



GOSHO STUDY: ON REPAYING DEBTS OF GRATITUDE

If Nichiren's compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering. Its benefit surpasses that of Dengyo and T'ien-t'ai, and is superior to that of Nagarjuna and Mahakashyapa.

A hundred years of practice in the Land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day's practice in the impure world. Two thousand years of propagating Buddhism during the Former and Middle Days of the Law are inferior to an hour of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law. This is in no way because of Nichiren's wisdom, but simply because the time makes it so. In spring the blossoms open, in autumn the fruit appears. Summer is hot, winter is cold. The season makes it so, does it not?

"After I [the Buddha] have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off, nor must you allow evil devils, the devils' people, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, or kumbhanda demons to seize the advantage!"¹²⁹

This is a short passage from a long and major Goshō. In it, Nichiren says that if his compassion is profound enough, then NMRK will spread forever. This is because NMRK has the power to open eyes and prevent suffering. Accordingly it surpasses the teachings of the Middle and Early Days of the Law, which do not have this power at this time.

And it is because of the Time that benefit from practicing NMRK is so vast compared to practice in earlier periods or in the "Land of Perfect Bliss". NMRK is the correct teaching for this kalpa, this period of confusion, suffering, degraded teaching, lack of faith.

What if the Daishonin's compassion is lacking? Then instead of a profound and inexhaustible flow of benefit, people will become more deluded, their suffering will intensify, and the teaching will be discarded.

Here in the entire land of Jambudvīpa, in all the 2,225 years since the passing of the Buddha, not a single person chanted it. Nichiren alone, without sparing his voice, now chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nam-myohorenge-kyo. The size of the waves depends upon the wind that raises them, the height of the flames depends upon how much firewood is piled on, the size of the lotuses depends upon the pond in which they grow, and the volume of rain depends upon the dragons that make it fall. The deeper the roots, the more prolific the branches. The farther the source, the longer the stream. The Chou dynasty lasted for seven hundred years because of the propriety and filial devotion of its founder, King Wen.

So the spread of the teaching, which vindicates the correctness of the teaching, rests on an awareness and acceptance of debts of gratitude. These are specifically to one's Parents, Teacher and Country.

Parent = Compassion = Pillar, "I will be the pillar of Japan"

Teacher = Wisdom = Open Eye, the Buddha's "clear and penetrating gaze"

Sovereign = Right Action = Great Ship, protecting people from error and suffering

The debt is not a function of the behaviour or correctness of the debtee. It describes our state of mind and behaviour, not someone else's. In fact, it describes enlightenment. Our attitude of gratitude is shown by compassion, wisdom and right action. Right action is, in the present context, Kosenruffu, sharing the Mentor's vision and determination and acting to make it reality.

"The Buddha, perfectly enlightened in the Three Bodies, takes the entire universe as his true body, takes the entire universe as his spiritual nature, takes the entire universe as his physical existence" (Nichiren Daishonin Goshō Zenshu, p. 563)

I've saved a discussion of the background because in this Gosho, it's essential to the meaning of the text.

The subject is the Unity of Master and Disciple, in Japanese *Shitei Funi*. This is a topic many of us - me for example - often find difficult. It is particularly important right now, with the arrival of a new format for gongyo. I hope to explain the concept, the meaning of the format change, and possibly why Study is one of the three essential practices.

This particular gosho is one I always thought fairly unimportant, as a friend in Hove used to say, "getting down to Nichiren's laundry list" (a koan of coins, a sack of rice, a winter robe, two shirts medium starch etc.) But as usual I missed the point. So let's start by reading the first paragraph:

*"I have not heard from either of you since that time. But I was very pleased to learn that you had read at Kasagamori the two letters I wrote in the Kenji era in memory of the late sage Dozen-bo."*¹

In April 1278 Nichiren was living at Mt. Minobu. His old teacher Dozen-bo had died two years earlier at Seicho-ji, where he had for many years been head priest and where Nichiren studied from the age of 12 to 16. Seicho-ji was originally a T'ien T'ai temple but like T'ien T'ai school generally in Japan had become contaminated by esotericism and wholesale imports from other schools, notably Shingon and Jodo2. By the time Nichiren reached Seicho-ji, Tendai was a bit of a doctrinal mess. Nichiren spent the years from 1239 to 1253 studying it.

