

# Healing the Planet for World Peace is the center piece for Transformational Economics

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*Key-note lecture in honour of the Great Mahasidha  
Lama Gangchen Tulku Rinpoche*



**Alfredo Sfeir-Younis**  
**Dzambling Cho Tab Khen**







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# **The Buddhist Mandala of Transformational Economics**



**This work is dedicated to my dearest beloved Spiritual Father, Teacher, and Master, the Great Mahasiddha Lama Gangchen Tulku Rinpoche.**

**He always encouraged me to focus on two main aspects of life, which are ingrained in the totality of my spiritual life:**

**The construction of “The 200% Society”: a society that is, at the same time, materially and spiritually rich and  
The total commitment to “Healing the Planet for World Peace”: a dedication to Mother Earth (Dzambling) and all the sentient beings, as my only path to Buddhahood.**

**They are two important manifestations of inner consciousness.**

**It is the union of these two life-established manifestations of consciousness which leads me to share with all of you today: Transformational Economics.**

**A form of economics that surfaces from a spiritual mandala of both inner and outer human transformation.**

**A mandala which contains, at its very center, the power of our collective-interdependence and the simultaneous manifestation and expressions of the outer and the inner-ecology of life on this planet.**

**The Buddhism he taught me contains all these necessary ingredients and, thus, be able to construct the spiritual mandala as a solid foundation of Transformational Economics.**

**Beloved Lama, thank you for your teachings, thank you for your patience with me, and thank you for all you have done**



**for me since we met (in this lifetime) at the United Nations, on September, 1996. That moment was transcendental in every possible way.**

**You brought my understanding of economics and environmental economics from a textbook level to the highest levels of human consciousness.**









**The Spiritual Opening of the  
Mandala**



**My presentation is woven within the tapestry defined for this event: The Spiritual Opening of the Mandala.**

**It is not just any opening. It seeks an “spiritual opening”; a fundamental inner shift, defining almost every aspect of humanity’s individual and collective existence.**

**This suggests that there are many alternative ways to open the individual and collective mandala of our planetary existence.**

**Buddhism offers powerful skillful means and a unique spiritual path to open the mandala of economics.**

**For the last several decades I have been talking about the great importance of bringing spirituality into the public domain: economics, politics, business, institutions and citizenry.**

**In the very beginning of this journey, I devoted myself to construct the yoga, the union, of my professional life as an economist with my spiritual life.**

**This is to say, to breakdown the duality between “doing” and “being” and “becoming”.**

**Today, I do not see the differences between my spirituality and my profession any longer.**

**There is no separateness.**

**I have demolished the boundaries that existed between economics and spirituality.**

**A duality that often stems from the fact that most people**



**see economics pertaining to the realm of “the material”, while spirituality to the realm of “the non-material”.**

**In a world governed by this duality, economics and spirituality are not supposed to mix together.**

**Consciousness plays a very important role in dismembering the duality between matter and non-matter.**

**Thus, this idea that they cannot mix it often mirror-images a lower state of individual and collective consciousness (i.e., no having attained ‘Unity Consciousness’).**

**In practicing economics as a profession, it is quasi impossible for me to separate the material from the nonmaterial.**

**For example, it is impossible and undesirable to separate the ‘economic calculus’ from the ‘ethics calculus’, particularly, on decisions that are addressing issues of equity, environmental conservation, and welfare of future generations.**

**This is also the case of situations prevalent at the global level: global warming, ozone layer depletion, loss in biodiversity, the contamination of the rivers and oceans, pollution in our cities, diseases as a result of all the above, rights of future generations and who pays for pollution and contamination.**

**This is why economics must not be practiced within a spiritual and ethical vacuum.**

**We may decide to refine this proposition by focusing on values and the metrics of success.**



**Today's material economics is immersed into values and notions of success that are counter to what people expect from economic decision-making processes.**

**In the realm of values, today's economics is materialistic and individualistic, promoting competition, exclusion and wealth accumulation.**

**With regard to possible notions of what may constitute "success", economics embraces the dangerous principle that "more materiality is better" (to me, this is just greed).**

**In the search for more materiality, we see with great consternation how economic systems progressively destroy our planet.**

**The word "more" refers specifically to 'having more', to "possessing more", and to "accumulating more" material things.**

