

# CHEESE



## IS ANIMAL RENNET HALAAL?

BY  
MUJLISUL ULAMA OF SOUTH AFRICA  
P.O. BOX 3393, PORT ELIZABETH  
SOUTH AFRICA  
6056

## ANIMAL RENNIN IN CHEESE

Please comment on the following article of an Aalim who says that cheese containing haraam animal rennet is halaal.

There are two issues which need to be considered in order to derive the Islamic ruling on cheese: firstly, does the rennet undergo a chemical transformation when it is extracted from its source, and secondly, the quantity of rennet vis-à-vis the other ingredients. Both of these issues have a direct and immediate effect on the permissibility or impermissibility of such cheese. [Of interest is to note that although this article is specifically about cheese, these two foundational premises may be extrapolated to derive rulings on all substances and food items.] The first issue, that of a complete chemical transformation, is called in Arabic *istih la*. *Istih la* basically answers the question: If an impure substance undergoes a complete and total chemical transformation into a pure substance, is that sufficient to consider it to be pure? The classic example used by the early scholars is that of vinegar derived from wine: if left in the [right circumstances](#) or agitated in a specific manner, any bottle of wine will undergo a chemical transformation and become vinegar. This resultant vinegar is completely harmless and does not intoxicate.

The next issue is really the crux of the matter. It concerns the *quantity* and *residuum* of an impure substance when mixed with a pure one. Now, there is pretty much unanimous agreement amongst the scholars that an extremely minute quantity of an impure substance, when added to a large quantity of a pure one, will not make the final substance impure. For example, if a glass of urine is thrown into an average-size lake, no scholar would consider the entire lake to be impure. Although the overall principle is a matter of agreement, there is no clear consensus on exactly *how much* impurity would affect a pure substance. So the real issue here is how to define what constitutes a miniscule quantity versus what would constitute a significant quantity. But the basic point is agreed upon: if an extremely minute quantity of an impurity is totally dissolved in a much larger quantity of a pure substance, such that the impurity does not leave any discernable presence (this is called *istihl k*), the resultant substance will still be pure.

Other scholars also give similar rulings. For example, Ibn Hazm claimed that if an impure substance is dissolved in a larger quantity of purity, to such an extent that the final product does not carry the name of the impure substance (i.e., such that the impure substance will not be a significant part of the final product), then the impermissibility that was initially applied to the impure substance will be removed from the final product, since the final product is not called that impure substance. As an example, he states that if a drop of wine were to fall into water, no effect is demonstrated, and the same applies for all other substances as well.

The primary issue that needs to be considered when it comes to the permissibility or impermissibility of cheese, in this author's humble opinion, is the quantity of animal rennet that exists in it. Consider the following: In a crude [experiment](#), **2 square centimeters** of a prepared calf's stomach lining was immersed in **30 grams of water** to produce the initial rennet solvent. After the extraction process, the remaining linings were **removed** via a fine sieve, and then **one teaspoon** of the solvent rennet (i.e., around one-seventh of the initial solvent) was then mixed with approximately **five gallons** of prepared milk to produce around **five pounds** of cheese. Someone with a little more time than myself may easily work out the precise percentages and the final quantity of animal rennet in an average slice of cheese, but from these numbers it is pretty clear that a very insignificant quantity of actual animal enzyme ends up in the final cheese. To quote only one reference, [Wikipedia](#) states that 1 kg of manufactured cheese contains about 0.0003 grams of rennet enzymes. Again, that's one kilogram – imagine how much rennet would be present in one slice, and now imagine how much would be in a corn chip that has only been coated with dried cheese.

Such a miniscule quantity of impurity (i.e., less than 0.00003 %) simply cannot make the entire product impure – a drop of *najas* blood that falls into a ten-gallon container of water is actually more concentrated than the amount of rennet enzymes in cheese.

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Hence, to conclude, it is the humble opinion of this student of knowledge (and of many great '*ulam* ') that cheese, regardless of how it is manufactured or who it is manufactured by, is permissible. [The only exception would be if *other* impure additives of a sufficient quantity were incorporated in the manufacturing process - such as bacon flavored cheese.]

So go ahead BROTHER— eat away! Oh, and pass the dip...

