**What will happen to the River and its waters?**

**The coping of the authorities with the water-level changes in the Ayalon River (1948 – 1965)**

We have before us two tableaus allowing me to present the lecture topic and the problem residents in the area have dealt with.

Apparently, we have before us a known problem, recognized in many places around the world and various climatic regions. Sometimes, in certain geographical and human conditions, encounters with potential destruction to man and the environment are created. These events cannot always be considered natural disasters, but it is clear that their damage to the environment and people is acute. When these events do not regularly materialize, and when the authorities do not have the experience and the ability to address the problem, many other more severe ones are created.

This lecture deals with the challenge the Ayalon River presented during the first two decades of the State of Israel. During this period (as well as in later periods), the river was not perceived by the involved agencies as a natural area – the environment. In other words, we are dealing with a period in which the environment was (in most cases) enslaved for human activity. With the lack of a clear, consistent policy concerning the problem created by the river, this ultimately resulted in a failed treatment of the problem, loss of water, and the disappearance of a natural area from the urban space. Therefore, I begin at the end – the Ayalon’s channel, which has been subjugated for the development of transportation infrastructure. The river became a concrete canal. The natural spaces in the stream's surroundings have been converted into built-up areas. The water was not utilized in the best way and the problem was not completely resolved. Why did this happen?

Most streams flowing in the State of Israel are seasonal streams (*wadis*). The Ayalon River is one of such streams draining an area of 815 km². It begins in the mountains and ends at the sea. In its drainage basin area, the stream crosses areas of lowland coastal plain, where diverse human activities (towns, agriculture, etc.) existed throughout history in the fertile lands near the stream. During the last 200 years, the scope of settlement has increased, and hence the scope of Man's encounter with the changing phases of the stream increased.

My lecture focuses on a very small area where the encounter between Man and River takes place. The River runs east of Tel Aviv and along the margins of other cities and communities. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, all the territories east of the stream were mostly farmland. In that period, and because of the housing shortage in Tel Aviv, neighborhoods began to be built in this area. The neighborhoods were established without planning, without infrastructures, and with temporary bridges being built to connect the new neighborhoods to the western part of the city. But these neighborhoods did not belong to Tel Aviv; therefore, there was no one to take care of and assist these neighborhoods when they were flooded by the river.

Following the 1948 war, it was decided to annex the area in question along with additional areas to Tel Aviv. From then on, the Tel Aviv municipality was responsible for the neighborhoods and the problems created there by the Ayalon’s flood waters. The municipality understood the geographical characteristics of the stream and approached the central government for finding a solution. It was their understanding that the solution to the problem was to be found primarily in areas outside the municipal environs; therefore, the Government is required to intervene. In other words, we have a cross-border problem here.

State officials acknowledged the central government’s responsibility concerning the problem. But they chose to note that in order to find such a solution it was necessary to implement comprehensive and inclusive planning. Accordingly, the solution would not be immediate!

But what were the residents going to do in the interim? What was the municipality going to do? In this matter, state officials did not have answers, and as I found, they also placed difficulties in the path of local entities (preventing granting of loans and other actions).

The fact that it took time to reach an overall solution was not the only problem. Meanwhile, professional differences of opinion were brought to light among central government officials. While transportation planners wanted to use the stream channel for the train carriageway, then for a highway, while diverting the river to the sea; officials dealing with water supply wanted to construct dams and lakes for water storage to increase the State's water supply.

But this was not just a problem of professional (or personal) disagreements. The great difficulty was the lack of laws arranging the relationships between the various State authorities in the various fields such as: water, drainage, planning, and environment. In the absence of these laws, the entire process of finding the solution to the flooding of the Ayalon River depended on the creativity of clerks; the municipality's initiatives and pressure, and its fund-raising abilities.

From the study of the discourse conducted between all the officials involved in the matter and the politicians, we can find additional reasons for delays in finding a solution. In addition to the professional disputes, there were apparently personal matters. I also found evidence of the influence of political controversy between the government and the municipality.

But what happened in the field? Although the Ayalon River did not overflow its banks every year, the municipality tried to provide a solution to the residents' distress. In addition to the improvements and modifications in the stream’s channel within the municipal area, the municipality tried to improve the neighborhoods’ infrastructure. However, the residents did not always cooperate. Furthermore, the municipality established clear procedures on how the residents should be treated in case of flooding and in fact transformed this into a reality as part of the course of city life.

In 1964/5, the Government decided to establish a dedicated company to establish a transportation route on the Ayalon River’s channel in cooperation with the municipality. More time would pass before construction of the route began. In everything related to the stream, it was decided that it would become a canal by which an attempt would be made to control the river's changing phases. This decision actually led to the loss of water. In all matters related to the environment and water, the stream's channel was converted into a construction area. When it came to the neighborhoods, more time would pass before the improvements in neighborhood infrastructure would be implemented.

In environmental history we try to understand how human beings have understood and treated the area surrounding them with all its components. In this case, we have seen how the changing relationships of different groups to the region has led to a cumbersomeness in finding a solution to an environmental challenge and dealing with the failed management of a natural resource – water.

For residents of Tel Aviv and the municipality – the stream and its waters were a hazard;

For the transportation planners and developers – the river channel was an ideal infrastructure space for transportation development;

For hydrologists – they did not see the stream as an ecological space, but saw only the water and sought to store them in reservoirs.

In the absence of laws and the lack of environmental thinking, the proposed solution was delayed, the residents suffered, water was wasted, and there was nobody who would could give voice for the environment.