

I am Life:

Notes on the Obvious

Benjamin Smythe

Life Is:
Notes on the Obvious

Benjamin Smythe

A Lightweight eBook
by Benjamin Smythe

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This book is dedicated to your heart.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Notes

Q & A

Ideas

About the Author

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Introduction

This book is a collection of notes and ideas recorded since the spiritual search ended one night on a wooden deck in December 2008.

The spiritual search started in 1992. My mother almost died and the shock of it threw me into an existential panic. While I had been raised a Christian, deep down inside I knew nothing was inherently wrong with anyone. Instead of turning to the Bible, I sought solace in poetry. Through a windy little path along the book shelves of Waldenbooks, I found the poetry of Gary Snyder. His references to Zen and spiritual enlightenment encouraged me to sit down one day in zazen. It was 1995 and I was 19 years old.

I snagged my mother's egg timer from the top of the stove, set it for 30:00, made a sign that said, "Busy Meditating," and shut the door. I yanked the pillow off my bed, folded it in half, sat crossed-legged with my face inches from the door, and hit the Start button. After what I thought was 20 minutes I sneaked a peek at the timer and it read: 2:00. Fuck.

When the timer finally went off I was in agonizing pain, felt worse than I did when I sat down, and was sure I was never going to be enlightened. And yet, something about that damn promise of liberation was so compelling, I showed up to that little pillow the next day. This time, I resolved not to look at the timer, sat down, and for the first time in my life, heard a thought happen as if it were being spoken by someone else.

The sitting went like this:

"My leg hurts."

“Who said that?”

“Whoa! I am enlightened! I hear the thoughts! Wow!”

“Who is that?”

“It isn’t me. Wow!” Of course, the joy wore off and uncertainty crept back in, but this silly moment became a carrot-on-a-stick I chased for the next 13 years.

The pain I encountered through sitting led to the promise of easing the discomfort through yoga. A girlfriend worked at a newsstand and while visiting I bought the current issue of Yoga Journal. I took it home, bent into the postured pictures on the pages, and discovered yet another painful reason to once-and-for-all find spiritual freedom.

I did yoga everyday and eventually decided, like any dedicated spiritual seeker, I wanted to study with a real master. And you know what is crazy? Spiritual masters advertise in Yoga Journal! I found an ad for an ashram and signed up for a month long work-study. A few months later there I was, standing at the door of an ashram about to study with a bona fide swami.

Fortunately, the swami I encountered was an angry, mean, grumpy bitch. She yelled at the yogis and was never happy. I immediately became disillusioned with the whole idea of a spiritual leader. “If people bow at her feet, do what she says and give her unearned respect because she is wearing those robes, I bet the whole spiritual game is full of shit.”

The beauty of having immature and unreasonably high expectations of others is everyone I met in spiritual communities ended up being a disappointment. “Damn! These people are just like me: confused, hurt, prejudiced, bored, tired, pissy and seeking.” This youthful

judgment allowed me to give up hoping I would find spiritual people, but it didn't quench the desire for spiritual states, especially that Wonka-esque golden ticket of Enlightenment.

The 16 years between searching and the end of the search were nothing special in terms of the seeker's story: drugs, sex, chanting, fasting, monasteries, churches, synagogues, videos, books, retreats, alcohol, depression, wilderness trips, and zazen. Even as I thought each new attempt to awaken was somehow an incredibly original idea, I was obviously following the bread crumbs of the endless seeker's before me.

I met some amazing people along the way, namely the life-loving Jews of Camp Tawonga and the TEVA Learning Center. I had a lot of interesting experiences, but somehow at the end of each day, I was routinely left with this nagging thought, "This can't be it."

When the night on the deck happened, I had exhausted every effort I could make. I was thoroughly over searching. I was tired, hurting, dreaming of suicide, confused, and fed up with the whole notion of Enlightenment. When I looked up into those stars and whispered, "God?" from that stupidest of places in me, it was the last hope I had. When the *no-answer* answer came, it was like someone had repainted the world with fresh paint. It answered and it has never stopped answering.

What is the answer? *This.*

Take Small Bites -- Chew Slowly

A caterpillar can become a butterfly and this is the ordinary miracle this book points to. All talk about awareness, life, consciousness, what-is, enlightenment, awakening, “this, that, and the other thing” are word-crumbs laid out on a path leading to one destination: *here*.

