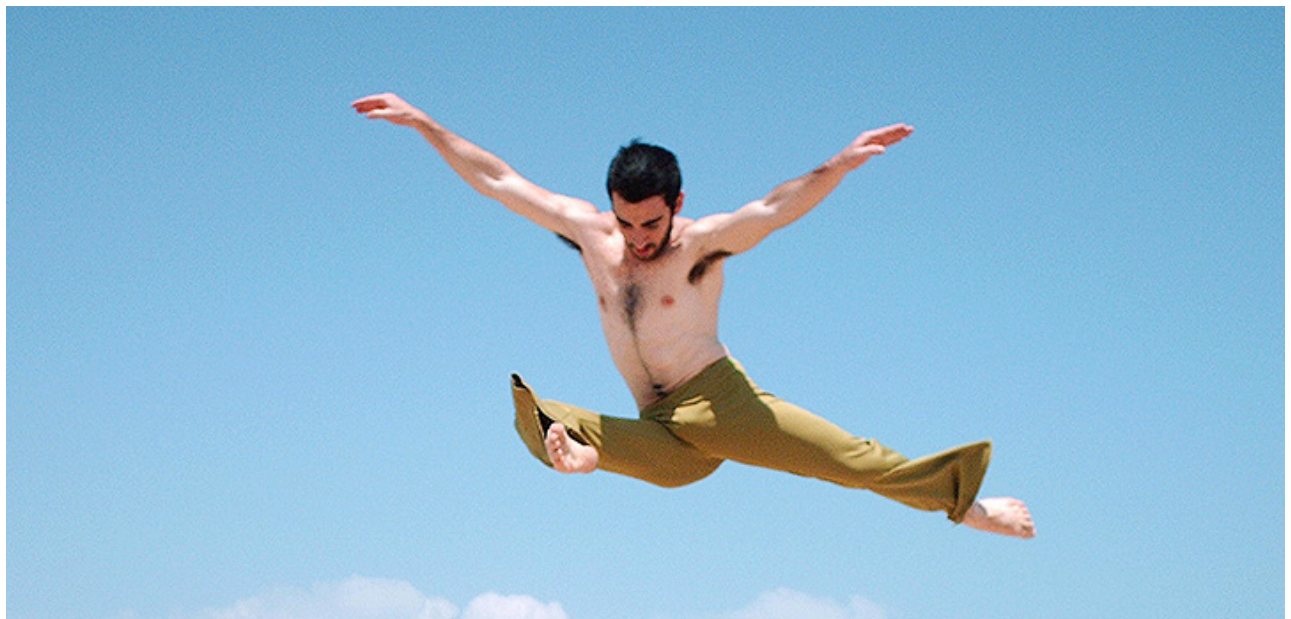


**Maya Geva Shapira**

Translation:
Judy Fixler

*Itzik Saltzman, solo dancer of the the troupe at fly dance*

Choreography on Wheels

Moti Alkis – choreographer and artistic director of
Ayalot Ha'Negev for 41 years

As an instructor of “Galgaldance” – a dance group of dancers seated in wheelchairs who dance with standing dancers – I closely know the disabled and their world, but this time, or to be more precise, I had a chance to meet someone new and special that I have never seen – a choreographer in a wheelchair – a 100% IDF disabled person.

A disabled choreographer teaching dancer without disabilities is not something usual. I was very curious and found myself traveling to Beer Sheva to meet **Moti Alkis**.

Moti, 66 years old, confined to a mobilized wheelchair, was born and lives in Beer Sheva. He served as a combat medic during the Yom Kippur War in a Camel Commando unit, founded by **Arik Sharon** – one of the commando units that suffered heavy losses – Shaked, Haruv, Egoz.

The Camel Unit sustained the line in Africa in the Ismailia Canal or the Al-Ismā'īliyyah Canal, (formerly known as the Sweet Water Canal which was dug by thousands of Egyptian fellahin to facilitate the construction of the Suez Canal). Their base was in Sinai, in the Mitla Pass, and from there they went out on their patrols and pursuits, using camels, helicopters, halftracks [a civilian or military vehicle with regular wheels at the front for steering and continuous tracks at the back to propel the vehicle and carry most of the load] and jeeps. They travelled from Ras Sedr in the Suez gulf to Jebel Ataqah and Mount Um Hashiba, to locate Egyptian intelligence units.

**Moti Alkis**

Maya Geva Shapira

During the course of the war, he was infected with hepatitis and hospitalized at Soroka Hospital. He was in a comma and was declared clinically dead. The battalion commander, Yigal Rozi z"l, summoned the head medical officer. All leaves in the Southern Command District were cancelled so that they could all come and donate blood for Moti.

