



**THE GREAT  
ATTEMPT  
TO MALIGN  
THE JEWISH  
PEOPLE**

## **YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Balak**

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky**

**Sinai Was the Focal Point**

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**Moshe's Manifestations Resulted in Striking the Rock**

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**Why Og Was Called Og**

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**Bilaam Understood the Epic Battle of Ultimate Evil & Good**

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### Balance/Counterbalance: The Power Of Speech vs. the Sword

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1. The Jewish People wanted passage thru Edomite territory.
2. Moshe: We were enslaved by the Egyptians & redeemed us when we called out to G-d.
3. Rashi: G-d responded due to the blessing we received from our Patriarch Yitzchok and the voice is the voice of Yaakov.
4. Edom's response to Moshe was: We shall come out with the sword against you.
5. Rashi: We also have a blessing from our Patriarch Yitzchok "And you shall live by the sword."
6. Bilaam wanted to curse the Jewish People but G-d didn't allow him.
7. Bilaam was killed by the sword.
8. Rashi: He exchanged his craft for ours so we exchanged ours for his.
9. His craft is "by the sword you shall live"; ours is power of speech – "the voice is of Yaakov."
10. "By the sword you shall live" is a classification, not a blessing.
11. Edom came out against the Jews with a strong hand.
12. Rashi: "Strong Hand" alludes to the blessing: The hands are the hands of Esav.
13. Midrash: When the voice is the voice of Yaakov the hands are not the hands of Esav.
14. Esav is the counterbalance to the Jewish People.

### When The Megalomaniac Subverts His Will

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1. Bilaam rises early to hitch his donkey.
2. G-d responds: Don't think your action is unique—Avraham, their forefather, preceded you in this area.
3. Avraham rose early to hitch his donkey to the Akeida.
4. He rose to curse the Jews, Avraham to do the will of G-d to sacrifice his son.
5. Chazal: Hate and Love disrupt protocol.
6. Why did G-d respond to Bilaam, which was contrary to G-d's will?
7. Bilaam personified evil; he wanted to bring intense prosecution upon the Jews.
8. Though Bilaam's alacrity and zeal were contrary to G-d's will, he demonstrated a level of negation never displayed before in a positive vein.
9. Avraham their forefather displayed this characteristic in a more difficult setting.
10. He rose early to sacrifice his son.



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### The Exponential Value of the Seemingly Inconsequential

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1. Bilaam was commissioned by Balak to curse the Jews.
2. He suggested Balak build 7 altars to sacrifice a bull and ram on each of them.
3. Bilaam's diatribe: He built 7 altars himself, which equaled number of altars of Patriarchs combined.
4. Guide For The Perplexed: The objective of sacrifices is an outlet for one to express his need to serve a Higher Being- G-d.
5. Without this outlet of expression one would serve a deity.
6. Ramban vehemently disagrees & rejects Rambam.
7. Sacrifices activate-coalesce spiritual forces.
8. Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk: Ramban misunderstood Rambam.
9. Rambam concurs regarding sacrifices brought in the Mishkan and Temple.
10. These were brought in locations that had the special effect.
11. Rambam refers to sacrifice one brings on his private altar when this was permitted.
12. Midrash: The Patriarchs are the location for the Divine Presence.
13. The altar of the Patriarchs was the equivalent of the altar of the Temple.
14. This was not the case with Bilaam.

