LIVING SPIRITUALITY NEWS Winter 2011-12

Dear LSN Supporters

Do Words Have Voices is the title of the Turner Prize-winning installation by the Scottish sculptor Martin Boyce. Speaking to the BBC Arts Editor Will Gompertz after the award ceremony in Gateshead, Boyce said of his work It's all about landscape – the psychological landscape, the physical landscape. It's about being in the space – the space between the sculptures is as important as the sculptures themselves.

Writing of another major, though very different exhibition, The Times Chief Art Critic Rachel Campbell-Johnston said of Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan, currently at the National Gallery in London: Where one painting might make anyone marvel, his works altogether weave an ever-more intricate web. You can grasp hold of the threads. But it's the untouchable spaces between them that create the fragile miracle.

The alchemical power of the space between is a recurring theme in poetry and spirituality, as well as in art. It's the silent space into which TS Eliot's words reach once uttered. And again in Eliot's words, it's the stillness between two waves of the sea.

The space between is the central metaphor in Gethin Abraham-Williams' new book, Seeing the Good in Unfamiliar Spiritualities: the physical spaces between the Jordan and the Tigris, the Ystwyth and the Rheidol, and the psychological spaces between magic and mystery, religion and atheism, heaven and hell. In David Tacey's book, The Spirituality Revolution, the space between is historical, so both physical and psychological. We are caught, he says, in a difficult moment in history, stuck between a secular system we have outgrown and a religious system we cannot fully embrace.

The space between is a place of insecurity as well as creativity. For Tacey it's a stuck place, out of which we must somehow change the myths and narratives that we live by ... so that spirit and soul can be included again in the common understanding of what it means to be human. For the contemporary American Carmelite, Constance Fitzgerald, the space between is a place of impasse, before the fragile miracle of renewal and transformation can take place. For Fitzgerald, the transformation will only come if the path into the unknown, into the uncontrolled and unpredictable margins of life, is freely taken when the path of deadly clarity fades. Like Tacey, she knows our need of new myths and narratives, and knows too that these can only emerge from the space between: Behind every new spirituality and any creative re-visioning of the world – at the root of any real theology – is an experience of God, she writes, yet every religious experience comes from a meeting with a new and challenging face of God in one's own time and social situation... The experience of God in impasse is the crucible in which our God images and language will be transformed.

How then might we live this moment, this space between, consciously, receptively and creatively? I'm drawn again to Tacey, and also to the seemingly contradictory convictions of two poets. For Ruth Pitter There is always a way for those who must go over: always a bridge from the known to the unknown, while David Whyte cautions: But still, there is no path that goes all the way.

Suspicion and doubt yield poor rewards, says Tacey, but if we enter into life with an open heart and a recovered innocence, the world of spirit unfolds before us. What better thought could there be for that magical, mysterious space between Christmas and the coming year?

With warmest good wishes for Advent, Christmas and the New Year, Eley In This Issue:

Unfamiliar Spiritualities by Gethin Abraham-Williams

All I Know by Kenneth Steven

Beyond the Spirituality Revolution

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Bookshelf

The Turner Prize 2011 Exhibition continues at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead until 8th January 2012 Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan continues at the National Gallery in London until 5th February 2012

Seeing the Good in Unfamiliar Spiritualities

Gethin Abraham-Williams

I first met Gethin when he was General Secretary of Cytûn, Churches Together in Wales. He took a great interest in the work of LSN and was such a wise and supportive presence that I was delighted when he agreed, on retirement, to become a member of our Project Group (LSN's combined management and reflection group). Since then we've all appreciated his contribution to that group and to the life of LSN as a whole. He joined me in conversation at our last Gathering, on Story and Meaning, held in Birmingham, when we explored some of the themes in his first book Spirituality or Religion – Do we have to choose? Now Gethin has written a welcome second book, in which his experience and reflection deepen and his argument becomes at once more persuasive and more challenging. I'm very grateful to Gethin for his friendship, for all he has done for LSN, and for his permission to print brief extracts from his new book.

