

# Vethantham: From Ancient Philosophy to the Holistic System of Vethathiri Yogam

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## Abstract:

This document explores the transition from the ancient Vedic scriptures and philosophy (Vethantham) to the modern, simplified system of Vethathiri Yogam, also known as Simplified Kundalini Yoga (SKY). The Vedas, central to Hinduism, are a collection of stories about Hindu deities, detailed instructions for rituals, devotional hymns filled with poetry and prayers. The term "Vedic" is broadly used to denote anything relating to or derived from the Vedas. Written in Vedic Sanskrit, an ancient form of the language, the Vedas are considered the four most sacred texts of the Hindu faith and are believed to be among the oldest literary works created by humankind. These texts contain sacred words and phrases, known as mantras, which are chanted during religious ceremonies. While the Vedas were formally written down around 1,500 BCE, their origins are much older. They were passed down orally for generations, possibly over millennia, preserving their wisdom through mnemonic techniques and careful recitation. Even later schools of Hinduism, which may differ significantly in their practices and interpretations, hold the Vedas in high regard. The four primary Vedas are: the Rig Veda (containing hymns and prayers), the Yajur Veda (focused on sacrificial rituals), the Sama Veda (melodies and chants), and the Atharva Veda (a collection of spells, incantations, and practical knowledge). In contrast to the complex rituals and philosophical depths of the Vedas,

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## Introduction

Vethathirian Simplified Kundalini Yoga (SKY) offers a more accessible path to self-realization and well-being. Recognizing the human being as a holistic entity comprising the physical body, the mind, and the vital life force, SKY emphasizes the importance of cultivating inner peace, harmony, and self-knowledge through systematic physical and psychic practices.

The comprehensive "SKY" system, developed by Maharishi Vethathiri Yogiraj, incorporates several key components:

- Simplified Physical Exercise: A regimen designed to maintain physical health and prevent disease through gentle movements and awareness.
- Kaya Kalpa Yoga: An ancient Siddha practice focused on enhancing and revitalizing life energy, promoting longevity and overall well-being.
- Simplified Kundalini Yoga: A form of meditation aimed at awakening and directing Kundalini energy, leading to clarity and strength of mind.
- Introspection: A practical methodology for understanding and transforming negative emotions such as greed, anger, vengeance, and worry, ultimately sublimating these energies into positive qualities.

This document highlights the contrast between the historical and complex nature of the Vedas and the modern, simplified approach of Vethathiri Yogam, offering accessible tools for personal growth and spiritual development.

## The Vedas - Ancient Roots of Hinduism

The Vedas represent a vast and ancient collection of texts originating in India, composed in Vedic Sanskrit. They are considered the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and the foundational scriptures of Hinduism. Hindus revere the Vedas as *apauruṣeya*, meaning "not of a man, superhuman" and "impersonal, authorless," emphasizing their divine origin. These texts are also categorized as *śruti* literature, a term that distinguishes them from other religious texts known as *smṛti*, which are considered to be of human origin and derived from memory or tradition.

Within orthodox Indian theology, the Veda is regarded as a form of divine revelation. The Hindu epic the Mahabharata attributes the creation of the Vedas to Brahma, the creator deity. There are four primary Vedas: the Rigveda, the Yajurveda, the Samaveda, and the Atharvaveda. Each Veda is further subdivided into four major text types, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding Vedic knowledge:

- Samhitas: Collections of mantras (hymns) and benedictions, forming the core of each Veda.
- Aranyakas: Texts focusing on rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices, and symbolic sacrifices, often explored in the context of forest-dwelling ascetics.
- Brahmanas: Detailed commentaries and explanations of the rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices outlined in the Samhitas and Aranyakas.
- Upanishads: Philosophical texts that delve into meditation, metaphysics, spiritual knowledge, and the nature of reality, representing the culmination of Vedic thought. Some scholars propose a fifth category- the Upasanas which emphasizes the role of worship in spiritual growth.

