

"You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart" How Can a Mere Human Being Fulfill the Obligation: To Accept the Bad just as He Accepts the Good

In this week's parsha, parshas Vaeschanan, Moshe Rabeinu introduces us to the first passage of krias shema (Devarim 6, 4): "שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל—Hear, O Yisrael: Hashem our G-d, Hashem is One. You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your possessions. Rashi comments: Perform His commandments out of love; there is no comparison between one who serves out of love versus one who serves out of fear. One who serves his master out of fear, if the master overburdens him, he leaves the master and goes off on his own. The Rambam writes in Sefer HaMitzvos (Mitzvah 3) that it is a mitzvas aseh—a positive commandment--to love the Almighty.

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Hence, it is only fitting that we examine the significance of this mitzvas aseh: "ואהבת את ה' אלקיך"—to love Hashem. We recite this command four times daily: (1) after Birchos HaShachar, (2) during Krias Shema along with its berachos, prior to Shemoneh Esreh of Shacharis, (3) in Krias Shema of the Arvis service and (4) in the Krias Shema recited at bedtime.

One Is Obligated to Bless the Bad just as One Blesses the Good

In this essay, we wish to delve into the deeper meaning of this mitzvas aseh, as described in the Mishnah (Berachos 54a): הייב
"חייב לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה, שנאמר ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה, שנאמר ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך וגו', בכל לבבך, בשני יצריך ביצר טוב וביצר הרע, ובכל משדך, בכל ממונך" —a person is obligated to bless G-d for the bad just as he blesses G-d for the good, as it says: "And you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, etc. "With all your heart" means with both of your yetzers—with the yetzer tov and the yetzer hara. "And with all your soul" means even if He takes your life. "And with all your possessions" means with all your money (financial resources).

Further on in the Gemara, the following clarification is provided (ibid. 60b): "חייב אדם לברך כו'. מאי חייב לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה הטוב והמטיב, כך מברך על הרעה הטוב והמטיב, והתנן

על בשורות טובות אומר הטוב והמטיב, על בשורות רעות אומר ברוך דיין האמת. אמר the Tanna stated in the Mishnah: "A person is obligated to bless G-d for the bad just as he blesses G-d for the good"--although a different berachah is recited over good tidings versus over bad tidings, nevertheless Rava teaches us that it is essential to accept them both with happiness. (Over the good, we recite "hatov v'hameitiv"; over the bad, we recite "baruch dayan emes.") Rashi adds: "לברך על מדת בורענות בלבב שלם"—one should recite the blessing over negative occurrences wholeheartedly.

This, in fact, is how the halachah is recorded in the Shulchan Aruch (0.C. 222, 3): חייב אדם לברך על הרעה בדעת שלמה ובנפש חפצה, כדרך "ממברך בשמחה על הטובה, כי הרעה לעובדי השם היא שמחתם וטובתם, כיון שמקבל מאהבה מה שגזר עליו השם, נמצא שבקבלת רעה זו הוא עובד את השם שהיא שמחה —סne who serves Hashem must accept whatever Hashem has decreed for him willingly and happily; this is the way to properly serve Hashem and should bring one joy.

The Relationship between "Your Two Yetzers" and Reciting the Berachah over Bad Tidings with Happiness

Concerning the Tanna's statement, it is worth examining the following: (a) he cites the passuk: ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך as proof that "A person is obligated to bless G-d for the bad just as he blesses G-d for the good." Where do we find an allusion in the passuk to the fact that a person is obligated to bless even the bad with happiness? (b) we must endeavor to explain the additional proof brought by the Tanna from the words "בכל לבבך"—which are interpreted as an allusion to the two yetzers, the yetzer tov and the yetzer hara. How are they related to the matter of reciting a berachah over bad tidings with happiness?

