



# WIDE HORIZON

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE NURSING CARE FACILITY

## **BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING**

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*The following talk was given in its entirety by Thomas C. Blair, C.S., of Colorado Springs, Colorado, as the keynote address at the Wide Horizon annual meeting on October 3, 2009.*

Some years ago while serving as an active duty chaplain in the United States Army, I was given the opportunity to attend a Bible seminar sponsored by the Bethel Bible Series. The underlying Biblical theme of the organization was “Blessed to be a Blessing,” based on Genesis 12: 1-3, which reads: “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing...and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

“I will bless thee ...and thou shalt be a blessing.” And so we have Abram, better known as Abraham, being blessed to be a blessing. For many years this idea has interested me, especially in the light of being a Christian Scientist. Cannot it be said, and rightly so, that every student of Christian Science is blessed to be a blessing?

Let’s begin by looking at the Biblical and historical record of being blessed to be a blessing. In the case of Abraham, he was asked to leave his extended family and established home and go to a land that God would show him. There is no evidence that Abraham questioned God, or had doubts about God’s directing. There’s no indication that Abraham and Sarah argued about what was to take place. They simply put themselves in a position to receive God’s goodness by being willing to bless others. One Biblical scholar states that the original Hebrew language of to “be a blessing” was written in the form of a divine command, that is, “I promise you that I will bless you, Abraham, and I command you to be a blessing.” In other words, Abraham’s blessing carried with it a directive--bless others.

What were some of the special qualities Abraham expressed which enabled him to be blessed to bless others? Mary Baker Eddy answers this question with her definition of Abraham in the glossary of *Science and Health*: “ABRAHAM. Fidelity; faith in the divine Life and in the eternal Principle of being. This patriarch illustrated the purpose of Love to create trust in good, and showed the life-preserving power of spiritual understanding” (579: 10-14). Fidelity, faith, trust and spiritual understanding are qualities which we naturally possess through our conscious awareness of the Christ presence in our lives.

There are many examples in the Old Testament where God’s children were blessed to be a blessing--Noah, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, David, and Daniel. The book of Ruth for instance, tells the story of the unselfed love of a young widow who gives up her own family and religion in order to love God and care for her mother-in-law. Her humility brings forth countless blessings to herself and those around her.

In all of human history, there is no greater example of one being blessed to be a blessing, than Christ Jesus. His entire life experience was one of blessing others with the healing Christ, Truth. This is so clearly illustrated in Luke, when Jesus “...arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon’s house. And Simon’s wife’s mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them”

(Luke 4: 38, 39). In essence, Jesus ministered to her, and she was blessed with healing, and in turn, she immediately ministered to others. She was blessed to be a blessing.

When good comes to us, we are to impart good to others. When we are healed, we are to share our healing understanding with others. When we are comforted, we are to comfort others. We recall from II Corinthians, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (II Corinthians 1: 3, 4).

The 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew indicates that when our daily needs are met, we are to assist others with their needs. (Matthew 25: 31-45) When the Truth of the Word of God becomes so alive in our thought, we are to share this Truth with others.

Take for example, Philip. The first mention of Philip (not the disciple of Jesus, but another Philip), is in the Book of Acts, where he is mentioned as one of seven individuals “full of the Spirit and wisdom,” ministering to the needs of the early church. One day, in obedience to divine direction, we find him on his way from Jerusalem to the desert wilderness of Gaza, when he comes across a complete stranger--an official from the royal court of the Queen of Ethiopia. The man is sitting in his chariot reading a passage from the book of Isaiah, hungering to understand what he is reading. Philip takes the time to explain to him the spiritual significance of the scripture. Here is a wonderful and simple example of how one who was blessed with the Spirit, was compelled to share the blessing of his faith, with an individual he didn't even know. The result: a life-changing blessing to the official. (Acts 8: 27-39)

Later on in history, we find that Mrs. Eddy's entire life was one of blessing others. In the February, 1896 issue of *The Christian Science Journal*, a lady writes: “My Dear Mrs. Eddy,--When I was a girl of twelve years I sat in Dr. Patterson's dental chair in Franklin N. H. (my name was, Lucy W. Clark, and my father was Chas. Clark,) and, listening to your reading Ossian's poems, I was nearly oblivious to the pain. The memory of that reading has always lingered with me, and as I look back upon my past life, it seems as though a change came over me. I knew it at the time. I was conscious of a power protecting me, a power outside of myself” (*The Christian Science Journal*, Vol. XIII, p. 480). She goes on to tell how she later became a student of Christian Science and how her life was changed by the then Mrs. Patterson.

I chose this example out of literally hundreds available because sometimes we think that we might not know enough about Christian Science to be a blessing unto to others. Yet this incident shows how Mary Baker Eddy blessed others, even before she discovered Christian Science.

Today, on all official Christian Science literature, the cross and crown emblem speaks directly to the heart of our religion, where every adherent is blessed with the ability to fulfill Christ Jesus' admonition to “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons.” And we all know how the passage ends: “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10: 8). Could not this also read, “Freely ye have been blessed with this healing understanding, freely bless others with it?”

How then can we more clearly understand ourselves as being blessed to bless others? Let's begin by examining the original meaning behind the Hebrew words for “bless” and “blessing“. Both have their root in the primary Hebrew word barak (baw-rak), meaning “to kneel.” The implication is clear--when divinely blessed, one is humbled before the awesome nature and power of God.

Thus, we find that a true sense of humility is closely connected to being blessed and thereby blessing others. The Hebrew word “barak” is also closely connected with the word for “spring,” as in wellspring--something that gives forth water continually, endlessly, without being asked or being reminded. The implication is one of inexhaustible resources.

And since the theme of this annual meeting is “Grace to Move Forward,” we will explore together the grace that Mrs. Eddy defined as “the effect of God *understood*” and the blessings that flow from this grace. (*Christian Science versus Pantheism*, 10: 23-24) Let’s begin with humility.

“Humility” comes from the Latin word, *humus*, meaning earth or ground. To have humility, is therefore, to be grounded. Grounded in what? Grounded in the absolute conviction of the healing power of the Christ as given to us through Christian Science. There is a reason why Mrs. Eddy referred to humility as “the genius of Christian Science” (*Miscellaneous Writings*: 356: 23-24). Recently a friend gave me a copy of one of the actual Bibles that Mrs. Eddy personally used for her study. In sixteen instances she wrote the word “humility” or “humble” in the margins--indicating the importance she placed on humility. For instance, she wrote, “humility brings true faith,” (p. 12, NT). Elsewhere, “Self-righteousness is destroyed by humility” (p. 104, NT). Lida Fitzpatrick, who served in Mrs. Eddy’s household three different times, often recorded metaphysical ideas shared by Mrs. Eddy with her workers. One such idea was, “Humility is the door, honesty is the way, and spirituality is the summit.” (Quote attributed to The Notebooks of Lida Fitzpatrick - first published in the *Christian Science Sentinel*, July 8, 1939 – as part of reminiscence of John Lathrop.)

And just how do we go about walking through the door of humility? Again, Mrs. Eddy points the way. From *Miscellaneous Writings* we read: “Sacrifice self to bless one another, even as God has blessed you” (155: 6-7). And what is this “sacrificing self” other than the giving up a false sense of a selfhood that is separate from God?

It seems that we are all eager to “put off the old man... and... put on the new man” as the Bible says (Col. 3: 9, 10), that is, to put off a false sense of manhood and womanhood, in the hope of gaining a truer sense of spiritual identity and purpose. But are we truly willing to put off the old man, the old woman--or are we really just hoping to make this old man and this old woman, more comfortable, more manageable, healthier, or more affluent? Isn’t the admonition to completely reject the mesmeric suggestion of a selfhood apart from God, and grasp the true reality of perfect God and perfect man?

There’s a great article for which Mrs. Eddy warmly commended the author, and it speaks to this very subject. In “Lowliness of Heart” Annie Dodge, speaking of Jesus’ “boundless love and compassion for sinners,” writes, “As an expression of his matchless love for humanity, his self-sacrifice, he became the servant of all, working for and saving all mankind. He made nothing of self, and all of God, serving Him unceasingly.” Later on in the article, referring to the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, she adds, “It requires great Christian grace and lowliness of heart to acknowledge, or confess, one’s sins, for by so doing one acknowledges the nothingness of the self that claims it can sin, and the allness of God, good, divine Love, in whom is no sin! All true lowliness of heart means the exaltation of the divine Principle, Love! Thus self disappears and unselfish love takes its place!” (*The Christian Science Journal*, April, 1908)

When a false sense of selfhood is eliminated in individual consciousness, what is left is what God has always known about man--perfection, oneness of being, the timeless expression of good. During the particularly difficult time of the Woodbury trial, very early one morning, Mrs. Eddy called upon her household for prayerful support. She asked several workers “what Love is.” She found no comfort in various answers until Laura Sargent said, “Love is selflessness forgetting self and laboring for the good of others.” This truth “relieved her severe belief of constriction of air passages” and she felt a keen sense of God’s healing presence. (*Rolling Away the Stone*, p. 283)

Someone once said that the only problem that ever exists is a belief of a selfhood apart from God. Much more that can be said about humility, but let’s move on to our second point, inexhaustible resources.

Last summer I joined some Christian Science friends in beautiful Yosemite National Park. As we were joking around the campfire one evening, I shared a riddle which I had heard from one of my sons. "Imagine you are in a block of cement all the way up to your chin. How do you get out?" This group of young and older friends thought and thought. And some of them had some fairly inventive ideas. But none was correct. After quite awhile, I finally gave in and told them the answer: "Stop imagining."

Do we not all "form a mental picture of," (i.e., imagine) that we live in an economy that is susceptible to bull and bear markets, credit crunches, recessions, where fixed incomes don't keep pace with increasing living expenses? Should we not rather, understand that we live, move, and have our livelihoods within the divine economy of Spirit, God? How often do we imagine that our supply comes from savings, 401k's, careful pre-planning, when in fact we know that "...to all mankind and in every hour, divine Love supplies all good" (*Science and Health*, p. 494).

Do we imagine that man is always in need and that God is always withholding, or do we understand that man as the complete reflection of an omnipotent and ever-present God, can never lack anything that is good, Godlike? By the very nature of the law of divine reflection, there is no limitation of any kind. Do we imagine that our security is in job stability, family connections, being in the right place at the right time, when in reality, we are never for an instant, out of the embrace of God's infinite, inexhaustible, spiritual blessing?

There's an old Chinese proverb that goes something like this: "You can't keep the birds from flying around your head, but you can prevent them from making a nest in your hair." We can't keep mortal mind from expounding its predicaments and predictions, but we don't have to listen to them--we don't have to take them into our thought. Perhaps it comes down to this: we should do less imagining and more expressing.

Sometimes we interpret God's blessings through what appear as material wealth and possessions. At such times we may be tempted to define ourselves by what we own, instead of what we spiritually are. Does God bless us in order to improve our standard of living, or rather, to improve of standard of giving? The reason each of us can give is because of the very nature of what we have been given--the Science of the Christ--the inexhaustible source of Truth that logically speaks to the human consciousness, dispelling doubt, fear, lack, loneliness, suspicion. I love the idea I once read, "Supply we gather as we give."

In a recent *Christian Science Monitor* religious article, the writer clearly points out that "Material things are by nature limited, finite. Spiritual ideas, however, such as love and compassion, have no limits. They don't run out. Because we are free to give only something that we have, to give love is to acknowledge that we have it, thus heightening its presence and power in our lives. In this way, giving truly blesses both the giver and receiver" (Vol. 101, Issue 106, September 6, 2009). Which of us who has ever returned faith for hopelessness, courage for despair, concern for indifference, patience for intolerance, has not been blessed by this giving?

We are not, have never been, on a mortal mind betterment program. We are at this moment, and always have been, at the creative point of perfection and completeness. It is simply a matter of opening our conscious thought to the incoming of the Christ, Truth. Christian Science shows us how to do this. We've briefly touched upon humility and infinite resources as they relate to biblical blessing. Let's move on to grace.

"There is great need of a revival of grace in the ranks of Christian Scientists" (MBE Library, Accession: L03946, Letter to William Clark, May 16, 1893). This seems to be as true today as it was over 115 years ago when Mrs. Eddy wrote it. In another early letter, Mrs. Eddy defined what grace was when she wrote,

“God bless you dear one for the good you are doing. But be wise calm slow to judge patient PURE LOVING [...] These are the graces of Christian Science [...]” (Accession: F00537, November 26, 1897 letter to Julia Field-King). These qualities, or graces of Christian Science, i.e., being wise, calm, slow to judge, patient, pure and loving, are qualities I recently saw so beautifully exemplified by a visiting Christian Science nurse. These same graces are sure to help when one is in need of physical healing. An experience I had in the Army, speaks of these qualities.

While stationed at the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, as a new chaplain, I volunteered to go through a very rigorous training course called Air Assault School. This is where you rappel out of helicopters, climb up troop ladders into Chinook helicopters, go on 10 mile road marches with heavy backpacks--you get the picture.

Late one afternoon, I was up in a helicopter, leaning out on the skid, or the rail of the helicopter, ready to repel down a rope. As I jumped away from the helicopter, the rope from below pinned my hand to the skid and my leather glove came off. My first reaction was to grab hold of the rope as I slid down but quickly I felt a burning sensation and used the inside of my arm to guide me down the rest of the way. When I arrived on the ground moments later, three fingers of the hand were greatly damaged. I went to the medics and asked them to bandage the hand, but to use no medication. One medic remarked that I could lose one or more fingers if it wasn't taken care of properly. Since it was the end of the day's exercises, I went home.

I lived alone as I was not yet married. Not knowing how to properly care for the hand, I called the Benevolent Association in the Boston area and asked to talk to a Christian Science nurse. She lovingly talked me through how to care for the hand.

At this point, I was certainly wondering if I would be able to complete the training. Throughout the night I prayed. Although these were not the exact thoughts I was thinking, they represent how I was approached the experience. What did God know about me as His idea? He knew me as spiritually complete and perfect in every way, untouched by accidents or incidents. Through the graces of Christian Science, I could see myself as wise in the Truth, calm in the face of adversity, slow to judge the graphic human picture, patient in tribulation, pure in the sense of being completely spiritual, and loved as the blessed child of God.

This “God knowing” and affirmation of true being, displaced the “human appearing” of hurt, pain, destruction, separation from God, good. As I prayed throughout the night, I felt a calm come over me, and any fear that had been occupying my thought, left. As I reported for duty very early the next morning, I was able to continue the training with a bandaged hand. Several days later, the medics wanted to see me. As I held up both hands, it was difficult for them at first, to determine which hand had been injured, as the healing process had been so quick. I was grateful to complete the course and graduate with the rest of the class.

I had proven to a certain degree what Mrs. Eddy wrote to an early worker, “To know there is but one God, one Cause, one effect, one Mind, heals instantly. Have but one God, and your reflection of Him does the healing” (MBE Library, Accession L05911 – first published in Christian Science Sentinel, April 4, 1936). As an aside to this experience, years later I heard from a friend, that a chaplain, who had gone through the training with me, often recounted my experience in his work as a chaplain. Even when unintended, healing blesses others. Certainly what Mrs. Eddy says, rings true, “The demonstration of Christianity blesses all mankind” (*Christian Science versus Pantheism*, p. 9: 20-21).

This experience has always been very special to me, for it absolutely proved God's love for me. It reminds me of what MBE said in a letter to Frank Gale in 1891:

“The healing will grow more easy and be more immediate as you realize that God, Good, is all and Good is Love. You must gain Love, and lose the false sense called love. You must feel the Love that never faileth, --that perfect sense of divine power that makes healing no longer power but grace” (MBE Library, Accession L08565 – first published in *Christian Science Sentinel*, July 15, 1944).

There can be no doubt as to Jesus’ and Mrs. Eddy’s expectation that we are to be a blessing to others through healing. In a letter to Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy, her adopted son, Mary Baker Eddy wrote: “...you never can be a practical C.S. without healing the sick and sinner besides yourself. It is too selfish for us to be working for ourselves and not others as well. God does not bless it” (MBE Library, Accession: L01953, Mary Baker Eddy to Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy, June 17, 1895).

A friend, having returned from a trip, gave my wife a refrigerator magnet which says, “When I count my blessings I always count you twice.” What a nice idea--one I am sure can apply to each of us. However, there may be times when we do not feel very blessed, much less feel capable of blessing others. Maybe we feel our time has passed, or that the mortal belief of age seems more and more a reality. I love the definition of age I heard many years ago--age is simply “youth wrapped up in experience.” Youth --a quality of vigor, eagerness, promise. Experience-- a quality of knowing what we know, having a deep rooted conviction of the absolute healing effect of Truth.

As Mark Twain once said, “Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.” And more importantly, as Mrs. Eddy said in an interview, “Years do not make one grow old if one grows in grace. ...Now I believe that if we kept our mind fixed on God, Truth, Life, and Love, He will advance us in our years to a higher understanding and change our hope into faith and our faith into spiritual understanding, and our words into works, and our ultimate faith into the fruition of entering into the kingdom” (*Christian Science Sentinel*, Vol. IX, No. 53, p. 1004). Again, “Years do not make one grow old if one grows in grace,” grace being “the effect of God understood,” the effect of the rightness of being, made practical in a conscious awareness of our Godlikeness.

Sometimes we lose sight of this awareness and entertain, or imagine, lingering thoughts of past history or of how things “could have been.” Perhaps there is a longstanding physical challenge that hasn’t been met? Perhaps a sense of lack -- lack of love, supply, purpose, companionship, spiritual growth, focus? Perhaps you are even questioning the healing power of Christian Science itself? In times like these, the very best thing to do is simply to bless others. You may recall Mrs. Eddy’s insight in *Miscellaneous Writings*, “To love, and to be loved, one must do good to others. The inevitable condition whereby to become blessed, is to bless others...” (p. 127: 20-23).

William Rathvon, who as a boy of nine, stood within a few feet of Abraham Lincoln as he delivered the Gettysburg Address, and later served in Mrs. Eddy’s household, noted in his diary that Mrs. Eddy once said, “There is never a time when there is not something for you to do. Doing that something opens the way for God’s blessings” (*Rolling Away the Stone*, p. 400).

We find that no matter what the situation may be--no matter how dire, or how long standing, or how believable a challenge may seem to be, there is always occasion for acknowledging man’s perfection as the complete idea of God. I was touched by a story I heard not too long ago. While on a short mission trip, a minister was leading a worship service at a leper colony on the island of Tobago. A woman who had been facing away from the minister turned around and faced him. The material picture was one of great deformity and quite shocking. She lifted up her partial hand in the air and asked, “Can we sing ‘Count Your Many Blessings?’” Overcome with great emotion, the minister had to leave the service. A friend caught up with him and said, “I guess you’ll never be able to sing that hymn again!” “Yes I will.” replied the minister, “but I’ll never sing it the same way.”

In a simple way, this woman had put off the old woman, the frightful and false, deformed, mortal picture, the purely personal identity, the human appearing, and caught a glimpse of the new woman, the Christ identity, a glimpse of what God knew about her. This found expression in singing grateful praises to God. Surely, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," (Matthew 5: 3), with "poor in spirit" being translated "humble; those who perceive their spiritual need." Indeed, for this woman, hers is the kingdom of heaven.

