

## Iqbal and the Process of Personal Transformation and Spiritual Ascension in the Modern Era

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### Abstract

Contemporary belief in God and materialism has resulted in the disregard of spiritual needs, alienating humanity from its genuine mission as God's vicegerent. This has led to environmental deterioration, psychological health problems, and social discord. Allama Muhammad Iqbal's thought, profoundly grounded in Islamic doctrine, underscores the significance of spirituality and self-awareness for individual and societal metamorphosis. This study seeks to examine Iqbal's philosophical perspectives on the ego (*Khudi*) and its connections with God, society, and the universe. It also explores how Iqbal's notion of selfhood influence an individual's societal function and relationship with God? Furthermore, it investigates how personal accountability, as promoted by Iqbal, can enhance societal welfare? A qualitative method is utilized to analyze Iqbal's poetry and philosophical treatises on *Khudi*. The research synthesizes insights from literature regarding Iqbal's teachings and evaluates his impact on modern interpretations of religion and identity. Iqbal's philosophy emphasizes the divine foundation of the ego and its capacity for spiritual advancement through self-cultivation and active participation in society and nature. His critique of Eastern and Western ideas emphasizes the necessity of a balanced existence, harmonizing material, and spiritual endeavors. Iqbal's notion of *Khudi* advocates for individuals to recognize their potential as ambassadors of God, promoting moral and spiritual development. Iqbal's teachings provide a significant foundation for addressing the challenges of contemporary life, highlighting the significance of spirituality and self-awareness. His ideology promotes a harmonious equilibrium between the physical and spiritual realms, directing individuals toward personal and communal advancement. By re-establishing their spiritual foundations, individuals can attain an elevated state of realization and foster a more equitable and peaceful world.

**Keywords:** Allama Iqbal, ego, *Khudi*, individuality, philosophy, spirituality

The global secularization of the human intellect has undermined the authentic significance of life and the fundamental truth of contemporary human existence. Human beings have come into conflict with God's nature and the rest of humanity due to their lack of awareness of their true role as God's vicegerent and their position in the hierarchy of God's creations. Additionally, the absence of God in their lives has isolated them from establishing a harmonious relationship with themselves, nature, and others. As a result, they have reached the point of causing environmental devastation, engaging in endless conflict, and contributing to global discord (Ali, 1988).

This study examines Iqbal's philosophical notions regarding the ego and its complex relationship with the world, as illustrated by his concept of the ego in response to humanity's dire circumstances. To introduce the primary focus of this research, the following context is

provided: the Eastern and Western scenarios that compelled Iqbal to develop his philosophy of the ego. It is anticipated that by delving into his concepts regarding the ego's existence, we will be able to gain a better understanding of the ways in which contemporary individuals can derive meaning from their lives and bolster their spirituality (Iqbal, Iqbāl, & Qarshi, 2006).

### Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of Iqbal's concept of *Khudi* and its implications for personal transformation and spiritual ascension in the modern era. A textual analysis of Iqbal's poetry is conducted, with a primary focus on *Asrar-e-Khudi* (The Secrets of the Self) (Iqbal, 1944) and *Ramuz-e-Bekhudi* (The Mysteries of Selflessness) (Iqbal, 1953), as these works provide critical insights into his philosophical perspectives on selfhood, peace, cooperation, and interfaith harmony. Additionally, *Javid Nama* (Iqbal, 2011) is examined to explore Iqbal's views on self-actualization and the journey of spiritual enlightenment. Since the original language of these works is Persian and the researcher does not possess proficiency in Persian, translations of these texts have been used for analysis.

To establish a broader intellectual framework, this study incorporates a systematic literature review of global scholarly works on Iqbal's philosophy, analyzing how his ideas have influenced modern discourse on selfhood and religious identity. Furthermore, relevant academic papers and studies have been reviewed to assess Iqbal's impact on contemporary perspectives related to spirituality, self-development, and human agency.

By synthesizing textual analysis and existing academic discourse, this research aims to present a comprehensive interpretation of Iqbal's philosophical legacy in the context of modern challenges and human development.

### Objectives

1. To examine how Iqbal's concept of "*Khudi*" (selfhood) fosters individual growth that benefits society as a whole.
2. To explore Iqbal's views on the importance of self-awareness and spirituality as foundations of national and social progress.
3. To analyze Iqbal's philosophy in light of contemporary problems such as materialism and secularism, with a focus on the relationship between personal moral obligation and social progress.

