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Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome to Project Zion. I'm your host, Karin Peter, and today we're talking about a resource called Temple Tuesday with its host, Joey Williams. Now, many of you know Joey. He serves as mission center president for both Western Europe and the Eurasia mission centers. And while he's been grounded due to COVID, he became the host for the Temple Tuesday Facebook challenges. So first, welcome, Joey and thank you for sharing with us here at Project Zion.

Joey Williams 01:05

Hi, Karin, it's good to be here.

Karin Peter 01:07

Well, Joey, we have had the Temple Tuesday for some time, but for those who might not have had an opportunity to discover it, or to listen to it, can you just do just a brief kind of overview? What are we talking about when we talk about Temple Tuesday?

Joey Williams 01:24

Yeah, well, at the beginning, the idea was very, very simple. Like you said, it was just this idea of a challenge. How can we at the beginning of the pandemic, we were thinking, what can we do to kind of inform people a little bit about the Temple, but also just to make it fun and get people to participate in a little challenge. And I think our idea came from the Ice Bucket Challenge. I think that was you or Robin Linkhart that was really excited about this Ice Bucket Challenge that was going around on Facebook where people were trying to raise money for ALS and awareness for ALS. And so we were like, Well, what can we do to inform some people about aspects of the Temple, but also give them just a little challenge to do. And of course, I didn't want people pouring ice over their head every week. So, we just came up with a different type of challenge; ways for people to connect or put comments down on Facebook as they watched the video. But as that went on for a little bit, it became pretty clear that there were about four different elements in a Temple Tuesday video. So the first, I think, would be to observe or discover a physical aspect of the Temple. And then to spend a little bit of time exploring what that means through the lens of maybe history, through its design, how its design relates to who we are as a people or who we are as an organization. There might be some symbolic aspects to the Temple that's in there. That could be an overt, you know, very open and able to see the symbolism or it might have been kind of serendipitous as, as I was exploring something, I was like. Wow, this is pretty symbolic to who we are as a people and kind of revealed in that moment, Oh, this, there's more to this than I might have thought. It could have been a theological significance. How does this aspect of the Temple serve a part of the purpose of the Temple? And then I tried to connect people with that. So, how does this element and what I've just discussed, what does that have to do with you and your congregation or the ministry that you do wherever you are? So, how are you an extension of the ministry that happens at

the Temple? Or even this symbolic significance? How is that also extended out into your life? And then the last element with the challenge is to discern what's, what's my invitation in this video? And how will I act upon it? How will I respond?

Karin Peter 03:59

So really to make all aspects of the Temple more real in people's lives instead of just a place in Independence that we may or may not ever visit. So all of those elements help to do that. (Exactly.) So, part of, you mentioned it, that Robin Linkhart was part of the beginning of this project. And there have been lots of people that have contributed to the project even though we see you, your face weekly on Tuesdays. But we, Brittany Mangelson has participated. She, she has done everything from editing to adding the music and the what's called the bumpers, the opening and closing of Temple Tuesday. Making sure Temple Tuesday shows up when it's supposed to in the places it's supposed to in people's feed on Facebook, and then kind of tracking how that, how we're doing with Temple Tuesday.

Joey Williams 04:57

She also makes sure that I, that I get one done. She's always writing on a Monday and being like, So are you going to have a video for me tomorrow?

Karin Peter 05:08

So, she's been good on that aspect is riding herd I think that's called. Also, uh, Neil deAtley was really involved in the beginning of this, and, and as a member on the team, on the creative team. But he, too, was struck with the idea of having a challenge to bring the Temple to life with people. And then we really depended on the expertise of different people including Lach Mackay who's been fabulous on making sure we have lots of information about the historical background, different aspects of the Temple, anecdotal kind of stories from the Temple. And kind of offering his wisdom and expertise in that.

Joey Williams 05:48

He's kind of my fact checker as well.

Karin Peter 05:50

Yes. I hate it when he does that. But yes. And then Joelle Wight joined the team and she's been really great in not just ideas and creativity, but in doing some specific work in making T, aemple Tuesday resources, which we're going to talk about today, accessible and professional looking for people to use in congregational life and in family devotions, and that kind of thing. So the team has been just a, a wonderful team to work with. And I've felt very privileged to be a part of that team. So, when you were invited to start this project, Joey, and you were actually invited not just to participate, but to be the face and the host of this, did you have any idea of what you were saying yes to when you agreed? And, and if you did and you did it anyway, why? I mean, what, what was it about the project that made you agree to it?

