



'And Yisro heard' (Shemos 18:1). The Gemara (Zevachim 116a) asks what exactly it was that Yisro heard that made him join Klal Yisroel. R' Yehoshua suggests it was the war with Amalek mentioned at the end of Beshalach. R' Eliezer suggests that it was Kriyas Yam Suf earlier in Beshalach. However, R' Eliezer HaModa'ee suggests that Yisro heard about Matan Torah. This would mean Yisro joined Bnei Yisroel after Matan Torah which would imply the Torah is out of chronological order, a concept known as Ain Mukdam U'MiUchar B'Torah. We use this principle sparingly, with a default presumption that the Torah is in chronological order unless there is a compelling reason to say otherwise. There are many examples, however, where the Torah clearly does not hold absolute chronological order, such as the events prior to Matan Torah which are discussed at the end of Parshas Mishpatim.

The Gemara continues with the narrative of the non-Jewish kings who trembled during Matan Torah and came to Bilaam for consultation. The kings thought that the world was going to be destroyed again by a flood or another great catastrophe. Bilaam reassured them by saying that they had nothing to fear and that it was simply Matan Torah. Bilaam tells them that Hashem is giving to His children a great treasure that has been hidden in storage for 974 generations before He created the world.

The Gemara (Chagigah 13b) states that Hashem intended to give the Torah to the world after one thousand generations, as the Pasuk in Tehillim says, "the Word He commanded for one thousand generations" (Tehillim 105:8). However, in reality, Hashem gave the Torah to the world after only 26 generations counting from Adam HaRishon and ending with Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Panim Yafos states that there is an influence from an ancestor upon a descendent for up to ten generations. Since a person is the composite of their mother and father, the second generation will be 50% of the previous generation. The third generation will be 25%, the fourth will be 12.5% and so on. The fraction of the tenth generation compared to the original generation is 1/1024 or slightly less than .001%. This same idea is found in the Maayana Shel Torah in the name of the Ostrovtsker Rebbe, Meir Yechiel Halevi Halstock, to explain why the Torah tell us that even the tenth generation of a Mamzer or a male from Moav and Amon are not allowed to marry into Kahal Yisroel. One might think that less than .001% would be considered nullified even by the strictest standards. In Halacha there are items that are nullified by 1/60 like non-Kosher taste, 1/100 like Terumah or 1/200 like Arlah, however when something can never be nullified, Chazal say 'it cannot be nullified even with one thousand'.

Based on this I would suggest another possible interpretation of the words from Tehillim "the Word He commanded for one thousand generations" (Tehillim 105:8), a Pasuk that we say each day at the beginning of Pesukei D'Zimra. The Rashbam in his commentary on the Talmud (Baba Basra 121b) explains that Metushelach learned Torah from Adam serving him for 243 years, Shem ben Noach learned Torah from Metushelach serving him for 98 years, and Yaakov Avinu spent 20 years learning Torah from Shem. Thus, since there were only 9 generations between Adam and Metushelach, the Torah was never transmitted to someone that was less than ten generations or 1/1000 of that previous generation. This is how the Torah from Adam HaRishon was passed down and kept before the Torah was given at Har Sinai (see Yoma 28b).

"They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived at Midbar Sinai and encamped (plural) in the wilderness, and Yisroel camped (singular) there opposite the mountain" (Shemos 19:2). The singular form for the word יָחַן 'encamped' elicits Rashi to comment, "Like one man with one heart". Whereas other encampments that use the plural form וַיִּחַנו 'encamped' throughout the Torah, indicating quarrels and disagreements, this encampment was marked with unity, harmony and peace.

Later in the same chapter it says, "The entire people responded (plural) together and said (plural), 'Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do'." One could ask, why here also the Torah did not write the words 'responded' and 'said' in their singular form. Did something change vis-à-vis their level of unity? Perhaps we can suggest that while many people can gather together and unite in one place, for one purpose, the same cannot be said regarding their individual perceptions of what they are experiencing. As the Gemara says (Brachos 58a), "Just as two faces are not identical, so too are two minds not identical". People do not have the same understanding and feelings. When each person said 'we shall do', it meant something different to each person. The exact Kavana intentions of how each one would fulfill their own statement was unique. This is why the words 'responded' and 'said' are in plural form to express that even though they were recited in unison, the words were not all stated with the same Kavana and understanding.

May we dedicate ourselves each day to 'Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do', and in that merit may we see the Geulah Shlayma speedily in our days.