

Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India, and Indonesia Study Guide

Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India, and Indonesia by Elizabeth Gilbert

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Plot Summary

Eat, Pray, Love tells how Elizabeth Gilbert uses a year of celibacy in Italy, India, and Indonesia to balance delights and devotion and to overcome the trauma of divorce, lost love, and depression.

Elizabeth Gilbert is a successful New York writer who at age 31 discovers that she is ambivalent towards motherhood and desperate to escape her marriage of convenience. Sobbing in her bathroom, Liz prays to God for the first time in her life, having grown up Protestant but with no particular faith. While her husband refuses to settle, Liz gets a magazine assignment to visit Bali and write about Yoga vacations, and there meets a healer, Ketut Liyer, who predicts that she will return and study with him.

Through David, the lover she takes after leaving home, Liz joins a Hindu meditation group and resolves to visit the Guru's ashram in India. Liz is in counseling and taking antidepressants, which get her through the divorce and a never quite complete breakup with David. Financially destitute from legal costs, Liz gets an advance for a book on travels through Italy, India, and Indonesia. She quits taking antidepressants in Rome and quickly is stalked by Depression and Loneliness but feels God helping her get by. Liz enrolls in Italian classes, practices speaking with friends, and gains weight on what New York friends dub a "No Carb Left Behind" tour of Naples, Venice, and Sicily.

Liz next goes to the Indian ashram, where she eats vegetarian meals, scrubs temple floors, struggles to meditate, and chants the Gurugita, which she initially loathes. Liz learns to control her "monkey mind" and discusses her past with a compassionate inner circle of friends, led by Richard the Texan, who nicknames her "Groceries." When she vows to observe silence, God playfully has Liz named the ashram's Key Hostess for retreats, and she surprisingly achieves the very spiritual heights that she had thought beyond her. Liz goes to her next stop nostalgic for the spirituality that she is leaving, but she can now be with God—be God—whenever she wishes.

Liz arrives in Bali knowing only the name of an ancient healer and the town he lives near, but has little trouble finding Ketut Liyer but considerable difficulty getting him to remember her. Ketut teaches Liz simple Balinese meditation—sit and smile—and encourages her to keep up her Indian Yoga as they spend hours discussing life. Liz befriends a destitute woman healer, Wayan Nuriyasih, and organizes friends worldwide to buy her a house. Liz's biggest surprise of a satisfying year is to meet an expatriate Brazilian, Felipe, and fall in love. They plan to split their time among America, Australia, Brazil, and Bali.



Book 1, Beads 1-18

Book 1, Beads 1-18 Summary and Analysis

Book 1, "Italy, or 'Say It Like your Eat It,' or '36 Tales about the Pursuit of Pleasure,'" opens with Elizabeth Gilbert in Rome, wishing that Giovanni would kiss her, but also dreading it. They meet regularly to practice each other's language. In her mid-thirties, emotionally brittle following a terrible divorce and a failed affair, Liz has sworn herself to temporary celibacy, to find healing and peace through solitude. She goes up to her studio apartment alone, offering a prayer of thanks at not being tempted.

Liz's story begins on her knees in her bathroom three years earlier, sobbing about her six-year marriage and the looming duty of motherhood. Liz refuses to share with the reader the joys and sorrows of the failing marriage or how it had come about, concentrating instead on the novel experience of praying for the first time to God, whom she conceives as "an experience of supreme love," caring nothing about theological niceties. She asks apologetically what to do and He answers in her own voice, "Go back to bed, Liz," beginning a conversation, not a conversion.

Months later, Liz leaves her husband and discovers the horror of divorce when he refuses to discuss terms. Trying to be civil, Liz spends months in limbo, feeling guilty. Liz falls desperately into the arms of David, a gorgeous, attentive actor/writer. "The reprieve" ends as the legal battle with her husband heats up, 9/11 traumatizes her, and David is repulsed by her addiction to him and despondency. Liz loses all self-esteem, grows suicidal, and loses 30 pounds, as the relationship continues on-and-off. To balance this misery, God through David introduces Liz to an Indian Guru. She also takes an apartment alone for the first time in her life and studies Italian. Liz begins attending a Hindu meditation group, and, learning that the Guru has an Ashram in India, decides to visit soon.

Liz jumps at the change to write about Yoga vacations in Bali, where she meets Ketut Liyer, a medicine man, who shows Liz how to achieve balance between delights and devotion and foresees her studying with him—after going broke and recouping her fortune. The idea of a year of travel begins to gel, three months each in Italy, India, and Indonesia. Setting out before the divorce is granted—a dreadful, expensive, time-consuming affair in New York, even if it does not go to trial—is impossible. Liz badgers her lawyer and takes her calm friend Iva on a book-signing tour. While driving across Kansas, Iva recommends that Liz write a petition to God asking to be freed from conflict. Iva then helps Liz imagine friends, relatives, and celebrities, living and dead co-signing it. After a nap, Liz hears from her lawyer that her husband has signed. A book advance then lets Liz head to Rome. She enrolls in Italian school with others who want to speak the lovely language for no practical reason, but Depression and Loneliness begin stalking her when she stops taking antidepressants. In a notebook, Liz declares that she does not believe in God, but He retorts: why she is talking to Him? Liz remains frightened but never doubts again, and feels loved by herself and God.



Book 1, Beads 19-36

Book 1, Beads 19-36 Summary and Analysis

Liz eats, retires her yoga mat, and makes friends. Two are American writers also named Elizabeth. One is married to an Italian, writes for *Gourmet*, and knows the best places to eat. Giovanni urges Liz to be "polite" with herself as she is learning the language. Sophie, who is often with Dario, is Liz's best friend from class. They practice new idioms every day by the Tiber. Liz feels haggard when a cab driver takes Sophie for her daughter. Maria, and American fluent in Italian, is married to Giulio, a filmmaker who wants to learn English and becomes Liz's second "Tandem Exchange Partner." Liz's newest friend is Lucca Spaghetti, a tax accountant who often takes her to obscure restaurants with rough cuisine like baby lamb intestines. Lucca cannot imagine living anywhere but Rome (near mama) or Liz in India.

Liz sometimes wonders why she is in Italy, experiencing pleasure. It goes against the family's "cultural paradigm," her farm upbringing, and American's general inability to "relax into sheer pleasure" (as opposed to entertaining themselves). Italians are masters of doing nothing, making do with little, and do not need to be told that they "deserve a break today." While Liz's Italian friends encourage her to enjoy herself, her Protestant brain tries to make her turn the trip into a typed report. Only when she defines pleasure for herself does this change, and she becomes not a museum-goer but an eater and speaker of Italian. She takes great joy in buying ingredients and preparing lunch and when she hears her ex-husband's accusatory voice in her head, she tells him to butt out of her life.

Liz rejects the idea of having sex in Italy. She misses kissing but feels that her string of romantic failures since age 15 is long enough to require a time out. She has never known how to set boundaries with those she loves. Friends have mentioned that she resembles the man she is with and she wants to find her own personality. Liz is also still in love with David and needs to resolve that before being with anyone else. At times she gets overcome by lust, because Roman men are too beautiful, but finds they no longer flirt with her as 12 years ago. Part of this lies in Italian men trying to live down the pestering stereotype but, still, Liz's female pride is hurt.

Lucca takes Liz to a soccer match. His family has always been fans of the Lazio team. They sit in front of a loud and foul-mouthed old man, whose every idiom Liz drinks in. When Lazio loses, Liz is surprised the fans go not go to get drunk, but to eat cream puffs. Liz studies hard, learning 20 words a day, hoping one magic day to be fluent. She stumbles and makes mistakes, and she and Giovanni compare idioms for commiserating with someone in distress. Liz's favorite word is *attraversiamo*—"Let's cross over." The capitals of Europe are competing to see which will be supreme in the new European Union, except for Rome, which knows it is eternal. Liz wants to be like Rome when she is old. She takes a six-hour walking tour that brings her to the swampy shore opposite Tiber Island, her favorite quiet place in Rome. It is still associated with



healing, as it has been since 291 BCE. Continuing, Liz visits the Pantheon and contemplates how the Augusteum has been so many things over time that Octavian does not contemplate, just as she is not what she or others had anticipated. One must be open to transformation.

When the books that Liz ships to herself from New York fail to arrive, the package's fate reveals the "Protestant-Catholic divide." Maria believes the post office has a duty to provide prompt, reliable service, while Giulio puts it all in God's hands. Liz decides against wasting time reading. After giving directions to an Australian girl bound for Slovenia, Liz gets the traveling bug and recruits Sofie for a pizza-eating outing in Naples. They find the food at Pizzeria da Michele magical. Liz's healthy diet is forgotten and her body figures it will recover in India. Liz is happy to look happy and healthy again.

Liz decides to break off completely with David. Having often wished that she could be self-sufficient like her mother, who accepts her husband's affection when offered but does fine when he is moody, Liz answers her candidly before the flight to Rome about the situation with David. Liz sees that she can—and must—find happiness without David, emails her decision, watches expectantly for an answer, and falls apart when David agrees and wishes her well. When Giovanni picks her up for their language session he can only watch her heartbreaking tears and assure her that he has been there.

Liz's sister Catherine visits for a few days and helps her get over her grief, dragging Liz around the city, pointing out features with a scholar's trained eye. Learning is sacred to Catherine, and she has a gift for making things clear. Liz feels that because of her own gregarious personality she is better suited than Catherine to being alone and wonders whether she wants children. Next to her sister, Liz feels unstable. Catherine has given her a bedroom to use when she wants, where she fears she could evolve into Crazy Aunt Liz. Someday she must become a more solid citizen, but pleads: not yet.

Liz drops out of Italian school to spend time talking with real Italians as she starts traveling, to get the feel of various places and eat their food. The spontaneity thrills her. After a weekend with her aunt and uncle in Florence, Liz visits Lucca's famous butcher shops, then Bologna, whose food is richer than Rome's. She is ogled on a train to Venice where she meets "Crazy Linda," a rich programmer from Seattle, to ride the gondolas. After that city's stench and melancholy, Liz finds Rome refreshing. Seeing a forty-year-old woman walking her fancy dog, attracting attention but refusing to look at anyone, Liz feels out of place in Rome. Julio proclaims that every city has a single word that describes its people. SEX is Rome's, POWER the Vatican's; ACHIEVE, Liz offers, is New York's, SUCCEED Los Angeles', CONFORM Stockholm's, and FIGHT Naples. Liz balks at producing a family personal word, but knows it is not SEX. This claimed, Liz cannot account for buying a fortune in sexy underwear unless it is just her libido healing.

