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chabad

The doors were repaired at Chabad's headquarters. But the sense of security is still broken.

Questions and concerns reigned in Crown Heights about the man charged with ramming the building.

By [Joseph Strauss](#) January 29, 2026



Maintenance workers were installing a new door on Thursday, the day after the car-ramming at Chabad world headquarters, Jan. 29, 2026, Crown Heights, Brooklyn. (Joseph Strauss)

CROWN HEIGHTS, Brooklyn — Levi was leaving a celebration at Chabad's world headquarters on Wednesday evening when a man he didn't know approached him with a question: How could he remove the bollards blocking the driveway into the building?

Levi, a teen from Los Angeles, didn't know the answer. But having traveled to Crown Heights for the Hasidic movement's Yud Shevat celebration, marking the yahrzeit of its penultimate leader and the ascendance of its final one, he understood the question. He had just been sitting in temporary bleachers, and they needed to be moved to get ready for the next event.

“He told me he’s from the bleacher company,” Levi said about the man, who said he was trying to remove the bollards to get his vehicle in.

“Just do it the same way you got it in,” Levi recalled another person responding. “He was like, ‘It’s really annoying and I want to end my work day.’”

Levi left — then heard the sound of tires screeching and a car ramming into the synagogue doors. Soon, he saw a video showing the incident — which ended with the man who had approached him being arrested.

Levi’s account could not be independently verified. (He also originally gave his name as Shmuel Munkes, an 18th-century Hasidic rabbi famous for his humor.) But it comports with what NYPD Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny said in an update on Thursday: that CCTV footage showed the alleged assailant, Dan Sohail, parking a few blocks away, removing bollards from the driveway, and then returning to his car before ramming into the doors a few minutes later.

“The bleachers were supposed to be taken out, so he must have done his homework to know that,” Levi said.

Exactly why Sohail allegedly rammed the building, and what he had done in the days and weeks before the incident, was still coming into focus on Thursday as prosecutors announced that he was being charged with four crimes. Sohail, 36, is being charged with attempted assault, reckless endangerment, criminal mischief and aggravated harassment — all potential hate crimes.

But it was clear that at a time when Jewish institutions have invested mightily in their security infrastructure and practices, a lapse had allowed a dangerous situation to unfold at 770 Eastern Parkway. The situation has renewed concerns about security that gained prominence after the deadly shooting at a public Chabad-led Hanukkah event in Australia last month.

“NYC must make securing 770 @Chabad a top priority,” tweeted David Greenfield, executive director of the Met Council. “The fact that someone could ram a car into 770, the most visible Jewish site in New York, is a serious security failure. If, God forbid, this had been a bomb, the outcome would have been catastrophic.”

NYPD officers were stationed outside the building and arrived on the scene within minutes, apprehending Sohail without incident. And ordinarily, there are in fact bollards designed to prevent large vehicles from approaching, a safeguard against both rammings and truck bombs that have targeted Jewish institutions and other sites in the past.

But Sohail had also been inside the building before, according to video identified on Thursday that showed him dancing in a circle with a group of Orthodox Jewish men about 10 days ago. He wears a kippah that at one point falls to the ground; Sohail leans down to pick it up and return it to his head.

Avi Winner, a spokesman for Chabad World Headquarters, said the incident struck at a paradox of the Hasidic outreach organization: The movement’s efforts to be welcoming and visible can also make it more vulnerable.

“The thing about Chabad is that it is so accessible — that’s really one of the things that people love about Chabad,” Winner said. “So to balance being accessible and welcoming to everyone, and also having healthy boundaries and security, it’s a tough balance.”

He added, “But there has to be a change. This has to be a wake-up call.”

On Thursday afternoon, police had blocked off a lane of Eastern Parkway and cordoned off the driveway as maintenance workers were installing new, solid doors to replace the wooden ones that had been damaged when Sohail allegedly drove repeatedly into them.

People in the area were also engaged in another activity, deliberating about Sohail’s potential motive.

A wide range of public figures, including Mayor Zohran Mamdani and NYPD Commissioner Jessica Tisch, denounced the incident as an antisemitic attack on Wednesday night.

But Sohail's father, Sohail Majid Butt, told the New York Times that he did not believe his son had been motivated by anti-Jewish hate. In fact, Butt said, his son had announced an intention to convert to Judaism — and that he, a Muslim, and Sohail's Catholic mother both supported him.

"I don't think whatever has happened intentionally," Sohail's father said. "There is no way. He is dancing with them in the party."

In his police update, Kenny said Sohail "seemed to be very at home with the Jewish community at the time he was attending that social gathering."

And Rabbi Mordecai Lightstone, a Chabad official whose son was inside the building at the time, tweeted on Thursday, "Antisemitism does not appear to be a factor in this."

Rabbi Yaakov Behrman, who works as a Chabad public relations liaison, said he believed the incident had been intentional, citing Sohail's alleged attentiveness to the bollards. He also tweeted that Sohail had been at a Chabad house in New Jersey earlier, and police were called to remove him.

Sohail also reportedly visited a yeshiva in Carteret, New Jersey, where he lives, earlier in the week, but was turned away. The rabbi of Chabad of South Brunswick in New Jersey told the Forward that Sohail had attended its Purim celebration last March, and he could tell that Sohail was "not exactly stable" after speaking for a few minutes.

Outside 770 Eastern Parkway, Menachem Amar, in for the celebration from Montreal, said he could not begin to speculate on Sohail's motivation.

“I don’t know why he’d want to do that,” Amar said. “I’m guessing the guy’s just mentally challenged or whatever, and he was upset about something, but I don’t think antisemitic. And I just hope he gets the help that he needs.”

Whatever happens with Sohail’s case, Winner said the Chabad community had been shaken by the incident.

“It’s one of the most recognizable synagogues in the world, and the fact that such a thing like this could happen is shocking, unbelievable,” he said.

This story has been updated since publication to reflect the fact that the lead source initially gave a joke name.