



Vol 116 | November 2024 | **VIP Members**

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## ISRAEL March 2-13, 2025

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*Led by Lee Friedman, guided by Joe Freedman.*



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*Led by Lee Otterholt, guided by Maroula Konti.*

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## Dear Readers,

Here is Rokdim-Nirkoda magazine issue 116.

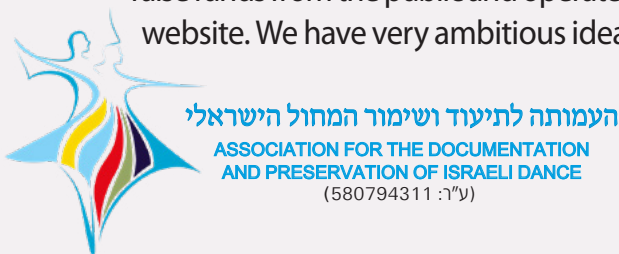
This is the fourth magazine since the massacre near Gaza, and 101 hostages, living and dead, are still there.

A year ago, when we were in the midst of the trauma, we asked and were asked whether to start the harkadot (dance sessions) up again – yes or no. I thought and worked for us to return to dancing in order to return to normalcy. Who thought then that more than a year later we would still have 101 hostages in Gaza?

Today, with the war still raging, we certainly do not forget those who are still there and their families.

### In this issue:

- **The Association for the Documentation and Preservation of Israeli Dance** was established at a good time. The Association will raise funds from the public and operate the "Rokdim-Nirkoda" website. We have very ambitious ideas and aspirations. **We need your support.**



You, our dear readers and dancers, are invited to support the Association. See: <https://bit.ly/3G1suUz>.

- **Iris Levitan** saw and wrote "Volunteering From Heart To Heart" – about the amazing activities of **Tzipi and Adi Atiram**, who teach dance to people with disabilities and bring great happiness to them and to their families. This is sacred work; may dedicated people like them abound!



- **David Ben Asher** met with, spoke and wrote an article in Hebrew about **Israel Yakovee**. Based on that meeting, Israel himself wrote the English article for this issue, "The Universal Yemenite Step of a Dancer and Cultural Advocate". The son of Yemenite immigrants from the Sha'arayim neighborhood in Rehovot, Israel's Yemenite roots burn in his bones to this day and his dances are danced with great love all over the world.

- **Matti Goldschmidt** compiled, adapted and wrote "Israeli Folk Dances in Switzerland" – a very comprehensive overview of Israeli folk dancing in this country, how it began and developed in almost every city in the country.

- **Heli Livneh** writes to us about the "Dance of the Month," "Ein Li Eretz Acheret – I Have No Other Country" (<https://bit.ly/4el62yD>). And truly, "Ein Lanu Eretz Acheret – We Have No Other Country".

- "Experiences through the Eye of the Camera" – Photos and experiences from a festive dance session (harkada) celebrating **Itzik Ben Dahan's** 58th birthday. Wishing you a long life – may you continue to delight dancers and gain fans and friends!



Yaron Meishar



Ruth Goodman



Danny Uziel



Vol. No. 116 | November 2024

To Receive This Issue  
Please Press **VIP**

#### ■ Publisher:

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Enjoy your reading,

Yaron Meishar, Ruth Goodman and Danny Uziel – Editors.

# The Association for the Documentation and Preservation of Israeli Dance

*We are pleased to announce the establishment of "The Association for the Documentation and Preservation of Israeli Dance".*

*We have many plans, and we are calling on everyone who cares about Israeli Folk Dance and holds this field dear to their heart to join and support the realization of our plans: <https://bit.ly/3G1suUz>*



העמותה לתיעוד ושימור המחול הישראלי

ASSOCIATION FOR THE DOCUMENTATION  
AND PRESERVATION OF ISRAELI DANCE

(ID: 580794311) [Registered Israeli nonprofit]

**Co-Directors:**



**Yaron Meishar**



**Shlomo Maman**

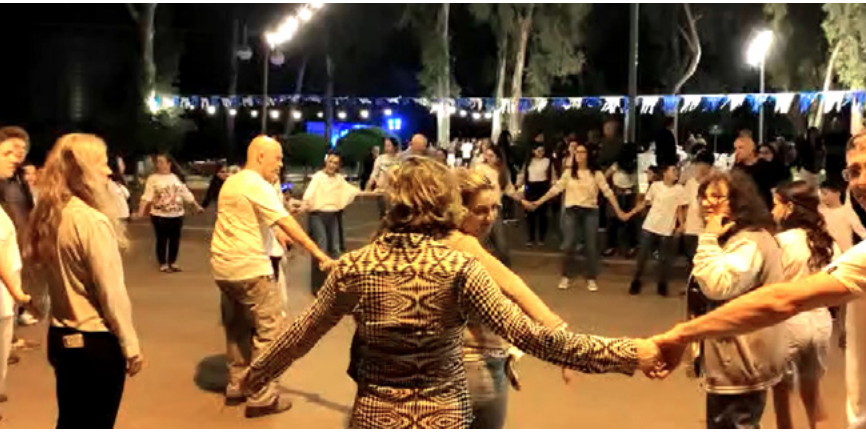
Chairperson: **Sergio Rosenboim**

Board of Directors: **Dr. Ronit Tamir-Ronen, Yael Mero**

Review committee: **Andre Schor, Avi Baranes**









## Activities that the association intends to carry out

The intended goals of the Association are as follows:

1. The Association will record and preserve:
  - Folk dances of the general public.
  - Folk dance choreographies for the stage presented by Israeli dance troupes.
2. To establish websites and/or rent existing website services where all the information about Israeli folk dances (for the public and for the stage) from 1924 forward will be archived.
3. To enable the online archive to be accessible to all, mostly free of charge.
4. To locate and document articles, documents, photos and videos from all the parties that wish to cooperate and upload them onto our websites so that they will be accessible to all.
5. To purchase videos, photos and certificates from sources that are otherwise inaccessible and offer them free of charge.
6. To establish and maintain a database of dance instructors and choreographers, which would include their contact information, allowing dancers to communicate with them.
7. To maintain a database of all classes, dance sessions and Israeli dance seminars (hishtalmuyot) in Israel and around the world.
8. To raise funds from the Israeli folk dance community around the world, through a website intended for that purpose, through the "crowdfunding" project, through public and governmental support and through the support of other entities.
9. To support dance troupes, directors and choreographers of the dance troupes, training courses for dance leaders, dance courses, dance events, festivals and special projects.
10. To promote cooperation with governmental offices to reestablish a program of "Batei Sefer Rokdim" – Israeli dance in public schools throughout the country (Israel).



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העמותה לתיעוד ושימור המחול הישראלי

ASSOCIATION FOR THE DOCUMENTATION  
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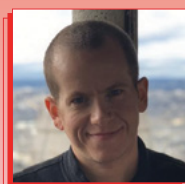
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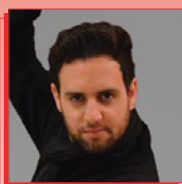
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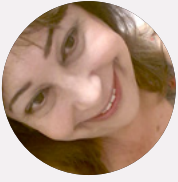
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# Volunteering from Heart to Heart

Adi and Tzipi Atiram – Dance Instructors  
for Those with Special Needs

International Down Syndrome Day is observed on March 21 (3/21). The date was chosen to represent the triplication (trisomy) of the 21st chromosome which causes Down syndrome.

"Yemenite step", "grapevine step", "skip" – these are professional concepts used every day in folk dance sessions in Israel and around the world.

At one dance club in Rishon LeZion, different concepts are heard. A new dance is taught in an entirely different way. It is the proper way for a different reality. This dance class is the "Baby" of Tzipi and Adi Atiram. It gives special attention to dancers with developmental limitations who suffer from Down Syndrome.



Adi Atiram



Tzipi Atiram

The Atirams have been teaching folk dancing to developmentally limited people for about 15 years. Four years earlier, they began to teach those who are wheelchair bound.

The story of Tzipi and Adi and delayed development dancers, started with their unprecedented success with wheelchair bound dancers in Rishon LeZion and continued in Ashdod. The Atirams were invited to a meeting with **Etti Madmoni** z"l, the former director of the AKIM branch in Ashdod. (AKIM is the Israeli national organization for people with intellectual disabilities and their families.) They were asked to organize and start a club for people with special needs. This was a new challenge for them. "Etti knew we had no knowledge of the field." Precisely because of this, she wanted us to work with AKIM. She was very persistent and they gave in to her request, even though they had no idea what this project was all about... "We were actually thrown into the water; very deep water...", Tzipi remembers.

Thus, for eight years they invested their hearts and souls in the Ashdod project. They broadened the horizons of their students, giving them the emotional experiences of folk dancing, performance, and an appearance at the Karmiel Festival.

When I came into the dance studio in Rishon LeZion, my first impression was that, externally, the dancers all resembled each other: full bodies, round faces, flat noses, and slanted eyes. But very quickly, led by Tzipi and Adi along with volunteer-dancers and parents of the dancers, I became acquainted with some of them and began to see the physical differences between them.





