

# K-443 the Law of God (1 of 2)

by Art Katz

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*Art Katz explores the paradox of the law in Psalm 119, emphasizing its role in fostering a deeper relationship with God rather than leading to legalism.*

**Duration:** 46:14

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:1-3, Psalm 119:5, Psalm 119:18, Psalm 119:34, Psalm 119:40

**Topics:** "Law Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of authentic praise and integrity in the worship of God. He highlights the need for praise to come from a genuine heart that seeks and loves the Lord. The use of instruments should be seen as a substitute rather than the main focus of praise. The speaker also discusses the character of David and how his devotion to God was evident in his actions and conduct. The sermon concludes with a reflection on the desire for understanding and the longing for God's precepts and righteousness.

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## Transcript

Let me state the anomaly of Psalm 119, the paradox of the faith. Paradox is seeming contradiction. And the remarkable thing is, if you pursue what seems to be in contradiction, it is almost invariably always the gate of opening into depths of perception of the knowledge of God that require paradox as the entry.

So we mustn't be frightened of paradox or paracontradiction because we have it here in Psalm 119 itself that from every reckoning, a psalm that is the lengthiest of all the book of psalms and devoted exclusively to the law, to commandments, to precepts, to ordinances, which seem to be a foundation for legalism and yet it comes from the sweet singer of Israel himself. So how do we reconcile that this free spirit, this Davidic man, is also the one who expostulates and celebrates law, commandment, precepts, ordinances, all the kinds of things that we would think would constitute legalism. Can it be that just the opposite is true? That the deeper apprehension of what appears to be a formula for legality and restraint and stricture is actually the formula for expansive freedom and knowledge of God.

That would be paradox and I believe that that's the case. So we want to look into this and see what the Lord wants to show us because the last one that we would expect to give us a dissertation on law would be David, maybe the one who has violated it more strenuously and tragically than any of the great figures of scripture and maybe for that reason he's celebrating it the more. I don't know when he composed this, whether this was after the episode with Bathsheba, the adultery and murder.

It seems so. So we're not going to read every verse of it but we're going to scan it and seek for a pattern, a repetition, something that he reiterates that will be a key of understanding for us. Anything with the suffix "-ism", is already a word that is suspect.

"-ism is something of man, communism, Judaism, legalism. But in our modern minds and even in our Christian minds we have associated law with legalism. That's not a necessary conjunction and maybe this will cure us of that kind of misconception.

Law is not inevitably legalism. Man's misuse of the law can bring people into a bondage of legality, of a legal kind. But is that God's intention? So what is the law? God's intention for it to be bound or to be freed? So that's what we want to explore here.

So unfortunately these words have those connotations. But I think the broadest word of the use of the word law here is Torah. Learning, teaching, how to live rightly.

In fact I have under the title Psalm 119 in italics the statement, the glories of God's law. And maybe for an antinomian generation like our own, this is a prescription for sanity. Now nobody even stopped me with the word antinomian.

That is to say, this generation even in the church is not disposed to law. And has raised a false tension between law and grace. As if grace nullifies law rather than is the provision of God for a fulfillment of the law.

Jesus came full of grace and truth. We can almost say full of grace and law, full of grace and Torah. So we have to disabuse ourselves from mentalities that have been current in the church in a cheap way to this hour.

And have deprecated and lessened the church's appreciation for the law which is to say the law giver. Which is to say righteousness. And that's why in an antinomian generation like ours, we have ministers running off with their organists and every kind of violation of liberty and divorce is rampant even in the church.

We've paid a price for a failure to give to the law the kind of regard that David gives it. And we can even raise the question can David be understood independent of Psalm 119? Is Psalm 119 a little genuflection, a little extraneous thing that David happened to be disposed one morning to write? Or is it at the heart of David? Is this why he's beloved? Is there something about this respect if not reverence for the law, the commandments? When you'll hear the passion he loves it, he delights. The word delight comes up frequently in this psalm.

For us it's laborious. It's not a delight, it's a begrudging acknowledgement. That's why we're not Davidic.

And if we understood how critical it is to be Davidic that the kingdom of God is the kingdom of David. It's Davidic in its flavor, in its spirit, in its constitution. Something through and through is interwoven in the very fabric of the kingdom of God.

