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The story of the
Rebbe's unwavering
effort to uphold
the neighborhood
of nessi doreinu—
Crown Heights. The
place where Hashem
commands his
blessing.

In preparing this
article we were
greatly assisted by
Rabbis Michoel
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Katzman, and Yossel
Bar-Chaim



**שם צוה ה'
את הברכה**



THE "FARBAND" BUILDING, LATER PURCHASED BY TZACH.

"Thousands of Yidden lined Eastern Parkway as far as the eye could see on Rosh Hashanah afternoon" recounts Rabbi Menachem Wolff in his diary of Tishrei 5725 with the Rebbe. "Relaxing in front of their homes after finishing their Yom Tov meals."

Although these Crown Heights residents were not Lubavitcher Chassidim, many fondly looked forward to the yearly *tashlich* procession that the Rebbe would lead down Eastern Parkway toward the Botanical Gardens.

Dressed in their Yom Tov finery, they rose in respect when the Rebbe drew near, many wishing the Rebbe "Ah gut Yom Tov!"

For those who did not experience it, it is hard to imagine how diverse and expansive the Jewish community of Crown Heights once was.

THE COMMUNITY THAT WAS

"All my neighbors were *frumme* Yidden of assorted backgrounds," muses Rabbi Yossel Katzman, who grew up in Crown Heights in the early 5720s.

Although a few Lubavitchers lived in Crown Heights to be in close proximity to the Rebbe, the

surrounding areas was once shared with many different *kehilos*.

From the 5700s through the 5720s the borders of the Jewish community of Crown Heights ranged from Rochester Avenue to the east until Washington Avenue to the west, and extended as far south as Linden Boulevard and as far north as Atlantic Avenue.

Over 40 shuls of all types dotted the flourishing neighborhood. These included shuls as large as the impressive Young Israel congregation on Eastern Parkway and Albany Ave. (subsequently replaced with condos) and Chassidishe *shtibelach* like Viznitz (now Beis Binyomin) and Satmar (now "Shain's Shul").

Belz, Gur, Sadigur, Skver, Skulen, Sosnowic, Spinka and many others had shuls in Crown Heights for their members who resided there, and even a few Chassidishe rebbes were settled in Crown Heights at the time.

A number of Litvishe Shuls were also located in Crown Heights, including the Agudas Yisroel Shul on Crown Street, the Novominsker Beis Medrash on Carroll St. and Schenectady Avenue (now Kehal Chassidim), and others.

The building that now houses Oholei Torah Elementary and *yeshiva gedola* once served as a Conservative temple, the largest in all of Brooklyn. Alongside these shuls were tens of yeshivos and *mikvaos*. Bobov for example, had a large campus housing a yeshiva, shul and *mikveh* on S. Marks Place.

Kosher grocery stores and other Jewish businesses were found throughout Crown Heights, some in areas you would least expect these days. Utica Avenue was home to a kosher pizza store, Meal Mart, candy store, Flohr's Judaica and much more.

FEARFUL FLIGHT

The Crown Heights of then, which was calm and *heimish*, was abruptly shaken up around the end of 5725. What was perhaps the scheme of some self-serving real estate brokers, caused the majority of the neighborhood's Jewish residents to flee, and quickly changing it to a predominantly low-income African-American neighborhood.

Initially, just a handful of Yidden sold their homes to non-Jews, acting on the rumor that a low-income populace would soon dominate the neighborhood and cause a rise in crime and the price of real-estate to drop. Taking the advice of the brokers, these Yidden sold their homes to African Americans. Almost overnight, this became a negative trend.

In droves, Yidden sold their homes to the first buyer and rushed to move elsewhere. The *frumme* Yidden moved to neighborhoods such as Boro Park and Williamsburg, whereas the less religious Jews moved further out to Queens and Long Island.

This story was nothing new for Jewish communities in North America. In many metropolitan areas, Jewish communities would settle in part of a city for a span of 30-40 years,

and invest heavily in building a Jewish infrastructure.

This wouldn't last long, and soon enough the Jewish community would collectively decide that it was no longer safe to remain in this neighborhood, they would swiftly move out, often leaving behind huge structures, the elderly, the sick and the poor.

Closer to Crown Heights, this had just taken place in the Brownsville and East Flatbush sections of Brooklyn, and many of those residents moved to Crown Heights.

