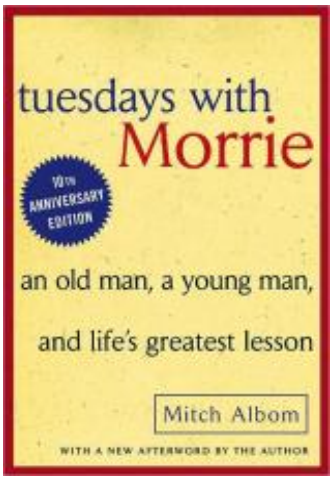
Tuesdays with Morrie

by Mitch Albom



About the Book

To paraphrase the poet Robert Burns, "The best-laid plans of mice and men often go astray." But maybe some of us have to go astray to land eventually on target.

Take Mitch Albom. As a young man graduating from Brandeis University, he made promises easily. Keeping them was another story.

"You'll stay in touch?", his sociology professor Morrie Schwartz asked him on graduation day in 1979. Mitch answered his favorite professor, his mentor, his friend, without hesitation, "Of course."

Fast-forward sixteen years to Mitch's life as a successful newspaper sports columnist and broadcast journalist. Adept at juggling phone calls, faxes, interviews, problems, often it seems while driving too fast to another appointment on an overloaded docket, Mitch has a wonderful wife but no time to spend with her, a beautiful house on a hill, a stock portfolio, and a brother he hasn't talked to in years. He lives on a deadline--too fast is the only speed he knows.

Then, one night, tired from another day into which he crammed too much work, he sits in front of the TV, channel-surfing, and catches the crest of "Nightline." And there's his old teacher and friend Morrie Schwartz telling Ted Koppel he has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), Lou Gehrig's disease, and that he's learning how to die. Mitch hadn't seen Morrie since graduation day at Brandeis.

Best-laid plans indeed.

The Laws of Nature

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

This story of Mitch Albom and Morrie Schwartz illuminates many universal truths, including this law of nature. And perhaps that law has an emotional equivalent as well. Morrie's illness and death gives Mitch a perspective that directly changes his life. The very success that caused him to neglect the most important things becomes the means to send Morrie's message to all who need reminders of what those things are. Action and reaction--just look at the evidence.

Action: A newspaper strike idles Mitch and makes him question his ability to survive without something that he feels is his "lifeline...when I saw my stories in print each morning, I knew that, in at least one way, I was alive."

Reaction: After a week of sitting home and watching TV, Mitch calls his old friend Morrie and begins a new "lifeline." This one is stronger than the others he's clutched. It's based on what's going on inside Mitch's heart and head instead of what's happening at work or in the stock market.

Action: As the disease progresses, Morrie loses his privacy in the most basic ways. He can't dress himself. He can't feed himself. He can't go to the bathroom by himself.

Reaction: Morrie learns to accept help from others. He shows us a few things about dignity and acceptance as he turns his physical weakness into strengths of the heart, the mind, and the spirit.

Action: Morrie is worried about leaving his family impoverished by his substantial medical bills. This is practical and real concern-the cost of caring for an ALS patient is staggering.

Reaction: The success and the pressure that kept Mitch too busy and preoccupied to keep in touch with his mentor, enable him to gain a substantial advance for Tuesdays with Morrie, thus relieve this anxiety in Morrie and offer some financial assurance to Morrie's wife.

Action: Mitch loses his friend Morrie.

Reaction: Mitch reconnects with his brother, Peter, whom he hadn't seen or talked to in many years.

Action: Morrie Schwartz dies.

Reaction: Morrie Schwartz lives on in the hearts of his family and friends and, now, in the people who read this book.

It's Really Very Simple

Morrie's are the most basic lessons, but in a world full of cynicism, consumerism, and disenfranchised people, they need to be given again and again: Take time to stare out the window instead of at your computer screen. Laugh. It's natural to die. Love is how you stay alive.

Morrie Schwartz is our messenger. We listen because he treats us with respect, he makes us laugh, and he's learned "how to give out love, and to let it come in."

Discussion Guide

1. Did your opinion about Mitch change as book went on? In what way?

2. Who do you think got more out of their Tuesday meetings, Mitch or Morrie? In what ways? How do you think each would answer this question?

3. Do you think Mitch would have come back to Morrie's house the second time if he hadn't been semi-idled by the newspaper strike?

4. Discuss Morrie's criticisms of Mitch throughout the book. Do you think Morrie should have been tougher on him? Easier?