The various schools of Indian philosophy and Hindu denominations hold diverse perspectives on the authority and interpretation of the Vedas. Those schools that accept the Vedas as their supreme scriptural authority are classified as "orthodox" (*āstika*) systems. Conversely, the *śramaṇa* traditions, including Lokayata, Carvaka, Ajivika, Buddhism, and Jainism, do not recognize the Vedas as authoritative and are therefore referred to as "heterodox" or "non-orthodox" (*nāstika*) schools.

Despite their differing viewpoints, both *śramaṇa* and Hindu traditions converge on core concepts within the Upanishads, the fourth layer of the Vedas. These shared ideas include karma (the principle of retributive action) and moksha (liberation from the cycle of rebirth).

In South India, the Vedas are known as *Marai* or *Vaymoli*, with *Marai* literally meaning "hidden, a secret, mystery." Within some South Indian communities, like the Iyengars, the term "Veda" extends to encompass the Tamil writings of the Alvar saints, such as the Divya Prabandham, exemplified by the Tiruvaymoli, highlighting the localized adaptation and integration of Vedic principles.

### **Simplified Kundalini Yoga: A Contemporary Approach**

"Yoga is a complete process of perfection of an individual by developing consciousness to its fullness" - Vethathiri Maharishi. Human existence is a fleeting journey between birth and death, marked by the certainty of departure, though the timing remains unknown. While a lifespan of 120 years is theoretically possible, it hinges on one's health and ability to maintain it.

Simplified Kundalini Yoga (SKY) was founded by Thathuvagnani Vethathiri Maharishi, born in 1911 in a village near Chennai, South India. Overcoming early struggles with poverty through determination and self-effort, he explored the origin and purpose of life, culminating in the development of Simplified Kundalini Yoga. This system provides a safe and highly beneficial approach to meditation and yoga exercises. For over 55 years, Swamiji dedicated his life to promoting world peace by helping individuals understand the value of self-awareness and fostering harmony with the environment. Recognizing the crucial role of physical health in achieving a happy, successful, and harmonious life, Thathuvagnani Vethathiri Maharishi synthesized and simplified existing yoga practices, dedicating this accessible system to the betterment of humanity.

### **The Vedas: Ancient Wisdom of India**

The Vedas are a vast collection of hymns, prayers, rituals, and philosophical treatises composed in India between approximately 1500 and 1000 BCE. These texts are considered the foundational scriptures of Hinduism and represent one of the oldest continuous religious traditions in the world. They offer a glimpse into the worldview, spiritual practices, and social structures of ancient India.

### **Origin and Development:**

The origins of the Vedas can be traced back to around 1500 BCE, a period marked by the migration of Indo-European speaking people, often referred to as Aryans, into the Indian subcontinent. These groups, originating from Central Asia, crossed the Hindu Kush mountains and settled in the northwestern regions of India. While older theories characterized this movement as an "invasion," modern scholarship leans towards a more nuanced understanding of migration and cultural exchange. The primary evidence for the Aryan presence comes from linguistic studies, which demonstrate the ascendancy of Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas, over pre-existing local languages. Sanskrit, an ancestor of many modern languages spoken in South Asia, became the vehicle for

the transmission of Vedic knowledge. Vedic literature, inherently religious in nature, reflects the beliefs, spiritual concerns, and societal values of the Brahmanas, the priestly class of ancient India.

The Vedas were initially composed and transmitted orally from generation to generation, a testament to the remarkable memory and dedication of the early Brahmins. This oral tradition continued for centuries before the texts were eventually committed to writing. Similar to the Homeric epics, the various parts of the Vedas were composed over different periods. The Rig-Veda is considered the oldest of the four Vedas, though pinpointing precise dates for its composition remains a challenge for scholars. It is generally accepted that the entire collection of the Vedas was completed by the end of the second millennium BCE. The texts were primarily composed in the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent, encompassing present-day Pakistan and northwest India.

