



Danielle Shkop

Translation:
Dena Matmon



YEAHBIT – An Israeli Fitness Party

A New Dance Sport Comes Into Being



You've certainly come across the term "Yeahbit" at least once. "Yeahbit, isn't that some kind of exercise?" "I think it has something to do with folk dancing..." "Yeahbit, is that for kids or for adults?"

So, let's straighten things out – What is Yeahbit? Yeahbit = An Israeli fitness party.

A Yeahbit activity is an aerobic workout with high BPM (beats per minute) of about 45 minutes in duration. It is conducted with a background of a special remix of Israeli music from the world of folk dance. The workout integrates steps from well-known folk dances with aerobic exercises, muscle strengthening and body building at various levels of difficulty, all at the discretion of the trainer. Like we said – a party!

A Yeahbit session includes 12 songs. Each workout begins with a song for warming up and ends with one to relax the muscles. The movements in each song have a set pattern, part aerobic and part "dance" (based on a known folk dance). This pattern repeats for the length of the song. The set pattern enables the trainee to quickly pick up the steps, without any previous experience.

The dances are divided into levels of difficulty: easy, intermediate, difficult and the workout is built from a combination of the three. Thus, there are three peaks to every workout. In this

way, the trainee will work hard but also give his/her body the time to rest during the activity. The purpose is to complete the workout with a feeling of achievement and with a smile.

An additional advantage of the method is the ability to improve and to make progress. The same exercises can occasionally be done a little bit better, a little bit stronger, with a higher level of intensity, thus adapting the workout to all levels and ages.

How did it all begin?

"I had this vision of creating something that would integrate folk dancing with aerobics, something suitable for a fitness gym," says **Gadi Bitton**, 55, a dance instructor, choreographer, Chair of Ha'Mador Le'Folklore Ve'Rikudei Am (the Department of Folklore and Folk Dance), Chair of Ha'Mador Le'Zemer Ivri B'Misrad Ha'Tarbut (the Hebrew Song Department of the Ministry of Culture), and the founder of the Yeahbit Method. He continues: "Yeahbit had been brewing in my mind for a long time. I went to many fitness studios and participated in many classes – kickboxing, aerobic dance, body-pump and others. I noticed that all of them used foreign music". In the framework of the new concept, Gadi introduced Israeli music into the world of fitness. As soon as the idea was crystallized in



Lilach Nimzar



Gadi Bitton

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Training...



his own mind, he turned to **Lilach Nimzar**, 34, an aerobics and fitness instructor as well as a dance teacher.

Folk dancing has been Lilach's hobby since she was a little girl; over the years she worked together with Gadi, in the building and filming of dances.

As a fitness trainer, Lilach leads aerobic dance workouts and integrates music that she loves from the folk dance world. She would combine strengthening exercises with dances and check on how her students reacted to the music and the movement. Gadi, who was working out in the same fitness studio, started to watch what was happening in the studio, and then, one day, he met with Lilach and told her of his idea.

The two started to work together, spending an entire year on the new project – forming a new company, finding investors, building exercises, etc.

And finally, three years ago, they put their new product on the market – Yeahbit!

Is it suitable for me?

Yeahbit is suitable for everyone: for folk dancers as well as for people who never in their lives stepped onto the dance floor. There's no need for previous experience. The method is suitable for young people and for adults, men and women, actually for anyone who loves Israeli music, dance and sports and who also wants some physical activity that he/she will enjoy.

Today there are three main programs:

Yeahbit Kids – geared for kindergarten through 12th grade.

Yeahbit Gold – geared for senior citizens.

And Yeahbit – geared for everyone else.

Each trainee can suit the exercises to his/her level, advancing and strengthening throughout the workout session. Every four months a new Yeahbit workout is added, with a new program that includes 12 new songs and dances. The instructors, who are spread throughout the entire country, introduce the new dances within the existing workout routines – a new dance or two at each session. In this way, the trainees continue

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to experience their success with familiar dances, while adding a variety of new dances to their repertoire.

However, over time, it has become clear that the marketing potential for Yeahbit is mostly for children. As opposed to previous years, all the trainers who took the Yeahbit instructors' course this year came from the world of children, one way or another. There seems to be a great thirst for new and innovative programs for children.

Unlike in gyms where it is difficult to introduce new areas of activity, there is great demand but little supply for the world of children. As a result of this, Yeahbit Kids was brought into the school system and was included in the curriculum budget. Many physical education teachers took advanced study classes in Yeahbit and they give classes to children, particularly as enrichment after regular school hours or as part of sports classes. Many cities are involved including Netanya, Kfar Saba, Herzlia, Tel Aviv, Modi'in and others.

In other countries, there seems to be a lack of Israeli material that is interesting enough to attract the children. Today, there's very little interest among Jewish children in folk dancing. Yeahbit, on the other hand, is attractive to them and evokes enthusiasm. There's a great demand, for instance in South America, among dozens of teachers who are interested in doing advanced study as instructors. Just after the outbreak of the coronavirus, Yeahbit instruction courses were supposed to begin in Argentina, Chicago and Los Angeles. The pandemic froze the situation. The aspiration is to resume preparations for opening these courses around the world as soon as the pandemic permits.

