leads to behaviour that reinforce happiness in the long run.
    - \* What feels meaningful is typically productive actions that involve other people, that are beneficial to others and the community. Engaging in such behavior typically results in positive feedback and improve personal satisfaction.
- Deal with reality, and accept it. Describe and understand how things happen. Do not assert how things are supposed to happen.
  - Learn to distinguish fantasy from reality, opinion from fact, impressions from knowledge. Acknowledge subjectivity in life.

## 3.4 Perspectives

### 3.4.1 About the meaning and purpose of life

My take: “What’s the meaning of life?” is a backwards question, and the answer is nothing definite, because:

- Life doesn’t exist because there is any meaning or purpose. But, meaning and purpose exists because there is life. That’s where everything starts.
  - Our cognition and perspective is what attributes meaning to the external world. This makes our existence valuable to ourselves in a way that anything external can possibly hope not. I mean, if you lose that consciousness, what even remains there to discuss?
- Philosophies that defend similar ideas, and my interpretations:
  - **Existentialism:** The life does not have a preordained meaning. Existence is what creates meaning, and that’s what matters. So, live true to yourself and create your own purpose.

- **Nihilism:** Life is devoid of any objective meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value. Individuals must either accept the inherent meaninglessness of existence or define their own meaning.
- **Absurdism:** Humans inherently seek meaning and purpose in life, but the universe is indifferent and inherently meaningless. So, rebel against this absurd universe by determining your own purpose and values!
- **Taoism:** Do not impose external purposes. Embrace the natural flow of life. Focus on harmony and live in accordance with nature.
- **Buddhism:** Concept of Anatta (not-self). There is no permanent self. Life is continuous process of change. Thus, search for a fixed purpose or identity is a source of suffering. So, let go of any attachments or desires for specific purposes and focus on inner peace.
- **Stoicism:** Happiness does not depend on external circumstances. It depends on your own virtue and rationality. So, focus on what's in your control and live virtuously in accordance with the nature. In other words: Do the right thing, based on what you know about the rational world, to find contentment and purpose in life.

### 3.4.2 About wisdom and intelligence

Here is my perspective on the importance of wisdom in broader picture:

- *Observation* is the process of learning, and collecting data.
- *Intelligence* is transforming data into knowledge.
- *Wisdom* is translating knowledge into appropriate actions, often in the face of uncertainty.
- What remains after is executing these actions.

All steps are important in the end, since a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. That being said, to make sure that you truly understand a topic or information, aim to translate it into actions, answering:

- So what? What does this mean? What am I supposed to do with this information?

Without that, knowledge is just a dry description of reality, barely relevant.

### 3.4.3 About Self-Actualization - Last step in Mazlov's hierarchy of needs

According to Mazlov, self-actualization is the highest step where personal potential is fully realized after other bodily and ego needs are fulfilled. It is commonly

interpreted as “the full realization of one’s potential” or of one’s “true self”, and is associated with a person who is living creatively, autonomously, and spontaneously.

**My perspective:** I am not convinced about the importance of self-actualization in the form described by Mazlov. Or rather, about whether search for any external activities, creativity or “passion” is truly necessary. Nevertheless, I believe a sense of purpose is required to be content and to feel that life is worth living, whatever that purpose may be. This concept is called *Ikigai* in Japanese culture, meaning ‘a reason for being’.

In my opinion, the answer lies in beliefs. The key to achieve this last step of fulfillment, after the other needs, is to behave in a way that is consistent with what you believe to be true, so that you can enjoy life and be proud of yourself.

In general, there are two ways this can happen:

- Believe what you do is right.
- Do what you believe is right.

The answer will likely be a mixture of the two. Awareness and being honest with yourself is important for that purpose. Note that, a conscious thought is not necessarily an internal belief. Just like, saying something out loud doesn’t necessarily make it true. So, this discussion is about internal beliefs, whether they are conscious or not.

