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The Sunday Talk Given by Prof. Anil Kumar

*“Ramnavami”
(Part 1)*

March 21, 2010

OM...OM...OM...

Sai Ram

With Pranams at the Lotus Feet of our most beloved Bhagavan,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Sai Ram to everybody! March 24th is observed as Sri Ramnavami, the birthday of Lord Rama. Rama is an *Avatar*—God Incarnate, God in human form. So, March 24th, the birthday of Sri Rama is Navami or the ninth day of the holy festival of Sri Ramnavami and is observed all over the country—right from the Himalayas down to Cape Comorin.

Not only that, there are several versions of *Ramayana*. Rama’s name is very well known in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka. They all know the holy epic *Ramayana*. So, *Ramayana* is a composition written by a sage by the name of Valmiki and it is this composition that deals with the story of Lord Rama or Sri Rama. Since we are observing and celebrating Sri Ramnavami, it is fitting to know some details of the scripture *Ramayana*.

TWO IMPORTANT SECTIONS IN SANATHANA DHARMA

Now, in *Sanathana Dharma*, there are two important sections. The first one is the *Puranas*, which we call the epics. The second one is *Itihasas* or mythology. So, the epics and mythology are the two important sections in *Sanathana Dharma*. The epics or the *Puranas* are 18 in number and are written by Sage Vyasa. Mythology comprises only two—one written by Vyasa and the other by Valmiki.

What are these two *Itihasas*, this mythology? One is *Ramayana*, the story of Rama written by Valmiki, while the other is *Mahabharatha* written by Vyasa. So of these two mythological texts, one is written by Valmiki (*Ramayana*) while the other (*Mahabharatha*) is written by Vyasa. But the epics, the *Puranas*, all 18 of them, are written by Sage Vyasa.

I want to bring to your attention another point. The purpose of *the Puranas*, the epics, is to encourage man towards liberation or *moksha*. How to attain *moksha* or liberation? How to reach the goal? How to find fulfilment in our lives? What spiritual path should we follow? All this is answered in those 18 epics written by Veda Vyasa.

However, these two mythological texts—*Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*—speak to us, direct us, and guide us on how to lead our daily lives: how to be truthful, how to be peaceful, how to be ideal, how to be righteous. They give the standard of life, the ideal way of life, the code of conduct.

Thus, my friends, the *Puranas* or epics are *mokshartha*, meaning for the attainment of *moksha*, liberation; whereas the mythological texts, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*, are *dharmartha*. That is, they are meant for *dharma* or righteousness, idealism. Thus both are important in *Sanathana Dharma*.

THE SACRED RAMAYANA

As this occasion happens to be Sri Ramnavami, let me draw your attention to this very important sacred text, *Ramayana*. There are many, many versions of *Ramayana*, but the original version is by Valmiki only. Later, many, many authors dealt with the same subject—on Rama and His life.

Well, people may question, “Why should there be so many *Ramayanas*? Why should there be so many versions?” The answer is this: the holy Ganges is flowing. Anybody can take a container, collect water and quench their thirst. Similarly, *Ramayana* is the holy river, the holy river Ganges. Anybody can take the container of their heart and collect the water of *Ramayana* and quench their thirst or eagerness for Divinity, their longing for Divinity. Therefore, many, many versions might have been written in the course of time, but the original standard *Ramayana* was composed by Sage Valmiki.

Furthermore, there are many poets who have unequivocally and openly declared that Valmiki is second to none, that Valmiki is the first Divine composer. So he is called *Adi-kavi*: *Adi* meaning ‘the first’, and *kavi* meaning ‘composer’. So, he is the first composer. All other poets or composers—like Mahakavi Kalidasa, Murari, King Bhoja, composer Bhavaboothi—all these great poets and composers all said that Valmiki’s text is the standard book. All other versions are branches that deal with a fraction of the original.

In fact, peculiarly enough, the other texts of *Ramayana*, written by these several other composers, contain certain episodes which are not there in the original text, but which are very, very popular and very well known among the masses. People have accepted the other stories also, although they have no place in the original text.

