



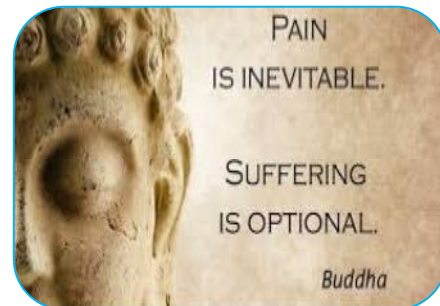
## A STUDY ON THE CONCEPT OF SUFFERING (DUKKHA) IN PANCA NIKAYA

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### ABSTRACT:

*Everyone desires to achieve happiness in life. Consequently, they have endeavoured to attain liberation from pain (Dukkha) to reach a condition of authentic bliss. The origin of sorrow is in humanity's lack of knowledge about their inner essence. Individuals are actively seeking remedies to address the issue and alleviate their distress. Nevertheless, individuals' perspectives on pain and enjoyment differ significantly. Merely observing human life reveals that individuals are susceptible to physical, mental, and spiritual pain. This has led to an increasing complexity of the issues, prompting individuals to seek answers for the issue of suffering, which has given birth to religious beliefs, ideologies, and many schools of thought.*



**KEYWORDS:** *Suffering, Dukkha, Sutra, Buddhism.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Buddhism encompasses the principles of a philosophy, the practices of a religion, and the guiding principles for a way of life. It has importance as a cognitive framework just for intellectuals. Furthermore, it represents a recent scientific breakthrough in our current civilization. Buddhism is a religious belief system that posits the cessation of suffering via the transcendence of one's wishes. The teachings of Buddha revolve around the concept of the Noble Truth, which is regarded as a precious source of enlightenment. It encapsulates the whole of the Gautama Buddha's experience. The founder of Buddhism is Buddha, often known as the Enlightened One.

Armed with a profound understanding of his enlightenment, the Buddha started his teachings by eschewing dogmatic and enigmatic concepts. Instead, he chose to impart a universally genuine experience, which he regarded as the ultimate truth. Hence, the true essence of Buddhism may be encapsulated by the concept of Noble Truth. It is important to note that the Buddha did not impart his teachings based on theoretical concepts. He consistently imparts knowledge from his experiential understanding, wisdom, and awareness of the truth. Upon presenting his teachings, the Buddha aimed to make his objective visible, highlighting the pointlessness of worldly existence and giving the precise, pragmatic road to redemption that he had uncovered. The fundamental teachings of the Buddha revealed the authentic essence of reality and the universe. It is essential to differentiate between the Buddha's basic teachings and the religious practices that emerged from them.

Buddhism has emerged as a prominent and influential culture in history. It has an impressive track record of accomplishments in literature, art, philosophy, psychology, ethics, architecture, and culture. Since the Buddha delivered his teachings and understood life's and religion's true purpose and

significance, religious beliefs and practices have transformed into a logical, scientific, and practical approach to spiritual growth. The teachings of the Buddha are referred to as the Dhamma. It does not consist of fixed principles or a theoretical framework.<sup>1</sup> It serves as a method or tool for transitioning from ignorance, desire, and suffering to transcendental serenity and liberation. Hence, elucidating his teachings aims to achieve practical liberation from suffering.

The teachings of Buddha include the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination, and Action (*Kamma*), among others. Special The Four Noble Truths are considered the fundamental principle of the Buddhist tradition and are believed to provide a conceptual structure for all Buddhist philosophy. These are the Noble Truths about suffering, its source, its cessation, and the road to its cessation. The Buddha became aware of these Four Truths on the night of his enlightenment and shared them with the world by initiating the unparalleled dissemination of the Dhamma.<sup>2</sup>

The Panca Nikaya comprises the fundamental teachings of early Buddhism. It included all facets of Buddhist thought, including morality and the spiritual journey. Gaining a profound comprehension of the Sutra Pitaka will enable us to accurately grasp the teachings of Buddha and the methods for attaining liberation from suffering in life.<sup>3</sup> That is why the researcher wants to select this topic: "A Study on the Concept of Suffering (Dukkha) in Panca Nikaya."

