

Love Is How You Stay Alive

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In *Tuesdays with Morrie*, a topic that particularly stood out to me was from the chapter “The Ninth Tuesday We Talk About How Love Goes On” (Albom, 1997, p. 130). In this chapter, Morrie discusses with Mitch whether he was afraid about being forgotten after he dies. Morrie provides Mitch his personal explanation: “I don’t think I will be. I’ve got so many people who have been involved with me in close, intimate ways. And love is how you stay alive, even after you are gone” (Albom, 1997, p. 133).

Morrie explains that this belief, that love is how you stay alive, is how he will be immortalized in the memory of others, including that of Mitch: “Mitch, all this talk that we’re doing? Do you ever hear my voice sometimes when you’re back home? When you’re all alone? Maybe on the plane? Maybe in your car?” To this, Mitch answers “Yes,” and Morrie continues to tell him: “Then you will not forget me after I’m gone. Think of my voice and I’ll be there” (Albom, 1997, p. 134).

This excerpt and concept that Morrie repeatedly addresses inspires me because it’s something that I have experienced while grieving the death of loved ones, particularly the death of my grandmother. I notice ways in which she left a lasting influence and impact on my life. I see these influences in the way I treat others, inspired by lessons she taught me and the way she cared for me, all denoted by her unconditional love.

I also find my grandmother’s legacy in the tokens that I keep to remember her by, such as the tattoos I got in her memory and the lilac perfume I wear, reminiscent of the great lilac bushes that grew in her gardens. Belongings of hers I inherited after she died, such as framed pictures and crocheted handkerchiefs, are among some of the first things I see when I wake up each

morning. Certain traditions I have are taken directly from her sharing them with me, like wrapping gifts in the Sunday paper “funnies” as she would for my birthday gifts.

Countless smiles and tears on my face can be accredited to the recollection of my memories of her. In a way, this is how I keep her alive and continue to love her and honor her love for me. Morrie’s concept, that one can stay alive through love, has made me speculate how the love I show to others will have a similar impact on their life and the persistence of my legacy. Because of this, I am aware of how I may be immortalized within others, inspiring me to be a kinder and better person.

This led me to an interest in how Morrie’s idea that love is how you stay alive could influence understanding and comprehension of death, the experience and processing of grief, and one’s acceptance of death.

To explore these topics, I want to establish what characterizes a mature understanding of death, which includes an important concept called noncorporeal continuity. Mark Speece (1995) has attempted to catalog concepts that are necessary for understanding death, specifically for children, who developmentally have less comprehension about death. Through Speece’s review of relevant systematic studies, the concepts he believes to be fundamental for a mature understanding of death include: death is universal (all living things eventually die), irreversible (once physical death occurs, one cannot be made alive again), it makes the body non-functional (after death, physical functions and life-defining capabilities cease), it has a cause (there are internal and external causes for death), and noncorporeal continuity (a non-naturalistic belief about death that posits that some form of personal continuation exists after physical death occurs).

Morrie's statement that "love is how you stay alive" is a noncorporeal continuity belief, qualifying as a mature concept of death in respect to Spreece's fifth requirement. Morrie's belief is similar to religious and spiritual understandings of noncorporeal continuity, specifically beliefs in an afterlife or reincarnation. These existential beliefs about mortality are practiced across different cultures and ethnicities. They may take the form of an organized religion, supernatural experiences, and cultural traditions and rituals done to remember the deceased. It is possible that spiritual beliefs can help facilitate transformational experiences and mindsets in the survivors of the deceased, which help their survivors cope with their loss (Taylor, 2020). This finding may suggest that Morrie's noncorporeal continuity belief that "love is how you stay alive" could also help individuals cope with death.

Noncorporeal continuity may also function as a way for individuals to process their grief in a productive way. Avoidance of grief has shown to lead to greater rumination over the experienced loss, among other negative outcomes (Schneck et al., 2019). Grief may be processed more positively and adaptively by engaging in beliefs, such as Morrie's, that support the concept of noncorporeal continuity.

