

# B'nai Mitzvah Family Handbook



ADAS ISRAEL  
Congregation

[adasisrael.org/bnaimitzvah](https://adasisrael.org/bnaimitzvah)

*A Message from*  
**THE CLERGY TEAM:**



## Dear Parents,

It is an incredible privilege to meet with your children, to get to know them, their hobbies, their passions, to learn together and to craft words of *Torah* together. The moment when they stand on the *bimah*, taking ownership of their Jewish identity is truly remarkable, every single time. *B'nai Mitzvah* are not just celebrations about the children, they are celebrations of the power of Jewish parenthood, and of spiritually engaged parenting. All of us at your spiritual home, Adas Israel, wish you strength and so much joy and meaning through this journey.

We are grateful to be on this journey with you and your family.

## The Clergy Team

Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt  
Rabbi Aaron Alexander  
Cantor Arianne Brown  
Rabbi Kerrith Solomon  
Rabbi Sarah Krinsky  
Hazzan Rachel Goldsmith

# B'nai Mitzvah @ Adas

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A young girl with long brown hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a purple and white striped sweater. She has her hands covering her eyes. In the foreground, a lit white candle is visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light.

## *B'nai Mitzvah:* Its Meaning & Customs

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The term *B'nai Mitzvah* (literally, “children of the commandment”) is a title given to all Jews upon reaching an age of maturity to signify that they are now eligible and responsible for the performance of the *mitzvot*, assuming personal responsibility for their religious, moral, and spiritual behavior. Although no ritual or service is necessary to establish this status, the *B'nai Mitzvah* celebration, over the past few centuries, has emerged as a way to demonstrate commitment to Judaism. Our *B'nai Mitzvah* celebrations occur as part of our regular congregational services. Before the congregation, family, and friends, the young person can now wear a *tallit*, be called to the *Torah* for an *aliyah*, lead prayers and interpret the weekly *Torah* portion. Family and friends share in the honors. In offering this privilege, the congregation says to its *B'nai Mitzvah*: you are now participating adults in our religious community. *B'nai Mitzvah* celebration bears witness to the continuity of Judaism embodied in a new generation of committed Jews. Certainly, the beginning of a young person’s transition from childhood to responsible Jewish adulthood is a time of celebration.



# If You Have A Question: Whom Do You Contact?

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**Jessica Lefkow** will be your primary contact for *B'nai Mitzvah* matters. She can always point you toward the answer or the person you may need to be in touch with. You are also welcome to use this guide. Please do not hesitate to email us, or to call the synagogue at 202.362.4433 and ask for:

## Oversight of *B'nai Mitzvah* Program

Cantor Arianne Brown, x114  
[cantor.brown@adasisrael.org](mailto:cantor.brown@adasisrael.org)

## Questions Regarding Religious Education

Rabbi Kerrith Solomon, x117  
[rabbi.solomon@adasisrael.org](mailto:rabbi.solomon@adasisrael.org)

## *B'nai Mitzvah* Date Scheduling or Tutoring Schedule

Jessica Lefkow x146  
[jessica.lefkow@adasisrael.org](mailto:jessica.lefkow@adasisrael.org)

Hazzan Rachel Goldsmith, x141  
[hazzan.goldsmith@adasisrael.org](mailto:hazzan.goldsmith@adasisrael.org)

## Honors & Torah Readings

Juliana Nieto, x144  
[juliana.nieto@adasisrael.org](mailto:juliana.nieto@adasisrael.org)

## *Kiddush* Information & Questions

## Receptions, Room Reservations & Catering

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## Billing Questions

Chloe Chemla, x145 or  
Rita Nicholls, x132

## *Mikvah/B'nai Mitzvah* Immersion

Rabbi Elianna Yolkut, x142  
[Rabbi.yolkut@adasisrael.org](mailto:Rabbi.yolkut@adasisrael.org)

## Adas Israel Sisterhood Gift Shop

202.364.2888

## Unresolved Issues / All Other Questions

Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, x154  
Rabbi Aaron Alexander, x122  
Cantor Arianne Brown, x114





## *B'nai Mitzvah* Planning Checklist:

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Our *B'nai Mitzvah* preparation program and timetables make sure that children have more than enough time to prepare for the *B'nai Mitzvah*. The best way for your entire family to prepare for the *B'nai Mitzvah* celebration is to attend services regularly.