Tzipi Atiram  
and Tomer Garufi

**"With endless dedication, patience, sensitivity, concern and love for them - for the 'children', as Adi calls them with a sparkle in his eyes as with the love of a father for his children - Adi and Tzipi have devoted the best of their energy and experience to them week after week"**

With endless dedication, patience, sensitivity, concern and love for them – for the "children", as Adi calls them with a sparkle in his eyes as with the love of a father for his children – Adi and Tzipi have devoted the best of their energy and experience to them week after week. With my own eyes, filled with tears, I saw them create this dance session from scratch.

I was astonished by the abilities of the dancers, who were so disciplined and thirsty to learn and to succeed. I was very moved watching them. The atmosphere was calm and exuded a pleasant feeling that made me feel very comfortable when I joined the circle.

I was excited to dance next to Tzipi. During all this, I couldn't believe my eyes – on her other side, was **Tomer Garufi** (35). I later learned that this was his permanent place in the circle.

An interesting additional key to the Atiram teaching method is "to flow" with the group. He says, "When I notice that even though I ask them to start with the left foot, almost everyone starts with the right foot, I flow with them by making a change to my original decision. Then everyone starts on the right foot".

**The secret to this successful method is based on a very important principle: i.e., look people straight in the eye when speaking to them. "I had a lot of problems at the beginning," Atiram reveals. "I learned that saying, 'You don't know' or 'You don't dance properly', was insulting to them. Some of them cried and I felt terrible. As a result, I don't speak to them in that way [anymore]. I learned through my mistakes to treat them as equals, with mutual respect."**

Among other things, this led to the need for Adi to collate all the practical material that was collected over the years, to consolidate all the written material and to produce and publish a handbook for the instructors.

Adi explains: "My dream is to spread it widely in order to expand the movement of 'dancers with special needs', all over the country. One of the reasons that the book was written was to prevent others from making the same mistakes that I made during my work."

The following are two short clips filmed at the 2024 Ashdodance Festival: <https://youtu.be/d-n9WnDq7Uk>, <https://youtu.be/mYwHQbrrlhE>.

Tomer Garufi doesn't speak. He was born with his umbilical cord wrapped around his throat. However, he understands everything. "Tomer uses 'gesture' language", his father **Gabi** explains. Gabi is a volunteer in every part of his being. Tzipi calls him, "Father of the year" while watching him communicate with his oldest son. "Just as there is sign language for use with the deaf, so there is the language of 'gestures' (transferring messages through movement, body language – A.L.)", Gabi explains.

My heart went out to Tomer during the dance session. He does not move away from Tzipi, dances close to her, and follows her every step with his watchful



Gabi Garufi, Tomer's father



eyes, meticulously and patiently following every movement. "You can see his desire to excel". Tzipi points this out with great composure.

**Vicky Lupo**, who is the same age as Tomer and appeared with **Anna Aronov** on the **Guy Pines** television program, also loves to dance. According to her mother **Aliza**, Vicky has dance in her soul: "She waits impatiently all week for the day of the dance session. It makes her happy. She expends energy and enjoys the social encounters. At home, when she hears music that she loves, she starts to dance".



*Israel Kadosh (39) and his mother Elian*

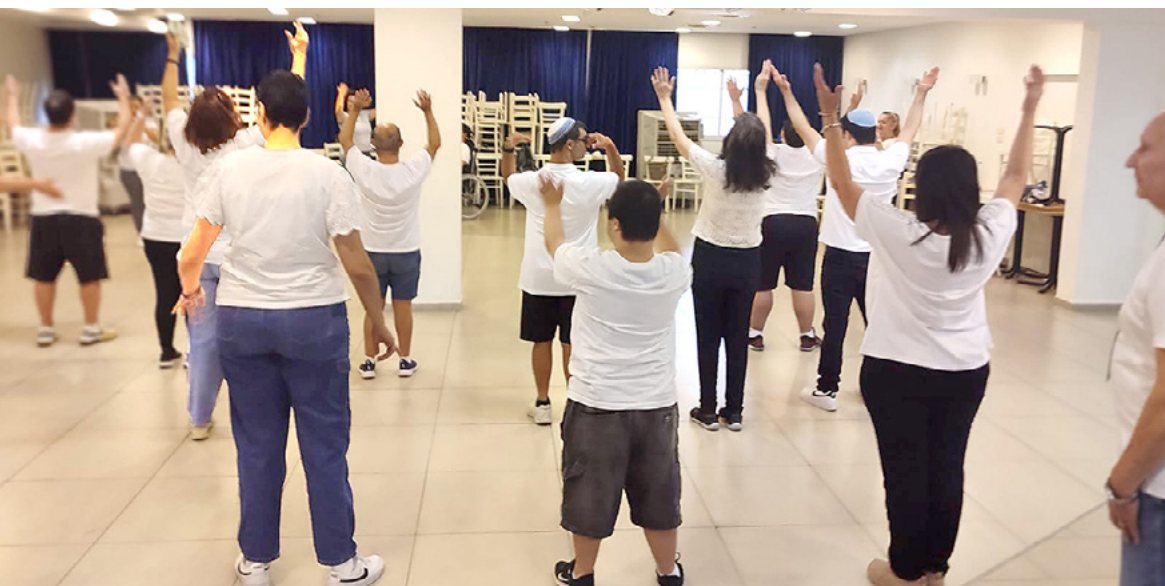
Thanks to dance, **Israel Kadosh** (39) and **Oded Naftali** (34) are friends outside the dance circle and are partners in some of their personal achievements.

Dance develops memory and the ability to study. It also builds self-confidence and a belief in oneself. It acts as a springboard to independent skills and to the dancer's integration into the social life of a community. Dance is a gift to worried parents. "As a result of learning the dances, Oded realizes that he has the capability to learn, possesses a developed memory and has started academic studies", says Gabi Garufi.

Thus, Oded and Naftali both have Bachelors' Degrees in the Social Sciences from Bar Ilan University. Israel Kadosh is studying in the same field. This is the first year of study within "Project Power", a project that integrates students with special needs into academia.

It should be noted that according to research undertaken by the Bar Ilan Education Department, which was published about two years ago and then presented to **Michal Herzog**, wife of the President of Israel, there is an increase in the intelligence of these students during the study year.

"Israel has been diagnosed as in need of rehabilitation, but not as being retarded", explains Elian, his mother, a volunteer with the Rishon LeZion branch of the AKIM Association. "And as such, he works in the local IKEA branch in Rishon LeZion. He is independent, operates



*My heart went out to Tomer during the dance session. He does not move away from Tzipi, dances close to her, and follows her every step with his watchful eyes, meticulously and patiently following every movement. "You can see his desire to excel". Tzipi points this out with great composure.*



a computer and a mobile phone, and I get great pleasure from him”, she tells us with a smile and with great pride.

Oded, Naftali and Israel Kadosh won two gold medals at an international swimming competition in Berlin, Germany. In a short conversation, Israel, with an embarrassed smile, tells me that he loves to dance as much as he loves basketball: “Even if my knee hurts, I come to the dance sessions,” he points out with satisfaction.

Three months ago, Oded, together with five other students, participated in the ceremony granting diplomas at Bar Ilan. When he served in the Israel Defense Forces, he was among those who received the “Outstanding Soldier” decoration from the President of Israel.



*Dance develops memory and the ability to study. It also builds self-confidence and a belief in oneself. It acts as a springboard to independent skills and to the dancer's integration into the social life of a community.*

“It all started with my love for folk dancing”, Tzipi tells us about the beginning of her road to dance. “I infected Adi with this ‘bug’ and to my delight, he later joined me at dance sessions”.

Adi fell in love with dance. He got strongly and very deeply involved, and invested time in learning the folk dances. He also attended dance sessions that included dancers in wheelchairs.

And from here, Adi’s road was a short one to passing an instructors course led by **Edna Kaveh**, at Givat Washington.

Subsequently, he took a professional course for working with the special needs population including the visually impaired and blind as well as those in wheelchairs, led by **Galit Ben Haim** and **Orly Baor z”l**, founder of the “Dance on Wheels” movement at Seminar HaKibbutzim. He also attended a course for children’s dancing with **Dr. Levi Bar Gil**. Within the framework of his studies in the magic world of dance to which he was exposed, he completed a course in choreography with **Shlomo Maman** at Tel Aviv University. (The completion of any instructors course grants graduates the privilege of membership in the Instructors Association, A.L.).





**There are some 5000 households in Rishon LeZion with special needs children. Almost 50% of them are single parent families. That means that "the partner 'got tired, disappeared', and thus for the remaining parent, it was twice as difficult".**

It turns out that for Adi Atiram the knowledge of instruction wasn't enough. He turned to the creative side – the artistic side – the inspirational – and discovered that he was also a creator. He choreographed partner dances, circle dances, dances for children and dances that are suitable for people in wheelchairs and people with other special needs.

As a result of the experiences of this special and creative couple, the angels Tzipi and Adi, who work modestly and harmoniously like industrious ants all day, every day at their sacred work, the two felt ready to lead a folk dance instructors course for the special needs population.

As part of the course content, there was a very instructive lecture given by Gabi Garufi, a tech professional, because of his experience of coping daily with his son, Tomer. I was privileged to hear most of it. It opened my eyes to the problems of coping with developmental limitations of a newborn, from the moment of birth and then on a daily basis. Together with his wife **Dalia**, a successful academician, they have raised three daughters (two lawyers and a student), the younger sisters of Tomer. Gabi gave us some statistics. There are some 5000 households in Rishon LeZion with special needs children. Almost 50% of them are single parent families. That means that "the partner 'got tired, disappeared', and thus for the remaining parent, it was twice as difficult".

