**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Balak 5772**

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**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**Taking the Plunge**

 In our portion this week Chukas, Hashem commands us to perform one of the most puzzling mitzvahs of the Torah, the ritual of the parah adumah - the red heifer (cow). Hashem commands that a red heifer, perfect in its redness, be slaughtered and burned. Its ashes are then mixed in a special container with spring water, and sprinkled on anyone who was ritually impure as the result of coming into contact with a dead body. (see Bamidbar 19:2 to 19:22) The procedure of the red heifer served to purify a Jew and allow him to return to communal life. The following story illustrates the power of the purification in Jewish life.

**Survivors Ended up in Far-flung**

**Countries with Weak Jewish Communities**

 After the Second World War, most of the Jews who had survived the inferno of Europe went on to settle in Jewish communities around the world, most of all in Eretz Yisroel and in North America. However, some of the Jews ended up in far-flung countries with little or no Jewish community presence.

 One such Jew was Solomon Fuchs (not his real name). Before the war, Mr. Fuchs was a chassid of the Gerrer Rebbe. Mr. Fuchs survived the war, however his dedication to Torah and mitzvahs did not survive with him. He left the ashes of Europe and made his way to New Zealand, which at that time in the 1940's hosted a tiny Jewish community.

**Survived the War with a Daughter**

 Mr. Fuchs survived the war with a daughter. Although he himself was not religious, he felt that it was important for his daughter to receive a formal Jewish education. Being that New Zealand almost totally lacked formal Jewish educational institutions during the post-war years, Mr. Fuchs was forced to send his daughter to learn in the United States.

 Sometime in 1949, Mr. Fuchs came to the United States from New Zealand to visit his daughter who was learning in a girls school in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. At the time, Crown Heights hosted a bustling Jewish community. One of the most prolific Jewish organizations in Crown Heights was, and is to this day, Chabad Lubavitch.

 When Mr. Fuchs arrived in New York after a journey of several days, he made his way to Crown Heights to visit his daughter. Soon after his arrival, Mr. Fuchs entered a certain building and waited for the elevator to come. He entered the elevator with a Torah scholar who had a penetrating glance. The Torah scholar asked Mr. Fuchs from where he came and what his business was here in America.

**Wanted to Know if there was**

**A Mikvah in New Zealand**

 The man also asked Mr. Fuchs about the extent of the Jewish community in New Zealand. Sadly, Mr. Fuchs admitted that New Zealand lacked the most basic of Jewish communal services. Specifically, the man wanted to know if there were a mikvah in New Zealand.

 Unfortunately, the answer was "no," besides of course the ocean which surrounds the country. (The mikvah, a ritual pool, is one of the most, if not the most important institution in a Jewish community. In fact, if a community only has enough money to build either a mikvah or a synagogue, they are obligated to build the mikvah first. A minyan can pray almost anywhere, but only a mikvah can purify the impure.)

**Parted with an Exchange of Blessings**

 Mr. Fuchs was very impressed by the Torah scholar, who happened to get off on the next floor. The two parted with exchanges of blessings and good will. After the man left, Mr. Fuchs asked another person in the elevator who the man was. "That is the son-in-law of Reb Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shlita."

 Mr. Fuchs went on to meet his daughter. They enjoyed a nice visit together, before Mr. Fuchs returned home several days later. A few years after Mr. Fuchs had visited his daughter, the then Lubavitcher Rebbe Reb Yosef Yitzchok passed away, and his son-in-law, Reb Menachem Mendel Schneerson became the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Under the leadership of the Rebbe, Chabad grew tremendously, spreading out around the world to far-flung places such as Nepal, Morocco, S. Monica, South Africa, Hawaii and even New Zealand!

 Meanwhile, Mr. Fuchs's daughter married and began raising a religious family. Mr. Fuchs himself was inspired by the holiness of his daughter's orthodox family. And soon, he decided to return to his Jewish roots, fulfilling the words of the Prophet: "He shall restore the heart of fathers to children..." (Malachi 3:24) He gradually increased his mitzvah observance and eventually became fully mitzvah observant.

