

Haruki Murakami's fantastic and extraordinary novels have amazed readers all around the world for 40 years. Throughout his career as an author, his creative works succeeded not only to attract the attention of literary critics but also to address average readership. But writing isn't his only occupation, running marathons is Murakami's, this mysterious author's, other pass time.

It might be hard to imagine initially, however, those long racecourses run by being out of breath have significant contributions to Murakami's literary career. *What I Talk When Talk About Running* was born while he was practicing for the News York City Marathon, in 2005. During the training, he decided to record his remarks and ideas. As a result, this memoir which reflects his intellectual state with making connections to his physical training appeared.

Divided into separate parts, this memoir examines the crossing points of running and writing -two distinct areas and explain how these two different interests made Murakami's life and work overlapped. When turning the pages, you'll see the important role of running over his brilliant process, gather the essential information about his training routines, and learn his remarks that he recorded on the road.

## Chapter 1 - For Murakami, running is the purity of the mind.

It's August 5, 2005, when it's being a lovely day on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai. On this sunny day, the sky is so clear without a cloud, and the gentle trade winds blow. In this stunning atmosphere, countless joggers are running all along the beach. Certains are fast, whereas others are slow.

Haruki Murakami is between these groups of joggers.

Murakami repeats this exercise almost every day. His goal is to practice, an hour per day, six days a week. It means he will be completed 156 miles at the end of the month. He isn't close to his personal best. He's already turned his 50, and now he has less energy than once he had.

Still, for Murakami, running means much more than physical activity, winning the races, or breaking the records. It's an important experience for him.

When Murakami began to run, he was over thirty. Until then, he runs a jazz bar and never thought of having a serious hobby. He hadn't written something worth mentioning either. But in the autumn of 1982, he decided to sell his bar to devote his time to write and after a while, he began a career as a jogger. Running was at the center of his life for twenty years since that change of career. Although his ambition for running has reduced over time, it has never totally disappeared. Since the very beginning, Murakami has completed 23 marathons each year.

The main thing that made Murakami turn back to the sport is its lonely character. Competitions or having rivals, those couldn't motivate him. It's his personal goals that give

meaning to success. He writes his books exactly with the same motivation, he aims for making himself content rather than making the readers impressed. That explains why he continues running as a daily routine despite his old age and lack and slows down.

This daily routine gives Murakami tranquility, and it's a leading motive that makes Murakami enjoy it. When he hit the road, his mind rids of the unnecessary things. Of course, some thoughts, a brief reminiscence, or a painful sentiment continues to mess out on his mind. But he becomes ignorant to all of them. Murakami defines this introspective state of mind as "the void", and each day he leaves his home and takes the route reaching this void.

It's a great comfort to know that the void is available after running for a while. This peace led by running is a significant assistance for Murakami because it eases the struggles of life. Regardless of how he feels, either angry or sad, he leaves for running- and it magically helps, after a few steps he forgets all the inconvenience.

## Chapter 2 - Running has a determinative impact on Murakami's literary approach.

Murakami did not ambition for a career as an author. He was very satisfied with his modest life passing in a small jazz bar in the center of Tokyo. But, things began to change in one day, in 1978. He went to Jingu Stadium to see a baseball match. While he was in there, suddenly an idea had come and motivated him to write a novel.

After a few months of this light-bulb moment, he published his first novel, Hear the Wind Sing. This first book by this brand-new author was greatly praised. Being motivated by this unexpected success, Murakami continued writing. By 1981, he's accomplished to build a literary career which was enough to sell his bar and become a new life as a full-time author.

But this radical change of profession didn't come without a cost. Because of his days inactively passed before the desk by writing, Murakami lost his physical form. He felt a necessity to balance his mental and physical well-being, so he attempted to make a change.

Keep in mind that Murakami was already more than 30 years old when he began his career as an author. Also, given his previous job, he didn't have a healthy lifestyle. He consumed almost 60 cigarettes each day, and the stress of work that longed until late usually weakened his physical well-being. So, intending to produce creative pieces he left his previous habits and adopted a new lifestyle which would keep him concentrated.

As the first step of it, he and his wife moved to Narashino in Chiba Prefecture, a smaller city than Tokyo. Living in this tranquil and small city, he successfully renovated his daily habits. He quitted drinking and smoking until late at night. Murakami changed his sleeping routine, he began going to bed early and waking up with the sunrise. He also added running to his attempts for a healthy life.

