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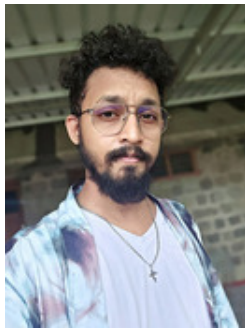
**EXPLORING INTERCONNECTEDNESS IN GENESIS 1: 26-28**

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ABSTRACT

The book of Genesis, as the first of the “five fifths of the law,” plays a significant role in both religious and cultural contexts. Genesis 1:26-28, in particular, stands out for its profound exploration of humanity’s creation and its relationship with the divine and the Earth. This essay delves into the theme of interconnectedness within this passage, examining the implications of being made in the image of God and the entrusted stewardship over creation. The Hebrew translation and text-critical notes provide a nuanced understanding of the passage’s verbs and syntax. The essay discusses the narrative’s literary form, structure, authorship, and Sitz im Leben, highlighting the influence of ancient traditions and mythologies. The phrase “image and likeness” is analyzed for its complex interpretations. Through a detailed examination of verses 26-28, the essay emphasizes humanity’s unique role and the theological themes of dominion and stewardship. Contextual relevance is drawn to contemporary issues such as environmental stewardship and social justice, underscoring the enduring significance of interconnectedness in Genesis. The conclusion reiterates the vision of interconnected stewardship, inviting a holistic engagement with creation.

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Introduction

The book of Genesis holds a prominent place as the first of the “five fifths of the law,” dividing the Pentateuch into five sections. In the English Bible, it is titled “The first book of Moses called Genesis.” However, in common Jewish tradition, these Pentateuch books are often referred to by their initial words, making Genesis known as “In the beginning.”¹ Across the ancient west Asia, various captivating stories about the creation of the world existed, many of which took on literary forms such as epic poems.² Genesis, too, encompasses such narratives. A central focus within this portion is the eighth divine act – the creation of humanity, signifying a profound caretaking and stewardship role.

The opening chapters of Genesis offer a profound exploration of the origins of the universe, providing a foundational narrative that has shaped religious and cultural perspectives for millennia. Within this rich tapestry of creation, Genesis 1:26-28 stands as a pivotal passage, unveiling the unique relationship between humanity, the divine, and the created order. At the heart of this exploration lies the theme of interconnectedness, a concept that transcends temporal and cultural boundaries, offering insights into the inherent unity between humans, God, and the Earth. This essay delves into the nuanced layers of interconnectedness woven into the fabric of Genesis 1:26-28, unravelling the implications of being created in the image of God and entrusted with the stewardship of the Earth.

Hebrew Translation

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הַרְמֵשׁ
הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

And God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.”

אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֱתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: | וַיְבָרָא אֱלֹהִים

And God created humankind in the divine image, creating it in the image of God - creating them male and female.

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבִשְׁתֶּהּ וּרְדוּ בְּדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
וּבְכָל-חַי הָאָרֶץ הַרְמֵשֶׁת עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

¹ John Skinner, *A critical and exegetical commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), i, ii.

² U. Cassuto, *A commentary on the book of Genesis: Part one From Adam to Noah*, Translated by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes press, 1961), 7.



Text Critical Notes

In Genesis 1:26, the Hebrew verb *נעשה* in verse 26 is a first-person plural imperfect qal form of the verb *עשה*, meaning “make” or “let us make.” Typically, this form would be cohortative, indicated by the addition of the syllable –a(h) to the imperfect first-person verbs. However, in the case of lamedh-he verbs, such as *עשה*, the seghol vowel is retained for the cohortative. There are only three exceptions to this rule, found in Isaiah 41:23, Psalm 119:117, and Psalm 77:4, where the original yodh is retained. The preposition *ב* with the 1st person singular suffix in *צלמנו* refers to “our image,” and *כדמותנו*, with the preposition *כ* and the 1st person singular suffix, means “in our likeness.” Notably, the Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, and Samaritan Pentateuch preface this verse with ‘and,’ connecting it with the preceding verses. In verse 28, the preposition *ל* with the 3rd person masculine plural suffix in *להם* means “for their food.” Additionally, the imperative form *וכבש* is derived from the verb *כבש*, signifying “subdue.” The command to “rule over” in *ורדו* comes from the verb *רדה*, and it is followed by the preposition *ב*, emphasizing authority or dominion.³ These linguistic details provide insights into the Hebrew grammar and syntax of Genesis 1:26 and 28, offering a nuanced understanding of the verbs, prepositions, and their implications in the context of God’s creation and the authority given to humanity.