 Some 40 years later, in the late 1980's, when Mr. Fuchs was already a great-grandfather several times over, he made another visit to Crown Heights.

**Opportunity to Visit 770**

 For the first time in his life, Mr. Fuchs had the opportunity to visit 770 Eastern Parkway one Sunday morning, where the Lubavitcher Rebbe used to hand out one-dollar bills to those who came to visit. Mr. Fuchs entered the shul alone and joined the large throng of Jews who had gathered that morning to take a dollar. Mr. Fuchs was alone with his thoughts and he spoke with nobody as the line moved along. When it came Mr. Fuchs's time to take a dollar from the Rebbe, the Rebbe motioned for him to stop. Immediately, the Rebbe asked Mr. Fuchs, "Nu," Asked the Rebbe sweetly in Yiddish: "Is there a mikvah in New Zealand yet?"

 Mr. Fuchs was floored. He nearly fainted. The Rebbe had remembered the aged Mr. Fuchs who now wore a beard and sported a black hat. The elevator ride some 40 years previous must have lasted for no more than one and a half minutes.(Heard from E.Z.L)

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone.*

**A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

**Being Moody**

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| **QUESTION:** |

What is the meaning of being moody?

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| **ANSWER:** |

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Moody actually means, yielding to the *yetzer harah*, (one’s evil inclination) because the person must at all times be under control. He has to know he is an *eved Hashem*, (servant of Hashem) and he must be in control.

 Imagine a man sitting at the steering wheel of a car and he's on the Thruway, a big busy road, and he decides to go into a mood! Now life is a highway, and the highway is more dangerous than any one that we travel with a car. We cannot afford to yield to moods. At all times a man must know first and foremost that he’s standing *lifnei Hashem* (before G-d.)



**Your Responsible to Hashem**

 He is responsible. You're responsible to *Hashem*. You can't yield to sadness, *atzvus*; no! Sadness is the *yetzer harah*. You can't yield to *atzlus*, to laziness. It's the *yetzer harah*. A man should always be in a good mood, that's also a form of *bechira.* Cheerful mood, to be *someiach bechelko,(happy with one’s lot in life)* a man should be happy with *Hashem* at all times.

 *Asherei ha'am sh'hashem elokuv*, we have many thoughts to think, and each one of them is a guided thought.

 Sitting at the steering wheel, you have in front of you all kinds of dials. You want to think about something? Dial *ahavas Hashem*, (loving G-d) dial *someiach bechelko*, dial *moreh shomayim*, all kinds of things. But never take your eyes off the road and the steering wheel.

 Becoming moody just means to yield to the yetzer harah, and moody people are the victims of every kind of temptation and sin. It's only when people become sad and morose or dejected, then they're customers for the yetzer harah.

Reprinted from last week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller,” based on a transcription of Rabbi Miller’s answer to one of the questions asked him by members who attended his classic Thursday night lectures in his Flatbush shul.

**How to See Israel**

 A man who had been sent from Tsfat (Zefat), in the Holy Land, to gather funds for his community visited the city of Rabbi Avraham Dov of Avritch and spoke wonders in praise of Eretz Yisrael. He described the air, the landscape, flowers and fruits. In language rich in expression, he pictures the holy places and gravesites of the tzadikim.

**An Enthusiasm that Knew No Bounds**

 His enthusiasm knew no bounds, until he finally bubbled over and said, "Rebbe, what can I say? Why should I go on? Even the rocks of Eretz Yisrael are pearls and precious stones of all sorts!"

 The Rebbe who had already previously pined to go up to the Holy Land could no longer find peace. In 1830 at age 65, he left his city and his flock of chassidim, went up to Israel, and settled in Tsfat.

 Sometime afterwards the funds gatherer returned home from his travels. He came before the Rebbe and asked with interest, "Well, then, has the Rebbe found what he hoped to see?"

 "The land is, indeed, very, very good," said the Rebbe. "The holy places, the graves of the tzadikim, the Western Wall, the tomb of Rachel, the air -- the air of Eretz Yisrael grants wisdom -- everything is exceptional. But when you said the rocks were pearls, that was an exaggeration."