Now the table had turned and Crown Heights was rapidly being emptied of its Jewish residents. Taking their places were multitudes of non-Jewish immigrants, many of whom were uneducated and unemployed. Shuls were abandoned and soon turned into churches, and crime abounded in the area.

BRAVING THE STORM

By 5729 (1969) almost all other Jews outside of Lubavitch had left the neighborhood. Even a number of Lubavitch families had moved to Boro Park, under the impression that Lubavitch would soon follow suit.

Those remaining in Crown Heights were subject to harassment and often violence from their new "neighbors."

The young children playing in the yard of Lubavitcher Yeshiva at Bedford Avenue and Dean Street were often attacked during recess by lawless punks who plagued the streets. At Oholei Torah, located on Eastern Parkway and Buffalo Avenue, the children were being tormented as well.

Business owners were afraid to open their businesses too early in the morning. After dark, the streets of Crown Heights became inhospitable. Few wanted to take the chance of running into the criminals and gangs that roamed the neighborhood.

The police did little to stop the danger for their Lubavitch constituents, and the cries of help to local politicians fell mostly on deaf ears.

Only one voice rose to address the gloomy circumstances, and only one individual insisted that a completely different approach be taken.

NO NEED TO PANIC

Years before the Rebbe's campaign to save the Crown Heights neighborhood, the Rebbe addressed the issue in a letter. In response to a private inquiry of a family who wished to sell their home on New York Avenue, reasoning that "a colored family has moved in nearby..." the Rebbe advised that they may sell their house, but was sure to bring an important matter to their attention:

"You must tell your mother that she has no need to panic from the fact that a colored family moved in nearby. They too are people with whom one can share a neighborhood. On the contrary: there are also white people that are not of the best nature..."

(Igros Kodesh vol. 6 p. 298)

DEADLY DISEASE

The Rebbe publicly addressed this saga of Jews fleeing their communities at the farbrengen of Acharon Shel Pesach 5729. Later, the Rebbe was *magiha* that portion of the farbrengen and requested that it be published:¹

"There is a phenomenon that has recently become widespread, similar to a disease, among bnei Yisroel, to abandon Jewish neighborhoods. As a result, the homes are being sold to non-Jews. More so, the shuls and batei midrash are being sold, etc. By extension this brings into doubt and is in fact destroying the parnassah of many Yidden."

The Rebbe continued:

Truthfully, this matter should have been solved through the community askanim and the rabbonim. It is not my role to give rulings in these areas... however at this point I must announce my stance publicly and its basis in a clear ruling in Shulchan Aruch.

Here the Rebbe went on to discuss at length, through a collection of *halachos* and *maamarei Chazal*, why according to *halacha* it is forbidden for a Jew to sell his home to a non-Jew when the sale brings inevitable



LEVI FREIDIN via JEW, 140816

negative effect, especially on the poor, sick and elderly.

All the more so, when every home in a Jewish community that is sold to a non-Jew will impact all other Yidden in the surrounding neighborhoods!

“Only through maintaining and building up the neighborhood,” stated the Rebbe, “can we avoid the danger of the damage that has been done.” The Rebbe emphasized how one could see a clear example from the communities of Williamsburg and Washington Heights, which remained steadfast in this strategy and did not allow their neighborhoods to be taken over, and they were in fact successful!

IS IT DANGEROUS?

The Rebbe continued in the *sicha* to refute the claim that if a Jewish neighborhood becomes a dangerous area, people needed to leave and the above mentioned *halachos* did not apply:

1. It is obvious that through every additional house that a Jew sells, the strength of the Yidden in the area is weakened, causing greater vulnerability. Essentially, one who sells his home is creating the danger.
2. It is also clear that only a small percentage can move out to another neighborhood, however the majority, and especially the poor, sick and elderly will not be able to move.
3. The only matter that is questionable is whether they will be helped through moving to another neighborhood. Even that is not guaranteed, and in fact it has happened on many occasions that people who abandoned the previous neighborhood, moved to a new one, only to be met by the same form of danger and terror. (Among other examples,



it seems that the Rebbe was referring to those who had left Crown Heights and moved to Canarsie, which shortly thereafter also became a crime-ridden neighborhood.)

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Rebbe ended the *sicha* with the following conclusions:

1. Those who move from Jewish communities like Crown Heights are damaging the neighborhood as a whole, and are impacting all other Jewish communities across the globe, where people will realize that this is a way to take advantage of a weakness among Yidden.
2. Aside for being prohibited by *halacha*, it is also foolish to move away from an established

community. Instead, the focus is to be on building and expanding the community.

