

Cultural & Religious Factors: Undervalued Aspects of Climate Communication



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Major Finding:

Science academics and communicators in Canada **under-appreciate the influence of culture and religion** in how their audiences receive messages about climate science.

‘Religion’ in this context is not theology.

People make choices and decisions based on their understanding of the world. Many people are influenced, at least in part, by religious beliefs and cultural contexts.

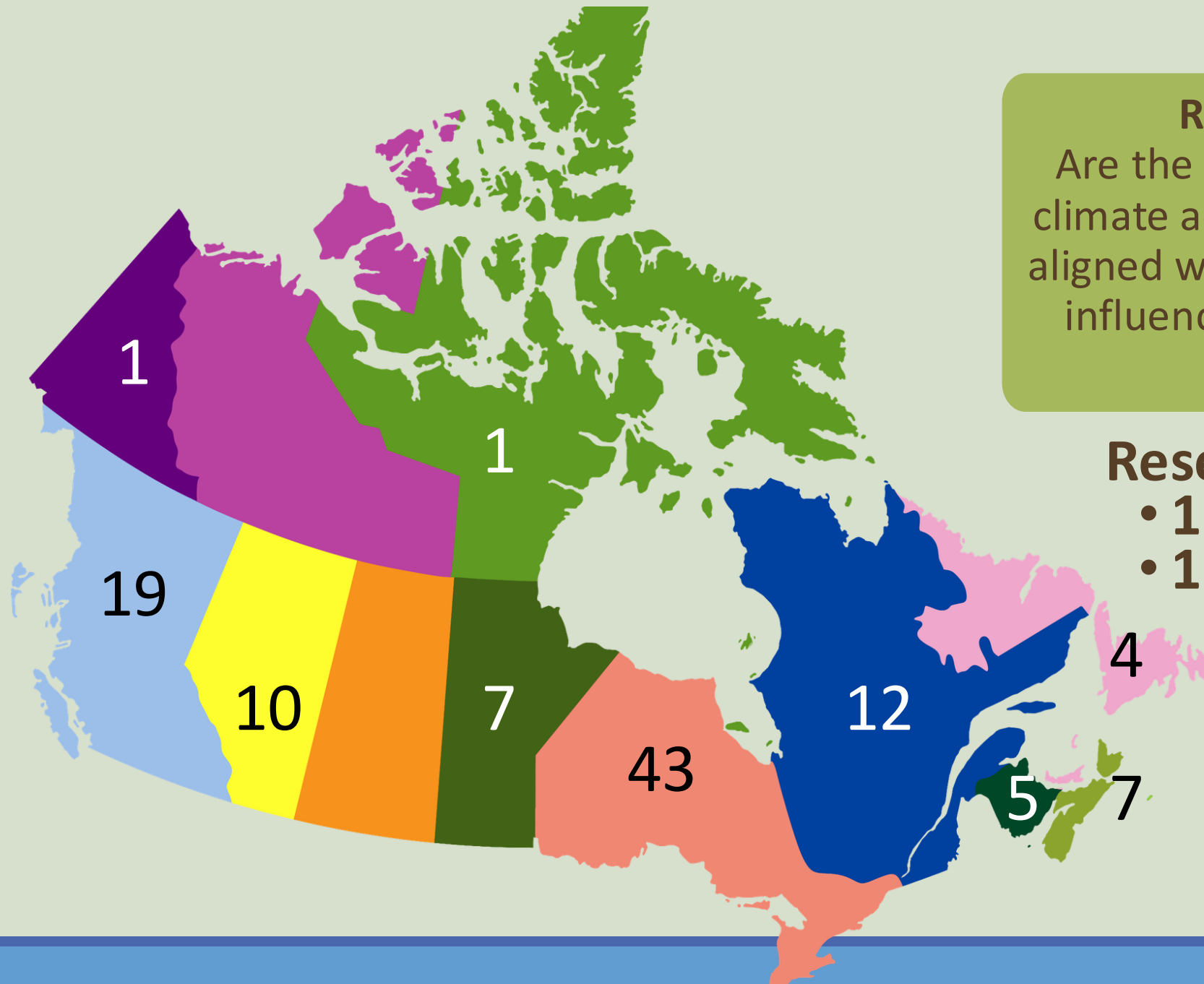


Surveying Climate Academics & Communicators

Identified over 600 potential participants using key words:

- climate
- climate change
- climate science
- climate literacy
- science communication
- net-zero
- decarbonization
- global warming





Research Question

Are the perceptions of Canadian climate academics/communicators aligned with what literature tells us influences public acceptance of climate science?

