

by **Joanna Rotté**

A Time to Be Born and a Time to Die

As the East West Foundation gets ready for its third Amherst summer session of Oriental Philosophy and Medicine, I would like to describe my experience at the second Amherst summer session, which was attended by nearly two hundred people over nine sunny days (plus one rainy day) last August. From Japan, Taiwan, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, England, Canada, and the United States, plus New York City, we had assembled with the common desire to "get better." I wondered how the fruitarians would feel without daily citrus or apples. Could the lacto-vegetarians make it without pizza or yoghurt? What would the smokers do with no marijuana? Were there stashes in backpacks, or would this be a time for change, beginning anew. Why had we come, if not to be reborn?

A Time for Silence and a Time for Speech

That night one student from each dormitory gallantly volunteered to tread the halls each morning sounding reveille: "It's four-thirty—time to wake for meditation." Not surprisingly, by the third day I was able to incorporate that warning into my dreams and doze right on through predawn. I had to resort, instead, to a bliss-shattering alarm clock. Reverend Genro Koudela, Buddhist monk and meditation instructor, had warned us: "Don't be discouraged by the early hour; you will be exhilarated all day and not miss the extra sleep." Though my faith was tested as I stumbled to the bathroom at 4:35 A.M., he was right. The misty, silent walk through the wet grass along the path to the gymnasium, where zazen was held, was itself adequate exchange for the loss of sleep.

Genro preceded each session with some thoughts on the nature and manner of zazen. There is a

correct physical posture: solid base (knees touching ground to receive earth's force); spine straight (head erect to receive heaven's force); thumbs joining in a circle, left hand resting on top of right, balanced at the belly, or *hara* (body's center below the navel). There is a correct mental attitude: allow thoughts to arise but pay no attention to them. There is a correct method: concentrate on full breathing from the *hara*; count each breath up to a count of ten and begin again. The purpose of counting is to focus, all the while observing the difficulty of maintaining focus—to recognize thoughts as interferences with the mind's equanimity.

We were instructed to go back to "one" each time our attention left the counting. I barely ever got past "four." Although my breathing became fuller and deeper, circulation seemed to stop. I fantasized my legs turning purple and falling off, forever entwined in a half-lotus. I found my mind becoming deranged, mired up with extraneous considerations. Within a few days, however, I was at least able to categorize the thoughts careening through my psyche; they were predominantly judgmental. Genro explained that such a manner of thinking arises from judging one's parents; he suggested that I look at and let go of that—meaning who am I to judge them, and what have they done that they need be judged? All is only mind; therefore, change the mind. Forget about the world; I can only change myself.

Although Genro reminded me that change happens in a flash, the preparation for it seemed encumbered, slovenly, turtle-slow. Sit, breathe, count, and observe the muddle. Zazen, on only one level a method for relaxation, is actually a battleground: illusion, fear, chemicals, excess yin seep out and crawl up and out; delusion, aggression, animal food, excess yang hike and kick down and out. Illusory phenomena without substance—let them go.

