

EREV SHABBOS

1 Elul 5786

Friday • August 14, 2026 •
Rosh Chodesh

CANDLE LIGHTING

8:05 PM

Friday • Vaughan, ON

SHABBOS ENDS

9:08 PM

Motzaei Shabbos • Sat night

TORAH READING

Shoftim

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 51:12–
52:12

PIRKEI AVOS

Ch. 6

First Shabbos of Elul

A Sign at the Crossroads



At the rubble. ZAKA volunteers operate at one of the sites struck by the earthquake in Colombia, August 13, 2026. The organization's field clinic is treating the injured, Jewish and not; in Cali the Hebraika community davened outdoors after their building was ruled unsafe. Photo: ZAKA Spokesperson.

"Thank God, we emerged unscathed from the earthquake, and that is the miracle for us. Now we are dealing with the damage and the repairs so that we continue to be an open house to Jewish visitors from around the world."

That is Rabbi Shmuel Friedman, two days after the earthquake that killed hundreds of people across western Colombia on Monday morning. The house he is talking about stands in Salento, a small town in the coffee country. The quake tore off parts of the roof, knocked out the electrical system, crushed the storage rooms and ruined the equipment inside them. What that equipment was for: Friday night meals. Kosher food packed up for Shabbos. Weekday prayers. A bed and a listening ear for the Israeli backpackers who have been showing up at this door for years. It is the Chabad House of Salento, and the family inside it — Rabbi Friedman, his wife Leah Hodaya, their children — baruch Hashem, walked out unhurt.

Four years ago the Friedmans arrived in Salento with almost nothing and opened the Chabad House in a small rented apartment. On their first morning, out buying basic equipment, they met eight Israeli backpackers who cheered that a Chabad House had finally come to town. There was no mikvah, so they immersed in a river, which turned out to be freezing and fast-moving. The apartment

filled up, and the activity moved to a bigger building near the center of town: the one whose roof came off on Monday.

Why does a Jewish house stand in a Colombian coffee town at all? Salento sits at the edge of the Cocora Valley, where the tallest palm trees in the world grow, and the trails fill every season with trekkers, many of them Israelis a long way from anyone who knows their name. The house exists so that a Jew moving through those mountains has an address before he needs one, so that when something goes wrong on the road, he does not have to stop and ask where to run.

Prepare the Road

Parshas Shoftim sets aside the cities of refuge for a person who killed unintentionally. The Torah permits the victim's close relative, the *goel hadam*, the avenger of blood, to pursue him; inside the walls of a refuge city the avenger cannot touch him, and there he lives. And the portion adds an instruction that sounds almost like road engineering: תִּכְּיֵן לְךָ הַדֶּרֶךְ, "prepare for yourself the road." The Talmud spells out what preparing meant: at every crossroads stood a sign reading REFUGE, so that a man running for his life would never have to stand at a fork asking directions. The refuge began at the signpost, planted long before anyone ran.

The Torah first promises these cities in a single verse: אֲנִי הָיָה לְךָ מִקְוֶה, "I will appoint you a place to which he shall flee." The initials of that promise spell Elul. The month we entered this week is a city of refuge built into time: a person brings in the mistakes of the past year, and the month shelters him while he sets them right.

Three Cities Still Unbuilt

The portion commands that when God broadens the borders of the land, "you shall add three more cities" — three cities of refuge beyond the six that ever stood. It has never happened. On this the Rambam builds his proof that Moshiach is written into the Torah itself: whoever does not believe in him denies the Torah, for the Torah commanded three more cities of refuge, and God did not command it in vain; so the days of Moshiach must come, when they will be built. God placed a promise of Moshiach inside a commandment: three more cities of refuge, still unbuilt.

Judges, Advisers, what about Officers?

On this very Shabbos thirty-five years ago, Shabbos Parshas Shoftim, 1991, the Rebbe spoke about a promise the prophet holds out for that time. The parsha opens by commanding "judges and officers": judges who rule on the law, and officers who enforce the ruling. In the promise, the officers are gone, and advisers stand beside the judges: וְאִשְׁכָּנָה שְׁפָטֶיךָ כְּבָרְאשֹׁנָה וְיַעֲצִיךָ כְּבִתְחִלָּה, "I will restore your judges as at first, and your advisers as at the beginning."

A judge hands down a ruling backed by authority. An adviser, in the sicha's words, speaks "not from above to below, as with a decree, but as a good friend who speaks to

him on a basis of equality," giving advice his listener can understand and accept with a feeling that it is for his benefit. When there are advisers, no officers are needed, because good advice is carried out willingly. And the sicha places a charge on every person of the generation: to know, and to make known, that the generation has not been left without an address: there is a judge, an adviser, a prophet of the generation, and his prophecy is הִנֵּה זֶה בָּא, "hinei zeh (Moshiach) ba, behold, he (Moshiach) comes."

It is the same promise in three forms. An appointed month: Elul. An appointed person: the leader of the generation. An appointed place on the road, because it was that leader who sent a young couple to a small Colombian town, so that the crossroads by the Cocora Valley would have its sign up before any Jew came running. And a promise of construction still open: three cities yet to be added, in the days that are coming.

A sign at a crossroads has one job: to stay readable, and to keep pointing the way to refuge.

On Monday the ground shook under the signpost itself, and the man who holds it up counted his miracle and turned to the repairs, because a sign at a crossroads has one job: to stay readable, and to keep pointing the way to refuge.

Elul began this week, and the month of refuge is open. In Salento the repairs have already begun, so the door can open with it. Three cities are still to be added, in the imminent redemption. Moshiach now!

SOURCES

Devarim 19:3, 19:8–9 · Shemos 21:13 · Makkos 10b · Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 11:2 · Sichas of Shabbos Parshas Shoftim, 7 Elul 5751 (Sefer HaSichos 5751 vol. 2) · JNS and COLive, August 12, 2026 · Times of Israel, August 13, 2026.

ON THE HORIZON

Mon, 18 Elul · August 31

Chai Elul, the birthday of the Baal Shem Tov (5458) and of the Alter Rebbe (5505).

Motzaei Shabbos, 23 Elul · September 5

First Selichos, after midnight. Rosh Hashanah 5787 begins Friday evening, September 11.

RAMBAM STUDY SCHEDULE · SHABBOS, 2 ELUL · DAY 194

Three chapters a day: Temurah, ch. 4; Tum'at Met, chs. 1–2 · **One chapter a day:** Kiddush HaChodesh, ch. 16 · **Sefer HaMitzvos:** Negative 107; Positive 107.

Sefer HaMitzvos, in brief: N 107, not to change a consecrated animal from one sanctity to another — a *shelamim* may not be made an *asham*, nor an *asham* a *chatas*; learned from the bechor, "no man shall consecrate it": what is already Hashem's stays as it is. P 107, the mitzvah of *tumas meis*, encompassing all the laws of the impurity a dead body conveys.