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We drove for half an hour through the mountains, and we arrived at the gate of the monastery. The gate was closed, so we left our bags there and walked to a different gate. This gate was supposed to open at 4:30, so we waited for 15 minutes. Then a nun came and opened the gate. We went into a very beautiful vestibule with new light wood benches around the periphery. There were very old frescoes on the walls. We then walked into a little room with a higher part up a few steps, which had benches around a table to sit around. It was made of light wood. It felt like we were in a tree-house or gazebo. Nikolas told us a bit about basic dress-code and some information about the nuns. The nuns brought us water, cups, and these little twisted cookies that were flavored like lemon or something else. They also served these congealed sugar cubes that were different colors and tastes. I had rose flavored. They set out the glasses with such precision and order; it was incredible. Nikolas then gave us some more guidelines.

We then went to put our bags in our room. We went up two sets of stairs and reached a landing with two large rooms, which they normally use as work spaces, but they made into men's and women's dormitories. The women's room had seven cots, and they all had different color sheets. There was some significance to the colors, apparently. It turned out that the four pink ones were for the undergrads, the two blue ones were for the graduate students, and the yellow

one by the window was for the postdoc. It was interesting how they are so into hierarchy. They are also so organized. The room is beautiful and so quiet. You could hear the chirping of the birds outside. Out the huge, long windows all I could see were mountains and trees and sky. It was so incredibly peaceful. The air smelled fresh and clean and flowing. It was absolutely beautiful. The bathroom has a stall for men and a stall for women. The showers are in another building, and you can't flush toilet paper down the toilet. You put it in the trashcan.

We had a bit of free time to lie down and get settled. Then, we met outside on the benches near the fountain. Nikolas told us all about the founding of the monastery. A monk from Mt. Athos heard his brother and brother's wife had died in Serres, leaving an orphaned son, so he went to take care of the boy. But, he still wanted to live a monastic life, so he went with the boy to the mountains and wandered and found an abandoned church, which had no roof. He repaired it. The church had actually been from before him. His nephew took over after and may have built the large church that is in front of the smaller, old chapel. They have a depiction of the founders holding their respective churches in the arch in the entryway. Monks were then in the monastery but it became messy and ill repaired and the monk had his family come and stay, and they weren't well-behaved, so the nuns took over. They established the monastery and cleaned it up. The abbess and the second-in-command, Vreny, came in 1986 with two other nuns to reestablish the monastery. The two others left later to found a new monastery.



We then had a tour of the monastery. At the top they are redoing an area to be a nice guesthouse and workshops. Then there is a gift shop, which had a lot that Yossi had told me about including the jams, teas, sweets, rosary bracelets, and many cute

dishes and cookbooks. It used to be an olive press and they had preserved all the equipment, and it's like a little museum. We then passed the place we are sleeping, which also has workspaces in it. We then passed the kitchen, dining hall, and library. Then we walked by the cells and a chapel. There had been a fire in 2010, which had ruined some of the cells, and the



nuns seemed pretty traumatized by it still. I guess seeing your only home in flames without being able to do anything is pretty traumatic.

We walked outside the walls of the monastery, and the view was breathtaking. We passed by the cemetery and apparently there are shelves of skulls there, since they found the cemetery in disrepair. They made terraces in the garden so they would have more room to garden, and they have greenhouses as well. When we came back we had dinner. After dinner we spoke a bit with the nuns, but not so much since everyone from the seminar was there, and it was only the abbess and a translator so it was hard to be engaged in the conversation. I spoke to Lee a lot since I was sitting next to him, and we were discussing the nuns and Judaism. Also, when we had been touring they had started their call to prayer which is one of them banging on a wooden board hanging outside the church. A nun told us that the reason they do that is that is what Noah did to call the animals into the ark. Also they hit a metal thing, which has something to do with Adam. I went upstairs to bed around 12, and people were reading so the light was on. I was so tired that I just fell asleep with the light on. I was cold in the middle of the night, but otherwise I slept well.



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I woke up before my alarm went off and got up, dressed, and davened (prayed) on the balcony. I had a very nice davening with good concentration as I stood at the railing overlooking the roofs of the monastery and the mountains. I think partly I had a good davening since I felt guilty about having eaten the food at the monastery the night before. I went down to breakfast and decided I wouldn't have any of the cooked food. I had bread and jam and tea and twisty cookies. We had a discussion about weird wedding traditions. Vicky was saying that in Greece they throw a baby boy on the wedding bed so you'll be fertile and have a boy. She also said they make the bed and mess it up three times, and they also have three unmarried people try on the wedding dress before the bride can wear it to help them get married. She said they used to show the sheets with blood, but not always did people bleed so the groom's parents used to kill a rooster so there was already blood on the sheets. We then toured the basement of the building with the dining room and library. They have made it into a kind of museum. It is very impressive. They have kept all the machinery needed to make wine, even though they don't make it anymore.

They had lots of large machinery and kegs and utensils. They also had a mini model of the church in the monastery, which I thought was beautiful and very detailed. We also saw the refectory where the nuns eat. They always listen to someone reading as they eat, and they said sometimes they are so busy digesting the story that they forget to eat. I gave my presentation first. It went well. Everyone asked me a lot of questions and seemed genuinely interested. I felt relieved after I went. Tina went after me and was speaking about a specific monk, and she emphasized the tension between seclusion and serving a community.

6/18

I woke up an hour early to go gardening. We got to the garden, and met the gardening nun, who is one of the South Africans and very nice. Some people raked, but me, Vicky, and Margot weeded the bean plants. We had the easiest job. The men weeded the mint. We then tied up cucumbers and then zucchini plants to the ladder-like scaffolding. We tied with these white pieces of cloth that we tied together. It was a lot of fun. It felt very productive to make these drooping plants stand straight. The plants were prickly and scratchy, so it was slightly uncomfortable. I now understand why they do chores. Doing work like this was very calming and enjoyable. Manual labor definitely has a place. I came in hot and dirty to breakfast, which was the normal bread, jam, tea, and they had sugar cookies in cute shapes with sprinkles. We are their children. We then headed out to a town, which was abandoned in the civil war and was completely deserted. The walk there was long and kind of uphill on a road and then off a road on a gravel path. I was surprised when we arrived at how such recent desertion led to such desolation. The nature had reclaimed the buildings. Stone walls, half-standing, is all that is left. There was a man on a motorcycle there who opened the church for us to see. The church was renovated more recently. The man was a grandson of people who had lived there, and he told us about the church. He said once a year, on October 26, they have a celebration there and a big feast, and they kill goats. It was kind of sad to see only the remains of what had been a vibrant community. I walked through some tall grass, and it burned my leg. I am not sure why. We walked back and I was speaking to Lee so the walk seemed much shorter. We spoke a bit about names, and he told me Penina was a grandmother name. His name is very unusual (and confusing) in Israel. I told him my siblings' names, and he then asked me about them, so I told him all about my family. He was impressed and was surprised about the emphasis on research. I explained how my father raised us on his research, knowing how things worked, and he liked it a lot. We had a bit of free time after we got back and then Margot gave her presentation on iconoclasm and



icons. It was interesting and a lot about art. Vicky went after also on iconoclasm. She had submitted a paper and was presenting it and wanted feedback from Lee and Merle. Her paper was very good and interesting. Denis gave his presentation in the afternoon. It was raining a lot.