Please be in touch with Cantor Arianne Brown and Rabbi Kerrith Solomon if there is anything they should know about your student's learning style or your family's expectations. If extra time and specially trained tutors are required, please take the time to make any special arrangements to help ensure that your child has a positive experience.

**The *B'nai Mitzvah* preparation process generally follows the outline on the following pages...**



## Three Years To Go:

- Attend initial Parents' Meeting with Adas Clergy. You will receive informational material and the *B'nai Mitzvah* application. This parents' meeting is usually held in the winter.
- Return online *B'nai Mitzvah* application by deadline date on application.
- Receive your child's assigned *B'nai Mitzvah* date in early spring.

## Two Years To Go:

- Attend *Kabbalat Parsha* Ceremony – a ritual ceremony for receiving your *Torah* portion.
- Attend *Shabbat* services.
- Attend Trope classes in Religious School or Jewish day school.

## Eighteen - Twelve Months To Go:

- Attend 6th Grade Student *Shabbaton* in the fall.
- Let out-of-town guests know the date of your event.
- Reserve the Synagogue for your reception with Food and Beverage Events Manager, Juliana Nieto, x144 (rooms & dates book up quickly and are reserved on a first come-first served basis).
- Arrange *Kiddush* and catering (if applicable) with Juliana Nieto, Food and Beverage Events Manager.
- Book photographers, videographers, and entertainment for reception (if applicable). If you plan to hire a photographer for your rehearsal, event or party, you must share the name/contact of the photographer with Jessica Lefkow ahead of time. We reserve the right decline access to any photographer if their name/contact has not been shared prior to the event being photographed.
- *B'nai Mitzvah Administration Fee* of \$795 (\*effective for 5783 *B'nai Mitzvah* families; amount subject to change) will appear on your synagogue statement. This fee covers all applies to administration, planning, and tutoring relating to the *B'nai Mitzvah*. It applies whether you participate in our program fully, or partially (i.e. tutoring with us in order to celebrate in Israel, or tutoring privately in order to celebrate at Adas). The fee must be paid in full before *B'nai Mitzvah* training can begin.
- Attend *B'nai Mitzvah* Family Retreat (*held in the Spring*).
- Attend 6th Grade Religious School Rituals class, including *Haftarah Trope* tutorial.

## Twelve - Eight Months To Go:

- Begin *Mitzvah / Tzedakah* Project – One component of the *B'nai Mitzvah* preparation is the student designing their own individualized *Mitzvah* project to be fulfilled. Ideally, the project will be one which taps into a special skill or interest of the student and provides an opportunity for the most meaningful way for them to contribute to their world. For ideas and suggestions, please see the *B'nai Mitzvah* page of our website, or reach out to Lindsay Kagin in our Education Department – [Lindsay.kagin@adasisrael.org](mailto:Lindsay.kagin@adasisrael.org).
- Prepare for your child's schedule in the upcoming months. Consider scaling back on other activities to ensure adequate study time.



## Eight Months To Go:

- You will receive information from us regarding scheduling your child's *B'nai Mitzvah* lessons. We provide weekly half hour sessions for 6-8 months, with more time allotted to offset some missed time over a summer.
- Juliana Nieto will contact you regarding the *Kiddush*. The standard *Kiddush* fund contribution is \$2,500 for 2023; (*prices subject to change.*)
- Order invitations. Unless otherwise notified, the starting time on the invitation should list the actual time the service begins: 9:30 am. You can let guests know that they should arrive by the start of the *Torah* Service, around 10 am. It is appropriate to list the Hebrew date along with the English date.
- Order *Tallit*, *Tefillin* and *Kippot* (*available in the Adas Israel Sisterhood Gift Shop*).
- Reserve hotel blocks for guests.
- Your child will receive their binder with study materials in advance of beginning their lessons.

## Six - Eight Months To Go:

- Attend *Shabbat* morning services! We require 10 *Shabbat* services during the time the students are taking lessons. The more time they spend in the service where their *B'nai Mitzvah* will take place, the more comfortable they will be on their special day.



## Six Months To Go:

- Submit names of *Shabbat Kiddush* sponsors and submit payment for the *Kiddush*. The standard *Kiddush* fee and enhancements must be paid 6 months prior to the *B'nai Mitzvah*.
- We will contact you to schedule check-in lessons with Cantor Brown.
- Jessica Lefkow will contact you to submit bio and photo for the Chronicle.

## Three Months To Go:

- You will hear from the Rabbinic Offices to schedule meetings with the Rabbi who will preside at your child's service. The first meeting will be a family meeting. Subsequent sessions will be between the student and the Rabbi to prepare the *D'var Torah*.
- We will send information about your rehearsal and attendance at morning *minyan*. This typically occurs on the Monday or Thursday morning before the *B'nai Mitzvah*. Many families choose to sponsor breakfast at morning *minyan* on their day. This can be arranged with Julian Nieto.
- Arrange date for photography to be taken at Adas Israel with Jessica Lefkow. Photos can be *scheduled on the same day as the rehearsal*.
- If you would like to schedule a *B'nai Mitzvah* immersion in the Adas Israel Community *Mikvah* for the week before, e-mail Rabbi Eliana Yolkut ([rabbi.yolkut@adasisrael.org](mailto:rabbi.yolkut@adasisrael.org)) for more information or book an appointment time at <https://mikvahcalendar.as.me/schedule.php>.

## Six - Eight Weeks To Go:

- Begin preparation of *B'nai Mitzvah Shabbat* Program Handout (if desired). Contact Jessica Lefkow for a sample document.
- We will send you information about honors that you may assign. Submit a draft of honors to Hazzan Goldsmith. Let her know if you have family or friends who are able to read *Torah*.

## Four - Six Weeks To Go:

- **Finalize** assignments for *Aliyot* and Honors with Hazzan Rachel Goldsmith.
- *B'nai Mitzvah* are invited to take part in the Friday night service. Notify your tutor to let us know if you will attend.

### MIKVAH PRAYERS

#### Becoming *B'nai Mitzvah*

To be read before preparing for immersion:

*I immerse today in celebration of becoming a B'nai Mitzvah. I immerse as an act of transition; from present to future, from student to learner and teacher, from Jewish childhood towards a new state of responsibility and privilege in the Jewish community. May I be filled with renewed energy and direction to continue on my Jewish path. May God grant me strength, courage, and peace. Amen.*

#### Parent of *B'nai Mitzvah*

To be read before preparing for immersion:

*As my child grows from a child to an adult, teach me how to hold them close and let them go; how to protect them from the world and expose them to the world; how to guide them and trust them. Give me strength, God, and confidence and wisdom. Watch over them, God. Teach them to believe in themselves and to have faith in goodness. Give them courage, humility, happiness and the love of good friends. Bless our family, God, with health, with peace, with joy and with love. Amen.*



## Two Weeks To Go:

- Program booklets, if desired, are the family's responsibility. Before printing, send draft of the booklets to your child's tutor for approval. Printing is the responsibility of the family.
- All *Torah* readers must contact Hazzan Rachel Goldsmith to be heard and approved, in person or by phone, two weeks prior to the *B'nai Mitzvah* date.
- We welcome families to participate in the sweet tradition of showering the *B'nai Mitzvah* with candy! This sweet shower is not a requirement. We only allow individually-wrapped Kosher Sunkist Fruit Gems, available for purchase in the Sisterhood Gift Shop.
- If any of your guests need accommodations, please email requests to [inclusion@adasisrael.org](mailto:inclusion@adasisrael.org).

## Week of *B'nai Mitzvah*:

### Monday or Thursday:

- **Attend and participate** in Monday or Thursday 7:30 AM morning *Minyan*. Our *B'nai Mitzvah* are invited to lead *Ashrei* if they have prepared it, and will be called up for an *Aliyah*. They will be invited to wear both *Tallit* and *Tefillin* (we provide both, but they are welcome to bring their own). At this time they will also be given their *B'nai Mitzvah* gifts on behalf of the Congregation.
- **Final Rehearsal takes place!** Parents, the student, and siblings who are participating are expected to attend. The Rehearsal will take approximately 1 ½ hours. Please remember to bring your binder, *Tallit* and dress shoes.
- During the Final Rehearsal your child's tutor will review the service participants, logistics and details and any questions you might have.
- Any time between Thursday morning and Friday 6pm, place programs and candy in the vestibule entrance to the Smith Sanctuary, or just outside of the Gewirz Beit Am.



