



# Forgiveness

A Film by Udi Aloni

**Official Selection Berlin International Film Festival**  
**Official Competition Tokyo International Film Festival**  
**Audience Award Woodstock Film Festival**  
**Jerusalem International Film Festival**  
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a **METRO COMMUNICATIONS** and **ELEVATION FILMWORKS** production

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**David:** Itay Tiran

**Lila:** Clara Khoury

**Muselmann:** Moni Moshonov

**Dr. Isaac Shemesh:** Makram Khoury

**Amal; Ghost; Girl:** Tamara Mansour

**Henry Adler:** Michael Sarne

**Nawal:** Ruba Blal

**Colonel Daniel:** Idit Teperson

**Yoni:** Omer Barnea

**DAM Rappers:** Tamer Nafar, Suhell Nafar, & Mahmud Jreri

**Written and Directed by:** Udi Aloni

**Produced by:** David Silber, Lemore Syvan, & Udi Aloni

**Production Designers:** Kuly Sander & Tommaso Ortino

**Artistic Consultant:** Florian Etti

**Original Score:** Tamir Muskat

**Editor:** Galia Gill Moors

**Director of Photography:** Amnon Zalait

**Screenplay:** Udi Aloni and Paul Hond

**Based on a Book by:** Udi Aloni

**Script Editor:** David Silber

**Stills Photographer, New York:** Nadav Neuhaus

**Stills Photographer, Israel:** Eyal Landesman

**Choreographer:** Ohad Naharin

**Associate Producer:** Sarah Kamens

**Executive Producers:** Moshe & Leon Edery, Miki Rabinovitz,

Andre Malignac, Sigal Primor, & Benny Korman

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COUNCIL

RELAIS FINANCE-ANDRE MALIGNAC

BENNY KORMAN

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## Short synopsis

A daring hybrid of realism and fantasy, *Forgiveness* is a psychological thriller that explores the tragedies of the Middle East. David, a young American-Israeli, returns to Israel to join the army, only to find himself in a catatonic state after accidentally shooting a Palestinian girl while on patrol. He is committed to a mental institution which sits on the ruins of a Palestinian village. The head psychiatrist tries to cure him with medication, while another patient in the hospital, a Holocaust survivor, tries to redeem him by opening his heart to the ghost that haunts him. He returns to New York under his father's care, believing that his horrific past is behind him...until his love for a Palestinian woman reopens the gates of his trauma zone.

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## Long synopsis

On April 9, 1948, a Jewish militia entered the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin and killed over 100 villagers. Soon after, a mental hospital was built on the ruins. The first patients to be committed were Holocaust survivors. A legend says that to this day, the survivors have been communicating with the ghosts of the village.

***FORGIVENESS*** tells the story of David Adler, a 20-year old American-Israeli who decides to move back to Israel, only to find himself committed to a mental institution that sits on the ruins of a Palestinian village called Deir Yassin.

Flashbacks and flashforwards reveal the events that led up to his hospitalization. A 10-year old female ghost holds the secret to the riddle. But only when the secret is revealed can she find rest and give David the option to end a perpetually-repeated destiny...

Doctor Itzhik Shemesh, a psychiatrist at the mental institute, injects David with a chemo-technological drug in an attempt to build a bridge over the trauma zone and allow David to live a normal life. Even though he doubts its ethical consequences, his use of the drug is an act that mirrors his own deep denial...

Doctor Shemesh is given permission to use the drug by David's father, Henry Adler, a Holocaust survivor who spent a short time in Israel before becoming one of the most pre-eminent musicians in America.

Henry, who has the arrogance of Oedipus and faith in the rational overcoming of trauma via action, doesn't understand why his son has been hospitalized. But Henry's lust for life and his desire for normality make him live in denial of the past, which is unbearable for David, whose restless soul seeks the truth. Henry will confront a horror beyond all horrors when the truth reveals itself.

A blind patient in the hospital named Muselmann, also a Holocaust survivor, tells David to listen to the ghosts that are haunting him, that they have something important to tell him.

Like the blind prophet Tiresias, Muselmann knows that the truth does not hold redemption, and this is why he never tried to reconstruct his life after the camps. Because he lives between the world of the dead and the living, Muselmann can act as a conduit between the murdered ghosts and David.

The flashbacks and flash forwards from the mental institute reveal, with the story of David's life, the story of the eternal return of the trauma and a destiny that seems unalterable...