Form

The Genesis traditions, characterized by legendary elements, reveal distinctive features that provide insights into their nature. Firstly, these narratives, acting as a written manifestation of an oral tradition, hint at a potential historical foundation that has been transmitted over centuries. The presence of historical substratum is suggested, creating a sense of continuity across time. Secondly, the literary quality of the narratives bears the imprint of artistic imagination, marking them as the result of creative expression. This artistic dimension adds richness to the storytelling, contributing to the allure and depth of the Genesis traditions. Thirdly, the subject matter of these traditions aligns with universal folktales, diverging from the conventions of historical documentation.⁴ The narratives take on a timeless quality, resonating with themes that transcend specific historical contexts.

As the Genesis 1 narrative approaches its climax, a noticeable shift in style occurs, departing from its earlier concise form to embrace a more poetic tone. This shift hints at the possible influence of ancient creation hymns, adding a layer of cultural and literary richness to the narrative. Several key elements in this section contribute to its distinctiveness.⁵ The use of the cohortative, indicating self-deliberation or consultation with divine entities, represents a departure from the earlier use of simple jussive. The unique creation of humanity in the image of God introduces a profound dimension to the narrative, emphasizing the special status of humans within the larger creation story. Moreover, the designation of humans as

³ See Norman H. Snaith, *Notes on the Hebrew text of Genesis I-VIII* (London: Epworth press, 1959), 12.

⁴ For a detailed reading, see Cassuto, *A commentary on the book of Genesis...*, 7.

⁵ See Skinner, *A critical and exegetical commentary on Genesis...*, vi, vii.



stewards over the Earth and all living creatures elevates the significance of humanity. This charge positions humans as caretakers and rulers, underscoring their role in the broader narrative of creation. Collectively, these features enrich the Genesis traditions, providing a nuanced understanding of their literary, cultural, and theological significance.

Structure

The structure of the creation narrative in Genesis is intricately woven with a system of numerical harmony, with the number seven playing a pivotal role not only in its overarching theme but also in shaping many of its specific details. Universally recognized as a number symbolizing perfection and ordered arrangement, especially in the East, the significance of seven extends beyond cultural boundaries.⁶ To both the Israelites and the Gentiles, it holds a special place in the symbolism of numbers.

In the Genesis account, the work of the Creator unfolds with absolute perfection and flawless systematic order over a span of seven days. This rhythm consists of six days dedicated to labour, followed by a seventh day set aside for the enjoyment and contemplation of the completed task. The number seven, steeped in symbolic importance, resonates as a marker of completeness and divine order. References to the significance of the number seven in Akkadian and Ugaritic literature reinforce its role as a perfect period for the development of significant works. This concept involves a six-day duration of active engagement, with the concluding and transformative seventh day marking the fulfilment of the creative process.⁷ The Torah, perhaps perceiving a resonance with non-Israelite traditions, integrates this numerical pattern into its narrative of creation.

It's noteworthy that actions spanning six days were often divided into three pairs, with specific works accomplished on corresponding days. This recurring pattern builds anticipation, mirroring the established rhythm of the creation story. The rabbinic saying further emphasizes the uniqueness of the seventh day, the Sabbath, proclaiming it as unpaired, distinct from the preceding six days of labour.⁸ This concept underscores the exceptional nature of the Sabbath as a day of conclusion and a shift in the overall situation.

The numerical harmony embedded in the creation narrative, with its reliance on the symbolic perfection of the number seven, contributes to the overarching theme of divine order and completion in the Genesis account.

Authorship and Date

The authorship and origins of the book of Genesis remain shrouded in mystery, lacking a named author or a definitive date of writing. Its narratives, handed down orally, predate their eventual compilation into written form. Scholars speculate that the earliest collections of Old Testament material might have emerged during the times of Kings David or Solomon,

⁶ Cassuto, *A commentary on the book of Genesis...*, 12.

⁷ Cassuto, *A commentary on the book of Genesis...*, 12- 13.

⁸ Cassuto, *A commentary on the book of Genesis...*, 13.



with potential later editing extending up to around 400 BCE. Comparable to other ancient cultures, various societies had their distinct creation stories, echoing down generations through oral transmission.

While a longstanding tradition associates Moses with the Pentateuch, the precise process of how these books assumed their current form is a subject of scholarly debate. Despite differing opinions on their compilation, a consistent theme emerges: these stories encapsulate the profound convictions of God's people. They affirm the belief that the world is a creation of the benevolent, singular Creator-God, emphasizing His goodness and the care bestowed upon His creation.⁹ Remarkably, the biblical narrative refrains from explicitly arguing for God's existence, as the people inherently knew Him through personal experience.

Examining the first chapter of Genesis, the assumed authorship is attributed to the Judean priests residing in Babylonia during the initial exile. This perspective contrasts with theories proposing authors like E or J or other historical sources, which contemporary biblical scholars sometimes identify as the original contributors.¹⁰ The narrative's focus remains on conveying a deep understanding of God as the ultimate creator, rather than engaging in theological debates. Ultimately, these stories serve as a testament to the intimate relationship God shares with His people, reflecting their unwavering conviction in His divine presence and benevolence.

SITZ IM LEBEN

Before the biblical narrative emerged, the Israelites had a tradition of recounting narrative poems that delved into the creation and the early history of the world. While the section in the Bible detailing the creation narrative omits certain aspects, the prophets and poets of the Bible often made references, direct or indirect, to matters related to the world's creation. Notably, these references include tales such as that of Rahab, the rebellious prince of the sea who defied God and was eventually subdued and slain by Him.¹¹ The brevity of these references suggests that the authors assumed their audience was familiar with these topics.

Interestingly, the biblical allusions occasionally bear a resemblance to narratives found in the legends of non-Israelite cultures. Despite these similarities, it is challenging to envision a direct influence of these myths on the biblical authors. It is implausible that the prophets and poets of Israel sought validation for their beliefs from pagan mythological works, which they likely held in disdain.¹² Moreover, it seems unlikely that they referenced heathen legends as accepted knowledge among the Israelites.

⁹ Pat and David Alexander, eds., *The Lion Handbook to the Bible* (Oxford: Lion Publishing plc, 1999), 115.

¹⁰ Norbert M. Samuelson, *The first seven days: A Philosophical Commentary on the Creation of Genesis* (Georgia: scholars press, 1992), 2.

¹¹ Cassuto, *A commentary on the book of Genesis...*, 8.

¹² Cassuto, *A commentary on the book of Genesis...*, 8-9.



While these biblical allusions share certain similarities with non-Israelite sagas, they also exhibit distinct differences. The actions ascribed to various deities in pagan literature find their attribution to the God of Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures, portrayed in a manner more aligned with Israel's religious consciousness. This suggests the existence of intermediary links in the developmental chain, bridging the gap between the poems of non-Israelites and the biblical myths alluded to.¹³ These intermediary influences may have shaped the unique character of the biblical narratives, combining external elements with a distinct theological perspective that reflects the religious convictions of ancient Israel.

