

HITKANSUT

**A Ritual Gathering  
for Yom HaShoah**

LEADER'S GUIDE



מכון שלום הרטמן  
SHALOM HARTMAN  
INSTITUTE



A photograph showing a person's hands lighting a candle in a menorah. The person is wearing a white shirt and a bracelet. The menorah has several lit candles, and the background is blurred. A yellow banner is overlaid on the left side of the image.

## Hitkansut: Leader's Guide

This leader's guide is designed to help facilitators interested in bringing the Hitkansut ritual to their communal spaces to plan a meaningful and impactful experience.

### WHAT IS HITKANSUT?

As we cling to the voices of the last living Holocaust survivors, it is time for the next generations to assume responsibility for keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive. **Hitkansut is an experiential and participatory ritual gathering that empowers the next generation to actively transmit the memories from the Shoah into the future.**

In Hitkansut, participants use a **specially designed Haggadah** created by a diverse group of scholars, writers, and educational leaders at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Israel and translated and edited by North American counterparts. The Haggadah presents a journey through memory with a clear narrative arc,

leading participants from the **responsibility to remember** to the commitment **to remember responsibly**; from *kinah*—**sitting in grief**—to *kimah*, **rising up to insist on human dignity**. Hitkansut weaves together literary texts, testimonies, discussions, prayer, song, poetry, and ritual to which participants are invited to contribute their own voices, memories, and thoughts. The core liturgy of the Haggadah provides the backbone for the gathering around which a variety of texts, songs, stories, and ritual moments are introduced.

### THE SEDER/ORDER OF SECTIONS

Hitkansut consists of six powerful and very specific sections. Participants are invited to **enter, remember, lament, confront, honor, and reflect**. Each section is meant to flow into the next and begins with a verse from the Tanakh that represents its essence. Leaders will discover a clear system of organization as they look through the Haggadah. Each of the six

ENTER
REMEMBER
LAMENT
CONFRONT
HONOR
REFLECT
ENTER
REMEMBER

**Acheinu**

Acheinu is a song derived from Jewish liturgy.

**1 Acheinu**

As for our kin, the whole house of Israel, who are given over to trouble or captivity, whether they abide on the sea or on the dry land:

May the All-present have mercy upon them, and bring them forth from trouble to well-being, from darkness to light, and from subjugation to redemption, now speedily and at a near time.

אחינו כל בית ישראל, הנחונים בצרה ובשביה, העומדים בין בים ובין ביבשה, המקום ירחם עליהם, ויציאם מצרה לרוחה, ומאפלה לאורה, ומשעבוד לאפלה, השתא בעגלא ובזמן קרוב.

*Acheinu kol beit yisrael, han'tunim b'tzara, b'tzara uvashivyah, haomdim bein bayam uvein bayabasha. Hamakom y'racheim aleihem v'yotziem mitzara lirvacha um'afaila l'orah umishibud lig'ulah, hashta ba'agala uvizman kariv.*

Portrait of the Beraha family in the courtyard of their home in Salonika, 1933-34, © United States

**Directions**

**Deepen the experience**

**The Voices of Those Who Remember**

Let us remember the generations who remembered:

In all the Jewish communities who held prayers, gatherings, and memorials—

Throughout the depths of the Shoah,

And at the end of the war in displaced persons camps and transit camps,

In the land of Israel, and in the diasporas.

*The tradition of remembering continues to this very day —*

We are a link in the chain.

**Core liturgy**

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sections of the ritual are color coded at the top of the page so that participants can move through the Haggadah with awareness of the intent and goals of each section. This organizational understanding will be key to selecting additional sources, stories, and songs and ensuring their appropriateness for each section.

## PAGE LAYOUT

Each page of the Haggadah offers features that serve different purposes within each section. **Text that appears in the outermost margins includes directions** for the leader and participants to follow throughout the ceremony. **The texts in gray background are the core liturgy**, written specifically for Hitkansut, that serve as the ritual's backbone. **The texts, songs and images on white background are brought to deepen the experience of Hitkansut.** They consist of original works written by the Hitkansut team, survivor testimonies alongside those of their children and grandchildren, traditional liturgy, poetry, and selections by public intellectuals. These suggested resources are extensive, and it

is not expected that they will all be utilized for every Hitkansut gathering. There is significant room for creativity, additions, substitution, and customization. Participants are invited to select the texts, songs and images that resonate for them as well as to bring their own stories, memories, photos, or songs to share.







