

Healing the Pain

Through Authentic Spiritual Life

by David Bruce Hughes
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Authentic Spiritual Life

Authentic spiritual life is difficult. It takes time and energy, intelligence, determination and self-discipline. It requires other personal qualities and activities that most people regard as unpleasant and try to avoid whenever possible. It is certainly much easier to just kick back and surf the web, listen to music or watch TV. So why bother with spiritual life? Why invest all that time and energy when you could be out enjoying yourself?

The answer is simple: Because you are a human being. Being human means that you are a spiritual being in the material world, and that includes an inherent deep dissatisfaction with life. As science-fiction writer Phillip K. Dick opined, “Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.” Oh, you can go into denial about it; you can suppress it from your consciousness for some time. You can distract yourself for hours or days on end, but it always comes back—usually when you least expect it. All of a sudden something clicks inside, you sit up and take stock, and realize your actual situation in life: You are suffering.

Sure, you keep up a good front. You manage to force a smile somehow, and hope no one suspects. Your act is together—those periods of desperation, those times when you feel everything caving in on you, the darkness and uncertainty eating away at your soul—you keep those to yourself and never let anyone know. Actually you are a mess, and you feel it deep within your heart. You hide it beautifully; but in the silence of the darkest hours of the night, within your most confidential chamber of consciousness, you know that it’s all a lie, that this material life is not enough. Way down under all your phoniness, all your bluster and bravado, you just know there has got to be some other way to

live, some better way to look at the world, some way to touch life more fully. The truth is out there somewhere.

Now and then you click into the groove by chance. You get a great new job; you fall in love; you win a little at the game. And for a while, life takes on a richness and clarity that makes all the bad times and boredom fade away. The whole texture of your consciousness changes and, full of pleasure in just being alive, you say to yourself, "OK, now I've made it; now I will be happy." But then after a little more time, that glow fades away like smoke in the wind, and you are left with a nostalgic memory and a vague awareness that something is deeply wrong.

There really is another whole realm of depth and sensitivity available in life; but somehow, you're just not seeing it. You can dream about it, but you can't quite grasp what it might be. You wind up feeling alienated, cut off from the juice of living. You feel insulated from the existential sweetness of being by a cocoon of sensory cotton. You are not really touching life; you are not making it. And then even that vague dissatisfaction fades away, and you are back to the same old, hard cold reality. The world looks like the usual foul place, boring at best and at its worst, dizzyingly confusing, violent and terrifying. Human life in the material world is an emotional roller-coaster, and you spend most of your time languishing at the bottom of the ramp, yearning for the heights, even though you know the only way you can go from there is down.

So what is wrong with you? Are you insane? A freak? No, you are just a typical human being on planet Earth. You suffer from the same spiritual disease that infects every human being: Maya or illusion. This is a spiritual disease, an infection of your mind and consciousness whose

tentacles reach everywhere: chronic tension, depression and health problems; lack of genuine compassion, even for people closest to you; emotional blockage, a feeling of deadness even in the midst of life. Ultimately, old age, sickness and death will take us all away. And then what? You don't know, and that yawning emptiness is terrifying.

No ordinary human being is entirely free from this spiritual disease. We have built an elaborate popular culture around hiding from it, suppressing it, pretending it's not there, distracting ourselves from it with material goals, sense gratification, achievement and status. But it never quite goes away; it's a constant undercurrent in every thought and every perception; a little wordless voice at the back of one's head saying, "Not good enough yet. Got to have more. Got to make it better. Got to be better." It's a disease, a disease of consciousness that manifests everywhere in subtle forms.

Go to a party. Listen to the forced laughter, that brittle sound like breaking glass, expressing fun on the surface but fear underneath. Feel the tension, the pressure; nobody really relaxes, they are too busy trying too hard to make others think they are having fun. Go to a game. Watch the fans in the stands, the fits of irrational anger; the uncontrolled frustration bubbling out of people; negative emotion and unbridled egotism masquerading as enthusiasm or team spirit. Watch the drunkenness, the fights in the stands. These people are not at peace with themselves; they are desperately trying to release a painful inner tension. Watch the news on TV; listen to the lyrics in popular songs. The same theme is repeated over and over in endless variations: loneliness, jealousy, envy, suffering, discontent and stress. Life seems to be a perpetual struggle, an enormous effort against staggering odds just to survive. And even if we survive, we still suffer.

And what is our solution to all this dissatisfaction? Led by mass-media dreams we fantasize, “If only I had more money, then I would be happy; if only I can find somebody who really loves me; if only I can lose 20 pounds; if only I had a color TV, Jacuzzi, or blonde hair, if only...” on and on *ad nauseam*. Most people just run through the same old maze, day after day and never act on their dreams and fantasies. But even if you do, it doesn’t work; it doesn’t have any effect. You have simply wasted a bit more of your valuable, irreplaceable time and energy without finding a real solution to the problems of life.

So where does this disease come from and more important, what can we do about it? It is a disease of consciousness, and it comes from conditions that we have established our own minds. It is a deep, subtle and pervasive set of bad mental habits, a Gordian knot of karmic entanglement that we have built up bit-by-bit over many years and even lifetimes, and that we have to unravel patiently, one piece at a time. We can overhaul our mind and purify our consciousness; heal them slowly, methodically, and transform our consciousness back into its pristine state, if we know the correct process. **Healing this disease is the actual purpose and process of authentic spiritual life.**

Transcendental Knowledge

To execute this process of healing consciousness, you need spiritual knowledge, transcendental knowledge. This is not the same thing as religion. A religion is a limited application of spiritual knowledge on a human social level. It typically contains a little spiritual truth, but a good deal of hogwash as well. It demands faith and obedience now and offers a reward later on, like a post-dated check. Transcendental knowledge, on the other hand, is eternal, unconditional and all-pervading. It gives results as soon as you apply it properly. A computer or other electronic device is man-made and has a beginning and an end, but the laws of physics and electronics on which it is based are permanent and unconditional. Similarly, religion may be more or less derived from spiritual knowledge, but we are talking about spiritual knowledge itself, as distinguished from the man-made organizations or institutions derived from it. That original eternal transcendental knowledge, called the Esoteric Teaching, is the basis of authentic spiritual life.

The Esoteric Teaching says that the cause of the human malaise is a diseased condition of consciousness. What is consciousness? Consciousness is the primary symptom of the soul. What is the soul? The soul is the self; the soul is who and what we really are. All living beings are souls, eternal conscious spiritual entities. Then what are we doing in these material bodies? Ah, that is the problem! Solve that, and all suffering is finished. But you cannot cure the disease of material consciousness on the material platform; you have to solve it on the spiritual platform, on the platform of consciousness itself. That is why no material solution, such as religion, philosophy or politics, can erase the suffering intrinsic to material existence. And that is also why

we need spiritual knowledge, transcendental knowledge of the soul and consciousness, to cure the disease of material existence and suffering.

Consciousness is like a mirror; it simply reflects whatever we direct it toward. If we reflect the sun in a mirror, the mirror appears to shine just like the sun; if we put something red in front of it, it appears red, and so on. Similarly, our consciousness reflects the qualities of whatever object we direct it toward. When we direct our consciousness outward toward the mind and senses, it reflects the qualities of the material energy; when we direct our consciousness inward, toward the soul and the spiritual world, it reflects the qualities of the spiritual energy. Consciousness reflects the qualities of whatever we reflect in it, and the aggregate of those qualities is our state or quality of consciousness.

Now here is the crux of the problem: the material qualities are inherently painful and unsatisfying to the soul. The soul is spiritual and eternal; the material world is temporary. We want to be free but everything in this material world is conditional. The material world is imperfect and we are perfect, and so forth. There is a fundamental incompatibility between our self—the soul—and the material world. Therefore we cannot be fully happy as long as we are in material consciousness or material existence; this is the cause of the suffering of human life. On the other hand, the spiritual energy is automatically satisfying and pleasing to the soul. Therefore when we are in spiritual consciousness, we are happy. This is the cure for the disease of existential suffering: to divert our consciousness from the material energy and focus it on the spiritual energy. There are very simple and powerful methods for this, which we will present later on. First you need to understand a bit more about how consciousness works.

The soul, the self, the “I” or living being is the conscious **subject**; whatever we focus our consciousness on is its **object**. As long as we don’t know or realize that we are a spirit soul, our tendency is to identify with the objects of our consciousness. This process is called **identification** or **objectification**, and it is an unnatural state of consciousness. For example, when we focus our consciousness on the material body, the tendency is to identify with the body, to think that “I am this body.” However, we are not the body, and the simple proof is that you can look at your body and say, “This is my hand, this is my foot, this is my head, this is my brain.” You can even say, “This is my mind, this is my intelligence, this is my ego.” But where is the person, the conscious being who is related with and feels that he possesses all these things? Where is the “I” whose hand, foot etc. we can easily identify as “mine”?

The answer is, of course, that the “I” is the subjective consciousness, whose object is the hand, body or mind, etc. Now what is the harm of identifying the subject—the consciousness or soul—with its object, the body? Well first of all, it’s not true. You are not the body or the mind; you are you, the spirit soul, the consciousness and source of energy behind the body and the mind. When you identify with something that is not your self, your identity becomes split between the real you and the thing you identify with. **This false identification or split in identity is the root cause of the suffering of material existence.**

Healing the Split

If you can heal the split you can heal the suffering, but that is not so easy. You have to know a lot more to actually succeed in healing the split. There are many approaches to healing the split, and most of them involve some kind of mental or psychological process. But the mind is also part of the body, and some of the proofs of this are that you can 'see' thoughts in the mind, and that you don't remember your previous life. If you were the same as the mind, you would not be able to make it an object of consciousness. And if the mind were the eternal self, you would be able to remember everything from your previous lives. So the mind is something like a computer, and it is different from the self. It is material and temporary, so it must be part of the body, and although it is subtle energy and not gross matter, mind is still material.

The intelligence and ego are also subtle material objects like the mind. Remember that the cause of the suffering of material existence is a disease of consciousness, so it must be treated on the platform of consciousness. Therefore any process that is based on the mind, intelligence or false ego may be a start, but cannot be fully successful. By 'false ego' we mean the false, temporary identity created by identification with material objects and designations, such as "I am my body," "I am a citizen of country X," "I am a member of family Y," "I am the object of material designation Z." Z could be "a doctor," "a man," "a woman," "smart," "stupid," "fat," "lonely," "rich," etc. "I am the owner of this material object," etc.

All these identifications are false, and to maintain identification with them is to create suffering for oneself, the transcendental spirit soul, by covering it with the material energy. The subject, the spirit soul,

the source of consciousness, can never become the object of consciousness, such as the material body or mind. If we accept this false objectification, we split our identity between the subject and the objects of consciousness. Because this identification is false, and because the qualities of material energy are incompatible with the spiritual energy, such a false sense of identity creates nothing but suffering for us.

To cure the disease of material consciousness, we have to transcend all these false conceptions of identity and recover our actual spiritual identity, our eternal spiritual self. This is the goal and method of authentic spiritual life, the Esoteric Teaching. You get results from this process immediately, as soon as you begin it. But to be perfectly honest, the complete cure is very difficult. It requires a long time, expert instruction, advanced knowledge and consistent effort. But the alternative is to suffer in material existence indefinitely—not much of a choice in our opinion. Fortunately, even if you fail to complete the process in this lifetime, because everything authentically spiritual is eternal, you get to keep the benefit and begin again in the next life exactly from where you left off in this one.

Now that you understand the general principle and overall goal of this process, let's take a look at some of the easy beginning methods. This information will empower you to get started right away for immediate benefit. As soon as you begin this process, the fog of existential pain will begin to lift. No one will have to convince you that this process is effective, because you will feel it affect your consciousness directly.

The essence of our experience in the material world is change. Change, driven by time, is incessant. Life flows by, changing moment-by-moment, and is never the same. Perpetual alteration of material perceptual qualities is the principal experiential fact of the manifested

universe. A thought springs up in your head and half a second later, it's gone. Another thought comes, and then it's gone too. A sound strikes your ears, and then fades to silence. Open your eyes and the world pours in; close them and it is gone. Winter comes, and it is too cold; then summer, and it's too hot. You're hungry, and then you eat too much and you feel uncomfortably stuffed. You long for something for years, and then when you finally get it, it's a disappointment. People come into your life and then they go away without saying why. Beloved relatives and pets die. Cherished possessions come and go, your fortunes go up and down. Sometimes you win and more often, you lose. No one can stop the river of time and change, even for a moment.

Labels and Pigeonholes

There is nothing wrong with this flow of time; it is the nature of the material universe. But we have developed an odd response to this endless flow of change: we categorize and value these changing experiences according to our desires. We stick each perception, every experience, sense perception and mental change into one of three mental pigeonholes. If it is something we want, we say that it is **good**; if something we don't want, then it is **bad**; or if it has nothing to do with our desires it is simply **neutral**. Then we give meaning and value to our experience according a set of fixed habitual mental responses.

- If we label a particular perception or experience 'good', then we try to freeze time right there. We grab onto that particular thought or experience, hold it, fondle it and try to keep it from escaping. When (not if) that doesn't work, we go into an all-out effort to repeat the experience which caused that thought or experience. Let us call this mental habit **accepting**.
- Over on the other side of the mind lies the box labeled 'bad'. When we perceive something 'bad', we try to push it away. We try to deny it, reject it, get rid of it any way we can. We fight against our own experience; we run from huge pieces of ourselves. Let us call this mental habit **rejecting**.
- Between these two reactions lies the 'neutral' box. Here we place the experiences which are neither good nor bad, but merely tepid, uninteresting and boring. We pack experience away in the neutral box so that we can ignore it, and thus return our attention to where the action is, namely our endless round of desire and aversion. The neutral category of experience gets robbed of

its fair share of our attention. Let us call this mental habit **ignoring**.

The direct result of these mental habits is a perpetual treadmill, a rat-race to nowhere, endlessly chasing after pleasure, fleeing from pain, and ignoring 90% of our experience. Then we wonder why life tastes so flat. In the final analysis, it's a system that does not and cannot work, because it is based on the false idea: that we are the controllers and enjoyers of this material world, that we should enjoy and not suffer, and that the material world in general and our experience in particular are under our control.

These unwarranted assumptions cause us much self-created grief. No matter how hard you pursue pleasure and success, there are times when you fail. No matter how fast you flee suffering, there are times when pain catches up with you. And between those extremes, life is so boring you could scream. Our minds are full of desires, opinions and criticisms, most of which we have borrowed from other people and the media, and very little of which is actually our own. We have built walls all around ourselves, and we lived trapped with the prison of our own likes and dislikes. We suffer unavoidably, but we rarely leave our comfort zone of habit and routine to see what is going on beyond it. And then we complain of being bored.

The Problem of Suffering

Suffering is a very important concept in spiritual life. It is a key concept that must be thoroughly understood. The Sanskrit word for suffering is *duhkha*, and it does not just mean physical pain. Pain is always there to some degree, but suffering is a mental state. It means the deep, subtle existential sense of **wrongness** and alienation from oneself which is a part of the mental treadmill, the deadening dance of desire and aversion. Pain comes and goes; it is a natural part of life, but suffering is a diseased condition of consciousness. It is not at all natural, but something we have created for ourselves by wrong thinking.

According to the philosophy of authentic spiritual life, material existence and especially material consciousness and identification automatically create suffering, *duhkha*. At first glance this seems very pessimistic, even morbid. It also seems untrue; there are plenty of times when we have been happy, aren't there? No, not really. That is part of Maya, the illusion. Take any moment when you feel happy, really fulfilled, and observe your consciousness closely. Deep down under the joy, you will always find a subtle undercurrent of tension; because no matter how great the moment is, it is going to end. No matter how much you just gained, you are either going to lose it, or spend the rest of your days guarding what you have got and scheming how to get more. And in the end, you are going to die; you will lose everything in this world. It is all transitory, here today and gone tomorrow.

Sounds pretty bleak, doesn't it? Actually it's not; not at all, because it is the truth, and the truth shall set you free. The truth only **sounds** bleak when you view it from the ordinary mental platform, the same level at which the treadmill mechanism of acceptance, rejection and

ignoring operates. Above that level there is another platform, a completely different way of looking at the temporary material universe. It is the level of spiritual intelligence, beyond accepting, rejecting and ignoring. A higher level of consciousness where we do not indulge in the bad mental habits of grasping pleasurable experience as it flows by, blocking painful things out and ignoring the rest. It is a level of experience beyond good and bad, beyond pleasure and pain. It is a lovely way to perceive the world, and it is a learnable skill. It's not easy, but it is learnable. And it is a key step in the process of curing our spiritual disease: the skill of detachment, which leads directly to real happiness and peace.

