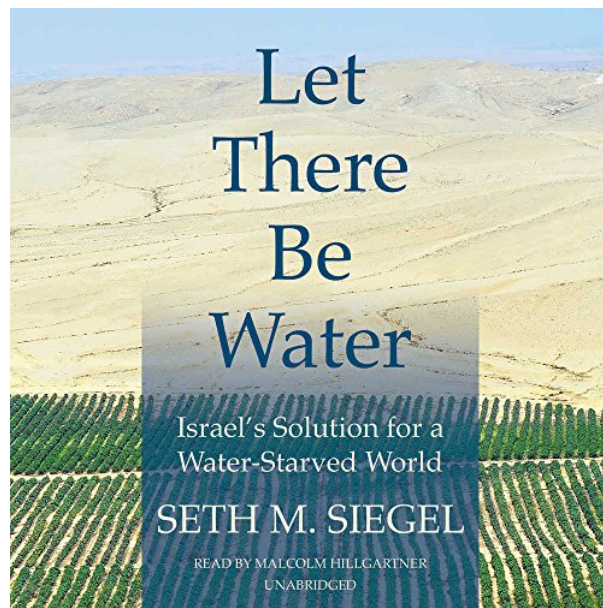
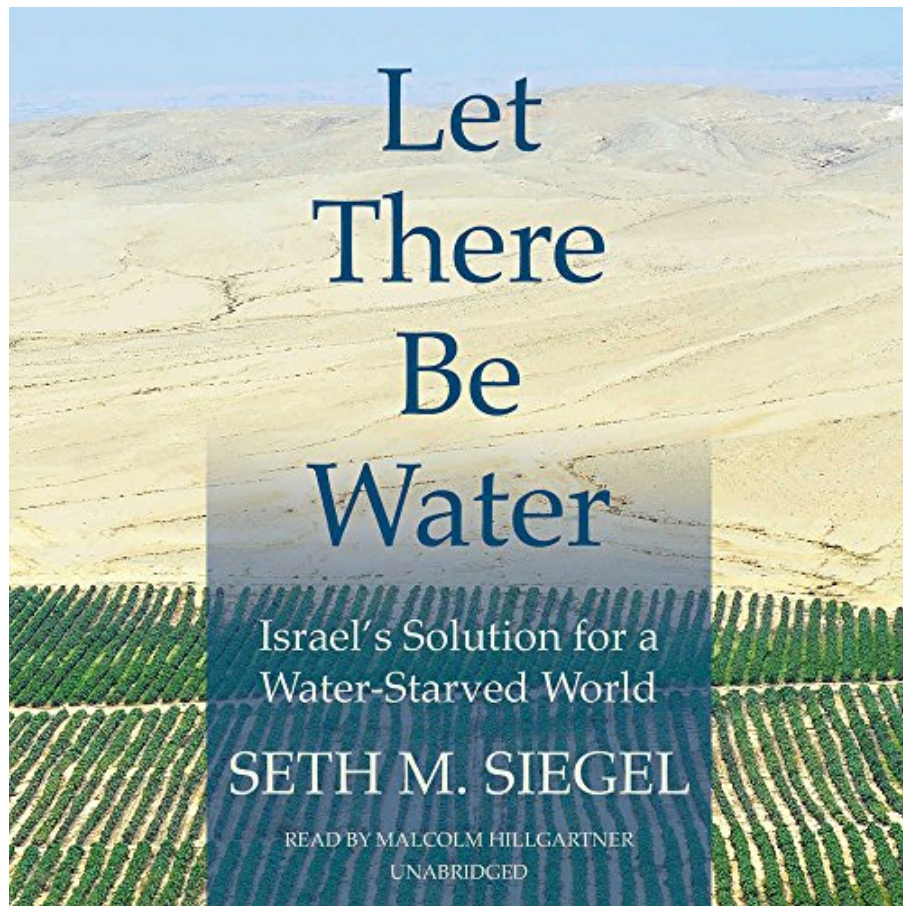


# LET THERE BE WATER: ISRAEL'S SOLUTION FOR A WATER-STARVED WORLD BY SETH SIEGEL



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## Review

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How Israel achieved water independence in 10 years

By Yoram Hazony

Seth Siegel has written a fascinating, engaging and highly readable book telling the story of how Israel went from chronic water shortages to being a water-exporting nation roughly between 2001 and 2013. Most people probably don't feel they need to know how this happened. But the story of Israel's struggles and ultimate triumph over the scourge of water scarcity is a drama so exciting, and it has such an exhilarating ending, that anyone who picks up this book will end up being very happy they did.

