

## Third Level of Pretension

This is the pretension that is known to be found among jurists, may Allāh be pleased with them, and it, too, has two degrees:

The **first** degree is that one carries out his action and whatever worship is legislated for him, or through what he deems as rationally commendable, intending thereby to show his acts of adoration to the people and win their hearts, intending to be pretentious through that act of worship or through its method, or condition, or a part thereof, as described by our fellows in their books of jurisprudence.

The **second** degree is that he abandons a deed in order to reach the same result. The greatest professor of theology, imām al-Khomeini, says the following: "Be informed that pretension in this level is more frequent and common than all other levels because most of us are not qualified for both above-stated levels. In this aspect, Satan does not intercept our way from that highway.

But, since most people are worshippers, upholding the rituals and formal manifestations of adoration, Satan is active here more than anywhere else, and the plots of the *nafs* in this level are many more. In other words, since most people, according to their quality, live in a physical Paradise, earning stations in the Hereafter through doing good deeds and abandoning bad ones, Satan, too, enters upon them from this door, instilling in their hearts the roots of pretension and deception in their deeds, so much so that branches grow out of them and leaves, substituting their good deeds with bad ones, hurling them into hell and the lower stations through these same rituals and acts of adoration, rendering the means whereby the abode of the Hereafter are built requiring their very destruction, introducing into an act what is supposed to get one in the 'Illyyean station to be turned by the angels, according to the command of the Almighty, into one qualifying the individual to be hurled into the inferno. The persons who fit in this level, who have neither rations nor a conveyance for the trip [to the Hereafter], must persist in cultivating themselves fully, and they must not neglect this matter, too, God forbid, lest they should be among the fellows of hell: They lose track of the path to happiness, and the gates of Paradise will be closed before them while those of the fires will be opened." Thus the imām, may his shade endure, ends his statement.

# Levels of Pretension from the Aspect of what is Hidden and what is Manifest, a Precise Research in the Issue of

Be informed that pretension, in as far as being manifest or hidden, has several levels. Some levels are obvious, some are more obvious, whereas some others are hidden, and some are more so.

The **first** level: It is the most obvious level: Someone undertakes an action in order to show off in a way so as if the need to pretend is not there, he will not do it. It is the most obvious of its levels and needs no explanation.

The **second** level: It is a little bit more hidden: The pretending side is not initially prompted to undertake the action; rather, the side that urges the origin of the action is the Divine side, the nearness to the Almighty, but the non-divine side intrudes into it, so much so that the act, despite the care of this side, becomes easier to undertake without it, such as one whose habit is to perform the *tahajjud* and to perform the night prayer (*qiyam*).

He performs it every night, but while feeling lazy and drowsy. But when he has a guest, he stands up from his bed with agility and ease. Had he not hoped for rewards from Allāh, he would not have abandoned the pleasure of sleep not only due to the presence of the guest but this presence had an impact on him, making it easier for him to pray and to offer *tahajjud*, and the prayer will then be easier than it would have been if he had been by himself.

The **third** level: In it, the pretension is more hidden than it is in the second level: The non-divine side has nothing to do with the original intention to undertake the action, nor in the ease of doing it. But, at the same time, the substance of pretension is present in the heart. It is known that such pretension cannot be identified except through the precise experiment such as suspected terminal physical ailments since these, after medical analyses, indicate the presence of a disease which the doctor starts treating.

So is the case with this spiritual disease: Precision is a must in diagnosing it. If some traces of the ailment are found, its substance will be known to be present. Its indication is that one must test himself at a time when people accidentally get to see his adoration. Will he then feel happy and elated on account of their seeing him or not?

An individual may undertake an action with a sincere intention, desiring no pretension in it; rather, he even avoids pretending and hating it. But, at the same time, if he realizes that someone accidentally gets to know about it, he becomes happy, as if he feels restful when he gets to know that the individual saw how that act exhausted him. Such happiness and elation form the mark of pretension which is hidden

within him, inside him, from which elation drips.

Had he directed his attention towards anyone other than Allāh, and had he paid no attention to people, there is no sense in this elation when he knows that others came to know about his [righteous] deed. Happiness [in such a case] is like a fire that is hidden inside a stone. It becomes evident when the stone hits iron and the hidden fire comes out to the open and becomes obvious when the stone hits a stone. People who are acquainted with and knowledgeable about the stone hitting the iron expose the hidden pretension.