Happiness and peace are some of the most important issues in human existence. Everyone is seeking happiness and peace of mind. This often is a bit hard to see, because we cover up those basic goals with layers of preliminary objectives. We want food, we want money, we want sex, possessions and respect. We even say to ourselves that the idea of happiness is too abstract: "Look, I'm practical. Just give me enough money and I will buy all the happiness I need." Unfortunately, this attitude doesn't work. Examine each of these goals and you will find they are superficial. You want food. Why? Because you are hungry. So you are hungry, so what? Well if you eat, you won't be hungry and then you'll feel good. So feeling good, or freedom from the pushing of the senses, is the real goal. The surface goals like food are just means to an end. What we are really after is the feeling of relief that comes when the desire is satisfied. Relief, relaxation and an end to the tension. Peace, happiness, no more yearning, all mean to be beyond desire.

Most people mistakenly think that perfect happiness means getting everything we want, being in control of everything, controlling the

whole world according to our every whim. However, this is an illusion. It doesn't work that way. Take a look in history at people who actually held this ultimate power. They were not happy people; they were not men at peace with themselves. Why? Because they were driven to control the world totally and absolutely, and they could not. They wanted to control all men, and there always remained men who refused to be controlled. They could not control the weather or the stars. They still got sick; they still had to grow old and die.

You can't ever get everything you want: it's impossible. Why waste time going down that road? Luckily, there is another option. Instead of fruitlessly trying to control the world, you can learn to control your mind, to step outside of the endless cycle of desire, aversion and ignoring. You can learn to recognize and acknowledge desires without being controlled by them. That does not mean that you lie down and invite everybody to walk all over you; it means that you continue to live a very normal-looking life, but live from a whole new internal viewpoint, a new level of consciousness. You do the things that any person must do, but you are free from obsessive, compulsive need and attachment, free from being driven by your desires. You may want something, but you don't need to chase after it. You may fear something, but you don't need to stand paralyzed, quaking in your boots or run away. The mental culture of equanimity is very difficult; it takes years. But trying to control everything is impossible, so the merely difficult is preferable because although it is hard work, it is actually achievable.

Spiritual Happiness

But why try to find happiness through spiritual life? Isn't modern materialistic civilization all about attaining peace and happiness? We build great skyscrapers, fast cars and miles of freeways. We have paid vacations, TV sets, free hospitals and sick leave, Social Security and welfare benefits. Government, planning commissions and scientific research are all aimed at providing some measure of peace and happiness. Yet the rate of mental illness climbs steadily, and the crime rates rise even faster. The streets are crawling with unstable individuals, and road rage is increasing. This materialistic civilization is not working; in fact, it is collapsing. A happy man does not feel driven to kill his family and himself just because he loses his job or house; yet this happening with increasing frequency even in our 'advanced' materialistic civilization.

We like to hold the conceit that Western society is exploiting every area of human knowledge to provide peace and happiness. But we are only beginning to realize that we have overdeveloped the material aspect of existence at the expense of the deeper emotional and spiritual aspects, and now we are paying a heavy price for that strategic error. It is easy to complain about the degeneration of moral and spiritual fiber in America and the world today, but the real task is to do something about it. The only place to start is within ourselves. Look carefully inside, truly and objectively, and you will see moments when you are irrationally angry, or passionately believe in something that you find out later is completely untrue. When you learn to see those moments as they are—see them clearly, cleanly and without condemnation—then you will be on your way up and out of the disease of material consciousness.

You can't make radical changes in the pattern of your life until you drop your filters, drop your identifications and habitual judgments, and allow yourself to see yourself exactly as you are. As soon as you do that, changes flow naturally. You don't have to force or struggle to obey rules dictated to you by some authority. You just change automatically, improving by the power of consciousness itself. But arriving at a realistic view of yourself is quite a task. You must drop all pretension, all self-serving justification and rationalization, and really see who you are and how you are, without illusion, judgment or resistance of any kind. You must see how you function as a social being and the effect you have on those around you. You must see your duties and obligations to your fellow human beings, and above all, your responsibility to yourself as an individual spiritual living being. And you've got to see all of that clearly and as a unit, a single gestalt of interrelationship. It sounds complex, but this insight often occurs in a single instant. The result of achieving this insight is deep understanding and serene happiness.

