Creative Realization Techniques
Saphira Linden

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Using Psychodramatic Methods in Non-Therapeutic Settings
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Techniques

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In this chapter, the application of action simulations and practices in Psychodrama and Drama Therapy are discussed in relation to various populations and goals. First, the process of conducting a spiritual retreat for self-realization is presented. Next, theater games programs with special needs students in the Boston schools are described. Out of that work, a participatory musical theater experience was created for the same population. Our theater company also worked with theater programs addressing racial unrest by bringing together high school adolescents from Boston and its suburbs and enacting their issues about ancestral immigration. Next, examples of using creative self-realization methods with executives and managers to resolve conflict in their organizations are discussed. Finally, the process of creating theatrical pageants to generate unity consciousness and encourage tolerance between religions, ethnicities, races and cultures using Drama Therapy and Psychodrama techniques is presented.

All of these programs are informed by a transpersonal or spiritual perspective that centers on seeing the strength rather than the pathology of a person, family, organization, or community. Our goal is to shift all whom we work with, including our theater casts, from their limited, conditioned sense of self to who they really are in their essential self. The core principles that have guided this work can be found below.

I2 Principles of Transpersonal Drama Therapy and Psychodrama

1. Assuming Health Rather Than Pathology
2. Shifting One’s Identity from a Limited Sense of Self to the Essential Self
3. Embodying/Roleplaying the Therapeutic Issues
4. Making the Unconscious Conscious through Symbolic/Metaphorical Approaches
5. Working with Archetypes
6. Embracing Love While Holding All Emotions as Sacred
7. Creating a Sacred Space
8. Fostering an Experience of Interconnectedness and Unity
9. Seeking Mastery Through Self-Discipline
10. Achieving Balance
11. Identifying and Achieving Our Life Purpose
12. Creating Life as a Work of Art

Guided Alchemical Meditation Retreat
For thousands of years, spiritual seekers have engaged in retreats using a variety of meditation practices. They have often lived in seclusion, doing self-realization practices handed down by their teachers. Some traditional eastern retreats involve sitting on a mountain top, or in a cave or hut, for 40 days, repeating a mantra thousands of times each day, while eating very little or fasting. The retreat discussed here uses practices from various meditative traditions that have been adapted to western culture. Most often retreatants leave their ordinary lives for a period to go deeply within and do meditation practices offered by the retreat guide. The goal is to concentrate on one’s inner life and experience realizations that enhance one’s life in the world. We present here an example of a retreat that integrates traditional meditation practices using breath, sound and light, methods drawn from Psychodrama and Drama Therapy, dream work, music, journaling and drawing. The retreatant involved was a woman who was confronted with a variety of serious emotional and physical life challenges at that time.

Integrating Transformational Embodied Arts into Spiritual Retreat
In the early ‘70s, I studied Psychodrama with its founders, JL and Zerka Moreno, and learned Sufi meditation practices with Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, head of Sufi Order International. All three teachers created forms and practices for students to work with, while at the same time they often broke their own rules, working intuitively and spontaneously. They gave me permission to experiment, explore as a theater artist, and work intuitively and spontaneously with all of the methods I was studying. I was also trained to work with dreams by Jungian analysts for many years. I was inspired to integrate all of these disciplines in working with clients, seekers, retreat guides, clergy, and therapists in training, as well
as students, executives, and theater artists. I have been honored to facilitate numerous retreats and trainings based on these multi-faceted transformational processes.

The Sufi alchemical retreat process was developed by Pir Vilayat based on principles from the ancient alchemists. The first three stages include Hindu and Buddhist practices to take people into a state of unity consciousness. The next three stages, based on the practices of western religious traditions, bring retreatants back into their everyday lives with new perspectives.

During an alchemical meditation retreat that I took in the Alps, I had a dream that revealed some challenging relationship issues and psychological patterns that needed to be dealt with. This pivotal learning experience motivated me to begin to integrate psychological depth work with classical meditation practices when guiding people on retreats.

The following is part of an exchange between the author as retreat guide and the retreatant, both during the retreat and also in reflecting on it after its conclusion. This account includes some of the practices that I offered during the 28-day Sufi alchemical meditation retreat, and their results.

