

MIDLIFE: REASSESSMENT OF “DREAMS.”

Jose Parappully SDB, PhD
sumedhacentre@gmail.com

Podcast link:

<https://anchor.fm/boscom/episodes/2-48-Psyche--Soul--103-e11nn78>

Hello, this is Jose Parappully, Salesian priest and clinical psychologist at Sumedha Centre for Psychospiritual Wellbeing at Jeolikote, Uttarakhand, with another edition of Psyche & Soul.

Part of the reappraisal that happens at midlife is looking closely at our “Dream.” The dream is a vision we create for ourselves in our youth or early adulthood in regard to our future. The dream is a compelling inner picture of what we most deeply want our life to be and what we want to pursue or accomplish in life. It is something that inspires and motivates us and around which we organize our life energies.

According to Psychologist Daniel Levinson three things happen with the dream at midlife:

1. *Reappraising and modifying the idealised dream.* Sometimes in our youth we create a dream that is far beyond our reach. A young man can, for example, dream, inspired by the feats of astronauts he watched on TV from his childhood days, that he is going to be an Astronaut. After struggling to get admitted to training and training for a while, he may come to recognise he was pursuing an impossible dream, that this dream is far beyond his capabilities. He then has to assess what aspects of this dream he may be able to realize and then modify it to make it one that is more feasible.
2. *Recognising the tyranny of the dream.* The question here is “Whose dream is it anyway?” It is quite possible that we are trying to live out our parents’ dream or that of some other significant person in our lives. Consciously or unconsciously we may have taken up a career or a vocation under overt or covert pressure. For example, the famous doctor wants his son to follow in his footsteps. Subtle and overt message may be communicated to his son that becoming a doctor would be the best choice for him. Even though being a doctor is not what the son is passionate about or the profession he is best suited for, he may acquiesce to please his father. Not a few priests and religious are living out the unrealized dreams of their parents through the vocation they have committed to. If such is the case with us, then at midlife we will realize the burden of living out other people’s dreams and choose to live one of our own. We choose to follow our “soul’s” agenda, than conform to parental or other expectations. Consequently, quite a few of us may choose to break our current commitment, or abandon our career/profession and make a new one, as we attempt to pursue our own dreams.
3. *Creating a new dream.* It is possible that even when the dream is our own, and a feasible one too, for a variety of reasons we may realise as we come to midlife that we have failed to realise it and there is now little chance of realising it. We must come to terms with the failure and arrive at a new set of choices around which to rebuild our life – create a new possible dream and pursue it.

Even when we have succeeded brilliantly in the pursuit of our cherished dream, at midlife we may question the meaning and value of our success. We may have a sense of contentment and the

desire to live out the fruits of that success as we move to the sunset of our lives. It is also possible we may experience our success as quite meaningless at this period of our lives and choose to pursue new and more meaningful dreams.

Whether successful or not in the pursuit of our dreams, at midlife we need to sort things out, and consider the next steps on the journey.

In regard to the reappraisal of the Dream, Levinson recalled Elia Kazan's novel *The Arrangement* which is about a man who at 40 begins a valiant struggle to regain his lost Dream or to kill himself, and James Baldwin's (a famous Black American writer's) review of that novel in his own early forties. Baldwin wrote:

Though we would like to live without regrets, and sometimes proudly insist that we have none, this is not really possible, if only because we are mortal. When more time stretches behind than stretches before one, some assessments, however reluctantly and incompletely, begin to be made. Between what one wishes to become and what one has become there is a momentous gap, which will now never be closed. And this gap seems to operate as one's final margin, one's last opportunity, for creation. And between the self as it is and the self as one sees it, there is also a distance, even harder to gauge. Some of us are compelled, around the middle of our lives, to make a study of this baffling geography, less in the hope of conquering these distances than in the determination that the distance shall not become any greater. (*The Seasons of a Man's Life*, 1978, p. 250)

Reflection Exercise and Prayer

Look back over your life.

- *What were your "dreams"? Who did you dream of becoming? And who have you become?*
- *What did you dream of accomplishing? What have you accomplished?*
- *Whose dream are you currently living – your own or someone else's? If someone else's dream, what does your "soul" (your authentic self) want for you at this juncture in your life?*
- *How do you feel about your dreams at this period in your life?*
- *Do you need to modify your dream or create new dreams? If yes, which? In what way and why?*

Having reflected on these questions, you could sit for a while in the presence of God who has your happiness very much at heart, and talk to your God about how you feel about your "dreams" at this juncture on your psychospiritual journey toward fullness of life.

What do you think might have been the adolescent dreams of Mary of Nazareth, and what happened to her dream when the unexpected happened, as we read in the story of the Annunciation? How would you have felt if you were in Mary's situation? How do you think Mary would have felt as she reached mid-life and looked back over her life? It could be worthwhile to spend some time talking to her and listening to what she might have to say to you..

May your weekend journeying be happy and safe. Be blessed.
Thank you for listening/reading.

Jose Parappully SDB, PhD
sumedhacentre@gmail.com