3. Those who focus on maintaining these communities will be rewarded with abundant *schar*.

The Rebbe followed these conclusions by saying:

“If after all that has been stated, one is ready to disregard all of these concerns and still sell his home, he should take a moment to imagine that he was an individual residing in a community of tens of thousands of Yidden, and that he was told that his neighbor was selling his home under the above mentioned circumstances. Think to yourself honestly, whether you would like this decision or not. When you have made your earnest decision, be sure to follow the Torah’s rule (and not just a rule but “כל התורה כולה”): Do not do unto your fellow that which you dislike...



7 CHESHVAN 5748, LEVI FREIDIN 1/4 JEM, 2020

SELFISH BEHAVIOR

The Rebbe mentioned a story of an individual who had sold his home to a non-Jew and rushed to move out of Crown Heights. Soon he discovered that the new neighborhood he had moved to was no better.

The Rebbe asked him whether he had told others in Crown Heights about his mistake so that they not end up in the same rut that he was in. He responded that he hadn't because he was afraid that if the truth would become known then the real estate rates in the area he had just moved to would plummet.

Commenting on the absurdity of this story the Rebbe spoke strongly: "This behavior is dangerous to the public both *b'ruchniyus* and *b'gashmiyus*!"

Perhaps instead of leaving to other communities, the Rebbe said, do what has been done in other places, where not only did people not leave, but new buildings were built and many Yidden successfully moved there!

"In the end, those who remain here and those who will continue to uphold these neighborhoods will receive revealed and bountiful brachos, and they will also

be responsible for raising the pride of Yidden here and elsewhere in the world where they reside."

Because in today's age, explained the Rebbe, whatever takes place here impacts elsewhere in the world. Therefore all we have spoken today will impact that the settlements of Eretz Yisroel will not be taken away from Yidden, and is even relevant to the Yidden in Melbourne and in London.

THE OTHERS

One place, among others, that this *sicha* was published in, was in the the journal of Agudas Horabbonim known as "*Hapardes*." In the next issue, a strongly supportive letter from Reb Moshe Feinstein was published, who left no doubts that he clearly agreed that it was forbidden for Yidden to move away from Jewish Neighborhoods because of the ramifications it would cause. "I agree with the Rebbe. Had he not written already on this subject, I would have written almost the same thing on my own. But now that the Rebbe has given his opinion, I can only say that this is the truth and it needs to be publicized..."²

THE MACCABEES

Crown Heights quickly turned from a nice neighborhood to a soft territory for crime. People were being robbed, beaten, and even murdered.

The crime hit close to home—an attempted attack took place when a Lubavitcher woman did not close the door of her home in order to watch her children playing in the yard.

Soon, a strong force emerged to keep Crown Heights safe, led by an individual by the name of Shmuel Schrage.

In an interview with JEM's My Encounter team, his wife, Mrs. Rose Schrage, recalled:

"My husband, Rabbi Samuel (Shmuel) Schrage, was a community activist in Brooklyn in the 1960s and 1970s.

He became involved because yeshiva boys in Crown Heights were being beaten up by gangs coming in from Bedford Stuyvesant, and a Jewish woman was attacked by a knife-wielding man in her own home. My husband went to ask for police protection from the Mayor, who said there was not enough police to go around. And that is when my



FAR REACHING EFFECT

The Rebbe explained that ultimately, leaving Crown Heights can even have ramifications in *shidduchim*:

"When you will tell your daughter that she should marry a bochur who has a beard, she will respond: 'If you are afraid of Goyim, why did you move to another neighborhood so that your former Jewish neighbors are forced to live with Goyim?' The explanation must be that you only felt compelled to ignore this result because you were living in a dangerous area.

"The message she will take from that is that whoever is mightier will have more power over others. Therefore instead of marrying someone who will study in kollel, she would rather marry someone with more money, or without a beard, or a better politician—because with the choice of either politics or Shulchan Aruch, her father chose to behave according to politics!"

husband started the Maccabees, a neighborhood patrol group, which became quite famous and which was written up in The New York Times.

The Maccabees, most of them Chassidic Jews, rode around Crown Heights six to a car, equipped with nothing more than radios and large flashlights. If they saw an incident, they alerted the police and aided the victim until the authorities came.

Often they would use their vehicle to give rides to individuals needing to get to places in Crown Heights after dark, so they could avoid running into danger.