It is my feeling that every retreat guide, like every therapist, brings to their work what they know how to do best and what they are guided to do in the moment. Based on my initial interview, in which the retreatant described bouts of depression, panic attacks, and marital disruption, I felt that the best approach would be to help her go into a deep exploration via an integration of meditation practices, dream work, and adapted creative arts modalities to work on the root causes of these conditions.

I asked the retreatant what her hope was for the retreat.

Retreatant (R): I felt like my whole life was a mess. My goal was to find out what it was in myself that was creating all this pain. I sensed the way to get through this was to get away from everything and sink into the retreat process and let it do what it was going to do because I was completely overwhelmed.

Retreat Guide (RG): “Let us call on the guidance of the ancient goddesses, as well as the masters, saints and prophets of the great religions, so that the feminine will come into the healing process as well.” The retreatant was also directed to enter the consciousness of a spiritual guide with whom she felt closely attuned. Thus we created the sacred container for the retreat process.
I suggested that she try to remember one or two dreams every night. She told me that she has rarely remembered any dreams, but she would try. Interestingly, every single night she remembered one or two dreams. I found that helpful because the dream images often referred to some part of herself that was asking to be heard and revealed what was going on in her psyche. Dreams also give clues about pacing and about what she was actually ready to address. The dreams became a guiding light as I integrated the meditative retreat practices with the processing of the dreams—using writing, drawing and other creative arts to get at what the dreams revealed. The retreatant’s inner guide and life challenges emerged at this time. As the dreams and the other practices continued, powerful healing and transformation occurred. It was quite wonderful to have the dreams guide us on how to best work in the context of the sacred vessel of the retreat.

**Integrating Psychodrama’s Role Reversal Practice into the Retreat**

The retreatant was guided to explore the dream images through the “active imagination” process of Carl Jung. In this process, the dreamer has a dialogue with the images, and we then added the Psychodrama and Drama Therapy techniques of enactment and role reversal to see what would emerge by embodying those images, thereby revealing more inner material.

**R:** What amazed me during this process was that I learned there is no such thing as a nonsense dream. Left to my own devices, I never would have figured out the significance of these dream images. But you encouraged me to dig through the symbolism and find what my unconscious was really telling me. Every dream turned out to be pretty profound, even the ones that seemed trivial on the surface.

I encouraged the retreatant to share her earlier family challenges: “Why don’t you say a little bit about what you were dealing with in your family system from early on?”

**R:** My father was an untreated raging alcoholic. He was extremely violent. While I did not get the brunt of his anger directly, I witnessed a lot of it with regular beatings of my mother and my brother. We had to lock our doors on a nightly basis to get away from him and his violence. One night, when I was nine, he pounded down a solid oak door with his fists in order to gain access to my room. I experienced an emotional white out. I was actually too frightened to feel fear. And certainly, underneath the fear is anger and a sense of invasion. I remembered exactly what happened, but I just didn’t feel anything about it
at all. Intellectually, I knew this dissociation was at the root of the depression and the panic attacks and the somatization I was experiencing. I was also diagnosed with multiple sclerosis earlier, and while it has been fairly benign in my particular case, there were still issues I had to deal with as well. So that’s the background that I came to you to help me heal.

One of the exercises that you gave me was to draw my father, but to draw him abstractly, energetically, to uncover different feelings about him. That was relatively easy, but writing about him was harder. Writing about his good qualities turned out to be a very short list. Then came the button-pushing qualities; this was a very long list, but it felt good to make it. Then I had to own as a part of myself both these good and evil qualities, a process of learning to embrace my own shadow. I had to embrace it and transform it by consciously exploring his personality traits inside of me, feeling more empowered to dis-identify with his rage and its effect on me and move ahead in my own life. This was not a comfortable exercise, but the benefits have been immeasurable. A lot of energy goes into unconsciously holding something we dread at bay. This exercise freed up that energy to be used for other more productive purposes.

As Marion Woodman, the extraordinary Jungian analyst, said, “It is important to deal with the rotten foundations so that the jewel that is hidden underneath all that debris can truly manifest.” That’s the jewel of our essential self, our soul qualities, that cannot be tarnished. Emphasizing this source of strength helps people to change their identity from their limited, abused sense of self to who they really are. Like with our retreatant, when this doesn’t happen, it can hinder a person from being successful in her life, in work and in relationships.