### Research Questions

1. How does Iqbal's idea of *Khudi* (selfhood) impact an individual's place in society and their relationship with God?
2. How can Iqbal's belief in personal accountability contribute to national progress?

## Implications

This study has major implications for Iqbal's worldview in both personal and societal contexts. It underscores that addressing contemporary issues of existence necessitates human transformation via self-awareness and spirituality. By highlighting the concept of "*Khudi*," or ego, Iqbal's teachings enable individuals to see their divine potential and engage in moral and intellectual advancement. This influences societal advancement since self-actualized individuals contribute to overall well-being. Moreover, Iqbal's critique of secularism and materialism offers a framework for balancing spiritual and economic objectives. He posits that societal strife and environmental degradation stem from a deficiency in spiritual connectedness. Integrating his teachings will therefore foster ethical leadership, community cohesion, and sustainable development. Ultimately, his theories guide contemporary discourse on identity and purpose through solutions to psychological and ethical dilemmas, facilitated by the reconnection of individuals with their spiritual roots and communal responsibilities.

## The Muslim world at the time of Iqbal

In terms of technology, science, and education, the Muslim world was so far behind the West. Razak (2013) expressed that when Iqbal came onto the intellectual scene, things were not looking good for the Muslim world. Several factors have contributed to the situation, including *Wahdah al-wujud's* precept, the masses' tendency towards conservatism and pessimistic thinking, and the colonization of the East by the West, influence in the Muslim world, especially in undivided India. Iqbal was challenged by this situation as a scholar and advocated for reform in response to the deplorable state of affairs in the Muslim world. Therefore, he developed his ego philosophy to solve the most pressing issues that Muslims were facing at the time (Razak, 2013). Iqbal observed that the Western world produced numerous scientists who utilized science and technology to elucidate the enigmas of nature and develop innovative conceptions. The West may have astonished the world with its innovations and discoveries. (Ali, 1988). However, in Iqbal's view, it failed to resolve the most vexing problems about human life. For example, basic concepts like "What is a man like?" or "How should he fit in with God's other creations?" scholars and scientists failed to present satisfactory explanations. On top of that, Iqbal saw firsthand how the West's infatuation with power and hunger for material prosperity drove its people. At that time through his poetry, Iqbal bemoans the fact that modern life has become so mechanistic for the people, especially in the West (Munawwar, 1985). They do not comprehend its fundamental significance and intent. In his perspective, such phenomena do not substantiate the notion that humanity was created for a specific purpose. While he aligned with the West's dedication to scientific exploration, he contested its secular perspective. He posited that even when Western civilization attains technological dominance, individuals do not experience inner harmony or tranquilly in their lives (Elahi, 1986).

As a critical thinker, Iqbal evaluated the situation fairly and expressed his impartial critiques of both the East and the West. He challenged the misconceptions commonly held by Eastern populations about their worldview while simultaneously addressing the deficiencies of the West. Individuals in the East, especially Muslims, were trapped in a cycle of pseudo-mysticism, which contrasted sharply with the circumstances in the West. At the same time, they

failed to assume an active role in the divinely ordained growth of the world. Iqbal analyzed the situation, characterizing their outlook on life as follows:

Rather than bringing back the forces of ordinary man's inner life and thus equipping him to participate in the progression of the past, it has instilled a deceptive sense of abandonment and rendered him entirely complacent in his apathy and spiritual subjugation (Iqbal, 1930).