Still, my husband received a lot of criticism at the time. Mainly this was because the idea of neighborhood watchmen was so original, and some people didn't understand it—they thought the volunteers were vigilantes who took the law into their own hands. A lot of this criticism came from local Jews.

So my husband went to the Rebbe. He said, "I can take the criticism from the outside but I can't take the criticism from my own people. That really hurts. I would like to disband the Maccabees."

The Rebbe said to him, "Don't disband—make it stronger!"

My husband followed the Rebbe's advice and eventually he became the head of New York City's Neighborhood Action Program. He also got involved in politics. Mayor John Lindsay appointed him to the New York City Youth Board, and Mayor Abraham Beame retained him in that position.

With time, my husband became quite famous for his activism—he was called Mr. Crime Fighter—and he became a kind of folk hero. Because of this, many politicians who were running for office wanted his support."

TRAGIC ENDING

Rabbi Schrage was himself a victim of the lawlessness in Crown Heights, when he suffered a heart attack just hours before the Shabbos of his son's bar mitzvah.³

Mrs. Schrage phoned 911 and Rabbi Bistritzky from the Hatzalah organization in Crown Heights. The Hatzalah at that time relied solely on man power, without an ambulance at their disposal. The local paramedics who arrived with the city ambulance refused to give Reb Shmuel the



THE NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE AND THE NEW YORK TIMES REPORT ON SHMUEL SCHRAGE'S MACCABEES PATROL.

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INSIDE A MACCABEES PATROL CAR.



adequate care he needed, slurring anti-semitic comments, while the police stood idly by, fearing to get involved.

Alas Shmuel was *niftar* on the way to the hospital, on 11 Teves 5737.

The tragic death—which traumatized everyone that heard about this senseless wrongdoing—was accepted with total shock and great pain by all who knew him and by the many who respected him in the neighborhood and in the city.

The Rebbe personally came out for the *levaya* and instructed what text should be written on his *matzeiva*. After the *shloshim*, the Rebbe had a extensive *yechidus* with Mrs. Schrage and her children, giving them encouragement and special *brachos*.

As a result of this tragic incident, in his memory the Schrage family arranged for the first Hatzalah ambulance in Crown Heights.⁴

SIMCHAS IN CROWN HEIGHTS

At the Shabbos farbrengen of Parshas Vayeshev 5730,⁵ it was announced that a fundraising event would be held in Crown Heights that

Motzei Shabbos to benefit the Chadrei Torah Or.

In the *sicha* that followed the Rebbe suddenly began to dwell on this event and encouraged everyone present to support it:

"They deserve a special yasher koach for planning their event in the neighborhood of Crown Heights 'section,' upon which Hashem has commanded his brachos... They will therefore have tremendous hatzlacha.

"We should learn from them to make all simchas, whether personal or public, in this neighborhood. Weddings, bar mitzvahs, t'naim, etc.

This is not a command, chas veshalom, rather a suggestion through which one can have tremendous hatzlacha, because it is here that Hashem has commanded his brachos—and so may it be!

In numerous other instances the Rebbe expressed a desire that *simchas* specifically take place in Crown Heights.

On one occasion, earlier on in 5729, the Rebbe replied to a letter from Rabbi Avrohom Gerlitzy in which he notified the Rebbe that his wedding would take place at the

Simcha Hall of Young Israel in Crown Heights:

ת"ח ת"ח על הבשור"ט, ואזכיר עה"צ שמהם יראו רבים ויסדרו שמחות בקראונהייטס - שכונה. ואפילו הדדים (לע"ע) בשכונות אחרות.

"Thank you for the good news. I will mention at the tziyon that many others should learn from you and have their weddings in the neighborhood of Crown Heights. And even those who (for the time being) live in other neighborhoods."

Ten years later in 5739, Reb Gershon Ber Jacobson, publisher of the *Algemeiner Journal*, asked the Rebbe for a *haskama* to have the upcoming wedding of his daughter in the hall at the Brooklyn Museum (outside of the frum community of Crown Heights), as for various reasons he was unable to use a regular Crown Heights hall.

The Rebbe wrote to him in response:

באם יעשה שלא בשכונה זו, ח"ו, הרי זה יהי נגד כל ההשתדלות בביסוס השכונה, וכשנעשה ע"י עורך העיתון ה"ז" נגד מיט א טראסק" וכך' כפשוט, וכיון שעשיתי בשכונה זו מוכרחת בודאי ימצא פתרון טוב.

