

ESSAY

Light of One Solitary Star

TULIP CHOWDHURY

Rabindranath Tagore created his magnificent works of poetry, songs, plays and fiction with a brilliance that made him a Nobel laureate. The great bard mentions the unique creative force of which he was the chosen one. In his work from time to time he was mesmerized by this mysterious force that seemed to urge him on to create yet more. He was very much aware of this force that drove him on and called it as "One who sits behind the eyes." In "A Tagore Testament" he addresses this force and says

What is this game ever-new
you play with me in your jesting mood?
Whatever I may want to say
You do not allow me to express....
What I wish to say I seem to forget
I only say what you want me to say....

Many of Tagore's songs seem to be a call to that force that leads him on. He speaks of wonder, of being in awe of this force. The poet speaks of his own work being directed towards a goal. Although he spared no efforts to express his thoughts and emotions he is surprised and thinks that his writing has been instrumental. It was as if someone unseen, someone who follows the rules of the universal, had urged him on. He writes of his work, "Seated within their author was another Composer, before whom the future significance was evident. On a flute, through each hole, a puff of breath produces a definite note asserting its individual claim. But who is tuning these diverse notes into melodious harmony?"

As he created, the great poet in Tagore was humbled when he found that even the simple things he wanted to say seemed to find an inner meaning, a universal meaning. Through the simple meaning of his words there seemed to flow an unknown melody, giving them greater significance. That which became personal became a thing of the universe. He had drawn pictures in his mind but they came out in colour from a brush he did not hold. And thus he sings:

The thought I never thought, I seem to express
the pain I never knew seems to awaken
Whose message is it? I do not know
And to whom have I come to speak?..
The poet was in thrall of this hidden force that led him on. He defined that force as "Pravu" and "Devata" and dedicated his work to this great force. He imagines that it is a powerful force that wants to fulfill the creative drive through the poet. He sings:
He mor devatha bhoriah deha pran
ki omrito tumi chao koribare pan...."
"provu amar, prio amar poromo don he
chiro pother shongi amar chiro jibono
he....

The great poet is aware that this creative force makes the poet the instrument and impels him toward the various faces of life.



To the poet this force is very dear and he thinks that this force sitting behind the eyes is his life's greatest friend. In some of his songs Tagore mentions his being oblivious to this great force. He wonders if he has missed the signs of this force that resides within him. He writes, amar hiyar majhe lukiye chhile dekhte ami paini... From time to time, through his works, the poet notes that it is not his own doing but there is someone hidden who touching all that he, the poet, does. It is this force that makes him write with a sublimity that comes only as the result of the work of the one who sits behind his work. He worships this great force and gives in to it, to have it play with his life as it pleases. And he writes:

Amare tumi oshesh korechho emoni lila tobo....
furaye fele abar bhorechho jibono nobo nobo....

When the poet writes he is aware of the influence of the sky, the moon and the stars on him. As he stands in this light nothing seems to reject him. He finds his own existence a lucky streak. He wonders how he can preserve the unique privilege of his existence. Must he not pay back for the love and joy continuously showered on him by this force that leads him on? He would not have the power to exist without this force sitting behind the eyes. And he wonders:

Why did you choose me?
In quest of what destiny?
Did you care, O Lord of Life?
Did all my nights, my mornings
my work, my pleasure,
Enhance your solitary abiding?

At times the creator in the poet wonders if the service of this God of Life within his presence has been accomplished to the full. He wonders if this force intends to keep the

flame of the poet burning. At times he is confused and wonders if his creativity has been burnt to ashes. And then again he argues --- surely the great force must be aware that creativeness within his being is not made of such meager substance? Have they both, the great one sitting behind the eyes and the poet, not realized that in the heart lies the constant care of an over-joyful vigilance? And Tagore writes, "This manifestation has carried me along in the boat of Life, out of the Past, from harbor to harbor, through the ocean of Time, drawing me towards a future that has yet to come---it is that God of Life I have spoken of."

The great bard finds his love of the earth, respect for nature, revealed through this great force sitting behind the eyes. The earth is ever new to him, like a person he has loved through many a day, through many lives. And yet he seems not to be able to sing in praise of them. Such beautiful days and beautiful nights are slipping out of his life and he cannot grasp the most out of them. All the colours, the light and darkness and this quiet magnificence pervading the skies, this peace and beauty filling the entire void between two worlds---what tremendous preparations are going on all the time! Can he find the words to describe them? From a distance of millions of miles, billions of years travelling through paths of eternal darkness, the light of one solitary star reaches us! Will that great force behind all the works of the poet allow him to sing, to praise all these? The poet is in apprehension of how the great force in his creative world holds him and at the same time he wonders how far it will take him.

