Tuesdays With Morrie

VEL700 Assignment 3

**Why I chose this book?**

As i was browsing through the list of all the books that the professor suggested for this assignment, I saw this one name that I remembered seeing in one of my neighbours room few days back: “Tuesdays with Morrie”. I really couldn’t figure out much about the book by just the name so i started googling: ‘What is Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom actually about?’ Where almost all the pages and articles said *‘It’s a book about Death’*, there was this one source that showed me that such a description of this book is just the tip of the iceberg. That this book really is about *anything and everything*. That this book is actually as much about *LIFE* too as it is about *Death.* It carries deep discussions on some topics about which no one is taught but everyone has to deal with at some points in life such as: Relationships, Love, Culture, Forgiveness, Fear, Courage, Optimism etc. It teaches how to live and how to die. Such a description intrigued a lot of curiosity in my head and that is why i chose this book.

**A Brief Introduction:**

The story at its centre has two main characters: Prof. Morrie Schwartz and Mitch Albom. Morrie is a very kind and extremely lovable psychology professor, who in his late sixties finds out that he is dying of ALS. Mitch, one of his favourite and long lost students, is a young man starting his adult life who unknowingly, not unlike others of his age, has fallen in the trap of *Money and Power*, become a total workaholic and is living what can be said a *materialistic* *life*. He goes to meet his professor after a long 20 years, when he sees Morrie is dying through a TV show. This meeting goes well and both of them, the former Teacher and Student, in a way sign up for their last class together. They meet for the next fourteen consecutive Tuesdays, up till Morrie’s death and discuss a different topic about life each day. These discussions constitute the content of the book and include life, death, love, culture, marraige, regret, forgiveness and much more.

**Chapters and Pages read:** I have read the whole book having 27 chapters spread over about 190 pages.

**Chapters 1-4: (The Curriculum, The Syllabus, The Student, The Audiovisual)**

The book starts in a very interesting way where the author gives us flashes from both future and past. As a foreshadowing he tells that his old dear professor dies of ALS but uses his last few months to teach him and in turn the whole world one of the most important lessons of their lifetime. Unlike almost any other person in his condition, Morrie refuses to surrender to death, even when it’s right on his doorstep, and decides to use his slow and patient demise as an experience, as a lesson for numerous people. He starts to lose control over his body, starting from toes the disease keeps on moving up leaving him unable to even little things like driving, walking and even going to restroom on his own. However, he refuses to be ashamed to ask for help and somehow his optimism and courage draws countless visitors; even Ted Koppel, the host of ABC-TV’s “Nightline” approaches for an interview. On the other side Mitch after passing from college tries to follow his passion for music but life offers him nothing but disappointment. After these unsuccessful attempts he kind of gives up and leaving behind all the teachings of his old professor takes up an ‘uninteresting’ job, making money like a machine, having no time for emotions, love or society he becomes a workaholic.

**Chapters 5-7 (The Orientation, The Classroom, Taking Attendance):**

Seeing Morrie on TV Mitch realises that he is running out of time to fulfill his promise to keep in touch with the old professor. On their meeting the teacher and student embrace in a long hug. This is where he is overcome with guilt and realises what he is was doing with his life. He realised that he was running after a paycheck over the last decade of his life. Here’s Mitch gets one of his last lessons from Morrie, about **culture**. That our culture and what we do because of it doesn’t make us feel good about ourselves these days. We need to create our own culture according to our needs rather than just blindly following one dictated by society. This was how Morrie, even on his deathbed, felt himself lucky while some perfectly healthy people in the world are still unhappy and unsatisfied with their life.

**Chapters 8-10 (We talk about the World, Feeling sorry about yourself and Regrets)**

Even in his condition Morrie reads newspaper daily and when asked about it by his student he says that just because he is dying does not mean that he should not know what else is going on in the world, now that he is suffering too he feels even more compassion for people suffering around the world. He says: *The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love and how to let it in.* Now comes the time when Morrie can no longer move by himself; even for going to restroom he has to ring a bell to call one of the helpers. At this point on being asked if he feels sorry about his condition, he says: *It’s horrible to watch my body slowly wilt away to nothing but it’s also wonderful because of all the time i get to say good-bye.* On the third Tuesday, the topic is Regret, and when Mitch asks Morrie if he would have any regrets, *if this was his last day in this world,* the professor points out another feature of the popular culture and replies: *The culture doesn’t encourage us to think about such things until we’re about to die. We are so wrapped up in egotistical things, career, money, family. We all need someone to point us into the right direction.* And Mitch realises that his life coach was sitting right in front of him.