Luca Spaghetti's birthday falls on American Thanksgiving Day and his friends Mario and Simona host a party. Liz explains how long it takes to cook a 20-lb. turkey, so they improvise other foods, like dysfunctional American families. The mood is dampened by



funerals for 19 Italian soldiers killed in George Bush's vendetta in Iraq. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is scorned as another idiot beside Bush. Liz is surprised that anti-Americanism is not stronger. A number of friends also attend the party, where fine Sardinian wine flows. The guests tearfully hold hands and state why each is thankful. Liz wants to say that she is grateful for being free of crushing depression, but settles for toasting friends. The men surprise Liz by washing dishes and participating in family life. The party is still going at dawn, so they could have baked the turkey for breakfast before Lucca drives Liz and Sophie back to Rome.

With a month to go in Italy, Liz has to buy larger jeans. The first 15 lbs. she has gained are needed, because depression has left her skeletal; the next five are for fun, and the last three prove the point. The sales clerk tries not to laugh at Liz's jokes but eventually concedes she looks like a "buffalo mozzarella" in her new, wide pants. Liz plans to fly to America for Christmas before going to India, but first visits Sicily, which, Goethe claims, helps one understand Italy. Liz finds the food excellent in the little towns, but the poverty horrible. She hears that the concrete used to build ugly new buildings is reinforced with the bones of Mafia victims. She summarizes Luigi Barzini's *The Italians* (1964): trusting no one in power, foreign or domestic, Italians live with disorder, disaster, and fraud, but tolerate nothing short of perfection in the arts, including cuisine. Creating and enjoying beauty holds everything together for them. Liz's misfortunes have been minor compared to the long-suffering Sicilians, but their perseverance in dignity and pride in what they do help her regain her own sense of identity. Liz's life is in ruins when in her New York bathroom she decides to study Italian and to visit Italy. She arrives skinny, not knowing what she deserves. In Italy, she collects herself and putting on weight shows not only physical growth but emotional as well.



Book 2, Beads 37-55

Book 2, Beads 37-55 Summary and Analysis

Book 2, "India, or Congratulations to Meet You," or '36 Tales about the Pursuit of Devotion,'" opens with Liz likening her coming to the Ashram to the introduction of a new chicken to the coop, at night while the hens are asleep and do not notice any change. She lands in Mumbai at 1:30 AM, on 30 December 2003, and a taxi deposits her at the temple at 3:30. For the first time in four months Liz tries out her mantra, "Om Namah Shivaya" ("I honor the divinity that resides within me"). Italy seems far away.

Yoga (Sanskrit for "union") is not just bending exercises, but includes seeking God through meditation, scholarly study, the practice of silence, devotional services, and mantras (sacred words). Its practices can bring one closer to any deity. The yogic path helps disentangle things that keep ego-dominated humans from sustaining contentment. Yoga teaches self-mastery, forgetting about brooding about past and future to stand in the eternal present. True yogis see everything in nature is "God in disguise"—but only humans are conscious of realizing God. While understanding this is easy, living it is nearly impossible without a living guru. Like most Westerners, Liz balks at the word, but instantly responds to David's Guru's photograph. The isolated ashram attracts devotees from around the world and all backgrounds. The application process wisely discourages anyone whose life problems might distract others. The Guru is not in residence, but some feel that one can communicate better with an absent teacher than with one who is being mobbed by students. Life is rigorous. Students rise at 3 AM and sleep at 9 PM, in between meditating and contemplating with little to distract them.

Liz helps chant in the New Year 2004. Women with the finest voices sing a phrase, which the rest repeat, blending until they sing as one. Liz is jet-lagged and afraid she will not last until midnight, but as the tempo builds, she is unwilling to drop the "little blue string of song" and helps with the mystical fishing net that holds unknown destinies. Liz knows no one but is not lonely. Everyone in the ashram has mundane work assignments, and Liz's is scrubbing the temple's marble floors. Being out of practice meditating, Liz finds this easier. While in prayer one talks to God, in meditation one listens, and when Liz tries to still her "monkey mind" that swings between happiness and worry, she gets bored, angry, depressed, and anxious. She battles to see God here and now, not past or future.

There are many techniques for teaching "one-pointedness." Liz's Guru uses mantras, both to give the mind something to do and to carry one through "the choppy waves of the mind" to another state, the "shorelines of divinity." Liz is envious of her roommate, who has practiced yoga longer than Liz has been alive and can slip into heaven instantly, just saying her mantra. During the hour-long meditative sessions starting at 4 AM daily, Liz and her Mind converse. Liz wants to focus; Mind offers ever-shifting images that drive Liz crazy. One morning, Liz slumps against the wall, feeling guilty while the others are transported. She wants to cry, but the Guru advises against falling



apart, lest it become a habit. Liz feels worthless until she recalls Jaws: "We're gonna need a bigger boat."

While Liz is trying to eat the tasty vegetarian dinner slowly as the Guru advises, a cool-walking stranger, Richard from Texas, approaches. A former junkie and alcoholic who has held many jobs that involve a bit of hustle, Richard nicknames Liz "Groceries" and helps her see that once one sits down, she can begin letting go of her ego in order to learn pure, divine love. A monk tells Liz that the mind rests in the heart to escape clamor and when Liz tries a different mantra, "Ham-sa" ("I am That"), she feels soft blue energy pulsing through her body, but breaks off, feeling unready. The phenomenon, kundalini shakti, is found in all religions, including St. Teresa of Avila. Indian yoga depicts it as a snake coiled at the base of the spine until released to ascend and burst through the skull into union with God. They talk of seven chakras, and science has confirmed monks' ability to center their minds on a blue pearl of light. Shaktipat is the divine initiation given by enlightened masters to their students. Liz is initiated in the Catskills when she first meets her Guru, but feels nothing special and concentrates on praying and reading until, next day, she dreams about Swamiji ("beloved monk"), telling her to hold back the sea and laughing at her failure.

In India, two nights in a row Liz dreams of snakes and dogs, thinks about David, and hates that meditation always dredges up demons. Liz cries in the bathroom, scrawls in her notebook, "I NEED YOUR HELP," and sees in her own hand, "I'm right here. It's OK. I love you. I will never leave you..." Next morning's meditation is a disaster and the day is filled with hate and anger. Richard predicts that some day Liz will look back on this as the sweet time in life when things begin to work themselves out. David has touched a place in her heart, but will pale when she learns to love the whole world. He may well have been her "soul mate," but these are meant only to reveal new layers of oneself. David has shaken Liz up after the failed marriage and introduced her to her Guru, and she must accept his "short shelf life." She needs to clear David out of her head to create the vacuum into which God can rush. She needs a backbone, not a wishbone. Richard points out serious control issues, that a blind man could see. She must let go or get sick.

At age nine, Liz spontaneously realizes that life passes too fast and goes through the kind of metaphysical crisis most people do at fifty. She wants the world to stop while she gets a grip on the universe. In later years, this hypersensitivity about mortality makes Liz want to experience everything—travel, romance, and pasta—until one night she collapses in the bathroom. She knows that some people are graceful about how the universe operates, but they are rare. Buddha is said, after enlightenment, to have feared few are teachable. Liz hopes she is one of them. She needs to let go, sit still, and let contentment come to her. The Guru says, "Look for God like a man with his head on fire looks for water."

Next morning, thoughts are like telemarketers and Liz broods about marriage, divorce, and David. The human species is just wired this way, fighting wars for love and control. When Liz asks her soul to show compassion for whoever wanders through her mind, and is mocked as a loser, the great lion of her heart roars, "YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW



STRONG MY LOVE IS!" In the meditation room she lets go and mythic energy races up her spine, inviting her to turn herself inside out, leaving her numb, stunned, wobbly-kneed, ravenous, and horny. Richard is impressed and they go into town to celebrate.

Worse than meditation is singing the Gurugita ("The Geet") every morning before breakfast. Liz has never liked the tedious 182 verses of Sanskrit creation mythology, but now dreads it. Her favorite monk, an ex-NYU professor says that it is a vital spiritual practice, not intended to be fun but to purify negative emotions. Her physical and emotional reactions show that it is working. Liz is not a tourist but a seeker. The next day's chanting is a horror and she is angry with the Swamiji, her Guru's guru and the ashram's founder, for making the Geet part of the program. She feels him laughing at her failures and flaws and demands results from this chanting.

Liz oversleeps, finds herself locked in, and, rather than taking the excuse, jumps out her window. She sits, bleeding and complaining about the Geet until Swamiji says it looks otherwise. Liz dedicates it to her beloved nephew Nick, and the 90 minutes pass like ten. Liz learns later that Nick suddenly stops suffering insomnia, that Sri Ramakrishna once tells a devotee that she serves God by serving her nephew, and that roommate Delia had dreamed about Liz burning to white ash in bed before closing the padlock. Richard helps Liz make up her mind to stay at the ashram rather than traveling around India, saying that by meditating she will see things much better than the Taj Mahal.



Book 2, Beads 56-72

Book 2, Beads 56-72 Summary and Analysis

Liz catches herself daydreaming about where to stay after her travels and decides to try the Vipassana meditation at sundown when the mosquitoes come out. Having never missed an opportunity to swat a mosquito in her life, Liz sits still for two hours. She has endured far worse in her life, but this time she ignores reflexes. All religions have rituals, scriptures, and clergy promising rewards (and punishments for the lapsed), but faith demands an irrational, courageous leap. It is not an insurance policy. Liz's prayers grow deliberate and specific as she does her part, figuring out what she wants God to do for her. Destiny is also a divine/human relationship between grace and self-effort. Liz grows more careful about with whom she interacts, what she eats and reads, and how she looks at things. Richard helps her see she can—and must—choose her thoughts. It is not like repression or denial of thoughts, but accepting and dismissing them. Liz vows not to harbor unhealthy thoughts and considers the kinds of ships to let into her harbor.

Liz becomes friends with 17-year-old Tulsi, a tomboy half her age and height, who bemoans being born an Indian girl who must marry. Richard too has been married and painfully divorced. Liz discusses with her inner circle the pain of knowing her ex will always hate her. A plumber/poet from New Zealand likens divorce to a slow-healing amputation and leads Liz onto the roof and up a tower to consider his ten "Instructions for Freedom," urging her to "let go" of things. Liz summons her ex, feels their cool blue souls circle, merge, and divide, and knows that they have been born to forgive one another. Liz does an impromptu handstand to celebrate her liberation.

