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A Critical Review of John Adair's 'The Leadership of Muhammad'

¹Dr. P.S. Syed Masood Jamali & ²Mr. A.M. Ali Ibrahim Jamali

Dean, School of Islamic Studies, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent University, Chennai, Tamilnadu,

India.

Assistant Professor and Research Scholar, School of Islamic Studies, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent

University, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.

dean-sis@bsauniv.ac.in & aliibrahimjamali@gmail.com

Abstract:

'The Leadership of Muhammad' is a famous book written by the prominent Management trainer John

Adair which documents the leadership qualities and skills of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) elaborately.

It is widely accepted and praised by all the scholars – Muslims and Non Muslims – all around the

world. This article intends to shed light on the appreciable aspects of the book as well as to criticize

the way it was compiled and documented. However it is an academic criticism about the inappropriate

data collection and methodology adopted by the author. This paper is divided into three parts: Firstly

introduction, then eight topics and finally, conclusion. The main purpose of this paper is to review

and analyze the contents of the book critically. In the due course of the review, it also explains the

structure of the book, its methodology, background of the author, his expertise, his objective, views

and opinions. It also evaluates the historical data mentioned in the book, analyzes the authenticity of

the Prophetic traditions quoted by the author and pinpoints some of the factual errors mentioned.

Keywords: Adair –leadership- Muhammad –fabricated Hadiths – Bedouin traditions – Leadership

theory.

Introduction:

John Adair is one of the foremost leadership thinkers of the world. His work 'The Leadership of

Muhammad' is considered as one of the best books written by him. This book consists of full of

fascinating details of desert life and Bedouin beliefs and highlights the leadership skills displayed by

Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). John Adair weaves the story of Prophet's life together with facets of

76

Bedouin culture, tribal leadership and ancient proverbs. He also provides key points for contemporary leaders and the aspiring ones. He draws the attention of the readers with his crispy writing and fine-looking presentation.

The cover of this book carries a Hadeeth (Saying of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh)): "On a journey, the leader of a people is their servant". It acknowledges the reflection of the famous Christian historian, Michael H. Hart who chose the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) as No.1 in his book titled, 'The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History'. Michael Hart's reasoning was based on the great contributions of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) in both religious and secular fields.

Here are some reasons that drive the people to read this book.

- i) The subject of this book is related to the great personality of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh).
- ii) This study deals with one of the main aspects of Prophet Muhammad's life and that too was researched and analyzed by a western thinker about leadership.
- iii) Last but not least, this research will do a world of good for everyone in throwing light as far as the leadership research is concerned.

This critical review is based on the following important things:

- a. To exhibit the right things highlighted by the author like coming up with the proper statements and clearing the problems with apt solutions.
 - b. To appreciate the author for the manner in which he compiled this book.
 - c. To point out the flaws in the book which the author himself may not be aware of.

Inductive research methodology was followed in this review. The book was read many times and the Author's methodology, his scientific remarks, issues related to Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) were clearly understood. The topics and issues brought up by the author were gone through meticulously.

Hence, every incorrect point mentioned in the book was responded in a proper manner keeping in mind that the main objective of this article is only to point out the incorrect data quoted in the book.

Short profile of the Author John Adair:

John Adair was born on 18th May 1934 in the United Kingdom of England. He got educated at St Paul's School before undertaking his National Service as a second lieutenant in the Scots Guards from 1953 to 1955. Unusually, he served as adjutant of a Bedouin regiment in the Arab Legion, which actually motivated him to write this book. He was very keen on his studies and completed his Doctorate in Philosophy from King's College, London in 1966. He worked as a lecturer in Royal Military Academy from 1961 to 1967. In 1979, he became the world's first Professor of Leadership Studies at the University of Surrey. Between 1981 and 1986 he worked with Sir John Harvey-Jones at ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries) introducing a leadership development strategy that helped to change the loss-making, bureaucratic giant into the first British company to make a billion pounds profit.

