From the Desk of the Director

Michael Zeldin '77

After spending 25 years on the “garden level,” I moved my office to the second floor four months ago. The view from my new office is no more picturesque than my view from the basement, but from where I now sit I see the Rhea Hirsch School in a new light.

More clearly than ever, I see the vital role this school can play in continuing its pioneering role in transforming Jewish education as a profession, a field of practice, and the key to a vibrant Jewish future. As founding director, Bill Cutter envisioned a profession of Jewish education at a time when there were few full-time educators and even fewer who combined significant educational expertise with deep Jewish knowledge. As steward of the RHSOE for over a quarter-century, Sara Lee then crafted a school whose seriousness of purpose and thoughtful approach to the challenges and possibilities of Jewish education set the standard for the profession and the field. Perched on their shoulders, I look back with admiration at the School’s past accomplishments and I see the vast potential that lies ahead.

Years ago we began using an exercise called “images of potentiality” to help groups envision the future of their organizations. The idea is to imagine oneself in a hovercraft looking down on the places where the organization’s life is lived, and to imagine what we might see 5, 10 or even 15 years into the future. When I look down at the RHSOE from my imaginary hovercraft, I see communities of practice buzzing with excitement and I hear promising young professionals engaged in sophisticated discourse with colleagues, mentors and teachers. As my hovercraft gets closer to the action, the images become sharper. One image in particular grabs my attention…

I find myself looking down on one of HUC’s electronic classrooms, equipped with smart board, computer and video projector, a large high-definition screen, and shades that can be raised to let sunlight flood into the new classroom or lowered to allow for easy viewing of the screen. (The sunlight may be fantasy, but the e-classroom is set to become reality by the end of 2007).

In this electronic classroom I see myself and my colleagues Isa Aron and Tali Hyman sitting alongside many others who are engaged with the work of the RHSOE. We are watching a screen filled with faces of lay leaders and Jewish education professionals from across North America who share an interest in the school. Sitting in the room or appearing on the screen are:

- the director of the Tartak Learning Center (which has become a major electronic repository of Jewish educational resources),
- the educators who oversee DeLeT (which is by now a permanent certificate-granting program of the RHSOE),
- the HUC admissions directors (who insist that the more they know about all that the RHSOE is doing, the more successful they can be in attracting applicants for the school’s programs),
- the MA program’s clinical faculty and DeLeT’s clinical educators (all of whom share a commitment to the power of mentoring in raising up the next generations

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of professionals for all the settings in which Jewish education takes place),

- the alumni coordinators and working group chairs of the RHSOE alumni association (who continue to represent the school boldly to many audiences inside and outside the Hebrew Union College),

- the officers of the school’s advisory committee (lay leaders from across North American with a passion for Jewish education and a commitment to the very best in Jewish education),

- the directors of the CECE (the newly-endowed Center for Experimentation in Congregational Education),

- the advisors of the innovative Professional Practice Doctorate (built on a model of advanced professional learning developed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching), and

- the faculty of the newly-created Institute on Mentoring in Jewish Life (which disseminates the RHSOE’s expertise by conducting seminars and symposia as well as by sponsoring and publishing research).

As I look down, the opening text study is concluding and participants are sharing their responses to the question at the end of the study sheet: What have you learned from the ongoing conversations among the representatives of the various parts of the RHSOE, and how has your part of the RHSOE benefited? The sounds of enthusiastic responses leap from every corner of the room and from the speakers that sit alongside the big screen, as person after person talks about the ideas, information and inspiration they have gathered from these meetings to enrich their work.

As my hovercraft pulls away and I return to my desk on the second floor, I am encouraged by the power of the synergy I witnessed. I return to reality heartened by the thought that the more the individuals engaged with the sacred work of the RHSOE learn with and from one another, the greater the creativity that is unleashed and the more powerful the institutional and individual growth becomes. I am energized by the richness of the discourse, and I am inspired by power of the partnerships that emerge when individuals who share a passion for Jewish education talk together even though their daily work appears to be quite different. And I am humbled by the task that lies before me as the new director of this incredible Rhea Hirsch School.