### Structure of the Vedas:

The core of the Vedic texts consists of four Samhitas, meaning "Collections":

- **Rig-Veda ("Knowledge of the Hymns of Praise"):** This is the oldest and most important Veda, comprised of hymns and prayers (suktas) dedicated to various deities. It was primarily intended for recitation during religious ceremonies.
- **Sama-Veda ("Knowledge of the Melodies"):** This Veda is essentially a collection of melodies and chants derived from the Rig-Veda. These melodies were specifically designed to be sung by priests during sacrificial rituals.
- **Yajur-Veda ("Knowledge of the Sacrificial Formulas"):** This Veda contains prose mantras and formulas intended for use during sacrificial ceremonies. It is a practical guide for priests performing yajnas (sacrifices). The Yajur-Veda is divided into two main branches:
  - **Black Yajurveda (Taittiriya):** Contains a mixture of mantras and explanatory prose.
  - **White Yajurveda (Vajasaneyi):** Presents mantras in a more organized and clearer manner.
- **Atharva-Veda ("Knowledge of the Magic Formulas"):** This Veda is distinct from the other three, focusing on more practical and worldly matters. It contains hymns, spells, incantations, and philosophical speculations. It is named after a group of priests believed to have specialized in magic and healing practices. The Atharva Veda delves into areas like medicine, sorcery, and various sciences, containing knowledge that continues to be explored and understood by modern researchers.

These four Vedas are considered the most sacred texts in Hinduism, representing a vast reservoir of spiritual and philosophical insights. They are believed to be among the oldest books created by humanity and are written in ancient Sanskrit. The verses and hymns within these texts, known as mantras, are still chanted during religious ceremonies and are believed to possess transformative power.

### Vedanta and the Essence of the Vedas:

Later, the philosophical school of Vedanta emerged, offering a profound reinterpretation of the Vedas. Vedanta shifted the focus away from strict ritualism and emphasized the philosophical and spiritual essence of the Vedic teachings.

The Aitareya Aranyaka provides an early association of the three Vedas (Rig, Yajur, and Sama) with the mantra "bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ", stating "Bhūḥ is the Rigveda, bhuvaḥ is the Yajurveda, svaḥ is the Samaveda" (1.3.2).

The Upanishads, considered the concluding portions of the Vedas, further distill the essence of Vedic wisdom, reducing it to the monosyllable Aum (ॐ). As stated in the Katha Upanishad: "The goal, which all Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which humans desire when they live a life of continence, I will tell you briefly it is Aum" (1.2.15). This signifies that Aum encapsulates the ultimate reality and is the object of all Vedic inquiry.

In essence, the Vedas serve as a multifaceted window into ancient Indian civilization, offering profound insights into religious beliefs, cultural practices, philosophical thought, and the ongoing human quest for meaning and understanding. They continue to inspire and influence spiritual seekers and scholars alike, providing a rich tapestry of knowledge for generations to come.

Later Vedic Period: Expanding the Vedic Corpus

The Later Vedic period (roughly 1100-500 BCE) witnessed a significant expansion and systematization of Vedic knowledge. This era saw the development of auxiliary texts and traditions designed to clarify, interpret,

and apply the core Vedic scriptures (Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads). Key components of this development include the Vedangas, Parishishtas, Puranas, and Upavedas.

#### Vedanga: The Limbs of the Veda

The Vedangas (Vedāṅga, "limbs of the Veda") are six auxiliary disciplines crucial for the correct understanding and practice of the Vedas. These disciplines are considered essential for preserving the integrity and efficacy of Vedic rituals and interpretations. V.S. Apte defines them as a class of works designed to aid in the correct pronunciation and interpretation of the text and the right employment of the Mantras in ceremonials. The topics covered in the Vedangas are treated in Sutra literature, concise aphoristic texts, which emerged from the end of the Vedic period through the Mauryan era (roughly 6th to 3rd centuries BCE). These texts reflect the transition from late Vedic Sanskrit to Classical Sanskrit, indicating a period of linguistic evolution alongside the development of Vedic knowledge.

#### The six subjects of Vedanga are:

- **Phonetics (Śikṣā):** Focuses on the correct pronunciation of Vedic mantras, including the articulation of sounds, accentuation, and the rules of Sandhi (phonetic combination). This ensures the accurate transmission of the sacred sounds, believed to be potent in themselves.
- **Ritual (Kalpa):** Deals with the proper performance of Vedic sacrifices and other rituals. It outlines the procedures, implements, and mantras required for various ceremonies, ensuring their effectiveness. Kalpa is further divided into Śrauta Sūtras (dealing with public sacrifices involving three fires) and Gṛhya Sūtras (dealing with domestic rituals).
- **Grammar (Vyākaraṇa):** Provides rules for the structure and syntax of the Sanskrit language, ensuring the correct understanding and use of Vedic texts. Panini's Ashtadhyayi is the most famous and influential work in this field.
- **Etymology (Nirukta):** Explores the origins and meanings of words, particularly obscure or archaic Vedic terms. This helps to clarify the meaning of mantras and other Vedic passages. Yaska's Nirukta is the oldest and most important extant text in this field.
- **Meter (Chandas):** Studies the rhythmic patterns and structures of Vedic hymns. Correct recitation of mantras requires an understanding of the meters in which they are composed.
- **Astronomy (Jyotiṣa):** Deals with astronomy and astrology, necessary for determining the auspicious times for performing Vedic rituals. It focuses on calculating the positions of celestial bodies and their influence on earthly events.

#### *Parishishta: Supplements and Appendices*

"Parīṣiṣṭa" ("supplement," "appendix") refers to ancillary works that elaborate on or provide additional details to the core Vedic texts (Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Sūtras). These texts deal primarily with details of ritual and elaborations of the texts logically and chronologically prior to them. Organized according to the Veda to which they pertain, Parishista works exist for each of the four Vedas. However, the literature associated with the Atharvaveda is particularly extensive, reflecting the diverse and practical nature of its contents.

#### Examples of Parishishtas:

- **Rigveda:** The Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Parīṣiṣṭa is a late text associated with the Rigveda canon.
- **Samaveda:** The Gobhila Gṛhya Parīṣiṣṭa is a short metrical text with two chapters.
- **Yajurveda:** The Kāṭiṃyā Parīṣiṣṭas, ascribed to Kāṭyāyana, consist of 18 works in the Caranavyūha and the Kāṭyāyana Śrauta Sūtra Parīṣiṣṭa. The Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda has 3 parishistas: The Āpastamba Hautha Parīṣiṣṭa, and the Vārāha Śrauta Sūtra Parīṣiṣṭa
- **Atharvaveda:** This Veda has the most extensive collection of Parishishtas, with 79 works collected as 72 distinctly named parishistas.

#### Puranas: Mythological Narratives and Vedic Reinterpretation

The Puranas are a vast genre of encyclopedic texts that narrate the history of the universe, genealogies of gods and kings, and elaborate on Hindu cosmology, philosophy, and rituals. They are important because they often present Vedic ideas in accessible narrative forms, making them understandable to a wider audience. A traditional view given in the Vishnu Purana (likely dating to the Gupta period) attributes the current



arrangement of four Vedas to the mythical sage Vedavyasa, thought to have lived at the end of the Dvapara Yuga, which is one of the four Yugas or epochs in a Yuga Cycle.

The Vishnu Purana (3.2.18, 3.3.4 etc.) states the original Veda was divided into four parts and further fragmented into numerous shakhas (branches) by Lord Vishnu in the form of Vyasa. The Vayu Purana (section 60) recounts a similar division by Vyasa, urged by Brahma. The Bhagavata Purana (12.6.37) traces the origin of the primeval Veda to the syllable Aum, divided into four parts at the start of Dvapara Yuga, and the Bhagavata Purana (9.14.43) attributes the division of the primeval veda (aum) into three parts to the monarch Pururavas at the beginning of Treta Yuga. The Mahabharata also mentions the division of the Veda into three in Treta Yuga.

### Upavedas: Applied Knowledge

The term "Upaveda" ("applied knowledge") refers to technical works associated with the Vedas, dealing with practical subjects. The specific subjects included in this category vary among different sources. The Charanavyuha mentions four Upavedas:

- Āyurveda (Medicine): Associated with the Atharvaveda; deals with health, longevity, and medical treatments.
- Dhanurveda (Archery): Associated with the Rigveda; focuses on martial arts, weaponry, and warfare.
- Gāndhārvaveda (Music and Sacred Dance): Associated with the Samaveda; deals with music, dance, drama, and other performing arts.
- Sthapatyaveda (Architecture): Associated with the Yajurveda; covers architecture, construction, and engineering.