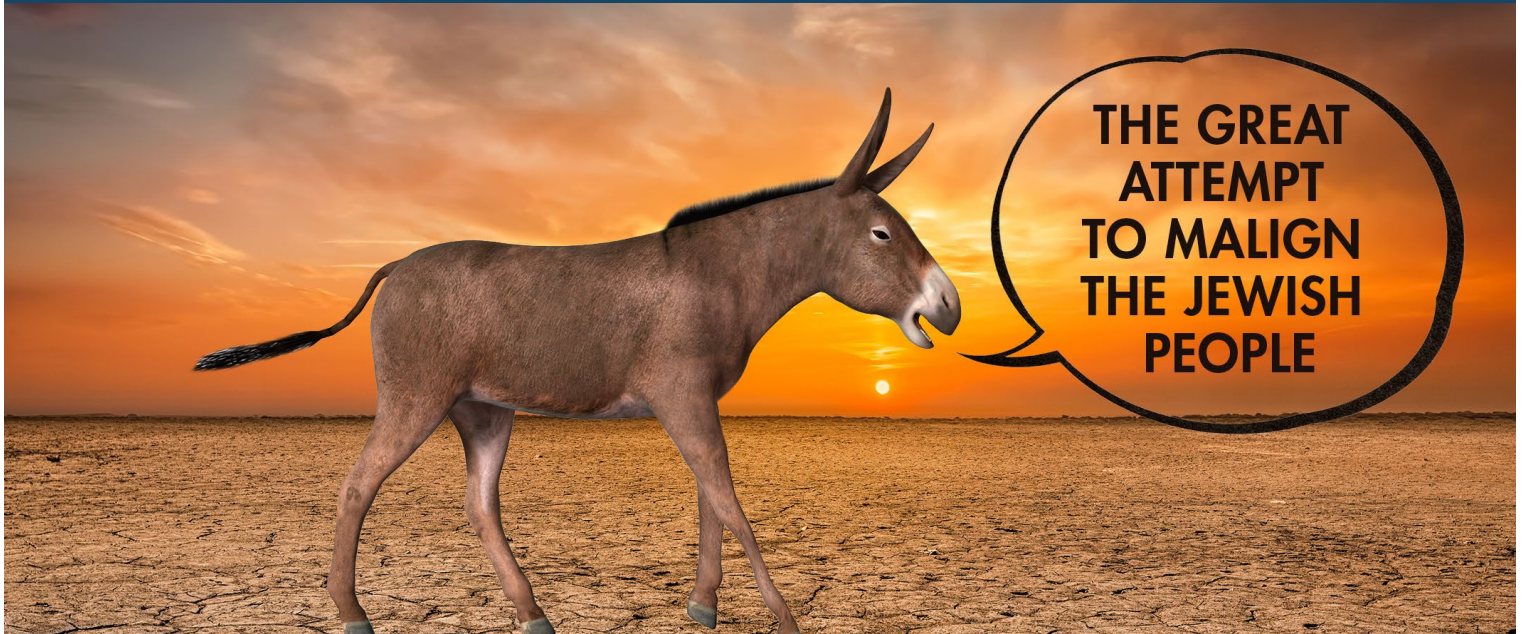
### All-Consuming Emotion Trumps All

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1. Bilaam hitched his own donkey for travel to curse the Jews.
2. Why would a man of Bilaam's renown, a pompous, self centered, megalomaniac, hitch his own donkey?
3. Avraham at 137 was told by G-d to bring his beloved son as a burnt offering.
4. He rose early in the morning & hitched his own donkey.
5. A man of Avraham's age, wealth, and stature prepared his own donkey?
6. Midrash: Intense love disrupts protocol.
7. When one is consumed with intense love or hate, all that exists is negated; all that matters is the objective of the love or hate.
8. One is consumed and subsumed by the objective.
9. To love is greater than to revere.
10. If one is able to achieve an advanced level of love, one will succeed to do the will of G-d because one's personal interests are negated due to the love.

## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Balak



### G-d's Ways are Just

*Midrash* citing a verse: "The Rock! – Perfect is His work; for all His ways are justice.' G-d did not want the nations of the world to come with a claim at the end of time, saying 'You have kept us away from You. You did not provide for us as You did for the Children of Israel.' What did G-d do? Just as He established kings, wise men, and prophets for the Jewish people, so too did He establish them for the nations of the world. If one compares the kings, wise men, and prophets of the Jewish people with those of the nations, one will see the difference. G-d allowed king *Solomon* to reign over the entire world.

"Similarly, G-d allowed *Nebuchadnezzar* to dominate the world. King *Solomon*, in his lofty position built the Temple and sang many praises to G-d. *Nebuchadnezzar*, on the other hand, used his power to destroy the Temple and blaspheme G-d. He had said, 'I will ascend to the heavens and will be the equivalent of the One

above.' G-d granted wealth to King *David*. What did he do with this wealth? He purchased the location of the Temple, for His name. Haman also merited enormous wealth; however, he expended it on trying to have a nation annihilated (Jewish people).

