

AMBITION AS A PLAN FOR LIFE

Most of us live this plan of life and find ourselves on various rungs of the social ladder as defined by this plan. Nothing is wrong with this worldview as far as it goes. And it goes far enough – from youth to early adulthood to maturity – the strategy serves us well. We make a place for ourselves in the world, raise a family, educate our children, acquire property and possessions and always have our sights set on the next level of material success. All this goes smoothly for a while, say till we are forty, forty-five or fifty – it’s hard to say exactly – when life starts losing its shine. A gradual dissatisfaction with everything that used to excite us, a nagging sense of emptiness, sets in. New frontiers do not beckon us; new goals do not prompt us to jump into action like in the past for we are not sure whether they are worthwhile; since the goals already achieved do not seem to give us the satisfaction that was promised. Yes, we have had our achievements and success in life but now they are BEHIND us. And in the second half of life, we are not so sure that more achievements and more success would do the trick. For happiness had remained elusive in spite of our achievements and success in the world. Shall we go on another wild goose chase? We begin to hesitate and falter.

In our youth, we had chosen the path of ambition. Now with the passage of time – after much has been achieved – in the afternoon of life, the future and the plan itself start getting a bit fuzzy. It is no longer crystal clear to us that more material acquisition is the way to happiness – though the advertisement industry screams into our ears that this is indeed the case – we have begun to have our doubts. For the first time in our lives, a hesitation, a doubt, a question starts invading our consciousness: Is this all there is to living? For the first time, we become conscious of the approaching old age with the progressive deterioration of our physical agility and a depletion of energy levels. We notice that the hormones are no longer running wild and the younger generation looks too wild. Though it’s hard to admit it, we feel like travelers stranded on the way – because the way is no longer clear – and our material possessions seem woefully inadequate to cheer us up. The confusion is further aggravated

because we have not been able to develop an alternate plan to ambition and are quite unsure whether another plan exists in the first place!

The arrival of Mid-Life Blues

And thus, we have arrived at a station commonly known as Mid-Life Blues. There is another expression which is nearer to the mark: a sense of emptiness. Or alternatively – lack of meaning. And this is what we truly suffer from: a sense of emptiness and lack of meaning. But how did we get here? Surely, we had some other goal when we started off? We did not aim for this, did we? So, what went wrong?

*An extract from my book An Odyssey of the Mind
Chapter 5: Mid Life Crisis*