

FROM THE PULPIT

Excerpts from messages being presented at area places of worship this weekend.

Rabbi Mordechai Levin, Beth El Synagogue

God tells us: "You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). What does it mean to be holy? What do we have to do to be holy?

The Hebrew Bible teaches that holiness is achieved in the midst of everyday living. Is not something apart from life, it is a part of life. Various verses instruct us as to how holiness is attained: by honoring parents, observing the Sabbath, caring for the poor, dealing honestly in business, refraining from tale bearing, loving one's neighbor and the stranger, acting justly, showing respect to elders, etc. (Leviticus 19).

Every person has the potential to achieve holiness. As a rabbi once expressed: "There is holiness when we strive to be true to the best we know, and when we are kind to someone who cannot possibly be of service to us. There is holiness when we forget what divides us and remember what unites us, and when we love — truly, honestly, and unselfishly. There is holiness when we remember the lonely and bring cheer into our dark corner, and when we share our bread, our ideas, our enthusiasms."



Levin

May the words of the Hebrew Bible inspire each of us to strive to live in the way that God expects us to live.

The Rev. Dan Delzell, Wellspring Lutheran Church, Papillion

Jesus didn't hesitate to describe religious people who will appear before Him on Judgment Day confident of their own righteousness. As incredible as it sounds, Jesus will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Depart from me." (Matthew 7:23) Wow! Those harsh words have brought uncertainty to many people who begin to wonder, "Will Jesus say that to me?"

People often mistake these words from Jesus to mean: "You didn't do enough. You needed to do more." That is not the point Jesus was making.

Jesus always taught that why you do what you do reveals your eternal destiny. It is only after receiving the gift of salvation through faith in Christ that your joyful deeds begin to be good in God's eyes. Those who rely upon their own efforts to earn heaven rather than trusting Christ alone for salvation are those who will hear Jesus tell them, "I never knew you."

Does Jesus know you? Is Christ's death on the cross enough to pay for your sins, or do your sincere and noble deeds buy your way into heaven? On



Delzell

Judgment Day, will you be trusting even partially in your own works, or completely in Christ's work on the cross as your ticket into paradise? There are only two roads and there is only One Savior.

Kollengode Parameshwaran, Hindu Temple, Omaha

The Path of Devotion (Bhakti Yoga) which can be loosely defined as a means to salvation (Moksha) through pure devotional love. Amongst the Hindu masses this spiritual practice has a very large following. The underlying simplicity of the concept of devotion, which requires of the devotee an expression of undiluted love with no abstract and abstruse intellectual concepts to be tackled, is perhaps the reason for its widespread practice. The Hindu devotee supplicates to the supreme God manifesting in different forms. The devotee establishes a spiritual relationship with his or her God which has an almost personal quality to the relationship.

Although the origin of the concept of devotion (Bhakti) dates back to antiquity, the widespread practice of this discipline owes itself to the Hindu poet saints from different schools of philosophy who date back from as early as 5th-6th century to as recent as 12th-13th century A.D. Different schools of this practice sprang from this original concept depending on the object of devotion. The impact this spiritual concept has had on the practicing Hindus is immense and extended beyond the confines of such formal schools and movements. Philosophical

speculation was a concern for the minority of the practitioners of the Hindu faith but for the vast majority of the masses a more concrete and simpler spiritual path was needed. These philosophical schools met those needs and changed the way people thought and made the concept of Bhakti easily accessible to all, redirecting the instinctual emotion of love and channeling it to the highest pursuit of God and self-realization.

This led to the opening of the cloistered environment surrounding the practice of Hindu religion and made it more egalitarian. In general, this liberal mass movement, by its cutting across the caste boundaries, provided an alternative vehicle to the Hindu masses and respite from the orthodox Brahminical systems. By being more than a path to salvation, the Bhakti movement has not only produced a mass of devotional literature, music and art that has enriched the Indian and world culture and gave India renewed spiritual impetus but has also led to the simplification of the practice of Hindu religion and the breaking down of artificial social boundaries.