## 2. DEFINITION OF THE SUFFERING (DUKKHA):

The term *Dukkha* in Buddhism originates from Sanskrit and Pali words. *Dukkha* is the first verity among the Four Noble Truths. *Dukkha* is a composite term that combines "Du" and "Kha". The prefix "Du" denotes anything unfavourable, unpleasant, or causing discomfort. The suffix "Kha" means being empty or without actuality. Thus, the term *Dukkha* is often rendered in English from Pali as characterized by suffering or anguish. Ignorant individuals see things differently from the viewpoint of Buddhagosa<sup>4</sup>, who asserts that things are temporary, destructive, and without substantiality. This misperception ultimately results in suffering and distress. Therefore, they are referred to as *Dukkha*.<sup>5</sup> *Dukkha* manifests itself via many emotions, from joy to hopelessness. Although it may seem counterintuitive, this principle is significant in Buddha's teachings. The first discourse of the Buddha spoke upon the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths remain the fundamental essence of Buddhist thought. The Four Noble Truths are:

1. *Dukkha*.
2. *Samudaya* is the origin of *Dukkha*.
3. *Nirodha*, the cessation of *Dukkha*.
4. *Magga*, the way is leading to the cessation of *Dukkha*.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Four Noble Truths, academics often interpret the term "*Dukkha*" as "Suffering". Based on this translation and interpretation, Buddhism is often believed to be associated with pessimism, and the Buddha himself is seen as a gloomy figure. However, *Dukkha* encompasses more than just the common understanding of "suffering", "pain", "grief", or "despair". It also contains more profound concepts such as "imperfection", "emptiness", "disharmony", and "discomfort". Hence, it is challenging to encapsulate the idea of *Dukkha* in a single phrase. However, to comprehend its essence more accurately, it might be temporarily translated as "suffering", "pain", "sorrow", or "misery". *Dukkha* refers to a state opposite of "*Sukha*" (happiness), which means bliss. *Dukkha* encompasses both physical and mental anguish, such as the pain of birth, the deterioration of the body, illness, and death. It also includes the experience of being confronted with unpleasant situations, being removed from pleasurable experiences, and failing to attain desired outcomes. However, it is often overlooked by

<sup>1</sup> *Majjhima Nikaya*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *EB*, R. E. Buswell (ed), Vol. 1, University of California: Los Angeles, 2003: p.295.

<sup>3</sup> *Majjhima Nikaya*, p.249.

<sup>4</sup> The word "Buddhaghosa" is taken from Sanskrit and *Pali*. It is the name of a monk who was born at the beginning of the 5th century and considered to be the greatest of commentators on the *Pali* Canon. See Oxford Dictionary of Buddhism.

<sup>5</sup> M. V. Ram Kumar Ratnam, *Dukkha: Suffering in Early Buddhism*, New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2003, p.45.

<sup>6</sup> Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, the United States of America: W. Rahula, 1974, p.16.

many individuals that even in times of pleasure and delight, Dukkha exists since these moments are only transient states that will cease to exist when circumstances change. Thus, the concept of *Dukkha* embraces the whole of life, including moments of pleasure and sadness, permeating every facet of our lives. Furthermore, it is essential to note that *Dukkha* does not imply the absence of happiness, satisfaction, and pleasure in life. The Buddha has taught that the joy or satisfaction we feel in life is transient, as shown by the study of *Dukkha*.

Currently, some believe that seeing life through the lens of *Dukkha* is a rather negative approach to existence. This perspective is not gloomy but rather a realistic approach to seeing life. If someone is afflicted with a condition and consciously denies their illness, thereby rejecting medical intervention, we would not see such a mindset as optimistic but rather as imprudent. Hence, without a comprehensive understanding of life's essence, those who adopt confident and pessimistic attitudes cannot approach life's challenges with the appropriate mindset.

The Buddha is considered realistic because he acknowledged the existence of suffering (*Dukkha*), delved into its causes, and discovered ways to achieve nirvana and cease it. The Buddha may be likened to a proficient physician. Initially, an experienced physician identifies the ailment. Subsequently, he determines the underlying reason. Later, he chooses the appropriate remedy. Ultimately, he administers the medication or implements the course of action that will restore the patient's health. Thus, the Buddha had a pragmatic and impartial perspective.

