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Dear Neighbor,

Tragically, each side has tried, at different stages of the conflict, to deny the legitimacy of the other's national identity, to rationalize the other out of existence. Some Jews continue to try to "prove" that Palestinian national identity is a fiction, that you are a contrived people. Of course you are - and so are we. All national identities are, by definition, contrived: At a certain point, groups of people determine that they share more in common than apart and invent themselves as a nation, with a common language, memory, and evolving story...We need to respect each other's right to tell our own stories. That's why I'm writing to you, neighbor: to tell you my story, not yours. If you choose to write in response, as I hope you will, you'll tell me your understanding of your history. I respect your right to define yourself, and I insist on the same right. That is the way to peace" (pp. 69-70, Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor).

So writes our friend and teacher, Yossi Klein Halevi, author of the enclosed book, *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*. Hearing and respecting one another's story is the way to peace, in the Middle East (with God's help, B'ezrat Hashem / Insha Allah), and here at home too.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict affects people around the world, including here in Durham, especially in the weeks and months since our City Council issued a statement on April 6 banning police partnerships with Israel. Some rejoiced; others (including many Jews) mourned. To us, it is clear that the vote tore at the fabric of our community. In reflecting on that moment in civic life, we realize there is much about Judaism and the Jewish relationship to Israel that is not understood by many of our neighbors. We humbly hope to contribute to a process of healing and reconciliation.

Earlier this summer, *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor* by Yossi Klein Halevi was published and became a *New York Times* bestseller. Cokie Roberts described the book as offering "a model not only for Middle East peacemaking, but for navigating divides in our own society." Klein Halevi is a senior Fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, and he co-directs the Institute's Muslim Leadership Initiative with Durham's own Imam Abdullah Antepli of Duke University. We enclose our friend Yossi's book for two reasons:

- 1) We hope that you will take the time to read it. We do not seek to change your politics, but we hope to deepen our Durham community's understanding about what the modern State of Israel means to many (but not all) Jews here in Durham. We trust and believe that sharing and respecting our narratives provides a path to peace not only in the Middle East but here at home.
- 2) We will follow up with an invitation to a conversation this fall that will include Imam Antepli (and possibly Klein Halevi as well), as well as fellow religious and civic leaders in Durham, to discuss your reactions to and questions about the story this book tells. Details will follow. We

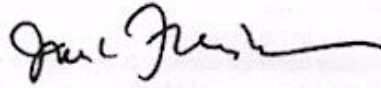
hope this conversation will provide an example for our community of constructive community dialogue. We also hope to contribute to Durham's remaining a place where all residents feel supported and respected in their individuality and uniqueness.

We believe in building a Durham for tomorrow that is equitable, diverse, affordable and a beacon of what's possible in North Carolina. We pray we can come together as a community, heal, and rededicate ourselves to building a city of equality, justice, and understanding for all of its citizens.

Shalom,



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