## Going Deeper: An Overview of the Six Sections of Hitkansut

Hitkansut contains six sections, in memory of the six million Jews who perished in the Shoah.

**1. We Enter: Invitation** — We begin the Hitkansut ritual by welcoming all participants to the gathering and setting the stage for participation through their own communal and personal memories. This first section sets the tone for the gathering as welcoming to all, as we remember the Shoah with dignity and empathy. It offers participants the chance to enter the ritual with an open mind and heart.

**2. We Remember: Life Then** — Our commemoration officially begins in this section with a remembrance and celebration of Jewish life in Europe before the war. Through images, stories, and songs, we recall the diverse experiences of individuals, families, and communities. This part of the ritual invites participants to recall their ancestors, their places of origin, languages, songs, and stories from the past—the vibrancy of Jewish life in Europe before the Shoah.

**3. We Lament: Elegy** — We move from appreciating the vibrancy of Jewish life before the war to mourning its destruction. We consider the magnitude of what was destroyed — the unfathomable loss of life, the destruction of families and communities

and culture. We mourn these losses and honor the lives of those who were murdered.

**4. We Confront: Evil** — In our despair we look to confront — to recognize and call out — the evil that humans are capable of perpetrating and that the Nazis and their allies committed during the Shoah. The ritual is careful not to obsess over evil, but to recognize that as humans, we have an obligation to identify it and fight against it.

**5. We Honor: Human Dignity** — Human beings are also capable of remarkable resilience in the face of evil. In this section we explore the many ways that individuals and communities responded with compassion and courage, even in the face of personal danger. The human capacity to do evil is met with the human capacity to uphold the human dignity of others.

**6. We Reflect: Remembering Responsibly** — As we conclude the gathering, we consider what it means to remember responsibly; we ask ourselves what is required of us today as we work to recognize and fight for the infinite value of human life to be honored by all. This section encourages participants to ask challenging questions about the power and influence of the Hitkansut ceremony and to reflect upon our own actions and commitments to building a just world.

## WHO AND WHEN IS HITKANSUT FOR?

The Haggadah is designed so that anyone can convene and facilitate a Hitkansut gathering. Facilitators do not require any special training or background in Hebrew, Yiddish, Jewish text, or Holocaust studies. Although this ritual is designed for Jewish audiences, anyone can participate and draw personal meaning from the experience. Much attention is given throughout Hitkansut to both acknowledging those who have a direct or familial connection to the Shoah and to making space for the voices of those who do not. Though, much like the Passover seder, it is a distinctly Jewish ritual built around Jewish memory and ideas, Hitkansut contains universal messages that are broadly resonant.

The Hitkansut gathering is used in diverse settings throughout Israel and North America, including schools, youth groups, college campuses, synagogues, community centers, prisons (in Israel), and for online gatherings. The content is appropriate for middle-school-age students through adults. A detailed guide, entitled “A Guide for Educators in Youth Settings,” is available on the [Hitkansut website](#).

The ritual is appropriate for a variety of circumstances: on Yom HaShoah and other relevant Holocaust remembrance dates, as part of travel experiences to Eastern Europe, as an educational event, or at the conclusion of a course of study about life before or after the war. Each gathering is led by one or multiple facilitators who gather a group of participants to experience Hitkansut.

## CUSTOMIZING HITKANSUT

The Hitkansut gathering should be tailored to the group participating. As long as the ritual moves from section to section as described above and incorporates the key ideas from each section, there is much room for personalization.

Facilitators may elect to choose on their own the most relevant reading materials, discussions, and songs for their participants. Facilitators will want to prepare themselves for a Hitkansut gathering by reviewing the Haggadah, familiarizing themselves with the core liturgy, and deciding which additional texts to include, if desired. Most importantly, facilitators should look for opportunities to introduce the participants’ voices. Hitkansut offers many places and prompts for doing so, but facilitators might want to go even further and match certain passages with the talents and interests of particular participants. For example, the facilitator might invite someone to teach a Yiddish song from their childhood; encourage participants to prepare to share personal testimony—whether direct, first generation, or second generation or later; and introduce movement, art, or other modalities that the facilitator deems appropriate.

