

Choosing to Die by Phyllis Shacter - Discussion Guide

1. Phyllis mentions that people are often relieved, after reading the book, to learn that they have more choice at the end of their life than they had realized even if they are facing a disease as horrible as Alzheimer's disease. What is your overall reaction to this? As a result of reading the book, has your view of end of life choices expanded? If so, how?
2. Is VSED a controversial issue for you? If so, why? What is it based on?
3. What new information did you learn from this book? Do you have more questions about this? What are they?
4. What parts of the book surprised you the most?
5. As a result of reading the book, what might you do differently toward the end of your life? Would you like to have a Celebration of Life before you die? Do you have a Health Directive that has been filled out and notarized?
6. How do you feel about Phyllis making her personal story so public?
7. Have you ever been a health advocate for someone who is at the end of their life? What was the experience like for you?
8. Phyllis mentions that other people had strong opinions about Alan's choice and her support of his choice. What is your opinion?
9. Is your own fear of death heightened or lessened as a result of reading this book? Why?
10. Alan said, "Now that I've investigated it, it doesn't sound horrible (VSED) and I'm going to do it. I'm doing it because I have a disease that will rob me of the ability to make this choice." What choice would you hypothetically make if you had Alan's experience and were diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease?
11. Are you living or are you dying? What does this question mean to you?
12. What parts of the author's story can you relate to the most?

13. What were your favorite passages in the book? Why?
14. There is one chapter in the book about Alan's experience with cancer and how he chose not to follow the doctor's prescription for surgery. What do you think you would do if you were in Alan's situation and you were diagnosed with Alzheimer's and then cancer only six weeks later? Would you have had the surgeries or not? If the answer is "no," what would you have done instead?
15. What was the most interesting for you about Alan's 9 ½ day process?
16. What do you think about their doctor's view of Alan's choice and why she stepped forward to help him?
17. Alan and Phyllis had good communication with their doctor. That is a main reason why their doctor came forward to help Alan at the end of his life. Do you have good communication with your doctor? What can you do to improve it?
18. Would you like to be as closely involved with your loved one's passing like Phyllis was with Alan? What preparation is helpful?
19. Why do you think Phyllis' involvement as Alan's advocate helped her to move in the direction of giving birth to herself in a new way?
20. Phyllis talks about how Alan prepared himself emotionally to die. How can you live your life today so that you are more prepared to die well in the future? How can you cultivate more awareness about dying? Is this a new concept for you?