Richard flies home, having seen major changes in Liz and being thanked for his help. Liz promises to move on with her life and find someone to love. On the drive back from the airport, Liz realizes she has been speaking too much and vows in the next two months to cultivate silence and solitude. Swamiji says silence is the only true religion. She vows to gain renown as "That Quiet Girl." Next morning, Liz is reassigned as "Key Hostess." Because "God dwells within you, as you," Liz need not change her natural character to be devout. She can go on serving, improving, and even working on aspects within her personality (like interrupting, which is a manifestation of self-importance), while bubbling as "Little Suzy Creamcheese," helping devotees attending a series of spring retreats, pledged to silence for 7-10 days. Liz sees them as the seekers in Close Encounters of the Third Kind, confused, disoriented, and fearful—but incomparably brave to undertake something like this.

The retreat deals with the turiya state, the elusive fourth level of human consciousness in which God bears witness to the mind's activity and brings constant bliss. The great gurus and saints live in this constantly, but most people experience fleetingly moments that vanish as fast as they comes. People have used drugs, sex, power, and wealth to keep the state from vanishing, but unsuccessfully. By abandoning the desires of the ego and entering the silence of the heart by the kundalini shakti, one finds that one's



treasure is always present within. Searching for the divine bliss makes suffering worthwhile.

Liz remains watchful of her wards in the back of the temple, praying that they will experience all the good things that God intends for her. She feels herself lifted by their collective intention as birds soar on thermal waves, and one Thursday is transported into God's palm. Always frustrated when eloquent writers who have experienced this fall back on "indescribable," Liz tries to be specific. She is pulled through the "wormhole of the Absolute" into a place of limitless wisdom and peace, a conscious, intelligent void, which is God. She is part of God and is God, a particle of the universe and the universe itself. It is not hallucinogenic, euphoric, or exciting, but like perceiving an optical illusion. The place is neither dark nor light, big nor small, and Liz is not entirely herself, wondering how anyone could not feel this and charmed by her old, limiting ideas. When she thinks about wanting to remain forever, she reverts to her old self. God tells her that she may return when she understands that she is always there.

The retreat ends, the next 100 seekers arrive, Liz helps them, they uplift her several times, and as they leave, they say she seems a "silent, gliding, ethereal presence." The ashram takes on a melancholy feeling as friends depart and she meditates 4-5 hours a day alone. Veterans assure her that she will not feel the full effects of the ashram until she has returned to normal life—whatever that may mean, in her case heading to Indonesia. The last night, Liz gallops around the walking path feeling alive and healthy, stops at a clump of eucalyptus trees and kisses one with pure, godly passion. Liz finds her word in the library: ANTEVASIN, a person who lives on the border between the worldly life and the forest inhabited by spiritual masters. Liz is there figuratively, on her toes following the moving light. The departing poet/plumber describes her as "slippery as a fish."

Religious rituals grow out of mystical experimentation by brave scouts who become prophets. Over centuries, their ideas harden into dogmas and stop working. Indians tell of a saint who ties his pesky cat outside during meditation, and his devotees turn it into a requirement for meditation to work, so the cat's death causes panic. In a world where fundamentalists seek to trademark God, it is vital to see that God responds to any sincere prayer and all paths lead to Him, as all rivers eventually enter the ocean. Religion's other function is to make sense of the world's injustices. The West lets everything sort out in heaven and hell, while the East suspects that chaos is just perception by limited senses or serves a divine function, for the gods prefer the cryptic to the evident. In the great spinning engine of the universe, peace exists only at the center.

This works for Liz. Most of her New York friends long for something to believe in but are embarrassed to become "something wacky" or to "cherry-pick" a religion. Liz disagrees: one must take whatever works and keep moving toward the light. The Hopi and the Dalai Lama see each religion as a thread destined to be woven into the rope that pulls humanity into a new realm. Even Pope Pius XI says, "The ways of Providence are infinite." It makes no sense for God not to transcend what any one person—even the most holy—comprehends. Their composite picture begins to tell the truth. Liz is



unwilling to waste her last hours in sleep, but sits before the portrait of Swamiji and feels the world halt as she becomes prayer. Liz leaves behind two poems, one written on arrival, wanting the search for God to be a "worker's uprising," and the second, written that morning, nostalgic for a place she "can't get far enough in."



Book 3, Beads 73-89

Book 3, Beads 73-89 Summary and Analysis

Book 3, "Indonesia, or 'Even in My Underpants, I Feel Different,' or '36 Tales about the Pursuit of Balance,'" opens with Liz knowing only that her contact lives in a village near Ubud. She takes a taxi, checks into a hotel and feels instantly adored. She bonds with Mario, who loves all things Italian, knows Ketut Liyer, and drops everything to speed her, unannounced, to Ketut's. Liz has no idea what to say. Ketut looks the same but does not recall their previous meeting. Only when Liz says that she is a book-writer from New York does he show recognition and joy. He says that she looks different: no longer worried, but happy and pretty, and produces a pile of letters from abroad about his artwork for Liz to answer. He has married, and his heavysset wife glowers across the courtyard. Ketut talks about his patients and how the terrorist bombing has emptied his bank account. He will teach her Balinese meditation and find her a husband.

When Islam sweeps through Indonesia in the 16th century, Bali becomes the last remnant of Hinduism. Balinese know their precise place in the clan, being expelled is disastrous, and the village is more important than the individual, because rice farming requires communal labor. Complex religious ceremonies mark 13 major rites of passage. When Balinese meet a stranger, they ask: 1) Where are you going? 2) Where are you coming from? and 3) "Are you married?" Mario helps Liz buy a bicycle and she rides to Ketut's. He is treating a teething baby for a destitute couple. He turns no one away, normally sees ten people a day, but this can swell to 100 on "auspicious" days. Ketut tells Liz that Balinese meditations are too complicated for Westerners, and teaches her an easy one: sit and smile. Yoga too is hard, but he encourages her to continue what she has learned. Liz's life is peaceful, meditating in the morning with yogic techniques and in the evening with Ketut's; riding around during the day, meeting people and checking out library books, and spending afternoons with Ketut. When she sees a house for rent, Liz takes it and enjoys living in Eden. In the library, Liz learns that Bali has as bloody a history as any place on earth, marked by castes, slavery, and warfare. In the 1920s/30s, elite Westerners dub it "The Island of the Gods," but it is too dangerous for tourism until the 1970s. Liz wonders if the Balinese are living off their image if a Westerner can learn what is behind their smiling faces. Liz accepts the complexities, enjoys the people, and vows to work on her own balance.

Ketut's age cannot be determined, but he is born on a Thursday, which is the question he always asks to prepare proper prayers and potions. Ketut believes in black magic, considers all forms of yoga "same-same," and recommends always agreeing with an opponent about religion and then practicing one's own religion in private. Ketut eats once a day and every night pulls healthy energy out of the universe into his core. People wait patiently for hours in his courtyard. He gives each his rapt attention and is often worn out by nightfall. Still, he wants to spend time with Liz, to hear stories about a world he has never seen. Ketut rarely leaves his porch. Ketut's wife, Nyomo, is scary and suspicious of Liz until Liz photocopies his worn-out notebooks and ledgers



containing his grandfather's priceless information. Ketut is delighted with the new books and shares them with his wife, who begins serving Liz treats and wordlessly showing love.

Liz befriends, Yudhi, a 27-year-old Javanese who talks like a California surfer and is so good a musician that he should be famous. In his teens, Yudhi works for a cruise line, settles in New Jersey, joins a band, marries Ann, the pretty bassist, and lives happily until 9/11, when he is rounded up and deported. There is little hope he will ever get back. Balinese hate Javanese. Yudhi and Liz talk about restaurants, movies, and why life is so crazy. As a good yogi, Ketut says that one can only fight one's own craziness. Ketut teaches Liz the "Four Brothers Meditation." Everyone is watched over from the womb by four brothers, Intelligence, Friendship, Strength, and Poetry. Liz is to pray to them mornings, at meals, and at bedtime. Ketut says that the stalker in her dreams is Strength guarding, and seeing him is rare. Liz may be destined to be a medicine woman.

Next day, Liz is hit by a bus and visits Wayan Nuriyasih, a beautiful healer in her 30s, who asks the three questions and recognizes Liz's dodge, leading to five hours commiseration about Wayan's drunken, violent ex and the fight to keep her daughter, Tutti. Liz prays silently that the pigtailed, skinny "cherry bomb gets to be a veterinarian." Wayan promises to find Liz a man and clean her kidneys. Liz is praying comfortably and often and practicing "Diligent Joy" to keep episodes of distress from burdening those around her. Liz's favorite person is Ketut, who has, of course, been to heaven and hell. These are rarely mentioned in Hinduism, but to Ketut they are real places and the same.

Wayan tells Liz how to thicken her hair and Tutti draws houses in which she wants to live. Wayan is praying for Liz to meet a man, because everyone needs sex. A gorgeous Brazilian, Armenia, invites them to a party. Liz dresses up and has fun, revisiting parts of her personality like flirting. She blushes after making a provocative comment to Felipe, the host. They move on to a nightclub, Liz's first since the early days of her marriage. There, she meets and is instantly attracted to a Welshman, Ian, and follows him to yet another place. They part at 3:30 AM. Felipe foresees wonderful times for Liz in Bali.



Book 3, Beads 90-108

Book 3, Beads 90-108 Summary and Analysis

Liz cannot sleep all night and in the morning is in no condition for meditation. She no longer knows how to flirt and does not want to ruin her new life. She recalls Richard advising she find a sexual "droughtbreaker," but begins to miss David. Richard's voice in her head keeps Liz from sliding into brooding. Felipe captures her mind. Wayan asks if Liz understands life. Her lease is up and the rent will be raised, suffering never ends and everything constantly repeats. Thinking of how Armenia breaks the mold, they laugh. Wayan has also adopted two starving orphans, Big Ketut and Little Ketut. Seeing Tutti playing, envisioning a house, Liz emails all of her friends, telling the story, and asking for donations in lieu of birthday presents. Within seven days, she has \$18,000. A friend reminds her that in Italian tutti means "everybody." Liz has a crush on Felipe, a divorcé, but is not ready for the effort of romance again, or even to be kissed. Ketut does not understand the words "romance" or "expertise." He has "made sex" only with his late wife.

Wayan is stunned by the money and slow in seeing the possibilities it opens. Liz uses a Sufi image of God long ago drawing a circle on the spot where Wayan now stands. Liz has to show up. Liz accompanies Wayan to see a financial advisor/real estate agent and Tutti pretends to swoon when she hears the news. Worried about the orphans, Liz encourages Wayan to reassure them and they cling to Wayan fiercely. Liz introduces Felipe to them and to Ketut, who reads Felipe's palm and pronounces him emphatically a good man. Felipe takes Liz to the beach, and admires her "fake thin" body. He asks if they should have an affair, an approach Liz appreciates, but accepts that she is unready to break her vow of celibacy. She would enjoy being with Felipe but must finish her transformation. Felipe understands and vows to remain her friend, but believes that she has overdone devotional practices in comparison with pleasure. He too has suffered from love and enjoys her company more than anyone's in years. He makes no demands. Liz has always made decisions about men too quickly and always fallen victim to her own optimism. Liz dislikes the idea of women being the property of fathers or husbands, but sees value in the old-fashioned vetting of suitors. Unable to sleep, Liz tries food and masturbation but finds no peace. until she chants the Gurugita. She is then glad that she has stayed alone—and then after dinner at Felipe's follows him to his bed. The mosquito netting seems to her a parachute to flutter down safely from the plane that has flown her through her hard times.

