



## ***Where Are You?***

**T**he journey through life can sometimes resemble a trek through the forest; the deeper you go the darker it gets. With each passing day the disappointment deepens and the frustration only grows as problems compound and multiply. For the many of us who are plagued by financial setbacks, personal heartache and woe, we tragically standby and watch as our youthful dreams become swallowed-up in the heart of our darkest fears. Bewildered and confused we lose our way in life, because we have lost touch with ourselves by becoming out of touch with G-d. A person can pass through life and not take a solitary moment to reflect

on where he is and what his purpose is in this world. Don't let this be your tragic fate; stop and ask yourself, "**Where am I**"? Introspection and contemplation of life's ultimate purpose is the road that leads to G-d; it puts you back in touch with yourself, so you can never really veer that far or get too lost in life. Yet, somehow today's generation feels so pushed over the edge, rejected, and forgotten, that we no longer know how to meaningfully relate to G-d. Seeming so aloof and distant, we don't sense His relevant concern in our day to day affairs which as a result, has plunged us into a profound spiritual darkness. But, how did we lose our intimate connection with G-d? Where has all the mutual feeling and love gone? My dear friend, the reason G-d seems to dwell so far out of our hearts and minds is because we have pushed Him there, so to speak. And the yawning chasm separating us from our Creator is only widening, as society concerns itself more with pleasure-seeking and self-gratification, than by seeking Him out. Our decadent

culture so steeped in the worship of the self, has left no room for devoted service to Him. Behind all the fun and games, however, happiness eludes the troubled spirit of a generation that can't find meaning to the large, gaping emptiness in their lives. Desperate for relief and answers yet, they can't make heads or tails out of their problems because they have uprooted themselves from G-d Who lies at the heart of both their pain and salvation. So, the long and very painful exile of the Jewish People continues to plod on. If you are ever to escape the darkness, however, you must start somewhere. Yes, this may seem awkward and strange at first; nonetheless, begin the journey by asking yourself, "**Where am I?**" Follow the flow, by allowing the answer to one question to logically lead to the next. Unavoidably you will be pressed to find existential meaning in your own life – the answer to which could only be summed up in one word: G-d. Continue the search, by reaching beyond what the conscious mind perceives, uncovering layers of

unbeknownst meaning behind life's seemingly ordinariness – until encountering the ultimate life-giving force itself – which is G-d. However, as long as a person is only focused on the desires of his heart and drawn after the urgings of his passions, then all meaning and satisfaction in life will continue to elude him; he will become lost to despair. But by asking “**Where am I?**” a person is prompted to search for the meaning missing in his life and automatically he will return to G-d. He will also discover that paradoxically, the journey back to G-d is inherently meaningful and enlightening in itself, as is written, “Light excels darkness” (*Koheleth, Chap. 2, V. 13*) – meaning the deeper a person has fallen in the abyss by straying from G-d, the more insight he gains from the contrast he perceives upon his return. So my friend, take a moment out of your hectic schedule to stop and ask yourself, “**Where am I?**” Turn your thoughts to G-d and strike up a conversation with Him. Seclude yourself somewhere private and begin to open up

yourself to Him. You will be paradoxically surprised to discover that as you come closer to G-d, you will be coming closer to finding the real you. Just the mere utterance of, “**Where am I** in this world?” sets off a ripple effect that continuously echoes in your mind until you make the return to G-d with a full and sincere heart. Homiletically speaking, it is Man’s lifelong task to overcome his inclination and respond to that clarion call emanating from up on High at every moment, summoning him to return to G-d. In fact, the remarkable phenomenon of the “returnee” movement we are witnessing today is a result of a collective response on the part of the searching masses to the Heavens beckoning, “**Where are you?**” So, what are you waiting for? Be a part of it. Pay attention and heed its beck and call. Take the dare by responding to the challenge. Don’t be afraid, go ahead and ask yourself, “**Where am I?**” Begin your journey on the road back to G-d. Leave your sordid past behind; clean up your act from here on in. Granted you’re full

