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The Second Infallible, Hadhrat ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, The First Imam

‘Ali (as) was Abu Talib's fourth son (i.e. after Talib, ‘Aqil and Ja‘far) who was born 23 years before Hijra. His mother was Fatimah, daughter of Asad b. Hashim b. ‘Abd Manaf. ‘Ali (as) is reported to have been born in the Ka‘ba on Friday, 13th of Rajab.

Hadhrat ‘Ali (as) lived with his own parents, then due to the drought that struck Mecca, Abu Talib's life underwent hardship. There must have been a wise reason for it, since it placed ‘Ali (as) in the full affectionate custody of the Prophet (S) and his school of thought. Being trained by Muhammad (S), ‘Ali (as) never in his life bowed before the idols, and was the first among men to believe in the prophethood of the Holy Apostle of Allah, since he lived with the Prophet (S) in his house for about seven years until the Prophetic Mission of the Holy Apostle (S) took place. ‘Ali (as) welcomed the Mission of the Prophet (S) whole-heartedly.

In this regard, ‘Ali (as) himself asserts: “Like a child running after his mother, I would always follow the Messenger of God who would each day teach me a new lesson of ethical virtues and enjoin me to follow him.”

Since the beginning of the Prophetic Mission, ‘Ali (as) was always with the prophet (S) and accompanied him in joys and sorrows and in ups and downs of life. He always did his best and made efforts and self-sacrifice during the thirteen years of hardships in Mecca, the battles of Badr, Uhud, and Khandaq, through the conquest of Mecca, Hunayn, etc., as well as in Medina.

Everyone knew ‘Ali (as) as a manifestation of justice, honesty, and self-sacrifice, and so was he. His strictness in carrying out justice and actualizing truthfulness has indeed become an example among both friends and foes.

In the early years of Islam, the Apostle of Allah used to go to the valleys around Mecca and take ‘Ali (as) with him, say prayers together and return at night. One day, Abu Talib saw his son saying prayers with

his cousin. First he talked a little to the messenger of God, and then said to his son: “O dear son! What are you doing?” “I have welcomed Islam, my dear father, and am saying prayers to God with my cousin.” ‘Ali (as) replied. Abu Talib said: “Do not separate from him, since he has certainly called you to good and happiness.”

The Beginning of ‘Ali (as)’s Self-Sacrifices

His holiness ‘Ali (as) has self-sacrificed both at the beginning of the call to Islam and during the battles. When the Prophet (S) openly called people to Islam, the Quraysh too started their persecutions and atrocities towards him and his followers. At first, in most cases they would maltreat the messenger of God while in prayer and would inflict various cruel acts on him. On these occasions, ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (as) and Zayd b. Haritha would by turn and sometimes together protect the Messenger (S).

In many battles, through self denial and suffering severe wounds, ‘Ali (as) did not leave the Prophet alone. He made himself a shield against the arrows of atrocities that the infidels shot upon the Prophet (S). In critical and hazardous moments, he would save the Prophet (S)’s life.

In the Fourth year of the Prophetic Mission

When the Prophet (S) was commanded by God “to inform your kin about the call and to warn them”, ‘Ali (as) tolerated reproaches from Abu Lahab and others patiently, and proclaimed, with a matchless bravery, his readiness to assist the Prophet (S) to the extent that the Holy Prophet (S) in the gathering of his kin – where ‘Ali (as) stood up for the third time to show his eagerness to protect the prophet – told him:

“Be seated! You are my brother and executor of my will and are my vizier and inheritor and vicegerent after me.” This heavy responsibility was laid upon ‘Ali (as)’s powerful shoulders since the very beginning of open call to Islam.

Another Self-Sacrifice

In order to confront the treaty signed and hung on the house of Ka‘ba by the Quraysh to suppress Beni Hashim and restrain the Prophet (S), the Messenger and his companions decided, on the first of Muharram, 7 years after *Bi‘tha*, to settle in the Shi‘b of Abu Talib. This economic sanction lasted for about three years and a half until the middle of Rajab, 10 years after *Bi‘tha*, during which the Holy Prophet, Khadija and their beloved daughter Fatimah were in extreme hardship and difficulty, so that sometimes several of them were forced to live on a single date.