"The greatness that the Jewish people were given, was also given to the nations of the world. Just as the Jewish people had the prophet *Moshe*, who was able to communicate with G-d whenever he chose to do so, so too did the nations of the world have *Bilaam*, who was also able to communicate with G-d whenever he chose to do so."

*Midrash*: "What is the difference between the prophets of the Jewish people and the prophets of the nations of the world? The prophets of Israel forewarned the nations not to transgress. However the prophets of the nations created breaches to destroy mankind so that it should have no connection with the world to come. The prophets of the Jewish people expressed

the Attribute of Mercy, while their prophets expressed cruelty. *Bilaam*, the prophet of the nations, wanted to uproot and destroy an entire nation.

“This is the reason the *Torah* tells us the story of *Bilaam*. It is so that one should understand why there is no longer Divinely inspired people (prophets) among the nations of the world. If the power of prophecy would be given to an individual from the nations, it would be used for destruction, as *Bilaam* had done. *Bilaam*, being given prophecy, is the reason the nations of the world cannot claim at the end of time that G-d did not grant them the same opportunity as He had the Jewish people.”

*Gemara* in Tractate *Avoda Zorah*: At the end of time G-d will announce to the world, “Whoever has a share in *Torah* should come and receive his just reward.” All the nations will respond by saying that each of them is deserving for his own contribution to *Torah*. However, G-d will prove to them that they have basis for their claim. Ultimately, the nations will complain to G-d that He favored the Jewish people over them. G-d will respond and refute their claim. However, because they will feel that they were not treated fairly, G-d will present them with a *mitzvah* opportunity to allow them to have one last chance to prove that they have no relevance to spirituality/G-d.

*Gemara*: G-d will give them an “easy” *mitzvah*, which is the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*. However they will bolt from the *sukkah* and treat it with disdain. If G-d only gave prophecy to the nations of the world so that they should not have a claim at the end of time, why did He choose to give that ability to person such as *Bilaam*, who personified evil and corruption? Just as *Moshe* was unique in his spirituality among the Jewish people, G-d should have chosen *Job* as the prophet of the nations of the world because he was righteous.

*Midrash*: As long as *Job* was alive, the Jewish people were not able to enter into Canaan because his merit protected the nations of Canaan. If *Job* would have been their prophet perhaps they would have developed along the proper spiritual path. Why was establishing *Bilaam* as their prophet sufficient to quell the claim of the nations of the world?

*Gemara* in Tractate *Zevachim*: When G-d was giving the *Torah* at Sinai to the Jewish people, the earth quaked so violently that the nations of the world believed that the world was coming to an end. They came to *Bilaam*. They said to him, “G-d is destroying the world.” *Bilaam*

responded, “You fools! Do you not realize that G-d is giving His strength/power to the Jewish people (which is the *Torah*). It is because of this monumental moment that the world is quaking.”

To this the nations of the world responded, “G-d blesses His people with Shalom.” After having their fears alleviated, they returned to their idolatrous and evil ways. Despite the fact that *Bilaam*, their prophet had given them an understanding of the gravity of the moment, they chose to reject the *tRuth*. We see from this that it was not because of *Bilaam*’s evil persona that the nations of the world chose to remain as they were, but rather it was out of their own volition that they did so. *Bilaam* was only leading them along the path that they had chosen.

## Similar But Not the Same

*Torah*: When *Bilaam* was on the way to curse the Jewish people, “G-d’s wrath flared because he was going, and an angel of *Hashem* stood on the road to impede him. *Bilaam* was riding on his donkey...The donkey saw the angel of *Hashem* standing on the road with his sword drawn in his hand...”