In addition to the immediate contribution of dance to the students, which is expressed in the fun of the social meeting accompanied by music, there is also an improvement in the broadening of movement and a close connection to the instructors who so love them. The instructors have a goal which is outside of the characteristics acquired during their years of dance i.e., the integration of the students into the life of the community as independent people. This, of course, is on the same level as the feelings of the parents, i.e., those who feel as if a dream has come true.

The skills acquired by the children in their folk dance classes, as well as in the swimming and bowling clubs in which they participate, has helped them develop self-confidence,



higher self-esteem, and a belief in themselves and in their abilities. They have created human relationships and kept them up, learned tolerance, patience, self-discipline, respect for others, acceptance of others, and serve in the Israel Defense Forces. After that, they have a framework for daily life: work, extracurricular activities and higher education.

They all learned the significance of the value of money. They operate mobile telephones, a long process that wouldn't have happened without their cooperation and their motivation to achieve these things. They are "people larger than life", Garufi explains, as he describes the Atirams and their activities with enormous esteem. They are "professional revolutionaries, auto didacts, people who acquired their knowledge through trial and error over the years and then wrote about them."

These are just some of the titles describing the hallowed acclaim that this couple receives from the parents of the dancers and from the wonderful volunteers, all of whom I was privileged to meet at a dance session: **Ahuva, Yehudidt, Rosa and Moshe Kedem** and the AKIM workers.

*The skills acquired by the children in their folk dance classes, as well as in the swimming and bowling clubs in which they participate, has helped them develop self-confidence, higher self-esteem, and a belief in themselves and in their abilities.*



*They have created human relationships and kept them up, learned tolerance, patience, self-discipline, respect for others, acceptance of others, and serve in the Israel Defense Forces.*

"We developed a close relationship, just like family, 24/7, we never argued", says Gabi, describing the interwoven relationships between Tzipi and Adi and the active good-hearted people who envelop the students with love.

In the nature of things, these dancers demand suitable movement, which requires changes in the steps and the original movements of the dances, as well as writing them down in an organized manner. "We received full understanding from the choreographers of these dances", Adi explains.

In addition, during the course of the year the Atirams also work on preparing choreographies for performances. "The knowledge I acquired in the course on fundamental choreography from Shlomo Maman helped me tremendously", Adi emphasized.

For example, within the framework of the Karmiel Dance Festival and Ashdodance, the audience received the students with great enthusiasm every time they performed.

It should be noted, that if it weren't for the sensitivity of the Karmiel artistic directors - first Shlomo Maman and now Gadi Bitton, and Avi Levy from Ashdodance, this wouldn't have happened.

I remember being present at the performance of a dance called, "Carmela", in memory of Orly Baor, that took place at Chanukah 2022 under the artistic direction of Shlomo Maman. In the films of the performance, you can see Tomer Garufi holding Tzipi's hand, as he did at the weekly dance sessions.

"Tomer's motivation to know all of the steps is rare", says Tzipi about her student, who is one of the outstanding and most ambitious of her students. Her voice trembled. "How can you not become emotional from the fact that, sometimes, when dancers are missing, Tomer, without saying a word, sits on the side and gives his place to someone else". This seems to be the only dance group that is short of female dancers.

"At the last stage, when I saw how beautifully Tzipi works with them, I stayed behind, as a consultant", listening as Adi openly flattered his partner while tears formed in his eyes. If it wasn't for the love and the encouragement, the appreciation, the respect and the admiration – first of all, between them and for each other – this project wouldn't be what it is today.

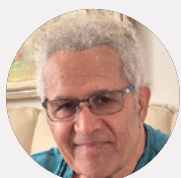
In the shadow of the October 7th catastrophe, in this painful period, with all of us hoping for the return of the hostages, it is heartwarming to see the emotional life work of Tzipi and Adi Atiram up close.



*And on a personal note: I was privileged to be immersed in "...two spirits in a short dance...", good, smiling souls, calm, patient and loving, returning to their world. I have decided – after digesting the wonder I've seen with my own eyes and the outcome of writing this article – to volunteer, to accept selfless love, and in the future – to prepare myself and participate in the instructors course in the field.*







Israel Yakovee

# The Universal Yemenite Step of a Dancer and Cultural Advocate

On Israel Yakovee's Yemenite heritage

## Early Life and Background

Israel Yakovee was born 77 years ago in the Yemenite neighborhood of Sha'arayim in Rehovot, Israel. He was one of eight children in the family of **Awami Nissim** and **Bracha Cohen**, who had immigrated from Yemen in the 1920s. Growing up in a religiously observant environment, Israel was deeply immersed in the traditions and customs of Yemenite Jewish heritage. This rich cultural background laid the foundation for his future endeavors.

As a child, Israel's life was marked by a profound connection to his Yemenite roots. His experiences, from traditional foods and customs to the deep-seated memories of family and community life, shaped his identity. The Yemenite dance, a fundamental element of his heritage, captured his imagination and passion from an early age.

## Youth and Education

After completing his elementary education at Sha'arayim, Israel was sent to Nahal Oz, a kibbutz near the Gaza Strip. This was a significant transition from his religious upbringing at home to a more secular life on the kibbutz. At Nahal Oz, Israel found a new environment that nurtured his personal growth, exposing him to the beauty of nature and the values of community living.

It was during this time that Israel was first introduced to folk dancing by Yossi Abuhav z"l, a dance instructor from Be'er Sheva. His natural talent for dance was evident, and Yossi encouraged him to enroll in a dance instructors course. Israel successfully completed the two-year program, earning a certificate as a certified folk dance instructor.

## Military Service and Initial Career

Following his time at the kibbutz, Israel joined the Nahal Brigade, where he served



Israel Yakovee  
demonstrating Yemenite  
dance in a traditional  
costume



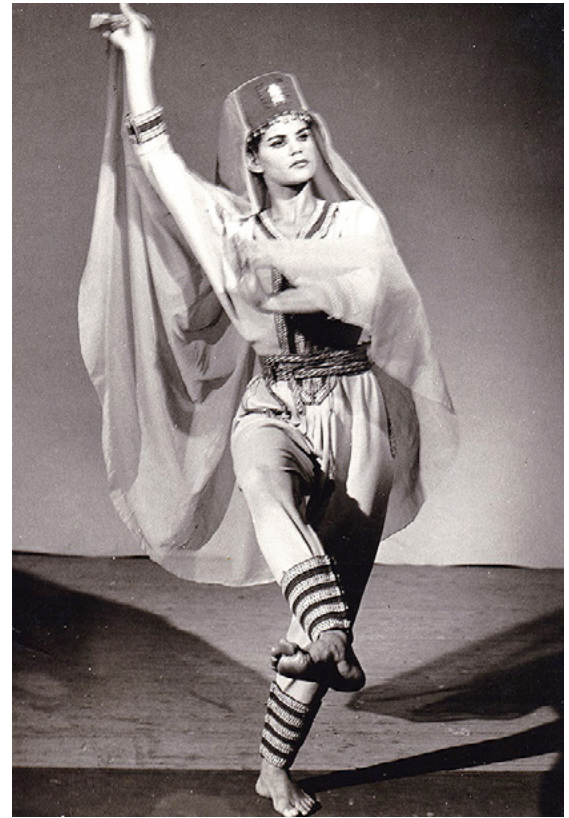
Israel Yakovee and his father



*Israel devoted himself to exploring and preserving the rich heritage of Yemenite Jewish culture. He meticulously studied Yemenite traditions, including wedding customs and social practices, and documented them through various media.*

as a platoon sergeant during the Six-Day War. His military service involved various duties, including a significant role in the security operations between Gaza and El Arish (on the Sinai Peninsula). After completing his service, he returned to Nahal Oz, was accepted as a kibbutz member, and sought to further his academic and professional dreams.

When the kibbutz did not support his desire to pursue higher education, Israel left and returned to his roots in Rehovot, determined to follow his dream of becoming a professional dancer. With the support of his sister Yoni, who was a well-known performer, he succeeded in passing the auditions for the musical, "Hello, Dolly!", and performed alongside her at the Alhambra Theater in Jaffa.



*Yoni, Israel's sister, principal dancer in Lehakat Inbal*



*Israel and Michelle Yakovee on their wedding day*

## The American Dream and Professional Growth

Having achieved his dream of becoming a professional dancer, Israel set his sights on academic advancement. He moved to Los Angeles, California, where his older brother, **Rahavia**, had already established himself. Rahavia was instrumental in getting Israel a student visa and a flight to the United States.

In Los Angeles, Israel enrolled at California State University, Northridge, where he pursued a degree in Physical Education and Physiotherapy. In addition to his studies, to support himself, he started teaching Israeli folk dance classes and worked as a





*Camp Finjan, 1994*



*Finjan Camp logo on the button*

*"My greatest achievement and satisfaction is the love and recognition that I now receive in Israel for [the fact] that I am considered an authority on Yemenite dance. That is, after all, what I value the most."*



*Israel and Bentzi Tiram wearing Yemenite costumes at Camp Finjan*

lifeguard. His passion for dance and commitment to cultural education allowed him to expand his dance programs and teach Israeli folk dance on both the East and West Coasts of the United States.