5. Do you think Mitch would have listened if Morrie hadn't been dying? Does impending death automatically make one's voice able to penetrate where it couldn't before?

Let's Talk About Death

6. Does this book make Morrie's death a public event? If so, how is it similar to other public deaths we've experienced as a society? How is it different?

7. Morrie referred to himself as a bridge, a person who is in between life and death, which makes him useful to others as a tool to understand both. Talk about other literary, historical, political, or religious figures who have also served this purpose.

8. Most of us have read of people discussing the way they'd like to die, or, perhaps, have been a part of that conversation. One common thought is that it would be best to live a long, healthy life and then die suddenly in one's sleep. After reading this book, what do you think about that? Given a choice, would Morrie have taken that route instead of the path he traveled?

9. On "Nightline," Morrie spoke to Ted Koppel of the pain he still felt about his mother's death seventy years prior to the interview. Is your experience with loss similar or different? Does what you've read in this book help ease any of that pain?

10. Morrie was seventy-eight years old when diagnosed with ALS. How might he have reacted if he'd contracted the disease when he was Mitch's age? Would Morrie have come to the same conclusions? The same peace and acceptance? Or is his experience also a function of his age?

Let's Talk About Meaning

11. Try the "effect of silence" exercise that Mitch described in your class or in your group. What do you learn from it?

12. Talk about the role of meaningful coincidence, synchronicity, in the book and in Mitch and Morrie's friendship.

13. Morrie told Mitch about the "tension of opposites" (p. 40). Talk about this as a metaphor for the book and for society.

14. Mitch made a list of topics about which he wanted Morrie's insight and clarity. In what ways would your list be the same or different?

15. Discuss the book in terms of structure, voice, and tone, paying attention to Mitch's use of flashbacks and other literary devices. How do his choices add to the meaning?

16. Are college students today missing out because they don't have the meaningful experiences that students in the 1960s had? Do you think Morrie thought they were?

17. Morrie said, "If you've found meaning in your life, you don't want to go back. You want to go forward" (p. 118). Is this true in your experience?

Let's Talk About Religion, Culture, and Ritual

18. Morrie believed, "You have to be strong enough to say if the culture doesn't work, don't buy it. Create your own" (pp. 35-36). How can people do this? How can this book help?

19. As his visits with Morrie continued, Mitch explored some other cultures and religions and how each views death. Discuss these and others that you've studied.

20. To the very end, Mitch arrived at Morrie's house with food. Discuss the importance of this ritual.

Let's Talk About Relationships

21. Was Morrie making a judgment on people who choose not to have kids with his statement: "If you want the experience of having complete responsibility for another human being, and to learn how to love and bond in the deepest way, then you should have children" (p. 93)? Whether or not he was, do you agree?

22. Mitch wrote, "Perhaps this is one reason I was drawn to Morrie. He let me be where my brother would not" (p. 97). Discuss Mitch's relationship with Peter.

23. Discuss the practical side of Morrie's advice: "Only an open heart will allow you to float equally between everyone" (p. 128). How could this advice be useful the next time you're in a social or other situation where you feel out of place or uncomfortable?

24. Morrie said that in marriage, "Your values must be alike" (p. 149). In what ways do you agree or disagree?

25. Would Morrie's lessons have carried less weight if Mitch and Peter hadn't resumed contact by book's end?

Author Bio

Mitch Albom is the author of numerous books of fiction and nonfiction, which have collectively sold more than 42

million copies in 48 languages worldwide. He has written seven #1 *New York Times* bestsellers --- including TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE, the bestselling memoir of all time, which topped the list for four straight years --- award-winning TV films, stage plays, screenplays, a nationally syndicated newspaper column, and a musical. Through his work at the *Detroit Free Press*, he was inducted into both the National Sports Media Association and Michigan Sports halls of fame and is the recipient of the 2010 Red Smith Award for lifetime achievement.

He founded the nonprofit SAY Detroit, which provides pathways to success for Detroiters in need through major health, housing and education initiatives. He also founded a dessert shop and a gourmet popcorn line to help fund it. Albom operates Have Faith Haiti, a home and school for impoverished children and orphans in Port-au-Prince, which he visits monthly. He lives with his wife, Janine, in Michigan.

Critical Praise

"All of the saints and Buddhas have taught us that wisdom and compassion are one. Now along comes Morrie, who makes it perfectly plain. His living and dying show us the way."

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