*Midrash*: “Why did the angel have a drawn sword in his hand? The angel could have blown upon *Bilaam* and caused him to die, as we see regarding the destruction of the army of *Sancherev*. When *Sancherev* had come upon the Jewish people with millions of troops to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, the verse states, ‘The angel of *Hashem* went forth and had smitten the camp of *Ashure*. He had blown upon them and they dried-up.’ Why did the angel come upon *Bilaam* with a drawn sword, when he could have simply blown upon him?”

“The angel said to *Bilaam*, ‘The power of the mouth was given to *Yaakov*. As the verse states, ‘The voice is the voice of *Yaakov* and the hands are the hands of *Esav*.’ It also states regarding the nations of the world, ‘By the sword you shall live...’ But you, *Bilaam*, took hold of the craft of the Jewish people and came upon them with your mouth (to curse them). Therefore, when I come upon you I shall do so with your craft (the sword).’ This is the reason the angel came upon *Bilaam* with a drawn sword.”

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: Before *Balak* commissioned *Bilaam* to curse the Jewish people he had consulted with the

Midianites in order to ascertain the secret power of the leader of the Jewish people. They had told him that the power of their leader lies in his mouth, his verbal expression. They therefore summoned *Bilaam* to counter *Moshe*, with his power of expression to curse the Jewish people. However, *Balak* and the Midianites had no understanding of the essence of *Moshe's* power.

The effectiveness of *Moshe's* ability emanated from his unique dimension of spirituality. *Moshe* had no relevance to evil, as *Bilaam* had. He was imbued with holiness only to carry out the Will of G-d. The only commonality between *Moshe* and *Bilaam* was that both of their expressions emanated from their mouth. Although *Bilaam's* curse was lethal, as it had proven to be, it had no relevance to his spirituality; but rather, it was rooted in his evilness/physicality.

*Chazal*: When *Moshe* had killed the Egyptian in Egypt when he was beating a Jew, he had done so through the enunciation of one of the Names of G-d. His killing of the Egyptian, through verbal expression rather than a physical act, was an indication of the spirituality of *Moshe*. *Bilaam* was known for his "evil eye." When *Bilaam* initially wanted to bless the Jewish people, G-d had said to him, "Do not bless them. They do not need your blessing." It is as one says to a bee, "We do not need your honey and we do not need your sting." This is because a blessing that emanates from an evil source is the equivalent of a curse.

When the angel appeared to *Bilaam* with a drawn sword, it was to communicate to him that although he believed that his verbal expression was the equivalent of the verbal expression of the Jewish people, it was not. *Bilaam*, being a gentile and part of the nations of the world, his power is rooted in the sword, which is physical that has no relevance to the spiritual. Although his curse could bring about dire consequences, it was only emanating from his evil essence, which is part of the physical realm. Despite the fact that the angel had presented the difference between *Moshe* and *Bilaam* in a cogent and convincing manner, *Bilaam* did not grasp or appreciate the difference.

## **Understanding the Connotation of Dust**

*Torah*: When *Bilaam* had gone to bless the Jewish people he said, "Who has counted the dust of *Yaakov* or numbered a quarter of Israel?..." *Bilaam* did not initially intend to bless the Jewish people, but rather,

his evil eye was attempting to find an entry point through which he could curse them.

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*: "This evil one, through his cunningness and guile was trying to find a way to bring harm upon the Jewish people. He was trying to find a point of vulnerability. He had initially mentioned the holy Patriarchs, who were the foundation of the Jewish people to impart some level of impurity upon their beginnings. When he realized that he could not, he tried to quantify and measure the Jewish people so that they should be susceptible to his evil eye. (The Jewish people are not permitted to count themselves. When a census must be taken, it is only through the halfsilver coin – *machtiz hashekel*).

*Chazal*: 'Blessing only comes upon something that is not measured, weighed or counted.' Therefore, the evil one attempted to quantify them in order to undermine their existence. However, he was not able to do so. Thus he said, 'Who has counted the dust of *Yaakov*...'

*Torah*: The Jewish people are compared to dust as it states regarding the blessing that G-d had given to *Avraham*, our Patriarch, 'Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth...'. Although this blessing was given to *Avraham*, it did not come to fruition until *Yaakov*. This is the reason the verse states, '...the dust of *Yaakov*.'" Just as dust cannot be counted, measured, or quantified to any degree, so too the Jewish people cannot. If in fact the blessing was given to *Avraham*, why was it not fulfilled until *Yaakov*?