**But, is it really a success to "having more"?**

**Despite of being materially rich most people are not happier.**

**When does more materiality make us better off?**

**There must be some betterment to materiality as we are living a material life on this planet.**

**But, what are the limits?**

**What are the attributes that will make "more matter" a source of our happiness?**



**In quantity and quality?**

**Like non-attachment?**

**And, most important of all: Should we construct societies that are material rich and spiritually poor?**

**The answers are not trivial.**









**The container of the  
ultimate substance**



**The original meaning of a mandala is “the container of the ultimate substance”.**

**“Ultimate” in the sense of being the most fundamental one, the essential one, the most vital one.**

**To “open our mandala” in a spiritual way suggests that the mandala is closed and needs to be opened; that the priority now is to uncover the spiritual foundation of our lives (and not necessarily the material one); and that the level and quality of our human welfare is not fully desirable.**

**If, today, the mandala is closed, it means that we are not able to appreciate and enjoy that ultimate essence.**

**In Buddhism, that ultimate essence is our “Buddha Nature”: our Dharma in its full expression.**

**Thus, we must address the causes and conditions which keep our individual and collective mandala closed.**

**We have to establish a “the critical path” within our own spirituality to be able to open it.**

**Everybody and everything has a mandala: the container of an ultimate essence.**

**Today, I focus on the most relevant causes and conditions responsible for the spiritual opening (and spiritual awakening) of the mandala of economics, politics and business.**

**To do so, it is necessary that I choose an appropriate “entry point”—the door to enter the mandala—and “starting**



**point” of the journey to choose and use effectively the spiritual means, and all the skillful means at our disposal (e.g., meditation, contemplation, silence, mantras, sutras, yoga, prayer).**

**The opening of a mandala is not just an “individual event”.**

**It is also a very sophisticated “collective event”.**

**It is an event deeply rooted within the realm of our powerful “collective inter-dependence”.**

**Where, interdependence is a fundamental state of our inner-being.**

**Not dependence.**

**Not independence; except, when the term “in” means “from within”.**

**This is why the main emphasis here is on discovering the main pillars of our collective reality; i.e., our human reality and the reality of all sentient beings and nature.**

**The most important conclusion we can draw at this stage is that nobody will be able to fully open its own mandala when everyone else does not open their own mandalas at the same time.**

**Lama Gangchen’s mandate to me has always been to focus mostly on the nature of our collective-human-reality, with a major emphasis on the public domain.**

**This is the true meaning of my spiritual name: Dzambling Cho Tab Khen.**



**The spiritual opening of the mandala will unfold via higher levels of both individual and collective consciousness.**

**As we reach those higher levels of consciousness, we self-realize that it is not possible to practice economics, politics and business without spirituality.**

**This relationship goes in both directions.**

**Thus, politics without spirituality is a suicidal path.**

**In turn, spirituality without politics becomes a simple abstract proposition.**

**This is why the Buddha himself taught us that it is not only relevant to self-realize compassion at the personal level, but to, simultaneously, commit ourselves to the creation of a compassionate society.**

**This is a dialectic relationship.**





**The Eight-Fold Path**



**True spirituality has its imprint in “action”, not simply in “thinking”.**

**But, this is not only about action, but the “right action”, as taught by the Buddha in “The Eight-Fold Path”.**

**I mention The Eight-Fold Path because the attainment of the “right action” cannot be dissociated from the right-vision, the right way of thinking, the right language, the right behavior, the right effort, the right concentration, and the right meditation.**

**In other words, the essence is Karma-Yoga, the yoga in action, and Buddhism has a lot to offer on that.**

**Equally important to the opening of those mandalas is the self-realization of key spiritual values immersed within the collective: love, compassion, solidarity, representation, cooperation, interdependence, justice, equality, participation, deliberation, etc.**

**Many of these values are essential to the attainment of Buddhahood.**

**As we go along the path of spiritual opening of a mandala, we will experience different forms of spiritual and cognitive experiences that will be responsible for the quality and effectiveness in opening those mandalas.**

**This clearly suggests that in opening a mandala, we do not need more materiality (material economics).**

**If we are to open the mandala of economics, spiritually, and reach a new and higher realm, we will need ever higher levels of human collective consciousness.**