### **Iqbal's Ideas on the Human Ego**

In assessing the complexities and necessities of his era, Iqbal presented a compelling theory regarding the evolution of individuals. His perspectives on the ego are fundamental to his conceptualization of personality concerning spirituality. It is important to acknowledge that many individuals who identify as "*Iqbalians*" have engaged deeply with Iqbal and his philosophical exploration of the ego over an extended period. The concept of the individual's ego has been a subject of contemplation for numerous thinkers from both Western and Eastern traditions (Iqbal, 1978). Egoism has been discussed in writings by contemporary Western philosophers through the use of various vocabulary and jargon. The founding father of contemporary Western philosophy, René Descartes (1596–1651), wrote extensively about the nature of man's depths of space some millennia before Iqbal. Following that, Spinoza (1632–1677) offered his take on this immaterial aspect of the individual as the "*Conatus Preservandi*"; while, Schiller (1759–1805) favored as the "*Karl Moor*," "*Ich*" (the will to life) according to Fichte (1762–1814), and "*Genus*" (the will to live) is named by Schopenhauer (1788–1860). Nietzsche (1844–1900) called it the "Hero," whereas Carlyle (1795–1881) called it the "Hero." The 'Will to power' was the term used by this contentious philosopher, while the French philosopher Bergson (1859-1941) used the term 'Elan Vital' to describe its innovative vitality (Bilgrami, 1966).

"*Khudi*" was the name that Muslim philosopher Iqbal gave to his take on ego philosophy. When compared to the ideas put out by Western academics, his view of the ego is more religious and filled with all the human qualities lauded in the Qur'an. Iqbal enlightened the world about the ego's existence and function via his notion of its place of birth, its latent capabilities, the difficulties it faces from the outside world, and how it reaches its ultimate destination after enduring this ordinary existence. The philosophical and theological notion of individuality put forward by the Iqbal strategy elucidates how one's relationship with God initiates the ego's existence (Ashraf, 1983). To develop a robust character, the ego must contend with the obstacles of the wild. Therefore, one should not try to avoid dealing with the difficulties that exist in the actual world. Iqbal clarified that being alone and avoiding outside influences can reduce the power of one's pride. This action will subsequently hinder the person from achieving a compelling character. According to Iqbal, the natural world shouldn't be perceived as an impediment to one's development. He believed that we should perceive man's frailty and the environment that hinders him as circumstances that are vital for the maturation and progress of man's ego by developing his dormant abilities (Iqbal, 1930)

An entirely new phase of Iqbal's artistic career began with *The Secrets of the Self*, which was initially published in 1915. It is associated with the poet's pivotal moment after returning

from Europe when his position began to shift. All of Iqbal's later writings expanded upon and developed this core notion, which is included in the poem and his imaginative philosophy of the self. Researching what Iqbal had to say about the poem is crucial before offering an analysis of it. (Ali, 1988).

By centering on the singular "I," Iqbal moves the emphasis from the divine to the human. The road to self-awareness leads to communion with the Absolute, as he states in the introduction to Nicholson's translation of *The Secrets of the Self*, and this introspective view of his life opens the door to the meaning-laden landscapes: (Nicholson, 2018)

The man remains an individual in every respect; he is physically and spiritually independent. He loses his unique identity as he grows farther from God. A whole person is he or she who draws near to God. That he has finally found God is also not true. The exact opposite is true: he becomes God. (Nicholson, 2018)

*The Secrets of the Self* is a depiction of the boundless possibilities of the human spirit by Iqbal. In order to do that, he lays up a hierarchical framework. "He has painted a clear picture of what a human life entails, its driving force, ideal trajectory, ultimate purpose, and means of attainment in the poem." (Ali, 1988). Iqbal's conception of personality is that man is God's finest creation and must incorporate many of the qualities listed in the *Asm AlHusna* (the Beautiful Names of Allah) into his character. Man is capable of becoming a unique person through this assimilation process. One possible outcome of this merging of human and divine characteristics has firmly established his character (Uthman EI-Muhammady, 2002). Iqbal thinks such kind of person has set himself up for eternal glory. He claims that when a person takes on God's characteristics, it makes his soul ready for eternal life after death. Iqbal goes on to say that his theory emphasized that a person's ego does not have any inherent divine power to remain eternal accurate for him. Accordingly, to reach the immortality of the ultimate, accomplishing anything that needs doing in this life on Earth requires a lot of hard labor. They are seen as activities that support one's ego, while simultaneously necessitating escape from any actions that crush one's pride. One more intriguing detail mentioned by According to Iqbal's theory of persona is, that man grows spiritually nearer to God when he absorbs God's Divine qualities. The more he draws near to God, the more powerful his character. Instead, it's the case that the farther one gets his character deteriorates as he grows apart from God. When it comes to developing a decent character and personality, a man's relationship with God is essential, but he must also prioritize his relationship with society. When it comes to keeping a positive rapport with the community, active participation in all communal activities is required (Siddiqi, 1970). Employing his assimilation of all the positive cultural practices through participation in society's principles and its historical legacy. He wants to stress the significance of the connection between people and their communities. Iqbal emphasized that the individual and society will gain from one another in this mutually beneficial partnership. The person is real, and they experience a sense of community as a result of one's membership in the society, and as a result of one's membership in the society, one's contributions ensure the survival of the society (Saiyidain, 1977). Here are a few lines from his poetry that emphasize how crucial it is for individuals to be part of a cohesive community in "The Secrets of Selflessness" (*Rumuz-e-Bekhudi*), (Arberry, 1953).

