

Emunah

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(Note: Emunah is a complicated subject. The children will probably have a lot of questions. Therefore, three days have been allotted for it. However it may be possible to cover it in two days.)

Part I - Belief and Trust in Hashem

What does it mean to believe in Hashem?

The Mitzvah of believing in Hashem is to know and believe that there is one G-d. Hashem does not eat or drink Hashem has no body; we cannot touch Hashem. Hashem is infinite and nothing is beyond Him! Hashem is the one who created the world out of nothingness. Everything in the world, from the biggest galaxies to the smallest speck of dust, was created by Hashem. Hashem is constantly re-creating every being and renewing the world's existence. If Hashem would stop creating the world for but a moment, all of creation would revert to nothingness. *(This will be explained further on.)*

Hashem is too great for us to understand because he is not on the same level as we are. A human being is much greater than an ant. Nevertheless, we can compare the two: we both have legs, we are both alive, we both eat, etc. Hashem, however, can never ever be compared to anything!

We cannot understand Him completely, but we must believe that He is above time, above space, above the laws of nature and above anything we can understand. To fully understand Hashem is

as silly as trying to teach algebra to a fly! The idea is not that the fly is stupid and cannot understand algebra, rather a fly was not equipped with the capability to understand math. Similarly, we are physical beings, so we cannot understand Hashem.

How important is the Mitzvah to believe in Hashem?

This Mitzvah is the foundation of the entire Torah. The only reason we keep the Torah is because Hashem told us to do so. It is only due to our belief in Hashem, that we observe the rest of the Mitzvos that He gave us.

That is one of the reasons why belief in Hashem is counted as the first Mitzvah and is the first of the Ten Commandments.

How do we know that Hashem exists?

The first and foremost reason why every Jew believes in Hashem is because within every one of us there is a Neshoma – a part of Hashem – that believes in Hashem. To deny Hashem’s existence can be compared to someone who refuses to believe that he is alive. Something that is a part of you is undeniable. Even Jews who claim to be atheists, continue to believe in Hashem deep down inside. (*Note: This will be explained in greater depth later on.*)

The existence of Hashem can be seen in other ways as well. For example, observe how everything in the world is made perfectly. The world is incredible! It has so many intricate details that were made exactly right. There is just the right amount of oxygen, the right amount of rain and sun, etc. Also, when one contemplates how many trillions and trillions of molecules and atoms it takes to make up a living being, and how they all function perfectly in order to form different objects and creatures, one can have absolutely no doubt that it was formed by a master Creator – Hashem.

To believe that the universe came about purely by chance is ridiculous.

A story to illustrate this:

Many years ago, during the golden age of Spain, there lived a great Torah scholar named Rabbi Yehuda Halevi. Rabbi Yehuda was also well known as a poet, artist and great thinker. One day, Rabbi Yehudah’s non-Jewish neighbor, Don Jose, asked him, “Why do Jews believe that G-d created the world? I believe it happened by itself.”

“Look at this immense world,” replied Rabbi Yehuda, “it is so obvious that it is the work of Hashem.”

Don Jose disagreed with Rabbi Yehuda. Just then Don Jose was urgently called away by his servant.

While Don Jose was gone, Rabbi Yehuda drew a beautiful portrait. It was a breathtaking scene of mountains, trees, and sky. When he saw Don Jose returning, he quickly spilled a bottle of ink on a corner of the drawing.

“Look!” exclaimed Rabbi Yehuda. “I accidentally spilled some ink and this drawing appeared!”

“Rabbi, you must be kidding,” said Don Jose. “This drawing could not have happened by accident. It must have taken hours of work by a skilled artist to draw this.”

Rabbi Yehuda smiled, “If a drawing cannot create itself, how much more so is this true regarding the entire world. It needed a master artist, Hashem, to create it.”

Someday in school, you are going to learn about the theory of evolution and the Big Bang. These theories are an attempt by science to understand how the world and human beings came about. Keep firmly in mind that these are only theories, and theories are not facts. In science class they will present these theories as if every scientist in the world agrees to them. In reality, there are many scientists who believe that Hashem created the world. In fact, all scientists agree that these theories ultimately leave many questions unanswered, but they have no other way of explaining the existence of the world. When you encounter these subjects in school, and feel a need to know more, be sure to contact your local Shliach who will be able to give you scholarly articles by great scientists that dispute evolution. (*Note: For more information about the above see B’Or Hatorah vol. 1-9.*)

Why does Hashem create the world continuously?

