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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to identify reasons for the failure of kibbutz society to retain its young people, and to explain the role that parents play in encouraging their children to leave Israel. Data was collected through intensive individual interviews with several dozen ex-kibbutzniks currently living in Los Angeles, California, and through occasional observations and conversations at kibbutzniks' social functions. To assure that they were products of a complete kibbutz education, informants were included in the study only if they had been born and raised on the kibbutz. Interviews were open-ended and designed to elicit detailed accounts of the kibbutzniks' life histories and educational experiences. Findings indicated factors which pushed young people to leave the kibbutz. These included educational factors, such as an educational system which pressures children to be like everyone else and against which young people rebel, and personal factors, such as a desire for economic independence and individual freedom. Findings also indicated several factors, including economic independence and the desire for success and happiness, which caused ex-kibbutznik emigrees to remain in the United States. Results suggested that kibbutz education fails to distinguish between the obligation to live in Israel and the option to live on the kibbutz, and that this causes young people to feel that they must either live on the kibbutz or leave Israel.

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Children of the Dream' Revisited - DRAFT

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The Kibbutz (a collective society) in Israel is based on the premise that the individual contributes to the Kibbutz according to his/her ability and in return the society provides for all his/her needs, thus ensuring a secure environment for members of the collective from cradle to grave regardless of their state of health. Related to this ideal is the original educational ideology of the Kibbutz which demands that equal education be provided to all. For many years, Kibbutz education, the main tool of Kibbutz socialization, was not achievement oriented. Since achievement leads to competition and competition impedes equality - a major premise of Kibbutz ideology - individuals were encouraged to be like everyone else rather than excel in school.

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What was emphasized, therefore, were the collective values on which the Kibbutz is based, rather than individual achievement. One result was a leveling impact: Kibbutz learners' academic achievements are lower than those of their peers of similar SES outside the Kibbutz (Chen & Maoz, 1986). Both ends of the distribution curve are reduced while the middle of the scale is expanded. However, Bettelheim, noting the accomplishments of Kibbutz education in the second generation, points out that no child on the Kibbutz fails because of economic or social deprivation or because of too much pressure to compete and conform (Bettelheim, 1969: 297).

Kibbutz children are generally described as benefiting from one of the most caring of educational systems. The Kibbutz invests more per capita than other educational frameworks in Israel in education and provides a wide range of supplementary support for any individual need. In addition, the children enjoy exceptionally rich extra-curricular activities including every possible sport with top coaching, dance, music

or crafts for anyone who wishes. The educational ideology was based on the assumption that only trained educators can succeed in socializing the children into Kibbutz life. The parents, therefore, are not involved in formal education, but rather the 'metaplot' [children's nursemaids] and the teachers are central in all educational decisions.

In the last decade a drastic change has occurred in this success story. A great many young people who were born and raised on the Kibbutz are leaving both the Kibbutz and the State of Israel. These young people, mostly between the ages of 24 and 35, have settled mainly in the metropolitan areas of New York, Los Angeles and Miami. It should be noted that the Kibbutz movement today is going through an unprecedented crisis - ideologically, socially and economically - however, the participants of this study were growing up prior to this crisis.

In light of the heavily value-laden education and the Kibbutz idea of total devotion to the Zionist dream as one of their major *raison d'etre*, it is understandable that the Kibbutz educators perceive this outflow of "yordim" (emigrants) as their failure. The aim of this study is to identify and understand the reasons for the failure of Kibbutz society (emphasizing the educational channels) to retain its young people, and to explain the role that parents play in encouraging their children to try their luck abroad.

The Israeli emigration phenomenon has been widely studied (Sobol, 1986; Shokeid, 1988). "Yordim" have always been viewed negatively by many Israelis because they do not share the heavy burden that living in Israel demands, and this attitude still prevails, though lately to a lesser extent. Studies of Kibbutz emigration have recently begun to receive separate attention (Mittelberg and Sobol, 1990; Kimhi, 1990). The Kibbutz Research Institute (Avnat, Leviatan & Mittelberg, 1987) has carried out

surveys in which questionnaires were sent to people from various Kibbutzim who have lived abroad for over three years. Their findings provide descriptive statistics of these emigrants.