In Seeing the Good in Unfamiliar Spiritualities (Circle Books £9.99) Gethin explores the role spirituality could play in a creative and life-giving response to the massive changes and challenges of our times, and draws, intriguingly, on the experience and insights of the exiled Ezekiel to do so. Living through times of comparable upheaval and trauma, Ezekiel had the insight and courage to reshape his people's beliefs in a way that not only served their needs at the time, but bequeathed a challenge to the world ever since. It was in the 'maelstrom of meanings' in Babylon that Ezekiel moulded his thinking and started entertaining God-thoughts that seemed frighteningly novel, but that would eventually become the core of a renewed spirituality.

It will be our capacity to reconfigure our understanding of God in the face of ... challenges that are new to us, that will decide whether the God we end up believing in, or not believing in, is a product of our unthinking past, or 'something/someone' much more exciting and dynamic... For Ezekiel, exile had the equivalent effect to the theory of evolution. It challenged cherished assumptions and unsustainable premises. It would lead eventually to the discovery that God has always operated in a *land without clear borders*, actually and metaphorically... What Ezekiel offered was not a restoration to the earlier faith, but a refinement of it in which the question that mattered was not Why? but What do we now need to become? (pp 12, 26f)

I do not know if there is such a thing as the God-gene, or if some brains are hard-wired to respond more readily to ideas of God. I only know that if God is, then God is for all and not for the few. I do not know why some of the most ethereal spiritual music has been produced by composers who describe themselves as un-believing, but I am grateful that their work has allowed my spirit to soar. I do not know why some of the most spiritual and the most thoughtful people I know find my believing strange, but I am glad of their friendship. I do not know what it means to think of God against the immeasurable vastness of the universe, any more than I can account for the problem of evil on earth, but I think it must all be of a piece. I do not know how some who say they believe as I believe, can behave in ways I find abhorrent, but I will walk with them as long as they will walk with me, as I will walk with God, and believe God walks with me. I do not know how spirituality works, I only know that, for me, God helps make sense of life, and explains me to myself. I cannot define or explain who or why God is; I cannot imagine God, but I sense I can trace the characteristics of God in the man who was baptised in the Jordan and transcended all religions. (p38)

When Tolkien spun his tales of Hobbits, of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, he set them in Middle-earth: not at a physically distant time, but rather at a *different stage of imagination*. Spirituality is a *different stage of imagination* for the world's faiths, and if we have lost it we need to recover it, and if it is new to us we need to embrace it, because as Bilbo Baggins sang in comfortable middle age: the road ahead eventually reaches the point where many paths and errands meet. (p56)

Peace is the reward for those who recognise that preserving the uniqueness or supremacy of their particular faith pales into insignificance before acknowledgement of the one god, the source and goal of all that is, and was, and is to come. (p114)

On our spiritual journeys, we expend so much energy and endure so much angst because we are not always looking in the right places. So where is God to be found? How is God to be known?... Spirituality doesn't set out to provide a definitive answer, but it suggests that we might get nearer to knowing if we were more prepared to live with a creative uncertainty, picking up clues here and there, looking out for signs, testing, rather than rejecting, all the spirits outright. RS Thomas is very much the poet of the searching seeker because he knew what it was to stand in that crossing place between the secular and the sacred, as priest and poet... Thomas may have been as difficult to know as he is to read, but in his bishop he found someone who understood and respected him intellectually and spiritually. In a perceptive monograph on Thomas's Poetry of Faith, the bishop explains that Thomas believed organised religion had too great a desire to tidy things up because religious belief was essentially precarious and provisional. Too often it wanted to claim too much and often wanted to give answers when there were more questions to face. Spirituality is essentially untidy. That is its genius. (pp115f)

The life of faith is never tidy, never completed. It is a growing into, with insights accumulating, spasmodically, all too rarely, with long, thick patches of the dense fog of not knowing. It is a walking alongside of the Other, who is both knowable and unknowable, who emerges, momentarily, out of the familiar ... and, of course, the unfamiliar. (pp118f)

All I Know

The late sun leaving in the trees an orange-red, A soft honey fire. There has been no breath of wind In fifteen days; leaves hang gold and gorgeous In the woods, and through them the deer tread Patched with light, wary. The year begins to die; The rowans hang in blood-red clutches, every day The ripe sun is lower in the sky. Is this what it must be? Or did everything begin to live for ever Before the bite of the apple and the long fall Into our own demise? Is the worm at the earth's heart Our fault, the birth of our badness, Or is the last blizzard of all things, The withering of all that is, no more Than it should be, like a child's blown bubble -Beautiful to begin with, spinning reds and blues -Until it fades in a ball of cobwebs, bursts In a thistledown of drops? All I know is the seed sleeps December long -Forgotten, gone, buried in the dark -And then is born again.

