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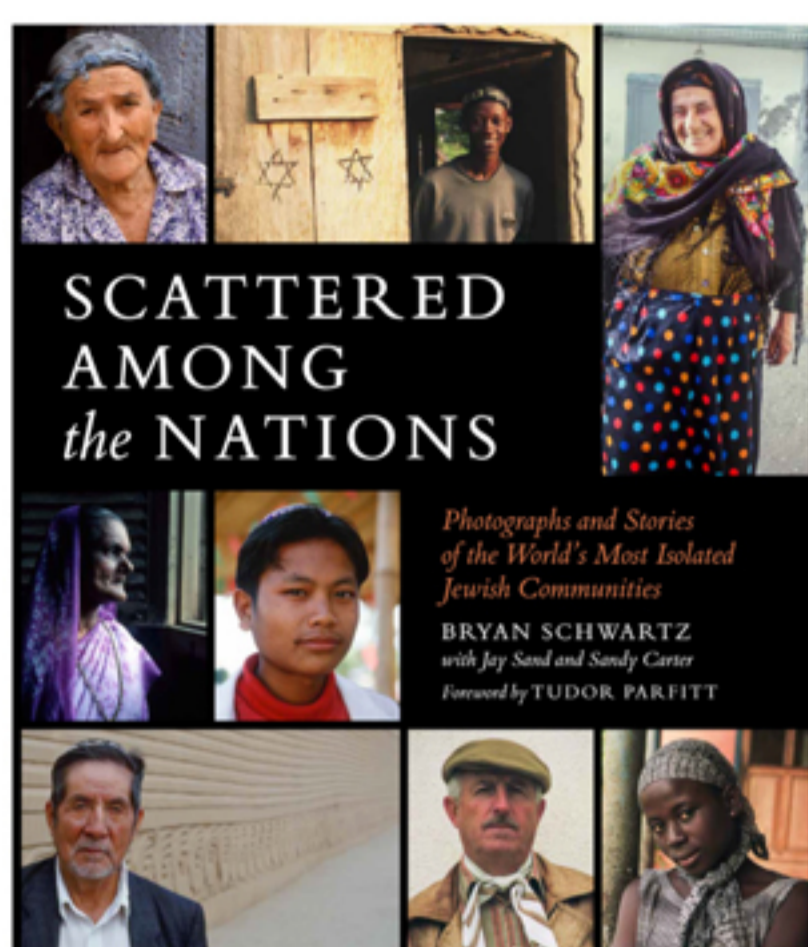
3 of the world's most isolated jewish communities

bryan schwartz | 12.8.15

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At the dawn of this new millennium, between 1999 and 2005, with the post-geographic era about to arrive for world Jewry, Jay Sand, Sandy Carter, and I traveled, to visit the world's most isolated Jewish communities, while they were still isolated—geographically, politically, culturally, linguistically. The communities we visited in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the former Soviet Union, and at the margins of Europe are poised for rapid change.

In *Scattered Among the Nations*, a project that I have worked on for 16 ½ years – and which is published today! –we share over 500 photographs and dozens of stories of living Jewish communities in the present—seeking an urgency fit to evoke their timeless vitality. This is not a book about cemeteries or societal remnants, but about a dynamic, multicultural Judaism. I hope that in our book, you will gain insights on the fundamental character of Judaism, but also see the diverse threads that make up our rich tapestry. Our hope is that through the pages you will realize that no racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic stereotype defines all Jewish people, but that many values and traditions do.



Here are the opening paragraphs of a few chapters, introducing you to some of the 16 communities you will meet in the book:

The House of Israel: Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana

In West Africa, Ghana's capital, Accra, is a long flight from any Jewish community. Ghana's second city, Kumasi, is another day's bus travel, heading northwest. From Kumasi, one can find a *tro-tro*, a beat-up van crammed with dozens of passengers and their goats, chickens, and packages, for the long, bumpy trip to the Western Region, on southern Ghana's Ivory Coast border. Far from home, disembarking from the arduous journey in Sefwi Wiawso, one of the least populous of Western Region's 22 districts, a Jewish visitor suddenly feels right at home.

"Shalom, my brother!" says Joseph Nipah, rushing to assist with bags and ushering the dazed and overheated visitor into a taxi. Joseph directs the taxi driver to New Adiembra, the village where the House of Israel community lives, down one hill and up another. Joseph introduces new arrivals to his wife, Marta, who immediately begins to fry plantains and fish for the hungry guests in her small, dirt-floored kitchen. Joseph takes the visitor's bags to Joseph Armah, who has the nicest home in the village. They will put the guest in the one habitation with electricity in the pink stucco home. A rotating fan scarcely defends against the crushing equatorial humidity and heat, but is appreciated nonetheless. One of Armah's daughters, Rebecca, runs promptly to go buy bottled water for the visitor. Running water has not come yet to the village.



The Longest Road to Judaism: Manipur State, India

Elitsur Haokip could be the Jewish Dalai Lama. He smiles warmly more often than he speaks. When he speaks, he speaks softly with uncommon eloquence—clear and sincere, simple and wise. He teaches without preaching. Though he has survived a lifetime of wars, Elitsur radiates peace.

But Elitsur takes his guidance from the Torah — not the Buddha. Elitsur's appearance evokes Tibet; his prayers invoke Israel.

Decades ago, Elitsur was among the first of the Kuki tribesmen in the northeastern Indian province of Manipur to begin exploring his Jewish roots. Today, he remains a leader of the Benei Menashe, or "Children of Menashe," who claim descent from the Biblical Menashe, eldest son of Joseph. The Jewish practitioners among this professed Lost Tribe of Israel number over 7,000.

They attend regularly nearly twenty makeshift, mud and bamboo synagogues in the remote hills on both sides of the India-Myanmar border.



Inca Jews: Trujillo, Cajamarca, and Lima, Peru



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