

## **HEALTH EDUCATION IN 3 JOHN 1:2: A PANACEA FOR CHRISTIAN HEALTH ILLITERACY**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined health education in 3 John 1:2 and its panacea for Christian health illiteracy (CHI). It carried out the exegesis of 3 John 1:2. It also identified factors responsible for CHI, and applied the health education in the text to CHI, to establish its panacea for CHI. The study adopted a documentation method for data collection. The primary source consisted of the Greek text of 3 John 1:2, while secondary data was sourced from published works on CHI. The grammatical-historical approach served as the framework, while the interpretive design was used. Data were subjected to exegetical analysis. The study showed that health education in 3 John 1:2 involved the prosperity of bodily health, spiritual health, and prosperity in secular affairs. The study considered ignorance, wrong notions about the use of herbs, misuse of faith, and the notion that every sickness must be healed through divine healing as factors responsible for CHI. It encourages Christians to care for their physical health and spiritual health concurrently because both are interrelated and interdependent in Christians' lives. The study recommends that more than ever before, Christians should find "power to draw forth" from the text to improve their health.*

**Keywords:** Health, Education, 3 John 1:2, Christian, illiteracy

### **Introduction**

Health education is vital to the future of every human society, religious and secular societies are inclusive. It is highly demanding because of the alarming rate of pestilence and untimely death in the contemporary world. The rampant cases of pastors who slumped and died while preaching on the altar are evidence of this reality. For instance, to mention but a few, it was reported on 5th April 2022 that an elder named Francis Ogunnusi at the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), Onikoko, Abeokuta in Ogun State, slumped and died while preaching on the altar during church service on Sunday (Olatunji, 2022). Apart from this, it was also reported on 26th July 2022 that Pastor Samuel Udo-Mbang, who was the National Overseer of Deeper Life Bible Church to Swaziland (Eswatini) slumped and died when he was preaching on the pulpit in the church on Sunday at the time of service (PM News Nigeria, 2022). Likewise, on 29th January 2021 a South African Pastor,

Reverend Bassie Jackals slumped and died at the age of 42, while he was preaching on Sunday at African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kuruman, Northern Cape (Nwanne, 2022). Besides, it was also reported that on Sunday 4th December 2022 Rev. Dr. Daniel Otoh, who was the associate pastor of The Shepherd's House Assembly, Abuja, slumped and died on the altar of the church while delivering a sermon (InfoGuide Nigeria, 2023). These reports show the alarming rates of untimely death possibly due to Christian health illiteracy. And so, it calls for health education among Christians.

As the Coalition of National Health Education Organization (2009, p. 1) rightly notes, "Health education is a social science that draws from the biological, environmental, psychological, physical and medical sciences to promote health and prevent disease, disability, and premature death through education-driven voluntary behavior change activities." Besides, "Health education is the development of individual, group, institutional, community and systemic strategies to improve health knowledge, attitudes, skills and behavior." This organization further notes that "The purpose of health education is to positively influence the health behavior of individuals and communities as well as the living and working conditions that influence their health." Therefore, to achieve the purpose of health education, all hands must be on the desk to promote and improve on health literacy in both religious and secular societies. And so, the challenge of Christian health illiteracy calls for a biblical-based health education.

In 3 John 1:2, which is the focus of this study, Apostle John considers health as one of the important aspects of Christian life. This text says, "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul." In this text, the apostle prayed for a Christian of Asia Minor, who was named Gaius, "a house-church leader" (Keener, 1993) to whom he addressed his third epistle (Easton, 2006). This text reveals that the apostle loved Gaius and was pleased with his spiritual health as a trusted and approved leader in the Church. It also depicts that Gaius was spiritually healthy but physically sick. The text further shows that total health is physical, spiritual, and prosperity in secular affairs. To be precise, the text depicts that it is necessary as a matter of health education for Gaius to prosper in a general sense and to prosper concurrently in both physical health and spiritual health. Therefore, this study examines health education in the text, to establish its relevance to Christian health illiteracy.