In the book *Mary Baker Eddy Christian Healer*, there is an account by Emma Shipman, an early church worker, who had served on a Literature Distribution Committee. The committee received a large number of periodicals from Mrs. Eddy's home at Chestnut Hill. Among these was an issue of *The Christian Science Sentinel* for January 6, 1906, which contained the following quote from Phillip Brooks, the Episcopal pastor of Trinity Church in Boston: "God has not given us vast learning to solve all the problems, or unfailing wisdom to direct all the wanderings of our brothers' lives; but He has given to every one of us the power to be spiritual, and by our spirituality to lift and enlarge and enlighten the lives we touch." Underneath this quotation, Mrs. Eddy wrote in her handwriting, "The secret of my life is in the above." (p. 374). Again, "He has given to every one of us the power to be spiritual, and by our spirituality to lift and enlarge and enlighten the lives we touch." We are blessed to be a blessing.

God's grace finds its way to every receptive heart, and often, we are "the effect of God *understood*," the effect of God demonstrated, to those around us. But, what if we feel there is no one around for us to bless? When we are open to the idea of blessing others, we are naturally and assuredly led to be where we need to be. I love the definition of attraction in *Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition Unabridged*, which reads in part: "A drawing to or toward something by other than physical means." When Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," (John 12: 32), could it not be that he was saying that if the Christ, Truth, be lifted up, all will be drawn to the Christ? As we lift up the Christ in our consciousness, we will also draw those around us, to the Christ.

Today can be the day when each of us accepts anew the blessings of Christian Science, what it can and does mean for us individually, and how we can bless others through renewed dedication and demonstration. As a friend of mine once said, "You are the grace of God to each other." To your spouse, children, all relatives, all church members. And as with any principle, you can't choose to whom the principle applies--it applies to all, equally. You are the grace of God to each other--EVERY each other.

Sometimes it's very challenging to bless those with whom we disagree--at home, the workplace, in government, or even in church. But, we can't ignore Jesus' teaching, "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you..." and as one Bible translation has it, "Bless them who insult you" (Luke 6: 27, 28, *American Bible Union Version*).

In a letter of 1888, Mrs. Eddy touched on this topic when she wrote, "Was sorry, sorry to learn of the discord among students who are acquiring the science of harmony. They never can understand God, the Principle of harmony in the midst of discord...they never can demonstrate the Principle that heals while in the error of discord" (MBE Library, Accession: L12804, Mary Baker Eddy to Caroline W. Frame, May 1, 1888). Elsewhere in her early correspondence, she said, "Think only on the right side let not the unreal decoy you into combat. Remember this. Practice mentally, not against the discord--but for the chord" (MBE Library, Accession: L01813, Mary Baker Eddy to Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy, Jan. 31, 1893). We can each ask ourselves, "Am I being the grace of God to others? If not me, then who?"

This grace takes tangible shape in many ways, as each of us is uniquely blessed with an infinite understanding of God, individually expressed. We clearly see this in the loving care that our practitioners and nurses provide and in the healing atmosphere Wide Horizon provides.

By now, you've probably noticed an underlying theme encompassing humility, inexhaustible resources, and grace. That of course, is healing. Humility, the "genius of Christian Science" leads us to the realization that "we have the best mind on earth as effect, because we have the only Mind in heaven as Cause." As our Leader says, "Humility is lens and prism to the understanding of Mind-healing..." thus enabling us to bless ourselves and others through healing (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 356).

With the blessing of infinite resources, God has already provided all to sustain His idea, man. With this spiritual focus, we can share with others the healing truths of the Comforter, especially in these economically challenged times.

And with regards to grace, Mrs. Eddy wrote these encouraging words: "The healing of my students changes its stages as they learn from experience. It starts a marvel of power and then becomes a marvel of *grace* ...More of the spirit than letter is required to reach this Christ-stage of healing sickness and sin. This dear one, is what I want you to attain" (*Christian Healer*, pp. 152-153). Can there be any doubt that each of us is this "dear one?"

There is no question about it. You are God's grace to each other. You are blessed to be a blessing.

Our benediction is from *Miscellany*, by our beloved Leader, Mary Baker Eddy:

*"May the divine light of Christian Science that lighteth every enlightened thought illumine your faith and understanding, exclude all darkness or doubt, and signal the perfect path wherein to walk, the perfect Principle whereby to demonstrate the perfect man and the perfect law of God....May the grace and love of God be and abide with you all"* (p. 187).

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