### "Fifth" and Other Vedas: Expanding the Concept of Vedic Authority

Some post-Vedic texts, including the Mahabharata, the Natyasastra, and certain Puranas, refer to themselves as the "fifth Veda," claiming a similar level of authority and importance as the original four Vedas. The earliest reference to such a "fifth Veda" appears in the Chandogya Upanishad. For example, the Divya Prabandha (especially Tiruvaymoli), a term for canonical Tamil texts, is considered a Vernacular Veda by some South Indian Hindus.

Other texts, such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedanta Sutras, are considered *shruti* (revealed knowledge) or "Vedic" by some Hindu denominations, though not universally agreed upon. The Bhakti movement, particularly Gaudiya Vaishnavism, extended the term Veda to include the Sanskrit Epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata) and Vaishnavite devotional texts such as the Pancaratra. This represents a broadening of the concept of what constitutes sacred and authoritative knowledge within Hinduism.

Gods and Mythological Accounts: Core Deities and the Purusha Sukta

The Rigveda, while featuring a multitude of deities, gives prominence to certain gods. Indra (250 hymns), Agni (200 hymns), and Soma (over 100 hymns) are central figures.

- Indra: Leader of the gods and associated with thunder and rain.
- Agni: The god of fire, considered crucial as the mediator between gods and humans through sacrificial offerings. Agni is the flame that lifts the sacrifice to heaven, a symbol of life and spirit of the world, the "vital spark", the principle of life in animate and inanimate nature.
- Varuna: Initially associated with heaven, Varuna developed into an ethical deity, observing the world and ensuring justice.
- Soma: The deified plant and intoxicating drink used in Vedic rituals.

The Vedas also contain the hymn to Purusha (Purusha Sukta, Rigveda 10.90), a primordial deity whose sacrifice by the gods gives rise to the universe. Purusha's mind became the Moon, his eyes the Sun, his head the Sky, and his feet the Earth. Significantly, the Purusha Sukta provides one of the earliest references to the four major divisions or castes in society:

- Brahmins (priests): From Purusha's mouth.
- Kshatriyas (warrior rulers): From Purusha's arms.
- Vaishyas (commoners - landowners, merchants): From Purusha's thighs.
- Shudras (laborers and servants): From Purusha's feet.

This passage is a foundational text for the later understanding and social stratification of Hindu society

## Simplified Kundalini Yoga: A Holistic Approach to Well-being

Yogiraj Shri Vethathiri Maharishi (1911–2006) was a visionary spiritual leader and the founder-trustee of the World Community Service Center, established in Chennai in 1958. His dedication to holistic well-being led him to found over 300 yoga centers globally and author approximately 80 books, many of which have become respected academic texts. His contributions were recognized by the Dravidian University, which declared him the 19th Siddha.

Vethathiri Maharishi aimed to provide humanity with a comprehensive science of living, a path toward betterment encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. This system, often referred to as "Vethathiriyam" (literally, a roadmap to profound knowledge), is built upon four core pillars:

- Simplified Kundalini Yoga Meditation: A method for achieving mental clarity, strength, and inner peace.
- Simplified Physical Exercises: Designed to maintain optimal health and prevent disease.
- Kaya Kalpa Yoga: An ancient Siddha practice focused on enhancing life energy and vitality.
- Introspection: A practical approach to transforming negative emotions such as greed, anger, and worry.

Maharishi emphasized that a deep understanding of nature is crucial for living in harmony with its laws, enabling individuals to balance material prosperity with spiritual growth.

The Four Pillars of Vethathiriyam in Detail:

### 1. Simplified Physical Exercise:

Vethathiri Maharishi emphasized a methodical approach to physical exercise. He first practiced and meticulously tested the exercises on himself before introducing them to others. Observing their positive effects, he then shared them with the world. A key aspect of these exercises is that most are performed with the eyes closed, encouraging inner focus and directing the mind's attention to the specific body part being exercised. Movements are gentle and deliberate, avoiding strenuous activity or excessive sweating.

This approach transforms physical exercise into a meditative practice, fostering both physical and mental well-being. A single session in the morning can promote energy and alertness throughout the day.

