

ויהושע בין נון מלא רוח חכמה כי סמך משה את ידיו עליו וישמעו אליו בני ישראל ויעשו כאשר צוה ה' את משה.

And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moshe had laid his hands upon him; and the people of Israel listened to him, and did as the Lord commanded Moshe. Smikha, in its original form the laying of hands, symbolizes the transmitting of authority from the giver to the receiver. But it also symbolizes a chain of transmission, for the one who gives has, at an earlier time, also received. משה קבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע ויהושע לזקנים וזקנים לנביאים ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it – or “handed” it - to Joshua, and Joshua handed it to the Elders and they to the Prophets, and the Prophets handed it to the men of the Great Assembly.

One who receives סמיכה becomes a link in the chain of the tradition, the מסורה. This link is forged first through the intensive study of the writings of the תנאים, אמוראים, גאונים, פוסקים, ראשונים, אחרונים, the transmitters of the מסורה of all prior generations. But ours is also a תורה שבעל פה, and these written words of Torah can only be truly understood when transmitted by living teachers who themselves have received smikha, teachers who themselves are part of this chain. With such study and such teachers, one becomes part of the living conversation that is our מסורה, our Torah.

The language of our contemporary smikha is יורה יורה, he may rule, he may rule. It is, first and foremost, a recognition that the individual has the knowledge and expertise to give rulings in matters of Jewish Law, or halakha. Such competency does not come easily. An individual must master all of the codified rulings, with their intricate deliberations, their numerous details and their subtle nuances, and must be able to determine the relevant rulings for real world situations. Most significantly, he must be able to use wise judgment, to understand that halakha does not provide just one answer. He must be able to fully appreciate and empathize with the individual and his or her

situation, to – in Rav Moshe Feinstein's phrase, pasken the shoel not just the sheila, give the ruling that is right for that person.

But a rabbi's responsibility goes beyond halakha. יורו משפטֵיך ליעקב ותורתך לישראל, "They shall teach your laws to Jacob, and your Torah to Israel." A rabbi must teach and inspire, give religious meaning and direction. He must show how the law can impart meaning, and the direction that the Torah offers in areas not governed by halakha. He must, in short, be a מורה דרך, a guide for each individual's search for a religious way, for a life of meaning.

To be such a guide, to give such direction, a rabbi must be a leader. He must be a מורה היציים, an archer, who extends his reach into distant territory. He must have vision. He must be able to look beyond the here and now, to see into the distance, to look heavenward to attempt to sense what God wants from us and to look into the future to see the possibility of unrealized opportunities.

Finally, this leadership must be one that respects the uniqueness of the individual. It must be leadership that, like the rain, the יורה ומלקוש, nurtures and sustains. A true leader is a pastoral caregiver, sensitive to the psychological and emotional needs of each individual and tending to them with care. He is not like a sculptor who imposes his image onto others and molds them in his likeness. A true leader is like a gardener, who provides the water, the soil, and the care, that allows each plant to flourish and blossom, to grow according to its individual nature and essence.

Smikha is a tremendous responsibility, not to be taken lightly. To rule on matters of law, to teach Torah, to give spiritual guidance, to be a leader with vision while respecting and nurturing each individual, is a charge many may shy away from. And yet, the Talmud tells us that just as great as the wrong done by one who gives הוראה when he is unfit, is the wrong done by one who *is* fit and yet shirks his responsibility to rule and to lead. It is thus a great privilege to be able today to give smikha to nine individuals who are so fit to

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rule and to lead, who understand the great responsibility that such leadership entails, and who have taken this mantle of responsibility so unhesitatingly.

And now for the conferral of smikha.