So that God is not averse to alluding to his son Jesus as the greater David. So dear is the word David, the name David to God, which means beloved. That it behooves us to borrow in to the meaning of that name that God finds so beloved.

And not the least of it, maybe the heart of it is to be found in Psalm 119. And I'm saying this for the first time. I've never before been so engaged as I have been this morning with this psalm, which came up in my order of reading, which I think is more than happenstance.

I have to confess that in times past, when my order of reading brought me to Psalm 119, I hurried through it. And in fact, I skipped liberally. It was too long.

And I was anxious to move on to other psalms that would be more enjoyable than to listen to this repetitious exposition and celebration of law of commandment. Maybe there's something residual in me, like most believers, that is already shaped by our Christian culture to be adverse. That these are negative words rather than positive.

They're not a source of delight for us, as they are for David. But I believe they need to be. And in my year of association with this orthodox rabbi whom I was visiting weekly, his greatest accusation against me and against the church, against the faith, is our failure to honor and to keep the law.

So I'm not saying that we need to become Judaistic, but there's something wanting in the church that even our critics pick up and that needs to be corrected or we can never be to them the full counsel of God. They need to see in us a deeper reverence for law than that they themselves hold, because they have turned it into a legalism. They have turned it into a device to govern with strictures the conduct of men under the rabbinical oversight that makes them tyrants.

But to see the law understood and revered and upheld Davidically is yet absent from their consideration because there's never been a church that has had this disposition, even this thought. In fact, it's never been my thought until today and just now. What do you think about that? So I'm assuming it's God's thought and somehow it needs to be configured into the issue of Israel and the church.

As I've already said, we will never be the full witness to Israel, the testimony that will move them to jealousy so long as we take an antinomian view, so long as we barely respect or tolerate the law and look upon it as an encumbrance and something that we have to begrudgingly acknowledge. We cannot be to Israel what we ought. We have got to be to Israel what is Davidic.

We've got to show them who are the monopolists of the law that there's a way of understanding, apprehending and experiencing and communicating the commandments and the precepts and the ordinances of God in a way that exceeds or transcends their legalistic, rabbinical and Judaic mindset. That's no small thing. So we'll see here the kind of language that David uses about the law.

He loves it. He asks for God to strengthen him and enlarge his heart that he might run after it. He delights in it.

He wants to know its every nuance and be instructed. So let's look at this. The rabbis have taken to themselves the office of the discerners and the articulators of the law.

Of course they've added their own refinements and in fact the whole corpus, the whole body of legalism has risen through rabbis that is not even scriptural. It's extraneous. It's extra biblical because the presumption is that God gave Moses the law but the fulfillment of it and the details need to supplement what was given or how would you know how to do it? How do you keep the Sabbath unless you're told in detail what would violate it? What is work? Well the rabbis will have to define that.

And how many steps are you allowed to walk on the Sabbath or carry this or light fire? So we know that not only is there the written law that Moses came down with from the mount but according to rabbinical understanding which is at the heart of modern Judaism is an oral law. And that that was communicated orally by Moses to Joshua and Joshua to the priests and the priests to every successive generation. And then finally I think about the 5th century I think it was after Christ that some genius, a rabbi thought that it's time now to codify and write what was oral because so long as it remains oral it will suffer some distortion as it's communicated from generation to generation.

And this is their rabbinical mandate. But here in David we have a law keeper and a law lover independent of any necessity for rabbinical instruction. That's no small point.

There's a need for rabbis to exposit in detail if you have not the office of the Holy Spirit to communicate to you the law, it's meaning and it's application. Rabbis are a substitute for the Holy Spirit. David did not need rabbinical instruction on how to fulfill the law.

He was in so a kind of relationship with the law giver that he could find application and fulfillment in that intimacy and that relationship and knowledge of God by the Spirit that does not require the legalism or the legality or the definitions of man. And when Israel will be restored again they'll be restored to a pre-rabbinical relationship with God by the Holy Spirit. I'll write my law in your heart and every man will know.