I look forward to working with all of you as I embark on creating the future of the RHSOE. I invite you to email me your visions as you look down on the RHSOE of the future from your hovercraft. Together, we will work to find ways to transform these visions into realities.

L’Shalom, Michael

From the Chairperson

Julia Berger ’00

As I look ahead to the privilege and responsibility of my new position as Chair of the RHSOE Alumni Association for the next two years, I am reminded of the Jewish teaching that, while one is not required to complete the work, neither is one free to abstain from it. I am thankful for the work done by those who came before me on the RHSOE Executive Committee, for the strong foundation they laid, for the commitment with which they did their work, and for the enthusiasm with which they encouraged others — like myself — to get involved. I hope that over the next two years I can pick up where they left off and, with the help of our Leadership Team, build upon our predecessors’ successful programs, explore new possibilities, and mentor a new group of professionals. Then I will pass the torch to the next generation of leaders, each of whom will carry on the mission and tradition of the RHSOE in their own way.

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Alumni Association Working Group Chairs

Educator in Residence: Michelle Shapiro Abraham ('96) and Lesley Silverstone ('86)
Development: Julie Vanek ('88)
Honorary Doctorates: Sue Huntting ('80) and Lauren Chizner ('97)
Kallah: Melissa Buyer ('00), Stacey Delcau ('01) and Ellen Lefkowitz ('99)
Membership: Sharon Amster Brown ('00) and Beth Young ('02)
Rabbinic-Education Alumni: Beth Nichols ('05) and Jennifer Clayman ('00)
Recruitment: Amy Appelman ('00) and Laura Bramson-Hyman ('98)
Sustaining Alumni Education: Tamara Lustgarten-Gropper ('94) and Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz ('77)

of RHSOE Alumni Association leaders.

As the Leadership Council and I look toward the future, we will be continuing our efforts in the areas of communication, continuing education, and supporting students and faculty. We’re also looking at new ways of using technology to help bridge the distance between alumni. While we have a wonderful group of talented and committed volunteers currently serving the organization, we also understand that we need to encourage more of our alumni to get involved and become future leaders. To this end, please feel free to contact me at <jclaireb811@aol.com> if you are interested in helping with current or future alumni projects.

* * * * * * *

Thanks to our fellow alumni who had a role in recruiting these new colleagues who are current RHSOE students in Israel:

- Bradley Cohen — Grew up at Temple Beth El in Boca Raton, FL, and worked at Har HaShem in Boulder, CO, for five years. He considers both of these his congregations.
- Lauren Luskey — Comes to us from Congregation Temple Beth El in Midland, TX.
- Dena Wachtel — Comes to us from Beth El Congregation in West Hartford, CT.
- Tamara Wheatley — Comes to us from Congregation B’nai Tzedek in Fountain Valley, CA.

Sara S. Lee Chair Campaign Continues

Julie Vanek ('88)

As reported last spring, we have done a wonderful job raising funds toward making the Sara S. Lee Chair for Jewish Education a reality. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to the many alumni and friends whose names appear on the donor list included with this issue of Tikshoret. Your generous gifts not only honor Sara, but they will also benefit future generations of RHSOE students through this endowed faculty position.

Our Campaign is ongoing! If you have been meaning to make a pledge but just haven’t gotten to it yet, we would love to hear from you! Please email Julie Vanek, Development Chairperson, at <vanekj@aol.com> for more information and a pledge form.

When we conclude our campaign, we plan to commission a piece of artwork that will hang at HUC with the names — listed alphabetically — of all the people who have contributed to make the Sara S. Lee Chair a permanent part of the Rhea Hirsch School.

This will stand as a reminder to future generations of Jewish professionals of the incredible commitment our alumni have to our teachers, the Rhea Hirsch School and to the College–Institute.

Julie Vanek serves as Temple Educator, Temple Shalom of Newton, Newton, MA.
**ECE Online Resource Center Opens to RHSOE Alumni**

Starting in November, 2007 ECE is making its Online Resource Center available to RHSOE and HUC alumni. This resource center contains documents, articles, papers, speeches, and other materials about Jewish education, organizational change, and congregations in general. In addition, you will be able to access some sample text studies and other materials of interest to congregations looking to begin a transformation process. To register for the Online Resource Center, go to [www.eceonline.org/resources](http://www.eceonline.org/resources).

