

**Subject:** Re: [Acmhe\_discussion] Mindfulness for Faculty?

**From:** Lisa Freinkel <freinkel@uoregon.edu>

**Date:** Tue, Aug 11, 2015 7:52 pm

**To:** Patricia Morgan <p.morgan@unsw.edu.au>

**Cc:** acmhe\_discussion <acmhe\_discussion@lists.contemplativemind.org>, "bnewell@fsu.edu" <bnewell@fsu.edu>

Hello everyone!

I'm very grateful to this listserv and this conversation, and to the deep leadership, wisdom and clarity represented here. Many thanks to Hal for his vision and discernment in helping to shape our terms; the *inquiry* vs. *advocacy* distinction, for starters, is tremendously potent. For me, I keep coming back to the question of reflection, and (as Hal reminds us) the status of the first person. What's at stake for me is this reflexive move of thought: the bending back of the mind on to its own conditions of possibility. Isn't this what the Academy has been all about since 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athens? How has that activity become so controversial over the millennia??? (I'm trying to write about these issues as well — so apologies if I rattle on a bit.)

Just a few notes from the University of Oregon where I've been a professor and now am a vice provost. I've had excruciating push back from a few colleagues about, in the first place, a proposed contemplative studies initiative and secondly a "mindful campus" initiative — despite high level support from Academic Affairs, Student Life, our colleges, our Grad School. And indeed, I've been accused of advocacy (it doesn't help that in some contexts I use my dharma name as my middle name, and have started to include my lay ordination and Clinical Pastoral Education training on some versions of my c.v.).

However, I sometimes think that "advocacy" is a red herring. I'm coming to realize that what often poses as a tension between either church and state might more appropriately, on my campus at least, be categorized as a tension between lay and monastic. For some critics, contemplative practice remains dangerous, mysterious, the purview of initiates, of masters and disciples (etc) — and thus is at odds with a mainstream approach that threatens the sacredness of that mystery.

My job — literally — is to listen carefully to these concerns, trying mindfully to build a community of interest and mutual care. I'll keep you posted! Right now my "mindful campus" initiative is very much on hold.

In the meantime, although I appreciate Patricia's note of caution re MBSR, my viewpoint is a bit different. I started an MBSR program here at Oregon about 3 years ago, and have taught several hundred faculty, staff, students and community members in the interim. What swayed me initially in this direction was the clarity of the CFM's training process, the tightness and road-testing of the curriculum, the ways in which my own teaching gets subjected to oversight and review, and the translatability of the teaching certification. That's what got me started. What keeps me going are the ways in which, through MBSR, I find in my teaching and in my students a fundamental process of reflection, with roots in the great wisdom traditions to be sure (including the home-grown traditions of depth psychology) — but a method that also retraces a path central to the Academy since Plato, echoed by Descartes in his stove-heated room, and reconfigured in the 20<sup>th</sup> century via as diverse programs of thought as pragmatism, phenomenology, deconstruction, cognitive science.... This path of reflection, introspection and insight is deeply precious; it's what I want to safeguard, at the very heart of all my work in higher ed.

And I suppose, as my initial foray into the lay vs. monastic side of the conversation, I'd invoke the ways in which today's debates in contemplative pedagogy may recap the broader problem besetting higher education today: the extent to which liberal arts is identified with a cloistered ivory tower — a separation from action and engagement in the quote-unquote real world. In this era of skyrocketing tuition and declining enrollments, liberal arts as a whole tends to suffer from its alignment with contemplation — and its supposed detachment from the world of action and transaction. I suspect that some of the confusion and consternation about contemplative studies may be channeling this anxiety.

Gratefully,

Lisa

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*In order to practice more mindful media consumption, I "unplug" weekly. I will not be available via email, text or cell phone from sundown to sundown, Friday through Saturday evenings.*

On Aug 10, 2015, at 9:10 PM, Patricia Morgan <[p.morgan@unsw.edu.au](mailto:p.morgan@unsw.edu.au)> wrote:

Dear Colleagues,

Firstly Hal thanks so much for generously sharing this information and initiating the discussion, I think it's very timely. Though I think caution needs to be applied when talking about 'certification' or the instrumentalising of practices or development of standards.