Important Words and Phrases

The interpretation of the phrase “image and likeness” in the Bible poses significant challenges due to the rarity of the term “image” and the uncertainty surrounding its etymology. Out of its 17 occurrences, 10 instances refer to various physical representations, such as models of tumours, pictures of men, or idols. Two psalm passages metaphorically liken man's existence to an image or shadow. The remaining five occurrences are in Genesis 1:26, 27; 5:3; 9:6. The ambiguity in the term's meaning, coupled with its infrequent use, complicates its interpretation.

In contrast, the term “likeness” is more transparent in meaning, having an abstract noun ending and an evident connection to the concept of being like or resembling. It can denote a model or plan, as seen in its usage in Ezekiel's vision. The pairing of “image” and “likeness” is found in a ninth-century Aramaic inscription, describing the statue of King Hadu-yissi, representing the oldest known instance of these terms in Aramaic. Various interpretations surround the essence of “image” and “likeness” in the biblical context:¹⁴

1. Traditional Christian exegesis, dating back to Irenaeus (ca. 180 CE), distinguishes between “image” and “likeness” as two aspects of man's nature. “Image” pertains to natural qualities like reason and personality, while “likeness” denotes supernatural graces, such as ethical virtues.
2. Some suggest that the “image” signifies the spiritual and mental faculties shared by humans with their Creator. Although plausible, pinpointing the specific qualities intended by the term remains challenging.
3. An interpretation posits that the “image” implies a physical resemblance, suggesting that man looks like God. This aligns with the frequent use of “image” to refer to physical representations.
4. Another perspective proposes that the “image” designates man as God's representative on earth. This viewpoint resonates with common Oriental beliefs regarding kings as divine representatives.

¹³ Cassuto, *A commentary on the book of Genesis...*, 9.

¹⁴ See Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1: Genesis 1-15* (Texas: Word Books, 2008), 29-31.



5. A different interpretation suggests that the “image” implies a capacity to relate to God. In this view, man’s divine image signifies the ability for God to engage in personal relationships, speak to him, and establish covenants.

Interpretation

Verse 26

The challenge posed by the first-person plural in this context has been a subject of considerable difficulty. The most widely accepted explanation suggests that the narrative portrays God in consultation with divine beings, potentially angels or the heavenly host. However, this interpretation raises two significant concerns: first, it attributes to angels a role in the creation of man, contradicting scriptural doctrine, and second, the existence of angels is not explicitly mentioned in the Priestly source (P). These considerations point to the possibility that the narrative may have originated in a pre-Israelite stage of tradition, reflecting a polytheistic perspective on the origin of humanity.¹⁵ In a later Hebrew redaction, the polytheistic notion might have been replaced by the idea of a heavenly council of angels, as seen in passages like 1 Kings 22 and Job 1.

The retention of this idea by the Priestly source, despite its silence on the existence of angels, could be attributed to the fact that it presented a less anthropomorphic view compared to the statement that man was created in the image of the incomparable deity. The general concept of a likeness between God and man is not unique to biblical doctrine and is found in various forms in classical literature.¹⁶ Describing it as “the distinctive feature of the Bible doctrine concerning man” might be an exaggeration, although in the context of Israel’s religion, such expressions hold distinct significance.

It’s important to note that in this narrative, “man” refers to the generic human race rather than an individual. While many commentators assume the reference to a single pair, the narrative itself does not explicitly support this view.¹⁷ The analogy with the earlier classification of marine and land animals is inconclusive, providing a more general enumeration that aligns with the previously presented classification, with the exception of the inclusion of “earth” where the expectation might be “wild beast of the earth.”

Verse 27

The fulfilment of the divine command is succinctly conveyed in three concise sentences, delineating the most significant aspects of human existence:

1. “So, God created man in his own image,”
2. “In the image of God, he created him:”

¹⁵ John Skinner, *The International Critical Commentary: A critical and exegetical commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 30-31.

¹⁶ Skinner, *The International Critical Commentary...*, 31-32.

¹⁷ Skinner, *The International Critical Commentary...*, 33.



3. “Male and female, he created them.”