of deep shame over the promiscuous deeds of the past and you committed the worst transgressions, nonetheless, lend your ears to G-d's pleas of, "**Where are you?**" Then with a resolute heart respond to the challenge by replying, "Here I am, G-d, I'm ready to come back to You!" That's all it takes. G-d is ready to forgive you and accept you back, because He is concerned about your welfare and seeks your return. My dear friend, you may feel lost, but you can find yourself, by looking for G-d. Just take your focus off the mundane, and focus on what's really important in life, by heeding the call of the ages of, "**Where are you?**"

## 2.

**Y**our marriage is shaky and your spouse is contemplating divorce. You're thinking of selling your house because you can't meet the mortgage payments. The school administration has just informed you that your son may be learning disabled. After seventeen years of devoted service, your company is downsizing and is letting you go.

Panic begins to set in. Your heart begins to pound and your mind races, but you can't find relief. The whole world seems suddenly black and you don't want to live anymore. Hold on! Take a moment and ask yourself, **"Where am I?"** Naturally, when faced with problems and life's harsh dilemmas most of us become sad and depressed. Ask yourself however, of what value is it to dwell on the sadness and pain? Will it contribute anything constructive to the situation or will it just make things worse? Remember the adage, "whoever is drawn after suffering, suffering draws after him". The challenge in life is to transform all the darkness into light by turning all the pain and suffering into great joy. Man's ultimate purpose in this world is to come close to G-d, which is measured by his ability to maintain a continuous level of joy and contentment. The secret behind achieving and sustaining joy is not to lose perspective on life, by asking yourself, **"Where am I?"** This technique is particularly important since most of us are prone to pessimism. The

minute something goes wrong in life and we're faced with a problem or dilemma, we lose heart and begin to view our whole future in a negative light. We begin to panic and our imaginations run wild with thoughts of doom and gloom. You must train yourself to nip the cycle of negative thinking in the bud, before it takes root in your mind and makes you depressed. During stressful moments in life, remember to stop and ask yourself, "**Where am I?**" This will help you keep a perspective on things and prevent you from sliding further down the trail of negative thinking. You will be more easily able come to your senses, as you realize that the spiraling effect of negative thinking will only lead to morbid thoughts and dysfunction. Furthermore, by staying focused on the higher purpose of life, you will be able to transcend the bitterness and suffering of the moment and stay with joy. Life is too precious to waste or shorten by being depressed and sad. So, rise up from your pit of despair by provoking yourself with the ultimate question, "**Where**

**am I?”** Granted it seems too simplistic, after all you’ve made a career out of being depressed and sarcastic. Over the years you have suffered untold disappointment, tasted failure too many times, resented others’ success, felt the sting of shame and humiliation, until all hope of improving your life and getting ahead was driven from your heart. Now all that’s left is a hollow shell of sour cynicism and bitter spite. Nonetheless, I’m telling you that you must draw the curtain on all the tragic scenes of the past, and begin your new starring role in the comedy called life! That’s right, no one is going to save you except yourself, so go ahead, defy all logic and common sense, and from amidst the pain and anguish, cheer up and just be happy. Cast-off that oppressively heavy yoke of gloom and despair that sorrowfully weighed you down all these years and start livening up. Of course it hurts just to be happy – especially if all you’ve known your whole life is sadness. But this is precisely your test in life; when the chips are so way down that

there is seemingly no way out, and everyone, including the postman has written you off as a hopeless failure, nonetheless, turn your back on them all and defiantly declare, that, “No one is going to sink my ship”. Consider your life mission done if you can boldly transform adversity into an opportunity to show the world who's really in charge, by not withdrawing in fear or getting broken. My friend, the Heavens will scintillate with joy in celebration of your courageous triumph over trial by ordeal, and the greater glory that it gives to G-d's Name. So gird yourself with faith and arm yourself with trust in G-d, as you ready yourself to battle with life's crushing forces. Keep your composure, stay in a happy frame of mind and never surrender to despair and you will be victorious. During those particularly low points in life, when your spirit flags, remember to ask yourself, “**Where am I?**” This will jolt you out of the self pity mode and restore your confidence by reminding you of G-d's ability to save, so that once again you become optimistic

