I have been trying to write this drash in my head all week. I have been haunted by the image of young people at a music festival, which is held during Sukkot because that’s when people have time off work in Israel, running for their lives as terrorists shot at them, leaving hundreds dead and taking many more as captives.

But there have been so many more horrific images in the past week that it’s hard to know where to start – whole families annihilated, children and babies killed, reports of torture and worse.

It is the worst atrocity against the Jewish people since the Shoah and we are all still shell-shocked. Many of us have friends and family in Israel. Many of us know people of all ages who have been called from their daily lives to fight for their country. Many of us know Israelis who are sitting at home, sleeping in their bomb shelter or safe room, watching the TV, wondering what is going to come next.

One of my Israeli friends posted on Facebook: Yes I’m safe. No I’m not OK. None of us are OK.

The kibbutzim that were attacked along the Gaza border were communes of peace, some of the last bastions of the Israeli left. Their peace activists are now either murdered, burying their loved ones or held hostage in Gaza. One of those now held captive in Gaza, Vivian Silver, worked regularly as a volunteer driver collecting sick Palestinian children and taking them to hospitals in Israel for treatment.

And as if that weren’t enough, we are on a high security alert here. Children at Jewish schools have been told not to wear their uniforms. Incidents of anti-semitism are on the rise, as if the murder of Jews in Israel is a kind of green light to attack Jews everywhere.

We are angry and we are grieving. This time last week we were rejoicing with our Torah scrolls, celebrating the end of one cycle of Torah reading and the beginning of the next. We knew there had been rocket attacks that morning but the scale of the atrocities were still unimaginable. Now our dancing has turned to mourning and we gather together because we are proud to be Jewish, because we stand in solidarity with the people of Israel, who make up half the world’s Jewish community in the world’s only Jewish state, and because we will not let terror and hate deter us from coming together as a Jewish community and celebrating Shabbat.

This is Shabbat Bereishit, the Shabbat of new beginnings, and we are indeed seeing a new world but not the one we hoped for last week. We do not know where this is taking us but the best we can hope for is that the hostages are brought back home safely and that the Hamas leadership is destroyed. After that who knows?

The Torah which we are about to read is embedded in the real world. Four chapters after the creation of the world we have the first murder. And it’s a murder between two brothers, Cain and Abel. It’s a short step from the Garden of Eden to fratricide. You probably know the story. Adam and Eve have two children, Cain and Abel. Cain is a farmer, Abel a shepherd. They both offer up their produce to God and while God accepts Abel’s offering, he doesn’t accept Cain’s.

Cain is very angry and goes to talk to Abel his brother. And there’s a strange thing that happens in the text that sometimes gets smoothed over in translations. Here’s what the Hebrew literally says: “Cain said to his brother. And when they were in the field Cain rose up against Abel and killed him.” There’s something missing here. What did Cain say to his brother? We don’t know. All we know is that words were spoken and later on, Cain kills him.

If people are not able to communicate with each other, if words fail, then there will be violence. That is what the text seems to be saying. There have been so many missed opportunities for us to talk to each other and now all we are left with is extreme violence and an end, in the near future anyway, to any possibility of dialogue.

We know that innocent Palestinian families are suffering in Gaza too.

It is worth remembering that there has not been an election in Gaza since 2006 and even then Hamas didn’t win a majority, it claimed power by force. And Hamas knew that a massacre of Israelis would also mean the death of hundreds, maybe thousands of its own people and they do not care. So in some sense the Palestinians of Gaza are also victims of Hamas.

God’s response to the world’s first murder is haunting. Where is your brother, God asks Cain. And Cain replies - I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper? Am I my brother’s keeper?

We need to care for those who are our brothers and sisters. We need to care for all innocent people who are suffering the consequences of war, but we need to bury our own dead before we can find the emotional strength to care for others. When I hear God say – the voice of your brother’s blood cries to me from the earth – I hear the voices of those young people murdered at the Supernova Festival. I hear the voices of children and parents murdered in their homes. I hear the tears of parents who do not know whether their children, dragged off to Gaza, are alive or dead. And I know that we need time to mourn before we can move on.

The Talmud uses this story of Cain and Abel to point out how important it is to tell the truth in capital cases to avoid an innocent person being executed. It imagines the court officials hectoring witnesses to make sure they tell the truth and the officials say:

Adam was created alone to teach you that anyone who destroys one soul from the Jewish people, it is as if they destroyed an entire world. And if anyone sustains one soul from the Jewish people, it is as if they sustained an entire world.

Let us sustain each other. Let us support each other and make sure that our anger and our grief is turned outwards to ensure justice and promote solidarity, not turned inwards against each other. We are all doing the best we can. We have lost so much this week. Let’s hold onto what we still have and show as much love and kindness as we can to each other and to our Israeli brothers and sisters.

We come together today in community and root ourselves in a three thousand year old tradition, ensuring Jewish continuity in spite of what has happened. Jewish life goes on. Lets begin our Torah reading again for a new year.

Ken yehi ratzon.