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## Glossary

### **Muselmann:**

A name used by both Germans and Jews to refer to the weakest people in Auschwitz. Like the living dead lying on the ground, the Muselmann was the one on the verge of death, the one beyond despair. Primo Levi described them as living people without life in their eyes. The word means “Muslim” in German. Maybe they looked like Muslims praying all day long to God, totally surrendered.

### **Mechilot/Gilgul Mechilot:**

The word mechilot in Hebrew contains a double meaning: one is “forgiveness”, and the other is “underground tunnels”. The expression refers to a Jewish legend in which righteous Jews that died in the Diaspora roll through underground tunnels and resurrect at the Mount of Olives when the Messiah comes. The screenplay of the film is based on the book by Udi Aloni named Gilgul Mechilot.

### **Deir Yassin / Kfar Shaul**

On April 9, 1948, a Jewish militia entered the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin and killed over 100 villagers. Soon after, a mental hospital was built on the ruins. The name of this mental institute is Kfar Shaul, which ironically enough also means “borrowed village”. The first patients to be committed were Holocaust survivors.

### **The Star of Redemption**

A theological book by Franz Rosenzweig, written in the 20s, that conceives of the relationship between God, Human and World as the upper triangle of the Shield of David, and Creation, Revelation and Redemption as the lower triangle.

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## Change Your Heart; Look Around You

an interview with *FORGIVENESS* director Udi Aloni

### **Can you tell me about how you came up with the title of your film, *FORGIVENESS*?**

I think it was a combination of three different influences. First, the original name in Hebrew is *Mechilot*, which has double-meaning: One, 'forgivenesses' in plural, and two, underground tunnels. There is a Kabbalistic belief that when righteous Jews die in the Diaspora, they go through underground tunnels (*mechilot*) in order to resurrect when the Messiah comes. I thought that if Jews come to Israel with more humbleness and more forgiveness, and not as conquerors, we could have a much better Israel-Palestine than we have now. But according to the narrative, I could also have called the movie *The Unforgiven* (which is the title of the beautiful film by Clint Eastwood) because –and this is my second point– the forgiveness is more in the heart of the audience than it is, maybe, in the film itself. The third influence happened after September 11. I was sitting in a seminar at NYU of Jacques Derrida and Avital Ronell about forgiveness. It was a very powerful seminar that made me contemplate the philosophical-political issues in my previous movie, *Local Angel*. Derrida says that when it is impossible to forgive, only then forgiveness can take place. In my previous movie, I tried to challenge this idea, and I visited Yasser Arafat while he was on curfew in order to try to understand the conditions for forgiveness, not between individuals, but between nations. When I finished shooting the new film, it suddenly occurred to me that this movie also deals the concept of forgiveness –but more in its emotional, melancholic aspects, and maybe as a necessary step towards love.

### **Why did you decide to move from documentary to fiction?**

The more I thought about important documentaries and fictions that try to deal with politics, the more I realized that they seem to share the rationale that, by creating a film that relates facts or tells a story about injustice, the audience will see the truth and then change their opinion. This is also the reason why many political fictions have a documentary-like appearance. More and more, I felt that an audience without a heart that is ready to receive the truth will be blind to the facts. So when I learned about the mental institute for Holocaust survivors sitting on Deir Yassin, a Palestinian village in which a massacre took place in 1948, I thought that a fiction has the potential to get much deeper into the unconscious of the trauma zone than another true story. In a way, this functions like the song from *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*: "Change your heart; look around you." First we have to change our hearts, and then we'll be able to see the truth. And after seeing the truth, we might get the courage to try to change the reality.

**So... if not documentary-like, what kind of aesthetic did you choose?**

I thought that if I want to deal with the collective unconscious of a community that searches for its own identity through its relation with the other, I should create a dream-like visual and yet keep the narrative intact. I had in mind an impossible hybrid of Hitchcock, Lynch, Kaufmann and Eastwood. In relation to Hitchcock, I thought mostly about *Vertigo* and the repetition of the same --but as the behavior of a nation-- and how you can break the curse of the vicious circle. Lynch and Kaufman show how the visual always situates us at the uncanny borderline between internal and external realities. And Eastwood uses tragic protagonists, like in the good old Greek tragedies. The theorist Slavoj Žižek, in his books, discusses the deep psychological insight of these film makers. I wanted to use some of those insights to make a political thriller.