Although *Avraham* only had fathered *Yitzchak*, which is one individual, the *Torah* tells us that *Yaakov* descended to Egypt with seventy individuals. Relative to an infinite and unquantifiable number, *Yaakov* had no greater relevance to "dust" than *Avraham*. If so, why did the blessing only manifest itself with *Yaakov*? Anything that exists is quantifiable. In contrast, G-d is and His Wisdom are unquantifiable. The *Torah*, being G-d's Wisdom is unlimited and infinite. Although all of the Patriarchs were uniquely spiritual, *Yaakov* was the only Patriarch that embodied and personified the *Torah*. As the verse refers to him, "The perfect man, who dwelt in the tent (of *Torah*)." Therefore, the blessing that G-d had given to *Avraham* manifested itself only with *Yaakov* because he was the Patriarch that had relevance to the infinite.

*Chazal*: This is the reason that *Yaakov* was the most special of the Patriarchs.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Metzia*: There are three instances in which one is permitted to alter the *tRuth*. One of those circumstances is, if one is asked, “Is it true that you have studied so many tractates?” One is permitted to alter the *tRuth* in order not reveal the extent of his *Torah* knowledge.

*Commentators*: It is because of modesty/humility that one is permitted to answer in this manner. However, with the understanding that *Torah* is something that is unlimited and not quantifiable, if one were to quantify his *Torah* knowledge by answering the question *tRuthfully*, it would impact negatively upon the spiritual value of his *Torah*. Although one has in fact studied a specific and measurable amount of *Torah*, the innate value of that is unlimited. Thus, by quantifying it, one would put limitation upon something that is not limited— thereby diminishing the *tRuthfulness* of its essence. Therefore, one is permitted to alter the *tRuth*.

*Torah*: “If you toil in My *Torah* you will merit all blessing.” What does “toil” connote? It is one’s unlimited dedication to the study of *Torah* itself. One can only merit the *Torah* and its blessing when one’s involvement in the unlimited is itself at an unlimited level.

With this we can understand the *Gemara* in Tractate *Megillah*: “If you have toiled and come upon it (*Torah*), you can believe it. If you did not toil and come upon it, do not believe it.” One can only come upon *Torah*, which is infinite, if one is selflessly committed to it. Therefore, only the one who truly toils can come upon its *tRuth*.

## One Should Not Trivialize Even the Most Deficient Mitzvah

*Torah*: *Bilaam*, the evil one, wanted to curse the Jewish people. However, despite his desire and efforts, G-d did not allow him to do so. Ultimately rather than cursing them, *Bilaam* blessed them. One of the many attempts that *Bilaam* had made was that he told *Balak* to build a number of altars and bring sacrifices to G-d. *Bilaam* had thought that perhaps in the merit of *Balak*’s offerings, he would be allowed to curse the Jewish people. *Balak*’s intent was not to acknowledge, serve and revere G-d but rather it was a means to bring a curse upon the Jewish people.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Nazir*: “It is worthwhile to engage in *Torah* and *mitzvos* even if it is without a pure intent (*shelo l’shma*). This is because if one engages in

a *mitzvah* without a proper intent it will lead him to perform it with a pure intent (*l’shma*). In the merit of the 42 offerings which were brought by *Balak*, the evil one, he merited that *Ruth* the Moabite should be his descendant (although he had done the *mitzvah* with the intent to curse the Jewish people) ...” *Ruth* the Moabite was the grandmother of King *David* from whom *Moshiach* will descend.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos* citing a verse: “You should bring desolation upon the land...” One should not read the word in the verse as “*shamos*- desolation” but rather it should be read as “*sheimos*- names.” From here, we learn “*shma k’gorim*” that the name that one possesses determines one’s destiny. The reason *Ruth* (*Rus*) was given such a name was because she was destined to have a grandson who would sate G-d with song and praise (*yeraveh HaKadosh Baruch v’shiros v’tishbachos*). Within the name “*Ruth*” lies the spiritual potential of King *David* who would author the book of *Tehillim*.

