



Shlomo Maman
Translation:
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My Teacher, Rabbi And Soulmate



My first encounter with **Yoav** was in 1975, when I was a professional dancer in Lehkat Inbal – The Inbal Dance Company. **Tzion Nuriel**, who danced with me in the company, brought us together. I remember the meeting at the harkada (dance session) at the Dubnov school. **Yoav and Mira**, his wife, together led the session there. At the end of the harkada, I was left thrilled and excited. In my heart I felt that I was at the best harkada in the country.

Tzion, an excellent dancer, who was also the demonstrator for partner dances with **Mira**, saw some of my budding dance skills and offered to arrange a meeting with **Yoav**, where I could show my dance to him. I was immensely excited to meet the person who was the object of all our admiration – the dancers as well as the most important dance leaders and choreographers of that era. For us all, it was about the choreographer of "Hora Medura," "Hora Nirkoda," "Erev Ba," "Ez Vakeves," "Sovevuni" and many more good ones.

Yoav was able to immediately recognize the talents of good dancers and dance choreographers, who were then called "creators".

It is true that I came to him quite confused with a lot of dreams and ambitions, but **Yoav** helped to put my thoughts in order and even offered me a suggestion to join the Batsheva Dance Company. I was wondering how little me could be accepted into the Batsheva Dance Company. But **Yoav** made an appointment for me and we went together to a hall where the dance company had their rehearsals. It was exciting to see how **Yoav** was received by the dancers and management who, after a conversation with him, offered that I come to rehearsals as early as the following day. But, for some reason, I gave up on the idea.

At the beginning of my career as a creator, I introduced **Yoav** to the first dances I created: "Gvanim", "Zemer Ba'Gilboa" and others. **Yoav** carefully examined the dances, recognized that they had too much material in them, and drew my attention to the fact that each dance contained movement sequences for five dances. He said, "You need to narrow down each to one dance and save the rest of the ideas for other dances."

Working with him was not easy. He was pedantic and did not give up until the desired result was achieved. If he did not like the dance, he would send me home to improve it. Sometimes I improved the dance on the spot together with him. When we worked on the dance, he came up with good advice, reasons and compelling explanations as to why the dance was not good enough.

At times he focused on the musical section and sometimes he lingered and insisted that I address the content of the song. **Yoav** had a huge understanding and knowledge of music. More than once, I heard him play the accordion. I remember when I played him recordings of songs and melodies for my dances that I had recorded in the recording studio. He had an acute ear and could hear subtle inaccuracies, and the occasional places where the recording was off-key. Of course, I returned to the studio and corrected everything to his full satisfaction.

There were times that he would tell me that he was jealous of me for recording songs and arrangements that were a good fit for my dances. Once, when I again made recordings, I surprised him with recordings of songs for his dances: "Itach U'Biladayich", "El Borot Hamayim", "T'chol Hamitpachat" and others. That was the least that I could do for him.

It was important to **Yoav** that the dances be simple but not simplistic and, as much as possible, not too complex, along with a lot of creativity and reference to the melody, rhythm and content of the song. He emphasized to me, and to all the creators he



Mira and Yoav – a great love

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worked with, that a dance must be constructed in a cyclical order. That is, every part of the dance will be repeated. This will make it easier for the dancers.

I, as well as the entire group of choreographers around him, had admiration, appreciation and reverence for him. I remember the first time I talked to him

on the phone; out of excitement, I swallowed the gum I was chewing at that moment and only then did I allow myself to talk to him.

Lucy, my ex-wife, and I came to him with the dance, "Shimri Li Al Hamangina". He watched us perform it and concluded that it was not a folk dance, but a performance dance. However, I would still teach it in the hishtalmut (workshop for instructors). And then he said: "If the dance is not accepted, at least we will have a beautiful performance." Needless to say, the dance has become one of the most danced dances in all sessions.

When he traveled with **Mira** to teach in camps all over the United States, they taught "Shimri Li Al Hamangina," with a slight change made by **Mira**, and the dance was indeed a great success there.

When I was invited to teach at "Hora Shalom" dance camp in New York, I first met **Danny Uziel**, a dance leader who greatly influenced the folk dance movement in the United States and raised many generations of dancers who continued his unique path of preserving Israeli dance in the Diaspora.

He told me about his special relationship with **Yoav and Mira**, beginning when he was **Mira's** dance partner and that he heard from them about

my dances. We were both a product of the beloved and esteemed **Yoav and Mira**; so we have closed the circle.

Yoav was one of the pioneers of hishtalmuyot (workshops for instructors) in the country. He nurtured and mentored many generations of choreographers, dance leaders and dancers. Every few months, he produced a workshop (hishtalmut) in which about six new dances were taught. In this context, he also included enrichment for instructors, either through lecturers or by having professional dancers and choreographers who taught different dance styles.