about your future. Beware the perils of negative thinking that has the snowball effect of carrying a person down the precipitous depths of irretrievable despair. Make periodic reality checks, by asking yourself, “**Where am I?**” This will break the inexorable hold that pessimistic thinking has on your mind by prompting you into an immediate awareness of G-d’s power to change the direction and course of your life.

### 3.

**Y**ou’ve stared blankly at the same four walls so many times over the years, that they’ve become the invisible bars locking you in a stifling existence. Entombed in the suffocating darkness, you grow increasingly impatient for some relief – after all, how long can you just pace back and forth in the same place. Sitting for hours in a catatonic pose, you tire from the mental reruns that play in your mind that incessantly revive the feelings of hurt and betrayal that have accumulated over the sad long years. Most disturbing of all is watching yourself

becoming increasingly dysfunctional with each day that passes, further convincing you that you're hopeless – so what's the use of trying. The problem my dear troubled friend, is not so much with what life has done to you, but rather what you've done with your life. The time has come for you to take an objective look at yourself and ask, **“Where am I in life?”** – “How did I allow myself to squander the prime years of my life on being depressed and becoming dysfunctional?” By examining the pattern of self-destructive behaviors and the disastrous consequences that led to breakdown and failure, you will shake yourself out of your torpor and start once and for all, to really want to live. But, routines and ingrained habits that have been conditioned since youth are difficult to break, without proper help and support. Change is scary and we all need someone to talk to about our feelings and fears. You don't have to go far nor search the ends of the earth for help. Find yourself a secluded spot and begin unburdening your heavy

heart to G-d in your native language. Confide in G-d as a child does to a father or as one friend to the other. Every step you take on the rocky road towards recovery and sane living, ask G-d to guide you and help you overcome your hesitations, fears and guilt. If you're persistent and strong, and don't let a day go by without consulting G-d or seeking His assistance, you will recover from crippling dysfunction and toxic shame – that's a promise! What are you waiting for? Stop laying on the couch so pathetically slumped and bored, staring somberly at the ceiling as if life is all over, when it's only just begun. Start the ball rolling by asking yourself, “**Where am I?**; what am I doing to myself?” Then chase away the dark clouds of sadness and depression by just getting up and springing into action. Boredom and laziness of themselves are detrimental to a person both physically and emotionally. Lying in bed bored and idle, is a form of spiritual death that leads to apathy and despair. Eventually nothing matters to you anymore – not even G-d – because you've

given up. Don't fall into the danger zone. Immediately adjust your distorted perception about life, clouded by negative thinking, by making a reality check and asking yourself, "**Where am I?**" By releasing your mind from the grip of an insidious, pessimistic thought-process, you will automatically feel lighter and more optimistic about your prospects in life. Capitalize on the good feeling of the moment and slide out of the lazy mode by getting busy. Don't forget to use this new surge of energy to passionately approach G-d and beg Him to grant you the necessary discipline and willpower to overcome, once and for all, your tendencies towards depression and negative mood states. No matter where you are holding at this point, there is no reason to despair. There is help and there is hope. You are not as lost in life as you think. Put yourself back on the road to responsibility and self-care, by simply asking yourself, "**Where am I?**"