It is interesting to note that as a consequence of *Balak* bringing the 42 offerings, although it was with a sinister intent (*shelo l’shma*), he merited to be the forbearer of *Ruth*, who was the forbearer of King *David* – establishing the Davidic line through which *Moshiach* will descend. We see that even a *mitzvah* that is performed at the most deficient level is able to generate a merit/blessing that has monumental and far-reaching ramifications. King *David* would have come into being regardless of *Balak*’s actions; however, the question is who will be his forbearer.

*Gemara*: There is a principle that “merit comes to those who are meritorious and tragedy comes through those who are undeserving.” *Balak* is considered meritorious because of the 42 offerings that he had brought. Although *Balak*’s intent was not proper, he is deserving of all that merit resulted from the chain of events that evolved from his actions.

*Mishna* in Tractate *Bava Metzia*. One has the obligation to return a lost article of his own father before returning the lost article of a stranger because one must be beholden to his parent for bringing him into existence. Only because the parent fathered the child does all opportunity that presents itself in the life of the child have any value. One has the obligation to return the lost article of his spiritual mentor (*rabo*) before returning that of his father. This is because one must be more beholden to his *rebbe*/mentor for giving him

a share in the world to come, which is eternal. If such far-reaching merit came upon one who performed a *mitzvah* with a sinister intent, how much merit will one have when one performs a *mitzvah* with a pure intent? One should not minimize the seemingly most trivial *mitzvah* because even its value cannot be understood and appreciated.

## **Forgiveness – An Expression of Compassion (From Chukas)**

The Jewish people were sustained in the desert for forty years by the Manna. It was a food that was absorbed into their inner organs. There was no bodily waste. In the fortieth year, the Jewish people complained saying, “Why did you bring us up from Egypt to die in the Desert, for there is no food and no water, and our soul is disgusted with the insubstantial food (Manna)? G-d sent the fiery serpents against the Jewish people and they bit the people... The people came to *Moshe* and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against *Hashem* and against you! Pray to *Hashem* that He remove from us the serpent. *Moshe* prayed for the people.” Why does the *Torah* need to inform us that *Moshe* acquiesced to their request? It would seem obvious that he would have responded to their request.

*Rashi* citing the *Midrash*: “It is from here that we learn that when an individual asks to be forgiven, one should not be cruel (*achzari*) and withhold forgiveness.” When *Moshe* prayed on behalf of the Jewish people, it was an indication that he had forgiven them for speaking against him. Not acquiescing to a sincere request is an indication of one’s insensitivity to the other person’s need – which is cruelty.

*Rambam* in *Hilchos Teshuva*: If the nature of one’s sin is between man and G-d, then *teshuvah* (repentance)

alone is sufficient to being about atonement. However if the nature of one’s sin is between man and his fellow, then in addition to *teshuvah* one must ask forgiveness from his fellow. If he does not forgive him then not even *Yom Kippur* will atone for that person.

*Rambam*: In order to be forgiven, “One should bring three acquaintances of the one from whom he is asking forgiveness and have them ask their colleague to forgive. If he is unwilling, then one should bring a second and third group of acquaintances to ask for forgiveness. If he remains adamant and is not willing to forgive, then he does not need to be forgiven by that individual. He is fully atoned. The one who did not offer his forgiveness is considered the sinner. It is forbidden for one to be cruel (*achzori*) and not be appeased...” If one recognizes the wrong he has done and asks to be forgiven, there is an obligation to forgive. If it is withheld, this is considered cruelty.

*Rambam*: A characteristic of a Jew is to be compassionate. Therefore, withholding forgiveness is antithetical to Jewish behavior. If one is obstinate and not willing to forgive, one must recognize that his failing is in the areas of compassion. However, if a Jew is willing to forgive, although the sinner does not deserve to be forgiven, it can be considered a flaw. Any characteristic, even one that is positive, if it is applied without a valid reason it is considered to be negative because the motive behind it was not valid.



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