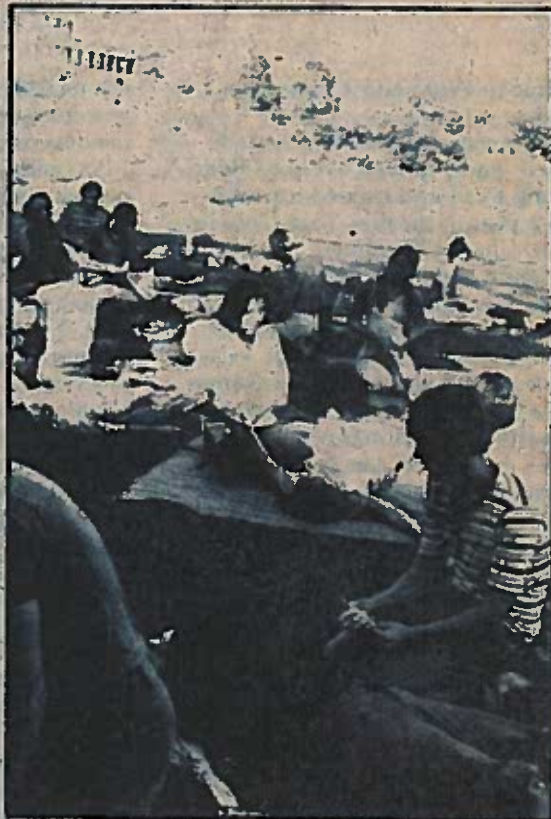
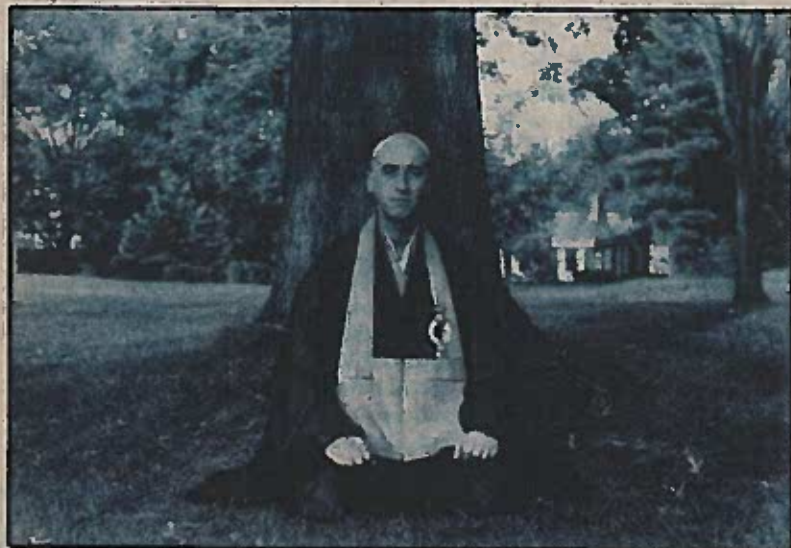
All week I reached for the snap that would disclose acceptance. The trigger, Genro told us, to

experiencing the Truth of the Self is detachment. When we sit motionless, the body resists; it gets cramped and hurts due to loci of blocked energy. But if concentration is held on the breath (the mind can only be in one place at a time), the painful feelings of resistance diminish. Thus detachment can begin. Through zazen, Genro promised us, we would come to recognize that knowledge or information is not Understanding. Words and book learning, especially for Westerners, OD'd on academic materialism, can cloud intuition. Better to experience—become aware through sitting, active nondoing.

Every Activity under Heaven

There is nothing to learn, anyway.

Why bother? Because it feels better to meditate than not to meditate. And there is that chance of experiencing Lao-tzu's Nothingness, the Absolute, wherein problems cease to be and detachment is complete. That's why I was there at five in the morning, chanting the Heart Sutra, manifesting myself as nothing more nor less than Japanese sounds. For the moment, that was enough: *Ma Ka Han Ya Shin Gyo*. Ahhhh. I am in a gymnasium combat zone at 6:00 A.M., seeing what I've created. I've created a maniac. Now what?



*Clockwise from above:
Reverend Genro Koudala,
Shizuko Yamamoto (center),
Hiroshi Hayashi,
William Dufty,
Gloria Swanson*



*Photographs by
Biron Kelly*



A Time to Weep and a Time to Laugh

The clapper clapped, the bell dinged, and I moved over to Okido. Having lived and trained for more than a year at the Oki Yoga Dojo in Japan, Charles Brummer, the instructor, taught in English with Japanese sentence structure: "Now, this way do." It was somewhat weird, but we accepted it, for he was firm but kind and fun, and he knew his ballgame. Each day Charles read to us from the writings of Oki Sensei, who advocates progressive adaptability to any condition of environment, weather, or food, in order to develop judgment. Okido is essentially hara training, which is learning to breathe from your center. This was more Zen, but now through active *doing*. In groups, with partners, or alone we eased or struggled through games and exercises to rid our bodies of toxins, to realign our spines, shoulders, heads, arms, and legs—in short, to balance our energy. We trotted outdoors and, in unison, vocalized big *ah-hah's*; we inhaled the universe and exhaled *ha-hā's*. Laughing was an exercise to correct our breathing. Oki Sensei wants his students to smile: in movement, in meditation, always return to laughter, smiling from the belly. I began to suspect that life is all about opening and contracting the hara. To breathe, to live from hara is to posit "I will . . ." It is an affirmation of life. By 8:30 A.M. I'd been flirting with Zen practice since falling out of bed four hours earlier. Although it hurt a little, I felt a momentary grin just below the navel.

