**Bombing in Jerusalem**
**Temple Judea, April 27, 2001**
**by: Daniel J. Moskovitz**

There is a terrible truth about the Jewish people: the truth is that we are most united when we are being persecuted, endangered or are under attack. Our community has the ability to set aside our differences, our disputes, and come together as an am echad, as a united people, when we perceive our very existence to be threatened. I say that this is a terrible truth, because it often takes bloodshed to bring about such feelings of harmony and unity. This reality was dramatized for me this past summer, while I was serving as Rabbi the B'nai Birth camp I went to as a teen.

One evening while at camp, we received word of a terrorist bombing in Machane Yehudah, the outdoor market in Jerusalem. Our participants, many with family and friends living or visiting in Israel during that time of year, quickly came together in the shared grief and outrage that swept across the Jewish world. The teens huddled around my laptop computer, arms around one another, tears rolling down many faces, as we scanned the internet for more information and a list of names of those killed.

It was soon learned that one of the victims of the blast was a young Jewish teenage boy, Grigory Pesahovic. This fact hit our teenagers pretty hard. None of them knew the young man personally, but they all rightfully sensed that they knew

him on a more universal level. Teenagers are pretty much the same no matter where you are and our own youth felt a commonality and fellowship with this young man which served to only unite them further in shared grief and horror at what had taken place.

In the period of just a few minutes, our group – and I will venture to say the whole of the Jewish community – had gone from a divided people, who could not agree on "Who is a Jew?", "Who is a Rabbi?," and "What is acceptable Jewish practice?", to a people who felt they could only truly rely on each other. Our global Jewish community was once again united. The prayers we offered for the victims were not Reform, Conservative or Orthodox. They were Jewish, and that is all that mattered to the victims. And for the moment at least, we could all agree that offering those prayers was all that mattered to God as well.

It was when I returned from camp and read the LA Times story on the bombing that I learned juts how brief that moment of unity really was. The Times reported that Grigory was the child of Russian immigrants who moved to Israel two years ago to escape religious persecution and live as Jews in the Jewish homeland. Both of his parents lived as Jews in Israel and raised Grigory as a Jew as well. Following Jewish law, they sought to bury their son within twenty-four hours of his death in a Jewish cemetery, but they were turned away by religious authorities when it was learned that Grigory's maternal grandmother was not Jewish. The religious

authorities, following a strict interpretation of Jewish law, do not view Grigory's mother Olga as a Jewish woman, and thus in their view Grigory himself is also not a Jew. The family took Grigory's body to a Christian cemetery under the impression that they would permit a non-religious burial. But the priest at the cemetery insisted on reciting Christian prayers over the grave, which the family would not permit. At this indignity Olga, Grigory's mother, stated for the Israeli press, "He lived as a Jew in the land of Israel. My son Grigory was not a Christian. I am not ready to let him be buried as a Christian."

Soon it was the Sabbath, and Grigory's parents, unable to find a suitable place of rest for their son, had to return him to the morgue until Sunday, when according to Jewish law funerals are once again permitted. Their struggle brought to light an often neglected aspect of the current religious authority in Israel: The Ministry of Religious Affairs which has authority over such matters was ordered by the Israeli Supreme Court five years ago to establish sections in Jewish cemeteries for Jews of non-traditional Jewish lineage. Last year, the Israeli K'nesset, passed a law permitting – for the first time in Israel – the establishment of non-religious cemeteries. In both cases such action must be taken by the ultra-Orthodox controlled Ministry of Religious Affairs which has juristdiction over the cemeteries and their related budgets. No plans or time-tabels have ever been set for either the pluralistic sections of Jewish cemeteries or the establishment of non-religious cemeteries. The

Ministry of Religious Affairs claims they don't have the money, but it more clearly seems like a case of fundamentalist foot dragging, the true victims of which are unable to complain.

Grigory was finally laid to rest four days later in a section of Jerusalem's municipal cemetery reserved for members of the Bahai faith, a section that does not require a religious burial. The death of this young boy and the other victims of the terrorist attack united our community. For what was apparently a very brief moment we were once again Am Yisrael, joined by our immeasurable commonality and shared faith. For that brief moment, being a Jew did not rest upon the blood that courses through our veins, whether it is from your mother or father, but rather the blood that flowed in the streets of Jerusalem. In his death Grigory united us, but when we attempted to bury him as God commanded us, we were once again a divided people, unable to see the vast wealth of Jewish tradition and belief which we have in common, but rather only able to focus on those subtle aspects that make us different.

If it is outrage and shock that unites us as a people, then let us be outraged – shocked at the treatment of this young boy and his family. Let us join together in condemnation not only of the terrorists who ended his life, but the religious institutions and philosophies that would not permit his life to end as a Jew, buried alongside the other heroes and martyrs of Judaism. For the terrorists, any Jewish life

was life enough to take. The Nazis and the Russians too, never spared Grigory's family from their anti-Jewish brutality and racism. But we, the Jewish people, we make the distinctions. Some in our community stand like Eichman, Himmler, or Mengele and say, "This one goes to the left and this one to the right." No! if it is horror that unites us, then let us be united at the horror of this image, and the eradication of such distinctions in our faith. We have been persecuted far too long for us now to be doing it to ourselves. May it be God's will that we finally learn to love and accept each other with the same passion that some would have to destroy us, and may that passion of a united community finally bring an end to the bombs and violence, the blood shed by all people of peace.