FREEMASONRY

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

STEPS TO BECOMING A FREEMASON



Provincial Grand Lodge of Somerset

UNITED GRAND LODGE of ENGLAND

Introduction

You have the opportunity to become a Freemason.

Perhaps this arises from personal interest and inquiry of friends, reading or internet searches?

It may be that you have family or friends who are Freemasons and they have asked you if you would like to join?

In both cases, I am sure, you will have questions, concerns and perhaps doubts about pursuing this further.



Freemasonry is an organisation of law abiding citizens who are good men of sound moral principle who believe in demonstrating tolerance and concern for others as well as enjoying a stimulating social life with fellow members and their families.

This booklet is designed to give you accurate information about membership and help you come to an informed decision as to whether Freemasonry is for you and what to expect as you go through the joining process.

I hope that you will form a favourable opinion and decide that Freemasonry is for you.

Stuart Hadler

Provincial Grand Master for Somerset

Reasons for Joining

The reasons given for wanting to join are many and varied.

Many are looking for an opportunity to make new friends away from work or in a new community. Some join because they respect friends, relatives or work colleagues who are masons.

Others find that Freemasonry offers a moral and ethical framework for their lives and an opportunity to dress up, enjoy and participate in the formality of a masonic meeting.

Freemasonry brings together men of good standing who wish to be better citizen's and enjoy a fulfilling and rewarding pastime and way of life.

If you have a keen desire to help those in need, we support a wide range of charitable activities through financial grants and donations.

The common experience is of broadening your social network and having fun but with a serious component too.

Becoming a Freemason involves being recommended and elected to membership of a Lodge. Lodges meet in many communities. There are, for example, 27 centres in Somerset and over 80 lodges from which to choose. Lodges vary in the frequency of their meetings, 7-8 a year is common. Lodges commonly meet in the evening, some on a Saturday and some during the day.

What do we do?

A regular lodge meeting will usually involve the performance of a ceremony and some items of general business such as elections and news. This is followed by a dinner for the members and their guests. There will be a number of short speeches and toasts and probably a raffle or other fund-raising event.

A meeting and dinner will normally last about 4 hours. It is not compulsory to stay to dinner, but to do so adds significantly to enjoyment and getting to know your fellow members.

Freemasonry has a fascinating history and our ceremonies draw from biblical history, the craft of the stonemason and architectural principles. They take the member on an interesting journey of self-discovery and moral truths. The ceremony is performed by the officers of the lodge who will have learnt their parts and having progressed over several years hope to achieve the ultimate privilege of election to Master of the year. There is normally a rehearsal in the week before the meeting.

Who is Freemasonry For?

Various definitions exist but at its core, Freemasonry may be said to be a secular fraternal organisation that brings together men of good standing who wish to enjoy each other's company, contribute towards the well-being of their local community and society and through greater self-knowledge and confidence be better men.

Freemasonry appeals to men of all ages and walks of life, who have a belief in a Supreme Being and who through association with like-minded others seek to be better citizens, develop a greater knowledge of themselves and enjoy a fulfilling and rewarding pastime and way of life.

It is logical, at this point, to make clear that while a belief in a Supreme Being is a requirement, a member's religious beliefs are private to him. Discussion of a religious nature is forbidden at our meetings. Similarly political discussion is not permitted. The fundamental principle of tolerance of beliefs, race, culture, class etc. governs our conduct towards each other and the wider community.

Freemasons are expressly forbidden from using their membership to seek personal, professional or business advancement.

Freemasons are required to be good citizens and comply with the law. Any attempt to use membership to influence legal or commercial processes would result in serious disciplinary action.

Requirements for Joining

The minimum requirements for membership are to be a good citizen, of at least the age of 18 and with a belief in a Supreme Being.

Whilst a criminal record may not be a bar to membership, offences must be disclosed so that each can be evaluated before your application can be progressed.

It is vital that an application is voluntary and not made under pressure from others.

There is a cost to membership, both a joining fee and annual subscription. Fees vary from lodge to lodge but £100-150 would be a fairly typical amount for a joining and an annual fee. In addition you pay for your meals and those of any guests that you invite. Meals, excluding drinks, are usually in the range of £12-15.



All members are expected to contribute to our charitable activities. Whilst the amount is a personal decision, £100 a year would be a reasonable budget.

