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## The Promise of Hope: Where to Turn in Troubled Times

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The events of September 11, 2001, were unprecedented in the history of this great nation. They have given cause for all to pause, ponder and to put life in its proper perspective. These events have added a new dimension of stress in the lives of many who were already experiencing personal struggles. To some the "perfect brightness of hope" (2 Nephi 31:20) has been diminished to a fading flicker, causing them to have feelings of fear rather than faith.

### PERSPECTIVE

We must view these and future events from an eternal as well as from an earthly perspective. These events are in keeping with the great Plan of Salvation. These earthly experiences are a part of our testing through trials and tribulations. In the preparation process the Savior gave the purpose for which we must be tested during these earthly experiences. He said:

My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them. (D&C 136:31)

Struggles are a part of the sacred sanctification process. We must remember that there are no soft or slothful ways to become sanctified to the point that we are prepared to live in the presence of the Lord one day.

The battle from the beginning, and the one that will be

the fight to the finish, has been over the choices we make in this life. These choices will determine our eternal destiny. We cannot always be in control of everything that happens to us in this life, but if we so choose we can be in control of how we respond to all that happens to us.

### Focus

During these troubled times when many stand in need of added strength to deal with these difficulties, attention must be given to a comprehensive approach to supply these needs. To receive hope and to make positive changes involves focusing on the physical, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of life. It is like putting on "the whole armour of God" (see Ephesians 6:13).

My focus today centers on the spiritual sources of strength in one's pursuit of hope, health, and happiness. I believe this singular area of strength forms the foun-

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dation for all other sources of strength during a person's times of need. This in no way implies that the other aspects of a person's life are of lesser importance or of lesser effectiveness. It is my feeling that without a focus on the spiritual, the other focuses will be less effective.

## Hope

Hope is an expectation of things to come with a feeling of surety. It is seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Hope is the eternal flame that burns within and lights the way from our earthly home to our eternal home. It is centered in Jesus Christ and is our constant compass in our times of need. It is so essential to our sense of well-being and our wellness. Moroni explained, "And if ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair" (Moroni 10:22). Hope diminishes feelings of discouragement, doubt, and even depression. It awakens courage and faith within the human spirit. The Apostle Paul said hope is the "anchor of the soul" (Hebrews 6:19). There is an old Scottish proverb that says, "Were it not for hope, the heart would break." Elder Russell M. Nelson explained the interrelationship of hope, faith and charity with these words: "Faith is rooted in Jesus Christ. Hope centers in his atonement. Charity is manifest in the pure love of Christ" (Nelson, 1997, p. 60). As we cultivate the light of hope it will increase in intensity and we will be filled with faith and charity. To find and nurture hope we should focus on our sources of divine strength and upon our sources of personal strength, for God "shall supply all our need" (Philippians 4:19).

## DIVINE STRENGTH

We are never alone during our times of need. Heavenly Father has blessed each of his children with at least three sources of divine strength. He has given us our agency to choose to draw upon these in our times of need.

## Light of Christ

The Light of Christ is a spiritual power. It is universal in nature and "proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space" (D&C 88:12). It not only lights the universe but is also given on a personal basis to each of Heavenly Father's children. The Savior explains:

And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man

through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit. (D&C 84:46; see also D&C 93:2)

Moroni counseled, "For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil" (Moroni 7:16). We do not live in spiritual darkness, as our conscience helps us to discern right from wrong. President Joseph F. Smith stated:

Every man is enlightened, the wicked as well as the good, the intelligent and the ignorant ... each in accordance with his capacity to receive the light. (Smith, 1939, p. 62)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie describes the *Light of Christ* with these words:

The Light of Christ ... dwells in the hearts of all men ... It is the instrumentality and agency by which Deity keeps in touch and communes with all his children, both the righteous and the wicked ... One of its manifestations is called conscience, through which all men know right from wrong. (McConkie, 1985, p. 257)

It is our spiritual compass, which if followed, will lead us to receive the greater light of the Holy Ghost. We were born with a clear and clean conscience filled with the light of Christ. The Savior taught, "Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning" (D&C 93:38). Upon reaching the age of accountability the Savior said:

That wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men. (D&C 93:39)

Sin and disobedience cause a darkening of the Light of Christ. As a result we become weakened to temptation (see Titus 1:15). Continued disobedience can eventually lead to becoming "past feeling" (see Ephesians 4:19, 1 Nephi 17:45, Moroni 9:20). We are never alone in our times of need when we have the Light of Christ.

## Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost will teach, comfort and protect us during our times of need. The Spirit is sensitive and can be easily offended; sin is offensive to the Holy Ghost and will cause him to withdraw from our presence. When the Spirit withdraws we are left with feelings of

darkness in varying degrees, and feelings of sadness, and often with feelings of depression.

When a people are living in conflict with their spiritual values and with the sacred covenants that they have entered into, they will experience emotional and spiritual pain. These feelings will be increased if they are in conflict with the principles that the Holy Ghost has borne witness to. The resolution of these conflicts begins with true repentance and a renewed desire to be obedient.

The Holy Ghost is a perfect teacher to those who are receptive to the Spirit and who are teachable. The Spirit never teaches those who are not teachable. Nephi counsels, "Receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do" (2 Nephi 32:5). The Spirit will enlighten our minds with both spiritual and temporal truths. The Savior said:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind. (D&C 11:13; see D&C 76:10, D&C 6:15)

The Spirit never teaches that which we are not capable of understanding; therefore, the Spirit often teaches us "line upon line, precept upon precept" (D&C 98:12, 2 Nephi 28:30). He not only increases our knowledge and understanding (D&C 76:12) but also increases our memory of things once taught:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (John 14:26)

One of the great roles of the Holy Ghost is to give comfort to those in need. He brings us peaceful and comforting feelings. He also brings feelings of love, hope and encouragement to all who seek him in their times of need (see Moroni 8:26). He focuses on the "peaceful things" (D&C 36:2; D&C 39:6).

We are never alone if we have the Holy Ghost as a near constant companion to teach and comfort us during our times of need.

### Personal Savior

The Savior knows each of us in a personal way. He is aware of our needs and our concerns. He gives us assur-

ance of his awareness with these words: "I say unto you that mine eyes are upon you. I am in your midst and ye cannot see me" (D&C 38:7). Elder Dallin H. Oaks explains the meaning of the Savior being in our midst:

The Savior is in our midst, sometimes personally, frequently through his servants, and always by his Spirit." (Oaks, 1991, p. 14)

He knows everything about each of us. This includes our thoughts. He counseled Ezekiel of old, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them" (Ezekiel 11:5). Ammon warned: "He knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Alma 18:32).

The Savior knows our weaknesses (D&C 62:1) and our actions (D&C 121:24). He stands ready to assist us through all our struggles. He has promised that he will respond to our righteous requests that we make to Heavenly Father. "Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, that is expedient for you" (D&C 88:64).

He will comfort us in our times of need (Jacob 3:1). He gives us a spirit of hope and a feeling of comfort and confidence that we can overcome the obstacles that we face. Listen to his words of counsel and comfort:

Fear not, little children, for ye are mine, and I have overcome the world ... and none of them that my Father hath given me shall be lost. (D&C 50:41-42)

Because of his infinite love for us, he is our advocate with Heavenly Father. He pleads our cause with the Father. He counsels:

Lift up your hearts and be glad, for I am in your midst, and am your advocate with the Father. (D&C 29:5)

If our struggle is with sin, we must remember that he stands ready to forgive us if we truly repent. Too often we forget that he is a loving, caring and merciful God. Some may feel that there is no hope because they have failed too many times. The Lord has counseled that there is great hope for the sinner who truly repents:

If he confess his sins ... and repenteth in the sincerity of heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive also. Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them. (Mosiah 26:29-30)

The results of true repentance and remission of sins bring peace, hope, joy and a clarity of conscience (see Mosiah 4:3). Alma described the feeling with these words:

I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. And, oh, what joy and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! (Alma 36:19-20)

The atonement of the Savior is infinite in nature and gives us great hope. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught this principle with these words:

I repeat, save for the exception of the very few who defect to perdition, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the atonement of Christ. (Packer, 1995, p. 20)

If we so choose, we are never alone during our times of need with a Personal Savior.

### PERSONAL STRENGTH

The Divine sources of strength are given to us by Heavenly Father based upon our personal worthiness. We have also been given personal sources of strength. These sources require not only worthiness but also an active involvement on our part.