THE STORY BEHIND SAGE VALMIKI

There is a story behind Sage Valmiki. He was, after all, a robber, a thief, an anti-social element of the first order, who earned his livelihood by robbing others, by theft. He didn’t even mind killing people in order to rob them. While people went through the forest along their way, this Valmiki, in his ‘previous’ life (in the earlier part of his life, before he became a sage), attacked all those travellers. He attacked them, robbed them and killed them.

Such a robber, such a thief, such a horrible, terrible man one day came across a group of saints who spoke about some spiritual truths of life, saying: “Nothing will come along with you, no matter how much you earn, whether through sinful acts or meritorious deeds, through righteous means or unrighteous methods. You may earn a lot, but nothing will come with you at the end.”

“Further, you are responsible for all your misdeeds—for all the murders that you commit, for all the pain and suffering you cause to these innocent travellers. You have to pay heavily. None of your family members, relations or friends will ever come forward to share your sin, to share your suffering at the end.”

These were the basic spiritual teachings of these saints who happened to pass by the jungle. Valmiki then transformed himself. Earlier, his first name was Ratnakara; after his transformation, he became Valmiki. My friends, what a wonderful story it is! What a wonderful episode it is!

SPIRITUALITY IS A PROMISE

One may be a thief, one may be a robber, or one may be a man of crime, of even murder! Yet, he can become a saint. A sinner can become a saint! That's what happened in the life of Valmiki. This is a lesson for all of us—not to condemn ourselves, not to demean ourselves, not to humiliate ourselves, not to develop a desire to forsake our life, not to be frustrated, not to be disappointed. Why? You can become a saint. When Valmiki could become a saint with his previous background as a sinner, why can you and I not become saints through incessant effort, determination, spiritual practice or *sadhana*?

Therefore, spirituality is a promise to everybody; it gives hope to everybody. You need not allow yourself to live in frustration, to think negatively of yourself. Never be negative about your own self; never condemn yourself. That is one lesson we can learn from the life of Valmiki.

Secondly, what did he do? This robber Ratnakara (the former name of Valmiki), after listening to the spiritual teachings, sat in one place while the sages gave him a *mantra*—the holy name Rama, Rama, Rama. “Repeat that name: Rama, Rama, Rama! That will save you. That will atone for your sins,” said those sages.

This Ratnakara believed. He sat there and went on repeating, “Mara, Mara.” Instead of “Rama”, he said, “Mara, Mara, Mara, Mara” because he could not utter the word correctly. These two syllables ‘ma’-‘ra’, ‘ma’-‘ra’ . . . if they are repeated again and again become “Rama” naturally. “Mara...Mara...Marama...Rama”, that's all. It becomes Rama. That is the story.

RISE FROM DEATH TO IMMORTALITY

But, my friends, ‘Mara’ has a meaning. What is it? Death! Valmiki had been repeating, “Mara, Mara” which means ‘death’. It means that every life has an end; the body has to be given up some day. So we should go beyond this idea of death and reach the state of immortality.

Mrityormaa Amritam Gamaya! Mrity is ‘death’, while *amrita* is ‘immortality’. So the meaning is: we should go beyond death and reach immortality. That is the real meaning of “Mara” that Ratnakara (later Sage Valmiki) repeated over and over again.

So, as he was repeating, “Mara... Mara...Mara...Mara...” like that, years went on. So much time passed that an anthill formed around his body! The anthill was called *valmikamu*. *Valmika* refers to an anthill in which serpents stay! So, an anthill formed around his body, while the sage went on repeating God's name.

Here, there are certain spiritual truths which I want to share with you. This anthill that formed around him is our *samsara* or family, our family life, our earthly sojourn. In this anthill there are

so many poisonous snakes. What are they? Sensual pleasures, our physical attachments and worldly desires—they are the snakes. So in the anthill of the world, surrounded by the desires of poisonous snakes, this Ratnakara went on repeating God's name.

What does it mean, my friends? That we, while in this world and in this family life, amidst all worries, anxieties and challenging situations, should not worry. On the other hand, we should repeat God's name like Ratnakara. We should contemplate on Him while in this anthill of *samsara*, surrounded by snakes of sensuality and other bad qualities. In this situation, we should think of Divinity. That is the second lesson that we can learn from the life of Sage Valmiki.

THINKING OF THE UNIVERSAL SOUL

And the third lesson: Valmiki means *valmikamu* and, as I just mentioned, *valmikamu* means 'anthill'. You must have watched a serpent, coiling around within its own coils. In the midst of the coils of a serpent, Ratnakara did penance. He repeated God's name. What is the significance of this?

The body is an anthill or *valmikamu*. Inside that, in the midst of it, there was Ratnakara who was meditating and thinking of God. It means that the individual consciousness, the individual soul is thinking of the universal soul or God Himself. That is the third lesson that we can draw from this.

Finally, what happened? As this Ratnakara was meditating on God in an anthill, what happened? *Kundalini*, the primordial energy, started ascending. This primordial energy started ascending and reached the top chakra. This chakra is called *sahasrara*, which means thousand-petalled lotus, thousand-petalled consciousness. Thousand-petalled awareness is here. Therefore, the primordial energy ascends and reaches *sahasrara*, as happened in the case of Ratnakara. Therefore, my friends, by constant contemplation, our energy also can rise. The energy resides at the bottom now. But by contemplation, it can rise upward and reach the top chakra or *sahasrara*.

SRAVANA, MANANA AND NIDHIDHYASA

Notice that there are three steps here: first, Ratnakara heard the spiritual teaching. He listened to the *mantra* given to him. This is called listening or *sravana*. Secondly, he went on repeating that *mantra*. That repetition or recapitulation is called *manana*. And thirdly, he held on to the same *mantra*. He did not change it because he was so determined to realise the truth of it—to reach the goal and get fulfilment. That is called *nidhidhyasa*.

So there are three steps: listening or *sravana*, repetition or *manana*, and determination to realise the truth or *nidhidhyasa*. These are the three steps in the spiritual practice of Ratnakara, who was transformed into a sage of the stature of Valmiki, the first Divine composer of the text, *Ramayana*.

This, in brief, I want to tell you in the beginning. Most of our friends must be familiar with the story of *Ramayana*. Many people know it. But the lessons that we can draw out of the life of Valmiki are known to very few people. Therefore, I chose to speak on that in the beginning itself.

EPISODE OF THE TWO BIRDS

Next comes another episode. Valmiki, now a saint (though once the robber Ratnakara) was going for a bath in the river along with his disciples. Suddenly, Valmiki happened to look at a

tree where two birds were perched. One was a male, while the other was female. These two birds were having fun, enjoying themselves. Suddenly, a hunter shot an arrow and one bird, the male, fell down and died. The other bird which was left there started crying.

This scene melted the heart of Valmiki. He could not bear the sight of separation of the male from the female. He felt the agony of the female bird due to the death of the male just at a time when they were having such fun. Right then Valmiki composed the first *sloka*, the first canto, the first verse:

*Maa Nishada Pratish Thaam Tvam Agama Saswatee Sama
Yat Kraunca Mathunat Ekam Avadhee Kaama Mohitam*

This is a Sanskrit verse. Forget about it. Don't bother about the language. Let us go by the content. Let us go by the meaning. Language is not important. The content and spirit are beyond language, understood between the lines. So now, let us examine this episode and try to draw some conclusions from it.

People know this episode, but they are not mindful of its implications. I want to draw your attention to one or two of its implications. What happened? In the episode, one bird is killed by the hunter with the result that one bird is left behind. What does it mean? The male bird is killed. It fell down at a time when the two birds were having fun, enjoying togetherness. It means desire, sensuality, and sensual pleasure will be killed. Sensual pleasure has to be removed, has to be condemned. That's why one bird is killed.

THE INSTANCES OF DASARATHA, VALI AND RAVANA

Let's go into the story of *Ramayana*. First example: the father of Rama, Dasaratha, died. Why? He was so much attached to his third wife, Kaikeyi. Because of his fascination for her, he had to shed his life, ultimately due to separation from Rama. The fascination or attachment of Dasaratha to Kaikeyi, his third wife, was the cause of his separation from Rama, his own son (who was God incarnate in fact). That ultimately led to his own death. So, sensuality will take you to death.

For a second example, let's take Vali. Vali was a king. But this Vali was killed by the hands of Rama. Why? Vali, being so powerful and mighty, abducted the wife of his own brother because of his sensual desire, for his pleasure. Because of this weakness, because of this unrighteous act, Rama killed Vali. Again, sensuality leads to death in this second instance!

In the third instance in *Ramayana*, you have another character named Ravana, the *rakshasa* or demon king. He was also killed by Rama. Why? Ravana kidnapped Sita, who is the wife of Rama. Again due to this weakness!

Therefore, out of the two birds, one bird is killed. It means that sensuality will be condemned; it ruins us. So sensuality will be killed. Sensuality is a weakness, irrespective of all our merits and virtues. This is the conclusion that we can draw out of this episode in the life of Sage Valmiki. Dasaratha, Vali, and Ravana are the three killed because of their sensual desire and because of their weakness for the senses. That is one conclusion. The second conclusion is this: out of the two birds, one bird is killed. We can draw another conclusion out of this.

UPANISHADS AND THE TWO BIRDS

In one of the *Upanishads*, it is said that the human body is a tree, and on the branch of this tree, two birds are seated. One bird is just there, watching everything. Another bird partakes of the fruits of this tree, looking all around. One bird is steady, while the other bird eats the fruits. Looking at the first steady bird with wavering looks, the second bird eats all the fruits. That is the story in the *Upanishads*.

What are these two birds now? The bird that is steady, without doing anything, is Divinity—the Divine, a witness, not doing anything. This bird is the witness, while the second bird is the individual soul or conscience. This individual soul eats the fruits of the tree. It means that he faces the consequences of his actions—*karma phala*, the fruit of action.

So, whatever we do, we have to accept the fruits of our own actions. This individual soul with name and form is spending its time reaping the consequences of its own actions, passing through life-after-life, caught in the cycle of birth and death. But when looking at the other, steady bird, concentrating on its Divinity, what happens? The second bird becomes one with it. The individual soul becomes one with the cosmic soul.

So when this hunter shot an arrow, one bird was killed. It means that the individual identity was killed: the name and form were gone. Then only one bird remained. What is it that remains? Consciousness—beyond name and form, the transcendental! That is the significance and deeper implication of this episode.

THREE-DIMENSIONAL VIEW OF RAMAYANA

The *Ramayana* can be viewed in a three-dimensional way: first, as *Rama Katha*, the story of Rama; second, as *Sita Charita*, the story of Sita; and third, as *Ravana Vadha*, the killing of Ravana. To repeat: first it is all the story of Rama or *Ramayanam*; second, it is the story of Sita or *Sitayaascharitam*, the *charita*, history or story of Sita; and third, it is the story of the slaying or killing of Ravana. So that's the three!

ASCENT OF MAN AND DESCENT OF GOD

Now, the next point I would like to draw your attention to is this: in *Ramayana*, *ayana* means 'travel, movement'. So *Ramayana* means movement or travel towards Rama, towards God. All our looks, all our actions, all our thoughts, all our words are directed towards Rama or God. So *Ramayana* means emancipation and glorification of the individual soul to the height of the cosmic soul.

If you take *ayana* or 'travel of Rama' only, what does it mean? God has come down in human form, in the name of Rama. God is in human form; that's one way of looking at it. The second way to look at it is that the human, by focusing on Rama, becomes God. So *Ramayana* is the descent of Rama from God, and also the ascent of man to God. I think I am clear. We can look at it in both ways.

Many, many things can be said about this, brothers and sisters. I thought of bringing up these valuable points, which are not in circulation and not very well known to many people in the beginning. Later, we will deal with some of the other points.

Yes, this *Ramayana* is meant for the whole world, not merely for India or Hindus. No, no! The scripture belongs to everybody. Why? *Ramayana* tells you about all the ideals: how to be an ideal son, an ideal brother, an ideal husband, an ideal friend, an ideal enemy, an ideal king. So,

all ideals are contained in *Ramayana*. If you know *Ramayana*, you are going to be an ideal man. Therefore, *Ramayana* is a holy scripture that belongs to all of humanity. It is not limited to any religion; it is beyond time and space.