<Fundamentals of Buddhism pages 150, 151, 152 where marked>

The practice was to study widely but under the supervision of one's own teacher, so I take the romantic view that Dozen-bo remained in frequent contact and saw Nichiren go from being an uneducated child to an energetic and gifted young scholar and monk during this period. After 18 years, Dozen-bo must have been as much father as tutor. When Nichiren returned to Seicho-ji in 1253 and publicly stated his radical view of the *Lotus Sutra*, together with a call for a return to the core of T'ien T'ai and the rejection of other doctrines, Dozen-bo knew the extreme risk he was taking and acted with compassion by arranging Nichiren's escape with two other priests, Joken-bo and Gigo-bo. This compassion is central to the Master Disciple relationship, as Daisaku Ikeda explains:

"This [greeting³] shows their [bodhisattvas of the earth] heartfelt concern for Shakyamuni's well-being. Their attitude is completely different from that of the voice-hearers who, in their state of object dependence, sometimes express doubts or complaints.

*It's on a different level, but I was always concerned about my mentor Josei Toda's health. Whenever I saw him I tried to get a sense for whether he was tired, how he was feeling. And President Toda was even more concerned about my health. If I was perspiring, he would say to me: "Dai, you should change shirts right away. Otherwise you'll catch cold." He was truly a wonderful mentor."*⁴

I found this quote from Pres. Ikeda personally interesting because I once offered a leader my own shirt because I was concerned he might catch a chill driving home in damp clothes. (He didn't take it so it probably doesn't count toward my Boy Scout merit badge.) I knew he'd do the same thing for me or any other member. We all would, wouldn't we?

The point is NOT that we're all 'nice guys'. The unity of master and disciple is forged over countless lifetimes from the most profound reciprocity, the shared determination to achieve perfect equality:

¹ "Flowering and Bearing Grain" in *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p.909

² True Word and Pure Land schools. Shingon was founded by Kobo, based on the Mahavairochana Sutra. After T'ien T'ai's death Kobo proclaimed the superiority of this Dainichi Sutra over the Lotus Sutra. Pure Land, founded by Honen, is also called Nembutsu and requires the recitation of the name of Amida Buddha.

³ In the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth greet Shakyamuni by asking "World-Honoured One, are your illnesses few, are your worries few, are your practices proceeding comfortably?"

⁴ Daisaku Ikeda, *Conversations and Lectures on the Sutra*, vol. 3, p. 313

A "good teacher" is a priest who is innocent of any wrongdoing in secular affairs, who never fawns upon others even in the slightest, who has few desires and is satisfied with little, and who is compassionate, a priest who trusts to the scriptures, reads and upholds the Lotus Sutra and also encourages others to embrace it. Such a priest the Buddha has praised by calling him, among all priests, the finest teacher of the Dharma.

*Bound as we common mortals are by earthly desires, we can instantly attain the same virtues as Shakyamuni Buddha, for we receive all the benefits that he accumulated. The Sutra reads 'hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us.' This means that those who believe in and practice the Lotus Sutra are equal to Shakyamuni Buddha."*⁵

and:

*"At the start I took a vow, hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinctions between us."*⁶

For Nichiren, the attainment of the disciple is the proof, the validation, of the success of the master:

*"If a tree is deeply rooted, its branches and leaves will never wither. If the spring is inexhaustible, the stream will never run dry. Without wood, a fire will burn out. Without earth, plants will not grow. I, Nichiren, am indebted solely to my late teacher, Dozen-bo, for my having become the votary of the Lotus Sutra and my being widely talked about, both in a good and bad sense. Nichiren is like the plant, and my teacher, the earth."*⁷

It is not enough that this be theoretically possible. It must be real, tangible, accessible and demonstrable:

"The Bodhisattvas of the Earth have four leaders. The sutra says, 'The first was called Superior Practices [Jogyo] ...and the fourth was called Bodhisattva Firmly Established Practices [Anryugyo]'. If Bodhisattva Superior Practices appears in the Latter Day of the Law, so must Bodhisattva Firmly Established Practices.

