



Aharon HaKohen Prepared for the Miracle of Chanukah by Leaving a Single Flask of Pure Oil with His Seal on It

In honor of the approaching eight days of Chanukah, on which every Jewish house will be illuminated by the “ohr haganuz” of the sacred candles that we will light each night, it is fitting that we review the guidelines established by Chazal. They suggested three methods of fulfilling the mitzvah of “hadlakat ner Chanukah.” Here is what we are taught in the Gemara (Shabbas 21b):

“תנו רבנן מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו, והמהדרין נר לכל אחד ואחד, והמהדרין מן המהדרין, בית שמאי אומרים יום ראשון מדליק שמונה, מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך, ובית הלל אומרים יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך.”

The Rabbis teach us that this mitzvah can be fulfilled in three different ways, i.e. three different levels of observance: (1) the simplest—each person lights one candle each night for his entire household, “נר איש” (2) a higher level of observance (mehadrin)—each member of the household lights a Chanukah candle for himself, “נר לכל אחד ואחד”, and thirdly (3) the choicest method of fulfilling this mitzvah (mehadrin min hamehadrin)—lighting a single candle on the first night of Chanukah and adding an additional candle with each successive night, “מוסיף והולך”. (This is the viewpoint of Beis Hillel. According to Beis Shamai, the “mehadrin min hamehadrin” method requires lighting eight candles on the first night and one less candle on each successive night.) This triple format is not found in any other Rabbinically-ordained mitzvah. Hence, our sacred sources labor to explain why our blessed sages saw fit to establish three alternative methods for the observance of the mitzvah of “ner Chanukah”?

It also behooves us to examine the source of the miracle that is the basis for the mitzvah of “hadlakat ner Chanukah” during the eight days of his festival. Here is the pertinent passage from the Gemara (ibid.):

“מאי חנוכה, דתנו רבנן בכ”ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון, דלא למספד ודלא להתענות בהון, שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טימאו כל השמנים שבהיכל, וכשגברה מלכות

בית חשמונאי ונצחום, בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול, ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד, נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים, לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאוים ימים טובים בהלל והודאה.”

What is the reason for the festival of Chanukah? As the Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: On the 25th of Kislev, the days of Chanukah commence. They are comprised of eight days, on which it is prohibited to eulogize or fast. For, when the Greeks entered the Heichal, they contaminated all of the flasks of oil that were in the Heichal. And when the royal Chashmonai house prevailed and defeated them, they searched and found only one flask of oil that was concealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol; it contained only enough oil to light the menorah for one day. However, a miracle was performed with it, and they lit with it for eight days. In the following year, they established and rendered these eight days permanent festival days, celebrated with the recital of Hallel and the expression of gratitude.

Note that Chazal say: “For, when the Greeks entered the Heichal, they contaminated all of the flasks of oil that were in the Heichal.” They do not say: “All the oils were contaminated.” They implied that the Greeks contaminated all of the flasks of oil in the Heichal on purpose. Their intent was to prevent the Jews from lighting the lamps with pure oil. Why was this so important to the Greeks? Why did the Greeks target the kindling of the Menorah more so than any of the other services performed in the Beis HaMikdash?

Now, we are believers, the descendants of believers. We do not believe that anything that transpires in this world is coincidental—be it something big or small. We believe in “hashgachah pratit”; everything is orchestrated by HKB”H. All the more so an incredible,

holy miracle such as the miracle of Chanukah, which Chazal instituted as a festival to be celebrated by Jews in all future generations. So, let us focus on the following question: Why did HKB”H orchestrate for the miracle of Chanukah to be based on the fact that the Chashmonaim only found a single flask of pure oil in the Heichal stamped with the seal of the Kohen Gadol?

Your Contribution Is Superior to and Outshines Theirs

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by referring to parshas Beha’aloscha. There the mitzvah of kindling the lamps in the Beis HaMikdash is presented, which is the basis for the miracle of the Chanukah candles. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Bamidbar 8, 1): **”וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, דבר אל אהרן ואמרת אליו, בהעלותך את הנרות אל מול פני המנורה העלה נרותיה. מול פני המנורה יאירו שבעת הנרות, ויעש כן אהרן אל מול פני המנורה העלה נרותיה.”** **Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, “Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.” Aharon did so; toward the face of the Menorah, he kindled its lamps, as Hashem had commanded Moshe.**

Rashi inquires: **Why does the Torah juxtapose the passage of the Menorah with the passage describing the contributions of the “nesiim” (the princes of the shevatim)? Because when Aharon saw the inauguration of the “nesiim,” he was disheartened, since he did not participate with them in the inauguration—neither he nor his tribe. HKBH said to him: “I swear by your life! Your contribution is greater than theirs, for you will kindle and prepare the Menorah’s lamps.”** Rashi, however, does not explain in what way the contribution of Aharon HaKohen is superior to the contributions of the “nesiim.” Nevertheless, the matter is explained in greater detail in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 15, 6):

You find in the passage above that eleven tribes offered sacrifices, and the tribe of Ephraim sacrificed, and all of the “nesiim” sacrificed, with the exception of the “nasi” of Levi. Who was the “nasi” of Levi? It was Aharon . . . He thought to himself: Woe is me! Perhaps, it is because of me that HKB”H is not accepting the tribe of Levi. HKB”H said to Moshe: “Go tell Aharon not to

despair; you are destined for something greater.” This is the significance of the statement: “Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you kindle the lamps . . .” While the Beis HaMikdash exists, the korbanos will be offered; the lamps, however, will face the center of the Menorah forever. Furthermore, all of the Berachos that I gave you to bless My children will never be annulled.

The Ramban is perplexed by the statement in the Midrash: **“While the Beis HaMikdash exists, the korbanos will be offered; the lamps, however, will face the center of the menorah forever.”** After all: **It is known that when the Beis HaMikdash no longer exists, and the sacrificial service is abolished due to its destruction, even the service involving the lamps will be abolished.** So, how can the Midrash claim that the lamps will illuminate the face of the menorah forever? Therefore, the Ramban explains that HKB”H’s statement refers to the Chanukah candles that HKB”H would establish in the future through the priestly Chashmonaim, the descendants of Aharon. They exist forever; for, even during times of galus, we fulfill the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah candles. He presents the following corroboration for this conclusion:

And I have found this explanation in the Megillas Setarim authored by Rabeinu Nissim, who mentions this tradition saying: I have seen in the Midrash: When (the princes of) the twelve shevatim brought their korbanos and Shevet Levi did not etc. HKB”H said to Moshe, “Speak to Aharon and say to him, ‘When you kindle the lamps.’ There will be another inauguration in which lamps will be kindled. And I will perform through your sons miracles and salvation for Yisrael, and an inauguration which will be named after them, namely the Chanukah of the sons of the Chashmonaim.”

Notwithstanding, it is still incumbent upon us to explain the words of “chizuk” HKB”H offered Aharon to uplift him when he became disheartened at not having participated in the inauguration of the Mishkan along with the other nesiim: **“I swear by your life! Your contribution is greater than theirs, for you will kindle and prepare the Menorah’s lamps.”** In what way was the mitzvah of the kindling of the lamps greater than the inaugural korbanos of the nesiim? Additionally, what is the deeper connection between the kindling of

the lamps by Aharon HaKohen in the Mishkan and the miracle of the lamps that HKB"Y performed through the Chashmonaim on Chanukah?

In the Merit of Aharon's Degree of Yirah He and His Offspring Were Given the Mitzvah of Not Exposing Themselves to Corpse Tumah

To explain the enigmatic words of our sages, I had a wonderful idea. I would like to refer to an intriguing statement from Chazal concerning the greatness of Aharon HaKohen. Due to his exalted status, he and his offspring were commanded not to expose themselves to corpse-tumah. As it is written (Vayikra 21, 1): "ויאמר ה' אל משה אמור: אל הכהנים בני אהרן ואמרת אליהם לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו" Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them, "To a dead person he shall not become impure among his people." They expounded in the Midrash (V.R. 26, 6):

"Say to the kohanim": This is the implication of that which is written (Tehillim 19, 10): "The fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever." Rabbi Levi said: Due to the fear (reverence) with which Aharon feared (revered) HKB"Y, he merited that this passage was given to him; it will not be taken away from him or his children or his grandchildren until the end of time. And to which passage is this referring? This is referring to the passage prohibiting contact with a dead body. As it is stated: "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, etc.'"

In Ohel Yaakov (Emor), the Maggid of Dubno, ztz"l, explains magnificently how Aharon's reverence of HKB"Y and his meriting the mitzvah of not becoming tamei to a corpse exemplify the principle of "midah k'neged midah"—measure for measure. He refers to a teaching in the Gemara (Berachos 5a): "לעולם ירגיז אדם יצר טוב על יצר הרע, שנאמר (תהלים ד-ה) רגזו ואל תחטאו, אם נצחו מוטב, ואם לאו יעסוק בתורה, שנאמר אמרו בלבבכם, אם נצחו מוטב, ואם לאו יקרא קריאת שמע, שנאמר על משכבכם, אם נצחו מוטב, ואם לאו יזכור לו יום המיתה, שנאמר ודומו סלה." **A person should constantly agitate his yetzer tov to fight against his yetzer hara . . . If he vanquishes it, fine; but if not, he should engage it in Torah study . . . If he vanquishes it, fine; but if not, he should recite "Krias shema" . . . If he vanquishes it, fine; but if not, he should remind himself of the day of death.**

Thus, the Maggid of Dubno explains: While reminding oneself of one's eventual demise is an effective way to withstand the yetzer hara, it is not exemplary. Indeed, Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of men, said of the eventuality of death (Koheles 7, 2): "טוב ללכת אל בית אבל מלכת אל בית משתה באשר הוא סוף כל אדם והחי יתן אל לבו"—it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for that is the end of all man, and the living should take it to heart. The Maggid is critical of this method, and says: **Why does this person only find a way to save himself in a house of mourning rather than driving the yetzer away from him by engaging in Torah and mitzvos?**

We can now explain the Midrash above very nicely. Why, indeed, were Aharon and his descendants commanded: **"To a dead person he shall not become impure among his people"?** Seemingly, it would have been preferable for them to come in contact with the dead and become tamei, so that they would be reminded of the eventuality of death and be spared from the yetzer hara. Hence, the Midrash answers: **This is the implication of that which is written: "The fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever."** In other words, when a person truly reveres HKB"Y, he recognizes His greatness and superiority. Therefore, he does not need to be stirred by remembering the eventuality of death. For, this exemplary, admirable level of fear and reverence **"endures forever,"** even without focusing on the eventuality of death.

Thus, the Midrash concludes: **"Due to the fear (reverence) with which Aharon feared (revered) HKB"Y"—namely, Aharon's exalted reverence of HKB"Y, he did not have to seek other ways to ward off the yetzer hara such as focusing on the day of one's death. Therefore, "midah k'neged midah": "He merited that this passage was given to him; it will not be taken away from him or his children or his grandchildren until the end of time."** After all, as kohanim, they served Hashem constantly. Instead of being stirred to repent due to the fear of punishment, such as recalling the eventuality of one's death, they were stirred and inspired by pure, exalted reverence, recognizing the greatness of the Almighty, through Torah-study and Krias Shema. This summarizes his sacred insight.

The Segulah of Pure Reverence of Hashem that Endures throughout All Generations that Follow

In this manner, it appears that we can embellish the Midrash's emphatic statement that **"it will not be taken away from him or his children or his grandchildren until the end of time."** Let us introduce a vital concept brought down by the Yitav Lev (Noach) in the name of the Afikei Yehudah. He explains how to discern if a person is serving Hashem l'shma, with the exalted reverence of recognizing HKB"H's greatness and superiority—"yiras haromemut"—as opposed to serving Hashem not l'shma, solely on account of fear of punishment—"yiras ha'onesh." Someone who serves Hashem solely for his own benefit, to avoid punishment, cannot pass this type of avodah on to his children. He applies the principle (Kesubos 42b) that a person does not pass down his fines to his children. Similarly, a person does not pass down "yiras ha'onesh" to his children, since following in his footsteps is like a fine. Conversely, if a person serves Hashem l'shma with "yiras haromemut," he does pass this manner of avodah down to his children.

With this understanding, the Afikei Yehudah interprets HKB"H's pronouncement (Devarim 5, 26): **"מִי יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבָבָם זֶה לָהֶם לִירָאָה אוֹתִי—**who can assure that such shall be this heart of theirs, to fear Me? This passuk specifically employs the term "אותי" referring to the exalted level of devotion—"yiras haromemut." It cannot be referring to "yiras ha'onesh," because that person is only concerned about himself; he wants to avoid being punished; **"וּלְשִׁמּוֹר וְלִשְׁמֹר אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתַי כָּל הַיָּמִים—**and observe all My mitzvos all the time—with this superior, ideal type of "yirah." If they do, it portends: **"לִמְעַן יִיטֵב לָהֶם וּלְבָנֵיהֶם לְעוֹלָם—**so that it shall be beneficial for them and their children forever. In other words, all of their future offspring will be imbued with this type of "yirah." This is also the message conveyed by the passuk (Mishlei 20, 7): **"מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּתוֹמוֹ צַדִּיק אֲשֶׁר יִבְנֶה בְּנָיו אַחֲרָיו—**one who walks in his innocence is a tzaddik; fortunate are his sons after him. In other words, his innocence and righteous behavior will extend to his offspring that come after him.

The Yitav Lev elaborates on this notion in parshas Re'eh. He adds that this lofty concept is explicit in David HaMelech's statement: **"The fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever."** For, if a person's "yirah" is pure,

meaning that it is solely for the sake of Hashem, inspired by awe of His glory—i.e., "yiras haromemut" rather than the self-centered "yiras ha'onesh"—then **"it endures forever"** in his children and grandchildren that follow him.

This explains the passage in the aforementioned Midrash beautifully: **"Say to the kohanim": This is the implication of that which is written: "The fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever"**—i.e., it is passed on like an inheritance to one's future generations. **Rabbi Levi said: Due to the fear (reverence) with which Aharon feared (revered) HKB"H—**namely, "yiras haromemut" inspired by the glory of HKB"H rather than "yiras ha'onesh"—**he merited that this passage was given to him; it will not be taken away from him or his children or his grandchildren until the end of time,** because the words of this passuk will be fulfilled: **"The fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever."**

The Chasam Sofer Teaches that the Shape of the Menorah Combines Torah and Yiras Shamayim Magnificently

Following this sublime path, we will now proceed to explain the words of consolation HKB"H offered Aharon HaKohen after he became disheartened: **"I swear by your life! Your contribution is greater than theirs, for you will kindle and prepare the Menorah's lamps."** Let us introduce a fantastic principle gleaned from the impeccable teachings of the Chasam Sofer, zy"a, in Toras Moshe (Beha'aloscha) related to the requirement that the kindling of the Menorah should be **"אל מול פני המנורה—**toward the face of the Menorah. He refers to what we have learned in the Gemara (Shabbas 31a):

"מאי דכתיב והיה אמונת עתיך חוסן ישועות חכמת ודעת יראת ה' היא אוצרו, אמונת זה סדר זרעים, עתיך זה סדר מועד, חוסן זה סדר נשים, ישועות זה סדר גזיקין, חכמת זה סדר קדשים, ודעת סדר טהרות, ואפילו הכי יראת ה' היא אוצרו."

The Gemara inquires: **What is the significance of that which is written (Yeshayah 33, 6): "The faith of your times will be the strength of your salvations, wisdom, and knowledge; fear of Hashem, that is man's treasure"?** It answers that the six words: **אמונת, עתיך, חוסן, ישועות, חכמת ודעת**—allude to the six orders of the Mishnah, which are the foundation of all of Torah she'b'al peh. Nevertheless: **"ואפילו הכי יראת ה' היא אוצרו"—"yiras Hashem" is man's one true treasure.** Rashi explains

that “yiras Hashem” is essential for remembering the Torah one has learned and retaining it in the storehouse of one’s mind. In other words, “yiras Shamayim” is the essential ingredient necessary for retaining and perpetuating all of Torah she’b’al peh, encompassing the six orders of the Mishnah.

Based on this understanding, the Chasam Sofer explains the shape of the Menorah. It has a central column that is the body of the Menorah; there are three branches coming off this body on each side. Now, we know that the kindling of the Menorah alludes to the light of the Torah. In the words of the Gemara (B.B. 25b): “הרוצה שיחכים ידרים... וסימניך שלחן בצפון ומנורה בדרום”—**one who wants to become wise should face south** (Rashi: He should face south while praying) . . . **and your mnemonic is: The Shulchan stood in the north, while the Menorah stood in the south.**

Thus, the shape of the Menorah alluding to the Torah is founded on this premise. The six branches coming off its central column allude to the six orders of Torah she’b’al peh: **Zeraim, Moed, Nashim, Nezikin, Kodshim** and **Taharos**. The central column forming the body of the Menorah alludes to “yiras Shamayim”—fear and reverence of G-d. Hence, the six arms of the Menorah branch off of it symbolizing that “yiras Shamayim” is the essential factor supporting the entire Torah, in keeping with the words: **“Fear of Hashem is man’s one true treasure.”** It was precisely for this reason that HKB”H instructed: **“אל מול פני המנורה יאירו שבעת הנרות—toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.** He wanted us to understand that the goal of Torah-study is to achieve proper “yirah,” which is the central column and foundation of the entire Torah. This is the gist of his sacred remarks.

Now, let us return to HKB”H’s words of consolation and encouragement to Aharon: **“I swear by your life! Your contribution is greater than theirs, for you will kindle and prepare the Menorah’s lamps.”** And we presented the elucidation in the Midrash: **While the Beis HaMikdash exists, the korbanos will be offered; the lamps, however, will face the center of the Menorah forever. Furthermore, all of the Berachos that I gave you to bless My children will never be annulled.** In keeping with this discussion, this means that in the merit of the exemplary “yirah” of

Aharon HaKohen, he managed to imbue all of his future generations with this same type of “yiras Shamayim,” thereby fulfilling the words of the passuk: **“Fear of Hashem, that is man’s treasure.”**

We can now appreciate why it is so vital to kindle the Menorah specifically with pure oil. This is intended to inspire Yisrael to study Torah with pure “yiras Shamayim,” namely “yiras haromemut,” which portends fantastically that this “yirah” will endure throughout all future generations— **“יראת ה’ טהורה עומדת לעד”**. For this reason, HKB”H instructs Moshe Rabeinu (Shemos 27, 20): **“ואתה תצוה את בני ישראל ויקחו אליך שמן זית זך כתית למאור להעלות נר תמיד—and you shall command Bnei Yisrael that they shall bring you clear olive oil, crushed for illumination to keep the lamp burning continuously.** In other words, the pure, uncontaminated oil ensures that the fire will burn continuously, forevermore like **pure, ideal “yirah” that endures forever.**

The Priestly Chashmonaim Descendants of Aharon Endangered Their Lives to Kindle the Menorah with Pure Oil

We can now rejoice! We have been enlightened! We can now understand why the miracle of Chanukah involved kindling the Menorah with pure oil. The Greeks knew through their powers of tumah that the eternal existence of the Jewish people—revolving around Torah-study with proper “yiras Shamayim”—is in the merit of kindling the Menorah with pure oil. This is the special segulah promised by the passuk: **“יראת ה’ טהורה עומדת לעד”**. Therefore, **“when the Greeks entered the Heichal, they contaminated all of the flasks of oil”** to prevent the kohanim from kindling the Menorah with purity. They did not want Yisrael to study Torah with the pure “yirah” of Hashem that endures forever. They figured that if they could accomplish this, it would cause Yisrael to forget and abandon the Torah.

I would now like to add a remarkable idea that I heard from my teacher and Rabbi, the holy Admor of Belz shlit”a. In the formula of Ahl HaNissim, we say: **“כשעמדה מלכות יון הרשעה על עמך ישראל להשכיחם תורתך”—when the wicked Greek regime rose against Your people Yisrael attempting to make them forget Your Torah and to compel them to abandon the statutes of Your will.** The commentaries are puzzled by this

statement. After all, memory is something that is in a person's mind. So, how could the Greeks force a person to forget something that is ingrained in his memory?

He refers to the comment of Rashi cited above: **Yiras Hashem is man's one true treasure; it is essential and vital to a person in order to store and improve one's memory.** Based on this comment, we see that "yiras Hashem" is a segulah for memory. Without "yiras Shamayim," this segulah is absent. This is what the Mishnah teaches us (Avos 3, 9): "רבי חנינא בן דוסא אומר, כל שיראת חטאו קודמת לחכמתו חכמתו מתקיימת, וכל שחכמתו קודמת ליראת שיראת חטאו קודמת לחכמתו חכמתו מתקיימת"—**Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa says: If one's fear of sin takes precedence over his wisdom, his wisdom will endure; but if his wisdom takes precedence over his fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure.** We can now postulate that the Greeks planned to make Yisrael forget Hashem's Torah by indoctrinating them to study Torah just like they would study any other subject or body of wisdom—i.e., without "yirah" and awe. As a consequence, they would forget the Torah. These are his sacred words.

We can now complete our enlightening journey. We can explain the incredible miracle of Chanukah that HKB"H performed on behalf of Yisrael: **When the Greeks entered the Heichal, they contaminated all of the flasks of oil that were in the Heichal. And when the royal Chashmonai house prevailed and defeated them, they searched and found only one flask of oil that was concealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol; it contained only enough oil to light the menorah for one day. However, a miracle was performed with it, and they lit with it for eight days.** The Pnei Yehoshua (Shabbas 21b) asks a simple question: According to Jewish law, if the entire community is tamei, it is permissible to kindle the Menorah in a state of tumah. Furthermore, we have a fundamental principle that HKB"H does not

perform a miracle for naught. So, why did HKB"H perform a miracle that enabled them to kindle the Menorah with pure oil? He answers that HKB"H performed the miracle, because He saw that the priestly Chashmonaim strove to kindle the Menorah ideally, specifically with pure oil. Hence, HKB"H fulfilled that which is taught in the Gemara (ibid. 104a): "בא ליטהר מסייעים אותו"—**if one comes to purify himself, he receives divine assistance.** In this case, HKB"H made it possible for the Chashmonaim to kindle the Menorah with pure oil.

Therefore, when the Chashmonaim entered the Heichal: **They searched and found only one flask of oil that was concealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol.** Thus, HKB"H alluded to them that they merited the miracle of kindling with pure oil in the merit of Aharon HaKohen, who stamped his seal of pure "yiras Hashem" on all future generations of Jews. Therefore, even though they only found sufficient oil to kindle the Menorah for one day, it miraculously provided kindling for eight days.

This explains fantastically why Chazal provided three options for fulfilling the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles: (1) For any Jew: "נר איש וביתו"—one candle per night for the entire household. (2) For the "mehadrin," those who are more meticulous: "נר לכל אחד ואחד"—each member of the family lights his own candle to emulate the Chashmonaim who went above and beyond the basic law wishing to kindle the Menorah with pure oil even though it was not absolutely necessary. Their goal was to instill pure "yiras Hashem" in all future generations. (3) For the "mehadrin min hamehadrin," the most meticulous seeking the highest standard of excellence: "יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך"—adding an additional candle each night (according to Beis Shamai) to emulate the ultimate level of "yirah" demonstrated by Aharon HaKohen, the first to exemplify this high standard, which he passed down to the Chashmonaim.

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