Kenneth Steven

From Kenneth Steven's new collection, Evensong (pub SPCK £8.99) used by kind permission. See also Bookshelf. Kenneth will be leading a writing workshop and speaking at a Look at a Book event at The Willen Library on 18th and 19th September 2012. See www.thewellatwillen.org.uk for further details in due course, or contact 01908 242190.

Beyond the Spirituality Revolution LSN's Final Gathering: 10.00am-4.00pm 21st April 2012

The Lumen URC Church in Tavistock Place is the wonderful venue for our last LSN event and we hope that as many of you as possible will be able to join us for a day of reflection, friendship, appreciation, farewell and looking to the future. A light, inspiring, award-winning space, within easy reach of three mainline stations, tube and bus routes, we think Lumen is the perfect setting for this event. The day will include input from Eley on her work with LSN over the past ten years, and also – in a manner yet to be finalised – from David Tacey, author of the ground-breaking 2004 book *The Spirituality Revolution – The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality*. We expect that a number of people who have been crucial to the life of LSN and its predecessors, *The Ecumenical Spirituality Project* and *The Fellowship of Prayer* for

Unity, will also be with us, and that there will be plenty of opportunity for people to share their thoughts, experiences and hopes for the future of spirituality. The cost of the day is £20.00 and this will include a light sandwich lunch and a memento to take home. As always with our events, we want to ensure that no-one is excluded and some help will be available for those who would otherwise find it difficult to attend. Please fill in the booking form enclosed with this newsletter, or print off the form from the website. We look forward to seeing you there!

Bookshelf

Wherever possible all the titles mentioned in Bookshelf will be available for borrowing from the Willen Library. For further information contact the LSN office, or the Librarian, Barbara Merrifield, on 01908 242693, or library@thewellatwillen.org.uk

The catalogue is now online via the website www.thewellatwillen.org.uk.

Marcus Borg: Speaking Christian (SPCK £9.99) In my recent recorded conversations with over 20 people about their spiritual journeys to date, Marcus Borg's name came up more than any other when my interviewees spoke about the writers who had helped them most in their spiritual quest. This American theologian, whose many books include Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time and The Heart of Christianity, along with The Last Week and The First Christmas, written with John Dominic Crossan, has provided a lifeline to innumerable people, questing and questioning both within and beyond the churches. In this, his latest book, he explores how much of Christianity's basic vocabulary has become obscured and distorted over the centuries, and shows how this language can be reclaimed and rehabilitated for the 21st century.

Janet Ruffing: To Tell the Sacred Tale – Spiritual Direction and Narrative (Paulist Press £15.99) Janet Ruffing, of Yale Divinity School, is one of the major voices in contemporary spirituality. Highly respected both for her academic rigour and pastoral insight and wisdom, she recently delivered the annual William Johnston Memorial Lecture in Dublin, on the theme A Path to God Today – Nurturing Imagination and Symbol. This new book is the fruit of 25 years of spiritual direction, particularly with international students, and develops themes first explored in an earlier volume published in 1989.

Christine Valters Painter: The Artist's Rule – Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic **Wisdom** (Sorin Books £10.99) This new workbook comes highly recommended by Dr Caroline Kitcatt, Director of The Norwich Centre, who recently participated in a workshop led by the author in the States. As readers set out on the 12-week course the author invites them to make a commitment to your inner monk and artist, to cultivate space for each to flourish, and to see what they have to offer to your creative and contemplative paths.