Joey Williams 06:50

Yeah, I would say that I had an idea. You know, it kind of was, in some ways a good fit. I was stuck here at the beginning of the pandemic in Independence. I live in Independence, and I had just come

back, then stuck, could not get back over to Europe. You know, I was worried. What will I do? How will I do my job from Independence. So in some ways, the idea of doing a video that could then be used in different places, especially over in Europe, where I work to help people see, I'm still doing something, I'm, I'm keeping you aware of the Temple and showing some people who never will come see the Temple, just a video of here's an aspect of something you'll probably never come and visit. And so that was a neat opportunity in a way to continue to do my job. But I have to admit, I probably had a lot of beginning of the pandemic optimism about the pandemic thinking, Well, this might be for two or three weeks, maybe a month or two months at the longest that I'll be doing this project. But after about three months, I did step back and go Why did I say yes to this?

Karin Peter 08:04

And I think when we hit like, April or May, maybe May. It's been, that was like 13 months. So (Yeah.), probably on what, 15 months now you've been doing this?

Joey Williams 08:15

Yeah, it's been, it's been quite a while now. But, you know, it was a great, still an opportunity to really reflect on the Temple and what it means to us as a people. And even just after a few months, I had already done quite a few videos, but I hadn't been inside. So I even got more scared of that. I was like, How much more is there to explore that we haven't even gone inside yet. But as we went further and further, the videos got a little bit more complex, more symbolic, more theologically significant. And so that required not only a little bit more time, but a little bit more preparation and pressure, I have to admit on, I wanted to get my facts, right. I wanted to represent the project and the organization in a good way. And so in some ways, I was like, why did I say yes to this, but I know that at the end of the day, I've, I've really liked some of the things that have come out of this project and some of the depth that we've been able to go into about what it means to not only have a temple and be a people of the Temple, but to be out in the world and be the Temple wherever we are and the ministries of the Temple in our local context.

Karin Peter 09:34

So you talked a little bit about how they did become more complex as we went along. They also started to take on a flavor of kind of some what we might call little mini-series within. For example, you did one on the different priesthood offices represented at the Temple, on the sacraments using images from around the Temple. So how do you choose the topics? What happened originally in choosing the topics and then as it began to deepen and you began to think more, We probably need some deeper theological and maybe even doctrinal content as we move along.

Joey Williams 10:14

Well, it was important for me because in Europe, we have been, been really intentional about trying to discover what it means to be a peace movement, or what role does peace play in Community of Christ in Europe? And then, as you know, President Steve Veazey has given the church a guiding question for about the last year and a half, Are we moving toward Jesus, the peaceful one? He brings this up in his closing words at the 2019 World Conference. And so from the very beginning, knowing that the Temple is dedicated to the pursuit of peace, I wanted to be really intentional about what does all of this represent in the lens of peace so at, when we look at through the lens of peace, what it means to be a

prophetic people, what it means to be a people of the Temple, that's all through the lens of peace. In 2018, Europe held its very first peace colloquy. So we had this colloquy where we invited all of these people to come. And what we did is we looked at the sacraments through the lens of peace. And I think that's one of my favorite, you talked about kind of a little mini-series, that was one of my favorite kind of series of things that I was able to do in the Temple was to discuss the sacraments, really through the lens of peace, and discover something about that, and what it might invite us into again. There's always that question of, What are we now being invited into when we encounter the Temple in our lives or the experience of the Temple. And then, of course, we just had the 25th anniversary of the Temple that we celebrated that also at the 2019 World Conference. So the theme of the Temple had a real place in our lives and in our mo, movement, and I think it was on our mind. So it was a good time to really dig into what does the Temple mean for us. That plaque as you go into the main entrance that's right on the side, and I'm not sure I had ever looked at it. I'm sure I have. But I haven't noticed it. But then to really stand there in front of it and read the Temple dedicated to the pursuit of peace, April 17, 1994. And to just start to really let that sink in. And then call me out, as I'm trying to do these videos, into, What does it mean to explore the Temple as a symbol of our dedication to peace in the world? So, of course, at first the Temple was closed. So literally, it was just going around the outside of the Temple and thinking, How can I connect people to the Temple? What is there outside here in this space to be able to connect people? And, and that might be just like, you know, there's, there's the doors as you go into any entrance from outside, and they have a long handle on them. And to just begin to look at the design, even from the outside before you enter, and how even a small child can lift up their hand and have access to get into the Temple, to open that door, that it's so long that if you're in a wheelchair, you wouldn't have to bring your hand up too high. But you could actually use the door. But of course, there's also sliding doors that come open.