Potentially, there are issues of commodification, standardisation and commercialisation. This is already happening to some extent in the areas of MBSR that intersect with contemplative education. While there may be issues with some people currently teaching contemplative education or developing contemplative pedagogy I don't think that standardising things will necessarily produce better contemplative pedagogues or researchers, or stop the potential for harm. I think if not sensitively handled it could mean that a lot of fine contemplatives will not be able to teach, they may for example not have the funds if a situation arises where particular courses are recommended that people have to do to become accredited. As we know with many professions that have to go through strict accreditation this doesn't mean that it stops them acting unethically. It always comes back to the individuals and the context. Currently we have mindfulness training courses here that, firstly, some people assume are the ones that need to be done to teach and secondly are very expensive. What stops these organisations having a monopoly is that they can't claim to be teaching 'the' accredited course, they are just teaching 'a' course.

I definitely think it is important that people who teach have their own practice and that there are possibly some loose guidelines but I don't think it needs to be more than that. The thing that makes contemplative education such a wonderful area to work in – is the organic way it has developed, how so many of the people involved are doing it for the love of it because they know the benefits in their own life, that the heightened ethical awareness, which can result from our practice is what guides us, not outside rules and regulations, that contemplative pedagogy is applied in so many varied and creative ways and that it is a type of grass roots thing. My sense is if some form of standardisation is applied then it will lose a lot of what is so wonderful about it.

I'm interested in seeing how this evolves and it's wonderful to have the opportunity to be a part of the discussion.

Kind Regards, Patricia

**From:** ACMHE\_discussion [[mailto:acmhe\\_discussion-bounces@lists.contemplativemind.org](mailto:acmhe_discussion-bounces@lists.contemplativemind.org)] **On Behalf Of** Roth, Harold

**Sent:** Tuesday, 11 August 2015 1:23 AM

**To:** Oren Ergas

**Cc:** acmhe\_discussion; [bnewell@fsu.edu](mailto:bnewell@fsu.edu)

**Subject:** Re: [Acmhe\_discussion] Mindfulness for Faculty?

Thanks to Oren, Aaron, and to all who have contributed to this extremely rich line of discussion. It suggests that it would be of great benefit for someone interested in these issues to organize a meeting or event at which we could convene to discuss them. It's too late for this

year's ACHME, unfortunately.

A number of you have asked me to post the Brown Contemplative Studies draft document in which we discussed standards for contemplative teaching in the college or university classroom. I have done so in the attached document.

Please remember that these are still being discussed among our Contemplative Studies Core Faculty and this not at all a set of finalized recommendations. However these draft standards do take seriously the question of what are the criteria by which someone is qualified to teach contemplative practices to students in a classroom setting. I have been concerned for a long time as our field of Contemplative Studies develops, that people are teaching without the proper training. The development and maintenance of such standards has also been a problem within MBSR (I know from personal discussions with its founders) and will be for any of the deracinated forms of contemplative practice that have been extracted from their original spiritual contexts and reconstituted in the setting of the modern Western Academy.

I offer these as points to begin this important discussion.

I am trying to stay off email because I am on our one family vacation of the year so I may not respond right away to your comments.

Deep gratitude for this forum and all our contributors.

Hal

Harold D. Roth  
Professor of Religious Studies  
Director, [Brown Contemplative Studies](#) Concentration  
Co-Founder, [Alpert Medical School Scholarly Concentration in Contemplative Studies](#)  
Recipient of 2014 President's Award for Excellence in Faculty Governance

On Mon, Aug 10, 2015 at 6:08 AM, Oren Ergas <[oren.ergas@mail.huji.ac.il](mailto:oren.ergas@mail.huji.ac.il)> wrote:

Dear All,

Responding to Hal's latest important addition and to locate my previous claims: There seem to be two different conversations going on here:

1. How to negotiate contemplative practice into higher education given diverse forms of resistance.
2. How these forms of resistance reflect certain social assumptions about the nature of 'education' its aims and 'legitimate' practices.

