Exploring the Interconnectedness of Two Doctrines: The Pentateuchal Image of God and the Quranic Caliph of God

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Abstract

Within the Abrahamic Sacred books, two distinct concepts regarding the position of humanity in the creation narrative emerge: the image of God in the Torah and the caliph of God in the Qur'an. While initially appearing unrelated and unsuitable for comparison, this essay aims to delve into the intriguing relevance between these two concepts. The research adopts a historical linguistic approach, employing methods such as Semitic etymology and semantic typology. Throughout the semantic investigation, the essay draws upon general linguistic data on one side and conducts a semantic analysis of Biblical-Quranic applications on the other.

In conclusion, this essay reveals that both Biblical and Quranic expressions on this matter refer to a semantic continuum ranging from 'resemblance' to 'having dominion.' Differences manifest in the restriction of this continuum within certain limits, achieved through the use of distinct words, roots, or contextual applications. Notably, Davidian accounts in the Old Testament showcase the entire range of the continuum, whereas the Torah emphasizes the 'resemblance' aspect, and the Qur'an emphasizes 'having dominion' over all creatures.

Keywords: Comparative religious studies, Psalms, Semitic studies, Semantic typology

1. Introduction

The doctrines of the image of God in the Torah the 'caliph of God' in the Qur'an have long served as profound sources of inspiration for believers and thinkers within the Abrahamic tradition. These doctrines have played pivotal roles in shaping Abrahamic religious anthropology and have exerted a lasting influence across various fields, from theology to ethics. Despite the extensive history of comparative studies between Abrahamic sacred books, conventionally, these two doctrines were perceived as disconnected. This perceived separation led some Muslim scholars from early times to incorporate the concept of the 'image of God' as an amendment to the 'caliph of God' doctrine, utilizing Hadith traditions. The primary inquiry in this essay revolves around uncovering a latent connection between pertinent verses in the Torah and the Qur'an through a comprehensive semantic analysis. The methodological approach involves historical semantic analysis, employing a combination of methods such as Semitic etymology, componential analysis of lexica, and textual analysis of lexemes.

2. Succession and Resemblance: Establishing a Semantic Connection

A crucial step in conducting this investigation involves elucidating the semantic connection between the meanings of succession and resemblance. For a discerning individual, it is apparent that when someone succeeds another, the expectation is for them to possess capacities and characteristics akin to their predecessor.

This rational link between succession and resemblance gives rise to a semantic relationship, as evidenced in Mawson's edition of Roget's Thesaurus, where under the title 'alter ego,' four meanings are listed: auxiliarity, deputy (linked with succession), friend, and similarity (Roget,1911, p. 359). Similar semantic connections are evident in various linguistic sources, as illustrated in literary applications from different languages (Perrin, 1820, p.196).

Despite the availability of evidence in lexical semantic sources, a wide array of connections between succession and resemblance can be observed in literature across various languages, transcending specific

linguistic boundaries. In the realm of biblical studies, relevant passages in German and English serve as illustrative examples:

„So werden auch wir christum kennen lernen, Ihn erfahren und erleben, wenn wir Ihm als treue Nachfolger Seines Lebens und Wirkens gleichförmig zu werden suchen; je inniger die Nachfolge, je grösser die Aehlichkeit" (Tauler, 1924, p. 228).

„How long did Jothan reign in Judah? Did his successor resemble him"? (Author of the Javenile Review, 1827, p.27).

"Moses stretched out his hand and waters (of the Red Sea) were divided and the Israelites passed through as on dry land, the waters forming a wall on the right and on the left. Elijah appointed as his successor a man who served him as minister and came to resemble him in many ways – Elisha, who, like Elijah, split the Jordan and walked across (Allison, 2013, p. 42)

"The phenomenon itself is hardly surprising. Once Moses become the paradigmatic leader of Isarael and Joshua his protégé, it seems a natural development to try and make his successor resemble him as much as possible" (Farber, 2016, p. 131).

Moreover, historical accounts, such as those pertaining to the line of kings in early 19th-century Spain, emphasize the thematic connection between succession and resemblance; like an account of Ferdinand – Charles V – Philip II which says: "But as he did not resemble his predecessor, neither did his successor resemble him: Philip his son, inherited the genuine spirit of Ferdinand and resumed his dark and intricable politics" (Andrew, 1808, p. 30).

