



## Supra-Rational Dichotomy

### The Privilege of Facing the Holiest Place in the World

I feel so privileged to have spent a whole Shabbat on the Mount of Olives, and prayed *Kabbalat Shabbat* (receiving the Shabbat) while seeing the sun setting over the Temple Mount.

**ספר תהילים פרק קכה פסוק ב** יְרוּשָׁלַם הָרִים סְבִיב לָהּ וְהַשָּׁם סְבִיב לְעִמּוֹ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם:

David *HaMelech* writes, “The Mountains surround Jerusalem, just as G-d surrounds His people” (*Tehillim* 125:2).

Perhaps King David was overlooking Mount of Olives when he wrote this. For me, it was my very first time ever praying while facing west! The tour guide explained how other religions worship the sun, and therefore often face the sun in prayer. Conversely, we, the Jewish people, when standing on the Mount of Olives – east of the Temple Mount, face the setting sun. This way we testify that at the end of the day, even the sun must bow down to the Almighty. The exhilarating experience of praying on this holy mountain helps me understand why Jews paid special taxes for the privilege of praying there, as an eleventh-century manuscript, found in the Cairo Geniza confirmed. We, too, were happy to increase our annual donation to the [Torah and Land Institute](#), for the privilege of spending a Shabbat with them on הַר הַזַּיְתִּים /*Har HaZeitim* – Mt. Olives.

### Facing the Temple Mount with Conflicting Emotions

Two conflicting emotions engulfed us as we faced the Temple Mount. First and foremost, it was a feeling of awe at the incredible holiness of this place – “the gate of heaven” as Ya’acov exclaimed when he awoke from his prophetic dream, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d, and this is the gate of heaven!” (*Bereishit* 28:17). Yet, on the other hand when facing the golden dome of the Muslim mosque, shining so brazenly in the place of our holy Temple, we were overwhelmed by the great pain of the *Shechina* (Divine Indwelling Presence) still lacking her eternal home. This grief is reflected in the words of the Italian, Meshulam Da Volterra, who visited Jerusalem in 1481. He reported that on Tisha b’Av, the annual day of mourning for the destruction of the Temple, the Jews of Jerusalem went up to the Mount of Olives. From there they see the Temple Mount, and there they wept and lamented the destruction of this house (Avraham Ya’ari, *Massa Meshulam m’Volterra b’Eretz Yisrael* Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1959, p. 68). From the depths of our heart, we welcomed the Shabbat queen with a prayer for the rebuilding of her eternal home: עֵיר עַל תְּלָהּ /*v’nivneta ir al tila* – ‘...May the city be rebuilt on her former mound!’ (Rabbi Shlomo Alkebatz, *Lecha Dodi* Prayer).

### The Red Heifer Transrational Dichotomy

“The dichotomy of our conflicting emotions is also reflected in the mitzvah of the Red Heifer that opens our Torah reading:

**ספר במדבר פרק יט פסוק ב** זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה הָשֵׁם לֵאמֹר דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ פָּרָה אֲדָמָה תְּמִימָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין בָּהּ מוֹם אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָלָה עָלֶיהָ עַל:

““This is the statute of the Torah which Hashem commanded, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel and have them take for you a perfectly red unblemished cow, upon which no yoke was laid’” (*Bamidbar* 19:2).

The mitzvah of the Red Heifer belongs to the category of חוקים/*chukim* – ‘supra-rational mitzvot’ that humans cannot comprehend- not even King Solomon. The Red Heifer Ritual included slaughtering and burning the red cow, along with a cedar branch, hyssop sprig and crimson wool. The ashes would then be mixed with water drawn from the Shiloach spring. Those who had been in contact with the dead would be sprinkled with this ash-water which would facilitate the return to their original pure status. Such ritual seems more like superstitious witchcraft than a Jewish purification process. How can a dead animal, cause someone else to become spiritually pure? What’s more, while the Red Heifer Ritual came to purify the defiled [the subjects of the ritual], it would inadvertently defile the pure [the performers of the ritual].” This dichotomy transcends the capacity of the human mind to fathom. The Red Heifer Ritual seems to make no sense!