He also served as a Visiting Professor in the University of Exeter from 1990 to 2000. He is currently an Emeritus Fellow of the Windsor Leadership Trust where he regularly speaks on Leadership Development programmes. Since 2006, he has been Honorary Professor of Leadership at the China Executive Leadership Academy in Pudong. In 2009, he was appointed Chair of Leadership Studies United Nations System Staff College in Turin. ¹

John Adair is one of the world's leading authorities on leadership and leadership development. Over a million managers worldwide have taken part in the Action-Centred Leadership programmes pioneered by him. He has written over 50 books, which were translated into many languages. Apart from being an author, he is also a teacher and consultant. ²

Some of his most well-known books are: Not Bosses but Leaders - How to Lead the Way to Success, How to Grow Leaders: The Seven Key Principles of Effective Leadership Development, Leadership for Innovation, The Inspirational Leader, Leadership and Motivation, Develop Your Leadership Skills, Decision Making and Problem Solving Strategies, Effective Leadership, How To Manage Your Time and The Leadership of Muhammad.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Adair_(author)

²http://www.johnadair.co.uk/

Brief introduction to the book:

The book 'The Leadership of Muhammad' is considered as the last book written by John Adair under the series of Leadership topic. John Adair had given the reasons for writing this book in the introduction. They are:

- a. The book is a biographical inquiry into one aspect of the Prophet Muhammad's (Pbuh) life, i.e. his leadership.
- b. It will make the reader to judge himself that how Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) lived as a perfect and an ideal leader.
- c. It also discusses the Leadership qualities in the life of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) and also proves the Universal truth and concept around the nature of leadership and its processes.

Topics of the book:

The book 'The Leadership of Muhammad' was first published by Kogan Page, London, United Kingdom in the year 2010. It is a detailed study about the leadership in the life of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) concentrating on the many stages in his illustrious life. At the same time, the author also mentions relevant incidents which clearly testify the traits of leadership found in the sayings and doings of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). He also added his academic and practical experience gained in the field of leadership.

In order to reach his objective, he divided the book into an introduction, eight chapters and a conclusion in which the brief life history of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) was mentioned. The eight chapters are as follows:

- i. In the black tents of Bani Sa'd
- ii. The shepherd
- iii. Caravan Leader
- iv. Dwellers of the desert
- v. Muhammad 'The Trustworthy one'

- vi. Sharing in hardship
- vii. Humility
- viii. From past to present.

Important aspects of the book:

This book is considered as an important work on the basis of the following aspects:

- i. A significant feature from the life of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) was analyzed in detail.
- ii. This is considered as the modern and unique book written in the Western world in the praise of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh).
- iii. It was published immediately after the unjust hatred campaign against Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) in some of the Western countries, so it served as a good response to them.
- iv. The author's experience in the field of Leadership gives the book an intellectual dimension and global importance.
- v. The fairness and impartiality of the author touch the reader in the time when bias and prejudice of some scholars of the Western world towards Prophet was spread among the people.
- vi. This book definitely opens the door for the people who are doing specialization in the Prophetic traditions. It helps them to consolidate their social and psychological knowledge.
- vii. The book won the Best Book Award of Science in Management from the British Institute of Management in the year 2011.

Descriptive methodology of the Author:

The descriptive methodology of the Author is as follows:

i. The author has given a topic for each chapter which symbolizes either a phase in the life of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) or any his noble qualities, except the last chapter. He made as it to connect from past to present.

- ii. After the topic, he quotes a Hadeeth (Prophetic Tradition) or Arabic proverb or any other related sayings.
- iii. Then, he begins with a historical narrative of a phase from the life of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh).
- iv. In each chapter, he explains the meanings of the leadership terminologies which could be derived from that particular period.
- v. He quotes key points at the end of each chapter. Under those points, he mentions several benefits related to the leadership theory and practice. He attributes those key points as pearls of wisdom as he says, "A pearl is formed around a grain of sand. Think of each key point as a grain of sand that If you coat it in time with quiet reflections from your own experience and values will become for you a pearl, lustrous and iridescent. Then it will be your pearl of wisdom". ³
- vi. Like he begins the each chapter with a Hadeeth or narration, he also ends with quoting a Hadeeth (Prophetic Tradition) or Arabic proverb or any other related adage.
- vii. He separates the quoted texts with different fonts except few places where the original text is similar to the quoted one.

References made by the Author:

In fact, the author didn't mention any particular reference or citation from which he derived the details especially, the incidents related to Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh).

Inside the book, the following references are found:

- i. He quotes the meanings of 21 verses from the Holy Quran along with the name of the chapter and verse number. But he didn't mention the source of that English translation.
- ii. On the whole, he quotes 27 Hadeeths (Prophetic Traditions) in the book but didn't mention the source of those Hadeeths except one in the Page No: 90 for which he relates to Ibn Majaa. He also quotes a number of incidents from the biography of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) but he didn't mention the sources for the same.

81

³ John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, New Delhi, Kogan Page India Private Limited, 2013, pp.2.

iii. In the entire book, he mentions only two references. They are Seera Ibn Hisham (P.No.52) and Seera Ibn Ishaq (P.No.82).

iv. As far as the Arabic books are concerned, he mentions the name of the famous manuscript Muqaddama Ibnu Khaldun (P.No: 99,100,101,102) and Nahjul Balagah (P.No: 91).

