

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES

**Parshas Va'eira**

January 26, 2006

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita***

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**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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## Parshas Va'eira

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

### 1. One of Moshe's Strongest Attributes Was the Basis for His Ultimate Failing

The Torah tells us that when the Jewish people believed that Moshe was the Redeemer, who would take them out of Egypt, there was a work stoppage. In response to the inactivity of the Jews, Pharaoh ordered that the straw subsidy that was given to them by the government to make bricks should be withdrawn and that they should gather their own straw to fulfill the same quota. Consequently, the predicament of the Jew became untenable. The Torah states, **"They (Dason and Aviram) encountered Moshe and Aaron... and said, 'May Hashem look upon you and judge, for you have made us putrid in the eyes of Pharaoh...to place a sword in their hands to murder us!' Moshe returned to G'd and said, 'My Lord, why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me...G'd said to Moshe, 'Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh...'"**

Rashi cites Chazal who explain the verse, **"Now you will see (the redemption/exodus)..."** to mean "Because you questioned My ways...you will see the redemption from Egypt, but you will not witness what I will do to the seven nations of Canaan when I will bring the Jewish people into the Land." It seems that the Torah is indicating that Moshe was not worthy to enter into the Land because he questioned G'd's ways. However, the Torah states explicitly that he was not permitted to enter into the Land because he struck the rock to bring forth water, rather than speaking to it as G'd had commanded him. As the Torah states, **"G'd said to Moshe and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will not bring this congregation to the Land that I have given them.'"** How do we reconcile these two verses which seem to offer different reasons Moshe did not merit to enter the Land?

Moshe was aware of Pharaoh's new order to withdraw the straw subsidies and its dire consequences to the Jewish people. Yet he only approached G'd with a claim after Dason and Aviram accused him of worsening

the fate of the Jewish people. Why did Moshe only approach G'd after being castigated by Dason and Aviram?

Moshe was an individual who lived his life selflessly for G'd – only to bring about kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G'd's Name). When Moshe came to Egypt as the Redeemer of Israel, he did so as the agent of G'd. Thus, the ramifications of his actions and statements were meant to bring about kiddush Hashem and not chilul Hashem (desecration of G'd's Name). Although the fate of the Jew had become more difficult, rather than improving, it was not considered to be an issue until Moshe was castigated by Dason and Aviram. Therefore, before the comments of Dason and Aviram were made, Moshe was not in any way compelled to approach G'd. However, after their severe reproach, Moshe had realized that because of the perception of Dason and Aviram, which was extremely negative, it would result in a chilul Hashem. Therefore, Moshe, because of his sensitivity to chilul Hashem, approached G'd in an inappropriate manner. Moshe had asked G'd, **"My Lord, why have You done evil to this people?"** G'd responded by saying, "You are not privy to My Divine Ways." Then Moshe responded, "If You do not want to share this with me, then why have You chosen me to be Your agent who cannot respond and dispel the chilul Hashem that is being perpetrated?"

The Torah tells us that Moshe continued saying to G'd, **"...From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name he did evil to this people, but You did not rescue Your people."** Although the basis for Moshe's reaction to the complaints of the people was rooted in his sensitivity to chilul Hashem, it was considered his failing. Because Moshe allowed himself to react to the comments of others, ultimately this would be the cause for him to be unworthy to enter into the Land.

Regarding the striking of the rock to extract water on behalf of the Jewish people, Moshe had failed. Moshe was commanded by G'd to speak to the rock, yet he chose to strike it because he had reacted to the complaints of the people. The Torah states, **"Moshe said (to the Jewish people), 'Listen now, O rebels, shall we bring forth**

**water for you from this rock..."** Once again Moshe reacted to the complaints of the Jewish people because of his sensitivity to G'd's Honor. The manner in which the Jewish people had requested water was inappropriate and disrespectful. They had said, **"You have taken us into the desert to die..."** G'd had proven Himself multiple times that He would not abandon His people in the wilderness. He would provide for them every human amenity. Therefore the manner of their complaint enraged Moshe.

