

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)

Rated R Our content rating V-1; L-7; S/N-7.

*How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.*

Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!

*Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd.
Alexander Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard"*

You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters
that have passed away.
Job 11:16

In the brave new world of Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) and Clementine Kuczynski (Kate Winslet) the old saying about forgiving and forgetting takes on new meaning. One does not have to repent of real or imaginary sins, as Zophar the Na'amathite admonishes Job to do just go to your friendly psychiatrist Dr. Mierzwiak (Tom Wilkinson), and he will wipe out the distasteful memory so that you can move on with your life. That is what Joel discovers his long-time lover Clem has done when he approaches her a little before Valentines Day and she states that she does not know him.

Once he learns what she has done, he decides to do the same. Joel should have been forewarned by Dr. Mierzwiak's answer to his question about whether there is a danger of brain damage from the procedure [erasing memory is brain damage. But then, as he lays in his bed with electrodes attached to his head and

one by one his memories vanishing, he changes his mind and tries desperately to hide some of his memories.

The film's timeline loops around like that of *Pulp Fiction* so that incidents such as the young man tapping on Joel's car window that seem to make no sense at first fall into place. The staff at Lacuna Inc., as the clinic is called, becomes involved, Patrick (Elijah Wood) falling in love with Clem, complicating the plot even more.

The film begins with Joel impulsively deciding not to take the train into work, but to jump on the one bound for Montauk instead, where he is drawn to a lone beautiful woman. Each seems to experience a *déjà vu*, their relationship quickly developing into a passionate affair. The film seems to be heading in a *Zorba the Greek* direction, with the wild, life-affirming Clem drawing out the introverted Joel. But something that we are not shown apparently happens to Clementine, perhaps a boredom arising from Joel's shy disposition, this leading her to go to Dr. Mierzwiak and his staff at Lacuna, Inc.

Screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, who teased our minds with such films as *Being John Malkovich* and *Adaptation* has provided a fascinating vehicle for Jim Carrey again to stretch his wings beyond his usual screwball comedy films. He and Kate Winslet form the emotional core, and aided by a strong supporting cast that also includes Kirsten Dunst, make us care about what happens to these emotionally scarred people.

For reflection/discussion

1) Why is Lacuna, Inc. a danger to a person's growth? What do you think of Mary's statement, "Blessed are the forgetful, for they forget even their blunders." If we forget our mistakes, how will we learn from them?

2) How is remembering central to the Jewish and Christian faiths?

3) What does the film say about love and the power of the human will?