

Universal Declaration of Human Rights as Haftarah

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a modern prophetic document. Like the biblical prophets, the UDHR imagines the world as it should be, and commands us to create this world.

Some congregations have developed the practice of reading the Declaration aloud as the Haftarah for Human Rights Shabbat. Here is the process as described by Rabbi Barbara Penzner of Temple Hillel B'nai Torah in West Roxbury, MA, and Dr. Susannah Sirkin of Physicians for Human Rights:

We consider the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to be the sacred text for Human Rights Shabbat. Our first encounter with a public reading of the Declaration was at the Reebok Human Rights Awards ceremony in 1993. Media magnate Ted Turner said it was better than giving a speech and that too many people talked about human rights but had never actually read the Declaration or knew what all these rights were. In our congregation, we read it with the haftarah blessings, to place the prophetic writers of this declaration—including Eleanor Roosevelt, French Jewish jurist René Cassin, Hansa Mehta of India, and Charles Malik of Lebanon—into our own prophetic tradition. We've found that the call is most compelling when the 30 articles are read by a multiplicity of voices standing up one by one in our sanctuary and representing diverse fields and interests across our community. This drives home the point from the Mishnah that God stamps all human beings with the mold of Adam—who was himself created b'tzelem Elohim, in the divine image--yet each is unique, precious, and equal in dignity and rights.

The text of the Declaration that follows was abridged by Dr. Sirkin and theatrical director Diane Paulus. The text was streamlined for a quicker public reading, but no original language was changed.

Now, T'ruah is pleased to take this practice to its next logical step. Cantor Nancy Abramson, Director of the H. L. Miller Cantorial School and College of Jewish Music of The Jewish Theological Seminary, has notated the text with trope marks, so that it can be chanted to the ancient melodies of our people. She writes:

I looked at this magnificent text as a series of pesukim (sentences), and notated each of the 30 articles as one pasuk. I tried to be faithful to the rules of cantillation grammar, yet keep intact the dramatic flow of the chanting. It was also challenging to notate the actual diacritical marks, since English text is written left to right and the Hebrew markings are read right to left. I chose to notate most cantillation marks in their original right to left form, but some pairs that always go together I wrote from left to right, to reinforce their linked nature. I also added hyphens to connect words meant to be chanted to only one trope symbol.

With some preparation, the text should make for smooth reading; there is also a recording posted on the T'ruah website (<http://truah.org/resources-91356/human-rights-shabbat.html>) to help guide Haftarah readers.

We hope the chanting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights blends the modern and innovative with the authentic and ancient in an inspiring way.

Preamble 1

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Preamble 2

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Preamble 3

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men,

Preamble 4

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4: No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave-trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6: Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.

Article 8: Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10: Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11: Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defense.

Article 12: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation.

Article 13: Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

Article 14: Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

Article 15: Everyone has the right to a nationality. And the right to change his nationality.

Article 16: Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family.

Article 17: Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20: Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Article 21: Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage.

Article 22: Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23: Everyone has the right to equal pay for equal work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions, and to protection against unemployment.

Article 24: Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26: Everyone has the right to free education. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Article 27: Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

Article 28: Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29: Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

Article 30: Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.