To protect the Prophet (S) from any harm, a few hours after nightfall Abu Talib would take him somewhere else to sleep, and then would have his son ‘Ali (as) sleep in the Prophet (S)’s bed so that if the Quraysh ambushed, he would be killed in place of the Prophet (S).

The Night of Hijra and Self-Sacrifice by ‘Ali (as)

Only a few Muslims were left behind in Mecca. Some had migrated to Abyssinia and some others had migrated to Medina before the Prophet (S). So nobody was left in Mecca except Muhammad (S), ‘Ali (as), Abu Bakr, and a few women or some prisoners. Suppression had reached to its highest degree in Mecca. A number of Muslims were in prison, being repeatedly lashed. If there were some youth who secretly loved Muhammad (S) and Islam, they would not dare to express it.

Muhammad (S) had decided to migrate to Medina and had told the secret only to ‘Ali (as), i.e., his best confidant. ‘Ali (as) was supposed to sleep in place of the Prophet (S) at that horrible night and to cover himself with the Prophet (S)’s green striped sheet and act in a way that the Quraysh would not have the slightest suspicion of what was going on.

The criminal youth of Quraysh were lingering around the house of the Prophet (S) to commit the crime. A silence was pervading over the whole city. The unsheathed swords were glittering. The young traitors rushed to the sleeping room of the Prophet (S). Is that Muhammad or ‘Ali? They wondered. Is he asleep or awake? What should they do? ... Muhammad (S) had by then gotten out of their reach!

They put ‘Ali (as) under pressure to reveal to them the hiding place of Muhammad (S). They threatened to kill him but all he said was that Muhammad (S) had left Mecca. ‘Ali (as) stayed in Mecca to do as he was advised to do by the Prophet (S).

He returned what had been entrusted to him to their owners. Then, together with some men and women, he set out for Medina. The whole self-sacrifice and hardship was for the sake of God and the Prophet (S). The following blessed verse is true for ‘Ali (as):

{وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ} 207

﴿And among the people is he who sells his soul seeking the pleasure of Allah, and Allah is most kind to His servants.﴾¹

In the battle of Uhud

‘Ali (as) displayed such bravery that amazed both friends and foes. Muslims, numbering seven hundred, and the Quraysh infidels, consisting of three thousand horsemen and two thousand foot-soldiers with full equipment entered the battle field. In this battle ‘Ali (as) killed many of the infidels with his piercing sword.

Every time the resentful enemy encircled the Holy Prophet (S), ‘Ali (as) would disperse them. When ‘Ali (as)’s sword got broken due to his powerful strikes in battle, the Prophet (S) gave him his own sword

called: “Dhulfaqr”. In this battle, ‘Ali (as)’s body was injured with over sixty wounds. It was in the same battle where the Prophet (S) saw the Angel of Revelation in the middle of the air, heralding: “There is no sword like Dhulfaqr and no brave youth like ‘Ali”.

In the Battle of Khandaq

The first war show of the enemy started this way: ‘Amr b. ‘Abduwad, a well-known Quraysh athlete, fully armed and equipped with armor along with several infidel troops crossed the trench (Khandaq). On the other side of Khandaq, ‘Ali b. Abi Talib(as) with several others set out to encounter them and block their way.

‘Amr challenged three times. ‘Ali (as) volunteered to fight with him. At the first and the second time, the Holy Prophet (S) did not allow him to step forward as a rival to ‘Amr. At the third time, however, the Messenger (S) allowed him to go. At this moment, the Prophet (S) remarked: “The entire faith is standing against the entire infidelity.” ‘Ali (as)’s extraordinary bravery resulted in ‘Amr b. Abduwad’s total defeat. On this momentous occasion, the Holy Prophet (S) said: “‘Ali (as)’s stroke on the day of Khandaq will be superior to all the devotional acts of my *umma* until the Day of Judgment”.

This very evident victory and some other factors weakened the enemy’s army consisting of ten thousand equipped troops, as a result of which they all fled to Mecca.

