

January 2015



“The Tools for Good Works,” RB4

Teaching by Sisters Anita Louise Lowe and Rose Wildeman
Oblate Meeting, January 18, 2015

I. Introduction

Today we will look at the first half of Chapter 4 of The Rule of Benedict, the “Tools of Good Works.” Sometimes we find this translated the “instruments” of good works. This title is quite down to earth compared with its corresponding section in The Rule of the Master. The master calls these tools or instruments “holy arts.” He used this term in his chapter on the abbot where he says, “The abbot is the master of this holy art,” and “this art must be taught and learned.” In other words, the master sets forth a task book for the abbot.

Benedict, however, sees these tools as basic instructions for all his monks. Remember that in the Prologue, he posed the question, “What must one do to inherit eternal life?” The answer, “Keep this simple rule for beginners.” Recall also that Benedict views the monastery as a workshop. Here, in this chapter, he presents the tools of the monks’ trade, good works.

In his book, *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living*, Michael Casey, a Cistercian monk from Australia, notes that the Rule focuses on practicalities of daily life. Therefore, St. Benedict begins his list of monastic virtues and vices with a list of do’s and don’ts. Most of these come from earlier lists and are applicable to any Christian. We have the “Ten Commandments,” the list that Paul sets forth in his “Letter to the Romans” (12: 9-21), and the 613 commandments of rabbinic Judaism.

The tendency can be to skim over the precepts of this chapter. We’ve heard them before. But, it’s important to note the way Benedict changes his sources. The list can be daunting, but it is not meant to be a series of tasks to be completed all at once. Casey says, “In a workshop there is usually an array of tools; the artisan knows when to use one and when to exchange it for another. Not all the tools are used simultaneously but only when the particular task demands it. In the same way, we will not be confronted

“Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else.”

—Rule of St. Benedict
The Tools of Good Works
(Ch. 4, vs. 20 and 21)



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with the need to engage in all the various good works at every hour of every day. Most often the need for one or another of them will manifest itself from time to time. ...The challenge is to recognize the call of the moment and to respond to it rather than seeking to impose on the reality of daily life a pre-programmed assortment of good deeds.” (Casey, p. xx)

He continues, “This chapter on the implements of good works can serve as a checklist of whether we are making the effort to do the deeds that follow from our commitment to the Gospel and resisting behavior that is contrary to the Gospel. It can serve as a kind of examination of the integrity of our conscience. ...This inventory of good works is meant to prod our consciences to see possibilities for virtue that we habitually overlook.” (Casey, p. xxiii)

II. Verses 1-9

In looking at the opening verses of this chapter, we find Benedict beginning with the core commandment of the Torah: to love God with all one’s heart, soul, and strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself. This was the answer Jesus gave to the question, “What is the greatest commandment?” (Mt. 22: 40) He joined together the commandments given in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19: 18b. The most important thing we must do: love. We are to love God and to love our neighbor. We are to seek to do good — to seek God. Love is manifested in our actions.

The master starts his list with a command to believe. Then, he proceeds to say we are to love God and to love our neighbor. Benedict, though, starts with love. We are to love God more than ourselves. When we practice love, then we are truly seeking God.

Casey comments on Jesus’ commandment, saying that it is not properly a commandment but rather an “exhortation to transcend the order of law and obligation and to operate on a higher plane. In calling us to love one another as he loves us, Christ is calling us to be perfect — not only in the sense of being complete human beings, but also as perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.” (Casey, p. 2)

He continues, “If love for God must be taken as a commandment, then it should be seen as an obligation to put ourselves in the way of meeting God... The active presence of God in our hearts impresses upon us the reality that we are loved, and our response to being loved is to love in return.” (Casey, p. 4)

Benedict continues his list by giving us portions of the “Ten Commandments.” Given as things we are not to do, we can in turn look at their opposites. What are we to do? How do we practice these precepts?

Benedict starts by enjoining upon us the commandments which concern our relationships with others. The temptation is to dismiss these as elementary. However, if we are honest, we know that the tendencies that lead to these vices dwell

in each one of us. The early monastics took these seriously. Remember, the monastic life is simply a more intentional living of the life of the baptized. Evagrius listed his eight evil thoughts, and Cassian discussed eight vices. For both of them, and for Benedict, living the spiritual life requires continuous effort and awareness. We are not simply to avoid or abstain from murder, adultery, or theft. We are to withhold consenting to the very thought of these, to the thoughts that lead to these actions.