At that time, if this person does not react to this pleasure, that is, when happiness appears in his heart, and if he does not rebuke himself for it, reprimand it and meet it with hatred, this pleasure will be like nutrition for the disease's substance. It grows undetected, and the effect of that growth gradually creates in him the need to find a reason for people having to be familiar with his work. It is like talking about a subject and saying something casually. For example, if he is one of those who offer *tahajjud*, he talks about how the weather is cold or hot at the end of the night, or about something like that, so that others will understand that he was awake at that time [for *tahajjud*].

It may even be more hidden than that, too, such as one does not say anything to suggest to others familiarity with them, with his actions, neither explicitly nor implicitly. But people can get to know it from the way he dresses himself, his appearance or general conditions, such as drowsiness, the low tone of his voice, how his lips are withered..., etc. Or he may not watch himself during his prostration in order to avoid hitting the ground so prostrating will bear an impact on his forehead. Deep inside his conscience he will be elated about it, that is, that he has a visible mark of adoration.

Or he may be at a mourning commemoration for Imām al-Hussain (ع) or a gathering for supplication. At the end of the gathering, he does not remove the tears from his eyes fully. There are marks like these, and even more hidden than that, which show no such indications: This means that he may perform a [righteous] deed sincerely without desiring anyone to notice it, nor does he like it to show, yet he expects people to start greeting him, to be generous to him, to meet him with a smile, with respect, to praise him, to be energetic in carrying out his errands, to be tolerant as they trade with him, etc. If he goes to a meeting place, they make room for him.

If anyone falls short of doing any of these things, he will find it in his heart to be too heavy, and he will find it unsuitable for his status. It is as if he is rewarded by people for the worship which he hides, so much so that had he not performed such worship, he would not have demanded all of this, nor would he have found it unacceptable when people treat him any less than that. In my view, this has roots which also extend to conceit. In reality, he demands that from Allāh, the most Glorified One, and even wonders why the Almighty did not cast love for him in the hearts of people so they may respect him although he did perform that "sincere" act of worship!

As a whole, unless the presence of worship is similar to its absence with regard to everything relevant to

people, and had one not contended himself with the fact that Allāh knows about what he does, such an individual will not be free of pretension, even as low as the sound of ants' tracks, nor is he free of conceit either which we, by the will of Allāh, will discuss.

It is possible this much pretension voids one's rewards. Nobody is spared such type of pretension except Allāh's sincere worshippers, for Satan can have no way of reaching them. Perhaps a reference to this lies in a statement by the Commander of the Faithful Ali (ع) who is quoted as having said, "Allāh, the most Great, the most Exalted, will say to those who recite [the Holy Qur'ān in public] on the Judgment Day: 'Did people not sell to you cheap? Did people not start greeting you? Were your needs not taken care of by people?' According to tradition, [the Almighty adds saying] 'There are no wages for you here; you were paid your wages in full.'"

Abdullāh Mubarak is quoted as having said that it is narrated about Wahab son of Muneer saying that a man from among the travelers said to his fellows, "We left behind the wealth and the sons fearing oppression, now we fear lest more oppression has afflicted us than that with which people who have wealth have been afflicted!

If one of us is met, he likes to be respected because of the station of his piety. If he asks for something, he likes to be given on account of his faith. And if he buys something, he likes the seller to sell it to him cheaper because of his faith!" This reached the knowledge of their king who rode among a crowd of people. The valley and the mountain became full of people. That traveler inquired about it and was told that the king was coming.

He asked his servant to bring him food. He was brought beans and oil which he kept stuffing in his mouth, eating violently. The king asked the travelers, "Where is your fellow?" They pointed to him, whereupon the king asked him, "How are you?" The man said, "Like anyone else," but according to another way of telling this incident, "I am fine." The king said, "There is nothing good with this man," leaving him. The traveler said, "Praise be to Allāh Who sent you away from me, thinking ill of me!"