The Torah teaches that Hashem is constantly giving life to the world day after day, moment after moment. (*Based on L’olam Hashem D’vorcha Nitzav B’shamayim*) If Hashem would stop sustaining this world for even one second, it would return to nothingness, like it was before Hashem created it.

Why didn’t Hashem create the world and then leave it to exist on its own? When a carpenter uses wood to build a table, the wood remains in the form of the table. The carpenter does not need to do any additional work to make sure that wood remains a table. Why is the creation of the world different?

There is a big difference between building a table and creating the world. When you build a table you have not created a new existence; rather you have taken something which already exists – wood – and merely changed its form and shape (Yesh MiYesh). When Hashem created the world there was absolutely nothing there beforehand. Hashem had contrived a completely new creation, and therefore Hashem has to constantly give it life for it to exist (Yesh M’ayin).

This is similar to an airplane that needs constant energy to stay in the sky. Due to gravity, it is natural for a heavy object to remain on the ground, so the airplane needs constant energy from the burning fuel to make it fly. If the fuel would run out, the airplane would fall back to earth. So too, if Hashem stopped providing energy to the world for even one second, it would return to its natural state, nothingness.

Questions for Review

1. Where did the world come from?
2. Why is the belief in Hashem the foundation of the entire Torah?
3. How do we know that Hashem exists; and that He created the world?
4. How often does Hashem create the world?
5. Why is this so?

Part II - Belief in Divine Providence

We explained that Hashem constantly creates the world. From this it is understood that everything that happens in the world, from the biggest to the most insignificant events, are all part of Hashem's plan and are done by Him. This is called Divine Providence.

We don't always understand the reason why something happens. Sometimes only much later do we understand why something happened and sometimes we never understand. (*Note: Ask the children for things that happened to them that day, and explain that they happened by Divine Providence*).

There is a story to illustrate this:

The Baal Shem Tov and his Talmidim were in the forest sitting beneath the trees learning Torah.

"Whatever happens in the world," explained the Baal Shem Tov, "no matter how insignificant it may seem, happens for a specific reason. Even though we may not understand it, there is a good reason for it."

At that moment a single leaf fell from the tree they were sitting under, and fluttered to the ground.

One of the students asked, "How can a simple falling leaf have a special purpose? It is a random, everyday occurrence."

The Baal Shem Tov did not answer. He motioned his students to gather around, and together, they all looked down at the leaf.

Soon afterwards, they saw a tired ant carrying a large load of food on its back, crawling underneath the leaf to escape the hot sun.

The Baal Shem Tov smiled, "There is a special reason for everything, even a falling leaf has a specific purpose – to shelter one of Hashem's creations."

We know Hashem does good things. Does He do bad things as well?

Everything comes from Hashem, and since Hashem is good, everything that comes from Hashem is good. Many times we don't understand how things are good, but they really are! Sometimes it becomes apparent later how something we thought was bad was really good.

A story to illustrate this:

The famous and holy teacher, Rabbi Akiva, was preparing to go on a long journey. Rabbi Akiva purchased a strong donkey, a rooster and a candle. Why would Rabbi Akiva need a rooster and a candle? Well, since there were no alarm clocks in those days, the way one would wake up was when the rooster would call out at dawn, "Cock-a-doodle-doo". Since there was no electricity in those days, Rabbi Akiva purchased a candle, so that he would be able to learn Torah during the night.

Rabbi Akiva set out on his journey. Throughout the day, he would recite words of Torah by heart, in order not to waste any time. As evening approached, Rabbi Akiva entered the

nearest town and looked for somewhere to spend the night. However, the people of the town were very wicked and would not allow visitors into their homes. When Rabbi Akiva saw that all the townspeople were evil and would not have visitors, he decided to leave the town and spend the night in the forest. He was not at all angry or upset, rather he said in his usual way, “All that Hashem does is for the best.”

Rabbi Akiva went out to the woods on the outskirts of the town. He tied his donkey to a tree and fed it fodder. He also gave the rooster some seeds to eat. After Rabbi Akiva had prayed Maariv, he took out one of his scrolls and started to learn Torah by candle-light. In a short time Rabbi Akiva became very involved with his learning.

Suddenly a storm started up, sending strong gusts of winds which blew out Rabbi Akiva’s candle. Now he was in complete darkness. Then, out of the darkness of the night, there appeared a wild cat which jumped on the rooster and took it away. Rabbi Akiva laid down to rest – but not for long. With a start he was startled by the terrifying roar of a lion. It had obviously been lurking in the forest and had decided it was in need of food. It pounced on the donkey and dragged it away. Rabbi Akiva was really frightened and he thanked Hashem that he himself had been saved from the lion.

