

JUST SLIGHTLY over a year ago, Israel was facing a crisis of gigantic proportions. The Kinneret was at an all-time low water mark, wells had been shut down because the water table was so far down as to endanger the future usefulness of the aquifers and in short, there just wasn't enough water to go around. Puzzled and apprehensive over the possibility of an additional year of drought, the Israeli public was asking some questions that should have been asked a long time ago: How did this happen? Who is responsible for the management of Israel's water resources? Why was nothing done sooner?

And then, the rains came. And Israel was, at least temporarily, off the hook. The Kinneret filled up, the water tables rose and everything went on as usual. A few people said we now should take steps to see that this never happened again, but they were drowned out by the loud voice of total indifference. In the end, while someone should most certainly have been doing something dur-

ing this year of reprieve, the sad truth is that nothing was done at all.

Oh, true, we have been treated to a spate of service broadcasts telling us to conserve water, but these are more laughable than pertinent since they all centre on the dripping or unclosed water tap. Now I'm not saying that one should not keep taps closed and certainly repair them if they leak. One's own water bill should be enough to show the common sense of that, even without concern for the national interest. But the real problem with these broadcasts is that it is not the dripping tap that is responsible for the water waste that brought us so close to disaster last year.

Preserving Israel's liquid assets

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IF THERE were any real intent to do anything about the waste of this, our most liquid asset, then we would be seeing a totally different type of broadcast. We might see someone explaining that the purchase of a water-saving shower head will guarantee more pressure for about half the amount of water used. This also represents a saving in hot-water usage and will pay for itself in a few weeks. We might see an explanation of the fact that by installing a water-saving flush tank, you save 10 litres of water each time you flush the toilet, not a small saving in the family with several children. Or, again, a talk about not watering lawns and gardens during the heat of the day

and, incidentally, an example being set by municipalities and local councils.

But the programme I'd really like to see is one that I'm quite sure I never shall. That would be a government-employed agricultural expert explaining that we are going to drastically cut back on cotton farming and are lowering the water allotments in many other branches of agriculture. Because it is faulty utilization of our water resources in agriculture and in industry that is the real cause for worry. Not only does cotton utterly destroy the soil where it is grown, and contribute more than any other crop to the amount of dangerous airborne pollutants, but it is also the biggest water exploiter of all. Of course, in all fairness, cotton is also the best cash crop and as such is much sought

after. It is also a touchy political issue, since the kibbutzim are the biggest cotton growers, and the government that tackles them will be a heroic one indeed. But in the end, dollars notwithstanding, we cannot afford this crop. We can make dollars in other ways, but no one can lend or sell us water if the well runs dry.

NOW, THIS moment, while there's water in the lake and the wells are still pumping (the ones that haven't been closed due to pollution) is the time for a total re-evaluation of our water resources. A study in depth that will consider every aspect of water management from pollution to end use. Now is the time to instigate new policies and to look at new ideas rather than paying further tribute to a set of outworn ideas and paying mere lip service to the entire idea of water conservation.

If this year is one blessed with rain, then we will have won a further reprieve; if not, then by next summer we will again be asking why no one is doing anything. But now is the time to ask.

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