

A Letter Worth Reading Twice

from Rabbi Rikki Arad



I want to start with a story that is still bleeding, because it happened only days ago.

Bar Asraf and Liron Barda were inseparable — the kind of love that made everyone around them believe in it. On the night of October 6th, 2023, Liron went to work at the Nova festival, a festival of love, music, and an endless summer that was never allowed to end.

On October 7th, Liron was brutally murdered. Hamas terrorists stormed Israel's border and swept through the festival grounds, killing every young life in their path. Nearly three years later, just days ago, Bar's body was found draped over her grave, a shot to the heart. He could no longer bear a single day without her. Bar was not at the festival that night. He never faced the gunmen, never ran through that field. And still, he was a victim — because trauma does not require you to be standing in the line of fire. It reaches into the people who love the ones who were, and it does not let go until it has taken them too.

This is not just a broken heart. This is a testament that Israel's enemies — the enemies of the Jewish people — are still alive, still active, still taking lives long after the massacre itself. Hamas did not stop killing on October 7th. They are still killing us today, one broken soul at a time. They are no better than Hitler.

And when I heard this story, my mind went somewhere I did not expect. It went to a little boy named Mulik.

Mulik was orphaned in the Holocaust, in Poland. He lost his mother, his father, and six siblings — his entire world, gone. When the last surviving adult from his community came to take him to Israel, to carry him toward whatever life might still be possible, eight-year-old Mulik asked for one moment first. He ran to his mother's grave, carrying a little honey he had collected, and he poured it over her grave. He told her he wanted to give her something sweet before he left her forever. Then he collapsed on top of the grave, weeping — a little boy, utterly alone in the world, saying goodbye to his mother in the only language he had left.

"I wanted to give her something sweet before I left her forever."

Mulik the Zulik. An orphan who buried his grief in the ground of his mother's grave and still found a way to cross an ocean, build a life, and become someone. This is the story I want to bring to the screen. And I believe it needs to be told now more than ever, because the enemies of our people have not gone anywhere. They have only changed their weapons.

Here is what makes this so much harder: Jewish filmmakers and Jewish stories are being boycotted right now. Funding is drying up. Doors that used to open for us are closing. Meanwhile, we are being drowned in jihadist propaganda, story after story, told louder and funded better than ours. If we do not tell our own stories — the true ones, the human ones, the ones about honey poured on a grave and a little boy who survived anyway — someone else will tell a different story for us, or no one will tell it at all.

This is not abstract to me. My own father was an orphan of the Holocaust. His family, too, was annihilated. He, too, made his way to Israel with nothing but the will to live and build. When I tell Mulik's story, I am telling my father's story. I am telling the story of a people who keep burying their children and their parents, and keep choosing, impossibly, to build a future anyway. And like Bar, I am a victim too — not of that morning itself, but of everything it left behind, the trauma that outlives the headlines and keeps living on in us, generation after generation, whether we were ever standing at the scene or not.

I am asking for your help to bring this film to life. For Israel. For the Jewish people. For the truth, at a moment when the truth is being outspent and outshouted.

If this speaks to you, please reach out. I would be honored to talk with you.

— Rabbi Rikki Arad