



Letters to the Editor-in-Chief

A LETTER FROM WRESTLING (PALI – ΠΑΛΗ) TO AN UNBORN CHILD... ***Christos Kollias***



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Letters to the Editor-in-Chief

A LETTER FROM WRESTLING (PALI – ΠΑΛΗ) TO AN UNBORN CHILD...



Hello my child. I am wrestling.

I am writing this letter to you because I am pinning my hopes on you; On you, and you aren't even born yet.

Since the beginning of time, man has wrestled with elements of nature, with other people, with himself and even with God. And where is all of this primarily taking place? Within man himself, and then this takes an external form known as sports competitions.

I am not a martial art, my child. I am the means by which, man's aggression is idealized, and war is transformed into civilization.

I am the backbone of sport and, according to Wolfgang Decker: "*there are no Olympic games without wrestling*". That's why your ancestors placed me on the last day of the games in ancient Olympia, following the sacrifice of a hundred oxen on the altar which had been lit by the Olympic running champion.

I am a primordial conjunctural element, a phenomenon of the world, a tool of the Creator, created to develop bravery in every form of life by making it better and stronger. The messenger god Hermes taught me to people and his daughter was the *Palaestra* (training arena), and the ancients had placed it in the centre of their city, that is, in the centre of their social life and where philosophical Ideas circulated.

However, my child, you don't have to strike the opponent and destroy his image. There is a great art to bringing him down whilst simultaneously protecting him.

In ancient times, my child, there were two sports. Just me and running. In the era you live in, what used to be fun games are now called sports. But I am not fun anymore. I entertain people; that is, I lead their souls to great achievements, brought about by life's demands.

Uncle Socrates revealed my secret name: **PALI** which means '*passage to the truth*'. And he wasn't wrong, as with my help, whoever studies me, is led to the truth through overcoming their ignorance and misconceptions. All of your great ancestors were trained in my art, not only in my training arena but also in the arena of their military, political and philosophical battles.

Wisdom itself, my child, is borne out of the wrestling of Ideas. The greatest philosopher Socrates was, apart from being a natural wrestler in the arena of Kynosargous until the age of 60, the greatest wrestler of Ideas known to humanity. He philosophically enriched Plato, a distinguished wrestling athlete in Nemea and Pythia, who then philosophically enriched his student Aristotle, who in turn, spiritually raised Alexander the Great, which is where the ancient Greek *tetrad* is completed. What happened after this can still be felt today. But who enriched all these people? There is a huge tradition of prehistoric mythology and ancient Greek religion which is full of me – wrestling. Gods fight each other, the Centaur fights with Lapithi, Theseus fights with Kerkion, Hercules fights with Antaeus. What can this possibly mean? Let us just stop here a moment, my child.



Antaeus was King of Libya, of enormous expanses, the son of Poseidon and Earth. He was the water element which is the emotional element of man and Earth, the sacrificial, primitive, instinctive, and animalistic element in man's nature. He discharged all his powers and renewed them by stepping on Mother Earth, just by coming into contact with her. But he lacked the third part of the soul, which is the intellect. That's why, if anyone passed through his area, they were challenged to fight. He would always win and then he would kill them! As Hercules was passing by for his 11th mission - the discovery of the garden of the Hesperides – he was challenged by Antaeus and the fight began! As the son of Zeus and Alcmene, his intellect, emotion, and instinct, had developed in a balanced way, therefore he had developed in a more balanced and harmonious way. This is what Greek culture is all about – to be up against the animal imbalance and uncivilized element of human nature.

Hercules' intellect, passed down to him by his father Zeus, led him to attack Antaeus' weak spot, namely his dependence on earthly desires and primitive instincts fuelled by his contact with Mother Earth. So, as he

hoisted him into the air, Hercules cut him off from the supply of these forces and by squeezing him tight, he crushed his body and threw him to the ground, dead.

So, my child, what you should have understood from all this is that I have always existed, I continue to exist, and I will always exist! Because I am within people – I am people!

But it does, of course, depend on how I am used. Is it to humiliate other as in the case of Antaeus? Or is it to harmoniously complete our mental development by completing various missions like Hercules?

Great Homeric men such as Odysseus and Ajax were trained in my art. Later, famous Olympic champions such as Hipposthenes and his son Etimoklis (the father a 6-time Olympic champion and the son a 5-time Olympic Champion) and Milon the Crotonian, son-in-law of Pythagoras, were also trained and their compatriots even built a temple in their honour!



At the peak of the Greek-Christian civilization of Byzantium, great emperors, such as Basil the Macedonian and Justinian were raised on my principles, acquiring a reputation as great wrestlers. The high point came in the form of Digenis Akritas who chose Death as his opponent. The marble threshers symbolize the struggle of the human soul for eternity.

Great men across the length and breadth of the earth cultivated me, such as the man who reformed the United States and great politician, Abraham Lincoln. Also, the great geneticist Nobel Laureate Norman Borlaug who, according to UNESCO, was considered to be the "best man who ever lived" because he saved more than a billion people from hunger. Then there was the great Olympic champion and national hero of Iran, G. Tahkti who stood up against the Shah (king) of his country to protect the poor of his homeland, and countless others across the world.

Since the beginning of time, I have been connected to divinity through all religions, from Ancient Olympia to distant Japan. In Iran, a wrestler is called a *pechlivan* which means 'compassionate', as it is inconceivable that a wrestler is not, above all, moral.

Until recently in Greece, in over 200 festivals and in the shadow of the churches, it is through me that our saints, those great spiritual wrestlers, were honoured by opposing sin, decay and death.

I am even there during the sacrament of Christian baptism, my child! The priest covers the newly christened child with oil, the liquid of *bravery* according to Socrates, in order for the child to be able to fight against the devil, against sin and against his passions in life.



But the greatest wrestler of all, my child, is the Lord Christ himself, who defeated death for good, descending humbly and winning the world over, fighting with death, sin and all those who serve them, helping me arrive at my ultimate interpretation: the union of the Divine and of man, who through training, reaches great heights... because I have always been a *means* and never a *purpose*.

And yet nowadays, my child, I find myself neglected, discredited, and disfigured. I find myself on the shelves of international sport consumerism that is the Olympic Games. They have even disrespected my name...! Now they call me wrestling, the meaning of which I do not know. As I said, my name means passage to *the truth*, and it is only through this interpretation that I can bravely shape people. They even went so far as to discuss my expulsion from the Olympic programme and why? I am not easy on the eye, they say, after first violating all my regulations. I am the only sport in the modern history of the Olympic Games that changes my

regulations every 2-3 years! I can't be bought though - I'm expensive, as anything unique and priceless should be! I shaped Greece and have taught her to battle and carry on. And yet in Greece, I do not have a home of my own even though I have been declared a national sport- and this despite other eastern nations honouring me in whichever form I exist in their homelands ...

A modest home, that radiates my existence and my mission for all mankind, a monument of sports culture and science is what I want.

Thucydides considers me a decisive factor in the victory of the Greeks against the Persians, writing that: *"the education of the Athenians in the palaestras and in the gymnasiums was the reason behind the victory in Marathon"*.

Nowadays, agents have my fate in their hands – and what do they have to offer, I wonder? Many of them have never battled in their lives and then they say they love me! Sometimes, my child, you will see agents and runners embarrassing each other, archaists gossiping in front of cameras and not because they care about me, but because they care about my association. Did you notice, my child, that Antaeus left descendants behind? However, I don't know where the offspring of Hercules went to.... I hope you are one. I will tell you the rest another time....

Rejoice and Think!

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