We can chart the commandments given here according to the Scripture to which they refer and to the actions we can do to put these into practice:

Do Not	Scripture	Today
RB 3 Kill	Exodus 20:12-17 and Mt 19:18-19	To save
RB 4 Commit adultery		To purify
RB 5 Steal		To be honest
RB 6 Covet		To devote
RB 7 Bear false witness		To bear true witness
Do		
RB 8 Honor all	Mt. 7:12	To respect
RB 9 Do not do to another what you would not want done to yourself (“Golden Rule” stated in negative)	Lk. 6:31 Tobit 4:16	To show concern for others

Benedict concludes his list of the commandments with the injunction to honor all people and to not do to another what you would not want done to yourself. We have here the “Golden Rule” stated in the negative. We need to replace our negative tendencies with positive ones, with unconditional love for all. This forms the basis of hospitality for Benedict.

Casey discusses the meaning of rendering honor, saying, “Rendering honor is a matter of recognizing another’s inherent value or dignity and, by word, deed, or attitude, communicating this recognition to the other person. When I honor others, I appreciate their uniqueness, and in consequence of that, I reduce myself and my self-assertion in order to make room for them. ...When I honor others, I am offering them gracious hospitality, welcoming them into my life and my space with sincere delight.” (Casey, p. 26)

He continues, “Honoring others and treating them as we ourselves would like to be treated demands a high degree both of empathy and self-regard. The commandment to love the neighbor as oneself can be seen as an invitation to put self and

others on an equal footing. We are all members of one body; what profits one is of advantage to all.” (Casey, p. 29)

And, “To treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated, we must begin by seeing others as like ourselves — despite the external markers (like race, gender, age, culture) that signal difference. First, I need to change my thinking. I need to restrain the malign tendency to go around making judgments on others, as if I were the norm according to which everyone else is to be measured. . . . I denigrate others in the perverse hope that they will be judged to be lower than myself. It is, of course, a futile strategy. Dishonoring others dishonors myself, even if it is only in my innermost thoughts.” (Casey, p. 32)

III. Chapter 4:10-19 *Works of Mercy*

Following on what Sister Anita just said about the “Ten Commandments,” St. Benedict continues his list of Good Works with the “Works of Mercy.” He begins by reminding us in verse 10 that our call is to follow Christ and he shows us that renunciation is an essential element of both Christian and monastic living. Michael Casey says that renunciation is a core requirement for community living. Those who live alone can do what they want. Those of us who live in community, however, must “renounce whatever behavior is inconsistent with the aims of the community or disturbs the harmonious existence of its members.” A person who is not willing to restrict their self-will is not suited for community living. (Casey, p. 33) I’m sure this would also apply to married life where restricting one’s self-will is an important element of being a spouse and a parent. He further says that the self that is to be denied is not our deep, inner core of personality, but our false self that seeks its own gratification. For Benedict, the self-denial demanded by the Gospel involves a channeling of our energies of self into the service of something greater than ourselves —

the imitation of Christ and the improvement of the lot of those who need help. (Casey, p. 340)

Verses 11-13 continue to spell this out: discipline your body; don’t pamper yourself, but love fasting. For Benedict, these things were for the purpose of retraining the body. He helped this by setting up the School of the Lord’s Service. The Benedictine way of life (*conversatio*) is a balanced set of external observances designed to provide an appropriate inner and outer environment for the seeking and finding of God. The body (outer) and the soul (inner) are interdependent. Over the years, through this exercise of body and soul, St. Benedict sees that we will be formed, reformed and transformed. (Casey, p. 37-39) Discipline and fasting are not just ways to lose weight and strengthen our muscles. When we work them together with our prayer life, they can help us in our efforts to love and follow Christ as well as those we serve.

