

A Guide to Burial in Israel for **US Members**



The US

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Introduction

Buying a burial plot can be an emotional act. Whether you are purchasing one for yourself or for the burial of a loved one, we at the United Synagogue wish you and your family strength, and Arichut Yamim as you embark on this process.

This booklet is a practical and halachic guide to the process of buying a burial plot in Israel with the US and for arranging a funeral and stone setting there.

The United Synagogue strives to provide the best possible pastoral care to our members at every stage of life. Burial can present many halachic and emotional issues. We very much hope that you will feel comfortable drawing on the guidance and support of our rabbis, rebetzins and offices in Israel and Britain. Do be sure that your rabbi, rebetzen or synagogue office have been informed of the bereavement and can offer the appropriate support.

Rabbi Gideon Sylvester
US Israel Rabbi

Rabbi Michael Laitner
US Living & Learning

Why Israel?

The place where we choose to be buried says much about the meaning of our lives. Choosing to be buried as a Jew in any country is a declaration of our faith and loyalties. Purchasing a plot in Israel further links our destiny to the Jewish people, its land and its faith. At the outset of our nation, Abraham purchases a burial place for his wife Sarah at the Cave of Machpela in Hebron marking the start of a distinctive family tradition which would emerge into a nation with a profound connection to the Holy Land.

Even when tragedy and famine prevented our forefathers from living in the Land of Israel, they did everything possible to ensure that their remains would be taken there for burial. So we see that Jacob asked his son Joseph to ensure his burial in the Land of Israel and later when the Jews finally left slavery in Egypt, they eventually brought Joseph's remains with them for burial in Shechem (Nablus) after their entry to the Land.

Centuries later, the rabbis of the Talmud spoke of the greatness of living in Israel, adding that one who could not live in Israel should do their best to be buried there. When Jews are buried in the Diaspora, it is customary to place some earth from the Land of Israel in the coffin symbolically interring each Jew in the soil of the Holy Land.

Burial in Israel is the way that we connect to thousands of years of Jewish history, to the Promised Land and to the great future of the Jewish people. While in the past, this was a difficult mitzvah to perform, modern travel and communications have made it much easier. To enable our members to participate in this mitzvah, the United Synagogue has purchased a small section in the beautiful Eretz Hachaim Cemetery near Bet Shemesh.

Eretz Hachaim Cemetery

The Eretz Hachaim cemetery is conveniently located on the road to Beit Shemesh just half an hour from Jerusalem, not far from Tel Aviv and thirty minutes from Ben Gurion Airport. Jewish communities from around the world, including some in North America, have bought sections for the interment of their members, thus the cemetery staff is attuned to the needs of Diaspora Jews. Eretz Hachaim cemetery has a dignified prayer hall on the premises, with a fully staffed office to help visitors and families in their time of need. A private family room is also available for the bereaved family for a pre-service gathering.



Costs for a Funeral in the US Section at Eretz Hachaim Cemetery

The following summary table sets out the costs as at the time of printing but are subject to change. Further details are provided below.

Matter	Amount	Payee
Plot purchase	£6,000	The US Burial Society
Transportation of a body from London to Israel	£4,000	Shamshi Mozes Travel (at time of transportation)
Funeral and burial services	\$1,800	Eretz Hachaim cemetery (after burial)
Cemetery maintenance fee	£1,150	Eretz Hachaim cemetery at time of purchase. This is a one off cost

These prices are correct at the time of printing

Purchasing a Plot at Eretz Hachaim Cemetery

US members may buy single or double plots in the US section. The current cost of a single plot is £6,000. This may be subject to change in the future.

US members wishing to purchase a US plot at Eretz Hachaim should contact Mr. Melvyn Hartog, United Synagogue Head of Burial, on 020 8343 6283 or 07939 110 508 or via email to mhartog@theus.org.uk



Transporting the Deceased to Israel

The specialist in London for arranging the transportation of the deceased to Israel is Mr. Shamshi Mozes of Mozes Travel (contact details on page 17). In the event of bereavement, he should be contacted immediately. Where necessary, he will help you to arrange for the deceased to be released from a home or hospital and collected for tahara (washing of the body). Once the body has been prepared for burial, he will arrange for it to be taken to the airport and flown to Israel, where it will be met by Eretz Hachaim representatives who will handle all the necessary arrangements. If you wish to accompany the body, he will also be able to facilitate flight arrangements. Please note that these travel costs are not included within the plot reservation fee.

