

# An Interview with Roni Zehavi-Oz

Roni Zehavi-Oz is a physical therapist working at Tel-Hashomer Hospital in Tel Aviv. She has been working in the water in Israel for three years. She has over 600 hours of aquatic bodywork training, including Jahara, Watsu and WaterDance.

"My specialty is shoulders: frozen, tendon tears, muscle tears, motorcycle accidents-- almost everything that involves shoulders. I also treat back pain and CVA. I treated a woman with severe arthritis, starting with Halliwick, then taught her to swim and then did WaterDance. Other patients I have treated with WaterDance include cancer patients, a diving accident patient, amputees and cervical conditions of all sorts, and a patient with implants in his cervical vertebrae.

"The best case to describe is the one with cancer. The woman had a double mastectomy. The cancer had spread to the spine; she also had a tumor in her head. She lived mostly on drugs and was in constant pain. I started her with Watsu, then switched over to WaterDance. With Watsu she always had a relief of pain, but I felt WaterDance would be a better place for her, because of what it gives. The woman came out of a session saying, "Wow, I only felt that in my dreams." She says that in her dreams she is still happy, doing what she used to do, not sick, that after her first treatment she felt totally healthy.

"Truely, there is another dimension in WaterDance. As a giver, I lose a sense of water, don't feel as if I'm in water. For the receiver it's like your being supported all around, by the environment and not just therapist. These people miss the hug. When I do hydrotherapy I always touch them, touch them on the hand and on the body. I think many times the environment gets tired of people who are very sick. They complain, they are unpleasant to touch, they don't look so good. People don't like to be near sick people, so they miss sympathy. Watsu can be too close, whereas WaterDance gives enough space and support. They are held by the water, you don't hold them, yet you give the assurance they need between dives. You are there when they need you.

"In hydrotherapy part of what we describe as the benefits is that all are equal: the handicapped can swim. This gives a sense of equality: "I can do that." The sick live with the fear of dying. Submerging them in hydrotherapy overcomes the fear of drowning and evokes the urge to live. People come out smiling after submerging.

"WaterDance brings life. It really gives a sense of living, accomplishing, security, achieving, all those beautiful words. Patients always leave the water feeling great. After giving I come out feeling high. It makes me feel so good I can't stop laughing. It is more intense than Watsu, comes from the belly. In Watsu I go into a meditation; it gives me more a feeling of melting into the water and person. In WaterDance it is like electricity, something in my stomach and I can give. Watsu is more a tool, WaterDance I feel to be a channel. I can actually feel the energy streaming around like electricity. Maybe that is why I emerge from treatments with a rush of energy. It comes from my intuition, my insights. Kavim, in Hebrew, means through the gut, the belly, intuitive, giving, very

intense. This is why I try to slow it down, because I think I get lost in the energy. So I try to find those peaceful moments where I can connect to that place of quiet.

"The most effective place is shoulders and neck. With the shoulders they suffer extreme pain. The shoulder is a joint that is only held by muscle and tendon. The pain can be intense, but when they go underwater, they don't feel the pain. I can do stretches I can't do outside. I can't explain it; it is not a place of joy, rather very quiet with planned movement. They go under and don't feel the pain. In the neck, in Watsu they always support themselves a little; only when submerged they can let go. I think it's the only place where the muscles that hold the neck can completely let go. About the woman with cancer, she is a dolphin dancer, after four or five treatments, she would go under and play and I would try to follow. When she goes under she is wild. She taught me about being with, just trying to support and continue the movement she is creating.

"WaterDance is not dangerous for bodily injuries but heart conditions I wouldn't put into the water. Perhaps not with unstable blood pressure also. WaterDance is very good for asthma patients; gives control of the breath. Basically, if they can go into the water, they can do WaterDance. Skin problems we don't put into the water when there are infectious or when we don't want them to get infected by the water. Every back and neck problem, problems of the spine, have the safest place in WaterDance, because they are supported by water. You only need to work carefully, to know what you are doing. In back problems, most enjoy extensions; the dangerous move is flexion of the back, as the breach of the disc is mostly on the back of the disc. Extension pushes the breach right back in. Therefore I always ask the person if it is hard to bend forward. The problem is that you don't feel pain in the water. When they go out it can hurt if we don't work carefully."