



# **BEING FAITHFUL WITNESSES TO OUR FRIENDS PEACE TESTIMONY: SERVING GOD IN A CHANGING WORLD**

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**A Panel Presentation  
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of the Friends World  
Committee for Consultation  
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## Introduction & Acknowledgments

These talks were presented as a panel, and are printed here in the order they were given. The topic on which the presenters were asked to speak was: *"How do Friends witness to our peace testimony in a changing world?"*

*Bakamana Mouana spoke in French. The text provided here is a transcript of the interpretation given by Tim Brown of Britain Yearly Meeting.*

The editor wishes to thank Peter Low of Aotearoa/New Zealand Yearly Meeting for the information given in the footnotes of Marian Hobbs' talk.

*The source for the graphics is the web site of Green Flame Graphix, specialists in Maori design. The designs are based on traditional Maori art. The fishhook, below, represents the source of food, and also symbolizes prosperity and peace. The site is found at: <http://greenflame.maoriart.net/>*





*Marian Hobbs is a member of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa/New Zealand. She is now in her second term as a cabinet member and her second year as Minister of Disarmament in New Zealand.*

Friends, you asked me to speak about “Being faithful witnesses, serving God in a changing world,” and I took that on to “Peace, a state of constant activity.” The making and maintenance of peace is a constant activity in the lives of every human being. It is not an activity to be left to others, to community leaders, to diplomats, to politicians, because leaders do not act in vacuums. They cannot impose peace on a population that wants to be violent.

But we know, from crises around the world, that most people want to live at peace; not always justly or equitably, but they want to avoid conflict – and there is a difference. That desire to live without conflict needs to be converted into the daily, continuous act of living in peace at the personal level, as much as at the national and international levels. At the personal level, we may confuse the arguments or idea with the person espousing the idea and abuse that person, rather than concentrating on the idea or argument itself. But this we need to do – concentrate on the arguments or idea – if we are to build a peaceful society that is open and therefore encourages new ideas and arguments. To maintain peace at the personal level, it is helpful to have that optimistic approach that acknowledges that we will all make mistakes – and here’s the optimism – and that we will *learn* from the mistakes, especially if those mistakes are not seen as final, but as steps on the way to improvement. Stressing the positive is always a survival technique. And then there is what I learned as a child, brought up in a very strong Catholic household, kneeling each night by my bed, reviewing and assessing my behaviour. That translates into the importance of giving yourself time to reflect. A regular

programme of reflection on how one makes and maintains peace is a valuable tool. Only you, the individual, know the pressures and the options. Only you can make an honest assessment of your progress. In my line of work, as a politician in the public eye, I know that there are many who will do this for me – the assessment – but you have to put aside the assessment of others, and assess yourself, so that you can live and work.

Maybe I'm too idealistic, but it is much simpler as a politician to represent a community of individuals who practise peacemaking on an individual and daily basis, and who reflect daily on how their behaviour enhances peace. It has become fashionable, and too easy, to blame others for violence, be it television, the demands of work, the food we eat, rather than practicing peacemaking ourselves.

Now I'll move on from the individual to peace in the community, because we do not live alone, we live in communities. The effectiveness of living in community is perhaps measured by our involvement with that community, and this is difficult. If we want to avoid conflict we can live quietly, without involvement. We build tall fences and seek to spend time only with those whose values we share, and thus avoid conflict. True, conflict may be avoided, but differences, even injustices, will not be resolved that way – that is, when we avoid conflict but do not work to eliminate injustice and poverty. In New Zealand/Aotearoa, the playcentre movement of the 1950s and 1960s was a nursery for politically active women, rather as the union movement was for men of the 1930s and 50s. The playcentre was an early childhood education centre that relied on the parents' cooperative to provide the service, rather than on professional, paid teachers. As such, the playcentre movement had to nurture the skills of conflict resolution at a community level, for child rearing is very

personal and very different for each family. It is the essence of cultural difference. As such, putting a community of parents together is going to introduce conflict about the different standards of behaviour and care. The playcentre movement realised this and paid special attention, and trained parents in conflict resolution. Those skills took many women on to other community tasks, where their confidence in conflict resolution made them a welcome asset. Playcentres, parent-teacher associations, church groups, sports clubs, service clubs are the backbone of community, and while there is always some conflict to resolve, you need not be too challenged by ideas and values different from your own.

