



# A Critical Study on Emotions and Grief in *Tuesdays with Morrie*

**Arthi Y P1**

Department of English

PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

**Dr. M. John Suganya**

Department of English

PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

## Abstract

The article explores the various shades of emotions humans experience through their lifetime with reference to Mitch Albom's memoir *Tuesdays with Morrie*. It is when time left on earth is very short, many a realization dawns. Morrie, the protagonist is diagnosed with ALS, a rare nervous disorder which probes him to go back in time and reflect on the choices he had made in the past. Morrie takes Mitch down his memory lane, explaining the challenges and tribulations he faced. The researcher delves deep into the forgotten human values. This is done by studying the meaningful interactions between a professor (Morrie) and his student (Mitch). Having been diagnosed with terminal illness, uncertainty looms large. Also, his grief is way harder to process. The researcher applies Kubler-Ross's model of grief to explain the five stages of grief. The article aims at giving an insight into processing grief and also, at leading a life of purpose. Morrie wants Mitch to value his life, differentiate between short lived happiness and long lasting ones, let go off materialism and it seems like he did succeed eventually in doing so.

Key words: grief, terminal illness, mental well-being, setting priorities, drawing boundaries.

## Introduction

Mitchell David Albom, popularly known as Mitch Albom is the best selling author of *Tuesdays with Morrie*, he is not only well-known writer, but also sports writer, journalist, singer, screenwriter, dramatist, and television broadcast. Although he published several more works, *Tuesdays with Morrie* earned unparalleled

acclaim and adulation. His books have sold over 40 million copies worldwide and have been translated into 47 languages. His constant writing themes are Time, death, love and loss.(web)

Morrie, a sociology professor and his student Mitch discuss some of the most important and meaningful aspects of life. Every Tuesday Mitch flies down to Boston to meet his professor, for Morrie addresses themselves as, “ The Tuesday people”(Albom 57). Mitch, the sports presenter lives a shallow life, meeting crazy deadlines and dancing his own dance. He has no time for anything but his career. He is busy running the rat race and fails to notice that time waits for none, that life is slipping away, that not just for his professor, time is running out for every human born on earth. Unlike Mitch, his professor allows himself to go through all emotions that he feels. He never ignores it or buries it under the carpet, pretending everything is alright. He takes time to dwell in what he feels, processes them and learns to make peace with his destiny.

Morrie is a living example of how humans tend to behave, or rather, how they are supposed to behave when death knocks the door. Every morning, he whines in self- pity, rages about his condition, cries his heart loud and then chooses to start afresh. He begins to think of all the lovely things that can happen during the day ahead. Positivity exhibited by Morrie during crisis hits the readers real hard. He deals with grief in a poised manner. Kubler-Ross model can best describe Morrie’s idea of handling things once he is diagnosed with ALS. The way Morrie carries himself through the various stages of grief has been narrated with finesse. A man, who is always so full of life is reduced to being a vegetable in a matter of months. He knows life is almost over and he decides to find ways to cope with his own death sentence, which he does in all sincerity. As said by Suganya et al, in their article, “Communal Expectancy and the Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by Meredith Russo” men also have freedom to express their emotions.“There is nothing wrong in a bloke exaggerating about his feelings. Love, compassion, fear, grief and happiness are some of the innate emotions of mankind regardless of gender” (Suganya et al, 880)

#### Kubler-Ross’s model

In 1969 - Swiss psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross first introduced her five stage grief model in her book *On Death and Dying*. Her theory of grief became known as the Kubler-Ross's model. While it was originally devised for people who were ill, these stages of grief have been adapted for other experiences with loss, too.(web)

According to Kubler-Ross, the five stages of grief are: Denial - anger - bargaining - depression – acceptance(web)

In this article, the researcher applied this Kubler-Ross's model to explain the grief of Morrie

Denial, the first stage of the model, where one constantly denies the reality - In the summer of 1994, when doctors declared that Morrie had become a victim of one of the rarest diseases, he couldn’t bring himself to accept that such a horrible thing can actually happen to him. He was angry just like he was at the time of his mother’s untimely demise. He felt life wasn’t fair. He thought that he had always tried to do right by people, neither had he harmed anyone to deserve a fate like this. Every time Morrie had trouble with his motor functions, he had known that it was something serious, but, denied the thought and chose to pacify his troubled self, saying that those were signs of aging.

Anger, the outcome of being unable to come to terms with the happenings - Shortly after he was diagnosed with ALS, he began to learn about what the disease would do to him. He had always loved to dance. He had always felt so alive when dancing. He would go to a church in Harvard Square each Wednesday night for an event called "Dance Free," which catered mainly to students and other young people (Albom 05). Morrie, a distinguished doctor of sociology, would go in sweat pants and a T-shirt, and dance all night until he was soaked with sweat. He was seething with rage that he couldn't dance anymore and that he could do nothing about it. He was even angrier, he wouldn't be able to go about his regular chores. He was mad he wouldn't get to spend much time with his loved ones, that few months after, he will have to depend on someone for everything.

Bargaining, the battle with destiny – People forget that we live in a world where sometimes bad things happen despite our best effort. Morrie was so saddened by the news of his impending death that he developed a false hope. He told himself, "When you're in bed, you're dying" (Albom 183). This was how he decided to bargain for his life. He was extremely particular that he wouldn't lie on his bed as he staunchly believed that staying up and about can extend his life span. Somehow, he thought that he could postpone his death if he doesn't spend most of his time lying on a bed.

