

# The Hundred-Foot Journey

**I've spent my fair share of time in a kitchen.** I'm not a great cook; I prefer to bake. In any case, I know that a successful culinary delight depends on, among other things, the right proportions of a diversity of ingredients blended together. You can't make anything with just flour, or just vanilla extract. You have to combine ingredients, and sometimes they are very different from one another. Of course, this kind of alchemical transformation is at work not



RYAN HARRISON

only our kitchens, but in life all around us, and is brought to exquisite life in *The Hundred-Foot Journey*.

I thoroughly enjoyed this film, which places an Indian family of cooks and restaurateurs in southern France, trying to resurrect their family business exactly 100 feet across the street from a Michelin-starred restaurant featuring classical French cuisine served with style and a poised, raised eyebrow. Fortunately, Hassan, a young man of

innate culinary genius, is one of the family members. His gift becomes the catalyzing agent of the entire film, and his desire to develop it brings change to everyone involved in the story.

This is a feel-good movie through and through. I laughed, I marveled, I cried. I think I even salivated. Through all of this, it occurred to me that one of the film's primary messages is the spiritual importance of *otherness*. That is, there's incredible potential and richness when things and people that aren't typically "us" get into the mixing bowls of our lives.

This is most clearly seen in the unfolding relationship that Hassan develops with the French restaurant and its proprietress, Madame Mallory (Helen Mirren). In one short (but important!) scene, Madame Mallory tastes a French dish that Hassan is preparing and questions why he would alter a recipe that is 200 years old. "Because maybe 200 years is long enough," Hassan replies.

This simultaneously youthful and wise approach to "what has always been"—bringing something new and wholly unexpected into it—is what sets Hassan apart and makes him the *crème de la crème* in the culinary world. It's also what we see, time and again, as the agent that propels forward movement. And not only in cooking.

We get a glimpse of its influence in the relationship be-

tween Hassan's father ("Papa," played by Indian actor Om Puri) and Madame Mallory. At the height of their struggle, Papa berates French cooking in general: "If you have a spice, use it! Don't sprinkle it in. Spoon it in!" His demand for the unabashed blending of distinctive ingredients presaged an unlikely, but rich, relationship between the two that ends up with wine, dancing, and romance.

We also see the power of otherness in the pursuit of dreams. By allowing Hassan to bring new life to age-old, beloved recipes through the addition of foreign herbs and spices, Madame Mallory finally earns her restaurant its second Michelin star, a highly coveted and distinguishing accomplishment.

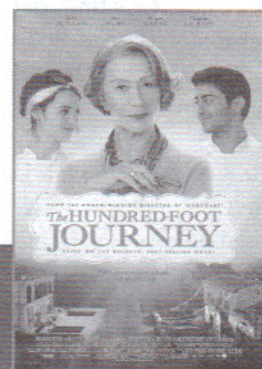
All of this leads to a well-seasoned truth: staying put, staying comfortable, staying the same with familiar approaches to life, have to be given up in order to bring something greater into being.

And yet, exerting otherness simply for its own sake risks the loss of its leavening ability. This is also seen in the film. Following Hassan's dazzling rise to greatness, when he commands attention and prestige, he becomes visibly lost. Wealthy, admired, and influential, he feels disconnected and alone. Only by returning to his family and the French community that learned to love him did Hassan discover the important balance between blooming where you are planted and reaching for the sun, a lesson our herb and vegetable gardens teach us each season.

*The Hundred-Foot Journey* is a delightful story. What you'll find is a tasteful, unfolding portrayal of the beauty that can come from complexity, and of the depth and richness of relationships that are possible only when we open to something new, something *other*. After all, coziness and convenience may produce results that are "good enough," but the deliciousness of transcendence requires vulnerability and expansion which, as in *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, can look, feel, and taste quite foreign.

Don't see this film on an empty stomach, but do see it with an open heart. And be prepared to simply simmer in enjoyment. **M**

Ryan Harrison attends La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren where he started and led monthly Spiritual Cinema Circle gatherings for more than five years. He is the director of Resident Life and Wellness at Hillcrest Homes, a Church of the Brethren retirement community, and is completing his doctor of psychology degree at the University of the Rockies.



## ABOUT THE MOVIE

Title: *The Hundred-Foot Journey*. Theatrical release: August 2, 2014. DVD release: November 2014.

Running time: 122 minutes. Director: Lasse Hallström. MPAA rating: PG.