The condition was fatal... a good friend of his mother's suggested using oil from **Rabbi Chaim Khuri** z"l of Beer Sheva, and rubbing it over Moti's body, in the hopes that the virtues of the rabbi will help bring him a fast cure from G-d. It is known that righteous people grant life in their death. Moti was declared a medical miracle and returned to life. It was a chance of about one in three million...

Complications from the hepatitis slowly developed into muscular dystrophy. Moti has been confined to a wheelchair for the past seven years, unable to stand, walk or dance.

How did you come to dance?

With much love. After the war, I shared an apartment with the accordion player **Benny Mazoz**, who dragged me to folk dance sessions. One day I went with him to a session with **Yossi Abuhav** which was accompanied by the **Yossi Lev** Orchestra. I was turned on and caught the dance bug. I danced a lot; in 1979, I completed a course for folk dance instructors. It was conducted by Yossi Abuhav z"l and **Moti Alfasi** z"l.

I opened folk dance classes in schools for children and youth. I had thousands of dancers in Beer Sheva. In the competitions, "Bet Sefer Roked" [Dancing School], produced through the Ministry of Education by **Avner Daniel**, I always won top prizes with the following schools: "Moledet," "Re'ut," "Oran," "Korczak," "Degania," and "Achva," by holding hands, having the largest number of dancers, with precise dancing and keeping authenticity. I opened sessions for adults at the Beer Sheva Country Club, at Ben Gurion University, in kibbutzim in the south, in Ariel and in Samaria. All was out of Zionism and love for the land of Israel.

During the 80's and 90's, I produced and led folk dance marathons accompanied by orchestras from the Broadcasting Authority, led by **Amos Aloni**, **Oded**



Stav, the soloist of the troupe at an amazing jeté. On the background a lake in North Carolina



Eden and Stav in duet on the background of lakes in North Carolina

A sense of rhythm, talent in movement and in dance, physical ability and leadership. The best [dancers] come to the troupes. The work of building up the dancers and their personalities is known to me.

Maya Geva Shapira

Shoham and a dance orchestra conducted by **Yossi Lev**; also, there were performance shows by dancers and singers.

The marathons were attended by dancers from all over Israel. They would begin at 20:30 [8:30 pm] and end at 8:00 in the morning. I hosted the leading choreographers/dance leaders in Israel: **Moshiko Halevy, Moti Alfasi, Rafi Ziv, Ayalah Goren, Yonatan Gabai, Shlomo Maman, Bentzi Tiram, Mishael Barzilay, Yankele Levy, Eliyahu Gamiliel, Avi Peretz, Shalom Amar, Se'adia Amishai, Shmulik Gov Ari and Moshe Telem.**

I collaborated with all the dance instructors in Israel. The big marathon "Me'Hat'zafon LaNegev Be'Ahava" [From the North to the Negev with Love], which I produced with my friends **David Alfasi** and **Kobi Azulai** attracted 800 dancers from all over the country.

The folk dance, "Taba", which I created in 1989 and was taught in the **Mishael Barzilay** course, was created when Taba was returned to Egypt. <https://bit.ly3GBFdMx>

Except for **Yossi Abuhav**, no one knew about my muscular dystrophy. I ran dance sessions and marathons until I was no longer able to because of my medical condition.

How does one manage to dance and lead/teach dancing with muscular dystrophy?

I received high doses of steroids and various other treatments that helped me. All along the way the doctors asked me to stop, but I decided that I must dance many hours daily and I would not give in, not even for a second.

In 1979, at one of the marathons that I produced at the country club, **Yigal Peleg** z"l, the great producer, came over to me and suggested that, as a choreographer, I teach jazz style to Lehakat Ha'Snuniyot", the troupe that he managed. We appeared with the troupe throughout the country, but my great desire was to run a performing Israeli dance troupe - folklore and modern dance.

"Ayalot Ha'Negev" dance troupe – a lifetime achievement

The troupe was created in 1980 and in 1983 I established a not-for-profit organization so that I would be able to receive support from the Beer Sheva Municipality, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Foreign Ministry and from donors and, of course, to be able to represent Israel throughout the world. The organization also enabled me to receive the use of a hall and gain entrance to the schools to recruit dancers.

The possibility of travelling abroad attracted the children, the youth and the adults who



Tzlil and Andrey in modern dance at the gala performance in Beer Sheva

A dancer is formed from their head, from his/her mental and intellectual level, before you start working on the body, hands and feet. There is a need for proper conditions to nurture the dancers and a lot of empathy and love



Ayalot Ha'Negev (bogrim) at a park in the city Saged in Hungary

came to dance in the troupe. I wanted to present Israel to the world from other aspects of culture and dance. From thousands of dancers, I chose only the best dancers. I understood that I need to start at the bottom and choose only those dancers with the appropriate qualifications to fit into representative troupes. Ayalot is comprised of the following groups: Efrochim (chicks), Ne'urim (youth), Studentim (students) and Bogrim (adults).

