

NEVER ASSUME

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Adam said, *"The woman that you gave to be with me - she gave me what I ate from the tree."* (Bereshith 3:12)

How could Adam have made such a brazen statement to his Creator? Some commentators explain that Adam was actually under the misconception that since God had given him a wife to be a helpmate, everything that she would tell him would only be for his benefit.¹ Others say that Adam did not even realize that he had been given the fruit that was forbidden. He trusted his wife that she would not feed him from the food that God had prohibited. Although it was unintentional, this 'misunderstanding' had dire ramifications, for as a result of violating this commandment, death was decreed upon the world.²

Since it is human nature to make assumptions, one should try to take the necessary precautions in interpersonal relationships. It is safe to presume that marriage partners will misunderstand each other frequently, especially at the beginning of the marriage when they do not yet fully know their spouse's personality. Since most situations are more complex than initially meets the eye, it is worthwhile to ask questions beforehand to clarify any vague points. Had first Adam, then Chava, asked some clarifying questions the whole mess might not have happened! Especially when dealing with monetary transactions, it is advisable not to assume anything, for often the other person has the opposite assumption. Writing down every detail beforehand can save a lot of arguing later on.

In order to demonstrate how easy it is to make incorrect assumptions, Rav Chaim Ozer once asked his students, "How is it possible to have two people where the first is the brother of the second while the second is not the brother of the first?" His students racked their minds to think of an answer to this seemingly enigmatic question. When he revealed to them that the second person was the sister of the first one, they realized that they had immediately made the mistaken assumption that both of the people involved were men.

1. Ramban and Seforno on Bereshith 3:12.

2. Or HaChaim on Bereshith 3:12.

