

Mitzvah Technique aims at improving posture

By Karen Shpowsitz

The students move easily around the North York studio, standing tall and walking across the carpet, then bending over, their bodies resting against small chairs and stools, their heads down.

Some are dancers or actors, several are university professors, two are chiropractors. By the end of the year-long course, all will be instructors in the Mitzvah Technique.

Off to the side, sits M. Cohen-Nehemia, founder and teacher of the exercise, which involves a series of movements that ripple through the pelvis, spine and head to help improve posture. The exercise attempts to realign and rebalance the body.

Dr. Mel Borins says the exercise "teaches you how to be straight and upright . . . and causes

changes in breathing and chest structure. By repeating it, you expand the chest and elongate the neck."

Borins, who runs a family practice in North York, came to Nehemia because of poor posture. "He worked with me over a period of months and got me more upright, by reteaching my body how to sit, stand and walk."

Nehemia, as he is known by most of his students, has taught the technique to members of the National Ballet of Canada, in York University's fine arts department, at the Royal Conservatory of Music and at dance and theatre centres in North America, Europe and Israel.

Three years ago, the Mitzvah approach was studied by the faculty of medicine at Dalhousie University in Halifax. Improvements in the group of faculty members were recorded in an article in the *Journal*

Perceptual And Motor Skills. "I have found the mechanism which corrects the body . . . the simple movement of body motion," Nehemia says.

His wife, Malka, says, "Mitzvah is the Hebrew word meaning a good deed . . . and anyone who does a mitzvah also does a good deed to himself."

People come to her husband's basement studio daily to learn the exercise.

The couple moved to Canada from Israel about 15 years ago. Nehemia's family dates back more than 500 years to the old city in Jerusalem. Malka, also Israeli, is trained as a nurse and midwife.

The couple moved to Winnipeg in 1969 to work with a dance company. Nehemia has studied classical, modern, and oriental dance and was a member of the

Israeli Inbal Dance Theatre.

As a dancer and choreographer, Nehemia was used to helping other artists deal with injuries. After working in an Israeli hospital, Nehemia went to London to study the Alexander technique, (a method of exercise from which the Mitzvah Technique is partly derived), which pays special attention to the head, neck and back.

Nehemia was invited to work at Camp Shalom, outside Toronto, and was also asked to lecture at York University's fine arts department.

"We decided to stay in Toronto and now we have people coming here from all over the world," Malka says.

Dancer Patricia Wynter was dissatisfied with her chiropractor and had nagging spasms in her neck and back.

After four years with Nehemia, Wynter is now an instructor and will teach two four-session courses in the technique at the Jewish Community Centre in North York later this month.

The Mitzvah technique is "not miraculous . . . and it is not helpful for everybody. It involves a lot of dedication and hard work on the part of the patient to do the exercise," Borins says.

But, he says, "I've found it very beneficial, personally."

Classes in the Mitzvah exercise are run at various locations in community centres across Metro. Nehemia also runs private morning sessions from 6 a.m. to noon, daily. His telephone number is 638-6399.

For information on the Jewish Community Centre workshop, call 636-1880.