When speaking of love, the poet once again finds the force sitting behind the eyes holding out light for him. The lamp-light that not only discloses the thing we are looking for, it also illuminates the whole room. Love surpassing its object of love continues. And like love and the lamp this great force draws him on. And thus he writes, "To know supreme joy through all earthly love, to perceive the visible form of the Exquisite One through the world of beauty, is what I call the realization of freedom. This world has enchanted me and in enchantment I taste the essence of my freedom."

From time to time the creator in the poet comes back to the great force that urges him to his imagination. And he knows that like the bird that soars high in the sky only to come back to earth, he too is bound to this great force that sits behind the eyes. He has sung to this great force knowing that it is this force that sings through him. And through ages the poet sings on, marveling about the one that sits behind the eyes,

Tumi kemon kore gaan koro he guni
ami obak hoye shuni, kebol shuni.....

Tulip Chowdhury is a poet, writes fiction and reviews books.

NON-FICTION

Never stop believing

INARA SUNAN TAREQUE

"Never stop believing in yourself. Perseverance and optimism are the route to success." Those are the very words that my father had told me, when I was very young. Verily, this credo has been implanted in my mind for a very long time. A very important lesson that I have learnt throughout the course of my life is that hard work never results in futility. However, unless you receive the support of others, the path to success is pretty much like a labyrinth. The former provides you with a tower of strength. In simple terms, hard work and succour are the backbone of success. My opinion might be very subjective, but this is what I believe in.

A year ago, when I was taking my O levels examination, I knew that it was a milestone in my life. For one thing, sometimes I was discouraged by people when they heard that I had taken eleven subjects. But I never felt the urge of dropping any one of my subjects. Why? Primarily because of two major reasons. First of all, I had always had an intense desire of garnering more knowledge about the world. So many things are yet to be discovered in the vast expanse of this world. Expanding my knowledge in different fields might allow me to contribute to new discoveries in future. Also, the more you know, the more you can help others. Who knows? Theories learnt in economics might allow you to save the entire economy of a country someday. Or perhaps chapters learnt in biology might help you to save a life! Because of these simple reasons, I could not choose to drop any of the subjects that I had. They were never a burden to me. It was challenging, but I like setting goals for myself.

For another, there were many who had always believed in me. First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah. I would never have made it if He had not been by my side. Moreover, without the unparalleled support and inspiration of my parents, I would never have made it. Whenever I had asked them to help me, they did so, without a hint of discontent on their faces, no matter how tired or annoyed they might have been.

My school, South Breeze, has evidently made a huge contribution towards my achievement. It has been my second home since childhood, and always will be. The fourteen years that I had spent there have made me who I am today. I would like to thank every single teacher of mine, who had spent hour after hour in teaching us. They contribute to moulding each and every individual in our school into a better and more responsible human being. Their contribution is a debt that can never be repaid. I would especially like to thank our principal, Mr. Zeenat Chowdhury, and our vice-principal, Mrs. Tanzeem Abdullah, for they are the ones who have made South Breeze such an amazing institution. Moreover, I would also like to express my gratitude to my teachers --- Mrs. Aneez Pasha, Mrs. Nazneen, Mrs. Shaheen Sultan --- without whose constant inspiration and support this would have been impossible. I would also like to thank The Daily Star for giving me an award. It has made a very huge difference in my life.

However, the day when I heard that I had got 11 A's and the world's highest in Human Biology, I could not believe it. I felt as if it was a dream, the most beautiful dream that I had ever had. I felt that my hard work had finally paid off. Nevertheless, in one way or another, my success is a product of the selfless contribution made by others. It has endowed me with the responsibility of contributing towards the development of my society. Although currently I am not residing in Bangladesh, that does not mean that I will shun my responsibilities. At present, I am doing International Baccalaureate Diploma in the United World College (UWC) of Hong Kong. IB is one of the most challenging secondary school courses, but it helps to develop one into a better-rounded individual. UWCs are boarding schools that offer scholarships to students all over the world. There are 13 UWCs all across the world, and in my school, I have classmates from 97 different countries. Studying here is truly an amazing experience. And whenever I get the opportunity, I boast about my country and its rich culture.

