



An Amazing Chiddush from the Brilliant Author of the Tanya During the Month of Elul HKB”H Resembles a King in the Field Who Welcomes Every Jew Cordially

This week’s parsha, parshas Ki Seitzei, is read annually on one of the first Shabbasos in the month of Elul. Thus, we will begin by focusing on a passuk in the parsha that reflects on the wonderful gift of the month of Elul. In His infinite mercy and kindness, HKB”H granted us this month to perform complete teshuvah to make amends for all the sins we committed during the past year. Here is the pertinent passuk (Devarim 24, 5): **”כי יקח איש אשה חדשה, לא יצא בצבא ולא יעבור עליו לכל דבר, נקי יהיה לביתו שנה אחת ושמוח את אשתו אשר לקח.”** **When a man marries a new wife, he shall not go out to the army, nor shall it obligate him for any matter; he shall be free for his house for one year, and he shall gladden his wife whom he has married.**

Let us begin with the illuminating remarks of the Arizal in Likutei Torah (Ki Seitzei). He interprets the opening pesukim of the parsha as an allusion to the process of teshuvah that we are obliged to perform during the month of Elul (ibid. 21, 10):

”כי תצא למלחמה על אויביך ונתנו ה' אלקיך בידך ושבת שביו, וראית בשביה אשת יפת תואר וחשקת בה ולקחת לך לאשה, והבאתה אל תוך ביתך וגלחת את ראשה ועשתה את צפרניה, והסירה את שמלת שביה מועליה וישבה בביתך ובכתה את אביה ואת אמה ירח ימים, ואחר כן תבוא אליה ובעלתה והיתה לך לאשה.”

When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture its people as captives; and you will see among its captives a woman who is beautiful of form, you will desire her, and you will take her for yourself as a wife. You shall bring her to the midst of your house; she shall shave her head and let her nails grow. She shall remove the garment of her captivity from upon herself and she shall sit in your house, and she shall weep for her father and her mother for a full month; thereafter you may come to her and live with her, and she shall be a wife to you.

The Arizal interprets this passage as follows: **“When you will go out to war against your enemies”**—refers to the yetzer hara and its malevolent forces; **“and you will capture its people as captives; and you will see among its captives a woman who is beautiful of form”**—alludes to the neshamah that is in captivity within a physical body that is fraught with sin; **“and she shall shave her head”**—implies that a person will rid his mind of negative intentions and beliefs; **“and let her nails grow”**—avoiding material comforts; **“she shall remove the garment of her captivity from upon herself”**—that was generated by the body’s transgressions; **“and she shall weep for her father”**—referring to HKB”H; **“and her mother”**—the holy Shechinah”; **“for a full month”**—namely, the month of Elul, in order to make amends for all on one’s iniquities via teshuvah.

The Zodiac Sign of Elul Is Virgo Revealing the Pure Unblemished Inner Self

It is with immense pleasure that we will now combine the wonderful interpretation of the Arizal concerning the **“captive, beautiful woman”**—alluding to the neshamah that we must free from its physical captivity during the month of Elul—with the sacred words of the Sefas Emes (Elul 5647):

”זהנה מזל אלול בתולה, היינו שיש נקודה פנימית כנפש ישראל שאין שולט שם מוגע נכרי, גן נעול, מועיין חתום, ונקראת בתולה, ועל זה הנקודה נאמר אני לדודי, שלעולם לא נתרחקה זו הנקודה מדביקות בשורשה ושמורה לשמו יתברך, אך לא בכל עת יכולים למצוא זו הנקודה, ועתה הזמן גורם שנתעוררו בני ישראל בתשובה, ונתקרבו נפשות בני ישראל אליו יתברך.”

The zodiac sign associated with Elul is Virgo (Sefer Yetzirah 5, 8). He teaches us that there is an innermost place in the soul of every Jew that is invulnerable and inaccessible to outside, foreign influences; this spot is referred to as **“בתולה”**—Virgo—a virgin, an untouched,

untainted maiden. Regarding this protected, innermost place Scriptures states (Shir HaShirim 6, 3): **"I am devoted to my beloved"**—for this element of the soul has never been separated from its attachment and closeness to the Blessed One, its source. It is not always possible, however, to find this spot. Yet, seeing as Elul is the time most conducive to perform teshuvah, it is the opportune time for Jews to locate this innermost spot and connect with the Almighty.

As our sacred sefarim teach us, in every single Jew—even if he is a frequent sinner, chas v’shalom—no matter who he is or what situation he is in, there exists a spot in the innermost chambers of his heart that is of divine origin. This divine spark is the root of a Jew’s neshamah that was implanted in him by HKB”H; this sacred spot remains untouched and untainted by one’s sins and transgressions; it remains clean and pure. This is the implication of the passuk (Vayikra 22, 32): **"ונקדשתי בתוך—בני ישראל—and I shall be sanctified among (within) Bnei Yisrael.** By specifically using the term **"בתוך"**, which we can translate as **"within,"** we can interpret this as a reference to the inner, divine locus within every Jew.

In the sefer Butzina D’Nehora, authored by the great Rabbi Reb Baruch of Medzhybizh, zy”a, he applies this concept to interpret the following passuk (Tehillim 37, 10): **"ועוד מעט—ואין רשע והתבוננת על מקומו ואיננו—soon there will be no wicked, you will contemplate his place and he will no longer be there.** In other words, even a Jew that has committed so many sins as to be considered wicked, nevertheless: **"ועוד מעט"**—there still remains within him that innermost spot; **"ואין רשע"**—which is not wicked, because the damage caused by his misdeeds does not reach that spot. To which David HaMelech prays to Hashem: **"והתבוננת על מקומו"**—contemplate this innermost spot; **"ואיננו"**—and you will realize that the wickedness does not exist in this innermost haven, for all of one’s sins are merely external manifestations that do not stem from the depth of one’s heart.

"From the depths I call to You Hashem" from the Innermost Spot in My Heart

We can now begin to appreciate the complexity of the mitzvah of teshuvah. For, it is seemingly difficult to comprehend how someone that has fallen prey to the yetzer hara, is totally under its control, and is filthy with sin, can suddenly awaken and summon up the strength to perform

teshuvah. The explanation, however, is that the mechanism and source of the mitzvah of teshuvah relies on the sacred, innermost spark that we have been discussing—that remains untainted by a person’s sins. By igniting this inner spark, one is able to arise to perform sincere teshuvah and to heal all of his 248 limbs and 365 sinews.

This incredible concept is also explained in Dover Shalom (230) in the name of our holy master, Sar Shalom of Belz, zy”a. Once, on Tu B’Shvat, at his hallowed table, while discussing the passuk (ibid. 130, 1): **"שיר המעלות—ממעמקים קראתיך ה'—A song of ascents, from the depths, I called to You, Hashem—**he raised the question: How is it possible for a person to overcome the yetzer hara that controls him?

To accomplish this feat, a person should beseech Hashem to arouse the holy spark that occupies one’s innermost being—that place where the yetzer hara has no power or control. In this manner, he will overcome the yetzer and draw closer to Hashem. This then is the meaning of the passuk: **"שיר המעלות—ממעמקים קראתיך ה'—I beseech You from the deepest, innermost portion of my heart that remains untouched by the harmful effects of my sins.**

We can now better appreciate the remarks of the Sefas Emes: **Now, the zodiac sign associated with the month of Elul is a virgin (Virgo). It indicates that there is an internal spot within a Jew’s being that is untouched by foreign influences.** Let us explain in keeping with our current discussion: The month of Elul is designated for teshuvah. As we have explained, the source of teshuvah is eliciting the inner spot that remains untainted by one’s sins. Hence, HKB”H performed an incredible **"chesed"** on behalf of Yisrael by giving us the month of Elul at the end of the year. During this special month, represented in the heavens by the **Virgin**, a Jew’s innermost being, untouched by the yetzer, can be revealed. Thus, he can be aroused to perform teshuvah to purify all of his bodily limbs from the stains of his iniquities, in keeping with the words: **"ממעמקים—קראתיך ה'—**summoning Hashem from his innermost self.

Based on the remarks of the Sefas Emes, we have also gained a better understanding of the Arizal’s interpretation of the pesukim at the beginning of our parsha: **"And you will see among its captives a woman who is beautiful of form"**—he interpreted this as an allusion to the neshamah. We can posit that he is referring specifically to the inner

spot of the neshamah that indeed resembles a **“beautiful woman”** in a spiritual sense. It is a spot that is untouched by foreign, undesirable influences and remains unblemished by a person’s wrongdoings and transgressions. During the month of Elul, symbolized by the **“Virgin,”** it is our task to release her from captivity by repenting, performing teshuvah, to heal all of the body’s limbs.

**“When a man marries a new wife”
Revealing One’s Inner Self during Elul**

Following this line of reasoning, let us now return to the passuk with which we began this essay: **“When a man marries a new wife, he shall not go out to the army, nor shall it obligate him for any matter; he shall be free for his house for one year, and he shall gladden his wife whom he has married.”** We can now propose that it alludes fantastically to the month of Elul, represented by the constellation Virgo. After all, the **“beautiful woman”**—the unblemished, inner self, every Jew reveals anew during the month of Elul—is akin to **“a new wife.”**

Hence, the Torah instructs him **“not to go out to the army.”** To make sense of this, let us refer to the opening passuk of last week’s parsha (Devarim 16, 18): **“שופטים ושוטרים—judges and officers shall you place . . . and they shall judge the people with truthful judgment.”** The Kli Yakar interprets this passuk based on an exposition in the Gemara (B.M. 107b) related to the passuk (Tzefaniah 2, 1): **“התקוששו ונקושו - קשוט עצמך ואחר—Improve yourselves and improve each other”**: **“First correct yourself and only afterwards correct others.** So, when the passuk says: **“Judges and officers shall you place,”** it means that you should first improve yourself by judging the correctness of your actions, and only then improve others: **“Judge the people with truthful judgment.”**

Thus, we can interpret the Torah’s admonition as follows: **“When a man marries a new wife”**—referring to his inner, unblemished self that is revealed in the month of Elul to inspire him to repent by doing teshuvah; **“he should not go out to the army”** to motivate others to repent by doing teshuvah. Instead, he should abide by the dictum to first **“improve yourself.”** Then, the passage continues: **“Nor shall it obligate him for any matter”**—in other words, he should take care not to commit any semblance of an aveirah. As the Chasam Sofer interprets this as a warning to **“ba’alei**

teshuvah”**: “ולא יעבר עליו לכל דבר, אפילו דבר קל לא יעבור, מה שהוא אפילו רק—do not commit even a minor transgression, even something that is only tangentially prohibited.**

This provides us with a lovely interpretation of the continuation of the passuk: **“He shall be free for his house for one year”** based on what the Sha’ar HaMelech writes concerning the statement in the Mishnah (Kesubos 57a): **“נותנין לבתולה שנים עשר חודש”—a virgin is afforded twelve months.** He asserts that the sages were alluding to the month of Elul whose zodiac-sign is a virgin. She is afforded from above the power to rectify via teshuvah all the wrongdoings of the past **“twelve months.”** Thus, we can interpret the passuk as follows: **“He shall be free for his house for one year,”** because in the month of Elul, when the innermost aspect of the neshamah is revealed—the **“אשת יפת תואר”**—a person is capable of rectifying via teshuvah the entire past year—rendering it free of any blemish or transgression.

**Teshuvah Inspired by Ahavah Transforms
Intentional Sins into Merits**

Continuing onward on this sublime path, we will now interpret the conclusion of the passuk: **“ושמח את אשתו אשר לקח— and he shall gladden his wife whom he has married.** How does this relate to the month of Elul? It relates to the previous part of the passuk: **“He shall be free for his house for one year”**—meaning that during the month of Elul, he should aim at rectifying the entire past year. This, however, raises the following difficulty: The month of Elul precedes Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment. As such, the teshuvah during this month is motivated by **“yirah”**—fear of the upcoming judgment. As the Tur (O.C. 581) explains, the shofar is blown throughout the month of Elul to inspire Yisrael to perform teshuvah. As it is written (Amos 3, 6): **“אם יתקע שופר בעיר ועם לא יחרדו”—is the shofar ever sounded in a city and the people do not tremble?!**

Now, we have learned in the Gemara (Yoma 86b) that as a result of teshuvah based on **“yirah,”** intentional sins are transformed into unintentional sins. In that case, if one performs this variety of teshuvah in Elul, it will not rid him completely of the aveiros of the past year. He will still be tainted by unintentional sins which also require atonement. This is pointed out in the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayikra 6) in relation to the passuk (Vayikra 4, 2): **“נפש כי תחטא בשגגה מכל מצוות ה’ אשר לא תעשינה, מי שחטא אפילו בשוגג אינו סימן יפה לו.”** **“If a person sins**

unintentionally from among all the mitzvos of Hashem that may not be done" . . . indicates that when someone sins, even unintentionally, it is not a good omen for him. Because "עבירה גוררת עבירה"—one aveirah leads to another, i.e., even an unintentional aveirah may lead to another aveirah.

It appears that this is why the Torah emphasizes that one must "gladden his wife whom he has married." In other words, he must ensure the happiness of the inner self that is revealed during the month of Elul, the "אשת יפת תואר". To accomplish this, he must perform sincere teshuvah inspired by "ahavah"; because with regards to this variety of teshuvah, the Gemara teaches (ibid.): "גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכויות"—this form of teshuvah is so effective that it actually transforms intentional sins into merits. As a result, he will indeed gladden his inner self; it will no longer remain captive to its bodily confines, since it will be cleansed of any blemishes in the merit of teshuvah of "ahavah."

We can support the notion that we are also capable of performing teshuvah of "ahavah" in the month of Elul from the sacred comments of the Bach (581, 2). He explains the rationale for blowing the shofar throughout the month of Elul as follows:

"משום דאיכא אסמכתא מקרא א'ני ל'דודי ו'דודי ל'י ראשי תיבות אלול"ל וסופי תיבות עולה ארבעים, כנגד ארבעים יום מראש חדש אלול ועד יום הכיפורים, כי באלול ארבעים יום התשובה מקובלת, להיות לבו קרוב אל דודו בתשובה, ואז דודו קרוב לקבל תשובתו מאהבה."

He brings support from the passuk (Shir HaShirim 6, 3): (Elul), and its final letters equal forty, corresponding to the forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom HaKippurim. Because during these forty days, it is customary to perform teshuvah, to have one's heart close to his Beloved (Hashem) through teshuvah; then his Beloved is likely to accept his teshuvah of "ahavah."

His point is crystal clear! It is customary to perform teshuvah during this forty-day period and, as a result, to draw closer to HKB"H, and to be accepted by HKB"H with open arms, so to speak. Accordingly, we can understand the Tur's explanation for the rationale for blowing shofar during Elul to inspire Yisrael to perform teshuvah as follows: Initially, a person must perform teshuvah based

on "yirah"; nevertheless, without a doubt, the goal of teshuvah is to ascend spiritually until one attains the level of teshuvah based on "ahavah." The combination of the two will assure that ultimately all of one's sins—both intentional and unintentional—will be viewed as merits.

During the Month of Elul HKB"H Is Openly Accessible to Every Jew

In truth, however, the comments of the Bach require further clarification. How did he deduce from the words "א'ני ל'דודי ו'דודי ל'י" that during these forty days, HKB"H is much more likely to accept the teshuvah performed by Yisrael out of "ahavah"? To justify the assertion of this tzaddik, we will rely on the well-known, incredible chiddush of the author of the Tanya, zy"a, as it is brought down in Likutei Torah (Re'eh): The month of Elul is depicted as a time when the king is passing through the fields before entering the capital city and his palace to resume sitting on his royal throne. As such, he is accessible to all of his subjects; they can approach him up close. Furthermore, he welcomes them eagerly and warmly. Here are his sacred words:

"אך הגה יובן על פי משל למלך, שקודם בואו לעיר יוצאין אנשי העיר לקראתו ומקבלין פניו בשדה, ואז רשאין כל מי שרוצה לצאת להקביל פניו, והוא מקבל את כולם בסבר פנים יפות ומראה פנים שוחקות לכולם, ובלכתו העירה הרי הם הולכים אחריו, ואחר כך בבואו להיכל מלכותו, אין נכנסים כי אם ברשות, ואף גם זאת המזבחרים שבעם ויחידי סגולה, וכך הענין על דרך משל בחודש אלול יוצאין להקביל אור פניו יתברך בשדה."

This can be understood based on an analogy to a king. Before he arrives in the city, the people of the city go out to greet him and meet him in the field. At that time, anyone who wants to go out and greet him is permitted to do so. He receives them all happily and cordially. As he returns to the city, they follow him. Afterwards, when he enters his royal palace, people can only enter with permission—and even then, it is only the select few of the nation and the elite. This is the analogy to the month of Elul—we go out to welcome the light of His blessed countenance in the field.

Now, I would like to present to our esteemed audience something that I have struggled to comprehend. Where did the author of the Tanya learn this incredible chiddush from? After all, it does not appear to be stated explicitly anywhere that during the month of Elul HKB"H resembles a king in the field. Nevertheless, Hashem has illuminated

the way for me. His source can be found in the beginning of Likutei Torah (ibid.) with the allusion to the month of Elul brought down by the Avudraham (Tefilas Rosh HaShanah) related to the passuk "אני לדודי ודודי לי"—whose first letters spell אלול. At that time, HKB"H graciously opens His hand to accept Yisrael through complete teshuvah. The last letters of these words are four "yuds," whose gematria is forty, corresponding to the forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Yom HaKippurim.

Now, if we examine the two previous pesukim, we see that Scripture opens with a question that the nations of the world pose to Yisrael concerning HKB"H (ibid. 1): "אנה הלך—where has your Beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your Beloved turned, that we may seek Him with you? To which, Yisrael respond (ibid. 2): "דודי ירד לגנו לערוגות הבשם לרעות בגנים—my Beloved has gone down to His garden, to the spice beds, to wander in the gardens, and to gather roses. Then, in the very next passuk is the allusion to the month of Elul: "אני לדודי ודודי לי הרעה בשושנים". Thus, Scripture states explicitly that HKB"H descends, so to speak, during the month of Elul, to his garden below on earth in Olam HaZeh like a king in the field "to wander in the gardens, and to gather roses." This is the underlying message conveyed by the allusion: "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine, who wanders among the roses."

The Prosecutors Taunt Yisrael in the Month of Elul: "Where has your Beloved gone?"

It behooves us to scrutinize the baffling question posed to Yisrael by the nations of the world: "Where has your Beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your Beloved turned, that we may seek Him with you?" This question is definitely unexpected! Clearly, the goyim oppose all matters of kedushah; they certainly have no interest in serving Hashem or performing His mitzvos.

To make sense of their inquiry, let us refer to the following passuk (Iyov 1, 6): "יהי היום ויבואו בני האלהים להתייצב על ה' ויבוא גם השטן בתוכם." "It happened one day; the angels came to stand before Hashem, and the Satan, too, came among them." The Zohar (Bo 32b) interprets "היום"—"the day"—as a reference to Rosh HaShanah, the day on which HKB"H stands in judgment of the world. It interprets "בני האלהים"—the sons of G-d—as

the prosecuting angels, who are joined by the Satan, to accuse Yisrael of wrongdoing. Therefore, the passuk portrays them as "standing before Hashem," because in a sense they are opposing Hashem, Who wants to vindicate Yisrael.

Now, these heavenly prosecutors—"the sons of G-d"—wait all year long to stand before Hashem and accuse Yisrael of wrongdoing. Yet, when the month of Elul arrives, and they see, so to speak, that HKB"H is not sitting on His royal throne, they become fearful and despondent—perhaps they will not be able to prosecute Yisrael. Therefore, they ask Yisrael in a roundabout, deceptive way: "Where has your Beloved gone . . . let us seek Him with you. They are pretending as if they wish to serve Hashem, but, in reality, their true intent is to prosecute Yisrael.

Hence, Yisrael respond: "My Beloved has gone down to His garden, to the spice beds, to wander in the gardens"—HKB"H has gone down to Olam HaZeh to arouse Yisrael to perform sincere, complete teshuvah; "and to gather roses"—to gather the Torah and mitzvos that they have occupied themselves with as exculpatory evidence. Then, Yisrael explain why HKB"H is doing this: "אני לדודי ודודי לי הרעה בשושנים"—because it is the month of Elul, the month before Rosh HaShanah, when the prosecuting angels will stand before Hashem to prosecute Yisrael. Therefore, HKB"H preemptively goes down to Olam HaZeh, like a king in the field, to inspire Yisrael to make amends before the Day of Judgment by performing teshuvah and to reveal Yisrael's merits.

