

Conscious spirituality  in search of truth...

Mindfulness Selection 2020

"Mindfulness means moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness. It is cultivated by refining our capacity to pay attention, intentionally, in the present moment, and then sustaining that attention over time as best we can. In the process, we become more in touch with our life as it is unfolding."

— Jon Kabat-Zinn



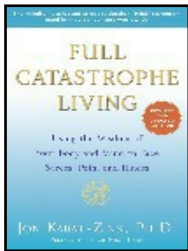
JON KABOT ZINN:FULL CATASTROPHE LIVING-MINDFULNESS

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JON KABOT ZINN:FULL CATASTROPHE LIVING-MINDFULNESS

Regular Mindfulness practices as identified in Jon Kabot Zinn's book "Full Catastrophe Living" promotes significant benefits to health wellbeing. Today in 2020 clinical health practices, organisations, employers, exercise trainers, education institutions, and individuals apply mindfulness on a regular basis.

Zinn is considered a leading exponent of mindfulness, breath control, and related practices to reduce physical and mental stress. Applying breath control techniques with a purpose, being non-judgemental can assist in reducing life's stresses. The Mind-Body Stress Reduction, MBSR practices developed by Zinn for use in his clinical settings have been used widely by thousands of people across the globe.

People who regularly meditate, participate in tai chi or yoga practices, singers, actors or performers are all cognisant of Zinn's and similarly related practises for maintaining positive breathing techniques. Zinn also suggests mindfulness body-scan techniques which can be applied prior to sleep, or lying down in the day comfortably. I first came across Zinn's early book titled, "Wherever You Go There You Are" in the 1980s, since then it has remained on my book-shelf. In 2017 whilst facilitating a soul pathways meditation-discussion group read the above book and suggested to participants they also access mindfulness resources. An extract from Zinn's inspirational book follows.

–Philip Crouch, Tasmania, 2020

INTRODUCTION TO JON KABOT ZINN

'The landmark work on mindfulness, meditation, and healing, now revised and updated after twenty-five years. Stress. It can sap our energy, undermine our health if we let it, even shorten our lives. It makes us more vulnerable to anxiety and depression, disconnection and disease.'

Based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's renowned mindfulness-based stress reduction program, this classic, groundbreaking work--which gave rise to a whole new field in medicine and psychology--shows you how to use medically proven mind-body approaches derived from meditation and yoga to counteract stress, establish greater balance of body and mind, and stimulate well-being and healing.

By engaging in these mindfulness practices and integrating them into your life from moment to moment and from day to day, you can learn to manage chronic pain, promote optimal healing, reduce anxiety and feelings of panic, and improve the overall quality of your life, relationships, and social networks.'
[Cited: *Book Depository*].



MINDFULNESS KEYS: PURPOSE - PRESENT MOMENT - NON JUDGEMENTAL

[PP: 45-46] MIND BODY STRESS REDUCTION, BREATH CONTROL

In MBSR [*Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction*], we generally focus on the sensations of breathing at the belly rather than the nostril or in the chest. This is partly because doing so tends to be particularly relaxing and calming in the early stages of practice. All professionals who make special use of their breathing as part of their work, such as opera singers, wind instrument players, dancers, actors, and martial artists, know the value of breathing from the belly and of “grounding” or anchoring their awareness in this region. They know from first hand experience that they will have more breath and be better able to modulate it effectively if the breath comes from the belly.

Focusing on the breath at your belly can be calming. Just as the surface of the ocean tends to be choppy when the wind is blowing, so too the “atmospheric conditions” in our own mind can influence the waves of the breath. Our breathing tends to be reactive and agitated when either the outside environment or the inner environment is not calm and peaceful.

In the case of the ocean, if you go down ten or twenty feet, there is only a gentle undulation; there is calm even when the surface is agitated. Similarly, when we focus on our breathing down in the belly, **we are tuning in to a region of the body that is far from the head and thus far below the agitations of our thinking mind. It is intrinsically calmer.**

So tuning in to the breath at the belly is a valuable way of reestablishing inner calmness and balance in the face of emotional upset or when you have a lot on your mind. **In meditation, the breath can serve as a reliable and ever-present anchor for our attention.** Tuning to the sensations of breathing anywhere we can them in the body allows us to drop below the surface agitations of the mind into relaxation, calmness, and stability, without having to change anything at all. The agitation and choppiness may still be at the surface of the mind, just as the waves and turbulence are at the surface of the water during stormy conditions.