Further costs relate to regalia and clothing. The usual mode of dress is a dark lounge suit and white shirt. Regalia is a minimal cost in the earlier years and may be supplied.

Making the right decision

Involving your partner

To fully enjoy Freemasonry, it is important that you have the support of your wife or partner. Freemasonry requires a time and financial commitment and it is important that this does not become the focus of domestic tension.

Finding the right Lodge

It is likely that if you are being recommended by friends or family, that this question is already answered. However lodges meet on different days, times and locations.

Wives and partners have many opportunities to participate and enjoy the social benefits of membership.

Prior to coming to a decision, it is probable that you will be invited to social events. You will find this a good way to get the feel of a lodge and whether it is the right one for you.

Some of our lodges have a focus on a hobby or career e.g. golf, scouts, emergency services, military. If you need assistance in finding the right lodge for you we shall be happy to explore options with you.

The right time to join

This is personal to you. Ideally you will be reasonably settled in career and family life and have some spare time that you want to fill usefully.

Your lodge will hope that you will remain with them for some years in order to settle into Freemasonry and become involved in its activities.

Some jobs involve moving to different areas and countries. It is possible to continue your masonry either with your first (Mother) lodge or by joining another as you move around.

It is often said by older members that they wished they had joined earlier and been able to make the most of the opportunities that Freemasonry offers. It is therefore preferable to consider joining sooner rather than later.

Some possible concerns

Whilst most potential members eagerly await the opportunity to join, a few have concerns or even doubts as to whether Freemasonry is for them. Having considered time and cost, there may remain other reservations or uncertainties.

The Members .. want you to enjoy .. joining and the tremendous sense of belonging to our Fraternity.

The members of your future lodge want you to enjoy the experience of joining and the tremendous sense of belonging to our Fraternity.

Most Freemasons feel that

to disclose the exact content of our ceremonies would diminish their significance and importance. However, be assured that there is nothing in Freemasonry that is incompatible with civil, moral or religious duties. You and your personal beliefs and views will be treated with the utmost respect. You will not be humiliated or embarrassed in any way.

Don't be afraid to discuss your intentions with family and friends. Most will have no knowledge of Freemasonry and may have some serious questions. This booklet should provide the answers, but if not please ask for help.

Naturally it is a matter of your own conviction that Freemasonry is an honourable organisation and that Freemasons that you know are decent and respectable people you wish to spend time with.

The Joining Process

You will be asked to complete an application form. This will be used as the basis of progressing your application.

If you do not live or work in the lodge's area then inquiries as to your suitability will be made of lodges in your area of residence.

If you have made direct application to join then we shall discuss your interest with you and seek to find a lodge suitable to you.

The lodge considering you application will want to get to know you well enough to make a decision as to your suitability.

There will be an informal and social stage of meeting with you and your wife or partner. You might, for example, be invited to meet at a local hostelry or attend a lodge social function.

It is helpful to meet with you at your home and you should therefore expect a request to meet with you and your wife or partner for an informal discussion. It is an opportunity for you both to have any questions and concerns answered and for us to have a better understanding of your circumstances and family support.

Once the Lodge believes that you would make a good candidate for Freemasonry, a Proposer and Seconder will be identified and you will be invited for a formal interview. This will usually be with members of the Lodge Committee.

Interview

The purpose of the interview is to formally consider your application, make sure that you understand the commitments of membership and can meet the basic joining requirements.

The Committee will want to hear your reasons for joining and be satisfied that this is a voluntary decision. You will have the opportunity to ask questions. You will then be asked to wait while the Committee consider whether to recommend you. You will normally be informed of the outcome before you leave.



Formal acceptance

Once the Committee has endorsed your Application you will be formally proposed at a Lodge meeting and at the following meeting a ballot will be held. If this is successful you will then be invited to attend for your Initiation into Freemasonry.

The time from application to Initiation depends on how well you are known, the frequency of lodge meetings and whether there are others ahead of you. Six months to a year would be fairly common, occasionally longer.

What if I am turned down?

The Lodge will consider your suitability for membership at a particular point in time. Whilst it is possible for you to be turned down at the Ballot, this is most unusual. If the selection process has been thorough, any concerns will have been identified early on and your application not pursued further.