Funeral and Burial Services

This cost covers bringing the deceased to the cemetery and the preparations at the cemetery. US Members have the option to prepay this fee, thereby locking into the cost as at the time of payment. The current cost is \$1800 (as at 31/10/16)

Cemetery Maintenance Fee

Eretz Hachaim charges an additional, one-time maintenance fee of £1,150 for care of the cemetery. This is payable at time of purchase.

United Synagogue Members who have made Aliyah

In order to bury an Israeli citizen who has passed away, it will be necessary to obtain a notification of death (*hoda'at petirah*) from a doctor and a burial permit (*rishayon lekevurah*) from the Ministry of Health, which Eretz Hachaim will require together with the deceased's identity card (*teudat zehut*).

In any case, it is important to make copies of these papers which will be necessary for future administrative purposes.

Where the deceased was in Israel and had already purchased a burial plot, their next of kin should contact the Chevra Kadisha of Eretz Hachaim on 02 999 7526 or 02 991 1446. They will arrange the collection of the deceased and their preparation for burial.

Israeli Funerals

Israeli funerals tend to be less formal than British ones. The parts in the UK which are recited by the Rabbi, are usually led in Israel by members of the *Chevra Kadisha*. A current or former US minister can officiate, if available. If you would like a US-style service, with such a minister, please contact Melvyn Hartog or Rabbi Gideon Sylvester, the US Israel Rabbi. The US Israel Office can also provide further information if required. US Burial Siddurim are available in the prayer hall, upon request.

If a non-United Synagogue minister officiates, he will most likely follow the local *minhagim* (customs), some of which differ from *minhagim* in the UK. Most funerals in Israel conclude at the graveside, however the eulogies are delivered in the prayer hall. Rather than 'sitting' to commence shiva as is the

case in the UK at the end of a funeral, the common custom in Israel is to have a '*shurah*' (line). Guided by the officiant, those attending the funeral make two lines. The mourners walk in between the lines whilst the onlookers recite words of blessing and comfort.

Eulogies (Hespeidim): Most Israeli cemeteries including Eretz Hachaim are happy for male or female family members or close friends to deliver eulogies in whatever language feels most comfortable. These are normally a few minutes long describing the deceased's life and highlighting their finest qualities such as their acts of kindness, charity, religious commitment and communal involvement.

Kriah: It is also important to remember that the mourners will be fulfilling the command of tearing *kriah* – tearing their clothes, as guided by the officiant. This should be borne in mind when dressing, especially for those arriving straight from the airport. Typically, a jacket, shirt, blouse or cardigan would be used which could also be worn throughout the shiva.

No coffins: Perhaps the most striking difference between Israeli funerals and those you will be used to from Britain is that in Israel, Jewish people are buried without a coffin. The only exception to this practice is serving soldiers.

Evening funerals: Since according to Jewish law, it is best not to leave a body unburied overnight, Israeli funerals may also take place in the evening. Mourners will be able to coordinate burial times with the cemetery to suit their needs.

Sitting Shiva in Israel

Standard practice is that the Shiva period commences from the moment that the grave has been filled. This is the practice for all who are mourning in Israel. But close family members who are in Britain and will not be at the burial may begin their shiva period from the moment that they learn of the bereavement. During shiva, the mourners sit on low chairs. In the UK, these are usually provided by the local synagogue. In Israel if the local synagogue does not provide this service, mourners can simply remove cushions from sofas instead.

Choosing a Stone

The Eretz Hachaim Cemetery will provide you with relevant details of a suitable stonemason upon request.

Typically a gravestone will carry the letters פ"ט or פ"נ standing for *Poh nikbar/tamun* (for a man) or *poh nitmana/tamuna* (for a woman) meaning 'here rests the body of'