"As water reflects a face back to a face, so a man's heart is reflected back to him by another"

With much joy, we have been enlightened. We can now explain how the Bach learned from the passuk: "אני לדודי"—"אני לדודי לי"—that during the forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur, "it is customary to draw closer to our Beloved, and that He will accept our teshuvah of 'ahavah.'" Regarding the mitzvah of (Devarim 6, 5): "ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך"—you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart. The commentaries ask an obvious question: How can a person be commanded to love HKB"H? After all, love stems from the heart and a person's feelings, it is not something that a person can be commanded to do.

They explain the matter based on the words of the wisest of all men (Mishlei 27, 19): **כמים הפנים לפנים כן לב האדם**—**as water reflects a face back to a face, so a man's heart is reflected back to him by another.** This teaches us that when a person loves his fellow man, it elicits reciprocal feelings in his fellow; it is like seeing one's reflection in water. Now, we have a passuk that states explicitly (Malachi 1, 2): **"אהבתי אתכם אמר ה'—I loved you," says Hashem.** Thus, it stands to reason that this would elicit in us a reciprocal love for hashem.

However, all the foolish, nonsensical pursuits of Olam HaZeh act as a barrier preventing this natural, reciprocal love in a Jew's heart from expressing itself and becoming a reality. Therefore, the Torah commands us **"ואהבת את ה'—אלקיך"**—to remove all obstacles that prevent and inhibit us from expressing the tremendous love of Hashem that resides in every Jew's heart. Then, this tremendous love of Hashem will pour forth naturally and spontaneously.

Based on this understanding, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, ztz"l, explains the juxtaposition of the concluding berachah before Krias Shema—**"הבוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה—Who chooses His people Yisrael with love**—and the first passage of Krias Shema—**"ואהבת את ה' אלקיך"—you shall love Hashem, your G-d.** Since HKB"H chooses Yisrael with "ahavah," we are able to love Him naturally and easily. Therefore, it was justified and fitting to command us to **"love Hashem."** In fact, this teaches us an important principle. When HKB"H reveals His great love for us, it is much easier for us to reciprocate our love for Him, like a reflection in water.

We have now gained a better understanding of the comments of the Bach. During Elul, HKB"H draws nearer to Yisrael with tremendous love. This prompts Yisrael to respond to the prosecutors and those taunting them:

"My Beloved has gone down to His garden, to the spice beds, to wander in the gardens." Hence, like a reflection in water, Yisrael reciprocate by performing sincere teshuvah. They are so inspired that even during the Aseres Yimei Teshuvah, when HKB"H has already returned from the field, so to speak, to sit on His throne of judgment, they continue to perform teshuvah of "ahavah." This all transpires as a result of the love that HKB"H shows Yisrael during the month of Elul.

At this point, we can interpret the following passuk very nicely: **"נקי יהיה לביתו שנה אחת"—he shall be free for his house for one year.** This means that with the teshuvah that one performs in the month of Elul, one can make amends for the entire past year; one will be free and clean of all sin, even inadvertent sins. How is this accomplished: **"ושמח את אשתו אשר לקח"—**by making one's inner self happy, inspiring it to return to Hashem by means of teshuvah based on "ahavah"—reflecting back to HKB"H the incredible love and affection He shows Yisrael in the month of Elul, like a reflection in water.

In summary: During the month of Elul, HKB"H draws near to Yisrael like a **"king in the field."** This enables every single Jew without exception to get closer to HKB"H. Therefore, it behooves us to take advantage of and make the most of this wonderful opportunity afforded us by HKB"H. During the month of Elul, every Jew should get as close to HKB"H as he is able to via sincere teshuvah; he should pray better; he should schedule regular, fixed times for studying Torah. In this merit, we will be rewarded with a **"kesivah va'chasimah tovah"**—we will be inscribed and sealed for a wonderful, blessed year to come—and be privileged to witness the arrival of the true, righteous redeemer, swiftly in our times! Amen.

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