

Serve and Preserve- The Stipulations of Stewardship

Minneapolis Jewish Artist Lab
Rabbi Alexander Davis 12/19

Rashi (11th C, France), Genesis 2:8

And placed there the man whom God had formed. The man was “placed” there- that is, assigned there- for the purpose for which he had been formed: to till it and enjoy its fruits, and to keep the animals out of it.

Chizukini (13th C, France), Genesis 2:8

He was formed elsewhere so he could see that it was full of thorns and thistles and would realize what a special place the garden was.

Radak (12th C, France), Genesis 2:15

To work it and watch over it- the man was to weed and hoe the vegetables and the trees for his food, and to protect it from animals and birds.

Ibn Ezra (12th C, Spain) ad loc:

To till the garden means nothing more than to water the trees whose fruit he would eat

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 12:3, ad loc.

ומה הלשון הזה לעבדה ולשמרה, לא אמר לעבדה ולא לעסוק בדברי תורה ולשמור את כל מצותיה, שנ' לשמור את דרך עץ החיים, ואין עץ חיים אלא תורה, שנ' עץ עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה. What then is the meaning of this expression: "to dress it and to keep it"? The text does only say "to work it and to keep it" in the sense of being occupied with the words of the Torah and keeping all its commandments, as it is said, "to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24) with the "tree of life" signifying the Torah.

Bereshit Rabbah 16:5

דָּבַר אַחַר לְעִבְדָּה וּלְשִׁמְרָה, אֵלֹהֵי הַקֶּרְבָּנוֹת, שְׁנֵאמַר (שמות ג, יב): תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים, וְכִתִּיב (במדבר כח ב): תִּשְׁמְרוּ לְהַקְרִיב לִי בְמוֹעֵדוֹ

to till and to tend is an allusion to sacrifices. Thus, it is written, “You shall serve (taavdun) God upon this mountain” (Ex 3:13) and “You shall observe” (tishmeru) to offer unto me (Num 28:2)

Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, p. 48

If there is a religious component to our relationship to the soil, to nature, to the world-as-garden, then how can we express that in our lives today, which in general are so cut off from the soil and its life?

Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (19th C, Germany), Genesis 2:8, 15

Man was created outside Paradise, and that he was destined, already in this life here below, to live in a Paradise. This earthly Paradise is, already here below, the destiny for Man and the earth. We are shown what we should be, how we should live, how this world of ours would form a paradise for us, if we would be that which we should be.

The terms *leovda* and *leshomra* include not only the direct work and care of the ground but also the whole moral behavior of Man in acting and refraining from acting in accordance with his duty. Indeed, as already indicated earlier, Nature itself finds its appointed purpose promoted as well as the necessary conditions for its continuance, in Man's conscientious dutiful use of the boundaries of nature, as expressed by *avoda* and *sh'mira*. Our sages too refer this conception here, to Torah and mitzvot, accordingly to the general mission of mankind.

Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*

What exactly are we meant to protect or guard? Some say from wild animals, or the less ordered, more chaotic world of nature outside the Garden. This doesn't ring true, though, because animals are clearly included in the Garden, the entire world has already been deemed "very good" and there is no implication of a radical dichotomy between the Garden and the world. I would suggest that the main threat to the Garden and by extension, the world, is precisely the other pair of the dyad- the cultivation, the human work.

The mission is to work, to produce, to develop- but at the same time to preserve, to guard, to be vigilant that the work doesn't get out of hand. It must remain, in a word, sustainable. Indeed, perhaps the best translation of the biblical phrase *leovda uleshomra* is "sustainable development." Working the land is crucial for human flourishing, but guarding the earth is the critical complement. We need to guard the world precisely from our *avoda*, the effects of our own work. In our struggle for the earth's fruits, we sow the seeds of our own, and the world's destruction, unless we temper our toil with responsibility and concern for posterity.

Stewardship
Artists' Lab Questions for Discussion
December 17, 2019

Zohar Chadash 5a

Creation is likened to a king who ruled a city, who built and maintained it, and then decided to appoint one of the residents as ruler over it in his stead. Everything would be handed over to the appointee, his job being the work, craft, of the world- to provide for the needs of the world and its perpetuation.

**According to this parable, how do you understand our relationship to the earth?
What are the advantages to this model? Are there any drawbacks to it?**

Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, p. 50-51

Stewardship, though, as an environmental ethical ideal, has been criticized from different quarters. More extreme "Greens" know its effectively anthropocentric stance, and the strong role in assigns to humans in the natural world. It is indeed different from a Jainist, or deep-ecological radical ideal of absolute non-intervention, but for that very reason^{ed} comment it may be a more realistic model for the world today. Other say that behind the noble idea of stewardship lurks the much more problematic or more technocratic concept of management. Is nature something to be managed? A few years ago, *Scientific American* put out in issue titled "Towards a Managed ~~to~~ Earth." **Note the acronym (TAME)- is that the idea that we strive for? What about wildness, and wilderness? What happens to our world, and to the human being, if everything comes under our thumb?**

Moreover, are we capable of managing the world? Will we ever know enough to perform that task wisely? The Earth is in through a more complicated than a module of our own design. What about human humility? These two critiques dovetail: one of the phenomena in the world that inspires or even enforces humility, is awe-inspiring wild nature.

The most cogent response to these criticisms is that while we always need to temper our attempts at understanding and administering the environment with healthy doses of humility, we no longer really have a choice regarding our role as stewards. True, we cannot totally manage the Earth- nor should we strive to- but our impact on it is so great that we have to take responsibility for shaping policy for actions, which determine a great deal of the course of the planet. In other words, if there is anything that we need to manage, it is ourselves, first and foremost. Stewardship, then, is more of a stance, an attitude about service and discipline than a scientific vision of a type of control. And it may be an unavoidable part of the human condition. As with freedom in the words of Sartre, it could be that we are doomed to stewardship.

What does Benstein mean by "doomed to stewardship?"

What are the implications in terms of policies and choices we make how we live?