While statistics are important for providing a broad picture of universal preconceived variables, such information is insufficient to gain an understanding of why the young people are leaving. Only by looking in depth at the ex-Kibbutz members' own perceptions of their own Kibbutz upbringing and way of life can we begin to understand more than the surface reasons for their emigration and to expose new and unpredicted variables. This problem is multivariate and factors such as personality, changes in societal ideals regarding politics and economic activity, individual successes and failures, relationships with parents and peer groups and the complex attitudes toward Zionism and Judaism all contribute to the overall perspective of Kibbutz life. Clearly it would be naive to believe that the Kibbutz educational system will explain all the reasons for emigration.

Data collection was carried out intensively and extensively, in the Los Angeles San Fernando Valley area, through intensive individual interviews with several dozen ex-Kibbutzniks. The open ended and focused interviews were designed to detail accounts of the Kibbutzniks life histories, emphasizing their educational experiences. In addition, occasional observations and conversations were carried out at Kibbutzniks' social functions. Informants were included only if they had been born and raised on the Kibbutz to assure that they were products of a complete Kibbutz education. Although specific individuals were not preselected, participants were continually sought until most of the following demographic categories were represented: gender; age; family status (single, married); with and without children; Kibbutz federation (there are three); occupation; and duration of stay in the US (from 2 to 10 years). Informants were guaranteed confidentiality.

## Findings

The interviews point to factors which push the young people to leave the Kibbutz and others which pull them to remain in America. The push factors seem to be more than the commonplace of curious young people who have completed a lengthy, unusually tense period of army service and desire change. It is also more than an urge to wander resulting from the knowledge that once they settle down to their responsibilities as adults, they will no longer have the option of wandering as they do in this "in-between" stage of life. It seems that there are aspects of Kibbutz life which serve to push these youngsters in the direction of America. It is these factors, together with those pull factors which especially act upon Kibbutz youth, that we will explore here.

## Push Factors

The major push factors which cause young people to leave the Kibbutz can be divided into educational and personal aspects (economic independence and individual freedom). The educational system on the Kibbutz, with its lack of intellectual competition, and its emphasis on equality and the communality of the peer group, places enormous pressure on many Kibbutz children to be like everyone else. Many of my informants noted that this pressure resulted in their desire to get away, to prove themselves outside of the Kibbutz, and to seek anonymity. In addition, the basis for the educational message on the Kibbutz, according to the founding fathers, was equality and sharing within the framework of a secular view of the "new Jew". For the second and third generation, however, this has changed, and one informant, Oved, views this ideological change as significant:

Though the work ethic remained strong on the Kibbutz, something weakened. The founding members had revolted against the religion and

traditions of their parents and Judaism and at some point we became trapped neither here nor there, and were stuck in the middle.

There was an ideological vacuum and nothing to fill the spiritual gap. Something was lacking and in my opinion that unconsciously makes people leave.

My informants were not educated to love of country, but mainly to the importance of the Kibbutz. This is apparent in their attitudes. Nava feels no connection to Israel and notes that she never considered returning to Israel. "I don't feel that I have anything there. I don't feel I left a country behind. I can't imagine myself developing something there." Mir explained that he received no education whatsoever to love of country. He noted that "if I had, I would have been willing to suffer for the country and to contribute." Guy's criticism is of the educational attitudes:

From the day I was born I have had to write something like 300 compositions on the topic "Why it's good to live on a Kibbutz" and I couldn't stand that. I wasn't interested in the ideological aspect; in my opinion it was all a lot of garbage.

The aspect of personal self-fulfillment is exemplified by Anat's feeling that on the Kibbutz, there is no place "to run away to." Adiv explains that Kibbutzniks leave because "it's a small, closed society. It generally begins with the desire to escape the pressure, to get out of a closed box, and not necessarily the desire to live in L.A." Muli feels that too much influence was left in the hands of the teachers, and too little in the hands of the parents. He notes that the reason people leave is because "they want to develop as individuals and not a part of a group". Nava disliked the communal way of life which she recalls as "strictness in accepting anything different or out of the ordinary.

Everyone toes one line." An additional aspect of communal pressure is a resulting fear of failure. In Anat's words:

The pressure in Israel to succeed, to do something with yourself, causes the Kibbutzniks to want to try things in the States because in Israel everyone will know if they fail. It's also harder to succeed there, so they all come here.