"If you will not make [the wedding] in this neighborhood, chas veshalom, this will counter all the efforts in establishing

"THEY DESERVE A SPECIAL YASHER KOACH FOR PLANNING THEIR EVENT IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF CROWN HEIGHTS...THEY WILL THEREFORE HAVE TREMENDOUS HATZLACHAH."



IN THIS KSAV YAD KODESH, THE REBBE THANKS FOR THE GOOD NEWS OF A WEDDING TO BE HELD LOCALLY IN CROWN HEIGHTS.

the neighborhood, and if this is done by a publisher of a newspaper, that will be “a thunderous opposition” etc. as is obvious. And because making the wedding in this neighborhood is so vital, surely you will find a good solution.”

DON'T LOSE FOCUS

A year passed since the Rebbe had spoken openly for the first time about the grave situation in Crown Heights.

A number of families (including the Bryski and Keller families), who were then living in Boro Park, decided to move to Crown Heights, shaken up by the urgency that the Rebbe expressed about strengthening the neighborhood of Crown Heights. But aside from that, little had been done to correct the situation.

The Rebbe addressed this at the farbrengen of Acharon Shel Pesach 5730,⁶ expressing dismay that instead of focusing on what needed to be done for the good of the community as a whole, people were more concerned about their status, which resulted in strong differences of opinion and *dinei Torah*.

The Rebbe requested of the Chassidim that they focus their energies primarily on what would be to the benefit of Crown Heights and only afterward on the gain



of the *mosdos* they had personal responsibility toward, and only after that toward personal gain.

“If we join and work on this in unison,” stated the Rebbe, “then the *Aibershter* will respond by providing *hatzlacha* in strengthening the entire



YOUNG ISRAEL OF CROWN HEIGHTS.



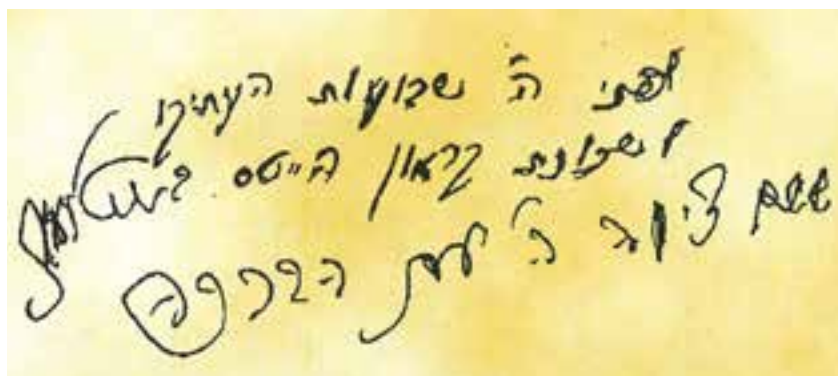
THE CHASIDEI VIZNITZ SHUL IN CROWN HEIGHTS.



THE KARASTIRER MIKVAH.



ANSHEI RUBASHOV (GELERNTER) SHUL.



שם ציוה ה' את הברכה

Crown Heights—not just two or three streets.”

The Rebbe concluded the farbrengen happily noting that day camps had been opened in Crown Heights for the first time. The Rebbe encouraged that they always be full of campers, even from other neighborhoods, as long as it wouldn't harm the organizations in those areas.

KEEPING THE SHULS OPEN

One way through which Lubavitchers endeavored to salvage the shuls that were quickly disappearing from the neighborhood was by many of *anash* making an effort to

daven and learn at a *shtibel* that was dwindling.

On a number of occasions the Rebbe encouraged that Chassidim do so. One Rosh Hashanah the Rebbe instructed Chassidim to fan out to the shuls in the neighborhood to ensure that they have a *minyan*, and come to 770 later for *tekios*. When the Rebbe heard that a shul on Union Street and Troy Avenue did not have a *minyan* consistently and was on the verge of closing, he stated that if others won't daven there, then he would go there himself.

Rabbi Michoel Seligson shared how he would go with his father, Dr. Avrohom Abba Seligson, to keep the *minyan* going at the Halayner Shtibel,

which was located on the corner of Eastern Parkway and Schenectady Avenue.

In many cases the Lubavitchers who came to daven there in fact kept these shuls open.