## Mazel Tov!

# The Big Weekend:

### Friday:

Attend and participate in the *Shabbat* Evening Service.

### Saturday:

*B'nai Mitzvah* Family should be at the synagogue at least 15 minutes before the service begins:

- Put the binder on the *Bimah*.
- In the Rabbi's office, the *B'nai Mitzvah* will put on their *Tallit* before the *Shabbat* service begins.
- **Enjoy!**





## Administrative Items & Frequently Asked Questions

The celebration of *B'nai Mitzvah* is a milestone not only for your family and child, but for the entire congregation. As we assemble to worship on *Shabbat*, we join in witnessing your child's passage to the beginnings of Jewish identity and responsibility. We welcome him or her as a fully participating member of our congregational community.

As you begin your preparation for the day, we want to help with your planning in every way that we can. Cantor Arianne Brown oversees our *B'nai Mitzvah* Program. For questions regarding the *B'nai Mitzvah* Program, please contact Cantor Brown.





## Eligibility Requirements:

- All *B'nai Mitzvah* families must remain synagogue members who are current in all synagogue obligations to retain their date and receive training.
- *B'nai Mitzvah* families are required to contribute a \$795 *B'nai Mitzvah* administration fee (amount subject to change) which will appear on your synagogue account the year before your *B'nai Mitzvah* date.
- We always make sure that finances are not a barrier. If you need a revised financial plan or if you have any questions regarding your synagogue account, please contact our Executive Director, David Polonsky.
- Because we regard the educational experience as an important community endeavor, it is the policy of Adas Israel Congregation that children attend and fulfill the prescribed program and curriculum of the Estelle and Melvin Gelman Religious School, Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School, or another equivalent program of religious education. Exceptions may be made to this policy on an individual basis. Families can submit a *Religious School Enrollment Exception Form* to Rabbi Kerrith Solomon for individual extenuating circumstances, with another educational program in place.
- Practically speaking in most cases, please make sure your expectation is that your child remains enrolled through 7th grade.

A young boy with dark, curly hair is shown from the side, wearing a patterned kippah and a white tallit with gold stripes. The background is a solid light orange color.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

**Are we a single or a double? Sharing a date is a common occurrence at Adas Israel.** *B'nai Mitzvah* originally scheduled as a “single” may be changed to a “double”, as dictated by the scheduling needs of the congregation and our families. The families involved will be notified as soon as possible if any change needs to be made.

**What if my child has special needs?** We embrace flexibility and creativity in meeting our students’ needs and challenging them to succeed. As stated previously, if your child has any reading or learning needs or requires additional educational support, please let Rabbi Solomon or Cantor Brown know as soon as you receive your assigned date so we can discuss the best ways to prepare your child.

**What can I do in advance to assist my child in preparing?** Take an active role in the process. Light candles on Friday night and recite the *Kiddush*. Attend *Shabbat* services with your family. Have fun learning prayers and following trope lessons together, available on [www.adasisrael.org/bnaimitzvah](http://www.adasisrael.org/bnaimitzvah). Create space in your child’s schedule for them to practice their weekly assignments, and listen to them chant whether or not you are familiar with the material.









## School & Service Requirements for *B'nai Mitzvah*:

Because we regard the educational experience as an important community endeavor, it is the policy of Adas Israel Congregation that children attend and fulfill the prescribed program and curriculum of the Estelle and Melvin Gelman Religious School, Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, Jewish Primary Day School, or some other full-time program of religious education. Exceptions may be made to this policy on an individual basis. Families can submit a *Religious School Enrollment Exception Form* to Rabbi Kerrith Solomon for individual extenuating circumstances.

