

Who Wrote the Last Lines?

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

“Moses, the servant of God, died there in the land of Moab according to the word of God. He was buried in a valley (a valley) in the land of Moab opposite Ba'al Peor. And no one knows where he was buried until this very day. Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eyes had not dimmed nor his energy sapped. The children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days.”

Leaving aside such issues as why Moses was apparently buried on a mountain and here it says a valley. And the remarkable fact that at 120 he was still strong and vigorous. The Talmud argues as to whether Moses actually wrote these last verses or not. One version says Joshua wrote the last verses. The other is that Moses was commanded to write them by God, crying as he did so.

The Torah stresses that he was the servant of God. Everything he did was according to this higher authority. In describing his death, very much against his own wishes, denying him the satisfaction of seeing his life's work completed, he faithfully accepted the Divine fiat as proof of what a faithful follower he was.

Whatever we may think privately about the process of revelation and documentation, it is faithfulness to the Torah and its traditions, that make us followers and disciples of Moses.