### 3. BIRTH IS SUFFERING:

According to the Buddha, nobody can avoid or evade suffering. If individuals anticipate experiencing enjoyment in life, they will always encounter disappointment. Although circumstances may not always align with our desires, it is within our capacity to develop a comprehension of them. When we experience birth, old age, sickness, death, and other such phenomena, we might discover the inherent nature of existence. Suffering encompasses the psychological and physiological conditions experienced by individuals. The Sutra examines and evaluates suffering from several perspectives, resulting in the following categorization:

What is the definition of Birth? Birth refers to the process by which creatures in different groups come into being, manifesting as the emergence of aggregates and the acquisition of sense fields.<sup>7</sup> There are four distinct types of generation. What are the four items or concepts being referred to? The various kinds of generations include oviparous generation (born from eggs), viviparous generation (taken from the womb), ovoviviparous generation (born from moisture), and abiogenesis (spontaneous generation). What is the concept of egg-born generation? The term "egg-born generation" refers to how creatures are born by hatching from an egg. What does the term "womb-born generation" refer to? These creatures are born by emerging from the amniotic sacs, a process known as womb-born generation. What is the concept of moisture-born generation? Moisture-born generation refers to the process by which some creatures are born in decaying fish, corpses, oatmeal, cesspits, or sewers. Spontaneous creation is the theory that living organisms may arise from non-living matter without needing pre-existing life. Automatic creation refers to the phenomenon of the existence of gods, dwellers of hell, confident human beings, and entities in the lower realms.<sup>8</sup>

In Buddhism, Birth encompasses not just human Birth but all sentient creatures. It specifically denotes the first appearance of any collections of organisms occurring at their Birth in any location. It serves as the foundation for pain since all human experiences, which are fundamentally filled with sorrow, originate from it. Buddhaghosa explains the initial Noble Truth by presenting various types of birth-related suffering. These include: "*Suffering experienced in the womb; Suffering during gestation; Suffering caused by miscarriage; Suffering during childbirth; Suffering upon leaving the womb; Suffering caused by self-inflicted harm; Suffering caused by the actions of others*".<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Majjhima Nikaya*, p.141.

<sup>8</sup> *Majjhima Nikaya*, p.12

<sup>9</sup> M. V. Ram Kumar Ratnam, *Dukkha: Suffering in Early Buddhism*, New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2003, p.47.

#### 4. AGEING IS SUFFERING:

What is the definition of ageing? Ageing is characterized by physical decline, including tooth loss, greying hair, and wrinkled skin. It also involves a decrease in lifespan and deterioration of the sensory organs in different species and groups of organisms. The phenomenon is often referred to as old age.<sup>10</sup>

In Buddhism, ageing refers to the process of becoming old. The maturation and disintegration of the aggregates define it. The gradual disappearance of youth and the approaching inevitability of death and destruction characterize its manifestation. *Dukkha* is founded upon both physical and mental aspects, for since it develops the circumstances of “leadiness” of the limbs, whereby the organs become prone to sickness. The deterioration of cognitive abilities, physical strength, interpersonal appeal, memory, intellectual capacity, and the general waning of one’s individuality contribute to the sensation of distress.<sup>11</sup>

Ageing is the fundamental cause of physical and mental distress, resulting from several factors such as heaviness in the limbs, deterioration and distortion of cognitive abilities, disappearance of youthfulness, weakening of physical power, and reduction in memory and intellect, leading to others’ disregard.

In *Samyutta-Nikāya*, the Buddha teaches *Ānanda*: “That is the precise reality, *Ānanda*. During youth, individuals are susceptible to the process of ageing; when in good health, they are vulnerable to disease, and while living, they are inevitably confronted with mortality. The skin has lost clarity and brightness, while the limbs have become flabby and wrinkled. The back is now bowed forward, and the visual acuity has a noticeable decline”.<sup>12</sup>Essentially, individuals will inevitably experience signs of progressive decline or cognitive impairment throughout their lifespan, from early adulthood to old age. This is the affliction of the ageing process.

