

The Consequence of Covid-19 on Religious Practices in Turkey

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Abstract: This study investigated the effect of COVID-19 on religious practices in Turkey. The pandemic is an extremely infectious disease that is caused by a new coronavirus. The disease was first discovered in China in December 2019 and has spread worldwide, causing so much unprecedented sicknesses deaths and unemployment. Turkey identifies its first case in March 2020 which causes so many infections and deaths leading to lockdowns and curfews which affects so many practices like 2020/2021 Muslim Fasting, Prayers, 2020/2021 hajj pilgrimage, the zakat/charity, congregational prayers etc. In Turkey Fasting is one of the interesting things for many especially foreign students. In the previous years where there was no case of Novel COVID-19, people go for "Iftar", neighbours' share food, family members eat together in one house, some families go to restaurants for breaking of their fasting, congregational prayers were held in both mosques and churches and many other practices. Due to the emergence of COVID-19, most of these activities are not possible now. Primary and secondary data were used. A structured interview guide was used to interview 32 respondents conveniently and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The research revealed that COVID-19 has a strong negative impact on religious practices in Turkey. We recommend that WHO should the various government of countries get a vaccine for this killer disease. The study was beneficial to key stakeholders.

Keywords— Corona Virus, Muslim Prayers, Muslim Fasting, Thematic Analysis, Turkey

1. INTRODUCTION

The Religious Practices of Muslims is listed in five pillars of Islam: the declaration or profession of faith called "Shahadah" the five daily prayers that are the "Salah", Fasting in the month of Ramadan called "Sawm", Almsgiving/charity which is the "Zakat" and the pilgrimage to mecca at least once in the life of the individual call "hajj". Islam educates on both the significance of beliefs and practices. Covid-19 affects each of the above practices.

In Turkey, like everywhere, the pandemic caught the country and the population by surprise. Despite this, major decisions were quickly made (recourse to quarantine and lockdown). Many voices reminded the people that human destiny is fraught with large-scale health disasters. The rampant spread of COVID-19 took place along the veins and vessels of globalization. The hardest hit were thus major centres of travel, tourism, and prayers like Istanbul, Meccah, Medina, New Paris, New York, etc. Places of pilgrimage like Mashhad and Qom in Iran have counted among the early international Corona hotspots as well. Officials around the world have been faced with the analogous task of managing the spread of the virus to prevent the collapse of national health care systems and large numbers mortality rate. Therefore, implementing proper hygiene protocols and social distancing measures have formed the basis of public health interventions nearly all over. The COVID-19 pandemic affected all religious practices in Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and Turkey is not an exception. The religions such as the Muslim religion, Christian religion, traditional religion and many other religions. All the prayer grounds of the various religions across the world was affected during the lockdown period. For example, The Turkish people celebrate the Holy month of "Ramadan" fasting in an atmosphere of joyfulness and gladness, where the entire streets in the various regions and districts are fully crowded and busy at night/ the time of breaking the fast, and the places of worships "mosques" are lit with lights from evening during the "Al Maghreb" prayers too early morning "Dawn" prayers/fajr prayers. The famous city in Turkey that is Istanbul is known for the Quran recitals in the mosques, especially in "Topkapi" palace, where the Holy Quran is recited day and night without a break. This was not possible during the 2020 fasting due to lockdowns. Every individual has to remain home and pray with their families and households since it is not allowed for any congregational prayers to be held. Islam have five Pillars and the pillars are the five religious acts that are been considered obligatory for all Muslims which include: The "Shahadah" meaning the Muslim Profession of Faith, Al "Salat" that is the Five (5) Muslim daily prayers, "Al Zakat" the paying of charities to the poor and needy, "Al Sawm" thus fasting in the month of Ramada, "Hajj" which is the pilgrimage to Meccah. This study on the consequences of the Corona Virus on religious practices in Turkey will discuss all the above five Muslim pillars of Islam and the Christian prayers and services.