Rabbi Akiva was all alone in the dark – no donkey to ride, no rooster to wake him up, and not even a light with which he could read from his Sefer. Nevertheless, he did not complain, he just said, “All that Hashem does is for the best.”

Once again, Rabbi Akiva lay down to rest under the tree. In the middle of the night, he was awakened by the sound of terrified screams. He quickly washed his hands and quietly crept to the edge of the forest. When he looked towards the town, he was met by a terrible sight.

A band of armed robbers had entered the town and attacked the townspeople while they were sleeping. They had stolen everything – silver, gold and all other valuables. The townspeople were tied up together and had been taken prisoners. The screaming and the frightened cries of the children could be heard from afar. The entire population of the town was led away in chains while the robbers finished collecting the booty.

Rabbi Akiva was worried, but placed his trust in Hashem. Although the procession of robbers passed fairly close to Rabbi Akiva, they failed to notice him, because it was so dark. When the group was well away, he lifted up his head towards Hashem and thanked Hashem for saving his life. He called out with a voice full of emotion:

“Now, at last, I can understand,
That the light blowing out was through Hashem’s hand.
Why were my donkey and rooster killed last night?
So there should be no noise, however slight.
Why was it my candle blew out?
So the bandits would not know I was about.
Hashem saves those in distress.
He does everything for the best.”

(Note: After the story, help the children realize the idea of Hashgacha Protis in their personal lives.)

Questions for Review

1. How many things happen on their own without Hashem?
2. Is there anything that is really bad? Explain your answer.

Part III - Making Emunah a part of our daily lives

Is belief in Hashem enough?

We've spoken a lot about believing in Hashem and Divine Providence, but such belief will not necessarily affect the way we act.

A thief might pray to Hashem to help him before he robs someone's house, even though he knows that this is not what Hashem wants. In that case, the thief believes in Hashem but it does not affect his lifestyle.

We have to make sure that our belief in Hashem affects our actions. For example, we should say Modeh Ani and wash our hands as soon as we wake up because we realize that we are in the presence of a King – Hashem! So too throughout the day we should always bear in mind that Hashem is everywhere and we should act appropriately.

Only when our belief has an effect on our behavior can it be considered complete.

Do only religious Jews believe in Hashem?

No, every Jew believes in Hashem because every Jew has a soul, which is a part of Hashem. This belief is a characteristic of the Neshoma that is transmitted as an inheritance from our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yackov.

Unfortunately in some cases it's hidden deep down inside. However, certain circumstances reveal this hidden faith. If a Jew is in danger of being cut off from Hashem, he will give up his life. For instance, when Jews were given the choice to either be killed or convert to another religion, many gave up their lives, even those who were never religious. This is because the hidden faith that all Jews possess becomes aroused in such situations.

Throughout history we have seen this repeated again and again. Whether at the time of the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, the Holocaust, or Communism; during every era of religious persecution, Jewish people, both religious and non-religious, sacrificed their lives to remain true to the Jewish faith. It is impossible for a Jew to disconnect himself from Hashem.

A story to illustrate this:

There was once a little boy, by the name of Yossel. He came from a very poor home; his parents had no money and hardly any food. Yossel was very hungry. One day, he passed by a fruit stand that was full of delicious apples. "If I take just one, it won't make a difference," he thought.

He stuck out his hand and took one. One small act of stealing led to another until eventually, he joined a group of professional thieves. Every night, they would plan a different place to loot.

One night, they decided to rob the neighborhood church. Lots were drawn and Yossel was chosen to be the one to break in. That night, he was given a few big sacks, and was sent to climb into the window of the church. In the middle of the night, Yossel entered the church. He took all of the golden and silver statues, and put them in his sack! Whew! That part done! Thank G-d!

He proceeded to climb out the window to where his friends were waiting for him with the getaway horse. However, since there were so many heavy sacks, he had to make a couple of trips in order to bring them all out.

The last time, on his way out, he tripped and fell down with the remaining sacks. The noise brought the police, who arrested him immediately.

When the priests found out that their church had been robbed, they were very angry. They were especially humiliated by the fact that a Jew had robbed them. They decided that he not only deserved a death sentence, but he would get a painful slow death. They gathered together a mob of anti-Semites and dragged Yossel to the center of town. They tied him to a pole and were about to start torturing him, when the bishop announced that he wanted to say a few words. He declared: "The wretched Jew has sinned greatly against our holy faith. He deserves a terrible death. Any torture we give him here, cannot possibly atone for his terrible sin. He deserves the worst of all punishments in this world and the next! However, being that we are very merciful we are going to give Yossel another chance." He turned to Yossel, "If you convert to our faith, you can live."

