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## Fixing Your Fire [Conceit] - 011 Burnout

### ***Wind-of-Wind-of-Fire: Constant Upward Movement***

We continue with the help of Hashem to discuss the element of fire, the root of *gaavah* (conceit), which is the nature in the soul of *aliyah* (ascension). Currently we are discussing the “wind” aspect of fire (wind-of-fire), which refers to the movement, or motivating force, of ascension. In particular, **wind-of-wind-of-fire** is the consistent nature of movement.

As we have said many times in the past, “Torah scholars have no *menuchah*, not in this world and not in the next world”, because they are always in a state of upward movement. The nature in the soul to have constant upward movement is **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul.

### ***Three Scenarios of “Burnout”***

Generally speaking, we find three scenarios of people who have lost their wind-of-wind-of-fire:

**1) Teenagers.** Teenagers often are idealistic and they want to progress in life; this might be spurred on by jealousy or it may come from pure motives, but either way, teenagers usually go through a period of idealism. But many times this idealism is short-lived; it begins in the teenage years and ends when the teenager years are over.

Teenage idealism is usually extreme in its nature. This is because a teenager usually does not have *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind), so there are still traces of childish immaturity even as he’s growing higher. Their wind-of-wind-of-fire will be accessed to a very high degree. But this fire usually dies down in midst of the teenage years.

**2) Tekufos\Periods.** Another example of it, which is very common, is found with many people who have “*tekufos*” (periods) in their life – periods of growth, and periods where they don’t grow. The periods of non-growth are not necessarily referring to a *yeridah* (fall) in one’s *ruchniyus*; rather, it refers to complacency.

For example, in the beginning of the *zman* (season) in the *Kolel*, some people are full of a feeling of renewal, and they learn passionately and excitedly, full of vigor, goals, and motivation. But as the *zman* comes to an end, this passion loses its momentum by many people in the *Kolel*. By the time it’s “*sof zman*” (the end of the *zman*), there are some people who feel totally burnt out.

**3) Complacency Due To Previous Achievement.** A third example (of weakened fire), which affects a smaller percentage of people, is when a person feels that he has achieved most of his growth

already, and he becomes complacent with himself. We are not talking about someone who hasn't done anything in his life yet he's convinced that he is successful. We are talking about someone who has indeed achieved in his life, and he has become complacent with his situation, so he stops trying to grow.

Although it is wonderful for a person to have achievements in life, there is no way for a person to assume that he has reached the purpose of his *avodah* on this world. There is *always* more room to grow in life. Torah scholars have no *menuchah* in this world because there is no such thing as stopping to grow.

(On a deeper note, there is a very deep point in the soul which is connected to Hashem in complete *d'veykus*, which is described in the verse, **חִבּוּקָה וּדְבוּקָה בְךָ**, "*Embedded and attached to You*"; this point of the soul is already at the state of perfection and it doesn't have to grow. But the external layers of our soul require movement and growth).

There must always be more growth. Sometimes a person is growing and then he gets burnt out along the way, but sometimes, a person is growing and he simply becomes complacent with what he has already achieved. For example, if a person wrote a *sefer* on a certain area of Torah, although there is an advantage he has of deriving great pleasure and serenity from this achievement, it can become his very downfall, because it can make him complacent.

If a person becomes complacent, he might be so satisfied with himself that he stays on that level until the rest of his life, never seeing a reason to change. He feels like he has reached "his" place in life, and he stops seeing the need for spiritual growth. He loses his **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

These are the three general scenarios of people who stop growing in life.

### **1) Why Do Teenagers Lose Their Idealism?**

Let's begin with the first example: teenage idealism, which is often short-lived. Understandably, it is not only teenagers who encounter short-lived idealism. There are older adults who also have temporary periods of idealism that come and go. But it is more dominant with teenagers, so we will discuss this matter as it pertains to teenagers.

We must know that in most cases, the reason why a teenager loses his idealism is not because he has simply become burnt out, but because there was never a *sefer* (order) in his *Avodas Hashem*. There is much to say about this, but we will mention only the fundamental points here, and briefly.