The Battle of Khaybar

In the 7th year of Hijra, the battle of Khaybar took place in which ‘Ali (as) accompanied the Holy Prophet (S). It was in this battle that the Prophet (S) said: “Tomorrow I will hand the army standard over to the one who loves God and His Messenger and God and His Messenger love him, too. In wars, he never flees; rather, he always attacks. He would not return until God resolves the problem through him.”

In the Conquest of Mecca

‘Ali (as) was with the Prophet (S) in this conquest. It is said that, in order to topple the idols inside the Ka’ba and to uproot idolatry, he stepped on the Holy Prophet (S)’s shoulder to climb up for smashing the idols.

In the Battles of Hunayn and Ta’if

Here also ‘Ali (as) was alongside the Prophet (S). In the battle of Hunayn all troops escaped except nine soldiers including ‘Ali (as) who persevered in the war.

In the Battle of Tabuk

This battle took place in the 9th year of Hijra when ‘Ali (as) was ordered by the Prophet (S) to stay in Medina in place of the Prophet (S). This was the only battle that after 27 battles ‘Ali (as) did not accompany the Apostle of Allah (S). Although his staying in Medina was by the order of the Prophet (S), he was a little sad about it and wished he had been able to fight in the company of the Prophet (S). The Holy Messenger told ‘Ali (as): “Are you not satisfied that your relation to me is similar to that of Aaron to Moses? Except that there will be no prophet after me.” This *hadith* is known as “*hadith of Status*” (*Hadith al-Manzilat*).

In the 10th year of Hijra, on returning from the Farewell Pilgrimage to Mecca, the event of Ghadir Khumm happened. Before a vast crowd, the Prophet (S), through Divine order, selected ‘Ali (as) as his successor and executor of his will. Then, the third verse of *Surat al-Ma’ida* was revealed, which is known as “Perfection of Religion” and “Completion of Blessing”: ﴿Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion.﴾

At the last moments of the Prophet (S)'s life, ‘Ali (as) was at his bedside. His holy head was leaning on ‘Ali (as)'s chest, when he closed his eyes to the world. ‘Ali (as) himself gave his sacred body the ritual washing (*ghusl*) and shrouded it and put it inside the grave with his own hands. ‘Ali was the last one who left the luminous grave of Muhammad (S).

The Visage of ‘Ali (as) in the Qur’an

Based on authentic documents, there are over 100 verses which have been revealed in relation to ‘Ali (as).

Several verses which, according to both Shi’a and Sunni, are about ‘Ali (as), are as follows:

{أَفَمَنْ كَانَ مُؤْمِنًا كَمَنْ كَانَ فَاسِقًا ۚ لَا يَسْتَوُونَ} 18

﴿Is someone who is faithful like someone who is a transgressor? They are not equal.﴾²

{إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنْذِرٌ ۚ وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ} 7

﴿You are only a warner, and there is a guide for every people.﴾³

Fakhr al-Razi, in his interpretation of this verse, maintains that “a guide” is meant to be ‘Ali (as).⁴

{إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ} 55

﴿Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down.﴾ [5](#) (5:55).

Fakhr al-Razi quotes Abu Dharr al-Ghifari as saying that this verse is revealed for Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (as). Similarly, Zamakhshari says in *tafsir* al-Kashshaf the same about this verse. [6](#)

'Ali (as) was an interpreter of the Qur'an and knew its mysteries and secrets because he had drunk his fill and saturated from the fountainhead of the Prophet (S)'s knowledge and insight. 'Ali (as) had been at all moments with the Prophet (S) and witnessed the revelation of the Holy verses. The Prophet (S) has told about 'Ali:

“Ali is with the Qur'an and the Qur'an is also with 'Ali; the two will not separate until they arrive at Kawthar.”

'Ali (as) was himself the Prophet (S)'s scribe of revelation, memorizing and recording, upon the Prophet (S)'s order, the verses revealed to the Apostle of Allah (S). Right after the Prophet (A.S.W.)'s demise, he stayed home and started compiling the verses of the Qur'an in order to prevent it from being dispersed and distorted.

Both Shi'a and Sunni scholars agree that 'Ali (as) was the most competent in the interpretation and commentary of the Noble Qur'an.