The ancient Esoteric Teaching anticipated Freud and other psychologists by thousands of years. It says: "What you are now is the result of what you did in the past. What you will be tomorrow will be the result of what you do now. The consequences of an evil mind will follow you, like the cart follows the ox that pulls it. The consequences of a purified mind also will follow you as inevitably as your own shadow. No one can do more for you than your own purified mind. A well-disciplined mind brings happiness." The spiritual process of meditation purifies the mind, just like bathing regularly purifies the body. And it prevents disease in the same way as bathing does. It cleanses the thought process of the spiritual infections that keep you snarled up in

emotional bondage. It brings a state of tranquility and awareness, a state of concentration and insight.

In our society, we believe that knowledge makes a cultured person civilized. Material civilization, however, only polishes the personality superficially. Subject an ordinary educated and sophisticated gentleman to stresses of war or economic collapse, and see what happens. It is one thing to obey the law because you know the penalties and fear the consequences; it is something else entirely to obey the law because you have cleansed yourself from the greed that would make you steal, and the hatred that would make you kill. Civilization changes man superficially, on the outside. Meditation softens him within, melts him through and through, and transfigures him into a higher state of consciousness.

Meditation is the cleansing crucible fire that slowly purifies the soul from ignorance through understanding. The greater your understanding, the more flexible and tolerant you can be, the more compassionate you can be. You become like a perfect parent or an ideal teacher; you are ready to forgive and forget. You feel love towards others because you understand them, and you understand others because you have understood yourself. You have looked deeply inside, seen your own illusion and your own human failings. You have seen your own humanity and learned to forgive and to love yourself. Once you have learned compassion for yourself, compassion for others is automatic. An accomplished meditator has achieved a profound understanding of life, and while seeing life realistically for what it inevitably is, he also relates to the world with deep and uncritical love.

Meditation is a lot like cultivating a piece of land. To make a field out of a forest, first you have to clear the trees and pull out the stumps.

Then you till the soil and fertilize it. Then you sow your seed, irrigate the field and remove the weeds, and then you harvest your crops. Similarly, to change your consciousness, first you have to clear out the various irritants that are in the way, pull them right out by the root so that they won't grow back. Then you fertilize, pumping energy and discipline into the mental soil. Then you sow the seed and you harvest your crops of faith, morality, spiritual consciousness and wisdom.

Faith and morality, by the way, have a special meaning in the context of authentic spiritual life. The Esoteric Teaching does not advocate faith in the sense of believing something because it is written in a book, attributed to a prophet or taught to you by some authority figure. Of course we have books and teachers, but what we mean by faith is the confidence born of direct personal experience. It is knowing that something is true because you have seen it work, because you have observed that very same thing within yourself. In the same way, morality is not a ritualistic obedience to some exterior, imposed code of behavior, but a deep sense of knowing what is right based on insight and compassion.

The purpose of authentic spiritual life is personal growth and transformation. The person that goes into the experience of meditation is not the same person who comes out the other side. Authentic meditation changes your character by a process of sensitization, by making you deeply aware of your own thoughts, words and deeds. Your arrogance evaporates and your antagonism dries up. Your mind becomes still and calm, and the ups and downs of your life smooth out. Thus properly performed meditation reduces tension, fear, and worry. Restlessness recedes and passion moderates. Things begin to fall into place and your life becomes a glide instead of a struggle. Meditation sharpens your concentration and thinking power. Then little by little your

subconscious motives and mechanics become clear to you. Your intuition sharpens. The precision of your thought increases, and gradually you come to a direct knowledge of things as they really are, without prejudice and without illusion. All this happens through understanding, insight and transcendental knowledge.

So is all this reason enough to bother with meditation and spiritual life? Scarcely. These are just promises, words on paper. There is only one way you will ever know if meditation and spiritual life are worth the effort: make up your mind to do it, learn from an expert how to do it right, then do it and experience the benefits yourself.

Thank you for reading.

We know your time is valuable.

We are members of an authentic spiritual community, students of the Esoteric Teaching. We can show you an easy method of meditation that will really help you solve the problems of life. For more information and assistance in learning the ways of authentic spiritual life, please visit our website:

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