These are basically two ways of locating contemplative practice within education. No. 1 works from within current conceptions (or paradigm) of 'education' and this is what Hal I believe is referring to, although his paper 'Against Cognitive Impirialism' directly speaks to no. 2 - ways of reconstructing our conception of 'knowledged' and shifting our 'educational' paradigm. I recently published papers on these if anyone is interested in the link below 'The post-secular rhetoric of contemplative practice in the curriculum', and 'The deeper teachings of mindfulness practice as reconstruction of 'education''' <http://huji.academia.edu/OrenErgas>. My previous claims were more within domain 2 as a general remark about a somewhat apologetic discourse that I (and I believe others) may feel themselves drawn into. I was pointing to some false assumptions that such discourse stands on that we need to be aware of so as not to forget that the current 'ball park' of 'education' is not limited by some 'higher

order' other than social conventions. That said, as Hal indeed remarked, and I have experienced this myself - getting a provost to listen to such sophisticated argumentation may not be the best strategy. no. 1 indeed may be far more pragmatically approached (perhaps as Buddhist skillful means) by appealing to the language that academia speaks as Hal recommends.

My own strategy is to become as comfortable as possible with diverse ways of 'speaking contemplative practice' that I try to skillfully use according to the audience. That entails both science *and* wisdom traditions. Whichever the case, for me at least, it is not *about* the latter two as third-person forms of knowledge. While clearly useful, no matter the route I take it is eventually about first-person experience and making sure that this audience can tell the difference between talking *about* contemplative practice, and actually engaging in it. Both are forms of 'education', yet the former is the familiar kind in which we fix our attention mostly *out there* to the *subject matter*, whereas the latter is the one I tend to think we most need, in which *we* become the 'subject matter'.

Best,  
Oren

Oren Ergas, PhD  
School of Education, Hebrew University  
<http://huji.academia.edu/OrenErgas>

2015-08-10 4:51 GMT+03:00 Aaron Godlaski <[aaron.godlaski@centre.edu](mailto:aaron.godlaski@centre.edu)>:

Hal,

Excellent points. As we continue this work it becomes more necessary to look critically at how we apply contemplative practices, the mechanisms by which they work, and ultimately their efficacy. This is no small task, especially when many are doing this work in isolation. However, with the continued growth of this community I think this isolation is lessening, and new avenues for collaborative study and assessment are opening.

As much as we are collaborating via retreats and workshops to develop and deepen our application of contemplative practices, I believe we should equally be coming together to systematically explore process and outcome from a variety of angles. This will require ongoing dialogue across disciplines in order to produce substantive work that validates contemplative studies and practice within higher education. Our personal experiences, and the anecdotal evidence provided by our students, (as profound as they may often be) will only take us so far towards forming a discipline of contemplative studies.

In my own experience, the clinical and neuroscience data on the efficacy of mindfulness meditation have often been enough to aid my argument for the place of contemplative practice on our own campus. However, relying solely on outcomes studied within such specific fields and experimental settings is self-limiting, as it risks contemplative practice being viewed as some form of "special application" of constructs better studied within other established fields. Limiting too, is the strong presence of some, and total absence of other,

contemplative traditions under study. Unfortunate, given that transformative practices are manifold.

Deciding whether to advocate for such practices depends on the situation, and requires careful discernment. One thing that will help advocacy when it is warranted is more, and thoughtful, study.

-Aaron

**From:** ACMHE\_discussion [mailto:[acmhe\\_discussion-bounces@lists.contemplativemind.org](mailto:acmhe_discussion-bounces@lists.contemplativemind.org)] **On Behalf Of** Roth, Harold  
**Sent:** Sunday, August 09, 2015 2:15 PM  
**To:** Judy Van de Geer  
**Cc:** acmhe\_discussion; [bnewell@fsu.edu](mailto:bnewell@fsu.edu)

**Subject:** Re: [Acmhe\_discussion] Mindfulness for Faculty?

Thanks to all contributors for their very interesting comments on the issue of "study versus advocacy," which I would like to reframe as "inquiry versus advocacy." This issue has repeatedly arisen in the many large and small skirmishes that we have fought here in building our Contemplative Studies undergraduate concentration. A "concentration" at Brown is like a "major" at most places. In less than a year we have 13 new concentrators.

To frame the comments that follow it might be helpful to show people the current version of our concentration program, so I have attached a summary to this message. The 16 independent concentrators, their topics, and what they are doing today are from the previous stage in our develop, what I would like to call the "Guerrilla Concentration Stage" before we were formally recognized, when we worked with individual students on "independent concentrations."