I know that I have huge responsibilities on my shoulders. In fact, every one of us from this new generation shares this responsibility. We all have to unite and join hands to build a better Bangladesh. We should remember the important role that our country has played in our lives. Bangladesh is a part of my identity, and I believe that one day I will be able to contribute towards its development. Again, perseverance, optimism and hard work can help us do so. We are, indeed, "The Nation Builders of Tomorrow".

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LETTER FROM BOSTON

Annoprashon in a Faraway Land

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

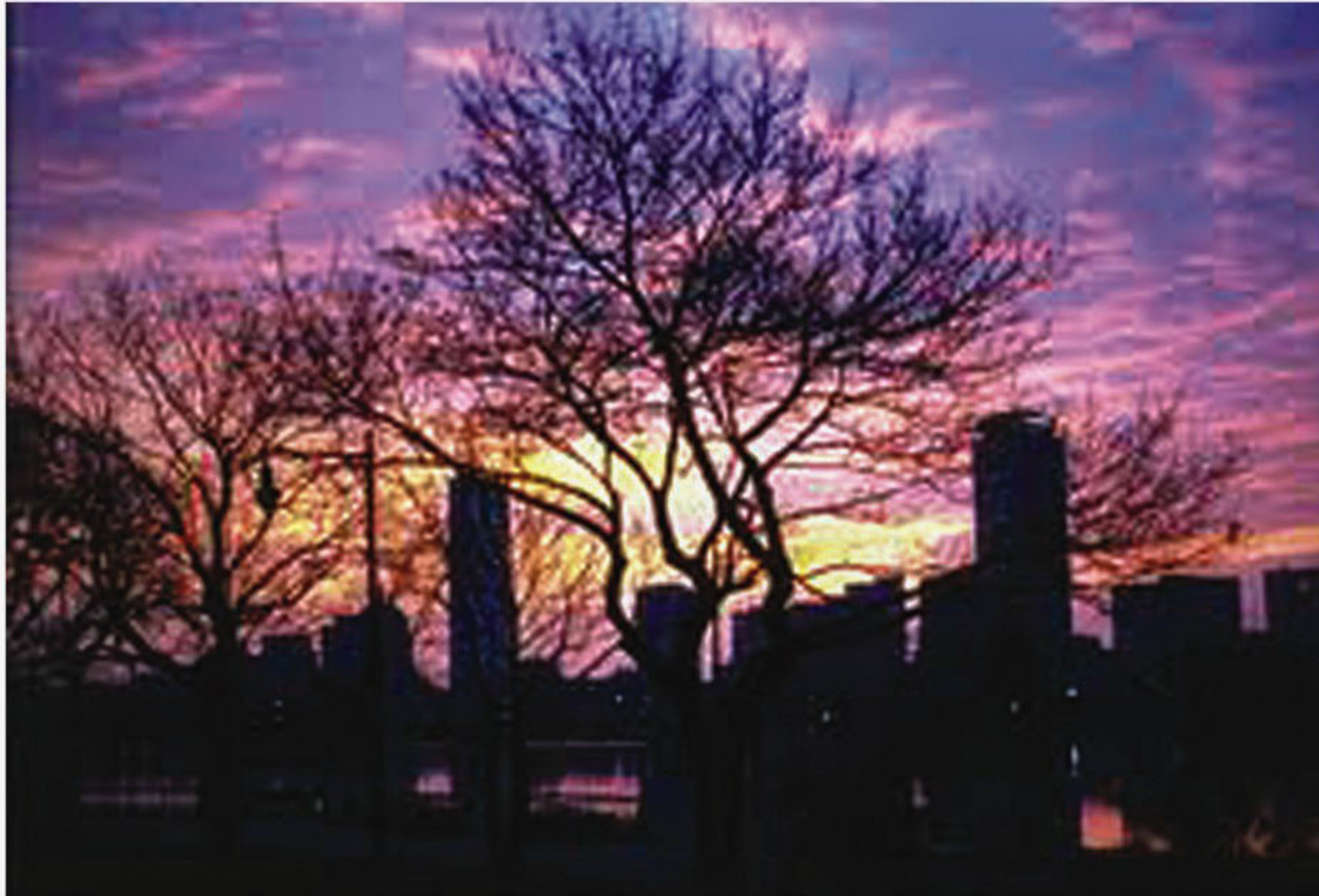
On a cold Saturday evening in February, while we were waiting with bated breath for two rounds of winter storms that had been forecast for Boston, we celebrated Aagami's annoprashon, and for the crowd gathered around him, the gathering clouds did nothing to take away from the merry-making and joyous chanting that continued well past midnight.