### 2. Simplified Kaya Kalpa Exercise:

Acknowledging that disease, aging, and death are universal aspects of life, Kaya Kalpa offers a method for rejuvenating life-force particles. It is not a medicine, but a specific exercise technique that promotes a healthy, fit, and agile body, ultimately contributing to longevity. By strengthening the life force, Kaya Kalpa helps to slow down the aging process and enhance overall vitality.

## Simplified Kundalini Yoga:

Simplified Kundalini Yoga centers on harnessing life-force energy for focused meditation. By merging the mind with the life-force, the individual can attain a subtler mental frequency, leading to enhanced awareness and improved intellectual sharpness and understanding. The process involves:

- Meditation: Cultivating a focused and tranquil state of mind.
- Introspection: Examining one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- Sublimation: Transforming negative emotions into positive ones.
- Perfection: Striving for continuous self-improvement and refinement.

This practice leads to:

- Development: Expansion of the mind, deepened understanding of the laws of nature, and heightened awareness of thoughts, words, and actions.
- Benefits: Increased perspicacity, receptivity, adaptability, magnanimity, and creativity.
- Results: Harmony, satisfaction, happiness, wisdom, and lasting inner peace.

## Simplified Kundalini Yoga Meditation:

Through this practice, the mind's frequency can be streamlined and refined. The depth of meditation correlates with a reduction in mental frequency, allowing for deeper levels of awareness. Consistent practice helps to

regulate thoughts, actions, experiences, and emotional responses, preventing excesses and promoting balance. Vethathiri's system includes nine types of meditation, each designed to focus the mind on the life force and ultimately connect with the eternal state from which it originates.

In essence, Simplified Kundalini Yoga, as taught by Vethathiri Maharishi, offers a comprehensive and accessible pathway to holistic well-being, integrating physical health, mental clarity, and spiritual growth for a more fulfilling life

## Conclusion:

During Vedic times, rituals held a paramount position in society. They were not merely symbolic acts, but rather believed to be fundamentally critical for maintaining the cosmic order. These sacred ceremonies were seen as the gears and levers that kept the universe functioning smoothly, a vital component in ensuring balance and harmony. In essence, these ceremonies represented a reciprocal agreement between humans and the divine. Humanity offered sacrifices and diligently performed rituals, and in return, the gods were expected to bestow their favor in the form of protection, prosperity, and overall well-being.

However, the later Vedic period (roughly 800 to 500 BCE) witnessed a significant shift in perspective. The authority and influence of the priestly class came under increasing scrutiny and questioning. The elaborate rituals, the complex sacrifices, and the meticulously detailed rulebooks governing ceremonies – all these foundational elements of traditional Vedic religion began to face rejection by some segments of society. Individuals seeking alternative paths to spiritual fulfillment began to emerge.

These dissenting voices, disillusioned with the established Vedic order, chose to dedicate themselves to the pursuit of spiritual progress through different means. Many embraced the life of ascetic hermits, renouncing worldly possessions and severing ties with conventional family life. They focused on inner exploration and self-discovery. Their profound speculations and philosophical insights were eventually compiled into a collection of texts known as The Upanishads, which offered new perspectives on the nature of reality and the path to enlightenment. Practices like meditation, celibacy, and fasting became integral components of this new spiritual approach, emphasizing introspection and self-discipline.

In contemporary times, the pursuit of spiritual well-being continues in various forms. Simplified Kundalini Yoga, or SKY, developed by Yogiraj Vethathiri Maharishi, offers a comprehensive system designed to cultivate strength, awareness, character, and consciousness. This practice integrates physical postures (asanas), breath control techniques (pranayama), acupressure, and meditative practices (thavam) to enhance body awareness and prepare the individual to manage life energy effectively. The physical exercises within SKY are specifically designed to promote circulation of blood, heat, air, energy, and bio-magnetism, contributing to overall health and disease prevention. Simplified Kundalini Yoga serves as a meditative path, aiming to unite the mind with the subtle life force. Furthermore, Kayakalpa, a practice deeply rooted in Ayurveda and Siddha medical traditions, is considered a potent method for promoting health, vitality, longevity, and heightened consciousness. It represents a specialized approach to well-being that draws upon ancient wisdom for modern application.

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