Noncorporeal continuity further relates to the idea that people can have a personal legacy after they die, material and immaterial, which specifically aligns with the phenomenon of generativity. Generativity, as defined by Erik Erikson, is one's concern for establishing and guiding the next generation. Generativity versus stagnation is stage seven of eight in Erikson's proposed stages of psychosocial development. This stage starts in middle adulthood, with care being the virtue of focus and the desired outcome being generativity. Failing to facilitate this outcome will lead to feelings of unproductiveness or stagnation, reflecting a lack in the virtue of

care. In this sense, generativity and its encompassing actions are how an individual ensures symbolic immortality (Newton et al., 2019).

If love is conceptualized as a generative act, then therefore love is something with the potential of symbolic immortality. Furthermore, this would support the idea that love is a noncorporeal continuity belief, a necessary component for a mature understanding of death. This implies that “love is how you stay alive” is not only a valid statement, it may also provide individuals a better understanding and acceptance of death. As a result of this outcome, this concept may also help individuals navigate grief. Acceptance is not only a critical component of maturely understanding death, it is also an essential step in grieving.

Future research on love being a form of immortality could further investigate the impact of different kinds of love, such as romantic or platonic, on death comprehension and grief. More research could also be done to quantify various components or actions of love needed for noncorporeal continuity. Whether love must be reciprocal between the dying and their survivors to qualify for the continuous effects could also be explored. Furthermore, how noncorporeal continuity and love influences the dying individual’s acceptance of death should also be better understood.

For adult development, these findings offer means through which individuals can cope with death. They also suggest the significance of love and its accompanying expressions in confronting death-related anxiety. This significance may inspire an increased awareness of the impact and importance of love, especially as it relates to mortality and the experience of grief in survivors of the deceased. As a result, people may be motivated to improve or cultivate relationships with love, along with other influential aspects of their life throughout their lifespan

to help guarantee a positive legacy and symbolic immortality for themselves or someone else they love.

Anecdotal evidence supporting the concept that love creates a symbolic immortality, along with helping comprehension and acceptance of death, are found within *Tuesdays With Morrie*. Just one example of this is the continuity of Morrie's love in Mitch's life and more tangibly, the significance he gave to Tuesdays and the lessons he taught Mitch.

The first Tuesday that Mitch begins interviewing Morrie for the book, Morrie labels themselves as "Tuesday people" (Albom, 1997, p. 57). Tuesdays became their day to write the book and converse together. Tuesday was also the day they would spend most often together nearly twenty years earlier when Mitch was his student in college.

As Mitch is preparing to leave Morrie's office that first day of their interview, he shares with Mitch the most poignant lesson-learned so far from his disease:

"The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love, and to let it come in.

Let it come in. We think we don't deserve love, we think if we let it in we'll become too soft. But a wise man named Levine said it right. He said, 'Love is the only rational act'" (Albom, 1997, p. 52).

Mitch and Morrie's Tuesday interviews continue, and their bond strengthens. During this time, when discussing his finding the spot where he will be buried, Morrie encourages Mitch to talk to him after he dies, telling him "After I'm dead, you talk. And I'll listen" (Albom, 1997, p. 170). Mitch agrees to this but somewhat skeptically.

As Morrie lays on his deathbed, his condition having severely worsened, he tells Mitch that he loves him, and Mitch reciprocates the sentiment, something that would have previously

been uncharacteristic of him before their reunion. As he leaves, suspecting that this may be his last time seeing Morrie alive and not knowing how to say goodbye, he tells Morrie that he would be back next Tuesday. That Tuesday never really came.

After Morrie dies, Mitch shares how he imagined having a conversation with Morrie in his head like Morrie had encouraged him to. It felt natural, authentic, and it brought him joy. In that same moment he also realized, fondly, that it was a Tuesday (Albom, 1997, p. 188). And so, Morrie lived on.

Morrie's sentiment that "love is how you stay alive" supports another one of his favorite quotes, which was "love each other or perish" (Albom, 1997, p. 91). Through love, Morrie maintained his relationships. Through love, Mitch wrote this book with Morrie. Through love, Morrie died without ever really going away, living on in the heart of Mitch and many others.

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