### **Statement of Problem**

Health education in 3 John 1:2 is a panacea for Christian health illiteracy in both physical and spiritual aspects. This is because it reveals not only to be spiritually healthy but also the reality of taking care of a Christian's bodily health. After all, a Christian can be spiritually healthy but physically sick. Also, the rampant cases of pastors, who slumped and died while preaching on the altar, necessitate Christian

health literacy in the contemporary church. Previous studies on 3 John 1:2 have focused mainly on reading 3 John within a Jewish framework as an overdue reconsideration of the text (Paley, 2021), scaling Gaius and Diotrephes: socio-economic stratification in 1 and 3 John (Carman, 2020), with little attention paid to health education in the text. This study is, therefore, designed to examine health education in the text, to establish its relevance to Christian health illiteracy.

### **Objective of the Study**

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- carry out the exegesis of 3 John 1:2 to understand health education in the text.
- identify factors responsible for Christian Health Illiteracy; and
- apply the health education in the text to Christian health illiteracy.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide the study.

- What does the health education in 3 John 1:2 mean?
- What are the factors responsible for Christian health illiteracy?
- In what ways can the study of health education in 3 John 1:2 serve as a panacea to address Christian health illiteracy?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a documentation method for data collection. The primary source consisted of the Greek text of 3 John 1:2, while secondary data was sourced from published works on Christian health illiteracy. The text was analyzed into phrases and keywords, and the syntax of its sentences was studied in its original historical contextual setting. Then, the context of the contemporary re-interpretation of the text was critically examined and the two studies were examined to produce a new interpretation of the text. Secondary sources included books, Bible commentaries, journal articles, and the Internet. The grammatical-historical approach served as the framework, while the interpretive design was used. Grammatico-historical exegesis is an approach in a biblical study that posits that “a passage of the Scripture should be understood according to its grammar, according to its syntax, and according to its historical context.”(Fuller, 2011, p. 1). Data are subjected to exegetical analysis. Using a grammatico-historical approach, this paper aims to examine health education in 3 John 1:2 as a panacea to address Christian health illiteracy.

### **Christian Health Illiteracy**

A study of health from the Bible for Christians reveals that total health is both physical and spiritual, that is, body, soul, and spirit. In the same vein, the World Health Organisation (2012, p. 12) “defines health as a state of complete physical, social and mental well-being, and not merely absence of disease or infirmity”. To

this organization, health is considered “a resource for everyday life, not the object of living.” As regards health literacy, Kwan, Frankish, and Rootman (2006, p. 2) define it as “The degree to which people can access, understand, appraise and communicate information to engage with the demands of different health contexts to promote and maintain good health across the life course.” To deduce from this definition, health illiteracy is the opposite of health literacy. In terms of health education, some Christians are not yet enlightened in mind to view the world around them from the lens of the Bible and live their lives in agreement with biblical injunctions. Therefore, to attend to health illiteracy, this study draws attention to some factors that are responsible for Christian health illiteracy.

The first point of view on Christian health illiteracy is ignorance. The Bible depicts that ignorance leads to destruction – “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...” (Hosea 4:6). As a result of ignorance, some Christians do not take care of their bodily health, while sickness and death in human society are at an all-time high. Some Churches also do not have health literacy programs for their members, while leading causes of death and chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, and chronic lower respiratory diseases, among others, are common in the world today (Sally, Curtin, Betzaida Tejada-Vera, & Anderson, 2021; News release, 2020). Besides, some Christians are ignorant of stress management, whereas “Stress is the number one killer in the world today” (INFOGuide Nigeria, 2023; Spain, 1979). Even though the fundamental reason for the Sabbath day for God’s people in the Bible is for rest, many Christians do not take proper time to rest or learn how to manage stress. Apart from stress during the week in our daily activities, most Christians get busier on their day of worship than on any other day of the week. In the name of spiritual commitment, they move from one worship center to another for Church activities without taking proper time to rest (INFOGuide Nigeria, 2023). The effects of this ignorance on the contemporary Church are the product of sickness and the alarming rate of premature death.