These notes are no different. They will resonate or they won't. It cannot be helped because there is no one who could help it.

The Universe is a game of tag and everything is IT!

Q and A

(The following questions and answers arise out of exchanges via email, YouTube and Skype.)

Q: Why does the search begin?

A: The search begins because something is remembered. It is like heading out the door with keys in hand and the sense arises that there was something else to bring along, but it isn't remembered what that is.

It is this "something else" that a seeker goes looking for.

Q: Is something ever found? What is it?

A: Nothing is ever found because there is no separate person who could find it. All exclamations of success are Life's exclamations.

Q: Is there anything wrong with searching?

There is nothing wrong anywhere. It is impossible. Life appears to search until it doesn't.

Q: What happens when the search ends?

The one who was searching cannot be found anywhere.

Q: What advice would you give to a seeker?

It cannot be helped. It is inevitable, whatever it is. No one is doing it. In this way, all there is to find is reading this sentence.

Q: Why is there so much emphasis in spiritual circles on annihilating the ego?

The Universe tells lots of stories and killing the ego is one of them. It isn't anything more or less than a story the Universe tells, like Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, or Star Wars.

Q: Have you transcended your ego?

The "you" that could transcend "an ego" is a story the Universe is telling. There is nothing to transcend because there is no one that could do it. The whole notion of transcendence is one of the stories told until it isn't.

Q: How does self-love work?

A: All the talking Life does is exactly like rain. Some of the drops hit the earth and evaporate, some of them nourish existing plants, some of them fall into the ocean, some of them nourish seeds, etc. Each story has exactly the effect it does. "Self-love is the cure to suffering," is a rain drop that may or may not yield anything.

Q: What do you mean, “Life is talking or not talking?”

A: Life is doing two things: talking or _____. The talking side is what looks like communication between people. The _____, well, that is literally everything else. It is all appearance. Nothing is ever really communicated because there isn't two of anything.

Q: How does a relationship fit into your life?

A: It appears like separate people are relating, in the same way it appears like a separate reader is reading these words. This is merely an appearance. There are no separate people. It is Life that talks, loves, gets annoyed, laughs, sleeps, and walks. Relationships have never ever happened anywhere on earth because there have never been two things that could relate.

Q: What are your thoughts about serving others?

There are no others. It ebbs and flows like a river doing whatever it does including appearing to help.

Q: Are you awakened?

A: No one wakes up because no one was ever asleep because there is nothing here separate from the Universe. The whole notion of awakening is another story the Universe tells. It is no different than the story of the Easter Bunny, Harry Potter or the Virgin Mary.

Q: What started “The Sign”?

A: The _____.

Q: Do you really think people are perfect?

A: There are no mistakes in the Universe. It isn't possible. Each and everything is nothing appearing to be something.

Q: Why do you share?

A: Sharing is impossible because there is not two of anything. It only looks like videos are made, watched and responded to. It is just an appearance. Whatever grows the grass writes this book.

Q: Is anything real?

A: The Universe is until it isn't. Whatever is appears to be, it appears to be. Real, unreal, false, true, good, bad, right, wrong...these are stories Life tells. Nothing is actually happening. Nothing is moving. Nothing is aware. This is a train without a conductor or passengers that has never left the station.

Q: What is the point anyway?

A: There is no point to the Universe separate from the Universe. It is.

The beauty of looking for meaning is it can appear there isn't any. However, meaninglessness doesn't mean anything either. In this way, everything apparently is, without any qualification. Life is so obvious. Here it is.

Q: What is the message?

A: There are two messages: one offers no one hope and the other offers no hope for no one. This is a hopeless message: Nothing is happening to no one.

Q: Where is the "self" that could love?

A: There isn't anything separate from the Universe. It is the Universe that loves, or not.

Q: How do you deal with loneliness?

A: Loneliness comes and goes. It isn't personal. If it hurts, well, that isn't personal either. What doesn't come or go?

Q: Why is losing the story heartbreaking?

A: What story?

Q: You tell a story of grieving for four days. What about that one?

A: The Universe tells all kinds of stories. They are neither true nor false.

Q: How do you rid yourself of hate for others?