Liz keeps her promise to Yudhi to take a week-long American-style road trip around Bali, but her head is spinning over having a lover. Liz phones Felipe every chance she gets and feels herself free-falling into love. On the last day of their trip, Liz and Yudhi outline Manhattan in the sand and mark all of their favorite places. Liz cannot offer him hope of seeing America again. Back in Ubud, Liz rarely leaves Felipe's bedroom for a month and neglects Ketut. When she visits, he claims not to have met Felipe, but is pleased that he spoils her and she still meditates. Weeks of fun and games result in a



painful bladder infection. Wayan cures it faster than antibiotics, advises them just to sleep, and shares colorful details of her service as a sex therapist in a patriarchal society. Driving home, Felipe warns Liz against letting the house-purchase drag on. Wayan throws Liz a traditional Balinese birthday party, which Liz shares with Little Ketut. It is the happiest birthday of Liz's life. Balinese "rubber time," difficulties in real estate transactions, and Wayan's sense of "taksu" (feng shui) slow the search, despite Felipe's help. Liz warns herself like Dorothy in Oz not to fall asleep in the poppy field, but then has two dreams in which her Guru and Swamiji tell her to enjoy. Ketut wants her to be happy with God and her boyfriend, invites her as a daughter eventually to attend his cremation and immediately the Balinese ceremony held when a six-month old baby's feet first touch the ground and s/he becomes human. Ketut's ceremony lasts hours and Liz imagines the joyous meaning of the mantras. When Wayan wants more money to buy an entire parcel rather than part, Liz listens to Felipe's warning not to endanger her friendship and also not to be ripped off. Liz feels bad, lying about having to withdraw the money and return it to the already-indignant donors, but within hours, Wayan concludes the deal. She wants Liz to visit her home some day. Liz wants a copy of the deed. Felipe wants, finally, to go on vacation.

Two years earlier, Liz visits Gili Meno Island alone, on a retreat of absolute silence, to examine one-by-one, every sorrow, anger, and shame she has experienced, to acknowledge their existence, feel the pain, accept each with love, and invite each into her heart. The parade is pitiful, but when she finishes, she rests and sees her heart still has infinite room. Liz writes in a new notebook, "I love you. I will never leave you. I will always take care of you," and for two years these words help her survive. Now free of her divorce, of David, and of mood-altering drugs, and happy to have helped a destitute family, Liz returns with her loving Brazilian. Zen Buddhists believe that a grown oak tree creates the acorn from which it is born. Liz feels that who she is now has brought the old Liz to this point. Who she is now tells hysterical Liz to go back to bed. Having completed her three I's, Liz suggests an A.A.B.B. rhyming couplet—Australia, America, Bali, Brazil—to accommodate their complex lives. Felipe knows no Italian, but Liz invites him, "attraversiamo"—"let's cross over."



Characters

Elizabeth Gilbert

The author of this memoir of travels to Italy, India, and Indonesia, Liz is a New York writer struggling to recover from a contentious divorce, a failed love affair, and a bout of severe, near-suicidal depression. Liz and her sister Catherine grow up on a Christmas tree farm in Connecticut in a largely non-practicing Protestant family. Having agreed with her never-named husband, whom she marries too young and uncritically, that once she turns 30 she will get pregnant and live like everyone else, Liz discovers, at 31, that she is ambivalent about motherhood and needs out of the marriage of convenience. Sobbing in her bathroom for the 47th consecutive night, Liz prays to God for the first time in her life. While her husband is refusing to settle, Liz gets a magazine assignment to visit Bali and write about Yoga vacations. There she meets a healer, Ketut Liyer, who predicts that she will return and study with him.

Through David, the lover she takes after leaving home, Liz joins a Hindu meditation group and resolves to visit the Guru's ashram in India. She is in counseling and taking antidepressants, which she does not enjoy but credits with getting her through the divorce and over the many inconclusive breakups with David. Destitute after legal costs, Liz gets an advance on a travel book through Italy, India, and Indonesia. She quits taking antidepressants in Rome and quickly is stalked by Depression and Loneliness, but feels God helping her get by through unconditional love. Liz enrolls in formal Italian classes, practices speaking with friends, and gains weight on what New York friends dub a "No Carb Left Behind" tour of Naples, Venice, and Sicily

Liz next goes to the ashram in India, where she eats vegetarian, scrubs temple floors, meditates, and chants the Gurugita, which she initially loathes. She learns to control her "monkey mind" and discusses her past with a compassionate inner circle of friends, led by Richard the Texan, who nicknames her Groceries. When she vows to observe silence, Liz is appointed the ashram's Key Hostess for retreats, and surprisingly achieves the very spiritual heights that she had thought beyond her. Liz goes to her next stop nostalgic for the spirituality she is leaving.

Liz arrives in Bali knowing only the name of the ancient healer she has met and the town he lives near. She has little trouble finding Ketut Liyer, who names Liz Lagoh Prano—"Happy Body"—but has some difficulty getting him to remember her. He teaches her simple Balinese meditation—sit and smile—and they spend hours discussing life. Liz also befriends a destitute woman healer, Wayan Nuriyah, and organizes friends worldwide to buy her property and build her a house. Liz also meets an expatriate Brazilian, Felipe, with whom she falls in love and plans to live, splitting their time between America, Australia, Brazil, and Bali.



Ketut Liyer

A ninth-generation Balinese medicine man, Ketut looks like Star Wars' Jedi Master Yoda. Elizabeth Gilbert first meets him while on assignment to write a magazine article about Yoga vacations. Ketut draws a picture to show Liz how to ground herself and see God through her heart. He insists that she come study with him as soon as she goes broke and recaps her fortunes instantly. He does not remember her when she does, two years later.

The name Ketut designates the healer a fourth-born; and Liyer means "Bright Light." As a young man, Ketut rejects the arduous training needed to be a healer and wants to be a painter. A rich American commissions a painting, and while working at night, Ketut sets fire to his arm pumping up an oil lamp. The doctors say it must be amputated, but Ketut appeals to his family, who put him on a six-day total fast, during which time Ketut feels God inside him. Obligated to follow in his ancestors' footsteps, Ketut studies lonthars, medical books written on palm leaves, learning about herbs. He uses drawings to help fighting families find harmony and lovers to find one another. He delivers babies, buries the dead, performs marriages, and files teeth.

Ketut's life story suggests he is 85-105 years old. The important fact is that he is born on a Thursday, which makes Shiva the Destroyer his patron god, the lion and tiger are his guiding animal spirits, the banyan his tree, the peacock his bird, and except that he interrupts others, he is generally decent, with a good memory and desire to help others. Ketut always asks the day of the week on which they are born to determine the correct prayers and potions. He believes in black magic and evil spirits harming people. He asks if Liz is meditating and says she must smile even in her liver. Ketut eats once a day and every night pulls healthy energy out of the universe into his core. People wait patiently for hours in Ketut's courtyard, he gives each his rapt attention, and is often worn out by nightfall.

Ketut's second wife, Nyomo, is scary and suspicious of Liz until she takes his worn old notebooks and ledgers to have them photocopied. They contain in Balinese-Sanskrit his grandfather's priceless information on medical herbs, palm reading, astrology, mantras, spells, and cures, but are falling apart. Ketut is delighted with the new books and shares them with his wife. She begins serving Liz coffee and other treats and wordlessly shows her love. Ketut reveals that she is his brother's wife, who after Ketut is widowed helps maintain his household as well. They do not have sex.

Wayan Nuriyasih and Tutti

After being hit by a bus and thrown into a ditch during the third leg of her travels, Elizabeth Gilbert visits Wayan Nuriyasih in Ubud, Bali. Wayan, whose name means she is a first-born, is in her 30s, beautiful and smiling, as she cares for patients in the "Traditional Balinese Healing Center," which Liz has passed many times and wondered about. It serves also as a luncheonette serving multivitamin specials, and Wayan lives there with her daughter Tutti and two adopted orphan girls, Big Ketut and Little Ketut.



Liz limps in, introduces herself, and is expeditiously treated with homemade concoctions. Liz dodges the expected question about her marital status, but Wayan sees the signs, for she too is divorced—a great rarity in Bali. They commiserate for five hours. Wayan's ex is a drunk and a gambler, who hospitalizes her repeatedly with beatings and allows child custody only because Tutti is a girl. Legal fees destroy Wayan and cut her off from all family, and frequent moves are hurting Tutti's schoolwork. Wayan's parents are poor rice farmers and cannot afford to take them in. If she moved there, Wayan would lose all of her patients, because it is too far away.

A pigtailed, skinny "cherry bomb" of a girl, Tutti is not a typical Balinese child, Tutti wants to go to college and be a veterinarian. Liz prays silently for this. When Wayan tells Liz that she is soon to be evicted, Tutti is playing with a single blue ceramic tile, imagining it as the floor of a permanent home. This moves Liz to contact friends via email to ask that in lieu of birthday presents, they donate towards buying Wayan land and a house. They raise \$18,000, which is put into a Balinese account. Liz gets frustrated when Wayan procrastinates and appears to be putting the touch on her for more money so she can buy more land and build a fancy hotel. Liz threatens to take back the money and return it to the irate donors, and Wayan swiftly closes a deal. Wayan throws a traditional Balinese birthday party for Liz and reminds her that she has, as promised, found her a man. She also heals Liz's bladder infection when making love to that man too often doubles her over with pain. Wayan explains at length to Liz and Felipe how she handles the delicate sexual problems suffered on the island.

Armenia

A gorgeous, glamorous Brazilian, who formerly uses "pretty power" to calm Central American wars for the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees and currently heads Novica, a multinational business marketing indigenous art on the Internet, Armenia invites Elizabeth Gilbert and Wayan Nuriyasih to a fellow expatriate's party in Ubud. The host is Felipe, with whom Liz swiftly falls in love.