One example was Rabbi Mordechai Harlig, father of Reb Mayer Harlig, who had a devoted following and a large shul and Mikvah located on the corner of President Street and Rogers Avenue. Like many other local Jews, his congregants began moving out of Crown Heights and begged him to come with. Some of the more wealthy members even promised that they would build him a shul in their new neighborhood. He asked the Rebbe whether he should follow his community or not, and the Rebbe told him that his followers will be fine, but he should remain in Crown Heights.

Reb Zelig Katzman, Reb Itche Springer and Reb Shlomo Laiken consistently davened at Rabbi Harlig's shul for over twenty years, helping keep it open until he passed away.

In the case of the larger, more modern shuls, these were saved in a unique twist. As the shuls dwindled, a few Lubavitchers would buy membership there, and that would prevent the shuls' boards from selling to non-Jews.

Many of the other shuls that are *anash* shuls today are around because Lubavitchers davened there on a regular basis.

NOT JUST 770

At the farbrengen of Parshas Mikeitz 5731⁷ the Rebbe spoke a lengthy *sicha*, agonizing over the dire situation in Crown Heights, and how so little had been done despite repeated entreaties from the Rebbe that a concerted effort be made toward retaining and reviving Crown Heights.

During the *sicha* the Rebbe mentioned that there were people who

thought he was only concerned about 770. To this shocking claim the Rebbe reiterated that the imperative to save the entire Crown Heights was from Choshen Mishpat in Shulchan Aruch. How could someone surmise that the Rebbe meant only 770?

The Rebbe dwelled on this question and refuted it, and the *agmas nefesh* was visible.

The Rebbe then mentioned that an organization had been started to deal with the crisis in Crown Heights. The focus was on buying the properties that the Yidden who had left were selling. This organization was called “Chebra” and was run by a group of Crown Heights residents.

“Unfortunately not many people are aware of this new organization,” the Rebbe said. “People need to come forward and purchase shares in the organization so that they can have the money to buy houses in Crown Heights on behalf of the community.”

Then the Rebbe announced the following initiative:

“In general, the ideology of Chabad Chassidus is more strenuous than the ways of Chagas Chassidus. However, many Chabad Chassidim seem to get more pleasure when treated with ‘Poilishe inyonim.’ Therefore we will motivate everyone with a segula. I will purchase a share in the ‘Chebra’ and one dollar from the money I used to purchase my share should go to each of the other investors that will purchase a share...”

Purchasing the shares is not only pertinent to the residents of Crown Heights, but also to all those who live in other communities around the world. Even more so—those who live in Crown Heights are already supporting the neighborhood by living here, as opposed to those that don’t. The only way they can assist in bettering Crown Heights is through the shares they buy in ‘Chebra.’

After the Rebbe spoke, a representative of “Chebra” announced

that each share cost \$500, and he explained how to purchase the shares.

COLLECTIVE EFFORT

Indeed many Lubavitchers proceeded to buy shares, and many Chassidim received a dollar bill from the Rebbe through the representatives, a rarity for many in those years.

Individuals were able to purchase shares on their own, however others who could not afford a share, purchased a joint share in partnership with others. Even among the *bochurim*, groups joined together to purchase a share.

In Lubavitch communities around the globe, Chassidim pooled together funds in order to buy shares in “Chebra.”

Despite these initial efforts, at the farbrengen of Parshas Beshalach 5732⁸ the Rebbe addressed a recent development with great anguish. Over two years had passed since the Rebbe had initially discussed the painful decay of Crown Heights, and had repeatedly encouraged any effort to rebuild and strengthen the area. Yet just three days earlier—on Yud Shevat—the Rebbe was informed that a home right near 770 was sold to a non-Jew!

The Rebbe expressed his disappointment openly, especially in light of the fact that there were many who were aware that the possibility of the sale of this home was developing, yet in the end they did not stop it from taking place.

“This hurts, and when something hurts, one cries out!

“However,” the Rebbe announced:

“כן יקום, עס וועט דא זיין די שכונו, מען דארף נאר טאן!”

“The neighborhood will in fact remain here, we need only to act!”

A few months later at the Acharon Shel Pesach farbrengen, the Rebbe

again mentioned the dire situation of Crown Heights and explained:

Shuls and *batei midrash* are the dwelling places for Hashem in this mundane world. And the same goes for every Jewish home, because people learn Torah and perform mitzvos within them. Therefore, when one leaves a Jewish community and sells his home to a non-Jew, causing shuls and *batei midrash* to be closed, he is effectively banishing Hashem from where He dwells! And the same is on the other extreme: When one strengthens and expands Jewish neighborhoods he essentially brings another property under the dominion of Hashem.⁹

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

The non-Jewish immigrants who moved into Crown Heights were predominantly individuals with low income, and beneficiaries of government programs.