What are the criteria for acceptance to the troupe?

The criteria are a sense of rhythm, talent in movement and in dance, physical ability and leadership.

The best [dancers] come to the troupes. I know how to work on building the dancers and their personalities. A dancer is formed from their head, from his/her mental and intellectual level, before you start working on the body, hands and feet. There is a need for proper conditions to nurture the dancers and a lot of empathy and love. During all these years, to this day, the dancers receive technique from classical and modern ballet teachers and from me.

Our Dance Center is a dance studio at the Moledet School in Beer Sheva, 15 x 10.5 meters [about 49 x 34 feet]. It has a special parquet dance floor, a piano for classical ballet, bars, mirrors, stage lights and sound amplification.

The Ayalot Ha'Negev dance troupe has represented Israel abroad after having been evaluated by the Interministerial Committee headed by **Dr. Dan Ronen** z"l, former chairman of CIOFF Israel and **Yosef Ben Yisrael**, manager of Maataf, [the Israeli center for popular culture and folklore] and the successors of **Shlomi Zion**. **Dr. Ronit Ronen** and **Yael Miro** are the successors of Dr. Dan Ronen.

Because of its high artistic level, the troupe was invited by festival managers, heads of [Jewish] communities, mayors and the heads of cultural exhibitions from all over the world.

Achievements

1995 – The young dancers passed the exams of the Royal Academy in classical ballet and won the academy's national competition of all the schools in the country. They

“I go with my heart, I go with my spirit”, says Alkis. “Our religion seeks peace. We don't want battles; peace, only peace!!”

Maya Geva Shapira

won the following awards: First place, **Adva Yaish**; second place **Keren Shvarts** z"l who died of cancer.

1999 – The troupe was awarded first place at the International Dance Festival in Voron, France.

2005 – Lehakat Ha'Bogrim (the adult troupe) won first place, out of 22 countries, at the International Cultural Fair on the Spanish Riviera Costa del Sol in Spain. They were invited by the King of Morocco to perform at his palace and be his guest.

Lehakat "Ayalot Ha'Negev" returned adorned with praise and prizes from the international dance festival competition for children in Vladikavkaz, capital of Northern Ostia, in Russia, where it represented Israel. This festival is considered one of the most prestigious and important festivals in the world; 20 countries have participated in it. Along with Ayalot Ha'Negev, there were representative dance troupes from all around the Caucuses that are along the Russian perimeter.

The Beer Sheva troupe won 3rd place out of all the troupes which participated in the festival.

The troupe was invited by **Elyon Vilenchik**, general manager of the Israeli Center for Support of Children's Art, who chose this troupe from all the dance troupes in Israel to represent Israel in this festival. At the festival, the judging committee crowned the choreographer, Moti Alkis, as the leader in first place, for his artistic level.

At the opening of the closing event of the festival, Moti was invited to the stage to accept the prizes and was decorated for valor, for his courage as an IDF disabled person, for being a teacher in a wheelchair. He was called up to the stage a second time to distribute the medals of the IDF Disabled Persons' Organization to disabled children who are involved in the arts.

At the conclusion, the troupe danced again with the winning troupes and was filmed for Austria National Television and for five additional networks. The event was said to



Ayalot Ha'Negev (bogrim) at a park in the city Saged in Hungary



Soloists from Ayalot Ha'Negev Bogrim – Hay, Hanan, Shlomit and Marina in Hungary

be: an astounding, stirring performance of the Israelis; they stood out with their dances more than all the other troupes. Their performance was a promotion for Israel, something with a national nuance.

Before the festival opened the troupe was invited to the 70th Anniversary Ceremony celebrating the Russian army's victory over the Nazis. There the troupe viewed a spectacular parade of the Red Army – tanks, missiles, weapons and ammunition, photographs of the fallen in whose memory helium filled white balloons were flown, symbolizing the lost souls.

The parade manager, **Marina**, introduced Moti, who is a recognized IDF disabled person and a recipient of Israel's decoration of valor, to one of the Russian President Putin's deputies, and to the elite members of the Red Army – medal and ribbon wearing generals.

This same Lehakat Efrochim represented Israel in August 2016 in the competition at the International Dance Festival in Nessebar, Bulgaria. It won first place in choreography and the Grand Prize – the Gold Star, which is higher than first place. For modern dance and duets they achieved second and third place.

The last time, before Corona, in August 2018, **Dr. Dan Ronen**, chairman of CIOFF Israel, recommended that the adult troupe of "Ayalot Ha'Negev" along with an orchestra be invited to represent the State of Israel at the International Dance Festival, "Folkmoor", in North Carolina in the USA.