Siegel picks up the story of water scarcity in Israel in the 1930s, when British experts were issuing one report after another arguing that the Jews trying to flee Nazi-dominated Europe just could not be physically accommodated in British-controlled Palestine. The Zionists, headed by David Ben-Gurion, sought to prove the British wrong, and thus was born the Israeli effort to turn a half-arid, half-desert land into a water-rich country capable of sustaining millions.

Along the way, Siegel has a great time telling how the Jews got water to their illegal settlements in the Negev desert; how the National Water Carrier brought the Sea of Galilee to the southern deserts and made the city of Beersheva possible; how Israeli-invented drip irrigation proved that it could not only save half the agricultural water needs of the world, but could do so while at least doubling crop yield for just about anything farmers grow; how Israeli engineers turned waste water from a repulsive pollutant and a health hazard into a central pillar of Israeli agriculture; and how desalination of Mediterranean sea water finally went from a dream to a reality in just the last few years.

This is truly a feel-good story. But Siegel also sheds light on some dark times and some dark issues. His chapter on the pollution of virtually all of Israel's rivers is heartbreaking, and he doesn't spare us the deaths of 4 Maccabiah games athletes who were poisoned falling into the muck of what was left of the Yarkon

River in Tel Aviv. Siegel also makes an important case for Ben-Gurion's nationalization of every drop of water in the country (including the rain falling on your roof) in 1959. This nationalization may have saved Israel, but Siegel also reminds us that until new legislation in 2007, Israeli municipalities used their income from nationalized water resources as a slush fund to subsidize crony politics, rather than fixing badly decaying water delivery systems.

Under Siegel's light and witty pen, all of this comes off as hugely entertaining, and leaves you with the feeling that you're learning things that everyone really should just know.

This is not to say that the book is without flaws. First, most readers will probably want to know which Israeli political leaders took responsibility and made the tough decisions to turn their country into a water-rich nation--as well as who opposed them. But while Siegel does mention some names (Baiga Schochat, Ariel Sharon) in passing, his book disappointingly shies away from really giving us a picture of the political struggles at the top that led to this miracle. Second, Siegel's overwhelmingly positive outlook may leave some readers feeling like important things are being swept under the rug. Siegel asserts that the socialized water system was free from corruption, for instance, but there are points in the book where you begin to feel that things couldn't have been quite that peachy.

On the whole, it is rare to find a book that's as slam-dunk worth reading as this one is. It's a pleasure and you end up knowing an ocean of things you never thought you'd care about--but which, Siegel convincingly proves, are really among the most important things in the world.

Yoram Hazony  
The Herzl Institute, Jerusalem

18 of 18 people found the following review helpful.

Something in the water

By David Wineberg

When you realize that Israel exports two billion dollars' worth of water from a tiny desert state overflowing with people, it might be instructive to know what it is they're doing. Seth Siegel's book is an in-depth, tightly focused and exhaustive look at the totality of what the country has accomplished in water.

There are three basic levels to the story. PEOPLE must be conscious of their water consumption and actively minimize it. The need has forced TECHNOLOGY to take leaps and bounds that have vaulted Israel to world leadership in water management. And unusually, there is the POLITICAL WILL to manage natural resources nationwide for the benefit of all, even to the point of co-operating regionally. With these three arms working together, and the only place on earth where all three are firing in sync, Israel is the poster child for survival.

On the people level, everyone shuts off showers while soaping up, closes taps when teethbrushing, and uses dual flush toilets Israel pioneered. Flow restrictors are on all showers, lush gardens are actively discouraged.

On the tech level, Israelis invented and perfected drip irrigation - to where crops need a fraction of the water (and fertilizer) that flood or spray irrigation requires, and produce more. Israel has pioneered improvements in desalination, allowing it to let lakes and rivers recover naturally while desalination provides the country's water - to the tune of more than 90%.

In management, Israel recycles 85% of sewage (vs 8% in the USA). and sends it to agriculture. Even toilet paper is recovered and recycled, reducing landfill and increasing processing capacity by 30%. Israel is now

actually short of sewage, because people have so reduced their water consumption. The country has done deals regionally, pumping Lake Galilee water to Jordan in exchange for a desalination plant on Jordanian territory in the Gulf of Aqaba. Leaks have been reduced to about 16%, because water authorities monitor all systems continuously.

Even before its founding, leaders knew water was the number one priority. The British refused to allow greater immigration because there wasn't enough water to support the local population. At that time the population was little more than half a million. Today it is 20 times higher, and Israel exports water.

Despite Israel's pariah status globally, Israeli water technologies and strategies are finding their way into Africa, Asia and America, as water shortages become the norm.

