

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I'm Mishy Harman and this is the season finale of Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by PRX, and is produced together with Tablet Magazine.

OK, so for the past three episodes we've been on a journey. A musical journey, made up entirely of the stories behind some of Israel's most iconic tunes. Stories that somehow capture the bubbling tensions, the complications and the intricacies within Israeli society.

We've heard all about our national anthem, *HaTikvah*, and about the dueling anthems of the Six Day War - *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* and *Yerushalayim Shel Barzel*. We've peeked behind the scenes of *Mitachat La'Shamayim* and explored the ongoing love affair between Israel and the "olympics" of cheesy pop melodies, the Eurovision. Last episode we heard the tale of Zohar Argov and the rise of mainstream Mizrahi music in what was, till that point, a music scene dominated by Ashkenazi culture. And today we've reached our last episode of the miniseries, **Mixtape Part Four - War, Peace and Bumper Stickers**.

Now, we've already encountered some of the country's most important singers and musicians - Arik Einstein, David Broza, Naomi Shemer, Meir Ariel, Yizhar Cohen, Zohar Argov. All pillars of Israeliness, in different ways. And what many of them - not all, but many - had in common, was their army service. See, from the earliest days of the state, the real trendsetters, the real hitmakers, the real stars - were almost exclusively the boys and girls of the military bands. That's right, the military bands. Of course, most of the songs these bands released were exactly what you might expect from artists in uniform: An ode to a tank, a hymn for a fighter jet, a ballad about a soldier missing his sweetheart.

But the song at the center of our next story didn't fit that mould. **Act One - A Song for Peace**. Here's Hannah Barg and our Mixtape Band.

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*[Band plays Shir La'Shalom]*

**Hannah Barg (narration):** Just like Meir Ariel, Yanka'le Rotblit - an International Relations student at the Hebrew University - was called up to the Six Day War as a reservist. But unlike Meir, he was severely wounded while leading his platoon of paratroopers through Abu Tor, in Jerusalem. Yanka'le lost a leg, but somehow managed to keep his joyfulness. Recuperating after the war, he became convinced that - despite the military triumph, despite the fact that Israel had tripled its size in less than a week of fighting - what the country now needed most was... peace.

So he sat down and he wrote a song. A Song for Peace.

The lyrics made their way to the most prolific Israeli song composer of the day - Yair Rosenblum - who was living in London at the time. And Rosenblum? His head was elsewhere. He had just seen an exciting new show that opened on the West End - a hippie counterculture musical called 'Hair.'

Looking over the text, Yair immediately realized that Yankale's song could be his opportunity to create a Hebrew version of 'Let the Sunshine In.'

He got to work, composed it, and sent it off to *Lehakat Ha'Nachal*, the band of the *Nachal* Brigade, which was the hottest of all military bands. The Beatles of the IDF, if you want.

Miri Aloni, the band's lead singer then, remembers hearing it for the first time.

**Miri Aloni:** We fell in love right away with the song.

**Hannah Barg (narration):** The band members loved its edgy vibe, and were moved by the hopeful words penned by a man who had just lost a leg in the war. They began rehearsing and slated *Shir La'shalom*, that's what the song was called, to become the centerpiece of their next big roadshow.

The days were the days of the ongoing War of Attrition, and while the army was bolstering its fortifications along the Suez Canal, Miri and her bandmates traveled up and down the new Egyptian border in armored vehicles packed with musical instruments.

**Miri Aloni:** Through the days we were performing like three and four times in the outpost, and above us were shooting and bombing and everything. And we were there between the beds of the soldiers under the ground and we singing with unplugged guitars the whole night. It was a lot of fun, it was a lot of fun.

**Hannah Barg (narration):** *Shir La'shalom*, 'A Song for Peace,' was an immediate favorite among the troops.

**Miri Aloni:** The soldiers loved it so much.

**Hannah Barg (narration):** But not everyone was as enthusiastic. One of the main naysayers was the legendary IDF general Rehavam Zeevi, ironically nicknamed 'Gandhi.' Gandhi was a hawk, a fearless fighter, who - during that very same period - was busy leading daring *mirdafim*, chases, after Jordanian and Palestinian terrorists. Here's Eitan Haber, who was then an up-and-coming journalist, and a good friend of the general's.

**Eitan Haber:** I was very close to Gandhi, the Head of the Central Command. And he didn't like this song. He thought it was defeatist.

**Hannah Barg (narration):** Lines like “*lift up your eyes with hope, rather than through the rifle's sights,*” were troubling to army higher-ups, who naturally thought that soldiers should keep their eyes on the target. And even worse was singing ‘*al tabitu le'achor, hanichu laholchim*’ - ‘don't look back, leave the fallen behind.’

For an army that had just buried hundreds of its boys, it seemed demoralizing, and just plain insensitive. There were those who wanted to ban the tune altogether.

It quickly became a matter of public debate.

The younger generation, by and large, liked the song.

**Eitan Haber:** I told Gandhi what I thought - that the song was outstanding, incredible. And that it captured what many Israelis were thinking at the time.

**Hannah Barg (narration):** But the old guard wasn't convinced. *Shir La'Shalom* was even discussed by a *Knesset* subcommittee, no less, that ultimately decided to let the band play.

Yet not everyone in the military fell in line. On one evening in 1969 the *Nachal* Band's van pulled up for a big performance at the Central Command. Everyone showed up, including - and this was somewhat nerve-wracking for Miri and her friends - one of the most vociferous objectors to the song. Yup, you guessed it. The revered general Gandhi.

The *Nachal* Band gave a good show that night. But they left out their biggest hit.

**Miri Aloni:** We finished the program and then the soldiers of course they say ‘*shir la'shalom,*’ ‘*shir la'shalom.*’ ‘Song to Peace,’ ‘Song to Peace.’

**Hannah Barg (narration):** With Gandhi in the house, the band simply couldn't play it. You see, he had *personally* issued an order stating that the song was not to be sung on any base under his command. And if there was one thing you didn't want to do, it was to get on Gandhi's bad side.

**Miri Aloni:** So we said to them, secretly, “when the colonel will go we will sing to you.”

**Hannah Barg (narration):** The crowd - hundreds of soldiers and officers - wouldn't budge.

**Miri Aloni:** Nobody left the place.

**Hannah Barg (narration):** But Gandhi was no idiot.

**Miri Aloni:** He realized what is going on and he stayed there. They waited and he waited for half-an-hour and then they started to... to go and we didn't sing the song at that night.

**Hannah Barg (narration):** There was no talking Gandhi out of it. Knesset decision or not, the song - he thought - had no place in the IDF.

**Eitan Haber:** Defeatism. That's the word. That's exactly what he thought.

**Hannah Barg (narration):** As you might imagine, the controversy just spurred greater popularity and the song became the talk of the nation: Op-eds were written for and against it, as *Shir La'shalom* climbed to the top of the charts.

Surprisingly, perhaps, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and Chief of Staff Haim Bar-Lev, were actually big fans of the song. And before too long Gandhi was put in place. He was, after all, part of a hierarchical system, and Bar-Lev rebuked him for over-reaching his authority.

'A Song for Peace' had won - at least temporarily. It would have its day in the sun, and then, like most hits I guess, it slowly petered out.

That is, until November 4th, 1995. Twenty-five years after she had taken off her uniform, and stepped out of the military-band-limelight, Miri Aloni was brought out of semi-retirement. She was asked to sing her old hit at a peace rally in Tel Aviv in support of Rabin, Peres and their Oslo agreements. When she got on stage, in front of roughly 150,000 people, she got right into the old groove.

**Miri Aloni:** [*Singing in Hebrew*] *Tnu la'shemesh la'alot.*

**Hannah Barg (narration):** Except this time, there was a heightened sense of excitement and urgency.

When the song was originally written - by a wounded soldier after a war - peace was a hypothetical ideal, a nice dream. But now, in the Kings of Israel Square in the center of Tel Aviv, flanked by Shimon Peres to her right and Yitzhak Rabin to her left, peace felt

tangible. Israel had recently signed treaties with the Palestinians and with Jordan, and peace in the Middle East was, potentially at least, around the corner. Within reach.