Karin Peter 13:51

Yes, we are ADA accessible and compliant. (Yeah. It's all ADA accessible.) Just thought I'd throw that out there.

Joey Williams 13:55

Exactly, exactly. But I just love some of that symbolism. And so that's what gave us the beginning ideas of, Where do we go? What do we begin to do? It was really just looking around and noticing what there was and then figuring out what we would talk about. Of course, people, like we've already mentioned, Lach, Robin, you, Karin, Brittany, who brings up some great Latter-day Seeker questions. All of those people became really good resources as to where should we go? What should we talk about? Elray Henrickson created a documentary at that last World Conference called "A People on the Move". And if you look that up, you'll see a lot of things that I've borrowed to be able to do some little snippets from that video and kind of repeat some of that material and explore it a little bit further. He walked around the Temple with Andrew Bolton and explored the Temple from a lens of peace and what it means to be a prophetic people, a people on the move. And then I would also say that I read Velma Ruch's book "Summoned to Pilgrimage: A Temple as Focus of a Pilgrim People". And that just, reading that really got me excited and inspired to share with others, the deep symbolism of the pilgrim's journey that's represented through the Temple. And I'll, I'll just read you a little quote, that was one of my, kind of, I guess, my centering quotes from Velma's book. She says, "This is a road by which the human soul

searches for the center and proceeds along the way from chaos to cosmos, from brokenness and confusion to that still point where true life is to be found."

Karin Peter 14:40

Ah, that's a beautiful quote, Joey. Thank you. You, you talk a little bit about the, the images you, you have used a variety of types as to help us see and understand what it means to be people of the Temple and live that out. Everything from running up and down that huge flight of concrete steps outside the bronze doors. I don't know how many takes you had to do to get that done. But oh my gosh,

Joey Williams 15:53

You can tell. I had lost my breath so much. You could tell I had done it quite a few times.

Karin Peter 16:27

So how many episodes have you recorded? Do you know?

Joey Williams 16:31

Oh, gosh, over 60 now. Just, yeah, once a week, and we started probably, what, 13 months ago?

Karin Peter 16:40

So do you, do you have favorites? I have favorites. But I want to hear your favorites.

Joey Williams 16:46

I do. You know, I love that some of the videos were about design aspects of the Temple, that some are about symbolic aspects of the Temple. The series on the sacraments is definitely one of my favorites. It was just fun to do and to explore that in a little bit more in depth way. Those videos are just a little bit longer, but, of course, it's really difficult to explain the sacraments in two to three minutes, so some of those are five minutes, six minutes. But probably one of my favorites is the gingko trees, which is one of the more recent ones. I grew up in Independence and so Higashimurayama was one of our sister cities and so that was always at the forefront of my mind. And then to be encountered with this opportunity to talk about gingko trees and walk through how my own religious organization and faith movement had incorporated the idea of the gingko trees into this, this space. It was like mind blowing for me because we have a little Japanese garden where, at the other side of independence, where I had always thought about Higashimurayama, gingko trees, the atomic bombs, et cetera, et cetera. And now, I was bringing this into my faith movement and my own identity as a person of faith. And that was just, just an eye opening experience for me to do that gingko tree one.