Research participants:

- 109 surveys
- 15 interviews

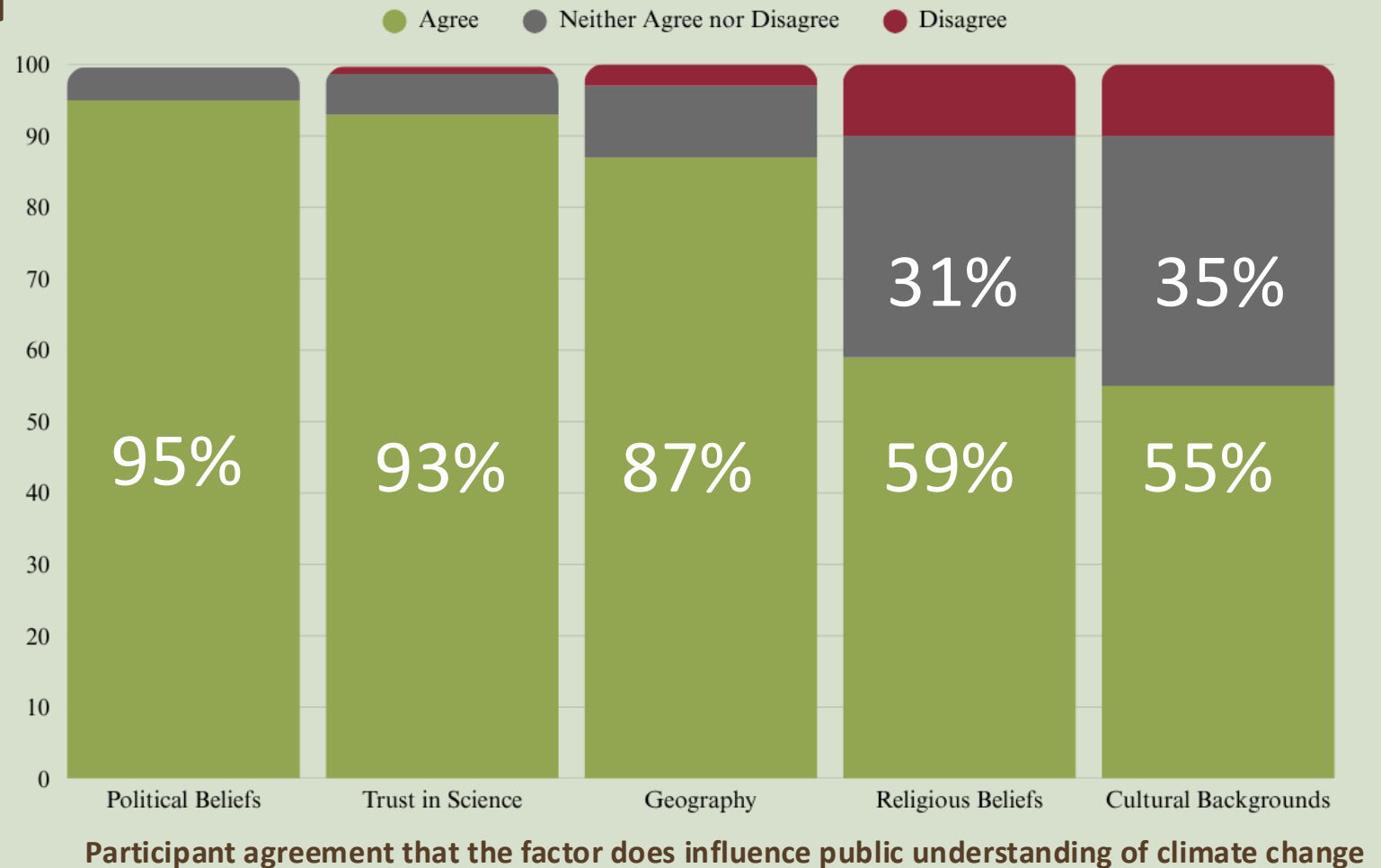
Barriers to Public Understanding of Climate Change