We, the choreographers, taught our new dances there. At the beginning of the journey, everyone who came to the hishtalmut paid an entrance fee, even if he /she was one of the choreographers presenting a dance in the hishtalmut. On one occasion, I came to the hishtalmut and attempted to pay at the entrance, but **Mira** informed me that I was not to pay; I was completely surprised. She told me that she heard from **Tzion Nuriel** that we did not receive a salary from Lehakat Inbal and that today, I was their guest. It moved me greatly to know how sensitive and considerate they were.

We were a cohesive group of choreographers who were his protégés. And with his encouragement, we created very successful dances that for years have become Israeli folk dance classics.

I will mention some of them: **Chaim Shiryon, Itzik Sa'ada, Avi Peretz, Israel Shiker, Avner Naim, Tuvia Tishler, Shmulik Gov Ari, Marco Ben Shimon, Sefi Aviv, Shoshana Kopolovitch, Moti Elfasi, Yankale Ziv, Bentzi Tiram**, me (your faithful servant) and many talented others.

I remember that **Yoav and Mira** told me, with great pride, about the successful huge dance sessions that were held every Saturday night in a square that

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Mira and Yoav demonstrate a dance together

was then called "Kikar Malchei Yisrael, and today "Kikar Rabin". They spoke about the masses of dancers, arriving by bus from all over the country, and that this was the highlight of the harkkadot in Tel Aviv.

Israeli folk dance marathons

Mira and Yoav were among the first to introduce the Israeli dance world to Israeli folk dance marathons, which took place from evening until dawn. Each time, they took place in a different venue and eventually they settled at the Wingate Institute. There they had tremendous success. I, who was by **Yoav's** side at

the marathons, remember how he filled them with added content. He put in sections of community singing, performances by dance troupes, incorporated choreographers who taught their new dance and danced a group of their dances with all the dancers.

The dance leaders who led dancing in his marathons were carefully selected and were obliged to send a list of their favorite dances in advance. With all the lists he received from the dance leaders, he prepared an ordered playlist to prevent re-playing a dance.

It is worth noting that this was before the age of computers and sophisticated equipment that exists today. This was a huge success that has become an integral part of the diversity of dance sessions through the years and continues to this day.

When I taught "Zemer BaGilboa" at his hishtalmut, I remember that when instructors approached me they

looked at me as if I had come from another planet because of all the unique movements I incorporated into the dance. I was asked why I do not create simple and easy dances like "Hora Habika" by **Yankele Levy**, which was taught in the same course. I replied that my style is different from other styles and that I want to express that in my dances. I was sure that, together with **Yoav's** guidance and direction the dance would be well received in the harkkadot; indeed, the dance was received with enthusiasm both in Israel and around the world.

There were times when I taught more than one dance in the hishtalmut, when all the other choreographers taught only one. When they approached him with a request to teach more than one dance, he objected. And when they asked why he allows me and not them, he immediately replied: "I love **Shlomo**." It was his way of expressing appreciation towards me and expressing the special bond that was between us.

Over the years, he suggested that we produce the hishtalmuyot together. And indeed, we did so together for a few good years. **Yoav** guided and promoted many choreographers and dance leaders, but he always thought of the next generation and marked them for the future to come. More than once he told me, "Remember that the hishtalmuyot will be transferred to you when **Mira** and I retire." He said the same thing to **Yankale Ziv**, who replaced him at the dance sessions when he retired.

I remember being invited to teach my dance, "Gvanim", in the hishtalmut of the Mador Le'Rikudei Am (Folk Dance Section), which took place at Moshav Bitan Aharon. While instructing, the veteran instructors harassed me with unnecessary questions. **Yoav**



Karmiel – Yoav at 80



Dayagim – Lehakat HaStudentim 2006

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Partnership at work

entered the center of the circle, requested them to be quiet, and asked them to allow me to teach the dance in my own way and to be respectful on this occasion.

At every opportunity, "Derech Eretz – Respect" for education and culture was on his mind and it was important for him to instill this in the dancers, instructors, dance leaders and choreographers.

When I came across good individuals with special talents I turned to him. This was the case with **Shmulik Gov Ari**, one of the talented choreographers I introduced to **Yoav**.

One time, **Yoav** came to my home in Ramat Gan to work on my new dances for the hishtalmut. I arranged with **Shmulik** to arrive as soon as we finished so that he could demonstrate the dance, "Lechu Neranena", for him. We waited for about an hour and **Shmulik** did not arrive. After waiting some more, **Yoav** decided that he did not want to wait any longer and asked to leave. I escorted him out and at the crosswalk, we met **Shmulik** who had arrived by bus from the far north. (At that time, there were no mobile phones therefore no possibility to inform us of a delay.) **Shmulik** apologized because there were a lot of traffic jams. While **Yoav** was very angry with him, he was persuaded to come back to my house and to work with him on the dance. After working and polishing to **Yoav's** satisfaction, we achieved a very successful dance creation that was done in all classes and is one of the best we have in Israeli dance.

Shmulik later told me that if **Yoav** had not accepted him then, he would not have continued in this direction of creating folk dances.