But in resting in awareness of the breath sensations, even for a moment or two, we are out of the wind and protected from the buffeting action of the waves and their tension-producing effects. This is an extremely effective way to reconnect with the potential for calmness within you.



It enhances the overall stability of your mind, even in very difficult moments, when you most need some stability and clarity of mind. **When you touch base in any moment with that part of your mind that is already calm and stable**, your perspective immediately changes. You can see things more clearly and act from inner balance rather than being tossed about by the agitations of your mind.'

JOHN KABOT ZINN: MINDFULNESS - FULL BODY SCAN EXERCISE

[PP: 95-97] MIND BODY SCAN 1-13

- (1) Lie down on your back in a comfortable place**, such as on a foam mat or pad on the floor or on your bed. Keep in mind from the very beginning that in this lying down practice, the intention is to “fall awake” rather than to fall asleep. Make sure that you will be warm enough. You might want to cover yourself with a blanket or do it in a sleeping bag if the room is cold.

- (2) Allow your eyes to gently close**, But if and when you find any drowsiness creeping in, feel free to open your eyes and continue with them open.

- (3) Gently let your attention settle on your abdomen, feeling the rising and falling** of your belly with each inbreath and each outbreath; in other words, “riding the waves” of your own breathing with full awareness for the full duration of each inbreath, and the full duration of each outbreath.

- (5) Take a few moments to feel your body as a whole, from head to toe**; the “envelope” of your skin; the sensations associated with touch in the places you are in contact with the floor or the bed.

- (6) Bring your attention to the toes of the left foot. As you direct your attention to them, see if you can direct or channel your breathing to them as well**, so that it feels as if you are breathing *to* your toes and *out* from your toes. It may take a while for you to get the hang of this so that it doesn't feel effortful or contrived.



It may help to imagine your breath travelling down the body from your nose into the lungs and continuing through the torso and down the left leg all the way to the toes, and then back again an out through your nose. Actually, the breath does take this and every other route in the body, through the blood stream. **Allow yourself to *feel* any and all sensations from your toes, perhaps distinguishing between them** and watching the flux of sensations in this region. If you don't feel anything at the moment, that is fine too. Just allow yourself to feel **“not feeling anything.”**

- (7) **When you are ready to leave the toes and move on, take a deeper, more intentional breath in all the way down to the toes and, on the outbreath, allow them to “dissolve” in your mind’s eye.** Stay with your breathing for a few breaths as least, and then move on in turn to the sole of the foot, the heel, the top of the foot, and then the ankle, continuing to breathe in *to* and out *from* each region as you observe the sensations that you are experiencing, and then letting go of that region and moving on.
- (8) As with the awareness-of-breathing exercise (Chapter 3) and the sitting meditation practices (Chapter 4), bring your mind back to the breath and to the region you are focusing on each time your notice that your attention has wandered off, after first taking note of what carried you away in the first place of what is on your mind when you realize it has wandered away from the focus on the body.
- (9) In this way, as described in the text of this chapter, **continue moving slowly up your left leg and through the rest of your body as you maintain the focus of the breath and on the sensations within the individual regions** as you come to them. If you are experiencing pain or discomfort of any kind, consult the sections in this chapter that suggest how to work with discomfort, as well as Chapters 22 and 23.



- (10) Practice the body scan at least once a day. Again, it helps to use the CD for guidance in the beginning stages of your practice so that the pace is slow enough, and to you remember the instructions and their tonal quality accurately.
- (11) Remember that the body scan is the first formal mindfulness practice that our patients engage in intensively and that they do it forty-five minutes a day, six days a week, for at least two weeks straight in the beginning of their training in MBSR [*Mind Body Stress Research*]. So when you are ready, that would be a good strategy for undertaking the next steps in your own developing meditation practice, especially if you want to follow the full curriculum of MBSR and give it and yourself a fair chance.
- (12) If you have trouble staying awake, try doing the body scan with your eyes open, as not is **step 2** above.
- (13) The most important point is to get down on the floor and practice. How much or for how long in not as important as that you make the time for it at all, every day if possible.



