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Rabbi Wayne Allen

*Parashat HaShavuah Series*

**Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei**

In an unusual locution, the outer altar upon which the sacrifices are offered is called by the Torah *Kodesh Kodashim*, holy of holies. Previously, the term “holy of holies” was reserved only for the inner sanctum of the Tabernacle, the place where the Holy Ark was kept (Exodus 29:37). This extraordinary usage of the term “holy of holies” caught the attention of Nahmanides, one of the great rabbinic scholars of the thirteenth century.

Nahmanides explains that the altar comes to be called “holy of holies” because of the nature of the sacrifices offered upon it. The most important of the sacrifices were called *Kodshei Kodashim*, so the altar upon which these sacrifices were placed was consequently called *Kodesh Kodashim*. What Nahmanides is arguing is that how the altar is used determines its standing. Since it is used for the holiest of purposes, it comes to be called holy itself.

In fact, the same is true with people. When people do holy things, they, too, earn the title “holy.” The classic example is that of Rabbi Isaac Luria. Rabbi Isaac ben Solomon Luria was one of the foremost and most influential Kabbalists in Jewish history. His mystical teachings became the foundation for Hasidism. To his followers, however, Rabbi Isaac Luria was known as “Ha-Ari HaKadosh,” the holy “Ari,” which is both the Hebrew word for lion and an acronym of “Our master, Rabbi Isaac.” The Ari became renowned for his exceptional piety, his ascetic life, and saintly character. All of these qualities earned him the title “holy.”

Likewise, Rabbi Ya’akov Yitzhak earned the title the Holy Seer of Lublin. When he died in 1814, the entire Hasidic world went into mourning. Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz eulogized him with the words: “The Holy Seer is dead - and the world goes on? I don’t understand.” A disciple remembered the Holy Seer as a man who “possessed all the qualities and virtues of the prophet Isaiah - except that he did not live in the Holy Land.” It was these virtues that made him holy.

Indeed, it is possible for any person who lives an exemplary life to earn the title “holy” by doing holy deeds and living a holy life.

*Shabbat Shalom!*

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