**Whoever is Worthy…Sees It!**

 The man reacted strongly and said, "Rebbe, whoever is worthy .... sees it!" The Rebbe rose without a word, and closeted himself in his room. For an entire year he did not leave that room. For an entire year he secluded himself and devoted himself to his Maker, through study and prayer, cut off from the world. When the year drew to a close, he emerged and invited the residents of Tsfat to a feast of thanksgiving.

 All sat, filled with curiosity, desirous to hear why the Rebbe had lived in enforced solitude and why he had called upon them to gather for this feast.

 The Rebbe proclaimed, "Indeed, the statement is correct. The rocks are pearls; whoever is found worthy .... sees it."

 Those present did not understand him and so he told them about the collector of funds and what the man had said.

 "In all my life," he said, "no one ever spoke to me with such force. I felt that Heaven had put the words on his lips in order to encourage me to reach such a state. I closed myself in my room; I sanctified and purified myself. And, indeed, my eyes were opened. I bear true witness before you. The rocks of Israel are precious stones and shine with the luster of pearls."

*Reprinted from the website of Chabad of Bel Air.*

**Who's Who**

**Yechezkel**

 The prophet Yechezkel (Ezekiel) was one of the greatest leaders of the Babylonian exile period. Born of a priestly family in Jerusalem, he was amongst the first of the exiles to Babylonia by King Nebuchadnezzar. Yechezkel prophesied the destruction of the First Temple and promised his brethren that they would return to the Holy Land.

 Perhaps his most famous prophecy is that of the Valley of Dry Bones, when he saw that the piles of dried bones rose and were vivified by G-d. In this way, he reassured his fellow Jews that Israel would enjoy new life and glory after the destruction. (*From the Beha’alasocho 5772 edition of “L’Chaim,”)*

**It Once Happened**

**The Saga of Vladek**

 It was at a routine meeting in the Polish royal palace when one of the noblemen revealed an appalling bit of news: A Christian girl had recently disappeared from one of the villages. As the girl had vanished just before Passover, there was no doubt that she had been murdered by the Jews in order to use her blood for their religious rituals.

 "The Jewish problem must be solved once and for all," declared another nobleman, as all nodded their heads in agreement. It wasn't long until a proposal was formulated to expel all the Jews from Poland.

 Now, the king who ruled over Poland at the time, secretly appreciated the Jews for the benefit they brought to his land. At the same time, he tended to be unduly influenced by the people around him. Given the anti-Semitic views of the wealthy landowners, he decided to choose the course of least resistance and remain silent. An official order of expulsion was written up and passed around the table for everyone to sign.

**The Most Senior of**

**The King’s Advisors**

 When the document reached Vladek, the most senior of the king's advisors, he was about to affix his signature when suddenly, his hand froze in mid-air. His entire arm felt as if it had turned to stone. In fact, Vladek himself felt rather peculiar. His voice shook as he spoke.

 "Gentlemen," he announced, "I cannot in good faith sign this document, when I know for a fact that it is based on untruth. As you all know, I am Jewish by birth, and despite my having renounced my faith I am well aware of the Jewish prohibition against ingesting blood. Under no circumstances will I sign this order of expulsion."

 Everyone was surprised by Vladek's firm stance, as he had never before refused to sign an anti-Jewish edict. What was different now?

**Happy with Vladek’s Refusal**

 The king, who had been less than enthusiastic about the plan, was actually quite happy with Vladek's refusal. The proposal was dropped.

 From that day on Vladek underwent a profound change. His mind was flooded by memories from his childhood. He remembered learning in yeshiva, playing with his friends, and basking in the glow of his mother's Shabbat candles. Indeed, after many years in yeshiva, little Velvel had grown up, married a Jewish woman, and become a successful businessman.

 But the more he mixed amongst the Polish noblemen, the more estranged he had become from Judaism. Eventually, he abandoned his wife and married the young widow of a Polish count. The transformation was complete when "Velvel" renounced his faith and became "Vladek," the Polish nobleman.

**After Many Sleepless Nights**

 Vladek's mind allowed him no rest. After many sleepless nights he decided to return to Judaism, despite the fact that Polish law forbade a Christian to convert. It was a very dangerous plan, as his actions could endanger the entire Jewish community if they became public.

 A few nights later Velvel left his mansion and made his way to a certain village where a famous rabbi lived. The rabbi was surprised when he opened his door to find a Polish nobleman standing on his threshold.

 "I am a Jew!" Velvel cried as tears ran down his cheeks. "I want to return to Judaism." In a few short sentences he related his life story.

 The rabbi, grasping the implications of such a request, was immediately suspicious. "I don't think it's a good idea," he tried to dissuade him. "You will only cause trouble for yourself and for other Jews."

 But Velvel was adamant. "I will do anything you tell me - anything at all!" he insisted. "Just guide me along the right path."

**“When My Walking Stick Sprouts Buds”**

 At that point the rabbi, who was still unconvinced that the nobleman's intentions were pure, replied, "I'll believe you when my walking stick sprouts buds and starts to grow!"

 A deep sigh escaped from Velvel's throat. With a feeling of despair he glanced at the rabbi's walking stick propped up in the corner - and nearly fainted. All he could do was point with his finger. The rabbi turned around and could not believe what he was seeing. The walking stick had sprouted a number of tiny green buds. A miracle from heaven!

**Devises a Plan to Help Velvel**

 The rabbi took him under his wing and devised a plan that would not place any Jews in danger. He also gave him his blessing for success. A few days later "Vladek" went on a hunting expedition in the forest from which he never returned. When the horse he had been riding returned home without its owner, everyone assumed that Vladek had been killed by wild animals.

 The former Polish nobleman became a poor Jewish wanderer. Traveling from town to town and from country to country, he eventually made his way to Holland and settled in Amsterdam. For the rest of his days Velvel lived a life of Torah in anonymity.

*Reprinted from the Beha’alasocho 5772 edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.*

**The Human Side of the Story**

**The Baker’s Miracle**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 Each passing anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz sparks memories not only of those who died but those who were miraculously saved.

 In the European city of Goborova the Nazis were intent on killing all of its Jewish inhabitants by crowding them all into the local synagogue made of wood and setting fire to it. The soldiers surrounded the building and issued a warning that anyone caught outside of it would be shot on the spot.

**Yoel the Baker**

 Among the Jews in the building was Yoel the Baker who had managed to bake some *challot* for Shabbat before the Nazi roundup began. He was determined to bring those *challot* from his bakery in order to offer his condemned brothers the bread they needed for their last Shabbat meal.

 Ignoring the danger to his life, he jumped out of the synagogue and soon returned with a bag of *challot* and an invitation for all to wash and enjoy a Shabbat meal.

**Then Came the Miracle**

 Then came the miracle. From out of nowhere came a Nazi officer and ordered the guards surrounding the synagogue to leave the area for an important combat mission. He even refused to allow them to spend a few minutes to set the synagogue on fire.

 The self-sacrifice of Yoel the Baker for the sake of Shabbat was seen by all as the merit that brought about this miracle.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

**Tefillin in the Sinai Desert?**

**By Jerry Klinger**

 In 1972 I was part of a group of young internationals who travelled to Israel to help defend our land and our people. Communication was rough; we were from South Africa, Britain, Australia, Poland, Argentina, America, France and Russia, and most of us could hardly speak or read Hebrew.

 The IDF (Israeli Defense Force) designated me a Nahal soldier – a sort of part pioneer and part fighter farmer. Our base was located halfway between the yellow-bricked, fly-infested Egyptian town of El-Arish and the Suez Canal.

**Tramping through Sand and Desert Scrub**

 We tramped through sand and desert scrub, looking for any signs of landmines or intruders. I liked to be assigned to the watchtower. No one would bother me up there and I loved to look at the mountains and wonder which one was Mt. Sinai.

 For the most part it was blessedly quiet. Our biggest excitement involved a Phantom jet roaring 100 feet above us heading to the Canal.

 During basic training I obtained a small prayer shawl, *tallit*, and a prayer book in Hebrew and English. On Shabbat I would go off on my own to pray.

**Desiring a Set of Tefillin**

 I wanted a set of [*tefillin*](http://www.chabad.org/generic_cdo/aid/102436/jewish/Tefillin.htm), the black ritual boxes (containing the holy *shema* prayer) donned on weekdays. , the black ritual boxes donned on weekdays. I wanted to feel the binding on my arm and the weight of the *tefillin* on my head. I wanted to be reminded that G‑d is above me. But at Nahal Yam there were no *tefillin*.

 Once in a while the Corporal would choose a soldier for regular patrol. That soldier carried the heavy field radio strapped to his back as well as his own rifle.

 One day it was my turn.

 As we trudged, we sweated and we talked. The Corporal led the way.

**The Hollow Metal Tube**

 We stopped to rest on a sand dune, miles away from anything or anyone. Right there we saw a hollow metal tube, very strangely out of place. Where had it come from? Who put it there? We had no idea. But for me that tube was an absolutely wonderful place to rest.

 As we rested, I asked the Corporal if he could contact someone to help me get a set of *tefillin*. He looked at me as if I had fallen off planet Mars. Whatever it was about *tefillin* that set him off, I still don’t know, but within a minute he was calling me every vicious name he could come up with.

 So I did what I always did when I did not want to hear anymore. I turned off the Hebrew translator.

**Something for the Corporal**

 As I stood next to the pole, I happened to look inside the top of the hollowed out tube. I thought I saw something. The Corporal was still screaming at me as I reached inside and pulled out a tightly rolled booklet of light green papers.

 I looked at it. I handed it to my enraged superior.

The pamphlet was titled “The Meaning and Significance of *Tefillin*,” published by Chabad in Israel.

 The Corporal stopped his tirade. His face turned deathly white and he handed the pamphlet back to me. We walked back to base in silence.

 Which Chabad guy placed the pamphlet in that pipe? Why did I look inside the tube at that exact moment? Perhaps I will never know. When I needed a little help, G‑d came through via a Chabad brochure.

 I never did get my *tefillin* while in the IDF, but I still have that little pamphlet from nowhere. When I returned to the United States I obtained a pair of *tefillin* which I have been putting on daily ever since.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine,*

**The Jewish Tattoo**

**By Rabbi Eliyahu Yaakov**

Daniel expected his Star of David tattoo to provoke a physical struggle with others. Instead it provoked a spiritual struggle within himself.

 Growing up as a rather unaffiliated Jew in Dallas, Daniel didn't exactly have what we might call a "positive Jewish upbringing." His two days of Hebrew school per week meant getting shuttled to his "Jew school" when the rest of his world was off.

 At Hebrew school, Daniel recalls the teachers wanting to be there even less than he did. They didn’t seem to believe in what they were teaching. It was as if they saw themselves as an assembly-line of sorts, robotically passing the torch of Judaism to the next generation in a zombie-like state of melancholy. Daniel learned about Jewish "traditions"—that Jews were to separate milk and meat and to keep Shabbat, but he had never actually seen such a thing in practice.

 Once a year, Daniel was sentenced by his mother to a day of synagogue confinement. That's how it felt anyway.

**Doing the Whole Yom**

**Kippur “Jewish Thing”**

 He would inform his friends that due to his having to do the whole Yom Kippur "Jewish thing" he would not be coming into school the next day. When they'd break out into their envious "No way, that's so awesome!" routine, he'd let them know that it was the one day he'd rather be in school.

 But something changed for Daniel in his teenage years.

 He got off the plane he found a land flowing with broken Jewish stereotypes.

 At age 16, Daniel's non-observant but proud Jewish father sent him on a trip to Israel, and Daniel came in contact with a type of Jew he had never met before. Growing up, a Jew meant the antithesis of anything cool — whiny, unattractive, easily pushed around, and not someone you'd want to be seen with.

 To Daniel's surprise, when he got off the plane he found a land flowing with broken Jewish stereotypes: pushy cab driver Jews and in-your-face street vendor Jews, police Jews and soldier Jews, criminal Jews and street musician Jews.

**Finally a Jewish People**

**He Could Relate to**

 Daniel finally met a Jewish people that he could relate to, enjoy being around, and that radiated with Jewish pride.

