

Hukkat: Jephthah the Gileadite

Judges 11: 1-33

<p>Jephthah the Gileadite was an able warrior, who was the son of a prostitute. Jephthah's father was Gilead; but Gilead also had sons by his wife, and when the wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out. They said to him, "You shall have no share in our father's property, for you are the son of an outsider." So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the Tob country. Men of low character gathered about Jephthah and went out raiding with him.</p>	<p>(א) וַיִּפְתַּח הַגִּלְעָדִי הִיָּה גִבּוֹר חַיִּל וְהוּא בֶן אִשָּׁה זֹנָה וַיּוֹלֵד גִּלְעָד אֶת יִפְתָּח: (ב) וַתֵּלֵד אִשָּׁת גִּלְעָד לוֹ בָּנִים וַיִּגְדְּלוּ בְנֵי הָאִשָּׁה וַיִּגְרְשׁוּ אֶת יִפְתָּח וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ לֹא תִנְחַל בְּבַיִת אָבִינוּ כִּי בֶן אִשָּׁה אַחֲרַת אֶתָּה: (ג) וַיִּבְרַח יִפְתָּח מִפְּנֵי אָחָיו וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ טוֹב וַיִּתְלַקְטוּ אֵל יִפְתָּח אַנְשִׁים רִיקִים וַיֵּצְאוּ עִמּוֹ: פ</p>
<p>Some time later, the Ammonites went to war against Israel. And when the Ammonites attacked Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah back from the Tob country. They said to Jephthah, "Come be our chief, so that we can fight the Ammonites."</p> <p>Jephthah replied to the elders of Gilead, "You are the very people who rejected me and drove me out of my father's house. How can you come to me now when you are in trouble?" The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "Honestly, we have now turned back to you. If you come with us and fight the Ammonites, you shall be our commander over all the inhabitants of Gilead." Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "[Very well,] if you bring me back to fight the Ammonites and the LORD delivers them to me, I am to be your commander." And the elders of Gilead answered Jephthah, "The LORD Himself shall be witness between us: we will do just as you have said."</p> <p>Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him their commander and chief. And Jephthah repeated all these terms before the LORD at Mizpah.</p>	<p>(ד) וַיְהִי מִיָּמִים וַיִּלְחַמוּ בְנֵי עַמּוֹן עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל: (ה) וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר נִלְחַמוּ בְנֵי עַמּוֹן עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּלְכוּ זִקְנֵי גִלְעָד לִקְחַת אֶת יִפְתָּח מֵאֶרֶץ טוֹב: (ו) וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְיִפְתָּח לָכֵה וְהָיִיתָ לָנוּ לְקַצִּין וְנִלְחַמְהָ בְּבָנֵי עַמּוֹן: (ז) וַיֹּאמֶר יִפְתָּח לְזִקְנֵי גִלְעָד הֲלֹא אַתֶּם שָׂנְאֶתֶם אוֹתִי וַתִּגְרְשׁוּנִי מִבַּיִת אָבִי וּמִדּוֹעַ בְּאַתֶּם אֵלַי עַתָּה כַּאֲשֶׁר צָר לָכֶם: (ח) וַיֹּאמְרוּ זִקְנֵי גִלְעָד אֶל יִפְתָּח לָכֵן עַתָּה שָׁבָנוּ אֵלֶיךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ עִמָּנוּ וְנִלְחַמְתָּ בְּבָנֵי עַמּוֹן וְהָיִיתָ לָנוּ לְרֹאשׁ לְכָל יִשְׂבֵי גִלְעָד: (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר יִפְתָּח אֶל זִקְנֵי גִלְעָד אִם מְשִׁיבִים אַתֶּם אוֹתִי לְהִלָּחֵם בְּבָנֵי עַמּוֹן וְנָתַן יְקוֹק אוֹתָם לִפְנֵי אָנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם לְרֹאשׁ: (י) וַיֹּאמְרוּ זִקְנֵי גִלְעָד אֶל יִפְתָּח יְקוֹק יְהִיָּה שְׁמֵעַ בִּינֹתֵינוּ אִם לֹא כַדְבָּרְךָ כִּן נַעֲשֶׂה: (יא) וַיִּלְךְ יִפְתָּח עִם זִקְנֵי גִלְעָד וַיִּשְׁיִמוּ הָעָם אוֹתוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם לְרֹאשׁ וּלְקַצִּין וַיְדַבֵּר יִפְתָּח אֶת כָּל דְּבָרָיו לִפְנֵי יְקוֹק בְּמִצְפָּה: פ</p>
<p>Jephthah then sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites, saying, "What have you against me that you have come to make war on my country?"</p>	<p>(יב) וַיִּשְׁלַח יִפְתָּח מַלְאָכִים אֶל מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן לֵאמֹר מַה לִּי וְלָךְ כִּי בָאתָ אֵלַי לְהִלָּחֵם בְּאֶרְצִי:</p>

