Opinion

SEASON'S MEANINGS

Broken glass, open doors and a renewed covenant

By Rabba Daphne Lazar Price

November 10, 2026

On Sunday, I attended a Kristallnacht commemoration at Kemp Mill Synagogue in Silver Spring, Md., featuring Dinah Zenker, a German Jew who traveled all the way from Munich to share the story of her mother, Holocaust survivor Ruth Strassberg. Hearing about Straussberg's experience of Kristallnacht through her daughter reminded me that the events of Nov. 9, 1938, are not distant history. They remain part of the living memory of Jewish families, passed from one generation to the next. History is carried by families and communities that make space for those memories.

I will also attend a commemoration at the Israeli Embassy this week, but this one will be to mark Sigd, the Ethiopian Jewish holiday of covenant renewal, communal responsibility, and longing for Jerusalem. The first gathering remembered the destruction of Jewish life and the second will celebrate Jewish preservation and renewal, but both explore what it means to belong to the Jewish People and what responsibilities that belonging places upon us.

This year, those questions feel particularly urgent.

On the eve of the 88th anniversary of Kristallnacht, demonstrators took to the streets of Philadelphia to boycott six Jewish- and Israeli-owned restaurants. Their message was unmistakable: "No business for Zionists!" Organizers insisted their protest targeted support for Israel, not Jewish identity, but their campaign singled out Jewish-owned businesses, treating their owners' political identities as grounds for exclusion.

The community response to these efforts deserves our attention: Hundreds of people lined up outside the targeted restaurants, choosing to patronize them rather than participate in their exclusion. Neighbors and supporters demonstrated that the streets belonged to everyone.

Let's be clear: Philadelphia in 2026 is not Germany in 1938. Historical comparisons demand precision, especially when invoking the Holocaust. Peaceful protest and political boycotts are legitimate forms of expression, including when directed at Israeli government

policies. But when Jewish business owners become proxies for a foreign government, the line between political criticism and collective punishment becomes dangerously blurred.

On Nov. 9, 1938, synagogues burned across Nazi Germany and Austria. Jewish homes and businesses were vandalized, their windows shattered, their owners terrorized. Approximately 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Kristallnacht marked a terrifying escalation in the Nazi campaign to exclude Jews from public life. It also reminds us of the institutions and bystanders whose failures helped make persecution possible. Its lesson is not simply to recognize antisemitism after it becomes violent, but to challenge exclusion before it becomes normalized.

Sigd offers another perspective on Jewish survival. For generations, Ethiopia's Beta Israel community preserved its traditions, religious leadership and connection to Jerusalem. On the 29th of the Hebrew month of Cheshvan, 50 days after Yom Kippur, Sigd continues to be celebrated in their communities in Israel and the Diaspora. The holiday draws inspiration from the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, particularly the people's recommitment to their covenant after returning from exile to the Land of Israel. Ethiopian Jews traditionally marked the holiday by gathering on a mountain facing Jerusalem to fast, pray and reaffirm their relationship with God, the Torah and one another. Today, Sigd is an official Israeli holiday, but its message of collective responsibility and covenant renewal belongs to the entire Jewish people.

This raises a question: Why is Kristallnacht so familiar to American Jews, while Sigd remains largely unknown?

We teach our children about European Jewish persecution, pogroms and the Holocaust, but how much do they learn about Ethiopian Jewish history? About the *Kessim*, the spiritual leaders who preserved Jewish tradition across generations? About the distinctive practices and sacred texts of Beta Israel? Too often, Ethiopian Jewish history enters our consciousness through stories of rescue and immigration, particularly Operations Moses and Solomon. These were extraordinary chapters in modern Jewish history, but Ethiopian Jews are not simply people whom the broader Jewish world rescued. They are custodians of an ancient Jewish tradition whose religious practices and understanding of covenant enrich Jewish life. Their story belongs not in an appendix to Jewish history but at its center, and celebration alone is insufficient.

Ethiopian Israelis have faced discrimination, racism, questions about their Jewish status and barriers to full participation in Israeli society. Recognizing Sigd as a national holiday in 2008 was important, but meaningful inclusion requires confronting discrimination, recognizing Ethiopian Jewish religious authority and ensuring that their traditions and

voices are fully represented. There is an irony in celebrating covenant renewal while failing to fully embrace those who sustained that covenant for centuries.

This is where Kristallnacht and Sigd speak to one another. Kristallnacht recalls a society that violently rejected Jewish belonging. Sigd celebrates a community that maintained its identity, faith and collective purpose across generations. Jewish history cannot be defined solely by the antisemitism we have endured; it must also encompass what Jews have created, preserved, debated and transmitted. Our peoplehood includes different languages, cultures, religious practices and historical experiences. Recognizing that diversity gives Jewish unity meaning.

As I move between these two commemorations, I am reminded that Jewish continuity requires more than remembering who tried to shut us out. It requires honoring those who kept our traditions alive and recognizing the full diversity of Jewish life. We cannot demand inclusion from others while treating inclusion within our own community as optional. That is a covenant worth renewing.

Rabba Daphne Lazar Price is an adjunct professor of Jewish law at Georgetown University Law Center.