



Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies XIX/2 Jan 2021 | ISSN P-2320-9429 | **31-43**

<https://www.vidyankur.in> | DOI: 10.5281/zenodo. 4739855

Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo. 4739855>

Tuesdays with Morrie: The Meaning of Living and Dying

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Abstract: *Tuesday with Morrie* is a book about living and dying. This book mostly emphasizes the practicality of life, existential realities of life. Morrie, being a Sociology professor addressed to his students on love, acceptance, forgiveness, open communication, death, culture, marriage, regret and many other existential realities with his personal experience and conviction. After having analysed this book, the author explores the basic insights of Morrie, offers his critical reflection, evaluation and situating it into the present scenario.

Keywords: Tuesdays with Morrie, Mitch Albom, Love, Compassion, Culture, Regret, Forgiveness, Humour, Dignity, Courageousness, Interconnectedness

Cite as: Nicholasrajan, Milton. (2017). Tuesdays with Morrie: The Meaning of Living and Dying (Version 1.0) Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies. July-Dec 2017 XIX/2 www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4739855 31-43.

Introduction

The book *Tuesdays with Morrie* is the final lesson between a college professor Morrie, and one of his long-lost students and the author of the book, Mitch Albom. After seeing his professor in an interview on the show “Nightline,” Mitch Albom is reminded of a promise he made sixteen years ago to keep in touch with him. Now stricken with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), Morrie does not have much time left, and Mitch recognizes this fact. ALS is a progressive nervous system disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, causing loss of muscle control. ALS is often called Lou Gehrig’s disease, after the baseball player who was diagnosed with it. The famous physicist Stephen Hawking was also stricken by it.

Albom travels from Michigan to Massachusetts to meet with him. This meeting goes well and affects Mitch and Morrie so much that they meet for the next fourteen consecutive Tuesdays, up until Morrie passes away. During each of these meetings, they discuss a different topic about life. These topics make up the content of the book and include death, love, culture, marriage, regret and the world we live in, among many others.

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The Characters Morrie and Albom

“Morrie” S. Schwartz was born on December 20, 1916, and died on November 4, 1995. He was an American professor

of sociology at Brandeis University. He was a good professor and author. He was the subject of the best-selling book *Tuesdays with Morrie*, written by Mitch Albom, a former student of Schwartz.

Mitch Albom was born in New Jersey in 1958, the second of three children. He grew up loving music and taught himself how to play the piano. He played in bands throughout his teenage years. Albom finished high school in three years and then attended Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, where he majored in Sociology. After graduation, he continued to explore the world and his love of music, performing in Europe and the United States. However, while living in New

York in his 20s, Albom became interested in journalism and volunteered for a local weekly paper, *The Queens Tribune*. This experience piqued his interest in the craft, so he applied to graduate school. Albom earned a Master's degree from Columbia University's graduate school of Journalism followed by an MBA from Columbia University's graduate school of Business. Albom paid part of his tuition by working as a professional pianist. Following his academic career, Albom became a full-time writer in New York City. Albom soon branched out into multiple forms of media, contributing to radio shows and television programs in addition to a growing list of periodicals. Albom is the author of four novels. Three of them have been turned into TV movies, including *Tuesdays with Morrie*, which Oprah Winfrey produced.

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Some Basic Insights of Morrie

In this section, I like to highlight some of the basic insights garnered from this insightful book.

“Accept what you are able to do and what you are not able to do”

In March 1995, Morrie was in a wheelchair and his legs dead and he would not walk again. This is the worst condition. But, he was not the person who would worry about the pathetic physical condition. Morrie was more positive in his word and deeds, especially in his thinking. Therefore, he refused to be depressed. Instead, Morrie had become a lightning rod of ideas. He jotted down his thoughts on yellow pads, envelopes, folders, scrap paper. *He wrote bite-sized philosophies about living with death's shadow: “Accept what you are able to do and what you are not able to do”; “Accept the past as past, without denying it or discarding it”* (Album, 1997: 10)

Life with dignity, courage, humour

Morrie at his final stage said that I am at the withdrawal of my life. “Am I going to withdraw from the world, as most people do, or am I going to live?” I decided I’m going to live – or at least try to live – the way I want, with dignity, with courage, with humour, with composure. This show how righteous he is? His words expose the thinking that

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nowhere in life he should become problematic to others. He wished that there should be dignity with courage and humour.

