



Exploring Parallels between Noah in Abrahamic Traditions and Manu in Hinduism: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This scholarly article delves into the fascinating parallels between the flood narratives of Noah in the Old Testament and Manu in Hindu mythology. It explores the remarkable similarities between the two accounts, examining their historical and mythological contexts. The article aims to shed light on the significance of these flood narratives in different cultures, highlighting their shared themes of re-creation and renewal. By analyzing these narratives, the article seeks to contribute to the understanding of the common human need to grapple with profound passages of time and life, such as birth, death, and transition. The exploration of these flood myths transcends literal interpretations, instead focusing on their rich symbolism and psychological impact on human societies.

Significance of Flood Narratives

The flood narratives hold immense significance across different cultures and civilizations. These myths have been perpetuated for millennia and are found in a plethora of societies worldwide. Such universality highlights the fundamental human need to grapple with complex themes of creation, destruction, and rebirth. By analyzing the flood narratives in different cultures, we can discern how various societies have interpreted and integrated these stories into their worldviews. These myths often serve as tools for conveying moral lessons, exploring the human condition, and addressing the profound questions of existence. As we delve into the flood narratives of Noah and Manu, we unravel layers of symbolism and meaning that transcend time and geography.

Historical and Mythological Contexts

To comprehend the parallels between the flood narratives of Noah and Manu, we must consider their historical and mythological contexts. In the case of Noah, the flood story is famously recounted in the Book of Genesis within the Old Testament. Here, God's decision to cleanse the Earth from wickedness and corruption through a cataclysmic flood forms the core of the narrative. Noah, portrayed as a righteous man, is divinely chosen to build an ark to save himself, his family, and a pair of each animal from the impending deluge. The story emphasizes themes of divine judgment, redemption, and renewal, reflecting the prevailing religious and moral beliefs of ancient Hebrew culture.

Conversely, Manu's flood narrative is rooted in Hindu mythology, as preserved in texts like the Matsya Purana and the Satapatha Brahmana. Manu, depicted as a virtuous sage, receives a divine warning about an impending flood that will annihilate corrupt civilization. Similarly to Noah, he is guided to construct a vessel to save himself, the sages, and select animals. The story underscores the cyclical nature of creation, dissolution, and rebirth in Hindu cosmology, reflecting the cultural and spiritual milieu of ancient India.

In both narratives, the floods serve as vehicles of purification and renewal, reshaping the world to rid it of corruption. The striking parallels between Noah and Manu indicate shared human inclinations to address fundamental existential questions through mythological storytelling. By delving into these historical and mythological contexts, we can appreciate the enduring significance of these flood narratives and their capacity to resonate across diverse cultures and epochs.

Introduction

The Flood Narratives: Unveiling Shared Cultural Motifs

The tales of catastrophic floods that engulfed the world, leading to the salvation of a chosen few, are ancient and universal, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. These flood narratives, though varying in details, form a collective human heritage that has shaped the foundations of religious and cultural identities across different civilizations. Among these narratives, the accounts of Noah's Ark in the Hebrew Bible and the legend of Manu in Hinduism stand as remarkable examples, representing two distinct cultures yet sharing striking similarities in their themes and motifs.

Significance of the Flood Narratives in Cultural Shaping

These narratives, despite being rooted in distinct religious traditions, have played a pivotal role in shaping the religious and cultural identities of their respective communities. The flood narratives, with their shared themes of divine intervention, human survival, and renewal, have provided a common framework through which these communities have interpreted their history, morality, and relationship with the divine. Both narratives offer lessons of righteousness, punishment, and redemption, influencing ethical codes and societal norms. Furthermore, these stories serve as potent symbols of hope, resilience, and the promise of new beginnings, contributing to the enduring impact of these narratives on cultural memory.

Overview of the Article's Purpose and Structure

This scholarly article delves into the fascinating parallels between the flood narratives of Noah's Ark and Manu in Hinduism, exploring their shared motifs and potential historical connections. Through a comprehensive analysis of ancient texts, historical records, and cultural context, this article seeks to elucidate the intricate relationships between these two narratives and the implications for the broader study of global mythologies. The article is organized into several sections, each delving into a specific aspect of the flood narratives.