**Miri Aloni:** It was like like a cloud of happiness went over the whole square, a pink cloud of happiness. To see so many people that coming to support the idea of Rabin that says that we must give the peace a chance.

**Hannah Barg (narration):** Eitan Haber, the young journalist who - in the late 60s - had tried to persuade Gandhi to accept *Shir La'Shalom*, was now Prime Minister Rabin's Chief of Staff.

**Eitan Haber:** I couldn't believe my eyes. The Square was packed, there was no room to move. And Miri got up to sing on the balcony and encouraged the entire audience to sing together with her. Everyone, except for Yitzhak Rabin.

**Miri Aloni:** When I stuck the microphone at the mouth of Yitzhak Rabin he was like "huhuhu," because he was a very shy guy.

**Eitan Haber:** He really couldn't carry a tune. He was humming along at best.

**Miri Aloni:** I remember that we when we finished the song we all laugh a big laughter because Yitzhak Rabin said, "I hope," in his deep voice, "I hope that in the peace process we will hit the notes not like we did... like we did here." [*Sigh*].

**Hannah Barg (narration):** A few minutes later, with the page with the words to 'A Song for Peace' neatly folded in his breast pocket, Rabin walked down the stairs of the municipal hall balcony and was about to get into his car. That's where he was met by the three shots that would end his life.

At his funeral, in front presidents, kings, prime ministers and hundreds of millions of people watching around the world, Eitan Haber eulogized him.

**Eitan Haber:** After the doctors and nurses wept, they gave me the piece of paper they had found in your jacket pocket. I want to read a few words now from that paper but it's hard. Your blood, Yitzhak, covers the printed words. Your blood on the paper of 'A Song for Peace.' This is the paper.

**Hannah Barg (narration):** Right then, Haber pulled out a plastic sheet protector. Inside it, clearly visible to all, was a white page with a big red stain in the center. He began reciting the barely visible printed words.

“Just sing a song for peace, don't whisper a prayer.  
Just sing a song for peace, shout it out loud.” Yitzhak,  
we already miss you.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hannah Barg. This story was written, produced and edited together with Maya Kosover and Yochai Maital. Shlomo Maital, Yochai's dad, was our wonderful dubber.

**Act Two - Can't Afford the Luxury of Despair.** Our final story of the miniseries, our final story of the season actually, begins at the very moment our previous story ends - November 1995. And it brings us back to the Israeli author David Grossman, with whom we began the miniseries.

**David Grossman:** David Grossman is my name. I'm sixty-four, I was born in Israel. I'm married to Michal, we have three children. We lost Uri, our son, eleven years ago, in the war against Lebanon, and we have Yonatan and Ruti and two granddaughters.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Last year, David won the Man Booker International Prize, and in April, on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, he was awarded the Israel Prize, the country's highest honor. David is a man of words. He's a prolific novelist and essayist, a leading advocate for peace and human rights, and he often publishes op-ed pieces that trigger fierce national debates. But we went to talk to him about something much less literary or highfalutin. We went to talk to him about bumper stickers.

**David Grossman:** Yeah, every car that I saw then, back then, had a bumper sticker. People felt the need to express their opinion. They felt the need to be critical towards almost everything that is not them. The bumper stickers competed with each other with their brutality and aggression and rudeness. I remember cars that I drove behind and I saw that half of the windshield is with very right-wing aggressive bumper sticker and on the left side of the windshield, there were very peaceful, hoping, and positive bumper stickers and you could easily say that this family is in trouble.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Even David's car had some bumper stickers.

**David Grossman:** Peace Now, and some bumper stickers who supported Yitzhak Rabin.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** On November 5th, 1995, the day after Rabin's assassination, David was driving up to Jerusalem. Traffic was crazy, half the nation was making its way to the Knesset, where Rabin's body lay in state.

**David Grossman:** And suddenly when I was stuck there in a traffic jam, I saw on the left a Volvo of settlers. And, of course, when I got closer and I saw the bumper stickers that covered almost all the back windshield, it was very right-wing and extremist, and even violent bumper stickers. And there stood a guy, the driver, with a screwdriver and he was peeling off the bumper stickers, and he peeled off the 'Rabin a Murderer,' 'Rabin a Traitor,' '*Rabin Rozeach*,' '*Rabin Boged*.' And then suddenly it occurred to me how strong and effective bumper stickers (that we all treated almost like a joke but) how effective they are in shaping public opinion after all.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He looked at the man, carefully getting rid of the slogan he had so proudly flaunted till it all became a reality.

**David Grossman:** I think he got shocked by understanding what was his very little, very minor, share in this wave of violence and hatred towards Rabin at these days. And really, I think he felt remorse and shame. He didn't want other people to see that he carried these cries out of Rabin is a murderer or a traitor.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** In his mind, David could trace a direct line, or chain - starting with inflammatory statements made by irresponsible politicians, continuing in the offices of creative copywriters who fashioned them into catchy phrases, on to drivers who adorned their cars with the stickers...

**David Grossman:** And in the end of this chain stands a person with a gun in and shoots the prime minister.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** David wanted to explore that chain, to decode the power of the bumper sticker.

**David Grossman:** So I started to collect bumper stickers.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He did this for eight long years. It even became a family project, and all the Grossmans would jot down slogans they saw on the back of cars.

There were right-wing catchphrases and left-wing ones. Bumper stickers praising G-d and bumper stickers slamming religion. Slogans about veganism, the army, the supreme court, and - of course - the coming of the Messiah.

**David Grossman:** All of them are very very short and precise. And... I mean they are like a punch to your face. Maybe because we are tired of complexity, maybe because of that.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But the hundreds and hundreds of slogans David collected told a different story. They showed just how complex Israeli society was. How we were fighting out our private wars in public, pulling the country in different directions, drifting farther and farther apart.

**David Grossman:** The Israeli spirit was encapsulated there.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** In 2003, he sat down with all those slogans.

**David Grossman:** And I took them, and I just wrote them, and put them on a table, and I looked at them and I thought, 'what can I do with them?'

**Mishy Harman (narration):** David started reciting them out loud.

**David Grossman:** And I noticed immediately that when I read them, there is a special rhythm. And also that it's very easy to rhyme them somehow.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Before too long, a song or poem, made up entirely of bumper sticker slogans, started appearing in his notebook.

**David Grossman:** I wanted to give the energy of the contradictions and the inner animosity and, as you said, the complexity of the situation.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** When he was done, David called up Sha'anun Street, the leader of Israel's most popular hip-hop band, *Ha'dag Nachash*.

**Sha'anun Street:** I remember, yeah.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That's him, Sha'anun Street.

**Sha'anun Street:** I'm a musician, member of *Ha'dag Nachash*, super band.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So one day he received this phone call.

**Sha'anun Street:** It was afternoon, he called me he said, "hello, Sha'anun, this is David Grossman. I would like to meet with you." He didn't say what it was about.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Sha'anun agreed and they met up in Jerusalem.

**David Grossman:** I just gave him the notebook with the bumper stickers that I wrote, in a pen I think it was still, and I said, "read, Sha'anun, read it." And he read, and I started to see the smile on his face.

**Sha'anun Street:** Well, I knew it was ahhh... I knew it was genius. I knew that it was golden.

**David Grossman:** And then he took... he took it, and some weeks later he came and there was a song.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The song became an immediate hit. Everyone identified something they could relate to. Right wingers liked it, left wingers liked it. Young people liked it, old people liked it. After all, it was a reflection of Israel, or - perhaps even more so - a reflection of the various different Israels.

Soon it was an international sensation.

**Mishy Harman:** But it's like hard to sing along with this song.

**Sha'anun Street:** Not the chorus, they can do the chorus. [*Sha'anun sings "kama ro'a efshar livlo'a"*]. Everybody can do that.