Trace out the purpose and live it successfully

Morrie speaks with Albom about finding your true purpose and meaning in life. “So many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half-asleep, strayed and blind without motivation. The best way one can trace out the meaning into your life is to devote and dedicate yourself to loving others, devote and dedicate yourself to your community around you, and devote and dedicate yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.” Instead of accumulating more wealth and more consumption of material goods focus on the things that meaningful and matters a lot. When we shift our attention away from superficial activities and thoughts, we free up energy to concentrate on important areas of our life — such as our passions and significant relationships. This is how we can find meaning and live our lives successfully.

Feel More

Today, we are in a fragmented world living our lives according to thinking rather than feeling. Both, thinking and feeling needed for a healthy balanced life. But, when people go about their thinking I mean only rationality then there arises the problem of exclusion. Today people are pushed to the periphery, marginalized, oppressed, suppressed and excluded because the feeling is missing among human beings.

Morrie beautifully explained and given more importance to the feeling that “Sometimes you cannot believe what you see, you have to believe what you feel. And if you are ever going to have other people trust you, you must feel that you can trust them, too—even when you’re in the dark. Even when you’re falling.”

It takes courage to trust others. Having faith in our intuition allows us to take bigger risks in relationships.

Living, and dying, on our own terms

Morrie encourages us to be ourselves, no holds barred: “Accept who you are; and revel in it.” He also invites us to devote ourselves to relationships with people who make us better. When we accept our very self then we will start living life on our own terms. Otherwise, in course of time, we lose our identity, originality and our authentic natural purity which is equal to dying not on our own term but on others identity.

Forgiveness and Self-Compassion

When the question about forgiveness was asked to Morrie he said “It’s not just other people we need to forgive. We also need to forgive ourselves.” We should forgive ourselves for all the things we didn’t do and all things we should have done. Self-compassion is very much interconnected with self-forgiveness. In order to forgive oneself, one must first experience self-compassion.

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Love

Morrie explains why people are so drawn to an excess of material things: People are trying to fill a hole that is not being filled by love. He asserts

that no amount of material goods will fill that hole, which is why people constantly think they need more possessions. He blames society for “brainwashing” people into believing that material things serve as an adequate substitute for love. In fact, the larger society has reduced love to love of the material things, forgetting the depth dimension of love, including the suffering that is necessarily part of it.

Regrets

Albom asked Morrie that whether he regrets the nearing culmination of his life on earth. Morrie responds with a lesson on how the culture doesn’t encourage people to think about death and regrets until they are nearing their dying day. While they are living, he says, they are concerned about egotistical things, but they should constantly stand back and assess their life to determine what is there and what is missing from it. When we learn to accept the very nature and essence of human beings, we will be ready to accept anything that is coming in the path of our lives. Humankind is moving towards death from the moment of birth. Death is inevitable. Therefore, we must accept it. Otherwise, we will be regretting and feeling sad about our culmination (or elimination) on this earth.

Feeling Sorry

Albom asked Morrie whether he feels sorry for himself. Morrie answered that at times, he does, usually in the mornings. He often mourns for his body and the control that he has lost, and cries if he needs to. Afterwards, however, Morrie moves on and recognizes how lucky he is to have time to say goodbye to his loved ones before he dies. He consciously limits the amount of time he spends pitying himself, as he knows he must enjoy the little life he has left. The answer of Morrie is enriching and encountering. He just meant that life is with up and downs and falls and pits, happiness and sadness, suffering and death. Life

is of a two-sided coin. Happiness and suffering are inevitable and they are intertwined, interconnected. We must be aware of this. We are happy when something good happened to us. In the same way, we must understand that there is the possibility of suffering on the way of our lives. Therefore, we should learn to accept and take sufficient efforts to get rid of the problems. Morrie's very enriching answer is "he called himself lucky when he must endure such suffering. He says that he must enjoy the little life he has left rather than feeling sorry for his condition.

Culture

Each person must not simply accept the larger modern culture, which Morrie consistently critiques. He takes issue with modern culture's overvaluing of materiality, achievement, and superficial things, which he believes is not conducive to living a happy, fulfilled, and successful life. He instead advocates for the creation of personal cultures, or a system of living life that allows someone to be fulfilled through careful questioning of modern culture and religion. Throughout the Tuesday visits, he counsels his student Albom to create his own personal culture so

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he too can live his life to the fullest. We, the people of the

21st century must create our own personal valuable culture devoid of materiality and superficial things. Today the modern culture is of modern technology. Humanity fell prey to the hands of modern technologies. Humanity is enslaved to modern technology. As result, we find happiness in the perishable things of technology. The happiness that is given by material things are not long-lasting. In order to be happy and live our life meaningfully, we must create our own personal valuable culture with our personal convictions so that we can live our lives to the fullest level of our existence on earth.

Marriage: “Love each other or perish.”

Morrie and his student talked about the culture’s problems with commitment, and the question was why most of the married relationships were not able to last forever? Morrie says that marriage is important, but also that since people don’t know themselves, they don’t know who they want to be with. He says that a loved one is important, as they will always be there for you for better or worse. Morrie says that the most important thing in a marriage is to have respect, be able to compromise, be open, have some common values, and believe in the marriage. He concludes by saying “Love each other or perish.”

Today marriage has become a problematic phenomenon. We see innumerable marriage bonds are broken in our lives. The reason for it is that people marry based on conditions rather than love, open talk, respect, compromise and convictions. They don’t know who they want to be with. When a marriage takes place without love, respect, open talk and conviction then it is proven to

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A Critical Look

In this book, Morrie dealt with existential realities to make life more valuable and meaning full in the light of happiness through his chat with his own student Albom. The essence of this book is how can human persons become more valuable, meaningful with happiness? Morrie has very much dealt with the realities of our everyday lives. Some of the

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existential realities he deals with are love, self, compassion, culture, marriage, regrets, forgiveness, grief, suffering, happiness and death. When Morrie talked about love with his student Morrie, he said that modern human beings are brainwashed that material goods are substitutes for love. They are brainwashed and as a result of such brainwashing, human beings started believing it and finding love in material things. In this regard, I remember an incident that a woman was caring for her one-year-old child as well as mobile. Unfortunately, the mobile slipped from her hand and she left the child as well to catch the mobile. This shows how material became more valuable, meaningful than human beings in the postmodern age.

We also read and hear a lot of things that people are murdered for the materials. This shows that love has lost its essence. Love on materials is increasing day by day. People

are after them. Morrie says that material possessions are not going to fulfil the thirst for love. Today we have to love people rather than things. When we do it with the help of Morrie's thoughts in our lives then we can reap the fruits of love in our lives with happiness. When Morrie spoke about the culture he said with grief that modern culture is overvaluing materiality, achievement, and superficial things. Morrie says that this is not conducive to a successful happy life. Modern technology is enslaving humanity. To come out of such a problem, we must create our own personal values and culture with our own personal convictions. Morrie says that the most important thing in a marriage is to have respect, be able to compromise, be open, have some common values, and believe in the marriage. Today marriages are mostly divorced because of the lack of conviction, love, open talk, compromise and common values. Morrie talked about death too. When Albom asked him whether he has negation or regret towards death, Morrie simply said that he is ready for anything. The culture somehow created a negation, hatred feeling among the people about the death. But, everyone must understand that death is part and parcel of our life. Death is inevitable. The culmination of the birth is death. The man from the moment of his birth walks towards death. Therefore, learn to accept the very nature and essence of existence to be devoid of regrets and to be with long-lasting happiness. Morrie encourages us to be ourselves, no holds barred: "Accept who you are; and revel in it." He also invites us to devote ourselves to relationships with people who make us better. When we accept our very self then we will start living life on our own terms. Otherwise, in course of time, we lose our identity, originality and our authentic natural purity which is equal to dying not on our own term but on others identity. What all Morrie spoke about is present in our own selves. The thing is, we must actualize them to live a life of value, meaning and happiness.

Conclusion

I would conclude this review with the citation from the Tamas Book that “The world is basically a paradoxical place”. It is both good and bad. But we experience much of evil in this world. This is the current scenario of the world. The interconnectivity between human persons has been lost. As a result, we experience a lot of evil things such as anguish, hatred feelings, jealousy and envy. When we live our lives with the thoughts of Morrie, I am sure that we will experience many good things in our lives rather than evil things.

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Received: Sept 2, 2018: Accepted: Sept 12, 2019
Words: 3950



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