

Menorah lighting ceremony is more relevant than ever, says Chabad Aurora's Hecht



At the heart of the Chanukah celebration is the theme of casting light into the darkness, and doing so this season is more relevant now than ever before, says Rabbi Yossi Hecht, leader of Chabad Aurora.

This Sunday, December 29, Rabbi Hecht will lead the Town of Aurora's traditional Menorah Lighting Ceremony ? set to be held for the very first time at Aurora Town Square after more than a decade at Town Hall.

The event, which begins at 4 p.m., includes traditional foods, a fire performance, the lighting of the Menorah itself, and an interactive component that will take attendees on a walking tour to select locations in Aurora's historic downtown core.

Taking the celebration to a new location this year is fitting, says Hecht, as part of the observance centres on rebuilding and dedication.

?When the story of Chanukah happens, the Greeks went into the Temple, dismantled it, and they turned everything into an unbelievable mess,? he says. ?The daily rituals that had to take place weren't able to until they cleaned things up. A jar of oil was used every morning to light the Menorah, which was shining light onto the world.?

The oil, he said, had to be made from special olives, with the first drop from each being collected, sealed, and used for the Menorah lighting.

?To make that happen, it would take eight days because it took three days to travel to that location where the olives are, one day to process it, three days to come back ? it would have been eight days later that they would have had it. Miraculously, they found one jug that was not touched by this whole mess and they were able to use that oil,? says Hecht. ?In a way, they dedicated, once again, the Holy Temple. By moving [the ceremony to] another place, we can say we're dedicating Town Square now with the Menorah Lighting, which is a shining light for all.?

Both Rabbi Hecht and Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, are excited about all the amenities the new space has to offer, including outdoor skating, and the growth opportunities it will afford the ceremony and celebration into the future.

?When we celebrate together as a Town, there is so much opportunity there that can be done,? says Hecht.

This too is at the heart of the celebration ? the principle of celebrating what we have today, but also celebrating the possibilities of what we might do together to build upon what was.

?What we did yesterday is not good enough for today. What we do tomorrow is not good enough for the next day. We always have to add in goodness and kindness into our daily activities,? says Hecht, likening this to adding a candle, an extra degree of light, each night during the Chanukah observance. ?Light is the key to all this because light illuminates and you don't take that away when you add a candle ? it becomes brighter, it is illuminated more, and in an unbelievable way it brings light into the Town, the residents of the Town. Let them add, let them do more, let them take that message home.

?We want everyone to participate and it is part of the holiday spirit that we celebrate together. Each individual can do something on their own as well. Take out the menorah, light it and fulfil your obligation of illuminating the world and making the world a better place, a much more peaceful place for all.?

Last year's Menorah Lighting Ceremony took place just weeks into the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. It remains a challenging time ?not only for the Jewish people, but challenging times for all nations of the world,? says Rabbi Hecht.

?It's tumultuous times in the world,? he says. ?Be that shining light. Be that leader that you are able to be and let it shine during these days in the Festival of Lights. Every person, if they are dedicated, if they stay focused, and if they have the moral clarity ? good versus evil, light over darkness ? they will be able to be that leader and make a difference.

?You may not see the ripple effect [of that difference] but like I tell so often in my community, that small act of goodness and kindness, your small act of helping another person, being there for one another, shining a light in our community, will have a ripple effect. We need to realize there are challenges and we're going through some very hard times, but be that shining light, continue to do good for the people around you, for your family, for your community ? and that will have a ripple effect and hopefully that will bring about a tremendous energy of peace and goodness in the world.?

For more on this weekend's event, visit aurora.ca/menorahlighting.

By Brock Weir