BHAGAVATA SAPTAHA IN PRASHANTHI NILAYAM

Another point, my friends: let me apply this to the present time in Prashanthi Nilayam. From March 16th, *Bhagavata Saptaha* has been going on. A young man, aged 26, who hails from Byavra in Madhya Pradesh, and whose name happens to be Rituraj Maharaj, is giving talks on the *Bhagavata*. March 23rd is the concluding day. He is giving talks on *Srimad Bhagavata* from March 16th to 23rd.

My friends, it is very, very amazing. Bhagavan Baba comes to the Mandir in Sai Kulwant Hall, and sits there giving His *darshan* for two hours in the morning, and again for two hours in the evening—sometimes for two and a half hours, extraordinarily enough! This *Bhagavata Saptaha*, or seven-day, week-long recitation or rendering of the holy scripture *Bhagavata*, has granted a unique pleasure: the greatest privilege and blessing of having Bhagavan's *darshan* for four and a half hours every day! Two hours in the morning and two and a half hours in the evening is very, very rare!

This young man, Rituraj Maharaj, a bachelor and sannyasi, wearing ochre robes, has been speaking and singing the *Bhagavata* emotionally, extempore in Hindi. He came here along with his disciples. The most interesting thing is that he has linked *Bhagavata* with Swami. In every sentence he says, "Swami, Swami, Baba, Baba!" So you have a complete picture of Baba on the one hand, and the complete story of Lord Krishna on the other hand, running in parallel. "Krishna – Sai Krishna! *Bhagavata* – Sathyam Sivam Sundaram!" Both stories are going along hand-in-hand, something like a railway track with parallel rails, or like the two wheels of a bicycle, or the two eyes. He has been narrating the story of Krishna and the story of Baba, bringing out all the parallels, coupled with his melodious singing. Sometimes, he is so lost in ecstasy that he even shouts! Yes, we often hear him shouting very loudly. That is his ecstatic condition; that is what I think.

SWAMI IS A COMBINATION OF RAMA AND KRISHNA

Though I have been visiting Prashanthi Nilayam for several years—for the past three and a half decades or even more—I have never come across a situation like this. This series of talks, delivered in Hindi by a single man, both in the mornings and evenings, attended by Bhagavan, (which is really a great privilege) is our good fortune.

Now my conclusion is this: Rama is Krishna, and Krishna is Rama. There is only a time difference. You must have heard the theory of incarnation or *Avatara*. God incarnates in human form. One incarnation is Rama; the next incarnation is Krishna. And who is Baba? Rama and Krishna! Baba is a combination of Rama and Krishna. So as we think of Sri Ramnavami, we have glimpses of Rama in Him.

As we listen to the discourses of Rituraj Maharaj, we see Him as Sai Krishna. This Rituraj Maharaj has been speaking of *Ramayana* for the last two days. He has linked Rama and *Bhagavata* (stories of Krishna) in his talks in front of Bhagavan, showing He is a combination of Rama and Krishna. What is the fundamental difference between the two?

Krishna is *Leelamanusha*, which means *leela* or 'mystery' in *manusha* or 'human form'. Krishna is *Leelamanusha* or the sport and mystery of Divinity in human form. That is Krishna. In Ramachandra, Rama is *Mayamanusha*. Here again, God is in the form of a human. This is the *maya* or 'illusion'. God appears to have been deluded. God acts, God pretends, God succumbs; God allows Himself to be victimised, to be trapped by *maya* or *samsara*.

So, the story of Rama is *Mayamanusha*, while the story of Krishna is *Leelamanusha*. Baba is both *leela* and *maya*. All His life is full of *leelas*, Divine sport, miracles. So He is *Leelamanusha* like Krishna. But at the same time, Baba is *Mayamanusha* because He pretends that He is just a human when He asks you, "Where do you come from?" or "When did you come?" or "When are you going?" or "How many are there in your group?" or "What did you have for breakfast?" He asks as if He does not know these things. That is *Mayamanusha*. Therefore, this year is really unique. This season is unique to have witnessed the combination of Krishna and Rama in Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba!

THE OUTER AND INNER APPROACH TO RAMAYANA

And now we go to another important aspect. This *Ramayana*, which is the sacred epic written by Valmiki, has a two-dimensional approach: one is outer and the other is inner. The outer part, the external part, the peripheral part (all that is on the circumference) is the story of Ramachandra. How the incarnation started and all the things that happened in the course of the life of Rama—that story is just the outer, external, peripheral dimension. But there is an undercurrent, an inner depth, an inner significance, full of philosophy, which is the spiritual dimension. Therefore, *Ramayana* has an outer, physical dimension in the story form, and an inner spiritual dimension.

