Do you remember the film The Truman Show with Jim Carey? Is a film about the ultimate reality TV show only the lead actor, Truman, played by Carey doesn't know he's living his life on camera.

At the end of the film, it's from 1998 so I'm not giving anything away here; at the end of the film Truman discovers the truth he dramatically walks off the sound stage that was his reality and his home for his entire life and the credits roll.

The final scenes in the movie are of all the people who have been glued to the story for years looking at each, hugging, crying, cheering, questioning and then collectively they each turn the channel searching for whatever else is on.

That's how I felt on Thursday.

The day before, like most of you, I watched the inauguration. I got up early, cleared much of my day and was glued to my TV. I had to see how this was going to end. If it was going to end?

The pomp, the circumstance, the familiar rituals and the inconceivable reality of the context it is all taking place in. I hung on every word, I cried, I smiled, I felt pride, hope, relief, trepidation, grief. I breathed, like I had been holding my breath for 4 years or since November or two weeks. I exhaled. I watched it all till late at night.

Yesterday morning and last night as we would normally sit down to the day's news and political commentary I turned to Sharon and actually said, "what else is on?" For the moment at least I didn't need to try to steer the ship of American democracy from my sofa in Canada.

We watched a French crime thriller on Netflix, that day I read a story about the struggles of indigenous and non-indigenous fishermen in BC and the importance of active listening. Between meetings and zoom calls I studied a 1963 speech by Abraham Joshua Heschel on Religion & Race with my rabbinic hevruta. I walked the dog. I seriously contemplated getting on my elliptical machine, but there had been enough radical change for a day, I'll try again tomorrow.

An oft quoted psalm these last few weeks echoed in my prayers, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." (Ps. 30:5)

Thursday, Friday - oh what a beautiful morning, and I'm referring to much more than our unseasonably blue skies.

When your mind is not occupied with stress and worry every moment is a gift, an opportunity to learn and appreciate. To count your blessings. There is still much to stress and worry about, much, so much work to do. The list is well known and we all have personal addendums to our world wide woes; but I am grateful for one less worry.

This week's Torah portion ends with perhaps the greatest moment of blessing in the biblical story, the freeing of the Israelites from slavery under the cruel Egyptian pharaoh.

In the middle of the night, just as God had warned, the 10th plague strikes the households of Egypt. God kills all the first-born in the land of Egypt. Young and old, rich and poor, human and animal, all the first-borns were killed, except among the Israelites, they were spared.

Immediately, Pharaoh demanded Moses and the Israelites leave Egypt. The Jews hurried from the land, carrying their unleavened dough before it could even rise into bread.

Moses said again God's commandment to the Israelites, "This is the law of the Passover offering. You must remember this day as a covenant between Me and My people. Remember, this day you were freed from Egypt by God to go to the land of milk and honey. Remember, this day, for all generations and honor Me by not eating any leavened bread."

The Jewish response to a moment of redemption is to remember our suffering. Sure we drink L'chaim to life, but we also it matzah the symbol of our hardship and suffering.

Think of the shehecheyanu prayer, a prayer I too said around noon time on Wednesday morning. What do we thank God for? *Shechyanu, V'kiyamanu, V'higiyanu l'zman hazeh* For keeping us alive, sustaining us and enabling us to arrive at this moment of joy.

The prayer first appears in the Mishnah in a tractate appropriately called Brachot or Blessings. In a section dealing with all the blessings one should say for this or that occasion our rabbis teach:

When one built a new house or purchased new vessels, he recites: Blessed…Who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time. (Berakhot 54a)

In his book, The Book of Jewish Customs Orthodox scholar Harvey Lutske teaches, "For many people, the Shechyanu is a very personal prayer. The fact that you bought a new house may be of no concern to the general public, but of course, in your life it is a major event. A child's graduation may be no different than that of his 2,000 fellow graduates, but not to his bubbie (grandmother). Shehecheyanu is a prayer of personal gratitude, appreciation, and acknowledgment." It's a prayer that says wow, look at how far we have come, at all we have been through so that we are able to stand in this moment of joy today. Thank you God!

The Talmud continues, *"[as] a general principle: One recites a blessing for the bad that befalls him just as he does for the good. In other words, one recites the appropriate blessing for the trouble that he is experiencing at present despite the fact that it may conceal some positive element in the future. Similarly, one must recite a blessing for the good that befalls him just as for the bad. (Berakhot 54a)*

Thank you God for my sufferings; because they help me appreciate my blessings.

V'kiyamanu - for sustaining us through all the bad. We thank God for helping us get through the ordeal, the challenges, the dangers because thank you has no meaning without context, if it is not connected to what was lacking or could have befallen us.

Trials and suffering can actually refine and deepen gratefulness if we allow them to show us not to take things for granted.

This process of remembering how difficult life used to be and how far we have come sets up an explicit contrast that is fertile ground for gratefulness.

Our minds think in terms of counterfactuals—mental comparisons we make between the way things are and how things might have been different. Contrasting the present with negative times in the past can make us feel happier (or at least less unhappy) and enhance our overall sense of well-being. This opens the door to coping gratefully.

I have prayed deeply and acted purposefully for an end to the many sufferings experienced by myself and so many others this past year and these past many years, at home and abroad. And yet through the lens of this Jewish teaching I am also deeply appreciative for the lessons those sufferings have taught us. Of the fragility of our society, the inequality that privilege makes us blind to, the global dependency and interconnectedness that knows no borders or walls. The awareness of what is truly essential. I did not appreciate any of these things nearly enough before having them threatened or impeded.

As so I can look back on this past period with an attitude of gratitude for having been sustained through the hardships thus far, deeply aware that we are still very much in the midst of the whirlwind but appreciative nonetheless for the redemption and quietude that comes after the storm.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam,
shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all,
who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this moment of joy.

I am so grateful to be able to turn the channel; it's a blessing and I am profoundly aware that there is still so much more work to do.