**Chapters 12-14 (The Professor, We talk about Death and Family)**

On Death Morrie says: *Everyone knows they are going to die, but no one believes it. If we did, we would do things differently.* He added: *Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live.* When one knows that he is gonna die, he sees the world very differently. He strips away all the extra (materialistic) stuff and focusses on the essentials. He starts to distinguish among his wants and his needs and might have to make room for some spiritual things. The topic for the next tuesday was Family. Morrie shows all his family photos to Mitch and quotes the famous poet Auden: *Love each other or perish.* He said his disease would have been unbearable if he had no family to have his back. Visitors, friends, rellatives wold still come to meet but it is a whole different feeling of knowing that someone is there who won’t leave, who always has an eye on you. It provides a kind of ‘*Spiritual Security*’. Morrie even advices Mitch on having children, not directly but he says that raising children teaches you how to love and bond in the deepest way possible and is the best experience the life has to offer.

**Chapters 15-17 (We talk about Emotions, Fear of Aging and Money)**

While talking about emotions, Morrie taught Mitch another great lesson directly from the buddhists: *Detaching oneself from an emotion. Don’t cling to things because everything is impermanent.* But how can one gain life experience from these good and bad emotions when he is detached? To this Morrie replies: *if you hold back on an emotion, you’re busy being too afraid and can never be detached. But if you allow yourself to go all the way through them, you understand them fully and completely.* You know what this emotion is when the next time it hits you and you can control its effects. As the discussion moves towards “*fear of aging*”, Morrie gets another big defeat at the hands of his Age and Disease, now he needs help to wipe his behind after going to restroom. But he accepts it graciously and faces it heads on. He somehow learns to enjoy this dependency. He reveals feeling like a child again, being looked after, getting helped in daily activities, and the human touch, he just embraces that human touch. He also says he is not at all envious of youth. He says he enjoyed being young but it’s better to be older since you are wise. While being this old he has experienced being young and can take himself back to remember the feeling of being any age that he wants with the help of these experiences.

**Chapters 18-21 (We talk about how love goes on, Marriage and our culture)**

The discussion of love comes back, Morrie says the money, power or any of the materialistic belongings are not going to take us anywhere but love is going to keep us alive even when we’re gone in the hearts of all the people whose life we’ve affected. Marraige. Almost everyone nowadays has a problem with it, someone getting into it someone getting out of it. To this Morrie says: *it’s really important to find a loving relationship with someone in this culture, because the culture does not give you anything like that.* People don’t know what they want in a partner, they don’t even know who are they themselves so how can they know their partner. He then emphasises the importance of a loved one in life giving his own example, how his coughing and constant pain often keeps him up all nights but he always has his wife on the other side of the bed sitting there to comfort him, trying to be helpful. On the next tuesday the topic of culture reappears. Morrie believes in the inherent good in people and thinks they are mean only when they’re threatened; and this is what our culture does through things like the economy. A solution here, as he suggests, is not to run away or disregard the community but for each individual to build a little own *sub-culture*; where big things like-how we think, what we value - are chosen oneself.

**The last chapters (We talk about Forgiveness, the Perfect Day and Good-bye)**

‘*Forgive yourself before you die, then forgive others.’* We don’t just need to forgive others but ourselves too. For all the things we didn't do, we should have done. We can’t get stuck in the regrets of what could have happened; that doesn’t help once we see death approaching. On being asked what Morrie would do if he gets a perfectly healthy day, he expressed his desire to spend it just like any other simple average day, full of people and things that he loved. This according to him is the whole point of life.

Morrie died on a Saturday after being two days in a comma, but he had his whole family with him, taking shifts to sleep besides his bed at all times. He went serenely, as he hoped. He was buried in a peaceful spot he wanted, on a Tuesday.

**Conclusion**

When in our deathbed, we can see our life from a third person’s perspective, leaving behind all the biases and our ego. But what if one could get this perspective while enjoying life itself? This is what Morrie Schwartz and Mitch Albom through this book taught us. The importance of learning through experiences and introspection, so that we can live our life to the fullest. Almost everyone nowadays needs a good teacher for this, *one who sees you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that with wisdom could be polished to a proud shine.* And Morrie, through this book has become that teacher for me and many others.

I have already recommended this book to some of my friends and will keep on sharing this precious knowledge with many others.

-Sarvesh Chandoliya

2014CS10251