## Cultural Ambassador and Dance Innovator

By 1975, Israel had completed his studies and married **Rachael**, his first wife. Together, they had three children – **Oren**, **Ronit**, and **Ilan**. Israel's dedication to folk dance continued to grow, and he began to explore ways to promote and preserve Yemenite Jewish culture through his work.

He played a pivotal role in the development of the Israeli folk dance scene in the U.S., organizing Israeli folk dance camps, workshops and seminars that introduced and popularized Israeli folk dances. His innovative approach included incorporating traditional Yemenite elements into his dance choreographies. This earned him recognition and respect in the global folk dance community.

He said: "My greatest achievement and satisfaction is the love and recognition that I now receive in Israel for [the fact] that I am considered an authority on Yemenite dance. That is, after all, what I value the most."

Despite personal changes in his life, including a divorce and a subsequent marriage to **Michelle**, with whom he had a son, **Lior**, and a daughter, **Maya**, Israel's commitment to his cultural mission remained steadfast.

## The Yemenite Dance Revival

In the late 20th century, Israel devoted himself to exploring and preserving the rich heritage of Yemenite Jewish culture. He meticulously studied Yemenite traditions, including wedding customs





*Camp Finjan – the teachers, from right: Israel Yakovee, Moshe Eskayo, Moshiko Halevy, and Israel Shiker*



*Historical photo from Camp Finjan*

and social practices, and documented them through various media. His efforts led him to create in the neighborhood of 100 folk dances, with approximately 80% of them inspired by Yemenite music and traditions.

Israel's work transcended borders as he shared his expertise through workshops, festivals, and cultural events across the globe. His outreach extended to Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, South America, Europe, Australia, and the United States, all areas where he found a keen interest in Yemenite and Israeli folk traditions.

## Legacy and Continued Influence

Today, Israel Yakovee resides in Boston, where he continues to teach, create, and promote Yemenite folk dance. He recently collaborated with Israeli choreographer **Eyal Eliahu** on a new line folk dance, Eid Al Yaman, to Yemenite music.

Israel co-created the circle dance, Blues Teimani, with **Marco Ben Shimon** to music by the band, **Yemen Blues**.

Israel's life's work embodies the fusion of personal passion with a deep-seated cultural mission. He has dedicated his life to not only preserving the Yemenite Jewish heritage but also to sharing it with the world. His contributions to folk dance and cultural education have established him as a leading figure in the preservation and dissemination of Yemenite Jewish culture.

*Israel Yakovee's journey is a testament to the power of cultural preservation and the impact one individual can have on a global stage. His legacy lives on through his teachings, dances, and the vibrant cultural exchanges he has fostered across the world.*



*Israel and Ronit, his daughter, performing at Camp Finjan*



Through his tireless efforts, Israel Yakovee has become a universal ambassador for Israeli folk dance, ensuring that the rich tapestry of Yemenite traditions continues to inspire and resonate with audiences around the globe. His life's work reflects a profound commitment to cultural heritage and a dedication to future generations of folk dance enthusiasts.

## Notable Achievements

- **Dance Instructor Certification:** Graduated from a two-year dance instructor course in Be'er Sheva.
- **Professional Performance:** Performed in the musical "Hello, Dolly!" at the Alhambra Theater in Jaffa.
- **Academic Achievements:** Earned a degree in Physical Education and Physiotherapy from Northridge University.
- **Cultural Contributions:** Created approximately 100 folk dances, with a focus on Yemenite Jewish traditions.
- **Global Outreach:** Taught and promoted Israeli folk dance in countries including Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, South America, Europe, Australia, and the United States.
- **Cultural Documentation:** Conducted extensive research on Yemenite Jewish customs and traditions, documenting them through various media.

Israel Yakovee's journey is a testament to the power of cultural preservation and the impact one individual can have on a global stage. His legacy lives on through his teachings, dances, and the vibrant cultural exchanges he has fostered across the world. 🧡



*Camp Finjan, group photo*



**Matti Goldschmidt**

# Israeli Folk Dancing in Switzerland

## On the Development of Israeli Folk Dance in Switzerland, City by City

**W**e are happy to continue our article series, "All Around the World", about the diverse places where Israeli folk dances are danced. The next country is Switzerland. As part of Central Europe, Switzerland is one of the smaller countries and, at 41,285 km<sup>2</sup> (15,943 m<sup>2</sup>), it is only about one-tenth the size of California. With a population of around 9 million, it ranks 20th among the 56 countries and territories in Europe. The official languages are German, French, and Italian and, to some extent, Romansh. In 2024, close to 20,000 Jews now live in Switzerland, with Zurich as the largest community, followed by Geneva and Basel.

The original Swiss Confederation, with the cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, came into being with the Oath of Rütli in 1391. Over the centuries, the confederation grew and shrank in members and size. Switzerland has existed in its current form since 1848 and is divided into 26 cantons, with the canton of Jura being the last to be established in 1979.

Although Jews were probably already resident centuries earlier in what is now Switzerland, the first document about the presence of a Jewish population dates back to 1213 (in Basel), followed by other documents such as Lucerne (1252) and St. Gallen (1268). As everywhere else in Europe, Jews required special residence rights. Jewish settlements came to an abrupt end in the middle of the 14th century, when practically all Jewish communities disappeared. Jews were blamed for the spread of the Black Death, whereupon they were summarily burned. Only in individual cases, they were lucky enough to have been expelled. From the 16th century onwards, Aargau was the only canton in which Jews had residential rights for the next 250 years (in the communities of Lengnau and Oberendingen). Between 1862 and 1874, all Jews in Switzerland were finally granted full civil rights and freedom of settlement throughout Switzerland, except for the canton of Aargau, which did not follow suit until 1879. In 1892, ritual (Jewish) slaughter was banned nationwide. For reasons of neutrality, Switzerland became a member of the United Nations only in 2002.

In addition to the two current centers for Israeli folk dance, namely Zurich and Bern, other cities where Israeli folk dance circles are found are included. On the other hand, we have not mentioned the many international folklore dance circles, all of which have not only older but also more modern Israeli folk dances in their repertoire. Apart from Zurich, in particular, and to a limited extent Basel and Geneva, the majority of participating dancers in Switzerland are non-Jews. These are people who have become interested in the country of Israel through Israeli folk dancing.

## Zurich

### Rikudei Am with Ronit Bollag

Spring 1983: Inside an envelope in **Ronit Bollag's** mailbox is a blue piece of paper with the heading, "Israeli Folk Dance Association" (IFDA) advertising a summer dance camp in Hatfield (England). Her interest was piqued and during a short conversation with IFDA's chairman, **Maurice Stone**, she was soon convinced that this camp was precisely what she had always been looking for. Rikudei Am – her childhood dream! Ronit was born in Israel and arrived in Switzerland with her Swiss parents at the age of 11. This is when she discovered Israeli folk dancing led by the local youth movement.

At the time Ronit received the invitation, she was a mother of two toddlers and needed to find a way to attend this Rikudei Am camp, albeit without children. The "way" was eventually found (thanks to a cooperative husband) and so, for the first time, she ended up in the world of Rikudei Am. Naturally, everything was new to her, i.e., the extent of the camp, the process, its organization, and surprisingly, the fact that Israeli dances are danced all over the world – not just in Israel.

These five days at the camp turned out to be extremely strenuous, both for her brain and body. Almost thirty new dances were taught, some with simple step sequences and some with more difficult ones – at the end, everything was difficult for Ronit! Like everyone else, she slept only a little, laughed a lot, and made new friends. Her language skills helped her out a lot and after five days, she returned home overwhelmed, with countless new impressions and the memory of not more than half (!) a dance in her head.

Back home, she quickly discovered that Rikudei Am sessions seemed not to exist in Switzerland. She contacted the youth association, Hashomer Hatzair, where Rikudim were a regular integral part of the programming. It took some persuading until two madrichot (youth leaders) finally agreed to teach her and a couple of other enthusiasts a basic dance repertoire. With the help of the youth department of the local Jewish Community (Israelitische Cultusgemeinde Zürich), she organized the first chug (dance session), which attracted more than fifty participants. This was on January 29th, 1984.

Not much later, the young Hashomer Hatzair madrichot completed their school term and left Zurich and the newly established chug. From then on Ronit continued, not only to organize, but also to take part in further dance camps and weekend workshops. And so, she also began teaching dances on three levels: one hour for beginners, one hour for intermediate and two hours for advanced dancers. Back then, in the older days, to

*Apart from Zurich, in particular, and to a limited extent Basel and Geneva, the majority of participating dancers in Switzerland are non-Jews. These are people who have become interested in the country of Israel through Israeli folk dancing.*



Machol Zürich 40th anniversary celebration. Photo: Machol Zürich





Workshop in Zürich, 2011. Photo: Matti Goldschmidt



Zürich 2011 with Marcello Marianoff. Photo: Matti Goldschmidt

learn the dances, you had to be on-site, take part in weekends and camps, buy videos and dance descriptions and, of course, the music material. Music that was not available at workshops could be ordered and bought from **Yaron Meishar** at "Rokdim".