Yes, my dear one, the sincere ones were apprehensive of hidden pretension, trying hard to mislead people about their righteous deeds out of their concern about hiding them more so than people's concern about hiding their bad deeds and sins, all of this in the hope their good deeds will be sincere, so Allāh will reward them on the Judgment Day by hiding these bad deeds and sins from people. These sincere folks knew and became convinced that Allāh Almighty does not accept anything but what is purely for His sake, for He has said,

***"And they have been commanded no more than this: To worship Allāh, offering Him sincere devotion, being true (in faith): To establish regular prayers, and to practice regular charity: such is the right and straight religion" (Qur'ān, 98:5).***

The Judgment Day is the Day of their want and need for righteous deeds; it is the Day when neither wealth nor offspring will be of any benefit save for one who reaches Allāh with a sound heart.

A scholar has provided this example: The desert travelers go there with the best currency in circulation because they know that the need for it is the greatest in the desert, and that the desert people accept only the best currency. The same applies to those who have hearts. They witness the Day of Judgment and the rations whereby they supply themselves: piety, knowing that the best of rations is piety. They bring about deeds that are free of pretension, protecting themselves against all levels of pretension.

## Unique Qur'anic Jewel

While narrating the story of Yousuf (Joseph) and his brothers, the Qur'<sup>an</sup> states that after the latter having come to Egypt and asked Yousuf to provide them with provisions and rations, the Qur'<sup>an</sup> states the following:

***"At length, once he had furnished them with provisions (suitable) for them, he put the drinking cup in his brother's saddle-bag. Then a crier shouted out, 'O you (in) the caravan! Behold! You are thieves, without doubt!'" (Qur'<sup>an</sup>, 12:70).***

One of the men of knowledge says, "It is not right to think that Yousuf accused his brother of theft so he would take him and keep him in his company because if Yousuf's purpose was to keep his brother with him, he did not have to accuse him in this ugly way, embarrassing him and letting him fall in the public's esteem as a thief although he is the son of the prophet of All<sup>h</sup>. Rather, he could have found another excuse to do that without scratching his dignity.

If he had to, he could have done so secretly, say, in a confidential personal meeting rather than before the public, so much so that a crier had to cry out to the caravan, charging it of theft. So, what prompted this announcement to the caravan which contained Canaanites who would return to the land of Canaan and the robbery committed by a prophet of All<sup>h</sup> would be the core of the talk in all meeting places and gatherings? Men will talk about it and so will the women, and the reputation of a house about which people know nothing but honor and spirituality will be ruined. There has to be something hidden in this matter."

The man of knowledge goes on to say, "The hidden matter is that reaching truly divine dignity is not easy except through public humiliation. We tie dignity to the truth because posts and stations among the public are not truly dignifying. True dignity is in reaching nearness to All<sup>h</sup>. In other words, it is neighborliness of All<sup>h</sup>, the company of the Lord of the Worlds, a station of the truth near an Able King. The company of All<sup>h</sup>'s servants is the company of All<sup>h</sup>. Whoever loves you loves All<sup>h</sup>, and whoever hates you hates All<sup>h</sup>. Whoever All<sup>h</sup> chooses, He starts with you. Whoever visits his brother in All<sup>h</sup>, the Almighty says, 'You have visited Me'.

This dignity does not become available except when conditions are met the greatest of which is humiliation by the people. If you wish, you can say that the greatest obstacle in the path towards Allāh and towards reaching Allāh's courtyard is love for prominence and eminence among the people. So long as the heart remains attached to such love, the owner of this heart cannot reach his destination as this narrative tells us: Two ferocious wolves, one of which attacks a herd of cattle from its beginning and the other from its end, are as detrimental to one's creed as loving distinction and a high station.

Therefore, the worldly mastership is rejected in the eyes of Allāh's friends who hate it as the Master of the Pious has said, 'By the One Who split the seed and created the breeze, had it not been for the presence of what is present..., you would have found this world of yours less important in my esteem than a goat's sneeze.' One who treads this path must take this love out of his heart, even if it means dropping his esteem from public eyes if he does not feel secure regarding the ills and detriments of his own *nafs*, just as severing a part of the body is permissible, even obligatory, when there is concern about the health of the rest of the bodily parts.

Therefore, the virtuous al-Naraqī has narrated in his book *Mi'rāj al-Sa'ada* about a scholar reciting the Qur'ān in front of their students and sincere ones deliberately in a way about which they claim he has no knowledge and that he is illiterate. Committing a small harm in order to attain a great deal of goodness is rational and according to the Sharḥ a permissible. This concept has many testimonials from those who tread the path towards Allāh, and many refer to it in their poems.