A Time to Kill and a Time to Heal

One morning I cut Okido to slip into another class, Sumie Painting, taught by Itsuko Ninomiya, artist, clothing designer, and seamstress, specialist in flower arranging, and just generally gorgeous woman about town. She whispered to me that the orthodox greenboard college classroom in which she was teaching was both a temple and a hospital. I settled in to see what that meant. The room was still. Each of about ten students sat, spine absolutely

erect, either holding a brush, handle absolutely erect, or with folded hands, concentrating on a vegetable—an onion, turnip with roots, daikon with leaves, an unhusked ear of corn—placed in front of his or her drawing paper. Within a half-hour, one student began to stretch her torso and arms toward the ceiling. Mrs. Ninomiya briskly ordered her out of the room: one doesn't stretch in a temple. Meanwhile, Mrs. Ninomiya lightly glided from student to student, assisting each creation. One man, by not waiting for her guidance, had clouded his drawing with too much ink and messed the colors on his palette. He was warned of his illness—lack of clarity and discipline—and ordered to clean his blood and his house so that his thinking and painting might become clean. Mrs. Ninomiya intimated that she was tending to the sick, those caught in their heads or blocked in their hearts; she immediately saw their discomfort in their work, but if they could grasp the idea of Zen Sumie painting, they could change their lives.

In the ritual the artist enters into union with the essence of the vegetable (or whatever chosen subject), not moving a hair of the brush until compelled by the truth of nature. Whether it takes an hour or a day to complete a whole stroke, the brush is not lifted from the paper. Several students meditated upon their vegetables from six in the morning until lunch, unmindful of the time, yet aware of the chaos lingering or diminishing inside as it was transferred to the paper outside. There was no hiding: in the outline of an onion, artists understood themselves. Mrs. Ninomiya explained that Sumie is not looking, but feeling, then drawing. Similarly, the traditional Japanese form of greeting is not contacting, but sensing, then bowing. As it was with the resisting body and book knowledge in zazen, so it was with the eyes in Zen Sumie—unnecessary in order to understand. By the end of the class, I felt honored to have been allowed into their temple, and embarrassed that I hadn't offered my own sickness to their hospital. The

quietude and spirit of willingness had been so generous that I cried a little bit. For the first time in my life I had seen a turnip.

A Time to Plant and a Time to Uproot

That experience sensitized me for the following class, led by Ken Burns, who introduced us to the nature of Wild Food Foraging: it's wild! Therefore, we were cautioned to include this new food in our diets ever so gradually, as its power tends



Left, Charles Brummer teaching Oki Yoga; right, Michio Kushi lecturing on Oriental medicine and philosophy

to make one's ki too vital for one to live and work with most people. People radiating strong ki are often, Ken reminded us, placed in jails. People asked about the advisability of collecting wild food within carbon-monoxide cities. Although it is not a good idea to choose plants growing along major thoroughfares or bordering parking lots, Ken said, wild plants actually thrive and seem to prefer living in the city—an environment that is itself hardly tame. We experimented with the five

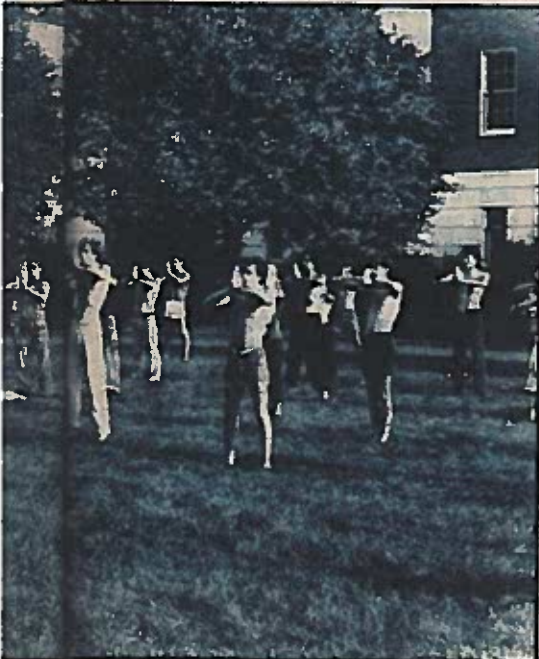
tastes from yin to yang—pungent, sour, sweet, salty, bitter—and learned to identify what is and isn't proper food. Generally, edible plants growing in one's local area are beneficial at their prime; the same principle of Universal Order applies to teas and herbal medicines. In short, before wild food foraging comes common sense; after wild food eating comes a straighter spine.

