

Book review on Tuesdays with Morrie

By 立月文

Summary

Mitch Albom studied sociology in Brandeis University. Morrie Schwartz was his favourite, old professor. Mitch graduated in 1979. In 1994, Morrie caught a deadly disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). The next year, he appeared in “Nightline” to be interviewed by Ted Koppel. Mitch “rediscovered” his teacher 16 years after graduation. He visited Morrie every Tuesday and they talked about important things in life, family, emotions, marriage, etc. Every Tuesday was a lesson and no books were required. It was taught by experience. There were altogether 14 lessons. In the last Tuesday, they said goodbye. After that, Morrie went serenely on a Saturday morning.

Reviews

Morrie was dramatically optimistic. Though at the very beginning he did mourn the slow, insidious way in which he was dying, he stopped it and concentrated on all the good things still in his life. He looked at things from a very different angle. Certainly, it was horrible to watch one’s own body slowly wilt away to nothing. But he saw it in a way that it was wonderful and even lucky because of all the time he got to say good- bye. He was not just optimistic, but smart as well.

I was so ashamed because I am one of those who spend many of their waking hours feeling sorry for themselves. If I tripped over and fell, if I lost all my work, which I had spent hours on, because the computer got down, and if my wallet was stolen, I would ascribe all these to the so- called bad luck. But why couldn’t I feel I was lucky? I was lucky because I would pay extra attention during walking thereafter and probably would not fall for the second time. I was lucky because I had to do my lab report again and acquire in- depth knowledge of the topic which might do wonders for my examinations. I was lucky because I had not put my identity card and other important things in my wallet and what I lost was just a few ten dollars. What does self- pity bring us other than sadness and depression? It is useful to learn from Morrie to look at things from a different place. Morrie could do it with such a horrible disease, I know I must be able to do it with far less serious problems.

Morrie always reminded Mitch to let go of things. He said there was no point in keeping stubbornness. However, I found he was sometimes stubborn too. Even though he did not have the luxury of moving from place to place, he insisted on being lifted from bed and wheeled to his study as he strongly believed that when he was in bed, he was dead. Yet, I do not think there is contradiction between what he said and what he did. To my understanding, what he said meant one should not cling to things which are negative in nature like vengeance. We should never be thinking of retaliation on the one who betrayed us and instead, we should forgive him/her. We should let it go. On the other hand, it is essential and necessary to hold onto non-materialistic but important things that we cannot live without like health and love. Morrie has shown this to us in action. He has set a good example for all of us to follow.

“Death” is a taboo among people. We Chinese use other words to replace it. I know that since the day I was born. But I have never asked why. I had never thought about it until I read the answer from Morrie. He said, “The fact that we make such a big hullabaloo over it is all because we don’t see ourselves as part of nature. We think because we’re human we’re something above nature.” I was suddenly enlightened. Yes, we human think we are above nature. We always try to conquer nature. We cut down trees and we suffered from flooding. We hurt the nature and we hurt ourselves in turn. Isn’t this because we are part of nature? It is natural to die. So it is not necessary to hide from it. As Morrie said, “Everything that gets born, dies.” If we knew we are going to die soon, we should face it and be thankful, like Morrie, because we still have time to do the things we think are the most important in life. We are far more fortunate than those who died in accident and had not got a chance to say goodbye to their families and friends. If we think in this way, we will no longer be afraid of dying.

“You need food, you want a chocolate sundae.” This was given by Morrie on the eighth Tuesday. I was again so ashamed because this is exactly my shadow. And I believe many people would feel the same, especially the youth in wealthy countries and cities like Hong Kong. They want the latest digital camera. They want the MP3 player with the largest volume. And of course, I am one of them. But we do not need these very things actually. This agrees with what Morrie said: “There’s a big confusion over what we want versus what we need.” I was so taken with the words. At first, I thought that he was going to convince us to satisfy with what we already had. But as I continued reading, I realized that he was not. He was telling of what gave people real satisfaction. It is offering others what they have to give, including time, concern, love but not money. I did not quite get the meaning just by this sentence. But Morrie has given examples which enlightens me. We can spend time playing cards with lonely old men in shelters, giving them companionship or expressing concerns for patients in hospitals in order to achieve satisfaction.

For the fourteen lessons Mitch had with Morrie, although the topic was different every Tuesday, the subject can be summarized as the meaning of life. He mentioned more than once that many people were walking around as if they were sleepwalking. They seemed half-asleep even when they were busy doing things they automatically thought they have to do. Morrie said this was because they were chasing the wrong things and they were leading a meaningless life. I thought deeply. The scene of people walking hurriedly on the street appeared in my head. Yeah, Morrie was right. He was absolutely right. Though he did not mention what the wrong things most people were chasing are, I guess he was referring to money and materialistic things. And I am certain that I have got it right. I see many people have devoted themselves to working and making money. They want a bigger house, a nicer car. They want materialistic enjoyment. They have ignored others, their families, their friends, their neighbours, but they do not even know. They spend more time in working than accompanying their wives, husbands, children and parents. There is a lack of care and concern among most people. That is why Morrie said we have to devote ourselves to loving others, devote ourselves to our community around us, and devote ourselves to creating something that give us purpose and meaning. This is how we can have a meaningful life. This is what makes our lives worth living.

Throughout the whole book, the word “love” appears very frequently. It is, without doubt, the main idea of this book. Nearly every topic that Mitch and Morrie talked about is connected with “love”, even money. Morrie defined love as when you are as concerned about someone else’s situation as you are about your own. I like this definition very much. It is simple but flawless. In the past, if someone asked me what love is, I would just say, “Love is when I like somebody very much.” It is a naïve description and that reveals I know nothing about love.

This is the most touching book I have ever read. When I was reading, I seemed to be walking with Morrie. I seemed to be watching his health decline- losing the ability to move his legs, his hands and his head, and his voice becoming raspy. And I would ask, “Why is it so unfair? Why did this terrible disease torture such a good person?” Besides, I feel like his student as well. I have learned so much from him. He has broadened my horizon. He let me know what love is. I hope I can really devote myself to loving others and I will try my best to do it. This is a book of wisdom and a book of love. I hope the spirit of Morrie will be spread to every little corner of the world and by then the world will become a much lovelier place to live in.

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