Joan Chittister: The Monastery of the Heart – An Invitation to a Meaningful Life (SPCK \pounds 10.99) Another new title which draws on ancient monastic wisdom as an aid and inspiration for daily living, the publication of this book coincides with the launch of an important new initiative by the author's community of Benedictine sisters in Pennsylvania. Described as a lay monastic movement for seekers of God and a meaningful life, the hope is that Monasteries of the Heart: A New Movement for a New World will enable members to create their own 'monastery' by supporting each other in shaping their spiritual lives around Benedictine values of community, prayer, meaningful work, peace and care of creation. See www.monasteriesoftheheart.org

Janet Morley: The Heart's Time – A Poem a Day for Lent and Easter (SPCK £9.99) A welcome new book by the author best known – and loved – for the prayers, blessings and psalms of All Desires Known. Here there is a poem and a thoughtful, rigorous commentary for each day from Ash Wednesday to the Saturday after Easter. RS Thomas, Michael Symmons Roberts, Denise Levertov and

Carol Ann Duffy are among the many different poets whose work is included. As the author says in her introduction: It is common for a poem to examine something familiar in such a way that it becomes newly strange. Applied to religious truth, this denies us the comfort of taking refuge in formulae. Poetry helps us in the process of 'unlearning', which is a necessary part of the spiritual journey. Janet will be talking about her new book at the Centre for Radical Christianity in Sheffield on 26th January. See www. stmarkscrc.co.uk

Kenneth Steven: Evensong (SPCK £8.99) And speaking of poets, this is a stunning new collection from the Scottish poet Kenneth Steven. His familiar, haunting evocation of nature is still here, but now his vision deepens and darkens. The mood is sombre, elegiac and for all the berry-reds and golds, the landscape is wintry and spare. At this low, dark time of the year the poet's hope is real, but thin and defiant.

Frank Parkinson: The Power We Call God (The Kindlers £3.00) A passionate, provocative, largely persuasive and occasionally infuriating booklet in which the author asks a crucial question of his Quaker sisters and brothers, and more generally of all contemporary Christians: Do we have the discernment and the spiritual energy to cultivate the emerging new theology which relates the creation story to our individual quest? Highly recommended and a great choice for discussion groups.

Mary Rose O'Reilley: The Barn at the End of the World – The Apprenticeship of a Quaker, Buddhist Shepherd (Milkweed Editions £12.50) Not a new book (pub 2000) but a friend recently gave me a copy and I've greatly enjoyed the author's wise, earthy – very earthy – and funny approach to spirituality. As one reviewer writes: This is a delightful book, penned by a teacher determined to bring spirituality down to earth ... In the end, her book is an open-ended inquiry, a wonderfully humble and good-natured and perceptive gift that will appeal mightily to anyone who yearns for a simpler path.

Felicity Leng: Consecrated Spirits - A Thousand Years of Spiritual Writings by Women Religious (Canterbury Press £14.99) An excellent new resource to stand beside the well-thumbed copy of *The Virago Book of Spirituality – Of Women and Angels* on my book shelves. An anthology of spiritual writings by women religious from the earliest times to the present day, this book is dedicated to my dear and much-missed friend and spiritual director, Sr Pia Buxton CJ, who died in October 2010. Themes include Community, Politics and Solidarity; Visionaries, Mystics and Contemplatives; Mothering, Healing and Family Relations.

Catherine G Lucas: In Case of Spiritual Emergency – Moving Successfully Through Your Awakening (Findhorn Press £9.99) I first met Catherine Lucas some years ago at a Wrekin Trust conference in London. She was, even then, developing her work on *Spiritual Emergency* and later came onto the BBC radio programme *Something Understood* to talk about her own experience of such emergency and her founding of the UK *Spiritual Crisis Network*. This highly original, and possibly controversial, book is the fruit of profound experience and careful research. A guide for mental health professionals, pastoral care specialists and people going through spiritual crisis or their carers, the author suggests that when spiritual crises are understood and managed, rather than dismissed as psychosis, depression or breakdown, they can offer enormous potential for growth and fulfilment.

Other recent additions to the Library include:

Peter Tyler: The Return to the Mystical – Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila and the Christian Mystical Tradition, Jim Cotter: Praying the Dark Hours – A Night Prayer Companion, Ann Lewin: Seasons of Grace – Inspirational Resources for the Christian Year, Alexander Ryrie: The Desert Movement – Fresh Perspectives on the Spirituality of the Desert, Sister Rosemary SLG: Kabir – The Way of Love and Paradox, Esther de Waal: Living on the Border – Reflections on the Experience of Threshold, Jan Berry: Ritual Making Women – Shaping Rites for Changing Lives.