A: Self-love is the cure to suffering.

Q: What do you do about guilt?

A: Guilt is the polar opposite of arrogance. Arrogance is, "I am so awesome I can influence you." Guilt is, "I am such a piece of shit I can influence you." Guilt and arrogance have never belonged to anyone. What's the problem?

Q: Is love important?

All emotions are Life's emotions. It only appears like someone *has* them because it really looks like there is a separate person here. The Universe dreams "I am" until it doesn't.

Q: Are awareness and the Universe separate things?

A: No. The "I am awareness" message is as perfect an expression the Universe as the "Nothing is separate," message. There is no one who could benefit or be harmed by either message.

Q: Do you think it is helpful to go to meditation retreats?

A: It does what it does. The momentum is already set. A meditation retreat may be experienced or not. This isn't heading anywhere. There is no ultimate point to Life. Life is the point. It only looks like there are separate agents making choices. It is merely an appearance. The Universe "makes" all the decisions and it only looks like something is happening.

Q: Do you have preferences?

A: Moving towards and away happens naturally. There isn't anybody doing it.

Q: How do you love what isn't permanent?

A: Love feels special because it feels personal because it feels like there is a person here who loves and is loved. This person is an appearance, a dream the Universe is having. When the dream ends, everything is the same minus the presence of a person. In this way, love may happen with greater intensity or not at all.

Q: Do I have to meditate?

Nothing is required to be Life. Life is the constant way of it. The particulars of what it does are not particular to anything separate from it. Meditation may happen or not, but it will never be required because the Universe already is what it is. It cannot be improved upon or detracted from.

Meditation is a story about an intention. It is a story told about someone doing something. Life's dream of a person who can intend to meditate ends and the Universe is all there is. It only looks like something is happening. Nothing is.

Q: What is Non-Duality?

It is the Universe as it is. It's this simple reading of this sentence.

Q: Is awareness my true identity?

A: There is no one here who could claim any identity. That being said, "I am awareness" is one of the many stories the Universe tells.

Q: You say "Self-love is the cure to suffering," and then you say, "No one is here." Who is it that suffers?

A: The Universe is the one talking, suffering, loving, liberating, sharing, fighting, harming, listening, etc. There is nothing separate from the Universe.

Q: What is the point of saying, “No one is here?”

A: There isn't one. It is said.

Q: Do you expect people to listen to what you have to say?

A: What people? There is only One Listener in all the bodies and it listens to every sound without a preference.

Q: This feels like a cop-out to avoid responsibility. Is it?

A: It appears like there are separate agents who could be responsible and this is just an appearance. In the dream of “I am” it appears that “You are, too.” This is just an appearance. There is no one who could be responsible separate from the Big Bang.

Q: Why am I not able to experience what another body is experiencing if all is One?

A: One appears to be “All” in the same way “I” appears to be personal. These are merely dreams the One is having.

Q: After awakening, how do you make a living?

A: The One was making the money all along. When It stops dreaming “I am”, money is made, or not, just like it always was.

Q: I like my spiritual practices. Do I have to give them up in order to realize the Truth?

A: No one can realize the Truth because the Truth is the end of someone. It looks like someone is engaging in spiritual practice because it looks like someone is here who could. This is an appearance. There is no such person.

Q: How do I share the Truth with others?

A: Life asks this question in the dream. When the dream ends, sharing is impossible. It does what it does and it only ever looks like it shares.

Q: How do you deal with pain?

A: It is dealt with perfectly in each instant.

Notes

No one can teach Life. It is already happening perfectly.

Just for a second, find something that is *not* the Universe.

Kindergartners don't sit around and say, "I don't exactly know what you mean when you say, 'Sand'."

The myth where eventually a soul achieves Nirvana and never has to be reborn again is a sophisticated form of self-hate.

Sex is as "spiritual" an activity as meditation or praying. That and it is so damn fun.

A mystery is something that cannot be explained. Life isn't a mystery. It is right here, obviously.

The classic spiritual seeker's story, "I had it but I lost it," is an amazing clue for the seeker. This thought cannot be true, because whatever this is cannot be lost or found. It is, without condition.

A Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Buddhist, an atheist, a physicist, a pagan, a Native American, a Jew, a monist and a child stand barefoot on the lapping shore of the Pacific. Is there anything they would agree on about the *cause* of their experience? If so, whatever this cause is must really be something.

A workshop/meeting about how Life is always present is one of the funniest games on the planet.

There is no way to prove intent.

The body can always be found here.

One day the whole world died. Every story vanished. Tears flowed for four days. After the grief, everything was as it was before, minus the people.

It is an energetic difference, the end of taking things personally. It is not about disappearing, emptiness, or a void. It is about total living without hindrance. Anger, rage, sadness, suffering, joy, love, bliss, laughter, silence...it is all amplified by the absence of "This is personal."

There is something to the energetics of languaging that cannot be denied. As long as It dreams in, "I, me, mine, he, him, his, she, her, hers, we, us, them, they, you, yours, and ours" it is energetically, physically contracted. When It wakes to IT is all there is, It expands, energetically.

Powered by "I am" is nothing compared to being powered by "It is." It is the difference between tossing a stone into a lake and tossing a truck into the lake. Plop...SPLASH!!!

Awareness doesn't stop at the edge of the body as it has no boundaries. There is no where it isn't.

Life is all the forms. It can swap out anytime it wants. It cannot be destroyed because It is all there is.

The Universe dreams "I am" until It doesn't.

Seeking for the way out of Life is like trying to get away from air. It is impossible.

There is no authority on Life. It is self-authorizing.

There is no separate person thinking or listening in any of the bodies.

The contraction, the expansion, and the preference for one over the other is all Life.

It's not that free will is a separate individual's illusion. It's that a separate individual is impossible.

It appears to move from here to there. This is just an appearance. It never moves.

The folly of the spiritual search is Life is looking for Life and there isn't anywhere It isn't. No wonder it is so painful.

It can't be helped, whatever it is.

Life is its own expert. Its expertise is Living.

No one can verify Life. It is right here.

There are those who will say, "If you really understand anything, you won't have to practice anymore." The truth is, there is nothing to understand and no one is practicing.

Sit in one spot with a sign that says, "You're Perfect" and the Universe will wave.

Whatever this is, it is not a word.

There are endless possibilities because possibility is all there is.

The Universe is reading this.

There is no way out.

Knowing what is going to happen is not possible.

It is not that “We are all One.” One is, and it is this. There is no “we”.

Wishing for reality as it actually is creates an incredible laughter.

In the end, there isn't one. It takes a beginning to have an end and nothing is happening.

Death is a non-experience and in this way, an impossibility.

Self-love is Living without apologies.

The entire story of the human race is only available in language.

The Universe is measured in IS, not *ought*.

It can't be helped, even the thought that it could be.

The face in the mirror is not over there.

The sense of "I" is Life's sense.

Set two mirrors up facing each other. What they reflect is what happens when "I" looks for "I". Take away a mirror and the whole Universe appears again.

Forget positive thinking. Just try to find a thinker.

Trust the silence. It never leaves this spot.

In the absence of a story, everything is what it is. Reading this is "reading this." Sitting here is "sitting here." The words are not the thing, and

even "the thing" doesn't touch the experience of this. Even "this" is miles away.

Life has no opposite.

Tomorrow is just yesterday in drag.

The cat, the tulip and the three year-old aren't any less devoted to Life than the priest, the holy man, or the nun.

The eyes are always open to either the play of light or the still darkness. The ears are always listening to either the dance of sound or the stillness of silence. Whatever Life is, it has no Off switch.

This is as intimate as it gets. Life is kissing Life everywhere, ceaselessly.

While it appears there are possibilities, there is never more than one. The one carried out is the only one there ever was.

Life is so damn honest.

The organism is pleasure-seeking. Intelligently, it grows towards the light.

There is never opposition or opposites because there is only Life, seeking pleasure.

Life seeks pleasure through billions of incompatible means.

As Life is constant and complete, the question is not, "Do I have to meditate?" but, "When is meditation not happening?"

Life is not language dependent.

There isn't a larger dialogue. There is one monologue about apparent possibilities.

"Nothing moves" is another way to say, "Everything is still."

The confusion is over. What does that mean? It means: *this is it*.

