

Shabbat Parashat Yitro We are “Doers”

“*Tikkun Olam*” is a term that we use extensively around our school, particularly in the upper grades. In fact, in Grades 6 & 7, our citizenship and leadership curriculum and courses are called Tikkun Olam 6 and 7. The term literally translates to “Repairing the World” and is a value that has its roots in the Torah and is a driving force behind how and why the Jewish people is expected to live life according to the *mitzvot*/commandments of our tradition. However, like many common phrases or vocabulary terms, because it is used so much, overused in fact according to some, it has lost the essence of its meaning. That essence has its roots in this week’s Torah portion.

This Shabbat, we read the story of B’nei Yisrael coming to camp at the foot of Mount Sinai in preparation for the revelation and acceptance of Torah. Moshe ascends the mountain of God and the transmission of the Ten Commandments kicks off the many months of on-going revelation from God to Moshe to the people that will take place from this *parasha* through the beginning of the Book of Numbers. This week, when the Children of Israel are offered the Torah’s teachings for the first time, it is their response which is the root of our value of *tikkun olam*/repairing the world. In one voice, the entire nation miraculously states: “*Na’aseh v’nishma!*”/“We will do and we will understand!”

Ours is a religion of actions and behaviors. It is understood that as imperfect human beings, we will have thoughts, feelings, and inclinations that may not match with what God would want from us. This is natural. However, Jewish tradition teaches that we are not judged based upon, or held accountable for, thoughts and feelings. Our reputations and “names” are built upon the actions that we either take or do not take, the urges that we do or do not control, the improvements that we do or do not bring into this world. B’nei Yisra’el’s response at Mount Sinai, saying that they will follow the prescribed instructions of the Torah (fulfill the *mitzvot*) and by doing them come to greater understandings of themselves, the world, and of God is the inspiration for this vision for and philosophy of life. The term *tikkun olam* is the catch-all expression that embodies what Judaism believes and says about how human beings are expected to conduct their lives on Earth. “We will do and we will understand!” The learning that takes place through our *mitzvah*–fulfilling actions will inspire us to bring even more *tikkun olam* into the world.

This Shabbat, as we reenact standing at Mount Sinai for the receiving of Torah (literally, as we rise when the Ten Commandments are read aloud in synagogue), may we all be inspired to take action to make the world a better place in small and big ways. May we all perform acts in the spirit of *tikkun olam*, making the world a much better place.

Shabbat Shalom!