The following sections will explore the historical contexts of the narratives, the characters of Noah and Manu, the flood event and its aftermath, the impact on cultural identities, and the broader implications for the study of mythologies. By examining the similarities and differences between these narratives, we aim to shed light on the cultural exchanges and shared human experiences that have enriched the tapestry of global mythologies. Through this analysis, we hope to provide a deeper understanding of the universal themes that unite humanity across time and space.

Historical Context

The flood narratives discussed in this scholarly article emerge from the historical contexts of diverse civilizations across different parts of the world. These civilizations include the Mesopotamian, Hebrew, Islamic, and Hindu traditions. Each of these contexts contributes unique cultural, religious, and geographical elements to their respective flood narratives.

Introduction to the Mesopotamian, Hebrew, Islamic, and Hindu Traditions

- Mesopotamian Tradition:** The Mesopotamian flood narrative is one of the earliest recorded flood stories, found in the Epic of Gilgamesh. This narrative is deeply rooted in the ancient Sumerian civilization, which inhabited the region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The protagonist, Utnapishtim, is instructed by the god Ea to build an ark to escape the impending flood, drawing parallels with other flood stories.
- Hebrew Tradition:** The flood narrative in the Hebrew tradition is famously found in the Book of Genesis within the Old Testament of the Bible. Noah is chosen by God to build an ark to save humanity and animals from the divine flood. The Hebrew tradition's flood narrative carries religious significance and moral lessons, highlighting themes of divine justice, obedience, and redemption.
- Islamic Tradition:** In Islamic tradition, the flood narrative is referenced in the Quran in stories about the Prophet Nuh (Noah). The narrative bears similarities to the Hebrew version, emphasizing divine guidance, the construction of an ark, and the preservation of righteousness. The Quranic flood narrative underscores moral lessons and the consequences of disobedience to God's commands.
- Hindu Tradition:** The Hindu flood narrative centers around the figure of Manu, found in texts like the Matsya Purana and the Satapatha Brahmana. Manu is warned by the deity Matsya (Vishnu's fish avatar) about the impending deluge and is instructed to build an ark to save himself, sages, and seeds of life. The Hindu narrative symbolizes cyclical creation and rebirth, aligned with Hindu cosmology.

Mention of Ancient Texts and Sources

- Mesopotamian Sources:** The Epic of Gilgamesh, specifically the "Epic of Atrahasis" and "Epic of Ziusudra," holds the Mesopotamian flood narrative. These cuneiform tablets reflect the cultural and mythological beliefs of ancient Mesopotamia.
- Hebrew Sources:** The flood narrative in the Hebrew tradition is primarily documented in the Book of Genesis (6-9). This foundational text within the Old Testament has influenced Abrahamic religions and continues to shape moral and theological perspectives.
- Islamic Sources:** The Quran includes flood narratives involving the Prophet Nuh, with references spread across various chapters (11:25-48, 23:22-30, 29:14-15, 54:9-15, 71:1-28). These accounts provide insight into Islamic teachings and perspectives on divine guidance and human conduct.
- Hindu Sources:** The Hindu flood narrative is present in texts like the Matsya Purana and the Satapatha Brahmana. These texts offer glimpses into Hindu cosmology, religious beliefs, and the symbolism of destruction and renewal.

These ancient sources not only narrate the flood events but also reflect the values, beliefs, and worldviews of the societies in which they originated. The presence of flood narratives across cultures highlights the significance of catastrophic events in shaping cultural memory and theological interpretations.

Narrative Similarities

The flood narratives of Noah and Manu stand as two pillars of ancient mythological literature, each recounting a cataclysmic event that reshaped the world. A comparative analysis of these narratives reveals intriguing parallels that transcend cultural boundaries and highlight the universal themes inherent in human storytelling.

The foundational similarity lies in the divine warning both Noah and Manu receive. In the Genesis account, God observes the wickedness of humanity and instructs Noah to build an ark to safeguard against the impending deluge. Similarly, in Hindu mythology, Manu is warned by the Matsya (Fish) avatar of Lord Vishnu, signaling the need to construct a vessel to survive the encroaching floodwaters. The divine intervention underscores a shared belief in the moral imperative of righteousness.

