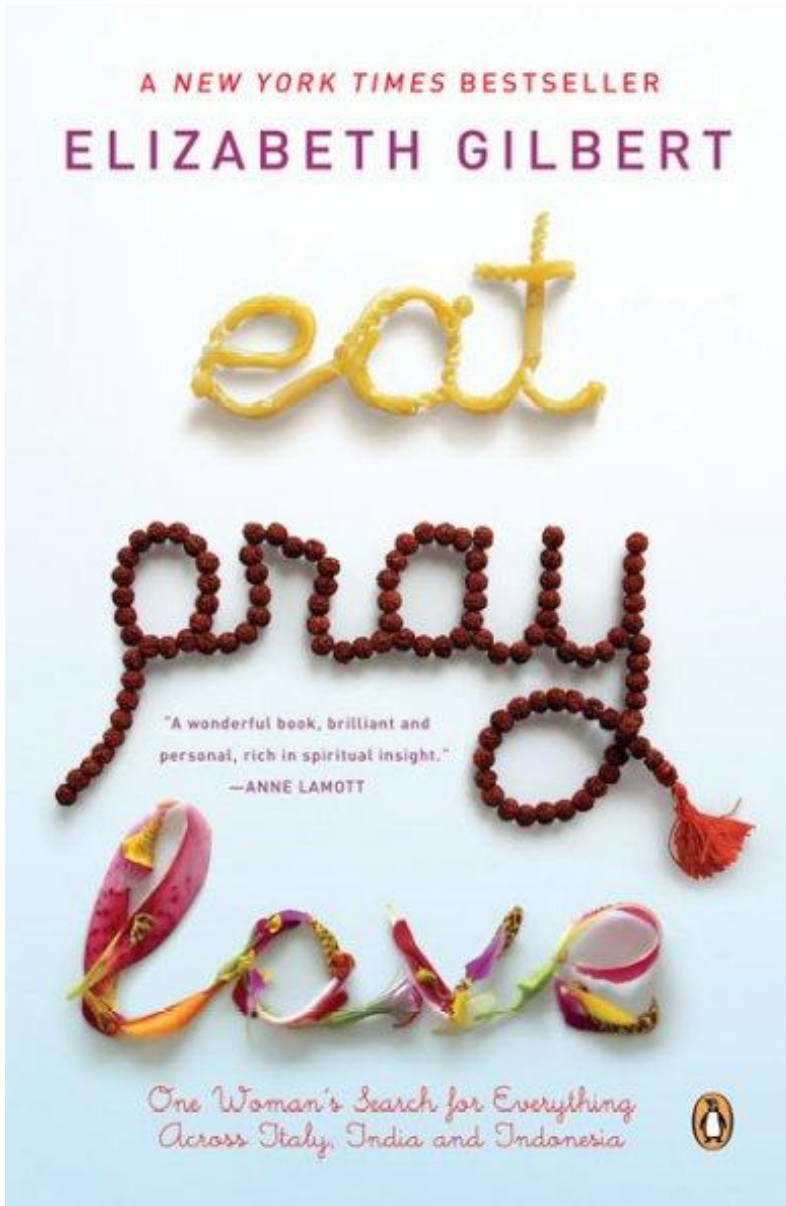


About the book...



Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia traces Elizabeth Gilbert's decision to travel the world for a year after suffering a midlife crisis and divorce, a journey that took her to three places in her quest to explore her own nature and learn the art of spiritual balance.

About the author...

Elizabeth Gilbert is the author of a short story collection, *Pilgrims*, a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award, and winner of the 1999 John C. Zacharis First Book Award from Ploughshares-and a novel, *Stern Men*. A Pushcart Prize winner and National Magazine Award-nominated journalist, she works as writer-at-large for *GQ*. Her journalism has been published in *Harper's Bazaar*, *Spin*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, and her stories have appeared in *Esquire*, *Story*, and the *Paris Review*.