Another aspect of the planned Kibbutz life is the fact that what outside the Kibbutz would be personal decisions are left not to the individual, but to the Kibbutz. When Ella returned from the army, she expressed a desire to study to be a physical education teacher, but the Kibbutz had no need of one, so she was refused and this was the factor which pushed her toward LA. Hanan also notes that because of its size, the Kibbutz cannot fulfill the expectations of all its young people. He points out that "the Kibbutz is too small to hold everyone, and can't live up to the expectations of so many strong, energetic young people who want to find themselves. Who ever heard of a 27-year-old in charge of any branch on a Kibbutz?" A similar sentiment was expressed by Udi, who said,

On the kibbutz you can't achieve what you are really capable of doing. When you leave the kibbutz you suddenly find that any idea can be put into practice. You may succeed or fail, but at least you can try. On the kibbutz it's impossible to try things; everything depends on money, and whether it's for studies or to open a business - there's no money.

Nava expresses this same problem as the need of Kibbutzniks "to prove to themselves that they are free of the constraining influence of others. Freedom from limits, the desire for independence". Zeev finds self-fulfillment an impossibility on the Kibbutz and explains that "people have to be given options, they must be able to attain self-fulfillment, to study what they like. People have to be given the chance to try and to see

that life outside isn't as easy as it seems. Only when you leave the Kibbutz do you begin to discover who you are and what you are capable of."

Nir views self-fulfillment as a goal. He believes that "It is natural for people to desire freedom, and that is what the Kibbutz provides the least of. In economic terms, the Kibbutz may give a great deal, but personal freedom is not felt or expressed, and therefore, people leave for a place where there's more freedom, less pressure, and not as much judgement; a place which is not as threatening and limiting. Here [in the US], I can disappear."

Another aspect mentioned is extremism. Koby expressed the feeling that people who received a radical education found it easy to go to the other extreme. On his Kibbutz, the message was that "Israel was the Kibbutz. We didn't know anything else until we left for the army."

Michal's criticism of her education relates to the lack of openness:

Maybe once there should have been more tolerance of the fact that people have questions about the Kibbutz or about Israel. I had a teacher who couldn't stand doubts and that caused insulation which isn't healthy. It's better to open up possibilities to ask questions, to weigh things more rationally, and to react more openly to problems.

The kibbutzniks' problem is that they are narrow-minded. One of the things I gained from my stay in the US is that my area of interest grew enormously compared to what was the case on the Kibbutz.

Economic insecurity and lack of professional training stand out as major concerns for these young people once they have decided to leave the Kibbutz. The relationship between the factors describing these phenomena are presented in figure 1.