**But your aesthetic is unlike any of them.**

You know, for me aesthetics and ethics cannot be separated from each other. And the fact that the hub of the movie is Israel-Palestine means that the movie has to bring with it the taste, the smell, the light, and the sound of the Middle East. So by using my experience as a visual artist, I wanted to celebrate the beauty and the mysteriousness that these two cultures create --and to let this beauty and mysteriousness radiate also to New York and to the underworld. Therefore, I used pre-eminent artists from both sides, Israel and Palestine, to help me to create the visual environment of this movie.

**You must be speaking about people like the world-acclaimed choreographer, Ohad Naharin.**

**Ohad** is a great example. He is by far one of the most original creators that Israel has produced. For the last 15 years, I have followed his work, which uses an international language of modern dance with the materials of Arab and Jewish cultures in Israel. So I really felt privileged when he agreed to take on himself the choreography of the film, which helped to create some of the film's most powerful moments. Moments much beyond dance itself.

**Can you tell me more about the cast, which is a mix of Palestinians and Jews, and how it was to work with them?**

For us, Jews and Palestinians working together is obvious. Inside all of the chaos, hate, and occupation which serve many external interests and feed the racist monster, there is a community of Palestinians and Jews who know that something extremely unique and beautiful can come from this region if we just get the chance. But to be more specific, I would like to say a few words about the actors themselves. At first, I searched for the protagonist in New York. I looked for a young, hot American actor. Then, I went to see in Tel Aviv, **Itay Tiran's** performance as *Hamlet*, which gave me goose bumps. I have seen many *Hamlets* in my life, but here, there was something so beautiful yet deep --even humorous in a way, that took me totally by surprise. I knew in this moment that I wanted him to play David. While working with him to create the character, I was more and more impressed by how many ideas and insights Itay brought to the film. After intensive months of working with him, by the time we got to the shooting, I felt that I had nothing to add. In a way, at this stage, he knew David Adler better than I knew him. If we had more time right now, I could tell you about the similar experiences I had in working with **Clara Khoury, Moni Moshonov, Makram Khoury, and Ruba Blal**. Each of them helped me to understand their characters and to make them much more alive than the way I

imagined them when I first wrote the script. I felt extremely privileged to have actors of this caliber working with me on the film. And I think that during the shooting, we all had the feeling that we were creating something important and unique together.

**From the point of view of production value, the movie looks very rich, even though it's a low-budget film. How did you achieve this?**

I have to admit that with this movie, I wasn't lucky only because of the actors, but also because of the amazing producer **David Silber**, who with so much love and innovation took upon himself this task. I think that his faith in the project made everyone--from the director of photography (**Amnon Zalait**), to the art department, to the costume designers, to the location manager-- want to invest their hearts and souls in this film. And I really believe that this amazing feeling that we had on the set is projected in the final result itself.

**There is a young actress, 11-year old Tamara Mansour. How was it for you to work with her as a director, especially taking into consideration that she plays three different roles in the film?**

Choosing the girl was one of the hardest tasks. Many young actresses auditioned, but there was something in **Tamara** that immediately grabbed our attention. **Amnon Zalait**, the DP, was very impressed by her presence, which made me take the chance to work with a girl who had never acted before. Tamara is from Palestine, and each day she had to pass through checkpoints to get to the set and back. There was the fear that because of that curfew the Israeli army imposes on Palestinians, she might not have been able to come to the shooting. I have to say that working with her was a true pleasure. The combination of her beauty, her intensity and her innocence touched all of us like magic. The fact that she knows four languages helped in shooting her scenes, which took place in New York and Israel.

**How did you come up with the concept of an anti-memory drug?**

When I wrote about Post-Traumatic Shock Inhibitor (PT-25) in my book, I wanted to create a symbolic manifestation of the selective memory that the oppressor uses in order to keep his split subject intact. On the one hand, he thinks of himself as an honorable man, and on the other, he is willing to do anything in order to live his good, productive life without any guilt whatsoever. It was kind of scary when, soon after I wrote the book, I read elsewhere that doctors are working to develop medicines to erase soldiers' negative memories or to attach good associations to bad traumas. Somebody already said that reality is more surreal than any fantasy; or in other words, there is no gap between the symbolic and the real. This might also relate to your question about what representation means in documentary films versus in fiction films.