After the Demise of the Holy Prophet (S)

According to the Prophet (A.S.W.)'s advice, 'Ali (as) was to be the Caliph of the Muslims. But when other persons surpassed him in taking over the rule, although he viewed caliphate as his own right and some of comrades and companions admitted and even insisted on this, 'Ali (as) practiced patience and tolerance in order to prevent differences and civil wars, interpreting the situation as “having thorn in his eyes and a sharp piece of bone in his throat”; and proceeded to defend his right by presenting logical reasons and proofs.

According to what is recorded in historical documents, 'Ali (as) didn't swear allegiance to Abu Bakr until after Fatimah (as)'s death and refrained from interference in public affairs during the caliphate of Abu Bakr. For about 25 years (11–35 AH), during which the three caliphs ruled, 'Ali (as) lived a thoroughly humble, benevolent, and reputable life. In this period, he attended to people's problems and teaching his companions.

He also spent his time in planting trees, farming, digging *qanats* (subterranean fresh water canals), doing charitable work, and worshipping the Almighty God, until his time for caliphate arrived.

As soon as 'Ali (as), at the request of people, took over the rule, he declared: “I will take and return to public treasury whatever has been unduly given to you, even though spent on dowries or buying slave-maids”. Upon this, a group of people turned up in Basrah and the battle of Jamal started. In this battle,

13 thousand Muslims from both sides were killed. Later on, the battle of Siffin began and brought about so many problems for ‘Ali (as) and the world of Islam.

The event of arbitration, which inflicted a great loss on Islam, was the consequence of this war, leading to dominance of Mu‘awiya on Sham (Syria) with intrigue and deceit. Shortly afterward, the battle of Khawarij at Nahrawan broke out, and thereby another predicament came about for Imam ‘Ali (as).

He talked to the Khawarij and delivered an ultimatum onto them. Some repented and admitted the rightfulness of Amir al-Mu‘minin (as), but others insisted on fighting and killed several of Imam ‘Ali (as)'s comrades. Thereupon, ‘Ali (as) was forced to order defense and war which finally led to the defeat of Khawarij.

These fights, indeed, materialized the Holy Prophet (as)'s foresight. He had told ‘Ali (as): “After my death you will wage war upon three groups. On *nakithin*, namely the breakers of pledge, i.e. companions of Jamal who first made a pledge and later broke it; on *qasitin*, that is the rebels and tyrants, Mu‘awiya and the people of Sham, who had since the beginning engaged in rebellion and mutiny; and on *mariqin*, i.e., those who disobeyed the Imam of their time and the legal rule and law, or the Khawarij of Nahrawan.

‘Ali (as)'s Murder and the End of His Rule

Three of the Khawarij vowed to kill three of the then rulers, namely Mu‘awiya, ‘Amr b. ‘As, and Amir al-Mu‘minin ‘Ali (as), and thus, supposedly redeem the Muslims from disturbances. Of the three evil-starred, Abdul Rahman b. Muljam Muradi agreed to kill Amir al-Mu‘minin. Ibn Muljam arrived in Kufa and got acquainted with a beautiful woman called Quttam, daughter of Akhdhar Taimi, from among the tribe of Taim al-Rabab.

The woman, having a chronic vendetta against ‘Ali (as), demanded the murder of ‘Ali (as) as her bridal gift. Accepting the proposal, Ibn Muljam with two others and the seditious woman went into the Kufa Mosque on the eve of the 19th of Ramadan, the year 40 AH, and waited for ‘Ali's coming for the morning prayer. Ibn Muljam, with his sword already envenomed, jumped out of his hiding place, and cleaved ‘Ali (as)'s head open with his sword in his *mihrab* (prayer niche). ‘Ali (as) was in bed from the morning of 19th till some time before midnight of 21st of Ramadan.

Though he was badly injured and weakened, he would talk, give advice, especially to his dear sons, al-Hasan (as) and al-Husayn (as). He said to them: “Always be adorned with *taqwa* (piety), do not pursue the world [i.e., worldly attachments and pleasures], and do not pity for whatever of the world that you lose. Tell the truth..., fight with the tyrants, and help the oppressed.

