

TITLE:  
OUTLET:  
DATE:  
PAGES:

HERE WE ARE  
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## Here We Are

Israel/France/Italy 2020  
Director: Nir Bergman

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The central clash in Nir Bergman's tough, moving *Here We Are* – between Aharon (Shai Avivi), living with his severely autistic 20-year-old son Uri, and his estranged wife Tamara (Smadar Wolfman), who wants the lad placed in a hostel for special-needs students – replays the theme of an ostensibly rather different film: Marc Webb's neglected 2017 comedy melodrama *Gifted* (2017). There, the offspring in dispute is a seven-year-old girl who proves to be a maths prodigy, and the struggle plays out between the girl's uncle (Chris Evans), a boat repairer with whom she lives in a Florida shack, and his mother (Lindsay Duncan), who thinks the child should be in a special school. In both cases the youngster passionately wants to stay where he/she is – and in both films it's implied that the need is as great, or even greater, on the part of the supposedly selfless man.


The overall tone of Bergman's film is more sombre than Webb's, though it's not without humour, often stemming from Noam Imber's wholly convincing performance as the gangling Uri, from his fixation on watching Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921) – which leads him to believe that he only has to smash a window for his father to come running – to his repeated inquiries as to his own tastes: "Do I like yellow?" "Do I like brushing my teeth?" Less amusing, indeed often hard to watch, is his tearful distress at the prospect of being separated from Aharon, leading to a full-on hysterical meltdown on a railway platform, nervous passengers picking their way past. This and much else can be credited to Dana Idisis's script, drawing – like her documentary short *Turning Thirteen* (2013) and her TV series *On the Spectrum* (2018) – on her experience of her own autistic brother.

The film pivots, though, around Shai Avivi's Aharon, grim inflexibility emphasised by repeated tight close-ups on his stubborn profile. There's more than a hint that Uri has inherited at least elements of his autism from his dad. Given her adversarial role, Wolfman's Tamara could easily have been portrayed as a controlling shrew; instead, she's shown as genuinely concerned to achieve what she feels best for her son. Bergman has impressive form in this territory, having created, co-scripted, and directed several episodes of the Israeli TV series *BeTipul (In Therapy)*, 2005-



Father and son: Noam Imber as Uri

o8), in which we see a psychotherapist, Re'uven Dagan (played by Assi Dayan) holding weekly consultations with a number of his patients, as well as having sessions with his own therapist. Hugely successful and widely commended for its sympathy and insights, the series was later adapted for Dutch, French, Argentinian and Serbian TV – as well as for HBO (2008-21), where it became a hit with Gabriel Byrne in the lead.

Bergman's first feature as writer-director was *Broken Wings* (2002), in which a family struggles to stay together after the death of the father. Here, too, he homes in on the fragility of intimate relationships and the way in which sentiments of love and guilt can collide with and corrode each other – something that *Here We Are* develops even more effectively in its study of the effects of dysfunction and of how sympathy, however sincerely felt, may lead to resentment and anger. Altogether this is a poignant, perceptive and subtly gauged film: if it has a weakness, it's the too facile last-reel resolution; a fault, as it happens, that it shares with *Gifted*. 

**In UK cinemas from 23 July**

#### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Eitan Mansuri Jonathan Doweck	Original, Geshar Multicultural Film Fund, Rosamont, Spiro Films	Studio Soho Distribution
<b>Written by</b> Dana Idiss		Israeli theatrical title <i>Hine Anachnu</i>
<b>Director of Photography</b> Shai Goldman	<b>Cast</b> Shai Avivi Aharon Rossman	
<b>Editor</b> Ayala Bengad	Uri Noam Imber	
<b>Production Designer</b> Nitzan Zifrut	Uri Smadar Wolfman	
<b>Original Music</b> Matteo Curallo	Tamara Efrat Ben Zur	
<b>Sound Designer</b> Ronan Nagel	Effi Amir Feldman	
<b>Costume Designer</b> Liron Cohen	Amir Sharon Zelikovsky Sharon Natalia Faust	
©Spiro Films Ltd	Natalia Uri Klauzner	
<b>Production Companies</b> MK2, Rabinovich Foundation, the Israel Film Council, Direzione Generale Cinema e Audiovisivo, Yes	Noni	
	<b>In Colour</b> [L851]	
	<b>Subtitles</b>	
	<b>Distributor</b>	

Tivon, northern Israel. Aharon Rossman lives with his 20-year-old severely autistic son Uri. His estranged wife Tamara wants Uri to be placed in a special hostel and arrives to take him on a visit there. Uri, who just wants to live with his dad, returns weeping and distressed. Since Tamara has obtained a court order, Aharon reluctantly agrees to the plan, but en route Uri throws a fit on the station platform at Beer Sheva. Aharon takes him to visit an old friend and former fellow-student Effi, who lives nearby. They move on the next day to a motel in Eilat; Aharon plans to take Uri to live with a friend in Pennsylvania, but finds that Tamara has blocked his credit card. The pair proceed to Jaffa, where Aharon's brother Amir has a yacht. Aharon hopes Amir will lend him the money for air tickets to the US, but a mishap between Uri and Amir's wife Sharon causes Aharon and Uri to quit the boat. The next morning on the beach Aharon gets into a fight with a popsicle seller and is arrested. Uri is taken to the hostel; released, Aharon returns to Tivon. There's a crisis when Uri breaks a window in the hostel; but when Aharon visits the lad, offering to take him home, he finds that his son has now settled in and seems happy and fulfilled.