Pinboard Advance Notice

To 10 March: Swan Theatre, Stratford: Written on the Heart, David Edgar's well-received play which sets the Authorised Version of the Bible in its historical context, with Oliver Ford-Davies as Lancelot Andrewes and Stephen Boxer as William Tyndale. See www.rsc.org.uk Contact 0844 800 1110

28 April: Worth Abbey, Sussex: Gardens of the Heart: celebrating 20 years of the Quiet Garden Trust with Esther de Waal and Philip Roderick. See www.quietgarden.org Contact info@quietgarden.org or 01494 434873

28 April: Centre for Radical Christianity, Sheffield: Relating to the Other – A New Vision for Religious Pluralism with Tariq Ramadan. See www.stmarkscrc.co.uk Contact info@stmarkscrc.co.uk or 0114 266 3613

15-17 May: Northampton, Spirituality in a Fragmented World: second international conference of the British Association for the Study of Spirituality. See www.basspirituality.org.uk Contact c.gregory@hull.ac.uk or 01482 462011

Please see the last edition of *Living Spirituality* News (available on the website) or phone the office for details of four other major conferences next Spring and Summer: **Into Christ Consciousness** – **Co-Creating our Emerging Future** 7-10 April, **Beyond our Wildest Imagining** 12-14 April, **Re-imagining Retreat** – **A Spring in the Desert** 14-17 May, **The Cave of the Heart** – **Contemplation, Mindfulness and Social Renewal** 28-30 June.

January 2012

5-8: St Cuthman's Retreat Centre, West Sussex: Epiphany Journeys led by Ray Simpson of the International Community of Aidan and Hilda. See www.stcuthmans.com Contact stcuthmans@dabnet.org or 01403 741220

11: Sarum College, Salisbury: Literature, Art and the Christian Imagination, first of six sessions examining the links between Christian spirituality and aesthetic experience. See www.sarum. ac.uk Contact courses@sarum.ac.uk or 01722 424800

14: London: A Magical Mystery Tour Through Colour, an Art & Spirituality Network event led by John Harley and Angela Schütz. See www.artandspirituality.net or contact ASN, 48 Kenilworth Avenue, London, SW19 7LW

20-22: Loyola Hall, Merseyside: Retreat for Men, led by Matthew Power and Stephen Hoyland. See www.loyolahall.co.uk Contact mail@loyolahall.co.uk or 0151 426 4137

24: London: Integral Spirituality with Jonathan Males. Taster session for a monthly evening course, for people to learn about the subject and decide if they want to commit for the year. See www. benedictinecentreretreats.org.uk Contact retreats@bcsuk.wanadoo.co.uk or 020 8449 2499

25: London Centre for Spirituality: Celtic Twilight – Hild of Whitby, evening led by June Boyce-Tillman. See www.spiritualitycentre.org Contact info@spiritualitycentre.org or 020 7621 1391 **27-29: St Beunos, N Wales: Look up at the Skies!** Considering the winter night sky – creation at its most magnificent, with Damian Jackson and Anne Morris. See www.beunos.com Contact secretary@beunos.com or 01745 583444

February

1: St Bede's, York: From Contemplation to Compassion, with Eley McAinsh, and extended times of silence guided by Jenny Sandler. See www.stbedes.org.uk Contact admin@stbedes.org.uk or 01904 464900

3-7: Othona Community, Dorset: Film for Thought: Work and Leisure, reflecting in spiritual terms on some good films, in good company and cosy surroundings. Led by Sandra Palmer. See www.othona-bb.org.uk Contact mail@othona-bb.org.uk or 01308 897130

4: Norwich: At the Midpoint, reflecting on our spiritual lives at the midpoint between the Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox. Led by Caroline Kitcatt of the Norwich Centre for Spiritual Exploration. See www.norwichcentre.org Contact info@norwichcentre.org or 01603 617709

11: Sisters of St Andrew, Edenbridge, Kent: From Anger to Praise, with Sr Marie-Christine and Jo Eaton. A space to explore an inner journey from anger to praise. Same theme also offered on 16 Feb. See www.sisters-of-st-andrew.com Contact thecentre@sisters-of-st-andrew.com or 01342 850 388