The Ministry of Health developed specific eligibility criteria for all candidates who applied to participate in Hajj. Eligibility criteria included that the participant must: (1) be between the ages of 20 and 65 years (with an advisory for candidates older than 50 years), (2) not have certain high-risk chronic diseases, (3) not be obese, (4) not be pregnant, and (5) have a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR) COVID-19 tests. All eligible candidates were scheduled for appropriate medical examination and screening visits. Each candidate received clear instructions to quarantine for 14 days, including 10 days at home or in a hotel before travel and 4 days in a facility upon arrival in Makkah. Coronavirus has affected all gatherings including practices in Turkey and all other countries worldwide.

1.1 The Profession/Declaration of Faith (Shahadah)

The belief that “there is no god but ALLAH” and that Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of ALLAH be Upon Him) is the Messenger of God” is central to Islam. This expression or saying, written in the Arabic Language is often highly featured in architecture and a range of objects, including the Islamic Holy book of divine revelations called the Qur'an. Moslems believe that, for one to become a Muslim, you need to have faith and strongly believe in the Shahadah”.

1.2 Prayer (Salat)

Muslims pray to face the direction of the “Kabbah” called the “Qibla” (Meccah) five times a day: at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and after dark. Prayer includes a recitation of the opening chapter (Sura) of the Qur'an and is sometimes performed on a small prayer mat or rug called the “Sadajah” used specifically for this purpose. All the five daily prayers “ Subh, Zuhr, Asr, Maghreb, and Ishai” was done in a mosque congregational at different times from dawn to late evening but the coming of the corona Virus made these congregational prayers impossible, people have to pray in their houses as single members or as one household with all their mouths and noises with the mask. All the Covid-19 protocols were observed even when the same family or household is praying. Moslem prefer to do all their compulsory five daily prayers congregationally because the reward of congregational prayer is ten times more than when praying individually. The cases of Covid-19 in Turkey made people be praying in isolation for several months because there was a lockdown all over the country to help reduce the cases of COVID-19.

1.3 Alms/charity (zakat)

Alms is the Arabic term referred to as charity and this is a portion of one fixed income that is compulsory given to the needy. Whoever does this gets a reward from Allah Almighty. Following the Islamic law, Muslims donate a fixed portion of their income to poor community members, have low income and are needy people. Many rulers and wealthy Muslims build Islamic schools, mosques, Hospitals, drinking fountains, and other institutions both as a religious duty and to secure the blessings associated with a charity. The advent of Covid-19 has interacted with the sharing of some individuals Zakat. Some didn't get the profit to share, have had the profit but how to assess the needy was a challenging example in Saudia Arabia where most people wait till the hajj pilgrimage time to get so many needy people to give to. Other Muslims also lose their jobs and could not save for the benefit of the poor.

1.4 Fasting (Sawm)

The Muslim Fasting is the complete abstinence from eating food, drinking, and sexual intercourse from daybreak to sunset as a religious/devotional ritual. The Almighty ALLAH stated in the Noble Quran 2:183 "O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous". During the daylight hours of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. In Islam, “Ramadan Kareem” is the most important month for Muslims. In this month, Muslims all over the world perform Fasting, which is the key practice in Islam. The noble Quran was also revealed in this month. Also, Zakat which is another key practice in Islam is given in this Holy Month to the deserving people. During Ramadan, Muslims perform special Sunnat namaz called Taraweeh” every day after Isha prayers. During this month, before Dawn Muslims have their pre-fast meal, which is called Sahur before the Fajr prayers. And at sunset, after Maghrib Azan the fast is opened. This practice is called Iftar after 30 days of fasting, Muslims celebrate Eid ul Fitr. The Covid-19 has a great impact on the 2020 and 2021 fasting across the world and Turkey is not an exception. Due to the situation, Muslims did not enjoy their fasting and a lot of their practices is missing.

1.6 Research Gap

This study is to investigate the consequences of COVID-19 on religious practices in Turkey (Prayers, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage) Taking into consideration prayer grounds, restaurants, foreign students, families, households, Prayer at home, and selling centres. The study is to find out if the new Covid-19 affects the above pillars of Islam, praying grounds, places of selling foods and clothing in Turkey to be precise Istanbul and Eskisehir cities.

