

# Project X Goes to Greece

Reflections of the Greek Tour

by the Reverend William Bartlett

*Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a difficult battle.*

– Plato

*The unexamined life is not worth living.*

– Socrates



I was asked to write a few thoughts about our trip to Greece. Many years ago, I read a book entitled *The Way of the Peaceful Warrior* by Dan Millman. Dan spoke of a spiritual teacher named Socrates who humbly worked the night shift in a gas station near the hills of Berkeley, California. Dan wanted to become a disciple of Socrates who would not begin teaching him until he had demonstrated that he had something important to say. Dan spent the first night sitting on a rock behind the gas station thinking of things to say. It was only at the bright sunrise that he came to Socrates with the thought, "There are no ordinary moments." Then the learning began.

That echoes my thoughts about our journey in Greece. It was extraordinary. The moments did not seem at all ordinary as we walked the ground of the real old sun priest Socrates and many others. His disciple Plato later opened an academy that we had

the good fortune to visit. We were actually in the land where these philosopher/mystics asked the important questions. What is life for? Why am I here? Is there more to me than this body? Is happiness a foolish dream; can it actually be found without closing my eyes to what I see? In fact, can it be found by having my eyes open to the great Light that guides us?



We arrived in Athens, Greece, the evening of May 21. It was late and we were tired. Yet, when we went to the restaurant on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor we saw a magnificent and illuminated view of the Parthenon and the Acropolis on a rocky hill in the middle of Athens.

The next morning we boarded the *Aegean Pearl* for three days of touring the Greek Isles and Turkey. The first stop was an afternoon/evening spent on the beautiful island of Mykonos. We then sailed to Patmos, the mysterious rocky island where St. John is said to have dictated the Book of Revelation. From there we cruised to the Turkish port of Kusadasi, then were bused to the ancient city of Ephesus. It was marvelous to experience the marble streets, the famous library, and many other buildings as they were in the high years of the Roman Empire. Then we continued on to Crete and the famed 1500-room Palace of Knossos where Minos ruled the Mediterranean with several thousand ships. Afterwards we visited the fabulous Archeological Museum of Minoan Art. My favorite art display was a very ancient clear crystal sun that gave clear hints to

the spiritual beliefs of the early Minoans. The last stop on the cruise that day was a perfect evening and sunset on the magnificent isle of Santorini before the overnight cruise back to Athens for a free day of wandering.

Wandering in the "Plaka," dozens of blocks of tourist markets and restaurants below the Acropolis, I again thought of Socrates. He is quoted as saying when he wandered the agora and market some 2300 years ago, "The market reminds me of how many things I do not need." Yet it is required to buy gifts and such, and it was a wonderful place to buy things not needed.

After another day in Athens visiting the Acropolis and touring Athens the nonordinary land tour began. The group, 20 of us, had an extraordinary guide named Peggy. She shared her insight and experience as a tour guide and as a staff member at the prestigious University of Athens Archeology Department. She shared how the archeologists who write lofty and arcane articles for professional journals saw themselves as superior to those who shared their knowledge with the many tourists who come to see the historical and sacred sights.

Peggy actually "put in" to be our guide when she saw the sites we wanted to visit. She held great esteem for the sights and the places of the philosophers/mystics we had asked to see and was quite interested in our teachings. She told us that many Greeks didn't have much interest in the historical sites, referring to the tours as "going to see the stones." It reminded me that many Nevadans only go to casinos when relatives are in town though casinos are not a very good analogy to these holy places.

And I think she saw that most of us really felt a reverence for the land and the life of old. So many have lost that, including the modern Greeks who see the sites as just stones. When we lose the mystical, Einstein suggested, we are like a snuffed out candle. When we become mired in Third-Dimensional

existence, we experience existential despair. Perhaps that is why so many Greek men twirl a little circle of beads called "worry beads." I was especially interested to hear Peggy say that these beads had come from the Buddhist influence of the "mala" or "juzu" prayer beads (similar to rosary beads) showing just how international and cosmopolitan the ancient times were.



The land tour took us to various wonderful places. My favorites: Epidauras, where we visited the Asclepian Temple of Healing; Olympia, the site of the original games; Delphi, known as the navel of the world, where the great oracles spoke and where we held a sunrise service; and the Temple of Apollo.

Both on the cruise and during our time in Athens Bishop Savoy gave timely lectures about the ancient Greeks and the religion of Light that heightened our appreciation for many of these sites.

Back to Socrates. As you will remember he was convicted of corrupting the minds of the youth and showing impiety to the many gods. He seemed to only have reverence for the one God, the God of Light. Shortly before his death, Socrates speaks his last words to his disciple Crito: "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Please, don't forget to pay the debt." I do not think that Socrates was interested in the sacrifice of a chicken. Rather, he was pointing out that Asclepius was the Greek god of curing illness, and it is likely Socrates' last

words meant that death is the cure—and freedom—of the enlightened soul from the body.

It was an extraordinary journey to Greece.