So the concern about inquiry or study versus advocacy have arisen in many forms during our experiences over the last 12 years in building our program. At first they emerged from my colleagues in Religious Studies, a field that is built upon the rational and "objective" investigation of all the various phenomena we have deemed "religious" without intentionally showing any bias in favor of the belief systems of any of them. The field emerged out of liberal Protestant theology after the second world war when it was finally realized that there were other religions in the world that needed to be taken account of. (see my article "Against Cognitive Imperialism" for details on this <http://www.drbu.org/iwr/rew/2008/rew-article-1>)

So when it was discovered I was teaching three one-hour "meditation practicums" per week in "Theory and Practice of Buddhist Meditation" a course I specially designed during Contemplative Practice Grant given by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society and administered by the ACLS I had won three years earlier, many of my Religious Studies colleagues hit the fan (or, was it "the roof?"). Teaching meditation in the classroom was no different from forcing my students down on their knees to pray to Jesus and accept him as their Lord. How I was able to resist these prejudices and the reason they even existed is a story for another time, but suffice it to say that this introduced me to the difference between inquiry and advocacy.

The most recent recurrence of this charge against Contemplative Studies was in

discussions with the fourth Provost at Brown I have tried to convince about supporting our program. While she was supportive in general, she told us we would have to counter the wide perception that we were advocates and not students.

Most academic departments be they in the Sciences, the Humanities, the Social Sciences, or the Arts, perceive themselves as pursuing inquiry and not advocacy. While what Oren says is quite true, try making his argument to a Provost who is trying to decide whether or not to give substantial financial support to a new and radically different field. It's way too nuanced for most administrators.

So what are we to do? In short I am convinced that we have to pursue knowledge based inquiry through the new academic field of Contemplative Studies that grounds practice within sound cognitive frameworks about techniques and results. This knowledge needs to stand whatever tests for legitimacy as exist in the relevant fields we have today in the Academy. Obviously both "subjective" and "objective" perspectives need to be embraced in the development of this knowledge. How to do this is a question for another time as well. We have attempted to accomplish this through the unique method of inquiry we have developed here we call "Integrative Contemplative Pedagogy." There is some information on our website but I am also working on a long article in which I spell this out in more detail.

Now if what we find through this research and scholarship is that contemplative practices produce a variety of positive changes in the people who follow them as, I believe, the research has demonstrated (not that there are absolutely no negative one; that is certainly not the case), then is it not incumbent on the field of Contemplative Studies to advocate that people practice them? (This is a general question, of course, that needs substantially more nuance: e.g. which practices and which results are efficacious and should be promoted?) When pharmaceutical researchers discover a drug that cures malaria should we not advocate people use it? To this I would say that of course we should - or rather, that someone should. Should it be the same people who research it? Of that I am not convinced.

But, does teaching a contemplative practice in a classroom or to colleagues on a campus indicate advocacy? Certainly in the classroom, via "Integrative Contemplative Pedagogy" we have developed a rationale for doing so that we can defend in which we advocate a first-person method based on individual empirical inquiry rather than advocate for any particular set of truth claims about what these practices are affirming. I think we can also defend such first-person inquiry in the research we do. But how about teaching more generally to colleagues within the university? I think it all depends on how it is done.

If there is a set of beliefs about the practices to which people have to subscribe, I would say be careful! Keep these to a minimum and maybe it will work. If challenged, find out what the best scientific research is (not all research is equally critical) and use it to address your critics. But also, as Erin says, we sure that whomever teaches has the grounding in experience to be able to really do this in an authentic manner. And is able to handle any emotionally disturbing experiences people in the groups we lead might have.

At Brown we have come up with draft criteria for teaching contemplative practices in our classrooms. I would be happy to share them with this discussion group should there be interest as long as people realize these are suggestions we have found viable and that

there is much more discussion to be had.

Sorry this has gone on for so long. It has spurred some writing I have been meaning to do that I hope to publish somewhere and soon.

Thanks again.