1.7 Research Objective

- To investigate the effect of COVID-19 on Muslim prayers in Turkey
- To discuss the consequences of COVID-19 on Muslim Fasting
- To examine the effects of COVID-19 on Almsgiving in Turkey
- To examine the impact of COVID-19 on the 2020 Hajj Pilgrimage
- To investigate the effects of COVID-19 on prayer grounds (Mosques, Churches, etc.)

1.8 Research Question

- What is the effect of COVID-19 on Muslim prayers in Turkey??
- What is the effect of COVID-19 on Muslim Fasting in Turkey?
- Does COVID-19 have effects on Alms or Zakat giving in Turkey?
- What is the impact of COVID-19 on the 2020 Hajj Pilgrimage?
- Does COVID-19 have a great effect on prayer grounds? (Mosque, Churches etc.)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Shahaadah (Profession of Faith): The Shahadah is the first pillar of Islam. The first act of worship that every Muslim performs is a confirmation of faith, known as the shahadah. The word shahadah means “to bear witness,” so by professing faith verbally, one is bearing witness to the truth of Islam’s message and its most fundamental teachings. The shahadah is repeated by Muslims several times each day, both individually and in daily prayer, and it is a frequently written phrase in Arabic calligraphy. People who want to convert to Islam do so by simply reciting the shahadah aloud, preferably in front of two witnesses. There is no other requirement or prerequisite ceremony for embracing Islam. Muslims also strive to say or hear these words as their last, before they die.

2.2 Salaat (Prayer): Salaat the prayer is the second pillar of Islam. Daily prayer is a touchstone in a Muslim’s life. In Islam, prayer is direct to Allah alone, without an intermediary or intercessor. Muslims take time out five times each day to direct their hearts towards worship. The movements of prayer – standing, bowing, sitting, and prostrating – represent humility before the Creator. Words of prayer include words of praise and thanks to Allah, verses from the Quran, and personal supplications.

2.3 Sawm (Fasting): fasting is the third pillar of Islam

Many communities observe fasting as a way to purify the heart, mind, and body. In Islam, fasting helps us to empathize with those less fortunate, helps us to reprioritize our lives, and brings us closer to Allah in strengthened faith. Muslims may fast throughout the year, but all adult Muslims of sound body and mind must fast during the month of Ramadan each year. The Islamic fast lasts from dawn to sunset each day, during which time no food or drink of any kind is consumed. Muslims also spend the time in additional worship, refrain from bad talk and gossip, and share in friendship and charity with others.

2.5 Zakat (Almsgiving): Charity is the fourth pillar of Islam. In the Quran, giving in charity to the poor is often mentioned hand-in-hand with daily prayer. It is central to a Muslim’s core belief that everything we have comes from Allah, and is not ours to hoard or covet. We should feel blessed for everything we have and must be willing to share with those less fortunate. Charity at any time is recommended, but there is also a set percentage required for those who reach a certain minimum net worth.

2.5 Haji (Pilgrimage): the Hajj pilgrimage is the fifth and last pillar of Islam. Unlike the other “pillars” of Islam, which are performed on a daily or annual basis, the pilgrimage is required to be done only once in a lifetime. Such is the impact of the experience and the hardship that it entails. The Hajj pilgrimage occurs during a certain set month every year, lasts for several days, and is only required of those Muslims who are physically and financially able to make the journey. The number of pilgrims included in the 2020 year’s Hajj was an official decision based on health risk assessment recommendations and political decision making, given the significant socioeconomic, religious, and health security implications. No confirmed cases of COVID-19 were recorded among all pilgrims during or after the end of the holy rituals. Mass gatherings impose grave challenges to healthcare systems and security authorities, especially the COVID-19 pandemic. Reducing the number of pilgrims was a courageous and well-calculated decision based on risk assessment and wide consultation with relevant stakeholders, including religious leaders. Collaboration between Saudi governmental sectors was one of the critical success factors of the risk mitigation plan.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Turkey taking Istanbul city and Eskisehir city into consideration: the research is purely qualitative. Qualitative research is also referred to as the phenomenological research approach to researches which is concerned with the understanding of the behaviour of humans from the person’s frame of reference (Ussif R, et al 2020). The phenomenological approach does not focus on the measurement of social phenomena rather focuses on meaning. It seeks to describe, narrate, translate, transcribe, and come to terms with the meaning almost occurring naturally to the social phenomenon and uses methods of research that are interpretative (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The researcher cannot be objective in qualitative research since he or she is part of the reality that is being tested. The qualitative approach/method or the phenomenological approach is associated with many methods of researches like post-modernism, phenomenology, ethnography, and ecological psychology (Ussif R, 2020)

Both primary and secondary data were used for this study. The structured interview guide was used to interview 36 respondents who are restaurant operators, foreign students, store owners and other individuals conveniently and the data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis.

