

QUALIFYING AS THE FOUNDING FATHER OF A CHOSEN PEOPLE



YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Lech Lecha

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

A Metamorphosis To Begin A New Existence

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1. Avraham was told by G-d that He will make his name great.
2. Rashi: The letter Hey will be added to his name: Avraham is numerically 248, which is equal to the number of parts of the human body.
3. Before Avraham was circumcised he did not have full control over his physicality.
4. He fathered Yitzchok after he was circumcised and added Hey to his name.
5. Gemara: G-d created the world to come with the spirituality of the letter Yud and the physical world with the spirituality of letter Hey.
6. Midrash: Just as the letter "Hey" brought about all existence, when added to your name, it will cause a metamorphic change within you.
7. Avraham became a new creation; one that did not previously exist.
8. The innateness of the Jew is the equivalent of all existence.
9. Midrash: G-d said "I will **make** you into a great People, not one that will evolve into a great People."
10. The Jewish People coming into being is the equivalent of Ex nihilo.

Sourcing + Acknowledging The Benefactor

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How Weighty is The Debt of Gratitude

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1. G-d told Avraham to leave his homeland, birthplace, and family.
2. He separated himself from every member of his family including Lot.
3. Why did Avraham agree to take his nephew Lot with him?
4. When Avraham was told by Nimrod to bow to the idol or be thrown into the kiln- he chose to die.
5. Haran, Lot's father and Avraham's brother, stood by the sidelines thinking that if his brother came out unscathed, he would follow.
6. He entered and perished.
7. Haran was the first man to die to sanctify G-d's name.
8. Avraham believed that Lot, as Haran's son, was the exception to the family.
9. Avraham separated from Lot when it was revealed he was a thief.
10. Lot, with all of his possessions, moved to Sedom- the seat of all evil.
11. Before separating, Avraham made a pact with him to be there for him at all costs.
12. When Lot was taken captive by the four mightiest kings, Avraham miraculously saved him, regardless if it cost him his merits. Why?

Weely Video: Qualifying As The Founding Father of A Chosen People

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Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Lech Lecha

QUALIFYING AS THE FOUNDING FATHER OF A CHOSEN PEOPLE



Canaan, the Location of Avraham's Effectiveness

The *Midrash* states regarding Avraham our Patriarch, "One who is meticulous regarding *mitzvos*, his reward is great." One could think that the *Midrash* is referring to one who is meticulous in the performance of *mitzvos*; however, it is actually referring to something that surpasses this.

The *Midrash* continues, "We find that Avraham was meticulous regarding *mitzvos*. Because of this, he is identified as 'the beloved of G-d.' As it states in *Yeshaya*, 'They are the progeny of Avraham, my beloved...' To what degree was Avraham meticulous? Even the rabbinic law of *eiruv tavshilin* was observed in the household of Avraham. As it states, 'He observed My Commandments, My Dictates, and My *Toros*...' Are there multiple *Torahs*? We know that there is only one *Torah* as it states, 'There is one *Torah* that shall be yours...' Why then does the verse refer to the *Torah* in the plural? It is to communicate, that Avraham had

observed the *Torah* and its intricacies by establishing fences to guarantee that the *Torah* will not be violated. G-d said, 'You who are meticulous in My *mitzvos*, should sit among pagans and idol worshipers? You should leave their midst and go to the Land that I shall show you (*Canaan*)...'"

Because Avraham was so meticulous regarding the observance of the *mitzvos* and the beloved of G-d, G-d did not want him to remain in *Charan* because he was among pagans. It was not befitting for someone of Avraham's spiritual dimension to remain in such a location. Rather, G-d told Avraham to go to the Land of *Canaan*. However, it seems to be difficult, if G-d wanted Avraham to leave *Charan* which was a land of idolatry, why did He tell him to go to the land of *Canaan* which was no less a location of paganism?

Although Avraham and his wife Sarah were able to convert many pagans in *Charan* to monotheism, as it states when he had gone to *Canaan*, "He had taken the souls that he had made in *Charan*..." he nevertheless

was not able to be as effective as he could be there. Thus, he needed to go to the Land of *Canaan* to be most effective.

