

Moses Runs Away

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Sometimes even the bravest of men have to know when to get out of the way and lie low.

Moses, brought up in the Palace, went out to see “his people.” It was clear where his loyalty was.

Moses struggled with both Egyptian and Israelite opposition. And after killing an Egyptian task master he flees towards Midian. There he arrives at the well.

Eliezer found Rebecca at a well. Jacob met Rachel at the well. And now Moses arrives at a well where he meets the daughters of Jethro. And like Jacob he shows his strength and his chivalry.

Rationalists will say that wells were the center of local social life (the dating apps of those days). As well as serving the water needs of the communities. Mystics will say that water is the symbol of fertility, growth and fecundity. In all cases they led to the future.

Naturally in a nomadic world of shepherds the well was crucial. But they remind us of the ancient tensions between city dwellers, cultivators and nomads. These tensions are to be found in the Torah right from the clash between Cain and Abel and then the parting of the ways between Abraham and Lot. The nomadic life is seen as purer, less contaminated than city life. Just as Isaac goes out into the fields to mediate, so Moses adopting the life of a shepherd has the time and the solitude to get closer to God away from the distractions of city life.

We can't all escape that way, in the world we live in. But we can try to find times within a day for silence, withdrawal and meditation, as well as prayer.