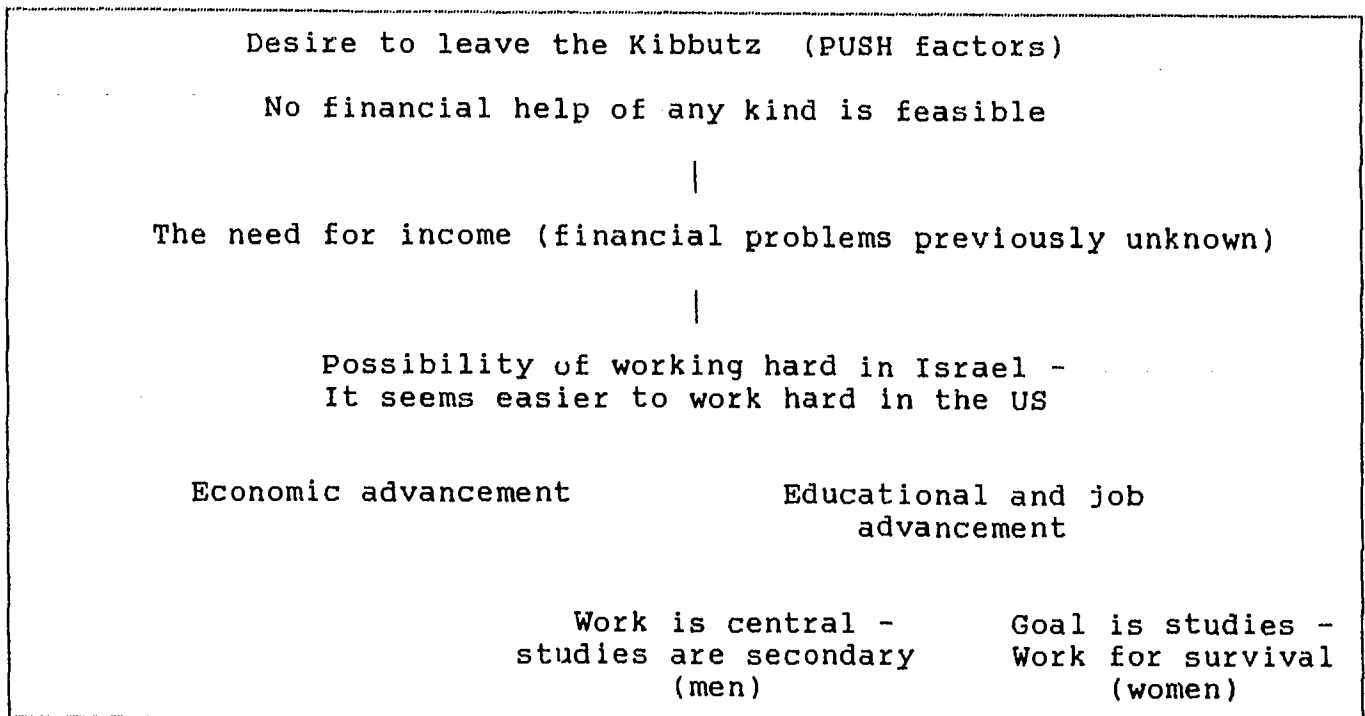


Figure 1: Push factors

The desire for economic independence as a contrast to the sharing of the Kibbutz system, serves as a major push factor. Hanan explained that in the US "I saw a classmate who began his own business and everything is his. On the Kibbutz, even if you grow twenty more acres of crops, it isn't yours. Young people want self-fulfillment, to see that they can build something up from nothing and make a lot of money."

This search for a challenge was expressed by Danny, who said, "For me, the challenge is America and living in America. Here I'm not told if I'm nice or not, but rather respected if I'm good."

#### Pull Factors

The pull of America has acted on immigrants from all over the world since the days of Columbus. For each group of immigrants, the negative aspects of the lives they led were translated into pull factors by comparison. Those who suffered from religious persecution were attracted

by religious freedom; those who suffered famine, were attracted to plenty. For Kibbutzniks, the pull is in the area of economic independence together with the educational message "Succeed and be happy" transmitted by their parents.

It is relatively easy for Kibbutzniks to find work in America. First of all, they know how to do a variety of jobs because of their Kibbutz experience which from early childhood prepared them for work in services, agriculture, industry and automation. Their demands are modest, and they are willing to wait for pleasures and meanwhile do without. They are used to working as part of a team and get along well with others. They have a network of Kibbutzniks who help them get started. They don't work for American Jews who might look askance at their having left Israel and thus have no need to justify their actions.

Secondly, they have discovered the satisfaction of financial and personal independence, and on the other hand, the pleasure of anonymity and the right to fail without being judged - far from the critical eye of "big brother".

Third, since they have no profession, but do, for their age, have a great deal of work experience, they feel that in the States they can manage without professional training. Those who have high school level technical training find it easier to complete an Engineering degree in the US than in Israel, though only one of my informants actually intended to study engineering.

Finally, they have received a double message from their parents: in spite of their parents' desire to see them remain in Israel, they were told at home that the important thing is for them to succeed and be happy.

All these aspects are apparent from the interviews. Ella credits the Kibbutz with her ability to succeed in America and notes that "As to work, I'm good at it because I was raised on a Kibbutz. I work well, and I

was taught not to lie or cheat. Oved discovered his worth in America, and says that he "did things here that I never knew I could do." Kibbutzniks are educationally unprepared for life outside the Kibbutz. The solution is going to America. Guy explains the phenomenon thus: "A Kibbutznik doesn't have a College degree. Milking cows doesn't count for much when you've barely finished High School."

