

BOOK EXCERPT

ROAR LIKE A GODDESS

EVERY WOMAN'S
GUIDE TO
BECOMING
UNAPOLOGETICALLY
POWERFUL, PROSPEROUS
& PEACEFUL

ACHARYA SHUNYA



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CHAPTER 2

WHEN RAGING IS A GODDESS THING TO DO

The Goddess destroys adversity and suffering with her blessed anger.

DEVI MAHATMYA 9.31

All humans do not view anger with the same lens. Society does not allow for everyone to embody anger equally, even when the reason is the same.

If people of a certain color or class express anger, for example, they are considered heroes of humanity, harbingers of positive change, leaders of human revolutions. But if people of another color or class or gender embody anger, they are painted in one stroke as “dangerous” to society and themselves.

For countless centuries, women in both Eastern and Western societies have been warned universally about anger. Not only is its expression considered unwomanly, but we have been conditioned to block out anger entirely from our collective awareness.

Oh, how the pundits, the so-called intellectuals, professors, teachers, and media personalities go on about women’s power of nurturance, their ability to soothe raging hearts, harmonize conflicted ideas and relationships, sacrifice for peace, suffer for good reasons,

and forge a whole new path for humanity through the sheer power of placation, pacification, appeasement, overcompensation—and ultimately, their super-woman ability to keep their silence. This is all rhetoric from patriarchal institutions and those raised and bred in patriarchy, and from time immemorial religion, too, has been one of patriarchy's greatest assets.

Dr. Harriet Lerner, author of *The Dance of Anger*, observes,

Even our language condemns [angry] women as “shrews,” “witches,” “bitches,” “hags,” “nags,” “man-haters,” and “castrators.” They are unloving and un-lovable. They are devoid of femininity. Certainly, you do not wish to become one of them. No wonder it takes courage to define oneself as a feminist, to risk being viewed as “one of those angry women.”

It is an interesting sidelight that our language—created and codified by men—does not have one unflattering term to describe men who vent their anger at women. Even such epithets as “bastard” and “son of a bitch” do not condemn the man, but place the blame on a woman—his mother!¹

The wise, gender-neutral Vedas nurture no such false qualms about anger. Anger, known as *krodha* in Sanskrit, is considered a divine emotion, much like joy, peace, and tranquility. It has a spiritual purpose and is meant to help us determine when our boundaries or sense of safety is being violated—physically, verbally, sexually, or emotionally. Anger is a sign that you are not satisfied with your present situation.

Healthy anger is an expression of Shakti, an empowering, activating spiritual force that rouses us from our comfort zone to renegotiate agreements and redefine expectations. Anger helps us overcome false guilt and irrational fear by unleashing momentum, strength, passion, energy, intensity, and driven behavior to move toward restoration of our sovereignty, respect, or boundaries. Anger can provide the

motivation to constructively correct an injustice. It urges us to act on our inborn sense of justice.

Therefore, a short-lived experience of timely, healthy anger goes a long way. Even animals display anger when they are threatened or encroached upon. Clearly, anger has an alerting and protective function in the divine scheme of things, and rather than giving anger itself a bad rap (especially if women embody it), it is better to learn to discern between healthy and unhealthy versions of anger and to express or retrain it accordingly.

This scientifically valid approach, more than ten thousand years old, exists in Hinduism, because the Vedas teach judiciousness, never absolutism. No wonder all Hindu goddesses and gods are depicted in art and mythology as having several hands (as a symbol of their supernatural abilities). While in some hands, they hold symbols of peace, prosperity, and spiritual awakening—like the lotus flower, *japa mala* (prayer beads), or hold their hand raised in a “fear not, I am protecting you” gesture (*mudra*)—in other hands they hold weapons, like a mace, bow and arrow, or discus. They are ready to experience righteous rage and set out for battle to protect dharma. They are both constructive and destructive, able to enhance light or destroy darkness, proactively. That is why in goddess myths and hymns, Durga is often fuming and roaring with anger, like her spirit animal, the lion.

We must stop listening to the voices that say all anger is bad or evil or that it does not become women. Let go of such foolish teachings that arise from fear of women recognizing their true power.

WHAT IS YOUR RAGE ASKING OF YOU?