Suggested resources:

Full Catastrophe Living -Jon Kabot Zinn, 2013, Bantam Books Trade, USA Isbn:9780345536938. *Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, Illness.*

<https://www.bookdepository.com/Full-Catastrophe-Living-Jon-Kabat-Zinn-Thich-Nhat-Hanh/9780345536938?ref=grid-view>

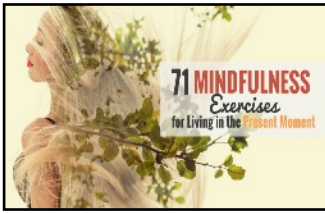
<https://www.mindfulnesscds.com/>

https://youtu.be/3nwwKbM_vJc

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AN EXTRACT FROM 71 MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

A basic definition of mindfulness as this applies in everyday life is being fully aware of having a purpose, being in the 'present moment' [not just living in the past or future] and most importantly, not being judgemental with yourself.

Mindfulness Hamilton is an online resource website which displays seventy-one useful mindfulness exercises which can be easily assimilated into a regular practice. The benefits to mental, emotional, spiritual and physical well being far out weigh the effort of learning various mindfulness techniques. These suggested exercises don't require hours in a sweaty gym, pounding a pavement, enrolling in programs-courses or buying expansive books, its simply a matter of practicing.

Featured mindfulness exercises displayed on this website can be carried out easily, it's only a matter of choice in what you might need right now. Of the seventy one suggested Mindfulness Hamilton exercises I've selected five which I regularly apply. These are, #26 Mindful Driving, #34 Outcome Directed Thinking, #47 Music Break, #48 Cultivate Humility, and #58 Walking Meditation.

—Philip Crouch, Tasmania, 2020

SELECTED EXTRACTS: MINDFULNESS EXERCISES FOR DAILY LIVING

EXERCISE #26: PRACTICE MINDFUL DRIVING

*'If your morning routine involves driving to work, running errands, or taking your children to school, you know how "mindless" people can be in morning rush-hour traffic and how stressful driving in your car can be. If you know that driving causes you to feel anger, stress, and anxiety, then you can change your viewpoint of this task by practicing mindfulness. **When you get into your car, take a few deep breaths.***

Don't turn on the radio or create other distractions while in the car. Turn your phone on silent. As you begin to drive, make an extra effort to notice your surroundings. If you get stuck in traffic or someone cuts you off, notice the feelings that arise (anger, frustration, anxiety, competitiveness), and simply identify them.

***Use traffic stops or other necessary stops to practice a few deep, calming breaths.** Once you arrive at your destination after you've turned off the engine, sit for a moment and take three deep breaths, really letting go on the exhalation. Do you have a long and stress filled commute to work? Get some ideas to make it better with some mindful commuting practices.'*



EXERCISE #34: PRACTICE OUTCOME-DIRECTED THINKING

‘Often we delve into our work with a “Just get it done” mind-set. We plow through the tasks mindlessly, just so we can check the item off the to-do list and move on. Rather than beginning a task in this state of numbed-out unconsciousness, take a few minutes to think about what you’d like to accomplish by practicing what’s called “outcome-directed thinking.” **When you focus your attention on a desired outcome** rather than on perceived problems, you’ll see opportunities where others don’t and get through obstacles that may impede other people.’

EXERCISE #47: TAKE A MUSIC BREAK

Listening to music is a powerful mindfulness habit that can reduce stress, elevate your mood, raise your IQ, and offer many other mental and physical health benefits. Taking a break to actively listen to music for a few minutes during your day can help you return to your work in a more positive, peaceful, and productive frame of mind. In fact, listening to music—especially classical music—can change your brain in ways that improve memory and learning.