In the beginning, Murakami was terrible at running. Only 20 minutes of running was enough for him to get breathless. But he insisted, felt like the sport was offering something particular to him. As well as he didn't give up on writing, he always kept himself motivated about running. In a short period, he became accustomed to the exercise. Inevitably, his strength increased, and he got into form. His body became suitable for running.

Extreme transformations might seem impossible for many people. But Murakami believed that would eventually be real. Sometimes, you suddenly discover an activity that takes you to a life that once you couldn't imagine. Murakami found writing and running, the activities that suit his spirits.

### Chapter 3 - A runner's body must learn to obey commands.

On a winter day in 2001, Murakami has completed half of the route, in Chiba Prefecture where Murakami was running his annual marathon. Everything's gone well so far, neither his energy nor his strength has lost, as well as he was at a good pace. But misfortune emerged when it was around mile 18.

He got a cramp in the leg. Their thighs bent into tight knots, he began trembling. He was in agony. None of his efforts didn't help, his pain and stress didn't reduce. Still, he finished the left few miles by walking.

In every step he took in agony, he regretfully repeated saying " I should have made more practice"

For Murakami, this embarrassing experience in Chiba was a severe warning that physical well-being isn't the only point of running, it also has a strong relation with discovering happiness and clearing the mind. A runner needs to be mentally determined and physically disciplined. For example, his failure in Chiba was caused by a weak endurance. So, to be well-prepared for the next marathon that's just a few months after, he must gather his strength back to be ready for the run.

To get ready, he set himself a strict training routine. He didn't settle for extending his practice hours, in another saying the quantity, he also tried to increase the quality of those hours passing by working out. Day by day, the toughness of these exercises was being increased because he endeavored for a better race and separately focused on each muscle. That wasn't easy to pursue but Murakami would take his efforts worth.

This hard training motivated Murakami to run in a marathon that he had never thought of attending before. The route of this marathon was the world's first marathon route which started in Athens and ended up in a small city, 26 miles in total.

He accepted the challenge upon the request that was made by a travel magazine in July of 1983. They agreed on the concept that the author-runner would complete the marathon all the way long from Athens and recorded his observations. This demanding trail in the Greek countryside would make it difficult, it was clear at the very beginning. Even nowadays, not

many people venture to do it because of the relentless heat, and the race that Murakami attend would take place in midsummer when Athenians stay at home to save their energy to be melted down under scorching heat.

It was already very warm when the race began. But still, he enforced himself to run against the warm. It was getting warmer at each step, but his determination was increasing, respectively. Therefore, he reached the finish line and completed the marathon despite all the difficulties. Neither the sunburn nor the sweat dripping down his back could keep him from success.

This experience, seeing an explicit result of his efforts, encourages Murakami for many marathons regardless of their toughness.

## Chapter 4 - Both writing a book and running a marathon require to be dedicated.

It's September 10, when Murakami comes back to Japan for a two-week trip. He would have two busy weeks. Since his newest book has just been published, magazines request advertising interviews. Besides, he needs to schedule plenty of meetings with his friends, editors, and designers. Most importantly, he must employ a new assistant.

Despite this busy program, he feels obligated to regularly reserve time for running. If he doesn't keep training, he wouldn't be ready for the New York City Marathon which will take place just a few weeks after. Hence, as much as possible, he hit the road to run in Jingu Gaien, the rich gardens encircling Meiji Shrine.

It requires concentration to feel like running every day, and determination not to stop on the midway. Fortunately, Murakami featured both endurance and focus that he developed as outcomes of endless efforts.

Most of the time, in interviews, people ask Murakami which features a becoming novelist should have to succeed. He answered those questions with a quick and simple response: talent. It's impossible to write successful fictional books without having an aptitude for words, a desire for telling stories, and a powerful imagination. But this talent wouldn't get in motion, even for the most popular novelists, if two more critical competencies were lacking: Focus and endurance.

Murakami thinks that just like running, writing is also a way of manual labor. If an athlete wants to professionally train for a marathon, he/she has to be so concentrated on his/her ambition to succeed. In a similar vein, focusing on telling personal stories is a must to be a successful novelist. It takes hours of thinking the excellent word that suits the sentence, the paragraph, and the chapter.