The primary source of data is a kind of information that is original and direct from the respondents. There are no distortions whatsoever from the views and ideas of the respondents. The type of data collected from fieldwork survey with questionnaires, interview guides or through

Secondary data is the type of data that already exist, collected for researches and other purposes. This data type was also used in this research including raw data and published reviews. Related literature on the above topic was also reviewed.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Response to Research Question 1

What is the effect of COVID-19 Muslim prayers in Turkey?

Muslims in Turkey like all other Muslims pray five times daily namely Subh, Zuhr, Asr, Maghreb and Ishai. These prayers are mostly done in a congregational prayer outside the home. It is done in mosques together with other men and women. Though it can be prayed individually, it is preferably to do it in the group but that attracts more regard Said Nura.

Muslims prayers are done individually or congregationally. Preferably, it is better to do the prayer in a congregation for better reward and more certainty. Due to Covid-19, and lockdown situations, Muslim men and Women could not pray in

congregational unless when the lockdown and other restrictions were over. In Turkey the lockdown is on and off as in when the situation or cases rise, the lockdown is implemented Narrated by Pinar.

According to MM, the lockdown has affected how Muslims pray because everyone is praying at home whether with their families or praying individually. Before the coming of COVID-19, all mosques in Turkey call for prayer (azan) in the mosques and Muslims gather there for the prayers.

BB narrated that, the reward of praying in public or congregational is lost by Muslims especially those individuals who are single-member households.

MAK mentioned that the Covid-19 protocol has made it impossible for Muslims to stand close to each other in the usual way to pray but rather distancing from one another.

Zee also said I wish I can go to the "Cami" mosque to pray for Friday prayers because I always feel happy and excited when I am involved in that congregation.

Abdul Karim mentioned that I don't enjoy praying alone. Not even fajr" prayers but due to COVID-19 protocols, I have to since I don't stay with my family here in Eskisehir.

Response to Research Question 2

What is the effect of COVID-19 on Fasting in Turkey?

Fasting use to be very interesting in Turkey before the coming of COVID-19 or the spread of the pandemic in Turkey in March 2020.

Rahmet narrated that, this year 2020 fasting is not interesting. I always go to break my fast in public which was organized by the Eskisehir Municipal Assembly for free and I get some kind of joy and happiness.

Fadila mentioned that, in Istanbul where I break my fast, there is a lot of things I missed. I do receive dates, water, sweets, food and meat for free. All the people who come there enjoy this. After breaking my fast, I even get extra food if I am not satisfied to eat again after we pray together for a special reward.

Asiya said, my husband and I including our children always go for Iftar (fast-breaking) outside our home before Covid-19. We go to the restaurant to buy the kinds of food and drink we want in that month but this 2 years, 2020 and 2021 fasting, we could not go out due to the lockdown and restaurants not operating.

Kamila said, in Istanbul where I break my fast every year, there is a "Mallam" Islamic scholar who always preaches to us before the time of breaking fast. We prepare our food and drinks including sweets, date to go with. This we use to break our fast and share it with other Muslim brothers and sisters. In Islam, it is good to share in the month of Ramadan especially to those who cannot afford to buy most of the things they need to break the fast with.

Eating in public is banned in many countries during the Muslim month of fasting. But the people of Istanbul continue living as they desire.

Istanbul's various municipalities even host communal iftars or evening meals for people to come and break their fast, often free of charge. And these are open to the public at large.

I came here last year during Ramadan. Four of us were fasting. The others were not fasting, but we were in harmony. They respect us," said Gulsen Abay, who was at one such communal iftar at Besiktas.

Most of the respondents conclude that both the Muslims and the non-Muslims all go for the Iftar.