When Ronit started teaching, she still had to use cassettes, followed by the "big revolution" of mini discs and CDs. Only in the early 2000s did the computer bring salvation. Today, it is hard to imagine how extensive the preparatory work for a chug was, from cueing the cassettes to lugging heavy equipment and to arranging an entire dance evening.

Ronit's dance classes soon attracted numerous people and early on, she began organizing dance weekends. The late **Yonatan Gabay** z"l was the first guest teacher, followed for many years by **Zion Ohayon**, who also taught at the Zurich Hashomer Hatzair. **Benny Assouline**, **Meir Shem Tov**, **Oren Ashkenazi**, **Dudu Barzilay** and **Eyal Eliyahu** deserve to be mentioned as well along with **Haim Vaknin** with his dance troupes. Since 2009, **Marcelo Marianoff** from Argentina has come almost every year, once together with **Yaron Elfassy** and once with **Ofer Alfasi**. "Machol Zürich", as the chug became called, had a special premiere in 2017 when the Israeli singer **Kobi Aflalo** was invited to a concert in Zurich and visited a dance workshop on Motz'ei Shabbat (Saturday evening). This was the first time they danced to live music – which everyone considered to have been a great experience. Over the years, they also welcomed other choreographers including **Bonny Piha**, **Yoram Sasson**, **Shlomo Maman**, **Moshe Telem** and **Yankele Levy** z"l.

According to Ronit, as she looked back over her forty years of dance activity, the highlight was definitely the 20th anniversary celebration in 2004, to which Haim Vaknin and the young, very talented dancers of the performance troupe Machol Hashalom/Machol Midbari, were invited. To start the festivities, the troupe presented a brilliant, lively show in the Jewish Community Center which absolutely thrilled the four hundred spectators. The young Israelis then remained in Switzerland for almost a week, to perform in Jewish retirement homes and in the streets of Zurich and also to enjoy Switzerland as tourists. In the following years, further generations of the troupe visited Zurich again, offering great dance shows and dancing within the chug. As of a few years ago, Machol Midbari no longer exists; but "no doubt, it left great memories and lasting friendships".

"Machol Zürich" also celebrated its 30th and 35th anniversaries with special workshops, to which it was able to welcome not only dance leaders, but also dear dance friends from all over Europe, Israel and even South America. Now, in its 40th year, planning went ahead

*Back then, in the older days, to learn the dances, you had to be on-site, take part in weekends and camps, buy videos and dance descriptions and, of course, the music material.*

to celebrate this anniversary in appropriate style and it took place September 6-8, 2024, with guest teachers **Shlomo Maman**, **Marcelo Marianoff** and **Danielle Shkop**.

The structure of the Zurich chug has changed over the years. While **Ben Edri** teaches both the beginner 1 and beginner 2 groups, Ronit teaches the intermediate and advanced levels together with Orna Gilgen-Kariv. What has not changed, however, is the great interest in Rikudei Am. Today, "Machol Zürich" consists of around 100 regular participants and Ronit was pleased to mention that some of them have been loyal since the very first day. In Zurich, as in most chugim in Europe, most of the dancers are women, but everyone enjoys dancing together and celebrating Jewish and Israeli holidays and traditions. The chugim take place on Tuesday evenings in the Jewish Community Center. Over the years, they have grown into a homogeneous group and are proud that newcomers and guests always tell them how warmly they are welcomed by the regular dancers.

In the meantime, additional chugim have emerged in Switzerland (see additional cities with chugim below) and there is a good cooperation with all other Swiss Israeli folk dance leaders. The demand for Rikudei Am is high and Ronit and Orna are often invited to teach Israeli folk dances in groups of international dancing and also at the annual Zurich Tanzt Festival.

Doubtlessly, Ronit can be proud to have "started the ball rolling" for Rikudei Am in Switzerland (albeit together with **Oded Harari** in Bern and **Marcia Leventhal** in Basel), while at the same time, she is grateful to her fellow dancers, co-leaders, helpers and supporters for their loyalty and commitment. As Ronit does not stop stressing: "Rikudei Am connects and enchants and offers a great opportunity to keep a healthy mind in a healthy body". On a personal level, she found many valuable friendships through dancing which she considers to be an important part of her social environment at home in Zurich and worldwide.

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*Workshop in Zürich, 2011. Photos: Matti Goldschmidt*

## Dancing with Orna

**Orna Gilgen-Kariv** was born in Kibbutz Ramat David and moved, with her Swiss husband, to Switzerland almost 40 years ago. All of her three children and two grandchildren live around Zurich. In 2007, she started to dance on a regular basis in Switzerland in Ronit Bollag's class held at the local Jewish Community Center. Initially, it was just to revive the repertoire that had been forgotten over the years. Through some diligent practice and exercise, she rose to become an Israeli folk dance instructor supporting Ronit, not only in the latter's classes. She leads three classes of her own at a small and beautiful community center on the western shore of Lake Zurich, which is attended by about thirty-five women





*Celebrating Purim at Machol Zürich. Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive*

between the ages of fifty and eighty – Jewish and non-Jewish people – who share their love for Israeli folk dances, songs, singers and performing artists.

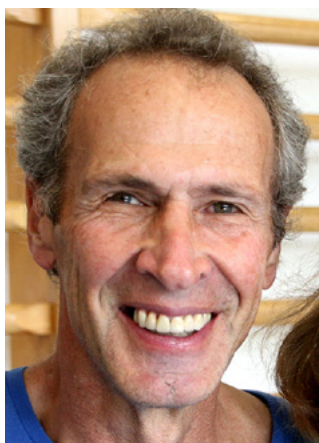
Orna started her first class in 2016 with only two women, who were joined during the following six months by two more women and one man. This class takes place on Mondays between 5:30 and 8:00 pm. Her second dance class started in the summer of 2021, in the shadow of the general Corona restrictions, with mainly Jewish and Israeli women. Some of them had never danced previously. Having reached the age of retirement, the participants of that class are full of enthusiasm and with a strong desire to overcome considerable difficulties such as natural physical limitations. Social activity, in combination with a “healthy mind in a healthy body”, is certainly only one of the reasons for them to participate in Israeli folk dancing. This class takes place on Mondays in the morning between 10:00 and 11:30 am.

Her third and most challenging class started in autumn 2023. It includes elderly participants and also women with physical disabilities. The great joy that all the participants of this class express gives Orna great satisfaction and happiness. This class takes place on Tuesdays in the morning between 10:00 and 11:30 am. Orna feels proud to have the privilege and opportunity to spread some Israeli culture to her Jewish and non-Jewish participants, and to anyone who wishes to participate.

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## Bern

### With Oded Harari



*Oded Harari*

**Oded Harari** (originally from Kibbutz Yehiam) received his professional ballet dance training in London and was active in the Kibbutz Dance Company, the Batsheva Dance Company (Tel Aviv) and the “Swiss Chamber Ballet” in Basel, among others. In the early 1980s, he, together with his wife, Pierrette, began to organize regular folk dance courses in Bern on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Just a few years later, in 1987, he founded the performance group “Nevatim” intending to introduce Israeli folk dance culture to the Swiss public, especially to non-dancers. From about 1990, he decided to invite Israeli dance masters and choreographers to Bern,



*To this day, former members of the group meet every two weeks in a Christian community hall, not just to dance, but also for purely social reasons.*

including **Moshe Telem** and **Shmulik Gov-Ari**. Just before the turn of the millennium, the regular courses were taken over by his daughter **Michal**, and then taken over by **Oren Ashkenazi** and his wife **Lena** around a dozen years later.

To this day, former members of the group meet every two weeks in a Christian community hall, not just to dance, but also for purely social reasons. The group is now led by **Christine Arni**. Older dances are reviewed and newer dances from the dance weekends and workshops offered elsewhere are taught.

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*Nevatim group with Oded Harari (lower row, right), performing in Bern. Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive*



*Workshop with Michal Harari (center) and Lena-Maria Stettler-Ashkenazi (right), Bern 2011. Photo: Matti Goldschmidt*

## With Lena & Oren Ashkenazi

**Lena-Maria Stettler-Ashkenazi** began dancing as a small child in the mid-1980s in one of the ballet classes that Oded Harari gave at the time in Bern, the capital of Switzerland with 147,000 inhabitants. His lessons usually ended with around fifteen minutes of Israeli folk dancing. For Lena, this was a first encounter with "Rikudei Am". In the 1990s, together with Oded's daughters, **Michal** and **Nicole Harari**, she took part in the workshops organized by Oded with Israeli dance masters. She particularly remembers a workshop with **Shmulik Gov-Ari** in 1990. At the time, she was eight years old, and with great pride, she was allowed to dance Gov-Ari's "Kol Niderai" in the inner circle. Ever since then, Oded has remained a great role model for her.



*Lena-Maria Stettler-Ashkenazi  
Photos: Matti Goldschmidt, 2017*



*Oren Ashkenazi*

In 1998, she founded a "dance session for young people" together with Michal Harari, an idea that **Hila Mukdasi** in Jerusalem, among others, implemented around two decades





Workshop in Bern 2017 with (from left to right) Oren Ashkenazi, Yehuda Rahmani, Gadi Bitton and Matti Goldschmidt.  
Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive



Hila Mukdasi and Lena-Maria Stettler-Ashkenazi (left), Bern 2011. Photo: Matti Goldschmidt

later. (See Rokdim-Nirkoda no. 108: <https://bit.ly/4dvkMAN>) This group consisted mainly of schoolmates and friends and it still meets today, even if the term “young” is no longer quite accurate twenty or thirty years later. Of course, young participants from Lena's Waldorf school in Ittigen, a community near Bern with almost 12,000 inhabitants, are still encouraged to take part in these meetings.