#### ***Unrealistic Aspirations***

First of all, there is the problem of unrealistic aspirations. Often, when a person becomes full of aspiration in his teenage years, he will take on certain goals that are beyond his mental capacity. He sets high pedestals for himself that are naturally impossible to reach, according to his natural strengths.

The truth is that our spiritual achievements do not come naturally to us, and they are entirely a gift of Heaven. When a person sees that he's not getting the Heavenly assistance he needs, he becomes broken when he discovers this reality, so he goes back to his original routine.

So the first thing one needs to do is to make sure that his aspirations are realistic. Many teenagers (as well as adults) become frustrated when they aren't reaching their aspirations or high spiritual levels that they wish they could be on, and often these are unrealistic goals.

To say it in more subtle terms, although each Jew must strive to become holy and reach self-perfection, one must know clearly the difference between a level that's within his natural reach with a level that can only come to him as a gift from Heaven.

If a person is hoping to receive growth as a gift from Heaven and therefore he is praying to reach a certain spiritual attainment, there is nothing unstable with this; it is praiseworthy and it is wonderful. But if a person cannot make the distinction between a level that's within his normal reach and a level that requires Heavenly assistance to reach, he thinks he can reach high levels through his own natural abilities, and he will be met with failure and frustration. It is a sure path towards failure, and sometimes it can even cause a person to become totally depressed.

So one has to be able to set realistic aspirations for himself. The truth is that it's hard to say what's considered a realistic aspiration and what isn't. It is a very subtle matter. One needs to consult with a very wise person who can guide him according to his abilities, who can explain to him what he is capable of and what he isn't capable of.

Just because a person sees that others were able to reach certain spiritual attainments does not mean that he can do the same. Others have different abilities than you do. In addition, high spiritual levels are entirely a gift from Heaven, and they are not attained through our regular abilities; so one must not think that his exertion alone will get him there. Even when a person does exert himself and he receives higher levels, it is still a gift of Heaven when he succeeds; it is never through one's own natural abilities. One can pray to Hashem to get it.

### ***Lack of Guidance In Avodas Hashem***

Another reason for short-lived idealism, where people lose their desire to grow, as we mentioned above, is when people are very not clear about what the *sefer* (order) is in *Avodas Hashem*. Instead, many people are into tidbits of advice and ideas which are culled from the many *sefarim*, and think that this is a way to serve *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. When a person eventually sees that he is not successful as he takes this path, he becomes broken and full of despair, and he takes a step back from being into *Avodas Hashem*. He loses his **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

The reason why this doesn't work is simple. There is no way to succeed with a path that is not grounded on any one solid approach! But people aren't aware of this, and then they aren't aware of the errors they are making. Then for some reason, they lose their ambition in trying to improve. It's because the path they took was never a valid path to begin with.[\[1\]](#)

In many cases, a person tries a path in *Avodas Hashem* which is not a valid path. We can write entire *sefarim* that explain all of the errors people are making in their *Avodas Hashem*. The errors and the misconceptions are not small mistakes; they are major! There was a lack of understanding to begin with about which path to take in life.

People might even spend months and years involved in a certain way of *Avodas Hashem* that proves detrimental. There are people who have harmed their physical health or have had to take pills because they have gotten into all kinds of mistakes as they embarked on a certain path in *Avodas Hashem* that wasn't for them.

(We should mention that when one serves Hashem totally *lishmah*, he has special assistance from Heaven to be raised from all of his failures and be brought onto the right path. But usually a person does not serve Hashem *lishmah*, so there is a lot less *siyata d'shmaya* (Heavenly assistance), and a person is easily led to make mistakes.)

The result from this is that a person becomes upset that others saw success and he didn't. Then he

loses his aspirations to grow, he stops learning Gemara in-depth eventually and he's satisfied with just *Daf HaYomi*, and perhaps he'll have a *halacha seder* each day and an *iyun seder* in his day, but he is no longer learning nearly as much as he used to. He's waiting for a miracle to happen. Perhaps he wants Hashem to send him a *tzaddik* to come to him in a dream and teach him the secrets of Torah, as Shlomo HaMelech, and then, he'll know the Torah....

This loss of aspiration doesn't come from making mistakes in one's *Avodas Hashem*. It is because there was a mistake in his very path to begin with. There was no way for him to succeed from the start, because he had no clear *derech* (path) and *seder* (order) to his *Avodas Hashem*.