### THE FALLACY OF THE CLAIM

The claim that in cheese production the animal rennet undergoes a total transformation (*istihaalah*) is false. The analogy of wine becoming vinegar is baseless. In the case of wine, true *istihaalah* occurs. The wine is transformed into an entirely different substance with its own nature and properties. It becomes vinegar which is different and apart from wine.

In cheese production, the rennet does not become cheese. The ten gallons of milk become cheese as a consequence of the action of rennet. It is simply an issue of the rennet asserting its effect on the milk in the same way that salt and spices assert their effects when added to food. There is thus no technical, *Fiqhi* transformation (*Istihaalah*) of rennet taking place here.

Adding rennet to the milk is like adding sugar to the tea. The sugar dissolves and exercises its effect of sweetness on the tea. The sugar does not undergo *Istihaalah* in the technical meaning. It has not disappeared despite having assumed another form inside the tea. It is this type of change which overtakes rennet when it is added to the milk in cheese production.

Now if impure sugar –sugar soaked in urine is added to the tea, such tea will become haraam regardless of the small quantity added. Every change cannot be described as *Istihaalah*. *Istihaalah* in the literal sense applies to every thing which undergoes change. Flour is changed into bread and cake. If the flour is impure or if pork fat is added to the flour which is then baked into bread, it will not be said that the bread is halaal because *Istihaalah* has taken place.

The consequence of *Istihaalah* is an entirely new, independent entity with its own distinct properties. When an impurity is burnt and reduced to ash; when wine is transformed into vinegar; when a dead animal putrefies in a saltpan and is transformed into salt; when a corpse disintegrates and becomes soil, *valid Istihaalah* occurs. No such *Istihaalah* takes place with rennet added to milk. Rennet merely imposes its effect on the milk and transforms the milk into cheese as a consequence of its action. Thus, the *Istihaalah* argument in this regard is baseless.

The quantity argument proffered in the article is likewise baseless. Even a tiny quantity of impurity renders the food, etc. impure, hence haraam for consumption. The analogies presented for rendering haraam cheese halaal on the basis of the minute quantity of rennet are erroneous.

The claim that an 'extremely minute quantity of an impure substance, when added to a large quantity of a pure substance, will not make the final substance impure', is fallaciously applied to cheese-production. The fallacy of this argument is well-borne out by the example

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of a glass of urine cast into a lake. The glass of urine will not render the entire lake *najis*(impure). This example in relation to rennet in cheese is deceptive and baseless.

Even if we progress on the glass or urine, we say that the lake will not become impure if even numerous buckets of urine are dumped into it. This rule applies to specifically water in a 'large' quantity. And, in terms of the Shariah 'large quantity' in this context refers to sea water, river water, lakes and to large ponds with a minimum size of 10 cubits square. This rule does not apply to milk for example. A glass of urine added to a large quantity of milk, will render the milk *najis*.

The contention that "there is no clear consensus on exactly how much impurity would affect a pure substances", is misleading. Firstly the rule in this regard applies to only running water and large quantities of water as mentioned above. It may not be extended to foodstuff. Secondly, the Shariah clearly defines the quantity of impurity which will render pure water impure. Even flowing water or water in a lake, pond or dam will become *najis* if the added impurity asserts its properties on the water to the extent that the properties of the water itself are changed. Thus, if the impurity affects the odour, taste, colour or flow, the water becomes *najis*.

From this it should be understood that even a large quantity of water in a huge tank becomes impure if the added impurity changes the properties of the water. The legalizer of haraam cheese, avers: "*So, the real issue here is how to define what constitutes a miniscule quantity versus what would constitute a significant quantity.*" Relative to a large quantity of water (large in terms of the Shariah), there is no conundrum as claimed. The Shariah does define the quantity as applicable to water. The quantity is simply the amount of impurity which will change the properties of the water. Thus, in relation to a river or a lake, even a thousand litres of impurity could be 'miniscule' if it has no effect on the water. But this rule is restricted to flowing water or water in large quantity. It does not apply to food and consumable liquids such as milk, juice, etc.

