



Soul Matters

What does it mean to be a
people of INTENTION?



Small Group

January 2018

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Intention?

“Here’s what I discovered. Intention is different from setting goals or resolutions in that it “pulls us into” who we truly are. Goals and resolutions “push us out” into future possibilities. To set intentions, we listen to our inner voice which tells us who we truly are.”

- Katie Covey, on what she learned from Soul Matters colleagues during their brainstorming session on being a people of intention

So here we are again, in the month of January with its talk of daring resolutions and its demanding call to “become better.” It’s hard not to buy into it. After all, it seems so well-intended. I mean, who could argue with the goal of self-improvement? And so most of us gladly go along and declare “This is the year I’m going to finally be a better me!”

But are we sure this is what we really want? When you read that quote above about being “pulled in” rather than “pushed out,” what happens in your heart? Do you find yourself still excited about the New Year’s work of striving to become a brand new self? Or do you suddenly notice an internal whisper that says “I long to be pulled in more deeply to the self I already am”? In other words, maybe our real New Year’s work is not about leaping into self-improvement, but about pausing, stepping back and asking “What hunger really has my heart?”

There is, after all, a big difference between becoming better and becoming ourselves. Self-improvement is not the same as self-alignment. Wanting to get from point A to point B is something quite different from longing to find your inner anchor. Goals and intentions may indeed be more distinct than we have thought.

So this month, maybe our most important work is to make room. All around us, there’s going to be plenty of busy talk about being “a people of goals and resolutions.” We are going to get more than enough advice about how to stay focused on a new future for ourselves. But in the midst of it all, may we, as a people of intention, also carve out a quieter place that keeps our attention closer to the present and who we *already are at our center*. May we make space for listening before we leap into the striving. And as we do that, maybe we will discover that this isn’t the year of “finally becoming a better me.” Maybe we’ll decide it’s enough to simply “finally be me.”

Our Exercises

Option A : Filling In The Blanks With Intention

It's not easy to stay true to your deepest intentions. But often it's even harder to figure out what they are. This exercise assumes that our deepest self already knows our core intentions and our work is to decipher what it wants us to hear. To help, you are invited to fill in the uncompleted sentences **on the following page** and then step back to see what they are trying to tell you. When filling in the blanks, trust your instincts. In other words, don't spend a lot of time pondering what to put in the blank. Instead just write down the first or second thing that pops in your head. Think of it as a Rorschach test on intention.

After you complete the sentences on the next page, use these questions to help you reflect on the work you've done:

- What would you change after giving the completed sentences a second look?
- What surprises you?
- Would your closest friend agree with how you filled in the blanks?
- What 2 or 3 sentences seem to merit your greatest attention right now?
- What single intention are you ready to make based on listening deeply to what the list of completed sentences is trying to tell you?

Come to your group ready to share the 2-3 questions that you engaged the most and why that was so. And if you are comfortable, consider telling the group what single intention you set based on the exercise.

Intentional Fill-In The Blanks

1. My most important promise to myself is _____.
2. I will help others by _____.
3. Because of me, my children will understand that _____.
4. I have always wanted to _____.
5. I am on this earth to _____.
6. I will learn more about _____.
7. I am avoiding _____.
8. If I could change one thing about myself it would be _____.
9. At my funeral, the two adjectives I hope people use to describe me are _____ & _____.
10. If I could go back and change one thing about my life it would be _____.
11. If I won or inherited a million dollars, the first thing I would do is _____.
12. If I won a free trip, I would love to fly to _____.
13. When I stop procrastinating, I will _____.
14. I am most happy when I am _____.
15. I want to spend the rest of my life becoming a _____.
16. I want to spend the rest of my life doing _____.
17. Looking back, I realize that I was born to _____.
18. In five years, people will be surprised that I am _____.
19. I have always intended to _____ once I have finished _____.

Option B: Start Your Day with Intention

“At the beginning of the day, the mind is most open to receive new impressions. One of the most important things we can do is to take full responsibility for the power of the morning.”

- Marianne Williamson

“Your day is pretty much determined by how you spend your first hour.”

- Anon

This exercise invites you to explore the power of intentional mornings. Too often our days take hold of us rather than us taking hold of them. For at least one week, pick **one** of the below practices to begin your day with a greater sense of intentionality and purpose.

Pick A Word

Carve out some time each morning to complete the sentence: “Today I want to be/feel _____.” You can do this while you are meditating, brushing your teeth, eating breakfast or walking the dog. Just make enough room to pick one descriptive word that you want to walk with throughout your day. So many to pick from: generous, powerful, unruffled, trusting, present, nurturing, nurtured, kind. Pull that word into your awareness throughout the day. It helps to literally place it in front of yourself. Write it on a 3*5 card and place it on your desk or put it in your wallet or purse. Maybe even write it on your hand!