When it is finally explained to him all the mistakes that he made in his life, he says, "Nu, my son will hopefully get it right and he'll make it up for me." He's already lost his own drive in life, so he's hoping that his children will rectify his mistakes. It is very hard when we hear people say such statements, in which they have given up on their own life, when they realize the mistakes of their past.

We see that any *baal teshuvah* has basically completely changed over his entire life and he has started a new beginning for himself; so too, those who were raised *frum* in the Torah world also need to know what it feels like to become a *baal teshuvah*, and start their life over again.

### ***Rectifying The Past Requires Individual Guidance***

So far, we have explained two reasons why people lose their drive to grow in life. One reason is due to unrealistic aspirations, which are met with frustration; another reason is because the very path that the person took in the first place was unclear and it lacked guidance, which leads to major mistakes in life, frustration, and a subsequent loss of motivation to grow.

We cannot give a general solution to these problems, because in order to rectify these issues, each person as an individual will require his own private solution, based on his unique personality and circumstances.

If you feel that the issues here describe your situation in life, and you have a family with teenage children, you should be attentive to the concepts spoken about here until now. It is our responsibility to try as much as we can to pay attention to these issues, to make sure that our children should have a clear path in their *Avodas Hashem* from the start - so that they don't get into major problems later on in life.

### ***2) Why Do People Lose Their Drive?***

Now we will address the second reason of why people lose their drive to grow. This is when a person enjoys a period of growth and then he loses his momentum to grow.

Sometimes this has to do with the personality of a person, and sometimes it is caused by external factors and surroundings. At the end of the *zman* in yeshivah\Kolel, you can hear people say, "It's the end of the *zman*" - they feel like they have lose their drive.

The solution to this problem is two-fold. There is an external part to the solution, and an inner part to the solution.

#### ***External Renewal***

The external part of the solution is for a person to find points of **renewal** in his life. Every person can find something in his life that provides him with renewal. I can't tell you which kind of renewal it

should be and how much you need to make use of it, because it depends on each person's personal situation. But the general idea of it is that each person can find areas of renewal in his life.

We really cannot live without renewal. "There is no *beis midrash* that does not have a *chiddush* (novelty)". In our own inner world as well, we cannot survive without renewal. Our external situation as well requires some kind of renewal to survive. Find something that makes you feel renewed. This applies to both your physical side to life, as well as your spiritual side to life: you need to find renewal.

However, you must first make sure that it doesn't damage your inner stability. If your renewal is stronger than your stability, the renewal will overtake your soul and then it will be detrimental. It will be based on thin air. If you already have inner stability, though, you can seek renewal. There must be an equal balance between the "same old" stability in your life with the renewal in your life.

Renewal leads you to have *hisranenus* - a renewal in the same old things. There can be a renewal in one thing which causes a person to feel a renewal towards the same old things he is used to.[2]

One doesn't have to find renewal in something he's currently involved with; he can find anything to give him renewal, which provides him with a renewed feeling towards the same old things he was used to. For example, if a person wants to finish a tractate in the Talmud, he usually picks another tractate to learn than the one he is learning. This can help a person find renewal in his life, and then it can even spill over into what he's currently learning.

If one does not have the stamina to finish tractates of the Talmud, he can try skipping to another chapter in the tractate, and if this is still too much, he can at least try learning different *sugyos* of Gemara, one after the other. But it should be emphasized that in order for this renewal to work, must do this for the sake of renewing himself, and not merely for the sake of trying to finish a project.

It doesn't always have to be a renewal in one's Torah learning; it can be renewal in the physical parts of his life. But when we try to draw renewal from the physical side to our life, it should be done sensibly of course, and it should not be pursued addictively [or else we have traded one problem with another].

It is more recommended for a person to seek renewal from an area outside of the current area he's involved with, because if a person is looking for renewal in the current area, his focus on renewal might make him lose concentration on what he's doing and takes away his inner stability. We usually need to get renewal from some area that is outside of the current area that we are involved with. The renewal we gain will satisfy our soul's need for renewal, and then it will be able to find renewal in the "same old" things.[3]

### ***Inner Renewal***

The additional part to the solution is to awaken inner renewal within ourselves. Although it is important for us to get renewal from external factors, the main renewal we need is inner renewal.