**Mishy Harman:** But it's hard because it has *reishim*, right?

**Sha'anun Street:** Well, they do [*in an American accent*] "*kama ro'a*" in America, and [*in a Spanish accent*] "*kama ro'a*" in Mexico, and, you know, [*in a*

*French accent*] “kama ro’a” [*Sha’anan laughs*] in French Canada. But ah... [*Sha’anan laughs*] yeah. Whatever accent we embrace, no problem.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Just before we said goodbye, I asked David to come up with his own bumper sticker, now, in 2018, as Israel celebrates its seventieth birthday. He thought about it silently for a few moments. He’s a man of words after all, and nowhere more than on a bumper sticker does each word count. Then, with more resolve than caution, he said...

**David Grossman:** Can’t afford despair. Can’t afford the luxury of despair. Maybe.

**Mishy Harman:** Do you think that would be a good bumper sticker?

**David Grossman:** No, no. No. [*Mishy and David laugh*].

**Mishy Harman:** If you were writing your own bumper car slogan now, what would it be?

**Sha’anan Street:** Shut the fuck up. That’s what I would put on the back of my car.

**Mishy Harman:** Why?

**Sha’anan Street:** There’s too much... Too much meaningless talk. Too much shouting. It’s about time we had some quiet.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** I told Sha’anan what David had said. Can’t afford the luxury of despair.

**Sha’anan Street:** It’s a great sentence. But he’s an author, I’m a rapper. So I would say “shut the fuck up.” [*Sha’anan laughs*].

**Mishy Harman (narration):** I guess it’s a combination of the optimist in me, the fact that shutting up would be a problem, since I basically talk for a living, and my general aversion to swearing on our show, but I prefer David’s version.

So in the spirit of his perhaps-less-than-sexy bumper sticker, let’s not despair. With all the complexities we saw throughout this miniseries - national ones, political ones, ethnic ones, and many other complexities we touched on in earlier episodes of the season and the show - with all that, you might wonder whether music actually *is* the unifying unicorn we set out to find. We all clearly sing in different keys, with different words and in different voices. But that, I guess, is what Israel is all about. It’s not that complications stop existing. It’s just that somehow, the cacophony can almost sound harmonious.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** And with that, believe it or not, dear Israel Story listeners around the world, we've reached the end of our Mixtape miniseries, and with a mixture of relief and sadness, the end of our third season.

This season - which began *fourteen* long months ago, back in April 2017 - was our longest season yet, eighteen episodes and two specials. We met Shlomo Avni, whose sole wish was to be buried at sea, and Lizzie Doron, who just wanted to escape her Holocaust-surviving-mother's nightmares. We heard from couples dealing with a loss of faith, and explored a missed opportunity for a peace agreement in the immediate aftermath of the Six Day War. We entered the Job-like saga of the two Harel families of Talpiyot, in Jerusalem, who both lost a son - named Yuval - within a span of three days in the Lebanon War in 1982. We encountered Aravrit, the hybrid Hebrew-Arabic font, and met Tamer and Sarah, a Palestinian-Muslim slash Ukrainian-Jewish couple living on the shores of the Dead Sea. We spent time with outsiders - the Iraqi immigrant Eli Amir who tried to fit in on Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'Emek, the brilliant mathematician Eliyahu Rips who believes he discovered a biblical cipher and Eliezer Sonnenschein, a struggling artist who terrorized museum curators till he became part of the establishment. We spent a whole hour detailing the demise of an electric car dream, and wondering whether it really could have made the world a better place. We heard about hummus wars, and pitcher wars at Pinati. We investigated the legacy of the Balfour Declaration, one hundred years later, and peeked into the private life of an unlikely landlady - Golda Meir. We heard from one-hundred-and-four-year-old Ruth Richman, our oldest listener, and - just a few neighborhoods over, from six-year-old Tamar Friedman, one of our youngest. We trekked up to Tell El-Ful, a hilltop in East Jerusalem, where we met brutalized concubines, ambitious kings and endless piles of trash. We delved into the rapidly growing world of Telegrass, the Uber of weed, and heard how Amos Silver became the unlikely mastermind of a greentopia. For Passover we told exodus stories of people coming out, the Iranian poet Payam Feili, and the orthodox gay activist Nadav Schwartz. Just recently, for Shavout, we told modern-day Ruth and Naomi tales, including a sort-of adoption of Nepali street girls, a wordless Israeli-Turkish lesbian love affair, and the story of the heart-wrenching friendship between Susi Doring Preston and her would-be-mother-in-law, Tirze Eyal. And of course, over the last four weeks we've been on our Mixtape journey - in which we've explored the complexities of Israeli society through the stories behind some of the country's most iconic songs.

