



# Oasis of Peace

American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam

## Spring 2024 Newsletter

Dear Cherished Friends and Supporters,

I continue to be moved by the ways Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is fulfilling its mission as the war in Gaza rages. In February, ABC News Australia profiled the Village's Primary School, capturing laughter, friendship, and comradery among Israeli and Palestinian children that probably would have seemed impossible to viewers had they not seen it with their own eyes. But as champions of the Village, we know it's not impossible, and that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is not intractable.

Recently, American Friends of NSWAS facilitated a presentation by NSWAS leadership to members of Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple in Beachwood, Ohio. Afterwards, Marlene Goldheimer, a member of the congregation, wrote:



*I realized how hard it must have been to make a presentation while a crippling war is happening in your midst. You made it clear that whatever war tries to tear down, you will persist in building back again. This determination reminds me of an animal I have always admired and felt an affection for—the beaver. No matter how many times humans or natural disasters destroy their lodges and dams, without delay they begin steadily hauling logs smoothly down the river to build again...Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, a place where truth builds trust, learning brings joy and understanding, and peace holds its stride.*

The work of holding peace is extremely difficult; it requires humility, patience, empathy, and a willingness to see the world through different, and oftentimes uncomfortable, lenses. NSWAS leaders, residents, teachers, students, parents, and facilitators are choosing to do hard work every day. They deserve our support as they continue to show us that peace is possible.

In hope and solidarity,

*Joan Waller*

President  
American Friends of Neve Shalom-Wahat Al-Salam

# Checking in on the Fifth-Grade Class

This year, American Friends of NSWAS is sponsoring the Primary School's fifth-grade class. This semester, students are embracing a special project that makes them all teachers for a day!

The children are volunteering to lead lessons on topics that interest them; fifth-grader

Rina recently led a sewing lesson for the class. The class also completed a two-week study project on the planets in our solar system; at the end of the two weeks, the students visited other grades to share what they had learned.



“Returning the kids after October 7 brought them back to a sane place that can contain everyone’s pain—a place where there is no fear of speaking about one’s feelings or emotions or of saying anything at all.

—Abed, a father of two from Lod

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“The meetings and activities offered since Oct. 7 gave me the feeling that some were attempting to bridge the deepening gap, following the terrible events on both sides. Personally, the dialogue sessions caused me to feel better in my work with the staff and also with the students in the class.

—Ori, second-grade teacher

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## Youth Building Ties

The Village is launching a new program aimed at fostering young adult leadership and activism. Youth Building Ties will invite 120 youth from three distinct backgrounds—Israeli-Palestinian, Palestinian from East Jerusalem, and Jewish-Israeli—to participate in intensive workshops led by facilitators trained in conflict resolution. Participants will learn how to facilitate and foster positive dialogue, interaction, and collaboration within mixed Palestinian-Jewish groups—a set of skills that they can bring back to their communities after the program ends.



## Comedian Noam Shuster-Eliassi on Grieving Both Sides



In February, Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* interviewed the stand-up comedian Noam Shuster-Eliassi about how she is navigating war in her life and work. Born and raised in NSWAS, she joined her parents there at the outbreak of the violence. “If there is a place to be during times of crisis, it’s Neve Shalom,” she said. “With all the difficulties, there is some degree of sanity maintained there.” In the interview, Shuster-Eliassi, whose comedy is well known in Israel and in the Arab world, reflects on the complexity of the war and the importance of honoring everyone’s grief.

## SFP Dialogue Sparks Clean Shelter Project



Seba Abu Daqa, a Palestinian woman originally from Gaza, and Tom Kellner, an Israeli woman, made a fortuitous connection last year. Both women live in Germany and were participants in the School for Peace’s dialogues for Jewish and Palestinian communities abroad. As they shared their anguish and grief with one another, they felt compelled to act. Together, they founded Clean Shelter, a nonprofit bringing much-needed toilets, tents, and beds to camps for displaced Gazans.



“There’s a special power that comes from the connection between Palestinian and Israeli women; women who are feminists and intellectuals who work together. It’s like a superpower.

— Seba Abu Daqa

## SFP Strengthens University Partnerships

In February, the School for Peace launched the 33rd edition of their course “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Theoretical and Experience Based Lens” for students at Tel Aviv University. Eight Palestinian and eight Jewish students will reflect on national identity, power relations, and individual and collective responsibility in the context of the conflict. Similar courses will be presented at four other Israeli colleges and universities this semester, including for the first time at Achva Academic College in the Southern District. The SFP has sponsored hundreds of dialogues for communities in crisis since October 7.



## Mourning in Community

In March, NSWAS resident Nariya Mark created a “bereavement tent” for Villagers and residents of the surrounding towns to gather in sorrow. Mark observed many struggling to express their grief openly; some were fearful of government reprisal, while others felt at a loss for how to comfort their neighbors. So, she erected a large tent and organized a daylong community gathering there, referencing the Jewish custom of Shiva and the Muslim tradition of dedicating three days to mourning. “The bereavement tent came from the wish to act, she said.” I wanted to give a stage and a place for people who lost their family and friends in the south and in Gaza to talk about their loss and for people to be together and listen.”

## New Chapter for the Village Hotel



As tourism in Israel has all but ceased for the moment, the Village’s hotel has pivoted to meet a different need: accommodations for aid workers and peace organizations seeking lodging and space for their meetings. A recent profile of the hotel’s outreach efforts in *Haaretz*, an Israeli newspaper, has kept rooms booked all spring.



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## Leave a Legacy of Peace

Consider supporting Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam through planned giving. Even the smallest gifts have a big impact over time. Choose to support the areas that mean the most to you—Israeli Jewish/Palestinian conflict transformation, youth leadership, arts initiatives, spiritual encounters, humanitarian aid, and more. Your generosity will sustain the Village’s inspiring work for decades to come.

The Options  
include:

- Bequests
- Life Insurance Policies
- Trusts
- Outright Gifts
- IRAs and Retirement Plans
- Life Estates

Planned giving is a powerful way to express your enduring commitment to peace while at the same time achieving both personal and financial security. Planned gifts offer substantial tax savings to donors, especially on appreciated properties and securities, and can reduce income tax and avoid capital gains tax.

Make peace a lasting part of your legacy. For more information, contact The American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam by emailing [afnswas@oasisofpeace.org](mailto:afnswas@oasisofpeace.org) or calling (818) 662-8883.

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