Karin Peter 18:19

Yeah, so the sacrament series definitely, as far as content, depth of content, I think it's just a, a wonderful resource. And we'll talk about some ways to use that in a minute. But I'm a very visual person. So some of my favorites are because of the visual aspects. But also, I am an avid collector of poetry. And so some of the, the phrases you've used in different videos have really, uh, stayed with me. So I'll give some examples. You do one is called The Access to Information. And, you know this is one of my favorites because you begin it by typing. We see you typing on a computer. And as you kind of give us some input into where you are, we discover you're in the library, and you talk about that and

how people can use the computers in there and have a way to access information if they, if they don't have that in their own home, which I think is that was just a brilliant visual. Another and this is, this is probably my favorite line out of all of the videos. It's from Windows into the Future. And you're standing outside what's called the Continents Room, which is where we have a lot of meetings when church leaders meet in independence. And outside the Continents Room there's a hallway so if you haven't watched this one, there's a hallway with windows that overlook the parking lot. And a lot of times, that's where snacks are set up during breaks. So we all meander out there to get our coffee and our snacks. And that's also where really meaningful conversations take place. As you're standing there kind of looking out the window and talking with your colleagues. And you talk about that and the phrase you use is that when you stand there and have those conversations in relationship that you, you are open to the windows of new perspectives. And I think that's just a marvelously poetic line. And so that has stayed with me throughout this whole project. And then I liked the one when you did the priesthood offices represented and you, I think Jane Gardner said you'd hijacked her office to do the one on the high priests. But you did. You visited the different priesthood, the actual facilities where people go to work there. And for me, it's the one you did on the seventy because I'm biased because I serve in that office. So I think you, you did just a super job explaining the ministry of the seventy, which if you come from a Community of Christ background, you have one perspective on that. But if you come from a LDS background, it's a completely different understanding. And so I think it was really helpful for people to hear more about the role of the seventy. So what have you learned as you've done this, about you? What have you learned about the Temple, about online ministry, about peace? What, what stayed with you?

Joey Williams 21:18

That is a really good question. I think what I've learned the most is if we just open our eyes a little bit more, if we open our ears just a little bit more to listen a little more closely, if we take the time to notice that we might uncover and encounter the divine in and at work through even the most seemingly inconsequential and unimportant details of our lives. I did one on the water fountains, and talked about clean water and what, you know, what a blessing to have clean water just coming out of a pipe at the Temple. But how many places around the world do not have that. And so just taking that time to notice can allow God to begin to work within us and call us to where we need to be. How do we work for clean water and access to water around the world? So that was just an experience of me standing in front of a water fountain. It, it really, that could have happened anywhere. It didn't have to happen in the Temple. It could have happened at a school. It could have happened at a park. It could have happened anywhere, but just taking that time to be intentional and to step back and open my eyes a little more, open my ears a little more and, and pay attention. So, often, also, the titles that we use become so repetitive we forget their deep significance. So, even when we just say Temple, it's just, you know, it's a place. It's in Independence. It's where sometimes people go there for conferences or meetings, et cetera, et cetera. But like the welcome desk, if we pay a little bit more attention, this is really a deeper question about hospitality, and generosity. And, you know, we would certainly be offended if we called that the tolerance desk. If we just tolerated people. The welcome desk, informed me about hospitality on a bigger level in my life and other questions of who is not only tolerated, but welcome here. And if we take that further, maybe it should be called the celebration desk. But not only do we welcome people into this organization, but what if we completely celebrate the diversity around us and believe in mutually transformational experiences when we encounter others who walk in who might be a little

different from us. So, just that paying attention has really called me into that little process that I said earlier of discover, explore, connect, and discern. And it, it's really brought all of that, I think, given it a little bit more life or meaning in my own life. But, Karin, I have learned so many other things, too. I have learned that the intentional design of the Temple was done with the idea of how it continues to call us not only as who we are today, but who we are to become in the future. And that was done guite intentionally on many aspects of the Temple. I have also learned that my key card to get into the Temple is disactivated after 10 p.m. so I can't access the Temple. (I learned that the hard way the first time, too.) I've learned that the Temple is truly a symbolic representation of our encounters with the divine throughout the world, wherever, wherever it is that we gather, through worship, learning experiences, educational experiences, and the ways we engage in mission. In fact, I was going around the Temple making connections for, for the Temple Tuesday listeners and I became more and more aware that I was actually going out from the Temple to gather my experiences to be able to talk about the Temple. So, when I stood at the flags, I literally thought about the people at conference carrying those flags and some of those who I've had the opportunity to serve with them in their own countries. And those experiences brought meaning to the Temple, as opposed to the Temple bringing meaning out into their lives. So, it's really people living as a people of a, of the Temple out in the world that has informed me of what the Temple really means. It's this inward outward flow, just like the design of the Temple gives us that it's just as much the prophetic people contributing to what the Temple is, as it is to the symbol that's in Independence, Missouri, that helps be a light of who we are to become out in the world. I've learned so much. I've got so much more I can share about my learnings.