Catherine

Elizabeth Gilbert's sister, Catherine is three years older, three inches taller, athletic, scholarly, maternal, and fearless. They get along as adults, once Liz at age 28 declares that she is tired of being picked on and Catherine asks what has taken her so long. Catherine does not gloat when Liz's marriage falls apart, even though Liz had always been the favored child. Catherine stands by Liz during therapy and they talk by phone almost every night before Liz's year-long trip around the world. Whenever either travels, they say "I love you," just in case. Catherine visits Liz in Rome right after Liz breaks up with David. She drags Liz around the city, pointing out features with a scholar's trained eye. Catherine finds Liz's newfound faith beautiful, but cannot herself believe. Learning is sacred to Catherine and she has a gift for making things clear.



Catherine lives in Philadelphia. She stores Liz's few possessions during her trip and has given her a room on the top floor of her house, where Liz fears she will become known as the crazy, alcoholic aunt. While in India, Liz dedicates the chanting of a long Sanskrit hymn which has always bored and annoyed her to Catherine's son, Nick, who has difficulty sleeping. This makes the time fly for Liz and she hears later, her nephew no longer suffers insomnia.

David

Elizabeth Gilbert's lover, into whose arms she falls desperately immediately after leaving her husband, David is an bigger-than-life character, a New York actor and writer with the big Italian eyes that "unstitch" Liz. He is initially attentive and romantic, and their falling in love is like a giddy movie montage. Liz's "reprieve," however, is short-lived, as David draws back from her despondency and dependence. David is both "catnip and kryptonite" to Liz. Liz is forever grateful to David for introducing her to a Hindu meditation group, which leads to her visit the Guru's ashram in India.

As Liz leaves on her year-long quest for balance between spirituality and pleasure, she and David are living apart but constantly hoping to find some way of getting past their differences. When in Rome Liz decides that she must break up for good, she knows she will miss David's banter, snacks, riding along listening to Springsteen, but not the crushing isolation when he begins to pull back. Still loving him to excess, Liz emails her decision and dreads receiving a reply, hoping he will talk her out of it, but David graciously lets Liz go, hoping she finds the love of her life, for "beauty attracts beauty." Liz still struggles to put David behind her in India, where her blunt friend Richard from Texas playfully taunts her. Richard admits that David may well have been Liz's "soul mate," but insists that soul mates are intended to have a short "shelf-life," appearing at a needful moment in one's life to help resolve issues and then move on.

Felipe

A Brazilian expatriate, living five years in Bali, Felipe throws a party of pork, alcohol, and dancing to which Elizabeth Gilbert is invited early in the third leg of her travels by a fellow Brazilian, Armenia. Felipe remarks that Liz is so young and beautiful that she needs only one dress to fit into society. Felipe is 52, with silver hair balding like Picasso, with warm, brown eyes, a gentle face, and a nice smile. He is in Bali recovering from a hard divorce, working with Balinese silversmiths to make jewelry from Brazilian gems for export to America. His grown children love him. He raised them while his Australian wife pursued her career. He had wanted to be "on the correct side of social history." Liz enjoys his "natural over-the-top displays of affection." He speaks at least four languages, has visited 50 countries, and enjoys listening to Liz without interrupting.

Felipe pursues Liz, accepting her reservations, but not relenting. They begin a month of nearly non-stop lovemaking that gives Liz a bladder infection. Felipe helps Wayan Nuriyasih find real estate to buy and, when the deal goes through, is able to go on



vacation with Liz. She takes him to Gili Meno, where she makes an intense retreat before her year's travel begins. Felipe has business in Bali and family and friends in Australia and Brazil. Liz has a life in America. Having completed her three I's, Liz suggests an A.B.A.B.—Australia, America, Bali, Brazil—rhyming couplets. Felipe knows no Italian, but Liz invites him, "attraversiamo"—"let's cross over."

Giovanni and Dario

Elizabeth Gilbert's first "Tandem Exchange Partner" in Rome during the first leg of her travels, Giovanni at 25 is ten years younger and has "giant brown liquid-center Italian eyes" that tempt Liz to give up temporary celibacy. They meet after Liz answers his Internet ad for a partner to practice Italian while he practices English. Giovanni's more dazzling twin brother Dario spends sensual time with Liz's Swedish friend Sofie. Shy and studious, Giovanni is too lovely and unsullied to inflict herself upon as she recovers from divorce, lost love, and profound depression.

The Guru

To protect her from curiosity-seekers, Elizabeth Gilbert does not name her Guru, whose stunning eyes call out to Liz from a photograph in then-boyfriend David's New York apartment and lead to Liz attending chant sessions and ultimately spending four months in the Guru's isolated ashram outside Mumbai (Bombay). Female, multilingual, university-educated, and a savvy businesswoman, the Guru is much easier for Liz to follow than the firebrand whom she succeeds. The Guru is a teenager when Swamiji recognizes her potential and takes her on as a translator. She is in her twenties when she succeeds him in 1982. The Guru is not resident in the ashram during Liz's stay, but people assure her spiritual communication is sometimes easier when the Guru is not being swarmed by devotees.

Ian

An attractive, intelligent, articulate Welshman to whom Elizabeth Gilbert is attracted at Felipe's party on Bali during the third leg of her travels, Ian does not give Liz his email address to keep up contact. Felipe calls Ian a "bullshitter," and then admits that he, Felipe, is Bali's premier bullshitter. Ian plays bongos in a reggae band in Ubud. Previously, he travels the world and has lived in an Ashram. He begins his career as a bomb squad expert in the British Army in North Ireland. More recently, he has built refugee camps in Bosnia and cleared mine fields.

Iva

Elizabeth Gilbert's Lebanese-American friend, Iva grows up in war-torn Beirut and becomes the calmest person in the world. While they are driving across Kansas, Iva suggests that Liz write a petition to God stating her specific desire to be free of her



destructive marriage. Iva is the first to spiritually co-sign it, and convinces Liz that many people, friends, relatives, and celebrities are joining in. Liz naps in the car briefly and receives a cellphone call from her lawyer announcing that her husband has signed the agreement.

Linda

Elizabeth Gilbert's dreadlocked, pierced friend whom she first meets during a preliminary visit to Bali, travels with in Costa Rica prior to this memoir, and with whom she finally joins up with in Venice, Linda possesses supreme self-esteem and dismisses all questions of metaphysics. She has ferrets and lizards, and manages a software development team in Seattle. She serves as Liz's "temporary, special-order, travel-sized Venetian codega."

Maria and Giulio

Elizabeth Gilbert's married friends in Rome on the first leg of her travels, Maria is an American-born businesswoman fluent in French, Chinese, and Italian, married to an Italian filmmaker who wants to learn English better but cannot accept her teaching without a fight. A wall covered by filthy graffiti in English is a monument to their passion. Giulio becomes Liz's second "Tandem Exchange Partner." Giulio observes that Americans are repressed and dangerous when they finally explode. Giulio initiates the game of giving cities descriptive words. Rome's is SEX, New York's is ACHIEVE. At the end of the second leg of her journey, at an ashram in India, Liz recalls this and is finally able to give herself a word.

Mario / Nyoman

The friendly, muscular, energetic desk man in the pretty hotel in which Elizabeth Gilbert settles in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, on the third leg of her travels, Mario loves everything Italian, which helps Liz bond with him. Balinese are named for their place in the birth order, making Mario (Nyoman) a third-born. He has visited the house of the famous healer, Ketut Liyer, with whom Liz has come to study, and takes her there on his motorbike.

Richard from Texas

A former junkie and alcoholic who has briefly held many jobs that involve a bit of hustle, Richard resembles the cartoon character Foghorn Leghorn when he appears in Elizabeth Gilbert's ashram in India, during the second leg of her travels. Richard worries about few things and brings a sense of security to Liz, whom he nicknames "Groceries" because of her big appetite. Richard comes to the Guru through an ex-girlfriend ten years earlier, and starts praying for an open heart. God obliges with open-heart surgery. Richard works in the ashram kitchen and enjoys watching Liz scrub floors. He helps Liz



see that once one sits down to meditate with a pure intention, what happens or fails to happen thereafter is of no concern. Richard talks about distracting the ego through love.

Richard has been married, has grown sons, and an ex-wife who thinks he has changed his name to Motherfucker. Preparing to fly home to Austin, TX, Richard sees major changes in Liz and she thanks him for his help. She promises to move on with her life and find someone to love. In Bali, struggling with whether or not to fall love with Felipe, Liz recalls Richard's advice to find a sexual "droughtbreaker" and "rainmaker," begins to miss her ex-lover David, but hears Richard's voice in her head and does not slide into brooding.

Sophie

Elizabeth Gilbert's best friend in Rome during the first leg of her travels, Sophie is a beautiful Swede in her late twenties on a four-month leave of absence from Stockholm to study Italian. Sophie gets so tired of hearing Liz moan about missing kissing that she says she will kiss her herself. Sophie accompanies Liz to Naples and finds the pizza so superb that she wonders why people bother eating in Stockholm.

Lucca Spaghetti

Elizabeth Gilbert's friend in Rome during the first leg of her travels, Lucca (whose surname is unusual even in Italy) is a creative tax accountant who still lives with his mother and has a "soap-and-water" girlfriend, Giuliana. Lucca often takes Liz to obscure restaurants with rough cuisine like baby lamb intestines. Lucca cannot imagine living anywhere but Rome or with Liz in India. He sometimes calls her Gandhi. Having visited New York, Lucca mocks "Amtrak Pizza."

Swamiji

Never seen in the book (he dies in 1982), Swamiji (Sanskrit for "the beloved monk") is the founder of the ashram in which Elizabeth Gilbert lives during her four months in India. Liz finds him scary, powerful, and fiery in photographs. He is also referred to as the Siddha Yogi ("perfected master") who establishes the lineage of teaching in the 1920s and is venerated as a saint. Liz does not mention his name in order to shield his disciple from publicity.

Swamiji is a relentless spiritual firebrand who like St. Francis of Assisi refuses to enter the family business but wanders India seeking a true spiritual master to show him God. He becomes a Hatha Yogi, an expert in ayurvedic medicine and cooking, an architect, a gardener, a musician, and a sword fighter. One day, a crazy old man sends him back to his native village to the guru whom he meets as a child, and Swamiji becomes his disciple. He achieves enlightenment, becomes a guru, and founds an ashram on a barren farm. In 1970, he visits America and initiates thousands of people a day into shaktipat, influencing leaders of the Civil Rights movement. Swamiji organizes the



translation of Yogic scriptures into Western languages. One of his youthful translators succeeds Swamiji when he dies. When Liz arrives, she wants her spiritual life, like the master's, to be ferocious.

Tulsi

A 17-year-old Indian tomboy half Elizabeth Gilbert's age and height, Tulsi becomes Liz's friend in the Indian ashram during the second part of her year-long travels. They scrub temple floors together and talk. Tulsi's family does not understand her devotion to God or her desire to study psychology and to roam the world like Liz. Liz tells Tulsi about being married and divorce. Tulsi bemoans being born an Indian girl who will have to marry. Tulsi wears "specs" with one shattered lens.

