

I was travelling in foreign territory, and found myself in a small village at the heat of the day. I was tired and thirsty, so I made my way to the town well and sat down beside it. When a local woman came to draw water, I asked her for a drink. She seemed anxious or fearful, but it wasn't immediately apparent to me why this was so. I thought it might be because I was a stranger, but from talking to her for a moment, I realized that she had some kind of a social anxiety problem.

She told me that she was an artist and a teacher, and I wondered how a person with such a problem could perform in a job that required her to confront so many people. She told me that it was like she could draw one bucket of water from the well each day, but when it was gone that was all there was. Her mission was to teach and, beyond that, inspire; but she worried that her anxiety was preventing her from fulfilling her purpose.

As she spoke of the children and the stories of their lives and their projects, I could tell that she was actually a great teacher, who overcame her anxiety by drawing from a well of creativity that dwelt deep within her. She connected with her students in that area, and helped them develop their own talents. I thought of the words of John, where "love casts out fear", and realized in my own life that my sense of purpose had triumphed over the anxiety I had when it came to speaking in front of others. In this woman's case, it appeared that the power of her creative drive had trumped her social anxiety.

I thought of the time that the Great Teacher met a woman at a well, and remembered other stories where women at wells were encountered. In each of these, a relationship was formed and the woman received a blessing. I felt a duty to try to do the same.

There was plenty of anxiety in each of those instances. Abraham's servant was concerned about choosing a proper wife for Isaac, so he prayed for guidance and God's providence¹. Jacob was running for his life from his brother Esau², and Moses was running for his life from Pharaoh³. In the last case, the anxiety was not with the man (Jesus), but with the woman, who had her own social and spiritual worries.

Moses had social anxiety, too, begging God to give him a pass because he had difficulty speaking in public, especially in addressing someone as important as Pharaoh. I suspect that he would have had trouble as a teacher, too. But God helped him overcome his limitations, noting that He was the Creator, and had created man's speaking "tools". When Moses was drawn to a burning bush that was not being consumed, he was shown the eternal nature of God's creativity.

This idea of an everlasting source was also promoted by Christ when He met a woman at a well. He offered the Samaritan woman complete satisfaction through a spiritual source by which she would never thirst. The woman I met somehow understood this in another sense, and she sought to bring out God-inspired creativity without limits. The bucket for this well would never be found empty⁴. And what would pour out would be treated as the life-blood of each student⁵.

As the woman and I talked, some of the students gathered around her, clinging to her and looking up to her in a way that reminded me of the petals of a flower. She was the center of their attention, their focus. And as she led them, she made them grow. Just as Moses, which his self-diagnosed speech inadequacy, spoke to Pharaoh and brought his people to the Promised Land, so this woman overcame a natural reticence to be one of the greatest teachers of all. By using gentle strokes (not striking the rock⁶), she coaxed out the needed flow of creativity and self-expression for each student that helped them to succeed^{7,8}.

1. Genesis 24:10-58

2. Genesis 29:1-12

3. Exodus 2:15-21

4. see 1 Kings 17:16

5. 2 Samuel 23:16

6. see Numbers 20:10-12

7. It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge. Albert Einstein

8. It is nothing short of a miracle that instruction today has not strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry. For this delicate little plant lies mostly in need of freedom without which it will fall into rack and ruin and die without fail. Albert Einstein

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