Chazal explain the two locations – *Charan* and *Canaan* with an allegory. If one would have a flask filled with fragrant perfume and it would be put in a cemetery, regardless of its fragrance, the dead could not benefit from it. If however, if that same flask of perfume was placed among the living, they would have great benefit from it.

Similarly, *Avraham* regardless of his dimension of person and ability was relatively ineffective regarding introducing monotheism in *Charan*. It was the equivalent of a cemetery. However, if he would go to *Canaan* he would be fully effective to make a monumental difference because *Canaan* is considered to be a location of the living. How is this allegory to be understood?

The *Gemara* in the latter part of Tractate *Kesubos* states, “One who lives outside of the Land of Israel, it is as if he has no G-d.” *Maharsha* in his commentary (based upon *Ramban*) explains that the world was divided among the seventy root nations of the world. Each location has relevance to a particular nation. Every nation was given an archangel to oversee its existence and function.

All sustenance and blessing that comes from G-d to every nation is transmitted through the archangel of each nation. The Land of Israel has no archangel associated with it, because G-d Himself directly oversees all of its needs. Thus, all the sustenance and spiritual influences relating to the Land of Israel emanate directly from G-d without an intermediary.

When one lives outside of the Land of Israel, he receives his sustenance through the archangel of that particular location rather than directly from G-d. It is thus the equivalent of not having a direct relationship with G-d. Due to this, the difficulty of refuting idolatry to affect people outside of the land of *Canaan* (Israel) is more difficult than within the land of *Canaan*.

Outside of the land of Israel, since the location is under the influence of an archangel, one cannot be as effective to eliminate idolatry since the location is under the dominion of that archangel. Paganism is the worship of deities which are angels. This is the reason *Charan*, which is outside of the Land of Israel

is compared by *Chazal* to a cemetery, a location of the dead.

The idolaters outside of the Land of Israel are entrenched in their idolatrous beliefs because they are removed from the direct influence of G-d. However, in the land of *Canaan* where G-d has direct influence, one is able to influence the pagans to leave their mistaken path and become monotheists. Since G-d is in such close proximity to the Land of Israel it is referred to by *Chazal* as the land of the living.

Thus, G-d told *Avraham* to go to the Land of *Canaan*, because he would be able to succeed in extricating the idolaters from their pagan beliefs to monotheism. They only had become idolaters because they did not have the proper spiritual guidance and thus became misled. However, *Avraham* who is qualified to enter into theological debate was able to present them with the truth. In addition, the *Gemara* tells us in Tractate *Bava Basera* that “the atmosphere of the Land (of Israel) gives one clarity and is thus wisened.” Meaning, being in the Land of Israel gives one a greater potential to understand and appreciate spirituality, because of one’s proximity to G-d Who is the source of all wisdom.

It is interesting to note that the *Torah* states, “*Yaakov*’s anger flared up at Rachel and he said, ‘Am I instead of G-d Who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?’” *Chazal* explain that because *Yaakov* had reacted to Rachel’s request in a harsh manner, by not being sensitive to her pain, G-d said to *Yaakov*, “Is this the manner in which you speak to one who is in a state of distress? Because you responded to Rachel in this way, I swear that your children will bow to her son.”

Why was it considered a punishment that the sons of *Yaakov* should ultimately need to bow to *Yosef*, the son of Rachel? *Yosef* of all of *Yaakov*’s children was the most special and *Yaakov* had seen him as his sole spiritual successor. If so, why was this a punishment? G-d caused that *Yosef* should ascend to become the Viceroy of Egypt and assume the role of the provider for the Jewish people and world. All of *Yosef*’s brothers and families depended on him for their sustenance. Since all of their material amenities came through *Yosef*, as the intermediary, it is considered a punishment. When one does not receive something directly from G-d, because it comes through an intermediary, one does not have the same level of appreciation and understanding to be fully beholding to G-d.

Avraham's Renown in the Eyes of The World

The *Torah* states regarding the test of *Avraham*, "Go for yourself (*lech lecha*) from your land...And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing." When G-d commanded *Avraham* our Patriarch to leave his homeland and his family, he did so without hesitation. This was one of the tests of *Avraham*.

