

Alhassanain (p) Network for Islamic Heritage and Thought

IMPORTANCE OF SALAT

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Naba Cultural

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IN THE NAME OF GOD

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Introduction

Religion is a way and a method for the correct fostering and training of the human beings where its commandments have been fixed by the Lord of the Universe. Even though such kind of training contains matters related to beliefs which should be believed in them, yet important practical teachings too has been considered in it.

Man should, with his firm beliefs, traverse in accordance with this method and follow the divine commands till the end of his life. With a little deliberation in our surrounding environment, we shall observe that the establishment of the whole universe is based on action and nothing else. The sun shines, the earth rotates and the rain descends. In short, the whole creation is at work based on some special rules and system. Even man too has come in accordance with fixed rules and till he wishes to live; he should endeavor and strive.

Those people who do not have a practical method in their life and occupy themselves more with useless hallucinations will not come in handy. If man's entire plans and schemes had remained amidst the writings and books and had not been proven in the experimental stages, then the present world would not have made such a great progress as we see today. Man would have neither become the master of other spheres of the solar system nor would have he been saved from the deadly diseases.

The Islamic ordinances too follow this natural and innate rule. Surely a person being bound over the innate affairs will not be considered a perfect Muslim unless and until he obeys the orders and commands of the Holy Prophet and puts them into action.

God mentions in His Book as such:

هذا كتاب انزلناه مبارك فاتبعوه

“And this is a Book We have revealed, blessed; therefore follow it.”
(An'am/155)

من يطع الله ورسوله فقد فاز فوزاً عظيماً

“And whoever obeys Allah and His Apostle, he indeed achieves a mighty success.” (Ahzaab/71)

قل ان كنتم تحبون الله فاتبعوني يحببكم الله يغفر لكم ذنوبكم

“Say: If you love Allah then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your faults.” (Al-Imran/31)

Such Ayats (verses) reminds us that Quran is a book of action and the condition for lofty salvation, for reaching the desired perfection, for gaining the love and grace of God and getting forgiveness of the sins is obeying the commands of God and His Messenger.

From the view-point of Islam any good and useful action which is in harmony with the teachings of God and is fulfilled with the intention of seeking proximity to God is considered as 'Ibadat' (worship), meaning that

the one performing that action is subject to the Grace and reward of the Compassionate Creator. Therefore if the common acts of every person like eating, sleeping, recreation, acquiring of knowledge etc. are fulfilled in the path of servitude of God and performed as per the aspirations of the divine Prophets will be counted as worship.

With this condition, Islam also possesses some of the Practical teachings, which will be called as, worship. Their general aim is to attract the people towards God and make them beseech Him. For example, Salat is reckoned to be the most important of all of them. God has wished that some of them should be performed by His servants in an obligatory manner and with the motive of seeking nearness to Him for these acts are having an extraordinary effect in the rectification of internal and external affairs of an individual and the society.

Worship of One God is not attributed exclusively to Islam. Rather in the other religions too, it has been introduced as the object of monotheism and a matter remote from polytheism and idol worshipping.

The Holy Qur'an as the last heavenly book has reckoned worship to be exclusive to God and considers worship of anyone and anything other than Him to be 'haraam' (forbidden) and an unforgivable sin.

وقضي ربك ألا تعبدوا إلا آياه

“And your lord has commanded that you shall not serve (any) but Him.”
(Bani Israel 23)

Let it not be unsaid that worship of God consists of various levels. A group of people worship God for acquiring some reward which such a worship will amount to trade. Another group worship God out of fear of His chastisement, which would be equal to the quality of a slave. Yet another group worship God for the purpose of expressing gratitude in front of the innumerable bounties. This will be the worship of a free person. (Nahjul-Balagha/510)

The Holy Prophet of Islam and his honorable legatees used to worship God with this intention and motive such that if God had not fixed any punishment for forsaking worship (yet) expression of gratitude necessitates that His commands should not be disobeyed. (Nahjul-Balagha/527)

These great personalities were fascinated by the Essence of Truth and reckoned His worship to be a matter of great honor for them. They sought honor and great-ness by being slaves of Him.

