

Shine a light into community at Menorah lighting ceremony

Shine a light into your community this Monday as Aurorans mark Hanukkah at the Town's annual Menorah Lighting Ceremony.

Hosted by the Town of Aurora in partnership with Chabad Aurora, the December 19 ceremony is a great way to mark the Jewish ?Festival of Lights?, find fellowship, and, in the words of Rabbi Yossi Hecht, project light through the darkness.

?This is a time of year where everyone feels a responsibility around the holiday times to be a light for another, be there for another, and to really illuminate a person's life,? says Rabbi Hecht, leader of Chabad Aurora. ?We're coming together at Town Hall with traditional foods, with a special show, and lighting the Menorah in the universal [theme] of freedom and light over darkness. This is a theme that really rings true to each and every one of us. As we go through challenging times, by doing just one more good deed, one more good action, we can tip the scale.?

When Chabad Aurora and the Town of Aurora teamed up for last year's ceremony, the theme of casting light upon the darkness was particularly potent with the threat of war looming over Europe. As Russia's war in Ukraine continues, this year's ceremony is convening at a time when antisemitism appears to be emboldened and on the rise.

?That in and of itself needs to be a message to each and every one of us to stand proud, stand strong, and by being that shining light it can remove a lot of that darkness,? says Rabbi Hecht. ?Antisemitism comes from a very dark place and a lot of it comes from people who are ignorant, they don't know, or they don't want to learn. They don't want to know the truth, and it could very well be that the truth will bother them. Out of all that comes hate, ugliness, and, of course, antisemitism that raises its ugly head.?

Education is key, he says, and gathering together at events like these are a perfect starting point to understanding.

?Once people partake in the celebration, everyone who is going to light the menorah or partake in the traditional foods, they're getting educated and understanding that they can be that shining light. There's no reason for antisemitism. We can all be that shining light, we can all stand proud, strong and tall. That's why we want to celebrate and spread that message publicly.?

Monday's Menorah Lighting Ceremony, which will take place on the second day of Hanukkah, is set to begin around sundown and include the lighting of the second candle, a live show, and traditional Hannukah foods like latkes and jelly donuts ? the foods symbolic of the oil that's at the centre of the observance.

?It's a celebration to thank God for the miracles he bestows upon us,? says Rabbi Hecht. ?It's the time the [early Jewish people] found a jug of oil during the Second Temple Era and miraculously the oil that would seem to be only last one day, but it lasted eight days. If you believe in miracles, if you're here to be a shining light and you help one other, that will open up a tremendous amount of blessings to be put in your life. There's no better feeling than when you care for another, you help another, and you really bring light to another person's life.

?What you did for one person one day that's good, tomorrow brings new challenges, the sun rises again, and especially in the world we live, the challenges seem to be so dark at times; eight candles shining bright, that light seems to extend and shine into the coming days, the coming months, because what we did yesterday is not good enough for today, what we do today is not good enough for tomorrow. You always have to grow. Spirituality, just like anything, needs maintenance ? as do we all.

?Hannukah teaches us it's never too late to always be that shining light. If you were to illuminate another person's life, your life would be better. Always increase in light every day and remember that light is always more powerful than darkness. A little bit of light can really push away and extend a whole new line of darkness. That's the reason we're coming together to celebrate together as people.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter