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RANDY K.  
MOSS

*The  
Nature of  
Change in  
Counseling*

A CHANGE OF HEART

*And it supposeth me that they have come up hither to  
hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word which  
healeth the wounded soul.*

—Jacob 2:8

As a practicing psychologist and as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I hope to engage in a gospel-based discussion of a most important topic. The process of change and how it occurs is the crux of my profession and our everyday lives. I wish to explore the relational aspects of “being” therapeutic as well as “doing” therapy.

Almost immediately an example arises of how this concept is ignored and swept away in favor of the performance, or doing part, of the industry. In the commerce of professional counseling, I have noted the trend to emphasize the products and not the relational aspects of those engaged. Conference speakers, workshop facilitators, supervisors, and clinicians all highlight the accomplishment aspects of their personal portfolio more than the connective and defining relationships that constitute the soul and the intra-personal context. This is a misdirected focus that belies the true nature of change.

Having worked among the American Indian and Native Alaskan peoples, I have learned that introductions should be about who we are and not what we have done. The Inuit elders always start their introductions with a brief genealogy of their grandparents and family constellation and clan affiliations. This interdependent nature of identity is a turning of the heart (Mal. 4:6) and is also the power demonstrated in counseling. This relationship concept is the foundation of this article.

Those who seek services from practicing counselors often are seeking comfort and understanding. I have been touched over the years by the awesome privilege of being with and being in relationship to those seekers. As a scriptural beginning to this topic, I share with you three citations. The first summarizes many clients’ silent reachings during difficult times, for the Psalmist represented the ineffable longings of many of those seeking help: “My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word. Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?” (Ps. 119:81–82).

The second scripture articulates the desired outcome of counseling. Here Paul’s description of change is complete and refreshing. He clarified both the process and the “being” aspects of change: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Paul told us that we must discover ourselves in Christ, a process of seeking, knocking, and responding to simple, quiet presentiments. He also admonished each to be new, to let the new creature enfold the past. Being constantly new and present is the source of influence in changes of heart.

The third verse captures the whole of my presentation. Here Alma invited us to witness the true change process: “Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word” (Alma 5:7).

Exploring the process of change in the art of counseling and the application of therapy will be challenging. Merely translating scripture and gospel-informed understanding into “psychologized” vocabulary is dangerous. Concepts from within the profession fall short of comprehending the subtle, yet powerful, wisdom and perspective the gospel extends.

In the word of God, the pure change phenomenon is most familiar as “conversion” or the “mighty change of heart.” *Conversion* is rarely a term used in counseling, and when used, it is only with trepidation and obliqueness. I will attempt to show that conversion (into someone different, not to some thing) is the real change. Psychology, on the other hand, has some difficult and distorted concepts of change. Since counseling is not only a vocation of caring but is also a large corporate business, the understanding and application of the change process is corrupt and, many times, self-serving.

However, as Richard Williams reminded us, the root meaning of *therapy* is “to fight alongside, together with.” Likewise, he points out that the “server in this case (therapy) is neither slave nor hired-person” (Williams, 1994, pp. 345–346). While the business concerns of counseling would balk at free services, the concept of being in relationship to, becoming comrades with, and walking alongside the client is a good foundation and the one I will explore further.

### **Pocket, Oil, and Altitude Change**

Those of us practicing the art and business of counseling witness three types of change. These categories are not exact, mutually

exclusive, nor comprehensive. They do provide a common vocabulary for this presentation.

The first common type of change I label reactionary change. This type of change is a response to exterior demands and expectations and results from a fear-inducing or coercive method of intervention. Rather than being a genuine change, this type is a pseudo-switch, an accommodation. More cosmetic than substantive, reactionary changes tend to be superficial, generally insincere, and mostly transient. Maintenance of reactionary change can be facilitated only by strict exterior forces or deeply seated fear. This is a change that at best brings about compliance but usually produces only limited movement toward joy (do not read “happiness”) and authentic relationships.

The second category of change I label functional change. This type complies to professional standards and societal goals. Functional change attempts to (a) increase productivity in the workplace, school, or elsewhere; (b) match or conform to demands consistent with standards or wishes that have been foreclosed on and/or partially internalized; or (c) regain a previous level of functioning lost because of tragedy. Many functional changes are merely internalized duty and serve to moderate guilt and real or perceived social obligations. This change is a rearrangement of external relationships among objects, people, and emotions, a more mechanical and developmental progression that structures change as a binary process involving on-off behaviors. The goal of most therapeutic enterprises, this type of change is generally positive, beneficial, and desirable but remains susceptible to the transformation of tragedy into trauma and pain into misery. This potential transformation can lead clients to identify the tragedy as the source of personal will, meaning, and life station.

The final type of change I describe as dynamic change. This is the mighty change of heart, the change that brings about the new creature. This is the transformation of relationships, not just a rearrangement. This type of change is the realization of internal relations with the world and all creation—a connection beyond mechanics, organizations, and context. Dynamic change is the literal awakening unto God spoken of by Alma, the engraving of His image on one’s countenance, the taking upon one the name of

Christ and literally loving and seeing neighbors as oneself. I believe dynamic change allows an abiding thankfulness. This change is the conversion of one's being, the reality of divine love made manifest in a person—the sudden and revolutionary mighty change. This type of change transforms pain into acceptance and joy and empowers action and compassion in the face of raw existence and tragedy.

The mighty change or dynamic change is not a stage-based progression. Rather, it is what theorists would call a discontinuous event. The event is not predictable nor manipulatable in the skill-based presentation of psychology and modern therapeutic ventures. This is a sudden shift, a momentary decision point, a networkwide transformation that transcends the expertise of the counselor and the presently employed theoretical framework. While beyond the control and direct application of the counseling content and context, this type of change sometimes occurs within formal counseling. What, then, are the actions and attributes the counselor can offer that optimize the possibility of dynamic change occurring? From gospel foundations, I will offer what I think are the tangible ideas and concepts of “being” that are essential to encourage dynamic change: in short, the offering of self in the use of the other.

### **Patient Practice**

Persuasion is the language of heaven. Persuasion is the invitation to conversion, the universal tool that brings about the mighty change. In 2 Nephi 2:16, Nephi described the method of heaven that brings about joy and salvation: “Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other.” I think that this scriptural truth is the best beginning to being effective in dealing with ourselves and those that invite us to walk with them.

Godly enticement transcends the pejorative common usage of the term. Heavenly enticement is a luring through attraction to something inherently divine, some way of being, that resonates subtly within each child of God. In mainstream psychology, the study of persuasion is conceptualized as an interchange game, not as enticement. There is ample evidence of a general disregard for individual capability to act, the belief that that capacity is not an acceptable

ontological fact. It follows that much of the purported technology of counseling is a mechanistic model of acting upon the client. Theory-driven interventions, specially honed skills, targeted objectives, and other therapeutic devices become tools wielded in sculpting the client to an externally preconceived design. In contrast, persuasion and partial self-creation through acting on persuasion places the process and tool of change in clients' hands. This is an uncomfortable realization for most professionals.

Persuasion needs further elaboration. I will use some phrases that come from process theology, based on the cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead. For this discussion, persuasion is described as creative divine love, which invites responsiveness to life, enjoyment, and novelty. Man is partially self-creating by acting within the divine love—otherwise known as God's subjective aim. Such an aim, mediated through divine love, can be defined as God's desire for all creation to reach the fullness of their divine nature. It is God's urge for harmony, balance, and relationship. This divine love is the abolition of coercion through an immediate and imminent relationship with God and with the many God-imbued creations. In the scripture quoted earlier, persuasion is relational and enticing, just the opposite of man's attempts to force change through control and coercion.

The limited damaging misunderstanding of God as a controlling and punitive despot or unflinching exactor of souls has led to humankind's using coercive methods. Humans use power and coercion as a distorted reflection of a misunderstood divine process. That power and control reside at the heart of many counseling activities is underscored by therapists' belief that they can produce change through interpretation and their professional status.

### **“Do You Hear What I Hear?”**

Persuasion in counseling is not causally instituted through the “talk” of counseling but rather by the presence of the listener. Creative invitation supports interaction and internal relationships rather than extrinsic consequences and better “doings.” Whitehead stated that Jesus's message dwelt upon “the tender elements in the world which slowly and in quietness operate by love.” The Apostle John simply said, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). Interestingly, the

Doctrine and Covenants tells us that “the elements are the tabernacle [body] of God” (93:35) and that God is “in all and through all things” (88:6). If immanence is God’s body, persuasion his message, and love his method, then ought not those engaged in giving comfort and fighting alongside others adopt these qualities?

God is an uncomfortable term and topic within psychology and academia, and God’s subjective aim even more so, with its inherent philosophy of the nature and destiny of man. Most scientifically trained and empirically oriented practitioners would bristle, if not rage outright, at such a notion. Loosely translated into gospel terms, God’s subjective aim is the literal answer to the Lord’s prayer: “As in Heaven so on earth.” This is the clearest articulation of God’s wish or subjective aim for all creation.

### **And It Came to Pass . . . Not Stay**

I subscribe to a process of metaphysics that holds that God’s subjective aim in the universe is the narrative of persuasion and the process of ever-becoming. Process philosophy and, I believe, the message of Jesus, introduce revealing concepts of becoming and perishing. While neither surprising nor unfamiliar concepts, these rich ideas posit change as basic to every instance and every event. Simply stated, each moment, whether measured or divided, is both a birth and death. This process is informed and imbued by a collective past and a rich actual future realized in an immediate present.

This circular nature of becoming is a departure from the strong linear developmental or mechanical causality currently sustained by the hidden assumptions of psychology. The change we seek is more a quantumlike event, not fully determined by the past or measurable constraints. This change maintains a shadow and lessons of the past and the totality of the future, providing a near infinite possibility of a new “now.” The moment the now is actualized, it moves directly into informing and enriching the next now. The past and now perish, and a qualitatively novel now comes about with a qualitatively different future and a comprehensive collective past.

This concept undermines the “fixed” state of much of current psychological theory and assumption. If in the now the actor (that is, the client or clinician) partially self-creates toward “heaven on earth,” the next now includes a different future—not simply a



theoretically different but an actually different future. This is participation in God: a divine contained now. Such a change is a partial realization of a greater “en-joy-ment,” “at-one-ment,” and peace. God’s aim and the self-creator’s aim are persuasively moved in a harmonizing action within divine love.

This nature of being is the key concept to a process and gospel-informed counseling that privileges persuasion over coercion and the “doing to” presentation of most modern psychologies. Acknowledgement of the circle of becoming, with its constant organizing of novel and creative nows, acts as a catalyst of the mighty change of heart. We can then realize the “new creature” at any juncture in our life. Such liberation from “fixedness” is the meaning of sacramental living, baptism, and repentance.

### **Object(ing) to the Subject**

The change of heart becomes actual when people change how they identify themselves. It happens when their subjective identity (as conceived in the perceptual world, the world out there) becomes an objective self within a connectivity of others experiencing their own subjectivity.

We commonly objectify others based on our own subjectivity. Such internal relationships (subjectivity) and interpenetration (connectivity) transcend the long-held, me-others split in the world. There is no more outside/inside: we are all inside. We come to realize the singular nature of being in God. The other person becomes self, and the collective selves become God identified and a direct manifestation of God. The conceptual artifact of the objective therapist and the therapist’s subject (client) and the subjective client and the objective other is exposed. “Love your neighbor as yourself” (John 13:34), all “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27), and “elements are the tabernacle of God” (D&C 93:35) take on new significance and meaning.

This shift in relationships illuminates Alma’s words that “they awoke unto God” (Alma 5:7). The realization of the internal and eternal relationships that everyone has with all others and all creation constitutes the mighty change of heart. This awakening, this change, is a joyful comprehension of life and becoming. We can then exclaim to God that “it is good.”

With persuasion and love acting within the client, there is an exciting unfolding and consequential enfolding of greater perspectives and quiet knowings. These knowings are different than thought monitoring, symbolic rearrangement, or insightful gestalt. The mighty change brought about through invitation and enticement is manifested as learned and lived love, felt wisdom, and tragic appreciation. The person intuitively, if not consciously understands, the nested ecologies of being. These ecologies are formed of greater inclusions and recognitions of relations: a move toward a circumscribed whole. All the afflictions besetting the client trailing this egocentric world of “done unto,” “incomplete,” and “alone” (all understood as manifestations of separateness or the “fallen state”) are transformed and erased. The afflictions become, as described in Alma 31:38, “swallowed up in the joy of Christ.”

### **Presence Present**

A second factor influencing mighty change is an extension of relationship. Healing presence with attending persuasion transcends the current panoply of theories. In 1 Kings 19:11–13, Elijah was in the mountains attempting to find out the will of the Lord. From within a cave, he witnessed many impressive demonstrations of power. The story relates how Elijah did not respond to such a demonstration; rather, he awaited invitation. This story teaches that the flash and bluster of impressive action does not indicate potency or changing power; rather, it is the still, small invitation that elicits response and motivates to action.

I see an analogy between the fire, wind, and earthquakes in this scripture and the many theories and technical skills used in counseling: lots of referential power and impressive show but little instrumental effectiveness:

There is no doubt that research poses threats to the therapist. He may discover that what he actually does differs considerably from what he thinks he does, that changes in patients are not caused by the maneuvers he thinks cause them and that his results are no better than those obtained by practitioners of other methods. (Frank, 1974, p. 331)

Consider the numerous theoretical schools and applications of counseling techniques and the lack of any definite superiority of one

over any other. This fact leads to the alternative of elucidating common factors underlying effective therapeutic exchange. Some common elements have been discussed in diverse journals, books, and conferences (see Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999).

I have experienced the evidences of authentic change potential in the “healing attentive presence.” By being wholly present and attentive to the relational interpenetration of the moment, the client and clinician find true changing energy and potential. John Cobb’s (1976) comment on this subject is seminal: “We try to persuade them to actualize those possibilities [the self-creative act of novelty and en-joy-ment] which they themselves find intrinsically rewarding. We do this by providing ourselves as an environment that helps open up new, intrinsically attractive possibilities” (p. 54).

Nephi also believed that the presence of an attentive healer is essential. Some 600 years before Christ appeared in the Americas, Nephi, quoting Zenos, anticipated the misery and separation of the children from their Father and prophesied a healing by an attentive presence (see 1 Ne. 19:11–17). Consequently, when Christ visited the new land, His presence brought about much healing. Third Nephi 10:9–10 describes the appearance of this changing:

And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land, and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away. And the earth did cleave together again, that it stood; and the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; and their mourning was turned into joy, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer.

Note that those things which were separate and rent apart (reminiscent of the lives of clients) were brought together. The at-one-ment, the universal reconnection, occurred with attentive, caring presence and quiet awakening. Even the fabric of the earth came together as one. The parallel to attentively being with and walking alongside the client seems remarkable and exemplary.

Mark Epstein (1995), a noted psychiatrist and philosopher, also concisely and accurately articulated the power of the healing presence: “The lesson for psychotherapy is that the therapist may well

Turning  
Freud  
Upside  
Down

have as great an impact through her *presence* as she does through her problem solving skills” (p. 186). Being alive and available without fire, wind, or earthquake demonstrations invites the client from the cave of shame and despair and into the light of change and wakefulness.

### **Shhhh . . . hhhhh . . . hhhhh . . . hhhh**

A third practical factor that helps facilitate the change of heart is what I call expanding space and silence. The mighty change rushes forth from contemplative space and profound silence. The power and necessary posture of the counselor is not that of the “answer” but only that of a grace-infused relationship providing the expanding space the client needs. This space is the distance between painful separateness and attentive presence. It is within this relational space that persuasion effects self-creation. The more space the therapist can comprehend with unassuming, attentive presence, the greater the possibility for the client to find healing for the rent parts of his or her existence.