One of the men of knowledge says, "I saw once in a vision someone whom I did not know. He handed me a piece of paper and ordered me to sign it. I signed it without knowing what is written in it or be familiar with its contents. Once I have signed it, the person who gave it to me said, 'Our narrative is quite hard; it is not tolerated except by an angel who is near to Allah, or a sent prophet, or a servant whose heart Allāh tested with conviction.'

He read this tradition and said, 'I undoubtedly choose humiliation.' So, I woke up from my sleep and came to know that I had signed the document of my humiliation among the people so I may win through such humiliation the ability to bear the difficult traditions and the secrets of Ahl al-Bayt, peace be with them." This topic has a lengthy continuation, so we shall leave it for its place and people.

Generally, the impurities of hidden pretension are numerous, countless. As much as one realizes on his own about how a human being or an animal becomes acquainted with his adoration, he still has a branch of pretension. Since he has no hope set on animals and infants being thus acquainted with his adoration, he does not care whether they are present [when he is involved in an act of adoration] or if they are absent, whether they notice his adoration or not.

If one is sincere, having no desire about anyone [with regard to his acts of adoration], he will think very lowly of their knowledge of his acts of adoration because he knows that they, too, are like children: They cannot bring him sustenance, nor can they bear any impact on his destiny, nor increase his rewards.

Rather, they cannot bring their own selves any good, or any harm, or death, or life, or resurrection..., etc.

At this point, in order to explain what we are driving at, we have to submit a question because the matter is very important: We see most people feeling glad when their good deeds are recognized; so, is such feeling of happiness lauded by the Sharīʿa, or is it held as contemptible?

The answer is that it is not lauded at all, nor is it held as contemptible either. Instead, it is praised in some cases and held with contempt in others. Here are the details:

The lauded one falls into four categories:

The **first** is that one's intention is to hide the acts of obedience and sincerity to Allāh, but when people noticed what he was doing, he has to remember that Allāh, the most Praised One, by virtue of His Attribute expressed in this supplication: "O One Who manifests what is beautiful!" has manifested something beautiful, so he is led to think that Allāh has fared well with him: The perfection of His munificence is that He hides obedience and disobedience. But Allāh, due to the beauty of His care, hides the man's acts disobedience while manifesting those of his obedience. This is a great act of kindness from the part of Allāh Almighty in his regard, hence the man is very happy on account of Allāh having done such a nice thing for him, not because people praise what he has done or the status in their hearts which he now occupies. It is as though he sees through it that Allāh, due to His favor and mercy, has accepted his deed, so he is happy about it.

**"Say: 'In the bounty of Allāh, and in His mercy, let them rejoice!'" (Qurʾān, 10:58).**

The **second** is that his happiness stems from [his conviction that] since Allāh Almighty manifests what is beautiful in him while covering up what is ugly in this life, He will do likewise in the Hereafter as well, for Allāh is the Lord of the Hereafter and of this life. Actually, His mercy in the Hereafter is broader than it is in the life of this world as referred to in the traditions.

It is as though he is repeating what Imām Zayn al-ʿAbidin (ع) has said in one of his supplications thus: "Lord! Just as You have covered up sins that I have committed in this life, I have a greater need that You will veil them in the Hereafter." His elation in the first case is due to accepting what is in the present time without considering the future, while in the second his mind is set about the future. One tradition states the following: "When Allāh covers up the sin of one of His servants in the life of this world, He covers it up for him in the Hereafter as well."

The **third** is that his elation stems from his belief that hopefully those who see his act of adoration will emulate him, hence he will have an increase in the rewards. Even if he undertakes the action publicly with this same intention, he will not be violating the spirit of sincerity: He will have the reward, due to his intention, as though he undertook that deed privately firstly, and secondly due to Allāh Almighty manifesting his deed and letting others emulate his act of obedience to Him, and one who thus feels elated is quite justified. The manifestation of indications of benefit is sweet and undoubtedly prompts one

to be happy about it.

The **fourth** is this: When he sees how those who noticed his act of adoration praise him for being obedient to his Lord, he will feel happy and glad that they, too, obey Allāh and love to see people obeying Him as well; their hearts incline towards the good deeds.

