

No Blueprints for Giraffes

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Jacob woke up from his dream of angels and ladders and exclaimed: "Surely God is in this place and I did not know it." (Genesis 28:16)

Jacob's surprise is itself a religious emotion. He may be little acquainted with God, but he has the gift of awareness, of wonder. Moses turns aside to see the burning bush; the Rabbis insist that the bush had always been alight, but only Moses bothered to turn aside and see. Great spirits do not dull themselves to the world; they do not stunt the soul by pre-set certainties of the mind. Poet John Ciardi wrote:

Who could believe an ant in theory?
A giraffe in blueprint?
Ten thousand doctors of what's possible
Could reason half the jungle out of being.

Things that cannot be, often are. Picasso, with the eye of an artist, said it was a miracle that he did not melt in the bathtub. Moses, with the eye of a prophet, saw it was a miracle that the bush did not turn to ashes. Jacob, with the eye of a dreamer, realized he awoke to a reenchanting world. They lived with hearts at full throttle, open to the electricity of experience. Who would willingly choose a world that always met our expectations? Appreciating God's surprises is a special sort of prayer.