

Client

Studio Arena Theatre

Title

Study Guide for Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays With Morrie*

Purpose

Marketing tool designed to educate and promote the play to prospective audiences

Prepared By

Jason Trost



Mitch Albom's

tuesdays

with

Movie

by

**Jeffrey Hatcher
& Mitch Albom**

Directed by

Gavin Cameron-Webb

Study Guide

TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE



**By Jeffrey Hatcher
& Mitch Albom**

**Directed By
Gavin Cameron-Webb**

Study Guide

Contributors

Robert Rutland, Ken Garfield,
Amy McDonald, MD,
Jason Trost

Layout Andrew Davis

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Summary & Themes

SUMMARY: This play is about an old man, a young man, and life's greatest lesson. Morrie is Mitch's favorite college professor. He took every class that Morrie taught while at Brandeis. Morrie is also fond of Mitch. He feels that Mitch has "got what it takes." Upon Mitch's graduation, they part ways. When things do not work out as a jazz musician, Mitch goes on to notoriety as a sports journalist. Morrie teaches until he is diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease. Mitch sees his former professor interviewed on Nightline with Ted Koppel and decides to visit. So begins Mitch's regular Tuesday visits with Morrie, an adventure in learning about the meaning of life.

THEMES: True values of life and living are explored in this autobiographical work. Tuesdays become extraordinary days for Mitch as he shares time with his mentor, Morrie. Morrie challenges the values and the pace of Mitch's life and world, from the perspective of age and infirmity; from very near the grave, if you will. The lessons are hard, but they affirm the value of love over achievement. We are reminded of the wisdom that the aged can provide for us about living life fully.

STYLE: Two actors with minimal stage settings engage us in this powerful story of reunion, sharing, struggle and fulfillment. The actors play Mitch and Morrie in the late 1970s as well as in the present. Often the characters speak directly to us, enhancing the intimacy of the play. The story is told simply, yet powerfully, through two remarkable performances.

Discussion questions

Pre-Show

- Have you ever known someone with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) or any other degenerative disease? If so, how would you describe your interactions with that person? If not, do you think you would be uncomfortable around someone who is terminally ill?
- Why do you think many of us leave broken relationships unmended until right before death?
- What is your personal belief about the afterlife? What do you think happens? Are your ideas informed by a particular religion?
- Is there an adult (teacher, friend, coach, etc.) in your life who you consider to be your mentor? If so, briefly describe how this person has helped or supported you.
- Imagine you had the opportunity to ask someone you admire what they think about life, like Mitch had with Morrie. What would you want to know?

Post-Show

- How do you think Mitch's career affected his personal life before his meetings with Morrie? How do you think Mitch's relationship with his work will change as a result of his experience with Morrie?
- How was Morrie Mitch's mentor?
- What was different about the story on stage compared to what you read in the book? Were any details added or changed in some way? If so, what's the reason for those changes?
- Compare the Morrie and Mitch you read about in the book with the Morrie and Mitch you saw on stage. What similarities did you see? What was different? Did anything in the stage production seem "wrong" to you when compared to what you thought it should be?

Theatre *Etiquette*



Members of the audience play an important part in the success of a theatrical performance. That's because audience reaction strongly affects the actors and the quality of the performance on stage. Actors certainly don't want a passive audience; they thrive on the audiences' response – the laughter, the applause, even the silent attention. That's part of what makes live theatre so engaging. But that response must be appropriate to the action on stage or it can be distracting for the performers.

Students accustomed to watching television in their own homes or attending concerts and movies are used to eating snacks, moving around, getting in and out of their seats, or sharing comments aloud during a show. Movies and TV shows are not affected by the audience but theatre performances are. Students may not be aware of how disturbing such behaviors can be in live theatre, not only to other audience members but to the actors on stage who can see and hear them in the audience.