There are some people who see obedient people and hold them in contempt, or feel envious, or speak ill of them, or ridicule them, or charge them with pretension rather than praise them for their act of adoration. This elation is due to seeing how good the belief of Allāh's servants is, how good their souls are. The sign of sincerity in this type is that one feels happy when people praise someone else just as he feels happy when they praise him, perhaps even more so, as it is quite obvious.

As regarding what is contemptible, it is when one feels happy for having earned a status in the hearts of people, so people may now praise and magnify him: This is hated and is contemptible, and surely Allāh knows best.

## **Wise Admonishment from the Professor of Theology, Imam-Al-Khomeini, May his Shade Endure**

Quite often, it so happens that a pretender does not pay attention to the fact that pretension has penetrated his actions, that his good deeds are a pretense and worth absolutely nothing. This is so because the traps of the self (*nafs*) and those of Satan are quite minute and transparent. Humanity's path is very narrow and dark: Unless man fully examines, he does not pay attention to what he does.

One thinks that his deeds are purely for the sake of earning the Pleasure of Allāh, but they instead please Satan. Since it is the human nature to be egotistical, such love for one's own self veils him from seeing his own faults. For example, earning the science of religion, which is one of the important acts of obedience and adoration, may afflict one with pretension in this great form of adoration even while he is unmindful, unaware, of it.

He, as we have already stated, due to the thick curtain, the curtain of self-love, likes to solve a scholarly problem in the presence of scholars and chiefs in a way which nobody else came up with. It will make him stand out, according to his own thinking. The more he explains the problem sufficiently, attracting the attention of those present, the more elated he feels. If someone opposes him, he has to overcome and humiliate him; he has to make him lower his head before people, forcing his own argument on him,

his opponent, whether it is right or wrong.

After vanquishing the opponent, he feels within himself that he has distinguished himself and earned a place of prominence. If a master believes what he says, so much the better. And the poor man is unaware that although he earned a status among the scholars and men of virtue, he dropped in the esteem of his Lord, the King of kings in all domains Who orders the deed of such an individual to cause him to be hurled into Sijjeen.

This pretentious deed was also mixed with various forms of disobedience: scandalizing a believer and humiliating him, harming the brother-in-faith, insulting and sometimes uncovering his faults. All these are sins and make an independent cause to render such an individual to be among the fellows of hell. If we suppose that the *nafs* places its trap before you and says to you, "My objective is to explain the legislative ruling and show the word of truth, which is the best form of obedience.

My goal is not to demonstrate my distinction, or to brag," you must ask it about its inner self the following question: If my friend, who is like me in my scholarly degree, explains the legislative ruling, and if he solves the problem himself, and if you were subdued in that meeting place, will your attitude be contrariwise?! If the case is positive, you will be truthful in your claim. But if the *nafs* approaches you through the venue of trickery, abandoning no deception, saying to you, "There is a virtue for manifesting righteousness, and Allāh rewards for it, and I want you to win this virtue and let you live in the abode of Allāh's rewards," you must say to it, "If we suppose that Allāh, the Praised One, granted you this virtue in case you are subdued and if you believe in righteousness, will you still seek victory over your opponent?"

Upon referring to your inner-self, if you find out that you love victory, too, and fame among the men of virtue as being a man of both knowledge and virtue, and that this scholarly research was in order to gain a status in their hearts, be informed that you are a pretender in this scholarly research which is one of the best forms of obedience to the Almighty and one of the best acts of worship, and that this deed was prompted by love for prominence and distinction which is more harmful to your conviction (*imān*) than two wolves raging in a flock the shepherd of which is absent, according to a narrative.

You are obligated, as a man of knowledge who seeks reform, one who guides others towards the path of the Hereafter, a doctor of psychological ailment, to reform yourself first and to repair your own temper so you will not be among the scholars whose good deeds are void, whose condition is very well known.

Lord! Do purge our hearts of the impurity of shirk and hypocrisy! Purify the mirror of our hearts from the adornment of loving this world which is the cause of all these matters. Be our Companion, help us, we poor souls who are afflicted with loving ourselves, with loving distinction and eminence, along this dangerous journey, this path that has many obstacles, the narrow and dark one, surely You can do anything at all, *Allāhomma āmeen*.

