

Yossi Quint  
Greece Trip Journal

I arrived at the monastery yesterday a few hours before Shabbat. The monastery is towards the top of a mountain nestled within a larger range of green lush mountains. After a two hour car ride in which we almost ran out of gas we safely arrived. There is a wall surrounding the monastery, which is around thirty feet high. Many of the cells are situated on the wall and look at on the mountain.

Once in the monastery we entered into the area right outside the dining room, in which they can greet visitors and serve the beverages and sweets. We were given cold water and an extremely tasty sour cherry drink as well as a variety of chocolates. We then went up to our rooms. I am staying with Ryan, Ronaldo, Jon, and Lee in a room that overlooks the mountain range. It is stunning. I have not been able to fully take in the magnificence of the mountains.

We were given some time to unpack so I showered, made my bed, and put out my Shabbat clothes. I then met with the group to hear some introductory information and share our initial experiences. I excused myself after an hour and came back to the room to pray. I then returned for dinner. Dinner was a magnificent meal that was all vegan and extremely tasty. The bread is great and there was great hummus as well. There was a green bean and bean dish as well as tomatoes from their garden and other fruits for dessert. After dinner, it started to pour and there was a lightning shower that was magnificent as well. Everything is beautiful in the mountains. It was so dark out but each time the lightning struck the entire mountain lit up.

This morning I woke up and prayed before going to breakfast. Breakfast was very tasty. The first session of the day was a tour of the artwork in the chapel. The church has three areas. During prayer non Greek Orthodox are only allowed into the outer annex. The entire church is filled with paintings from floor to ceiling depicting apostles, saints, Jesus, God, royalty, and angels. There is also a cross with Jesus crucified on it. Everyone was tired so we had some coffee and take a short break. We then heard Lee talk about historical narratives as presented in different museums in Europe. We ate another tasty meal and had a two-hour break. I read a bit and then took a nap. I woke up for cookies and coffee and a tour of the bell tower. On the second floor there is a small (hidden) chapel. It is one small room maybe eight by ten feet, which also has floor to ceiling paintings. There were Chayot and maybe Offanim painted on the walls. The Chayot had six wings and a head nestled in between them and the angels I think were Offanim were circles made of wings. We then went up another two flights to the top of the bell tower.

We descended the bell tower and watched a baptism take place. Since I wear a hat I am not allowed into the church, but from outside I could see some of what was going on. After the baptism we watched a local priest with some community members remove

some of the church's relics. They do this each year and tour around with the relics to raise money for the church. We then walked up to the gate and walked around the wall; towards the garden and Ossuary. Just outside the monastery is a small water fall and a river leading down past the garden. There are also stone bridges crossing over the rivers. I did not go into the ossuary and I was happy to have a few minutes to myself to think. Even though I am removed from the city and the everyday I am surrounded all the time by people who are talking a lot and on a very different journey than I am.

After dinner, Macrena was speaking to a few people around the dinner table and I sat down to listen. She was giving advice about marriage and the importance of humility. She thinks that husbands and wives should humble themselves and accept what their partner wants. She spoke about how when a husband and wife fight the other should not fight back but let it go since the next time he/she is angry and lets out his anger on the other they can return the favor.

She spoke about when real fights exist it is important to go to a spiritual father/mother to get advice since they are both closer to God and more aware and also have a more objective stance. She also thinks we have free will but there are actions we can do that are blessed. She thinks there are things that God wants and that we should try to fulfill that and when the Abyss or other spiritual figures give advice they are showing you how to fulfill God's will and even if they are wrong it becomes right, which reminded me a lot about my feelings about rabbinic authority. She told us a story about when a certain person asked his priest how to plant a vegetable and he told him to plant it the wrong way it nevertheless grew because he listened to the priest.

I asked Vreni what she experiences when she prays. She said she feels God's consolation. She requests of God that which others have asked her to request, and she says her personal prayers. She feels God's presence but not all the time. She doesn't think she can influence when God comes to comfort her, or make her feel close. She also spoke about the Jesus prayer but said that we couldn't understand the feeling of it. She also said that before she goes to bed after she says her set prayers and prayers for others she says her own prayers. I would like to start praying for others and myself before I go to bed.

