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The Prize for Preserving and Fostering Israeli Culture in the Field of Dance

**Presented by the President of Israel to
Yaron Meishar and the Field of Folk Dance**

In a very impressive ceremony at Beit HaNassi (the Official Presidential Residence), **Isaac Herzog**, President of the State of Israel, presented **Yaron Meishar**, the editor of "Rokdim-Nirkoda" magazine, with the Yitzhak Navon Prize for the Preservation and Fostering of Israeli Culture in the Field of Dance. Watch here: <https://youtu.be/QqelDSXqR8Y>.

This is the fifth year that this prize has been presented by the President as an expression of gratitude for the work of those artists who have contributed to fostering Israeli culture, its dissemination and preservation. The prize is awarded to artists in various fields – dance, theater, literature, cinema, music, art and design.

Awards were given in seven areas of art this year: encouragement of creativity in the field of theater (the winner: **Hana Vazana Grunwald**); artists at the beginning of their careers (**Nir Strauss**), encouragement of creativity in the field of dance (**Yaron Meishar**), encouragement of creativity in the field of literature (**Baruch Pickel**), choreographers at the beginning of their careers (**Stav Struz**), writers of literature at the beginning of their careers (**Bruria Moskovich**), and life achievement prize (**Rina Yerushalmi**).

In explaining its reasoning, the Prize Committee wrote:

Yaron Meishar is a dancer and folk dance instructor, a man with a vision and a man of action who, over the course of decades, initiated and established a huge enterprise called, "Rokdim," that documents and preserves the culture of Israeli folk dance. Meishar has filmed and presented to the world over 6,500 dances on video with the best instructors and choreographers. He founded "Rokdim-Nirkoda" magazine and he has already published over 100 editions; (this is Edition 113). He also established the "Rokdim" internet website, www.rokdim.co.il, with the purpose of making available all the information and tools that exist in the field of Israeli folk dance to dancers and instructors.



"I won the prize, but actually all of us have won it – our entire field of folk dance was awarded esteem, the first of its kind – from the cultural establishment in Israel and it reads: 'This culture is an asset!! An asset that deserves to be preserved and made accessible to whomever is interested'".



Erez Navon, Isaac Herzog, Yaron Meishar and Miki Zohar

About 200 people, friends and family of the prize winners, filled the Events Hall at Beit HaNassi. After a fine reception and excellent refreshments, people filled the hall for an emotional and celebratory ceremony honoring all seven prize winners.

The audience in the hall rose to its feet and applauded the entrance of President **Isaac Herzog**, his wife **Michal**, and the Minister of Education and Culture, Mr. **Miki Zohar**.

The program started with a film of the life and personality of President **Yitzhak Navon** [April 9, 1921 – November 6, 2015], for whom the prize is named, emphasizing his unique contribution to culture, including, of course, his major theatrical work, "Bustan Sephardi – The Spanish Orchard". This was followed by the singer, **Lea Shabat**, who also sang two more songs during the course of the program.

The first speaker was President Isaac Herzog:

"Each and every one of you, dear prize winners, has devoted your life to art, and through art, has fostered its humanism and Israeliness. Some of you have used your bodies and danced; some have used words and writing – literature, songs, plays and cinema. Some have done so through acting – in film and theater. But each and every one of you, in the tradition of President Navon, knows, deep in your body and your soul, that culture is always a bridge – a bridge between cultures, groups, and generations. It is a bridge that connects the recognition of common sense to the heart and the soul. All of you, our prize winners, represent the bridge of your work, every day and every hour.

I want to thank everyone involved in this work: to you my friend, Minister of Culture and Sport, Mr. Miki Zohar, to the devoted members of the Prize Committee, to the various other committees, and of course to you – the dear children and family of President Navon. I hope and pray that we will be privileged – in the spirit of Navon and that of the winners – to understand how the differences between us are a great gift, a real asset to us all. I hope we will recognize all the colors of the Israeli mosaic, that we will recognize in depth that the State of Israel would not be what it is, that Israeli society would not be what it could be, without all these various pieces. So, my best wishes to all of you and continued great success."

Miki Zohar, Minister of Culture and Sport, greeted the winners and the audience:

"The secret of Israel is hidden in its special diversity and in its multiculturalism. Jews from every corner of the globe have come from varied and different cultures, but they are all one

"Hundreds of people made the effort to inform me, by e-mail, WhatsApp and mostly, face to face, how much my instructions have helped them and that they were the clearest and most comprehensive instructions. That's the biggest compliment I could receive..."