Both runners and novelists need determination. Determined runners will find the strength to keep regularly training even though they feel so tired by ignoring their bodies crying for a

break. Similarly, writers must bear the hours passing in front of the computer, or notebooks, etc. to find the true word. To write a novel, and make it ready to be published, one must sit down to write for hours, for every day.

Good news that any ambitious author or runner can gain the ability to focus and endurance. Although talent can't be gained over time, it's something natural; people can learn focusing and staying determined. By making regular practices to train your mind and body, the dreams that once seemed unreachable can come true.

## Chapter 5 - Being in a good health is important for exploring deeper wells of feelings.

It's a chilly day in October, in Boston. The autumn leaves all around the city put on makeup with the colors of brown and orange. In the sky, you'll see the geese flying from Canada as the winter is coming. On the surface, joggers are running around the Charles River.

As usual, you can see Murakami running in this marvelous scene. With every step he takes, he exhibits his healthy and balanced life habits. He perplexes the people of Japan with his chilly and enjoyable practice. Because people generally consider that an artist should be marginal and live a life full of struggles. They believe that this pity life gives inspiration to the writers.

Murakami doesn't agree with that. His position is quite contrary.

The perception of people towards the origin of art can be funny. One of the accepted ideas about writers suggests that artists get inspired by their challenging lives and conflicts. Similarly, people think that this chaos nurtures the artists' aesthetic ideas and provides them with an elegant style. Maybe, It has been a case for certain writers but generally speaking it's just a stereotype created by films and serious.

Murakami's way is completely different. He can't bear a degenerate life because he thinks that writing is already so demanding. According to him, the most exciting ideas are hidden in deeps, but they usually entail devastating and dark emotions with them. Thus, as he aims for producing creative works, he inevitably faces considerable dreadful thoughts. It can cause damages to the mental and physical health of the writer.

So, to stay strong to react to side-effects of these toxic thoughts caused by writing, he keeps a healthy life routine. Like daily training, sleeping early and other similar life habits make him prepared to resist the agony he feels when he digs in the deeps to find inspiration. It's a very fragile balance, but it's the only way to keep himself safe from being overwhelmed and exhaustion

Hence, unlike other artists that spend their life by pursuing extremity and oddness, Murakami chooses another way. His days are full of useful and respectable activities. He watching the

people walking in the park. He always buys the same, simple shoes. He enjoys his time by listening to Eric Clapton's songs. Finally, he searches for fun at every moment he lives.

## Chapter 6 - Experiencing an ultramarathon is dreamlike, also it changes life.

Early in the morning, you hit route starting from Yuubetsu, a modest town on the west coast of Lake Saroma in Hokkaido, Japan. The summer has just arrived but the weather is still cold in the north region. Under the sunrise, you run, run, and never stop.

Finally, you see the mile-marker 26, however, you don't stop running. You do it for hours. At every step, you take you to feel the pain in the muscles. Everything else loses their importance, now running is the only thing that you care about.

After twelve hours, you reach the Wakka Natural Flower Garden on the eastern part of the lake and the finish line is there. Congratulations, you have successfully experienced an ultramarathon, now you're a different person.

Running an ultramarathon is a frightening task, even for the worldwide known runners. Ultramarathons are races longer than 26 miles. Murakami completed an ultramarathon that was 62 miles long, it corresponds to running a normal marathon more than two times. Murakami found courage for this only once. Although he was able to complete all the trail with no stop or walking, after the race, he had physical struggles for months.

That ultramarathon itself was a surreal occasion. Until he hit the second half, everything went normal, but it gradually became overwhelming in the second part. That was hard to stay determined. His extreme physical exertion could be read on his body. He couldn't ignore the pain of his swelled feet so changed the shoes on the way.

Only disconnecting could give him enough power to ignore the pain. When he got close to the finishing line, he isolated himself from the world and abandoned his conscious mind. Then, he wasn't a human being, he was a mechanical thing, a robot that was programmed for only one reason: completing this race. The feelings that emptiness of mind brought resembled a religious revelation and made him keep running till the end.

Nevertheless, this eccentric feeling of disassociation didn't go even after the ultramarathon. Still, Murakami made his regular training, but the meaning of running was lost for him. He couldn't feel the same happiness or satisfaction that he'd once gotten before from this practice. He named this persistent feeling of boredom as "runner's blues."