See what I mean? So that's a little point of no small significance to remember. It's important for us for how shall we fulfill the righteous requirements of God and love the ordinances and the precepts that are not stipulated in detail and do not require men to enlarge for us except we have the same Davidic relationship with the law giver that David himself had. Puts the whole premium on intimacy and relationship with God by the Spirit.

And that's the profound distinction between ourselves and Judaism. And this kept coming up in an exacerbating way in my weekly dialogues with this rabbi. I'm the man of the Spirit.

He's the man of legalism and rabbinical detail. And so he had to come to a decision about me. What is this Spirit that prevails? And finally he was compelled to the interpretation that it had to be demonic.

Why? Because I'm subscribing to a deceiver. A man who allowed himself to be worshipped as God which is the height of idolatry. Who violated the Sabbath and deprecated the sages and the Pharisees who are the most prominent expression of righteousness.

So either he had to agree that I'm in another place that is the right place that requires his submission the leaving of the lesser for the greater or to dismiss the man and his view which he did in an insulting way both to me and to the Lord. It was a valuable thing for me to be thrust head on into the grit of conflict between Judaism and Christianity. And I hope that you'll be the beneficiary as the Lord brings things to recall to add dimensions to what we are exploring even this.

Okay. So, happy or blessed are those whose way is blameless. Who walk in the law of the Lord.

Happy are those who keep his decrees. Who seek him with their whole heart. Who also do no wrong but walk in his ways.

Just to, we ought to dwell a little bit on these initial verses of what constitutes blessedness or happiness whose way is blameless. I don't know how often probably for most believers very infrequent rare and maybe for some believers never to know what David is speaking about here the blessedness or blamelessness. Have you ever enjoyed a moment in which everything is clear? Your conscience is undefiled both with God and with men.

You've come to a certain purity. You've attended the things that are needful. You're walking rightly and there's a delicious sense that comes over you.

I don't know how to describe it. And you can almost taste it. There's something about righteousness that is to be enjoyed.

There's something about blamelessness that's as if all that we were organically intended for by God is in that moment experienced. And it's a remarkable transcendent sense. I don't know how to speak of it maybe because it's not frequent enough in me but I have here and there in given moments tasted what he's talking about.

So when he's saying happy and blessed he's not just woofing he's not just making words he knows what the root of blessedness is is blamelessness. It is so rare certainly not to be found in the world which is full of chicanery, guile men living by their wits cutting corners, taking liberties but even in the church where is there one who walks blameless? And you can say God search my heart if you find any wicked thing in me. So just to let you know there is such a condition.

David knew it God intends for us all to know it and to walk consistently in it and so long as we remain antinomian having an attitude of disdain for law and thinking it a synonym for constriction or restriction we cannot come to this. There must be not only respect for law a reverence, a delight if we are to come to a sense of blamelessness because until we know what God is requiring the subtlety of our hearts will confound us and will keep us from this kind of blamelessness before God. If you are blameless before God you don't have to worry about being blameless before men.

If you can fulfill his requirement how would you define that word? We should have our dictionary here I'll bring it tomorrow. How would you define integrity? Rare as it is what would be an antonym? Sometimes you have a better grasp of a word not by finding a synonym but by finding an antonym. What is opposite to integrity? If men recognize the need for integrity in inanimate things like metal how much more in the things that we are in God's image.

Don't fail to note two verbs in the end of verse one and the beginning of verse two who walk in the law of the Lord and be happy those who keep his decrees. So our David is not a dilettante you know that word? One who likes to talk fancy over the coffee table and make allusions to law or righteousness. David is this is why he is beloved in God's sight.

He is one who wants to keep it and walk in it and not just to use it as an adornment in conversation.