If you would like more information about The Experiment in Congregational Education, go to [www.eceonline.org](http://www.eceonline.org) or contact us at <info@eceonline.org>.

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**The Experiment in Congregational Education Launches Los Angeles Project!**

Amy Asin

In what feels like a real homecoming, The Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE) is in the process of launching a cohort of seven congregations in the Los Angeles area. These congregations are part of ECE’s RE-IMAGINE Project to re-imagine congregational children’s education K–7, and the work is being done in partnership with the Bureau of Jewish Education. They will create a new vision for children’s supplemental education, and design and launch an alternative model for children K–7.

Ultimately, ECE hopes that these congregations will both innovate and become innovators so that they can continually adjust and change as they face new challenges in the future. The seven participating congregations in Los Angeles are: Adat Ari El, Temple Adat Elohim, Leo Baeck Temple, Temple Beth El of San Pedro, Temple Isaiah, Temple Israel of Hollywood, and Temple Judea. Several of these congregations have RHSOE alumni working as rabbis and educators. In Los Angeles, The RE-IMAGINE Project is funded by the Jewish Federation and an anonymous donor of the Jewish Funders Network.

ECE is also working with 32 congregations in the New York area. All of these congregations have participated in one of three cohorts of The RE-IMAGINE Project. In addition, three congregations are part of a Professional Learning Pilot which seeks to help them align the way they do professional learning with teachers to the new vision that they conceived of as part of their work in The RE-IMAGINE Project. Another nine congregations in New York participated in FOCUS: Teacher Recruitment, a short-term project to align teacher recruitment to a school’s primary goals, led by RHSOE alumna Sue Hunting. The projects in New York are supported by UJA-Federation of New York.

ECE is working closely with SAJES — Suffolk Area Jewish Education Service and the BJE of New York.

Amy Asin is the Associate Director of the Experiment in Congregational Education.

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**It’s that time again!**

Gather with fellow alumni in the spirit of learning and renewal at our 5th Annual Alumni Kallah, February 1–3, 2008 at the American Jewish University in Simi Valley, CA. Registration materials are enclosed.
Announcing an exciting year-long focus for alumni learning!

Our Kallah and Sustaining Alumni Education Working Groups are thrilled to announce that they are working together to provide a year-long learning focus for our alumni: Jewish Identity Formation. Our colleague and newest RHSOE professor, Rabbi Tali Hyman ('00), is working closely with both working groups to develop the learning piece for the kallah and on-going learning to follow the kallah that will include at least one webinar experience. A webinar, or web seminar, is a type of online conference. The kallah and webinar will be related, but independent. Participation (or lack thereof) in one does not preclude participation in the other.

It is our hope that this learning will spark a dialogue amongst our alumni, beginning with definition and questions offered by Tali in the article below.

Definitions and Guiding Questions for Exploring Jewish Identity Formation

Tali Hyman '00

Ethnographer Pamela Perry reminds us that identities are not static, immutable things, but are social processes that are created and recreated by people in their daily lives and social interactions. (p.3, Shades of White, 2002, emphasis in original). Perry further asserts that the contradictions, inconsistencies, and conflicts we find “need not be seen as nefarious” (ibid.). In fact, she views them as “potential inlets” for change (ibid.).

It is more descriptive therefore to talk about Jewish identity formation as a cultural process. As such, it is

a) an activity rather than a single, fixed product with an essence that can be seized and then reproduced across time and place;

b) replete with tensions that need to be navigated, rather than fixed or healed;

c) a highly variable series of strategies or “tool kits” for responding to cultural dilemmas. This process is in flux and differs from person to person, and over time across the same individual’s life.

Largely motivated by anxieties over survival and continuity, research on Jewish identity formation has emphasized how to reduce or eliminate our dissonance, or “identity noise,” such as: the multiple and competing values between Jewish and American, Jewish and secular, Jewish and Christian cultures. Lingering in and investigating the “noise” is not generally pursued because it is tacitly (or explicitly) assumed that identity dissonance is threatening to the well-being of American Jewry. Therefore, any notions of a “healthy” Jewish identity will include attempts at rendering that which is conflicted, multiple, dissonant, and changing, as harmonious, unified, coherent, and stable. But, what if we were to linger in those dissonant spaces and consider — and even honor — the tensions...

