

REINALDO W. SIQUEIRA

Death and Ancestors in Contemporary Judaism

Introduction

Historically, Judaism and Jews have eluded a clear cut definition, for “there never was, and there is not now, one Judaism; rather there have always been many Judaisms” (Sigal 1988:1).

Contemporary Judaism, understood as the present manifestations of Judaism in the 21st Century, reflects the complex and multifaceted development over more than thirty-five centuries of a people with a religious, philosophical, cultural, and group identity, which ranges from ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jews to secular non-religious Jews. This diversity is present both in the modern State of Israel and in almost any other country where there is a sizeable Jewish community.¹ Frequently the different branches of Judaism sustain quite different beliefs and practices concerning any specific subject. They do share, however, a basic core of beliefs and values that historically have united and identified them as Judaism vis-à-vis other religious and social groups existing in the world. This unity, however, is not that of a unified system but rather that “of a symphony” (Silver 1989:6). The present Jewish religious and non-religious ideas concerning death and ancestors, with their related cultic and mortuary practices reflect this long, complex, and many times antagonistic development.

This paper first briefly surveys the major Jewish beliefs concerning death and the soul in order to provide a basis for the differing Jewish understandings concerning these two ideas. There follows a summary of the main Jewish cultic and mortuary practices that are directly related to these variant beliefs. Finally, it explores the opportunities and challenges Jewish

beliefs and practices pose to Adventist Mission, presents some practical suggestions on how to deal with these, and points out some areas that need further exploration with the goal of finding ways to improve the effectiveness of our mission efforts.

Death and Soul in Judaism

The Hebrew Bible

The biblical view concerning the nature of man and death is the foundation stone for Jewish thought about the reality of death and the nature of what comes after. It is clearly recognized that in biblical times the human being was considered an inseparable unity. Three key biblical words *neshamah*, *ruach*, and *nefesh*, in reference to a person, did not imply any idea of what became traditionally understood as “soul” or “spirit.” The first two terms meant only “breath,” and the last one, *nefesh*, referred to the individual or even to the body (Ivry 2007:19:33). Death (most usually expressed by the Hebrew word *mavet*) was conceptualized as non-existence, the opposite of life: the person ceased breathing, life was gone, the body decomposed and returned to dust (Bowman 1980:1:802). Nothing but God’s and the survivors’ memories of the dead person remained after death. The Hebrew Bible expressly teaches that a dead person does not think, talk, feel, suffer, worship, or praise God—the deceased do not participate in anything that is done in the world of the living; therefore, biblical thought rejects the idea of the immortality of the soul. Any kind of ancestor worship or interaction with the dead is expressly forbidden as a direct anathema to God. In patriarchal and ancient Israelite times, those who practiced any such rituals regarding the dead did so following the customs of the pagan nations and were considered unfaithful to God and his covenant. The only biblical hope for life after death and interacting again with someone who has passed away was the resurrection of the dead that God would bring at the eschatological close of human history (see Andreason 2000:314-346).

The Intertestamental Period

Belief in the immortality of the soul became part of Jewish religious thought via contact with Greek philosophy during the Hellenistic period of Second Temple times before the Common Era. From these influences, some Jewish circles incorporated the belief of a blessed immortality for the righteous soul and eternal torment for the soul of the wicked (Kohler). Speaking about the righteous dead, the Book of Jubilees 23:31 states: “And

their bones will rest on the earth, and their spirits will increase in joy, and they will know that the Lord is an executor of judgment; but He will show mercy to hundreds and thousands, to all who love Him" (Wintermute 1985:2:102). Statements in the book of 1 Enoch also attest to such beliefs, affirming that "all good things, and joy and honor are prepared for and written down for the souls of those who died in righteousness. . . . The spirits of those who died in righteousness shall live and rejoice; their spirits shall not perish, nor their memorial from before the face of the Great One unto all generations of the world" (1 Enoch 103:3, 4). About the wicked, this source asserts: "Woe to you sinners who are dead! . . . You yourselves know that they will bring your souls down to Sheol; and they shall experience evil and great tribulation—in darkness, nets, and burning fire" (1 Enoch 103:5-7; see Isaac 1983:1:84). The belief in the immortality of the soul is also attested to in other works of the time such as the *Wisdom of Salomon*, *IV Maccabees*, the *Sibylline Oracles*, the *Testament of Moses*, the *Book of Baruch*, and in the writings of Philo of Alexandria (Kohler; Silver 1989:274).

Jewish literature of this period shows the complexity that was developing in Jewish thought and beliefs concerning the state of the dead and the concept of resurrection. Some voices, for example Ben-Sira, maintained a view very close to the biblical teachings (Silver 1989:275, 276). Some voiced the belief of an immortal soul whose functionality, however, depended on the existence of a body, hence the need for resurrection. Other groups held a more "classical" Greek view of the soul as an independent entity, fully functional after death. In such thought the resurrection was understood as an elevation of the soul to a higher level in the heavenly realms. Between these extremes, many shades of belief concerning these topics existed within Judaism during the Hellenistic period of Second Temple times (Elledge 2017).

During Hellenistic times, the acceptance within some Jewish circles of belief in the immortality of the soul and the immediate reward or punishment after death, apparently led some pious Jews to honor the righteous dead by offering food at their graves, as pointed out in the injunction of *Tobit* 4:17. "Be generous with bread and wine on the graves of upright people, but not for the sinner." Such practices, however, were severely condemned by other religious groups, as can be seen in Ben-Sira's outburst in opposition to them, as well as in the *Book of Jubilees*.²

Rabbinic Judaism and the Talmud

Later in the Common Era, the *Talmudic* rabbis believed in the continued existence of the human soul after death. There were divergent views,

however, concerning the nature of this existence. Some held that the soul of the righteous would enter the Garden of Eden in Heaven immediately after death (*Shabbat* 152b), while the soul of the wicked would go to *Gehinnom*—the place of torment reserved for them (*Chagigah* 15a). On the other hand, there were those who defended the view that the soul of the righteous at death, after being separated from the body and its functions, ascended to Heaven where it was kept in the treasury beneath God's throne of glory (*Shabbat* 152b). This soul then awaited the moment when it would be reunited with the body at the resurrection. The soul of the wicked, having been cast out of the body was imprisoned on the earth (*Shabbath* 152b; Grintz 2007:19:35). Along with the view of the soul being kept in the heavenly treasury, the belief existed that the soul of the righteous remained in relation to its dead body until the final decomposition of the later. During this interim period the soul would be ascending to heaven and descending back to the grave (35).