- Misinformation / disinformation
 - Lack of sense of urgency / underestimating the threat
 - Conspiratorial worldviews
 - Messages mismatch with an audience's worldview
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- Communications using overly technical language
 - Lack of interest in climate change topics
 - Lack of information from trusted sources
 - Lack of personal experience with climate related events / outcomes

Religious & Cultural Factors Are Underestimated

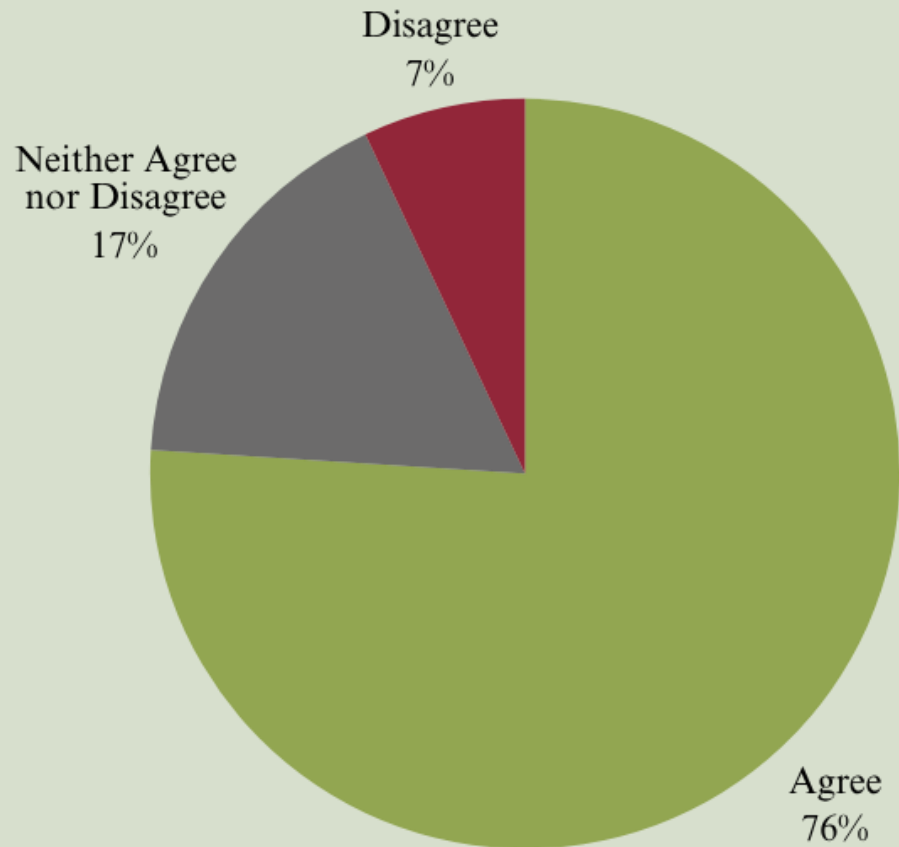
Agreement with factors including **religious beliefs** and **cultural backgrounds** were less strong.

This highlights the disconnect between the perceptions of those communicating the science and existing literature.



Religion & Culture in Climate Engagement

If someone hears a message that doesn't feel like it was meant for them, they may ignore it or they may distrust it



76% of research participants **agreed** that:

“Climate change messaging mismatch with an audience’s worldview” represents a significant barrier to public understanding about climate change

Why This Matters for Impact Assessment

IA practitioners are science communicators. The same dynamics apply

Meaningful participation ≠ compliance

1. Communities feel unseen

2. Decisions face opposition

3. Projects face delays

4. Trust erodes further

We need to build cultural and identity literacy into the IA process from the start. Not as an add-on, but as a core design principle.

The same gap that exists in climate science communication, exists in IA consultation design.