Hazrat Ali (A.S.) in his supplication with God says; o God, I have not worshipped Thee out of fear of Thy punishment or due to greed of Thy Paradise. Rather I found thee to be worthy of worship. So I worshipped Thee. (Bihar-ul-Anwar 14/41)

By the Grace of God, we shall now talk about Salat, which is the fundamental pillar and the significant form of Islamic worship. We ask the Merciful God to accept us among His slaves and conclude our life with a happy ending. Amen.

Salat is a rite for beseeching and connecting oneself to the Creator of the Universe, which is fulfilled at fixed times and with specified limits.

Due to its manifold valuable and instructive aspects, Salat is obligatory upon every Muslim from adolescence till the end of his or her life. To explain more, forsaking of Salat would invite the punishment of God and the despair of great material and spiritual bounties.

Let it not remain unsaid that Salat is of different kinds which some among them are not obligatory. However performing them would bring great rewards from God.

In the Holy Qur'an and the Islamic traditions the word 'Salaat' has been used instead of Salat. For example

انّ الصلوة كانت علي المؤمنين كتاباً موقوتاً

“Surely prayer is a timed ordinance for the believers.” (Nisa/103)

'Salaat' in Arabic means 'dua' (Prayer), benediction and glorification (Mufrada'at-Raagheb/193) and since our collective actions in Salat is a son of supplication and humility in front of God, it is named as Salaat.

The general rules and manner of performing Salat has been mentioned in Qur'an. However its details have been clarified for the people by Holy Prophet and his immaculate legatees through their sayings and deeds. Thus extraction of religious precepts from Qur'an without reference to the Sunnat (practice) is not possible and anyone who adopts this method will undoubtedly follow the path of deviation. The All-Knowing God says in Qur'an as such:

وانزلنا اليك الذكر لتبين الناس ما نزل اليهم

“And we have revealed to you the Reminder that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them.” (Nahl/44)

Similarly, in a famous tradition among Shias and Sunnis, the Holy Prophet has said:

“I leave behind among you two precious and valuable things. One is the Qur'an and the other my 'Itrat' (progeny)¹ and as long as you hold on to these two you will never be deviated.” (Bihar-ul-Anwar 23/108, 113 & 118)

By paying attention to the holy Ayat and the tradition of Holy Prophet it becomes clear that God appointed Holy Prophet in order that he explains the Quran for the people. The Holy Prophet too ordered the people to follow his 'Ahl-e-bait' after him in the matter of Quranic verses because Quran had been revealed in their houses and Holy Prophet had transferred his knowledge to them.²

Therefore the condition for receiving guidance and in getting deviated is that we should refer to both (Qur'an and Itrat). That is to say Holy Prophet and Ahl-bait are the explainers of the details of the precepts of Qur'an and the discoverers of its mysteries. As such, Salat was recited for the first time by Holy Prophet himself. In the very initial stages of his appointment, he stood near Ka'aba along with Ali (A.S.) and his spouse Khadijah for Salat and praise of his Lord and they rubbed their faces on the ground before their Lord. (Asad-ul-Ghaba 3/414)

With this action they left the polytheists bewildered and brought about a shudder in their hearts.

In this way right from the advent of Islam, Salat was introduced as the first, the best and the most audible devotional act and religious slogan.

Importance of Salat

Regarding the importance of Salat suffice it is to say that more than 90 Ayats of Qur'an have spoken about Salat wherein God has greatly emphasized the unremitting performance of Salat and extolled the performers of Salat.²

As examples, we should confine ourselves by mentioning three such Ayats:

واقم الصلوة لذكري

“And keep up prayer for my remembrance.” (Taha/14)

حافظوا علي الصلوات

“Attend constantly to prayers.” (Bagareh/238)

ويقيمون الصلوة

“...and keep up prayer.” (Bagareh/3)

Besides Holy Qur'an the Islamic texts too are filled with traditions of the Immaculate Ones (A.S.) regarding the virtue of Salat. Our Immaculate leaders have, at appropriate times reminded the people about the true worth of Salat and in the field of action too, they superseded the others.