Get Grateful

Begin your day with gratitude. So many ways to do this. You can keep it simple by just sitting in silence and pulling into your mind the things you’re looking forward to or the things you are blessed with (your health, a family that loves you, a job you enjoy). One focused way is to start each day by thinking of 4 people you are grateful in your life, letting the good energy from that relationship flow into you. Or maybe use a [gratitude jar](#) or write your gratitudes down in a gratitude journal and review its pages as it grows day by day. The point is to replace your to-do list and the morning news with thankfulness as the thing that launches you into the day.

Nourish

This route gives you permission to indulge yourself and give yourself the gift of generosity. It invites you to begin your day with the feeling of being gifted by life, rather than armoring up for the battle of another day. You can keep it very simple. For instance, shower with aromatherapy, treat yourself to a fancy cup of coffee, give yourself an extra 30 minutes to get ready at a slower pace or wake up early enough to see the sunrise. Whatever it is, add something to your morning routine that nourishes you.

Sort

Go ahead and pull out that to-do list and worry list. Write it all down. Then go through it and self-consciously pick the handful of things you will give your attention to and intentionally allow yourself to put the rest into a “parking lot” for some other day. The goal is to narrow the list and achieve a sense

of manageability. Sounds simple, but most of us start our days with a hill of worries that just places a shadow over or entire day. End that feeling of “I’ve just got too much to do today” and move yourself into the space of “I’ve chosen the things I can and want to do today.”

Sing

That’s right. Get up. Pick a song you love. And do nothing but sing it or sing along with it. Songs have more power than we give them credit for. Don’t underestimate the power of singing as opposed to just listening. When the words come out of your mouth, the music gets more deeply into your body and spirit, enabling the feeling to stay with you and “set the tone” for the entire day.

Walk in Nature

Get out and connect with nature rather than the morning news. Let the smells, sights and weather on your skin remind you of your deeper and wider connections. Begin the morning by reminding yourself that you are more than an employee or a parent. Simply put, begin the day with a wider sense of who you are. Feeling a part of something larger helps you maintain perspective during the day. Feeling connected to the interdependent universe reminds you that you are not alone. Here’s one version of a [walking meditation](#) if you’re looking for some inspiration.

Be Silent

It’s the most basic of spiritual practices: Empty yourself and let yourself sit only with silence and your breath. Here’s a [5-minute breathing meditation](#) and a [TED talk](#) to help you out if you’re new to this practice.

Inspire Yourself

Start your morning off with something that inspires you: a podcast, a poem, an inspirational audio book, a work of art from the internet or simply a quote. We find it so easy to begin our days with what is weighing us down. Why not turn things on their head and start with something that lifts you up?

Think

Did you know that many of the most famous writers, inventors and leaders set aside 2 hours a week to do nothing but sit and think? Sounds odd, right? I mean, when don’t we think? The point is that most of the time what we call thinking is really working on a task. Rarely do we let our thoughts wander freely. We are not good at ruminating. So begin your day with some rumination. Sit down with your thoughts and see what *they* want to think about. Do it a little each day or take on the bigger task of finding two whole hours each week of this month. Here’s [an article](#) that will convince you that it’s worth it.

Meditate

The classics! If you don’t have a daily meditation practice, use this month to try it on for size. There are lots of resources out there on the web. But the best route is to talk to a friend who regularly meditates and ask them for a bit of guidance and inspiration.

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the single question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of intention means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. Are you so dead set on telling your life what you intend to do with it that you no longer notice what it intends to do with you? Could your life's purpose be something that comes from life itself rather than something that is forced on it?
2. What dictates your days? Your To-Do list or your intentionality? Do you begin by asking, "What do I have to get done?" or "What do I want this day to be about?"
3. Are you too intentional? Is it time to put down all the "doing" and pay a bit more attention to "being"? Has your long list of intentions left you feeling exhausted and even lost?
4. Are you serving a purpose or living a lifestyle?
5. We all "go along with the crowd" in some way. Which is fine as long as we are doing it intentionally and self-consciously? Are you doing it intentionally and self-consciously?
6. Are you sure "bettering yourself" is what you really want? Or is that hunger inside you about "finding and aligning with your deepest self"? Do you want to "finally be better" or "finally be me"?
7. The philosopher, Nietzsche, said, "No one can build you the bridge on which you, and only you, must cross the river of life," We are all intentionally crossing a bridge of some sort. Are you crossing someone else's bridge? Or your own?
8. Did he/she/they really intentionally hurt you and let you down? What if they're doing the best they can? Could your anger at them really be your way of avoiding feeling grief over the fact that they are just never going to be who you need them to be?
9. Is it finally time to give up that unrealistic intention? The one you've failed at following through on again and again? The one you've been beating yourself up over, again and again? Is it time to intentionally be gentle with yourself and let it go?
10. Do you intentionally allow yourself to make mistakes? New things do not arise without trial and error, missteps and slip-ups. If we're not making mistakes, we're likely choosing safety. Are you intentionally choosing safety over new life?