GBA+ : An Entry Point Already in the Toolkit

The 'Plus' already includes religion

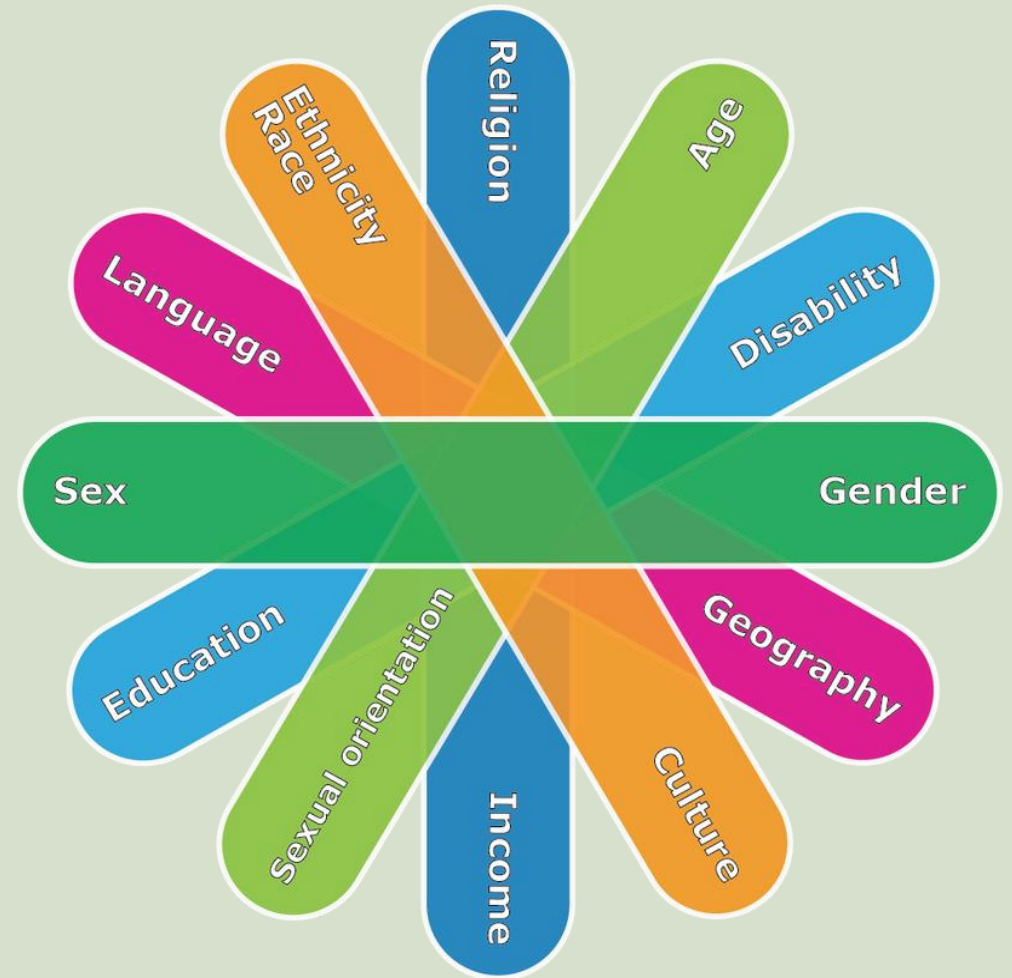
The framework explicitly names religion as an identity factor. The question is whether we operationalize it.

The gap in practice

GBA+ often ends up measuring demographic proxies rather than how worldviews shape community response to a project.

Research contributes evidence

Science communication literature on identity-protective cognition gives practitioners the empirical grounding to act on what GBA+ already asks for.



Source: Impact Assessment Agency of Canada

Meeting People Where They Are

In secular societies, like Canada, the influence of the audience's religious beliefs may be discounted when preparing science communication.

People are **not** empty vessels. They bring their full identities into hearing, trusting, and responding to science.

Using their identities to engaging can bridge a gap, build a relationship of trust and enable better dialogue.



Knowledge Mobilization Is Undervalued

For science communication to be **impactful**, it requires the **creation of space** for multiple knowledges to exist.