The legalizer of haraam cheese alleges: "*But, the basic point is agreed upon. If an extremely minute quantity in an impurity is totally dissolved in a much larger quantity of a pure substance, such that the impurity does not leave any discernable presence (this is called istihlak), the resultant substance will be pure.*"

This is another deceptive fallacy. Whilst this applies to large quantity of water, it may not be extended to milk and foodstuff. In fact, a few drops of urine added to 10 or 20 litres of water will become totally dissolved and there will be no discernable effect on the water. Nevertheless, this water will be *najis*. The argument of 'discernable presence' applies to rivers, lakes, the sea and ponds, not to milk, etc.

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A teaspoon of faeces added to dough to produce a cake will exercise no discernable effect on the final product (the baked cake). Will it be permissible to consume this cake? Perhaps the writer of the article will enjoy the faeces-laced cake

The writer then presents another extremely misleading argument in support of his view of the permissibility of consuming haraam cheese. He says: “*The primary issue that needs to be considered when it comes to the permissibility or impermissibility of cheese, is the quantity of animal rennet that exists in it.....To quote only one reference, Wikipedia states that 1 kg of manufactured cheese contains about 0.0003 grams of rennet enzymes. ....Such a miniscule quantity of impurity simply cannot make the entire product impure.*”

Why can it not make the entire product *najis and haraam* when it has manifested its strength, power and effect on the entire product? In the context of cheese-manufacture, the miniscule quantity is irrelevant. Whilst this extremely small and insignificant quantity may have no relevance if it happens to be urine or impure water, the same does not apply to rennet. Despite the miniscule quantity, it exercises a powerful effect on the milk. It coagulates and converts a large quantity of milk into cheese. Thus, rennet cannot be wished into insignificance on account of its miniscule quantity. Let us assume that such a miniscule quantity of a substance added to a liquid transforms the liquid into an intoxicating beverage. The resultant beverage will be a haraam liquor notwithstanding the .00003 grams of the impure substance added. The final product produced by the miniscule ingredient confirms the powerful effect of the *najis* substance. It is not simply a matter of the rennet having dissolved into the milk without producing a discernable effect. The miniscule amount is added by design. It is the miniscule quantity which is required to overwhelm the properties of milk for transforming it into cheese. Thus, the *najis* ingredient (rennet) asserts its properties and effect thereby eliminating the properties of the milk which it coagulates into cheese.

The rule applicable to even abundant water is that it becomes *najis* if the *najaasat* in it overwhelms its (the water's) properties regardless of the quantity required to effect this change in the water. If it be assumed that .0003 grams of an impurity eliminates the properties of the water in a pond, then the whole pond will be impure regardless of the miniscule quantity of the impurity which exercises the powerful effect. The effect of the impure rennet permeates every drop of the milk rendering it impure. The effect of the impure rennet may not be wished away on the basis of its miniscule quantity of .00003 grams per kilogram of cheese.

The Shariah does not consider the weight and percentages of the impure ingredient. It takes into account the effect of the impurity. When the Fuqaha say that a quantity of impurity does not render the lake's water impure if the water undergoes no change, they do not heed the amount. They look at the effect of the impurity on the properties of the water. So whether the *najaasat* be a big quantity or a miniscule amount, if it changes the natural properties of the water, the latter will be impure otherwise not.

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The arguments produced by the legalizer of haraam cheese open a wide gateway for *fitnah*. His arguments are irrational. Consider his statement: “Hence, to conclude, it is the humble opinion of this student of knowledge that cheese, regardless of how it is manufactured or who it is manufactured by, is permissible. The only exception would be if other impure additives of a sufficient quantity were incorporated in the manufacturing process such as bacon flavored cheese.”

What is the difference between impure rennet and ‘other impure additives’? And, why differentiate between rennet and bacon when the effect of rennet on the milk is stronger than the effect of bacon? And, a little bacon flavour if added to the milk, will not produce such a great change as rennet does. Both animal rennet and bacon are haraam and *najas*. What then is the rationale for differentiating between the two, especially when rennet exercises a greater effect on the milk than bacon?

Furthermore, what is the meaning of ‘a sufficient quantity’. If the bacon added to the cheese is less than whatever may be the meaning of ‘sufficient quantity’, will the cheese be halaal? What percentage of bacon in cheese will be permissible? And, what is the evidence for such permissibility?