Critical points about the book:

During the review of the book, a number of incorrect information was traced out which certainly required to be criticized academically. That can be proved by the following points:

a. Quoting weak and fabricated Hadeeths:

The Author should be appreciated for his efforts in bringing out the special leadership attributes of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). But it doesn't exempt him from relying on correct and authenticated prophetic traditions. He had quoted many false Hadeeths that were rejected by the Scholars of Hadeeth. Some people may argue that he is not a Muslim and he doesn't know the difference between Saheeh and Dhayeef Hadeeths. But the research methodology requires verifying the authentication of that information before quoting from others.

Even the author knows that there are some fabricated Hadeeths as he mentions in the last part of the book as, "An acceptable hadith is composed of two parts: the main text and a chain of authorities – of its genealogy – reporting it". ⁴ In this modern era, the verification of the authenticity of Hadeeths is a simple process as authenticated reference books and websites are easily approachable.

b. Not referring the authentic sources from which Prophetic traditions should be derived:

Not only for a research but as a general rule, it is not advisable to quote anything without proper authentication. Especially, when someone quotes the sayings and doings of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh), he has to be doubly sure what he quotes. He has to refer the original sources from which one can get many treasures in that topic. The author is not unaware of the authentic sources of Hadeeth either, for he says at the end of his book, "The two famous collections of Hadiths are by Bukhari (810-70) and Muslim Al Hajjaj (817 -75). If a saying appears in both of them it has a very good

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⁴John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, New Delhi, Kogan Page India Private Limited, 2013, pp.116.

pedigree". 5

Had the author referred the original sources of Hadeeth, he could not have quoted such wrong information and he could also have got excellent details about the meritorious characters of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) like his patience, tolerance, humility, modesty, wisdom, sagacity and so on.

Those attributes are necessary to be displayed not only by his followers or the ones who are serving as leaders, but it is imperative for everyone to have those attributes irrelevant of which field they are in. On that aspect, Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) was the perfect example for all the people in dealing with others and all the aspects of their life.

Some of the errors found in the context of Hadeeths are as follows:

i. The author narrates a story of a camel.⁶ In that story, he writes that Wahb ibn Kaysan accompanied Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). But in fact, Jabir Ibn Abdullah (Ra) was the one who accompanied him. Wahb Ibn Kaysan was the one who narrated this Hadeeth from Jabir Ibn Abdullah (Ra). He was not a sahabi (Companion) as well. The correct Hadeeth was recorded in Saheeh Al Bukhari.⁷

ii. While narrating a famous Hadeeth of Anas (Ra), he says, "He served me more than I served him! He has never been angry with me. He never treated me harshly". 8 This is completely opposite to the authentic texts of Hadeeth. The correct Hadeeth Narrated by Anas (Ra) is as below:

"I Served the Prophet (Pbuh) for ten years and he never said to me, "Uff" (A minor harsh word denoting impatience) and never blamed me by saying, "Why did you do so, or why didn't you do so?". 9

C. Describing the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) as natural phenomena and not a divine blessing and guidance:

⁷ Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Saheeh Al Bukhari*, Riyadh, Darus Salam Publishers and Distributors, 1997, Volume:3, Hadeeth No: 2097, Pp.181.

⁵John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, New Delhi, Kogan Page India Private Limited, 2013, pp.117.

⁶ Ibid, pp.35-36.

⁸John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, New Delhi, Kogan Page India Private Limited, 2013, pp.69.

⁹ Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Saheeh Al Bukhari*, Riyadh, Darus Salam Publishers and Distributors, 1997, Volume:8, Hadeeth No: 6038, Pp.47.

While doing study on the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) the author says that Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) became as greatest of the leaders on his natural ability and potentiality but not on the aspect that he was the Prophet sent by Allah. The author says, "We can now all learn to lead – just as Muhammad developed as a leader". ¹⁰

He says in another place, "Muhammad has behaved as a great Arab chief should, but with a characteristically gentle and humorous touch". ¹¹ While narrating an incident happened in the early life of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) the author says, "In fact guiding such a meeting to an actionable decision required not only the authority of position and personal prestige but also skill. Do you imagine Muhammad as a boy sitting on the edge of the open-sided meeting house in order to learn that skill? I do". ¹²

Highlighting the commendable traits of the personalities who made a big impact in the world is a routine procedure followed all over the world. So that it may pave the others to follow his qualities. This type of compilation has spread in all the cultures. According to Muslims, Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) is the greatest of the greats without any iota of doubt. This is because of Allah who has chosen him as his messenger and endowed his blessing on him by completing his personality in all aspects. In reality, Muslims have such different dimensions for Prophet which may not be realized or recognized by the author.