The Individual exists in relation to the community.  
 Alone, he is nothing!  
 The wave exists in the river,  
 Outside the river, it is nothing!  
 When a word is taken out of its verse,  
 It causes the sense to be lost.  
 The green leaf that falls from the branch  
 Loses all hopes of enjoying the spring.  
 He, who does not drink from the fountain of society,  
 Will find that the fire of his melodies dies out in him (p. 31-32)

### **Humans with Their Natural Context**

The interdependence of humans and their natural surroundings is a prominent theme in Iqbal's work. Man and his physical surroundings, he said, are inseparable. In this dynamic, man and his natural surroundings fight for dominance. From time to time, they may pierce man's pride and undermine him, while simultaneously on occasion, the ego could triumph over the surroundings and fortify its position. Iqbal stated in defining the ego's conflict with its environment and the proper role of the ego:

As a result of both internal and external influences, ego existence is fraught with conflict. This realm of mutual invasion is not a place for the ego. It is shaped and trained by its own experiences; it is a direct energy within it. (Iqbal, 1996, p. 82)

In Iqbal's view, the demand to master the material world does not imply that humanity should act like tyrants and carelessly loot the treasures buried beneath the surface of the planet. His true feelings. What is intended is that, as created in God's image, man ought to act justly and have a structured approach to dealing with the physical world to draw spiritually close to God. He must be careful not to let his senses lead him astray when he sees the riches in the material realm, humanity must rely on their inner spiritual aspect for direction. To act fairly and impartially. Under the watchful eye of based on these principles, humanity will make use of the world's resources and distribute them so that they can be shared with other people (Shafiqie, K. A., 2014). The precise quotations of Iqbal about this issue are:

Recognizing man's connectedness to nature and the potential for harnessing her forces is the essence of naturalism in the Qur'an. However, this relationship should not be exploited for selfish ends. Immoral ambition for dominance, but for the betterment of free personal growth in a spiritual sense. Complementing sensory perception with what the Qur'an calls "Fuad" or "Another Reality" is necessary for a full understanding of the world as in "heart" (*qalb*). (Saiyidain, 1977, p. 91).

Iqbal is of the view that, the Ultimate Self reveals the 'I-amness' via nature, just as he does through humans. He used the analogy of human character to describe how nature is to the Ultimate Self. If we don't consider nature to be God's creative activity, then we can call it the habit of God. Therefore, there is a great deal of tension in the current condition of man's interaction with his environment. As he continues to elaborate on his man about his natural surroundings, Iqbal makes the point that man must conquer the requirements of one's



surroundings to develop a robust character. On the other hand, when the environment triumphs over the human ego, man's personality will suffer (Ali, 1988). With clarity, Iqbal described the struggle between human nature and the natural world in his collection of poetry called the *Rumuz e Bekhudi (The Secrets of Selflessness)* (Iqbal, 1975, p. 60):

Whoever conquers the world of matter  
Can build a world out of a speck of dust!  
The hills and the deserts, the rivers, the plains  
They are all means of education for those with a vision!  
You, who have been put to sleep under opium's narcotics;  
Regard this world of cause and effect as contemptible!  
Its real purpose is the expansion of the Muslim's personality  
And a testing of his hidden possibilities!  
Conquer it, or it may conquer you  
And hold you as the flagon holds the wine!  
So that through the control of all its forces  
Your manifold capacities may attain perfection!  
So that man becomes the vicegerent of God,  
Laying down the law for all the elements!  
Dip your hands in the blood of the mountains,  
Extract the bright pearls from the bosom of the sea!  
Take from the Sun its bright luster,  
And from the flood the lightning that illumines the palace!  
Press intelligent into the services of your quest;  
And conquer the world of the matter and the spirit!  
He who controls the world of matter,  
Can make lightning and heat into his chariot.