Anger suggests a correction is needed. When we become angry with our poor health or sedentary ways, we begin exercising and eating right. Or, if our boss or colleague is making uninvited sexual advances, we get angry and report them to human resources. If we don't feel our anger, we won't take the actions we must take. Sometimes, if we were abused as children and our feelings got suppressed, we must get in touch with the anger many years later and only then return to balance.

Naturally, anger can arise in the face of upcoming difficulty, too, since it may help us meet the root of the challenge with vigor

and set it right. For example, an impending foreclosure may make us angry with our own fiscal situation and give us renewed energy to look for another job or loan. But when we don't wish to face the difficulty and get caught up in emotional resistance, the anger builds disproportionately around the difficulty itself, and energy that could be directed to correcting the fiscal situation is wasted. Then there is a danger of implosion, potentially causing disease, or an explosion, causing damage to relationships.

Sometimes, others cause us grievances that cannot be overlooked. In a worldly, day-to-day realm, it may be important to finally call out such a person. You can initiate a correction process by opening a dialogue on what can be done to make amends, such as an apology. You can correct repressed anger only by speaking up, expressing what is true to your true Self.

Also, if you find yourself on the other side of the equation and are the person who has angered another, and if you truly want to reclaim your goddess purity and lightness, you shall take steps to correct what was incorrect: come clean, apologize, and submit yourself to a course of justice if that's what it takes.

EXPERIENCE ANGER LIKE A GODDESS

When we think of anger, we almost always think of an emotion that leads to violent actions. But there is a difference between experiencing anger as a pure emotion and what you then decide to do with the anger, what action you take because of it—which is a secondary decision of your ego.

Durga's anger deserves reverence because it quells the destructive forces that endanger dharma. In her battles with unconscious beings, she models a perfect relationship with anger. Instead of blinding her, anger opens her eyes, expanding her perception and awareness. During what appears to be thunderous rage, she is, in fact, composed and focused with single-mindedness. Her every move is conscious and tactical to uphold dharma. So, healthy anger must be experienced and appreciated consciously, rather than suppressed or swallowed.

The goddess experiences anger “for an instant” as it arises, informs, and guides. It does not stick around to color her entire personality red,

making her unconscious. When we remain conscious, we will neither suppress anger nor fly off the handle. We work with it.

I feel anger as flash, almost like electricity all over my body and mind, and then seek to know why it flashed. This is the beautiful relationship I have with anger today. It is as if I have a private valet that screams “Red alert!” in every cell when my boundaries are violated by sleepwalkers, and I can always find a correct way to address the situation—for example, by walking out on a disrespectful conversation, or addressing it in depth at a later point, calmly, with discernment and detachment.

Before I act, I also ask myself: “Why am I angry? Is my anger coming from egoic entitlement, or is this something else, deeper or bigger, that deserves my attention? What are the actions that will most likely get me what I need? Will raising my voice help? Will a dialogue help? Will understanding help? Will firmness and compassion help? Will an all-out courtroom battle help?” As I see it, there are three types of anger: unconscious anger (asura), conscious anger (deva), and superconscious anger (Durga).

Unconscious Anger: Asura

Unconscious anger has no connection with dharma. It emerges exclusively from selfish entitlement. When we are unconscious, our mind is often steeped in desires and a sense of entitlement to get those desires met at any cost. We get angry when our wishes are thwarted. We rage at any living or non-living obstacle that we imagine is keeping us from our desire fulfillment. We get mad when we must deal with loss of whatever we are attached to (a lover or a promotion). We also cannot handle change or transience (aging, disease, death) because we have no greater philosophy or perspective to cope with life’s changeability. So, we rage, pull, push, and control with increasing frustration. Anger from entitlement, attachments, control, and ignorance is unconscious anger.

Over time, if this pattern continues, the mind becomes vindictive, delusory, sleepless, bitter, projecting scenarios that don’t necessarily match reality, anxious. Irritation and other negative emotions dominate the mind. My suggestion is to see through this anger every time—don’t

suppress it but don't indulge it either; try to restrain it, transform it; understand it and ultimately illumine it with self-knowledge.

