

## Hanukkah program brings light to bereaved Jews

**H**ow do you celebrate a joyous holiday like Hanukkah when you have recently lost your beloved partner, parent, sibling, or child?

On December 22, Lights in the Darkness: A Hanukkah Program for Bereaved Jews will offer a chance to honor and remember a loved one with a community of people who understand how different the holiday is because of the loss.

The program will be held at the JCC in Manhattan from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

"We have people attend from ages 20 to 80 who have lost a loved one in the last year or two," says Rabbi Stephanie Dickstein, LMSW, Spiritual Care Coordinator, Shira Ruskay Center/JBFCs. "Holidays take on a different meaning during the period of mourning and grieving. Often people ask, 'How can I observe this holiday when the person I love is missing?'"

For more than 10 years, the JBFCs Rita J. Kaplan Jewish Connections Programs and Shira Ruskay Center have offered the free Lights in the Darkness program in Manhattan and other boroughs.

"The Lights in the Darkness event is not a support group, although the Shira Ruskay Center does provide Jewish bereavement spiritual support groups," adds Robin Schoenfeld, LMSW, Bereavement Coordinator, Shira Ruskay Center/JBFCs. "Our Hanukkah program is meant to offer a warm supportive environment to help people remember their loved ones."

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The program weaves together a variety of ways to learn about and celebrate the holiday and to remember close friends and family members.

"After we light the menorah, I'll ask everyone to light their own candle and then say a few words about how the one they loved brought light into the world," explains Rabbi Dickstein.

Some participants choose to speak, others may light a candle and keep silent.

In this ritual, Rabbi Dickstein finds an apt metaphor in a selection from Talmud, a collection of ancient Rabbinic writings, which she paraphrases:

**"One night, a rabbi out walking meets a blind man holding a torch. The rabbi asks, 'Sir, why would a blind man need a torch?' The blind man replies, 'So that other people may see me.'"**

"When each person holds a candle and shares the story of how their loved one brought light into the world," says Rabbi Dickstein, "other people can see them, and in that, there is mutual comfort and support."



Rabbi Stephanie Dickstein, LMSW, leads a Hanukkah program for Jews who have recently lost a family member or close friend.

**To attend Lights in the Darkness, call (212) 399-2320, ext. 211.**

**For bereavement resources and programs, go to [www.jcprograms.org](http://www.jcprograms.org)**