Reviews

BookPage: **On the International Road to Recovery**

Like most quests, travel writer Elizabeth Gilbert's didn't come about because she was perfectly happy at home. She had recently passed "the doddering age of thirty," gone through a nasty divorce and first post-divorce relationship (and breakup), and was exhibiting every symptom of depression. So she decided to heal herself by dedicating a year to studying the things she believes are critical to a truly happy and fulfilled life. The plan was to spend four months in Italy learning to experience pure pleasure, four months on an ashram in India learning to dedicate herself to a spiritual practice and the last four months in Indonesia, working with a medicine man to discover the art of balance.

If Gilbert were any less honest, self-effacing and full of humor, ***Eat, Pray, Love*** could have easily turned boring or, frankly, irritating. Who wants to read about someone who's not really middle-aged having a midlife crisis—and then has the privilege of going around the world to lick her wounds? But this book is an incredibly engaging story that lets you experience Gilbert's adventures right along with her, while forcing you to think about how you live your own life.

If this all sounds too serious, it's not. Gilbert is funny, and as soon as her spiritual quest veers into slightly uncomfortable territory for non-believers she counters with something like her suggestion to a pesky kid on the beach in Bali: "I'm not talking because I'm on a friggin' spiritual journey, you nasty little punk—now go AWAY!" or lets you in on her New York City-speed inner monologue during the early days of meditation in the ashram.

While it's hard to believe some of the people she meets actually exist—the straight-talking Texan yogi, the Balinese medicine woman with a special "banana massage" for the impotent or the Brazilian lover "of a certain age"—you're simply grateful by the end that Gilbert hit the road and decided to share her story.

Kirkus Reviews

An unsuccessful attempt at a memoir from novelist and journalist Gilbert (***The Last American Man***, 2002, etc.). While weeping one night on the bathroom floor

because her marriage was falling apart, the author had a profound spiritual experience, crying out to and hearing an answer of sorts from God. Eventually, Gilbert left her husband, threw herself headlong into an intense affair, then lapsed into as intense a depression when the affair ended. After all that drama, we get to the heart of this book, a year of travel during which the author was determined to discover peace and pleasure. In Rome, she practiced Italian and ate scrumptious food. Realizing that she needed to work on her "boundary issues," she determined to forego the pleasure of sex with Italian men. In India, she studied at the ashram of her spiritual guru (to whom she had been introduced by the ex-lover), practiced yoga and learned that in addition to those pesky difficulties with boundaries, she also had "control issues." Finally she headed to Bali, where she became the disciple of a medicine man, befriended a single mother and fell in love with another expat. Quirky supporting characters pop up here and there, speaking a combination of wisdom and cliché. At the ashram, for example, she meets a Texan who offers such improbable aphorisms as, "You gotta stop wearing your wishbone where your backbone oughtta be." Gilbert's divorce and subsequent depression, which she summarizes in about 35 pages, are in fact more interesting than her year of travel. The author's writing is prosaic, sometimes embarrassingly so: "I'm putting this happiness in a bank somewhere, not merely FDIC protected but guarded by my four spirit brothers." Lacks the sparkle of her fiction.

Library Journal

An interest in the human condition is the common thread that ties together Gilbert's diverse body of work, ranging from a collection of short stories (***Pilgrim***) to a novel discussing the outdoor lifestyle of Eustace Conway (***The Last American Man***). In her new work, she continues her exploration of the human psyche through a very personal journey of self-discovery in three countries: Italy, India, and Indonesia. In Italy, her first escape, she devours the food and the melodic language with equal gusto. In India, she decamps to an ashram to learn the intense discipline prayer and spiritual pilgrimage require, in the process revealing the depths to be found in reflection, meditation, and historical teachings. In Indonesia, she generates strong friendships and gains insight into homeopathic medicines, healing, and the complexities of different cultures. Throughout, she candidly shares her observations and emotions as she grows from a woman shattered, lost, and confused to one rejuvenated, confident, and in love. A probing, thoughtful title with a free and easy style, this work seamlessly blends history and travel for a very enjoyable read. Highly recommended.

Publishers Weekly

Gilbert (***The Last American Man***) grafts the structure of romantic fiction upon the inquiries of reporting in this sprawling yet methodical travelogue of soul-searching

and self-discovery. Plagued with despair after a nasty divorce, the author, in her early 30s, divides a year equally among three dissimilar countries, exploring her competing urges for earthly delights and divine transcendence. First, pleasure: savoring Italy's buffet of delights--the world's best pizza, free-flowing wine and dashing conversation partners--Gilbert consumes la dolce vita as spiritual succor. "I came to Italy pinched and thin," she writes, but soon fills out in waist and soul. Then, prayer and ascetic rigor: seeking communion with the divine at a sacred ashram in India, Gilbert emulates the ways of yogis in grueling hours of meditation, struggling to still her churning mind. Finally, a balancing act in Bali, where Gilbert tries for equipoise "betwixt and between" realms, studies with a merry medicine man and plunges into a charged love affair. Sustaining a chatty, conspiratorial tone, Gilbert fully engages readers in the year's cultural and emotional tapestry--conveying rapture with infectious brio, recalling anguish with touching candor--as she details her exotic tableau with history, anecdote and impression.

Discussion questions

(http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/eat_pray_love.html)

1. Gilbert writes that “the appreciation of pleasure can be the anchor of humanity,” making the argument that America is “an entertainment-seeking nation, not necessarily a pleasure-seeking one.” Is this a fair assessment?

2. After imagining a petition to God for divorce, an exhausted Gilbert answers her phone to news that her husband has finally signed. During a moment of quietude before a Roman fountain, she opens her Louise Glück collection to a verse about a fountain, one reminiscent of the Balinese medicine man’s drawing. After struggling to master a 182-verse daily prayer, she succeeds by focusing on her nephew, who suddenly is free from nightmares. Do these incidents of fortuitous timing signal fate? Cosmic unity? Coincidence?

3. Gilbert hashes out internal debates in a notebook, a place where she can argue with her inner demons and remind herself about the constancy of self-love. When an inner monologue becomes a literal conversation between a divided self, is this a sign of last resort or of self-reliance?

4. When Gilbert finally returns to Bali and seeks out the medicine man who foretold her return to study with him, he doesn’t recognize her. Despite her despair, she persists in her attempts to spark his memory, eventually succeeding. How much of the success of Gilbert’s journey do you attribute to

persistence?

5. Prayer and meditation are both things that can be learned and, importantly, improved. In India, Gilbert learns a stoic, ascetic meditation technique. In Bali, she learns an approach based on smiling. Do you think the two can be synergistic? Or is Ketut Liyer right when he describes them as “same-same”?

6. Gender roles come up repeatedly in ***Eat, Pray, Love***, be it macho Italian men eating cream puffs after a home team’s soccer loss, or a young Indian’s disdain for the marriage she will be expected to embark upon at age eighteen, or the Balinese healer’s sly approach to male impotence in a society where women are assumed responsible for their childlessness. How relevant is Gilbert’s gender?

7. In what ways is spiritual success similar to other forms of success? How is it different? Can they be so fundamentally different that they’re not comparable?

8. Do you think people are more open to new experiences when they travel? And why?

9. Abstinence in Italy seems extreme, but necessary, for a woman who has repeatedly moved from one man’s arms to another’s. After all, it’s

only after Gilbert has found herself that she can share herself fully in love. What does this say about her earlier relationships?

10. Gilbert mentions her ease at making friends, regardless of where she is. At one point at the ashram, she realizes that she is *too* sociable and decides to embark on a period of silence, to become the Quiet Girl in the Back of the Temple. It is just after making this decision that she is assigned the role of ashram key hostess. What does this say about honing one's nature rather than trying to escape it? Do you think perceived faults can be transformed into strengths rather than merely repressed?

11. Sitting in an outdoor café in Rome, Gilbert's friend declares that every city --- and every person --- has a word. Rome's is "sex," the Vatican's "power"; Gilbert declares New York's to be "achieve," but only later stumbles upon her own word, *antevasin*, Sanskrit for "one who lives at the border." What is your word? Is it possible to choose a word that retains its truth for a lifetime?

Readalikes

Diane Johnson, ***Natural Opium: some traveler's tales*** (1992)

Frances Mayes, ***Under the Tuscan Sun: At home in Italy*** (1996)

Susan Orleans, ***My Kind of Place: Travel stories from a woman who's been everywhere*** (2004)