**There is a great variety of aesthetics and textures between New York, the mental institute, the army, and the underground. Which scenes did you find the most difficult or interesting to shoot?**

As far as "interesting" goes, the question is hard for me to answer. Each scene was a challenge to shoot in its own way. But for sure, the most difficult and exciting scene was the rainy night in Brooklyn. It's the scene where David is losing his mind with the med-gun in his pocket. **Itay** and I felt that a good night of rain would give the character the

right emotional environment for the scene. Even as someone who doesn't believe in superstitions, Itay did a rain dance the night before. And as the gypsy curse says: be careful what you wish for. We had two days and nights in a row with one of the biggest storms that New York has experienced. Most of the American union crew wanted to call the night off (probably rightfully so), while we, the Israelis and Palestinians, trained to grow up tough, were out there in the middle of the storm, not giving up. The producers, **David** and **Lemore**, were out there with us, helping to hold down the tents (bravely but unsuccessfully) in the wind. One after the other, the projectors were blowing out, and the equipment was failing on us. Not only that, but exactly at the right time, like a miracle, two subway trains that we had been waiting for all day long passed by the bridge, finalizing the best set that God could offer us. **Clara** got hurt, Itay got hurt, but none of them were ready to quit. When I saw the daily footage, I couldn't help but admire once again our DP, **Amnon Zalait**, for the beautiful result of all of this.

**Is there anything that you would like to say in closing?**

Perhaps I should end on the same note that I began with, the seminar at NYU. There Derrida told a story about Yankelevich, who never agreed to forgive the Germans for the Holocaust. He met a young German who tried to negotiate forgiveness with him, and in the end, they play the piano together. The music, which is beyond words, was the place that the impossible could take place. I want to bring the possibility of forgiveness back from heaven to the realm of the possible, the realm of politics, the realm of action --in short, back to earth.

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## Bios

### **UDI ALONI DIRECTOR**

Forgiveness is a direct evolution of Aloni's work to date, including Local Angel, Gilgul Mechilot, The Book of Sham, Innocent Criminals, the Re-U-Man interactive project, and the documentary film Left, all of which have been exhibited to unanimous acclaim. Aloni's projects in films and in visual arts always explore the fascinating discourse that takes place between theology and politics. His book, Gilgul Mechilot, and his feature film, Local Angel, include correspondences with the most pre-eminent philosophers of our time, including Slavoj Zizek, Alain Badiou, Avital Ronell, and Judith Butler, who refer to him as a unique and revolutionary thinker. Aloni, in all of his activities, including university lectures, conferences and demonstrations, is a strong voice in promoting justice, peace, solidarity and love between Israel and Palestine. His movies and visual art projects have been presented in various leading museums, galleries, and film festivals, among them the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and the Berlin, Toronto, and Buenos Aires film festivals. In the last five years, Aloni has concentrated on making films and writing. Forgiveness, his first fiction film, is a hybrid of his deep theoretical thinking and his pioneering creativity in visual aesthetics.

### *Filmography*

1996 "Left" 52 min documentary film  
2002 Local Angel 70 min documentary film  
2003 Innocent Criminals  
2006 Forgiveness feature film  
2008 Azadi 73 min documentary film

### *Interactive Presentations*

1996 The Metropolitan Museum of Art – Re-U-Man  
1997 Tel-Aviv University – Re-U-Man  
1998 Mishkenot Shaananim – God is dead already from the beginning  
1999 MUSEUMS and the WEB - God is dead already from the beginning  
2000 Van Leer Institute – Three Shofar Blows: A Midrash for Rosh Hashana

### *One Person Exhibitions*

1987 Bograshov Gallery, Tel Aviv  
"The Archive of Mordechai Dimitry", Bograshov Gallery, Tel Aviv  
1989 Bograshov Gallery, Tel Aviv  
1990 The Museum of Israeli Art, Ramat Gan  
1992 "Apologetic Computer", Julie M. Gallery, Tel Aviv  
"Parrhesia", The Museum of Israeli Art, Ramat Gan  
1995 "The Book of Sham" - Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York  
1996 Project Room, Israel Museum, Jerusalem  
1997 Re-U-Man Installation, Cinematech, Tel Aviv

### *Selected Group Exhibitions*

1986 Recipients of the American - Israel Cultural Foundation Grant Awards.  
1987 The Hall of Windows, Acre.  
1988 "Critics' choice", Artifact Gallery, Tel Aviv  
"Fresh Paint", Tel Aviv Museum of Art  
"Artists for Human Rights", Artists House, Jerusalem  
1989 Israel Festival, Jerusalem  
"Aperto '90 - The Israeli Proposal", The Museum of Israeli Art, Ramat Gan  
1991 "Summer exhibition", Tel Aviv Museum  
1993 "Look Who's Talking", Hubertus Wunschik Gallery, Dusseldorf  
"There", The Israel Museum, Jerusalem  
1995 Group exhibition at Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York  
2000 "The City" at Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York