With this we can reconcile the reasons for Moshe being denied entry into the Land. Because Moshe reacted to the complaints of the Jewish people, initially when the straw subsidies were withdrawn, he expressed a characteristic that he was destined to repeat later regarding the striking of the rock. Because Moshe reacted inappropriately initially to the complaints of the Jewish people in an attempt to prevent chilul Hashem, he was destined to ultimately react to the complaints of the Jewish people regarding the rock – which actually prevented a kiddush Hashem. As the Torah states, **"You had the opportunity to sanctify Me and you did not..."** If Moshe had spoken to the rock and it would have given forth its water. It would have been a lesson for the Jewish people to draw upon regarding their own behavior. The rock, which is not subject to reward and punishment (whether it gave forth its water or not) followed the Dictate of G'd, the Jewish people who are deserving of unlimited reward, if they choose to do the right thing, and punishment if they should fail, definitely should follow the dictate of G'd. When Moshe struck the rock and did not carry out G'd's Dictate as was prescribed, he denied a setting for kiddush Hashem. Thus, he was punished by being denied entry into the Land.

We find another example of Moshe's sensitivity to chilul Hashem. This was demonstrated regarding his sending of the spies into the Land. The Jewish people had approached Moshe prior to the moment they were about to enter into the Land. They had said to him, "We must send spies into the Land to prevent a chilul Hashem. G'd had promised us that when we enter into the Land we will find houses filled with all goodness (wealth). Do you not think that the nations of Canaan would bury their wealth before we enter so that we should not be able to locate it? If this should be the case, the word of G'd will not be fulfilled, thus causing a chilul Hashem." The Jews could only present their request in this manner because they understood that had they asked to send spies to determine if the Land was conquerable, it would have been rejected by Moshe. G'd had promised them that they would enter and conquer a land that flows with milk and honey. They had baited Moshe with the threat of chilul Hashem in order

to accomplish their own objective to determine whether the Land was conquerable or not. G'd's response was, "Send for yourself spies..." Meaning, "I permit you to send spies, but I do not endorse it." On one hand Moshe's sensitivity to chilul Hashem was one of his greatest attributes. But on the other hand it was also the basis for his failing.

## ***2. The Illuminating Experience of Sinai***

The Torah states, **"Say to the Children of Israel: 'I am Hashem and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a G'd to you; and you shall know that I am Hashem you G'd, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt.'** In this verse we find the four expressions of redemption.

The Torah states regarding the fourth expression of redemption, **"I shall take you to Me for a people... and you shall know that I am Hashem you G'd, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt.** G'd is saying to the Jewish people that they would only know after the Sinai event that He took them out of Egypt and performed all of the miracles on their behalf.

Prior to Sinai, the Torah tells us on many occasions that the Jewish people acknowledged with certainty that what had transpired in Egypt was attributed to G'd Himself. As the verse states after the Sea had split and closed upon the Egyptian armies, **'They (the Jewish people) believed in G'd and His servant Moshe..."** Meaning, the Jewish people attributed the miracles to G'd Himself. During the third plague of lice, the Torah tells us that even the Egyptian sorcerers acknowledged that the plague was not brought about through sorcery but rather they had stated, **"This is the finger of G'd..."** Seemingly, it was clear to the Jewish people, before Sinai that G'd had redeemed them from Egypt.

Rambam writes in, The Fundamentals of Torah, that the basis to believe in Moshe as G'd's spokesman and agent was not based on the miracles that he performed. If one's belief is based on witnessing miracles it is not considered conclusive because it is possible that the miracles came about through sorcery. The basis for the authenticity of Torah, that it is the Word of G'd, and all that had transpired through Moshe was truly the hand of G'd, was only substantiated at Sinai when G'd openly communicated with Moshe in the presence of the entire Jewish people.

### 3. Humility- the Driving Force of Moshe

If the Jewish people's belief in Moshe being G'd's spokesman/agent was based upon his performance as a miracle worker, then it could be claimed that the basis for his supernatural ability was not due to G'd but rather he was a greater sorcerer than those in Egypt. The only reason we know that the miracles were not witchcraft is because G'd openly designated Moshe as His spokesman. Thus, the verse states, **"I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a G'd to you; and you shall know that I am Hashem you G'd, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt."**

The Midrash tells us that during the first five plagues, Pharaoh hardened his own heart and would not allow the Jewish people to leave. However, during the remaining plagues, which came upon Egypt, the Torah does not state that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but rather, G'd hardened the heart of Pharaoh. The Midrash states, "From this point onwards, even if Pharaoh wanted to send out the Jewish people, I (G'd) would not allow it. From the sixth plague onward, Moshe decreed and G'd fulfilled (his decree)... "Seemingly, whatever transpired after the fifth plague was Moshe's decision. He structured the plagues as he saw fit and G'd caused them to unfold as Moshe had decreed- based on the principle, "A tzaddik decrees and G'd fulfills." If this was so, then it could appear that since Moshe initiated the plagues, he was the one who brought about the revealed miracles in Egypt. Thus, one could conclude that Moshe was a greater sorcerer than those in Egypt.