In a time when no Jew had yet benefitted of the subsidized housing available for those who couldn’t afford, the Rebbe expressed disappointment that the *askanim* who were attempting to prevent additional Crown Heights homes from being sold hadn’t implemented a simple strategy that could greatly strengthen the Jewish character of the neighborhood.

Waves of Jewish immigrants from Russia, Poland and Romania were arriving on New York’s shores and were being placed in housing projects in random areas throughout New York.

If minimal effort was invested, explained the Rebbe, then these immigrants could have been settled into the many vacated homes and buildings in Crown Heights. The government would even give abundant funding to the communities who were welcoming them, as they had done elsewhere! Instead the

WE ARE ADDRESSING THE *MIKVEH* THAT IS CLOSEST TO THE SHUL OF *NESI DOREINU*, AND IN FACT THE ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOOD IS ONE THAT *NESI DOREINU* HAS CHOSEN TO RESIDE IN, AND GAVE *BRACHOS* TO IT—WHICH HAVE ALREADY BEEN FULFILLED



homes abandoned by Yidden were increasingly being filled by non-Jews, many of whom harbored ill feelings toward the Yidden of Crown Heights.¹⁰

The Rebbe also addressed the sorry state of the Karestirer Mikveh, the one nearest to 770, saying that he had visited it a year earlier and the stairs were dangerously slippery and the lights dark.

“This is the state of the *mikveh* closest to the shul of the *nosi hador*!” exclaimed the Rebbe.

“When a guest from across the world comes to 770... he is sent to use that *mikveh*. What will be when he slips there? It is the fault of [the *askanim*], who were obligated to fix it.

“We are addressing the *mikveh* that is closest to the shul of *nesi doreinu*, and in fact the entire neighborhood is one that *nesi doreinu* has chosen to reside in, and gave *brachos* to it—which have already been fulfilled, and these above mentioned individuals [—the *askanim*] are beneficiaries of these *brachos*. So how could it be that they have not ‘dipped a finger in cold water’ to make this neighborhood how it should be? And the welfare of 770 is dependent on the neighborhood around it.”

BE PROTECTED

Although some progress was made in the years following the Rebbe’s incessant call to strengthen Crown Heights, in the summer of 5741 the Rebbe highlighted a recent rash of robberies at a Shabbos farbrengen.¹¹

Drawing a comparison to the mitzvah of *egla arufa*, where the elders of the city are held accountable for a person found dead outside their city limits, the Rebbe expressed surprise that nothing was being done to combat this ongoing issue of public safety!

“It is vital that those who have the status of the neighborhood’s ‘elders’

V SCHILDKRAUT via JEM, 108712

MAYOR OF NEW YORK CITY MR. JOHN LINDSAY IN YECHIDUS, 5 KISLEV, 5729.

show a response to this unacceptable behavior, so that it be stopped...

"My intention is not that the elders themselves use weapons to protect the neighborhood, for they may unintentionally shoot themselves while trying to stop the thief, because they are inexperienced in this field.

"Rather it is incumbent upon them to find suitable people to guard the neighborhood to avoid further robberies."

RENT HIKES AND RESPONSIBILITY

During one of the sichos when the Rebbe publicly addressed the saga of the *sefarim* that were stolen from the Library of Agudas Chasidei Chabad,¹² he also spoke strongly of an issue that Crown Heights was suffering from:

"It is imperative that in the neighborhood where the [Friediker] Rebbe lived and was active, that concern be given to strengthening and expanding the neighborhood. It must also be seen to that decent apartments and homes be available for all at an affordable price.

"Especially in light of the skyrocketing rent prices, which demands irregular resources in order to be able to afford an apartment, and which stands in the way of maintaining the neighborhood...

"Some may say that because this is the neighborhood in which the [Friediker] Rebbe lived, therefore one must be forced to pay exorbitant sums to live here. And paying these prices doesn't even merit an apartment with decent living conditions!

"Let it be known that this approach is contrary to the will of the [Friediker] Rebbe! It is also contrary to '*kiruv rechokim*.' And furthermore, this can even negatively impact our closest ones!"

The Rebbe expressed that it is of great importance that meetings be



held immediately to resolve this, so that affordable homes and apartments are made available to all, and that they be in perfect condition!