In 2004, Lena and two friends attended the 27th Machol Europa, which was held in Coventry, England. In addition to **Moshe Telem and Shmulik Gov-Ari, Yaron Carmel, Oren Ashkenazi, Yaron Elfassy** and **Alberto Zirlinger** were also present as dance teachers. As a result, from 2005 onwards, Lena joined Michal Harari and together they took over the courses that Oded had started about a quarter of a century earlier.

Even during her five-year stay in Israel, from 2008 onwards, Lena continued to co-run the courses from afar as best as she could. In 2013, she returned to Bern with her husband, Oren Ashkenazi, and together they founded the group “Machol Neshama”, under whose name a good number of different choreographers came to Switzerland as guest teachers. Meanwhile, Michal had to put her organizational dance-related activities on hold due to her work-related stays abroad. Shmulik Gov-Ari has been invited to the group's twentieth anniversary event in late autumn 2024, which has since been renamed, “Machol Oryana”, after Lena and Oren's deceased daughter. At such events, Oded and Pierrette, his wife, are always invited as guests of honor. It is a good occasion to put on the horas that Oded particularly still loves from his kibbutz days.

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## Basel

Basel (population 173,000) is a border city on the Rhine River, situated in northwestern Switzerland at the bend in the river where France, Germany and Switzerland converge. Too often, Basel is bypassed by many visitors to Switzerland, who instead head to Zurich for its metropolitan flair or to the majestic Alps. It holds a special place in modern Jewish history as the venue of the first Zionist Congress in 1897, convened by **Theodor Herzl**, where among other events, Hatikvah was adopted as the Zionists' national anthem and the desire to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine was proclaimed. There is no documentation if the participants indeed danced at the end of the Congress. However, it is a fact that the Jews of Basel have danced up to the present day.

**The garden Rikudei Am course became so popular that parents also wanted to try dancing.**

It is one of the peculiarities of Switzerland that cantons (territorial subdivisions) might divide, as happened in Basel in 1833. Since then, Basel consists of two so-called half-cantons.

Dancing in Basel's Jewish Community, the Israelitische Gemeinde (IGB), started with a children's dance group that eventually moved from the countryside of Baselland to Basel-Stadt. In the late 1980s, **Jardena Puder**, a young community madricha (teacher/dance leader), started an Israeli dance group for children. Young **Mira** and

**Elana Leventhal** joined Jardena's course, and, totally enthralled, they began dancing at home. Their dad, Stephen, found old cassette recordings of Israeli dance music from his university days. Their mom, **Marcia Leventhal**, originally from Portland, Oregon (U.S.A.), who also danced at university, had the idea of holding a children's course in their garden. Mira and Elana asked some school friends to join them and soon there was a large group that came regularly to dance after school. The garden Rikudei Am course became so popular that parents also wanted to try dancing. In the spirit of the intercultural focus of the Protestant church of a small village in Baselland, a room was offered for Israeli folk dancing. Word spread and soon the dance group in Aesch was firmly established.

Having heard about the dancing in the countryside, Mrs. **F. Silbiger**, a teacher in the Hebrew school in Basel, invited Marcia, who had moved to Switzerland in 1986, to teach simple dances for the children's Hanukah party. The chazzan's (cantor's) wife, **Mirjam Hellmann**, also a teacher in the Hebrew school, then asked Marcia if it would be possible to start a group for women in the synagogue. Initially, a group consisting of five women was formed. **Rabbi Levinger**, the Basel IGB Rabbi, excited by this success, found a larger hall for the dancing and on a Tuesday evening in 1992, the first official steps in "Basel Tanzt" (literally: Basel Is Dancing) were danced. Tuesday evenings became the official Israeli dancing evenings with alternating weeks between the women's group in the IGB in Basel-Stadt and the village group in Baselland.



*Susan Worthington.  
Photo: Private collection*

In time, Marcia's three children, **Elana**, **Mira** and **Gabriel**, also began dancing with the village group. They brought many of their friends, so that the village group became a wonderful mixture of both students and adults. **Ruth Meier-Haldemann**, who would later take over the leadership of the group, together with **Susan Worthington**, and Ruth's husband **Remo**, first started dancing in the village dance group. Three official children's classes, one in Baselland as well as a girls course and a boys course in the Jewish community in Basel, followed the start of the two adult classes. A few years later, two additional senior dance groups were started. There was one in Baselland and one in the IGB of Basel. And so, the "Basel Tanzt" Israeli dancing program was complete with two adult/teenager classes, two classes for seniors and three children's classes.



*Mira Leventhal (right) teaching a children's group in Basel.  
Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive*



The name, "Basel Tanzt" (בזל טנצט), is taken from a special dance festival that takes place in Basel. However, because the name is also in Yiddish and therefore spelled with Hebrew letters, the original organizers of the group felt that this would be a perfect name for the dance group. Over the years, hundreds of T-shirts sporting the "Basel Tanzt" logo (in Hebrew letters) were proudly worn by dancers all over the world.

New dances and music were needed. In Israel, Marcia met with **Yaron Meishar** who supplied most of the available dance material. Together with her three children and many of the new dancers, she went on to participate in weekend courses organized by **Oded Harari** in Bern and **Ronit Bollag** in Zurich, along with guest choreographers and teachers from Israel. In 1992, Marcia first attended Maurice Stone's Machol Europa in England. This offered her the chance to talk with participants from around the world, many of them dance instructors in their own right, as well as to meet some of the core Israeli leaders of Rikudei Am. This is how **Moshe Telem** became the main mentor of the "Basel Tanzt" group.



*The Emunah children's dance group in Basel.  
Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive*

According to Marcia, wonderful children's dances were created by **Shmulik Gov-Ari**, **Levi Bar Gil** and **Shlomo Maman**, which formed the core program for the children's groups. Fortunately, these dances were suitable not only for the children. They were also danced and loved by the senior groups and used as an introduction to Israeli folk dancing for groups of beginners in the Basel region. Over the years, several dance instructors from Israel were invited. To name just a few: **Moshe Telem**, **Shlomo Maman**, **Zion Ohaiyon**, and **Yankele Levy z'l**, who danced in the center of the "Basel Tanzt" circle. During these special sessions, the members of all the Basel groups, including children and seniors, came together to dance. In 2000, to celebrate Marcia's 50th

birthday, dancers in and around Switzerland were invited to a weekend in Baselland with **Dudu Barzilay**.

Marcia was assisted in teaching the main groups by her daughters Elana and then Mira, who also taught a pre-teen group. When Elana and Mira left for university, **Jardena Lang**, who had been in the original Basel children's dance group, took over as the assistant for the "Basel Tanzt" group. In looking back on the groups, an early goal was to have just enough dancers to close a circle, meaning a minimum of five dancers. Over time, during an evening when they had a guest choreographer and all "Basel Tanzt" groups came to Basel, the circle expanded to at least 50 dancers.

Ruth Meier-Haldemann and Susan Worthington took over the leadership of "Basel Tanzt" in 2007 and have continued to lead the group to this day. Both joined the "Basel Tanzt" group in 2004. Susan, originally from Liverpool, England, lived for several



*Dancing in Basel with Yankele Levy z'l.  
Photo: The Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive*

*The repertoires in the sessions may vary from place to place but there are always plenty of familiar dances and it is good for her to see some new and different ones as well.*

years each in the U.S.A., Germany and Israel. She moved to Switzerland in 1991. When she began dancing in Basel, she “appreciated Marcia’s patience while she struggled to grasp the choreography of the more basic dances”. Her desire to improve as quickly as possible led her to sign up for various dance workshops, not only in Bern, Geneva and Zurich, but also in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and England. She was highly impressed by the variety of the dance steps and music of the dances as well as the energy and commitment of the dancers.

The repertoires in the sessions may vary from place to place but there are always plenty of familiar dances and it is good for her to see some new and different ones as well.

These days, the “Basel Tanzt” group is small but it has a dedicated core of regulars who did not let even Covid stop them – apart from when there was a complete lockdown.

The repertoire consists of only circle dances. Currently, the level is beginners to intermediate. Naturally, the group is inclusive. All are welcome and prior dancing experience is not necessary.

The room that is regularly used for the dance sessions has a floor designed for movement and dancing, so the surface is gentle on the feet!

The cost per session is CHF 20 (= US \$22 or NIS 85). “Basel Tanzt” dances on Wednesday evenings from 19:30-21:00 (7:30-9:00 pm) at the HWS Schule, Eulerstrasse 55, 4051 Basel. When coming, please check the screen at the main entrance because the dance sessions do not always take place in the same room. Look for “R. Meier”.

Contact: **Susan Worthington** [worthingtons@bluewin.ch](mailto:worthingtons@bluewin.ch)

**Ruth Meier-Haldemann** [ruth.meier@intergga.ch](mailto:ruth.meier@intergga.ch)

## Geneva

Every week, a dance group meets in Geneva, which aims to “bring together Jewish young people and adults from Geneva.” The association preferred not to publish any details about its dance courses, so it was not even possible to find out which day of the week the group meets. According to the current dance leader **Ayelet Joanes**, generally speaking, outsiders could join the group but preferably for a single session only. Otherwise, it is subject to special approval from the local Geneva Maccabi Jewish sports organization.

