

Moses, Maimonides and the Alter Rebbe

Letters and Numbers of Torah – Shemot

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Exodus 4:2-4:3

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְיָהוָה [מַזֶּה] מַה זֶה בְּיָדְךָ וַיֹּאמֶר מִטֵּה

And the Lord said to him, "What is this in your hand?" And he said, "A staff."

וַיֹּאמֶר הֲשִׁלִּיכֵהוּ אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁלִיכֵהוּ אֶרְצָה וַיְהִי לְנָחָשׁ וַיִּנָּס מִפְּנֵי

And He said, "Cast it to the ground," and he cast it to the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses fled from before it

We find a kri-and-a-ksiv in the phrase, Mah zeh b'yadecha, "What is in your hand?" How do we understand this?

Rashi on Exodus 4:2

Its simple meaning is [that God is talking to Moses] as a person who says to his friend, "Do you admit that this before you is a stone?" He answers him, "Yes." "Well, I will make it into a tree."

Why must Rashi give a parable at all? Can't we understand the simple phrase 'ma zeh' on its own? Furthermore, in the above verse, a staff turns into a snake. How is the parable — a stone turning into a tree — relevant?