As a courtesy, please prepare students for their theatre experience. Discuss what is expected of them as ambassadors of your school when they attend a performance, along with any behaviors that may be problematic. Since some students may not have attended theatre before, it can be helpful to talk about why these behaviors are a problem. The following guidelines are designed to help insure a fulfilling theatrical experience for all in attendance:

Guidelines

- Before the play begins, audience members may chat quietly and become familiar with the setting. Once the play begins, talking is not permitted. This is because in live theatre, unlike in television or movies, there is no second chance. Once that moment is gone, it is forever in the past.
- Audience members should remain in their seats during the performance. Trips to the lobby or washroom should be completed before the performance and during intermission, if there is one. Leaving one's seat during the performance is disruptive not only to other audience members but to the actors as well.
- Food, drinks, candy, and gum are not permitted in the theatre. Consuming any of these during the performance is distracting.
- Cameras and recording devices may not be used in the theatre. Use of any type of recording equipment violates copyright laws and may interrupt the performance.
- Students are encouraged to leave all unnecessary devices, electronic and otherwise, at home. This includes CD players, MP3 players, radios, pagers, cell phones, games, and toys. Any inappropriate or distracting use of such devices will result in confiscation.
- Teachers and chaperones are responsible for the behavior of their classes. Please have adults attending the performance sit among the students to ensure appropriate behavior.

A hard-working cast of actors and a host of talented theatre artists, technicians, and craftspeople have worked to create an enjoyable and entertaining theatre experience for our audiences. With your cooperation, we are sure it will be just that.

Thanks from everyone at Studio Arena Theatre!



'Tuesdays with Morrie' Author Endeavors to Practice Lessons of His Mentor

Ken Garfield

(Pictured left) Mitch Albom

Mitch Albom used to rush through airports, dodging people who wanted to grab him by the shoulder and bellow, "How 'bout them Pistons?" He was a big-time Detroit sportswriter barreling to his next big-time assignment. He had neither the time nor the interest to slow down and relate to some guy whose existence he figured revolved around ball games and Budweiser. So whenever anyone approached him in the airport to talk, the big-time sportswriter on deadline followed the advice offered by National Basketball Association coach Chuck Daly: "Always keep your feet moving." But that was in another time long ago, before Albom wrote a book that changed his life and touched the lives of millions who have read it. Now when people stop Mitch Albom, it's to tell him about a mother with cancer or a father who just died, and how "Tuesdays with Morrie" (Doubleday) helped them see what really matters. Often they'll recite the book's signature line: "Death ends a life, not a relationship."

The young sportswriter who wrote a book about his dying college professor and the need to slow down and savor life no longer runs through airports. Now when a fellow human being stops to talk, Albom stops to listen. You will not find a more unlikely conscience of the culture. ESPN regular Albom is sharp-dressing and fast-talking; he's 41 years old and at the top of his game. His high-speed life is spent flying from here to there, covering Detroit's beloved Red Wings hockey team one season, the Wimbledon tennis tournament in England the next. When he's home in Detroit, he hosts a radio

talk show from 3 to 6 p.m. weekdays. He also hosts two other radio shows, on Saturdays and Mondays. In a streak of invincibility surpassing that of any team he has ever covered, Albom has won the Associated Press Sports Editors column-writing contest 13 of the last 14 years. When Albom's not writing columns or winning awards, he's spouting opinions faster than a know-it-all on a bar stool as a regular on ESPN's "Sports Reporters." The TV show is seen locally at 7 a.m. on Sunday. "I think he's a jerk," said Charlotte, N.C., mortgage processor Lisa Kitterman, who tunes in anyway. "It's sort of like a big windbag thing." He may be a windbag on sports, but to Kitterman, 32, he's a gentle visionary on life. She read "Tuesdays with Morrie" in one afternoon at South Carolina's Folly Beach, and it moved her to tears. "It's about the whole idea of grasping life," she said.

When he's not working, Albom plays keyboard in a band -- the Rock Bottom Remainers -- with fellow hotshot writers Stephen King, Dave Barry, Amy Tan, Roy Blount Jr. and Matt Groening, creator of "The Simpsons." King jokes about "Tuesdays" being like the Energizer Bunny, Albom said. It just keeps "going and going and going." When he is working -- firing off Detroit Free Press columns on deadline -- woe be it to any editor who tries to cut even an inch of his prose. Said one Free Press colleague: "Sometimes I wonder myself if he should stop and read the book once in a while." That same colleague sat at his desk until 3:30 one morning finishing "Tuesdays with Morrie."