Question #1:
For example, how do these tensions/dilemmas make you feel?

• An “orange challah” for a Friday night “Challah-ween”?
• Travel to Israel or travel to Thailand?
• Soccer tournaments and Sunday school camp retreats? Are these bad tensions?
• Do you consider one of the following poles necessarily good or bad?
  — materialism vs. spirituality
  — individual vs. community
  — particularism vs. universalism
  — Bar Mitzvah ceremonies vs. Bar Mitzvah celebrations

a) How might you describe or understand this “noise” of Jewish identity formation?

b) Would you say that it is contributing to the perceived qualitative and quantitative decline of American Jewish life?

c) In what ways might it contribute to pockets of “Jewish renaissance” that are simultaneously being detected?

d) What are the various ways in which individuals and communities cope with the noise?

e) How do you personally, as a Jew and as a Jewish professional cope with the “noise,” would you say? Do you embrace it, ignore it, reject, use it? All of the above?

Question #2:
What might be the implications for our pedagogical methods and curriculum designing if serious Jewish identity formation tensions were honored, named, and discussed? What are the perceived costs and benefits of doing so? What do you imagine that would look like?

Tali Hyman is the newest professor at RHSOE.
Mazel Tov & Milestones

Sharon Amster Brown '00 and her congregation, Temple Israel (Long Beach, CA) have received the Congregation of Learners Award through the Union for Reform Judaism. The award will be presented at the URJ Biennial in San Diego in December.

Rabbi Miriam Cotzin Burg '00, her husband Daniel, and daughter Eliah welcomed a son on October 15, 2007. The baby is the nephew of Debra Cotzin Kellner '04 and Rabbi Richard Kellner '05.

Rabbi Elissa Ben-Naim '97, her husband Gal, and big brothers Yoni and David welcomed Ari Jacob into the family on June 23, 2007. Ari weighed 6 lb. 6 oz., and was 18 inches long.

Margit Crane '87 completed her first eBook. It is called HELP! My Teen Has Been Abducted By Aliens.

Kay Goodman '74 feels blessed to still teach in both the public and private sector at the age of 85. She speculates that her strong commitment to Judaism and its values has provided a good piece of this blessing.

Rabbi Bruce Greenbaum '86 will be honored in November on his Bar Mitzvah year with the congregation. Congregation Beth Israel (Carmel, CA) is holding a Gala Dinner in honor of his and his wife Susan's 13 years of service to their congregation and community.

Rabbi Bruce Greenbaum '86 and his wife Susan will be honored in November by Congregation Beth Israel (Carmel, CA) for their 13 years of service to their congregation and community.

Tamara Lustgarten Gropper '94 and Rabbi Daniel Gropper '96 joyfully welcomed their daughter, Noa Yael, to the world on February 28, 2007. She was named for Daniel's sister Naomi, z”l, and Tamara's grandmother Jeanette.

Rabbi Paul Kipnes '91 and Michelle November celebrated as their son Daniel became a Bar Mitzvah in August 2007. In addition, Paul and Congregation Or Ami (Calabasas, CA) received a Nachshon award from the URJ in honor of lifelong education for their multigenerational Mishpacha Family Alternative Education program. The Mishpacha program has been led over the years by RHSOE graduates Lori Brockman '99, Rachel Margolis '07, Rebecca Saliman '07, and currently by Interns Sara Mason '08 and Dan Medwin '08.

Rachel Isaacson Margolis '07 married Ari Margolis on June 3, 2007. 2007 Rachel is currently the Director of Education at University Synagogue in Brentwood, CA, and Ari is a current RHSOE student in the program for rabbinical students.

Rabbi Sheryl Nosan-Blank '91 welcomed daughter Aliyah Blank on September 6, 2007.

Teresa Parker '04 is delighted to announce the birth of her first grandchild, Hailey Nicole Ice, born on Father's Day to Jennifer and Joe Ice. In addition, she has been granted the title of Reform Jewish Educator (RJE).

Estee Pollak '06 was engaged in August to Robert Garrett.