**Spirituality must not be absent.**

**In preparing this presentation, I came to realize the great importance of**

- 1. Deepening the meaning of the term “mandala”,**
- 2. Learning from the debate on the Buddhist spiritual meaning of a mandala (“The Book of Protection”, the three most important Lam Rims), and**
- 3. Addressing those specific sutras where the Buddha talks about economics proper.**

**These spaces of wisdom are intimately related.**

**What we are going to find on the road to the spiritual unfolding of the mandala of economics are many unique experiences.**

**These include acknowledging that there are different styles of life and different paths to attain higher levels of human welfare.**

**This is unique when we self-realize that everything is interdependent: we depend on each other; that the scope of interdependence resulting from economic actions goes very far in time and space; that the real essence in economics is not simply materiality: most people are longing for happiness; that we need to live in a suitable locality to ensure the quality of life; that societies must improve education and skills to attain higher levels of welfare; that we are to exercising self-control (conscious consumption and conscious production); that we have to take into account not only human beings but all beings on the planet; that society has to take care of the elders and the children and future generations; that we have to**



**follow a moral conduct and to practice merits through economic actions and not let just the market decide the outcomes of human welfare; that there is a need to adopt a model of “noble living” which responds to a different set of values –like love and kindness, frugality—which leads to a simple livelihood; that we all have to adopt and self-realize the true value of “equanimity”; that we are to set norms regarding how wealth is to be obtained; that countries must stop trade on drugs and other substances, women or children, toxic substances... an essential guide to competitiveness; and that we must practice a form of economics that dispels all forms of suffering.**

**In the Dighajanu Sutta, the Buddha speaks clearly about how to expand your wealth as well as how to avoid losing it (another dimension of protection within the mandala).**

**The essence of this sutra is that material wealth alone will not make a human being happy or a society a balance one.**

**The Buddha also added a link between creation of wealth and human behavior, and he warns us that more materiality creates more desires.**

**These desires translate in more material wealth and egopower, greed and craving.**

**The Buddha offers an alternative which, in essence, it is an instrument to the spiritual opening the mandala of economics.**

**He states that consciousness has to rise in order to avoid those negative situations, via the practice of trust, confidence, virtue, liberality and wisdom.**



**These attributes will create the space for a higher sense of values. In addition, the Buddha also established the individual and the collective responsibilities in economics.**

**These are not only individual.**

**The gaining of material welfare should not overshadow the concern for the society as a whole.**

**It is the combination of the spiritual and the material notions of welfare that will result in an ideal society.**

**The Buddha explicitly states that there are these four conditions of worldly progress, whereby prosperity and happiness go hand in hand.**

**These are:**

- 1. The accomplishment of persistent effort: becoming skillful and not lazy;**
- 2. The accomplishment of watchfulness: an obligation to take care of the wealth that has been earned (fires, thieves, etc.);**
- 3. The good friendship: one must bring to the creation of wealth: faith (saddha), virtue (sila) charity (caga) and wisdom (panna); and**
- 4. The balanced livelihood: not being extravagant. Spiritual welfare is attained via the self-realization of the above attributes.**

**The Buddha was also very clear about the possible sources of wealth destruction: drunkenness, gambling, and association with evil-doers.**

**And, the normal conclusion was that the abstinence from**



those will increase wealth.







# The Kaamabhogii Sutta



**In the Kaamabhogii Sutta, the Buddha talks to a Banker, named Anaathapindika, and explained him the many attitudes that people may have as regards wealth.**

**These different attitudes form a model of economic behavior.**

**One of the key aspects of this Sutra is the sharing of wealth.**

**This is a key issue with millions of ramifications.**

**Not easy to address but we all know how concentrated wealth is in the world, and how economics plays a fundamental role in that concentration.**

**As a matter of fact, globalization has been a tremendous accelerator in concentrating wealth in just a few hands.**

**This means control, and the accumulation of political power, also in a few hands.**

**In laymen's terms, the Sutra speaks out about the spiritual consequences that inequality has.**

**When speaking to Anathapindika, the Buddha established four kinds of happiness.**

**The happiness that emanates from ownership, i.e., a lawful way to earn your wealth; the happiness that emanates from wealth, i.e., a proper way to enjoy the wealth you earned lawfully; the happiness that emanates from not having debts (debtlessness), i.e., do not owe to anyone; and the happiness that emanates from not being blamed (blamelessness), i.e., a form of life which is blessed by good**