3 million copies

With Albom now, it always comes down to that. Since Doubleday published a modest first run of 25,000 copies in 1997, the book about Albom's final visits with Morrie Schwartz, his beloved college professor, has struck a nerve. "Tuesdays with Morrie" has sold 3 million copies worldwide and is in its 64th U.S. printing. It has spent the last 84 weeks on The New York Times' best-seller list for nonfiction hardback. It's available in 26 countries and is a hit in Australia, Brazil, Japan and Spain. Albom has turned down offers for Morrie Schwartz refrigerator magnets. He has heard that comedy star Adam Sandler, hoping to be taken more seriously, wants to play him in a movie being planned by Oprah Winfrey. Dustin Hoffman and Jason Robards are two of the names he has heard to possibly play Morrie. All this for a 192-page book that chronicles Albom's visits to suburban Boston for 14 Tuesdays in 1995 to talk about the meaning of life with a dying old man.

Albom had lost touch with Schwartz soon after graduating in 1979 from Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass. He had promised to stay close to the colorful sociology professor who loved to dance, and who once taught a class on trust by getting students to fall backward into each other's arms. But who has time for promises and professors when there are games to get to? A TV show reunited them after 16 years. Albom was channel-surfing late one night on his wide-screen TV when he slowed down

to see what was on "Nightline." There was Ted Koppel, of course. But who was that fellow he was interviewing, the thin little man talking about laughter and dignity even as Lou Gehrig's disease was robbing him of his strength and, ultimately, his life? It was Schwartz. Though not especially religious (he was raised Jewish in suburban Philadelphia), Alбом wonders today whether it was more than the accidental surfing of channels that brought student and teacher back together. "God, fate, destiny, I don't know," Alбом said. "I don't even watch 'Nightline' all that often."

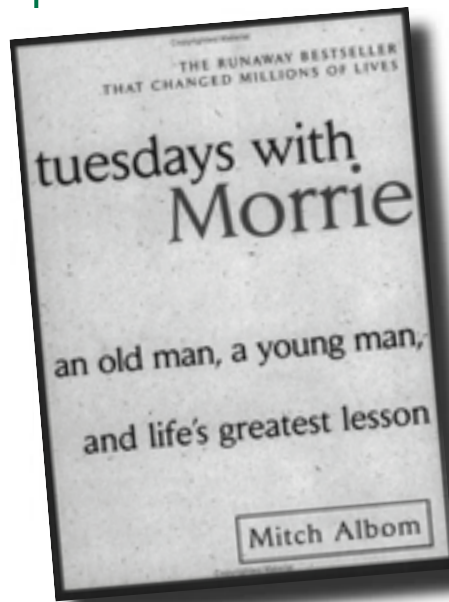
'A final thesis'

Alбом got in touch with Schwartz after the show. Soon he was flying to Boston each Tuesday, renting a car, stopping at a deli to get bagels and salad and then spending the day at his professor's bedside. They began talking by the light of the window in the professor's study. By the time death ended their conversation, Alбом was caressing his feet, and Morrie was telling him, "I don't know why you came back to me. But I want to say this. . . . If I could have had another son, I would have liked it to be you." Alбом's not sure why Schwartz chose him to be the student in what they both wistfully called "a final thesis." Alбом thinks it might have been because Schwartz saw some of himself in this grim workaholic of a sportswriter who refused to let his feelings show. "It was like he was forgiving me," Alбом said. Alбом was deep into his Tuesdays with Morrie before he decided to write the book to help cover the Schwartzes' medical bills. By then, he had already begun gently clipping a microphone to the neck of the professor's pajamas, recording the weekly words of wisdom. One London critic said "Tuesdays with Morrie" is high on schmaltz, serving up dollops of syrup for navel-gazing baby boomers wondering where to look for meaning. Alбом might take that as a compliment, for he spent nine months in his basement working to craft simple sentences that reflected Morrie's simple lessons. With Morrie gone -- he died Nov. 4, 1995, at age 78 -- it's left now to Alбом to keep the lessons alive, as he did recently with 40 Southern utility company executives and their wives on a two-day retreat. What an unlikely scene, this high-powered sportswriter preaching

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Excerpt from TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE

by Mitch Alбом, p. 1-2



"The Curriculum"

The last class of my old professor's life took place once a week in his house, by a window in the study where he could watch a small hibiscus plant shed its pink leaves. The class met on Tuesdays. It began after breakfast. The subject was The Meaning of Life. It was taught from experience.