It is not possible to give a definitive list of reasons and indeed it may be more of an opinion e.g. a belief that you might not be suited, fit in to that lodge or be ready for membership.

If your are unsuccessful, then please ask for some feedback. Remember that those who have come to a view have considerable

experience of Freemasonry and of what is required to enjoy and make a success of membership.

In many instances it will be quite appropriate to make a fresh application when time and circumstances are appropriate.

Preparing for the Big Day

Who to speak to

Your Proposer and Seconder have the primary responsibility for ensuring that you are briefed and well prepared for the day. You will know who they are and how to contact them.

The Lodge Secretary will write to you giving you details of when your Initiation will take place and what to bring with you.

Each Lodge has a Mentor who ensures that new Members settle in, are well informed and supported. He will usually appoint a Personal Mentor to befriend and work with you. Your Personal Mentor may well be either your Proposer or Seconder.



It would be unusual not to have some anxiety or questions. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the above for advice.

Dress

You will need to acquire suitable dress for lodge meetings. In most cases this is a dark grey or black lounge suit with white shirt, black tie, socks and shoes. A few lodges wear a dinner jacket. You will be advised on the correct dress for your lodge.

Budget

You will be required to pay in advance a fee for your Initiation and the Annual Subscription. The amount varies from Lodge to Lodge. The Lodge Secretary will inform you how much is required and how this may be paid.

The Big Day

What to wear and bring

Dress for the day will have been explained. As jewellery is removed or covered for the Initiation ceremony, please wear as little jewellery as possible.

Your meal is usually paid for you but you may wish to purchase drinks for your immediate friends. A collection is taken and there may be a draw or envelope collection for charity. £5 and some small change would suffice for this.

What you will be expected to say

Within the Ceremony, you will be prompted as to any response you are required to make.

At the Dinner following the meeting a Toast will be proposed to you as the Initiate. You will be expected to give a short response. Your Proposer will brief you on what to say. In essence a thank you to those that recommended and welcomed you, some reaction to the experience and your hopes and intentions for the future. It is in order to read or speak from notes.

What commitments you will be required to make

During the Ceremony you will be required to affirm your belief in God and that your application for membership is entirely voluntary and made without any expectation of material gain.

Your Initiation will be the highlight of your masonic career. It is very special.

You will take an obligation not to disclose to non-masons our modes of recognition. These are combinations of hand-grips, signs and words intended for use only within our meetings. They are based on the means by which travelling stone masons proved their qualifications to other masons.

You will be asked to confirm that you will do your best to provide support to those in need of charitable assistance.

Enjoying the day

Your Initiation into Freemasonry will be the highlight of your masonic career. It is very special.

You will be the centre of attention and everyone present will want to make you welcome and help you to enjoy the experience and the occasion

Although you will no doubt have some apprehension, please remember that everyone present has gone through the same ceremony. You can be assured that the ceremony is dignified and you will be well looked after, not embarrassed or demeaned.



What you can tell others of your experiences

Much will have taken place and the common experience is to have difficulty recalling too much detail. You will be provided with a booklet which outlines the ceremony.

There will be much that you won't have understood but the symbolism and significance of the ceremony will emerge as later on you see it performed for others and reflect upon it.

Please feel free to talk to family and friends about your experience. There is nothing that you should feel inhibited from sharing except the modes of recognition you obligated yourself not to disclose.

Do remember however that it would be a shame to spoil the experience for someone else by telling them too much in advance.

What happens next?

Completing your membership journey.

Having been Initiated you become an Entered Apprentice. You will then take two further steps (degree ceremonies) along the journey, that of Fellowcraft and Master Mason. These two ceremonies convey further moral lessons for life and are conducted in a similar way to the first. You will be informed in good time when these will take place. They may be at consecutive meetings or separated by several meetings depending on the number of other candidates ahead of you.

One difference is that you will be required to have learnt the answers to a number of questions based on the previous ceremony. You will have a prompter to assist you and you will be given a copy of the questions and the answers well in advance of the meeting. It would be sensible to ask your Proposer or Mentor to rehearse them with you.

Other opportunities

Having been initiated, you will be able to take a fuller part in the activities of the Lodge.



You may be invited to visit another lodge. If you can manage it, you would find it helpful not only to enjoy the social occasion but also to go and see someone else initiated soon after your own. You will take in so much more as a relaxed observer!