It is interesting to note that when the Jewish people were caught between the Sea and the approaching Egyptian army the Torah states, **"They said to Moshe, 'Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert? What is this that you have done to us to take us out of Egypt?'"** We see from this verse that although the Jewish people witnessed multiple plagues which were revealed miracles, they believed that Moshe was the one who had taken them out of Egypt. In their view, G'd did not want to redeem them because they were unworthy. It was only because of Moshe's dimension of spirituality and personal merit that He agreed to allow them to leave Egypt. Therefore it was actually Moshe and his initiative (Moshe decreeing redemption) that caused them to leave Egypt. It was not until Sinai, when the entire Jewish people witnessed G'd openly communicating with Moshe that it was revealed firstly that the miracles did not come about through sorcery. Secondly, the redemption itself was unrelated to Moshe's own personal merit.

The Torah tells us regarding the time of Moshe's birth, **"His mother saw that he was good (tov)."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that "tov (good)" means that Moshe was born circumcised which was an indication that he had a special spiritual dimension. Another interpretation of the word "tov" is that Yocheved had seen that the Divine Presence upon Moshe. Moshe's parents understood with certainty that their child was the future Redeemer of Israel. When he was placed in a box on the Nile, his survival was a miracle. The daughter of Pharaoh recognized this miracle when she drew him from the water – thus calling him "Moshe" because he should have drowned in the Nile. Chazal tell us that Moshe was born with the ability to speak and had mature intelligence. Although he was an infant of three months the verse states, **"He cried like a lad... (and not a newborn)."** Despite the fact that Moshe knew that he was a miracle child and that G'd had performed miracles for the sake of his survival, when G'd appeared to him at the burning bush he was obstinate and refused to be His agent as the Redeemer of Israel. Moshe felt unworthy and not qualified for such a position. Chazal tell us that the basis for Moshe's obstinacy was that he felt that if he accepted the role as Redeemer of Israel he would slight his older brother Aaron. G'd told Moshe that he should not be concerned about this because Aaron, his older brother, would come out and greet him as the Redeemer and will "rejoice in his heart."

If Moshe understood through all that had transpired in his life that he was the only one who was truly meant to be the Redeemer, and G'd Himself had confirmed this (by presenting the opportunity to him), then why did he choose to be obstinate and difficult by rejecting his responsibility? One could say that it was due to his unique level of humility. However if it was a task that needed to be done and he was the only one qualified to fulfill it, why should his humility interfere with his obvious mission?

The Torah tells us that Aaron married Elisheva achos Nachshon (Elisheva the sister of Nachshon). The Gemara explains that the reason the Torah mentions Nachshon as being the brother of Aaron's wife is because when one chooses a wife, he should investigate the character traits of her brothers. Since Nachshon was from the most prestigious tribe (Tribe of Yehudah) and he was its Prince, he had a special pedigree. His sister merited having special children. In contrast, Moshe who was the most special person who ever lived married a convert and

not someone with a special pedigree. One could say that since Moshe was in a far off location (Midian) as a fugitive, he had no choice but to marry a woman who was a convert. However, if in fact Moshe was so unique and special, then why did G'd not provide him a wife with the most prestigious pedigree?

Maharal of Prague z'tl explains that Moshe's dimension of spirituality was equivalent to the entire Jewish nation. His spirituality was all-encompassing. If he were to marry a wife from one of the tribes, regardless of its pedigree, she would be limited by the spiritual profile of that particular tribe. Because Moshe was an unlimited spiritual person, he could not marry someone with a specific profile/limitation; and this could only be accomplished by marrying a convert. Knowing that the dimension of his spirituality was all-encompassing (the equivalent of the entire Jewish nation), Moshe should have acquiesced and accepted G'd's appointment without resistance. Yet the Torah tells us that Moshe was obstinate to the point that G'd needed to punish him.

The Midrash Tanchuma tells us that after the fifth plague, it was Moshe who decreed and G'd fulfilled. He structured the order and profile of the plagues that were meant to bring about redemption- based on the principle – "The Tzaddik (righteous) decrees and G'd fulfills." For Moshe, this process of redemption was something contradictory to his very essence – which was humility. It was difficult for Moshe to accept this role – and thus felt that Aaron, his older brother should be the appointee of G'd. Although Moshe had all the indicators that he was the only one qualified to take the Jews out of Egypt, his level of humility caused a conflict of interest within him to not appreciate this fact. Therefore he was obstinate to the point of needing to be punished by G'd.