In pursuit of the spiritual goal of developing one's own identity, Iqbal places the physical world in a position of fundamental importance. In Iqbal's view, there are three tiers to the development of one's sense of self: (Nurudin, 1978).

- a. identity and "I am" (intrapersonal)
- b. interpersonal relationships between oneself and others
- c. God and one's self (transpersonal)

Iqbal has done an excellent job of describing these tiers in *Javed Nama*, an extract from his *magnum opus*, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Arberry, 1966, p 57):

Art thou in the stage of "life", "death" or "death-in-life",  
Invoke the aid of three witnesses to verify thy station,  
The first witness is thine own consciousness—  
--see thyself, then with thine own light  
The second witness is the consciousness of another ego---  
See thyself, then with the light of an ego other than thee,  
See thyself then with God's light---

If thou standest unshaken in front of this light,  
 Consider thyself as living and eternal as He!  
 That man only is real who dares---  
 Dares to see God face the face---  
 No one can stand unshaken in His presence;  
 And he who can, verily, he is pure gold,  
 Art thou a mere particle of dust?  
 Tighten the knot of thy ego;---  
 Rechisel then, thine ancient frame;  
 And build up a new being.  
 Such being is real being;  
 Or else thy ego is mere ring of smokes

According to Iqbal's theory of personality, a person's character develops as a result of their connections to their spirituality, their surroundings, and their community. Additionally, his idea clarifies that an individual's personality encompasses more than just their external behavior (Bilgrami, 1966). Similar to the Muslim intellectuals of antiquity, Iqbal posited that human personality and behavior are fundamentally generated within the human psyche. Character emerges as the mental state of an individual that is ultimately manifested in behavior. Iqbal does not classify people according to their personalities in his theory. Divide one's mind into competing parts, much as what has been conveyed by Freud's id, ego, and superego (Freud, et. al, 1989). The soul-substance of a human being is more often referred to by Iqbal as the Self or the Ego. "*Khudi*" is a Persian word that he utilizes in his concept of the Self. There are dimension sides to the ego, as Iqbal elucidated in his '*Khudi*' philosophy. One component, the source, or the Creator. Iqbal analyzed the situation, characterizing their outlook on life as follows: "Rather than bringing back the forces of ordinary man's inner life and thus equipping him to participate in the progression of the past, it has instilled a deceptive sense of abandonment and rendered him entirely complacent in his apathy and spiritual subjugation". A wall is woven by the "efficient ego" to separate itself from the "appreciative self" as it is occupied with the outside world. No matter how preoccupied one is with worldly concerns, prayer, and meditation will help to bring the "efficient ego" back to its original state and its connection with God (Iqbal, 1930).

He distinguished between two types of egos: **one** that interacts with the outside world and is dealt with efficiently; and **the other**, the "*appreciative ego*," which maintains a connection to its source, the Creator. According to Iqbal, the 'efficient ego' is reminded of the "*appreciative ego*" of its life's mission. In its preoccupation with the outside world, the "*efficient ego*" constructs a wall to keep the "*appreciative self*" from seeing through. No matter how preoccupied one is with worldly concerns, prayer, and meditation will help to bring the "*efficient ego*" back to its roots and its connection with God (Iqbal, 1930) (Freud, et. al, 1989).

Furthermore, Iqbal elaborates on the continuous reminder of the ego of its origin and its connection to the Almighty during the five daily prayers and other petitions, whether done individually or collectively. Therefore, prayer in Islam somewhat represents the situation where an individual's ego reports its actions and its God-centered life to the Ultimate Ego while



dealing with material affairs globally. The precise words of Iqbal regarding the effect of prayer on the ego's existence consist of (Iqbal, Iqbāl, & Qarshi, 2006). Iqbal's point of view about, the source of vitality for every living being is their ego. Not only does the ego provide him with life, but it also defines his preferences. In humans, the ego is responsible for making decisions and passing judgments. A man's "will attitude" or "mental attitude" is also created by this creature. Action, wishful thinking, and desire are crucial to the ego's survival. Without these components, an individual's ego is lifeless. A person's personality revolves around their ego. To sum up, the ego is where it's at when it comes to human endeavors (Saiyidain, 1977).

