

We began the 7th perek this week and the first topic discussed by the gemara is the source for the idea of a zimun. When three people eat a meal together they are required to praise Hashem through a specific introduction to bentching. The requirements, details of who qualifies, and the various situations that can arise will all be explained in the coming weeks.

After introducing the halacha in the mishna, the gemara immediately asks for a source for this practice of zimun. One of the sources the gemara uses is a verse from Tehilim, Psalms (34:4), that states, “Gadloo La’Hashem eetee, uniromema shimo yachdav”, declare the greatness of Hashem with me, and let us exalt His name in unison”. The connotation of the verse is that an individual is proclaiming to at least two other people, “let us praise Hashem together”. The gemara extrapolates from these words of King David, that if there are three people prepared to bentch at the same time, they should join forces to exalt His name as a unit.

The Malbi”m, Harav Meir Leibush Wisser (1809-1879), wrote a tremendous amount of literature based on the principle that there are no true synonyms in Biblical Hebrew, Lashon Hakodesh. He wrote complete books showing the nuanced differences between similar words accompanied by proofs from many verses throughout Tanach that supported his ideas. One particular pair of words the Malbi”m separates between are the words Gadol, great, and Rom, exalted. In his work on the book of Psalms he writes that the word Rom is used to describe a state of exaltedness beyond human capacity. With our limited intellect, we are only capable of grasping and understanding to a certain degree. A greatness that transcends our imagination is referred to as Rom. On the other hand, the word Gadol is used to convey a greatness that we can associate with and is within our realm of comprehension. The picture we paint of Hashem’s greatness is encapsulated in the word Gadol. We do not fully grasp the infinite awesomeness of Hashem, however, we can glorify Him in accordance to our limited understanding.

With this lesson in mind, the Malbi”m explains our gemara’s source for zimun as follows, “Gadloo La’Hashem eetee”, despite our limitations we proclaim Hashem’s greatness according to our human capacity, utilizing all of our creativity and expression to attribute greatness to Him. That is the reason the root word Gadol is used. The result of that effort is “Uniromema shimo yachdav”, our feeble attempt at appreciating Hashem, manifests as Rom, a glorifying of Hashem’s name that is beyond comprehension.

This can be a powerful lesson for us in all areas of avodas Hashem, service of G-d, but it is particularly inspiring in the context of the zimun and preparation for thanking Hashem for the food He provides for us. The spiritual endeavor of bentching can be a daunting one; it is a frail and weak attempt at expressing appreciation for something that is impossible to properly say thank you for—sustenance. We just need to channel all of our abilities and the outcome will be a glorification of Hashem’s name the likes of which we never could have imagined.