Yudhi

A smiling, stocky, 27-year-old Javanese, who talks like a California surfer, Yudhi spends many evenings with Elizabeth Gilbert during her four months on Bali, drinking beer and talking about restaurants, movies, and why life is so crazy. Mocked by Muslim neighbors as a Christian in his childhood, Yudhi turns to music and is so talented that he ought to be famous. He longs to live in America and be in show business. In his teens, Yudhi works for Carnival Cruise Lines, jumps ship in New York, settles in New Jersey, learns Spanish, joins a band, marries Ann from Connecticut, the pretty bassist, and lives happily in Brooklyn until 9/11, when he is rounded up and deported. There is little hope he will ever get back and his marriage is in trouble. Jakarta's slums are too much for Yudhi, so he comes to Bali, where Javanese are considered thieves and beggars. Yudhi and Liz take a week-long American-style road trip around Bali, making friends, and talking hip-hop.



Objects/Places

The Ashram

To protect the sacred place in which she grows spiritually in India, Elizabeth Gilbert withholds the Ashram's name, saying only that it is a two-hour taxi ride from the Mumbai (Bombay) airport. Outside the ashram's walls everything is dust and poverty, but inside are gardens, flowerbeds, and orchards. The buildings are nice but not extravagant. These include a cafeteria-style dining hall, comprehensive library of spiritual classics, two meditation "caves," a covered outdoor pavilion for yoga classes, a park with a walking path around it, and concrete dormitories. During Liz's stay there are never more than a few hundred residents at any given time, and the Guru is not in residence. There are a few paid staff members, but most of the labor is done by students. One temple is open to the general public, but the rest of the ashram is restricted to students, who are expected to spend at least a month there. Indians and Europeans are equally represented. Courses are in Hindi and English. The application process weeds out those who might distract others. The public temple features a statue of the Siddha Yogi ("perfected master") who establishes the lineage of teaching in the 1920s and is venerated as a saint.

Liz's closest friends are Richard from Texas, a plumber/poet from New Zealand, an Irish dairy farmer, Tulsi the teenage tomboy, and Vivian, a former nun from South Africa. At the end of her stay, Liz is transferred from scrubbing temple floors to serving as "Key Hostess" for 7-10-day silent retreats, whose participants arrive looking like they belong in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The retreats deal with the turiya state, the elusive fourth level of human consciousness in which one finds that one's treasure is lead present within. The devotees' collective meditations several times lead Liz into the divine bliss, to which she is always able to return. Liz meditates during her last night at the ashram, and leaves behind two poems to the memory of the founding Swamiji.

Gili Meno Island

A tiny, pristine island off Lombok to the east of Bali, Gili Meno attracts Elizabeth Gilbert for a ten-day retreat of absolute silence. It is her "ultimate truth and reconciliation hearing." She walks the circumference of the island morning and night, feeling lonely and a failure, envies the couples she sees, and laughs at one little kid who pesters her every day to make her shoo him off. On the ninth day, Liz forces herself to examine one-by-one, every sorrow, anger, and shame she has experienced, to acknowledge their existence, feel the pain, accept each with love, and invite each into her heart. She writes in a new notebook the statement, "I love you. I will never leave you. I will always take care of you," which for years help her survive. At the end of her year of travel, having fallen in love with Felipe, Liz takes him to the island to "cross over" to their new life.



Gurugita

A central feature of life in the Indian ashram in which Elizabeth Gilbert spends four months, the Gurugita, nicknamed "The Geet" by her friend, Richard the Texan, is 182 verses of impenetrable Sanskrit text sung every morning for 90 minutes before breakfast. It is the reason everyone must arise at 3 AM. Since first hearing the Geet in an upstate New York ashram, Liz has never liked the long, tedious dialog between the goddess Parvati, embodying female creativity and the almighty god Shiva, representing male consciousness. Their dance or union—yoga—causes the universe and makes it manifest. Liz tries to avoid attending but is advised to stick it out. One morning, Liz oversleeps and finds herself locked in her dormitory. She jumps out a window, injuring her leg, and complains about sitting at the Geet until the late Swamiji says it looks like she wants to be there. When she dedicates the chanting to her beloved nephew, the time passes in a flash and she becomes a devotee. On Bali, Liz chants the Geet to get back into meditation after making love for the first time in 18 months.

Indonesia

An island nation stretching across the Indian and South Pacific oceans northwest of Australia, Indonesia provides the third "I" in Elizabeth Gilbert's year-long travels. The Hindu religion comes to the Malay Archipelago in the 4th century CE, but is conquered in the 14th century everywhere but on Bali, located mid-chain. The Balinese are the last remnant after the Muslims invade in the 16th century. Most Balinese are descended from royalty and priests. The caste system is complex but less brutal than in India. Bali is the size of Delaware. In the library, Liz learns that Bali has as bloody a history as any place on earth since the 16th century, marked by oppressive castes, slavery, and warfare. In the 1920s/30s, elite Westerners dub it "The Island of the Gods." World War II and the war of independence make Bali a dangerous place, but in the 1970s the Indonesian government resurrects the myth and up-scale tourists are lured back. Bali remains a popular tourist destination until the terrorist bombing in October of 2002, so English is widely spoken. The Balinese language is "more complex than Martian," as is their sociology and ritual. Liz is satisfied understanding that Balinese need to know where everyone is coming from, where they are going, and if they are married.

Naples

Wild, raucous, dirty, "an anthill inside a rabbit warren," Naples appeals to Elizabeth Gilbert instantly when she and friend Sofie pay a visit to sample its famous pizza. Naples is hung with laundry, filled with tough kids, loud women determined to make themselves understood, and a young girl who flips Liz off while smiling. Liz cannot believe that Giovanni and Dario, her sensitive Roman friends, grow up in this city, but Giovanni has given her directions to the Pizzeria da Michele, whose pies bring to Liz a delirium of love and to Sofie a metaphysical crisis at being Swedish and even bothering to eat.



New York

Elizabeth Gilbert's home during her married life, New York is a giant, riotous place in which she seems not quite comfortable. She and her unnamed husband own an upscale home in the suburban Hudson Valley and an apartment in Manhattan. Liz is in Manhattan when the terrorists strike on 11 September 2001, but neither she nor her estranged husband is hurt; the event brings to their crumbling relationship none of the deference to larger tragedy that most New Yorkers experience, and they proceed to divorce. Immediately after leaving the marriage, Liz moves in with a lover David. Liz joins a Hindu meditation group and resolves to visit the Guru's ashram in India. She also begins studying Italian in the "Night School for Divorced Ladies." In New York, Liz experiences a famed Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, draw a crowd into his own silence. Although she has many friends in New York, most of think she has lost her mind, "cherry-picking" a religion, Liz doubts if she will want to live there after her year's travels end. When Giulio and Liz are assigning names to cities, New York gets ACHIEVE.

Rome

Rome is the focal point for Elizabeth Gilbert's four-month visit to Italy, which kicks off a year of travel, gathering material to write the present book. She rents an apartment in an historic building and falls asleep content after her first Roman meal. She loves the fountains, particularly the one in the Villa Borghese. For most of her stay, Liz studies Italian in the Leonardo da Vinci Academy of Language Studiers. Liz is embarrassed that her interest in museum and churches is mild, except when accompanied by her older sister Catherine, an encyclopedia of history and architecture. Liz visits the the Pantheon, which is nearly obligatory for visitors to Rome, but is more affected by the decrepit Augusteum, built when Octavius could not conceive of the Emperors not being worshiped, variously used down through time, and currently neglected. Liz sees that her life needs to be similarly open to reinvention. When Giulio and Liz are assigning names to cities, Rome gets SEX (and the Vatican POWER).

Sicily

The large island located at Italy's toe, Sicily has for centuries been kept poor and oppressed by the Mafia. Goethe claims, "Without seeing Sicily one cannot get a clear idea of what Italy is." Elizabeth Gilbert spends the last week of her four months in Italy on the island. She finds Messina grimy, greatly enjoys the food in Taormina's tiny trattoria and even more so in Syracuse, the historic city that links classical Greece and classical Rome. Historians claim that rhetoric and plot are invented in Syracuse, and they seem alive and well in the modern town. The once-beautiful Palermo still sports rubble from World War II. Sicily's sufferings give Liz hope and appreciation for the pursuit of beauty.



Ubud

The third leg of Elizabeth Gilbert's year-long adventure centers on the town of Ubud in the mountainous center of Bali, an island the size of Delaware situated in the center of the Malay archipelago. Ubud is the cultural hub of the island, featuring painting, dance, carving, and religious ceremonies. There are good restaurants, bookshops, and classes, including meditation. Liz at first stays in a pretty, comfortable hotel, but then rents a home from an Englishwoman who is away for the summer. She buys a mountain bike to visit old Ketut Liyer, the would-be artist, and young Wayan Nuriyasih, operator of the "Traditional Balinese Healing Center." Liz raises funds to buy Wayan property in or around Ubud, where her patients live. Towards the end of the story, Liz spends most of her time at the home of the Brazilian expatriate Felipe. On one occasion they visit the beach.

Venice

By comparison with Rome, where Elizabeth Gilbert spends most of her four months in Italy, Venice seems like a 14th-century science fair experiment gone bad. Venice stinks with decay and seems an appropriate place only for a slow, alcoholic death. During Liz's brief visit, its melancholy—Venetians seem ready to put themselves out of their own misery at any time—helps her feel the progress of her own psychic healing. Her companion on this jaunt, "Crazy Linda," is a haven of jokes and good fun.

Themes

Religion

Eat, Pray, Love is the quest of a nominal Christian to find and become one with God. Elizabeth Gilbert needs a person to pray to rather than a "That," and accepts the loaded word "God" and use of the male pronoun (capitalized), knowing that any term will be adequate and inadequate to the reality. At base, God under any name and addressed as male or female is the same for her. As she cannot accept Jesus as more than a teacher of peace, she does not call herself a Christian, and apologizes in advance to readers who find this offensive. Several times, Liz gently denounces fundamentalism and exclusivity by any religion. She particularly likes the Hopi Indian description of every religion as a thread waiting to be woven into a great tapestry of universal truth, which will pull humankind into its next reality. She finds confirmation of this view in the Dalai Lama and, surprisingly, in an ecumenical pronouncement of Pope Pius XI. She dwells at length on how yogic practices can help one achieve profound unity with his or her deity under any name. Yoga (meaning "union"), originates in Hinduism, but is practiced also by Buddhists and other Asian philosophies, and much of her material is drawn from Hindu sources. Transcendence she shows, however, is also experienced by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim mystics.