Regular attendance at *Shabbat* Services gives our students the opportunity to become familiar with the prayers and the structure of the services, and the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to participate comfortably in various parts of the service. We recommend that students in Grades 3–5 attend *Shabbat* Services at least once a month. Students in Grade 6 must attend 10 *Shabbat* morning services from the time they begin their *B'nai Mitzvah* lessons in the same service (Smith, Traditional Egalitarian *Minyan* or *Havurah*) where the *B'nai Mitzvah* will take place. *B'nai Mitzvah* Tutors will check in at each lesson to confirm *Shabbat* attendance.



## Preparation of Students:

The study of the required materials will begin approximately six months before the assigned date (seven to eight months before if that time spans the summer months or High Holy Days). Students are taught by designated *B'nai Mitzvah* Tutors. Lessons are a half-hour in duration once per week. We expect students to practice at home 20 minutes a day, 5 days a week. All students meet with Cantor Arianne Brown for several check-in lessons throughout the process.

If you would like your child to use an outside tutor, please contact us for approval. We want to make certain that your child is taught by a teacher who is experienced and knowledgeable in this area and familiar with our services at Adas Israel. Even when using an outside tutor, our instructors will meet periodically with your child to assess their progress.

### General Material that students prepare:

- Friday night and *Shabbat* morning *Kiddush*.
- The blessing recited on putting on a *tallit*.
- Trope (cantillation) for *Torah* and *Haftarah*.
- The two blessings recited on reading from the *Torah*.
- The blessings before and after chanting a *haftara* (portion from the Prophets).
- Their *haftara* portion.
- *Ashrei*
- A portion from the *Torah*
- *Shabbat* morning *Torah* Service
- If all of the above have been completed, additional *aliyot* may also be assigned.
- Students will also prepare a *D'var Torah* with assistance from the Rabbi assigned to your child's *B'nai Mitzvah* service.



## Shabbat Kiddush & Catering Information:

The entire congregation looks forward to celebrating this special *simcha* with you and your family. We invite you to honor family members and friends by listing their names as sponsors of the *Shabbat Kiddush* in the *Shabbat* announcements. Please contact Juliana Nieto, x144 for *Kiddush* information or questions. Please return the *Kiddush* form **six months prior to your date**.

The Kiddush contribution fee is \$2,500 per family (subject to change). The fee applies to each family regardless of whether there are one or two families celebrating on that Shabbat, or if you celebrate in the morning or at Mincha. This helps ensure a beautiful Kiddush experience for you and your guests on the day of your Simcha, as well as participation in the larger value of celebrating Kiddush together every Shabbat at Adas Israel. Please contact our executive director, David Polonsky, if the Kiddush fee presents a financial hardship. We will always make sure that finances are not a barrier for your celebrating this milestone within the Adas community.

For room reservations for a *Shabbat* dinner, private receptions/party or for *Kiddush* information please contact:

**Juliana Nieto,**  
**Food & Beverage Event Coordinator**

## Evening Receptions/Parties:

We invite and encourage families to hold their “*Seudat Mitzvah*” celebration at the synagogue. It is an appropriate way to add a Jewish dimension to your *simcha*. Our beautiful reception halls and fine panel of kosher caterers combine to provide a number of options for your *B’nai Mitzvah* celebration.

In the event of a double *B’nai Mitzvah* or a *B’nai Mitzvah* in two different services on the same *Shabbat* morning, it is especially important for you to let Juliana Nieto know your plans as quickly as possible so that any conflicts can be resolved and everyone’s needs can be met. *Rooms are reserved on a first-come, first-served basis.*

We want to be helpful in order to make certain that all your needs are met for you to create a meaningful event. Juliana Nieto can answer your immediate questions about the catering policy and will be happy to answer any questions that you may have concerning social hall usage. Please note the following guidelines, which will assist you in your planning. These guidelines are intended to help you and your caterer create a *Shabbat* atmosphere which is in harmony with Jewish law and your celebration.

1. In order to make you feel comfortable in the synagogue we have liberally interpreted the laws regarding *Shabbat* so that live or recorded music is permissible when it is Israeli, Klezmer, or classical music used to create an atmosphere.
2. No pictures may be taken in the Sanctuary or in the congregational *Kiddush* or public areas on *Shabbat*. Photos may be taken at private receptions.
3. Writing is not permissible on *Shabbat*, including signing photographs or writing in a memory book.