He said to his beloved sons, al-Hasan (as) and al-Husayn (as): “Be enemy to the oppressor and supporter of the oppressed.”

Truly, ‘Ali (as) lived in purity and departed from the world in purity. He was always with the Truth, and the

Truth was with him. Verily, as he himself said at his martyrdom “*Fuztu wa Rabb al-Ka’ba*” (I triumphed, by the Lord of Ka’ba), indeed he attained salvation.

His name is one of the holiest, greatest, and most respected of human names not only with God, God's angels and Muslims, especially Shi‘as, but also with all human beings by and large; the word “Ali” has given a fascinating luminosity to the pages of history, which is admitted not only by Muslims and Shi‘as but also by followers of other religions.

While on his deathbed, he opened his eyes and cast a look at his children one after another and then the following verse was uttered through his lips:

{لِمِثْلِ هَذَا فَلْيَعْمَلِ الْعَامِلُونَ} 61

﴿**Let all the workers work for the like of this!**﴾⁷

Then, he bade farewell to all, and repeated the sacred Word, *la ilaha illa Allah* (there is no god but Allah) so far as his spirit left his body and rushed to the Eternal Paradise. ‘Ali (as)’s sacred body was buried in Najaf al-Ashraf, Iraq. May God's blessings be eternally with him.

Imam and Imamate

Those who, after the Prophet (S), undertook the guidance of people are called Imams. As the religion is provided – through the Prophet (S) – for the people and has a Divine origin, so also are the Prophet and Imams appointed by God. God chooses those who are competent enough for leading people. The Imam learns religious knowledge from the Prophet, who acquires it, through Revelation from God Almighty. People need Imams and religious leaders as much as they need the religion itself for the following reasons:

First, principles of ordinances and religious imperatives are conveyed to the Prophets through Revelation; however, in any period Imams and leaders are required to comment and elaborate on the Qur’anic verses and ordinances and solve people's various problems; and can also make people familiar with details of religious issues and prevent them from deviation.

Second, Islam is a perfect and comprehensive religion which both includes issues concerning religion and religious leadership and contains executive organization for ruling. It is the Imam who can and must, like the time of the Prophet (S), having the right to rule, supervise people's individual and social affairs; direct and solve their problems in exact line with Divine laws and rules; supervise the accurate execution of these laws and rules; and express his decisive comments on new issues.

The Imam possesses eminent features as follows:

1. As the Imam is a religious and intellectual leader, he is fully aware of religious, ideological, and social issues.
2. The Imam is Infallible and immune from sins and faults. The Imam, like the Messenger (S), is immune from flaws and deviations. He does not involve in disobedience toward God, nor does he indulge in carnal desires.
3. The Imam possesses piety and virtue; he is a paradigm of purity and righteousness, and is divinely endowed with moral and spiritual perfections. The Imam, who wishes to be a teacher for others, must himself be an example of virtue, piety, and truthfulness of speech and action for all people and in all ages. In administering Justice and preserving people's rights, the Imam does not fall into the slightest deviation, and never abandons righteousness in favor of expediency.

According to the conditions and requirements mentioned above, the Imam cannot be elected by people. Rather, he is appointed – through God's command – by the Prophet (S) for this position. As specified by some traditions, the Prophet (S) appointed 'Ali (as), Imam al-Hasan (as), Imam al-Husayn (as), and his son and eight other grandsons including the awaited Mahdi (as), as Imams.

The immaculate Imams, in every period and era, through dissemination and interpretation of aspects of the Islamic knowledge and training scholars – who in turn have trained their own students – and by means of stating narrations and traditions compiled in Shi'a and Sunni books, have maintained the ever radiating light of Islam to be handed over from generation to generation.

Nahj al-Balagha

This is a collection of 'Ali (as)'s sermons, letters, and wise sayings which characterizes the most eloquent example of Arabic literature. It is lower in rank than the Qur'an and the Holy Prophet (S)'s sayings, and much higher than human words. In his letters and instructions to the rulers and governors of his time, the most prosperous instructions are to be found. *Nahj al-Balagha*, as an exquisite literal and spiritual collection, has been translated into most of the world's living languages and has been given various commentaries and interpretations.