To strengthen the argument for a semantic rational connection between succession and resemblance from a universal standpoint, also modern management science teachings can be referenced. Principles articulated by Smith and White emphasize the tendency for new CEOs to resemble their predecessors as quoted: "In general, there is a striking tendency for new CEOs to resemble their predecessors (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996, p. 187).

Exactly in this concern, Finkelstein and Hambrick give us three key propositions as follows:

Proposition 6-14: The more powerful the predecessor CEO, the more the successor resembles the predecessor.

Proposition 6-15: The less powerful or less vigilant the board, the more a successor resembles the predecessor.

Proposition 6-16: The higher the recent performance of the organization, the more a successor resembles the predecessor (Finkelstein, Hambrick & Cannella ,2009, p. 194).

The semantic connection between succession and resemblance is considered and focused on by Muslim philosophers too. First of all, it is Avicenna (d. 1037) who spoke of this God- human common characteristics without direct reference to the meaning of 'resemblance'. Speaking of man as 'caliph of God', he stated that: "for the successor (caliph) of God on earth, it is expected to be a human deity (rabb al-nawʿ) and after God, it is expected for him to be capable to be served by creatures" (Ibn Sīnā, 1960, p. 455).

Avicenna's statement is echoed by later philosophers (Mīr Dāmād, 1988, p. 397; Sabzawārī, 2004, p. 308), and the discussion evolves with Mulla Sadra (d. 1640) directly addressing the concept of resemblance in the context of the 'caliph of God.' speaking about the teaching of 'caliph of God', he said: "It is expected for the successor to do the same deeds that does the predecessor; the only difference is the fact that successor does the deeds in a weaker manner" (Mullā Ṣadrā, al-Ḥāšiya, p. 176).

Mulla Salih Mazandarani's perspective as a Shi'a scholar (d. 1675) further emphasizes the importance of similitude in the successors of the Prophet, underlining their resemblance in all characteristics except prophecy (Māzandarānī, 2000, pp. 5/349). Additionally, Mazandarani underscores the necessity for successors to know and act in accordance with the Qur'an (idem, pp. 11/16)

2-1. mṯl/mšl as a bridge between succession and resemblance

In search of semantic connection between succession and resemblance, it is conducive to investigate the common Semitic root √mṯl > mšl and its applications in the Old Testament and the Qur'an. The core meaning of the root is extended in Semitic languages in two ways: to resemble as more common line, and to govern in other line. The meanings with the core 'to resemble' appears in Semitic cognates such as:

Akkadian mašālu(m): 'to equal' (Black et al., 2000, p. 201); mišlu(m), mešlu : 'half, middle, centre' (idem, 212); seemingly also connected mušālu(m) : metal mirror (idem, 221);

Ugaritic mšlt : garment, harness (shirt), comparison (Del Olmo & Sanmartín, 2003, p. 329);

Hebrew מָשַׁל (māšal): to represent, to be like | to use a proverb, to speak in proverbs or sentences of poetry; מֹשֶׁל (mešel): likeness, one like (Gesenius, 1939, p. 605);

Phoenician √mšl : likeness, resemblance (Krahmalkov, 2000, p. 317);

Aramaic מָשַׁל (māšal): to speak metaphorically (Jastrow, 1903, p. 2/855);

Syriac ܡܬܠܐ (mtalā): to compare, to symbolize | to use a parable (Costaz, 2002: 194); ܡܬܠܐ (mtalā): parable, proverb, story; ܡܬܡܬܠܝܐ (metmetloyā) : fashioned (Brun, 1895: 327);

Mandaic √mtl : 'to liken unto, to compare | to make parables (Drower & Macuch, 1963: 281); Arabic مثل (√mṯl) : to resemble, to imitate anyone | to punish anyone as an example, to mutilate'; مَثَّلَ (maṯṯala): to compare anyone with; مَثَل (maṯal): similar, comparison | proverb, parable, maxim, narration, argument (Hava, 1899: 699); مِثل (miṯl) : 'a like, a similar person or thing, match, fellow, an analogue' (Lane, 1968: 8/3017); مِثَال (miṯāl) : 'mode, manner, fashion, form' (idem, 8/3017), pattern, type, example (Hava, 1899: 699); تِمثَال (timṯāl) : 'image, statue, likeness' (idem, 700);

Epigraphic Sout Arabic √mṯl : 'the like of, similar in status to someone' | 'statue, image' (Beeston et al., 1982: 88);

Geez መሰለ, መስለ (masala, masla) : 'to be like, to look like, to be likened to, to resemble, to appear, to seem' (Leslau, 1991, p. 365).