No grades were given, but there were oral exams each week. You were expected to respond to questions, and you were expected to pose questions of your own. You were also required to perform physical tasks now and then, such as lifting the professor's head to a comfortable spot on the pillow or placing his glasses on the bridge of his nose. Kissing him good-bye earned you extra credit.

No books were required, yet many topics were covered, including love, work, community, family, aging, forgiveness, and, finally, death. The last lecture was brief, only a few words.

A funeral was held in lieu of graduation.

Although no final exam was given, you were expected to produce one long paper on what was learned. That paper is presented here.

The last class of my old professor's life had only one student.

I was the student.

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about life to wealthy men and women nibbling shrimp, sipping Chablis and planning the next day's charter fishing trip.

Forgive everyone

Recently in the Beau Rivage resort casino on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in Biloxi, Miss., gamblers were spending a fortune at the blackjack table. Upstairs in a ballroom, Albom talked

the way, but first the executives and their wives crowded around Albom for autographed copies of "Tuesdays with Morrie." Sharon Evans was one of the first in line. The wife of Mississippi Power Co. CEO Dwight Evans, she sits with dying patients as a hospice volunteer. She promised Albom that her husband, one of Mississippi's most powerful men, was going to read every word. "It's almost as good as the Bible," she said. About the only glitch in the evening came when Albom was introduced as Morrie. He said he gets that all the time.

who lives in Amsterdam and is struggling with cancer. About all he volunteered was that Peter, 38, didn't like people trying to get in touch after they read about him in "Tuesdays." Here he is telling people to do like Morrie and hold back no emotion -- and he can't even bring himself to admit that all these people who stop to tell him their stories are moving him to tears. On those occasions when tears do well up, Albom says it's just something in his eye. Maybe in the end, this is why Albom and "Tuesdays with Morrie" have touched so many people. It's a book about an old man who tried to live a good life, written by a young man struggling to do the same. The young man isn't where he wants to be in life, but who is? That's the point above all others that Albom shares in the book and wherever he takes the message in person: Living is in the trying.



(Left to right) David Rzeszutek as Mitch and Emanuel Fried as Morrie.

about Morrie's anguish over never having reconciled with an old friend. Forgive everyone everything so you don't die with regret, Albom said. Forgive yourself, too. Albom talked to the group about the power of touch -- a hand on a shoulder, perhaps. You need the warmth of touch when you're born and when you die, he said, but you also need it in between. To this roomful of executives with beepers on their belts, he shared Morrie's vision of the one path to immortality -- giving yourself away to others. "Then when you die," Albom said, "you're not 100 percent gone. You live on. . . . They can hear your voice. It rings on. You spent time putting yourself inside them. That's why it lives." When Albom was done, the group retired to the Coral Room, where the walls are lined with aquariums full of exotic fish. The sea bass and lamb and more wine were on

Stopping to listen

The funny thing about all this is that the person struggling the hardest to live out the lessons of "Tuesdays with Morrie" is the guy who wrote it. Albom said as much to the group of executives in Biloxi. Here he is talking about putting family before business -- and he's on business more than 1,000 miles from his wife, Janine, back home in suburban Detroit. When he was done with his talk, Albom skipped dinner and conversation and rushed back to his room to finish Sunday's column. Here he is talking about the most important things in life -- and he covers games for a living, a job he said is getting harder to justify. Here he is telling people to open up and share -- and he doesn't like to share much about his wife or his younger brother, Peter,

So now, after Morrie and the book, Albom stops whenever anyone wants to talk. Instead of seeing a sports fan obsessed over a game, he sees real people carrying pain like a 50-pound weight. Albom's not to the point where he knows what to say to somebody about a death in the family or a struggle with loneliness. So he just forgets about where he's rushing to for a moment and listens. Wherever Morrie is, the young man can hear the old man whispering, "I told you I'd slow you down."



Taking makes me feel like I'm dying.
Giving makes me feel like I'm living.

If you don't like the culture,
make your own.

It's a different world out there,
but you're the same person
wherever you go.

