



I'd like to talk briefly about the concept of stewardship... and in the Torah, the idea arises in Genesis 2:15.

וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגֶן־עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ:

The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.

The critical words are the last few... to till is a form of usage of the land, but land can be used in many ways, not all of them respectful to the basic biotic processes that sustain life. And so, as he was told to till, to use the land, Adam was also told to care for it.

Ulshomrah—the last word—comes from the root *shamar*, a word of deep importance in the Jewish tradition. *Shamar* refers to the concept of guarding, watching or preserving. In Judaism, people are referred to as a *shomer* when they, for example, sit with a dead body prior to burial. More generally, the term can be used for someone who accepts the responsibility of caring for or guarding someone else's property.

This idea of stewardship grows out of the idea of the *shomer*; the one who watches over something that isn't theirs.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives, amongst a few definitions of steward: "1. An official who controls the domestic affairs of a household, or 2. One who manages the affairs of an estate on behalf of his employer..." From these two definitions, we can see that, in the English language, central to the idea of stewardship is the care for someone else's stuff.



Now, caring in our culture is often related to ownership. We usually care deeply for what we own, take some care for what others own, and often have little concern for what nobody owns. Yet it is the attitude of thoughtful caring that moves us towards the actions of a steward.

Let me finish with a very brief commentary, created about 700 AD, in a tractate from Talmud based on a line from Ecclesiastes:

רְאֵה אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי מִי יוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר עִוְתוּ: ¹³

ⁱ Consider God's doing! Who can straighten what He has twisted?

As stewards, our work is to till and to tend, to not corrupt or destroy.

About the Speaker

Richard Kool is a professor in the School of Environment and Sustainability at Royal Roads University, and is director of the historic Jewish Cemetery, owned by Congregation Emanu-El of Victoria. He has a long interest in the relationship between religion and science, and in particular, between religious traditions and environmental education and pro-environmental action.