Liz illustrates from the Hindu tradition how the "inexpressible" experience of individual saints gets crushed over by ritual and dogma. When a yogi stakes his cat outside during meditation to avoid distraction, his followers eventually see the tying of a cat outside as a prerequisite to devotion, and when the cat dies are in a quandary how to proceed. Liz realizes that she must always live on the borderline between the world and the mysterious forest of the adepts. Early in her experience with yoga, Liz accepts that she is too well educated and not emotionally susceptible to mystical transformation, and is surprised—and delighted—to experience it, lifted up on the "thermal updrafts" of others' meditations. She does her best to describe what she experiences, refusing to cop out like most mystics. By the time she reaches Bali, Liz can easily sink into meditation and achieve oneness with God. Cynical New York friends chide her about "cherry-picking" religion, but Liz believes one must do that to find those elements that best serve his or her goal.

Sex

Sex runs throughout Eat, Pray, Love. In the course of the book, Elizabeth Gilbert describes her hedonistic youth, beginning in early adolescence. She always falls in love too quickly and in too needy a fashion. Therefore, as part of her year-long quest for autonomy, Liz pledges herself to celibacy. In Rome, she longs to be kissed but also fears being kissed and bringing back the passions. A girl friend gets so tired of listening to her that she offers to kiss her to get it over with. In India, celibacy is simpler because



she lives in a spiritual milieu, keeping constantly occupied with physical labor and learning to empty her mind in order to meditate.

Sex comes to the fore in Bali, Indonesia. First, Liz becomes friends with a female healer, Wayan Nuriyasih, who treats a knee infection suffered in a biking accident. After discussing at length their both being divorced, Wayan observes that Liz has gone a long time without sex—her knee cartilage has stiffened because the hormones released during sex are not flowing. Wayan declares that everyone needs sex and sets to praying for a lover for Liz. Her elderly male healer-friend, Ketut Liyer, agrees that Liz needs a lover who will spoil her and whom she must spoil. He laughs about being too old to have sex with his second wife.

Liz meets an older Brazilian expatriate, also divorced and as caring and tender as neither her ex-husband nor ex-lover David have been. Liz clings to her celibacy, however, not wanting to deprive herself of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to realize her autonomy. Felipe is understanding, but points out the benefits of an affair. With a mighty effort, Liz goes home alone. She gorges herself in an effort not to masturbate, which she suggests has been a regular practice for a year and a half. She observes how disappointment often follows the release and finds the need for erotic memories somehow degrading. Next night, she goes to Felipe's bed and experiences the freest, most satisfying sex of her life.

Over the next month, they make love so freely that Liz develops a painful bladder infection for which Wayan offers a natural cure. While it is working, she tells Liz and Felipe about her practice as a sex therapist and the difficulties she encounters dealing with macho Balinese men. She makes dildos for lonely women, helps impotent males get blood flowing to their limp "bananas," supervises copulation of couples trying to conceive, and arranges for village studs to impregnate women whose husbands would disown them if they do not conceive. Wayan accepts all of this as a natural part of her calling, but has to change the subject when it begins to make her feel different, "even in my underpants." The cure works and Liz and Felipe appear destined to live happily ever after, enjoying one another's perfectly-matched bodies.

Time

The way in which human beings regularly disregard the present by dwelling on the unchangeable past or yearning for an unpredictable future is examined repeatedly and in depth in *Eat, Pray, Love*. Elizabeth Gilbert obsesses on three continents about her misspent youth, indifference towards motherhood, poisonous marriage, and unresolved and unresolvable relationship with David. These thoughts drive her nearly to suicide and put her on mood-altering drugs. As she travels, Liz marvels at tourists who ignore what they are seeing and plan when and how they can return to the same place again. It is the height of foolishness.

As early as age nine, Liz realizes that life passes too fast and she goes through the kind of metaphysical crisis that most people do at fifty. She wants the world to stop while she



gets a grip on the universe. In later years, this hypersensitivity about mortality makes Liz want to experience everything—travel, romance, and pasta—until one night she collapses in the bathroom and begs God to help. This leads to her year-long journey. In an Indian ashram, Liz has trouble stilling her "monkey mind" that swings between emotions and keeps her from seeing God as always here and now, not past or future. Liz is envious of her roommate, who has practiced yoga longer than Liz has been alive, for being able to slip into heaven instantly, just by saying her mantra.

Liz's mind refuses to let her focus until a monk gives her a different mantra and she feels soft blue energy pulsing through her body. She breaks off, feeling unready. Liz cannot abide chanting the Gurugita every morning, but perseveres. Only when she is assigned as the ashram's "Key Hostess" to help retreat-goers is Liz lifted up to the elusive fourth level of human consciousness and finds herself in God's palm. As soon as she thinks about wanting to remain forever, she reverts to her old self, and God tells her that she may return when she understands that she is always there. After a few more experiences, Liz can be one with God—herself be God—whenever she wishes, and she is amazed that others do not perceive this.

Style

Perspective

Elizabeth Gilbert is enjoying a successful magazine writing career as she turns 30 and has to face up to her youthful determination to begin a family at that age. She cannot get excited about children, knows it is unfair to have them otherwise, and loves/hates the man she marries too young and uncritically. Having been brought up in a rarely-practicing Protestant family, Liz has no spiritual support as she goes into crisis, leaving her never-named husband, who demonizes her and thwarts her efforts to part amiably. After a near suicide, she begins therapy and antidepressants. She also falls into the arms of an actor/writer who first introduces her to yoga. Liz feels instantly drawn to the photograph of David's Indian Guru and resolves to study at her ashram.

All of these elements combine to produce this richly entertaining and thought-provoking book. Liz knows how to craft scenes and story lines. She finds that she believes in God, but in no denominational way. She apologizes to fundamentalists of all stripes but strives to show the rich tapestry of religious experience and how it coincides nicely with psychology. Liz accepts that some people cannot "cherry-pick" religion, but believes that is right for her and many others. Liz loves to eat, to travel, and to make new friends. She talks a lot about the art of traveling, which could help some readers. She learns to accept her past, not worry about the future, and to live in the moment. She appreciates how the Christian West has participated in the universal quest for transcendence and only chides a bit about the Inquisition. She clearly wants to break down religious walls so the Hopi Indian vision of all the threads of religion coming together into the rope that pulls humankind to the next reality can be fulfilled.

Liz writes this book not only because she is paid in advance for it, but because she senses that thinking people need the various fruits she has tasted: tolerance, compassion, love, and sacrificial giving. Anyone who reads with an open mind and heart will benefit richly, and even some die-hards may be touched.

Tone

Eat, Pray, Love is a story of travel and pilgrimage, paid for in advance by the publisher. Elizabeth Gilbert is, therefore, always "on the clock," watching for people, places, events, objects, and ideas that will contribute to a successful publishing project. She hits, playfully, on the idea of three I's as her destinations: Italy, India, and Indonesia, which her somewhat jaded New York friends turn into jokes. Despite an endless and bitter divorce and a love affair she can neither fit into fully nor let fall aside, Liz never loses her sense of wry humor or ability to analogize. When things are most dismal, Liz personifies Depression and Loneliness as Pinkerton Detectives who track her down in Rome, make themselves comfortable in her apartment, chop away at her ego, and even light cigars whose stink remains in the morning. At the most sublime, Liz refuses to be a



literary sluggard like ancient mystics, saying only that meeting God is "inexpressible"; she gives it the old college try and is impressive. The book is always optimistic.

Liz writes about food, societies, and religion, three topics in which it is hard to be objective. She is most subjective about food, which she samples widely and describes voluptuously. She is playful describing different nationalities and regions, pointing out the good (e.g., Italian being based on the most beautiful of the dialects rather than the most politically important) and the bad (e.g., the Mafia's centuries-long oppression of Sicily), and even the mediocre that needs not waste one's time. Liz dislikes religious fanaticism and fundamentalism but admires all religions, which she is certain are all the same at their base. She apologizes to Christians who will allow no one but Jesus to lead them to God. When she gets to India, Liz takes pains to explain that Yoga and Hinduism are not synonymous, and that adherents of any religion can use its techniques to deepen their experience of the divine. One always knows where Liz stands but she never imposes her views on anyone. The effect is a willingness to follow where she leads.

Structure

Eat, Pray, Love consists of 108 scenes, strung like the beads on an Indian japa malas prayer necklace, the forerunner of the Western rosary. The Introduction, deemed the "109th bead," explains the structure. Each of the three sections, devoted in order to one of the "I" countries—Italy, India, and Indonesia—consists of 36 beads, which Elizabeth Gilbert finds auspicious because she is 36 when she writes the book. That kind of playfulness typifies the entire book. The need to keep up the formal structure sometimes splits scenes into several "beads," and sometimes results in very short, isolated beads. It is a cute device that neither adds to nor detracts from the storyline. The division into three books is well-founded, because Liz seeks something different in each phase.

Book 1 is entitled, "Italy, or 'Say It Like your Eat It,' or '36 Tales about the Pursuit of Pleasure.'" The first nine beads tell how Liz happens to take her year-long trip and reach the first step: Rome. She has much ground to cover, explaining how she has come to be divorced and in a love affair that is going nowhere, how she has discovered God and prayer, become a devotee of yoga, and decided to visit India. A preliminary trip to Bali sets her up for a year-long journey that ends in Bali. The Italian portion is filled with Liz's love of the language and a food travelogue. Liz is largely uninterested in history or art, so only when her scholarly sister is in Rome does she describe monuments. Liz loves people and food fills many pages, as does her ongoing fight with depression.

Book 2, "India, or 'Congratulations to Meet You,' or '36 Tales about the Pursuit of Devotion,'" shows Liz arriving at her rural Ashram just in time to chant in the New Year 2004. Book 2 grows weighty with philosophy and religion as Liz immerses herself in yoga and meditation. A new circle of friends helps her come to terms with her past and before she leaves India, Liz experiences oneness with God in a way she had thought



herself incapable. The two poems she leaves behind show the extent of her spiritual growth. Liz had intended to spend a month as a religious seeker at the ashram and then become a tourist; she is persuaded that what she will see after four months of meditation will outshine the Taj Mahal.

Book 3, "Indonesia, or 'Even in My Underpants, I Feel Different,' or '36 Tales about the Pursuit of Balance,'" shows Liz arriving in Bali with less of a plan how to proceed than ever in her life, but she quickly meets two Balinese healers, an old man and a young woman, makes new friends, organizes her worldwide Internet friends to buy a home for the woman healer and her children, and most unexpectedly falls in love with a Brazilian expatriate. Book 3 shows how the Balinese seek balance in their lives and how far off-kilter Liz is, but also shows how the confusing Balinese system is adapted to its milieu but not a universal one. Liz struggles with her vow of celibacy, recalls how unprepared she had been for marriage, and ultimately and ecstatically yields, feeling the painful old wounds heal and looks forward to crossing over to a joyful new existence. A brief afterword assures readers that Bali is not devastated by the tsunami of 2004 and thanks by name the donors to Wayan's house.



