

LIFEFORCE YOGA & MENTAL HEALTH: ALLIANCE & COMPLIANCE



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In Psychotherapy: How Yoga Skills Enhance Treatment

- ▶ Strengthens the Therapeutic Alliance
- ▶ Helps Client focus
- ▶ Helps Client self-soothe
- ▶ Provides tools for mood regulation
- ▶ Provides tools for self-care for therapist and Client
- ▶ Increases self-efficacy
- ▶ Helps in management of Bipolar Disorder & schizophrenia (Visceglia, 2011)
- ▶ Nondual Strategies for working with difficult emotions
- ▶ Provides tools and language to access a larger Self

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The Safe and Sacred Container

"Crying is one of the highest spiritual practices. One who knows crying knows yoga."
-Swami Kripalu



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Centering

- ▶ Welcome the breath wherever it's landing.
- ▶ Inner gaze with invited breath
 - Brow point: clarity, intuition (Om)
 - Heart: compassion, self-care (Yyyyyam) with wings to the heart (Garuda Mudra)
- ▶ Notice where the breath is now (Belly?)
- ▶ Waves of breath - Ocean sound (Ujjayi)
- ▶ Intention (Sankalpa) Client's intention reveals itself
- ▶ Smile Yoga
- ▶ Check-in

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Elements of Safe Container

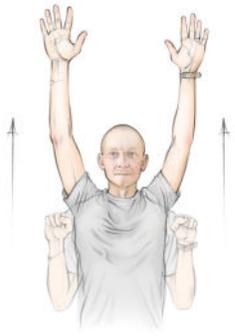
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graph LR; A[Check-in] --> B[Centering]; B --> C[Permission]; C --> D((Welcoming/Normalizing))
```

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Permission

- From you – for feelings to flow in the room
- From the client – ask before introducing
- From you – to stop at any time

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Bellows Breath (Bhastrika)

In a seated position, make fists and bend your elbows at your waist with your upper arms close to your torso. Bring your fists in front of your shoulders with your folded fingers facing out.

Inhale through your nose, reaching your arms up over your head, opening your hands and spreading your fingers wide.

Exhale through your nose back into the starting position. Practice should be steady at one breath per second.

Repeat 5 to 25 times.

Close With:

Directing Awareness: After your breathing, sense into your face, your left arm, the tingling in left palm, then your right arm, the tingling in right palm.

Grounding: Inhale to the crown, "I am." Exhale to the seat, "Here."

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Bellows Breath

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Directing Awareness ~ Cueing to Sensation

After an invigorating Breathing Practice (Bellows, Skull shining, Pulling Prana, Breath of Joy, Power Hara):

Body scan sensory cues to areas of greatest sensation. This integrates and moves into parasympathetic.

Avoid global cues like "notice how your body is feeling right now," or "become aware of the sensations in your body." Global cues risk triggering overwhelm, flooding, fight or flight.

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Grounding

Directing Awareness: Body Scan

Inhale: "I am" from the feet to the crown;
Exhale: "Here," to the feet.

Root chakra practices, including sitting and standing poses.

Mantra tone: Lum; So-hum

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Meeting the Mood

- ▶ The order of yoga interventions you choose is important.
 - ▶ Allows the client to feel seen and acknowledged
 - ▶ Offers accessible small moments of accomplishment
 - ▶ Enhances the therapeutic alliance
 - ▶ More likelihood of compliance
- ▶ Co-create with the client rather than prescribe.
- ▶ The practices themselves are often the same for different mood disorders, but the sequence is different.
- ▶ Some practices are contra-indicated for bipolar with manic tendencies and psychosis.

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Meeting the Mood & Constitution ~ Gunas

Rajasic: In emotional terms, this would be anxiety, anxiety-based depression, mania, hypomania. Meet the rajasic state with vigor, then move to a more calming practice.

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Meeting the Mood & Constitution ~ Gunas

Tamasic: In emotional terms, this would be dysthymia (mild, chronic depression), lethargy, major depression. Meet the tamasic state with a slow, restorative practice, then build to a more energizing practice.

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Yoga Philosophy: Our True Nature is not Depressed.

Yoga teaches that suffering is based on the false perception of separateness (Avidya).

No matter what yoga lineage or school, there is a shared philosophical foundation that supports optimal mental health: that we are deeply and intimately connected.

The practices of yoga remove the constrictions, physically and emotionally, so that we feel that connection, even if momentarily, to a sense of a whole and undamaged self, to each other, and to something larger than who we are as individuals.

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Yogic View of Depression

Constricted Prana - constrictions in all Koshas (physical, energy, mental, emotional, beliefs, bliss)
Mistaken belief of Separation - *Avidya* (II:3)

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Yogic View of Psycho-Emotional Imbalance: Kosha Model

Constricted Prana: Constrictions in all five Koshas

- Anamaya Kosha • Physical
- Pranamaya Kosha • Energy-Breath
- Manomaya Kosha • Mental-Emotional
- Vijnanamaya Kosha • Wisdom-Intuition
- Anandamaya Kosha • Bliss

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Dukha -
Suffering -
literally means
obstructed space

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Sukha
Happiness -
literally means
unobstructed space

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Meditation

- ▶ Techniques that “give the mind a bone” to reduce rumination and negative self-talk.
 - ▶ Use of Nada Yoga (mantra)
 - LifeForce Yoga Chakra Clearing Meditations
 - Kirtan Kriya (from the Kundalini tradition)
 - LifeForce Yoga Bliss meditation
 - ▶ Use of Mudras
 - ▶ Use of Breathing practices that withdraw the senses like Bee breath (Brahmari)

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Centering Meditation

- ▶ Cultivate the opposite of constricting emotion that may be arising. What would be the opposite of Fear? Maybe trust? Security? Peace? –image, word, energy
- ▶ 4:4:6 Breath; exhale is the mantra
- ▶ Movement & Mudra
 - ▶ Inhale arms out in front of the heart
 - ▶ Exhale hands in Eagle Mudra to the heart
- ▶ Toning (Nada Yoga)
 - ▶ So-hum (I am That)

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Calm Strength

In a seated position, find an image that represents calm strength, maybe from nature or a time when you've felt calm and strong. You can also use a word like "Courage".

Inhale through your nostrils as you extend your arms out in front of your belly. Pause and see that image or the word you have chosen.

Draw your hands to your belly as you chant "Ha-Ha-Ha" which represents "calm strength".

Repeat three to five times.

Place an intention and know that the image or word is on the altar of your heart, there whenever you need it.

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Nada (sound) Yoga ~ Research

© 2022 Jan-Apr; 19(1):52-58. doi: 10.4103/ijoy.ijoy_141_21. Epub 2022 Mar 21.

Immediate Effects of OM Chanting on Heart Rate Variability Measures Compared Between Experienced and Inexperienced Yoga Practitioners

The present study showed that a brief chanting of OM (5 min) might enhance parasympathetic nervous system activity, promote relaxation, and provide calmness. Further, this experience may be achieved effectively in individuals experienced in yoga than nonyoga practitioners.

Effect of Om chanting and Yoga Nidra on depression anxiety stress, sleep quality and autonomic functions of hypertensive subjects – a randomized controlled trial

The current study validates the effectiveness of Om chanting and Yoga Nidra in reducing depression, anxiety, stress and improving sleep quality and autonomic functions in hypertensive patients.

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Om Chanting Reduces Depression & Hypertension

40 women (age 50-60 years) with blood pressure values of 120-179. Randomly assigned to chanting group (daily Om, 7:30 AM) or control group. Pre intervention depression, anxiety, stress and MMSE scores (measures cognitive function) and blood pressure and pulse rate were not significant between the groups. Following six months of Om chanting, systolic and diastolic pressure, pulse rate, depression, anxiety, stress decreased significantly. MMSE scores improved significantly. Authors conclude Om chanting can be used as a means in calming the mind and enhancing memory

Beneficial effects of OM chanting on depression, anxiety, stress and cognition in elderly women with hypertension, Arati Amin, Et. Al. Published online, 2016: www.innovativepublication.com/

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Chanting Om Shown to Deactivate the Limbic System

Researchers compared 15 seconds of "OM" (5 - O; 10 - m) to 15 seconds of the sound "Ssssss..." and to 15 seconds of rest. Significant deactivation in the amygdala as well as other emotional areas only during 'OM' chanting

Bangalore G Kalyani, et al., "Neurohemodynamic correlates of 'OM' chanting: A pilot functional magnetic resonance imaging study" International Journal of Yoga, 2011 Jan-Jun; 4(1): 3-6.

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Pulling Energy

Stand comfortably with your feet beneath your knees and your knees slightly bent.

Inhale through the nostrils and bring your arms over your head, palms facing behind you

Exhale through the nostrils and pull your hands down, into heels feeling your chest

Repeat 3 to 20 times.

Variable: Inhale and reach your arms forward in front of your chest, exhale and pull your hands back into fists facing your chest. You can also alternate left forward, right back and reverse.

Close With:

Directing Awareness: Sense into your foot, your left arm, the big toe in left palm, your right arm, the big toe in right palm.

Grounding: Inhale from feet to crown, "I am." Exhale to the feet, "Here"

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Overview of Biochemical & Physiological Changes

- ▶ Decrease in cortisol levels (stress hormone)
- ▶ Increase in GABA levels (primary inhibitory neurotransmitter)
- ▶ Increase in HRV (heart rate variability)
- ▶ Increase in BDNF (neuroplasticity, genetic expression)
- ▶ Demonstrated improvement in memory, cognitive functioning, perceptual motor skills, visual perception

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Overview of Biochemical & Physiological Changes

- ▶ Relaxes chronic muscle tension
- ▶ Restores natural diaphragmatic breathing
- ▶ Improves oxygen absorption and carbon dioxide elimination
- ▶ Increases alpha and theta waves
- ▶ Regulates hypothalamus at an optimum level
- ▶ Certain techniques stimulate vagal nerve activity
- ▶ Bioavailability of oxygen and glucose, building blocks for the production of neurotransmitters
- ▶ Calms sympathetic nervous system while activating parasympathetic system

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Amygdala Whisperers



Trauma enlarges Amygdala, shrinks hippocampus. Yoga practices reverse this. Evidence shows reduction in amygdala. Evidence shows growth of hippocampus and greater cortical thickness in left prefrontal lobe region, including lateral middle frontal gyrus, anterior and dorsal superior frontal.

Brain Plasticity, 2019; 5(1): 105-122, Published online 2019 Dec 26, "Yoga Effects on Brain Health: A Systematic Review of the Current Literature", Gothe, N.P., et. al.
Brain Imaging Review, 2016; 17(4): 1631-1639, Published online 2016 Sep 7, doi: 10.1007/s11857-016-0904-z

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Yoga Changes Your Brain

- ▶ More grey matter detected in brain regions of yoga practitioners in areas that regulate emotion, self-awareness and directing attention.
- ▶ More hours of practice per week correlates to enlarged areas of brain.
- ▶ Positive brain changes were observed in somatosensory cortex, superior parietal cortex, visual cortex and the hippocampus.

▶ Villemure, C., Bushnell, C. Annual Meeting of Society for Neuroscience, November, 2013
▶ Villemure C, Ceko M, Gotton VA, Bushnell M. "Insular Cortex Mediates Increased Pain Tolerance in Yoga Practitioners." *Cerebral Cortex*, 2013 May 21.

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LifeForce Yoga® for Mood Disturbance Study

Between times one (before the LifeForce Yoga® program) and two (two weeks after learning it), participants reported:

- 64% decrease in total mood disturbance (POMS)
- 53% decrease in average depression scores (BDI)
- At two months, overall mood disturbance continued to drop.

Bennett, S., Weintraub, A., Khalsa, S.B., "Initial evaluation of the LifeForce Yoga® program as a therapeutic intervention for depression," *Intern. Jour Yoga Therapy*, 2008.
<http://www.yogafordpression.com/IJYT-2008-Bennett.pdf>

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Yoga Decreases Depression & Increases Neuroplasticity

58 major depressive disorder (MDD) patients were randomized into yoga or control group. The severity of depression was assessed with Beck Depression Inventory-II scale (BDI-II). Blood samples were collected before and after intervention for the measurement of the biomarkers that characterize neuroplasticity, including mind-body communicative and cellular health biomarkers.

Restorative Neurology & Neuroscience. 2018;36(3):423-442. Maduri R, Tolahunase, et al., "Yoga- and meditation-based lifestyle intervention increases neuroplasticity and reduces severity of major depressive disorder: A randomized controlled trial."

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Reduced Rumination in Women with Depression