When *Avraham* arrived in the Land of *Canaan*, that G-d had promised him would be a location of blessing, the *Torah* states, "There was a famine in the Land..." *Chazal* tell us that the famine that was in the Land of *Canaan* at that time was the most severe famine since the beginning of existence. Despite this, *Avraham* did not question G-d's Word. *Avraham* chose to descend to Egypt to avoid the famine. Being confronted with the famine was also considered a test to see if he would question G-d's Word.

The *Midrash* states regarding *Avraham*, "G-d wanted to test that *tzaddik* (*Avraham*) to make known to the world his good deeds." Thus, the value of the test of "*lech lecha*" was not only for *Avraham's* personal spiritual advancement, it was also for the entire world to be able to appreciate who he was. *Avraham* was to be the role model for existence. The world would come to learn that the motivating factor in every aspect of *Avraham's* life was his dedication to fulfill the Word of G-d. Despite the challenges and adversity of each of the tests, he stood steadfast as a servant to his Master. The world needed to see how *Avraham* remained fervent in his belief in G-d, regardless of the great difficulties he had experienced. Why was it important for the world to understand and appreciate *Avraham's* level of dedication to G-d?

When G-d told *Avraham* to leave his homeland, He said to him that it will be for his benefit to do so. The *Torah* delineates the benefits and incentives that G-d gave to *Avraham*, "And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing...and the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you." Meaning, if *Avraham* were to leave his homeland, he would gain renown in the world as a great personality who is blessed.

Consequently, the *Torah* tells us that the nations of the world will bless their children through *Avraham*.

Meaning, as *Rashi* cites *Chazal*, that the parents will say to their children, "You should be like *Avraham*." *Chazal* tell us that *Avraham* was one of the most humble people who ever lived as he had said to G-d, "I am dust and ash." If so, why would *Avraham* be incentivized by being told that he would become a world-renown figure?

Avraham's objective in existence was to espouse monotheism and refute the false beliefs of paganism. If *Avraham* were to gain renown and be seen as the one who achieved the ultimate blessing, even the pagan world would revere and esteem him. This would be a sanctification of G-d's Name. *Avraham* would become synonymous with the ultimate level of blessing.

The nations of the world will understand that *Avraham's* position of monotheism is the basis for all of his success and power. The pagans will realize that all of the deities that they had worshiped were only manifestations of the One all-powerful G-d. Therefore, G-d tested *Avraham* for the world to see and appreciate the basis for his unlimited success. It was due to his selfless sacrifice to the Omnipotent One.

On *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* we say in the *Amidah* (silent Prayer), "You (G-d) should give honor to Your people." What is the value of giving honor to the Jewish people after the truth is revealed through the coming of *Moshiach*. The Commentators explain that throughout the millennia the Jewish people have sacrificed their lives for the sake of the glory of G-d. Because they identify themselves as G-d's people, the Jewish people have been persecuted and killed throughout the generations by the nations of the world.

We ask G-d to give His people honor by allowing the nations of the world at the end of time to understand that all of those who had suffered and sacrificed to bring Glory to G-d has the ultimate value. When the nations will come upon this realization, at that moment of truth, they will understand in retrospect what the Jewish people had done. Their sacrifice and suffering was worthwhile because it is negligible compared to the innate value and accomplishment of serving G-d the Creator. Similarly, G-d wanted the world to appreciate *Avraham's* dedication to the Master in order to understand and appreciate its value.

Avraham, the Spiritual Progenitor of Man

The Torah states, "G-d said to Avram, 'Go for yourself (*Lech lecha*) from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" All of the earlier commentators agree that the test of "*Lech lecha*" was one of the ten tests that G-d had presented to Avraham, our Patriarch.

The *Midrash* tells us that the location "*Ur Kasdim*" alludes to the fiery kiln into which Avraham was cast. Avraham's father, Terach, had informed Nimrod the king that his son Avraham had committed an act of blasphemy by smashing his idols. As a result, Avraham was given an ultimatum by Nimrod to either bow to the idol or die in the fiery kiln. Avraham chose to die to sanctify G-d's Name.