Conscious Anger: Deva

Conscious anger is connected to dharmic desire to correct personal situations and is entirely healthy. It keeps us safe. It informs us of our boundary violations—physical, mental, emotional, or sexual. When this anger comes up, it informs us and then it dissolves, fades away, or retires from our dominant mind in due course. It does not simmer forever, and it does not distort our perception or permanently affect us in any way, which is what unconscious anger does. We can retain our ability to make judicious choices, forgive, and move on, if that is a reasonable option, or we can battle further, if that is the best option. Ultimately, what we do with our anger comes from a more discerned place in our mind, not our gut impulses.

Conscious anger feels non-vindictive but correctional. It stays proportional to reality and yields some restlessness, but not of an unmanageable nature. In fact, one may feel more empowered and peaceful in due course, due to clarity and sense of dharma. This anger will help you make corrections to your own habits or in setting new boundaries and expectations with others. How you express your new expectations will change, case by case, depending on who you are talking to. You will make conscious choices and grow from this anger.

Superconscious Anger: Durga

Superconscious anger is rare to experience. It has no personal agenda. It protects dharma and boundaries of all sentient beings. It arises solely to reinstitute dharma. This is divine anger. Whoever experiences superconscious anger has gone beyond their own ego to feel the pain and suffering of all beings who are being unfairly victimized by asuras. They act from anger to lead correctional movements, missions, and battles to restore dharma in this universe. This anger is a force of good, and positive change, every single time. One feels blessed from within! You are fortunate if you can be a conduit or supporter of the superconscious anger.

Superconscious anger is the way of the goddess, and here's how to convert your anger to goddess anger: Don't take your anger lightly. Don't dismiss it or suppress it. Go deeper. Listen to it. What is it trying to tell you? Try to transform your raw emotion by making your engagement with it more deliberate. Be willing to feel your anger somatically (how it expresses itself in your body), breathe with it, pause mentally, and reflect upon why it has arisen, why it lingers, why it burns your heart.

This way, through mindfulness, you can convert any unconscious emotion of anger into a conscious experience that is no longer "blinding" you with fury. In fact, it shall open your eyes to what you had been failing to see all along. Instead of staying stuck in unconscious iterations of anger, like resentment, victim consciousness, or irritability, you can begin using your conscious anger to your advantage, helping you solve problems, make decisions, and heal challenging situations.

As you tune in to your inner Durga more and more, you will channel your conscious anger for the greater good, for a larger number of people—as superconscious anger. The goddess-like anger I have experienced from injustices of patriarchy and misogyny in my own life, for example, have ultimately led to the manifestation of this book—a book that will inspire positive change and hope for all women and suppressed beings worldwide.

Superconscious anger becomes an expression of inner guidance and soul inspiration. It is the most powerful type of anger—one you can learn to understand, befriend, and draw upon from your inner Durga. Learning to contact your superconscious anger and bring it into life's daily challenges will bring you unexpected solutions and help make your life more fulfilling. You will become an instrument of positive change, and the world will be glad that you channeled your rage like Durga, for the sake of all of us!

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DHARMA, NONVIOLENCE, AND RIGHTEOUS RAGE

The concept of dharma is discussed at length in the Vedas. Dharma is a set of non-religious universal practices of self-restraint, as well as a

lifestyle of embodying ethical values to help our forgetful egos remain cognizant of the boundaries of all sentient creatures (physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, intellectual, and social boundaries) and to not transgress them with an abuse of power, nor to become the victim of others.

Dharma asks that we be more sensitive to others' pain and live by higher humane values like nonviolence, compassion, truthfulness, and honesty. Dharma also asks that we never abandon ourselves or our self-respect. Without dharma contextualizing our strength and boldness, we may get lost in the world of ego battles and justify our abuse and exploitation of others. We may feel deeply inadequate, remind others of their inadequacy, or occasionally become foolishly violent while defending positions we were never meant to defend.

One of the central dharma values is nonviolence, or *ahimsa*. Ahimsa can be, in a simple way, translated as “harmlessness”—to not wish or do harm to any living creature. The commonly used English equivalent “nonviolence” is inadequate as it gives a false impression that ahimsa is just a negative virtue. Ahimsa is not mere abstention from the use of force, not just abstention from killing and injuring; it also implies the positive virtues of compassion and benevolence because not killing and not injuring a living being implicitly amounts to protecting and preserving it and treating it with humaneness, respect, and love.

From a goddess perspective, we have to ask: Does practicing ahimsa put us in direct contrast with practicing conscious and superconscious anger?

It is true that the holy books of the Hindus—the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita—extol the value of ahimsa. Here's but one example: “Ahimsa is the highest dharma. Ahimsa is the best austerity. Ahimsa is the greatest gift. Ahimsa is the highest self-control. Ahimsa is the highest self-sacrifice. Ahimsa is the highest power. Ahimsa is the highest friend. Ahimsa is the highest teaching.”² But you may be surprised to learn that the same sacred texts do not advocate a blind upholding of ahimsa (like some religions and leaders encourage): certainly not over justice, equality, self-respect, and righteousness—and if these are threatened, even *himsa* (violence) is permissible, albeit with judiciousness.

Absolute values may represent an awe-inspiring ideal, but in my opinion, the ideal falls flat for worldly seekers like you and me.

There is no denying the fact that we live in a society made up of a few awakened (Durga-like) and some semi-awake (deva-like) citizens, but unfortunately, a majority are sleepwalking (asura-like) egos, out to destroy dharma. Durga does not battle because she is an inherently angry person who delights in violence! Durga's anger and violence are anchored in dharma, of compassion and care—nonviolence—for the greater good.

Of the four main religions emanating from India, Buddhism and Jainism teach absolute implementation of nonviolence, while Hinduism and Sikhism offer a much more judicious application of the implementation of ahimsa. Therefore, to the Hindus and Sikhs, it is perfectly dharmic to use carefully measured violence in order to stop greater violence.

Personally, I am no advocate of violence. But violence, too, has its rightful place in life; life does not preclude death, does it? We are asked to fight against evil and injustice at both a personal and a collective level, rather than simply to close our eyes and pretend all is well. We cannot deny there are certain dire moments in the lives of individuals, as of communities and nations, when we will have to meet force with force in order that justice be done. That is why in both Hinduism and Sikhism, dharmic battles, called *Dharma Yuddha*, are those in which a dharmic one fights in the battlefields of life, lifting the sword with peace in their heart and truth in their speech, not under the influence of unconscious anger. However, even an iota of unconscious anger makes one liable for committing the sin of unrighteous violence.

In different words, both traditions rightfully advise the same message:

- Ahimsa should be upheld with great reverence, but it must not make you emotionally and intellectually impotent and unable to fight unfair aggression.
- Ahimsa should not enable spiritual bypassing or make you tolerant of atrocities against innocent animals, men, women, or children of our planet (of any religion, creed, or gender).

- Ahimsa should not result in making you a meek slave of your aggressor.
- Your vow of ahimsa should not empower your aggressor to inflict atrocities on you or your loved ones.

Therefore, if someone were to force their way into your house and harm you or your child, you must not sit back and take it in the name of practicing ahimsa. You may need to resort to himsa, or violence, for self-defense in such a circumstance. And this is dharma, in the same way a soldier cannot put down her arms when at war and a police force must use violence at times for greater good. Not doing so would go against dharma.

Therefore, as discussed in the list above, we must all eschew “unconscious anger,” the mere indulgence of mindless rage or vindictive, petty animosity; expressing hatred, dislike, and egotism; and deriving pleasure from a show of personal power. But we must not hesitate to embody our “conscious anger” to protect dharma in our individual myths. We may be chosen to also embody what I call “superconscious anger,” which brings about restoration of dharma at a collective level. Then, like Durga, we may become dharmically angry for the sake of universal evolution of consciousness.

Indeed, Durga protects dharma. She does not battle because she delights in violent bloodshed! The pulverizing and destroying Durga depicted in the myths is always ultimately kindhearted. Her savage side is shown to the enemies of dharma—those who oppose goodness, righteousness, ethics, law, cosmic duty—while her compassionate form is shown to the adherents of dharma. Her violence is divine, born of necessity, reserved for the destruction of destructive forces, and thus constitutes an aspect of preservation of dharma, and not its destruction. Like the nursing tigress, her fangs are bared only toward those who endanger her cubs, while the cubs themselves may lie at ease in her protective underbelly, enjoying her nourishing milk.

We, too, must turn away from unconscious anger. Our job is to cultivate a Durga-like clarity of our own dharma—the ethical

imperative—in a given situation, and essentially work toward peace, but remain prepared for any necessary battle at the same time. Because this planet still contains asuric beings who see women as no more than objects of pleasure, treat people of color as dirt, and don't hesitate to harm fellow humans only for having a different sexual preference. Clearly, anger against such injustices is part of a divine dharmic order.

ROARING DURGAS EXISTED IN EVERY CULTURE

In eighteenth-century India, a twenty-two-year-old royal widow, Queen Lakshmibai of Jhansi, was unfairly dethroned by the colonial rulers of India. However, Lakshmibai did not take this meekly. She fought many battles with the British with an army in which she inducted women and taught them sword fighting. She even organized guerilla attacks on her usurpers, until at last, Lakshmibai was shot down from her horse and killed. But before dying, according to eyewitness accounts, while she sat bleeding on the battleground, she picked up her pistol and shot her killer. In the British report of this battle, the British General Hugh Rose commented that Queen Lakshmibai was “personable, clever, and beautiful,” and she was “the most dangerous of all Indian leaders.”³ Lakshmibai is not alone. There are dozens more *roaring goddesses* from India's history, from as early as the first century CE, from the southernmost tip of India to the Himalayas, India's northernmost tip.

And that is not all; here are just a few of the many stories of warrior women across history and around the world:

- Archaeologists have discovered the skeletons of “badass” warrior women in Mongolia, dating back to the period of Mulan. Artnet News reports, “Close study of the skeletons suggests that the women, one about twenty, the other over fifty, were skilled at archery and had extensive experience on horseback. . . . It may have been that women were needed to defend home and country alongside the men.”⁴

- In Russia, the bones, weapons, and headdresses of four real-life Amazon warriors were discovered.⁵
- Yaa Asantewaa was the queen mother of the Ejisuhehene in what is now modern Ghana. She raised and led an army of five thousand against the British colonial forces who had captured the previous king and sought to completely subjugate her people.⁶
- The Mino were an all-female military regiment of the present-day Republic of Benin from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. They had a ferocious reputation, and were famous for decapitating colonial soldiers during combat, as well as those whom they took captive.⁷
- Queen Nzinga Mbande was a powerful seventeenth-century ruler of the Ambundu kingdoms of Ndongo and Matamba in modern-day Angola. She fearlessly and cleverly fought against the Portuguese Empire, who were colonizing the Central African coast in an attempt to control the slave trade in the area at the time.⁸
- Harriet Tubman was an African American abolitionist and humanitarian, who worked as a Union spy during the American Civil War. Born a slave, she escaped and went on to lead rescue missions using the Underground Railroad that saved at least seventy enslaved people. In 1863, Tubman guided the Combahee Ferry Raid, which liberated more than seven hundred enslaved Blacks in South Carolina and made her the first woman to lead an armed expedition in the Civil War.⁹

I have not even covered all the continents, but suffice to say, the Durga archetype is alive and well across the annals of time. It is only more recently—with the spread of false “feel-good” spiritual notions like absolute pacifism alongside the puritanical values preached by

patriarchal interpretations of all religions—that we women seem to need reminders of our warrior goddess heritage.

Wake up, Durga! Don't take abuse and discrimination based on gender, color, or anything else lying down. If you have been unfairly treated, wrongly blamed, victimized, or marginalized, just call out to Mother Durga. She will rise from the depths of your own soul to protect you by reminding you of your own dharmic rage. She will manifest as a helper, a friend, a teacher, or a book from out of the blue that reminds you of your own buried power. You will become Durga herself when you rise in shining self-respect and self-defense, fearlessly setting wrongs to right for yourself, the planet, and all innocent beings.

I AM THE DAUGHTER OF A DURGA: MY JOURNEY WITH ANGER

I witnessed my mother openly express her conscious anger toward wrongdoers, reprimanding her boundary violators. At the same time, she respected others' boundaries. And she was equally trusting, vulnerable, and kindhearted with people who showed her that they were worthy of her trust. She told me that I must embody my Shakti like a living flame; everyone should get light and radiance from me, but the same people should be cautious about poking a finger through me or my business because then they would get burnt. Slowly, but surely, I have become that flame.