You will appreciate that those taking part have learnt the words of the ritual and are in effect performing a play. A common reaction is to feel that you would not be able to either learn or have the confidence to perform.

Experience shows that with some effort we can all learn to a greater extent than we ever thought possible and that by performing confidence and capacity grows significantly.

It is important to realise that, here again, members are supportive and appreciative of effort and want each brother to give of his best.

You may well be asked to perform a small piece of ritual at an early stage. Regard it as an "ice breaker".

Even if you are nervous and need a prompt, your effort will be well received and applauded. It becomes more comfortable thereafter.



At a later stage you may be asked to take a junior role in the lodge, perhaps as a Steward, assisting in running the meeting.

Accepting such a role will help you enter more fully into the life of the lodge, get to know the other members better and above all enjoy coming along and taking part.

Enjoying what you've joined

Freemasonry is to be enjoyed. It is a hobby and you will commit time to it in proportion to the enjoyment and fulfilment that you and your family gain.

Clearly your involvement needs to be tempered by family and work priorities. It is important not to take on too much too soon but to take time to understand the basics.

Visiting other lodges can be very fulfilling and an opportunity to make many new friends.

Including my family



Giving time to your masonic hobby will be easier if your wife and family appreciate why Freemasonry is important to you and that they in turn derive benefit from your membership.

The social activities of a lodge usually involve family too. They may be informal fun events when all the family can join in or more formal events such as a dinner.

Lodges vary as regards the range and extent of social activities. It is also possible to support other lodges' events and widen the opportunities for friendship and enjoyment.

Developing understanding and making the most of my membership

Having joined a lodge, the options to develop your interest and enjoyment are many and varied.

Your first priority is to your Mother Lodge and playing a useful role within it. The greatest privilege is to become Master of the Lodge having progressed over a number of years through the more junior roles.

As with any club or society, there are various administrative roles to be undertaken. Lodges are always on the look-out for members who have aptitude and inclination to assist with or take on these roles for a few years. Organising fund-raising and other social events needs a particular flair and enthusiasm.

Getting to understand the ritual is not a speedy process. Insight is best gained through learning and taking part. In addition, there are many good books that can aid an appreciation of the symbolism and principles that the ritual seeks to convey.

Some members have a particular interest in the history of Freemasonry and seek opportunities to advance their knowledge through joining specialist groups and study.

Having joined a lodge, opportunities to join other branches of Freemasonry will present themselves. These explore masonic principles from differing perspectives and can add to knowledge and enjoyment. It needs to be stressed however that whilst invitations may be tempting and fascination to learn more attractive, it is important not to become over-involved or over-committed. This is particularly true in the early years and when family and work are priorities. Far better to defer wider involvement until you are ready and the time is right.

Supporting others in need

During your Initiation, you will be reminded of the priority we give to support those in need. Indeed one of the three great principles of Freemasonry is the support of those less fortunate than ourselves.

Freemasons are one of the most generous social groups in this country and each year many millions of pounds are



donated to needy individuals and to charities large and small.

Funds are raised by personal giving, lodge charity events and income from investments.

You will be asked to make regular contribution to your lodge's fund-raising efforts. Some of this money will go to local good causes and some to support the work of our Central Charities that assist our own members, families and dependents as well as a wide range of national and local charities.

We do not look to public appeals and events to assist us in our task but depend upon the generosity of each member to achieve our commitments to those in need.

If I have questions or concerns?

Personal circumstances can change and have an impact on your ability to enjoy and participate in the activities of your Lodge. This may be due to a change at home or work, health or financial issues.

You may find that Freemasonry is not living up to your expectations or that Lodge activities become less enjoyable or rewarding than they once did.

It is easy to drift away and not try and resolve the issue. Your lodge will want to do its best to alleviate any concerns and give you personal support through any difficulties. After all that is one of the fundamental tenets of Freemasonry.



Do seek guidance and help at an earlier rather than later stage. Who you speak to is for you to decide but it is often your Proposer, Seconder or Mentor as they will know you best.

The Lodge Almoner is also key to addressing more specific hardship and health issues.

Getting More information

If you would like to clarify any specific points about membership and your application to join then please feel free to speak to those you already have contact with. They will be pleased to assist and, if necessary, ask others to help.