**deeds (right actions, boon) of the body, mind and speech (Ānāya Sutta).**

**In some way, the first three are related with what you have created and the last one contains the corresponding positive consequences.**

**In sum, material wealth represents also a foundation for both material and spiritual development.**

**All of the above is repeated in the Pattakamma Sutta.**

**There, the Buddha states four fundamental “wishes”: that wealth must come from lawful means; good reputation in society; live a long and healthy life; and happiness after death.**

**In the Vaddha Sutta the Buddha specifically speaks about growth, including economic growth.**

**Naturally, it does it in the language and with examples pertaining to a rural based society, more than 2500 years ago.**

**The essential message is that one cannot grow a material dimension only, like with more grain, more buildings, more animals, more corporate power, more workers, etc.**

**The Buddha explicitly states that we need to grow also in terms of faith, virtue, love, generosity, and wisdom.**

**We need to explore much more the connection between these two groups of attributes: material and spiritual.**

**But, we clearly know and are experiencing what happens**



**when economics is grown without wisdom.**

**This is the difference between focusing on growth and on human and sentient beings' evolution.**

**Economics has to focus on both.**

**It's clear that the Buddha gave lots of importance to economics and to establishing the real importance of material wealth.**

**The Buddha made many people aware of the relationship between poverty and spirituality.**

**A poor person struggles against poverty, and the mind is loaded about that.**

**The worrying about the prospects that poverty brings into life, distorts the spiritual path.**

**It also overshadows some notion of moral responsibility of the human collective.**

**This does not mean living without an awareness of our collective interdependence.**

**In the Dhammapada, verse 203, the Buddha states: "hunger is the most severe illness".**

**Today, I want to declare a new form of economics, based on all the above-mentioned dimensions: "Transformational Economics".**

**The term "transformational" is not random.**



**This term comes from the purest forms of Buddha's teachings.**

**The term “transformational” must be the influencer in the process of transition towards a new economics.**

**Transformational Economics is a form of economics that provides the space, the conditions, and the opportunities to all beings –human being and sentient beings– to transform themselves and reach full enlightenment through the practice of economics.**

**This will happen by elevating human consciousness. It is time that economics produces happiness and peace.**

**We have to transition to this new economics now.**

**We have to transition away from what we have now.**

**Buddhist principles are fundamental in paving the way to this transition.**

**The great transition may take the form of a very unique ladder.**

**Specifically, transition: from private-material economics to politics of the common good, from the politics of the common good to the rights and justice of all, from the rights and justices of all to the social concerns of the community of beings –human beings and sentient beings–, from the social concerns of the community to the human dimension of planetary transformation, and from the human dimensions of planetary transformation to all forms of consciousness.**



**Each step has its challenges and it demands very specific forms of action.**

**This transformational process dictates that our attention today must be put on the need for an economic transition.**

**From the existing neoliberal economics –governed by greed and markets– to Transformational Economics.**

**Today's economic system is only geared to transform matter into matter: the creation of material wealth only.**

**Contrary to that, Transformational Economics demands to go far beyond matter alone.**

**It demands an economics which becomes an important instrument to transform all humans and sentient beings into the right direction.**

**It warns us that if that does not happen, we will always be in a lower level of vibration and welfare.**

**It demands an economics of love, compassion, generosity, caring and sharing, dignity, justice, solidarity, inclusion, and the like.**

**The self-realization of these transformational values of economics establishes that, ultimately, the true paths of individual transformation and collective (social) transformation are not separate from each other.**

**They are mutually interdependent.**

**Because materialistic and individualistic economics focuses only on matter, this form of economics does not**



**liberate us, it does not enlighten us...**

**In Transformational Economics, the process of “wealth creation” and the patterns of “wealth distribution” must take into account both the expansion of material and spiritual wealth.**

**This transformation we are looking for within our countries and the planet as a whole, leads us to think carefully about the very different understanding we of what constitutes (is) “development” and “human welfare”.**

**There is no doubt that the term “development” must include the “human factor”, so that we are clearer about “who”, and not necessarily about “what” are we to develop and transform.**

