

TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE: A BOOK REVIEW

BY SAMANTHA JAKIMOWICZ



Keep your heart open for as long as you can, as wide as you can, for others and especially for yourself ~Morrie Schwartz

Tuesdays with Morrie, an Old Man, a Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson is a memoir by an American sports writer, Mitch Albom. The story begins with Mitch, watching TV in his home, flipping through the channels, and stopping when he recognizes the voice of his beloved old Professor (Morrie Schwartz) being interviewed about his experience of dying from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig's disease. Having lost touch with his mentor over the years Mitch immediately contacts Morrie. What was meant to be a catch-up visit became the first of sixteen Tuesdays where Mitch and Morrie spend time discussing the fundamentals of life. After a couple of visits, Mitch began recording their talks, with Morrie's permission and his encouragement; as he wanted to share his journey.

As the weeks pass by, the reader learns about the beautiful and unique relationship between teacher and student, as Morrie once again shares his wisdom with Mitch. This book is a guide on how to be a better person, how to live with love, and how to follow your dreams.

¹ Tuesdays with Morrie [online image]. Retrieved August 24, 2018 from:
<https://cbsnews1.cbsstatic.com/hub/i/r/2017/05/12/eae1c282-4c0f-45b8-9aa2-e1d0258cecdd/resize/620x/a613fd8f4c9d4834f5cd0ae77f6689b4/mitch-and-morrie.jpg>

Some of the topics discussed include feeling sorry for yourself, regrets, death, family, emotions, fear of ageing, money, marriage, culture, and forgiveness.

Morrie's experience of ageing is more intense than most as his disease is rapidly progressing. Nevertheless, he deals with the idea of his death philosophically, describing it much like returning to childhood and needing:

'Someone to bathe you. Someone to lift you. Someone to wipe you. We all know how to be a child... for me it's just remembering how to enjoy it ... We all yearn in some ways to return to those days when we were completely taken care of – unconditional love, unconditional caring.'

Morrie shows a great deal of empathy during his visits with Mitch, often reflecting on experiences with his former students. One example of this is the description of a standoff where one of the protesters recognised him as their favourite teacher and called for him to come through the window. An hour later, after listening to the concerns of the marginalised black students, Morrie crawled out the window with a list of the protesters' concerns and demands.

Morrie also described having worked at a mental health facility after he finished his formal education. Here he met a woman who came out of her room every morning and lay on the floor. He began sitting on the floor with her and eventually learned she just wanted to be noticed. Morrie was the only person who had taken the time to understand her needs, the other doctors and nurses simply stepped over or around her.

During the time when Morrie and Mitch had lost contact, Mitch had become increasingly unhappy, cynical and influenced by the pursuit of wealth. His time with Morrie reminded him of when he was younger and passionate; it was in many ways transformative' and led to him developing a renewed enthusiasm for life. Morrie held on to life long enough to teach Mitch the value of love and relationships. As his health continued to deteriorate, the rekindled relationship between teacher and student became a *'final lesson in how to live'*.

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the different ways that Mitch and Morrie experienced and demonstrated empathy. Is one approach better than the other, or are they just different?
2. From Morrie's perspective, is empathy about feeling badly for other people, or is there something more involved?
3. Compare the Mitch and Morrie portrayed in the book to what we learn about their youths. Were they as empathic back then as they are now?
4. It is evident from this book that Morrie was a great teacher, not only of social psychology, but of life itself. The empathy that Morrie demonstrated when interacting with Mitch was empowering and transformative. How can empathy empower each of us to live a better life?
5. Why was Morrie's last class referred to as *'The Meaning of Life'*?
6. What does Morrie mean when he says, *'Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live'*?
7. Most of us, when thinking about death, believe that it would be best to live a long, healthy life and then die suddenly in our sleep. After reading this book, what do you think about that? Given a choice, do you think Morrie have taken that route instead of the path he travelled?
8. As healthcare professionals, how do we make time to listen to and learn from our patients?
9. Not all stories end happily ... death and dying are natural processes. How can healthcare professionals provide empathic care when caring for a person who has a terminal illness? What behaviours would be indicative of empathy in this situation?

LINKS

Tuesdays with Morrie was recreated into a TV movie by Thomas Rickman. This excerpt depicts the last Tuesday that Mitch and Morrie spent together: <https://youtu.be/YNCxfA1PsM>

REFERENCE

Albom, M. (1997). *Tuesdays with Morrie, an Old Man, a Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson*. New York: Broadway Books

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