EXERCISE #48: CULTIVATE HUMILITY

When you are humble, you are grounded in yourself with enough self-assurance and poise that you don’t need to show off, act defensive, or toot your own horn. When you practice humility, you intentionally let go of self-aggrandizing behaviors and thoughts that put you in a “me first” frame of mind. Working toward humility is a growth experience in which you no longer need to see yourself above others—nor do you put yourself below them. You have a sense of confident neutrality about who you are as compared to others. You view your own strengths and weaknesses accurately, and you recognize that everyone has intrinsic value, even those who appear “beneath” you in some way.

EXERCISE #58: PRACTICE WALKING MEDITATION ¹

A walking meditation requires engaging all your senses. **You are intentionally aware of your feet hitting the ground, your eyes taking in the sights around you, your lungs breathing the air in and out, and your ears hearing every sound.** It’s a practice that allows you to be more connected with the environment, which is an essential part of who we are. Being in nature releases you from the ongoing internal dialogue of your mind and makes you more aware of the beauty of the outdoors. By combining walking with mindfulness, you are practicing an excellent habit for releasing the stress of the day so you can transition to your evening activities in a more harmonious frame of mind.

¹ This exercise is a regular practice for me





Suggested resources:

Mindfulness Hamilton – '71 Mindfulness Exercises for Living in the Present Moment.'

<https://mindfulnesshamilton.ca/resources/online>

<https://www.developgoodhabits.com/mindfulness-exercises/>

<https://www.mindfulnesscds.com/>

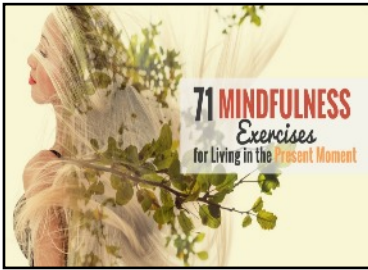
https://youtu.be/3nwwKbM_vJc

<https://www.bookdepository.com/Full-Catastrophe-Living-Jon-Kabat-Zinn-Thich-Nhat-Hanh/9780345536938?ref=grid-view>

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SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS AND MINDFULNESS

The following online article extract was posted on Mindfulness Hamilton's web site by a school teacher, Ken Burgess, 26th November 2018. The article headed "It stops the scary stuff pupils thrive with mindfulness lessons," is extremely interesting. This focused program was implemented at the English Martyrs Primary School, in Merseyside, England and has proved successful for students and teachers alike.

According to the school principal, implementing this Mindfulness program far outweighed any remuneration issues for a training educator. In my own life experience, having grown up, like many others in a socially disadvantaged in England, and also in disadvantage areas in NSW, Australia can appreciate how mindfulness exercises can advantage human development. Mindfulness programs when implemented can contribute significantly to overall wellbeing for young students—and older adults alike when these simple exercises are followed. An extract from the article written by Ken Burgess, and comments from the school's head teach Lewis Dinsdale appear below.

—Philip Crouch, Tasmania, 2020

KEN BURGESS: MINDFULNESS INTRODUCED INTO DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS

...A Mindfulness Class at English Martyrs Primary School on Merseyside, UK

'English Martyrs Catholic primary school in Litherland is a stone's throw from one of Merseyside's most notorious areas for gangs and gun crime, and most children at the school have been affected by the violence. It is an unlikely place, perhaps, to find a thriving mindfulness teaching programme. But English Martyrs is one of a growing number of schools in deprived parts of Britain that are embracing meditation techniques to help vulnerable children cope.

"We see a lot of pressure put on children's shoulders due to family circumstances, parents losing their jobs, financial stress, anxiety about crime, fear about homelessness," said head teacher Lewis Dinsdale.

"Children internalise things, but what mindfulness has done is bring a number of quieter children to the surface - children who we'd never have known were going through such anxiety and stress at home. They haven't wanted to speak to their mum and dad about it but it's coming out in these sessions."

One nine-year-old-boy confided that "petal breathing" - where the children open and close their fingers in time with their breath - helped him to forget about "all the scary stuff". "If I concentrate on my breathing, the worrying thoughts just go 'pop' and disappear," he said. Nationally, the Mindfulness in Schools Project said it had trained nearly 2,000 teachers this year, a jump of 40% on last year, and much of that growth came from schools with higher than average proportions of vulnerable children.

