



"Mining" for Sparks

by Steve Hyatt and Mendel Levin

One Shabbat afternoon this past winter at Chabad of Northern Nevada, the subject of holy sparks was the focus of much of our discussion. It is explained in Jewish Mysticism that every object and place in the universe has a spark of the Divine, which sustains it and causes it to exist. It becomes revealed and elevated when we sanctify it in a *mitzva* (commandment) setting. These sparks exist throughout the world and when enough of them have been "mined" and elevated and returned to their holy source, Moshiach will come.

The idea that these holy sparks exist all around us captured our imaginations that Shabbat afternoon. Intrigued, a number of us decided that the following morning we would meet at a nearby rural, undeveloped park to return some sparks to their source.

The next morning I walked out my front door and a teeth-shattering, frigid wind slammed directly into my face as the last gasp of winter flowed down from the towering snow-covered peaks of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. *Talit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* bag securely tucked under my arm, I hiked up my collar and walked down the mountain to meet my friends at Horseman's Park.

As the park came into view I could see Jacob, David and Baruch shivering with their hands in their pockets as they tried their best to keep warm. Just as I stepped into the parking lot, our Chabad rabbi, Mendel Cunin drove in with his five children. As we huddled together

against the cold, I said, "Remember no one every said a mitzva had to be easy," to which the rabbi joyfully replied, "True, but no one ever said it can't be fun!"

With a smile on our lips and a tune in our hearts, we began our journey to a scenic overlook that provided a 360-degree view of the valley and the majestic mountains that stand guard over Reno. As we were preparing to say the morning prayers, Baruch reminded everyone that this spot could have possibly been waiting since the creation of the world to have a mitzva performed upon it. We hoped that our small effort would hasten the arrival of Moshiach, ending the exile of the Jewish people and initiate the rebuilding of the third Holy Temple.

As a relentless wind continued to challenge our resolve, we began to put on our "mining" gear. We donned *talit* and *tefillin* and started the morning service. As the wind howled around us, it was all we could do to keep the pages in our prayer books from blowing back and forth and our kippas atop our heads. Just as we thought we had everything under control an enormous gust caught our *talit* bags and sent them dancing down the side of the mountain. Laughing out loud we scurried to retrieve them and then hurried back to our "mine shaft" and continued chanting the psalms and prayers of the morning service.

What a sight we were to behold: a group of grown men and five children standing on the edge of a canyon, the mountains to our backs, the sun in our face and a frigid wind reminding us that winter was not quite ready to give up without a fight.

But while it was freezing outside, the heat of our prayers burned brightly in our hearts and inspired our little group to complete their mission. As our intrepid group of "miners" continued on with the service, the clouds that hung directly over the eastern horizon suddenly parted and we were drenched in the warm embrace of the sun's rays.

Re-energized, we picked up the pace and continued. Approaching the end of the service, I looked up from my prayerbook and marvelled at the views from our outdoor *shul*. To the west was the Sierra Nevada mountain range, to the east was a gorgeous view of the growing city of Reno, to the south was a view of the mountains that formed the gateway to the historic city of Carson City and to the North was the rugged, undeveloped high desert, home to antelope, coyote and red tailed hawk. It was both a humbling and inspirational moment.

As we concluded the service, the clouds once again slipped in front of the sun and the temperature felt like it dropped ten degrees. The promise of snow was definitely in the air as we made our way back to the park entrance. Along the trail we could see homes built on the opposite side of the Steam Boat Ditch Canyon. We couldn't help but wonder if a Jewish family might have rubbed their eyes in disbelief as they glanced out their kitchen window and saw Jewish men, wearing *talit* and *tefillin*, swaying in unison on the edge of a rugged canyon as they prayed. As my friend and mentor Rabbi Chani Vogel once told me, "Shlomo Yakov, you never know who may be watching as you perform even a simple mitzva. What seems like a minor act for you may be a life altering experience for someone observing your actions." His wise words reverberated in my mind as my buddies and I returned to our vehicles.

When we arrived back at the parking lot we all agreed that despite the daunting weather, the experience of praying on an undeveloped piece of land, where we were fairly certain that no Jew had ever prayed before, was an experience that we wanted to repeat again.

Maimonides teaches that any individual's good deed can tip the scale and brings Redemption to the entire world. We agreed to meet regularly to perform good deeds and "mine" for holy sparks, doing our part to bring Moshiach now. ■

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Four New Emissary Couples

Rabbi Avrohom Yitzchok and Fruma Perlstein recently arrived in Bayside/Foxpoint, Wisconsin, to enhance existing educational and outreach programs there. The young couple will be directing the local Chabad day camp, Torah High, and coordinating other youth programs. Rabbi Avrohom and Dina Hendel will be arriving soon in Coral Springs, Florida. The Hendels will be assisting with activities in the local Chabad Center as well as teaching at the Hebrew Academy Community School.

Rabbi Yossi and Naomi Winner are establishing a new Chabad Center for Jewish students and faculty at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Rabbi Hershy and Bella Bronstein will be arriving soon in N.W. Coral Springs, Florida. They are starting a new Chabad Center in that area to serve the Jewish residents.

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