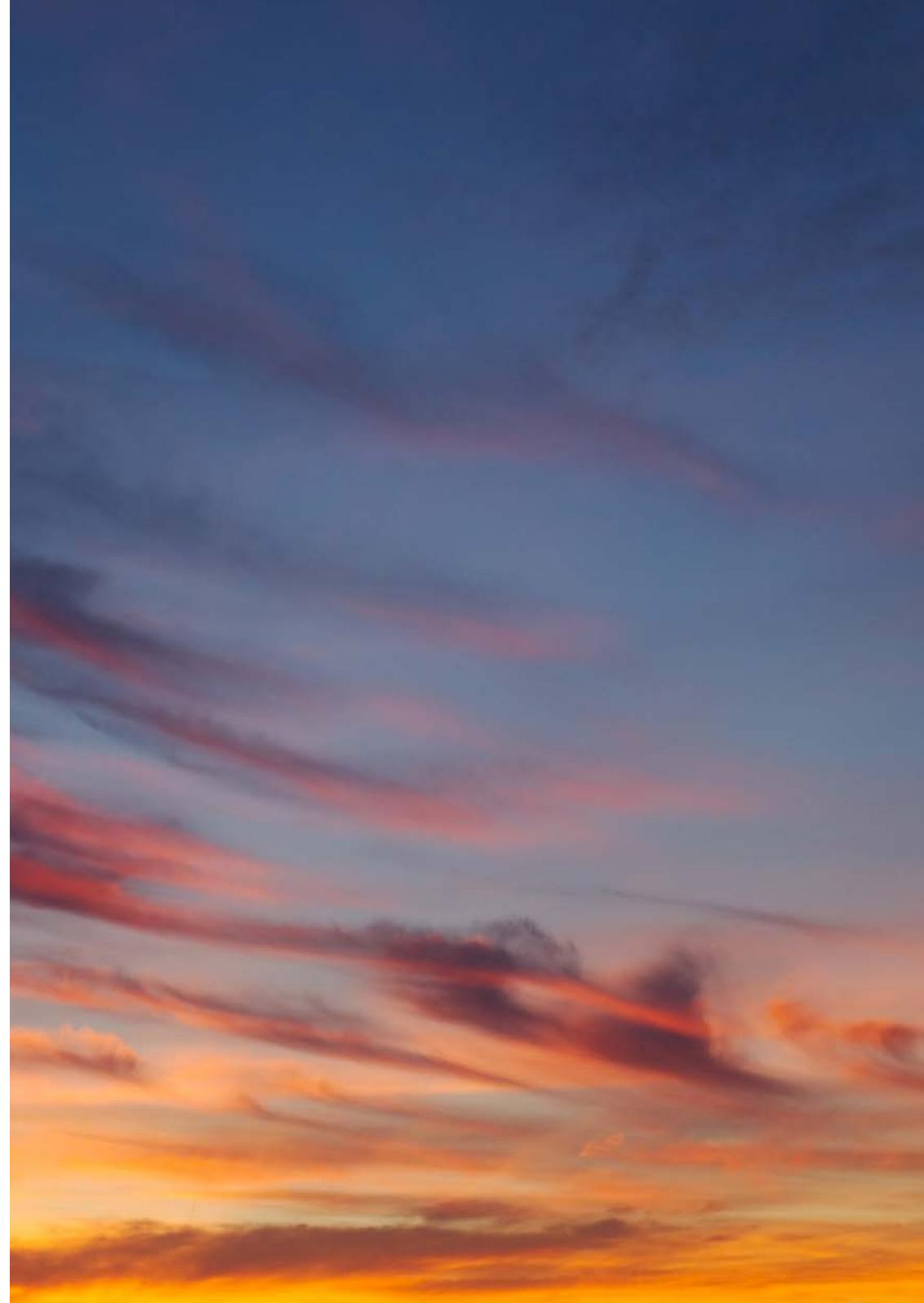
Followed by their Hebrew and/or English names indicating if they were a Cohen or Levi.

Their dates (using the Hebrew and/or Gregorian calendars) and an epitaph reflecting their life and or how they will be missed.

Please contact the US Burial Society if you would like advice about selecting a stonemason in Israel and about wording on the stone.

At the bottom of the stone it is customary to write the letters תנצב"ה which stand for the words תהא נשמתו/ה צרורה בצרור החיים - May his/her soul be bound up in the bonds of eternal life.

Your local rabbi or a rabbi at Eretz Hachaim will be able to help you compile the wording for the stone. The cemetery's stone mason is available to advise you on different types of stone with a focus on a stone which is dignified and sturdy.



Stone Settings

Whereas in Britain, we normally wait for up to a year before placing a stone on a grave, in Israel, it is customary to do so after thirty days. Both customs are equally valid.

