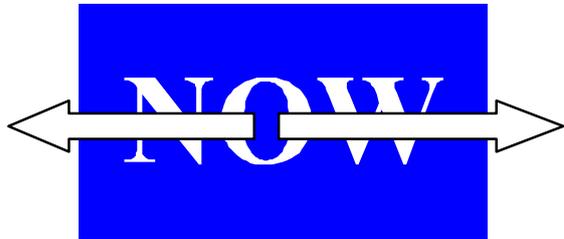


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Editor’s Note,

Thanks to this month’s contributors. Present content seems to be driven by the arrival of a number of interesting new books. I’d appreciate your thoughts on whatever you are reading for inclusion in future issues and whatever you are writing would be even more welcome. As an example, the next NOWletter will be another single subject issue, an essay by long-time contributor Eric Best.

The NOWletter appears between 8 and 12 times every year and is a vehicle for news and views about awakening to what is really going on. The content is based primarily on contributions from readers, either their own writing or examples of what moves or interests them. Subscription is free.

Index of articles and back numbers from 1993 at:
<http://www.capacitie.org/now/archive.htm>

C.S. Lewis: Reflections on the Psalms, An Appreciation from Louise Joy

When I was a child, I learnt by heart the heavens and the valley of the Psalms, majestic language which has stayed with me all my life. Over my bed was a portrait of Jesus in white robes, all the children of the world around his knee. "Jesus loves the little children" we sang from the Methodist School Hymnal. All was sweetness and light.

When I was eight years old I started a Bible Study group, "The King of Psalms". It was a shock then to read C.S. Lewis on "The Cursing Psalms" with their "spirit of hatred" and "refinement of malice"; a blessing on anyone who dashes the brains of a Babylonian baby against the rocks. Sounds like Zeus... In his classic style, C.S. Lewis twists and turns the discussion: the Jewish writers were more vitriolic and vindictive than other ancient cultures, in all of whom hatred was not disguised, existing in a 'wild', 'natural' and 'childlike' condition almost comic in naivety.

This hatred, this indignation, expressed in The Psalms, is not simply personal vindictiveness but a rage against something which is "manifestly wrong". The Jewish people cursed more bitterly because they took Right and Wrong more seriously than other nations. We are more subtle in disguising our ill will towards others. The animal rage of the Psalmist against Wrong is nearer to truth than a pseudo-scientific tolerance towards the offender and not the victim. This hatred - festering, gloating, undisguised - is a reaction to cruelty and injustice for which rage is the appropriate response.

Pettiness on the other hand is a despicable emotion which C.S. Lewis invites us to see in ourselves. In the middle of an exquisite Psalm, there is gloating that the Psalmist can enjoy his feast while his enemies can only look on from outside. In fact his enjoyment is not complete without their exclusion. I actually heard someone express this feeling, looking out from a restaurant on to the street. Hard to believe and yet I heard the words echoing the Psalms.

Revenge in the Psalms seems out of proportion and yet whenever we say "He'll live to be sorry for it." we are enjoying the same satisfaction, chewing the cud. In his inimitable way, C.S. Lewis brings these gross emotions of the Psalms right back to where they belong. In us. Time and again he notes their value.

Contradictions are second nature to the author of The Screwtape Letters: in his discussion of "Judgement" in the Psalms, he notes, "the worse man may be in the right against the better man" and "being wronged does not commonly make people amiable". In my parallel reading of Stefan Zweig, that other master of the incongruous, I find Rosbepierre, instigator of The Terror in Revolutionary France, was totally incorruptible, concerned only "for the sake of all mankind to establish a secure footing for The Republic". It was the devious, utterly self seeking Joseph Fouché, 'weaving the threads of discord', who survived him. The dangers of self righteousness, of being sure we are right, are ever present for those with high standards of purity.

A surprise is the rejoicing of the psalmist in welcoming the Judgement of God. This is not the Terror depicted in centuries of Christian art and literature, the dreadful last Day. It is rather a longing of the poor for a Just Judge, a kind of 'Jack the Giant Killer', in the inimitable analogy of C.S. Lewis. Who are "the poor" in our society? They may be, he suggests, ordinary people who do not know how to cheat on their Income Tax.

The Law, "sweeter than honey" is our next surprise. Not the heavens declaring the glory of God and the firmament showing his handiwork of my childhood, but The

Law in which the ancient Jew delighted. Always on the alert to the dangers of spiritual pride, we are led finally to value the "beauty, sweetness and preciousness" of The Law whose ethics we take for granted until we are surrounded by cruelty and the loss of individual rights.

With a delightful touch of whimsy, C.S.Lewis leads us through the Praising Psalms. He finds no harm in comic relief however serious the topic. How ludicrous of God to demand praise, how childish, how self centred. Turning praise around to spontaneous enjoyment, he finds the world "rings with praise - lovers praising their mistresses, praise of weather, wines, dishes, flowers...even sometimes politicians and scholars." We can't help praising everything we delight in and value. The praise completes our enjoyment. Fully to enjoy is to glorify.

Why this jumble and not a lucid, flawless, orderly, ethical exposition, appealing to our intellect? What is required is not merely knowledge but a certain insight, getting the focus right. The Psalms are poems with all the hyperbole, emotional rather than logical connections to lyric poetry. This is truth at a deeper level, truth with second meanings, resonating in Plato, Virgil, the pagan myths and The Psalms.

Louise Joy

Where we find:
 The Heavens: Psalm 104:2, Psalm 19:1 King James Version
 Valley: Psalm 23:4 King James Version
 Children: Methodist School Hymnal (undated) Hymn 63
 2 and 3 Ludgate Circus Buildings and the various Methodist Book Depots of the Australian Commonwealth and New Zealand
 Portrait of Jesus: in the Little Bungalow, Azamgarh, North India where my parents, Drs. Ted and Edna Gault were Methodist medical missionaries at the Christian Hospital 1937 - 1942.
 King of Psalms: Woodstock School, Landour, Mussoorie UP North India 1940s
 C.S. Lewis: Clive Stapleton Lewis (29 November 1898 - 22 November 1963)
 "Reflections on the Psalms": First published by Geoffrey Bles 1958. First issued in Fontana Books 1961. Printed in Great Britain
 Author of "Mere Christianity" (1941 -1944), "The Screwtape Letters" (1942), "The Chronicles of Narnia", seven fantasy novels for children, which sold over 100 million copies, translated into 30 languages, an all time favourite being, "The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe" (1950)
 Cursing Psalms: chapter 3, pp 23 -33: Psalm 109: 5,6,7,9,11,13 ("the worst"), Psalm 69:23 ("refinement of malice")
 Childish, naive: Psalm 139
 Pettiness, vulgarity: Psalm 23:5
 Judgement: chapter 2, pp 15 - 22. Psalm 67:4; 96:12,13; 35:24: 9:8,12; 68:5; 10:2; 50:6-21; 143:2; 7:3-5: 35:12-14; 7:8
 Praising: chapter 9, pp 77-83. Psalm 50:23; 54:1-6; 30:10; 88:10: 119: 164,175
 Honey, The Law: chapter 6, pp 49-57. Psalm 119: 4,16, 54, 72, 103,
 Second Meanings: chapter 10, pp 84 - 91, chapter 12, pp 101 - 115
 Stefan Zweig: "Joseph Fouche: The Portrait of a Politician" Guild Books No.400. Translated from the German by Eden and Cedar Paul. Published for The British Publishers Guild by Cassell &Co. Ltd. London First Edition 1930. Second Edition 1934. First Published in Guild Books 1948.
 Zeus: "Greek Myths: Gods, Heroes and Monsters: Their Stories, Their Sources and Their Meanings" by Ellen Switzer and Costas with Photography by Costas. A Jean Karl Book. Atheneum 1988. New York
 Myth: "Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of Self" by Marilynne Robinson. Yale 2010
 158 pp. Reviewed in The Guardian Weekly 23 - 07 - 2010, pp 36,37 "Our most profound thinkers have been concerned with metaphysical questions and to call them insoluble or irrelevant, is no reason to dismiss the process of deep enquiry."

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The Audible Life Stream by Alistair Conwell

Ancient secret of Dying While Living

In providing a commentary for this recently published book I have made life simpler for myself by leading with my response to the book and following these notes with the author's introduction in full. The introduction provides a comprehensive outline and there is no point in me trying to paraphrase.

I was reluctant to make any comment at all on first viewing as the content seemed to be completely outside my own experience. The fact that I am primarily a visual rather than auditory person made me doubtful about my suitability for the job. As I read the book I found that Conwell's description of the Audible Life Stream phenomena seemed to be a very close match to what had turned up in my case as visual phenomena and that awakened my interest in what appeared to be an alternative and equally effective route.

In my early years of meditation which often involved retreats of several days I found that as the busy mind slowed down, my normal thought processes were replaced by patterns of extraordinary beauty and complexity of shape and colour, ever changing, never repeated and infinitely superior in design to anything I could have created and put together in my everyday conscious state. I named this phenomenon the 'Unconscious Display', a misnomer I realize in that there was awareness of the process and I suppose in labelling it unconscious I was trying to capture the strong sense that it was nothing to do with me.

As I continued to read I was reminded of several experiences which were almost identical to some of the auditory phenomena dealt with in the book. The most extreme case occurred one night as I lay in bed in our hut in the hills. I sensed a deep throbbing which I immediately interpreted as a heavy vehicle parked on the nearby dirt road with diesel engine running, an unlikely explanation in view of the location but it was so persistent that I arose and went searching, torch in hand but there was nothing but the sound. Eventually I fell asleep and as soon as it was light I went down and followed the course of the river to check whether someone had an irrigation pump working but again there was nothing.

There is much of interest in the book and a great deal about which I must, in the absence of direct comparable experience, remain agnostic. However, it is a fascinating read and presents an interesting and what for me is an original approach to what I find the most interesting aspects of our being.

The book covers a number of matters explored in recent NOWletter articles namely, death, time and eternity and addresses the perennial question of what is involved in awakening, by indicating a path which might well provide an answer for many people. There is another interesting connection in that one of the earliest NOWletters, number 5, September 1993, contains a brief note on Darryl Reaney's book *The Death of Forever* and this is also referred to in the book as well as a note about one of our founding members, John Wren-Lewis.

Alan Mann

The Author's Introduction

Physicians are aware that the sense of hearing is the last sense faculty to dissolve at the time of death. However, they, like the vast majority of people, are unaware of the fact that when this physical sense ceases to function our capacity to perceive spiritual sound naturally takes the ascendancy.

But why should we be concerned about death—after all we've all got lives to live? The answer is very simple; having complete knowledge of the spiritual significance of death will undoubtedly determine how we live our lives. For in the final analysis, it is through our knowledge and understanding of death that all the ultimate questions about the meaning and purpose of life can be fully answered. Yet, for most of us death remains the mystery of mysteries. Paradoxical though it may seem, mystics throughout history have said that it is possible to solve this mystery while being very much alive—to die while living. The secret is to consciously tune into and eventually merge with the phenomenon known in the West, at least, as the Audible Life Stream or Primordial Sound Current.

The Audible Life Stream is the central tenet of the most ancient spiritual teachings known. Mystics say it is the quintessential fabric of the entire universe—physical and spiritual. Without it nothing would exist. It is the essence of all things and, in fact, resounds continuously within each and every one of us. Put simply, this stream of conscious vibrating energy, which has the most enchanting musical quality, is our immortal spiritual essence.

Thus, this book is an attempt to provide convincing evidence of this timeless spiritual maxim and highlight its importance in the process of death—the one event of life that is the most heavily pregnant with spiritual potential—whenever it will eventually occur. Also given in the concluding chapters is advice about learning the science of dying while living to experience the Audible Life Stream for yourself.

As to the evidence; simply explained scientific principles in Chapters 2 and 3 will show that the Audible Life Stream phenomenon and the practice of dying while living are perfectly aligned with modern-day quantum physics theories, including the much talked about idea of a Theory of Everything based on the concept of superstrings. Believing these one-dimensional vibrating superstrings resonate in a musical pattern, some physicists agree that the theory is one which successfully unifies all the primary forces of nature, giving us a picture of ultimate reality.

Chapter 4 presents scriptural excerpts from the major religious traditions that make mention of mysterious sounds and music, foreshadowing the death of the physical body and birth of the spirit.

Yet arguably, Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 are the most compelling because they include testimonies from researchers, and ordinary people of diverse backgrounds, whose spiritual awareness has been profoundly deepened after their lives were unexpectedly touched by what could only have been the Audible Life Stream. For example, although seemingly unaware of the phenomenon, it was apparently through the vibrations of the Audible Life Stream that out-of-body experience (OBE) research pioneer, Robert Monroe, was able to astral travel at will.

And when he heard its other-worldly musical tones he was left to ask himself if it was indeed God. Also, internationally renowned music therapist and author, Don Campbell, was profoundly moved after being miraculously healed of a life-threatening condition by this potent force, which he refers to as an 'inner sound' not perceived by the physical ears.

However, holding special importance in the weight of evidence are the numerous near-death experience (NDE) testimonials that include references to hearing wondrous sounds and enchanting music, notably far superior to even the finest music of this world. Like Monroe and Campbell, these people seemingly had no inkling of the Audible Life Stream phenomenon before their life-changing experiences.

In his best-selling book, *Life After Life*, celebrated NDE investigator, Dr Raymond Moody, admits:

In many cases, various unusual auditory sensations are reported to occur at or near death.

In such cases, however, death occurs unexpectedly and usually as a result of an accident or unforeseen complications during a medical procedure. The person has little or no idea what actually takes place and is totally ill-prepared.

Equally ill-prepared for death, are the vast majority of us. Despite its inevitability, medical professionals know that most people secretly deny death. American physician, Sherwin Nuland, observes:

None of us seems psychologically able to cope with the thought of our own state of death... As with every other looming terror and looming temptation, we seek always to deny the power of death and the icy hold in which it grips human thought.

So in setting the scene for the book, Chapter 1 will identify the true nature of our death denial and fear. Although we may not realize it, our death phobia impacts greatly upon how we live our lives. Yet, this fear can be overcome if we gain an experiential understanding of death through preparation. Preparation, in this sense, is not in terms of the drawing up of wills and testaments or making funeral arrangements. While these things are certainly necessary, it is the spiritual preparations that are far more important because death is a doorway into the realm of spirit, from where we have all originally come. We can enter through this doorway temporarily while still living in this world by consciously immersing ourselves into the current of the Audible Life Stream. By doing this, with proper guidance, a conscious experience of death can be knowingly induced—safely and without any threat to the physical body. Breathing and heart-rate continue very subtly, but for all intents and purposes one is dead to the physical world while very much alive to the realm of spirit.

This then is an invitation to, firstly, acknowledge the true nature of the spiritual doorway that death presents for us and, secondly, to learn what preparatory steps can be taken to open and actually enter through the door while still alive. Having done this, you will perhaps view life, which ultimately has no beginning and no end, in the widest of contexts with literally infinite possibilities.

Alistair Conwell 13 March 2009

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The Myth of 'Doing Nothing' from Colin Drake

I was recently talking to a friend who complained of existential anxiety which was dispelled by reading a good book on nonduality or attending an inspiring satsang, but which always returned. So I asked him what he 'did' on a daily basis to establish himself in nondual awareness, whereupon he grinned sheepishly indicating that he did nothing. Which made me ponder the teachings of many modern teachers of nondualism who say there is nothing to 'do' and everything just 'happens by itself'. Indeed even in my book *Beyond the Separate Self* there is a chapter entitled 'Nothing to Achieve, Find or Get' which could give the impression that there is nothing that one needs to do ... However I can assure you that if one continues to live in the same headspace without 'doing anything' then there will no change in one's outlook and anxiety levels. For as I say in the book:

At a deeper level than this flow of fleeting objects (thoughts and sensations) we are this constant subject, awareness itself; this is already the case and as such cannot be achieved. All that is required is to realize this!

So awareness is central to our being, whilst thoughts and sensations are peripheral. This is self-evident for without awareness our thoughts and sensations would pass unnoticed. Thus we cannot lose this awareness; we just need to stop overlooking it.

It is impossible to get that awareness which you already are, and thus have in full abundance. All that is required is to recognize this. In this respect you do need to 'get' this, but this is in fact nothing as it is not a thing but the 'ground' from which all things arise, in which they exist and back into which they subside. So there is in fact 'no thing to get' and you do need to 'get' nothing(ness)!

So although there is:

- 'nothing to achieve,' we do need to realise the deeper level of pure awareness, for this to be the case.
- 'nothing to find', we do need to stop overlooking the awareness that is always present.
- 'nothing to get', we do need to recognize that we already have this awareness.

This realization, or recognition, of the deeper level of pure awareness is easily accomplished by directly investigating our own moment-to-moment experience. My book aims to provide a simple straightforward framework in which this investigation can take place. However even after the recognition of this deeper level we do need to cultivate, and establish, this by further investigation/contemplation for as it says in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*:

All those of all [differing] potential, regardless of their acumen or dullness,
May realise [this intrinsic awareness].

However, for example, even though sesame is the source of oil and milk of butter,

But there will be no extract if these are unpressed or unchurned,

Similarly, even though all beings actually possess the seed of buddhahood,
Sentient beings will not attain buddhahood without experiential cultivation.

Nonetheless, even a cowherd will attain liberation if he engages in experiential cultivation.

For, even though one may not know how to elucidate [this state] intellectually,
 One will [through experiential cultivation] become manifestly established in it.
 One whose mouth has actually tasted molasses,
 Does not need others to explain its taste.

Even after one has ‘tasted molasses’ this taste will dissipate after a time, requiring further ingesting for the taste to reappear. In the same way the effect of ‘awakening’ to the reality of the deeper level of pure awareness will dissipate if one ‘nods off’ again and re-identifies with the mind/body. So one needs to continually inquire into/investigate/contemplate the nature of Self and Reality for this ‘awakening’ to become established. It is only in this established awakening that all existential anxiety is banished.

Colin Drake

Beyond the Separate Self is available at www.nonduality.com

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The Charismatic Path by Alex Reichel

A preliminary note to advise that Alex Reichel’s latest book, *The Charismatic Path*, is now available. He sent me a copy which I promised to review for a future NOWletter. I am aiming for the October issue. It is published by St Francis Community, 175 Georges River Crescent, Oyster Bay, NSW 2225.

Confession of a Buddhist Atheist from Alan Mann

The author, Stephen Batchelor, introduces the book as a thirty seven year journey through the Buddhist tradition. It is a follow-up to his *Buddhism without Beliefs*. These regular publications indicate that he is beginning to follow the example of Don Cuppitt who is renowned for regular updates of his spiritual and philosophical progress. He mentions Cuppitt’s latest work *For the Time Being* and finds Cuppitt more interesting and relevant than any of the contemporary writers on Buddhism.

My first impression was not very promising because the back cover of the book carries an endorsement from Christopher Hitchens whose rabid anti theism and assumption that the God of the Madrasa or Sunday school is what everyone means by the word, makes me wonder whether he is bad, mad or just sad.

Batchelor has an engaging personality and the book opens with a biographical journey through his spiritual development from initial training as a monk in the

Tibetan tradition through to his present situation which he describes as that of a fifty six year old secular, non-denominational lay Buddhist. He intersperses accounts of his own progress with an account of the Buddha's life and times and this is embellished with descriptions of the places and journeys of the Buddha based on Batchelor's own travels in the steps of Gotama.

Realising he could no longer sustain a belief in such matters as rebirth, and the traditional forms of Buddhism in general, he had an urge to find out what the Buddha was really like. He mentions that at one point in his journey he joined a Zen monastery where the master Kusan Sunim gave him the koan 'what is this?' (p.62) I thought it an excellent question and think it is more penetrating than the familiar 'what am I'.

His concern about the accumulated myths, legends and superstitions compared with what he understands as the essential teachings of Gotama led him to undertake an investigation of the life of the Buddha to see if he could sort the wheat from the chaff.

This involved a painstaking search through the earliest records, principally the Pali Canon, the first attempt to record the sayings and sermons which had been passed on by rote for the four hundred years or so following the death of Gotama.

The resulting picture of the Buddha is of a very secular human being, albeit a remarkably wise one, who was living in tumultuous times and subject to family and political pressures which make his achievement all the more remarkable.

Disenchanted with Buddhist superstition Batchelor stumbles on continental philosophy, finding a contemporary understanding, which corresponds with the more down-to-earth aspects of Buddhism. He finds Husserl's 'bracketing' and Heidegger's 'Being' of particular relevance as we readers and contributors to the NOWletter have also remarked upon from time to time.

On one occasion, in Switzerland, he makes a side trip to hear a teacher at Saanen who he thought made good sense and who concluded his talk, rather like the Buddha, with the advice to his listeners that they should rely on their own understanding and the importance of not following any teacher. He ponders on whether both of these two teachers thought their own teachings were exempt from this rule.

I thought his earlier book, *Buddhism Without Belief* better than his present work as I imagine that Buddhism draws its strength primarily from experience and only secondly from the teachings, rituals, etc., that provide a framework of belief. I felt that in this latest book, Batchelor, like Hitchens, was offering up the straw man God, for targeting and destruction. His arrival at the conclusion of the militant atheists of this world, that God in any form is an illusion seems to miss the point completely and render a life devoted to Buddhism, as his has been, quite meaningless. His meditation on the koan presented by his Korean teacher, the question 'what is this?' resulted in abandonment of attempts to find an answer, contentment and finally a point where he says "meditation became completely unremarkable, nothing special at all". A result that, in my view, can be formulated as 'this—is what is. And 'what is' as sacred, whole, the All, absolute and, if you are not squeamish about the word—God; the divine revealed as simply the secular in its fullness.

People often remark that Buddhists don't believe in God(s), notwithstanding the various devotional aspects of some forms of Buddhism. So, what is going on? Is it that they don't believe in a creator God? The end of the Buddhist spectrum that I find to be of interest is that which speaks of recovering our first nature, the Way, etc. As far as I can tell from my own enquiry this is simply a manner of talking about God in

the way that ‘liberal’ Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Jews, etc, have spoken for ages; an attempt to refer to the mystery whilst deliberately avoiding the mud that has attached itself to the word God over the centuries. I share the view of another Zen Buddhist friend and occasional contributor to the NOWletter that there is only God. Consequently, the Batchelor outlook is for me yet another mystery. Buddhism seems to be a broad church and, if so, all to the good.

Many years ago my cousin sent me a copy of the Hsin Hsin Ming. It is a poem, (sermon or sutra) believed to have been written by Sengstan (Sosan) 3rd Zen Patriarch. It is the most wonderful expression of that which, the poem itself assures us, cannot be spoken. So, I wonder how Batchelor would explain this poem, what does it say to him? Isn’t that what his Korean teacher was asking him to *see* by presenting him with the koan ‘*what is this?*’ The wide range of response in Buddhism leads me to wonder if certain personalities, on reading the Hsin Hsin Ming, conclude that atheism is the answer and others that there is only God?

I found Batchelor’s new book very interesting and some of his conclusions very much in line with my understanding. My progression as a lay seeker seems to have mirrored his professional exploration at certain stages of his journey. However, he has clearly left me at some fork in the road at which I have yet to arrive or didn’t notice in passing. Well worth a read in my opinion and I’d welcome other opinions to include in future NOWletters.

Confession of a Buddhist Atheist, Spiegel & Grau, New York. I bought the book from the Book Depository UK which has a very attractive policy of shipping books at the standard rate worldwide without charging for freight.

<http://www.bookdepository.co.uk>

Alan Mann

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Quotations from The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth

Page 304—On mystics and the ‘What is This?’ question.

...The other-worldly mystic, content to stay upon his pinnacle and to overlook all other altitudes, deserves the contempt he gets: indeed, his spiritual pride and spiritual egoism (arising from the illusion that his own salvation is a private somewhat, independent of the salvation of others) make him far worse than the ordinary sensual man who has no such pretensions. The true mystic, on the other hand, completing the circle, returns to eliminate our common life, to serve regretfully all creatures, and to demonstrate the truth that the spiritual is not other than this despised material world, but the same world seen under the form of eternity.

Douglas Harding

Page 335—On the ‘What is This?’ question

“There is nothing that is supernatural in the whole system of our redemption. Every part of it has its grounds in the workings and powers of nature...”

William Law The Spirit of Love

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