

Elul – Give Me Shelter

by Rabbi Ephraim Sprecher

“You shall separate 3 cities for yourself in your land, which Hashem your G-d, is giving you to inherit.” (Devarim 19:2)

The Torah commands us here to designate cities of refuge and shelter. These refuge cities are for the person who commits an accidental murder, where he would run, to receive protection from the GOAL HADAM (The redeemer of blood). These cities of refuge are Levite cities where the accidental murderer undergoes rehabilitation until the death of the Kohen Gadol.

But today we have no cities of refuge and shelter. And we know that the Torah is G-d’s GPS (G-d’s Personal System) for all times. So what is the message of the Cities of Refuge and Shelter for us today?

The Baal Shem Tov explains that the month of Elul is compared to a city of refuge and shelter. Perhaps the Rolling Stones were alluding to this idea in their number 1 hit song called “Give Me Shelter.” So it is no coincidence that this Mitzvah of the Cities of Refuge and Shelter is included in Parshat Shoftim which is usually read in the first week of Elul as a preparation for the High Holy Days.

The month of Elul is our symbolic “safe-house.” This month is the appropriate period for introspection, soul searching and self examination. Elul is the time to rehabilitate, re-JEW-venate and improve our

negative character traits and deeds and make amends for all our past transgressions throughout the year.

Let us take advantage of this wonderful opportunity of the safe-house of Elul and let us sing “Give Me Shelter” not just in Elul but throughout the entire year!