Also, the other ‘impure additives’ – and there are several in processed cheese – are substantially weaker than rennet. None of the other impure additives exercises such a startling and powerful effect on the milk such as rennet. So why would the impurity of rennet be tolerable whilst the other weaker impurities are unacceptable if used in a ‘sufficient quantity’, whatever this conundrum means? The logic of the writer is convoluted.

According to our Fuqaha there exists difference of opinion even in regard to genuine *infahah* which the modern-day dictionaries incorrectly define as ‘rennet’. There is no difference regarding the *najaasat* of rennet. The difference pertains to *infafah*. But in cheese-manufacture today *infahah* is not used. Rennet extracted from the linings of the stomachs of haraam animals is used.

The official position of the Hanafi Math-hab is permissibility of cheese which contains *infahah* extracted from even *ghairmathbooh* animals (i.e. animals not slaughtered Islamically). However, according to some Hanafi Fuqaha and according to the other three Math-habs, even *infahah* is haraam, hence the resultant cheese too is haraam. As far as rennet of *ghairmathbooh* animals is concerned, there is consensus of the Fuqaha of all Math-habs on its impermissibility.

There is also consensus of the Math-habs on the impurity of even large masses of water if the impurity changes the properties of the water. Thus, to a far greater degree will a small quantity of water or consumables (such as milk, juice, etc.) become impure if the added

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*najaasat* imposes its effect and changes the properties of the consumable item. The criterion for impure rendition is not the quantity or the percentage or the weight. The criterion is the *effect* of the impurity.

In the manufacture of soft drinks, a couple of litres of an alcoholic beverage (the concentrate) is added to sweetened water in huge tanks of tens of thousands of litres. The miniscule quantity of the alcoholic substance – miniscule in relation to the water in the tank – exercises such a powerful effect that it completely overwhelms the sweetened water and imposes the effect of its flavour and colour on the large mass of water. It will be stupid and fallacious now to argue that the impure alcohol constitutes only .05 or .003 percent of the soft drink. Despite the miniscule percentage, it (the impurity) has completely overwhelmed the water/syrup by imposing its own properties on it. Thus, the miniscule argument is the effect of miniscule brains.

Regarding Ibn Hazam (rahmatullahalayh), firstly, in relation to the Aimmah-e-Mujtahideen, namely, Imaam Abu Hanifah, ImaamMaalik, ImaamShaafi', Imaam Ahmad Bin Hambal, Imaam Abu Yusuf, Imaam Muhammad (rahmatullahalayhim) and many other Aimmah, he is of mediocre calibre. Secondly, we are not the Muqallideen of Ibn Hazam. Thirdly, the writer has cited Ibn Hazam out of context. Fourthly, the notion which he attributes to Ibn Hazam is baseless.

While the writer has set himself up as a mujtahid, his extremely defective 'research' portrays stupidity. The research of even a non-Mujtahid Aalim should be intellectually panoptical. But the legalizer of haraam cheese is extremely deficient in this aspect, hence he has failed to understand the proper view of Ibn Hazam.

Attempting to extravasate support from Ibn Hazam, the writer says: "*Ibn Hazm claimed that if an impure substance is dissolved in a larger quantity of purity, to such an extent that the final product does not carry the name of the impure substance (i.e., such that the impure substance will not be a significant part of the final product), then the impermissibility that was initially applied to the impure substance will be removed from the final product, since the final product is not called that impure substance. As an example, he states that if a drop of wine were to fall into water, no effect is demonstrated, and the same applies for all other substances as well.*"

The haraam cheese legalizer has failed to understand what Ibn Hazam states here. Ibn Hazam unequivocally states that the pure substance will remain pure if the impurity does not exercise any effect on the pure substance, e.g. water, milk, etc. The writer concedes this in the aforementioned statement in which he says: "*no effect is demonstrated*". As far as the impurity, rennet is concerned, it exercises a profound and a powerful effect on the milk to such an extent that it eliminates all the properties of the milk by asserting its properties on the milk. In the example of a drop of wine added to water, which is also not permissible, nevertheless, according to Ibn Hazam such water will remain halaal on condition that the

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water remains water without the slightest change in any of its properties. It has to incumbently remain pure water without any change whatsoever just as it was prior to the addition of the drop of wine.

