



Oasis of Peace

American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam

Winter 2023 Newsletter

A Way Forward Together

Dear Cherished Friends and Supporters,

This has been an incredibly difficult letter to write.

Not one of us imagined the tragedy and horror that would befall the Israeli and Palestinian people at the close of this year. I, like so many of you, have been overcome with terror, grief, rage, and even hopelessness over the past three months. It's hard to have confidence that we do actually have tools that can help ease the immense suffering this war is causing and begin to rebuild, no matter how slowly, the way forward together.

To all those who are working, praying, writing, meeting, all in hope of finding a way to keep building: know that your hope is shared by many, especially the residents of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam (NSWAS). This war is the reason for the Village's founding, for the mission and values shared by Father Bruno Hussar nearly fifty years ago. The conflict today is asking: Will Arabs and Jews find each other and their common good in community and solidarity? Will they speak to their children from both their own experience and from the perspective of "the other"? Will they comfort each other's grief-stricken families and friends? Will they endure this violence without coming apart?

I hope that what you will read here answers these questions with a resounding yes: there is a way forward through this darkness. I also hope you will see the continued value of supporting Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam at this crucial time. The Village's commitment to peace has never been more vital, and I invite you to join with us in helping their light shine even brighter.

If we make it possible, then it will be possible.

Yours in peace,

Joan Waller

Board Chair, American Friends of ANWAS



Protecting Young Minds



At the start of the fall semester, there were 190 children enrolled in the NSWAS Primary School; 108 were Arab and 82 Jewish, and there were 96 boys and 94 girls. Because the school is both binational and bilingual, it faces unique difficulties when it comes to navigating these students' feelings about war. But it is also uniquely positioned to succeed: for the past three years, the SFP has been leading intensive teacher trainings on cultivating empathy and healthy dialogue in the classroom.

Even so, the reality of war has been challenging. The Primary School has been forced to close intermittently due to danger from nearby rockets. And it is generously lending classroom space to students from Tal Shahar, a nearby moshav (agricultural community), who do not have air raid shelters at their own school. Because instruction is in-person, safety drills are now part of the weekly lesson plan; children learn where to go if they hear a siren, how to behave in shelters, and how long they must remain there. Walking to school is no longer an option for many because they are unprotected on the roads.

But there is a lot to inspire hope, too. The new students from Tal Shahar have joined a few Primary School classes and have been invited to participate in special active recess breaks that promote dialogue and understanding. The school has committed more resources to mental health, adding mindfulness sessions to the curriculum and offering psychological help from specialists in children's mental health. And the children are not only sharing their perspectives peacefully, they are serious about ending the violence on all sides, as this excerpt from a Jewish student's letter-writing exercise shows: "Dear people of Gaza, I cannot, and probably will never, understand the suffering that you go through. I really believe that one day this conflict will end and we shall live in peace without resentment and hatred. I wish all the best things in the world would get to all human beings. With love and with deep understanding that you too deserve only good."



Keeping Faith with Each Other

Since October, the Village has hosted six dialogues for residents, facilitated by instructors from SFP. Participants are invited to share openly about their most painful feelings, including anger about the October 7 massacre and death and destruction in Gaza. Small-group breakout sessions give everyone a chance to contribute. Many have also reflected on current tensions between groups in the Village and how best to keep empathy, understanding, and trust alive in times of crisis. Sessions dedicate time to identifying concrete actions residents can take to promote peace and unity in the Village and beyond. These dialogues will continue as events unfold. NSWAS has also been offering free group meditation and yoga sessions to support mental health and wellness.

“
A natural response might be to keep silent and wait for events to unfold. But talking is thinking, and in such catastrophic times it is important to think together.

—Dr. Roi Silberberg, Director,
NSWAS School for Peace

”

“
I think I have managed to change a lot of peoples’ opinions—maybe not their political ones, but their personal ones. I know how to overturn that mantra that says, ‘they are like this, they are like that.’

—Haled, Former NSWAS Resident

”

other side,” Haled said. “I can put myself into another’s shoes, and that is useful. To speak about the conflict with someone, you take it in a series of rungs. The first rung is a personal conversation...If I meet a Jewish person my age who has no idea what is an Arab, then I know I have to climb that ladder slowly.”