THE REBBE'S VISION

Today, looking back at the Rebbe's early campaign for Crown Heights, the Rebbe's clear foresight becomes evident.

Taking into context the timing of the Rebbe's sichos on this matter, it may have been hard to understand the high expectations the Rebbe had.

Crime statistics from those years show that in fact every major urban city in North America was suffering from the same criminal epidemic! Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, and many others, were cities in which thousands of people



were murdered each year in regular homicide attacks.

Few residents of major cities in the USA ventured out of their homes from dusk through dawn, fearing the ruthless criminals who freely roamed the streets. In the same areas where today yeshiva *bochurim* can comfortably return home from a *farbrenge* in the wee hours of the morning, many would shudder to walk outside of their homes, in the 5720s, 30s and 40s.

As seen consistently throughout the Rebbe's *nesius*, the Rebbe spearheaded a new phenomena, far in advance of its mainstream acceptance.

The Rebbe expressed this in a letter to Mr. Sid Davidoff, an administrative assistant to then Mayor John Lindsay at the end of 5730, after encouraging him to communicate with community leaders and Rabbi Hodakov to better the situation in Crown Heights:

"...This will strengthen the joint efforts between you and the representatives of this community, so that the residents who expanded this community and erected educational, charitable and religious institutions will be encouraged to remain here. In essence our goal is that this neighborhood will serve as an example of harmony and coexistence for other neighborhoods in our vast city, and in fact throughout the entire United States which suffer from similar challenges..."

The Rebbe wanted strength in the face of crime, and that every Yid deserved to live in safety.

Only decades later would Mayor Rudolph Giuliani implement this idea through adding additional law enforcement officers, successfully bringing down crime in New York City in drastic proportions. He set a trend that the mayors of many other major American cities followed, to the extent that today it is difficult

Standing today almost 50 years after the Rebbe pioneered the concept of a safe atmosphere for each of us, it still remains up to us to assist in this campaign, upholding the Rebbe's special *shchunah* in every way possible. We need to do all we can to ensure that every Yid is welcome in Crown Heights, offering affordable and livable

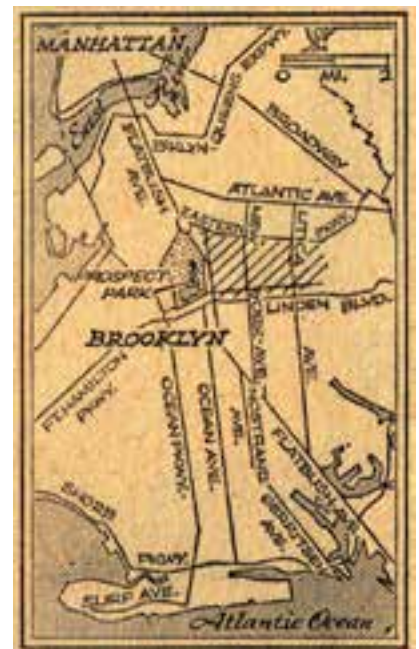
In the Rebbe's words:

NOT A GHETTO

It is told that one *askan* sent in a suggestion that Crown Heights be converted into a gated community. Clear borders should be drawn and a fence should be built, and only Yidden would be permitted to reside within it.

This idea was immediately dismissed by the Rebbe, with the explanation that he desired “*uforatstva*” for the neighborhood to blossom and spread, not to be fenced in and closed!

1. Sichos Kodesh 5729 vol. 2, mugah in Likutei Sichos vol. 6 p. 350
2. See follow-up letter in Likkutei Sichos vol. 6 p. 357
3. Much of this description is based on an article in the Crown Heights Newspaper written by Rabbi Michael Seligson.
4. See extensive article, Kfar Chabad Magazine 8 Teves 5767
5. Sichos Kodesh 5730 vol. 1 p. 302
6. Sichos Kodesh 5732 vol. 2 p. 81
7. Sichos Kodesh 5731 vol. 1 p. 359
8. Sichos Kodesh 5732 vol. 1 p. 598
9. Likkutei Sichos vol. 7 p. 278
10. Sichos Kodesh 5735 vol. 2 p. 60.
11. Sichos Kodesh 5741 vol. 4 p. 620
12. Tzadik L'melech vol. 4 p. 30
13. Hisvaaduyos 5747 vol. 2 p. 489



THE REBBE EXPLAINS HIS STANCE THAT NO ONE SHOULD MOVE OUT OF CROWN HEIGHTS.