The king of the Ammonites replied to Jephthah's messengers, "When Israel came from Egypt, they seized the land which is mine, from the Arnon to the Jabbok as far as the Jordan. Now, then, restore it peaceably." Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites. He said to him, "Thus said Jephthah: Israel did not seize the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites. When they left Egypt, Israel traveled through the wilderness to the Sea of Reeds and went on to Kadesh. Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, 'Allow us to cross your country.' But the king of Edom would not consent. They also sent a mission to the king of Moab, and he refused. So Israel, after staying at Kadesh, traveled on through the wilderness, skirting the land of Edom and the land of Moab. They kept to the east of the land of Moab until they encamped on the other side of the Arnon; and, since Moab ends at the Arnon, they never entered Moabite territory. "Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon. Israel said to him, 'Allow us to cross through your country to our homeland.' But Sihon would not trust Israel to pass through his territory. Sihon mustered all his troops, and they encamped at Jahaz; he engaged Israel in battle. But the LORD, the God of Israel, delivered Sihon and all his troops into Israel's hands, and they defeated them; and Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that land. Thus they possessed all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. "Now, then, the LORD, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites before His people Israel; and should you possess their land? Do you not hold what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So we will hold on to everything that the LORD our God has given us to possess. "Besides, are you any better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he start a quarrel with Israel or go to war with them? "While Israel has been inhabiting Heshbon and its dependencies, and Aroer and its dependencies, and all the towns along the Arnon for three hundred years, why have you not tried to recover them all this time?

(יג) ויאמר מלך בני עמון אל מלאכי יפתח כי לקח ישראל את ארצי בעלותו ממצרים מארנון ועד היבק ועד הירדן ועתה השיבה אתהן בשלום: (יד) ויוסף עוד יפתח וישלח מלאכים אל מלך בני עמון: (טו) ויאמר לו פה אמר יפתח לא לקח ישראל את ארץ מואב ואת ארץ בני עמון: (טז) כי בעלותם ממצרים וילך ישראל במדבר עד ים סוף ויבא קדשה: (יז) וישלח ישראל מלאכים אל מלך אדום לאמר אעברה נא בארצך ולא שמע מלך אדום וגם אל מלך מואב שלח ולא אבה וישב ישראל בקדש: (יח) וילך במדבר ויסב את ארץ אדום ואת ארץ מואב ויבא ממזרח שמש לארץ מואב ויחננו בעבר ארנון ולא באו בגבול מואב כי ארנון גבול מואב: (יט) וישלח ישראל מלאכים אל סיחון מלך האמרי מלך חשבון ויאמר לו ישראל נעברה נא בארצך עד מקומי: (כ) ולא האמין סיחון את ישראל עבר בגבולו ויאסף סיחון את כל עמו ויחננו ביהצה וילחם עם ישראל: (כא) ויתן יקוק אלהי ישראל את סיחון ואת כל עמו ביד ישראל ויכום וירש ישראל את כל ארץ האמרי וישב הארץ ההיא: (כב) וירשו את כל גבול האמרי מארנון ועד היבק ומן המדבר ועד הירדן: (כג) ועתה יקוק אלהי ישראל הוריש את האמרי מפני עמו ישראל ואתה תירשנו: (כד) הלא את אשר יורישך כמוש אלהיך אותו תירש ואת כל אשר הוריש יקוק אלהינו מפנינו אותנו נירש: (כה) ועתה הטוב טוב אתה מבלק בן צפור מלך מואב הרוב רב עם ישראל אם נלחם נלחם בם: (כו) בשבת ישראל בחשבון ובבנותיה ובערעור ובבנותיה ובכל הערים אשר על ידי ארנון שלש מאות שנה ומדוע לא הצלתם בעת ההיא:

<p>I have done you no wrong; yet you are doing me harm and making war on me. May the LORD, who judges, decide today between the Israelites and the Ammonites!" But the king of the Ammonites paid no heed to the message that Jephthah sent him.</p>	<p>(כז) וְאָנֹכִי לֹא חָטָאתִי לָךְ וְאַתָּה עָשִׂה אֵתִי רָעָה לְהִלָּחֵם בִּי יִשְׁפֹּט יְקֹוֹק הַשִּׁפְט הַיּוֹם בֵּין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבֵין בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן: (כח) וְלֹא שָׁמַע מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן אֶל דְּבַרֵי יִפְתָּח אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח אֵלָיו: פ</p>
<p>Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah. He marched through Gilead and Manasseh, passing Mizpeh of Gilead; and from Mizpeh of Gilead he crossed over [to] the Ammonites. And Jephthah made the following vow to the LORD: "If you deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's and shall be offered by me as a burnt offering."</p> <p>Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites and attacked them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. He utterly routed them—from Aroer as far as Minnith, twenty towns—all the way to Abel-cheramim. So the Ammonites submitted to the Israelites.</p>	<p>(כט) וַתְּהִי עַל יִפְתָּח רוּחַ יְקֹוֹק וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶת הַגִּלְעָד וְאֶת מְנַשֶּׁה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶת מִצְפֵּה גִלְעָד וּמִמִּצְפֵּה גִלְעָד עָבַר בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן: (ל) וַיְדַר יִפְתָּח נֶדֶר לִיקְוֹק וַיֹּאמֶר אִם נָתַן תַּתֵּן אֶת בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן בַּיָּדִי: (לא) וְהָיָה הַיּוֹצֵא אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִדְּלַתִּי בַּיְתִי לְקִרְאתִי בְּשׁוּבִי בְּשָׁלוֹם מִבְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וְהָיָה לִיקְוֹק וְהֵעֲלִיתֶהוּ עֹלָה: פ</p> <p>(לב) וַיַּעֲבֵר יִפְתָּח אֶל בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן לְהִלָּחֵם בָּם וַיִּתְּנֵם יְקֹוֹק בְּיָדוֹ: (לג) וַיִּכֶם מֵעָרוֹעֵר וְעַד בּוֹאֵף מְנִית עֲשָׂרִים עִיר וְעַד אָבֵל כְּרָמִים מִכָּה גְדוֹלָה מְאֹד וַיִּכְנְעוּ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן מִפְּנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: פ</p>

שופטים ג: (עתניאל) וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ־ה' וַיִּשְׁפֹּט אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה וַיִּתֵּן ה' בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־כּוֹשֵׁן רְשָׁעִים מֶלֶךְ אֲרָם וַתַּעֲזֵז יָדוֹ עַל כּוֹשֵׁן רְשָׁעִים:

The spirit of the LORD descended upon him and he became Israel's chieftain. He went out to war, and the LORD delivered King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hands. He prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.

שופטים ו: לַד' וַרוּחַ ה' לָבְשָׁה אֶת־גִּדְעוֹן וַיִּתְקַע בְּשׁוֹפָר וַיִּזְעַק אַבְיֵעֶזֶר אַחֲרָיו:

The spirit of the LORD enveloped Gideon; he sounded the horn, and the Abiezrites rallied behind him.

שופטים יג: כה (שמשון) וַתְּחַל רוּחַ יְהוָה לַפְעַמּוֹן בְּמַחֲנֵה־דָן בֵּין צֹרְעָה וּבֵין אֶשְׁתָּאֵל:

The spirit of the LORD first moved him in the encampment of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

