I've been thinking a lot lately about loving my fellow Jews.

This is a very difficult moment for the Jewish people, not only as we face what is happening in Israel and Gaza, but because of how that is affecting our community internally. I have been in conversation with Jews who are outraged at our members who are criticizing Israel, outraged that they are not standing with Israel in this moment of grief and vulnerability. I'm also in conversation with TBI members who are disgusted and outraged at Israel's continued bombing in Gaza and at the American Jewish community's justifications for it.

I am wondering hoping that there might be a way that we can see and hear each other, and hang in as a community together, even with fellow Jews who are saying things or advocating for things that feel dangerous or downright morally wrong. This is, in fact, the great outcome of the whole book of Genesis: that after the favoritism and rejections – the banishment of Yishmael in one generation, that usurpation of Esau's blessing in the next, we finally get to a generation where very different brothers manage to live together without banishing or trying to kill each other.

It isn't easy, of course, but the seeds of that possibility occur in this week's Parashah, MiKeitz. In last week's parashah, Vayeshev, in fact, by all appearances, Jacob's sons seem to be replaying the tormented patterns of previous generations. Chapter 37, verses 24-25 say, the brothers "took him and cast him into the pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. Then they sat down to a meal."

It's hard to imagine a rejection of humanity, an alienation more complete than this image: twelve brothers eating while the other cries out, hungry, from an empty pit. The Renaissance humanist commentator Sforno comments on the brother's meal that by eating, they "demonstrate[d] that what they had done was no crime in their eyes. . . When righteous people become aware of having inadvertently committed a sin, they not only do not celebrate it by eating, but they impose a fast day or more upon themselves."

He gives examples of cases where that is true, and then concludes, “they had truly felt themselves personally threatened by Joseph, someone who was considered so mature that his own father had appointed him as manager over his senior brothers. The brothers had made strenuous efforts to put physical distance between themselves and Joseph in order to avoid any altercation. When he had sought them out in spite of their having signaled clearly that they wanted to avoid him, they felt understandably very threatened.”

As my colleague, Rabbi Amelia Wolf, commented last week, “They had to reason with themselves, actively convince themselves that they were in the right. They had to distract themselves, think about other things. Think about their own wounded pasts, their own trauma, the humiliation their mothers had felt when neglected by their father, the humiliation they themselves had felt in the face of beautiful clothing gifted only to their brother. Their fear that their brother would rise up against [them.]”

And yet, this week, the brothers themselves descend to Egypt to procure food, the same 10 who threw Joseph into the pit. In Torah study yesterday, we asked the question, why did all 10 of them go? Why couldn’t just one or two? And the most interesting possible answer, to my mind, is that all of them went because all of them wanted to. Maybe they all felt that they had some unfinished business with this place where they had sold their brother.

And they do meet Yosef, but at first they don’t recognize him. He accuses them of being spies, despite their protestation that they are 10 or 12 brothers, one of who is at home with their father and one of whom is gone. Yosef imprisons them. After 3 days, he lets all but Shimon go free and return to their father. He tells them, in Chapter 42, verses 18-20, that he will free Shimon if they prove that they are who they say that they are by returning with their youngest brother.

They return to their father, who categorically refuses to send Benjamin with them. It's so tempting to get caught up in wondering about Yosef's internal motivations that I hadn't noticed a fascinating aspect of this story: from the brother's perspective, Shimon is now all but lost. "Another one bites the dust." And then there were nine.

It is only when they run out of grain from Egypt that the brothers negotiate returning with Benjamin. And thanks to Howard Epstein for pointing out in Torah study yesterday that we have here the same imagery of the brothers eating while one of them languishes in captivity. We don't know how long it took for that Egyptian grain to run out, but we know that they consumed it, and as far as they knew Shimon was enslaved while they were doing so.

When they return to Egypt with Benjamin, Yosef frames him for theft. And the parasha ends on this cliffhanger. The simplest, likeliest trajectory for this story would be for the brothers to retreat, to sacrifice yet another brother.

But the reason that this story is so powerful, so redemptive, is that next week's parasha will begin with Yehuda stepping forward toward Yosef, rather than retreating. He will not proclaim Benjamin's innocence – indeed, as far as he will know, Benjamin is in fact guilty of theft. But he will step up to most powerful man he has ever met and say, "I'm not letting history repeat itself." Rather than giving one brother away so that the others will be at peace, he will offer himself and the rest of his brothers as slaves in Benjamin's place.

It is this insistence on Yehuda's part that moves Yosef, not only to release Benyamin, but to reveal himself to his brothers. And it is this moment that the brothers, who have been willing to lose one for the sake of the peace of the rest – first Yosef, then Shimon, and almost, we might have thought, Benyamin – reintegrate to being the full twelve who will become the tribes of Israel.

It was not easy. It almost didn't happen. And I think about it today, when so many Jews feel so deeply, so existentially threatened by the actions of our fellow Jews. I believe that fear and rage is truly coming from a place of wanting our people to be well, physically, spiritually and morally. We have different definitions of what that wellness looks like, how to get there. Some of us feel that the greatest threat is Hamas, while others feel that the greatest threat is the war itself, what it is doing to our humanity, to our legitimacy, to the children of Gaza.

But as Emily Tamkin wrote in *The Forward* on Oct 23rd, ". . .I would hope that everyone realizes that merely declaring someone is not Jewish does not make it so. Accusing them of not being invested, arguing that they're not a part of, and so do not have a claim to, Jewishness or cannot speak as a Jew — all this rhetoric does is harm Jews. It also undermines the concept of Jewish peoplehood and connectivity. And this is, I would argue, an inopportune moment for that."

Ae don't get to write off Jews who are justifying or calling for things that one finds morally abhorrent as "not real Jews." We don't get to cast them from our people as the brothers cast Joseph into the pit, to sacrifice them for the needs of the greater whole, as the brothers did with Shimon and almost did with Benyamin.

Because that is not the ending.

As we go into a new year, let's listen to each other's cries. Even if what other Jews are saying feels threatening. Even if we are advocating for different political ends, let's remember that we are family. There are many dangers facing the Jewish people, but casting each other away is the most dangerous thing of all.