The retreatant faced many obstacles that made it difficult to live in balance. Different arts exercises were given, supported by ancient breathing and sound practices, while sitting and walking, to help balance her energy. Sacred music and movement helped inspire meaningful realizations to come forth during the retreat. Poetry writing helped to concretize the retreatant’s experience, while allowing unconscious material to surface. These practices allowed us to clear through issues and discover and explore the multi-faceted dimensions of her essential self. As the retreatant was aware and motivated to work on herself as part of the retreat process, she had several authentic self-realizations.1

Role reversal was also used in the following practice:

1 Linden, 2013
The Ideal Mentor and Nemesis Meditation and Simulation

The retreatant was directed through a meditative visualization process to enter the consciousness of an ideal mentor. This being may have qualities of the spiritual guide she had chosen earlier, but she was asked to approach this exercise freshly, and to visualize no one who she actually knew. To think about what that ideal mentor might say to her is a good exercise. But to actually enter into the body, heart, soul, and consciousness of that being can be much more profound. I encouraged the retreatant to draw the image she received in meditation, concretely or abstractly, to list the qualities of this ideal mentor, and then to embody this mentor and “role reverse” with that being and offer guidance to herself in the role of her mentor. This approach helped her to get in touch with her own wisdom self and view her challenging issues with a broader perspective.

The second part of the practice was to visualize her nemesis. Again, this is no one that she knows. She was invited to draw the image of that being from the meditation either concretely or abstractly. Again, she was instructed to list and draw the personality traits of this nemesis, and to embody this being as well, as a way of holding both the ideal and the shadow aspects. Then the retreatant had a dialogue between them. This helped the retreatant to own her source of strength, including the less apparent positive power she developed in response to her father’s abuse of power.

R: Prior to the retreat I was feeling really stuck creatively. The energy was flat and colorless, just like my feelings about what had happened in my past. But I found a single practice in the last days of the retreat to be the climax of a very long process. That experience broke the dam and opened my creativity. It was on the 26th day. I was repeating a powerful sound practice with movements attached to it, and my mind was flip-flopping all over the place. Unexpectedly, I felt an energy around me and a voice said, “Try to stay with it.” So I went deeper and deeper into the sound and movement, and I began having this image that was like a dream only I was very awake. I walked into a cave with a man by my side. I saw a two-year-old baby who was chained to the wall of the cave. The cave was very dark and enclosed. He unchained the baby and brought her out into the light. She wasn’t crying. She was emaciated and very close to death. And he just held her. It was at that point I started to cry and cry. That baby he was holding was me.

The man walked back into the cave and I followed him. He held up a lantern and I could see children of all different ages chained to the walls of this cave. It occurred to me that every
time my mother was beaten or there was a traumatic event in my house another child was chained to the wall of the cave. They all started calling to me and crying and saying, “Feed me! Love me! Take care of me!” I turned to the man and asked, “How am I supposed to do this? There are so many of them! Where do I even start?” The man answered, “Write about them. Write about every single one. It’s time you gave each child her voice.”

It was through that process that I began to feel all of the feelings that were too overwhelming to feel when I was a child. I had spent twenty years taking retreats and had been through years of psychotherapy, and all that was to get to exactly this place. As of this writing, after exploring and reconciling who each of these traumatized children were inside of me, my marriage is now on solid ground. I’m falling in love with my husband all over again. I’m taking flying lessons and he’s my flight instructor. The panic attacks are history. The depression is gone, and I feel much more integrated and whole and more of who I am than I ever was before.

**RG:** In this retreat model, the key is being able to get to what’s below the surface consciously through engaging the practices that are designed to lead toward self-realization: meditation, breathing methods that help balance energy, intoning phrases selected by the retreat guide to mirror and manifest particular qualities in the retreatant, and practices with light that connect the retreatant with her inner light. These practices catalyze images and memories to arise and, combined with other creative modalities to generate movement in the psyche, help to surface hidden elements of the psyche.