#### 5. SICKNESS IS SUFFERING:

Sickness manifests in several forms. We often encounter others reluctant to discuss illness, even if they, too, may be susceptible to it. This is a manifestation of rejecting what is disliked, which is the antithesis of eagerly embracing what is appreciated. Additional instances may be seen in the preference given to birth and young, contrasted with the emotions towards death and degradation. Continuing in this manner will only create more suffering for ourselves.

Sickness is not a facet of suffering to evade; it is something to contemplate. “I am in a state of physical well-being and possess the capacity to engage in various forms of Dhamma practice. In the event of illness, I may be unable to engage in some activities. Therefore, it is imperative that I now devote myself to the practice of Dhamma”.<sup>13</sup>

#### 6. DEATH IS SUFFERING:

What is the precise definition of dying? It refers to the decline, cessation, fragmentation, vanishing, mortality, the passage of time, the dissolution of attachments, and the relinquishment of the physical form. This phenomenon, esteemed individuals, is often referred to as death.<sup>14</sup>

All living beings are subject to mortality. Birth and death are interconnected occurrences in the continuum of existence. Death is an inherent quality of the aggregates, symbolizing a decline. It is the disconnection of the vital force in an individual's existence. It appears to lack alignment with one’s predetermined fate, particularly in the context of being born again. Human beings exist in a perpetual state of apprehension about mortality. *Dukkha* is fundamentally caused by separating individuals from their loved ones, cherished possessions, property, and other sources of pleasure.

<sup>10</sup> *Majjhima Nikaya*, p.296.

<sup>11</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu Nanamoli (tr), *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, Buddhism Pali Society. Kandy, Sri Lanka, 2011, p.514.

<sup>12</sup> *Samyutta-Nikaya*, p.41.

<sup>13</sup> Bhikkhu Khantipalo, *The Three Basic Facts of Existence*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 2006, p.8.

<sup>14</sup> *Majjhima Nikaya*, p.296.

**Grief is Suffering:** What is the nature of grief? Mental anguish refers to the distressing and unpleasant sensation from mental stimulation. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as sorrow.<sup>15</sup> Regarding sorrow, it is a mental anguish experienced by someone who has suffered the loss of loved ones or similar circumstances. While it has the same meaning as sorrow, it is distinguished by its inherent capacity to devour and fully occupy the mind. It is characterized by persistent grieving. The misery is inherent and serves as a foundation for more suffering.<sup>16</sup> Grief is a psychological condition characterized by emotional distress. The term refers to the overt display of distress by physical actions such as pulling out one's hair, crying, beating one's chest, contorting the body, ingesting poison, hanging oneself with ropes, walking over the fire, and enduring other forms of misery.

**Lamentation is suffering:** Lamentation is the expression of loud and vocal distress by someone who has experienced the loss of relatives or similar events. Its defining trait is crying out. The primary purpose of it is to declare and distinguish between virtues and vices. It is shown as chaos. Suffering arises from the presence of formations and is inherent in being a foundation for suffering.<sup>17</sup>

**Pain is Suffering:** Suffering refers specifically to physical discomfort. Its defining feature is the suppression of bodily autonomy. Its purpose is to induce sorrow in the imprudent. It presents itself as physical suffering. The pain is inherent and causes psychological distress.<sup>18</sup>

**Misery is Suffering:** What constitutes misery? Mental anguish refers to the distress and unpleasantness that arises from a disturbance in the mind, resulting in pain and discomfort. This esteemed individual is referred to as suffering.<sup>19</sup>

**Despair is Suffering:** What is despair? Despondency and despair refer to feeling overwhelmed and hopeless due to a personal misfortune or affliction.<sup>20</sup> This esteemed individual is referred to as despair. It is the consequence of intense psychological distress caused by the loss of riches, family, and other similar factors. It presents itself as despondency. A burning and all-encompassing effect on the cognitive faculties characterizes the sensation. The individual expresses their discontent. This leads to the individual/s biological systems being compromised by symptoms such as fever and illness.