The rice plant flowers and bears grain, but its spirit remains in the soil. This is the reason the stalk sprouts to flower and bear grain once again. The blessings that Nichiren obtains from propagating the Lotus Sutra will always return to Dozen-bo. How sublime! It is said that if a teacher has a good disciple, both will gain the fruit of Buddhahood, but if a teacher fosters a bad disciple, both will fall into hell.

If teacher and disciple are of different minds, they will never accomplish anything. I will elaborate on this point later.

You should always talk with each other to free yourselves from the sufferings of birth and death and attain the pure land of Eagle Peak, where you will nod to each other and speak in one mind.

The sutra reads, "Before the multitude they seem possessed of the three poisons or manifest the signs of distorted views. My disciples in this manner use expedient means to save living beings.

Be sure to keep in mind what I have stated thus far.

Respectfully,

Nichiren

*The fourth month in the first year of Koan (1278)*⁸

Nichiren expresses his appreciation to Dozen-bo for making it possible for him, Nichiren, to become the Votary of the Lotus Sutra. Is he just being polite? But then suddenly he changes the topic entirely, talking about the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in the Entrustment Chapter (15) of the *Lotus Sutra*. Why the abrupt change?

This is part of a pattern we should learn to recognize in which Nichiren first assumes the identity of Bodhisattva Jogyo, then "casts off the transient to reveal the true", for which the Japanese name is *Hoshaku Kempon*. This he first did that fateful night in September 1271 on the beach at Tatsunokuchi when Hei no Saemon tried to have him beheaded. I think that Joken-bo and Gigo-bo as T'ien T'ai priests would have understood this reference quite clearly. But what truth, precisely, is revealed?

⁵ "Letter to the Sage Nichimyo", *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p.323

⁶ *Lotus Sutra*, Expedient Means chapter, LS2, p.36

⁷ "Flowering and Bearing Grain", *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p.909

⁸ "Flowering and Bearing Grain", *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p.909

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Here Nichiren says in effect, "If I am Jogyo, leader of the Bodhisattvas of the earth, then Dozen-bo's role is that of Anryugyo, Bodhisattva Firmly Established Practices." More importantly, both are implicitly Buddhas:

*"In praising these Buddhas with the utmost respect, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are actually praising the eternal oneness of mentor and disciple. A Buddha lives each moment with the greatest sense of fulfillment, fully awakened to the truth that the present moment is itself eternity. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are in fact also Buddhas whose lives are illuminated by the awareness that the present moment is one with eternity. This, in other words, is a meeting between Buddhas. Therefore it is joyful."*⁹

And also that Dozen-bo's role was to pave the way for Nichiren's appearance as Original Buddha, a role inseparable from Nichiren's own.

Dozen-bo has succeeded as master because his disciple has become enlightened to his true nature and karmic inheritance. As a direct result, Nichiren can reveal Dozen-bo's true nature:

"It is said that, if a teacher has a good disciple, both will gain the fruit of Buddhahood, but if a teacher fosters a bad disciple, both will fall into hell."

This is far more than a role reversal - it is a reciprocity founded on perfect equality.

'But', we might say, 'this is impossible - Dozen-bo never even accepted Nichiren's teachings, he was head priest of a degraded and heretical temple until his dying breath!'

Nichiren explains:

"My disciples in this manner use expedient means to save living beings."

Nichiren without Dozen-bo, he implies, would be no more use than the Life Span chapter without the Expedient Means chapter (Juryo without Hoben). Both are equal and essential to realize the full meaning of Myoho Renge Kyo, the Middle Way.

This also echoes the doctrine of *Himyo Hoben*¹⁰, the profound Truth hidden in a preparatory teaching, which is first announced in Shakyamuni's exchange with his elder disciple Maitreya, or Bodhisattva Miroku, at the transition from the Entrustment chapter (15) to the Life Span chapter (16) of the Lotus Sutra.