### *Projects In The Public Realm*

1990 "The Twin" - Environmental project in Yeruham Community Center, Israel, parallel to a twin project in Tel Aviv Museum.  
1991 The stage for the Amnesty International Human rights event - The cultural center of Tel Aviv  
1992 Carmiel Cultural Center, Israel  
"Parrhesia 1", The Museum of Israeli Art, Ramat Gan  
1993 The Ghetto Project, Venice Biennial, Italy  
"Parrhesia 2", Dusseldorfer Schauspielhaus, Dusseldorf, Germany  
"Parrhesia 3", Internationaler Wettbewerb, Graz, Austria  
1995 "Parrhesia 4", Soho, New York  
1996 The Re-U-Man 22nd Street Bridge Project, New York, New York

### *Selected Bibliography*

1990 Udi Aloni, The Museum of Israeli Art, Ramat Gan  
'An Other of Our Own', Adi Ofir, Catalog  
1991 'A Cautious Touch in the Origins', Michael Sgan Cohen, Studio Magazine  
'Elysha Wanders', Udi Aloni, Studio Magazine  
1992 Parrhesia, The Museum of Israeli Art, Ramat Gan  
'Redemption Through Transgression', Baruch Blich, Catalog  
1995 "The Book of Sham" - Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York  
2004 Local Angel book and DVD (ICA London)  
2005 גלגול מחילות – book in Hebrew, published by Kibbutz Hameuchad  
2006 Polemics –Alain Badiou, Verso, New York & London  
2008 The Symptom 9 – Alain Badiou. The Four Dymensions of Art. Published by Lacan.com

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## **OHAD NAHARIN CHOREOGRAPHER**

One of the world most renowned choreographers, Naharin made his choreographic debut in 1980 in the Kazuko Hirabayashi studio in New York. Between 1980 and 1990 he performed and worked with his group in New York. In 1990 he was appointed Artistic Director of the Batsheva Dance Company. Naharin was awarded the "Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" by the French government in 1998. In 2002, Naharin was awarded the esteemed New York Dance and Performance "Bessie" Award for the performances of his work *Virus* at BAM the same year. In 2004, he was awarded the "Bessie" again, this time for the performances of *Anaphaza* at the Lincoln Center Festival in July 2003. This year, Naharin was awarded with the prestigious "Israel Prize" in the field of dance.

## **DAVID SILBER PRODUCER Metro Communications Ltd.**

2008 -- The Lost Island  
The Lemon Tree  
2006 – Forgiveness  
Beaufort  
Bubble  
Secrets  
2005 – Aviva My Love  
Joy  
Metallic Blues  
2004 – Turn Left at the End of the World  
Columbian Love  
Walk on Water

## **ITAY TIRAN – David Adler**

2006 – Forgiveness by Udi Aloni  
Beaufort by Joseph Cedar  
2005 - Hamlet - The Cameri Theater

## **MAKRAM KHOURY – Dr. Isaac Shemesh**

2008 – The Lemon Tree by Eran Riklis  
2006 – Forgiveness by Udi Aloni  
2005 – Free Zone by Amos Gitai  
2004 – Munich by Steven Spielberg  
The Syrian Bride by Eran Riklis  
The Body by Jonas McCord

## **LEMORE SYVAN PRODUCER Elevation Filmworks**

2006 – Forgiveness  
Human Capital  
First Born  
2005 – The Ballad of Jack and Rose  
Duane Hopwood  
2004 – King of the Corner  
2003 – Casa de los Babys  
2002 – Personal Velocity

## **CLARA KHOURY – Lila**

2006 – Forgiveness by Udi Aloni  
2004 – The Syrian Bride by Eran Riklis  
2002 – Rana's Wedding by Hany Abu-Assad

## **MONI MOSHONOV – Muselmann**

2008 -- We own the Night by James Gray  
2007 -- Two Lovers by James Gray  
2006 – Forgiveness by Udi Aloni  
2005 – Shnat Effes by Yosef Pishchazde  
2003 – Gift from Above by Dover Kozashvili  
2002 – Kedma by Amos Gitai  
2001 – Late Marriage by Dover Kozashvili  
2000 – Besame Mucho by Yosef Pishchazde