So let's let that factor in because David is eminently the man of the spirit before Christ and before the giving of the spirit but Paul says in at least one place the law is holy he never denigrates the law and the first verses of chapter eight of Romans is a remarkable statement about the law in the New Testament context there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit the same word that we saw with David walking for the law of the spirit of life in

Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death for what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh nothing inherently defective in the law but the inability of men to really walk in it righteously God sending his own son the likeness of

sinful flesh and forcing condemnation to flesh that the righteousness of the law this is a key verse might be fulfilled in us not ignored or set aside might be fulfilled in us the righteousness of the law not its detailed slavish observation but its essence the whole sum of what it's about might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit back to the text pointing out the verbs in these first few verses walk, keep brings us to verse 2 part B who seek him with their whole heart so there is no respect and reverence for the law no keeping of it except there is also a seeking of him so it's a the great premium on the quality of relationship with the law giver that is not stipulated in such detail that one can know it in a kind of legalistic way but requires a seeking

of him for the fuller exposition of what that righteousness is that God wants fulfilled and a seeking of him with the whole heart so the language of David is a certain totality that is not in keeping with the tenet of our age which is partial and casual there is a remarkable Davidic thing here that we need to recognize and to obtain if there is to be a walking and a keeping there's got to be a seeking but not just a casual seeking a seeking with the whole heart none of this language is haphazard there's a remarkable divine logic step by step, verse by verse that gives us a real glimpse into the Davidic mind and then the the result of it is a doing in verse 3 who also do no wrong if you have sought the Lord with your whole heart in order to keep his decrees and walk in his law it will be

evidenced in your action, in your conduct walk in his ways verse 5 he talks about oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes then I shall not be put to shame you'll find as you read through the psalms several references to shame that the thing that is most painful for David to consider that he would ever experience is shame and the antidote to shame is blamelessness lest you act in such a way as to be shameful for David that is the thing most to be avoided he cannot consider that he should ever act or conduct himself in such a way as to be put to shame unless we make Psalm 119 the subject of a whole semester which wouldn't be a bad thing but just to direct your attention to verse 7 I will praise you with an upright heart and to raise the question whether that's the

necessary condition for real praise and the thing that keeps us or tarnishes our praise or makes us ineffective in praise is the want of an upright heart I was trying to say something about the kind of exaltation the remarkable transcendence something that comes when you hit a moment of righteousness and blamelessness there's a remarkable purity of heart and thought and something like that is reflected in praise so the fact that we have to foment praise or promote it or structure it aid it is a statement that we're not spiritually in the place where praise would rise of itself if you're walking in the Davidic way praise is the natural expression of someone who has an upright heart you cannot contain it because you're experiencing something so akin to God in what he is in himself in his

own integrity and wholeness that you just are prompted to give him praise that's the praise for which he waits and any other praise is less or other than that praise and the fact that it requires implementation of music or other kinds of worship aids is the indication that we're not in this spiritual place so David found it, that's true and it's to be found if you seek him with a whole heart see this language is so strange to us it is so total in its attitude toward God because our age is partial we're shallow we have not an intention of this kind or a faith to believe or to desire this totality and yet it makes up what David is as the great psalmist and lover of the law and the commandments the ordinance and the statutes so I'm not saying this to

embarrass or to make you to be chafed I

myself need this kind of instruction and model that God is giving in the intention that we would move toward it and attain to it that he might have a people of praise in the earth which is the meaning of the name Judah that we would exhibit to our Jewish kinsmen what they themselves are incapable of expressing unless they're walking Davidically and to walk Davidically in that seeking of the Lord would inevitably and of necessity bring them to the knowledge of Jesus if they're apart from that knowledge it's because they're apart from this walk so how do Paul says we're called to move them to jealousy he doesn't explain there's no asterisk at the bottom of the page to indicate how and to what but I believe we're stumbling on it here this will move them to jealousy when they will hear and

see a people of praise who are not orchestrated to praise as a charismatic device but as something that issues out of the walk that is total toward God with a whole heart that has sought him and loves his law, wants to walk in all his ways blamelessly in righteousness praise will issue out of that this is Davidic our use of instrumentation is more the substitute rather than the implementation and it disguises our lack of authentic praise so that years ago in Ben Israel we covenanted with God, don't let our praise exceed the truth of our life that was our prayer our corporate prayer to God and he took us at our word it was painful to come into our services and to hear our praise it was so flat it was so, what's the word out of tune it was not harmonious why? because our life was not

harmonious our life was flat our life was contradictory and all that was imperfect in the life came out in the imperfection of our praise, why did we pray that? that we would not ourselves be deceived by our own musicality that we ourselves could produce something flattering and sound that would beguile us to think that that's the statement of the truth of our life both with God and with each other so to avoid that trap we covenanted let us not exceed the truth of our life by a worship that we can produce through instrument and through voice and God so hearkened to that prayer that it was painful to hear us until the life over a course of time graduated to a place that reflected a quality of praise that was pleasing in his hearing so instrumentation can be a trap because it can produce