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But for cash-strapped schools, it's not cheap. Dinsdale said that he had to find £2,500 to train one member of staff. "As a head teacher you're always looking at the bottom line, and that's a lot of money," he said.'

The investment had paid off, he said, not just helping with children's mental health but improving their academic performance too. He described how some children used to have panic attacks when sitting SATs. One girl had been physically sick on her test paper. He was critical of Ofsted inspectors for not being more tuned in to the benefits of mindfulness. "It's frustrating because it isn't a box that they have to tick," he said.

English Martyrs head teacher Lewis Dinsdale is enthusiastic about the benefits of meditation for young children. Dinsdale has been so convinced by the positive effect that the school has now introduced mindfulness workshops for parents too. "Some mums and dads are at breaking point and they're taking it out on the children. They don't know who to turn to," he said.

The Raise the Youth Foundation in Bolton, a non-profit independent school, teaches children who have been excluded from the education system. Many of them have suffered abuse, lived on the streets and been in and out of foster care. "We are their last hope," said Jason Steele, the school's founder.

He said that the school brought mindfulness into the curriculum two years ago, though at the time he was far from convinced that it would have any significant effect. "I thought they'd be playing up," he said. "But what's surprised me is that all of them have taken something from it, some more than others."

Steele said children at his school were probably among the most difficult young people to care for because they were used to pushing people away. **Mindfulness, though, had built their self-esteem and was now a hugely positive force in their lives.** "It's helping them to engage with the present rather than worrying about the future or blaming the past for everything," he said.

Many of the teenagers have missed years of schooling; most have never sat exams before. He said that before mindfulness became part of the curriculum, they would do everything they could to avoid taking tests. "They would just run around school slapping people, calling them Muppets, ripping paper, just really low-level behaviour," he said.



That type of disruptive behaviour has not gone away, but it has tailed off. It happened because they were scared of failure, he said. That had been their life experience. “But showing them how to do meditation is helping them learn about relaxation, it’s given them a confidence they never had.”



Suggested resources:

Mindfulness Hamilton - *Schools and Mindfulness, 2018.*

<https://mindfulnesshamilton.ca/it-stops-the-scary-stuff-pupils-thrive-with-mindfulness-lessons>

<https://mindfulnesshamilton.ca/resources/online>

<https://mindfulnessinschools.org/>

<https://www.raisetheyouth.co.uk/>

<https://www.mindfulnesscds.com/>

<https://mindfulnesshamilton.ca/author/kgburgess>

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THE CONSCIOUS LIFE: MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS

Meditation for many people is consciously a daily practice that focuses on an inner reflection, contemplation, and developing a spiritual interconnectedness with a higher source. Whilst there are thousands of meditation methods that can be adapted too, ultimately its the benefits that contribute to mind-body-spirit balance that are most important.

The process of developing your practice may change as you gain confidence, experience life transitions, and discover additional meditation practices. Health practitioners, employers, education systems, local yoga or tai chi groups and more now regularly apply various forms of meditative practices. For people new to meditation practise it's not necessary to purchase expensive DVDs, enrol in programs, or purchase 'guru' style books. People with mobility or restrictive physical movement should be encouraged to develop a form of meditation practice as this would greatly benefit physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. The Conscious Life web site provides a valuable entry resource for seekers of Truth who want to begin their meditation practice as easy to follow guidelines are offered. Since the late 1970s Ive practiced various forms of meditation, and encouraged others to begin. "The Conscious Life" website suggestions offering simple meditation guidelines are recommended below.

—Philip Crouch, Tasmania, 2020

*'Ordinary men hate solitude,
But the master makes use of it,
Embracing his aloneness, realizing,
He is one with the whole universe.'
—Lao Tzu, Tao-Te-Ching*

THE CONSCIOUS LIFE: HOW TO MEDITATE... FOR BEGINNERS

'1: CHOOSE A CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT.