 For the first time in his life, he actually felt a certain affinity with his people, a certain identity and joy in being Jewish.

 A number of years later, as Daniel made the transition into college, he felt a sense of yearning for clarity about who he was and what he was about. His friends were getting into a piercing and tattoo craze. Daniel decided that if he was going to get a tattoo it was going to be something that would express who he was. He felt that his tattoo should exemplify his Jewish pride and therefore settled on a Star of David. He wanted it so that if anyone would ever try to force him to wear a Jewish star in the future, he'd be able to say, "Look, I beat you to it!"

 Daniel wanted to show that he was not afraid of his Jewishness and express his Jewish pride by defending the Jewish people. He decided to put his Star of David tattoo in a place where everyone would see it, showing the world that he is not afraid of them. Since everyone wore shorts all the time in Dallas, he put the tattoo on the back of his calf muscle.

**A Different Kind of Brawl**

 After getting the tattoo, Daniel would scan every bar, park, and public place he’d walk into, trying to spot the guy that was going to mess with him. He couldn't wait to get into a fight defending the honor of the Jewish people.

 But the fight never came. At least it never came in the manner that he expected it to…

 Someone came up to him and said, "Hey, you Jewish?"

 "Yeah," said Daniel, "what's it to you?"

 "Well, actually I'm Christian and I was just wondering about this thing that I heard Jews do with separating between milk and meat."

 Taken aback, Daniel responded, "Well, I'm not religious, so how should I know?"

**“Hey, You Jewish?”**

 Other times people would approach him and say, "Hey, you Jewish?"

"Yeah, what's it to you?"

 "Oh well, I'm Christian and I think you guys are great. I love the Jews!"

 "Uh… okay… thanks a lot…"

 On other occasions: "Hey, you Jewish?"

 "Yeah, what's it to you?"

 "Well, I'm Jewish too."

 "Uh, okay… Are we supposed to be friends now?"

 Instead of the fight he anticipated, Daniel was embattled with questions from Jews and non-Jews alike.

**The Tattoo Kippah**

 Daniel's tattoo turned out to be his kippah of sorts. Not only did it espouse Daniel's Jewish identity to all, but it forced him to be aware of his Jewish identity wherever he went and whatever he did. When Daniel would consider doing something that wouldn’t look all that good for the Jews, he’d now think twice about it. *What would people think about Jews if I get caught?*

 Daniel started to sense that he was representing the Jewish people. He could no longer remain ignorant.

 Daniel started to sense that he was representing the Jewish people. He felt like he couldn't remain ignorant, unable to answer people's questions about Judaism, so he began looking up the answers. He started making time to learn about the Jewish people, their history, and their Torah.

 All of this triggered his own questions: What does it really mean to be a Jew? Is there anything real to all this anyway? Is Judaism relevant to my life?

 Daniel expected his Star of David tattoo would provoke a physical struggle with others; instead it provoked a spiritual struggle within himself.

 He decided to make his way back to Israel to explore Judaism further and determine what it really means to him. He searched out the depths of Judaism – its philosophies, its spirituality, and the “whys” of Judaism. Slowly but surely, Daniel began to piece together a picture of Judaism that resonated with him. Through learning, asking, and exploring, false stereotypes and stigmas were broken, and Daniel was able to bring meaning and understanding to the seemingly hollowed “traditions” and “rituals” of Judaism.

**Growing in Jewish Wisdom and Experiences**

 As Daniel grew in Jewish wisdom and experiences, he found himself in dialogues with others about similar topics and enjoyed the positive back-and-forth and being able to share what he has gained. At that point, Daniel connected with an Israeli tour company and began helping others come to Israel and get the type of eye- and heart-opening experiences that he had been privileged to receive when he was younger. Daniel saw that this is what he wanted his life to be about, so he enrolled in a course to become a certified Israeli tour guide.

 Today, Daniel is living his dream in Israel. He is happily married with three children and he is a sought after Israeli tour guide. He works full time to bring the beauty of the Land of Israel and Judaism to Jews of all backgrounds, sparking in others the type of personal journey that had been sparked for him back when he made his way to Israel for the first time.

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