It appears that we can explain the Mishnah based on a basic clarification of Rashi's in Bereishit (1, 1). When Hashem conducts the world with the midah of "rachamim"—mercy—the name הוני" is employed. When He conducts the world with the midah of "din"—judgment—the name אלקנ"ם is employed. Additionally, let us introduce a teaching from the Zohar hakadosh in the Midrash

HaNe'elam (Toldos 138a): אצטריך יצר הרע לעולם כמטרא לעולם, דאלמלא "אצטריך יצר הרע לעולם כמטרא לא ליהויי"—the yetzer hara is as necessary to the world as rain is; were it not for the yetzer hara, there would be no joy associated with learning Torah.

We can now appreciate Rabeinu HaKadosh's precise wording in the Mishnah: "חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה, שנאמר" "מחייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה, שנאמר—a person must love HKB"H and be grateful to him for both types of conduct alluded to by the names "ה' אלקיך". In other words, it should not make any difference whether HKB"H is acting with the name Havaya—indicating divine mercy—or the name Elokim—indicating divine judgment.

As to how to accomplish this feat, the Torah states: ""ככל לבבך" with all of your heart—with your yetzer tov and your yetzer hara. A person should bless Hashem for both types of conduct, for good tidings and for bad tidings, with both yetzers. The yetzer tov reminds a person to bless Hashem and not to attribute occurrences to nature and happenstance. The happiness with which a person blesses Hashem is attributable to the yetzer hara (as we learned from the Zohar above). So, even if you must sacrifice your life--"רבכל נפטך"—or forego all of your material possessions--"רבכל מאדך"—under all of these circumstances, a person must bless Hashem with happiness.

Without a doubt, this notion causes every Jew to shudder. How is it humanly possible to fulfill this mitzvas aseh: "זיאהבת את ה' אלקיך? How is it possible to attain such an exalted spiritual level—to accept the negative with the same joy that one accepts the positive? After all, we are not heavenly malachim; we are mere mortals made of flesh and blood. If things are not good for us, we experience pain and remorse. So, how is it humanly possible to not only recite a berachah over the bad tidings but to do so with happiness, just as one does for the good tidings?

A Person Is Happy that His Sins Have Been Forgiven

We find many different and wonderful approaches to this question from our blessed sages—beginning with the sages in the Gemara and then continuing on with the holy Rabbis in the eras of the Rishonim and finally the Acharonim. We shall begin with the explanation of Rabeinu Yonah on the Rif (Berachos 54a): "חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם "חייב אדם לברך על הטובה וכו'. כמו שמברך על הטובה בשמחה ובטוב לבב, כך יש לו לברך על שמברך על הטובה ולקבל מוסר הבורא בסבר פנים יפות, ויחשוב כי הכל כפרת עוונותיו" person must accept the Almighty's punishment with a positive attitude and view it as an atonement for his transgressions.

Thus, the berachah over bad tidings is recited with joy, because the person has been forgiven for his misdeeds. The Mishnah Berurah provides us with the following explanation: "כי באמת כל היסורין בין בגוף ובין בממון הוא הכל כפרה על העוונות, כדי שלא יצטרך להתייסר לעתיד לבוא, ששם העונש הוא הרבה יותר גדול, וכדאיתא במדרש (ב"ר סה-ט) להתייסר לעתיד, [היינו שהוא הכיר גודל מדת הדין שלעתיד, וכעין זה אמר גם כן דוד המלך ע"ה (תהלים קיט-קכ) סמר מפחדך בשרי וממשפטיך יראתי, ותבע בעצמו יסורין כדי שינקה מכל וכל ולא יצטרך לפחוד עוד], אמר לו הקב"ה, חייך דבר טוב אתה מבקש וממך אני מתחיל, שנאמר (בראשית כז-א) ויהי כי זקן יצחק ותכהין עיניו מראות".

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In truth, all suffering, physical or financial, represents atonement for transgressions. This precludes the need for additional suffering "le'atid la'vo"—for there the punishment is much worse. According to the Midrash (B.R. 65, 9), Yitzchak recognized the severity of the "din" in the future world and, consequently, requested suffering in this world. HKB"H informed him that this was a wise request on his part and acquiesced—as reflected by the passuk (Bereishit 27, 1): "And it was when Yitzchak became old, his vision became weak." According to the Midrash, this practice began with Yitzchak.

Everything the Merciful One Does Is for Our Benefit

Let us now examine a second approach to the matter of reciting a berachah over bad tidings with the same degree of happiness one recites a berachah over good tidings. The Rambam writes in his commentary on the Mishnah (Berachos 9, 2):

"חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה כו'. מה שאמר כשם שהוא מברך על הטובה, רוצה לומר לקבל אותו בשמחה ולב טוב ולכבוש כעסו, וייטיב נפשו כשיברך דיין האמת, כמו שיעשה בשעה שיברך הטוב והמטיב, וכמו שהיו אומרים החכמים ברוב דבריהם (ברכות ס.) כל מה דעביד מן שמיא לטב".

A person must accept negative events with happiness and must control his anger. He should be as comfortable uttering "dayan ha'emes" as he is uttering "hatov v'hameitiv." For, the sages have taught us (Berachos 60a): "All that comes from Heaven is for the good."

To understand the Rambam, let us refer to what we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 60b). Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva state: "לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר, כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד"—a person should always be accustomed to say: "Whatever the Merciful One does, He does for the best." The Gemara there relates an incident involving Rabbi Akiva. A lion came and devoured his donkey; the wind came and extinguished his fire; a cat came and ate his rooster. As a result of this seemingly negative series of events, he and his household were saved. For that night, the nearby town was raided and all its inhabitants were murdered. This prompted Rabbi Akiva to proclaim: "Everything HKB"H does is always for the good."

For this reason, one must recite a berachah over bad tidings with happiness just as one would over good tidings. By doing so,

he reveals his belief that everything the Merciful One does is for his benefit. Further support for the Rambam's teaching is provided by another Gemara (Niddah 31a):

"דרש רב יוסף, מאי דכתיב (ישעיה יב-א) אודך ה' כי אנפת בי ישוב אפך ותנחמני, במה הכתוב מדבר, בשני בני אדם שיצאו לסחורה, ישב לו קוץ לאחד מהן התחיל מחרף ומגדף, לימים שמע שטבעה ספינתו של חבירו בים, התחיל מודה ומשבח, לכך נאמר ישוב אפך ותנחמני, והיינו דאמר רבי אלעזר, מאי דכתיב (תהלים עב-יח) [ברוך ה' אלקים אלקי ישראל] עושה נפלאות לבדו, וברוך שם כבודו לעולם, אפילו בעל הנס אינו מכיר בנסו".

Rav Yosef expounds on a passuk in Yeshayah (12, 1). He states that the passuk concerns two merchants who embarked on a business trip. One of them got a thorn lodged in his foot and was unable to continue; he began to curse. Several days later, he received news that his friend's ship had sunk at sea; he began to thank and praise G-d for saving his life. We see that often a person does not recognize the good performed on his behalf.

In this latter case, what appeared to this merchant to be misfortune—getting a thorn lodged in his foot—turned out to be a tremendous chesed; his life was spared. Hence, the Rambam teaches us that it is for this very reason that a person must bless Hashem with happiness for the bad just as he would for the good.

How nicely this explains the juxtaposition of the following pesukim: "שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, ואהבת את ה' אלקין בכל לבבך" The great author of the Noda B'Yehudah writes in the Tzlach (Pesachim 56a) that with the utterance of the words "שמע ישראל", we convey our faith that everything the Merciful One does on our behalf is for the good. So, this is how we interpret the passuk: "שמע ישראל ה' "שמע ישראל ה' "שמע ישראל ה' "rachamim" is in effect, reflected by the name אלקינו", or the attribute of "din" is in effect, reflected by the name אלקים, we proclaim our belief that "ה' —both represent complete mercy; there is only one, and He is Havaya. As we have learned, this coincides wonderfully with the next passage: "ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך" השמע that a person must recite a berachah over bad tidings with happiness just as he would over good tidings.

Why Don't We Recite "ברוך הטוב והמטיב" over Bad Tidings

Nevertheless, it is clear that the teaching of the Rambam requires further explanation. He himself quotes the statement of Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva (Berachos 60b): "לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר, כל דעביד" "Whatever the Merciful One does, He does for the best." Then the Gemara relates the incident involving Rabbi Akiva; their lives were saved due to a series of seemingly unfortunate events. The story proves convincingly that good things result even

from negative events. If so, why do we recite the berachah: "ברוך דיין over bad tidings? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to recite: "ברוד הטוב והמטיב"—just as we do for good tidings?

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I've given the matter much thought and would like to propose an explanation that will have practical value for all. First, however, let us address an apparent contradiction concerning this issue. On the one hand, the Gemara states: 'לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר, כל דעביד" "רחמנא לטב עביד a person should always be accustomed to say: "Whatever the Merciful One does, He does for the best." On the other hand, the Gemara states elsewhere (Berachos 5a): אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו יפשפש במעשיו, שנאמר (איכה ג-מ) נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה "ונשובה עד ה"—if a person sees that afflictions are befalling him, he should scrutinize his deeds, as it is stated (Eichah 3, 40): "Let us search and examine our ways, and return to Hashem." We have learned that a person is obliged to adopt the attitude that everything happens for the best. How does this coincide with the need to greet misfortune with scrutiny—to ask why these misfortunes have befallen him? After all, we have just stated that a person must believe that everything happens for the best.

Yes, it is true that a person must believe that ultimately good will ensue from all bad and negative things. Nevertheless, it is still incumbent upon an individual to investigate why HKB"H visited this negative situation upon him—albeit good will eventually result from it. For, certainly, it is not beyond the Almighty's powers to bring the good to this person directly without the need for the initial misfortune. This sequence of events should make a person realize that he has committed a transgression and is in need of atonement. Therefore, HKB"H brought him the misfortune first, so that he would perform teshuvah and receive atonement. In the merit of accepting the afflictions and scrutinizing his actions—to remedy his wrongdoing—he will succeed in ultimately transforming this negative into something positive and good.

Thus, indeed, a person must proclaim: "עביד רחמנא לטב" everything the Merciful One does is for the best. We cited the Gemara above regarding the merchant who was prevented from travelling on a ship destined to sink, because a thorn lodged in his foot. Notwithstanding, this person still needed to perform some form of self-evaluation. Why did HKB"H torment him with the thorn? Surely, HKB"H could have arranged some other way of preventing him from sailing on that ship—not involving the thorn or some other form of suffering.

This is the thrust of the statement: "אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו "יפשפש במעשיוי- if a person sees that afflictions are befalling him, he should scrutinize his deeds. He must investigate and discover what he has done wrong to bring about this misfortune. Therefore, he must accept the "din" and happily bless Hashem: "ברוך דיין האמת"—blessed is the judge of truth—for bringing about the suffering to atone for his transgressions. In the merit of accepting the misfortune in this manner together with the performance of teshuvah, he receives atonement. In this manner, HKB"H has arranged for the bad to result in good—fulfilling the other dictum as well: "כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד"—everything the Merciful One does is for the best.

Thus, it turns out that both statements: (1) "כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד" and (2) "אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו יפשפש במעשיו" work hand in hand to achieve the same outcome. First, the person scrutinizes why HKB"H visited these misfortunes upon him, even if they are minor. Then, he is motivated to perform teshuvah for his sins and he merits atonement. As a result of this atonement, a good outcome is realized.

Furthermore, we have succeeded in reconciling Rabeinu Yonah's point-of-view with the Rambam's. Rabeinu Yonah stated that the happiness associated with the berachah over misfortune is due to the atonement for a person's transgressions. The Rambam stated that the happiness associated with this berachah is because of the knowledge and belief that everything the Merciful One does is for the best. Based on what we have just explained, their two explanations accomplish the same result. Only by gladly accepting one's misfortune for the sake of atonement, is the bad ultimately transformed into good. Both situations—the atonement for one's sins and the transformation of the bad into good—warrant uttering a berachah with happiness.

"הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו

Continuing along this exalted path, let us elaborate even further on the Mishnah's statement: "חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על"
—a person is obligated to bless over the bad just as he blesses over the good. As Rava explained, this means that a person must utter both berachos with happiness. It is worthwhile for every Jew to review and recall on a daily basis the following remarkable statement in the Gemara (Pesachim 118a):

"אמר רב חסדא, מאי דכתיב (תהלים קו-א, קז-א קיח-א, שם-כט, קלו-א) הודו לה' כי טוב, הודו לה' שגובה חובתו של אדם בטובתו, עשיר בשורו, ואת עני בשיו, יתום לה' כי טוב, הודו לה' שגובה חובתו של אדם בטובתו, עשיר בשורו, ואת עני בשיו, יתום "Rav Chisda said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Give thanks to Hashem for He is good"? It means: Give thanks to Hashem, for He collects a person's debts from the person's good fortune; a rich man by his ox; a poor man by his lamb; an orphan by his egg; a widow by her hen. Rashi provides the following clarification: "עשיר בשורו, "עשיר בשורו, בשורו ממון ומכפר על גופו"—the person is deprived of material wealth in lieu of physical punishment and suffering.

Rav Chisda, one of the great Talmudic scholars in Bavel, reveals to us an astonishing concept. David HaMelech, Yisrael's sweet psalmist, repeats the passuk: "הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו" on five separate occasions in sefer Tehillim (106, 1; 107, 1; 118, 1; 118, 29; 136, 1). At first glance, we would interpret this passuk as stating that we must thank Hashem for all the good that He has bestowed upon us—for his constant favors and kindness.

Yet, Rav Chisda comes along and reveals that this is not the correct interpretation of the passuk. Rather, David HaMelech is teaching us to thank Hashem for the loss of money or property that we incur. For, we are required to believe without any reservations that HKB"H—in His infinite mercy and kindness—first collects the debts a person owes for his transgressions from the person's money and possessions. Hopefully, this precludes the necessity for physical punishment, chas v'shalom. Regarding this incredible kindness, David HaMelech proclaims: "הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו"—give thanks to Hashem, for He is good; for His kindness is eternal.

Now, we are lowly, corporeal creatures, with a yetzer implanted in us from birth. When one of us experiences a financial loss or some form of property damage, it is extremely difficult to respond in such a noteworthy manner—to scream out our gratitude to Hashem with the declaration: "הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו". Yet, if we were to speak with someone who, chas v'shalom, has fallen ill with a serious illness—may Hashem protect us—our attitudes would change very quickly. For that person would surely cry and plead that he merited such an exchange—his physical health in exchange for atonement by means of financial loss. So, why wait until we reach that desperate situation, chas v'shalom? It is far more preferable that we acknowledge that every misfortune that befalls us is HKB"H's way of choosing for us a more trivial form of punishment as atonement. In this manner, we will awaken to perform teshuvah, precluding the necessity for more serious afflictions and suffering.

We have now achieved a better understanding of the Mishnah: "חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה"—a person is obligated to bless over the bad just as he blesses over the good. He should do so with happiness by repeating to himself Rav Chisda's vital lesson. He should believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that HKB"H chose a lighter punishment for him as opposed to the more severe punishment that he deserved, chas v'shalom, to atone for his wrongdoings. By happily accepting the chosen punishment, he will truly be spared from suffering. This is also the reason for accepting the misfortunes with happiness, for in this manner, he demonstrates his tremendous faith in Hashem's "hashgachah"—believing with certainty that Hashem chose for him a very minor punishment.

How beautifully this allows us to explain a teaching in the Arizal's Pri Eitz Chaim. In the berachah of Modim, there are exactly 86 words—the numerical equivalent of the name אלהי"ם. Based on what we have learned, we can suggest the following explanation. Even when it appears to us as if the attribute of "din"—reflected by the name אלהי"ם in force, nevertheless we express our gratitude to Hashem in Modim: "על חיינו המסורים בידך, ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך, ועל "על חיינו המסורים בידך, ועל נשלותינו הפקודות לך, ועל " for our lives which are entrusted to Your hands, and for our neshamot which are under Your protection, and for Your miracles that are with us every day, and for your wonders and favors that are at all times—evening, morning and afternoon.

The Wonderful Combination of Good and Chesed

I was struck by a wonderful idea concerning Rav Chisda's revelation. Where did he find an allusion to his idea in the passuk: "הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו"—that David HaMelech is not referring to absolute good or chesed? Recall that according to Rav Chisda, he is referring to some sort of misfortune that befalls a person, which conceals an inherent form of chesed. As examples, he cited the rich man and his ox, the poor man and his sheep, the orphan and his egg and the widow and her hen. They receive atonement through these possessions rather than by means of physical, bodily afflictions.

Let us introduce what the great Rabbi Gedalia of Linitz writes in Teshuos Chen (Vayechi). He finds a fantastic, practical allusion in the passuk: "הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו". He notes that the passuk opens with the term "טוב" and concludes with the term "חסד". He reconciles this discrepancy by providing a deeper insight into the holy name Havaya, הוי"ה—which represents HKB"H's interaction with creation according to the attribute of "rachamim," mercy.

When HKB"H conducts creation according to the doctrine of "rachamim," we can distinguish between two essential aspects of "rachamim." In one scenario, the "rachamim" are revealed and apparent to all. In the second scenario, the "rachamim" are not apparent; they are concealed. Outwardly, it appears as if the attribute of "din" is in effect, chas v'shalom; however, in actuality, even within the administration of "din," tremendous chesed is concealed. This is in keeping with Rabbi Akiva's and Rabbi Meir's dictum that a person must react to all events that appear negative with the declaration: "כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד"—everything the Merciful One does is for the best.

We can now apply this concept to interpret the passuk: "הודו לה". The passuk instructs us to praise and thank HKB"H even at times when the "rachamim" of Havaya are concealed—when they take on the lesser form of הוי"ה equaling מו"ב. For, when a person believes in Hashem and pays his gratitude to Hashem even in times of "hester panim," he will ultimately merit: "כי לעולם "היבי לעולם that the "rachamim" of Havaya will be realized in its full glory and splendor—as alluded to by the expansion of the name which equals הס"ד. This concludes the idea of the Teshuos Chen.

Now, we can better appreciate the depth and significance of Rav Chisda's revelation. Rather than sufficing with the simple meaning of the passuk: "הודו לה' כי טוב" --give thanks to Hashem, for He is good—he taught us to interpret the passuk as: הודו לה' שגובה חובתו" "של אדם בטובתוי.-give thanks to Hashem, for He collects a person's **debts from the person's good fortune.** Since the passuk equates the name מו"ב with the descriptive טו"ב, it is evident that the passuk refers to circumstances when Hashem's "rachamim" are not apparent; under these circumstances, the holy name is represented by its "mispar katan," which equals טו"ב. This conveys the vital message that we are required to thank Hashem even during times of "hester panim." For at these times, due to His "rachamim," He collects His debts: "עשיר בשורו, ואת עני בשיו, יתום בביצתו, אלמנה בתרנגולתה" —from a person's material possessions, whatever they may be. In the merit of this "emunah," we will also merit the realization of the conclusion of the passuk: "כי לעולם חסדו"—the revelation of the name הוי"ה in its fully expanded form equaling דם"ד.

Donated by Dr. Ralph and Limor Madeb For the Refua shelema of Refael Gavriel Simcha Chaim Ben shulamit

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