Instructors Explain

Michal Barak, 49, fitness instructor, Pilates teacher, TRX (Total Body Resistance Exercise) trainer and senior citizens instructor, talks about the Yeahbit workouts she has started to lead: "When I was first exposed to it – it excited me! I realized that it has unbelievable potential to connect people who love to dance with a physical

activity and Israeli music – it's the ultimate combination." From Michal's experience as a fitness trainer, the basic difficulty for people is to start doing a sports activity because "it doesn't interest me". But for those who are interested, Yeahbit accesses sport indirectly, in a pleasant and dance-like way, without the title of "sport". And along the way they dance, become stronger and enjoy.



Michal Barak

We asked Michal what is so unique about Yeahbit, as compared to other sport-dance classes (for example zumba, salsa, etc.). She replied that Yeahbit integrates every dance with strengthening exercises, as well as aerobics and dancing. It particularly integrates Israeli music from the folk dance world and creates an atmosphere full of energy – the feeling of an Israeli party.

In addition, the dances are constructed in a set pattern, so that occasionally the exercises can be executed more successfully, stronger and on a higher level, and just like folk dancing – in Yeahbit every song has its own dance. Thus, regardless of where you trained before, you can come to any Yeahbit workout session anywhere in the world and you will be familiar with the dances and the steps. Michal says that, "From a different perspective, you can say that Yeahbit is a more 'enjoyable' workout. Unlike strength and TRX exercises, for instance, people come to Yeahbit to enjoy themselves and to burn calories. There's no 'right' and 'wrong' – the important thing is to enjoy, keep moving and to dance. The workout is more accessible and pleasant, and less 'threatening'".

Lilach, who created the method, adds that as a trainer, the fun is watching the trainees over a period of time. When you keep exercising on a regular basis, you can see how people fall in love with it and can't stop.

The same exercises can occasionally be done a little bit better, a little bit stronger, with a higher level of intensity, thus adapting the workout to all levels and ages.

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Shai Goren

of sports and a healthy lifestyle. People are sweating when they complete the workout and they burn calories. But they enjoy it and they dance and develop their dance skills – it's a combination of everything and people wait impatiently for the next class".

I also want to participate!



Hani Pe'er

Hani Pe'er, 58, saw an ad on Facebook for a new group that was opening near her home, with a link to a video. The video showed a lot of people dancing and jumping, in a happy atmosphere with good Israeli music. She liked the idea right away and she's been training for the last year. Hani doesn't define herself as either a sports person or as a dancer. What attracted her first was the music, which reminded her of the folk dancing she did in high school and it revived her yearning for it.

She continues by saying that Yeahbit lets each individual train at his/her own level. Nobody compares themselves to others. Everyone comes to dance, to enjoy and to burn up calories - together.

"As for age", Hani says, "the group always changes. Sometimes younger people come, sometimes older people, but I'm always comfortable with them and feel that I'm part of the group. The feeling is that it is dancing regardless of one's age".

Yeahbit instructors are, in two words – energy

chargers. This is the opinion of all the trainees we interviewed (each about his/her trainer). All the trainees describe an identical situation, with lighthearted, driven, motivated trainers who inspire an atmosphere of fun. It doesn't matter if you're 20 or 50. And that's the essence of Yeahbit – a fitness party for everyone!

Hagit Sternberg, 48, trained regularly at the Misgav Country Club's fitness sessions when someone told her about a new group with a new instructor. It took some time until she came to the first session, but from that moment on, she was hooked!

"As a woman who has been dancing zumba for almost 20 years, what drew me to Yeahbit was that I love Israeli music." Hagit, who was a folk dancer in her youth, about 30 years ago, says that because of Yeahbit she was happy to start folk dancing again. "I come from Karmiel and every year I promise myself that I'll return to dancing at the next dance festival. And every year, I've found another excuse not to do it. But this year I really plan to do it. Yeahbit reminded me how much I've missed it."

Hagit does Yeahbit twice a week, "but if there was a session every day, I would go".

How to Join?

So, if you'd like to be part of the next fad – the simplest way is to open "HOT VOD" [HOT Israeli television channel videos] and find an array of preset Yeahbit workouts. All you need to do is move the living room furniture and begin to workout at home.

Yeahbit also has an internet site, www.yeahbit.co.il, where you can purchase the workouts online. In the near future, a new site will open with an organized listing of all the locations where in person workout sessions with instructors will take place.



Hagit Sternberg

Are we likely to lose the folk dance crowd in favor of the Yeahbit world? Is there a fear that more harm than good would come to the world of folk dance? And isn't there fear that the means (i.e., Yeahbit) will eventually become the end?

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Of course, there are instructors all over the country who give private lessons. So, if you want to train with a friend – you can check the community centers/country clubs/studios/fitness clubs near your home and see if there are Yeahbit courses. If not, you can suggest that your fitness center start a course. They can contact Yeahbit through the Yeahbit website's homepage and it will help them find a suitable instructor.