The second issue on Christian health illiteracy is the wrong notion about the use of herbs. As a result of the lack of proper Christian health education “many believers term any unorthodox medication and treatment as a fetish, idolatry, and evil.” (INFOGuide Nigeria, 2023). However, in the book of Genesis, God gave mankind fruits, vegetables, and grains as food to make them healthy (Gen 1:29; 2:16; 9:3). As a result, some Christians do not understand that herbs are God’s given and that they are also meant for their medication and treatment of their body. Nevertheless, as Christians make use of herbs for medication and treatment of their body, they should avoid witchcraft, idolatry, and spiritualism in the use of herbs because it is against the teachings of the Bible (Gal 5:19-21) (Smith, 2022).

The third point of Christian health illiteracy is a misuse of faith. This has caused problems for many people in the contemporary Church. This is because many Christians are religious and they have over-spiritualized everything. They consider

every sickness as the work of the devil, witches, among others. However, this misconception about sickness contains half-truths. This is because it is wrong to assume that it is the devil alone that is responsible for all sicknesses. It is important to understand that each person has inherited a sinful nature which causes every person to become ill at times. Sickness can also come as a product of the lack of care one shows one's body. For instance, if one does not eat right, sleep right, or take proper care of one's body, it may result in sickness. As a result of the misconception that all sickness comes from the devil, some Christians address every sickness spiritually even though many sicknesses are not the product of spiritual problems (Stewart, 2022). To this effect, they do not go to the hospital for medical checkups to know the state of their health and for proper medical care. Consequently, when the repercussion of this misguided spirituality comes, they blame enemies and witches.

Another point of view in the Christian health illiteracy is the belief that every sickness must be healed through divine healing. In the New Testament (NT), many Christians indeed demonstrated remarkable gifts of healing, and these manifestations were among "the signs of an apostle" (2 Cor 12:12). However, there were some who were not healed despite the presence of gifts of healing in the Church. As Paul rightly makes clear by saying, "Trophimus I left sick at Miletus" (2 Tim 4:20), and to Timothy, he urged, "Use a little wine because of your stomach and frequent illness" (1 Tim 5:23). This suggests that even though Paul had a gift to heal (Acts 14:6-10), it is clear that he could only heal those whom God willed to be healed in such manner. It is also possible that such gifts can be manifested in more than one way. This includes other forms such as the prayer of the elders for the sick (James 5:13-16) or even the use of medicine and medical technology (Brand, 2003). Therefore, the above factors in Christian health illiteracy call for an exegetical study of 3 John 1:2 to understand the health education in the text.

### Exegesis of Acts 3 John 1:2

Ἀγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὐχομαί σε εὐοδοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν, καθὼς εὐοδοῦται σου ἡ ψυχή (SBLGNT) is translated in RSV as "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health; I know that it is well with your soul." This verse opens with the clause, Ἀγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὐχομαί... ("Beloved, I Pray that all"...). It addresses Gaius as a beloved Christian, whom Apostle John loves and has concern for both his physical health and spiritual health. Ἀγαπητέ ("beloved") is the vocative masculine singular adjective of no degree from ἀγαπητός, which means "beloved, dear." This implies the outpouring of the Christian love of Apostle John to Gaius. In the phrase περὶ πάντων (concerning all things), περὶ is a preposition taking genitive and accusative. When is used with accusative it means "around" but whenever it is used with genitive as it is used in this context with πάντων (genitive plural adjective of no degree from πᾶς, which means "all, every,

all things”) it means “concerning, about.” Therefore, in this context, this phrase implies “concerning, or in respect to all things.” This suggests that the writer prays not only for the bodily health and spiritual health of the addressees but also to prosper in his secular affairs.