I once told group of teenagers about spending 24 hours on the streets of downtown San Diego to see what being homeless was like. The next summer this 14 year-old kid walked up to me and said, "Guess what I did? I slept on the street. You were right. It was awesome." Never know who is listening.

There isn't "consciousness." There is _____.

The emotion of awe is the Universe seeing Itself with wonderment.

Life is so obvious it can be easy to miss because even the sense of something missing is It.

Mystical states are like an amusement park. No matter how cool it is to ride the roller coaster, eventually they kick you out.

The act of comprehending is higher than what is comprehended.

Except on the first and last day of life, everyone has the same 24 hours to spend being still or moving piles around.

To relate takes no effort because relating is impossible. The words do not get tangled in the ear anymore than the hearing gets cut up by the speech. Seamlessly everything appears to happen, and this is merely an appearance.

What notices the answer is the end of every question.

In 2006, I took Psilocybin and Ecstasy, drank 1.5 gallons of water in 45 minutes, and became so sick I was puked blood. I truly felt like I was going to die. Guilt washed over me, and, lying there on the desert floor, I saw my mother's face, my father's, my sisters, and my friends'. I thought, "They are going to hate me." A voice came, "Can you forgive yourself if you die right now?" I knew the end of suffering was being able to say, "Yes" to this simple question, so I did. Even as the pain continued, the suffering vanished. I learned the only lesson I really have to share: *This is it.*

Enlightenment is another word for Life. Here it is.

All words are heard, noticed, seen by whatever this is. This *isn't* a word.

There are no awakened beings. There is One Being that has never slept.

The search for the Truth ends at the Truth. What is the Truth? There was never a search. There was mere inevitability.

It could be said there is a mass awakening occurring. However, this would require a *mass* and nothing of the sort can be found anywhere.

There is a story the Universe tells about an ego, a mind, an "I", and a true identity. It is almost as good as the one it tells about Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.

Listen to as many spiritual teachers as possible. Just don't believe any thing that is said without verifying it.

The message is the same no matter what the messengers looks like. What is the message? Nothing is happening to no one.

There are tons of pointers. Here is another one: thoughts arise...sensations arise...emotions arise...what doesn't arise?

It isn't possible to make a mistake because there isn't anyone who could make it.

Awareness is the constant. Everything else is the variable. Is there anything else? Sure looks like it, don't it?

There are no states of consciousness without memory. *This* is memory-less.

Ideas

Gun-to-Head Motivation

Imagine someone walks into a room, puts a gun to your head and asks you to do something. If you don't do it, your life is over. How motivated would you be to give it your best shot?

Imagine someone walks into a room, puts a gun to your head and asks you to quit the job you hate. Imagine he keeps the gun on your head until you are doing the work you want. How motivated would you be to give it your best shot?

Imagine someone walks into a room, puts a gun to your head, and asks you to ask for what you really want in your relationship with your partner, your boss, your children, your family, your friends, the world and yourself. How motivated would you be to give it your best shot?

Imagine the gunman follows you wherever you go, gun to head, and tells you to not waste another second lying to other people. How motivated would you be to tell the truth, no matter what?

How motivated would you be to chase your dreams if someone had a gun to your head?

If you can imagine it, you don't need that gun. Stop lying to yourself and get on with it.

Fearless Asking

I was listening to a friend in the coffee shop talk about her fear of applying to grad school. She said she didn't think she would get in so why bother applying.

"What's the point if they aren't going to accept me?" she shrugged.

"Do you want to go there?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. It would be the best program I could apply to and I would love to do the research they're doing there, but they won't accept me. My grades aren't good enough," she said.

I thought for a moment about how this used to happen to me. I wanted something, but I assumed *without evidence* I couldn't have it, so I didn't ask for it. Which means *I* was the one who failed to give it to me. I didn't even wait for Reality to say, "Yes" or "No." I said, "No" for it.

"Can you see how you have already decided for them? You are worried about them rejecting you, which they may or may not do, so to save them the trouble, you reject yourself.

In a way, it is very nice of you to do their work for them since they are busy finding students to come to their school, however, what if you're one of the people they want to find?

What if how they look at you isn't how you look at you? What if they aren't looking for great grades, but an interesting work history, or a specific passion?"

"But this is a top university and they won't take me. I know it," she said.

"What is the worse thing that can happen if you apply?"