Quotes

"In the end, what I have come to believe about God is simple. It's like this—I used to have this really great dog. She came from the pound. She was a mixture of about ten different breeds, but seemed to have inherited the finest features of them all. She was brown. When people asked me, 'What kind of dog is that?' I would always give the same answer: 'She's a brown dog.' Similarly, when the question is raised, 'What kind of God do you believe in?' my answer is easy: 'I believe in a magnificent God.'" Book 1, Bead 3, p. 14.

"Tonight, this strange interior gesture of friendship—the lending of a hand from me to myself when nobody else is around to offer solace—reminds me of something that happened to me once in New York City. I walked into an office building one afternoon in a hurry, dashed into the waiting elevator. As I rushed in, I caught an unexpected glimpse of myself in a security mirror's reflection. In that moment my brain did an odd thing—it fired off this split-second message: 'Hey! You know her! That's a friend of yours!' And I actually ran forward toward my own reflection with a smile, ready to welcome that girl whose name I had lost but whose face was so familiar. In a slash instant, of course, I realized my mistake and laughed in embarrassment at my almost doglike confusion over how a mirror works. But for some reason that incident comes to mind again tonight during my sadness in Rome, and I find myself writing this comforting reminder at the bottom of the page:

"Never forget that once upon a time, in an unguarded moment, you recognized yourself as a friend." Book 1, Bead 18, pp. 54-55.

"Oh, it was such an exquisite and lucky moment in my life to be sitting right in front of this man. I loved every word out of his mouth. I wanted to lean my head back into his old lap and let him pour his eloquent curses into my ears forever. And it wasn't just him! The whole stadium was full of such soliloquies. At such high fervor! Whenever there was some grave miscarriage of justice on the field, the entire stadium would rise to it feet, every man waving his arms in outrage and cursing, as if all 20,000 of them had just been in a traffic altercation. The Lazio players were no less dramatic than their fans, rolling on the ground in pain like death scenes from Julius Caesar, totally playing to the back row, then jumping up on their feet two seconds later to lead another attack on the goal." Book 1, Bead 23, pp. 69-70.

"She takes me into dozens of churches in Rome, and I can't keep them straight—St. This and St. That and St. Somebody of the Barefoot Penitents of Righteous Misery ... but just because I cannot remember the names or details of all the buttresses and cornices is not to say that I do not love to be inside the places with my sister, whose cobalt eyes miss nothing. I don't remember the name of the church that had those frescoes that looked so much like American WPA New Deal heroic murals, but I do remember Catherine pointing them out to me and saying, 'You gotta love those Franklin Roosevelt popes up there...' I also remember the morning we woke early and went to



mass at St. Susanna, and held each others' hands as we listened to the nuns there chanting their daybreak Gregorian hymns, both of us in tears from the echoing haunt of their prayers. My sister is not a religious person. Nobody in my family really is. (I've taken to calling myself the 'white sheep' of the family.) My spiritual investigations interest my sister mostly from a point of intellectual curiosity. 'I think that kind of faith is so beautiful,' she whispers to me in the church, 'but I can't do it, I just can't...' Book 1, Bead 29, p. 90.

"He's hitting on me, this kid! It's not entirely unflattering. He's not entirely unattractive. Though he's not remotely uncocky either. At one point he says to me in Italian, meaning to be complimentary, of course, 'You're not too fat, for an American woman.'

"I reply in English, 'And you're not too greasy, for an Italian man.'

" 'Come?'

"I repeat myself, in slightly modified Italian: 'And you're so gracious, just like all Italian men.'

"I can speak this language! The kid thinks I like him, but it's the words I'm flirting with. My God—I have decanted myself! I have uncorked my tongue, and Italian is pouring forth! He wants me to meet him later in Venice, but I don't have the first interest in him. I'm just lovesick over the language, so I let him slide away. Anyhow, I've already got a date in Venice. I'm meeting my friend Linda there." Book 1, Bead 32, p. 99.

"The students here are about equally divided between Indians and Westerners (and the Westerners are about evenly divided between Americans and Europeans). Courses are taught in both Hindi and English. On your application, you must write an essay, gather references, and answer questions about your mental and physical health, about any possible history of drug or alcohol abuse and also about your financial stability. The Guru doesn't want people to use her Ashram as an escape from whatever bedlam they may have created in their real lives; this will not benefit anyone. She also has a general policy that if your family and loved ones for some reason deeply object to the idea of your following a Guru and living in an Ashram, then you shouldn't do it, it's not worth it. Just stay home in your normal life and be a good person. there's no reason to make a big dramatic production over this.

"The level of this woman's practical sensibilities are always comforting to me." Book 2, Bead 39, pp. 27-128.

"My mind tried to protest, said, 'Yeah, but you're such a failure, you're such a loser, you'll never amount to anything—'

"But suddenly it was like a lion was roaring from within my chest, drowning all this claptrap out. A voice bellowed in me like nothing I had ever heard before. It was so internally, eternally loud that I actually clamped my hand over my mouth because I was afraid that if I opened my mouth and let this sound out, it would shake the foundations of buildings as far away as Detroit.

"And this is what it roared:

"YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW STRONG MY LOVE IS!!!!!!!!!!"



"The chattering, negative thoughts in my mind scattered in the wind of this statement like birds and jackrabbits and antelopes—they hightailed it out of there, terrified. Silence followed. An intense, vibrating, awed silence. The lion in the giant savannah of my heart surveyed his newly quiet kingdom with satisfaction. He licked his great chops once, closed his yellow eyes and went back to sleep.

"And then, in that regal silence, finally—I began to meditate on (and with) God." Book 2, Bead 50, pp. 157-158.

"So I stood up and did a handstand on my Guru's roof, to celebrate the notion of liberation. I felt the dusty tiles under my hands. I felt my own strength and balance. I felt the easy night breeze on the palms of my bare feet. This kind of thing—a spontaneous handstand— isn't something a disembodied cool blue soul can do, but a human being can do it. We have hands; we can stand on them if we want to. that's our privilege. that's the joy of a mortal body. And that's why God needs us. Because loves to feel things through our hands." Book 2, Bead 61, p. 188.

"It wasn't hallucinogenic, what I was feeling. It was the most basic of events. It was heaven, yes. It was the deepest love I'd ever experienced, beyond anything I could have previously imagined, but it wasn't euphoric. It wasn't exciting. There wasn't enough ego or passion left in me to create euphoria and excitement. It was just obvious. Like when you've been looking at an optical illusion for a long time, straining your eyes to decode the trick, and suddenly your cognizance shifts and there—now you can clearly see it!—the two vases are actually two faces. And once you've seen through the optical illusion, you can never not see it again.

"So this is God,' I thought. 'Congratulations to meet you.'" Book 2, Bead 67, p. 199.

"The whole idea of Bali is a matrix, a massive and invisible grid of spirits, guides, paths and customs. Every Balinese knows exactly where he or she belongs, oriented within this great, intangible map. Just look at the four names of almost every Balinese citizen—First, Second, Third, Fourth—reminding them all of when they were born in the family, and where they belong. You couldn't have a clearer social mapping system if you called your kids North, South, East and West. Mario, my new Italian-Indonesian friend, told me that he is only happy when he can maintain himself—mentally and spiritually—at the intersection between a vertical line and horizontal one, in a state of perfect balance. For this, he needs to know exactly where he is located at every moment, both in his relationship to the divine and to his family here on earth. If he loses that balance, he loses his power." Book 3, Bead 76, p. 227.

"How a Balinese single mother facing eviction found it in her heart to take in two extra homeless children is something that reaches far beyond any understanding I've ever had about the meaning of compassion.

"I want to help them.

"That was it. This is what the trembling feeling was, which I'd experienced so profoundly after meeting Wayan for the first time. I wanted to help this single mother with her daughter and her extra orphans. I wanted to valet-park them into a better life. It's just



that I hadn't been able to figure out how to do it. But today as Wayan and Armenia and I were eating our lunch and weaving our typical conversation of empathy and chops-busting, I looked over at little Tutti and noticed that she was doing something rather odd. She was walking around the shop with a single, small square of pretty cobalt blue ceramic tile resting on the palms of her upturned hands, singing in a chanting sort of way. I watched her for a while, just to see what she was up to. Tutti played with that tile for a long time, tossing it in the air, whispering to it, singing to it, then pushing it along the floor like it was a Matchbox car. Finally she sat upon it in a quiet corner, eyes closed, singing to herself, buried in some mystical, invisible compartment of space all her own." Book 3, Bead 91, p. 272.

"All I can do is laugh, because, hey—why not? It just might be crazy enough to work. A life like this might strike some people as absolutely loony, as sheer foolishness, but it resembles me so closely. Of course this is how we should proceed. It feels so familiar already. And I quite like the poetry of his idea, too, I must say. I mean that literally. After this whole year spent exploring the individual and intrepid I's, Felipe has just suggested to me a whole new theory of traveling:

"Australia, America, Bali, Brazil = A, A, B, B.

"Like a classical poem, like a pair of rhyming couplets.

"The little fishing boat anchors right off the shore of Gili Meno. There are no docks here on this island. You have to roll up your pants, jump off the boat and wade in through the surf on your own power. There's absolutely no way to do this without getting soaking wet or even banged up on the coral, but it's worth all the trouble because the beach here is so beautiful, so special. So me and my lover, we take off our shoes, we pile our small bags of belongings on the tops of our heads and we prepare to leap over the edge of that boat together, into the sea.

"You know, it's a funny thing. The only Romance language Felipe doesn't happen to speak is Italian. But I go ahead and say it to him anyway, just as we're about to jump.

"I say, 'Attraversiamo.'

"Let's cross over." Book 3, Bead 108, pp. 330-331.



Topics for Discussion

How do mosquitoes figure in the memoir *Eat, Pray, Love*?

How apt do you think the words that the friends assign to cities are? Would you change any? What word would you assign to your city? How does Liz's word fit her? What word would you give yourself?

How does Liz critique religious fundamentalism? What does she offer in its place?

What is the biggest surprise during Liz's year-long travels—to her and to you as a reader?

What is the biggest disappointment during Liz's year-long travels—to her and to you as a reader?

Liz warns that one needs a guru to practice yoga beyond the stretching exercises. What can you take from this book and use to deepen your own spirituality?

Liz is annoyed that mystics "cop out" about describing their experiences. Do you think she succeeds in describing hers? What questions would you like to ask her to clarify things?