RUTH AND SIMON ALBERT  
ADAS ISRAEL SISTERHOOD  
GIFT SHOP



2850 Quebec Street, NW  
Washington DC 20008  
202.364.2888

**Dear *B'nai Mitzvah* Families,**

*Mazel Tov* on your forthcoming event. This is a big milestone for your family and we would like to help you with this process. When you make a purchase at the Sisterhood Gift Shop, you are helping to support Sisterhood and the Synagogue. Profits from the Gift Shop are donated to Adas Israel to be used for special Synagogue and Sisterhood projects.

**What can we do to help you?**

- We can help you select and order *B'nai Mitzvah* invitations, at a discount.
- We can help you select your *Kippah* and place your order for inscribed *Kippot*.
- We can order any additional items (personalized thank you's, napkins, etc).
- We have a large selection of *Tallitot*, both traditional and contemporary, made from wool, silk, cotton and linen. Most of our *tallitot* are made in Israel by their local designers.
- We have beautiful *B'nai Mitzvah* gifts at all price ranges. We can help you select gifts for friends and family.
- We can keep a Registry of Gifts for your child so that when your friends and families come in the Shop for gift suggestions, we have your list available.
- We have individually wrapped kosher Sunkist Fruit Gems available for purchase for your *simcha*.
- And...we have Gift Certificates for purchase. Gift Certificates can be used toward any purchase in the Shop.

We would love to meet you and be of service to you. We can be reached at: (202) 364-2888 or by e-mail at: [Adasgiftshop@gmail.com](mailto:Adasgiftshop@gmail.com). You can also visit us on the Adas Israel website, [www.adasrael.org](http://www.adasrael.org) and select the Gift Shop tab.

Sincerely,

**Adas Israel Sisterhood Gift Shop Managers**



**Invitations:** Use the word ***"simcha"*** (Please share our *simcha* when...)  
Invite guests ***"to worship"*** (Please join us to worship and celebrate....)  
Use the Hebrew name of your child  
**Parasha**....use the *Torah* portion assigned to your child  
Use the Hebrew date  
Jewish symbols....*magen david* (star), *menorah*, lions, scrolls, *tallit*, etc.  
Plant trees in Israel....there are special invitations with lovely JNF certificates

**Music & Entertainment:** **Hora**....it's fun to lift your child in a chair, siblings too  
**Klezmer**....some Klezmer groups do both social dance music as well as Israeli & Klezmer music  
**Israeli Dancing**

**Meals:** **Motzi**....blessing over the bread. Ask special friends or family to participate  
**Birkat HaMazon**....blessings after meals. Provide booklets for your guests  
**Kippot**....provide *kippot* if your event is in the synagogue especially for *motzei* & *birkat*

**Party:** **Havdalah**....gather guests to recite *Havdalah* on the dance floor at the beginning of the celebration  
**Shabbat Dinner**....a special intimate dinner for close family and out of town guests before services. Don't forget challah, candles and *Kiddush*  
**Tzedakah**....use special cards which note that a contribution has been made in your guest's honor to a charity. Mazon is a good one  
**Theme ideas**....connect to Jewish characters, *tzedakah*, Israel, holidays, *Torah* portion, a Jewish value

**Gifts:** **Israeli Bonds/JNF Tree Certificates**....encourage your friends to consider this option  
**Tzedakah**....encourage your child to share a portion of monetary gifts with a favorite charity. Tell your guests which one your child is supporting.  
**Adas Israel**....honor your child and the synagogue with a *mitzvah* plaque or contribution to the *B'nai Mitzvah* Endowment  
**Ritual Objects**....start a collection of items such as menorahs or *Kiddush* cups

**Lasting Memories:** **Scrapbook**....make a scrapbook for or with your child to include a family tree, photographs of ancestors, invitation, copy of *torah* portion & *haftarah*, rsvp or greeting cards with special messages from guests, newspaper or *Chronicle* clippings. Let each member of your family dedicate a page.

## ADDING JEWISH VALUE TO YOUR CELEBRATION











**ADAS ISRAEL**  
**Congregation**

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