Verses 14-19 are commonly known as the “Corporal Works of Mercy.” Esther De Waal in her book entitled *A Life-Giving Way* says they were inspired by the “you did it to me” verses of Chapter 25 in Matthew’s Gospel. Remember, Jesus says “When you did it to them, you did it to me.” De Waal says that “by offering ourselves in service, by putting ourselves out for others, we are freed from the domination of our own immature need for comfort.” (De Waal, p. 3). It is not enough to be successful in our efforts in prayer if we neglect the needs of our brothers and sisters. This takes the interdependent working of our inner and outer selves that I just mentioned to a place outside of ourselves. It is not enough to just concentrate on ourselves and our prayer life, we must also let our prayer lead us and show us ways we can be of service to others.

Read the rest of their presentation on the Oblate web site:
www.thedome.org/oblates



(Left, top) Sister Marge Sasse, Elaine Baumgart, and Sharon Bittner share during prayer time.

(Left, bottom) Mary Lou Bassler, Phyllis Claycamp, Phyllis Schmits, Sister Sylvia Gehlhausen, Sandy Turner, and Theresa Bauer pause for reflection.

(Above, middle) Elaine Nolan and Marcia Stroud join Charlie and Judy Luebbehusen for some refreshments.

(Above, right) Sister Betty Drewes spreads her good humor.

Bona Opera

Lenten practice recommended by St. Benedict in Chapter 49 of the Holy Rule

Ash Wednesday launches the season of Lent — a very important liturgical season for all Christians to prepare for the most important feast of Easter. St. Benedict emphasized the importance of the Lenten season by devoting Chapter 49 of the Holy Rule to “The Observance of Lent.” For centuries now, Benedictines everywhere observe the custom for each monastic to list on a Bona Opera form (Latin for good works) the good works of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that the monastic resolves to do during Lent. This Bona Opera is then submitted to the prioress or abbot, who blesses it with a signature of approval (as recommended by St. Benedict in Chapter 49 of the Holy Rule.)

Here at the monastery in Ferdinand, we invite all our Oblates and Oblate Candidates to participate in this Benedictine custom. Please see testimonials below from some of our Oblates who have taken advantage of this opportunity in past years to enhance their Lenten preparation for Easter:

“Writing a Bona Opera and submitting it to the prioress for her blessing helps me to be more humble. During Lent, I try, as an Oblate, to live the Gospel message more fully and to apply the teachings of St. Benedict in all parts of my life. Also, I work to reverence life, to spread peace and to practice the Great Commandment — that is, to love God and my neighbor with my whole heart and soul.”

—*Mary Eileen Fritz*

“Lent to me is a time to slow down, seek reflection and take action. It is a time to listen and a time to open my eyes and see life around me. The Bona Opera gives commitment to taking the time to reflect on where God is and is not in my life. Lent is a time to act and to make daily changes by being more aware and giving. Whether I make a commitment to say “Good morning” to a new person each day or take the time for reading Scripture, a new spiritual book, or saying extra prayers, the Bona Opera allows me to grow in becoming a more forgiving, peaceful person and ultimately a better Christian.”

—*Mel Schroeder*

If you wish to participate this year in the Bona Opera custom, you may want to read Chapter 49 of the Holy Rule. Then after prayerful reflection, complete the Bona Opera form included with this newsletter. Remember that you cannot do everything; choose one thing that you feel you most need to focus on to deepen your relationship with God and with all your brothers and sisters in Christ.

You will notice that included on the Bona Opera form is a line where you may write the name of a spiritual book or a particular book of the Holy Bible that you intend to read during Lent. That practice stems from Chapter 48 of the Holy Rule; you may want to read that chapter also before completing this part of the Bona Opera.

This year Ash Wednesday is much earlier than it was last year. The Bona Opera form is included with this newsletter. We will need to have your completed Bona Opera form mailed to us by Wednesday, February 11. Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, our prioress, will then sign it. Please mail your completed Bona Opera to: Oblate Office, 802 E. 10th St., Ferdinand, IN 47532-9239. If we receive your completed form by the above date, it will be placed at the altar for Mass on Ash Wednesday. Then it will be returned to you. (We would appreciate a self-addressed, stamped envelope included with your form. This will expedite the return of your form to you.) Then with your Bona Opera in hand, you will have a personal reminder of your Lenten offering to God.