Fortunately, these blues have slowly left Murakami over time. Now running has provided Murakami with the same happiness and satisfaction as before. Probably, he would never run again a 62-mile long ultramarathon, but now he's preparing for the next big race- the New York City Marathon.

## Chapter 7 - Murakami will not stop running as long as he finds it meaningful.

The day of the New York City marathon has finally come. Murakami's daily training and extreme efforts lasting for months brought him up to this special day. The mornings consumed by running, the elaborated programs, all the pains, and injuries – they were all done for this day, the New York City Marathon. Now it's his day to shine and give all that remain.

So, what's the result? It isn't the best but not too bad either.

Life contains ups and downs. There is no gigantic peaks or huge literary settlements. All you can do is trying as much as possible and keep walking on the way to your goals.

Murakami had sincerely been waiting for the New York City Marathon. In the days of waiting, he frequently imagined the upcoming big day. He visualized the crowd of countless joggers, his boiling legs, and the escalating flow of adrenaline as the end would be seen.

Nevertheless, it didn't happen in the way that he'd expected. Although he started well and felt motivated at the beginning, he couldn't control his pace. Still, he managed to reach the long slope of Central Park. But suddenly, he felt a cramp in his legs and saw them shaking. Finally, it took just over four hours for him to complete the marathon. This failure disappointed him, but not too harshly. It's life and we all can face this kind of experience. Maybe it's because of his intense training or maybe he gets older.

After six months, he tested himself with the Boston Marathon, one of his favorite trails. For this race, he embraced a different method. He reduced the hardness of training and kept his speed slow at the start with the purpose of saving more energy for the last parts. However, there wasn't a considerable change between the results. He completed it but not with brilliant success. Even though he felt disappointed again, he faced the reality and moved on.

This is Murakami's point of view on the developments. Although he will gradually lose his power, no need to stop. Anyway, he gets joy and satisfaction from running. Running has become an important part of his personality, therefore a routine he'll never quit. It's similar to what a salmon drop itself to the upstream or some ducks couple forever. There are some things you can't escape doing.

## Chapter 8 - Life is a journey of finding out your capabilities.

A day in the 1960s, teenage Murakami was naked in his room and watching himself in the mirror. Staring at his reflection in the mirror, he meticulously examines his imperfections. He finds out that his eyebrow isn't thin enough, the form of his fingernails is strange. More points aren't perfect.

Forty years later, the author was waiting along the shores of Niigata to begin running exhausting triathlon. He still bears the same defects and inadequacies as that fragile teen self. However, now, he would swim for 1 mile, bike for 25, and complete a more than 6 miles long jog.

He can't lose time by focusing on his defects. If he becomes successful at the end of this triathlon, will bring him a more positive approach.

Murakami is anxious when it comes to triathlons. Although running is like a natural part of him, he gets nervous because of the tasks of biking and swimming. Particularly, swimming causes him a lot of stress because he couldn't learn it properly. Also, at an earlier race, he got panicked while he was close to the ocean. He couldn't control himself and quit the race.

This traumatic experience made him out of triathlons for many seasons. But it doesn't mean he completely gave up for triathlons. He attempted to hire a swimming instructor to teach all the critical methods. Finally, he found a coach who had an ideal approach. She trained him softly until he felt calm and confident in each stroke.

In 2006, Murakami gave it another try on the beach. He felt well-prepared this time. He dropped himself into the water and smoothly moved. But in the midway, he began panicking due to his fogged goggles. Still, he managed to calm down and remembered his workouts, and gain his strength back. It didn't take long to get out of the water and moving to the bicycle part.

Murakami completed this difficult trial and challenged the waters. Sure, he wasn't the winner. But, he accomplished something that once seemed unreachable for him. He had potentials in his depths. Of course, it saw once his imperfections on the mirror but he also tried and found his positive features and used them.

## What I Talk About When I Talk About Running by Haruki Murakami Book Review

A literary career or running marathons didn't the things that Haruki Murakami once dreamed of. However, he discovered his potentials and ended up a successful novelist and a determined runner. On the way, he noticed a lot of crossing points between these two different interests. To fulfill both, it requires discipline, strength, and determination that suits only your ambitions. Running has a very determinative role in his current lifestyle, if he didn't run, he wouldn't be a world-wide known novelist.

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