Baba, in His Divine discourses, speaks of both aspects at the same time in a single discourse! He deals effectively with both these two dimensions. You may ask me, "How is it possible?" It is possible for Baba! Why? He narrates and describes, taking you along the journey, along the trip of the story. Then immediately, He will take you into its inner depths, as He starts explaining the inner significance of the story. Again, afterwards, He goes on narrating the next episode. As you listen, just as you start imagining the whole story, suddenly He takes you again into its inner depths, so that you will realise the inner significance.

So Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba's approach to *Ramayana* is both outer and inner—the narrative, descriptive part of the story (the outward story) going hand-in-hand with the spiritual dimension, which is full of inner meaning.

SWAMI'S OWN STORY IS SATYAM SIVAM SUNDARAM

Another very interesting point is that almost no *avatar* or incarnation ever heard His own story. Krishna never heard His own story. No! Jesus never heard His own story. Prophet Mohammed never heard His own story. Buddha never heard His own story. Mahaveera never heard His own story. No prophet, saint, sage, *avatar*, or incarnation has ever heard their own stories.

It was only Sri Ramachandra, Lord Rama, who heard His own story, recited in front of Him by the two boys, Lava and Kusa. These two boys started singing the glory of Rama and only then Rama started hearing His own life story, His own biography. This was very, very unique then, and that is also happening today.

All speeches in Prashanthi Nilayam, all dramas enacted in front of Swami, all compositions—the poems, poetry, dramas, music, speeches—all contain references to Sathya Sai Baba. They are

full of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings, full of Sathya Sai Baba's life. Remember, Swami presides over every meeting. So He hears His own story—boys speaking about Him, elders speaking about Him, scholars speaking about Him—referring to His own life right in front of Him. That's really amazing! Amazing, surprising, unbelievable! This God listens to His own life as if He is a third party, as if He is not a part of it. He listens as if it is someone else's story, which means that He is not attached.

The story narrated now is of this period, but He belongs to the past, present and future. So He is a participant and He is a listener. He is the hero and He is the audience. He is the key and He is the theme. He is also the composer once again.

So what happened in Lord Rama's life, when Rama heard His own story just as Baba listens to His own story today? In those days, that was *Ramayana*, while today this is *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*. That is really very interesting.

SWAMI IN EVERYONE IS THE LISTENER

I want to tell you another interesting point, my friends. Hindi is the national language of this country, but many people here do not know that language. In South India, many people do not know Hindi. In North India, all know Hindi. But in Puttaparthi, there are not many Hindi-speaking people. So, all do not know Hindi. Yet the speeches delivered here by Rituraj Maharaj on *Bhagavatam* for the last seven days have been in Hindi. Many people do not speak Hindi. But all of them are listening, clapping and smiling. Why? How?

When I speak in Telugu, I hear everybody listening and clapping. Why? This includes many of the foreigners who do not know any regional language, either Hindi, Telugu, or Tamil. They do not know any Indian languages. Some Latin American Spanish-speaking people, German people, French people and Japanese people don't know English either; but they are still happy and they clap. Why?

The answer is this: they are not listening. Swami in them is listening! Swami is seated there on the Mandir veranda, the speaker is speaking about Swami nearby, and Swami in everyone is listening. This is called *triputi*, or union of the three—the speaker, listener and theme—are one only. Swami in everyone is listening. Therefore, He smiles and claps, because it's His own story, his-story! That is my observation. So the language of the heart is truly very real. The proof is that all are enjoying these talks, though Hindi is not known to many, many people here!

OM...OM...OM...

Asato Maa Sad Gamaya

Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya

Mrt'yormaa Amrtam Gamaya

Om Samastha Lokā Sukhino Bhavantu

Samastha Lokā Sukhino Bhavantu

Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavantu

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

Jai Bolo Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Babaji ki Jai!
Jai Bolo Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Babaji ki Jai!
Jai Bolo Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Babaji ki Jai!

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