The Christians who were natives and the foreigners all answered that they Covid-19 affected their month of fasting because the month is the month of enjoyment and free food to them.

Response to Research Question 3

Does COVID-19 have effects on Alms or Zakat giving in Turkey?

Moslem give out their alms or charity to the needy annually according to when the person thinks is due for payment. There is also zakat where after Ramadan, the Eid day before salat Muslims gives out zakat to the needy.

ZAK narrated that, zakat is a charity that the rich or the well to do individuals give to the needy or poor in the community.

This zakat helps most of the needy to reduce their poverty and to increase the living standards of the poor people. Most needy people get this zakat and they use it to establish themselves.

The Coronavirus have an effect on zakat for all this period of the pandemic.

Most people lost their jobs and couldn't afford to issue zakat don't as they use to do.

Due to the lockdown, is even difficult to get individuals to receive Zakat.

Because most people lost their jobs due to COVID-19 the amount of money shared as zakat to the needy is reduced, narrated IB.

MAF said, I use to get zakat from the rich every year but in the years 2000 and 2001 due to the lockdown, we cannot get people to share their wealth with us. It is very hard for people to make ends means let alone save zakat to others.

Response to Research Question 4

What is the impact of COVID-19 on the Hajj Pilgrimage?

The Novel COVID-19 impacted negatively on Hajj 2020 and 2021 said, Mr Sadiq.

A total of 1,000 pilgrims from 160 different nationalities, living within the borders of the Kingdom, were randomly selected to perform the rituals of Hajj in 2020. The same scenario is going to be used for the year 2021 because it has been announced that no people coming from different countries for Hajj in July 2021.

Hajj is a pilgrimage where millions gather annually to pray and it is the fifth pillar of Islam. All those who can afford to pay for the trip are encouraged to go and pray, do Umrah and ask for forgiveness and to visit the most important and historic places in the religion.

The coming of COVID-19 has made it impossible for the year 2020 and 2021 year hajj to only the Muslims in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia who were from different countries were made to pray and not those coming from outside Saudi. Even in Saudi Arabia, a few numbers are taken to observe the hajj following all the Covid protocols.

According to AZ covid-19 has a strong impact on our hajj last year and this year. Most people plan to go and even pay their monies could not go.

For hajj to be cancelled for once means, there will be a problem and thank God that, it was observed even if is one hundred people "Allahu Akbar"

TT mentioned that all my plans towards the 2020 hajj has been defeated by COVID-19. I build my house, bought a new car, pay for my hajj expenses and sow my "Arami"- the white Islamic attire for hajj and Umrah but all in vain due to Covid-19.

Both Hajj and Umrah were cancelled by the public. People outside Saudi Arabia cannot get the opportunity to these blessings.

Proceeding with Hajj in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic was crucial for several reasons: (1) unlike Umrah, which can be performed anytime, Hajj is an annual event restricted to a specific date in the Hijri lunar year; (2) Hajj has a spiritual and religious place in the hearts of all Muslims worldwide who represent almost 25% of the global population; (3) Hajj has specific and time-limited rituals with a well-known course and order, unlike Umrah; and (4) Hajj is 1 of the 5 pillars of Islam, which makes it an annual destination for millions of Muslims in Saudi Arabia and abroad



Hajj 2019 compared to 2020.

The 2020 and 2021 hajj was interrupted because of the high risk of importing COVID-19 cases into the Kingdom and also the high probability of exporting cases after Hajj pilgrimage could have led to higher spreader of the virus and this will have both national and international implications. The international concerns about Hajj and its related worldwide transmission were what led to the deferment of Hajj 2020/2021 visas by some countries, including Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, Dubai, USA, and Germany etc. before the decision to have a restricted Hajj for only domestic pilgrims. The exclusion of older people and those with high-risk chronic diseases was also a necessity because both represent higher risks of spreading the virus.

Response to Research Question 5

Do COVID-19 have a great effect on Restaurants and prayer grounds? (Mosque, Churches etc.)

According to Mr Fred, A foreign student in Turkey, Covid-19 have a great effect on our prayer grounds because I cannot go to church during the lockdown period. Every weekend I am home with my friends thinking of when the lockdown will be over for us to start going to the church.