11. Are you as good at assuming the good intentions of others as you are at defending your own?
12. You surely sent an unintentional message to your child this week. All parents do. The question is: Are you willing to take the time to notice it and fix it?
13. How are you doing at the work of intentional authenticity? Are you succeeding at being the same person on the outside as you are on the inside?
14. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The below recommended resources are not “required reading.” We will not analyze these pieces at our small group meeting. Instead they are here to companion you on your personal journey this month, get your thinking started, and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of INTENTION.

Word Roots

From Latin *intentus* "to stretch out, lean toward. In 17th Century English law: "state of mind with respect to intelligent volition".

Wise Words

It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are you busy about?

-Henry David Thoreau

Those who have a why to live for can bear almost any how.

-Friedrich Nietzsche

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

-Viktor E. Frankl

Your day is pretty much determined by how you spend your first hour.

-Anon

"i had every intention of telling you," he claims.

"but it's already too late," i say.

he replies with the ever so cliché line that is,

"it's never too late."

i'm not sorry

that some things just are.

-C. Eley

Intention is the difference between those old mustard stains and Jackson Pollock.

-Anon

Those who follow the crowd usually get lost in it.

-Rick Warren

Any dead fish can go with the flow — you have to be intentionally alive to swim against the current.

-Ann Voskamp

Cat: Where are you going?

Alice: Which way should I go?

Cat: That depends on where you are going.

Alice: I don't know.

Cat: Then it doesn't matter which way you go.

-Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Great minds have purpose, others have wishes
-Washington Irving

In any given moment we have two options, to step forward in growth or to step back into safety.

-Abraham Maslow

Find a purpose to serve, not a lifestyle to live.
-Criss Jami

With goals, the future is always the focus: Are you going to reach the goal? Will you be happy when you do? What's next? Setting intention, at least according to Buddhist teachings, is quite different than goal making. It is not oriented toward a future outcome. Instead, it is a path or practice that is focused on how you are "being" in the present moment. Your attention is on the ever-present "now" in the constantly changing flow of life. You set your intentions based on understanding what matters most to you and make a commitment to align your worldly actions with your inner values... Goals help you make your place in the world and be an effective person. But being grounded in intention is what provides integrity and unity in your life.. What would it be like if you didn't measure the success of your life just by what you get and don't get, but gave equal or greater priority to how aligned you are with your deepest values?

-Phillip Moffitt, from [The Heart's Intention](#)

The Intentional Act of Being in a Congregation

Let me tell you why I come to church. I come to church—and would whether I was a preacher or not—because I fall below my own standards and need to be constantly brought back to them. I am afraid of becoming selfish and indulgent, and my church—my church of the free spirit—brings me back to what I want to be. I could easily despair; doubt and dismay

could overwhelm me. My church renews my courage and my hope. It is not enough that I should think about the world and its problems at the level of a newspaper report or magazine discussion. It could too soon become too low a level. I must have my conscience sharpened—sharpened until it goads me to the most thorough and responsible thinking of which I am capable. I must feel again the love I owe to others. I must not only hear about it but feel it. In church, I do. I am brought toward my best, in every way toward my best.

-Rev. A. Powell Davies, Unitarian Minister

You too can be carved anew by the details of your devotion.

-Mary Oliver

Conscious change is brought about by the two qualities inherent in consciousness – intention and attention... Whatever you put your attention on will grow stronger in your life. Whatever you take your attention away from will wither, disintegrate and disappear.

-Deepak Chopra

I am in earnest - I will not equivocate - I will not excuse - I will not retreat a single inch; and I will be heard.

-William Lloyd Garrison

Gratitude is not an emotion that comes upon us without our control. It is not dependent on what happens to us, but on our intention. Like good posture, it is a practice, an attitude that is entirely our choice in every moment... A friend of mine told me once after a particularly lovely day she came home, sat in her easy chair and said out loud, "Thank You." And she swears she heard a voice say out loud, "You're welcome." Practice gratitude. For everything. For what you see out the window, for what you hear from your co-workers, say "Thank You." When your

kids walk in the room, when you take a breath, when your spouse tells you how to drive, when to stub your toe, say “Thank You.” Practice gratitude and eventually you will be able to hear the universe say, “You're welcome.”