**4.**

**C**alm down and stop yelling at the kids. You just arrived home from work and already you're picking a fight with your wife, shouting at the kids, and grumbling about the neighbors. Take a moment and reflect, "**Where am I?**" What's overcome me that I'm so foolishly hurting the ones I love? Think about it, not only are you hurting them, but you're also senselessly harming yourself, as well. What greater objective in life is there, then to strive for peace? In fact, peace is synonymous with G-d's name, so that when a person is aligned with G-d he is at peace with everyone. Conversely, when a person acts divisively with everyone around him, he demonstrates that on some deep level he is also at odds with G-d. Wavering in faith, he subconsciously denies G-d's absolute control and authority, so he mistakenly believes that others have the independent power to harm him. When things don't go his way, he reacts by automatically shifting the blame to either his wife, his children, his neighbors, or his boss, – and so the

arguments ensue. Do you really need this? Cool it, and ask yourself, “**Where am I?**” – “What am I doing to myself?” Don’t you see how your paranoid thinking has made you so moody and depressed, that you can’t function properly anymore? Look how irritable and combative you’ve become because you spend your days imagining how others are trying to exploit you or get ahead of you. You’re not the same person anymore, and others know it. The time has come to make peace with yourself and others by making peace with G-d. Lay down your arms and stop waging war with the whole world. No one can hurt you because we are all under His dominion. There is no reality except G-d, because He is reality. The disappointments, frustration and minor daily hassles that we all experience are generated by Him – not others – so why get broken? Let go of all the pain and the angry feelings already, and start tasting the sweetness of life. Lower your pride and make amends with all those you’ve hurt over the years. By reconciling with your

wife, children, neighbors and friends you will be reconciling with G-d as well. Tear down the wall separating you from your fellow man, and put an end to the decades-old, cold war you've waged with the world. Furthermore, your deeply innate yearning for communion with G-d, cannot be satisfied unless you also join in solidarity with the rest of mankind; the two go hand in hand. So go ahead, extend an olive branch of peace to all of humanity and begin to feel that sense of wholeness and oneness with G-d. Remember, "G-d did not find a [more worthy] vessel to contain blessing for Israel than peace" (*Uktzin 3, see Devarim Rabba 5, 14*). Moreover, since G-d's name is synonymous with peace, the more you seek peace, the more you are able to accept G-d in your life. On the other hand, the more friction that exists between you and others, the more you shut G-d out of your life; one is dependent on the other. It's really all a matter of attitude and perception. The more the pieces of the puzzle – about G-d's primacy as the only reality that exists – fit

together in your mind, the more at peace will you be with others. Gone will be the competitive drive, vendettas, strategies and tactics that you typically wager against your fellow man in your quest for domination. On the other hand, those with weak faith can never relax. Doubting themselves, because they have doubts about G-d, they lack a sense of stability and always feel threatened in life. They pick fights and argue with almost everyone around them in their compulsive drive to control them, because they feel so out of control. If you recognize this destructive tendency in yourself and you want to change, then make it a habit to ask yourself, “**Where am I?**” – “What am I doing to myself and others?” This will stop you in your tracks, when you feel the compulsive desire to control others coming over you. Regain control over yourself, by letting go and letting G-d take over. Sense the relief that comes when you allow G-d to shoulder the burden. Now that you're not so uptight and afraid, go out and make friends with the rest of the world.

**5.**

**A**re you ashamed of your problems? Have you resisted getting help because of fear of disclosure – after all, what will the neighbors say? Ironically, most people who are crushed under the weight of their problems retreat from society, instead of reaching out to others for the help they so desperately need. If you're tired and fed-up living a cloistered existence, then why not climb out of your shell by asking yourself, **"Where am I!"** and, "Why have I cut myself off from the rest of society?" Often however, deep-seated shame and guilt over our failures and predicament in life prevents us from getting help and support. It all stems from a loss of self-belief, which makes you feel undeserving of the right to have love and satisfaction out of life. Well, if you feel too unworthy to grab hold of a life-preserver, then throw one to someone else that's drowning, and you'll save yourself, as well. This is the secret behind recovery; by reconnecting to our fellow man by giving him the support and encouragement not to