This is IT, the Moment, the dividing line between Nichiren's concept of the **Unity** of Master and Disciple, and conventional views of the **Way** of Master and Disciple. Let's put it into context I the Sutra.

Up to this point the Assembly in the Air has been going well for Shakyamuni's disciples. The awesome Treasure Tower has appeared, Shakyamuni's emanations have arrived to join the gods, demons and other supernatural beings. Shakyamuni's disciples have spent up to 40 years with their master striving to learn everything he could teach them. Now their master is about to entrust the heart of his teaching to them, his loyal followers.

Then suddenly it all goes wrong. An incalculable quantity of Bodhisattvas suddenly arises from the earth, serene, golden, dignified beings! Maitreya, who has been promised enlightenment in the lifetime after next ad must have felt "this close" cannot restrain himself:

This illustrates the principle of 'upsetting attachments and arousing doubts.' Their attachments crumble and they are filled with great doubt. Maitreya, again voicing the thoughts on everyone's mind, then asks:

World-Honoured One, when the Thus Come One was a crown prince, you left the palace of the Shakyas and sat in the place of practice not far from the city of Gaya, and there attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Barely forty years or more have passed since then. World-Honoured one, how in that short time could you have accomplished so much work as a Buddha?...

*Suppose, for example, that a young man of twenty-five, with ruddy complexion and hair still black, should point to someone who was a hundred years old and say, 'This is my son!'. This would be hard to believe, and so too is what the Buddha says..."*¹¹

Pres. Ikeda comments:

⁹ Daisaku Ikeda, *Conversations and Lectures on the Sutra*, vol. 3, p.312

¹⁰ Hi = hidden, myo = unfathomable, hoben = expedient.

¹¹ Daisaku Ikeda, *Conversations and Lectures on the Sutra*, vol. 3, p.317

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To have one's dearest beliefs, the basic assumptions in which he has believed and relied overturned, is extremely painful. It is very hard to accept.

The doctrine expounded in the essential teaching came as perhaps even more of a shock. The essential teaching reveals for the first time the eternity of the Buddha's life over the three existences of past, present and future. That's a dramatic revelation, one that fundamentally overturns Shakyamuni's previous teaching. It is a revolution in how people view the Buddha."¹²

And:

When we come to the essential teaching, everything Shakyamuni has taught up to that point is fundamentally overturned. The theoretical teaching reveals a succession of important doctrines; these include the true entity of life, the enlightenment of the people of the two vehicles (the voice-hearers and the pratyekabuddhas), the enlightenment of women, and the enlightenment of evil people. In addition, predictions of future enlightenment were bestowed on Shariputra, the disciple reputed to be foremost in wisdom, and Shakyamuni's other disciples who had comprehended these doctrines.

But in an instant all of this becomes meaningless. That's because the very foundation of these teachings, the premise upon which they were based, has fallen apart...His denial of "the effect of Buddhahood" expounded in these teachings amounts to a denial of the "cause of Buddhahood" undertaken with that aim."¹³

Nichiren precisely understood this and turned it loose in Japan, and ultimately the world. It was not enough, it could never be enough, for Maitreya to slog away at his arduous practices in order to become a little Shakyamuni. It was not enough, it could never be enough, for Nichiren to aspire to being a little Dozen-bo, or a lesser Shakyamuni. Nichiren had to undergo Hoshaku Kempon because if he did not, T'ien T'ai's Ichinen Sanzen was, as Pres. Ikeda puts it, no more than a picture of a plate of food instead of the food itself.

Similarly, it is not enough for us to be little Daisaku Ikedas. That is theoretical Buddhism. It is a derivative and dependant relationship. It is a painful austerity where there should be joyful unity.