Knowledge Mobilization:

The connection between academic research or creative works and organizations, people, and government to improve programming and inform policy change

Localization of Climate Messaging is Key

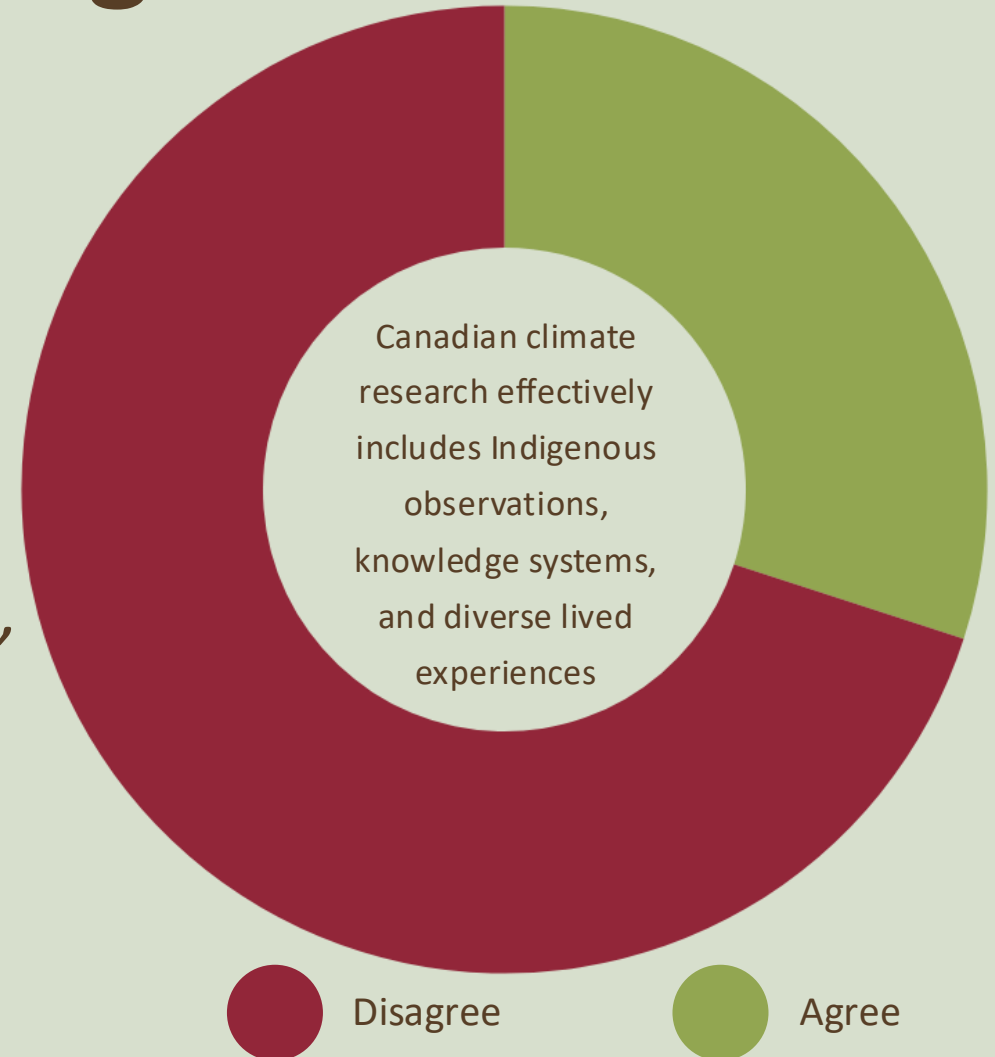
When messages are tailored to the unique characteristics of different communities, climate change becomes relevant and real.



Co-Production of Knowledge

*“I have an exercise for my 3rd year students to **interview an elder** in their life know, **about their observations on climate change**. Students are astounded by what they hear from someone they trust (usually a grandparent). For example, **a harbour students have never seen frozen in their lifetime once hosted car and horse races on the frozen surface.**”*

- Quote from Survey Participant



*“Getting people to **care** about climate change isn't actually the ultimate metric of success.*

*The **ultimate metric of success** is that **you want people to take some sort of action** to make a positive change in the world.”*

- Quote from Interview Participant



Good impact assessment communication is not just about delivering facts.

It's about CONNECTION

1 Expand your scoping lens

2 Operationalize the Plus in GBA+

3 Localize your communication

4 Move from consultation to co-production

5 Ask the better question



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Obrigada
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Let's continue the conversation!

Message me your questions or comments in the IAIA26 app.

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