Conversely, one of the most powerful parts of leading a Hitkansut gathering is convening a group to plan the ritual in advance. In the context of a school or classroom, different grades, classes, or small groups might dive deeply into one section of Hitkansut, identify sources, rituals, and other artifacts that they wish to include in the gathering, and then contribute them toward a shared ceremony to be performed together later. See specific lesson plan ideas in [our educator’s guide](#). In an adult study group individual team members may want to divide and research each section ahead of time and then lead the rest of the group through that section during the ritual.

Additional sources for Hitkansut can be drawn from Holocaust archives, museum visits, readings, films, music, oral histories, and testimony, and so much more. A partial list of additional resources can be found at the end of this leader's guide.

## LENGTH OF HITKANSUT

Each Hitkansut gathering can be lengthened or shortened according to the needs of the group, as long as the ritual progresses through each of the sections with intention. Gatherings for younger populations may need to be shorter and allow for more movement. Larger gatherings may require a pre-selected group of volunteer readers who are prepared to help guide and move the ritual along. Musical selections add a great deal to the atmosphere and energy of the Hitkansut gathering. The leader will want to determine the best ways to incorporate the musical aspects of the ritual. The adaptability of the Hitkansut ritual and its flexibility allows for creativity of all those involved in its implementation.

A gathering that includes reading of the core liturgy, at least two or three supplemental readings, one song, and one ritual moment in each section will last approximately one hour. A gathering in which each section is given an allotted hour for study, song, and ritual might last a full day. Following the Haggadah in its current full form would yield a ceremony of ninety minutes to two hours.

## HITKANSUT AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

There are many ways that facilitators might use Hitkansut as an educational tool in addition to utilizing it as a ritual. We share several here:

- **Make preparation for the ritual part of the experience:** A facilitator can assign each section of the Hitkansut ritual to individual participants or to small subgroups, with the task of conducting research to find stories, songs, texts, or additional archival materials that they may wish to include in the gathering. This project may be short term, or it may be extensive and take place over a longer timeframe.

Participants could be asked to familiarize themselves with the core ideas of each section and then find readings and other sources that express those ideas through interviews, research in online archives and books, etc.

- **Create a course of study centered on the sections of the Hitkansut ritual:** In addition to going through a process of considering which pieces to include in their gathering, participants may also wish to hold discussions and reflections that focus on the essence and meaning of each section of the Hitkansut ritual. This collaborative effort creates a strong investment in the project as a whole and adds to the impact of the ritual itself.

- **Invite members of the community** to share family stories or other family artifacts from the Shoah as part of the gathering.

- **Ask participants to write or create** their own original texts, songs, poetry, or artwork in advance, to add to the ritual and to personalize the experience even further. This is a good place to include younger generations in the process of contributing to the Hitkansut gathering.

- **Intensive text study:** Select one or more texts from the Hitkansut Haggadah and study it in depth with the participants. Who was the author and what was their personal story? How does their perspective contribute to our understanding of memory and the Shoah? What can we learn from their experience to inform our own actions and commitments?



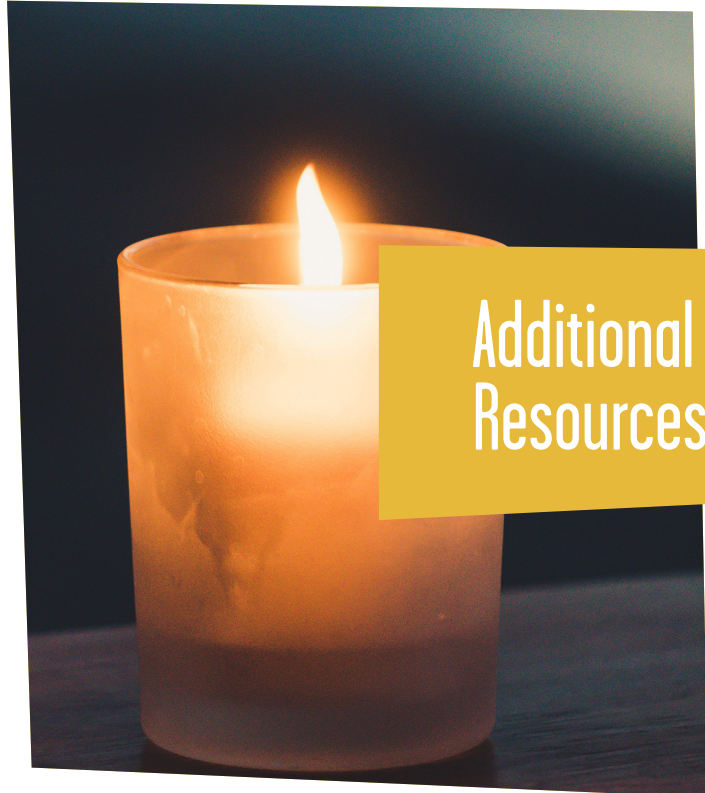
## BEST PRACTICES FOR HITKANSUT FACILITATION

For the most impactful experience, we recommend the following best practices in facilitating a Hitkansut gathering:

- Make copies of the Haggadah and other supplementary texts in advance, as well as a plan for bringing music and appropriate technology to the ceremony.
- Be mindful of the diversity with which the participants enter the space. Including all participants in the experience requires increased sensitivity and a commitment to providing an inclusive environment.
- Take the time to encourage participants to introduce themselves before the ritual begins.
- Thought should be given to the use of language found in the texts and in the music of the ceremony. The leader may wish to use Hebrew, English, Yiddish, or a combination.
- If the ceremony is held in person rather than online, the physical setup of the room or space in which the ceremony will be held is also important. Establishing a comfortable space where participants can see each other is ideal. One suggestion is to sit in a circle with the lights dimmed.
- Access to drinks, tissues, and a good sound system will elevate the experience and provide comfort to participants as needed.

### \* CONNECT WITH US

We want to hear about your Hitkansut gathering or educational program. Please reach out to us with questions or ideas, with your plans for Hitkansut gatherings in your community, and your experiences with Hitkansut. You can reach us at: [info@shalomhartman.org](mailto:info@shalomhartman.org).



## RESOURCES

The following is a partial list of additional resources you and/or your participants can consult if you would like to look for more personalized, alternative texts and testimonies to add to your Hitkansut gathering.

### Research Resources

Centropa: <https://www.centropa.org/>

Generations of the Shoah International:  
<http://www.genshoah.org/index.html>

Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center:  
<https://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org>

Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust: <https://mjhny.org/>

Museum of Tolerance Archives and Reference Library: <https://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/archives-and-reference-library/>

United States Holocaust Memorial  
Museum: <https://www.ushmm.org/>

USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive  
Online: <https://vhaonline.usc.edu/login>

Yad Vashem: <https://www.yadvashem.org/>

### **Recommended Songs and Niggunim**

Among the texts in the Hitkansut Haggadah are the lyrics of several songs. There are also key points in Hitkansut at which niggunim (wordless melodies) may be appropriate. The following list cites composers and/or performers of various recordings of these songs and niggunim, many of which can be found online. Communities may choose to consult [the recording of the 2022 Hitkansut Ceremony of the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America](#) for performances of some of these songs and niggunim.

#### **We Enter: Invitation**

Suggested songs to be used as niggunim (wordless melodies) include:

- Baruch Chait, “Gesher Tzar Me’od/Narrow Bridge”
- Deborah Sacks Mintz, “Makom Bina”
- Lev Tahor, “Acheinu”
- Nava Tehila, “Niggun Tishrei”

#### **We Remember: Life Then**

Suggested recordings of the following songs include:

- “Oyfn Pripetchik”: Esther Ofarim, Mandy Patinkin
- “Arum Der Fayer”: A Libe; Zalmen Mlotek, Rabbi Avram Mlotek, and Elisha Mlotek
- “Motele”: Norbert and Rochelle Horowitz with Rita Karin

#### **We Lament: Elegy**

Suggested niggun: Shalsheles, “Esa Einai”

#### **We Confront: Evil**

Suggested recording of “Eili Eili”:

[Rabbi Angela Buchdahl](#)

*(The song begins at minute 35:44 of the linked recording.)*

#### **We Honor: Human Dignity**

Suggested recording of “The Partisans’ Song”: from the soundtrack of Partisans of Vilna

Suggested recording of “Who is the Person Who Desires Life”: The Rabbi’s Sons, Shuli Natan

#### **We Reflect: Remembering Responsibly**

Suggested recordings of the following songs include:

- “Rejoice, Rejoice”: Arik Lavie, Nechama Hendel
- “V’taher Libeinu”: Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Temple, Yeshivat Ramat Gan



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The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) represents world Jewry in negotiating for compensation and restitution for victims of Nazi persecution and their heirs. Among its activities, the Claims Conference administers compensation funds, funds social welfare services, and allocates funds to preserve the memory and lessons of the Shoah. For more information, please visit [www.claimscon.org](http://www.claimscon.org).



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