**To summarize my opinion:** For someone to be content with themselves, their beliefs and actions need to be aligned so that they can be proud of themselves. Believing that you are important and worth being happy is vital. If you believe that everyone is important to themselves, thus worth being happy, this can make it easier for you to believe you are worthy as well. Being non-judgemental helps, though I don’t consider this general belief to be necessary in all cases for everyone.

Some related concepts to this are cognitive dissonance in psychology and lowering expectations of future. See the discussions below for more information.

### 3.4.4 About Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive Dissonance is a type of psychological stress that happens when the beliefs and actions, or rather the external world, are not aligned. Since this is a mentally taxing situation, the mind wants to resolve this situation in any way possible. Thus, a common response is rationalization, or in other words: “Believe what you do is right” (the first option in the previous discussion).

In practice, rationalization can cause issues and can even be pathological, or otherwise not be beneficial. However, that is not my point here. My point

is: This is a stressful situation. Alignment of the mind and external world is critical. This alignment is necessary to be content and to be at peace.

That's why I consider it a useful practice to go over the internal beliefs, questioning them or aligning them with the external events and the reality.

### 3.4.5 About lowering expectations and living in the moment

This concept is about: Having no or low expectations. More specifically, keeping your beliefs regarding the future minimal. This idea is particularly prominent in Buddhist and Stoic philosophies, as far as I know.

In general, the fewer and more flexible the beliefs are regarding the outer world and the future (while acknowledging any uncertainties), the easier it will be to align them with external events and be at peace. I believe this is the true importance of having an open mind. Thinking rigidly in terms of shoulds and musts, regarding how the world is supposed to function, is not beneficial in many circumstances.

Though of course, I'd also say: Do what needs to be done, to achieve fulfillment. This minimalism of low expectations is not an argument against ambitious actions. I just say: Keep your beliefs, regarding how the external world and other people should behave, simple and open-ended. Respond and behave in line with your internal beliefs, aiming to keep yourself and internal peace safe.

This idea is also closely related to *Carpe diem* (seize the day) and living in the moment. Philosophies that teach similar ideas, and my interpretations:

- **Stoicism:** Live in the present moment and focus on what is within your control.
- **Buddhism:** Live and experience the present moment. Life is like a river, ever-changing. Nothing is permanent, so do not get overly attached.
- **Taoism:** Concept of Wu Wei (effortless action). Go with the flow, as in do not disregard the flow of the universe. Allow actions to unfold naturally. Let go of the desire to control everything. Let go and find peace.
- **Hinduism:** Concept of Nishkama Karma (detached action). Perform your duties without being attached to the fruits of your actions. So, focus on the present moment without being overly concerned with the future.
- **Existentialism:** Embrace the uncertainty of the future and the unknown, rather than relying on fixed beliefs or predetermined destinies. Enjoy the freedom!
- **Modern mindfulness:** Live and stay in the present. Observe the thoughts and feelings without judgment.

### 3.4.6 About ikigai and having a sense of purpose

**My take:** Having a sense of purpose is important to be content in life. However, this purpose doesn't have to be grandiose. Purposelessness can be a purpose itself. As in, the purpose is to be existing or to be happy. That can be the main internal belief and can work fine, as long as you live in accordance that belief, and satisfy it.

The issue with happiness being the core belief or purpose is that: Happiness is an internal state, an emotion, thus it is unrealistic to expect to be happy all the time. Keeping this expectation at a reasonable level can be important. Besides that, I don't see any issue with existence being the sole purpose.

**Practical framework for ikigai:** The intersection of four elements: (1) What you love, (2) what you are good at, (3) what the world needs, and (4) what you can be paid for.

While the above framework is helpful in practice (since money and jobs are necessary in life under normal circumstances), in general, I do not believe this purpose have to be something specific, constant or explicitly defined. Spontaneous living and tackling a variety of interests can be perfectly fine too.

The key is to have something to look forward to.