

Cast your light into the darkness as Aurora hosts annual Menorah Lighting Ceremony

Be the light you want to see in the world as Chanukkah approaches and the Town of Aurora and Chabad Aurora team up to host their annual Menorah Lighting Ceremony.

This year's Menorah Lighting Ceremony will take place next Sunday, December 14, at Aurora Town Square. The celebration is set to begin at 3.30 p.m. with a variety of family activities, followed by the ceremony itself and traditional sweet treats at 4.30 p.m.

Chabad Aurora's Rabbi Yossi Hecht says recent years have seen a 'surge' in public displays of Chanukkah and of the Jewish identity and this is reflective of the times in which we live.

'At this fraught time for the Jewish community, with war in Israel and Jews facing a major rise in antisemitism, this year we are doing more to celebrate Chanukkah with joy and Jewish pride,' says Rabbi Hecht. 'The Menorah and Chanukkah represent freedom of the human spirit, freedom from tyranny and oppression, and the victory of good over evil and the universal message of Light Over Darkness.'

This is a theme that will be felt throughout the afternoon as participants are encouraged to each add a light of their own into the darkness.

'You do the ritual [of lighting the menorah] in your own home, which is beautiful and it should be done, but there's another element of 'why are we just keeping this for the family? Why don't we express this message' to the world and bring that message to our communities, to our friends, and really in places where that is really what they stand for?' says Rabbi Hecht of holding such ceremonies in public municipal spaces. '[Leaders] carry the weight on their shoulders, whether it is of the municipality, of the city or town, of the province, of the country. They are really shining a light, keeping this society and this social fabric together, enacting laws for there to be a continuum in a socialized, in a democratic, and a wonderful country for all of us to live.'

'This gives everyone an opportunity to celebrate, to participate and be a part of this wonderful message and wonderful event. Now it's in Aurora Town Square, which is an open place for everyone, and there's a very warm feeling when you come in. To be able to express that message in such a public place, I think, really sheds light and is a great opportunity for all the residents of Aurora 'those that legislate, those that carry the weight of the Town on their shoulders, to participate and be able to express the message of 'Now you go be the light.''

Participants will quite literally be able to do just that, says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora.

Now in its second year at Aurora Town Square after more than a decade of observances at Town Hall, Ware says the new space enables the ceremony to hinge less on the variables of December weather and focus on providing the observance in comfort.

'Rabbi Hecht always has an impact, always teaches something new, and I just can't stress enough how much fun it is,' says Ware, who notes that on-site activities range from face painting, to buskers, and the traditional fare of latkes and jelly-filled donuts, which act as further symbols of the Chanukkah miracle where one night's supply of oil found after the destruction of the temple burned for eight.

'It's not only about how light is coming in and the many other geopolitical things happening around the world, but we're also wanting to send people home with the message that you individually have the ability to bring additional light into the community,' Ware continues. 'We're actually setting up an activity where you can commit to one action that you can do in terms of how you're going to bring light into the community and then we're all going to paste it up on a board just so you can see one flame and another flame and another flame and how it all combines. A lot of the challenges over in the east, we may have felt a little bit powerless, but the Rabbi is reminding us how we all have our individual energies and all the choices we make. We can choose to add light to the

community or we can just choose to carry on.?

For more on this year's Menorah Lighting Ceremony, visit aurora.ca/menorahlighting.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter