



Harmonizing the Divine: Exploring Spiritual and Religious Influences on Music

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Abstract:

This conceptual paper presents a comprehensive framework for understanding the intricate relationships between music, spirituality, and religion. By examining the intersections of these concepts, this exploration aims to illuminate the ways in which spiritual and religious beliefs shape music's meaning, composition, and experience. The discussion surveys key concepts and theoretical perspectives, including the sociological, psychological, and anthropological contexts of music spirituality. This paper also delves into the historical development of sacred music traditions, exploring their evolution and cultural significance. Additionally, it examines the role of music in ritual and ceremony, highlighting its capacity to facilitate spiritual experiences and communal bonding. Furthermore, this exploration investigates the intersection of spirituality and secularity in music, considering the tensions and synergies between sacred and profane musical expressions. The paper also touches upon the emotional and transcendent aspects of music, discussing how it can evoke feelings of awe, wonder, and connection to the divine. This conceptual exploration lays the groundwork for future research, inviting scholars to investigate the complex dynamics between music, spirituality, and religion. By considering the cultural, emotional, and transcendent aspects of music, this paper encourages a nuanced understanding of music's capacity to convey the divine and foster spiritual growth. The proposed framework has implications for various fields, including musicology, religious studies, psychology, and anthropology. It also offers insights for musicians, composers, and spiritual leaders seeking to harness music's transformative power.

Keywords: Music Spirituality, Religious Influences, Sacred Music, Conceptual Framework.

I. Introduction:

The intersection of music, spirituality, and religion has been a cornerstone of human experience throughout history, transcending cultural, geographical, and temporal boundaries. Music's unique capacity to evoke emotions, convey meaning, and foster communal bonding has made it an integral part of spiritual and religious practices worldwide. From the sacred chants of ancient civilizations to the contemporary hymns of modern worship, music has played a pivotal role in expressing devotion, facilitating spiritual growth, and connecting individuals with the divine. The intricate relationships between music, spirituality, and religion are multifaceted, influenced by cultural norms, historical contexts, and individual experiences. This complex interplay has given rise to diverse musical traditions, each reflecting the distinct spiritual and religious values

of its respective culture. As a universal language, music possesses the power to bridge cultural divides, evoke emotions, and inspire spiritual contemplation, making it an essential aspect of human existence.

Background: Intersection of Music, Spirituality, and Religion

The intersection of music, spirituality, and religion is a profound and complex phenomenon that has been observed across cultures and throughout history. Music's unique capacity to evoke emotions, convey meaning, and facilitate communal bonding has made it an integral part of spiritual and religious practices worldwide. From the sacred chants of ancient civilizations to modern-day hymns and worship songs, music has played a vital role in shaping spiritual experiences, reinforcing cultural values, and fostering communal identity. This intersection is characterized by the emotional resonance of music, its cultural significance, and its ability to transcend linguistic and cognitive boundaries, connecting individuals to something greater.

The significance of this intersection is multifaceted. Music's emotional impact facilitates spiritual experiences, communal bonding, and personal growth. Its cultural significance reflects and shapes cultural values, norms, and spiritual practices, while its transcendent quality connects individuals to a higher power, ultimate reality, or divine presence. Key dimensions of this intersection include sacred music traditions, spiritual experience, and religious ritual. Sacred music traditions encompass historical and cultural contexts, while spiritual experience involves music's role in facilitating spiritual growth, transformation, and self-awareness. Religious ritual examines music's function in religious ceremonies and practices. Understanding this intersection can provide valuable insights into human experience, spirituality, and cultural identity, highlighting the importance of continued exploration and research in this field.

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1. Understanding the Complex Relationships

The intersection of music, spirituality, and religion is a profound and multifaceted phenomenon. This complex relationship has been observed across cultures, historical periods, and geographical boundaries.

- a. **Historical Context:** Music has played a vital role in spiritual and religious practices, from ancient civilizations to modern times.
- b. **Cultural Significance:** Music reflects and shapes cultural values, norms, and spiritual practices, influencing individual and collective experiences.
- c. **Interconnectedness:** Spirituality, religion, and music intersect in complex ways, influencing emotional resonance, personal growth, and communal bonding.
- d. **Research Rationale:** Understanding this intersection can provide valuable insights into human experience, spirituality, and cultural identity, highlighting the importance of continued exploration and research.

2. Conceptual Framework

A. Defining Spirituality and Religion in Music

Spirituality and religion in music encompass complex, multifaceted concepts that intersect and influence individual and collective experiences.

Spirituality in Music

1. **Emotional Resonance:** Evoking feelings of transcendence, connection, and meaning. Music's emotional resonance facilitates spiritual experiences, fostering a sense of unity and shared humanity.

This resonance transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries, connecting individuals to something greater.

2. **Personal Growth:** Facilitating self-awareness, reflection, and transformation. Through music, individuals can explore their inner selves, confronting and resolving emotional conflicts. This transformative process nurtures spiritual growth, empowering individuals to re-evaluate their values and purpose.
3. **Cultural Significance:** Reflecting and shaping cultural values and norms. Music embodies cultural narratives, preserving historical memories and cultural heritage. By engaging with spiritual music, individuals connect with their cultural roots, reinforcing identity and community.

Religion in Music

1. **Sacred Traditions:** Integrating music into religious rituals and ceremonies. Sacred music traditions evoke reverence, solemnity, and communal worship. These traditions often adhere to established norms, reinforcing doctrine and communal identity.
2. **Doctrine and Belief:** Reinforcing religious teachings and values. Religious music conveys core tenets, strengthening adherents' faith and commitment. This music serves as a pedagogical tool, transmitting religious knowledge across generations.
3. **Communal Identity:** Fostering a sense of belonging and shared experience. Congregational singing creates a collective voice, uniting individuals in worship and solidarity. This shared musical experience reinforces communal bonds, transcending individual differences.

4. Key Dimensions of the Intersection

The intersection of music, spirituality, and religion encompasses three key dimensions that provide a framework for understanding this complex relationship.

A. Sacred Music Traditions

Sacred music traditions represent a vital aspect of the intersection, rooted in ancient cultures and civilizations. These traditions have evolved over time, reflecting the cultural, historical, and theological contexts of their respective faiths. They often possess distinctive musical characteristics, such as styles, forms, and instrumentation.

Examples include:

- i. Gregorian chant in Christianity, with its monophonic melodies and Latin texts
- ii. Quranic recitation in Islam, characterized by melodic intonation and Arabic script
- iii. Bhajan in Hinduism, featuring devotional songs and instrumental accompaniment

These sacred music traditions serve as a bridge between the divine and human experience, facilitating spiritual connection and communal worship.

B. Spiritual Experience

Spiritual experience is a fundamental dimension, encompassing the emotional, personal, and transcendent aspects of music. Music's emotional resonance evokes feelings of transcendence, connection, and meaning,

facilitating spiritual experiences that foster personal growth. This dimension includes mystical encounters, where individuals directly experience the divine or ultimate reality.

Examples include:

- i. Gospel music's emotional intensity, inspiring joy and redemption
- ii. Kirtan's devotional fervour, cultivating love and devotion
- iii. Sufi music's ecstatic states, inducing spiritual ecstasy and unity

Spiritual experience through music transcends denominational boundaries, speaking to universal human aspirations.

C. Religious Ritual

Religious ritual represents the communal and liturgical dimension, where music plays a vital role in worship and ceremony. Congregational singing and collective worship foster a sense of community and shared identity. Music also serves as a vehicle for religious symbolism, conveying theological themes and values.

Examples include:

- i. Christian hymns in worship services, expressing faith and doctrine
- ii. Jewish cantorial music in synagogue services, preserving tradition and cultural heritage
- iii. Islamic adhan (call to prayer), summoning believers to worship

Understanding these key dimensions provides a foundation for exploring the complex relationships between music, spirituality, and religion.

III. Spiritual Influences on Music

Music has long been a universal language, capable of transcending cultural, geographical, and temporal boundaries to convey profound spiritual emotions and experiences. The spiritual dimensions of music have shaped its creation, performance, and reception across diverse traditions and genres. From the sacred chants of ancient civilizations to contemporary devotional songs, music has served as a powerful medium for expressing spiritual longing, seeking divine connection, and exploring the human condition. The spiritual influences on music are multifaceted, encompassing the emotional, cognitive, and social aspects of human experience. This section examines the various ways spirituality shapes music, including the role of faith, mysticism, and personal growth in musical expression, and explores how music, in turn, influences spiritual experiences, fostering a deeper sense of meaning, purpose, and connection.

1. Emotional Resonance and Personal Growth

Music's spiritual significance extends beyond its cultural and religious contexts, resonating deeply with individuals on emotional and personal levels. This dimension explores music's capacity to evoke powerful emotions, facilitate self-awareness, and nurture personal growth.

A. Emotional Resonance

Music's emotional resonance is a profound aspect of its spiritual influence, allowing individuals to process, express, and connect with their emotions on a deeper level.

1. Catharsis: Music releases and processes emotions, providing solace and comfort. Through cathartic experiences, music helps individuals confront and resolve emotional conflicts, leading to spiritual renewal. This process fosters emotional healing, cleansing the mind and heart.
2. Empathy: Music fosters understanding and connection with others' experiences. By sharing emotional experiences through music, individuals develop compassion and empathy, bridging the gaps between diverse human experiences. This empathetic connection cultivates spiritual unity.
3. Transcendence: Music transports individuals beyond mundane concerns. Transcendent music experiences evoke feelings of awe, wonder, and connection to something greater. This transcendent quality allows music to access profound spiritual dimensions.

Examples:

- i. Gospel music's uplifting melodies
- ii. Kirtan's devotional intensity
- iii. Ambient music's calming soundscapes

B. Personal Growth

1. Music's role in personal growth is multifaceted, inspiring individuals to explore their inner selves, challenge assumptions, and transform their lives.
2. Self-awareness: Music inspires introspection and reflection. Through music, individuals gain insight into their thoughts, emotions, and values, cultivating spiritual self-awareness. This increased awareness fosters personal responsibility.
3. Transformation: Music facilitates personal change and renewal. Music's transformative power helps individuals overcome adversity, re-evaluate priorities, and embrace new perspectives. This transformative process nurtures spiritual evolution.
4. Mindfulness: Music cultivates present-moment awareness. By engaging with music, individuals focus on the present, letting go of past regrets and future anxieties. Mindfulness through music fosters spiritual presence.

Examples:

- i. Spirituals' struggle for freedom
- ii. Mantras' meditative repetition
- iii. Instrumental music's expressive freedom

By examining emotional resonance and personal growth, we uncover music's profound impact on individual spiritual journeys.

2. Cultural Significance and Identity

Music's spiritual significance extends beyond personal experiences, profoundly shaping cultural identity and values. This dimension explores music's role in reflecting, preserving, and transforming cultural heritage.

A. Cultural Heritage

Music embodies cultural narratives, preserving historical memories and cultural traditions.

1. Tradition: Music passes down cultural values and customs. Through music, cultural heritage is transmitted across generations, ensuring continuity and identity.
2. History: Music reflects cultural struggles and triumphs. Songs of struggle and liberation inspire resilience, while celebratory music reinforces cultural pride.
3. Community: Music fosters cultural belonging. Shared musical experiences strengthen communal bonds, reinforcing cultural identity.

Examples:

- i. African-American Spirituals
- ii. Native American powwow music
- iii. Celtic folk music

B. Cultural Identity

Music shape's cultural identity, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and their place within their culture.

1. Representation: Music reflects cultural diversity. Diverse musical styles and traditions promote cross-cultural understanding.
2. Expression: Music articulates cultural values. Through lyrics and instrumentation, music conveys cultural perspectives.
3. Preservation: Music safeguards cultural legacy. Traditional music preserves cultural heritage, protecting against cultural erosion.

Examples:

- i. Latin American salsa
- ii. Indian classical music
- iii. Middle Eastern maqam
- iv. C. Cultural Transformation

Music also transforms cultural identity, challenging assumptions and fostering change.

1. Innovation: Music blends traditions. Fusion genres create new cultural expressions.
2. Social Justice: Music inspires activism. Protest songs mobilize social change.
3. Globalization: Music transcends borders. Global music exchange enriches cultural diversity.

Examples:

- i. Afrobeat's fusion of African rhythms

- ii. Reggae's social justice message
- iii. World music's global collaborations

By examining cultural significance and identity, we uncover music's profound impact on shaping cultural narratives and values.

IV. Religious Influences on Music

Music has long been an integral part of religious traditions, serving as a powerful medium for expressing devotion, conveying sacred texts, and fostering communal worship. Across cultures and faiths, music has played a vital role in shaping religious identity, reinforcing doctrine, and facilitating spiritual experiences. From the majestic chorales of Christianity to the devotional bhajans of Hinduism, and from the sonorous adhans of Islam to the chant-filled rituals of Buddhism, music has been a universal language of faith. This section explores the profound impact of religious influences on music, examining how theological concepts, liturgical practices, and communal values have shaped musical styles, forms, and traditions.

1. Sacred Music Traditions and Ritual Practices

Sacred music traditions and ritual practices have played a vital role in embodying the spiritual essence of various faiths, fostering devotion, communal worship, and spiritual growth through the centuries. These traditions have employed distinct musical elements, such as melody, rhythm, and instrumentation, to convey sacred texts and evoke profound spiritual emotions, thereby creating a deeper connection between the individual and the divine.

A. Sacred Music Traditions

1. The Christian tradition has given rise to the majestic Gregorian chant and hymnody, which have resonated through cathedrals and churches for centuries, inspiring devotion and spiritual reflection.
2. Islamic sacred music, characterized by the sonorous Adhan (call to prayer) and intricate Quranic recitation, has become an integral part of Muslim worship and cultural identity.
3. Jewish Cantorial music and Synagogue chant have preserved the rich cultural heritage of Judaism, while providing a musical framework for communal worship and spiritual expression.
4. Hindu Bhajan and Kirtan have evolved as powerful devotional traditions, fostering love, devotion, and spiritual growth through music.
5. Buddhist Chanting and Mantras have become essential components of meditation and spiritual practice, cultivating mindfulness and inner peace.

B. Ritual Practices

1. Liturgical music has played a central role in Christian worship services, enhancing the spiritual experience and fostering communal unity.
2. Islamic daily prayers (Salah) and Friday Khutbah have integrated music into the fabric of Muslim worship, reinforcing spiritual commitment and community.
3. Jewish Shabbat services and Passover Seder have featured Cantorial music and traditional chants, preserved cultural heritage and promoted spiritual connection.

4. Hindu Puja (worship) and festival celebrations have incorporated Bhajan and Kirtan, creating an atmosphere of joy and devotion.
5. Buddhist meditation and chanting ceremonies have utilized sacred music to cultivate mindfulness and spiritual growth.

C. Musical Symbolism

1. Instrumental symbolism, such as the church organ and temple drums, has conveyed theological concepts and reinforced faith and spiritual values.
2. Vocal styles, including Gregorian chant and Quranic recitation, have become iconic representations of their respective traditions.
3. Rhythmic patterns, such as those found in Sufi whirling and Hindu Bhajan, have embodied spiritual energy and devotion.

D. Interfaith Dialogue

1. Shared musical elements, like call-and-response patterns, have bridged cultural and religious divides.
2. Collaborative performances have fostered greater understanding and respect among diverse faith communities.
3. Musical exchange programs have promoted cross-cultural dialogue and spiritual unity.

2. Doctrine, Community, and Institutional Affiliation

A. Doctrine

Music reflects and reinforces theological concepts, shaping spiritual understanding and practice.

1. Scriptural inspiration: Music draws from sacred texts, conveying divine messages and reinforcing theological concepts. This scriptural foundation provides a rich source of lyrical content, inspiring musical compositions.
2. Theological themes: Music explores complex doctrines, facilitating spiritual contemplation and deepening understanding. Musical themes often grapple with existential questions, moral dilemmas, and spiritual aspirations.
3. Liturgical function: Music integrates with worship, enhancing spiritual experience and fostering communal unity. Liturgical music creates a sacred atmosphere, preparing worshippers for spiritual encounter.

Examples:

- i. Christian hymns articulating Trinity and Redemption
- ii. Islamic chants emphasizing Tawhid (Unity)
- iii. Jewish liturgical music reflecting Covenant and Torah

Through doctrine, music influences spiritual perspectives, shaping worldviews and guiding moral principles.

B. Community

Music fosters communal identity, belonging, and spiritual growth.

1. Congregational singing: Collective worship reinforces communal bonds and shared identity. Singing together creates a sense of unity, transcending individual differences.
2. Musical tradition: Shared heritage strengthens cultural and spiritual ties, transcending generational divides. Traditional music preserves historical memory, linking past and present.
3. Ritual participation: Music engages individuals in sacred rituals, cultivating spiritual growth and communal participation.

Examples:

- i. Gospel choirs in African-American churches
- ii. Sufi whirling in Islamic mysticism
- iii. Jewish cantorial music in synagogue services

Community-driven music reinforces social cohesion, spiritual unity, and cultural continuity.

C. Institutional Affiliation

Music is shaped by institutional contexts, influencing spiritual practice and community.

1. Liturgical music: Institutional worship styles and traditions shape musical content and style.
2. Sacred spaces: Architecture and acoustics influence musical experience and spiritual atmosphere, from grand cathedrals to intimate prayer rooms.
3. Clerical involvement: Religious leaders shape musical content, practice, and spiritual significance.

Examples:

- i. Catholic chant in cathedral services
- ii. Evangelical worship music in megachurches
- iii. Buddhist chanting in monastery rituals

Institutional contexts frame musical expression, spiritual practice, and communal worship.

By examining doctrine, community, and institutional affiliation, we uncover the complex interplay between music, spirituality, and religion.

V. Intersection of Spirituality and Religion in Music: Shared Experiences and Emotional Resonance

The intersection of spirituality and religion in music fosters shared experiences and emotional resonance, transcending denominational boundaries. Music provides a common language, bridging spiritual and religious divides. Through its universal appeal, music conveys emotions, longings, and aspirations that unite humanity.

The shared experiences of music create a profound sense of unity and communal worship. Emotional expression, spiritual longing, and collective spiritual experience are all facets of this shared encounter. For

instance, ecstatic Sufi whirling and Christian charismatic worship share a common intensity, while Jewish and Islamic devotional music evoke similar emotions. Buddhist and Hindu chant traditions also resonate with universal spiritual longing.

Music evokes profound emotional responses, resonating with spiritual and religious experiences. Catharsis, empathy, and transcendence are all essential aspects of this emotional resonance. Gospel music's uplifting melodies, Qawwali's soulful Sufi devotions, and Gregorian chant's contemplative atmosphere exemplify music's capacity to evoke powerful emotions.

Moreover, music facilitates interfaith dialogue, promoting understanding and respect. Shared musical elements, collaborative performances, and musical storytelling all contribute to this dialogue. Abrahamic hymns and songs, interfaith choirs and music ensembles, and sacred music festivals demonstrate music's potential to unite diverse faith traditions.

Ultimately, music explores universal themes that bridge spiritual and religious traditions. Love, compassion, forgiveness, redemption, hope, and transformation are among the themes that transcend denominational boundaries. Christian hymns of love and redemption, Islamic chants of mercy and compassion, and Jewish songs of hope and renewal illustrate music's capacity to convey shared human experiences.

By examining the intersection of spirituality and religion in music, we uncover the profound shared experiences and emotional resonance that unite humanity. Through music, we find common ground, fostering greater understanding, respect, and unity among diverse faith traditions.

Distinctions and Interplay between Spiritual and Religious Music

While often intertwined, spiritual and religious music exhibit distinct characteristics, reflecting differing emphasis and purposes. Spiritual music focuses on personal spiritual growth, introspection, and connection with a higher power. It emphasizes individual experience and emotional resonance, exploring universal themes and the human condition. This genre often incorporates diverse musical styles and traditions, untethered from specific doctrine or institution.

In contrast, religious music serves as an integral part of worship, reinforcing doctrine and communal identity. Rooted in specific theological traditions and scriptures, religious music emphasizes communal worship and liturgical function. It often features traditional instrumentation and styles, closely tied to institutional practices and authority. Examples include Christian hymns and choruses, Islamic Adhan and Quranic recitation, and Jewish cantorial music.

Despite these distinctions, the boundaries between spiritual and religious music blur, reflecting complex interplay. Shared musical elements and themes bridge the gap, with religious traditions influencing spiritual music and vice versa. The evolution of religious music toward spiritual emphasis and the intersection of personal spirituality and communal worship further erode these boundaries.

