

The Israelite Samaritans and the Festival of Unleavened Bread

Photographs by Dale Lazar

May 4–July 24, 2015

Dale Lazar's striking photographs convey the small, yet enduring community of the Israelite Samaritans during one of their most important annual holidays. The photographs in *The Israelite Samaritans and the Festival of Unleavened Bread* depict moments captured by Lazar during the festival between 3 AM and 7 AM.

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. Lazar shares his insights about the Samaritans and observations about taking the photographs in the gallery handout.

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.

Melissa Hiller

American Jewish Museum Director