Inner renewal is the essentially the power behind **wind-of-wind-of-fire** which we are discussing. Most people have not have not revealed that much inner strength from within their soul, and therefore, they aren't either able to awaken inner renewal from within themselves.

Inner renewal is when a person is able to constantly begin again anew, in whatever situation he is in. Hashem renews the creation every day, and there is a deep power in our soul to feel this inner renewal. But the external layer of our soul cannot grasp this secret of renewal. It can only identify with the continuity of Creation: the fact that time is always continuing before us.

The external layer of our soul does not identify with the idea of the renewal of Creation; it can only understand the outer dimension of the world, which includes past, present, and future – the continuum of time. For this reason, people feel dry inside themselves, thus they seek renewal. But the soul isn't satisfied with external renewal; it is only satisfied with inner renewal.

When we stood at Har Sinai, we were told by Hashem, “Remember the day where you stood before Hashem at Horeb”, and the Sages learn from this that we were being told, “Today you are standing at Sinai; view each day as if you are coming to Sinai, and it should be in your eyes like new.” This describes the deep power of our soul to see renewal. It is a very subtle concept to define, and reaching it is even more subtle. It is the power that lies in **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul.

When one cannot see past the continuity of Creation, he does not see any renewal of Creation, he becomes dry inside his soul. But when a person has the deeper perspective towards Creation that there is nothing which stays the same, and that it is always changing every moment – even the chair and table you saw in your house this morning is not the same chair or table anymore – this gets him used to the perspective of renewal. It starts with realizing how the Creation in front of you is always changing.<sup>[4]</sup> This helps you leave the perspective of continuity and enter the perspective of renewal.

For example, when you meet a good friend after 30 days where you didn't see him, the *halachah* is to make the blessing of “*Shehechyanu*”. Why? It is because he has changed since then; he is new. If you see him the next day, you don't make a *Shechyanu*, because you don't see him as new. But the truth is that everything in Creation is constantly changing, and the changes are too small that you don't register it. You can get used to the idea that each thing you come across today is not the same thing you saw yesterday.

Here is a very simple and practical example, which applies to when we learn Torah. When we start to learn a *sugya* on Sunday and then we learn it again on Monday, the natural perspective is to see it as a continuity of the day before. But there is a whole new perspective we can have: each day, we are starting again, from a new place. But didn't you already learn these words of the Gemara yesterday? If you think that you are merely reviewing yesterday's learning word-for-word, this is the antithesis of renewal. One needs to understand that today's learning is totally new from yesterday's learning. Anyone who has learned a little Torah knows that there are new things discovered each day in one's learning.

The Creation is always changing, and it is just that the changes are so small that we don't see it. But it's really changing every second. When one is aware of this concept, he can keep refreshing his understanding towards the same thing. This is because what you see today is different than what you saw yesterday; it has gone through changes since then.

When a person remains confined to the way he has been used to thinking since he was a child (which is called “*katnus*”\small-mindedness), he can only see the same old thing each day. But the more a person has matured spiritually, the more he can keep changing his perspective towards something. The more a person absorbs the perspective of renewal, he will find that he can keep refreshing his understanding towards something, starting again from scratch.

### ***A New Perspective Towards Life***

Firstly, we need to absorb this concept at least intellectually, because it is a subtle concept to understand. Then we need to see it as a new perspective entirely towards life in front of us.

One who lives with this perspective is always full of inner vitality; he is truly alive. Whereas others still live in the same old and dry perspective towards life, a person who lives with the renewal concept

undergoes a massive change in his soul, from beginning to end. It is hard to describe this with words.

When a person lives with renewal, he sees his friend one day and he sees him as an entirely new person the next day. To illustrate, you can get to know a person today in a way that you didn't know yesterday, and you discover more things about him, which gives you a different perspective towards him. Even if you don't get to know him more today, he has undergone some changes since yesterday.