εὐχομαί (to pray) is the indicative present middle or passive deponent first person singular verb from εὐχομαί, which means “pray, request wish.” Keener (1993) avers that *περὶ πάντων εὐχομαί* ... (“I desire that in respect to all things it will go well with you...”) is a standard greeting in many ancient private letters, which quite frequently started with a prayer for the health of the reader. To this effect, Balz (1990) claims that “The shift in content is significant: the concern for well-being and health is not foremost for the writer of 3 John, but he can assume the “spiritual welfare” of the addressees (v. 2 b).” However, it is equally important to understand that not only the term εὐχομαί is commonly implied to pray in the New Testament (NT), but it is also used to convey a strong and earnest desire for anything (Acts 27:29; Rom 9:3; 2 Cor 13:9). This suggests that John wished earnestly that “in all respects” Gaius might have the same kind of prosperity which his health of soul had in his bodily health (Barnes, 1996). This is because it is clear in the text that Gaius was a man whose “spiritual health” was evident to all. In verses 2-6, Gaius is depicted as an outstanding spiritual man (Walvoord and Zuck, 2020). Besides, Kittel and Friedrich (1989) note that the original cultic connection of εὐχομαί became weaker with time so that εὐχομαί can take on the sense of “to wish” or “to ask.” Ancient epistolary style, as seen in 3 John 1:2, shows how indeterminate the term has become. However, the fact that a Christian like Gaius already has the divine health of the soul, it is equally evident that the writer of this epistle strongly desired the prosperity of his bodily health. This suggests that Christians should not only take good care of their spiritual health but also take good care of their bodily health concurrently.

The writer of this epistle was not only concerned for Gaius to prosper in respect to all things but also concerned for him to be in good health in his bodily health. This shows in *σε εὐοδοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν* (“that may go well with you and that you may be in health”). *σε* (you) is a personal accusative singular pronoun from *σύ* (you). *εὐοδοῦσθαι* (“go well with you”) is the infinitive present passive verb from *εὐοδόω*, which means “to be on a good path, succeed, go well” (Balz and Schneider, 1990). In this context, it is used by a person “to prosper, be successful.” Hence, it would apply in this context to any plan or purpose entertained, in which a Christian might lawfully engage, including prosperity in secular affairs, such as “success in business, happiness in domestic relations, prosperity in any engagements and transactions.” (Barnes, 1996).

In addition, *καὶ ὑγιαίνειν* (“and that you may be in good health”) is proof in this expression that the apostle earnestly desired Gaius to be in health in particular. *ὑγιαίνειν* (“you may be in good health”) is the infinitive present active verb from *ὑγιαίνω*, which means be healthy. As Balz and Schneider (1990) rightly note “This

verb refers to physical health (Luke 5:31; 7:10; 15:27; 3 John 1:2).” Therefore, in this context, it implies being in good health, go well with your physical health. The writer was pleased with the spiritual condition of Gaius and desired that he might get along equally well on a physical level. Thus, the expression “I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you” is not a mere conventional expression of good wishes. The apostle was concerned for the temporal well-being of others, and not only for their spiritual welfare (Walvoord and Zuck, 2020). As Exell (2006) rightly notes, “John’s prayer for him implies that his affliction was severe, that it was not a mere passing ailment.” This shows that Gaius was at that time suffering from bodily indisposition and John strongly desired him to enjoy bodily health. John can be hinting in this context that Gaius was not well and as a result, John was praying for restored health. This suggests that someone can be spiritually healthy and physically sick. Therefore, the fact that physical health is the product of nutrition, exercise, cleanliness, proper rest, and the disciplined order of a balanced life, it is necessary for Christians to take care of their bodily health along with their spiritual life (Wiersbe, 1989).

The expression καθὼς εὐοδοῦται σου ἡ ψυχή (“I know that it is well with your soul”) shows that the spiritual health of Gaius was evident at that particular time but Apostle John strongly desired that he should equally prosper in bodily health as he was prospering in his spiritual health. καθὼς (“as, just as, even as”) is the adverb from καθῶς. This adverb shows that the apostle wished Gaius similar prosperity in his bodily health “just as” he prospers in his spiritual health. This shows that Gaius’ spiritual life was evident to all. He was advancing in the knowledge of the truth and was exemplary in the duties of the Christian life (verses 2-6). εὐοδοῦται (“to prosper, succeed”) is the indicative present passive third person singular verb from εὐοδόω (“to be on a good path, succeed, go well”) as noted above. Σου (your) is the personal genitive singular pronoun from σύ (you). As a genitive singular, in this case, it means “your.” Hence, it implies “your soul.” Ψυχή (“soul”) is the nominative feminine singular noun from ψυχή. The ψυχή is thus the “seat and center of life that transcends the earthly” (BAG, 1979). In this context, it means “health of your soul” (spiritual health).