رجال لا تلهيهم ولا بيع عن ذكر الله

“Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah.” (Nur/37)

Yes, they were at no time heedless of God and surely the true applicability of this Ayat is none other than them. For the acquaintance of our readers we mention here some of the glaring sayings and divine deeds of those great personalities:

Holy Prophet reckoned Salat to be the pillar of religion (Bihar-ul-Anwar 83/202, 207) and said:

Salat in reality is like the pillar of a tent. If the pillar is firm and constant, the ropes, nails and covering of that tent too will remain steady and if the pillar of the tent breaks, then its ropes, nails and covering will no longer be of any benefit. (Al-Kafi 3/266)

A person asked Imam Sadiq (A.S.): “which is the most superior and loveable thing due to which the slaves will be admitted to have gained nearness to God?” Hazrat replied: “After the Ma'rifats (gnosis) of God, I do not consider anything to be superior than Salat. Do you know that the virtuous slave of God Isa-bin-Maryam (A.S.) has said: “And He has enjoined on me the prayer.” (Al-Kafi 3/264)

In another tradition, Imam Sadiq (A.S.) said: The First thing which a slave will be accounted for is Salat. Thus if Salat is accepted by God then all his other acts too will be accepted by God. However if Salat is not accepted, his other acts too will not be accepted. (Al-Fagih 1/28)

Hazrat Ali (A.S.) while making a will to his sons says: Be heedful to God with regards to Salat for Salat is the best of the acts and your pillar of faith. (Toful-Oqool/198)

In the battle of Siffeen, when Ali (A.S.) was busy fighting, he used to occasionally look at the sun. Ibn-Abbass, who was a witness to this incident, asked Hazrat about this affair to which the latter replied: “My look is on the decline of the sun³ so that I perform my Salat.” Ibn-Abbas said: “Is it the time to perform Salat when we are already engaged in a battle?” Imam (A.S.) replied, “Why are we in battle with them? It is because of Salat that we are in conflict with them. (Bihar-ul-Anwar 83/23)

To mention the last point, when the people of Taif⁴ asked Holy Prophet to exempt them from reciting Salat as a condition for accepting Islam, Holy Prophet in reply said:

“Surely there is no goodness in religion if there is no Salat in it.” (Seera-ibn-Hisham 3-4/504)

Among the unadmirable and graceless affairs which all are involved in is sluggishness in the obedience of God and taking lightly His commands. For example if a father asks something from his sons, which is within his limits and if he disobeys, the wise will blame him for this matter. Not giving importance to Salat too is taking lightly the commands of God and His Messenger and degrading the teachings of Islam because Salat is not only a worship which they have asked us to perform but is an affair which has been insisted on and its abstinence has been reckoned to be the destruction of religion. (Bihar-ul-Anwar 84/202)

In the Holy Qur’an it has come that: On the day of Qiyamat it will be asked from the inhabitants of Hell:

ما سلككم في سقر قالوا لم نك من المصلين

“Which of your action has cast you into the Fire Hell? They shall reply: ‘Because we were not from the worshippers.’” (Muddasir/42)

One of the narrators of tradition says as such:

One day, I visited Imam Sadiq’s wife for expressing my condolence on the occasion of his demise. At that moment she cried and I too cried. Thereafter she began to speak and said: If you had seen Hazrat during the last moments of his life, you would have witnessed an astonishing affair. At the time when Hazrat was bidding farewell to this world, he ordered all his relatives come near him and then looking at their faces he said:

“Our intercession will not reach those who take their Salat lightly.” (Bihar-ul-Anwar 47/2)

Holy Prophet himself has said:

“The one who takes his Salat lightly is not from us.” (Bihar-ul-Anwar 83/9 and Kafi 3/269)

Taking Salat lightly consists of various levels which over here we shall mention four important cases amongst them:

(1) Forsaking Salat along with its denial:

From the view point of Islam, anyone who denies the basic entity of Salat in religion and does not believe it to be a divine duty will exit from Islam and will be judged as a 'Kafir' (an infidel).

