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I Remember Them.

In the 1930s and 40s my Grandpa, Morris Goldberg, who worked as a food salesman, would send money to family in Eastern Europe and would receive letters of thanks. And then, one month, the letters stopped coming. This is all I know. I don't know their names, who they were, how they lived.

I wonder which of my features, likes and dislikes, gifts and challenges I might have inherited from them. I am grateful for them for being part of the chain of inheritance that produced my own children. Despite not knowing them, I feel indebted to them. I remember them.

Rachel Jacoby Rosenfield

A Note about Adapting *Hitkansut* to English

When our colleagues at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Israel approached us about creating an English/North American version of *Hitkansut* I was intrigued. I understood that this would not merely be a translation of the Hebrew original into English, but an adaptation of a ritual designed for Israelis into one that resonated with North American Jews. This was a peoplehood project, an opportunity to create a new and shared ritual framework for the memory of the Shoah that, as its title suggests, gathers us together.

Hitkansut is translated literally as “convergence.” The challenges of translating the ritual are embodied in its Hebrew name – the English does not easily capture the layered elegance of the Hebrew. The Hebrew root KNS (כנס) is shared by more familiar words like Beit Kenesset (Synagogue) and the verb le-hikanes (“to enter”). The *Hitkansut* ritual invites us to enter a space of sacred community. But it is a verb in the reflexive form, beckoning us to gather not only with one another but into ourselves, our own memories, family histories, and epigenetic inheritances. In our translation, we settled on the use of both the Hebrew *Hitkansut* and the word “gathering” in English, and we use them both side by side and interchangeably. We hope that the word *Hitkansut* will, in time, enter the Jewish lexicon as a word as familiar as seder.

The *Hitkansut* Haggadah and ritual, like the Passover seder, follows a prescribed order that takes us on a journey from kinah to kimah, from sitting in grief to rising up to insist on human dignity. And much like a seder, the ritual only comes to life when the communities that perform it add their own voices, memories, songs, artifacts, and texts. *Hitkansut* may also be compared to a play. There is a “plot,” a narrative that takes us from the responsibility to remember to the commitment to remember responsibly. Much like a script, *Hitkansut* only comes alive in the hands of the players, those who participate in the ritual and bring their own memories and voices to the performance. Whichever metaphor resonates most, communities can adapt the ritual as a way of both remembering and shaping memory for generations to come. With fewer and fewer Shoah survivors in our midst to share their own stories, the responsibility to remember is becoming a collective endeavor. Through this ritual, we are remembering together in a personal, participatory, and transformative way – listening to the voices of the past while drawing on our own memories, associations, and understandings in the present.

The translation and adaptation of the ritual was not merely a scholarly endeavor but a ritual act in and of itself. We immersed ourselves in “the plot” of *Hitkansut*

in Hebrew and discovering the resonances, dissonances and gaps we strove to fill. We brought together a formidable group of thinkers and artists, including author Dara Horn and Yiddish singer and Rabbi Avram Mlotek to excavate the ritual and consider how to make it a powerful and authentic expression of Shoah memory for North America Jews. We then gathered during a precious 24 hours before new COVID restrictions were implemented and enacted the ritual as a working group, each adding insight to the section they studied and suggestions as to how we might best adapt it to English. We added Yiddish songs, a text about a US soldier liberating a camp and a yizkor candle lighting. We also wrote original texts: one by the voice of a grandchild of a survivor, another about not knowing the names of family who were killed and yet feeling bound to them and their memory.

Through the process of translation and adaptation we could almost feel the ritual breathing, expanding to include the stories and perspectives of American Jews and contracting to lay bare the essential truths about how the Shoah has shaped Jewish memory and the collective identity of our people. As Michal Govrin and I worked on the final details of the Haggadah before it went to press, Russia had just invaded Ukraine and we knew we had to write a text about the ways that memory of the Shoah calls upon us and obligate us today. Michal wrote a poem “The Call,” included in the “Remembering Responsibly” section of the Haggadah. And as I write this piece, in January 2024, we are exploring further adapting *Hitkansut* as a vehicle for relating to the grief and trauma of the Black Shabbat of October 7.

The English version of *Hitkansut* has been embraced by the North American Jewish community with tremendous enthusiasm. Rabbis and educators are facilitating the ritual in their synagogues and schools and some are using the “plot” as a template for a year-long educational curriculum.

Hitkansut is powerful because it enables us to find our voices, our personal connection to the Shoah, whether direct, part of known family story, or unknown but deeply felt as an experience of Jewish peoplehood. For me, the adaptation of this ritual reminded me of my own grandfather and stories my mother told me about how he supported his family during the war for many months until the letters stopped coming. I included a brief text about this in the ritual as a nod to the fact that so many of us don’t know who we lost, and we grieve nonetheless.

The gathering brings us solace, the plot gives us direction, the texts and songs give us expression, the ritual grounds us so we can stand with dignity and act with integrity.