Examining the construction of the vessels, distinct parallels emerge. Noah's ark is built according to specific dimensions and houses pairs of animals along with his family. In a similar vein, Manu crafts his boat as directed, saving himself, seven sages, and essential seeds of life. This constructional symmetry speaks to the preservation of life, emphasizing the role of chosen individuals in maintaining the continuity of existence.

Upon surviving the flood, both Noah and Manu witness a renewal of life. The aftermath of devastation is marked by a covenant—a divine promise. In the Biblical narrative, God establishes the rainbow as a symbol of this promise, while in the Hindu story, Lord Vishnu assumes various avatars to ensure the continuity of dharma and righteousness. This shared motif highlights the idea of renewal and rejuvenation after periods of chaos.

Exploration of Shared Motifs

The survival of the virtuous is a central motif in both narratives. Noah is depicted as a righteous man chosen by God for his faithfulness in an increasingly corrupt world. In the same vein, Manu's virtue and piety are integral to his selection as the recipient of divine guidance. This shared emphasis on righteousness suggests a shared cultural appreciation for individuals who uphold moral principles even amidst adversity.

The renewal of life following the flood mirrors the cyclical nature of existence. Noah and his family repopulate the Earth, emphasizing the perpetuation of the human species. Similarly, Manu's role as the progenitor of mankind underscores the concept of renewal and the idea that life finds a way to persist even in the face of destruction.

Names and Symbolism

The names "Noah" and "Manu" hold a profound significance in their respective religious narratives, marking the pivotal roles these figures play in the stories of the Great Flood and the preservation of life. The linguistic connections between these names have long been a subject of interest among scholars, hinting at a potential shared origin or influence between the two tales.

The name "Noah" is derived from the Hebrew word "נֹחַ" (Nukh), which translates to "rest" or "comfort." In the context of the biblical narrative, this name carries a profound meaning as Noah's ark provides refuge and comfort amidst the devastating floodwaters. Similarly, the name "Manu" finds its roots in Sanskrit, where it signifies "man," symbolizing the progenitor of humanity. The names are emblematic of the central roles these figures play in the renewal and continuation of life after the cataclysmic floods.

A notable linguistic connection between the two names is the recurring syllable "N" or "Nu." In the case of "Noah," this syllable is the prefix of the name and is mirrored in "Manu" where it appears as a prefix as well. The prominence of this syllable in both names raises intriguing questions about its symbolic meaning and its potential link to the concept of renewal and new beginnings.

The syllable "Nu" itself holds deep symbolism across various cultures. In ancient Egyptian mythology, "Nu" represents the primordial waters from which creation emerged, signifying the origin of life. This symbolism aligns with the flood narratives of both Noah and Manu, where the waters play a dual role of destruction and renewal. The recurring presence of this syllable in both names could signify a shared understanding of the fundamental role of water in shaping the destiny of humanity.

Beyond linguistic connections, the symbolism of names in religious narratives holds a significant role in conveying deeper spiritual truths. Names often serve as indicators of a character's attributes, mission, or destiny. In the cases of Noah and Manu, their names encapsulate the essence of their roles as saviors and progenitors. These names become more than mere identifiers; they become vessels of meaning, carrying the weight of the stories they are part of.

The concept of names as symbols also extends to the broader themes of faith and devotion. Both Noah and Manu are portrayed as virtuous individuals chosen by a divine force to undertake the monumental task of preserving life in the face of destruction. Their names, then, become embodiments of divine guidance and intervention. The symbolism of names underscores the idea that these figures are not acting solely on their own accord but are instruments of a higher purpose, playing out the will of a benevolent force.

Cultural and Geographical Context

The flood narratives of Noah and Manu hold significant places in the cultural and geographical contexts of their respective civilizations. The stories are rooted in regions that have experienced great river valleys and flooding, shaping their narratives in unique ways.

The Middle East, particularly Mesopotamia, is the backdrop for the Noah flood narrative. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers frequently overflowed their banks, causing massive floods that impacted ancient civilizations. This geographical reality undoubtedly influenced the development of flood myths in the region. The story of Noah, as recorded in the Bible's Book of Genesis, reflects the culture's response to these natural phenomena and serves as an explanation for the devastating floods that regularly occurred. The Ark's landing on Mount Ararat, a prominent peak in present-day Turkey, further ties the narrative to the geographic region.

In contrast, the Indian subcontinent, the setting for the Manu flood narrative, is characterized by its own river valleys, notably the Ganges and Indus. These rivers, too, were prone to flooding, and their impact on the civilizations that thrived along their banks cannot be underestimated. The Matsya Purana and Shatapatha Brahmana present Manu as the hero of the flood narrative. His tale is interwoven with the sacred Ganges river, connecting the flood myth to the cultural and religious practices of India. The choice of the Malaya Mountains as the location for the boat's landing emphasizes the connection between myth and geography.

Cultural Impact and Influence

The flood narratives of Noah and Manu have left a profound imprint on the respective civilizations in which they originated. These stories offer explanations for human existence, morality, and the relationship between humans and the divine. They have guided the moral compass of these societies, emphasizing the significance of righteousness and virtue in the face of adversity.

In the Middle East, the Noah flood narrative became an essential aspect of Abrahamic religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The moral lessons of divine justice, redemption, and divine promise resonate across these faiths. The story has influenced art, literature, and cultural practices, fostering a collective sense of identity among adherents of these religions. Furthermore, the flood narrative's emphasis on salvation and renewal echoes the human quest for redemption and second chances.

Similarly, in the Indian subcontinent, the Manu flood narrative has been woven into the fabric of Hinduism. The story underscores themes of dharma (righteousness) and cosmic order. It highlights the idea that the preservation of righteousness ensures the continuity of life, both in a literal sense after the flood and in a spiritual sense through adherence to moral principles. The influence of the narrative is evident in Hindu cultural practices, rituals, and festivals that celebrate the triumph of good over evil. Manu's role as the progenitor of mankind is a source of cultural pride and a reminder of the profound connection between myth and human history.

Reflection of the Relationship between Humans and the Natural World

The flood myths of Noah and Manu offer insights into the complex relationship between humans and the natural world. Floods, often catastrophic events, hold a mirror to humanity's vulnerability in the face of natural forces. These myths address the age-old human struggle to navigate the unpredictability of the environment while seeking to comprehend the divine plan.

The flood narratives acknowledge the awe-inspiring power of nature and the profound impact it can have on human lives. Both narratives depict a catastrophe of global proportions, underscoring the fragility of human existence in the grand scheme of the cosmos. The Ark in the Noah story and the boat in the Manu narrative symbolize humanity's attempt to harness and survive the overwhelming forces of nature.

Furthermore, these myths highlight the moral dimension of humanity's relationship with the natural world. The destruction caused by the flood is presented as a consequence of human wrongdoing and unrighteousness. This motif serves as a cautionary tale, reminding humanity of the ethical responsibility to maintain a harmonious balance with the environment and fellow beings. The flood myths prompt introspection about humanity's impact on the Earth and the imperative to steward the planet responsibly.

Interpretation and Allegory

The flood narratives found in various cultures have often been interpreted allegorically, providing deeper meanings beyond the literal events. These allegorical interpretations allow for a broader exploration of moral lessons, spiritual teachings, and philosophical insights that transcend the boundaries of time and culture.

In Hinduism, the story of Manu and the great flood carries profound allegorical significance. Beyond the literal depiction of a worldwide deluge, the flood represents a cyclical pattern of destruction and rebirth, symbolizing the constant cycles of creation and dissolution that characterize the universe in Hindu cosmology. The allegory of the flood serves as a reminder of the impermanence of the material world and the need for spiritual awakening. It highlights the importance of dharma (righteousness) and the eternal principles that guide human behavior, even in the face of chaos and upheaval.

Similarly, in the Biblical account of Noah's Ark, the flood narrative has been interpreted allegorically to convey spiritual truths. The flood can be seen as a metaphor for the cleansing of the soul, where the destruction of corrupt humanity represents the purification of one's inner self. The ark becomes a symbol of salvation, representing the refuge that a righteous person finds in the divine amidst the trials of life. The flood story emphasizes the consequences of human actions and the concept of divine judgment, encouraging reflection on personal conduct and moral choices.

Discussion on the allegorical interpretations of the flood narratives in different cultures

The allegorical interpretations of flood narratives extend beyond Hinduism and the Abrahamic religions. Across cultures, the flood stories often serve as vehicles for conveying universal truths and philosophical insights. In Mesopotamian myths, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the flood allegory signifies the fragility of human existence and the pursuit of immortality. Here, the flood narrative underscores the limits of human power and the inevitability of mortality.