A restaurant operator mentioned that, we cannot prepare food for sale before no one is allowed to go out. Even after the lockdown restaurants were not allowed to operate because people cannot go outside their homes to eat nor but food in a restaurant to eat.

AB said this causes a lot of unemployment in the country because most of us we're not getting any job to do.

No market for Islamic dresses narrated Metin. We sell dresses in a supermarket and during fasting, most people buy long dresses for prayers and fasting. Again they buy beautiful dresses and shoes for themselves and their children when is time for the feast, but due to COVID-19, there is no market for all kinds of dresses, suits, shoes and what have you again.

We do not get sadaka/gifts either do we get free food to break our fast said a foreign student from Yemen who enjoy all this before COVID-19.

A student from Pakistan called Shack said, the rich here in Eskisehir share their wealth with us the student every year but last year and this year due to the pandemic, no one calls any of us for those gifts. People are finding it difficult to be able to support the needy since the COVID-19 started.

5. DISCUSSIONS

All collective religious practices and gatherings, like prayers and collective iftars, have been banned due to COVID-19. The hajj pilgrimages to Mecca and the umrah was cancelled to prevent the spread of the disease. The Saudi Arabian authorities have closed the holy places in Saudi for both prayers, umrah, and visits probably for a fairly long time followed by recommendations, while some had anticipated them and blamed the official institution for its lack of responsiveness. To convince the Turkish people to stay home, the authorities have not hesitated to rely on more recent history and to use the factor of Turkish-Ottoman identity. They have indeed reminded people that confinement was already used during the Ottoman period. The “five pillars of Islam” are religious duties that provide a framework for a Muslim’s life. These duties are performed regularly and encompass duties to God, personal spiritual growth, care for the poor, self-discipline, and sacrifice.

The pillars of Islam provide structure and hold something steadily in place. They provide support, and all must be present for the framework to balance steadily.

The articles of faith provide a foundation, answering the question of “what do Muslims believe?” The Five Pillars of Islam help Muslims to structure their lives around that foundation, answering the question of “how do Muslims affirm their faith in daily life?”

Islamic teachings about the Five Pillars of Islam are found in the Quran and the Hadith. This is dispersed throughout the Quran and emphasized in importance through repetition.

The Prophet Muhammad did mention the five pillars of Islam in an authentic narration “Islam has been built upon five pillars: testifying that there is no deity worthier of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, performing the prayers, paying the zakah, making the pilgrimage to the House, and fasting in Ramadan” (Hadith Bukhari, Muslim).

As everywhere else in the world, in Turkey COVID-19 is at the heart of current affairs. This deadly outbreak that operates without ethnic, confessional, or political distinction should have brought about a sacred union among the population and mobilization of everybody for the recovery of all.

6. CONCLUSION

From the study, it can be concluded that COVID-19 have a strong impact on Muslims prayers. The five daily prayers observed in the mosque across the world was not possible again. Due to social distancing and lockdown, people are compelled to pray in their houses.

Also, the virus has negatively affected the annual Muslim fasting. Individuals and households could not go for Iftar and Taraweeh prayers due to the ban on social gatherings and the limited number of people to be involved in such activities.

Furthermore, hajj is not an exception in the COVID-19 consequences. . Hajj was cancelled for the first time in the 21st century and only a few people in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia were made to observe. All safety and Covid protocol had to be observed before the feast. 2020 mass hajj cancelled and 2021 too. No Umrah in large quantity again.

Most of the needy do not Zakat from the rich as they use to get due to the issues that the pandemic came with.

Prayer grounds and selling centres are all affected due to covid-19 because of the locked-down no one has access to these places and buying and selling is not taking place.

Iftar was cancelled for the public and Taraweeh, salat was not also observed in the mosques. Every Ibadaat came to a standstill.

7. RECOMMENDATION

- We recommend Turkish government should work hard together with the health ministry to get a cure for the new COVID-19 so that, they will be no lockdown again.
- The World Health Organization should try and get a vaccine that is working to help all so that all things will come back to normal.
- All individuals in the country should follow the COVID-19 protocols to reduce the infectious rate if not end it completely.

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