give-up in life and to go on, we find the inner strength to keep at it ourselves until we triumph over adversity. Even if you find yourself in a very dark corner and you're terrified of change, you must make the first move, by asking yourself, "**Where am I?**" This is the only way to shake yourself out of the stupor and emerge from the darkness to the light. Mere human contact is sufficient to break the deathly silence of too many years spent in loneliness and isolation. Talk to others, encourage them, be a friend and offer them your shoulder to lean on when they're feeling down. You'll feel like a different person and you will understand what you were missing all these years. The inspiring moral of your heartwarming story will be that, no matter how bleak the situation in life seems, if you hold onto to faith and don't give-up, you will come through with flying colors. Remember however, that speech has the power to make or break a person, so be measured in your words and be careful what you say. It's human nature – especially when we're in

pain – to be indiscriminate with our mouths and to say whatever we want or feel. We forget that sometimes our words are like arrows that sting, and unwittingly with all our cynicism and bad attitude we can turn others off completely. Therefore, always keep the tone of the conversation positive and upbeat, and speak words of faith in G-d and you can't go wrong. Don't misuse the golden opportunities that come along to help your friend, by complaining about all your aches and pains. Instead, leave him with an inspiring message that's uplifting. Keep it up, and eventually you will rightfully earn a reputation as a dynamic speaker who inspires the millions. Just by taking a moment to wrench yourself away from your fixation on problems by asking yourself, **"Where am I?"** can be the start of a brilliant career. Don't take this matter lightly! This advice is critical for those who are sinking in the swampy waters of failure and disappointment in life and are all too ready to give-up and go under. By helping others you help yourself; it's as elementary and

simple as that! And it doesn't take much. Sometimes it could be a just a smile or a kind word. Remember however, that speech is like fire: it either warms you up or it burns with a sting. So, filter-out all negativity and sarcasm from your words before you speak, and always be positive. This is a fundamental rule of persuasive speaking. Therefore, keep a wrap on your words, by speaking only about faith and Divine Providence, and you can change the world.

## 6.

**E**veryone has problems. Not a day goes by that a person is not consumed by worry either about his health, age, finances, his family or his future. No matter how carefully we choreograph the steps, inevitably we will slip and slide, and even fall in the precarious dance called life. Yet, why are some able to cope and others not? The answer is attitude. The true hero accepts that in life we're meant to struggle, so he triumphs over adversity, despite the odds,

because he never allows himself to get broken. In fact, fierce determination is what underlies the inner strength of the Jewish character, and has been the hallmark of Jewish survival throughout the ages. Following this lead, expect life to be bumpy at times and don't get so weighed down by all the particulars of your problems. Maintain your perspective on life, by asking yourself, "**Where am I?**" and, "What is my purpose in life?" Periodic self-examinations will help you transcend the suffering of the moment and bring you closer to G-d by connecting you to your higher purpose in life. The sublime pleasure derived solely from being attached to G-d, transcends all the minor pleasures of this world. No longer will you feel deprived by the lack of satisfaction of petty want and need. But, like any relationship in life, you have to constantly work on it. Therefore, make it a habit to speak to G-d on a regular basis, as a child before his father, or like one friend to another. As your bond with G-d grows more steady and strong, your connection to

worldly matters will slacken. It's not easy. Pain hurts and is hard to ignore. Nonetheless, just get past it and comfort yourself knowing that G-d in His infinite compassion, will never abandon you. Just, never give up!

### 7.

**All** people are subject to mood swings. Today you're happy, tomorrow you're not and the next day you're somewhere in-between. As such, it's easy to lose perspective in life and to get confounded and lost. But by making a habit of periodically asking yourself, "**Where am I?**" it's like sticking reassuring signposts along the way to guide you. The ups and downs in life can be very jarring and frightening. One moment you can be burning passionately for G-d in rapturous prayer, and in the next, barely a syllable falls from your stymied mouth, so engulfed it is in sadness and depression. That is precisely when you need to provocatively challenge yourself with the question, "**Where am I?**" Acting like a guide