Examination of the moral lessons and spiritual teachings conveyed through the flood stories

The flood narratives share common moral lessons and spiritual teachings that resonate across cultures. These stories emphasize the consequences of human transgressions and the importance of ethical behavior. The floods serve as reminders of the need for humility, as well as the responsibility to uphold virtues even in challenging times. The narratives highlight the role of individuals as custodians of creation and stress the significance of compassion, justice, and unity.

Analysis of how these narratives address themes of divine justice, repentance, and renewal

Divine justice is a recurring theme in flood narratives, as it underscores the belief that wrongdoing will eventually be met with consequences. In the stories, the flood serves as a means of restoring cosmic balance and purifying a corrupted world. The concept of repentance also emerges, as individuals are given opportunities to reflect on their actions and seek redemption before the flood occurs. The narratives thus convey the idea of renewal through transformation, offering a chance for humanity to start anew after the floodwaters recede.

Scholarly Perspectives

The flood narratives, present in diverse cultures across the globe, have captured the interest of scholars from various disciplines, including historians, theologians, anthropologists, and mythologists. These narratives, while sharing common elements, have given rise to intriguing debates regarding their origins, historical accuracy, and cultural significance. This section delves into the scholarly perspectives surrounding the flood myths, exploring their interpretations and shedding light on the discussions that have shaped our understanding of these ancient stories.

Introduction to Scholarly Perspectives

The flood narratives hold a prominent place in human mythology and cultural history. Found in civilizations ranging from Mesopotamia to India, these stories have prompted scholars to analyze their deeper meanings, connections, and potential origins. Scholars have approached the flood myths from various angles, seeking to uncover the symbolic messages embedded within them. These perspectives contribute to the understanding of how different societies interpreted catastrophic events and the impact of these interpretations on their worldviews.

Works by Historians, Theologians, Anthropologists, and Mythologists

Numerous scholars have extensively studied the flood narratives, providing invaluable insights into their significance and cultural contexts. Historians such as Romila Thapar have explored the presence of flood narratives in Hindu texts like the Mahabharata and Vishnu Purana. Theologians have delved into the theological implications of the stories, considering the role of divine intervention and retribution. Anthropologists, including A.J.A. Dubious, have drawn parallels between flood myths in different cultures, suggesting cross-cultural influences and common themes. Mythologists, like Joseph Campbell, have analyzed the psychological and archetypal dimensions of these myths.

Debates Surrounding Historicity and Origins

One of the central debates revolves around the historicity of the flood myths. Some scholars argue that these narratives could be rooted in actual historical events, such as local floods or deluge catastrophes that shaped early civilizations. Others view the myths as allegorical accounts conveying moral lessons, spiritual truths, and cosmological concepts. The question of whether there was a universal flood that influenced multiple cultures remains a topic of discussion.

Furthermore, scholars have explored the potential cultural diffusion and exchange of flood narratives. The striking similarities between the flood story of Noah and the Hindu flood legend of Manu have led to theories of cross-cultural transmission or shared cultural experiences. The presence of flood myths in diverse civilizations raises intriguing questions about their transmission mechanisms and the interplay between cultural narratives.

Cultural Implications

The flood narratives of Noah and Manu hold profound cultural implications that have shaped religious identity and beliefs across various traditions such as Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. These narratives serve as foundational myths that not only explain the origins of humanity but also convey moral lessons and divine intervention. In Islam, the story of Noah (Nuh in Arabic) is recounted in the Quran, highlighting his role as a prophet and the ark as a

symbol of salvation. This narrative underscores the significance of obedience to God's commands and the consequences of disbelief. Similarly, in Christianity, the flood story of Noah emphasizes themes of redemption, covenant, and God's mercy, as portrayed in the Book of Genesis.

The cultural implications of the Manu flood narrative are deeply rooted in Hinduism. Manu, as the progenitor of mankind, symbolizes human responsibility in upholding righteousness (dharma). The flood narrative is intricately woven into Hindu cosmology and ethics, reflecting the cyclical nature of creation, destruction, and rebirth. The contrast between the Abrahamic and Hindu flood narratives reveals diverse perspectives on the relationship between humanity and the divine, the purpose of existence, and the role of individuals within the cosmic order.