11: Glasgow: Songs of Longing, a day of prayer and reflection mediated through music and song, with Tom McGuinness of the Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Glasgow. See www.iscglasgow.co.uk Contact admin@iscglasgow.co.uk or 0141 354 0077

22-27: Othona Community, Dorset: The Buddha's Four Noble Truths and The Way of Jesus. A gentle retreat led by Simon Small, author of From the Bottom of the Pond: the forgotten art of experiencing God in the depths of the present moment. See www.othona-bb.org.uk Contact mail@othona-bb.org.uk or 01308 897130

March

2-3: Thirsk, N Yorks: Spiritual Legacies for our Times – Carl Rogers, Julian of Norwich and Etty Hillesum. Lecture and seminar with Brian Thorne, at the Centre for the Study of Theology and Health, Holy Rood House. See www.holyroodhouse.org.uk (new website under construction). Contact theologycentre@holyroodhouse.org.uk or 01845 522580

10: Bristol: Treasure in the Field: Spiritual Capital, Sustainable Living, Christian Ecology Link conference with Jonathan Porritt and Tim Gorringe. See www.christian-ecology.org.uk/treasure

10: London: Are you ready for the next Quantum Leap? Christians Awakening to a New Awareness (CANA) Study Day, with Sister Ishpriya. See www.christiansawakening.org Contact cana@christianswakening.org or 01730 265591

21: Ivy House, Wilts: Montgomery Trust Lecture: Living with a Monastic Heart – Patterns of New Monasticism, with Esther de Waal. See www.ivyhouse.org Contact stdenys@ivyhouse.org or 01985 214824

22-25: Othona Community, Dorset: The Aramaic Jesus and the Sufis – Shared Paths of the Heart, three-day workshop with Neil Douglas-Klotz, world renowned expert on the Aramaic Jesus. See www.othona-bb.org.uk Contact mail@othona-bb.org.uk or 01308 897130

23-25: Sisters of St Andrew, Edenbridge, Kent: Listening to God In and Through My Body. A weekend workshop on Bio-Spiritual Focusing, led by Felicity Young and Margaret Lyth. See www.sisters-of-st-andrew.com Contact thecentre@sisters-of-st-andrew.com or 01342 850 388

24: Thirsk, N Yorks: Spirituality and Health, with Stephen Wright of the Sacred Space foundation, at the Centre for the Study of Theology and Health, Holy Rood House. Event in partnership with the Guild of Health. See www.holyroodhouse.org.uk (new website under construction). Contact theologycentre@holyroodhouse.org.uk or 01845 522580

26-29: St Beunos, N Wales: Social Justice Seminar, with Peter McVerry. Seminar focusing on social justice and how Christian spirituality is inextricably linked with the love and care for neighbour, particularly those on the margins of society. See www.beunos.com Contact secretary@beunos.com or 01745 583444

30- 1 April: Thirsk, N Yorks: Welcoming Mary Magdalene, Woman of Spirit. Women's spirituality weekend with Elizabeth Baxter. See www.holyroodhouse.org.uk (new website under construction). Contact theologycentre@holyroodhouse.org.uk or 01845 522580

The Living Spirituality Network

The Living Spirituality Network exists for people who are exploring the meaning of spirituality, both within and beyond the traditional churches. The Network provides supporters with information, encouragement and contacts as they seek to understand and deepen their spiritual lives. We work with a wide range of individuals, groups and communities, many of whom find themselves on the edges of mainstream church structures. For further information on the Network, and the groups and communities with which we are in contact, please contact the office for a copy of our leaflet.

Support:

The Living Spirituality Network relies on grants and donations from small communities, projects, networks, individuals and churches. Major support is gratefully received from the Society of the Sacred Mission.

Living Spirituality News is issued three times a year, and is available by post, by email or via the website. If you know of anyone who would welcome a copy, please contact the Administrator. It is issued free of charge but donations of £10.00-£15.00 pa would help considerably in off-setting our costs and would be gratefully received. Please make cheques payable to: 'CTBI – Living Spirituality Network', and send them to the Administrator at the address given. If you are a taxpayer and are willing to Gift Aid your donation, please ask for a form to sign.

A large-type version is available on request.

Contact us at:

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