(יא) וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל מַלְאָכִים אֶל סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֲמֹרִי לֵאמֹר:	(כא) וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל מַלְאָכִים אֶל סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֲמֹרִי לֵאמֹר:
(כב) אֲעֲבֹרָה בְּאֶרְצְךָ לֹא נֹטָה בְּשׂוּדָה וּבְכָרִם לֹא נִשְׁתָּה מִי בְּאֵר בְּדֶרֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ גִּלְדָּה עַד אֲשֶׁר נֵעֶבֶר גְּבֻלְךָ:	(כב) אֲעֲבֹרָה בְּאֶרְצְךָ לֹא נֹטָה בְּשׂוּדָה וּבְכָרִם לֹא נִשְׁתָּה מִי בְּאֵר בְּדֶרֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ גִּלְדָּה עַד אֲשֶׁר נֵעֶבֶר גְּבֻלְךָ:
(כג) וְלֹא נִתֵּן סִיחֹן אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל עֹבֵר בְּגְבֻלוֹ וַיֵּאֲסֹף סִיחֹן אֶת כָּל עַמּוֹ וַיֵּצֵא לְקִרְאֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמְדַבֵּרָה וַיָּבֵא יְהִצָּה וַיִּלְחֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:	(כג) וְלֹא נִתֵּן סִיחֹן אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל עֹבֵר בְּגְבֻלוֹ וַיֵּאֲסֹף סִיחֹן אֶת כָּל עַמּוֹ וַיֵּצֵא לְקִרְאֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמְדַבֵּרָה וַיָּבֵא יְהִצָּה וַיִּלְחֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:
(כד) וַיִּכְהוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפִי חֶרֶב וַיִּירֶשׁ אֶת אֶרְצוֹ מֵאֲרֹנָן עַד יָבֵק עַד בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן כִּי עַז גְּבוּל בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן:	(כד) וַיִּכְהוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפִי חֶרֶב וַיִּירֶשׁ אֶת אֶרְצוֹ מֵאֲרֹנָן עַד יָבֵק עַד בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן כִּי עַז גְּבוּל בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן:
(כה) וַיִּקַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת כָּל הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל עָרֵי הָאֲמֹרִי בְּחֻשְׁבוֹן וּבְכָל בְּנֹתֶיהָ:	(כה) וַיִּקַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת כָּל הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל עָרֵי הָאֲמֹרִי בְּחֻשְׁבוֹן וּבְכָל בְּנֹתֶיהָ:
(כו) וַיִּירָשׁוּ אֶת כָּל גְּבוּל הָאֲמֹרִי מֵאֲרֹנָן וְעַד הַיַּבֵּק וּמִן הַמְדַבֵּר וְעַד הַיַּרְדֵּן:	(כו) וַיִּירָשׁוּ אֶת כָּל גְּבוּל הָאֲמֹרִי מֵאֲרֹנָן וְעַד הַיַּבֵּק וּמִן הַמְדַבֵּר וְעַד הַיַּרְדֵּן:

Jephthah's Daughter

שופטים פרק יא

(ל) וַיְדַר יִפְתָּח נָדָר לִיקָוֶה וַיֹּאמֶר אִם נָתַן תַּתֵּן אֶת בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן בְּיָדִי: (לא) וְהָיָה הַיּוֹצֵא אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִדְּלַתִּי בֵּיתִי לְקִרְאֵתִי בְּשׁוּבִי בְּשָׁלוֹם מִבְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וְהָיָה לִיקָוֶה הַיּוֹצֵא עֹלָה: פ

OJPS: then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be the Lord's, **and** I will offer it up for a burnt-offering.'

NJPS: then whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's **and** shall be offered by me as a burnt offering."

Alter: It shall be that whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return safe and sound from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I shall offer it up as a burnt offering.

The Hebrew is ambiguous: it could mean whatever or whoever. Some scholars have argued for the latter because "to meet" (*likra't*) seems to imply a person, but the Hebrew, which is in fact a preposition and not a verb, has the sense of toward, and it seems unlikely that Jephthah would have deliberately envisaged human sacrifice from the start... The vow focuses on the act of return to the house, but the killing of Jephthah's only child will mean the destruction of his house in the extended sense of the term.

The Talmud and early Midrash described Jephthah's vow as "inappropriate" (*shelo ke-hogen*) and maintained that he received his comeuppance with the appearance of his daughter whom he was obliged to sacrifice (*bTaan4a*; also cf. *BerR* 60.3).

Ta`anit 4a

R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: Three [men] made haphazard requests, two of them were fortunate in the reply they received and one was not. Namely: Eliezer, the servant of Abraham; Saul, the son of Kish; and Jephthah the Gileadite. Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, as it is written, So let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, 'Let down thy pitcher etc.' She might have been lame or blind, but he was fortunate in the answer given to him in that Rebecca chanced to meet him. Saul, the son of Kish, as it is written, And it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter. [He] might have been a slave or a bastard. He too was fortunate in that it chanced to be David.

