

A Story about Death

“Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live.” These were the words of Morrie Schwartz, a professor, coach, and mentor to many who had met him. He was also a victim of the notorious amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a fatal and merciless disease that causes death slowly and painfully. It destroys a victim’s nerves and muscle tissues, often from the legs and works its way up. The victim ultimately dies of suffocation, unable to get enough oxygen in the lungs.

Morrie knew he was dying, but he decided that he would not sit back and wait for death; instead, he wanted his death to be of value. He began to open discussion groups about death. Before long, he became famous across the nation, and was noticed by the producer of a famous TV program. He was invited to the program as a special guest and appeared on TV. It was not until then that the author, Mitch, found out about Morrie’s illness. Morrie was once Mitch’s favorite professor in college, but they had long lost contact. Mitch realized that he had to do his best to reconnect the broken link between him and his teacher. He made his visits to Morrie on Tuesdays. That was the beginning of Mitch’s last session with Morrie and its final report is presented as this book.

Morrie gave Mitch all he had learned in life. They shared fourteen Tuesdays together, teaching, learning, talking, hugging, kissing, and opening their hearts. Morrie wanted Mitch as well as every reader to understand the meaning of life and death. Morrie had a different interpretation of everything in life, and that made his life happier, more meaningful, and more contented. He was not reluctant to share his secrets; he wanted every person to know what life is, to reach for what is really important, and not going after trivial things we had thought to be indispensable. He taught Mitch about all men’s worries: regrets, death, family, relationships, and so on. He held nothing back. When Morrie finally passed away, his heart still pounded in those who loved him.

What impacted on me the most was how Morrie’s words were only simple, everyday ideas that we all know. We all know them, but we don’t act them out as we ought to. Morrie does. He truly believes in these morals, so he could easily be the person he wanted to be, the person he knew he should be. This is what distinguishes him from the rest of us. There is no use in wondering about what the world would be like if we all practiced these morals like Morrie did. It is too ideal and almost impractical. Yet why can’t we do as Morrie did? Why would these simple ideas be so impractical?

“Everyone knows they’re going to die, but nobody believes it. If we did, we would do things differently.” These are my favorite words spoken by Morrie. He was sentenced to death by his sudden diagnosis of ALS, so he chose to live his life to the fullest. If we truly understood that our final fate is death, or if we were notified of our “deadline”, would we still live as we did now? Or would we start to look for all the beauties we had never noticed before? Would we start to appreciate everything around us? Would we start to appreciate our lives? I believe so. I think this is what Morrie meant when he told us to learn how to die.

Morrie thought of his death as a research. He was the best example of his own doctrines. I was skeptical of these doctrines before. He helped me believe in them. His soul thrived in the book, giving my soul warmth. As the famous artist Renoir said, “The pain passes, the beauty remains.” Morrie discarded his suffering body, but left behind a whole new world full of love.