So part of peacemaking at the community level is to step outside the comfort zone and become involved in very different activities. Prison visiting, ESL tutoring (that is, teaching English to speakers of other languages), refugee support work; in other words, to work with people whose cultures and life experiences are very different from yours. In this regard, I understand that Friends from the Wanganui settlement played a very important role in opening up the communication between city council and Maori at the time of the Paikatore garden conflict.<sup>1</sup> That situation needed people, community people, to step outside their comfortable known values in order to seek some common values. That's a New Zealand story that is replicated around the world in many communities, but the skills demonstrated on these occasions are not learnt overnight. They are developed from years of community involvement and personal practice.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a Quaker residential settlement in the community of Wanganui. They helped ensure peaceful communication between Maori (indigenous) groups and the local municipal council, mostly non-Maori, at the time of a very divisive land occupation in the 1990s.

**Peace in the nation.** So far I have noted that if we want to be people of peace, we need to practice peace at a personal and at a community level. We choose our level of involvement. Sometimes involvement with our own immediate family precludes intense community involvement. But unless we practice peace maintenance at a personal and family level, we may not be able to maintain peace at the community level. And then there is always the danger of exposing oneself to a charge of hypocrisy when you do not practice the standards you expect of others. Conflict in our community at the nationwide level can be media-manufactured conflict. In other words, the media interview people at opposite ends of an issue, and therefore they can ignore the milder concerns of those in the middle. So one of the issues of peace building within a nation is to find and listen to the concerns of those who are not issuing press statements. And there are many different ways of doing this. Those subsets with established networks such as churches, marae-centred Maori,<sup>2</sup> unions, professional bodies, are one conduit.

Another issue is to seek the truth in any argument. Some people confuse assertion with argument, or assertion with proven truth. The Internet has much to answer for in this, or perhaps more fairly, the minimal teaching of information literacy and research. And if I say this, I need to remember that a high proportion of our citizens cannot discern the difference between assertion and argument, between assertion and fact. That's why I receive letters berating me for something I haven't done or that hasn't actually happened. Their proof is having heard someone state this on talkback radio, or a commentator surmise that *I might* do this. And so it becomes fact. And in a democracy,

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<sup>2</sup> Maoris who are closely linked to their tribal communities.

it does not look good to say that the voters don't know the facts, that they've got the story wrong. So conflict in a nationwide community is very difficult to handle, especially by a politician. We need an informed and communicating community.

We had one issue in Aotearoa/New Zealand that ripped our community apart. It was the tour of the South African rugby team in 1981. I find it very interesting to reflect on now. I was firmly, if not radically, in the anti-Springbok tour camp. And so much was my life lived in that group that I can still see only two camps, and no middle. And yet there must have been some in the middle. But what was so sad was that when the tour was over, no work – *no* work – was done to heal those wounds. I was banned from discussing the effects on our community on public radio. Everyone had reported the conflicts, but no one wanted to build the peace. Just pull a bandage of silence over a festering sore. We have had several divisive issues in New Zealand this year (that's the past year; I wrote this in November): The future of genetic modification in New Zealand; who owns, controls, develops, enjoys the foreshore and seabed around New Zealand's coast;<sup>3</sup> and an immigration and security issue focussed on Ahmed Zaoui.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Foreshore is beach and coast below the high-tide mark; sea bed is beyond the low-tide mark. These concerns affect such issues as Maori customary rights and who can exploit the natural resources, such as cultivating mollusks, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmed Zaoui is an Algerian seeking asylum in New Zealand, who has been detained for over a year on the basis of alleged links with terrorism. Those allegations are unproven as of this writing.