We gain personal strength during our times of need through controlling our thoughts, feelings and behaviors, exercising faith, fasting, scripture study, pondering our patriarchal blessing, receiving priesthood blessings, listening to priesthood counsel, and by seeking and receiving personal revelations.

#### Thoughts

Our thoughts are one battleground of the struggle with Satan. There are important concepts concerning our thoughts and how they affect us during our times of need. Our thoughts can control our lives in either a positive or negative way. Proverbs counsels "For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). President Marion G. Romney spoke of the struggle for the control of our thoughts and thus our lives with these words:

The great overall struggle in the world today is, as it has always been, for the souls of men. Every soul is personally engaged in the struggle, and he makes his fight with what is in his mind. In the final analysis the battleground is, for each individual, within himself. (Romney, 1980, p. 66)

Thoughts tend to attract their own kind. Negative thoughts attract other negative thoughts and feelings. Disappointments lead to feelings of doubt, discouragement and even depression and despair. When we think positive thoughts they will attract other positive thoughts and feelings. While fear leads to failure, faith leads to fulfillment. The Savior explained this concept when he said:

For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth ... light cleaveth unto light. (D&C 88:40)

The brain is like a video recorder: every thought we think, every feeling we feel, every word we speak, every image we process is stored for future use. But we are in charge of the camera. The film is fast and the focus is fierce. The film which is not erased by the process of repentance will stand the test of time and be taken with us into eternity for full review.

We must discipline ourselves to think positive thoughts during the difficult days of our lives. The Savior counseled, "let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly" (D&C 121:45). The Apostle Paul taught the Philippian saints:

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ... think on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

#### Feelings

To feel is a Christlike characteristic and a divine gift. Our emotional responses to our earthly experiences are stored in the cells of the brain. These cells become a storehouse for our emotions. We have been blessed to be the keeper of the keys to this emotional storehouse. If we so choose we can be in control of which emotions we choose to retrieve and to relive. When we emotionally respond to a present experience with positive, uplifting feelings we have a tendency to relive the positive feelings of our past. Unfortunately some portion of our negative

responses to present experiences is drawn from our storehouse of negative feelings.

There are common feelings that we experience as we face troubled times. These seem to be natural and may serve some useful purposes in our lives. But they can also become condemning and controlling factors that may lead to negative results. The counsel seems clear in the scriptures as to our responses to the negative aspects of these feelings. I will address only two of these, *worry* and *depression*.

### Worry

There is a difference between a conscious concern about a matter and a feeling of worry. Concern is positive while worry is negative. Worry ranges from discomfort to despair. In the extreme it can be a truly painful emotion. The counsel seems clear as how we should deal with feelings of worry.

First, we should take comfort in the knowledge that Heavenly Father is keenly aware of our needs and our feelings. The Savior counseled: "For your Father, who is in heaven, knoweth that you have need of all these things" (D&C 84:83).

Second, we are counseled to live one day at a time. The Savior said: "Therefore, let the morrow take thought for the things of itself" (D&C 84:84).

Third, the Psalmist gave counsel that we should "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee" (Psalms 55:22).

Fourth, Paul taught the Philippian Saints that we should leave much of our negative past behind and focus on the present and the future:

This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark. (Philippians 3:13-14)

### Depression

Depression is sometimes difficult to deal with. There are no simple solutions in serious situations. There are many organic and non-organic causes of depression. I will focus on the non-organic, many of which involve unresolved personal problems.

The Lord has given counsel that will be helpful in decreasing the degree of depression that a person may be feeling. Some feelings of depression come from sin. Moroni explained "despair cometh because of iniquity"

(Moroni 10:22). President Benson counseled that "sin creates disharmony with God and is depressing to the spirit" (Benson, 1986, p. 2).