Another difference in the stone setting ceremony, is that while in Britain we are accustomed to start the ceremony in the prayer hall and then walk down to the grave, in Israel it is more usual to conduct the entire stone setting ceremony at the graveside. If you wish to make use of the prayer hall, you must make a specific advance reservation but this will be on the understanding that since there is only one prayer hall at Eretz Hachaim, a funeral would take precedence should it take place at the same time as the stone setting.

Halacha - While the Deceased is in Transit

During the time between the death of a close relative (one's spouse, sibling, parent or child) and burial, a bereaved person is referred to as an *onen*. At this stage, one is exempt from all positive commandments. Therefore, the *onen* (the bereaved person in this situation) does not recite prayers or lay *tefillin*. This is because it is a time of deep distress and a time when the mourners are preoccupied with arranging the burial. Practically and psychologically, it would be unfair to expect them to devote their time, energy and emotions to religious practice. All the normal prohibitions, such as eating non-kosher food, speaking badly about others, not observing Shabbat still apply. During this period, an *onen* does not eat meat, drink wine (except on Shabbat) or engage in unnecessary, luxurious bathing in addition to the some of the restrictions of the shiva. Since, following the burial, the mourners should not wear leather shoes, the mourner may wish to bring non-leather footwear to cemetery.

Once the body is handed over to the *chevra kadisha*, the bereaved family is relieved of responsibility for making funeral arrangements, they leave the category of *onenim* (plural of onen). They now return to normal religious practices until such time as they regain responsibility for the funeral arrangements.

We thank the AACI (Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel) for helping to provide some of the information in this booklet.

May you be blessed with only good times. If you are reading this at a time of bereavement, we send you blessings of comfort and our condolences. May you be comforted amongst the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Useful Contact Details

Eretz Hachaim Cemetery:

Tel: 00972 2 991 1446

Fax: 00972 2 999 7527

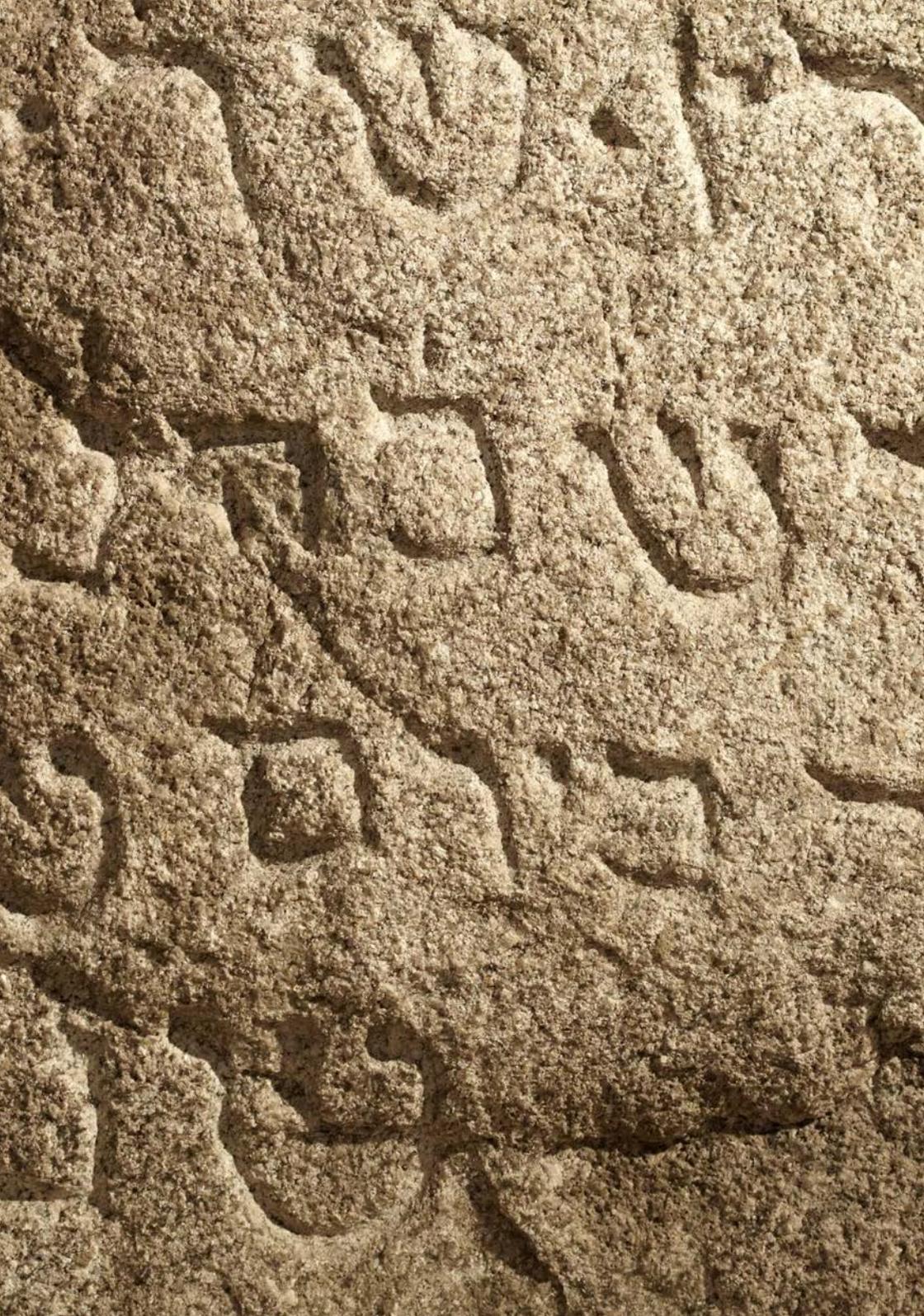
PO Box 41136, Jerusalem 91410 Israel

USA Office: Tel: 718 437 2200 Fax: 718 437 4266

<http://www.erezhachaim.org/about.asp>



Directions: When driving on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road – Route 1, exit towards Bet-Shemesh on to route 38, drive 5km (approximately 3 miles) until the intersection of 'Tzomet Shimshon' continue 300 metres, on the left side there is a sign for the Eretz HaChaim Cemetery, drive up that entrance road to reach the cemetery entrance. The office is located in the centre of the cemetery.



United Synagogue Burial Society

Head of Burial

Melvyn Hartog:
020 8343 6283 / 07939 110 508
[**mhartog@theus.org.uk**](mailto:mhartog@theus.org.uk)

US Burial Society
United Synagogue
305 Ballards Lane, London, N12 8GB
020 8950 7767
www.theus.org.uk/burial

United Synagogue Israel Rabbi

Rabbi Gideon Sylvester:

8 Yad Mordechai Street, Katamon
Jerusalem 9322708
0508 762 117
gidonsyl@netvision.net.il

United Synagogue Israel Office

Gaby Godfrey:

c/o StandWithUS Israel Education Center
King David's Crown, King David 26
Jerusalem
Tel: 020 8343 5697
ggodfrey@theus.org.uk

Transportation of the Deceased to Israel

Mozes Travel:
Mr. Shamshi Mozes
07813 792 364

Glossary of Hebrew Terms

<i>Aron</i>	Coffin
<i>Aveilim</i>	Mourners
<i>Beit Olam / Beit K'varot</i>	Cemetery
<i>Chevra Kadisha</i>	(lit: Holy society) Term used for the burial society / undertakers
<i>Hesped</i>	Eulogy
<i>Hoda'at petirah</i>	Death certificate
<i>Kaddish</i>	A prayer; one version of which is reserved for mourners
<i>Kriah</i>	Tearing of a mourner's garment prior to the funeral.
<i>Levaya</i>	Funeral
<i>Matzeva</i>	Gravestone, the term is also sometimes used for the stone setting ceremony
<i>Mait (Meis)</i>	Body of the deceased
<i>Onen</i>	Mourner during the period between death and burial
<i>Seudat havra'ah</i>	First meal eaten by bereaved family members after a funeral
<i>Shiva</i>	Seven day mourning period
<i>Sh'loshim</i>	Thirty day mourning period
<i>Tahara</i>	Washing of the deceased's body

Further Reading

Mourning in Halachah, The laws and customs of the year of mourning, Chaim Binyamin Goldberg, ArtScroll Mesorah Publications, 1991

The Jewish way in Death and Mourning, Maurice Lamm, New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 2000 (also available online at www.chabad.org/)

Sefer Hashiva, prayers and ideas for visitors to a house of mourning, Michael Laitner & Fiona Palmer eds., London: United Synagogue Publications, 2013. Extracts are available online at www.theus.org.uk/shiva/seferhashiva along with general information on linked pages about burial, shiva and stone settings.



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