Aagami is the only child of Taposh and Nita, our family friend, and one of the most celebrated and charming couples in the Bengali-speaking society in New England. Taposh is the founder of Amra Kojon, a global community of musicians and music-lovers, and an inveterate party monger. The proud parents hosted a party at their house in Providence, Rhode Island, to celebrate his first taste of solid food. The invitation letter indicated that the party was arranged to bring us together as Aagami takes tiny steps on his march towards manhood! To quote:

"Now that Aagami will be 6 months old, it is time for him to step into a new phase of his life as he graduates from liquid food to a solid food diet!! It certainly is an important step of his childhood and he would like his family and friends to be a part of this celebration."

The Bangladeshi and Indian Bengali community in the Boston area is familiar with Taposh's amazing wizardry and skills as a "party" organizer, be it in the cultural or in the social arena. In addition to the two mega cultural shows of 2003 and 2008, he and Amra Kojon have been an integral part of Boston's annual celebrations of Bengali New Year, Tagore's birthday, etc. He is also known for his house parties, which always end up drawing an overflow crowd. Often my wife and I would drag each other out in the wee hours from his Hope Street residence, Shaptak House, to go home.

So we could guess that Aagami's first year on this planet would be just as colourful, if not for him, at least for his scores of uncles, aunts, cousins and his



extended family. On this February evening Taposh's house, which is full of arts and crafts from Bangladesh, and other memorabilia from his mega-events in 2003 and 2008, was brimming with people by sunset. Since it was February and winter was not yet officially over, while Taposh might have been tempted to have the event outdoors, he probably yielded to his rational instincts and gave up that idea. When Rumi and I reached his house, there was a big fire burning in front of the house as a sign of his defiance of nature and a symbol of the happenings inside the house, where we were greeted by a cacophony of voices, aroma, sounds, and musical medley.

Taposh's cooking skills, honed over a few years of his bachelor life while he was waiting for Neeta to join him, is worth mentioning. He has been credited with preparing a five course meal with fish, vegetables, salad, daal and chorchori on an hour's notice. At the Annoprashon, the hors d' oeuvre was his creation, with chick peas, cucumber, tomato, carrots, celery, and scallions with a generous dash of freshly squeezed lime. We had tasted it before and knew that it is such a rare treat that the guests swipe it off within fifteen minutes. So we made a bee line for the dining table as soon as we arrived. I pretty much ignored other veggies and dips. Then came the annoprashon cere-

mony. His grandmother, or RaaniMaa, had brought many of the paraphernalia for the annoprashon ceremony from Bangladesh, including the "topor", in which he looked adorable. While we were relishing every single phase of the hour-long rituals, poor Aagami could not care less, and on a couple of occasions expressed his displeasure at being subjected to rounds and rounds of solid food and being tossed around from one lap to another while we were all watching and clapping. I have a feeling he does not enjoy crowd as much as Taposh does. At least, not yet!

The dinner was served after the annoprashon ceremony was over. Because fish curry is such a rare commodity at my house (I can't smell the smell of indoor cooking), that's what I usually target at Taposh's. My mother, when we were younger, imprinted upon us the importance of tasting the Kolkata style of cooking macher kaalia and dolna. The guests soon got to know that RaaniMaa was the chief architect behind the fish curry. And it did not disappoint the fish lovers.

As only can happen at Taposh's party, just as the dinner was in progress, he started humming a line from a familiar song, "aha ki anondo akashey batashey..". That was just the instigation we were waiting for to get started. What followed for the next half an hour was an impromptu musical show around the dining table. "Purano shei diner kotha", led to "ei jey nodi", which was then followed by "gram chhara ei Rangamatir poth". One song segued into another and we were in a truly frenzied spirit that can be likened to a revivalist chant, a rapture in the American South. We sang at the top of our voice and heaved with the rhythmic motion of the music.

The meal was rounded off with freshly made jilaybi and kheer. Then came the paan enhanced by flavors and out-of-this-world fillings. Finally, my wife had to drag me away in the early hours of Sunday, but not before I went in for another round of paan for the road.

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