

Shabbat Shalom! When I played lacrosse three years ago, I was very happy to start the game. I thought that it was a nice and peaceful game. The second I got into the box, we lined up to do a drill where you have to get the ball while getting checked. Everyone went and I was last in line. Finally it was my turn. So I ran in and picked up the ball. The boy who pursued me crosschecked me and I went flying. I was shocked that one was allowed to hit somebody like that in lacrosse. I wanted to quit after the first practice. My dad looked at me and said, "You need to finish what you started." It was a serious challenge for me to keep going. Though I really wanted to quit, I kept going. And because of that I learnt that good things can come from challenges.

Today we read *parashat Tetzaveh*. It talks about a number of important items connected to the *mishkan*, which was the mobile place of worship for the Israelites while they were wandering in the desert. Most people concentrate on the fact that the *parasha* talks about the clothes the priests wear. But one of the important aspects of the *parasha* is the fact that it commands the priests to keep the *ner tamid*: the eternal flame burning. The fuel for the *ner tamid* was olive oil, and was not electricity like we have today. In A Torah commentary for our times it tells us: "The clear oil of beaten olives were powerful symbols representing the Jewish people. The life of the olive, the rabbis explain, is a hard one. It dries and shrivels while still on the tree. Then it is cut down, crushed, ground and pressed until it yields oil. So it is, the rabbis claim, with the history of the people of Israel. They have been beaten, chained, imprisoned and surrounded by those threatening to crush them. Enemies constantly endanger them. Yet they have survived." We understand that the harshness of our experience throughout history has made us a stronger and better people. This idea can be applied to other experiences as well.

School is not always easy and I'm not just talking about sports and getting checked in lacrosse games. Homework, math tests, and science are all challenges. In order to succeed in school it is necessary to work very hard. In my own case I'm a better person because of the hard work that I have done in school.

One of worst catastrophes in the history of the Jewish people was the Holocaust. Six million Jews were killed. Of those who survived all were negatively affected. But many of the survivors were strengthened in terms of their inner resolve and personal resistance. In fact, many Holocaust survivors struggled for the decades that followed the war. Many also succeeded in incredible ways. Some became incredibly strong family members. Some became the leaders of Jewish organizations. And some succeeded in business. It seems that the survivors who succeeded in unimaginable ways were actually strengthened in the challenges they faced during the Holocaust.

Since the Holocaust, we have been blessed with the modern nation of Israel. Israel has also faced many challenges. Its enemies have tried attacking it with armies, missiles and terrorism. And over the last decades knowing that it did not succeed, they tried economic boycotts as well. But despite all of these challenges Israel hasn't only survived, it has thrived. Israel has not grown in spite of its challenges—but because of its challenges. Personally I am looking forward to going to Israel on BI's family trip this summer to see all of those successes. I hope all of you will consider joining us on this trip this summer so you too can see what is happening in Israel.

Some challenges are minor; some are major. My experience on the lacrosse field doesn't even come close to what a Holocaust survivor or the modern nation of Israel

has experienced. But despite that fact, I do believe that we all can be compared to olive oil. For the more we are pressed, the finer we become. Shabbat Shalom.