-*Steve Garnaas-Holmes*

Intentions and Trust

Today I want to greet joy
Without a trace of suspicion
I want to open my eyes to the light
Without a blink of dread
I want to look at my past
Without a whisper of shame
I want to look at my future
Without a hint of fear
Today I want to dance
Without pausing to think
I want to belly laugh
Without caring who hears
I want to open my arms
and twirl in the sun
Until I fall breathless
free to be myself
full of the joy
that I open to allow
completely letting go
Without even a smudge of suspicion
or a wink of hesitation
That's my intention
It's what I want

-*Amy Loyd*

Habits eat good intentions for breakfast.

-*John Ortberg*

Questions of Those Who Assume Good Intent:

What if it wasn't an attack, but was a mistake?
What if it wasn't a mistake, but a miscommunication?
What if it wasn't a miscommunication, but an oversight?

What if it wasn't an oversight, but was caused by an undisclosed personal issue?

-*[Skip Prichard](#)*

Folks write down the name of someone who fills them with frustration, disappointment, and/or resentment, and then I propose that their person is doing the best he or she can. The responses have been wide-ranging... One woman said, "If this was true and my mother was doing the best she can, I would be grief-stricken. I'd rather be angry than sad, so it's easier to believe she's letting me down on purpose than grieve the fact that my mother is never going to be who I need her to be."

-*Brené Brown, [Rising Strong](#)*

Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.

-*Parker J. Palmer*

I had at least begun to guess that my greatest need might be to let go and be free from the drive after achievement — if only I dared. I had also guessed that perhaps when I had let these go, then I might be free to become aware of some other purpose that was more fundamental, not self-imposed private ambitions but something which grew out of the essence of one's own nature. People said: 'Oh, be yourself at all costs'. But I had found that it was not so easy to know just what one's self was. It was far easier to want what other people seemed to want and then imagine that the choice was one's own... It was only when I was actively passive, and content to wait and watch, that I really knew what I wanted.

-*Marion Milner, quoted in [A Life of One's Own](#)*

I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're Doing Something. So... Make New Mistakes. Make glorious, amazing mistakes. Make mistakes nobody's ever made before. Don't freeze, don't stop, don't worry that it isn't good enough, or it isn't perfect, whatever it is: art, or love, or work or family or life. Whatever it is you're scared of doing, Do it.
-Neil Gaiman

Songs and Music

One Life

James Morrison

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq4LJc6eVKs>

Today I'm gonna try and change the world *Cover of song written by Johnny Reid*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccm_6HwUbs

Landslide

Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sQ7cuYgizw>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYQzKDD_TOM

(Ashley Stevenson Cover)

“Well, I've been afraid of changing...”

Defying Gravity (cover)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bijDJmQhF1Y>

“Something has changed within me/Something is not the same/I'm through with playing by the rules of someone else's game/Too late for second-guessing/Too late to go back to sleep/It's time to trust my instincts/Close my eyes and leap!”

Sleep When We Die - talk and song -- MUST WATCH!

(song starts at minute 12:20)

Kenna

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPQ-Ez5j27Q>

Musician and activist Kenna on speaks on purpose, intention and social change, and then sings a powerful version of his song, Sleep When We Die. A must watch and must listen! “I want you to like my music, but I want you to love my purpose...” “Entertain your crazy!”

100 Years

Five for Fighting

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tR-qQcNT_fY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO65i93oYUk>

(cover)

“When you only got hundred years to live...”

Videos

What is Your Purpose in Life? - People ages 6-100 answer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mK66az43EOI&t=26s>

Resolutions: I Promise - Spoken Word Poem

Natalie Patterson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuEShily4>

MA

Living With Intent - TED Talk

Mallika Chopra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTwRlz13NYI>

A video celebrating everyday people doing everyday things with intention. And a reminder about three questions that determine the quality of our days: Who am I? What do I want? How can i serve?

Turning Mass Intention Into Mass Action

Todd Rogers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fn82cNy52a4>

The three secrets of turning intention into action: making a plan, applying peer pressure and reinforcing identity!

Reinvent Your Life

Charles Bukowski

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CQll0P4piQ>

What Will Your Verse Be?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=85&v=R_zsMwCOoEs

Excerpted from the film "Dead Poets Society
Intentionally choosing the "verse" that our lives will contribute.