She also told us that after monastics die their bodies are supple and not cold because they have gone to paradise and that is the miracle of the monastics.

I am very happy to be here and I have learned a lot. The scenery is absolutely gorgeous and I think I will gain a lot from the nuns. I do need a bit more me time though to think by myself and I hope to find it.

Sunday:

We left the monastery early this morning for a day trip. We first stopped in Serres, which

is about ten minutes from the monastery for breakfast. We also went to a museum, which is housed in a building that used to be the marketplace. We then got back into the car and headed for the beach. On the way to the beach we stopped at another museum, which housed archeological finds from that area. I was taken back by the golden diadems. We then went to the site from which many of the finds were from and saw multiple mosaic floors, a church, and a cistern. After driving for a few minutes towards the beach we saw a turtle crossing the road so we pulled over as did the other car and John ran out of the car to bring the turtle to the other side of the road. After one more stop we reached the beach. The water was extremely blue and we spent a few hours there. I got a lot of splinter like things in my feet, which still hurt. After spending a few hours at the beach swimming and playing volleyball with some locals we went to visit the city that Aristotle lived in. There were ruins of houses, the market, and a temple. The temple overlooked the sea. It was one of the most magnificent views I have seen. A few of the men went swimming while the rest of us took in the view. On the way back to the monastery we stopped by the place where Euripides was killed by a pack of wild dogs.

Wednesday:

I just came back from a Q & A with the Abyss. She was just speaking about the importance of having a healthy diet and giving nutrition tips. I am not sure why but I am appreciative that she cares about this and cares about our health. She is in touch with the world and earthly matters and sees herself as someone who is working to improve people's lives in all walks of life.

Before coming to the monastery I was working in a think tank in Jerusalem. When I got there I found out I was working for Yossi Klein Halevi who is an author and the only person at the institute without a PhD and who is not a professor. We were both surprised that we were paired but as we got to talking we realized we both have a deep desire to experience something bigger than ourselves. We are searchers. I told him that I was going to a monastery and he gave me his book about his multi year journey to monasteries' in Israel as well as a couple of other books about monastics and early Christian texts. On my last day of work before heading here, he told me "You receive according to the size of the cup that you bring" and "you are coming from Jerusalem" this is no ordinary trip remember that.

The trip has been much busier than I expected and I have had a lot less time to meditate. I have found an inner calm however and have had many conversations that have made me think. I have also learned a tremendous amount. I have learned a lot from watching the nuns and there is a beauty in the monastic life. They seem to have figured out a way of life that benefits them and the communities surrounding them. I am also a bit surprised how much different monastic life is in this monetary than in the texts I read from hundreds of years ago. Life is much less ascetic and they are more in touch with the world on a daily basis, which they are glad about.

The nuns have taught me the importance of humility and finding a spiritual father. I think humility is clear though requires work but finding a spiritual father is very difficult in a religion which law plays a central role and where people of character are hard to find and access. It is easy to see the bad in others and I need to overcome that or figure out how to deal with it. I have also started saying personal prayers again. Asking God for help for my friends and for myself. Lastly, I have a desire to be a more law abiding Jew, being obedient. However, I am not sure that is the best path, but it is the easiest. I do not believe in absolute truth and I understand the negative effects certain laws can have on others including myself.

Anyways right now I feel a bit anxious after writing but today I felt calm. I still want to figure out my goals and the questions I should be asking myself. I will soon return to a more complex world and need to deal with it. I wish I became even more in touch with myself during this stay. I wont fully realize the impact it has had on me till latter, but I will try to review my journal soon because if I do not review it so much of what I did gain will be lost.

Wednesday:

I just got back from the garden where I picked onions with Ryan, Marjorie, Lee, and Lee's wife – Verda. It was relaxing and enjoyable. There is a certain calmness of working the fields, which takes away much of our inhibition and allows us to talk freely. I also felt really good once I was done and I said it was the pinnacle of my existence. I wonder if it is the manual labor that made me feel good or perhaps the repetition. I don't know but I know it was enjoyable and I feel happy and at peace with myself.