The network established by the Kibbutzniks in LA provides both friendship and employment opportunities. Most of my informants found work on arrival through other Kibbutzniks. When he arrived, Udi worked for a company which employed 70 people, most of whom were Kibbutzniks. Of friends, he says, "My only friends here are kibbutzniks, but I have social connections with my employees who are American." In Nir's words, "Actually, here we have founded our own little Kibbutz. We're very happy to have friends here from my Kibbutz. This is the chain of our lives here. Many Kibbutzniks have this continuity to their lives. Members of one Kibbutz are involved in construction work; of another in solar sprinklers, and of a third in tiles." Adiv was also helped by the 'old-timers' in getting settled. Yochai describes his experience in social terms: "In time we met lots of Kibbutzniks. We made lots of new friends, with no strings attached. We would celebrate the holidays together and go on trips together." He also found work through the Kibbutz network: "I found work through Kibbutzniks who have a construction and renovation firm. Kibbutzniks help one another a great deal."

Amir believes that the Kibbutzniks are "hypnotized" by money. Motti also discovered the power of money in LA:

Kibbutzniks come because of curiosity to see what America is, and first of all the desire to travel. But most settle here. The Kibbutzniks suddenly see what money can do, something they hadn't seen before. Life is easy here and that's why people stay.

Guy enjoys the easy life LA provides and says that what keeps him in America is "the hope of gaining financial security. The idea of being able to support a family has worried me since the army. The fear and worry about economic security. I like the easy life and that's what keeps me in America. As a Kibbutznik I have a responsibility to make money and keep it."

Gal also remains because it's the easy way. He explains:

Inertia keeps me here. There are lots of opportunities here for economic success, and young people can set up an economic base within a short time and take care of their families. I've learned the system and it would be dumb to leave everything and start from scratch because if I fail in Israel, I have no profession so I can't fail and begin again.

Yohai enjoys the personal freedom lacking on the kibbutz. He finds that "the mentality is different here. There are no obligations. I see people when I want to. We decided to take advantage of the freedom, the privacy, the power of the money and especially the independence. Independence is a powerful thing. I want to see a movie, I go; I want to go to a restaurant, I go."

Many Kibbutzniks who arrive in America forsake planned studies for the alternative of economic success without an education. Gil, who was one of the most promising youngsters on his Kibbutz, notes that financial considerations caused him to work instead of studying. "When we came, I had hoped to study engineering. If we had stayed on the Kibbutz, I certainly would have studied, because when you stay on the Kibbutz, you have to do something with yourself. Here, I have to make a living, and I have no time for studies." Guy mentions the lack of financial support Kibbutz parents provide their children. A kibbutznik "has to make money with no degree, no help from his folks; it's hard and you feel guilty, you wonder how the Kibbutz will accept it. Going abroad solves the problems - you can succeed without a degree, and no one judges you."

Educational opportunities are greater in America. Danny is typical in his attitude:

I graduated from a technical high school but in Israel this gave me no advantage in studying engineering in college, whereas in the States, I'll be able to finish more quickly and that is my plan.

Hedva, who has no profession, hopes to begin studying as an alternative to working at an unskilled job. She complains that she has no education; "What do you learn to do on a Kibbutz?"

Many Kibbutz emigrants note that their parents have given them a very clear message, encouraging them to do what's best for them. This is the result of the parents' frustration with the changes the Kibbutz has undergone, and their natural desire to see their children happy. Since they are unable financially to help their grown children outside the Kibbutz, they find it difficult to tell them what to do with their lives.

Tsvika blames the parents for their children's leaving:

The Kibbutz accepts the phenomenon of the children leaving more and more. Many parents have children who don't live on the Kibbutz. The Kibbutz has softened. The parents are to blame for the children's leaving.

This is seen in the clear message which Ella, who remained single longer than her friends, received from her mother: "My mother told me to stay where I was happy in spite of the fact that it was hard on her." Danny also received the same message: "Both my parents have told me that the important thing is for their son to be happy." Michal criticizes the message she received from her parents. "I feel guilty that I left my parents and the Kibbutz. But from the beginning my parents told me that a person has to live wherever is good for him. They didn't only say that, they also behaved that way, but that doesn't make it any easier." Oren was raised on a religious Kibbutz, and here the message was different. He

says, "We were mainly educated to religious precepts and the importance of settling the country, and I think it is these which will cause me to return to Israel. My parents want me to be happy, but in Israel."