Aphorism:

- 1.) a concise statement of a principle
- 2.) a terse formulation of a truth or sentiment

The Great Unknown:

Some Views of the Afterlife

from the study guide for San Jose Repertory Theatre's production of 'Tuesdays with Morrie'

One way that humans have devised for dealing with the tragedy of death and the knowledge of our own mortality is to develop complex visions of what might follow death. The story of man's dealings with death is the story of the birth of religion. Evidence from archaeological finds suggest that humans, while originally simply leaving their dead aside, started to assume a more paternal or mournful role, leaving with corpses various mementos and marking graves. From flower petals to flint, fetal positions to facing east, bear bones to goat horns, man started supplementing the basic corpse.

Ancient Greece

The journey after death was to a land known as Hades, ruled by a god named Hades. The first part of the journey required crossing the river Styx by being buried with a coin for the boatman Charon. Next, Cerberus, the three-headed guard dog, would have to be appeased with honeycake. The Underworld offered punishment for the bad and pleasure for the good. On the one hand, the Elysian Fields, a sunny and green paradise, was the home to those who had led a good life. Others were condemned to torture.

Protestant Beliefs

Generally speaking, Protestants believe that everyone has the gift of eternal life. The body dies, but the soul lives forever. The big question is where each person will spend eternity. Heaven is a glorious location where there is an absence of pain, disease, depression, etc. and where people live in new, spiritual bodies in the presence of Jesus Christ. Hell is a location where its inmates will be punished without any hope of relief, for eternity. The level of punishment will be the same for everyone. The Bible talks about fire and worms.

Roman Catholic Beliefs

Hell is a location where its inmates will be punished without any hope of relief, for eternity. Among those punished will be Satan, the angels that supported him, and persons who have died without having repented their sins. Sincere confession of a mortal sin to an authorized priest and making restitution, if required, leads to absolution of the sin and the avoidance of Hell. The level of punishment will be meted out in accordance with the seriousness of the individual's sin.

In Hell, punishment will be in the form of isolation from God, and some supernatural form of fire which causes endless pain but does not consume the body. The Church teaches that "the souls of those who have died in the state of grace suffer for a time and purging that prepares them to enter heaven." They spend time in Purgatory until fully cleansed of imperfections, venial (less serious) sins, etc. Purgatory will be terminated at the time of the general judgement. The intensity and duration of the punishment can be reduced by friends and family, if they offer Masses, prayers "and other acts of piety and devotion." For babies who died unbaptized, they enter Heaven after staying in limbo for a while.

Hinduism

The final goal of salvation in Hinduism is escape from the endless round of birth, death, and rebirth. That can mean an eternal resting place for the individual personality in the arms of a loving, personal god, but it usually means the dissolving of all personality into the unimaginable abyss of Brahman. Four ways of reaching such salvation are described. Jnana yoga, the way of knowledge, employs philosophy

and the mind to comprehend the unreal nature of the universe. Bhakti yoga, the way of devotion or love, reaches salvation through ecstatic worship of a divine being. Karma yoga, the way of action, strives toward salvation by performing works without regard for personal gain, and Raja yoga, "the royal road," makes use of meditative yoga technique.

Islam

The Islamic holy book, the Koran, says that salvation depends on a man's actions and attitudes. However, repentance can turn an evil man toward the virtue that will save him. The final day of reckoning is described in awesome terms. On that last day every man will account for what he has done, and his eternal existence will be determined on that basis. Muslims recognize that different individuals have been given different abilities and various degrees of insight into the truth. Each man will be judged according to his situation, and every man who lives according to the truth, to the best of his abilities, will achieve heaven. However, infidels who are presented with the truth of Islam and reject it will be given no mercy. God judges all men, and the infidels will fall off the bridge al-Aaraf into hell while the good men continue on to heaven. The Koran has vivid descriptions of both heaven and hell. Heaven is depicted in terms of worldly delights, and the torments of hell are shown in lurid detail. Muslims disagree as to whether those descriptions are to be taken literally or not.

Buddhism

Buddhism sees ignorance rather than sin as the roadblock to salvation. That is, the belief that the world and self truly exist keeps the illusory wheel of existence rolling – only destruction of that belief will stop the mad course of the world. Its doctrine is based on the belief that life is basically suffering, or dissatisfaction. It follows that the origin of that suffering lies in craving or grasping. This cessation of suffering is possible through the cessation of craving, and the way to cease craving and so attain escape from continual rebirth is

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by following Buddhist practice, known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

Original Buddhist teachings place emphasis on the individual monk working through self control and a series of meditative practices that progressively lead him to lose a sense of his grasping self. The ultimate state, Nirvana literally means "blowing out," as with the flame of a candle. That is, nothing can be said about it except that it is a transcendent, permanent state. The experience is also likened to a lotus flower unfolding in the sun.

