

# THE AUCTION OF THE YEAR!

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

A hushed excitement settled over the massive walled courtyard. Above the rim of the parapet the sun, framed by deepening hues of blue and radiant streaks of white, turned fiery red and slipped toward the horizon.

Young Kohanim dressed in the brightest whites scurried up tall ladders to light towering braziers. Dancing shadows leaped upward toward the flames exciting the congregants with a taste of what was soon to come.

Crowded onto the specially built balconies, the women were hushed by the majesty of the Haichal towering high above them. It's gilded crown caught the last reddish rays of light as the darkening sky awakened beneath a sparkling blanket of stars.

The festivities were about to begin. Kohanim and Leviyim began filing onto the steps of the Haichal. There were fifteen ascending stairs, as if to heaven's gates. Two massive pillars, Yochin and Boaz, flanking her entrance like indomitable sentinels. The beauty of their marble carvings and awesome size were breathtaking, inspiring a sense of majesty and profound humility.

The Kohanim and Leviyim began preparing themselves for the vocal accompaniment that would inspire the crowd to deeper heights of primal purity. A foreshadowing of the harmonies that would soon envelop the entire mountain floated across the expectant silence of the crowd. The Segan Hakohanim, the Master of Ceremonies for the evening, begins to speak.

"In the name of the King, may his reign be long and prosperous. In the name of the Kohain Gadol who brings forgiveness to the Children of Israel. In the name of the Head of the Sanhedrin whose Torah and guidance nurtures our nation as a baby is sustained from his mother's milk. I welcome you to this year's Shimini Atzeres - Simchas Torah celebration!"

"For seven days we have danced. For seven days we have sung the praises of G-d and His Chosen Children. For seven days we have embraced our responsibilities as teacher's and standard bearers for the world. For seven days we brought sacrifices and prayers on behalf of the seventy nations. But tonight we must sing and dance as never before! Tonight we celebrate that among all the nations of the world G-d chose us to be His treasured people. It was to us and us alone that He entrusted His most prized possession, the Torah! Tonight we celebrate as if with G-d Himself!"

"However! Tonight will not be a celebration of uninhibited frivolity. Instead, tonight we celebrate with

unrestrained love and pride that we are G-d's Chosen People! Tonight we celebrate the gift of Torah and the glory of responsibility. Tonight we celebrate the greatness of our heritage, the greatness of our ancestry, the greatness of our scholarship, the greatness of our scholars!"

"Who among you will be the first? Who will honor our G-d and our nation by dedicating the first Hakofa? Can you set a price on that which is priceless? "The Torah which you teach is more valuable than thousands of gold pieces!" Who among you will dedicate the first Hakofa?"

"Ah! I see 5000 gold zuzim from Mar Sura! I see 10,000 zuzim from Mar Puma! Wait! Mar Berebbi doubles the amount! 20,000 gold zuzim from Mar Berebi! Who will challenge such honor? Who among you wish to honor G-d in His own home above tens of thousands of gold pieces?"

A hush fell over the packed assembly. Countless people were crowded into the temple courtyard. The echo of the Segan's words reverberated off the distant hills of Yerushalayim and Yehudah. The entire city waited expectantly to hear who would dedicate the first Hakofa as the King, the Kohain Gadol, the Head of the Sanhedrin, and the greatest of the Torah scholars danced together carrying Sifrei Torah and flaming torches.

Suddenly a young attendant hurried forward to the Segan Hakohanim. Listening intently to the whispered message, the Segan's eyes opened wide in delighted shock. "My dear and beloved brethren. It is my honor to announce a bid of 10,000 talents of gold! However, the dedication is conditional. Only on condition that the bid is matched by the assembled congregation!"

Groups of men quickly gathered to form financial coalitions. With furtive glances upward to their wives in search of approval or hoping for secrecy, group after group assembled. Would they be able to match the ten thousand talents of gold?