**What is the ultimate form, or state, of transformation?**

**Today’s material/individualistic economics gives us only apparent and transitory joy.**

**This is a major source of attachment, greed and emotional desires to have more and more.**

**In Transformational Economics, we are in search of profound joy.**

**We all know that profound joy is far beyond matter and material gains.**

**For an experience of profound joy, we must transform and transcend deeply into the impacts and needed influences of economics.**



**These impacts are felt at both the individual and social levels; these are inseparables.**

**And, they are felt at the inner and outer levels; these are inseparables.**

**The capacity to transcend today's economics depends on our levels of consciousness, awareness, mindfulness and concentration.**

**The higher the levels of consciousness, the more we are able to transcend: to go beyond.**

**Thus, Transformational Economics must be embedded and governed by higher levels of consciousness.**

**But, how do we get there?**

**When I say “there” I am referring to going beyond the immediate experience of transcending, like transcending the immediate material world.**

**The Buddha states that economics is an important foundation to spirituality.**

**Injustice and abuses surface out of poverty and economic deterioration.**

**But Buddha also mention as an important cause the nature of our own mind within the laws of karma.**

**Thus, He stated that suffering was mainly because of greed, anger and delusion. He classified these three as the root causes of suffering.**



**These are the three mental defilements.**

**And, we have to liberate ourselves from them to attain Nirvana in this lifetime.**

**One of the principal objectives of Transformational Economics is to create the conditions not only for material welfare but also for ensuring our ethical, moral and spiritual welfare.**

**Spiritual welfare within a system that creates the conditions and promotes the implementation of mindfulness, interdependence, etc.**

**Transformational Economics is organized in a way to eliminate suffering.**

**And, to simplify human desires, to promote non-violent activities, to be conscious of caring for all human beings, sentient beings and nature, and to self-realize compassion, generosity, love and kindness, and the like.**

**In contrast, today's economics is set to create more desires, convert those desires into material needs, and implement a path where more is better.**

**For this, economics needs to promote self-interest, and give no attention to the collective interest.**

**Self-interest is a major cause of suffering, because of our mistaken belief that we are a separate, independent, "I" (ego).**

**This is a delusion.**









**The key attributes of  
Transformational Economics**



**Transformational Economics liberates us from suffering, at the gross and subtle levels.**

**There are several teachings of the Buddha that define, explain and indicate the way to the self-realization of each of a number of key attributes of Transformational Economics:**

- **Dana (generosity), sharing with others in a beneficial way objects that would improve other beings' material and spiritual welfare.**
- **Sila (morality, moral standing), maintaining good conduct and behavior so that the leader and followers do not breach ethic principles and morals.**
- **Pariccoga (selfless sacrifice for the greater good), embodying an inner concern and preoccupation about the prosperity of others ("greater prosperity") and including the whole planet, all sentient beings and the future generations to come.**
- **Ajjava (integrity) including, for example, a great sense of loyalty, the courage to bring a great sense of truthfulness, and a constant search for honesty.**
- **Maddavan (kindness), being gentle and open-minded, as opposed to being ego centric and arrogant, heightening the importance of the right behavior and interaction with others.**
- **Tapa (austerity), expecting to have a simple life, and not a life of indulgence (material indulgence) and various sensual pleasures.**
- **Akkodha (non-anger), leading an inner existence which must not show anger hate, or vindictiveness against others, but rather compassion (karouna).**
- **Avihimsa (non-violence), not afflicting harm on others including animals and all living things, adhering to peace and tranquility for all and not indulging himself in his**



**power.**

- **Khandi (tolerance), being patient and be capable to address all types of emotions, be they greed, anger, ignorance or any kind of suffering.**
- **Avirodhana (righteousness), not allowing misdeeds, and should be just like environmental justice.**

**Transformational Economics is the economics of togetherness.**

**It is the economics that understands interdependence: that everything and everyone impact everything and everything else. It is only within this type of economics that we can talk about compassion, love, cooperation, solidarity, justice...**

**All of them are states of being.**

**And, as such they must be self-realized.**

**This is why we need a different consciousness to attain different outcomes.**

**The above, will enable us to better understand collective emotions and develop the right collective actions.**

**Furthermore, this notion of interdependence will allow us to construct a Transformational Economics that will understand the “total equality” that exist among all living beings and nature.**