President Isaac Herzog with Yaron Meishar



The winners

People. I honor the prize winners for their work to preserve and to foster these many cultures that together form the special and exciting Israeli puzzle.

Navon nurtured the Ladino culture and the Eastern Jewish tradition. We are proud to present you with a prize for the encouragement

of creativity, that you – the prize winners – have contributed so much to its cultivation and preservation. Thank you in the name of the Government and thank you, Mr. President, for hosting this ceremony at your residence."

Erez Navon, the son of Yitzhak Navon, fifth President of Israel, spoke of his father's legacy:

"I stand here and speak about my father's home. I remember that, as a child, I played by that window in this house. Today I work to commemorate the work of my father, Yitzhak, and his legacy to the culture of Israeli society. The Chofetz (Hafetz) Haim ["Pursuer of Life" a book by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan], in an actually prophetic discussion, referred to Israeli society as a guided discussion, not an instrument of destruction or distancing. Thus, he referred to my father, as President of this country. The play, "Bustan Sephardi," which my father wrote, expressed the Eastern Jewish culture that Abba [my father] fostered and developed and it is actually a reflection of the People of Israel as seen through Navon's eyes."

Dr. Ruth Eshel, Chairperson of the Committee in the field of Dance, spoke on Choosing Yaron for this Honored Prize:

"With me on the Committee for choosing the Winner for **Encouraging Creativity in the Field of Heritage** were the highly respected dancers and choreographers **Orly Portal** and **Shira Eviatar**. I was pleased to see Yaron Meishar's name on the list of candidates. I've been familiar with his work for several decades, familiar with his passion, his struggle to document and to preserve the folk dance legacy of our people. I found him to be the most appropriate candidate.

However, the question of principle was raised as the prize is for "creativity". Who is a creator? What is a creation? Are a creator and a creation, as accepted in today's world, limited only to the creator of a dance (choreographer) and the creation is the dance (choreography), or, as I claim, the editor of "Rokdim-Nirkoda" is a creator, and his publication is his creation, and his subject suits the subject of legacy.

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In both cases, the creator of the dance and the editor of the magazine, create something out of nothing. Both express through creative work, whether dances or magazine issues, their grasp of their world of art. Both demand a choice of selecting, of what to leave out and what to concede. Both demand creativity, devotion to a purpose and passion.

In addition to "Rokdim-Nirkoda" magazine, the "Rokdim" website should be mentioned, as a site with films and videos of thousands of folk dances which were produced. It contains a catalog with the details of every dance – all paid for out of Yaron's pocket, as he follows his vision and belief in the importance of his life's enterprise.

As opposed to the newer folk dances, most of which don't make it and disappear very quickly, Yaron's life's work to "document and preserve Israeli folk dances" will always remain an asset to the legacy of the dance creations.

I am very pleased that all the members of the dance committee decided to award Yaron Meishar this prize for creativity."



Dr. Ruth Eshel, Yaron Meishar, Shlomo Maman and Heli Livneh

Yaron's Performance Record – The Reason He Received This Prize (summary):

Yaron took upon himself a national mission in the field of culture: to document and preserve the unique phenomenon of Israel – folk dance. There are other documentations, but Yaron's documentation has been a long-time project, comprehensive and detailed. The collection is easily accessible and is free of charge for everyone – an asset for generations to come.

At the beginning of the 1980s, and at enormous personal expense, Yaron established a home recording studio where he edited thousands of songs and prepared them to be used for the dances. These edited versions are still being used today, at least those that we still dance. Each dance included the instructions for the steps in "folk dance language" and every audio recording was accompanied by a booklet containing the instructions. Yaron was the first person to use the computer for digital editing and recording and in the 1990s, he consulted with choreographers and helped them to edit the songs used for new dances.

At the same time, he started the unending mission of filming and editing videos of dances. Almost every dance that was ever taught or danced in Israel is documented in the "Rokdim" collection.

With an investment of hundreds of thousands of shekels, Yaron has filmed hundreds of instructors and choreographers. In hundreds of the films, Yaron himself is teaching the dances with great methodical talent, to the pleasure of the students and for their benefit. He says: "Hundreds of people made the effort to inform me, by e-mail, WhatsApp and mostly, face to face, how much my instructions have helped them and that they were the clearest and most comprehensive instructions. That's the biggest compliment I could receive..."