## 7. ASSOCIATION WITH THE UNLOVED IS SUFFERING:

When associating with the unloved, they interact with unfavourable entities and forms (inanimate objects). A relationship with anything terrible is one of its characteristics. The mind is the target of its distressing effects. It takes the form of a condition that is detrimental. Because it is a foundation for pain, it is suffering.<sup>21</sup>

As a consequence of coming into touch with unpleasant ideas, words, and actions that originate from undesirable fellow beings and inanimate objects, a man will experience suffering. His mental state is negatively impacted of this connection, and he experiences stress. This has the potential to be changed into hate, which causes a man to engage in negative actions, which in turn plant the seeds for future experiences of suffering. It is the factor that causes misery.

## 8. SEPARATION FROM THE LOVED IS SUFFERING:

In what ways can being apart from someone you love cause stress? There is the situation in which one does not experience desirable, pleasing, or attractive sights, sounds, aromas, flavours, or tactile sensations, or one does not have any connection, contact, relationship, or interaction with those who wish one well, who wish for one's benefit, who want for one's comfort, who desire for one's security from the yoke; nor does one have any connection with one's mother, father, brother, sister,

<sup>15</sup> *Majjhima Nikaya*, p.1099.

<sup>16</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu Nanamoli (tr), *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, Buddhism Pali Society. Kandy, Sri Lanka, 2011, p 515.

<sup>17</sup> *Idid.*, p.515.

<sup>18</sup> *Idid.*, p.516.

<sup>19</sup> *Majjhima Nikaya*, p.296.

<sup>20</sup> *Idid.*, p.296.

<sup>21</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu Ñāṃamoli (tr), *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, Buddhism Pali Society. Kandy, Sri Lanka, 2011, p 517.



friends, companions, or relatives. The term for this kind of stress is “*the stress of separation from the loved one*”.<sup>22</sup>

When separated from the person they love, they are also separated from pleasing entities and forms (inanimate objects). The ability to dissociate from appealing items is one of its characteristics. Arousing sadness is the purpose of this thing. It is shown in the form of loss. In the sense that it serves as a foundation for the pain that is sadness, it is suffering. The human being has an insatiable need to create associations with objects and people that bring forth a sense of pleasure inside him. Even though he tries to form attachments with such individuals and things, he often finds himself divorced from them instead.

### 9. NOT GETTING WHAT IS WANTED IS SUFFERING:

Human existence is intricately connected to longings, ambitions, and the endeavour to achieve diverse objectives. Individuals continuously strive for satisfaction and happiness by pursuing their goals, ranging from the simplest to the most deep ambitions. A prevailing consensus exists: failing to get one’s desired object or outcome is synonymous with experiencing distress. Suffering is an intricate and diverse notion. It includes many feelings, from disappointment and annoyance to intense pain and despair. Essentially, it is rooted in the feeling of unmet expectations or wants not being achieved, resulting in emotional unrest and discontent.

The desire for anything, whether a goal, an item, or an experience, frequently affects one’s emotional well-being due to the combination of anticipation and expectation. Not achieving these ambitions might cause a feeling of loss and create an emptiness in the person’s life. When not dealt with, this emptiness may worsen and become a kind of distress since the lack of the intended result has a noticeable effect on the person’s mental state. The degree of anguish caused by unfulfilled aspirations often relies on the importance attributed to the sought entity or objective. If the want is firmly ingrained or seen as essential for one’s pleasure or personal growth, the distress of not achieving it may be more intense. For example, the inability to reach a significant professional goal, a valued romantic partnership, or individual ambitions may trigger extreme distress, resulting in emotions of insufficiency, letdown, and even hopelessness.

Nevertheless, the correlation between the failure to acquire desired outcomes and experiencing distress is only uniformly relevant in some situations. An individual’s perspective and reaction to unfulfilled aspirations have a crucial impact on their misery. Human resilience and flexibility often manifest, enabling people to effectively traverse disappointment and convert it into personal development and introspection fuel. Failing to get one’s intended outcome is a fortunate occurrence. This situation provides a chance for self-reflection, encouraging people to reevaluate their principles, priorities, and methods in pursuing their objectives. This setback can provide fresh insights, redirection, or reveal unexpected avenues for satisfaction and gratification.