The meanings with the core 'to govern' appears in cognates like followings:

Hebrew מָשַׁל (māšal): to rule, to have dominion, to reign (Gesenius, 1939, p. 605);

Phoenician √mšl : to rule over (Krahmalkov, 2000, p. 316); to rule, to have dominion (Hoftijzer & Jongeling, 1995, p. 702);

Aramaic מָשַׁל (māšal): to handle, to touch | to attend, to manage, to control, to govern, to rule (Jastrow, 1903, pp. 2/855);

Arabic مَثَلَ (maṯala): to remain standing before someone (Hava, 1899, p.699); to stand erect (Lane, 1968, pp. 8/3017).

A comparison between these two lines of meanings, proves that the meaning of 'to resemble' is the older one ad more original. Then, one can conclude that the meaning of 'stand for, represent' was a bridge to reach the extensive meaning of 'to rule, to govern'.

2-1-1. Bridging role of mṯl/mšl in David's words

Apart from the etymology, it is more important that the two lines of meanings for the root √mṯl > mšl are integrated in some Biblical passages narrated from David, parallel to Quranic accounts about Adam and David being caliphs of God. I already tried to show the bridging role of the Psalms between Pentateuchal and Quranic teachings, in some cases such as the 'inheritance of the earth by righteous people' (Pslams, 37, p.29; see: Pakatchi, 2018: 21-35). In the case of man as caliph of God, it seems that the Psalms can be helpful to bridge the gap between the Torah and the Qur'an. In this regard, first of all, it should be recited some verses speaking of the position of man among God's creature as follows:

ה: מָה־אֱנוֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֶנּוּ וּבֶן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֶנּוּ

ו: וַתְּחַסְּרֵהוּ מְּעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תְּעַטְּרֵהוּ

ז: תַּמְשִׁילֵהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדֶיךָ כֹּל שַׁתָּה תַחַת־רַגְלָיו

ח: צֹנֶה וַאֲלָפִים כֻּלָּם וְגַם בַּהֲמוֹת שָׂדָי

ט: צִפּוֹר שָׁמַיִם וּדְגֵי הַיָּם עֹבֵר אָרְחוֹת יַמִּים

4) what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? 5) For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honour. 6) You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet. 7) All sheep and oxen, even the beasts of the field; 8) The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, that pass through the paths of the seas (Psalms, 8, pp. 4-8).

Also it should be referred to another passage speaking of David's kingship in the Second Book of Samuel, where we read:

א וְאֵלֶּה דִּבְרֵי דָוִד הָאַחֲרֹנִים נְאֻם דָּוִד בֶּן־יִשַׁי וּנְאֻם הַגֶּבֶר הֻקַם עָל מְשִׁיחַ אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וּנְעִים זְמִרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל:

ב רוּחַ יְהֹוָה דִּבֶּר־בִּי וּמִלָּתוֹ עַל־לְשׁוֹנִי:

ג אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִי דִבֶּר צוּר יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשֵׁל בָּאָדָם צַדִּיק מוֹשֵׁל יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים:

1) Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel. 2) The spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. 3) The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. (2 Sam, 23, pp.1-3)

In comparing these two passages, it is noteworthy that the pivotal terms elucidating the position of the prototypal man (Adam) and David originate from an identical root, namely √mšl. The passage addressing man (Adam) employs the verb תִּמְשִׁילֵהוּ to denote the position of ruling and having dominion over God's creation. In another passage detailing David's governance over men, the term used is מוֹשֵׁל.

Transitioning to the Qur'an, a parallel observation emerges as the word conveying the position of both Adam and David remains consistent. This shared term in both Quranic accounts is خَليفة (ḫalīfa), a term that has been borrowed into English as 'caliph.' The pertinent verses are as follows:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (٣٠) وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (بقره/٣١).