- ▶ Researchers at the University of Virginia compared a protocol of LifeForce Yoga and Iyengar to a healthy living support group as an intervention for women with depression.
- ▶ the experience of depression is that of stress, persistent negative thinking (ruminations), and isolation
- ▶ Both groups showed improvement in rumination (persistent negative thinking) and stress. Yoga was especially beneficial as a self-care technique and as a relational technique, influencing key components of depression
- ▶ Participants repeatedly cited how empowered they felt by participating in the yoga class and that they carried this sense of empowerment and self-awareness with them through their daily lives.

Kinser, P., Bourguignon, C., Whalley, D., Hausstein, E., Taylor, A.G. (in press). Feasibility, acceptability, and effects of gentle Hatha yoga for women with major depression: Findings from a randomized controlled mixed-methods study. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*. 2014 Dec;28(6):377-83. doi: 10.1016/j.apnu.2014.08.014.

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LifeForce Yoga Nidra Improved Depression & Anxiety

Twelve subjects received a *LifeForce Yoga Nidra to Manage Your Mood* CD or on an MP3 player with two different length Yoga Nidra instructions, one of 20 and one of 40 minutes in length—3 weeks of home practice.

Median BDI went from 30 to 16 at the third study visit, representing a change in level of depression from moderate to mild mood disturbance. BAI decreased from 27 to 13, representing a change in anxiety from moderate to very low.

Mankar S, Cruser dA, Jordan M, Ingram J, Brown S. Effects of Utilizing Yoga Nidra on Reducing Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety in a Psychiatric Population. *J Am Osteopath Assoc*. 2012;112(8):543. Abstract C19.

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Pranayama Breathing for Depression

1. Stairstep (analoma viloma/analoma Krama)
2. Skull Shining (Kapalabhati)
3. Bellows Breath (Bastrika - modified version)
4. Breath of Joy (Slow with “Lum”)
5. Power Hara (Slow with “Ram”)
6. Yogic-3-Part Breath (Extend Inhalation 4:4)
7. Right nostril breathing (in right, out left)

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Breath of Joy with "Lum"

Stand comfortably with your feet beneath your knees and your knees slightly bent.

Inhale through the nostrils as you raise your arms in front of your body to chest level, taking one-third of a full breath.

Continue to inhale as you swing your arms out on both sides of your body, filling another third of your lungs.

Inhale the final third as you raise your arms over your head.

Exhale, bringing your arms into a chair pose as you swing your arms down and behind your body with the mantra "lum" (LUM).

Repeat three to ten times.

Close With:

Directing Awareness: When you have finished, sense into your face, your left arm, the tingling in left palm, your right arm, the tingling in right palm.

Grounding: Inhale from feet to crown, "I am." Exhale to the feet, "um."

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Breath of Joy with "Lum"

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Power Breath

Stand with legs hip-width apart with heads of shoulders aligned and at each side. Twist left and breathe halfway. Twist right and inhale fully, exhale with "ha," twist left and extend your right arm across your body while your left hand remains at your center. Exhale with "ha," twisting right and extend your left arm across your body while your right hand remains at your shoulder. Let your spine follow your twist.

Repeat three to eight times.

After three rounds, by adding the mantra "Haum" (hahum) as you twist, which accentuates your power center at the navel groove.

Close With:

Directing Awareness: Sense into your face, your left arm, the tingling in left palm, your right arm, the tingling in right palm.

Grounding: Inhale from feet to crown, "I am." Exhale to the feet, "Haum."

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Power Breath

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Practice for Empowerment III: Victory Goddess (Uttara Hanasana)

Stand in the five-pointed star pose. Exhale with a "ha" breath through the mouth as you jump into Victory Goddess. Knees back over ankles, arms up with elbows bent in cactus position. Return to the five-pointed star.

Repeat five to ten times.

Enhance this practice by cultivating a personal image for strength.

Close With:

Directing Awareness: Return to a standing position and sense the power in your arms and legs. Breathe your image for strength through the container of this body that you are co-creating.

Grounding: Inhale from feet to crown, "I am." Exhale to your feet, "um."

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Practice for Empowerment III: Victory Goddess

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Stairstep Breath

We don't talk about the breath

(Anuloma Krama) Meets Anxiety

- ▶ Take little steps through the nostrils, as though climbing a mountain (usually 4 to 8)
- ▶ Sustain for four counts (as is accessible) at the top of the mountain. A soothing visual image may be cued here. "See something beautiful."
- ▶ Now glide down the mountain. (Trolley, escalator)
- ▶ Practice two or three times.

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Stairstep Breath

(Viloma Krama) Meets Depression

- ▶ Take a glass elevator (or gondala) ride through the nostrils up the mountain.
- ▶ Sustain for four counts (as is accessible) at the top of the mountain. A visual image may be cued here. "See something beautiful."
- ▶ Take little steps down the mountain through the nostrils.
- ▶ Practice two or three times.

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Finger Pushing Mudra (Vakri)

This mudra deepens the breath and brings a calming sense of balance to the mind.

Press the palms toward each other: In front of the belly and press the fingers and tips of the thumbs together.

Imagine a scorching image or the word "peace" at the brow point as you breathe through the nostrils, ascending your exhalation longer than your inhalation.

Repeat for 5 to 20 minutes.

32 Finger Pushing Mudra

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Bee Breath with Mudra

Bee Breath with Mudra (Brahman)

In a seated position, slightly tilt the chin toward your chest. Keep the throat relaxed and the lips closed.

Inhale slowly through the nostrils and draw the back of the tongue to the back of the throat. Release the breath by making a deep, buzzing sound in your throat like a bee. You will hear a "humming" of bees in your throat. Start with three rounds on the inhale only.

To enhance the meditative effect of Bee Breath, try Wama Mudra (Shamukhi). Index fingers rest to the brow, middle fingers over the iris (direct, ring fingers press the forehead area beyond the edges of the nostrils, little fingers rest at the edge of the lips, and thumbs press the cartilage by the cheekbone into the ear canal).

Close With:

Directing Awareness: This practice elicits the sweetest deep breath, as it withdraws the senses (pratyahara). Bee breath may be your portal into meditation. Still the stillness of total remains for 3 to 10 minutes.

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Shanmuki mudra

- ▶ Index points to brow point
- ▶ Middle covers eyelids
- ▶ Ring at edges of nostrils
- ▶ Pinky at edges of lips
- ▶ Thumb blocks ear canals with cartilage by cheekbone
- ▶ Or Helmet Mudra
- ▶ Or no mudra

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Left Nostril Breathing

Left Nostril Breathing (Chandra Bhedana)

Sit with the spine erect, use Balancing Mudra by making a fist of your right hand. Next, release the thumb and the third and fourth fingers, leaving the index and middle finger against your palm.

Place the thumb against your right nostril and slowly inhale through your left for four counts.

Close off the left nostril and release your thumb and slowly exhale through your right for six counts. Then release the left nostril and close off the right to begin the cycle again.

Do Ten rounds to begin and notice if you are "feeling calmer." You can do more rounds if you wish.

If the left nostril is blocked, use the third and fourth fingers of your right hand to press at the bottom of your left cheekbone. When you feel the right points, you will feel more breath moving through your left nasal passage.

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Resources

Yoga Skills for Therapists
Effective Practices for Mood Management



A toolkit of "no mat" yoga strategies for you and your clients

The book offers a practical, hands-on guide that teaches the power of basic yoga techniques to bring great self-awareness, balance, and lasting well-being to you and your clients.

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Resources

Weintraub, A., *Yoga for Your Mood Deck: 52 Ways to Shift Depression and Anxiety*, (Sounds True, 2021) <https://bit.ly/31VdIKZ>

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Mason H., Birch K, eds., *Yoga for Mental Health*, (Handspring, 2018) <https://amzn.to/3A2S5Wg>

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Arielle Schwartz <https://drarielleschwartz.com>



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