

The First Semicha
Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l
Lesson For All Musmachim
by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Bamidbar 27:18 we are told for the first time of Moshe Rabbeinu's transferal of his leadership to his prime disciple, Yehoshua. Moshe Rabbeinu's primary concern was that Am Yisroel should have a proper leader, a true *roeh neeman*, faithful shepherd. Am Yisroel should have a leader who would know how to deal with each individual according to his/her unique needs and personalities as Moshe had been able to throughout his career as the leader of Am Yisroel. His care and concern went beyond his own lifetime; he felt his responsibility was to see that Am Yisroel would be led properly after his demise. This showed that he was truly the leader for Am Yisroel. This is so unlike most public officials and executives of large corporations who feel absolved of all responsibilities upon retirement. Moshe Rabbeinu felt that the responsibility of Am Yisroel's future remained with him even when he would not be present personally.

Hashem told Moshe to give Yehoshu *Semicha*. *Semicha* literally means to place hands upon someone or something. Moshe was to place his hands upon Yehoshua. This transferal of leadership through placing hands was practiced subsequently till the time of the early Amoraim. Our *semicha*, rabbinic ordination is a borrowed term. It is merely a license or certificate given by the Rav or Rosh yeshiva that the recipient is fit to render decisions in Halacha. We still use the term *semicha*, however, for this certification.

My Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Moshe Feinstein ,Zt'l, explained that receiving semicha in the literal sense means he is under the hands of the one who gave him *semicha*. It means the recipient is *kafuf*,

submitting to the authority of the Torah and the Mesorah carried over from previous generations going all the back to Har Sinai. While Rav Moshe explained this idea in the context of the real *semicha*, nevertheless, conceptually, it applies to all rabbanim for all times. Only with the mindset of complete submission to our mesorah going back to Moshe Rabbeinu can one be fit to be a member of the Sanhedrin or to be any type of leader in Klal Yisroel. This is indeed how every *musmach* must see himself.