something that sounds greater than the reality from which it comes here in verse 14 I delight in the way of your decrees what a strange figure this David is to delight in decrees not just to tolerate them or honor them but to delight in them and by the way if you've not heard before you'll hear some other time the word delight itself whether in decrees or anything is absent from most modern consideration there's painfully little delight to be expressed as a word or something to be sought or to be experienced in contemporary life it's absent delight is a very special condition and it needs to be restored it should distinguish the church a delight and I don't know if you have a synonym for that it's an intense enjoyment and most of us have been so dulled and a generation of kids who swim in

generous allowances and toys and gifts and music and records and discs that everything is dulled there's no delight so delight is something to be sought it's a distinction of our humanity we're less than human if we are incapable of delight and delight and joy are transfiguring aspects of the believing personality of the Davidic life and to delight in decrees where you least expect it is a remarkable statement the Christian air that we breathe is antinomian against the law and has celebrated grace falsely as being an alternative to the law rather than the very enablement for its keeping David is conscious of his frailty I'm glad that's there lest we think that he's made of different stuff than we like he could attain to this by some remarkable natural composition of his own life but we

who are just ordinary cannot aspire or hope to come into this kind of relationship so do not let me stray it's more than just David throwing out a little lifesaver it's David acknowledging that he's made of the same stuff that he's frail, that as much as he's devoted that he can move and depart from as we know tragically became true in his life that's one of the beauties of Scripture is the acknowledgement of the frailty of its greatest saints given for our encouragement lest we think they're made of special stuff we cannot hope to attain to that, this is only academic this is little icing on the cake so that one little insertion do not let me stray shows his dependency, shows his frailty shows how tenuous his own faith is and subject to losing something which is precious and that's what

I'm encouraging you to do is find things like that in this inexhaustible psalm I will delight in the way of your decrees we've mentioned verse 14, as much as in all riches this is not hyperbole he really means this I will meditate on your precepts fix my eye on your ways, I will delight in your statutes I will not forget your word take note of I will, I will I will, I will this is not something automatic and that does not require the willful conscious seeking and participation of the believer with regard to the law I will, I will, I'll make this my business and it's in this assertion of the I that wills that our personhood is established the distinction of our humanity is in one who wills the right thing do you understand that? not to will rightly is to be a blob, is to be an encumbrance,

is just to compact a mankind that fills the earth and occupies space, but the one that wills and wills rightly and I will, I will meditate I will seek, I will that statement out of the depths of one's being is the very foundation of personal identity that is God's intention for us that he would have a distinguished humanity in the earth that is fully human it's not something opposed to spirituality, this is spirituality is will I will meditate I will fix my eyes I will delight I'm setting myself elsewhere David says I set myself to seek the Lord this kind of mentality is absent also from our generation as much as it is antinomian, so is it also as much casual and careless one day is like another it just eats so many meals and moves through so many washing of clothes and purchases and the

days are succession without significance for the want of this kind of assertion of I will so this is not vain egoism, this is the summoning up of the very essence of God's intention for our humanity and asserting it and acting on it I will we need to dwell on a phrase that I will not sin against thee this is not the issue of expediency or to be saved from judgment, this is the issue of such respect and devotion for God that he does not want to shame his name or cast a shadow over God but think of the absence of that and the kinds of crimes that men commit today without any regard of how it affects the creator, it gives them complete license to torture, commit atrocity, mayhem, murder, rape without conscience because there's not a God being violated against and if the only thing that keeps

you from sin is the consequence of being caught and the price that you would have to pay in being incarcerated or executed is not a sufficient deterrent, the great deterrent of God is God himself and we're living in a generation that is God less, it lacks David's consideration of God which is the greatest thing given to walk blamelessly both before men and before God David's heart is that I might not sin against thee I've sinned against Bathsheba and her husband but the greatest sin against thee and thee alone have I sinned, he's not mindless that men have been affected but the greatest offense is against thee and when you hear the circumstances of men you wonder, do they think that God is not there to see not there to hear not there to observe as if he's in fact non-God I'm not just