If the source of depression is sin, we must seek relief through the cleansing power of repentance. We will then be "filled with joy, having received a remission of [our] sins, and having peace of conscience" (Mosiah 4:3). The Lord also counsels us to petition him in prayer to find relief from suffering:

Pray always, that you may come off conqueror.  
(D&C 10:5)

If thou art sorrowful, call on the Lord thy God with supplication, that your souls may be joyful.  
(D&C 136:29)

There is great power in prayer to relieve feelings of depression. When we search the scriptures and apply them, we will find strength and relief from our suffering. Alma counseled, "the words of Christ [will] carry us beyond this vale of sorrow" (Alma 37:45). It is most important for those who are depressed to be involved in meaningful activity and for them to develop healthy patterns in their life. They should indeed be "anxiously engaged in a good cause" (D&C 58:27). The Savior counseled that all should:

Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated. (D&C 88:124)

### Faith

It is essential that we have sufficient faith to make changes in our life. Faith gives us power to make these necessary changes (see 2 Nephi 1:10). If we do not have sufficient faith, we cannot change or be healed of our infirmities. Our weaknesses can never become strong without full faith. It takes faith to be healed (see 3 Nephi 12:8). It takes faith to get answers to our prayers (see D&C 10:47). Moroni reminds us that "hope cometh of faith" (Ether 12:4).

We must never underestimate the power of the Lord even when we feel personally powerless. Nephi reminds us of the infinite power of the Lord with these words:

Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten that the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children

of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him? Wherefore, let us be faithful to him. (1 Nephi 7:12)

### Fasting

The Lord has commanded us “Ye shall continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth” (D&C 88:76). Great power is received as we fast and pray concerning our struggles and our spiritual welfare.

When we fast we should do so with a purpose, with prayer and with “an eye single to the glory of God” (D&C 4:5). We should strive for mastery of self, having pure thoughts, and meditate and ponder spiritual things. We can gain added strength through scripture study during the fast. We should listen to the promptings of the Spirit as we seek solutions.

We should petition the Lord in soul-searching prayer for strength and deliverance from the bonds of our behaviors. Jacob counseled:

Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause ... (Jacob 3:1)

Fasting and prayer will help us control our thoughts, feelings, passions and appetites. We can bring these and our bodies under subjection of our spirits. We will experience added spirituality, strength, power and humility. We will be able to get answers to our prayers and enjoy feelings of peace and comfort. Our guilt will be swept away as we truly repent. Ill feelings will be removed from our souls and we will experience an increase in love. We will become free from undue worry.

### Scripture Study

We can receive great comfort and counsel as we prayerfully ponder the scriptures during our times of need. When faced with an increased need for understanding and direction we should search the scriptures for answers. Nephi counseled:

Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do. (2 Nephi 32:3)

The scriptures should be of the greatest importance to us. Our spiritual survival during our stress and struggles is greatly dependent upon the strength that we receive

from searching the scriptures and applying the principles in our lives.

The scriptures provide food for our spirits, which is as important as physical food is for our bodies. It is not enough to read the scriptures; we must truly search them. Random reading results in reduced retention; however, a studious search of the scriptures will result in great strength during our struggles. The Apostle Paul gives insight into another result of this search. He said: “We through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

The scriptures are replete with powerful promises to those who follow the counsel of the Lord. We should ponder these powerful promises and develop faith and trust in the Lord. His promises are sure. The Savior gives us marvelous promises that should strengthen us. He counsels:

Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you ... (D&C 68:6)  
And inasmuch as ye are humble and faithful and call upon my name, behold I will give you the victory. I give unto you a promise, that you shall be delivered this once out of your bondage. (D&C 104:82-83)

### Patriarchal Blessing

Our patriarchal blessings are another source of personal strength. President Ezra Taft Benson gave great insight into one of the purposes of a patriarchal blessing. He said of the Savior:

He knows in advance every strategy the enemy will use against you ... He knows your weaknesses and he knows your strengths. By personal revelation you may discover some of your strengths through a careful and prayerful study of your patriarchal blessing. (Benson, 1988, p. 214)

Elder James E. Faust also taught the principle of power in a patriarchal blessing in helping us to deal with our difficult days. He said:

God knows our spirits; he knows our strengths and weaknesses. He knows our capabilities and our potential. Our patriarchal blessings indicate what the Lord expects of us and what our potential is. Our blessing can encourage us when we are discouraged, strengthen us when we are fearful, comfort us when we sorrow, give us courage when we are filled with anxiety, lift us up when we are weak in spirit. (Faust, 1982, p.6)

### Priesthood Blessings

When we find ourselves in troubled times or on difficult days, we may seek a priesthood blessing. For the blessing to be effective, we must be humble and teachable. We must be willing to submit our will to the will of the Lord as spoken to us in the blessing. This blessing can be a great source of counsel from the Lord. Our minds can be enlightened and our knowledge and understanding quickened. Our vision can be expanded. The Savior has given a powerful promise concerning that which will be spoken by the priesthood holder who is giving the blessing:

And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost ... shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord and the power of God ... (D&C 68:4)

We must have full faith and complete confidence in the counsel that we receive. We must have courage to follow the counsel. If we do so, we will receive added power to succeed in our struggles.