From an article by the journalist **Cory Vaillancourt**: "We want peace. The head of the Israeli delegation and choreographer of the troupe, advocates for harmony through dance. Alkis spent time in the Israeli armed forces, providing help for the wounded until he himself became an IDF disabled person. For the last three years he has been confined to a mechanized wheelchair, but this does not stop him from helping the troupe to continue to spread the message of peace through dance."

"I go with my heart, I go with my spirit", says Alkis. "Our religion seeks peace. We don't want battles; peace, only peace!!"

Rolf Kaufman, President of World CIOFF: "Lehakat Ayalot Ha'Negev representing Israel, is an excellent troupe. I was impressed by Moti Alkis, his leadership ability to guide the troupe and his professionalism, despite his physical limitations which confine him to the wheelchair."

Dr. Dan Ronen: "I enjoyed reading Rolf Kaufman's letter about the "Ayalot Ha'Negev" performance at the festival, praise to the troupe and to Moti Alkis. We are happy for your success and thank you for your efforts and for your contribution to promote

Maya Geva Shapira

the good name of Israel and "CIOFF Israel." Let's hope for productive and inspiring collaboration."

Where does the inspiration come from? What is the creativity process?

From everyday life, from my experiences; dance is in my soul, my spirit and my blood. I forget my disability the minute I begin working with the dancers and it helps me to cope with my disability in my daily life. The spirit overcomes the physical condition. The process is mental. Everything that goes through my brain is passed on to them directly; our state of concentration complements; I teach them my language.

Anastasia Hefetz is my assistant who knows my dances and understands my dance language. Through her, I pass on the artistic material. The young dancers imitate her dance steps, steps which I've worked on with her while arranging the choreography.

In the adult groups I have as my righthand, **Anatoly Shenfeld**, who is a modern and classical ballet instructor. He is a graduate of Ayalot Ha'Negev who graduated from the Dance Academy in Jerusalem. He dances, and, through him, I create the steps and the choreography.

On the day the doctors told me that I will no longer dance, I knew that I will dance in my mind. The talent for the art of dancing is from The Creator alone. No one taught me that. When I first started, I consulted with **Shalom Hermon**. I listened to his advice and implemented it in my work as a choreographer. The dancers accepted me as I am, in a wheelchair, they never stared at me or offended my dignity.

Tell us about the dancers you taught and where they are today?

I have graduates, professional dancers, who are instructing and teaching professional dance.

Chai Cohen is a professional dancer and choreographer at the Beverley Hills School for the Arts. He has 350 students. He created the choreography for the ceremony when Obama was elected to the Presidency of the USA.

Noam Segal dances with a modern dance professional troupe in Marseille, and is going to Norway to audition for a professional modern dance troupe – one of the best in the world, whose instructor is **Shlomi Roimi** – choreographer and artistic director who had danced with Ayalot Ha'Negev and in the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company.

Limor Buda, teacher of the IDF disabled troupe at Beit Halochem in Beer Sheva.

Dedi Alufar and **Tzvil Harosh** created the SOL Dance Company, a professional modern dance troupe. They founded Beit Hamachol in Beer Sheva.

The rehearsal director [assistant to the artistic director] of the Kamea Company is **Eyal Ganon**, a graduate of Ayalot Ha'Negev.

In 2020, I contracted Corona and I was in very serious condition. I was in the Corona unit at the Soroka [University Medical Center] hospital for five weeks; miraculously I got out. With G-d's help and the rehabilitation center, "AleH Negev", I was rehabilitated and returned to my present condition thanks to the professional and devoted care I received. I was filmed for [Israel's television] Channel 13 news, representing the

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Maya Geva Shapira

rehabilitation center. I was interviewed along with the former Minister of Health, Yuli Edelstein, and Almog, the founder of the rehabilitation village.

This year, the 40th anniversary of Ayalot Ha'Negev, I will produce a unique dance production and restart the troupe anew after the Corona crisis and after five years in which I was not able to recruit new dancers from the schools.

The production, under the auspices and at the request of Beer Sheva's Mayor, Ruvik Danilovich, and his assistant Tzvika Cohen, and the general manager of Kivunim, Shlomi Numa, will be accompanied by the Israel Police Orchestra, at Mishkan Le'Omanuyot HaBama Beer Sheva. The participants in the event will be troupes and choreographers who grew up under my tutelage and who had danced with "Ayalot Ha'Negev". The production is planned for the end of 2022.

Moti is a warm-hearted friendly person; he has strong faith in the Almighty and optimism that drives him to create beautiful special dances from his wheelchair. 🙌



Moti at work with Anastasia and Arie

Moti is a warm-hearted friendly person; he has strong faith in the Almighty and optimism that drives him to create beautiful special dances from his wheelchair.
