



**“Bad guys are released quicker than we can finish the paper work, and that’s just the tip of the iceberg.”**

December 2, Fox News correspondent Peter Doocy asked Press Secretary Jan Psaki, “So when a huge group of criminals organizes themselves and they want to go loot a store—a CVS, a Nordstrom, a Home Depot—until the shelves are clean, do you think that’s because of the pandemic?”

Ms. Psaki replied, “I think a root cause in a lot of communities is the pandemic, yes.”

Many disagree and point a finger instead at Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom and LA County District Attorney George Gascón’s left-wing policies and liberal justice reforms, such as Proposition 47, a 2014 law meant to keep non-violent criminals out of crowded prisons by more than doubling the amount one can steal and still be charged with only a misdemeanor. (That amount jumped from \$450 to \$950.) In March 2020, California adopted a zero-bail policy for misdemeanors and lower-level felonies, sending criminals right back to the streets.

This week, an 81-year-old woman was murdered during a home invasion in Beverly Hills. The suspect has a long criminal history. “Literally, we’re arresting the same people again and again and letting them right out to commit more crime,” said Mark Stainbrook, chief of police at the Beverly Hills Police Department. “That individual was out on parole and he was out committing crime. He should never have been out in the first place.”

Jamie McBride, director of the Los Angeles Police Protective League, summed up the situation similarly: “Bad guys are released quicker than we can finish the paperwork, and that’s just the tip of the iceberg.”

The police arrested 14 people in the

recent smash-and-grab robberies and were forced to release them all.

One of the smash-and-grabs took place at The Grove, a shopping center a few minutes away from my home. It is terrifying to imagine a robbery taking place in the same place where my grandchildren enjoy the trolley and the dancing water fountain.

### **Defund the Police**

In 2020, California’s homicides increased by 31 percent, the highest increase since states began keeping reliable records. Vehicle thefts rose by 20 percent and aggravated assaults rose by 8.8 percent. After the Black Lives Matter “peaceful protests” in Los Angeles, in which 66 police cars were damaged and several stores in the *frum* neighborhood were vandalized and looted, the Los Angeles City Council responded to calls to “defund the police” and approved a \$150 million cut to the LAPD’s budget.

A friend encouraged me to download the Citizen app, which provides real-time local crime alerts. Right away, my phone started ping-pong. There was a man with a machete down the street. There was a strong-armed robbery at the CVS a few blocks away. Next, a man with a gun was spotted at the supermarket near our home—and my daughter was on her way there at the time.

There was a spate of home robberies, some in broad daylight and on blocks where many of the homeowners are *frum*. Friends of mine had their cars stripped of catalytic converters, tires and rims. Both my car and my husband’s car were broken into, again and again.

We started staying home more and

thought twice before going into a store. And it was not from fear of COVID.

### **Magen Am Steps Up**

The Los Angeles Police Department charts a 59.2 percent increase of anti-Semitic incidents over the same period last year. In one of the Black Lives Matter marches, held in a park a little over a mile from my home, protesters chanted, “[Expletive] the Jews! Kill the cops!” A van bearing a message stating that the Jews caused the coronavirus drove through the streets of the neighborhood, and signs hanging from a freeway overpass also blamed the Jews for COVID. A neighbor down the street from us hung posters all over his property declaring that Israel caused the genocide of the Armenian people. In May 2021, during the war in Israel, anti-Jewish slurs were shouted from cars bearing Palestinian flags, rocks were thrown, and Jews were attacked on the streets.

On Erev Chanukah of this year, flyers describing a Jewish conspiracy to cause COVID were distributed in Beverly Hills.

Yossi Eilfort, who grew up in California, decided to take action against the violence. “I was young when I heard about the terrorist attack on the Chabad *shluchim* of Mumbai, and it affected me deeply,” he shared. “However, I believed that the United States was a safe place for Jews. That’s not necessarily the case anymore.” In 2016, he established Magen Am, an organization that provides trained and licensed security teams to protect Jewish communities. Magen Am has a staff of 50, and its teams include IDF and US Army veterans.