A person went to the presence of Holy Prophet and said, "O Messenger of God, advice me." Holy Prophet (S.A.W.A.) said: "do not forsake Salat deliberately for if anyone who leaves Salat intentionally the religion of Islam will depart from him." (Al-Kafi 3/488)

(2) Forsaking Salat without its denial:

The one who has accepted the teachings of Islam and is bound by its instructions but due to some reasons like sluggishness and laziness does not follow some of its instructions such as forsaking of Salat will not exit from the religion of Islam but will be counted as a sinful person before God. Amidst this the point which is worthy of discussion is that in Islamic traditions the forsakers of Salat are named as infidels because forsaking of Salat is similar to covering of truth and degradation of the commands of God.

A person asked Imam Sadiq (A.S.): what is the reason that you do not consider the one who performs obscene acts like adultery as an infidel but consider the forsaker of Salat to be an infidel?

Imam (A.S.) replied: The reason is that an adulterer and his like engage in that act due to passion since passion overcome him. But the forsaker of Salat does not forsake Salat except for the reason that he takes Salat lightly. An adulterer takes pleasure from his action contrary to the forsaker of Salat who does not desire any benefit from his action. Thus when there exists no pleasure there occurs a waste and disrespect for Salat which in such a case infidelity will turn towards that person. (Al-Faqih 1/206)

It is worthy of mentioning that infidelity over here does not refer to expulsion from the religion of Islam. Rather it has been used in the meaning of sin and its like. (Bihar-ul-Anwar 93/60)

(3) Non-observance of limits and conditions of Salat:

As it was previously mentioned, Salat is a worship, which has come from God. Therefore it is having some limit and conditions where the correctness and acceptance of Salat depends on observance of these limits and conditions.

It is the example of a person performing Salat who is not particular in observing the limits and conditions of Salat and does not ask from the learned the matters related to Salat. In such a case he has not honored the right of God.

Once Holy Prophet (S.A.W.A) was sitting in a mosque when a person came and started to perform Salat. However he did not perform his 'ruku' (bowing) and 'sajdah' (prostration) correctly. By observing this incident Holy Prophet said; This man has struck the ground just like the beak of a crow striking the ground and if he dies just now, he has indeed not died on the path of my religion. (Al-Kafi 3/268)

(4) Delaying the time of performance of Salat:

A specific time has been fixed for performing the daily prayers which if one performs Salat at those specific times he will possess great virtue. For each of these prayers a wider time has been fixed where a worshipper who due to some excuse or other obstacles is unable to perform Salat at the specific time, is having at his or her disposal the wider time.

Now if a person delays his Salat without any excuse and reason it will be the sign of sluggishness and laziness in worship.

Imam Sadiq (A.S.) has said: "For every Salat, two times has been fixed where the beginning of time is more superior than the other two." (Al-Kafi 3/274)

In another tradition Imam (A.S.) says: "The superiority of beginning of time upon the other time is like the superiority of the Hereafter upon this world." (Al-Kafi 3/274)

It was asked from Holy Prophet (S.A.W.A.) about the most loveable deed to which he replied: "Performing Salat at the beginning of time." (Bihar-ul-Anwar 83/13)

Hazrat Ali (A.S.) says: There is no act more loveable to God than Salat. Therefore do not allow any worldly affair to make you neglect Salat. God has reproached a tribe and said:

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ

“They are heedless of their prayers and are indifferent with regards to its time.” (Ma’oon/5) (Bihar-ul-Anwar 83/13)

From the sayings of the leaders of Islam it can be concluded that Salat is a great divine duty which acting negligently and indifferently towards it will amount to the disobedience of God and a person doing so will be deprived of many of the bounties of this world and Hereafter. Surely what deprivation can be more than the isolation from God and what pleasure can be more than the taste of proximity towards God!

It should be known that Salat is the means of connection of a slave with his Lord. The more a person strives on this path, the more the divine grace will become his companion.

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

“Those who struggle in Our Way, We shall surely guide them on Our path.” (Ankabut/69)

Etiquette of Inner Aspect of Salat

Undoubtedly a worshipper converses with God and finds himself in need of Him. It is obvious for everyone that a feast in the honour of great personalities possesses some etiquette and some duties are to be fulfilled in order to respect and honour them. Can it be said that the enforcement of external aspect of Salat without the feeling of attentiveness and presence amounts to bondage of God?