After this class, we hiked back to campus ready for lunch. Many of us took our plates outdoors each

afraid, she said, because she has an angel, as we all do. At least for the ten days at Amherst I too had an angel, Miss Senda. I absorbed her classes, observed her facility during individual consultations, and communicated without language at every passing. I brought her flowers, and she gave my feet the most invigorating, painful treatment of their years on earth. She is a woman full of love. She expressed fond sentiment for Americans, dating from her childhood in the port town

condition translates as "strange" or "crazy." People who think too much are off-center and have hardness in the abdomen, from lack of use.

The night before Miss Senda's first class, the East West Foundation treated us to a rock-and-roll, rhythm-and-blues dance band party with beer and corn munchies. Miss Senda congratulated us the next morning, explaining that dancing, especially with the liberating stimulus of a little alcohol, is a fine way to loosen and liven up the hara.



Kelly Birn

day, forming circles of new friends on the grass, in the sun or under shade trees. We ate simply or overate, depending upon our inclinations to play volleyball or to pass out afterwards. The picnicking was very open, very American.

A Time for Mourning and a Time for Dancing

On most of the ten mornings, Oriental Healing was offered by a little cupcake of a woman, Miss Yoneko Senda, who gave us her wisdom gathered from more than thirty years of healing practice in Japan. She survived the horrors that rocked Japan but had never been



Kelly Birn

of Yokohama, where fireworks blazed each fourth of July. Her hope for the Westerners she met at Amherst was that we may connect our heads with our haras. She saw in the forms of our bodies, faces, and ways of expression, the signs of too much thinking and too little connection to our native country—the mother's womb. The tie from generation to generation is through the umbilical cord, represented by the navel after physical severance. Her own way to hold the ancestral link is by meditating through her navel, the seat of God. In Japanese, she explained, when the navel is off-center, the word designating that

She advised using the front of the feet as well as the sole, putting strength in the big toe and letting the rhythm of the drum reflect in the hip movement; then, from the center, the rhythm will permeate the whole body. Because the drum is heard more through the body than the ears, its beat is, in fact, a sort of musical massage. A black woman friend of mine commented, "That's what helped my people survive in America." The quantity and the quality of the food one is eating is visible in the condition of the hara, which is visible in one's dancing. As Miss Senda quoted a Japanese saying, "You're a fool if you do

dance, and you're a fool if you don't dance; so you might as well dance."

Actually, dancing is a form of *katzugen undo*, therapeutic exercise whereby the body corrects its own imbalances. In Miss Senda's classes, we experimented with this therapy. Beginning with a small, revolving movement of the hands, shoulders, head, or whatever, each allowed the mind to stop and the body to go as mild or wild as it wanted and needed, releasing the blocks, tightnesses, creases, and stagnant

shone through one afternoon when he spoke of how to show children you love them. In daily tasks and duties, he said, be assertive (yang) with children; discipline them strictly. When dinner time comes, be balanced; sit and eat together, and listen that you may become friends. Whenever they express what may be characterized as "dream," be receptive (yin), recognizing it as an expression of creativity, and always offer encouragement no matter what direction their dream may take—

by Hiroshi Hayashi of Boston's Seventh Inn Restaurant. Hiroshi demanded of those capturing his words and experiences on paper, "If you never did it yourself, why ask? You are greedy collecting recipes and never try. Learn from your own experience." A man of sparkling eyes and gleaming teeth, Hiroshi is a melange of orchestra conductor and spiritual master. While he makes a symphony of food, he poses *koans*, questions so obvious that no one ever seems to unpuzzle the answer satisfactorily. For example, many who have been adhering to a suggested macrobiotic book diet still have trouble or sickness. Why? If there is trouble, the choice of food is wrong, because of lack of judgment. Change the diet without books; be responsible and free. Hiroshi reminded us that natural food is of high energy content; therefore, only small amounts are needed. Most sickness, quite simply, comes from overeating. He favors moderation as opposed to restriction, and because he appreciates quality over quantity, he harbors a sincere and worthy fondness for eating. "What I am most interested in," he has written with that mind-stopping obviousness, "is to cook and to eat anything on this earth."



