

# Eat, Pray, Love (2010)

Rated PG-13. Our Ratings: V – 0; L – 3; S/N – 4. Running time: 2 hours 13 min.

*Does not wisdom call,  
and does not understanding raise her voice?  
On the heights, beside the way,  
at the crossroads she takes her stand;  
beside the gates in front of the town,  
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:  
“To you, O people, I call,  
and my cry is to all that live...  
I love those who love me,  
and those who seek me diligently find me.  
Proverbs 8:1-4, 17*

*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;  
and all these things shall be added unto you.  
Matthew 6:33*

Ryan Murphy's adaptation of Liz Gilbert meets the Bali Elizabeth Gilbert's best-selling shaman who affects her whole memoir is spiritual-lite fare.

Far more of a romantic comedy than a female clone of Somerset Maughn's *Razor's Edge*, it chronicles a recently divorced woman's search in distant exotic lands for meaning and the regaining of her sense of worth. We are not shown enough of Liz Gilbert's (Julia Roberts) marriage to Stephen (Billy Crudup) to understand why she seems so suddenly to leave him and refuse his pleas for

2010 Columbia Pictures

reconciliation. The depiction of her affair with the younger David Piccolo (James Franco) makes her seem somewhat flighty and him more like a boy toy whom she can leave with little feelings of regret.

Actually, the event that triggers the above actions takes place at the beginning of the movie, during a writing assignment when Liz is in Bali visiting an old charming shaman named Ketut Liyer (Hadi Subiyanto). His insights while reading her palm apparently start her thinking about her life and its purpose. Following her divorce and during her affair with David she shocks her publisher and best friend Delia Shiraz (Viola Davis) by announcing her intent to take a year's sabbatical from her writing career to seek for meaning in three countries, all beginning with an I—Italy, India, and Indonesia (Bali). Thus it is in Rome, Italy, where she quickly befriends the Swedish Sofi (Tuva Novotny), language coach (Luca Argentero), and a number of others, that the “Eat” part of the title is fulfilled. This segment could be from the Food Channel, so beautifully photographed are the sumptuous meals, especially spaghetti—and can you believe that one of her new friend's last name is even named that (Giuseppe Gandini)? Liz learns the necessity for her to enjoy just being: in a charming barbershop scene an old man holds forth on “the joy in doing nothing.” Abruptly we find Liz in India where she enrolls in an ashram of the guru whose picture and teachings she had become familiar with in New York. Here, presumably she learns the “Pray” of the title—in just three months rather than the lifetime that eastern religions suggest is necessary. Adapting the local dress, she attends the sessions of worship and teachings and makes two friends, the young girl Tulsi (Rushita Singh) and the older, abrasive-tongued Richard from Texas (David Jenkins). Tulsi is troubled because her family is forcing her into an arranged marriage, to which Liz can only

offer the solace of her embrace and the assurance that she will think of and be with her in spirit. Richard, by his constant badgering of her, helps Liz realize the need to love herself despite her failures. In turn she is of help by listening to his confession of his alcoholism that led to the breakup of his family and his estrangement from his son. She apparently comes away from India with the understanding "God dwells within me." Back in Bali Liz reconnects with Ketut, who cannot remember her until she reminds him of their first encounter and shows him the religious print that he had given her. His bumper sticker reflections apparently help her find the balance she needs, and in the Brazilian divorcee Felipe (Javier Bardem), she finds "Love." That "love" might be a little larger than romantic feelings we see when she is able to help the woman healer tending her injured leg (the latter caused by Felipe who almost ran her down while she was riding her bicycle). Healer Wayan Nuriasih (Christine Hakim), also divorced and thus shunned by her family, lives at the edge of poverty. She and her young daughter are about to be put out on the street, so Liz emails all of her friends and family, who respond by sending enough checks to pay for a new house for the pair. This episode stands out because it is one of the few incidents in the story in which Liz puts her own self-absorption aside to care for another.

I have read that Liz Gilbert's book was on the New York Times' Best Seller list for 150 weeks, so despite what seems to be the story's shallowness, the author's quest for balance of "body, mind, and spirit" struck a responsive chord. The film, with its fetching star and stream of handsome men (all are not only good looking but non-abusive), will appeal mainly to those who devour during the hot summer hours the glut of thick romantic novels, in other words, women. And yet a mixed group could have a good time discussing the issues raised in the story—such as the role of food in our lives; the need to be able to enjoy the moment without feeling guilty about not being productive; the role of prayer and other spiritual

practices in our lives; and more. The glowing photography shows off gloriously the sites of the three countries, and maybe the producers for the DVD could render a service to all travelers by a featurette showing how Liz Gilbert was able to pack such an extensive wardrobe into her luggage.

## For Reflection/Discussion

Spoilers below.

1. What other films/novels show a character seeking spiritual enlightenment in the religions of the East? Why do you think that so many Westerners have not delved into the spirituality of Christianity, which is also rich in meaning? (Kathleen Norris seems to be a notable exception with such books as *Cloister Walk*.) Maybe because the local manifestations of Christianity, that is the churches, show so little knowledge of the faith's deep stream of spirituality?

2. What truths do you see in the Italian segment? How is food an important part of the Christian faith? Note how often Jesus eats with people, is accused of eating with sinners, and, describes the kingdom of God as a banquet (as in Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 13:19). How is the old man in the barbershop right in describing Americans as obsessed with work? What are some times in which you realized "the sweetness in doing nothing" ?

3. In the scene in which Liz orders everything on the menu what is the danger of emphasizing food in our lives, as does the film and some of the chefs on the food channels? In real life, what would Liz have to contend with if she threw herself so much into eating? (Note how many chefs are overweight?)

4. In the amusing and touching Thanksgiving meal segment, what do the characters (and perhaps us viewers) learn about the importance of gratitude? (For an intriguing contrast, check

out the wonderful film about an Italian immigrant family's Thanksgiving Day meal in which the wife/mother, a non-observant Jew, expresses her puzzlement about the holiday. She says that she doesn't know to whom she should be expressing her thanks.)

5. What do you actually learn about Hinduism in the India segment? How do we see that it too regards religion as a communal affair, and not just the private affair that some derivations of Eastern religions make it out to be?

6. What is the truth and what is the danger of the teaching that "God is within you" ? Does this allow for any sense of the "otherness" of Creator and creature (as in Isaiah 55)?

7. What do you see as the significance of the elephant scene? Have you experienced an almost mystic bond with a large animal? (Some of us have felt that way during a whale watch when the ship is able to pull up close to one of the large creatures so that we can look into its eye.)

8. From the film's title and the amount of time spent on it, what is Liz Gilbert's primary understanding of love? How is Liz forced to make a choice? (Did you catch, however the contradiction between Felipe's two statements—first, that being in the import/export business, he could live anywhere; and then later, his statement that his business is in Bali, so he must live there?)

9. What do you think of Liz's helping Wayan Nuriasih? An expansion of her understanding of love? How is this evidence that Liz is progressing well in her spiritual journey? Has the film made you more aware of your own spiritual journey, of your need to reach a deeper level of spirituality? In what ways?