In the *Talmud*, views concerning the level of independence, consciousness, and functionality of the soul after death were also quite divergent. On one side were those who stated, "if one makes remarks about the dead, it is like making remarks about a stone" (*Berakhot* 19a). In another point of view, some held that a dead person hears whatever is spoken in his or her presence until the grave is sealed (*Shabbat* 152b). Others proclaimed that a dead person knows at the most his or her own pain, but not what transpires in the world (*Berakhot* 18b). Another side believed that the deceased soul has contact with the living and can direct them in worldly affairs (18b; *Shabbat* 152b; *Talmud Yerushalmi, Avodah Zarah* 3:1; Grintz 2007:19:35, 36).

During Talmudic times, belief in the resurrection of the dead continued to be one of the central teachings of Rabbinic Judaism. The tenth chapter of the *Mishnah*, tractate *Sanhedrin*, explicitly affirms that corporeal resurrection will be part of the World to Come, with the exception of those "who say there is no resurrection of the dead" (Robinson 2008:192). The most well known explanation of this belief is the rabbinic parable in the *Talmud*, found in *Sanhedrin* 91a-b:

To what is the matter likened? To a king of flesh and blood who had a beautiful orchard and there were in it lovely ripe fruit, and he placed two guardians over it, one a cripple and the other blind. Said the cripple to the blind man, 'I see beautiful ripe fruit in the orchard. Come and carry me and we will bring and eat them.' The cripple rode on the back of the blind man and they brought and ate them. After a while the owner of the orchard came and said to them, 'Where is my lovely fruit?' The cripple answered, 'Do I have legs to go?' Answered the blind man, 'Do I have eyes to see?' What did he do? He placed the cripple on the back of the blind man and judged them as one—so also the Holy Blessed One brings the soul and throws it into the body and judges them as one." (See Boyarin and Siegel 2007:17:241, 242)

Middle Ages

Although much continuation of *Talmudic* views can be observed among Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages, increasingly divergent views developed regarding the human soul and its nature, its situation after death, and the resurrection of the dead.

For Saadiah Gaon (882-942 CE), the soul was “a more pure, transparent and simple substance than are the spheres,” meaning that the soul was understood as the refined part of the body. At the time of death, it separated from the body and existed without a fixed abode until the body had decomposed. The souls of the dead remained in a heavenly treasury until the resurrection, when each would be reunited with its body and continue in this combined state thereafter (Boyarin and Siegel 2007:17:143; Pines 2007:19:36).

There were also a number of Jewish Medieval philosophers who understood and taught more along the lines of the Platonic idea of soul. For Isaac Israeli (832-932), in accordance with the belief held in Greco-Roman paganism, the soul was an incorporeal substance that after death went to enjoy the eternal bliss above the heavens or went beneath the heavens where it was tortured by fire. Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021/1022-1070), for his part mentioned the idea of Platonic recollection, according to which the soul existed prior to its conjunction with the body. When united with the body, the soul then forgets its previous knowledge which it may again recollect after death. Ibn Gabirol, however, also expressed belief in the Jewish idea that the souls of the righteous rest beneath the throne of glory. Following Israeli and ibn Gabirol, Joseph ibn Tsaddik (late 15th Century) also believed that the soul was incorporeal, existed before the body and continued to exist after death. If in life the soul attained the necessary level of knowledge, after death it returned to its place of origin—the world of the intelligibles; however, if it remained ignorant, it was pulled by the motion of the celestial spheres and tortured by fire. For Judah Halevi (1075-1141), Judaism was the religion that insured the immortality of the soul after the death of the body. Hasdai Crescas (1340-1410/1411), a critic of Maimonides and other Jewish Aristotelean philosophers, argued that since man was a spiritual being his soul remains immortal after its separation from the body. The souls of the righteous would then enjoy the splendor of the *Shekhinah* and attach themselves to God in an ever-growing union with the divine. The souls of the wicked were unable to reach this union because of sin and so they suffered great sorrow. In the worst cases, this suffering was so complete that it led to their total destruction. For Joseph Albo (1380-1444), the soul was a spiritual being with an independent existence. It was not intellectual in nature, but it was capable of attaining knowledge (Pines 2007:19:36-38).

The Middle Ages also witnessed a number of Jewish philosophers who followed a more Aristotelian concept of soul, according to which the soul was not an independent entity but rather the intellect. Abraham ibn Daud (1110-1180) is considered to be the first Spanish Jewish neo-Aristotelian. He maintained that the individual soul continued to exist after the death of the body, and he characterized the soul as an immaterial substance that was not matter but form (37; Olan 1969:5:169). Following this same understanding, Maimonides (1135/1138-1204) believed that the soul was a form—the form of reason. Nothing remained after a man’s death except his intellect with no trace of individuality. In his *Mishneh Torah* (*Yad, Tes-huva*, 8:2), he stated that in the *Olam Haba* (World to Come—heaven) there were no bodies but only souls, or more precisely the form of souls—the intellect of the righteous—serving God as angels. In the heavenly realm there was no eating, drinking, sitting, standing, sleeping, or anything characteristic of the body. Maimonides seems to have denied the idea of an individual immortality (Olan 1969:5:169; Pines 2007:37). However, in his commentary in the *Mishnah*, in tractate *Sanhedrin* 10, in what seems to be a contradictory statement to his view on the soul, he declared that the resurrection was one of the foundations of the Jewish religion, and he postulated it as the 13th of the 13 Principles of the Jewish Faith. For Maimonides, there was no religion and no connection with the Jewish nation for whoever did not believe in it. In his work, *Ma’amar Techiyyat haMetim* (“The Essay on Resurrection”), he clarified his understanding of these apparent contradictions. He stated that there will be resurrection, but it will not be permanent, for the resurrected individual will die again. The souls of the righteous will again return to the *Olam Haba*, for this was their true reward. Some modern interpreters of Maimonides ask themselves if that was truly his understanding; they propose that his belief in the resurrection was a concession for the masses, while his true view was that of the afterlife of incorporeal intelligences that have acquired theoretical knowledge in this life (Boyarin and Siegel 2007:243).

For Abraham bar Hiyya (1070-1136 or 1145), the intelligible soul was a “form” which continues to exist even after its separation from the body. In the case of the wise and righteous person, that soul would ascend to the upper world, attach itself to the pure high form, and forever enter into it. For the wise and wicked person, that soul would arrive at the world of the spheres where it would revolve under the circle of the sun, whose heat would be for it a perpetually scorching fire. As for the ignorant but righteous person, that soul would return a second and third time to bodies until it would acquire wisdom and be able to ascend. The fourth case was that of the ignorant and wicked person, that soul would die the death of an animal (Pines 2007:37).