What is obvious from the verses of Quran and traditions of Holy Prophet and his pure Household is this that praying to God without the presence of heart will not be of any use. Rather it is disdaining the Honor and Greatness of God. Yes, one of the important etiquette of Salat is paying full attention to the Merciful God and discarding everyone other than Him from the domain of thought and reflection.

قد افلح المؤمنون الذين هم خاشعون

“Successful indeed are the believers, who are humble in their prayers.”
(Muminun 1 & 2)

Holy Prophet (S.A.W.A.) said: “God wishes prosperity and helps a slave till the time His slave does not pay attention to anyone other than Him.”
(Bihar-ul-Anwar 83/161)

Imam Sadiq (A.S.) has said: “whenever you wish to establish the obligatory prayer, you perform it in its proper time and like the one who bids farewell to Salat and fears that he will never get the chance to perform it again. Know that you are facing the One who sees you but you do not see Him.” (Bihar-ul-Anwar 84/233)

When it was asked from Imam Reza (A.S.) about the etiquette of Salat, Hazrat (A.S.) in reply mentioned the presence of heart, easing of the organs and limbs and standing with lowliness and humiliation in front of Almighty God. (Bihar-ul-Anwar 84/246)

As such, the duty and obligation of a worshipper is to pay attention to God and neglect all the others. In this case the organs and limbs of the body too will accompany the heart and at the time of Salat they will not engage themselves in anything other than Salat.

By following the above etiquette i.e. presence of heart, complete attention towards God, discarding everyone other than God from the thoughts, the obedience of limbs and organs of body towards the heart which all of them terminate in one affair, a worshipper gets closer to the aim of Salat and discovers in himself the pleasure of supplicating and having relation with God. In short his condition becomes such that words cannot be described for it. We may mention other etiquette too like cleansing of the heart from the filth, paying attention to the meanings of Salat, crying for ones sins etc. the details of which are not within the scope of this discussion.

How good the first Imam of the Shias Hazrat Ali (A.S.) has said: “O Kmail what is important is not that you pray, fast and gives charity. Rather what is important is that you perform Salat along with a pure heart and good

deeds in front of God and in a state of humbleness and lowliness.” (Bihar-ul-Anwar 84/230)

Position of Leaders of Islam at the Time of Salat

The leaders of religion are an example and symbol for us in all aspects of life such as worship and fulfillment of obligations. In the world of creation, no one is superior to them in the matter of servitude of God. Therefore we shall refer to some of the cases and see what their condition in the state of Salat was so that perhaps we too may acquire a portion from the ocean of their humbleness and humility.

One of the wives of Holy Prophet (S.A.W.A.) has said: “We were talking to Holy Prophet and he too was conversing with us. However when the time of Salat approached it became such that as if he did not recognize us and we too were unacquainted with him.” (Bihar-ul-Anwar 84/258)

They have also narrated that whenever he used to stand for Salat his blessed face would turn dark and gloomy. (Bihar-ul-Anwar 84/248)

It has come about Imam Baqir (A.S.) and Imam Sadiq (A.S.) that whenever they would stand for Salat the color of their faces would turn red and sometimes pale as if they were supplicating with the One whom they were (actually) seeing. (Bihar-ul-Anwar 84/268)

When Imam Zain-ul-Abideen (A.S.) was to stand for Salat his face would acquire another color and his standing posture in Salat was like the standing of an abject and broken-spirited slave in front of a great King and the organs of the body would shiver out of fear of God. (Bihar-ul-Anwar 84/250)

It should be known that change of color of face and uneasiness of the organs are the sign of faith and firm belief of the heart. It was as though they were witnessing God at the time of Salat and perceiving Him with all their existence.

In connection with the esoteric interpretation of the (قد قامت الصلاة) Hazrat Ali (A.S.) has said beautiful words which is as follows:

The time has approached for ‘Ziarat’ (visitation) and supplication, fulfillment of wishes, perception of ideals and gaining proximity towards God and His Grace, Bounties, forgiveness and satisfaction. (Tawheed)

Therefore, Salat in reality is a meeting with the Lord of the Universe and the one who achieves faith and resolution in this matter the same will also be manifested in his organs and limbs. Moreover at times when he is not praying too, he will strive to remain far from the indecencies and filth and will always consider God to be a witness and observer of his actions.