A crucial and complementary aspect of this relational space is profound silence. This is not a bored, disinterested, or confused quiet filled with conceptual questions and judgments, which constitute unproductive silence. Rather, it is an evocative silence full of permission and manifold outcomes. The terror of silence, which many see as signifying universal indifference or personal meaninglessness, can be quieted by the inviting silence that conceives introspection, assessment, meditation, and transformation. Silence is essential for the mighty change. Note the paralysis of Alma the Younger during his conversion and of the silence spoken of in 3 Nephi 10:1–2:

And now behold, it came to pass that all the people of the land did hear these sayings, and did witness of it. And after these sayings there was silence in the land for the space of many hours; For so great was the astonishment of the people that they did cease lamenting and howling for the loss of their kindred which had been slain; therefore there was silence in all the land for the space of many hours.

This particular silence, which punctuated the astonishment generated by the message, allowed the listeners to accept the transformation of lamentations and separations into healings through

the inviting call and mercy of Christ. Epstein (1995) acknowledged the value of silence:

We are all hungry for this kind of silence, for it is what allows us to repossess those qualities from which we are estranged. . . . When a therapist can sit with a patient without an agenda, without trying to force an experience, without thinking that she knows what is going to happen or who this person is, the therapist is infusing the therapy with the lessons of meditation [silence]. (p. 187)

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The counselor must neither fool him or herself nor deceive the client by pretending to know the future or by being the repository of “the answer.” Simple and pure presence and experiencing the internal relationship with the “other as self” creates the necessary space and silence the client can productively occupy. These concepts underscore the posture the counselor should have in the interpenetrating “walking with” the client toward the mighty change of heart. A counselor would do well to follow what this Tibetan master stated:

Do not think, scheme or cognize,  
Do not pay attention or investigate; leave mind in its own sphere . . .  
Do not see any fault anywhere,  
Do not take anything to heart,  
Do not hanker after signs of progress . . .  
Although this may be said to be what is meant by non-attention,  
Yet do not fall prey to laziness;  
Be attentive by constantly using inspection. (Epstein, 1995, p. 188)

The role of the counselor is to prepare the space and silence that elicits and invites the remembrance to connection and wholeness.

### **Are You Myself?**

Surrendering the objective stance is the next important counseling aspect. Can we be unrelated if we hold that God is in all things and through all things? If we hold that each person is part of the body of Christ and that all the elements are the tabernacle of God, then the answer is a resounding no. Relatedness necessitates mutual influence, points to constant unfolding and enfolding of experience, and therefore is bidirectional.

Many theories of therapy along with ethical codes separate the

client from the counselor. I believe that often this separateness is internalized by practitioners as a qualitative difference between them and those seeking their help. This is the sad state of “doing unto” and not “being with.”

When internal relationships are realized, the counselor and the client experience not a mere rearrangement of status or an exchange of information but a peculiar transformation. Participating in this connected world allows everyday encounters to be germinal for the mighty change of heart. The scope of influence is no longer held by a select and papered few. Influence is reciprocal and mutually changing and efficient.

### **Papers, Permissions, and Ph.D.s**

The self-professed ownership of “truth,” of the way or the “answer,” is professional arrogance, and it detracts from and blocks the healing presence. This clinical arrangement fills the room with chatter and shrinks the space of discovery. The Apostle Paul has some harsh words that could apply to the business-oriented and condescending attitudes of counseling: “For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake” (Titus 1:10–11). In the people-are-broken worldview of mental health (this is not to suggest that there are not structural anomalies, biological analogues, and true mental illnesses) is an advertising ploy where every person outside ourselves (our subjectivity) becomes a client (object) to feed the insatiable appetite of the therapy industry. “Psychotherapy is the only form of treatment which, at least to some extent, appears to create the illness it treats” (Frank, 1974, p. 8).