The Haskalah (The Jewish Enlightenment)

The Jewish Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th Centuries, known as the *Haskalah*, saw some proponents tackling the issues of death and the immortality of the soul. One of the most outstanding was Moses Mendelssohn, who produced the work, *Phaedon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* (Phaedon or On the Immortality of the Soul), published in 1767. Following Plato's *Phaedo*, Mendelssohn defended the belief of the immortality of the soul from the perspective of the rationality of modern times. He rejected the theory that the soul, after death, enters into an inanimate state similar to sleep. For Mendelssohn, all rational beings were destined to increase their perfection. It was for this reason that the world was created, and it is impossible that these beings, after their struggle to perfect themselves in this world, would have their efforts frustrated in the World to Come. Hence, it was possible and necessary that the human desire for this eternal bliss, implanted in the human being by God himself, should be fulfilled, regardless of any setback or obstacle to it (Bergman 2007:19:38).

In the 19th Century, the idea of the immortality of the soul lost its importance and appeal among Jewish philosophers. An important representative of this phase is Moritz Lazarus in his work on the ethics of Judaism (*Ethik des Judentums*, 1898). He rejected or was not concerned with the idea of individual immortality of the soul. For him, more important than the destiny of the individual was the destiny of society; and true knowledge of a man's fate can be attained, not by the philosophy of the "I," but rather by the philosophy of the "We." For Lazarus, expanding on the sayings of Rabbi Jacob in *Pirkei Avot* 4:16-17, it is better to have a life of goodness in this world than an eternity of bliss in the World to Come (Bergman 2007:19:38).

From the Twentieth Century to the Present

The ideas of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the dead have been modified, reinterpreted, and in some circles even abandoned by some Jewish thinkers and modern religious movements (Sigal 1988:235).

For Ahad Ha'Am (1856-1927), the founder of "cultural Zionism" and one of the foremost pre-state Zionist thinkers, belief in the immortality of the soul was a sign of weakness: people who lacked the courage to face death looked for a "future" after it. He ridiculed belief in the World to Come and the immortality of the soul. To him, such beliefs were a "sickness of the spirit" (Bergmann 2007:38).

Hermann Cohen, in his *Religion der Vernunft* ("Religion of Reason") (1918), spoke of the immortality of the soul as applying to communities as a whole, instead of the individual. A community never dies but enjoys an eternal continuation in history. The existence of the individual soul is perpetuated through this history and becomes a reality only through the continued existence of the community. True immortality of the soul is the perpetuation of the community's "spirit," understood as the obligation to implement the principles of truth and morality in this world (Bergman 2007:19:38).

Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983), an American Jewish writer and educator and the co-founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, was a theological naturalist who rejected all beliefs rooted in supernatural phenomenon such as the afterlife and the resurrection of the dead (Sigal 1988:235). For Kaplan, a person's salvation did not lie in the World to Come but rather in his self-realization in this world: "it lies in learning what to live for in the here and now" (Sculd 2014:159, 160). In his *Sabbath Prayer Book* published in 1945, he modified the wording of traditional Jewish prayers to reflect his convictions. For the second benediction of the *Amidah* prayer that praises God for resurrecting the dead, Kaplan proposed wording to praise God "who in love rememberest thy creatures unto life" (203).

The Reform movement in modern Judaism rejected the idea of the resurrection of the dead and accepted the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 clearly states that Reform Judaism rejects "as ideas not rooted in Judaism, the beliefs both in bodily resurrection and *Gehinnom*" (Boyarin and Siegel 2007:244; see Robinson 2008:192, 193; Gillman 2011:202-204, 230, 231).

While the rationalistic and humanistic perspectives became quite common in many branches of contemporary Judaism, the traditional doctrines concerning the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the dead still maintained their stronghold in Orthodox Judaism (Gillman 2011:211-213) and even gained renewed attention and support in postmodern Judaism. The Jewish Renewal movement, with its retreat center *Elat Chayyim* near Woodstock, NY, fostered a rebirth of Jewish interest in the issues of life after death, belief in the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, and even some issues of messianic resurrection of the dead (Salkin 2003:366; Gillman 2011:239, 240).

Among certain Jewish circles, a renewed interest in eschatology in the last decades of the 20th Century resulted in a renewed interest also in the doctrine of bodily resurrection. Contemporary Jewish scholars such as Will Herberg, Arthur A. Cohen, Michael Wyschogrod, and Neil Gillman; Reform Judaism rabbis Eugene Borowitz and Richard N. Levy; and Conservative Judaism rabbi Hershel Matt have all voiced and written about

their interest and belief in a bodily resurrection as a better understanding of God's final solution for the problem of death than the classical understanding of the immortality of the soul (Gillman 2011:215-239, 243-274).

Jewish Mysticism, the Kabbalah

Before concluding this brief survey of Jewish views concerning death, immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the dead, let us review the impact that ancient Jewish mysticism, known as *Kabbalah*, has had in modern times and its importance among the general Jewish population. As Neil Gillman has observed, this form of Jewish mystical thought had far more impact on the masses of believing Jews than the thinking of the Jewish philosophers (2011:173).

The roots of this Jewish form of esoterism and mysticism were already established by the beginning of the Common Era—the time of the birth of Christianity. Earlier Persian and Greek influences interplayed with the dynamics of Palestinian and Hellenistic Jewish sects of the latter Second Temple times, especially with Apocalyptic and Merkabah (throne/chariot of God) mysticisms. This mysticism then developed through the centuries, producing esoteric and mystical literature at the same time the *Talmud* and the *Midrashim* were being composed. Such a development was especially notable among the Hasidic (“pious”) milieu of Jews in Europe and Egypt. It took a strong foothold in Provence in the southern region of France in the 12th Century, and especially in Spain from the 13th Century and onward. After the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain by the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, the *Kabbalistic* center moved to Safed, in the Muslim-controlled Galilee region in the Holy Land. From there, it radiated out to many countries of the Jewish Diaspora, from northern Africa to Oriental Europe (Poland, Lithuania, etc.) and Russia. It became quite influential among the Hasidic movements of Central and Oriental Europe during the 18th and 19th Centuries. These Hasidic movements, and more specifically the Chabad, popularized some of the teachings of *Kabbalah* world-wide during the 20th Century, having a profound impact on the Jewish world and even among non-Jewish circles (see Scholem 2007:11:677-681; Garb 2007:11:677-681).

Kabbalists believe in the pre-existence of the soul, that the body serves as the soul's outer cloak, and that the soul survives the body after death. They also believe in the resurrection of the body as a firm Jewish doctrine established in the Bible and in Jewish Oral Tradition. However, their most distinctive contribution to the development of afterlife beliefs in Judaism is the *Kabbalist* central doctrine of metempsychosis: the transmigration/reincarnation of the soul (the Hebrew term used is *gilgul*, “revolving”).