Sayyid al-Radhi, a descendent of Imam 'Ali (as) and a peerless scholar of his time both in eloquence and poetic gifts, compiled a part of the Imam's sermons and letters of his own selection and taste in the second half of the fourth century A.H./eleventh century CE. The compilation is known as Nahj al-Balagha. Going through this work will truly reveal that 'Ali (as) has not only been a man of sword but also a unique champion and a matchless orator in the field of eloquence, as well as a true Imam and an infinite man in other dimensions.

Imam 'Ali (as)'s Wives and Children

Sons and daughters of 'Ali (as) are said to be twenty seven, of whom four belong to Fatimah (as), i.e. Imam al-Hasan (as), Imam al-Husayn (as), Zaynab Kubra, and Umm Kulthum. His other children include:

Muhammad (Abu al-Qasim), whose mother was Khawla Hanafiyya. He was known as Muhammad Hanafiyya and was a brave and strong man who displayed great bravery in the battles of Jamal and Siffin in the company of his noble father.

'Umar and Ruqayya were twins born to Umm Habib, daughter of Rabi'a.

Hadhrat 'Abbas, Ja'far, 'Uthman and 'Abd Allah Akbar, whose mother was Umm al-Banin, were all martyred in Karbala tragic event. The bravery, valor, self-sacrifice, and loyalty shown by Abu al-Fadhl al-'Abbas and other nobles are exemplary in the tragedy of Karbala. Muhammad Asghar and 'Abd Allah, whose mother was Layla daughter of Mas'ud Darmiyya and who were martyred in Karbala. Yahya whose mother was Asma' daughter of 'Umays.

Umm al-Hasan and Ramla, whose mother was Umm Sa'id.

His other children were: Nafisa, Zaynab Sughra, Ruqayya Sughra, Umm Hani, Umm al-Karam, Jumana, Umama, Umm Salama, Maymuna, Khadija, Fatimah.

It is worth mentioning that Imam 'Ali (as) did not marry any other women as long as Fatimah (as) was alive; when she died, according to her will, 'Ali (as) got married to Umama, Hdhrat Zahra (as)'s niece (her step-sister's daughter).

Some Sayings of His Holiness Imam 'Ali (as) in *Nahj al-Balagha*:

1. Surely *jihad* (holy struggle) is one of the doors of Paradise, which God has opened for His own friends. *Jihad* is a garment of virtue, a protective armor of God, and His trustworthy shield.

The one who refrains from *jihad*, God will afflict him with humiliation and misery, and overwhelm him by predicaments and inflictions, and make him mean and abject. He will also be deprived of God's Mercy and will turn unwise. By turning ones back on *jihad*, one would distance from Truth, be degraded, and deprived of justice and equity.

2. Through changes of situations, the truth and inner nature of people will be exposed.

3. Any day on which God is not disobeyed, will be a feast day ('id).

4. In the company of the Apostle of Allah (S) we used to fight even against our parents, sons, brothers and uncles, and this fight increased our faith, our submission, our obedience to Allah, our endurance

over the pangs of pain and our fight against the enemy.

5. Allah sent the Prophet (S) at a time when the people were going astray in perplexity and were steeped in mischief. Carnal desires had deflected them and self-conceit had swerved them. They were perplexed and misled in their affairs and overwhelmed by the evils of ignorance. Then the Prophet (S) did his best in guiding and instructing them, and called them to the right path and towards wisdom and good counsel. (Extracted from *Nahj al-Balagha*)

[1.](#) Al-Qur'an, 2: 207

[2.](#) Al-Qur'an, 32: 18.

[3.](#) Al-Qur'an, 13: 7.

[4.](#) Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn, vol.3, p. 129. See also: Tafsir-i Nimuna, vol. 10, p. 131.

Al-Qur'an, 5: 55.

[5.](#)

[6.](#) Tabari, Tafsir, vol. 6, p. 186. See also: Tafsir Nimuna, vol. 4, p. 428.

[7.](#) Al-Qur'an, 37: 61.

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