### Discussion

There is general agreement that the Kibbutz ideal is not what it once was. The criticism of many areas of Kibbutz and Israeli life and the doubts voiced about them have become the ethos of the Kibbutz of the 90's. There are no absolutes, and the message disenchanted parents give their children range from "It doesn't matter where you live, as long as you are in Israel" to "It doesn't matter where you live, as long as you are happy" or "We're stuck here, but you still have a choice".

In their study of semi-legitimacy, Etsioni-Halevy and Shapira (1974) examined the question of emigration which lies somewhere between black and white in terms of Israeli social norms. Normative inconsistency results in semi-legitimacy. Thus the double message received from parents as to the importance of the Kibbutz together with the importance of self-fulfillment, within the context of severe criticism of Israeli society, politics and economic policy, result in a lack of clarity as to the actual message. This educational failure to make clear the distinction between the obligation to live in Israel (which is the expression of Zionism) and the option to live on the Kibbutz, bring young people to feel that their only option in Israel is to live on the Kibbutz, and if not there, then not in Israel at all. It seems that the young Kibbutznik suffers from individual anomie in his belief that he can only find self-realization abroad, so he justifies it through collective anomie - the expression of discontent with the current political regime, which is the accepted view

of the Kibbutz society. Since 1977, when the Labor party lost control of the government, any criticism is justified, and no reaction including "This is not the country I dreamed of and fought for, neither I nor the founding fathers; I have nothing in common with those people..." is repudiated.

The ties to Israel and the commitment to building the country, which once were the bywords of the Kibbutz, no longer exist among the young people. The young emigrants I interviewed are intellectually shallow and have little knowledge of the history of their country and their people. The Kibbutz founders who had strong Jewish backgrounds and deep Zionist perception sought universality when they established the kibbutz according to socialist premises. But while this socialist movement could take for granted the solid background of the founders, it provided the young generation with no Zionism or Jewish history thus providing them with no roots. It is in LA that many discovered their roots and often increased their ties to Judaism.

The Kibbutz educational system does seem to have succeeded in some areas of value transmission. The strong work ethic stressed by Kibbutz society and exhibited by the LA ex-Kibbutznik community is the best example of successful value transmission. However, the informants' self-perception as merely average students, the lack of encouragement of intellectual curiosity in the schools, and the practice of encouraging conformity, encouraged mediocrity and prevented many of them from seeking higher education as a means toward social mobility. For the majority, success in business seemed the only possible vehicle for social mobility. This finding confirms Mittleberg's (1988) survey findings in which he correlated Kibbutz children's success in school with their aspiration for success later in life. Apparently the less of an academic achiever the Kibbutz young person was, the more he sought avenues for success in

business.

For people who have no personal or parental financial backing, where can success in business be materialized better than in the US? Most of my LA informants enjoyed a moderately good standard of living by relying on their resourcefulness and the manual skills they had acquired in their Kibbutz life. Studies in the US, taken up only by a minority of the Kibbutzniks, were mainly in technical or business related areas (e.g., computers, business administration, accounting). In addition, the emigrant community developed a strong support system (along the lines of the mutual help and responsibility on which they were brought up) which made the transition for newcomers that much easier.

These ex-Kibbutzniks were born into the Kibbutz life rather than choosing it as did their parents and grandparents, and their position as second or third generation Kibbutzniks should be viewed in this context. Their Kibbutz education attempted to inculcate the view that the Kibbutz is the best possible way of life. However, in such cases, value education should provide choices and convince the candidates by indicating strengths and limitations rather than by using indoctrination. Leaving the Kibbutz should be accepted as a natural alternative, and children should be prepared to consider the option. As Bettelheim noted, "Kibbutz education turns out a majority of persons well content with themselves and with their lives. For others it is stifling. But as long as they can escape, leave and join, with some effort, a world beyond the Kibbutz, I personally would not worry about them" (Bettelheim, 1969: 298). Kibbutz leaders, however, do have to worry: leaving the country altogether calls for reflection on the emphasis Kibbutz education puts on the continuation of Zionist ideas, the epitome of which was the creation of the Kibbutz..



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