Find a nice, quiet place where you won't be disturbed for fifteen minutes or longer. Sit down, relax and rest your hands on your lap. You can sit on the floor cross-legged with the support of a meditation cushion, or on any chair with your feet resting on the ground. It is not necessary to force yourself into a lotus position if you are not used to it. **Regardless of how you sit, it is important to maintain the natural curve of your back.** That means no slouching. People with chronic back problems who cannot sit for a prolonged period of time can explore other meditation positions.

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2: BREATHE SLOWLY AND DEEPLY.

Close your eyes softly. Direct your soft, unfocused gaze downwards. Begin by taking a few slow and deep breaths – inhaling with your nose and exhaling from your mouth. **Don't force your breathing; let it come naturally.** The first few intakes of air are likely to be shallow, but as you allow more air to fill your lungs each time, your breaths will gradually become deeper and fuller. Take as long as you need to breathe slowly and deeply.

THE CONSCIOUS LIFE: MEDITATION TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

3: BE AWARE

When you are breathing deeply, you will begin to feel calmer and more relaxed. That is a good sign. Now, focus your attention on your breathing. Be aware of each breath that you take in through your nose. Be mindful of each breath that you exhale with your mouth. Continue focusing on your breaths for as long as you like. If you find your attention straying away from your breaths, just gently bring it back. It may happen many times. Don't be disheartened. What's important is to realize that you have wandered and bring your attention back to where it should be. As you develop greater focus power, you will find it easier to concentrate.

4: ENDING THE SESSION

When you are ready to end the session, open your eyes and stand up slowly. Stretch yourself and extend your increased awareness to your next activities. Well done! You have done it!

- Aim to have the length of your exhalations as long, if not longer, than your inhalations.** By expelling more used air, you make more room for fresh air to fill your lungs. If your out-breaths are much shorter than the in-breaths, you can help to expel more air by gently contracting your abdominal muscles.
- **If the weather is chilly, keep yourself warm with a blanket or shawl during meditation.**
- Meditating with an empty or full stomach may be distracting or even uncomfortable.** Make sure there is something in your tummy, but not so much that you feel distracted while sitting.



- Some people find it easier to meditate with light music or other relaxing sounds in the background**, while others prefer total silence. If you belong to the first group, choose an appropriate music that helps you to calm down and yet won't distract you from your practice. *One example from native American flute music, is the sound of nature.*

6: HOW OFTEN SHOULD I MEDITATE?

- **Once a day, or more if you wish.** Some people meditate in the morning before breakfast and have another session just before they sleep. Meditation may seem like a chore at first, but learn to enjoy it and look forward to it everyday. See it as an opportunity, rather than an item on your to-do list, to spend some intimate moments with yourself. Cultivate meditation as a habit that you'd do naturally every day, like brushing of your teeth.

7: HOW LONG DO I NEED TO MEDITATE EACH TIME?

- Aim for at least fifteen minutes for each session.** For most people, it will normally take ten minutes or more for the mind to settle down. So if your meditation is too short, you would find the session has ended before you even have a chance to get into it.

8: WHY DO I FIND IT SO HARD TO CONCENTRATE OF SIT STILL DURING MEDITATION

- Many people, including long-time meditators, have experienced occasions when they find their concentration is not as focused as they want it to be.** So, it is important to be patient and compassionate with yourself, especially if you are a beginner.
- Meditation requires your mind to be quiet.** Therefore, anything that stimulates your mind just before your sitting is not going to be very helpful, such as a heated argument with your partner, an exciting computer game, a dramatic movie or a thought-provoking book. If you find yourself often having a hard time sitting still during meditation, try to avoid engaging in any of these activities prior to your session.
- Some people also find a relaxation exercise** or a gentle stretch before meditation helps them to get into a tranquil state faster.
- Alternatively, you can try walking meditation** if you face difficulty with the sitting version, or work on improving your concentration.





Suggested resources:

Meditation for Beginners - The Conscious Life

<https://theconsciouslife.com/how-to-meditate-a-guide-for-beginners.htm>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHdOSMpZ1_w

<https://theconsciouslife.com/meditation-positions-back-friendly.htm>

Native American Flute Music

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHdOSMpZ1_w

<https://mindfulnesshamilton.ca/resources/online>

<https://www.mindfulnesscds.com/>

https://youtu.be/3nwwKbM_vJc

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