Oblate Birthdays

February

1—Richard Huggins, 7—Lynn Steiden, 10—Judy Powers, 11—June Berg, 11—John Wallace, 15—Mary Ann Stoll, 18—Rita Kohl, 24—Carolyn Adler, 26—Patti Schroeder, 29—Mary Martha Salas



March

2—JoAnn Desjarlais, 12—Scarlett Winters, 17—Patty Allery and Kathy Dixon, 21—Paula Dumont, 22—Verna Jeanotte and Ruth Keethers, 25—Denise Leinenbach, 29—Gary D. Pope

April

4—Sharon Cavanaugh, 7—Judy Bueckert, 28—Shirley Stern, 29—Marcia Brown and Carole Swim, 30—Ron Allery and Leeny Hardesty

Sisters Scrip Program

You can support the sisters through Scrip, a fundraising program offering gift cards from hundreds of merchants — both nationwide and local! For a list of gift cards on hand at the monastery, visit thedome.org/scrip.

Interested? Contact Sister Rosa Lee Koch!
rlkosb@thedome.org or 812-367-1411, ext. 2658

Getting To Know the Oblates

Jackie and Dave Richards

Hello! God's blessings and peace to all of you from Jackie and Dave Richards. We live in the beautiful countryside of St. Philip, Indiana, and are members of St. Boniface Parish in Evansville.

Dave, the oldest son of David and Betty Richards, was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, but moved with his parents to Evansville after his father accepted a chemical engineering position with Igleheart Bros. — a division of General Foods. He has a younger brother, John, who was born, works, and resides in Evansville.

Dave was educated at Scott Township Elementary School, J. Reitz High School, and the University of Evansville, where he earned both Bachelor (1969) and Master's (1975) Degrees in Education. Following his graduation in 1969, he taught art education to fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth graders for three years at Caze Elementary School in Evansville. He resigned from the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation at the end of the 3rd year and continued his art teaching career with the Metropolitan School District of Mt. Vernon, Indiana, where he taught kindergarten through 6th grade students for 37 years. Dave retired from teaching at the end of his 40th year.

Jackie, the fifth of eight children of Francis and Gertrude Dippel, was born in Evansville, but experienced the majority of her childhood years in St. Philip. Jackie's education included St. Philip Elementary School, Mater Dei High School, and the University of Southern Indiana, where she earned an Associate's Degree in Respiratory Therapy (1975) and a Bachelor's Degree in Health Services (1998). Following her 1975 graduation, she worked at Deaconess Hospital for approximately 20 years as a respiratory care practitioner. Jackie now works for St. Mary's Medical Center, Evansville, as a community educator.

We were blessed to have been raised in faith-filled homes — Jackie, Catholic, and Dave, Protestant. Little did we realize the impact our Christian upbringing would have on us as we entered adulthood. To be sure, our experiences in the education and medical fields would be significant as we began our adult journeys. But, the most powerful and challenging times would come in our first marriages. This is where we would experience in so many critical situations the amazing power of God's love for us.

Dave married Joanne in June, 1971, and a little over eight years later, Jackie married Rick in March, 1979. Though young and, perhaps a bit naive, we were very much aware of the fact that the beautiful individuals we had wed were each burdened with a chronic illness.

Rick's cross to bear was diabetes — a disease which gradually led to total blindness and later on to kidney failure and finally his death in October, 1987. It should be noted that one month before his death, Rick entered the Catholic faith — a faith that he joyfully expressed to everyone.

Joanne's cross was the auto-immune disease, Systemic Lupus. Her illness was a roller coaster of flare-ups and quiet periods. The flare-ups eventually led to kidney failure, hemodialysis, a kidney transplant, and three years later, her death in June, 1983. During their marriage, Joanne and Dave were very active in their Lutheran faith. God was truly with us.

Looking back, we (Jackie and Dave) realized that only with the power of the Holy Spirit within us were we able to lovingly and responsibly devote ourselves to the needs and hopes of our spouses. Only with the Lord's help and strength were we able to help them carry their crosses.

Twenty-six years ago Jackie and Dave met each other, for the first time, at a Widows Support Group. Over the coming weeks and months we shared our life experiences and discovered that we had so much in common — especially our strong faith in God and our desire to be of service in His church. Our love for each other continued to grow and soon we were making plans to be married. In June, 1989, those plans came together at St. Anthony Church, Evansville, with Father Earl Rohleder presiding.