The book is straightforward, if a little fawning. Siegel avoids the Dead Sea disaster, in which 95% of the Jordan River is diverted, and the Dead Sea is losing three feet a year. It's to the point where shoreline hotels now must run shuttle buses to the shore. He keeps to his topic, and holds interest with results, since there are so many substantial ones to describe. He addresses the elephant in the room - the Palestinian situation - but as ever, there is no meeting of the minds. Still, 96% of West Bank Palestinians have state-provided clean water, where none had it before.

Let There Be Water is a blueprint for survival: necessary, critical, successful, and replicable.

David Wineberg

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Bringing Water to the Promised Land

By Kevin L. Nenstiel

"I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs."

—Isaiah 41:18

As 2015 winds down, and we look backward on history's hottest recorded summer ever, perhaps it's time to consider the future. As entrepreneur and philanthropist Seth Siegel writes, changing rain patterns severely threaten human populations. The California drought offers a foretaste of impending crop failures, urban stresses, and ecological catastrophe. Siegel directs our attention to the one nation with a long history of forward-thinking water policies: Israel.

The state of Israel has pioneered important advances in how to use and improve our water consumption since before the state existed. They've developed ways of moving water from where it exists to where the people need it, allowing high-yield agriculture in regions traditionally arid, even in historic deserts. They've improved water use techniques, increasing farm yields with less water, while cities consume less, leaving farmers and wildernesses more.

Siegel provides an intriguing mix of history and science, describing not only what advances Israel has made in water management, but also why it made particular advances. He describes the unique political, economic, and geographic pressures shaping Israeli water policy. The mix of intense regional water close to lifeless desert was, recently, almost unique to Israel. But as Siegel notes, if environmental trends continue, similar conditions may soon exist globally.

First, Israeli culture doesn't disparage water. Children never sing "Rain, rain, go away." Israel nationalizes

water access, making all water everywhere a common good. While American libertarians campaign to repeal laws against rainwater collection, Israel maintains a strict enforcement policy: rain barrels aren't a right. Hoarding or misusing water isn't abstract moral wrong; Israel considers water abuse theft from the people, and prosecutes water hogs accordingly.

Because water is scarce and distributed unequally by nature, sharing and distributing water has the same aura of civic responsibility in America that we get from, say, joining the military. Responsible water use isn't some mere principle; it's a foundation of common civic government. By basing much public philosophy on communal responsibility to water, Israel's government might superficially resemble American conservatism; but it expresses very different impulses in actual policy.

But Israel couples this nationalizing with incentives for more egalitarian, democratic water management techniques. According to Siegel, much municipal water in Europe and America gets lost to leakage, but Israel has created technologies designed specifically to curtail leaks and limit mechanical waste. Especially since home leaks often aren't noticeable until they've created significant structural damage, the shift to preventative identification has both public and private benefits.

Israeli engineers, working through public-private partnerships, have invented more intense, ecologically specific irrigation technologies: Siegel extols drip irrigation, invented in Israel and now more commonly being adopted in other nations and continents. Israeli agronomists have created new plant variants that put more growth into edible fruits and flesh, less into inedible stems and foliage. This boosts agricultural yield from limited water applications, costing less in transpiration and wastage.

Israel's National Water Carrier, which moves water from the moister north to the arid south with minimal evaporation, rivals the Interstate Highway System as a marvel of public-spirited engineering. Israel has found ways to recycle urban wastewater into clean, fresh irrigation, and connect water where it is with soil where water's needed. Siegel describes the public commitment to water in ways familiar to Americans praising George Washington every July 4th.

This book describes technologies, social movements, and other important forces in language accessible to non-specialist readers. He describes very intricate advances in aquifer management, farming, and sewage removal, without bogging down in terminology. Siegel's storytelling resembles a novel: much like Leon Uris, he makes Israeli history moving and alive. He's just discussing water, and water policy, rather than war.

Siegel delves into the history of Israel's water consumption style. It didn't just intend to create better water usage; many of its techniques were invented to facilitate land grabs in places like the Negev before Partition in 1948. Some readers might find the political opportunism distasteful, and the implications for Palestinians who farm in more time-honored ways has harsh undertones, but Siegel spotlights the advances themselves, not transnational politics.

Informed readers realize water management issues aren't one nation's problem anymore. Droughts in California and floods in Texas signal new times for handling clean, drinkable water. Siegel's descriptions of Israeli advances give world peoples hope that, as climate changes, human ingenuity can manage these changes proactively.

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#### About the Author

Seth M. Siegel is a lawyer, activist, writer, and successful serial entrepreneur. His essays on water and other policy issues have appeared in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, and in leading publications in Europe and Asia. Siegel is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He is a highly sought-after speaker on a range of topics including water policy, Middle East politics, and national security. He is married and lives in New York City.

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