for the perplexed, this thought provoking device has the power to pull you back from the extremes by putting you back in touch with G-d. Don't stop here however; go further by confiding in painstaking detail to G-d, your mind-boggling struggle to keep sane and to keep going in life. If one day you wake up in the pit of despair, remind yourself where you are in life by asking rhetorically, "**Where am I?**" This will provide you with a spiritual frame of reference in life and thereby restore you to a better frame of mind. Change doesn't happen over night. Traveling the road to recovery requires patience and forbearance. Much of the unnecessary pain and suffering in life is a result of your being too nervous and impatient to see results. Not willing to wait it out, you jump the gun and easily relapse into bad habits and routines. Again, use the phrase, "**Where am I?**" – as a reminder, when you feel particularly restless and at risk for relapse – that recovery takes time, but it's worth the wait.

**8.**

**C**hange in life can only occur if you sincerely believe it can change. But a person strives in life with a protracted sense that life goes on forever. He cannot endure what seems like an endless procession of disappointments and failures, and so he breaks. Putting things in perspective, a person must ask himself, “**Where am I**” in life. The truth is, is that we are here today and gone tomorrow, so why all the fuss? Why not consider that, given the brevity of life’s short sojourn, is it worth squandering the paltry years on being moody and depressed? Why not make the best of it? Of course having to deal with all the disappointment and failure makes the challenge harder, nonetheless, you're young and life is ahead of you – so don't waste the opportunity. Enrich your life with meaning by familiarizing yourself with its higher purpose, which only comes when you connect yourself to G-d – then the true beauty of life shines before you. Suddenly all the petty hurts and frustrations won't

mean much anymore, as you grow more confident that G-d has a special way of making things work out in life. This all depends however, on your ability to stay happy and not get broken, which is simple once you grow accustomed to ask yourself, **“Where am I?”**

**9.**

**The** most painful part of spiritual growth and development lies in the waiting. In the whirlwind of our fast-paced and high-tech society we've come to expect everything too soon and too fast. We don't want to be kept waiting. Nonetheless, life is a waiting game, and you must have an abundance of patience. Yet, we live in a neurotic society that is chronically anxious because of restlessness and impatience. If you're seeking an alternative to the mad rush, and want to live a pleasant and serene life, then you must return to the wisdom of the former generations and cultivate patience. But how do you cope during the long periods of waiting? No one is suggesting that you sit

around and do nothing. That is counterproductive and will only lead to bitterness and depression, and finally total surrender. The secret to remaining patient is to keep busy and lead an active life, until your time comes. Socialize with friends, encourage the needy and volunteer with the less fortunate, and you will feel heartened and inspired too. Keep the hotline to G-d open and unburden your heart to Him during those low points in life when you tend to blame yourself. Speak to others only words of faith and about G-d's Divine Providence. Your eyes will then open to the wonderful workings of G-d on this earth. As you become more accepting in life, then patience will come more easily to you.

### 10.

**E**veryone knows that you can't get through life without a sense of humor. People who learn to laugh in life live better and longer. Why not give it a try? Haven't you had enough of taking life so seriously? Think about it, will all the worrying and frowning

improve your lot in life? If you are ever to witness change in your life, then do yourself a favor and be happy. But, in order not to let the minor hassles and petty concerns to irritate you, you have to begin recognizing the higher purpose in life, which only comes through attachment to G-d. To accomplish this, begin by putting your life in proper perspective and asking yourself, “**Where am I?**” Get a handle on your priorities by drawing up a mental list of what’s of primary importance and what is secondary. The truth will then stare you in the face as you suddenly realize that most of what was preventing you from being happy in life was of minor concern and importance. As you grow more aware that all along you were missing the single most important factor in life – which is G-d – everything else will seem silly. The only true satisfaction in life lies in attaching yourself to G-d. You will have come full circle, right into the arms of G-d. You will no longer be lost in life, because you know where you are and where you belong.