Muslims follow and emulate the Prophet in each and every walk of their life. They honour, respect, adore and revere Prophet in order to draw closer to God, to exhibit their love for the Prophet. They do all these things not on the aspect that Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) is a great reformer but as the messenger of Allah.

D. Stressing that the environment in which Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) constituted those great leadership abilities in him:

John Adair reiterates that the reason for leadership qualities of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) is because of his environment. He says, "Muhammad was a product of Bedouin society but he also, as we have

¹⁰John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, New Delhi, Kogan Page India Private Limited, 2013, pp.110.

¹¹Ibid., pp.37.

¹²Ibid, pp.30.

seen, transcended it". ¹³ He says again, "His knowledge of the Bedouin ways was extremely useful to Muhammad as a leader during the desert war between the Muslims and Quraysh". ¹⁴

He claims in the beginning of Second Chapter, "In this chapter I shall ask you to consider the possible lessons of leadership that Muhammad – as an intelligent and observant youth – might have gleaned from long days and nights shepherding a flock of sheep and goats in the wadis that threaded through the sun baked hills and mountains around Mecca". ¹⁵

A man is a product of his environment. It will have an impact on him positively as well as negatively. Nobody can deny that fact. But Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) is the messenger of Allah and not like other men and therefore Allah took care of him, completed his physical and moral characters since his birth. On this aspect Allah declares in the Holy Quran that: "Did He not find thee an orphan and give thee shelter (and care)? And He found thee wandering, and He gave thee guidance. And He found thee in need, and made thee independent". ¹⁶

E. Claiming that Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) was implementing the Bedouin traditions:

While commenting on one of the stories mentioned in his book about the life of the Bedouins, the author says, "This story could have taken place in the lifetime of Muhammad". ¹⁷

He writes in another place, "He tended to see the best in people, and to put his cloak over their faults and failings. He abided by the spirit of the Arab proverb: Deal as gently with the faults of others as you do with your own". ¹⁸

He ends the first chapter with a saying, claiming that is an Arab proverb, "It is the tribe that tells the chief how to do his job". 19

These thoughts are not correct. Allah had sent our Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) with the clear divine

¹³Ibid, pp.109

¹⁴Ibid, pp.48.

¹⁵John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, New Delhi, Kogan Page India Private Limited, 2013, pp.17.

¹⁶ Holy Quran: 93: 6-8.

¹⁷John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, New Delhi, Kogan Page India Private Limited, 2013, pp.47.

¹⁸Ibid, pp.91.

¹⁹Ibid, pp.15.

guidance and the religion of truth. That doesn't require any custom or approach as claimed by the author for Allah knows the conditions and needs of the people better and His method is the most appropriate one to reform them. Hence, the Prophet was not in a need to follow the Bedouin traditions and customs.

Allah clearly states in the Holy Quran, "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion". ²⁰

F. Assuming that there were other Prophets sent by Allah:

While explaining the importance of having a leader, the author says, "If Muhammad had allowed other prophets in the Arabian peninsula – they did arise, men both influential in their tribes and eager to work alongside Muhammad – his architectural vision of the new theology and the new community could have become fragmented in his lifetime". ²¹

In fact, prophet is the one who was sent by God and can't be appointed by human being and therefore the author's point of view is unacceptable. According to Muslims, Muhammad (Pbuh) is the final prophet and there is no prophet after him. This is not the choice of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) but Allah's wish and preference. He rightly declares in the Holy Quran in Chapter Al Ahzab, "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allah, and the Seal of the Prophets: and Allah has full knowledge of all things". ²²

G. Digression in some of the topics which is neither relevant to Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) nor to the leadership theory:

The title of the book clearly specifies the subject and the content but the author brought many information which falls outside of the main subject. The main theme consists of nearly 50% only. There are totally 111 pages in the book. If it is calculated, a major portion of the book is deviated from the main topic.

²⁰ Holy Quran: 5: 3.

²¹John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, New Delhi, Kogan Page India Private Limited, 2013, pp.83-84.

²² Holy Quran: 33: 40.