"Never!" Yossel screamed. "I may be a thief, but I am a Jew!" They tortured him but it was to no avail. Finally in his last moment on this world, Yossel screamed out, "Shema Yisroel..." and with those holy words on his lips he breathed his last...

This story teaches us, that although Yossel was a thief, and he committed sins against Hashem, he still had Emunah in Hashem. He was even willing to give up his life, so as not to give up his belief in Hashem. Nevertheless, his belief in Hashem was not a part of his day-to-day life. It did not affect his everyday actions and was only revealed through special circumstances.

[Note: Those few Jews who did "convert" did so only because their Neshoma had not yet faced an experience that would reveal its hidden faith. There are many stories about Jews who had "converted", who when faced with a situation where they had to harm another Jew, could not do so. Every Jew has a certain line that it is impossible for him to cross. It is just a matter of his Neshoma nearing that "line" and being aroused to Mesirus Nefesh.]

How can we demonstrate our belief in Hashem?

Nowadays, we are free to practice our religion. No one is threatening to kill us if we remain Jewish. We are not faced with situations that automatically test and reveal our faith. Our job is to reveal our faith and connection to Hashem in every part of our day and in everything we do.

For example, when we get up we say Modeh Ani; before we eat we make a Brocha; from our earnings we give Tzedakah; and before we go to sleep we say the Shema. This is what Hashem wants us to do. The Rebbe has told us that combining our daily life and our Torah life is the way to bring Moshiach.

Emunah and Moshiach

Our Sages tell us that the Jewish people were taken out of Mitzrayim in the merit of their faith in Hashem. Similarly, Moshiach and the final Geulah, will come in the merit of our faith in Hashem.

When the Jews were redeemed from Mitzrayim, they had such strong Emunah that it became a part of their everyday life (e.g. slaughtering the Korban Pesach in front of the Egyptians; thus putting their lives in jeopardy). They were taught by Moshe Rabbeinu that even in Mitzrayim, they had to trust in Hashem and follow everything He said.

So too now, in the merit of our Emunah we will be taken out of this Golus. It is not enough to have Emunah because we have it is a characteristic of our Neshoma, rather it has to become part of our daily life. We strengthen this faith by following the words of the Rebbe. The Rebbe teaches us, that even in the hardest of times, we must still have complete faith and trust in Hashem, even when it is beyond our understanding and there is no rational basis for it! Through this, we will certainly merit the revelation of Melech HaMoshiach right now!

Questions for Review

1. If I believe in Hashem will this automatically make me act properly? Explain.
2. Have non-religious people given up their lives for their belief in Hashem? Why?

Story of the Rebbe

Piercing Eyes

Samuel was a young American who had grown up with almost no knowledge of his Jewish heritage. His Jewish friends were in a similar position – none of them had any idea about Torah and Mitzvos. They lived very un-Jewish lives. In addition, like many other people around them, they opposed organized religion in general. Samuel and his friends wandered around the world, lost, searching for some kind of meaning in life.

At that time, many different religious cults and groups were springing up all over America. Samuel attached himself to one particular group whose ideal was to live in the forest, close to nature. They had a rather meaningless philosophy, with various types of rituals and practices which had their origins in

Christianity. This did not bother Samuel in the least. On the contrary, he was happy to join this group, as a form of rebellion against his upbringing.

This cult had some weird practices, one of which was that after a certain period of time, any new member had to take part in a particular ceremony. The ceremony was a type of initiation, and was seen as an acceptance and conversion into their strange religion. Samuel, as a new member, also had to undergo the initiation rites. The members of the cult set a date for his conversion to their group.

As the day of his conversion drew closer, Samuel started to feel a little hesitant. Many different thoughts and feelings came to his mind. Deep down, he had not really taken on this new religion, and he

had not renounced his Judaism either. He also felt offended by the actual initiation ritual, which was really rather frightening. All this began to bother him. However, as there was some time to go before the date of the ceremony, he decided not to think too much about it.