Without repeating the entire debate on genetic modification, I'd like to explain how I reached my decision.<sup>5</sup> I used the royal commission to hear people's views, to hear evidence and arguments, and to *test* the evidence and arguments. A royal commission is a mix of departmental advice and statutory scrutiny, managed by legal process, whose members are trained in testing arguments and evidence. Normal government advisory processes are not as rigorous or transparent as a commission. So I used a commission and accepted their advice. I too had to read, and listen, and work out what were the fears and how they could be lessened. There were fears – and still are – about food safety, food choice, about the safety of international markets, about how to prevent cross-fertilization. Note I used a neutral word, not "cross-contamination." Always I was searching for neutral language, for open processes, for truth and previous experience. I didn't want to persuade people to accept genetic modification, so I tried for factual, unemotional language. I did want the citizen to own a case-by-case decision-making process. It was the process that was my focus. If the process was trusted, if people's fears were heard and lessened, then I might be able to lower the conflict. Time will tell.

On Ahmed Zaoui I cannot comment. This is the first time this law process has been used, and we have much to learn. One of the obvious problems is the protection of sources versus the transparency of process. And we have two New Zealand communities – the readers of *The Listener* (many are professional and liberal and the Radio New

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<sup>5</sup> As Minister for the Environment, Marian Hobbs had to take primary responsibility for the government's decision on how much research, trial plantings, etc. will be permitted for genetically modified crops.

Zealand audience); and the talkback audience. They have diametrically opposed opinions on this. Somehow we have to find a bridge between these two strands in our nation. This is peace building at a national level.

The last issue is foreshore and seabed, and peace building here is also very difficult. The extremes are vocal, but with time and clear information and meetings of all kinds, we are working to establish clarity and a way forward. Is it so different from a Meeting for Clarity inside the Society of Friends? Peace and resolution at a national level take time, reflection, clear articulation and listening. Our instant society, especially instant news, is not good at this, and while communication is far faster, it's not always more meaningful.

And finally to the world stage, which has become much more difficult again. The Berlin wall came down, China became engaged with the world outside Asia, the non-proliferation treaty was signed. Thirteen steps to disarmament were agreed to. We have photos of missiles being dis-armed, of weapons being destroyed. Peace appears to be breaking out. But just as in New Zealand when, following the 1981 Springbok tour, we didn't examine the causes for our behaviour, so we really never examined why there have been two major world views. Then, when the search for a different approach to achieving equity broke out in regional conflict, and then in increasing attacks on civilian populations, we – and that's not a global "we" – responded with war and weapons. It's easy to slip into a lecture on analysing the different sides in current world conflict, to discuss the different blocs, in efforts to make it seem even more distant and uncontrollable by us as members of that world community than it is right now. To do that would be to defeat my argument, that we can build a more peaceful world by our practice, personal behaviour,

by our behaviour within our families and not-so-familiar communities, and also by the manner in which we engage or conduct a nationwide debate, and how we act for peace on the global level.

I have some interesting portfolios. As you may have gathered, I am the minister for the environment. I am also minister for disarmament and arms control and minister responsible for New Zealand Aid and overseas development. These three portfolios do support each other brilliantly. (Being minister for school buses, which I also am, is not so helpful.)

We want peace. On the international stage, I argue and seek partners in the new agenda coalition for disarmament. *If we had no arms then we would have no problems about weapons being in the hands of certain groups that we don't want them in the hands of.* This is a message that New Zealand restates at every opportunity. New Zealand does work actively against the proliferation of arms. We celebrate when Iran signs the additional protocol to allow more inspections; when Libya agrees to rid itself of weapons of mass destruction. And we work to prevent armed countries extending the range of their weapons, such as the United States' plans around the development of tactical nuclear weapons.

But to be effective, I have to get this work understood and supported by citizens. It has become the focus of diplomats and NGOs, so there has to be a process to build peace and disarmament education within the community, and I think you will see that my steps from personal peace to international peacemaking are all part of that educative process.