talking about people in the world, I'm talking about people in the church how else do they run off with the organist and commit what they do and take on and put on wives unless they do not regard that God is

seeing and that he's affected they lack David's regard for God that is caught up that I might not sin against thee that's why I want your law in my heart not just the details of it but the substance and the spirit of it for it's your very provision that will save me from offending against thee you cannot understand this psalm or David except you understand such a heart and it's the kind of heart that we lack that's why the church is not Davidic or the kingdom come when it will come it will have this deep heartfelt reverence for God and conscious that he's present as Paul said the

judge is at the door his every act was with an awareness of a God who sees who knows and is not to be offended against if you had David's regard you would know that he knows your thoughts and you would abhor a thought contrary to him and this is where most of us fail we think that our thought life is our own and that we can think what we will and actually enjoy roasting someone or being critical in our spirit envious and comparing and finding ways to exalt our superiority this is rife in the church this is not academic this is nitty gritty so is your mind your own you can think your own thoughts or are you aware with David that you do not sin against God and hold thoughts and entertain thoughts that are offensive to him what is that scripture I think it's also from David maybe even from

the Psalms about the meditation of my heart and the thought somebody know that the meditation of my heart is acceptable acceptable unto you that it would not offend you I would not sin against you even in my thoughts or my meditations that's the purity of heart the blamelessness not just in your conduct but in your thoughts for what you will allow in your thoughts will in time be expressed in your conduct so to come to that remarkable point where your mind and your heart is pure you will not entertain thoughts that are contrary to God is the state to which God is calling us and it's available you mentioned if we allow our hearts and minds to think the kinds of thoughts that we've already experienced today what would this class be what will this school be what will be the result will we

have the full benefit of God's intention or will it mar it and adversely affect the freedom of the Lord to bring forth maybe that's why he's giving us this before we get to the principal subject as a word that will wash us that we might then attend to the thing for which we're called with a right heart a right mind and a right spirit Lord help us thank you Lord to desire Davidic hearts that requires a heart that will not consider sinning against God not only in conduct but in speech and in thought and that's why David prays that he might not stray from his commandments and treasure your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you teach me your statutes with my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth I delight in the ways of your decrees as much as all riches I will meditate

fix my eyes on your ways I will delight I will not forget your word I will I will I will open my eyes verse 18 that I may behold wondrous things out of your law cause here the word law is much more inclusive than just prescription or ordinances or details of how to walk it's an all inclusive word here your law here is Torah the totality of the teaching the manifestation the revelation of your way I live as an alien in the land do not hide your commandments from me it's not an accident that he's an alien even in Israel because anyone who has an attitude like this is going to find himself in conflict and in opposition with the majority that view that prevails in a religious Israel that falls short of this kind of reverence for God and for his law he will be strange pilgrim a stranger and an

alien that's how David found himself and we will also even in the church if we came increasingly into this kind of respect and love of the law and the way of God I will is coupled with do not let me stray I will is my self assertion and yet I know my weakness and unless you keep me from straying I'll blow it so both things are somehow appropriate and not at all an opposition David served his generation and then fell asleep

and we were praying Lord that we might serve our generation so servanthood and the mentality of servanthood is intrinsic to this whole Davidic mode of thought and life give me in verse 34 understanding that I may keep your law give me that I may it's not that I can independent of you now that you've raised the standard the bar seeing what you want unless you give me how

can I keep what do you make of verse 40 in the light of what was said about give me that I may where he cries out see I have longed for your precepts in your righteousness give me life isn't he already alive what is he asking the life of God that particular enablement that is divine because the requirement is divine how many of us have ever prayed like that give me life it sounds like a contradiction are we not already alive but not as alive as we ought to be and I will not will not recognize the deficit until we get serious about the requirement then we recognize on the basis of my natural life never can I attain to a standard of this give me your life for your standard and that's the fact that he can ask that as petition indicates that it's something that can be given but if you don't

ask you'll not receive and you live beneath the life of God religiously that's what religion is is man in his own humanity seeking to fulfill a certain limited understanding of God's requirement

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