



Avital Efrat
Translation:
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The Best Instructor and Dancer I Have Ever Known!

Memoirs of a Friend



I met **Mishael** by chance in 1976, after graduating from high school. When I was in high school, I participated in the Holon dance troupe under the direction of **Yossi Frum**. One day I asked my manager at work, **Hanania**, to leave earlier in order to register for an Israeli folk dance class. He refused and told me that on Saturday, his friend is leading a dance session in Holon and that then he would introduce me to him.

On Saturday, I arrived at Mishael and Yehuda Emanuel's Hishtalmut Madrichim – workshop for dance instructors – in Holon, without realizing that it was a session specifically for instructors.

That day, Hanania introduced me to Mishael who invited me to his class in Neot Rachel in Holon. Mishael noticed my talent and invited me to dance with him at "Mo'adon HaTze'irim" (Youth Club) in Jaffa. I danced at that club throughout my military service in the IDF (Israel Defense Forces).

Mishael believed in me and he gave me the opportunity to instruct in his Israeli folk dance classes in schools, and in the evenings at Beit Barbur, Beit Ha'Sofer, Ironi Alef, Bank Leumi, at IDF bases, and more. [All are known locations where Mishael's dance sessions were held in the 70's and 80's – AH.] Mishael then recommended that I join the course for Israeli folk dance instructors.

From the day we met, there was great chemistry between us. He encouraged and promoted me, helped me find a job and more. I also instructed in his classes and demonstrated the dances with him in all dance sessions and in the hishtalmuyot (courses for Israeli folk dance instructors). We became very close friends.

In those days, Mishael had large classes in Tel Aviv and its vicinity. Dancers followed him from session to session. His most famous dance session was in old Jaffa, a session whose participants formed a close family. We traveled together throughout Israel. After class, we would sit in the "Migdalar" (Lighthouse) restaurant in Jaffa and sing until the wee hours of the night. To this day, there is a close relationship between the dancers from that period.

Mishael nurtured and promoted dance leaders who learned from him, and then began their own dance sessions. Among them are instructors and choreographers, such as, **Israel Litzi, Moshe Levy, Eyal Ozeri, Eyal Levy, Israel Shiker, Victor Gabbay** and many more, including me.

I remember the session at Beit Barbur where, after class, we would take a dip in the pool. I



Michael and Avital dancing together

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remember the dancing in Kikar Malchei Israel – The Kings of Israel Square (now Rabin Square), on holidays and Saturdays, where I was among the dancers on stage. Mishael's style, warmth and love of dance captivated everyone who met him.

Later, Mishael started working at Bikurei Ha'Itim, Beit Ha'Sofer, Beit Kazanchi and Golda (Briza) in Holon. He had a unique style, and he created a unique atmosphere in his dance sessions. His Hishtalmuyot – Workshops for Dance Instructors, had a good reputation. Dance leaders and instructors wanted to teach with him in the hishtalmuyot and dance sessions. Of course, almost all of them participated in his workshops.



Karmiel Festival – Michael can excite dancers

His classes had a family atmosphere. He always helped everyone. Mishael was central to how the sessions were organized. He knew how to win people's hearts and make them happy.

When Mishael would travel to dance sessions in the north of Israel, many friends would travel with him. I remember visits to the sessions of the late **Menachem Menachem** in Nahariya and the dance marathons that **Sefi Aviv** held in Machanaim. The late **Benzi Tiram** had always invited us to his dance sessions at the Technion during Sukkot, as part of the "Ushpizin" custom of welcoming guests during the holiday. We danced with **Yankele Levy** z"l at Beit Katz and Beit Nagler, and with **Eli Shtamer** (**Elad Shtamer's** father) and many more. He never refused to take us. We never paid for fuel expenses. He always respected everyone. Dance leaders from Israel and around the world would come to his home to stay with him and even sleep over. The home was an Israeli folk dance social center.

Mishael was known as an excellent dancer and had always been in the center of things. He had a special partner, **Batshi** – Bat Sheva, who danced Rock'nRoll with him. They danced together wonderfully. When they danced, circles of people formed around them to watch.

In 1990, at the end of Sukkot, Mishael organized a television show which was directed by **Yigal Ben David**. The television show presented the influence of the original Yemenite dance on Israeli folk dances. Participating in the show were Yemenite dance troupes from around the country,



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such as the Amka dance troupe, along with singers including **Aharon Amram, Zion Golan, Ofra Haza, The Amranim** and others, who performed original Yemenite songs.

Mishael organized a troupe, consisting of excellent Israeli folk dancers, who demonstrated Israeli folk dances. Participants in the dance troupe included **Seadia, Dany Benshalom, Ami** from Emek Hefer, **Eyal Ozeri, Mishael** and me. At that time, television was in its infancy; it was in black and white.

Throughout the years, Mishael was active in caring for the success of dance leaders. He was a founding Member of Irgun HaMardrichim L'Rikudei Am – the Association of Folk Dance Instructors and Choreographers in Israel. The association was very important to him. Each Thursday, he attended the association executive committee meetings. He was involved in the management of the association for many years. He was the one who instilled in me the importance of being active in the Association.

An example of his caring for dance leaders was Mishael's initiating the import of the "SuperScope" – a cassette tape player that had an innovative feature that allowed the operator to change the playback speed. This enabled dance leaders to play a song more slowly for beginner dancers. Instructors purchased and worked with it for many years... until the advent of the minidisc player, followed by the CD player and the computer...

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There was nothing that you would ask Mishael to do, that he would refuse. He always helped everyone voluntarily. I remember many cases where I recruited him to voluntarily lead at various events.

One day, Mishael decided to produce recordings with new arrangements for basic Israeli folk dances. He worked with Yehuda Keisar [a fantastic guitar player]. He invited me to hear the arrangements in real time, before distribution, and to express my opinion. After that, Mishael produced records and recordings with the **Reuveni Brothers**.

For me, Mishael was the most significant teacher. To this day, in my heart, I cherish this privilege. I was invited to all his family celebrations that were at his home. I knew his family and friends very well, including those who didn't dance...

During the last few years that Mishael was still active, he led dancing at Beit Dani in Tel Aviv, and Nostalgia dance sessions at Kfar HaMaccabiah in Ramat Gan. I loved participating in his dance sessions. My style of dance and instruction were greatly influenced by him.

When I learned that Mishael was sick, I couldn't believe it. He always danced, played sports, swam and ate healthy food. It was hard for me to accept that such an active, happy person who was so significant in my life would suffer the devastation of a debilitating disease. Throughout the period of his illness, I visited him many times and was in contact with his family. The announcement of his passing was very difficult for me to hear. It is a great personal loss for me.

May his memory be blessed. 



Friday sessions in Kibbutz Ginagar – from right: Hanan, Eli, Michael, Amnon (choreographer of this dance) and Yair