For instance, Gospel music combines emotional resonance with theological depth, while Sufi devotional music blends spiritual intensity with Islamic roots. Buddhist chant exhibits meditative quality and liturgical function, illustrating the fluidity between spiritual and religious music. By exploring these distinctions and interplay, we gain insight into the diverse ways music shapes human spirituality.

The interplay between spiritual and religious music also reveals the dynamic nature of musical expression. As individuals and communities navigate their spiritual journeys, music adapts, reflecting shifting values and beliefs. This adaptability ensures music remains a vital component of human spirituality, fostering connection, growth, and transcendence.

By examining the intersections and distinctions between spiritual and religious music, we uncover the rich tapestry of musical expression that underlies human spirituality. Through this exploration, we deepen our understanding of music's transformative power.

VI. Implications and Future Directions

The exploration of music, spirituality, and religion yields significant implications and future directions, encompassing therapeutic applications, well-being, interfaith dialogue, and cultural understanding. This interdisciplinary field offers a unique opportunity to integrate theoretical and practical insights, informing innovative approaches to spirituality, mental health, and community building. By examining music's role in spiritual and religious contexts, researchers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies for promoting personal growth, social cohesion, and cultural exchange.

Therapeutic Applications and Well-being

Research on music's spiritual and religious dimensions informs therapeutic practices, enhancing well-being and quality of life. Music therapy harnesses the emotional and cognitive benefits of music, alleviating stress, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, music's spiritual resonance fosters personal growth, self-awareness, and meaning-making. Studies have shown that music-based interventions can improve mood, reduce symptoms of PTSD, and enhance overall mental health. Additionally, music's therapeutic potential extends to palliative care, hospice settings, and spiritual support.

Interfaith Dialogue and Cultural Understanding

Music bridges cultural and religious divides, facilitating interfaith dialogue and cultural understanding. Collaborative musical projects and performances bring together diverse faith communities, promoting mutual respect and empathy. By sharing musical traditions and experiences, individuals transcend theological differences, discovering common humanity. Music festivals, concerts, and workshops provide platforms for interfaith exchange, fostering global understanding and peacebuilding. Moreover, music education programs can incorporate diverse spiritual and religious traditions, cultivating cultural competence and tolerance.

Future Research Directions

Future research should investigate the complex relationships between music, spirituality, and religion, addressing questions such as: What are the neuroscientific correlates of spiritual experience in music? How do different cultures integrate music into spiritual and religious practices? What are the effects of music-based interventions on mental health and well-being? How can music facilitate interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange? Exploring these questions will deepen our understanding of music's role in human spirituality and inform evidence-based practices.

Practical Applications

Practical applications of this research include developing music-based therapies for spiritual growth and well-being, creating interfaith musical programs and events, integrating music into religious education and worship, and fostering cultural exchange through musical collaborations. Furthermore, policymakers and community leaders can leverage music's therapeutic and social benefits, supporting initiatives that promote cultural diversity, inclusion, and social cohesion.

Conclusion

The intersection of music, spirituality, and religion offers a profoundly rich terrain for exploration, yielding profound insights into the complexities of human experience, well-being, and cultural understanding. By

harnessing music's therapeutic potential and fostering interfaith dialogue, we may cultivate a more compassionate, empathetic world, where diverse spiritual and religious traditions are celebrated and respected. This convergence of music, spirituality, and religion has far-reaching implications, enabling individuals and communities to navigate life's challenges, foster resilience, and discover meaning and purpose. As research and practice continue to evolve, the transformative power of music will remain a vital force, shaping individual and collective spiritual journeys, and bridging cultural and religious divides.

The transformative potential of music, spirituality, and religion is vast and multifaceted. By exploring this intersection, we uncover new avenues for personal growth, social cohesion, and cultural exchange. Music's universal language transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, speaking directly to the human heart. As we continue to navigate the complexities of our globalized world, the intersection of music, spirituality, and religion offers a beacon of hope, illuminating our shared humanity and common aspirations. By embracing this convergence, we may forge a more harmonious, inclusive, and compassionate world, where music serves as a catalyst for spiritual growth, interfaith understanding, and cultural celebration. Ultimately, the fusion of music, spirituality, and religion has the power to transform lives, communities, and societies, fostering a brighter future for all.

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