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## Olten

For over thirty years now, a dance group originally founded by **Oded Harari** has been active in a church community in Olten (canton Solothurn) under the direction of **Ursula Rutschi**. A group of people of mixed ages meets every two weeks on Thursdays. The intention is to bring together not only experienced dancers, but also those with no previous experience to let them experience “the special temperament of Israeli folk dance”.

Contact: **Ursula Rutschi** [ursula.rutschi@ref-olten.ch](mailto:ursula.rutschi@ref-olten.ch)



## Schaffhausen

**Reto Rutishauser**, from the city of Schaffhausen (population 36,000, the capital of the canton with the same name), came across Israeli dancing more or less by chance at a birthday party in March 2004. As a result, a small group formed spontaneously and met once a month. Just one year later, they attended a dance weekend in Zurich and, in the same year, a workshop with **Matti Goldschmidt** in Thayngen (also in the canton of Schaffhausen). Above all, it was the retired teacher, **Verena Stamm**, who introduced Israeli folk dance in this canton with her annually organized workshops. The 2005-2009 workshops were led by Matti Goldschmidt. In 2010-2011, two further workshops with Matti Goldschmidt took place in Herblingen (canton Schaffhausen) under the direction of Rutishauser. In recent years, meetings have been held at irregular intervals under the direction of Rutishauser on a Saturday afternoon from 3:30 to 5:30 pm in a free church according to a fixed six-month program. The participation fee per person is five francs (= US \$5.50 or NIS 21). The group consists of up to fifteen women of different ages; so far, "men never have shown up", as Rutishauser jokingly remarked. Their repertoire consists of almost one hundred dances. During the time of Covid-19, Rutishauser kept the session up to date online.

Contact: **Reto Rutishauser** [rutishausersh@bluewin.ch](mailto:rutishausersh@bluewin.ch)



*Reto Rutishauser leading a line of dancers in Schaffhausen 2010. Photo: Matti Goldschmidt*

## Solothurn

**Jutta Maass** has been leading a group in the city of Solothurn (population 17,000, the capital of the canton with the same name) for almost two decades with around a dozen participants, half of whom are women and half men. She also runs a second dance session in Biel/Bienne (canton Bern with French and German as the two official languages), also with about a dozen participants, including two men. The groups each meet fortnightly [every two weeks] (always on Sundays) in a free church; the participation fee per person

is five Swiss francs (= US \$5.50 or NIS 21). For the Solothurn sessions, the proceeds are donated to Holocaust survivors in the Ukraine and for the Biel sessions, to the Methodist Church. Preference is given to older dances and dances up to the year 2000. Couple dances are danced only occasionally at the Solothurn session.

Contact: **Jutta Maass** [jutta.maass@bluewin.ch](mailto:jutta.maass@bluewin.ch)



*Dancing in Schaffhausen with Matti Goldschmidt (left), 2010. Photo: The Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive*

## Weinfelden

It all began around the year 2000, when **Daniel, Birgit Seidenberg's** husband at the time, [who was originally Christian despite having Jewish parents,] formed a new Jewish community with other Messianic Jews in the German-speaking part of Switzerland for Bible study. Soon after he formed the community, only Jewish holidays and festivals were celebrated, which – quite naturally – also included singing and dancing. These festivals mainly took place at a location called Sonnenberg in Hefenhofen (Canton Thurgau). In order for the group to improve their dance skills, the Israeli-born qualified dance and movement therapist, **Ben Edri** (Zurich), was invited to Weinfelden (population: 12,000; canton Thurgau) twice to three times a year. Matti Goldschmidt also spent a weekend teaching Israeli folk dance in 2006. Ben Edri was regarded as “very strict, if not over precise”, but the girls learned the dances well and they delighted the visitors at the holiday festivities.

Daniel Seidenberg's religious and philosophical orientation went into new directions that soon led to the disintegration of the dance group. At that point it consisted only of Birgit Seidenberg as the dance instructor and several of her daughters (out of eleven children) as well as the daughters of family friends. The remaining dance enthusiasts finally joined **Nathalie Neuenschwander** and **Daniela Grob-Brook's** Winterthur dance group around 2012, when Birgit's group ceased to exist.

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## Winterthur

After **Nathalie Neuenschwander** (then still from Islikon, Canton Thurgau) attended a workshop with Matti Goldschmidt in Schaffhausen, she decided to set up a permanent dance group with another dance enthusiast, **Daniela Grob-Brook**. In 2007, they invited Matti Goldschmidt for the first time to Winterthur (population: 112,000; canton Zurich) to come and teach basic dances. This was followed by eleven more visits through 2019. Over the last several years, dance instructor **Oded Harari** (Bern) was brought in to expand their dance repertoire.


The group of up to twenty dancers (almost all of them women) met every fortnight for around two to three hours. However, with the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, the group came to a standstill in 2020. Neuenschwander had already left the organization team a couple of years earlier for further professional training and was replaced by **Käthli Höfling** (Wiesendangen, Canton Zurich). At the end of the lockdown, the group met less and less frequently, with Grob-Brook and **Ronit Bollag** (Zurich) mainly teaching in the last few months. With only a few workshops a year and without a fixed core of dancers for regular meetings, the dance group could no longer be maintained and is no longer active. The few people, who are still active today and who will not give up dancing, travel 24 kilometers or so to Zurich.

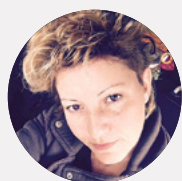
Contact: **Daniela Grob-Brook** [daniela.gb@bluewin.ch](mailto:daniela.gb@bluewin.ch)



Winterthur dance group in 2019. Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive

## Herisau

For just a few years, a dance circle was established in Herisau (population 16,000, the capital of the canton of Appenzell Außerrhoden), initially led by **Eva Sgier** and then by **Daniela Lei**. The basic material was introduced through several workshops with Matti Goldschmidt in 2008-2010. The group is no longer active. 

**Heli Livneh****Translation:**  
**Ruth Goodman****Photos:**  
**Alex Huber**

## Dance of the Month

# Ein Lanu Eretz Acheret – We Have No Other Country

**S**hlomo Maman was born in Tiberias on October 10, 1953. He currently resides in Tel Aviv, is a father to his daughter and a grandfather to his granddaughter.

Shlomo: I started my journey in the world of dance when I was still a young boy. Every Shabbat, my father, all my brothers, and I would walk to synagogue together. One Shabbat, after we returned home from synagogue, my father asked me if I wanted to go with him to watch a soccer game at our neighborhood stadium in Tiberias. I happily agreed.

As we made our way back home from the stadium, we passed through the "Histadrut Hapoalim" building, and heard beautiful music emanating from the background. We went inside the building, where I beheld a sight I will never forget. There was a hall with a large stage at the end, on which a pair of professional dancers danced. Two men were dancing a traditional Yemenite dance. The sinuous movements of the dancers and the way they moved their bodies captured my heart. I tried to understand how they move like that. The music was Yemenite in style, and the dancing pair moved to the music, in perfect coordination, as if they were born with it. At the end of the show, the audience cheered with loud applause, and that's when I knew; I knew this was what I wanted to do. I, too, wanted to dance.

When I was a high school student in Tiberias, we had a neighbor who served in the paratroopers. Every time I saw him coming back from the army dressed in his green uniform, red shoes and red beret, I saw him as a man doing holy work for the Land of Israel. The way he walked to his home was full of glory and pride.

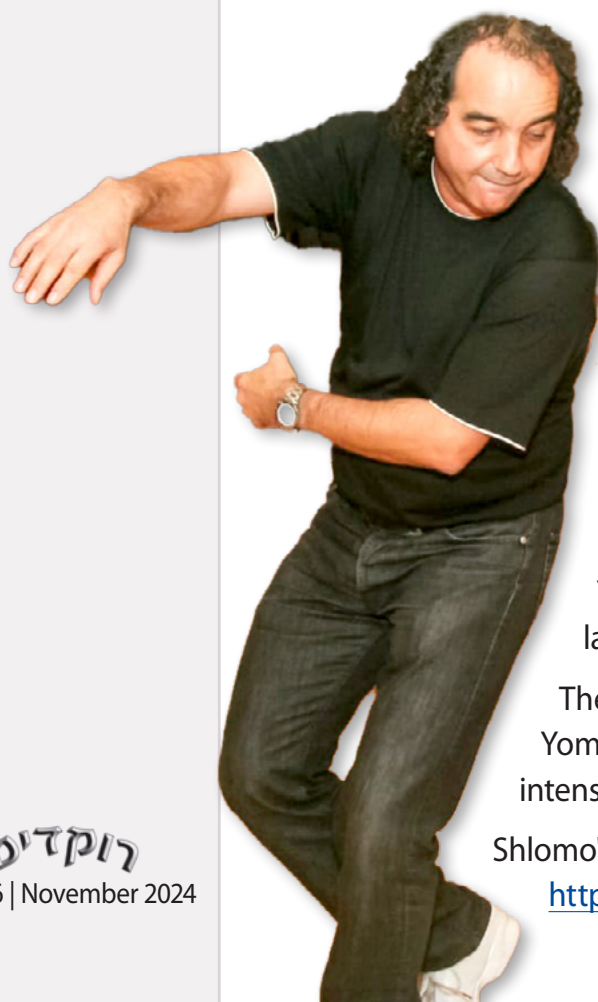
When it came time for me to enlist in the IDF for military service in February 1972, I volunteered to serve in the Paratroopers Corps, inspired by the soldier neighbor I saw returning home. I successfully passed the tests and was accepted into the Paratroopers Corps. This was a dream come true for me. I had become a fighter in the IDF.