She thought for a second and said, "I don't get in."

"Wouldn't that look like sitting here in the coffee shop?"

"What do you mean?" she said.

"Wouldn't not getting in leave you with what you have anyway?"

"Oh, I guess so," she said.

"So what do you have to lose in asking for what you want if the worse thing that happens is you end up where you are?" I said.

"I guess nothing," she said, "Huh. I didn't think of it like that."

"I didn't either until I did. Now asking is such an adventure because I have no idea what anyone will say! If I don't ask, I don't get to go on the adventure. Since the worse thing that happens is I get what I already have, there is no reason to fear asking because what I already have is always this."

"But that isn't fair for me to put pressure on anyone," she said.

"Oh, I did that too. What you are really saying is, 'No one has the ability to respond honestly.' I used to not ask people for things because I didn't want other people to feel like they had to say, "Yes." This changed when I saw I was insulting them by worrying they didn't have the courage to tell the truth. Now I just ask and let them respond because I trust they can be honest. If they give me something they didn't want to give me, that isn't personal to me."

When I ask fearlessly, I am asking intelligently. It doesn't take a lot of courage or strength to see that someone saying "No" puts me right where I was before I asked. What do I have to lose?

One Person a Day

Right as I exited Fairway Market today a woman dropped a yam in the parking lot. This forearm-sized tuber rocked for a second beyond the edge of her flip-flops before it came to a rest. The grocery bags in her arms and her perfect lumps made bending down to pick it up a Herculean task of yogic proportions.

“Let me get that for you, sweetheart,” I said.

“Oh, thank you so much,” she said. I smiled at her grateful expression and went on my way.

This little exchange got me thinking:

What if, instead of aiming to help a lot of people over the course of a lifetime, I aim to help one person over the course of a day.

Picking up dropped yams, holding the door for someone, giving change to, sharing a joke with, etc. are all examples of what “help” could be. It can be a little help or a lot of help. Either way, the point is to offer help to one person a day.

This got me really excited. How hard is it to help one person a day?

Then I thought, “What if I make it my little challenge to help one person a day, AND to ask one person a day for something I need help with?” It

could be as simple as propping open the front door when I have a load of laundry, or giving these shoulders a quick squeeze. The point of this is to invite someone else to share the gift of giving. I love to give, and I bet other people do, too.

I notice I tend to think in big numbers. I want to help LOTS of people. But truth is, lots of people are hard to come by. However, ONE person a day is almost a sure thing.

What person? Exactly.

No One's Heart is on Trial

There is not a worthy Judge in all the Universe.

As the world worlds, one of the thought-bubbles that forms is:

"I have the right to judge others."

This thought, believed, creates a sense of entitlement:

"I can pass judgment, I should pass judgment, and this judgment I pass is meaningful and should be considered by those I judge."

This thought arises in a free Universe, where it has no power to do anything other than weigh the one who believes it down.

"You should; you ought; you shouldn't; you better; you'd be more if you just; who do you think you are?!"

Life feeds the hungry, Life watches American Idol, Life hands out blankets to the freezing, Life enjoys caviar and champagne on the Thames.

"If you don't, then you are. If you do, they you can't. Where do you get off? I think you should..."

Life has these heavy thoughts until it doesn't. Perhaps today is the day.

Sewn Together by Silence

Living and working with all kinds of people may reveal that everyone is tuned to a certain key that, when struck just right, rings perfectly. Some are tuned to advaita, some are tuned to the Biblical God, some are tuned to psychology, Buddhism, Islam, etc.

While a certain sharing may resonate with one person, the same story may be useless shite for someone else.

This Living thought-symphony is not being played in a uniform key, obviously. So many different songs are sung at the same time that they seemingly do not blend harmoniously.

This is why the beauty of the Universe is found in the silence all the thoughts grow out of. No matter the tradition, perspective, or language-game, this silence is the foundation from which everything is built. It is not the poetry that joins, but the space between the words.

"There is no 'we'. There is only It."

"Jesus loves you."

"Om Namah Sivayah."

"Despair is caused by unacknowledged emotions."

"All experience is the brain."

Hear this music? Where does it come from?

Same place everything does.

_____.

About the Author

Benjamin Smythe lives in the Bay Area of Northern California.



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