You Are About To Get Your Life Back

<https://www.facebook.com/upliftconnect/videos/1040500262753621/>

The Power of Choice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfx6aSCutEo>

The challenge of choosing growth or safety, and doing it with intention.

Choice & Doubting our Decisions

Alan Watts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7CH9cRN8Rg>

The challenges of intentionality and the inevitability of doubting our decisions. What to do? Be gentle with yourself and treat yourself like a cloud!

Man Filmed a Tree In The Woods For a Year

The gift of Intentional and sustained Intention

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGccrPoAr5I>

Auggie's Photo Album

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGV_h36uZ5E

"You'll never get it if you don't slow down my friend..."

Ten Minutes of Intentional Mindfulness - TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/andy_puddicombe_all_in_takes_is_10_mindful_minutes

Let Justice Roll!

Marble Collegiate Community Gospel Choir

James Earl Jones, Narrator

Narration are excerpts from Dr. Martin Luther King's 'Letter from the Birmingham City Jail'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRlyRot2UgE>

The Story of the Confederacy, Controlling History & Intentional Misinformation

<https://www.facebook.com/ezraklein/videos/784311181756486/>

Podcasts

Outside In - Invisibilia Podcast

<http://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/485606589/outside-in?showDate=2016-07-29>

This episode explores the effort to change oneself by intentionally changing one's outer circumstances. If you purposefully rearrange something on the surface, does internal change follow?

Oops - RadioLab Podcast

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/91721-oops/>

Stories of unintended consequences that arose from good intentions.

Articles

Am I in the River?

Myke Johnson

<https://findingourwayhome.blog/2015/10/27/am-i-in-the-river/>

"The intention creates its own magic..."

Intentionally Talking to Our Children About Difference

<http://www.upworthy.com/a-viral-video-celebrating-kids-who-dont-see-difference-may-be-missing-a-larger-point?c=upw1&u=41aa6fc0057fcfdc850d917bc669deaf216c544e>

Intentional Mealtime - UTNE Reader

<http://www.utne.com/mind-and-body/mindful-eating-ze0z1211zsau>

What If You Intentionally Made Time to Just Think?

http://www.businessinsider.com/i-created-a-2-hour-rule-based-einsteins-habits-2017-8?utm_source=Dan+Pink%27s+Newsletter&utm_campaign=fa95415343-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_09_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4d8277f97a-fa95415343-313330493&goal=0_4d8277f97a-fa95415343-313330493

Books

The Power of Habit

Charles Duhigg

How to intentionally change your habits and take back your life.

The Art of Pilgrimage

Phil Cousineau

(Using intention to bring a new perspective to everyday “journeys.”)

“Phil Cousineau invites us to extend our vision of pilgrimage to something beyond an actual journey to Jerusalem, Mecca, or Machu Picchu. He invites us to think about unique times or stages in our lives that might hold a special difficulty. Perhaps extended time at the bedside of a loved one in hospice could be seen as a pilgrimage of sorts. Or walking with a child through a health crisis, or a learning challenge. Maybe a short-term job assignment, or an unwelcome task that comes our way could be reframed in this way. Perhaps even just a regular day on the calendar could be reimagined.”

Where We Belong

Hoda Kotb

From a review: “Kotb writes about individuals who realized their path in life was either veering off in a completely new direction or was getting too far off course from where they knew they belonged. By following their passions, their gut, and their heart, these people intentionally took their life in a new and more meaningful direction. From the investment banker who became a minister after years of working on Wall Street, to the young woman from a blue-collar background whose passion took her to Harvard Medical School, to the high-powered

PR exec who found herself drawn to a pioneering residential community, to a “no-kids” guy who now helps children all over the world.”

The Miracle of Mindfulness

Thich Nhat Hanh

Offers reflections and practical exercises as a means of learning the skills of mindfulness.

Movies

Smoke

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1062983_smoke

A story about moving from wandering through life to living it intentionally.

A clip:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGV_h36uZ5E

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http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0453562/?ref=nm_sr_1

The story of Jackie Robinson and unfailing intention, endurance and belief in one’s inherent worth.

Field of Dreams (PG)

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097351/?ref=fn_tt_tt_1

A classic on the theme of faith and intention: “If you build it, they will come.”

Billy Elliot

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/billy_elliot/

A young miner’s son’s intention to become a ballet dancer changes his life, and the lives of those around him.

Ratatouille (G)

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0382932/?ref=nm_sr_2

A tiny rat with the big intention to become a gourmet chef. What else is there to say?!

Get daily inspiration on the monthly theme
by liking the Soul Matters Facebook inspiration page:
<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>



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