In *Al-Muhalla BilAathaar*, Ibn Hazam states:

*“Every liquid – water, olive oil, melted butter (ghee), milk rose water, honey, gravy, perfume, etc, - in which an impurity or a haraam substance falls, abstention from it is compulsory. If it (the impurity) changes the colour (of the liquid) in which it was added, or its taste or its odour, then the entire quantity of the liquid becomes faasid (corrupt, despoilt) and consuming it is haraam. Neither is it permissible to use it nor to sell it.”*

He furthermore, stipulates for the purity of the liquid, should a drop of impurity be added: *“If it remains as it was prior to the addition (of the impurity).”* But after addition of the impure haraam rennet, the milk no longer remains as it was prior to the addition. Its colour, taste, odour and fluidity are changed.

The writer has not understood the purport of Ibn Hazam’s view pertaining to the names of things. Ibn Hazam does not mean what the writer has understood and conveyed in the above quote. Regarding the *Ahkaam*(laws) being subservient to the names, Ibn Hazam says: *“The Ahkaam are for the names (of things), and the names are subservient to the sifaat (attributes/properties) which define the things and which differentiate between the different kinds (of things).”* The crucial issue thus is the reality of a substance. In the case of a drop of wine dissolving in water without producing the slightest change in any of the properties of the water, the substance still remains water. The drop of wine did not change the name of water into wine or gravy or juice or anything else. It remains water, hence according to Ibn Hazam, it remains pure.

However, when rennet regardless of the miniscule amount is added to a large quantity of milk, the milk no longer remains milk. The name of the end product changes, hence a new *hukm* is applicable. Now what is the new rule for the resultant cheese which is made from impure rennet? There is no need to interpret Ibn Hazam’s principles pertaining to this issue for the simple reason that he, himself explicitly proclaims such cheese najis and haraam. Thus, he says:

***“It is not halaal to eat cheese made with the infihah of a maitah (dead animal or an animal slaughtered un-Islamically), for verily, its effect is manifest in it (i.e. in the cheese). Similarly, everything mixed with haraam (is not halaal to eat).”***

This ruling of Ibn Hazam knocks out the bottom from the fallacious argument of the legalizer of haraam cheese. It also scuttles the erroneous attribution of permissibility of cheese to Ibn Hazam.



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It is quite clear from Ibn Hazam’s writings that if the impurity regardless of the miniscule amount, changes the properties of the pure substance, the latter is rendered impure and haraam. He furthermore, with clarity declares cheese containing haraam rennet to be haraam. Furthermore, Ibn Hazam’s ruling of the impermissibility of cheese applies to such cheese which according to the Hanafi Math-hab is halaal. As mentioned earlier, there is difference of opinion among our Fuqaha on the permissibility of *infahah*. There is no difference of opinion regarding the impermissibility of rennet.

Basically, according to all Math-habs, even a little impurity added to liquids other than water, will render the liquids impure regardless of the quantity of the liquids, and regardless of the properties of the liquids changing or not. As far as water is concerned, the ruling differs. If impurity dissolves in a large quantity of water without changing its properties, the water remains pure unanimously. If any of the properties of the water is changed by impurity, then even the large mass of water becomes impure according to all authorities.

However, if a small quantity of water does not undergo change on account of the added impurity, then according to some Fuqaha (non-Hanafi), the water remains pure whilst according to other Fuqaha the water is impure.

The writer concluding his fallacious argument, says: “...*regardless of how it is manufactured...is permissible.*” Thus, according to him, cheese containing pig rennet (pepsin) is likewise halaal. Let him enjoy his pork!

### WHAT IS RENNET? WHAT IS INFATAH?

Since we are on the subject of cheese, we take the opportunity to explain the difference between rennet and infatah. The following are reproductions of two letters which we had sometime ago written in response to queries on this topic.

#### **Letter No.1**

The Mufti Saheb erred in his fatwa regarding beef rennet. Rennet derived from non-zabeehah animals is haraam, hence products containing such rennet are likewise haraam.