Karin Peter 26:10

I think it's really, really interesting, because obviously, it's had an effect on your own discipleship formation, which I was going to ask you about. But maybe what I'm interested here is, how does, how does it affect then what you do as a minister, you're employed by Community of Christ, you serve in a role that's both administrative and visionary. You serve in the office of seventy, which is missional and invitational. So, how does this whole project we just kind of look over everything that has been done. But how does that impact you as you go forward now with this new understanding of what it means to be a people of the Temple,

Joey Williams 26:53

I would say one of the best things that it does is reminds us that this is an inward outward journey, like I just kind of said, that we continuously are going in, as we go up that worshippers path into the sanctuary where we have this divine encounter. And this is symbolic of, of our faith walk, right? We have these moments of, we need to go in and figure out who are we and who am I in relationship to this greater world around me and to this God who for some reason loves me in spite of who I am. And then that divine encounter leads to some change or transformation or invitation to go out into the world in a different way to be different, changed, transformed and ready to serve, ready for action. And I don't see it so much as a cycle that it just repeats. We don't fall into the same traps. But I also no longer see it as we have one goal that we're getting to. I see it as more we continue to come back in to discover where we are at this time and what that means for us. And then, how might we be led into new possibilities for the future. So it's, it's ever growing and we're always moving forward. But it does have some things that bring us back in that then send us back out. So, not so much just goal oriented, but continuous

reflection, continuing to come back in to figure out who we are and who we are being called to become. And then to walk that step, you know, to take the steps that lead us back out to who we are becoming.

Karin Peter 28:41

The ultimate challenge there, we might say since each of our episodes have a challenge. So, Joey, you've mentioned at different times that Temple Tuesday started, it has grown and evolved on its own journey, and it is an ever growing process. So, how might people find these? They've been going for over a year, so it's not like they're going to rerun at any point going forward, although I guess that might be a possibility at some point. But how, how do we find them? What's the, do they just disappear now? Or what if people want to go view them?

Joey Williams 29:18

Yeah, there's a couple ways to access them. So, Temple Tuesday videos are still happening. So, probably the best way to connect right now is to get on Facebook, go to Latter-day Seekers Ministries, and if you like that page, then it will start coming up in your feed every Tuesday when a video is released and you can see those videos in your feed and click on them and begin to watch them. You can also go to the video section on the Facebook page where you'll find all of the videos that have been posted. So, that would be the first way. The second way would be to go to the YouTube site that, that we have which is Latter-day Seekers Ministries on YouTube. So, you just type that into the search bar and you'll have to look for it because a couple other sites come up first, but you look for the purple logo of the lion, lamb and the child. And so you'll be able to find it there. And then when you get on that page, you'll click the playlist for Temple Tuesday videos. And then that is a catalog. It literally will show you all of the titles and I believe even when those were put on Facebook, the dates of when they were put on, so, you can go through that and see which ones you want to watch. So if you are really into it, you could do a Temple Tuesday binge watch.

Karin Peter 30:44

If you've watched everything on Netflix, we have something for you.

Joey Williams 30:48

If you have done the pandemic binge watching of everything, then this will take much less time than bingeing Downton Abbey, for example. And it will be crazy for me to ever hear that someone binged, watched all of the Temple Tuesday videos like in one day. That would be hilarious.

Karin Peter 31:05

Okay, there's a challenge out there for you listeners.

Joey Williams 31:10

But we've also, and I'm really excited about this, we've also created a resource to help people not only access these, but also that people can then find ways to actually use them in their ministry. So if you go to allthingsarespiritual.org, and I'll repeat that, allthingsarespiritual.org, and that's all connected. At the top of that you'll see a button that says spirituality in mission. And if you click under there, you'll see the Temple Tuesday videos. And these have been organized in a great way because there are several videos for worship or classes. So there's a section on videos for gathering, videos for disciples

generous response, for a focus moment, and for sending forth. There's also a button where you can push and get some videos on prayer for peace. So, if you want to know more about the prayer for peace, you can click there, classes for adults, an adult class, a worshipers path class, you might give, a sacraments class you might give, discussion groups, and it has even some questions that will help people after the video process that information a little more and discuss a little bit further. And then there's some spiritual practices videos that are specifically for doing spiritual practices, as well as some devotions. So, you could even use some of the videos as a devotion. But that's a great place to go and a resource if you want to use these a little bit more in your ministry or even on your own, individuals can access it that way.

