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The Israelite Samaritans and the Festival of Unleavened Bread: Photographs by Dale Lazar
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Dale Lazar's striking photographs of the Israelite Samaritans tell a compelling story of this small, yet enduring religious community celebrating the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The photographs depict moments captured by Lazar between 3 AM and 7 AM. Additional photographs portray members of the Samaritan community during a subsequent visit to the region.

Lazar's interest in the Israelite Samaritans developed when he accepted an invitation in 2013 to attend an event he knew little about: the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Who the individuals making up the Samaritans are, what our commonalities might be, and how communities remain distinct in our hyper-globalized world, are all considerations underpinning Lazar's photographs. To probe these issues to their fullest, and to gain a deeper understanding of the context behind the festival's activities, Lazar struck up a dialogue with respected scholar and Samaritan elder Benyamim Tsedaka.

Their initial contact developed into a friendship; Lazar visited Tsedaka in Holon, Israel, and he invited Tsedaka to speak at the AJM last November. A selection of photographs in the exhibition portrays the Samaritans that Lazar met during his visit with Tsedaka in Holon.

Samaritans practice a form of religion that predates the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem. Israelite Samaritanism is similar to, but distinct from Judaism. Unlike Jews, who use both the Torah and Talmud, the Israelite Samaritans have one sacred text, the Samaritan Torah, which is written in ancient Hebrew. Samaritans are led by a high priest rather than being guided by a rabbinic council. While Jerusalem represents the most holy place for Jews, Samaritans venerate the Temple Mount on Mt. Gerizim.

The Samaritans are at once contemporary, traditional and deeply religious. Nearly 800 remaining members live in Holon, Israel, and Kiryat Luza, in the West Bank. Once a large community of over a million people in late Roman times, they are one of the smallest religious groups in the world.