Depression, which is bound to happen after the long ordeal – Tired of fighting reality, Morrie succumbed to the pressure. Despite being so optimistic, the disease got the better of him. Having lost to something he had thought he would eventually conquer made him spiral into a whirlwind of sorrow. The blow was so hard on him. At some point, even getting up and showing up made no sense to him. He wasn't able to relish food anymore, though he was a bigtime foodie. Food helps to cure diseases and helps to promote interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships as said by Suganya et al in their article, "Gender Performance on the Reinvigoration via Food". He could no longer step out of the house for a breath of fresh air. All these little acts that brought him immense happiness were denied to him and it was no wonder he sank into depression.

Acceptance, when life leaves one with no option, but to accept – After a brief period of depression, Morrie understood that this was no way to live life. He knew that he had to take a decision. He had just two options to choose from. He could either wallow in pity and torture himself to death or he could face the illness head on and make his time on earth worthwhile by making a few adjustments and changing his thought process. He knew healing physically was out of question. He accepted his fate and chose to heal himself spiritually so he could spend the rest of his days in peace. Though moving on was next to impossible, Morrie moved forward.

## Results

The minute Morrie's doctor gave him that fateful news, his world started falling apart. He felt so powerless as there was nothing he could do, but, simply watch the disease eat him alive. But, Morrie had always been a very cheerful person. Perhaps, that was the reason he was unable to grieve for too long. Soon enough, he came up with ways to deal with the harsh reality of his life, or his death. He had witnessed both his parents passing away and may be such terrible incidents had made him stronger to weather the storms with ease. He departed the world in a graceful manner. He did as much good as he could as taught as many beautiful

life lessons he could till he breathed his last. All of this was possible since he processed his fears, sorrow, uncertainties efficiently.

### Argumentation

It is said, life is a dance. Morrie's life was one phenomenal dance. Life is filled with many such Morries. People just have to look around. There is a lot to learn from people like Morrie. Today, if his teachings have been published as a book, it will serve as a bible for many life coaches because he fought both his disease and his fear of dying. Morrie says a story about a little wave which is rising up and above happily, but, stops when it sees the other waves hitting the shore and getting washed away. Watching this little wave, another wave asks the reason behind its stillness. When the little wave expresses its fear, the other wave clarifies that, they are not waves, they are part of the ocean, meaning to say, they shall always remain. Likewise, death means a life ending, not the end of any relationship. Death is not going to fade all the wonderful deeds one did during his time on earth. Also, Morrie does harbour rough past, especially with his father. But, in the end he chooses to forgive him. As he rightly said, "when you know how to die, you know how to live" (Albom 82). This is what he calls an aphorism. We needed people to fall back on when we were babies and so did we when we were adults. So, there aint no shame in being dependent on people while we grown old.

### Conclusion

Morrie lays emphasis on family, love, forgotten human values- forgiving, acts of kindness, meaningful interactions, morality, dependency, marriage, etc. In actuality, it is in little gestures that joy lies. When asked what his idea of perfect day would be, Morrie says all he wanted to have sumptuous meals and have a wonderful time with his family and friends and sleep like a baby. This shocks Mitch and later makes him realize that such things which seem so ordinary have a lot to offer, that these very normal things seem like a privilege to Morrie as he is counting his days. Everything he wants to do needed him to put in so much effort as the disease has crippled him, denying him things that other people can do effortlessly. The idea of holding a prayer meet for his death when he is very much alive shocks Mitch. He re-evaluates the decisions he had made in the past. He learns the best life lessons during Morrie's final days. End of the day, it is all about living a life of purpose.

### References

- Albom, Mitch. *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1997, New York City  
<https://study.com/learn/lesson/mitch-albom.html>  
<https://www.healthline.com/health/stages-of-grief#5-stages>

Suganya, M. John & Boopalan, Priyanga & .V, Harish Sachin. (2023). Gender Performance on

the Reinvigoration via Food Section A-Research paper Eur. European Chemical Bulletin. 12. 883-891.

10.31838/ecb/2023.12.s1.095.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140450\\_Gender\\_Performance\\_on\\_the\\_Reinvigoration\\_v](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140450_Gender_Performance_on_the_Reinvigoration_v)

<https://www.eurchembull.com/uploads/paper/b9181a968de998b7727c25b6af5d20f2.pdf>.

Suganya, M.John & S., Jeevitha & Grashya, L.. (2023). Communal Expectancy and the

Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by

Meredith Russo. European Chemical Bulletin. 12. 878-882. 10.31838/ecb/2023.12.s1.094.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140477\\_Communal\\_Expectancy\\_and\\_the\\_Authentic\\_Sel](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140477_Communal_Expectancy_and_the_Authentic_Sel)

[f\\_of\\_Men\\_and\\_Transgenders\\_-](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140477_Communal_Expectancy_and_the_Authentic_Sel)

[\\_Arms\\_and\\_the\\_Man\\_by\\_George\\_Bernard\\_Shaw\\_and\\_Birthday\\_by\\_Meredith\\_Russo.](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140477_Communal_Expectancy_and_the_Authentic_Sel)

<https://www.eurchembull.com/uploads/paper/72c7b104b7b5ddc1f8fe0b8cbb0f69a8.p>

df