"The programming and maintenance of an internet site of this size costs thousands of shekels. Without the support of crowdfunding by the users, the site has no chance of continuing to exist."

This enormous investment is the basis for a library of more than 6,500 filmed dances. The films for "Rokdim" are the only ones that present, in writing, all those dances with copyrights for the music, on the film itself as well as on the internet. These videos are the basis for instructors and dancers to learn the dances.

Yaron initiated and edited (and is still editing) "Rokdim-Nirkoda" magazine, presenting articles about Israeli dance through a variety of topics, mostly interviews with choreographers, and major event organizers (such as **Yoav Ashriel, Moshe Telem, Moshiko Halevy, Shlomo Maman, Gadi Bitton, Avi Levy** and many more).

One hundred and twelve editions have already been published and they are a great cultural asset. They are a treasure that includes dance events of the last 35 years, archival material that is priceless. Yaron dreams of the day when he will finish uploading all the articles from all the print media to the "Rokdim-Nirkoda" website, where people can search for articles by subject, author, key words and more.

In the articles that Yaron himself writes, he doesn't hesitate to address sensitive subjects in the field, like "advocating for the right of choreographers to receive royalties from users (just as song composers, lyricists and singers already receive or should receive)."

Yaron also offered and explained a revolutionary proposal to stop the flood of dancing – a "Shnat Shmita – A Fallow Year". In a poll he conducted, in which more than 1,300 people voted, more than 70% of voters supported his proposal.

Yaron was the one and only person who fought for legal standing for copyrights (recording companies and ACUM) and today he is still the only one (as far as I know) who pays royalties for dances that people purchase on the site. No one else fulfills this obligation.



Yaron Meishar receiving the certificate and prize from President Herzog

Yaron speaks:

"I won the prize, but actually all of us have won it – our entire field of folk dance which was awarded esteem, the first of its kind – from the cultural establishment in Israel and it reads: 'This culture is an asset!!!! An asset that deserves to be preserved and made accessible to whomever is interested'.

I'm very proud to be here in this place. But I look toward the future and I worry: Who will follow in my footsteps? Who will continue to add material to the site and make it stronger; who will add videos and documentation? Who will continue to edit and produce "Rokdim-Nirkoda" magazine?

The “Rokdim” dance archives are a never-ending job. You add dances, you add music and films. And where I really need help and cooperation is from all of the choreographers.

The “Rokdim” dance archives are a never-ending job. You add dances, you add music and films. And where I really need help and cooperation is from all of the choreographers. They are the ones who can give the most exact information about a new/old dance and in the shortest period of time. They are the most capable to teach and to present their dances through the videos on the site. I hope that everyone understands this.

I have a dream... for each dance that is on the site, to add the words of the song, the steps of the dance, – the story of the dance. Unfortunately, the site as it currently stands will not permit this. I have a lot of material on the computer that needs to be uploaded to the site... I also have friends who are willing to do this on a voluntary basis. The site, however, isn't ready to accept all of this. The programming and maintenance of an internet site of this size costs thousands of shekels. Without the support of crowdfunding by the users, the site has no chance of continuing to exist.

“Rokdim-Nirkoda” magazine is 35 years old. In recent years, I've been able to fulfill my old dream and to use online publications (instead of printed ones). All of this was made possible through the fantastic programming work of **Amnon Ben David** from Jerusalem. The internet preservation and documentation site is [“Rokdim-Nirkoda”](#).

This year, I invested another 50,000 shekels to professionally redesign the website. It is still being worked on and hasn't yet been uploaded.

For 35 years there were six or seven attempts to connect/partner with companies and with individuals who thought (or hoped) that the magazine had financial potential. I won't mention names, but everyone dropped out when they saw that the dream of a lot of money was only a dream... In this place, a lot of money and a lot of time needs to be invested – with dedication and an obsession for perfection.

So Where Does the Money Come From?

This is the problem, says Yaron. A day of filming costs more than 1,500 shekels. Editing the films costs about 120 shekels per dance and we have already gone through 3,000 shekels for a single day of filming. In addition to the financial cost, there are the hundreds of work hours involved in a day of filming and dozens of work hours per week for the maintenance and addition of data.