Working with the self is a life-long work. Retreats can be a wonderful vehicle for going inward deeply and integrating new insights and life lessons. Through this process, we can become clearer channels to bring through our highest, most meaningful intentions in our individual beings, in our relationships, and in service to our family, friends, and wider communities.

**Special Needs Students in The Boston Schools**
The Boston school system at the time of our involvement was beset by problems. In the midst of that dysfunctional system, an incredible woman teacher and program director named Ruth Love created several special needs programs in the elementary schools. We were invited into these school programs as an
experiment. We asked the head teachers to give us their students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, language barriers, emotional disturbances, or lack of motivation from parents to work with. We got the students out of their seats and created theater games based on the cognitive material that teachers were required to work with that semester. We created dramatic structures that allowed each challenged student to feel creative and masterful, and have fun too. With this approach, these “special” young people were learning in an embodied way, with all of their senses, and the teachers told us that they were learning more effectively.

As theater artists, we were inspired by these students and how we could make a difference. Part of the training for us as facilitators involved doing role reversals to get into the shoes of the students—body, mind, heart and soul. Like a spiritual guide, she embodied love always with her students and with us, and she really listened to the students and related to their strengths with perseverance, kindness, intuitiveness and belief in them. Here is what Ruth wrote about what happened:

Theater Workshop Boston has developed workshops in theater related disciplines for 140 students with special needs and for 30 teachers and others in the J.J. Hurley school. The personnel of Theatre Workshop Boston were sensitive to the entire spectrum of the realities involved. Their individual and combined educational preparation (advanced degrees in several fields), their experience in the classroom, in theater arts, and in personal discipline became increasingly impressive as those credentials were discovered to be alive in the people themselves.

Inspired by the need for effective healing and educational play for the special needs students and their families, TWB created a participatory musical play called *Sunsong.* The play addresses family dynamics using Family Systems theory. Definitions and descriptions of technical terms by family therapists David Kantor and Barry Dym are included in the script. One foundational concept in Family Systems theory postulates that if the child is seen as the one having the problem, one has to look at and work with the whole family system to improve the situation. *Sunsong* translated that principle into a therapeutic musical play about a family whose communication breaks down. The company also used a healing breath practice in working with the children based on the elements in nature.

The play is designed to involve all the children who come to the performance, along with eight actors. At the outset, the children are guided through

2 Linden, Sonneborn, 1976; see References
3 Khan, 1926
a physical warm-up accompanied with original music. Later in the play, everyone is led through a musical circle dance while singing, ending with: “Feel that love, follow that love, into the center of your heart.”

When the children first enter the theater lobby, they are guided to draw each of their family members on paper before coming into the performing space. This is an adapted “social atom” exercise from Sociometry, a discipline within Psychodrama. Based on what the children draw, the actors assign each child to one of the four element breath environments (earth, water, fire, air). Four actors in full-body costumes play People Puppets — mother, father, sister, brother. They perform on their knees to be at the same height as the children. The other four actors play Element Guides, each in one of the four elemental environments created in an open space. The Guides concentrate internally on the element breath attunements they learned beforehand, while working with the children in their elemental environments externally.

The family of People Puppets perform a humorous but believable scene, where the communication breaks down between the family members, and the sister and brother make their way to the element groups. The groups of children in the four environments create healing gifts in the form of songs, dances, stories, and rituals to help the puppet sister and brother go back to their parents and help to transform the dynamics in their family.

Over time the company learned that many children and their parents who participated in the play were inspired to interact differently. I recall meeting a child who participated in the play when she was four years old, now in her twenties, who still remembered the play vividly and who said that it continued to inform how she relates to her family. Also, as theater artists, we learned that we can create theater for healing, for transformation, and for education on deep levels.