Influence on Literature, Art, and Cultural Expressions

The flood narratives of Noah and Manu have left an indelible mark on literature, art, and cultural expressions across civilizations. Literary works spanning centuries have drawn inspiration from these narratives, exploring themes of human frailty, divine justice, and the quest for meaning in the face of adversity. In John Milton's epic poem "Paradise Lost," the biblical flood serves as a backdrop, evoking themes of sin and redemption. Similarly, Indian epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata incorporate flood motifs to convey moral dilemmas and tests of character.

Artistic representations of the flood narratives have adorned religious texts, paintings, sculptures, and architectural marvels. The image of Noah's ark, animals two by two, and the rainbow has become iconic, capturing the essence of divine intervention and renewal. Hindu temples and sculptures depict Manu and his vessel as symbols of cosmic order and the preservation of life during times of upheaval.

Contemporary Relevance

Despite the passage of time, the flood narratives of Noah and Manu continue to resonate with contemporary society, highlighting their enduring appeal and relevance. In a world marked by rapid change, environmental concerns, and moral challenges, these narratives offer insights into human behavior, accountability, and the consequences of neglecting ethical responsibilities. The universality of the flood theme transcends cultural and religious boundaries, serving as a reminder of the fragility of life and the importance of harmony with nature.

In an era where scientific explanations coexist with religious beliefs, the flood narratives also prompt reflection on the intersection of faith and reason. The symbolism of water as a purifying agent and a source of renewal resonates with themes of transformation and personal growth in modern spiritual contexts.

Conclusion

In summary, the comparative analysis of the flood narratives from the Old Testament, Hindu mythology, and the Quran offers a fascinating exploration into the common threads that bind diverse cultures across the globe. Through a thorough examination of the stories of Noah in the Old Testament and Manu in Hindu mythology, as well as their Quranic renditions, we have observed remarkable parallels that transcend geographical and religious boundaries.

The flood stories of Noah and Manu, while originating in different cultural contexts, share striking similarities in their core elements. Both narratives depict a divinely chosen figure—Noah and Manu—selected to build an ark in preparation for a devastating flood that will wipe out all life on Earth. This flood is often interpreted as a cleansing force, symbolizing the need for renewal and rebirth. The role of these chosen individuals extends beyond mere survival; they are entrusted with preserving the seeds of life, be it animal pairs or the essentials of sustenance, to ensure the continuation of life after the cataclysmic event.

A significant commonality between the narratives lies in the ethical lessons they convey. Both Noah and Manu are depicted as righteous and virtuous individuals who find favor with the divine due to their piety and adherence to moral principles. This highlights the shared belief in the importance of virtuous conduct and righteous living. The flood narratives thus serve as cautionary tales, warning against the consequences of moral decay and the abandonment of ethical values.

Furthermore, the universality of the flood narratives underscores the timeless human quest for meaning and purpose in the face of natural disasters and catastrophic events. These stories speak to humanity's inherent need to find solace, hope, and guidance in times of crisis. The archetypal themes of destruction and renewal resonate deeply within the human psyche, transcending cultural and religious boundaries. The flood narratives remind us that adversity and challenges are part of the human experience, and they provide a framework for understanding how to navigate such trials with resilience and faith.

In a world characterized by diverse belief systems and cultural perspectives, the enduring significance of the flood narratives is evident. They serve as bridges that connect humanity's collective consciousness, highlighting shared values and aspirations. The power of these narratives lies not only in their historical or religious contexts but also in their capacity to inspire reflection, introspection, and a deeper understanding of our place in the cosmos.

As we reflect on the parallels between Noah and Manu, as well as the ethical lessons embedded in their stories, it becomes clear that the flood narratives are not confined to specific dogmas or traditions. Rather, they encompass universal truths that transcend time and space. The enduring allure of these narratives lies in their ability to resonate with the human condition, offering guidance, comfort, and a profound reminder of the interconnectedness of all

humanity. Thus, whether recounted in the pages of ancient texts or pondered upon in contemporary discourse, the flood narratives continue to be a source of wisdom, insight, and inspiration for generations to come.

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