These three clauses operate in apposition, with the first two arranged in chiasmic way, drawing attention to the divine image within humanity. The third clause then specifically indicates that both male and female bear this divine image. The phrase “male and female,” frequently found in legal texts, serves to underscore the sexual distinctions within humankind and anticipates the forthcoming blessing of fertility mentioned in verse 28.¹⁸ This repetition imparts a rhythmic cadence to the language, possibly reminiscent of an ancient hymn celebrating the glory of humankind, akin to Psalms 8.

Contrary to the persistent idea that the initial creation of man was bisexual and that the sexes were separated afterward, the passage does not support such a notion.¹⁹ Instead, it emphasizes the simultaneous creation of male and female in the divine image, rejecting the idea of a sequential or separate origin of the sexes.

Verse 28

Once again, a benediction serves as the source of fertility, but in this instance, it extends to include dominion, presenting itself as another fragment of a hymn. God’s blessing upon mankind mirrors that pronounced upon animals in verse 22, with the directive for both to be “fruitful and multiply.” While the command for animals is straightforward in verse 22, verse 28 goes a step further by stating, “And God said to them,” drawing attention to the personalized relationship between God and humanity.²⁰ Additionally, man is given the charge to “subdue and rule the earth” along with its animal inhabitants, underscoring his role as the image-bearer of God on Earth.

The emphasis in Genesis is primarily on the fulfilment of the blessing of fruitfulness. This command, like others in scripture, carries an implicit promise that God will empower humanity to fulfil it. This verse offers a clear articulation of the divine purpose of marriage: positively, it exists for the procreation of children, and negatively, it stands as a rejection of ancient oriental fertility cults. God’s desire for His people is that they be fruitful, and His promise renders any engagement in such cults or the use of alternative means to secure fertility not only unnecessary but also indicative of unbelief.²¹ The divine intention is clear: trust in God’s promise for fertility rather than seeking other methods, as His blessing alone is sufficient for the fruitful fulfilment of life.

Awa Parallels

The genesis of the concept can likely be traced back to Babylonian mythology. In the process of creating Ea-bani, Aruru first conceives a mental image of the God Anu. Similarly, in the Descent of Ishtar, Ea envisions a zikru in his wise heart before bringing Asusunamir into

¹⁸ Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1: Genesis 1-15...*, 32,33.

¹⁹ Skinner, *The International Critical Commentary...*, 33.

²⁰ Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1: Genesis 1-15...*, 33.

²¹ Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1: Genesis 1-15...*, 33.



existence.²² In both instances, the reference is evidently to the physical form of the created being. It appears that the intermediaries facilitating the transmission of ideas between heathen peoples and Israel were a group of sages, bearers of international 'Wisdom.' These sages had a tendency to obscure the distinct religious elements specific to each nation. Within this context, they incorporated epic poems into Israelite cycles, where the ancient eastern tradition took on a form that resonated with the national spirit and religious convictions of Israel.²³ The result was a harmonious fusion of international influences with the unique identity and beliefs of Israel, showcased through these epic narratives.

Theological Themes

The culmination of the creation account is marked by the emergence of humanity. Throughout the narrative, priority has been given to elements most pertinent to human existence - the earth, humankind's abode, and the sun and moon, which intricately shape life cycles. Notably, these aspects have been described in more detail compared to other components of the created order.²⁴ However, as the creation of man unfolds, the narrative intentionally decelerates, underscoring the profound significance of this pivotal moment.

In verse 26a, there is a momentous announcement in the first person, signalling God's deliberate intention. This declaration sets the stage for a purposeful act that goes beyond the preceding acts of creation. Verse 26b articulates the purpose behind man's creation - to rule over the earth. This signifies a divine mandate for humanity to exercise dominion and stewardship over the created world. The actual creation of man is detailed in verse 27, a distinctive and pivotal moment in the narrative. Here, the narrative slows down even further, accentuating the unique nature of man's formation. Verse 28 marks a significant blessing bestowed upon man. This blessing encompasses two fundamental aspects: the capacity to multiply and the authority to rule over the earth. It encapsulates the divine intention for humanity to flourish and to actively participate in the governance of the created order.²⁵

The deliberate pacing and emphasis on man's creation highlight the unparalleled significance attributed to human existence within the broader context of the creation account. The intentional focus on the purpose, process, and blessing associated with the creation of man underscores the unique role assigned to humanity in the grand tapestry of the created world.