Cheers,

Hal Roth

Harold D. Roth  
Professor of Religious Studies  
Director, [Brown Contemplative Studies](#) Concentration  
Co-Founder, [Alpert Medical School Scholarly Concentration in Contemplative Studies](#)  
Recipient of 2014 President's Award for Excellence in Faculty Governance

On Sun, Aug 9, 2015 at 9:31 AM, Judy Van de Geer <[judyvandegeer@gmail.com](mailto:judyvandegeer@gmail.com)> wrote:

Bravo, Oren – well said and well done for wearing your beliefs in the open. We all know that “educare” is mystical process and we do not quite know how one receives education. Neuroscience is getting closer. What we do know is that our very presence in the classroom, the totality of our own wisdom, mannerisms, attitudes, physical and mental wellbeing in the moment of our dialogue or even testing of students is variable and follows quantum physics as much as modalities of pedagogy or even the core of the topic itself. Therefore, it is wonderful that transparency and accountability are coming to the fore. By that , I mean that we as educators work at knowing ourselves and are willing to share the “inner teacher” in the same way we are becoming openly more able to care and discuss the inner student. Of course, the magic happens in the interchange and exchange of knowledge. But so much more is transferred between student and teacher. Our recognition of this brings and authenticity and clarity as was only possible in the one to one tutoring of the master and his acolyte which harkens of religiosity. Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, among others must be smiling as so many more of us are getting and sharing their inspired works.

**From:** ACMHE\_discussion [mailto:[acmhe\\_discussion-bounces@lists.contemplativemind.org](mailto:acmhe_discussion-bounces@lists.contemplativemind.org)] **On Behalf Of** Oren Ergas  
**Sent:** Sunday, August 9, 2015 7:59 AM  
**To:** Rodney Reynolds Dietert

**Cc:** [acmhe\\_discussion@lists.contemplativemind.org](mailto:acmhe_discussion@lists.contemplativemind.org)  
**Subject:** Re: [Acmhe\_discussion] Mindfulness for Faculty?

Dear All,

Just responding to this recent thread and especially to the issue that Hal and James raise in reg. to the advocacy vs. scholarship/studnetship of contemplative practice. It's an issue

over here in Israel as well. This may be a much more polemical approach but what can I do...

One thing that needs to be taken into consideration is that we are all a part of an institution labeled 'higher education'. Once 'education' is there, that means that 'curriculum' and 'pedagogy' are there and that means that human beings have engaged in certain deliberations as to what is considered 'knowledge of worth' and 'what is educational'. It's in fact *only* human beings that have done so, which means that much thought has been given to it, but in no way should we think that these deliberations reflect ultimate, ideal or necessarily valid deliberations.

The 'accusation' of 'mindfulness' or contemplation as advocacy within an educational context in that sense must always be located within the claim that the teaching of math or history, Law, or Economics are other forms of advocacy. They are choices made, and as such - they could have been otherwise. It is far more because of habit, 'tradition', and social reproduction that we do not refer to 'math' and 'history', or 'English' as such, and not because of their necessarily being conceived of as belonging to a different world than 'mindfulness' or 'contemplation'.

This of course harkens back to notorious dualisms of cognition/affect, body/mind ethics/science etc. because there is a very strong and misguided belief held by many that if we stick with math, science, history etc. either in school or in university lecture halls then we are somehow avoiding ethics or avoiding the proselytizing of certain beliefs; that if we do not speak of emotions or students interior lives in our lesson then we are not educating in that domain. That is utter falsehood. We are educating yet, in what Eliot Eisner called a null curriculum - such in which our society comes to believe that 'education' does not have to do with such domains. Every moment of teaching in a lecture hall that somehow gives a student the feeling that his interiority is marginal (and that applies to any subject matter we teach) compared to the 'knowledge' that we have so wisely selected for him or her as a society, is an initiation into a divided life, and alienation, that affects not only this student, but also all those with which he or she will interact, as they reproduce this mode of being. Students' living minds-bodies are emoting, feeling, sensing, being every moment that a teacher/lecturer speaks of supply and demand/quadratic equations/Napoleon/synaptic connections. Ignoring this subjective domain does not make it go away. It only entrenches misguided ideas about what is 'education', and what kind of practices ought to be part of it.