Miraculously, Avraham emerged from the kiln unscathed. Prior to this, Avraham had been a fugitive and was hunted by the members of his community to be killed because of his espousal of monotheism. He hid in a cave from his countrymen for many years. Avraham was considered to be a pariah by his family and his community.

If this is so, why is G-d's directive to leave his land (*Charan*), birthplace, and father's household considered to be a test? In addition, G-d promised Avraham that he would have children, which he did not have at that moment, he would also have wealth, which he did not have, and he would have renown. One would think that leaving such a hostile community would not have been considered a blessing and not a test.

Avraham came to recognize G-d through his own quest for truth. He understood that there is a single Creator and not various deities that brought about existence and maintain. The *Midrash* tells us that Avraham perceived the world to be a magnificent citadel that had many rooms that were fully illuminated. Upon seeing the magnificent illuminated citadel he asked, "Who is the Master of this citadel? (Is it possible that this magnificent illuminated citadel has no master?)" He continued to repeat his question until finally, the Master of the citadel (G-d) revealed himself to Avraham and said, "I am the Master of the citadel."

Avraham was driven to discover this truth only because he had a unique level of indebtedness to his benefactor who is the One responsible for creating and maintaining existence. He rejected all of the

paganist arguments that were presented to him by the theologians of his generation, because he wanted to express his debt of gratitude only to the One who was his true benefactor. His expression of gratitude would manifest itself through total submission and negation to the Master.

The *Mishna* in Tractate *Bava Metziah* states, "If one finds the lost article of a stranger and the lost article of one's father, one is obligated to return the item of his father first because the father was responsible for bringing him into existence." We see that regardless of what the father had done to the child after facilitate him coming into existence, the child must acknowledge his gratitude to his father because he is a beneficiary of the father's action.

Regardless of the fact that Avraham's father was an idolater, evil, and gave him over to be killed; Avraham, being one who appreciates being the beneficiary of good, could not abandon his father and leave him to his pagan beliefs, regardless of the dictate of G-d to leave. Avraham had an overwhelming need to reciprocate and demonstrate gratitude to his father, despite what he had done to him.

Similarly, although his community regarded Avraham as a pariah and wanted to kill him, he nevertheless felt a sense of indebtedness to them for whatever good they may have contributed to his development. This is the reason "*Lech lecha*" is considered to be one of the ten tests of Avraham. Despite the fact that Avraham felt he had a debt of gratitude towards his father and countrymen, when G-d had told him to leave, he did not hesitate for a moment. He did not ask G-d to give him another chance to attempt to influence his father to repent and become a monotheist. But rather, Avraham negated himself totally to G-d immediately left *Charan*.

The Torah states that in addition to leaving his birthplace and countrymen, G-d wanted Avraham to leave "his father's household (family)." *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* explains that G-d wanted Avraham to distance himself not only from his father but also every member of his family as much as possible. He was to become the beginning of a new existence and could not be associated with his past.

The Torah states in the Portion of *Bereishis* regarding Creation, "*B'Hebarom* - when He (*Hashem*) created them (existence)." *Chazal* tell us that the letters of the

word "B'hebarom" allude to *Avraham*, our Patriarch *Avraham*. The letters of the word "B'Hebarom" when rearranged spell the name "*Avraham*." *Maharal of Prague* explains that the allusion to *Avraham* through the word "B'Hebarom" indicates that he was not a continuation of the previous existence, but rather, he himself was the beginning of a new existence. His spiritual essence was the equivalent of *ex nihilo*. Although *Avraham* was told to separate himself from his family, his nephew *Lot* accompanied him from *Charan* to *Canaan*. Why did *Avraham* merit to be considered to be the beginning of a new existence?

The *Torah* states after Adam had eaten from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, "G-d said to Adam, 'Have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat? Adam responded, 'The woman whom You gave me- she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'" *Chazal* tell us that Adam was an ingrate because he had blamed his sin upon G-d. He believed that G-d had given him a wife that had caused him to fail. Rather than acknowledging that the woman was a blessing through which he could achieve spiritual perfection, he regarded her as the cause of his failing. Thus, Adam did not appreciate what G-d had created on his behalf because he was an ingrate.