Judaism

Moral behavior and attitudes determine one's eternal existence in the hereafter. Although there is no Christian notion of saving grace in Judaism, it is taught that God always offers even the most evil men the possibility of repentance. After such repentance one can atone for one's rebellion against God's ways by positive action. But the notion of individual salvation and heavenly existence is not prominent in Judaism. In fact many Jews criticize Christianity for being a "selfish" religion, too concerned with personal eternal rewards. The notion of an afterlife is not well developed in the Old Testament. Later writers speculated unsystematically about a final Day of Judgment. Jews still hope for the coming of the Messiah, who will hand out eternal judgment and reward to all. This hope is largely communal; the entire Jewish race and the whole of creation is in view more than individual men. In the end the moral life of man here on earth is considered the most proper concern of man; final judgments are best left to God.

OTHER VIEWS

Egyptian

Beliefs about the transition from the mortal world to eternal life were recorded throughout the more than three thousand years of ancient Egypt's history, though new ideas were incorporated from time to time. Most important for full participation in the afterlife was the need for an individual's identity

to be preserved. Consequently, the body had to remain intact and receive regular offerings of food and drink. The final step in the transition to the afterlife was the judgment in the Hall of Maat (the god of justice) by Horus (the god of the sky) and Thoth (scribe of the dead) by comparing ab (the conscience) and a feather. The ritual was known as the Weighing of the Heart. Heavy hearts were swallowed by a creature with a crocodile head who was called the Devourer of Souls. The good people were led to the Happy Fields, where they joined Osiris, god of the underworld. Many spells and rituals were designed to ensure a favorable judgment and were written in the papyrus or linen "Book of the Dead."

The Aztecs

Similarities can be seen between the Polynesian beliefs and the beliefs of the Aztecs. A priest would deliver a formalized speech over the newly dead person, following a ritual to ease their path to the next level of existence. Water was trickled onto the head as during a baptism, and words of mourning pronounced. Papers were laid on the corpse which were intended to aid the person to pass through the hazardous journey they faced. The perils ahead included mountains, deserts, confrontations with serpent and lizards, and a place where the wind would drive with obsidian knives. Once the person had overcome the perils of the Underworld Way, the soul would arrive before Miclantecutli, where it would stay for four years. The final stage required the help of the man's dog, sacrificed at his death, to travel across the Ninefold Stream, and then hound and master, to enter the eternal house of the dead, Chicomemictlan.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Members of The Watchtower Bible & Tract Society (WTS) believe that Hell does not exist. They interpret Hell symbolically as the "common grave of mankind." Most people simply cease exist at death; they are annihilated. The Heavenly Kingdom was established in 1914 CE. A "little lock" or "Anointed Class" of about 135,400 people are believed by this group to currently inhabit Heaven. Another

8,600 are still alive and will so spend eternity with God at a later date. The battle of Armageddon will start soon. Jesus, under Jehovah's divine rage, will execute vengeance upon the rest of Christendom and followers of "Babylon the Great" (other religions). After the world is purified, a theocracy "God's Kingdom" will be established on earth for 1000 years. Those who survive rmededdon, the "other sheep," will live in peace in the newly created utopia. They will be joined by the worthy dead who have been resurrected. After 1000 years of God's Kingdom, Satan, his demon forces and all those rebellious ones who turn against God will be finally destroyed. In order to be saved, a person must accept the doctrines formulated by the WTS Governing Body, be baptized as a Jehovah's Witness, and follow the program of works as laid out by the Governing Body.

Existential

The Existential system of beliefs is very simple - nothing comes after death. We simply cease to be. This creates what is known as the Existential dilemma. That is, our life becomes absurd and meaningless without an afterlife to strive toward. In act, many believe that the genesis of contemporary religion can be found in the desire for purpose. Thus, the Existential person must try to find meaning in a life that is essentially meaningless and without end culmination.