Broadcasting Hope

NSWAS resident Adam Ben Shabbat recently launched a weekly podcast to highlight the voices and perspectives of current and former Villagers during this difficult time. For his first episode, Shabbat, who is Jewish, interviewed an Arab childhood friend, Haled, about lessons he has taken from the Village to Haifa, where he now lives: “The most important thing I got here was an ability to understand the

Holding Space for Dialogue



Even as the violence rages around them, the School for Peace (SFP) is redoubling efforts to resource communities throughout the region and the globe. This spring, SFP will lead courses at Ben-Gurion University, Hadassah Academic College, Tel Aviv University, and Ruppin Academic College for students seeking to bring conflict resolution skills into their academic training. For many years, SFP has taught doctors, nurses, psychologists, human rights lawyers, and other professional cohorts to practice empathetic dialogue with each other and with clients.

“People are really under stress. But we have a role that is slightly different; we give them an alternative. What we are doing now is really a dialogue in the dark.”

—Noor Abu Ras, Coordinator of University Courses, NSWAS School for Peace

The SFP is also providing special training for the staffs of health organizations in the region, including facilities in Beersheva, Haifa, and Rehovot. And, the school continues to lead dialogues on Zoom for Israelis and Palestinians living abroad and grappling with the grief, sadness, and anger of this moment. These virtual sessions have taken place in Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Turkey, Spain, and Switzerland. The school’s director, Dr. Roi Silberberg, says that he has never felt the need for the SFP more than now: “We will not succumb to the darkness of quietude, and the chilling distance of alienation. We will maintain the hard-won trust between the Palestinian and Jewish graduates of our many SFP programs, harness their collective power, and disseminate it outwardly into the world.”

Demanding a Ceasefire

NSWAS is one of many organizations in Israel and around the world calling for a ceasefire. Communications and Development Director Samah Salaime recently met with Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to strategize about how peace organizations can apply pressure in productive ways, including by defending Palestinian citizens of Israel against escalating harassment and violence. She emphasized it is imperative the international community continue to push for an immediate end to the war. NSWAS also continues to prepare for the moment when it will be possible to bring medical aid to Gaza through its Humanitarian Aid Program. American Friends of NSWAS is proud to have raised more than \$55,000 for the program since the outbreak of the violence.

The Oasis Art Gallery



The Oasis Art Gallery plans to host a series of collaborative workshops for Palestinian and Jewish artists. *Art in the Time of Destruction* will challenge these artists to think deeply about the role art can play in alleviating the current crisis. Together, they will create new work that will be installed at the gallery entrance. The participating artists, many of whom are now struggling financially because of the war, will receive a small honorarium.

Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam in *The New York Times*

[The Village] is a statement against the status quo, saying that things can be different.

—Amit Kitain, NSWAS Resident

The New York Times recently profiled NSWAS, focusing on several residents who were born and raised there, moved away as young adults, and returned when they began having families of their own. It also recounts a critical event in the Village's history—the first test of its ability to “deepen empathy—without entirely eliminating the agonies of a deep-seated conflict.” In 1997, Villager Tom Kitain was killed in a plane crash on his way to Lebanon to serve as a combat soldier in the Israel Defense Forces.

“My dad always said Tom’s funeral was the only time Palestinians wept walking behind the coffin of an Israeli soldier,” recalled NSWAS resident Shireen Najjar. But there was disagreement about how to commemorate Kitain’s life; his family wanted to name a Village space after him, but others objected, given his role in the IDF. After much debate and a formal vote, a plaque now hangs in the space that reads: “In memory of our Tom Kitain, a child of peace who was killed in war.”



Oasis of Peace

American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam

229 North Central Ave Ste. 401
Glendale, CA 91203-3541

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 409
Jamestown, NY

*Because You
Believe in Peace*



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 or calling (818) 662-8883.

The American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is a not-for-profit organization with 501(c)(3) status under the Internal Revenue Service Code. We do not sell, trade, rent or otherwise disclose donor information. Our donor privacy policy is available on our website or by mail. Official registration and financial information of American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.