

Sudden Wonders

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Moses wandered in the wilderness of Midian, never suspecting that God would appear to him. He noticed a bush on fire, and heard a voice.

As David pastured his father's flock, he had no inkling of the approach of Samuel, come to anoint a new King. Soon he had the responsibility of leading a nation.

Miraculous moments are sudden: God called to Abraham. Joseph was summoned to Pharaoh. Jacob is confronted with an angel. Elisha, while plowing with oxen, is summoned by Elijah to prophecy. Crucial events in the Bible are not anticipated. "The highest things cannot be planned," taught the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, "for them readiness is everything." We prepare our souls without knowing for what we are preparing them. An athlete trains years for the single jump; religious practice is for the everyday challenges of living, to be sure, but it is also for the wild, unanticipated starburst of possibility.

Building an entire life around a moment may seem exaggerated or even foolish. But it yields beauty each day and enables us to celebrate the unexpected. It takes a lot of backdrop to highlight life's sudden colors. As French poet Paul Claudel wrote: "For the flight of a single butterfly the entire sky is needed."