### The Joy of Transrational Emunah Grants a Glimpse of the Divine Realm of Unity

Rebbe Natan of Breslev helps us come to terms with the Red Heifer Enigma. He explains that being willing to follow Hashem’s decree with the pure emunah, which is beyond intellectual perception, purifies us from the impurity of death, originally brought about by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The supra-rational secret of the Red Heifer can hold the two opposites together – purifying the impure while making the pure, impure. Thus, the Red Heifer, in which opposites unite, rectifies the blemish caused by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, that separated the original Divine unity, thereby causing death and mortality to enter the world. Since eating from the Tree, the human mind is incapable of truly comprehending the oneness uniting all opposites. Yet, we must believe with complete faith that in truth, all contradictions are perfectly united in the Divine realm. The seemingly incompatible contradictions are only due to our limited intellectual perception caused by Eating from the Tree. Thus, by keeping the mitzvah of the Red Heifer with emunah alone, we rectify the impurity of death and division. Through keeping the mitzvot with transrational devotional emunah, we reach the level of true joy, granting us a glimpse of the otherworldly reality, where the unity of all opposites is revealed (*Likutei Halachot, Nefilat Apayim* 4:19).

### Visiting the Place of the Red Heifer Ritual

The Red Heifer Ritual took place on the Mount of Olives, opposite the Temple Mount. The Talmud, *Zevachim* 112a teaches that the Red Heifer was slaughtered and burned outside of the special pit that was prepared for that purpose on the Mount of Olives. Reish Lakish taught that this was a special place that had been certified as containing nothing that might ritually defile the Red Heifer. The selection of the Mount of Olives for the Red Heifer Ritual was in keeping with the Torah command that it must be done “outside of the camp,” and “facing the front of the Tent of Meeting”

**ספר במדבר פרק יט פסוק ג ונתתם אתה אל אלעזר הכהן והוציא אתה אל מחוץ למחנה ושחט אתה לפניו:**  
**(ד) ולקח אלעזר הכהן מדמה באצבעו והזה אל נח פני אהל מועד מדמה שבע פעמים:**  
 “You shall give it [the cow] to Eleazar the Kohen, and he shall take it outside the camp and slaughter it in his presence. Eleazar the Kohen shall take from its blood with his finger and sprinkle it seven times facing the front of the Tent of Meeting (*Bamidbar* 19:3-4).

Rabbi Shmuel ben Shimshon, who arrived in Jerusalem in 1211, describes his first days in the city in great detail. He ascended the Temple Mount soon after arriving and often prayed on the Mount of Olives, the place where they used to burn the Red Heifer.

**משנה מסכת מדות פרק ב משנה ד**

כל הכתלים שהיו שם, היו גבוהים, חוץ מכתל המזרחי, שהכהן השורף את הפרה עומד בראש הר המשחה, ומתכונן ורואה בפתחו של היכל בשעת הזית הדם:

All the walls that were there [in the Temple] were high except the eastern wall, for the Kohen, who burned the Red Heifer, would stand on top of the Mount of Olives and direct his gaze carefully to see the opening of the Sanctuary at the time of the sprinkling of the blood (*Mishna Midot 2:4*).

On Shabbat, a couple of weeks ago, my husband and I were privileged to visit this pivotal place, facing the front of the Temple gate. I can't believe we were able to enter the place where the Kohen stood to the east of Jerusalem directing his gaze toward the entrance to the Temple while sprinkling the blood (*Yoma 28b*); (Rashi, *Bamidbar 19:4*).

**The Supra-Rational Devotional Emunah of the Mount of Olive Settlers**

One of the brave settlers of the Mount of Olives offered our group water and seats in his magnificent glass covered gallery, overlooking the Temple mount, while he shared some snippets of daily life for Jews living on *Har Hatzeitim*. Only seven families live in two and a half buildings surrounded by Arab inhabitants. "The half building," he explained "consisted of Jewish apartments sandwiched between Arab residents above and below." Getting a minyan together from such a scarce Jewish population cannot be taken for granted. Bringing the children to a playground, involves a planned car excursion to the Jewish quarter of the Old City. This is unlike Jewish settlements where children from a young age go outside independently to play on their own. The Jewish settlers on the Mount of Olives are dedicated to the cause of generating a Jewish presence on one of our holiest mountains. All Jewish neighborhoods in our Holy Land started with such courageous pioneers. Being in a predominantly Arab area is not without peril. I must admit that my personal fear made me so much more impressed by the bold families who are willing to put their lives at risk in order to keep the mitzvot of settling the Land of Israel. I was inspired by the immense impact of their presence on the mountain, and the fearless joy reflected in their faces. Now that's what I call following Hashem through supra-rational devotional emunah!