They understand the three Hebrew terms that define the human being—*nefesh*, *neshamah* and *ruach*—as referring to three distinct parts of the soul. *Nefesh* is understood as life itself, the vital part of the being; *neshamah* is the part of the soul related to mystical cognition; while *ruach* is the part of the soul related to ethical discrimination. In this understanding, the soul could undergo multiple reincarnations until it becomes perfect through the observance of the *mitsvot* (commandments) of God. Then it could achieve resurrection in the last body in which it was incarnated. This belief also understands innocent suffering in one's life as a way of purification of the soul from sins committed in a previous life. The incarnated human soul that keeps the *mitsvot* and perfects itself also helps to repair (*tikkun*) God's Creation, preparing the world for redemption at the coming of the Messiah. Such a perfected soul can even repair God's original unity that was shattered at Creation. For *Kabbalists*, God is a transcendent God: he is above and distinct from Creation, but he is also immanent—he exists within Creation. In *Kabbalistic* thought, these two aspects of God's own nature need to be restored to their original unity that existed before the Creation (Scholem 2007:652-659; Gillman 2011:176-188).

Cultic and Mortuary Practices

Throughout time, the distinctive Jewish beliefs concerning the state of the dead, bodily resurrection, and the immortality of the soul had a powerful influence on Jewish cultic worship and mortuary practices. These practices reflect the differing answers, from biblical times to the present, given to the problem of death and the hereafter, and the theology behind those answers. The variations in these practices can be articulated around two major perspectives: (1) the resurrection of the dead, and (2) the immortality of the soul.

The Resurrection of the Dead

First I will examine the *Amidah* (Standing) prayer that is at the very core of every Jewish prayer service. Also called the *Shemoneh Esrei* (The Eighteen) prayer, or in the *Talmud*, *Ha-Tefillah* (The Prayer, par excellence), this is a very ancient prayer. One Jewish tradition dates its composition back to the 5th Century BCE, to the 120 Men of the Great Assembly (*Talmud*, *Megillah* 17b). Another tradition ascribes its arrangement to Rabban Gamaliel in Yavneh, after the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem that occurred in the year 70 CE (*Talmud*, *Berachot* 28b). Scholarly opinions concerning its origin span between these two traditions (Ehrlich 2007: 2:72-73; Donin 1991:69).

Originally composed of 18 benedictions (later it became 19), it is a congregational prayer recited individually by the worshiper in every worship service, standing in silence, moving only the lips, while facing the direction of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. On the day of *Shabbat* and the festival days it has only seven benedictions, with the exception of the *Musaf* (additional) service of *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year) when the number is nine benedictions. If there is a *minyan* (a quorum of at least ten male adults) attending the service, the worship leader will repeat the *Amidah* aloud, making some additions to it. During regular weekdays it is recited in the three daily services (morning, afternoon, and evening). On *Shabbat* and festival days, in addition to being recited in the prayer portion of the regular service, it is repeated in the *Musaf* service. On *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), it is recited a fifth time, during the *Ne'ilah* (Concluding Prayer) (Ehrlich 2007:72; Donin 1991:71, 72, 109-122).

The first benediction of the *Amidah* praises God as the Faithful, Powerful, and Awesome God, the God of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a Good God that remembers his promises to them, the One who helps and redeems, the One who is the Shield of Abraham. The second benediction focuses on the power of God to resurrect the dead, stating:

“You are powerful forever, O Lord;
 One who resurrects the dead are You, great to save.
 Sustain the living with mercy, resurrect the dead with great compassion,
 support the falling, heal the sick, free the bound,
 and keep Your faithfulness to those that sleep in the dust.
 Who is like You, O Lord of mighty acts?
 Who resembles You, O King, who kills and resurrects,
 and brings forth salvation?
 Faithful are You to resurrect the dead!
 Blessed are You, O Lord, who resurrects the dead!” (author’s translation).

The *Amidah* clearly points to the hope of the resurrection of the dead as God’s solution for the problem of death, and powerfully extols him for this hope. This prayer is strong evidence of the importance and centrality of this doctrine for early Jewish theological thought (Donin 1991:79, 80).

A second important example is the thirteenth statement of the Thirteen Principles of the Jewish Faith by Maimonides of the 12th Century. There are other lists of principles of faith beside that of Maimonides, such as those of the *Karaite* Judah Hadassi (mid-12th Century); David ben Samuel Kokhavi (13th Century); Hasdai Crescas (15th Century); Joseph Albo (15th Century); Elijah Delmedigo (15th Century); and Isaac Abarbanel (late 15th Century) (Altmann 2007:2:529-531). The principles proposed

by Maimonides prevailed over these other lists and became the “official” statement that embodied the Jewish faith. It comes as an appendix to the regular morning prayer service in Askhenazi (Jews in Germany and central and northern Europe) prayer books. A poetic version of Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles appeared as the *Yigdal* hymn (ca. 1300) that has been adopted in practically all Jewish cultic rites (530). The thirteenth principle affirms: “I believe in perfect faith that there will be a resurrection of the dead in the time pleased by the Creator, blessed be his Name and his Memory forever and ever” (Fridlin 1997:120, author’s translation).

The final line of the *Yigdal* hymn declares: *Metim yechieh ‘El berov chasdo, baruch ‘adei-‘ad Shem tehilato* (24) (“The dead ones God will resurrect by his great mercy, blessed forever be his praised Name”; author’s translation).

A third example is another well-known Jewish liturgical hymn, the much beloved *Adon Olam* (“Lord of the Universe”). It is attributed to Solomon ibn Gabirol (11th Century), but it may be much older, with its origin in Babylonia. It is sung during the initial part of the morning prayer service and also during the conclusion of the evening prayers. On *Shabbat* and festival days it appears as part of the *Musaf* (additional service) and during *Kol Nidrei* (the opening service on the eve of *Yom Kippur*). *Adon Olam* is a very popular song, chanted on many occasions in the Jewish world (Herzog 2007:1:414, 415). The final strophe declares: “*Beyado ‘afqid ruchi be’et ‘ishan ve’a’irah* (“In his hand I depose my spirit, in the moment of rest, but I will wake up”), *Ve’im ruchi geviyati YHWH li velo’ ‘ira* (“And with my spirit, my body, the Lord is with me, I will not fear”) (author’s translation).

The wording of this final strophe seems to speak not so much of the daily regular sleep, but rather of the final sleep, the sleep of death (see Borowitz and Schwartz 2010:182, 183).³ This hymn begins by extolling God as the Creator, the Eternal God that always existed in eternity, the only One, for there is no other like him. He is the living Redeemer, the Protector in difficult times, and one’s Portion in this life; the One to Whom one can surrender one’s life (spirit) and one’s body without fear, for he/she will raise up, for he, God, is with him/her and he/she should not fear.

