מדרש

Midrash

ON GENESIS 15:1

Why the mitzvot's details matter so much

Bereshit Rabbah 44:1

Rav teaches that the mitzvot (commandments) were given not because God has a personal stake in their details—such as how an animal is ritually slaughtered—but in order to refine (letzaref) and purify those who perform them. The midrash then applies this idea of refinement to Abraham himself, reading Psalms 18:31 as describing how God's perfect, refined word tested and purified Abraham, notably through the fiery furnace, and in turn serves as his shield. The verse "fear not, Abram, I am a shield for you" thus confirms that the very God who refines through mitzvot also protects the one who has been so refined. AI SUMMARY

“After these matters, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying: Fear not, Abram, I am a shield for you; your reward is very great” (Genesis 15:1). “After these matters, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying…” “The Almighty’s way is faultless; the word of the Lord is refined [tzerufa]. He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him” (Psalms 18:31) – if His ways are faultless, all the more so that He Himself is.

Rav said: The mitzvot were given only to refine [letzaref] people through them. After all, why should the Holy One blessed be He care whether one slaughters an animal from the throat or he slaughters it from the nape? Thus we learn that the mitzvot were given only to refine the creations with them.

Another interpretation, “the Almighty’s way is faultless” – this refers to Abraham, as it is stated: “You found his heart faithful before You” (Nehemiah 9:8). “The word of the Lord is refined” – as the Holy One blessed be He refined him in the fiery furnace. “He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him” – “fear not, Abram, I am a shield for you.”