Yeahbit = a continuation of folk dancing?

Alongside the enthusiasm for Yeahbit, there are also many questions about it.

One of them, which arose from various dance leaders, deals with the existence of "double dances", i.e., two dances choreographed to the same music. According to the regulations of Irgun HaMarkidim – The Folk Dance Leaders Organization, if a registered dance has been created to a melody, it is not permitted to create another dance to the same melody. In order to create a dance, the melody must first be registered on the organization's website, and only after receiving approval, the choreographer may choreograph a dance to this melody.

The question arises as to whether or not this regulation applies to Yeahbit. After all, in creating Yeahbit's dances, they are actually reworking a song that already has a dance and choreographing a new dance with the same steps arranged differently from the original.

Isn't that considered creating a new dance to a song that already has a dance?

Well, first of all, **Gadi Bitton**, the founder of the method, wants to make it clear that, practically speaking, it is possible to choreograph a dance to any melody, whether or not a dance has been created to it in the past. Moreover, under antitrust law, this must not be prevented especially in the arts.

That being the case, the decision not to create another dance to a melody that already had a dance, was made anyway. In the past, there had been cases that caused different groups in the

harkadot (dance sessions) to simultaneously dance different dances, which created confusion among the dancers. Therefore, the consent was obtained among the markidim (dance leaders), so that today it is unacceptable to create a dance to a melody that already has a dance, but legally – it is possible.

After this clarification, Gadi replied: Yeahbit dances fall under the category of "adapted dances". Just as we (the dance leaders) adapt dances for children or seniors, so I have adapted dances for the gym and for children. I have taken most of the steps from the original dances; instead of dancing them in a circle, I have arranged them in line formation. There are dances that have been adapted for dancers in wheelchairs, for example, that have many more "drastic" adjustments than the Yeahbit adjustments, in order for the dance to be done.

I think if we are interested in "spreading the word", there are many ways to do it; this one is more correct in my opinion. Anyone who works with children probably knows that today's children no longer like to dance in a circle; they do not connect to this form of dance. This is why I took Yeahbit in the direction of line dancing but kept to the basic steps of the original dance so that the trainees could later enter the dance circle and easily integrate since the steps are familiar. I think there is only a benefit here. People who may not have been exposed to folk dancing, will now be exposed to it [through Yeahbit]; later they will be able to easily join the dance circle. We have just added the contemporariness of sport, which is what interests the community today.

If there would be a new form of dance tomorrow, in which, for example, your dance is included with song and dance step changes, is this a legitimate act in your eyes? Even though your name would not be displayed in the context of the aforementioned dance?

I think that, if they would take my dance and add breakdance movements to it, and it is danced on the streets - I would be very pleased.

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Despite using the music and steps from the world of folk dance, Yeahbit tends mainly to the world of sports and fitness. Another question arises: Are we likely to lose the folk dance crowd in favor of the Yeahbit world? Is there a fear that more harm than good would come to the world of folk dance? And isn't there fear that the means (i.e., Yeahbit) will eventually become the end?

Gadi responds: "The world is constantly in motion and changing; we need to change with it. If the world of folk dance is facing extinction, despite all our efforts, it is better to try to develop the field in a new direction, in order to keep, in some way, the dancers who may leave".

With this thought in mind, Gadi created the innovative fitness project, which incorporates Israeli folk dance. He explains: "The world of sports has conquered the world and that is why I started this project. We shouldn't be afraid. Yes, it is possible that people will move from folk dance to Yeahbit, but even if we get to this point, we will have benefitted. After all, those who want to leave folk dancing – will leave. In the new situation, we at least allow a person to choose an alternative that is close enough to remain associated with the field. Those who are tired of folk dancing can find pleasure in Yeahbit. But also vice versa, the circle of folk dance enthusiasts may gain a new audience of "fitness seekers".

As for the claim that Yeahbit will bring about the end of Israeli folk dance, Gadi replies that, over the years, many new fads were forsaken: international folk dances, salsa, lambada and others. What has helped Israeli folk dance to survive is renewal and innovation and Yeahbit might well help to preserve this culture.

Gadi hopes, despite the criticism, that the community of dancers will regard it as a recipe for success.

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Today, however, it's difficult to examine these claims, as the coronavirus cut off the continuity of Yeahbit's development. But trainees who folk danced in the past say that Yeahbit has awakened a yearning in them and some have returned to Israeli folk dancing. Trainees who weren't familiar with folk dance say that Yeahbit exposed them to a new world and some of them have started to participate in sessions for beginners because of Yeahbit.

Apparently Yeahbit is bringing new blood to a new audience. Whether they join the dance sessions or sweat with Yeahbit, we the dancers can only win. And in the meantime – you are invited to burn some calories with Yeahbit! ✨

Contact information:

Website Homepage: www.yeahbit.co.il

E-mail: Seals@yeahbit.co.il

Telephone (in Israel): 054-7446227

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Yeahbit.co.il

