

Luzzatto, a member of an illustrious Italian rabbinic family. In it, he is advised to review the laws from time to time “because one is prone to forget.” Rabbi Calimani adds: “I am sure he will do so.”



Details from *Shehitah Kabbalah* Granted to Samuel Luzzatto by Rabbi Simhah ben Abraham Calimani, Venice, 19 Adar 5534 (March 2, 1774)

This elaborately decorated document contains two distinct texts certifying Luzzatto as both a *shohet* and a *bodek*—an examiner who checks that the animal’s lungs do not contain lesions that would render the meat not kosher. Centered above the text, two *putti* (cherubs) flank the Luzzatto family coat of arms. One holds a knife (or *halaf*) representing the office of *shohet*, and the other a pair of animal lungs, which represents Luzzatto’s additional role as *bodek*. As the laws of *shehitah* vary from animal to animal, different types of *kabbalot* can be issued indicating which ones a particular *shohet* may slaughter. Illustrations of the many animals that Luzzatto was permitted to slaughter surround the text.

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Re'eh 5780

ראה תש"ף



## Gratitude During Challenging Times

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This week’s parashah begins with the verse: **רָאָה אֲנֹכִי נָתַן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם / בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה** (Deut. 11:26). Within the context of the biblical narrative, this verse refers to a choice given to the Israelites upon entering the Promised Land: they could either choose to follow God’s commandments and reap rewards, or not to follow God’s commandments and suffer negative consequences. The blessings and curses set before the Israelites are enumerated in Deuteronomy 27–28, and were read publicly upon entering the Land, as recounted in Joshua 8:30–35.

But what can this verse mean to us today, in the twenty-first century, when we are no longer standing on the border of the Promised Land following a forty-year trek in the desert? If the Bible speaks to people in all times and places, how can we discern the verse’s relevance to our own lives?

I understand the word **הַיּוֹם** / “today” in the same way that the Midrash understands the words **הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה** / “this day” in Exodus 19:1 and Deuteronomy 27:9.

**בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה  
בָּאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי:**

“In the third month since the children of Israel’s leaving the Land of Egypt, **on this day**, they arrived at the wilderness of Sinai.” (Exod. 19:1)

**הִסָּכַת וּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נְהִייתָ לְעַם לֹא־לְהִידָּה**

“Be silent and hear, O Israel; **this day** you have become a people of Hashem your God.” (Deut. 27:9)

Why does the Torah use the words “this day” in each of these verses? Exodus 19:1 would read better with the words “on *that* day,” and Deuteronomy 27:9 doesn’t actually take place on the day the nation entered a covenant with Hashem! In his commentary on each of these verses, Rashi, the preeminent medieval Jewish biblical exegete, references midrashim (cited in *Yalkut Shimoni* 273 and BT Berakhot 63a, respectively) which present the idea that *on any given day that these words are read or heard*—meaning *on every single day*—it should feel as though the event in question (receiving the Torah or entering into a covenant with God) is occurring “today.” Similarly, in our verse in Parashat Re’eh, on any given day that we read these words, we are being told that God is giving us blessings and curses.

In the biblical narrative, בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה (previously translated as “blessings and curses”) refers to a choice between receiving blessings *or* curses, depending on our behavior. Yet this phrase does not have to be read as a choice. Rather, it can be understood to encompass both: God giving us both blessings *and* curses at the same time. Life is full of both positives and negatives simultaneously. We all have blessings for which we’re grateful and experience hardships that feel like curses; they co-exist in our lives, and we don’t get to choose only the good or only the bad.

In this verse, the Torah is directing us toward the realization that both the good and bad in our lives come from God, as is written: אֲנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם / “I am giving you.” Indeed, Jewish practice acknowledges that both the positive and negative in our lives come from God. The Shulhan Arukh (OH 222:1–2) teaches us that upon hearing good news or experiencing something extremely positive, we recite either the blessing *Hatov vehemetiv* / “Who is good and causes good,” or *Sheheheyanu* / “Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.” We also recite a blessing upon hearing bad news or experiencing something extremely negative, that of *Dayan ha’emet* / “Who is the True Judge.” It is not our place to accept the good that God gives us and reject the bad; we don’t get to pick and choose God’s lot for us. Additionally, we are not to blame God for the negative things we suffer while taking credit for the positive things in our lives; Deuteronomy 8 already warned us against that.

“Beware lest you forget your God . . . and you say in your heart: ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ But you shall remember your God, for it is

He that gives you power to get wealth . . .” (Deut. 8:11, 8:17–18)

The first word in our parashah, *Re’eh* / “See,” charges us to recognize that all of the above are true. The 12<sup>th</sup> century Spanish biblical exegete Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra notes that the command “*re’eh*” is written in the singular despite Moshe’s speaking to all the Israelites, because Moshe addressed each individual who was present. We can learn from this that it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to internalize the verse’s message.

Each of us must recognize that we receive both blessings and curses from God every day. Sometimes it is easy—and during these challenging days of pandemic, perhaps almost unavoidable—to get caught up in the travails of the day and lose sight of the blessings in our lives. It is also easy to take certain privileges for granted and stop being consciously grateful for them. But the opening verse of this week’s parashah enjoins us to recognize and appreciate every good thing with which God blesses us, even at a time when we may be contending with challenges and losses that would have seemed unimaginable a year ago. We are literally instructed to “see” God’s gifts.

May we all strive not to lose sight of our blessings, and in recognizing them every day, merit increased peace and joy in our lives.

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## דבר אחר | A Different Perspective

### Licensed to Kill (Kosher Animals)

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In Deut. 12:20–25, explicit permission is given for the slaughter and consumption of meat outside of the sacrificial system. The passage includes the phrase “as I have instructed you” (v. 21), and the Talmud identifies these words as the source of the various prescriptions for kosher slaughter (*shehitah*) (BT Hullin 28a).

In later times, after the aspiring *shohet* had been examined on their knowledge and expertise in the laws and practice of *shehitah*, a *kabbalah* (license) was written up for them. This example was granted to Samuel