New Zealand Aid fits into this process, rather like supporting refugees and prison visiting at the community level. Through our working with the Pacific Island states, we step outside our comfort zone. We make decisions in

culturally different ways. We seek new ways of resolving our differences, ways that are better than colonial power to colony, or “do as I say, because I am more powerful, I hold the chequebook.” For those of you in New Zealand, listen to the debate on Niue<sup>6</sup> at the moment, in which the media seem to say, because it is poor and dependent, we can make the decision to abandon them. And again it’s about power to the purse-string holder, not power to the community to decide its future.

If in our work we reduce, even eliminate poverty, if we eliminate illiteracy and the diseases caused by poor housing and dirty water, then we are peace building. We are eliminating some of the causes of violence. And that’s how I answer some of the talkback hosts who question the value of \$14-million spent on education in the Solomon Islands.<sup>7</sup> Removing illiteracy there heightens the chances of the people of the Solomon Islands being able to develop their own resources and being able to develop better mechanisms for resolving conflict than by using an imported AK-47. Yes, that is \$14-million not being spent on increasing student allowances or reducing the cost of pharmaceuticals in New Zealand. But it *is* about peace building.

So in bearing faithful witness to God, I do focus at different levels – personal, community, nationwide and international. But the skills are often the same, focusing on goodness and on positives, reflecting and improving on what we do, learning how to resolve conflicts, stepping out

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<sup>6</sup> The isolated Pacific island of Niue (pop. 1,200), which is constitutionally linked to New Zealand, suffered enormous damage in a cyclone in early January 2004.

<sup>7</sup> The Pacific state of the Solomon Islands is relatively poor and undeveloped, and has suffered civil strife in recent years.

into different communities to learn, and to learn what is shared rather than what is different, finding that little shared ground, seeking truth in the middle of conflict, clear communications and advocacy. There are more of us in the world who share these ideals than you might believe. We do this among good people. Let us search for that which is of God and celebrate that. Let us inch our way forward. For those of you who have climbed mountains (in my distant youth) it is one step at a time. I believe and hope and trust that we will build a more peaceful, just and equitable world.



*Bakamana Mouana is the representative of Kinshasa Monthly Meeting, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Meeting supports Project Muinda, a peacebuilding programme.*

Dear Friends,

I bring you the greetings of Kinshasa Monthly Meeting.

Before anything else, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to our Friend Elizabeth Duke for everything she has done to enable me to be here amongst you.

I will give you a brief description of the Great Lakes region in general, and my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, in particular. And then I will present to you our witness for peace in our regions.

The Great Lakes region includes Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and Congo. For many years now, all these countries, except Tanzania, have experienced a constantly-unsettled internal situation, characterised by *coups d'état*, political instability, inter-ethnic conflict, massacres and genocide. All these countries are also listed as being amongst the poorest in Africa, and the people of these countries suffer not only from hunger and poverty, but also from HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases that are decimating the youngest sector of the population.

As for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, my country ought to be the leading country in the region, because of its geographic situation and its enormous natural resources; but it is, alas, a country that has never known peace. Since it gained its independence in 1960, the Congo has always been mired in recurrent crises, which have only served to reinforce divisions, political instability, tribal hatred and a culture of intolerance and mistrust. The history of the Congo is littered with every kind of grim event: power struggles, political assassinations and wars.

According to the international organisations in the region, the recent war, which began on 2 August 1998, and which has scarcely come to an end, has caused approximately three million deaths. Because of its size, this war was characterised by Madame Albright, the former American Secretary of State, as being the first African world war. Seven African armies were involved: Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi on the rebel side; Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and even Chad on the side of the government. But the people have experienced atrocities, and indescribable suffering, being forced to seek refuge in other parts of the country, hoping to find safety. Many women were raped in front of their husbands. Many young girls were raped in front of their parents. Many children under 18 were conscripted into the armed forces. You could see a small child carrying a huge weapon. Many children know the names of different weapons better than they know the titles of books.

**Our peace witness.** Abraham Muste said, "There is no way to peace. Peace is the way." That means that peace work is an apostleship and a life that is the result of internal transformation for all those who dedicate themselves to it.

