**How to Handle Toxic People**

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**#1**

**Today's Learning Material**

The history of Yitzhak (Isaac) and Rivka’s (Rebecca’s) family is recounted in great detail in Torah Bereishis, chapters 25-28, along with all of their complexities. After twenty years of infertility, they become parents. Rivka’s pregnancy was not easy. The mother-to-be sensed trouble in her womb - “and the children struggled within her” (Torah Bereishis 25:22) – and tried to ascertain why. She sought answers from G-d, and was told that she will give birth to twins. As soon as she hears the joyous news, she is also told that “one kingdom will be mightier than the other kingdom” (*ibid*. v. 23), or, in other words, a difficult struggle between these two brothers would ensue.

The process began when the two were “fighting” in their mother’s womb. Even at birth – Esav emerged first, but Yaakov (Jacob) didn’t give up without a fight, and held onto his brother’s ankle in an effort to delay him. Esav posed a real threat to the physical and spiritual wellbeing of his brother Yaakov on a daily basis. In fact, the tension between them rose constantly, until eventually it erupted.

Later on in life, Yaakov had to live in very close proximity with another evil, toxic man, Lavan. But that we’ll discuss in future sessions of EJ Learning Experience.

**#2**

**CASE**

I have a co-worker who is tyrannical and otherwise difficult. Sometimes she accuses me of incompetence. I suffer greatly from having to work together with this person as a team.

**Question: What advice would you give me?**

Working together with someone incompatible can be one of life's greatest trials.

**Sefer Hachinuch, 550**

*"Don't plow with an ox and a donkey together" (Torah Devarim 22:10)*

*Among the reasons for this commandment is concern for the suffering of animals, which is a Torah commandment. For it is known that to animals and birds there is great anxiety to dwell with other kinds, and so much the more to labor with them... And a very wise person should learn a moral from this and never appoint for anything two people who are far apart in their natures and different in their conduct, for example a righteous and a wicked person, or a light-hearted and a grave person. For if the Torah was strict on the suffering of animals who aren't given understanding, so much the more for people, who have an intelligent soul to know their Creator.*

**#3**

**Taylor Swift**

You, with your words like knives

And swords and weapons that you use against me

You have knocked me off my feet again

Got me feeling like a nothing.

**Questions:**

* **What are the main qualities of the people you find easy to get along with?**
* **What types of difficult people do you find it hardest to deal with?**

**#4**

**Pirkei Avos 1:7**

*Nittai of Arbel says: Keep far from a bad neighbor, do not become connected to an evil person ...*

**Questions:**

* **How do you understand this on a practical level?**
* **What if this toxic person is your close relative and it is extremely hard to avoid them?**

**Talmud Kidushin 31a**

*Dama ben Nesina (a gentile) once wore a gold-embroidered silken cloak and was sitting among his noble peers when his mother came, tore his robe off him, struck him on the head, and spat on his face, yet he did not shame her.*

**Questions:**

* **What do you think about Dama ben Nesina's reaction?**
* **How should one deal with abusive parents?**

**#5**

**Pirkei Avos 4:1**

*Who is wise? He who learns from everyone.*

**Question: What can you learn from dealing with difficult people?**

**#6**

**Questions:**

* **If someone offered you a million dollars to cope with the most difficult people in your life, how would you manage to cope with them?**
* **What are some good strategies in dealing with angry people?**
* **What's a good way to deal with people that are always complaining and blaming?**
* **What's a good way to deal with people whose feelings are very easily hurt?**

**#7**

**Question: What's your takeaway from today's discussion?**