

The Waiting Game

Category: Waiting

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | October 1, 2020

סבלנות. The first Hebrew word I learned when I spent the 1972-1973 academic year in Jerusalem was “savlanoot”—patience. I added the word to my Hebrew lexicon, but I never incorporated it into my daily life. I am not a patient person; whether standing in line at the grocery store or checking my mailbox for the results of my mammogram, waiting causes me angst and anger. When I want something, I want it now.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, however, waiting has become an integral part of my life. I must patiently await the November 3 election, hoping that my candidate wins and that a kinder, gentler nation emerges. I must patiently await tomorrow, hoping that it will bring me something to do that today has not provided. I must patiently await phone calls: ones telling me that my children have jobs and that their lives have somewhat returned to normalcy. I must become a player in the waiting game, even though every part of me shouts “No!”

As I head into my seventh month of quarantine, I have learned that how I handle waiting better helps me deal with the waiting itself. By walking for an hour every morning, I escape the four walls of my apartment, see a handful of other people, and watch autumn leaves replace spring flowers. Instead of staring at the clock, waiting for the minutes to turn into hours, I can then lose myself in a book. Rather than causing myself mental anguish by having the 24/7 news play in the background, I can listen to the Broadway songs that bring me so much pleasure. These activities do not end the waiting game, but they give me the patience to deal with it.

The problem, however, lies in the nature of this particular game. Most games have a beginning, middle and end; unfortunately, the waiting game has no definite end in sight. Will a vaccine come soon to curb—or cure—the virus? Will I get to visit my children again? Will my patience yield positive results, or will my now-tarnished golden years be squandered in waiting for peace, good health and security to return?

Teaching, ushering, socializing—those were the activities that defined me. Now, I am someone who waits for the past to become the future. I hope that I have the סבלנות—patience—to wait out the present.

*Ronna Edelstein
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*