Quakers in the Congo, despite their small numbers, are determined to contribute to social transformation in our tortured country. In 1993, the Muinda Peace Project was created, and it was the first organisation to introduce the idea of peaceful conflict resolution in the Congo. We began by training and setting up "peace cells." Peace cells are little groups composed of people who come from different tribes but who live in the same block or in the same quarter of the town. Their role is to counter false perceptions, ethnic prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination and intolerance.

Today, the idea of peaceful conflict resolution has spread right across the Congo. Other organisations have become involved in this work, and the result is remarkable

in several regions, particularly in Kinshasa, which is a city of 7 million, and in the town of Kananga. During the war, and even after the war, we extended our work to healing the people who were traumatised by the war, to women, to the war-wounded and to demobilised child soldiers.

Given the vast number of different tribes that live in the Congo – 450 – and the persistence of inter-ethnic tensions, we initiated a programme of peaceful co-existence for the tribes of the Congo. That work consists of improving communication amongst our peoples.

We do not pretend that we are the only ones working for peacebuilding in Congo. Other organisations exist. We have created links with other religious groups, like the Mennonites and other Protestants. As people say, peace is a group effort. At the African level, there is a Quaker network for the promotion of peace and the prevention of conflict. But because of the lack of roads and means of communication in Congo, these groups only meet outside Congo.

We are grateful to the Friends of Europe and America for their support and their prayers, with which they have witnessed to us throughout this difficult time for our country.

To finish, I would like to quote a verse from Matthew, which for me is the most beautiful text in the entire Bible: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God”. [Matt. 5:9]

Thank you.



*Lonnie Valentine is a member of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting and a professor of peace studies at Earlham College, a Quaker university located in Richmond, Indiana, in the United States*

### **Our Peace Testimony: What Now?**

May the words I speak be what  
God would have me speak,  
May you Friends hear in these words what  
God would have you hear.

As the observer to this Friends World Committee for Consultation triennial from the Earlham School of Religion, I give thanks for the invitation to be present with all of you. I believe that the Earlham School of Religion (ESR) and FWCC share much in our mission to Friends and to the world.

Hear this from *our* Peace Testimony:

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretense whatsoever; this is our testimony to the whole world...The Spirit of God by which we are guided is not changeable... the Spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any with outward weapons, neither for the Kingdom of Christ nor the Kingdoms of this world.<sup>8</sup>

What does this, our Peace Testimony, tell us about how to be faithful witnesses, seeking to serve God in this changing world?

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<sup>8</sup> Fox, George; The *Journal of George Fox*, John Nickalls, ed. Pp. 399-400, abridged. 1975, London Yearly Meeting.

The Peace Testimony of Friends presented to King Charles II in 1660 combined two claims.

First, this statement saw Jesus as one who renounced violence and called upon his disciples to do the same. Jesus was a conscientious objector. Jesus taught love for all, even enemies. So, Jesus was the model for Quaker peacemaking.

Second, this statement confessed this Jesus as the Christ, the Spirit to whom Friends gave witness. Peacemaking was the deep desire of the human heart; Jesus was fully human. But also, Jesus was the Christ, the one who revealed the desire for peace in the heart of God.

Early Friends did not come to this Peace Testimony easily, and neither will we. Before the Peace Testimony, Friends had participated in the Puritan army, and even Fox had urged the army to purify England and the world for the Kingdom of God. However, these early Friends were opened to a new way in the midst of their intense inward and outward struggle.

They came to hold that it was “the Spirit of Christ” that had guided them into the “practice” of peace. This Spirit “moves” them “to seek peace and pursue it... doing what tends to the peace of all.” This “yes” to peace-making, however, implied a “no” to war. No more would Friends fight with “outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever.”

That is, Friends understood their conscientious objection to war to be both the way to peace and the witness that was revealed to them by the Spirit of Christ.

Therefore, from the beginning of the Religious Society of Friends, we brought together Christian witness with conscientious objection and active peacemaking. Because Jesus is the Christ, refusal to participate in war was given to Friends as their witness to the whole world by God. To be

faithful witnesses to this is one fundamental service to God in our changing world.