A 20-year old is not the same person anymore when he is 25, and he is not the same person anymore when he turns 30 and 40. Just because you don't know this person doesn't mean he hasn't changed since 5 years ago, even if you can't see changes on him. (People don't even know themselves totally, so why should they assume that they know and recognize another person?)

Even though we see that there are people who don't seem to change even after they have gotten married and they go on to live their life, and it seems that some people simply stay the way they are until they die, this is all a superficial perspective towards people. The more inner that a person becomes, the more he realizes that nobody remains the same. Everyone goes through changes; Creation is always changing.

This perspective totally changes a person's view on life. Again, as we said before, this cannot be fully described in the word. It is to see a new world each day upon getting up in the morning; to see the renewal of Creation and live with it. It also provides a person with a feeling of inner renewal, which is essentially the soul's ability of **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

This nature in the soul is not simply a nature in a person to be ambitious. There are people who do not ever give up on the pursuit of honor and money, and this is certainly a spark of the power of **wind-of-wind-of-fire**, but it is not the inner use of **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. The inner use of **wind-of-wind-of-fire** is when a person believes in the constant renewal of Creation.

When one has revealed the depth of his soul, he finds it natural to make use of the **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. It is really the deep nature of the soul, and it only needs to be revealed outward from its hidden state. When one penetrates into the depth of his soul, he reveals this simple nature in his soul, **wind-of-wind-of-fire**, which propels him to have constant upward movement.

Of course, a person is always affected by his physicality, and he will still have free will to choose between good and evil. But he will have succeeded in revealing the nature of his soul of constant upward movement. In order to get to this point, one has to get remove his attachment to physicality and reveal his soul.

### **3) Why Do People Become Too Complacent?**

We mentioned a third scenario of why people lose their drive to grow: when a person feels like he has already achieved in his life, so he becomes somewhat complacent and he remains at that level he is on, for the rest of his life.

The truth is that were indeed some *tzaddikim* who reached a certain point in their *Avodas Hashem* where they didn't have to keep growing past that point. But most *tzaddikim* are constantly in a state of growth.

The reason why people become complacent is because they are really viewing their existence as being part from Hashem. Without being connected to the purpose of our life – to actively strive for more and more closeness with Hashem – a person will feel fine as long as he has seen that he has had some spiritual growth, and he'll feel that it's okay to stay at his current level. But when he puts the purpose of life in front of him at all times, when he views his life in relation to how he must get to

the reality of Hashem, he will then see life differently.

As long as a person is stuck inside the view that comes from his own private existence, he is seeing life from that perspective and even his goals in *ruchniyus* (spirituality) will always be about what “I” need to accomplish, and he fails to see the purpose of it all. Either he will end up in despair as he tries to grow to higher achievements, because he has trusted his own limited understanding; or it will be because he simply isn’t reaching his goals. Either of these situations will make him give up at some point from any more desire for growth.

It’s possible that a person has learned a lot of Torah and he has fulfilled many acts of *mitzvos* in his life, and perhaps he has even taught Torah to others and he has thereby greatly benefitted others – yet he, himself, might be remaining at the same level, for his entire life. Even if he has helped others grow, it is still very possible that he is not growing past his current level. His growth begins and ends there, and that is what he remains like, until the day he dies.

There is another way to live entirely; a much deeper perspective towards life: when one puts Hashem in front of himself at all times, he is connected to endlessness, and then he is never complacent. Hashem is endless, and therefore, our bond with Hashem is never complete; so our task in life is never done.

(On a very deep note, there is a deep place in our soul which is already connected with Hashem and it is completely serene, and therefore it doesn’t need to grow past this point, because it is already at the very endpoint. But the rest of our soul requires ascension, growth, and striving for more closeness with Hashem. Until the year 10,000 (which will be the perfected state of Creation), there is no soul which will ever reach total closeness with Hashem (on its external layer). The perfection of the year 10,000 is contained in the deepest part of the soul which is already fully connected with Hashem and thus it has total serenity. But the external layers of our soul are bound to the rules of the time preceding the year 10,000, and therefore, our soul (its external layers) ultimately requires more and more growth.)

Thus, the more a person is aware that his soul requires constant growth, the further away he is from becoming complacent.