Kathy Shinn

Miss Yonoko Senda gives the author's toes an acupuncture massage to release energy at the endpoints of the meridians

accumulations wherever they were lodged. People flailed, rolled, swayed, beat themselves, and sounded themselves out. I swung my screwed-tight neck so fast and freely that my consciousness went to another planet and couldn't have cared less about ever coming back. But it did, for the sake of the 10:00 A.M. lecture.

A Time for Embracing and a Time to Refrain from Embracing

Michio Kushi lectured three times a day, all ten days, on Oriental Philosophy and Medicine. For me, the highlight of Michio's seminars

cab driver to scientist. Finally, always keep your promises, so that they will trust you. In trusting you, they will love you. So, in showing your children you love them, you receive their love in return. In my judgmental fashion, I recalled many parents who discipline properly, but neglect to respect or lend validity to a child's dreams, and I pictured others who give rein to every want and whim of a child, never distinguishing between caprice and true dream. I thought, how nice for everyone to become real parents—to all us children.

A Time to Seek and a Time to Lose
"Find Your Own Way" was the motto for the cooking classes taught

A Time to Pull Down and a Time to Build Up

Shizuko Yamamoto, well known in this country for her teaching of shiatsu massage, conducted her afternoon classes outdoors, in a grassy field. I had already taken a few shiatsu classes with Shizuko in New York City but was happy to work on my technique; besides, by four in the afternoon, my spine needed some finger pressure. She explained the basis of proper treatment: it is done not to heal the person, but to stimulate his or her own innate healing power; therefore, never give without restraint, but work with the intention of energizing the receiver's ki. No one can heal anyone else—except perhaps, a mother her own child. The rest of us are simply channels for the forces of heaven and earth to meet the forces inside those whom we touch. Under

Shizuko's guidance, we exchanged full body massages as well as specific corrective manipulation. Some could be painful. While demonstrating one leg-twisting adjustment, Shizuko warned, "If you do it one time, it's treatment; twice, it's torture." We were prompted to develop sensitivity (knowing how little, how much pressure to apply; how few, how many times to adjust) and diagnose the receiver's condition through our own feet, hands, and spine—to use intuition rather than eyesight alone. And after all the demonstrating we were exhorted to invent our own techniques. Again, the notes and texts were to be trashed. We learned that we must teach ourselves.

A Time for War and a Time for Peace

Two special guests, actress Gloria Swanson and author William Dufty, arrived on the weekend to join Michio for lectures and a panel discussion. Miss Swanson, trim, elegant, and full of common sense in her seventy-seventh year, reminisced about her initiation to natural foods fifty years ago. She wondered, "If doctors cannot cure themselves, why let them try to cure us?" Her husband, Mr. Dufty, the author of *Sugar Blues* and *You Are All Sanpaku*, recounted stories of his days with Georges Ohsawa, "who came in a time when it was virtually unheard of for a missionary to come from the East to the West." Ohsawa's ideas—that (1) each person is personally responsible for his or her own health and happiness, and (2) the decline of the West is biological—were revolutionary then. Today, with the popularity of psychological training programs, the first proposition has become almost acceptable to the middle class; the second is still heresy. Ohsawa, a world traveler, claimed that in his lifetime he had never seen a totally healthy child—not that there wasn't one, just that he had never seen one. He wanted to change all that; so does Dufty. A politico, Dufty described America as biodegeneration coupled with majority rule, resulting in tyranny by the degenerates. From the news of

the nation, in the wake of Watergate then, it appeared Dufty was right on target. And, by the laws of the Universe, that state of total darkness before the dawn can only eventually turn into its opposite: embracing by the regenerates. It could be the struggle and prayer, for the Age of Aquarius, starting with our lifetimes. And in the meantime, there is the work on one's self, exemplified by Miss Swanson, who scorned all vestiges of dependency with "there is no such thing as an expert."