As Wiersbe (1989) rightly notes, spiritual health is a product of nourishing oneself with the Word of God (cf. John 1:1), that is, getting Christ into one’s soul. It also involves “working out” that nourishment in godly exercise (1 Tim 4:6-7). A Christian must keep himself clean (2 Cor 7:1) and avoid the contamination and pollution that is in the world (2 Peter 1:4; James 1:27). Besides, it is not only that exercise and service are important, but it is also important that Christians rest in the Lord and gain new strength through fellowship with Him (Matt 11:18-30). “A balanced life is a healthy and happy life, a life that honors God.” As noted in the third John, Gaius was a commendable Christian (vv. 1-8), who lives spiritually (vv. 3-4), serves faithfully (vv. 5-6), and ministers generously (vv. 7-9) (Akin, 2003). Therefore, this

verse can be interpreted as “I know you are prospering in your soul. I wish you similar prosperity in your bodily health.” This implies that Apostle John strongly desired Gaius to prosper in his secular affairs in a general sense and be in bodily health in particular just as he prospers in his soul (spiritual health).

### **Health Education in 3 John 1:2 as a Panacea for Christian Health Illiteracy in the Contemporary Church**

This section shows the panacea of health education in 3 John 1:2 for Christian health illiteracy. The study reveals that health education in the chosen text involves prosperity in secular affairs and health in both physical and spiritual. It reveals that physical health is not always an indicator of spirituality. One can be constantly ill or suffering from disease and still be in the will of God. The Christian life of Gaius depicts this reality. However, it is the will of God for Christians to be healthy both physically and spiritually and to prosper in secular affairs. Unlike some Christians who concentrate only on their spiritual health at the expense of their physical health, the exegetical study shows that Christians must see to both physical health and spiritual health together at the same time in their Christians’ lives. This is because both are interrelated and interdependent. Therefore, it is not good enough for a Christian to be spiritually healthy but physically sick. It is clear in the text that Christians’ physical well-being is equally important to their spiritual well-being.

As noted in the exegetical study of the chosen text, spiritual health is a product of nourishing oneself with the Word of God and “working out” that nourishment in godly exercise (1 Tim 4:6-7), that is, by keeping oneself clean as a Christian (2 Cor 7:1), avoiding the contamination and pollution that is in the world (2 Peter 1:4; James 1:27), and Christians rest in the Lord and gain new strength through fellowship with Him (Matt 11:18-30). Likewise, physical health is the product of nutrition, exercise, cleanliness, proper rest, and the disciplined order of a balanced life (INFOGuide Nigeria, 2023). Hence, Christians ought to pay attention to these issues to take proper care of their spiritual health and physical health. While Christians take proper care of their spiritual health, it is equally pertinent to take proper care of their physical health simultaneously as stated below.

First and foremost, Christians must see to stress management because the study reveals that “stress is the number one killer in the world today.” To this effect, Christians must find time for proper rest. Church must enlighten every member to be involved in the church ministries and activities. This allows the responsibility to be shared among the members of the church. Apart from this, Christians should maximize the primary purpose of the Sabbath day as the day of rest (Exod 20:9-10) by not getting too busy on the day of their worship. Thus, it will liberate church leaders like Gaius from unnecessary stress that may weaken their bodily health.

In addition, Churches must organize free medical checks and health talks to improve public health consciousness (Winnail, 2009). This will serve as liberation for Christians who are under bondage of health deterioration due to ignorance. To

achieve health education that will enlighten the Christians, the church should adopt what Yazachewand and Alem (2004) called “persuasive” and “informed decision-making” approaches to health education. While the persuasive approach has to do with an intentional effort to influence the other person in what we want them to do, the informed decision-making approach has to do with providing people with information, problems, and decision-making skills to make decisions but leaving the real choice to the people.

Apart from this, Christians must understand that not all sickness comes from the devil, malevolent spirits, or as a result of spiritual problems. It could come by the care they show their body. Therefore, Christians should show proper care for their body by eating the right food at the proper time (Eccl 10:17), sleeping right, or taking good care of their body as God’s temples, to be used for His glory (1 Cor 6:19-20), and God’s tools for His service (Rom 12:1-2). Besides, because unorthodox medication and treatment come from herbs that God provided for the use of human beings, Christians should not consider them as a fetish, idolatry, and evil, but to maximize herbs for their bodily health. The fact that study also reveals to us that not every sickness will be healed through divine intervention, it is equally essential for Christians to attend hospital for medical checks and treatments. This will equally improve Christians’ physical health.

