

Fly me to the The Ja

Water is known to be the essence of life. The new Jahara Water Therapy gives a new dimension to the essence of living. More and more Israelis are connecting to the gentle power of water.

By Bebe Barnea

A National Geographic book depicts astronaut Mark Lee floating 430 kilometers above the earth's ocean. Free of gravity and with the distant blue expanse of the Atlantic Ocean in the

land has turned into more of an effortless and floating experience," says Maya Fisher, a Biosynthesis student at Tel Aviv University.

A person steps into a circular swimming pool, heated at body temperature of 34 degrees. One then takes a seat under a flexible floatation device called a Third Arm, which quickly eases away the feeling of body weight. Gradually, one settles into the arms of the therapist leaving the Third Arm to support your pelvic and back. With eyes shut and ears dipped under the surface of the water, one enters a world free of gravity, with no borders between the body and the water that supports it. The therapist gently moves you around, gently, precisely, effectively, guiding you through a journey of physical and mental expansion.

"It is nothing like a massage," says attorney Moshe Shiffman a partner and co-founder of a large law firm in Eilat who discovered the Jahara Water Therapy at the Arava Jahara Institute near Eilat. "It totally relaxes me. I have a stressful job and now, before I enter the courtroom, I imagine the sensation of being weightless in the water and my body effortlessly strengthens – shoulders stretched back, my back upright."

"Once you have learnt how to straighten your body targeting core muscles and realigning the skeleton to your natural posture, you are on the way to straightening your soul," assures Neta Shezaf a Jahara Advanced Specialist and Teacher who began her Jahara studies in 2001 in Eilat under Tova Rosen – the founder of the Jahara Center in Israel. ▶



Starting young. A baby with Jahara Water Therapist, Neta Shezaf.

background, the image of Lee floating in space is one of perfect harmony, serenity and tranquility. Would we not all want to experience this 'unearthly' sensation? We can and we don't have to travel into space to experience it.

The closest way to replicate this sensation is through Jahara Water Therapy - the gentle power of water. "Since I started Jahara therapy, movement on

The Womb Jahara Water Therapy

Circle of support. A group Jahara session with Therapist Tova Rosen at the Hod Hasharon Center.



The Jahara Center in Israel

Today, Jahara is considered one of the most influential methods in water therapy and Israel has become the largest center for Jahara in the world. There are presently in Israel 120 specialists and at the end of 2009, there will be a further 32 trained therapists operating at four Jahara as well as at various aquatic centers across the country.

Outside of Israel, there are only 60 Jahara specialists located in United States, Brazil, Argentina, Switzerland and Germany. In Israel, the Jahara Water Therapy "simply caught on like a wildfire," says Tova Rosen, who is currently the Jahara International Program Director and the most advanced Jahara teacher after Mario Jahara – the founder himself.

The Founding Father

The Jahara Water Therapy philosophy was developed by Mario Jahara, a Brazilian with Middle East roots, who was hired as an aquatic specialist by an upscale resort in Southern California in 1995. Mario was then a Zen Shiatsu teacher and a successful author, with two body-therapy books released in Portuguese, and an advanced Shiatsu and aquatic-bodywork teacher. He had extensive training in body structure related methods, including Shiatsu and the Alexander Technique.

His aquatic training at the time, although extensive, proved inadequate for his professional day-to-day needs. Following a back injury resulting from the handling of a heavy client, Mario started to experimentally use a Styrofoam flotation device in his sessions to distribute the weight of the patient more evenly across the water and to allow one of the therapist's hands to be released. This flotation device

was to become Jahara's characteristic 'Third Arm'. Since then, many devices have been developed to help both the therapist and patient to work with the optimum freedom of mobility vis-à-vis body weight and mass. The exercises of Jahara Therapy are circular; slow spiraling movements that link together, with the head always leading and moving.

Mario teaches his students about "the gentle power of water", referring to its surface "as a mirror". When the therapist guides the patient, they work slowly and gently in unison with the currents of the water "in order not to break the glass". In this way, Shezaf explains, "the patient can see his reflection on the water's surface. The water becomes a mirror to the soul."

The Founding Mother

In 1996, after completing a master's degree in Kinesiology in California, Rosen took an introductory course in Jahara at Berkley where she met Mario Jahara. Although academically well-qualified with years of practical experience in aquatic rehabilitation, the Jahara technique drew Rosen in like a whirlpool, and by 1999, she had established a home for Jahara Water Therapy in Israel. (www.jahara.com.)

Why do you think Israel was so quick to respond positively to the therapy?

"Israelis seek spirituality," says Rosen. "The main idea of Jahara is to bring inner peace and tranquility and many Israelis are searching for this. Since water-sports are popular in Israel, being a land by the sea, Jahara has been naturally well received." It is not surprising for Israelis living under constant threat and stress to search for ways to find relaxation in their lives and "Jahara provides a method that is simple, precise and profound," explains Rosen.



From the classroom to the pool.(Left)Founder of the Jahara Water Therapy, Brazilian Mario Jahara instructing a class in Israel. (Right) Mario working with local therapist Neta shezaf.



Total relaxation. Therapist Shezaf gently supporting her patient.

How is it different from other hydrotherapies?

Apart from being "safe and effective," says Rosen, who coordinates and teaches a year-long Jahara Specialist Program at the renowned Wingate Institute "is its philosophy." Jahara is not just about the movement of the body in water, "but of connecting the body and the mind." The Jahara Technique is "both physical and spiritual."

The Philosophy

There are five conceptual components in Jahara, each prescribing a method of treatment aligned with elements in Chinese philosophy. These are: Support (Metal), Adaptability (Water), Expansion (Tree), Effortlessness (Fire) and Invisibility (Earth).

"I connected to Jahara because of its philosophy and methods," says Shezaf also an acclaimed international flamenco dancer, teacher and choreographer. "Since dancing is something I do every day, movement is a powerful source of therapy for me. In Jahara, we move slowly and gently, touching on the physical to reach the spiritual."

Shezaf explains that by "creating movement in the water causes the space between each vertebra to

expand, releasing tension in the nervous system as well as in the blood vessels that runs through the spine." This allows the body to relax. "There emerges a strong sense of inner calm that carries on to other parts of the patient's life beyond the pool."

The Jahara treatments, "are harmonizing the relationship between my body and mind creating an enriched new core within me," says the 20 year old Maya Fisher. "Instead of shrinking or freezing under stressful situations, I feel as if I'm mentally and physically expanding - exuding more confidence and presence, adapting to difficult situations more easily than before. I have more space to breathe, and breathe deeply. Alarms are not going off all the time and the nervous system is calm. All this allows for my mind to be more adaptable like more over pebbles and rocks."

Due to the lack of gravity in the water combined with the technique of Jahara, "stress peels off like dry skin," says Fisher. "I feel like layers of stress is coming off of me and I can deeply relax, far more than with a massage. And all this relaxation happens with the incredible support of the therapists, who acts almost invisible during treatments." This sense of security and serenity concludes Fisher, "is like returning to the safe haven of the womb!" ■

Photos courtesy of Jahara Israel