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## Scattered Among the Nations

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 By [Zelda Shluker](#) February 2016

**Scattered Among The Nations: Photographs and Stories of the World's Most Isolated Jewish Communities** by Bryan Schwartz with Jay Sand and Sandy Carter. (Weldon Owen, 252 pp. \$60)

*Scattered Among the Nations* has beautiful pictures—of men, women and children, homes, synagogues and landscapes—but it is not just a dramatic collection of images. The stories noted in the subtitle are eye-opening histories of far-flung communities and fascinating tales of charismatic leaders. Its four sections—Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America—reveal both the diversity and commonality of those who are descended from Jews and those who choose to identify as Jews.

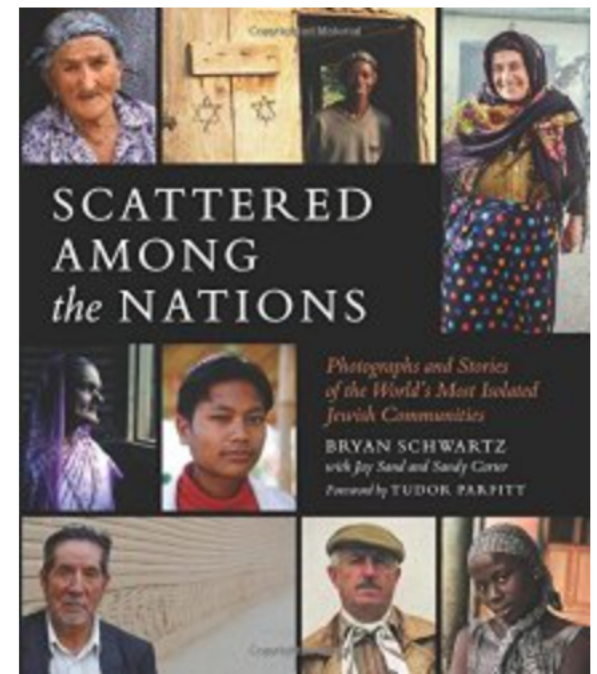
The book is the result of 16 years of travel by lawyer-photographer-writer Bryan Schwartz in collaboration with writer-photographers Jay Sand and Sandy Carter. However, a visitor today to the places covered in this book would not find the same people and circumstances. For instance, the majority of the Inca Jews of Peru, who have been following Judaism since the 1960s and whose conversion was accepted by Israel's chief rabbinate, have made aliya.

But other communities remain in their native homes, and we learn about their wildly different customs. For instance, the approximately 5,000 Bene Israel of the state of Maharashtra, south of Bombay—whose ancestors arrived 2,000 years ago after being exiled from the Land of Israel—honor the prophet Elijah with pilgrimages to a rock that they say contains the hoof print of Elijah's chariot. To receive Elijah's blessings, they have a weekly *malida* ceremony involving prayers, songs and bowls of fruit and flowers.

The Jews of Vinnitsya, Ukraine, four hours from Kiev, are hardened survivors who still smile, so maybe it is appropriate that their favorite holiday is Purim, when vodka flows amid a bawdy performance of the Esther story. "Nowhere could Purim resonate more than here," writes Schwartz. "Haman might as well have been a Cossack, a Tzarist and a Nazi."

Other Jewish groups run the gamut from wealthy to primitive. They include ostrich farmers who live in mansions in Oudtshoorn, South Africa; they arrived there after late-19th-century pogroms in Lithuania. In Ghana, the House of Israel Jews have neither electricity nor running water. Both communities, however, warmly welcome foreign visitors.

According to the authors, what connects these distant communities to the rest of the known Jewish world is shared pride in their heritage and passionate devotion to God and Jewish traditions. Schwartz has created an organization, **Scattered Among the Nations**, as a way to bring these communities attention as well as spiritual and financial assistance.


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