Furthermore, one of the factors responsible for taking care of human bodily health is “bodily exercise.” No matter the amount of spirituality, such as prayer, fasting, and holiness in Christians’ lives, the place of bodily exercise cannot be over-emphasized. To this effect, Christians must engage themselves in physical exercise to be healthy physically.

In 1 Timothy 4:8, the Apostle Paul advised that, though our foremost concern should be on spiritual matters, physical exercise is good for our bodily health. Medically as Winnail (2009) notes regular exercise lowers cholesterol levels, reduces blood pressure and stress, prevents diabetes and heart diseases, and builds a strong heart. Therefore, exercise is a part of how Christians can care for their body, which is God’s temple to be used for His glory (1 Cor 6:19-20), and His tools for service (Rom 12:1-2). Though bodily exercise benefits Christians only during this life, godly exercise is profitable now and for eternity. According to Paul, God expects Christians to practice both bodily and godly exercises. A healthy body can be used by God, but Christians must focus on holiness (Wiersbe, 1989).

It is equally important to understand that cleanliness is a part of the care Christians can show their body. To this effect, Christians must see to effective waste management (Deut 23:13). This requires Churches to provide a waste bin in their church premises and their communities. Churches should also instruct their members on waste disposal and pay their waste payment to those who are in charge of waste disposal. In addition, Churches should provide good and modern toilets in their

church premises (Deut 23:13). Also, when Christian congregations hold their conventions and congresses, they should employ the services of waste collectors, and utilize mobile toilets in addition to their internal arrangement (Winnail 2009). Furthermore, apart from the diverse opinions of scholars on biblical injunctions on dietary instructions, Christians should be sensitive to health teachings that are attached to dietary instructions to be mindful of the kind of food they will be eating. This is because many unclean animals carry parasites that bring about serious diseases in humans. The Bible records many significant teachings that medical science has only newly come to understand. By divine inspiration, Moses recorded that the blood and fat of both clean and unclean animals should not be eaten as human food (Lev 3:17; 7:23-26; Gen 9:4). “The blood of animals can contain bacteria and viruses that transmit disease.” The purpose of this vital biblical prohibition was to prevent the spread of sickness. In the same vein, the prohibition against visible fat is similarly important—particularly as it relates to our contemporary diet. This is because “One of the most significant discoveries from epidemiological studies conducted in the last 50 years has been the link between high-fat diets and heart disease, stroke, and various types of cancer” (Winnail, 2009). These are the major causes of death in the world today. With evidence from medical science, excessive fat consumption is dangerous. However, before the medical science discoveries, God had revealed this truth to Moses thousands of years ago. Therefore, Christians must abstain from eating blood and fat for their bodily health.

### **Conclusion**

The study establishes that health education in 3 John 1:2 serves as a panacea to address Christian health illiteracy because it presents to Christians a balanced Christian healthy and happy life, which centers on prosperity in secular affairs and prosperity in both physical health and spiritual health. A healthy Christian life is not only to be healthy spiritually but also to be healthy physically. The study also educates Christians on Christian health illiteracy, which mainly stresses ignorance, wrong notions about the use of herbs, misuse of faith, and the belief that every sickness must be healed through divine healing. Unlike some Christians who concentrate only on their spiritual health at the expense of their physical health, the exegetical study shows that Christians must see to both physical health and spiritual health together at the same time in their Christians’ lives. This is because both are interrelated and interdependent. The better a man’s health, the more thoroughly he can do the work of God. While spiritual health is a product of nourishing oneself with the Word of God and “working out” that nourishment in godly exercise (1 Tim 4:6-7), it is equally important to understand the fact that physical health is the product of nutrition, exercise, cleanliness, proper rest, and the disciplined order of a balanced life (Wiersbe, 1989). The study concludes that 3 John 1:2 is not a mere conventional expression of good wishes. The apostle was concerned for the temporal well-being

of other Christians, particularly their bodily health, and not only for their spiritual welfare (Walvoord & Zuck, 2000).

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