### **Principles of spirituality:**

Iqbal defines and outlines three principles of spirituality that help us to emerge in the modern era also they are:

**The first principle is**, that the ego was born at a certain specified time and has a specific location of origin. Only by divine decree did the spatio-temporal order give rise to the ego (Iqbal, 1930). It was nonexistent in this realm of terrestrial existence before that. (Freud, et. al, 1989). An example of a verse in *Surah al-Isra'* that makes it apparent that the ego is something God created and that He gave it life through His instruction is this one: "They ask you concerning the spirit. Say: 'The spirit is of my Lord's command. Little indeed is the knowledge granted to you'." (Al-Qur'an, 17:85)

**The second principle is**, that the ego will only ever experience this physical existence once and will never again be subject to the laws of space and time (Iqbal, 1930). The Islamic concept that each person is born into this world once is consistent with this interpretation of the human soul by Iqbal. Unlike Hinduism and Buddhism, which teach that the soul may reincarnate multiple times until reaching Nirvana, Islam, and Muslims reject this concept (Freud, et. al, 1989). Referring to numerous verses of the Qur'an on the ego's existence proves this to be accurate. You can find one such reference below:

Until when death comes to one of them from among the disbelievers, he will say: "O Lord, let me go back (to life again in the world) so that I may work righteousness in the things that I neglected. "Never! It is only a word that speaks out. Behind them, there shall be a barrier till the day they are raised up (on the Day of Judgment)". (Al-Qur'an, 23:99-100)

Iqbal outlined **the third and final principle**, which states that when the finite ego is raised from the dead on the Day of Judgment, it will stand before God as a unique and irreplaceable person and be shown the results of its work here on earth (Iqbal, 1930). After being evaluated for its past deeds, the ego is in a condition of either reward or punishment. The ego's next step in its development will be determined by the verdict (Freud, et. al, 1989). To back up his claim, Iqbal cited the following passages from the *Qur'an*:

There is none in the heavens and on the earth but shall come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a servant. Certainly, Allah has kept a strict count of all (with His absolute knowledge) and numbered them all exactly in detail. And each one of them will come to Him on the Day of Judgment, alone (Al-Qur'an, 19: 93-95).

## Conclusion

Deeply ingrained in spirituality and the idea of ego ("*Khudi*"), Iqbal's philosophy offers a strong foundation for people negotiating a society going more and more materialistic. He contends that the ego is a divine trust that has to be developed by employing self-discipline, spiritual elevation, and meaningful interaction with the environment and society—not a tool of selfishness. Deeply exploring human nature and spirituality, he created a novel philosophy of personality that enthralled the East as well as the West. Unlike Western philosophical traditions, which sometimes see the ego in isolation or as a weapon for self-assertion, Iqbal offers a dynamic and whole picture of the self that combines personal ambition with greater moral and spiritual objectives. His philosophy inspires people to realize their divine potential and actively help to improve the earth, therefore elevating human beings to a great degree of accountability. In a time of materialism and secularism, Iqbal's lessons act as a call to arms for bringing the physical and spiritual spheres into line. Inspired by both the mastery of the material world and the development of an enlightened spirit, his idea of *Khudi* urges people to achieve their potential as vicegerents of God. Advocating instead for a life guided by higher ethical and spiritual values, he issues a warning against the extremes of total detachment from earthly problems and mindless pursuit of monetary prosperity. Iqbal's vision is one of self-awakening, pushing people to release the psychological and social restraints limiting their actual ability. Rooted in prayer, self-reflection, and moral action, his ego philosophy is not one of conceit but rather of transcendence an unrelenting trip toward a higher awareness. According to him, the ego comes from God and it is our holy responsibility to grow and raise it. Personal and group true fulfillment results from people establishing a strong relationship with the Divine, in line with nature, and actively helping society grow. Only by pursuing activities that feed the ego and the spirit while avoiding self-destructive impulses can mankind reach actual oneness, harmony, and long-lasting wealth. According to Iqbal's vision, this is the road to a society in which people and countries both realize their full potential, therefore guaranteeing a future shaped by knowledge, might, and spiritual enlightenment.

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