

YOUR PREAMBLE NAVIGATOR

Please read the Preamble out loud to each other. Then, starting in the upper lefthand corner, follow the commentary around the page. Read the texts, absorb them, and discuss them with your partner. If you choose, use the following questions as your guide.

People

1. When the Preamble says “We the People,” what image comes to mind?
2. Now read the verses from the Torah which refer to the beginning of Jewish peoplehood. How are these two peoples alike, and how are they different?

Union

1. What is attractive about unity, even when it is for a negative purpose?
2. Does unity require everyone to be the same?

Justice

1. What do you think “establish justice” means in the context of the Preamble?
2. How is justice defined in the Jewish sources?
3. Does *establishing* justice involve the same concerns as *pursuing* justice?

Domestic Tranquility

1. What does “domestic tranquility” mean, and how did Adoniahu violate that?
2. Can violent acts ensure domestic tranquility? Does it make sense for a legal document to stretch the truth in order to ensure domestic tranquility?
3. Why is peace more valued than truth in these rabbinic sources?
4. How do you negotiate “truth” and “peace” in your life?

Common Defense

1. Is the Talmudic statement “If one comes to kill you--arise early to kill him” constitutional?
2. This text refers to an individual person’s right to defense; can you infer from this text to the common defense of a state?

General Welfare

1. Why is it important for “general welfare” to be included in the Preamble?
2. In the Jewish source quoted, what constitutes general welfare?
3. Do you think that general welfare means protecting the most vulnerable people in your society, or does it simply mean having an orderly society wherein everyone is protected?

Blessing/Liberty

1. What is a blessing? Is a blessing a gift, or is it the gratitude you express upon receiving a gift?
2. How is liberty defined by the Midrash?
3. How does this compare with the American notion of liberty?
4. Why is liberty considered to be the essence of blessing?

Posterity

1. What does it mean to live for posterity? Is that a gift, or is it a burden?
2. Posterity is usually understood as caring for the future. However, the Midrash assumes that it's more than that. What do ancestors have to do with the future? How could parents who are no longer alive be the glory of their children who are still living?