Furthermore, the inherent essence of desire and its attainment is ephemeral. What seems essential in the present may diminish in importance as time passes. As people develop and situations change, their wants often transition, making earlier unmet goals less significant. While failing to acquire desired things might result in misery, it is not an unequivocal reality. Instead, it is a complex facet of human existence, shaped by personal interpretations, adaptability, and the changing dynamics of aspirations. By embracing this intricacy, one might achieve a more profound comprehension of pain and discover opportunities for personal development, resilience, and the search for enduring happiness beyond the simple satisfaction of cravings.

### 10. THE FIVE CLINGING-AGGREGATES IS SUFFERING:

The notion of the “five clinging aggregates” originates from Buddhist doctrines and is a vital element in comprehending sorrow (*Dukkha*). According to Buddhist philosophy, the attachment or grasping onto these aggregates is the fundamental cause of human suffering. The five aggregates consist

<sup>22</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, p.10.

of form (*rupa*), feeling or sensation (*vedana*), perception (*sanna*), mental formations (*sankhara*), and awareness (*vinnana*). Each of these aggregates symbolizes distinct aspects of human life and understanding.

Form encompasses the tangible elements of reality, such as the physical body and things in the external world. Feeling refers to the feelings and experiences, whether pleasant, terrible, or neutral, resulting from interacting with these forms. Perception encompasses the identification and understanding of these feelings. Mental formations include cognitive processes, affective states, and intentional actions, all of which are influenced by prior encounters and contribute to an individual's psychological status. Consciousness refers to being aware and conscious of these events. According to the teachings of the Buddha, holding onto these aggregates or incorrectly seeing them as lasting or forming a lasting self (*anatta* or not-self) results in suffering. The attachment stems from a lack of knowledge and a misunderstanding of the genuine essence of reality. By attributing a feeling of lastingness or unique identity to these collections, people expose themselves to unavoidable distress.

Attaching a lasting identity to the physical form may result in misery as it undergoes changes caused by age, sickness, or accident. Adhering to certain emotions or perspectives might lead to discomfort when such encounters change or diminish. Similarly, when one excessively identifies with ideas and emotions (mental formations), it might result in pain if they create chaos or if one cannot manage them. The fundamental understanding in Buddhist teachings on the five aggregates and suffering is that these elements of existence are transient, interconnected, and lack a permanent self. Gaining a deep comprehension of the temporary nature of these elements and relinquishing any emotional or mental connections to them is essential in mitigating distress.

People may transcend suffering by acknowledging these collections' impermanent and interconnected nature and fostering non-attachment or detachment (*Nibbana* or *nirvana*). This entails witnessing these collections of phenomena without clinging to them and recognizing their transient and constantly evolving essence, so attaining freedom from the recurring cycle of pain and distress. The teaching on the five clinging aggregates explains how our connection to temporary elements of existence causes suffering. It highlights the route to liberation by emphasizing the need to recognize impermanence and develop a mindset of non-attachment.

## 11. CONCLUSION:

The examination of the notion of suffering (*Dukkha*) in the Panca Nikaya, a compilation of writings in the ancient Buddhist scriptures, reveals a deep comprehension of human life and the essence of dissatisfaction. These writings show *Dukkha* as an inherent and interconnected reality permeating human existence and encounters. Upon analyzing the teachings of *Dukkha* in the Pāṇcaka Nikāya, it becomes clear that suffering comprises a range of manifestations that extend beyond bare bodily or mental agony. It encompasses the underlying discontent and impermanence in all parts of life, highlighting the temporary nature of pleasure and the unavoidable presence of change and unhappiness.

Moreover, the teachings emphasize the interdependence among desire, attachment, and suffering. The unwavering quest for wants and the clinging to the transient elements of life, such as the five aggregates, sustain the cycle of *Dukkha*. Clinging onto an individual identity within these collections of elements gives rise to a fundamental misinterpretation of existence, resulting in distress. The Panca Nikaya's examination of *Dukkha* offers a deep comprehension of the human predicament. This text highlights the widespread suffering caused by our solid emotional connections and our failure to comprehend the concept of impermanence. Moreover, it provides a profound route to freedom by fostering awareness, ethical conduct, and insight. This thorough framework offers significant insights into the essence of suffering. It guides those aiming to surpass the cycle of *Dukkha* and achieve a state of enduring calm and release.

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