

## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE FINAL PASSAGE of Torah (8 verses: Deut. 34:5-12) tells of Moses' death: his burial; the people's mourning; Joshua's succession; and in conclusion, the uniqueness of his prophecy and mission. Epilogue-like in form and post-Mosaic in content, it is in a different category than the rest of Torah. For its reading in the synagogue, no minyan (quorum of 10) is required and no aliya (calling up one to participate) allocated (Maimonides). An authoritative view is that this whole passage of eight verses was written and appended to the end of Torah only after Moses' death. Another view insists Moses himself wrote these verses on his impending death as if it had occurred – in a dramatic manner, “in tears” (“b'dema”). The Hebrew may also mean “with tears;” thus, Maharsha (1555-1631) explains: Rather than with ordinary ink, Moses wrote the story of his death with the tears of his eyes. Another meaning – “in disarray” – is offered in the name of Vilna Gaon (1720-1791): Rather than in orderly words, Moses wrote the story, then not yet realized, in scrambled, mixed-up letters. In any case, the final formation of the final eight verses of Torah – in visible script and intelligible style – is indisputably post-Mosaic. The total Torah, however, is ascribed to Moses, because of his total devotion to it (Mechilta, Ex. 15:1). The dynamics of Torah's revelation, rather than the mechanics of its production, make the Torah – as a whole – Mosaic and Divine.

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

### RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

**WHAT IS THE SECRET OF JOY IN TORAH?**  
The Psalmist (19:8-11) sings of Torah and its precepts as more precious than gold, sweeter than honey; they "rejoice the heart!" This sentiment, ingrained in Jewish minds, sounds bewildering to outsiders.

"I can understand that a man can, and must, respect these 'statutes,' and try to obey them in his heart. But it is very hard to find how they could be, so to speak, delicious, how they exhilarate," says C. B. Lewis (Reflections on the Psalms, p. 55).

Indeed, for the adherents of Torah, the precepts of Torah are precious, delicious, exhilarating. Torah is the dearest legacy of the Jewish people. For Jews, Torah means enlightening teaching (not gloomy "law"). Torah symbolizes love and life; no wonder Jews rejoice in Torah.

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*Yeshurun* is a term of endearment for the people of Israel. From the Hebrew *yashar* (upright, straight). The name implies, "the just people." So sings Moses of Israel's privilege and God's Kingship (Deuteronomy 33:5): God's enthronement over Israel is based on the people's justness – being *yeshurun*. And also – so elaborate our sages (*sifre*) – on the people's unity among themselves and among their leaders: "When the people unite, peace among them – God becomes their leader!" From the end to the beginning.

In a strikingly dramatic manner, we connect the end to the beginning: As we conclude the reading of the last portion of *Devarim* (Deuteronomy), we start at once with the reading of the first portion of *Bereshit* (Genesis). In truth, Torah has no end and no beginning. The cycle of constant study must never be broken or interrupted.

**RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

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*YESHURUN* is a term of endearment for the people of Israel. It stems from the Hebrew *yashar* (upright), namely: The Just People. While the name *Ya'akov* (Jacob) suggests crookedness and *Yisrael* (Israel) struggle, *Yeshurun* implies straight justness. So sings Moses of God's kingship over His people (Deuteronomy 33:5):

*When in Yeshurun*

*He became King;*

*Assembled with the leaders of the people,*

*Together (were the leaders) of Israel's tribes.*

God's enthronement over Israel is based on the people's justness, being *yeshurun* – by name and conduct. The verse also mentions assembly and togetherness. Thus, our sages elaborate: The kingship of God depends on the people's unity among themselves and their leaders: "When the people unite, peace among them, God becomes their King!" (*Sifri*).

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