

<<Tuesdays with Morrie>>

Three days with Morrie

This book is about... this used to be the usual way I start a book report.

Not this time.

Placing itself over self-help or inspirational books which are flooding book stores as well as our own shelves, "Tuesdays with Morrie" is more than problem-solutions which give you all the short-cuts. Brief as it is (I was reading it on traffic and finished in three days), it carries big questions about our life and death. Thus it has to be taken seriously.

It is a lesson about life. Someone is teaching us about life with his own one.

I have always been troubled by death questions. There are different ways in which people try to console themselves— some believe in karma, some believe in an afterlife, some lie to themselves... but we never confront it face-to-face. I guess I am one of those who, like many other people, put "death" at the back of my head so that I can focus on the endless tasks (or errands as you like) put before me. Or maybe I know — I think, I still have plenty of time. Death will wait. Sooner or later I will give some time to it, but it will never be now. There are always a lot of reasons to keep us from thinking about death, and one of them is fear. We know that we will die, and there seems to be nothing we can do about it.

I remember when I awaited the ambulance with my grandmother, who was gasping in an oxygen mask, her whole body shaking. I remember her being strapped in the bed, looking helpless and barely able to move while a tear slid down her bony cheeks. I couldn't think of a word to say to her to make her feel any better. "No worries, it will be fine." I knew it may not be. "No you won't die." I knew everyone would, even though we don't know when. Death is a fact I cannot deny, particularly when it is in your face. Therefore while she constantly mourns over the nearness of death and the torture of being almost there but not yet, sometimes I fall into the Chinese way of declining "unlucky" topics — "Don't say that".

One thing about Morrie's account of death that fascinates me, is that he has the courage to bring along the dark side of the story. Most other life stories we would have read are encouraging, and usually they emphasize the bright side of the whole experience — the wonderful things one would do before they die; how one would

make the best use of their time left...Morrie's story, however, for many times, made my heart thump or my body shiver. That his body is slowly withering, that he gradually loses control of himself, and how he has become so completely dependent on others to survive, becomes even more saddening by him acknowledging these facts. "Someday, someone is gonna wipe my ass." Says Morrie.

Yet he made the difference. He took a different perspective that shatters our normal conception of death and aging. We think that aging is a distressing process, and youth is the most beautiful moment of life to be envied; he says we need not be jealous with a past that we have gone through; we feel ashamed to be dependent and taken care of when we fall sick; he sees it as a chance to relive our life as a baby, surrounded by the overflowing love and care from others; we think that people in such a terrible situation must be depressed and full of self-pity; he is able to detach from the sufferings by accepting the emotions as they are and experience them to the fullest.

In this way, Morrie triumphed over death. And here in this book he reveals his secret to us.

"Learn how to die, then you know how to live."

So what do we do now? I can in fact, summarize the whole thing in love – for oneself, for others, and for the greater community. Many of us has taken the "realistic" approach to living, and habitually declines such messages of love as clichés, as something we all know but never been capable of living up to. Yet are we going to keep ourselves from thinking about it until our last breath? Morrie's remark was inspiring – since he had to count his days, he got the precious time for contemplating the true meaning of life, and nothing else. We may think whatever that is happening is most important to us at this moment, our job, our school project, an appointment... but who knows what happens next? Perhaps there is just one other second around the corner for us to reflect and conclude.

Thanks to Morrie, "a teacher to the last" (as written on his tombstone), for this wonderful course about life and death. I guess everyone can become a student of his, if only we would take on the assignment - to stop for a while, feel our surroundings; take a second to think about our lives and how we should live as part of nature.

One thing I would love to do next, is reading the Chinese version – to remind myself of those sincere and inspiring phrases by Morrie, and to read the story to my

grandmother, while I gently hold her skinny, crinkled hand.

If you have always shut down the issues of life and death, this is your perfect chance to open the door.