A fourth example is the *Kaddish*, a doxology prayer that is recited at the close of individual sections of regular prayer services in the synagogue. There are four main types of *Kaddish*: (1) the Complete *Kaddish*, containing the entire text, that is usually recited by the worship leader after the *Amidah* prayer; (2) the Half *Kaddish* that excludes some final verses of the prayer; (3) the *Kaddish de-Rabbanan* (the *Kaddish* of the Scholars/Masters) that replaces a part of the prayer with a request for God’s blessings upon teachers and disciples who study the Torah—in one part of the prayer service on Friday night and at the end of the early morning service it is

recited by mourners after communal study; (4) the Mourners' *Kaddish*, that contains basically the full text of the prayer with the exception of one line, and is recited by the close relatives of a deceased person at the end of the prayer service, after the concluding *Aleinu* prayer. The Mourners' *Kaddish* is recited while standing with one's face turned toward Jerusalem; in some communities only the mourners stand for this recital of the *Kaddish*. Its apparent origin is quite old, probably dating previous to the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE, since it does not have any reference to such a momentous event (Avenary 2007:11:695, 696). The custom of mourners reciting the *Kaddish* seems to have begun in the 13th Century CE in Germany, in the midst of a severe persecution by the Crusaders. The *Kaddish* is recited at the funeral ceremony, and the mourner recites it daily for a period of eleven months after the death of a close relative. It is recited as well on the *Yahrzeit* (anniversary) of the death of the beloved kin. It is so connected with the experience of mourning for the deceased that it became popularly known as the "prayer for the dead" (696, 697).

What is surprising about the *Kaddish* is that nowhere in the prayer is there a reference to the dead. No request is made on their behalf, and there is not even an allusion to the mourning experience. What the prayer specifically does is sanctify and exalt God as the Creator and King and praises his Name, and there is a request for the coming of the Kingdom of God. In the Sephardic version there is an added request for Redemption and for the soon advent of the Messiah. In this request, a petition is made that this coming would happen in the days of the lifetime of the ones praying. At the end of the prayer, there is also a request for a peaceful and blessed life for the worshipers and for the House of Israel (Donin 1991:216-222).

Why then did this prayer become identified with mourners and traditionally the most well-known prayer in reference to the dead? Various answers have been given to this question: (1) it is an expression of submission and acceptance of the will of God and his Sovereignty, even in face of the worst evil in human experience—the loss of a beloved one; (2) it is an indirect prayer in favor of the soul of the dead, so that mourners could free the soul of their relative from hell (reference is here made to a late *haggadah* ("story") in *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, usually dated to the 10th Century, that reports how Rabbi Akiva helped to rescue the soul of a father from hell by teaching the small son of the deceased to recite the *Kaddish* in public; (Avenary 2007:696; Donin 1991:222, 223); (3) there are those, however, who propose that it became the prayer of mourners because of its eschatological emphasis on the final coming of Redemption through the Messiah, and the correlated hope for the resurrection of the dead. Earlier versions of the *Kaddish* did have a reference to the resurrection in its messianic section at the beginning (Avenary 2007:696;

Gillman 2011:142). This form of the *Kaddish* remains today in the “Burial *Kaddish*” that is recited at the graveside immediately following the burial. It begins with: “May His great Name be exalted and sanctified [Amen], in the world that will be renewed, and where He will resuscitate the dead and raise them to eternal life.”⁴

A fifth example can be seen in the very short morning prayer, *Modeh Ani* (“I Give Thanks”) that religious Jews are supposed to recite right after they wake up: “*Modeh* [woman: *Modah*] *’ani lefanecha Melech chay veqayyam* “I give thanks before You, living and eternal King” *Shehechezarta bi nishmati bechemlah, rabah ’emunatecha*, “that returned my soul in me with compassion, great is Your faithfulness” (author’s translation).

This prayer is of late origin, probably composed in the 17th Century, as it was first published in a prayer book in 1675 (*Modeh Ani* 2007:14:406). The idea seems to be that of the existence of the soul as a separate entity that can leave and return to the body. However, it also seems that the view here is close to the *Talmudic* idea that both soul and body must coexist together, not as separate entities (Bronner 2015:100). Therefore, awakening every morning becomes a daily symbol of the final awakening at the resurrection (Gillmann 2011:141, 142, 212).

A last example appears in the custom of some Jewish individuals or groups in the Diaspora of placing a small bag of earth from Israel close to the head of the deceased. This practice is connected with the idea of the bodily resurrection, since Jewish Orthodoxy believes that those buried in the earth of the land of Israel will be the first to be revived in the resurrection at the coming of the Messiah. However, this custom is also related to the search for ways of atonement for the dead, since the *Talmud* speaks of the atoning powers of the soil of the land of Israel (*Ketubbot*, 111a) (Robinson 2008:188; Meyers 1971:99-105).

The Immortality of the Soul

It should first be noted that Judaism assigns great value to human life, which is to be cherished and preserved as long as possible. The dying person (called *goses*) should not be left alone, some member the family or relatives and friends should be present to the very end. Religious Jews usually recite the *Viduy* (a prayer of confession of sins) as a deathbed confession. The moribund may also address God, asking that their death serve as atonement for the sins of their life. The dying person will also try to pronounce the *Shema’* (Deut 6:4—the central statement of Jewish faith in God as the God of Israel and as One God) as his/her last words. Because Judaism sees life as a gift from God, Jewish law forbids euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. One who commits suicide is abhorred as one

who denied the life given to them by God. Such a person cannot be buried in a Jewish cemetery with full funeral rites, with such a deed becoming a stigma to the family (Robinson 2008:184, 185).

When a person dies, his/her eyes and mouth are closed, usually by the firstborn son. The body is covered with a sheet and is not left alone until the burial. Those present with the body, the *Shomer* (Guard), usually read various Psalms. Among Orthodox Jews, the immediate family will tear their clothing, called *K'riah* (tearing), and they will wear the torn garments for the seven-day period of mourning known as *Shivah* (seven). Liberal Jews usually wear a torn, small black ribbon on the lapel (187).

Practices and customs based on the belief of the immortality of the soul can be seen in many details related to Jewish burial and mourning rites. For example, in an organized Jewish community, the *Chevrah Kadishah* (Holy Society), the Jewish Mortuary Society composed of volunteers, will come to prepare the body for burial. They wash the body in warm water, and cut the hair and nails. After this first washing, they then perform the *Taharah* (purification) ritual of the dead body, using a specified measure of water (around twenty-four quarts). They pour this water over the body as a symbolic purification of a person passing from one state to another, from life to death. For just as a human being enters life from the waters of the womb, he or she departs life in the waters of the *Taharah* (Dosick 2009:304). The body is then wrapped in a white linen shroud. Men will also be wrapped in their *tallit* (prayer shawl) with the *tsitsit* (fringes) having been cut off, for the dead cannot anymore fulfill God's commandments that are represented by the *tsitsit* on a *tallit* (Robinson 2008:187, 188). The white burial shrouds are called *tachrichin*, and their pure white color is symbolic of the purity of the soul. Because the shrouds are the same for all people, rich or poor, they represent the uniformity and equality of everyone in death (Dosick 2009:304, 305).

