Discussion Prompts for Studying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

• How does the declaration—and especially its preamble—reflect the historical moment when it was written, in the aftermath of the Holocaust and World War Two?

• What progression or flow do you detect over the course of the 30 clauses?

• Are there rights enshrined in the declaration that you are surprised to find there? Rights you would expect to see that are absent?

• What parts of the declaration feel most Jewish to you? Are there parts that feel to you like they are in tension with Jewish traditions or values?

• Halacha generally speaks in terms of obligations rather than rights. How do you see the relationship between obligations and rights?

• Obligations for treating citizens fall on state governments, whereas the rights enumerated in this document are the rights of individuals. How is that difference significant? What does it say about how one sees the world?

• In the mid-20th century, states were the main actors responsible for protecting or infringing upon individual rights. In the 21st century, what other bodies are important in any discussion of rights?