However, we know that Friends have not always been faithful to what was given to them. We do all fall short of the glory of God. We need to reclaim the commitment to our Peace Testimony and we do that as the Spirit of Christ moves us.

To lose the Peace Testimony or Christ is to forget the guidance we have been given.

On the one hand, some Friends have seen the great pain that some Christians have inflicted upon the world, including upon Quakers. This has led some to reject Jesus as the Christ, rather than seeing how Christ has been distinctly experienced and understood by Friends. Remember, early Friends were NOT seen as good Christians in their day. We may be heretics to some Christians, but not to Christ if we are faithful witnesses.

On the other hand, some Friends have seen peacemaking as only a human wish, unconnected from the saving work of Christ. This is, of course, the majority view throughout Christian history and today as well. However, this was not how early Friends understood the refusal to fight and their commitment to seek peace. Those Friends saw Jesus as the Prince of Peace and the risen one who led them to this witness.

So, what now?

In New Zealand, the two sons of Thomas Mason reached the age for military service in 1864. There was no provision for conscientious objection by the government. However, the sons stuck by their understanding and their father explained the Peace Testimony to the commanding officer in Auckland. After some time, the commander agreed to give the boys indefinite leave of absence, though

he stated that he “would not allow anyone but a Quaker to shelter himself under the same plea.” In writing his account of this incident, Thomas Mason said this: “Few seem able to understand the great law of Christianity—love to all. Would it were more greatly recognized. How different then would the relations of the settlers and natives be.”

In this story, I see all the elements of the Friends Peace Testimony woven into one unified witness.

First, conscientious objection is the witness for Friends, no matter how unacceptable the world—or other Christians—finds it. We need to evangelize for peace to Christians and the world.

Second, such refusal to fight is based in the “great law of Christianity—love to all.” Peace is given by Christ, and so we are to serve this peace.

Third, Christian Quaker conscientious objection is the foundation for new peacemaking efforts in the changing world. The refusal to fight anyone is the foundation upon which we are to build peace.

The Peace Testimony of 1660 said that the Spirit of Christ guided Friends into the “practice” of peace. Today, in the very documents the FWCC provided for us at this triennial, we can see the tasks for us.

In our ecumenical work with the World Council of Churches, we can both give witness to our conscientious objection to war and also urge other denominations to support their own conscientious objectors. For example, in the United States, most denominations have issued statements in support of their members who believe conscientious objection to be part of their faith. However, not much is being done to educate young members of these denominations about conscientious objection. Friends can help.

The Quaker United Nations office in Geneva is currently working on the issue of conscientious objection as a human rights issue in the UN, seeking wider international recognition for conscientious objection. Each of us, and our Monthly and Yearly Meetings, can lend support to this effort.

Within Africa, there has been the appeal of Friends to urge the governments of Burundi, Rwanda and Congo to recognize conscientious objection. Friends must help these, our brothers and sisters.

Finally, within our Monthly and Yearly Meetings we need to support our own young people who wrestle with the issue of participation in war and the increasing militarization of society. Like Thomas Mason, we need to nurture and support young Friends as they face the demands of militarism.

In conclusion, for Friends, conscientious objection has been rooted in the view that Christ has led them to this unchangeable Truth. At the same time, Friends can adapt this witness to the changing world by working with other Christian confessions and internationally to promote conscientious objection. Most critically, however, we are first called to nurture among ourselves that Spirit of Christ that led early Friends to renounce all war.

Seek ye first the peaceable Kingdom of God.







### *About the Wider Quaker Fellowship*

*Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas, works to facilitate loving understanding of diversities among Friends while we discover together, with God's help, our common spiritual ground, and to facilitate full expression of our Friends' testimonies in the world. Friends World Committee's Wider Quaker Fellowship program is a ministry of literature. Through our mailings of readings, we seek to lift up voices of Friends of different countries, languages and Quaker traditions, and invite all to enter into spiritual community with Friends.*

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