Contextual Relevance

In Genesis 1:26-28, the concept of interconnectedness emerges as a foundational theme that not only defines the relationship between humanity and the divine but also establishes a profound link between humans and the created world. This interconnectedness is expressed

²² Skinner, *The International Critical Commentary...*, 32.

²³ Cassuto, *A commentary on the book of Genesis...*, 9.

²⁴ Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1: Genesis 1-15...*, 27.

²⁵ Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1: Genesis 1-15...*, 27.



through the unique status accorded to humans as beings created in the image of God and given the responsibility to exercise dominion over the Earth.

The idea of being created in the image of God implies a deep connection between humanity and the divine. It suggests that humans share intrinsic qualities with their Creator, encompassing spiritual, intellectual, and moral aspects. This shared image serves as a unifying thread, highlighting the interconnected nature of the relationship between God and humanity. It signifies not only a remarkable closeness but also a divine intention for a harmonious partnership. Furthermore, the mandate to exercise dominion over the Earth reinforces the interconnectedness between humans and the created order. Far from a license for unchecked exploitation, this responsibility positions humans as stewards and caretakers of the environment. The call to “subdue and rule” implies a cooperative and interconnected relationship with the Earth. It emphasizes the idea that human flourishing is intricately tied to the well-being of the entire created world.

This interconnectedness, therefore, extends beyond the human-divine relationship to encompass the broader ecological context. Humans are not isolated entities but integral parts of a complex and interdependent web of existence. The Genesis narrative emphasizes the interwoven nature of creation, where each component plays a vital role, and the well-being of one is inseparable from the well-being of the whole. As we reflect on Genesis 1:26-28 in the context of interconnectedness, it challenges us to reconsider our role in the world. It prompts us to acknowledge our responsibility not only to God but also to our fellow creatures and the environment. This interconnected worldview invites a holistic understanding of our existence, where our actions have repercussions on the entire fabric of creation.

In contemporary times, grappling with issues like environmental degradation, climate change, and social justice, the interconnectedness presented in Genesis serves as a relevant guide. It encourages a perspective that values the well-being of all living beings and recognizes the delicate balance required for a sustainable and flourishing world. The divine charge to exercise dominion is a call to interconnected stewardship, where the care for creation reflects our acknowledgment of the intricate bonds that tie us to both God and the Earth. Genesis 1:26-28 invites us to embrace a worldview rooted in interconnectedness - a paradigm that recognizes the sacredness of all life, the shared image with the divine, and the collective responsibility to nurture and protect the intricate tapestry of creation.

Conclusion

The exploration of interconnectedness in Genesis 1:26-28 unveils a timeless and profound vision of the relationship between humanity, the divine, and the created world. The divine act of creating humans in the image of God establishes an intrinsic connection, highlighting the shared spiritual, intellectual, and moral qualities that bind us to our Creator. The mandate to exercise dominion, far from endorsing exploitation, calls for a responsible and interconnected stewardship over the Earth. As we reflect on this ancient narrative in the context of



contemporary challenges, the relevance of interconnectedness becomes increasingly apparent. Genesis beckons us to embrace a worldview that recognizes the sacredness of all life, acknowledges our shared image with the divine, and calls us to collective responsibility in nurturing and protecting the intricate tapestry of creation. Through the lens of interconnectedness, Genesis 1:26-28 transcends its historical and cultural origins, offering a timeless invitation to engage with the world as interconnected stewards, weaving our story into the grand narrative of creation.

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