

NEWSLETTER

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Lighting the Menorah Under the Shadow of War

Some Jewish leaders in New York said Hanukkah celebrations felt different this year, given the Israel-Hamas war and a rise in antisemitic incidents.

**By James Barron**

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Good morning. It's Thursday. We'll look at why Hanukkah feels different this year. We'll also find out about New York's first offshore wind farm, which is sending electricity to Long Island from out in the Atlantic Ocean.



Hannah Beier/Reuters

Saul Dreier lit one candle with another on a menorah. “Happy Hanukkah,” said Dreier, 98, who survived three concentration camps during World War II, to the group gathered around him before a gala at the Museum of Jewish Heritage on Tuesday.

It was a ceremonial moment before Hanukkah, which begins tonight.

Hanukkah celebrates a miracle, when one day’s supply of oil lasted for eight days. And in New York — home to the first Jewish congregation in the United States, Shearith Israel, formed in 1654 by Jews who had fled Portuguese-controlled Brazil — the ritual of lighting a menorah every night will be played out in homes and in public places.

At 5 p.m., Temple Emanu-El, at Fifth Avenue and 65th Street, and the New York Board of Rabbis will host an interfaith candlelighting. Participants will include Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the Catholic archbishop of New York; the Rev. A.R. Bernard, the senior pastor of the Christian Cultural Center; and Sabeeha Rehman, the author of “We Refuse to Be Enemies: How Muslims and Jews Can Make Peace, One Friendship at a Time.”

A few blocks away, the first candle on what is billed as the world’s largest menorah — across from the Plaza Hotel in Grand Army Plaza — will be lit at 5:30 p.m.

Some Jewish leaders say Hanukkah in 2023 is different from celebrations in past years, given the Israel-Hamas war and the rise in antisemitic incidents in the United States. “If there’s one thing Hanukkah signifies, it’s resilience and renewal,” Jack Kliger, the president of the Museum of Jewish Heritage, said, “and if ever there was a time we needed that, this is it.”

Shine a Light, a national initiative that began three years ago against antisemitism, says that one in four American Jews experienced hatred last year. Last month the federal government opened discrimination investigations into half a dozen universities amid complaints about antisemitic and anti-Muslim harassment after the Israel-Hamas war broke out. Among them were Columbia, Cooper Union and Cornell in New York.

Also last month, bias incidents investigated by the Police Department’s Hate Crime Task Force were up 33 percent compared with November 2022. And this week a Queens man was charged with stalking and assault as hate crimes in connection with an attack on an Israeli tourist in Times Square. The charges were among the latest arising from a rash of bias incidents in New York City since the war began.

“Being a Jew in New York post-Oct. 7” — the day of Hamas’s surprise attack on Israel — “definitely feels different than on Oct. 6,” Hindy Poupko, a senior vice president of UJA-Federation of New York, said. “And in moments of Jewish vulnerability, it’s our responsibility to ensure that our community has opportunities to double down on who we are.”

Shine a Light is helping to organize a concert tonight along with the annual menorah lighting in Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn, in partnership with Chabad of Park Slope, and a ceremony on Monday at Queens Borough Hall. Shine a Light is also working to bring people in New York from different communities and backgrounds together.

“I think people are struggling about how to have conversations, for Jews to be able to say to their friends, their colleagues, their partners at work, ‘This is what it feels like to be Jewish right now, and this is why we as a community are scared,’” Carly Maisel, a representative of the Shine a Light coalition, said.

Shine a Light is also a sponsor of “A Night of Light — Bringing New York Faith Communities Together,” an interfaith gathering scheduled for Dec. 12 at the Park Avenue Synagogue. Among the religious institutions also involved are Central Synagogue and St. Peter’s Church, whose senior pastor, the Rev. Jared Stahler, noted that his sanctuary was a block from Central Synagogue on Lexington Avenue.

“Every generation has to make an investment in relationship if that physical proximity is going to mean anything,” he said. “This is true about Central and St. Peter’s, but it’s true more broadly: Houses of worship share a common city. We’ve got to be there so people know they’re not alone.”

Dreier, who lit the candle at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, was one of 1,100 Polish Jews who were spared being sent to death camps when the German industrialist Oskar Schindler put them on a list to work in his factories. The story of the so-called Schindler Jews, as they became known, was the subject of a book by Thomas Keneally and the Steven Spielberg movie “Schindler’s List.” Dreier was the only survivor of 30 people in his extended family.

An American military officer gave Dreier drumsticks as the war was ending, and he became a drummer. Nearly 70 years later, in 2014, he decided to put together a Holocaust survivors’ band. (His wife said, “You’re crazy,” according to a documentary about him. He did not listen to her.)

On Tuesday, he said, “the world changed 360 degrees” with the Israel-Hamas war.

But when asked if the world now reminded him of the world when he was a teenager in Poland, where he could not be secure in his identity or his religious beliefs, he said it did not.

“First of all,” he said, “I am in America.”

WEATHER

Prepare for a slight chance of snow showers on a partly sunny day in the low 40s. At night it will be partly cloudy, with temperatures in the high 30s.

ALTERNATE-SIDE PARKING

In effect until Friday (Immaculate Conception).
