

Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Ki Tisa 5770

D'ei Chochmah L'nafshechah

“Let your soul know wisdom”

Parshas Ki Tisa

From the discourses of Moreinu v'Rabeinu
the Gaon and Tzaddik Shlit'a

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*Shalosh Seudos*¹ of Parshas Ki Tisa 5766

”וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: וַעֲשִׂיתָ פִּיּוֹר נְחֹשֶׁת וְכִנּוּ נְחֹשֶׁת לְרַחֲצָהּ, וְנָתַתָּ אֹתוֹ בֵּין-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּבֵין הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, וְנָתַתָּ שָׁמָּה, מַיִם.”

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: ‘You shall also make a laver of brass, and its base of brass at which to wash; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it.’”²

Purim is Preparation for Pesach

Parshas Parah which we read after Purim is the way in which we purify ourselves so that we are fit to enter into Pesach. As the verse says, “You shall eat the *matzos* in a holy place.”³ Purim itself is the preparation for *Parshas Parah*, because on that day the main elements of *avodas Hashem* involve eating and drinking, and those activities are where the *klippas nogah* has the strongest hold. We have no way of knowing just how precious the rectification of *klippas nogah* is in the eyes of Hashem. Most people believe that the main *tikkun* is to pray and learn as much as possible, but they fail to see how important it is for them to repair *klippas nogah*, to eat and drink in holiness and ensure that all of their actions are for the sake of heaven.

The preparation for the time of, “This month is yours,” begins on the day of Purim itself. We begin to purify our mouths so that we can come to Pesach, the time of the פה סח, the “mouth that speaks,” in holiness. This paves the way for that great day—

¹ The lesson was delivered at the third meal of Shabbos.

² *Shemos* 30:17-18

³ *Vayikra* 6:9

the day of Shavuot on which we receive the Torah anew. This is why right after Purim we receive the command to build the copper laver and its stand for washing. We must come to cleanse our vessels of action, the *middos* of *Netzach-Hod-Yesod*, which parallel the laver, its stand, and the outer altar.⁴ We strive to cleanse them of *klippas nogah* so that we do not remain totally immersed in the illusory pleasures of this world.

Thinking about Hashem

The truth is that every single Jew knows and has always known full well that he must purify and sanctify himself. However, when it comes down to action, he is still far from holiness and does not even know how to begin. To help us, the Torah provides direction: if a person wants to purify the level of action, his aspect of *Netzach-Hod-Yesod* which parallels the laver, its base, and the outer altar, he must, “put water into it.” A human being must, by necessity, eat and drink—but he must make sure to draw into all of his material aspects the waters of Hashem’s light, the waters of *Chochmah* that emerge from the wellspring sourced in the house of Hashem. It is to this that the *Zohar* refers when it discusses the concept of the *igulah* or circle, and the *ribuah* or square. The “circle” represents faith and *yichud*, while the “square” represents *teshuvah*.⁵ [We will soon see how these two concepts must be bound together.]

The Arizal revealed numerous *yichudim* and *sheimos* that one should focus on while eating, and anyone who can access his works and bring them into practice is indeed fortunate—provided that he truly grasps the inner nature of the meditations.⁶ However, the Maggid of Kozhnitz explained long ago that although the Arizal revealed these *yichudim*, he did not reveal the pathway into them. Each and every *yichud* is a spiritual level all its own, and how is one to enter it without a guide? Fortunately, the Baal Shem Tov came and showed us the way into the King’s palace.⁷ “And with this

⁴ Commentary of the Vilna Gaon to *Sifra D'tzniusa*, Chapter 5.

⁵ *Zohar*, Introduction, p. 5

⁶ See the well known letter of the Baal HaSulam for more on this subject.

⁷ *Sha'ar Hamitzvos*, *Parshas Eikev*

shall the maiden come to the king.”⁸ He taught us that we should focus on simple *kavanos* as we eat, such as counting out ten bites and focusing on the *yud* of the *Shem HaVaYaH*, and then continuing by counting out five bites and focusing on the *hei*, and so on. He can even just think of the letters of the name of the food, since the Arizal taught that the name of the food itself signifies a particular permutation of the Divine Name. The main thing is that one thinks about Hashem while he enjoys the material; that he should “place water into it,” and draw down the upper waters. Even if he hasn’t yet purified and cleansed his hands and feet properly, nevertheless he should begin by placing the waters of Hashem’s light into his eating and drinking, and in some way follow the path of the *tzaddikim* who do eat in a state of holiness. Then he will merit to, “eat the *matzos* in a holy place”—to purify his body and leave behind his lusting after the things of this world. Then he will enter into the freedom of Pesach. It all begins with the light of Purim, when Hashem’s light descends to the lower worlds and every single Jew approaches holiness through binding himself to the *tzaddikim* who are like Mordechai HaTzaddik.

The Mask of Moshe Rabbeinu

The verse tells us that when Moshe Rabbeinu descended from Mount Sinai, his face shone with beams of light and he had to cover his face with a mask while he was with the people.⁹ The mask, *מסכה*, represents the way in which a person who is still very far from Hashem, who even went so far as to sin with the golden calf, can still receive illumination from above. [This light is dampened because the person’s sins make him unworthy of receiving the beams directly. Nevertheless, the light does come through in a way that he can access.] The mask symbolizes the contemplation of faith, G-d’s existence, and the Divine Names, coupled with a longing to return to one’s Creator.

Like Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk, all of the *tzaddikim* worked to arouse the Jewish people to sanctify themselves through their material pursuits, because they knew

⁸ *Esther* 2:13

⁹ *Shemos* 34:29-35

that it is impossible to climb the ladder of holiness without first ascending that first step of contemplating G-dliness even in the simplest way. Because it is the first necessary step, the *sitra achra* lies in wait there and does what it can to prevent a person from taking it, since without that a person won't ever get anywhere at all. Even if a person has the desire [and the potential] to meditate on all of the Arizal's *kavanos*, he will nevertheless find that if he does not ascend that first step he will remain mired in the temptations of this world and not get anywhere at all. All of his knowledge of Kabbalah will remain theoretical at best, because he will lack the means to actualize it into a living connection with Hashem. He must therefore make sure to "put water in it"—to infuse all of his material pursuits and pleasures with the waters of faith. Then he will really be able to "wash his hands and feet" and repent completely, and leave the lusts of this world behind him altogether so that *dveikus* will be his delight. The truth is that all of the pleasures of this world are only a pale reflection of the ecstasy of *dveikus* with Hashem, and when a person learns to infuse his worldly pleasures with thoughts of Hashem, he opens the way for himself to achieve ever-higher states of holiness and connection with the Divine.

The Revealed and Hidden Torah

After putting water into the copper laver of the levels of *Netzach-Hod-Yesod*, a person can "wash his hands and feet"—he can achieve the holiness of Mordechai who is associated with the hands, and of Esther who is associated with the feet.¹⁰ [Rebbe Nachman explains that Mordechai, who is like "pure myrrh," is like the "hands [that] drip with myrrh" of *Shir HaShirim*.] The hands parallel the revealed Torah [because they are uncovered] and the feet parallel the concealed Torah [since the legs are covered, and Esther's name implies concealment]. The main element of the unique holiness of the Jew stems from the Torah's revealed and hidden aspects, but if a person fails to sanctify his material pursuits the Torah that he studies becomes over-material. "You shall not allow this book of the Torah to be removed from your mouth [*מוש*]

¹⁰ *Likutei Moharan* I:10

מפיך]”¹¹ can also be read as, “You shall not make the Torah crass and over-material because of the actions of your mouth.”¹² If a person wants to connect with Hashem, he has to put all of his effort into sanctifying his physical self.

The verse says, “He that separates himself seeks his own desire.”¹³ This can also be read as, “Desire seeks a person’s separation.” We can understand this to mean that the negative desires inside a person cause him to fail to fulfill Hashem’s intention for him, which is to achieve sanctity and enter the Torah’s revealed and hidden parts so that he can achieve *dveikus*. The negative desires would rather than a person remain in the state of separation rather than connection with Hashem. And, truly, it is Hashem’s desire to share His Torah with each and every Jew, especially the hidden Torah which is sourced in the level of *Atikah Sesima’ah* and which expresses the Divine essence, as it were.¹⁴ This sharing is conditional, though; the sanctification of the body has to be a priority for him. Each person must find a path in accordance with his own ability to purify himself, and this demands a degree of mental and emotional effort. As we find in the verse, “Magnify Hashem with me [אתי]”¹⁵—the letters אתי are an acronym of the three prerequisites: יגיעה, תפילה, אמונה—faith, prayer, and effort. One must exert his mind and heart to focus on faith and prayer. And the very first step of all is to “place water in it”—to begin to make efforts to sanctify his eating and drinking, which unites Hashem and His *Shechinah* in the *yichud* known as *HaVaYaH-ADNI*. The two Names הוייה אדניי have a combined *gematria* of ninety-one, the same as that of the word for food, מאכיל.¹⁶ This focus on Hashem during one’s physical pursuits is the pathway to “washing the hands and feet” and to ultimately receive the light of the Torah.

¹¹ *Yehoshua* 1:8

¹² *Likutei Moharan* I:110

¹³ *Mishlei* 18:1

¹⁴ *Zohar, B’haaloscha* 155b; *Likutei Moharan* I:13,33,49,105; *Likutei Halachos, Tefillas HaMinchah* #7, *Rosh Chodesh* #5; Also see *D’ei Chochmah, Parshas Vayeishev* 5768 on the relationship between *Atikah* and *Netzach-Hod-Yesod*.

¹⁵ *Tehillim* 34:4

¹⁶ *Pri Eitz Chaim, Sha’ar HaShabbos*, Chapter 24

The Avodah of Shabbos Evening

All that we have discussed relates to the spiritual state of Shabbos evening, which is an expression of *CHaGaT* within the level of *Yisrael Sabbah u'Tevunah*.¹⁷ This level is the completion of *Binah* and *teshuvah*, and we correspondingly find that Shabbos evening is when the pathway of complete repentance is revealed. [*CHaBaD* of that level is revealed on Shabbos during the day.] When Shabbos enters, a person separates himself from the six days of the workweek. The weekdays are characterized by intermittent experiences of purity and sanctity that constantly revert back into the mundane.¹⁸ In that “workweek” state, a person’s repentance is never really complete because he is constantly slipping back into negativity and impurity. However, Hashem wants us to leave this state behind, to leave the *klippas nogah* and enter into the holiness of Shabbos. To do this, one must expend effort to reach the state of *Binah-teshuvah*, take the necessary steps to purify his material pursuits, so that his Torah and prayer will not be sullied by a distracted mind.

The Kings of Purim

This entire lesson is encapsulated in one of the segments of the thirteenth story of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, “The Seven Beggars.”¹⁹ The story begins: **“There once was a king who had an only son. The king wanted to give over his kingdom to his son during his lifetime. [On the day of his son’s coronation, the king] made a great ball. Whenever the king makes a ball, there is great rejoicing. But now, when the king was giving over the kingdom to his son during his lifetime, the rejoicing was immense. All the royal ministers, dukes and officials were there, and they rejoiced greatly at this feast. [Everyone in] the land was also pleased by this. It was a great historic event that the king was giving the kingdom over to his son during his**

¹⁷ *Sha’ar Hakavanos, Shabbos*

¹⁸ *Likutei Moharan I:79*

¹⁹ Segments of the story reprinted with permission from Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan’s translation for Breslov Research Institute, as well as Rabbi Avraham Greenbaum’s translation as it appears in “The Essential Rebbe Nachman.”

lifetime, and there was great rejoicing. There were all sorts of entertainment at the ball, such as bands, comedians, and the like; everything to make people rejoice..."

This is an allusion to the day of Purim, when the King of kings wants to give over the kingdom to the *tzaddik* and every single Jew. It is the day when the Divine Name in the aspect of ברכיו is revealed. [The Name ברכיו is formed when the letters of the Name *EHYH* are each transposed with the letter that follows them in the *Alef-Beis*. *Alef* becomes *beis*, *hei* becomes *vav*, *yud* becomes *chaf*, and the final *hei* becomes *vav*. For our purposes it is enough to understand that this Name is a contraction of ברכיו—literally, “in this is contained 26,” the *gematria* of the Name *HaVaYaH*.] On that day, one is able to see that Hashem’s Name pervades all of creation. On Purim, Hashem wants every single Jew to merit the light of Mordechai HaYehudi—the light of holy Jewish pride. This is the meaning of the verse that recounts the honoring of Mordechai: “ככה תעשה לאישׁ”—“So shall you do to the man...”²⁰ The word “ככה” is an acronym for the phrase: “כתר כל הכתרים”—“The Crown of all Crowns.” The highest Crown of *Kesser*. This is the natural gift that Hashem wants to give every Jew, for every single Jew is really a king. When he repents honestly and atones for his sins, he returns back to being incorporated within the essence of the source of all emanations—Hashem Himself.

This is as the Baal Shem Tov taught, that although the *tzaddik* has rulership and dominion, nevertheless he exercises his free will to reaffirm the foreknowledge of Hashem. This is the aspect of the “Crown of all Crowns,” that the *tzaddik* affirms again that Hashem alone is the ruler and manager of all creation, and He constantly works to bring everything to its ultimate good purpose. Then the *tzaddik* is naturally filled with joy and spiritual vitality, he makes a grand feast for all the ministers and officers so that everyone can rejoice together with him—and all the honor is directed toward the King alone. This is the Purim joy of each and every Jew—and at the feast “there were all sorts of entertainment,” all manner of wonderful dances, “everything to make people rejoice.”

²⁰ Ibid., 6:11

The King's Vision

“When the rejoicing reached its peak, the king stood up and said to his son, ‘I am an expert in astrology, and I see that you are destined to lose your kingdom. When you lose power, be careful not to become depressed; you must remain joyful. If you are happy, then I will also be happy...’ Right after Purim, when the Shabbos of *Parshas Parah* arrives, every Jew falls from grace. So he needs to know not only how to rule with the dominion of Purim; he also needs to know how to manage after he falls from his power. This is the aspect of the *parah adumah*, the red heifer that can cleanse the penitent from the taint of death. It isn't enough that a person knows how to ride the euphoria of experiencing G-dliness in everything. He also needs to know how to repent properly and repair the *klippas nogah*.

This is like the dichotomy we see in the Noam Elimelech, who on the one hand was filled always with joy and true Jewish pride, who stood “tall as a cedar” in the knowledge of being chosen by Hashem. On the other hand, he was always in a state of abject submission and repentance before Hashem, like the “lowly worm.” He was always seeking ways in which to “wash his hands and feet” by separating himself more and more from the desires of this world. Naturally, even this “fall from power” was done in a spirit of joy, because he always knew in his innermost heart that it is Hashem Himself who draws him back in repentance, to again contemplate G-dliness within creation and consecrate himself again to His service.

“...But if you become sad, then I will still be happy—because you are no longer king. If you are not able to remain happy when you lose your royal power, then you are not fit to be a king. But if you remain happy, then I will be extremely happy.” The main obscuring of Hashem's presence occurs when a person falls into depression because he feels that he is no longer a king; he has lost his Jewish pride. And the truth is that when a Jew is in such a melancholy state, he really isn't worthy of the power that Hashem invests in him, because he has drifted away from the sure knowledge that Hashem runs the world benevolently. When a person cannot hold onto

faith in that fact, then a superficial view would indicate that he really is unworthy of dominion and power. However, in his essence, a Jew is always a king, for he always has the potential to reconnect to his source—and “power and joy are in His place.”²¹

The King's Son Ascends the Throne

“The king's son took over the kingdom with a firm hand. He appointed his own ministers, dukes and officials, and set up his own army. The king's son was very wise, and he loved wisdom very much. He surrounded himself with great sages. Whenever anyone presented him with a wise thought, he cherished it, and gave the person whatever he wanted, whether honor or wealth. If the person wanted wealth he would be given wealth; if he wanted honor, he would be given honor. The [king's son] valued wisdom so much, he would give anything for it...”

Every single Jew who merits to grab hold of this path that is revealed on Purim, this path of discovering spirituality within every single bit of food and drink and all the other pleasures of this world, also ascends to the throne “with a firm hand.” He is able to make *yichudim* through interacting with the material world, and he also repents fully of all his sins. As a matter of course, he feels incredible vitality and joy, because he is able to really feel that Hashem's light pervades everything and Hashem forgives him all his sins. When a person comes to this state, Hashem uplifts him higher and higher. This is the concept of the wisdom that the king valued so very much. Because the day of Purim is filled with the light of *Chochmah*, naturally every person who draws down the light of *Chochmah* merits to have all of his spiritual and physical needs met. Hashem answers his prayers—because the King values *Chochmah* above all.

“All the people therefore became involved in academic studies. Soon the entire land was involved with wise thoughts. Those who desired wealth did so to receive wealth [from the king's son], while others did it to gain importance and honor. Since everyone was immersed in theoretical studies, the land forgot the art of war. The people became so totally involved in mental gymnastics, that they all

²¹ *Divrei HaYamim* I:16:27

became very intelligent, even the least of them. The people developed such high intelligence that the least of them would be the most intelligent people in other lands. The wise men of that land were therefore extremely intelligent. As a result of their secular studies, the wise men of that land became atheists. They convinced the king's son of their ideas, and he also became an atheist..."

This is the danger of dwelling too long and too much on trying to grasp the lights of *Chochmah*—one runs the risk of forgetting the art of war. This is why Purim is followed by *Parshas Parah*; we are again brought back down into the need to acquire the art of war against our evil inclination. Because not everyone reaches the level of Mordechai the *tzaddik*, whose rise to greatness coincides with his sitting at the King's gate in sackcloth and ashes in a state of complete self-abnegation and repentance. A person who reaches this level never lets go of the tactics of war, because he knows that the war is never-ending. We see this from the ways of the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples, whose ascents to the highest levels of *dveikus* were intertwined with their constant introspection and humble repentance before Hashem.

Even though the *tzaddikim* choose to reaffirm always that Hashem is the arbiter of all existence, they never use this as an excuse to slacken from the spiritual work that is put before them. They never allow their trust in Hashem's power to effect all the necessary *tikkunim* become the excuse for letting go of their own responsibilities in *avodas Hashem*. They continue to work because they know that this is the desire of Hashem, that we, here in the lower world, make a dwelling place for Him—by continuing the struggle against our lower natures.²²

"...The common people, however, did not become atheists. The arguments of the wise men were so deep and subtle that the common people could not grasp them, and therefore they were not harmed [by these ideas]. But the king's son and the wise men all became atheists..."

²² *Midrash Tanchuma, Parshas Naso* #16

The main light of *Chochmah* is to be found in the deeper secrets of the Torah, in its hidden aspect. This is why the king's son was in danger, while the common people were not. The common people never lost hold of the art of war because they never rose up to the level of *Chochmah* that has the power to repair all of the world. It is the king's son who did merit to receive some aspect of the light of Mordechai HaYehudi who needs extra spiritual protection so that he shouldn't fall from his lofty level and lose his hold on the art of war.

“...Nevertheless, the king's son had a spark of good in him. He had been born with good, and he had a good nature. Whenever he contemplated his situation, and realized what he was doing...he would moan and sigh because he had fallen into such confused beliefs. Realizing that he had fallen into error, he would moan and sigh very much...” The king's son was “good”—just as Moshe Rabbeinu was “good,” was innately filled with good *middos*.²³ It is this inherent good that drove him to moan and sigh over his fall, because it pained him that he had been so expert in the deepest secrets of the Torah and still could fall from his level. It hurts him that after such a lofty experience of joy and clarity in the mysteries of the Torah, he has to go back to ashes of the *parah adumah*. He cries because he must repent sincerely for all his sins and start seeking the means to escape from the impurity that still afflicts him. He still has a great deal to cry about before Hashem.

“...But then he would try to think logically, and he would once again become immersed in his atheistic ideas. This happened many times. When he contemplated, he would moan and sigh, but as soon as he began to think logically, his atheistic ideas would overwhelm him...” The king's son is caught in this terrible situation, because the truth is that the level of *Chochmah* approaches the ultimate purpose of his existence. It is only because he allows the light of *Chochmah* to draw him away from fighting against his *yetzer* that it becomes damaging and dangerous.

²³ *Shemos* 2:2

The Lost Children

“There was once a mass flight of people from a certain country: everyone fled. As they were on their way they passed through a forest, and a boy and a girl got lost. One person lost a boy and another lost a girl. They were still little children of about the age of four or five. They had nothing to eat, and they cried and screamed because they were hungry...” The image of the forests represents *Parshas Parah*, because it is when a person reaches that juncture that he begins to realize that he has lost the aspect of the “boy and girl” within himself. He contemplates his true situation and sees that his love and fear of Hashem (the masculine and feminine aspects) are gone. That is why he nothing to “eat”—the light of the Torah that is his sustenance is degraded because it is dependent on his love and fear of Hashem for its power. And so he has no choice but to cry and weep that Hashem will help him to master again the art of war against his lower nature.

“Suddenly a beggar appeared with bags in which he was carrying bread. The two children approached him and began to follow him. He gave them bread, and they ate. ‘How did you come to be here?’ he asked. ‘We don’t know,’ they replied—they were only little children...” The blind beggar represents the Noam Elimelech himself. A person must earnestly try to study and emulate the ways of the *tzaddik* even if he is very far from his path, because persistence will ultimately allow the seeker to grasp the ways of the *tzaddikim*. The entire purpose and intention of the *tzaddikim* is to help the Jewish people come closer to Hashem, to help them master the art of war and ensure that they have the “bread” they need to eat. When the *tzaddik* asks, “How did you get here?” the wanderer himself has no idea. He’s like a little child lost in the wilderness, and he has no clue what it was that made him fall so far from Hashem.

“...When he was about to leave, they asked him to take them with him. ‘But I don’t want you to go with me,’ he said...” At the outset, when a person begins to draw close to *tzaddikim*, he is tested from above by being faced with rejection. It is all a challenge to see whether he will persist in his goal of coming to the truth and

connecting with the *tzaddikim* and learning from them. It is only after overcoming this initial test that the *tzaddik* shows him the path and directs him so that the seeker will be able to follow the *tzaddik* and his teachings.

“...They noticed that he was blind. They wondered how he was able to find his way if he was blind...” The children are astounded at the “blindness” of the *tzaddik*—that he has no interest whatsoever in the things of this world. Every glance, every interaction with the physical universe is just a lens through which he gazes upon the countenance of the King. And this produces wonder and awe within the children, because his level of “placing Hashem before him always” is so far beyond their imagining. What is even more perplexing is how the *tzaddik* manages to rise to the highest levels of *Chochmah* without losing his simplicity—his nature as a “beggar”—he still begs Hashem for mercy in repentance. This is the most wondrous thing of all, that his grasp of the lights of *Chochmah* never make the *tzaddik* lose hold of the “art of war.” How can he find his way if he is blind? How can he maintain a process of always walking the walk of *teshuvah* when he is so detached from the temptations of this world?

“...The fact that they wondered about this is itself unusual since they were only small children, but they were intelligent...” What is so unusual is that in this latter generation, people still have the mind to delve into such a question at all. This only proves that, although we are very small souls compared with earlier generations, although we are only like little children, Hashem has nevertheless helped us to have some grasp of the aspect of *Chochmah* and live with it.

“The beggar blessed them that they should be like him—that they should be elders like him—and then he left them some more bread and went on his way. The two children understood that Hashem was watching over them and that He had sent them this blind beggar here in the forest to give them food...” The children “understood”—they came to the level of *Binah*. One must eat the food of the true *tzaddikim*, one must absorb their teachings, so that one can rise to the level of

Chochmah and contemplation without losing hold of the art of *Binah*, of *teshuvah*. This is the conjoining of Purim and *Parshas Parah*, of *Chochmah* and *Binah*. This way, we can wash our hands and feet in the waters of repentance, while following in the way of the blind beggar, of blinding ourselves to anything but the light of the King's countenance.

May Hashem help us to sanctify ourselves with the holiness of Mordechai HaTzaddik. Then we will be able to enter *Parshas Parah* and all of our material lives and place within it "water"—the knowledge that G-dliness permeates all of creation. With that water we will be able to "wash our hands and feet," to study the works of the *tzaddikim* that teach us the art of war. Then we will merit to consume the *matzos* in a holy place, with the building of the *Beis Hamikdash* and the arrival of our righteous redeemer, speedily and in our days. Amen.

Translated and Adapted by Rav Micha Golshevsky.

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