### ***Holy Stubbornness***

The Vilna Gaon said that a “stubborn person is successful.”<sup>[5]</sup> There is an *avodah* we have to stubbornly persist for more and more growth in our *ruchniyus*.

Some people were born with natural stubbornness, which comes from **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in the *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic layer of the soul), and they can naturally channel their nature of stubbornness towards spiritual ambition<sup>[6]</sup>. But even if a person wasn’t born with natural stubbornness, he can live a life in which he is never complacent from more growth, because a person can keep demanding more growth from himself; for we are never done in our life’s task.

### ***The Inner World: To Live Above Time and Space***

The biggest tragedy in life is when people lose their **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. It is the depth behind the statement of the Sages, “The wicked in their life are considered to be dead.” This is not only referring to the wicked, but to the wickedness in the soul<sup>[7]</sup> which doesn’t want to improve itself and it doesn’t strive to go higher.

When one doesn’t have constant aspirations to grow higher and improve, it doesn’t matter if this is at the beginning of the *zman*, the middle of the *zman*, or the end of the *zman*. One who is tied to “*zman*”

is trapped in the “garments” of this world, for time is a garment that wraps around the world, and being limited to time confines a person to a superficial dimension which he never grows past. He has no inner world to live in; he is instead bound to time.

When a person has an inner world to live in, it doesn't make a difference to him if it's the middle of *Tamuz* or if it's the first day of *Elul*. He lives constantly in the inner dimension of life. When one is connected to the inner truth each day, he lives with a sense of purpose in his life. He knows where he is heading towards and for what he was created for; he is aware that life is about constant growth.

Surely there are times where we fall from our level and we stumble, and we have weaknesses in our personality which can hamper us, but that shouldn't change our perspective that life is always about constant growth.

### ***Strengthening Yourself Each Day***

This concept was actually described only briefly. It describes the point of **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul, and it is the motivating force of our entire life. All other parts to our life are but details of this root power of spiritual movement.

**Wind-of-wind-of-fire** must be in constant use. Each day we need to be in touch with it and awaken it. If we ever see that we are slackening off from growth, we need to re-awaken ourselves with this power. Remember that there is a purpose to your life which you are heading towards, and make sure that your *Avodas Hashem* has order to it and that you are being guided properly.

### ***Never Despair***

Don't ever despair; *never, ever despair*.

How can you allow yourself to despair from reaching your place in eternity? Just because life contains difficulties shouldn't cause you to give up from reaching your purpose in life. It is the most foolish and insensible thing in the world for a person to give up from reaching one's purpose in life, which he was created for!! He would be giving up all of his eternity, just because he finds life hard. This is the worst kind of *katnus* (small-mindedness) and *shiflus* (lowliness) possible!

Some people have a more difficult life than others, and others have it less difficult. But the common denominator between all people is that there is no justification for giving up on reaching our purpose of life.[\[8\]](#)

### ***In Conclusion***

The more a person is a *bar daas* (sensibly thinking person) and he has learned how to settle his mind each day, he accesses his **wind-of-wind-of-fire** and strengthens it. When one is making use of this root power, it is then that his *Avodas Hashem* can truly begin, and it is then that he can try his hardest and *daven* to Hashem for success.

Of him it can be applied the statement of our Sages, “If someone says to you “I toiled, and I found”, believe him.”[\[9\]](#)

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[\[1\]](#) Refer to ***Fixing Your Fire #004 - Knowing Your Way***

[2] See also **Tefillah #043 - Finding Renewal**

[3] For more on “renewal”, see **Tefillah #043 - Finding Renewal**; and **Fixing Your Water\_019\_The Desire For News**

[4] Refer to *Nefesh HaChaim - Shaar III*; for further explanation of this matter, refer to the adaptation of the Rav’s **Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part II, Chapter Three**

[5] *Gra: Sifri D’Tzneyusa: Hakdamah*

[6] See **Tefillah #0144 - Always Serving Hashem**

[7] refer to *sefer Tanya*

[8] Editor’s Note: There is a wonderful sefer written by a recent tzaddik, Reb Asher Aryeh Freund zt”l of Jerusalem, on how we can knock away at the voice of despair inside ourselves and constantly grow higher: see sefer **Imrei Asher: Michtavim**.

[9] *Megillah 6b*

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