Eventually the date of Samuel's conversion arrived. As part of the ceremony, Samuel had to prepare an altar, which would be the basis of the ritual. Although many years have passed since that day, Samuel still becomes overwhelmed with emotion when he tells the story of how his life changed:

"This was not the first time that I had lit the fire on the altar, and I had never had a problem with it before. However, this time it was proving difficult to light. I looked around for some more newspapers to place under the sticks so that they would catch fire. When I had found some, I made a large pile, and in the middle I lit a big fire. Suddenly, a particular picture seemed to stand out from the stack of newspapers. It was a photograph of a Rabbi with striking features and a gray beard. The eyes seemed to cut right into me like a sword piercing through my heart. Although I did not know who this man was, I felt as if his eyes were begging and pleading with me. The message seemed to be: 'S-T-O-P!'

"Although I was a wild young man then, and usually nothing bothered me, I felt very disturbed by this. I could not ignore the sight of this man, and

decided to remove the newspaper from the stack before the fire consumed it. I was intrigued by the whole business, and I decided to read the article attached to the picture so that I could find out the identity of the man who had moved me so much.

"When I opened the newspaper, I saw that it was a local newspaper from the nearby city of Amherst, Connecticut. The picture of the Rabbi was on an advertisement put in by a Jewish movement called Chabad. I had never heard of this organization before, but I suddenly felt connected to it because of the man with the piercing eyes. From then on, I had no peace, I felt some inner push to go to the local Chabad House, whose address was on the advertisement. When I got there, I met Rabbi Deren, an emissary of the man with the piercing eyes."

One can imagine how Samuel's life changed direction after that. Once Samuel had found the Chabad House, he visited often. He had many friendly and open discussions with Rabbi Deren, who gradually steered him onto the path of Torah. He showed him how to come to terms with his Jewish heritage and taught him to learn Torah and do Mitzvos.

Nowadays, anyone who knows Reb Shmuel, with his beard and his long Tzitzis, would not recognize him as Samuel, rescued at the last minute from selling his soul to a pagan religion by a picture of the Rebbe.

Story

The Czar and the Soldier

The Russian Czar Nicholas (Nikolai) the First was a ruthless anti-Semite. He was the one who decreed that Jewish boys should be drafted into military service at a tender age. These boys were known as "Cantonists". The Czar's purpose was to tear them away from their Jewish faith as well as from their family and eventually, to turn them into Christians.

Accordingly, these poor, unfortunate children were first forcibly taken away from their parents and sent to distant villages to live among peasants, where they were brought up as Christians. Then they were drafted into the army to serve for twenty-five years!

Under such terribly trying conditions many became completely estranged from Judaism, and a few even gave up the struggle and converted to Christianity.

There were, however, many brave souls who refused to give in, and gave up their lives for the sake of a faith from which they had been torn away in their childhood. Something they could hardly explain, stirred them in their innermost heart to cling to their faith at all costs.

The hero of our story is one of these "Nikolai" soldiers.

Czar Nicholas the First would often disguise himself as a plain civilian, and move among the people to hear what they might be saying about their Czar.

Once, in his disguise, the Czar entered a bar where peasants and soldiers were sitting and drinking;

some already drunk! The Czar took a seat next to a soldier who offered him a drink. The soldier did not know that he was “treating” the Czar, nor did the Czar know that his companion was a “Nikolai” soldier. This soldier now looked no different than the rest of the coarse peasant soldiers.

When the Czar finished his drink he put down the empty glass on the table. His “host” immediately slapped him on the face.

“Hey, what’s the idea of you hitting me?” protested the Czar.

“Don’t you know you shouldn’t leave your glass empty? You must immediately refill it!” retorted the soldier.

The Czar refilled his glass, drank it, and he and the soldier repeated this performance until they emptied the entire bottle. As if they had not already drunk more than enough, the soldier breezily ordered another bottle although he had paid for the first with the last of the money he had in his money-purse.

When the owner of the bar demanded full payment, the soldier offered his sword as a “pledge” until he would bring the money to settle the bill.

The Czar and the soldier then left the bar together, holding on to each other like a couple of buddies and swaying drunkenly. The Czar, however, was not so drunk as to fail to notice what the soldier had done, and he asked him in what regiment he was serving. The two then went their separate ways.

The following day the commander of that regiment received word that the Czar was coming on an official inspection tour. The soldiers were all thrown into a frenzy of preparation. They knew how strict the Czar was, and how merciless he was towards anyone with whom he found the slightest fault. It could be that such a soldier’s very life would be weighed in the balance!

One can well imagine the feelings of the soldier who had parted with his sword the previous day, and who could not possibly redeem his “pledge” in time for the Czar’s inspection. Whatever could he do now to “save his skin?”

