

P'nai Or Shabbat Morning Torah Study Info

"For those of you who have never participated in these Torah study sessions before, here is the practice and process we are inviting you into:

1. Arthur chooses a passage from the weekly Torah that seems to him likely to engage our own lives. For example, he might choose the passage where ancient Israelites are facing the Reed Sea ahead of them and Pharaoh's Army close behind

2. He invites the community to search back into their/our own lives and each of us to bring to awareness a moment when they faced what seemed an impossible choice. Silently, each of us recalls how that felt: in our guts, our arms and legs, our heart, our breath.

3. After a very few minutes of silent lifting-up such a moment, he offers in a midrashic English version and then in Hebrew the blessing over Torah-study in words that celebrate "Yahhh, Breath of Life" instead of "Adonai, Lord," and "Ruach Ha'Olam, Breathing Spirit of the world," instead of "Melekh, King of the world."

4. Then we read aloud in English, with different readers reading paragraph by paragraph around the "circle," the passage he has chosen. The passage is usually from the weekly portion. Sometimes he chooses that week's Haftarah instead; sometimes, as in the pre-Passover special Shabbatot we are now in the midst of, it is a special reading traditionally set aside.

(Last week, that special portion was about the "Red Heifer" ceremony to release a person who has been in contact with a dead body from the awe-struck, uncanny spiritual state of "*tumah*" into a more communal spiritual state. We connected it with the creation of "distance reconnection" as a response to the Coronavirus deadliness. And we took into awareness our own contacts with death.)

If we are using a passage from the Five Books of Moses or a Haftarah from the Early Prophets that have been translated into English by Everett Fox, we read his translation, because in Arthur's view it is by far the best translation of the Hebrew Bible into English. (*The Five Books of Moses* and *The Early Prophets*, both published by Schocken Books.)

5. Then we talk about the passage and about our lives. Our lives become part of Torah and the Torah becomes part of our lives. We talk in the worlds of Emotion and Spirit as well as in the world of Intellect. Arthur may add a thought and weave the conversation together. The D'var Torah that emerges is collective and multiflavored.

6. When an hour is up, we close with Arthur's sharing an embodied and somewhat midrashic version of Kaddish d'Rabbanan, the prayer that honors the holy process of learning and teaching.

Through The Shalom Center, Rabbi Arthur Waskow is offering a similar Torah study to non-Pnai Or-niks on a Zoom link on Thursday evenings **beginning this week** so as to preserve the intimacy of the Saturday morning group and to be sure that neither group is so large that it becomes difficult to participate. **Therefore, please DO NOT forward the Pnai Or Zoom link to people outside our community!"**