A Time to Scatter Stones and a Time to Gather Them

Interspersed throughout the ten days was a series of classes called Women's Circle Studies. They covered futon (Japanese mattress) making, cosmetics, macrobiotic childbirth, and child care. Miss Senda, a woman without offspring of her own, exhibited massage for children. She entertained herself each day by taking moving pictures of the babies crawling and the kiddies tromping about the grounds. One evening she showed us facial massage to enhance health and beauty. The clarity of the face, most significant in diagnosis, reflects the cleanliness of the blood. If cosmetics, which enter the bloodstream, are used, they should be from edible derivatives. This accent on beauty was a new note in macrobiotic studies. Miss Senda suggested that everyone take care in clothing and face in order to promote joy for others. Her contention was a breeze blowing through the two hotly opposed contemporary female positions of (1) Flamboyance: I use my appearance to attract, and (2) Planned Negligence: I refuse to attract by my appearance. When we dress ourselves, groom, and even color ourselves—as does the Universe with the changing of seasons, rising and setting of the sun—the issue is not attraction, but, rather, pleasure for those who can appreciate. My only objection to the discussion and to the Women's Circle Studies in general is that by implication they were for women—exclusively. I myself am pleased by beautiful—i.e., conscious—men. I also find value in a man knowing

how to make a futon, massage a child, prepare food, take care of a home. There were single as well as married fathers at Amherst, not to mention all the potential fathers. Perhaps such discussions might be labeled Domestic Arts and Skills. Why advance separatism? Polarity will not disintegrate if a man understands flower arranging. Electromagnetic charge will remain romantically mysterious without ignorance. From an ocean of variety, each may choose his or her specific stream of expression, according to his or her selective taste, governed by his or her own condition.

Underlining the exclusivity problem, the evening "Way of Life Discussions," led by members of the East West Foundation staff, were all chaired by men. Do they not have wives who could team up with them so that the leadership might be balanced? Are there no single women in the East West Foundation capable of stirring up thought or leading a meditation? It seemed so pat, so graphically compartmentalized: women in the home, men on the podium. Even if they attended, few women participated in the Way of Life Discussions; I myself walked out. I am a little weary of the chauvinist quip that "men run the society and the women run the men." In true macrobiotic practice, I think, no one runs anything or anybody.

A Time to Love and a Time to Hate

William Dufty said it: "As Americans, let us create our own way." All week long every teacher (most of them Japanese) exhorted, "Find your own way." The East West Foundation has adopted the Japanese way and the appearance of its leader, Michio Kushi, perhaps in hopes of capturing some of his charisma. That is okay, but it is not macrobiotics; macrobiotics is the expression of freedom through change within the tradition known as the Order of the Universe. Although macrobiotics may make practical use of anything in history, it is not glued to a religious, political, or cultural system. It is to their creative advantage that the tendency for development of both the Japanese

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and American cultures has been amalgamated. The East has stressed spirit and stillness (yin); the West has stressed matter and movement (yang). Now is the moment of union. Japan is older and probably wiser; America is younger and probably more vital. But may not Japan sometimes be rigid from age and America sometimes gullible from youth? To superimpose through concept is superficial; to assimilate through experience is deep.

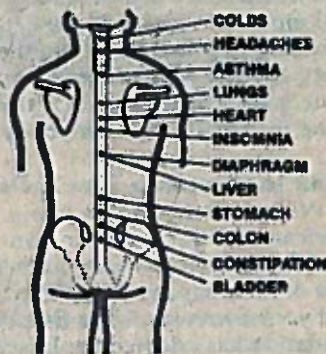
A Time to Keep and a Time to Throw Away

The East West Foundation brought us ten stirring days. We partook of fine food, two smashing parties, a sculpture exhibit, slide shows and films, a performance of Japanese drummers, as well as all the classes. After ten days we were unified, but individuals. That is the law: From the one comes the ten thousand. Find your own way. *Non credo*—"I don't believe."

If it attracts you, go to Amherst, but don't believe anything. You may become as changed as the man who telephoned his wife midweek to request she throw out all the cheese in the refrigerator, or the middle-aged woman with jowls hard and swollen from years of sparse talk and no laughter, who rose in a circle of strangers, opened her arms, and sang. Whatever the change, something will be found and something lost. Everything will balance through change. □

For information on the Amherst program, which will take place from August 13-21, contact the East West Foundation, 359 Boylston St., Boston, Mass. 02116, (617) 536-3360.

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