Ruth Wolpe Rose '77 is proud to announce that her younger grandson became a Bar Mitzvah on October 27, 2007.

Katherine Schwartz '94 and her husband Andy Schultheiss celebrated the birth of Gavriela Michal (Gavi) on Thursday, October 11, 2007. She was born at 8:30 am weighing 6 lb. 7 oz.

Jane West Walsh '85 and Rabbi Ariel Walsh are thrilled to share the news that their son Ben is now engaged to his beloved, Sonya Rielly, and her son Brenden.

Rabbi Laura Novak Winer '94 had an article published in the Journal of Jewish Education entitled, “Considering the Informal Jewish Educator.”

New Positions!

Rabbi Michael S. Churgel, RJE '99 assumed the position of Rabbi at Sinai Reform Temple in Bay Shore, NY on July 2.

Yuri Hronsky '01 began a new job as the founding Principal of Kadima Heschel West Middle School this fall.

Jodi Kaufman '96 is now the Director of Education at Temple Beth Torah in Wellington, FL.

Dan Robbins '83 switched careers in August. He is now an ophthalmic technician at Medical College of Virginia. Dan also noted that his son Sam became a Bar Mitzvah in May 2007.

Directory Updates

Looking for an old friend or lost classmate? You can find any HUC alumni, including fellow RHSOE colleagues on the online directory. Simply go to www.huc.edu/alumni/private/. The directory is password protected. For passwords, please contact Debbie Niederman at <debbieniederman@aol.com>.
On this Rosh Hashanah morning, I declare before this holy congregation that I am an unabashed, unrepentant, obsessive, committed advocate of Hebrew. I am, as it is said in Hebrew, “m’shugah l’davar,” obsessed (in the positive sense) with the Hebrew language.

I wasn’t always so crazy about Hebrew. If you promise not to tell my current Hebrew students, I will even admit to being a bit of a discipline problem in Hebrew school: not particularly focused on Hebrew learning and more interested in socializing with my Jewish friends. Hebrew school was my Jewish social oasis.

As my colleague Rabbi Jan Katzew, the director of the department of Lifelong Jewish Learning at the Union for Reform Judaism states, Hebrew is “a countercultural phenomenon in Reform Judaism, a minority voice in the choir. In a movement that has been explicitly and implicitly devoted to educational integration and cultural interaction, Hebrew represents an element of educational differentiation and cultural otherness.”

I have spent a good portion of my career challenging those assumptions, and this morning I hope to inspire you to join me in this challenge.

For the last two years I have been engaged in a project through the Mandel Foundation at Brandeis University entitled the Visions Project. Twenty-five educators from throughout the U.S. were invited to participate with the caveat that they would develop a project that would be replicable or at least applicable in their home institutions. I spent some time debating the focus of my project and settled on Hebrew… the vision of Hebrew at Temple Beth Israel.

At the outset of the project I was troubled by the seeming dissonance between the number of hours required for Hebrew study by the children in our congregation, and the virtual lack of Hebrew study offerings for adults. I was distressed by the challenge of employing faculty in our Hebrew School who are competent, knowledgeable and committed to Hebrew language yet who come out of our own movement. I was, at the outset of the project unsure as to where we as a congregation stood regarding Hebrew learning.

I am happy to say that a great deal has changed since my project began. The creation of a Hebrew task force populated by TBI members who are also “meshuga l’davar…crazy about the idea” moved us to seek out high quality Hebrew learning opportunities for our adult members. Last fall, at the instigation of this committee, we held a Hebrew Marathon with over 30 participants who made a commitment to begin to learn Hebrew. The Hebrew school has also been examined. Although the schedule has been modified, the hours on task have remained virtually untouched; and the material for learning has improved and has become more accessible with on-line opportunities for students to extend learning beyond the classroom.

The engagement of faculty who are products of our own programs is a challenge as of yet unmet, but I feel there is some positive light on the horizon. The Chalutzim program — a seven-week unit of intensive Modern Hebrew language learning — at OSRUI (the URJ camp in Wisconsin) has grown exponentially in the last several years, becoming the most exclusive program at camp. The fact that this program in such high demand speaks of a need to expand Chalutzim to other URJ and non-URJ camp programs, inspiring more teens to learn Hebrew in an ulpan-like setting, growing in competence and commitment to Hebrew and becoming a pool of future teachers in Reform Hebrew schools.