As each coalition negotiated within themselves Kohanim of note and stature circulated among them affecting mergers between the smaller groups. Soon the totals began to be tallied. Talent after talent of gold was counted. The excitement mounted. Would they be able to match the anonymous gift that was greater than a king's ransom?

The Segan again took his position. "The total is 7,000 talents of gold! We need 3000 more! Children of Israel! Remember our ancestors who left Mitzrayim. When it came to creating the Egel Hazahav the gold was gathered in moments. Men demanded that their wives give up their jewelry and nothing was withheld. Let us take it upon ourselves to remake that ignoble moment in our history into honor and glory! Let it be our motivation to reach deeper and give even more! Show Hashem that for His honor and the honor of His Torah nothing will stand in our way!"

As the men turned to each other with hope but doubt a shout was heard from the side. "She throws down her jewelry! She throws down her jewelry!" As if on cue, jewelry and gold began to rain down on the assembled crowd as the women on the balconies threw down their contributions. "That my daughter should marry a Talmid Chacham!" "That my children should become great Torah scholars!"

"For the merit of my grandchildren who sit in the great Torah academies of Sura and Pumpadisa studying G-d's very own words!" "For the glory of my husband who sits among the elders of the land!"

Raising his arms heavenward, the Segan summoned for silence. As young Kohanim hurried through the crowd collecting the jewelry in beautifully woven copper baskets, all turned their attention to the top step before the Haichal. Standing beside him was the King, the Kohain Gadol, and the Head of the Sanhedrin. Leaning toward the Segan the Kohain Gadol whispered an instruction. Quickly, three men were summoned from among the crowd. The three men were clearly of great wealth and stature but nevertheless seemed humbled and diminished by their summoning. The Kohain Gadol began to speak.

"My dearest and most beloved children. Tonight you have gloriously sanctified the great name of G-d. You have shown profound respect for the Torah and those who learn the Torah. However, there are among us individuals who have been designated by the Creator to raise the banner of Torah to heights never before realized.

"First and foremost, the women. Your dedication, support, and love for G-d and Torah shames us all. May your husbands, children, grand-children, and all your generations merit the crown of Torah and Chesed! May you merit to be as our Fore-Mothers, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah!"

"The three men who stand before you deserve special recognition and thanksgiving. It is they who joined together their love of G-d and Torah and challenged us all to honor Hashem as never before by matching their 10,000 talents of gold! As the King, the Av Bais Din, and I, along with the members of the Sanhedrin lead this first Hakafa in honor of G-d and Torah, I ask Nakdimon ben Gurion, Ben Kalba Savua, and Ben Tzitith Ha-Kezah to join us. They are the ones who will represent you all."

"Lift your children high! Raise your voices in song! Tonight we celebrate the glory of our G-d!"

The time honored custom of auctioning off the different honors of Simchas Torah is a special opportunity for us to show our love for Hashem and His Torah. I remember the many years that I spent Simchas Torah with my Grandfather Zt'L. The Shul would auction off the honor of buying Chasan Torah for Rav Moshe Zt'L. The wealthiest families in the community vied for the honor of honoring the Gadol Hador with coalitions of less wealthy families. True, in the end it was the Shul and the community who profited financially, but it was the Torah that was honored.

Purchasing Atta Hareisa is not for personal gain. The selected Pisukim speak of the glory and pride in being G-d's Chosen People. Those who buy this honor have the opportunity of giving others the chance of honoring the Torah. The same is true for Chasan Torah, Chasan Bereishis, Kol Haniarim, and Maftir.

Do any of us know the value of giving honor to the Torah? Can you imagine the reward that awaits us when we give Hashem such nachas?

I do not know the exact value or reward but it is beyond the imagination.

Simchas Torah is a time for song and dance. It is a time for showing unrestrained love for G-d, His Torah, and His People. May the merit of the honor we show Hashem and His Torah bring a speedy redemption to all those who are in need of healing and a return to Yerushalayim and the Bais Hamikdash!

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