



Book Review :

The First Phone Call from Heaven By Mitch Albom

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People nowadays seem to have got used to checking the cell phone from time to time for text messages or call alerts. How would you feel if you got a call from someone who had passed away? I got fascinated the moment I started reading the story named 'The First Phone Call from Heaven' written by Mitch Albom. A few residents of a small town on Lake Michigan claimed to have got phone calls from their departed loved ones, drawing wide attention from both believers and non-believers of religion. While curious crowds were flocking to the town, a single father was determined to find out the truth behind the mysterious calls. What happened thereafter kept me reading with immense interest.

I got hooked on the story for a number of reasons. For one thing, the characters are true to life. There is Katherine Yellin, whose deceased sister called and told her about her peaceful life in heaven. Quite taken aback, she felt bewildered at first, but the repeated call gradually drove away her fear and soon

she found herself waiting every Friday with her cell-phone in her hand. Six others had a similar experience of receiving the Friday 'call' from heaven. They were deemed the 'chosen ones', objects of admiration, when the incidents became front page news and claimed network coverage. However, the response was not all positive. Someone with an incurable disease found Katherine's experience so consoling that he overcame his fear of the afterlife and willingly submitted himself to death. Katherine was then harshly criticized for spreading false hope. Even the church was affected. The increased size of the congregation was no longer a welcome sign as it was doubted whether the attention was on Gospel preaching or on the attempt at actual contact with heaven. In real life, haven't we sometimes suffered the loss of our dear ones and long so much to seek encounters with them somehow? Are there not people who seek to make a profit by overstating the phenomenon? Do churchgoers really



care for spiritual enrichment and for pursuit of the truth? Indeed evidence of human nature abounds in the story.

The occasional reference to the invention of the first telephone also adds to the appeal of the story. The writer points out that, whoever the inventor was, the very first telephone conversation contained these words; 'Come here. I want to see you.' And ever since then this has been the intention of the users of the telephone. The seven 'chosen ones' in the story were so convinced of their contact with the departed souls mainly because of their eagerness to see them again. Bell, the inventor of the telephone, was told to stop talking nonsense when he mentioned a wire that could transmit the human voice. Likewise, there were protesters who viewed the phone calls from heaven with contempt and disbelief. Then upon royal request, there was a demonstration of the telephone for Queen Victoria. And the event was in the news. Similarly, there would be a TV show

broadcast live in which Katherine would be sharing a phone call with the world. Would this justify her claim to the heavenly call? I think the writer has very cleverly made use of the comparison to convey the message that despite the great changes in the models and functions of the telephone, its main use of establishing a link between people remains the same and that our desire to connect and to stay connected is still there.

Of course, there is no shortage of thrills to keep the reader on the hook. As mentioned earlier, Sully Harding, the single father, was skeptical of the calls from heaven. He put his life at risk in his search for information that would justify his suspicion of a hoax. Out of the reader's expectation, the truth turned out to be related to a past incident that had caused his wife's death and his imprisonment. Did he succeed in solving the mystery? Were the phone calls really from heaven? These are the questions that kept me turning the pages. And you will have to read the book to find out the answers.