In April 2020, Magen Am divided the

Hancock Park community into zones and set up chats for each zone to report incidents. They began nightly patrols, too. There are plans to expand Magen Am patrols to the Pico-Robertson area and to other areas around Los Angeles, but they are challenged by the need for more funding and manpower. “Recently, crime has shot up in Los Angeles, and it’s spreading within the community,” Yossi said. “To catch up with the new crime trends, we’ve added a daytime Magen Am presence.”

Magen Am also organized self-defense classes and basic pistol courses in the community.

## Learning to Defend Ourselves

A few of my friends recently became gun owners. My husband and I also thought about it, and we even studied the firearm safety certificate study guide and received our cards.

My husband brought home a Glock 19. I watched him hold it. My husband has gentle hands. He’s a *mohel* and a healer. He also sits and learns a few hours each day.

My husband looked at the gun, shook his head, and put it back into the case. I agreed. *Yidden* should be able to defend themselves. But for the two of us, this was not the way. We returned the gun the next day.

My husband walks to *shul* before dawn every morning to *daven vasikin*. I’m haunted by the stories of his grandfather, who came to the United States as a teenager after being chased and beaten by Russian gangs. To fight the panic when my husband leaves the house each morning, I’ve started getting up at the same time he does, spending more time on my *davening*, forcing myself to say the words aloud and concentrating on what they mean. This is my “*kol Yaakov*.”

Recently, the Los Angeles Police Department sent out a safety bulletin reminding people to check their

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surroundings and not display high-value property such as purses, watches or jewelry. The department advises the public to comply, rather than resist, in the event of a robbery. Magen Am distributed a flyer on follow-home daytime robberies, warning about the trend of criminals watching people as they walk up to their garages or doors and then robbing them. Magen Am added a new situational awareness class to teach community members how to properly observe their surroundings.

## Stay or Go?

My husband and I talked about moving—actually, we went around and around discussing all the factors—and we came back to the same place: we need to stay in California for now. But there seems to be a trend in the opposite direction. One of my friends moved to Florida a few weeks ago. Another is filling out papers to immigrate to Eretz Yisrael. I know of a few dozen *frum* families, mostly young ones, who have moved away. When I asked, they gave a list of reasons for leaving that included the exorbitant cost of housing, filthy streets, high crime rates, and—everyone gave this one—the problem with homelessness. California’s homeless number more than 160,000.

My grandchildren are still shaken by the homeless man who shouted at them and tried to block their car from moving. A few weeks ago, a homeless man hid behind a car in our driveway, opened a bag of garbage and smeared it over the driveway. A neighbor saw him and asked him to move, but he refused. Magen Am came and man-

aged to get him to move; it took us hours to clean up the mess. Last week, a homeless woman went up the stairs outside our house and spread out her belongings. When my husband asked her to leave our property, she spat back, “I have the right to be here.”

An especially frightening incident took place one sunny morning after my husband dropped off a friend at the local farmers’ market. As he waited for him in the car, he saw a man dash across the street. “I thought he was rushing because someone needed help,” my husband told me later. “The next thing I know, the guy is in my back seat.” The carjacker told my husband to get out of the car and leave the keys. My husband refused.

The carjacker hit my husband in the back of the neck and climbed over the seat. My husband opened the door of the car, but he didn’t get out. Instead, he screamed for help, keeping his feet inside the car.

The carjacker fled. Onlookers chased him until the police showed up and caught him. They told my husband that this man has done this before and has been caught—a few times. The assistant DA called my husband later, asking him to provide testimony in court. He reminded him that the carjacker has the right to know who is testifying against him, and that in all likelihood, he will soon be free to do it again. The assistant DA added that this man is an illegal immigrant. California has the highest rate of illegal immigrants of any state. An estimated 2.5 million people are there illegally.

Recently, there has been a push for change. In October 2021, California went to the polls to vote on a recall of Governor Newsom. The voters were asked two questions: Should Newsom be recalled from the office of governor? Who should succeed Newsom if he is recalled? However, Newsom defeated the recall and remains in office while crime continues to rise. ●