Thus, one who is lacking in the characteristic of gratitude cannot be the progenitor of mankind, within the context of spirituality. This is because one who does not have a sufficient sense of gratitude towards his benefactor (G-d) cannot submit and negate himself fully to Him. It was not until *Avraham* came into existence with his all-consuming sense of gratitude towards his benefactor and his need to submit himself to the Master that the initial failing of Adam was correct. Thus, *Avraham* merited to be the beginning of a new existence because he restored the relationship between subject and Master.

It is interesting to note that the *Torah* tells us that until the end of time a Moabite and an Ammonite is not permitted to intermarry with the Jewish people, even after conversion to Judaism. This is because in the fortieth year of the Jewish people's wandering in the desert, they had come upon the Moabites and Ammonites and were not offered hospitality. As the *Torah* states, "They did not offer them their bread and water when they had left Egypt."

Ramban explains that the reason the Moabites and Ammonites are not permitted to intermarry into the

Jewish people is because they should have shown their indebtedness to the Jewish people for what all that *Avraham* had done on behalf of their ancestor *Lot*. Had it not been for *Avraham*, *Lot* would have been killed and they would not exist. Their expression of ingratitude was a reflection of the essence that was portrayed by their ancestor *Lot*.

The failing of the Moabites and Ammonites is not a failing in their behavior but rather a revelation of their true corrupted character as ingrates, which is what initially disqualified Adam from being the spiritual progenitor of humanity. *Avraham* corrected this and thus merited to be the founding father of the Jewish people. These ingrates thus cannot intermingle with the Jewish people until the end of time.

The Context in Which G-d's Guarantee Has Value

The *Torah* states after the Great Flood, "And G-d said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I give between Me and you, and every living being that is with you to generations forever: I have set My rainbow in the cloud and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall happen...I will look upon it to remember the everlasting covenant...'"

After the Great Flood G-d made a covenant with the world, that if the spiritual status of existence would once again decline to such a degree that His Attribute of Justice would call upon its destruction, the Attribute of Mercy will subdue the Attribute of Justice, so that G-d would not once again destroy the world.

This covenant is indicated by the rainbow in the cloud. When one sees the rainbow, one should remember, that if it were not for the covenant, G-d would destroy the world. If the rainbow is the sign of the covenant, why does the verse need to state "I will look upon it" to remember the covenant. Seemingly, the words, "I will look upon it" are superfluous. Are the words "I will look upon it" referring to the rainbow or something else?

Sforno explains, "The phrase 'I will look upon it' is referring to the supplications of the devoutly righteous (*tzaddikim*). Meaning, 'G-d said, 'When I will gaze upon the prayers and repentance of the devoutly righteous I will remember My covenant and not destroy the world.'"

Without the repentance and supplications of the *tzaddikim*, the world would not be able to continue to exist. The devoutly righteous are in a continuous state of introspection and repentance because they are aware of the shortcomings of existence and what needs to be addressed and corrected. The *Gemara* tells us that the world stands in the merit of 36 hidden *tzaddikim*. Although G-d made a covenant with existence not to destroy it, His Attribute of Mercy is only evoked by the supplications of the *tzaddikim*.

The *Torah* tells us that G-d at the covenant between the parts made a promise to *Avraham*, our Patriarch that after 400 years He would take the Jewish people out of Egypt. Although the Jewish people were to be taken out of Egypt because of this covenant, the *Torah* states, "And the Children of Israel groaned and cried out from the harsh labor and their outcries ascended to G-d."

Sforno explains, "The outcries of the Jewish people came from their pain; however, they ascended to G-d not because of the repentance or supplications of the Jewish people but rather because of their suffering.

When the *Torah* states "and G-d heard their outcries..." This is referring to the outcries of the *tzaddikim* of the generation." We see once again that although G-d was bound by the covenant with *Avraham* to take his descendants out of Egypt, it was only due to the supplications of the *tzaddikim* that G-d's Mercy was evoked. We learn from this that although G-d may be bound by a covenant, there must be an element of devoutly righteous that will allow the covenant to be upheld. It is for the sake of a handful of *tzaddikim* who repent and cry out in prayer, that G-d honors the covenant.