One parent wrote:

> The children were loosening up and a beautiful spontaneous expression was beginning to develop out of the structure of the play. As a parent, I felt very warm watching my children interact with the others. They were opening up, growing and learning in a very natural way. Sunsong was much more than a short Saturday afternoon entertainment. Everyone there had been transformed. I witnessed a very vivid enactment that had shaken rigid parts of myself. All the parents in the audience seemed recreated in some way.\(^6\)

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4 Sonneborn, 1976  
5 Dayton, 2005  
6 Eivers, 1975
High School Theater Arts Programs to Address Racial Unrest

Our theater received a grant from the government to develop theater arts programs bringing urban (mostly African American and Latino) and suburban (mostly Caucasian) high school students together to do a theater project. We worked with socio-dramatic scenarios to explore what it might have been like to come to the U.S. through Ellis Island. Each student made a passport for one of their ancestors; then, in the drama, some were rejected by Ellis Island officials at first and some were accepted right away. The ones who were rejected had to wait in line for some time before being accepted. Students playing their own ancestors who were accepted, were placed on an assembly line, and some became artisans. One actor portrayed Mother Jones, who enacted a scene of a factory assembly line, passionately opposing labor injustices. The adult actor-facilitators played scripted roles, while also expressing improvisational responses to the scenarios based on what the high school students were enacting. Since the families of all the urban and suburban students had been immigrants, they found a natural commonality. Through this enactment, they had genuine experiences of being interconnected and were motivated to see the “other” in new ways.

Teacher Training Programs

We also developed other creative arts teacher training programs where Drama Therapy and Psychodrama modalities were introduced. The teachers were invited to create lessons that used creative arts and meditation techniques related to their curricula requirements in the current semester. We started these sessions with different approaches and discussed how the principles of meditation, quiet moments, tuning to their breath, and creating sound/music moments could be introduced to help students be more centered and productive. We then introduced different creative arts and demonstrated how to create lesson plans using these different art forms. It has been proven time and again and supported by neuropsychology research that people learn best and heal from trauma more effectively through embodied experiences. For example, Bessel van der Kolk\(^7\) demonstrates that students, and others, more effectively experience a lesson, as well as heal from trauma, via a participatory theater game or a movement discipline that involves their whole body and all of their senses. This is why participatory plays are more effective learning experiences than proscenium plays (actors on a stage, audience in seats). When teachers have an experience of creating a lesson using embodied exercises, often first in a supportive training group, they are more likely to continue to work that way on their own.

\(^7\) van der Kolk, 2015
Organizational Consulting
The president of our theater's board of directors, Dr. George Litwin, involved me and others in our company in his work with top Fortune 500 companies. He was an active spiritual seeker, beginning with his professorship in the Social Science department at Harvard with Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (Ram Dass), where they did controlled experiments with LSD. George suggested that we refashion the creative learning programs that we developed for students and teachers for corporate executives, who he felt would greatly benefit from our approaches to learning. He designed a comprehensive program called “Managing People” for all levels of management, at one of the largest banks in the world, and had been called in to help deal with a major personnel and financial crisis. The whole IT department, run by a Vice President who managed hundreds of people, went belly up when he decided to transition people jobs to computers and other technology, with no regard for all the people who would lose their jobs. George invited me into a private meeting with him and the VP. My role was to make the point that “Managing People” means that it is important deal with feelings and learn to empathize with the people that work for you.

I was not sure how I could help, but when the VP said, “George, I don’t know how this happened,” I asked him to talk about what had happened. After hearing his story, I spontaneously placed my hand on his heart. That one action said it all. He was stunned, and then got very quiet, and sheepishly said, “Oh, yeah.” Then George, with compassion, helped him understand more about the situation and did strategic planning with him to remedy the situation in his department on many levels.

Later, our theater company was brought in to create a film about a similar situation in another country, where people were being replaced by machines, to be shown to 5,000 vice presidents around the world. The film catalyzed discussion, role plays, and other active leadership training exercises with other Vice Presidents at the bank, to demonstrate the importance of managing people with empathy, empowering them while helping them get other jobs or whatever they needed to move on, including financial assistance.

In a new start-up software company in California, one of the three founders was a spiritual seeker, who had participated in one of our Transformational Theater workshops. He knew we also worked with organizations and asked if I would consult with them as they were about to go away to have a strategic planning meeting. I asked, “Do you share the same vision?” He thought for a moment and said thoughtfully, “I don’t know.” I was invited to guide the partners in a brainstorming session via teleconference. We began a meditation process and visioning exercise with music, after which I asked them to draw their vision and create a short poem about it. They had been instructed to bring music and drawing materials. After each founder shared their individual vision
with all of us, they were guided to create a shared vision together integrating the three images they had drawn. I explained that the visioning process uses their right brain and helps balance out the left-brain strategic planning process. They were pleased to discover how their vision drawings and poems complemented each other. Later, as their first company employees were hired, I was brought in to take them through the same process. In this way, each person could own the mission of the company, inspired by this shared creative process. This company became very successful.

