

# Opening Address – Antenna Documentary Film Festival 2026

by Festival Director Dudi Rokach

## Part 1

Not long ago, I was sitting in the emergency room at RPA.  
Nothing dramatic. Just a long wait.

To kill time, I was, of course, scrolling on my phone.

Around me, phones vibrated.  
A nurse called out names.  
Someone coughed.

At some point, without really deciding to, I stopped scrolling and listened.  
People were talking quietly. Fragments of other people's lives.

Someone asking about a test result.  
Another complaining about work.  
Someone on the phone saying they'd be late.

I remember a woman saying, "It's probably nothing,"  
and her friend answering, "Yeah... probably."

What surprised me was that I didn't mind it.  
I was comfortable sitting there, watching and listening.

For a while, it was fine.  
But then, at some point, it felt strangely familiar.  
Maybe a little too familiar.  
And suddenly, I didn't like how comfortable I was.

Sitting still.  
Listening to other people's lives.

While time is passing.

I didn't know what to do with that feeling.  
I thought it would pass, but it didn't.

## **Part 2**

Trying to understand that feeling better,  
I realised I'd felt something similar before — in another room  
in therapy.

Sitting there, week after week.  
Talking.

And at some point, I remember noticing  
how quickly time was passing.

A year.  
Then two.  
Almost three. While I was still sitting there.  
Still talking.

It wasn't only the passing of time that bothered me.

It was the feeling that this space —  
a place I was spending so much time in —  
didn't feel quite real.

Yes, I was talking about myself.

But I was paying someone to listen.  
Paying someone to care.

A relationship that existed only in that room.

It felt somehow wrong.

### **Part 3**

And yet, over time, I couldn't ignore that something real was happening.

Not suddenly.

Not dramatically.

But I was changing.

And only slowly I began to understand  
that therapy works —  
not despite its artificiality,  
but because of it.

Because I know it is not a real relationship,  
I am less afraid.  
I don't have to protect the other person.  
I don't have to worry about what my words will do to their life.

I am free to be selfish.  
To admit a need.  
To change my mind.

The relationship is real enough to matter —  
but unreal enough to survive whatever I bring to it.

That is what makes it a safe space for experimentation.

Not safety as comfort.  
Safety as the freedom to stay with what is happening while I try out new ways of speaking,  
of feeling,  
of being —

### **Part 4**

Like many of you, I spend my days — and many of my nights —  
in viewing rooms, watching films.

Watching other people's lives.

What frightened me in that waiting room  
was the thought that the space I spend so much time in  
only *feels* like life —  
but always stands slightly apart from it.

And that fear wasn't a mistake.

The viewing room, like the therapy room,  
is, of course, an artificial space.

But precisely because it is artificial,  
something else becomes possible there.

Cinema — and especially documentary cinema —  
creates a space that is very close to life,  
but not quite.

The experience is real enough to affect us —  
but unreal enough to let us stay with it.

And in that space —  
where no action is required of us —  
a different kind of freedom appears.

Not the freedom to act.  
But the freedom to notice.

To notice what a story does to us.  
Where we resist.  
Where we lean in.  
Where we care.  
And where we don't.

We are not ONLY watching other people's lives.

We are ALSO paying attention  
to what is happening *to us*  
as we watch.

Documentary cinema does not ask us  
to feel the right thing.

It asks us to stay with  
whatever we feel — long enough to recognise it.

The French philosopher Simone Weil famously wrote  
that attention is “the rarest and purest form of generosity.”

That’s what I want to believe we’re practicing here — together — over the next few days.

Not killing time  
But choosing, for a while. How we pay attention in it.