Necessity of Salat

The duties, which God has fixed for His slaves are all, based on wisdom and expedience. Salat too as an important pillar of Islamic worship possesses numerous valuable aspects and instructive benefits which over here we shall mention some of those benefits.

(A) Tranquility of the soul:

The period, which we are at present living, is the period where man has appreciably progressed in most of the material fields of life. Today man is in foil control of the means and tools of comfort of the physical body and has established the best hospitals for the treatment of the physical diseases.

In spite of stepping into this modern life and civilization man feels himself to be lonelier than ever. He finds himself to be more vexed and disturbed and does not see any refuge for his sentiments and honor in the world of industry and technology. Day by day the statistics of corruption, destruction and crime is on the increase and in contrast, the value of man is plunging down.

In this turbulent ocean, a Muslim worshipper stands for a moment doing supplication of the Creator of the Universe. He leaves behind this deceivable world and all the things, which are attracted to it and cries out loudly the cry of Allah-o-Akbar i.e. God is the Greatest.

Greater than that which can be described.

Greater than that which can take place in the domain of thought and reflection.

Greater than that which can be arrayed with the others.

Only Him does I worship and only from Him do I seek help.

By performing Salat, a worshipper finds hope in the Divine Mercy and his body and soul finds comfort under the protection of God's Grace.

ألا بذكر الله تطمئنّ القلوب

“Be aware of the remembrance, of God; it gives comfort to the hearts.”
(Ankabut/45)

(B) Prevents sins:

A worshipper who has sincerely brought faith and believes in the life hereafter and reckons God to be always a Witness upon his actions will consider sins as the source of disgrace and will get disgusted from it.

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهِي عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ

“Surely prayers keep one away from the indecencies and prohibitions.”
(Raa’d/28)

Yes, Salat prevents one from the indecencies and the unfavorable things i.e. the natural usefulness of Salat is as such. Of course it is not in the case of all Salat but that kind of Salat which a person has been heedful of God and has perceived the meeting of his Lord in the state of Salat.

Such a Salat will surely not allow a person to step on the path of sins.

Imam Riza (A.S.) has said:

Perseverance of the remembrance of God day and night is for this reason that a slave does not forget his Master, Administrator and Creator and he does not exceed the bonds. Moreover his standing before God and remembering Him forms such a condition in himself that prevents him from sins and all types of corruption and destruction. (Bihar-ul-Anwar 82/261)

(C) Cleanliness from sins:

Just as we wash and clean our body and clothes from the dirt it is necessary that the rust from sins and polytheism too be removed from our heart and mind. We should take ourselves close to the fountainhead of purity and perfection and clean our souls in the clean and limpid fountainhead.

Holy Prophet (S.A.W.A.) in a talk with his followers says as such:

Is it possible that a person who has a river flowing near his house washes himself everyday five times in that river and his body remain contaminated with filth? No.

The daily five prayers too are having the same effect and with this five times Salat, God cleanses the person of his sins and offences and purifies him. (Tahzeeb 2/237)

In a sermon Ali (A.S.) lays stress on the above recommendation and says: Salat makes the sins to fall off just like the leaves of trees and it destroys them. (Nahjul-Balagha 316/Semon 199)

The secrets and benefits of Salat are more than what can be mentioned in this treatise and basically our deficient mind is incapable of understanding all of those secrets.

It is hoped that we and our respected readers acquire sufficient acquaintance with regards to Salat and its injunctions by having a greater reference of the Ayats and traditions and by this way establish a close connection with the Merciful Creator.

We end this treatise by sending praise and thanks to the Almighty God and by sending salutations upon the chaste soul of Holy Prophet (S.A.W.A.) and his legatees. May it be accepted by all of them?

THE END

Notes

- 1- By 'Itrat' is meant Ali (A.S.), Fatimah (A.S.) and their eleven immaculate sons.
- 2- With regards to transfer of Holy Prophet's knowledge to the Immaculate Imams refer to Al-Kafi, Vol.1, Pages 223 and 263.
- 3- Decline of the sun is the time of establishment of noon prayers.
- 4- Taif is some place near Mecca.

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