A priesthood blessing should be a great source of comfort to us. It is the means by which we can have feelings of peace, hope, and love. Our confidence can be restored as a result of the blessing.

Our mind and body can become invigorated. Our spirit can be renewed and we can feel a divine determination to deal with our difficulties. We can feel the presence of the Lord and the companionship of the Spirit.

### Priesthood Counsel

During the days ahead we must carefully listen to the counsel of the living prophets. Their counsel takes precedence over all other counsel. As Satan increases his works of destruction, there is an ever-increasing need to listen to the voice of the prophet.

The Savior has counseled us to listen to our priesthood leaders as well as the prophet. He said: "...whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38). Some unfortunately choose not to listen. At times they resist counsel. It is no wonder that the Lord lamented: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Why is it that some choose not to listen to counsel? They have some *natural man* tendencies, such as:

### Rationalization

And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Nephi 28:8)

### Complacency

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. (2 Nephi 28:21)

### Delusions

O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. (2 Nephi 9:28)

### Forgetfulness

Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one." (Alma 46:8)

In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me. (D&C 101:8)

There is great safety in troubled times in listening to the voice of the prophets and our priesthood leaders. If we do so, we have no need to fear what may come in the future.

### Personal Revelation

When we speak to Heavenly Father we do so by means of prayer. When he speaks to us he does so by means of personal revelation. This two-way, divine communication is critically important to our success, to our sense of well being, and to our spiritual salvation. We always pray to Heavenly Father and to him alone. Our prayers are rendered in the name of the Son and communicated by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Receiving personal revelation is not a passive process, it involves proper preparation. To pray is to have a conversation with Deity. We are instructed to pray often (2 Nephi 9:52), to ponder before we pray (D&C 9:8), to ask for the right things (D&C 8:10, D&C 88:65), to avoid vain repetitions (3 Nephi 13:7), and to ask in faith (3 Nephi 18:20) with humility (D&C 112:10) and with sincerity (Moroni 7:9). Personal revelations come by the promptings and impressions of the Spirit to both the mind and to the heart.

Manifestations of the Spirit come to the mind in a variety of ways, as enlightenment (D&C 6:15) and through the scriptures (2 Nephi 32:3). They may come in the form of instant recall (John 14:26), or as an audible voice (Helaman 5:30). Sometimes they come by way of counsel from leaders (D&C 1:38), by dreams or visions (1 Nephi 8:2) or by visitations (Alma 32:23).

The Spirit also reveals the will of the Lord through the feelings of the heart. These feelings come in the form of peaceful feelings (D&C 6:23), warm spiritual feelings (D&C 9:8), compelling feelings (D&C 128:1) or darker feelings of stupor of thought (D&C 9:9).

We have been given the promise that, "If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge" (D&C 42:61).

### COUNSEL

In our present and future times of need, we can take great comfort and confidence in the counsel we receive

from the scriptures. It will give us great hope and will strengthen our faith and our resolve. We should prayerfully ponder the following and countless other passages of counsel that the Lord has provided for us in the scriptures:

Look unto me in every thought, doubt not, fear not.  
(D&C 6:36)

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)

The words of the Savior would be appropriate concluding counsel here:

Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good, if ye walk uprightly and remember the covenant wherewith ye have covenanted one with another. (D&C 90:24)

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer. (Romans 12:12)

All of the counsel found in the scriptures and given by the Brethren is counsel of hope. It reflects the love the Savior has for us and his desire that we succeed and enjoy health and happiness. We have a rich repository of resources from which we can receive spiritual strength during our times of need. There are no other ways to gain strength in our times of need. If we follow this counsel, we will find infinite strength and will have the promise of hope. To this I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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