Among the important acts of adoration in Islam is the congregational prayer service in which the distinction of the *imām* is greater; therefore, Satan penetrates in it more than in others. His enmity

towards the imām is greater. Satan stands to deprive the imām of this virtue, empty his deed of sincerity, thus causing him to be lodged in Sijjeen, rendering him associating a partner with Allāh, the most Great.

Satan enters into the heart of imāms of congregational prayers from various paths such as conceit and pretension, which is making a show of this form of worship before the public in order to win a status in their hearts and earn the reputation of being great and sublime. For example, Satan sees so-and-so, who is a great worshipper, having attended his congregational prayers, whereupon he increases his submission, bringing him closer to himself through various means and tricks in order to get him in the end to fall in his trap.

He reminds the imām in his place of meeting, or through another way, to let people know that "So-and-so worshipper attends my congregational prayer service," finding in his heart love for this person who attends his service, demonstrating love and sincerity to him in a degree which he does not demonstrate to Allāh Almighty or to His close servants even for one moment in his lifetime, especially if the attendant of the prayer service is a respected businessman. If, God forbid, a man of distinction attends the prayer service because of losing track of his path, so he joins the ranks in his congregation, the calamity will then be greater.

Satan, at the same time, does not leave the imām alone whose group is smaller in number. He attends and insinuates to him to let people understand that "I have abandoned the world and I pray in the quarter's small mosque with the poor and the indigents." This imām is like his predecessor, even worse, because he nurtures in his heart the vice of jealousy, too, permitting its tree to produce its fruit. Since he had no share of the good things in this life, Satan deprives him of his share in the Hereafter as well, rendering him a loser in this life and in the one to come.

This Satan does not leave me or yourselves alone when we are not imāms of the congregational prayer service not because we shy away from it but our hands fall short of it, so he insinuates to us to defame the group of Muslims, to charge them, to suggest that there are faults with that group, counting our deprivation of the group as our isolation from it and abandonment of this life.

We identify ourselves as being free of love for the self and for prominence. We, then, are in a worse shape than both previous groups. We do not have the complete life enjoyed by the first group nor the incomplete one for the second group, nor do we have the Hereafter. Had we been able, our seeking eminence and our love for distinction and wealth would have been greater than both those groups.

Satan is not satisfied with playing tricks on the group's imām, nor is the fire of his desire quenched by turning the imām into a fellow of hell, but he also enters the rows of those who follow the imām as well to commit his mischief.

Since the first row is the best, and since the right side of a row is better than the left, it is his first target. Satan takes the hand of the poor worshipper and gets him out of his house despite the distance from the place where the group congregates and seats him in the right side of the first row. He starts insinuating

to him to inform people of this virtue which he attained. This poor man, too, without Satan tempting him, manifests the distinction of his own self with twinkling and coddling, thus his inner *shirk* shows itself, entering his deed into the Sijjeen (the sinners' record).

Then Satan enters in the rest of rows, mobilizing their folks to hold on to the first row and to throw the poor worshipper, who is sitting in the first rank, with their arrows of defamation and curses while labeling themselves with integrity. It may be noticed that Satan takes the hand of a respected person, especially if he is among the people of knowledge and distinction, to seat him in the other row so that this person may show people that despite his status among the public or in the world of knowledge, while a man like him ought not emulate such an imām, but "On account of my renunciation of this life and abandonment of the self's desire, I attended his congregational service. Despite all of this, I even sat in the last row..."

The likes of this individual are never seen in the first row at all! Satan does not contend himself with only the imām and those who follow him but sticks to the beard of one who prays individually, taking his rein, pulling him out of the home or market, spreading a carpet for him with twinkling and coddling in a corner in the mosque, a man who does not see any imām as being just, so he prolongs his bowing and prostrating as people look on, repeating lengthy sacred verses.

This person hides inside himself his desire that people must understand the following: "Due to the plentitude of my sanctity and precaution, I abandon the group so I may not be afflicted by praying with an imām who is not just." Besides being conceited and pretentious, this man is also ignorant of the issues of the Islamic Shar`a because the emulation authority of this person perhaps does not apply any criterion besides a good appearance so he may emulate an imām.

Thus do we place the rest of our matters at the disposal of Satan while whenever this cursed one finds an impure heart to which he resorts, he burns the apparent and the hidden deeds, rendering him among the fellows of hell even through good deeds. Thus ends the wise admonishment of Imām al-Khomeini.

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