As someone who has danced in all classes in the country, I went to almost every harkada and taught

my own dances. On one occasion, I taught my dance at a dance session of **Michaël Barzilai** before I taught it in **Yoav's** hishtalmut. When this came to **Yoav's** attention, he was very angry with me. He always insisted that the dances presented at the hishtalmut would receive their first appearance in the hishtalmut and only later would be presented in the chugim. After I taught the dance in the hishtalmut, **Yoav** turned to me at the end and said: "I do not like your bringing 'used dances' (dances that have already been introduced) to the hishtalmut." I was very hurt and I, who was in daily contact with him, refrained from calling him. **Yoav**, realizing that I was hurt, came to my house with a huge bouquet of flowers and apologized. This is the greatness of a person who knows how to admit his mistake, apologize and reconcile when he realizes he has offended someone.

Lucy and I became part of the **Ashriel's** household; we traveled with them on Saturdays on trips all over the country and along the way, we met with the greatest Israeli folk dance choreographers: **Yankele Levy, Bentzi Tiram** and others. On our wedding day at the "Mitzpor" hall in Tiberias, we were photographed all day as we walked around at various wedding photography sites. When we arrived late to the wedding ceremony, **Mira and Yoav**, who were like our second parents, were very angry and scolded us because they were not pleased that the guests had to wait so long for us.

We were like family. I remember that during the first Lebanon war, when I was drafted and sent to Lebanon as a paratrooper, **Lucy** was filled with anxiety and wanted to prevent me from going to war. **Yoav and Mira** took her to their home, supported her and provided her with peace of mind and relaxation.

In recent years, **Yoav** lived in an assisted living residence in Ramat Aviv. On one occasion, **Nourit Grinfeld** organized an evening in his honor at the venue. The residents there were exposed to his extensive and revered activities. **Yoav** was very happy and excited from this gesture that enabled all the friends and residents there to get to know and cherish his work.

One day, **Yoav** approached me to organize a show to mark his 85th birthday, in which we would dance and speak about his contribution to

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the folk dance movement and dance his dances. The initial intention was to hold a modest event at the Dance Library. But since the library was under renovation, we asked to hold it in the small hall of Lehakat Inbal. When that also proved impossible, I turned to the Givatayim Municipality and so, in cooperation with them, we produced a huge tribute to **Yoav** at the Givatayim Theater, which we called "Erev Ba". Performing that evening were the Givatayim dance troupes and the Tel Aviv student troupe. In addition, **Yizhar Cohen** and **Dafna Armoni**, the group of accordionists who played for **Yoav** through the years, including **Moshe Gerstein** and **Ami Gilad** who worked with **Yoav** at the beginning. Also, a group of dance leaders and dancers who danced some of Yoav's dances on the stage. All of this was under the guidance of Yoav's protégé, **Avner Naim**.

The hall was packed and many guests could not enter and had to wait until the end of the show to join in the harkada in the plaza outside the hall where we danced **Yoav's** beautiful dances. We never imaged such a success. Most importantly – **Yoav** was happy. I was glad to have the privilege of contributing in some small way to acknowledge this giant man who contributed so much to Israeli dance and to the community of dancers.

I never got to dance in one of the performing dance groups that he formed over the years; his work was extensive and began with "Rikud Ha'Emek" which he created for the Dalia Festival performed by soldiers from the Nahal. He later formed Lehakat HaPoel Tel Aviv, Lehakat Gadna Petah Tikva, Lehakat Hakibbutzim Ve'Hakvutzot, The Ramat Gan Workers' Council Troupe, Lehakat HaStudentim Tel Aviv (I have been the choreographer and artistic director of this troupe for about 30 years), and his crowning jewel, Lehakat "Pa'amei Aviv" of the Tel Aviv Municipality. I especially remember **Yoav's** fisherman's dance choreography, which I revived twice for my troupe's performances, including for the show in the amphitheater at the Karmiel Festival. This dance is a masterpiece of Israeli choreography at its best.

It is impossible to describe our folk dance movement



Mira and Yoav Ashriel demonstrate a dance in Kfar Maccabia

without **Yoav Ashriel**. He was one of the pioneers and mainstays of this movement. **Yoav** has made a significant contribution to promoting the culture of Israeli dance.

When **Mira** passed away, **Yoav** asked me to conduct the funeral as a religious/secular ceremony; and so it was. When **Yoav** passed away, I told the family about this request, and in consultation with them, it was decided that we would do it again in the same format. The funeral ceremony was very sad especially in light of the fact that thousands wanted to pay their last respects to him, but they were unable to attend the funeral due to the limitations set because of the coronavirus. However, despite these limitations, **Yoav** received the respect he deserved and was buried next to his wife, **Mira**, whom he loved so much, in the cemetery at Kibbutz Shefayim.

I'm hoping that we will return to normalcy and get rid of all the limitations of the plague and then we will hold a big event that will honor his memory and his tremendous contribution to Israeli dance.

Yoav and Mira were an integral part of my adult and professional life. Thanks to him, throughout I have believed in my abilities and I attribute a large part of my success to him. With love, admiration and much appreciation!



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