Behold thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent (caliph) on earth." They said "Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what ye know not." (30) And He taught Adam the nature of all things; then He placed them before the angels and said: "Tell Me the nature of these if ye are right." (2: 31)

يَا دَاوُودُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ فَاحْكُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوَى فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَضِلُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ بِمَا نَسُوا يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ (ص/٢۶)

O David! We did indeed make thee a vicegerent (caliph) on earth: so judge thou between men in truth (and justice): nor follow thou the lusts

(of thy heart) for they will mislead thee from the Path of Allah: for those who wander astray from the Path of Allah is a Penalty Grievous for that they forget the Day of Account. (38: 26)

2-1-2. Bridging role of the Greek word 'eikon'

The Greek word εἰκών (eikon), commonly known in English as 'icon,' holds significance within English culture, particularly as a "devotional painting of Christ or another holy figure, typically on wood, venerated in the Byzantine and other Eastern churches" (Stevenson & Waite, 2011: 706). However, beyond its familiar application, this term was deliberately chosen by the translators of the Septuagint as the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew צֶלֶם (ṣelem), signifying 'image.' This choice is evident when referring to Adam being created in the image of God in the Torah. The narrative of Adam's creation in Genesis reads as follows:

כו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בִדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעֹוף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה
וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:
כז וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמֹו בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתֹו זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

26 Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 27). So, God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis, 1, pp.26-27)

The translation is Septuagint is as follows:

26) καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ᾽ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ᾽ ὁμοίωσιν, καὶ ἀρχέτωσαν τῶν ἰχθύων τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τῶν πετεινῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῶν κτηνῶν καὶ πάσης τῆς γῆς καὶ πάντων τῶν ἑρπετῶν τῶν ἑρπόντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

27) καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, κατ᾽ εἰκόνα θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτόν, ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς.

According to Greek lexicography, the word εἰκών encompasses a spectrum of meanings, including likeness, image (whether picture or stature), image in a mirror, personal description, semblance, phantom,

similitude, comparison, pattern, and archetype (Liddell & Scott, 1996, p. 485), all of which fall within the realm of resemblance.

This term traces its origins back to the proto-Indo-European root *u̯eik- (Beekes, 2010, p. 382), offering several applications relevant to this inquiry:

1.   *u̯eik-1: to choose, to separate out, found in Sanskrit, Avestan, as well as certain languages of Italic and Germanic branches (Pokorny, 1959: 3/1128; Monier-Williams, 1979, p. 987).

2.   *u̯eik-2: energetic force, typically hostile, with extensions such as victory, battle, to fight, and to overcome, present in Celtic, Germanic, Baltic, and Slavic languages (DeVaan, 2008, p. 679; Glare, 1990, p. 2057; Pokorny, 1959, pp. 3/1128).

3.   *u̯eik-3: to come together, to become equal, with extensions such as resemble, be like, found in Greek and the language of the Baltic branch (Pokorny, 1959, pp. 3/1129).

4.   *u̯eik-4, *u̯eig-: to bend, to curve, to go round, to exchange, with descendants in Greek, Indo-Iranian, Italic, Germanic, and Baltic languages (idem, 3/1130). Notably, Latin word vicis, meaning 'the place or part filled by a person is rotation, succession, etc.' (Glare, 2056; Pokorny, 1959, pp. 3/1131), holds particular importance for this essay.

Pokorny asserts that the latter is derived from an older root *u̯ei-, signifying 'to turn, to bend,' with descendants found in various branches of Indo-European languages, encompassing Sanskrit, Greek, Albanian, Latin, as well as languages within Celtic, Germanic, Baltic, and Slavic branches (Pokorny, 1959, pp. 3/1121, 1130). However, in a semantic evaluation, all roots from 1 to 3 trace back to root 4 and, consequently, to the older root *u̯ei-. The meaning 'to battle' serves as a semantic extension of 'to be/become equal,' which can be analyzed by referring to English verbs like 'act against, counteract.' Another relevant term is the English word 'match,' which carries dual meanings of 'competition' and 'likeness.' Furthermore, the traditional Chinese character 競 (jìng) etymologically refers to two individuals in interaction—signifying equivalence—while in Chinese lexicon, it denotes the meaning 'to compete, to struggle' (Howell, 2016, p. 34).

It is noteworthy to mention that Glare also establishes a connection between root C and some cognates of root B in Oscan from the Italic branch, as well as Gothic and Anglo-Saxon languages (Glare, 1990: 2004). Additionally, Dolgopolsky, in reference to the Latvian term vèikt, which means 'to manage, to carry out' and is related to root B, asserts that it is derived from the proto-Indo-European *u̯eik-, signifying 'resembling,' i.e., root C (Dolgopolsky, 2008, pp.2301-2302).