We're all running;
we're in the human race.
Some people are running so fast they
don't know where they're going.

When you're in bed, you're dead.

Don't hide your light under a bushel.

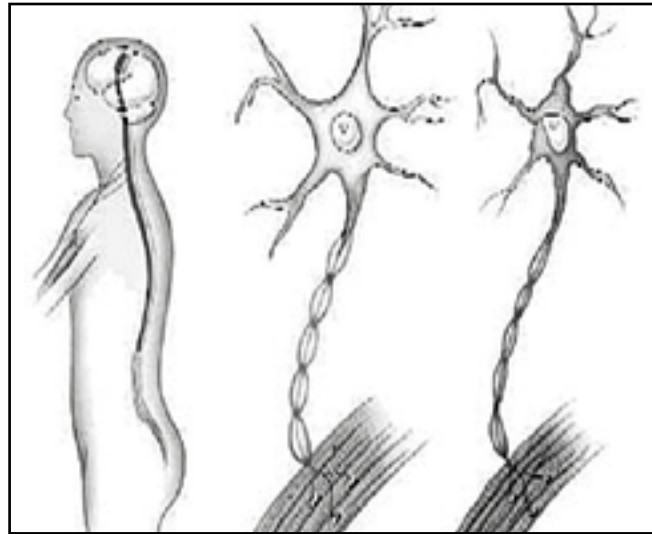
Aphorism:

- 1.) a concise statement of a principle
- 2.) a terse formulation of a truth or sentiment

ALS

(Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis)

By Amy McDonald, MD



What is ALS?

ALS, also known as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis or Lou Gehrig's Disease, is an adult onset disease that results in a progressive degeneration of the neurological system. Motor neurons are the nerve cells that tell the brain to move the muscle. When these cells die, the signal is cut, and the brain loses its ability to control muscle movement. "Amyotrophic" refers to muscle atrophy, or wasting, causing weakness or twitching. "Lateral Sclerosis" refers to the degeneration of the spinal cord after cell injury and the death that occurs there.

Who gets ALS?

A little over 5,600 people in the U.S. are diagnosed with ALS each year. It is estimated that as many as 30,000 Americans have the disease at any given time. About 60% of the people with ALS are men and 93% of patients are Caucasian. Most people who develop ALS are between the ages of 40 and 70, with an average age of 55 at the time of diagnosis. However, cases of the disease do occur in persons in their twenties and thirties. Genetics and environment play a role in the disease, but more research is needed to figure out direct causes.

How does ALS present?

Typical ALS presents with weakness which may start in the hands or legs, muscle cramping or twitching, slurred speech, shortness of breath, or difficulty swallowing. Each patient will present different symptoms. The weakness of the limbs eventually leads to progressive paralysis. Weakening of the diaphragm and muscles for respiration occur and swallowing is impaired, leading to weight loss and malnutrition. Some patients choose to have feeding tubes for nourishment and mechanical ventilation (a respirator machine) to help them breathe. Others do not wish to live this way. For most patients, their mind and thoughts are not impaired by the disease and remain sharp.

The mean survival time of ALS is 3-5 years from onset of diagnosis, though some patients may live longer or shorter. Death results usually from respiratory failure or infection.

Is there any treatment?

Generally, the disease is progressive and fatal with no cure. There is some evidence that people with ALS are living longer, at least partially due to clinical management interventions, riluzole (Rilutek®), and possibly other compounds and drugs under investigation.

Palliative Care and ALS

My specialty is Palliative Medicine, which deals with comfort care and alleviation of symptoms for patients with chronic disease and terminal illness. We try to focus on the whole person and examine all aspects of discomfort, including physical, psychological and spiritual. Our team consists of physicians, social workers, chaplains, music therapists, and bereavement counselors for family and caregivers.

In my experience with ALS patients, there are many ways a palliative care specialist can help improve a patient's quality of life. For shortness of breath, medicines are used to control breathing and anxiety. Sometimes oxygen and non-invasive ventilator devices may help breathlessness. We screen for and treat depression. Pain and muscle spasms are treated. Communication aides are needed when patients lose the ability to speak. Home health aides can come to the home and help take care of the physical needs of the patient.

Overall, it is the patient's right to choose where they die and whether to be kept alive on a ventilator or fed by a feeding tube. Some patients prefer to die naturally at home with comfort-directed care. These issues need to be discussed with the patient and family before the disease progresses to its final stages.