#### **4. Pharaoh's Limited Understanding of the Jewish People**

The Torah tells us in the Portion of Shemos that G'd instructed Moshe to present himself to Pharaoh and request that the Jewish people be released from bondage. The Torah states, "**G'd said to Moshe, 'They will heed your voice. You and the elders of Israel shall come to the king of Egypt and say to him: Hashem (YKVK), the G'd (Elokei) of the Hebrews appeared to us...'**" When Moshe and Aaron came before Pharaoh the Torah states, "**Afterwards Moshe and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, 'So said Hashem (YKVK), the G'd (Elokei) of Israel, Send out My people that they may celebrate for Me in the wilderness.'**" Pharaoh replied, "**Who is Hashem (YKVK) that I should heed His voice to send**

**out Israel? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Israel!**" Moshe and Aaron again responded, "**The G'd of the Hebrews appeared to us...**" When they initially presented their credentials before Pharaoh they referred to G'd as "**Hashem (YKVK), G'd of Israel**"; however, when Pharaoh said that he did not recognize "Hashem (YKVK)" and rejected their request, they replied by referring to G'd as "**G'd of the Hebrews...**" When Moshe and Aaron initially approached Pharaoh, why did they not use the exact phraseology that G'd had related to Moshe?

The Midrash states, "When Pharaoh rejected Moshe and Aaron's initial request, they had said, 'Perhaps he rejected us because we did not use the exact phraseology that G'd had communicated to me. We were denied because we did not follow the exact instruction of G'd.' They therefore returned to Pharaoh and addressed him in the manner prescribed by G'd." What is the significance of the change in reference to G'd as "G'd of the Hebrews" from not "G'd of Israel?"

The Torah tells us that Yaakov was named Yisroel by the angel because he was able to lord over man and G'd. He was able to survive the insurmountable circumstances with his father in law Lavan and his brother Esav. In addition, Yaakov defeated the archangel of Esav. Thus, Yaakov assumed a dimension of person that transcended physical limitation. Therefore Yaakov was named "Yisroel" to identify him as a spiritual/unlimited being. The Jewish people are referred to as "Bnei Yisroel (the children of Yisroel)" and not as "the children of Yaakov" because in essence they are spiritual beings who find their context within physicality.

It is interesting to note that the appellation of G'd "YKVK-Hashem," represents Him in the past, present, and future ("I was, I am, and I will be"). This appellation identifies G'd as the Creator who is the Infinite and Omnipotent Being.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the title always assumed by the Egyptian monarchs was "Pharaoh." This appellation contains the Hebrew letters "*ayin, pay, raish*" which spells the word "*afar – dust/earth.*" The Egyptian people believed that all existence was in fact limited because there is nothing outside of the physical realm. They rejected the belief that there is a spiritual realm which transcends limitation. Thus it is befitting that the king of the Egyptian people, who personified the belief, ideology, and essence of his people, should be given the title of "Pharaoh."

When Moshe and Aaron initially approached Pharaoh they referred to G'd as "Hashem (YKVK), the G'd of Yisroel" and not "G'd of the Hebrews." By referring to G'd as "**Hashem (YKVK), the G'd of Yisroel**" they had expressed a linkage between the Infinite/Omnipotent Being and the Jewish people. G'd is infinite and thus His people, who are attached to Him have relevance to the infinite. Since Pharaoh believed that everything was finite/with limitation and thus bound to the confines of nature, the concept of an "Unlimited" spiritual Being and a people who possess this characteristic was unacceptable and rejected by Pharaoh. Pharaoh thus responded to Moshe, "**I do not know Hashem (YKVK).**" Therefore Moshe and Aaron returned and addressed Pharaoh as G'd had instructed them saying, "I am the G'd of the Hebrews" thus using concepts that were finite/limited.

G'd had promised that the Torah would never be forgotten from the Jewish people (children of Yisroel) and that they would never become extinct. If in fact G'd had limitation, how could He give them such a guarantee? Throughout history the odds against the Jewish people's survival has been overwhelming, yet they have survived and thrived – and their enemies have perished and gone into the dust bins of history. The very existence of the Jew, despite the adversity and aversion to them is another uncontested proof to his linkage to the infinite.