Some examples of deviation are as follows:

i. In the second chapter, 'The Shepherd' which consists of eight pages talks about herding the sheep throughout the history and elaborates the history of Prophet Dawood (Pbuh), Prophet Moosa (Pbuh) of being shepherds in about six pages, whereas the description of the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) is confined to only one page.

ii. In the third chapter 'Caravan Leader' which consists of thirteen pages reveals about history of Quraish tribe, Bedouin life and method of decision making among the Arab tribes for about ten pages. He didn't mention Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) except in two places. He also quotes the Hadeeth about the camel of Jabir Ibn Abdullah (Ra) in three pages.

iii. In the last chapter 'From Past to Present' which consists of thirteen pages, the author mentions about bravery and the leadership of Salahuddin (Saladin) and Mogul King Timur Leng (Tamerlane). He also mentions some texts from the famous book 'Muqaddama Ibn Khaldun'. But he mentions Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) only at the end of that chapter.

iv. The fourth chapter 'Dwellers of the Desert' is the longest chapter in the book which covers 23 pages. The chapter talks about camel, its life and adaptation to the Bedouin culture. But he writes about Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) only in two pages approximately.

Factual mistakes found in the book:

There are some errors found in the book which are completely opposite and contradictory to the reality. Some of them are as follows:

i. The author says that Bani Sa'd tribe was living in Najd, a great desert area in Khali regions that forms a plateau of about 1,500 metres high. ²³ But that is a wrong information as per the historians and their records. Because, the tribe Bani Sa'd was living in a place which is nowadays called as 'As Sayl al Kabir' which is located between Makkah and Taayif.

ii. While mentioning the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh), he says, "Most of the 650,000

87

²³John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, New Delhi, Kogan Page India Private Limited, 2013, pp.5.

alleged sayings of the Prophet fall outside the canon". 24

This is completely exaggerated one as the total number of Hadeeth (Prophetic Traditions) would not reach that level even if all the available Hadeeth texts are added. For example, in Saheeh Al Bukhari 7275 Hadeeths have been recorded, in Saheeh Muslim 2200 Hadeeths are recorded. If the number of all the Hadeeths registered by the Hadeeth scholars put together, it will not reach even one lakh. Yes, there were many fabricated Hadeeths. But Hadeeth scholars refuted those Hadeeths strongly and warned the people not to believe in them.

iii. The author also tumbles in naming those who were with Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). In some places he mentions them as Arabs, in other paragraphs as Muslims and in some other places as 'Bedouins'²⁵. There are no clear wordings like Muslims or companions.

iv. The author quotes the words of the early Arab historian Ibn Hisham about Ismaeel (Pbuh) as, "Ishmael, son of Abraham, was the first human being to ride a horse and the first to speak Arabic (the language of the Angels) and the first to shoot from the bow. For love of him God imported one hundred pure horses from the sea coast and he pastured them near mecca". ²⁶

In that quote, he says that this information was told to Ibn Hisham by his father. But there was no such thing mentioned in the book 'Seerathu Ibn Hisham'²⁷.

v. While mentioning the marriage proposal of Khadeeja (ra) to Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) he says that, "she sent him a proposal of marriage which included the words: 'O son of my uncle (Arabic has no word for cousin), she wrote in her letter, 'I like you because of our relationship and your high reputation among your people, your trustworthiness and good character and truthfulness'. ²⁸

But in veracity, Khadeeja (ra) didn't write any letter to Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) about her proposal. This mistake might have occurred because of the translation. In fact, Prophet Muhammad

²⁴Ibid, pp.116.

²⁵Ibid., pp.73.

²⁶Ibid., pp.52.

²⁷ Abdus Salam M. Harun, Seerat Ibn Hisham – Biography of the Prophet, Cairo, Al Falah Publication, 2000, pp. 3-4.

²⁸John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, New Delhi, Kogan Page India Private Limited, 2013, pp.60.

(Pbuh) didn't know to read and write.

vi. While mentioning the name of the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) he mentioned as 'Abd –al – Muttahib'²⁹ instead of 'Abd al Muttalib'. This might have happened on the sources taken by him.

Conclusion:

At the end of the research, some significant results are found. The important suggestions and recommendations are as follows:

- i) The leadership qualities of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) are undisputed and unquestionable. He was blessed and guided with those qualities by the Almighty.
- ii) An author cannot be prevented from expressing his views. But he has to be fair and positive in dealing with history.
- iii) As far as John Adair is concerned, he didn't come up with any information that misrepresents the character or attribute of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh).
- iv) He has included some wrong information in the book that could be avoided had he approached any Islamic university or reputed Islamic Scholars before publishing this book.
- v) This critical review could serve as an eye opener for all those who intend to write about Islamic history or the merits of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) to read and refer all the basic authentic sources before compiling the matter.

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²⁹Ibid, pp.9, 26, 28.

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