I believe that our certificates, degrees, and objectification of the client through scholarship and diagnosis sometimes preclude us from fully participating with those seeking dynamic change. Sadly, psychotherapists have been taught to be separate, to be objective, to not experience a relationship with the client outside the sterile prescriptions of theory, law, and ethics. The miseducation continues in outlining the concept that influence (change and alteration) is only unidirectional, a movement flowing from the therapist to the client. The client gains something substantial and meaningful, but the

counselor comes away only with another case study, another billable service, and an addition to the “saved” tally.

True therapy is attentive, internally connected, and mutually changing. If we walk out of the session without awareness of having been moved and enriched with increased personal and collective perspective and relationship, then we are practicing priestcraft and empty professional games.

### **Tied with Fancy Hope**

Finally, the counselor and client must team with hope, not what I call binding hope, but enlivened hope. Binding hope is experienced as a façade of escape and counterfeit freedom. Due to the perception of undeserved pain, a person who binds hope seeks justification through anticipated revenge, debilitating excuses, or smug beliefs in a greater reward in the worlds to come because of their suffering. This hope binds one to wishful thinking and spiteful redemption (which is not redemption at all).

Giving clients binding hope through an exterior flood of excused interpretations, vain promises of ideal outcomes, and false understandings that arise from a relationship developed through strategic empathy is wrong. If a life narrative fictionalizes tragedy or overidentifies with trauma, should counselors bind clients to a hope that is meaningless and absurd? Counselors must be cautious not to promote an empty hope that mutates into a binding separateness; unbinding people from such false hope is the righteous goal of counseling, as it has been for existential writers and religious teachers and prophets.

The second kind of hope is enlivened hope, a term I base on Paul’s teachings. This is the hope arising out of awakening unto God. Again, this awakening is the realization of a universal internal relationship with all creation. Enlivened by responding to the relationship with the whole body of Christ, all others, our own desires, and all possibilities folding into “now,” the client and counselor “become new creatures” (Mosiah. 27:26) from which to inform the next frame of being. Our grace-infused incompleteness made whole in the immanence of God, our intimacy with our pain, anxiety over consequences, and shaky subjective aim are nested within the subjective aim of divine love. This reality makes up enlivened hope.

The mighty change of heart arises from the symbolic baptismal cleansing of soiled relations and from enlivening hope that wakes the client to strength and joyful acceptance and knowing. This hope swallows up affliction in the joy of Christ. This is the hope that bears the fruit of at-one-ment and en-joy-ment through interdependence, attentive presence, space and powerful silence, and understanding the gospel. It awakens all of us from a dark and distant slumber and invites us to act with compassion, deliberately and unhesitatingly. It prepares us to hear the Word. Hope allows man to have joy and therefore peace. Counseling can provide a place for the change of heart that produces comfort and godly peace.

Peace is the final fulfillment. It is the hallmark of process development and gospel labors, the mighty change of heart. It is harmonization with the universe. Peace is the culmination and fulfillment of each person's subjective aim comprehended in the divine period. Peace is the destination of God's enticement: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Peace is the deconstruction of personal ego into the whole fabric of creation. Such is the aim of development, personal becoming, and change of heart; in counseling, it is the goal of therapeutic persuasion, presence, silence, and space. Crowned with an enriching hope and shared experience, the client finds the thread of peace in the fabric of life.

In closing I wish to leave a summary thought from Alfred North Whitehead. He referred to the desired outcome of all these processes and captured the intent of gospel-informed psychology, the change of heart and the point of this presentation:

Peace is the removal of inhibition and not its introduction. It results in a wider sweep of conscious interest. It enlarges the field of attention. Thus Peace is self-control at its widest—at the width where the "self" has been lost, and interest has been transferred to coordinations wider than personality. . . . As soon as high consciousness is reached, the enjoyment of existence is entwined with pain, frustration, loss, tragedy. Amid the passing of so much beauty, so much heroism, so much daring, Peace is then the intuition of permanence. It keeps vivid the sensitiveness to the tragedy; and it sees the tragedy as a living agent . . . surrounding fact. . . . Peace is the understanding of tragedy, and at the same time its preservation. (1933, pp. 368–369)



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