

Southfield Public Library

Have A Little Faith by Mitch Albom

Discussion questions used at SPL - September 2011

1. Why is it important for people to “have a little faith”? Does it need to be in a higher being? Is having faith in people enough?
2. On a scale of 1-10, where was Mitch Albom on the faith scale? Did he have it? Did it grow during his dealings with the Reb and with the Rev? What do you think he meant on that the eulogy request turned into something else? (p 48)
3. Why do you think the Rabbi picked Albom to give his eulogy? Why did Albom accept it?
4. What sort of man was the Rabbi? Was he someone you’d like to know? Go out to lunch with?
5. What hurdles did the Reb have to overcome in becoming a man of God?
6. What sort of man was the Rev? What were his hurdles?
7. How would you compare the two men’s beliefs? Did they view God in the same way?
8. There is a lot of talk about rituals from the Rabbi. . .would you agree that they are a way of keeping generations connected? Even keeping families together?
9. Both the Reb and Pastor Henry believed they had the keys to happiness. . .would you agree with them?
10. In the chapter called What is Rich (p 112), the Reb sums up his beliefs. . . “I have what I need, why go chasing more?” Was he an exception to the rule among us? Was it because of his upbringing during the Great Depression? How much as a nation do we go chasing after things? Do you think Henry would agree with that sentiment?
11. Mitch asked a question of the Reb - “what do people fear most of death?” The Reb’s answer. . . “being forgotten.” Would you agree? What can people do to insure those gone won’t be forgotten?
12. Mitch talks about his aversion to his early religious training. . . how did you feel about yours? Do you see it differently now?

13. Why did Mitch have a hard time believing in Henry? Did you understand his reasons?
14. Which man did you identify with, Henry or the Reb?
15. "It is far more comforting to think God listened and said no, than to think nobody's out there" (page 82). What do you think of this statement by the Reb? Do you agree?
16. Do you ever have conversations about faith – or the lack of it- with people in your life? Why do you think it is so hard to talk about?
17. How important is community. . .see p. 62. Do you feel as though we've lost that? Where are connections the strongest? See p. 166.
18. Why do you think it took so long for Henry to realize his destiny?

Southfield Public Library

General discussion questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author's writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author's use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

Southfield Public Library

Have A Little Faith

Questions and background from Mitch Albom's website <http://mitchalbom.com/node/5813>

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. *Have a Little Faith* asks, "What if our beliefs were not what divided us, but what pulled us together?" How would you begin to answer this question? Which of the world's ills could be healed, what wrongs could be made right, if religion was more of a unifying force?
2. How would you react if someone you knew asked you to write their eulogy? How would you go about doing so?
3. In describing the journeys of faith taken by the Reb and Pastor Henry, Mitch Albom discusses his complicated relationship to his Jewish beliefs. Talking about one's religious faith is a personal endeavor; do you find it easy or difficult to talk to others about religion, specifically your relationship to it? Are you comfortable discussing religion with someone with different beliefs?
4. In continuation of the above question, do you think anyone can ever "win" a religious argument? What do you think lies at the core of disagreements about religion?
5. How can many faiths coexist? If different faiths have different beliefs, how can they all be correct? Does one faith have the right or obligation to convert the other? When Mitch asks this of the Reb, he explains that just as there are a variety of trees, multiple faiths all come from the same God (page 160). What do you think about the Reb's explanation? Can dialogue and debate about different beliefs, as the Reb argues, really enrich one's own faith?
6. Compare and contrast the Reb and Pastor Henry. How are their stories similar, different? Did you identify with one man more than the other?
7. Were you uncomfortable with Henry's troubled past, especially when he admits his violation of the Ten Commandments? What did you think of Mitch's hesitation towards him? Do you think that someone who turns so far away from God, even though truly repentant, can really be a "Man of God"?
8. Think about some famous eulogies delivered in recent memory: Charles Spencer's eulogy of his sister, Princess Diana; Oprah Winfrey's of Rosa Parks; Cher's emotional tribute to her former husband Sonny Bono; President Obama's stirring remarks about Senator Edward M. Kennedy. Re-read Albom's eulogy of the Reb at the end of the book—what does it have in common with other eulogies you've heard or read? What makes a eulogy truly memorable—does it rely solely upon the personality of the person who died?
9. Have you ever experienced a crisis of faith? How did you approach it? Was it resolved? Was there a lesson you took away from it?
10. In "A Little History," Albom describes his early religious education, and his resistance to it. Did you receive any religious instruction as a child? If so, did you enjoy it, or did you experience the same way Mitch did, going to lessons feeling like a "dragged prisoner?" (page 11).

11. Albom talks about his ambivalence toward his New Jersey childhood home, characterizing it as being “too small for what I wanted to achieve in life, like being stuck wearing your grade school clothes,” (page 25). What do you think of your hometown now? Why are hometowns so pivotal to how people are shaped?
12. Consider what the Reb says to Albom in the chapter “May: Ritual”: “‘Mitch,’ he said, ‘faith is about doing. You are how you act, not just how you believe.’” Do you agree with the Reb’s sentiment?
13. Re-read the anecdote that Albom relays on page 76, about his interpretation of the story of the parting of the Red Sea. What does this story mean to you?
14. “It is far more comforting to think God listened and said no, than to think nobody’s out there” (page 82). What do you think of what the Reb says here? Do you agree?
15. Both the Reb and Pastor Henry describe what they believe to be the keys to happiness. What do you think the secrets to happiness are? Where might faith fall on such a list?
16. In “September: What Is Rich?” Albom explores the Reb’s childhood as an impoverished son of immigrants living in New York City. At the end of this chapter, how do you answer the question asked in its title? What does “rich” mean to you?
17. At the end of the chapter “Church,” Albom describes the Hindu celebration of Kumbh Mela, a gathering that’s been called the world’s largest single act of faith. In your own life, have you ever been a part of something big while doing something small? How did it make you feel?
18. Opposite the start of “The End of Autumn,” Albom chose a quote from the Robert Browning Hamilton poem “Sadness” to appear. What did this verse mean to you? How does it relate to the themes Albom explores in the book?
19. After reading *Have a Little Faith*, were you inspired to learn more about religions other than your own? What are some commonalities between different religions?
20. Have you read any of Mitch Albom’s works, such as *Tuesdays with Morrie* or his novels *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* or *For One More Day*? What does *Have a Little Faith* have in common with Albom’s other books?
21. If you had to write your own eulogy, what would you say about yourself? How would you most like to be remembered?