Jephthah, the Gileadite, as it is written, "Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth out of the doors of my house etc." It might have been an unclean thing. He, however, was fortunate in that it so happened that his own daughter came to meet him. This is what the prophet had in mind when he said to Israel, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" And it is further written, "Which I commanded not, nor spoke it, neither came it to my mind." 'Which I commanded not': This refers to the sacrifice of the son of Mesha, the king of Moab, as it is said, "Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead and offered him for a burnt-offering." 'Nor spoke it'; This refers to the daughter of Jephthah. 'Neither came it to my mind': This refers to the sacrifice of Isaac, the son of Abraham.

This view held sway until the 12th century, when an alternative interpretation was advanced. Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164) was cited (by Nahmanides) to the effect that Jephthah's vow was to be parsed as follows: "Whatsoever emerges from my doorway ... will be dedicated to God OR offered as a sacrifice" (Judges 11:31). Rather than sacrifice his daughter, Jephthah had her secluded and she remained a virgin her entire life (11:39). David Qimhi offered the identical parsing in the name of his father Joseph (1105–1170) and it was adopted by Gersonides and Abrabanel, while Nahmanides (Leviticus 27:29) rejected it out of hand.

רד"ק שופטים י"א:ל"א

והעליתיהו עולה – דעת רז"ל בזה ידוע. וא"א ז"ל פירש "והעליתיהו" הו"ו במקום או. ופירש "והיה לה" הקדש, אם אינו ראוי לעולה; או "העליתיהו עולה" אם ראוי לעולה. וכמו זה הו"ו "מכה אביו ואמו", או אמו, ויפה פי'. וכן נראה מהפסוק כי לא המיתה...

The Sages' opinion of this is well-known. My father interpreted it as "OR I shall offer it as a burnt offering, explaining that "it will belong to the Lord," i.e., sanctified, if it is unfitting for a sacrifice, or "offered as a burnt offering" if it is suitable. The same goes for the conjunction of "One who strikes his father OR his mother." This is a fine interpretation, and is supported by the text that indicates that he did not kill her.

Nahmanides (Lev. 27:29)

Now do not let yourself be misled by Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra's empty words, when he says that the meaning of the expression and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering is "or I will offer it up," as if to say: "if that which comes forth of the doors of my house be a man or woman, that person shall be holy to G-d, inasmuch as he will abstain from the ways of the world, to stand to minister in the Name of the Eternal in prayer and thanksgiving to G-d; but if it be something fit for an offering, I will make it a burnt-offering." Accordingly [Ibn Ezra's interpretation continues, since Jephthah's daughter was the first to come out to meet her father], he built her a house outside the city where she resided in seclusion, and he provided her with sustenance all her days, and no man knew her, so that his daughter remained shut away [from the world all her life].

All this are words of emptiness. For if he vowed that [whatsoever comes forth of the door of his house] shall be the Eternal's, this does not mean that he should be a recluse [from the world], but instead he is to be like Samuel, of whom his mother said, and I shall give him unto the Eternal, and he was a servant in the House of G-d, not a recluse. And according to the ordinances of the Torah, no man can utter a vow which will bind the persons who come out of the door of his house to live thereafter in seclusion, just as he cannot bring them as an offering. And if the matter be so [as Ibn Ezra put it] then Jephthah's daughter would be bewailing her virginity with her companions with her, like harlots enhancing their hire! Heaven forbid that this be a custom in Israel, to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year because she did not marry and she worshipped G-d in purity! Rather, this whole subject is to be understood in its plain meaning [that Jephthah actually brought her as an offering], and his mistake was as I have explained.

(EXTRA)

Some recent scholarship (Simon, Marcus) posited that this approach was influenced by a familiarity with Latin monasticism. Moshe Zucker, however, observed that the “non-sacrificial” approach had already been taken by the Karaites as illustrated by the early 10th-century author Ya‘qūb al-Qirqisānī in his *Kitāb al-anwār* (Book of Luminaries), apropos of the laws of consecration, implying that the subject had already become part of the ongoing Karaite/Rabbanite controversy. Indeed, later in the 10th century, the premier Karaite exegete Yefet ben Eli proposed the same interpretation as Qirqisānī, while the Rabbanite Judah Ibn Bal‘am (1000–1070) defended the Talmudic-Midrashic position, calling any alternative “unthinkable.” In the 13th century, the Karaite exegete Aaron ben Joseph (1260–1320) reiterated the Karaite position (*Mivḥar yesharim* [Choice of the Upright] Judges, ad loc).

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