

Old and Grey and Full of Sleep

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Only once in the Torah is Moses called "a man of God." The description occurs when Moses blesses the people at the end of the Torah. (Deut. 33:1) According to one tradition, Moses had long wished to bless Israel, but waited as long as he could, for he was constantly growing in spiritual stature. He was then able to pronounce the greatest possible blessing right before his death.

We have Moses' public blessing, but there is no record of what he said to those closest to him. What words did he confide at the end of his mission? The Bible is unclear about the fate of Moses' wife Zipporah, but it is beautiful to imagine that as he left this world Moses whispered to her some version of the lines by W.B. Yeats:

*When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read.*

The Torah is not only a legacy of a nation. It is the chronicle of a family. For thousands of years both when young, and when old and grey and full of sleep, we have taken down the book, and slowly, slowly read. With each word it comes back to us, as if from a dream, where we have been, and who we are.