SENTIMENT AND *Tuesdays With Morrie*

*(Pictured Left to right) David Rzeszutek as Mitch
and Emanuel Fried as Morrie.*



After reading TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE, I found myself pondering the nature of sentiment in the play. I am encouraged to do so because, as I write this article, I am rehearsing DRIVING MISS DAISY at the Virginia Stage Company in Norfolk, VA., another play where sentimentality is involved. I find myself repeating the question, “Can sentimentality be a part of the style of a play?” We often have sentimental feelings when watch a play, but is that sentimentality a part of the playwright’s process when writing the play? Or is it something organic to the creative process?

Mitch Albom’s real time experiences with Morrie Schwartz were an emotional and elevating part of Mr. Albom’s life. It is only natural that these sentiments would find their way into any adaptation of his story for the stage. Hopefully, the audience will have sympathetic responses to what they see and hear. This very fundamental aesthetic process (artist’s experience to work of art to audience) is the basic foundation of art. If sentimentality is part of the artist’s experience, then it should ultimately translate to the audience, if we do our job right.

Perhaps we should look more closely at the meaning of these words “sentiment” and “sentimental.” They come from the Latin, “to feel.” I chose the following definition as a good place to start:

Sentiment:

“refined or tender emotion: manifestation of the higher or more refined feelings.”

(Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary)

When you see the play, you might make an immediate connection to this definition. The sentiments are “refined and tender.” We are moved, touched and elevated.

Throughout history, plays have been designed to evoke specific responses. Comedy is the most obvious example. Aristotle insisted that tragedy must, by design, evoke pity and fear. In the English theatre of the early to mid-18th century, a style called sentimental comedy emerged primarily as a reaction to the satire and cynicism in the popular comedies of the late 1600’s. While the plays of this period have passed into obscurity, the definition has application to TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE:

Sentimental Comedy:

“a comedy that addresses itself to the spectator’s love of goodness, rather than to his sense of humor, and emphasizes the moral aspects of its situations and the virtues of its characters.”

(Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged)

Furthermore, with sentimental comedy, the audience was encouraged to respond emotionally to the play, and their ability to do so was referred to as “sensibility.” Later, the style was sometimes disparagingly referred to as “weepee theatre.”

Some more contemporary definitions imply that the word “sentimental” has taken on a more negative connotation:

Sentimental:

“having an excess of sentiment or sensibility: indulging in feeling to an unwarranted extent: affectedly or mawkishly emotional.”

(Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged)

Why do you suppose the word began to take on this meaning? As a fast paced society, are we more embarrassed by emotionality? Who has time for it?

In the arts, perhaps it is a question of style. We all know how it feels to experience this definition of “sentimental.” We are uncomfortable. We feel manipulated, even angry. I remember as a teenager being annoyed by the sentimentality of John Boy and company in The Waltons. 19th century fans of melodrama would be moved to tears as little Mary ascended into the grid, deus ex machina style, on costume wings. Today, such nonsense would strike us as ludicrous.

However, we know that plays can and do awaken our sentiments. What is it that arouses tender emotions in you when you see a play? And at what point do you simply feel manipulated? Part of the aesthetic business of dealing with sentimentality in theatre is to find the balance: allowing the sentiments to flow freely without going overboard and becoming "mawkish."

In closing, I wish to mention an interesting thematic connection to what I am writing here. In the play, Morrie is a man with a mission. It seems to me that part of what he is calling on Mitch, and all of us, to learn is the joy of discovering and expressing our feelings; the joy of developing a

healthy sentimentality. Like the 18th century theatre goer, he extols us to uncover and manifest our sensibilities. Sentimentality, in the best and richest sense of the word, is Morrie's joie de vivre. So, come ready to let your sensibility shine.

—Robert Rutland

PS: Dictionaries are great. Why not do a little exploring of your own? Check out "sentiment, sentimental, sensibility," etc. for yourself.



A tree's leaves are most colorful just before they die.

There is no point to loving; loving is the point.

Everybody knows they're going to die, but nobody believes it.

Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live

Aphorism:

- 1.) a concise statement of a principle
- 2.) a terse formulation of a truth or sentiment

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