Chazal tell us that the Jewish people merited to be redeemed from Egypt because they maintained their Jewish identity by not changing their names, language, and attire. Seemingly, if there was a covenant in place that guaranteed their redemption, why would they need a special merit to be taken out? We again see from this that a covenant's value only has relevance to be effective if there is a basis that there will be a future relationship with G-d.

The *Torah* tells us that G-d said to *Moshe* after the sin of the golden calf, "The Jewish people are a stiff-necked people. I will therefore destroy them..." *Sforno* explains that because the Jewish people are "stiff-necked" their

obstinacy will not allow them to repent. If that is so, there is no hope for them. If they will not repent, G-d has no reason to maintain them, because it is only through repentance and supplication that one merits the Attribute of Mercy which is an indication that there is a future. If there is no repentance and supplication, even by a few, there is no reason to uphold the covenant.

Noach's Regression Regarding His Spirituality

The *Torah* states after *Noach* and his family came out of the ark into the new existence, "*Noach*, the man of the earth (*ish adamah*), debased himself and planted a vineyard..." *Rashi* explains the meaning of the word "debased" to mean that *Noach* made himself ordinary (*chulin*), meaning "lacking in holiness." The *Midrash* explains, "*Reb Yehudah* the son of *Reb Shalom* says, 'Initially *Noach* was *ish tzaddik* (devoutly righteous man) and after the Flood he became an *ish adamah* (man of the earth).' It is not because he chose to work the earth but rather it is because he chose to plant a vineyard."

Although *Noach* was initially quantified by the *Torah* as a "devoutly righteous man", he nevertheless was a physical being who needed to attend to his physical needs. However when he was later quantified as a "man of the earth," although his physical needs were no more than they had been, what changed within *Noach* that caused his classification to be reduced?

The determining factor which establishes one's classification is based on what is primary and what is secondary to the individual. If one's material pursuits are solely for the sake of facilitating one's spiritual objective, then this initiative is classified as spiritual. However, if one's material initiative is for the sake of the physical and unrelated to his spirituality, then the individual will become debased and physicalized.

Noach did not need to plant a vineyard as his first act in the new existence. He could have chosen to plant another type of plant such as wheat. Yet he chose a species that ultimately led him to become intoxicated and brought disgrace upon himself and his family.

Although *Noach's* belief in G-d remained intact at some level, his choice of the vine rather than another species was an indication that he was inclined to a greater degree to the physical, rather than the spiritual.

One could say that since he had failed in his mission to cause his generation to repent, he saw himself to be ineffective in the spiritual realm and thus saw himself as a failure.

It is interesting to note that after the Great Flood *Noach* was not qualified to be the *Kohen* (priest), but rather his son *Shem* became the *Kohen*. Why is this so? The *Gemara* in Tractate *Avodah Zorah* tells us that *Noach* was no longer qualified to be the *Kohen*, because in the ark he assumed a blemished status. Because he had delayed bringing the food to the lion on time, it injured him in a way that caused him to become disqualified to be the *Kohen*.

Thus, *Noach* felt that he had failed on multiple levels. He not only failed in his mission regarding his generation that was destroyed, but even as an individual he personally could no longer officiate as the *Kohen* in his service of G-d. His connection to G-d was thus weakened further.

All of this impacted on his sense of self, ultimately causing him to choose to plant the vine rather than any other species. This choice was thus an indication that he had become a “man of the earth.” He was no longer a *tzaddik* that facilitated his spirituality through the physical but rather he became a farmer. He thus became an earthy person (relatively speaking) that ultimately became disgraced.

The *Torah* tells us that when Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden he was told by G-d to “work the land.” While he was in the Garden his duty was to “safeguard and watch over the Garden.” While both Adam and *Noach* entered into a new world, Adam understood that he needed to work the land because he had putrefied himself by eating of the Tree of Knowledge, but *Noach* who had no choice but to work the land chose to become a man of the earth due to his own personal failure. Unlike Adam, *Noach* could have maintained his spirituality and not debase himself.



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