An observant Jew will generally be buried just wrapped in the white shroud. But if a country requires that a dead person be buried in a casket, this is done using a simple wooden box, made without nails, as better built caskets would delay the return of the body to the earth (Robinson 2008:188). The body is honored as the holy vessel that contained the soul, so it must be treated with the utmost reverence. Traditional Judaism requires burial in the ground (Dosick 2009:303). Jewish burial practices reject embalming, for this delays the return of the body to the dust of the earth; above-ground burials are also banned, for this renders impossible the return of the body to the earth. Cremation of the body is also abhorred as a pagan practice that destroys the body and disregards the creation of the human body in the image of God (Robinson 2008:188; Dosick 2009:303).

It is a Jewish custom to bury the dead person within twenty-four hours of death, if possible, or at least within forty-eight hours. The funeral is held this soon after death to emphasize Jewish belief that the soul, wherein is the spark of life, immediately returns to God who gave it. So also, the body that has been the earthly abode of the soul should immediately be returned to the dust. It should not be the object of mournful veneration, for it was only the container-dwelling of the soul (Dosick 2009:303). However burial can be delayed in consideration of the time needed for relatives to come and participate.

There are no burials on *Shabbat* or festival days. It is usual to hold a service before burial, with a *hesped* (eulogy) given by a rabbi or by close individuals who knew the deceased (306). Then the body is escorted to the graveyard, with close relatives and friends carrying it or accompanying it on foot at least part of the way into the cemetery. At the graveside, after the body is deposited in the grave, each person present will place three shovelfuls of dirt into the grave, starting with the immediate family. One person does this and then inserts the shovel into the ground, then the next person comes and does the same. The *Kaddish* and the prayer 'El Maleh Rachamim ("God Full of Mercies") are recited at the graveside after burial. It is also a custom among observant Jews to wash their hands before leaving the cemetery because of the impurity implied in contact with a dead body or even by walking in a cemetery (Robinson 2008:187-189).

Until the burial, everything was focused on honoring the deceased. Now Jewish practices and customs turn to comforting the mourners. From the moment of death until the burial, the mourners were in *Aninut* ("delicate"—a time of intense grief), the first stage of the mourning process. After the burial, the participants return to the home of the deceased's family (189). Immediately on returning from the cemetery, the period of *Shivah* (seven days of mourning after the burial) begins. A candle, known as the *shivah* candle, is lit in the home. Jewish tradition sees Proverbs 20:27 as teaching that "the candle [the flame, the light, the spirit] of God is the soul of humankind." The *shivah* candle is therefore seen as a symbol of the soul of the deceased (Dosick 2009:308). After the lighting of the candle, a small meal that has been prepared by friends of the mourning family is served, usually consisting of bread and hard-boiled eggs. Or chickpeas and bagels may be served, for like eggs they are circular, representing the never-ending cycle of life, death, and life. This begins the second stage of the mourning process, the time of *Avelut* (mourning) that runs concurrent with the *Shivah* and lasts seven days (307).

In an observant home, mirrors will be covered, removed, or turned to the wall. Differing reasons have been given for this practice. Some say that its intention is to avoid human vanity in the face of death. Others

understand it as a manifestation of the fear that the projection of the human image could be snatched by the spirit of the recently deceased. Some believe that this custom is based on the superstition that the Angel of Death has already visited the household, and if the mourner sees the “reflection” of the angel in the mirror, he may also die. During *Shivah*, the mourners do not wear leather shoes, and they sit on low stools or on the floor. This is symbolic of “being brought low” in grief, as well as a symbol of submission to the will of God, and it recalls ancient days when mourners would sit on the ground. The mourners do not shave, bathe, go to work, or study the Torah (except for passages related to mourning). They do not engage in conjugal relations, extend greetings, get haircuts, do their laundry, or wear freshly laundered clothes. This is the time when the community comes to express their condolences, tell their remembrances of the departed one, and bring food for the mourners (Robinson 2008:189, 190; Dosick 2009:309).

On the first day of mourning, visitation is usually limited to family and close friends. It is a *mitzvah* (good deed) to help form a *minyan* (10 male adults) at the home of mourners so that *Kaddish* can be recited. The *Shivah* is usually suspended during *Shabbat*, for the joy of the Sabbath takes precedence over mourning, and the mourners attend religious services at the synagogue. *Shivah* ends on the seventh day after death; a friend goes to the house of the mourners, greets them and escorts them out for the first time in a week (Robinson 2008:190).

The mourning period now enters into a third phase called *Sheloshim* (thirty) when restrictions are reduced. This period of twenty-three days following the *Shivah*, along with the previous seven days, total a period of thirty days of mourning (Dosick 2009:310). During these thirty days men do not shave, and the mourners do not have their hair cut. The mourning for spouses, children, and siblings officially ends after thirty days. The mourning for a parent continues for eleven months and the mourners will not shave or cut their hair until friends “urge” them to do so. During *Sheloshim* the mourners do not attend festive meetings. In the case of mourning for a parent, this will continue for eleven months. During this period of mourning, priority is given during regular services in the synagogue for mourners to lead out or have an *Aliyah* (reading of the Torah). In Israel, the mourner visits the deceased’s grave after the end of *Sheloshim*; outside of Israel, this graveside visit usually occurs one year after the death (Robinson 2008:191).

The mourners recite *Kaddish* daily for eleven months after the death of a beloved one. The reason for eleven months rather than twelve, according to a Jewish legend, is that a soul that does not have enough of its own merit to enter heaven has one year to “earn” eternity. Each time a mourner

recites *Kaddish* for the deceased, this soul earns points in its heavenly quest. The legend also says that no person could be so bad that he or she would need a full year of *Kaddish* points (Dosick 2009:307).

Not only the daily recitation of the *Kaddish*, but many other religious and charitable acts done by the mourners in memory of their beloved deceased are seen by religious Jews as ways to atone for the sins of the departed one. Dedication to the study of Torah and other religious literature, leading the worship service at the synagogue, participation in an *Aliyah* to read the Torah, the giving of alms to charity—all these actions are considered ways of atoning for the soul of the deceased. This atonement is believed to help the soul to avoid *Gehinnom* (Hell) and to ascend to higher levels in Heaven (see Hebel 2010—a book that contains religious and charitable actions that can be done to help atone for the soul of the deceased kin).

A year after the death, the mourners go to the cemetery for the “Unveiling the Tombstone” at the graveyard—in Israel this is done after thirty days. The name of the deceased and the dates of his/her birth and death have been carved onto the tombstone. At the top of the stone the letters “peh” “nun” for *poh nitman* (here lies buried), or *poh nkbar* (here is interred) often appear. At the bottom of the stone the letters “tav,” “nun,” “tsade,” “bet,” “hay,” standing for the phrase *T’hi nishmato [nishmatah] tsurrah b’tsror hachayim* (“May his [her] soul be bound in the bond of life”), are often carved. There is no set ceremony, but the tombstone will be covered with a white linen cloth; Psalm 23, *El Maleh Rachamim*, and *Kaddish* are recited; a eulogy to the deceased is given; and at a certain moment in the ceremony the tombstone is unveiled (Robinson 2008:191, 192; Dosick 2009:310).