Twelve years later, Dave entered the Catholic faith in April, 2001. Two years after that, Jackie's sister, Sister Jennifer Dippel, OSB, encouraged us to look into becoming Benedictine Oblates. We investigated. We liked what we saw — mainly, that the sisters looked like a “fun bunch” to be with. And with guidance and a series of terrific study sessions with Sister Sylvia, we made our final Oblate profession in October, 2003.

We love the encouragement, support, prayers, and meetings that we share with the sisters and our fellow Oblates. The renewal and refreshment of our minds and spirits after each meeting help us to share our love for Jesus and our faith with everyone we meet.

P.S. Yes, the sisters really are a “fun bunch”--- and definitely a true blessing from God.

Thank you, Lord Jesus!



A Christmas Reflection

By Ellen Stanton



This reflection has a message that we can carry with us throughout all seasons of the year.

I arrived home after a year's work of going and coming back and forth. I needed to get all the chores done before returning to work way up north from home. In a minute, I noticed that the neighbor on the corner had pitched numerous items out onto his back and front yard... "What was up with the neighbor?" I asked Don. He didn't know.

This man was indeed a problem neighbor. We all know the kind, the one who always argues loudly with everyone on the street. He had a running yard sale that was visually offensive, a flea market of sorts, and the kind you want to pretend to ignore. I have to admit that I had a bad

reaction. I certainly did not have the kind of patience, closeness, and tenderness, which the Pope spoke of in his homily at the Christmas Eve Mass.

Let me back up a minute. I didn't even know this neighbor's name! Yes, that's true. I have lived in so many cities and have been "away" so much that I quite frankly found it easier to NOT know my neighbor. That was... until I became an Oblate.

There it is. In this manger of the heart, the crowd is not to be ignored. To find the Babe, we journey together or not at all. So, Don got his scooter out. I signed Christmas cards and together we went up and down the streets of our little nowhere town of twenty houses. We knocked on doors to say "Merry Christmas" and to pass out cards.

Some knew Don and me; some didn't. We've lived here thirty-five years. Being

a hermit of sorts, this activity was not easy, but becoming an Oblate had changed me in ways I had not expected. I can't look at the neighbor's yard with its domestic discord without feeling pain and wondering how isolation contributed to the cause. When we reached his house, he was no longer there. The police had taken our neighbor away. I did not want to ask what happened. But, we really just wanted to know his name.

So, Christmas has many fronts and the manger is not always sweet-smelling. Yet, it feels more like home and perhaps I'll find my way in a little closer.

Share the Joy of Being an Oblate of St. Benedict

All Oblates and Oblate Candidates are encouraged to share the joy of being an Oblate with others. Spread the good news among your friends, relatives, and members of your church. Talk with those you think would be fine Oblates. Invite them to read this newsletter.

We always welcome those who may want to learn more about the Oblates to contact Sister Betty Drewes or Sister Brenda Engleman at any time. Contact information can be found on page 7 of this newsletter.

Scenes from Oblate Meetings



Monastery Moments and Oblate Offerings

February 13–14, 2015

Heartfulness: Transformation in Christ workshop will be held in Kordes Center. Will begin on Friday at 7:30 p.m. and end on Saturday at 4 p.m. Experience with Centering Prayer will be helpful. *Presenter: Sister Kathy Bilskie*

February 21, 2015, Sunday

Oblate Meeting will be held in St. Gertrude Hall. Begins at 1 p.m. and ends at 3 p.m. Presentation: Chapter 4 of the Holy Rule, "The Tools of Good Works" (Part 2) *Presenters: Sisters Rose Wildeman and Anita Louise Lowe*

February 28, 2015

Monastic Lectio Divina retreat will be held in Kordes Center. Begins at 9:30 a.m. and ends at 4 p.m. *Presenters: Sisters Kathryn Huber and Jane Will*

March 7, 2015

Psalms: Prayers of the Heart presentation will be held in Kordes Center. Begins at 9:30 a.m. and ends at 11:30 a.m. *Presenter: Sister Rose Mary Rexing*