Concerning the connection between the roots A and C, it is Pokorny who mentions these words including the descendants of the root 1: Old Anglo-Saxon wēoh, wīg : 'idol, god's image', Old Saxon : wīh : temple, Old Icelandic vē- : 'sanctuary, temple' (Pokorny, 1959, pp. 3/1128). Also, the connection between the meanings of 'to separate' and 'to resemble' can be observed in Aramaic צְלַח (ṣālaḥ) having a meaning in a range between 'to split' and 'to become fit' (Jastrow, 1903, pp. 2/1283).

The connection between the Sanskrit vivikta, meaning 'kept apart, distinguished, separated' (Monier-Williams, 1979, p. 987) belonging the the root A, with the Latin words vincō (to conquer, overcome) and victor (conquerer, winner) – root B - is also proved by some etymologists (DeVaan, 2008, p. 679). Anyway, the relationship between the 4 roots is more understandable, when one considers that bending a thing, the result is a separation with two equal matches.

While the awareness of translators regarding the far-reaching roots of the Greek word when translating the Hebrew צֶלֶם (ṣelem) to εἰκών may be uncertain, the etymological evidence not only justifies the semantic connection between 'dominion' and 'resemblance', but also highlights an inherent integrity in the roots of the pivotal word concerning Adam's position in the Septuagint, εἰκών.

3. Exploring the Quranic Term 'Ḫalīfa' within its Context

Within the provided information about the context, a semantic continuum encompassing 'resemblance-succession-ruling' becomes apparent. This continuum is evident in the applications of mtl/mšl and the etymological background of εἰκών, as previously discussed.

Considering the existence of this semantic capacity, the chosen term to represent this continuum plays a pivotal role in defining its scope.

The Pentateuch uses the term צֶלֶם (ṣelem), narrowing the range to signify 'image, statue' and 'resemblance' (Gesenius, 1939, pp.853-854). On the other hand, the Quran employs خَلِيفة (ḫalīfa), limiting the continuum to the realm between 'to rule' and 'to resemble,' with a strong emphasis on the concept of 'successor.'

As previously explored, the Arabic root √ḫlf intertwines the meanings of 'to be substitute' and 'to resemble,' both connected with the concept of 'having dominion' (Pakatchi, 2016, p. 269). This explanation establishes a direct connection between the concepts of 'caliph of God' and 'image of God' within the mentioned continuum.

It is noteworthy that a classical Muslim scholar from Andalusia, Ibn Sīd al-Baṭlayūsī (1025-1127) recognized this connection, asserting the equivalence of the image of God with the caliph of God. He contended that understanding the concept of 'image' (صورة: ṣūra) in light of this equivalence helps avoid anthropomorphism (Ibn Sīd al-Baṭlayūsī, 1987, p.184).

In the context of Prophet Muhammad's mission, confronting paganism and idol worship, careful word selection was imperative. The avoidance of confusing expressions and steering clear of anthropomorphism likely influenced the use of ḫalīfa instead of terms familiar in the Biblical context.

Using a cognate or synonym of the Hebrew צֶלֶם (ṣelem) in Arabic could have been misleading. The term صَنَم (ṣanam), a cognate of צֶלֶם meaning 'idol,' and a synonym like صورة (ṣūra), used in Hadith literature, might have posed similar challenges. Even the Qur'an refrains from using the Davidian root mṯl/mšl when discussing the position of Adam and David, as it could be perceived as too close to anthropomorphism and potentially confusing.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, from a general semantic perspective, the continuum from resemblance to having dominion is adaptable and can be restricted in various ways. This restriction is influenced by the choice of words and their application in different contexts.

Regarding the position of man before God and His creatures, this semantic continuum is manifest with the root mṯl/mšl. However, in the

Torah and the Qur'an, certain parts of the continuum remain latent. The Torah, using the term צֶלֶם (ṣelem), emphasizes the resemblance aspect, compensating for the latent part of having dominion with additional explanations about Adam's rule over all of God's creatures. In contrast, the Qur'an focuses on the meaning of ruling and having dominion with the term خَليفة (ḫalīfa), consciously distancing itself from the aspect of resemblance in a manifest form to avoid anthropomorphism. Nevertheless, the part of resemblance in the continuum is considered at a deeper level, as the root √ḫlf includes a latent sense of resemblance.

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