Yaron with President Herzog and cheering friends



Lea Shabat accompanying the event with her songs

Sources of Finance:

1. Subscription + VIP through monthly payments.
2. Subscription + VIP yearly, something everyone can afford to do.
3. Supporters beyond the purchase of a subscription. See: <https://bit.ly/3G1suUz>
4. **Irgun HaMarkidim – The Instructors Organization** which supports us yearly with a respectable amount.

Let us hope that the lovers of dance, those who use the films and the services offered by these important websites and those who simply support this culture, will join as [VIP subscribers](#) and will help us continue to grow and develop."

Our Cheering Friends

Some 20 friends, dancers, family members, fans, came especially to this ceremony in Jerusalem, to congratulate and join Yaron when receiving this prize.

I asked the influencers and leaders of folk dance to give their opinion following receipt of the prize.

Shlomo Maman, choreographer, artistic director of dance festivals:

"Yaron's joy with having been awarded this prize is the joy of all of us. Yaron has done so much work to document and preserve our folk dances. This involves a great deal of effort and a great deal of patience to work within many limitations and difficulties. Yaron has coped with them and works in a very respectful manner to overcome the many obstacles. We owe our thanks to Yaron. Because of him, our dance instructors and our dancers appear for the filming of the dances and help us to teach them.

Unfortunately, there isn't enough appreciation for the helpful work that is being done that really helps us all. Not everyone is aware of the effort, the investment and the contribution given to us by Yaron. Even I, when I need to teach one of my own dances after a long break, use Yaron's documentation to remember the steps that I myself had choreographed.

And unfortunately, Irgun HaMarkidim – the Instructors Organization, doesn't appreciate Yaron's contribution sufficiently. In my opinion, it should be much more supportive of his

work. It would be appropriate if every dance leader, every member of the Irgun HaMarkidim, would subscribe to "Rokdim-Nirkoda" Magazine. After all, it's their journal. This journal also interests the dancers themselves and should be the heritage of every dancer. And here, in Israel, the Government Ministry of Culture, found it correct to make this miracle happen in the field of folk dance. And this time it happened because of Yaron Meishar. Congratulations to Yaron, cheers to us all."

Galit Edri, an advanced student of Yaron's, after the Instructors' Course, said:

"I completed the Instructors Course and am now doing advanced study with Yaron. We have been teaching together, in one of his Tuesday sessions at Dizengoff Center in Tel Aviv, for more than six months.

I think he is one of the most upright people around. A real kibbutznik. Exact in his movements and the best teacher I could possibly ask for.

Although he isn't the most effusive, his dancers love and admire him. He gave me the privilege of working with him, to learn from him and to accompany him to this very important ceremony at Beit HaNassi."

Eyal Ozeri, choreographer, instructor, active chairperson of the Instructors Organization:

"Any activity that exposes this branch of folk dancing in Israel (which does not receive enough recognition in Israel), is extremely important. Yaron's receipt of this prize elevates our dances to the highest possible level, even up to the residence of the President of Israel. What a great blessing!

Yaron is worthy of this prize as he has invested days and nights to the task of documentation and collection of material which he produces. There is nothing that compares to this work in Israel or anywhere in the world. He should be registered in the Guinness Book of World Records for the amount of material he produces in the field of dance, as we all know.

As to your question concerning "Rokdim-Nirkoda" magazine, in my opinion every member



Yaron's friends came to show their support

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of Irgun HaMarkidim should be subscribed to the publication, which contributes so much to us and, after all, we are part of the activity and get great enjoyment from it. This publication serves our purposes and should therefore be a part of us.

And thus, the field of folk dance has now been awarded government and state recognition and we – it is now our obligation to foster and to preserve this culture for the sake of future generations of Israelis.”

Avi Levy, choreographer, instructor, artistic manager and initiator of the Ashdodance Festival:

“I super congratulate Yaron on being awarded this prize. He deserves this honor. He is the only person in Israel and in the world who has so continuously preserved folk dances. He is caring and serious. He enlarges the folk dance movement and does tremendous work with the music, the correct adaptations, the instructions, the credits to the choreographers and the composers. This is a comprehensive and thorough preservation. There is no other kind. This is a piece of history.”

Moshe Telem, choreographer, who has taught in many countries around the world:

“Well done, Yaron. You have done wonderful work. Two facts: Don't double document dances (if it's been done in the past). We must avoid this kind of documentation as it hurts the original choreographers. As to your question: instructors don't need to be obligated to register for the site. Each one should do his thing. And something else: “Rokdim-Nirkoda” Magazine must appear in a printed version and not only on the internet. It won't hurt the lead writers for the magazine to invest some money and to help edit and publish a respectable printed version, as I did in the past.”