If you have yet to make contact with us and wish to do so, please send your inquiry to the Provincial Secretary. His Email address is: pglsomerset@btconnect.com.

A number of weblink references are provided at the end of this booklet.



Appendices

Our Principles & Requirements for Membership

- 1. Masonry consists of a body of men banded together for the purpose of mutual intellectual, social and moral improvement and pledged to preserve our mysteries, privileges, customs and ceremonials. Its members endeavour to cultivate and exhibit tolerance, respect, support and personal integrity towards one another and the world at large.
- 2. The essential condition of membership is a belief in a Supreme Being.
- 3. Masonry recognises no distinction of religion and emphasises the duties of loyalty and citizenship. It does not permit any of its members to discuss religious or political questions in Lodge.
- 4. It offers no pecuniary advantages binding one Mason to deal with another, or to support him in any way in the ordinary business relations of life.
- 5. We support a wide variety of Masonic and non-Masonic charities but Masonry is not in any financial sense a mutual-benefit society. Masonic charities are solely for the less fortunate.
- 6. Masonry teaches that a man's first duty is his family. People should not therefore join if the associated fees and charitable contributions will be to the detriment of their loved ones.
- 7. A prospective member should be sure he:
- desires the intellectual and moral improvement of himself and others;
- is willing to devote time, means and efforts in the promotion of brotherly love, relief & truth;
- · seeks no commercial, social or pecuniary advantages; and
- is able to afford the necessary expenditure without detriment to himself or his dependents.

The Masonic Family

The United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) is the ruling and governing body of freemasonry in this country. It is based at Freemasons' Hall, Great Queen Street, London.

For administrative purposes, Lodges around the country are grouped under 47 Provincial Grand Lodges.

UGLE is governed by The Grand Master, who is The Most Worshipful His Royal Highness The Duke of Kent. A number of senior executive officers and selected senior brethren assist him. Grand Lodge meets four times a year at what are known as "Quarterly Communications". Those eligible to attend include Grand Officers, and the Masters, Past Masters and Wardens of Lodges.

Many countries throughout the world have Freemasons' Lodges which are governed by a defined Grand Lodge (e.g. the Grand Lodge of Sweden, the Grand Lodge of Hungary.). Some of these foreign Grand Lodges have descended directly from UGLE. The Constitutions, Rules and Regulations of such Grand Lodges are recognised as 'regular' and English freemasons are permitted to join in their meetings.

Some Grand Lodges, on the other hand, have Constitutions, Rules and Regulations that are not acceptable to the UGLE (i.e. they are 'irregular') and with whom we therefore have no contact. Irregularity includes, no requirement of belief in a Supreme Being, admittance of women, involvement in political action.

Worldwide there are reckoned to be some 6 million Freemason's of who 250,000 are members in England & Wales. There are 88 lodges within Somerset under the supervision of the Provincial Grand Master. The combined Somerset membership is in excess of 4000.

History

The origins of Freemasonry are subject to scholarly debate. Freemasonry neither originated nor existed in King Solomon's time. Many historians have tried to prove freemasonry descended from the mysteries of classical Greece or Rome or was derived from the religion of the Egyptian pyramid builders.

Other theories include:

- Freemasonry sprang from bands of travelling stonemasons acting by Papal authority;
- It evolved from a band of Knights Templar who escaped to Scotland after the Order was persecuted in Europe;
- Freemasonry derived from the shadowy and mysterious Rosicrucian Brotherhood which may or may not have existed in Europe in the early 1600s.

Organised Freemasonry as we know it today began with the founding of the first Grand Lodge on 24 June 1717 in London.

It is in England that the first evidence of a Lodge completely made up of non-operative masons is found. Elias Ashmole, the Antiquary and Founder of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, records in his diary for 1646 that he was made a Free Mason in a Lodge held for that purpose at his father-in-law's house in Warrington. He records who was present, all of whom have been researched and have been found to have no connection with operative masonry.

English evidence through the 1600s points to freemasonry existing separately from any actual or supposed organisation of operative stonemasons. This lack of evidence for the existence of operative Lodges but evidence for Lodges of "accepted" masons has led to the theory of an indirect link between operative stonemasonry and Freemasonry.