It is hardly out of disrespect to the disciplinary knowledge we teach that I write this. It is rather out of a critical view of how we constructed the endeavor of 'higher education' that somehow collapses first person experience to a social third-person disembodied endeavor. In such image of 'education' we get caught up in the idea that 'mindfulness' is bringing something that is alien to 'education'; as if that which 'mindfulness' seems to be teaching seriously needs justification that 'math' or history don't. If we come to see 'education' more as a human experiment as Neil Postman for example proposed, we begin to consider that it is not about whether advocacy or not, it is about what kind of practices fit into the kinds of ways of being and knowing that may serve us better.

What this comes down to is that advocacy in 'education' cannot be avoided no matter what is being taught, nor who is teaching, nor how it is taught. We may as well own that, and work our best to advocate what seems to be beneficial. In that sense I do not think what is being advocated here is 'mindfulness', nor 'contemplation'. It is "self"-understanding, being kinder to each other, finding meaning...and yes - nothing wrong with stress-reduction either as long as the former are always a horizon kept in mind at least in the eyes of those teaching the practice. Contemplative practices, in that sense are simply directly targeting foundations of most robust 'education' rationales I know of, without



which there is not much reason to study disciplines.

This came out long, and I hope that it is not too redundant for most,  
Best wishes and luck to all with engaging in what seems to me the core of what makes  
'education' indeed 'higher'.

Oren

It does take quite a work of 'disarming' the labels of 'mindfulness' and 'contemplation' (in  
any definition we give them) from what is actually being advocated here.

Oren Ergas, PhD  
School of Education, Hebrew University  
<http://huji.academia.edu/OrenErgas>

2015-08-09 14:00 GMT+03:00 Rodney Reynolds Dietert <[rrd1@cornell.edu](mailto:rrd1@cornell.edu)>:

Thanks for this wonderful discussion. It is so helpful. I agree that the receptivity of  
different audiences depends upon careful and accurate crafting of labels and  
descriptions. In my own efforts, I have tended to include the idea of "value-added  
personal tools using contemplative practices" as a way to connect with faculty across  
disciplines without sending up red flags that they are walking into sessions where there  
is advocacy for or hawking of religion. There is pushback among faculty against  
anything viewed as the latter at Cornell.

Yet even with this approach, I have far more CP programming at the professorial level  
on other university campuses and at state and national conferences than for campus-  
wide faculty programs at Cornell. It is a challenge how to accurately describe the  
teaching and not fall into a trap of preconceived roadblocks among some faculty.

Thanks again.

Rodney Dietert  
Cornell

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From: ACMHE\_discussion <[acmhe\\_discussion-bounces@lists.contemplativemind.org](mailto:acmhe_discussion-bounces@lists.contemplativemind.org)> on behalf of James Morley  
<[jmorley@ramapo.edu](mailto:jmorley@ramapo.edu)>  
Sent: Sunday, August 9, 2015 5:59 AM  
To: Linda Coutant; Erin McCarthy  
Cc: [acmhe\\_discussion@lists.contemplativemind.org](mailto:acmhe_discussion@lists.contemplativemind.org)  
Subject: Re: [Acmhe\_discussion] Mindfulness for Faculty?

I would support two things that Harold said:

1. With academic colleagues we have to be especially careful about the fine  
line between "advocating" and "offering" what we are about. There are those

who will spin any demonstration of intellectual enthusiasm (or advocacy) on our part into religious zealotry. At Ramapo we offer a Mindful Faculty Fellowship program to our colleagues. But we maintain the 'fine line' by making clear that all of our faculty development offerings are a gift one need not accept i.e. "strictly voluntary." A delicate dance contingent on who you are dancing with.

While faculty all over the world believe that their own individual discipline is the only one that matters (ever done General Ed?) it's particularly important that we, esp as contemplatives, never fall into that trap. With colleagues it's best to just quietly let the success market itself.

2. We included both words 'mindfulness' and 'contemplative' into our over-long title. But I agree that "contemplative" and more inclusive and open to further interdisciplinary dialogue. Sorting out the relation between those two terms would take a conference - or two.

BTW - I enjoy this perpetual spring of email dialogue. I can't always jump in. But I deeply appreciate all that everyone's doing. I feel less alone.

James Morley, Ph.D.  
Professor of Clinical Psychology  
Ramapo College of New Jersey

Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Phenomenological Psychology  
Director, Krame Center for Contemplative Studies and Mindful Living  
<https://ramapo.academia.edu/MorleyJames>

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