In my visionary fantasy world, Jewish Federations from throughout the U.S. would subsidize the cost of Hebrew language learning for any college student who takes Hebrew language courses. The trade-off would be that those subsidized students would then agree to teach in local Hebrew and Religious Schools sometime in the few years following their enrollment.

Personally, I think there is nothing more important than creating and sustaining a lifelong relationship with the State of Israel. On September 6, 2007, The Chicago Tribune included an article entitled “Young American Jews’ bond to Israel loosens.” The article articulated how the younger generation is less connected to Israel than the generation that lived through the Holocaust. It quoted statistics on connection to Israel that show a sharp decrease in feelings of identification.

My colleagues and I work hard to deepen the connection to Israel. This is primary in our minds this year as we seek to build bridges with our Israeli cousins on Israel’s 60th birthday. I believe that if these young disconnected Jews knew, spoke, and understood Hebrew, they would feel connected to Israel…and to each other.

Lori Sagarin ’84 is Director of Congregational Learning at Temple Beth Israel in Skokie, IL.


Leadership for Congregational Life in the 21st Century: The Mandel Fellowship Program

Professor Sara Lee ’77

As early as the 1980's, rabbinical students at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion recognized that the academic and clinical knowledge and capacities acquired in the MAJE program of the Rhea Hirsch School were invaluable assets for their professional future. Those who chose to pursue the degree by extending their tenure at HUC–JIR with an additional year of study perceived that not only would their skills as educators be enhanced, but their understanding of the dynamics and leadership in Jewish institutional and communal life would be greatly enriched. The intense mentoring in the MAJE program offered them the opportunity to further develop their commitment to and capacity for reflective practice. All of these additions to the five year rabbinic curriculum attracted many rabbinical students to elect this one year MAJE option, and we number 85 rabbis among our alumni colleagues.

The recognition that this MAJE program contributed in unique ways to shaping the leadership of those rabbinical students who completed the program was an important factor in motivating the Mandel Foundation to provide a grant to build upon the foundation of the rabbinical/education year of study. The grant provides for the selection of eight rabbinical/education students from the Rhea Hirsch School of Education and the New York School of Education to be Mandel Fellows during their year of study. In recognition of the critical role rabbis play in the transformation of congregational life, the grant seeks to provide learning opportunities that build upon the coursework and internships of the MAJE and MARE degree programs with the goal of creating a new generation of visionary rabbinic leaders who can help shape compelling congregational communities.

During their year as Mandel Fellows the students will participate in two seminars created in partnership with Mandel Foundation faculty. The winter seminar takes place in Boston from January 6–10, 2008 and the focus will be exploration of definitions of community, the unique characteristics of sacred communities, visionary rabbinic leadership and visionary institutions. In addition to HUC and Mandel faculty the Fellows will learn with scholars and rabbis who can expand the Fellows’ understanding of these topics. In June 2008, the Fellows will participate in a three week seminar in Israel. The focus for that seminar will be the place of Israel and Jewish Peoplehood in the leadership and vision of Reform congregational communities. During the academic year there will be a number of joint seminars for the Fellows on the two campuses using videoconferencing.

The Fellows were chosen from among the rabbinical students applying to the MAJE and MARE programs. The criteria for selection included academic excellence; leadership potential; capacity for vision; capacity for reflection; and interest in and commitment to transforming synagogue life. A national HUC committee of program directors and faculty made the selection based on written materials and a personal interview, utilizing the technology of videoconferencing.

For 2007–2008 three men and five women were selected. Mandel Fellows studying at the Rhea Hirsch School in Los Angeles are: Erin Ellis, Noam Katz, Ari Margolis, Dan Medwin and Rena Polonsky. Mandel Fellows studying at the New York School of Education are: Rachel Kort, Melissa Simon and Melissa Zalkin-Stollman.

RHSOE Executive Committee 2007–2008/5768

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<th>Chair</th>
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<td>Joy Wasserman, ex-officio</td>
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