Each year, the anniversary of the death of the beloved one is commemorated in a practice called *Yahrzeit* (“time of the year” in Yiddish, a Jewish dialect of German). The first-year *Yahrzeit* is commemorated on the anniversary of the day of the funeral; from then on, it is observed on the anniversary of the day of death (311). At this time, it is particularly commendable for family members of the deceased to lead the synagogue service, take *Aliyah* (read a passage of the Torah), and recite *Kaddish*. It is also traditional to light a memorial candle in the home, a *Yahrzeit* candle that burns for twenty-four hours. This candle, as was the *shivaah* candle, is symbolic of the soul and the spirit of the deceased. If possible, one should also visit the grave on the day of *Yahrzeit* (311). Some Ashkenazi Jews also fast on the day of *Yahrzeit* for a parent or grandparent (Robinson 2008:192). By commemorating the anniversary of the death of the beloved one, instead of his birthday, Judaism celebrates a life fulfilled (Dosick 2009:311).

Another very important example of the impact of the belief of the immortality of the soul and the Jewish attitude toward the deceased ancestor is *Yizkor*, memorial prayers that are recited five times in the Jewish liturgical year. On *Yom Kippur*, and on the last days of the three annual pilgrimage festivals (Feast of Tabernacles [*Succot*], Passover [*Pesach*], and Pentecost [*Shaavuot*]), the entire community comes together in a special section of the service in memory of all its deceased people. Memorial candles are lit in the synagogue in memory of the deceased, whose names are often read aloud. Specific prayers are inserted into the morning service of the three Pilgrim feasts, and in the morning and afternoon services of *Yom Kippur*. These include both communal prayers and individual prayers paying tribute to the memory of the deceased. In recent decades, prayers remembering those who perished in the Holocaust and those who died defending the State of Israel have been added to the *Yizkor* service in many synagogues (312).

In these prayers, when referring specifically to someone who is deceased, his/her name will be pronounced, followed by the phrase *'alav hashalom* ("on him [may there be] peace") for a man, and *'aleha hashalom* ("on her [may there be] peace") for a woman. In a written list, the name of the deceased person is followed by the Hebrew letters "ayin" and "hay," standing for the two phrases above. Another custom is to write the Hebrew letters "zayin" and "lamed" after the name of the deceased, standing for the phrases *zichrono levracha* ("[May] his memory [be] for a blessing") for a man, and *zechronah levracha* ("[May] her memory [be] for a blessing") for a woman. These phrases are used to distinguish the name of a deceased person from those who are living, and it is a way to demonstrate reverence, respect and affection for the beloved ones who have died (312).

The first part of the synagogue *Yizkor* service is comprised of individual prayers, during which the congregants pray in favor of their deceased parents (father or mother). The second part includes communal prayers in favor of the victims of the Holocaust and the deceased soldiers of the State of Israel. The *Yizkor* service concludes with the recitation of the prayer *'Av haRachamim* ("Merciful Father") and *'Ashray* ("Blessed are the Ones"), a recitation of the first verse of Psalm 84 and Psalm 114, followed by the entirety of Psalm 145, and concluded by the final verse of Psalm 115 (see Fridlin 1997:220-226). During the recital of the first individual prayers, those whose parents are yet alive and those who lost their parent(s) within the last year may leave the synagogue and not participate in this part of the service. They are invited, however, to return for the communal section to pray for the victims of the Holocaust and the deceased soldiers of Israel (220).

The individual section is composed of two prayers: The first prayer is a direct request to God that he may *Yizkor* (remember) one's deceased father or mother, whose soul has departed to the divine realm. In memory of the beloved deceased, the praying ones commit themselves to the giving of alms for the sake of the deceased, so that these souls may be connected to the flowing River of Life, together with the souls of patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel, and with the souls of all the righteous ones that are in the heavenly Garden of Eden (220, 221).

The second prayer is the *'El Maleh Rachamim* ("God Full of Mercies") that is also recited at the burial service along with the *Kaddish*. In this prayer, the names of the deceased father and mother are again mentioned, and one pleads with God that the soul of his/her beloved deceased may enjoy a peaceful rest under the wings of the Divine Presence and on the divine steps where the holy ones and the saints shine like the glow of the Firmament. For the sake of the deceased, the mourner again commits himself/herself to give alms in the memory of the beloved deceased. The prayer requests that the soul of the beloved one may rest in the heavenly Garden of Eden, and that the Merciful One may protect it under his Wings for eternity and connect it to the stream of life. It is proclaimed that the Eternal God is the deceased's heritage, and the prayer ends with the final request that the mourner's father or mother may rest in peace in the grave (220, 221).

Then follows the communal section of the *Yizkor* service. In many synagogues, a prayer in favor of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust is inserted into the service, asking that God will remember them, their suffering, their faithfulness, and the tragedy they went through. The prayer requests that God will remember these victims, even though they were not afforded the opportunity to be buried properly in a Jewish grave. It is also requested that God take vengeance upon the perpetrators of such crimes, avenging thereby the blood of his children according to the biblical promises (222).

For those whose parent or family member died as a victim of the Holocaust, two individual prayers (*Yizkor* and *'El Maleh Rachamim*) are recited with an insertion mentioning that these beloved ones were victims of the atrocities of the Holocaust. One specific addition is quite interesting: at the end of *'El Maleh Rachamim*, instead of asking that they may rest in peace in their grave (since they did not have a proper grave and most of them were burned to ashes), there is the request that they may rise up (resurrect) at the end of time (223).

In many synagogues there then follows the recital of the *Yizkor* and *'El Maleh Rachamim* prayers for the sake of the soldiers who died in defense of the State of Israel, but there is no reference to giving meritorious alms

on their account. The bravery and unselfish sacrifice of these soldiers are the merit upon which the praying one requests God's favor for their souls.

The two final prayers, *'Av haRachamim* and *'Ashray*, exalt God as a Merciful God who remembers his children with mercy, avenges the blood of the innocent, and judges with justice. He takes care of the afflicted with his kindness. He raises the fallen ones, provides for the needy, is near to all who invoke his Name and saves them. The service closes with the final words of Psalm 145:20-21 ("The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless His holy name forever and ever") and Psalm 115:18 ("But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord!") (225, 226).