Nichiren was so determined to drive this point home that he even embedded it in his calligraphy:

¹² Daisaku Ikeda, *Conversations and Lectures on the Sutra*, vol. 3, p.323

¹³ Daisaku Ikeda, *Conversations and Lectures on the Sutra*, vol. 3, p.321-322

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Shitei funi
Oneness of Master and Disciple



Shisho:
Master +
teaching of
any art
Master

Tei:
Deshi:
Younger
brother +
child
Disciple

Fu:
funi nin:
Not two
but two

Ni:
Nin funi:
Two but
not two

Shi shi ku
Oneness of Master and Disciple
(as appears in the *Ongi Kuden*)



Shi:
indicates
Master

Shishi:
Lion

Shi:
indicates
Disciple

Ku:
Roar

Ku:
indicates
master and
disciple
chanting
together

Calligraphy by
Sachiko Kishimoto

You've all seen this in *Art of Living*¹⁴. The point being that Nichiren uses, not the characters for Shi Deshi, but Shi Shi, different characters with the same sound.

In other words, we must always challenge ourselves to break what Sensei calls the "frozen ground" of self-imposed limitations, of attachments to the unnecessary luggage of provisional attitudes and practices.

This sounds quite easy, but in fact it is almost always painful. I've had to carefully consider my relationship with my parents because my mother now has severe Alzheimer's. Our parents are our "masters" in childhood. They want nothing more for us than that we become happier and more successful than they were. And as children we're eager to show how strong and self-sufficient we are, just like our parents. When the time comes and our parents become old, ill, frail and we have to care of them, take over from them and watch them slip into ku, it is painful. But much of that pain goes beyond concern for their well being, it comes when we realize that we no longer stand in their shadow, trying to become them. Instead we have to become ourselves, and we can recognize our attachment to our parents for what it is within the larger context of infinite life and the Mystic Law.

In Buddhism, there are no sacred cows. Our great desire is to reveal the Mystic Law within our own lives, in response to the Expedient Means of our Mentor, the practice of "Upsetting Attachments and Arousing Doubts".

¹⁴ *Art of Living*, May 2002

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The greater the degree to which attachments are upset and doubt aroused, the greater the difficulties that will arise. Since we are "upsetting attachments and arousing doubts" in order to fundamentally improve the lives of all people, it is impossible for us not to face tremendous obstacles.

Also, our efforts have the world as their focus. We are implementing the principle of "upsetting attachments and arousing doubts" on the global stage. While spreading peace and culture, education and friendship, we are steadily changing people's views about Buddhism and what it means to be human."¹⁵

I hope you notice the cunning way I snuck up on our first question, the new gongyo format.

Why do we have it? The first point I'd make is that you get what you pray for. Look at the 4th Prayer:

"I pray that the great desire for kosen-rufu be fulfilled, and that the Soka Gakkai International develops eternally in this endeavour."

Based on the principle of "Upsetting Attachments and Arousing Doubts" obviously "develop" means something more than "get bigger". The Oneness of Master and Disciple is the engine for change within our organization and our own lives. This is sometimes difficult for people like me who believe in the principle of "Clinging to the past but going along with things while being a bit of a misery".

To provide another angle on this I'd like to introduce exhibit "A". a piece of Tibetan art showing the Judgement Hall of Yama Raja.

<Picture of Yama Raja's Judgement Hall>

Can you find the man staked out in the triangle at the bottom? That represents the Avichi Hell, reserved for the worst people Tibetans could conceive - wizards who used sorcery to kill people, for example. Now, right beside that can you see four Tibetan monks being crushed under a giant volume of scripture? What could they have done to merit such harsh treatment? Killed their Abbot? Strangled chickens with their bare hands?

No, much worse. They hurried or skipped lines when reciting sutras.

This reflects the nature of much early Buddhism - after Shakyamuni's passing everything was based on verbal recollection. Every precious word had to be memorized and recited endlessly to prevent it being lost forever.

From the first there were problems. For example, Shakyamuni told his constant companion Ananda that several thousand of the minor rules could be relaxed. These "vinayas" or rules of monastic discipline were handed down with the Sutras and Commentaries, but were intended to define a monastic life, not a life in ordinary society.

However it may be, at the first Buddhist Council convened by Mahakasyapa, the "Foremost in Ascetic Practices", and in the absence of other senior disciples such as Shariputra (which should tell us something) Ananda was criticised for forgetting precisely which ones were no longer needed. Unable to decide, Mahakasyapa resolved to keep ALL of them.

So assiduously were these rules kept that at the Second Buddhist Council, about 110 years later, when the urban monks of Vaishali asked for a dispensation from ten of the Vinayas, they were expelled from the Buddhist Order. These ten requests included the ability to keep salt in a horn, to eat after the hour of noon, to accept alms of money as well as food and so on. The argument was not about doctrine, it was about whether Buddhism itself was to become a museum piece. It was also the moment at which Hinayana first separated from Mahayana.

I'm going into considerable detail about this because I want to show how slavish attachment to the *status quo* can produce results which are unnatural and alien to the heart of Buddhism, which have nothing to do with the master's spirit. Shakyamuni said that even the perfect teaching of Dependant Origination was "a raft for crossing over, not for taking up and carrying about". What would he have thought about a major schism between followers because of an argument over keeping food because of a futile attempt to apply unchanging monastic rules to a changing world?

¹⁵ Daisaku Ikeda, *Conversations and Lectures on the Sutra*, vol. 3, p.324

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Greg Martin, a national leader for SGI-US, said at a Summer Study Conference in Baltimore in July last year:

"Shakyamuni in his Lotus Sutra was attempting through this medium to teach us not simply about how great is the life of Shakyamuni, but more importantly, how great is the life of every single human being, that we eternally and originally possess the Buddha nature, that we too can manifest it in our daily lives. Unfortunately, within a few generations of his death his disciples had lost that key and begun to believe that Shakyamuni was special. He was different, something you and I could not achieve. Then, of course, when Shakyamuni is elevated and we are demoted, there is this gap that's in between. And who conveniently goes in there? Priests. They create their own jobs. If they elevate you to the level of the founder, they're out of business. Evidently it's not in the priesthood's best interest to remind you that you too possess that power.">

To some extent we can see the entire history of Buddhism as the struggle between conservatism, exclusiveness, provisional attachments and dependancy on authority, on the one hand; and a progressive exploration of the living spirit of the Law on the other - which means abandoning the extrinsic, embracing life, struggling to embody the Law rather than imitate it, challenging ourselves constantly.

To do this we need to find someone who has what we need, someone who can open the door for us. That is the Master. Then we must attempt to embody and reveal *in practice* the fundamental truths which we have learned in theory. This is the meaning of the Bodhisattvas arising from the earth and joyfully greeting the assembled Buddhas. The Unity of Master and Disciple is based not on transmission from greater to lesser, but on transmission from theoretical to actual.

Where does this leave us today with gongyo?

From the history of Buddhism and Nichiren's life we learn to look to the Bodhisattvas of the earth for actual change revealing the Law. That's US.

I understand Sensei has said that the time for our organization to be led by one person is passing. The change in gongyo format did not come from Sensei. It came from members in districts in Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, Germany etc. and up through the national organizations. They proposed this change as something to make the practice more accessible to today's society. Does that remind us of the monks of Vaishali?

What is the "cost"? We will no longer recite some lines from the Sanskrit part of Juryo which were originally included as part of gongyo by the priesthood as a lesser version of their own. Should we fear eternal torment in Yama-Raja's Hall?

What is the intention? It is to place more emphasis on daimoku, the primary practice, the "lion's roar of Shi Shi Ku" without removing the key elements of Hoben and Juryo required by Gosho. This is entirely appropriate - the master entrusts the Law to us and we respond not by imitation but by discarding the transient.

"One who practices still more earnestly whenever one hears the teachings of the Lotus Sutra is a true seeker of the way. T'ien-t'ai states, "From the indigo, an even deeper blue." This passage means that something dyed repeatedly with indigo becomes even bluer than the indigo plant itself. For us the Lotus Sutra is the indigo plant, and the growing intensity of our practice is "an even deeper blue."

-- for May 2002 Gatwick Chapter Study Lecture by Rick Heybroek

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