During the fourteen months of my basic training I participated in a military operation in Lebanon. Afterwards, I served as a regular soldier during the Yom Kippur War in the southern sector of Egypt, at the Suez Canal, and later, with my unit in the Golan Heights.

The current war has brought back to me the difficult memories I had of the Yom Kippur War, and today we are experiencing a war with a much greater intensity, both as an army and as citizens.

Shlomo's dances can be viewed on the "Rokdim" website:

<https://bit.ly/4fGuS34>





*"The music was Yemenite in style, and the dancing pair moved to the music, in perfect coordination, as if they were born with it. At the end of the show, the audience cheered with loud applause, and that's when I knew; I knew this was what I wanted to do. I, too, wanted to dance."*

### Shlomo tells us about the dance "Ein Li Eretz Acheret (I Have No Other Country):

I choreographed the dance "Ein Li Eretz Acheret – I Have No Other Country" immediately after the song's release in 1986. The song was written as a belated response to the death of **Ehud Manor's** younger brother in the War of Attrition (Milchemet HaHatasha). When I tried to choreograph the dance, it was very difficult for me to create a dance to the arrangement of the original song, because the rhythm and its verses, as originally performed, did not permit me to create a dance with a proper division of existing rhythms. In addition, the original song has a passage without lyrics, and I thought that passage should be played right after the chorus.



I decided therefore to re-record the song with a new arrangement by **Kevin Assi D'Cruz** that was more suitable for folk dancing. In the recording, I perform together with the singer **Keren Porat**. I made slight changes to the transitions, to the tempo of the song, and also added vocal doublings so that it sounded as if a choir was singing it. I taught the dance using this arrangement in all the harkadot (dance sessions) in Israel and around the world.

Unfortunately, even though I had put a lot of thought into how I felt the arrangement and dance movements expressed the spirit of the song, the dance was not received as I expected it to be. At that time, the dance was not successful and was not danced anywhere.

After October 7, 2023 the song took on a new meaning and became a kind of anthem that has been accompanying us all in the difficult period we are going through now. Therefore, I thought it was the right moment to re-choreograph the dance to this special and moving song with steps based on my original dance. My goal was to create a dance that would not be too complex and be accessible to everyone, both beginners and advanced dancers.

While I was considering this issue and contemplating making changes, my good friend, the instructor **Chaim Milstein**, called me and recommended that I choreograph a new dance for this song. That call gave me the strength, desire and confidence to go for it. Fortunately, this year the dance was received with great enthusiasm on all dance floors.

The song "Ein Li Eretz Acheret" touched my heart very much. The lyrics and melody evoke our beloved land and emphasize the fact that, for us, "we have no other country", that it is ours and that we will do everything for it. We will always belong to it and will always be willing to sacrifice ourselves for it.

I see how excited the dancers are when they dance my dance in harkadot, and it makes me happy and excited every time. The goal of the people of Israel now is to move forward and believe that we really have no other country!

The dance, "Ein Li Eretz Acheret: <https://bit.ly/4el62yD>



## Ein Li Eretz Acheret – Dance Notation

**Meter: 4/4**

**Formation: Circle**

### Part A: Face Center, hands free

- 1-2 Touch rt. toes fwd across L while placing palm of rt. hand on left shoulder, hold.
- 3-4 Touch rt. toes diagonally rt. while placing palm of left hand on rt. shoulder, hold.
- 5-8 Cross R behind L, step L to left side, cross R over L to the left while rising on rt. toes and raising arms, hold.
- 9-10 Step L back in place behind R, step R to rt. side.
- 11-16 Mayim step to the rt. (CCW) beginning with L across R: Step L across R, R to rt. step L behind R, R to rt. side, step L across R, hold.
- 17-32 Repeat counts 1-16.

### Part B: Face Center, hands free

- 1-2 Sway R-L.
- 3-4 Move fwd toward center turning rt. into the center with two steps: R,L.
- 5-8 Step R fwd, hold, step L fwd while raising left arm upward, hold.
- 9-12 Back Yem. R to end facing diagonally left with rt. arm raised.
- 13-16 Moving out of center toward the line of the circle: Turn left circling in an arc with three steps L,R,L to end facing center, hold.

17-24 Yem. R, Yem. L.

Repeat Part A

Repeat Part B counts 1-16

### Part C: Face Center, hands free

- 1-4 Step R to rt. while extending both arms to sides and upward with palms down, hold. While lowering the arms: step L behind R, step R in place.
- 5-8 Repeat counts 1-4 with opposite footwork starting with L to left.
- 9-12 Open mayim to the rt. (CCW): Step R to rt., L across R, R to rt., L behind R.
- 13-16 Sway R-L while circling arms up and out to the sides, close R next to L while bringing hands to chest, hold.
- 17-18 Step R fwd toward center while raising arms upward to the rt., hold.
- 19-20 Step L fwd toward center while raising arms upward to the left, hold.
- 21-24 Small leap fwd onto R, step L fwd while bending slightly fwd, step R bwd while straightening body and raising arms, hold.
- 25-28 Three steps bwd toward the line of the circle: L,R,L while lowering arms, hold.
- 29-32 Repeat counts 13-16 (Part C).
- 33-64 Repeat counts 1-32 (Part C).

### Ending

- 1-32 Repeat Part A
- 33-36 Face CCW: Step and lean fwd onto R with bent knee, hands crossed at chest; hold.

Dance Notation by **Ruth Goodman** and **Ruth Schoenberg**

*I see how excited the dancers are when they dance my dance in harkadot, and it makes me happy and excited every time.*



## Ein Li Eretz Acheret – I Have No Other Country

Lyrics: Ehud Manor; Music: Corinne Allal

### Transliteration

Ein li eretz acheret  
Gam im admati bo'eret  
Rak mila be'ivrit choderet  
El orkai, el nishmati  
Beguf ko'ev, belev ra'ev  
Kan hu beiti

Lo eshtok, ki artzi  
Shinta et paneha  
Lo avater la,  
Azkir la,  
Ve'ashir kan be'ozneha  
Ad shetifkach et eineha

Ein li eretz acheret  
Gam im admati bo'eret  
Rak mila be'ivrit choderet  
El orkai, el nishmati  
Beguf ko'ev, belev ra'ev  
Kan hu beiti

Lo eshtok, ki artzi  
Shinta et paneha  
Lo avater la,  
Azkir la,  
Ad shetehadesh yameha  
Ad shetifkach et eineha

Ein li eretz acheret  
Gam im admati bo'eret  
Kan hu beiti  
Ein li...

### Translation

I have no other country  
Even if my land is aflame  
Just a word in Hebrew  
Penetrates my veins and my soul  
With an aching body,  
With a hungry heart,  
Here is my home.

I will not be silent,  
For my country has changed her face.  
I will not give in to her,  
I'll remind her,  
And sing into her ears  
Until she opens her eyes

I have no other country  
Even if my land is aflame  
Just a word in Hebrew  
Penetrates my veins and my soul  
With an aching body,  
With a hungry heart,  
Here is my home.

I will not be silent,  
For my country has changed her face.  
I will not give in to her,  
I'll remind her,  
Until she renews her days of yore  
Until she opens her eyes

I have no other country  
even if my land is aflame  
Here is my home.  
I have no...



Lyrics transliteration and translation  
by Ruth Goodman, Benny Levy and Allen King



# Itzik Ben Dahan's 58th Birthday

Such a beautiful invitation to Itzik Ben Dahan's birthday celebration cannot be refused. The invitation is so colorful and beautiful, with lots of pictures of gifts.



I know the smiling man who helps everyone, the man who retired from the army at the age of 48, "stormed" the folk dance floors and gained quite a few fans.

Six years ago, I came to celebrate Itzik's birthday at the Germanov Community Center. The hall was packed with folk dancers. Back then, I brought him a gift – his dance videos – almost all of them – that appear on the Rodkim website burned onto a disc. Here is the link to the videos on the Rokdim website: <http://bit.ly/3Z2Wzfl>

Of course, I came to this birthday celebration with my partner. The parking lot was full of cars. Itzik was still outside helping visitors find a parking space. I asked him who was leading the dance session inside, and he



answered with a shy smile that Bat El, his wife, who knows the job extraordinarily well, was running it.

The modern, large and air-conditioned Yitzhak Navon Sports Hall in Yavne was full to the brim, packed with hundreds of dancers who came to celebrate Itzik's birthday with him. It was certainly heartwarming.

In addition to the dancers, many instructors and choreographers arrived to show their support, from the Haifa area in the north, and all the way to the south from the Arava region.

And that means that you are loved, Itzik!

So here is part of the experience in pictures. 