Those who support the indirect link theorise that freemasonry was brought into existence by a group of men in the late 1500s or early 1600s. This was a period of great religious and political turmoil and intolerance. Men were unable to meet together without differences of political and religious opinion leading to arguments. Families were split by opposing views and the English Civil War of 1642 to 1646 was the ultimate outcome.

Those who support the indirect link believe the originators of Freemasonry were men who wished to promote tolerance and build a better world in which men of differing opinions could peacefully co-exist and work together for the betterment of mankind. In the custom of their times they used allegory and symbolism to pass on their ideas.

As their central idea was the building of a better society they borrowed their forms and symbols from the operative builders' craft and took their central allegory from the Bible, the common source book known to all, in which the only building described in any detail is King Solomon's Temple. Stonemasons' tools provided them with the multiplicity of emblems to illustrate the principles they were putting forward.

A more recent theory about our origins places freemasonry within a charitable framework. In the 1600s there was no welfare state, so anyone falling ill or becoming disabled had to rely on friends and the Poor Law for support.

In those days many trades had what have become known as "box clubs". These grew out of the convivial gatherings of members of a particular trade during meetings of which all present would put money into a communal box, knowing that if they fell on hard times they could apply for relief from the box. From surviving evidence these box clubs are known to have begun to admit members not belonging to their trade and to have had many characteristics of early masonic Lodges.

They met in taverns, had simple initiation ceremonies and passwords and practiced charity on a local scale. It is possible that freemasonry had its origins in just such a box club for operative masons.

Whatever our origins, after 1717 and the establishment of the Premier Grand Lodge, as it is known, Freemasonry grew in popularity, spreading across much of the world, attracting many famous and notable personalities.

Ritual and symbolism

Ritual is an essential part of Freemasonry. It is something that has been passed down through the centuries from Mason to Mason, and makes our fraternity unique.

The purpose of ritual is to remind the candidate of certain ethical and moral precepts, awakening in him respect and tolerance for another's ideas and beliefs. Ritual has been employed by nearly all cultures as a process to assist in self-realisation and as such is a rite of passage, which if fully understood and experienced will lead to an improved state.

The ritual of Freemasonry promotes self-knowledge, tolerance and philanthropy, as echoed in its three great principles of Brotherly Love (tolerance and respect), Relief (concern for others) and Truth (integrity). It also extols the cardinal virtues namely: Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude and Justice.

It is suggested that you should regard your initiation not only as the beginning of your Masonic career or way of life, but also as a porchway to discovering about yourself and your relationship with your fellow man. When you start to learn the ritual it is equally as important to focus upon the meaning of the words as it is to commit them to memory.

Symbolism

Freemasonry relies heavily on symbolism.

Symbols are sometimes described as a universal language because they present the message in a way that is understood by all and does not depend on words.

The word "symbol" is defined as a thing that represents something else by association. In Freemasonry it might be defined as a material object that represents a basic moral truth or lesson.

Symbolism is part of everyday life: road signs; mathematical symbols; the striped barber's shop pole etc.

Our ritualistic ceremonies are the foundation of our fraternity. In the ceremonies are contained all the philosophy and lessons of Freemasonry.

Many of the symbols are called to your attention as you progress through the ceremonies, but there is so much more to the ceremony that does not meet the eye at the time, and one of the many interests to Freemasonry is the discovery of different meanings and a greater understanding of the symbolism contained within the ceremony.

Hence there will be many members of your Lodge who have seen the same ceremony literally hundreds of times but this doesn't detract from their enjoyment as there is so much to Freemasonry, and one can still be learning new aspects of it having been a member for many years.

Masonic Web pages

Somerset

<u>www.somersetfreemasons.org</u> Provincial Grand Lodge of Somerset

www.youngmasons.co.uk The Adair Club

England

<u>www.ugle.org.uk</u> United Grand Lodge of England

www.freemasonrytoday.com UGLE Official magazine

Masonic Charities

www.grandcharity.org Freemasons' Grand Charity

www.rmtgb.org Royal Masonic Trust for Girls & Boys

www.rmbi.org.uk Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution

www.msfund.org.uk Masonic Samaritan Fund

Education and Research

Please Note – There are many internet sites that contain material and comment about Freemasonry. The list provided can be relied upon to give accurate information.

NOTES

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