Suddenly he had a bright idea which he hoped would work for him. He carved out a sword from a piece of wood, exactly the size of a metal sword, and fitted it into the sheath, hoping against hope that the Czar would not notice it.

The Czar, resplendent in his royal robes and riding on his royal horse, came majestically among the

rows of soldiers. They all stood at attention, their arms raised in salute.

The Czar stopped in front of the soldier with whom he had been drinking the previous day, and the poor soldier’s heart trembled, but the Czar addressed himself to the soldier next to him saying: “Look at your uniform! Is that the best you could do?”

The poor fellow was flabbergasted! He was quite sure that there was nothing wrong with his uniform. But, who would dare argue with the Czar? So he began pleading with the Czar that he would be more careful in the future, and could the Czar be gracious enough to excuse him this time.

The Czar ignored the soldier completely and, turning towards his “companion of the bar,” shouted angrily: “Draw your sword and chop off his head!”

Now the soldier with the wooden sword was in a double quandary. Anyone daring to disobey the Czar would surely be sentenced to death. Even had he been able to do so, how could he kill an innocent person? On the other hand, if he drew his sword as the Czar commanded, he would immediately see that the sword was not a genuine one, but just a piece of wood! The Czar would rightly be furious, and the “swindler” would come to a sorry end.

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, they were followed by a bright idea.

“Your Majesty,” he began. “I am ready to carry out your order, as you feel my friend is guilty. Nobody would wish to disobey the Czar. But, if he is truly innocent, I ask the Al-mighty who, alone, sees into the hearts of men, to save him. In such a case, the Al-mighty can save my friend by turning my sword into a wooden one.” Saying which, he quickly drew his sword out of its sheath and, to everyone’s astonished gaze, there, in his hand, was a sword of wood!

Only the Czar knew that it was all a trick, but he made no comment about the “miracle,” for he could not give the game away without implicating himself.

“Very well,” said the Czar. “I will pardon your friend. As for you, I wish to promote you to the rank of Officer.” The Czar was very much impressed with his brilliance.

It was clear that the Czar was determined to avail himself of this soldier’s genius. He received promotion after promotion until he finally became a member of the Czar’s bodyguards, and personal

advisor in the Czar's court.

One day the Czar began to discuss religion with him and asked:

“Are you truly a Believer, and do you attend church regularly?”

“Yes, Your Majesty, I am a Believer but I do not go to church, as I am a Jew.”

“You are a Jew?” exclaimed the Czar. “I thought you were a Christian and so I promoted you to higher rank.”

“The Czar never asked me about my faith. But, I am ready to serve the Czar again as a plain soldier,” said the Nikolai soldier.

“I have a better idea,” said the Czar. “Become a Christian and I will make you General. You will then be my personal friend. The Czarina and I will be your godparents and you will not lack either honor or riches.”

The Nikolai soldier was taken aback at the Czar's offer. He had, in truth, been torn away from his family and faith at a very young age. In fact, he had no idea, if his parents were still alive. Yet, he had never entertained the thought of changing his religion, he always meant to remain a Jew.

The Czar, seeing his hesitation, began to urge him to accept his offer while, at the same time, hinting that things would go badly for him if he refused. So, somewhat reluctantly, the Nikolai soldier decided to say “yes” to the Czar, though in his heart he meant to remain a Jew, only pretending to be a Christian.

Everything was arranged, the date set, and the Czar,

Czarina, and the Nikolai soldier, set out for Kiev, where the bishop was to carry out the baptism and conversion.

The soldier sat in the royal carriage, followed by the court nobility, silent and lost in thought. Instead of feeling honored and elevated, he felt suddenly conscience-stricken. His heart sank and he was overtaken by a strong determination. How could he ever have even thought of becoming a Christian (even if only in pretense)! A Jew he was born, and a Jew he would remain to his dying day!

The royal carriage was then crossing a bridge over the river in the center of the city. The Nikolai soldier suddenly jumped out of the carriage and, with the words: “Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echod!” issuing from his lips, he flung himself into the rushing waters. His body quickly disappeared.

The Czar, Czarina and the rest of the party, looked on in horror at the unexpected tragedy. Sadly, the royal party turned back. The Czar, in particular, had become attached to the Nikolai soldier, and he began to think deeply about the whole matter. If these Jewish “Cantonists” could feel so strongly about their Judaism despite everything that could discourage anyone, then his plan to “Russify” them was obviously a failure, and there was no point in continuing it.

Thus, the sacrifice of this martyr was, after all, not in vain, for soon thereafter the Czar rescinded his cruel decree.