**We are all co-equal.**

**There is no meaning to the political borders among nations.**



**The strength of the mandala of a nation state is at the center and not on its borders.**

**This is a theme I developed last year, in Borobudur.**

**Interdependence enables us to be fully aware of our inner and outer ecology, and establish clearly the common identity of all other forms of life.**

**A new meaning for ecological awareness and eco-morality.**

**The Law of Interdependence states that we are completely interdependent of each other as human beings, interdependent of other living beings, and interdependent with nature.**

**The ultimate expression of this law is that we are also indivisible.**

**Only our intellect gives us the impression we are separate and divisible.**

**In fact, this is intimately connected to a life-long correlation: between the quality of the external environment and the quality of our inner environment.**

**We must commit to the construction of a compassionate society.**

**As an activist, I am involved in Engaged Buddhism.**

**Lama Gangchen called it Modern Buddhism.**

**Others, also called Social Buddhism.**



**Thus, I always share the view that: Buddhist spirituality has its true imprint in “action”.**

**Not simply in thinking.**

**The “ECO” element in many interpretations of Buddhism is absent: Eco Friendly, Eco Morality; the advocacy of self-interest and not collective interest will bring us to a collective failure: by maximizing self-interest, we will never attain collective interest; Buddhist must be environmentally conscious beings; Buddhism has a great contribution make regarding rights (human and nature’s rights), justice (human and ecological justice) and equity; income is not a proxy for happiness and Transformational Economics embraces the economics of happiness.**

**We need a transition to get out of the existing neoliberalism and its very low level of consciousness; a healing of the planet, through new forms of economics, politics, institutions and social; a commitment with the self-realization of compassion at the individual level and with the construction of a compassionate society; an understanding that our responsibility rests on the principle of interdependence described with all forms of life; an inner power of simplicity and austerity in economics; and a process of building the necessary roads and bridges which are needed between the individual and the collective (bridges of consciousness).**

**Furthermore, a process whereby we realize the importance of a true social action and of building of communities and not commodities; a material wealth creation process with its alternative forms of public policies, designed to avoid unnecessary creation of poverty, concentration of wealth, and social degradation in our societies; and a bundle of**



**powerful instruments to develop full harmony between our material and spiritual reality.**







**Transformational Economics  
is a non-violent activity**



**Today, economics is violent.**

**Violent with human beings, sentient beings and nature.**

**This has to stop.**

**Transformational Economics by its very nature is a non-violent activity.**

**The time has come to build new and adequate instruments to support a transformation and revolution, which creates a true spiritual awakening.**

**This spiritual awakening demands moving from having and doing to the being and becoming.**

**Healing the Planet for World Peace is the center piece for Transformational Economics.**

**The economics to heal nature and all forms of life.**

**The opening of the Borobudur Mandala demands a New Eco-Morality.**

**Given the challenges we are facing today, we all must aim at new ways of understanding and connecting with nature, natural law, and all living beings.**

**They play a fundamental role in both our material and spiritual transformation.**

**In the past, the emphasis has been on the linkages between the state of nature and our material wealth and betterment.**



**Today, we ought to discover the existing links between “the state of nature” and our processes of spiritual transformation as well.**

**It is in this sense that we are introducing the idea of a New Eco-Morality.**

**At the core of this New Eco-Morality is the view that destroying nature not only has material consequences – including global warming and ozone layer depletion—but has immense implications in our spiritual transformation.**

**Spirituality in economics will enable us to realize the importance of true social action and the building of communities and not commodities.**

**Alternative material forms of wealth creation must be carefully studied, to avoid the unnecessary creation of poverty, concentration of wealth, and social-ecological degradation in our societies.**

**In the future, all notions of welfare and wealth must be understood as shared in an interdependent way.**

**Transformational Economics will become the most powerful instrument we may have to develop and attain the full harmony in the intersection between spirituality and materiality: the 200% Society.**

**In an interdependent world, it is essential to embrace the notion of ‘the greatest social good’; it makes much more sense as a decision-making rule, than advocating a society in which only materialism and individualism rule the system.**



**To embrace that, Transformational Economics incorporates the concept of moral discipline.**

**This suggests that neither economics nor politics may be practiced within an ethical and moral vacuum.**

**Alfredo Sfeir-Younis  
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