Karin Peter 32:49

And there's a great, on that same place, on the allthingsarespiritual.org, there's a great how-to video hosted by Joelle Wight who actually walks you through how to find the YouTube channel and all the videos on there, how to download them, that kind of a thing. So if you, if you feel that listening to a podcast is as technically adept as you might be, do not worry, because she gives all kinds of instructions on how to use Temple Tuesday videos in those very ways that you described. And also the, by clicking on the different things--gathering, disciples generous response--you can actually download the video and a PDF. So if you feel like you're not a really good planner to make that happen, it's downloaded as almost a script for you so, you don't, you don't have to worry that maybe that's not your giftedness to take a video and use it in the different ways. So, that's out there. And if you have more questions about it, you can certainly contact us. You can contact Joey at, is it jwilliams? (jswilliams) jswilliams@cofchrist.org. You can contact me at kpeter@cofchrist.org. And we can help you locate that information. So, we have this great resource Temple Tuesday. We're finding new ways to use it. We're hoping to find additional ways to use it as we develop new resources for Latter-day Seekers Ministries, but also for Community of Christ. So, if you have an idea, if you've used a Temple Tuesday video in a different way in your congregation or your small group or your family, let us know. We'd love to hear it and share that information with somebody else. So, Joey, lots of places are reopening. COVID has been in decline in a great many places and so we're moving into what are, are post-pandemic or postworst-of-the-pandemic might look like, depending on where you live. What's next for you?

Joey Williams 35:09

Well, hopefully, like you said, it seems like people are being a little bit more mobile and, hopefully, I will be able to travel soon. I think it's now been 13 months, that, 14 months that I have not traveled to Europe. And so working as the mission center president over in Europe has been quite a challenge with a seven hour time difference, but I will really be looking forward to being able to get back in ministry over, in person, over in Europe, and that we've already begun to talk about some activities that will happen before I'll even be able to go there because, you know, right now going and quarantining doesn't financially make sense, why to take a trip that might last, you know, four weeks that could last up to eight weeks just because of quarantining. So, I'll have to think about how I plan my travel when I do that, but hopefully within the next months, few months that are coming, I'll be able to get back out there.

Karin Peter 36:12

And we can still expect some Temple Tuesday videos to be posted in the meantime before, even, even as you increase your travel time. So, if you haven't yet had a chance to have them come to your Facebook feed, you do have that opportunity, as well. So, Joey, I want to thank you again for being with us as we kind of draw this episode of Project Zion to a close. Are there any last thoughts or comments you want to share with us about this experience of Temple Tuesday?

Joey Williams 36:44

Well, I guess if I'm going to be true to form, I'd have to end with a challenge, or at least a reflection. You might even call it, you might even call it a practice to help us move closer towards what it might mean to be a people of the Temple. So, I would ask after you've listened to this podcast, just to take a little time to walk around, notice, open your eyes and your ears to things maybe you haven't paid attention to before. And can you begin to see and hear the divine at work in you, around you in the things that are happening around you? Is there maybe a symbol that you haven't noticed before? Is there meaning in something that you might be seeing in a new and even unexpected way? And is there a connection that you're making to that? A new way of seeing things, a new way of understanding, a new way that you might even do things or be and how will you respond to that invitation?

Karin Peter 37:51

Thank you, Joey, again, for being with us and for issuing that Temple Tuesday challenge to our listeners of this episode of Project Zion. I want to remind our listeners to visit the allthingsarespiritual.org website for the Temple Tuesday videos, or the Latter-day Seeker Ministries YouTube channel. And a big, big thank you to Joey Williams, not just for the episode today, but for his continued ministry and journey with Temple Tuesday. I'm Karin Peter. This is Project Zion. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 38:40

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