It's been an amazing ride we've shared together. And you've been with us every step of the way. Your encouraging emails, facebook posts, tweets, they are what keep us going, through marathon pitch meetings, countless recordings, long editing nights. So, thank you. Thank you for listening, for supporting us, and for allowing us to do what we love to do most - tell stories that illuminate a different, diverse, and complicated Israel.

We bring you all our content for free, but, as you can imagine, it costs a lot of money to produce. So if Israel Story is meaningful to you, if it makes you think, and laugh, and cry, and feel, and if you want to help us continue to do what we do, please consider making a donation on our site, and - even better - becoming a sustaining member. A member of the Israel Story *mishpacha*, the Israel Story family.

You can also help us by bringing in new members to this family. Spread the word, send your friends and relatives favorite episodes, post them, share them, tweet them. And, if you haven't already done so, go to iTunes and write a review of the show. That bumps us up the rankings and makes us more visible to new listeners. As always, you can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story. And if you want to sponsor episodes of Season Four of Israel Story, simply drop us a line at [sponsor@prx.org](mailto:sponsor@prx.org).

Our feed will be relatively quiet in the upcoming months, but that doesn't mean we've disappeared. We're already hard at work on our next season, which we hope will just continue this surprising, magical storytelling journey of ours.

So during this break, we both have things to do: While *we* work on creating new episodes, *you* can catch up on all our past episodes - in both Hebrew and English - on our site, on iTunes, and on any of the other main podcast platforms. And you can do us one more, very important, favor. Go to our website, [israelstory.org](http://israelstory.org), and fill out our short listener survey. That will allow us to learn more about you, and understand what you like, what you don't like, what we should do more of, less of. Again, you can find the survey on our website, [israelstory.org](http://israelstory.org).

The 'Mixtape' miniseries was based on our latest live show. Thanks to everyone who made this tour possible, and especially to Hanoach Piven, Naomi Schneider, Mikey Ezrachi, Lior Zaberg, Yotam Michael Yogev, Eli and Mira Kosover and Shlomo Maital. To Dalit Ofer, who advised us on all our musical selections for the miniseries, and to Sheila Lambert, Megan Whitman, Robin Mancoll, Annie Sandler, Ben Murane, Pamela Lavitt, Elaine Cohen, Eric Segal, Bar Sananes, Chrissy Rinehart, Yael Bermano, Valentina Khomenko, Rachel Schy and Rebekah Steinfeld. Thanks also to our dear friends and colleagues at Tablet Magazine - Esther Werdiger, Wayne Hoffman, Alana Newhouse and Morty Landowne - and our PRX family - Kathleen Unwin, Madeleine Sullivan, Maggie Taylor, Robert DeBenedictis, Kali Navé and Kerri Hoffman.

We're coming back to North America with 'Mixtape' in November 2018, so if you'd like us to come perform in your community, contact us at [livetour@israelstory.org](mailto:livetour@israelstory.org).

This episode was edited by Yochai Maital, recorded by Ben Wallick, and mixed by the one and only Sela Waisblum.

All the original music throughout the episode was written, arranged and performed by our wonderful Mixtape band - Dotan Moshanov and Ari Wenig, together with Ruth Danon, Eden Djamchid and Ronnie Wagner-Schmidt.

Israel Story is brought to you by PRX - the Public Radio Exchange, and is produced in partnership with Tablet Magazine. Our staff includes Yochai Maital, Shai Satran, Maya Kosover, Roe Gilron, Zev Levi, Ari Wenig, Hannah Barg, Rotem Zin, Judah Kauffman, Abby Neuschatz, Pola Lem, Yoshi Fields and Joel Shupack.

I'm Mishy Harman, and we'll be back next season. So till then, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye*.

*[Band plays Yihiye Tov]*

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