Conclusion: Opportunities and Challenges in Mission

Adventist mission to the Jewish people must face the complex situation of Jewish beliefs and practices related to death, the state of a dead person, and the hereafter. The belief in the immortality of the soul became the predominant one in Judaism for centuries. Such a belief brings in many complications that impact one's understanding of God, the Bible, and the status of people in this world and the hereafter, questions regarding salvation and atonement for sins, etc. However, there is much in Jewish liturgy, teaching, and practices that preserve the early biblical view on the state of the dead and its teaching of the hope of resurrection at the end of time.

When approaching a Jewish person, or a Jewish community on these topics, emphasis should first be given to the biblical teachings on these subjects. Second, the rabbinic teachings that are based on the biblical perspective should also be emphasized. Furthermore, the biblical view concerning the hope for the resurrection of the dead can be further substantiated by the study of this view in well-known Jewish prayers such as the *Amidah*, the *Kaddish*, and the morning prayer *Modeh 'Ani*, as well as in the beloved hymn *Adon Olam* that show reminiscences of this Jewish hope. One should further recall that the hope in the resurrection is one of the Thirteen Principles of the Jewish Faith as stated by Maimonides, and this principle of faith is also expressed in the hymn *Yigdal*.

The study of the biblical belief of the resurrection can also be a way to develop and affirm a proper understanding of the biblical message concerning atonement for sins. Such a study can help a Jewish person understand that there is nothing that a living person can do to improve the status of their beloved deceased, for redemption and atonement are deeds of God and not of man. The way for atonement is taught in the ritual of the sanctuary, and this points to salvation by God's grace and by the merits,

death, and ministry of the Messiah in the Heavenly Sanctuary. The resurrection of the dead is part of this way of redemption, for it depends totally on God and is another evidence of God's grace. Life after death is totally dependent on God's grace, for he alone is able to change the situation of a dead person and bring him/her back to life through his power to resurrect the dead.

One can also promote the understanding that the resurrection of the dead does justice to the biblical theology of Creation. Resurrection is the only belief that corresponds to the biblical teaching about the nature of man, confirming the way the Bible reports that he was created by God. It points out his mortality, his dependence on God for life and the fact that God is the only One who has life in himself. It also emphasizes the moral character of humanity and their freewill—the human responsibility for their future in life. The resurrection of the dead corresponds to the biblical narrative of sin, the Fall as the reason for death, and the way outlined for redemption. The idea of the immortality of the soul, on the other hand, aligns itself with the contradictory statements of the Serpent that man, even after sin, would never die and would have the opportunity to become like God.

A very delicate situation always manifests itself in the contextualized missiological approach to the Jewish people as they come to participate with us in our worship on *Yom Kippur* and the other three annual pilgrimage festivals. The Jewish visitor or attendee that is taking an interest in the Adventist message will usually anticipate the *Yizkor* service. This portion of the service is the most expected part of the liturgy among the majority of Jews today. Some even go to the synagogue on these specific dates just to recite the *Yizkor* for their beloved that has passed away. To completely ignore it is very offensive and can break the feeble connection the Jewish person is establishing with us. To use the traditional prayers of *Yizkor* in our service without much concern would be an unfaithful attitude toward Adventist fundamental beliefs, to our mission of restoration of biblical truth, even to God and his teachings in the Bible.

One possible solution is to replace most of the *Yizkor* prayers (specifically those that are built on the idea of the immortality of the soul) with biblical prayers and the recital of Bible texts that speak of the resurrection of the dead and the final reunion with the deceased in the soon coming Kingdom of Heaven. The lighting of memorial candles during the service is another complex issue to be dealt with. These could be seen as representing the memory of the beloved ones who have departed, and one could argue that it should be practiced with this meaning. However, since these are usually considered as a symbol of the soul of the deceased ones, such a practice could be very confusing for our community members and

the visitors who are studying with us. So even if it could be quite a shock for our Jewish visitors that we do not light memorial candles on such occasions and do not recite all the traditional *Yizkor* liturgy, this could become a way to open a respectful dialogue concerning the biblical view of the state of the dead and the hope of the resurrection.

Special wisdom must also be exercised with those who are going through the process of actively mourning the recent loss of a beloved one. A Jewish person, even in an advanced stage of interest in the Adventist message, would normally prefer the assistance of the regular Jewish mortuary services and to bury the deceased in a Jewish cemetery. This is a precious time to approach this person with unbiased and true friendship, including one's presence during the funerary services and subsequent mourning periods. Such supportive actions and a friendly, non-judgmental attitude may later open the door for much dialogue about death, the state of the dead, and the biblical hope of the resurrection.

Belief in the immortality of the soul continues to be predominant in contemporary Judaism. In present Jewish society there is also much influence from *Kabbalah* with its view not only on the immortality of the soul but also reincarnation and transmigration of the soul. However, in many branches of today's Judaism there are signs of an important rediscovery of the biblical hope of the resurrection. Perhaps a wise approach by Adventists in their outreach to Jewish people can help strengthen this phenomenon and encourage many Jews to prepare themselves for the biblical hope of the soon coming of the Messiah and then enjoy the much desired reunion with their resurrected beloved ones.

Endnotes

¹ Jewish world population (derived from synagogue and Jewish institutions membership) was calculated in 2018 as including approximately 15 million people. This population is widely dispersed among the different continents, with Asia having almost 7 million (with 6.7 million in Israel), followed by the Americas with 6.5 million (5.7 million in the United States), then Europe and Russia with 1.4 million (more than 450 thousand in France), Oceania with 121 thousand (including almost 115 thousand in Australia), and Africa with 73.6 thousand (around 67 thousand in South Africa). See “Vital Statistics: Jewish Population of the World (1882-Present),” Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-population-of-the-world> (accessed September 4, 2019).

² Ben-Sira’s attack appears in Ecclesiasticus 30:18: “Good things lavished on a closed mouth are like food offerings put on a grave.” The Book of Jubilees 22:16-17 presents the following admonition of Abraham to Jacob: “And you also, my son, Jacob, remember my words, and keep the commandments of Abraham, your father. Separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs... They slaughter their sacrifices to the dead, and to demons they bow down. And they eat in the tombs. And all their deeds are worthless and vain.” See Harry Rabinowicz, “Death,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (2007), 5:511.

³ The Hebrew word *geviyah* that appears in the final line may also refer to a dead body, a corpse, see Fabry 1977:2:433-438.

⁴ Chevra Kadisha Mortuary, N.d. *Prayers to be Said at Funerals and Visiting Gravesites of Beloved Ones* (Los Angeles: Chevra Kadisha), 11; “The Graveside Kaddish,” Chabad.org, (accessed September 11, 2019). https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/387409/jewish/The-Graveside-Kaddish.htm.

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Reinaldo W. Siqueira PhD is Dean of the School of Theology of UNASP in Brazil and the Assistant Director of the World Jewish Adventist Friendship Center for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He is married to Debora and they have two young adult sons, Matheus and Joao Andre.