Mufti Nizaamuddin, Mufti Mahmood and other senior Hanafi Muftis did not issue a fatwa on the permissibility of beef rennet. They merely echoed the same difference of opinion between Imaam Abu Hanifah (rahmatullahalayh) and Imaam Abu Yusuf and Imaam Muhammad (rahmatullahalayhim) on a substance called *Infatah*. Mufti Nizaamuddin and others are of the view that *Infatah* of non-zabeehah calves is haram, and this is our view as well.

The Mufti Sahib has understood that rennet is *Infatah*, hence his error.

He has confused rennet with *Infatah*. Modern dictionaries simply translate *Infatah* as ‘rennet’ when in reality *Infatah* is not rennet. Rennet is the enzyme which is extracted from the stomach linings while *Infatah* is not the rennet enzyme of which the Mufti speaks.

*Infatah* is the curdled milk - the actual milk — which is obtained from a calf which is slaughtered a couple of hours after it drinks its mother’s milk. It is not the enzyme rennet

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which is obtained from the actual stomach linings. In fact, *Infahah* of non-zabeehah calves according to *Qiyaas* should also be haraam. However, in view of the fact that Rasulallah (sallallahualayhiwasallam) and the Sahaabah had consumed cheese containing *Infahah*, the hillat ruling is given *khilaafe-qiyaas* or in conflict with logical reasoning. When *qiyaas* clashes with an act or ruling of Rasulallah(sallallahualayhiwasallam), then we put the *qiyaas* aside and act according to the ruling of Nabi-e-Kareem (sallallahualayhiwasallam).

According to the principles of Fiqah, a *khilaafe-qiyaas* hukm (ruling) may not be extended to other things and substances. It has to be confined to its original substratum which in this case is *Infahah*. It does not follow from the pennissibility of *Infahah* that everything in the stomach and the stomach and the whole non-zabeehah animal is halaal. If the hukm of pennissibility of *Infahah* has to be extended to even the rennet enzyme extracted from the non-zabeehah's stomach, then tomorrow someone can argue that the stomach lining too is halaal, and the stomach too is halaal, and on this basis everything of the non-zabeehah animal is halaal. But this is palpably baseless. This baseless consequence is the effect of extending the hukm of the *Infahah* of non-zabeehah animals to the enzyme rennet obtained from the actual stomach linings of non-zabeehah cattle.

It is impossible to produce true *Infahah* on a commercial scale. A little rennet enzyme will achieve what a huge amount of real *Infahah* can accomplish. People posing questions to senior Muftis in India and Pakistan sometimes themselves do not understand the issue correctly. They present an incorrect picture, hence obtain a fatwa to suit their desires. Now if someone writes to a Mufti saying that the cheese contains beef rennet and rennet is *Infahah*, then obviously he will obtain a fatwa of pennissibility. Meanwhile the Mufti is unaware of the difference. All cheese containing animal rennet from non-zabeehah animals is haraam.

### **Letter No.2**

(1) The fundamental error of those who proclaim cheese containing the rennet of *ghair mathbooh* animals to be halaal is that they are confusing rennet with the substance known as *infahah*. They have failed to understand the difference between *infahah* and *rennet*, hence their error. Cheese containing the *infahah* of halaal *ghair mathbooh* animals is halaal. We say that cheese with such *infahah* is halaal, and this hukm is *khilaafe-qiyaas*. Since Rasulallah (sallallahu alayhiwasallam) and the Sahaabah had consumed such cheese, we say and believe that it is halaal.

However, it will be wrong to say that cheese in which haraam fat has been added is halaal. Since the hillat of the *ghair mathbooh infahah* cheese is *khilaafe-qiyaas*, it (the hukm of hillat) cannot be made *ta'diyah (extended)* to another haraam substance.

The error of the halaalizers of such cheese is that they say that rennet from *ghair mathbooh* animals is halaal because *infahah* is halaal. And, this is manifestly erroneous. We too say that cheese containing *infahah* from *ghair mathbooh* animals is halaal. But *infahah* is not rennet as the dictionaries say. We have to look at the *haqeeqat* (reality) of *infahah* not at the erroneous or customary meaning given to it by the present-day dictionaries.

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