### 5. *Realizing Moshe's Potential* (from Shemos)

The Torah states, "**Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe by the River...She saw the box among the reeds...She opened it and saw him, the child, and behold, a youth was crying. She took pity on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrew children.'...She called his name Moshe, as she said, 'For I drew him from the water.'**" Pharaoh, the monarch of Egypt, had decreed that every male newborn child was to be thrown into the Nile. Why would his daughter defy his order and save a Jewish boy? Despite the fact that she was the daughter of Pharaoh, the monarch of the most advanced pagan civilization, she recognized that the child that she had come upon in the River was truly unique. She had an instant affinity and bond with him.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that when Pharaoh's daughter went to bathe in the Nile she actually went to immerse herself for the sake of conversion. As the Gemara states, "she went to cleanse herself from the idolatry of her father." It was at that moment that she had noticed a box floating in the River. Evidently Pharaoh's daughter was an exceptional individual. Despite her pagan upbringing and

environment, she was sensitive to spirituality and was able to see the truth. The Midrash tells us that when she opened the box she had seen the Divine Presence upon the child. After she converted she was called "Basyah – Bas Ka", which means "the daughter of G'd." Because of her spiritual capacity she was able to appreciate and quantify the child for what he was. She therefore named him "Moshe." The Torah tells us that she named him "**Moshe, because he was drawn from the water.**" What is the profoundness that lies within that name?

Sforno explains, "The daughter of Pharaoh called him Moshe because she understood from the circumstance in which he was found that Moshe was destined to be a person to save others. When she had seen him floating in the box in the water it was obvious to her that he should not have survived. He should have drowned. His miraculous survival was because it was the Will of G'd. G'd caused Moshe to survive because "he was destined to save others." Thus the appellation of "Moshe" identifies his essence as the Redeemer. He was the one who was destined to take the Jews out of bondage.

Maharal of Prague z'tl explains that Moshe, throughout his life, had a precarious relationship with "water." When he was born, he was placed in a box in the water. The Egyptian astrologers had seen in the stars that Moshe's demise would come about through water. This is in fact what was meant to be. The Torah tells us that because Moshe had struck the rock to bring forth water, rather than speaking to it as G'd had commanded him, he was denied entry into the Land of Israel- subsequently he passed away in the plains of Moav. What is the relationship between Moshe and water?

Maharal points out that one of the characteristics of water is that it does not assume a fixed form. It assumes the form of the location in which it is found. It is not a fixed entity. The Torah itself is an entity which takes on many guises, which bring about multiple results. When one studies Torah with a pure intent (l'shma) it elevates the person to unusual spiritual heights. However, when one studies Torah with an ulterior motive (shelo l'shma) it brings about a lesser level of accomplishment. The consequence of the action is a lesser dimension of spirituality. When one studies with a sinister intent (l'conter) in order to undermine another individual, the same Torah acts as a destructive force which is equated by the Gemara to a death potion. The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that when the Torah is studied for its own sake it is the equivalent of a life potion; however, when it is studied with a sinister intent, the identical Torah study is transformed into a death potion. Although, the subject

matter itself remains intact and unchanged in all of these cases, its reality is determined by what one infuses into it.

Moshe was continuously associated with water because he was the conduit for Torah, which has the characteristics of water (as explained by Maharal). The Gemara tells us that Torah is comparable to water because just as water flows from an elevated location to a low location, so too can Torah only be contained by a person who is truly humble. Moshe, being the most humble person who ever lived, was the most appropriate conduit and repository for G'd's Torah.

Rabbeinu Bachya writes that the Torah is also compared to the incense (ketoris). The Torah tells us that when Moshe wanted to prove that Korach and his congregation were not qualified to officiate as Kohanim (priests), he told them to take fire pans with incense. As a result of burning the incense, they all died instantaneously. The Jewish people accused Moshe that it was the burning of the incense that had killed the people of G'd. They believed that there was something lethal within the incense. Shortly thereafter there was a plague. Moshe instructed his brother Aaron to burn incense in the middle of the camp. As a result of the burning of the incense the plague ceased. Moshe demonstrated to the Jewish people that there was nothing inherently lethal in the incense, but rather it was the impurity of the individual that brought about death.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the same is true regarding Torah. The same Torah when it is studied with a proper intent (for its own sake) it acts as a Tree of Life. However, if one studies that same Torah with a sinister intent it "breaks/decapitates" the person. Although the Torah that is studied by both individuals is the identical Torah, the essence of the Torah is determined by the intent of the individual.

Moshe was called "Moshe" because as water does not have a limited form (and is considered undefined), identically Moshe was the unlimited person.

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6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi

2:00pm Mincha

### **Special Weekday Classes**

#### **Monday**

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street

12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**  
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue  
Between E.51<sup>st</sup> and E.52<sup>st</sup>

#### **Tuesday**

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**  
Location: Yad Avraham

#### **Wednesday**

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
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1:00—2:00 pm Derech **Hashem**  
Location: Yad Avraham

#### **Thursday**

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**  
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
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