Finger-pokers don't like your flaming boundaries. They shame you for having them. For a while, I let everybody make me feel guilty for being powerful. But not for too long; I was eventually able to see through it. Now, my flame is brighter, bigger, more radiant. It appears formidable to the asuras, yet as a friend and source of light to the devas.

It is heartbreaking to see all the pretense that goes on in the name of being anger-less—and as a result, optionless, passionless, goddess-less. Equally sad is the sheer unconsciousness that is embodied behind false pacifism—all the anger we humans must collectively suppress to “prove” our worthiness to divinity!

Thank Goddess, we women do have divine role models who roar instead. That is why my anger today is not merely directed toward

men who seemingly abuse us women, but toward our own spiritual ignorance as sleeping goddesses, which can make us easy targets.

Furthermore, it is one thing to protect ourselves; it is a whole other thing to rise and speak up for the protection and celebration of all beings. Perhaps this book—which has emerged from channeling my superconscious anger—will be a gift for women worldwide.

A DURGA CONTEMPLATION FOR YOU

I ASK: What makes me angry? Which of the three forms of anger is this?

I RECOGNIZE: Anger is a messenger. What is it telling me or asking of me?

I CONNECT: Where in my body do I feel anger? Does it change with my awareness?

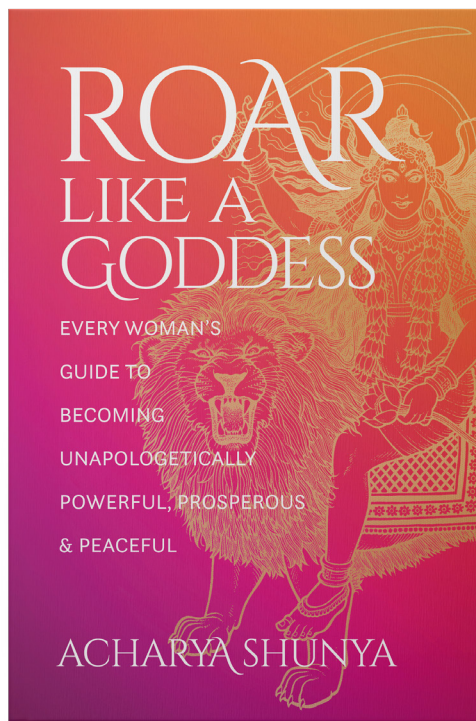
I DECIDE: I can react unconsciously or respond with discernment.

I ACT: What dharmic action will I take? What are my next steps?

I REMEMBER: I am Durga, composed power, warrior goddess!

Chapter 2: When Raging Is a Goddess Thing to Do

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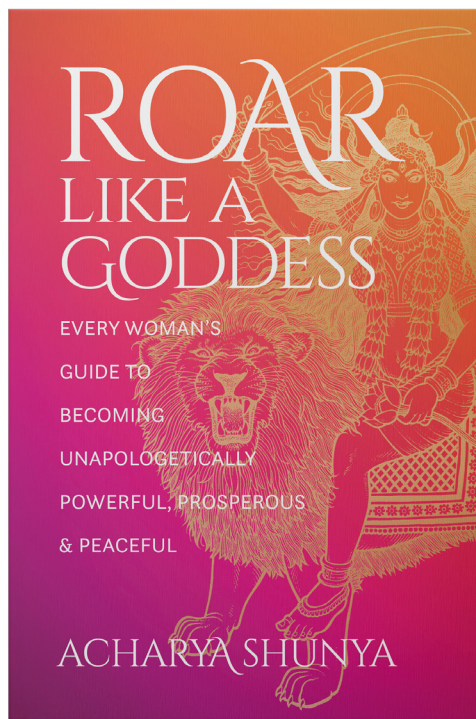


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ACHARYA SHUNYA is an internationally renowned and award-winning spiritual teacher. The first female head of her 2,000-year-old Indian Vedic spiritual lineage, Shunya is a classically trained master of Yoga and Ayurveda and leader of the divine feminine path to soul ascendance. She is president of The Awakened Self Foundation, founder of the nonprofit Vedika Global, and author of Ayurveda Lifestyle Wisdom and Sovereign Self. She resides in Northern California. For more, visit acharyashunya.com.

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