“Unfortunately, there isn't enough appreciation for the helpful work that is being done that really helps us all. Not everyone is aware of the effort, the investment and the contribution given to us by Yaron. Even I, when I need to teach one of my own dances after a long break, use Yaron's documentation to remember the steps that I myself had choreographed.”

Nourit Grinfeld, choreographer, instructor, manager of various dance sessions, new, middle-of-the-road and nostalgia:

“Yaron deserves to be presented with this award and recognized for his enormous documentation work. Personally, I help Yaron with his work on a daily basis. Because of him, I am progressing, being filmed, filming and documenting all the time. The documentation that Yaron is doing has helped all of the instructors in their work. As for Irgun HaMarkidim, as yet it isn't strong enough and there is no real connection between the organization, the site and the magazine that Yaron publishes.”

Advocate Avi Peretz, past chairperson of the Folk Dance Instructors Organization, one of the outstanding choreographers and instructors of Israeli and international folk dance:

“Yaron Meishar is worthy of receiving this prize for his work and his long-term investment

throughout the years to preserve and document folk dances – through writings, the filming of folk dances and interviewing the prominent personalities and choreographers who have contributed to the creation and expansion of the folk dance movement for so many years.

We must keep in mind that this is the personal initiative of one man, with no assistance, to which he has devoted his life.

The question is: What will the future bring? In my opinion, it is important that a government body or a museum or some other body will continue this important enterprise. This would be most welcome..

I myself am sure that Yaron deserves this prize. We have been friends for many years. Yaron's project is an important contribution to Israel and to the world in anything concerning the folk dance movement.

I wish Yaron good health and a long life. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors."

Ora Arnon, past member of the Bat Dor Dance Company, dancer and choreographer:

"If there wasn't someone who would do the work that Yaron has been doing, this country and its people would have lost an important part of its cultural legacy. Folk dances have been with us for over 100 years, including the period before the pioneers who established

Kol HaKavod and Mazal Tov to Yaron Meishar!

The Rokdim-Nirkoda Editorial Staff and Board of Directors congratulates our wonderful **Yaron Meishar** on his receiving the prestigious Creative Encouragement Award, named for the late President of Israel, **Yitzhak Navon z"l**.

The awarding of this prize is recognition of Yaron's tremendous contribution to the documentation and preservation of the culture of Israeli Folk Dance.

For decades, Yaron has single-handedly and tirelessly worked to establish the extensive "Rokdim" enterprise, including the "Rokdim" website that provides a broad range of resources and information in the field of Israeli folk dance, as well as his founding of "Rokdim-Nirkoda" magazine.

We were so proud to see Yaron receive his award, presented by the President of Israel – **Isaac Herzog**, together with the Minister of Culture and Sport – **Miki Zohar** and **Erez Navon**, the son of Yitzhak Navon.

Video from the Awards Ceremony on August 8, 2023:

<https://youtu.be/QqelDSXqR8Y>





All Yarons' guests together. Standing from right: Advocate Yonatan Zvi (the lawyer of the Documentation and Preservation Association), Eyal Ozeri, Heli Livneh, Shlomo Maman, Galit Edri, Sarit Doron, Ruthi Yifat, Dr. Ruth Eshel, Inbal Yifat, Orli Shahar, Lucy Maman, Israela Kahane, Tzemach Ben Aharon. Kneeling from right: Oron Krymolowski-Meishar, Yaron Meishar, Liora Sagi, Miri Krymolowski

this country. And since then, thousands of dances have been choreographed to the music of thousands of Israeli songs of every sort. The documentation and preservation of this enterprise will also allow future generations to understand, and to know and enjoy the fruit of the dances of so many creative people. This is part of our people's culture. Good luck and thanks to Yaron Meishar for his life enterprise."

Marco Ben Shimon, choreographer and dance instructor who created many dances that have become national assets:

"I wish you all the best in all your endeavors. Well done, my friend Yaron. Please accept my warm wishes on being awarded the Yitzhak Navon Prize for preservation of our folk dance legacy of the last 40 years. You are definitely deserving of this prize for your thorough, consistent and dedicated work on the "Rokdim" website which serves us all so loyally. For all this, may you be blessed!" 🙌

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