In a radio marketing company, we worked offsite with the marketing personnel to develop the marketing plans for their own company. They were taken through a step-by-step process to brainstorm ideas, in small groups, for the company’s future success. Each group was invited to create a mini-drama that expressed the ideas of each group member using music, drama, movement, costume pieces and props that we brought. Then each group creatively expressed their marketing ideas through dramatic enactment for the larger group.

In working with two real estate companies who wanted to merge, there were two co-owners in one of them who were in constant conflict. A spontaneous role reversal was guided with those two partners, where they were asked to express the feelings of the other. When they recognized how hurtful they were being to each other, that was a game changer in being able to go forward in the merging process. (See John Maxfield’s recommendation in References.)

Theatrical Pageantry to Inspire Unity Consciousness

A series of theatrical pageants were developed with the guidance of a meditation teacher with whom I studied. It was my responsibility to develop the rehearsal process to realize our mentor’s inspiration and script, while engaging all involved in a process of self-realization. The largest and most public of these pageants, The Cosmic Celebration, the unity of the human family, evolved over an eleven-year period in many cities in the U.S. and Europe, involving casts of 350–400 people in each city, with diverse racial and religious backgrounds. Participants were given roles that reflected a soul quality associated with a source of strength that they would express through the pageant. These roles included masters, saints, prophets, angelic beings, goddesses, and archetypal “people in life” enacting challenges human beings face. The cast was taken through spiritual practices to develop their characters more authentically. They were asked to embody and physicalize the being they represented through sounds and gestures, as would be done to develop any character in a play. They were invited to have a dialogue with this character as a guide, as was done in the retreat process described earlier. The player-seekers held these roles as inner concentrations through a two-month rehearsal process as the production unfolded. In this way the named soul quality was awakened and strengthened through the pageant rehearsal process as well as the performance itself.
Conclusion
In this chapter, we have discussed the efficacy of integrating meditation and other spiritual practices with Psychodrama, Drama Therapy, Transformational Theater and other creative arts modalities in the service of self-realization, healing, educational successes, organizational change, and other kinds of transformational learning, with a variety of populations. In the end, we ultimately work to inspire the people we serve to create their lives as beautiful works of art.

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Saphira Linden
Ms Linden, RDT/BCT, TEP, LCAT, Director, Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy Certificate Program/Professional Psychodrama Training, Boston, since 1999; trained with Jacob and Zerka Moreno, Psychodrama founders; adjunct faculty several universities, institutes. Honored with ASGPP “Fellow” award, Gertrud Shatner life achievement award, “given by NADTA since 1993, in recognition of distinguished contribution to the field of drama therapy in education, publication, practice, and service.” Earlier, “NADTA’s first Teaching Excellence award “in recognition of outstanding dedication to education in the field of drama therapy through teaching and mentorship.”

As Artistic Director of Omega Theater/Theater Workshop Boston, (since 1967), created and produced numerous award winning original plays, arts events including The Cosmic Celebration, transformational theater pageant, U.S, Europe, 11 years. Developing participational theater for young people/families as educational—transformational experiences, subject of half hour PBS film, in series Artists In America. Has trained hundreds of professionals in arts, mental health, education, pastoral service, organizational development.

Ms. Linden has been a leading pioneer in Transformational Theater and Drama Therapy, Transpersonal Psychotherapist;Sufi meditation teacher/guide, since 1971; Management Consultant; founded Omega Arts Network: Transformational Artist-healers globally; has a Boston private practice; the author of numerous articles/chapters about her work, she envisioned/edited the comprehensive anthology The Heart And Soul Of Psychotherapy: A Transpersonal Approach Through Theater Arts—Drama therapy, Psychodrama and Transformational Theater, Trafford Publishing, 2013.

Contact her at the Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy Certificate Program and Professional Psychodrama Training, http://www.omegatheater.org, or at info@omegatheater.org
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