March 22, 2015, Sunday

Oblate Retreat will be held in St. Gertrude Hall. Begins at 1 p.m. and ends at 3 p.m. Theme: "Peace According to St. Benedict" *Presenter: Sister Mary Ann Verkamp*

April 2–5, 2015

Triduum Retreat will be held in Kordes Center. Begins on Holy Thursday at 3

p.m. and ends on Easter Sunday morning. *Presenter: Sister Kathryn Huber*

April 11, 2015, Saturday

Oblate Meeting will be held in St. Gertrude Hall. Begins at 1 p.m. and ends at 3 p.m. Presentation: Chapter 5 of The Holy Rule, "Obedience". *Presenter: Sister Jeana Visel*

April 6–8, 2015

Come Away Retreat will be held in Kordes Center. Begins on Monday at 2 p.m. and ends on Wednesday at 2 p.m. Come away to a retreat atmosphere of quiet, meals and prayer. You may request spiritual direction.

April 16 and 30, 2015

The Labyrinth: Walking Our Way to Wholeness program will start at Kordes Center. Begins at 6:45 p.m. and ends at 8 p.m. Come enjoy a spring evening on the monastery grounds, learn about the labyrinth, and experience a meditative walk on Hildegard's grass labyrinth. You may come to one or both sessions. *Presenter: Sister Linda Bittner*

April 18, 2015

Who is My Neighbor? The Challenge of Living a Life of Justice program will be held in Kordes Center. Begins at 9:30 a.m. and ends at 3 p.m. *Presenter: Sister Jackie Kissel*

April 25, 2015

Basics of Bread from a Benedictine Workshop location to be announced. Begins at 9:30 a.m. and ends at 2:30 p.m. *Presenter: Sister Jean Marie Ballard*

May 2, 2015

Wise Women in the Benedictine Tradition presentation will be held in Kordes Center. Begins at 9:30 a.m. and ends at 11:30 a.m. *Presenter: Sister Mary Ann Verkamp*

May 17, 2015, Sunday

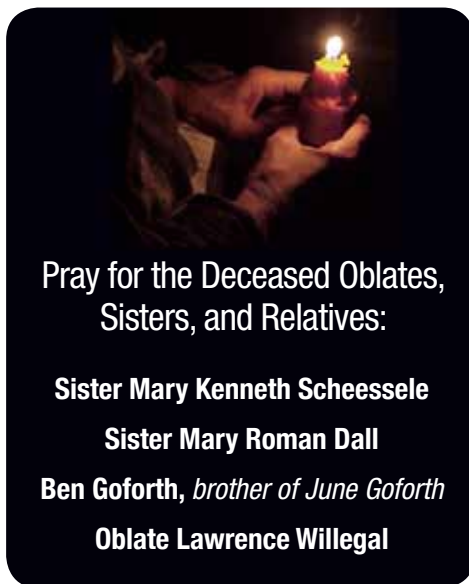
Oblate Meeting will be held in St. Gertrude Hall. Begins at 1 p.m. and ends at 3 p.m. Presentation: Chapter 6 of the Holy Rule, "Restraint of Speech." *Presenter: Sister Karen Joseph*

All times are Eastern time.

In Memoriam

Oblate Lawrence "Larry" Willegal passed away on Sunday, January 25, at the age of 90. He and his family were originally from Whitewater, Wisconsin. His wife, Mary, preceded him in death in 2009. Larry is survived by two daughters, Mary Willegal and Sister Kate Willegal, OSB, both of Ferdinand. One son, Lawrence, and his wife Carol presently live in Fredonia, Wisconsin. He had one grandson and one great-grandson. Larry was a faithful member of St. Ferdinand Parish.

In 2002, Larry became an Oblate of St. Benedict. Throughout his last years, he continued to prayerfully support the Sisters of St. Benedict. When he was able, he would attend Mass and other events at the monastery. He was indeed a caring, kind gentleman and always had a smile on his face. May his soul rest in peace! Amen.



Pray for the Deceased Oblates,
Sisters, and Relatives:

Sister Mary Kenneth Scheessele

Sister Mary Roman Dall

Ben Goforth, brother of June Goforth

Oblate Lawrence Willegal

Oblates is published four times a year by the Oblate Leadership Team: Sisters Betty Drewes and Brenda Engleman.

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